

**VOLUME I**

**THE PROBLEMATIC OF PARTNERSHIP  
IN THE ASSESSMENT  
OF  
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

**A thesis presented for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy,  
University of Newcastle upon Tyne**

By

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25<sup>th</sup> September 2000

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## Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

I certify that all material in this thesis which is not my own work has been identified and that no material is included which has been submitted for any other award or qualification.

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis investigates the positioning of partnership in the process of assessing a child's special educational needs. It looks at partnership in parent-professional relationships and in relationships between different professionals. Two case studies provide the empirical basis of the research: one of the first two years of an LEA parent partnership project, the other of a child, David, whose 'special educational needs' were in the process of being assessed. The reasons for choosing case studies, the kind of knowledge this would be expected to generate, and issues of validity are discussed.

This thesis looks at whether an educational psychology service can act in partnership with parents by analysing a variety of data from an LEA Parent Partnership Scheme. It also investigates the meaning of partnership for the stakeholders of a child's statutory special educational needs assessment by looking at the views of everyone involved in one child (David)'s statutory assessment. The people interviewed are the child, the mother, the named person, the head teacher, the class teacher, the special education needs co-ordinator, the educational psychologist, the clinical psychologist, the senior clinical medical officer, the occupational therapist, and the acting principal educational psychologist. They are asked their views of the child's situation, what they think assessment is really about, what their role is in the assessment, what kind of partnership they experience in the assessment, what kind of partnership is possible, and where power is located in the assessment. Two case studies raise many questions about conceptions of 'professional', 'need', 'objectivity' and 'partnership'.

Five key areas are identified from the results of the two case studies for further discussion. The first two areas each take a different unexpected finding with the aim of an explanation: 1) David's Mother's achievement of her aim of a statement emphasising David's learning difficulties rather than behavioural difficulties, despite the school's insistence on the latter; and 2) The discovery of David as lacking agency in the assessment process. The explanation incorporates the descriptive and the theoretical. Engestrom's activity theory assists an understanding of the boundary crossing accomplished by David's Mother in the realisation of her goal.

The last three areas theorise about, respectively, partnership, power and statementing. The basis of multi-disciplinary assessment is challenged. Instead of one multi-disciplinary assessment in one case there are as many assessments as there are participants. Statementing is suggested to involve the painful negotiation of different discourse within a complex power structure. Implications for professionals working with children deemed to have special educational needs are discussed and policy changes are considered. Methodological issues for the position of the researcher, as insider practitioner, outsider practitioner and outside researcher is reflected upon.



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## **Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations**

DFE	Department for Education
DFEE	Department for Education and Employment
EWO	Education Welfare Officer
EP	Educational Psychologist
ed psych	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
SCMO	Senior Clinical Medical Officer
OT	Occupational Therapist
IEP	Individual Education Plan
GEST	Grants for Education, Support and Training
Newby LEA	LEA in which both case studies were located, name fictitious
PPO	Parent Partnership Officer
LEA	Local Education Authority
Parent Federation	Voluntary agency involved in the first case study
Parent Partnership Scheme	Local education authority scheme for involving parents in statutory assessment of children's special educational needs
Named person	
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
EBD	Emotionally Behaviourally Disturbed
PRU	Pupil Referral Unit]
Statemnting	The statutory process of assessing a child's special educational needs



# **CHAPTER ONE**

## **INTRODUCTION: ORIGINS, RESEARCH, ASSUMPTIONS, AND LEGISLATION**

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### **1.1 Setting the Scene**

This thesis originated in an interest in investigating professional practice as an educational psychologist. The researcher's experience in holding three different posts at the same time, that of an educational psychologist, a parent partnership officer and a lecturer, led to reflections on her professional identity. One area of reflection was her positioning in relation to parents when a child's special educational needs were being assessed. The researcher found that certain parent perspectives seemed to be available to her in her role as parent partnership officer that were not available in her role as educational psychologist. Also, on occasions, there seemed such a voluminous gulf between what the parent expected and wanted, and what the professional educational psychologist expected to provide.

There was a further professional interest. This was that despite the area of home-school relations being so awash with literature (Armstrong, 1995; Bastiani, 1987; Cameron, 1986; Chandler, 1986; Cullingford, 1985; David, 1993; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994; Gascoigne & Wolfendale, 1995; Macbeth, 1989; Pugh, 1987; Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987; Topping & Wolfendale, 1985; Wolfendale, 1983; Wolfendale & Topping, 1996), there still seemed so many unanswered questions. For example, it was still unclear what kind of parent involvement impacted on achievement. In the area of special educational needs

assessment, relations with parents seemed quite problematic, and the researcher wanted to look in more depth at reasons for this. Literature she considered at that time did not seem to answer the questions she had. The researcher therefore looked for the opportunity to consult the literature more widely and to carry out some empirical research.

## **1.2 Thesis Organisation**

The thesis is organised into five chapters. In this chapter, the first, the researcher sets out for the reader the way the thesis is organised, and explains some key assumptions underlying the approach taken by this thesis. The researcher gives further founding ideas for the research by providing a framework within which to begin to look at the literature around parent partnership in special educational needs assessment. The framework is taken from John Bastiani's (1987) four models of home-school relations. This is used in the current chapter to discuss the positioning of parents in key reports and legislation

The second chapter looks at the way the relationship between parents and professionals, when involved in the statutory process of assessing a child's special educational needs, is positioned in the literature. It starts from a critical consideration of the relationship between parents and schools generally, drawing again on Bastiani's framework (Bastiani, 1987). This literature leads to an investigation of literature about the role, not of the parent, but of the professional. Key issues are identified for a particular professional group, educational psychologists, and the implications of these issues for partnership with parents are discussed. The multi-professional nature of special educational needs assessment, so far omitted from explicit investigation, is then looked at in more detail. Literature looking at multi-professional working in all services is used to provide a context for that relating to special educational needs assessment. The literature review as a whole leads to the identification of the two research questions for this research:



*Research question one:*

*Can an educational psychology service undertake parental partnership?*

*Research question two:*

*What does it mean to the stakeholders to be "partners"? What are the stakeholders' perspectives on partnership?*

The third chapter explains and discusses the methodology chosen for this thesis as that most appropriate to investigate the two research questions. Two case studies provide the focus: one of an LEA parent partnership project, the other of a child, David, whose "special educational needs" were in the process of being assessed. The reasons for choosing case studies, the kind of knowledge this would be expected to generate, and issues of validity are discussed at length. The methodology is considered from a critical perspective. The fourth and fifth chapters present the analysis of data from the two cases. These chapters assert the importance both of the analysis of data and of giving the reader some access to the raw data. Therefore a major aspect of the reporting of the second case study, in Chapter five is a set of panels, in a separate volume of the thesis, containing key utterances of interviewees on the main identified themes of all those involved in the case. The reader is encouraged to look at the panels at the same time as reading Chapter five. The final, sixth chapter, looks at five areas identified from the results of the two case studies. The first two areas each take a different unexpected result with the aim of giving an explanation. The explanation incorporates the descriptive and the theoretical. The last three areas theorise about, respectively, partnership, power and the statutory process of assessing children's special educational needs. This sixth chapter also suggests possible practice and policy developments that may lead from the research, and discusses avenues for further research.

### **1.3 Assumptions Underlying the Research Process**

This thesis is based on certain assumptions about how people operate as individuals and with each other, and about what research does, in its attempts to talk about the world of people and their business with each other. Some time will be spent discussing these assumptions and their relation to each other, since they inform every chapter. The assumptions emanate from a range of different psychological, philosophical and sociological paradigms.

Firstly, the researcher takes a generally post-positivist approach to research (Usher, 1996). Thus, she rejects a notion of there being a world "out there", outside the researcher, for the researcher to examine and to present to the reader in some objective fashion. There is not a world separate from the researcher, from her interpretation of it, and her action on it. This informs the general approach to research, valuing the researcher's interpretation of the research data. However, this also means that the researcher's perspective is made explicit at times throughout the thesis. This becomes particularly important when looking at issues of validity, dealt with in the discussion of research methodology in Chapter 3.

Miriam David (1993) has produced a detailed analysis of the detrimental role played by research from social scientists in relationships between parents and schools. She finds researchers have made parents "objects" and "subjects". By using a combination of "critical" paradigms, the researcher hopes to avoid such a reproduction of power relationships.

Key to the research is the meaning attributed by those subject to, and of, the research, and the perspective of the researcher herself. The action of individuals

can therefore only be understood by looking at the social context in which those actions take place. Concern, in this research, is with meaning within social interactions. The researcher therefore takes a fundamentally social constructionist approach:

*Social constructionist view of the self as continually shaped and reshaped through interactions with others and involvement in social and cultural activities. (Wetherall & Maybin, 1996, p220).*

The cultural meaning of actions includes the historical antecedents (after Leont'ev and Wertsch....):

*the activities of human beings, at all stages of development and organization, are social products and must be seen as historical developments. (Holzman, 1996, p87).*

A social constructionist approach has several implications for this thesis. The literature review in Chapter 2 will reflect a concern to look at concepts like "partnership" and "professional" from an historical perspective, and to analyse the meaning of such concepts for parents and for certain professionals. The analysis of the results will aim to look at the identified themes from the perspective of those involved in the parent partnership project or in David's case. The analysis of the interviews of those involved in David's situation takes into consideration that the data obtained reflects the subject's negotiation of the interview situation. A social constructionist approach will direct the first part of the analysis in the discussion of the results, in Chapter 5. Engestrom's (Engestrom, 1996; Engestrom, Engestrom, & Karkkainen, 1995) concepts of activity systems and boundary crossing, which originate in Russian social constructionist psychology, is used to explain one of the key unexpected results of the analysis of David's case. The researcher will therefore focus on "human practices at the level of concrete interactions of



individuals acting in a meaningful social context" (Chaiklin, 1996, p378), but, also like Chaiklin, will be motivated by a "premise that actions must be understood by issues and factors that are not immediately present in the situation" (1996, p378). Another word for this is "positioning", a term which relates more to philosophical or sociological disciplines. "Positioning" becomes a key tool of critical analysis, both of the literature and the results. The researcher examines the way parents and professionals have been "positioned" in the cultural world as the "the practices provide systems of signs which are at once systems of classification, regulation, and normalization" (Walkerdine, 1989, p204, referring to a different situation, the teaching of mathematics in schools). In a sense, a key idea for the researcher is the assumption that all is never quite how it appears.

This leads to a further paradigm, that of post-structuralism. The researcher takes a structuralist approach by conceptualising human actions and attitudes in partnership in special educational needs assessment in terms of structures in order to understand them. She also looks at how the "structures" of partnership, by which she means the concepts defining partnership, have been constructed. A structuralist approach is taken in the literature review, applying a framework of different models of home-school relations to research on different aspects of parents' involvement in education. It is also taken in Engestrom's (op cit) activity system applied to the discussion of the results. However, structuralism is used throughout as a spring-board for post-structuralist analysis, deconstructing important concepts. Key to this process is an investigation of the way language is used:

*Language is not a transparent medium for conveying thought, but actually constructs the world and the self in the course of its use. (Wetherall & Maybin, 1996, p220).*



This research aims to identify the ways language is used to construct what is understood by partnership, and the ways it is used to construct the other meanings which seem to play an important role in facilitating or inhibiting partnership. For example, in the literature review the ways concepts of "need", "professional", and "assessment" are constructed by language is discussed. These *ways of using language* (researcher's italics) are what the researcher means, in this thesis, by "discourses". Discourse analysis "addresses the ways in which language is so structured as to produce sets of meanings, discourses, that operate independently of the intentions of speakers, or writers" (Bannister, Burman, Parker, & Tindall, 1994, p92). The researcher

*treats the social world as a text, or rather as a system of texts which can be systematically 'read' by a researcher to lay open the psychological processes that lie within them, processes that the discipline of psychology usually attributes to a machinery inside the individual's head.*  
(Bannister, Burman, Parker, & Tindall, 1994, p92).

Marks, Burman, Burman and Parker (1995) took a similar approach to the investigation of a number of educational case conferences, and made the following comments about the nature of the material they were to look at:

*Discourses are socially produced rather than residing within an individual parent or professional's head. In other words, the way people speak in case conferences draws upon a repertoire of meanings circulating within contemporary social, educational and cultural practices. We are not concerned therefore to identify or evaluate individual attitudes, but to explore dominant themes preoccupying case conference discussion.*  
(Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995, p42).

In the literature review, when the researcher is concerned with discussing the way language constructs key concepts, she is also exploring discourses within the literature relating to partnership with parents in special educational needs assessment, and to all the areas which impact on this literature:

*the focus is on the institutions within language rather than the language within institutions.* (Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995, p43).

The researcher looks at myths in the making by identifying discourses and discussing their effects. She examines the difference between rhetoric and reality by deconstructing the familiar. Nothing is safe from deconstruction, not even the researcher's work. However, for the sake of being able to use the research process to add to perceptions about partnership, a deconstructive approach to this account, to the thesis, is left to the next piece of research, or indeed to the reader.

A final assumption, but one of crucial importance, is the identification of power in any analysis of what happens between people. Discourses are not benign. Instead the work that language does when used by individuals is that it conveys power. Such foregrounding of power has its origin in the sociological thinking of Habermas, but also been extensively developed by philosophers such as Foucault and Derrida:

*Habermas advances the opposite view, that power is often exercised through the manipulation and / or distortion of communication, in which different groups have a different say in the construction of what passes for consensus and in which communication is directed towards the achievement of ends and not towards reaching agreement (....) In this way communication is directed towards the achievement of the ends of those whose interests it expresses, becoming the dominant ways of thinking and talking about issues. This structuring of social relationship through dominant communication may be summarised as discourse. So power, in this view, is exercised in the structuring of the social framework within which interests, ideas and issues are formed and known. Professional knowledge, skills and ways of talking may form a discourse in this sense, expressing the interests of a profession. (Hugman, 1991, p35-36).*

Another sociological paradigm draws attention to issues of power, and is mentioned here as the origin of the "critical" approach the researcher often refers to. Critical theory has its origins in a critique of modernism (Caper, Hanson, & Huilman, 1993,



p337). Critical theory is an "array of theoretical and cultural work which exposes and ruptures hidden, reified relationships of power and dominance within society" (Danforth, 1995, p139).

The researcher therefore draws upon several paradigms, which are all different but highly related ways of making sense of the world. The paradigms originate from seemingly disparate disciplines, psychology, sociology and philosophy. However, as should be clear from the preceding discussion, the researcher's understanding of individual psychology as essentially social suggests a rapprochement between psychological and sociological paradigms. Both are needed. Social constructionism seems to ignore issues of power. The latter is provided by the identification of discourses and the analysis of the work being done by the discourses. However, discourse analysis alone leads too quickly to issues of power. The richer picture is provided by including tools of analysis from social constructionism (i.e. from Engestrom, op cit).



## 1.4 A Model of Home-School Relations: From Structuralism to a process of deconstructing the accepted

For many years any consideration that parents might be *partners* with schools in the education of children was a discourse absent from the literature. Various writers have identified different historical phases in the relations between home and school (Bastiani, 1987; Mittler & McConachie, 1983) or levels of involvement (McGilp, 1991). Bastiani (1987) has delineated the following models: compensation, communication, accountability (rights), and participation. The following table closely paraphrases Bastiani's (1987) models as he expresses them.

**Table 1.1: Bastiani's (1987) Models of Parent Relationship to Formal Education**

<b>Model</b>	<b>Characteristics and Assumptions</b>	<b>EXAMPLES</b>
Compensation	<p>An underlying belief that inequality in education might be overcome without structural changes, by changing attitudes.</p> <p>Parental interest crucial for achievement</p> <p>Teachers have a task to facilitate greater involvement of parents, to make the least "successful" families more like the most "successful".</p> <p>Deficit models of family life.</p> <p>Parents passive and an undifferentiated group</p> <p>Parents need the involvement of professionals.</p>	<p>The Plowden Report 1967</p>
Communication	<p>Parent involvement is dependant upon the level of information parents have about the school and about the progress of their child/ children.</p> <p>Information understood to be largely un-problematic.</p> <p>The need to look for opportunities for communication and to develop them in their most effective form.</p> <p>Attention to practical arrangements for communication.</p>	<p>The Plowden Report 1967</p> <p>Court Report, 1976</p> <p>Taylor Report 1977</p>

<b>Model of Parent Relationship with Formal Education</b>	<b>Characteristics and Assumptions</b>	<b>EXAMPLES Reports, Legislation, Projects etc.</b>
Accountability	<p>Parents as consumers of education. Parents a major audience for education. Different models of accountability:</p> <p>parents an undifferentiated consumer group. Within this a discourse of choice over school, a concern for access to performance indicators (league tables published in national press) a discourse problematising home-school relations, as suggested by the work of the Advisory Centre for Education.</p> <p>parents as a differentiated group and a concern to hear the needs of different, individual, parents.</p>	Advisory Centre for Education League tables in national press
Participation	<p>Emphasises shared goals and complimentary roles for teachers and parents - which assumes a partnership of equals</p> <p>An ideal to aim for, representing a radical critique of home-school relations</p>	Pre-school playgroup movement

These models were not seen by the researcher as either conceptually or historically discrete. However, they are presented as a useful framework to facilitate an analysis of the positioning of parents in the formal education of children. This framework is returned to throughout the literature review. It represents a modernist, structuralist classification of partnership. However, the researcher uses it to deconstruct the legislation and reports they are applied to, and even to deconstruct the models themselves. The aim is to make clear the positioning of parents in reports and legislation. This provides a base from which, in Chapter 2, to apply the same process to the literature, empirical and non-empirical, looking at the relationship

between parents and professionals in the process of special educational needs assessment.



## **1.5 Parents as Partners: Committees, Reports and Legislation**

From the late 1960s onwards various significant reports, many from government committees of enquiry, and several pieces of legislation seemed to place parents as partners firmly on the political agenda.

### **1.5.1 Committees.... and Reports**

First was the Plowden Report (DES, 1967) looking at primary education:

*Teachers are linked to parents by the children for whom they are responsible. The triangle should be completed and a more direct relationship established between teachers and parents. They should be partners in more than name; their responsibility becomes joint instead of several.*

(DES, 1967, pt 1, ch 3, para 80).

and:

*by involving the parents the children may be helped*

(DES, 1967, pt1, ch4, para114, p43).

Chapter 4, of the Plowden Report, "Participation by Parents", looked at current perceptions of parental involvement, at levels of involvement and at the ways parents and schools could work together. The rationale for such involvement was that this would bring better performance in school. Plowden found parents were generally satisfied with schools, but schools were over-confident about home-school relations. 'we were almost invariably told by heads that "we have good relations with parents" however rudimentary the arrangements made' (DES, 1967, pt 1, para 104, p37).

Recommendations to improve partnership were to do with information, communication and choice. Improved information was envisaged to be information on each school to facilitate choice, written reports on children's progress and making children's work available to be seen. Improved communication involved a meeting between the head teacher, teacher and parents before a child started school, and the creation of further opportunities for formal and informal talks with the teacher. Choice was about parents having a choice of school. Therefore, although the report spoke of partnership, it was actually characterised by models of parent-school relations based on the compensation and communication models (Bastiani, 1987).

The Bullock Report (1975), looking at teaching and learning in literacy, endorsed the idea of parents coming into school to help with language activities (Bullock, 1975, par 5.37 p70). In many ways it too endorsed a compensation model, with a slight nod towards participation in the need to recognise parent perspectives:

*Parents act as escorts on journeys and in environmental studies outside school; they help in the school library, in the games period, in home studies areas. In all these situations they are involved in the learning process. We believe there is room for many more such initiatives, and our purpose in this chapter is to consider what parents can contribute in the nursery and infant school. It is no use pretending that the parent can easily slip into the learning situation. There are adjustments to be made and sensitivities on both sides to be respected. (Bullock, 1975, 5.37, p70).*

Although Bullock emphasised parental involvement in the early years, reference was made to other phases, though with less emphasis, and to the importance of parental involvement when children are experiencing difficulties in reading:

*There should be every effort to involve parents and help them to understand the nature of their children's difficulties. Evidence from the Educational Priority experiment and from schools themselves shows that lack of interest on the part of parents can be too readily assumed. The more the interest of*

*parents can be aroused, the more they are likely to play a constructive part in helping their children at home.* (Bullock, 1975, 18.12, p272).

The Taylor Report (DES and Welsh Office, 1977), investigating the governance of schools, emphasised that parents should have "a collective voice in the development, management, and review of the educational service which was provided" (in : Beveridge, 1992, p12). Parental membership of governing bodies was seen as important for parental involvement in schools but not sufficient for effective involvement:

*We do not believe, however, that parent membership of the governing body is sufficient in itself to achieve the full involvement of all parents in the life and activities of the school.* (DES and Welsh Office, 1977, 4.19, p27).

*It is the individual parent who is in law responsible for securing his child's education and whose support in this task is vital. There should therefore be at the individual level also a partnership between home and school. The individual parent will want the school to be an open and welcoming place. He will expect it to provide a framework within which he can communicate with his own child's teachers, in a spirit of partnership, about the child's welfare and progress.*

(DES and Welsh Office, 1977, 5.26. p43).

Here we see an emphasis on a communication model, an assumption of a compensatory model, and once again a nod towards participation.

The report of greatest significance to the focus of this thesis is that of The Warnock Report (DES, 1978). Having placed this report within other key reports from different aspects of education, it is clear that Warnock continued the trend towards "partnership" with parents. Not only did it, throughout, stress the need for "the closest possible involvement with parents in the assessment of the child's educational needs and in the provision made" (7.18, p107) but an entire section (chapter 9) was devoted to Parents as Partners "It is a partnership, and ideally an equal one" (9.6, p151).



The chapter stressed at length the importance of parents, and used the term partnership on several occasions, including a notion of equality (as shown by the quotation above). However, the way that parents were framed in the body of the chapter on parents suggested, once again, Bastiani's (1987) compensation and communication models rather than participation. For example, many of the recommendations were concerned with facilitating information between home and school, but particularly from the school to home, and ways the parents could assist the school in its task. There was also a strong sense in which the parent was presented as *in need* (researcher's emphasis) - in terms of coming to terms with the child's disability, or in terms of requiring practical help. There was no sense in which parents may have perspectives that the school or other professionals outside school ought to take on board. The report urged a single point of contact for parents, and suggested the need for a named person (a role discussed in Chapter 2).

Partnership was seen in the DES white paper, "Better Schools" (DES, 1985), as parents and schools in joint partnership in a shared purpose for the benefit of the child.

The Elton Report (DES, 1989b), investigating behaviour problems in school, contained a section devoted to the place of parents in the behaviour of children at school. Once again there was an emphasis on Bastiani's (op cit) compensation and communication models. The report recognised the stress many families were under, but did not believe this absolved them from "their responsibilities for bringing up their children properly" (DES, 1989b, section 5.12, p138). Teachers' picture of parents was seen to be generally negative, and the report saw this as a distorted view:

*It also seems clear that there is a small minority of parents who cannot or will not provide appropriate guidance for their children and who are positively hostile to schooling. We are convinced, however, that the majority of parents share and support the aims and values of the schools to which they send their children. (DES, 1989b, 5.3, p133).*

In order to help parents support the aims of schools, the report recommended: advice from LEAs, Government, governors and head teachers about the ways parenting influenced behaviour; parenthood to become a cross-curricular theme in the National Curriculum; advice to parents to take full advantage of channels of communication available between school and home to develop good working relationships; and parents to make every effort to attend parents evenings. It also recommended that: "the government should explore the possibilities for imposing on parents civil liability for their children's acts in school" (5.35, p141). The report urged schools to recognise school-based factors in disruption, and to do more to be positive to children and welcoming to parents. However, the general discourse was one of discipline and control. There was an absence of authentic notions of partnership despite a section entitled "Partnership with Parents". Parents were urged to become involved in the endeavour of schools. The agenda was set by schools rather than by schools and parents in partnership. Furthermore, there was an intrusion of institutions, from government to head teacher, into the way families operate. This included advice on parenting to existing parents and teaching about parenting skills to children, with the assumption that they would be parents in the future. Here were the beginnings of notions of cycles of deprivation.

Partnership was a discourse in reports of other services. Even before the Plowden Report, the Seebohm Report (1968) looking at the organisation of social services had noted that consumer interests were not the same as service providers and that social services departments should consider how clients could be more involved in decision making.

The report of the Committee on Child Health Services (DHSS, 1976), known as The Court Report, was an investigation into the way child health services should best be organised in order to ensure the health, in its broadest terms, of children. This report was ahead of its time in the ideas espoused and the recommendations it made. In relation to the current thesis, it spoke of partnership with parents, that health services should:

*see their task as not usurping the responsibility of the family but as encouraging it, so that families are better able to exercise their responsibility for their children. They should see themselves as partners with parents: prepared and willing to give them explanation and advice about their health (...) The need is for a service that is geared to ensuring that parents are well informed and increasingly involved in their children's development and health, and which from the start will enable them to feel confident in their ability to care for their children.*  
(DHSS, 1976, 5.6, p86).

The Court Report also stated that the balance of professionalism should not undermine the role of the parents:

*The growth in the number and variety of professions connected with child-rearing, however necessary in our kind of society, has in some measure undermined the self confidence of parents... The role and importance of the professional must not be undermined; the issue is how professionalism should be delivered to and, on occasions, shared with the layman.... We feel especially keenly that services for the very young child must not be allowed to become over professionalised; instead they (referring to health, education and social services) should seek to work through the family encouraging its strengths and helping its short-comings. There is evidence that measures that do not involve parents achieve only short-term gains.*  
(DHSS, 1976, p22-23).

The report stated that parents of "handicapped" children had a need to:

*be treated as participants and not by-standers in the process of assessment and decision-making (...) We think parents should have the right of direct access to the district handicap team and others concerned in the treatment of their child. It is usually thought that to open professional doors to parents*



*might lead to problems of overlapping responsibilities and uncoordinated care. But the possibility of such administrative difficulties should not be an excuse for denying parents access to the help they feel they need. It should serve only to underline the importance of each professional, when approached, accepting a personal responsibility for co-ordinating any action he may advise or take with that programmed by the team. We are aware that some parents may 'shop' their handicapped child around, seeking for what professionals might regard as an unattainable cure but this is a manifestation of unmet need that should not be suppressed but recognised, and supported with the best advice and guidance (DHSS, 1976, section 14.51).*

Once again the articulated discourse was one of participation. However, the details of the report seemed to be located in a communication model, in, for example, the need for professionals to ensure parents are well informed. Nevertheless, it was unusual to find in a government report the recognition that professionalism, meaning professional power, might require limits to be placed upon it.

There has been a claim to endorse "partnership", in several major reports, and indeed an emphasis in some on "equal" partnership. However, a close look at assumptions underlying the language used about parents suggests the reports discussed have all, to a large extent, assumed Bastiani's (1987) compensation or communication models of parental involvement in schools. Partnership was clearly on the agenda, but realising it in anything more than name seemed to be problematic. With some exceptions, a strong discourse of deficit parenting was seen to underlie the recommendations of many of the education reports. The story now moves to consider legislation, particularly educational legislation, in which the rhetoric of government policy preceding legislation included partnership with parents as an explicit aim.

## **1. Legislation**

Before the 1980s, parents had few rights to equal participation in education:

*Parent rights, under the 1944 and the 1980 and the 1981 Education Acts, amount to a grudging appeals system to which few parents will actually have recourse. (Tomlinson, 1982, p108).*

Five successive Education Acts, 1980, 1981, 1986, 1988 and 1993 all attempted to bring the parent relationship with formal education into the legislative sphere. They were characterised primarily by communication and advocacy models of parent relations with formal education. For example, the 1980 Education Act gave parents rights to be elected by fellow parents onto a school governing body, to be given information about the school, to be consulted about choice of school, and the right to see minutes of governors' meetings. Despite Tomlinson's (1982) disparaging remarks about the 1981 Education Act, it has been hailed as a major step towards partnership with parents in the assessment of children's special educational needs. It will be considered in more detail in the next section. The 1986 Education Act built upon the 1980 Education Act with other rights: to an annual meeting between parents and school governors, to information about the school's financial affairs, and to appeal if their child was excluded from school for more than five days. The 1988 Education Act further delineated parents' role in the decision making of schools through the governing bodies and outlined parent rights to information.

The Education Act 1993 was concerned with a very wide range of aspects of the management of education. Its various provisions included: changes in the funding arrangements of schools; the requirement of admissions policies for schools; the provision for the establishment of grant-maintained schools; orders for action when children failed to attend school; and provisions for the inspection of schools and the identification of "failing" schools. Parents were mentioned in several places. They were governors, and procedures for their appointment were set out. They were to be consulted about the placement of an excluded child in a particular school and

they were to be balloted on whether a school was to change status to, or from, grant-maintained. The Act also included greater parental involvement in special educational needs assessment, and the details of this will be considered in the next section. The 1993 Education Act therefore seemed to strengthen the consumer role of the parent, in line with Bastiani's (1987) "accountability" model.

One of the fundamental principals of the 1989 Children Act was that "parental responsibility" was preferred to that of "parental rights". Parental responsibility was defined, in terms of whom it applied to. Partnership was not a concept used in the Act, although some commentators have described it as an act emphasising parent partnership. Certainly, under the 1989 Children Act the obligations of parenthood could not be taken away or abandoned, and children were to be kept in touch with their families. However, there were limits placed on parents independent actions with children and the state could not obtain compulsory powers over a child without applying to the court when parents would have rights to make representation. Fundamental principles which were new at the time in childcare law, included the duty to "ascertain the wishes and feelings of the child". There was also a clear duty to work across agencies when children were in need.

### ***Legislating for the Assessment of Children's Special Educational Needs***

The 1993 Education Act and its associated Code of Practice (DFE, 1994) concerned itself with the assessment of a child's special educational needs, and is therefore of central importance to this thesis. Rights of parents to be involved in their child's assessment were formalised in several ways. The Act required information of various kinds to be given to the parents. This included the LEAs intention to make an assessment, the results of the assessment, the name of a "named officer of the



LEA", and a draft of the statement. The Act required parents to be consulted about their child's special educational needs, and required LEAs to consider any representations made by the parents. It also gave parents the right of appeal to a committee.

The Code of Practice on the Identification and Assessment of Special Educational Needs (DFE, 1994) associated with the 1993 Education Act stated the need for parental involvement at every stage of assessment. An early section of the Code, entitled, "Partnership with Parents", stated:

*Children's progress will be diminished if their parents are not seen as partners in the educational process with unique knowledge and information to impart. Professional help can seldom be wholly effective unless it builds upon parents' capacity to be involved and unless parents consider that professionals take account of what they say and treat their views and anxieties as intrinsically important.* (DFE, 1994, Chapter 2, para 2.28, p12).

The Code provided a quite detailed list of ways a school should make arrangements for parents of children with special educational needs. Partnership was conceptualised in various ways: as acting on a parent's concerns; in terms of procedures for involving parents when a concern was first expressed within school; and in terms of arrangements for incorporating parents' views in assessment and subsequent reviews (DFE, 1994, 2.33 p14). A quite comprehensive amount of information was to be made available to parents. Various strategies were advised in order to provide access, such as information in a range of different languages, information on tape, and "a parents room or other arrangements to help parents feel confident and comfortable" (DFE, 1994, 2.33, p14). An investigation of the language used in the Code of Practice, in the description of actions, roles and responsibilities at every level, suggested that parents were to be "consulted" at stages 1 and 3 and "informed" of a move from

stage 1 to stage 2. It was not clear how such consultation was defined. However, there was a suggestion that parents might contribute more than information, such as their knowledge of the child, and might have views of the child's needs. At stage 1, information was to be requested from the parents. This included views of the child's development, and perceptions of performance, progress and behaviour. It also included views of contributing factors to any difficulty and action that the school might take.

With respect to special educational needs the 1993 Education Act, stated that parents were to be "informed" of several matters, similar to those outlined in the 1981 Education Act. Thus, parents were to be informed that an LEA proposed to make an assessment of SEN, of the procedure to be followed and of the name of an officer of the LEA from which information could be obtained. Parents were to be told of their rights to make representations and to submit written evidence to the authority with 29 days notice. They were also to be notified of the LEAs decision to make (or not to make) an assessment (and reasons), and if a statement was not to be made. The act stated the conditions under which a parent "may" appeal to a tribunal.

### **1.5.3 Legislating for Partnership: is it possible?**

Partnership has occupied as ambiguous a position in legislation as it did in the reports discussed earlier. As partnership was embraced in some ways, in others it was confounded by the continuing presence of other constructions of parents' relationship to education (Bastiani, 1993).

Much of the "parental rights" legislation can be seen as reinforcing a consumer discourse (Bastiani's 1987 accountability model) rather than - or even at the same time as - one of partnership (Bastiani's participation model). Although both give parents more agency in the education of their child than does the client discourse implicit in a compensation model, they are not identical. The consumer discourse was gradually reinforced in the 1980, 1986 and 1988 Education Acts. Being positioned as consumers invests in parents the right to make demands and choices, and implicitly assumes the ability and interest in doing so. It is arguable as to whether or not this means a relationship of partnership. It seems to suggest a movement of power towards the parents. A participation model, absent from the 1980, 1986 and 1988 Education Acts would, however, clearly have suggested a balance of power based upon some kind of equality.

Bastiani's (1987) "communication" model also seemed easily identifiable in legislation, but perhaps this is the area about which it is easiest to legislate. Perhaps a "communication" model translates more easily into practical arrangements than a "participation" model.

There seemed to be a connection between the "communication" and "accountability" models. Since the early 1990's there has been a focus on the provision of information booklets to parents (DES, 1991a; DES, 1991b; DES, 1992), Bastiani's "communication" model. Greater information can also be seen to be part of the "accountability" model, since it may enable parents to fulfil their role as consumers of education, in being able to assert their entitlements. However, responsibility comes hand in hand with such entitlements, and parents also seem to be expected to play a role in following suggestions in curricular booklets in order to "support the education" of their children (DES, 1991a). The particular view of educational "support" is that



defined by the government, rather than by individual parents. Whilst this can be viewed as asking parents to support "good practice" in education, it can also be viewed in an alternative light. It is as if parents are being asked to enter into a contract: the government allows parents to have a certain degree of "choice" and information about certain aspects of education, but in return parents are expected to assist in the carrying out of government policy.

The same legislation purporting to champion parents' rights also carried a discourse of discipline and control (see Fulcher, 1989). The 1988 Education Reform Act effected the most extreme movement of power from schools to central government this century: it took the designation of the curriculum from the teachers and imposed a National Curriculum. This discourse has continued throughout the 1990's, with the imposition of testing for children and the inspection of schools. If teachers are being asked to be partners with parents, they are being asked to relinquish power in a situation in which power has already been taken away by the government.

Bastiani (1993) discussed obstacles to partnership in terms of contradictions in government policy in the arena outside special educational needs. For example, partnership was affirmed by parental involvement in boards of governors, but weakened due to funding difficulties reducing home-school initiatives. Notions of parental choice of school have been turned, amongst other things, into competition between parents for scarce places (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1993; McGeorge, 1995). And finally one can argue that we now have a notion of schooling dominated by control and regulation in which parents have no say over what and how their children learn. Conversely, Hogg and Salter (1989) claim that the introduction of the National Curriculum, as legally binding, should enable parents of pupils in maintained

schools to keep in touch with what their children are being taught and how they are progressing.

Miriam David (1993) reviews the relationship between parents and education since 1944, and she also reviews the interaction between research and policy in parent/school relations. Her detailed analysis reveals the inability of policy or research to take into account the complexity of social and economic reforms and their effects on family life.

## ***Special Educational Needs***

Despite the rhetoric of parent partnership in the language used by Plowden and Warnock, and various enabling acts of parliament, parents were often forgotten during the 1980's. The Select Committee on Education, Arts and Science (1987) demonstrated a focus on parents by reporting on progress in the position of parents since the 1981 Education Act. However, two HMI reports on services for children with special educational needs failed to even consider the quality of parental involvement as an issue in the evaluation of services (HMI, 1989a and HMI, 1989b).

The 1981 Education Act, far from legislating for parent partnership, can be seen to embody discourses that act counter to a notion of equity and mutuality in home-school relations. Booth (1983, p184-194) drew attention to an appeals system structured towards LEA representation, lack of parental access to records and decision making power firmly in the hands of the LEA. Fulcher (1989) demonstrated that the 1981 Education Act retained discourses of segregation, deficit, disability, resources and bureaucracy which ran counter to the claims made that the Act would signal moves towards looser categorisation, greater integration, and equality of access (see also Kirp, 1980). Whether these discourses run counter to parental involvement is debatable. However, it seems likely that moves towards further bureaucratisation are likely to strengthen the professional role in assessment, rather than the parental role. Parents are likely to hold very differing views on the segregation/integration debate, so disability and segregation discourses may have an unpredictable impact on partnership.

The Code of Practice (DFE, 1994) brought optimism for change in the way LEAs dealt with children's difficulties. Russell (1994), a major voice in this area, greeted



the Code with cautious optimism. She suggested the new procedures could bring "greater clarity and consistency about how children's special needs are identified, recorded and met" (Russell, 1994, p48), but feared that the combination of tribunals and schools not catering adequately for SEN would lead to statements being considered as "dowries". Warnock has been assumed (Wolfendale, 1989) to be a champion of parent partnership. It was indeed one of the first major reports to emphasise partnership, but a reading of what partnership was to involve actually suggested other models, that of compensation and communication. Russell saw a danger that "The spirit of 'parents as partners' - a cornerstone of both the Warnock Report and the 1981 Education Act - could be turned into parents as protagonists" (Russell, 1994, p48) if they went to tribunals in increasing numbers, rather than being involved in "joint working to meet children's individual and changing needs." Russell ultimately saw that the "challenge is now for all those whom the Code affects to see it indeed as a 'living document' and to use the framework to develop a more dynamic, interactive and consumer-sensitive approach to special educational needs" (Russell, 1994, p52).

The system for appealing against LEA decisions, the tribunal, was now independent from the LEA, and parents had greater access to reports and files. However, the discourses identified in the 1981 Education Act by Fulcher (1989) of segregation, deficit, disability, resources and bureaucracy could also be identified in the 1993 Education Act. The discourses of bureaucracy, control, deficit, and resources could be seen in the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994). Although rarely enforced (never, to the knowledge of the researcher) there has been a provision in both the 1981 and 1993 Education Acts for parents to be fined for refusing to allow their child to be assessed. Such discourses, particularly those of discipline, control, bureaucracy

and deficit, seem to call into question any notion that such acts can empower parents.

#### **1.5.4 Concluding Comments**

Bastiani's (1987) typology of parental involvement found four different models underlying the ways in which parents related to schools: compensation, communication, accountability and participation. These models have been used to position the assumptions underlying legislation and key reports. The major models underlying reports were found to be "compensation" and "communication", whilst those underlying legislation were "communication" and "accountability". "Participation" was the subject of many headings in influential reports and was a major motivation for much of the legislation, but was suggested to amount to little of substance in the text. Key assumptions of the researcher's approach to this thesis led to the examination of discourses around reports and legislation. Discourses running counter to participation were identified in both reports and legislation, such as professional power, deficit and bureaucracy. Other discourses are likely to make achievement of partnership unpredictable. The same framework, from Bastiani (1997), will be applied in Chapter 2 to literature looking at the range of ways parents and schools have related to each other.

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### **LITERATURE LOOKING AT PARENT PARTNERSHIP POSSIBILITIES IN MEETING CHILDREN'S SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

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This chapter considers how the notion of partnership in the process of meeting children's special educational needs, particularly parent partnership, has been conceptualised in the literature. Chapter 1 analysed particular pieces of legislation and key reports for the positioning of parents in social policy in general and educational policy in particular. Bastiani's (1987) typology of parental involvement found four different models underlying the ways in which parents related to schools: compensation, communication, accountability and participation. These models were used in Chapter 1 to place the assumptions underlying legislation and key reports. These same models are applied to the literature in this chapter, empirical and non-empirical. Literature until and including 1996 is considered, since this is the year in which the main data collection for this research was carried out. Key literature since 1996 is included, as appropriate, in following chapters.

This chapter aims to be a developing story in finding out what the literature has to say about partnership, particularly parent partnership, in meeting the special educational needs of children. It considers a range of different areas of literature. The first literature considered is that relating to education in general, in order to see the significance of parents' relationships to schools where special needs is a factor. To understand partnership, there are further layers whose literature needs separate consideration. This includes looking at professionalism and within this the professional role of the educational psychologist in particular



and inter-agency collaboration in general. The professional context of partnership has further layers. One cannot consider a partnership without looking at the conceptualisation of the role of each of the partners - the parents and the professionals. The corollary of the role of parents in schools is the role of professionals. Looking at this role involves making connections with the literature concerned with professional identity, and extending this to literature looking at the way different professions work with each other, inter-agency collaboration. The connection between inter-agency collaboration and parent partnership is rarely made, but both involve working outside traditional professional autonomy. The particular case of the profession of the educational psychologist is considered in a little more detail than others. There are two reasons for this. The first reason is that this is the main professional group outside school concerned with children deemed to have special educational needs and with whom parents will interact as part of the statutory process of assessment. The other is that this is the professional background of the researcher, which gives her insight into professional issues and possibilities for partnership. The professional space in which the educational psychologist operates is currently dominated by the assessment of special educational needs. This context is unpacked looking at the assumptions underlying the concepts of both "special educational needs" and "assessment". This involves consideration of the way "special educational needs" have been theorised. Models of SEN have changed over the years and are likely to have influenced, and been influenced by, notions of professionalism and partnership.

This chapter involves a review of the large amount of literature in some areas (particularly in the area of parent involvement in education) and much smaller bodies of literature in other areas (such as the perspective of different professionals on partnership). It also reviews the few empirical studies available, and refers to methodological limitations. However, in the context of

this study it is valid also to view texts as "data", and to provide a commentary on what was being said about parents and professionals at different times and from different perspectives. The perspective of professionals on partnership can be found by looking at research carried out by those professionals in which the parent voice has been present, but we can also find information from research in which the parent voice has been absent. There has been only limited research directly asking professionals about their relationships with parents.

## **2.1 The Broader Educational Context**

An historical approach is taken in order to unravel the different themes contributing to the construction of the relationship between parents and schools. The immediate post-war atmosphere was an optimistic one in which education had the potential to change society, contributing to the wider social development of society, and acknowledging a collective responsibility towards those experiencing learning difficulties (Armstrong, 1995, p12). The much broader educational context was one in which the concept of compulsory education was a relatively new idea and a selective system operated. A major belief at the time was in the supremacy of the effect of home background on intelligence and attainment: what happened in schools made little difference. This was underlined by the Coleman Report (Coleman, et al., 1966). However, large-scale research in the 1970s and 80's of Rutter et al (1979) and Mortimore et al (1988) found that schools did make a difference - and the school effectiveness and improvement movement was started. In a different context, Head Start programmes (Zigler & Valentine, 1979) were suggesting compensatory education could make a difference to children's later educational progress and key research commentaries also gave the same message (Mortimore, 1982; Woodhead, 1976; Woodhead & McGrath, 1988). The 60s and 70s were also categorised by debates over the effects of the selectivity of education, leading to a move to a "comprehensive system", and a discourse against selectivity (Fulcher, 1989). The last fifty years has also increasingly seen the rise of the view that state assistance inhibits the responsible and independent actions of individuals and communities. The face of school education has changed dramatically in the last twenty years, with government centralisation of control over curriculum and the delegation of funding away from local education authorities. A major move towards accountability has brought testing of pupils and the inspection of professional practice. The testing of children at regular



intervals and the regular national reporting of results at a school level have enabled comparisons to be made of schools and LEAs. A number of regulatory mechanisms have meant a complete change in the professional atmosphere in education: from an emphasis on personal professional responsibility to accountability to external bodies. The "Ofsted" inspection of schools, local education authorities, and training providers, but also other initiatives such as "Best Value" have particularly effected this. There has been a meeting of two movements, the school effectiveness and improvement movement, largely coming from educational research, and the accountability movement, largely coming from government policy. However, it is unlikely that either would have gained ascendancy without the existence of the other.

This background is important since it exerts a strong influence on possibilities for the relationship between parents and schools. Moves towards a view that school makes a difference were followed by a belief that parents could assist schools in their endeavours. This contributed to the creation of a climate for closer involvement of parents in schools. Such a background also includes notions of responsibility: whether educational achievement is seen as a personal achievement or a collective responsibility. Notions of accountability strengthening the idea of parent as a consumer of education also push the balance of responsibility a little in the direction of parents.

## **2.2 A shift of emphasis**

A variety of conceptualisations of parents seemed to coexist in the late 1980's and early 1990's, as underlined by Bastiani's (1987) models summarised earlier and by Munn's (1993) title "Parents and Schools: Customers, Managers or Partners?" However, the balance of conceptualisations also seemed to shift: from an emphasis on Bastiani's (1987) "compensation" and "communication" models, to the strong embrace of "accountability" and "participation models". The emphasis seems to have been different at different times in history, and in different educational contexts. However, what we seem to have now is all four models operating in varying ways across and within different educational contexts, making parent-school relations confusing and unpredictable.

In this section the researcher gives a brief overview of the positioning of Bastiani's models in three main areas, pre-school education, delivering the school curriculum, and meeting special educational needs. The aim is to demonstrate key issues in each area. These areas are returned to, in section 2.3, as the researcher looks in turn at four themes that illuminate the difficulties experienced in home-school relations. These are the lack of an agreed definition, the continuing deficit discourse, unintended outcomes of partnership, and the assumption of parents as an homogenous group.

### **2.2.1 Overview: Pre-school Education**

This area is indicative of multiple models of partnership operating concurrently. Pre-school education has always had, throughout its history, some notion of compensatory ideology as far as children's development is concerned. Head Start parent programmes (Fuerst & Fuerst, 1993; Zigler & Valentine, 1979) gave parental involvement in compensatory pre-school education a foreground

position. However, the playgroup movement in the UK is a lone example of organised, national, long-term parent agency in education. It was created by parents as a response to government inaction, post-war, in providing nursery education (Crowe, 1973). In this way it can be seen as an early example of both the "accountability" and "participation" models. It was unusual to find these models at this time. However, even here a compensation model was applied to certain groups of parents who might need playgroups to assist them in parenting. A compensation model underlies another initiative in pre-school education, the Portage programme (Cameron, 1986). This is a programme supported by peripatetic teachers for parents to use with children who have special educational needs. It is referred to again in the section 2.2.3 on the meeting of special educational needs.

Gillian Pugh has been one of the main voices calling for partnership in home-school relations in the pre-school years (Pugh, 1989; Pugh, 1996, p26). As an example of the embrace of other models, her concern for the quality of information for parents in pre-school education, and accessibility in terms of translation into ethnic minority languages, was indicative of the move to a communication model (Pugh, 1987). The 1990s saw further interest in participation and accountability models of parent involvement in pre-school education (Rennie, 1996).

However, the move in the 1990's to professionalise pre-school education is challenging the position of parents. An inspection review of education for the under fives defined a successful partnership between the home and the school as one that "enables parents to understand how they can best contribute to their children's education". It recommended that one of the teacher's roles was to "explain to the parent what the school is seeking to achieve", but also recognised that "teachers benefit from sharing the parents' greater knowledge



of the child as an individual and from learning something of the child's home background" (DES, , p7).

New accountability mechanisms are threatening the survival of parent-led provision in pre-school playgroups. For playgroups to be considered educational provision, which enable parents of children attending them to receive free places (subject to certain conditions), they are required to apply government defined standards of training and practice, and to submit to the OFSTED framework. The pressures of such standards are leading to the resignation of many playgroup leaders from their posts. There is evidence that this is changing the nature of playgroup provision. This seems to suggest government difficulties with a participation model, in as much as a parent led provision seems to have been taken from the parents.

Whilst pre-school provision has an element of "care", or even of "socialisation", there seems to have been a clear role for the parent. Such a role seems to have spanned Bastiani's four models. However, the more provision has moved towards "education", the more the participative role of parents seems to have been compromised.

### **2.2.2 Overview: Delivering the School Curriculum**

The 1980's and 90's saw a further increase in the range of ways parents might contribute to schools. There was a major development in different ways to involve parents in reading, both as an intervention for all children as part of the school's literacy policy and as a compensatory programme for children experiencing difficulties in reading (Topping & Wolfendale, 1985). Involvement in literacy represented the first important curricular involvement of parents and many similar local projects were developed. Since then, curricular involvement

has moved into mathematics (Higgins, 1996; Merttens & Vass, 1990; Merttens & Vass, 1993) and science (Solomon, 1994). Parental contribution to the curriculum has involved schools making parent rooms, parents involved in the setting up and running of after school clubs, parents being invited to curriculum meetings, parents involving parents in baseline assessments, parents assisting in the classroom and on outings, and parents helping to organise parent teacher associations (Brito & Waller, 1993; Easen, Ford, Higgins, Todd, & Wootten, 1996; Munro, 1993). Parental support of the literacy development of their children has been broadened to include a focus on improving the literacy skills of the family and on improving the home learning environment for the child (Wolfendale & Topping, 1996). The OFSTED inspection framework sets out requirements for inspectors to ascertain parents' views on their children's schools by sending out a questionnaire as well as by holding a parent meeting as part of the inspection process. Parents have also been seen as important in the school effectiveness and improvement movement (Stringfield, 1994, p161).

Most ways parents interact with schools involve the locus of control being with the school (Border & Merttens, 1993, p121). Today's market economy has extended to education. Although Gallagher (1995) demonstrated that parent partnership sits well in a market economy, as a consumer one may have the right to complain, but not to change the buying policy, or the organisation of production. The various different ways to involve parents in school, or to support parents, all seem to be aimed at supporting the teachers in delivering the school curriculum. Often the rhetoric of studies is one of parent agency, but the substance of the parent scheme being described or planned firmly places agency with the school (National Commission of Education, 1996). However, Hannon (1993) analysed the nature of learning at home and at school, and suggested benefits in the flow of ideas being two-way, rather than one-way, between home and school.

### **2.2.3 Overview: Meeting Special Educational Needs**

In the area of special educational needs parents found hardly a mention in Pritchard's (1963) history of the education of the "handicapped", covering the period 1790-1960. Prior to the 1970s parents were primarily regarded as a "problem" (DES, 1955, p77). For many "mental retardation was associated with degeneracy, moral turpitude, incest and pauperism" (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p16; see also: Thomas, 1978) - so it is not surprising that problems experienced with children were seen to reflect directly on the parents. Parents were either viewed as in need of psychiatric counselling to cope with grief from the birth of a child with severe learning difficulties (Read, 1985, p17; Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p12) or they were required to change, being seen as the main influence on their child's response to school (DES, 1967; Evans, 1975, p14).

In the 1970s parents started to be viewed in guises other than "problematic": as teachers in a compensation (Barton & Moody, 1981; Thomas, 1978), or "transplant" model (Jeffree, 1980, quoted in Mittler & McConachie, 1983, p9; Topping, 1986). As clients, parents were allowed an honorary role of teacher in order to provide information and to carry out the advice of professionals, to enable professionals to use parents as change agents. The Newsoms were also influential in involving parents of children with special educational needs in assessment, as informants to help professional decision making (Newson, 1976). However, parents were still likely to find that the structure of the professional's role with them transformed their relationship to a kind of patient (Gliedman & Roth, 1981, p231).



A major writer and researcher in the area of parental involvement, Sheila Wolfendale, suggested stages within the "compensation" model (Wolfendale, 1985, p4). She saw a movement from the "inoculation of special programmes" for those deemed to be at risk, to careful matching of teaching methods to educational objectives, to the application of "pedagogic principals of optimising human potential to all children" (Wolfendale, 1985, p4). There have been notable examples of the involvement of parents in carefully constructed and targeted programmes when their children have special educational needs. This has included devising pre-school programmes at home with peripatetic workers as part of the Portage Programme (Cameron, 1986; Daly, Addington, Kerfoot, & Sigston, 1985). The Hester Adrian Research Centre, Manchester University, was responsible, in the 1970's and 80's for giving strong leadership to parental involvement in the education of children with severe learning difficulties. This consisted of a series of projects, research and books for teachers, parents and other professionals (Clarke, 1982; Cunningham & Davis, 1985; Cunningham & Sloper, 1978; Mittler & McConachie, 1983; Mittler & Mittler, 1982). Parents have been involved in interventions to reduce children's behavioural problems in the form of behavioural programmes initiated by teachers and educational psychologists (Miller, 1996, chapters 9&10), but they have been noticeably absent from other writers (Blyth & Milner, 1996; Charlton & David, 1989). Such involvement comes fully within the compensation model, casting parents both as a part of the problem and as professional aides.

Research suggests the relationship between parents and professionals in the meeting of special educational needs has had a difficult ride. Piper and Howlin (1992) discovered that parents of children with "developmental disorders" experienced professionals as often asking for information that had already been given. Other sources suggest that dissatisfaction with professionals has remained a common experience over the last thirty years (Piper & Howlin, 1992;

Sadow, 1994; Thomas, 1978). Whilst there has been little evidence of an "accountability" model, a "consumer" focus has been in evidence in the last ten years or so in the spawning of investigations of parent views (Armstrong, 1995; Bartlett & Dean, 1988; Dawson & Kierney, 1988; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994; McCarthy, 1991; Sadow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987), and more latterly of children's views (Armstrong, 1995; Cooper, 1993; Davie & Galloway, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994; Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Gibbs & Stoker, 1996; Lewis, 1995; Tisdall & Dawson, 1994; Wade & Moore, 1992; Wade & Moore, 1994). These investigations have often shown parent dissatisfaction, and a lack of inclusion of the child's voice. Differences between parental perspectives and professional perspectives are looked at in more detail in the following sections (2.5 on the work of educational psychologists with parents, and section 2.7 on multi-professional work in the area of special educational needs).

In recent years there has been a serious, funded attempt by central government to develop greater partnership with parents. The Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) enabled Local Education Authorities (LEAs), through the then GEST (Grants for Education, Support and Training) scheme, to bid for funds to develop Parent Partnership. Such schemes aimed to involve parents more in SEN assessment. All those who put in a bid were given funds. A key aspect of such schemes was the recruitment of named persons. It is worth looking in some detail at this role, since it is a key aspect of the research of this thesis.

### ***The Named Person: The Need for a Link-Person between Parents and Professionals***

A possible way forward for the 1990s has been the development of parent partnership schemes in LEAs and the associated creation of a role for a "named person". It is possible that this role, by empowering parents, will fulfil some of

the solutions suggested by researchers in the preceding paragraphs of this chapter.

The role of the named person, mentioned first in the Warnock report (DES, 1978), did not actually become mandatory in the 1981 Education Act. Warnock's conceptualisation was for parents to have someone to support them through the assessment process. The need was identified due to Warnock's observation that:

*Even if information about supporting services is readily available, many parents will be unable to make the best use of such services without help.*

*Named persons are to be designated to every parent as a point of contact, to ensure concerns about their child's development are followed up, to provide a single point of contact with the LEA and expert counsel in following their child's progress through school. (DES, 1978, 9.27).*

According to the Warnock report, the person to fulfil this role was envisaged to be most usually the head teacher (9.27), or a health visitor in the early years (9.26). There was no element of choice and parents were to be informed as to the identity of the named person when they were informed of the results of one of the school-based stages of assessment. Warnock seemed to recognise some potential difficulties in selecting an appropriate named person in her designation of alternative people to take on such a role in particular circumstances. For example, for parents unhappy with the provision allocated, Warnock stated that the named person should be the person who completed the LEA advice - the advisor in special education or the educational psychologist (9.33).

The named person role is offered informally through many voluntary organisations. For example, the role of parents as supporters of other parents has developed mostly through voluntary organisations and through legislation.



Hornby (1988) described the operation of "Parent to Parent" schemes - in which volunteers, usually parents, are trained to staff a telephone help-line for other parents. It is interesting to note that the training is by professionals rather than parents. Other organisations such as MENCAP, SCOPE, CONTACT-A-FAMILY, and IPSEA (Independent Panel for Special Education Advice) all involve parents to different degrees acting in a support role to other parents. The report of the 1986-87 Select Committee drew attention to evidence received from the National Council for Handicapped Children of a

*greater use of members of voluntary organisations and community groups to act as befrienders to help parents in their dealings with schools and LEAs. Voluntary organisations have indicated that with quite limited financial support they could provide better help to parents*  
Report of the Select Committee (1987, p.xi).

The report recommended that projects to encourage this be facilitated and funded by LEAs.

A survey of 100 parents who had a child with special educational needs and who had contacted IPSEA between March 1990 and March 1991 in order to look for advice concluded that "parents feel the need of an independent body from whom they could seek unbiased opinions" (Simmons, 1992, p1). However, the sample may have been unrepresentative, being only those who felt dissatisfied with the LEA service. On the other hand, they are likely to be one of the groups Warnock envisaged requiring a named person. Simmons (1992) found that 42% of panel members met with parents at least once. The help they elicited from the panel member was broken down as follows (p32):

25% involved some form of assessment of the child, followed by a written report

20% drafted letters

20% accompanied parents to meeting

15% visited possible school placements with parents

Simmons (1992, p1) found great variation in panel members and some parents experienced problems with them. Problems included panel members being unhelpful, having irrelevant expertise, agreeing with the LEA, or being always busy. The question of support for panel members was raised:

*On another occasion, (Case22P) the Panel Member had agreed with the school offer made by the LEA, which was not acceptable to the parent. This case, like Case 84P, raised questions about the loyalties of Panel Members. In case 84P, the parents wanted an integration placement, while the Panel Member did not share their view. The mother commented "Not everyone agrees with inclusive education". Given the wide range of aspirations reflected in the parents contacting IPSEA, it is clearly problematic, on occasion, to match Panel Member with parent. In a few cases where Panel Members and parents did not share ideologies, then parents felt disappointed.*  
(Simmons, 1992, p33).

Rather than look to volunteers, Hegarty (1993) saw the need for teachers to act as the link person between the parents and other agencies:

*help(ing) them to find their way around the system, explain(ing) their rights to them and interpret(ing) official information and reports. They can also assist in practical ways such as facilitating appointments, helping with transport and securing allowances. (p128).*

However, the 1993 Education Act and its associated Code of Practice brought about an increase in the use of volunteers to support parents through the statementing process. The "named person" appeared in a quasi-statutory status in the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994), which defined the role as:

*the person whom the LEA must identify when sending the parents a final version of a statement. The Named Person, who should usually be identified in co-operation with the parents, must be someone who can give the parents information and advice about their child's special educational needs. He or she may be appointed at the start of the assessment process and can then attend meetings with parents and encourage parental participation throughout that process. The Named Person should normally be independent of the LEA and may be someone from a voluntary organisation or parent partnership scheme.*  
(DFE, 1994, p128).

The role was, therefore, to be someone identified in co-operation with the parents, not solely selected by them, or solely by the LEA. The remit of support also extended to the giving of advice to the parents on their child's special educational needs, which seems a very broad remit. Questions occur as to the boundary between the named person's role and that of one of the professionals, particularly the educational psychologist, involved in the child's assessment.

Voluntary agencies were keen to be seen to be involved in providing support to parents, as "befrienders", until it became clear that no further funding would be available and the voluntary agencies were expected to provide volunteers for LEA parent partnership schemes which might detract from their own activities.

In 1994 Mencap carried out a survey of LEAs to evaluate the first year of operation of the Code of Practice requirement to identify a named person. It found that of the 75% of English LEAs who could articulate how they saw the role of the named person, most saw the role as befriender (90%), also advisor (70%) and advocate (60%), a significant minority saw the role as acting as a professional (20%) (Mencap, 1995, p2).

The role of the named person in Scotland (see Kerr, Sutherland, & Wilson, 1994) has a different focus to that of the named person in England. A succession of circulars, which all have the effect of statute to those to whom they apply, set out the role of the named person, most recently summarised in Circular 4/96. The circular states:

*Named Person: a person specified in a Record of Needs who is available to assist parents or young persons with advice or information about the child's or young person's special education needs, including what is set out in the Record of Needs. While the Named Person should be able to participate in, and help parents with, all aspects of the Record of Needs, the Named Person has no formal role in the provision of education for the child or young person concerned (section 62(2)(c) of the 1980 Act and*



*regulation 2(1) of the Education (Record of Needs) (Scotland) Regulations 1982) (see paragraph 121).*

It is noteworthy that the named person in Scotland may have a role to support the child rather than the parent, and it is also important to note the limitations that are put on the role.

The named person scheme can be described as a microcosm of the debate over Bastiani's models of relationships between home and school. The discussion about the precise role - befriender, advisor, or advocate - seems to mirror the debate over what kind of partnership is possible between parents and schools.

### **Conclusion**

The reductionism, here, of parental relations to a typology of four different models is in itself problematic. The reality is more complex. The researcher has shown that overlaps occur between different models and has suggested complexity within particular models. The additional notion of the parent as customer has been introduced. Whilst the customer was under-theorised by Bastiani (1987), Woods (1993) proposes five different models of parental involvement based on just one of Bastiani's (1987) models, accountability. These are the competitive market model, the personal control model, the quality assurance model, the participative model and the consumer citizen. All have some credence, and underline the complexity of discourses operating on parental involvement. Solomon broadens the area considerably, taking in a myriad of cultural features in showing how, in a home-school science education project, "conceptualisations of science and of education were different in every home, yet linked to a web of meanings and intentions already existent in the home" (Solomon, 1994, p565) and presumably the school.

## **2.3 Four Problems with "Partnership"**

Bastiani's "participation", or partnership between parents and professions, has been the least visible of all models. Parents were able to be in control only in an area omitted from government attention, that is, pre-school education in the post-war decades. Parents have been enlisted to support the work of teachers in delivering the curriculum, but have been given no voice in curriculum design or pedagogy. And in the area of special educational needs, the focus of this thesis, parents have been primarily regarded as having useful information to give the expert professionals in the exercise of their role, and in assisting the experts in carrying out activities at home. Professionals have viewed parents as consumers in order to evaluate the professional role. But partnership itself has been a goal visible in rhetoric but absent in action. Teasing out reasons partnership has been so difficult to achieve "in reality" further illuminates this story. Reasons are looked for in four areas: in the problematic implications of a clear definition of partnership, in the continuing deficit discourse underlying many parent-school relationships, in the lack of attention to unintended outcome of partnership, and in the assumptions of an homogenous group of "parents". The literature review now turns to consider each of these four areas.

### **2.3.1 Partnership: Problematic Definition**

Part of the difficulty in achieving partnership has been the assumption that its definition is understood and agreed by those involved. Most moves towards partnership either fail to define it, or fail to think through the implications of its own definition, as pointed out by Easen et al. (1996). Many writings in education in which there is a mention of parent partnership do so without any definition, and with an assumption that it is both an accepted and an

unproblematic relationship. For example, an earlier investigation of ways to manage pupil behaviour stated:

*when a pupil presents a serious case of indiscipline, work with all who can help. The most important of these are parents, with whom the school is inevitably in partnership.* (Jennings, 1979, p20).

However, some writers have been consistent in clear definitions of partnership.

For example, Wolfendale has consistently emphasised:

*parents are active and central in decision-making generally and its implementation;*  
*parents are perceived as having equal strengths and equivalent expertise;*  
*parents are able to contribute to, as well as receive, services;*  
*parents share responsibility, thus they and professionals are mutually accountable.* (Wolfendale, 1985, p14).

Similarly, Gillian Pugh has consistently emphasised shared purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate (Pugh, 1989). Cross (1989) defines partnership as exchange of knowledge, common purpose and joint decision-making. Shaeffer (1992), in his exploration of the role of parents and the community in school improvement, provides one of the most detailed definitions of partnership in the literature, similarly based on mutuality and equity (p278-279). However, all such definitions bring challenge to the embodiment of the professional as expert.

Taking these definitions further into educational practice has proved problematic. Part of this has been the difficulty in delineating the characteristics of each partner in order to assess what each brings to the situation. Some writers emphasise the overlap in role and have difficulties in defining a distinctive role (Mittler, 1979). Mittler (1979, p111) observes the parenting in professional roles, which he defines as: controlled emotional involvement; considering the needs of the whole child; and building on their relationship with the child. He notes that, in partnership with professionals, parents are learning technical, presumably



professional skills - mostly to do with the application of behaviourism to the teaching of children with severe learning difficulties.

Other writers emphasise the differences between parents and professionals. Hegarty (1993, p119) compares teachers and parents on dimensions of the nature of involvement. This includes having a professional relationship vs an emotional one, differences in length of involvement, number of children related to (few or many), and the basis of expertise (i.e. skill, common-sense, emotional commitment):

*parents and teachers inhabit very different worlds and view the child from different perspectives. Unless there is a deliberate sustained effort to bridge the two worlds, the likelihood is that the child's education will suffer. (Hegarty, 1993, p119)*

Similarly, Gascoigne (1995, chapter 2) suggests several possibilities for conflict in the dimensions on which parents and professionals differ:

- Unpaid/paid
- Compulsory/voluntary
- Permanent/part of career development
- Continuous/sporadic (evening off, weekends off, holiday entitlement)
- Untrained/trained
- Inexperienced/experienced
- Isolated/networked with colleagues
- Subjective, passionate, emotional/objective
- Whole child focus/focused on one aspect

Roles may be more easily understood not so much on the basis of characteristics but by differences in cultural capital (Lareau, 1989). However, most definitions have rarely encompassed such complexities, neither have they

recognised the possible problems, for the professional role of equity notions in "partnership" notions. Perhaps the main problem is that use of the term "partnership" obscures the implications of enabling parents to have a degree of agency in situations. This will be taken up later in this chapter, when the story turns its gaze on the history of the role of the professional in general and the educational psychologist in particular.

### **2.3.2 The Continuing Deficit Discourse**

A deficit discourse was supreme pre-Plowden. This states that parents are lacking in interest or ability to help and support their children. Such a discourse includes the idea that parents need to change in some way in order to do this, or to be compensated to make up for their own deficiencies. A deficit notion of parenthood runs counter to any kind of "equality" assumed in a relationship of partnership. However, this discourse now seems to appear at the same time as notions of partnership. Most writers have been slow to recognise such an inconsistency.

A compensatory ideology is identified even in Plowden (1967) (Bastiani, 1987, p91; Wolfendale, 1983, p23). Wolfendale (1983, p23) points out that Plowden (1967) follows her chapter "Participation by Parents", with one on Education Priority Areas, in which she advises on the need to look at the effects on children's learning of disadvantaged homes and neighbourhoods. This leads one to ask what kind of partnership is possible if parents continue to be viewed as part of the problem.

The confusion of deficit notions with those of partnership is not restricted to major reports like Plowden. Many programmes purport to be based on partnership when a compensatory ideology is clearly visible. In a case study

(Dawson & McHugh, 1987) of a programme for teachers to work directly with parents of children experiencing behavioural and emotional difficulties the authors claim to avoid blaming parents and make explicit the recognition of parents as partners:

*It has been our experience as teachers using a family systems approach that even the most unpromising situations can be changed by working with parents as partner.* (Dawson & McHugh, 1987, p121).

However, it is difficult to see in what way their programme involved partnership when it was defined by the professionals. Moreover, the programme assumes parents need to change in some way, and states that problems are seen to be located in "family relations". It could be argued that this is parent blame by a different name.

Assumptions of deficit parenting underlie almost any scheme to increase parental participation in education, exceptions being the involvement of parents in school governing boards, fund-raising parent teaching associations and pre-school playgroups. For example, a project in Newcastle LEA which aimed to raise standards in a particular group of schools was prefaced by a deficit model of parenting. An evaluation report (Easen, Ford, Higgins, Todd, & Wootten, 1996) asked how it could ever hope to raise standards through one of its actions, parent partnership, when partnership was based upon an assumption which ran counter to partnership. Similarly, Border and Mertsens (1993) suggest that many schemes involving parents in aspects of the curriculum, such as paired reading, have the effect of camouflaging contradictions and conflict endemic in such situations. For example, there is no evidence of attempts by schools to take on board notions of family literacy.



There were early attempts to counter such notions. For example, Tizard and Hughes's (1984) research with pre-school children, comparing the interactions between children and parents with children and teachers, demonstrated "higher levels" of cognitive challenge in home than school, whatever the social class of the home. Other key researchers (Bastiani & Wolfendale, 1996, p2; Pugh & De'Ath, 1989; Wolfendale, 1983) have continuously argued for partnership based upon mutual respect for different skills, between parents and teachers. There have been attempts to counter the deficit notion in some education documents, such as the Elton Report (DES, 1989a) and the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994). In the latter, schools are asked not to

*interpret failure to participate as indicating a lack of interest or willingness. Parents may feel they are being blamed for their child's difficulties when the school first raises questions with them.* (DFE, 1994, 2.29, p13).

Certainly, Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (1994) found "many of the assumptions about parents which underlie the current reforms do not match closely with the real views, experiences and behaviour of the parents most directly involved" (1994, p206). Hughes et al (Hughes, 1993; Hughes, Wikeley, & Nash, 1994) followed 150 children through key stage 1 (5-7yrs) of the National Curriculum ascertaining the views of parents and teachers in regular interviews over two years. They found evidence that parents' interest and concern for their children's education was not always being recognised by the designers and providers of that education (see also: Wolfendale, 1985, p4). Those who do not get involved directly in their child's education have often had well founded reasons (Topping & Wolfendale, 1985, p4).

A key assumption in deficit notions is that it is legitimate for parent practices to be subject to scrutiny. Conversely, "professional practices are treated as non-problematic" (Barton & Moody, 1981, p135). The embedding of deficit notions in

programmes purporting to aim for partnership suggests a need to look more critically at conceptualisations of professionalism, the subject of section 2.4.

### **2.3.3 Unintended Outcomes of Partnership**

It is rare for a scheme aiming to develop partnership with parents to make it clear from the start that it might be difficult for partnership either to be achieved, or to be effective for children or parents. The constant assumption is of the unquestioned good that could come from partnership. However, the following discussion questions such assumptions.

There has been very little attempt to evaluate different ways of parents being involved in schools (as noted by Easen, 1996), exceptions being Widlake and Macleod (1985) on reading intervention. Parent partnership, the buzzword of parental involvement of the 1990s, has been assumed to be a given good. Brito and Waller (1993) document significant strengths and opportunities, as well as weaknesses and threats to partnership of sessions with parents of children who were the recent intake of a primary school. Macleod (1996) looks again at the results from three key studies (Tizard, 1982; Hannon, 1987; and Tizard et al., 1988). She finds major methodological problems in all studies, and little convincing evidence of favourable effects of parents hearing children read. Sandow (1994), researching a different area, found that children whose parents received frequent visits from professionals to advise on programmes to use at home with children with severe learning difficulties made less progress than parents who received infrequent visits. It was suggested that "any intervention was better than none", but that parents who were visited less were "empowered" rather than "deskilled". (Sandow, 1994, p143). Sandow (1994, p145) also refers to a report by Cunningham (1996) evaluating his programmes with parents of children with Down's syndrome in which he found no evidence



of any advantage to children or parent, except that the mothers whose children had been included were more likely to seek help from professionals and to re-enter employment.

Other literature suggests that efforts to achieve partnership with parents can have the opposite effect (Bastiani, 1993a; Hegarty, 1993; Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987). For example, home-school contracts have been seen by some, such as Hegarty (in Woodhead & McGrath, 1988) and Macbeth (1988; 1993) to represent a major advance in home-school partnerships. However, it is possible that paper contracts may militate against home-school relations if they allow schools to assume other methods of communicating need not occur. A contract may bring a negative discourse of control, which could be claimed to be incompatible with partnership. Research suggests it may not be the paper contract that will facilitate partnership:

*An important point is that we are finding the processes more rewarding than we think the finished product will be. We know now that we will want to continue with the dialogue each year.* (White & Smith, 1993, p17).

Similar contradictions between relationships and bureaucracy have been documented in New Zealand. Sullivan (1992) suggests that a conceptualisation of parent partnership in terms of community involvement was hampered by the increased demands on teachers and erosion of the teacher's professional position which has resulted in community involvement being fossilised into their equivalent of our board of governors (Boards of Trustees):

*Under the reforms, Boards of Trustees become an institutionalised version of 'community', and their function of administration is far removed from the notions of equity and educational improvement that originally went hand in hand with the concepts of partnership and community.* (1992, p163)



Parental representation on the governing board has therefore militated against any definition of partnership that involves reciprocity, let alone notions of equality. In the UK parental involvement on Boards of Governors has existed now for many years yet has failed to achieve any substantial change in parental representation (Robinson, Timperley, McNaughton, & Parr, 1994). Requiring parents to be members of governing boards is likely to make little contribution to partnership if parent members, or the boards as a whole, have little power.

These findings suggest there should be more attention to evaluating parental involvement schemes and more investigation of the process of parental involvement to make visible possible key variables. Some researchers have made a start on this complex endeavour. In the area of literacy, Renshaw (1994) started to analyse the many varied reading situations created by and for children at home, and speculated on ways they could be valued by teachers as a child makes the transition to school. Sally Tomlinson, David Galloway and Derrick Armstrong (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994) looked in detail at the process at the heart of this thesis, the statutory assessment of children deemed to have special educational needs. This research suggested that parents involved in special educational needs assessments lacked the power to state their own views, and were likely therefore to be disempowered by professionals attempting to bring them into partnership (Armstrong, 1995). In other words, partnership might simply make it more likely that parents go along with the professional's view of the situation. The same research (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994) found parents often felt their contribution was only listened to when they were confirming professional views, and professionals seemed to direct them towards a consensus.

If parents have not been disempowered, Brown (1994) argues:

*it has involved a constant challenge to change professional attitudes, often at great personal cost. Progress has been made - but at what price? Repeatedly, parents have to prove their children's worth; rarely is there wholesale acceptance of them as individuals with their own valued uniqueness. Year after year parents struggle to change attitudes, beliefs, misconceptions. Just as one teacher becomes attuned to a child's needs, the year closes and the child moves on and more parent energies have to be invested in educating a new teacher, even more so when a shift of school involved. For many parents, nearly every 'victory' has been bitter-sweet, won at great personal cost, and demanding constant vigilance and total advocacy for their child. Parents and professionals need to realise that at the end of the day the most important advocates any child can have are their parents (...) Schools need to realise parent potential.* (Brown, 1994, p237)

We do not yet know in detail the mechanisms by which parent partnership leads to intended outcomes. Neither do we know the extent of any unintended negative outcomes. Greater awareness is needed of the processes underlying home-school relations in the different educational contexts. In particular, the relationship between parents and professionals needs to be given much closer attention.

#### **2.3.4 Notions of Homogeneity**

A statement of partnership seems to assume homogeneity within the parent group. However, several features define differences between parents such as cultural capital and the defined "difficulty" of their child.

Even if there were such a possible identifiable group of people called "parents", there is little evidence of attempts to base policy on actual parent needs and views. For example, research by Hughes, Wikeley and Nash (Hughes, 1993; Hughes, Wikeley, & Nash, 1994) suggests that the notion of "parents as consumers", as suggested by government booklets on "Parents Charter", may have little basis in reality. Official wisdom about parent needs and perspectives, on which government policy may claim to be based, may not be correct. Hughes

(1994) argues that "this central role (of consumer) has been developed without any extensive consultation with parents themselves, and that it embodies a number of assumptions about parents that have never been tested" (1994, p206). He further suggests that the evidence finds parent views at odds with assumptions made by Government policy. Rather than parents who are critical of schools, Hughes find parents who are generally happy with local schools. Partnership is at least likely to be problematic if it is based on inaccurate information about current majority construction of the role or of the diversity of parents.

Several sources have underlined the particular perspectives of parents from different ethnic minority groups, and the ways in which efforts to involve parents, assuming homogeneity of need, might, at the very least fail to involve them, and, worst, disempower them in their relations with schools (Crozier, 1996; Gregory, 1994; Shoho, 1994; Stoker, 1996). Parental involvement might increase educational inequality by including an unrepresentative group of parents, usually those confident in their relations with school and their role as educators of their own children at home (Toomay, 1993, p131). Parental choice of school seems at face value to underlie a model of accountability for all parents. However, research has shown that choice of schools is limited by various aspects of cultural capital, particularly access to information on schools and physical proximity to particular schools (Gewirtz, Ball, & Bowe, 1995; Reay, 1996). Equity of choice therefore seems to be limited to different groups of parents.

In the area of special educational needs parent characteristics (such as level of confidence and level of education) and characteristics of the child's learning difficulty interact to differentially empower parents (Gascoigne & Wolfendale, 1995, chapter 2). An example of the latter, Chandler (1986) found differences in



parent-professional relations between parents of children in different special needs placements. Interviews were carried out with parents of children in four different kinds of placement: schools for children with moderate learning difficulties, nurseries, residential schools for children with behavioural and emotional difficulties and mainstream schools. The group who, when asked if they felt partners in the assessment process, said they felt least involved as partners, were parents of children in residential schools for children with behavioural and emotional difficulties. Parents of pre-school children gave the highest response to whether they felt they were partners. Parents were found to be slightly more positive about the part played by the educational psychologist than the teacher or the doctor. Most felt their own contribution was important, but it was regarded as essentially passive. All felt mostly satisfied with the outcome of the assessment, but all felt the process could have been improved. The problems in this research were the small sample size. Also, the use of direct questioning about partnership raised concerns about the validity of findings, due to the varied understanding parents are likely to have about such a concept as partnership.

Many parents of children with special educational needs are required, by the need to liaise with teachers over the assessment and education of their child, to have a relationship with schools that is different to that of other parents, and one they may not wish to have. Tomlinson (1981a) distinguishes between parents that have been "sent for and told" about their children's difficulties from those who have been "consulted". Parents of a child with severe learning difficulties (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p25) are likely to have a very different relationship to professionals from those with a child who has a reading difficulty first discussed when the child is 6 years old. Parents also vary in the possibility of drawing upon the resources of pressure groups. There is evidence that the existence of powerful pressure groups behind certain types of special

educational need has led to advantages in terms of securing scarce educational resources (Riddell, Brown, & Duffield, 1994, p342). Other children, such as those with moderate learning difficulties, have no powerful advocacy group to promote their cause. One consequence of the variation between parents is that partnership, by itself, may not ensure equal access to influence decision making. It may go some way to redressing the power balance between parents and professionals, if such a linear model applies, but it may also exacerbate that between different groups of parents.

Sadow, Stafford and Stafford (1987, p22) referred to "customers" and "suppliers". Customers mark out those parents who have some rights in commenting on education, and are part of a consensus about the service on offer. Other parents simply supply their child and have little agency in their relationship with professionals. The identified discourse (problem, deficit, client, teacher, partner) may mark out different types of parents, which is likely to interact differently with the same discourse in legislation. Customers and suppliers may both find partnership problematic. Customers may resent any reciprocity suggested, and simply make demands. Suppliers may find it impossible to even notice a suggestion of partnership.

Miriam David (1993) found that research and policy have, in the main, been silent on the issues of gender and race. In most research reviewed she finds "parents" are investigated as if they were gender-neutral and race-neutral. David reviews research looking at mother's changing involvement in education, and she looks at the implications of this for children. She finds women's involvement in education is generally different to that of men. There are other silences: David finds social scientists have looked at how the family influences education, but not at the complex ways in which education influences families, or, in particular, mothers. "Partnership" requires mothers, as "unpaid teacher

substitutes" to be responsible for reducing the "social dissonance between children on the basis of school rather than home" (David, 1993, p168). Meanwhile, schools seem to take little account of the varied and changing roles in families, and demands upon them. David is one of the few researchers to draw attention to the unspoken truth, and problems for research into "parents" and "teachers", that teachers are also, often, parents.

Parental involvement has been suggested to present a caricature of middle class family life as an ideal and to fail to acknowledge the diversity of parenting practices (Bailey, 1993). Tomlinson (1982) suggests that professional attitudes towards parents in the area of special educational needs have been shaped by their social class status. A larger proportion of parents whose children are formally assessed for special educational needs are from lower income groups in relation to the professionals. This might explain the difficulties in achieving partnership with parents in the area of special educational needs.

A recognition of the effect of the different kinds of cultural capital (Lareau, 1989) brought to the relationship with schools by different parents could be recognised by a conceptualisation of parent partnership which moves away from a focus on the individual parent towards community involvement:

*Throughout the 1970s and 80s (... in New Zealand ...), there was a general move towards the empowerment of children, parents and the community which was part of a drive for equity in education. Central to this was the concept of 'community' which was considered important because it could voice particular needs, whether they were cultural-ethnic-, gender-, or ability-related. (Sullivan, 1992, p153).*

Similarly, an ecological approach to families in the area of special educational needs, recommended by Thomas (1992) would ensure a more complex conceptualisation of parents in relation to schools. Tett and St. Clair (1996) look for programmes which "genuinely reflect the lived experiences of children and



their families" in order to give parents a "genuine 'voice' in their children's education" (p363).

There is little evidence that practitioners are aware that different actions might be needed to enable different groups of parents to find partnership either accessible or empowering (Gross, 1996). Neither is there evidence that professionals are aware that they might need to reconceptualise partnership in ways that avoid assuming parents to be an undifferentiated group.

### **2.3.5 Concluding Comments**

The rhetoric of parent partnership has been challenged from all sides. It has been revealed to be a problematic concept, even more so since there is an assumption in educational practice that it is unproblematic.

Assumed definitions have made way for the realisation that mutuality and equity in roles of parents and professionals rarely exist in practice. Parents have been regarded as an undifferentiated group. However, the researcher suggests that it is a group that, as such, does not exist. Positive educational outcomes of partnership have been assumed with little supporting evidence, but there is evidence that partnership can disempower parents. Partnership has been suggested, in the preceding sections, to be compromised by professionals in a lack of awareness of the form and effect of professional power, and how this operates with different parents and in different areas of education.

The argument therefore shifts focus to look at the professionals. The professional perspective on partnership has been implicit in the preceding discussion. However, it is necessary to focus explicitly on the professional role

in order to analyse further the way parent partnership has been positioned in the process of meeting children's special educational needs. The discussion looks first to the role, in general, of the professional, then to the role of the educational psychologist in particular, and finally to the ways professionals work together.

## **2.4 The Professional Context of the Assessment of Special Educational Needs**

The professional perspective on SEN partnership is considered by looking at the extent to which working with others (parents or other professionals) is part of the professional role. The researcher looks at two key areas in order to illuminate the context of this aspect of professionalism. The first, the changing meaning of being a professional, is considered in the light of the pressures on the professions over the last 50 years. The second, the particular professional context of those involved in working with children deemed to have special needs, is considered by deconstructing the meaning of special educational needs and the assessment process. It is in the light of these two areas that this chapter then turns to the role of a particular professional, the educational psychologist. The professional identity of the educational psychologist is given particular attention since this is the major professional group involved in special educational needs assessment. Implications for parent partnership are regularly returned to throughout. Finally, this chapter looks at an aspect of professional identity that impacts upon partnership with parents in special needs assessment. This is the extent to which working with other professions, multi-professional collaboration, is part of the professional context.

### **2.4.1 Being a Professional**

The meaning of being a "professional" has been under continuous pressure over the last 50 years. This section examines the complexities of this pressure and suggests implications for partnership.

Johnson (1972, chapter 2) discussed different definitions of a profession (see also: Freidson, 1994, chapter 2). A "trait" model of professionalism, popular in



the 1960's, saw the characteristics of the first professions, medicine and law, as including:

- a claim to a distinctive body of knowledge, skills, and expertise
- independence of judgement and practice
- operating as an individual practitioner, networked to colleagues
- the centrality of the professional-client relationship
- independence from the state
- offering a disinterested service to the public
- monopoly over practice, with control over access to expertise
- "policed" by an organised body by taking responsibility for entry and training, licence to practise
- ethical code of conduct, and standards of practice

Perkin (1996) claimed professions, during Victorian England, raised the quality of life in all spheres by their uses of standards of practice. The entry of "new" professions, such as teaching and social work, whose characteristics failed to match those of law and medicine (for example, shorter courses and skills difficult to define or to claim as unique) started a dilution of the definition of being a professional. The power and privilege of the professions have, since then, been repeatedly challenged in a number of ways. From an earlier role as defenders of the less powerful against the bureaucratic state, the professions started to be seen as serving their own vested interests (Johnson, 1972; Midwinter, 1977; Tomlinson, 1981b) and therefore as maintaining power which needed to be challenged. Several challenged the claim of the professions to expert knowledge. One writer (Larson, 1977) articulated it as professional mystique by virtue of being part of a socially dominant group. Others, notably Perkin (1989), saw the professions subject to a major critique in the 1970's and 80's, as an unproductive workforce in a time of economic recession, responsible

for the growth of welfare services and high profile pay disputes, both of which contributed to a further drain on national resources. In the battle between free-market corporate business and the traditional professions, the latter were the losers. A discourse of "nanny state" or "dependency culture" were illustrative of the power of the former (Perkin, 1996, pxiii).

The different kinds of power noted by Hugman (1991, p5) as being able to be exerted by the professions can be seen today as representing a major challenge to the professions. This includes power within the professions themselves, power of those who control the resources, power of those who use the services, and power exercised by the wider social institutions, often the state. At one level a simplistic analysis occurs. Power within professions continues to provide an hierarchy with internal mechanisms of registration and control over ethical practice. External sources can be seen to be exerting power in the form of mechanisms of accountability required by the state and its agents. The growth of continuing professional development has challenged the notion of expert "knowledge". This is both an internal requirement of continued registration, but also an external, statutory requirement in medicine and law. In other professions, such as the teaching profession, state regulation has been unremitting over the last 20 years, from the National Curriculum to Ofsted. Advocacy platforms represent a further level of critique and regulation, representing the power of those who use the services. Clients have asserted their right to a voice and have challenged the skills, perspectives and power of professionals. Users have formed their own interest groups which provide information currently relied upon from the professional. For example, IPSEA (the Independent Panel of Special Education Advisors), and "Contact a Family" are both organisations supporting families of children deemed to have special educational needs. The internet provides information on all areas of disability at the touch of a finger (assuming, of course, access to the technology).

The exertion of external forces of power, from the state and from service users, could mean a simple diminution of professional power. However, analysis of the current situation suggests we are now in a time of great ambiguity in the positioning of what it means to be a professional. Lukes drew attention to the social construction of power (Lukes, 1974) and Hugman (1991) has applied this to the professions:

*what professionals do and do not do, what they see as properly their concern and not their concern must be examined in relation to the structural positions of those profession*  
(Hugman, 1991, p33)

The complexity of current structural positions is exemplified by theorising about the operation of power within and on professions today. Professional characteristics, suggested in 1970's sociological analysis to protect the professional, in reality probably protects both client and professional. For example, a code of ethics both protects the professional and can be seen to advance their own interests, but also advances the interests of the client (i.e. standards of service including values of equal opportunities and confidentiality). The ambiguous position of the state can be seen as both a mediator between the professions and their clients, and as a client of the professions (Hugman, 1991, p18-19). It seems likely that during the times in which the interests of the state are consistent with those of the professions, the professions experience a great deal of power. However, the professions today seem to occupy a problematic position, with both state and clients taking positions against them. Conversely, with the rise of accountability mechanisms in every area of professional life, the professions have also been seen as agents of the state. As agents of the state they are relied upon to carry out government policy. This means accepting prescriptive roles (i.e. the national curriculum for schools) and also acting as accountability mechanisms for areas of state concern such as family life and the



practice of other professions. Professions also put themselves in the position of critics of the same policy. A more positive discourse was added to this complexity as descriptors of professionalism as unproductive started to be replaced in the 1990's with the realisation that "good behaviour can be good business" (Perkin, 1996, pxvi).

Bastiani's (1987) models of the relationship between parents and education not surprisingly mirror the power challenges to the professions. As society's view of professionals has changed, so has the relationship between the professional and his or her client. A compensation model seems to represent the traditional role of the professional, described at the start of this section, with its emphasis on the role of disinterested expert. The other models represent different encroachments into the professional role by the user and the state. However, the complexity of power available to professionals within each model means that it is difficult to see any simple shift in power from professionals to parents. The parent role can occupy a position of client in any of the models, positioning the parent as relatively powerless:

*Given the extensive and advanced nature of prior training and the specificity of role, it is easy to see how the client concept (...) arose and became an endemic part of professional practice. Clients, mostly parents, became 'dependants' and 'customers' of services offered by experts in children development, child rearing, psychopathology, and procedure.*

(Wolfendale, 1983, p134).

### **Concluding Comments**

Some forms of accountability and participation represent major shifts in professional power. The shift of power in accountability models is relatively clearly articulated as the encroachments of the power of the user and the power of the state into the arena of the professional.

Fulcher (1989) defines professionalism as: "the historical struggle in which occupational groups attempt to control areas of occupational life" (Fulcher, 1989, p159). This suggests control is, in fact, a central tenet of professionalism. However, release of control was earlier suggested to be a requirement of partnership. The future for partnership between parents and professionals may be bleak. It is no wonder, therefore, that section 2.3.1 in this chapter demonstrated difficulties in delineating different roles characteristics of parent and professional, when it is now seen that the role of the professional has more to do with structural power than with traits. It is also no wonder that section 2.3.2 also demonstrated professional reluctance to take on board notions of client agency, in the continued embrace of notions of parent deficit.

Seen in this light it now becomes clearer why participation has been difficult to achieve. It suggests that partnership is impossible if this means maintenance of professional power. The possibility exists that the accountability model is the only way that users can become empowered to act with agency in professional decision-making.

However, an alternative story may be possible. Professionals may aim to develop partnership with parents as an aspect of their role in carrying out government policy. Professionals also exercise a degree of autonomy and may embrace partnership with parents as part of this. Professionals may find the empowerment of others empowering to themselves. Partnership may therefore be possible for professionals. This thesis will aim to investigate such possibilities.

In this section the researcher has theorised key elements of the first part of the "story", looking at the difficulties in achieving parent partnership, in terms of current understandings about the status of the professions. In the light of this,

the unfolding discussion continues by examining the status of partnership within the professionalism of a key professional group in special educational needs assessment, educational psychologists.



## **2.5 Educational Psychologists: Problems with Partnership**

What is most noticeable is that partnership with parents has eluded educational psychologists. Evidence from the literature suggests that, despite the formal embracing of partnership following Warnock and later the Code of Practice, and despite the continuous exhortations of educational psychologist trainers such as Wolfendale (1985; 1995), educational psychologists have been unable to fully embrace partnership with parents. The reader may wish to consider the issues presented in the following sections at the same time as those of earlier sections in this chapter, particularly themes in partnership in home-school relations. These were the lack of complexity in the definition of partnership, the deficit assumption, unintended outcomes, and assumptions of homogeneity.

### **2.5.1 Partnership not on the agenda**

There is evidence of a view in the 1980's and before of partnership not being on the professional agenda (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987). By this is meant partnership named as such and distinct from enlisting parents in assessment and intervention as an extension of the professional role. The nature of the "parent" discourse in the Summerfield Report (1968), the last major working party, appointed by the then Secretary of State for Education and Science, into the role of the Educational Psychologist, indicated a slight movement towards one in which the parent is the client to the expert educational psychologist, and therefore away from "parent as problem". However, partnership was not an articulated relationship:

*Where parental consent to a placement is withheld, or anything else prevents a preferred course of action from being taken, it is desirable for the educational psychologist to record the best conceivable*

*recommendations before giving the best practical solution.* (DES, 1968, section 6.19, p60).

*When it (communication) is good children understand better what is required of them and are motivated to respond to the best of their ability; and adults, whether parents or professional workers, supply more relevant information or gain better insight or support.* (DES, 1968, section 6.5(4), p58).

Parents as "honorary teachers" to the "expert" educational psychologist was epitomised by Newson (1976), a psychologist at the forefront of calls to involve parents in the assessment and diagnosis of young children with special educational needs. Wolfendale (1995, p79) suggests that until the end of the 1970's educational psychologists recognised a complex relationship with parents, but one characterised by the educational psychologist as expert, as counsellor or therapist, and as a go-between for the school and home. It was evident in articles in the relatively young professional journal, "AEP Journal", reporting a number of examples of working with parents (Blow & Hardingham, 1982; Bushell, Miller, & Robson, 1982; Cooknell, 1982; Dyson & Swinson, 1982; Emerson, Hood, Pitt, Palmer, & Sinclair, 1981; Holland & Noaks, 1982; Westmacott & Cameron, 1982). These examples included enlisting parents to teach "mentally handicapped children" (Emerson, Hood, Pitt, Palmer, & Sinclair, 1981), "remedial reading" (Bushell, Miller, & Robson, 1982; Dyson & Swinson, 1982) and "disturbing, undesirable, and amoral behaviour" (Blow & Hardingham, 1982, p16). What is most surprising, although it confirms the general trend, is that as late as 1987 Sandow, Stafford and Stafford found little evidence that either parents or professionals were trying to build partnership or saw it as a goal. None of the educational psychologists mentioned the goal of partnership. This research analysed the constructs, as indicated in questionnaires, of 64 (74%) of the 107 parents whose child had been assessed under the 1981 education act during one year (Sep 84 - Sep 85). Sandow et al. (op cit) also administered a questionnaire to professionals, which was returned by 98 of them, and carried out personal construct interviews with the 5 educational psychologists who had

worked with all 107 children. Sandow et al. were concerned to find a methodology that could collect diverse view of parents and professionals and was at the same time capable of reliable analysis. Other findings from Sandow et al.'s research will be reported at appropriate times in the following sections of this chapter.

Cross's (1989) research indicated that partnership was a goal of parents but not of professionals in her research tracing the path to the inclusion of parents in the Scottish system of statementing - recording. She sent questionnaires to parents and a sample of professionals from four special schools with a 48% return (or, 111 in total). Responses indicated that professionals looked for a restricted involvement of parents, whilst parents felt that not all information was shared and there was little mutual responsibility for the child's education.

Research by educational psychologists into their own actions with parents show several examples of confusing *partnership* (researcher's italics) with a view of parents in the role of clients or teachers. For example, Swinson's (1985) project for involving parents in the education of their nursery aged child by asking them to read to the child each day was in keeping with the "parent as helper" mode of parent partnership - seeing parents as a resource to assist teachers. Jewell (1986) described a process for writing individual education plans for children with literacy difficulties. The educational psychologist was required to write the individual education plan and to give advice on the direct instruction teaching method. However, Jewell suggested that regular monitoring and evaluation, and training for teachers and parents was required so that they might "eventually be able to write and design their own " (Jewell, 1986, 16). Pumfrey (1991) claimed in the title of her article to look at implications for LEAs, professionals and parents of issues in identifying and alleviating specific learning difficulties, but did not, in the text, address any issues for parents.



### **2.5.2 Partnership as Unproblematic**

Evidence from literature in the 1990s suggests that partnership was accepted into the articulated professional role, but was seen as unproblematic. Norwich (1993) found educators (head teachers, teachers, SENCOS, support staff and educational psychologists) in the UK and USA recognised ideological dilemmas associated with identification, integration and curriculum, but not parent professional relationships. Results suggested that professionals found all areas provided problems, but the problems presented by parent-professional partnerships could be tackled, and did not pose a contradiction to them in the way they worked. It is possible that professionals saw parents' contributions to assessment as positive, non-interfering in professional actions, and that professionals did not assume they knew best. Another explanation is that professionals saw it as their responsibility to encourage greater parental involvement as an aspect of their role, but one that was non-problematic. Findings suggest that other dilemmas, such as spending more money to get resources to integrate, were seen as a problem. Unlike encouraging parent partnership, this was something over which they felt they had little control.

### **2.5.3 Partnership Articulated**

In their attempts to seek partnership with parents, educational psychologists continued to occupy an "expert" position. Webster (1990) reports the development of a scheme to help parents to make representations during the formal assessment of their child's special educational needs. One of the four stated aims of this initiative was to encourage the view that parents were genuine partners in the assessment process. The scheme involved the piloting of a form for parents to use, and a support process involving education welfare

officers to help parents to complete the form. However, despite notions of partnership, parents were not involved in the design of the form or the support process. Evaluation was looked at in terms of the rate of parents returning the form, rather than any direct involvement of the parents themselves.

Wolfendale (1993) described ways parents could make a fuller contribution to assessing, recording and communicating their children's development and prospects. Although she defined assessment very broadly, the techniques suggested and examples used were mostly in the area of special educational needs. She viewed the problem of contribution as a technical one, requiring improved communication and the devising of forms and checklists. She did not seek ways for parents to comment on professional actions.

There is little evidence from the literature that educational psychologists might be aware of the problematic of parent partnership, an exception being Wolfendale (1995). Partnership is not only rarely achieved in practice, but there is evidence of a difference in perspective between educational psychologist and parents, which appears to be absent from professional concern. For example, Sandow, Stafford and Stafford (1987) found many differences between parents' and professionals' priorities and assumptions about their relationship. Parents were concerned, and rated as number one, that the professional should keep in contact with their child and know their child, whereas professionals rated this as tenth. Professionals assumed parents would be negative towards remedial and special provision and need convincing, but parents indicated this was not their view (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p146). Educational psychologists viewed their own role in terms of advising on provision rather than only on need. Rather than partners, educational psychologists saw their role in terms of advice and information givers (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p150). Open records were seen as undesirable (p150). Sandow et al (op cit) summarised

that professionals presume parents "seek specialist expertise, information and advice, and above all a guaranteed solution to the problem", but found that "parents seek individual attention to their child's problem based on close knowledge of the child gained by frequent contact with him" (p149). However, there were some similarities in perspective: both parents and professionals had minimal concern for integration and both felt the assessments took too long.

Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson's (1994) research into twenty-nine children going through the statementing process for behavioural difficulties, found similar differences in perspectives. Parents thought educational psychologists' reports did not reflect the open discussions they had held with educational psychologists in which the child's behaviour problems were considered in the context of the school's own shortcomings and lack of LEA resources. Parents felt reports concentrated on within-child factors like psychometric tests that had not been discussed with them, leaving many parents "bewildered and resentful". This situation can be explained by the observation that the educational psychologists were acting for different clients in each situation - as the parent advocate and advisor in their discussions of the shortcomings of the school, and as LEA representative in their report to the panel.

A note on methodology is appropriate here. Much empirical research by educational psychologists into their role consists of surveys of opinion of the service experienced. Such studies are interesting in being indicative of a consumer discourse. They are also very restrictive methodologically: there are limits to the possible findings since they rarely problematise the concepts at the centre of the research. Such methodology does not easily allow dialogue outside the questions asked, which would be needed to consult in a more wide-ranging way about service delivery. For example, Land (1985) surveyed all parents involved in a Portage scheme (home visitor to parents where their pre-



school child had special educational needs, training parents to use a structured teaching method) over a five year period. The aim was to find views of the benefits of the scheme, utilisation of the techniques after leaving the service and suggestions for improvement as a way of evaluating the scheme. It was clearly seen as important to the evaluation of a service to survey the view of parents. However, no alternatives to the service were provided in the questions asked. Such surveys seem biased towards positive responses.

There are some signs of educational psychologists recognising differences in perspective between themselves and parents. This is notable in their attention to communication skills, in particular to the need to listen to parents. One example is a "pack" produced by and for educational psychologist for use in schools in order to promote teachers' ability to manage pupil behaviour, "Building a Better Behaved School" (Galvin, Mercer, & Costa, 1990). This enshrined notions of partnership. For example, one suggestion contained in a handout entitled "Joint Problem Solving Meeting with Parents: Guidelines for Teachers" was to, "Be prepared to modify your ideas in the light of parent information and views" p221. Also Hurford and Stow (1985) recognised the exhortation of the Warnock report and the 1981 Education Act to "treat parents as partners in their child's education" and provided training for teachers on listening skills to enable them to listen to parents. Of course, it is notable that it was teachers who were exhorted to listen to parents, whereas evidence (from this literature review) has suggested that this was also needed of educational psychologists.

#### **2.5.4 Concluding Comments**

The educational psychologist is one of the main professional groups outside school with whom parents interact as part of a statementing process. It is also a

profession that has spoken more clearly than others involved about the need for parent partnership (Wolfendale, 1993; Wolfendale, 1995), but with whom, as we have already discussed, there are difficulties in achieving partnership. Writing by educational psychologists on their work with parents suggests a consistent focus on a client discourse. However, research to elicit parent opinion, and parental criticisms of "statementing" suggest a customer discourse. There is little sign of any major shift towards partnership. Educational psychologists now espouse partnership in their work, but the evidence from the literature is that they continue to see parents as supporters of the professional role. Both research and practice looking at the development of parents as partners has been limited by a failure to problematise the concept of partnership. Reasons for this impasse is looked for in the following sections in the key professional issues for educational psychologists in the 1990s.

## **2.6 Educational psychologists: Key Professional Issues**

The researcher has now suggested that partnership presents difficulties for educational psychologists. The current section looks for reasons for such difficulties. Previous sections in this chapter have together underlined the importance of aspects of professionalism in starting to understand why home-school relations have been so problematic. The defining characteristic of the need of professionalism to control professional identity, in the face of threats to identity from the state and from users, was suggested to be a major constraint on partnership. It is therefore important to consider the notion of the professional identity for a particular professional group, educational psychologists. It is hoped this will throw light on the difficulties in maintaining a partnership relationship with parents. First a brief historical context will be set before looking at key issues for the professional identity of educational psychologists. These include a resistance to the encroachment of state funding, the move towards a systemic focus in work, and a reconstruction of both "special need" and "assessment".

Educational psychologists have written most of the literature quoted here and a large proportion of it all has been published in the journal of one of the educational psychologists' professional associations. It therefore offers an interesting commentary on important professional themes. This lends validity in terms of the current review even though most of the literature quoted is non-empirical.

### **2.6.1 Historical Context**

Educational psychologists added themselves to the growing numbers of new professions. This role came into being in the early 1900s, with Cyril Burt the



first educational psychologist to be appointed in 1913. The major defining drive towards the evolution of the profession came from the development of tools in the form of tests assumed to measure intellectual ability. These were needed, it was believed at the time, to assist in the identification of children for placement in special schools. The professional role of the psychologist was defined by the trappings of science, objectivity and rationality, and the scientific practitioner was born (Quicke, 1978). The Summerfield report (DES, 1968) led to a major expansion in numbers of educational psychologists over the following 10 years until there was a national restraint on public services. Educational psychologists expanded their sphere of influence and certain groups of children who had previously received little education were placed in school.

Since then the profession of the educational psychologist has been characterised by a search for a distinctive professional role and by difficulties in resting within the statutory role as it has evolved since the 1981 Education Act. The search for a role has not been helped by a lack of agreement within or outside the profession about a preferred role. The demands on educational psychologists from other changes within schools and LEAs have further complicated the situation. The following sections demonstrate the way the profession of educational psychology has been subject to multiple demands and increasing ambiguities, before looking again at implications for parent partnership. This section also demonstrates the difficulties already apparent in the process of statementing.

### **2.6.2 Resisting Statementing**

Educational psychologists were thrown, by the 1981 Education Act, into the lead role in identifying children's special educational needs. This process, the statementing process, is the context for the particular aspect of home-school

relations, which provides the focus of this thesis. For most services statementing also provided a management role in applying the new assessment framework. Statementing could be said to represent a widening of educational psychologists' sphere of control, being seen as gate keepers to scarce resources (Fulcher, 1989; Tomlinson, 1982). However, it has also meant a narrowing of role to focus, for example, on special needs, and on a particular aspect of provision for children with special needs. At the same time, other legislation was applied to change the relations between the LEA and schools. In particular LEAs were required to delegate funds to schools and to maintain an ever-decreasing proportion of central funds. Whilst the statutory role of educational psychologists in statementing has, for some ensured a continuing role in the face of competition for central LEA funding, for others it has locked the profession into unsatisfying work (see: Lucas, 1989, p174-8 for a discussion of the issues). Certainly role demands have increased, with little increase, in relative terms, in staffing. Some writers have gone so far as to express the view that statementing set educational psychology back 20 years (Gregory, 1993, p68) in its exclusion of all other forms of work. Concern over possible litigation if procedures are not carried out properly (Denman & Lunt, 1993, p14) have only served to heighten the emphasis on statementing. Whilst many writers talk of working at different levels, they still emphasise the statementing role (Facherty & Turner, 1988, p100). Furthermore, Jennings (1995) shows that, even relatively recently, a small sample of those leading the profession - nine London Principal Educational Psychologist, saw statutory work as the first priority for educational psychologists both at the time of the study and in the future. Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994, p127) drew attention to the ambiguous professional position of educational psychologists in the statementing process, occupying a powerful position as gate-keepers of information, able to coerce reluctant parents, and administering a bureaucratic process as agents of the state. However, educational psychologists have also



been preoccupied with an internal power dispute over which area will ensure its continued identity as a profession: statementing - or a wider role far from statementing.

The effect on partnership with parents of educational psychologists' reluctance to embrace statementing may depend upon the attitude of parents, as a group and as individuals, to statementing. It may also depend upon the way partnership is conceptualised. Parents may see statementing as the major opportunity to have their child's special needs met. Partnership may be characterised by agreement. If both hold true, it would be likely that partnership with educational psychologists would be compromised. However, there may be other complexities. Educational psychologists may resist statementing but see its value for particular children. Implications for partnership are therefore difficult to predict.

### **2.6.3 Systemic Focus**

A systemic focus, for educational psychologists, has represented a way out of statementing. It has also seemed to offer educational psychologists the opportunity they looked for to move towards a social constructionist model of the child in their approach to assessment and intervention. A move towards a more systemic way of working, in various guises, has been a recurring theme for the last 20 years (Boxer, Challen, & McCarthy, 1991; Cameron & Stratford, 1987, p14; Facherty & Turner, 1988, p100). However, it was also clear that individual assessment was still seen to be the major part of psychologist's work (HMI 1988-9 in Dowling and Leibowitz, 1994). The first and second priorities for a group of nine London Principal Educational Psychologists were, respectively, statutory work and casework (Jennings, 1995). A more systemic focus included a move away from direct involvement with the child, to intervene more



widely, and in a variety of ways, in the system in which the child was a part. For some this meant putting "collaborative work with teachers at the centre of the activities or the EP" (Wagner, 1995, p22) whilst for others this meant directly attempting to influence educational policy within an LEA (Facherty & Turner, 1988). For many this also involved an assumption that one was working with the person who referred the problem, usually the teacher, rather than with the child. For some it carried with it a concern to move away from the use of psychometrics (Gillham 1978), and the direct assessment of a child.

A systemic focus also seemed to offer educational psychologists a way out of a major, continuing, dilemma for them, that of the identity of their "client". Some suggest this should be seen as "the child" (Lucas, 1989, p173). Others suggest educational psychologists faced split allegiance (Armstrong & Galloway, 1992; Gregory, 1993, p67) between the LEA and the child and parents. There seem to be several valid ways to conceptualise the people with whom an educational psychologist worked, including the person accountable to, the client, the person concerned with and the customer. However, the preponderance of views sought from head teachers and teachers in evaluations by educational psychology services of their work suggest EPSs see their clients as teaching staff (see: Dowling & Leibowitz, 1994, for a summary of evaluations).

Shephard (1979) found six different kinds of accountability, with different expectations by each of educational psychologists:

- The LEA
- Secretary of State for Education
- Primary clients - schools staff, families parents and children
- Educational psychologists' professional colleagues
- The educational psychologist profession as a whole (see also: Stoker, 1994)

- The educational psychologist him/herself - loyalty to the task (ideals, integrity and values)

There was a recognition that multiple clients have differing needs and perspectives (Armstrong & Galloway, 1992; HMI, 1990a, para 4; Lucas, 1989, p173). What was in the best interests of a particular child may not be in the best interests of other children. Different ideas about the educational psychologist's role were likely to be located in who was seen to be the focus of their work. The following quotes from the same article, by Dowling and Leibowitz (1994) illustrate the ambiguities in thinking about the nature of the educational psychologist's client:

*the needs of the customer have to be weighed against what are seen as the best interests of the child.* (p242-3).

*In 1989, with the possibility of educational psychologist budgets being devolved to schools, headteachers seemed the highest priority customer for the Westminster Psychological Service.* (p244).

*The model that seems most desirable is one in which the child is considered the primary customer and the educational psychologist, teacher and other significant adults (parents etc.) collaborate in the child's best interests. Using this model, the service agreement begins to evolve into a joint plan of operation in which the tasks and responsibilities of both educational psychologist and school are set out as a contract for partnership. The recent DFE circular supporting central funding for educational psychologist services is likely to strengthen this concept.* (p244).

A systemic focus seems to enable educational psychologists to manage the ambiguity of multiple clients by working consultatively with parents and professionals. This assumes professionals and parents work together to investigate the child's situation. This is likely to involve different kinds of working relationships between educational psychologists and others, parents or professionals, depending upon the model of consultation adopted. The advisor consultant will have a different role to the consultant aiming to empower the consultee. A systemic focus is likely to encourage partnership with parents

where empowerment is the goal and the difficulties in developing partnership are recognised and dealt with.

#### **2.6.4 "Special Need" - A Problematic Concept**

The statementing process, the context for this research, is predicated upon a concept of "special educational needs" which can be shown to be highly problematic. The power of a discourse of "need" lies in the assumption of "rationality" and "objectivity, and other related discourses. It assumes unquestioned acceptance of such discourses, and appears unproblematic. However, such assumptions are highly problematic. Woodhead (1991) demonstrated that need is a compacted term - a "condensed combination of compacted claims" (p41). The use of the word conceals value laden assumptions, seems to convey notions of empiricism, authority, universality, and objectivity. "Need" dares to claim to be an authoritative statement of fact. Not only this, but it conveys emotive force, inducing responsibility for being met. "Need" assumes: helplessness and passivity; dire consequences if need not met; and a consensus of knowledge and values between author and reader, social worker and client, policy maker and community (Woodhead, 1991, p41). It hides the possibility that it might be a personal choice or a political decision. The term appears as something intrinsic to children, rather than "'needs' as extrinsic to children, part of their make-up, and 'needs' as a cultural construction" (p42).

If assessed "need" is problematic it therefore follows that the notion of "special need" must also be called into question. Various writers (Edwards, 1978; Fulcher, 1989; Norwich, 1995; Solity, 1991; Wood, 1994) have provided a critique of the currently constructed notion of "special needs". As defined in the legislation, special need is a relative concept, defined in relation to educational context and local provision. This leads to unresolved ambiguities which, in



practice, rarely assume the problematic proportion one might expect. Further ambiguities centre on an accepted notion of 2% of the school population likely to require long-term special needs provision and 20% likely to have some special need at some time during their education. The difficulty in these percentages lies in their origin in research fraught with methodological difficulties, not least that it relies upon contested notions of IQ (Solity, 1991) and a medical model of child difficulties.

Corbett links difficulties with concepts of "special" and "need" to professional power:

*Special need is no longer a helpful or positive term. It is reflective of a professional ownership, in which medical and educational definitions classify what can be special and who can claim a need. (Corbett, 1993, p549).*

The relationships between parents and professionals are understandably problematic if they are concerned with the definition of such a political dimension, that of "special educational needs".

However, consideration must also be given to the process in which the concept "special need" is used, the assessment of children. It is to the role of the educational psychologist in assessment that the researcher turns to next.

### **2.6.5 Reconceptualising Assessment**

There has been a long attempt to define the "unique" contribution made by educational psychologists to the assessment of individual children (Aubrey, 1992, p195). This is seen to relate to skills (Campion, 1987), the application of psychology (Boxer, Challen, & McCarthy, 1991; Norwich, 1995, p34) and the position of educational psychologists in the education system (Boxer, Challen, &

McCarthy, 1991). Educational psychologists are assumed to be in the "middle ground" between parents, children, schools, support services and LEAs (Facherty & Turner, 1988, p100). They also have professional links with colleagues in other LEAs. Aubrey, however, (1992, p199) questions the unique contribution of educational psychologists and the necessity of their perspective on special needs children, suggesting that others provide valid perspectives on the same concerns. The "traditional" position is underlined by Peter Farrell and others:

*it is important for educational psychologists to adopt a strategy for assessment which is seen to be objective and systematic, and which is grounded in psychological theory..... the major influence should be their professional skills and knowledge gained from study and practice in psychology, for it is this additional layer of expertise which is the justification for educational psychologists having a key role in the assessment of these (EBD) children.*  
(Farrell, Harraghy, & Petrie, 1996, p81).

However, research into decision-making in educational psychologist's interviews suggests such interviews are not simple information gathering processes and the role of the educational psychologist is not a straightforward application of the objective gathering of such information. Rather:

*The interview is inadequately conceptualised as an information gathering process. The particular way in which information is constructed by participants arises out of a context of social interaction which includes the interview itself and perceptions about its purpose and the roles of those taking part. The interviewer, as participant, is not neutral, either in the way information is received or transmitted. Professional objectivity may mean no more than an awareness of a wider context within which decision making is set. In the interview, participants negotiate outcomes on the basis of shared meanings developed within the interview. Although this negotiation does not imply any necessary agreement over substantive issues it may nonetheless have implications for the way these outcomes are arrived at and perceived. Finally, the relative power of the parties involved in an interview and the perception that those parties have of the inequality or equality of power is important in influencing the outcome of decision-making. (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1991, p86).*

As an example of the negotiated nature of assessment, Booth demonstrates the way "mental handicap" can be seen not as a clinical diagnosis, but as a social



status acquired over a period of time during which parents and doctors negotiate a child's passage from normality to a deviant status. He presents a number of case studies and shows that:

*becoming a mentally handicapped person is an intricate social process which turns on a series of critical decisions initiating gradual but perceptual changes in a child's social status and leading ultimately to the elaboration of a social role which cannot be seen in clinical terms..... following on from diagnosis , it was left up to the parents to elaborate the idea of subnormality into an organised social role. For these parents, their child bears witness to the social reality of subnormality. From this point onwards, the child's actions and behaviour are assessed as those of someone who is subnormal and thereby work back on themselves to define in turn what subnormality is. (Booth, 1981:257).*

In the last section definitions of "need" and "special needs", assumptions underlying assessment, were suggested to be problematic. In this section assumptions underlying the nature of assessment itself is suggested to be problematic. Both Woodhead (1991) and Armstrong, Galloway and Tomlinson (1993) note that framing descriptions of children in terms of children's "need" can be argued to serve a function for those making the descriptions - principally the removal of responsibility, and focusing attention away from their own needs. The use of a referral process can be seen as a legitimate use of outside professionals to meet the needs of children, rather than an expression of professional control. For example, the observation that teachers more easily refer children with behavioural difficulty (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993; Farrell, Harraghy, & Petrie, 1996, p82) has been suggested to be due to teachers' need to maintain a sense of professional self esteem. Tomlinson reconceptualises such interests as professional power:

*The adoption of the concept of special educational needs as a rationale for the separation of children in normal and special education and the abolition of statutory categories of handicap are likely to give more, rather than less, power to the professionals. (Tomlinson, 1982, p104)*



Such a reconceptualisation of assessment, from objective information gathering to the expression of professional interest and power seems to represent a major shift. Unless the vested interests of a professional group are served by partnership it seems likely that the possibilities for successful partnership between parents and professionals in the assessment process will recede even further into some fantasy world.

### **2.6.6 Concluding Comments**

In educational psychology there seems to be a profession resisting statementing and seeking instead a systemic way of working but torn by ambiguities in the identity of the "client". A concept key to the educational psychologist role, "special needs" has been found problematic, and assessment has been reconceptualised as a negotiation of professional need.

It is important to set this professional role within the wider educational context. Market place education in the 1990s has continued the trend back to a medical model of the child through its rewards to schools for test results and attendance and the exclusion of those who might jeopardise the school's market position (Searle, 1996). Similarly, delegated funding has encouraged many schools to see statementing as a source of further funds, and attempts to have complex discussions on ways to use budgets targeted for special educational needs have had little success. Pressure within LEAs to reduce overall special needs budgets has encouraged moves to define criteria for statementing. Such criteria can most easily be defined if based on characteristics of the child. The statementing process itself encourages a within child model, since reports are looked for that focus on the child, rather than other aspects of the learning situation. With decreasing resources, the different pressure groups battling for resources for children in schools have also found comfort in a focus on child

attributes, since these can enable them to claim legitimacy of need through diagnosis of a label, such as ADHD, dyspraxia and dyslexia.

It is difficult to predict the possibilities of the professional situation of educational psychologists for partnership with parents. However, parent lobbies currently favour statementing as a way to secure special help in school. This might pose problems for partnership with professionals who find difficulties with the statementing process. Similarly, partnership might be problematised if roles are unclear, such as the identity of a professional's client. Traditional conceptualisations of "special need" and of "assessment" tend to locate causes within the child. One could envisage some parents finding this helpful, but others not.

Partnership has been shown to be problematic in general home-school relations. The current situation has suggested educational psychologists know the relationship between education and parents has changed, but have yet to re-negotiate their own relationship with parents. Perhaps, with so many uncertainties, educational psychologists have simply had too many exigencies to attend to. Perhaps the political realities of the 1990s have distracted educational psychologists. Or perhaps they perceive parent partnership as a further erosion of professionalism. Although parents have been "a cornerstone of EP work" Wolfendale confirms that "the advent of parent lobbying groups, "named person", advocacy and empowerment concepts are a challenge to ways in which the EP relates to parents, particularly within a business/ market-led model of service delivery" (Wolfendale, 1995, p78). Wolfendale's analysis, based on her own experience and a workshop with a small group of educational psychologists, suggests educational psychologists are unclear about the way ahead. They are now faced with certain imperatives and realities, which include parent's charters, parent access to information, an emphasis on accountability, and

changes in the LEA and EPS role. Wolfendale suggests a profession uncertain what to do about its relationship with parents. She gives a picture of a profession facing the following questions:

*"partnership" - on whose terms, whose empowerment?  
EPs supporting schools to realize CoP partnership principles in practice?  
How to maximize "equivalent expertise" in practice?  
EPs role re parents juxtaposed with that of parent-partnership officers  
Should EPS have parents' policy?  
Should EPS have "governing body" / "advisory group"?*  
(Wolfendale, 1995, p79).

This thesis aims to understand more about the possibilities for the educational psychologist role in developing parent partnership.

However, there is one final area of literature for review, that of multi-professional partnerships. The statementing process involves meetings with and reports from a number of different professionals. An earlier evaluation of possibilities in special educational needs assessment for partnership with parents in general, and with educational psychologists in particular cannot be considered without looking at the multi-disciplinary context in which assessment happens. This review will locate issues for multi-agency collaboration in special educational needs assessment in the wider context of such collaboration in all three agencies, health, education and social services.



## **2.7 Multi-professional Collaboration**

At different times in the past the agencies involved in all areas of child welfare, health, education and social services, have been woken up to calls to work together. Recommendation for agencies to work together came from major problems resulting from a lack of co-ordination between agencies, and there was therefore recognition that multi-agency co-ordination was problematic. However, whilst there continue to be calls from all services for multi-agency working to redress problems in the fragmentation of services (Hodgkin & Newell, 1996; Roaf & Lloyd, 1995) multi-agency working has, in recent years, like partnership, been presented as a given "good". Something of unquestioned value and importance. It has also been presented as unproblematic.

Dealing first with the past, a series of tragedies in child welfare throughout the 60's, 70's, and 80's (DHSS, 1982; Hallett, 1995), notably the death of Maria Colwell and the Cleveland sexual abuse enquiry (Butler-Sloss, 1988) led to recommendations for agencies to work together. This has been evident in government circulars since the 1960's emphasising inter-agency co-ordination in child protection (see Hallett, 1995).

The Plowden Report (1967) saw partnership between professionals as crucial to solution of the problem of social disadvantage. The same need to combine expertise from different disciplines, medical social and psychological, in order to disentangle the needs of the child, was evident in The Court Report (DHSS, 1976). The latter stated that:

*We have been at pains throughout our report to emphasise the inter-relationship of health, educational and social factors in a child's development. The length of time that the majority of children spend at school makes it a unique setting in which preventative and remedial work may be carried out. Hence it is crucial that the balance between a child's*

*health needs and his educational and social needs be understood, and effective co-operation between the three authorities and between their professional staff be established. Continuity of association as equals seems to us to be the surest method of obtaining this.*  
(DHSS, 1976, section 10.58).

And:

*The real cause of educational failure may lie in the individual's psyche or physical health or in the environment of home, school or society. To disentangle the strands is beyond any single expertise. Medical, social and psychological advice have therefore to be available if the child is to receive the best education that can be offered, and a full team approach with the teacher will sometimes be essential.* (DHSS, 1976, section 10.39).

However, the importance of interagency collaboration is now an expected and key element of all aspects of provision in health, education and social services. In the area of social services, Russell(1990) saw the 1989 Children Act as "an act for the whole local authority (housing, recreation, leisure and education as well as social services. It also lays duties on child health services". It does indeed place a duty on other authorities, including the LEA, the health authority, the local housing authority and the health authority to provides services for a child in need. In 1992 the Department of Health recommended (Circular 92/18) that local authorities develop a Child Services Plan which would specify the provision of relevant services for young people in need. Multi-agency co-operation is a key assumption of all current documents in the areas of child protection and catering for looked after children. In the area of health NHS documents continuously recommend multi-agency working (NHS Executive: 1996).

### ***Multi-disciplinary Special Educational Needs Assessment***

Multi-agency working is now a key element in the statutory assessment of children's special educational needs. There has long been an expectation that educational psychologists should work with other professionals, since the earlier days when educational psychologists worked in Child Guidance Centres



in teams which included psychiatrists and social workers. One of the earliest references to a multi-agency approach can be found in Pritchard (1963) on the origins of the child guidance clinic, in the realisation in the US that

*psychiatry alone would not solve the problem. What was required was a team approach, and each team must contain a psychologist and a social worker in addition to a psychiatrist. (p193).*

A government committee of enquiry set out ways the child guidance clinic should work (DES, 1955, p51-52). Multi-agency working was also clear in the last national survey of the way educational psychologists work:

*No one discipline can be expert in all aspects of a child's life and the contributions of colleagues trained in the field of psychiatry, psychology, education and the social sciences must all be used effectively, each accepting the competence of his colleagues in their own field.*

The Summerfield Report (DES, 1968, section 2.34).

Statemaking has been, since the 1981 Education Act, statutorily a multi-agency process - requiring psychological, medical and educational advice, reports, plus reports from others as appropriate. The child's parents are to be informed at the time of the assessment of their right to submit information to the authority (Education Act 1993). Russell (1992) saw the 1981 Education Act as forcing professionals to work together. Advice to LEAs on the implementation of the 1981 Education Act, refers to effective "multi-professional work" involving:

*...co-operation, collaboration and mutual support on the part of all contributors and should seek to reach agreement with them on their several roles and functions. It follows that the advice given by each one should reflect his or her concerns, leaving others to concentrate upon their particular area of expertise.*

DES (1989a, para. 51) quoted in Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994, p134).

In the Code of Practice (DFE, 1994) there is specific reference to the legislative frameworks of health and social services, and reference to the Children Act 1989, in order to reinforce the principle of inter-agency co-ordination. The 1996



Education Act requires Social Services Departments and Health Authorities to comply with requests from the LEA in regard to children with special educational needs (Section 322).

However, what has been particularly significant for multi-professional working is that the 1981 Education Act has led, over the last 20 years to a massive expansion in the number and range of professionals involved (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p120-121). Despite this, there has been little writing on perspectives of multi-agency working of those involved in special educational needs assessment, other than perspectives of educational psychologists. One exception is Reid et al. (1996), looking at the role of speech and language therapist with pupils with special educational needs. They note the requirement of a shared framework for assessing pupils' speech and language therapy needs for planning appropriate educational and speech and language programmes and for documenting and recording progress.

In the next section issues in multi-agency work will be considered in all services, but, as regards education, particularly in the process of special educational needs assessment.

### **2.7.1 Issues in Multi-Agency Working**

The difficulties in inter-agency working noted in earlier government reports, which led to a call to improve such work, have continued to show a presence. This includes the difficulties in clarifying the purpose of multi-agency working, difficulties evaluating such working, and differences in the cultures of agencies. Research draws upon experience in all three services, health, education and social services. However, there is a particular focus in this review of the literature on research relating to the multi-disciplinary process of special educational needs assessment.

#### ***Clarity of Purpose***

A question often unanswered is how inter-agency work should be conceptualised, and for what purpose (Hallett, 1995, p6-10). In fact, difference in the terms used are indicative of changes in focus. Early discussions in health speak about "the division of labour" (Stacey, Reid, Heath, & Dingwall, 1977). Multi-professional co-ordination was the tone of a summary of enquiries in the 1970's and 80's (DHSS, 1982), suggesting the need was simply one of improving communication and information exchange.

When reasons have been given for agencies working together, they have varied in tone. There has been a consensus of opinion that the high level of complexity of problems means that the solution does not lie within any single discipline: that different disciplines make unique contributions (DHSS, 1982, p69; Hallett, 1995, p298). This idea has been articulated in other ways. For example Mawhinney (1993) speaks of services all dealing with the same person, the same client. Others see the compartmentalisation of children as pupils, patients and clients as an administrative convenience rather than a proper distinction (Dessent, 1996,

p8). A study of government reports on child abuse of the 60's and 70's, recommended that all "workers need arrangements for exchanging information, and where there is an overlap of function or activity, a clear and common understanding of the extent and purpose of each individual's involvement in the case" (DHSS, 1982, p68). However, the need to put together the views about a child from several disciplines seems to quickly become an administrative task, of sharing information once roles have been clarified (Dessent, 1996, p8). Some have seen this as only an approximation to the full possibilities provided by multi-agency working. For example, the Court Report had suggestions to make for bringing about collaboration between services for children with "psychiatric disorders" (DHSS, 1976). It expressed the view that this should not be achieved via more committees, of which there were too many already, but "collaboration and communication should be facilitated by joint working arrangements and by joint elements in training (both basic and later in-service)" (DHSS, 1976, section 15.43).

Various meanings of interagency working in special educational needs assessment can be gleaned from the different documents available. For example, the Code of Practice suggests regular meetings at both school and local authority level, between representatives of education, health and social services. An HMI report evaluating services for young children under five with special educational needs (HMI, 1991) defined good "interdisciplinary service" as co-ordination between services, the involvement of all services, manageable case-loads, stability of personnel, joint training and the sharing of information. However, none were unproblematic. For example, whilst sharing of information was seen to be positive, this led to the problem of confidentiality.

In conclusion, there seems to be little clarity in the literature about what is meant by multi-agency working, or the implications of different ways of working.



### ***Evaluating Inter-Agency Collaboration***

Most reports or research discussions assume that a lack of effective multi-agency working prevent the aims of a particular policy or project from being achieved. For example, effective work in child protection during the 1970's was seen to be hampered by "ignorance, or misunderstanding, of respective functions" (DHSS, 1982, p68), and knowledge of the different kinds of statutory duties of each agency. However, there is little evaluative research investigating such assumptions and little research looking at the extent to which agency collaboration has taken place. There is some evidence that reports and legislation urging greater inter-agency collaboration continue to fail to influence practice. This resonates with findings in chapter 1, about the difficulties in legislating for parent partnership. For example, Swann (1981, p278) argued that there was little evidence, eight years later, of The Court Report's (DHSS, 1976) serious implementation, with a combined opposition of professional medical organisations, insufficient public resources and government inaction, citing that the report had never been debated in the House of Commons. The Audit Commission in 1994 found that, although parents and the different authorities (education, health and social services) all had a shared concern for the well-being of children, very few local authorities had effective interagency structures.

Hallett and Birchall (Birchall & Hallett, 1995; Hallett, 1995, p323) carried out research into the views of professionals involved in inter-agency work in the area of child protection as to their level of satisfaction with such working. A postal survey was carried out of 339 professionals (general practitioners, health visitors, paediatricians, specialist police, social workers and teachers) (Birchall & Hallett, 1995) and interviews with 90 professionals (Hallett, 1995, p323) involved

in 48 registered child abuse cases from three diverse locations in the North of England. The survey found a general view that interagency co-operation in child protection was important, and general satisfaction with the level of collaboration. Almost all co-ordination comprised information exchange rather than joint working of two or more agencies (Birchall & Hallett, 1995, p241).

Information exchange has been a key aim of much multi-agency working, and can be viewed differently from different perspectives. From the client's perspective, there seems to be a need to experience a "seem-less" service, which avoids having to say the same things to countless professionals (Dessent, 1996, p8; Roaf & Lloyd, 1995). From the professional perspective, separate assessment of a client by several services can be viewed positively. It may represent the putting together of different perspectives on a child, and therefore supportive of good practice. However, the importance of efficient communication systems within and between agencies cannot be underestimated, as demonstrated by the finding by Humphreys (1995) that only 56% of confirmed cases of child sexual abuse received counselling, since they became "lost" in the system. Also, Mallett (1996) suggested parents were often left to achieve communication between services.

Parent dissatisfaction with the procedures of the 1981 and 1993 Education Act, referred to in earlier sections of this chapter, suggest similar difficulties in client - professional perspective in the area of special educational needs. By the 1990's multi-disciplinary working had become a bureaucratic process, rather than "contributing an additional dimension to the procedures for identifying children's needs" (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p137). Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994) attributed this to a consequence of increasing demarcation of responsibility between professionals. Information sharing can have negative implications for clients. For example, as mentioned earlier in this section an HM

report evaluating services for young children under five with special educational needs found "interdisciplinary service" important but problematic (HMI, 1991). Whilst sharing of information was seen to be positive, this led to the problem of confidentiality. McCarthy (1991) found significant client -professional differences. A survey of 69 parents of statemented children who were attending a special school or who were integrated into mainstream found that the majority of the sample agreed that their child needed a statement. The majority also felt the procedure was fully explained to them, had a draft sent to them to make comments and felt fully involved. However, a substantial minority did not feel involved in any of these ways: 23% felt that procedures were not fully explained; 36% said the statement draft had not been seen; and 25% felt they had not been fully involved or informed (McCarthy, 1991, p17).

A survey of 39 parents and 89 professionals examined the various expectations and perceptions brought by participants to the assessment process (Simeonsson, Edmondson, Smith, Carnahan, & Bucy, 1995). The survey took the form of a questionnaire of open and closed questions. There were some interesting findings, in particular considerable variability in perspective on the content and form of child assessments and on different roles. Professionals appeared to overestimate the negative feelings experienced by parents during the assessment process. Parents were more likely than professionals to feel that assessment evaluations had been adequately explained. A large percentage (75%) of parents felt they had been asked personal and intrusive information, but a very small (3%) percentage of professionals felt this had happened. This suggested the need for professionals to assess parent expectations and perceptions, in order to avoid stereotypical beliefs among professionals. Families seemed to vary considerably in their expectations of involvement. Simeonsson et al. (1995) recommend an individual approach to each family:



*Parents need to feel like valued contributors to this process. To that end there is a need to expand ways in which they can share in information gathering, consensus building and decision-making. In this way, families can be supported to be not only effective consumers of services but also active participants in the provision of such services. (Simeonsson, Edmondson, Smith, Carnahan, & Bucy, 1995, p213)*

Evaluative research rarely asks searching questions. Even the evaluative research by Hallett and Birchall (Birchall & Hallett, 1995; Hallett, 1995, p323) did not ask whether the aims of inter-agency co-operation were achieved or how inter-agency work had contributed to desired outcomes. One exception, Atkins, Dyson and Easen (1995), in two case studies of inter-agency working in urban areas, found that there was no clear idea between professionals of the meaning of inter-professional collaboration. This rendered problematic the advocacy of collaboration. One response to this is to recognise the need for mechanisms to make inter-agency collaboration number high amongst an organisation's interests, and therefore a higher priority for individuals within the organisation to work towards achieving. White and Wehlage (1995), working in the USA on a multi-agency project to reduce social exclusion in five cities, urge cautious reflection on the purpose of collaboration. They found that agencies involved in a complex project should focus on ways to achieve the main objectives of their project, rather than on interagency collaboration per se. Similarly, in the UK, in the areas of child protection limits are also placed on inter-agency collaboration where this might detract from acting in the best interests of the child (Butler-Sloss, 1988, p248, also the 1989 Children Act).

Most evaluations referred to have looked at professional perceptions, just one side of an evaluation, or, occasionally adult "clients" (such as parents). A significant voice absent from this research on multi-agency working (and indeed from the literature in general in the area of this thesis) has been the voice of a particular user, the child.

### ***Different Cultures and Power: Conflict and Consensus***

A likely difficulty for multi-agency working is that organisations have very different cultures (Kendrick, 1995). This may be understood in terms of different professional backgrounds, training, role, values, and pay and conditions (Dessent, 1996; Goldie, 1977; Hallett, 1995). There may not be shared understanding of the meaning of terms used in different agencies, such as "need" and "partnership". Agencies all have different statutory duties. In the area of children looked after, an Ofsted report (1995) found evidence of lack of awareness of the various agencies involved with looked after children, education, health and social services, of legislation, of the roles of each other and little evidence of shared training. A contrary finding in the area of child protection, found a large majority felt clear about the role of others (Hallett, 1995, p323). However, the role of teachers and general practitioners were least likely to be clear to themselves and others, a worrying finding when these were the only professionals who had a continuing role with the children outside child protection procedures.

There seems to be little recognition of the complexity of organisations, of the different cultures within organisations rather than between them, exceptions being White and Wehlage (1995) and Lipsky (1980). Looking at complexity within organisations different groups and individuals within an organisation are likely to have different interests. Professionals at field level across agencies might have more in common than field worker with colleagues at different levels in their own agencies. Atkins et al. (1995) found that co-operation was easier at the level of the individual client case, and much harder that at project level or at a strategic level. Roaf and Lloyd (1995), in their detailed two-year study of agencies working with young people in Oxford, found it difficult for workers at the ground

level to have real access to expertise in their own agency, let alone that in others.

The different professional cultures seem to lead to both consensus and conflict between professionals. The literature provides examples of both. First, the researcher considers conflict.

### ***Power and Conflict***

The current examination of multi-agency working through the literature has earlier shown examples of negative evaluations from parents of such working. There is similar research that suggests parents are disadvantaged due to the conflict between professionals. Tomlinson (1982, p96-104) interviewed 80 professionals involved in the assessment of 40 children passing through the referral processes for "ESN-M" schools. She found differences in the ways different professionals judged children to be "ESN-M". Head teachers of mainstream schools used "functional and behavioural" criteria, based on "intuitive judgements" in accounting for ESN-M children. Educational psychologists tended to "account for ESN-M children in functional and statistical terms; an ESN-M child has low attainment and a low IQ". They also accounted for children in terms of school perspective, talking, for example, in terms of children being rejected by a school. The medical officers tended to use "social accounts" more than any of the other professionals, articulating the child in terms of class. Whilst Tomlinson found evidence of co-operation between professionals and some praise for each other's skills, she also found conflicts over communication, anxieties over status, and annoyance over perceived inadequacies. Earlier in this review the researcher has referred to research by Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994) which suggested parents were disempowered by the attempts of other



professionals to work in greater partnership with them, by co-opting them into the "professional perspective" (the researcher's emphasis).

Gascoigne and Wolfendale (1995) found a similar view of relationships with professionals in general. They asked thirty-five parents of children with special educational needs about experiences in dealing with the education system to find out how they attributed motives to the behaviour of education officers. Almost all recounted negative experiences. Obstacles to parent partnership were found to include parental assumptions about how professionals work which impeded the effective involvement of parents as partners. Parents assumed that professionals communicated to each other and passed on important information parents had provided about the child (Gascoigne & Wolfendale, 1995, p47). Parents expected that what they said would be noted, communicated and acted upon - particularly in primary schools. When that did not happen it suggested to parents that their input was not valued. Parents assumed they were tapping into an existing partnership among the professionals: it was a shock to find professionals worked in an isolated manner in which channels of communication were fraught with difficulties of protocol, practical difficulties and politics.

Differences in culture seem to lead to hierarchies of professions and, therefore, differences in power. Such differences in power between professions are evident but complex. Looking at the professionals involved in the statementing process, there are indications of many potential inequalities in power, and rivalries between professionals. For example, in the 1970's and 80's as educational professionals, particularly educational psychologists, made incursions into the identification of children with special educational needs, the role of the medical officer diminished in importance. Educational psychologists started to work more and more in educational psychology services rather than in

the medical led, but multi-professional child guidance centres. Multi-agency working continued, but in a different form. The 1981 Education Act had major implications for multi-agency collaboration of professionals involved in special educational needs. There has long been sibling rivalry between educational psychologists and another medical professional group, the clinical psychologists (Wright, 1978, p43). Clinical psychologists themselves experience power disputes with other professions, but particularly psychiatrists in relation to psychiatrists in mental health teams. For the clinical psychologist, being able to work in a way they felt comfortable depended upon working with a psychiatrist who shared similar values:

*Any occupation can claim to be a profession but it is only those that are able to control the terms on which they work that are likely to gain the status and regard that are believed to go along with professional recognition. (Goldie, 1977, p158, on professional boundary issues for clinical psychologists).*

The case of teachers suggests a further profession occupying an ambiguous position in relation to other professionals involved in statutory assessment. For example, Tomlinson (1982, p91) drew on several writers (Goode, 1957; C.Wright Mills, 1951; Etzioni, 1969) to suggest that teachers seemed to be seen as more of an occupational group, or semi-professionals, than as professionals, and she suggested they were not always regarded as having expert, superior knowledge. With the 1981 Education Act, special needs teachers, "for the first time in the history of professional special school teaching since the 1980s there is an opportunity for 'special' teachers to have real involvement in the selection and expansion of their clientele, a satisfaction of their needs if not of their clients" (Tomlinson, 1982, p92).

Other potential difficulties might relate not to inequalities or historic rivalries, but to boundary disputes. For example, the funding of non-educational provision, such as speech therapy, has long been a disputed area in the provision for special

educational needs. One study, of the problems in inter-agency collaboration in the management of child sexual abuse (Fargason & Barnes, 1994), carried out a systems analysis to find out where the problems lay, and used the resulting information to put in place strategies to reduce conflict.

Tomlinson suggests that teamwork of professionals in special educational needs assessment is likely to be "fraught with anxieties and problems" (1981b, p277) due to differences in the criteria used by the different professionals, poor communication, and professional encroachment on perceived areas of competence.

*The assumption that medical, psychological and educational personnel, each working with their own professional autonomy, theoretical models and belief systems can co-operate smoothly in the ascertainment process is problematic enough, but when other personnel - social workers, psychiatrists, education welfare officers and so on - are also involved in seeing and reporting of specific children, the process becomes even more complex.*  
(Tomlinson, 1981b, p268).

By contrast, the next section looks at the pressures on professionals to avoid, rather than seek, conflict in their working relationships.

### ***Power and Consensus***

An interesting finding from Hallett's (1995) survey of professionals involved in child protection cases was that that decision-making in child protection was characterised by consensus rather than dissent (1995, p329). Her supposition was that this might be explained by the need to collaborate with fellow professionals in the future. It may also be a result of a procedural system that has the effect of limiting disagreement. Alternatively, anxiety about child protection may have led to a tendency to defer to those who are assumed to "know" (1995, p330-331). Hallett suggested that while such consensus was



likely to be important in inter-agency work, it may limit the advantage of having a number of agencies involved as a break on the possible coercive power of the state. White and Wehlage (1995) made a related finding. Case managers had been expected to be able to expose institutional problems, but research found that this did not happen. White and Wehlage examined community collaboration in five cities, to reduce social exclusion amongst young people, and found there were no mechanisms for giving case managers a voice in policy making.

Consensus was also recognised by Dessent (1996), commenting on the effects of decision making within highly complex organisations, trying to meet a multiplicity of priorities:

*Co-ordination around 'special' centres (e.g. child guidance) or within special schools are historic and current examples of an almost in-built tendency to produce effective co-ordination for the professionals sometimes at the expense of normalisation for the child and the parents. (Dessent, 1996, p9).*

Findings demonstrating such consensus seem to confirm and extend the earlier discussion in this chapter, in section 2.6.5, which suggested assessment could be seen as an expression of professional interest and power rather than a process of objective information gathering. In this section, looking at assessment in the context of the actions of number of different professionals, it seems that people can collude, often without full awareness, in ignoring certain things about a child. For example, there is a suggestion that a shared view evolves during a meeting due to the need to cope with the complexity of situations and improve clarity (Danforth, 1995; Marks, 1993; Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995). The context is one of professionals avoiding challenging each other. This can lead to early closure - and a "freezing of the child's image" (Danforth, 1995; see also: Partlett, 1991). Danforth (1995) argues that our objectivist practices are, by their very nature flawed since they preclude any more critical questions about the child's situation. We spend time trying to make our assessments more

accurate, when a professional's words about the child may actually help to freeze their assessment - and to "form" the child in the minds of those involved in the assessment. Put in a different way: "Objectivist inquiry had produced standardised cultural accounts which tended to subsume the divergent and paradoxical aspects of social living into categories of normalized order" (Danforth, 1995, p137).

Multi-agency working in the 1990s seems to assume an emphasis on the interactive nature of needs. This meant, according to Galloway et al. (1994, p151) that it was more likely that decisions would be "negotiated between professionals, as well as between professionals and their 'clients' in pursuit of a range of professional, political and pragmatic objective". The main role, therefore of the multidisciplinary assessment, was to "provide an arena for these negotiations" p151.

Multi-professional working seems to have become a mantra of professional life. However, this analysis of the literature has suggested that there is little agreement over what constitutes multi-agency working, or that it might take different forms. There is some evidence that achieving collaborative ways of working in ways other than sharing information seems extremely problematic. Far greater attention is needed to the ways different professional perspectives work together to construct children's needs. The empirical work of this thesis will aim to look at the implications of perceptions of all involved in a multi-agency statementing process for the assessment of the child. This chapter returns to focus on the relationship between parents and professionals, now with the understanding that such a relationship may occur in the context of a relationship with several other professionals, a multi-agency context, to look for possible ways forward.



## **2.8 Ways forward: for Practice and for Research**

This story has been long and complicated. From a concern to find whether parents involved in the special educational needs assessment of their child might expect to experience partnership with professionals, the researcher has journeyed far. Limits to partnership were suggested to lie in the positioning of parents by the professional, for example in the attribution of deficits to parents but not to professionals, and in the assumption of parents as an homogenous group. The need, therefore, to look in some detail at the professional role, led to an investigation of the role of a particular professional group, that of educational psychologists. Similar themes were identified when the story took in the multi-professional context of partnership between parents and professionals. In particular, both centred on the way professional concerns construct the identity of the client through actions presented as objective rather than differentially displaying power. This final section looks to possible solutions, first in the area of practice, considering how parents and professionals might be able to interact in partnership in the sphere of education. Secondly, the discussion turns importantly to define the research concerns of this thesis.

### **2.8.1 Practice Solutions to the Problematic of Partnership**

Some argued that partnership was so fraught with contradictions and complications as to be meaningless and redundant. Hegarty (1993) saw it as a sacred cow that should be slaughtered (1993, p129). In its place should be functional descriptions of home-school relations, to "allow more scrutiny of what actually happens or can be made to happen" (1993, p129). He also argued that a concept of partnership limited the richness of the reality of home-school relations. One can draw parallels here with Lucas (1993, p68): "Croall (1992) asked whether educational psychologist are applied scientists or educational



apologists for a defective system?", and ask whether it could ever be possible for professionals to achieve partnership, either with parents or other professionals.

Many other writers argued for solutions to the problems of engaging with parents as partners that involve changes in practice. Easen, Kendall and Shaw (1992) came closer than most in finding a way that professionals could work with parents without a deficit assumption. They viewed non-equal partnerships as potentially limiting the effectiveness of their work together. They described weekly visits to parents' homes to work with them, and with the child:

*the partnership between parents and educators revolves around jointly observing and sharing interpretations of children's behaviour. Through talking together both partners engage in a process of sharing and exploring different perspectives on their observations rather than transplanting the parent's perspective with a 'better' professional one. (Easen, Kendall, & Shaw, 1992, p288).*

They described how a parent group run on similar lines led to the parents producing a booklet, a play and a hookey mat on their experience of bringing up children. What seems distinctive is that although the professional still felt they had something to offer to the parent, she or he also genuinely felt there was something to learn from the parent: it was a genuinely participatory endeavour. The outcome, for the professional, was not decided at the start, but depended upon the parent: "by treating their learning processes as centrally important, parents are empowered in their role as primary educators of their child" (Easen, Kendall, & Shaw, 1992, p295).

On a similar theme, Panter (1992)'s guidelines for teachers of opportunities and limitations of working with parents of mainstream pupils, epitomises the 90's engagement with the problematic of partnership. She provided clear vignettes (1992, p112-115) of the different perspectives of parents and teachers, to

demonstrate the potential conflict, and finally advised a problem solving process (1992, p115-116) to find a way through all the conflicts and develop a strategy for particular parents and teachers working together.

Bastiani (1993) supported the conceptualising of "partnership as a process, a stage in a process or something to work towards rather than something that is a fixed state or readily achievable" (1993, p113). He stated that partnership would always mean different things to different people. He also pointed out that some argue that other structural changes needed to occur before partnership could be entertained. Bastiani suggested we need to 'model' partnership in action in different ways and at different levels (1993, p114).

Many have advised a change in power relations through attention to professional actions (for example: Armstrong, 1995; Corbett, 1993; Ryburn, 1991), or an awareness of the wider context: an awareness of the political conditions needed for moral concerns to be truly realised (Tomlinson, 1981a, p348). Ryburn (1991), for example, suggests that, without a change in power, legislation can only signal direction:

*If we welcome the emphasis of this legislation on consultation, fairness, partnership, participation and collaboration we will see it as an essential tool with which to challenge and improve current practice - a mandate for working together; and through the empowerment of children and their families, a means to narrow the present divide between principles and practice..... Power is not a finite resource which is diminished for one party through the empowerment of another. When we work in ways that empower the users of services, we will bring power, authority and conviction to standards of good practice in social work to which we all aspire. In turn we will empower ourselves with a newfound conviction in the value of our profession. (Ryburn, 1991, p76).*

Sadow, Stafford and Stafford (1987) saw a tension in joint decision making that both professionals and parents avoid. They seemed to be advocating a more or less confrontational approach between parents and educational psychologists, but one of equals, in terms of asking parents to share the problems and

questions associated with the difficulty a more valid form of partnership between them (Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987, p149).

Instead Danforth urged professionals to: "look beyond our usual concerns of diagnostic accuracy to concerns of power" from "'Is he really emotionally disturbed?' to "'What social injustice is being forwarded by representing this child as emotionally disturbed?'" (Danforth, 1995, p136).

As alternatives, or additions to "objective" assessment, Danforth recommended scrutiny of the assessors themselves (1995, p143)

*We may begin to turn our attentional focus from our students to ourselves, thereby creating the moral impetus to replace questions of human defectiveness with questions and answers bearing forth care, connection, and critical awareness.* (Danforth, 1995, p143).

Such a focus is supported by Marks, Burman, Burman, and Parker (1995) in their analysis of transcripts of a number of case conferences, demonstrating the difficulties in "hearing" parents and children due to the power processes operating in assessments:

*We suggest that reflection on status and hierarchy, language and emotional experience in the case conference will help educational psychologists and other professionals to foster a critical and reflective practice.* (Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995, p47).

Corbett (1993) stated a need to allow other perspectives and alternative discourses within the debate on special educational needs. She introduced the notion of voices as a solution to the problematic of defining special educational need:

*As such, an emergence of new and diverse perspectives on the old meanings, categories and identities can only refresh our way of seeing.*



*We may then be able to allow special need to dissolve and to support new discourses in redefining the nature of need. (Corbett, 1993, p552).*

### **2.8.2 Research Focus**

A way forward is needed, therefore, that allows other perspectives and alternative discourses to inform the debate about whether partnership is possible. Research is needed that scrutinises the relationships between professionals. The focus should be on the process of negotiation between parents and professionals and between professionals, and on the power relations operating in the different relationships. Some space should be provided to hear the perspectives of all voices involved in this complex multi-disciplinary process, whilst continuing to keep in mind the political exigencies operating on those voices.

This review of the literature has suggested that partnership with parents is a problematic relationship for educational professionals to negotiate. Reasons for such difficulties have been suggested to lie in the nature of professionalism, since it has seemed to be the case that the professional perspective has governed home-school relations. Looking at the particular case of parent partnership in special educational needs assessment, particular issues relating to the professional context of the educational psychologist have been suggested which have made partnership an undetermined possibility. The literature has also suggested that a consideration of partnership in formal assessment, statementing, should look at the perspectives of other professionals involved, not just those of the educational psychologist. The process is a multi-disciplinary assessment and should be researched as such.

Much of the literature quoted has been non-empirical, suggesting a need for empirical research. The empirical research that exists has compared

perspectives of all those involved in assessment (Armstrong, 1995; Cross, 1989; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994; Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995; Norwich, 1993; Sandow, Stafford, & Stafford, 1987; Tomlinson, 1981a; Tomlinson, 1982). In much of this research professionals and parents have been treated as homogenous groups. Research by Tomlinson has, however, considered differences between professional groups (Tomlinson, 1981a; Tomlinson, 1982). Also, Sandow et al (1987) and Armstrong, Galloway and Tomlinson (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994) referred to professionals as a group and to educational psychologists in particular. Whilst there is much literature on the role of the educational psychologist, there is little looking at the ways in which they work in partnership with others. Past research has documented and discussed situations in which educational psychologists, for example, have worked with parents. However, it has not analysed deliberate attempts to develop particular kinds of relationships between professionals and parents. With the exception of Armstrong, Galloway and Tomlinson (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994) past research has not examined the process of assessment for clues about relationships between parents and professionals or between the professionals. There has been some research acknowledging parents as a non-homogenous group but most has failed to do this.

There is a further omission. Wolfendale has suggested the importance of the current political dilemmas for educational psychologists (Wolfendale, 1995). However, all research referred to here was conducted prior to the 1993 Education Act and the Code of Practice. Both particularly required partnership with parents. The code also provided for the named person, who might empower parents to take a partnership role.

There is very little empirical research problematising the concepts of "partnership", "need", "assessment", and "professional", or even "parent". Most research has taken such concepts at face value. There has been little attempt to look at how parents or professionals conceptualise these key terms. Research into partnership has generally failed to take into account the myriad professional issues also impinging upon a group of professionals attempting to engage in partnership. Very little empirical research has looked directly at conceptualisations of power, or at the operation of power in the relationships between parents and professionals, still less on the relationships between professionals.

What seems to be needed is a way to look directly at the attempt by professionals to develop partnership. It seems most appropriate to focus on educational psychologists involved in a parent partnership process, and to explore processes operating to facilitate or hinder partnership. It also seems appropriate to allow attention to different professionals and look at possibilities for their partnership relationships. The researcher therefore chose to ask two research questions, and to move from the first to the second research question via progressive focussing (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, 49):

*Research Question One*

*Can an educational psychology service undertake parental partnership?*

*Research Question Two*

*What does it mean to the stakeholders to be "partners"? What are the stakeholders' perspectives?*

It is suggested that an approach is needed which aims to look in depth at the processes operating in this complex area. A research strategy is required that tries to identify the interaction of discourse in order to develop a clearer theoretical framework. Such a framework would seek to make inferences about possibilities for partnership in the assessment of children's special educational



needs. However, such research would not seek to summarise views of a large sample and apply them to the population. This thesis has therefore taken two case studies to investigate in depth. One is a service focus looking at the first two-year's operation of a parent partnership project co-ordinated by an educational psychology service.

In asking the first research question, the researcher aimed to look at, in the light of the literature:

- What were the strains and opportunities in partnership for that educational psychology service?
- What did it mean, in the light of the problematic of parent partnership and the ambiguities over the educational psychologist role, to undertake parent partnership?
- What further insights could be found about the reasons for the difficulties in parent partnership from an examination of the project?

The researcher chose to investigate a government-initiated scheme for local education authorities to develop greater partnership with parents involved in special educational needs assessments. The Department for Education and Employment (DFEE) had recently requested bids from the Local Education Authorities (LEAs), through the then GEST (Grants for Education, Support and Training) scheme, for funds to develop Parent Partnership. Such schemes aimed to involve parents more in SEN assessment. All those who put in a bid were given funds. Just prior to starting work on the current research, the researcher had completed a year (September 1994 - August 1995) working half-time in a professional role as an LEA educational psychologist. As part of this role, she was asked to take on, for one and a half days per week, the development of the LEA's Parent Partnership Scheme. Another educational psychologist was asked to work on the same project for one day a week. This seemed an ideal place to

focus research on the possibilities for educational psychology services of parent partnership - an educational psychology service involved in developing greater parent partnership. Other methodologies would be likely to reveal insights into educational psychology services and parent partnership - such as interviewing those involved in a small sample of such schemes. However, the investigation of a relevant project of which the researcher had been a part seemed too good an opportunity to be missed. Furthermore, development activities can be useful to throw into light the limits any system has for such a development. This particular case could also pursue the possibilities identified in the literature review for the way forward for positive parent partnership. For example, one area identified, which might promote partnership with parents, was the development of the named person role - and an aim of the parent partnership project was to recruit and train named persons. Evaluation has been lacking in every area of partnership research, both between parents and professionals and between professionals. An investigation of an attempt to develop partnership with parents might enable such an evaluation.

To answer the second research question, another case study was investigated. This was a statutory assessment of one child's special educational needs. All those involved in the child's assessment were interviewed. A case study of a child is likely to allow an in depth analysis of some key issues identified by the literature. An investigation of the perspectives of all those involved in one child's assessment would enable the exploration of previously under-researched concepts across different professionals. This could include looking at concepts of partnership, assessment and power. These concepts have all been suggested by the literature review to be highly problematic, and a case study would enable further deconstruction in the process of analysis.



## **CHAPTER THREE**

### **CHOSEN RESEARCH PROCESSES FOR INVESTIGATING PARTNERSHIP**

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#### **3.1 Introduction: A Tale of Two Cases Leading to Theory Generation**

The complexity of parent partnership in the domain of special educational needs suggested a methodology capable of getting fully inside an area that has so many other influences. Adopting Hammersley's (1992) disconnection between survey and case study, all survey methodologies were rejected as being too "broad brush" in their capabilities to unearth underlying processes.

The case study was therefore adopted as the research methodology most likely to enable some of the strands identified in the literature to be unravelled from a real-life educational context (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, p48). Case studies are assumed to be orientations rather than methods, since they can embrace a wide range of methods. Each of the two research questions was considered through a separate case study, different in nature from each other, and involving separate data collection. Both case studies aimed to investigate situations involving parent partnership in special educational needs as they actually occur. The subject of the first case was a project, and the researcher aimed to document and analyse the first two years of operation of the project. The second study focused on a child, David, who was at the time of the research the subject of a statutory assessment of his "special educational needs". The case comprised interviews with all those involved in David's assessment. The particular kind of case study adopted and the



merits and problems they posed for each research question will be considered separately in the next sections. The definition and boundaries of each study will also be considered separately under each research question.

This chapter defines a case study and discusses what was to be achieved from research using single cases. It then goes on to look in turn, in detail, at the two different case studies carried out in this research. In each case the following is documented and discussed:

1. the kind of research methods adopted, and, thereby the different kinds of data collected; and
2. the ways the data is analysed.

Issues of validity are explored separately for each case and, as a particular aspect of this, the positioning of the researcher in each case. Issues of reliability, replicability and ethical issues are considered here in relation to validity.

### **3.1.1 What is a Case Study?**

*A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomena and context are not clearly evident. (Yin, 1994, p13).*

The literature review demonstrated the context in which the notion of parent partnership in special educational needs assessment resides. This is a context bound by major areas of literature, including: special educational needs; parental involvement in education; and the evolution of the professional role. For the purposes of this thesis, the context of professionalism included looking at a particular professional role, that of the educational psychologist; and multi-professional collaboration.

However, the formulation of "context" in educational research has made a considerable shift over the last 10 years, from a "metaphor of inside-out to a metaphor of figure/ground":

*The trend is not to understand features of social life as a core with spatially organized "contextual" shells around it like the layers of an onion. Rather, we are increasingly pressed to see both objects of interest and contexts as aspects of social and historical formulations that show different salience at different times and in relation to different practices. The relationship between context and its object is no longer spatial, but perhaps it is understood better as a kind of ongoing, immensely complex cultural encounter that constantly constitutes and reconstitutes social products. (Seddon, 1995, p400).*

Such a shift is mirrored by several very different movements in psychology: towards post positivism, and towards a socio-cultural approach to activity, as discussed in Chapter 1.

### **3.1.2 Aims of the Case Studies**

The literature review demonstrated the complexity of analysis of possibilities for parent partnership for special education. Several literatures were engaged with. Several concepts were deconstructed, and discourses identified. The questions, which remained, suggested the need for a methodology capable of delving into the complexity of a situation, rather than summarising across a wide range of situations. Case studies were therefore used to uncover complexities in greater depth than had been possible simply by analysing the literature. It was implicit in the literature review that people's individual orientation towards or away from partnership in a particular situation was likely to have much to do with the complex social context in which the partnership activity takes place. The current research into partnership therefore needed to look at partnership situations in order to consider everything in the situation together, rather than to focus on discrete elements as if the situation can be taken apart. A case study might be able to focus both on particular aspects of partnership whilst at the same time keeping account of the whole. However, this was not likely to be easy, as confirmed by Sandelowski:

*When the prevailing imperative is to take things apart, taking things together is not an easy task to do or even to describe in words that also tend to take things apart. (Sandelowski, 1996, p529)*

What would "taking things together" achieve? Case studies are often criticised for not being capable of generalisation (Foster & Parker, 1995, p56; Robson, 1993, p168; Wilson, 1995, p71-72). However, certain kinds of generalisation are possible, particularly if the question asked is explanatory in nature (Yin, 1994, p6). The case studies analysed as part of this research were designed to constitute theoretical research (see also: Scott & Usher, 1999, p84-98; Smith, 1997).



*The aim is to give theoretical accounts of the topic - perhaps of its structures, or processes, or relationships - which link with existing theoretical ideas.'* (Bassegy, 1999, p40).

Theory building would not be about individuals, but, in line with the social constructionist approach discussed in Chapter 1, it would aim to say something about the context of "partnership" in "special educational needs assessment":

*The focus of attention and theory building has shifted from the cognitive processes that are internal to an individual to a more systematic investigation of patterns of change and maturation as people act and interact in a sociocultural context.... consciousness, knowledge and maturing forms of awareness of insight have a social origin, and are mediated through action in a social context.*  
(Crawford, 1995, p241).

This would entail the identification of discourses, and theorising about the function of the discourses in terms of the execution of forms of power. An analysis of the function of speech acts in the following chapter or in this case the internal perspectives of the project personnel and the interviewees, tells us not so much about internal traits of the particular person. Moreover, such an analysis looks at the function the speech act is performing in the context in which the conversation is taking place. A major aim of both case studies was therefore to carry out a discourse analysis of, in the first case, project action and, in the second case, participant perspectives on a particular child assessment and on statutory assessment in general. Given what is already known from the literature review such an analysis is likely to be critical, but should also add clarity to an immensely complex area.

The kind of theory aimed for in this research is one capable of generating practice and policy implications for people involved in working and caring for children with

special educational needs (Altricher, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p207; Elliot, 1991, p45-56; Iwaniec & Pinkerton, 1998).

### **3.2 The First Case Study: The First Two Years of a Parent Partnership Scheme**

The research orientation used to investigate the first research question was a case study of a project which aimed to develop greater parent partnership in the process of special educational needs assessment. This project was being carried out by an educational psychology service (EPS) and the researcher was a co-director of the project. The paucity of existing empirical research in this area meant that a wide range of research methodologies could add knowledge to the field under study. However, opportunist sampling suggested a case study that offered rich possibilities for unpacking issues in the light of the literature. The literature review had suggested the need to investigate what happened when professionals made a deliberate attempt to develop parental participation, rather than investigating the occurrence of partnership in "everyday" professional actions. Here was a unique opportunity to look at in depth at a deliberate effort to create partnership in special educational needs assessment.



### **3.2.1 What Kind of Case Study? Theoretical Story-telling**

#### **Research Question One**

#### **Can an EP service undertake parental partnership?**

Case studies can be evaluative, or action research, or theoretical (Bassegy, 1999). The case study used to investigate the first research question, as to whether EP Services can engage in parent partnership, was primarily a theoretical study with some elements of story-telling and of evaluation. It was a retrospective analysis of the project events, trying to illuminate the events by drawing upon any documentation collected at the time. This is what Bassegy (1999) defines as "story-telling and picture-drawing" case studies:

*Story-telling and picture-drawing case studies are both analytical accounts of educational events, projects, programmes or systems aimed at illuminating theory. Story-telling is predominantly a narrative account of the exploration of the case, with a strong sense of a time-line. Picture-drawing is predominantly a descriptive account, drawing together the results of the exploration and analysis of the case. Both should give theoretical insights, expressed as a claim to knowledge, but this is more discursive than the fuzzy propositions and generalisations of theory-seeking and theory testing case study.*  
(Bassegy, 1999, p62)

### **3.2.2 Project Phases, Activities and Data Sources**

The researcher collected together documentation relating to the different project activities. The aim was to tell as full a story as possible within a qualitative research framework. The main activities were grouped under five overlapping categories, and fell into three time phases. These are described in the text below. Following this, Figure 1 depicts the phases in a diagrammatic form. Following this, data collected at each phase are described in Table 2. A chronological account, in tabular form, of project activities can be found in Volume II, Appendix 1.

#### ***Phase 1: the first 9 months of the project***

*(1) An audit of statutory assessment from the perspectives of parents and actions to increase parental participation.* This involved an analysis of the form parents returned to indicate acceptance of a draft statement or need to discuss its content with a local education authority (LEA) officer, interviews with parents whose child had been given a statement during the previous year (full LEA report in Volume II, Appendix 2), and meetings with different parent groups. The information parents received when their child's special educational needs were formally assessed were reviewed and actions taken to make improvements. Educational psychology service staff meetings were used to bring current Parent Partnership Scheme activities to the attention of other educational psychologists.

*(2) Developing the role of the LEA parent partnership officer (PPO).* This aspect of phase 1 focused on activities directly looking at ways to develop the role of the PPO. This included an analysis of government circulars relating to the Parent Partnership Scheme funding, meetings with the LEA steering group for the parent partnership project, a conference for parent partnership officers organised by the DFEE

(Department for Education and Employment), meetings with other Parent Partnership Officers in the region, and the activity reviewing available data/literature on parent partnership in special needs assessment. Meetings with parent and voluntary groups also assisted the development of project activities and of the role of the parent partnership officer.

*(3) Developing a working relationship with the Parent Federation, through meetings and a variety of development activities including piloting a parent drop-in sessions and joint interviewing of project officers.*

***Phase 2: the last 3 months of the first year of the project***

*(4) Named person development.* Recruiting and training named persons, to support parents through the assessment process.

***Phase 3: year 2 of the project***

*(5) The developing relationship between different kinds of parent partnership officers:* In the second year the remaining educational psychologist continued working as a Parent Partnership Officer. There were also two newly appointed project workers with the Parent Federation working as Parent Partnership Officers. The relationship between the different PPOs was investigated.

The first two activities were often difficult to unravel from each other, since one informed the other. They seemed to mark a first phase in the project. The recruitment and training of named persons was the only very clearly focused



activity, and one required by the GEST scheme (Grants for Education, Support and Training). It marks a clear second phase in the project. The third phase was the second year of the project, when the researcher was no longer working as Parent Partnership Officer, but when important issues arose particularly from the interviews with members of the Parent Federation and the remaining educational psychologist operating as an LEA PPO.

The following diagram, Figure 1, depicts the different phases of the two years of the project documented and discussed in this research. The arrows in Phases 1 indicate the interrelated nature of the actions in this phase. The thick grey arrows show the chronological progression from one phase to another. Table 2, showing the data sources available for analysis for each project activity, follows the diagram. Samples of documentary data from the Parent Partnership Scheme, including notes taken during meetings, can be found in Volume II, Appendix 3.

Figure 3.1 Phases in the First Two Years of the Parent Partnership Scheme

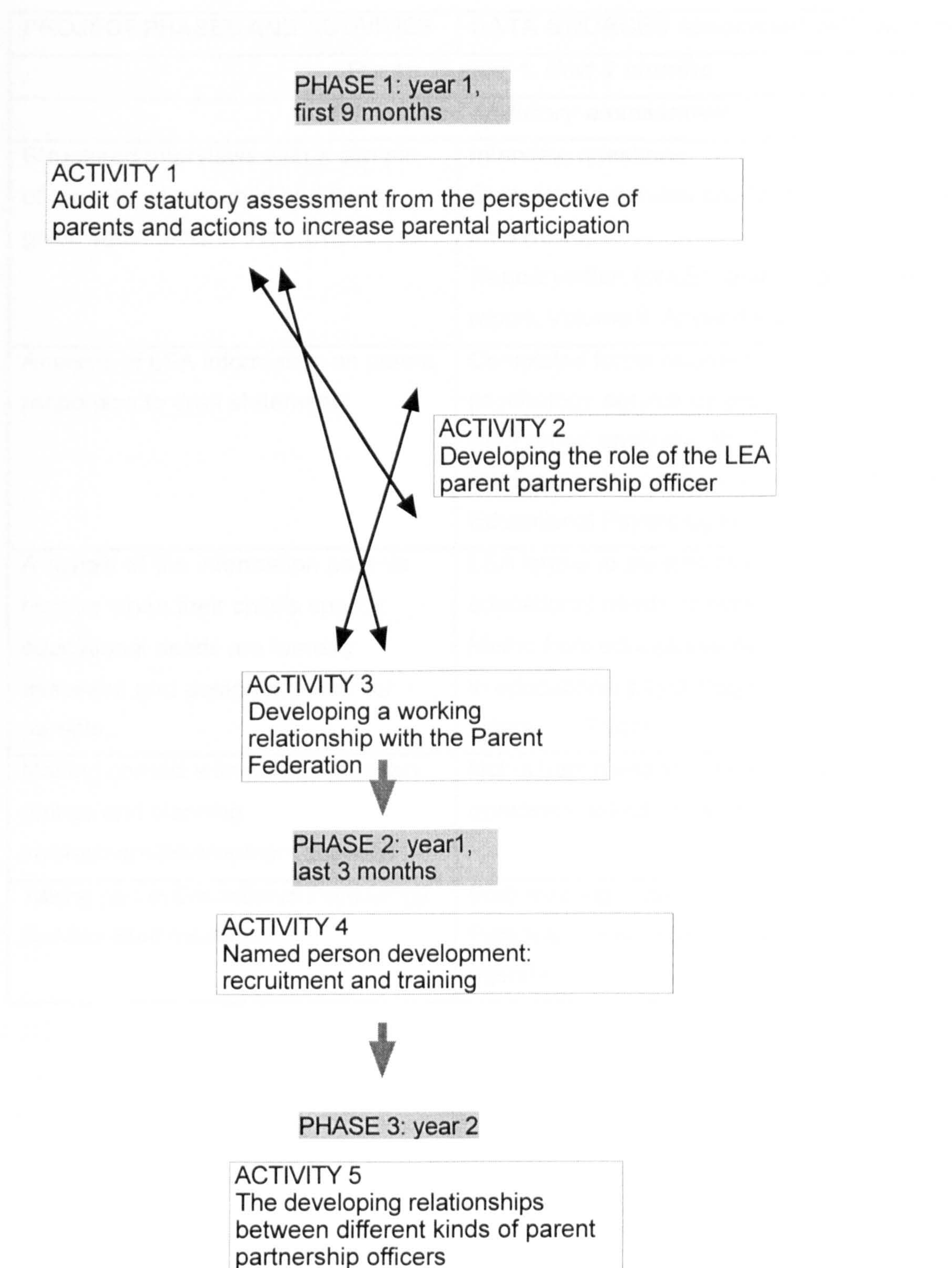




Table 3.1 Summaries of Data Sources from the Different Activities at each Phase

PROJECT PHASES AND ACTIVITIES	DATA SOURCES associated with each activity
<b><i>Phase 1: year 1, first 9 months</i></b>	
<b><i>(1) Audit of statutory assessment</i></b>	
Structured interviews with a sample of parents whose child had been given statements in the previous year	Interview questions Completed interview pro-formas (structured interviews) Report written for LEA analysing interviews (full report, Volume II, Appendix 2)
Analysis of LEA information on parent responses to draft statement	Completed forms returned to educational psychology service by parents Brief report analysing the forms Personal notes on discussion with Principal Educational Psychologist
A review of the information parents receive when their child's special educational needs are formally assessed and design of folder for parents.	LEA letters to parents re statutory special educational needs assessment. Memo from educational psychologist to colleagues in educational psychology service re changing letters. Folder
Making contact with parent/voluntary groups and planning involvement/development activities	Notes from meetings, recording summaries questions asked, views of parents
Taking part in Educational Psychology Service Staff meetings	Staff meeting minutes Personal notes, often written on staff meeting agenda



<b>PROJECT PHASES AND ACTIVITIES</b>	<b>DATA SOURCES associated with each activity</b>
<b><i>(2) Developing the role of the LEA parent partnership officer</i></b>	
Meetings with Parent Partnership Scheme steering group	Meeting minutes and personal notes
Making contact with parent/voluntary groups and planning involvement/development activities	Notes from meetings, recording summaries questions asked, views of parents
Reviewing available data/literature on parent partnership in special needs assessment, including making contact with other parent partnership officers in the region and attending training sessions	DFEE GEST bid specifications Information available from voluntary agencies Small selection of wider research literature Personal notes of regional meetings with parent partnership officers Hand-outs and personal notes from training sessions
Taking part in DFEE initiated colloquium on Parent Partnership	Handouts and personal notes taken during the course
<b><i>(3) Developing a working relationship with the parent federation</i></b>	
Meetings and joint activities with parent federation workers	Personal notes on meetings Written outcomes from some meetings (i.e. brainstorm of parent needs)
<b><i>Phase 2: year 1, last 3 months</i></b>	
<b><i>(4) Named person development</i></b>	
Undertaking training course run by the Advisory Centre for Education	Handouts and personal notes taken during the course
Recruiting and training suitable volunteers to be named persons, to support parents through the assessment process	Written material relating to training: notes from meetings to devise training, notes to aid delivery of training, forms for those attending to indicate role preference

**Phase 3: year 2**

**(5) The developing relationships between different kinds of PPOs**

Further developing the relationship between LEA parent partnership officers (PPOs) and Parent Federation PPOs. Second round of recruiting, training and placing named persons.

Interviews with remaining educational psychologist parent partnership officer, and three Parent Federation workers

### **3.2.3 Further Interviews**

Apart from one data type, data sources were all activities carried out as part of the project. One data source, that of interviews, was exploited in order to provide some data directly from those involved in the project. Interviews focused on issues of role identity in the second year of the project. Interviews also constituted one of a number of validity strategies, since they provided voices different to that of the researcher (see sections 3.2.5, 3.4 and 3.5.2 for discussions about validity).

The choice of interviewees involved a process of strategic sampling (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select people who would be able to comment effectively on the parent partnership project and on broader issues of parent partnership in SEN assessment. This included their views about the possibilities and problems for parent partnership in SEN assessment, their views of the roles of themselves and those of parents and professionals, and their views of the formal assessment process.

Four interviews were carried out, comprising the following:

1. The remaining educational psychologist working on the parent partnership scheme;
2. Manager of Parent Federation (used to act in role of parent advocate for all parents who contacted agency, now occasional representation at tribunals);
3. Two parent partnership project officers employed by the Parent Federation on a job share; and
4. A DFEE representative, from the Special Educational Needs Section, involved in administering LEA parent partnership projects.



The role of each signified the particular reason for their inclusion in the sample. The three involved in the Parent Federation occupied relatively new roles in the statutory assessment process, providing local support to any parent of a child going through statutory assessment rather than to children with needs under a specific label. It was hoped that the DFEE representative would give information about government intentions for parent partnership. The educational psychologist, the co-project director, was interviewed very briefly about the parent partnership scheme in the course of being interviewed as part of the second case study of this research. Most of the project activities had been carried out with her, so notes on meetings had often included her views. She was, therefore, interviewed only about the second year of the project, and about the relationship with the Parent Federation.

#### **3.2.4 Making Sense of the Data**

The data collected on the first case study was very varied in type, including mini-research projects (interviewing parents, analysing formal parent responses to draft statements) and their associated reports. There were primary and secondary data sources on several activities. For example personal notes were taken during most meetings and minutes or some other written record were made (including handouts on training sessions). There were also interviews with people involved with the parent partnership scheme. Other secondary sources included pro-forma LEA letters to parents, DFEE GEST bid outlines, literature from voluntary organisations on different "disability" types. In addition to being varied, the data was great in volume.

Analysis of all data collected involved returning to it several times, oscillating between two activities. One activity involved summarising the data, trying to achieve a form of closure. The other involved revisiting all the data in turn and in detail in order to do the opposite of closure. The aim of this was to further open issues and deepen the analysis. The researcher aimed to be open to what the data was suggesting (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In the first cycle of this process, at the end of the first year of the project, the researcher wrote a report summarising all activities until that time. Part of the report was a chronological account, in tabular form, of project activities (Volume II, Appendix 1). This first analysis helped to set out what had happened in the project and what data sources were available. Revisiting the report a further year later enabled the generation of diagram 3.1, p129 and table 3.1, p130-2.

In order to generate the analysis of project activities for the next chapter of this thesis, the first report and the individual data sources were revisited. Thus the first report now itself gained the status of data. This revisiting was based on the ideas from the literature review, and kept in mind the first research question: "Can an Educational Psychology Service undertake parental partnership?" The literature review found that some complex discourses of "professionalism" seemed to impinge upon any possibility of partnership with parents. The main task of the researcher was, therefore, to tell the story of the project, and in doing so to analyse the data for underlying themes. The themes would be analysed for discourses defining professionalism, which were operating to position parent partnership in particular ways within the project. Discourse analysis has been used in psychology to generate more complex analysis of concepts previously regarded as internal states, such as happiness (Billig, 1997, p40-41). The researcher used discourse analysis to look at the social meanings of the different project activities. The study of

apparent contradictions in discourses was seen by the researcher as one of the most revealing sources for the discourse analysis (Hayes, 1997, p3). The process of analysis was more one of principles than of distinct stages of analysis. Principles involved the following:

- (a) Revisiting the data (reading and listening);
- (b) Analysing the data for "themes and discursive features" (Billig, 1997, p54);
- (c) Checking out intuitive hunches, looking for counter examples, always keeping a "critical gaze";
- (d) Drafting and re-drafting the written analysis of the data; and
- (e) 'Keep writing, reading, thinking and analysing until you produce a version with which you are not totally dissatisfied'. (Billig, 1997, p54).



### **3.2.5 Validity Issues: The Researcher as Insider**

Implications of the position of the researcher as a co-project director of the parent partnership scheme for validity are now considered. Such considerations involved further discussion of the classification of this research, as to whether it could be considered practitioner research.

#### ***Problematizing the Kind of Research***

The position of the researcher and the nature of the research methods used in this case study are quite difficult to classify. Practitioner research is research which examines, for reflection, examination and development, one's own work as a practitioner and the thinking that informs it (Elliot, 1991; Schon, 1991). The activities carried out whilst working as an educational psychologist on the Parent Partnership Project could be said to involve practitioner research. However, the examination of these activities subsequently, whilst not in the role as educational psychologist, is rather more difficult to define. Practitioner research tends to be about professional action in a particular setting. This case study is an analysis of the researcher's activities whilst involved in the Parent Partnership Project not to carry out practitioner research to improve professional actions. However, part of the case exploration will involve a consideration of the role in researching a project, as a researcher, in which the previous role was as an insider professional - how to separate the role of researcher from the role of project officer. Atkinson's (1994) exploration of the tensions experienced by teacher-researchers may also be relevant here. Such tensions between the professional identity and the research identity (Biott, 1996) is common to both the current research and more conventional practitioner research (as defined by Robson, 1993), as evidenced by the dilemmas of this discussion.

This research could also be considered to be a form of ethnography. It can certainly be categorised among the "particular segments of social life that are naturally occurring" (Hammersley, 1992). It depends upon whether terms such as "case study" or "ethnography" refer to methodologies or epistemologies, and whether or not they are seen as discrete approaches. An epistemology of ethnography involves a view that one can only understand the world of others by participating in their world, and that the social world should be studied as far as possible in its "natural state", without being disturbed by the researcher:

*Such a perspective suggests that the social perspective is not objective but involves subjective meanings and experiences that are constructed by participants in social situations. Accordingly, it is the task of the social scientist to interpret the meaning and experiences of social actors, a task that can only be achieved through participation with the individuals involved. (Burgess, 1984, p78).*

The current research can therefore be seen as a form of ethnography, with one important difference, that the researcher was already a member of the social world being studied, and is not, as is the case with most ethnographic situations, a newcomer. For example, the current research differs from the participant research described by Burgess (1984) in that the former assumes a participant that is a newcomer prior to the research. Such research requires role negotiation, acceptance, and migration from the research context, discussed in detail by Burgess (1984, p85). The insider role of the researcher in this thesis precluded a direct application of such a process, but facilitated reflection on the kind of role negotiation experienced by the researcher and the effect of this on the research.

The current research therefore has similarities with both practitioner research and ethnography, but also important differences, and is akin to Hammersley's

"practitioner ethnography" (Hammersley, 1993, chapter 4.6). Both areas of research methodology are able to offer insights for the current research.

### ***The Researcher as Insider***

The prime advantage in this methodology was also its principal problem, that of the researcher's degree of engagement with the project. Having worked on the parent partnership project for a year, the researcher would be an insider in the case to be researched, the Parent Partnership Scheme, and therefore could capitalise usefully on details of the process of the project which would not be easily available to an "outsider". The emphasis was on researching the project as it happened, with decisions made as an educational psychologist project officer, not as a university researcher. An outsider researcher might make quite different research moves. Implications of the insider-outsider dichotomy for this research are considered here in detail.

As an insider the researcher would be cognisant of all project activities and their complexities and have access to aspects of the project that would be invisible to an outside researcher. Relevant advantages are Robson's "Insider' opportunities" (1993, p447) and Hockey's (1993) "relative lack of culture shock or disorientation". The researcher would be able to draw more widely than the data artefacts, the diary and documents on all project events, since she would have access to her memory of events. She would be more aware of the context of events than any external researcher coming in to interview project personnel and scrutinise documents (Hammersley, 1993). This has advantages for the generation of "thick" descriptions (or Silverman's "deeper picture": 1993, p15).



However, problems of an insider perspective are also well documented (Hammersley, 1993; Robson, 1993). As an insider this researcher had a personal investment in the project and might therefore have difficulty in seeing problematic aspects of the project. The researcher may, in particular have pre-conceptions about possibilities for parent partnership for educational psychologists which are difficult to leave to one side in the consideration of the project data. Furthermore, the fact that this researcher would not only be drawing upon the external data of project documents and personal notes but also on memory raises questions of validity in that the researcher's memory is not accessible to anyone else to verify. One cannot know whether another person would have generated the same issues from the analysis. There were certainly aspects of the project that an insider researcher would not see - but an outsider researcher would also miss aspects, possibly different ones.

The inside-outsider dichotomy can of course be claimed to be a false one as demonstrated in Kitzinger and Wilkinson's discussion of theories of "othering" (Kitzinger & Williamson, 1996, p7-12). For example, they talk about problems of "othering": criticisms that women have been researched - represented - by others rather than by themselves in a way that has distorted women's experience. However, a possible solution, that one should only research oneself, and refrain from any research on the other, is met with the problem of defining the insider and the outsider of any particular group. For example, can any woman research infertility, or must it only be someone who has experienced infertility? An exhortation to only research the insider results in a "homogenising of women's experience" (quoted from Patai, 1991, p144 in: Kitzinger & Williamson, 1996, p11). In any research, the researcher perspective has an influence on the research. In the current case study, the difference is that the researcher, in addition to having a

perspective as a researcher, also had a perspective as a worker in the project being investigated. Double advantage or double invalidity? The insider-outsider debate is returned to in more depth, in the light of the second case study, in section 3.6.

This thesis adopts in broad terms a post-positivist philosophy. There are major problems in the use of any research methodology as a tool to obtain the full reality of any event (Maxwell, 1992). Any tool will have a particular bias - there are advantages and disadvantages to every approach (Denscombe, 1998). In any research endeavour, there is a responsibility to "treat different forms of data in an appropriate manner and to be clear about what (the) data represents" (Brown & Dowling, 1998, p57). Phillips (1987) quoted by Maxwell:

*In general it must be recognised that there are no procedures that will regularly (or always) yield either sound data or true conclusions. (Maxwell, 1992, p21).*

Possible threats to validity and reliability posed by the researcher's position in the project were addressed in four ways:

- (a) Looking at the data in detail to carry out an analysis on more than one occasion and over an extended period of time: during the project, at the end of the project (crucial, to draw upon the recency of memory of project events and issues) and three years after the researcher had ceased involvement in the project. This strategy helped to "make the familiar strange: to maintain enough distance so as to ensure that the analytical half of the insider/outsider coin operates effectively" (Hockey, 1993, p208);
- (b) The researcher focussed deliberately on possible difficulties in parent partnership for an EP Service. Such difficulties were clear both from the



experience of professional practice (a group of parents had already attended a meeting with the PEP which had involved a degree of "heated" discussion about resources) and from the literature review;

(c) Generating some data deliberately for the case-study of the project, rather than in order to carry out the project, to allow voices to be heard directly about the project that were different to that of the researcher. This data was generated through interviews with the remaining educational psychologist working as a parent partnership officer, three workers from the Parent Federation, and the DFEE officer who had responsibility for parent partnership. Of course, the interviewer would be influencing these voices through the selection of questions to use, and through the influence on the interview interaction of her own identity as a previous parent partnership officer; and

(d) Presenting both the original analyses of the project and the final thesis draft to the co-project officer, another insider, for her comments. This led to discussions about the accuracy of accounts and ethical issues. The co-project officer, the other Educational Psychologist, confirmed the accuracy of the researchers' account from her perspective. The ethical issues were more difficult to resolve and concerned the effect, despite permission having been given, of releasing the raw utterances of interviewees into the public domain. Despite the written account having been made three years after the interviews were given, one of the Parent Federation PPOs was now employed as the LEA PPO. A decision was taken to omit some of the more evaluative raw utterances from the account of results (Chapter 4) due to a possible detrimental effect on the people involved and their professional work. The remaining account seemed to preserve the depth of the different perspectives on the role of the PPO and the named persons.



### **3.2.6 Progressively Focussing to a New Research Site**

A new site of data was needed which would offer perspectives of people in several different kinds of roles to find what partnership meant to them. The parent partnership project did not lend itself easily to this. It also seemed as if much of the research possibilities of the Parent Partnership had been 'used' - which probably says more about limitations of the insider perspective of the researcher rather than data possibilities of the project - since, as with any complex social situation there are likely to be many possibilities for data collection. However, it was decided to choose a site related to the first, the parent partnership project, but one in which the researcher was more of an "outsider". Consequently a quite different case study was the research site for the second research question. Thus the researcher was able to take advantage of the benefits of "progressive focussing", suggested by Edwards and Talbot to include "in depth focusing on shifting relationships", the ability to capture complexities, a "focus on the local understandings", and "readable data that brings research to life and are true to the concerns and meanings under scrutiny" (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, p48).

In the discussion of the next case study, the position of the researcher including issues of insider-outsider and the kind of validity adopted for this research and its relationship to epistemology are dealt with in more detail.

### **3.3 The Second Case Study: The Statutory Multi-Disciplinary Assessment of One Child, David**

#### **Research Question Two**

**What does it mean to the stakeholders to be "partners"?**

**What are the stakeholders' perspectives?**

The first research question entailed a detailed analysis of a Parent Partnership Project in order to investigate whether an educational psychology service can engage in parent partnership. The second research question arose from a process of progressive focusing - an intention to broaden the concept of partnership to include all those involved in the statutory assessment of children's special educational needs. The refocusing arose not just from the literature review but also from the analysis of the first case, as explained by Edwards and Talbot (1994):

*Progressive focusing often depends upon a series of case studies in which the focus of observations is continuously redefined as previous data are examined. Part of the data examination process is to allow fresh questions to be asked of the taken-for-granted and to enable the presentation of familiar events in new and challenging ways.* (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, p49)

The first case study shed light on possibilities for educational psychologists in having partnership with parents but left open the question of the nature of partnership experienced by other professionals. The researcher had discovered little literature looking at the problems and possibilities of the variety of professionals involved in assessing children's special educational needs. Research into multi-disciplinary working had shown different perspectives on assessment held by different professionals and had suggested that different professional perspectives work together to construct children's needs. It shed some light on the partnership



orientations of educational psychologists with respect to members of the parent federation, but said little about the operation of professional power in the process of special educational needs assessment.

Once again a case study methodology was adopted as being one which would enable an investigation of statutory assessment at a micro-level. In this way it was hoped that the processes of partnership, through different professionals working together, operating in a single situation, might become more visible, better conceptualised and possibly better understood.

To investigate the second research question, the researcher focused on the case of a multi-disciplinary assessment of a particular child leading to a formal statement of special educational needs. All those involved in the writing of advice for the statement, and others involved in the statutory assessment process, that is, all the stakeholders, were interviewed for their perspectives on partnership in assessment. The interviews were transcribed and transcriptions subject to detailed analysis described and discussed in this chapter. One other form of data was collected that of reflections of the researcher in the form of a diary. The diary played a major role in informing the process of the research, and it is referred to again in section 3.3.1.

This case study aimed for "fuzzy generalisation" (Bassegy, 1999, p62) and the identification of dominant discourses from an analysis of interviews of all those involved in the statement of one child. Some element of story-telling was involved in order to set the scene and to fill in case details as the interviews were analysed. However, the interviews provided the major source of data to address the question



of the meaning for stakeholders of partnership in statutory SEN assessment. The case was essentially "theory-seeking" (Bassey, 1999, p62).

The remaining sections of this chapter discuss the methods of data collection chosen to investigate David's case. Having set out the main research actions used in the case study, this discussion continues with a statement on validity, on the possibilities and restrictions for what research can say. Following the general statement, validity is an area returned to throughout a consideration of both data collection and analysis. The nature of interviews is given close scrutiny to inform both their conduct and analysis as the main source of data to answer the second research question. The reasons for choosing interviews are discussed. The determination of the choice of one case rather than several, and the choice of David in particular, is presented, and issues for validity are examined. A nine-stage process of analysis is described and is depicted diagrammatically. A final section explains the systematic nature of the data analysis, and discusses issues of validity and reliability in analysis, including that of the position of the researcher and ethics. Ways in which the second case study was influenced by the first, enabled refocusing, are referred to as appropriate.



### **3.3.1 Research Actions: Description and Rationale**

#### ***Case Selection***

The case chosen for this research was presented to the researcher by an EP colleague. The researcher had no professional involvement in David's case. Brief details of the case, as described by the EP case worker (now paraphrased by the researcher) are as follows:

David was a 7-year-old boy in a mainstream primary school. A formal assessment was currently being carried out of his special educational needs. The child was seen as having difficulties in conforming to the behavioural demands of the school. He had been described as bright, but also as having learning difficulties. There seemed to be some disagreement between David's mother and at least one other person involved in the statutory assessment process about the way the child's needs should be conceptualised. David's mother was described as very articulate about the assessment and about her child's needs.

Parent interviews in the study of the Parent Partnership Scheme had demonstrated the non-homogeneity of parental perspectives on statutory assessment. This was confirmed by Wolfendale in relation to the focus of the previous case study: "One of the central challenges facing PPSs (Parent Partnership Scheme's) is that each individual family has unique circumstances which shape their responses to the SEN services" (Wolfendale & Cook, 1997, p91).

There are at least two implications of this. One is that generalisations cannot be made from any particular parent about any other. The other is the potential that any case might have for revealing important issues about the statutory assessment



process and about partnership. This is not to say that findings would in any way be the same about any case - they would be likely to differ. However, it was possible that particular cases could reveal theoretical understanding about statutory assessment and could be seen, therefore, as critical cases, or: "information rich cases that manifest the phenomena intensely, but not extremely" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p28).

In order to select a case for study the researcher discussed possible options with the person who had worked with her on the project as parent partnership officer. The case the researcher looked at was the first one suggested as being "information rich". One or two others were explored, but since all offered a similar potential for "rich analysis" there seemed no obvious criteria for selection and little reason to look any further. The paucity of past empirical data had not revealed enough information to generate criteria for case selection, if indeed this were possible. Various writers had attempted a typology of parents (Gascoigne & Wolfendale, 1995) but such typologies give no indication of their empirical basis. There was no theoretical basis for an "ideal" case selection most likely to facilitate theorising about partnership in SEN assessment.

The researcher was, however, aware that there were certain details of partnership that she would be likely to find in this case and not others, and other details that the researcher would be unlikely to find here but would in others. It is likely that interviews would generate very different findings if the researcher had chosen a parent agreeing with all advice givers. Many parents might not be articulate about SEN assessment. However, the reportedly articulate characteristic of the parent was attractive to the interviewer as providing the opportunity to develop ideas through the dialogue of the interview.



A possible technical difficulty in selecting this case was that the statement would be finalised at some point during the assessment - so some interviews would be carried out before the outcome of the assessment was known and others would be carried out after this point. Interviewees would not all be responding to the same point in the process and partnership possibilities might differ throughout the process. However, the fact that the assessment process was still being carried out, and had not yet reached a conclusion, afforded the possibility of recording reactions to developments. The status of the statutory assessment process when any interview was carried out would be taken into consideration in the analysis. Interviews all took place at different time during the assessment. The aim was to be immersed in each interview, taking into consideration the agendas the researcher was bringing, to allow the themes of each individual story and of the overall story, to be accessed.

Like many cases, the full picture of the nature of the difficulties for the child was unclear at the start of the assessment and opinions voiced by those involved had already differed. One could argue that this biased the research towards a concluding definition of partnership involving conflict, or towards a conclusion that would find partnership unlikely to be possible. However, the presence of disagreement was not unusual in the researcher's experience (see also: Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994). There was no suggestion that the parent was in disagreement with all professionals. The research would allow the role of disagreement in partnership to be investigated. Several writers had already suggested conflict as integral to partnership (Armstrong, 1995; Bastiani, 1993a; David, 1993; Easen, Ford, Higgins, Todd, & Wootten, 1996; Todd & Higgins, 1998), and this case would enable the relationship between the two to be investigated. In the researcher's experience it was also common to be unclear at the start of the

assessment about the nature of the child's difficulties - this is a principal official reason for a formal assessment (DFE, 1994). Choice of this case would allow probing about different views of a child. It would be interesting to use this case to look at the defining characteristics of partnership and to see to what extent a consensus on the child was reached, or continuing difference, and whether partnership could be maintained through difference.

Case selection was not made on the basis of typicality or otherwise, but on the basis of its "explanatory power" (Scott & Usher, 1999, p86). Case study, it is worth remembering, "is not sampling research... Sometimes a "typical case" works well but often an unusual case helps illustrate matters we overlook in typical cases...Our first obligation is to understand this one case...The first criterion should be to maximise what we can learn" (Stake, 1995, p4).

Another way of saying this relates to the dichotomy between technical and account validity. When all has been done to explain the technical details of methodology or to reduce possible problems: the question of what kind of account can be given, what kind of story told, still remains. The case investigated was a real case of a statutory assessment of a child's special educational needs. The researcher was confident that this case would have the potential to generate insights of importance to a theoretical analysis of partnership and of the assessment process as a whole.

An analogy with facets of a precious stone is perhaps relevant here, in which the shape and perhaps texture of the faces are all slightly different. However, the facets all look in different ways at the same mass of material. The "stone" is one extremely complex, multi-disciplinary assessment process. All cases might tell different stories about the details of partnership in statutory assessment (the facets

of the stone), but a similar story about, for example, the discourses of "statementing" or about the theoretical structure of "statementing" (the core of the stone). The aim of this research was to shed light on the way the complex system works, to theorise about it, and to open it up for what it is.

### ***Researcher Diary***

The researcher kept a diary noting reflections on research methods, the role of the researcher, the analysis of the data, and theoretical issues. She wrote to facilitate a dialogue with herself to aid the development of ideas:

*(the diary) becomes a companion of your own personal development through research: it links investigative and innovative activities: it documents the development of perceptions and insights across the different stages of the research process. In this way, it makes visible both the successful and (apparently) unsuccessful routes of learning and discovery so that they can be revisited and subjected to analysis.* (Altricher, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p11)

Diary writings in between interviews informed the researcher's choice of questions for the next interview, and helped in decision-making about each stage of analysis. This is similar to an emphasis on the active use of data from diaries for the further development of research "to fill in gaps in a theoretical framework" (Glaser and Strauss, 1967, quoted in Altricher, Posch, & Somekh, 1993, p12). The diary informed all stages, and is presented in extracts in Appendix 4, in Volume II.

### ***Interviews for a Reflexive Account***

An external researcher who had no knowledge of this research interviewed the researcher. The aim of the interviews was to provide understanding of the impact of the researcher in the research process. The impact on the research account is



discussed in a later section of this Chapter, in section 3.6, "Insider-Outsider Perspective".

### **3.3.2 Interview Process**

The process involved in carrying out the interviews is described. This includes describing the "case sample", the identity of the interviewees, the dates and location of interviews, the interview format and questions, and the form of recording interview responses. Particular issues for the validity of the conduct of interviews were considered.

#### ***Interview Sample and Timing***

All main participants in the statutory assessment process of David Bewick, a 7-year-old boy attending an urban primary school, were interviewed. The sample included all statement advice providers, plus any additional teaching or medical staff likely to have been involved in contributing to the statement process. David and his mother were interviewed twice, but all others were interviewed once.

All interviews took place during a 12 month period that started six months after the end of the researcher's involvement in the parent partnership project. They occurred after the researcher had ceased being employed as an educational psychologist in the LEA in which the child lived, and had started a full time post as lecturer in psychology at one of the regional universities. David's statutory assessment was initiated in November 1995 and the final statement was dated 1<sup>st</sup>



May 1996. The list of the interviewees, dates of the interviews, and chronological order on interview, are presented in Table 3.2 as follows:

<b>INTERVIEWEE</b>	<b>Interview Date(s)</b>
<b>David's Mother (two interviews)</b>	29/2/96 20/8/96
<b>David (two interviews)</b>	6/2/96 9/1/97
<b>Head Teacher</b>	10/5/96
<b>SEN Teacher</b>	10/5/96
<b>Class Teacher</b>	10/5/96
<b>Educational Psychologist</b>	22/7/96
<b>Acting Principal Educational Psychologist</b>	1/8/96
<b>Clinical Medical Officer</b>	14/8/96
<b>Clinical Psychologist</b>	15/8/96 19/8/96
<b>Occupation Therapist</b>	15/8/96 21/8/96
<b>Named Person</b>	19/12/96

Table 3.2 Relative timing of interviews on participants in David's case

### ***Interview Frequency***

It was decided not to return to all interviewees to ask questions on emerging issues since this could have been a never ending process. It was decided, therefore, to carry out one interview with each person in the case study, and only request a further interview when a particular need to do so arose. Particular reasons for a second interview, with the four following subjects, were as follows:



*David, Child:* David was the child at the centre of the case. As the literature demonstrated, children's views are often omitted from the research of which they are the focus, although there have been some positive developments in this area recent years. It was felt to be extremely important to gain access to David's views if this was possible. In his first interview he seemed, to the researcher, to be extremely reticent and defensive. He was reportedly finding school a difficult place to be and seemed to find talking about it extremely hard. The researcher therefore stopped the interview early, and left almost a year before returning to request a second interview. By this time, David was still experiencing school as a difficult place but some of the difficulties were abating and he felt comfortable enough to talk about them.

*Mother:* Parent partnership was the prime focus of the research and therefore the perspective of the parent was of major importance. It was decided to request a second interview in order to give the opportunity to fully develop some key themes. The second interview took place six months after the first, and after everyone in the case except the named person had been interviewed. This gave the opportunity to feed into the interview issues arising from interviews with all other professionals involved in the assessment.

*Clinical Psychologist:* The interviewee's interest in following several themes, and the researchers' interest in seeing where these would lead, meant that time ran out in the first interview before some key questions had been asked.

*Occupational Therapist:* The researcher requested a further interview since the interviewee's lack of knowledge of the statutory assessment process led to a longer interview than planned, and key questions had not all been asked.



One interviewee was not asked all the key questions. The interview seemed fairly laboured and the interviewee was clearly frustrated with the response of the LEA to the school's request for help. The researcher perceived the person concerned as sometimes giving defensive answers. She did not return to this interviewee, since she felt the information from the educational professionals were likely to be sufficient and she felt it would be an intrusion to push the person's defensiveness any further. To go into further detail on this matter carries ethical risks in terms of confidentiality (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998).

### ***Location***

The location of all interviews was the choice of the interviewee. Interviews with the parent and child all took place in their home. The interview with the named person took place in the researcher's office (a location suggested by the named person due to work and home being a distance from the researcher's work location). All other interviews took place in the work base of the interviewee for their convenience.

### ***Interview Format and Questions***

The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured format. The researcher wanted to make sure that certain key areas were covered. However, she also wanted to allow a certain degree of freedom to enable the interviewee to develop areas as they arose, and to be able, herself, to capitalise on particular issues which arose unexpectedly. Each person being interviewed occupied a different role, often a different professional role, in the formal assessment process, so some of the questions asked were particular to that interviewee. As the research developed,

certain themes arose which were capitalised upon by being asked about during the next interview with a different person.

The key interview questions focused on three main areas:

- partnership;
- conceptualisation of David's situation; and
- perspectives of the assessment process.

The main area of interest was perspectives on partnership, both parent partnership and partnership with other professionals. Direct questions were asked on this area. Linked to this was a question on power in the assessment process, and participant views of where it was located. Power questions seemed fundamental to conceptualisations of partnership due to assumptions of equality in a partnership relationship. Also linked to partnership was a question on the participants' perspectives on their role and, specifically, whom they thought of as their "client". Answers to this question were expected to throw light upon how participants expected to work with others in the assessment process, and therefore have significant implications for partnership.

Views of any aspect of the assessment process and of each participant's role in it would have implications for how they perceived their working relationships in the context of the assessment. A set of questions was asked about participants' views of David's situation and views of the assessment process. In order to get further into the nature of the relationships between participants it was important to explore key areas of their common purpose in working together, the stated reason for an assessment being a child's special educational need. The researcher already knew that there were some differences in views about difficulties for David. It would be

important for an exploration of partnership to look at the effect of any differences on the meaning of partnership, and, more broadly, effects on the ways the participants conceptualised the relationships between each other. Questions about the assessment process were also intended, from a different direction, to investigate implications for partnership. The literature had suggested assessment might not involve the rational process assumed by the Code of Practice, and might be more likely to involve participant negotiations and personal/professional issues influenced by different kinds of power. The literature had also looked in detail at conceptualisations of "parent" and "professional", and at the particular professional identity of the educational psychologist. Examples of notes on interview questions, used in conducting the research, can be found in Appendix 5, Volume II.



Key questions included, therefore, the following:

**Perspectives on partnership**

What does it mean to be in partnership?

Which other people in the assessment did you come into contact with? Did you feel a partner?

Were you in a partnership relationship with the parent? In what way?

What would make more partnership possible?

Is conflict a necessary part of partnership?

(Probes for role of named person, voluntary organisations)

**The nature of David's situation at school - abilities, needs and difficulties**

What do you think have been the nature of difficulties for David at school?

What do you think of the outcome of the assessment?

What has been your involvement in David's situation and what nature will this involvement take in the future?

**Perspectives on the formal assessment process (statementing) - what happened in the assessment process?**

What is statutory assessment really about?

What do you think of it - how can it be improved?

What has your role been in assessment? Are there difficulties/ ambiguities in your role?

How do others see your role?

Who has the most power in assessment?

## ***Recording and Transcription***

All interviews were recorded using an audiotape recorder and an external microphone. All interviews were transcribed verbatim, but without notes about such features as intonation and speech overlap. A professional typist transcribed all but one interview. The interview with the DFEE representative was transcribed by the researcher due to the poor quality of the recording and to enable the researcher to investigate the process of transcription as a research tool. Transcripts offer a "highly reliable record to which researchers can return as they develop new hypotheses." (Silverman, 1993, p11). However, the information transcripts omit, such as intonation and emphasis and non-verbal cues present at the time of the interaction suggested the importance of including in the analysis notes taken at the time of the interview or shortly after, and notes taken when listening to the tape recording (Denscombe, 1998, p132; Silverman, 1993, p117).

### **3.4 Methodology Examined: What kind of Validity?**

There seems little to be gained from the argument that the concept of validity should be rejected. Such arguments are commonly based on one of three premises. Firstly, that validity is not necessary in qualitative research, arguing that such research is an intensely personal endeavour (Silverman, 1993: quoting Agar 1986). Secondly, that its aim is to generate rather than test hypotheses (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). And thirdly, from a feminist position (Stanley & Wise, 1983), that objectivity is an excuse for power relations and the validity of "experiences" should replace supposedly male-dominated versions of "objectivity" (Silverman, 1993, p154). However, as Silverman argues, to focus on "experience" alone undermines what we know about the cultural and linguistic forms that structure what we count as "experience". Research is about reflecting, in a systematic fashion, on the social reality "out there" in order to communicate those reflections. Whilst recognising that validity is problematic, and that knowledge is context bound, we do need to have some ways of thinking about the statements being made from research. Silverman talks of knowledge claims and truth, referring to Hammersley: 'If we recognise that "no knowledge is certain", how can we go about judging "knowledge claims... in terms of their likely truth?" (Hammersley: 1990, p61)' (Silverman, 1993, p155).

Being located primarily in a post-positivist epistemology, this research does not view validity in terms of any simple equating of aspects of methodology with limits to validity. Instead, it sees all aspects of methodology as problematic and asks what, given actions taken in the research, can be communicated about the research questions.



Validity, in this study, means being explicit about areas which have implications for "the story" being told from the data in order to give the fullest interpretation. It is, therefore, not the "concrete activity" described by Perakyla (1997, p201), "to test the truthfulness of the analytical claims". The production of accounts of research represents "a complex discourse of authorship, authority and responsibility" (Coffey, 1996, p72). Validity is therefore focused on "personal and interpersonal qualities", rather than method. It is "knowledge in method which is tied up with a particular knower" (Reason and Rowan, 1981, p250 in: Bannister, Burman, Parker, & Tindall, 1994, p152).

The researcher does not, however, go as far as to claim that validity refers only to accounts not data or methods (Maxwell, 1992, p283). It is relative to purposes and circumstances, but data and methods can influence accounts. The researcher takes the approach that attention to the technical aspects of data collection and analysis is not sufficient, as they would be within a positivist framework, for research to be deemed valid. Attention must therefore be given to technical aspects of methodology. However, somewhere is a point where technical and account validity meet. At its simplest, one could view both performing a separate purpose: technical validity to observe methodological rigour in data collection and analysis, and account validity to look at what can be said from the data. Some aspects of rigour seem more technically aligned, such as accounting for the questions asked of each interviewee and applying a systematic process of data analysis. However, other aspects seem to suggest a blurred region where technical and account validity meet. For example, details of the socially constructed nature of the researcher's account of this case are not regarded, in any simplistic way, as instances of bias to be ironed out and removed to reveal the "true" perspectives of the interviewees. Instead, such details, which are themselves in the form of discussions, are treated

as data in their own right, as part of the case study. They are necessarily part of the context of investigating the case. Silverman's (1993) comments on distortions in documentation and statistics apply equally well to reflexive accounts:

*they were now treated in their own right, not as distortions of the phenomena they ostensibly measured but as constitutive of those.* (Silverman, 1993, p66).

An important aspect of the post-positivist position adopted in this study is, therefore, recognition of the position of the researcher perspective in the conduct of the research and the need for an element of reflexivity in the account. Reflexivity as an aspect of methodological rigour features in most post-positivist methodology discussions (Ball, 1990). Reflexivity can be defined as follows:

*Reflexivity concerns a set of issues that arise when considering the relationship between the content of research and the writing and actions of researchers.*  
(Potter, 1996, p228)

Finally, both technical validity and account validity are important, but cannot easily be distinguished from each other, or from the difference in their philosophical roots (the former in positivism, the latter in post-positivism). This is not a dichotomy that can be settled. Instead, the researcher remains in the uneasy space in between. As each type of validity is discussed in this research, the researcher adopts a continual vigilance for the gaze of the other type. There is an emphasis, therefore, on awareness on the part of the researcher, and a continual openness to the asking of questions.

### **3.4.1 Account Validity: What can be said from Interviews?**

The choice of a particular sample and method of data collection are never free from discussion. There are always other choices that could have been made, and which would have generated different findings and different kinds of knowledge about a situation. What is important is to be clear about the reasons for choices that were made, their impact on the knowledge generation possible, and ways in which issues for validity were considered and dealt with.

The semi-structured interview was selected as the most appropriate method of data collection to answer the second research question.

Of three reasons for choosing interviews (Burgess, 1984, p105; Scott, 1996, p65) the first two were valid for this study:

- Allowing researchers to access past events;
- Allowing access to situations at which the researcher is not able to be present;  
and
- Allowing access to situations in which access is refused.

The researcher could have sought to have access to meetings at which a number of the statement participants were involved, or to sessions in which professionals were engaged in assessment tasks with David (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994). Such a process would, in all likelihood, have been likely to generate data capable of answering the research question. However, interviews were capable of capturing a different kind of data from observations. They could, potentially, capture the perspectives behind the actions. The researcher has been part of many assessment situations, but these had not involved access to answers to the kind of



questions used in this research. Furthermore, observations of meetings were felt to be too intrusive for the researcher to encroach too much upon the privacy of those involved. Given that there were controversial issues in the case between the parent and several professionals, a less invasive methodology was appropriate.

Much is written on the kind of communication that happens between interviewee and interviewer. Holstein and Gubrium (1997) are not alone in claims about the particular kind of communication which occurs during interviews, different to every-day conversation (Ball, 1990; Silverman, 1993, p90-114). Interview communication is a function of the particular situation of the interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee. Interviewees (and presumably interviewers) are experiencing subjects who actively construe their social worlds. This is aptly articulated in Silverman:

*When we talk with someone else about the world, we take into account who the other is, what that other person could be presumed to know, "where" that other is in relation to ourself in the world we talk about.*

Baker (1982, p109) quoted in Silverman (1993, p90).

The particular communication taking place in interviews, and current thinking on the socially constructed nature of attitudes (Potter & Wetherell, 1987) suggest interviews will not reveal, in a simple way, a fixed system of individuals' views and perspectives. They are, in any case, a construction of the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee:

*Interviewing provides a way of generating empirical data about the social world by asking people to talk about their lives. In this respect, interviews are special forms of conversation. While these conversations may vary from highly structured, standardised, quantitatively orientated to free-flowing informational exchanges, all interviews are interactional. The narratives that are produced may be as truncated as forced-choice survey answers as elaborate as oral life histories, but they are all constructed in situ, as a product of the talk between interview participants.*

(Holstein & Gubrium, 1997, p113).

The current research is particularly close to Silverman's (1993) view of research as "moral tales" as people struggle to present their actions in the context of moral versions of responsibility. In this study the researcher was interested in presentations of responsible parenthood, or responsible professionalism. Silverman refers to "an unresolved debate about the status of interview accounts, namely are such accounts:

- true or false representations of such features as attitudes and behaviour?
- simply "accounts", whose main interest lies in how they are constructed rather than their accuracy?" (Silverman, 1993, p15).

Interviews would allow access to a variety of events in the statutory assessment process without actually being present. Access to the statement events would be through the eyes of the parent, child and professionals concerned. However, this was the very material the researcher was interested in - not the researcher's own observations of events, but the perspectives of the participants on the events and implications for partnership. The researcher would be able to describe the different "moral tales" (Silverman, 1993) being told by each participant, and to identify, through detailed analysis, the discourses operating within the statutory special educational needs assessment.

### **3.4.2 Accounting for "One" Case**

Interviews with parents as part of the Parent Partnership Project (Research Question 1) had given some insight into the research possibilities of case investigation. They had suggested what kind of data might be possible from, on the one hand a comparison of several cases, and, on the other, the detailed investigation of a particular case. There was a good argument for both approaches;

both would reveal different facets of the same "problem". As the study proceeded the importance, for this particular study, of a single case, became more apparent.

At the start of the research it was not clear whether one case study would allow the depth needed for such theoretical concerns to become visible, or whether further case studies would be needed. However, the structured interviews from the Parent Partnership Project had suggested that the type of case might not be crucial if the aim was to develop "fuzzy theory" (Bassegy, 1999, p62) about partnership and "statementing". The interviews of 24 parents had demonstrated the potential that any case could have to illuminate the assessment process. This is not to say that cases were not varied and would not have different things to say. There would be likely, for example, to be very different issues about partnership from one of the five (out of twenty-four) cases, in the interviews of parents in the Parent Partnership Scheme who had no idea that their child had been given a statement compared to those who had understood what was happening.

But, as the interviews proceeded, it became evident that an in-depth focus on one case was more likely to generate the theorising needed than extension to further cases. One case is a different analysis from "more than one". Comparisons could usually be seen to be an advantage, strengthening the research. However, it would also be likely to detract from, and limit, the kinds of theorising the researcher could engage in. The researcher's statements would inevitably become more drawn into similarities and differences, rather than the issues and process of the particular (Golby, 1994, p18). With more than one case the whole process and possibilities for analysis changes, and "comparison" becomes the major focus. However, by looking at one case the researcher was forced to look in depth within the single case and to make the analysis as "thick" as possible. There was an opportunity cost in terms of



time. The researcher could either do a couple of cases superficially or one really in-depth.

### **3.4.3 Towards "Technical" Validity**

The account validity of interviewing has been discussed earlier, looking at "What can be said from interviews?" Here the researcher considers more technical aspects of validity, to do with the effect of the conduct of the interview on response possibilities. The complexity of interactions mean that it is likely that interviewees interpret questions in very different ways (Foddy, 1993, p23). However, the difference can be reduced by orientating each interviewee to the question - and part of this is the checking out of knowledge of an area prior to asking the central question, and returning to ask the question in a different way. This has resonance with Spradley's (1979) suggestion to start with descriptive questions (which allow statement), then structural questions (to find how interviewee arrange their knowledge) and finally contrast questions which allow opportunity to discuss the meaning of situations (articulated in Burgess, 1984, p112).

There is a tension in interview research between closed and open questioning. The emphasis in the present research was towards open questions. However, as Foddy (1993) points out, this requires a continual eye on the nature of responses to make sure the answers are of the sort the researcher requires. Straying from the question often leads to more focused probing - or, in effect, the asking of more closed questions. The central issue is that interviewees should be orientated towards the research area, by the provision of response frameworks, so that they are clear what kind of answers they should give (Foddy, 1993: p76-89 and p152).

The provision of a response framework was achieved in the current research in the following ways:

- (a) For every key area a particular question was first approached with a broad question to find out about the level of memory or knowledge of a particular area. Questions demanding a more descriptive answer were used first to enable the researcher to gauge the kind of analytic question to use. For example, with non-educational professionals more time was spent exploring understanding of the statutory assessment process. There was little point in asking someone's view of changes in the process if the person had little involvement in statutory assessment and did not know what the process involved.
- (b) As interviews proceeded more opportunity was taken to explore issues, especially with those who had little direct involvement with David, such as the Acting Principal Educational Psychologist. Issues, for example, included the role of the EP as a "contradiction manager", managing the contradictions which seemed to present themselves in the system of assessment.
- (c) It was important not to suggest answers. For example, at some stage in the interview the area of "conflict" between advice providers was raised. If this was not clear from an interviewee's answers to other questions, then a more open probing question was used first, such as "Did all advice writers agree about David's difficulties?"
- (d) The focus in interviews varied. School personnel were asked more detailed questions about David's situation and how it had developed and what they had felt and thought at different times. More time was spent asking what non-education interviewees remembered of David, a question not necessary for

someone working with David every day. The acting PEP, who had little direct knowledge of David, was asked instead about the way a decision was reached about provision for David.

Volume II, Appendix 5 contains samples of the interview questions used to conduct the research, and Appendix 6 contains coded transcripts for a sample of interviewees.

Possible problems in unstructured interviewing include the interview technique - i.e. the researcher interrupting the interviewee, confusion over the meaning of the words used in the interview (or assumptions of shared meaning), the level of rapport between the interviewer and interviewee, and the asking of leading questions (Burgess, 1984, p119).



### **3.5 Second case Study: Analysis of Interview Data**

Particular care needs to be taken in deciding what kind of description of the social world is capable of being presented from an analysis of the interviews in this case study. This issue has been discussed in detail earlier in this chapter in the previous section 3.4.1. Interview questions were all focused on a particular child in addition to the general area of assessment, at a time when the child's situation was likely to be providing a critical incident for many of the professional involved. It is worth restating that interviews would not, in this research, reveal in any simple way people's attitudes to partnership in assessment. Moreover, this was not the aim of the case study research. This study aimed to produce a theoretical account of partnership in assessment implied by the varied and complex accounts from the interviews and the other research strategies. This study, as many in education and social science, was "theoretically driven by the assumption that social phenomena derive their meaning from how they are defined by participants." (Silverman, 1993, p14). For example, Silverman takes, and problematises, the concept of the "family":

*...how we invoke the family, when we invoke the family and where we invoke the family become central analytic concerns (of the sociologist). Because we cannot assume, as laypeople must, that families are 'available' for analysis in some kind of unexplicated way, 'the family', conceived as a self-evident phenomenon, always escapes.*

*The phenomenon that always escapes is the 'essential' reality pursued in such work. The phenomenon that can be made to reappear is the practical activity of participants in establishing a phenomenon-in-context. (Silverman, 1993, p203).*

This leads to the question of the nature of the particular phenomena in the current research that the researcher is evoking, by constructing interviews to investigate theoretically. "Partnership", but also, "statutory assessment", "assessment" of children's needs in more general terms, and the roles of "parent" and "professional",

are being made, in this research, to reappear in order to establish them in context. The current research used interviews to enable concepts identified in the literature as problematic (i.e. partnership, statutory assessment, and assessment...) to reappear, and to be pulled and rearranged and the context to be re-enacted, through the discursive nature of the semi-structured interview.

### **3.5.1 A Nine Stage Process of Analysis**

Qualitative data is very difficult to get to grips with, due to its volume and complexity: "the researcher can become so immersed in the case that data analysis becomes difficult" (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, p48). In this case the data consisted of fifteen transcripts in total from eleven interviewees, in addition to numerous diary notes.

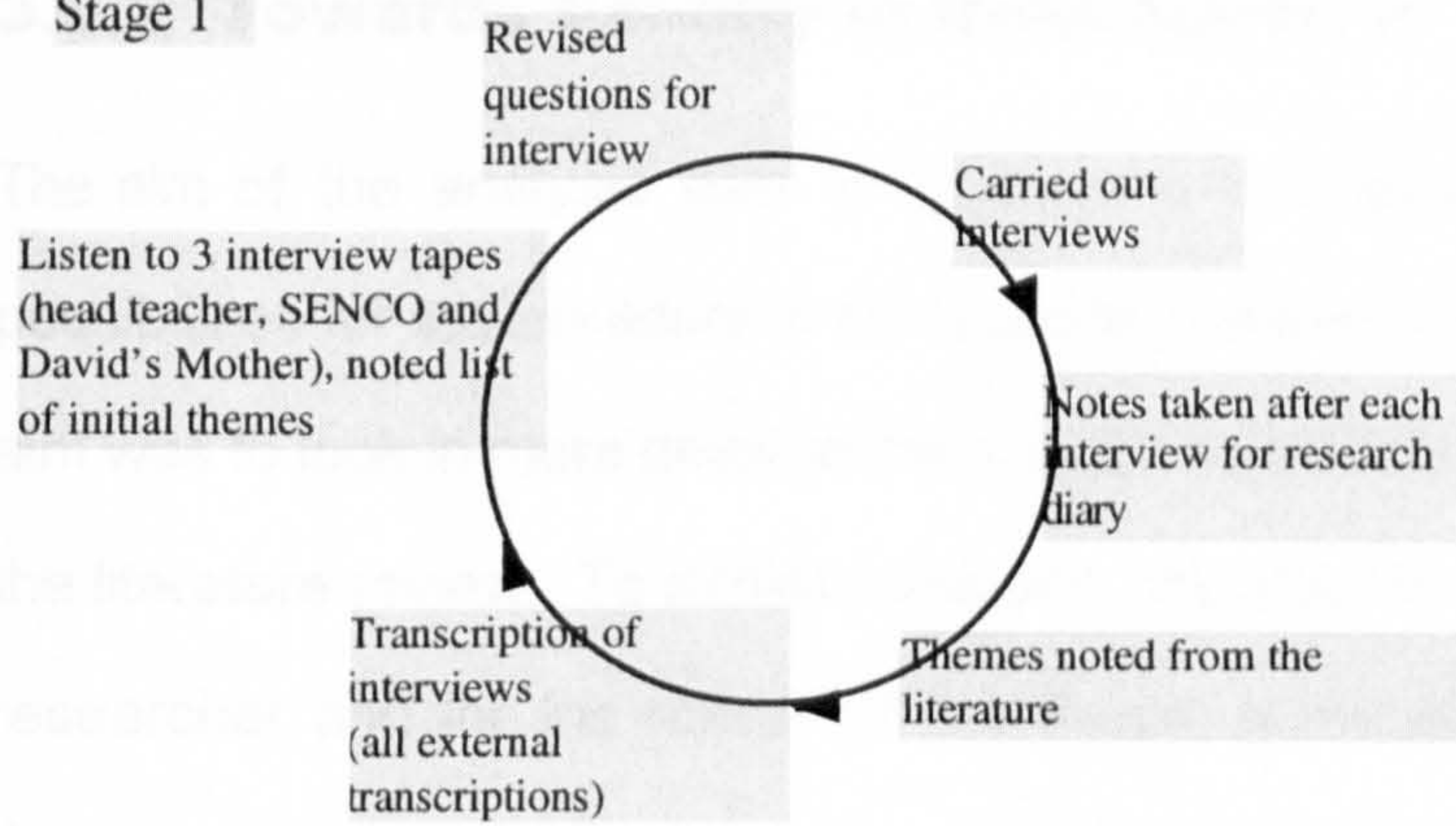
A valid interpretation of the interviews was attempted through a number of different strategies. This included:

- The employment of thorough structured analysis of the text of interviews;
- The engagement of external researchers to examine various aspects of analysis;
- The interview of the researcher by a fellow researcher to aid a reflexive account;
- The presentation of partial analyses (to peer professionals, peer researchers and to the interviewees themselves) to verify the validity of analysis; and
- Reliability checks of the researcher's analysis of all themes in one interview and of a particular theme in five different interviews.

The structured nine-stage process of data analysis is depicted in diagrammatic form (Figure 3.2). Following this, the stages are discussed in more detail with reference to reliability and to different kinds of validity. The circles indicate several continuous processes. Although each stage was discrete in terms of identity, at any one time several stages were happening concurrently. Samples of notes, forms, tables, and diagrams used in the nine-stage process can be found in Volume II, Appendix 7.



**Stage 1**



**Figure 3.2: Process of Analysis of Interviews of Participants in David's Case**

**Stage 2:**

One interview (2nd Int. of David's Mother) analysed in greater depth, to find major themes :  
 Transcript marked, utterances underlined, themes noted in margins;  
 Concept map made of themes, linked to utterances and page numbers;  
 10 main themes identified;  
 Transcript returned to, utterances linked to themes; and  
 Any additional themes noted.

**Stage 3:** 1st independent researcher analysed 2nd interview with mother, to find the main themes, with no knowledge of the themes identified by the researcher. 10 themes confirmed.

**Stage 4:** For 5 interviews significant phrases in the text underlined  
 In the margin a code heading written denoting one of the 10 themes and other identifying words. Code number added. Any new themes noted.  
 Notes made for these 5 interviews summarising each theme. Continual reference to the literature.  
 Frames (not detailed) made summarising 5 themes for each of the 5 interviewees (themes: views of David, assessment, role, power and partnership). Conference paper and journal article published. Seminar presentations.

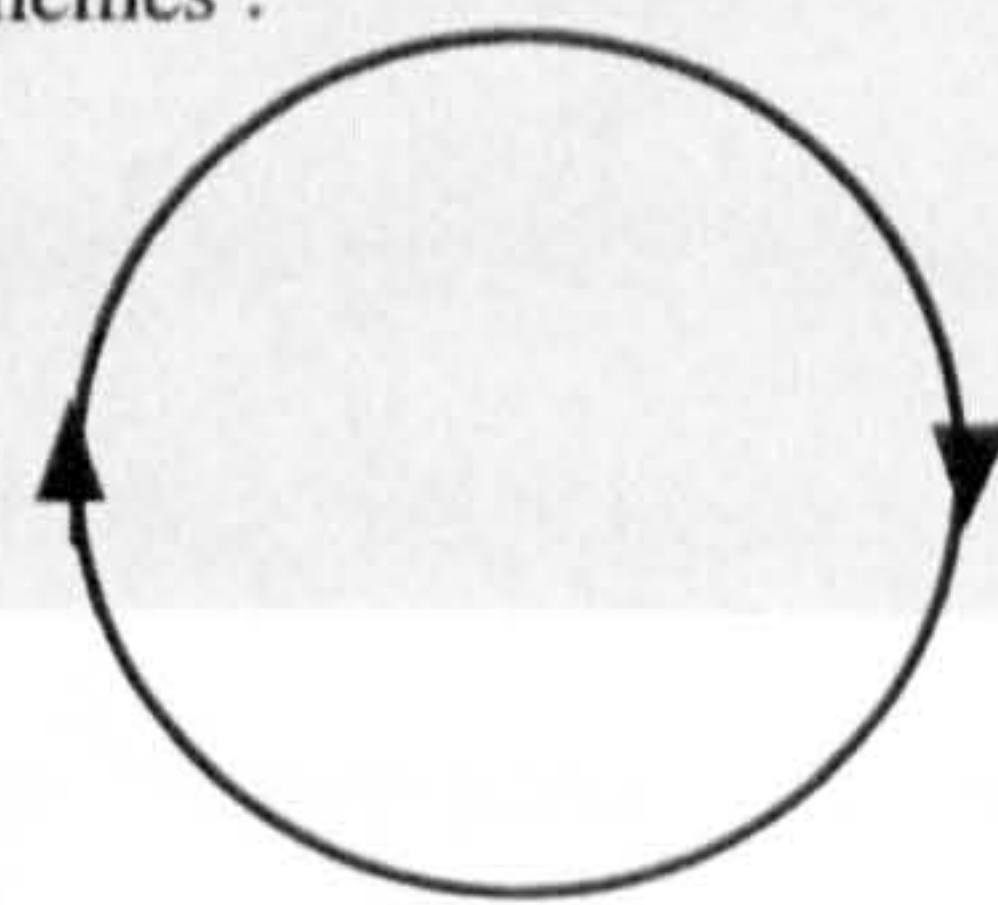
**Stage 5:** Reflexive account. Interviews of the researcher by a second independent researcher

**Stage 6:** 10 themes returned to. 10 themes for each interviewee summarised in large tables, with page numbers to refer back to interviews. For some interviews this information came from the summary sheets in conjunction with the raw interview, for others this information came straight from the coded transcriptions.

**Stage 7:** Decision taken to focus finally on original 5 themes. Coded transcriptions and the large summary sheets used to make summary presentation frames, summaries of raw quotes for each interviewee, for the themes David, Partnership, Power, Role and Assessment.

**Stage 8:** 3rd independent researcher made random selection of one interview per theme, selected all relevant utterances from transcript and reduced these to main utterances. Comparison of this analysis with that of the researcher.

**Stage 9:** Panels summarised in prose, and in reduced frames of raw quotes



Notes taken on significance of analysis for research questions: for discussion chapter



### **3.5.2 Towards Validity in Data Analysis**

The aim of the analysis was to produce a theoretical analysis of the partnership possibilities for stakeholders in the statutory assessment process. In particular, the aim was to look in more detail at the operation of the complex discourses identified in the literature review. To achieve this aim, the objective was to produce, for both the researcher and for the reader of this thesis, summaries of the interviews in ways that gave access to the raw data, to the breadth of the variety of utterances, but also to an overview of what each interviewee was saying on the subject of each theme. The summaries enabled the researcher to form "maps" of each theme, to ask questions of the themes and to begin to formulate theory for the discussion. It was a very concrete, visual, process involving many large diagrams, tables and drawings (see Volume II, Appendix 7). The principles used in the analysis of the Parent Partnership Scheme (see section 3.2.4) were adopted here.

#### ***Revisiting the data (reading and listening)***

The researcher decided there was a need to stay as close as possible to the full text of the interview, and to avoid coding individual phrases excessively. To engage in any more detailed coding of individual utterances would have focused on the micro detail, at the expense of keeping "the whole" in mind. She found this enabled her to be able to continuously look for connections between the codes she was using, for new themes, and for connections and contrasts between the different interviews. She decided to use a process of continually moving from the full text to reduced forms of the text in different ways, to enable final representations of the interviews to be presented that had validity in terms of being representative of the whole. The continuous movement between the transcripts and some form of

analysis, allowed the researcher to check the representativeness of the themes or quotes, asking whether any had been left out and whether a reasonable impression of the themes was being given. This process, always coming back to the interview transcripts, was used at all stages (apart from stage 5) of the analysis.

The researcher also found the need to use a tactile, physical, and visual form of analysis. Therefore a decision was taken not to use a computer package, such as NUDIST, to analyse further all the interviews. However, the computer played a major role in analysis: WORD was used to reduce transcripts to the different themes and CLARIS/ APPLEWORKS to design the different concept maps and process maps (see: Richards & Richards, 1994, p445). However, the large sheets of paper plus coloured cuttings of utterances with page numbers showing the relationships between themes in the mother's second interview, and the large sheets of drawing paper used to display tables of all ten themes for each interviewee were all of great importance for the researcher. They aided the process of keeping large amounts of data and great complexity of ideas in the mind at the same time. Their tactile and visual nature aided the researcher in making connections between the utterances of different interviewees.

### ***Indexing the data for themes and discursive features***

The research aimed to arrive at a valid selection of themes and a valid account of the themes in each interview. Interview transcripts were read several times in a process of indexing, or coding, them for themes and discursive features, at stages 2 and 4 (see the diagrammatic presentation of the process of analysis, figure 3.2).



Other stages aided in the development of themes and discursive features, which led to a revision of codes. The aim at all stages of the analysis was to be aware of themes from the interviews, the research questions and the literature, but also to be open to other themes being suggested by the data itself. There was also some oscillation between seeing the data in terms of ten themes and seeing it in terms of five themes. At stage 5 interviews were analysed in terms of ten themes but presented, in seminars and at a conference, in terms of five themes. When it came again to present data to a reader in the final thesis, the five themes again presented themselves as the most succinct way to do this. It was clear that some of the ten could be subsumed into others.

The five themes comprised perspectives on each of the following:

- David
- assessment
- partnership
- role
- power

Although the themes relate very strongly to the interview questions, arriving at these final headings took a very detailed, lengthy, systematic process of analysis.

The researcher investigated the possibilities for illuminating the data from counting the number of times an interviewee mentioned a particular aspect of a theme, or the number of turns in the interview conversations in which such an aspect was mentioned - in other words, the counting of the number of times a code was indexed in a particular interview. For example, in an attempt to find a way to assign a single summary label to the SENCO's (special educational needs co-ordinator) remarks

about David, the researcher investigated whether any kind of counting of responses would give a rationale for such a label. Appendix 8, in Volume II, represents a frequency count of each turn of speaking in which a particular description of David was mentioned in the transcript of the SENCO's interview. Attempts to further classify the table into "behaviour" and "learning", and even further into "positive behaviour" and "positive learning", seemed particularly problematic. For example, is "not writing" a learning issue or a behavioural one? It was therefore not possible to find a way to reduce the SENCOs comments to a single label that would seem to be useful to the overall analysis. It was felt to be more in keeping with the spirit of this thesis to concentrate on meaning and keeping close to the transcripts, and to focus on developing the complexity of each theme.

Numerical analysis was not carried out for any other interview or theme. The SENCO interview was the one that appeared most likely to generate numerical data due to the variety of terms used in relation to a particular theme. Once the generation of such data from this interview was found to be inappropriate, there was seen to be little to be gained from investigating such data in other interviews. In particular, other interviewees were much more definite in their views than the SENCO, such that there was little variety of terms and little possibility in any numerical data.

***Check out intuitive hunches, look for counter examples, always keeping a critical gaze***

The process of going back and forth between the transcripts and different kinds of summaries of themes several times (stages 1, 2, 4, 6, 7, and 9) from the initial notes on tapes and transcripts, to the detailed notes on transcripts, to the large tables



depicting each interviewee and theme and finally to condensed A4 sheets of raw quotes - enabled a continual check on validity to be maintained.

Communities of academics and practitioners were drawn upon to explore ideas about the data. This took the form of presentations of "research in progress" at educational research conferences and at meetings of various interest groups for educational psychologists and for academics.

Two external researchers, who had not been involved in any way in the research, were engaged to carry out aspects of particular parts of the analysis, in order to assist the process of "checking out", to aid validity. At stage 3 an external researcher, an educational psychologist, analysed the 2nd interview with David's mother, to identify the main themes. The educational psychologist had no knowledge of the themes identified by the researcher. She found very similar themes to that of the researcher, but added the theme of the parent's theory of child development. Her analysis was used to make a decision how to code the interviews when detailed coding was carried out. This confirmed the use of the initial ten categories, each proceeded by the coding used:

*DAV: Ideas about what David's problem is and reasons for his problem situation at school*

*POW: Where do they think power is located?*

*PART: What is partnership? How do you feel in some/ any way a partner? What is a professional role? What is a parental role?*

*ROLE: What is your role in the assessment?*

*STAT: What is the "statementing" process really about? what are their views of it? do they see it as an objective or negotiation process?*

*CON: Who, and what, is a contradiction manager?*

*CLIENT: Who is your client? Who are you for?*

*CHDEV: What is your underlying theory of child development?*

*LAB: What is your thinking around labels, generally and to do with David?*

*FEEL: What, for you, has been the affective component of this assessment? What have you felt? What has been the relationship of your feelings to your role, the "statementing" process, partnership, power... etc.?*



At stage 8 a further external researcher, a university research assistant, was engaged to check the reliability of a further aspect of data analysis. By this time the themes had been reduced to five, which seemed to encompass the ten original themes. The research assistant was given no information at all about the research, its aims, or about the researcher's findings to date. She was given all interview transcripts and made a random selection of one interview for each of the 5 major themes, selected all relevant utterances from the transcripts and reduced these to main utterances. She compared her selection of utterances with that of the researcher, and with the researcher's panels of frames from each participant. The external researcher agreed with 95% of the researcher's panels, which was a significant positive check on the reliability of the researcher's analysis. The researcher looked again at the 5% of different utterances and made a decision as to whether or not to revise her own panels. About half of these differences were included.

The researcher attempted to be aware, and to make note in this account, of utterances which seemed to conflict with each other. Such conflict was looked at as a challenge, asking what it might mean for the research question. The analysis was therefore not dependent upon prior assumptions and definitions, but tackled all utterances in a way that moved towards a more complex understanding of concepts. For example, when looking at participant responses to the theme of "partnership", many interviews contained what might have been seen as conflicting responses. The head teacher attributed power to others in the case, the acting FEP in charge of the statutory assessment panel, and yet spoke of excluding David. The researcher's response to this was to look at power as a complex and non-unitary concept for each participant. The head teacher experienced both power and

powerlessness in different ways. The analysis would note this, and look to explore this in the discussion chapter. In this way:

*Each of the passages subjected to deconstruction contains an alternative, possibly paradoxical account of the projected reality assumed in the writing. This could be teased out by seeking conflicting images in the metaphors used, the omissions from the text, the desire for coherency and the narrative imperative and the way that the rhetoric is sometimes subverted by incidentals at the margin - for example in the referencing.*  
(Sanger, 1995, p97).

Sanger (1995) advises freeing ourselves from the requirement to achieve unitary and plausible accounts of social interactions. This leads naturally to the final aspect of analysis, often omitted in methodology accounts, that of producing the written analysis of the data.

### ***Draft and re-draft the written analysis of the data***

An account was produced of each of the five main themes for each interviewee in three forms: in text, adding the researchers' interpretation; in large panels depicting frames of summaries of raw utterances (two A3 pages per theme), and in small panels giving key quotes for each theme from each person (one A4 page per theme). This method of presentation aimed to make the analysis visible to readers, to enable them to interact with the data and the researcher's ideas and to add their own interpretations. These accounts have been placed in Volume II of the thesis, in Appendix 9.

The presentation of some form of raw utterances was seen as important in order to allow readers to make their own interpretation of the data. The panels aimed to summarise the views of each interviewee, but not to convey frequency of particular

themes. Frequency, or emphasis, would be conveyed through the prose account of the interviews in Chapter 5. The telling of themes from the interviews led towards interpretation, since comparison was at the heart of this research. The prose aimed to include expanded quotes, and to explain the relative emphasis given by an interviewee to a particular aspect of a theme.

### ***Producing an account***

Versions of the account of the data in Volume 2 of the thesis, and of the summaries in the following chapter, were returned to repeatedly, concurrently with other research activities. This continued until some kind of conclusion had been reached in telling the story of David and in realising the aim to expand the themes and discourses identified in Chapter 2. This process could have continued even further, by recognising the textuality in the researcher's account itself. A post-structuralist approach recognises that the account of this research will, itself, be performing a function. The researcher's findings are not objective, disembodied facts. It follows also that discourses can be identified from her own writing about the research.

*that descriptions are not just about something but they are also doing something; that is they are not merely representing some facet of the world, they are also involved in that world in some practical way (Garfinkel 1967; Wieder 1974).*  
(Potter, 1996, p46).

However, other than to note the researcher's awareness of such textuality, any further comment was seen to be outside the scope of this thesis.



### **3.6 Insider-Outsider Perspective**

Dangers in researching "the other" in special educational needs have been well documented in the literature (Clarke, Dyson, & Millward, 1998; Clough & Barton, 1995; Corbett, 1996; Oliver, 1990; Oliver & Campbell, 1996; Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998). The importance of a major voice in research for "the researched" has also been well documented (Clarke, Dyson, & Millward, 1998; Clough & Barton, 1998; Corbett, 1993; Corbett, 1996; Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998):

*People with learning difficulties are in greater danger of being victims of the good intentions of others than most other marginalised groups. (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998, p25 quoting Mittler 1991).*

This debate has been paralleled in other areas of "inequality", such as research of ethnic minorities, those HIV positive, and research of women, well summarised in Wilkinson and Kitzinger (1996).

The insider-outsider dichotomy has been challenged earlier in this chapter, looking at the writer's position in researching the Parent Partnership Project, in the section, "The Researcher as Insider". Given the likely complexity of power relations in the present research it would be hard, if not impossible, to decide who is the insider and who the outsider. The researcher's position is problematic, being of the same educational profession as one of the participants.

It would be tempting, and valid, to write at length about the researcher's own issues in carrying out this research, her motivation and what it has meant for her. But this might add little in terms of understanding the problematic of the assessment process, in producing some kind of account of what is "out there".

From an extreme post-structural position, some might claim that a reflexive account would get her "as far" as it was possible to go. However, the researcher prefers the uncomfortable position "working the (insider-outsider) hyphen" (Hurd & McIntyre, 1996: quoting Fine 1994), in which she can respond to the interviews as if there were some kind of *unsubjectivity* (researcher's italics), whilst trying at the same time to be aware of the effects of her self as researcher, and her motivations as an insider-professional. The researcher of the current project is therefore both an insider, researching the familiar, and outsider, occupying a position of power in relation to the researched.

### **3.6.1 Researching the Familiar**

The fact that the researcher had been employed only a few months prior to the fieldwork as an educational psychologist in the same LEA (local education authority) was likely to influence the research in significant ways.

She was likely to be looking at all the research tasks with a slight movement towards this professional role. The role was likely to influence selection of interview questions, conduct of the interview, and analysis of results. She was also likely to have pre-conceptions about issues (Hockey, 1993, p199):

*The essence of teacher-research: learning what to notice amid that which is everywhere. (Britsch, 1995, p309).*

Such problems were likely to be increased in the case of one of the interviews, of a close colleague and friend, which therefore blurred roles of friend, colleague, and researcher (Hockey, 1993, p199). There may also have been to an element of

"discipline hostility" (Hockey, 1993, p218), given the tensions identified in the literature between some professional groups. The times the researcher was asked to switch off the tape or to not report a particular aspect of a response seemed to be due to the "ex-educational psychologist" role the researcher occupied.

Advantages (Hockey, 1993, p199) in researching peers and familiar settings include orientation to the setting, enhanced rapport, the ability to gauge the accuracy of responses, and the likelihood that interviewees might reveal more of themselves. These features were likely to apply to interviewees known to the researcher, and also to those identifying positively with the educational psychology service. Indeed, the research was only possible due to the "position" of the researcher. The access to the case granted by the Principal Educational Psychologist, and when he left, the Acting Principal Educational Psychologist was only possible (as both stated to the researcher) since the researcher had recently been an employee of the LEA and had worked there as an educational psychologist. The importance of the researcher role and her contacts was also important to the parent in her hope that the research would in some way make "a difference". This research seemed likely to demonstrate the importance of Robson's (1993, p447) "practitioner opportunities" facilitating the implementation of the research. It also seemed likely to demonstrate "practitioner-researcher synergy", in terms of the advantages of practitioner insights and role in facilitating the design, carrying out and analysis of a useful and appropriate study.

Other aspects of the "insider" in this thesis refer to the researcher's personal perspectives on the subject matter of this research. This area was investigated at stage 5 of the process of data analysis, in the interview of the researcher herself by another external researcher. For example, the researcher held ambivalent



attitudes to the educational psychologist's role in the statutory assessment of children's special educational needs. She felt many aspects of the process were extremely problematic. She also saw the statutory assessment process post-Code of Practice as far too complex for anyone not involved in it daily. She felt the tools used by the educational psychologist, in terms of psychometric assessments, were extremely problematic and she felt children were often adversely labelled by the system of identifying special educational needs. However, given the current legislative and socio-cultural context of schooling and of special educational needs within schools, the statutory assessment process seemed to be, for some children, the only way of securing the extra support needed at school. As a practising educational psychologist the researcher experienced "statementing" as deeply unsatisfying. Apart from the earlier difficulties mentioned, much of the researcher's work in preparing reports for statutory assessments had led to the local education authority (LEA) refusing to make a statement, in an effort to reduce the education budget. As an educational psychologist, the researcher was, therefore, locked into a cycle of work which seemed to have little benefit for children. The only benefit seemed to be in helping the LEA to avoid direct conflict with schools, by transferring such conflict to the relationship between schools and educational psychologists. The current research therefore seemed to serve a personal and professional need for the researcher:

*The researcher then fills this indeterminate openness with his or her interpretative baggage; imposes names, categories, constructions, conceptual schemes, theories upon the unknowable; and believes that the indeterminate is now located, constructed, known. Order has been created. The restless, appropriate spirit of the researcher is (temporarily) at peace. (Scheurich, 1996, p249).*

Hockey (1993, p211) suggests that researching the familiar, as an insider, is more likely to have a personal impact on the researcher which leads to a positive outcome

of the research (see also Scheurich, 1996). Given the description above of the researcher's perspective on statutory assessment, this research may be seen in terms of helping to understand more about her personal frustrations in a complex area. Such perspectives are likely to have influenced the whole process of the research (its conduct and analysis) in many different ways. An analysis of such ways is beyond the scope of this thesis, but will be developed in further publications.

### **3.6.2 The Researcher as Outsider**

The researcher was an "outsider" to the extent to which she had not occupied any of the positions of those in the research, apart from that of the educational psychologist. And even then, she would have been a "different" educational psychologist, by virtue of being a different person. She was also an outsider in the very role of "researcher". This role was likely to be ambiguous, with problems of "impression management" to avoid showing current researcher role (outsider) characteristics (Hockey, 1993, p199). There may have been increased expectations of her as a researcher (Hockey, 1993, p199).

### **3.6.3 Solutions**

Hockey (1993) suggests strategies to make the familiar strange, and some of these were adopted by the researcher. This included continually asking questions to make the familiar problematic and keeping a diary on any insider/ outsider issues that occurred in the research process.

Wilkinson (1996) suggests questioning the dichotomy between insider and outsider, or researching in ways that take account of the "other", such as providing the researched with a voice. However, to claim to see the world from the perspective of the interviewee is to fail to understand the role of the researcher and "involve a failure to analyse" (Silverman, 1993, p24). It is possible that what is most important in insider-outsider discussion is power relationships and the effects of these on the researched.

Alertness (Hockey, 1993, p213) to the positive and negative effects of being both insider and outsider was an issue addressed in several ways in the current research. The use of a research diary, the use of a peer analyst, the reflexivity interview of the researcher and interviews/questionnaires to the researched about the initial findings were all ways to look at the impact of the person of the researcher, including her perceptions of how she is known, on the conduct and data analysis of the research. However, they have been included in such a way as to be integrated into the account of the research, not to take centre stage for the self of the researcher (see: Mellor, 1998, for an alternative solution to the insider-outsider dilemma). Allan, Brown and Riddell (1998) present a clear case that legitimacy in academic research in the area of special educational needs rests on the ability of researchers to "demonstrate that they are committed to improving the lives of disabled people" and the use of research to challenge oppression. Riddell, Wilkinson and Baron (1998) found ways to involve people with learning difficulties in the research project, but continue to judge research on:

*Its rigour, its ability to make sense of diverse experience and its capacity to make suggestions about the conditions which might improve people's lives.*  
(Riddell, Wilkinson, & Baron, 1998, p93).



### **3.7 Ethics**

The researcher found that ethical issues could not all be predicted in advance of the research being carried out, and neither could neat and tidy solutions be found to take account of the issues that presented themselves.

*Ethical research dilemmas arise out of the complex interacting and often conflicting differences of interests, principle and interpretation. Different principles can have antithetical implications in practice, and even the same principle can be actualised in contrary ways. (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998, p34).*

Ethical considerations, in particular confidentiality and the intrusion into people's lives, are likely to be a particular concern of this research. Confidentiality issues were likely to be present in case-study research (Edwards & Talbot, 1994, p48), in the researching of peers and familiar settings (Hockey, 1993, p219) and in the conduct of interviews. In this research, possible dangers in infringements of confidentiality included negatively influencing the teachers' attitudes towards the child, and embarrassing or compromising the parent and the other professionals by their views being known to each other. However, the need to address ethical issues was a constant concern:

*questions of ethics are constructed and confronted throughout processes of interaction (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998, p34).*

The current research took several actions to address issues of ethical research practice, principally around permission, confidentiality and the personal conduct of interviews. The researcher first obtained permission from the Principal Educational Psychologist to carry out interviews with those involved in statutory assessment, subject to the permission of the individuals concerned. The educational psychologist

of the child, David, approached David's mother to find out whether she was interested in being involved in the research. A positive interest led to the researcher visiting David's mother at home to introduce herself, explain the research, and ask for permission to interview all those involved in the case. David's mother gave this permission.

All interviewees were asked if they were prepared to be involved in the research. It was explained that this was for a PhD, but that articles drawing on the research would be published. Names of interviewees would not be given in the PhD or the published articles. Interviewees were all asked if they agreed to the use of a tape recorded to record their interview. All agreed to take part and agreed to be recorded. The parent, the Principal Educational Psychologist, and the Educational Psychologist were asked their permission to use information from David's file and all agreed.

That some form of privacy was important to the interviewees was clear from actions during the research. For example, one view expressed by David's mother about her interview was that a particular statement of hers should not be published. The researcher honoured her wish. Several others requested that the tape be turned off so they could say something at one or two points in the interview. Another did not want to be named on the tape. Diary notes were made of these occurrences and they were used to inform the analysis but their speaker was not identified in any verbal or written report of the research.

Phtiaka's (1994, p162) resolution of the problem of the potential harm to participants from their responses being identified by others, in her case children in a school situation, was to withhold the exact quotation and report the spirit of the utterance.

However, to omit from the thesis quotations from the transcript would, in the researcher's opinion, have meant too great a loss from the analysis of richness and clarity. Ways to honour the principals of privacy and of informed consent are not usually so straight forward, as demonstrated by several writers, but particularly and recently by Swain, Heyman and Gillman (1998) and Kvale (1996, p115). Swain's (1998) particular contribution was to demonstrate, through some research interviews, the fuzzy area of confidentiality:

*Part of their construction as issues is the very fact that they are deemed private ..... it is only worth reporting since it is unusual and unknown and usually private. (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998, p29).*

All participants had given permission for their interviews to be used in the PhD and in articles on the understanding that real names were omitted. An article based on initial findings was therefore published about year after the final interview. As the thesis took shape it was clear that findings would be discussed in great detail. Despite permission being granted, the researcher became concerned about how interviewees would view the findings and the effect of the findings on their professional lives:

*How can you obtain consent for what might happen in the future - when the open ended interview may go down paths not envisaged by interviewer or interviewee?..... Participants might not fully understand the nature of dissemination. (Swain, Heyman, & Gillman, 1998, p28).*

More than one year after publication of the article the researcher made contact with all those who had been involved in the case who could be contacted. This raised further important ethical issues. First, a visit was made to David's mother and to David. Prior to the visit David's mother was sent a copy of the published article. The aim in visiting her was to ask what she felt, on reading the article: about its findings; about any difficulties in being able to identify the views of others within the article;



about her views about showing the article to other participants; and about publishing any further articles. This discussion took place almost three years after conducting all the interviews. David's mother said she found the article interesting, agreed with the ideas being expressed, had forgotten "how bad it was", and had no problems in disseminating it to other interviewees. David's current situation contributed to her view: by this time, David was attending a different school, continued to have support for writing, and but was not regarded as a management "problem" (researcher's emphasis). At a recent parents evening a teacher had told David's mother that David was "a pleasure to teach". David's mother said: "I've waited nine years to hear someone tell me that". Asked about the effects of the research, David's mother said she had found it helpful, almost therapeutic. Looking back, she now felt that having a researcher involved had given her more power. She found it helpful to know that the researcher was going into school to talk to the teachers about David, and wondered if it had helped to "make them less hasty to exclude David". However, at the time she had worried that a researcher might have a detrimental effect on staff attitudes. At the time she wanted people to know that children might be wrongly labelled as "behaviour problems" and to change attitudes. She had been, she said, "on a crusade". David, listening to the conversation between the researcher and his mother, asked the researcher if she had made any money out of "all this". The researcher said no, but that it would help with her job. David therefore asked if he could have 25% of the researcher's salary! David's mother suggested to him that he could write a book when he was older, and sell it himself.

All other interviewees were sent the article and a questionnaire (see Volume II, Appendix 10). They were asked their views of the researcher's interpretations, as discussed in the article. They were also asked their views of the problems in confidentiality in case study research. Three replied - the Acting Principal

Educational Psychologist (PEP), the Educational Psychologist (EP), and the SENCO (and one, the occupational therapist could not be found). None of the replies signalled major problems in confidentiality for this particular piece of research, but the EP drew attention to some ethical dilemmas. The PEP thought that the value of the research meant that issues such as confidentiality should be seen as problems to be overcome rather than barriers to undertaking such research. The SENCO felt that a particular perspective of the professional had been omitted in order to preserve confidentiality. The EP said:

*It is difficult for professionals to be quoted about one case, which may be for them a-typical or especially fraught. Their reputation could rest on a simple instance. Parents seek protection from the consequences of plain speaking, fearing that their opposition or disagreement with professionals might adversely affect their child. Promising confidentiality could mean interviewees drop their guard, only to find themselves quoted (albeit anonymously) in their more extreme, less balanced/ considered mood. (educational psychologist response to questionnaire, Appendix 10, on ethical issues and initial findings)*

However, the idea of contacting interviewees for views of findings and confidentiality, seemed to the researcher to present a degree of closure to the research process. It had not been without problems, since one could not be contacted, and many did not reply. There was also no clear, unproblematic way of involving David in this process (given that David's mother wanted David to be kept relatively unaware of the process of statutory assessment). The researcher was not alone in finding difficulties, but also benefits, in taking findings to research subjects (Riddell, Wilkinson, & Baron, 1998). The ethical issues raised by contacting subjects were not those with any clear, unproblematic, solutions. However, without any expectations that any aspect of methodology, including ethical issues, would be found to be unproblematic, it was felt that reasonable steps, given a real-world setting, had been taken to ensure the well-being of all from their involvement in the

research and to ensure that theorising would be able to be carried out from the fullest analysis of the given data:

*The accounts of participants is to a large extent dependent on the conditions under which the accounts were generated. (Scott, 1996, p70).*

The research actions, including both ethical courtesies and ethical infringements would all contribute to the kind of account of partnership "reality" possible from the current research.



### **3.8 Conclusion**

This research has used two different case studies to investigate the two main research questions. The first, to look at whether an EP service could undertake parental partnership was essentially a story telling analysis of a project the researcher had been co-ordinating over the course of a year. The second, to look at what it meant to the stakeholders of statutory SEN assessment to be "partners", involved the interviewing of all those involved in one statutory assessment. This study aimed to present the "moral tales" (Silverman, 1993) being told by each participant. The case studies involved a variety of data collection techniques in order to tell the fullest story and to provide the most valid basis for theorising about the discourses operating within assessment, taking into account the person of the researcher herself and ethical considerations.

## **CHAPTER FOUR**

### **CAN AN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY SERVICE UNDERTAKE PARENTAL PARTNERSHIP? EVIDENCE FROM A PARENT PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

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This research involved a variety of data sources, centred on two case studies, a different case for each research question. This chapter presents the data relating to the first case study, and in response to the first research question:

*Can an Educational Psychology Service undertake parental partnership?*

The research to investigate this question was an exploration of an LEA Parent Partnership Scheme, in which the researcher was one of the two parent partnership officers. As referred to in the previous chapter, this was a form of ethnography. The important position of the researcher, responsible for making "the social world readable" (Coffey, 1996) was discussed in the last chapter. Her investigation involved the consideration of a range of data sources relating to the scheme, many involving the researcher's own notes made after different meetings or project activities. An analysis of results involved the bringing together of:

*hypotheses or guesses made by the researcher at the beginning of the study; the preoccupations which the material expresses during the study; and the researchers expectations and agendas ... suggested by the data (Foster & Parker, 1995, p166).*

The analysis is presented as a broadly chronological account, making clear the data sources being drawn upon (see table 3.1 in Chapter 3 for a detailed list of data sources for each stage). However, the account goes a step further than description, by incorporating a degree of interpretation. The following diagram shows the main themes arising from each chronological stage of the Parent Partnership Project. This

chapter takes each stage in sequence. The main activities contributing to each stage are developed to enable the reader to have some access to the situations from which the researcher has drawn conclusions about discourses. For those who do not wish to look at the data in such detail, the conclusions to each section, corresponding to each stage of the project, can be read without the preceding descriptions.

Throughout this chapter, "LEA" will refer to Local Education Authority, "PPO" to Parent Partnership Officer, and "EP" to educational psychologist. A glossary of all abbreviations can be found at the start of the thesis.

This chapter presents an analysis of the implications of the activities of the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme for the capability or otherwise of an educational psychology service (EPS) to undertake parent partnership. However, combining roles of researcher with that of "previous Parent Partnership Officer" led to difficulties in identifying, and in keeping in mind, the nature of the data of the current research. Distinguishing between the "practitioner research", or "action research" activities of the PPO, and those of the "thesis researcher" proved problematic. For example, the PPO looked at implications of the interviews for the statutory assessment system leading to statements, and for the PPO role. The researcher of the current thesis was interested in implications of the "event" of interviewing parents for the question of whether an EP service could undertake parent partnership. Included in such event would be a reflection on the meaning of the decisions taken and the outcomes.

Methodological reflections are discussed in more detail in chapter 3, with some ideas for further research in Chapter 6. This practitioner research raises many important issues, both substantive and methodological. Discussion of such issues contributes to progression to the second research question.



## **Newby's Parent Partnership Project: Major Themes**

The major themes arising from the analysis of the Newby Parent Partnership Project centred on role definition and negotiation, and on the problematic of the statutory assessment process. These are depicted in the following diagram that relates these themes to phases of the scheme. The phases are then described and discussed, in turn, in further detail. In Volume II, the appendices contain material relating to the Parent Partnership Project. Appendix 1 is a chronological account of project activities, appendix 2 is the full report of interviews with 24 parents, appendix 3 contains samples of documentary data, and appendix 11 contains notes from educational psychology service staff meetings.



**Figure 4.1: Phases and Themes in the first two years of the Parent Partnership Scheme. Main issues arising within the themes**

**PHASE 1: year 1,  
first 9 months**

4.1 Audit of statutory assessment from the perspective of parents and actions to increase parental participation

**ISSUES ARISING FROM  
DATA ANALYSIS**

Statutory assessment problematic for most parents, invisible for some  
 Provision does not relieve parental concerns  
 Structures of assessment working against partnership  
 Parent partnership (PP) problematic: parent discourse of conflict, disempowerment, professionalism and bureaucracy  
 Educational psychologist discourse of parent as customer: seeking parent views in order to better provide for needs of child and parent

4.2 Developing the role of the LEA parent partnership officer

Contradictory position of educational psychologist's role: is PP what EPs do or does PP threaten EP role?  
 Lack of emphasis of role of school in PPS  
 Importance of personal and professional perspective  
 Discourse of conflict reduction in DFEE PP guidelines and conflict avoidance in EP actions  
 Potentially disempowering effect of partnership not recognised by EPs or DFEE. EP focus on process - DFE focus on the named person and on voluntary organisations  
 Bureaucratisation of statutory assessment by EPS potentially damaging to PP.

4.3 Developing a working relationship with the Parent Federation

EP perspective of problematic role of voluntary organisation: are they advocates of parents or do they follow own agenda? Do they lobby against LEA or are they supporters of the LEA? EP PPOs and parent Federation failure to discuss difficult issues in parent partnership, named person role, and PPO role. Many areas of agreement but conflict between EPS and Parent Federation concealed. Voluntary organisation use of LEA PPO relationship as leverage for funds

**PHASE 2: year 1,  
last 3 months**

4.4 Named person development: recruitment and training

Problematic identity and role of the named person: parent supporter, advisor, advocate?  
 Questions about:

- Independence of named person
- Implications of LEA involvement in training
- Timing of named person involvement

**PHASE 3: year 2**

4.5 The developing relationships between different kinds of parent partnership officers

Conflict in the definition/ operation of the roles of LEA professional vs roles of voluntary organisation professional

- What is the role of a 'professional', of a 'parent', and of a 'voluntary agency worker'? Different perspectives of PPO role and named person role.
- Issues of 'independence', 'power' and 'proximity to decision making'
- EP PPO and Parent Federation PPO both see selves as empowering parents, in very different ways.



## **4.1 An audit of Statutory Assessment from the Perspective of Parents and Actions to Increase Parental participation**

Aims of this particular project were never clearly stated by the steering group. The two parent partnership officers wanted to find ways to involve parents more in the process of statutory assessment when their child was being assessed. Therefore it seemed to be logical to start with the ascertainment of parents' current perspectives on statutory assessment. All project activities involved some kind of audit of parental participation in the statutory assessment process, but there were some activities designed specifically with this in mind. This included an analysis of LEA information and interviews and focus groups to find out parent perspectives. There were two forms of available documentary information from the LEA. One was parents' responses to their child's draft statement, and the other information sent to parents by the LEA about the assessment of their child's special educational needs. The deliberate seeking of information included structured interviews with a sample of parents of children undergoing statutory assessment in the previous year, and meetings with different parent and voluntary groups to ask about their views and experiences of the statutory assessment process.

### **4.1.1 LEA Information on Parents' Responses to Their Child's Draft Statement**

When issuing a draft statement, usually delivered in person by the educational psychologist, the LEA asked parents to give written consent to implement provision. This involved parents completing one of two forms: part "A" was to be returned and signed if the parent was in agreement with the provision, and part "B" was to be returned if the parent wanted to talk further about the provision to an officer of the



council. An analysis of the forms was one of the first actions of the Parent Partnership Project. It was part of a process of looking for ways to find a baseline for "partnership" and to evaluate the project.

Project notes indicate difficulties in finding criteria to evaluate the Parent Partnership Scheme. In particular, there was interest in finding some measurable indicator of the current level of parent partnership. Criteria required by the funding specifications from the DFEE included minimising the number of statutory SEN appeals. However, reducing statutory appeals did not seem a useful measure since the number was already very low (11 between 1983 and 1994), but maintaining such a low level could be a viable aim (from notes on steering group meeting, 5/9/94). Parental written contributions to the formal assessment process were discounted as useful criteria, since the LEA was starting from a high level (85%). However, the project could have looked at parental perceptions to see whether the process of obtaining parental advice could have been improved. Possible criteria suggested at the first steering group meeting were as follows:

*number of consultation meeting with parents/ parent groups*  
*number of parents involved*  
*surveys of 'satisfaction'*  
*production of materials*  
*reduction/modification of "Part B" returns to proposed statements*  
*range and number of "Names Persons" identified*  
*(from notes on steering group meeting, 5/9/94)*

The PPOs wondered if the number of "B returns" represented an indicator of parental satisfaction with the assessment process. They therefore analysed all "B" returns for the last year, including notes kept by the PEP on the problem the parent wanted to discuss, and the action taken following the discussion. A report was written, by the researcher in her role as PPO, with the results of the analysis. Extracts of the report follow:

*It was hoped that an analysis of the reasons for part B returns and of action taken by the LEA would give some indication of the level of parental involvement in, or satisfaction with, the statementing process. Results show that most returns (23/33) were due to concerns about provision. Of the remaining 10, 6 were due to concerns about the wording of the statement or advice, one was concerned with speech therapy provision, and the remaining 3 were for a variety of different reasons.*

*We can analyse the reasons for B returns to find if they give clues about whether parents felt they were involved in the statementing process or whether they felt satisfied with the outcome (two quite different things). Most B returns were due to concerns about provision. It is arguable such concerns could have arisen however involved parents were in the process, since provision is decided by the statementing panel. However, such returns may indicate less than satisfactory parental involvement if they happened because the panel was not acting on full information about parents views about provision, information which could have been ascertained by more home visits by EPs before the assessment went to panel. A judgement about this could only be made by asking the casework EPs or the parents, and it would be difficult to judge reliably on hindsight.*

*We can also analyse action taken by the LEA in response to part B returns for clues about parental involvement. In most cases it appears that action was taken in favour of parental wishes. However, even here simple conclusions cannot be drawn from the data (.....).*

*Two parents were unhappy with a special school placement but later accepted it. Does this show good or poor parental involvement? Perhaps they were surprised at how well the special schools were able to cater for pupils. On a different note, how many others felt similarly unhappy about a special school placement, but sent in part A since they did not feel they had a choice? How many were happy with a special school placement and did feel involved in the decision? How many parents feel there is a choice to be made?*

*Four parents did not want their child to go to a special school and their children are now in mainstream without support. Does this mean parents are satisfied, since their children are in mainstream not special education, or do they feel dissatisfied since they wish their child had support in mainstream? There is not enough information to answer these questions. Certainly, mainstream schools vary in the support they can offer. A child may have special educational needs in one school but not in another. In one of the cases above, the child has moved to a different mainstream school and their needs can now be met with no extra provision.*

*One child was not given the word processor requested by parents. This may indicate a lack in LEA resources, a difference in opinion about what the child needs, or there may be another explanation. The parents may now understand the LEA's assessment of the child's needs and agree that a word processor is not needed, or they may think they have not been adequately listened to, their child not adequately catered for. Again, no simple conclusion can be drawn from this about the level of parental involvement.*

*Part B returns are unreliable indices of the level of parental involvement since they are not designed for this purpose. They serve a particular administrative function at a crucial time in the assessment process, that of finding out whether the statement can be finalised and the provision made available. The only reliable indicator of parental satisfaction or involvement is likely to be*

*questionnaires or interviews, administered at various times during the assessment, which directly access such parental attitudes. (Unpublished report to Newby LEA, written by the researcher).*

Official parental response to the draft statement, prior to the Code of Practice, was therefore unlikely to provide any baseline data indicating levels of parent partnership. Furthermore, given that the system for parents responding to the draft statement would need to change following the Code of Practice, this analysis would provide little in the way of an evaluation of the Parent Partnership Scheme. However, the collection of "B" returns was the LEA's only attempt at that time to monitor parental satisfaction with the statutory assessment process. There had been no attempt to look more widely at parental views of the whole process of assessment and intervention in a child's special educational needs. The number of "B" returns could also be seen as a level of parental demand upon the LEA. This suggested that prior to the Parent Partnership Project relations with parents had been considered, in Newby LEA, in terms of bureaucratic demands made by parents upon the LEA, rather than as an area for wider investigation and development.



## **4.1.2 Parent Interviews**

One of the main Parent Partnership Project tasks was to meet with groups of parents to find out their views of the assessment process and of the extent they felt a partner in the process, and to find ways to facilitate greater parent partnership. The PPOs had access via the Parent Federation to parent groups who were "dissatisfied" in some way with the LEA, and to other groups via LEA peripatetic support teachers. The outcomes of such meetings are discussed later in this section. Whilst these perspectives were seen as important and were noted, the PPOs did not know how representative they were of all parents of children being assessed. The PPOs therefore decided to interview a random sample of parents whose child had been assessed in the past year, and then to check the age, difficulty and school attended by the sample to see if they could make some claim to have a sample representative of the total population. The report, written at the time by the researcher in her role as PPO, is reproduced in full in Volume II, Appendix 2. Extracts, including the scope of the interviews and a summary of the results, are reproduced below, before presenting a discussion of issues arising.

### ***Scope of the interviews***

*Interviews were semi-structured, and asked parents about the following:*

- Their initial reaction to an assessment*
- Their views of the statementing process*
- The extent to which they felt a partner in the process*
- Ideas for improving the process, including views about having a named person*
- Their views of the outcome of the process"*

### ***Summary of Results***

- Most parents had known for a long time about their children's special educational needs*
- Most said little about what happened during the assessment. Five parents had very little idea of the assessment*
- A third felt the letters were OK*

- *About a half said they felt a partner in the process*
- *Most parents remembered giving their views of their child*
- *A quarter felt the level of information given about the assessment was unsatisfactory, and just under half would have liked more information*
- *Just under half the parents would have liked a named person, and a similar number would have attended a support group*
- *Two thirds were satisfied with the outcome of the provision, but over half of these still had major reservations about their child's educational provision*
- *Half the parents felt the assessment had come at the right time, but just less than half felt it should have happened sooner*
- *Half the parents felt the time taken by the assessment was unsatisfactory, and half felt time taken was satisfactory. Views about time taken bore little correlation to actual time taken, and seemed to be a more general complaint about it taking a long time for someone to give their child help.*
- *A third of the parents (8) felt the reports were satisfactory*  
(extract from report for Newby LEA, written by the researcher in role of PPO, full report in Volume II, Appendix 2).

Excluding all those who could not be contacted by telephone to confirm participation in the research skewed the sample used for the interviews. This would exclude those ex-directory and those without a telephone. Some of these might have come into the category of well-informed parents, others into the category of parents who knew little about the statutory assessment process. However, there were still important issues raised by the results.

### ***Issues Arising from the Interview Report***

#### ***"My child's needs are still not being met": A communication issue or a resource issue?***

One of the main issues arising from the interview report was the relationship between the outcomes of the formal assessment process and perceptions of parents of whether the child's needs were being addressed. Sixteen of the twenty-four parents expressed satisfaction with the statement. However, nine of the sixteen expressed continuing reservations about their child's education. A significant

proportion would have liked more information, and would have liked a named person. However, most remembered giving their views and half of the parents interviewed also answered that, yes, they felt a partner in the assessment process. The PPOs impression from actually carrying out the interviews was that dissatisfaction over provision was linked to parents' dissatisfaction with the time it took to start the assessment and for the process to reach completion. For the PPOs, many parents did not seem to have confidence that their child's needs were being attended to, and the assessment process did not seem to have made them feel any more confident about this. Notes indicate the PPOs understood such parental dissatisfaction to have a complex origin and saw possibilities for their own role in terms of such complexity. The PPO might therefore be involved in working with other EPs to improve communication between school and parents. At the same time the PPO might be working with the PEP at the LEA level to look at the level of provision schools might normally make for children with special educational needs without having resources attached to children's statements. The latter activity might be linked to discussions with parents about what they might expect from schools. The PPO might also look at the appropriateness of the provision, and of the EPS service delivery to schools. That such a variety of possible actions were available to the two educational psychologist PPOs suggested that it was at least possible for educational psychologists to believe that "partnership" could be subsumed by the professional role of the EP without compromising notions of professionalism.

### ***Statements: An Invisible System***

A fifth of parents interviewed had little or no idea their child had been through the statutory assessment process and now had a statement, despite all the letters, reports and visits from EPs. Also half the parents wanted further information. Few parents were able to describe or comment upon what happened during the assessment. This suggested to the researcher that the process was very



inaccessible to a large number of parents. Only one or two gave the impression they felt quite at ease with everything that happened, for example, a parent whose husband worked in education.

The finding that a fifth of parents interviewed had no recollection of their child's statement presented a major issue of the project. A difficulty with all project officers is how to reach a group of clients who are, for whatever reason, excluded from the project's actions but likely to benefit from them. This presented a major challenge to the project which was never addressed, except through raising awareness with case worker EPs about the relatively large numbers of parents who felt excluded, or who needed to exclude themselves, from their child's statutory assessment process. There are major implications here were for the whole edifice of the process itself. In terms of the research question, this aspect of the report indicated that the PPOs were aware of the non-homogeneity of parents. The complexity of any "partnership" relationship was therefore likely to be apparent to the PPOs.

### **4.1.3 Information Seeking and Presenting**

More information for parents about needs and difficulties, and about the assessment process, was a stated aim of the Parent Partnership Project funding. It was also stated, in project notes, to be seen as important by the PEP and the PPOs. The rationale was that this would help to encourage greater partnership to the extent that partnership involves both partners having access to information. Information collected was thought to be likely to give ideas about other ways to develop the project.

The PPOs wrote to over a hundred local and national voluntary and parent support groups concerned with particular areas of disability or difficulty. They received replies from forty of them and leaflets from twenty. The leaflets were from organisations such as the Cleft Lip and Palate Association, Disability Action (DA), Epilepsy Advisory Service and SKILL (National Bureau for Students with Disabilities), information useful for parents of children with a particular difficulty. The Educational Psychology Service was not a resource centre so it was difficult for the PPOs to see how the leaflets could be made available to parents to browse (as indicated by the report at the end of the first year). They decided instead that some would be kept for individual EPs to give to parents as they thought appropriate, and others could be given to the Parent Federation for their resource centre, a centre used by a large number of parents.

One of the main kinds of information sought on behalf of parents was information about the assessment process itself. One of the parent partnership schemes in a neighbouring LEA designed their own leaflets taking parents through the maze of assessment, producing a very glossy set of booklets (further discussion of this in section 4.2.3, on "Meetings with Parent Partnership Officers"). The PPOs considered designing their own (noted in end of year report), and at several times during the

project discussed the kind of information leaflets parents might find useful (in "Parent Partnership Project Report of activities September 1st-November 14 1994"). The PPOs decided to distribute to parents what they thought were very helpful leaflets from the Elfreda Rathbone Society and the organisation "Contact a Parent". These leaflets explained the statutory assessment process and gave information to parents of other organisations to contact.

One of the initial discussions between the PPOs and the Parent Federation's Director was about ways to help parents to keep track of the complex assessment process and the paper work involved. During the first visit to the Parent Federation two of the workers there showed the PPOs a folded A3 sheet that they used with parents. It was used to keep the letters and reports together. It comprised a specially designed grid to record some basic information about the assessment, what had happened so far, and the names and telephone numbers of people involved. The PEP granted funds to design and to print a number of more durable card folders for parents to keep their assessment papers and the PPOs gave time to discussing the form this might take. However, a year later the folders were still not printed. The two main problems were getting the EPs to agree on the cover design and finding a reliable printing company within the budgeted price range. Shortly into the second year of the scheme the project, folders were printed, but the card used was too thin, and some EPs did not like the use of children's "stick person" drawings of themselves.

The letters sent to parents during the course of the statutory assessment process represent the first formal source of information to parents about the process. However, in Newby LEA the educational psychologists delivered such letters themselves, in order to provide parents with an opportunity to talk about the assessment with an informed professional. Parent Partnership Officers notes indicate that the wording of the letters was an area in which the PPOs and several EPs wished to see changes, in order to design more informal and accessible letters.



In the PPO research interviewing parents, eight of the twenty-four parents felt the letters were "OK", four felt improvements could be made and eleven did not know. The researcher PPO drafted a "more friendly" initial letter for discussion, as did a fellow EP (staff meeting minutes). However, Parent Partnership Officer notes and staff meeting minutes indicated that the PEP rejected all attempts to change letters, saying the law required certain things to be said (see later in this chapter, section 4.2.2 "Educational Psychology Service Meetings", part of section 4.2 "Developing the Role of the Parent Partnership Officer"). It seems that meeting legislative requirements involved actions that potentially alienate parents. Given the claims in the Code of Practice to value parents as partners, such a finding suggests problems in the statutory assessment process.

### ***Problematic Information***

Seeking information for parents, finding what they needed in order to feel comfortable with the statutory assessment process, and finding ways to present information in an accessible way was unexpectedly problematic. There was a clear priority for the Parent Partnership Officer to improve information, and, on the surface an easy and defined task. However, the perceived need to make sure all parties agreed to information format and process led to problems. Indeed in a neighbouring LEA the new, accessible information designed by the Parent Partnership Officer was never circulated to parents (from notes on Regional Parent Partnership Scheme meetings).

Maybe there was also a systemic problem involving the nature of professionalism, in that there did not seem to be any simple way to help parents to become familiar with the assessment process. The greatest accessibility to information was by virtue of the role occupied, being seen as the information keeper and information giver. EPs understand the statutory assessment process because it is part of their job to do so. Definition of the EP role as administrator of the statutory assessment process

requires knowledge of how the process actually operates in an LEA. Maybe the location of statutory assessment as enmeshed in the role of this one particular professional group, means there are endemic difficulties in information passing to any other group. This relates to the nature of professionalism, encompassing skills, knowledge and structures: educational psychologists carrying their own hegemonic weight. If a professional is not actually living a central role in assessment, statutory assessment with all its complexities is a hard process to fully know about. Professionals other than educational psychologists do not have the professional need to know about the intricacies of the process, such as the "verbal signals" required in a report which are recognised by the panel taking decisions about provision. Perhaps Newby EPS was more enmeshed than others: EPS's in some LEAs would explicitly reject the role of administrator of the statutory assessment process. As a result, it is possible that Newby might have greater difficulties than other EPS's in engaging in parent partnership.

#### **4.1.4 Meetings with Parent Groups**

The PPOs met with several different parent groups: parents of children with sensory difficulties, parents of children attending a special school, parents who had set up a support group for those who had children with SEN, and a group of parents and professionals, the "pre school panel". A "Drop-in" session for parents to discuss general issues about SEN provision and assessment with the PPOs was arranged at the Parent Federation. The drop in was only well attended if the PPOs arranged to see particular groups: parents did not "drop in" individually in response to advertising. Notes were kept on all the different meetings.

Many issues were raised, mostly concerns about the statutory assessment process, communication and provision (or resources). The statutory assessment process was seen by most involved in the group discussions as problematic. There was a



discourse of conflict, having to fight for resources for the child. One parent expressed the view that parents should "not have to fight" (PPO notes). There was also a discourse of disempowerment: one parent regretting that they had not understood the significance of the parent advice, another saying parents believed professionals but were let down by them. A further parent said that "you may fight and still not get the help" (PPO notes). The bureaucratic nature of the process was also criticised. One parent complained about the time taken by assessment and provision to be in place, since she had paid for her child's first hearing aid rather than wait for the LEA. Ambiguity in the statement was also remarked upon, with one parent saying that her child had not been provided with what was in the statement. Surprise was expressed that there were parents who were satisfied with their child's level of provision. Some comments suggested lack of understanding by parents about the nature of the assessment and what it was capable of delivering, perhaps due to poor communication by EPs and schools. Another discourse was a critique of professionalism which also underlies parents' comments earlier about having to fight. Several parents complained that the EP asked parents questions, "writes it all down" (PPO notes), did not really see the child and only saw the parent on a few occasions. One parent felt "fobbed off" (PPO notes), suggesting she felt her concerns had not been registered or acted upon, and another found it very difficult to cope with different professionals coming into her home.

Parents are a diverse group, and it may be that the groups the PPOs met with represented some small subsection of the total. People who meet as part of a particular group do so for a purpose that meets needs, albeit probably diverse needs. Parents who have no problems with their child's provision may be unlikely to attend groups in which one of the sub-texts is concern about provision. Apart from one man, in the parent support group, all parents in the groups met with were mothers. However, the PPOs perspective (from notes of meetings) was that the existence of some parents who felt dissatisfaction with provision was a reality needing to be



considered. If the project purported to value parental participation and saw parent views as important to the meeting of children's needs, all parent perspectives would be seen to be important. The issues raised in the meetings PPOs had with parent groups were brought to the attention of other members of the Educational Psychology Service to inform casework. Parents also provided a range of important views to inform the Parent Partnership Officer role.

Parent meetings demonstrated, again, PPO recognition of the heterogeneity of parent perspectives. Notes on meetings demonstrated PPO attempts to grapple with the meaning of parent partnership in the context of such heterogeneity. They demonstrated an engagement with a "market-place" definition of the parent-professional role, in the very process of seeking parent opinion. However, there were limits to such engagement. The PPOs continued to keep control of the project: there was no notion of giving the project over to "parents".

#### **4.1.5 Concluding Comments**

The audit of parent perspectives had demonstrated the complexity required in any approach trying to develop partnership with parents. In meetings with parents discourses of conflict, disempowerment, professionalism and bureaucracy were identified. The heterogeneity of "parents" had been underlined, in the meeting of parents who found it difficult to believe that any parent was satisfied with the provision for their child and, in the other extreme, parents who had no idea that their child had been through the statutory process. This is not to suggest that parents can be grouped, just that they might vary along different continua. Problems seemed to be easily identified, but solutions seemed problematic. For example, there seemed to be consensus that information to parents should be improved, but there seemed no way to agree a design of documentation that would make the assessment process easily

comprehensible. There was also some suggestion that professionalisation of the statutory assessment process made accessibility of information problematic.

A move seemed to have been made in Newby's educational psychology service away from the bureaucratic consideration of parents, in the "A" and "B" returns, towards a genuine interest in finding parents' perspectives. This suggested that the PPOs were looking to provide what parents said they needed. This was suggestive more of a customer relationship with parents than one of partnership.

## **4.2 Developing the Role of the LEA Parent Partnership Officer**

Although no clear goals were articulated for the Newby Parent Partnership Project, the project evolved in response to the aims of a number of different stakeholders. These included the Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP), a steering group chaired by the PEP, DFEE Circulars defining project criteria, other EPs in the same LEA, and the PPOs themselves.

Government criteria for evaluating the Parent Partnership Projects indicated that a major aim was to reduce conflict between parents and LEAs, to work in increasing partnership with voluntary organisations, and to consider parent partnership with parents of all children with SEN, not just those with statements. Circulars in succeeding years suggested an evolving perspective on partnership and had a major effect on the way this particular project grew.

The report by the researcher at the end of the first year of the project notes the researcher's opinion that the project was attractive to the service for a particular reason. According to the report, the Principal Educational Psychologist hoped the scheme might be a way of reducing some recent tension that had arisen between the service and a small group of parents. The Principal Educational Psychologist had a few months prior to the start of the project met with a group of parents at a meeting organised by a local voluntary organisation, the Parent Federation. Many of the parents had expressed anger with what they thought was the LEA's inability to provide for their child's special educational needs. One of the few points of guidance (but a significant one) given to the two educational psychologists acting as parent partnership officers by the Principal Educational Psychologist about the direction of the project was that a better working relationship be developed with the Parent Federation.



The context, national and local (i.e. the Parent Federation), in which the project came about had the effect of influencing the initial project tasks. The GEST (Grants for Education, Support and Training) Circular (DFEE, 1993) which had guided the bid was one of the main sources of information for possible project aims. In particular the Parent Partnership Officers were mindful that the LEA would soon need to apply for further funding, and part of the criteria for any further grants would be the extent to which the project had met the aims within the Circular for the first project. Other criteria would emanate from the Parent Partnership Officers own ideas. Working with the Parent Federation was clearly seen as a priority, since it was one of the principal educational psychologist's priorities. Working with voluntary agencies in general was a major aspect of the GEST bid. The PEP gave the Parent Partnership Officers considerable freedom in developing the project, but was kept informed of every aspect of development.

The Parent Partnership Officer role was developed as a continually evolving process through discussions between the PPOs as they attended meetings and engaged in project activities. Parent Partnership Officers met frequently with the Parent Federation and this continued throughout the first year. The Parent Partnership Officers regularly brought issues about the project to the fortnightly staff meeting with EPs, reported to termly meetings with a Parent Partnership Scheme steering group, and took their ideas to termly meetings with other Parent Partnership Officers from other Regional LEAs. In all activities, but particularly the steering group meetings, the PPOs were mindful of the funding agency criteria for the scheme, from the DFEE Circulars. Other meetings over the year impacted on the development of the Parent Partnership Officers role. This included meetings with various parent groups (referred to above), a training session on the named person run by the Advisory Centre for Education, and a DFEE symposium for the region looking, again, at the named person. Specific aspects of role development are reported here as they relate

to meetings attended and to the Circulars conveying funding criteria. Meetings with different groups and with the Parent Federation are reported on in more detail in other sections in this chapter.

Newby Parent Partnership Scheme steering group meetings confirmed aims and reported achievements. They enabled the development of the Parent Partnership Officer's role to be discussed with both the PEP and the Director of the Parent Federation. The PEP was, according to notes kept, very facilitative, but placed several constraints on Parent Partnership Officers. These included resisting changing LEA letters to parents, delaying circulation of the folder due to concern over the cover design and an expectation that there would not be widespread use of the independent named person. Steering group meetings did not seem to play a deciding role in the development of the project, since project activities had all been discussed in other forums prior to these meetings. The term "partnership" was mentioned frequently in minutes, but this did not seem to be reflected in the listed actions and activities. The activities seemed to embody ways of trying to involve parents more in the assessment of their own children, by providing information and finding out other aspects of the statutory assessment process to improve.

#### **4.2.1 DFEE Definition of Parent Partnership Projects**

The researcher wished to include the DFEE perspective on the Parent Partnership Project by analysing DFEE Circulars guiding LEAs bidding for the three years of the scheme (DFEE, 1993; DFEE, 1994; DFEE, 1995) and carrying out an interview with the DFEE representative in charge of administering the grants. Circulars for three years (1993/4, 1994/5 and 1995/6) were analysed by the researcher. These three years covered the time from first applying for the grant, to the end of the second year of the project. The Circulars gave indications of the government view of parent partnership, and in particular of what it was supposed to achieve. They briefly set out the

objectives, proportion of grant available, the number of LEAs to be supported, the basis of allocating the grant, eligible expenditure, information needed by the DFEE from the LEA, and requirements for evaluating the schemes. The researcher used the analysis of Circulars to compare the DFEE perspective with the Newby LEA perspective by combining the analysis of Circulars with other project data. A transcript of the interview with the DFEE representative was analysed for information about her perspective on parent partnership, named person, and the role of both LEAs and voluntary organisation. This analysis was returned to several times, and her transcript re-read, in order to look in the interview for perspectives on themes emerging from other aspects of analysis.

### ***Analysis of DFEE Circulars***

The most obvious finding was that the Parent Partnership Project was, indeed, influenced by government intentions for partnership. Notes from the report written by the researcher at the end of the first year of the scheme indicate that Newby's Parent Partnership Scheme was very mindful of the DFEE guidelines on evaluation criteria, in order to put forward the best possible case for a continuation of funds. The DFEE objective of reducing conflict and statutory appeals was one issue considered in the evolution of project activities, and led to the analysis of B returns, the form returned when the parents wish to speak about a draft statement. One DFEE project criteria adopted by Newby included working with a local voluntary agency, the Parent Federation, on the recruitment and training of named persons. Another criteria for judging bids in the first year of the project referred to "effectiveness of use of existing local or national information and advisory expertise or services, particularly voluntary services" (DFEE, 1993: 45, Section 24: Development of SEN parent/partnership schemes). It was also stated that "The funds are expected to be used primarily to cover the expenses of parent partnership officers, to mount training



courses for volunteers in the field, and to produce some publicity material." (p45 GEST Circular 10/93, Grant 24: Development of SEN parent/partnership schemes).

There was evidence that the circulars influenced the project in ways that might not have been decided by the PPOs acting primarily on their own ideas of what developing partnership was about. Notes state that PPOs initially wanted to concentrate on work in schools. The development of training for teachers was thought important to raise awareness of the teachers' role in talking to parents about children causing concern. One finding of the interviews with twenty-four parents was dissatisfaction with provision. The PPOs expressed a view that this might have something to do with difficulties in communication between teachers and parents about children's needs and about the way needs were being met in school. The Circular, however, made little mention of schools, and stated that funds could not be devolved to schools. Eligible funding was for activities that encouraged parent partnership, named person training, and working with voluntary organisations. Despite this, criteria given for evaluating the first year included improvement in relations between schools, LEAs and parents. Schools were suddenly part of the agenda at the evaluation stage. However, since the guidelines placed emphasis on other activities, with school relations an afterthought, the LEA PPOs directed the project in the first year in ways that did not focus on the school. The school focus became one of the main concerns of the second year of the project (see section 4.5 in this chapter, an analysis of year 2 of the project).

GEST criteria for the second year of the Parent Partnership Scheme, which the PEP had to apply for when the first scheme had barely begun, involved a few changes in emphasis. Instead of simply developing parent partnership with LEAs, the objective was

*to encourage partnership between parents, LEAs, schools and voluntary bodies in the work of identifying, assessing and arranging provision for pupils with SEN" (DFEE, 1994: page 28, Grant 7, Development of SEN Parent /Partnership Schemes).*

Another shift in emphasis was to highlight those with statements. Previously the emphasis had seemed to fall equally on children with SEN but without statements.

After the first year one criteria was removed, which was that "indicators of a likely reduction in the number of statutory appeals" was no longer a criteria for granting the award. Criteria for 94/95 and for 95/96 were almost identical and both were more detailed than the first year (93/94). They included commitment to maximum parental involvement and evidence of an effective scheme the previous year. They required evidence of local or national parent groups and voluntary organisations participating in the scheme and an indication of the effectiveness of any existing participation. They asked for evidence of the extent to which the bid furthered the development of the named person. Eligible expenditure had been expanded from the first year. In the first year this had comprised the following:

*full or part-time salary costs of a co-ordinating officer; expenses and costs for volunteers in the scheme; training courses for those in the scheme; publicity costs; accommodation and associated costs for facilities for parents; and any costs involved in using or building on existing voluntary services where they could not otherwise be involved. (DFEE, 1993)*

This had been changed in subsequent years to recognise the need to provide some expenses for people volunteering to be named persons, including insurance, expenses and costs. Such expenses were now allowed in order to support extended activity by voluntary groups. Publicity expected to be generated by Parent Partnership Schemes had been elaborated to include dissemination of information to parents.

One aspect of the grant was found in the guidelines for all three years. This was the suggestion that the government envisaged voluntary agencies would become more and more involved in LEA Parent Partnership Schemes. In the first year a cautious message was given as follows: "Funds may not be devolved to schools or used to pay for voluntary services which may otherwise be available free to parents" (DFEE, 1993). In the latter two years the following was added: "Grants may be used, however, to complement and enhance existing arrangements for partnership between parents, LEAs and voluntary bodies" (DFEE, 1994; DFEE, 1995).

Each year the DFEE required information from LEAs. This included a clear outline of their proposed scheme, names of any voluntary organisations involved, proposed administrative and organisational structures, how partnership between the LEA and parents would be improved and confrontation diminished, and, wherever possible, performance measures. An LEA contact name and telephone number was also required. The second and third years also required details of the way the previous grant had been used and details of how the LEA intended to extend and develop their schemes in co-operation with voluntary organisations and parent groups. The third year also asked for an account of progress made in the recruitment and training of named persons: "how many named persons had been matched with families who have children undergoing a multi-disciplinary assessment or who have a statement" (DFEE, 1995).

The monitoring required by the DFEE showed a change over three years in the direction of more explicit requirement for LEAs to judge themselves against clearly stated and objective performance measures. In the first year the project asked only that a sample of LEAs provide examples of SEN policies produced by schools in its area. In the second year the evaluation was more demanding (DFEE, 1994: 29):



*Information will be required from a sample of LEAs or consortia along the lines of that provided with the bid, as well as details of LEAs' own monitoring against their performance measures. The Department will be looking for objective evidence that LEAs' schemes have led to an improvement in relations between schools, LEAs and parents, and to the identification of sufficient numbers of named persons. Evidence of parental satisfaction with the schemes will be helpful in any evaluation* (DFEE, 1994: 29).

By the third year, in addition to the criteria above, a research project was to be undertaken on the effectiveness of schemes (DFEE, 1995: 24).

### ***Perspective of the DFEE Representative***

The DFEE representative saw partnership as involving some degree of equality between the LEA, voluntary agencies and parents. The LEA PPOs spent some time speculating on reasons for the emphasis on partnership with voluntary organisations. A view expressed by the PEP was that the government might wish some EP activities to be provided by voluntary organisations as a cost cutting exercise. However, most of the voluntary organisations contacted by the PPOs to recruit volunteers to be named persons were not at all interested: local workers for organisations such as Scope suggested that they needed all their volunteers for their own schemes. The DFEE view expressed by the representative was that the aim in involving voluntary agencies had been to "shift the balance" (interview, p4), so that parents would look to institutions other than the LEA for information about the statutory assessment process. Working with schools had become, according to the DFEE representative, an important area of the work of the Parent Partnership Officer. However, it seemed to be seen by the DFEE representative in terms of schools knowing the PPO was there to support parents or to allocate named persons to provide support. There was no suggestion of assessment as a process, and the school's crucial role in enabling parents to be fully part of that process.

The DFEE, she said, wanted named persons to be independent. She recognised that different named persons would choose to play different roles. She also recognised that there were vested interests everywhere: that all the different agencies working with parents were capable of trying to "make decisions for parents" (interview, p7), and that they should not do this. She emphasised the need to listen "to what the parent really wants" (interview, p7). Voluntary organisations tend, she said, to recruit a much broader type of person. LEAs tended to recruit people who had been through the assessment process with their child, but voluntary organisations also

recruited people who had no knowledge at all about special educational needs. This breadth was to be encouraged.

A major barrier to partnership, she said, was the negative perspective of some parents whose experience had led them to feel unable to trust the LEA. She said she was optimistic that parents would now, through the Parent Partnership Schemes, be "supported far more than those parents before and that there are routes of communication and lines of help that they can go to" (interview, p8). The DFEE could now tell parents to contact their parent partnership officer.

However, she said that a degree of conflict was unavoidable in the statutory assessment process, but the way everyone dealt with the conflict could be improved. She was optimistic that if parents had more understanding of the way resources were allocated to schools they may have a "much more realistic view for their child" (interview, p11). She said she wanted governors to tell parents how money for special educational needs was actually spent in schools. The aim of reducing tribunals was removed once the DFEE realised this might look as if it was suggesting that LEAs use the scheme to try to prevent parents from going to tribunal.

Partnership was seen in terms of the giving of information and in terms of the effect of the tone of official LEA letters on parents. It was also seen as providing parents with "somewhere to go" to find the information (p11). The person giving the information would understand how the system works, and "perhaps most of all give parents a realistic view of how it all works, what is available and what they can expect" (p11). The Code of Practice (DFE, 1994) itself was seen as facilitating partnership. The representative said she saw the Code of Practice as having "opened up knowledge" (p8), that parents now had access to knowledge that they did not have before. However, she recognised that assessment remained "pretty daunting and upsetting" (p8). Partnership was "just the feeling that they are not on



their own whereas before that were going to meetings feeling totally overawed by everyone sitting there. They can now bring people in... we always suggest they take somebody with them" (p9). The potential for disempowering parents through partnership was suggested to the DFEE representative, but she dismissed this as a matter of taking care to listen to the parents.

### ***Concluding Comments***

The government seemed to be making certain assumptions about the Parent Partnership Schemes that were not shared, at least initially, by the PPOs. This was ascertained by comparing the GEST circulars, the interview with the DFEE representative, and notes taken by the researcher in her role as PPO. For example, the emphasis on relationships with voluntary organisation in the scheme was stated as puzzling by the LEA PPOs at the start of the project. Omissions in the GEST guidelines were also instructive: the scheme did not mention other advice providers such as social services or health services. Partnership does not seem, from the GEST Circulars, to extend to other services. The contradictory positioning of work in schools has been mentioned earlier in this section.

The GEST Circulars and the DFEE representative seemed to make assumptions, but did not provide evidence, that there were poor relationships between schools, LEAs and parents. Such an assumption was denoted by the language used: "improving relations and reducing confrontation" (DFEE, 1993). It was assumed that confrontation existed and needed to be reduced. It was also assumed that confrontation was a negative event, without any exploration of the possibility of a variety of different levels and faces of confrontation, for example, that one face of confrontation might be positive in some way. There was also an assumption that greater advocacy on behalf of parents would reduce conflict. However, the opposite was expressed by the PPOs as more likely to be the case. A motivation to reduce

conflict between parents and LEAs seemed to be accompanied by little evidence that any investigation had been carried out about the magnitude of the problem, or about the actions, in such a complex process, likely to reduce any conflict. There was some suggestion by parents in meetings that they might prefer not to use a named person since this was conceptualised in terms of yet another tier of communication, possibly miss-communication, and the parent would rather liaise directly with the professionals themselves. A similar objection might be levelled at the idea of working for greater involvement of voluntary organisations in partnering parents in the statutory assessment process.

A premise of the DFEE conceptualisation seemed to be that partnership was a matter of providing parents with some kind of advocate independent of the LEA, and that this would reduce conflict. However, the conceptualisation of the LEA PPOs in Newby seemed to be to place more emphasis on assessment as a process, and that schools, rather than LEA officers or educational psychologists, should play a crucial role. The Newby PPOs, left to decide their own objectives for the project, would have looked at ways to develop greater communication between parents and schools, and more opportunities to have a dialogue about children's needs. There was, evidently, considerable variation in perspective on the actions likely to bring about greater partnership.

#### **4.2.2 Educational Psychology Service Staff Meetings**

Educational Psychology Service staff meetings, in contrast to the steering group meetings, did seem to have an impact on the development of the Parent Partnership Officer role. This was evident in the discussions of the way Newby enacted the Code of Practice, and in discussions on Parent Partnership Officer activities. Parent Partnership Officer notes (made by the researcher in her role as PPO) indicate that she saw EPS staff meetings as important in order to involve other EPs from the start,

to "reach a consensus with them (other EPs) ... to make it easier for them to continue some parent partnership activities after the scheme had finished" (PPO notes).

A major issue in developing the role of the Parent Partnership Officer, present from the start, was the boundary between the role of the educational psychologist and that of either Parent Partnership Officer or named person. Boundary issues arose when there were conflicts between PPO actions in working for greater partnership and actions consistent with the role of the educational psychologist. Several examples of these issues arose in educational psychology service staff meetings during the first phase of the project:

The Parent Partnership Officers perceived themselves, in their EP role, as named persons. Parent Partnership Officer notes indicate the view that many problems in partnership with parents could be erased by the EPs having more time to do their job well. For example the view was expressed that parents could benefit from more time to talk to EPs about the assessment process. EPs in Newby, unlike many other Educational Psychology Services, visited parents at most stages of the statutory assessment process (i.e. deliver letters, offer support to complete parental advice, deliver the draft statement, etc.). PPOs, and other EPs, saw this, and the school meetings which also take place, as enabling parents to have several opportunities to find out about and participate within the statutory assessment process. However, there was an alternative view, implicit in Parent Partnership Officer notes, held by the ACE trainers and the Parent's Federation workers, that there was a need for someone to work with parents who occupied a role independent from the LEA. The need for independence is stated by the Code of Practice, and affirmed in the interview with the DFEE representative (interview transcript). However, the PEP, in minutes of the staff meeting for 24<sup>th</sup> February 1995 (see Appendix 11 for selection of minutes over the year) stated:



*At this stage it seems unlikely to be appropriate to recruit and train large numbers of "independent" Named Persons. Experience so far with the new assessment system has indicated no requests for "independent" Named Persons. However, it was agreed that parents could be asked about their wishes in this respect without stating that the casework EP will fulfil this role by default. Contacts with other LEAs suggested that Newby's system was currently as successful as any in promoting partnership with parents. (staff meeting minutes, 24<sup>th</sup> February 1995)*

Parents should be asked if they wanted a named person without stating that, by default, this would be the EP. Newby was seen to be "as successful as any" in promoting parent partnership. There was a need to clarify how named persons would be involved in the assessment of individual pupils (minutes dated 27th March 1995). For example, staff meeting discussion led to a consensus that it would not be seen appropriate for the educational psychology service, as a matter of course, to send named persons the reports of children.

Parent Partnership Officer notes indicated that some potential conflicts existed between the Parent Partnership Officer role and that of the EP, since Educational Psychology Service meetings required careful checking out of Parent Partnership Officer activities with other EPs (in notes a notion of "keeping back covered"). There might be problems if PPOs came across parents with whom other EPs were working and gave parents different advice about the statutory assessment process. EPs would not wish the Parent Partnership Officer role to create a situation in which their work-load was increased, which might happen if, for example, partnership led to more "demanding" parents.

One discussion demonstrated concern about the possibility of conflicting advice to a parent by the caseworker EP and the PPO. Such a concern arose during a discussion about whether PPOs should operate a drop-in sessions at the Parent Federation. The issue here was the difficulty in delineating a role for the EP PPO in talking to the parent of a child who would have a different EP as caseworker (staff meeting minute, 1st May 1995).

In Educational Psychology Service staff meeting minutes the orientation of the EP role was clarified as, "service to schools is to the child not the school" (3rd Oct. 1995), and later in the same minutes, "our qualified aim to promote the policies of the council". The role of the EP was in the first phrases, the child, rather than the school, and in the second, the council. The tension between these role orientations was recognised in the meeting. Furthermore absent from this verbalisation of the EP role was a reference to parents being a client of the EP, which must lead to a question concerning the extent of EP commitment to partnership with parents.

There seemed to be a variety of different characteristics of the statutory assessment process that seemed to act indirectly against parent partnership. The administrative, bureaucratic nature of the statutory assessment process came across strongly as a discourse underlying staff meeting minutes. This was likely to detract from the personal factors needed in partnership. It was likely to add to the sense of alienation for those parents (i.e. those interviewed) whose children had a statement and for whom the statutory assessment process was a puzzle or did not exist. The negativity towards the statutory assessment process expressed, from Parent Partnership Officer notes, by EPs, may have enlisted parents as fellow sufferers of a difficult system, but this negativity was more likely to contribute to the presentation of the system as problematic.

One theme of staff meetings was discussion about a process to make schools more responsive to and accountable for SEN so that EPs would have more scope in their work for an "interventionist, child centred role" (Minutes Nov. 28th 1995). Many discussions centred on the procedures that would, eventually lead to this outcome, but in the short-term would place the EP in the role of managing various aspects of a changing system. For example, it was evident from meeting minutes that EPs had control over the format for statement agreement meetings and over decisions about



ways to make advice writing more manageable for teachers. Meeting notes acknowledge some transfer of power from EPs. The power to decide that a statutory assessment would be initiated had transferred from the EP to a panel convened to decide whether a statutory assessment should go ahead (13th Feb. 1995 minutes). This panel was seen to provide a bureaucratic barrier to statutory assessment process (27th March 1995), which may, therefore, be a constraint to parent partnership where parents wanted a quick resolution to assessment. However, the PEP resisted rationalisations of the system on the basis that this might appear to schools and parents that the LEA was pre-judging the assessment. There was a stated, systemic need for the LEA to "pursue effective criteria to help schools judge what level of SEN they are expected to meet from their own resources" (March 27th 1995). The LEA was stated, in league tables in The Times Higher Education Supplement, to have one of the highest rates in the country (and the highest in the region) of statement completion within 6 months.

All issues arising from the educational psychology service staff meetings seemed to imply some compromise of partnership, if partnership is conceptualised as some kind of mutuality and equity. Disparities between the professional role of the educational psychologist and that of the PPO seemed most clearly apparent in staff meeting discussions. The disparities seemed to be about an assertion of the professional role of the educational psychologist. In Newby, the role of the Parent Partnership Officer certainly had to be carried out in a way that was mindful of, and not unsympathetic to, the LEA context, and in particular, the professional role of the EP. One view of this might be that parent partnership would be constrained and detracted from. However, another view might be that parent partnership will always take place in a context, in this case the LEA context, and therefore it might facilitate partnership if it is negotiated in tandem with the EP role. The view of the PEP was that the EP role was, already, a role involving the "toleration of ambiguities" (research notes, PEP comment in conversation with the researcher, January 1996). Furthermore, in staff meeting



minutes there was no recognition that the educational psychologist role in supporting parents may simply co-opt parents into the professional perspective. Finally, the current increasing bureaucratisation of assessment seemed likely to make the process even more inaccessible to parents.

### **4.2.3 Meetings with Parent Partnership Officers**

Monthly meetings took place with PPOs in six other LEAs in the immediate sub-region, and a region colloquium (lasting one day) was held for all PPOs. These meetings helped Newby PPOs to develop their role, and to identify with the role. Notes were kept on every meeting, and some documentation from other PPOs collected. The latter included guidelines from a PPO to parent advisors, and information packs for parents designed by PPOs. Discussions centred on what each Parent Partnership Officer was doing in the role, and, in particular on ways to approach named person recruitment and training. There was considerable variety in the Parent Partnership Officer role and identity. In only one other LEA in the sub-region there were educational psychologists acting as Parent Partnership Officers, but all used LEA officers (including an education welfare officers) or teachers. Two LEA PPOs had a major role in "trouble shooting" difficult situations, parents who were very dissatisfied with the statutory assessment process or outcome. In one of these the education welfare officers were likely to be used as named persons. In Newby the role of trouble-shooter would be carried out by the PEP. For several PPOs a major activity was writing and designing an information folder for parents. Another was also the LEA administrator for statements. In this LEA many named persons had been trained, but none had been linked with parents. However, the funding was primarily used (steering group minutes 10.7.95) "to streamline administration processes". By the end of the first year, PPOs from two LEAs had designed folders for use by parents. One LEA had designed and printed a thick A3 loose-leaf folder of information about SEN assessment and had started to think about training. The other folder was that of the Newby PPOs.

At the DFEE Colloquium, there were few educational psychologists in the role of PPO: PPOs had a wide range of backgrounds including teacher, education welfare officer, and education officer. At the Colloquium the Newby PPOs were told by two other,

non-educational psychologist PPOs, that in their opinion there would be unreconcilable conflict in trying to carry out the PPO role at the same time as being an educational psychologist. This suggested that educational psychologists might be seen as operating in ways not compatible with parent partnership and also that some independence from the LEA was needed.

The development of the PPO role in the region was characterised by diversity. The activities being carried out in the region suggested a confusion of conceptualisations of "partnership" with other conceptualisations of parents' role with respect to professionals. The focus was on various activities such as devising information packs and delivering advice in a way consistent with views of others in the LEA. While helpful to parents, these would also mainly serve to reduce the problems parents might pose to LEAs. However, there seemed to be no exploration of ways to empower parents. A further theme was the development of named person recruitment and training. However, the development of information for parents was carried out only in two of the six regional LEAs, and Named Persons were trained in only two LEAs. There was very little evidence of parents using named persons.

#### **4.2.4 Developing the PPO Role: Concluding Comments**

The EP PPOs demonstrated engagement with a concern to develop partnership with parents. The PPO role was developed through reference to DFEE project criteria, the personal aims and interests of the PPOs, and moderation from the PEP and the other educational psychologists in the service. Themes, which emerged from this analysis of the way the PPO role was developed, included the contradictory role of the EP as PPO. Educational Psychologists were suggested, by themselves, to be in a prime position to support parents. This was set against a discourse of independence, from the LEA, evident in communication from the DFEE and other PPOs at a regional colloquium. EP facility to act in partnership with parents was also set against a



discourse of defensiveness identified from EPS staff meeting minutes, and a need to keep control.

A discourse of the DFEE Circulars was one of reducing conflict between parents and LEAs, and of moving power from LEAs to the voluntary sector, possibly to achieve greater empowerment of parents. This quiet discourse of conflict was matched by a similarly muted discourse in the Educational Psychology Service staff meeting minutes of avoiding conflict in the operation of the Parent Partnership Scheme. Both the DFEE and the LEA PPOs seemed to look to ways to support parents more in the statutory assessment process. Both emphasised the provision of information and the manner of provision. However, the discourse of the DFEE was on the structure of relationships with voluntary agencies and named persons. Implicit here was that independence from the LEA would facilitate partnership. However, the LEA PPOs seemed to place greater emphasis on the process of statutory assessment. They were concerned with improving the roles of professionals with a statutory role, in the light of parent views on statutory assessment, in order to help parents to be more involved.

### **4.3 Developing a Working Relationship with the Parent Federation**

Prior to the start of the Parent Partnership Scheme, a local voluntary organisation, the Parent Federation had held an open meeting, at the start of the school year, advertised in the local newspaper as being for parents for whom the start of the school year might not be a joyous occasion. This had led to several meetings, one of which was attended by the PEP, and was reported to have involved some very dissatisfied parents. The Director of the Parent Federation reported (in the interview with her) that forty people attended the first meeting, and by the fifth week (when the PEP was speaking) there were fifteen people actively attending. Prior to this the Parent Federation was primarily involved with adults with learning disabilities, and the meetings were a way of looking at the need for work with children and young people. At the meeting with the PEP the Parent Federation copied five statements and blanked out any way of identifying the child, and asked the PEP to identify the age and needs of the child from the statement. Her account suggests that she and the parents were surprised and concerned that the PEP and the parents were unable to identify the child's needs. It was seen, by her to indicate a problem in the process that statements were so general and similar.

Parent Partnership Officer notes indicate that the PEP saw EP involvement in the Parent Partnership Scheme, and Parent Federation involvement in the management of the Parent Partnership Scheme, as a way to minimise any enflaming of parental dissatisfaction. However, he also recognised a positive role that the Parent Federation might be able to play in parent partnership, since he envisaged that the Parent Federation might be able to attract funding in order to be able to continue the recruitment, training and support of named persons. The Parent Federation seemed to be seen as a lion to be tamed. From the perspective of the Director of the Parent



Federation this presented an opportunity. In her view, the new legislation had given a push towards parent partnership and the LEA had also moved positively in this direction:

*however it ended up with a positive response, because at the same time it was, the amendments to the Education Act, and of course there was pressure on the LEA to actually look at working more effectively with parents. Not just in terms of quantitative things like time scales and numbers and resources, but in a better, we don't say an equal partnership, but a better partnership.*  
(director parent federation interview, p3).

Meetings between LEA PPOs and the Parent Federation were numerous and regular. The main activities over the year seemed to involve development of the PPO role, hosting the drop-in sessions and delivery of named person training. The Parent Partnership Officer notes indicate a discourse of both similarity and difference. The PPOs brainstormed parent's worries and issues, and the role and training needed for a named person with the Director and a volunteer organising a parent support and campaign group. The Parent Partnership Officer notes state: "Torn roles and loyalties - agree with them but can also see other sides. Possibility of several sides all having a view to the truth. Worry that P and D do not see this, that when they hear a parents view they only see parents' side, or even their own issues. Helped to develop folder". The torn roles and loyalties of the educational psychologists were never spoken about openly with the Parent Federation Director. The educational psychologists' main concern was that those working with parents from the voluntary organisation would hear, and only see, the parents' perspective, but that, by implication, partnership would involve seeing all sides. The Parent Federation Director often worked with parents who experienced difficulties with the statutory assessment process, and did not meet parents who were satisfied with the process. Areas of possible contention between the Parent Federation and the LEA PPOs were never discussed. It was easy to stay with areas of similar perspective. However, there were always areas in which there seemed the possibility of conflict, but these were never discussed. Such areas included definitions of partnership with parents.



Various, important roles were never clarified in terms of possible conflict. These were the role of the named person, the role of the PPO and the role of the Parent Federation Director.

At the very end of the first year the Parent Federation was successful in attracting funding in order to appoint its own Parent Partnership Officers. This was possible by using leverage from involvement with the LEA Parent Partnership Scheme. The researcher, in role as LEA Parent Partnership Officer, was involved in the selection process and two appointments were made for a job share. Research notes indicate that both were well qualified and skilled for the post. However, the LEA Parent Partnership Officers both had concerns about the possibility that one of those appointed might lack balance in perspective, and the ability to be sympathetic with the distress of a parent without instantly taking sides.

The year of the researcher's role as PPO saw a major shift towards greater voluntary agency involvement in the formal parent partnership scheme activities. As it happened, this shift was in line with DFEE criteria. However, it had not been the LEA PPOs intention to work towards this as a conscious goal. It seemed to be an unplanned consequence of the close working relationship with the Parent Federation, a relationship motivated more by a need to prevent further exertion of influence rather than to increase it.

The relationship between the LEA Parent Partnership Scheme and the Parent Federation was, itself, a problematic one, albeit those differences in opinion were rarely stated. However, by the end of the first year, there were four PPOs operating in the same LEA: two were employed by the LEA and were also educational psychologists, and two were employed by the Parent Federation (one with a teaching background). Despite the many meetings with the Parent Federation Director, there had been little discussion about the role of the Parent Federation PPOs in relation to

the educational psychologist PPOs. In the past there had been conflict (i.e. between the Director and the PEP) and there was continuing disquiet of parents over statutory assessment process (i.e. findings of the interviews). Given this background, it seemed unlikely that an increase simply in numbers of partnership workers would lead to enhanced partnership working, either between the four PPOs or between parents and the statutory assessment process they were grappling with.

### ***Concluding Comments***

Conflict seemed to exist in some form in the relationship between the Parent Federation and the LEA PPOs. Both types of PPOs had a sense of purpose in working together on the naming of problems experienced by parents, and of "projects" such as named persons training or the "drop-in" sessions. Differences were not discussed as the LEA PPOs looked to develop a working relationship with the Parent Federation. The LEA had also facilitated, crucially, the securing of funding for Parent Federation, with no discussion of their different ideas about partnership, the role of the named person or the role of the PPO. Conflict was, therefore, concealed and unnamed.

## **4.4 Named Person Development: Recruitment and Training**

The recruitment and training of named persons was a key aim of the parent partnership schemes and took place towards the end of the first year of the project. Training was planned by the LEA PPOs with some discussion with the Parent Federation Director. The sessions took place at the Parent Federation centre. Sessions were attended by the Director, and PPOs from a neighbouring local education authority. Most of the issues in recruitment and training had been covered in a two-day training course attended by the LEA PPOs, facilitated by the Advisory Centre for Education.

### ***Who and How to recruit?***

Named persons were recruited by asking educational psychologists and the Parent Federation staff for suggestions of people to approach, and asking for volunteers from all the groups visited by the Local Education Authority PPOs (PPOs). In the early days of the Parent Partnership Scheme, the PPOs approached local branches of National Voluntary Organisations to see if their officers could act as named persons or whether they could provide named persons. This had been part of the DFEE expectations for how named persons would be recruited. However, as was stated in the earlier section on "Developing the Role of the Parent Partnership Officer" voluntary agencies would not donate their own volunteers since volunteers are very time consuming to recruit, and the agencies needed them for their own work. A church group also expressed interest in providing volunteers, and this offer was held for a subsequent training course. In the event the first training course, of two half days, was attended by a small group (eleven) who were selected both by educational psychologists, as parents known by them through professional



intervention with the parent's child, and from groups known to the Parent Federation. Diary notes state that the final group consisted of "angry parent group plus others".

***What should the role of the named person be?***

The named person was conceptualised in terms of possible qualities and role designations. PPO notes suggest educational psychologists thought the best people to act as named persons would be parents who had experienced the statutory assessment process themselves. The Local Education Authority Parent Partnership Officers were looking towards the named person playing a role as supporter to a parent, allowing the parent to develop the confidence to speak at meetings, write the parent advice, and contact the appropriate professionals when this was required. On a continuum between advocacy and supporter, the LEA PPOs hoped the named person would occupy a role more towards a supporter. Advocacy seemed to be allied to the more "aggressive" (researcher's italics) advising of a parent about their rights, exerting pressure on the parent to occupy an adversarial role vis a vis the LEA in trying to obtain provision the parent wanted for their child.

***How would named persons themselves be supported?***

Named persons were thought to require continued support, in order to answer their questions about the situation of the parent they were supporting, to help them think through "what to do" when parents presented certain problems. This support was to be provided by the Parent Federation. Questions of paying expenses and providing insurance (i.e. to guard against major difficulties ensuing from giving parents advice) for the named persons were considered, but rejected. No funds were available for the former and the latter was thought not to be needed since named persons were not envisaged to be in a position to give advice.

## **Training Content**

The training for potential named persons took place over two half days (10am – 2pm, including lunch), and adopted activities similar in style to the ACE training (Advisory Centre for Education). There were activities on the following:

- skills involved in listening;
- the possible qualities and role of the NP;
- people's fears in taking on the role of the named person;
- in small groups, seeking information for a case;
- listing and comparing the qualities of advice from three different sources: the professional, the parent, and the named person;
- understanding the statutory assessment process (including a game to demonstrate the numbers of professionals a parent might need to relate to);
- implications of the issue of confidentiality; and
- a case discussion from a panel of different professionals.

Omitted from the course, notes stated, were the areas of negotiation, conflict resolution, dealing with meetings, the statutory assessment panel, SEN provision and tribunals. These areas were seen to be important, but less important than giving a basic grounding in listening skills, in the statutory assessment process and in the role of the named person. There would always be opportunities to deliver further training sessions. Those attending the second training session, in a final verbal round, stated as their skills: being a listener, providing support, drawing on own experience, being a confident befriender, being able to understand the parent and a sense of humour. Their continuing needs were many. They wanted ways to deal initially with people, more information about the Code of Practice, and more knowledge about the 1993

Education Act. Two felt in trepidation or panic that they would now be acting as named persons and felt they were leaving with many more questions.

At the end of the training, the named persons were asked to fill in a form indicating whether they were still interested in being a named person, and the kind of help they thought they might be able to give to a parent. Of the eight who had attended both sessions, four were interested in being a named person immediately and four would consider taking on the role some time in the future.

### ***Issues arising From Named Person Training***

When the named person training was carried out many issues about just what would be the role of the named person, how they would be linked to parents, and how they would be supported, had still to be resolved. Indeed, notes indicate that the researcher, in her role as LEA parent partnership officer, was unsure whether named persons would be used at all by the LEA. Ten of the twenty-four parents interviewed in the early stages of the parent partnership scheme said they would have liked to have had a named person during the statutory assessment process, indicating a need to be more supported in some way. However, a view had been stated in staff meetings (see section 4.2.2) that educational psychologists would remain, in general, the first stated named person. Considering this was a major plank in the Parent Partnership Scheme, four named persons signing up to take the role seemed rather too small a number, unless, as became apparent, the educational psychology service expected to use only a small number of named persons.

The training revealed interesting outcomes in terms of the impact on those undertaking the training. Four of the eight said that one of the main outcomes was increased understanding of the statutory assessment process. Given that they all had children who had a statement, it was surprising that the brief overview of the statutory



assessment process in the training had been so revelatory. It would be interesting to look more into this question, since it seems to go to the heart of difficulties identified in another section, of making information about assessment accessible to parents.

Concerns of those trained about taking up the role of the named person were very varied. Three expressed a lack in confidence about ability, and a concern at not knowing about SEN procedures or jargon. Two were worried they might not be able to "get what the parent wants". Two thought they might give the "right sort of help", and one was concerned she might not have enough time to help. One was worried that she might not know what a child needs and how to help the child. This demonstrated considerable diversity in how the different people trained to be a named person saw the role. For some, there were very clear overlaps with the professional role of the EP, in the reference to knowing what a child needs. There was also a discourse of advocacy, in getting what a parent wants.

One main issue underlying all the work recruiting named persons may be conceptualised as the relationship between named persons and the LEA. The Code of Practice stated the aim that named persons should be independent from the LEA. The selection of named persons by the LEA officers and the identity of the trainers as LEA officers would seem to compromise such independence. It raised many questions. Did the training delivered by the LEA PPOs represent quality, by enabling prospective named persons to understand the possible difficulties? Did it inculcate LEA values? Did it have the effect of discouraging people who might have been perfectly able to act as named persons? Maybe it accomplished all of these to different degrees with different people. However, the nature of, and rationale for, an "independent" role is not clearly stated in the Code of Practice. The relationship between the role of the Parent Partnership Officer, the role of the named person and the Local Education Authority became a major issue in the second year of the Parent Partnership Scheme.

## **4.5 Year 2: The Developing Relationship between Different kinds of Parent Partnership Officers**

Year two saw many changes. The LEA Parent Partnership Officer (PPO) was involved in work in schools with a new LEA PPO, and there was increasing conflict between LEA PPOs and Parent Federation PPOs. This section describes these changes and raises issues very briefly. Such issues are taken up in greater detail in the final section, on themes from the analysis of Newby's parent partnership scheme. This section is based upon interview data. Transcriptions were available from interviews with the remaining EP PPO, the Principal Educational Psychologist, the Parent Federation Director and the two PPOs, and the DFEE representative responsible for managing Parent Partnership Project funding. Apart from the folder developed by the LEA PPOs, there was no documentary data available to the researcher for this year of the project. This section of Chapter 4 first describes some events of the second year, then discusses issues relating to the events. LEA PPOs and EP PPOs are used interchangeably, indicating the same individuals.

For the second year of the parent partnership project, the researcher, who had occupied the position of Parent Partnership Officer, was replaced by a teacher from the peripatetic learning support service, working one day a week and the second Educational Psychologist PPO had her time reduced to one day per week. The teacher and the educational psychologist worked together on several projects. They compiled a folder from a questionnaire survey of schools' best practice with parents. According to the PPO, the folder was not designed to suggest or tell the parent what to do, but to give examples of the way schools have involved parents at different stages. It was also designed to explain what happens at different stages of assessment and what possibilities there are for provision. The educational psychologist and the support service teacher carried out joint visits to other agencies such as Age Concern to investigate sources of volunteers. The two had already



worked together supporting volunteers hearing reading in schools. The educational psychologist (EP) PPO said (interview transcription) she saw the future of parent partnership in terms of projects in schools to involve parents more - such as in reading.

The two Parent Federation PPOs, appointed on a 0.5 FTE job share, were both interviewed as part of this research. One of them worked with the remaining EP Parent Partnership Officer to deliver a further training course for Named Persons. This time sixteen people were trained, using a very similar format (two half days, similar content), from a very diverse group. Together with parents suggested by EPs and the Parent Federation were people from a church organisation who were mostly ex-professionals, including ex-teachers and head teachers. At the end of the second year there were eighteen people on the named person register and 12 people came along to monthly support meetings. Some of those originally trained dropped out since they were not used – (educational psychologist interview, p10) "keeping volunteers engaged and not losing interest is very tricky."

Matching named persons to parents seemed, to some degree to be a joint activity of the Parent Federation and the Educational Psychology Service. Allocating named persons happened during a meeting of the educational psychologist Parent Partnership Officer and one of the Parent Federation Parent Partnership Officers. People attending the courses filled out a form indicating skill, commitments, what they felt they could or could not offer a parent. At the meeting of the two different PPOs, the named person matched parent(s) requesting certain kinds of support. Both the Parent Federation and the Educational Psychology Service kept identical files on named person volunteer details. Although the system was still being worked out, training and matching were seen, according to interview, as joint activities, and supporting the volunteer was the Parent Federation's responsibility.



During year two there were four requests from educational psychologists for named persons, a number that may be seen as quite low. One reason for this number is that in this particular LEA, as already stated, the EPs themselves were first identified to the parents as "named persons". From September 1996 onwards Parents were asked (in the first letter received when a statement is initiated) if they would like to allocate this role to a different person. However, as the Educational Psychologist Parent Partnership Officer stated in her interview, it was likely to be difficult for parents to request an alternative when they might feel this would be seen as slighting a powerful professional who was involved in assessing their child. The named persons allocated to the four parents came from the pool of people first suggested for training by the EPs themselves, from having worked with them on their own child's assessment.

In the year from April 95-May 96 the Parent Federation saw 157 families, gave 6 hours of support time, and for families who had a dependent under 18 years, 24% of their queries were about education. The range of issues were choice of school (particularly finding a nursery school near home), school transport, and the listing in statements of speech and language advice rather than therapy. Concern and pressure about the latter had led, according to the Parent Federation Director, to the provision of a dedicated speech therapist for one of the special schools.

#### **4.5.1 The Parent Partnership Officers: A Difference in Perspective**

A difference in perspective was identified between the PPOs, between the PPO, who was also an EP, working for the LEA and those working for the Parent Federation. These perspectives were explored in detail, teasing out different ideas of the PPO and named person role, assessment, partnership, the nature of neutrality and the

professional role. Interview responses indicated some kind of power struggle between the EP PPO and the Parent Federation PPOs.

### ***The True PPO....?***

The educational psychologist expressed her view that Parent Federation PPOs regarded themselves as "the" Parent Partnership Scheme, and indicated disagreement with this view (EP interview p13). She cited the example of the Parent Federation PPOs going to the meeting of the regional Parent Partnership Officers, expressing surprise that they were the only ones employed from a voluntary agency, and expressing the view that being from the voluntary agency was somehow "better". The training sessions were described, according to the educational psychologist, in the Parent Federation newsletter as the Parent Federation's own training sessions, not the LEAs sessions. The EP wanted people to remember that the Parent Partnership Project had started with the LEA PPOs, and that it was the LEA that had involved the Parent Federation.

Similarly - or conversely - a theme in the Parent Federation Director's interview was of her organisation not being recognised by the LEA as key to parent partnership. She cites the example of not being invited to an SEN exhibition, and another of contacting the GEST bid writer, an LEA officer, only to find he had no knowledge of the Parent Partnership Scheme.

### ***Role of Parent Partnership Officer***

A major struggle seemed to be around the role of the Parent Partnership Officer and the kind of advice offered to parents.



The Parent Federation Director described a variety of roles the Parent Partnership Officer might have. This included attending meetings - the most visible part of parent partnership, understanding the relationship of each of the professionals involved in a case and enabling (Parent Federation Director interview, p7). She states the importance of not making assumptions.

*But what we did from that was draw up that contract information, so we can actually respond, and parents, then we're actually discussing, it's as much a prompt to discuss with parents the role we can take rather than assume we each know. We go into a position of representation or emotional support into a meeting.*

(Parent Federation Director interview, p6)

Parent Federation Director's view of partnership was that it necessarily involved conflict, but that after the conflict all sides learnt something new and came together in a different way: "Partnership doesn't mean equal" (interview, p9) "We try to make them positive and learn by them", (interview, p4). Following an incident with a Parent Federation Parent Partnership Officer, the Parent Federation Director implemented a new process of being clear with the parents about the role the Parent Partnership Officer will have, and a form for recording roles expected of the PPOs.

The Parent Federation PPOs had different ideas about the role of the PPO. One saw her role in terms of advocacy, in terms of "giving people the opportunity to find out the information so they have the voice" (interview, p5). She described listening to parents, over two meetings, to provide what parents were asking for. This might be listening to them, putting them in touch with voluntary organisations, and providing them with leaflets. She described probing how much the parent knew about the five stages of assessment and finding out the stage a parent's child had reached. She said she had a mechanism for making clear what she and the parent had agreed she would do. She saw herself as a professional advocate, able to summarise the parents' views, without taking sides with the parents or the LEA. Having a child who



had special educational needs, but had not been given a statement, meant, she said, that she could see issues from the perspective of both the parent and the professional. She saw the role as PPO overlapping with her role as named person.

The other PPO saw herself as having a flexible role with different parents. For example, she provided "emotional support" for one parent who felt assessment to be a battle, but who was well able to write her own letters. She provided help in understanding the paperwork for another parent. With another parent she attended meetings, and her role was to ask questions if jargon was used. She stated that she did not argue points for the parent since this would be likely to "disempower her more" (interview, p6). She described her presence in meetings as providing parents with a kind of armour: "Because they felt they had so much against them, and they wanted to show they had somebody on their side" (interview, p7). Her personal test of her involvement was: "have I made them feel better in some way, have I made this frustrating, difficult, complicated process, plus all the other emotional package that comes with it..." (interview, p22). She made a distinction between her normal role with parents and her role with a parent she was representing at a tribunal. In the latter, she had a sense of taking over, sorting out the paperwork, and making a judgement about the child's needs.

Both Parent Federation PPOs were asked for their definition of partnership. One saw partnership as working together for the interests of the child. It involved, for her, constant communication. The parent contributed knowledge of the child through constantly living with the child. The other saw partnership as giving "parents information about what the process is and how to participate in it" (p13). Furthermore, the parents could give professionals detailed information about "all sorts of aspects that the EP may not observe during a visit to the school" (p13), such as medical interventions, home interventions, and behaviour with other people.

The Educational Psychologist PPO's view of partnership in general is reported in detail in Chapter 5, in the section on "Partnership". Her view of the role of the PPO is reported here, and was one, she thought, of "empowering parents". She gave the example of the way she supported parents in writing their advice for the statement:

*I'm often a scriptwriter for parents, and I use their words, because they're often orally good, but would be terrified by the actual writing, or they have very good insight. I've just recently done one with a parent and we read through what we'd agreed, and I'd done the writing. And I said, it sounds good, doesn't it. She said, yes, and she said, I wouldn't have thought any of that was relevant, in other words, whether he sleeps and what he eats, and all this sort of thing... ..It's lively, ....So that is an empowering experience.  
(EP interview, p19)*

She compared this with the (in her view) "deskilling" way that one of the Parent Federation PPOs worked with parents on the same task:

*.....She says, oh, you can't put that, this would be a better way of putting it. You can't say, he can't count from one to five, you say, he has poor numerical skills. So you don't actually, you put down what you think would get what the best outcome for that child.....Nothing to do with the parents, it's getting the procedure good  
(EP PPO interview, p18)*

The implication is that the EP PPO understood the Parent Federation PPO to believe that parent advice should be written like professional advice in order to obtain more resources from the LEA:

*... getting something out of the authority. And if you've done really good advice, you might get...I think it's not going to make them partners. It again pushes them into thinking they aren't that skilled, they need somebody to help them, they need somebody to talk for them, they need somebody (EP PPO interview, p19)*

The EP's view of the role played by the two different PPOs was helpful to understand both her ideas about what a PPO "should" be like, and her views of the role of the named person. Details of her view of the Parent Federation PPO role are omitted from this analysis for reasons of confidentiality, since they refer to a particular incident.



However, a comparison of views on role revealed the EP view that a positive role, for a PPO in a voluntary agency, was the role of the second Parent Federation PPO:

*She always rings up about problems, she always sees what level they're supposed to be at. She always answers them at that level. And she doesn't immediately assume a problem is how it is expressed. (EP interview, p15)*

The EP's description of how a PPO should not operate was to go through the Code of Practice with "a fine tooth-comb", spending hours and hours with parents, anticipating problems, anticipating problems and undoing a year's work with a particular parent to do with the labelling of her child:

*....somebody who's just gunning for parents and going straight on the manifest problems that they give you, and we've got to sort it out, you can be sorting things out at the wrong level. All the time. (p13)  
statementing is the only way forward, problem accepted at face value, meetings recorded, parent primed to see the child in terms of labels.  
(EP interview, p15)*

Such a role was, the educational psychologist thought, really meeting the needs of the PPO. Other EPs, the Educational Psychologist PPO stated, were unlikely to refer parents to the Parent Federation PPOs since they needed to feel confident that, in the context of their already pressurised lives, this would not lead to further problems to be dealt with:

*I think you've got to actually separate, and this is something I want to try and do on Wednesday, is separate the befriender's role from the advocacy role. There are always going to be a few cases where there is conflict. And there is the tribunals and all that sort of thing. And I have tried to say that, you know, you could quickly pick up those who would want to do that, and you need a different sort of person to be an advocate. C has introduced herself often, in just ad hoc meetings, I am a parent advocate. (EP interview, p18)*



#### **4.5.2 Perspectives on the Statutory Assessment Process**

One of the Parent Federation PPOs saw the assessment process as the negotiation of views about the child, a negotiation between parents and professionals. She was very positive about the process, and saw it as bringing all the different views together through clear communication. Such a process, she said, brought about the best outcome for the child. The 1993 Education Act brought, she thought, many more opportunities for parents to participate in assessment. Partnership was possible, and was a question of giving information about what the process was and how to participate in it. Assessment worked very well, she thought, if parents understood the process and there was someone there to support them. The other Parent Federation PPO felt the statutory assessment process was great in theory, and could not be faulted. It could provide an holistic view of the child, with reports from everyone involved: "It's important to get the whole view and then let the communication happen" (Parent Federation PPO interview, p16).

The Parent Federation Director had been invited to the Stage 3/4 moderating group. This was a twice yearly meeting looking at and commenting on the decisions that had been made by the panel, about whether a statutory assessment (at Stage 4 of the Code of Practice) should go ahead. She felt one decision, to not make an assessment, was wrong, and indicated she was impressed that others felt the same (the head of a middle school and a medical officer). She stated that she hoped the parent would come to her, at the Parent Federation, to seek redress. She stated in the interview her concern at how parents were told of panel decisions. She now understood that a negative decision might not rule out other solutions for the child. However, parents were often not aware of this:

*... it's not like a win and lose situation, which is often how the correspondence is presented. And often what parents feel, is, when their authorities say to them, we've made a decision not to issue a statement, they feel they've been battling all the time, and they feel that, they believe that nobody else sees the*

*difficulties of their child, but clearly from the discussions and the samples, people clearly did observe the difficulties of the child, but however the statement wasn't the solution. There were other solutions, but haven't, aren't necessarily, passed on to the family, and the family aren't made aware of (interview Parent Federation Director, p14)*

### **4.5.3 Professional Identity and Neutrality**

Key to the different perspectives on the PPO role, was the professional identity of each, and the nature of the PPO's employer. The Educational Psychologist said she thought professional training provided a kind of neutrality, but she recognised that a particular role was provided by the identity of the employer:

*... I think that if you, I think who employs you is very important, because you do have a role to carry through, you've been funded, after all, by education, to put through measures which are going to make smoother running for the authority, as well as getting involved parents... E.P.s are neutral in as much as they're used to being more objective, and being able to balance what they hear from everybody*  
(EP interview, p13)

However, the Parent Federation Director saw the role of the EP as far less neutral:

*... the Ed Psych at the end of the day is projecting the view of the bureaucracy, I would say, the LEA. It isn't their personal opinions, and I think that is the important thing, is their role is as a professional in an assessment situation ... She sees the EPs client as the child, but from a resource led focus rather than one that is needs led, from a need to be realistic about the provisions that are available.*  
(interview Parent Federation Director, p14)

Her views indicated she felt such a role was difficult for the LEA PPO:

*... I think they have a very frustrating, a very frustrating role, because I don't think it's the will of psychologists, and I think they're just having to operate in realism, you know, because it is an issue that they aren't able to provide a solution to. It's about resources, and they'll have to prescribe to the resources that are there, because otherwise you're raising false expectations with the family and the child to offer something that isn't going to be offered*  
(interview Parent Federation Director, p15)

She relates understanding about the frustrations of the role of the EP, but they at least get paid for those frustrations!

*... But that must be incredibly frustrating when you've spent years and years training in a field, and you are a professional at that, and it can't, I don't say*



*they do it, I don't believe they do it with joy, and I think it is as equally frustrating for them as it is for parents. And I think both partners in the relationship of the parent partnership are having a degree of frustration. Unfortunately, or unfortunately for parents, professionals are given remuneration through a salary to absorb some of that frustration and parents aren't. (interview Parent Federation Director, p16)*

The nature of the professional role interfered, she thought, with the LEA PPOs ability to authentically represent the parent perspective, or, to "speak out" on behalf of the parent:

*... Because their jobs, I think a lot of it is the whole economy and security in which the local government and public services work around, that is very, very difficult for people as individuals or small groups of people, in particular those, more so those in the professions, because they've got more to lose, to actually speak out. And that's very much become one of our roles, and I think that is a pure and a definite, an undersold partnership role that we have, because we do have people that aren't able to voice themselves, but will let us know and we can voice this. Yes. And parents can say things. Parents are increasingly encouraged by professionals to make formal complaints. Now we've never seen that before... (interview Parent Federation Director, p16-17)*

The Educational psychologist recognised such conflicts, but indicated that her professionalism meant that she was prepared to be in conflict with the LEA if she believed a particular outcome was needed for the child. By the same token, she could also be in conflict with the parent, though this, she said, was rare. She indicated that she was able to take on both roles, LEA representative and parent supporter:

*...I think in Newby there are conflicts of role, because we are local LEA officials in things like, being present at statutory reviews, we are the representative of the local authority. In taking out statements and in trying to put through the answers that the panel have come up with, we'd be the ones to take them out, that have to take the parents to visit the set school, etc. So there can be situations where outcomes don't fit with one's personal ideas. But you have a job then, which is the job of sorting something out for the authority. And we do have both roles, quite strongly, in this authority. We're not just psychologists who come in and do assessments. (EP interview, p7)*

Both Parent Federation PPOs felt independence from the LEA was important in terms of credibility with parents. There was also a recognition of the possibility of lack of

impartiality. One of the Parent Federation PPOs said that if she had taken on the PPO role two years previously, when the situation with her child was different, the role would have been problematic due to the presence of her own agenda.

One PPO saw the other PPO as lacking sensitivity: "she does bamboozle parents into taking over things, doing all the paper-work, wanting to type up eight pages in very formal English" (Parent Federation interview, p10). She also thought the other PPOs own child's disabilities influenced her approach to parents in an unhelpful, and an unrecognised, way.

Both Parent Federation PPOs held views about professional power. EP perspectives on power can be found in Chapter 5, in the section on "Power". One saw such power in terms of setting dates for meetings and assuming parents could attend and sending letters which might be difficult to read. She also saw the exercise of power in the setting of agendas for meetings and asking parents to fit in with such agendas, rather than asking them to contribute to the setting of the agenda. Professionals, she thought, provided situations which parents often found intimidating, making it difficult to communicate views.

The other Parent Federation PPO saw professional power in terms of the educational psychologist's role in the assessment, in deciding how much help the child could get. She saw the EPs as having power, but less power than the parent perceived. She was hopeful that the EP and the parent would be able to work together, so "the EP can use the power, responsibility, influence, however, whatever you want to call it, to work with the parents wishes in co-operation" (Parent Federation interview, p12). She also recognised that power resided in the most vocal parents.

These themes were developed further in looking at the views of the different PPOs of the role of the named person.

#### **4.5.4 Conflict over the Role of the Named Person**

A major area of conflict arose from the different approaches of the Parent Partnership Officers to advising parents about a named person. The issues were over when to allocate a named person to a parent and the type of person best recruited to be named persons. Related to the latter point was the role the named person should adopt with parents.

One of the Parent Federation PPOs thought (from interviews with all parent Partnership Officers and the Parent Federation Director) parents should request a named person before a statutory assessment had been started, before an educational psychologist or any outside professional had become involved. The Educational Psychologist Parent Partnership Officer felt this was too early and provided difficulties for volunteers of lacking the time limit for involvement that a statutory assessment (expected to take less than six months) could provide.

The Parent Federation Director stated that she and the Educational Psychologist did not always agree on who should be selected to be a named person. The Director said she would like to put an open advertisement in the paper but felt the EP would prefer to find people by "snowball" contact. For her the disadvantage of the latter was that the people recruited were very similar. The training was sufficiently demanding to make sure only those able to be named persons eventually volunteered themselves. The Director felt she, herself, would make a "terrible" named person since she was too emotional.

The question of the "biases" of the named person became a key issue in the relations between the different PPOs. Use of named persons trained and selected by the LEA may be conceptualised as allocating named persons whose qualities could be relied



upon to support parents well. It could also be conceptualised as allocating persons seen as unlikely to advocate the challenging of professional decisions. The Acting Principal Educational Psychologist's main concern was in "keeping up a stock of appropriately trained named people" (p3 of interview). The definition of "appropriate" was never explored, but seemed to involve equating required levels of knowledge with the support of the local education authority:

*...already people who you and S (the EP PPO) have worked with, and established a relationship with, are moving on into other areas, and new people come in. And again, perhaps the levels of knowledge of staff in the Parent Federation will be no different from the named persons themselves. Their understanding about some of the deeper issues, and again, I have a concern that there are some people who perhaps view, might be, supporting the parents is to do with fighting the local authority, as opposed to something that we would see more akin to partnership.*  
(Acting Principal Educational Psychologist interview, p4)

Other difficult issues were to do with the recruitment and training of the named persons. Initially, named persons were drawn from suggestions from EPs of parents who had a child who had a statement and who, for whatever reason, might be a suitable person to support another parent through the process. The second cohort of named persons to be trained comprised of 15/16 people from a very diverse group. Together with parents suggested by EPs was a group from a church organisation, who were often ex professionals, including ex teachers and head teachers. The EP described the sessions as very difficult:

*...I felt more uncomfortable myself, in doing the training. I didn't enjoy it as much. Because of feeling I had to actually doing active negotiation between parents and professionals in the training...  
what you're trying to do training while you've still got a lot of sorts of prejudices that you really need to tackle before you can be a good named person.*  
(EP interview, p9-10)

There were very different perspectives on qualities needed in a named person. The Educational Psychologist saw the named person's role as to provide support and confidence, someone who had "been there before". She saw no need for conflict:

*But let the named person be more low key, that the psychologists are referring people, parents who they feel need support, need confidence, need somebody who has been there before, somebody to take away the steam of things, not to put steam into things. And I want to keep those two things separate (advocate and named person). (EP interview, p18)*

The Parent Federation PPO, could, she felt, usefully be an advocate for those cases where the parent was already in conflict with LEA, such as tribunal cases.

The different perspectives of the PPOs and the Parent Federation Director about the identity and role of the named person suggested important issues to do with professionalism and power, which are discussed in the final section of this chapter.

## **4.6 Key Themes arising from the Parent Partnership Project**

### **4.6.1 Ambiguities in Role: Whither Partnership?**

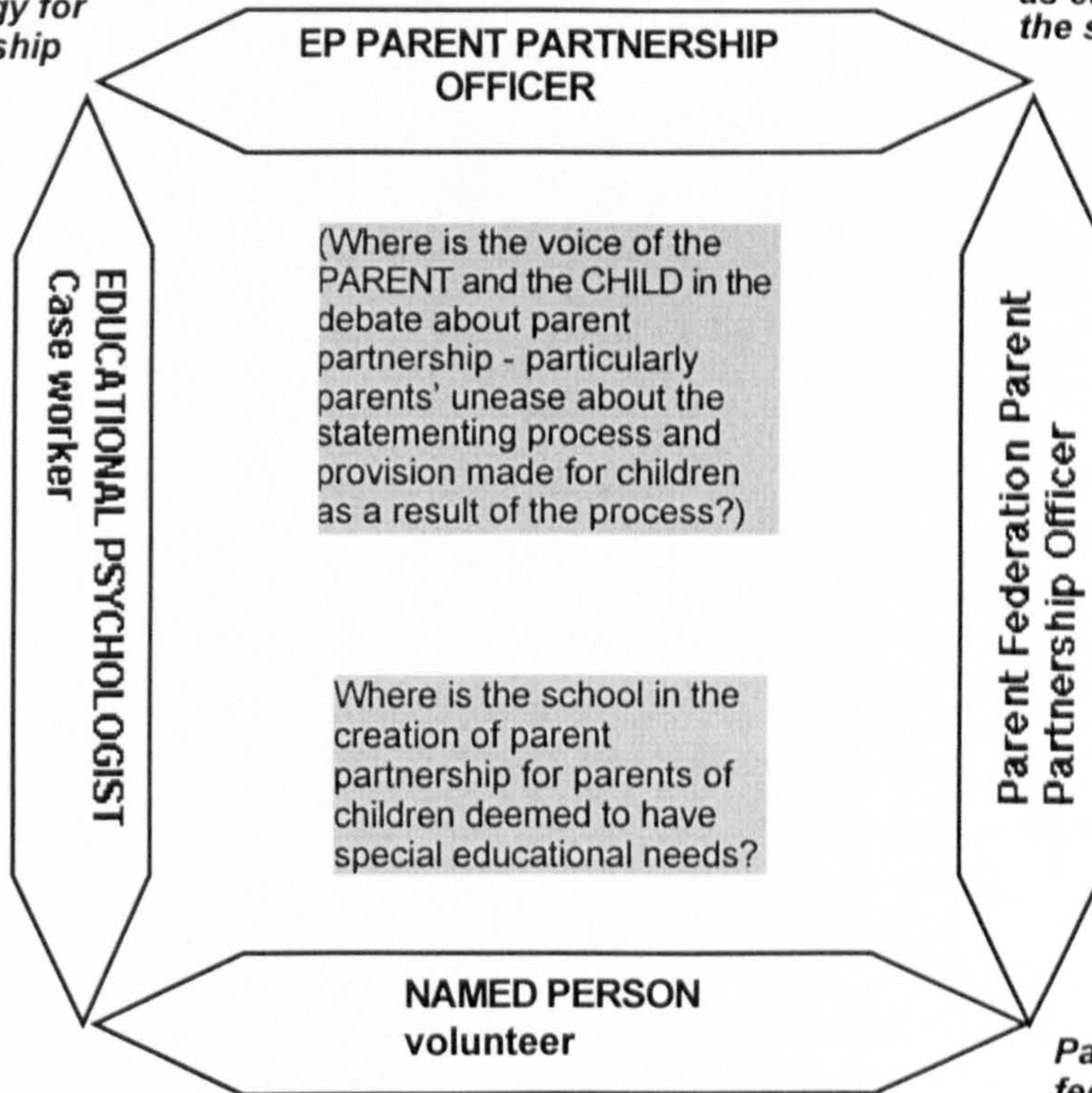
The analysis suggests overlap and ambiguities in the roles of four different kinds of people: the Parent Federation Parent Partnership Officers, the EP Parent Partnership Officers, caseworker Educational Psychologists, and volunteer named persons. Figure 4.2, on the next page, shows the four different roles within four boxes. The areas of struggle and ambiguity between different roles are found in the text at the meeting point of each pair of boxes, and in the centre of the diagram. Each person involved in the Parent Partnership Scheme seemed to have been occupying two, sometimes three or even four roles. For example, all operated with parents as named persons. The EPs and the Parent Federation PPOs all carried out work with parents that could be classified as EP casework. Major struggles happened when the same roles were being carried out by people occupying very different positions. In the second year of the project the LEA Parent Partnership Officer and one of the Parent Federation Parent Partnership Officers engaged in a power struggle. This was concerned with the identity of the "real" Parent Partnership Officer. The location of decision making decided on key features of the named person role, and on what kind of support was needed by parents as they negotiated their child's statement. Both operated as named persons, in addition to being part of the system recruiting, training and matching named persons to parents. Roles were blurred; overlap, conflict and power were fiercely wrestled with.



**Figure 4.2 Themes from Analysis of Newby Parent Partnership Scheme: Ambiguities in the relationships between four different kinds of roles**

*PPOs might create extra work or even problems for other EPs. PPOs may interfere in case work. PPOs are also casework EPs  
EPs fully involved in forming Strategy for Parent Partnership Scheme*

*Who controls the Parent Partnership Scheme?  
When are named persons involved?  
Who is invited to train as named persons?  
Role of PPO: advocate vs supporter???  
What kind of partnership between Parent Federation and LEA?  
Both EP and Parent federation PPOs act as case workers with the same families*



*Issues of independence of named person from LEA.  
Is independence important?  
Are volunteer named persons really independent if trained by the LEA?  
EPs are named to parents as named persons early in assessment process - does this make it difficult for them to ask for a volunteer named person?  
Role of other voluntary agencies?*

*Parent federation as campaigner for parent rights vs parent supporter vs protagonist to the LEA...?*



One of the major underlying themes of their struggle was the issue of independence. The Code of Practice asserted the need for named persons independent of the LEA. The EP, either in the named person role or in the Parent Partnership Officer role, was suggested to be unable to act independently of the LEA. Those either working for voluntary agencies or as volunteer named persons were assumed to be independent. However, as the results suggested, there was a view expressed by the EP and PEP that such people may impose their own lack of independence, through personal or political needs. In all these struggles the voice of the parent and child seemed absent, and the role of the school completely omitted. This suggests these voices were excluded from the "battle" between the different roles and had little opportunity to influence the way that partnership was constructed between the key players.

The roles of named person and parent partnership officer were created in order to develop greater partnership with parents. The struggles and ambiguities between the different roles all seemed to be struggles of power in some way. The power may have been power to define the role of the PPO, or of the named person, or the power to influence a family as a caseworker. Within the struggle for power, was a discourse of professionalism vs independence. For some, the educational psychologists, professionalism brought dividends, whilst for others, the Parent Federation PPO's, independence from the LEA brought them an advantage over the "professionals" in being able to deal effectively with parents' needs. The themes of professionalism and power are built upon in the following two chapters.

#### **4.6.2 The Statutory Assessment Process: Competing Discourses - Partnership, Mystery and Bureaucracy**

The other main theme arising from the first stage of this research was the statutory assessment process itself. This process, according to the Code of Practice, was supposed to involve partnership with parents as a key aspect of practice. Parents were to be involved and consulted at every stage, and permission sought at key points. However, parental response to statutory assessment process, as found in the interviews and discussions with different groups, suggested that the way the statutory assessment process actually works was to follow bureaucratic values which led to practice sometimes at odds with partnership. An example, quoted earlier, is the PEP refusing to allow more "parent friendly" letters for fear that the letters would not fulfil legal responsibilities. Although there were few appeals, and parents in the interview survey were in general pleased to receive the provision attached to a statement, the statutory assessment process had somehow failed to achieve: many parents still had major concerns about their child's education. Other parents seemed to have been taken through the process without any recollection or understanding. The structures needed to protect the rights of parents seemed to be helping to make the process so remote as to reduce their rights. At different levels, statutory assessment was failing to deliver: there seem to be cracks in its edifice.

#### **4.6.3 Conclusion**

Analysis of the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme to investigate a conceptualisation of partnership found partnership to be problematic, found conflicts and ambiguities in the role of the main partnership players and structural incongruities in the statutory assessment system. A phrase in a letter from the EP PPO (not the researcher), returning a completed questionnaire about the project, seemed very instructive in getting to the bottom of "the EP perspective" on partnership. The letter stated that:



"We are also learning from joint discussions with the Parent Federation about ways of ensuring positive parental involvement in assessment of need and decision making". Involvement, rather than advocacy, seems to have been a discourse underlying LEA PPO development of the project.

Partnership within the relationships of those aiming to deliver it to parents seemed to have been deconstructed to problematic and prone to power struggle. The research into the Parent Partnership Scheme therefore raises questions about whether partnership between professionals and between parents and professionals was possible, or at least about what partnership is actually able to be about, in a messy real world context.

The second case study, the subject of Chapter 5, attempted to look directly at the perceptions of all players in one statement in order to unpack these issues further, and look at implications for partnership, with parents and between professionals, and at the structure of the statutory assessment process itself. The themes from the current case study, of the Parent Partnership Scheme, will be taken up again in Chapter 6, in a discussion of the implications of both case studies.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **WHAT CAN DAVID AND HIS “ADVICE WRITERS” ADD TO THE STORY OF PARTNERSHIP?**

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The second case study involved the analysis of interviews with all participants involved in one child’s statutory assessment of special educational needs. To repeat the second research question:

*Research Questions 2: What does it mean to the stakeholders to be “partners”?*

*What are the stakeholders’ perspectives?*

The researcher aimed to make available the voices of the participants in David’s statutory assessment to the reader:

*In analysing the interviews, the researcher strove to give voice to the participants – to empathise with their view of the world and reconstruct what was said in the spirit of what was said. (Foster and Parker 1995, p166)*

A long and structured process was used to arrive at summaries of each participant’s interview(s) and at an analysis of those interviews under five main themes, with further minor themes where these presented themselves. This process can be found in detail in Chapter 3. The five main themes comprise the following: David, assessment, partnership, role and power. A diagram defining them and relating them conceptually can be found below.

**Figure 5.1 Analysis of Interviews of Participants in David's Case: Conceptual Map of Themes.**

This analysis firstly presents perspectives of the assessment. This chapter starts from the general and moves to the particular: from views about the statementing process to views of David:

**ASSESSMENT**

What do participants think about the STATEMENTING PROCESS generally  
What is it about? What happens? Has it changed? What do other participants feel about it? Is it an objective assessment of a child's needs? Is it something else, more akin to negotiation? What are participant's views on labelling in general?  
What is the emotional impact of assessment?



**DAVID**

What was the STATEMENTING PROCESS like FOR DAVID?  
What were participants' perceptions, feelings, and views of David and his situation? What views were there about labels for David?



The relationships between people involved in David's assessment are analysed next in the chapter, focusing in turn on three interconnected themes. These themes are partnership, role and power:

**PARTNERSHIP**

What were participants' relationships with others in assessment process?  
What knowledge did they have of the roles of others? What did others aim to achieve in assessment? Did participants think they were in partnership with others? What is partnership about, and is it possible?



**ROLE**

What were participants' perceptions of their own role?  
Who or what is their main concern, or their client?



**POWER**

Who did participants think held the most power in the assessment process? What indications were there of their own spheres of influence?



### ***Presentation of Analysis: Three Formats***

In this thesis the analysis of the five themes has been presented in three formats: in text and in two different visual panels presenting summaries of raw utterances. The formats are explained, in the following paragraphs:

*In the form of text, in this chapter.* The following text presents the perspectives of each person interviewed. Writing on themes form separate sections, each with concluding comments aiming to make sense of different perspectives. An analysis of David's interview is presented at the end of the chapter, in a section separate from the themes. This chapter aims to go one step further than description, to make a comparison of perspectives and some suggestion of issues arising.

*"Panels" of summaries of raw utterances taken from transcripts.* In Volume II of the thesis, in Appendix 9, there are two A3 pullout panels (sometimes more) for each theme. Each panel contains a box for each participant of a selection of their raw utterances on a particular theme. The selection aimed to give a comprehensive coverage of the range of views expressed on a particular theme. The aim was to enable the reader to have some access to the raw data, with a minimum of interpretation, but in sufficient detail to appreciate the complexity of the data and to assess the validity of the writing in the current chapter. Where there were many comments on some themes, it was difficult to be selective in the reporting of some summaries of raw utterances, such as the head teacher on "Partnership". Panels are different sizes, reflecting the differences in ranges of comments between participants. There are separate sets of A3 panels summarizing the responses of David's mother on all themes, and of David himself on the areas he spoke about. David's mother, as key to research on parent partnership, was given separate panels to enable a greater range of utterances to be presented to the reader. Themes of labelling and of the emotional impact of the statutory assessment process were additional to the five main themes, but were integrated into the theme of 'assessment' and 'David' in

the text in the current chapter. David was given separate panels to emphasise an otherwise quite hidden voice, and because his themes did not match those of other participants. He spoke on the following: behaviour (what teachers do in response to children, what happened to him), what is easy and hard at school, people you see about getting help at school, and the extra help at school. In David's panels, the true names of people have been anonymised by fictitious substitutions. From his utterances, names seemed quite meaningful to David. In the panels of other participants in the assessment, names have been substituted by the title of the job or role. The inclusion of names in these panels seemed to be confusing rather than helpful.

*In the form of visual depictions of summarised raw utterances for each person.* The panels were further condensed into an A4 summary for each theme, with small boxes for each person. The aim was to enable the reader to make, at a glance, a comparison of perspectives. All participants, including David's mother and David himself, are presented together in each A4 summary, where possible. Each summary is presented in Appendix 9 in Volume II.

A reader wishing to simply get the flavour of the results, rather than the detail, can read the conclusions of the five sections in this chapter, alongside the A4 summaries of raw utterances in Volume II, Appendix 9. The reader wishing to look in detail at the data analysis is advised to read the text in this chapter at the same time as referring to the A3 panels. Such a reader may also move between text, panels and A4 summaries, in order to appreciate the full complexity of the data, or in order to ask specific questions of the data.

All forms of data display and analysis include quotes from interview transcripts. Such quotes are followed by a number referring to the page number in the transcripts (extracts of transcripts only, available in Appendix 6). The page numbers serve only to demonstrate that they are, indeed, quotes from the interviews, not to enable the reader to

refer to the interviews. Some quotes also have an interview number, for those participants who were interviewed more than once. In all summarised raw utterances three dots indicate that text has been omitted.

Various abbreviations have been used. EP has been used at times, denoting "educational psychologist", PEP denoting "Principal Educational Psychologist", and SENCO for "Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator". A glossary is provided at the start of this thesis of all abbreviations used.



## **5.1 ASSESSMENT: The Context in which Partnership Operates**

Participants' views of assessment show every different perspectives of the process they were involved in together. Views have implications for partnership possibilities, and add a further dimension to participants' perspectives of their role in the assessment process vis à vis each other. The statementing assessment process was seen by many to be problematic and alienating.

### **5.1.1 David's Mother**

David's mother had not wanted a statutory assessment to be carried out, but had not challenged it. She had not, despite her background as an educational professional, known when the assessment process had started or who was on the panel. The final statement was, however, one that she approved of:

*I think it says, the statement says, that he has specific learning difficulties and the main thing that is the first thing that is tackled is the help so that he can, that his work will match his ability, do you know what I mean? Or reflect his ability.*

*... That some of time should be spent in, when it's actually been broken down from the original statement, that some of the child should be spent in him to follow adult direction, turn taking in games, and things like that, behavioural, yes, yes. (David's mother, interview 3, p1)*

Assessment was seen in terms of a negotiation: "I suppose, the negotiation has been, sort of, the negotiation of the difference between making David OK for school and making school OK for David" (interview 3, p20). Taking sides, seeing things as "black and white" were mentioned in several places. David's mother struggled throughout the whole process to maintain a view of David as primarily having learning difficulties. She had challenged the report written by the school to request a statutory assessment. She asked that it put more emphasis on "educational things" (interview 3, p3). David had been central to the process in some ways, but unaware of what was going on "He's central to us, but ... (...) we're hidden from him" (interview 3, p19).

The affective side of assessment, for those involved, is rarely highlighted. David's mother did not want statementing, hated all the meetings, found the time David was excluded from school a "nightmare", and found the whole time very unpleasant. Despite her feelings overall about meetings, the involvement of her friend as named person she described as "great", since it led to a 3 or 4 way conversation. The time taken by the assessment was "maddening". She had been very angry with David when he was expelled, and described feeling the lack of fairness that she was being put in this position. She described David as sorry and nervous, wanting to change schools. Whilst she did not want this to happen she was absolutely determined he would not go to a PRU (pupil referral unit).

Overall, David's mother seemed to see statementing as a process that was overly legalistic. Her view was that it should be abandoned in favour of better meeting children's needs within the usual process of teaching in school. However, her responses indicated that statementing had, at least, provided her with the outside professionals who had been able to help her avoid the "behavioural" label for David and secure for him an "educational intervention."

### **5.1.2 Head Teacher**

The head teacher seemed to be someone who could see both sides of an issue, and statementing was a prime example of this. She could describe positive aspects of statementing: that it brought the views of lots of people together, that what was written had to be shared with parents. She articulated problems in the process, including labelling children, the time it took, and the paperwork. However, her "even handed" approach was evident in her statement of a positive side to the time taken. She expressed the view that, despite not having the statement, David had been shown to be more manageable after time had passed. The head teacher could see assessment as both objective and subjective. She recognised the need for "hard evidence" but saw what counts as a serious behaviour problem to be a subjective decision. She could see the

way other children would David up, could see some of his behaviour as “naughty 7 year old”, and could see other behaviour from David as simply unacceptable. Her responses indicated she recognised that David would not stick out at all in another school. However, she said she could see a role for flexibility in the process, to meet her need for some interim support. She also recognised the difficulties in administering such interim support fairly. In the “good old days” days there would, she said, be small enough classes and enough support staff that relationships formed would have prevented problems such as David’s. However, in the current situation, statementing was the only avenue for her. And all she wanted was support – which is what she now had. She would have preferred something to tackle behaviour. However, she seemed to recognise that this was improbable, since the options in the LEA would likely to be directed at children with more “extreme” problems. And whilst she was content to have the current statemented help, she could not see any solution should there be any further major problems. The whole process, in dealing with David’s problems and trying to get help, had seemed to be a quite painful one for her.

Her approach seems to be epitomised in the following quote:

*You know, this, when you’re looking at both sides of the case, sometimes I wish I was more black and white, because it would be easier, you know. (head teacher, p8)*

### **5.1.3 Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

The SENCO’s utterances indicated she was far more positive about the statementing process. She was very frustrated with the time it had taken. She could see no need for delay now that the statement had been agreed (with David’s mother) and she was ready to work with David. She saw the assessment as having power. It provided evidence, she indicated, that David was intelligent, had unmatched abilities, and that his frustration turned to anger. Her responses indicated she felt great responsibility in being the advice writer since acquiring resources depended upon what was written in the report. However, she also seemed to have confidence in her own ability to be listened to by the panel. She



saw the process as improved by new instructions about report writing. Her unanswered questions about David, which the assessment had done nothing to resolve, included why was he so angry? And, how could his anger needs be catered for?

#### **5.1.4 Class Teacher**

The class teacher saw the assessment process as one involving chance; "it is very hit and miss" (p13). He indicated he perceived it to be about time delays and paperwork. His language carried a discourse of disillusionment. He said he knew that the assessment consisted of various professionals, such as educational psychologists and doctors, putting forward their views. He did not know who looked at the papers, and said decisions were made according to immediate financial constraints: "if they've got a pile of twenty and they've only got money for ten..." (p14). People involved had, he said, pre-conceived ideas about David. He indicated several times that the time taken for the assessment had been problematic and the effects of provision from the statement had come too late. The process seemed to have little importance for him since David's problems had been known about for a long time and should have been sorted out earlier. He said there should be a process for getting help earlier without waiting for the assessment.

His comments on the assessment process can be read in conjunction with his perceptions about David's main problems, and his views of how to tackle those problems. He acknowledged that what David really needed was help with his academic work. He also spoke about David's academic problem being initially overshadowed by his behaviour problem, and this only coming to the fore once his behaviour had improved. He briefly acknowledged that if help had been given earlier, David's problems would have been handled in terms of a behaviour problem, and the desired outcome might not have occurred.

From the perspective of the class teacher, there seemed to be particular contradictions in the management of behaviour problems within the statementing process. Quick response by the LEA could have meant suggestions relating only to behaviour – i.e. alternative provision, which seem to deny recognition of learning problems. However, it could also have meant the allocation to David of support staff who might have noticed David's academic problems.

### **5.1.5 Educational Psychologist (EP)**

The educational psychologist said she saw statutory assessment as “an unnecessarily legalistic procedure”. In her view, the recent Code of Practice had resulted in schools exerting a more “intensive bureaucratic push” to improve reports and achieve secured resources. She indicated she would like to scrap the statutory process of assessment. She saw it as a red herring to the real task of changing attitudes and working out how to organise teaching in order to help a child. Those involved spent all their time on the assessment. This resulted in parents and schools thinking that once they had a statement they were going to get what they need. In reality, she saw the possible outcomes from statementing as very limited. Once the statement was issued there was then an even greater task in deciding how best to use the resources to support the child. Stages 1 to 3 (of the Code of Practice) were often the most fruitful and time should, she believed, be focused on working together to look at the current situation, assessing the situation that could best bring about learning. The educational psychologist would prefer to ignore statementing. It had interfered so much with her evaluation of her own work in schools that it has precipitated her decision to leave the profession.

### **5.1.6 Named Person**

David's mother's named person did not feel the statementing process was a good idea, since it “can be used to let the school off the hook” by giving a legitimate way of excluding a child from education. She felt it would provide David with a stigma he could not get away from, and it was a system that was no good in its current form. Ideally, she would have all children assessed to find out their educational needs.

She described the school as wanting the statement to provide a “behaviour” label either to enable them to acquire more staff or to exclude David, but she said a behaviour statement would not address David's problems:



*Because, I mean, which comes first, the chicken or the egg. Are his behavioural difficulties the result of his educational needs not being met, or, there's no answer, and you don't know, so I think to, just to bung a label onto somebody really is quite unfair.*  
(named person, p11)

The named person's view was that an assessment should aim to look at and cater for David's educational needs.

The named person confirmed the affective impact on David's mother of the statementing process: "incoherent (in meetings) when stressed", "very distressed", "in a turmoil", "went to pieces (in meetings)". The strength of parental emotions in such a situation meant, she said, that David's mother's had no opportunity to benefit from her professional knowledge.

### **5.1.7 Clinical Psychologist**

The clinical psychologist stated that her role in the statementing process was "almost accidental" (interview 2, p1) and that she paid little attention to it. Like the occupational therapist, her involvement did not depend on the statementing process. Children she was working with may be statemented at any time during her work with them, or not at all. However, unlike the occupational therapist, her responses indicated she had a clear idea of what statementing involved and who had to provide reports. For her it seemed to involve reams of paper, which sometimes lead to appropriate help and at other times, little help. She described the educational psychologist as co-ordinating statementing:

*...As far as I can see, what the process consists of is a child being identified somewhere, or by somebody, who has problem with education, that perhaps, or behaviour in school, which calls for some kind of special assistance or special needs to be catered for. And I would see the main person being involved in that, or certainly co-ordinating it, would be the educational psychologist, who in addition to his or her own assessment, which is always very comprehensive, would also gain information from other people who are involved with the child, including the school doctor, perhaps the GP if that's relevant, speech therapy, paediatrician, etc, and myself, if I get involved. (clinical psychologist, p3)*

Her assessment would, she indicated, involve looking at the following aspects of a child's functioning: emotional, cognitive, neurological and possibly attainment (reading and spelling).

Objectivity was possible, and was important to her. From her responses it seemed to involve commenting on the positives as well as the negatives, recognising a variety of factors in a child's life, providing evidence for views of the child and formulating problems in a way that makes sense with the intent of trying to help the child. Objectivity helped to protect the child by ascertaining his or her needs.

### **5.1.8 Senior Clinical Medical Officer (SCMO)**

For the Senior Clinical Medical Officer the assessment process was very much multi-disciplinary in nature, and needed to be such:

*I feel a child with special educational needs has a multi-disciplinary sort of needs and unless you approach it in a multi-disciplinary manner you will not be able to meet the child's needs effectively. (senior clinical medical officer, p6)*

She did not find any other way of describing what goes on, other than multi-disciplinary and complex, and requiring an emphasis on the child's needs first, rather than resources. Her responses indicated she recognised what statementing involved. The maintenance of children in the community was, she said, much harder than caring for ill children in hospital. She felt the assessment system worked well, that parents were happy with it, especially those who had experienced the previous system. She expressed herself as being very impressed with the way the statementing panel worked and had very much enjoyed being on the panel. A view that one person made decisions was dispelled, finding it to be very much a group decision with all pieces of advice considered seriously. She also found that the child needs were put to the fore, rather than simply slotting them into available resources. The only stresses she experienced in the process were lack of time for all the assessments and working in isolation.



The senior clinical medical officer disagreed with parents who complained about the system. She saw this as indicating parents' lack of acceptance of the limitations of their children: "they don't accept that there is a limit to what their child can achieve".

She had observed a change in practice in schools, in that SENCOs now concentrate more on the 18% who do not have statements – which she saw as an improvement. Her role had changed over the years since she too was now more involved with the 18%, not just the 2% who were statemented. Despite this, she felt that SENCOs were more discriminating now in children they selected to refer to her. This enabled her to focus her own work on children who most needed her.

The assessment process was both objective and subjective, as far as she was concerned. She stated that any process involving people and their judgement had to have some degree of subjectivity. The Senior Clinical Medical Officer was extremely positive about the system and all those working within it.

### **5.1.9 Acting Principal Educational Psychologist (Acting PEP)**

The acting PEP saw the statutory assessment process as "bureaucratic", "cumbersome", and "complex". She objected to the use of the term "statementing" to mean "an assessment", and preferred to talk about an assessment which may or may not lead to a statement. The current Act, the 1993 Education Act and its associated Code of Practice, were, she said, brought in by the government to try to save face. This was needed since, in her view, the consumer orientated 1988 Education Act had led to schools finding it easier to reject children with SEN. She also saw the current Code as unnecessary. The previous system was working well, and the Code has only added further bureaucracy and complexity. However, for her, statements were still necessary, both to protect the small proportion of pupils who had several and particular needs. It was also a better system



than in the past when a child's placement at a special school might have been a decision made by two professionals during the course of a conversation. Given that objectivity was not possible about another human being, she indicated that the educational psychologists' psychometric tools were the best EPs had for bringing greater objectivity into the process. She would like to see less time spent on the various processes of statementing, particularly tribunals. She would also like effort to be concentrated on all participants working on collaborative intervention for a child. Currently, when the educational psychologist is called, it was not to work on an intervention; it was to see LEA resources:

*...the assessment process and getting a statement is seen as access to resources as opposed to, how can this assessment inform practice of the people actually working with the child. Because even when you put additional help in, the child will still be spending the majority of his time in school, with his, you know, without any extra support, with his ordinary teachers. (acting PEP, p20)*

Controlling the LEA SEN budget was extremely difficult. It was needs led, so in a way she thought professionals had little control over it. Once a statement had been issued it was extremely hard to cease. To remove statements there would have to be an LEA policy to state what kind of need would be given extra resources. However, the acting PEP did not think that this would be possible given the complexity of children's needs or the "woolly" definition of SEN in the Act. She suggested the need to return to realistic expectations about what an education system can provide and the progress a child can make given current possibilities for provision. The culture of parent rights, and the ease in appealing, had fuelled unrealistic expectations. This made it difficult for the system to work, and left the inarticulate parents even more disadvantaged. Parents who used to refuse to have their child assessed were now clamouring for statements: there had been a cultural change.

The acting PEP provided interesting insight into how the panel had reached the decision to give David a statement focused on learning rather than behaviour. She said the assessment finding a complex combination of both learning and behavioural difficulties was not unusual. If there were evidence that some further support for learning might lead

to progress, which might in turn improve behaviour, this route would be taken in the first instance. To set up a behavioural programme without tackling the learning could, she said, "be extremely damaging" (p19), by leaving the child with an obvious source of frustration. That the child had already been having help in school, and making progress was a signal that this would be a good direction to follow. That the child's situation had been brought to the panel suggested the school did not have enough available help for the child from its own resources. However, if the extra help in school was not working, possibly because the child's self esteem was already too damaged, and the child resented the extra help, then this might be a signal to consider an option focusing more on the behaviour. The acting PEP also said that parent views influenced the decision:

*If you've got a situation that is ambiguous, and you don't go with a recommendation that you know will be acceptable to the parent, again, how do you make the argument, when the parent says I'm not accepting what you're offering, I want the other, if it is clear from the information that you've got from the assessment that it is a bit of both? How do you, you know, if it came to is, how do you sort of draw the line and say, we think you're wrong, we're going for this side of the equation?*

*...Well, again, if you're talking like you're thinking things are coming from a, from the home side, you're, the likelihood of your being able to do anything positive about that is being increased if you, in the initial stages, are going along with the, going along with in a, in a just a giving sort of way, but at least trying to carry the parent with you in saying, well, OK we've tried this, look we've still got these problems, now, let's start and address those.*

*...Yes. You have to take the longer view, yes. If a child's got emotional problems that appear to arise from problems there have been at home, you're not going to get anywhere just by sort of turning on the parents and saying, oh well, it's, that, from the parents' point of view, they're saying it's all my fault. Well, up go the defences.*

*...I mean, that's the start of getting some co-operation, and if, if that then doesn't work, you're in a strong position to say to the parent, look, we've got to start addressing these other issues. If you go in and say we think it's the EBD side, and the parent says, no, it isn't, and then you've got, again, you've immediately created conflict that's not doing anything for the child (p21).*

*...Because the work that you would do to try and help with the behaviour is going to be ineffective (p22) (acting PEP, p21-22)*

In the process of reaching a decision about the statementing, the decision seemed to be made to support the work that was already happening reasonably successfully in school, i.e. to enable David to continue to have individual help for writing. If this did not work out, then the panel would act in a different way, and might aim to persuade the parent to support a more behavioural avenue.



### **5.1.10 Occupational Therapist (OT)**

The occupational therapist expressed finding the statementing process very confusing. As the section on "power" will also demonstrate, she seemed to feel very remote from the process, and it impinged little on her work. She knew what it was, but had picked up the jargon around it from the paperwork arriving on her desk. She professed to still being unclear of certain details (i.e. the meaning of "IEP"). She saw it as a legal, and legally binding, process. Her role was very clearly to focus, in her reports, on a child's needs rather than provision. She had a set assessment and tended to write a "bog standard" comment: "Something like, this child requires ongoing occupational therapy assessment and review (interview 1, p9). She said the educational psychologist's (EP) role was central, saw them as the expert (particularly with children with behaviour difficulties), said the EP should chair meetings, and had a lot of confidence in the EP's report. She had seen a change, since the introduction of the Code of Practice, since schools were not taking a higher profile in meetings. In her view this led to less appropriate decision making. She cited, as an example, a Head teacher at a meeting unable to challenge the wishes of the parents. Statementing was objective, she thought, in the sense of everyone coming to a consensus about a child, but it was also necessarily a process of negotiation. Negotiation made it more likely that everyone involved would maintain some responsibility for the child.

### **5.1.11 Conclusion**

Attitudes of all participants to the statutory assessment process, were, overall, very negative. For most participants it was an overly bureaucratic process. For the named person it was a stigma. For the educational psychologist it detract attention from working together to find ways forward for David. For the class teacher and head teacher it was simply too late – it was needed months earlier. However, all but the class teacher, the educational psychologist and the named person could identify some positive attributes of the statementing process. The senior clinical medical offer saw few problems in



statementing: it was a way of seeing the child as a whole and within a context. The clinical psychologist and the occupational therapist both seemed to feel marginalised within the process. However, both could see benefits to the system. For the clinical psychologist it bought objectivity and for the occupational therapist it bought joint responsibility through everyone having to make a contribution. David's mother could see that the assessment had involved other people and therefore enabled the discussion about David to become less of a polarisation of views between herself and the school and more of a conversation, more of a partnership. However, her overwhelming view of the process was negative, and that it should be abandoned. The class teacher and head teacher wanted some provision of support from the LEA before the statementing process had concluded. Attaching provision to assessment mean, for the educational psychologists, that attention seemed to be deflected from action in schools to help children. The resources issue at the heart of statementing was extremely tricky for all the educational professionals.

## **5.2 DAVID: What are Participants' Conceptualisations of David's Situation?**

The interviews were analysed to find out what the different people involved in David's statement had to say about David, his situation reasons why his situation had arisen and possible ways forward. In particular, the researcher was interested in how David's difficulties were being framed by the different participants. Of interest was whether there were similarities or differences between the professionals, and between the parent and other professions.

The main finding was the variety of ways of conceptualising David's difficulties. Interviews were analysed to find whether a major "label" could be identified for each participant and whether the participants mentioned other categorisations of David's difficulties.

In broad terms, people differed over whether they saw David as having primarily behavioural difficulties or primarily learning difficulties. However, it was very difficult in most cases to classify each interviewee in a simplistic way as one or the other.

### **5.2.1 David's Mother**

David's mother related, in her second interview, her story of David's early years at school. The family first lived in a county a few miles further south. In one of her interviews she spoke of David not settling well at nursery. David's mother said this did not trouble her until David started school and a letter arrived to say the teacher was concerned that David was withdrawn and resistant to tasks such as colouring in. David had been a child who would play with Lego and his own imaginary games, but he played little with pens or painting. When there was a suggestion of problems at school she immediately thought this must be due to the break-up in her marriage. David started school six months after the marriage break and there was irregular contact with his father. As time went on and

home became more settled, she could not understand why the problems at school were continuing: "It didn't seem to fit" (interview 2, p2). The head teacher at the time advised her that David needed the belt, that she needed to be firm with him. The teacher at the time was, however, supportive. She tried to increase discipline, unable to feel strong in the face of such advice. She then felt uncomfortable, and told a friend she could not be firmer: David, she believed, did not have an undisciplined life. The teacher's observations of David were that his fine motor skills were less developed than were those of other children. David's situation became more serious as he was excluded, at the age of four, from his first school for kicking a teacher in the dinner queue. David's mother said she thought exclusion was a pointless response to David.

At the age of 6 the family moved to their current home. The head teacher at the time, of David's new and current school (not the head interviewed for this research), had been given information about David's difficulties at his previous school, but, according to David's mother, stated that there could be a clean slate. David's behaviour difficulties continued. Teachers told her that any learning difficulties were as a result of his behavioural problems. However, this did not concur with an increasingly settled home life in which major behaviour problems were absent. David's mother and her parents started to notice and to look for patterns in the nature of curricular demands on David and his behavioural outbursts, such as the Monday morning requirement to write news. The first key, for David's mother, in unlocking this problem was involvement with the clinical psychologist, in her finding of a mismatch between IQ and what David was achieving. According to David's mother, in unlocking this problem was involvement with the clinical psychologist, in her finding of a mismatch between IQ and what David was achieving. According to David's mother, the clinical psychologist made a decision that this: "isn't an emotional problem or primarily a behavioural problem or family problem... its educational and S... (the EP) should take it on" (David's mother, interview 2, p9). The second key seemed to be the arrival at the school of the new SENCO. She started helping David in the September since he had by then fallen a lot behind his peers. Such help was provided



from the school's resources, since the outcome from the statement was still undecided. The class teacher thought there were no problems in David's fine motor skills, as evidenced by his ability to draw. According to David's mother, he said David was simply being "bloody minded" (David's mother, interview 2, p10). A further key was David's mother's understanding at the time that the doctor believed David had severe fine motor problems, and had referred him for occupational therapy.

At first the strategy of the school seemed to be to call David's mother to have David sent home, which to be counter-productive since he liked to be at home. David's mother found it very helpful to talk about such issues to the clinical psychologist. A home-school contract, based on behavioural techniques was tried. Eventually, the educational help from the SENCO led to improvements in writing and his behaviour also improved such that outbursts were less frequent. However, there were still problems, and he was excluded on the day his stated help was first implemented. Once again, David's mother could see a reason for David's outburst on this occasion. Her response suggests there was too much pressure on David: the need for the 3 hours a week to "work" (researcher's emphasis) and a further pressure, David being asked to keep with him a contract and get it signed by all his teachers (David's mother interview 3, p6).

David's mother saw her son as having a high IQ, writing difficulties and behaviour that has "to be tackled" (David's mother interview 3, p6). She was very clear in her view that it was only helpful to David for his problems to be tackled from a learning perspective: for him to receive support for learning. By this she meant extra help with his writing. She also said she would like some account taken of his ability needs, but she said this was unlikely to happen. She hoped that as he became able to express himself in a written form, his "ability" needs would take care of themselves. She did not think the school understood what a problem it could be to a child to have a high ability but difficulties in writing. It had also proved to be the case that as he had been supported to develop writing his behaviour had improved. To tackle David from his behavioural needs first, would, she said, make

him feel labelled, and would require an inappropriate revision. She disagreed with the view of the school, which had been to see David mostly in terms of his behavioural problems and to intervene with behavioural techniques. However, her responses suggested that she recognised that David evidenced, at time, a major behavioural challenge for the school. She was not sure whether or not David had emotional difficulties, but did not feel that following this as a route for intervention would be helpful to him. She disagreed with the school's handling of David generally, and said that the circumstances, which came together the day he was excluded, could have been avoided. She said he had enjoyed his sessions with the special needs teacher working on his writing.

David's mother said she found the issues of labelling David's problems a tricky one to think about. At first she had expected the EP to be able to give David a label. Although she agreed (as a professional) with the EP's reasons for not fixing a label, as a mother she needed one. She sought, if there was a label for David, for it to be the "right one" and definitely no label associated with behaviour or emotional difficulties. She explored the labels "dyspraxic", "gifted" and "dyslexic". She was wary of labels due to the effect they have on expectations of a child. The only criteria for using a particular label was its ability to protect or help David (for example if he was excluded again). David's mother did not object to the school saying he misbehaves, but she did not want him labelled a behaviour problem.

### **5.2.2 Head Teacher**

The head teacher's comments about David seemed to consist of reported views or observations of David of others, generally those of class teachers, and comments about the impact David had on others. David's behaviour problems seemed to be uppermost in her concerns: his behaviour problems overshadowed any others. She asked where his anger came from, commenting that she felt he needed psychological help. She recognised some kind of educational difficulty that was not behaviour, but did not feel this was a learning difficulty. Views of David being an able child seemed to puzzle her, and



she did not accept this view, since she had noticed them more from those were new to David rather than from those “who have grown up with him” (head teacher, p11).

*And the impact he's having on the teachers as well. On his teachers, or the other children in the class, which is a worry to me that you're going to lose children, which it was at one stage. Because he's hit them, children have been frightened of him. I think he has a silent power over children, he's quite manipulative, David, he can manipulate teachers, actually. I don't know whether Mr\*\*\* has talked about this, but basically he has certainly noticed that, you know, I'll do this if you do this.  
(head teacher, p10)*

The head teacher also made comments about the management of David in the school context:

*She's only three hours a week with him, in writing, which may improve his self esteem, which may improve his behaviour, but it isn't actually tackling behaviour. We have nobody to sort of with him in PE or in the yard. We don't have him to stay at lunchtimes, you see, we're just beginning to reintroduce that. A lot of it is to do with authority funding, staffing, the size of the classes and the amount of spare people you've got. You know, at one stage when I was teaching as well, last year, when Mr.\*\*\* was absent, when he ran away, there was nobody to go and get him.  
(head teacher, p4)*

In the interview with the head teacher, she rarely expressed views or observations that are directly relating to herself. Where they were her own views, there were questions about the reasons for David's problems rather than a detailed description of the problems. She remarked that staff who had known him a long time did not comment on his positive characteristics, unlike those new to the school.

*I think I can understand him a little bit better, sort of, as to where he's coming from and where his anger is coming from. I still don't know what causes it, I mean, he's very eccentric. He has to win, it has to be about him, but I can see other people going in to that class, coming out and saying he's a very bright boy, and really all this talk about David, but he's good in the classroom and things. Which I haven't necessarily had from permanent staff, you see, who have grown up with him?  
(head teacher, p11)*

Assessment participants' views of David seem directly related to their particular role and perspective provided by the role. The head teacher has a management role in the school, and her comments about David relate to management.



### **5.2.3 Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

The school's special educational needs co-ordinator seemed to recognise a wide range of descriptors for David. Her descriptors related to both learning and behaviour difficulties. In the process of analysis, the possible contribution of summary quantitative analysis was investigated. A table was constructed to record the number of speech blocks in which a certain descriptor of David was used (not the number of times the descriptor was used). It was hoped this might help to make a generalisation that the SENCO favoured either a "behaviour" label or a "learning" label (see Appendix 8). However, it proved impossible to classify many descriptors, particularly those relating to work output, as solely "learning" or "behaviour". For example, it was difficult to see how to classify "this week he has done absolutely nothing" (SENCO, p4).

The SENCO was told about David, on arrival in the school, principally of his extreme behaviour difficulties. Her first direct experience of his difficulties seemed to be of his minimal writing and of the major differential between ability and work output. She rationalised his anger as due to frustration at not being able to get his ideas on paper. However, she did not see this as a motor problem, due to the speed at which he improved given help. Having noticed his repetitive behaviour, she wondered whether there was a slight autistic tendency. She remarked on her observation of his sadness at the lack of contact with his father, displayed when the word "dad" came up in a writing session. She was at a loss to explain why David displayed such anger when other child with the same difficulties might not do so. She seemed, to a certain extent, to separate David's behaviour difficulties from his learning difficulties, although she said that both improved dramatically after her first individual sessions with him working only on writing. She was at a loss to suggest what to do to address behaviour difficulties, and said she found learning difficulties much easier to address:

*because its not something that you can just do for an hour, three hours a week, its something that, I mean, really, say with David, bringing it back to him. Why is he*

*behaving like this when not every child who has difficulties does this badly, or as, badly is perhaps a bit judgmental, but it is bad behaviour, it is unacceptable behaviour.*  
(SENCO, p14)

The SENCO said she saw David as an intelligent child, who had done little or no writing in school for a long time and now did minimal writing. She saw in him feelings of frustration, anger, a desire to win and an ability to refuse to write, to say no. She described him as attacking children unprovoked. She remarked on his ability to pick up on the words used by adults and use them cleverly and manipulatively. He was, she thought, self conscious of his writing, so teaching him at the start of the day without obviously withdrawing him from lessons, was seen to be a good strategy for David. However, she also described him as comfortable with being out of step with everyone in other ways – because, in her eyes, clearly he was. She also saw him as gentle, thoughtful, amusing and interesting to talk to.

The SENCO's position, as an experienced teacher new to the school, seemed to enable her to give a description different from that of the head teacher and class teacher. She remarked that the staff room view of David was not a realistic one since it focused too much on negative characteristics. One could even go so far as to claim her perspective seemed independent from that of the other teachers' perspectives.

#### **5.2.4 Class Teacher**

David's class teacher recognised both behaviour and co-ordination difficulties with writing: he did not wish to call them learning difficulties. He said that the school was first concerned with David's behaviour – particularly running out of school and “going berserk” (class teacher, p2) in the classroom over seemingly small disagreements. He felt writing difficulties only came to the fore when David went into year 3, since in a mixed age class in year 2 David had been able to opt for the easier work with less writing demands. He saw David as a bright child who could read well, and was articulate and informative in class discussions. There were other aspects of David he found difficult, such as twisting round (class teacher, p3) what the teacher said. David was, he said, annoying in little

ways to other children, such as poking them. The class teacher's comments on David's need to succeed and his manipulative strategies were similar to those of the SENCO. He felt David became very frustrated about being asked to write and not wanting to or not being able to. There were indications that the class teacher felt that writing frustration did not fully explain David's behavioural difficulties. The class teacher very cautiously mentioned other possible contributory factors, such as the effect of David's father having left, and the adult way he and his mother spoke to each other. Both learning and behavioural difficulties were recognised as characterising David's problems. David's class teacher said he found it entirely reasonable that the statement addressed learning, but that he needed David's mother to show greater acknowledgement of the behavioural difficulties.



### **5.2.5 Educational Psychologist (EP)**

The educational psychologist saw David's main problem to be his relationship with peers. Having a friend at school to play with at break was extremely important to him, and being prevented from going out to play had been, in her view, the cause of most of the flare-ups. David could not see the irritation he caused to other children, and his high level of intellect and need to succeed had led him to belittle the ideas of others. She thought he felt let down by peers, although he had described having a particular friend at one stage this year. The EP also saw him as feeling aggrieved that his writing was not on a par with his intellect and that he had to have sessions with the SENCO. She thought school did not recognise his co-ordination problems (i.e. she reports them telling her he was demonstrably good at climbing trees). She saw his co-ordination problems as to do with imbalance: that his ideas were so far ahead of his ability to record them that he experienced great discomfort. His attitude to anything he found difficult in the past had been to turn off, but now he was starting to be able to practice at things, and there had been improvement recognised by all involved. Her interview responses indicated she gave minor importance to any major emotional difficulties being at the heart of his displays of anger. She saw his relationship with his mother as positive, with no great difficulties in his current family composition and residual pain due to the separation from his father. However, her responses suggested she saw it of great importance that David should learn to recognise and deal with his own strengths and weaknesses rather than continuing to learn to react manipulatively to difficult situations. His outbursts had, she said, reduced from daily to once a term:

*He has, actually, responded incredibly well to initiatives really, from not wanting to approach things that are hard for him, like writing, he is willing to practice, and he likes the idea that practice makes perfect, and he will do it in school. He'll still, he'll still feel that he is above things, that he doesn't have to do certain things, or if he is partnered with somebody else, on the computer, which we thought was a good idea, he'll rubbish this person's ideas.  
(educational psychologist, p21/22)*

David was excluded for three days in the period after a draft statement had been sent to his mother, and before a statement agreement meeting had taken place. He was involved in a situation that led to him hitting both a child and his favourite teacher, the SENCO. The EP's opinion was that this was all to do with his difficulties in dealing with peers. It was not, she thought, to do with a behavioural rewards programme, which had been given a set back, just before the incident. This used a snakes and ladders type chart in which David would go up for "good" behaviour and down for "bad" behaviour (researcher's italics).

The EP analysis was quite a complex one, focusing not on the family but on David's relationships with peers, and the difficulties experienced with peers as a result of the problems at school. Her responses indicated that she avoided the learning/behaviour dichotomy.

### **5.2.6 Named Person**

The named person described David in very varied terms, rivalling the SENCO for variety, and exceeding her in the range of positive attributes. She described him as both very active and able to spend hours on one activity using one of his many toys. She emphasised his brightness and need to move on when he had become bored. A theme in her description of David was its contrast with many of the descriptors of other professionals, particularly school professionals. She related him being very sensitive, and sociable. He was a "gorgeous kid" whose needs had always come first. She recognised that he needed to become less aggressive, but also related her view that schools did not like children, such as David, who reasoned with them: indeed they were frightened of such children. She said he was being constantly portrayed as a perpetrator when he was also a victim. The named person also described David telling his mother, proudly, that he had recently restrained himself from attacking a child who was bullying him. She said the school's action, to exclude David, would actually be seen in a positive light by him since



he would like to be at home with his mother. There was a sense, in the Named Person's descriptions of David, of "the other story" being told.

### **5.2.7 Clinical Psychologist**

The clinical psychologist's responses indicate that she saw David's problems as an interaction of home and school issues, and of the physical, psychological and environmental. This was another example of a varied description of David. She assessed him and found him to have an IQ of 135, on a particular assessment tool, which indicated to her that he was "bright". She said problems arose due to David comparing himself with peers. She also described David's problems as having an "organic" element to them (clinical psychologist 1, p6). If an emphasis exists in her description, it seems to be on the organic, rather than on emotional difficulties, when the latter might be predicted from her professional training. However, she also commented strongly on the school having some responsibility for David's difficulties. In particular she commented that being sent home acted a reinforcement for David of difficult behaviour rather than a deterrent. She also referred to an element of family problems, for example David feeling let down by his father, and the family being small therefore having little "give" and no male support. She stated the need to focus on positive aspects of David, and to recognise the improvements that he had made.

### **5.2.8 Senior Clinical Medical Officer (SCMO)**

The SCMO focused on David having "wider learning difficulties" (SCMO, p190. This included motor learning difficulties, concentration problems, and behavioural and emotional difficulties. In her responses the emphasis was on the first three, but she said that she had more recently become concerned with the latter. She said "a) he has got developmental difficulties that are innate, and b) his environment has not been very conducive, certainly not during the past few years, and certainly not now, because of the marital disharmony and also father leaving, that hasn't" helped at all" (SCMO, p22). Focused attention from his mother was recommended as a way to improve his



concentration. She referred David to the occupational therapist for help with motor difficulties, to advise the teachers and his mother. She did not think his emotional difficulties would benefit from referral to psychiatry: "There is a process that he has to go through, and with his mum being so supportive and so knowledgeable, I felt that, again, there was no need to get outside agencies involved" (SCMO, p19). She said that if his learning difficulties were addressed, his behavioural difficulties would improve.

The SCMO based some of her views on David's own perspective. She said David had spoken to her about being fed up that he could not do his work. She thought he had some, but not full, insight into his difficulties, and that this was leading in part to his behavioural difficulties.

### **5.2.9 Acting Principal Educational Psychologist (Acting PEP)**

The acting PEP's involvement with David's situation was to do with considering his case at the statementing panel. Her role was to Chair a meeting that took the decision whether a statement should be made and, if so, what should it contain. She described David very briefly as having a statement "for learning support", and being "bright", with "behavioural problems", having "motor difficulties" and "specific learning problems" (acting PEP, p18). She did not see his situation as particularly complex and said it was not unusual that a child with such combination of difficulties was brought to the statementing panel. She gave a very detailed explanation about how she reached a decision about the particular kind of provision in a statement in a case akin to David's (see the previous section in this Chapter, on Assessment).

### **5.2.10 Occupational Therapist (OT)**

A quote from one of the interviews with the OT, of her explanation of the way David was brought to her attention, is instructive in what was expected of the OT, and also of the views of the SCMO who wrote the "referral letter".

*P1 ...I'll just read out the bare bones of the referral, shall I? I'd be most grateful for your advice to Mrs ... (David's mother) and school about David, who attends St. Michael's Primary School, and is currently undergoing an assessment of his special educational needs. David is experiencing behaviour and learning difficulties in school. His main problem is with writing he has very poor fine motor and pencil control. He realises that his ability to write is rather limited, and he gets frustrated and angry. This has created problems with his behaviour at school. I saw David for his medical assessment, and found him to have poor fine motor control. He was refusing to co-operate at times, and it was clear that he gives up when he cannot perform fine motor tasks. I would be most grateful for your expert advice. Following the referral letter, David was on a waiting list for a short period of time, because I was working just by myself, and he was then asked to attend East Street Clinic on 13<sup>th</sup> June, so he did have quite a wait. (Occupational Therapist, p1)*

The OT described, from her assessment, David's gross motor skills as being "OK", as were skills indicating "body awareness" (Occupational Therapist, p2). When looking at his fine motor skills, she found that there were no problems in the mechanical aspect of writing (pencil grip, posture, control), but that David experienced considerable frustration and he was easily defeated. The OT did not observe any behaviour problems. However, the knowledge that he had been experiencing major behaviour problems in school was a major theme in the OT's responses. She was very concerned that his behaviour difficulties could be caused by a lack of attention over three years to writing difficulties. However, David also puzzled her since his writing difficulties were out of proportion with his fine motor difficulties, and she said there might be some other factors involved. David did not present with any clear motor difficulties. Despite that, her recommendation was for David to carry out a programme to improve fine motor co-ordination.

### **5.2.11 Conclusion**

All participants varied in the emphasis given to, the terminology used for, and any reasons hypothesised for the combination of problems around behaviour and learning. David's mother was very clear that his learning difficulties, his writing and spelling, should be tackled first. She was only prepared to acknowledge his behaviour difficulties provided this did not become a label or the prime focus of any intervention. The head teacher and the class teacher both emphasised David's behaviour, and termed other difficulties as

motor, or writing difficulties rejecting the term learning difficulties. They saw behavioural difficulties as most in need of being tackled. The acting PEP recognised behaviour problems and motor difficulties, and used the term specific learning difficulties. The previous section of this chapter demonstrated the way she saw parents' views and information from school about progress, as crucial to finding an appropriate panel decision. She would first aim to tackle the learning difficulty since the area was responding to help in school, and it was also the avenue favoured by the parent. The Clinical Psychologist also saw David's problems as essentially an interaction of factors, and looked to the school recognising their part in David's outbursts.

Most saw ability as crucial to understand David's problems (his mother, the named person, the EP, the SENCO, the clinical psychologist, and the OT). Others seemed to put less or no emphasis on ability (acting PEP and CMO) and two key school professionals saw it of far less importance than other factors (the head teacher and the class teacher). Participants varied in the attention they gave to other aspects of David. The SENCO and the named person gave particularly varied comments. Others focused on themes not mentioned by anyone but themselves: the EP was alone in the emphasis on concern about David's relationships with peers; the CMO focused on concentration, and the clinical psychologist was alone in the idea of an organic component. The OT seemed rather confused about David. She gave a conclusion involving "fine motor" difficulties even though the mechanical aspects of writing were there. She noted his frustration but found it difficult to articulate how this fitted the whole picture. The head teacher and class teacher were both alone in emphasising David's need to win, his manipulation of others, and the way his teachers felt challenged by the manner in which he spoke to them (although this was mentioned by the SENCO and the named person).

Participants varied in their view about what David needed. The head teacher seemed to feel David needed psychological help, the class teacher saw the current three hours in the statement was now sufficient, but that more help had been needed a year earlier. The



medical personnel were all satisfied with help for learning. The EP's responses suggested her main view was that the three hours provision was of less importance than changing attitudes and everyone trying to work together to find little ways forward. Some professionals did not express themselves to be greatly alarmed by David's emotional state. The EP felt there were no major difficulties in the family; the clinical psychologist saw no need for David to have been referred again to her; and the CMO felt any residual disturbance from David's father leaving could be worked out between David and his mother. However, three people (his mother, the head, OT and the SENCO) expressed the need to find out the reason for the severity of his anger.

The discussion chapter will consider the meaning of such a varied assessment of the same child. One might have expected a more or less similar view of the child from all participants, and such a variation raises questions about notions of objectivity and rationality that might be assumed to underlie a process of multi-disciplinary assessment. In particular, the discussion will look at participant views of David from the needs of their particular roles, and their different professional perspectives.

## **5.3 PARTNERSHIP**

What are the participants' experiences of and views of parent partnership? What are views of partnership with other professionals?

The picture of partnership given by all those involved was a complex one, broadly framing partnership as problematic, but not universally so in any simple way. Once again, there were very different perspectives on partnership.

### **5.3.1 David's Mother**

Partnership was a complex affair for David's mother. Her responses indicated that partnership with other professionals was several things for her. It was, all at the same time – possible, was to be fought for, was implicit in her relations with others, and was impossible. She thought partnership was a compromise and that true partnership in the assessment was not possible. She defined partnership as "having open and honest communication and feeling comfortable in communicating" (David's mother, interview 3, p29).

The final statement she viewed as a "sort of compromise", since it was an "educational statement" (David's mother, interview 3, p1). It gave educational support but also mentioned social goals amongst the educational skills to be acquired.

David's mother saw partnership with the school as particularly problematic. Factors working against partnership included the lack of time to build up a relationship, the power imbalance between her and the school, and the personalities and attitudes of those involved. She had worked hard to be a partner and to reduce her powerlessness. Factors contributing to this were discussed in the section on power. However, the main factor contributing to difficulties in partnership seemed to be a gulf between her and the school in their purposes.

*you say we're all, or they say we're all on the same side and it's only David's interests that we're thinking of, but the way I think of David's interests and the way school think of him, there's like, an ocean apart, isn't there? ... I know there are another 99 children in the school, but I don't have to think about them.  
...There is a difference. There is a difference between, I mean, David's, I want what's right for him exclusively. They want what's right for him in a context...  
(David's mother, interview 3, p30)*

At the centre of this case was the disagreement, referred to in the previous section, about the significance to be given to David's learning and behavioural difficulties in conceptualising his educational needs, and in how to construct those difficulties. For David's mother, partnership seemed to occur more when she said the school were recognising her own perspective of David. She cited two instances of changes in the attitude of the class teacher towards her own perspective. One was a change, in the class teacher's construction of David's resistance to writing. According to David's mother, the class teacher first saw David's resistance as a refusal to comply with instructions being given ("bloody mindedness", interview 3, David's mother, p11). He now seemed to see David's refusal as related to the level of difficulty experienced by David in doing the task, to some educational problem experienced by David. At one meeting she said the class teacher had a fixed view and would not change. However, she reflected that his view had later changed such that he now recognised David's educational needs. On a different occasion the class teacher had disagreed with someone saying David had a high IQ. David's mother had challenged this, saying it was not an opinion one could disagree with, since it was the result of an "objective test" (interview 3, David's mother, p14).

There were times when partnership was particularly difficult. When David was excluded she said they had needed almost to renegotiate David's situation, despite the fact that the draft statement had just been issued. At the start of the statementing process, the school were "at the end of their tether" (interview 3, David's mother, p12) and were primarily interested in answers, a package, to solve the problem of David. At this point in the process she said voices like that of the clinical psychologist could not be heard (i.e. constructing David as a very bright child frustrated by his writing skills).



David's mother referred to a feeling of lacking confidence in dealing with school, and the importance of support from the EP or the named person to help provide that confidence. She said she felt more in partnership with other professional outside the school, than with the "school" itself. She also felt more in partnership with the SENCO. This may be because her role appeared rather than detached from that of the head teacher or the class teacher. The SENCO had played an important role for David's mother. At the early difficult meetings, as a newcomer to the school the SENCO mainly listened. The SENCO started working with David for five minutes each morning – and things started to improve. Amongst the improvements David's mother listed were changes in attitudes towards David, and changes in David himself. She related the SENCO's reference to David's behaviour problems at this time:

*she (the SENCO) says to me, mind, that it isn't just that that's the problem, she'll still say that to me, that he's got attitudes that could do with changing. Which I don't disagree with. But certainly from sort of her input, things have changed. David's changed, and attitudes towards him have changed. (David's mother, interview 3, p16)*

The head teacher focused, in David's mother's view too much on "the school" with not enough concern for the individual. She said the head teacher referred more than once to the "other 99 children", referring to those in the school who were not having a problem. It seemed to her as if, as soon as a child had a problem they ceased to be a member of the 99. There would, David's mother said, always be a limit on partnership with the school in a situation like David's, because the school could always exclude him.

When criticising the school, David's mother was quick to say that she recognised what they were trying to do. She recognised the difficult task they had in meeting individual needs in large classes, and that the school honestly cared for David and wanted to help him. She seemed to step a difficult path in trying at the same time to partner David, to assert her view of his difficulties, and being "fair" to the school about the more general demands upon them and the efforts they were making with David.

David's mother had no idea, before they were involved, what the role of either the educational psychologist or the clinical psychologist would be. The role of the doctor continued to puzzle her. There were aspects of the roles of all the professionals that concerned her. She did not like the "clinical" title of the clinical psychologist, since it was associated with being medically ill. The involvement of a doctor concerned her since she associated it with concerns about the parental care of a child. She had a very general, but major concern, about what David would think of her in later life when he realised he had been to see all these professionals. However, she said she had no choice. She said that at one time in the assessment she had been willing to look at any interpretation of David's difficulties, even her own parenting, if this would lead to an improvement in the situation. She did not ask for anyone in particular, just someone to offer psychological help. She thought the educational psychologist would be able to diagnose David and affix a label, such as dyspraxic or dyslexic.

The statement agreement meeting was reported by David's mother to be a particularly positive experience: "they had a strategy there, what they were going to do and what he needed and how they were going to work with him" (David's mother, interview 3, p17).

She saw the main role of the educational psychologist being to bring the different sides into dialogue, away from their opposing viewpoints. In other words, to bring the participants into partnership. This was, for her, an empowering experience. Perhaps partnership can be achieved in a situation of opposing viewpoints as long as each side feels genuinely listened to. She did not complain about having her head banged metaphorically together with that of the school, since it had the effect of her voice being heard.

Having a named person at meetings had made a great difference to David's mother. They had not spent a lot of time discussing the named person role: she was there as a

friend she could trust, and as a person with professional experience of meetings. The presence of her friend as named person had added a voice to the proceedings that was similar to hers. The named person had helped her reconstruct meetings after the event and was someone else remembering things to say during the meeting. David's mother's description of the named person's main role was similar to that of the named person herself (see the later section in this Chapter on Role, for the named person). As a result of the actions of both the EP and the named person David's mother said meetings were now more of a dialogue, a three way conversation, rather than "the school and me" (interview 3, p10). She likened this to a move towards partnership. Crucial for David's mother was that the school was recognising David's needs. It did not matter, fundamentally, for David's mother whether the learning difficulties had caused the behaviour difficulties or the converse – what mattered for her was achieving support likely, in her view, to help David. This was support directed at his learning difficulties.

She longed to return to a very different relationship with the school: "the only contact I would have with the school would be at parents' night and selling the jam at the summer fair, that would be my ideal relationship with the school" (David's mother, interview 3, p28). As a parent she had not chosen to have a child who experienced difficulties, and she had done as much as she could to work alongside the school. However, she had found she was partnering the school too much and had needed to step back from the school in order to realign herself with David. However, now, the statement having been resolved, she seemed to have reached a point at which she said, that she really wanted to hand over to the school. She seemed to have "good enough" resolution to her actions with the school to meet David's educational needs, when she said, "what was happening was in David's best interests" she wanted to take a back seat and allow the school to do their job.

At one point in her interviews David's mother did, in fact, agree to label herself as a partner in the assessment process. This seemed only to be possible for her once she had



obtained a statement acceptable to her. She also said she felt involved in the assessment, particularly by the educational psychologist, and had been able to comment on a school report. She seemed to construct the production of the final statement as representing a kind of ending point (“now its all over” interview 3, p26) in a process that was nevertheless continuing.

### **5.3.2 Head Teacher**

Many of the head teacher's comments related to others she worked with in connection with David, to her relationship with them. To some extent, therefore, many of her comments could be said, by virtue of them being to do with relationships, to say something about partnership.

The head teacher did not seem to occupy a strong position of partnership with others in the assessment process. She disagreed with David's mother over ways to meet David's needs, but said she recognised that David's mother understood difficulties resourcing the school. She seemed to distance herself from the SENCO's perspective on David. This was evidenced by her comments that the only staff who spoke of him as very able, a view she did not hold, were those who had not “grown up” with David. She said she felt a partner with the EP, but felt the EP would only understand their problems if she experienced them at first hand – that is if the EP had to deal herself with David in the “middle of a scenario” (head teacher, p6). She felt remote from the statementing process and let down by the LEA when resources were not provided prior to statementing.

The head teacher's perspective seemed to be one that fully realised the inherent difficulties in the situation of her role as head teacher in acting in partnership when there were so many potentially conflicting agendas amongst the participants.

### **5.3.3 Class Teacher**

The class teacher expressed feeling quite remote from the process of statementing because he felt decisions had sometimes already been made before receiving the input of others. When asked if other professionals had been of help in the assessment, he expressed positive and negative views. He said they had helped bring opposing views together, the “academic” side and the “behaviour” side (class teacher, p9). However, he said there had been a lack of any specific help in dealing with David’s behavioural outbursts. The EP had given him what he saw as the “usual” (class teacher, p9) advice of no confrontation, a policy he already generally adopted in his management of behaviour. He said he thought David’s mother had slightly changed her view, that whilst she still saw David’s problems as mostly academic, she now recognised the behavioural. A home school reporting system, using a book, had broken down. David had found ways for negative comments to be concealed from his mother, such as by hiding the book, and his mother had been reluctant to receive negative comments at home.

Detailed conclusions cannot be drawn about the class teacher’s relations with most participants. However, his responses suggest a feeling of lack of partnership in the statementing process, but some constructive involvement with certain individuals in dealing with David’s problems.

### **5.3.4 The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

When asked if partnership could describe her role with other professionals, or some other word, the SENCO said she had a partnership role. Other responses suggested this was particularly so with respect to teachers and the EP. Her approach with teachers involved suggesting certain strategies to try with David. She expressed being on the same wavelength as the current EP and knew, she said, that the statementing panel always respected her advice (her report). She felt her age and experience as a teacher gave her credibility.

However, her position in the assessment process was a complex one. She stated that her relationships with the teaching staff had not been a problem, but that the class teacher listened to her ideas for managing David with some reluctance. She was also involved in negotiating with David's mother and the class teacher a report system which could communicate to his home any negatives in David's behaviour. However, she was aware that David's mother did not want to hear about the negatives. She valued the input of the educational psychologist who made the debate an "academic" one, rather than an "emotional" one:

*(David's mother) is articulate and she knows quite a lot, and she's very interested, and she's not, she's not doing anything except what most intelligent, articulate mothers would do, which is to defend her child. I mean, she's not being unreasonable in her defence at all, I don't think. I think it's quite reasonable what she's doing. So, but, I say, just one person against half a dozen, even though we didn't have it in for her or anything like that, didn't have it in for David or anything like that, but we were all sort of saying, look, this child's behaviour is dreadful, and she was saying, but it isn't, and then you've got to find some way, haven't you? (The EP) was very good about ... about defusing it, not talking about learning and behaviour but talking about David, do you know what I mean?  
...I think she actually said that, you know. We're in conflict here, you're talking about his behaviour and you're talking about his learning, let's not have two sides, let's, and that was a good thing.  
...We talked about what David's needs are, and his needs are for him to get more to grips with his learning. Now, how we do that, that is more open to debate, but it's an academic debate, not an emotional debate. (SENCO, P12)*

Partnership, for the SENCO, seems to involve some conflict, but essentially finding ways through difficult situations to work together, through listening and respecting. Partnership seemed to involve a level of real engagement with other. However, the reader may choose to interpret the conflict implicit in the SENCOs relations with others as a lack of partnership, and blinkered thinking.

### **5.3.5 Educational Psychologist (EP)**

For the educational psychologist working in partnership with parents was central to her work and was how she would approach any other person. Involvement was the same as partnership. Partnership involved: honouring the difference in roles; not deskilling oneself as a professional; and recognising parents' superior level of engagement with their child.



*...It's not a matter of equality or expertise, it's a matter of mutual respect. You know, I don't think we should pretend we are all on a level, that kind of partnership. Or that we have equal parts to play. It's about becoming involved together, and honouring what each other can give. And they'll be different contributions.*

*...Well, I, as a psychologist, I suppose that the knowledge that one has of general child development, and the ways things can work and change, and the educative processes, things that enhance learning, things that get in its way. And that sort of background, is going to be helpful. Because you are planning an educational intervention.*

*...The parents would obviously bring their bonds with their own children, their own concerns. Their minute knowledge of how things work from morn till night, the whole history of development, and going through a day with a parent you can learn much, much more than a minute observation. We just have, as psychologists, very rare, little glimpses, bits of observation, and we can check out with parents whether that is normal, or regular sort of way of behaving, or response to a particular situation, or whatever. (EP interview, p2)*

She was able to clearly delineate in her mind the different roles of the parent and the EP, and had a very clear view of what partnerships involved. However, she recognised it as a kind of utopian deal. Certain things mitigated against partnership, including pressure groups that encouraged parents to see themselves as "treated with less than they deserve" (EP, p4). Other barriers to partnership were parents who sought their own needs and status rather than the needs of their child, and a statementing system that encouraged seeing answers as residing with resources. The EP said she had experienced very little conflict with parents and had hardly ever been unable to work with in partnership with parents.

In David's case she saw for herself a very clear active partnership role, to work to encourage less polarisation of the views of participants. She saw the school as saying David had mostly emotional difficulties, and the mother as saying it was only a learning difficulty and not wanting David to be singled out. She saw David as very remorseful for his actions in school. A way of achieving partnership in such a difficult situation was to suggest intervention from someone outside the school, such as the clinical psychologist. This, her responses suggested, would enable David's mother to have a more private forum in which to look at David's behaviour. It also gave the school a way of agreeing to

continue to keep David on role when his actions might usually have led to permanent exclusion.

Partnership with all participants in the assessment process seemed to be, from her comments, something to be achieved through hard work rather than a prior assumption of working relationships. It also seemed to characterise her general approach to all those she worked with.

### **5.3.6 Named Person**

For the named person, partnership did not exist – people just paid lip service to it. She explained her perception of partnership with reference to two aspects of her involvement with David's mother, the meetings she has attended, and a snakes and ladders game suggested as an intervention with David.

In meetings, the named person had always had a sense of “them and us” (named person interview, p13). She described others at the meeting sitting in two allied pairs, the head teacher and class teacher, and the SENCO and EP. She said the head teacher and class teacher sat very much apart from David's mother and herself. The named person described the SENCO as being positive about David, the EP as saying less than she would have expected, but still not feeling that the SENCO was acting in partnership with her and David's mother. For this to happen, she would need the SENCO to offer David's mother some time sitting talking, informally, the two of them, about David's needs:

*the woman who was giving David extra tuition, the support teacher, she was sat at the far end of the table, and then there was S... sitting next to her. So it was a kind of six.*

*...Well, they were the best. ..S... was, that was the first time I had met her, and I think she said less than I would have expected, but then possibly she didn't know David that well. Now, the support teacher said, she was the most positive, and she was trying to sort of, desperately trying to come up with something. I think she quite enjoyed the times that she's had with Davie, one to one, and she was really desperately trying to come up with some kind of like, you know, let's try this, let's try that, not wanting to give up on him.*



*...Had she (the SENCO) said to (David's mother), look, let's us get together, just the two of us, I mean, is there a barrier between teacher and parent? I don't know. But I expected her to say, can you pop in for half an hour one day and we'll just go through some, and there was none of that kind of informality. That I think there needs to be. I think the child spends most of its working time at school.  
(named person, p13)*

The snakes and ladder intervention demonstrated the difficulties in partnership. Partnership, for the named person, was for David's mother, as parent, to be consulted as the expert on her child, David. At one meeting an intervention was discussed to encourage better behaviour, involving the snakes and ladders type behavioural chart referred to earlier in the section on "David". The idea of the chart was that David would earn points for good behaviour and lose them for bad behaviour. The named person suggested at the time just staying still for bad behaviour (rather than losing points), and David's mother said the programme would not work at all. However, the named person's suggestion was not taken on board, and she thought David's mother was not able to put across her view. David's mother had also suggested that David should be allowed to use a computer at school for writing, and this suggestion did not seem to have been followed up. Despite what they both thought about the snakes and ladders intervention, the named person described David's mother presenting herself in a meeting as if she was pleased about it. David's mother was so relieved that the school was at last suggesting ways forward rather than listing his misdeeds. The named person also noted that having suggested the snakes and ladders game, they also suggested other areas for action. However, she also expressed being sad at the level of excitement in the room, when it was over a way forward which was likely to fail. To her it felt like "two steps forward and five steps back" (named person, p14).

For the named person, partnership would also involve providing David's mother with support, from someone within the school environment, who had been through the process before, or an outside professional. Partnership would involve reassuring parents, right at the beginning, that something was not necessarily their fault. The named person felt partnership would involve constructive conflict because the process was multi-disciplinary



and involved more than just parents and teacher, “people have different views, and all views need to be acknowledged, discussed. We none of us hold the answers, and I think a little bit of everybody’s input might work a little bit better” (p28).

The level of distress in meetings experienced by David’s mother, described by both the named person and David’s mother in their interviews, suggested a process far from the image of partners meeting together for rational discussions. Partnership seemed to be won at a cost. In this example the cost was that of keeping quiet about an opinion that a particular plan had severe problems, in order to maintain a feeling of working positively together on ways forward. Parents were seen as having a very important contribution. The named person also saw parents as having needs which, she believed, should be met by the school. This included the need to be supported and to be told they are not to blame.

Several aspects of the named person’s interview confirmed David’s mother’s perspective on partnership. She spoke of David’s mother’s level of distress experienced during the assessment. She also spoke of David’s mother’s good will towards the school and efforts to see things from their perspective – but in the end having to choose between this and being a mother to David.

*And it’s no, no matter how well structured she had herself and written down, she was still, it was still a distressing situation for her, to be sitting there, you know, to be told that your child is disruptive and that he’s stuck a pen in another child and, etc., and kicked a teacher, you know, it’s not very pleasant. And the turmoil, I think, I mean, we discussed it afterwards, and B... said she wanted what they needed to do, but also she was, as a mother she was horrified to think that that was her child they were talking about. And yet, I mean, I felt as well in the meeting that there was no, initially, the first meeting I went to, there was no support for her.  
(named person, p5)*

### **5.3.7 Clinical Psychologist**

A major theme in the interview with the clinical psychologist was her concern about her role as a psychologist in the multi-disciplinary team in which she worked, with psychiatrists

and nurses. She felt uncomfortable with those in her team from other professions. The professionals in her team devalued the skills of the psychologist; or did not know what the psychologist did. Psychology seemed to be regarded as something easily picked up by a lay person and one of the clinical psychologist's managers did not know what a psychologist did:

*...you don't get builders who are addressing a building problem being composed of plumbers and hairdressers, you know. It just doesn't make sense to me... they're asking me to sell my skills and I say why, why should I? ' Does anybody tell me how to be a child psychiatrist or a paediatrician? ... And if psychology is such an easy thing that it can be dispensed to somebody. Yes. One of the psychiatrists said to me recently that he and I did the same thing. And I said, it isn't the same. For one thing, he got paid much more, even though my salary was good. I said, apart from anything else, I've done about six years of psychology at university, I think you might have done six hours. ... And they did teacher things, they did social work things, they did speech therapy. They didn't do psychology things. Psychology was done by psychologists, and very well. (clinical psychologist, interview 1, p10)*

Although she agreed that she should liaise with others on a case, she would do so because of the particular role or skills the other person brought. She said she had an obligation to discuss David with her team but did not feel referral to any of the other professionals in the team would be needed. He had already had a medical examination, and her responses indicated that she was concerned that a referral to the psychiatrist would lead to prescribing medication for David to control his behaviour. She said any further referral would only label David further and might be used by the school in a way detrimental to David. Liaison with others was important, but she said it was important to be selective and to limit the numbers of others. At the end of the day the clinical psychologist would still have to take a decision herself: she saw two heads as better than one, but twenty different opinions was problematic. Problems occurred in teams due to inequalities between the professionals, and people trying to do the same job as others rather than keeping to their own professional role.

*...So it's important that when you're working in a multidisciplinary fashion, that you've got multidisciplinary people. And this is where this falls down, in the sense that everybody in this department says they're doing the same thing. We've even had a message from the manager, that everybody must go out and do what (the clinical psychologist) does. (clinical psychologist interview 2, p12)*



The clinical psychologist preferred working with other psychologists, and was very comfortable with her role with respect to educational psychologists: "because we're doing the same thing, there is a sort of understanding about what the other person might be doing, and you can know when to stand back...or come in" (clinical psychologist interview 1, p4). She would allow the EP to include parts of her report in theirs. She would always contact the EP if she was going into a school and would be uncomfortable if her view of a child conflicted with theirs. She thought other EPs should pay closer attention to scores on psychometric tests of ability.

Partnership, one hundred percent partnership, with parents was not possible. Her responses indicated that she saw parents more as "informers" and certainly as very knowledgeable about the child. She did not see parents as customers (since they did not have choice of service). They were usually seen as part of the problem, as clients with the child. The clinical psychologist's aim was not so much to partner parents as to make an ally of parents so they could work together. Occasionally partnership was possible. She felt in partnership with David's mother since she saw the mother as very concerned for her child and as intelligent. The clinical psychologist stated that she empathised with David's mother. David's mother had seen the clinical psychologist to talk over her own worries. This suggested to the clinical psychologist that she was seen as an ally, being outside the system.

The clinical psychologist was very clear in her assertion that, aside from her team, the educational players close to David needed to work harder to find reasons for his behaviour. She was very concerned that he had been referred to her a second time, now that he had been allocated statemented support and his behavioural and learning difficulties had both improved. She was concerned that one temper tantrum at school had led to exclusion, and blamed the school for not being able to contain him. She expressed the view that the school might not be pleased that they could not cope with a bright child who had a problem, and that they actually wanted rid of him.



Barriers to partnership included parents not attending, not being interested in their child, lacking insight, and not attending voluntarily. Another barrier was the manner in which parents perceived the clinical psychologist's role, as waving a magic wand to cure the child. The clinical psychologist's expectation was that the parents would work hard to change the situation. In situations involving child protection issues partnership with parents was never possible for the clinical psychologist. However, parent's need to protect their child meant that they might not let their child have what was "best" for them:

*...I would say (parents know) probably a hell of a lot, actually. It's their child. But they're going to be biased, aren't they? ...Because the, the thing you want to do above all else is to protect your child ... And that's what (David's mother) said. She wanted to protect David. And I could see that no, that if something were decided for David which the school psychologist, which the Education people, everybody thought was good, if it didn't seem good to (David's mother), she would be unhappy with it, because, yes, the medicine may be good, but it tastes nasty and therefore you can't give it to him.*

*(clinical psychologist, interview 2, p22)*

She approached the question of the meaning of partnership in a very explorative manner, looking at various aspects of her relating to parents, and looking at her own interaction with professionals for insight into the concepts of partnership. For example:

*And I'm trying to think of me going along for advice. I mean, I might go to the GP and ask for advice about my health, or something. Is that a partnership? ... But we're partners, I suppose, in the sense that we're working together, and he's giving me a prescription, and he's relying on me to take it. And if I don't take it, I'm not working in partnership with him ... perhaps if we could describe the relationships here between parents and myself, I would say it is a partnership of difference sometimes. People are coming along for advice, to ask someone for help. They're not going along to their solicitor or the GP or the bank manager, but they've come here.*

*(clinical psychologist, interview 2, p20)*

### **5.3.8 Senior Clinical Medical Officer (SCMO)**

The Senior Clinical Medical Officer saw the partnership as involving parents in professionals' efforts to meet the child's needs. The professional's task was to demonstrate to the parent the child's need and difficulties. She seemed to take parents' views very seriously, similarly the views of children – and spoke of extending parent partnership to the child. She said most parents were happy with the assessment process.

There were issues about how the SCMO defined partnership. She said partnership could work against the parents, against their feelings, since the presence of the voices of so many professions can make parents doubt themselves. However, professional involvement was ultimately for the child's benefit. She acknowledged difficulties in working with some parents. When parents have views that differ from those of the professionals, these were seen by her to represent difficult cases. Her response would be to repeat tests or explanations to show parents what she meant. She cited two examples of cases where a named person was involved. One was described by her as being difficult and had involved the named person agreeing with the parent, and the child being taken away from the school suggested by the professionals. The other had involved the parent agreeing with the professionals. The Senior Clinical Medical Officer seemed to take a very clear and unproblematic position regarding partnership. She spoke about all those she worked with in extremely positive terms.

*Yes, I think, I have to say that we are extremely lucky in Newby, we have a superb, fabulous education department, and all the heads, the teachers and the ed. psychs. are first class, they are absolutely superb people, very highly professional, and very highly educated, they all are. And the health people also, from the SENCOs point of view, talking about the SENCOS, they are very well integrated, within the education system. And I think if I ever have children I would love to move up to Newby, just in case the child had special needs, you know, that would be an absolute ideal place to be. (SCMO interview, p25)*

She held a "communication" model, but one that regarded parents' and children's views as very important. Her role with parents was to listen to them, so that their information could help her assessment, but also to teach parents what they can do to help their child. She seemed to see herself in the centre of the assessment, mentioning important links with the parent, the child, the SENCO, the EP, the statementing panel as a whole, and other doctors. Her closest links she perceived as being with SENCOs, then parents and children. She expressed feeling fully a partner in the assessment process and said that without any of the participants statementing would not work so well. SENCOs ask her to explain things to parents, which she did as she very much liked to assist other



professionals. She contacted other doctors for verbal reports about the child, in order to bring a fuller picture to the panel, and she did not just want to rely on the written advice. She had thought she would know the child best of those on the panel, since she had always seen the child at least once, but she was very surprised to find everyone knew the child similarly well. She had thought the EP advice would be given more weight in the decision making. However, she has found that all advice is taken very seriously. She also noted that a lot of weight was given to the parents' views, providing these did not involve sacrificing the child's welfare.

The only conflict in her conceptualisation was related to communication. For example, she cited a positive aspect of her relationship with teachers as being able to disagree with them, and they with her. An example of the way this worked with parents was that part of her role was to repeat information, or repeat the views of other professionals, to help parents understand the child's difficulties and needs.

### **3.5.9 Acting Principal Educational Psychologist (Acting PEP)**

The acting PEP saw partnership as involving ways of working that "help parents to be more fully engaged and fully understanding about the assessment process and helping their child ... working together to help the child" (acting PEP, p15). Her other responses suggested she saw many barriers to partnership, particularly in the current culture and current practices. She spoke in terms of a culture of parent rights. She thought this favoured articulate parents and operated against partnership by fuelling unrealistic expectations either of what resources were possible or of what resources could achieve. Parents had a particular role to play, distinct from the professional role. As an example of this she thought they should refrain from trying to write professional" advice. Barriers to partnership included professionals not understanding the full situation and making unhelpful comments that led to unrealistic expectations. The acting PEP was particularly concerned with the future of the Parent Partnership Scheme and the kind of person



volunteering in future to become a named person. She felt volunteers might do so for their own unresolved personal reasons, and might take information at face value and seek conflict with the LEA, rather than “something more akin to partnership” (p4).

She related a story of a parent (not David's mother) to illustrate the difficulties experienced by parents, and the difficulties in improving partnership:

*... producing the brochure and the various leaflets so that you were able to give parents more information at the start of the assessment process. And in fact I think it would be interesting to do some research into that, as to how much use people make of these things, and what, and do people actually find it helpful, or is it just more bits of paper. We had an example just this week of a parent who has moved around quite a lot, but the professional person who has established the best link with him is the EWO (education welfare officer), so we agreed that the EWO was going to actually deliver the statement, rather than the EP on this occasion. And he then came back to me with the part A completed, but also with the proposed statement and the documents, and I said, oh, I understood that was to stay with mum. And the problem was that mum had actually said to him, will you keep these for me. I've got nowhere to put them, I wouldn't know what to do with them... Her lifestyle, and the way her house is, there isn't ... and she recognised that these were important. She's got no problems about the recommendation about where her child is going to school in September. It's that's all in order and what she wants. She doesn't want these bits of paper. (acting PEP interview, p3)*

### **5.3.10 Occupational Therapist (OT)**

Parents were the OT's supporters, not so much her partner. She felt she invested a lot, in her six-week input with each child, and expected parents to invest a little. She saw herself as the leader: she and the parents were not equals. Neither was parents seen as consumers of her services. Barriers to partnership were to do with parents not turning up for appointments or having a haphazard approach in carrying out her recommendations.

*I think it mostly empowers, well, I hope it mostly empowers them, because I think that, you know, it's good for parents' confidence to think that, oh, and if I do this every week, because the OT says it'll work, then if I do it it will work, and you get them all on a big buzz, a positive buzz, hopefully. I suppose some parents may go away and think, bloody cheek, I'm not going to do that, who does she think she is. I always chat to parents about the fact that it's much easier for an outsider, be it a teacher or an OT, to ask the kid to do 10 press ups a day, than it is for them to get them to do it. I always point that out. But then, I always involve the child, if I think they can cope with that level of conversation in, you know, at the end of the session,*

*I'll always say, and this is a little bit of homework, and with the child right there, so that they know that, and so if you get, you know, and if you can think of a little strategy where they're very much included in it, and they're doing it for me, and not for their mum and dad, that works.  
(OT interview 2, P21).*

Her relations with other professionals seemed less straightforward and more problematic. She identified a strong heal-education divide on several issues, and felt totally isolated from the statementing process "we're contributing to something that doesn't have any power over us and we are not accountable to it" (OT interview 2, p8). She felt taken for granted by doctors, since she expressed irritation with an assumption that "OT will be provided by (M...) as she always does" (OT interview, p7). She had to rely on the doctors to make the decision as to whether or not to include her advice in the statement. And, interestingly, in this case, her advice had not been included in statement although she did not know this. The lack of information she had been given about David or about the statement seemed to add to this feeling of isolation. She worked in schools directly with the child, and always attempted to suggest exercises for the teacher to try with the child through informal conversations with them. She found advising teachers a difficult aspect of her work and was way of giving them extra work to do.

In a meeting of the Dyspraxia trust she said she felt excluded and uncomfortable, as she heard her name being mentioned as an OT in a case, with no reference to her sitting in the meeting. Being talked about brought home to her "no matter how helpful... I'm ultimately a professional person... barrier always" (OT, p17). Her professional alliances were again realised when, in the process of playing a support role to a parent she had to realign herself as a professional alongside the paediatrician involved when the paediatrician's view of the child changed.

Professional boundaries over the right and ability to classify a child as dyspraxic led to the OT reflecting on interesting professional delineations. She looked to the medical profession to take a decision about whether or not such a label should be conferred.

However, at the same time she did not feel such a label at all valid and helpful. There were several reasons for this. She thought dyspraxia difficult to define. It was, she thought, used by parents as the acceptable face of cerebral palsy. And, she thought that many children were otherwise extremely healthy and parents should therefore not be focusing on a difficulty. Despite her views, she preferred to defer to the doctor to confer a label rather than let parents know her views. However, in one case, the features of dyspraxia had been so extreme that she had used the label, and a teacher at a language unit had challenged her place to confer such a label.

Overall, the partnership was not a defining characteristic of the OT's relationship with either parents or other professionals. Indeed she felt quite isolated from other professionals and there was an air of disempowerment (see the later section on "Power" in this chapter). Her domain seemed to focus on work with children and parents, but in a relationship in which she was in charge, instructing the parent on how to support her work.

### **5.3.11 Conclusion**

Partnership seemed to be very problematic for all participants involved in David's statement. Each participant had something to say about working with parents, and something to say about the way they related to other professionals. Parents were regarded in a different way by each professional external to the school: in partnership, the way she worked with everyone (the EP); as a supporter to what she does with the child (the OT); and as an informer, a client, and part of the problem (the clinical psychologist). School professionals all seemed to recognise the tensions in their relationship with David's mother, and their responses in different ways all suggested the importance of some kind of closer working together. For the mother and the named person parent partnership was extremely difficult, with terms used such as "doesn't exist" (named person) and "an ocean apart" (describing David's mother's view of David and how she saw the school's view of David).



The problems participants had in their relationships with each other differed considerably. The head teacher and the class teacher both seemed to feel alone and isolated from decision making to do with David, which suggested a lack of a feeling of partnership with other professionals. The SENCO seemed to be in a very different position, said she was in a partnership role, and spoke of knowing that her advice was always listened to by the panel. The responses of the EP and the acting PEP suggested partnership to be an ideal in how they worked with other professionals, as with parents. Partnership seemed to be part of their professional identity. The health professionals all varied in the nature of their partnership orientation with other professionals. The OT perceived a barrier between health and education, and seemed to feel very remote from statementing. Statementing had little impact on her work, so there was little reason to communicate with other professionals involved, whether that be a communication of partnership or otherwise. The main theme in the clinical psychologist's references to other professionals was the difficulty in working with those in her multi-disciplinary team. As far as other professionals outside her team was concerned, she saw herself as outside the system, and had little to do with statementing. Once again there was a suggestion of remoteness, something unlikely to be akin to partnership. The SCMO's responses suggest she saw herself working very much in partnership with other professionals.

All participants related differently to the EP. The head teacher and clinical psychologist's responses both suggest they felt the EP did not understand the demands on them. The head teacher was pleased that the EP was in school one day when David was posing a behavioural challenge, and sent the EP to deal with it. The class teacher's commented about the EP advice, that to tell him to engage in "no confrontation" was inappropriate. However, the SENCO seemed to feel very much in partnership with the EP. The clinical psychologist and the senior clinical medical officer (SCMO) both seemed to have a clear view of how to work with other EPs, and their responses suggested they saw this as unproblematic. However, the way they saw their relationship with the EP differed: for the

SCMO this relationship seemed to be a surprised feeling of observing at the panel all the reports listened to and respected. For the clinical psychologist the relationship with the EP seemed to be one specially reserved for a fellow psychologist. The OT seemed to revere the EP as an expert, whose report she would trust. However, there was no suggestion of co-working and she spoke of feeling remote from education and statementing. David's mother felt "more" in partnership with the psychologists than other professionals, and gave examples of ways they had helped her to feel less powerless in the assessment process.

Conflict and difference of opinion seemed to characterise partnership. Depending upon the perspective taken about the definition of partnership, conflict may be seen to be consistent with partnership. However, the presence of conflict might also suggest partnership is proving problematic for those involved. Whether such differences in opinion support partnership might depend upon the nature of the conflict, the reasons for the tightly held positions and the needs being expressed by those positions. David's mother needed to feel listened to, to have David's educational needs recognised. Provided this happened she seemed able to take on board the different position the school took in trying to meet the particular needs of one child, and she was happy to openly recognise David's behaviour difficulties. The school needed to feel listened to in a way that offered some possibility for change in David's situation, since the head teacher and class teacher perceived themselves as powerless to influence David. Partnership was particularly problematic when these needs were most threatened. For example, David's mother could not *hear* (researcher's italics) behavioural concerns being expressed by the school when she was most worried about a behavioural resource being allocated to David. The school could not *hear* "objective" data about David's intelligence when they needed resources. An IQ result would not bring "help". At times of such stress it would be likely to be most difficult to change attitudes. Partnership also seemed influenced by the extent to which the "other side" appears to hold a fixed view.

In the next chapter, orientations towards partnership are explored further to make sense of these differences. In the next section, participant views of their role are described. Whilst this has been implicit in the present section on partnership, and is, indeed found within the partnership theme, role perception is a key to understanding how people relate to each other. A focus on role was likely to benefit the analysis as a whole.



## **5.4 ROLE**

What was the role of each participant in the assessment process? One again there were wide variations in how the participants perceived their own role in the assessment process. There were several instances in the large panel frames of raw quotes in which utterances appeared both in the panel about partnership and that on role. For example, the SENCO described herself as having a partnership role. This was central to the theme of partnership, and to that of role, and therefore needed to be repeated. Such a finding might lead to the view that role was a redundant theme, and should be subsumed into partnership. However, partnership, as illustrated in the literature, was such a complex concept that one aim of the current research was to use the data to pull out its different hues, and identify its facets. This is what the researcher was aiming to do in identifying utterances on the theme of role, and repeating raw quotes already used in the partnership theme where this seemed appropriate.

### **5.4.1 David's Mother**

David's mother perceived her role primarily as advocate for David, and relatively powerless. Her main role was to keep asserting the learning perspective on David's difficulties, persuading people that there was an educational problem. She saw it as important to keep the statementing process hidden from David, and to be very low key when telling him about appointments coming up with other professionals. She made a point of not being too much of a teacher with David. One of her roles was to exert effort not to become powerless. She achieved her aim, that of educational help for David, and therefore fulfilled her role. She also set limits on her agency, and felt she could not effect a situation in school where David's "high ability needs" (David's mother, interview 3, p6) were being addressed.

## 5.4.2 Head Teacher

The head teacher's responses seemed to underline her management role. She expressed her role as being difficult, often involving bringing bad news to David's mother. She was concerned with the allocation of resources when the statemented time was allocated (i.e. who was going to teach him), worrying about who would teach him next year, and struggling to find ways for staff to adopt her more flexible approach to discipline.

*Well, we now have a behaviour policy, which works fine with the vast majority of children, stickers system, you know, punishments laid down, and their attitude would be, quite rightly in some cases, because he is maturing, that he knows about this and he has to follow this, but not that he can't possibly sometimes cope with this. And I try to bring a bit more flexibility on that line. It's the same with any child with a behaviour problem. (head teacher interview, p1-2)*

She said she had an overseeing role, rather than a direct role in the assessment process. There was a role for her to liaise with the LEA when there was an immediate problem with David's behaviour, and her status might be needed to lobby for immediate resources from the LEA (which she found unforthcoming). However, when statementing was involved there was no need for her involvement. Statementing had its own rules, and its own slow momentum, and the bureaucratic actions required could be delegated to the SENCO. Her role was to see David as part of the school and consider the impact that he was having on the teachers and the other children, rather than to consider the reasons for his problems. The latter was, she thought, the role of the EP. She had to consider the effect his behaviour might have on the decision of parents to send their children to the school. Her role was to listen to her teachers, and their perspective seemed to help to form her view of David.

*My perspective would just be basically to see him as part of a school and to worry about the non social things. Because, I mean, I'm sometimes in his classroom, but you know, he's usually quite good verbally, but I mean, basically it's things like, church, we go on a Thursday, Harvest Festival, odd time assemblies, and it could just be talking, it could be passing a pencil, chatting away, but you know he's had real tantrums and things like that, that basically he can't cope with. So mine is a whole school issue, rather than, and S... 's is more to find out what is making him so angry and upset I feel. Yes. And the impact he's having on the teachers as well. On his teachers, or the other children in the class, which is a worry to me, that*

*you're going to lose children, which it was at one stage. Because he's hit them, children have been frightened of him.  
(head teacher, p9-10)*

*I'd spelled out to him, you find another school if this happens again, and I'm not an angry sort of person, but basically you know at this stage you just can't go, I mean, in front of all the parents out here, you know, whack. And you thought, he's got to go, rather than me lose half a dozen, but you know.  
(head teacher, p12)*

The Head said she saw the EP as there to look after David's individual needs – but her own prime responsibility was towards managing the school as a whole.

### **5.4.3 Class Teacher**

The class teacher was not asked any direct questions about his role, so the analysis has inputted a view from answers to other questions. The lack of a direct question was due to the small amount of time available for this interview and the need to prioritise questions. A direct question on role was omitted since it seemed more likely to generate a general answer relating to the “teacher” role, rather than a specific answer relating to David's situation.

The class teacher spoke a lot about David's presentation in the classroom, in terms of both responses to writing demands and various aspects of his behaviour. He specifically spoke of his approach to David in terms of managing David's behaviour. He spoke of the way he tried to de-escalate things, and to provide David with himself as an example of someone who responded in dependable, predictable ways. His role in terms of David's writing and more general learning was assumed, but not specifically commented upon.

*...I think you try to, what's the word, to instil a sort of confidence in him you know, so that he can accept various situations in a better frame of mind than he used to be able to accept. And I think really, that's what I, overall, with his behaviour, that's what I try to do... he's very independent in the way he thinks, and I think you can just influence him in small ways, rather than have a big influence on him. He doesn't, sort of, make very much of coming to talk to you or things like that, you know. (class teacher interview, p11)*



The class teacher also referred to a second role, that of trying, with others, to get the LEA to make provision to help the teachers in managing David.

#### **5.4.4 The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

The SENCO saw herself as having a pivotal, partnership role. She had a central role in working directly with David, and spoke about what she planned to do when the statementing time was made available. She had central, heavy responsibility, to write down David's needs in a way that secured help for him. She said she thought she had a better chance than any other teacher to be able to get a broader view of David's difficulties, since she was not so bound by immediate classroom problems involving his behaviour. She had a role suggesting strategies to the class teacher, encouraging other teachers to be more positive about David, and finding a reporting process that David's mother would agree to.

#### **5.4.5 Educational Psychologist**

The educational psychologist saw her role primarily in terms of working in partnership, particularly with parents, to develop joint initiatives in the best interests of children. She saw her role in terms of facilitating intervention which would work positively for the child, as "clearing up contaminating things" (set views, defensiveness and blame) in order to make a "fertile ground for a change" (educational psychologist's interview, p3), and trying to bring together the very polarised views of his difficulties. Such a role was recognised by the SENCO and by David's mother.

*You know, there is a range of professionals. I think there is quite a tendency for people to blame parents for children's behaviour, their lack of learning, or lack of stimulation. And if there is blame involved, you are never going to establish any sort of parent partnership. So bleaching the arena from blame, as it were, is very, very important. But certainly, amongst teachers, I think, there is often a need to blame somebody else, because they are under stress. So the psychologist's job is often to tackle that blame game and represent the views of all the professionals to each other and to the parent.*

*...it's about making a fertile ground for change and for movement, for the child, and nothing will change as long as people hold set views which are blaming. So I think*

*that is very important at the start. I think a lot of the defensiveness and aggressive reactions do stem from people feeling under attack. And usually when it comes to it, you can get to a point where we all agree that the child has certain difficulties and there isn't a need for the parent to stick up for their children unreasonably if they feel they are under attack. So I would say that my job as a psychologist is very much in clearing up any of these contaminating things. (educational psychologist, p3)*

The educational psychologist's client was the child, but, she says the client could also be whoever had referred the case. However, she always put the child at the centre of her work.

*But personally, I have always found it very easy to put the child in the centre, and then rippling round would be what is next to the child, the parents, and then the school, and I tend to have that sort of pattern to my, to the weight that I give to people. (educational psychologist, p8)*

Playing out this role led to a variety of actions in David's case. She was involved with the SENCO in finding strategies to work with David when implementing his statement, putting forward the "snakes and ladders" game to try to teach David to deal with "negative setback". The head teacher found it important to insist on an additional role, to ask the EP to deal with David herself on one occasion when he was refusing to work. When David was excluded the EP's role was to "pour oil on troubled waters and make people feel that he wasn't a danger..." (educational psychologist, p23). She had to pacify the school and offer David's mother a way out by suggesting another person to involve in David's situation (the clinical psychologist), and to encourage the teaching staff that they were in fact already doing a good job with David. Her role involved working at the centre of conflict. It involved her own recognition of ambiguities in her role by being an officer of the LEA. It involved a requirement, on occasions, to take actions contrary to her personal ideas.

#### **5.4.6 Named Person**

The named person saw her role primarily as supporting David's mother. This seemed to be a complex role. In particular it required her to make sure David's mother did not miss anything at the meetings David's mother found so distressing. She said her role involved



keeping David's mother in the "real world" – she argued with her, supported her decisions, encouraged her, but refrained from advising her. She gave examples of arguing her out of the idea that she was a bad parent, encouraging her not to punish David when an incident at school had seemed like the last straw. She was very positive about David's mother, about what she had been able to cope with and achieve throughout the assessment. She said she allowed David's mother to let off steam about David and be negative about him.

The named person mentioned three times the need not to blame parents, and the responsibility of schools and other parents to tell parents they are not being regarded as to blame. She saw a major role for her in this, since it was not a role the school was fulfilling.

*One person mentioned that it might be her fault and, oh, she took that on board, and that's been the most difficult thing for me to actually, this is what we argue about most of the time and... she was feeling really isolated and really lonely and really guilty, and I got to the point where I just said to her, I mean, I didn't mean it, but I just wanted her to wake up and start and think, and I said to her, why are you talking like this? You're not the most important here, David's the most important, you know, we are not here to meet your needs of "woe is me" (named person, p32)*

*Well, not so much the time, but in the middle of a meeting, if you didn't agree with something, I think. Having said that, the person might choose to take along a named person who wouldn't be, I think it's their choice, the parent. (named person, p28)*

As regards her role vis a vis other professionals, she said at first she felt unwelcome, regarded almost, as she described, as a spy. She felt she did not need to have any training as a named person – indeed that might cloud her view. She did not need, she thought, to have knowledge of education. She was there as a friend, as an outsider who was not afraid to speak and could provide a different perspective.

*(training for named persons?) No, I don't think, no, I don't think so, because then it would kind of cloud my input, I think, in some way. I'm there to support B... and to give an outsider's view of David, and my impression of David, as a non-professional, non-teaching, just a friend who knows him in his home environment and has known him for a lot of years. I know his character, I don't know anything about his education... their input, in my view, should be not to do with his education, not to do with how he learns, not to do with having a knowledge, even a small knowledge of the educational psychologist's role, just about the child. And I think then you can*



*give a clear kind of picture that's unclouded by any educational stuff or psychological stuff. (named person, p28)*

She had an important role in meetings to keep calm and to remember what was said for David's mother. She was not there as a professional – except that the teaching staff seemed to change their regard for her when she realised the named person had a post as a professional in social services. In one meeting she challenged the emphasis of the school on a behavioural rather than a learning statement, and was asked what right she had to put forward such a view. It was at this point that she let them know her professional experience with children who display behavioural problems.

The named person's role had certain ambiguities. She did not wish training, seeing the value in her informal knowledge of David, and yet her view seems only to have been respected once she was seen as a fellow professional. She was there to support David's mother, and this involved difficult discussions to help David's mother see the other side of matters. And yet she seemed to play a crucial part in the main aim of David's mother, to achieve a statement which had a learning label rather than a behavioural one.

#### **5.4.7 Clinical Psychologist**

The clinical psychologist's responses indicated a very clear identity as a psychologist. However, she did not clearly articulate what that role was, only that it was different from other roles in her team. Her responses indicated disagreement with the view, which she said had been expressed in her team, that everybody was a psychologist. Her role was to carry out a full assessment of David, to provide an opinion which took no account of available resources, to find out whether the resulting provision was working for David, and to support David's mother. She saw her role as working very much with the family rather than just the child. However, if a child was "at risk", her primary client would be the child rather than the family. She speculated on where she was vis a vis "the system", and several responses indicated that she saw herself outside the educational system in a way

that was helpful to clients (i.e. David's mother seeking support for herself). Her responses to parents, differentiating her role from that of other professionals, gave some indication of how the clinical psychologist saw her role:

*...Sometimes they think I'm a doctor, and I always tell them I'm not... we're in the business of doing is looking at how people behave and why, and why some things go wrong sometimes. ... they usually think I'm a psychiatrist, that's probably the most frequent one. Sometimes I get muddled up with CPNs or social workers. They'll say, oh, I saw a psychologist last year, and I know it wasn't because the name isn't anybody I've heard of. ... They think I'm a counsellor, and I tell them what the difference is between counsellors and psychologists... while psychologists may use counselling sometimes, that's not the main, or the only tool that they have. (clinical psychologist, p15)*

#### **5.4.8 The Senior Clinical Medical Officer (SCMO)**

The Senior Clinical Medical Officer saw herself as having a very important role and had a very clear idea what that role consisted of. "Head to toe" was repeated several times to describe her approach to assessment. The child was very clearly and centrally her client. She not only looked at medical aspects, but heard from the child's parents and from the child themselves their view of the difficulty. Her role was to find out what the problem was and how it could best be sorted – not just to have a medical view. Ability assessment did not come into her remit. She acts sometimes as a counsellor to the parents, able to explain things to them again, even things they had been told by other professionals. SENCOs often asked her to be involved this way. She aimed to be very approachable, and felt parents and other professionals knew they could contact her at any time. She also explained medical matters to SENCOs, and they put her right about certain things.

Her role had changed. Every year, in September, she went into each of her 17 schools to talk to the SENCO, to ask about all children on the SEN register from Stage 2 onwards. She did not see all children who were at stage 2, but referred to their health records and contacted other health professionals. She saw some children at stage 2, if referred for something in particular, and all children who were being considered for a statutory



assessment at stage 4. Her role had extended beyond the 2% to the 20%, but she no longer attended every review. She looked at every area of health and development: concentration, co-ordination, hearing and vision. She spoke to both the parent and the child, and regarded both with great importance.

#### **5.4 9 Acting Principal Educational Psychologist (Acting PEP)**

The acting PEP spoke both about the role of the EP and about her role as a PEP. The EP's client was, definitely the child. Although in her LEA there was a heavy LEA officer role for the EP which led to the ambiguities of the dual role, she said that this did not get in the way of working for the child.

*We've got the disadvantage here of an authority where it is a quite heavy LEA officer role, but on the other hand, in terms of how we are regarded within the LEA, we've got high status. ... but it does mean that we have perhaps got more of the ambiguity of the dual role. But I think even if you take out the LEA officer role... you would still as the EP be having to negotiate with parents and teachers... What can I do to get a better deal for this child out of it.*

*I don't see (the LEA role) as being detrimental to trying to do the best for the child. Because I don't see setting up people to, oh, let's fight for some more resources, I don't see that as being helpful. (acting PEP, p15)*

The EP role was, she said, to provide an individual picture of a child, an "uncontaminated view of progress" (acting PEP, p26), not coloured by the emotional parental relationship.

As acting PEP her responses suggested she felt quite burdened and stressed by the responsibilities of managing the SEN budget. The budget was needs led and therefore could not easily be managed. This led to defensive practices due to the risk of tribunals and the need to reach government performance indicators. She was also constrained by a wide role in managing a large support system. She had very little time to do what she enjoyed doing which was to be an EP. At the same time she aimed to trying to carry out quality assessments not driven by the statutory process.



#### **5.4.10 Occupational Therapist (OT)**

The OT saw herself as adopting a problem solving approach. Her remit was to work with children in mainstream schools, and to “keep the lid” (OT interview 2, p6) on motor problems. She also aimed to avoid labelling since she saw the norm as so wide she did not want people’s concerns to become out of proportion. She did a “set assessment” (OT interview 2, p2) of fine and gross motor skills, including body awareness and was uncertain about dealing with anything broader – such as behaviour or concentration problems. Her role was to provide OT, for her stated client group, if it was needed, and in the context of a waiting list. She was not part of defined statemented provision.

The OT said she said she felt very marginalised by the statementing process. It was a process she knew little about and impacted little on her work. She also described herself as being a “pig in the middle” (OT interview 2, p10), being asked to hear the concerns of parents who felt schools would not listen to them.

#### **5.4.11 Conclusion**

Once again one of the main impressions from the analysis of participant view of their role was the variety. Considering this was the same assessment of the same child, participants mentioned roles which included all of the following: what can I do to get a better deal for this child (acting PEP), bleaching the arena from blame (the educational psychologist), an accidental role, providing an opinion (the clinical psychologist), persuading people there was an educational problem (mother), a set assessment (the occupational therapist), a full medical assessment from head to toe (the senior clinical medical officer), a whole school social issue (the head teacher), and a pivotal, partnership role (the SENCO). In their responses, and with the exception of the senior medical officer and the occupational therapist, the participants in the assessment process were particularly unclear about the details of their role, about what they would actually see

themselves as doing in the assessment. In fact, what was clear was that answers to the question about role were answered in a wide context, and demonstrated that one cannot look at participants' role in statementing without looking at the wider context of a person's role, and the whole complexity of their professional orientation. Participants spoke with very different voices. For example, the acting PEP spoke as a manager of an educational psychology service, so her assertion that her role was to see the child as the client would need to be read with knowledge of her staff management and budgetary responsibilities in mind. The SENCO, on the other hand saw her role as very wide ranging, being concerned with staff attitudes, with writing the school advice, implementing the statement in working with David, and her role needs to be understood in terms of her position as a confident, experienced professional who is also a newcomer to the school. In the next chapter, role is discussed in terms of the orientation of the participants towards each of the child David, the school and the LEA.

## **5.5 POWER**

How was power experienced by the participant's? Once again, the most notable feature of participant views of where power lay in the assessment process, was the variety in perspectives.

### **5.5.1 Mother: David's mother**

For some interviewees, raising the question of power brought silence, puzzlement: it did not seem to be part of the way they thought about statutory assessment. However, in the interview with David's mother this question led her to say that she "could write a three thousand essay on this" (David's mother, interview 3, p8). Clearly it was a major aspect of the way she conceptualised the assessment. For her the school held the most power since the school staff had set the assessment process in motion. They held the ultimate veto, the power to exclude David from school. David had already been excluded once and had been told that the next incident would mean permanent exclusion. David's mother said she felt a lack of status in meetings and relied heavily on her friend and named person, acting as the named person, to increase her power.

However, this situation was not in any simple way one of the power of the school and the powerlessness of herself. She said the school, or the LEA had a limited number of possibilities for a child like David. She also had ideas about her own power:

*I don't think I was powerless in the situation, and I mean, I think, but there were times when I felt totally powerless, and there was, I think, I had to put an awful lot of effort in not to become powerless. (David's mother, interview 3, p8)*

One of the activities that gave her more power was the gathering of information from outside the school, initially from the clinical psychologist and then from the educational psychologist. However, the major aspect of involvement of outside professionals which empowered her was not, as might be assumed in the objective discourse of the



assessment, test results demonstrating high ability, but in the fact that they like David: “for a start she liked him, that was the first thing” (David's mother, interview 3, p9).

This helped to redress the lack of power she experienced through having a child who was causing the school some difficulties, and whom, she said, everyone at the school perceived as “horrendous” and “horrible” (David's mother, interview 3, p9). The clinical psychologist's assessment did, also, empower her, through demonstrating the mismatch between performance and ability. Such an assessment seemed to have little further influence, however, since David's mother said the school did not listen to the clinical psychologist. The educational psychologist empowered her, indirectly, by making the process less one of polarised sides, and helping everyone to recognise the complicated factors involved. The presence of the named person at meetings enabled those present to hear a contrasting picture of David. However, the major factor in “making a difference” (David's mother, interview 2, p13) for her was the help given to David by the SENCO and the involvement of the other professionals helped to change attitudes.

David's mother felt powerless since she had not chosen for David to have difficulties, and she had found it very hard to try to get the school to see that David was not “naughty”, but he had a “problem”. Having to do this made her feel “as if she was going out on a limb”, made her feel people were asking, because she was a single parent and felt vulnerable, whether she was a “good enough mum”. She had needed the involvement of “professionals” in order to provide the “objective” information to support her position. She did not want David to have a statutory assessment. She wanted stability for him so did not want to transfer him to another school. She now worried about removing the statement in the future, and hoped it would not remain for ever (quotes David's mother, interview 2, p13).

When David was suspended, just as the statement had been issued, there was a particularly “dangerous point” (David's mother, interview 3, p34), with talk of changing the

statement and questions about why the statement had not been behavioural. David's mother suggested that the EPs idea to involve the clinical psychologist had made a difference to such a critical moment. She felt change in David's situation would only be gradual, there would not be "answers".

David's mother herself was an educational professional and said this enabled her to put her views across in a way that other parents might not be able to. It was therefore a form of power. However, she continued to have a feeling of powerlessness which she struggled to rise above. She also went to great lengths to maintain a relationship with the school, to be even handed. For example she recognised the difficulties faces by the school in meeting the needs of one child. This aspect of David's mother was recognised and appreciated by the head teacher, as noted from her interview. However, David's mother was able to assert her view on a crucial issue, the way David was to be viewed in the assessment. She solidly maintained a view that his learning difficulties should be the focus of any intervention, and that this would lead to improvements in both learning and behaviour. She resisted, continually, any emphasis on his behavioural difficulties. In this she appeared to be powerful, since the statement was, in the end, primarily one focusing on his learning difficulties. There were difficult times, such as when he was excluded and the school spoke again of behaviour and units, or David's mother's view of the way a school report was written emphasising aspects she said would have been overlooked in any other child. Essentially David's mother, despite powerless attributes and despite not wanting a statement, had achieved her aim.

### **5.5.2 Head Teacher**

The responses of the head teacher suggest an overall feeling of powerlessness.

*This time last year, my first term here, we had a teacher... off... so I was in there, it was horrendous, my first term, sort of, and awful lot of the time, there was nobody. (head teacher, p13)*

The statementing panel was seen by the head teacher as holding the most power since “they” decide whether or not to award the statement. The main role she played in the statementing process was to try to secure some help prior to the statement, and this had not been forthcoming. She had considered using exclusion to try to make the LEA act, and had told David and his mother that the next incident would lead to permanent exclusion. She thought that the presence of the named person at the meetings had made things more difficult. The named person had challenged the head teacher’s view of David’s difficulties. She was not surprised by the content of the statement and did not know if it would work. She was concerned that the teacher David was due to have next year was not likely to be so flexible. She was also concerned that if the statement did not tackle behaviour, if the stated resource did not “work”, there seemed to be no other options.

*...I have spoken to (the EP) recently saying, if he, we’ve only had, this week’s been funny, but suppose he was to riot again, and this statement, this extra sort of time didn’t work, I said, what happens next. And there isn’t really anything again. Because I’m sure there are far, far worse children, as I’ve said before, who need these (...) places (Pupil Referral Unit Places). (head teacher, p13).*

### **5.5.3 Class Teacher**

The class teacher said he felt very remote from the statementing process, powerless within it. He said the awarding of resources was hit and miss and depended on available provision when a case was considered. He saw the LEA as having most power, again due to their ability to decide whether or not to give any help. Like the head teacher, he too indicated he felt frustrated and powerless, due to the time it had taken to secure any help for David. However, when asked who had the most influence in terms of improving David’s situation, he listed several people: David’s mother, himself as David’s teacher and the SENCO. He seemed to experience a kind of power over David’s immediate situation, but no influence over the larger picture in terms of extra LEA Provision to support David in School. The latter seemed, in his view, more powerful and influence.



#### **5.5.4 The Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO)**

The SENCO was alone in recognising her own power, and in articulating several sources of power. She said she had a pivotal role in the assessment process, due to her long experience as a teacher and due to the high regard with which she knew her advice was held by the statementing panel. However, she did not see herself as the most powerful in the assessment process. She also indicated she was in a relatively powerful position due to her location outside the classroom:

*Everyone has their own perspective, don't they, on a child with a difficulty, and if you're the class teacher and you've got this all day, every day, and, you know, it just becomes a huge obstacle in the way, and if you're coming at it, sort of, sideways...You have a better change, maybe to see what's behind it, and maybe to have some ideas, you know of how to help. (SENCO, p7)*

However, the LEA's psychology service was seen by the special needs teacher as having most power. She cited the power to decide whether a statutory assessment went ahead, the use of their non-subjective assessment tools and the way the school's EP had facilitated a rational discussion about the child rather than an "emotional debate" (SENCO, p12). The SENCO did not seem to notice her own power in the same way, though clearly she recognised that she had the ability to influence others. When asked, she also acknowledged the power of other participants. This included David's mother's indirect power from the observation that he behaved better before a parents' night. It also included David's power to say no. The SENCO also acknowledged David's mother's powerlessness in refusing to emphasise David's behaviour, in that she was "one person against have a dozen" (SENCO, p12).

#### **5.5.5 The Educational Psychologist**

The EP said power resided with whoever had pushed the hardest for an assessment to go ahead, usually the school. She could see that people might think the EP had the most power, since they were often seen as the gatekeeper of resources, but new procedures

following the Education Act 1993 meant educational psychologists no longer decided even whether to start an assessment. However, the fact that no decision to assess could be made without an educational psychologist's report meant, she reflected, that educational psychologists must have some power. EP power had been reduced as they were no longer the gate-keepers for SEN resources. She recognised the power, in theory, of the statementing panel, who made decision about resources. However, she saw the power of the panel reduced by dwindling resources and by their lack of visibility to teachers and parents.

If parents were the ones asking for an assessment, power would reside with them. More articulate parents who argue their views more strongly have, therefore, more power. However, she said that all parents tended to be given what they were pushing for in her LEA, with some minor compromises. The EP also spoke generally of "parent power" (EP, p2) in terms of the engagement they had with their child, an engagement greater than that possible with any professional.

### **5.5.6 Named Person**

The named person saw most power in the hands of the head teacher, since the head teacher had the power to exclude a child from school. This power, she said, stopped the parent from challenging the school, and made her more "subservient".

*I think even though an educational psychologist may be, whose information is like more than valuable in my view, can be saying, well, this is a suggestion, this is what I suggest, this is what we feel, blah, blah, the head still has the last say at the end of the day. The power of exclusion, I think that's the rather than the statement (named person, P22)*

The school's power was also demonstrated, she said, in the insistence on the behavioural label.

The intervention of the named person in meetings conveyed some power to the parent, and but was also perceived as a threat to the teaching staff. Others involved in the



assessment had input, not power. She did not feel any person had “the answer” concerning David, but a little input from everyone could make David's situation work a little easier. The statement had little power due to the School's power to exclude. David, she said, was powerless due to the label of “being disliked” (researcher's emphasis). It was very hard to change this and be liked. David's only power was the power to be excluded:

*I was going to say, David holds the card, doesn't he? If he doesn't want to be at school, he just misbehaves,. But again, that's, that's something that's learned. ...I think, in this case, I don't think he has any power at all. And I think what sometimes happens is the child is a problematic child, and as the months go on,, people dislike that child, personally. And I think that's a human nature thing. And it's very difficult to shed that label, if you like. So even for David to improve, to try and get back in the good books, it's a long, hard slog. And people don't like it. So he's powerless at the moment. (named person,, p24)*

The school was, she said, challenged by David. They therefore perceived his power, in a number of ways:

*I think they were grasping at straws, and I think to be fair, the school tried to use anything. They were at the end of their tether, and they were trying to look for anything that might have an effect... if another child is attacked, of course it has to be acknowledge, and of course the problems have to be, you know, resolved. ...Well, personally I didn't think that the school trip should be used in that way, it was a different thing. I thought they could have looked for something else. ...and if the child questions, and if the child, staff aren't used to that and it's quite scary. (named person, p15-19)*

The only power David's mother had was to keep David away from school, which she would, the named person said, never do.

The named person saw the school as having the most power in the statement, but clearly, from her comments about her own role, saw herself as occupying a quite powerful position with respect to David's mother. However, the main power struggle in the process could be claimed to be over the kind of statement, whether essentially behavioural or essentially learning. In this, the named person seemed to have power in challenging the label and in supporting David's mother in not accepting a behavioural label, despite the school maintaining its insistence throughout on a behavioural label.



### **5.5.7 The Clinical Psychologist**

The clinical psychologist's responses suggested a very strong concern for her control over her own professional boundaries and role definition within her team, indicating a feeling that there is a major need to make efforts to hold on to power, and a possibility of becoming professionally powerless. She described how she had control over her own referrals, and was clear about the influence that another professional in the team could have on her own cases. Instances of medical professionals trying to "give" psychology to other team members were seen as actions to diminish her power:

*...He said I wanted to order the little psychological test for everybody in the team to use. And I said, what test is that, and he said, it's the one with the little boxes. It's a bit like me saying I'd like to give a prescription for those little pink pills, I can't remember what they're called ... He said, but I'm only wanting it to give to the team members to help them talk to children. And you can score them ... And I said, I mean, it's a classic, isn't it? A classic ... I don't want to be scoring. (clinical psychologist interview 2, p14)*

When asked directly about the location of power in the assessment process, the clinical psychologist professed the view that it should lie with the EP. She thought power probably lay with the LEA since it withheld resources. She saw parents as having more power than they realised in their right to take their situation to a tribunal. She referred to her own power as a professional to be heard in the statementing process. In this respect she was concerned that her reports to SCMOs should not be subsumed into medical advice, taking parts of her report out of context. Her description of reasons parents gave for coming to see her, that they could get a report on their child quicker and that she was independent from school, indicated powers conferred to her by parents. She saw her contribution, which could be articulated as a form of power, as highlighting David's difficulties and getting educational help. She, in turn, passed power to educational psychologists, in telling parents that it is the educational psychologist who can get the parent what they want, and not the clinical psychologist.

### **5.5.8 The Senior Clinical Medical Officer (SCMO)**

The Senior Clinical Medical Officer did not see the statementing process as one involving power. Her experience on the panel had demonstrated to her that everyone's advice was given a lot of weight, and the panel decision was a group decision. Power was not seen to be a feature of the process. This perhaps signified her emphasis on there being one more or less objective picture of the child and her view that it was the professionals' task to find it out and communicate it to the child and parents. However, her responses also indicated that she feels a great sense of agency, a form of power, in her role in statementing process. Her power seemed particularly to be directed towards assisting professionals in persuading parents of professional opinions.

### **5.5.9 Acting Principal Educational Psychologist (The Acting PEP)**

The acting-Principal EP did not feel she had power. She thought power lay in the regulations and the assessment process itself. All she did was apply the regulations to consider, with her panel (which included head teachers and a medical officer) whether there was a case for resource provision.

*I just don't see the whole thing as a system of power. You know, it, all right, the statement panel makes the decision, but I actually think the statement has very little power.*

*...Because although we make decisions, there are a limited range of options anyway that you can offer. If a case has been made, we haven't got the power just to say, well, we don't feel like allocating any more money this month because the budget's gone through the roof, because the regulations say that, if these needs are identified, then something's got to be done about them. (acting PEP, p12)*

In her responses it was possible to see other kinds of power were important to her. For example, the paperwork of statementing had the power to make some parents feel relatively disempowered, as suggested in the example she gave of a parent who asked the educational welfare officer to keep the paperwork for her (see section in this chapter on Partnership). She saw power in the tools of EP assessments, psychometric testing.



These were the best they had at present, she thought, to give a relatively objective picture of a child. And in the wider sphere, in the course of the delegation of budgets, SEN carried some power as one of the few areas not to be entirely delegated. In this context she described SEN as a “life-boat” (acting PEP, p15). She perceived parents as having power in the current climate of parent rights, and commented on the ease of making an appeal against LEA decisions through the tribunal system.

### **5.5.10 Occupational Therapist (OT)**

The OT always had complete faith in what she was doing and could always see some small aspects of progress in the skills of the children she worked with. However, she said she felt totally isolated in the statementing process and had to rely on another professional (the SCMO) to include her in the statementing process. The OT experienced powerlessness in a number of other ways. She found it difficult to ask teachers to take on her suggested programmes – and put it in a report rather than negotiating it with them. In the interview she used terms which belittled what she did, such as “one hypothesis, from my little field” (OT interview 1, p5). This suggested a lack of confidence, a kind of powerlessness.

The OT experienced a degree of powerlessness in relation to dealing with David’s problems. She noticed that David’s parent had looked on fine motor difficulties as confirming reasons for his behaviour difficulties. However, the OT said the magnitude of the behaviour problem, in particular that he had been excluded, meant it was less likely that fine motor difficulties were at the bottom of it all. She did not want to be seen to be “the answer” (OT interview 2, p9) – and wanted to back off, defer to the psychologist and get hold of reports of David from others. The OT identified other professionals as having certain kinds of expertise in dealing with children, expertise that she did not consider herself to have. David’s behaviour label had disempowered her, made her feel out of her depth, leading her to take “safe” actions in her dealing with David. Dealing with behaviour



and with concentration problems were seen to be more within the skills of "someone more expert" (OT) interview 2,p5), the educational psychologist.

The OT retained confidence in her defined professional skills, but a quite general sense of powerlessness in all other respects, particularly in the statementing process, but also specifically in dealing with David's care.

### **5.5.11 Conclusion**

Analysis of interview in this research for participants' perceptions of influence and responsibility shows that power is not unitary: it is not the case that parents, or even David, were in any simple way "the powerless" (researcher's emphasis). All participants experienced power and powerlessness in different ways. All varied in their ease in identifying with the concept of "power". For example David's mother said "I could write a three thousand page essay on that..." (David's mother, interview 3, p8). On the other hand, the PEP and the SCMO did not feel power came into it. Most did not recognise their own power as perceived by others.

In answer to a direct question about where they saw power residing, four participants attributed power to the "LEA" in some form, usually the statementing panel. These were the head teacher, the class teacher, the clinical psychologist and the occupational therapist. Three attributed most power to the "school". David's mother, the named person and the educational psychologist. One, the SENCO, attributed most power to the educational psychologist, and the acting PEP and the educational psychologist both said power lay with the parent.

Another major location of power, from indirect responses in the interviews, was David himself. The head teacher saw power in David's outbursts and the PEP saw power in the articulation of David's needs. The named person, the head teacher and the SENCO all

saw power in David's verbal response to teachers. However, it was articulated in different ways: by the named person as the school finding David as a threat, and by the head teacher and SENCO as power to manipulate teachers.

Other articulations of power were in the assessment itself (the OT and David's mother), the resources (the head teacher and David's mother), the bureaucracy (the acting PEP), the label (all participants engaged in conflict over the label designated for David), and rights (the named person attended meetings as a right). The acting PEP also spoke of power in negotiation, in trying to carry the parent with her.

In terms of their own perceptions of themselves, participants experienced a sense of powerlessness. This was true, in general terms, of most participants, including: David's mother, the head teacher, the class teacher, the named person, the clinical psychologist, the OT, and even the acting PEP. The SENCO seemed alone in her articulation of influence in a variety of spheres (i.e. the LEA and other teachers). However, all participants articulated an area of influence or control. For example, the head teacher recognised she could use exclusion to try to make the LEA respond to her needs and the OT felt powerful within her own domain in working with children and parents.

The most notable outcome in terms of power, was that despite the feelings of powerlessness of David's mother, her insistence on seeing David in terms of having a learning difficulty rather than a behavioural difficulty was one that was accepted in the final outcome of the statementing process. The statement provided for three hours per week of support from a teacher for writing and concentration difficulties. This is adopted as one of the main issues for further investigation: an analysis of how the learning label was adopted, rather than one focusing on behaviour. What was particularly intriguing, and is taken up in the next chapter, was an analysis of the lines of power that seemed to lead to David's mother's success in achieving her goal for him.



## **5.6 David's Story**

A report of David's story in this chapter has been separated from that of the other participants since that was how his story appeared in the interview transcripts. It was not easy to apply the same themes to David. David seemed to be a particularly important stakeholder in the assessment process, given that the statement was focused on *his* special educational needs. However, he was very absent, in some ways, from the assessment. In the interviews with other participants he seemed to be the hidden focus of the assessment. He also seemed to be the hidden focus of the interviews. It was important to try to make David's voice more visible by selecting utterances from the two interviews. In the selection the researcher aimed to keep as much as possible of the raw text, but omitted all the researcher's questions. These were reproduced in the panels in Appendix 9 in Volume II. Some of David's utterances were integrated into the summary panels in Volume II about "Power", "David" and "Assessment" (see Volume II).

### **5.6.1 What Happened in David's Interviews?**

David's two interviews, taken at the beginning and end of the data collection period, suggested what he knew of the assessment process and how he felt about it. They also suggested what he knew of how teacher's and others were trying to help him, what he thought about how he was being helped, what happened at school and how teachers responded to him.

In the first interview David's responses suggested he was very reluctant to talk about anything difficult happening at school, and much of the initial talk was exploring whether he wanted to talk. There was a recognition that the researcher coming to talk was difficult for him since he wanted to forget. This was broken by his assertion about how good he was at reading and the researcher's interest in his current reading. Shortly after this



David some brief words about the school's concerns, about the help he was getting with writing, and about the various people he had been visiting outside school (for the statutory assessment).

In the second interview a year later, he presented to the researcher as much more able to talk about school. This interview seemed to have 3 phases:

- a) General conversation about Christmas. David playing with his war station.
- b) Getting into the interview (the researcher: "I'm here to ask you to help me with my book, to ask what you think about how we should help children in school"). Asking David about what children felt about getting extra help.
- c) David taking the interview to a different phase, by making it all relate to him, by telling the researcher he was one of the people who received help.

Direct questions on help David received, what it consisted of, what he felt about it, and what he thought he was good at in school.

David had little memory of all the people he had seen, little idea of the statementing process and little idea of what it had all meant to his mother. He did not know whether people had had meetings. What he said most about was to do with the help he got, and about what teachers should do with outbursts from children. He did not want to go into his exclusion in detail. On the day of the interview he had been visited by the OT, but he was a little unclear as to her role.

In the second interview David spoke about his views of the way teachers treated children (including advice about what they should do when children had a temper tantrums), his own problems, and the extra help he was getting.

### **5.6.2 Main Themes**

David was critical of how teachers deal with children's outbursts. He felt they make too much of them, and teachers should just try to calm children down. Sending a child home suits some (but not him) who prefer to stay at home. Being sent home meant losing teaching time, and causing problems for parents who could not miss their work, and having one's mum "playing hell". He did not think he should have been excluded for what he had done. He thought that the worst that could happen was that he would be excluded permanently. He also did not like the way one of his teachers used to prod children, or slam books down in front of them.

David spoke of powerlessness, a theme of the interviews with the adults. He said he was powerless to stop his behaviour, and did not know what had happened to make his outbursts stop. He used terms like "brains get locked into doing it" (David, interview 2, p6). However, he also remarked that there was a time recently when he had been able to control his temper. He spoke of being happier now than when he had been interviewed the previous time.

From his responses, David seemed to be very pleased with the help he was receiving from the support teacher. He remarked upon not being allowed to write short stories now he was in this class. Writing was, he said, the hardest thing he had to do, and holding a pencil was also difficult. He liked the help he got because the work was easier. He did not mind leaving the class to do work with his teacher and it did not make him feel different. He preferred this to doing different work within the class. He wanted this help to continue – but not forever. Getting the extra help had made him feel better about school

David did not seem to know the types of people he had seen for the statutory assessment, or that he had been assessed. His responses implied he thought he had been to most of the people so they could give him help, and suggested he thought they had explained what they were doing and who they were but that he had forgotten. He knew the EP saw

him to find out what help to give him and remembered she had borrowed things like books from the school. He remembered the clinical psychologist by the box with all the puzzles inside. He remembered, with help from his mother, that she had said he was “a hundred in brains!” (David, interview 1, p10) and was better than anyone else she had met. He liked being able to miss school in order to see the different people. He had recently seen the OT, and said that she had come to “practice work with my fingers, like fitting beads on things and stuff” (David, interview 2, p15).

David noticed things in those around him, in a way that differed from the comments in the adult interviews. For example, he remembered what the OT said her friends called her, he remembered those he had gone to for help by their hair colour, and remarked on similarities in the names of his teachers (several had “Lin” in their name). In a teacher he generally did not like, he remarked that he did like her art classes. He particularly liked a teacher who had told jokes.

On visiting David and David’s mother two years after the second interview, he had moved to a different school, continued to get extra help at school, and no longer had any temper outbursts at school.

Themes in David’s interview were of the emotional density of what had happened to him at school. A feeling of powerlessness was evident particularly in his continuing puzzlement about his behaviour and the reactions of adults. His clarity of perspective on how teachers should be with children was striking, as was the importance to him of the help he was getting for writing. The absence of his views from the story of his statement as presented by the adult participants in their interviews, gave the impression of “a hidden child”. His views seemed hidden and the assessment process was deliberately hidden from him by his mother. The characteristic of David as hidden was noted by the researcher as being a particularly striking find. It was taken up in the concluding Chapter 6 as a particularly notable area for further discussion.



## **5.7 Comments to Conclude the Chapter**

*Research Question 2: What does it mean to the stakeholders to be “partners”?*

*What are the stakeholders’ perspectives?*

In answer to the second research question, partnership seemed to be elusive for many of the stakeholders in the case study child’s statutory assessment of his special educational needs. When “partnership” was defined by the stakeholders (participants) the definition seemed to differ considerably from person to person. People varied in whether partnership was central to their role. Some saw themselves as partners to certain professionals and not others, others defined their professional role very centrally in terms of partnership, whilst others saw themselves as distant from any kind of partnership. Partnership seemed to be particularly problematic for when the professional or personal needs of an individual were threatened. Although stakeholders might not see themselves in terms of partnership, all saw their role as being orientated towards at least two others. Several saw their role as an orientation towards four “others”, the parent, the child, the LEA and the school. These were the SENCO, the EP, the acting PEP, and the SCMO. The role orientations were all underpinned by different expressions of power, with all participants experiencing power and powerlessness in different ways and failing to recognise the power others perceived them to possess. These role orientations and the different expressions of partnership and power are theorised further in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 looks at the implications of two key striking findings for partnership: the primary designation in David’s statement as a child with learning difficulties, and the phenomenon of David’s voice as hidden or concealed. It then theorises further about partnership, power and the nature of statementing.

## **CHAPTER 6**

### **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: SOCIO-CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF PARTNERSHIP IN THE ASSESSMENT OF SPECIAL NEEDS**

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This chapter is a theoretical analysis of five key areas identified from the results of the two case studies. Two different tools (Engestrom's activity systems and Foucault's discourse analysis) are applied to the findings from the two case studies, each themselves with different theoretical bases. This discussion focuses primarily on participant perspectives of David's statutory assessment (the second case study), and integrates ideas from the analysis of the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme as appropriate (the first case study).

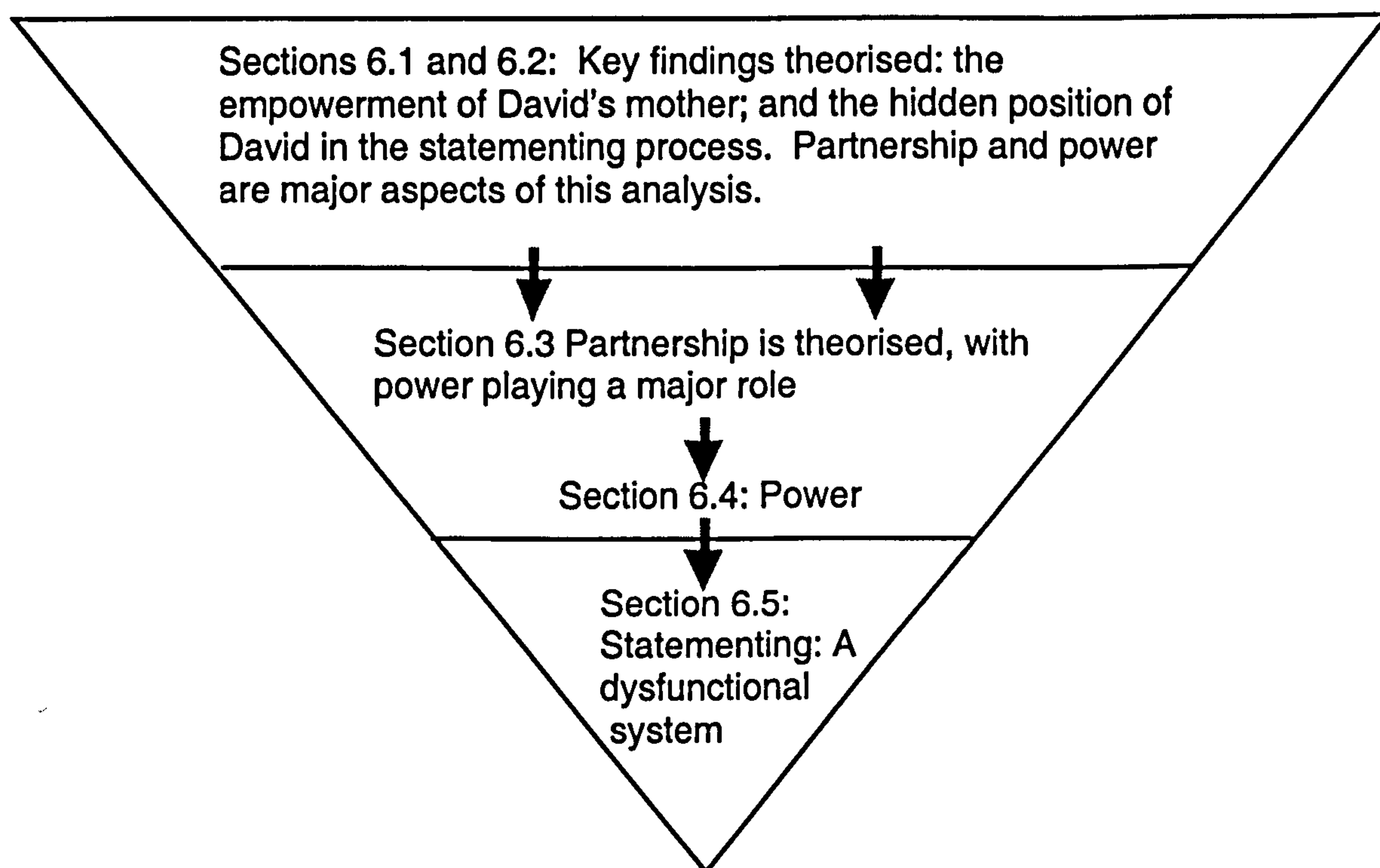
Sense is made of the perspectives on David's statement by viewing it as a complex set of systems. The researcher draws upon Engestrom's (1996; 1999) "activity system", which he has applied most notably to primary care medical practice. The concept of boundary crossing from Engestrom, Engestrom, and Karkkainen (1995) is also used to analyse the roles of the statement participants. The starting point for such analysis is the unexpected outcome of the statement, that David's mother achieves her goal of a statement focusing on learning difficulties.

Discourse analysis, with origins in Foucault's thinking, has been a tool throughout this research, is also evoked to draw attention to assumptions underlying practices. A further item from Foucault's "box of tools" (Allen, 1996; Allen, 1999, p19) is the idea of "transgressive practices" where individuals transgress boundaries. This proves useful for looking at what happened in David's statement and at what is happening in

professional life, as inferred from the results of this empirical research. (It should be noted that Foucault's concept of transgressing boundaries is different from Engestrom's concept of crossing boundaries).

This analysis involves looking at five key areas from the results. The first two areas each take a different unexpected or unusual finding from the results. These sections aim to explain the two findings, and in the process make some theoretical contribution to our understanding of partnership. The last three involve theorising in a more overarching manner. These take in turn two key themes from the previous sections, partnership and power, before a final look at the nature of statementing. The themes become progressively focused as shown in Figure 6.1. The diagram of the Chapter Structure is followed by a brief resume of each section in the chapter.

Figure 6.1 Structure of Chapter 6





*Section 6.1: Transgressive practices and boundary crossing: an exploration of how David's mother achieved her goal*

David's mother was able to achieve a statement for "learning difficulties" despite the head teacher wanting the statement to emphasise his behaviour. This outcome was unexpected. The way in which this happened is the starting point for understanding the processes of David's statement by viewing it as activity systems.

*Section 6.2: The hidden child David: looking at the purpose of his concealment*

David is virtually hidden within the assessment. The assessment system lacks power to facilitate the transgression that would be necessary to provide David with a voice. The reasons for this are looked for in the narrative of professional practice. A "Framework for Consultation with Children" is considered in section 6.2.3.

*Section 6.3: Banishing the narrative of partnership*

The first research question is finally revisited when the illusion of partnership and its potentially disempowering affects for both parents and professionals is revealed in the complex diversity of negative perspectives on partnership. The second research question is addressed in looking at the effects of partnership for other professionals.

*Section 6.4: Power: a multi-dimensional analysis*

Power is a major factor in the first three sections of this chapter. This section pulls together thinking on power, as it has arisen from the two research questions. This challenges the usual uni-dimensional theorising and builds upon a previously published article co-written by the researcher, with a 50% contribution (Todd & Higgins, 1998, in Volume II, Appendix 12). Implications for professional practice are considered in section 6.4.3.

### ***Section 6.5: Statutory Assessment: a Dysfunctional Political System***

The nature of statementing is considered in the light of the preceding discussion about the experience of David and his mother, and in the light of a theoretical consideration of partnership and power. Further avenues for research are considered in section 6.5.1.

First, this chapter introduces the application of Engestrom's activity systems to David's statementing system.

## **Section 6.1: An exploration of how David's mother achieved her goal. Engestrom's Activity Systems as a Tool**

In recent years increasing interest has been shown in conceptualising complex human activities in terms of different kinds of systems. Systemic analysis has been applied to families (Campbell, Draper, & Huffington, 1989; Hoffman, 1981), but also to complex and equally messy human institutions. Soft systems analysis is one example of the use of a systemic approach to research in a real human situation. However, Checkland's approach (Checkland, 1981) was limited in being only able to adopt one perspective on the problem situation and had no way of handling conflict. Other tools for looking at systems, which might avoid such problems, demand some attention. Some approaches are appropriate as a guide to carrying out actions in human institutions, such as problem solving frameworks (Frederickson, 1990; Monsen, 1998), action research (Atkinson, 1994; Elliot, 1991; Hart, 1995) and other "new paradigm" approaches to research (Burden, 1977). However, an approach was needed which was more specifically geared towards analysis, one which had the power to place some of the complexities of the statementing process in a way that its constituent parts could be analysed, to enable the link between different elements to be investigated. The outcome of David's assessment was therefore unpacked from the interviews with assistance from (Engestrom, 1996) "activity systems". This tool assisted the researcher to "understand the ways in which a particular problem-solving activity is embedded in a set of cultural practices and institutions at a specific point in their historical evolution" (Daniels, 1998, p104). Drawing on Vygotsky and Leont'ev, the basic unit of analysis of human behaviour is not seen to be within the individual, but is at the level of an activity system, comprising not only a number of individuals and groups of people, but the cultural, historical and societal context within which human activity is played out. Such a view



recognises the socially and culturally constructed nature of individual behaviour. It requires attention to a broad context in any problem solving analysis. In the current research, it requires the assessment of a child to be located within "the physical and institutional context, the social roles and status of the individuals involved, the cultural mediators available" (Daniels, 1998, p104). The use of activity systems did not mean a reduction in the complexity of the matter being discussed in this thesis. However, it allowed a focus on certain areas of the complexity, in a way that related aspects of statementing to aspects of human activity found in other contexts. It allowed more theoretical analysis of what was actually happening in David's statement.

The aim in using activity systems has therefore been to facilitate theoretical analysis of the empirical data of this thesis. Whilst the aim has not been to evaluate the use of activity systems in such an analysis, some such evaluation is included in the final section of this thesis to assist the reader in evaluating the methodology of this thesis.

Engestrom's basic activity system is reproduced below (Figure 6.2, p354) with text to explain the general items and nodes. This is followed by a diagram depicting its application to the process of David's statement (Figure 6.3, 356), and by text explaining and discussing the systems as applied to this research. The activity system provided a device for theoretical discussions on partnership, power and professionalism in the ensuing sections.



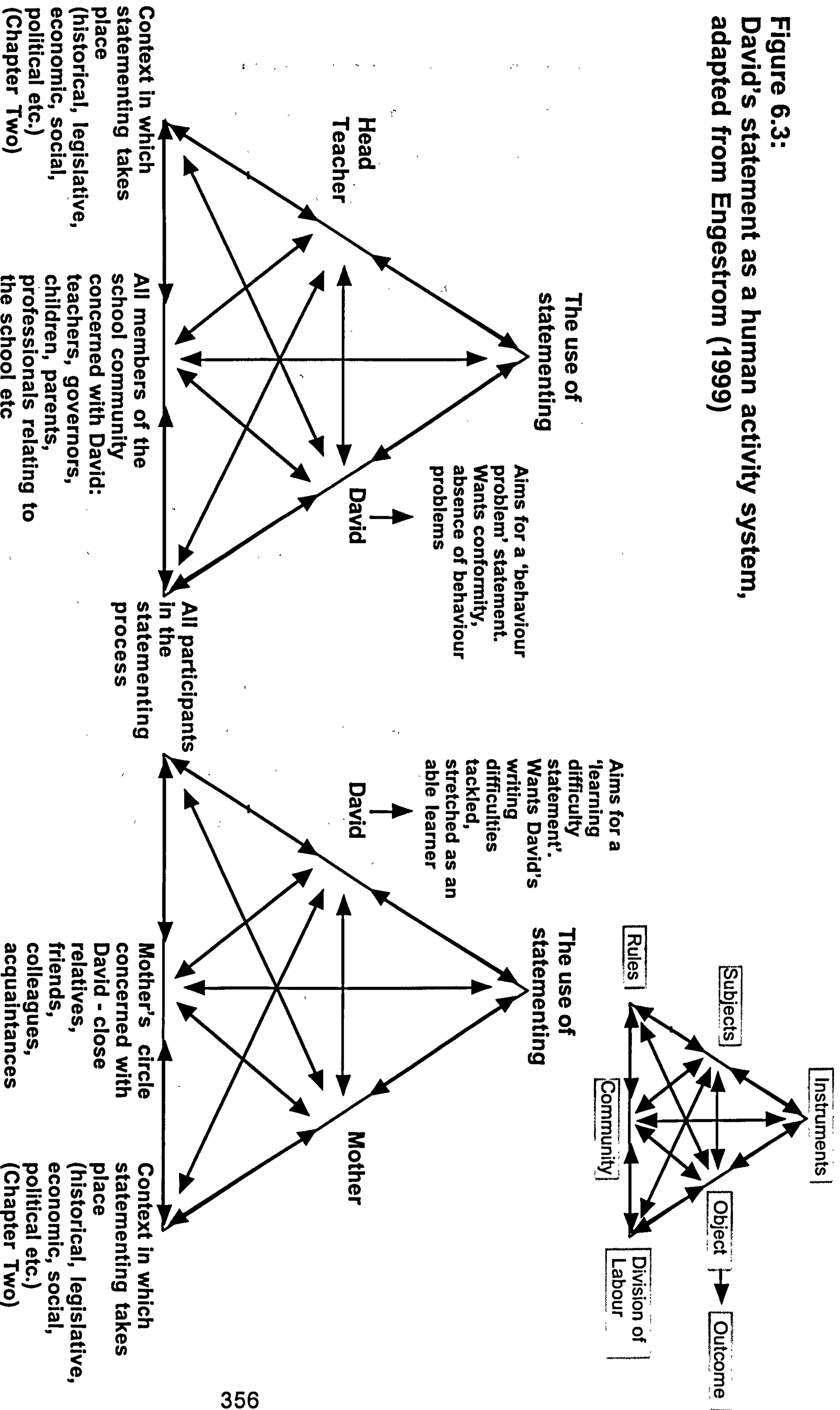
### **6.1.1 Conceptualising David's Assessment**

The activity system is a powerful tool that facilitates theoretical discussion of findings from the rich context of the problem solving process of statementing. The power of this tool of analysis lies in being able to visually portray the societal and cultural complexities within which statementing is located. In a later section in this chapter the researcher shows the way activity systems can show the connections of differing strengths between nodes, and some of the inner contradictions, between the different facets of a highly complex situation. All diagrams in this chapter aim to facilitate engagement with the discussion of the research findings, rather than simply serving as a summary device. As such they are likely to demand time to understand what they are saying.

David's statutory assessment is represented over the page by two related activity systems (Figure 6.3, p356). Figure 6.3 depicts these systems and shows Engestrom's original labels in order to help the reader. It would be quite legitimate and possible to represent the assessment by as many activity systems as there are participants. Maybe a three dimensional model would show activity systems for not only the head teacher and David's mother, but also the class teacher, the clinical psychologists and all the others interviewed. However, in order to simplify the analysis it was decided to focus on just two activity systems. The discussion would include reference to all participants without needing to place each one in her, or his, own activity system. It was decided that the school, as the institution initiating the assessment, and the mother, as parent of the child seen as location of the problem, should be viewed as the main activity systems, and would allow theorising around other systems to take place.



**Figure 6.3:**  
**David's statement as a human activity system,**  
 adapted from Engestrom (1999)



The activity system of the school has been inverted, in order to relate it to that of the mother. This shows that both systems share an element in common, that of the "rules" of statementing. It is hoped that such a tool enables aspects of the whole statementing system to be discussed at a more theoretical level.

Engestrom's "rules" have been defined, in terms of the current research, as the context in which statementing takes place (historical, legislative, economic, social, political etc.). This would encompass all material discussed in the literature review in Chapter Two. This context includes the changing discourse of special educational needs, the ambiguous role of the professional, the varied ways parents relate to schools, and the major constraints on partnership. These aspects of the two activity systems are seen to be identical, since both the head teacher and David's mother reside within the same complex cultural context. Indeed a line could have been drawn linking these identical nodes, but this was rejected as distracting to the reader. Each of the "subjects" (the head teacher and the mother) is concerned with David as the "object", occupying the "problem space". However, they look for different, but overlapping, outcomes for David, so what is written for each in the "outcomes" box is different for each. In both activity systems the same statementing process is the prime "instrument" used to solve the problem, including use of verbal and written language in meetings and assessment interviews, letters and reports. The "tools" of statementing are likely to differ in each activity system. For example, the head teacher might expect the SENCO to use various educational tests. David's mother is expected to apply her personal, relational, perspective on her son. "Division of labour" refers, in this research, to the division of tasks in the community and vertical divisions of power and status. In this research, findings about role orientations and power positions would all be located at "division of labour". "Community" will vary in each system but will overlap and includes individuals and groups who share the same general concern about David's situation. A little time

spent studying these activity systems, to see how Engestrom's (1999) nodes have been applied to statementing, is rewarded by ease in understanding the following discussions.

In the diagram of the two related systems there are connections between nodes in each triangular activity system. These connections vary within each system: there are major differences between connections in the mother's system and those in the head teacher's system. Some of the connections between the nodes vary considerably in the strength and nature of their relationship, and include strong connections, ambiguities and inner contradictions. Notation showing these different connections have not been included in Figure 6.3, in order to give the reader an opportunity to understand the way Engestrom's original labels have been applied, and the way the head teacher's system has been inverted. However, they are explained and discussed in Figure 6.4 (p364) and in the following section looking at Transgressive Practices and Boundary Crossing.



### **6.1.2 Transgressive practices and boundary crossing**

The analysis of results from the second case study looked at the themes of "David" (views of his situation and his problems), the assessment process in general, perceptions of partnership, views of role, and understanding of the location of power in assessment. In all these areas the overall, general finding was one of the range of perspectives on each theme. Unexpected outcomes were identified, not least the outcome of the assessment itself in terms of a statement dealing with learning difficulties, an outcome sought by David's mother.

David's mother achieves a powerful position in his statementing process through various "transgressive practices", by which individuals challenge the view of the self imposed by the social institutions and processes in which they are engaged, and crossing the "limits or boundaries imposed by others" (Allen, 1999, p47). "It is an ambivalent position, neither welcoming its new self nor forsaking its past, and it can confirm the boundaries and the impossibility of removing them" (Allen, 1999, p48). David's mother's main transgression is in claiming the right to label her son, a role reserved for professionals (Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995). This transgression seems to occur gradually, as part of the mother's "daily process of weighing up, evaluating and choosing between options" (Reay, 1996, p582). The transgression process seems to evolve over more than a year of difficulties with school, and into the start of the formal assessment process. It is associated with the transgression of yet another boundary, that of being a partner to the school. She realised she had to withdraw from being a partner to the school, in order to partner David:

....you overcome it, and you do your utmost to work alongside and with the school.... what I found was, I was doing that too much, and I had to step back from that and partner myself alongside David, realign myself with David..... I was too much partnering the school, if you like..... Supporting the school. Which is what you think a good parent does..... (David's mother, Interview 3, p28)

David's mother's actions also transgressed the practice whereby teachers initiate assessments with a fairly clear idea of the outcome they expect (Armstrong, 1995, p31). Not only that, but she eluded the *powerlessness of the partnership discourse* (researcher's italics). A complex discourse operating within different professional roles means that stated role orientations can be at odds with their enactment, and children and parents may seem to be excluded from decision making despite the intentions of professionals to include them (Armstrong, 1995, p63 and p119; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p79). In David's assessment each professional set the agenda from her own perspectives and the particular kind of power exerted by those perspective (Todd & Higgins, 1998). This confirmed findings from Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson that parents could experience "disempowerment by partnership" (Armstrong, 1995, p47; see also: Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994). Given the lack of power which made it impossible for parents, in a relationship with professionals, to state their own views, partnership seemed to represent opportunities to co-opt parents into professional viewpoints. Current forms of parental involvement are also likely to disempower parents by reinforcing existing gender inequalities since they generally locate women primarily in their mothering role (Maclaclan, 1996).

Whilst helpful, the concept of transgression offers little in the way of understanding implications for the wider sphere in which David's mother operates, or reasons for being able to transgress. For example, an individual analysis sheds little light on the process by which David's mother was able to continue to resist disempowerment.



*I still feel as if I've got that job to do, to make sure that it doesn't slip to being, David is a behaviour problem.....I don't mind, I don't object to them saying that he misbehaves, but I don't want him labelled a behaviour problem... as long as he's getting the help that he's getting, that's fine. It doesn't matter.*  
(David's mother, interview 3, p26)

### **6.1.3 A Systems Approach to Boundary Crossing**

A more systemically defined boundary crossing is defined and illustrated by Engestrom (1995) as a cognitive process representing expertise in professionals, when they

*operate in and move between multiple parallel activity contexts. These multiple contexts demand and afford different, complementary but also conflicting cognitive tools, rules, and patterns of social interaction. Criteria of expert knowledge and skill are different in the various contexts. Experts face the challenge of negotiating and combining ingredients from different contexts to achieve hybrid solutions* (p320).

Engestrom's concept of polycontextuality is also useful to the current analysis. Polycontextuality refers to the multiple ongoing tasks apparent in expert work: "Polycontextuality at the level of the activity system means that experts are engaged not only in multiple simultaneous task-specific participation frameworks within one and the same activity. They are also increasingly involved in multiple communities of practice" (p324). These concepts represent a useful extension to Allan's use of Foucault's unhelpfully individualistic "transgressive" practices.

In their analysis of boundary crossing, Engestrom et al (1995) looked at three case studies, set respectively in a municipal welfare and health centre, a primary school, and a factory manufacturing cabins for large ships. They found several interesting features. The first case illustrated the difficulty of boundary crossing by means of meetings only. The second demonstrated that boundary crossing does not have to achieve mutually



accepted interpretations across boundaries to be fruitful, and that realisation of differences and contrasts through argument could trigger significant collective concept formation on one or both sides of the boundary. The third demonstrated that boundary crossing could be a mutual process of problem solving in which the initially assumed roles of the parties may be changed or reversed. Turning back to this thesis, applying Engestrom's concepts assisted directly in the task of analysing how the particular outcome of David's statement was achieved. It was directed at finding out by what kind of professional relationships and role orientations was the outcome secured. Such a systemic analysis hopes to redress Reay's (1996, p586) critique of parental choice for failing to consider that "options are the products of a particular context".

#### **6.1.4 Boundary Crossing in Dynamic Activity Systems: strong connections and inner contradictions**

David's mother was empowered enough to be able to carry out a major, crucial transgression of labelling her child and resisting partnership through further boundary crossing, and by means of ambiguities and various inner contradictions in her activity system.

*if I was to choose a label, I'd choose gifted.....It's less important, but it's still important to guard against one label being stuck on. I still feel as if I've got that job to do, to make sure that it doesn't slip to being, David is a behaviour problem. .... I don't object to them saying that he misbehaves, but I don't want him labelled a behaviour problem. Do you know what I mean?.....And it's not as important, it's not as important to have the label, as long as, as long as he's getting the help. You know, as long as he's getting the help that he's getting, that's fine. It doesn't matter.*

(David's mother, interview 3, p26)

The ways in which the participants in David's statementing process operated to achieve constant renegotiation within the activity system, which involved some major acts of boundary crossing, are described below and illustrated in the following activity system (Figure 6.4, p364). Useful to this analysis is Engestrom (1999)'s assertion that activity systems are in a constant state of change:

*...constant construction and renegotiation within the activity system. Co-ordination between versions of the object must be achieved to ensure continuous operation. Tasks are reassigned and redivided, rules are bent and reinterpreted. (Engestrom 1999)*





Change over time is beyond the scope of this research, but a dynamic view of activity systems is illustrated in Figure 6.4. This diagram reproduces the earlier activity system (Figure 6.3, p356), but includes notation to indicate some of the connections between the nodes. This includes strong connections, weak connections, ambiguities, and important inner contradictions (see (a) to (g) in Figure 6.4). Strength is indicated by darkness of line. This section aims to explain the ways in which David's mother achieved her goal with reference to the connections (a) to (g), and these connections are all explained in the following text.

Often diagrams are summary devices, designed to be able to show information at a glance, for very brief attention. However, as was previously stated this diagram is designed to facilitate the reader's engagement with the argument. The diagram and the associated text are likely to involve the reader in careful study for some minutes in order to understand the nature and effect of the different connections. The reader is also invited to keep in mind while reading that the main focus of this section is an analysis of the ways in which David's mother achieved her goal, the acceptance by the local education authority of her version of the reality of her child. There were limits to the boundary transgression possible for David's mother: she had a very different perspective on David to that of the school (one might speculate she is referring here to the head teacher):

*the way I think of David's interests and the way school think of him, there's like, an ocean apart* (David's mother, interview 3, p30)

She also felt disempowered by her being defined (by several interviewees) as a single parent. However, empowered by her level of cultural capital (i.e. her financial resources and social location) (Reay, 1996, p583), she engaged with those outside the system of the school to accrue more of an equal partnership. She could have been co-

opted by the professional viewpoint within the school: a reference, which the researcher discussed earlier, to Armstrong's (1995) observation of the ways parents might become disempowered by partnership.

*I had to put an awful lot of effort in not to become powerless,  
(David's mother, interview 3, p8)*

David's mother felt unable to cross, un-aided, into certain aspects of the professional role. Whilst she could label David as having a problem, she needed the other professionals to support her view and to define the learning problem in more detail. Contrary to the findings of Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson, David's mother did not have to take actions outside the assessment process in order to empower herself (1994, p80-83). In order to strengthen her position she chose to co-opt with the professional viewpoint of professionals who were part of the assessment but outside the school and to adopt their reports for herself. Such viewpoints would strengthen her own position. In particular she looked towards the two psychologists, the senior clinical medical officer and the SENCO (who, despite being a member of school staff, also held a professional viewpoint outside that of the school). In the following quote, Mrs Bradley is the SENCO:

*...on your own as a parent... it's very hard to argue it, it's very hard to say no my child isn't naughty he has a problem... it's a very dangerous sticky wicket and you feel very isolated... it's only when other professionals are involved that can look at it objectively perhaps. ... I could say he had a fine motor problem and it was causing his behaviour problems, or some of them until I was blue in the face but until the doctor had tested him and said yes it is an actual thing, I was powerless really. ... It's the actual help with Mrs Bradley first thing in the morning that I think's made the difference. I think the other things (the actual formal assessment) have helped to change attitudes...  
(David's mother, interview 2, p13)*

The co-opting of certain professional viewpoints by David's mother is illustrated at (g) on the activity system representing David's statement, Figure 6.4 showing an "ambiguous" connection between "mother" and "All participants in the statementing process". The



ambiguity refers to her wish not to be involved with statementing at all, but also to her assertion that some of the participants empowered her. The rise of the "new" disabilities, such as ADHD and dyspraxia, can be understood as empowering parents (albeit differentially, see Riddell, Brown, & Duffield, 1994) without parents having to rely, as did David's mother, on being empowered by professional viewpoints. David's mother had several possible labels at her disposal and would only use them if they were likely to help David.

The strong orientation towards David by most, but not all, participants in the statement is illustrated by a strong but ambiguous connection between David and the participants in both activity systems, at (a) in Figure 6.4. This can also be seen graphically in a diagram later in this chapter, Figure 6.5 (p380), on role orientations. This analysis has tried to make some kind of distinction between merely declaring orientation towards a particular client, here the child, and evidence of that orientation in order to take account of Armstrong's concern that such declarations are rarely acted upon (Armstrong, 1995). Evidence of role orientation towards David was strongest on the part of his mother. Evidence was also available of the class teacher's positive orientation to David, despite his feeling of frustration with the LEA for not acting sooner to provide support. The class teacher counted himself among those having most influence on David. This orientation, is, in effect, a discourse of "affect" towards David. In a more obvious manner, "liking David" (which was expressed by the two psychologists and by the SENCO) was seen as very important to David's mother, and empowered her. It normalised her: made her like a "normal" mother, gaining approval for herself from approval for her child (Bailey, 1993; David, 1993). In effect, affect provided a bridge for David's mother to move into a different role.



"Liking David" was therefore itself a major facilitator of "boundary crossing" – since it provided a discourse that was contrary to the discourse of blame and negativity. The latter were in clear evidence at the time of the interviews for this research, as evidenced by media response to a boy attending Manton Junior School in Worksop. There was intense media attention when the 10-year old boy, who had been excluded on two previous occasions, returned to school when the governors withdrew funding for an individual teacher. The head teacher decided to close the school rather than take the child back. Discourses identified in media articles (The Express 1996, October 30<sup>th</sup>, p18: The Scotsman, October 30<sup>th</sup>, p2: The Mail, October 30<sup>th</sup>, page 10) were of blame and condemnation, accompanied by actions unlikely to lead to conciliation (i.e. the head closing the school, the mother seeking court action). On the same day "The Independent" led with the endorsement of "the cane" by the then Education Secretary, Gillian Shephard. It was in such a context that the various participants in David's situation were responding to him. The boundary crossing achieved by David's mother challenged the dominant discourses of the day. That this could happen underlines a greater complexity of family-school relations than is suggested by the blame and defensive actions reported by the media, and supports the more complex picture discussed in detail by David (1993).

Other discontinuities in the system contributed to the achievement of the outcome wanted by David's mother. The connection at (c) on the head teacher's activity system indicates an ambiguous relationship between the head teacher and David. Despite the weakness in role orientation of the head teacher towards David, her main concern being the whole school, she facilitated time being given by the SENCO to work with him before the completion of the statement. The resulting improvements in David's behaviour and writing had the effect of empowering his mother to hold on to her goal for him. It also

provided evidence to the statementing panel that learning support could achieve progress for David.

The strong orientation towards David on the part of most was contrasted by the strong discontinuity in the head teacher's activity system between her and many involved in David's statement (i.e. the difference in her views of David and those of other participants). This is illustrated by (b) in Figure 6.4. A further major discontinuity was the head teacher's view of statementing, illustrated by (h). She both desperately needed the LEA to provide some extra support for her school in order to manage David, and this could only be provided by the statementing process, but she also had little confidence that any LEA solution would be effective.

The role played by the educational psychologist suggested boundary crossing might be one of her role characteristics. The traditional role of psychometrist and report writer (tests and report writing being, in this case the "instruments" or "tools" of the statementing process) had far less prominence in this assessment than her role as mediator. By definition her role was to transgress boundaries and to combine ingredients from different contexts. Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (1994) note the conflict and confusion that may arise from the ambiguities of the role of the educational psychologist. Armstrong refers to childcare professionals in dealing with "skill and compassion" with a wide range of competing interests and needs (Armstrong, 1995, p49). The educational psychologist did not, herself, express any confusion about her role, but her role in "clearing up any of these contaminating things" (educational psychologist interview, p3) suggest one dealing with conflict between others. The reader is directed to Figure 6.5 (p380) later in this chapter for a diagrammatic representation of the educational psychologist's role.

The role of the SENCO in this case was also characterised by multiple boundary crossing. She worked very much across contexts: in the context of the child, the parent, the school and the LEA. This can be seen graphically in the diagram later in this chapter, Figure 6.5 (p380). She had only recently joined the school, and saw her role as mediating with the teachers to change their attitudes to David. She also saw her role as working with David to improve his skills, and working with David's mother to find communications systems about David that would be acceptable and effective. She felt she worked in partnership with the educational psychologist and she was confident she could influence the LEA statementing panel with the advice she wrote on David. The researcher has already referred in this section to her not being a party to the professional opinion of David held by the school. Her commitment to helping David with writing skills was translated into her advice for the LEA, which conveyed a strong message of learning difficulties in addition to one concerning behaviour difficulties. The polycontextuality of the SENCO empowered David's mother in a number of ways: the SENCO mediated with staff to encourage a more tolerant attitude towards David, worked with David to improve his writing, liked him and wrote "advice" (the report required by the local education authority) for David's statement.

There was no evidence in this research of Miller's (1994) finding that consultation with educational psychologists about children with behaviour problems had the effect of allowing a temporary boundary to be established with a teacher in a way that was different from that of the teacher as part of the school culture. Miller's temporary boundary established the teacher as part of a system with the child, the parent, the educational psychologist, and the LEA. It enabled the teacher to act outside his or her usual role, and to collaborate successfully with the educational psychologist in working to improve the behaviour of the child. However, as soon as the collaboration was over, the original boundary of the school culture re-asserted itself, as shown by a lack of any



impact of successful strategies with particular children on the school as a whole. In David's case the SENCO seemed in a more permanent boundary with the EP, identifying strongly with the LEA. However, the class teacher had little identification with the EP. It may be that the research interview took place after the school boundary had re-asserted itself, or that David's teacher was among the minority Miller identified who did not regard the educational psychologist's intervention as successful, and did not therefore join the temporary boundary.

There were differences in the two activity systems, that of David's mother and that of the head teacher, in the connection between the subject's "community" and the "tool", statementing. David's mother's community had very little connection with the statementing process, whereas the head teacher was part of a community in which statementing would be relatively unfamiliar to some but very much part of the role of others (h). However, David's mother did have one person from her community, her own ally, the named person, to help her avoid being co-opted by a viewpoint she did not hold. This is indicated at (d) by the two different arrows, the thick arrow representing the named person and the faint arrow representing all other friends, family and colleagues. One could imagine that the head teacher was less supported, in the statementing process in terms of personal support by other people, than was David's mother.

The existence of the named person was, in itself, a contradiction for the system. Findings of the first case study, looking at the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme, indicated the difficulties educational psychologists had in accepting a role for the Named Person. There was a view, expressed by the researcher in her role as educational psychologist, that the named person would not be required if the educational psychologist had more time to work with the parent. Other research indicates that participants have expected roles in case conferences (Marks, 1993; Marks, Burman,

Burman, & Parker, 1995), but the named person, as a new participant, is likely to be without any clear role. The need for her to be given a role is likely to account for the behaviour of the teaching staff, as reported by the named person in David's situation, in challenging her authority to speak and being silenced. They seemed able to accept the named person's view only when she had revealed a professional role in her working life, and, better still, one related to the process in hand of dealing with difficulties in coping with a child. The named person was therefore encouraged to cross a boundary in order to adopt a role that could be understood by other participants, that of "honorary professional". Without that role it seemed that no one could place her contribution to meetings. The importance of the named person for David's mother was in empowering her to maintain in meetings her view that there was another side to David and to his situation. In particular David's mother maintained her view that he had a learning problem, and also that his behaviour was not problematic at home. Such a role for the named person finds resonance with the debate in the first case study between the different parent partnership officers about whether parents needed a role emphasising support, or one emphasising advocacy. David's mother's named person seemed to defy such a clear dichotomy by acting in both roles, by not taking a clear "anti-LEA" stance, and by taking on a role of "honorary professional".

Difficulties in placing the boundaries of new roles such as the named person, and of the parent partnership officer who recruited, trained and managed named persons, was also found in the analysis of the first case study. In the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme, the LEA Parent Partnership Officer (PPO) and the voluntary agency PPO clashed in a major way over their own role and over the way they defined the role of the Named Person. Essentially the LEA PPO rejected the boundary crossing activities of the voluntary organisation PPO. Such difficulties in boundary crossing were confirmed by the DFEE evaluation of parent partnership schemes (Wolfendale & Cook, 1997). One



response to the scheme by PEPs actually mentioned the need to define boundaries in the roles of EPs and PPOs, another of the need to clarify PPO role, and another of the problems of the hidden agendas of the named person.

At the end of this long process of negotiation, the final negotiation was one in which the advice (the reports from school, the parent(s), the educational psychologist and the senior medical officer) was considered by the statementing panel, chaired by the acting principal educational psychologist. She, in her interview, stated that where there was a disagreement about a child, she would go first with the perspective of the parent:

*... if you've got a situation that is ambiguous, and you don't go with a recommendation that you know will be acceptable to the parent, again, how do you make the argument, when the parent says I'm not accepting what you're offering, I want the other, if it is clear from the information that you've got from the assessment that it is a bit of both? How do you, you know, if it came to it, how do you sort of draw the line and say, we think you're wrong, we're going for this side of the equation?*

*.. Well, again, if you're talking like you're thinking things are coming from a, from the home side, you're, the likelihood of your being able to do anything positive about that is increased if you, in the initial stages, are going along with the, going along with in a, in a just a giving in sort of way, but at least trying to carry the parent with you in saying, well, OK we've tried this, look we've still got these problems, now, let's start and address those.*

*...Yes. You have to take the longer view, yes. If a child's got emotional problems that appear to arise from problems there have been at home, you're not going to get anywhere just by sort of turning on the parents and saying, oh well, it's, that, from the parents' point of view, they're saying it's all my fault. Well, up go the defences.*

*(acting principal educational psychologist, p.21)*

Where there continued to be a difference of opinion, the parent's view seemed to be the one to be carried. What seemed to be of major importance in this particular case was that David's mother should be able to sustain her goal of provision for learning difficulties to the end of the statementing process. If she could do this, given the view held by the acting PEP, her goal would have a high likelihood of being adopted. However, the difficulty was sustaining her goal. Also, she did not know the position of the acting PEP.



The expected outcome for David's statement would be one focusing on behaviour, given the school's insistence on a behaviour label for David and the difficulties for parents in playing an active role in statementing (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994). This would have happened, given the expected connections in the activity system. However, a number of important contradictions, ambiguities and several instances of boundary crossing occurred in this case study in a way that empowered David's mother to insist on an alternative label, and to propel decision makers to accept her label. A number of important theoretical points have been made in this section which will be taken up again in the final three sections of this chapter. The complex inter-relationships of those involved in the statement have been shown to facilitate David's mother's empowerment. The two major themes in such a process, the inter-relationship and empowerment are theorised in sections on partnership and power. However, before this, the position of David is considered in some detail.

## **Section 6.2: The Hidden Child David: Looking at the Purpose of his Concealment**

It was apparent to the researcher when she first presented the initial findings of this research to groups of researchers and practitioners, that there were two hidden voices: that of the researcher herself and that of David. The former was important in such a qualitative piece of research, and was provided by the research diary and various actions involving other external researchers, as discussed in Chapter 3, looking at methodology. The latter was of more concern and posed a question which seemed likely to have major implications for the assessment process: why, in a process which was about some fairly crucial aspect of a child's life, did the child appear to be absent? Of course, in many ways the child was not absent. David, and his situation at school was the reason for the assessment and all assessment events either involved professionals working with him, writing about him or talking about him. The research questions asked participants about David and he was interviewed on two occasions for this research.

David was hidden because he lacked the power to take part in the assessment process as an event, a complex multi-layered, non-transparent, process, rather than as an information gathering exercise. The statutory assessment of a child is often seen as an exercise in putting together different parts of a jigsaw: this would constitute an information gathering exercise. A more likely analogy, based on the current research, is of a series of mazes within mazes. David appeared caught within his own maze trying to negotiate the problem of being at school, with, seemingly, no idea of other mazes around him, such as that of the assessment process itself. He lacked any active role that gave him agency in the process: he was a passive recipient of statementing. An activity system for David's relationship to statementing does not exist: to find out the

nature of his activity system in other spheres of his life would involve analysis, for example, of David's personal constructs, and is beyond the scope of this thesis. This section aims to theorise the reasons for David's concealment in terms of the discourse of the professionals. It also aims to look at what the child's voice in general and David's in particular might bring to an assessment.

The disempowerment of David from assessment is confirmed by research on twenty-nine children with behavioural difficulties (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994), discussed previously in the literature review. Very few children, who were in both residential and mainstream schools, had been consulted about their views. Most had major misunderstandings about their own needs, their placement, and the role of professionals. The misunderstandings were likely to have a major negative impact on their understanding of themselves as learners. Subsequent research tells a similar story. Dyson, Lin and Millward (1998) recognised a recurrent theme in the literature of the voices of service-users being overwhelmed by the voices of service providers. The "child" was also hidden in the DFEE funded research into parent partnership schemes since children's views were not sought on ways to involve parents in statementing (Wolfendale and Cook, 1997). Notable exceptions include texts looking at different ways to involve children in professional actions (Davie & Galloway, 1995; Gersch & Nolan, 1994; Masson & Oakley, 1999; Morris, 1998) and research into children's perspectives of different aspects of education (Blatchford, 1996; Cooper, 1993; Cooper & McIntyre, 1995; Lewis, 1995; Lloyd-Smith & Davis, 1995; Rudduck & Chaplain, 1995). However, none of the examples given looked in any detail at the implications of the child's perspective for complex multi-agency situations.



### **6.2.1 The Discourse of Professional Practice**

If it was true that parents lacked the power needed to state their own views, and were likely therefore to be disempowered by professionals attempting to bring them into partnership (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994), then this was likely to be even more the case with children. Children are disempowered by the narrative of professional practice (Todd, 2000, see Volume II, Appendix 12). Professionals, particularly those external to the school such as educational psychologists, clinical psychologists, and senior clinical medical officers, have the role of applying their "rational objectivity", in the form of tests and other tools, to define and label the child. This was a role recognised by David's mother, and was one of the reasons she co-opted their viewpoints in order to empower herself (as discussed in the previous section). The discourse of professional practice is suggested to include being decisive, acting as the expert, and working in a rational, objective framework to define, label and reduce the child to certain terms and descriptors (Todd, 2000). Such a narrative emanates from the within-child focus of many professionals, based upon the medical model (Allen, Brown, & Riddell, 1995), and also Mehan (1996):

*The psychological language gained its authority from the mastery and control of a technical vocabulary, grounded in a quasi-scientific authority that contributes to the stratification of languages of representation and thereby the construction of children's identities.* (Mehan, 1996, p261).

The construction of the child forced by such a model leads professionals to locate the problem within the child. The child is assessed and the answer becomes the provenance of the professional. Implications of the professional narrative for the child is a person objectified, presented in parts, silenced and disempowered. Professionals are only able to see certain aspects of a child if they employ certain reductionist tools.

A further discourse operating in the assessment of a child's special educational needs is that of bureaucracy and control (Fulcher, 1989), as discussed in the literature review. The procedures in the UK claiming to improve outcomes for children and increase parental involvement are essentially bureaucratic ones, about who should write reports and how long each stage in the assessment should take, and lead to managerial solutions to speed up procedures rather than human solutions to increase advocacy. Control is exercised in many ways in an assessment, one example being in the scientific discourse of some of the professionals which is exercised in the paperwork which accompanies an assessment. The other way control is exercised by the professionals is that the complexity of the bureaucracy (local rules about procedures and notification of changes in the details in procedure) are only readily available to the professionals working daily in the statementing process.

*What all such narratives obscure is the major role of the professional as exerting power within the system. (Cornwell, 1988, p163)*

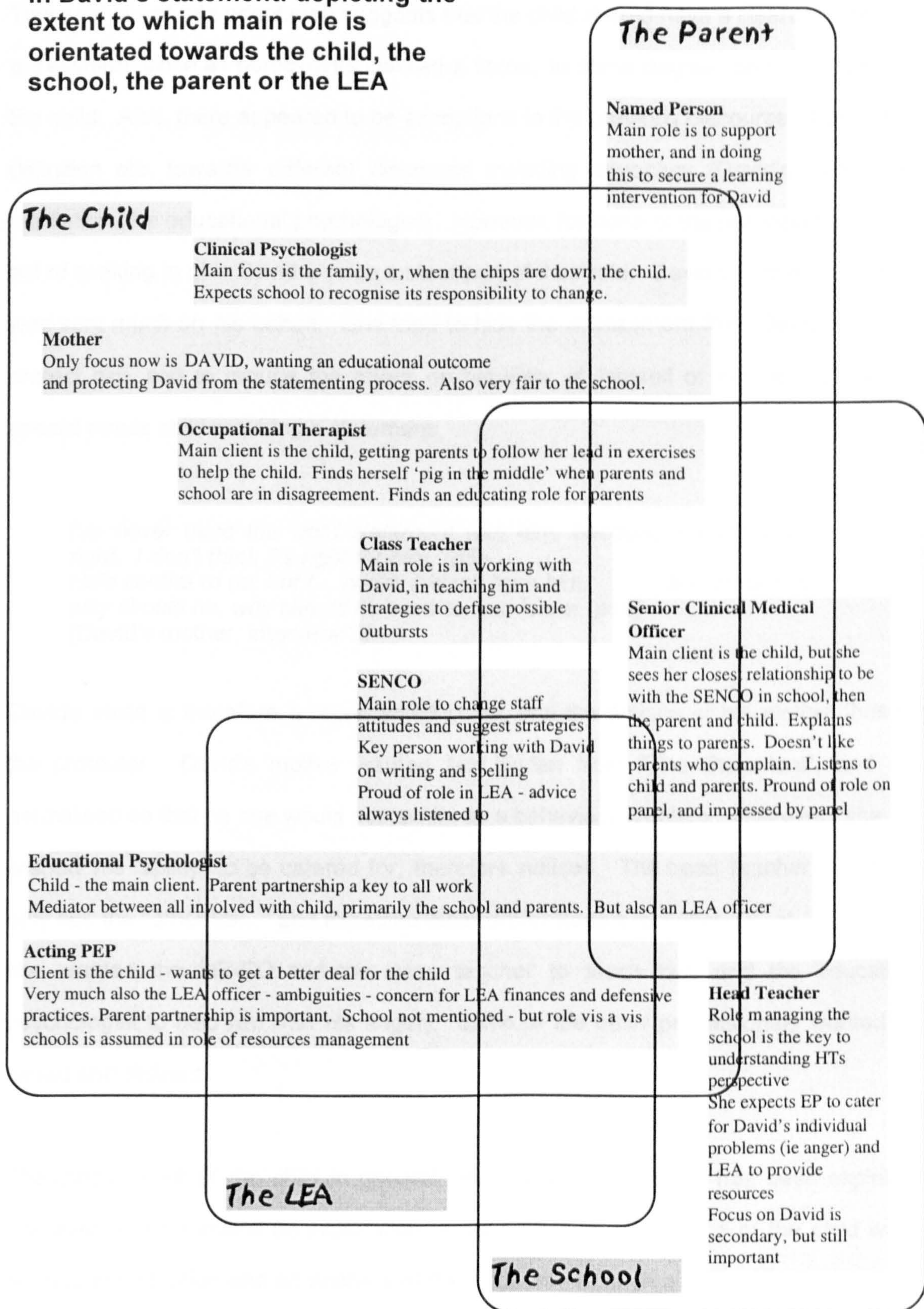
Analysis of role perspectives reveals further complexities in the discourse of professional practice and is therefore worth turning to now in more detail. The role orientations of each participant in David's assessment are depicted in the diagram below (Figure 6.5, p380). Once again, the diagram demands close reading. The role orientations were arrived at from analysis of the interviews. Most participants were asked a direct question about the main focus of their role, in terms of whom they saw to be their main client. There were also asked indirect questions about role focus. Utterances were further analysed to judge the extent to which role was orientated towards the following: the child, the school, the parent and the LEA, since:

*The tools of speech that professional communities use seek to both determine and construct professional boundaries. (Daniels, 1998, p105).*

In order to construct the Venn diagram of role orientations in Figure 6.5 (p380) the summary frames, in Volume II, Appendix 9, were drawn upon. Each rounded square represents a role orientation. The rounded squares overlap to enable the researcher to show people orientated towards more than one role. For example, the occupational therapist has been placed in three areas: the child, the parent and the school, to show that her role was focused on all three areas. In bold and Italics, next to the role name of each participant, the major role focus has been briefly stated. The diagram suggests the complexity of the positions occupied by all involved in David's statement: all were concerned with at least two, usually three, and, in four cases four, different role orientations.



**Figure 6.5. Roles of all Participants in David's statement: depicting the extent to which main role is orientated towards the child, the school, the parent or the LEA**





This analysis of role orientation suggests that the child should have a clearer voice in the assessment since all participants claimed a focus, to some degree, on the concerns of the child. Also, there appeared to be exceptions to the previous discourse of objectivity, definition etc. towards different discourse including advocacy (David's mother) and mediation (the educational psychologist). However, for none of the participants was the act of seeking to give David a voice a clear part of their role. David's mother's advocacy was very much on his behalf. She tried to hide the assessment from David in order to protect him, and to reduce the effect on his view of himself of the label of being a special needs child requiring a statement:

*I've never used the word statement with him, because I won't, I don't think it's right. I don't think it's right for him. (p5)*  
*He's central to us, but (... )we're hidden from him... .... He'd understand it all, but why should he, why should he have to, you know. (p19)*  
(David's mother, interview 3)

David's voice is therefore a represented voice, and the actions of his mother those of the protector. David's mother wanted him hidden from "The Statement", and then normalised so that no one would notice him as a behaviour problem. However, she also wished his "ability" to be catered for, therefore noticed. The head teacher could now only see the "other 99..." and expected other professionals to notice David (for example she wanted the SENCO and the class teacher to teach him, and the educational psychologist to help him with his anger). Some of the other professionals wanted him tested and defined.

The concealment of the child in general, and David in particular, has been explained. However, there remains an exploration of the contribution the voice of the child would bring to the situation and an analysis of the discourse of such a voice if it were allowed.



## 6.2.2 The Voice of the Child

When David was asked about what had happened to him he was able to give a very clear picture of his sense of powerlessness, of his views of how teachers reacted to his behaviour, how he felt they should have reacted, and his positive view of the extra help he was getting for his writing. David had a very distinctive voice, but he did not speak with the same discourse as the professionals. The level of his concealment suggests to the researcher the need to bring his voice once more to the foreground (paraphrased from Volume II Appendix 9):

David's awareness of himself and his actions...

*I wasn't behaving well. I was kicking and fighting with people and punching people...*

*I'm an excellent reader, but writing is hard for me to do. Maths [is what I'm good at].*

*... I feel quite good [about getting this help]*

*...Yes [I'm quite good at listening], quite good.*

*...Yes, [I'm] a wee bit happier [about things] now.*

David was left with misleading impressions of the assessment process.....

*What's an assessment?...[I think it's about] trying to find out what kind of help I need...*

*... I don't remember anything [the assessor did] ... I think I quite liked it... Yes, she [the assessor] told me that I was... a hundred in brains... I'm better than nearly everybody she's met..*



David had some idea of a sense of power.....

*Eventually... it (the behaviour problem) just seemed to come to a halt sometime this term*

*...I don't think I should have been excluded for the things that I've done.*

David had some good ideas of how teachers should respond to behaviour problems.....

*They [teachers] boss them [children] around a bit and tell them what to do and stuff...Well, my old teacher used to go, do this, do that [and hand movements indicating teacher prodding him]*

*[when kids lose their temper] I think they should just try to make them calm down....[but instead] they make a big fuss of it. They could do things better. If they'd just tried to calm me down instead of dragging me about, dragging me to the head teacher and stuff like that....*

*...Afterwards, when they've [children] missed their playtime, they feel sad ...When they're doing it, they probably feel mad.*

*...Sometimes they [children] stop themselves, but once they've started to do it, their brain gets locked into doing it and it's like they have to do it. ...It's really hard to stop.*

David's was very positive about the extra help he was getting for writing:

*...Well there was a person called Mrs Sadler and there was me. We did some work in the mornings together... It's because I've missed quite a bit of work at school... Quite a bit of writing... I didn't enjoy writing when I was naughty but I do enjoy it now.*

*...It's a good thing. By the way, I have extra help as well... Sort of like practising skills with my fingers... Holding a pencil is quite hard for me to do. So writing is hard for me to do.*

*... I'll have this extra help for quite a long time. Not when I'm an adult though, not forever. I would like it to stop sometime.*

The narrative of the child is, like that of the professional, complex and contradictory. It is spontaneous, individual, challenging, personal, involves feelings, and is sensible, rational, and immediate. David is very skilled at articulating his views of his own situation. One can speculate that staff at the school might have responded differently to his situation, had they known that he was well motivated to find ways for the trouble at

school to cease, that he had ideas about how they might react to problem situations, and that he valued the extra help he was getting. The head teacher might, at least, have felt more positive about finding a solution to his situation. Other research has also demonstrated that the voice of the child challenges professional wisdom. Allen (1999) found that children who were included into mainstream schools and interviewed about their experiences challenged dualisms, such as able-bodied vs disabled, since they varied in the extent to which they adopted the persona of disabled or different.

When children are asked questions by a professional involved in the assessment process, they are often not able to give such answers as David gave as part of the research precisely because the questions are part of the assessment. The child's narrative in such situations is minimal. Given that behaviour is communication, in David's situation at school, his main narrative was one of challenge together with verbal silence. Excluding David from the statementing process seems entirely consistent with a view to protect him but is not consistent with a view that David might benefit from being able, as part of the assessment, to gain insight into himself as a learner. Protecting David does not engage with what might need to happen in assessment in order give him a voice in the assessment event. In order to have a voice David would need to be empowered to cross boundaries, the boundary of his role as passively assessed, and professionals would need to re-define their own boundaries. This is clearly very difficult for professionals to do:

*the difficulty (for a professional) of articulating alternative perspectives within the assessment process contributed towards a silencing of Chantel's own voice (Armstrong, Dolinski, & Wrapson, 1999, p31)*

Although David was silenced in the assessment, in his situation a case can be made that he was not completely disempowered. His mother transgressed her role to such an extent that she was able to maintain her refusal to accept the label of "behaviour

problems", and insist on a recognition of his writing difficulties. Children do not have the power to transgress their boundaries in order to create the opportunities to make their voices heard:

*In the absence of a clear policy on the role of the child in the assessment, and of procedures to empower the child, the conflicts of interest that permeate an assessment will continue to inhibit the development of frameworks for partnership with children.* (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p66).

The possible ways such opportunities might be created are the subject of the final part of this section. Theorising about the ways participants relate within a statutory assessment, about what partnership means in assessment and about the positioning of power, is the subject of the next two sections of this chapter. However, before further theorising about power and partnership, the researcher considers strategies to adopt in the practice of the educational psychologist in order to reverse the silencing of the child in assessment.

### **6.2.3 A Framework for Consultation with Children**

The current research revealed a need to find ways for children to have a greater degree of agency in the assessment process. An analysis of ways in which educational psychologists work with children reveal many opportunities for consulting with children, as shown in the list below (adapted from: Hobbs, Taylor, & Todd, 2000):

1. How professionals introduce themselves
2. How professionals give the child a choice over whether or not to see them



3. How professionals involve the child in their decisions about the direction of their work with them
4. How professionals include the child's voice in their work
5. How professionals communicate to the child their views
6. How professionals explain their actions (tests, meetings, observations etc.)
7. How professionals use different mediums, such as conversation, video, letters and other therapeutic documents in their consultations

Other professionals are invited to reflect on the "journeys" their work involves in order to identify similar opportunities. A distinction can be made between technical solutions, such as one's involving extra tools or resources, and political ones that involve changes in power sharing within systems. In order to give the child a voice, technical solutions are required, but are insufficient. However, some technical solutions, especially some designed to consult with children, are likely to entail a change in power if they are to be implemented. In particular they are likely to entail the ethical work referred to earlier in this chapter.

### ***Complexities and Implications of Consulting with Children***

Throughout the process of any professional work with a child there will be many different points at which the child could and should be consulted. Should the educational psychologist tell the child about the techniques she is going to use before using them? How much choice does the child have over where or not to see the educational psychologist? Does the child have to be there - or does the educational psychologist justify lack of choice through her belief in the effectiveness in her approaches - i.e. this WILL be good for the child, his life will be better.... How do educational psychologists include the child's view of themselves in a way that fully

involves them, that communicates what the child wants to say in a process he understands? What does the educational psychologist do when the child says “no” to the inclusion of their perspective in a report? What does the professional do if the parent wishes the child to know as little as possible about what she, the professional, is doing, in order to avoid any labelling the child may experience? Reports are written at the end of most assessments, usually for other professionals, sometimes for the parents. Maybe the report educational psychologists could write for children should be seen as the only valid report. Maybe the things educational psychologists would be able to put in such a report are the only valid things to write. Maybe the ways professionals would need to interact with and change the systems they are part of in order to be able to present such reports would mean more child-friendly systems.

Any approach that consults with children such that the problems identified earlier in the research by Galloway, Armstrong and Tomlinson (Armstrong, 1995; Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994) are avoided, is likely to have positive implications for how children feel about themselves and any decisions made about their education. However, some opportunities to consult with children raise major questions about the extent to which it is possible to do so. Furthermore, how much does the child know about who different professionals are, or the wider implications for their lives, for long-term labelling, of consulting with them? There is always a risk, that more consultation will lead to the child being more conscious of labelling and feeling further isolated and rejected, especially if education is thought to be rejecting the child. For example, the school might see themselves as the educational psychologist’s main client. There will be situations where the school sees the EP role as helping to remove a problematic child to a different provision. Would the EP’s consultation with a child involve openness about how the school views the EP role, even if that role was likely to have a potentially very negative outcome for the child: “I’m here to get you to change schools”?

### **Section 6.3: Banishing the Narrative of Partnership**

The first two sections in this chapter developed some theoretical ideas from the two key surprising findings of the second case study: one focused on David's mother; and the other focused on David himself. Underlying both were the primary themes of partnership and power. Both sections also looked at the positioning of a discourse of powerlessness in relations between participants. In the first section, David's mother crossed boundaries in order to become empowered, and in the second, David continued to occupy a position of powerlessness. In this section the researcher theorises about these one of the primary concepts, partnership.

The inherent problematic in partnership has already been discussed in Chapter 2, where the literature analysis suggested that partnership to enable parent voices to be fully included seemed to elude professional actions. This has been confirmed in ensuing literature (Edwards & Waren, 1999, p325; Vincent & Warren, 1997). Further confirmation came from the analysis of findings from the first research question, looking at partnership possibilities for educational psychologists with parents. Results suggested such different conceptualisations of the parent/professional relationship that the term "partnership" seemed rather meaningless. It therefore seemed that a negative answer would respond to the first research question, *Can an EP service undertake parental partnership?* Partnership orientations of all participants in David's assessment, from findings resulting from the second research question, provide the starting point for this final theorising on the possibilities for partnership in a multi-professional process of assessing a child's special educational needs.



### **6.3.1 Power in Partnership with Parents and Children**

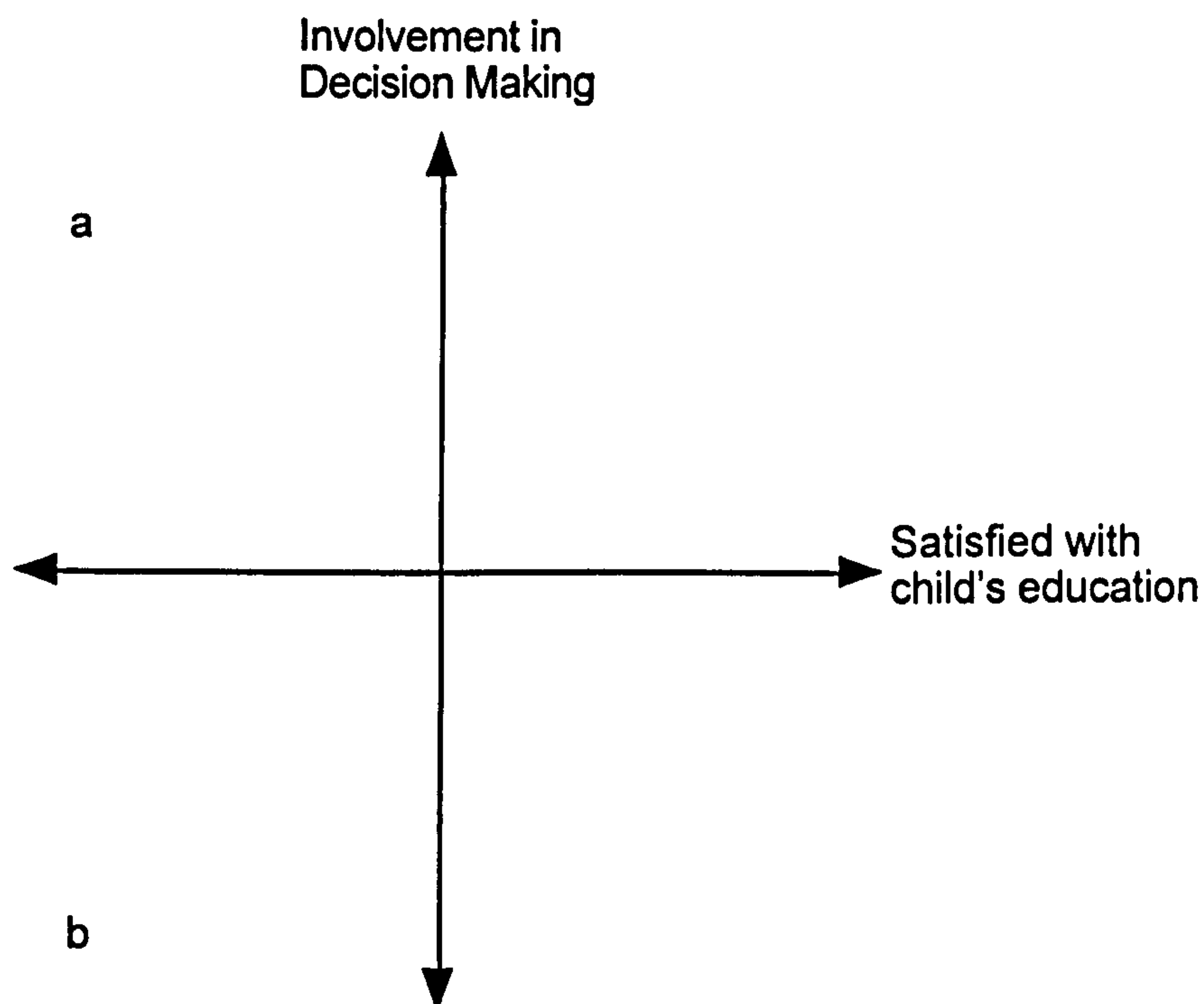
The first previous section in this chapter discussed the ways in which David's mother realised she had to take various actions to stop partnering the school, since this was taking her away from her goal. She had a very ambiguous relationship with "partnership", valuing partnership with some professionals, but recognising its dangers and impossibilities:

*the way I think of David's interests and the way school think of him, there's like, an ocean apart*  
(David's mother, interview 3, p30)

Partnership can be seen as a discourse that can maintain parents in a relationship of powerlessness. In the previous section of this chapter looking at the way in which David's voice was hidden, the narrative of professional practice was also suggested to disempower the child. Partnership is a discourse of professionalism, and has been suggested, in this thesis, to disempower by co-opting the less powerful into the professional viewpoint. Both parents and children would be subject to such a disempowering effect of partnership.

Partnership, as a concept, may conceal more complex relationships. This research suggests other dimensions may be important in an analysis of parent relationships with professionals. For example, in the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme, the two dimensions of "involvement" and "satisfaction" seemed more important ways of conceptualising the positions of parents, and attitudes of professionals towards parents, as shown in Figure 6.6 below. Parents at (a), highly involved and highly dissatisfied, and parents at (b), barely involved and highly dissatisfied, caused most concern to the EP Parent Partnership Officers. Some of those at (b) were those with little access to any aspect of the statutory assessment process.

**Figure 6.6 Dimensions of Parent - Professional Relationships in the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme**



Power plays a major role in the problems that seem to exist in forming effective partnerships between professionals and parents and between professionals and children. The question then follows as to whether the same might be found in partnerships between professionals themselves. Relations between professionals have already been a key focus of this analysis. The importance of the inter-professional context was a crucial aspect of theorising statementing as activity systems. The complex relations between different professionals were also crucial to the explanation, in section 6.1, of the way David's mother achieved her goal. The theoretical analysis now turns to look at partnership and the importance of power in partnerships in the relationships between all, particularly all professionals, involved in the statutory process of assessing a child's special educational needs. This brings the analysis back again to the second research question, that of: *What does it mean to the stakeholders to be "partners"? What are the stakeholders' perspectives?*

### **6.3.2 Partnership Perspectives of Different Professionals**

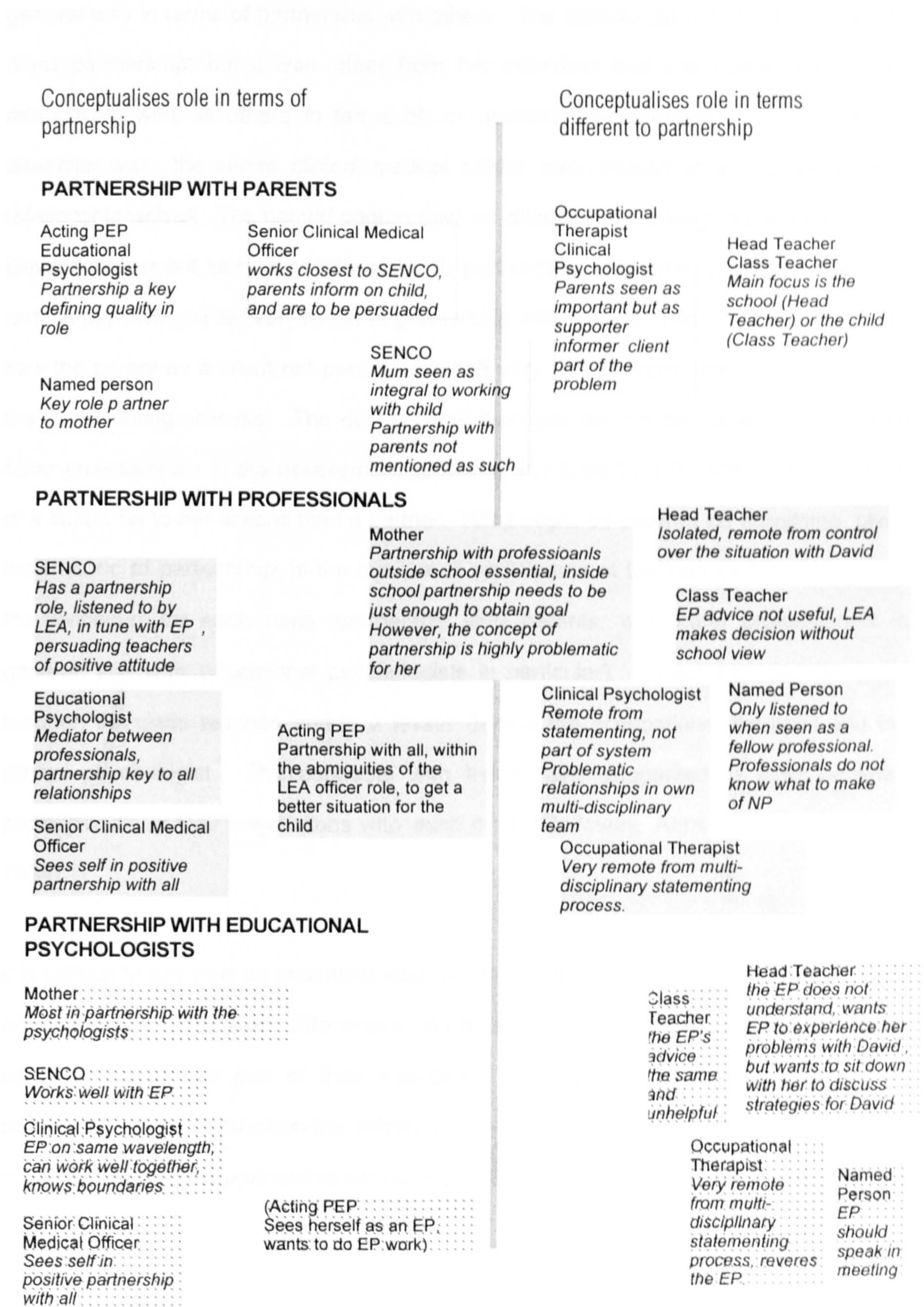
Those interviewed about partnership in David's assessment, gave their views about partnership with parents, partnership with other professionals in general, and partnership with educational psychologists in particular. The methodology for achieving these responses can be found in Chapter 3, and compacted raw utterances relating to partnership can be found in Volume II, Appendix 9, and described in text in chapter 5. Almost all participants were asked directly about partnership, and, prior to this, were questioned about the nature of the ways they worked with others in David's situation, and in assessment in general. The researcher made judgements on the extent to which partnership was explicitly conceptualised as part of someone's role from answers both to direct questions and indirect questions.



Some participants conceptualised their role in terms of partnership per se, so this was a defining quality in their role with parents and other professionals, but others had attitudes to partnership which varied. These different relationships are shown in Figure 6.7 (p393). A distinction is made between a role orientation towards partnership with parents, and one orientated towards partnership with professionals in general. The first research question of this thesis looked at partnership possibilities between educational psychologists and parents. The final part of the diagram now reverses that analysis and looks at the extent to which different participants saw their role in terms of partnership with educational psychologists. The diagram is organised such that those who see their role in terms of partnership are on the left of the diagram. The further to the left the more a participant seemed, from the analysis of their interview, to conceptualise themselves in terms of partnership. The page is then also organised into three sections, in terms of partnership orientations towards (respectively): parents, other professionals and educational psychologists.



**Figure 6.7 Role Orientations Towards Partnership: with parents, with other professionals in general, and with educational psychologists in particular.**





It was interesting to note that many participants in the assessment were placed differently on each continuum. The educational psychologist conceptualised her role in a general way in terms of partnership with others. The SENCO did not choose to use the word partnership, but it was clear from her interview that she conceptualised her relationship with all others in terms of, or approaching, partnership. In a not too dissimilar way, the senior clinical medical officer saw herself in a positive working relationship with all. The named person saw no difficulty in working in partnership with David's mother but saw very little reality in partnership with other professionals. The clinical psychologist felt very much in partnership with the educational psychologist, but saw the parent as a client not partner, and felt very remote from other professionals in the statementing process. The occupational therapist did not feel at all involved with other professionals in the assessment of David, and looked on David's mother as more of a supporter to her actions than a partner. What might be seen to be surprising, given the rhetoric of partnership, is the number of participants at the non-partnership end of the continuum for each scale (partnership with parents, with other professionals in general, and with educational psychologists in particular). These included the head teacher, the class teacher, and to a lesser degree the occupational therapist and the clinical psychologist. This contrasts with the equality suggested to exist between professionals in their negotiations with each other (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994).

It is difficult to see how an uncomplicated concept of partnership can be a characteristic of assessment given such differences and given the number of participants for whom partnership was not part of their role-view. The variety of conceptualisations of partnership calls into question the validity of any simple exhortation for those involved in statementing to act in partnership with parents. Similarly questioned is the usefulness of



efforts to move towards multi-professional collaboration with other professionals without recognising the complexities in professional relationships.

The power implications of all inter-agency work and all work with parents and with children, should be recognised. There are indications that current research and practice continues to fail to do this. Recognising power imbalances means finding ways to give a voice to parents who lack the cultural capital, parents who are neither empowered by pressure groups nor their own determination.

### **6.3.3 "Partnership" and "Professionalism"**

The researcher has claimed that partnership is a discourse of professionalism: if partnership exists anywhere it exists as the provenance of the professionals. However, it can also be shown to be absent from the role orientations of professionals. This was the case with many professionals in David's assessment. One can understand where the different participants of David's statementing have located themselves as partners by drawing on knowledge of the different professional orientations. Statementing is a multi-professional process, but operates with many professionals for whom inter-agency co-operation is not a role priority, and for whom the central terms (such as special educational needs) "are subject to different interpretations within agencies and by individuals" (Dyson, Lin, & Millward, 1998, p8). Co-operation with other agencies is something "added-on" (Dyson, Lin, & Millward, 1998, p60). The systemic nature of assessment calls for an organisational acknowledgement that inter-agency concern is at the heart of an agency's core focus. There is also a suggestion that parent partnership schemes may place too little emphasis on the complex inter-agency nature of their role, since binary discourses were evident in

Wolfendale and Cook (1997), conceptualising the parents against the LEA. Partnership with professionals seemed, from discussions with Parent Partnership Officers (PPOs), largely absent from role conceptualisations of some of the voluntary agency PPOs.

Partnership may be absent from role orientations, but it now forms an aspect of the rhetoric between professionals. However, just as partnership can disempower parents, Armstrong (1999) quotes Oliver (1994) in confirming the unintended outcomes of partnership amongst professionals:

As Oliver (1994, p3) argues:

*It is often assumed that the function of language is communication. While it is undoubtedly true that communication is a function of language, it is not the only one. Language is also about politics, domination and control.*

Thus attempts to involve other professionals as "allies" may not have the desired consequences. Where particular agencies have negotiated ownership of clients, other professionals can be left feeling as outsiders (Armstrong, Dolinski, & Wrapson, 1999, p31).

Decision-making about children with special educational needs takes place within the context of claims by professional groups to an "expertise" based upon their rational application of knowledge. However, in practice these claims are contested between professional groups and between professionals and competing "client" groups. The client might be the LEA, the school, the parents or the child. Negotiations about "ownership" of clients, for example, play a significant part in defining and redefining different professional roles and responsibilities (Galloway et al., 1994, quoted in Armstrong, Dolinski, & Wrapson, 1999, p34). Such negotiation of power seems incongruent with a notion of inter-agency partnership.

Once the relations between different professionals is conceptualised in terms of power, it is not surprising that Dyson, Lin and Millward (1998, p40) found children subject to multiple assessments from different professional groups, even when interventions were to be located solely in education (i.e. this might require assessment by the class teacher, the SENCO, the educational psychologist and the peripatetic support teacher). However Dyson et al's call for a co-ordinated response looks again to a technical solution and seems to ignore the "political", power-driven, nature of assessments.

The political perspective is also absent in other research looking for solutions to the problems of parent partnership. Wolfendale and Cook (1997, p77) found in their survey of views about parent partnership schemes that most felt that they could identify specific examples of partnership, but that many other factors mitigated "against it becoming routine practice, such as lack of time, resource implications, the balance of understanding of the system in favour of professionals" (Wolfendale & Cook, 1997, p83). Partnership difficulties are seen as a technical rather than a political problem. Similarly, diary notes made as part of the research actions of this thesis indicate that the researcher, in her role as educational psychologist Parent Partnership Officer, felt the named person role could be played more appropriately by educational psychologists in their usual role if given more resources to spend more time listening to parents (a technical solution), rather than any power change implied by the introduction of independent named persons.

If partnership is a problem because those involved ignore the dimensions of power, one might wonder whether partnership becomes a possibility once power is addressed. However, there is evidence from research carried out as part of this thesis that as soon as the relationship between parents and professionals is spoken about in terms of power, denoted in this case, by the focus on "rights", there seems to be a problem in



conceptualising relationships in terms of partnership. Here, "relationships" refers to relationships between all involved, between parents and professionals and between different professionals. In the Newby Parent Partnership Scheme, the subject of the first case study in this research, a major dispute erupted as a result of different conceptualisations of the educational psychologist Parent Partnership Officer and the voluntary organisation (the Parent Federation) Parent Partnership Officer (PPO). The dispute was over different conceptualisation of the PPO role and the named person role. Whilst this was a battle for the ownership of clients, it was also a battle for the kind of client-professional relationship possible. The LEA PPO, the educational psychologists, conceptualised parent relationships in terms of partnership, whereas one of the voluntary agency PPOs conceptualised such relationships very clearly in terms of rights. One can question the extent to which either PPO empowered parents. Findings in Chapter four, case study one, suggest parents may have felt overwhelmed by the level of information given out in the name of "rights". The LEA professional looked to parent reports maintaining a descriptive discourse, possibly prejudicial of a partnership discourse. For the educational psychologist, "rights" and "partnership" were very different, whereas for the voluntary agency officer, partnership was conceptualised in terms of rights. Dissonance between "partnership" and "rights" was evident also from the DFEE evaluation of parent partnership schemes (Wolfendale & Cook, 1997, p83). There was a clear difference in the language used about work between LEA parent partnership officers and those managed by the voluntary sector. The former could look at their work in terms of progress towards partnership, and avoidance of tribunals. The voluntary agency managers of PPOs spoke more in terms of a discourse of parent rights, and many could not comment about whether partnership had been achieved, or on whether any impact had been made on statementing or tribunals.

Partnership is conceptualised in this theoretical analysis in a complex, non-unitary manner. It is argued to be a discourse of professionalism operating in the relations between those involved in assessing a child. It is used by participants to achieve goals. Partnership provides a distracting narrative of obligation to comply with others and has been suggested to disempower parents, children and professionals. A discourse referred to constantly in this section exploring partnership, indeed in all sections of this chapter, has been that of power, and theorising directly about power is the subject of the next section (6.4). It is likely that partnership will only be possible if some overt action is taken to deal with the particular positioning of power within a partnership. However, when this happens, the possibility of partnership seems even more remote. Perhaps, therefore, the narrative of partnership within multi-professional and parent-professionals interactions should be abandoned. More optimistic recommendations come from Statham (2000), talking about partnership between health and social care. Whilst she is not referring to the education of children with special educational needs, her recommendations are nonetheless pertinent, since they recognise the importance in addressing power issues:

*Partnership at the micro level has multiple meanings that have to be negotiated  
Imbalances of power and authority as well as resources abound and are part of  
the dynamics of the partnership. (Statham, 2000, p88).*

Statham recommends the development of skills in collaboration, negotiation, and conflict resolution. She looks to the bringing together of people and organisations, and underlines the importance of understanding and managing change. For her it is crucial that professionals develop the capacity to operate across the boundaries of professions and systems. No longer is the protecting of professional identity the key to successful career progression.

*There will always be knowledge that is specific to professions, but increasingly social care and health will have to create shared knowledge.*  
(Statham, 2000, p89).

However, trainees in the professions need to be trained in this area. She also sees the need for a profound cultural change, towards recognising a social model of disability, racial and cultural diversity and social inclusion - all of which are based upon civil rights and removing barriers and discrimination. She sees these as placing people using services in an entirely different relationship with professionals, and professionals with them (Statham, 2000, p88). A change from patronage to partnership is seen to be possible, but only within a time-scale of some 10 years (Statham, 2000, p89). Stratham's revisioning of partnership seem consonant with Galloway's "democratic professionalism" (Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p129) or Vincent and Warren's (1997) call for different way of relating to be explored that achieve different outcomes. However, recent literature suggests that educational psychologists are being slow to awaken to new conceptualisations of what it means to be a "professional" (Webster & Hoyle, 2000).



## **Section 6.4: Power: a Multi-dimensional Analysis**

The source of problems in achieving working partnerships was demonstrated, in the last section, to be lack of attention to power relations. Engestrom theorised power in activity systems in particular locations. He claimed that "the division of labor", represented here by "all participants in the statementing process" refers to "both the horizontal division of tasks between the members of the community and to the vertical division of power and status" (Engestrom, 1999). He also saw power in the instruments, represented here as tools to carry out statementing. However, the researcher would claim that power cannot be limited to particular aspects of the activity systems: it operates in complex ways throughout the systems. The previous section looking at David's mother's activity system was essentially one theorising about power. In this section the empirical findings from the second case study, looking at the experience of all participants (not just David's mother) provide the starting point for final theorising about power. Final, that is, as far as the limits of this research is concerned.

### **6.4.1 Power Perceptions in David's Assessment**

In the Case Study of David's assessment:

*roles, aims and power vary to such an extent as to render facile any easy mutuality in relationships between participants in the assessment process, particularly those of the parent and the educational professionals. Analysis of interviews in this research for participants' perceptions of influence and responsibility shows that power is not unitary: it is not the case that parents, or even David, are in any simple way 'the powerless'. All participants experienced power and powerlessness in different ways. (Todd & Higgins, 1998, p232)*

The school was seen by David's mother and the named person to be powerful (being able to use exclusion), but also (by the named person) to be powerless – grasping at straws to get any solution for David. The LEA statementing panel (personified by the acting principal educational psychologist) was perceived by most to be the major source of power in the assessment. However, the PEP felt it was the regulations, or the child's stated needs, that had power, but she did not see power as an appropriate term. The head teacher seemed to feel little power resided with herself: she had been unable to obtain resources ahead of the statement and could not see any solution could be possible if the current provision did not succeed.

All participants could attribute power, but no one recognised power attributed to them by others. The power attributed and experienced seemed to defy assumptions of it as a unitary concept. For example, the power represented by the head teacher threatening (to the LEA and to David's mother) to exclude David should there be any further behavioural problems, is likely to be quite different in nature to the power experienced by David's mother as professionals expressed to her some positive evaluative comments about her son. Crozier (1996) has demonstrated the complexity of parents' position in relation to schools in reporting a case study of black parents who felt a level of

dissonance with schools despite having the advantage of educational knowledge, and challenges a uni-dimensional model of capital culture (Lareau, 1989).

Previous sections have discussed how David's mother avoided powerlessness, something she was conscious of doing:

*there's a limit of decisions available, for a start, isn't there?  
.... I think the school has the most power.... They are the people who actually start the process off, whether you like it or not. And I think, I don't think I was powerless in the situation, and I mean, I think, but there were times when I felt totally powerless, and there was, I think, I had to put an awful lot of effort in not to become powerless.  
(interview 3, David's mother, p8)*

The complex ways she avoided powerlessness were the focus of an earlier section in this chapter, on David's mother's boundary crossing.



The following paragraphs of this final section explore different aspects of a multi-dimensional concept of power in the complex human system of the statutory assessment. First, the different experiences of power by participants of David's assessment are explained with reference to a multiplicity of discourses that relate to professionalism. This leads to a rather bleak conclusion about the functionality of statementing.

## **6.4.2 A Multiplicity of Discourses of Professionalism**

What is suggested here, and has been referred to throughout this chapter, is that people operate according to a number of different kinds of power discourses, each operating in different ways on different people. The discourses are discordant, and therefore influence behaviour in unpredictable ways. This explains the finding that all participants experienced power in some way. The researcher is able to underline the complexity in the single term "power", but further research is needed to go further and to produce a theoretical model of the way power operates in statutory assessment. What follows gives some idea of the multiple discourses of power operating in the kind of inter-agency work with children which formed the subject of this thesis. All discourses seem to be attached to the concept of the professional.

### ***Consequences of Professional Need***

Traditional power hierarchies, though weakened, might predict power to reside first in the LEA and other professionals, then within, in order of decreasing power, the head teacher, the class teacher, the parent and lastly the child. Power would be assumed to reside in professional status and likely to vary between professionals (i.e. battles between professionals in terms of ownership of clients, particularly evident in the interview with the clinical psychologist). Professional decision-making is not grounded simply within a personal value context (e.g. humanitarianism), but also within the context of professional, institutional and political discourses of practice which frame "what is possible" (Armstrong, Dolinski, & Wrapson, 1999, p34; see also Galloway, Armstrong, & Tomlinson, 1994, p102).

Tomlinson refers to the "use of professional expertise to individualise what are, in effect, social problems" (Tomlinson, 1982, p105). However, the refrain of "the professional" can, itself, be seen as a discourse, which assumes homogeneity in aims and values between different professional groups, or even within the same group, which may obscure a more complex situation:

*the tendency to focus on the professional/lay person divide remains common, and can risk promoting an essentialist view of "the professional"; that is, a view that overlooks or minimises the differing identities and subjectivities subsumed under that heading and the myriad ways in which individuals negotiate and make sense of contradictory positions and understandings.* (Vincent & Warren, 1997, p146).

All professionals involved in the assessment revealed themselves to be members of groups in which identity was non-homogenous and had to be negotiated. The literature review in Chapter 2 suggested erosion of professional power to all professionals, and this is likely to have had different effects on the power of different professionals. This was particularly apparent in the case of the two psychologists: the clinical psychologist painfully negotiating identity within the medical team, and the educational psychologist negotiating PPO identity in relation to parents with the Parent Federation Parent Partnership Officers. Both professionals seemed very much involved in battles to maintain their ability to keep their own clients (the educational psychologist) or assign children particular labels (the clinical psychologist): power battles by another name.

Others have explained the different responses of particular agencies to the same child as the inevitable consequence of values varying with function (Dyson, Lin, & Millward, 1998, p9). This may also be what Dyson, Lin and Milward (1998, p13) are referring to when they talk of the "one-dimensional gaze" of professionals, working in strong and strongly differentiated professional cultures. However, a view which has major implications for the assumed aim of assessment, is that professional needs, rather than



the needs of the child, are negotiated and fought for in the multi-disciplinary process (Todd & Higgins, 1998, p235). Such an alternative definition of need is also expressed in the arena of parental involvement in schools, seeing what happens in "partnership" as an expression of professional need:

*Schools can be seen as "arenas in which the tension and conflicts of social division are of central importance" (Wilson and Wyn 1993 p.6) where embattled teachers must defend their professionalism and sometimes do so by erecting barriers between themselves and parents (Hannon 1995). Easen, Ford, Higgins, Todd and Wootten (1996, p54)*

Others have reviewed the changing nature of home-school relations (Bastiani, 1987; MacPherson, 1993) the mismatch of rhetoric, ideology and practice (e.g. Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997) and put forward arguments that partnership is a tool to maintain professional control (Vincent & Tomlinson, 1997) in the face of powerlessness and frustration.

The implication of failing to recognise this in assessments is to make it even less likely that the school's contribution to a child's difficulties can be a legitimate element of the assessment, since:

*In consequence of there being no formal acknowledgement of the needs of other participants in the assessment process, once the procedures are invoked teachers may feel that their own needs can only be expressed in terms of the child's needs. Yet this creates a discourse which assumes a focus on the child whilst inhibiting any meaningful discussion of circumstances within the school which might affect a child's behaviour. In this way the 1981 procedures for identifying and assessing children with special education needs may themselves contribute to a deskilling of teachers by discouraging reflexivity on practice (Armstrong et al 1993). (Armstrong, 1995, p132).*

Teachers take steps to maintain their sense of their own professionalism and resist challenges to their authority (Armstrong, 1995; Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993). A discourse of equality in partnership obscures such power relations by talking

as if they do not exist. The head's and the class teacher's insistence on a behavioural label and refusal to accept a learning difficulty or to relate his difficulties to his "ability", can be seen as an attempt to maintain their professional identity (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993, p400). Identifying a child as disturbed rather than disruptive legitimises the school's difficulty in catering for him (Armstrong, 1995, p128). The routinisation of teaching, and the loss of teaching as a skilled activity, and associated loss of professionalisation, has contributed to the "apparent willingness of teachers to identify large numbers of children whose needs cannot be met in their mainstream schools" p127 (Armstrong, 1995, p127). The classification of children according to particular designations (i.e. whether according to labels of behaviour, age, attainment or defined special need) has also been conceptualised as an organisational need: assisting the school to manage the education of large numbers of children in relatively large groups (Booth, Ainscow, & Dyson, 1997). Teachers can maintain their sense of themselves as skilled professionals if they are able to have challenging pupils legitimately identified as the responsibility of others and if they can "redefine their role in terms of the skills associated with teaching 'normal' children" (Armstrong, Galloway, & Tomlinson, 1993, p400). Legitimate rejection of the child can happen if David "has behavioural difficulties", but is far harder to sustain if he "is a bright child with learning difficulties". Similarly, there was talk by interviewees of the blame David's mother must feel if her son is classed as emotionally disturbed. However, a gifted child with writing difficulties is quite clearly the school's responsibility, and would bring little blame to the parent. Concern to maintain one's own personal or professional sense of oneself, self-esteem, and to avoid blame, all can account for many of one's "powerful" actions. These actions are essential to avoid feeling powerless.

### ***Rights... equity... independence... blame...***

Across the attempts of participants in David's assessment to work together, intrudes discourses of "rights" (of the parent, and also of the child), but also "blame" (of parents, of the teacher, of the professional). The complex interaction of rights and partnership was discussed in section 6.3.3. This related the assumptions by voluntary agency workers of a discourse of rights and of partnership referring only to partnership with parents (not with other professionals). However, the educational psychologist looked towards partnership with everyone, and saw rights in opposition to partnership and equity (yet a further discourse) since it brought advantage only for the most powerful. Discourses of partnership and rights seem to be conceptualised differently by different people.

Across partnership and rights, came a discourse of independence. The issue of the relationship to the local education authority of people working with parents was suggested to be important for the empowerment of parents: people "independent" from the LEA are implied to be more likely to empower parents (DFE, 1994). Research suggests that independence of information may not be a major issue for parents if they feel they are able to get adequate information from the LEA (Leming, 1999; Wolfendale & Cook, 1997). This was the majority view of parent partnership officers interviewed by Wolfendale and Cook. However, a minority view of the parents interviewed was that the employment of parent partnership officers by LEAs was a problem, particularly since parents might already have experienced problems in relating to the LEA, and that further independence was required. It is difficult to know how to place such a view, since another minority view was that the insider knowledge of the parent partnership officer, having worked closely in the past with the LEA was seen as an advantage. David's



mother was empowered in different ways by those closely allied to the LEA, and by the named person, a person independent from the LEA.

A discourse of blame leads to defensiveness which operates in opposition to partnership and rights for both parents and professionals. For parents, partnership is almost impossible if their child has one of the many undesirable categories of special educational needs particularly that of a behaviour difficulty. Conceptualisations of blame were evident in interviews in Case Study 2, with the school personnel particularly puzzled. They expressed the need to find out why David reacted the way he did, and linked his behaviour to family circumstances in a causal relationship (i.e. to the absence of David's father).

*All (head teachers) felt that they had not just the power, but the responsibility to intervene in mothering practices if they saw fit, regardless of the fact that none of them was a mother. They understood that teaching parents about their educational role was a part of their professionalism, but when this is considered alongside their limited understanding of the demands and pressures on mothers, it raises serious questions concerning the hidden agenda underpinning much parental involvement in education.* (Maclaclan, 1996, p36)

Blame also had the effect of continuing the dominance of the deficit view of home-school relations, assuming that parents need to be instructed in how to interact with schools, and in how to support their child's development and learning. This is likely to be a major factor in the failure of parental involvement to have an impact on schools, since a lack of mutual respect provides little incentive for co-operation (Easen, Ford, Higgins, Todd, & Wootten, 1996; Todd & Higgins, 1998). The educational psychologist in David's situation understood the debilitating effect of blame, and indeed saw her role as "bleaching the arena of blame". Professional defensiveness is also evident in David's case. This may be an attempt to remove a sense of blaming the professional, as

professional power is eroded and action is taken to regain such power. This becomes the theme of "professional need", in the previous section of this chapter.

### ***Rationality.... Affect... Reality... Fictionality***

A discourse of "rationality" is evident within professionalism in general and within the assessment process in particular. Rationality is underlined by a subtle discourse, that of "bureaucracy": a key element of professionalism (Fulcher, 1989), discussed earlier in the section on the hidden child.

Such a view is at odds with the experience, from interviews of participants in David's assessment, that strongly held beliefs and a powerful range of emotions played a major part in the assessment. David's mother related how emotionally difficult the whole statementing process had been for her. Professional display of "affect" included the isolation felt by the head teacher when the LEA could offer her no resources prior to the statement reaching a conclusion; the anger of the clinical psychologist with other medical colleagues in her struggle for client ownership; and the omission of the occupational therapist from statementing and anger with others' attempts to define her role. This suggests "fictionality" in the operation of assessment: partnership seems to be based on a false rational view of the world. It denies the reality that "affect" is there in some form in all relationships and colours those relationships. Affect is a driver for apparently rational decision: much of what results as rational is emotionality. Partnership denies the reality of deeply felt emotions. One of the reasons for the positioning of a particular participant in relationship to partnership is to do with affect: to do with how one feels perceived by the other. Such an analysis seems to be leading into an area for further investigation, outside the current research. It seems to suggest a systemic

explanation to the problem of the presentation of self, which seems to be lacking in the literature (Chell, 1993; Goffman, 1963).

### **Definition**

A further discourse of the professional is that of "definition". One aspect of the power of the professional is the power to define (Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995). Such a power was revealed earlier to be an expression of professional need. However, the power of definition is claimed for a variety of reasons, by different people. Labels are viewed by David's mother in terms of their use in achieving her goal for him, although she has an uneasy relationship with different labels. McDermott (1996, p270-271) reveals the terminology of special needs to be a powerful discourse in the meaning she conveys by reversing phrases (see discussion of the discourse of need in Chapter 2). She talks of the acquisition of a child by a learning disability, thereby questioning the child as a unit of analysis, emphasising the cultural life given to the category learning disability – that is consists of "a social practice of displaying, noticing, documenting, remediating, and explaining it" (McDermott, 1996, p272). The need, that our own society has, for the category of special needs is the need to mark different rates and ways of learning. It is a need that may not show society favourably, if the negativity of the discourse of need is brought to the foreground:

*...degradation is always a ceremony in which public agreement on what one can be degraded for is displayed and directed against the total identity of others. This means that it takes much work across persons to make an individual liable for some part of their behaviour; a person must not only do the wrong thing, but exactly the wrong thing that everyone is looking for someone to do and then at just the right time."*  
(McDermott, 1996, p286).

Lloyd and Norris (1999) present a robust case for the power of active parents' organisations pushing for medical diagnoses, press coverage, "experts" and drug



companies in the creation of the category of ADHD. The "new" disabilities are important labels for some parents in empowering them to claim the need for a statement (as signalled earlier in Riddell, Brown, & Duffield, 1994).

### **6.4.3 Implications for Professional Practice**

A major conclusion of the analysis in this thesis is that partnership was likely to disempower those whom it sought to empower. The narrative of power in professional relations and in relations between parents and professionals needs to be addressed in order to enable the full participation of all in complex multi-agency processes. Corbett (1999) suggests professionals need to find ways to let go of power, and the first form of this is "recognising that those with ownership of power are not without weaknesses and personal agenda" (Corbett, 1998, p61).

*Consideration of the dynamic, as opposed to deterministic, relations between different social interests will allow a better understanding of professional roles and of the contradictory pressures to which they are subject as intermediaries between dominant and subordinate social groups. (Armstrong, 1995, p126).*

#### ***Ethical Work***

This research suggests that professionals need to continue to divert their narrative from that of being the expert in "label definition" toward developing expertise in "unfreezing the image" (researcher's emphasis) they have of a child, and enabling other voices to be heard (Clough & Barton, 1995; Clough & Barton, 1998). They need to channel skills into technical and political solutions for doing this, into ways to consult, and ways to challenge other professional narratives. Professionals may need to start to uncover the personal, subjective, and affective. In the process, they may find themselves challenging their own "Professional Thought Disorder" (PTD):

*a compulsion to analyse and categorise the experience of others, disordered cognition – rigidly held beliefs, delusions of grandeur, negative transference and projection in which sufferers cannot distinguish their own wishes and impulses from those of the people they wish to be helping.*

(Defined by Allen 1999, p119, quoting Lawson 1994 and Corbett 1996).

A long overdue shift in the culture of blame, either of teachers or of parents, in recognition of the complexities in any human situation, could go a long way to make home- school relations less defensive and more effective. Professionals also need less stake in a fixed view of themselves and their role to allow a shifting mutuality between parents and teachers (Vincent and Warren, 1999).

Professionals may need to consider "shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, dispelling commonplace beliefs, taking a new measure of rules and institutions". Marks, Burman, Burman and Parker (1995) suggests a similar shift in practice, to address practices that have been fashioned to meet the needs of professionals, rather than those of children:

*... anxiety about how to contain and respond to dilemmas regarding what to do, can be managed by a variety of ritualised practices which give participants a sense of being in control. We suggest that reflection on status and hierarchy, language and emotional experience in the case conference will help educational psychologists and other professionals to foster a critical and reflective practice.*  
(Marks, Burman, Burman, & Parker, 1995, p47)

Allen (1999, p119) also suggests "refusing the other ", refusing to gaze, and allowing the "cannibal desire to know the other give way to the act of hearing what the speaker says". Professionals should refuse to offer promises of rescue or escape routes to the "grounds of certainty". Professionals should recognise the way inclusion has been fictionalised. Many authors have looked to the creation of services wanted by the people who use them. Allen looks to the creation of spaces for dialogue and boundary crossing – but acknowledges that these spaces can also be oppressive.

A power analysis needs to take into consideration power differentials also between different groups of parents, which mean that various kinds of choice, such as being able to choose to ask one's LEA to start an assessment of one's child, are problematic



for many parents. There is therefore a need to "rework the elitist paradigms within which analyses of choice have been constructed" (Reay, 1996, p594) in order to address the hidden psychological costs for working-class parents in the process of engaging in, for example, a choice of school for one's child.

### ***Conclusion***

The resolution of power, into an outcome for the child and all participants, is, as the researcher has been suggesting, a process of major complexity. The understanding that such complexity exists has been a major outcome of this thesis, and exploration of the interaction of various discourses has been pursued to the limits of the possibilities of insights from the two case studies. A more structured theoretical framework of the way these different aspects of power operate in the statementing process, if it is possible, would need to be the subject of further research. The final area to be considered in this chapter is the nature of statementing itself in the light of the preceding discussion.

## **Section 6.5: Statutory Assessment: a Dysfunctional Political System**

The statutory assessment of children's special educational needs is a process that has been denuded of all traces of power in its discourse of objectivity and rationality, and one for which all those involved in it sought technical, rather than political, solutions. However, it has been shown, in this chapter, to be fundamentally political, resting solidly on a complex discourse of power. The statementing system has inherent contradictions, and was seen as universally (though not unambiguously) negative by all participants in David's assessment) and yet thousands of statements are carried out in England, Wales and Northern Ireland (and records in Scotland) every year.

The removal of categories and the creation of a multi-disciplinary assessment involving parents have been seen as a major contributions of Warnock, by its inclusion in the 1981 Education Act, to the education of children believed to have special educational needs. However, the language used in this and the more recent 1993 Education Act and the related Code of Practice, assumes an objective rationality. The system is presented as essentially unproblematic. Multi-disciplinary assessment is presented as if the contribution of each of the professionals, and the parent(s), is different but complimentary, as if each is a different part of the jigsaw, the whole jigsaw giving a complete picture of the child.

This research challenges such a conceptualisation of statementing. Whilst some participants of David's assessment saw it as bringing objectivity (the clinical psychologist), and evidence (the SENCO), most saw it as essentially bureaucratic. This included the acting principal educational psychologist, the educational psychologist, the class teacher, the occupational therapist, and the head teacher. Some saw it as

objective a process as one could have (the occupational therapist and the SENCO). David's mother and the named person saw statementing as stigmatising. Some, such as David's mother, also saw it as a process of negotiation. Participants were responding to the different discourses of power referred to in the previous section.

Solutions to many of the problems either in assessment or in parent partnership have looked towards a technical solution assuming functionalism. The previous sections have raised many problems for such a conceptualisation of assessment, suggesting it to involve negotiation concerning a variety of different discourses within a complex power structure. Statementing is suggested to be fundamentally political, and inherently dysfunctional, a recognition that "the prevalent cultural values and beliefs about the activity support and constrain the participants' attitudes, goals, understandings and actions" (Daniels, 1998, p104).

Tomlinson, writing before the 1981 Education Act was implemented, refers to Habermas's (1973) "crisis of legitimacy". She states that "A crisis comes about when a system, in this case an educational system, cannot rationally or politically meet the ideological commitments needed to maintain legitimacy" (Tomlinson, 1982, p105).

This leads to the further theorising about the role played by participants in the system. Those involved in statements act in ways that maintain the system, which necessarily involves managing contradictions. Thus the term "contradiction manager" is suggested to define the role played by all. The researcher's contradiction management takes further Vincent and Warren (1997)'s active accommodation, referring to the way professionals integrate the need to accept limitations in their role but to employ available resources to work towards desired goals. Professionals have a tendency towards "a



depolitized understanding of the issues involved, casting them as technical problems amenable to 'expert' solution" (Vincent & Warren, 1997, p146).

Although she transgresses boundaries, David's mother plays a role that requires her to manage all parts of the system, continuing to keep very firmly focused on David but keeping a constant vigilance that all (her attention to school and to David) is still in balance. Whilst she is now partnering David, she states several times that she recognises the school has a difficult task and tries hard with David, and her view is acknowledged by the head teacher. She seems to have a "good enough" goal with the school. Her least demand is that the school recognise David as "learning difficulty" rather than "behavioural difficulty", and that the statement reflect this view. She has other wishes, such as that school cater for David's needs as an able child, or cater for him without a statement, but she recognised that this is highly unlikely. Although she disagreed with an idea to use snakes and ladders as part of a behavioural programme to show David the consequences of his transgressions against school rules, David's mother acted in agreement with the idea at a meeting in order to affirm the newly apparent discourse of seeking ways to help rather than seeking blame. She manages contradictions in her constant boundary crossing.

The educational psychologist and the acting principal educational psychologist both articulate their role in terms of mediating and managing ambiguities in the whole statement system. The head teacher also plays this role managing all parts of the system, but puts the main value on managing the school system. The other participants manage contradictions in a smaller sphere of responsibility. For example the clinical psychologist manages contradictions between views of the child and the family; the SENCO manages contradictions between the staff, the child and the mother; and the SCMO manages contradictions between parents and school staff (and indeed said that

teachers asked her to play this role). Others have a more focused role. The named person is there to "support" David's mother and the class teacher focuses on David himself. The occupational therapist was very unsettled by David's behavioural past, and this led her to maintain very close boundaries, and to stay very clearly within her own remit, that of advice about motor skills.

The role of PPOs in contradiction management is evident in the way David's mother's friend helps her to continue to be a part of the process. The system requires her to have a particular, role-bound voice, but not an empowered one. The way the discourse of contradiction management is attached to the role of the named person is confirmed in more recent literature. In the DFEE evaluation of Parent partnership Schemes Wolfendale (1997) demonstrates the ways PPOs and the named persons they train become two further tiers maintaining the edifice of statementing. There is no criticism in this report of statementing itself, or of the concept of partnership. The lack of problematising is itself a discourse, assuming the status quo, even though the problematic can be unravelled from the detail. One example of this is in the long list, from parent responses, of difficulties in the process of providing parents with more information about statementing. The list is provided, next to a short list on the virtues of information provision for parents, but there is an absence of theorising about the significance of such criticisms beyond a need to simply provide more and better information. However, evidence from the first case study of this research suggested that in certain circumstances Parent Partnership Officers can claim power to follow an agenda different to that dictated by conventional power discourse in order to claim their own agenda. The dispute between the different kinds of parent partners in Newby Parent Partnership Scheme demonstrated that the voluntary organisation workers do not have the same kind of incentive, by virtue of their non- or semi- professional role, to manage the contradictions. One had claimed a right to define her own role, a role emphasising parental advocacy rather than support.

Professionals from the Parent Federation conform to definitions of professionalism rather than any the desire or chance to create new alliances, new understandings of the role between professionals and parents. They seemed to assume a professional definition of need and an emphasis on individual problem solving rather than other more emancipatory ways of seeing, and rather than producing clients' alternative frameworks (Vincent & Warren, 1997, p158-159).

Referring back to the activity system depicting David's statement (Figure 6.4, p364) contradiction management happens at the position of "division of labour", at the place where all those involved in the statement enact their tasks. Activity systems are constantly in a process of construction and re-negotiation, "constantly working through contradictions within and between its elements. In this sense, an activity system is a virtual disturbance- and innovation-producing machine" (Engestrom, 1999). The diagram shows the precarious nature of the systems: if the participants were to cease to manage the contradictions this might call the whole of statementing into question.

Looking to the future, the prognosis seems very bleak, and maybe it is for the current system of addressing the special educational needs in catering for all children. The statementing system contains crucial contradictions. For example, the DFEE has resisted calls to substantially dismantle the statutory assessment process on the grounds that parents wish it to remain, and yet the parent in this research did not want her child, David, to be subject to such an assessment. The entire system could be seen to be predicated upon preventing the parent, for example, from having a voice (i.e. the need to have advice from so many other professionals, the bureaucratic emphasis of the process) and yet at the end of the process the acting principal educational psychologist defers immediately to the parent. However, the current research suggests we are, as a community, not yet at the point of being able to propose models of



organisational practice to work towards. There is still much work to be done in listening to different perspectives within the system. The researcher can perhaps signal some important directions for change in policy, rather than particular guidelines for policy change.

The current statutory assessment should be abandoned in a move towards authentically inclusive education. We now have an overly bureaucratic system for identifying and providing for the special educational needs of children. The child's parent and a range of professionals are statutorily required to contribute to the assessment. Such a system was designed to protect children from decisions being made by a single professional, in the pre-1981 Education Act procedures. However, the current system has evolved in response to a number of other very different pressures, such as parent as consumer demanding assessments within certain time limits, and LEAs looking for ways to reduce funding attached to statements. The research carried out for this thesis focused on perspectives of individuals, and as such demonstrated that the individual voice in assessment has been lost, at great cost. Implications for policy may therefore be to stop looking for bureaucratic solutions and to seek answers to more fundamental questions. The Revised Code of Practice (DFEE, 2000), currently in draft form for consultation, is a revision of the existing framework, and seems not to address the questions that needed to be asked. It goes further than the previous code in recognising individual needs of different parents (DFEE, 2000, p8-11). However, it leaves more fundamental questions unanswered. Such questions return policy on special educational needs to a consideration of the policy on the education of all children. It means looking at what education is fundamentally for, and addressing the problems that government targets pose for schools that have a high proportion of children with statements. It means addressing the emotional needs of staff in schools, so that their needs are not played out in the assessment of a child whose behaviour they find difficult to manage. It means

looking at what schools can be reasonably expected to provide for children who have special educational need, and ways they might creatively investigate the kind of learning experiences they are able to provide for children without recourse to statementing (Bath, Buckle, & Todd, 1999; Buckle, Bath, & Todd, 1999; Todd, Bath, & Buckle, 1999). It means an authentically inclusive education system. The finding in this research that assessment is not about a rational assessment of "need" similarly suggests a fundamental questioning of the kinds of needs that education is designed to meet. Instead of focussing on the special educational needs of children, one should start the process by looking at the special educational needs of schools, and the needs of the professionals.

Assessment should be recognised for what it is: it carries a degree of objectivity, but it also the burden of bureaucracy, the need for negotiation, and stigma for the child. The different statementing activities, report writing and meetings, should somehow reflect these multiple functions. The ways this might happen would be the subject of further research.

A simplistic systemic focus in the approach to children's problems should be questioned. This research can perhaps be taken even further in its recommendations. Rather than simply raise problems in different models of multi-agency working, this research seems to question the focus on the system. Here we seem to have fallen into an impossible tautology. Focus on the child separate from the system has led in the past to problematising the child, rather than the system. However, a focus on the system, as has happened in the statementing process risks losing the child completely, as demonstrated by the silencing of David. David's situation was forced into an over-elaborate and protracted procedure. It raises the possibility that David's situation could have been addressed from working with a much smaller group of professionals. Why

were nine professionals required to address David's problems in school? It also raises the strong possibility that if the professionals had listened to David a solution may have emerged without the need for exclusion and statementing.

### **6.5.1 Further Research Directions**

All research designs, particularly those looking at human endeavours, are limited to the extent to which they will be able to address the questions the research claims to ask. Rather than methodological limitations, the researcher would prefer to talk about limits arising from the methodology to the claims that can be made from research. This research could have adopted any number of different actions to look at partnership in the statementing process. Limits to claims described in Chapter 3, Methodology, pertain. Partial findings and conclusions from this research have been published on two occasions (Todd & Higgins, 1998; Todd, 2000). This case has led both to some rich theorising and has communicated powerfully to academics and practitioners involved in the area of special educational needs (a staff research seminar in January 1997 and a BERA presentation in September 1998, groups of professionals - educational psychologist meetings in 1998 and 1999, and an international group of academics and professionals at the International Narrative Therapy Conference in Adelaide, February 2000).

Importantly David's case is atypical: David's mother achieves her goal despite opposition from the school. Atypicality does not exclude this case from a contribution to knowledge since its contribution does not depend upon the sample having a particular degree of representation to a population. David, his situation, and implications of the perceptions of those around him, has had all the important elements of a powerful human drama: conflict, emotion, and interesting plot. Its contribution is to the ability of the case to



communicate and to the theorising that is possible about constructs central to the research question, such as partnership. Maybe these two, the communicability of the case to the reader, and the theorising, are different sides of the same coin. Perhaps a finding here about validity is that the power of a case to theorise is indicated by its power to communicate to the reader of the research.

A helpful outcome of this research would be to inform any subsequent research looking at similar areas, particularly partnership with parents, in order to encourage an approach which recognises the problematic. The literature review in Chapter 2 suggested much research fails as valid evaluations of service delivery because the questions take too little account of assumptions being made. The research findings of this study take this further and suggest that much previous research fails to recognise the political nature of professional endeavour. Questions to stakeholders constantly assume that problems in systems require more or less of the same (referred to as technical solutions), rather than major structural changes. Research from educational psychology services to parents evaluating service delivery would need to listen with different ears, with new awareness of the political nature of decision making. However, there are questions about whether this would be possible, whether the professional, practitioner researcher would be able to confront such political impossibilities.

This research tried to make available the voices of those involved in statutory assessment, in order, through the medium of the researcher, to allow these voices to suggest implications for assumptions made about the nature of partnership and assessment (such as rationality and objectivity). There are now a number of few examples of this kind of research, reflecting theoretically on the discourses of special educational needs (Allen, 1999; Allen, Brown, & Riddell, 1995; Armstrong, 1995; Clarke, Dyson, & Millward, 1998; Clough & Barton, 1998; Corbett, 1993; Galloway, Armstrong, &

Tomlinson, 1994; Slee, 1995; Vincent & Warren, 1997). And these writings have been referred to in this research. However, a great deal more work needs to be carried out, both in research and practice, to investigate perspectives of all participants of assessment.

This research used a tool from Engestrom, activity systems (Engestrom, 1999), to carry out a theoretical analysis of David's assessment. Whilst this was not the focus of this chapter, some evaluation of this tool is possible. Several problems became apparent in the systems analysis: the systems emphasised cognitive functions and ignored the affective. This tool provided a useful way to display elements in statementing around particular participants in order to facilitate the development of further understanding of the actions and perspective of those participants. Thus it proves useful to understand how David's mother achieved her desired outcome. However, it was abandoned as a tool to understand the position of David in statementing, namely because he was "hidden" from the process. It also proved unable to deal with theorising about partnership and power. Engestrom recognised power as an important aspect of complex systems in society. However, in the activity systems power appeared to be neutral, rather than crucial to understanding human activity, since it was not a key term on any of the nodes. Also there is a sense in which statementing goes beyond any structural analysis, when the complex discourses discussed in the previous chapter, are brought into play. However, the way the system demands reference to community and culture at different levels, makes Engestrom's activity system an unusually powerful tool with which to counter the individualism prevalent in the analysis of human interactions. In some ways it achieves this more effectively than does Foucault. Certainly, Foucault's concept of "transgression" was unhelpfully individualist in comparison with Engestrom's "boundary crossing". However, Foucault maintains an insistence on the cultural operation of power as the starting point for any analysis of

any aspect of human endeavour. To this extent Foucault is fundamentally both systemic and beyond the systemic. Further research could usefully investigate possibilities and limitations of all forms of systems analysis, as tools to investigate complex human activity.

The current research uncovered complex discourses of power, as discussed in Chapter 6. Further research could usefully take this analysis of power further. The researcher has confirmed power to be fundamentally non-unitary and multi-dimensional, but a coherent model of the operation of power within complex multi-agency systems was beyond this research. Further studies could focus specifically on power, looking at the nature and operation of different kinds of power and of the effects of actions to change sites of power. Other studies could aim to change professional practice, and be conceptualised as a form of action research, but could also investigate power. A research project which might achieve this would be one aiming to encourage greater consultation with children. Such a project would also be likely to require professionals to find ways to "give" power to children and it could therefore investigate effects of attempts to change the dynamics of power.

This research has also contributed to thinking about different identities of the researcher. This has included awareness of the importance of reflexivity in research and reflections on the different research actions of the practitioner researcher in comparison to the professional researcher. Reflections on researcher identity are omitted from most research. Further research, on whatever subject, could usefully explore such reflections further.

Many interesting contradictions found in this research were under-theorised due to the limitations in this research, and could usefully demand further attention. The effect of



concealed affect in driving relationships led to a suggestion of a systemic conceptualisation of the way self is presented in complex human institutions, a systemic Goffman (1963). Such ideas require further research and reference to literatures beyond the scope of this thesis.

This research has been all about perspectives. It has accessed perspective through interviews, and it has found ways that some of those perspectives are empowered only with great struggle (David's mother) or not at all (David). The conclusion that partnership and assessment are fundamentally political, means that the whole of an assessment process may look quite different viewed from a particular perspective. Policy, practice and research all need to recognise and investigate different perspectives.

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