AN EXPLORATION OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' USE OF CONSULTATION USING SOCIO-CULTURAL ACTIVITY THEORY

by

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ABSTRACT

Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory is used within this research as a conceptual lens through which to explore the practice of EP consultation. Consultation has become a key means of service delivery in many psychological services. However, despite the accepted notion that EP practice and consultation exist in tandem, there is a dearth of research into what it is that EPs actually do when they say they are 'having a consultation'. In addition, EP consultation has not yet been fully explored as a phenomenon which operates within the wider social, cultural and organisational constraints of a school system. Thus, by using Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory as a framework for data collection and analysis, a micro and macro level analysis of the activity of EP consultation was enabled.

Data were collected from six EPs working in one Educational Psychology Service (EPS) through the use of semi-structured interviews. In line with Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory, the 'object', 'outcome', 'tools', 'rules' and 'division of labour' within the activity of EP consultation were explored. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was used to analyse the data across the interviews, from which numerous themes emerged. Building on the work of Leadbetter (2006), an activity theoretical conceptualisation of EP consultation is presented and proposed as a detailed and functional model which can be used by trainee EPs, and those who are qualified, to make sense of the phenomenon on which much of their practice is based.

DEDICATION

In loving memory of Mair Roberts

22nd December 1947 – 24th August 2018

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction to the research

Using second generation socio-cultural activity theory (Engeström, 1987), this research aims to explore the activity of EP consultation from the perspective of EPs. Activity theory is used as a framework for both data collection and data analysis in order to facilitate an exploration of the activity of EP consultation at a macro level, situating consultation in the context of the wider social, cultural and organisational systems within which it exists. Building on the work of Leadbetter (2006), the research will explore what exactly it is that EPs say they do in consultation in terms of: the goal (**object**) and overall purpose (**outcome**) of consultation; the way in which EPs facilitate their consultation meetings (**tools**); factors which EPs perceive to support and constrain their work in consultation (**rules**); who else is involved (**community**); and what role the EP plays in the consultation process (**division of labour**). Contradictions will be analysed to surface implications for EP practice.

1.2 Personal and professional interest

I embarked on my educational and child psychology training almost three years ago, in September 2016. Prior to starting my training course, I was a teacher for seven years in a primary school. Moving from the teaching profession into the world of educational psychology training was an unexpectedly uncomfortable experience for me. I found myself almost lost within a new culture full of unusual acronyms, assessments and interventions that I had not yet heard of, and being privy to conversations regarding the roles and responsibilities of EPs that I did not yet fully understand. I had completely

underestimated the identity shift that I would go through across the course of my doctoral training in my quest to understand and embrace the EP role.

I experienced particular difficulty understanding the phenomenon of EP consultation. I knew from my reading and preparations for my training course that consultation was defined as one of the five overarching roles of an EP (SEED Review, 2002). Moreover, browsing a range of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) websites revealed that almost all EPSs across the country were advertising consultation as a key service provided by their EPs: "direct consultation from a named educational psychologist" (EPS A); "we work consultatively" (EPS B); "we offer a consultation service" (EPS C); "we consult with you" (EPS D); "we use consultation to work through complex situations" (EPS E). I understood consultation, therefore, to be a key means of service delivery and it appeared to be a unique selling point for the EP profession.

As my first professional practice placement began, I felt very daunted by the prospect of having to 'have a consultation' with school staff. I did not understand what made a consultation different from a conversation, what it was about a consultation that made it such a valuable experience, and importantly, how I would go about leading a consultation. This led me to explore the research literature in depth in search for answers. Within the literature, I was able to locate conceptualisations and theoretical models of EP consultation, such as those proposed by Gutkin (1999), West and Idol (1987) and Wagner (2000), which offered useful insights into the psychological principles underpinning practice. However, I found myself still left wondering how, and if, EPs translated these models into real life practice.

Further exploration revealed that research regarding real life EP consultation practice was sparse. I felt dissatisfied with the limited body of research which explored how espoused theories were enacted by EPs in their day-to-day practice. Furthermore, within the research which did exist , the voice of the EP was significantly neglected. As such, I utilised time on my professional practice placements to shadow EPs in consultations and engage in learning conversations with them about their practice. Throughout my shadowing experiences, however, I quickly noted that EPs found it difficult to describe what they did during their consultations and their consultation practice seemed to have just become an everyday, internalised part of their work.

Thus, I began my research journey into the exploration of EP consultation practice. My personal motivation for this research was to use the knowledge I would gain to inform my own practice, and to help me to develop my identity as an educational psychologist who is able to carry out one of the main functions of EP practice competently and confidently. However, on a wider level, my professional motivation for this research was driven by a need to help EPs make their tacit knowledge of consultation explicit. I wanted to contribute something to the literature which would help future trainee EPs make sense of the phenomenon of consultation and also to promote thinking amongst qualified EPs regarding their own professional practice.

1.3 Context of the research

This research took place within a local authority EPS (hereafter known as XXX EPS). At the time of the research, XXX EPS provided a service to a large city in the UK. Each EP working for XXX EPS worked within a cluster of schools, using a time allocation

service model of delivery. Consultation as a mode of service delivery was introduced to the service approximately fourteen years prior to the research. EPs work very autonomously within XXX EPS and, at the time of the research, there were no prescriptive guidelines regarding consultation. Therefore, the EPs' use of consultation was variable and eclectic.

1.4 Contribution to knowledge

The aim of this research is to contribute to the currently very small body of knowledge regarding what it is that EPs do when they engage in consultation, from the perspectives of EPs themselves. The perspectives of EPs regarding their own consultation practice have been neglected in the research so far. There is a dearth of research into what it is that EPs actually do when they say they are 'having a consultation'. Moreover, conceptual models lack specificity regarding how EPs actually go about engaging in consultation in real life practice. In addition, using socio-cultural activity theory will enable a wider, macro level analysis of the activity of EP consultation and surface social, cultural and organisational factors which affect an EP's work. This area has been underexplored in the research literature.

1.5 Research aims

There are four overarching aims of this research:

- To understand the specific practice procedures used by EPs in real life consultation practice;

- To harness the voice of EPs to allow analysis of EP consultation from their perspective;

- To explore the wider social, cultural and organisational factors that affect an EP's practice when engaging in consultations in schools;

- To develop Leadbetter's (2006) original activity theoretical conceptual model of consultation to provide a practical and detailed model which could be used by trainee EPs, and those who are qualified, to make sense of the phenomenon of EP consultation.

1.6 Structure of the thesis (Chapters 2-5)

Chapter 2 of the thesis describes the historical role of the EP and outlines the social, cultural and historical context which facilitated a paradigm shift within EP practice from EPs as individual caseworkers to EPs as consultative colleagues. Then, the concept of consultation is considered through an exploration of definitions, theories and models of consultation, most of which have emanated from the USA. The UK context is then returned to and consultation as a mode of service delivery, as proposed by Wagner (2000), is described and critiqued from a socio-cultural activity theory perspective. Finally, the limited research into EP consultation processes in the UK is critically discussed before the rationale for the current research is presented.

Chapter 3 considers the research approach and research methods. Socio-cultural activity theory is described and critiqued. Then, data collection methods, ethical considerations and methods of data analysis are outlined.

Chapter 4 contains the research findings and discussion. The data are presented according to each node of the activity theory system and themes are illuminated through quotations taken from the interviews. Themes at each node of the activity system are discussed in relation to the corresponding research questions and the research literature.

Chapter 5 concludes the research with a discussion of implications for EP practice which have arisen from analysis of the contradictions present within the activity system. Limitations of the research are discussed as well as thoughts for future enquiry.

CHAPTER TWO: CONSULTATION

2.1 Introduction

This research utilises second generation activity theory (Engeström, 1987) as a conceptual lens through which to explore the activity of EP consultation. A central tenet of activity theory is historicity. Engeström (1999) explains that activity systems take shape and transform over lengthy periods of time, arguing that they can only be understood against their own history. Engeström (1999) suggests that history ought to be studied as history of the theoretical ideas and tools that have shaped the activity, as well as at the local level of the history of the activity and its objects.

Thus, this literature review will begin by briefly describing the historical role of the EP and outlining the social, cultural and historical context which facilitated a paradigm shift within EP practice from EPs as individual caseworkers to EPs as consultative colleagues working within schools. Then, dominant theories underpinning the construct of consultation will be outlined as well as various definitions of consultation. This review will draw on research from the USA to explore various models of consultation before introducing influential contributions from the UK into the practice of EP consultation. The limited research into the processes of EP consultation in the UK will be outlined and discussed from a socio-cultural activity theory perspective.

2.2 A brief history of educational psychology practice: from individual caseworkers to consultative colleagues

In 1913, Cyril Burt became the first educational psychologist in the UK and his contribution shaped the structure of educational psychology practice for the following

fifty years (MacKay, 2007). A major influence that shaped Burt's early role was the mental testing movement, which focused on the assessment of individual differences in children (MacKay, 2007). Another major influence shaping the educational psychology profession at this time was the child guidance movement, which was interested in the study and treatment of children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (Dessent, 1978). Wagner (2000) argues that the growth of the child guidance movement, which led to the location of EPs in psychiatric clinics, further contributed to the constriction of the role of the EP to that of a tester. Wagner (2000) describes the prevalent model of psychology at the time as one of individual pathology operating within a medical model of practice.

The Summerfield Report, published in 1968, surveyed EPs to ascertain the amount of time EPs spent on different activities. The results of this report reflected a continuation of the focus on individual pathology and identified the two key activities engaged in most by an EP as 'psychological assessments' and 'treating children' (Leadbetter, 2002). Dessent (1978, p. 31) stated that the work analysis showed "a preponderance of individual, clinical, diagnostic and therapeutic work with little indication of involvement in advisory, preventative or in-service training". Over the following decade, a traditional role for educational psychologists became established, described by Phillips (1971) as the identification, diagnosis and treatment of children with learning or adjustment problems.

However, in 1978, the seminal edited text 'Reconstructing Educational Psychology' (Gillham, 1978) voiced the frustrations and dissatisfactions experienced by many EPs

regarding their role. Within this text, writers proposed the role of the EP as an agent of change working with school systems, and positioned EPs as those who could employ systemic, preventative approaches and were concerned with the wider environment. However, as Leadbetter (2002, p. 81) notes, changes within the professional practice of EPs during this time existed "more in the minds and aspirations of a creative few rather than representing a huge sea change of activity."

The 1981 Education Act, informed by The Warnock Report (DES, 1978), introduced the concept of special educational needs and advocated the integration of children with special educational needs into mainstream settings. This led to the implementation of statementing which is described by Gillham (1999, p. 220) as "nothing less than a tragedy for the profession". An EP's psychological advice was given supremacy by local authorities and, in some cases, EPs were even required to write the Statement of Special Educational Needs (Leadbetter, 2002). While providing job security for EPs, Leadbetter (2002, p. 86) states that this new role definition became "another type of straitjacket for the profession". Legislation, therefore, served to restrict creative EP practice to a great extent and continued to embody a focus on individual assessment (Wagner, 2000).

The 1981, 1993 and then 1996 Education Acts saw EP services struggling to cope with the escalating number of referrals for statutory assessment, consequently reducing local authority educational psychologists' capacity to provide preventative or systemic work in schools (Leadbetter, 2002). Many teachers at the time perceived EPs as inaccessible, detached from the life of classrooms and schools, and as having little

impact (Wagner, 2016). The strain on the EP profession was also recognised in a Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) report (2000, p. 3) which noted:

> "The Green Paper (DfEE, 1997) recognised the wide ranging responsibilities of educational psychologists. In doing so it observed that the growing pressure for statements has led to educational psychologists spending more of their time carrying out statutory assessments, at the expense of providing early intervention and support when the child's needs are first identified. The Green Paper made a commitment to explore ways of changing the balance of educational psychologists' work to ensure their expertise is used more effectively."

An effort to overcome problems of long waiting lists and individual, within-child-based referrals resulted in the introduction of time allocation models and an impetus within some educational psychology services to change their model of service delivery to that of a consultation approach which emphasised early interventions and preventative, systemic work (Leadbetter, 2004).

The historical timeline of the development of EP practice in the UK from Cyril Burt to the turn of the millennium will be paused at this important juncture and revisited later in Section 2.4. The following sections will explore the development of consultation as an approach used within school psychology, mainly within the USA. The section will begin by offering definitions of consultation and outlining its theoretical underpinnings. Influential consultation models emanating from the USA will be outlined before returning to the UK context and considering how consultation was enacted by educational psychology services at the turn of the millennium.

2.3 What is consultation?

2.3.1 Defining consultation

There have been many definitions offered to explain the nature of consultation in applied psychology. Bramlett and Murphy (1998, p.31) defined consultation as "an indirect, problem solving approach wherein school psychologists work with teachers or other caregivers to assist children with either learning or adjustment concerns or both." This definition is based on the contributions of prominent researchers and practitioners from the USA in the field of school-based consultation (e.g. Conoley and Conoley, 1990; Gutkin and Curtis, 1982; Zins and Erchul, 1995).

Gutkin and Curtis's (1982) summary of the literature on school-based consultation offers nine key characteristics which define a consultative approach to working:

(1) consultation involves indirect service delivery;
(2) there is a trusting relationship between consultant and consultee;
(3) neither the consultant nor the consultee has power over the other;
(4) the consultee is actively involved in the problem-solving process;
(5) consultees are free to accept or reject suggestions made by the consultant;
(6) there is a voluntary relationship;
(7) the consultation should be confidential;
(8) the focus is to help to solve a current work problem of the consultee; and
(9) the consultation has dual goals: the short term goal of remediation (i.e. resolving a presenting problem) and the long term goal of prevention (i.e. improving the consultee's problem-solving skills).

Bramlett and Murphy (1998) suggest that it is this preventative aspect, alongside the indirect focus, that most clearly distinguishes consultation from direct services provided by school psychologists, such as testing, counselling or therapeutic intervention. Fig 2.1 contrasts direct and indirect service delivery models.

Fig 2.1 Direct and indirect service delivery models, taken from Conoley and Conoley (1990, p. 85).

Direct Service Model

referral *treatment*

Teacher ⟶ Psychologist ⟶ Child

Indirect Service Model

referral *treatment*

Psychologist ⟵ Teacher ⟶ Child

(consultant) ⟷ (consultee)
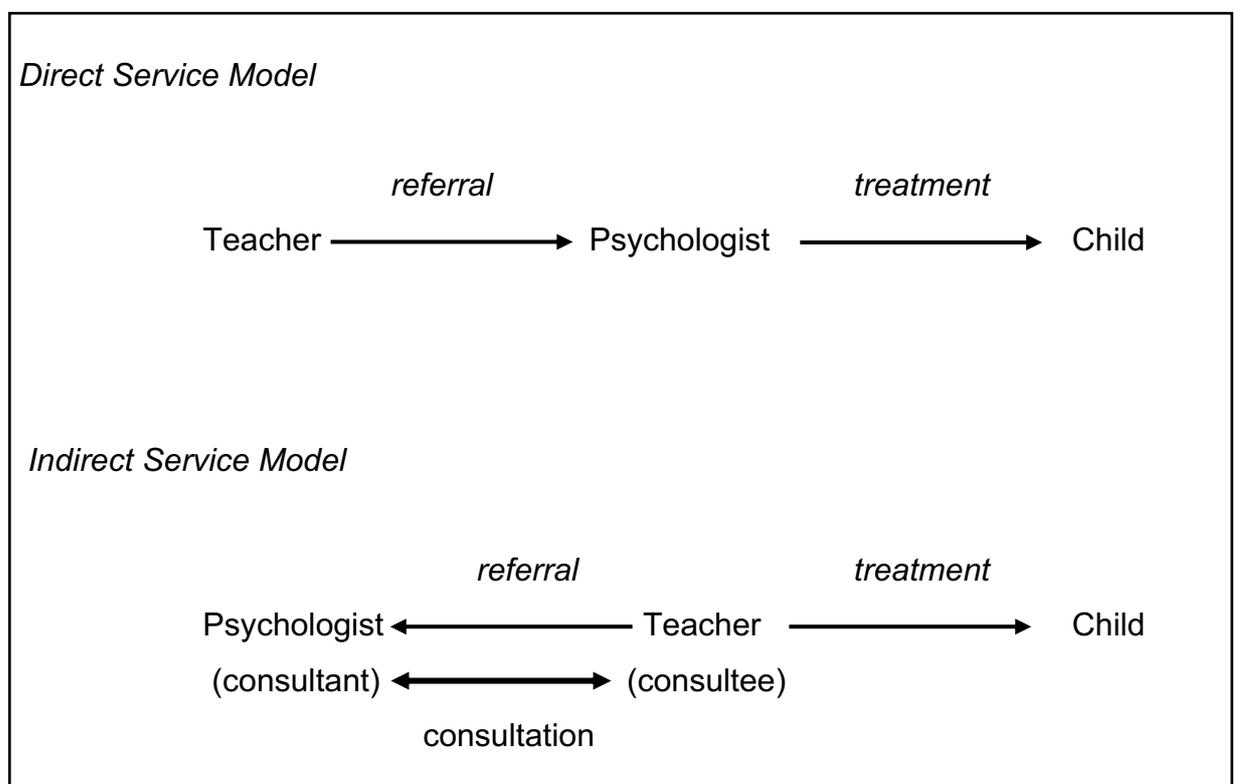
consultation

2.3.2 Theories of consultation

Conoley and Conoley (1990) identify three dominant theoretical perspectives which have been particularly influential in school psychology, namely mental health consultation (Caplan, 1970), behavioural consultation (Bergan, 1977) and process consultation (Schein, 1988).

2.3.2.1 Mental health consultation

Mental health consultation is grounded in psycho-analytic theory, with the primary goal being to help consultees gain insight into the personal feelings and behaviours that may be contributing to the presenting problem (Caplan, 1970). Underpinning school-based mental health consultation is the assumption that at least some of a child's difficulties are exacerbated by teacher characteristics, which typically exist at an unconscious level (Conoley and Conoley, 1990). A mental health consultant, through their analyses of the motives and psychological makeup of their consultee in the form of delicate and covert verbal strategies, aims to help consultees break loose of constricting thoughts or feelings about a particular child or problem (Conoley and Conoley, 1990). Alpert (1976) summarises the four main assumptions of mental health consultation as: (1) the consultant can change a teacher's perception; (2) a change in the teacher's perception will affect the teacher's behaviour; (3) a change in the teacher's behaviour will affect student behaviour; and (4) teacher learning will be generalised to future cases.

Elements of Caplanian consultation are regarded as beneficial in school-based practice (i.e. the model's preventative focus; its promotion of a non-hierarchical relationship between consultant and consultee; and its emphasis on both individual factors and environmental factors in achieving change) (Caplan, Caplan and Erchul, 1995). However, it has not been applied widely by school psychologists. Watkins (2000) suggests that mental health consultation may be too psycho-dynamically oriented for school based practice, feeling unfamiliar to teachers and failing to directly address the concerns raised by the consultee. Moreover, Alpert (1976) and others

(Bergan, 1977; Gresham and Kendall, 1987) have cited a lack of empirical validation of the four assumptions outlined above.

2.3.2.2 Behavioural consultation

Unlike mental health consultation, behavioural consultation (Bergan,1977), which is based on social learning theory, considers overt behaviours to be influential in a consultee's success, rather than unconscious processes (Conoley and Conoley, 1990). Bergan (1977) viewed consultation as a four-stage process: problem identification; problem analysis; plan implementation; and plan evaluation. A behavioural consultant leads the consultee through a structured problem-solving process in order to "define the problem, isolate environmental variables prompting or supporting the target problem and devise environmental manipulations to reduce the probability of the continuation of the problem behaviour" (Conoley and Conoley, 1990, p.91).

Behavioural consultation was historically consistently favoured within school psychology (Bramlett and Murphy, 1998). It is likely to be more easily accepted and implemented in schools, and the focus is more easily understood as the client (i.e. the child) and their problem, therefore making it less threatening to the consultee (Erchul and Conoley, 1991). A critique of the approach, however, pertains to the lack of focus on the nature of the consultant-consultee relationship, and how the quality of this relationship can influence whether a favourable outcome will be achieved (Larney, 2003).

2.3.2.3 Process consultation

Process consultation, strongly linked to the work of Schein (1988), is concerned with the building of a 'helping relationship' between the consultant and the consultee (Schein, 1990). Within process consultation, the 'helper' facilitates a mutual inquiry process that creates a shared sense of responsibility for exploring the problem and generating solutions, whilst implementing some of their own diagnostic and intervention skills (Schein, 1990). Process consultation, through its focus on the relationship formed between the consultant and the consultee, facilitates change at the level of the consultee's behaviour, attitudes, feelings and views (Leadbetter, 2002). In contrast to mental health consultants, process consultants are not concerned about unconscious dynamics among staff members (Conoley and Conoley, 1990). Moreover, unlike behavioural consultants, process consultants target teacher skills rather than focusing on children's behaviours per se (Conoley and Conoley, 1990).

Schein (1969) contrasted process consultancy with the 'purchase/expert' and 'doctor-patient' models of consultation. Schein (1969) described the 'purchase/expert' model as that in which a client buys expert services or information. It is content-oriented and is most successful if the client has correctly diagnosed the problem, correctly matched the available specialised expertise with the problem to be solved and has thought through the consequences of posing the problem and having it solved (Huffington, Cole and Brunning, 1997). The 'doctor-patient' model of consultation is used when the client is aware of some 'symptoms' of their problems, but they have not come up with a diagnosis. The client looks to the consultant to identify the cause of the problems and recommend solutions. The 'doctor-patient' model is most successful when the client

has correctly interpreted the 'symptoms', the consultant correctly diagnoses the problem and recommends appropriate solutions, and the client accepts the recommendations, implementing what the consultant has suggested (Huffington, Cole and Brunning, 1997).

Process consultation, on the other hand, is less concerned with the content of the problem, and more with the process by which the client identifies and solves the problem. Schein (1969) explains that process consultation is based on the following assumptions:

- The client seeks helps when they do not know exactly what the problem is;
- The client is not aware of what help is available or what would be relevant to the problem;
- The client knows what interventions will work;
- The client benefits from learning how to solve problems him/herself.

Process consultation is a useful model for school psychologists to adopt when working with staff in schools to effect change for children and young people (Leadbetter, 2002).

2.3.3 Consultation models emanating from the USA

A large body of research conducted in the USA has resulted in the production of some useful conceptual models for understanding consultation. An area of debate between American researchers has been concerned with the nature of the consultant-consultee relationship, which is considered to be instrumental in effective consultation practice (Bramlett and Murphy, 1998; Gutkin and Curtis, 1999). Gutkin (1999) suggested that collaboration is a central tenet of consultation, explaining that psychologists must collaborate with teachers to ensure they 'buy in' to any plans. Erchul (1987), on the other hand, analysed consultations in schools and found that consultants typically

controlled the dyadic relationship across all stages of consultation, therefore challenging the generally held argument that school consultation should constitute a balanced collaboration. Erchul and Chewring (1990) introduced the term 'cooperative', rather than collaborative, to describe consultation relationships and questioned the relative effectiveness of a collaborative versus a more directive approach.

Gutkin (1999), however, posited that the acts of being collaborative and directive were not dichotomous. Instead, Gutkin (1999) conceptualised a model of consultation consisting of two dimensions, positioning 'coercive' as the opposite of 'collaborative', and 'non-directive' as the opposite of 'directive' (Fig 2.2). Collaboration and directiveness, therefore, exist as discriminable continua. Within Gutkin's (1999) model, consultants can occupy any of the four quadrants and they may even move between them consciously or unconsciously (Leadbetter, 2002).

Fig 2.2 Two dimensions of consultation (Gutkin, 1999)

"consultants overtly employ their professional expertise to influence problem solving" (Gutkin, 1999, p. 180)

directive

"unilateral decision making by consultants, in which consultees are expected to follow consultants' leadership regardless of whether they agree with it" (Gutkin, 1999, p. 180)

coercive

collaborative

"a process of joint/shared decision making between consultants and consultees, with both parties having opportunities to exert leadership and provide input whenever they believe that would be appropriate" (Gutkin, 1999, p. 180)

non-directive

"consultants restrict the overt expression of their unique professional knowledge" (Gutkin, 1999, p. 180)

However, Gutkin's (1999) model was criticised by Erchul (1999), who suggested that it failed to incorporate an interpersonal perspective on the consultant-consultee relationship. Erchul et al. (1992) state that the fundamental unit of analysis in consultation ought to be the consultant/consultee dyad, rather than purely focusing on one individual, namely the consultant. Accepting Erchul's (1999) critique, Gutkin (1999) expanded his model of consultation to include the consultee dimension, facilitating an examination of the behaviours of both the consultant and the consultee, as well as the interactions between them (Fig 2.3).

Fig 2.3 Gutkin's (1999) expanded model of school-based consultation, taken from Gutkin (1999, p. 237).
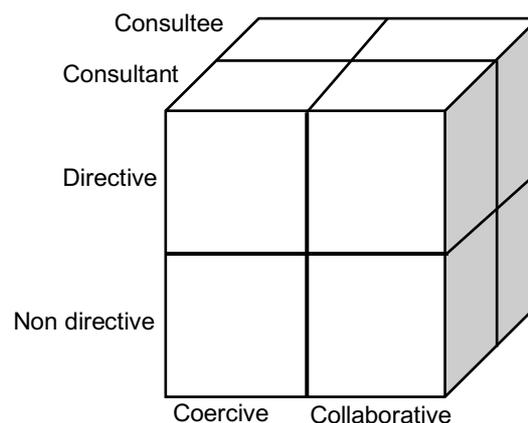
However, Gutkin (1999) did not develop his theory much further beyond stating that there is a need to address the issue of how consultants respond in an ongoing way to consultee needs. Moreover, although this view widened the existing unitary perspective on consultation, it did not take into account other factors, such as wider social, cultural and historical factors, role definitions and demarcations, and mediating tools used within the consultation process (Leadbetter, 2002).

Schmidt and Johnson's (1970) continuum of consultancy styles (Fig 2.4) includes a dimension of directive-non-directive, which is helpful to view alongside Gutkin's (1999) consultation models. On the left hand side of the continuum, the consultant is consultee-focused, working in a process consultancy style characterised by the consultant listening, reflecting back and attempting to create an environment in which the consultee can generate their own solutions to the problem. On the right hand side of the continuum, the consultant assumes an expert role, using specialised experience and knowledge to offer solutions to the consultee's problem.

Fig 2.4 Schmidt and Johnson's (1970) consultancy continuum, cited in Huffington, Cole and Brunning (1997, p. 28).
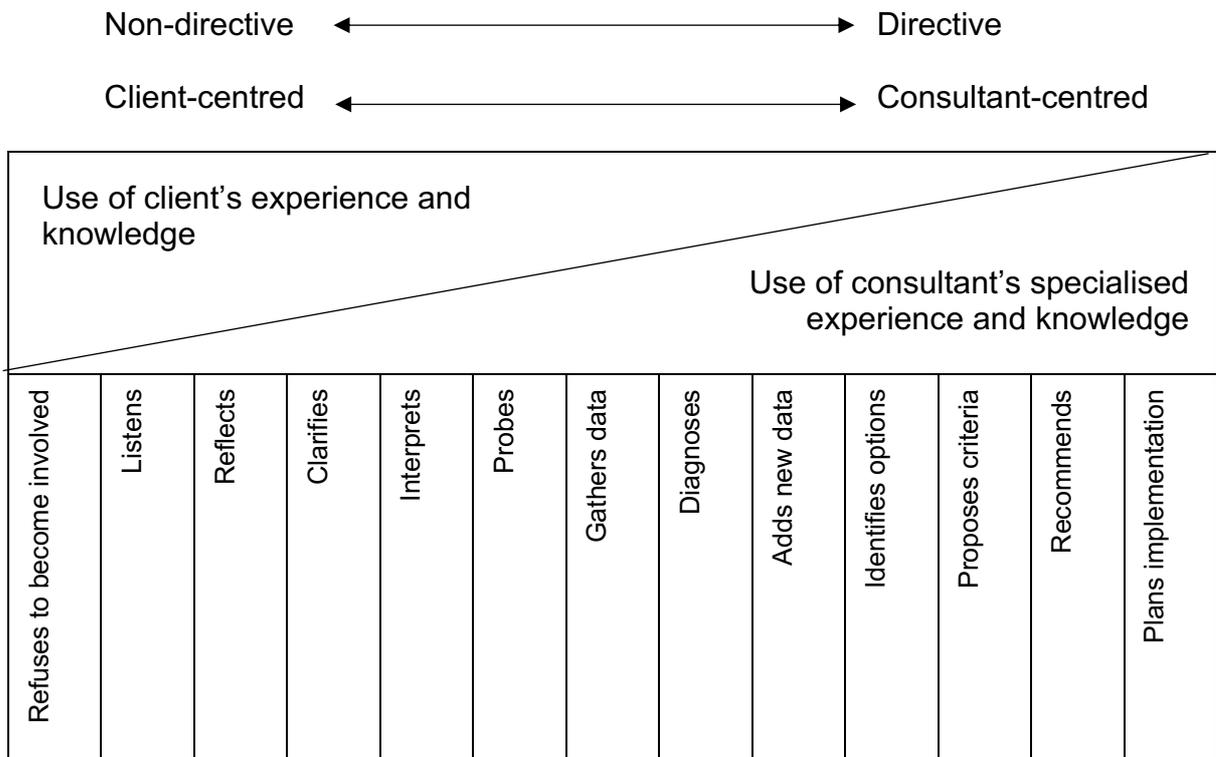
Another useful conceptual model of consultation was proposed by West and Idol (1987) which emphasises the importance of the knowledge bases of the consultant (Fig 2.5). West and Idol's (1987) model separates the knowledge base that informs the interaction between the consultant and the consultee (known as 'knowledge base 1') and the knowledge base that provides the techniques and insights used by the consultee in working with the client ('knowledge base 2'). Knowledge base 1 might include skills such as listening, empathising, questioning and problem solving, and knowledge base 2 might include knowledge and experience of evidence-based interventions and specialist research.

Fig 2.5 West and Idol's (1987) model of the two knowledge bases that inform consultation in schools.
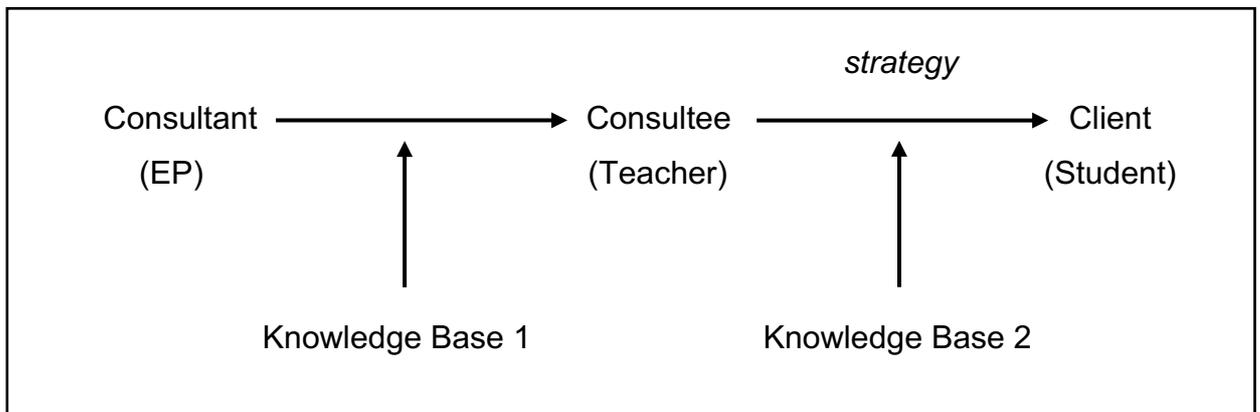
2.4 The practice of consultation in psychological services in the UK

As described in Section 2.2, by the turn of the millennium the EP profession in the UK has been discussed as having undergone a paradigm shift, moving away from a focus on individual, within-child assessment towards an impetus to engage in more preventative, systemic work (Leadbetter, 2002). Alongside this, however, was the relentless increase in statutory duties (Leadbetter, 2000). In an attempt to control the

demand for assessment of individually-referred children, some EP services introduced time allocation models for schools and changed their espoused approach to that of consultation (Leadbetter, 2000). Some services did this in a very public, high-profile manner and others moved in a low key manner from advisory work to consultation, or adopted consultation as one mode of service delivery alongside other approaches (Leadbetter, 2000). One particular model, developed by Patsy Wagner (1995, 2000) in the London borough of Kensington and Chelsea, became influential in UK EP practice due to the availability of published materials, training and articles (Larney, 2003).

2.4.1 Consultation as a comprehensive service model (Wagner, 1995, 2000)

Wagner (2000, p.12) stated that "everything [EPs] do is consultation" and she rejected the idea that EP consultation is a discrete activity that can be offered or chosen from a hypothetical menu of EP activities. For Wagner (1995, 2000), consultation is a comprehensive service delivery model. Wagner (2000) suggested that consultation, as practised by an educational psychologist, may have some elements of the models described by Conoley and Conoley (1990) (see Section 2.3.2), but she believed that none was adequate for the EP context. Wagner (2000) posited that a psychological model which matched more closely the complex social systems in which an EP works (i.e. school, family and professional systems, and their interrelationships) was needed. Wagner (2000) suggested that consultation, in an EP context, required a paradigm shift from individual models of psychology to interactionist and systems psychologies.

Wagner's (1995, 2000) model of consultation is underpinned by four theoretical frameworks: personal construct theory; symbolic interactionism; systems thinking and

social constructionism. Wagner (2000, 2016) explains that personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) informs conversations by helping an EP to elicit and explore a person's constructs so as to understand an individual's meaning of self and situations. Symbolic interactionism helps an EP focus on how meanings of self, others and behaviour are negotiated and conveyed in social interaction, highlighting the way that understandings are particular to situations, as are the possible keys to change. Systems thinking helps identify patterns that occur over time and in wider contexts. EPs consider individual, class and organisational levels, helping schools to make links between them, facilitating the analysis of inter-relating systems around the child (Wagner, 2016). In line with social constructionism, Wagner (2016) contends that language creates reality and meaning, and advocates an avoidance of the language of deficit and labelling in favour of descriptions, explorations and reflections on the phenomena of people's experiences.

Drawn together, EP consultation becomes "a conversation that makes a difference" (Wagner, 2000, p.14). It is the process of consultation, not the outcomes that are arrived at when the consultation concludes, that is the key to the difference consultation makes (Wagner, 2016). Wagner (2016) explains that if the actions themselves made the difference, they could be recommended without the need for the consultation in the first place. The process of consultation creates a reflective space in which problems can be examined in a way which shifts thinking towards a more interactionist perspective and away from a within-child explanation, facilitating opportunities for change which are translated into strategies and interventions (Wagner, 2016). Wagner (2000, p. 15) outlines a four-stage process assisting change:

(1) *Externalise the problem*: The EP helps the person externalise the concern, meaning it becomes something different from when it was internal.

(2) *Take a helicopter view:* Questions are asked about the concern, eliciting information about what has been tried, the effects of interventions, what changes are sought, the views of stakeholders, and other relevant factors. A more detached and comprehensive view emerges of the concerns and the roles in relation to those concerns.

(3) *The paradigm shift:* Through examining connections, complex patterning between the focus and features of the situation surface. The person concerned begins to view the concern as an interaction between the person and the environment, rather than as situated within-person. This leads to the opportunities for change, both direct with the person and indirect with the situation.

(4) *Engage in self-reflexivity:* The person recognises their role in the patterns of behaviour and possibilities for change develop through taking different actions.

Many EP services in the UK set out to adopt Wagner's (1995, 2000) model, or variations of this, for use in their own work context. Dickinson (2000), of Lincolnshire EPS, explains that his service added a number of key principles to Wagner's (1995, 2000) model. Firstly, Dickinson (2000, p. 20) stressed that "EPs are employed to have conversations", emphasising the fundamental premise that talking is the most powerful aspect of an EP's work and it is the mechanism through which change is effected. Secondly, Dickinson (2000, p. 20) explained, "We do not exist outside of our

interactions with consultees". This statement underpins Wagner's (2000) assertion that everything an EP does is consultation. Dickinson (2000) states that every task (e.g. an observation, a psychometric assessment etc.) is carried out with the intention to return with the information to the consultee in the interest of pursuing solutions. Thirdly, Dickinson (2000, p. 21) states, "We are not a casework service". Dickinson (2000) emphasises the interactionist setting in which an EP works, and clearly explains that an EP cannot, and should not, take responsibility for 'the problem'. This view was also adopted by Buckinghamshire EPS (Munro, 2000, p. 56): "We decided to stop using the term 'referral', which seems to be linked to 'handing over problems'."

Further examples of EPSs adopting Wagner's (1995, 2000) comprehensive model of service delivery include Dennis (2004), Gillies (2000) and MacHardy, Carmichael and Proctor (1995).

2.4.2 Consultation as a comprehensive mode of service delivery: critique from a socio-cultural perspective

Leadbetter (2002) critiques Wagner's (1995, 2000) model of consultation from a socio-cultural perspective, which is highly relevant to the present research. Firstly, Leadbetter (2002) notes that Wagner's (1995, 2000) model does not place great emphasis on consultation outcomes, either for teachers or pupils. Leadbetter (2002) argues that there is a lack of clarity about the extent to which outcomes are discussed, negotiated and agreed between the members of the consultation community. This lack of specificity paves the way for confusion regarding the goals of the consultation and could result in people working towards seemingly different end results.

Secondly, Wagner's (1995, 2000) model, grounded in particular psychological paradigms (i.e. social constructionism, personal construct psychology, systems thinking and symbolic interactionism) is likely to affect conversations that take place (Leadbetter, 2002). This may result in a lack of shared beliefs and understandings with some of the teachers with whom the EPs are consulting, who may unknowingly ascribe to other models of psychology. This could lead to contradictions, tension and disagreements within the activity of consultation, and information about how these are dealt with is not discussed in the literature (Leadbetter, 2002). The EP appears to be positioned as a donator of frameworks and ideas, assuming a dominant role within the consultation (Leadbetter, 2002). In relation to this point, Leadbetter (2002) argues that explicit discussion of the skills involved in facilitating the consultation process (i.e. those labelled 'knowledge base 1' by West and Idol,1987, cited earlier) is lacking. Rather, the skills are left to be assumed based on the psychological principles underpinning the model. This appears to be a significant weakness given the overarching emphasis Wagner (2016) places on the process of the consultation itself, and her statement that it is the actual process of engaging in a consultation that is the key difference consultation makes.

Lastly, Leadbetter (2002) argues that Wagner's (1995, 2000) model does not allow for an analysis of broader cultural and historical perspectives. While Leadbetter (2002) agrees with Wagner (2000) that systems thinking is essential when considering the complex, multi-layered contexts that surround a child, she argues that analysis from an historical and cultural perspective could deepen understanding of the genesis of problems and further facilitate possible ways forward.

2.5 Research into EP consultation processes in the UK

Thus far, this review has focused on the main theoretical underpinnings of EP consultation emanating from the USA and UK. However, research into the application of these models in EP consultation practice is sparse (Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen, 2008). Leadbetter (2006) noted that there have been very few studies in the UK that have explored what exactly EPs do under the guise of consultation. This view was reiterated two years later by Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008), who noted that there is a lack of clarity and consensus about EP consultation due to the limited research conducted on the actual consultation processes of EPs. Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008, p. 170) define consultation processes as "the specific practice procedures engaged in by the consultant". Six years later, Nolan and Moreland (2014) implored psychologists to make their tacit knowledge of consultation processes explicit so the profession could glean a better understanding of how consultation works and how EPs can develop their consultation skills. This section will critically consider the existing limited research into EP consultation processes from a socio-cultural activity theory perspective.

Bozic and Leadbetter (1999) analysed the type of utterances that occurred during meetings between a teacher and an EP using a combination of discourse analysis, conversation analysis and grounded theory. Bozic and Leadbetter (1999, p. 271) found that EPs used "a facilitator mode of interaction" when talking with teachers, which included: use of acknowledgement tokens (e.g. mm, hm, right, yeh, okay); requests for clarification and use of formulations. Bozic and Leadbetter (1999) found that the language tools used by the EP served a number of purposes: to avoid, or at least

postpone, agreement or disagreement with the teacher's previous utterance; to keep a topic open for further discussion; and to keep conversational control in the hands of the EP.

A strength of Bozic and Leadbetter's (1999) paper was their use and analysis of actual examples of conversations between EPs and teachers. At the time of the study, most of the literature pertaining to EP-teacher interaction was concerned with top-down or conceptual models of how the process might or should work and there was an absence of any examples of actual conversations (Bozic and Leadbetter, 1999). Moreover, Bozic and Leadbetter (1999) engaged in a bottom-up process of interpretation, suggesting that their analysis and consequent results were not being driven by existing espoused theories of consultation processes.

However, Bozic and Leadbetter (1999) acknowledge that their analysis is only partial because they did not consider pairs of utterances in which EPs took more of a leading role in the conversation e.g. feeding back information or discussing intervention strategies. Therefore, Bozic and Leadbetter's (1999) paper does not provide a complete picture of the language artefacts used by the EPs during their conversations. Moreover, the extracts of conversations used by Bozic and Leadbetter (1999) were not explicitly identified by the EPs taking part as examples of consultation. Several phrases are used throughout the research paper to describe the interaction between the EP and the teacher: "EP-teacher talk" (p. 265); "EP-teacher meeting" (p. 266) "routine meeting" (p. 266) "a conversation" (p. 268). The word 'consultation' is avoided throughout the main body of the paper despite the introduction making reference to

literature on "consultancy conversations" (p. 264). From a socio-cultural activity theory perspective, the object of the activity under study seems unclear and it is therefore difficult to ascribe the results to the practice of EP consultation.

Monsen and Frederickson (2002) studied the cognitive information-processing aspects of the consultant-consultee dialogue. Ten trainee educational psychologists were taught the 'accessible reasoning strategy' during the first nine months of their training. Monsen and Frederickson (2002, p. 200) define accessible reasoning as "interviewer utterances which express understanding or interpretation of some aspect of the interviewee's problem which they have shared." Each trainee psychologist conducted two interviews, nine months apart, with two actors, one employed to play the role of a primary school teacher at interview one and the other at interview two. The results showed that the trainee psychologists' use of accessible reasoning increased significantly at the time of interview two. However, it is difficult to generalise the results of this study to real-life EP practice. Firstly, the consultations were conducted with actors and were therefore not rooted in real life. Secondly, it seems unsurprising that the frequency of accessible reasoning strategies used by the trainees significantly rose given that this technique had been explicitly taught to them as part of their training following interview one. Given the inexperience of the participants, the use of accessible reasoning may have featured as a very prominent artefact in their developing repertoire of skills, making their likelihood of applying this strategy very high. Therefore, although the results of this study show a specific process engaged in by the trainee psychologists, they cannot be easily attributed to real life EP practice.

Miller (2003) interviewed teachers who had worked with EPs to establish interventions for children considered by these teachers to be engaging in challenging behaviours. Miller (2003) identified four broad EP factors which teachers perceived to be the main contributors to the development of successful interventions within the consultation:

(1) *The EP's knowledge base.* The teachers valued the EP's specialist research knowledge and prior experience of successful interventions, their practical knowledge about the school system, including their recognition of the constraints and realities of classroom teaching, and the EP's knowledge of the child, developed through classroom observation.

(2) *The EP's skills.* Three main EP skills were identified by teachers: listening, questioning and problem-solving.

(3) *The EP's personal qualities.* The teachers valued the EP's encouraging approach and their ability to empathise with the teacher's situation.

(4) *Aspects of the EP role.* Some teachers described the EP as an authority figure and, by being external to the organisation, they were seen as more detached from the emotional effects of the difficult behaviour which facilitated information-seeking questions to be asked. The external position also meant that the EP could act as an arbiter, especially between school and parents.

Miller's (2003) findings map onto West and Idol's (1987) model of the two consultant knowledge bases, cited in Section 2.3.3. The consultant's experience of successful interventions and their specialist research knowledge may be seen as examples of

knowledge base 2 and their listening, questioning, problem solving, encouraging and empathising could be examples of knowledge base 1. Moreover, from a socio-cultural activity theory perspective, the findings shed some light on possible EP role demarcations perceived within consultation through the descriptions of the EP as an authority figure, an arbiter, a listener, a problem solver, and so on. However, Miller's (2003) findings are based on the perspectives of the teachers involved in the consultation meetings, meaning that the findings represent the teachers' constructions of what they felt the EP was doing. Teacher perceptions may have been influenced by prior interactions with EPs, preconceptions about the role of an EP, the history and culture of the school in relation to the ways in which they use EP time, and more. The results, therefore, may be more reflective of the teachers' perceptions of what they thought the EP did, as opposed to actually reflecting the artefacts in use during the consultation.

Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008) explored the espoused theory of consultations of ten EP consultants, their theory-in-use and the degree to which there is a match or mismatch between the two. Seventeen case studies were generated from ten EPs. The results showed a consistent fit between what EPs say they do in consultation (espoused theory) and what they actually did (theory-in-use), especially in relation to problem-solving. The most frequent codes applied to the EPs' definition of consultation were 'problem-solving/analysis' and 'systemic focus'. The most frequently reported theoretical and practice models used to inform consultation were 'solution-focused processes' and 'other' (which referred to a wide range of psychological theories, including attribution theory and social learning theory), followed

by 'problem solving/analysis'. Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008) found that most EPs went through at least one problem-solving cycle during each consultation.

While Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen's (2008) study offers some useful, in-depth data on what it is EPs actually do in consultation, their methodology is open to critique. Each EP was asked to complete a pre-consultation questionnaire before meeting with a teacher, which asked them to consider the theoretical models informing their practice and to share their working definition of consultation. From an activity theory perspective, the pre-consultation questionnaire could be considered an important artefact influencing the EP's consequent consultation meeting. Its purpose was to prompt reflection on psychological theories and models harnessed in consultation, which may have inadvertently made the application of these theories in situ more likely. Therefore, it could be considered that the EPs were primed prior to their consultation meetings. Consequently, it is unclear how reflective the consultations analysed were of everyday EP practice, casting some doubt on the conclusion that there is a match between EPs' espoused theory and theory-in-use in relation to the practice of EP consultation. In addition, gathering the views of EPs through the medium of a questionnaire inevitably limits the scope of the data that can be collected and does not allow for a full exploration of EP views.

Nolan and Moreland (2014) observed and recorded seven EP consultations and interviewed consultants and consultees. Data were subjected to discourse analysis to explore the main discursive strategies used by the EPs in consultation. Seven strategies were identified:

(1) EP-directed collaboration;

(2) demonstrating empathy and deep listening;

(3) questioning, wondering and challenging;

(4) focusing and refocusing;

(5) summarising and reformulating; pulling threads together;

(6) suggesting and explaining;

(7) restating/revising outcomes and offering follow up.

Positively, Nolan and Moreland's (2014) research has surfaced a useful list of discursive strategies used by EPs in consultation which helps to develop understanding about how consultation is enacted. However, aspects of their methodology require the results of this study to be interpreted with caution. Firstly, the researcher was present within each consultation, taking observation notes and making an audio recording of the meeting. It is therefore difficult to know how far the researcher's presence influenced the strategies employed by the EPs. Secondly, the structure of the consultations were such that two EPs were present within each meeting. This is certainly not reflective of every-day EP practice in which EP services are stretched and the likelihood of two EPs attending one consultation meeting in a school setting is very low. Lastly, the EPs were interviewed following their consultations, but there is very little description of what these interviews entailed beyond validating the analysis of the audio transcripts. The views of the EPs, therefore, are not fully represented within the data set.

In considering the previous research (i.e. Bozic and Leadbetter, 1999; Monsen and Frederickson, 2002; Miller, 2003; Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen, 2008; Nolan and Moreland, 2014) from a socio-cultural activity theory perspective, it appears that the existing body of research into EP consultation processes has focused on the artefacts (i.e. knowledge, skills, language) used by EPs in consultation, from the perspectives of researchers, or as in Miller (2003), teachers. The perspectives of EPs in describing what it is that they do in consultation have been significantly underexplored and, where views have been sought, this has been to either validate pre-analysed data (i.e. Nolan and Moreland, 2014) or via a questionnaire (i.e Kennedy, Frederickon and Monsen, 2008). Moreover, throughout the analyses of such artefacts, the role of the EP has been decontextualised and isolated from the wider social, cultural, historical and organisational factors at play within consultation. The EP has been positioned as a seemingly autonomous agent employing language strategies and applying psychological theories and models, without explicit consideration of factors existing at a macro-level (e.g. the culture of the school, the other people involved in the consultation, the implicit and explicit rules at play etc.). EP consultation appears to have been considered as an individual action rather than, in line with the key premise of socio-cultural activity theory, a collective activity.

However, Leadbetter (2006) considered the elements that play a part during a consultative conversation from a second generation activity theory perspective (Engeström, 1987) and schematised a basic activity system in action when consultation takes place (Fig 2.6). Leadbetter's (2006) model offers a very useful starting point in considering consultation as a phenomenon that exists within a wider

social, cultural and organisational system, as enabled through the lower part of the triangle. Leadbetter's (2006) model offers a framework for analysing the processes of EP consultation at a much wider level, something which appears lacking from the current body of research into EP consultation processes in the UK.

Fig 2.6 Consultation meetings between EPs and teachers viewed as an activity system, taken from Leadbetter (2006).
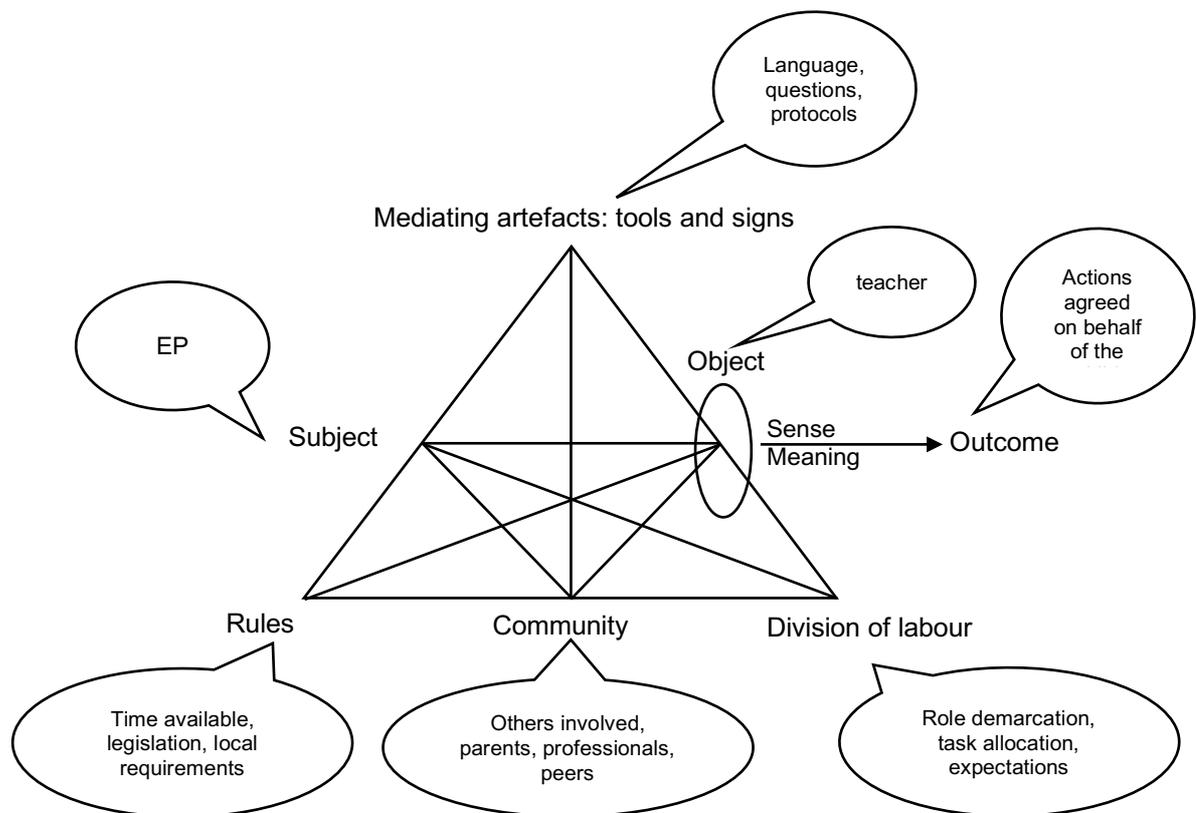
But, Leadbetter's (2006) conceptualisation lacks detail and specificity regarding exactly what artefacts EPs use in consultation, what rules are at play, how work is shared out etc. While the model offers an interesting framework for deconstructing EP consultation practice, it does not provide practical information which can be used by EPs to understand consultation. For example, at the tools node of the activity system,

Leadbetter (2006) suggests that EPs use 'language', 'questions' and 'protocols'. This leads to more questions than answers: what do EPs do with their language? What sorts of questions are used and why? What protocols are followed? etc. Likewise, when looking at the rules node of the system, Leadbetter (2006) suggests that 'legislation' and 'local requirements' impact consultation practice. Questions arise again: How does legislation impact EPs in consultation? Which legislation is being referred to? What are the local requirements? Therefore, while Leadbetter's (2006) model widens thinking around EP consultation and encourages EPs to consider wider social, cultural and organisational factors, the model does not offer information regarding what they are or how they impact an EP's work.

2.6 Chapter summary and rationale for the current study

The critical analysis of existing research into the practice of EP consultation in the UK has revealed a number of key areas for further consideration, which form the rationale for the current study. Firstly, there is still a dearth of research into what it is that EPs actually do within activities which they describe as consultation. While there are a range of conceptualised models and frameworks within the literature, the way in which these are enacted by EPs is still not fully understood. Conceptualisations of consultation lack detail and specificity regarding how EPs actually go about engaging in consultative conversations. From the perspective of a trainee educational psychologist, this renders the prospect of 'having a consultation' a daunting task. Gresham and Kendall's (1987, p. 314) argument that "we simply do not know enough about consultation, how it works, under what conditions it works, or the most important

variables in predicting successful consultation outcomes..." still stands more than thirty years since it was written.

Secondly, the current literature which has attempted to shed light on what it is that EPs do when consulting has significantly neglected the views of EPs themselves. Previous research has largely focused on the analysis of observations and audio recordings of EP consultations (Bozic and Leadbetter, 1999; Monsen and Frederickson, 2002; Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen, 2008; Nolan and Moreland, 2014) or teachers' views of EPs in consultation (Miller, 2003). Where EP views have been sought, this has been via the limited medium of a questionnaire (Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen, 2008) or for the purpose of validating the researcher's findings (Nolan and Moreland, 2014). As stated by Nolan and Moreland (2014), EPs have struggled to make their tacit knowledge of consultation explicit, but a contributing factor to this may be that they have not yet been given a voice within the research literature.

Thirdly, previous research has largely focused on the language strategies used by EPs in consultation. Whilst this is still a key area for consideration and certainly requires further exploration, the role of the EP within consultation has not yet been explored as a phenomenon that exists within the context of a school system. Consultation is a social event, which exists between two or more people who operate within wider social, cultural and organisational constraints. Facilitators and barriers to the practice of EP consultation have not yet been explored. Leadbetter (2006), through her conceptualisation of EP consultation as an activity system, has prompted an

exploration of consultation at a macro level, but the model currently lacks any contextual detail or specificity.

This research, therefore, intends to build upon Leadbetter's (2006) original conceptualisation of consultation as an activity system by gaining the views of EPs regarding what it is they do when they engage in consultation. Utilising second generation activity theory (Engeström, 1987), this research will enable an exploration of EPs' accounts of consultation in the context of the wider social, cultural and organisational systems in which it exists. Second generation activity theory (Engeström, 1987) allows an exploration of what EPs perceive the goal and purpose of consultation to be (**object**, **outcome**), how EPs facilitate the process of consultation (the **tools** they use), the wider social, cultural and organisational factors that support and constrain their work (**rules**), who else is involved in EP consultation (**community**) and the role that is played by EPs in the process (**division of labour**). By gaining the views of EPs, they are positioned at the **subject** node of the system, meaning that the voice of EPs will be enabled in the research literature. The findings of the research will be populated around a second generation activity system, with the overarching aim of providing a detailed and functional model of EP consultation which can be used by trainee EPs, and those who are qualified, to make sense of the phenomenon on which much of their practice is based.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research aims

This research aims to use second generation activity theory (Engeström, 1987) as a conceptual lens through which to explore EP consultation processes. Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory is a framework which situates human activity within collectively organised, artefact-mediated systems (see Section 3.4.1.2). According to activity theory, human activity is dependent on conditions that exist in the environmental context (e.g. written and unwritten rules of the system; the social and cultural structure of an organisation etc.). Using Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory to analyse the processes of EP consultation will allow an exploration of what EPs say they do in consultation in relation to: its goal and overall purpose (**object**, **outcome**); the **tools** (both abstract and concrete) which they use; the **rules** (both written and unwritten) at play; who else is involved (**community**); how work is shared, specifically focusing on the role of the EP (**division of labour**). Thus, unlike research outlined in Chapter 2, which positioned the EP as an autonomous agent acting freely within a consultation, activity theory will position the EP as part of a wider, interacting system, and will facilitate an analysis of EP consultation as a phenomenon which operates within the constraints of wider organisational and cultural systems.

3.2 Research questions

RQ1: What were the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs during consultation, specifically:
   a) What did the EPs say was the goal (**object**) and overall purpose (**outcome**) of their consultation meetings?
   b) How did the EPs actually facilitate their consultation meetings (**tools**)?

RQ2: What wider social, cultural and organisational factors were present within the consultation meetings, specifically:

a) What factors did the EPs say constrained their work (**rules – constraints**)?
b) What factors did the EPs say supported their work (**rules - supports**)?
c) What role(s) did the EPs assume within the consultation meetings (**division of labour**)?

RQ3: What **contradictions** were present within the activity system of EP consultation and what implications do these have for future EP consultation practice?

3.3 Research approach

The research questions stem from a wish to understand what EPs do when they engage in consultation by exploring EPs' tacit knowledge of consultation processes, from their perspective. In seeking to understand EPs' constructions of consultation (i.e. what tools they use, what they think supports and constrains their work, how they perceive the work to be shared, what they think the outcomes of their consultations are etc.), a social constructionist approach was employed. Social constructionism assumes the ontological belief that there are multiple socially-constructed realities (Creswell, 2003). Knowledge, therefore, is subjective and reality is represented through the eyes of participants (Creswell, 2003).

Social constructionism posits that the very categories of things and people that characterise our thinking and language (e.g. in the case of this research, 'consultation') are human constructions rather than objective descriptions of the world (Burr, 2015). Words and events carry different meanings for each of us and there exist multiple realities, rather than an objective 'truth' (Thomas, 2013). Within this research, consultation is considered a socially constructed phenomenon that has developed over time (see Chapter 2). The research seeks to understand more about consultation as

a socially-constructed object within the context of educational psychology practice in the UK, from the perspective of EPs.

Social constructionism suggests that all human psychological and social phenomena arise out of social life from interactions between people, which are, in turn, given structure and content by the culture we live in (Burr, 2015). To understand social life properly, we must extend our enquiries beyond the individual into social, political and economic realms (Burr, 2015). Social constructionism, therefore, lends itself well to satisfying one of the overarching aims of this research – to explore EP consultation within the social and cultural context of EP practice. In seeking to theorise the essence of Vygotsky's work, activity theorists reject the separation of the individual and the social, insisting that the individual and society be conceived as equally important elements of a single, interacting system (Daniels, 2001). In line with this assumption, use of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory in this research (see Section 3.4.1.2) brought interrelations between the individual subjects (i.e. educational psychologists) and their community into focus, enabling a macro-level analysis of the activity of consultation at a wider organisational and cultural level (Daniels, 2001).

Moreover, one of the key principles of activity theory, outlined by Engeström (1999), is the concept of 'multi-voicedness'. Engeström (1999, summarised in Daniels, 2001 p.93) explains that "an activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, traditions and interest." The division of labour node of Engeström's (1987) activity system "creates different positions for the participants, [each of whom] carry their own diverse histories" (Engeström, 1999, cited in Daniels, 2001 p. 93). In addition, the

'subject' position of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory allows analysis of human activity to be conducted from the perspective of a participant in that activity. Use of this tool, therefore, enabled six educational psychologists, each of whom assumed the 'subject' position, to share their constructions of the phenomenon of consultation, within the social and cultural context in which they work. This lends itself well to the central tenet of social constructionism which acknowledges that there are multiple socially constructed realities (Thomas, 2013) and one of the overarching aims of the research, which seeks to explore EP consultation practice from the perspective of EPs.

3.4 Research methods

3.4.1 Socio-cultural activity theory

Definitions of socio-cultural activity theory (hereafter referred to as activity theory) and beliefs about its roots, function and relationships to other concepts have varied over time and are still strongly debated (Leadbetter et al., 2007). In seeking to comprehend activity theory, Daniels (1996) suggests that it cannot be discussed out of the context of its history. It is generally agreed that activity theory originated in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 1930s, and is rooted in the work of Lev Vygotsky, who is regarded as its founder, Alexander Luria and Alexei Leontiev (Holzman, 2006). Following the suppression of Stalin, Vygotsky's writings resurfaced in the 1960s and were translated into English and other languages from the 1960s to 1980s, from which scholars began developing Vygotskian and activity theoretic research (Holzman, 2006). One such scholar, Yrjö Engeström (1987), in his interpretation of activity theory, identified three

generations in activity theory's development, each of which will be described in this section.

3.4.1.1 First generation activity theory

According to Engeström and Miettinen (1999, p.4), first generation activity theory was inaugurated in the late 1920s by Lev Vygotsky, who is credited with having established a "triangular model of action" (Fig 3.1). Vygotsky introduced the concept of mediation in response to the shortcomings of the pure behaviourist interpretation of human behaviour which sought to explain behaviour through the 'stimulus-response' formula (Bakhurst, 2009). Vygotsky did not abandon the stimulus-response model completely, but instead added a third element, mediation, to it. Fig 3.1 is Vygotsky's diagrammatic description of mediated action where S is the primary stimulus, X is the auxiliary stimulus (i.e. mediation) and R is the response (Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish and Psaltis, 2007).

Fig 3.1 Vygotsky's triangular model of mediation, adapted from Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish and Psaltis (2007).

Stimulus (S)   Response (R)

Auxiliary Stimulus (X)
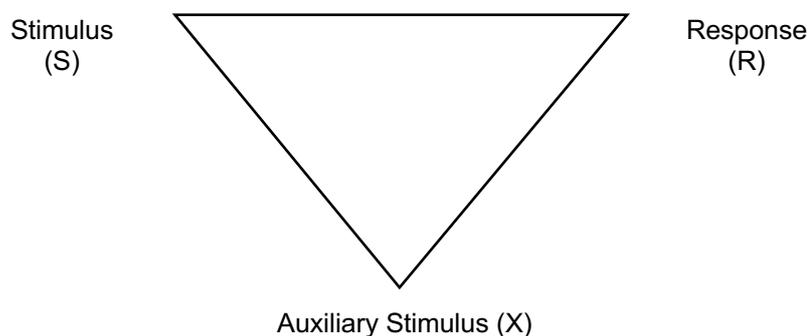
As suggested by Vygotsky's model, human behaviour is mediated by artefacts, both physical and psychological, that are created to prompt or modulate action (Bakhurst, 2009) and thinking is revealed in the way the tool is used to act on, or change, the object (Edwards, 2005). Vygotsky (1981, p. 137) suggested that mediation occurs through tools and signs such as "language, various systems for counting; mnemonic techniques, algebraic symbol systems; works of art; writing; diagrams; maps and mechanical drawings; all sorts of conventional signs; etc." (Vygotsky, 1981, p.137).

In interpreting Vygotsky's theories about higher mental functioning, Kozulin (1998) suggested that human behaviour should be considered as purposive and culturally meaningful actions, rather than reactive or adaptive responses to environmental or biological stimuli. In contrast to the pure behaviourist position, Kozulin (1998, p.13) claims that: "Activity then takes the place of the hyphen in the formula S-R [stimulus-response], turning it into the formula subject-activity-object, where both subject and object are historically and socially specific." This notion is typically construed by activity theorists as the first generation model of action (Fig 3.2).

Fig 3.2 First generation activity theory model, taken from Daniels (2001).

Mediational means (Tools)
(machines, writing, speaking, gesture,
architecture, music, etc.)

Subject(s)
(individual, dyad, group)

Object/motive ⟶ Outcome(s)
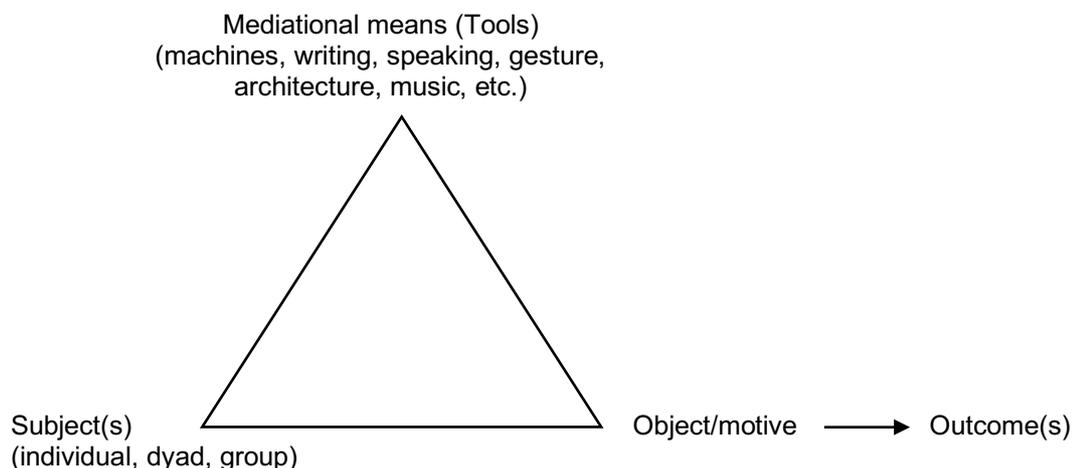
3.4.1.2 Second generation activity theory

Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory model has become a well-known embodiment of activity theory (Roth, 2004). This research has utilised Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory as an analytical tool in order to gather and explore EPs' views regarding consultation.

Second generation activity theory emerged from the work of Vygotsky's student, Alexei Leontiev, who distinguished between "action" and "activity" (Bakhurst, 2009). Leontiev (1981, p. 210) used a hunting analogy to exemplify these distinctions. He asks us to consider "a beater", a member of a hunter-gatherer society, whose role it is to startle animals so that others can catch them. The beater's individual 'action' is beating a hedge, completed in order to fulfil a goal (i.e. to startle the animal). His 'activity', however, is hunting, which is undertaken by a community and has an "object" and a "motive" (i.e. the community's the need for food or clothing). The beater's action alone (i.e. beating a hedge) does not address the motive directly, rather it is a contribution to a wider, social activity in which the participants each supply some part to the realisation of a common end. Action, therefore, is individual; activity is collective (Bakhurst, 2009).

Engeström (1987) schematised Leontiev's position through expanding the first generation activity triangle to include six elements (subject, object, outcome, tools, rules, community and division of labour - Table 3.1), referring to what the diagram models as 'an activity system' (Fig 3.3). Expanding the triangle enables a much wider 'macro-level' analysis of human activity and emphasises the importance of bringing interrelations between the individual subject and his or her community into focus

(Leadbetter et al., 2007). This is in preference to a micro-level concentration on the individual actor or agent operating with tools, as shown in the first generation model (Daniels, 2001). Engeström's (1987) activity system depicts his acceptance that no actions take place within a sealed-vacuum-like environment, suggesting that relationships between individual actions, the tools used and their outcomes should also be related to wider historical, cultural, social and contextual factors (Leadbetter, 2008). Use of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory is ideally suited to the aims of this research which seeks to understand EP consultation within its wider social and cultural context.

Fig 3.3 Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory model, taken from Daniels (2001).
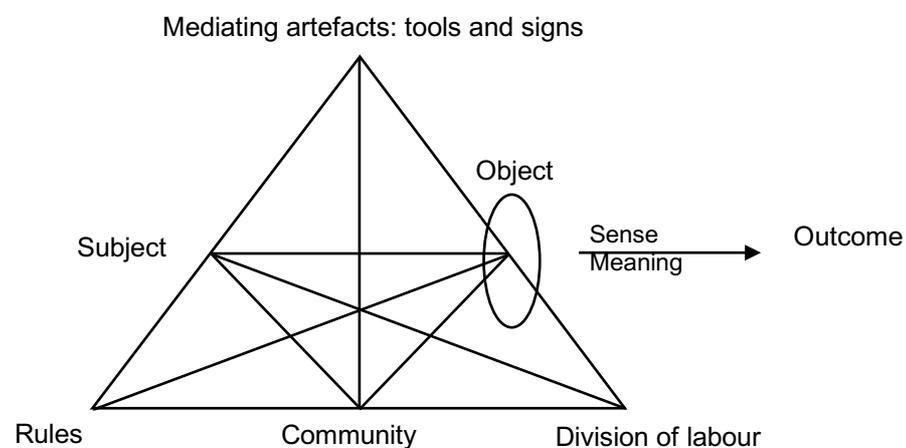
Within the second generation activity theory model, Engeström (1987) introduces the terminology 'rules', 'community' and 'division of labour'. The functions of each node of the triangle are presented in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1 The functions of each node within an activity system (adapted from Leadbetter, 2008).

Node	Function
Subject	The subject position can be taken up by an individual, group or dyad taking action. It describes the perspective from which we are looking.
Object	The object is what is being worked on, acted upon or the focus of activity.
Outcome	The outcome is what is hoped to be achieved.
Rules	Rules are explicit or implicit norms that regulate actions and interactions within the system (Engeström, 1993; Kuutti, 1996). They reflect what supports or constrains the activity.
Community	The community refers to the participants of an activity system, who share the same object. The community identifies who else is involved in the work or activity.
Division of labour	The division of tasks and roles among members of the community and the divisions of power and status.
Mediating artefacts	Artefacts mediate the object of activity. They can be concrete (e.g. a textbook, a computer) or abstract (e.g. language).

The research questions, underpinned by activity theory, seek to understand EP consultation through a consideration of each node of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system. As presented in Section 2.5, Leadbetter (2006) used Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system to schematise a basic activity system when consultation takes place, suggesting that the close study of a consultation meeting can act as a powerful tool for personal and professional development (Fig 2.6). This research seeks to expand Leadbetter's (2006) work by gaining the perspectives of EPs regarding what it is they do in the guise of 'consultation' – i.e. what was their **object**? What was the **outcome**? What **tools (artefacts)** were used? What supported and constrained the work (**rules**)? What role did the EPs play in the activity (**division of labour**)?

3.4.1.3 Third generation activity theory

Engeström (1999) proposed a third generation model of activity theory (Fig 3.4) which introduces conceptual tools to understand the multi-voicedness of activity systems (i.e. different players viewing and acting within activity systems in different ways) (Leadbetter, 2008). Engeström (1999) suggests that there are networks of interacting systems. Within these networks, struggles take place in defining the object of the activity, leading to contradictions, tensions and new object negotiation and formation.

Fig 3.4 Engeström's (1999) third generation activity theory model, taken from Daniels (2001).
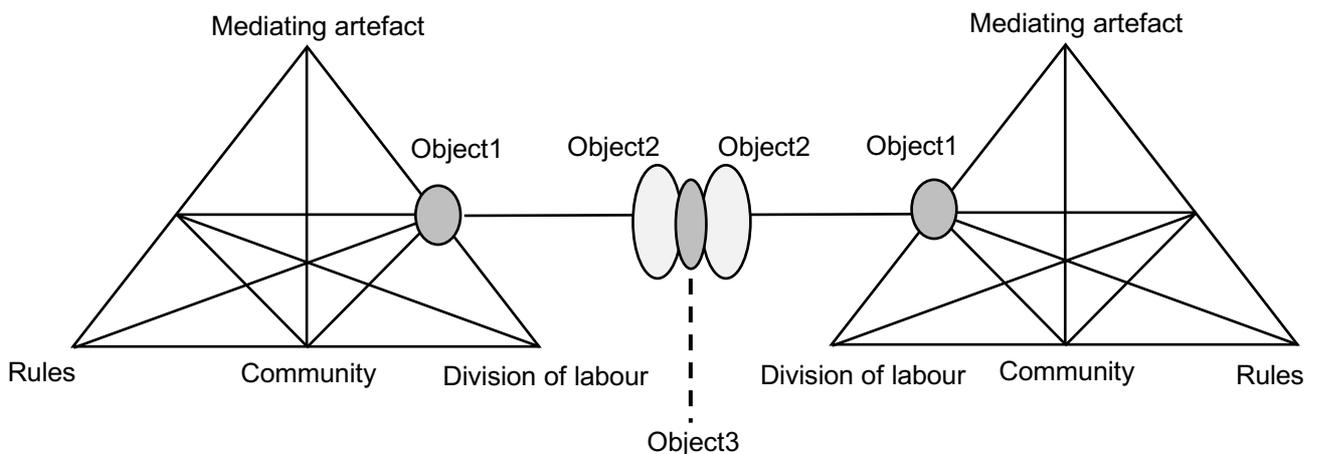
3.4.1.4 Contradictions

A central tenet of Engeström's (1987) activity theory is the concept of contradictions. Contradictions surface through problems or breakdowns within and between activity systems (Engeström, 1987). Engeström (1987) distinguished between primary and secondary contradictions. Primary contradictions are those which exist within a node of the activity system (e.g. a tension between one rule and another) and secondary

contradictions are those which are found across nodes of the activity system (e.g. a tension between the tools and the rules). According to Engeström (2011), as an activity system becomes fragmented by its inner contradictions, the object of activity tends to get blurred or lost.

However, contradictions are conceptualised within activity theory as a fruitful analytic tool in order to study, and encourage, organisational change (Groleau, Demers, Lalancette and Barros, 2011). Exploring contradictions helps to surface tensions within an activity system and facilitate the generation of possible solutions to alleviate these (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). The third research question is concerned with surfacing contradictions within the activity of EP consultation in order to consider the implications these may have for EP consultation practice, and to generate possible solutions to improve EP consultation practice.

3.4.1.5 Five principles of activity theory

Activity theory has seen a rapid expansion of interest, particularly in the last twenty years, and is used in many parts of the world (Leadbetter, 2008). Although Engeström has written extensively about activity theory and has authored seminal papers, he is not the only researcher developing and using the theory, meaning that different emphases are found in the variety of activity theory interpretations. In response to this, Engeström (1999, pp. 4-5) has defined five key principles, which Daniels (2001, p. 93) argues "stand as a manifesto of the current state of activity theory":

1. The prime unit of analysis is "a collective, artefact-mediated and object-oriented activity system, seen in its network relations to other activity systems" (Daniels, 2001, p, 93).

2. An activity system is always a community of multiple points of view, as depicted in the 'division of labour' node of the triangle - 'multi-voicedness'.

3. Activity systems develop over long periods of time and are constantly transforming - 'historicity'.

4. Contradictions play a central role as they identify sources of change and development within the activity system.

5. Activity systems can undergo expansive transformations when the object and motive of the activity are reconceptualised through "collaborative envisioning and a deliberate collective change effort" (Daniels, 2001, p, 93).

3.4.1.6 Strengths and critiques of activity theory

Edwards (2011) suggests that activity theory provides a theoretically-grounded framework for understanding the social and cultural aspects of activity, recognising the inseparable link between individuals, their community and the values and knowledge to be found in the practices in the institutions or systems they inhabit. In addition, activity theory, as an analytic framework, facilitates a contextually specific understanding of workplace learning and development (Edwards, 2011). Moreover, not only does activity theory afford an analytic device, Leadbetter (2008, p.209) argues that it has been developed to be used as a way of "engaging with organisations to examine and expand efficient work practices". On a practical note, Murphy and Rodriguez-Manzanares (2008) note that the flexibility and versatility of activity theory's

research procedure and methods allows them to be applied across a wide range of settings.

However, activity theory is not without its criticisms. Holzman (2006) explains that it is impossible to present a definitive view of activity theory because there is no unified perspective and there are multiple definitions in existence (Holzman, 2006). Moreover, Engeström (1999, p. 20) explains that, in becoming internationally recognised and multi-disciplinary, there is a fear that "activity theory will turn into an eclectic combination of ideas before it has a chance to redefine its own core".

Despite these potential limitations, Holzman (2006) explains that activity theorists do not perceive the lack of a unified theory as problematic. In fact, Engeström (1999, p. 20) states that "closed systems of thought do not work", suggesting that the richness and mobility of activity theory reflects the multi-faceted, mobile and rich nature of human activity. Puzyrei (2007, p.86) captures the complexity of activity theory by likening it to

> "an unfamiliar city, unlike no other we know. It is simultaneously vital, very young, and up to date and a mouldering old ruin half-buried under dust and ash. A city that is undergoing unprecedented growth and construction that is also overrun by archaeologists. A city with many streets that are still unnamed and whose central plaza seems to be well hidden from prying eyes. A city whose history holds many secrets. A city with a great future. A city that is destined to not only be a place of pilgrimage but its country's capital".

Activity theory is also criticised for not considering the roles that motive, emotion and identity play in activity (Roth, 2004). Toomela (2000, p. 362) describes activity theory

as "a dead end in the pursuit for an understanding of the human mind". Toomela (2000) argues that activity is insufficient for comprehending psychological phenomena, in particular emotions, and suggests that the analysis of activity alone cannot tell us *why* a person engaged in a specific activity. Moreover, McMurtry (2006) argues that activity theorists exclusively focus on the relationship between individuals and social collectives, ignoring the physical and biological systems in which they exist. McMurtry (2006) suggests that everything we learn and know is given form and shape through our sense organs, emotional states and nervous system, explaining that personal identity arises in the complex mix of biological predisposition, physical affect, social circumstance, and cultural context. In order to understand a person's knowledge and practices, therefore, McMurtry (2006) states that activity theorists will have to admit the biological and ecological into their system of individual-social relationships.

However, Blunden (2007) argues that the 'subject' node of the activity system helps to overcome criticisms about how to consider individual agency within an activity system. Moreover, activity theorists would argue that the concept of the self and identity is embedded within sociocultural contexts and culturally mediated activity, meaning that any analysis of the self should be incorporated within the system of social relations (Stetsenko and Arievitch, 2004). Daniels (2007, p. 95) explains that identity and discourse are best understood within "the ensemble of societal relations".

3.4.2 Context

This research is situated within XXX Educational Psychology Service (EPS) which provides a service to a large city in the UK. At the time of the research, I was on

placement within the service as a trainee educational psychologist (see Table 3.4 for potential ethical implications). A consultation-based model of service delivery was introduced approximately 14 years prior to the research. EPs work very autonomously within XXX Educational Psychology Service and there are no prescriptive guidelines regarding consultation. Therefore, EPs' use of consultation is variable and eclectic.

3.4.3 Participants

3.4.3.1 Positionality

A key assumption of interpretivist research is that knowledge is situated in relations between people, known as 'situated knowledge' (Thomas, 2013). The person doing the research takes a central role in the discovery of this situated knowledge, therefore assuming an undeniable position within the research (Thomas, 2013). Thomas (2013) implores the interpretivist researcher to accept their subjectivity and offer a full discussion of positionality so that readers know who they are and where they stand.

At the time of writing this research report, I was a 31 year old, trainee educational psychologist in my third year of doctoral training. At the time of data collection for this research, I had been on placement at XXX Educational Psychology Service for one academic year. Therefore, all of my research participants were known to me on a personal and professional level. Prior to training to become an educational psychologist, I was a teacher in a primary school. Moving from the teaching profession and becoming a trainee EP, I was confronted with the unfamiliar concept of consultation, which appeared to be accepted amongst the EP community as an inherent part of EP practice. However, I recalled being involved in what I viewed as

'conversations' with educational psychologists as part of my teaching role and not being aware that what I was actually engaged in was 'consultation'. This led me to question: what makes a consultation a consultation? is a consultation different from a conversation? what do EPs do when they consult? importantly, how do I 'do' consultation? This personal quest to find out more about consultation, and the dearth of published research, led me to conduct this research to explore consultation as a social object, develop an understanding of consultation from the perspective of EPs and, in turn, help form my identity as an EP who engages in consultation practice within the EP community.

3.4.3.2 Participant recruitment

I introduced this research project to an area team within XXX Educational Psychology Service at one of the fortnightly team meetings. At the time of the research, the area team comprised three senior EPs, eleven main grade EPs, four trainee EPs and one assistant EP. I shared the participant information sheet (Appendix 1) with the team and answered any questions posed. Following this introduction in the team meeting, I emailed the participant information sheet and the consent form (Appendix 2) to each of the senior and main grade EPs and requested that they contact me should they agree to take part in the research project.

3.4.3.3 Participant information

Six EPs volunteered to take part in this research project. Table 3.2 outlines participant demographics.

Table 3.2 Participant information.

Name*	Susanne	Louise	Julie	Caroline	Rachel	Jane
Role	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist	Educational Psychologist
Years of experience as an EP	25	2	38	7	5	20

*Names are pseudonyms

3.4.4 Data collection

3.4.4.1 Interviews

In line with the positioning of this research within the social constructionist paradigm, the use of interviews regards knowledge as generated through human interaction, often in the form of conversations (Kvale, 1996). Kvale (1996, p. 14) describes an interview as an interchange of views between two or more people on a topic of mutual interest, considering an interview as an '*inter-view*'. Laing (1967) suggests that knowledge is constructed between participants, allowing participants (be they interviewers or interviewees) to discuss their interpretations of the world and express how they regard situations from their point of view. Likewise, Baker and Johnson (1998) argue that the interview is a particular medium for enacting and displaying people's knowledge, indicating how they make sense of their social world and of each other. In this sense, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018, p. 409) suggest that "the interview is not simply concerned with collecting data about life: it is part of life itself, its human embeddedness is inescapable."

3.4.4.2 Types of interview

Fontana and Frey (1994) use a three-way classification of structured, semi-structured

and unstructured interviewing to distinguish between three main types of interview (Fig 3.5).

Fig 3.5 Characteristics of three main types of interview, based on Punch (2014), Robson (2002) and Thomas (2013).

Structured interview	Semi-structured interview	Unstructured interview

Structured interview	Semi-structured interview	Unstructured interview
• tightly structured	• pre-determined questions, but the order can be modified	• unstructured
• questions planned in advance and standardised	• question wording can be changed and explanations given	• open ended
• pre-coded strategies are used for responses	• questions can be omitted and additional ones added	• questions are not pre-planned or standardised
• interview itself does not attempt to go into great depth	• the amount of time and attention given to different questions/topics can vary depending on the interview	• interviewees set the format and determine the important issues
• little scope for further follow up		• no pre-established categories for responding

The type of interview selected should be aligned with the strategy, purposes and questions of the research (Fontana and Frey, 1990). In the context of this research, structured interviews were not considered fit for purpose. There is currently a dearth of research into the process of EP consultation (Nolan and Moreland, 2014) and EPs' tacit knowledge of consultation remains little explored (Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen, 2008). Therefore, a structured interview was considered too restrictive. Unstructured interviews were rejected due to their incompatibility with the research design, which adopts activity theory as a theoretical framework and methodological approach. In order to answer the study's research questions, the interviewer was

required to ask the interviewee about particular nodes of the activity system, meaning that the interviewee was not free to set the agenda or determine the important issues to be discussed. Semi-structured interviews, however, were deemed to be fit for purpose in the current study. Use of a semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to structure the interview around the nodes of the activity theory triangle and enabled freedom of exploration within each node to follow up points as necessary.

3.4.4.3 Interview process

3.4.4.3.1 Positioning the interviewer

A key advantage of utilising a semi-structured interview as a data collection method is its flexibility and acceptance that the researcher may deviate from the interview schedule as and when necessary. However, Mercer (2007) points out that few authors define how much digression from the standardised prompt is desirable. There is debate among researchers regarding how involved the interviewer should be within the interview, with some arguing that "interviewer neutrality is the byword" (Holstein and Gubrium, 2003, p.13) and suggesting that an interviewer who reveals his or her own personal viewpoint "encourages acquiescence and even sets up a self-fulfilling prophecy," (Powney and Watts, 1987, p.42). On the other hand, however, some researchers suggest that a more interactive and conversational approach to interviewing yields more extensive data (Smith, 1995), and argue that

> "the interviewing process [has become] less of a conduit of information from informants to researchers that represents how things are, and more of a sea swell of meaning-making in which researchers connect their own experiences to those of others and provide stories that open up conversations about how we live and cope," (Ellis and Berger, 2003, p.471).

My positioning within the interviews was driven by the research approach of social constructionism which accepts that there is a relationship between the inquirer and participants, and they influence each other. This research is driven by the key tenet that knowledge is socially constructed in meaningful human interactions: therefore, the concept of interviewer neutrality, as suggested by Holstein and Gubrium (2003), is inappropriate. Moreover, as discussed in Section 3.4.3.1, I assume an undeniable position within the research as a colleague of the participants who, over the past year, had come to know me on a personal and professional level.

With Powney and Watts' (1987) critique regarding interviewee acquiescence in mind, techniques were employed throughout the duration of the interviews to enhance the credibility of the data collection process:

- large activity triangles were annotated in the presence of the participants who were asked, at regular intervals, to confirm that what had been written down provided an accurate representation of their views (see Appendix 6 for an example);
- a verbal process of 'checking back' was used at regular points throughout the interview to enable the participant to agree that their views had been interpreted as they intended, to correct misconceptions or expand on points; and
- the final stage of each interview involved a review of the activity triangle as a whole, during which time annotations were read out to the participants and they were asked to confirm their accuracy and/or make revisions.

3.4.4.3.2 Content of the interview

Prior to attending their interview, each EP was informed that the content of their interview would be based around one real life consultation example from their practice. The methodological decision to focus each interview on a real life consultation example was made with reference to Argyris and Schön's (1974) discussion of espoused theories and theories-in-use. Argyris and Schön (1974) define espoused theories as those that people report as a basis for actions, and theories-in-use as the theories of action inferred from how people actually behave. In other words, there is a difference between what people purport to do and what they actually do. One of the aims of this research was to shed light on what EPs do when they engage in consultation. In an attempt to avoid EPs reporting espoused theory (which may have resulted from a discussion with EPs about consultation processes in general), each EP was asked questions in direct relation to an actual consultation they had carried out. Strengths of this approach included:

- the facilitation of an in-depth analysis of an actual piece of EP consultation practice as opposed to a broad discussion of general consultation practice, which may not be reflective of how the individual EP really uses consultation;
- the generation of data which is rooted in its specific social and cultural context, allowing for an activity theoretical analysis of mediating variables as well as supporting and constraining factors relevant to that situation;
- the opportunity to look across each EP's activity triangle and search for themes and patterns across the data.

Limitations of the approach were carefully considered and addressed. Firstly, asking EPs to talk about a real life consultation example from their practice relies on the EP's memory of that consultation. However, as Keightley (2009, p. 57) explains, "any given memory is not an inevitable product of a past experience." In order to support the EP's memory within the interview, they were asked to bring along anonymised notes made by them within the consultation to act as an aide-memoire. As part of general practice, EPs within XXX Educational Psychology Service make consultation notes in situ on the service's 'Consultation Record' pads; therefore, written records of each consultation were easily accessible to the individual participants and they were not being primed to do anything differently from their usual day-to-day practice. In addition, it was stipulated that the consultation must have taken place within a maximum of six weeks prior to the interview to ensure that the consultation was relatively recent.

Secondly, a potential limitation was highlighted around how each participant would interpret the word 'consultation' within the instruction to bring a real life consultation example to the interview. I questioned whether I should define the term 'consultation' for the participants. However, after careful consideration of the aims of my research, I decided that the term 'consultation' needed to be kept deliberately vague. The purpose of my research was to find out what EPs do during consultation. A key component of this is finding out what EPs perceive consultation to be. Requesting that the EPs bring an example which was not primed by me, (i.e. by not sharing my definition of consultation), allowed their constructions of consultation to be revealed. In line with the positioning of this research in the social constructionist paradigm, I was interested

in how my participants constructed consultation and was wholly accepting that multiple perspectives may be conveyed.

The final limitation considered related to the concern that asking each EP to talk about only one consultation example from their practice would limit the data gathered. Asking EPs to talk about consultation more generally, or to talk about more than one consultation example, may have facilitated a wider discussion about the tools, the rules, the division of labour and the outcomes of consultation practice. However, the scope of the research project had to be considered, which included the capacity of the participants to engage in potentially lengthy and numerous interviews and the capacity of the researcher to collect and analyse the data sufficiently. By interviewing six EPs, each of whom spoke in great detail about one consultation example, I judged that a wider exploration of the tools, rules, division of labour and outcomes of consultation practice would be enabled. Moreover, EPs were asked to choose a consultation example that was reflective of their "typical consultation practice", in an attempt to make the interview data as reflective as possible of what each EP does when they engage in consultation.

3.4.4.3.3 Semi-structured interview schedule

The semi-structured interview questions were based on the work of Leadbetter et al. (2007) who demonstrated how an activity system could be used as an analytic tool. Leadbetter et al. (2007) adapted the second generation activity theory triangle, positioning a key question at each of the six nodes of the triangle (Fig 3.6).

Fig 3.6 Leadbetter et al.'s (2007) adapted second generation activity theory triangle.
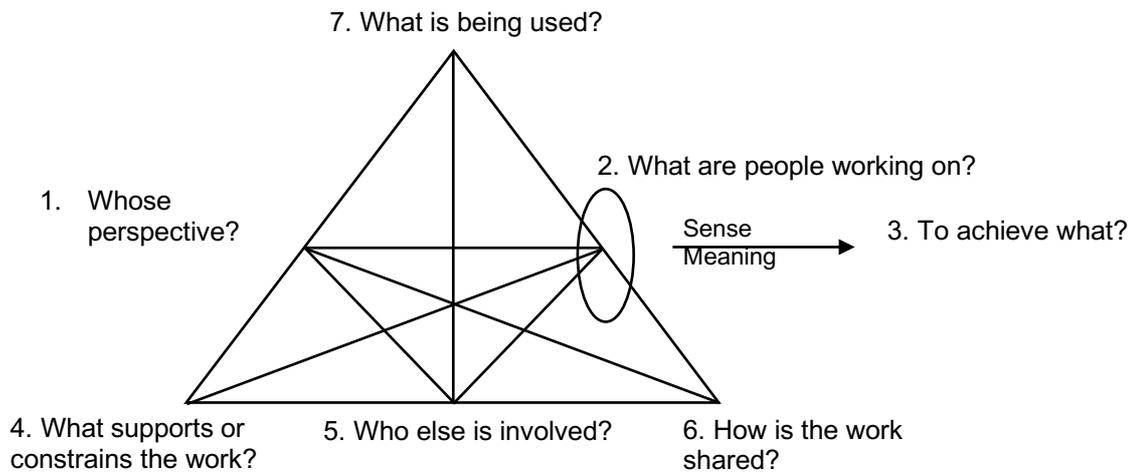
Leadbetter et al.'s (2007) seven key questions were used as the overarching questions asked of the EPs in this research. Possible follow up questions were added to the triangle, forming a guide, reminding me of my research aims, but from which I was able to deviate when necessary (Fig 3.7).

3.4.4.3.4 Interview structure

The six interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis and were structured using Robson's (2002) interview sequence (Table 3.3). All six interviews were conducted in a quiet room in XXX Educational Psychology Service at a date and time convenient to the participant. The average length of each interview was 45 minutes. All of the interviews were audio-recorded using a dictaphone and annotations were made by the researcher during the interview (Appendix 6). Participants were invited to check the accuracy of annotations throughout the interview.

Fig 3.7 Semi-structured interview schedule, adapted from Leadbetter et al. (2007).

4. What is being used?

- What physical tools, if any, were used in the consultation? (e.g. child's books, target plans, laptop, case file etc.)
- What abstract tools were used? (e.g. language? psychological knowledge? etc.)

2. What are people working on?

When engaging in this consultation, what were you working on?
- What was the focus?
- Why were you there?

1. Whose perspective?

Tell me about your role within the service:
- Years of service?
- Special interest(s)?
- Role/responsibilities?

Tools

Subject

Object

Sense
Meaning

Outcome

3. To achieve what?

- What was the end goal?
- What was the overall purpose of your consultation?

Rules

Community

Division of labour

5. What supports or constrains the work?

- What factors do you feel supported your work in the consultation?
- What factors do you feel constrained your work within the consultation?

6. Who else is involved?

- Who was present during your consultation?
- Who else, in the wider community, was indirectly involved?

7. How is the work shared?

- What was your role within the consultation meeting?

Table 3.3 Interview sequence (taken from Robson, 2002, p. 277), as applied to this research.

Sequence	Interview sequence as applied to this research
Introduction	• Rationale for the research explained and consent form (Appendix 2) re-read to the participant. Consent reaffirmed. • Opportunity for any further questions to be answered. • 'Explaining activity theory' prompt sheet (Appendix 4) used by the researcher to introduce the activity triangle to the participant. • The large activity theory triangle, with the interview questions displayed, introduced to the participant (Appendix 5).
Warm up	• Discussion of the 'subject' node of the triangle.
Main body of interview	• Questions asked around each node of the triangle (object, outcome, tools, rules, community, division of labour). • The researcher annotated the activity triangle as the EP spoke (Appendix 6).
Cool off	• Summary of the activity triangle provided by the researcher reading aloud the annotated notes written at each node of the triangle. • Participant asked if they would like to add or change anything/go back to any particular node(s) of the triangle.
Closure	• Participant thanked for their time and participation. • Participant informed of the next steps in the data analysis.

3.4.4.3.5 Pilot

Robson (2002) states that the first stage of any data gathering should be a pilot study. A pilot study highlights some of the inevitable problems of converting your design into reality (Robson, 2002), allowing the researcher to refine or modify their research methods (Thomas, 2013). One change was made following the pilot. Within the pilot interview, I explained each node of the activity theory triangle in the main body of the interview, as it appeared within the interview schedule. Following the interview, both the participant and I agreed that this disrupted the flow of the interview, particularly as

information given by the participant at particular nodes of the triangle (e.g. rules) often contained information relevant for one of the alternative nodes (e.g. division of labour or tools), meaning that I had to interject in the participant's discussion to contextualise and explain why I had moved to a different node of the triangle. A consequent change to the design was made – the activity triangle was introduced in its entirety to each participant in the 'warm up' section of the interviews. This allowed the participant to gain an overview of the activity system prior to applying it to their consultation and also to ask any questions about activity theory or the activity system presented before the main body of the interview began.

In conversation with my research supervisor, I decided that the data collected from the pilot interview could still be used in the data analysis because no changes to the interview questions were made. Moreover, the participant who engaged in the pilot study had a good previous knowledge of activity theory pertaining to her own research interests therefore the limitations of the pilot design would not have affected her ability to answer the interview questions. Consent was gained and the data were subsequently analysed alongside the data collected from the other interviews.

3.4.5 Ethical considerations

Table 3.4 outlines the issues which were carefully considered and planned for in both seeking ethical approval and conducting the research.

Table 3.4 Ethical considerations as applied to this research.

Ethical consideration	Measures to address the ethical consideration, as applied to this research
Voluntary informed consent: "...the condition in which participants understand and agree to their participation without any duress, prior to the research getting underway" (BERA ethical guideline 10, 2011, p.5)	• A participant information sheet (Appendix 1) was presented at a team meeting and emailed to EPs after the meeting. The participant information sheet detailed what the research was about, what taking part would involve, what would happen to the data, withdrawal procedures, storage of data and contact details of the researcher and her supervisor should participants have any questions. • Consenting to take part in this research was entirely voluntary – participants were asked to contact the researcher should they wish to take part. • Before the interviews took place, participants were asked to read and sign a written consent form (Appendix 2). The consent form was reviewed at the beginning of the interviews and consent was reaffirmed verbally.
Right to withdraw: "...researchers must recognise the right of any participant to withdraw from the research for any or no reason, and at any time, and they must inform them of this right" (BERA ethical guideline 15, 2011, p.6) "...where there are necessary time limits on data withdrawal, for example up to a point at which data are aggregated, these limits should always be made clear to participants" (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2014, p.9)	• From the first contact (i.e. at the team meeting), participants were be made aware of their right to withdraw from this study at any time before, during, or up to two weeks after their interview. Participants were provided with contact details of the researcher and her supervisor. This information was provided verbally (during the meeting) and in writing (on the participant information sheet – see Appendix 1). • Before the interviews commenced, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw within the specified time frame and they were asked to provide written consent to confirm they had been informed of this (Appendix 2). • A debrief statement (Appendix 3) was provided at the end of the interview which reiterated the participant's right to withdraw and again provided both the researcher's and the research supervisor's contact details should they have wished to do this.
Confidentiality: "Participants in psychological research have a right to expect that information they provide will be treated confidentially, and, if published, will not be identifiable as theirs" (BPS Code of Human Research Ethics, 2014, p.22)	• Each participant was assigned a pseudonym to prevent any identifiable name being attributed to the data, therefore ensuring confidentiality. The only record of participants' names was on the consent forms, which were stored in a locked filing cabinet with only the researcher having access to them. A pseudonym was also assigned to the EPS.

Storage, access to and disposal of data: "Research data should be managed to the highest agreed standards, in accordance with funder requirements, current legislation, including Data Protection legislation, University IT Security policies and standards...throughout the research data life cycle" (University of Birmingham Research Data Management Policy, 2019, paragraph 3.1)	• Each interview was audio recorded on a dictaphone and written notes were made on activity triangles. Immediately after the interview, the audio recording and written notes were transferred to a password protected and encrypted memory stick, and saved according to the participant's pseudonym. The audio recording was deleted from the dictaphone and the written notes were shredded. • The encrypted memory stick was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the Educational Psychology Service at which the researcher was on placement. Only the researcher had access to this data. • In line with the University of Birmingham's ethical guidelines, the data (electronic recordings and field notes) will be kept for 10 years on a password-protected encrypted memory stick, during which time the researcher, supervisors and any university examiners may have access to it. After this time, all electronic data will be erased (and removed from any back-up drives).
Consideration of my dual role as a researcher and also a trainee EP on placement in XXX Local Authority: "Conducting insider research is like wielding a double-edged sword. What insider researchers gain in terms of their extensive and intimate knowledge of the culture and taken-for-granted understandings of the actors may be lost in terms of their myopia and their inability to make the familiar strange." (Mercer, 2007, p.7).	• Mercer (2007) explains that participants may have preconceptions about the insider researcher's opinions of the subject of the research (in this case, consultation) which may affect the information they choose to share within the interview. As such, I made a conscious effort not to discuss my construction of consultation, in any context, until after my research data had been collected and analysed. As a result, my participants were not aware of what I perceived consultation to be which minimised the chance of them providing tailored responses. • Platt (1981) states that insider researchers need to avoid contaminating their study by informing participants too specifically about the research questions to be studied. This is particularly acute when interviewing one's peers. As such, I was very careful not to specify exactly what I was researching within day-to-day conversations within the EPS, and referred to the description of the research as presented on the participant information sheet (Appendix 1) when/if I was questioned about my research.

3.4.6 Method of analysis

3.4.6.1 Thematic analysis

The data have been analysed using thematic analysis, utilising the activity theory framework. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe thematic analysis as a method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns (themes) within data. However, due to the flexibility of the approach, thematic analysis has been criticised in relation to its absence of clear and concise guidelines, which can lead to an 'anything goes' approach and a lack of transparency (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In response to this, Braun and Clarke (2006) outline clear step-by-step guidelines for the researcher to follow in order to conduct a deliberate and rigorous thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), following their 'recipe' leads to an analysis which is theoretically and methodologically sound.

Braun and Clarke (2006) explain that thematic analysis involves a number of choices, which are often not explicitly considered in research papers. Braun and Clarke (2006) guide the researcher through a number of questions which have been designed to promote an ongoing reflexive dialogue on the part of the researcher throughout the analytic process. As recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006), these have been considered explicitly in Table 3.5 in relation to this research project.

Once Braun and Clarke's (2006) guiding questions were considered, Braun and Clarke's (2006) step-by-step guide was used to structure the data analysis. Table 3.6 summarises the steps taken, as applied to this research.

Table 3.5 Guiding questions, taken from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Question	Key messages from Braun and Clarke (2006)	Application to this research
What counts as a theme?	- A theme captures something important about the data in relation to the research question. - A theme represents some level of patterned response or meaning within a data set. - More codes do not necessarily mean the theme itself is more crucial. - Researcher judgement is necessary to determine what a theme is – you need to retain some flexibility, rigid rules do not work. 'Keyness' of a theme is determined in relation to the overall research question, not quantifiable measures.	A flexible approach was adopted. Themes were developed from codes across the data set, but the 'keyness' of each theme was determined in relation to the research questions, rather than the number of times it occurred in the data set.
A rich description of the data set, or a detailed account of one particular aspect?	- A rich thematic description of your entire data set gives the reader a sense of the predominant themes and is an accurate reflection of the entire data set. Useful in an under-researched area, or with participants whose views on the topic are not known. - Alternatively, provide a more detailed and nuanced account of one particular theme, or group of themes.	EPs' views on their use of consultation and the facilitators and barriers are not known in the literature, therefore the thematic analysis, which related to the research questions, attempted to provide a rich thematic account of the entire data set.
Inductive versus theoretical analysis?	- Inductive, or 'bottom up', analysis means the themes are strongly linked to the data themselves (data driven). Data is coded without trying to fit it into a pre-existing coding frame. - Theoretical, or 'top down', analysis is driven by the researcher's theoretical or analytic interest in the area.	The data was coded in relation to the nodes of the activity theory triangle therefore a theoretical thematic analysis was conducted.
Semantic or latent themes?	- Semantic themes do not go beyond what a participant has said or written. Analysis progresses from description or interpretation. - Latent themes identify underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations.	Latent themes were identified because of the interest in the underlying ideas, assumptions and conceptualisations of the data.

Table 3.6 Step-by-step guide to analysis, adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006).

Step	Application to this research
Step 1: Familiarising yourself with the data	Immersion in the data was achieved through reviewing the hand-written activity triangles created during each interview alongside repeated listening of the corresponding audio-recordings. Verbatim notes were added to each activity triangle during the repeated listening process. An electronic copy of each activity triangle was then created using Microsoft PowerPoint (Appendix 7).
Step 2: Generating initial codes	Codes were pre-set by the activity theory triangle (i.e. subject, object, outcome, tools, rules, community, division of labour). Once the data had been coded deductively around each node of the activity triangle, data within each node was coded using open coding. This was completed by hand, using hardcopies of the activity triangles with pens and highlighters.
Step 3: Searching for themes	Data relating to each node across the six interviews were collated and presented on individual documents (Appendix 8). Then, the initial codes were printed, cut out and spread across a table. The researcher engaged in an iterative process which involved collating initial codes that fitted together into groups, reviewing newly formed groups of collated codes, and moving initial codes to alternative groups/making new groups where necessary. At the end of this process, the codes had been organised into broader themes which were tentatively named (Appendix 9).
Step 4: Reviewing themes	The relationships between the codes and the themes were checked through a process of investigator triangulation. The researcher engaged in a critical reflection about the themes with another trainee educational psychologist following Macguire and Delahunt's (2017) six key questions (see Fig 3.8). A written record of the peer-debriefing encounter was kept to serve as a reference for methodological decisions (see Appendix 10 for an example). Following this process, a thematic map was produced for each node of the system (presented throughout Chapter 4).
Step 5: Defining and naming themes	Themes were brought to supervision with the researcher's thesis supervisor whereby the researcher discussed personal insights into the research findings and engaged in critical reflection.
Step 6: Producing the report	See Chapters 4 and 5

3.4.6.2 Advantages and disadvantages of thematic analysis

Thematic analysis has many advantages. It enjoys theoretical freedom, meaning it is a highly flexible approach that can be adapted to the needs of many studies (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Moreover, thematic analysis is an accessible method of analysis because it does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of other qualitative approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Thus, novice researchers and researchers who are not familiar with qualitative methods may find that thematic analysis is easy to learn as there are few prescriptions and procedures (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004). In addition, King (2004) suggests that, when faced with a large data set, thematic analysis is useful because it encourages the researcher to adopt a well-structured approach to handling the data, resulting in a summary of the key features and the production of an organised report. Thematic analysis can be used to look for patterns across research participants, highlighting similarities and differences, and generating unanticipated insights (Braun and Clarke, 2006; King, 2004).

However, compared to approaches such as grounded theory, ethnography and phenomenology, there is limited substantial literature on thematic analysis, which may leave inexperienced researchers feeling uncertain about how to conduct a rigorous thematic analysis (Nowell, Norris, White and Moules, 2017). The flexibility of thematic analysis can lead to inconsistency and a lack of coherence when developing themes derived from the research data (Holloway and Todres, 2003). Furthermore, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a simple thematic analysis does not allow the researcher to make claims about language use.

3.4.6.3 Following a criterion for trustworthiness

The terms 'reliability' and 'validity' applied in fixed design research are avoided by many proponents of flexible, qualitative design (Robson, 2002). The positivist criteria for establishing trustworthiness (i.e. internal validity, external validity, reliability and objectivity) are not relevant for assessing the rigour of interpretive inquiry because they make different ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and the nature of the relationship between the researcher and that reality (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The clear ontological and epistemological differences between these two inquiry paradigms (Table 3.7) suggest that assessing the rigour of qualitative inquiry requires different criteria and procedures (Anney, 2014).

Table 3.7 Ontological and epistemological differences between the quantitative and qualitative paradigms, adapted from Guba (1981) and Krefting (1991).

Assumptions	Quantitative (positivist)	Qualitative (interpretivist)
The nature of reality	There exists an *actual reality*, a "way things really are," that can be discovered by methods of science.	Social realities are social constructions, selected, built, and embellished by social actors (individuals) from among the situations, stimuli, and events of their experience.
The nature of the relationship between the researcher and reality	There is an independent relationship between the inquirer and objects.	There is a relationship between the inquirer and participants and they influence each other.
The nature of truth statements	There is an absolute truth in the inquiry. Inquiries are generalisable. Nomothetic knowledge is developed.	There is no single truth; there are various constructions held by individuals and often shared among the members of socially, culturally, familiarly or professionally similar groups. Qualitative inquiries are not generalisable. Idiographic knowledge is developed.

Nowell, Norris, White and Moules (2017, p1) state that,

> "...in order for research to be accepted as trustworthy, qualitative researchers must demonstrate that data analysis has been conducted in a precise, consistent, and exhaustive manner through recording, systematizing, and

disclosing methods of analysis with enough detail to enable the reader to determine whether the process is credible."

Trustworthiness is one way researchers can persuade themselves and readers that their research findings are worthy of attention (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Lincoln and Guba (1985) refined the concept of trustworthiness by introducing the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability to parallel the conventional quantitative assessment criteria of validity and reliability. Table 3.8 describes Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness and shows how each was applied to this research.

Fig 3.8 Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) six key questions.

- Do the themes make sense?
- Does the data support the themes?
- Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?
- If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?
- Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?
- Are there other themes within the data?

3.5 Chapter summary

This chapter has offered a description of the chosen methodology. The social constructionist positioning of this research was outlined and consequent methodologies (i.e. use of socio-cultural activity theory as a conceptual and analytical tool, semi-structured interviews as a data collection tool, and thematic analysis as a data analysis tool) were described. An overview of ethical considerations was provided.

Table 3.8 Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria for trustworthiness, each applied to this research.

	Description	Strategies applied to this research
Credibility	The confidence that can be placed in the truth of the research findings (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002; Macnee and McCabe, 2008). Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest that credibility establishes whether the research findings represent plausible information drawn from the participants' original data and offer the correct interpretation of the participants' original views.	*Member checking* – as described in Section 3.4.3.1, the activity triangles (Appendix 7) were co-constructed with each participant during the interview process. Participants were asked at regular intervals to check the accuracy of what had been written and were given opportunities to make revisions to the triangles during and after the interview. *Investigator triangulation* - Investigator triangulation involves using more than one researcher in the coding, analysis and/or interpretation decisions (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Within stage four of the thematic analysis (reviewing the themes), another trainee educational psychologist, who was also employing thematic analysis in her doctoral research, checked the relationship between the codes and the themes. After this process was completed, the researcher and her peer engaged in a critical discussion which was structured by Maguire and Delahunt's (2017) six key questions (see Figure 3.8). A written record of the encounter was kept to serve as a reference for methodological decisions and rationales (Appendix 10).
Transferability	The degree to which the results of qualitative research can be transferred to other contexts or settings with other respondents. This decision is made by the reader, not the researcher, as the researcher does not have knowledge of the reader's specific setting.	*Thick description* - 'Thick description' of the participants and the research process must be provided by the researcher to enable the reader to assess whether the findings are transferable to their own setting (Korstjens and Moser, 2018). Chapters 3 and 4 provide a rich account of descriptive data, including the context in which this research was carried out, its setting, participant demographics, the interview procedure and schedule, and methods of analysis. Appendices 7-9 show the data analysis process.

Dependability	To achieve dependability, researchers must ensure the research process is logical, traceable, and clearly documented so that readers can examine the process and judge whether it is in line with the accepted standards for a particular design (Korstjens and Moser, 2018).	*Audit trail -* Chapter 3 details a transparent description of the research steps from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of findings. Full records of the research path have been kept throughout the project and are detailed in the appendices (e.g. participant information sheet, raw data collected within the interview, electronic activity triangles etc.). In addition, the researcher utilised a research journal throughout the research project to document notes of reading, references, thoughts relevant to the project, modifications, justifications of decisions, supervision notes, emerging problems and worries, future actions etc.
Confirmability	According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), confirmability is established when credibility, transferability and dependability are all achieved. Confirmability is concerned with establishing that data and interpretations of the findings are not figments of the researcher's imagination, but clearly derived from the data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).	

CHAPTER FOUR: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

The raw data collected across the six individual interviews are extensive, with the aim

of providing a 'rich' picture of the activity of EP consultation. As outlined in Chapter 3

Section 3.4.6, the data were analysed using thematic analysis according to the

following nodes of the second generation activity theory model: **object**, **outcome**,

tools, **rules**, **division of labour**. The **subject** positions are discussed in Section 4.2.

The **community** is identified in Appendix 8(v). Appendices 7-9 show the progression

of data analysis through Braun and Clarke's (2006) six stage process.

In this chapter, Research Questions 1 and 2 will be answered:

RQ1: What were the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs during consultation, specifically:
a) What did the EPs say was the goal (**object**) and overall purpose (**outcome**) of their consultation meetings?
b) How did the EPs actually facilitate their consultation meetings (**tools**)?

RQ2: What wider social, cultural and organisational factors were present within the consultation meetings, specifically:
a) What factors did the EPs say constrained their work (**rules – constraints**)?
b) What factors did the EPs say supported their work (**rules - supports**)?
c) What role(s) did the EPs assume within the consultation meetings (**division of labour**)?

In Section 4.3, themes relating to the **objects**, **outcomes** and **tools** will be presented,

described and discussed, with reference to the literature. Then, in Section 4.4, themes

relating to the **rules** and **division of labour** will be presented, described and

discussed, again with reference to the literature. All themes will be illustrated with direct quotes from the individual interviews.

Research question 3 is concerned with the identification of **contradictions** within the activity system and the consequent implications for EP practice:

> RQ3: What **contradictions** were present within the activity of EP consultation and what implications do they have for EP consultation practice?

Human activity can trigger tensions caused by systemic contradictions (Engeström, 1987). These tensions arise when conditions of an activity put the subject (in this case, the EPs) in contradictory situations that can impede achieving the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). As the findings are described and discussed, contradictions will naturally surface. Descriptions of these contradictions will therefore be offered within this chapter, but the reader will also be signposted to Chapter 5 where the implications of these contradictions for the practice of EP consultation will later be considered.

As the chapter progresses and the findings related to each node of the activity system are discussed, the themes will be gradually added to an activity theory model until, at the end of the chapter, a completed activity system of EP consultation is conceptualised as a representation of the data collected (Fig 4.11).

4.2 Subject (from whose perspective are we looking?)

The subject positions emerged through initial questioning about the EPs' years of experience and their current interests. The EPs represented over 90 years of collective

professional practice experience. Experience in the EP role varied from 2 years to 38 years.

The subject position illuminated historical influences on some of the EPs' current practices. Julie highlighted her prior experience as a teacher as a major factor influencing her work in schools and Susanne listed a range of psychological approaches underpinning her educational psychology training twenty-five years ago which still influence her practice today:

> "I trained in 1980/81...when I trained everybody who was allowed on a course had to have been a teacher for two years at least...I think that's very crucial and I do find it sad that the current generation don't have to...people who've worked in school realise the constraints that schools work under...I've got the background of sh** this must be awful for you you've got thirty children etc so the fact that I was a teacher I think massively impacts on the way I work in schools..." (Julie)

> "...there was a big emphasis on Personal Construct Psychology when I was trained and also ABA in its broadest sense...behaviourism and Precision Teaching was quite a big thing we had Ted Raybold come in so and Direct Instruction so I suppose those were the things I was sort of steeped in at the time..." (Susanne)

The EPs also indicated preferences towards underlying psychological theory and approaches, as exemplified by Louise and Rachel:

> "...I'm interested in social constructionist perspectives and particularly interested in discourse around [mental health and behaviour]..." (Louise)

> "...I like Personal Construct Psychology I use that quite a lot in my practice...I'm quite interested in executive functioning and meta cognitive skills that's something I'll quite often assess...I do a bit of behaviourist stuff but I'd say I'm more into people's thoughts and perceptions of things..." (Rachel)

The subject position revealed that all of the participants, with the exception of Jane, have only ever worked as a qualified EP in XXX Educational Psychology Service (EPS). This has important implications for the reader's judgements about the transferability of the data (as defined in Table 3.8). XXX EPS has operated a consultation service delivery model since 2004. Julie and Susanne were working within XXX EPS during this time of change and Louise, Caroline and Rachel began their careers as EPs within XXX EPS when consultation was firmly embedded as the status quo, as exemplified by Caroline:

> "I've been fully qualified for about seven years now and I've only worked in XXX service which I think is important because XXX operate a consultation service so it's all I've known really..." (Caroline)

The data, therefore, are limited to the experiences of EPs working within XXX EPS. The limitations of this are discussed in Section 5.4.

4.3 Object, outcome, tools

RQ1: What were the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs during consultation, specifically:
   a) What did the EPs say was the goal (**object**) and overall purpose (**outcome**) of their consultation meetings?
   b) How did the EPs actually facilitate their consultation meetings (**tools**)?

4.3.1 Object and outcome

A thematic map of the object and outcomes of EP consultation is presented in Fig 4.1.

Fig 4.2 is a representation of the themes regarding the objects and outcomes of EP consultation mapped onto an activity theory diagram.

Fig 4.1 A thematic map of the objects and outcomes of EP consultation.
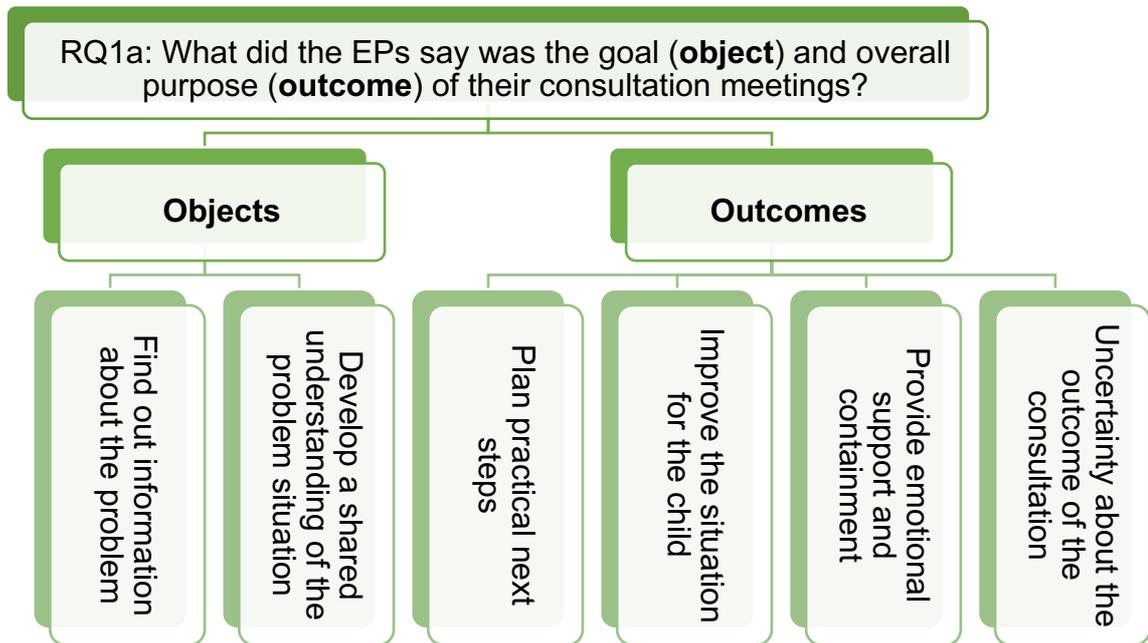
Fig 4.2. An activity system modelling the subject, objects and outcomes of EP consultation, as represented by the data.
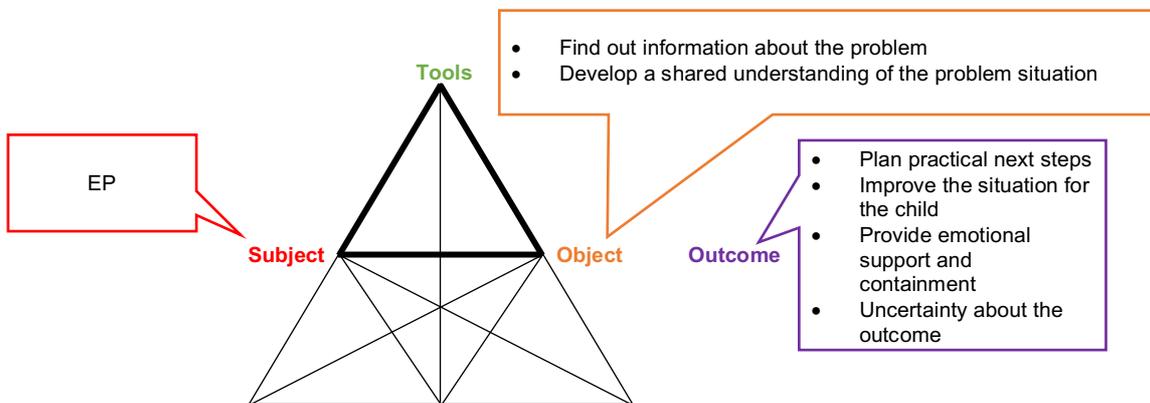
Within the activity system, the object is defined as the goal or motive of the activity, and the outcome is the end result of the activity (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In considering the object of their consultations, the EPs identified two main goals: (1) to find out information about the problem; (2) to develop a shared understanding of the

problem situation. The outcomes of the EPs' consultations were organised into four themes: (1) plan practical next steps; (2) improve the situation for the child; (3) provide emotional support/containment; (4) uncertainty about the outcome of the consultation. Each theme related to the object will be described and discussed in Section 4.3.1.1 and each theme related to the outcome will be described and discussed in Section 4.3.1.2. Direct quotes from the interviews will be used as illustrative examples.

4.3.1.1   Object

4.3.1.1.1 Find out information about the problem

Across all of the consultations, the EPs initially focused on finding out about the problem. The EPs' knowledge of the situation varied across the interviews from Susanne who entered her consultation in a position of not-knowing ("I hardly knew anything about him") to Caroline who had previous involvement with the child and was seeking updated information about their progress towards previously agreed targets. Some EPs reported receiving information through third parties prior to the consultation meeting: "I was hearing it all second hand through other people" (Jane); "when I went in I was getting a lot of information about 'she's got this need; she's got that need'" (Rachel). The EPs, therefore, described a key goal of their consultation as to find out information about the problem for themselves.

Finding out about the problem features as an initial step in most consultation frameworks. For example, Bergan's (1977) four stage process begins with 'defining the problem' and, likewise, the first action in Wagner's (2000) four stage model requires 'externalisation of the problem'. Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008)

acknowledge that problem identification has been considered the most significant phase of the problem solving process by some researchers, stating that you are unlikely to be able to contribute effectively to solving a problem that you do not know enough about.

4.3.1.1.2 Develop a shared understanding of the problem situation

After finding out information about the problem, the EPs sought to develop a shared understanding of the problem situation with their consultees. Turner, Robbins and Doran (1996) suggest that the first stage of consultancy is to "work at the level of the thinking which led to the definition of the problem". The EPs focused on understanding and developing their consultees' constructions of the situation, explaining that they sought to help them "make sense" of the situation (Louise), "enhance people's understandings" (Rachel), "put our heads together" (Jane), encourage others to "think with a fresh pair of eyes" (Caroline), and "unpick and understand" what was happening (Susanne). The EPs' activity, therefore, was aimed at exploring and developing a co-constructed understanding of the situation for the child.

The findings of this research align closely with Nolan and Moreland (2014) who found that the task of EPs in consultation was to develop a collective understanding of the child and the situation. The process of joining together to engage in a shared process of understanding is fundamental to the practice of EP consultation. Wagner (2000) refers to a joint process of problem and solution exploration through which the teacher is enabled to 'see' the problem differently. Anderson and Goolishian (1992, p. 29) suggest that, through engaging in a conversation about a problem, the consultant and

the consultee participate in the co-development of "new meanings, new realities, and new narratives." The activity of the EPs in seeking to facilitate a shared understanding of the problem situation is reflective of the 'helping relationship' described in process consultation (Schein, 1990). Within process consultation, the 'helper' facilitates a process of mutual inquiry that creates a shared sense of responsibility for exploring the problem and generating solutions (Schein, 1990). Therefore, the goals of consultation, as reported by the EPs, align with those conceptualised within the research literature.

4.3.1.2   Outcome

4.3.1.2.1 Plan practical next steps

One of the outcomes of the consultation meetings described by the EPs was the planning of practical next steps. There was a sense across all of the interviews that the EPs wanted to ensure that something tangible followed their consultations, as exemplified by Susanne:

> "I always try to have some sort of outcome at the end even if it's quite short whatever that is even if it's 'I don't know I'll find out'...sort of practical outcomes if you like...I didn't want to leave her kind of like hanging because she was the giver of the information so I wanted to be able to have a bit of a plan about what to do in pragmatic terms but also in terms of containment so the school know it's not just going to be left..." (Susanne)

The practical outcomes described by the EPs included "adjusting interventions" (Caroline); wanting to "leave ideas" (Jane); having "a plan of what to do" (Susanne); planning to "take action about the child's language" (Julie); and seeing "where further intervention was needed" (Rachel). Behavioural models of consultation emphasise the

importance of designing and planning intervention within the consultation process (Conoley and Conoley, 1990).

4.3.1.2.2 Improve the situation for the child

The EPs wanted to ensure that a positive outcome for the child or young person was facilitated through their consultation meetings by improving the problem situation for them in some way. Jane described wanting to "stabilise the situation" in order to "keep the child in school a bit longer until the end of term". Louise sought to "reduce the barriers and difficulties" faced by the child in order to help him make progress. Julie described wanting to "do what is best for the child" by "getting him out of that completely inappropriate group". Likewise, Caroline described wanting to "help the child's teacher and SENCo work out how to help her progress".

The outcomes 'plan practical next steps' and 'improve the situation for the child' complement previous definitions and conceptualisations of consultation. Leadbetter's (2006) activity theoretical conceptualisation of EP consultation (presented earlier in Chapter 2, Fig 2.6) suggests that the outcome of consultation is 'actions agreed on behalf of the child'. Agreeing actions and planning next steps can be viewed as synonymous processes. Moreover, Gutkin and Curtis (1983) stated that an outcome of consultation is the remediation of a problem situation. Remediation, by definition, suggests the action of making right, which implies positive change and therefore aligns well with 'improve the situation for the child'. Likewise, Bramlett and Murphy (1998) suggested that a goal of consultation is to assist children with learning or adjustment concerns. Assisting the child implies action will be taken which would result in a positive

change, again echoing the findings of this research in which next steps are planned and the situation for the child is improved. These themes, therefore, align well with previous definitions of the outcomes of consultation.

4.3.1.2.3 Provide emotional support and containment

The outcome 'provide emotional support/containment' was discussed by all of the EPs. The EPs discussed: providing reassurance (Susanne); calming the consultee down (Julie); school staff who felt panicked, lost (Rachel) and stuck (Louise) by complex cases; staff who were stressed (Julie) and struggling (Jane); and seeking to help staff feel capable, competent (Caroline) and give them hope (Louise). The EPs, therefore, were not only seeking to facilitate a positive outcome for the child or young person, but also for their consultee(s). Providing emotional support to consultees suggests a strong relational aspect to EP consultation and emphasises the importance of the consultant-consultee relationship. This will be further discussed in Section 4.4.1.2.1 – 'Relationships', under the rules node of the triangle.

Providing emotional support and containment has not been previously identified as a specific consultation outcome within the literature. In considering this finding through the social and cultural lens of activity theory, the current climate in which schools are operating must be reflected upon. SEN policy and legislation holds teachers highly accountable for meeting the diverse needs of all children whom they teach, including those with special educational needs (SEN) (Ekins, Savolainen and Engelbrecht, 2016). However, Ekins, Savolainen and Engelbrecht (2016) argue that, in order for teachers to develop the confidence and self-efficacy they need to be able to respond

effectively to the needs of children with SEN, there ought to be greater emphasis on teachers' knowledge and understanding of SEN processes and practices. Insufficient training has resulted in teachers feeling inadequately prepared to teach pupils with diverse needs (Ellis, Tod and Graham-Matheson, 2008).

In activity theory terms, there is a tension between high levels of accountability imposed on teachers and insufficient levels of training and support. Ekins, Savolainen and Engelbrecht (2016) argue that we need to recognise the emotional impact that teaching children with complex needs has on many teachers. Not feeling able to cope with the needs of some children can undermine a teacher's sense of themselves as a professional, and reduce their levels of self-efficacy and confidence (Ellis, Tod and Graham-Matheson, 2008). Ellis, Tod and Graham-Matheson's (2008) findings appear to be echoed in the findings of this research. The consultees were described as "struggling" (Jane), "stressed" (Julie), "panicked" (Rachel) and suffering "continuing angst" (Julie). The current social and cultural context of EP consultation, therefore, has introduced an additional outcome for the EP and positioned the EP into a supportive and containing role. In relation to one of the aims of this research, this shows how the wider context within which the EPs are operating can impact of the activity of consultation.

4.3.1.2.4 Uncertainty about the outcome(s) of the consultation

Three EPs (Susanne, Louise and Jane) described not knowing exactly what the outcomes of their consultation meeting would be prior to entering into the consultation: "I didn't know how it would pan out" (Louise), "I wasn't certain what would come out of

it" (Jane), "I only had rough thinking about what I wanted to achieve" (Susanne). The EPs described adopting a flexible position within their consultations, accepting that the outcomes would be dependent on, and guided by, their consultees: "it would depend on the teacher's attitude and what was a priority for her how she understood the problem" (Jane).

4.3.2 Tools

Fig 4.3 is a diagrammatic representation of the themes regarding the object, outcome and tools mapped onto an activity system. A thematic map of the tools is presented in Fig 4.4.

Fig 4.3 An activity system modelling the subject, objects, outcomes and tools of EP consultation, as represented by the data.
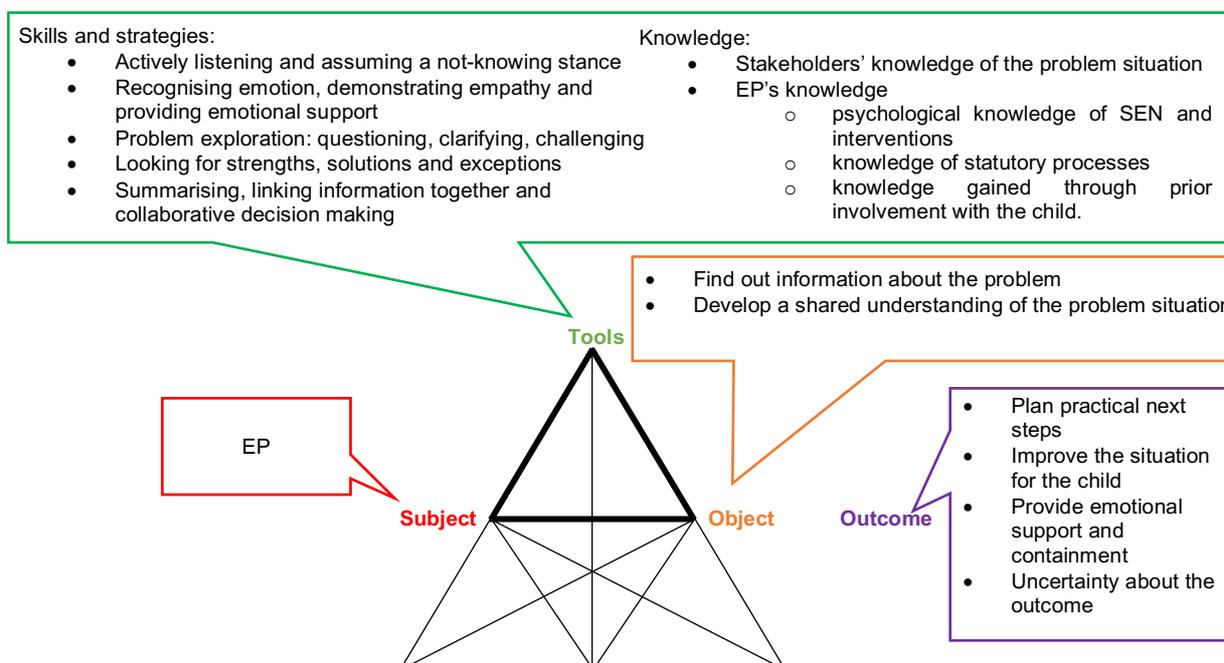
Fig 4.4 A thematic map of the tools used by EPs in consultation.
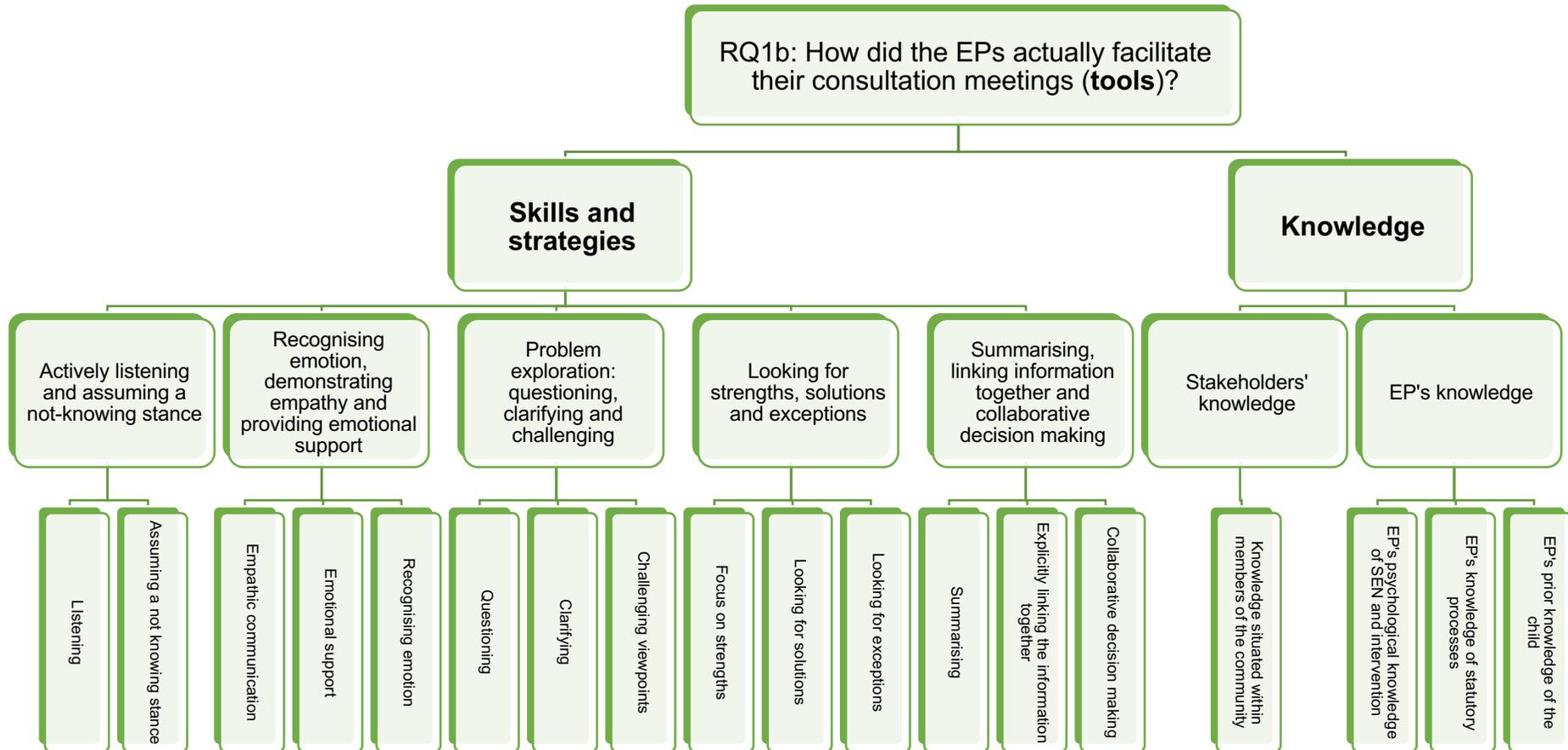
Within the activity system, the subject's ability to act on the object is mediated through the concept of tools. This node of the triangle, therefore, relates to the tools the EP (subject) used in order to find out about, and develop a shared understanding of, the problem situation (object). Nine main themes were abstracted from the thematic analysis of the tools node of the triangle which were organised into two superordinate themes: (1) skills and strategies and (2) knowledge.

Each main theme related to the superordinate theme 'skills and strategies' will be described in Section 4.3.2.1.1. Each main theme related to the superordinate theme 'knowledge' will be described in Section 4.3.2.1.2 . The 'skills and strategies' and 'knowledge' used by the EPs overlapped. Therefore, both superordinate themes will be discussed together in Section 4.3.2.2, with reference to the literature.

4.3.2.1   Description of the tools used by the EPs within consultation

4.3.2.1.1 Superordinate theme 1: Skills and strategies

4.3.2.1.1.1 Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance

In order to find out about the problem situation and help make sense of it, the EPs needed to listen actively to the information given by the consultees. The EPs highlighted their listening skills as a key factor supporting their ability to understand the problem situation, with one EP explicitly linking the key skill of listening to the practice of being a psychologist:

> "...the first twenty to twenty-five minutes was Jo information giving and me chipping in...I wanted her to tell me stuff first that's a bit what psychologists do anyway sometimes we're the last ones to chip in because you're doing the listening and processing..." (Susanne)

The EPs described listening as an active process. While the consultees were sharing information, they were "processing" (Susanne), "formulating" (Louise), "listening carefully" (Jane) and getting "the measure of [the] situation" (Julie) before they engaged in the problem-solving process with the consultee:

> "...I'm a very good listener in schools I take on board what teachers say...I listen listen and then if something's crucial I will come back to it...I get the measure of a situation before I start sort of trying to therap or intervene..." (Julie)

Complementing the process of actively listening, the EPs also assumed a not-knowing stance, which entails a general attitude in which the consultant's actions communicate an abundant, genuine curiosity (Anderson and Goolishian, 1998). Some EPs assumed a not-knowing stance because, prior to the consultation meeting, they genuinely did not have a lot of information about the case (Susanne), or they had only been privy to hearsay information reported by people not directly involved in the problem situation (Jane, Rachel):

> "...the first thing I did was we sat down and said right start from the beginning so that was a purpose for me because there'd been a lot going on for this kid and I didn't know I hardly knew anything about him so it was just to get a bit of a history..." (Susanne)

> "...I wanted to learn something else about him because I was hearing it all second hand through other people what happened at the point of exclusion and I was quite interested to know well how is he actually what's he like in the classroom what was she dealing with where does it go wrong...I didn't feel I fully understood what was going on..." (Jane)

Caroline, however, reported adopting a not-knowing stance as a deliberate tool in order to position the consultee as the expert within her consultation and empower them as the agent of change in the problem solving process:

> "...I was acting a bit dumb so 'ah I can't remember what is Rapid Read?' you know because sometimes because I don't actually know but because I want to reiterate that they're the expert really in this child's life...and my role is as facilitator and also to help them feel capable and competent and able to effect change" (Caroline)

Anderson and Goolishian (1998) argue that the consultant should adopt a curious, not-knowing stance in order to enable circular and therapeutic questions to be asked therefore generating new meaning for the consultee. Utilising the 'not-knowing' strategy, whether deliberately or not, immediately positioned the consultee(s) as the knowledge-holder(s) and reduced, as implied by Caroline, the perceived power held by the EP as 'the expert'. This reflects the role of the process consultant who, through assuming a non-expert stance, aims to help the consultee come up with their own decisions about the action to be taken in order to bring about change (Turner, Robbins and Doran, 1996).

4.3.2.1.1.2 Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support

As discussed in Section 4.3.1.1.6, an outcome of the EPs' consultations was to provide emotional support and containment. In order to do this, the EPs tuned into the emotions that were overtly or covertly expressed within their consultations. All of the EPs reflected on how they thought their consultees were feeling. For example, Jane described her consultee as "struggling", Rachel felt staff in her school were "panicked",

Louise reflected on her consultees as being "stressed" and "feeling stuck", Julie commented that her SENCo was suffering "continuing angst" and Caroline described the class teacher she was consulting with as experiencing feelings of powerlessness: "she doesn't feel able to do anything about it".

Emotional support can facilitate emotional change via a sense-making process of the troubling event and its difficult emotions (Burleston and Goldsmith, 1998). In addressing the emotions present within the consultation, the EPs believed they had demonstrated empathy and provided emotional support, as exemplified by Louise:

> "...at one point the mum started crying the TA started crying so it's recognising that emotion within the room and empathising and almost trying to support them with that whilst not pathologising the child further by saying this is a challenging case but needing to recognise that there are stressors...so there's some emotional support for the staff and for mum..." (Louise)

The EPs explained that they sought to offer support "from the bottom up" (Caroline), aiming to "come alongside" (Jane) their consultee(s) to see if they could help in some way and make their consultees "feel at ease" (Susanne). The EPs, therefore, actively tried to position themselves alongside their consultees, avoiding assuming a top-down role. Jane described herself as having a "mentoring relationship" with her consultee, emphasising the non-hierarchical and trusting nature of the relationships within the consultations, which will be further described in Section 4.4.1.2.1 – 'Relationships', under the 'rules' node of the triangle.

4.3.2.1.1.3   Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging

Problem exploration was a key feature present in each EP's consultation , which was enacted through questioning, clarifying and challenging. Problem solving/analysis was also one of the most cited practice models in the findings of Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008). The EPs in this research described the main function of their questioning as enabling them to ascertain factual, specific and detailed information about the problem situation. The EPs consistently reported drawing on 'wh' questions (what, where, when, why, how) in order to draw out relevant information and to gain a clearer view for themselves, and others:

> "...'what' questions to avoid speculation and make it more factual..." (Rachel)

> "...from a behavioural perspective trying to be specific about the whens the whats and the hows..." (Louise)

> "...asking questions to gain a clearer view of what she'd tried so far what she was dealing with where it goes wrong..." (Jane)

The EPs' search for factual and specific information meant that consultees' viewpoints were occasionally challenged. Process consultants recognise that presenting problems cannot be accepted as truths; rather, a problem is seen as a construct made by the problem owner, which makes sense in context (Bateson, 1973). This aligns with one of the fundamental principles of Wagner's (2000) consultation framework which is underpinned by social constructionism. In line with this view, Caroline, Rachel and Julie reflected on the subjective nature of people's perceptions and were very aware of the need to challenge viewpoints:

> "...I think people can be a bit speculative without having any concrete information so by asking 'what' questions makes it more factual..." (Rachel)

> "...I go back to a point where I think there's a bit of not misunderstanding but people have certain ways of thinking about things and they therefore embellish or make the figures fit with that viewpoint so I'm testing and challenging that viewpoint a bit..." (Caroline)

> "...when the school say 'and he's always got that drippy nose and it drives me mad' you can say 'well on the day that I was there actually he was using a tissue what was different about that day?' you know so you've got the ability to question what it is they've said...you can justifiably challenge them..." (Julie)

The EPs also sought clarification from their consultees. Clarification was used to elicit further information, check perceptions and to enable the EPs to establish a clearer viewpoint.

4.3.2.1.1.4   Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions

A strengths-based and solution-focused approach was referred to by all of the EPs as a key tool used within the consultation meetings. The use of exception questions, for example "when doesn't the problem occur? when is it less of an issue?" (Louise), "what was different about that day?" (Julie), "when isn't it happening?" (Jane), were reported as key tools to reframe the consultees' thinking and encourage them to think about solutions rather than dwell on problems, as exemplified by Susanne:

> "...I was reflecting on his strengths and uniqueness through exception questions because obviously staff talk about all the hard things that have happened..." (Susanne)

Some EPs also made explicit reference to the strengths evident within the adults' practice or approach in order to provide emotional support and make the consultees feel able to effect change:

> "...highlighting the positives that they're doing so you know they're going over and above for this child with the resources that they've got and you know they're all there committed and wanting to make it work so kind of just recognising that really..." (Louise)

By focusing on solutions and drawing out adults' effective practice, the EPs hoped to "instil in them a sense that there is more that can be done" (Louise), "help them feel capable and competent and able to effect change" (Caroline) and "empower the staff to allow them to come up with solutions" (Julie). Turner, Robbins and Doran (1996) argue that the thinking and processes involved in solution-focused questioning provide a template for employing systemic thinking in the short, hurried consultations in which EPs have to work in schools. Systems thinking is identified by Wagner (1995, 2000) as a theoretical framework underpinning her conceptualisation of consultation.

4.3.2.1.1.5 Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision-making

The EPs summarised information regularly during the consultation. Summarising enabled the EPs to make sense of the information they had been given, to check out their and others' understanding, and to reflect salient information back to the consultees:

> "...I tried to make sense of the consultation through summarising especially when it got a bit messy I said, 'At this point, I'm just summarising'..." (Caroline)

> "...summarise at particular points so for example you know she was talking about what happened in Year 1 and then what happened in Year 2 and then I was able to sort of reflect back and say 'well that's interesting that was a difference that happened last year' so having a bit of a commentary and feedback..." (Susanne)

The EPs deliberately made explicit links between information at points throughout the consultations. By explicitly linking information, the EPs sought to facilitate a shared understanding among those present within their consultations:

> "...when people were contributing things that were part of the formulation in my mind I would be...making links between information to see how things were related so sort of voicing that formulation that I was developing and they were also developing but we were doing it together in a way..." (Louise)

> "...part of my questioning as well was also which I think you can do as psychologists when we look at the holistic picture because the school will naturally focus on...what had been happening in school......I think sometimes schools still forget I know it's a bit stating the bl**ding obvious but about the sort of impact of the family situation...various professionals had been involved at different stages so just trying to sort of pull it all together really and make sense of it..." (Susanne)

Rachel used a key analytical tool - the 'Interactive Factors Framework' (Frederickson and Cameron, 1999) - specifically because she intended to draw explicit links between information provided by a range of stakeholders (i.e. school staff, multiple medical professionals, external agencies). The Interactive Factors Framework (Frederickson and Cameron, 1999) provided a useful visual structure whereby arrows were used to connect information to help the multi-disciplinary team involved in the consultation make sense of the very complex case:

> "...I decided that as part of that multi-agency meeting I wanted to do an Interactive Factors Framework as a way of sort of working out how things might affect each other but particularly how the medical needs would impact on behaviour and cognition..." (Rachel)

The EPs also facilitated a process of collaborative decision-making, as exemplified by Louise:

> "we then worked together through the TA's knowledge of books he likes to read the external agency's knowledge of Pocket Folders which I don't know and me kind of thinking more well what we need to be doing is working up to fluency and I think that's where we brainstormed together..." (Louise)

Similarly, Julie described how she and the SENCo "came up with a plan together", insisting that "referral to an ed psych doesn't mean it's the ed psych's problem, but it does mean that you're sharing the decision-making and sharing the problem". This directly links to the intentions of Wagner (2000) and Dickinson (2000), who, when implementing consultation as a mode of service delivery, insisted that EPs should not take responsibility for schools' problems and emphasised the interactionist setting in which an EP works. Likewise, Caroline explained that she checked records of agreed actions with her consultees to ensure outcomes were collaboratively devised: "I said, 'I've written this as an action is that OK?' so it's a shared process". Jane described how she introduced ideas very cautiously: "is it possible that we could...?". This is supported by Nolan and Moreland (2014), who found that EPs were often tentative in their suggestions, gently floating ideas that consultees could then challenge or build upon, so that outcomes are crafted together.

4.3.2.1.2 Superordinate theme 2: Knowledge

4.3.2.1.2.1 Stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation

Within this theme, the word 'stakeholders' is used to refer to anybody else within the consultation who was not the EP. Across the interviews, stakeholders included SENCos, teachers, teaching assistants, parents, learning mentors and external agency professionals. This theme reiterates the notion that the EP is not the only person within the consultation who holds knowledge and is able to make sense of the

problem situation. Some EPs made explicit reference to the fact that the consultees are the people with the expert knowledge of the child and also the school system within which they are working:

> "...we know that child least in that room so yes we can bring the psychological knowledge or the kind of cognitive psychology but we don't know the child and what seemed to be very clear in this case is that he needs a very personalised approach you can't just take PT and plonk him in there and he's going to make progress..." (Louise)

> "I want to reiterate that they're the expert in this child's life and my role is as a facilitator...[the teacher] knows the system she works in and you know can come up with things herself..." (Caroline)

In the cases of Susanne, Rachel and Julie, they entered their consultations with very little knowledge about the child or their situation in school. Likewise, despite being involved in previous meetings about the boy who was the subject of her consultation, Jane felt she did not fully understand the situation. The EPs, therefore, were heavily reliant on the stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation and many of the skills and strategies they employed were geared towards drawing out this knowledge (e.g. active listening, assuming a not-knowing stance, questioning, clarifying, challenging, collaborative decision making).

4.3.2.1.2.2   EP's knowledge

Specific reference was made by the EPs to their: psychological knowledge of special educational needs and interventions; knowledge of statutory processes; and the knowledge gained through their prior involvement with the child.

Some EPs used their psychological knowledge very explicitly in their consultations. Caroline sought to develop her consultee's theoretical knowledge and understanding of an intervention she had tried:

> "...I try to give an understanding behind it so the theoretical so...she said I've started to get this girl to work with another girl to teach her and I said oh it's great that you're doing that because this girl will feel more competent and therefore will feel better about herself as a learner and therefore be motivated..." (Caroline)

Susanne engaged in a very explicit discussion with her consultee regarding autism and attachment, drawing on her expert psychological knowledge and experience to tell the consultee that she did not think the child had autism:

> "...we had quite a conversation about attachment versus autism...basically is he autistic as well as having all these other issues...we did have the discussion about it's sometimes hard to say whether a kid has got autism or not...and I just said well for what it's worth I think it's highly likely there's other reasons why he's presenting like he is..." (Susanne)

Likewise, Julie, as part of her collaborative decision making with the SENCo, agreed that she would "come in do an assessment of him...and see whether or the interventions you're providing are appropriate". This, again, implies the EPs' use of expert psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions.

In addition, the EPs also identified their knowledge and understanding of statutory assessment processes as a tool used within the consultation. Julie was asked explicitly by her consultee whether the child would be better suited to a language resource base or a special school, therefore drawing very explicitly on expert knowledge about SEN provision. Similarly, Louise was asked by the SENCo to explain the Education, Health and Care assessment process to the child's parent within the consultation meeting and

Susanne reported explaining the statutory assessment process to her consultee, telling her that, in her opinion, the child would not meet the criteria for assessment. Knowledge of statutory assessment processes, therefore, was drawn upon frequently in the consultation meetings which is perhaps reflective of the wider social and cultural context surrounding SEN within the UK. This will be discussed later in Section 4.4.1.1.3 - 'SEN policy and legislation', in the context of the rules node of the triangle.

Lastly, some EPs stated that they drew on their prior knowledge of the child and/or the situation in the consultation. Louise reported that she used information from her prior assessments to help her "make sense of what might be going on". Jane commented that she had an overview of the situation, explaining that she felt "it's good to know some of the contextual stuff it made me feel a bit more confident".

4.3.2.2   Discussion of the tools used by the EPs within consultation

The findings of the 'tools' node of the activity system offer a useful insight into the skills, strategies and knowledge drawn upon by EPs when engaging in consultation, addressing Leadbetter's (2004) criticism, which was later restated by Nolan and Moreland (2014), that there is still a lack of explicit discussion around the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs when facilitating the consultation process.

The two themes of 'skills and strategies' and 'knowledge' identified in this research align with West and Idol's (1987) conceptualisation of 'knowledge base 1' and 'knowledge base 2', respectively. According to West and Idol (1987), knowledge base 1 informs the interactions between the consultant and the consultee and might include

skills such as listening, empathising, questioning and problem solving. There are strong parallels between the skills and strategies identified by the EPs in this research and the discursive strategies highlighted by Nolan and Moreland (2014) (Table 4.1).

Table 4.1 The discursive strategies used by EPs in consultation as identified by Nolan and Moreland (2014) and the skills and strategies discussed by EPs in this research.

Nolan and Moreland (2014)	Current research
• EP-directed collaboration • Demonstrating empathy and deep listening • Questioning, wondering and challenging • Focusing and refocusing • Summarising and reformulating, pulling threads together • Suggesting and explaining • Restating/revising outcomes and offering follow up	• Active listening and assuming a not-knowing stance • Empathising and providing emotional support • Problem exploration (questioning, clarifying, challenging) • Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions • Summarising, linking information together • Collaborative decision making.

Themes related to working collaboratively, demonstrating empathy, listening skills, questioning, challenging, summarising and pulling information together are present in both pieces of research. The theme 'looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions' did not arise in Nolan and Moreland's (2014) research, but was identified by Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen (2008), who found that EPs reported the use of solution-focused processes as one of the most frequently used theoretical and practice models applied by them in consultation. The findings of this research, therefore, strengthen the currently very limited body of existing literature describing the skills and strategies, or 'knowledge base 1', employed by EPs when engaging in consultation.

The skills and strategies used by the EPs can be viewed in terms of a process. There is a holistic sense to the themes in terms of listening to the consultee, empathising, exploring the problem, looking for ways to move forward through solution focused and strengths based questioning, summarising, linking information together and making collaborative decisions. The process described by the EPs aligns with staged consultation models/frameworks presented in the educational psychology literature. Within Wagner's (1995, 2000) four stage framework, as described in Section 2.4.1, the EP leads a process of externalising the problem, taking a helicopter view, facilitating the paradigm shift and self-reflexivity. Gillies (2000) suggests a basic sequential framework for consultation, comprising of entry, exploration, rethinking, action planning, implementation and termination.

West and Idol (1987) also conceptualised 'knowledge base 2', which informs the interaction between the consultee (e.g. the teacher) and the client (e.g. the child), and might include knowledge and experience of evidence based interventions and specialist research. Within this research, the EPs' knowledge base 2 comprised of psychological knowledge of special educational needs and interventions; knowledge of statutory processes; and the knowledge gained through their prior involvement with the child. In line with West and Idol's (1987) conceptualisation, the two subthemes 'psychological knowledge of special educational needs and interventions' and 'use of knowledge gained through their prior involvement with the child' can be used to inform the interaction between the teacher (or other stakeholder) and the child.

However, the EPs' knowledge of statutory processes was used by the EPs at the level of the consultee. It was used to explain the EHCP process (Louise, Susanne), to inform a professional opinion on whether or not the EP felt a statutory assessment would be warranted (Susanne) and to inform judgement about the appropriateness of educational placement (Julie). Such knowledge is not applicable to the consultee's direct intervention work with the child and therefore adds a differing function to the use of knowledge to that previously outlined by West and Idol (1987). There is a direct link between this tool used by the EPs within their consultations and the constraining rule 'SEN policy and legislation', as identified under the rules node of the activity system- see Section 4.4.1.1.3 for a description. As described later in Section 4.4.1.1.3, the current social and cultural climate, in which schools have suffered significant budget cuts and where many staff believe that they do not have sufficient resources to support their SEN pupils, has led them to turn to statutory processes as a way of securing additional funding (NAPEP, 2018). This has led to EPs drawing upon their knowledge of statutory processes as a prominent tool within their consultation meetings.

Within Schmidt and Johnson's (1970) consultancy continuum, application of such knowledge positions the EP towards the 'expert' end of a facilitator/expert continuum (Fig 4.5). However, use of the 'skills and strategies' places EPs at the 'facilitator' end of the continuum.

Fig 4.5 The findings of this research as applied to Schmidt and Johnson's (1970) consultancy continuum.
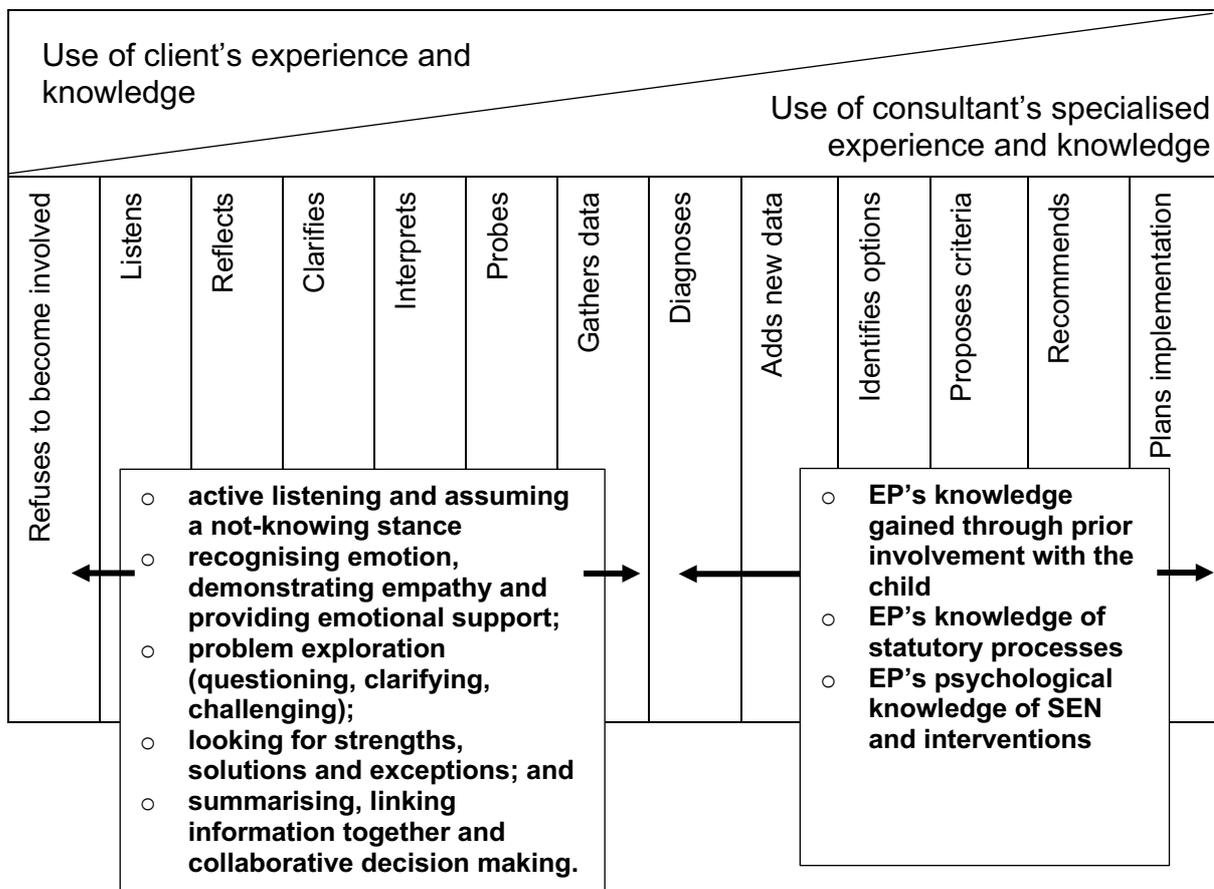
The findings can also be conceptualised on Gutkin's (1999) directive-non directive dimension (cited earlier in Fig 2.2). In employing their 'skills and strategies', the EPs can be described as being non-directive. In employing their psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions, their knowledge of statutory processes and their prior knowledge of the child, they moved to the directive end of the continuum. These findings support Gutkin's (1999) assertion that the EP can move between the quadrants of his consultation model throughout the consultation process and conceptualises the role of the EP within consultation as constantly changing. This will be further discussed in Section 4.4.2 – Division of labour.

Overall, the findings related to the tools node of the triangle provide a comprehensive picture of the skills, strategies and knowledge employed by EPs in order to achieve the object and outcomes of consultation, and the findings map onto theoretical models of consultation presented in the literature (i.e. West and Idol, 1987; Schmidt and Johnson, 1970; Gutkin, 1999). As stated in the research aims and rationale, the findings within this node of the triangle contribute to the currently very limited literature regarding the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs during consultation and, by gaining the perspectives of EPs regarding what tools they used during the consultation, this research has attempted to help EPs make their tacit knowledge of consultation explicit, as implored by Nolan and Moreland (2014).

Interestingly, despite surfacing strong links between the tools the EPs said they used during their consultations and the conceptualisations of consultation found within the literature, none of the EPs explicitly named or made reference to a consultation model or framework in their interview. This may suggest that the EPs have developed an internal working model of the consultation process, perhaps explaining why, thus far, EPs have struggled to make their tacit knowledge of consultation processes explicit. This was exemplified by Louise, who stated:

> "...these are interesting questions because they get you to think...think about things you don't normally think about it..." (Louise)

Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system was used as a data collection tool, but also served as a tool which supported the EPs' reflection about what they

actually did during their consultation meetings. This suggests that Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system offers a useful framework to support evaluation of practice and could be valued within the practice of EP supervision. This view is supported by Leadbetter (2007) who suggested that the close study of a consultation meeting can act as a powerful tool for personal and professional development.

4.3.2.3   The activity system so far: subject, object, outcome, tools

Research question 1 was concerned with the upper section of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system (object, outcome, tools). Thus far, the findings of this research have supplemented the currently very limited body of research regarding what it is that EPs actually do in consultation, specifically the practice procedures they engage in. There are strong parallels between the reported objects, outcomes and tools used by the EPs, previous literature and conceptualisations of consultation. Fig 4.6 shows the themes which emerged from the data analysis mapped onto a basic activity system, with the upper section of the triangle outlined in bold for clarity. The model, so far, conceptualises the EPs' object-oriented activity and offers a visual representation of the mediating artefacts used by the EPs in order to achieve their objects and outcomes.

In answer to research question 2, the next section will present and discuss the findings regarding the lower section of Engeström's (1987) activity system, specifically the rules and the division of labour, enabling a macro level analysis of the activity of EP consultation. As outlined in Chapter 2, there has been a lack of consideration of the wider social, cultural and organisational factors which impact an EP's work within

consultation. Conceptual models of consultation, such as that posed by Wagner (2000), present theoretical underpinnings and offer a useful staged framework for enacting consultation, but they do not explore factors which support and constrain EPs in their work.

Fig 4.6 An activity system modelling the subject, objects, outcomes and tools of EP consultation, as represented by the data.

Skills and strategies:
- Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance
- Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support
- Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging
- Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions
- Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision making

Knowledge:
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation
- EP's knowledge
  o psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions
  o knowledge of statutory processes
  o knowledge gained through prior involvement with the child.

Tools

- Find out information about the problem
- Develop a shared understanding of the problem situation
-

EP

Subject   Object → Outcome

- Plan practical next steps
- Improve the situation for the child
- Provide emotional support and containment
- Uncertainty about the outcome

Engeström (1987) argued that no actions take place within a sealed-vacuum-like environment, and he stressed that the collective and communal aspects of activity were equally as important as the mediation that was taking place. The following section will therefore seek to contextualise the practice of EP consultation and facilitate an exploration of consultation as a phenomenon which operates within the constraints of wider social, cultural and organisational systems.

4.4 Rules, community and division of labour

RQ2: What wider social, cultural and organisational factors were present within the consultation meetings, specifically:
  a) What factors did the EPs say constrained their work (**rules – constraints**)?
  b) What factors did the EPs say supported their work (**rules - supports**)?
  c) What role(s) did the EP assume within the consultation meetings (**division of labour**)?

4.4.1 Rules

A thematic map of the rules is presented in Fig 4.7. In Fig 4.8, the rules have been added onto the developing activity theory diagram.

Rules represent norms, conventions or social traditions that are established by the community to govern its members (Engeström, 1998). Yamagata-Lynch (2010) describes the rules node of the activity system as any formal or informal regulations that can affect how the activity takes place. In order to draw out this information, Leadbetter et al.'s (2007) key question "what supported or constrained the work?" was asked. Seven themes emerged from the findings which were organised into two superordinate themes: (1) constraints and (2) supports.

4.4.1.1 Superordinate theme 1: Constraints

4.4.1.1.1 Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person

The fundamental psychological principles underpinning Wagner's (2000) model of EP consultation (i.e. symbolic interactionism, systems thinking, personal construct psychology and social constructionism) stress the paramount role that people play within the consultation process. According to Wagner (2000), the EP is interested to understand how meaning is constructed by those involved in the situation, recognising

Fig 4.7 A thematic map of the constraining and supporting rules in EP consultation.

RQ2a: What factors did the EPs say constrained their work (**rules – constraints**)?

RQ2b: What factors did the EPs say supported their work (**rules - supports**)?

Constraints

Supports

Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person

Power dyanmics

SEN policy and legislation

Relationships

Attitudes and approaches

EP factors

Practical factors

Senior Managment Team (SMT) directives/presence

Lack of autonomy/authority of SENCo and other staff

EP used as spokesperson to SMT

Pursuit of EHCP

EP's relationships with school staff

EP's relationships with other professionals involved

Parent and school staff/external agency relationships

measured and realisitc

open minded, receptive, solution foclused

skilled, committed, proactive

EP's knowledge

EP's confidence

EP's professional autonomy

time

space

Fig 4.8 An activity system modelling the subject, objects, outcomes, tools and rules of EP consultation, as represented by the data.

Skills and strategies:
- Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance
- Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support
- Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging
- Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions
- Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision making

Knowledge:
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation
- EP's knowledge
    - psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions
    - knowledge of statutory processes
    - knowledge gained through prior involvement with the child.

Tools

EP

Subject

Object
- Find out information about the problem
- Develop a shared understanding of the problem situation

Outcome
- Plan practical next steps
- Improve the situation for the child
- Provide emotional support and containment
- Uncertainty about the outcome

Rules

Constraints
- Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person
- Power dynamics
- SEN policy and legislation

Supports
- Relationships
- Attitudes and approaches
- EP factors (confidence, knowledge, autonomy)
- Practical factors (time and space)

that the way a person conceptualises a problem is a particular punctuation, or viewpoint, of a behavioural sequence. To do this, the EP requires access to the adult most closely associated with the problem situation, which, according to Wagner (2000), is typically the class teacher. Wagner (2000, p. 12) describes teachers as "our main role partners", arguing that "EPs are most effective when they work with teachers collaboratively."

Some EPs in this research stated that a key constraint in their work involved gaining access to the "right person". The "right person" was defined as the adult who would be actively involved in the change process. In most cases, the "right person" was the class teacher, but for Susanne it was the learning mentor.

> "...having the class teacher there I hate it when the class teachers aren't there so it was the class teacher SENCo me and [external agency] which I think is perfect...it shows that the school values the consultation and the teacher is the person who is going to be actively involved in the change process so it's going to help her being there..." (Caroline)

> "...I was speaking to the right person...most of my consultations are with the SENCo and they're not the people who know the kid the best..." (Susanne)

Although Caroline and Susanne were able to consult with the "right person" on this occasion, the above extracts both imply that having access to them is not always guaranteed. Moreover, Jane, in describing her historical involvement with her case, explained that the class teacher had never been present within any of the meetings that she had previously attended. This prompted Jane to request a consultation directly with the class teacher, identifying her eventual access to her as a factor which consequently supported her work. Likewise, in reflecting on what constrained her work, Rachel explained that the class teacher was not present in her meeting, but she felt that she would have benefitted from being a part of the consultation process, particularly as she was experiencing the child's needs as a behaviour issue:

> "...the class teacher wasn't there she was experiencing the behaviour as a behaviour issue perhaps if she'd come to the meeting and heard about her medical needs and emotional anxiety she may have had a different perspective..." (Rachel)

Through consultation, EPs explore the perceptions, beliefs and ideas that inform a concern, with the person who raises the concern (Wagner, 2000). Wagner (2000) argues that it is the process of engaging in the consultation, rather than the outcomes of the consultation itself, that facilitates the change process. However, the cases of Rachel and Jane, whose schools did not actively involve the class teachers within the consultation process, and the comments made by Susanne and Caroline which implied that access to the change agent was not always guaranteed, raises important questions regarding how far schools understand the psychological principles underpinning EP consultation, and indeed how far the psychological principles of consultation can actually be enacted by EPs if they are not given access to the key change agents.

In comparing this finding to Leadbetter's (2006) original activity theoretical conceptualisation of EP consultation (presented in Fig 2.6), there is a notable difference in the emphasis placed on the role of the class teacher (or other change agent) within the process of consultation. Within Leadbetter's (2006) model, the class teacher is defined as the object of the activity. In other words, the whole activity system is directed towards the teacher, with the exploration of the teacher's beliefs, perceptions and views being the goal of the EP's work. This research has shown, however, that the class teacher (or other change agent) may not even be present within the consultation meeting.

This finding, therefore, has surfaced a tension between espoused theory and real-life practice regarding EP consultation. The following reflection offered by Susanne sheds

some light on why EPs may not always have access to class teachers within their consultations:

> "...most of the time I don't know if it's your experience you know you're bobbing for a consultation a chat with the SENCo off for your observation or whatever you're doing you might get five minutes with the class teacher if you're lucky...and it just feels unsatisfactory...it's the way the school is organised to have capacity and release teachers...I don't think we can always expect it you know it's not always appropriate...it just so happened that because of the learning mentor's sort of role they're more flexible...I do think it's a constraint if we're going to say we're doing good quality consultation..." (Susanne)

Susanne raises the key organisational issues of time (both the EP's and school staff's) and capacity within the school system to release staff. Susanne even goes as far to say that an EP cannot always expect to meet with the class teacher, describing this as not always appropriate and the EP as "lucky" if they do.

Considering the fundamental premise of consultation, as outlined by Wagner (2000), is that the EP will explore the perceptions and beliefs of the problem holder (i.e. typically the class teacher), there is a clear **contradiction** present within the activity system, occurring between the rules and tools nodes of the triangle (i.e. capacity within the school system to release teachers v the psychological underpinnings of consultation which require access to the agent of change). This has a significant implication for EP consultation practice, which will be further discussed in Section 5.2.1.

4.4.1.1.2 Power dynamics

Three EPs identified power dynamics within the school system as a key constraining factor impacting their consultations, with the EPs making specific reference to the lack of autonomy and authority of the SENCos and other school staff, who they felt were being micro-managed by the schools' senior management teams.

Schools operate in hierarchical systems. Although recommended in the SEND Code of Practice (2015), it is not a legal requirement for SENCos to assume a place on the school's leadership team. Research has shown that this has led to feelings of disempowerment among SENCos. Layton (2005, p. 55) found that SENCos themselves "do not believe that key people and agencies see them in a leadership role", a finding supported by Kearns (2005) who reported that SENCos do not feel empowered to develop their role or express their vision of teaching and learning in any broader sense.

Within this research, only one EP (Caroline) reported that their SENCo was a member of the senior leadership team who, despite this, did not have any real influence over decision making regarding the SEND pupils. In Caroline's case, both the SENCo and the class teacher felt powerless within the stringent school system. Rachel reported that the senior leaders were "watching things" and "steering" the consultation. Rachel described the school's SENCo as "not very autonomous" and as being "micro-managed" by the school's senior management team. Similarly, Julie explained that the senior management team made decisions "without reference to the people who have to implement them" and, as a result, the SENCo felt "not listened to". Caroline

explained that "directives come from above". Caroline described there being "massive inflexibility" within the school system which had resulted in inappropriate SEN provision, particularly around the child for whom the consultation was about. She reported that the class teacher and SENCo "know it's not right, but do not feel able to do anything about it".

The EPs' reflections on the constraining influence of power dynamics within the school system has highlighted a significant implication for EP consultation practice. This finding has revealed that the EPs are consulting with the class teachers (where possible), SENCos, learning mentors and TAs, but these people do not appear to have the autonomy or authority to effect change within the school system and, as a result, make positive changes for the child or young person. There is a clear **contradiction** present between the 'rules' and 'outcome' nodes of the triangle. The implications of this contradiction will be further discussed in Section 5.2.3.

4.4.1.1.3 SEN policy and legislation

SEN policy and legislation, in particular Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), was identified by the EPs as a key factor constraining the consultation process. Across the six consultation examples described by the EPs, reference to a desire to request an EHCP assessment, was made by school staff in five cases.

Caroline reflected that "EPs are seen as a bridge to EHCP". As such, Caroline and Rachel both reported that they felt the wider purpose of the consultation meeting from their schools' perspectives was to gather evidence to move towards an EHCP:

> "...the wider purpose from the school's point of view was to gather evidence for EHCP..." (Caroline)

> "...EHCP was at the top of [the SMT's] thoughts which was then evident in the SEN team's approach..." (Rachel)

Susanne reported that another professional had advised the school that the child "might be an EHCP candidate" prior to her consultation meeting, therefore this became a topic to be addressed within the consultation. Julie's SENCo wanted to know whether the child in question would be better suited in a resource base or a special provision, thus immediately shaping the context of her involvement. Louise reported that the SENCo had spoken to her directly before the meeting regarding the possibility of exploring "alternative provisions" for the young boy.

Norwich (2014) argues that the special educational needs system cannot be understood outside of the wider context of school education and policy. In recent years, there have been significant cuts to school funding which has left teachers at the front line in supporting a range of children's needs, including those with SEN (NAHT, 2018). In a survey of school leaders' experiences in relation to the education of children with SEN, 94% of respondents reported finding it harder to resource the support required to meet the needs of pupils with SEN than they did two years ago (NAHT, 2018). 73% of respondents attributed this to the cuts to mainstream funding, leading to reduced numbers of teaching assistants, pastoral staff and depleted resources, which has had a major impact on schools supporting their most vulnerable pupils (NAHT, 2018). The views expressed in this survey were evident in some of the EPs' consultations, as evidenced by the extracts from Susanne and Louise below:

> "...the [external agency] person had said 'oo and he might be an EHCP candidate'...not because of his needs which was particularly interesting but because it's a school which does give good pastoral support and a lot of provision she was saying 'oh well if you have an EHC it will reflect you know the provision you've put in'..." (Susanne)

> "...meetings can go off on a different agenda when people feel stuck and they think the solution is ok let's just go for an EHCP...sometimes the conversations can be shut down with 'we don't have the resources' or basically 'we can't do that...'" (Louise)

The National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) (2018) conducted an inquiry into the support for children and young people with SEN. In line with Norwich (2014), they reported that there is a lack of capacity within mainstream schools to provide a graduated response to additional needs before turning to statutory processes. They described a perception among schools that EHCPs are seen as a means to ensure funding is targeted at pupils who need support in light of inadequate special needs budgets. Within her interview, Caroline reflected on schools' use of EPs as gatekeepers to the EHCP process:

> "...some SENCos get very hung up on I need your report because I need to get through EHCP really..." (Caroline)

The current social and cultural context regarding SEN provision, therefore, was evident within the EPs' consultation meetings. Some EPs perceived their schools to be working towards a different object to them (i.e. to gather evidence for an EHCP), surfacing a key **contradiction** within the activity of EP consultation. The implication of this contradiction for EP consultation practice will be further discussed in Section 5.2.2.

4.4.1.2 Superordinate theme 2: Supports

4.4.1.2.1 Relationships

Schein (1988) and Dennis (2004) argue that a positive working relationship is needed to enable consultation to be effective. In line with this view, the EPs' relationships with the school staff and other professionals involved in their consultations were highlighted as a supporting factor in every interview. Susanne, Julie and Caroline attributed the nature of their positive relationships to their longstanding involvement with their schools, which resulted in them knowing the staff, and the context within which they work, very well:

> "...I've been there since about 2005 so I know the staff well...it wasn't an unfamiliar situation..." (Susanne)

> "...The staff including the SMT really trust me...I've known them for 15 years..." (Julie)

> "...We get on really well...I've had the school for a number of years I know about the context..." (Caroline)

Rachel and Louise reflected on their positive working relationships with both the school staff and the other professionals who were present within the consultation.

> "...I have a good relationship with the school SEN team and the other agency professionals..." (Rachel)

> "...the external agency professional is very sensible and is on the same wavelength as me and seems to bring a similar view to situations...not trying to drive the meeting off in a different agenda..." (Louise)

Louise also commented on the nature of the relationship between the parent and the professionals within the consultation, describing the parent as noticeably quiet and

anxious during their first encounter but far more relaxed, willing to ask questions and challenge during the consultation meeting. For Louise, the parent's familiarity with the professionals in the room was a key supporting factor in her becoming actively involved in the consultation process. Louise also reflected on the positive relationships which were evident between the parent and school staff, describing them as "working like a team".

Jane likened her relationship with her consultee to "a mentoring relationship". She described wanting to "come alongside" the class teacher to offer support. Similarly, Caroline described her consultee as being stuck within "a top-down system" therefore she endeavoured to "support her from the bottom up". Susanne did not use the word 'consultation' with her consultee, preferring to say that they would "have a natter". Susanne reported that she wanted to make her consultee "feel at ease" by using language which would facilitate a "shared common understanding". Through her choice of language, Susanne was attempting to break down barriers which might position her in a top-down role.

Wagner (2000, p. 12) noted that a key disposition of consultation is to "work with others as equals". In line with this assumption, this theme suggests that the EPs viewed trusting and non-hierarchical relationships as an important factor supporting their work and they endeavoured to facilitate these where possible. It is also important to consider this supporting factor in the context of one of the outcomes of consultation identified by the EPs: to provide emotional support and containment. This supporting rule enabled this outcome to be achieved. The importance of the theme 'relationships' in

supporting EPs in their work can be summed up by Caroline who, when reflecting on the rules node of the activity system, said, "it's all about people isn't it."

4.4.1.2.2 Attitudes and approaches

The positive attitudes and approaches of the people involved in the consultation meetings were identified by the EPs as a key factor supporting their work. The EPs used a range of adjectives to describe the positive qualities of their consultees, including "open-minded" (Caroline, Rachel), "measured" (Louise), "committed" (Jane), "proactive" and "skilled" (Susanne). When talking about the school staff involved in her consultation, Louise reflected:

> "...there's an acknowledgment that they might not have the resources to do certain things but it's 'ok how can we make that work then' they are very solution focused and they have an holistic view of the child as well... (Louise)

This supporting factor is very important when viewed alongside the constraining rule 'SEN policy and legislation', presented in Section 4.4.1.1.3. The findings show that, despite the immense pressures evident within the school system regarding a lack of funding, limited resources and depleted staff, the outcomes of consultation are more likely to be achieved if those working around the child are open minded, solution focused and committed to effecting change.

4.4.1.2.3 EP factors

The EPs identified three personal factors, which included their knowledge, confidence and professional autonomy, as supporting factors in their work. As described in Section 4.3.2 – Tools, the EPs utilised their psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions,

their knowledge of statutory processes and their prior knowledge of the child/situation within their consultation meetings. Possessing such knowledge bases made the EPs feel confident within their consultation meetings:

> "...it's good to know some of the contextual stuff it made me feel a bit more confident..." (Jane)

> "...I also talked about...the statutory process and basically I was confident enough to say there's no chance there's no purpose you know he wouldn't meet the criteria..." (Susanne)

> "...I think I've got enough confidence to not hide behind language I'll just sort of say it as it is..." (Susanne)

Confidence was also linked to the EPs' sense of professional autonomy. The EPs reported feeling that their service managers trusted and respected their judgement. This facilitated a sense of freedom and agency over the ways in which they applied psychology in schools:

> "...[EPS manager] conveys that she trusts in our work and we can practice however we feel best in the situation so I feel very confident as a practitioner..." (Caroline)

> "...in terms of EPs we're quite autonomous and if there was a kind of complaint made against us our judgement would always be respected I don't think we're managed in a top down way in the way that perhaps some of the other teams are managed which does give us the freedom to be a bit more challenging..." (Rachel)

4.4.1.2.4 Practical factors

On a practical level, the EPs identified having sufficient time and an available physical space as a factor supporting their consultations:

> "...to have the luxury of time and we did we nattered for about an hour probably to be able to spend that time and it is time well spent..." (Susanne)

> "...we had a room and it started on time..." (Caroline)

> "...we talked in the head's office it's good to have a private space to go to..." (Jane)

This finding supports that of Gillies (2000) who identified time and space as two of the five effective ingredients for consultation.

4.4.2 Division of labour

The division of labour node of the activity system facilitates a consideration of role demarcation and role expectation (Leadbetter, 2007). The findings of this research have focused specifically on the role of the EP in order to gather information about what they did within the activity of consultation. The thematic analysis of the data has surfaced twelve different roles assumed by the EPs during their consultations. The twelve roles are presented on a thematic map in Fig 4.9. In Fig 4.10, the themes related to division of labour have been added onto the activity theory diagram.

Fig 4.9 A thematic map showing the division of labour within EP consultation.

RQ2c: What role(s) did the EPs assume within their consultation meetings (**division of labour**)?

Note taker | Listener | Supporter | Summariser | Clarifier | Collaborative decision maker | Questioner | Sense maker | Challenger | Holder of expert knowledge | Spokesperson | Gatekeeper

← non directive   directive →
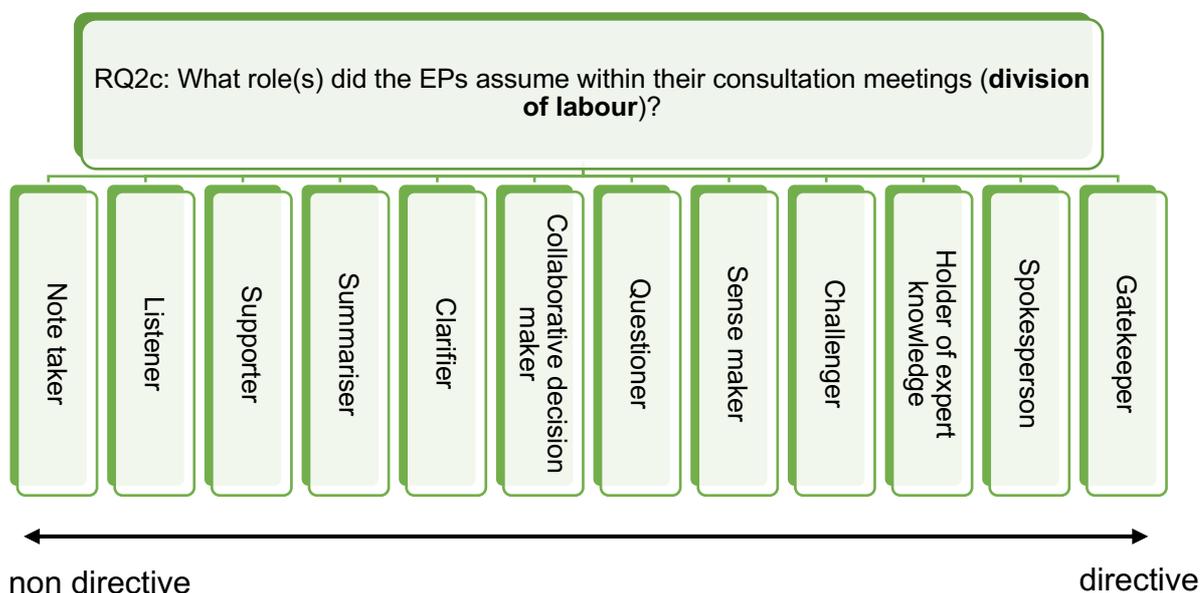
The roles assumed by the EPs can be roughly positioned on Gutkin's (1999) directive-non directive continuum, as shown by the arrow in Fig 4.9. The findings support Gutkin's (1999) assertion that consultants can assume many differing roles within the process of consultation, and suggest that the role of the EP within consultation is constantly changing. Gutkin (1999, p. 187) noted that consultants need to be able to move "fluidly and skilfully" between dimensions, particularly collaborative-non directive and collaborative-directive in order to meet the needs of the consultee.

Many of the roles assumed by the EPs will not be surprising to the reader because they directly correlate with the themes described earlier under the tools node of the triangle (see Section 4.3.2). Therefore, in the interest of readability and to avoid repetition, all themes will not be individually discussed in this section. Descriptions regarding the themes 'listener', 'supporter', 'summariser', 'clarifier', 'collaborative

decision maker', 'questioner', 'sense maker', 'challenger' and 'holder of expert knowledge' can be found in Section 4.3.2 – Tools. Individual codes related to each theme are presented in Appendix 9(vii).

Fig 4.10 An activity system modelling the subject, objects, outcomes, tools, rules and division of labour of EP consultation, as represented by the data.
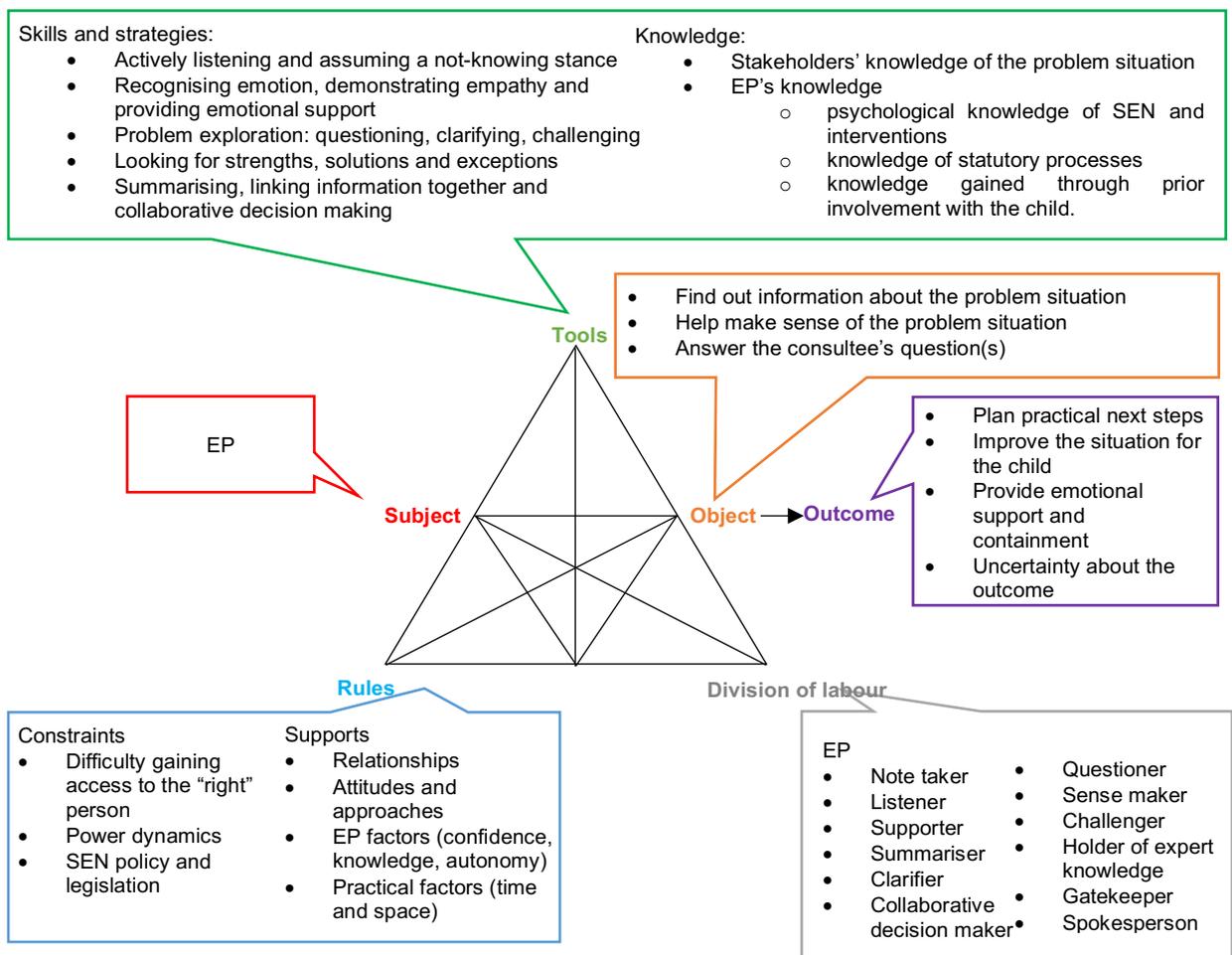
In line with a key premise of activity theory, an aim of this research is to contextualise EP consultation within its social and cultural context. The themes 'holder of expert knowledge', 'spokesperson' and 'gatekeeper' afford particular discussion because they are all roles which the EPs described as being assigned to them by others within the

consultation meeting, suggesting that the current social, cultural and organisational context in which EPs are consulting is having a direct impact on their work.

4.4.2.1 Holder of expert knowledge

Some EPs reported being positioned as experts by others within the consultation. Jane commented that her school "feel [it's] their job to receive special advice" and, despite intending to "come alongside" her consultee and "work out ideas together", she reported falling "more into advice donation". Jane's role within the consultation, therefore, changed due to the expectations of her consultee. Louise felt as though her SENCo "naturally positioned [her] as the expert", looking to her for the "knowledge base around what the outcomes should be". According to Louise, this led to the consultation reaching various "stuck positions" because the school staff did not readily recognise their role as experts in the child.

4.4.2.2 Gatekeepers

As described in Section 4.4.1.1.3, the EPs were positioned by others as gatekeepers to additional resources, specifically EHCPs. Caroline made reference to staff "needing an EP report to get through EHCP", describing EPs as "a bridge to EHCP". Rachel reflected that the head teacher perceived her role to be that of "rubber stamping" and both Susanne and Louise were asked specifically about the possibility of statutory assessment for the children they were involved with. Likewise, Julie was asked her opinion on whether or not the child in question would be more suited to a specialist provision. It is interesting to consider this finding against one of the main aims of consultation as proposed by Wagner (2000, p.12):

> "Consultation aims to offer schools a more useful, egalitarian, less instrumental, individualistic form of education psychology. It de-emphasises positional authority and gate-keeping within the LEA." (Wagner, 2000, p.12)

The findings of this theme would suggest that consultation has not de-emphasised positional authority or gate-keeping in the case of EPs. Rather, consultation appears to have been used as a forum for discussion around how schools can access additional resources. Indeed, 'knowledge of statutory assessment processes' emerged as a key tool drawn up by all of the EPs within their consultations which directly links to the constraining theme 'SEN policy and legislation' which was described in Section 4.4.1.1.3. The implications of this finding for EP consultation practice will be discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.2.

4.4.2.3 Spokesperson

As described in Section 4.4.1.1.2, the directive nature of the senior management teams and the seeming lack of autonomy and authority of the SENCos, and other internal and external staff, had implications for the EPs' role. Both Julie and Rachel reported being positioned into the role of spokesperson:

> "...if the SENCo felt she was listened to more she wouldn't need to use me in the way that she does...I don't overstep the boundaries I don't go up to SMT and say it's a cr** decision that you put him in a Year 2 group but my notes are copied to the senior management and head teacher and I will say 'actions we need to discuss whether this child being in the wrong year group is in his benefit' i.e. I get my point to the SMT without having to actually call them out on it...I do it across all my practice however I make it more overt when I feel that the SENCo herself cannot do that..." (Julie)

> "...there's definitely a kind of undertone that it's the EP that makes the challenges so in previous consultations where as a collective we've thought oh we don't like that it's been sort of nudge Rachel and get her to question it..." (Rachel)

The autonomy of the EPs and their perceived status as experts and gatekeepers appears to have afforded them a position of authority within the school system. Julie reported that the SMT "really trust me" and Rachel explained that the head teacher is "generally...open to me being someone who assesses and suggests interventions". In this context, the EPs perceived their attributed role of expert as a supporting factor in that they could influence decision making at a higher level and make positive changes for the children and young people. The importance of this was also highlighted by Caroline, who, when reflecting on a key constraint in her consultation meeting, said:

> "...I've never met the head teacher therefore our influence through consultation can only go so far contributing to change at a higher level is never going to be possible..." (Caroline)

When considering this role demarcation alongside the constraining theme 'power dynamics', as described in Section 4.4.1.1.2, the EPs appear to play a critical role in supporting SENCos and class teachers not only understanding and making sense of problem situations (the object of the consultation), but also enabling them to achieve the agreed outcomes. This has important implications for EP practice, which will be discussed in Chapter 5, Section 5.2.3.

4.5   Chapter summary

This chapter has presented, described and discussed the themes which emerged from the thematic analysis of the six individual EP interviews regarding what they did when they engaged in consultation. The themes under the object, outcome and tools nodes of the triangle have been discussed in answer to Research Question 1. The findings

have added to the very limited body of evidence currently describing the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs when they carry out the activity of consultation and the use of Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system supported EPs in making their tacit knowledge of consultation processes explicit. Moreover, through engaging in a discussion regarding the factors constraining and supporting (rules) the EPs in their work and the various roles assumed by the EPs within the consultation meetings (division of labour), a macro level analysis of EP consultation was enabled, in answer to Research Question 2. Finally, in relation to Research Question 3, throughout the analysis of the activity of EP consultation, several contradictions have been identified, the implications of which will be discussed in the Chapter 5. Fig 4.11 presents a summary of the data from this research modelled onto an activity system.

Fig 4.11. Presenting the activity system as a whole: subject, object, outcomes, tools, rules, community, division of labour

Skills and strategies:
- Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance
- Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support
- Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging
- Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions
- Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision making

Knowledge:
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation
- EP's knowledge
  - psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions
  - knowledge of statutory processes
  - knowledge gained through prior involvement with the child.

- Find out information about the problem situation
- Develop a shared understanding of the problem situation

EP

- Plan practical next steps
- Improve the situation for the child
- Provide emotional support and containment
- Uncertainty about the outcome

Tools

Subject

Object

Outcome

Rules

Community

Division of labour

Constraints
- Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person
- Power dynamics
- SEN policy and legislation

Supports
- Relationships
- Attitudes and approaches
- EP factors (confidence, knowledge, autonomy)
- Practical factors (time and space)

Included:
- EP
- SENCo
- Teacher
- TA
- Learning Mentor
- External agencies
- Medical professionals
- Parent

EP
- Note taker
- Listener
- Supporter
- Summariser
- Clarifier
- Collaborative decision maker

- Questioner
- Sense maker
- Challenger
- Holder of expert knowledge
- Gatekeeper
- Spokesperson

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CHAPTER FIVE: IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE SURFACING THROUGH CONTRADICTIONS

5.1 Introduction

Within activity theory, contradictions surface through problems, breakdowns or tensions within and between activity systems (Kuutti, 1996). Tensions arise when the conditions of an activity put the subject in contradictory situations that preclude achieving the object (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). In some cases, the activity may collapse altogether and the subject may not attain the object; in others, the subject may attain the object but be unsatisfied with how they have done this (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Exploring contradictions helps to surface tensions and facilitate the generation of possible solutions to alleviate these (Yamagata-Lynch, 2010). Thus, contradictions, as conceptualised in activity theory, serve as a fruitful analytic tool in order to study, and encourage, change (Groleau et al., 2011). The contradictions which surfaced throughout the activity theory analysis of EP consultation in Chapter 4 will be drawn upon in this chapter to consider potential implications for future EP practice.

5.2 Contradictions leading to implications for practice

Three main contradictions surfaced from the activity theory analysis of EP consultation, which are presented in Table 5.1.

Table 5.1. Contradictions surfacing from the activity theory analysis of EP consultation.

Location	Contradiction
Rules V Tools	Gaining access to the "right" person (**rules**) 'V' the psychological underpinnings of consultation which depend on access to the change agent (**tools**);
Rules V Object	SEN policy and legislation (**rules**) 'V' find out about the problem and develop a shared understanding of the problem situation (**object**)
Rules V Outcomes	Power dynamics within the school system (**rules**) 'V' planning next steps and improving the situation for the child (**outcomes**)

5.2.1. Contradiction surfacing between the rules and tools

In the analysis, a key contradiction surfaced between the rules ('difficulty gaining access to the "right" person) and the tools used by EPs within consultation ('skills and strategies' and 'knowledge'). Fig 5.1 presents the contradiction on the activity system. The contradiction is depicted using a broken arrow, which after Engeström (1987), has become the traditional way of depicting tensions within an activity system (Niccolini, 2012).

Fig 5.1 Contradiction between the rules and tools.

Skills and strategies:
- Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance
- Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support
- Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging
- Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions
- Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision making

Knowledge:
- Stakeholders' knowledge of the problem situation
- EP's knowledge
  - psychological knowledge of SEN and interventions
  - knowledge of statutory processes
  - knowledge gained through prior involvement with the child.

Tools

Subject → Object → Outcome

Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person

Rules   Community   Division of labour

As discussed in Section 4.4.1.1.1, a fundamental assumption of consultation proposed by Wagner (2000) is that the EP works collaboratively with the class teacher (or other change agent) in order to "explore a concern, the patterns and sequences around a particular punctuation of a concern and the perceptions, beliefs and ideas that inform a concern" (Wagner, 2000, p. 14). Underlying this approach is the hypothesis that the person who had the concern has in some way restricted their view of the things that might make a difference, hence the need for consultation in order to open up possibilities and options for change (Wagner, 2000). The tools used by the EPs, in particular their 'skills and strategies', are intended to facilitate this process of exploration.

However, as identified by the EPs in this research, gaining access to the class teacher was not always easy, or indeed possible. School organisational factors, such as the restricted capacity for teachers to be released from class and the limited time available in the school day, were cited as possible reasons for the EPs' difficulty gaining access to these important change agents. This resulted in the one EP reflecting: "we all purport to do consultations in schools, but most of my consultations are with the SENCOs".

The SEND Code of Practice (2015) defines the role of the SENCo as including: co-ordinating provision for children with SEN; advising on the graduated approach to providing SEN support; liaising with parents; liaising with professionals; and being a key point of contact with external agencies. The emphasis on the role of the SENCo as the key point of contact with external agencies, coupled with the limited capacity

within school systems to release teachers from their teaching duties, has positioned the SENCo as a mediator between the EP and the class teacher. The findings of this research suggest that previous conceptualisations of EP consultation as a model of indirect service delivery, such as that proposed by Conoley and Conoley (1990) (Fig 2.1), may require adaptation to include the important mediating role of the SENCo within current school systems, in which access to class teachers is impeded by the limited availability of time and the lack of capacity to release them from the classroom. An adapted conceptualisation of EP consultation practice is presented in Fig 5.2

Fig 5.2 A model of EP consultation service delivery, based on the current research.
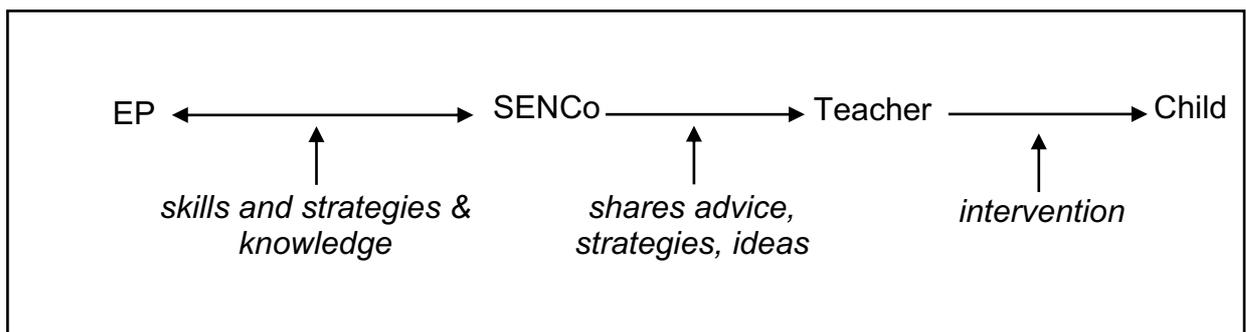
Fig 5.2 shows the EP consulting with the SENCo who subsequently shares advice, strategies and ideas with the teacher. Within this model, the EP's consultative skills, strategies and knowledge (i.e. their tools) are used with the SENCo, who is most likely not the primary problem holder. This means that the teacher is not given the opportunity to engage in a psychological process of exploring their perceptions of a situation and they therefore cannot engage in a paradigm shift to an interactionist and systemic viewpoint. This raises concerns about the likelihood of the class teachers understanding and implementing agreed actions or interventions. A key implication for EP consultation practice moving forwards is the consideration of the effectiveness of

consultation when the model shown in Fig 5.2 is employed. Future research should explore consultation outcomes for children and young people when the EP has consulted through a 'mediator' (i.e. the SENCo) rather than the 'change agent' (i.e. the class teacher).

Gillies (2000, p.33) identifies five ingredients for effective consultation, one of which is "understanding of consultation by the consultee". Gillies (2000, p. 33) stresses the importance of pre-entry and entry phases of EP consultation, describing these as crucial in "setting the scene". This is supported by Turner, Robbins and Doran (1996) who argue that a clear exposition of consultation is required in order for school staff to understand the EP's role. In analysing the tools used by the EPs within their consultations, none of the EPs made reference to explaining or describing the consultation process or its purpose. A further implication for practice, therefore, is concerned with being more transparent and explicit with school staff about what consultation is, how consultation is enacted, who consultation most benefits, and why. Alongside the limited time and capacity within the school system to release teachers, a lack of understanding by school staff regarding the underpinning psychological principles of consultation could be a contributing factor the EPs' limited access to the agents to change.

Lastly, Turner, Robbins and Doran (1996) suggest that there should be clarity about consulting with the SENCo about a third party's problem. In the current context of austerity where staff numbers in school have depleted and teachers are suffering immense workloads, it may become common practice that EPs will work through the

SENCo rather than engage directly with the problem holders themselves. This raises an important implication for EPs regarding how they will ensure that their SENCos effectively mediate the process of sharing advice and strategies with class teachers. Future work of the EP may involve training SENCos in consultation skills so that they can engage in consultative conversations with staff within their own schools, following consultation with an EP. In line with the key activity theory premise of historicity, it is interesting to reflect on how dynamics have changed over time. Before the turn of the millennium, EPs were perceived as inaccessible by teachers and as detached from the life of classrooms (Wagner, 2016). It seems that now, EPs are more available through the medium of consultation, but teachers are unable to get out of their classrooms to engage in the process.

5.2.2 Contradiction surfacing between the rules and object

A further contradiction surfaced between the rules ('SEN policy and legislation') and the EPs' object ('find out information about the problem', 'develop a shared understanding of the problem situation'). Fig 5.3 presents the contradiction on the activity system, represented by a broken arrow.

The EPs reported that their main goals of consultations were to find out information about the problem and develop shared understanding of it. However, some EPs felt that their consultees were working towards a different object, specifically gathering evidence to apply for statutory assessment. As described under the division of labour node of the activity system (Chapter 4, Section 4.4.2.2), this meant that the EPs felt pushed into a gatekeeper role.

Fig 5.3 Contradiction between the rules and object.
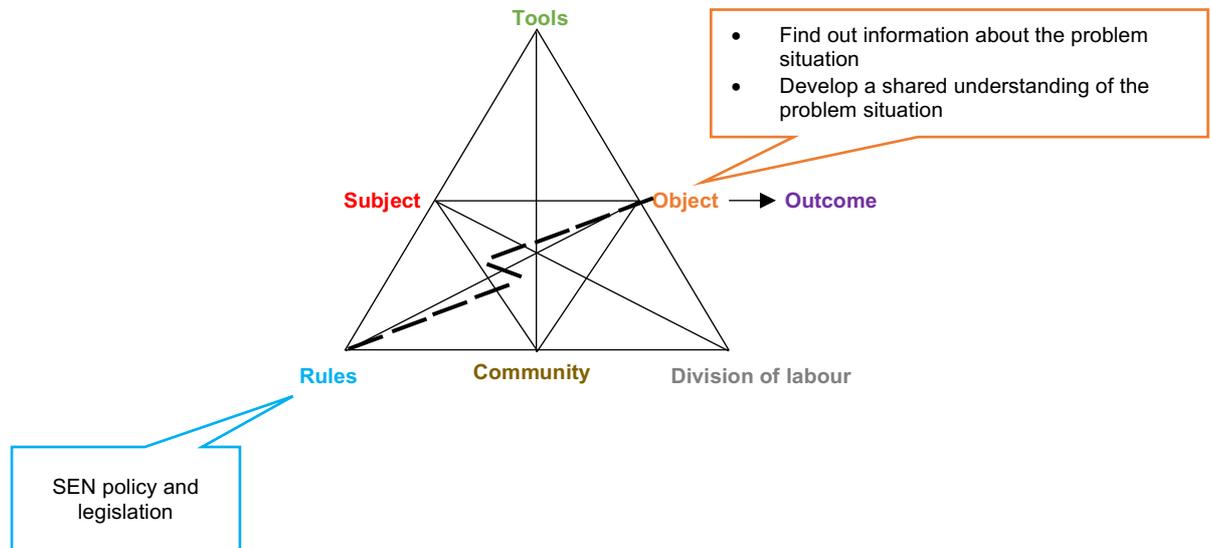
The current social and cultural climate in which EPs and schools are situated is one of austerity. As evidenced by the findings of the research, the EPs were engaging in conversations which were driven towards enabling schools to ascertain resources and money through the mechanism of EHCPs. School staff positioned the EPs as the gatekeepers to this process, as evidenced by them seeking advice on whether alternative provisions would be appropriate, asking the EPs to outline statutory assessment processes to parents, and directly asking EPs whether statutory assessment would be possible.

Activity theory is concerned with the concept of historicity and how activity develops over time. In Section 2.2, a brief historical timeline was presented, suggesting how and why consultation became a mode of service delivery for EPs. Before the turn of the millennium, EPs were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with their work. As described by Leadbetter (2002), they were struggling to cope with the escalating number of

referrals for statutory assessment which had a direct effect on the amount of preventative or systemic work they could do in schools. Consultation was therefore introduced as a way of emphasising early intervention and preventative, systemic work.

In considering the findings of this research almost twenty years later, pressures for statutory assessment are still apparent and, as evidenced by the findings of this research, these conversations are now mediated through the medium of EP consultation. As shown by the findings in the object, outcome and tools nodes of the activity system, the EPs are still showing fidelity to consultation models, but it appears that their consultees may have a different agenda. This again raises an important question regarding how far schools understand the purpose and principles underpinning EP consultation. There may be a contradiction between consultees' outcome-driven expectations of consultation (i.e. EP reports, tangible evidence to support the graduated response etc.) and the EPs' interest in engaging in a process of consultation in order to reframe perspectives and develop shared understandings with the consultee, suggesting again that EPs need to be clear about their role in the consultation process. As stated by Wagner (2000), "when EPs clarify what is appropriate to their role in the system, and work out ways of explaining it clearly to a range of role partners, they increase the engagement and contribution of those partners."

It seems that austerity alongside SEN policy and legislation, in which money and resources can be accessed through mechanisms such as EHCPs, may have altered

the function of EP consultation, from the perspective of schools. This is an important area which requires further research and exploration. This research is based on only six consultation examples from one EPS. Therefore, a much wider exploration is required in order to ascertain how far EPs consider that their consultation work is genuinely directed towards providing preventative work and early intervention, as was originally intended, and how far they are being used as gatekeepers within a reactive and process-driven system.

5.2.3 Contradiction surfacing between the rules and the outcome

A third contradiction surfaced between the rules ('power dynamics') and the outcomes of EP consultation ('plan practical next steps', 'improve the situation for the child'). Fig 5.4 presents the contradiction on the activity system, represented by a broken arrow.

Fig 5.4 Contradiction between the rules and outcome.
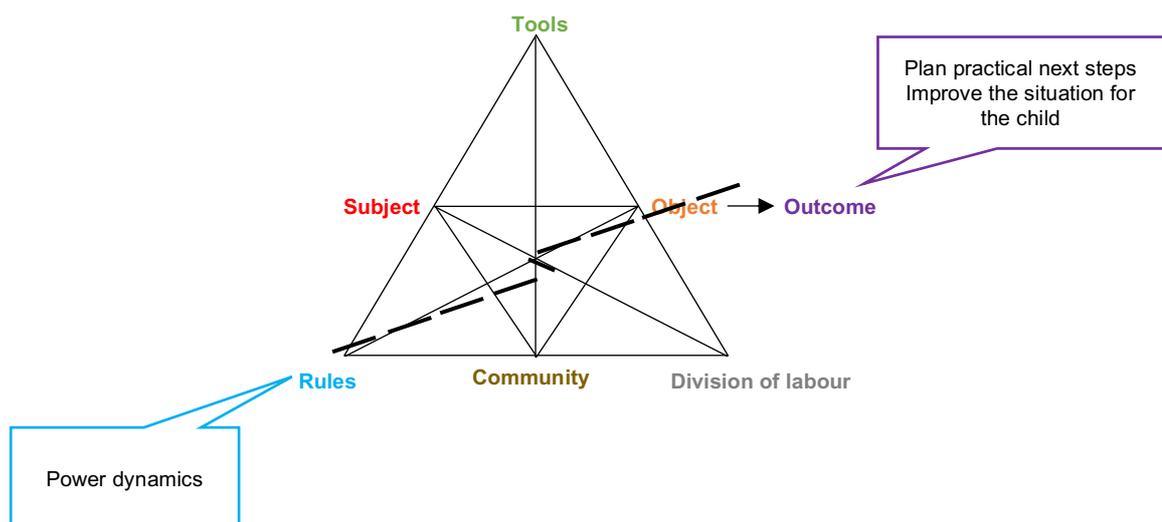
As described in Section 4.4.1.1.2, some EPs reported that the SENCos lacked authority and autonomy within their schools and there was a sense that they were often micro-managed by school senior leaderships teams. This meant that EPs were consulting with staff members who had little power to make changes within the school system. As noted by some EPs, their relationships with senior leaders within the school system facilitated their work and enabled them to make positive changes for the child(ren) about whom they were consulting. The implications for EP practice are clear. The EPs who invested time in building relationships with those who hold powerful positions in school were more likely to effect change at a higher level. EPs, therefore, have an important role to play in supporting their SENCos and empowering them within their school systems through building positive and effective relationships with senior leaders.

5.3 Applying the findings – implications for my own practice

I embarked on my research journey almost three years ago in an effort to find out more about the practice of EP consultation. My personal motivation for this research was to use the knowledge I would gain to inform my own professional practice, in turn developing my confidence and competence as a trainee educational psychologist.

A key implication for my own professional practice has stemmed from the findings which surfaced at the tools node of the activity system. The dearth of published literature into the specific practice procedures engaged in by EPs during consultation left me feeling underprepared and very daunted by the prospect of leading a consultation meeting. However, by conducting an in-depth exploration of the tools used

by EPs within their consultations, I have identified a comprehensive list of specific skills and strategies employed by EPs in their work. Consequently, this list has become a key mediating artefact supporting my own consultation practice, which I draw upon very deliberately when I engage in the activity of consultation. At this early stage of my career, my research has helped me to find out about, understand and begin to acquire the key skills and strategies used by EPs in consultation, therefore developing my confidence as a consultant. Conducting this research has enabled me to move from a personal position of 'conscious incompetence' (being very aware that I did not know how to carry out a consultation) to 'conscious competence' (having an awareness of the skills and strategies required, and applying these with careful consideration and conscious effort) (Howell, 1982). As I become more experienced, I will move into the 'unconscious competence' stage, whereby my knowledge of specific consultation processes will become a natural and embedded part of my consultation practice.

Secondly, the analysis of the contradictions in Sections 5.2.1-5.2.3 surfaced a common implication for EP practice: to develop the understanding of school staff, particularly those in senior leadership positions, regarding the psychological principles underpinning EP consultation. It has been suggested that being more transparent and explicit with school staff about EP consultation will facilitate access to important change agents and promote school staff's understanding of the purpose of consultation, from the perspectives of EPs. As such, within my own practice, I have engaged in a meeting with each of the senior leadership teams in the schools for which I am the visiting EP. Within these meetings, as recommended by Turner, Robbins and Dornan (1996), I have provided an exposition of consultation using the model conceptualised in Fig

4.11. Presenting EP consultation as an activity system enabled me to talk about the objects and outcomes of EP consultation with school staff, describe the role of the EP and the tools they use, and explore potential supporting and constraining school system factors. In all cases, these meetings were received positively and they facilitated a reflective conversation between senior leaders regarding how to ameliorate constraining factors relevant to their school system. I plan to revisit these conversations on a regular basis with senior staff members to enable an ongoing dialogue about the psychological principles of consultation and therefore try to ensure the best conditions for this key aspect of my work to take place.

5.4 Further implications for practice

One of the aims of this research was to make the construct of EP consultation much clearer for trainee EPs, and qualified EPs, by developing Leadbetter's (2006) conceptualisation of EP consultation as an activity system, adding detail and contextually relevant information. This model is presented in Fig 4.11. This model could be used as a teaching tool on Educational Psychology training courses in order to introduce the concept of EP consultation. The model provides a practical resource through which to explore the different elements of the activity of consultation. This will give trainee EPs a much fuller understanding of the practice procedures (i.e. the tools) used by EPs in consultation as well as facilitate discussion and reflection about the factors that are likely to support or constrain their work (rules) within schools.

Moreover, not only would this model be useful in a training context, it may also have a place in the supervision of EPs. One EP (Louise) commented on the way in which

Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system helped her to make her tacit knowledge explicit. Guiding EPs through the nodes of the activity system within this research facilitated the generation of rich data during which the EPs were highly reflective of their own practice. Future research could explore the use of activity theory as a reflective tool used to evaluate individual consultation practice.

5.5 Limitations and future research

There are a number of limitations to consider in relation to this research. The first, and perhaps most obvious limitation, pertains to the number and nature of the research participants. Due to the scope of this research project, only six EPs were interviewed, each of whom only spoke about one consultation example from their professional practice. The research, therefore, was conducted on a very small scale. Moreover, of the six EPs who took part, only one had ever worked outside of XXX EPS as a qualified EP. This means that the data generated is extremely insular and only represents the practice of some EPs in one EPS. Future research could explore consultation practice across EPSs in order to generate a much wider data set that is not tied up in the practice procedures of one Local Authority.

Secondly, central to how the research findings have been viewed is the position of the researcher. At the time of the research, I was a colleague of the EPs and had been on placement in XXX EPS for one academic year. In relation to the first limitation, my consultation practice had been shaped by my experience in XXX EPS through my shadowing experiences of various EPs, my own professional practice supervision with an EP from XXX EPS, and conversations with various EPs in the service about the

process of consultation. My placement experience, alongside my reading of the research literature, affected the lenses through which I viewed the data. Other researchers may have discussed the findings differently and come to different conclusions. However, I attempted to address this through high levels of reflexivity in the form of a research journal, regular supervision with my university supervisor, and utilising a process of investigator triangulation by asking a colleague on my training course to cross check the codes to themes of the initial data.

Thirdly, due to this research being concerned with gathering the perspectives of EPs regarding what they do in consultation, the perspectives of the consultees were not explored. However, many of the findings of this research, particularly those found at the 'rules' node of the activity system which consequently formed key contradictions, pertain to what the EPs thought the perspectives, motives, feelings and views of their consultees were. The consultees' voices were not enabled through this research and they therefore have not been able to validate or refute the EPs' views. Future research could use a similar design but explore consultation from two subject positions – that of the EP and the consultee.

Fourthly, the analysis of the data was completed by the researcher. However, activity theory offers opportunities to reflect data back to participants through the use of Developmental Work Research (Engeström, 2007). This facilitates a process of interrogation of the data from the perspective of those who took part and the results can be used to enable changes in practices. Unfortunately, this was not possible within the scope of the current research. However, engaging in this process would have

significantly enhanced the research process and offered outcomes as contributions to organisational change and learning. In order to try to overcome this, the data was reflected back to individual participants during and after the individual interviews in order to check that they felt their perspectives had been accurately construed. In addition, the researcher utilised a process of investigator triangulation to check the codes to themes of the initial data, therefore offering a further cycle of reflection.

5.6 Concluding comments

In conclusion, this research has used second generation activity theory (Engeström, 1987) to explore the activity of EP consultation. The findings have shown what EPs perceive the object and outcomes of consultation to be, and the tools which they use to achieve these. The objects, outcomes and tools reported by the EPs align with conceptual models of consultation presented within the literature. This research has also explored key supporting and impeding factors to the process of EP consultation by considering consultation as a social phenomenon which exists within the constraints of wider social, cultural and organisational systems. Contradictions were surfaced in order to identify implications for practice.

The motivation to carry out this substantial piece of research arose from my interest in the professional practice of EP consultation. Having joined the EP profession three years ago from a teaching background, I endeavoured to find out more about the unique contribution of an educational psychologist. This led me to consider the phenomenon of consultation, which appeared to be an EP's unique selling point. Searches of the research literature, however, left me feeling confused about the actual

practice of EP consultation due to the overarching focus on conceptualised models and theoretical frameworks, and a lack of knowledge regarding what EPs actually do in their day-to-day practice.

This research, therefore, sought to demystify the professional practice of EP consultation by gaining the perspectives of EPs regarding what it is they actually do when they 'do' consultation. I endeavoured to develop Leadbetter's (2006) existing conceptual model, adding contextually relevant detail regarding the goals and purposes of consultation, the tools which are used, the rules at play, and the roles which EPs assume, with the aim of providing a useful and practical tool which could be drawn upon by trainee EPs, or indeed those who have already qualified, to make sense of the phenomenon of consultation.

Using activity theory as a thread running through the whole of my research has challenged and extended my thinking. Activity theory was drawn upon throughout my reading of the literature in Chapter 2 in order to consider the historicity of EP consultation as an activity which has taken shape over time. It was also used as a lens through which to critically consider existing research into consultation in the UK. In Chapter 3, Engeström's (1987) second generation activity system was used to structure my data collection within the interviews with the EPs. In Chapter 4, the data were analysed according to the nodes of the activity systems and, in Chapter 5, the key concept of contradictions was drawn upon to suggest implications for EP practice. Engeström's (1987) second generation activity theory model, therefore, served as a descriptive framework and an analytic device. This research has shown the potential

use of activity theory in the realm of educational psychology practice in order to describe, analyse and evaluate consultation practice.

It is hoped that at a pragmatic level, this research has offered opportunities for professional reflection, but also practical suggestions in response to the research findings that can enhance the future activity of EPs when working consultatively in schools.

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Appendix 1 Participant information sheet

What is the research about?
Consultation has become a key means of service delivery in many psychological services. However, the existing research around the process of EP consultation is limited. Literature has largely focused on the theoretical underpinnings of psychological consultation, leading to the presentation of consultation as an abstract phenomenon. This research aims to shed light on what it is that EPs actually do when they are engaging in consultation, and to gain an understanding of factors which either facilitate or act as barriers to EP consultation practice. Through the analysis of the tensions currently present within the activity of EP consultation, it is hoped that possible solutions can be drawn out which will improve consultation practice, and therefore, service delivery.

What will taking part involve?
Participation is voluntary. If you would like to take part in this research, you will be asked to engage in an individual interview, lasting between 1 and 1 ½ hours. During the interview, you will be asked to talk about one 'real-life' example of using consultation, which is typical of your practice. You do not need to bring any physical documents relating to each consultation with you, although you can if you would find this useful as an aide-memoire. You will be asked to use pseudonyms if referring to specific people or places during our discussions.

What will happen to the data collected during the interview?
The interview will be audio recorded on a dictaphone and written notes will be made. Immediately after the interview, the audio recording and written notes will be transferred to a password protected and encrypted memory stick. The audio recording will then be deleted from the dictaphone and the written notes will be shredded. The encrypted memory stick will be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Only the researcher will have access to this data.

What if I change my mind?
You can withdraw from this research, without explanation, at any time before or during the interview. You can also request that your data to be withdrawn up to two weeks after your interview, again without explanation. Prior to taking part, you will be provided with the researcher's name, address, email and telephone number, as well as the contact details of the researcher's supervisor, should you wish to withdraw.

What will the data collected during the interview be used for?
The findings from this research will be written up and published as a doctoral thesis for the award of Applied Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Birmingham. Neither individual participants nor the Local Authority in which they work will be named within this work. A summary of the findings will also be shared with you and the Educational Psychology Service. Again, all findings will be anonymised.

What if I have questions or require more information?
If you have any questions or would like to discuss this research further, please do not hesitate to contact either myself or my research supervisor. Details can be found below.

If I would like to take part, what do I do?
If you would like to take part in this research, please send me an email by [insert date]. Upon receipt of your email, I will liaise with you to arrange a suitable date, time and location for the interview to take place.

Thank you for your time and consideration,
Kathryn O'Shea
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Researcher:	Kathryn O'Shea		*Supervisor:*	Dr Jane Leadbetter
Address:	XXX EPS		*Address:*	School of Education
Tel:	xxxxxxxxxxx		*Tel*:	xxxxxxxxxxx
Email:	xxxxxxxxxxx		*Email*:	xxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix 2 Informed written consent form

<u>Consent form: Individual interview</u>

Title of project: An exploration of educational psychologists' use of consultation using socio-cultural activity theory.

Researcher: Kathryn O'Shea
                 xxxxxxxxxxx
                 xxxxxxxxxxx

This research is part of my doctoral studies at The University of Birmingham.

Purpose of the study:
- To explore what educational psychologists do during consultation and seek to understand what factors facilitate consultation and what factors act as barriers.

	Please tick
I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of the research.	☐
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have received satisfactory answers to any questions I have asked.	☐
I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation or data from the semi-structured interview at any time up to two weeks after my interview, without explanation, by contacting the researcher via phone/email/letter/in person	☐
I agree to my semi-structured interview being audio-recorded and give my permission for the recording to be used for transcription, analysis and as part of the researcher's doctoral studies at The University of Birmingham.	☐
I agree to take part in this study.	☐

Signed: _____

Name: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 3 Debrief statement

<u>Debrief statement</u>

Project title: An exploration of educational psychologists' use of consultation using socio-cultural activity theory.

Researcher: Kathryn O'Shea
Supervisor: Dr Jane Leadbetter

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research study. The purpose of this statement is to remind you about what will happen next, now that you have completed your interview.

1) Your interview data will be transferred onto a password protected, encrypted laptop which will be stored in a locked filing cabinet that only the researcher has access to.

2) Your data will be saved according to a unique ID number to ensure confidentiality.

3) In two weeks, on [insert date here], the researcher will begin to analyse your interview data and the results will be used as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis at The University of Birmingham.

4) In line with the university's ethical guidelines, your data will be kept for ten years on a password protected, encrypted memory stick (stored in a locked filing cabinet), during which time the researcher, supervisor and any university examiners may have access to it. After this time, all electronic data will be erased (and removed from any back-up drives).

If you would like to withdraw your data from this study, you can do at any time, without explanation, before [insert date here]. Should you wish to withdraw, you can contact the researcher or the research supervisor using the following details:

Researcher:	Kathryn O'Shea		*Supervisor:*	Dr Jane Leadbetter
Address:	XXX EPS		*Address:*	School of Education
Tel:	xxxxxxxxxxx		*Tel*:	xxxxxxxxxxx
Email:	xxxxxxxxxxx		*Email*:	xxxxxxxxxxx

Once again, thank you for your time in participating in this study,

Kathryn O'Shea

Kathryn O'Shea, Trainee Educational Psychologist

Appendix 4 Explaining activity theory prompt sheet

4. What is being used?
- Activity always involves artefacts (or tools)
- Tools can be concrete/physical e.g. machines, instruments, materials etc.
- Tools can be abstract/psychological e.g. language, knowledge, previous experience etc.

2. What is being worked on?
- Can be physical or conceptual
- Acted on by the subject
- The intention that motivates the activity

3. To achieve what?
- What is the end goal?
- What is hoped to be achieved?

1. From whose perspective are we looking?

Tools

Subject

Object → **Outcome**

Rules

Community

Division of labour

5. What supports or constrains the work?
- Rules which govern the activity
- Can be explicit e.g. set by law, contracts etc.
- Can be implicit e.g. cultural norms, values, embedded practices/routines etc.

6. Who else is involved?

7. How is the work shared?
- How are roles organised and demarcated?
- Who is responsible for what?

Appendix 5 Example of a large activity triangle used within an interview

4. what did you use?
(concrete / abstract)
Tools

1. whose perspective?

Subject

2. what were you working on? (goal / focus)?

Object ⟶ Outcome

3. To achieve what (purpose)?

Rules

5. what supported your work? what constrained your work?

Community

6. who else was involved?

Division of labour

7. How was the work shared? What was your role?

Appendix 6 Example of a completed activity triangle from an interview

- prior assessment (month before)
- collaborative problem solving
- co-constructed formulation was going on
- asking questions → looking from a behavioural perspective. Being specific about whens/whys/hows
- help make the links between information to see how things were related
- voicing my/our formulation
- empathising with staff – all stressed, crying. Recognising emotion. Highlighting +ves, instil a sense that more can be done

- look for difficulties + exceptions
- solution focused Q – when is the problem less of an issue?
- joined the links between learning + difficult behaviour
- looking for his strengths/motivations – what engages him? His interests? Using these to find solutions
- My knowledge of instructional psychology → knowing we were aiming for fluency. Back of my mind (app. 4).
- knowledge of statutory assessment processes

EP

1. Whose perspective?

4. What did you use?
TOOLS

- Renew SEN support plan
- general update, renew targets, set new targets
- help school make sense of a complex, messy case
- bring the pieces of the jigsaw together → why is he having difficulties? how can we support him to make progress?

2. What were you working on?

SUBJECT

OBJECT _____ OUTCOME

5. To achieve what?

- Help YP make progress (academic, communi- cation, behaviour)
- Reduce barriers and difficulties for him
- Give staff hope, felt stuck in a difficult situation
- Didn't really know how it would pan out

RULES
COMMUNITY
DIVISION OF LABOUR

5. What supported your work? What constrained your work?

6. Who else was involved?

7. How was the work shared? What was your role?

- Everyone wanted him to make progress.
- Met parent before. Parent familiar w/ professionals
- quiet → relaxed, contributing, challenging.
- Parent + school working like a team, +ve relationships
- external agency or same wave length
- Good relationship with school, SENCo go above and above, solution focused, take on the new

- SENCo measured, understands processes
- SENCo looked to me + external agency for knowledge base; positioned us as experts, but we know the child least.
- Don't like to position myself as expert only and as knowledge. EP perceived as magic support.

SEN processes (CoP) and local level
alternative provisions isn't the agenda

→ SENCo
– CIT
– TA
– External agency
– EP

EP
collaborating formulation co-constructing empathising questioning expert?

External
knowledge of Cog + learning and associated intervention

SENCo
taking notes

Parent
questioning, challenging, giving info.

Teacher / TA
knowledge of child in school

Appendix 7 Example of partial transcription of an interview, following repeated listening of the audio-recording

TOOLS

- There was that collaborative problem solving, it was almost like a co-constructed formulation was going on
- One of the things I was doing was asking questions.
- When people were contributing things that were part of the formulation in my mind, I would help to make the links – making links between information to see how things were related
- Voicing that formulation that I was developing and they were developing, but doing it together in a way
- Use a behavioural perspective – trying to get people to be specific about the 'whens', the 'whys' and the 'hows'
- Try to look for the circumstances in which that YP might be having difficulties and when there might be exceptions to that when he's not having difficulties
- Solution focused questioning, trying to find when the problem doesn't occur or when it's less of an issue
- Trying to find his interests and what motivates him. Looking for his strengths and using these to find solutions
- Prior to the meeting, about a month before, conducted individual assessment work with this boy and observations. Used the information I had learnt – cognitive strengths and challenges, and also affective/emotional challenges - utilised that to help me make sense of what might be going on.
- I'd already started to formulate myself I was sharing that but also keeping it open to information I'd get in that meeting.
- My knowledge from an instructional psychology perspective as well. Knowing that we were aiming for fluency in terms of his word reading but linking this to his interests.
- Empathising with the staff – they're all stressed. At one point mom was crying, the TA started crying.
- Recognising the emotion in the room, empathising, recognising there are stressors.
- Highlighting the adults' strengths, what they're doing well. Emotional support for staff and for mom.
- Noticing the positives, give them hope.
- Trying to instil in them a sense that there is more than can be done to help this child.
- Knowledge of statutory processes.
- TA's knowledge of the child, external agency's knowledge of interventions and where to go next
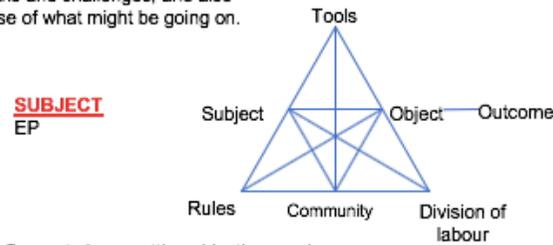
SUBJECT

EP

OBJECT

- Review support plan already in place general update, reviewing targets, setting new targets together
- Help everybody, but particularly the school, make sense of what is quite a complex and messy case, everyone was feeling stuck
- Bring the pieces of the jigsaw together to build a picture of 'why is this YP having these difficulties?',

OUTCOME

- I certainly didn't know how this meeting was going to pan out I went into it and had to go with how everybody was in the room on that day.
- Help the YP make progress in terms of academic, communication and behaviour needs
- 'how can we support him to make progress by reducing those barriers and difficulties he's experiencing'

RULES

- Everybody wanted him to make progress and move forwards in some way
- Met the parent before – mum was familiar with all of the professionals in the room. First time we'd met her she was quiet and anxious. This time she was relaxed, actively involved, questioning, challenging school and professionals
- Felt truly collaborative. Everyone had something to contribute.
- Mum and school staff were working like a team, they had positive relationships – they were reflecting on this.
- External agency person on the same wavelength as me, doesn't try to drive meeting in a different agenda.
- I feel I have a good relationship with the school
- School go over and above
- SENCo is very measured and understands SEN processes
- School is very solution focused and have an holistic view of the child– they look at the bigger picture, the child's wellbeing, recognise we can't just address academic progress if there are other issues that need to be addressed as well
- Got to be mindful of the context in which you're working – all of those things did make me feel able to challenge in the consultation. Have to be flexible and read the situation.

- Support plan – setting objectives and outcomes – gave us the focus of 'what next' and 'how', Gave a set structure which avoided people falling into problem talk
- SEN processes (CoP and at Local level) – alternative provisions 'on the agenda'. Parent doesn't have the full understanding of this.
- EHCP – not a 'magic support' – perceived in this way by parent?
- SENCo new to the role - looks to us for the knowledge base- the 'what' and 'hows'- "what do we do now?", naturally positioning us as the experts, but we know the child least. Coming back to a stuck position – clear the child needed a personalised approach.
- I don't like to position myself as the expert, the only one who brings the knowledge and the answer

COMMUNITY

- School staff – SENCo, CT, TA
- External agency
- Parent

DIVISION OF LABOUR

EP
- collaborative problem solving
- co-constructing
- help make the links between information
- voicing that formulation
- doing it together
- questioning
- conducted individual assessment work
- using my knowledge from an instructional perspective
- empathisisng
- emotional support
- knowledge of statutory processes
- asking questions
- she looks to us for the knowledge base
- naturally positioned as the expert

Parent
- giving information
- trying to problem solve
- asking questions and challenging

External agency
- knowledge of cognition of learning
- knowledge of literacy interventions

Teacher and TA
- knowledge of child in school
- knowledge of child's interests

SENCo
- SENCo taking notes on the support plan
- giving information
- looking to us for the knowledge base

Tools

Subject — Object — Outcome

Rules — Community — Division of labour

Appendix 8(i) Codes – object

Louise
- Review SEN Support Plan already in place, *get a general update*, reviewing targets, setting new targets together
- Help everybody, but particularly the school, *make sense of what is quite a complex and messy case*, everyone was feeling stuck
- *Bring the pieces of the jigsaw together* to build a picture of 'why is this YP having these difficulties?'

Susanne
- *Find out what's going on* first of all, I hardly knew anything about him
- Attempt to *give them an understanding of the situation and what's going on* for that kid.
- *Unpick and understand* why he was behaving like he was.

Object

What did the EPs say was the goal of their consultation meetings?

Julie
- *Answer her questions* - Is the child wrongly placed in this language group? Is there more we should be doing? Is he a special school or language resource base child?

Jane
- Consultation with class teacher
- Just *see what she's dealing with*
- See if there's anything I can help her with
- '*put our heads together*' kind of thing
- I wanted to learn something else about him. I was hearing it all second hand. *I didn't feel I fully understood* what was going on. *Learning more about the context* that she's in. What's he like in the classroom? What's she dealing with? Where does it go wrong?

Rachel
- Lots of *unanswered questions*, no-one *pulling it all together*.
- Multi-agency meeting where we could *work out how things might be affecting each other* - i.e. how medical needs would impact on behaviour and cognition
- How can our *assessments be brought together* to put something in place for the child? How can I *enhance other people's understandings* of different areas?

Caroline
- A review meeting
- *Seeing whether the interventions had been successful*
- To try to help the child's teachers and SENCo *work out how to help her progress* because she wasn't making any progress

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Appendix 8(ii) Codes – outcome

Louise
- I certainly **didn't know how this meeting was going to pan out** I went into it and had to go with how everybody was in the room on that day.
- **Help the YP make progress** in terms of academic, communication and behaviour needs
- how can we support him to make progress by **reducing those barriers and difficulties** he's experiencing

Susanne
- **Rough thinking about what I wanted to achieve**
- Use the consultation as a focus to **think about 'where next' and 'what to do'**
- I always try to have some outcome at the end...**practical outcomes...plan of what to do**
- To **give co-constructed advice** about where we go next
- **Reassure** Jo that what she was doing was valid **and to contain** the SENCo

Julie
- **Calm SENCO down**. Help her to make the best of the decision which had been made above her, without causing her continuing angst.
- **Do what is the best for the child** - get child out of that completely inappropriate group
- This consultation led to a further outcome – we need **to take action** about this child's language

Outcome

What did the EPs say was the overall purpose of their consultation meetings?

Jane
- I wanted to be able to **leave some kind of ideas**
- I **wasn't certain what would come out of it** – it would depend on the teacher's attitude and what was a priority for her, how she understood the problem
- I wanted to somehow **stabilise the situation**
- **Keep the child in school** a bit longer, get to the end of term
- join her for a while, come alongside her I knew **she'd been struggling** with this case for the best part of two terms – **see if there's something I can add to support her** a little bit

Rachel
- to **see where further intervention was needed**...**help school who were feeling lost**. School were **panicked by profound medical needs**; worried about how they manage the situation

Caroline
- To try to help the child's teachers and SENCo work out how **to help her progress** because she wasn't making any progress
- Looking at **adjusting the interventions** so that she could make progress

Appendix 8(iii) Codes – tools

Tools
How did the EPs actually facilitate their consultation meetings?

Susanne
- consultee's working knowledge
- consultee talked a lot
- wanting information from the consultee first
- that's what psychologists do [listening]
- listening and processing
- 20-25 mins consultee was information giving
- having a shared common understanding [through language]
- making people feel at ease
- EP hardly knew anything about the child
- tell me where it all started
- finding out what had been going on and when
- wanting clarification
- factual questioning
- summarising
- reflecting back
- having a commentary
- asking particular questions if knowledge was missing
- asking particular questions if I'd not quite got the whole picture
- reflecting on his strengths and uniqueness through exception questions
- questioning to look at the holistic picture
- consciously questioning other services' involvement
- pulling all of the information together and making sense of it
- information-give from the EP about statutory process
- conversation about autism and attachment
- 'I think it's highly unlikely...' [giving an opinion]

Louise
- support plan
- collaborative problem solving
- co-constructing the formulation
- asking questions
- help make the links between the contributed information
- voicing the joint formulation
- using a behavioural perspective
- trying to be specific about the whens, the whys, the hows
- looking for exceptions
- solution focused questioning
- finding out his interests and motivations
- using his strengths to find solutions
- using prior assessment information to make sense of the situation
- sharing my formulation
- keeping my formulation open to change
- my knowledge of instructional psychology
- empathising with the staff
- recognising the emotion in the room
- recognising there are stressors
- highlighting the adults' strengths
- emotional support for staff
- emotional support for the parent
- noticing the positives
- give staff hope
- instil a sense that there is more that can be done
- knowledge of statutory processes
- drawing on the knowledge of other people in the room
- TA's knowledge of the child
- external agency's knowledge of interventions and where to go next

Julie
- clarifying
- good listener
- take on board what teachers say
- come back to crucial points after listening
- get the measure of a situation before I start to intervene
- good at questioning
- example of specific questioning: what is it about this situation that's worrying you?
- solution focused questioning
- empathising with school staff
- sharing the problem and sharing the decision making
- came up with a plan together
- giving an opinion
- validating the staff's concerns
- facilitating discussion around solution generation
- justifiably challenge and question
- empowering staff to find their own solutions
- I have a bank of knowledge about learning

Jane
- Had a lot of information before the consultation (3 meetings about him, met the boy, met parents).
- asking questions to allow elaboration on how he was in the classroom and what led to problems
- asking questions to gain a clearer view of what she'd tried so far, what she was dealing with, where it goes wrong
- asking questions to gain a clearer view
- zooming in on the problem
- seeking clarity
- thinking about the problem in detail (whats, whens, hows)
- had ideas in mind
- donating advice
- listened carefully
- introducing ideas cautiously
- drew on tools I've used in the past
- trusting dialogue
- join her for a while, come alongside her

Rachel
- prior assessment of the child but didn't offer too much
- interactive factors framework
- IFF as a tool to make links across professionals
- clarification questions
- questions to draw out more information
- 'what' questions to avoid speculation/be factual
- asking relevant questions
- join up the links

Caroline
- take a backwards seat
- wanting the teacher to come up with ideas herself
- a shared process
- checking written actions with the consultee
- reflecting comments back
- picking up on points other people have made
- wondering out loud
- acting a bit dumb
- asking for clarification
- reiterate that they are the experts my role is a facilitator
- help them feel capable and confident
- help them feel able to affect change
- "Ah it's really complex isn't it...I'm not sure" to try and leave space
- trying to leave space
- bring out class teacher's good practice
- share theoretical understanding
- summarise and paraphrase
- labelling to deepen understanding
- putting the onus on the teacher to think of ideas
- supporting the class teacher from the bottom [rather than top down]
- questioning (frequency, intensity, duration, onset) for facts
- going to back to a point where there's misunderstanding
- testing and challenging viewpoints/perceptions
- using a methodological approach to look in detail
- make sense of the consultation through summarising
- wont meet criteria for EHCP

Appendix 8(iv) Codes – rules

Rules
What factors did the EPs say constrained their work?
What factors did the EPs say supported their work?

Louise
- everyone shared the same outcome
- parent was familiar with the professionals
- everyone had something to contribute
- parent and school staff had positive relationships
- external agencies working together
- EP's good relationship with the school
- school go over and above
- not a school who jumps to EHCP
- SENCo is very measured
- SENCo understands SEN processes
- school is solution focused
- school has an holistic view of the child
- EP reading the situation and adapting practice
- Support plan provided a set structure
- Structure avoids people falling into problem talk
- alternative provisions 'on the agenda'
- parent does not have a full understanding of SEN processes
- EHCP being perceived as a 'magic support' by parent
- SENCo positioning EP and advisory teacher as experts (DoL)
- EP not wanting to position themselves as the expert (DoL)

Susanne
- trusting relationships with school staff
- known the staff over time [13 years]
- staff felt comfortable
- speaking to the right person
- SENCos aren't the people who know the child the best
- good ethos in school
- skilled pastoral support staff
- proactive staff
- no 'magic wand' expectations
- school takes things on board
- EP knowledge of statutory processes
- EP's confidence in assessment of need
- EP's knowledge of conditions/needs
- luxury of time
- consultee having time to talk
- EP's confidence as a practitioner
- other professional recommending EHCP

Julie
- staff trust me so they take advice
- SENCo unable to tell SMT they'd made a wrong decision
- known the staff for 15 years so advice is taken
- it helps when the HT knows you
- school expecting you to do something (DoL)
- SMT make top down decisions
- SENCo feels she is not listened to
- SENCO worries about everything
- if the SENCo felt she was listened to more she wouldn't need to use me in the way she does (i.e. informing SMT of her opinion)

Jane
- School invests/works hard with their kids
- Class teacher keen and committed to the child
- Had a contextual overview of the situation made me feel more confident
- Just EP and CT – made it simple, created space
- personal professional mentoring relationship with the teacher
- private space to go to
- school are expecting to receive special advice/tell them what to do (DoL)
- class teacher hadn't been involved in previous consultations
- intervention tools provided structure and a process

Rachel
- Psychological framework as a facilitator to make links across professionals
- school unaware of what was happening outside of school
- multi-disciplinary turnout
- good relationship with the school and SEN team
- good relationship with other professionals
- School/SEN team open minded
- School open to putting in support
- People were enthused by the approach
- Collaborative approach
- School gives a lot of time to these meetings
- autonomy as an EP not managed in a top down way
- managers are supportive our judgement is respected
- SMT micro manage [top down]
- EHCP at the top of SMT's thoughts
- SMT's agenda evident in SEN team's approach
- HT steering SEN team
- professionals unaware of other funding streams so look to EHCP
- SENCo not very autonomous
- HT and DHT are watching things
- HT views EP's role as a bit of rubber stamping (DoL)
- undertone that it's the EP who makes the challenges
- class teacher was not there
- CTs not generally involved with SEN
- undertone in the multi-agency team that it's the EP that makes the challenges

Caroline
- SENCo not hung up on receiving EP reports
- SENCo values new approaches
- SENCo is open minded
- EP and SENCo get on really well
- consulting with the person who is directly involved in the change process [i.e. the teacher]
- I hate it when the class teachers aren't there
- a room was available
- started on time
- SENCo pre-prepared a progress report so this discussion didn't need to happen
- working in a consultation led service
- very confident as a practitioner
- service managers trust in our work which instils confidence
- service perspective – not expected to be the expert (DoL)
- had the school for a number of years/know the school
- like one of them, not an outsider
- school's outcome [EHCP] differed to EPs
- stringent about how they teach and it doesn't match the child
- teacher unable to effect change at a high level
- school's perception of EP role [do they see us as facilitators?] (DoL)
- never met the head teacher therefore change at a higher level is not possible
- EP seen as bridge to EHCP

Appendix 8(v) Codes – community

Susanne
- Learning mentor
- EP

Wider community
- SENCo
- Pastoral team
- Parents
- Deputy Head teacher
- Behaviour support team
- Psychotherapist

Louise
- SENCo,
- Class teacher
- Teaching assistant
- External agency
- Parent
- EP

Julie
- SENCo
- EP

Wider community
- Senior management team
- Speech and language therapist
- SEN Teaching assistant

Jane
- Class teacher
- EP

Wider community
- External agency (autism)
- External agency (behaviour support)
- External agency (exclusions)
- Head teacher
- two deputy head teachers,
- SENCO
- mother and step father
- step grandparents

Community
Who else was there?

Rachel
- Paediatrician
- Parent (mother)
- School nurse
- External agency (learning)
- External agency (physical needs)
- SENCO
- Assistant SENCO
- Head teacher
- EP

Caroline
- SENCO
- Class teacher
- External agency
- EP

Wider community
School SMT

Appendix 8(vi) Codes – division of labour

Louise
collaborative problem solving
co-constructing
help make the links between information
voicing that formulation
doing it together
questioning
conducted individual assessment work
using my knowledge from an instructional perspective
empathisisng
emotional support
knowledge of statutory processes
asking questions
she looks to us for the knowledge base
naturally positioned as the expert

Susanne
pen and paper
I wanted clarification
summarise at particular points
information give from me about statutory processes
(autism): answered school's questions
offered containment
pulling everything together
shared a strong hypothesis
having a shared common understanding
listening and processing
factual questioning...look at holistic picture

Julie
copious notes
can I just clarify?
sharing the problem and decision making
justifiably challenge
validating concerns
giving opinion: "he's wrongly placed"
questioning
very good listener
the EP is going to do something
get my point to the SMT

Division of labour
What role(s) did the EPs assume
within their consultation meetings?

Jane
getting more clarity
donating advice
listened quite carefully
asked her questions

Rachel
join up the links
avoid speculation
EP who makes the challenges
asking relevant questions
clarification questions
rubber stamping
get Rachel to question it

Caroline
consultation note pad create it there
shared process – checking actions
ask for clarification
facilitator
help them feel capable...competent...able to effect change
give an understanding so the theoretical
summarise and paraphrase
labelling...deepen understanding
supporting her from the bottom
challenging that viewpoint
make sense
questioning
seen as bridge to EHCP

Appendix 9(i) Themes – object

Object
What did the EPs say was the goal of their consultation meetings?

CODES ——→ THEMES

Find out information about the problem

Develop a shared understanding of the problem situation

find out what's going on
get a general update
seeing whether interventions had been successful
learn more about the context
I didn't fully understand
unanswered questions
see what she's dealing with

given them an understanding
enhance other people's understandings
help everybody make sense of complex case
work out how things might be affecting each other
unpick and understand
bring the pieces of the jigsaw together
pulling it all together
put our heads together
assessments brought together

Appendix 9(ii) Themes – outcome

Outcome

What did the EPs say was the overall purpose of their consultation meetings?

THEMES ⟶ CODES

Plan practical next steps

adjusting interventions

see where further intervention was needed

think about where next and what to do

take action

practical outcomes...plan of what to do

leave ideas

give co-constructed advice

Improve the situation for the child

keep the child in school

help young person make progress

do what is best for the child

help her progress

reduce barriers and difficulties

stabilise the situation

Provide emotional support and containment

calm SENCo down

reassure and contain

help school who were feeling lost, panicked, worried

support her

she'd been struggling

Uncertainty about the outcome of the consultation

rough thinking about what I wanted to achieve

wasn't sure what would come out of it

didn't know how the meeting would pan out

Appendix 9(iii) Themes – tools(1)

Tools

How did the EPs actually facilitate their consultation meetings?

SUPERORDINATE THEME

Skills and strategies

THEMES

| Actively listening and assuming a not-knowing stance | Recognising emotion, demonstrating empathy and providing emotional support | Problem exploration: questioning, clarifying, challenging | Looking for strengths, solutions and exceptions | Summarising, linking information together and collaborative decision making |

SUB THEMES

| Listening | Assuming a not-knowing stance | Empathic communication | Emotional support | Recognising emotion | Questioning | Clarifying | Challenging viewpoints | Focus on strengths | Looking for solutions | Looking for exceptions | Summarising | Explicitly linking information together | Collaborative decision making |

CODES

Listening
- listening and processing
- listened carefully
- that's what psychologists do [listening]
- good listener
- come back to crucial points after listening
- I take on board what teachers say
- get the measure of a situation before I start to intervene
- 20-25 mins consultee was information giving
- I wanted information from the consultee first
- tell me where it all started

Assuming a not-knowing stance
- I hardly knew anything about the child
- took a backwards seat
- acted a bit dumb
- didn't offer too much [assessment info]
- "Ah it's really complex isn't it...I'm not sure" to try and leave space

Empathic communication
- empathising with the staff
- empathising with school staff
- recognising there are stressors
- recognising there are stressors
- emotional support for staff and parent
- validating the staff's concerns
- join her for a while come alongside her
- making people feel at ease

Emotional support
- instill a sense that there is more that can be done
- give staff hope
- help staff feel capable and confident
- help staff feel able to effect change
- trusting dialogue
- join her for a while come alongside her
- supporting the CT from the bottom

Recognising emotion
- everyone was feeling stuck
- causing her continuing angst
- school were panicked
- people were feeling lost
- she'd been struggling

Questioning
- factual questioning
- 'what' questions to avoid speculation
- questioning for facts
- questioning for specific information
- trying to be specific about the whens, the whys, the hows
- finding out what had being going on and when
- thinking about the problem in detail (whats, whens, hows)
- what she'd tried so far, where it goes wrong
- asking questions to allow elaboration
- questioning to look a the holistic picture
- asking relevant questions
- asking questions
- good at questioning
- questioning to draw out more information

Clarifying
- clarification questions
- gain a clearer view
- asking for clarification
- wanting clarification
- clarifying
- seeking clarity
- going back to a point where there's misunderstanding
- asking questions if knowledge was missing

Challenging viewpoints
- justifiably challenge and question
- testing and challenging viewpoints/perceptions
- people can be a bit speculative

Focus on strengths
- using his strengths to find solutions
- reflecting on his strengths and uniqueness through exception questions
- finding out his interests and motivations
- highlighting the adults' strengths
- noticing the positives
- bring out the class teacher's good practice

Looking for solutions
- facilitating discussion around solution generation
- solution focused questioning
- solution focused questioning
- using his strengths to find solutions
- empowering staff to find their own solutions
- instill a sense that there is more than can be done

Looking for exceptions
- reflecting on strengths and uniqueness through exception questions
- looking for exceptions
- noticing the positives

Summarising
- make sense of the consultation through summarising
- summarise and paraphrase
- summarising

Explicitly linking information together
- pulling all of the information together and making sense of it
- help make the links between the contributed information
- picking up on points other people have made
- joining up the links
- drawing on the knowledge of other people in the room
- voicing the joint formulation
- sharing my formulation
- co-constructing the formulation
- having a shared common understanding
- IFF as a tool to make links across professionals

Collaborative decision making
- a shared process
- collaborative problem solving
- sharing the problem and sharing the decision making
- came up with a plan together
- checking written actions with the consultee
- keeping my formulation open to change
- introducing ideas cautiously

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Appendix 9(iv) Themes – tools(2)

Appendix 9(v) Themes – rules(1)

Rules

What did the EPs say constrained their work?

Constraints

Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person	Power dynamics	SEN policy and legislation

Gaining access to the "right" person

Senior Management Team (SMT) directives/presence

Lack of autonomy/authority of SENCo and other staff

EP used as spokesperson

Pursuit of EHCP

class teacher was not there

I hate it when the class teachers aren't there

SENCos aren't the people who know the kid best

class teacher hadn't been involved in the previous consultations

SMT micro manage

SMT's agenda evident in the SEN team's approach

HT steering the SEN team

SMT make top down decisions

HT and DHT are watching things

stringent about how they teach

massive inflexibility of the school

SENCo feels she's not listened to

SENCo unable to tell SMT they'd made a wrong decision

SENCo not very autonomous

teacher unable to change school's approach

teacher unable to effect change at a high level

CTs not generally involved with SEN

if the SENCo felt she was listened to more she wouldn't need to use me in the way she does

undertone that it's the EP who makes the challenges

other professional recommending EHCP

EHCP at the top of SMT's thoughts

school's outcome [EHCP] differed to EP's

EP seen as bridge to EHCP

EHCP perceived as magic support

professionals unaware of other funding streams so look to EHCP

alternative provisions 'on the agenda'

Appendix 9(vi) Themes – rules(2)

Appendix 9(vii) Themes – division of labour

Division of labour

What role(s) did the EPs assume within their consultation meetings?

CODES → THEMES

Note taker
- copious notes
- pen and paper
- consultation note pad create it there

Listener
- listener
- listening and processing
- very good listener
- listened quite carefully

Supporter
- empathising
- emotional support
- help them feel capable, competent, able to affect change
- validating concerns
- supporting from the bottom
- offered containment

Summariser
- summarise at particular points
- summarise

Clarifier
- clarification questions
- ask for clarification
- getting more clarity
- can I just clarify?
- I wanted clarification

Collaborative decision maker
- co-constructing
- having a shared common understanding
- doing it together
- collaborative problem solving
- shared process checking actions
- sharing the problem and decision making

Questioner
- factual questioning
- asking relevant questions
- asked her questions
- questioning
- questioning
- asking questions

Sense maker
- look at holistic picture
- join up the links
- make sense
- help make the links between information
- pulling everything together
- shared a strong hypothesis
- voicing that formulation

Challenger
- justifiably challenge
- challenging that viewpoint
- EP who makes the challenges

Holder of expert knowledge
- naturally positioned as the expert
- highly likely there's other reasons why he's presenting like he is
- I will tell you if he's wrongly placed
- donating advice
- give a theoretical understanding
- deepen understanding
- my knowledge from an instructional perspective

Spokesperson
- get my point to the SLT
- get Rachel to question it
- it's the EP who makes the challenges

Gatekeeper
- bridge to EHCP
- rubber stamping
- I will tell you if he's wrongly placed
- there's no chance, he doesn't meet criteria
- knowledge of statutory processes
- information give from me about statutory processes

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Appendix 10 Example of investigator triangulation

	Key discussion points	Changes made as a result of the discussion
Do the themes make sense?	Yes. It was noted that theme heading were clear.	N/A
Does the data support the themes	Yes.	N/A
Am I trying to fit too much into a theme?	We reflected that the opposite was true. I had 24 themes, some of which were very similar. We found that the 24 themes were most probably 'sub themes' which needed to be reviewed again to form 'main themes'	The 24 subthemes were reviewed and reduced to 18 by amalgamating subthemes which overlapped. The 18 subthemes were then organised into 7 main themes.
If themes overlap, are they really separate themes?	XXX identified a number of codes which she could have easily placed under one of two different theme headings ("exploring the problem in detail" and "building a holistic picture"). When looking at the themes together, we reflected that there was a significant overlap across the corresponding codes. This suggested that these were not two separate themes and they could be amalgamated.	"Exploring the problem in detail" and "building a holistic picture" became one theme: "problem exploration"
Are there themes within themes (subthemes)?	Unlikely given that there are so many subthemes which are currently very narrow.	N/A
Are there other themes within the data?	None identified.	N/A