

# A Framework for Developing Educational Psychologists' Consultation Practice

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Consultation is one of the five key functions of educational psychologists' (EPs') practice, and yet the profession's understanding of its practical and psychological complexity has resulted in a lack of clarity and consensus around its definition and application. The current systematic literature review sought to consider how EPs are using consultation within their current practice to support children and young people. Ten papers were included in the final synthesis, following strict inclusion/exclusion criteria and reported using Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines. Papers were assessed for consultation quality, regardless of methodological design, using a consultation analysis framework developed from National Association of School Psychology (NASP) guidelines, with key descriptive and evaluative information reported. The NASP consultation framework provided a clear outline of strengths and weaknesses within current practice and offers a practical and accessible model for supporting consultative EP practice. Implications for practice emerge, alongside a consideration of the limitations of the review and future directions for research.

*Keywords:* educational psychologist, consultation, guidelines, framework, practice

## Introduction

### Five Functions of Educational Psychology Practice

Consultation, alongside assessment, intervention, research and training, completes the five core functions of educational psychology (EP<sup>1</sup>) practice (Fallon et al., 2010; Scottish Executive Education Department, 2002). Indeed, consultation is consistently present on the curriculum for programmes training EPs in both the United Kingdom (UK; British Psychological Society [BPS], 2019) and the United States (US; National Association of School Psychologists [NASP], 2020) and is considered a cornerstone to modern EP practice (BPS, 2019; NASP, 2020). However, despite being defined as a key function of the EP role within much of the EP research, consultation is often poorly defined or not defined at all and is, therefore, an area that warrants further investigation. Specifically, there is no agreed definition of consultation within UK EP practice (Claridge, 2005), although examples include: "a voluntary collaborative non-supervisory approach established to aid the functioning of a system and its inter-related systems" (Wagner, 2000, p. 11) and "an indirect, problem-solving approach whereby school psychologists work with teachers or other caregivers to assist children with either learning or adjustment concerns or both"



(Bramlett & Murphy, 1998, p. 31).

### The History of Consultation

Two countries that have given considerable time to developing consultative practice are the UK and the US. Within the US, school psychologists were using consultation as early as 1925 (Bramlett & Murphy, 1998), which later became viewed as an increasingly viable form of service delivery (Bramlett & Murphy, 1998). This led to the development of a number of conceptual frameworks (cf. Alpert, 1976) aimed explicitly at more effective use of consultation within practice. Within US literature, explicit frameworks are popular and offer an often highly structured consultative experience.

In the UK, consultation's popularity increased during the late 1990s and early 2000s, particularly with the publication of the seminal works of Wagner (1995, 2000), who offered both conceptualisation and process. Wagner's model of consultation provided a creative and flexible solution to a long-held problem within educational psychology — how do we work together with schools in a way that is proactive, rather than is reactive? With a strong basis in psychological theory, including symbolic interactionism, systems thinking and social constructionism, it presented a move away from an "expert", towards a collaborative model of practice. Despite offering a framework to guide consultative practice, it did not

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<sup>1</sup>EP includes both educational psychologists and school psychologists (SP), and the use of "EP" hereafter refers to both as one professional group.

provide prescriptive steps that EPs should follow when working consultatively (Wagner, 2000), leaving the creativity and flexibility of the process within the hands of the practitioner. Other psychologically informed models of consultation include behavioural consultation, process consultation and organisational consultation (see Larney, 2003, for an overview of each).

The drive towards consultation within both the US and UK can be linked to a considered effort to maximise resources (Kennedy et al., 2009). As UK EPs struggle to keep up with growing demand, due to increased amounts of statutory work and proactive preventative work (Hill & Murray, 2019; Lyonette et al., 2019), consultation offers a problem-solving approach that promotes staff development and builds capacity (Kratochwill et al., 2014). Consultation is an indirect method of service delivery and enables practitioners to effect change within the lives of children and young people at a much greater rate than traditional models of assessment and intervention (Guiney et al., 2014). It is now considered an effective way to appropriately address difficulties experienced by children and young people, by working with the adults that support them (Kennedy et al., 2008).

### **Current Consultation Practice in School and Educational Psychology**

Consideration should be given to the difference in EP practice within the UK and US. Within the UK EPs often work with a number of different settings, and in the US EPs frequently work within one educational setting or chain. While, in both the US and UK, consultation is considered one of the most used, valued and preferred services offered by EPs (Kennedy et al., 2009), research findings about its use are mixed. Research in the US is more established and focuses on the effectiveness of consultation as a tool to implement change, rather than on developing a more detailed conceptual understanding of consultation (Kennedy et al., 2009; Kennedy et al., 2008). Additionally, US practice frequently uses prescribed models of practice, such as behavioural consultation (Kennedy et al., 2008), which aims to work with the client to identify individual, environmental variables that the client wants to change, limit or prevent (Larney, 2003). By contrast, published UK research is only just beginning to assess what it means to conduct consultation, explore how consultation is used in current practice and what constitutes consultation (Kennedy et al., 2008). Positively, some non-published theses (Ryan, 2018; Taylor, 2017) are beginning to tentatively offer some insight into contemporary practice.

As technology and society develop so does the range of innovative ways EPs choose to deliver consultation to clients. Tele-consultation, where the client or EP is present via a video link, is one such method that is increasing in popularity (Schultz et al., 2018). Indeed, a method of necessity during the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Association of Educational

Psychologists, 2020). Other methods of consultation include group consultation, which is considered an effective way to reach a wider audience (cf. Farouk, 2004). Regardless of method, research suggests that all models of consultation aim to achieve: change within the system, individual or group; the communication of information and advice; and the use of evidence-based approaches, all within a collaborative relationship that values all participants as equal (Guiney et al., 2014).

Whilst Wagner (2000) described consultation as simple on the surface, such description belies the complexity of its process (Kennedy et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2018). If EPs lack a nuanced understanding of the process of consultation, it will consequently remain difficult to adequately communicate its benefits to schools and service users (Larney, 2003; Wagner, 2000). The complexities of conceptualising consultation might have contributed to a dearth of research considering its use and effectiveness (Kennedy et al., 2009). Nonetheless, in the absence of a comprehensive evidence base, is it possible to ascertain effectiveness and communicate potential benefits to commissioners?

## **Methodology**

### **Rationale and Aims of the Current Review**

The current review aims to investigate how EPs are using consultation within their current practice to support children and young people. The paper aims to provide a contemporary review of literature into individual, face-to-face consultative practice between EPs and school staff by asking: How are EPs demonstrating effective practice in their use of consultation?

### **Search Strategy**

A systematic search of all literature relevant to the research question was conducted within the following databases: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts (ASSIA), the British Education Index (BEI), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), PsycINFO and Web of Science. Additionally, manual searches were completed of all known UK and international EP journals. Literature searches were completed between January and February 2019 and the following search terms were used: *consultation* and *educational psychologist\** or *school psychologist\**. All relevant literature in the years 2009 to 2018 inclusive was searched. To be included, the papers had to meet the following inclusionary criteria: (a) EP professionals only; (b) consultation held between EP and school staff/ parents; (c) written in English; (d) subjected to peer review; (e) empirical (including both qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods); (f) consultation was face-to-face; (g) focus of the research was on EP practice rather than training/syllabi/supervision; and (h) included only individual consultations.

### **Data Classification**

Papers that met the inclusionary criteria were rated for consultation quality using a consultation analysis framework produced in accordance with the guidance for a comprehensive and integrated model of consultation for school psychology services, published by the US National Association of School Psychologists (NASP; 2010). To the authors' knowledge, it provides the only comprehensive guidance on worldwide consultative practice. Within the NASP guidance, "consultation and collaboration" is considered a major area of EP practice and the following six areas are described:

1. Consultation as a problem-solving process as a vehicle for planning, implementation and evaluation;
2. Effective communication of information for diverse audiences (it was felt clarification would be beneficial and as such, "diverse audiences" was considered to include audiences from different ethnic, religious, demographic, chronological backgrounds, alongside other professional backgrounds and education levels);
3. Collaboration across all levels of involvement;
4. Facilitation of communication and collaboration among diverse audiences;
5. Function as "change agents" using skills in communication and collaboration to promote change; and
6. The application of psychological and educational principles.

These six key areas formed the criteria against which the relevant papers were rated. Regardless of methodological design, all papers were rated against the NASP areas, alongside the logging of key descriptive and evaluative information within a study characteristics table (see Table 1).

**Table 1***Study Characteristics*

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Getty and Erchul (2009)	USA	352 SPs	Quantitative	Self-report, questionnaire.	Modified version of The Interpersonal Power Inventory- Consultant Form- Usage (IPI-Form-CT-U).  Seven-point Likert Scale to ascertain the likelihood of using a soft power strategy.	Principal Components Analysis of IPI data. ANOVA analysis of Likert data.	When consulting with a female teacher, Female SPs were significantly more likely to use soft power strategies when consulting with female teachers.  Male consultants were significantly more likely to use expert power strategies.	Developed an enhanced understanding of the application of social power strategies to school consultation.  Research supports the suggestion that male consultants prefer to communicate in a direct style.

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Osborne and Alfano (2011)	UK	Not specified	Mixed methods	Looked at EP consultations with foster carers/adoptive parents. Questionnaires completed afterwards for 101 EP session and 78 sessions for carers/adoptive parents.	Two questionnaires: one for EPs and one for carers/adoptive parents. Comprised of open-ended questions to assess views on consultation and rating questions (seven-point scale) to assess carer/adoptive parent's perception of being able to plan a way forward.	Thematic analysis.	The main areas of need were behaviour management and emotional wellbeing, with many of the enquiries relating to education. EPs provided: practical strategies, general advice, confirmation/reassurance of current strategies, helping carers plan a way forward and gaining further information whilst waiting for other help. Carers/adoptive parents' ratings of concern decreased, and confidence increased following consultation.	Feedback suggests quantifiable changes in carers/adoptive parent's perceptions of their levels of concern and confidence. A range of issues was discussed. Carers/adoptive parents valued the practical help and the emotional support.

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Newman et al. (2014)	USA	20 in service-level SP practitioners and 3 SP interns	Mixed methods	Exploratory study involving a survey on prior consultation experiences before and after training.	Participants completed four iterations of an online survey during the training portion. This also ensured instructional consultation fidelity. Participants took part in a semi-structured focus group.	The survey data were used to indicate fidelity to the model of consultation. Thematic analysis on the transcript of the focus group and open-ended questions from survey.	Perceptions of confidence lower for some stages of the consultation model (e.g., contraction and negotiation). Value in consultation being a specific process in its own right and being explicit with consultees about this.	Instructional Consultation as a model has components that do not fit within pre-existing systems. Highlighted the importance of continued professional development.
Nolan and Moreland (2014)	UK	5 EPs	Qualitative	Consultations between EP/schools were observed, audio-recorded and analysed. Semi-structured interviews with each EP. Follow-up telephone interviews.	Semi-structured interviews.	Discourse Analysis.	The discursive strategies that emerged were: Demonstrating empathy and deep listening; Questioning, wondering and challenging; Focusing and refocusing; Summarising and reformulating, pulling threads together; Suggesting and explaining; Re-stating/revising outcomes and offering follow-up.	The roles of consultation are not equal, despite consultation being viewed as collaborative. EPs facilitate effective communication with the use of empathy and interpersonal warmth.

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Al-khatib and Norris (2015)	UK	Demographic data from the first 150 referrals to an EP led family consultation service 60 clients randomly selected for further analysis	Mixed methods	Self-report questionnaire.	Initial demographic data from 150 clients. Further qualitative data from open-ended survey questions.	Descriptive statistics (e.g., bar charts and tables). Themes from the qualitative data.	Most clients only require 1 meeting and client satisfaction was high. Benefits of consultation listed were: Gaining information; Gaining greater understanding; Improved communication; Identification of strategies.	Family consultation service has the potential to make a contribution to the UK government's strategic aim of improving access and responsiveness to psychological services. EPs need not limit themselves within traditional contexts.

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Davies et al. (2016)	USA	SP Interns	Mixed methods	Schools attended training on recognising and responding to concussions and traumatic brain injury. Consultation was used to follow up and reinforce the knowledge and skills taught in the training.	Modified versions of two unpublished questionnaires: Concussions in the Classroom Questionnaire; Sports Concussion Parent Measures.	Basic descriptive statistics. Basic presentation of surface themes from open-ended questions.	SPs are generally not involved in concussion cases. Following notification of a child's concussion, consultation aimed to provide information and advice, ways to support the child and monitoring of symptoms.	Using following up consultations alongside training improves the school-based services for children who sustain concussions.



Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Noell et al. (2017)	USA	Student–teacher dyads and 3rd and 2nd year SP trainees	Quantitative	Treatment plans were devised for each child within the use of Behavioural consultation and student's outcomes were measured via structured observation. Teachers self-reported.	Semi-structured interviews. Teachers self-reported using the Intervention Rating Profile-15 and Consultant Rating Profile. Structured observation schedules. Daily treatment plan implementation scores.	Main variables were assessed using ANOVAs.	Treatment plan implementation was found to be higher for the Integrated Support condition compared to the Weekly support condition.	Meeting and discussion of implementation does not appear sufficient to ensure treatment implementation. Teachers who received support (consultation) demonstrated an effect size three times larger. Students whose teachers received implementation support (consultation)

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Bahr et al. (2017)	USA	175 SPs	Quantitative	<p>Section 1: A survey that looked at the four main areas of the practice of school psychology principles.</p> <p>Section 2/3: select and rank order their top five preferred professional activities and rate their knowledge on ten main NASP areas.</p>	Questionnaire.	<p>A range of descriptive statistics.</p> <p>Chi-squared, Cramer's V and effect sizes.</p>	<p>Problem-solving consultation was ranked as the most preferred activity.</p> <p>SPs rated themselves in the high range of knowledge about the NASP practice model, with consultation and collaboration ranked as the highest in terms of knowledge.</p>	<p>SPs were most knowledgeable about consultation and collaboration, closely followed by data-based decision-making.</p> <p>Consultation was considered as a strong area of practice.</p>

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018)	Ireland	Child, parent and EP triads	Qualitative	Three case studies.	Semi-structured interviews.	Thematic analysis.	The participants identified aspects of their experience of consultation and three overarching themes were identified: Support; Understanding; Valuing consultation.	Support: Effective use of time and resources. Understanding: clients are not clear on what consultation is and the role of psychologist. Valuing consultation: demand for systemic consultation. Consultation empowered parents and teachers, but the value of consultation is not always recognised by schools.

Author/Date	Country	Sample	Methodology	Research design	Measures	Data analysis	Findings	Conclusion
Eddleston and Atkinson (2018)	UK	12 EPs	Qualitative	Action research. The constructionist model of informed and reasoned action (COMOIRA) and Appreciative Inquiry (AI) were selected for the pilot phase, where EPs were asked to evaluate consultation meetings.	Consultations were evaluated using two professional practice frameworks. Questionnaires. Focus groups.	Descriptive statistics. Thematic analysis.	Lack of consensus among EPs regarding the usefulness of the frameworks. AI was considered as a tool that within consultation captured complexity. COMOIRA was seen as a helpful to the change process and useful to reflective practice.	AI and COMOIRA could offer a way for EPs to bridge the link between theory and practice. The study adds to the research that highlights how services were struggling to find an adequate evaluation instruments to measure the impact of their work.

## Results

The search yielded ten papers. Initially, both the authors rated four randomly selected papers independently and blind from each other. Each paper was rated in a red, amber or green format for each criterion, where red was “no demonstration”, amber was “partial demonstration” and green was “full demonstration” (now shown as white, grey and black, respectively). After comparing ratings for the four selected papers, 91.7 per cent agreement was achieved across the green, amber and red domains. Following a moderation discussion, a final inter-rater reliability score of 100 per cent was obtained. After this moderation, the remaining six papers were classified independently by the first author.

A Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) flowchart (Moher et al., 2009) demonstrates the search process at each stage of the review (see Figure 1). A description of the ten included studies can be found in Table 1.

### Study Characteristics

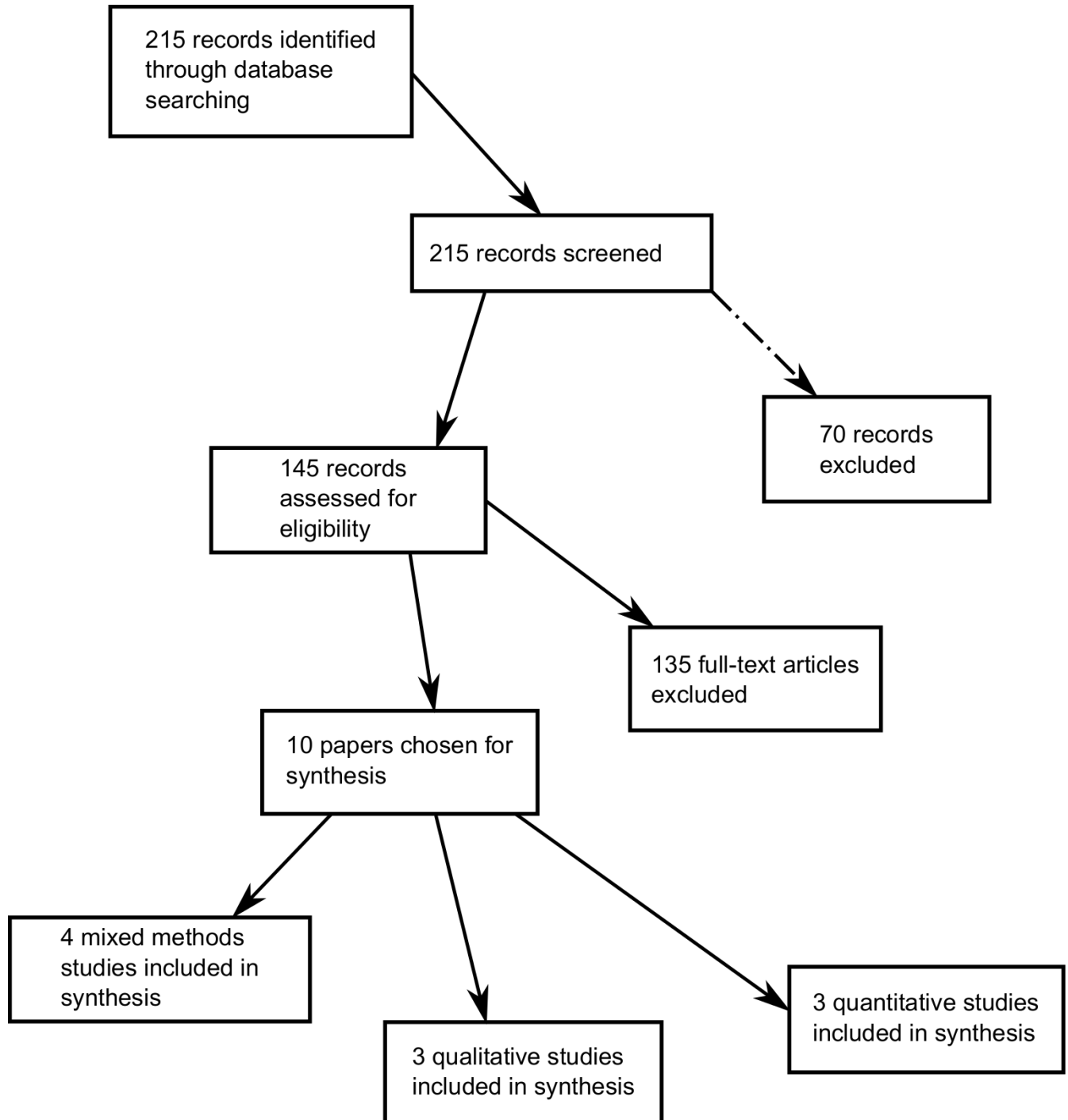
The ten included papers consisted of three qualitative studies, three quantitative studies and four mixed methods studies. Five of the studies were conducted in the US, four in the UK and one in Ireland. Sample sizes within the studies ranged from five to 352 EPs. Most of the studies used qualified EPs, with two using trainee EPs enrolled on doctoral-level programmes. Consultations were held between EPs and parents, teachers or other school staff and concerned children (aged 4 to 16 years).

Many of the studies utilised pre-existing measures to assess the use of consultation and its associated skills within EP practice, whilst others created their own questionnaire surveys to gather data related to research aims. Likert-like questions were frequently used, alongside more open-ended questioning. Nolan and Moreland (2014) and Noell et al. (2017) chose to use semi-structured interviews, whilst Newman et al. (2014) and Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) conducted focus groups alongside other measures. Over half the studies used both thematic analysis (or extraction of themes) and descriptive statistics (e.g., the use of tables and charts). Four studies used analysis of variance (ANOVA) and/or other inferential statistics, whilst Nolan and Moreland (2014) assessed their data using discourse analysis.

### Consultation Framework Analysis

The papers were assessed for consultation quality against a consultation framework analysis based on guidance published by the NASP (2010, see Table 2). None of the papers scored “full demonstration” on all six criteria. Nolan and Moreland (2014) and Al-khatib and Norris (2015) achieved five out of six and four out of six criteria at “full demonstration” respectively, and partial demonstration on the other

criteria. Three papers failed to achieve “full demonstration” or any criteria (Bahr et al., 2017; Davies et al., 2016; Getty & Erchul, 2009). It should be noted that all included papers gained ratings at “partial demonstration” or above in at least two out of six criteria.

**Figure 1***PRISMA Flowchart*

**Table 2**

*Consultation Analysis Framework*

	Consultation as a problem-solving process as a vehicle for planning, implementation and evaluation	Effective communication of information for diverse audiences	Collaboration across all levels of involvement	Facilitation of communication and collaboration among diverse audiences	Function as “change agents” using skills in communication and collaboration to promote change	Application of psychological and educational principles	Partial demonstration	Full demonstration
Getty and Erchul (2009)		Grey		Grey		Grey	3	0
Osborne and Alfano (2011)	Grey		Black		Grey		3	1
Newman et al. (2014)	Grey		Black		Grey		4	2
Nolan and Moreland (2014)	Grey	Black	Black	Black	Black	Black	1	5
Al-khatib and Norris (2015)	Grey		Black	Black	Black	Black	2	4
Davies et al. (2016)	Grey						2	0
Noell et al. (2017)	Grey			Black	Grey		2	1
Bahr et al. (2017)	Grey		Grey			Grey	3	0
O’Farrell and Kinsella (2018)	Grey		Black	Black	Black	Black	1	4
Eddleston and Atkinson (2018)	Grey		Black		Black	Black	1	3
Partial demonstration	9	5	1	1	3	3		
Full demonstration	0	1	6	5	4	4		

White: Not demonstrated; Grey: Partial demonstration; Black: Full demonstration.

The authors acknowledge that practice within Ireland is distinct from practice with the UK and US. However, the current review suggests that the Irish paper (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018) mirrors findings from the UK in most respects. The papers will now be considered in relation to each of the six NASP (2010) criteria.

### **Criterion 1: Consultation as a Problem-Solving Process as a Vehicle for Planning, Implementation and Evaluation**

Apart from Getty and Erchul (2009), all of the papers achieved "partial demonstration" on this criterion, indicating some awareness of the need and value of problem-solving as part of consultation. However, this was rarely discussed within a cycle of planning, implementation and evaluation. Noell et al. (2017) and Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) discussed explicitly the importance of evaluation or review, but this was a largely neglected area within the other studies. For example, Noell et al. (2017) noted that "meeting and talking about implementation do not appear to be sufficient to support implementation; review of data appears to be critical" (p. 535). Meanwhile, it was proposed that the "review and evaluation of consultation is key within individual consultation and should take place at each meeting" (Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018, p. 442). Other studies demonstrated an understanding of the importance of ensuring evidence-based approaches within consultation (e.g., Al-khatib & Norris, 2015; Davies et al., 2016), but also noted the constraint of using a one-session consultation design (due to time-limiting factors) or an action plan format (paperwork was set up for actions rather than monitoring). Most studies discussed problem-solving as one of the main components of consultation, particularly in terms of providing "next steps" or "a way forward" (Nolan & Moreland, 2014) but this area appeared underdeveloped, and the importance of maintaining implementation standards for the evidence-based approach was often overlooked.

### **Criterion 2: Effective Communication of Information for Diverse Audiences**

Within this criterion, Nolan and Moreland's (2014) study alone gained a "full demonstration" score for its description of popular strategies for communicating information, or eliciting information (e.g., questioning, reflection, focusing and refocusing), combined with an illustration of providing information to more than one audience. Specifically, Nolan and Moreland (2014) considered family and school staff as separate audiences. Five studies were rated as "partial demonstration", with authors tending to demonstrate the giving of information or advice within consultation to only one audience or stakeholder group. When discussed, information-giving (such as suggesting what a member of staff could do next)

was often one-way and relied on positioning the EP as the expert.

### **Criterion 3: Collaboration Across All Levels of Involvement**

Collaboration was the strongest and most consistently demonstrated criterion. Six out of ten papers scored "full demonstration", although, notably, three scored "no demonstration". Collaboration within consultation was recognised as a cornerstone for good consultative practice on numerous occasions. For example, O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) detailed that "consultation should be collaborative" (p. 316), discussing the collaborative nature of consultation as a core concept across levels (individual, group and systemic). Other studies made reference to collaborative consultation being preferable to expert consultation (Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018; Newman et al., 2014; Osborne & Alfano, 2011), although this was not the case in those studies where the aim was concerned with specifically measuring the impact of consultation on client outcomes (Davies et al., 2016; Getty & Erchul, 2009; Noell et al., 2017). In these studies, less weight appeared to be given to certain processes of consultation, such as the perception of EP as the expert. Nolan and Moreland (2014) and Al-khatib and Norris (2015) discussed the importance of informing stakeholders explicitly that consultation is a collaborative process prior to engagement. Other examples of collaborative consultation included reference to joint problem-solving (Nolan & Moreland, 2014) and working within a team (Newman et al., 2014). Although collaboration within consultation appeared a well-understood concept, it was not demonstrated across multiple levels.

### **Criterion 4: Facilitation of Communication and Collaboration Among Diverse Audiences**

Five papers were rated as "full demonstration" on this criterion, with two more as "partial demonstration". Papers were rated "full demonstration" due to their consideration of more than one diverse audience, which included reporting communication and/or collaboration with different genders, ages and ethnicities. Nolan and Moreland (2014), beyond simply acknowledging diverse audiences, assessed and discussed ways of facilitating communication in order to enable the "... recognition of each other's ability to bring knowledge and skills to the session [consultation]" (p. 68). For example, offering post-consultation support to school staff to continue communication between home and school following the consultation session and the use of accessible metaphors to help parents understand the difficulties their child was facing.



### **Criterion 5: Function as Change Agents Using Skills in Communication and Collaboration to Promote Change**

Four out of ten papers were rated at “full demonstration” for this criterion and three at “partial demonstration” (see Table 2). Studies rated “partial demonstrated” considered explicitly the effect of consultation on the client and/or child, for example by making the client feel more confident. This was facilitated in two main ways: firstly, by the use of positive and effective strategies — giving the client time to consider the problem without distraction or being supported to clarify the true issue at the core of the problem presented — to enable clients to go away feeling confident that their perception of the problem had changed (Newman et al., 2014; Osborne & Alfano, 2011) and, secondly, by the acknowledgement from school staff that EP consultation can promote change; an example included increasing intervention fidelity (Noell et al., 2017), which led to the finding that implementation support tended to result in children making bigger behavioural gains. Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) noted the importance of working collaboratively with school staff to empower them to become “agents of change”, in contrast to the majority of the studies, which appeared to consider the EP as the agent of change. Al-khatib and Norris (2015) inferred their EP role as agents of change and measured this by asking clients if they felt that they needed a follow-up consultation. If the client did not request a second consultation, they assumed that change must have occurred, given the client’s perception that further involvement was no longer needed. Nolan and Moreland (2014), O’Farrell and Kinsella (2018) and Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) all discussed ways in which the EPs used psychological skills to elicit change. For example, Nolan and Moreland (2014) discussed exploring possibilities with clients to encourage new insights or the use of deep listening as a technique for eliciting change.

### **Criterion 6: Application of Psychological and Educational Principles**

The four papers rated as “full demonstration” on criterion 5 were also all rated as “full demonstration” on the application of psychological and educational principles. This reflected use of referenced psychological theory and educational principles. Strong papers in this area were found to directly reference theory and the impact that this had on the conception of the research and/or the evaluation of the consultations. O’Farrell and Kinsella (2018) spent a considerable portion of their paper assessing data from semi-structured interviews with a parent, teacher and EP triad, in relation to referenced psychological theory. Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) used evidence-based, referenced, psychological frameworks as a way of bridging the gap between theory and practice. Finally, Al-khatib and Norris (2015) used referenced psychological theory as part of the rationale

for their research. Other papers rated partially demonstrated were able to consider and discuss general psychological theory without specificity.

### **Discussion**

Via systematic literature review, the present paper aimed to address the question: how EPs are using consultation within their current practice to support children and young people? By outcome, the review considered current EP practice in Ireland, the UK and the US and assessed consultation quality using a framework based on the NASP (2010) six key areas of consultative practice. Although previous papers have focused on consultation across EP practice, they have tended to look at implementation, specifically in terms of integrity and fidelity to process (cf. Collier-Meek et al., 2019), effectiveness (cf. Wong et al., 2018) and professional/client preference (Kennedy et al., 2009), rather than contemporary use of consultation within the daily EP practice.

Of the final ten papers, five originated from the US, where the research base is arguably more mature (Kennedy et al., 2008). For example, more than two decades ago, Sheridan et al. (1996) offered an interview schedule for professionals using consultation procedures. Similar practice is not uncommon within the field of consultation research in the US, where explicit frameworks are welcomed. As such, the focus of research in the US has moved away from conceptual issues and discussion, towards more measurable variables, such as outcome implementation. By contrast, UK research appears to be still grappling with defining and conceptualising consultation. Simply, the literature suggests that internationally EPs in the US have a more solid and shared understanding of consultative practice. Research within the US also seems to have an agreed understanding of consultation, demonstrated by the development of the NASP (2010) guidelines and is now assessing its effectiveness within school settings (Kennedy et al., 2009). By contrast, research conducted in the UK and Ireland continues to explore the complexities of consultation, which has led to a dearth of empirical investigation into its implementation and effectiveness. Wagner’s (2000) work, offering the reader a range of recording frameworks and templates, remains influential, while modern practice rarely appears to follow a single model, with a shared understanding still to be established (Claridge, 2005; Jones & Atkinson, 2020). However, notably, both in the UK and US, the ambiguity of consultative practice is reflected by generally low scores on the criterion “*application of psychological and educational principles*”. This suggests that internationally EPs may find it challenging to articulate explicitly the psychological and educational principles that underpin their consultative practice.

### Consideration of Collaboration

The current review found a particular strength within the criterion of “*collaboration across all levels of involvement*”. Given reference that collaboration is a core component of consultation (Wagner, 2000), it is reassuring that EPs are referencing it within current practice. Indeed, collaboration is cited as a discrete concept that is discussed within the opening stages of consultative practice. However, collaboration is sometimes something of a “tick box” exercise, evidenced by lower scoring on criteria 4 and 5 (see Table 2) that focus on the facilitation of communication and collaboration to promote change. It appears that whilst EPs report working collaboratively with clients, service users still often emphasise a desire for EPs to provide solutions and advice; thus, acting as the expert (Kennedy et al., 2009; Larney, 2003; Wagner, 2000). Indeed, Athanasiou et al. (2002) reported that teachers “want professionals outside the classroom to solve student problems” (p. 261). One suggestion for this is that EPs tend to rely on theory-in-use, rather than their espoused theory (Argyris, 1999; see Bulkley & Schwarz McCotter, 2018, for a school-based example). An individual’s espoused theory represents their description of how they intend to behave in a given situation, whereas their theory-in-use is how they actually behave (Argyris, 1999). In the case of current consultative practice, EPs appear to be reporting collaborative behaviour, although this may not be operationalised well within practice, (Kennedy et al., 2008). One explanation may be that EPs aim to be collaborative, yet their behaviour and resulting consultations are often more consistent with acting as the expert or providing information. This would offer some explanation of the repeated and frequent references to collaboration within the ten reviewed papers, seemingly at odds with scoring low on criterion 4. Wagner (2000) described the need to change systems within educational psychology services and within schools, in order to accommodate the development of true collaborative practice.

**Communication and Collaboration With Diverse Audiences.** The time period for this systematic literature review predates the 2020 killing of George Floyd and subsequent calls for racial justice via the Black Lives Matter movement. These events led to a re-evaluation of educational psychology practice (cf. Williams, 2020), reinvigorating developmental work on anti-racism (Division of Educational and Child Psychology [DECP], 2006) which had taken place more than a decade before. Table 2 suggests scope for improvements within consultative practice, in working with diverse audiences. Work centred on the development of EPs’ cultural competence (Anderson, 2018; Nastasi, 2017) might help promote practice within consultation. However, the lack of specific guidance around culturally competent consultation practice is notable, and a future development might be to learn from school psychology models which have a multicultural focus and reduce stereotype threat (see Crowther

et al., 2020, for examples).

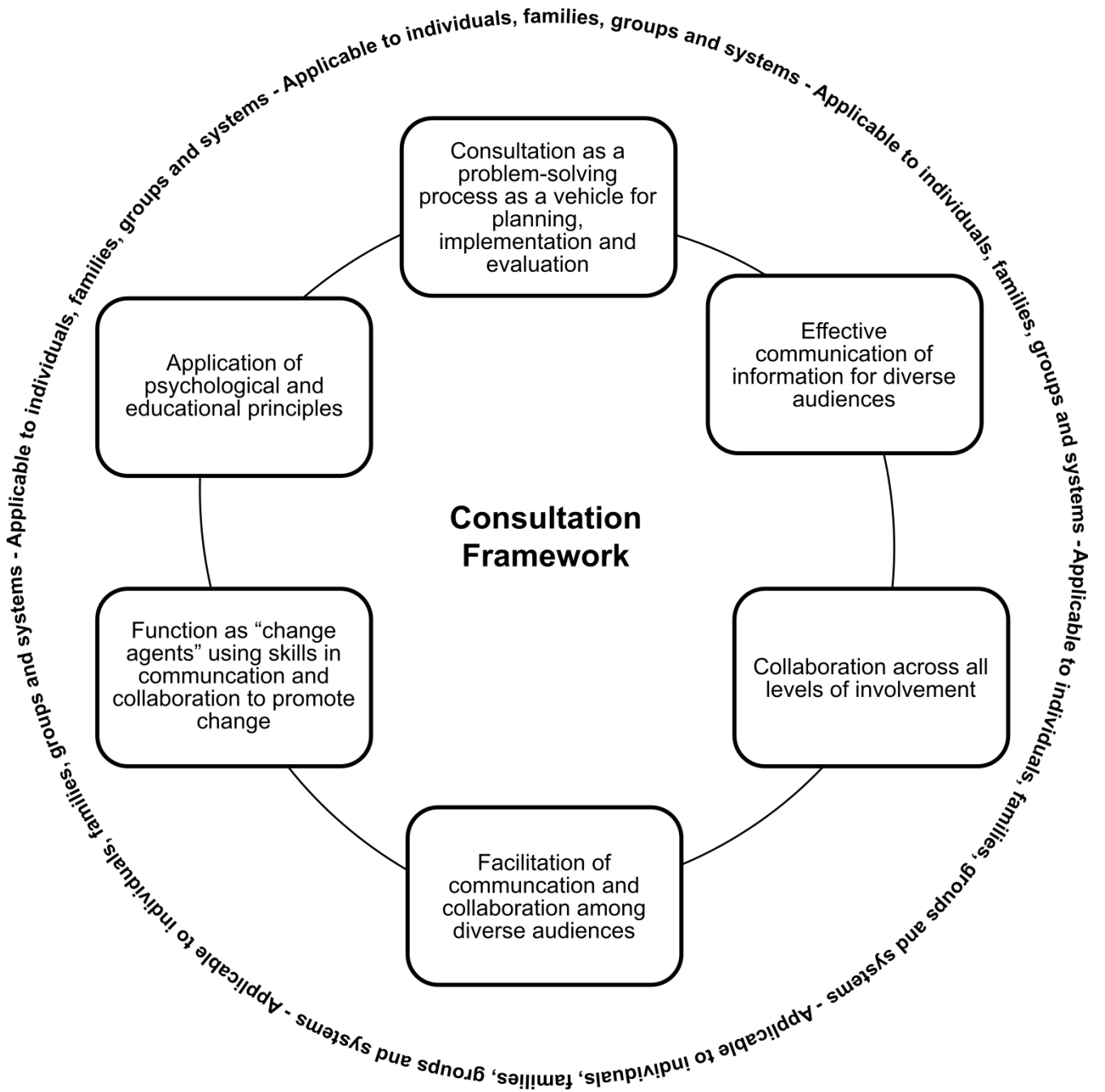
**The Way Forward?** Within the current paper, the authors propose a consultation framework, based on guidelines published by NASP (2010), in order to assess consultation quality. The framework is based on the six NASP criteria, which offer reference points for what constitutes effective consultation. The model presented (see Figure 2) aims to offer EPs a tangible, user-friendly tool for use within practice and supervision, alongside professional reflection. Finally, the Appendix provides an overview of examples of effective consultation drawn from the ten reviewed papers. The consultation framework offers EPs the opportunity to guide practice towards six anchor points that help maximise the effectiveness of consultation for service users.

Kennedy et al. (2009) discussed the importance of consultation within UK EP training curricula, considering if trainee EPs should be taught specific models of consultation, as is the case within the US or if they should be given a “broad introduction to a variety of consultation theory and practices” (p. 608). The NASP (2010) informed consultation framework presented here offers the opportunity for trainee EPs to be introduced to core components of quality consultation, without constraint to a particular model, framework or theory. It is considered that this may also help establish a shared professional understanding of consultation.

Table 3 offers a suggestion of reflection points that may be used alongside NASP (2010) guidelines and Figure 2. It provides points that will support EP reflection on the six criteria. Finally, the Appendix is presented as a tool for use alongside the NASP (2010) guidelines presented in Figure 2 and the reflections presented in Table 3.

Figure 2

A Consultation Framework Based on the NASP (2010) Guidelines



**Table 3***Consultation Framework Reflection Points*

Consultation framework criteria	Possible reflection points
Consultation as a problem-solving process as a vehicle for planning, implementation and evaluation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has the process of plan–do–review been adequately addressed?</li> <li>• Does the service user have a clear understanding of the process of plan–do–review?</li> <li>• Is there adequate provision to ensure “review”?</li> <li>• Has consultation been considered a joint problem-solving venture?</li> <li>• Is the service user offering their own problem-solving skills to the process?</li> </ul>
Effective communication of information for diverse audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are service users from diverse backgrounds able to access the language content of the consultation (e.g., has a translator been invited, if necessary)?</li> <li>• Is information communicated in a non-biased way?</li> <li>• Have information and services been effectively communicated?</li> <li>• Has information been disseminated to the service user in an applicable format (e.g., written, spoken, PCP poster)?</li> <li>• Are all potential “problem holders” present?</li> </ul>
Collaboration across all levels of involvement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has “collaboration” formed the basis for your involvement?</li> <li>• Is the consultation demonstrating signs of collaboration between all “problem holders” equally?</li> <li>• Have the qualities of collaborative working been communicated to the service user?</li> <li>• Is the service user able and comfortable to co-produce appropriate outcomes/suggestions?</li> <li>• Is collaboration infiltrating all aspects of communication, rather than remaining a discrete point discussed at the start of the consultation?</li> <li>• Is there an abandonment of the “expert”?</li> </ul>
Facilitation of communication and collaboration among diverse audiences	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have you appropriately ensured that all “problem holders” present at the consultation are communicating effectively?</li> <li>• Are those service users from diverse backgrounds an equal member of the consultation?</li> <li>• Are psychological and counselling skills being used to ensure the facilitation of communication?</li> </ul>
Function as “change agents” using skills in communication and collaboration to promote change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is there an explicit communication of the benefits of consultation in effecting change?</li> <li>• Have you ensured the use of psychological and counselling skills to empower service users to become “change agents”?</li> <li>• Are service users equally contributing to the consultation to ensure a sense of “change” and ownership?</li> </ul>
Application of psychological and educational principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are the suggestions put forward based in evidence?</li> <li>• Are you communicating the explicit psychological theory that bases your hypotheses and formation to service users, in an appropriate format?</li> <li>• Are you drawing upon an evidence base or relying on practice-based evidence?</li> </ul>

### **Limitations**

There are limitations to the review, which will now be considered. Firstly, it is limited to published, peer-reviewed research. As such, there may be a number of unpublished and impactful studies, such as doctoral theses and book chapters, which could offer new insights into EP consultative practice. Although the review searched all school and educational psychology journals internationally, only English language papers were sought. English-speaking countries are likely over-represented, and no doubt that literature not published in English would have offered interesting and valuable information into the wider use of consultation. Although the NASP (2010) consultation framework re-presented here has good professional face validity and resulted in high levels of inter-rater reliability, it will require further research to study its application to UK practice, in particular.

### **Future Directions**

This review has offered a fresh understanding of current consultative EP practice. The NASP (2010) guidelines have allowed the assessment of the consultation quality of the empirical studies included in the review, leading to a more comprehensive understanding of how consultative practice is conceptualised by EPs. As such, it has offered a range of future directions for both practice and research, including a potential foundation framework for UK EP consultative practice. Despite this, it is acknowledged that the framework presented here is based on US NASP (2010) guidelines, which may not reflect all aspects of UK practice. Indeed, as noted, US EPs are often based within one school, whereas UK EPs tend to have more of a community role. Despite this, the inclusion of the consultation framework, which could be used within supervision and training, offers anchor points for EPs to develop their consultative practice. Further empirical investigation into the usefulness of the framework, alongside a consideration of how it fits into current UK EP practice, will be necessary if it is to be assimilated into wider practice training. Similarly, awareness that EPs might not be collaborating as effectively as they believe offers opportunity for practice reflection. Explicit consideration of how collaboration is transformed from a discrete concept into an inherent one may be required in order for EPs to work more effectively with service users. Finally, the review demonstrates that, although there is emerging research into consultation, there is still a significant dearth, particularly in the UK, focusing on its conceptualisation; and that the term is often ambiguous. This is demonstrated by the lack of consensus around definition, raising questions over whether research into effective consultation is really measuring the same concept or activity. As such, further empirical research could focus on UK EPs developing an agreed understanding of consultation practice.

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## Appendix

### Examples of Effective Consultative Practice (Taken From Research)

#### Criterion 1: Consultation as a Problem-Solving Process as a Vehicle for Planning, Implementation and Evaluation

1. Complete the “review” section within the “plan, do, review” cycle
  - Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) suggest that a review of the consultation should take place following every consultation.
  - Noell et al. (2017) found that structured “follow-ups” did not make a significant positive impact unless a review of the data was also included.
  - The use of review enables the re-assessment of information and an updating of both client and consultants knowledge.
  - *A review will also offer an incentive for clients to complete the produced “next steps”.*
2. Use evidence-based approaches
  - Al-khatib and Norris (2015) suggest that the use of methodologies based in evidence (such as CBT) allowed more readily for better planning, implementation and review.
  - Most evidence based approaches are built on a research base that have requires a review of effectiveness, which is likely to be of benefit, also, for consultation.
3. Have a helpful paperwork system
  - Al-khatib and Norris (2015) note the importance of effective paperwork systems, as consultations are usually time constrained.
  - If a consultation is conducted to fit in with a paperwork template, it can alter the effectiveness or flow of the conversation.
  - Writing during consultation may be a barrier by impeding inter-personal communication.
  - Action plans can summaries actions and next steps nicely for clients but may not incorporate the nuances of the consultative process.
4. Use problem-solving strategies to provide tangible next steps
  - Nolan and Moreland (2014) focus on using problem-solving strategies to develop a way forward for clients. These include: developing coping strategies, developing a collective understanding and offering information to help a client make a realisation.

- Problem solving was often referred to, rather than described suggesting that most problem-solving techniques are permissible, as long as they include the client engaging in the process.

5. Maintain high evidence-based standards to help the implementation of strategies

- This was a weak area within the current review and as such it would be worth a consideration on how to ensure a high quality amount of evidence-based standards are communicated to clients. Communication could include the importance of research and evidence regarding the implementation and fidelity to strategies.

#### Criterion 2: Effective Communication of Information for Diverse Audiences

1. Use strategies when communicating information
  - Nolan and Moreland (2014) provide an example of using metaphors to communicate ordinarily complex information about a child’s difficulties.
  - The EP can be useful at explaining others’ jargon.
2. Use strategies when eliciting information
  - Nolan and Moreland (2014) note the following:
    - It is important to create a non-judgemental environment was helpful for allowing schools and parents to be open.
    - The EP can often become a “mediator” between school and home to offer a safe space for discussion.
    - The use of questioning to check perceptions and explore possibilities can be helpful.
    - Set a gentle pace.
    - Use a warm and reassuring tone of voice.
    - Be mindful of body language.
3. Move away from relying on the EP as the “expert”
  - Nolan and Moreland (2014) note the following:
    - The importance of language — particularly the use of “us” and “we”.
    - Avoid jargon where possible.
    - The use of a circle of seats, without tables, can be helpful for communication from all of those involved.

4. Know when to offer information and how to do it effectively

- Nolan and Moreland (2014) noted that information should be offered and not thrust. It should be based on the information given in the consultation and framed as such.
- Osborne and Alfano (2011) noted that it would often be useful for a client to have information about the consultation before it occurs.

**Criterion 3: Collaboration Across All Levels of Involvement**

1. Ensure collaboration

- Nolan and Moreland (2014) noted that the involvement of collaborative practice helped to reduce barriers between schools and home.
- O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) note the difference between the EPs' and client's understanding of consultation so developing a joint understanding will be key.
- Osborne and Alfano (2011) note the usefulness of having a range of clients in a consultation or develop a collaborative environment.

2. Relinquish the "expert role"

- Repositioning the EP as a facilitator to a process, rather than as the answer to the problem. This can be done by providing a foundation (e.g., an example or possible theory) and then encouraging the client to join in.

3. Help clients to have an explicit awareness of what collaborative practice involves

- Nolan and Moreland (2014) note that clients that were made explicitly aware that consultation is a consultative process felt "at ease" and much more able to contribute fully.
- O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) note that clients often have a poor understanding of what consultation is and as such, it may be necessary to offer training before consultation begins.

**Criterion 4: Facilitation of Communication and Collaboration Among Diverse Audiences**

1. Conduct consultation with a wide range of audiences

- Aim to conduct consultation with a wide range of audiences, paying consideration to gender, job role, ethnicity, religion and socio-economic status.

2. Alter communication for different audiences

- The types of questioning and language used with school staff will need to be different than for parents.
- It is important to avoid stereotyping and to offer clients the chance to adjust or correct summaries.

**Criterion 5: Function as Change Agents Using Skills in Communication and Collaboration to Promote Change**

1. Use positive and effective strategies to promote change

- Nolan and Moreland (2014) found that EPs who demonstrate empathy and interpersonal warmth observed more cognitive and emotional change.
- Ensure that clients are given time to process information.
- Provide a space that enables the client to have a distraction-free consideration of the problem.
- EP to support the client to clarify the true problem, by using focusing techniques.

2. Encourage the client to acknowledge that consultation is beneficial to implementation fidelity

- Noell et al. (2017) found that school staff who had a good understanding of the link between consultation and implementation fidelity observed bigger positive behavioural gains from the children in their class.

3. Find a way to measure a client's perception of change

- Osborne and Alfano (2011) used post-consultation surveys to ascertain this.
- The use of scaling before and after the consultation.

**Criterion 6: Application of Psychological and Educational Principles**

1. Use explicit psychological theory

- Eddleston and Atkinson (2018) clearly frame their consultative practice within psychological frameworks.

- The papers who demonstrated this criterion used references when discussing theory that would have enabled a client to find out more if they desired.
  - Generic psychological theory was common (e.g., social learning theory) but a lack of explicit reference to this may reduce the credibility of the suggestions put forward.
2. Use an explicit evidence base.