

How can Educational Psychologists improve their practice of working systemically in Early Years settings?

Evidence from Action Research in one Local Authority Nursery in the Southeast of England

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Abstract

Aims and Background: This action research study aimed to improve my practice of working systemically with an Early Years setting. Two integrative literature reviews highlighted a lack of research in this area, alongside a desire for Educational Psychologists to work at a systemic level in the Early Years, giving a rationale for this research.

Method and Data analysis: The study took an exploratory design and an action research framework to investigate How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting over an academic term. In this research, the data collected was qualitative, as I received feedback from participants, I analysed it and modified my practice. Consequently, data collection and analysis were discussed simultaneously. The essence of my data set is made up of my research diary, observations, audio recordings of a meeting and focus group with the EY staff and questionnaires to evaluate each systemic piece of work. Much of the data was analysed using a broadly ethnographic approach and some of the data from cycle three was also analysed using qualitative content analysis.

Results and Discussion: By working systemically with an EY setting I improved my practice in this area and created a toolbox of approaches that a Trainee Educational Psychologist or an EP new to systemic working could use when working systemically with an EY setting. This toolbox included: consultation skills, attuned interactions, participation, contracting and guiding principles. One limitation of this research was that I did not have sufficient contact time with the Early Years staff to explore with them 'how' I worked systemically and as such I had to determine this from my own interpretations of the data. Thus, I would recommend this, as an area for further research.

Declaration

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Abbreviations

CoP	Code of Practice
CYP	Children and Young People
EHCP	Education and Health Care Plan
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPS	Educational Psychologist Service
EY	Early Years
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
LA	Local Authority
QCA	Qualitative Content Analysis
SEND	Special Educational Needs
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLA	Service Level Agreement
TA	Teaching Assistant
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist

1. Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the chapter

This action research study aimed to improve my practice at working systemically with an Early Years setting. This chapter will include an outline of the research, the rationale and context for the research as well as information about myself and the thought processes that led me to undertake this research. As I adopted a reflective and self-reflexive position (Fox, Martin, & Green, 2007; Moore, 2005) I have written in the first person as this has helped to present my role as a practitioner influencing, and being influenced by, the systems I worked with.

1.2 Definition of terms

In this study Early Years (EY) refers to children under 5 years old living in the UK.

‘EY setting’ refers to an EY education or care provider that receives government funding or are funded privately and based in a private building as opposed to run from someone’s home. This includes private nurseries, maintained nursery schools, pre-schools, day-care provision in Children’s Centres and schools with nursery classes.

Another key term is ‘working systemically’. Burden (1999) and Gillham (1978) describe the systemic approach as an EP working more preventatively and using psychology to benefit the whole school and wider community as opposed to working with individual children. Boyle and MacKay (2007) state that working systemically can include activities such as training, research, consultation and involvement in policy and organisational change which are more involved in the strategic issues facing settings. In this research, the term ‘working systemically’ will be used to mean creating positive change for all or groups of children by working with the systems around the child, such as the EY setting, the EY staff, their family and the community as opposed to casework with individual children.

‘System’ is another term used in this research. A system can be defined as the properties of a whole that results from the interactions between people. Using Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological systems theory, the word system in this thesis mirrors his model, including interactions assumed between systems, i.e. how the child develops via the child existing and interacting with significant areas (‘systems’), including: family, EY staff, the education and/or care provider and its related processes, the community, and other indirect influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

1.3 National context

1.3.1 Relevant recent legislation influencing working systemically in the Early Years

During the last decade several policy documents and reports have shaped how EPs work with the EYs. The Allen Report (2011) recommended that identification and intervention should occur before a child starts primary school and highlighted the need for EPs to be more involved with EY settings. In 2012 the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) was reformed to include: stronger collaboration with parents and other professionals and improved staff training and support (DfE, 2012). In 2014 the EYFS was updated to include: further integrated working when monitoring children's progress and the importance of staff training was highlighted as key (DfE, 2014). In 2015 the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (CoP) was introduced, and this stressed the need for children's services to focus more on prevention and early intervention, the participation of the child and their family in decision making, as well as a greater collaboration between children's services (DfE, 2015). These policies and reports influence what the EP service delivery should look like now and in the future. There is a clear focus from them all that staff training is important, collaboration with parents and other agencies is central and that prevention and early intervention continue to be key. These are all areas in which an EP working systemically can support EY settings with.

Despite several policies and documents seeming to support a more systemic way of working, legislation such as the Warnock report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) set a precedent that children with learning difficulties needed very different teaching from other children and promoted the concept that they require individualised solutions to individual problems. This focus on the problem as being within the child, can prevent professionals from analysing the systems around the child. The SEND CoP (2015) has moved forward since then taking context into account. However, by writing Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP) with the individual identification of children, with funding attached to the child, it is likely that this endorses the individualisation of problems, as opposed to promoting wider or systemic approaches to inclusion in schools. Furthermore, in the current climate where there is a shortage of EPs (DfE, 2019), Educational Psychology Services (EPS) are likely to prioritise EHCPs over more systemic work, leading to EPs work being focused at the individual level. Consequently, EPs may become skilled at working at the individual level and have less opportunity to develop their skills at a systemic level; potentially making them less likely to work in this way when they do have capacity. Taylor (1994) supports this by stating that once a model of working has been established, individuals and subsystems find it very hard to move away from this.

1.3.2 Early Years

The previous section highlights some of the changes that have taken place within the EY. Despite this, few services and little funding was put in place following these reforms and this is supported by the fact that there are relatively few studies investigating EPs working with EY settings. This gap in the literature makes the EY an important area for me to investigate how I can work more systemically. Tickell (2011) also states that the EY is significant for children in creating the foundations for the rest of their life and provide support for parents early on in the parenting journey. The Allen report (2011) also suggests that support early on makes more financial sense. The EY is also suited to working systemically due to its philosophy and practice. The EY takes a process-based approach to education grounded in writings from Bruner (1966), Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978) which focuses on creating an environment that enables children to learn and explore (Dennis, 2004). Thus, this focus on the learning environment lends the EY to working more systemically with an EP.

1.3.3 Systemic working and Educational Psychology

Educational Psychology as a profession has been through its own changes which impact on the way EPs work with the EY. Educational Psychology originated from the medical model of working prevalent at the time, where the 'problem' was believed to be within the child (Frederickson & Cline, 2009). The profession has since been influenced by Critical Realism, Constructionist theory and Social Constructionism (Woolfson & Boyle, 2017) and now a more ecological model of thinking is instead favoured over the medical model. This is where the focus is on the interactions the child has with several other areas, including: family, education and/or care provider, the community, and other indirect influences in the family's life (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, although the thinking has moved on, it could be argued that the practice of some EPs has not significantly changed (Shannon & Posada, 2007). Boyle and MacKay (2007) state that literature has examples of systemic work that is unique and exciting, but that is not yet part of the day-to-day service delivery. Suggesting that many EPs are still focused on statutory-led work and individual casework (Winter & Bunn, 2019; Shannon & Posada, 2007). As a Trainee EP (TEP) I am not yet in a status quo of working and thus wanted to use this opportunity to improve my practice at working in a systemic way. Through the process of working systemically with an EY setting I hope to improve my own practice and provide professional insights on how fellow TEPs and EPs may also improve their systemic practice.

1.4 Local context

This research took place in a LA in the South of England where I was on placement as a TEP. This LA operates a fully traded model of working where schools are required to buy support from the EP service if they would like access to the service. This contrasts with some other LAs who might offer a part traded model or have no trading at all, where some or all of their services are free for schools. This LA has over 100 private day nurseries, over 200 registered childminders and nine LA nurseries, six of which are attached to schools and three are

stand-alone nurseries. One of the LA nurseries attached to a school was used for this study. This context is important since schools and EYs settings have experienced significant funding cuts over recent years, but all the LA nurseries still buy in EP time. The predominant work EPs are involved with in these EY settings focuses on individual case work, which frequently means consultation with staff and parents/carers, assessments of the child's strengths and needs and at least one report outlining the work undertaken and recommendations. It could be argued that EY settings are happy with the service delivery model they are receiving as they continue to buy this service in. However, it could also be argued that this is the only model they have experienced and if EY settings could try a more systemic model of service delivery, they may see the benefit of this and buy a systemic model in as well as or even instead of, individual casework.

1.5 Working systemically

Key figures in taking a systemic approach include Gillham (1978) and Burden (1999). Both have pushed for a shift away from working with individual children and/or families and instead suggested that the profession should take a systemic approach focusing on the education system, specifically school system issues. However, Webster and Lunt (2002) and Farrell et al. (2006) state that although EPs aspire to take a systemic approach they are still mostly working at the individual level (Winter & Bunn, 2019). Gillham (1978) and Burden (1999) state that by working systemically, EPs could work more preventatively as opposed to re-actively and use psychology to benefit the whole school and wider community and not just individuals. Roffey (2015) goes as far to state that by primarily re-acting to individual demand, this could be an ethical issue, since the profession could instead be working pro-actively to promote the needs of vulnerable children and young people at a wider-school or systemic level. With regards to EY settings, Hurst (1997) states that by working more systemically EPs could improve provision for all children by upskilling and training EY staff. Similarly, the EP Working Group (Kelly & Gray, 2000) suggests that by working systemically to support SENCOs and teachers this could in turn reduce statutory work as school staff become more empowered and capable at meeting children needs. Therefore, it could be argued that the model of service delivery used by an EPS is key to creating change in how schools work with children (Dennis, 2004; Boyle and Mackay, 2007).

Dennis (2003) goes as far to say that by not working systemically school staff and EPs are in affect colluding with the idea that school staff do not have the expertise to support these children. This in turn puts schools in a position whereby the EP is positioned as the expert who comes to 'fix' the children that do not fit the standard model. Wagner (2000) argues that this model of working can lead school staff to thinking that children with special need are someone else's responsibility not theirs. Therefore, if EY/school staff are to adapt their approaches and the environment to support all children, Dennis (2003) believes it is imperative for EPs to support these staff to develop their skills. The Research Report of the EP Working Group (Kelly & Gray, 2000) lists several systemic ways in which EPs could be working, including working through solutions to organisational level issues, advising on SEN policy and practice, approaches to behaviour management and pastoral schemes.

1.6 Reflective practice, reflexivity, and action research

The Health and Care Professionals Council (2008) states that EPs must stay up to date with their professional practice. The two main ways to do this are through evidence-based practice (EBP) and practice-based evidence (PBE). EBP is where a theory has been created based on research and this theory can be used to shape practice. PBE is where practitioners develop their skills by trying different ways of working and then evaluating it, one method of PBE is action research. In action research the researcher aims to improve their current practice and holds themselves accountable by evaluating their practice and making improvements (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Action research can also be a collaborative process, where the practitioner works with participants to create ways forward and although the aim is for the practitioner to learn and develop it can also lead to the participants learning too (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This collaborative process promotes systemic working while at the same time it provided me with a tool to work on a gap, I have in my own professional development which is how to work more systemically.

A skill that goes hand in hand with action research is being a reflective practitioner. This involves practitioners thinking about what they have done, evaluating it and coming up with new ways forward. This process has the power to discover new insights and methods of working, which in turn could lead to more successful ways of working (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Therefore, it was important for me to develop my skills and knowledge in this area as it would support me to improve my systemic working. Another tool which was important for me to use in this research was self-reflexivity. This is where I reflect on my position as a white female, in her mid 30s, from British background and being a former teacher and how that influences my practice (Pellegrini, 2009). Mead (1962) states that through self-reflexivity, practitioners reflect on their perception of reality and try to take an objective position about themselves. Through this process alternative perceptions about a situation can be discovered which in turn can influence practice. Self-reflexivity can help practitioners avoid the role of 'expert' as it helps them to see that their view of reality is based on their experience and that someone else will have a different view. In this study I have therefore used self-reflexivity to understand my position, context, and participants to help me work more collaboratively.

Reflective practice, self-reflexivity and action research are all tools I have used to improve my practice and knowledge of working systemically. These tools also uphold the principle of collaborative working which is key in working systemically. Next, I will outline my conceptual theoretical and epistemological position.

1.7 Researchers position

1.7.1 Philosophical perspective underlying the current research

Once a research area is chosen, it is tradition for researchers to think about the paradigm and philosophical stance of that research. I have chosen to take a pragmatic perspective. Pragmatism rejects epistemological arguments in favour of creating change through action

and reflection (Dewey, 1938). A pragmatic view is described by Morgan (2014) as separate from the philosophical arguments of whether there is a true reality or whether reality is based on an individual's interpretation and instead focuses on human experience. Dewey (1938) describes experience as a process of interpretation; this is where beliefs are interpreted which leads to actions, these actions are then interpreted to generate further beliefs and so on. For Dewey (1938) experiences are what create meaning and this meaning comes from the connection between beliefs and actions. The research question for this study resonates with this paradigm in that knowledge will be created through cycles of action and reflection. For action research these cycles of action and reflection are the basis of a researcher's theory, or 'living theory' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). These provide a holistic view of the situation the researcher and participants are living in (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). To improve my professional practice, I have used action research to improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting which have been turned into a 'living theory' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). A living theory is where the practice of the researcher, in action research, is the source of their own theory (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Although not viewed as important a propositional theory by some, they provided a rich picture of the situation the researcher and participants are living in (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Therefore, in this research I will form my own living theories of how I can work systemically with an EY setting.

1.7.2 Axiological position

Axiology relates to the knowledge, experience, interests, and values we bring to our research. Herr and Anderson (2015) argue that knowledge creation is not neutral but is pursued with some interest in mind. These interests or values impact the decisions we make, including decision regarding methodological considerations, such as: how we collect data, analyse, and report it (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Therefore, it is important for me to reflect on my position as a researcher throughout my research.

1.7.2.1 My knowledge and experience that influence the research

The purpose of this research was to improve my skills and knowledge of working systemically, specifically with an EY setting. This idea stemmed from my previous roles as an Inclusion Manager, Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCo) and as a school Governor in two very different secondary schools. All roles involved a systemic approach to working to promote inclusion, yet at the time I lacked the psychological skills and knowledge to successfully do this. Through my experience on the doctorate training course, I have developed my psychological skills and knowledge but have had limited opportunity to use them at a more systemic level. I believe working at a systemic level means that larger numbers of CYP, parents/careers and school staff can benefit from the application of psychology, which I believe will lead to increased inclusion. I also believe that prevention and early intervention are important to prevent difficulties in the future and therefore it is important to invest in young children, those who are not yet five. This is one of the reasons I have chosen to focus on the EY.

1.7.2.2 My values that influence the research

Our values as EPs are central to the way in which we understand our role, but also our understanding of the people and organisations we work with and consequently the decisions we make. Key values of mine include fair opportunity, growth and proactiveness. With regards to my value of growth, a key belief of mine is that it is important to continue growing and improving but also to support others to do the same. This value resonates with action research as an approach since it provides a framework to support me to achieve this core value of wanting to grow and improve my practice and potentially the practice of others. This value has also influenced my choice in wanting to work with the EY, since it is my belief that the EY can create the foundations of future growth and development (Allen, 2011). My interest in systemic working can also find roots in this value. In that I believe systemic working has the potential to provide growth to a greater number of children and young people (CYP) compared to working at an individual level. Another key value of mine is proactiveness. This value also influenced my choice of action research as a methodology, this is because action research provides a structure in which I can follow so that I am proactive in observing, reflecting, and modifying my practice. It is my belief that by working systemically I am also working proactively since systemic working is likely to have benefit for a larger group of children thus preventing some 'problem' manifesting in the first place. As discussed in relation to my value of growth, I also believe that the EY is the best place to start when trying to be proactive by putting early interventions in place before or as difficulties emerge.

With regards to fair opportunity, some people are more in need of resources than others and that as a society we should support those with more difficulties than ourselves. This value is in line with the moral principle of social justice that in my view, should underpin the EP profession. Social justice can be defined as a vision of society where the distribution of resources is fair (Duncan, 2010). A big part of an EP's role is to promote change on behalf of the CYP for whom they work. If we consider a social justice approach to this, it means moving the focus from an individual's current problems and on to preventing these problems for the wider population, which can be achieved by an EP working systemically.

It is important to highlight that my interests and values will have had an impact on the research and therefore it was important for me to be reflexive of my position throughout my work, to be able to identify the influence it has had (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Here I have shown how I wanted to combine my experience of working systemically in a school system and my values with the psychological skills and knowledge I have learnt on the course, to improve my practice in working systemically with an EY setting. This makes me a 'knowledge creator' in that I am an action researcher who wants to improve my practice and potentially others in the profession and thus I am at the centre of the research (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011).

1.8 Purpose and rationale of the research

There are multiple purposes in this research, which is supported by an action research design. Firstly, this action research study explored how I improved my practice of working systemically with an EY setting. A second purpose was for the EY staff to be active participants in this research, working with me to create changes for the children. The final purpose is to create a toolbox of principles, resources and/or ways of working for myself to use in future and, potentially, for others in the profession.

The rationale for exploring how I can improve my practice in working systemically with an EY setting is linked to documents such as the CoP (DfE, 2014), Allen report (2011) and the EYFS (DfE, 2012) which stress the need to focus on prevention, early intervention, and improved staff training. All areas in which an EP, working systemically, can support EY settings with. Another reason is it upholds my values of growth, proactiveness and or fair opportunity. EPs working systemically with EY settings is also under researched and this gap in the literature further inspired me to improve my own practice and knowledge. By working systemically with an EY setting for one term I have improved my practice in this area and created a toolbox of approaches that will continue to support my developing practice and I hope will be of benefit to other TEP and some EPs too.

1.9 Study outline

This action research study aimed to improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting. A literature review highlighted a lack of research in this area and a desire for EPs to work at a system level in the early years. This research took an exploratory design and used a modified version of McNiff and Whitehead's (2003) action research framework to investigate how I can improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting over an academic term. In this research, the data collected was qualitative, as I received feedback from participants, I analysed it and modified my practice. Consequently, data collection and analysis were completed together. The essence of my data set are made up of my research diary, an observation, supervision notes, audio recordings of a meeting and focus group with the Early Years staff and questionnaires to evaluate each systemic piece of work.

1.10 Research question

In action research the research questions are often underpinned by values. These values give the researcher flexibility to adapt the research question(s) as the research evolves (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). I am interested in improving my systemic practice with an EY setting as I believe this approach can lead to preventative, inclusive and empowering change, which link to my values of fair opportunity, growth and proactiveness. My primary research question is:

How can I develop my practice of working systemically with an Early Years setting?

1.11 Outline of the chapter one

This chapter has outlined the research area, the rationale and context for the research as well as information about myself and the thought processes that led me to undertake this research. The next chapter will discuss the recent literature on working systemically and EPs working in the EY.

2. Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction to the chapter

This chapter presents two small literature reviews, which explored the literature surrounding EP practice in the EY and how EPs are working systemically. This review looked at both empirical and theoretical literature to identify unresolved issues and knowledge gaps. First, this section will start by outlining how the literature search was conducted. A critique of the literature identified is then presented. Finally, a synthesis of the literature from both reviews is presented, followed by an outline of the aims of the proposed research.

As mentioned in Chapter one 'working systemically' is not a term that is universally used. The literature review will therefore use the terminology as stated by the authors of the different articles and so the terms universal approaches, systems level work and systemic working will be used interchangeably.

2.2 Details and rationale for the literature search

The scope of this review was to find studies exploring how EPs are working systemically in the EY. I started by completing an initial scoping of this area using variations of the words: 'educational psychology', systemic and 'early years' on 15/01/21.

These initial scoping searches revealed no studies exploring this area with the following criteria: a) in a peer reviewed journal; b) empirical literature (as opposed to theoretical); c) EY focused; d) a focus on EPs working systemically. During this search I did, however, find papers exploring 'how EPs work in the EY' and 'how EPs work systemically' separately and it was at this point I completed initial scoping searches of these two areas separately. Although splitting the search into two discreet areas provided some relevant papers, it only yielded 3 empirical studies for the review question 'how EPs work in the EY' and 3 for the review question 'how EPs work systemically'. It was at this point that I decided to change my exclusion criteria to include theoretical literature, as well as empirical literature, to provide a more comprehensive picture of the literature in this area. The integrative review method allows for the combination of both empirical and theoretical literature which enabled me to identify a more comprehensive picture of the literature and across two literature searches to identify unresolved issues in this area and to identify the knowledge gap (Booth et al., 2016; Hopia et al., 2016). In the next section I will outline the systematic search completed for the first literature review.

2.2.1 Details of a systematic literature search: exploring how Educational Psychologists work in the Early Years

A computerised search for literature on several databases (Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescence Studies, CINHAL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycINFO) was conducted on the 16/01/21 using the following search line: ("education* psycholog*" OR "school* psycholog*") AND ("early years" OR nursery* OR infant* OR "kinder garden" OR Preschool) searching in subject terms and with 'Educational Psychology' selected as a major heading. A total of 204 articles were identified and initial screening of titles and abstracts excluded articles that were unrelated and a total of 7 articles remained. The full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility excluding a further 4 articles. The remaining 3 articles were then used to conduct a citation search using Scopus and Google Scholar, this yielded an additional paper. The search then became broader to find any other key papers in this area, so the references of the current four papers were screened. This brought up another two papers. Then the full-text articles were examined to check they met the inclusion criteria of a) UK based article; b) English Language paper; c) date of publication between 2000-to the present; d) from a peer reviewed journal or an unpublished thesis; e) Early Years focused (0-5 years old attending the setting) and focused on EP practice; and f) articles accessible via UEL database search. For full details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria with reasons, please see Appendix I. All six articles met the inclusionary criteria. See Appendix II for the process detailed in a PRISMA diagram and Appendix III for summary of the selected articles. The review question for this literature search was: how do EPs work in the EY?

2.3 First integrative literature review

2.3.1 Literature exploring: how do Educational Psychologists work in the Early Years?

This section will outline what the literature says about how EPs work in the EY and their recommendations going forward. As mentioned above there was little past research on systemic working in the EYs. Dennis (2003 and 2004) gives two reasons for this gap in the literature. First, Dennis (2003 and 2004) argues that EPs had little involvement with EY provisions until after the National Childcare Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998). Secondly, Dennis (2004) warns that the legacy of EP practice in schools presented a threat to systemic working in the EY, because it is easier to transfer an existing model across than to put in place something different for EY.

To critically review the literature, I used the Understanding Health Research: A tool for making sense of health studies (2021). This tool was chosen because of the guidance it gives to help the researcher review a variety of different methodologies, which was appropriate for this literature review since the papers found used a variety of methodologies. It is also important to note that this tool is intended to review and interpret published health research papers. To assess if it would be appropriate and helpful to review

for use in Educational Psychology, I piloted using this tool with papers I had excluded from the literature search. I found that although this tool gave examples from health research to help the reviewer review and interpret the paper, the clear guidance and instructions given in the tool could be applied to a variety of areas in social science. Therefore, I decided this tool to be both appropriate and helpful to review and interpret the papers in this literature review. Once the papers have been reviewed, the Understanding Health Research tool provides a summary of the review process, an example of which can be found in Appendix IV. The tool uses the following judgements based on the reviewers' answers to a range of questions: positive sign, neutral and negative sign. The summary produced at the end of the review process is not a decisive judgement of the paper, since some of the areas reviewed are more important than others. Finally, it is important to note that three of the papers used in the literature review were position papers, as such these papers could not be reviewed using this tool.

2.3.2.1 The role of the Educational Psychologist in the Early Years

Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010) reported that there is confusion about the role of the EP in the EYs. Indeed, this lack of clarity continues, since, eleven years on there still appears to be little research which has explored the role of the EP within the EY. This further demonstrates the importance of research in this area to reduce this knowledge gap.

In her position paper, Dennis (2004) discusses lessons that can be learnt from the delivery of EP services in schools which she argues were historically based on the medical model of working. Dennis (2004) explains that external services, including EPs, are justifying their existence in terms of being able to help schools, and now EY settings, with the children who do not fit typical development and that require individualised solutions. Dennis (2004) believes that this has led to 'learned helplessness' from schools, as they believe they need an 'expert' to help them work with these children. In an earlier position paper, Dennis (2003) adds that not only is this service delivery model in schools questionable, but it also does not address the fact that EY providers are significantly different from schools in terms of status, pay, level of training and conditions of service. Dennis (2004) proposes that for the EY the model of service delivery should not be replicated but instead redesigned. This literature highlights one EPs view about the role of the EP in the EY and the perceived risks involved in using the same service delivery model in the EY as is used with schools. However, both Dennis' (2003) and (2004) papers are position papers and so this subjective view is likely to have discrepancies with other EPs and indeed with those who work in the EY settings. It is also important to reflect on the age of these papers and that it is possible that EP practice in the EY has moved on since these papers were written.

In Wolfendale and Robinson's (2004) position paper, they used the literature to describe the current role of EPs in the EY. They start by outlining that the role of the EP in the EY was predominantly focused on testing. However, there has been a move towards a consultation model of service delivery, which includes more multidisciplinary work and working at a system level. Shannon and Posada (2007) explored this further, looking at the current and future models of service delivery within the EY. Questionnaires were completed by 37 EPs and 3 EPs were interviewed. The results suggested that EPs were primarily involved with

individual casework which frequently involved some form of assessment. This was then contrasted with the EPs' perception of priorities, which focused on more preventative and systemic work and that a lack of time was given as a reason for focusing more on the individual level. Shannon and Posada (2007) suggested that this incongruence between how EPs are working and their view on what the priorities are, has likely led to the reported dissatisfaction with the current service delivery model in the EYs reported in the study. These results were also found to be different from what Dennis (2003, 2004) and Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) had proposed for EPs working in the EY, they had instead proposed more holistic, proactive, and systemic working. On the other hand, Shannon and Posada (2007) also found that EPs were involved with multi-agency working, as proposed by Dennis (2003, 2004) and Wolfendale and Robinson (2004). However, this was mostly taking place at an individual level as opposed to at the organisational level. I used the Understanding Health Research tool to critically review Shannon and Posada's (2007) paper and found that this study showed nine 'positive signs', one 'neutral sign' and four 'negative signs'. One of the most significant negative signs was that the researchers do not justify their sample size. This suggests that they have not considered the importance of this in their research or that the size is too small, and they had not wanted to draw attention to it. Regardless, it would reassure readers of the quality of the research if the authors had referred to this. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix III, 'literature review map - how do EPs work in the EY'.

Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010) agree with Dennis' (2004) concerns about the lack of change in EY practice. They used multi-professional focus groups (including EPs) to investigate the range of assessment and intervention practices used in EY settings. They found that most individuals stated that the volume of work associated with assessment had increased but that the nature of that work had not necessarily changed for everyone. Positive changes described included: assessments were more likely to be conducted over time, there was an increased involvement of parents and more of a focus on contextual factors. Regarding multi-disciplinary working, the focus groups revealed that although the importance of sharing information and joint planning and review was recognised, practice remained relatively unchanged. This concurs with Shannon and Posada's (2007) findings that although there seems to be a will to work more proactively and holistically this does not always transfer into practice. I reviewed Robinson and Dunsmuir's (2010) paper using the Understanding Health Research tool and found ten 'positive signs', two 'neutral' signs and two 'negative signs'. One of the negative signs was that the paper did not mention getting ethical approval, however it is likely that the study did get ethical approval, but did not mention this, since this paper is in a peer reviewed journal. Another limitation of the paper was that the article did not describe the setting of the focus groups; it is important that the researcher considers the setting of the data collection so that they can comment on how it might have affected the results. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix III, 'literature review map - how do EPs work in the EY'.

Douglas-Osborn's (2015) research responds to some of the concerns highlighted in the literature, including Dennis (2003, 2004) and Shannon and Posada (2007) about the amount of individual case work at the expense of providing a more holistic work with EY settings. The research looked at the author's work with one EY setting over a year and a model of

practice was developed based on the needs of one EY setting. The work undertaken included more frequent involvement in casework as well as more systemic work such as parenting workshops, solution circles with staff and helping implement interventions. Douglas-Osborn used questionnaires and interviews and found that although participants valued a more holistic way of working, they stated that they would not be able to afford this ordinarily. I used the Understanding Health Research tool to critically review this paper and found that in all areas but one this study showed 'positive signs' of being a strong piece of research. The one 'neutral' sign was because the study was a case study and so is not generalisable outside this situation. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix III, 'literature review map - how do EPs work in the EY'.

2.3.2.2 Recommendations to improve the role of the Educational Psychologist in the Early Years

Dennis (2004) disagrees with the model of EP service delivery used in schools and consequently proposes five areas of change that could lead to an improved model of EPS delivery for EY, which are: avoiding individualisation, empowering staff, training, systemic work and monitoring and evaluation. This includes EPs being frequently available to EY staff to have regular discussions to help reduce the 'within child' culture and through training and systemic work helping staff recognise their responsibility and potential to support all children. However, Dennis (2004) warns that the legacy of EP practice in schools presents a threat to this development, because it is easier to transfer an existing model across than to put in place something different. This paper highlights important areas for change, however, it must be noted that some of the suggestions made in this article are based on personal experience and opinion as opposed to EY literature and/or research. This said, one could argue that at the time of publication EPs had only recently started working with EY and thus there was very little literature or research for the author to refer to.

Wolfendale and Robinson's (2004) recommendations are mostly in align with Dennis' (2004). They laid out several basic principles for how EPs could work in the EY, which included early intervention, a holistic approach to the identification of need, partnership with parents, equality of opportunity, multidisciplinary working, accountability, and evidence-based practise. However, it is important to recognise that although this article uses the literature to back up its claims more effectively than Dennis (2004), it still only reflects one line of argument. Dennis (2003) suggests that to support some of the changes hoped for the EY, there should be a role for a senior Specialist EY EP in every EPS. This role would help maintain a strategic overview of this area and to ensure that skills are maintained and developed across the EY setting and EPs. However, it is important to note that this paper came from an EP's point of view, thus this subjective view may have discrepancies with other EPs and those who work within EY settings. Additionally, it would have been interesting for someone to evaluate Dennis' reflections and whether it is in fact a feasible and supportive way of supporting EY settings.

When Shannon and Posada (2007) asked EPs about the future of EP practice in the EY they wanted to see: more time allocated to the EY, concurring with Dennis (2003) and Douglas-

Osborn (2015); preventative work and organisational work, in agreement with Dennis (2004), Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) and Douglas-Osborn's (2015); and working more collaboratively, also suggested by Wolfendale and Robinson (2004). Working collaboratively was also the main recommendation in Robinson and Dunsmuir's (2010) paper. They suggested that practitioners used a shared framework for practice to support collaborative working, which would involve a clarification of roles (Robinson and Dunsmuir, 2010).

Douglas-Osborn's (2015) study highlights the importance of taking a more holistic way of working and the value of using a framework such as action research and Research and Development in Organisations to guide thinking to achieve that. This research suggests there is a greater role for EPs within the EY, involving more than conducting casework, through providing a more holistic and intensive approach to supporting practitioners, parents/carers, and children, which compliments Dennis' (2003) recommendation of having a senior Specialist EPs in every EPS to oversee a more extensive role within early intervention services.

2.3.2.3 Summary and links to the next literature review

It has traditionally been argued that the traditional model of service delivery used by EPs employs a 'within-child' medical model of working (Dennis, 2003; Dennis, 2004; Pellegrini, 2009; Frederickson & Cline, 2009). However, probably partly due to the EP training being enhanced to doctorate level in early 2000s, the profession has developed its scope and has since been enhanced to accommodate influences from theoretical orientations such as Social Constructionism and the Ecological model, leading to more systemic ways of working (Woolfson & Boyle, 2017; Pellegrini, 2009). Despite this the literature highlighted above suggests that the role of the EP in the EY focuses primarily on individual casework and assessment, suggesting that some EPs are using a more traditional service delivery model in the EY (Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010). The research also highlights that EPs want to be involved in systemic work in the EY such as: preventative and organisational work and working more collaboratively (Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010). This disparity between what EPs would like to do and what they are doing could be explained by Dennis (2004) who predicted that the pressure on EPS, will mean that EPS will put the same service delivery model in the EY as they have in schools; therefore, inheriting the historic 'within-child' deficit model. Prilletensky, et al. (1997) argue that this continued focus on reactive work at an individual level is ineffective in solving long-term problems. With that in mind, if EPs work more with the systems around the child, their work should have a much wider impact. Beavers (2011), Williams and Greenleaf (2012) and Bronfenbrenner (1979), support this, predicting that without that recognition and collaboration with the systems external to the child, there can be little change. The literature above has highlighted the importance for EPs to work more systemically, but what is less clear is how EPs should do this. Therefore, the second literature review focuses more on how EPs work systemically. Since there is a gap in the literature on working systemically in the EY, the next literature review focuses more broadly on how EPs work systemically, without specifying the context.

2.4 Second integrative literature review

2.4.1 Details of a systematic literature search: exploring how Educational Psychologist work systemically

A computerised search for literature on several databases (Academic Search Complete, British Education Index, Child Development and Adolescence Studies, CINHAL, Education Research Complete, ERIC, PsycINFO) was conducted on the 06/02/21 using the following search terms: systemic AND DE “education* psychology*”. A total of 164 articles were identified and initial screening of titles and abstracts excluded articles that were unrelated and a total of 14 articles remained. The full-text articles were then assessed for eligibility excluding a further 10 articles. The remaining 4 articles were then used to conduct a citation search using Scopus and Google Scholar, this yielded no additional relevant papers. The search then became broader to find any other key papers in this area, so the references of the current 4 papers were screened. This brought up another 15 papers, then full-text articles were examined to check relevance and a further 14 were excluded. Leaving a total of 5 papers which met the inclusionary criteria of: a) UK based article; b) English Language paper; c) date of publication between 2000-to the present; d) from a peer reviewed journal or an unpublished thesis; e) a focus on EP’s systemic practice; f) challenges and facilitators to working systemically discussed; and g) articles accessible via UEL database search. For full details of the inclusion and exclusion criteria with reasons, please see Appendix V. See Appendix VI for the process detailed in a PRISMA diagram and Appendix VII for summary of the selected articles. The review question for this literature search was: how do EPs work systemically?

2.4.2 Literature exploring: how do Educational Psychologist work systemically?

This section will outline what the literature says about how EPs work systemically with a particular focus on: What systemic work are EPs involved with? What are the challenges and facilitators to working systemically? The findings from the literature review will then be discussed in relation to the current study with a discussion about the appropriateness of evidence-based practice. To critically review the papers in this literature review I used the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist (2021). The qualitative research checklist was chosen because all the studies in this literature review had qualitative methodology as its core component. Attempting to judge the quality of research can be subject to bias and so this checklist guided the author’s judgements. The checklist recommends using the following judgements for each question: Yes (which indicates a strength of the research methodology), No (which indicates a weakness in the methodology) and ‘Can’t tell’ (indicating that there was not sufficient detail in the paper to make a judgement). I added one more judgement ‘partially/satisfactory’ to indicate that appropriate methodology had been used but maybe not effectively, appropriately, or sufficiently. An example a completed CASP Checklist can be found in Appendix VIII.

2.4.2.1 What systemic work are Educational Psychologist involved with?

2.4.2.1.1 Policy

In their position paper, March and Moir (2018) seem to take an ecological perspective as they explore how EPs are using systemic ways of working to support nurture-based practices in Scotland. In their review of the literature, they highlighted that EPs have supported schools with making and implementing policy at school level. This is also highlighted by Geiger et al. (2015) who took a systemic and pragmatic approach to developing quality 16 + further education provision for young people with complex needs. A significant part of their work involved supporting local schools with reviewing and amending policies and procedures for transitions to further Education. I used the CASP checklist to critically review Geiger et al. (2015) paper. I judged this study to have five strengths, two areas that were satisfactory and one area of weakness. The key limitations were that it was not clear how the data was collected and analysed. It was reported that some of the data was collected in the steering group meetings however, it was not clear how this was then analysed. It is therefore not possible to generalise these findings. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix VII, 'literature review map – exploring how EPs work systemically'. March and Moir (2018), in referring to the literature, highlights that EPs have also influenced policy development at LA and national level. However, Roffey (2008) argues against this stating 'We cannot do much about the socio-political macro level of change' (p.25). This view may reflect the differences in how Scottish and English governmental departments work, as March and Moir (2018) talk about EPs having a partnership with Education Scotland, advising on national policies and practices.

2.4.2.1.2 Supporting staff, training, and coaching

Roffey (2015) seems to take an ecological and optimistic position in her position paper on working at a systemic level to support student well-being. In her review of the literature, she highlights that a key area for EPs is supporting staff, for instance through a course for staff on mindfulness. March and Moir (2018) also highlighted that training has been a key element in supporting nurture-based practices such as initial training on nurture groups, providing ongoing coaching for these groups, and developing and delivering wider training for the whole school such as restorative approaches training and positive relationships. Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) used training as a key element in their studies where they worked with staff to develop their skills in project management so that they were more able to solve other problems arising in school in the future. Rather than a one-off training, Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) EPS designed the Coach Consult Programme with the aim of producing sustainable systemic change. They stated that the required skills were introduced in training and then these skills were translated whilst on the job with the help of a coach. I used the CASP checklist to critically review Balchin, et al. (2006) paper. I judged this study to have three strengths, four areas that were satisfactory and one area of weakness, namely that it was not clear what data was collected. It was

reported that the participants themselves collected some of the data, but it was not made clear what each school collected. However, the researcher did attempt to address this by stating that an alternative method might defeat the purpose of the coach consult method, in that the participants themselves must have ownership of interventions and of any data generated. However, it still would have been helpful if the researcher could have provided more clarity around what data the school used. Because of this limitation, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix VII, 'literature review map – exploring how EPs work systemically'.

2.4.2.1.3 Translating, disseminating, and conducting research

In Geiger et al. (2015) action research project two TEP conducted a literature review to support the stakeholders to identify good evidence-based practice on which this project was subsequently based on. Similarly, March and Moir (2018) reported that EPs have worked in partnership with LAs and Education Scotland in drawing on the research to ensure whole school nurture projects are evidence informed, conducting research on the effectiveness of nurture groups, and developing frameworks to evaluate the impact of universal nurturing approaches. To support this Balchin, et al. (2006) and Randall, et al. (2015) have done just that, in the context of school development through coaching, using the evidence base, building on it, conducting research, and exploring the long-term impacts. I used the CASP checklist to critically review Randall et al. (2015) paper. I judged this study to have three strengths, three areas that were satisfactory and two areas of weakness, namely that it was not clear what data was collected. As with Balchin et al. (2006) study, the same issue arose where the data collection and analysis for parts of the study had not been sufficiently outlined. Therefore, it is not possible to generalise the findings of this study. Further details of the strengths and limitations of this paper are summarised in the Appendix VII, 'literature review map – exploring how EPs work systemically'.

2.4.2.1.4 Interventions

In March and Moir's (2018) position paper, their review of the literature highlighted that EPs are working systemically by supporting the set-up of evidence-based intervention. Roffey (2015) adds that the literature shows that EPs have also built on single interventions in one school and scaled up across a LA. However, it is important to note that both March and Moir (2018) and Roffey (2015) are position papers and therefore it is important to reflect that, although the authors use research to support their claims, only one line of argument has been presented. Another point to consider is that in March and Moir's (2018) paper is that they have drawn on research and policy predominantly from the Scottish education system and so will not be fully reflective of other contexts.

2.4.2.2 What are the challenges and facilitators to working systemically?

2.4.2.2.1 Ownership, collaborative working, and participation

Randall et al. (2015) adopted a systemic and coaching approach to building capacity in schools to create systemic change. In their study participants reported that it was too much for one person in the school to run the whole school project, even with the coaching to support them, and that a working party was needed. March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature provided similar findings in that having a shared definition of good practice was not sufficient, instead collaborative working with models of good practice was what enhances consistency and improves quality of practice in schools. In Roffey's (2015) position paper, she reported that the most influential people in the school is the head teacher and the school leadership team and that having a positive relationship with these individuals is important in creating sustainable change.

In Geiger et al. (2015) study, a senior EP initiating this work approached stakeholders to seek engagement in the project. They reported that this top-down approach made it a challenge to engage key decision makers from the start. In contrast, Randall et al. (2015) and Balchin et al. (2006) model of recruitment was to offer the opportunity to all schools, but they only worked with schools who showed a commitment to the project by putting it on the school development plan. In Geiger et al. (2015) study, ownership also appeared to be a challenge, with the steering group asking the EPS to run a follow-up meeting as opposed to taking up the reigns and continuing the work for themselves. However, in both Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) studies ownership was very much placed with the school and follow ups reported that most schools were continuing or had embedded the project they had started.

2.4.2.2.2 Contracting and negotiations

In March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature, they reported that common issues at the contracting and negotiation phases were not having a clear understanding of each other's roles and not agreeing how to communicate with each other. Similarly, in Randall et al. (2015) study, participants reported that they would have liked more guidance at the initial stage of the project, specifically around redefining their identified problem following the needs analysis stage. In Geiger et al. (2015) study a challenge they faced was in terms of negotiation of the priorities and approaches to be taken. They found that an action planning approach enabled the EPs to provide an evidence-based context to the discussion and prioritisation of changes needed. Likewise, Balchin et al. (2006) reported that the negotiation conducted tackled issues at a systemic level both within the LA and schools. Without that negotiation, the EPS might have responded to the original request for a one-off training which would not have had the same systemic and long-lasting impacts (Balchin et al., 2006).

2.4.2.2.3 Time and money

Balchin et al. (2006) took a systemic approach to developing play experiences for children in four schools. They found that a key barrier for their schools was the limited time available

for the school's project manager to liaise with support staff. Another barrier was the expense of regularly releasing the project manager from teaching to attend the coaching sessions, plus the cost of the EP as the coach. Although Balchin et al. (2006) reported that the perception of the headteachers in these schools was that the project was cost effective, a cost benefits analysis has not been completed. Geiger et al. (2015) also reported that time and money was a hurdle they too had to overcome. They managed to secure funding for two TEPs to support the project, the second challenge was engaging stakeholders who named time constraints as a key reason they could not be part of the project. Geiger et al. (2015) reported that by agreeing that members could assess the purposefulness of work achieved by the end of the first steering group meeting, before committing, helped commit all stakeholders.

2.4.2.2.4 Frameworks, models, and principles

A range of frameworks, models and principles have been referred to between the five papers examined. Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) incorporated elements of soft systems method (Frederickson, 1990), problem analysis approach (Monsen et al., 1998) and consultation (Wagner, 2000) in the Coach Consult Method. For example, the school's project managers were coached through a needs analysis and problem redefinition, both elements of soft systems methodology and the problem analysis approach. Geiger et al. (2015) reported that by using an action research design, it helped provide the EPs and stakeholders with a framework to promote cycles of planning, acting, and observing and then reflection and next steps which enabled them to work towards their agreed aims for the project. In March and Moir's (2018) position paper, their review of the literature highlighted that EPs are working systemically by supporting the set-up of evidence-based interventions using the knowledge and application of implementation science principles, for example, through providing ongoing coaching; initial and follow-up training; quality assurance visits; a range of mechanisms to ensure sustainability; and monitoring the impact of the intervention.

In Roffey's (2015) position paper, she reported that EPs will often use a consultation framework, even if not explicitly referred to, as these skills are often embedded in EP practice, such as being skilled listeners, able to reframe situations, validating problematic feelings and using solution and strengths focused questions. Reference to EPs working as consultants or using consultation skills was reported by all five papers as a key facilitator in systemic work. Geiger et al. (2015) also states that it is this consultation approach which demonstrates the distinct contribution that EPs can offer, compared to other professionals, in systemic work. Roffey (2015) adds to this by stating that as such EPs can be powerful role models, including how to run or participate in meetings, how they take account of contextual factors and their inclusive practices.

2.4.3 Summary and synthesis of both literature reviews and links to the current research

In brief, the first literature review suggests that the role of the EP in the EY focuses primarily on individual casework and assessment (Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010). However, the literature also highlights the desire and benefits of EPs working more systemically (Dennis, 2003 and 2004; Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004; Douglas-Osborn, 2015; Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010), but what is less clear is how EPs should do this in the EY. The first literature review has highlighted a clear gap in research looking into systemic practice in the EY, which provides the rationale for this study. The second literature review then provides clear ideas about how EPs work systemically in other contexts, so that I can take what is already known and use this information to apply it to the EY. My research aimed to build on these findings and explore how I can develop my practice of working systemically with an EY setting.

The Health and Care Professionals Council (2008) states that EPs must stay up to date with their professional practice and by taking a practice-based approach such as action research I was able to improve my practice while at the same time exploring this gap in the literature. However, it could be argued that since both literature reviews have referred to position papers and to studies that lack a rigorous design, that to establish a stronger evidence base there is a need for more rigorously designed studies. However, Fox (2003) argues that in educational psychology what constitutes good research is not clear and that EPs mainly come from a social constructionist rather than positivist position, therefore taking a more practice-based approach to research can often be more appropriate. Gingerich and Peterson (2013) argue for the practical value of practice-based evidence because it can describe the intervention and its context with transparency, readers can then judge the appropriateness of the outcome measures in relation to the context and populations they themselves work with. This is appropriate as this study was based upon the needs of the EY setting and how they would like to be supported through a systemic approach. The study was therefore designed to answer the following research question: How can I develop my practice of working systemically with an Early Years setting? The next chapter will explore the current research in more detail as I introduce the method section.

3. Chapter Three: Methodology and Action Research Process

3.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter will outline the method and action research process used in this research. First, I will discuss ontological and epistemological frameworks and discuss the paradigm selected which underpins this research. Secondly, I will outline my design and the purpose of the action research. Then I will introduce my sampling method and the contextual information of the Nursery and attached school. The next section will outline the chronology of the work undertaken and introduce some of the techniques and tools I used. This will be followed by a data collection and analysis section, where both will be discussed together due to the continual process of data collection and analysis that happens in action research. Finally, this section will look at the trustworthiness and ethical issues linked to this research.

3.2 Ontological and epistemological framework

When thinking about the present research, it was necessary to think about my philosophical world view, as Guba (1990) argues this view guides our actions. Guba (1990) states that a research paradigm is characterised by three things: ontology – which questions our belief about the nature of reality and what is real (Creswell, 2009)? Epistemology – what is the relationship between the researcher and the nature of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2013)? Methodology - how we go about finding out knowledge. In social research there are three main paradigms recognised: positivism, constructivism, and realism. The pragmatic paradigm sitting outside of these mainstream positions, and it rejects the need for epistemological positioning (Dewey, 1938). Additionally, pragmatism claims that methods best suited to the research questions should take philosophical priority. I took a pragmatic ontological position in the research, in that I was guided by the idea that experiences are what create meaning and this meaning comes from the connection between beliefs and actions (Dewey, 1938).

This research does not take a positivist paradigm where the truth or reality is being measured through experimentation; it also does not pursue a constructivist interpretation of individual realities by exploring the use of language. Instead, I have taken a pragmatic position which means that I believe knowledge is formed by the world we experience and is being individually constructed (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). A pragmatic approach places significance on the decisions that the researchers takes and why they take them rather than prioritising an alignment towards philosophical beliefs (Morgan, 2014). The

research question and methodology for this study resonates with this paradigm in that knowledge will be created through cycles of action and reflection. Using pragmatism, I could explore the research question 'How can I develop my practice of working systemically with an EY setting?' by making the changes to my practice and prioritising what is happening in an interactive situation, rather than focusing on cause and effect (Robson, 2002). Pragmatism therefore suited this research as it shares the view that reality is continuously reflected on, acted on and renegotiated in response to a new and unpredictable environment (Morgan, 2014).

3.3 Design and purpose of the action research

The literature review highlighted that there is a gap in the literature looking at EPs working systemically in the EY and as such I felt an exploratory research design would be appropriate. An exploratory purpose focuses on exploring the research question as opposed to offering conclusions or solutions to it. An exploratory design is therefore well suited to exploring new areas of research and those with limited research. Due to lack of research base, I had little to guide my thinking when designing the research. As such, I felt a methodology that provides opportunities for change throughout would support the exploratory design of this research, also providing justification for an action research methodology.

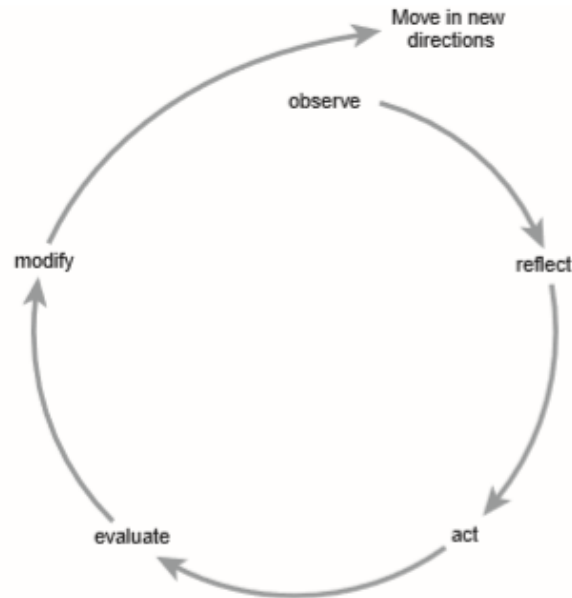
3.3.1 Action research

Action research gave me a structure in which I could investigate and evaluate my own practice, this type of action research is sometimes called self-study action research (Herr and Anderson, 2015). Action research is often a cyclical process and moves through phases such as observing, reflecting, acting, evaluating modifying and ending with moving in new directions. The use of action research meant I could work flexibly as it allows for change throughout the process. This enabled me to improve my practice so that it was responsive to the needs of the setting and could deliver specific outcomes which were integral to the project. Another strength of action research is that it can be used to focus on generating solutions to practical problems at the same time empowering practitioners to engage with the research (Meyer, 2000). Action research is a process that promotes people interacting and learning from each other to problem solve and take action together which is also important in systemic working (McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

This research used the modified version of McNiff and Whitehead (2003) action research framework (Figure 3.1) to investigate 'How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting?' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). This model of action research was chosen for its simplicity and therefore its ability to be adapted and followed flexibly. Koshy et al. (2011) support this, stressing that there can be an over reliance on action research models, which can adversely affect the intended flexibility. This model was also chosen due to its emphasis on reflection, and because the last phase acknowledges that a change of direction may be needed.

Figure 3.1

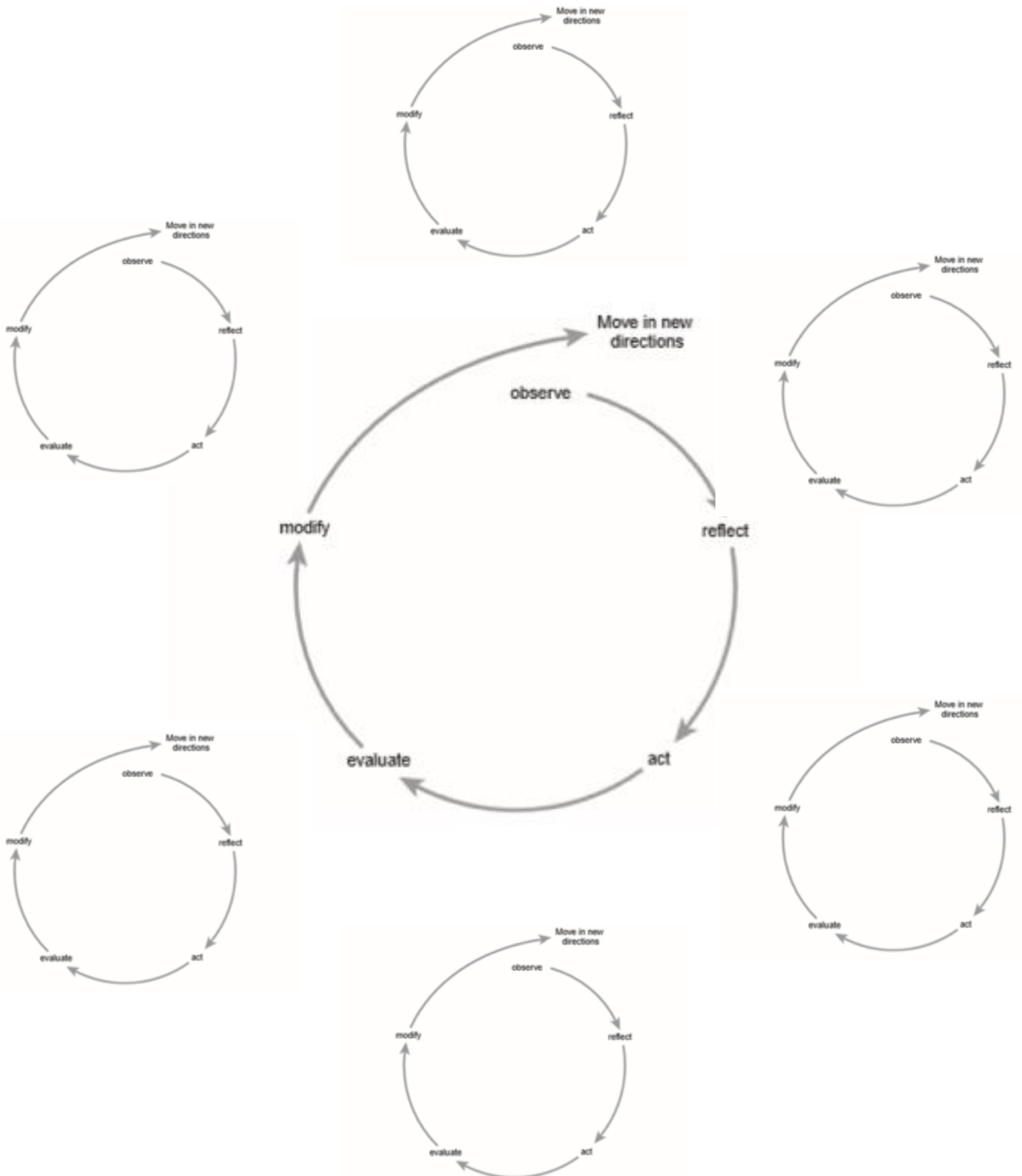
Modified version of the plan in McNiff and Whitehead (2003)



I adapted the modified version of McNiff and Whitehead (2003) action research framework (see Figure 3.2) to better reflect how it was used in my research. Firstly, it was used as an overarching model repeated three times, for instance, when a new systemic way of working was introduced and delivered (e.g., a training session) the larger central cycle was followed. The other way this model was used was in a continual sense, for instance, each time a new approach to encourage systemic working was tried (e.g., a circular question used), which could happen several times in a meeting with staff, a small cycle was completed. As such in each large cycle, several smaller cycles would have occurred. This interacting model allowed me to improve my practice at different levels, encouraging systemic working through everyday interactions but also through the systemic projects themselves.

Figure 3.2

Action Research Framework used in this research



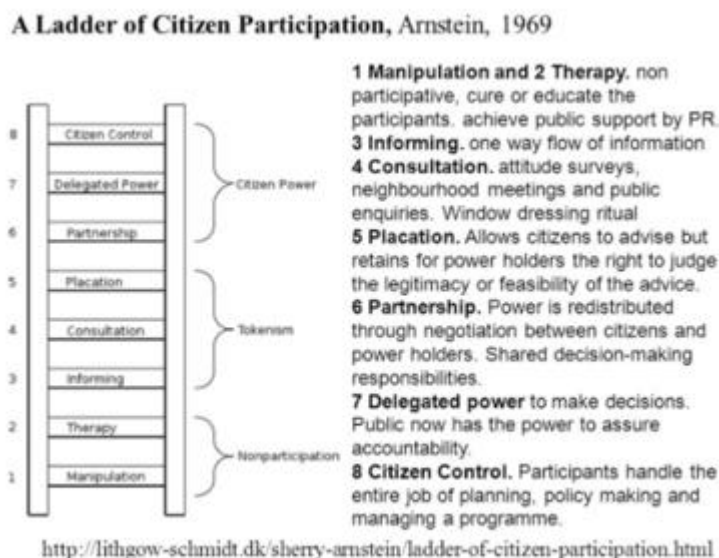
By following the model, I adapted (Figure 3.2), it has assisted me to improve my practice. Fox (2003) advocates for professionals creating evidence through their practice. Fox (2003) states that EPs often resort to a positivist position and follow pre-existing evidence-based interventions in their work. I have chosen action research methodology not only to improve my practice but also to develop new ways of working to create a research base from my practice. The action research approach I have adopted is known as person-centred or living theory action research, which means the researcher offers explanations and theories for their work. Here, a theory can be described as what I am doing, in that sense theories are explained as having a living form; in a sense the theory is mine and is entangled in my professional practice and the values and interests that I hold. These personal theories are called living theories which change and develop in unison with my practice.

3.3.2 Participation

I wanted this research to be participatory and I took this into consideration when designing it. I wanted the participants I worked with to be active in the research process, I wanted to design a research study in which they could share their views and I would listen and act on them. I used Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation (Figure 3.3), as a framework to help me assess the level of participation throughout the research. The purpose of the research was to work with the participant and in partnership to improve my practice in working systemically with them. However, as will be discussed in chapter four, the level of participation the participants wanted to have, was lower than what I had hoped for, and in following a participatory approach I respected their opinion and we negotiated what level of participation would be reasonable for them.

Figure 3.3

A Ladder of Citizen Participation (Arnstein, 1969)



3.3.3 Summary of the three action research cycles

In this section I will briefly introduce the three action research cycles that were completed over four months to answer the following research question: How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting? This research was based upon the needs of the EY setting and how they wanted to be supported through a systemic approach and as such it developed as the research progressed, including negotiating how many cycles we would complete. A detailed account of the action research process has been provided in chapter four to reflect the fact that the data was gathered, analysed, and acted upon in unisons.

3.3.3.1 Cycle one - reluctant talkers training

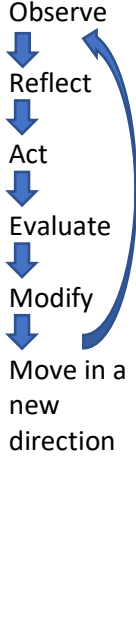
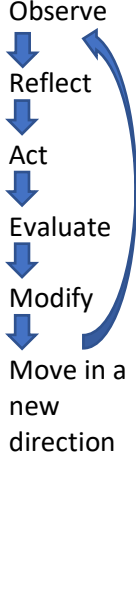
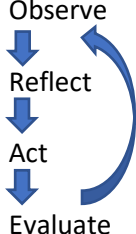
Here I will present a summary of cycle one and in Table 3.1 below, I have also presented a table showing how both the large and smaller action research cycles were used in this cycle.

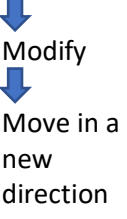



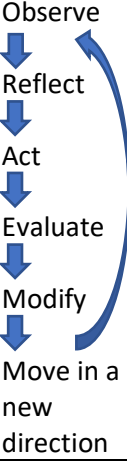
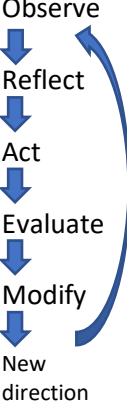
After the participants (EY staff) had agreed to take part in the research, we met to agree a contract, which we called a Service Level Agreement (SLA), and to plan the systemic work for the term ahead. This meeting was audio recorded to enable me to listen back and reflect on the techniques I used to work with the EY staff. I used several techniques in this meeting to improve my practice, the most prominent technique at this point was attuned interaction skills to create a safe and trusting atmosphere. During this meeting staff highlighted that they would not have the time to be co-researchers and to explore with me how I can improve my practice at working systemically but they did have time to be involved with the systemic work we planned together. Consequently, the research was less participatory than I had hoped.

After a further meeting and two observations of the EY setting, a systemic piece of work was negotiated. I was to plan and run a training session on reluctant talkers for the four EY staff, which was then evaluated verbally as a group and then via questionnaire individually. During this cycle I used my research diary, listening to the audio recording and peer supervision to support my reflections and learning. By the end of the cycle, I had identified techniques that I believed supported but also limited systemic working with the EY setting and as such modified my practice moving into cycle two.

Table 3.1

A table showing how both the large and smaller action research cycles were used in cycle one

Larger cycle of action research	Smaller cycle of action research	Description of what I was doing
<p>Observe ↓</p>	<p>Observe ↓ Reflect ↓ Act ↓ Evaluate ↓ Modify ↓ Move in a new direction</p> 	<p>Larger cycle: Observing – Observing and gathering information about how the participants (EY staff) like to work and their hopes for the project and how the setting works.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: Observing – Observing in the meetings to set up a SLA for the project and to plan the systemic work for the term ahead. Reflecting – Reflecting on the discourse in the moment. Acting – I acted by asking questions that promoted systemic thinking and working. Evaluating – I evaluated in the moment the questioning techniques I was using. Modifying – Attuned interaction skills seemed to have a positive impact, I modified by practice by using more attuned interactions skills. Moving in a new direction –Prioritising attuned interaction skill for my next interaction with the EY staff.</p>
<p>Reflect ↓</p>	<p>Observe ↓ Reflect ↓ Act ↓ Evaluate ↓ Modify ↓ Move in a new direction</p> 	<p>Larger cycle: Reflecting – Using my research diary and peer supervision to reflect on what I had observed so far and to start to plan next steps.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: Observing – Observation of the EY setting on two occasions. Reflecting – Reflecting in my research diary and peer supervision (before and after the observation) how to work systemically. Acting – Using circular questions to promote systemic thinking and working. Evaluating – Evaluating in the moment the questioning techniques I was using, modifying my approach and moving in a new direction in response to how the EY responded to my questions. Modifying – Using more circular questions and less linear questions. Moving in a new direction –Planning to use more circular questions in my next interaction with the EY staff.</p>
<p>Act ↓</p>	<p>Observe ↓ Reflect ↓ Act ↓ Evaluate</p> 	<p>Larger cycle: Act - Completing a training session for the EY staff on reluctant talkers.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: Observing – Observing the EY staff’s response to how I approach the training session.</p>

	 <p>Modify Move in a new direction</p>	<p>Reflecting – Reflecting in the moment, on the EYs responses to my approach to the training.</p> <p>Acting – Trying to work collaboratively with the EY staff by engaging them in the session and asking for their views and opinions.</p> <p>Evaluating – In the moment evaluating how collaborative the session is.</p> <p>Modifying – Targeting questions towards the TAs who may not have had as much of an opportunity to speak.</p> <p>Moving in a new direction – Thinking about how I can engage the TAs more in future cycles.</p>
Evaluate 	 <p>Observe Reflect Act Evaluate Modify Move in a new direction</p>	<p>Larger cycle: Evaluating – Use of verbal feedback, questionnaire, and my own reflections to evaluate the systemic piece of work completed.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: Observing – Observing the verbal evaluation of the training session. Reflecting – Reflecting in my research diary that the evaluation of the training wasn't sufficient as only 3 staff out of 4 staff were engaged with the process. Acting – Asking staff to complete a short questionnaire. Evaluating – Evaluating whether verbal or written data collect was most useful. Modifying – Using questionnaires for all evaluations and sometimes verbal information too, depending on the circumstance. Moving in a new direction – Questionnaires used in cycle two and three.</p>
Modify 	 <p>Observe Reflect Act Evaluate Modify Move in a new direction</p>	<p>Larger cycle: Modify – Modifying techniques and approaches, where appropriate.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: Observing – Observing my thoughts about the techniques used this cycle. Reflecting – Reflecting on the techniques and approaches. Acting – Recording these in my research diary. Evaluating – Assessing the pros and cons of the techniques and approaches. Modifying – Thinking through modifications that could be made. Moving in a new direction – Planning to put these modifications into action in cycle two.</p>
Move in a new direction (and into cycle two)	 <p>Observe Reflect Act Evaluate Modify New direction</p>	<p>Larger cycle: Move in a new direction – The techniques and approaches that I perceived as most affective were carried over to cycle two if appropriate.</p> <p>Smaller cycle example: I did not use a smaller action research cycle here.</p>

3.3.3.2 Cycle two - Attention Autism intervention

The start of cycle two involved negotiating the next piece of systemic work. This was done by exploring further what systemic working may include and a table of examples was created to support this process. It was agreed that the next piece of work would be to support a TA to set up an Attention Autism intervention. I promoted the TA's ownership of the intervention and the sustainability of it by:

- Giving greater ownership to the TA, over the design and delivery of how I would support her to set up the intervention.
- The intervention was modelled for the TA, in line with her preferred way of working.
- After modelling the intervention, we had a reflective session to prepared her for taking over ownership of the intervention.
- I compiled a written guide for setting up the intervention that could be used independent of my involvement.
- I was asked to 'train up' another TA, but instead we agreed that the first TA would be 'promoted' to the position of in-house trainer and so with my support she supported another TA to set up her own intervention.

A questionnaire was then used to gather the TAs feedback on the support received to set up the intervention. During this cycle I used my research diary, conversation with colleagues at the LA, reflective session with the TAs, the evaluative questions and further reading to support my reflections and learning. By the end of the cycle, I had identified techniques that I believed supported systemic working and as such modified my practice moving into cycle three.

3.3.3.3 Cycle three - starting school session

Acting on my learning from cycle one and two I continued to improve my practice of working systemically in cycle three by introducing the idea of being guided by principles as opposed to a reliance on questioning technique. In this cycle the work negotiated was to work with the reception teacher and one of the EY teachers to plan and deliver a starting school session for parents whose children would be progressing from nursery to the reception class. In this piece of work I tried to improve my systemic practice by:

- Working 'with' staff to deliver the session for parents, as opposed to 'for' staff.
- Supporting parents/carers to create their own positive ways forward.
- I discussed with the EY staff how this session could be completed next year after my involvement had ended.

During this cycle I used my research diary and an evaluative questionnaire completed by the parents to support my reflections and learning. At the end of this cycle, I held a focus group with the staff to reflect on the project overall and questionnaires for those that could not attend the focus group.

3.4 Sampling and participant information

Purposive sampling was used to select an EY setting for this research. Purposive sampling involves selecting participants who will help achieve the purpose of the study, by allowing the researcher to use their judgement when recruiting. I used my judgement by putting in place inclusion criteria to help me select an EY setting, these included: staff were receptive to working systemically with a TEP and open to improving their own practice. An example of this is having shown an interest in or taken up systemic work in the past, such as training. I had hoped to use opportunity sampling where EY settings interested in this research could submit a request to become involved. However, given the traded model of service delivery used in this LA, the Principal Educational Psychologist did not want to offer all EY settings this research opportunity and then only give it freely to only one EY setting, given that all the other services from the EPS need to be paid for. This very specific context is problematic when it comes to thinking about generalising or transferring the research findings since there will be other services who are neither traded nor have experience of working or willing to work systemically and thus it is likely that how I improve my practice in those services would be different from how I improved my practice in this context.

The EY setting was identified through discussion at an EPS team meeting, in the LA where I was on placement in the Southeast of England. Following this, the head teacher of this EY setting was approached by their link EP and asked if they would like to take part in the research before their details were passed on to me. I then met with the Head Teacher to discuss the research in full, followed by a meeting with the EY Teachers and Teaching Assistants (TAs). As the research developed, the Reception Teacher became involved. During the last cycle of action research some parents also became involved in the research during a session for parents on starting school. They were all given a participant information letter and an informed consent letter (all of which were submitted as part of my application for research ethics approval, the ethical approval letter can be found in appendix IX). In total 32 parents attended the information session and 8 staff were involved with varying degrees of participation, this included: two EY Teachers, three TAs, the Reception class Teacher, and the Head Teacher.

3.4.1 Contextual information of the Early Years setting and attached school

The EY setting is attached to a Church of England Infant school and is average-sized. It is a LA maintained infant and nursery school with a Head Teacher overseeing both. The EY setting is open term time only and has two sessions. Each session is three hours long with 39 different children attending each session and all places are fully funded. Each session has one EY Teacher and two TAs. In terms of diversity, the proportion of children from ethnic backgrounds other than white British is much higher than average and the proportion of children who speak English as an additional Language is reported by the setting as high. Children eligible for pupil premium funding (additional funding for looked after children, pupils known to be eligible for free school meals and pupils with a parent or carer in the armed services) is lower than the national average. Children on Special Education Needs

(SEN) Support or with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) is higher than the national average. In the next section, I will now outline the procedure for my research project.

3.5 Procedure

In this section I will outline the chronology of the work undertaken and introduce some of the techniques and tools I used while improving my systemic practice, including solution focused techniques, systemic questions, techniques from the field of organisational change and attuned interactions.

3.5.1 Chronology of the work undertaken

The chronology of the work undertaken in this research is summarised in Table 3.2. Only a summary of the procedure has been outlined here since further details of the research process will be given in the results section to reflect the fact that the data was gathered, analysed and acted upon in unison.

Table 3.2

Chronology of work undertaken

Phase of research	Time frame	Type of work	Details
Recruitment	January 2019	EPS Meeting	Discussions at EPS team meeting to identify a setting and assess suitability.
	February 2019	Meeting with Head Teacher	Meeting with the Head teacher of the nursery to discuss research and assess interest.
	March 2019	Meeting with EY staff	Meeting with the staff at the nursery to discuss the proposed research project and give the information and consent letters.
Cycle 1	March 2019	Contracting and planning meeting	Planning meeting to negotiate the research project: how we will work together and what systemic work might be of interest in the summer term (45 minutes).
	March 2019	A day at the nursery	I spent a day in the nursery building relationships and getting familiar with the setting (6 hours).
	March 2019	Negotiating systemic work	Meeting and communicated by email to confirm the first piece of systemic work.

	May 2019	Observation	Observation at the nursery to inform planning for the training on 'reluctant talkers' (1hour).
	May 2019	Training	Delivering a training session on 'reluctant talkers' to EY staff (35 minutes).
	May 2019	Evaluation of the training	Questionnaire used to further evaluate the 'reluctant talkers' training.
Cycle 2	May 2019	Negotiating work	Meeting and communication by email to confirm the next piece of systemic work.
	June 2019	Setting up the Attention Autism intervention	It was agreed that the next piece of work would be to support a TA to set up an Attention Autism intervention.
	June 2019	Evaluation	Questionnaire used to evaluate the setting up of the Attention Autism intervention.
Cycle 3	June 2019	Negotiating work	Phone and email communication to confirm details for the third piece of systemic work.
	July 2019	starting school session	Completed two sessions for parents on starting school, delivered with the reception teacher.
	June 2019	Evaluation	Evaluation questionnaires used to evaluate the session.
	July 2019	Focus group or Questionnaire	Focus group with EY staff to review the whole project and debriefing. Questionnaires for those that could not attend the focus group.

3.5.2 Techniques and approaches I planned to use when working systemically

3.5.2.1 Consultation skills including language and questioning techniques

Pellegrini (2009) states that consultation skills such as the questions asked are key intervention in educational psychology in which to support positive change. Williams and Greenleaf (2012) highlight the importance of using discourse carefully since the language we use can shape how reality is perceived and how we act towards solving problems. Consequently, I had to think carefully how I used language to create a reality that moved away from the deficit model (where the problem is located in the child) and instead took a

more ecological approach (locating the problem in the interactions between systems such as family, peers, EY staff, resources in the EY setting and community factors). It was hoped that the meaning produced by this type of discourse would alter how the EY staff and I approached solving problems. To help me modify my discourse in the research process I used techniques from solution focused psychology, systemic thinking, and the principles of attunement, which I will introduce below. Other areas identified in the literature review as being key facilitators when working systemically were 'ownership, collaboration and participation' and 'contracting and negotiation'. I have discussed both below to introduce these areas before discussing how they were used in chapter four.

3.5.2.1.1 Solution Focused psychology

Solution focused approaches have been increasingly used by EPs over the last two decades. Solution focused psychology has been described as a philosophical theory, which takes a social constructionist position arguing that reality is formed through social interactions and negotiations which are also affected by our choice of language (O'Connell, 2007). Solution focused approaches are a way of thinking and speaking guided by assumptions, including:

- Treat people as experts in their lives
- People have the capacity and resources to solve problems
- Focus on the person not the problem
- Explore preferred futures
- Find out what is already working

Educational Psychology and solution focused psychology share a basic belief that systemic working is helpful when trying to avoid the 'within-child' medical model of working (Simmonds, 2019). This is also in line with the origin of solution focused psychology, where families are viewed as systems where if any one part of the system changes, it can have a ripple effect on other related systems (de Shazer, 1991). Solution focused psychology is pragmatic as there are a variety of 'techniques' associated with it that an EP can use when working with people. One of these techniques is looking for exceptions. de Shazer (1991) suggests that practitioners can discover the times when people have been successful and what resources they used to make it a success, for example:

'When faced with this sort of issue before what did you do that worked?'

'What else have you done that contributed to some difference?'

Another technique used is, exploring a person's preferred future, by asking what it would look like and together thinking how they can use their existing resources to move towards that future (de Shazer, 1991). To do this the practitioner uses a range of solution-focused questioning skills and elicitation techniques, for example:

'How will you know when things have improved?'

'What will be happening differently when things have changed?'

These techniques can be utilised by EPs in several ways, in this research they were used to support the nursery staff to take a more ecologic perspective and hence think and work in a more systemic way with me.

3.5.2.1.2 Systemic Thinking

Systemic thinking, primarily developed in family therapy, views people as complex systems who live within complex interacting systems (i.e., school and family) (Taylor, 1994). Over time, systemic thinking has been influenced by the social constructionist paradigm, in that it is through language that problems are constructed but also resolved (Pellegrini, 2009). In Educational Psychology, systemic thinking has helped to shift the focus from seeing 'problems' as residing within the individual and instead to the interactions of the interacting systems. However, Pellegrini (2009) states that despite this change in thinking by EPs, many EPs' practice has not significantly changed, with a focus on individual assessments with limited exploration of the interacting systems around the child. There are several approaches that can be used to apply systemic thinking in our work as EPs. A number of these will be discussed.

Questions are one of the key tools used by EPs to facilitate change, however Tomm (1988) states that some questions can lead to a cause-and-effect way of thinking, which can lead to the assertion of blame. Pellegrini (2009) explains how EPs can avoid this by applying systemic thinking by using questions, that are based on the assumption that there are connections within and between all systems. Tomm (1988) describes two questioning techniques that promote a circular assumption in that it focuses on the interconnections within systems: circular questions and reflexive questions. Circular questions are those that explore a person's interactions and the answers to these questions provide information to the system about the system, in other words, helping the person make connections between their behaviour and others (Tomm, 1988). Examples of circular questions, include:

"Who finds this problem the most concerning?" and
"How do you react to the child's response?".

Reflective questions, as the names suggests, prompts people to reflect on their beliefs and narratives about themselves and others in the system, helping people to think about the implications of their behaviour and consider possible alternatives (Tomm, 1988). Examples of reflective questions, include:

"If you talked to Jenny about this, what do you think she might say?"
"What do you think Yusuf thinks when you ask all the children to tidy up?"

Another style of questioning is feed-forward, which encourages people to imagine the future. It focuses on the patterns of relationships in the future and uses positivity to encourage people to think about alternative ways forward (Tomm, 1988). Tomm (1988) claims that this style of questioning can help people be conscious of the fact that life is not predetermined and inspires them to change things. Examples of a feed-forward questions, include:

"Who will think differently next week?"
"When you have created the calm corner in the nursery, what will the children be doing differently?"

These questions can be used by EPs in several ways, in this research I needed to be reflexive and reflective to observe and analyse the effect of these questions and be able to respond in the moment, choosing questions to use next that will facilitate change.

3.5.2.2 Attuned Interactions

Attunement has its origins in attachment theory and refers to how an individual responds to another person, through language and behaviour that is responsive to the person's emotional state (Bennathan and Boxall, 1996). A set of attunement principles have been developed by Kennedy et al. (2010) to support a therapeutic intervention programme aimed at promoting attunement, Video Interaction Guidance. There are six principles and below I have provided examples of the behaviours associated with each (Kennedy, et al., 2010):

- Being attentive (friendly posture; paying attention; leaving time for others to think/speak).
- Encouraging initiatives (Active listening; showing warmth or playfulness through intonation; naming positively what you hear, think, or feel; looking for initiatives).
- Receiving initiatives (receiving with intonation, words, or body language i.e., returning eye contact, smiling, nodding in response, repeating words they used; being friendly and/or playful as appropriate).
- Developing attuned interactions (receiving them and responding; waiting for your turn; giving and taking short turns; giving them a second (and further) turn on same topic;)
- Guiding (building on a response; giving information/help when needed; offering choices; making suggestions)
- Deepening discussion (collaborative discussion and problem-solving; naming it when opinions differ and managing conflict through restoring the earlier principles of attunement; investigating the intentions; reaching new shared understandings; supporting them to set goals).

Interventions focusing on these principles have been shown to be effective in enhancing positive relationships (Bakermans-Kranenburg, et al., 2003). Furthermore, Hattie and Timperley (2007) highlight the importance of positive relationships when wanting to create change. Therefore, in this research I needed to be reflexive and reflective to observe and analyse the effects of my attuned interaction skills and be able to respond in the moment to work with participants to create change.

3.5.2.3 Contracting and negotiations

The literature review highlighted contracting and negotiations as key facilitators of systemic working. Burden (1978), Balchin (2006) and Murphy and Duncan (2007) state that contracting at the start of a project is key so that expectations can be clarified, goals can be agreed upon and a collaborative alliance can start to form. In March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature, they reported that common issues at the contracting and negotiation phases were not having a clear understanding of each other's roles and not

agreeing how to communicate with each other. Burden (1978) suggests this can be resolved by having a written contract, so that it can be read and even signed giving the process weight. Murphy & Duncan (2007) also highlighted the importance of a positive working relationship in negotiations and contracting, which provides further support for the importance of the attuned interactions skills, as mentioned above. The contracting meeting in this project took place with the EY team at the start of the project by completing a Service Level Agreement. This was done together so that there was agreement among the EY staff regarding the aims and expectations of the project, this will be discussed further in chapter four.

3.5.2.4 Ownership and collaborative working

In the literature review ownership was highlighted as a key facilitator in working systemically (Geiger et al., 2015; Randall, et al., 2015; and Balchin, et al., 2006). Randall et al. (2015) and Balchin et al. (2006) promoted ownership of their research projects through their model of recruitment and during the contracting phase. Randall et al. (2015) and Balchin et al. (2006) model of recruitment was to offer the opportunity to all schools, but they only worked with schools who showed a commitment to the project by putting it on the school development plan. In contrast, in Geiger et al. (2015) study, a senior EP initiating this work approached stakeholders to seek engagement in the project. They reported that this top-down approach made it a challenge to engage key decision makers throughout the project. However, in both Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) studies, ownership was very much placed with the school and follow ups reported that most schools were continuing or had embedded the project they had started. I had hoped to use a similar bottom-up approach to Randall et al. (2015) and Balchin et al. (2006), where EY settings interested in this research could submit a request to become involved. However, given the traded model of service delivery used in this LA, the Principal Educational Psychologist did not want to offer all EY settings this research opportunity and then only give it freely to only one EY setting, given that all the other services from the EPS need to be paid for. Thus a top down purposive sampling was used, whereas the participating EY setting was targeted, which possibly impacted on the level of ownership the EY setting felt they had or wanted over the project and their level of collaboration during the project.

Both Balchin, et al. (2006) and Randall, et al. (2015) also suggested that ownerships was key in promoting the longevity of the project once the researchers had ended their involvement. Another facilitator within this area, was highlighted by Geiger et al. (2015), Burden (1978) and Randall et al. (2015) who stated that it was important that the EY staff felt a sense of collaboration and shared responsibility over the project. March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature provided similar findings stating that collaborative working with models of good practice was what enhances consistency and improves quality of practice in schools. In this research I needed to be reflexive and reflective to observe and analyse the effect of these approaches and to respond in the moment, this will be discussed further in chapter four. In this section I have introduced consultation skills, techniques and approaches I planned to use when working systemically with the EY setting. All these techniques have been reflected on in the action research cycles in chapter four and I believe my systemic working has improved because of this process. I also added guiding principles to my

repertoire of tools in working systemically, which developed out of my reflections from cycle two and will be discussed further in chapter four.

3.6 Data collection and analysis

The data collected in this research was qualitative, which is in line with the research question and axiological position of the research. In action research there is a continually process of data collection and analysis. In this research, as I received feedback from participants, I analysed it and modified my practice. Therefore, although I have attempted to separate data collection and analysis, they were not necessarily considered as separate at each phase of the research. In the first half of this section, I describe the tools used to collect and analyse the data, why they were chosen, how they were constructed, and the critiques associated with these tools. I will then go on to look specifically at data analysis and my use of a broadly ethnographic approach to analyse much of cycles one-three and my use of qualitative content analysis during some of the final action research cycle.

3.6.1 Data collection

3.6.1.1 Meetings and conversations with the Early Years staff

During the project, I had numerous informal conversations with the EY staff and some more formal conversations and meetings. I decided that an audio recording of large formal meetings would be helpful, but in the end, there was only one of these and a focus group at the end of the project. Therefore, for the informal conversation and formal meetings with only one or two staff members, I decided I would take notes in the meeting and reflect that same day in my research diary. A critique of using meetings as a way of gathering data, comes from the realm of focus groups, Morgan (1998) highlights that in focus groups there is the potential for the researcher or a participant to dominate the discussion or go off task. To mitigate this, I shared an agenda with participants at the beginning and checked in to see if there was anything else they wanted to discuss. I also prepared detailed planning notes to help me think through how I would work systemically in the meetings (see Appendix X).

The audio recording provided me with a detailed account of the meeting and how I worked together with staff to discuss working systemically and how I facilitated those conversations. The audio recording had an advantage over the research diary in that a recording is likely to lead to less subjectivity as it does not rely on my memory of the event and allowed me to listen to the meeting several times to reflect. In qualitative research audio recordings are often transcribed so that data analysis can more easily take place. However, in action research the data analysis is cyclical and ongoing, I was analysing what was said in the meeting as it occurred and making modifications to my practice during the meeting. I then listened back after this meeting and reflected in my research diary on what I heard and what further modifications needed to be made for next time. I did this, instead of transcribing the data since transcribing would not have been an efficient use of time and potentially, I may not have had time to transcribe the recording before my next visit to the EY setting.

The limitation of not transcribing is that it prevented further systematic analysis of the data and thus it is possible that my analysis was limited by this. However, for the focus group at the end of the research I was able to transcribe the audio recording as I had the time to dedicate myself to further data analysis. This will be discussed further in the section entitled 'data analysis'.

3.6.1.2 Observations

Two observations of the EY settings were arranged in conjunction with the EY staff at the start of the project. The first observation was a full day at the setting. Following the large action research cycle, I was at the 'observe' phase of the cycle, taking notes about what I saw that could help me answer my research question. Following a small action research cycle, I observed, reflected in the moment on what I was observing and acted on those reflections during my conversations with the EY staff; I then evaluated the language I used with them and their responses to this and considered modifications to my practice and how I might 'move in a new direction' to continue to improve my practice at working systemically. The second observation I completed was in preparation for the first piece of systemic work, where I observed the context in which a group of children were reluctant to speak. During this observation I followed the larger action research cycle, focused on the observe phase and I took notes, I did not interact with the children or the adults on that occasion and reflected in my research diary following the observation to help formulate a plan of how to 'act' based on these observations.

3.6.1.3 Questionnaires

Four questionnaires were used in the research, three to evaluate the pieces of systemic work but also to act as an intervention. This included a questionnaire to evaluate: the training session on reluctant talkers (see appendix XI), the support of staff to set up an Attention Autism intervention (see appendix XII) and an evaluation form for the parent session on starting school (see appendix XIII). This method was chosen because it was a quick way to collect feedback and it is easy to analysis (Wilson and McLean, 1994). This was important for this action research project since I needed to be able to reflect on the feedback to enable me to modify my practice and move in a new direction within a day or so. The questionnaires were designed with open questions to capture people's unique responses to the questions. I included one likert scale question, on how helpful the session was, although this was not part of the data collection since it did not answer the research question. However, it did provided a quick way to check on the participations' perception of the effectiveness of the work, which provided a context in which to frame the participates reponses to other questions.

One of the questions (question 5, 4 and 5 respectively on the questionnaires) used in the questionnaires was based on solution focused psychology and was used to empower participants to think about what positive change they would make to their own practice. This question although important for the improvement of my systemic practice reduces the reliability of the questionnaire since it is intended to elicit a positive response and thus

researcher bias is likely to have occurred (Stake, 1994). However, as I have used a range of data sources this bias is hopefully reduced as I am able to cross-reference the data.

Another questionnaire used (see Appendix XIV), was that given to EY staff who could not attend the focus group, this questionnaire included similar questions to that chosen for the semi-structured focus group (discussed below) to gather staff views of the systemic work completed over the research project. Coolican (2009) criticises the use of questionnaires as he states that they describe instead of explaining what the questionnaire is measuring. Coolican (2009) suggests using questionnaires in combination with other data collection methods to reduce this problem, which is what I have done in this research.

3.6.1.4 Focus group

The staff I had worked with in the project were invited to a semi-structured focus group to discuss their views of the systemic work completed over the research project. Four EY staff attended, and three were unable to attend and were invited to express their views via a questionnaire with similar question areas (as outlined above). The focus group lasted 30 minutes and an audio recording was taken so that further analysis of the data could take place, this will be discussed in the 'data analysis' section below. I prepared a prompt sheet to give some structure to the discussion (see Appendix XV). A focus group was chosen to gain a variety of staff's subjective experiences which could be shared and discussed in a short time space (Yin, 2011). This worked well in conjunction with the questionnaires from those who could not attend the focus group.

3.6.1.5 Research diary

The purpose of this research was to improve my practice and therefore the essence of my data set are made up of the problems I identified and anticipated and the solutions I developed. To record these, I kept a research diary. Mills (2003) talks about the importance of research diaries in action research, stating that they represent the thought processes of the researcher as they try to systematically reflect on their practice, which subsequently leads to action. I made entries into the diary regularly, including after visiting the setting, after communications such as emails and phone calls and when I was planning/designing systemic projects, it was a continuous reflective process. In terms of a critique, a research diary is subjective and therefore will be biased and it cannot be generalised. However, in this study I have been investigating how I can improve my practice, and this would have been difficult to gather in any other way. I placed significant value on the research diary in this study and therefore I felt it was helpful to try to triangulate the data, where possible, with other data I gathered.

3.6.1.6 Supervision

McNiff and Whitehead (2011) state it is key for action researchers to be open to critique so that they can test the trustworthiness of their knowledge claims; Dunsmuir and Leadbetter (2010) state that supervision can support this process. I had access to supervision regularly during the research I received in individual supervision from both university tutors and placement supervisors, peer supervision and peer support from colleagues on placement and at university. Within this research, formal and informal supervision sessions were recorded and then reflected on in the research diary. Where supervision had a significant impact on the research, this has been discussed in chapter four also. As with the research diary supervision added to the continuous reflective process I was involved with during the research and formed part of both the small and large action research cycles.

3.6.2 Data analysis

I used two main forms of data analysis in this research, a summative approach, and a broadly ethnographic approach. For cycles one, two and some of cycle three I adopted a broadly ethnographic approach to data analysis and then for a section of cycle three I used qualitative content analysis (QCA). In this section I will outline the reasons why I took these approaches and the procedures I took.

3.6.2.1 A broadly ethnographic approach to data analysis

Ethnography research is where the researcher is part of the research process and is involved with looking at social interactions in a given environment. In that way knowledge is constructed through an intersubjective research process (Cook & Craig, 1995). In that way, researchers have a significant effect and are complicit in the narratives constructed (Sandelowski, 1991).

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) states that an ethnographic approach is well suited to analysing interactions, relationships, and unpredictable situations, that can be too complex for quantitative methods. Ethnographic analysis is an in-depth interpretation of sources of data such as observation, research diary and focus groups to create "thick descriptions". In that way a broadly ethnographic approach to analysis fitted well with the unpredictable nature of action research. An issue with ethnographic research is that subjectivity will be part of the data collection. I kept a research diary to support my reflections around bias and assumptions. Jackson (1990) nonetheless warns that seeing the world from our own perspective is unavoidable and as such I needed to take this into consideration when interpreting the results.

3.6.2.2 The Ethnographic data analysis procedure in this study

In this study a broadly ethnographic analysis took place throughout the research, I continuously analysed, interpreted, and learnt from the data following the action research cycles. Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) state that this continual analysis involves careful attention to the purpose of the study and creative insight. At the end of the three cycles, I turned my attention more fully to the analysis; asking myself what does the data tell me, what have I learnt and how does this answer my research question?

Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) state that whilst there is not a specific approach to ethnographic data analysis, they recommend the following points, which I followed. First, become immersed in the data from reading/listening to it, here I revisited my notes from meetings, supervision, observations, audio recordings and my reflective diary. From here I decide which data to use i.e., data that closely connects to the research question. Then I made analytical notes from the text/audio, paying attention to patterns or contrastive points to understand and reflect on my practice. I also took Eriksson and Kovalainen (2016) recommendation, that the research report is typically written in prose with enough description for the reader to know what happened in a specific situation.

3.6.2.3 Why I used qualitative content analysis

In this section I will give a brief consideration to other methods of analysis to justify my decision to use QCA. Firstly, thematic analysis was considered as a flexible and useful tool that provides rich data, however it was also described as giving a complex account of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006); whereas QCA is described as providing simple reporting (Green & Thorogood, 2004). Shapiro and Markoff (1997) add that despite its simplicity, it can provide rich meaning from its thoughtfully done coding and categorisation. Given that I was using another form of data analysis throughout the research, I decided that a simplified set of reporting would be more beneficial here. There is both a qualitative and quantitative approach to content analysis (Kohlbacher, 2006). Kohlbacher (2006) describes quantitative content analysis as a process of calculating frequencies of words and similar terms. As QCA is described as making inferences about what the communicator intended to convey, I considered QCA more suited to the research question in this study. Qualitative data analysis methods have been criticised and were labelled as unscientific (Kohlbacher, 2006). Krippendorff (2004) instead describes content analysis as a rigorous systematic tool to make sense of a particular context. Krippendorff (2004) states that researchers choose QCA because it supports the researcher to make replicable and valid inferences, can increase a researchers' understanding and meaning of a phenomenon and/or inform action.

QCA can be applied in an inductive or a deductive way; the purpose of the research dictates which way it is used. Inductive is a 'bottom-up' approach that is data driven, avoiding any preconceptions, and categorising of the data into pre-existing coding frames. Deductive QCA is when the purpose of the study is based on prior knowledge and the main aim is theory testing (Kyngäs & Vanhanen, 1999). For this research, as it is exploratory in nature and there

is limited literature on the subject area, the inductive approach was used. Elo and Kyngäs (2008) stated that when analysing the data researchers must also decide if to only analysis manifest or the latent (laughter, posture, silence) content as well. After reviewing the audio recording of the focus group several times, it was decided that analysing the latent content was unlikely to add anything when I reflected on the research question.

3.6.2.4 Qualitative content analysis procedure

I used QCA twice in cycle three, once for the parents' questionnaires following the starting school session and once at the end of the project to analyse the focus group and questionnaire of staff views of the systemic work completed over the project both times using the same procedure. The focus group was recorded and saved as an audio file which was subsequently transcribed as a word document. This research broadly followed Elo and Kyngäs' (2008) procedure for QCA, summarised below and see Figure 3.4.

3.6.2.4.1 Preparation

One of the aims of the preparation stage is to become immersed in the data, I did this by reading the data several times. I read the parent questionnaires from the starting school session and the questionnaires from staff which reflected on the project, several times. For the audio-recording of the focus group I listen to this several times and I transcribed this verbatim, which helped immerse myself in the data.

3.6.2.4.2 Organisation

The next stage is to organise the data. The data was subject to content analysis using ATLAS.ti (Muhr, 2021). Atlas.ti is a software tool that is designed to help arrange, reassemble, and manage the analysis of qualitative data in systematic ways. I followed an inductive approach starting with open coding which involves adding notes or headings in the text while reading it to describe the content (see Appendix XVI for the open coding of the parent session questionnaire, Appendix XVII for the open coding the staff questionnaire and Appendix XVIII for the open coding of the transcript of the focus group).

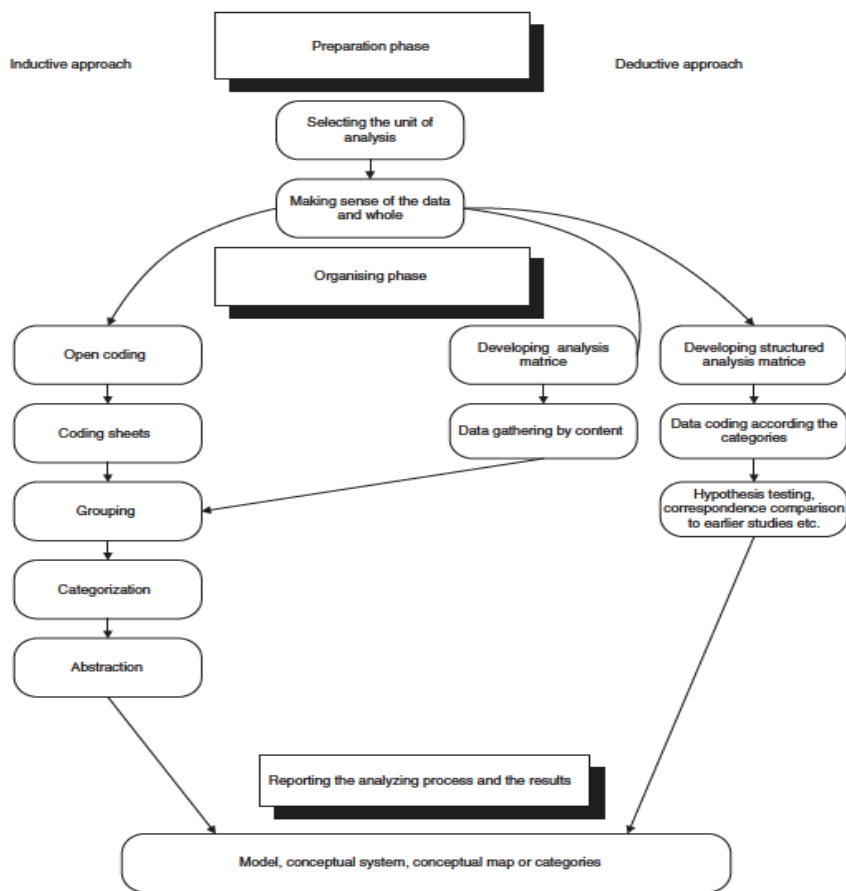
These notes and headings were then collected into coding sheets and categories and grouped under higher order headings where appropriate, see Appendix XIX for an example of this process with the data from the parents' questionnaire (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008). Due to the nature of the questionnaires, most responses were short (one sentence or bullet points), creating units of analysis. The code extracts were then grouped to form sub-categories and generic categories which relate to the main category/question of research. Through interpretation of the data, I grouped datum that I felt 'belonged' together. Where similar categories arose, where the distinctions between them was ambiguous, these categories were collapsed into one.

3.6.2.4.3 Reporting

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) described this stage as the reporting of the results through models, conceptual systems, conceptual map or categories. The findings were presented in a diagram, showing the abstraction process including the main category, generic categories, and sub-categories.

Figure 3.4

Elo and Kyngäs (2008) preparation, organisation and reporting phases in content analysis.



3.7 Research quality and trustworthiness

Trustworthiness is a term used by qualitative researchers to assess the quality of research and is used in place of the phrase 'validity' used by quantitative researchers (Guba, 1981). Five main areas qualitative researchers look at are credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and reflexivity, which will be used in turn to assess the trustworthiness of this research (Guba, 1981).

3.7.1 Credibility

Howitt (2010) states that in quantitative research measurement validity is the extent to which something measures what it says it is measuring. However, in qualitative research credibility is used as an equivalent term and can be described as accurately documenting a phenomenon (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This research explores the improvement of my skills and knowledge of working systemically. Therefore, a measure of credibility would be how well the methods of analysis matched the data. The data was the feedback I received from the EY staff in relation to the questions and techniques I used, but also the engagement of staff and parents with the systemic methods I used such as delivering training and the EY staff views on the whole model of working. The analysis of the data mostly happened in direct communication with EY staff and parents. As the 'data' or feedback from the EY staff and parents became available, I needed to instantly interpret that communication and adapt in the moment. It was therefore possible that I may have misunderstood a communication. As an attempt to uphold credibility in these situations I used member checks (Shenton, 2004). This process involved collaboration with participants to check the accuracy of the data. This was done by using clarifying questions during conversations with staff and secondly by using paraphrasing at the end of conversation to ensure that I had understood them correctly. Credibility was also upheld by helping to ensure the honesty of the participants (Shenton, 2004). This was done by involving only participants who were genuinely willing to be involved, encouraging participant to be honest and building a rapport with them, informing participant that there are no right or wrong responses and that they have the right to withdraw from the study at any time. Participants were also told about their independent status in this research, so they were able to talk freely without fear of repercussion (Shenton, 2004).

Audio recording and questionnaires gathering feedback from systemic pieces of work were also used to uphold the credibility of the research. This is because by using audio recordings of the meetings and the questionnaire responses, I could reflect on what was said and done and not rely solely on my interpretation in the moment. Some misinterpretations were noted, through this process, which enabled me to reflect on how I could avoid such misinterpretations again and allowed me to revisit that misinterpretation and adapt my practice going forward. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) state that action researchers should be active in testing out the validity of their knowledge claims which is what the audio recordings and questionnaires have helped me do here. Another measure I took to uphold credibility was I kept a research diary so that I could reflect throughout the project. This included monitoring my own constructions, decisions, and interpretations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). I documented each communication and interaction with the EY setting, which helped promote the transparency of the action research cycle particularly the evaluating and modifying stages.

As well as internal scrutiny, I sought external scrutiny in the form of my research supervisor. I had frequent sessions with my supervisor, so that the experience of the supervisor could help me notice any flaws or biases in my work (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). However, I did not share the audio recording of the meeting with the EY staff to help protect the EY staff's anonymity. Instead, I shared my reflection on these communications. Another level of external scrutiny is that this research will be presented in front of a panel of academics as

part of the universities VIVA process. Through this process amendments are likely be made to this research which will increase its credibility. A final way in which credibility was upheld, was by the examination of previous research findings to see if the results from this investigation are congruent with those of past studies.

3.7.2 Transferability

Qualitative researchers often refer to transferability as opposed to external validity as used by those taking a more positivist approach (Shenton, 2004). Positivists aim to generalise their findings to wider populations and may argue that by taking a qualitative approach that this is not possible. However, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that if the researchers provide sufficient contextual information, it would be possible for a reader to relate the findings to their situation if their context was similar. Thus, to assure this study's transferability the following six pieces of information have been included (Shenton, 2004): Contextual information about the participating organisations, inclusion and exclusion criteria for participation, numbers of participants, data collection method, details about the number and length of the interviews as well as over what period the meetings and conversation with staff took place. However, as this research is about my own practice, the aim is not for it to be generalisable to larger populations. Instead, it is hoped that other EPs may find some element of my improving practice helpful and use that in their own practice, in similar contexts and situations. Thus, having a clear and detailed method section is vital for other TEPs or EPs to replicate any of the techniques used here.

3.7.3 Dependability

Some qualitative researchers use the word dependability in place of reliability since the phenomena investigated by this type of research is often of a changing nature. Shenton (2004) suggests that dependability can be addressed by outlining the following areas in detail in the study: the research design and method, outlining the specific details of what will be done, and by reflecting on the effectiveness of the project. In this research, it is my opinion that these have been covered in sufficient detail to uphold the studies dependability.

3.7.4 Confirmability

Qualitative researchers often refer to confirmability as opposed to objectivity. This is where the researcher tries to ensure that the findings reflect the experiences of the participants and are not the researchers' interpretations of them. Shenton (2004) suggest that by keeping a research journal and by writing a reflective commentary within the design and method section, this would go some way to achieving this. For instance, the writing up would need to include reasons why one method was chosen over another and any weaknesses in the technique employed.

3.7.5 Reflexivity

Reflexivity is a tool which can be utilised to further the claim to the integrity and trustworthiness of qualitative research (Finlay, 2002). Researchers conducting qualitative studies are recognised to play a role in influencing the research that they collect, select, and interpret. Arguably, the research is a joint product of the participants, the researcher, and their relationship (Finlay, 2002). Therefore, through the tool of reflexivity, I have engaged in an explicit analysis of my own constructs of interpretations and questioned how and why these interpretations have been conceived. In addition to a research journal being kept throughout the process of the study, I openly acknowledge my social positions including class, gender and race which can influence the relationship with the participants and any meanings constructed from the discourse that takes place.

3.8 Ethical issues

This research was designed to uphold the British Psychological Society's (BPS) Code of ethics and conduct (2018) and the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). It has also gained approval from the University of East London's ethics committee (Appendix IX). I have structured this section under the four ethical principles from the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021): respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities; scientific integrity; social responsibility; and maximising benefit and minimising harm.

3.8.1 Respect for the autonomy, privacy and dignity of individuals, groups, and communities

By following this principle, psychologists are valuing people's dignity and are sensitive to the power dynamics that may exist, especially with regards to people's rights. This affects how psychologists approach research, such as following procedures for confidentiality, valid consent, anonymity. With regards to valid consent, psychologists are required to explain the nature of their research. In this research all participants, including EY staff and parents were given an opportunity to discuss the research, an information letter and a letter asking for their informed consent (all of which were submitted as part of my application for research ethics approval). This information clearly explained the process of the research and outlining the data collection process. Consent was then gained for their information to be shared in the research report whilst providing all participants discussed in the report with pseudonyms to protect their identity.

EY staff were given a week between being given the information letter and the informed consent to allow time for them to consider if they would like to take part and to ask questions. However, parents were given both letters at the same time due to time constraints but were given time to absorb the information and ask questions. All

participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the research at any point. EY staff were also reminded at each new action research cycle of their right to withdraw and again before the audio recording at the start of the focus group. It was also made clear in the participate information sheet that the recordings are kept on an encrypted data stick and in a locked cupboard and will be destroyed once the research is published or two years after the thesis write up is complete, whichever comes first.

3.8.2 Scientific integrity

By following the principle of scientific integrity, psychologist need to be designing, reviewing, and conducting research that ensures that the scholarly and scientific standards of the research is of high quality. As discussed above in the section on credibility, to uphold the principle of scientific integrity, I sought external scrutiny from my research supervisor throughout the research journey. Also, this research will be presented in front of a panel of academics as part of the universities VIVA process. Finally by the examination of previous research findings to see if the results from this investigation are congruent with those of past studies.

3.8.3 Social responsibility

The principle of social responsibility reflects the ideas that researchers have a shared collective duty for the welfare of others. By following this principle, psychology researchers should aim to generate knowledge with beneficial outcomes. As such in chapter five of this thesis I have included a section on implications for practice, where I have outlined the beneficial outcomes for other professionals from this research.

3.8.4 Maximising benefit and minimising harm

By following this principle, psychologists need to maximise the benefits and avoid the potential risks for their research. This includes consideration for the research participants and other's that may be affected by the research. To protect participants from harm, parents were debriefed at the end of the starting school session and EY staff were debriefed at the end of the study and a risk assessment was completed to attempt to mitigate risk that might occur because of the research study (submitted as part of my application for research ethics approval). Some of my work brought me into direct contact with children, however no data was gathered from these children and thus no further risk assessment or consent was needed.

In terms of maximising benefit, the staff I worked with gained knowledge and support through the techniques I used and systemic work I undertook. I will also maximise benefit from dissemination of the research. I plan to feedback to the staff the results of this research in the form of an informal discussion and a summary 2-page document to make it more accessible, with a link to the full thesis for those interested. I hope in this informal

discussion with staff to also discuss how I can feed back to the parents who attended the starting school session, one idea I could suggest is putting together a short paragraph to put in the school newsletter with a link to the 2-page summary and full thesis, for those interested. In terms of the EPS, I have fed back informally to the link EP for the school about the work that was done, and I also plan to feedback to the EPS more formally to share the knowledge that I have gained and some of the resources that were found to be useful in the form of a short presentation and question and answer session.

3.9 Chapter summary

This chapter has outlined why the research was conducted, I discussed my ontological and epistemological views and justified why I believe the choice of action research was most appropriate. The research procedures for recruiting participants, data collection and analysis were explained, and trustworthiness and ethical issues were discussed. The next chapter will present the action research process and findings.

4. Chapter Four. The Action Research Process

4.1 Introduction to the current chapter

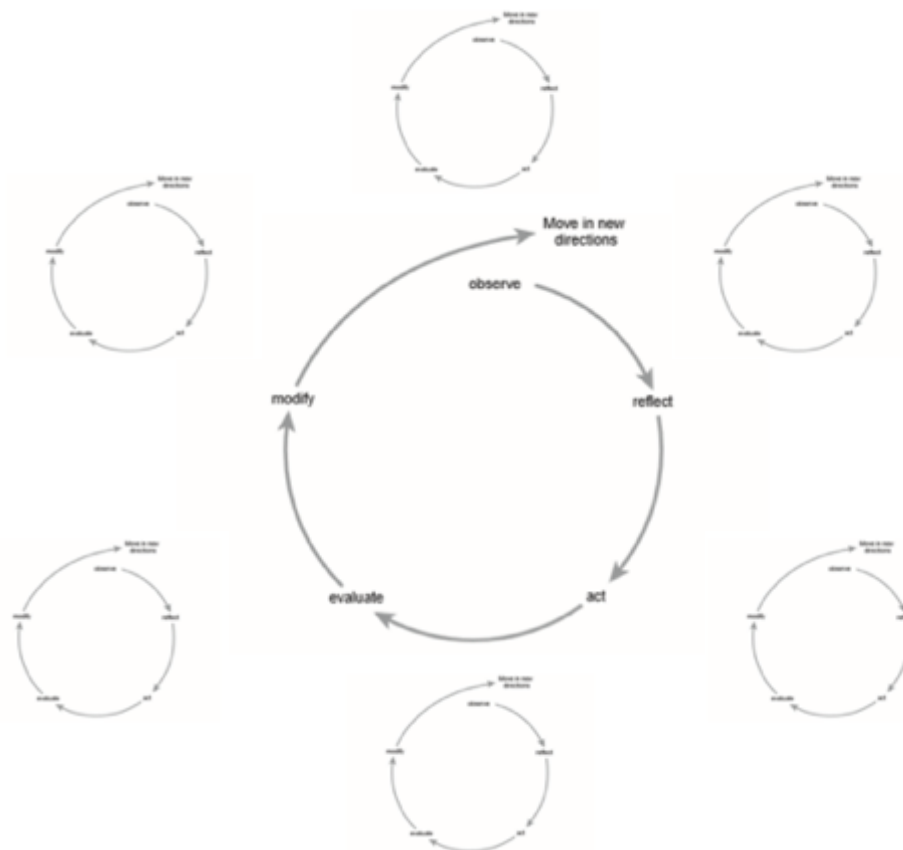
This chapter provides an account of the development of the research as I worked together with a group of EY staff to improve my professional practice in working systemically. In this section, I have outlined how each cycle was planned, conducted, results gathered and analysed, then reviewed and reflected on. Once a piece of systemic work was completed, I started a new cycle. This research has been presented chronologically.

4.2 The action research process

As discussed in Chapter 3, this research used a modified version of McNiff and Whitehead (2003) action research framework, see Figure 4.1 below. Three distinct action research cycles were conducted in this research, which were the three systemic pieces of work conducted with the setting. During the interactions with the EY staff and parents/carers, I followed the smaller action research cycles, as depicted by the small cycles circling the larger cycle. I introduced techniques, approaches, or questions, I gained feedback by observing how they responded, I analysed what their responses conveyed; and depending on the feedback, I had different responses, including changing the phrasing of the questions. These changes led to new ways of working which I developed during further work with the EY staff. This model allowed me to improve my practice at different levels, improving my systemic working through everyday interactions but also through the systemic pieces of work themselves.

Figure 4.1

Action Research Framework used in this research



4.3 Cycle one

I will describe how I followed the action research cycle to answer the following research question: How can I improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting? This research was also based upon the needs of the EY setting and how they wanted to be supported through a systemic approach. During cycle one I built on what is already known about working systemically and applied it with one EY setting. Burden (1978) highlights the importance of understanding the practices and ideologies that already exist within a setting and establishing a positive working relationship before attempting any form of change.

4.3.1 First contact

I made first contact with the Nursery via the Headteacher, who put me in touch with the EY staff team. Before my first meeting with the EY team I spent some time thinking and planning how I would develop a positive relationship with the EY staff (See Appendix XX for a research diary extract). I decided that the principles of attunement (Kennedy et al., 2015) would be key in creating a safe and trusting atmosphere, and I decided to focus on the foundation of attunement which is 'being attentive'. Within the principle of 'being

attentive' I particularly focused on '*waiting and watching before speaking*' as I know that I find silence uncomfortable, but that some people value that extra time to process and respond. I also decided to focus on '*wondering aloud about what they are doing, thinking or feeling*', I felt this was important in this first meeting, since I will not know the EY staff so it could be easy to misinterpret verbal and non-verbal communication (see Appendix XXI) for a diary extract following the meeting).

I met with the EY staff team at the end of the Spring term, the team consisted of two EY Teaching Assistants (Natasha and Bhavina) and two EY teachers (Claire and Laura), Pseudo names used. In this meeting I explained the research and assess their interest.

4.3.2 Contracting and planning meeting

To plan for the term's work with the nursery, I had a 1-hour planning meeting with the EY staff, which I audio recorded. I had several aims for this planning meeting including building relationships with the staff, gaining an understanding of the setting, to plan out the systemic work for the term and to agree a contract for the project.

4.3.2.1 Getting to know the nursery

Based on my reflections in my research diary (Appendix XX and XXI) I decided that it would be important to open the meeting by getting to know the setting (see Appendix X, for a copy of my semi structured prompt sheet used in the meeting). During this discussion about the setting, the staff talked about the closure of a local children's centre and the closure of a charity that supported parents locally, they stated that they had seen the skills and confidence of parents decreasing since then. At this point I attempted to explore how this could be developed by asking "*I wonder if that is something you would be interested in developing further?*". The '*I wonder*' was an attempt to soften the question and the '*developing further*' was aimed at making the question less threatening, as it acknowledges the existing skills. However, there was a lengthy pause and an indirect answer after I had asked this question and I had wondered if I had moved too quickly into the planning phase of the meeting, this reflection is captured in the below diary extract following the meeting:

"... the pause initially suggested to me that staff were not yet in a place to decide what changes they wanted to make. Perhaps because it was threatening to talk about developing practice with a relatively new person or perhaps simply because they needed more time to decide what they wanted to focus on."

However, as the topic changed and children who were reluctant to talk was discussed, the staff were very interested in improving their practice in this area, saying: "I'd love to unpick that" and "how do you encourage without pushing?". Overall, during the meeting, the staff had highlighted several areas in which systemic working could be of benefit, but they wanted more time to think about how what we had discussed might translate into a systemic piece of work. One of the EY teachers, Claire, suggested I had a follow up meeting

with her next week to plan this out further. At the same time, she also invited me to spend the day at the nursery, so that I could get to know the nursery and the team better. I was honoured to have received this invitation, as I reflected in my diary:

'First thoughts about the meeting were that it was a success, especially in terms of building an atmosphere of safety and trust. I do not think I would have had an invitation to spend the day at the nursery if I had not built that foundation in...'

The next paragraph looks at the second half of the meeting where we agreed ways of working to help ensure we had the same expectations of the project.

4.3.2.2 Service level agreement

One of the key facilitators of working systemically highlighted in the literature review was the area of contracting. Contracting before beginning a project of this nature is key so that expectations can be clarified, goals can be agreed upon and a collaborative alliance can start to form (Burden, 1978; Murphy & Duncan, 2007). We worked collaboratively to complete the SLA (see Appendix XXII) and I found it a helpful process since it helped us ensure that our expectations about the project were aligned. We also came across one misconception, which was that I had presumed that I would meet regularly with all four of the EY staff, however they had assumed I would be meeting with just one of them. As they could not commit this time, it was agreed that one staff member would become the project lead, Claire, and that she would liaise with me. During the meeting the staff expressed their interest in working systemically with me, although they expressed their concerns about having the time to be actively involved in the research to the level of exploring with me how I can improve my practice at working systemically. Consequently, the research was less participatory than I had hoped. This negotiation helped meet the EY staff's need not to commit too much time, but also my needs in terms of being able to regularly review and plan in collaboration with the project lead. Another area that we negotiated was how many cycles of action research would be appropriate, I felt at least three to give me time to learn and improve over several cycles and the EY staff felt three was the most they would have time to be involved with, so we agreed on three. After the meeting I listened back to the audio recording and reflected in my research diary. As part of that reflection, I completed a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunity, Threat (SWOT) analysis to help me process the event and plan next steps (Appendix XXIII).

4.3.3 A day at the nursery

In March 2019 I spent a day in the nursery. To reflect and improve on my practice I used the mini action research cycles to guide my thinking and actions. I took notes during my day and wrote those that related to the research question up into prose in my research diary which I have summarised below (further details can be found in the dairy extract, Appendix XXIV):

- I used the principles of attuned interactions ‘encouraging initiative’, ‘showing emotional warmth through intonations’ and ‘listening actively’ to do this (Kennedy et al., 2015). This approach helped establish the foundations of a trusting relationship with Natasha (one of the TAs) which I was unable to build initially in the team planning meeting.
- I used circular questions during the day, such as ‘When you play like this, how do the children who are reluctant to talk respond?’. This approach helped orient the staff towards the context by exploring their interactions.
- During my observation I noticed that although the EY staff had highlighted a lack of support for parents as an issue for them, only one member of staff seemed to engage in a conversation with parents at drop off and pick up. To me this would be a key time to build a relationship and provide support for parents. I reflected on the literature review, where Geiger et al. (2015) had highlighted the importance of staff choosing and taking ownership in the project for it to be a success. As such I did not want to press the issue, but I decided I would remind them of the concerns they had raised with me about parental support during our planning conversations.

4.3.4 Planning the first piece of systemic work

At the end of the day at the nursery, I met with Claire to plan the first piece of systemic work. I used an adapted version of ‘Consultation as a Framework for Practice’ (Wagner, 2008) and a simplified version of ‘Target, Monitoring and Evaluation’ (Dunsmuir et al., 2009) to structure the meeting, see Appendix X under the subheading ‘planning the work for the term’ and ‘project plan’ for a copy of my semi-structured preparation prompts. This structure helped clarify expectations, develop a shared agreement about the goals that are to be worked towards and to support the formation of a collaborative working relationship, which Murphy and Duncan (2007) argue are key in ensuring positive outcomes. It was apparent at the start of the meeting that I had not explained systemic working clearly enough. Consequently, I gave more examples, and we spent time talking about the sort of work I could be involved with, which resolved the issue.

In terms of Claire’s hopes for the first piece of systemic work she wanted those children who were reluctant to talk to start speaking more freely. This hope was still very focused on changes she wanted to see in the children, so I used questioning techniques to attempt to move the aim towards a more systemic one. I used a feed-forward question to encourage Claire to think of alternative ways forward by asking her to imagine the pattern of behaviour between the staff and the children in the future, asking: ‘What will the staff be doing differently when these children are talking more?’ She replied that staff would have a better understanding of why children are reluctant to talk and how to support these children. I then asked a solution focused question to prompt her to think about how she would like things to change, ‘how could my involvement move us one step closer to this image?’ I was surprised then that she suggested I could observe the children, as I had hoped that I would guide her towards a more systemic piece of work. I used a reframe to offer a different perspective, saying that it would be good to see the context in which the children were not talking. After agreeing to observe, I asked how we could meet the vision she had described of staff having a better understanding of why children are reluctant to

talk and how staff could support these children. She suggested that some training on this would also be helpful. I was pleased this had moved towards a more systemic piece of work and we agreed the information from the observation could help inform the training. Please see Appendix XXV for some reflections on this meeting in my research diary.

4.3.5 Observing the context in which some children were not talking

In following the action research cycle, the information gained from the planning meeting and the day at the nursery had led me to formulate an initial hypothesis surrounding the reluctant talkers. That is, the children who are reluctant to talk in the Nursery, found it anxiety provoking to speak with some of the adults. I thought I could use the observation to test this hypothesis, however I was aware that by taking a systemic lens to this situation, it might be interpreted by the staff that I was 'blaming' them for the children's reluctance to talk (Burden, 1978). I decided to take this problem to peer supervision, here one of my peers suggested that I do a positive focused observation focusing on what is working. This method of observation complemented the solution focused questions I had been using, and the staff seem to have been responding well to those. I took notes during the 1-hour observation and summarized this into a list of, what is working well to support the children identified as reluctant talkers:

- The unstructured free play environment encouraged almost all children to communicate with each other.
- Children identified as reluctant talkers talked aloud in the reading corner. The reading corner was set back from the rest of the nursery, perhaps providing the children with a sense of privacy to feel confident that they would not be overheard.
- Where adults took a slow and gentle approach in their verbal and non-verbal communications. In these situations, most children responded verbally to these adults.
- On one occasion an adult talked to a child about their soft toy, this encouraged the child to hand the toy over and tell the adult the toy's name. This child reportedly rarely spoke at nursery.

4.3.6 Delivering training to staff on supporting reluctant talkers

In preparation to deliver training to staff on supporting reluctant talkers I examined what my aims were for the training session and how I might achieve those (see Appendix XXVI for an extract from my research diary). With regards to my aim for 'staff to feel empowered, participate in the training and apply the learning from the training in their practice', I asked Claire to collect a list of aims for the training session from the EY staff team and the subsequent content they wanted, and I used that to structure the training session (see Appendix XXVII for a copy of the PowerPoint presentation used to supplement the training).

I decided to start the training by finding out what the staff already knew about reluctant talkers and what they were already doing that worked. This approach from systemic family

therapy highlights the importance of valuing and building on positive practices that already exists to give people the confidence to move forward (Hammond, 1996). It was at this point I directed the staff to what I had seen working, during my observation. I also used this opportunity to meet my other goal for the training, which was to encourage the participation of all EY staff. I did this by using some solution-focused questions directed at specific people, including: 'what did you do that made a difference the day I observed?', 'how did you do that?' and 'how did that work?' I used what the staff said to springboard into what the theory and research says about reluctant talkers and selective mutism, highlighting that anxiety underlies this. I continued to highlight the good practice that already existed in the nursery and highlighting the importance of doing more of what works.

In terms of my aim for 'staff to feel empowered, participate in the training and apply the learning from the training in their practice', I built in time at the end of the training for the EY staff to work collaboratively to furnish their own solutions and complete a table of next steps. See Appendix XXVIII for this completed table. During this stage, the EY staff seemed reluctant, so I used more directive questions, such as "who, what, where and when" to generate specific actions. Some of the actions agreed still seemed to focus on specific children as opposed to a general change in the setting or staff practices. However, there was a balance to be struck, although I wanted to widen the lens beyond the child, ideas for next steps needed to come from the EY staff if they were going to follow through with them. It was apparent to me at this point that the process of systemic change was far more challenging to the EY staff than if I had worked 1-1 with the child.

4.3.7 Evaluation of the training session

At the end of the training, I asked the EY staff to support me to evaluate the session to help shape future cycles and my professional practice. I used a simple What Went Well (WWW) and Even Better If (EBI) approach as it is quick and simple and can be done collaboratively. However, I felt dissatisfied with how I had collected the feedback since the EY TAs did not feedback their thoughts on the session, instead agreeing with the EY staff. To gain all the staff's views I followed up with an anonymous evaluation form to the EY team (Appendix XI). Based on the EY staff responses (Appendix XXIX) and my own reflections on how I felt the training session had gone, I made the following observations. I had unintentionally positioned myself as an expert, by delivering a training session 'to' the staff. In effect I was working 'for' them and although I tried to co-construct the aims, reflect on their good practice, and gave time to planning next steps, I still felt I was depended on for my 'expert' knowledge. In terms of improving my professional practice I needed to consider how I could work *with* the EY staff, such as co-delivering a session and/or reframing the session as a workshop or facilitating a solution circle, where staff could share good practice, so that I empower others to create their own solutions.

4.3.8 Reflections and learning from cycle one and the subsequent implications for cycle two

After having completed the first piece of systemic work and concluded the first action research cycle, I reflected upon the process and any conclusions I could draw. I used the large central action research cycle (Figure 4.1) to guide my reflection and implications for cycle two.

This first cycle focused on building a positive working relationship so that staff felt safe and supported by me, in order to be able to take risks. I tried to do this in several ways:

- I used the principles of attuned interactions (Kennedy et al., 2015)
- I committed time to getting to know the nursery and its staff.
- Taking a positive psychology approach including solution focused psychology to reduce the threat posed by taking a more systemic model of working.
- Gave staff the time they needed to plan and not impose my time scales on the staff.

In terms of implications for cycle two, it seemed key to continue to have positive working relationships at the forefront of my mind and to continue to move up to the high levels of attuned interactions (Kennedy et al., 2015). Another area I reflected on was the quality of the collaborative working with the EY staff. I used Arnstein (1969) ladder of citizen participation (Figure 3.3), as a framework to help me assess the level of participatory work in the project so far. In cycle one, I felt the project fitted with the 'Placation' rung of the ladder, in terms of the EY staff's participation with the project. This is because I had designed and facilitated the project, and the EY staff's opinions were important in decision making. I had hoped to be nearer the top of the ladder in terms of EY staff wanting to make the project their own. However, there were barriers preventing this, firstly this project was not the EY staff's priority, and they had limited time to commit to the project. Another issue was that I had approached the nursery to ask if they wanted to be involved with this project, the project was essentially owned by me and was my idea and that meant that from the start the process was not fully collaborative. With regards to the implications on cycle two, there was a need to find ways to work '*with*' the EY staff as opposed to '*for*' them, so that I empower others to take ownership of creating their own solutions.

During the first cycle, I noticed that when it came to negotiating the first piece of systemic work Claire was still unsure what working systemically meant. Through describing a few examples for her, this issue was resolved. This made me realise that in a bid not to impose my ideas on to the EY staff, I had left them unsure what work I could get involved with. If EY and school staff are used to working in a specific way with an EP, they will not necessarily know what other ways an EP could work. The list of examples we discussed prompted a better understand the wider role of the EP and enabled them to make informed decisions about how best to work with me. Being active to promote the wider roles of the EP will be key in working systemically in my future practice.

Another professional skill I improved this cycle was my use of language. From a social constructionist perspective, language can be used to help give phenomenon meaning

(Williams & Greenleaf, 2012). In taking that view on board, I had to think carefully how I used language to create a reality that moved away from the deficit model and instead took a more systemic approach to supporting children's needs. Another example of my developing uses of language and questioning skills is in my initial conversations with the EY team; I used linear questions, such as 'who does what?' and 'when does that happen?'. While these were useful to clarify the situation, Tomm (1988) suggested that they can lead to problems being framed as "within-people", potentially leading to judgements being made, blame being assigned and those 'blamed' feeling defensive. Therefore, once I was more familiar with the EY staff and setting, I reflected further on my choice of language so that I used language that promoted systemic change.

In this cycle I used solution focused questions, circular questions including one feed-forward question and reframing. I found the solution focused questions particularly helpful in promoting the EY staff to recognise their own skills and capacities and encourage them to do more of what is working. I used a feed-forward question once and found the effect of this question powerful as it allowed Claire to construct an alternative positive future regarding the interaction between the EY staff and the children. I also found reframing helpful, to give an alternative perspective when conversations drifted towards the within-child explanation. In terms of implications for cycle two, my analysis of my use of questions helped me clarify which questions were useful in which context. The solution focused questions still have their place in cycle two, as they will continue to help with empowering the EY staff. I also decided that moving forward I should use more circular questions, such as feed-forward. As these questions helped orient the EY staff towards the context by exploring their interactions.

So far, I have reflected on the challenges and facilitators to working systemically I have faced, here I will reflect on the systemic work itself. In this cycle, the systemic piece of work I completed was a training session for staff on reluctant talkers. Through training, there is an opportunity to work more preventatively and use psychology to benefit a greater number of children by upskilling staff. To do this, I attempted to give staff greater ownership of the training by asking them to decide on the aims and content, increasing their engagement with the training (Geiger et al., 2015). I also built on the positive practices that already exist to give them the confidence to develop their practice (Hammond, 1996). Finally, the training encouraged the EY staff to furnish their own solutions and action plan. Randall et al. (2015) goes one step further, arguing that instead of providing one-off training, EPs should support staff to develop their skills in project management so that they were more able to solve their own problems. In terms of implications for cycle two, I needed to consider how I can work systemically while also creating sustainable systemic changes.

4.4 Cycle two

Here I will describe the action research process I followed and how I built on what I have learnt from cycle one to answer the research question: How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting?

4.4.1 Planning the second piece of systemic work

In preparation to meet with Claire to negotiate the next piece of systemic work I asked her to talk to the EY staff about what they would like to develop in their practice. Reflecting on the difficulties in cycle one, regarding conceptualising what systemic work might look like, I created a table of examples which I shared with the EY staff team prior to my meeting with Claire (see Appendix XXX). Claire reported that it had been helpful to have a “*menu*” to help them understand what sort of work I could get involved with. This made me reflect on, how clear is the role of the EP? Stobie (2002) highlights that EPs find it hard to describe their role to others and that the increase in diversity of practice can cause confusion among others working with EPs. This led me to reflect on how important it is to define my role clearly and to use written examples to help others understand the diversity of the role so that they can get the most out of working with me.

To structure the meeting, I amended my semi structured script from my first planning meeting to add in more circular questions (Appendix XXXI). This is because previously the circular questions were helpful in guiding Claire away from a cause-and-effect thinking and towards making connections between the effects of interactions within systems. In the meeting Claire told me that the EY staff team have experience of working with children with a diagnosis of Autistic Spectrum Condition (ASC) but would like further support to help extend how long some children with ASC can engage with an adult led activity. To begin, I explored the concern with some linear questions and once I had a general picture of the concern, I asked questions that create difference in the information provided to provide an alternative view, such as: when is following an adult’s agenda more difficult/easier? I also drew on solution focused psychology, asking Claire to describe her preferred future for this area and using questions to help her mentally project forward and describe what would be happening differently. Another technique I used was feed-forward questions to orientate her towards the wider interactions in the nursery, such as: ‘what will the adults be doing differently when the children are more able to follow an adult’s agenda?’ Through this support Claire arrived at a preferred future in which the children with difficulties in following an adult’s agenda would be able to follow an adult’s agenda for steadily increasing amounts of time, all staff would have strategies they can use to increase all children’s attention and all children would benefit from the new strategies used by the staff.

With Claire’s preferred future to work towards I moved on to explore what was already working. Using the principles of solution focused psychology, I explored the existing strengths and resources the EY staff had. Claire noted that a key strength the EY staff team had was developing the children’s communication and interaction skills and that one EY TA ran a small intervention group. I asked further questions to explore what it was about these interventions that worked and followed up by asking questions such as ‘how does that provide ideas about what might be helpful now?’ In response, Claire told me that the children can focus better in small groups and that the staff often introduce new skills to the children in a small group setting. At this point she asked if there was a small group intervention the staff could do with the children to support them to follow an adult’s agenda, I was aware of such programmes and agreed to communicate these ideas over email/phone to finalise the plan for this project as the meeting came to a close.

I emailed Claire information on Attention Autism and Claire informed me that one of the EY TAs, Natasha, was particularly interested in running this intervention. Gameson and Rhyddrech (2008) highlight that long-term change and positive outcomes are more likely when people feel empowered, enabled, and engaged. To enable Natasha to have ownership of the intervention I also asked her how she preferred to learn and how she would like me to support her to set up an Attention Autism intervention. I chose my language carefully so that I was putting her in a position of power and myself in a supportive/temporary role. Natasha had highlighted that she learns best from 'seeing something in action' and so we agreed that there would be a modelling component to our work together.

4.4.2 Supporting staff to set up an Attention Autism intervention

We started with a training session, introducing the theory behind Attention Autism and moving on to what the intervention entails. The facilitation of the Attention Autism intervention was supported by a written guide, adapted from resources from the website Centre for Autism Middletown (2019). The purpose of the guide was to support the training process and to provide sustainability of the intervention, independent of my involvement. The guide (extract in Appendix XXXII) included:

- A quick start summary page
- A detailed explanation of the intervention and how to set it up.
- Example 'lesson plans'
- A tool that can be used to review a child's progress

Natasha was given time to explore this guide in the training session and time to ask questions. During the 1-1 training session I took an informal approach to delivery and used the principles of attuned interaction (Kennedy et al., 2015) to continue to enhance our relationship focusing on the areas of receiving initiatives and developing attuned interactions. This was a key part of the training for me since I wanted to create an environment in which Natasha felt safe to learn and ask questions. During the modelling I followed the standard formula for delivering the intervention (Centre for Autism Middletown, 2019) and the progress through the activities was child led and dependent on the progress of the group. I ensured the resources I used were readily available in the nursery setting so that Natasha would be able to visualise how she would be able to run her own intervention.

Following the modelling session, we then had 20 minutes together in which to reflect on Natasha's learning, answer any questions she had and to reflect on how the session could be improved next time (Appendix XXXIII contains prompts I had prepared). In my research diary, I reflected on the 'reflective session', I wrote: *'I felt this approach gave Natasha permission to work 'with' me to think of ways forward, treating her as my colleague where we were learning and improving together'*. The principles of attuned interaction (Kennedy et al., 2015) were also key in this interaction, where I used the 'guiding' and 'deepening discussion' principle to help me focus on maintaining that attunement while trying to deepen our reflection.

Initially we had planned to end my involvement here and Natasha would deliver the intervention herself going forward. However, the following week Claire emailed me to say that a TA from the reception class, Suki, had heard about this intervention and would also like some training to deliver this. I was pleased that this intervention seemed to be up-scaling, but I was concerned that it was reliant on me to re-deliver the training, I wanted to build in something more sustainable. Claire, Natasha, Suki and I agreed that Natasha would meet with Suki to go through the theory and accompanying guide, then Natasha and I would co-deliver an Attention Autism session for Suki to observe and finally we would reflect together on our learning using the same prompt sheet as used with Natasha. This approach not only supported Suki to run the intervention but also it gave Natasha another opportunity to develop her skills and reduced dependency on me by setting up Natasha as a practitioner who could support other colleagues to run the Attention Autism intervention.

4.4.3 Evaluation: supporting staff to set up an Attention Autism intervention

To evaluate the support given in setting up the Attention Autism intervention, Natasha and Suki completed a questionnaire, (See Appendix XXXIV for a summary of the responses). Both Natasha and Suki gave the support in setting up an Attention Autism intervention a 4 or 5 out of 5 in terms of how helpful the modelling, handouts and other resources were. One of the TAs also reported *"I found the session very helpful seeing the group and how it works was really good."* This comment was also reflected in my conversations with the TAs in the reflective sessions where both TAs reported that what was most useful was seeing it in action. Neither TA put anything for the 'what could have been improved?' question. Perhaps this is because they did not want to offend me. It may be helpful in future for me to say how valuable their ideas would be for this section so that they see completing it as helpful as opposed to it being about identifying problems. The final question was aimed at creating change by asking 'what will you do differently?' both were confident enough after the sessions with me to say that they were going to run the Attention Autism intervention.

4.4.4 Reflections and learning from cycle two and the subsequent implications for cycle three

After completing cycle two I was aware that my relationship with the staff was still a key facilitator in working systemically. Firstly, Natasha volunteering to work with me in cycle two seemed to be because of my focus on being attentive and encouraged her initiatives in cycle one. Then during the 1-1 Attention Autism trainings session my focus on receiving initiatives and developing attuned interactions, seemed to create an environment in which Natasha felt safe to learn and ask questions. My focus on the principles of attunement helped keep me in the 'present' with the EY staff. In terms of implications for cycle three, the principles of attuned interaction will continue to be important in preparing the way for systemic working.

Another key feature underpinning my attempts at working systemically with the EY staff was ownership and participation. In cycle two I had been more conscious of this, using Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation to make me aware of how I worked with staff. In cycle one, although I had co-constructed some elements of the training with staff it was at the level of 'placation'. However, in cycle two I asked Natasha, how she wanted me to work with her, and we co-constructed the support she wanted in setting up the Attention Autism intervention. This way of working helped us move up the ladder of citizen participation to 'partnership' where we worked together to negotiate and shared decision-making responsibilities. I then handed over some of the responsibility of setting up the intervention to Natasha when another TA Suki asked for support, moving us up the ladder further towards 'delegated power'. In terms of implications for cycle three, I needed to consider how I can establish and maintain this position on the ladder.

As in cycle one, the questions I have used in cycle two have been a key part of my practice in working systemically, for instance: Questions that create difference helped me direct Claire's thinking towards alternative perceptions of a phenomena; preferred future questions and feed-forward questions enabled Claire to imagine her preferred future which orientated her towards the wider interactions in the nursery; and resource activation questions enabled me to empower Claire to participate more in the process of planning our work together. At the end of cycle two and before starting cycle three, I spent some time reading how I could improve my practice in this area further. I explored different frameworks for practice for EPs, including Wagner (2008), Rees (2008) and Gameson and Rhydderch (2008). A common theme between them was a focus on principles that guide practice as opposed to techniques or questions. Rees (2008) argues that when you are guided by principles, as opposed to the techniques you use, not only do they influence the questions you ask but also how you think, feel, and understand the world. This made me reflect on how I could improve my practice further, moving into cycle three.

In this cycle, the systemic piece of work I completed was supporting two TAs to set up the Attention Autism intervention. Acting on my reflections from the training I delivered in the first cycle and Randall et al. (2015) argument of the importance of developing staff's project management skills, I attempted to make this cycle's work more sustainable. Firstly, I compiled a written guide for setting up the intervention that could be used independent of my involvement; Secondly the intervention was modelled for the staff to help them visualise how they would run it; the reflective session encouraged a sense of partnership working and prepared them for taking more ownership of the intervention; and finally, Natasha was promoted to the position of 'trainer', supporting Suki to set up her own intervention. In terms of implications for cycle three, I needed to take with me the importance of the systemic working being sustainable.

4.5 Cycle three

Here I will describe the action research process I followed for the third and final cycle and how I built on what I have learnt from cycle one and two to answer the research question: How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting?

4.5.1 Planning the third piece of systemic work

In the final cycle Claire took the lead in thinking about the next piece of systemic work. She had conversation with Jenny (Headteacher) and Bev (Reception class teacher), about the possibility of my involvement in working with Bev to support parents of the EY children with the transition to school. I found this development positive because: firstly, Claire had taken ownership in planning this cycle; and secondly, when we had discussed working with parents/carers initially, it had not been deemed as a productive use of time. I reflected on the possible reasons why they changed their mind in my research diary (see Appendix XXXV). During the planning phase Claire, Bev and I negotiated delivering a joint 'Starting School' session to all parents whose children would be starting in reception the following September.

I tried to underpin these communications in principles that I believed promoted systemic working, as opposed to 'techniques' such as the use of a specific type of question. These principles, bar one, were adopted from a range of authors whose own principles resonated with me and my approach to systemic working. One of the principles was my own, not unique, and likely a response to a range of readings. These principles underpin all parts of my work in cycle 3, including how/what I thought about and how I choose to act. The principles are listed below:

1. A pragmatic principle, beliefs are interpreted which leads to actions, these actions are then interpreted to generate further beliefs and so on (Dewey, 1938).
2. A constructive principle, co-creating the social world (Wagner, 2008).
3. A self-reflexive principle, responding to the changing context (Wagner, 2008).
4. Systemic thinking, awareness of the circular patterns of relationships and influences (Gameson and Rhydderch, 2008).
5. Enabling Dialogue, where people feel engaged through collaborative working (Gameson and Rhydderch, 2008).
6. Creating lasting strategic change as opposed to reactive ones.
7. If it works do more of it; if it doesn't, do something different (Rees, 2008).
8. People have unique solutions to their problems (Rees, 2008).
9. People have the necessary resources to make change possible (Rees, 2008).

I used these principles to underpin the communications with Claire and Bev to co-construct ideas for the 'Starting School' session. See Appendix XXXVI for the structure used to prepare for the discussions. In our discussion Claire and Bev reported that in previous years feedback from parents had been that they wanted ideas to help reduce their child's anxiety about starting school. Bev and Claire reported that they had noticed that some parents were also very anxious and that they might benefit from support to manage their own emotions too. As a result of these communications the following was agreed:

Roles and aims for the session:

- Claire to greet parents (as the familiar face for many parents), to introduce Bev and myself and be on hand at the end for questions.
- Bev to focus on the specifics of the Reception class i.e., what day they will start, who will meet the children etc

- Sam to focus on supporting parents to prepare children physically and emotionally and to think about the impact their children starting school will have on the parents emotionally.

4.5.2 Co-delivering a parent session on starting school

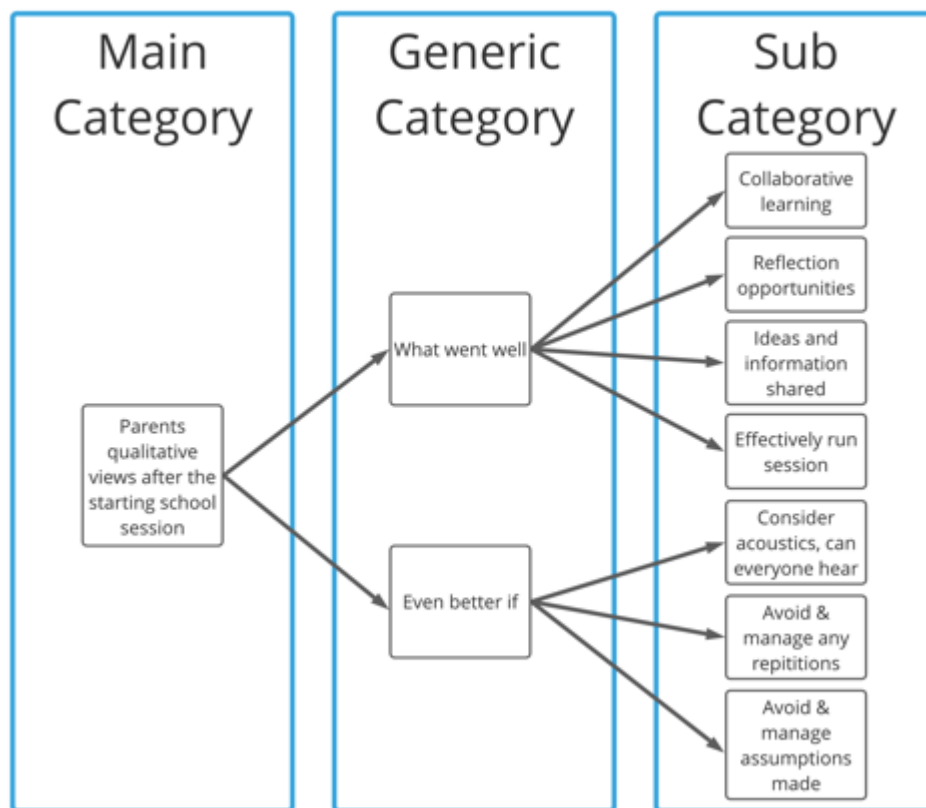
We delivered two parent sessions (a day and an evening session) of 1 hour long, each. Due to time constraints for Bev and Claire to meet, we worked separately on our sections of the session and shared our finished presentations and thoughts with each other for feedback. I used the above nine principles to underpin my work and my reflections from the cycle 1 training. I aimed to create lasting change (principle 6) by working in collaboration with Bev and Claire so that the session I delivered with them could be easily delivered by them the following year. I also wanted to plan a session where I was not delivering 'training' and positioning myself as an expert but instead discussing preparing for school collaboratively and sharing ideas (principles 7, 8, 9) so that they were co-constructed (principle 2) ways forward together. I organised a visual presentation where I put together a few slides with questions such as 'What can you do to help your child look forward to school?' and parents either had to talk about this with another parent, reflect on their own or we discussed it as a group. I also had some pre-prepared ("hidden") ideas in case the group needed support to think of ideas, which I used sparingly. Please see the PowerPoint in Appendix XXXVII for these slides, including the 'hidden' ideas.

4.5.3 Evaluating the parent session on starting school

To evaluate the 'Starting School' session, parents were asked to complete a questionnaire, (see Appendix XXXVIII for a table of the responses). The findings from the questionnaire have been presented in a diagram (see Figure 4.2), and in the below prose. The diagram shows how the data was categorised in to generic and sub-categories that derived from the QCA of the data. The analysis of the data sort to address the research question 'How can I improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting?' as such not all the data from the questionnaire was used if it did not relate to this question. Question five 'what will you do to prepare for your child to start school?' was used as an intervention to promote parents to think about the next steps they might take as a result of the session. Also question one 'On the below scale how helpful was the session on starting school? was not subject to further analysis, since my research question focuses on how I can work systemically as opposed how effect this systemic working. However, it reassuring to know that parents found the session helpful, with 21 parents scored the session as excellent, 12 as good, 1 as ok.

Figure 4.2

Categories map showing parents qualitative views after the starting school session



With regards to the questions, ‘2. What did you like about the session?’ and ‘6. any other comments?’ examples of some representative quotes included: *‘learning how to support my child in starting school’* and *‘I enjoyed listening to other people’s ideas and opinions’*. Based on the QCA and my own reflections, I made the following observations: the parents liked gaining ideas and information to support their child starting school, they enjoyed having an opportunity to work collaboratively with other parents and an opportunity to reflect.

With regards to the questions, ‘3. what didn’t you like?’ and ‘4. what could have improved the session?’ examples of a few representative quotes included: *‘maybe no children. Very hard to hear at times’*; *‘maybe slightly less discussion in pairs’*; *‘everything was fine’*. Based on the QCA and my own reflections, I made the following observations: several parents highlighted that it was difficult to hear at times. There were several pre-schoolers in the room which meant it was noisy at times, and although parents were encouraged to leave children at home this was not possible for everyone. For further sessions with parents, it would be important for me to think about how to reduce this noise, such as providing a creche or to reduce the size of the group.

A few parents commented that they would have liked to have seen a reduction of the repetition in the session, specifically related to discussions with other parents, on reflection I could have used a greater variety of approaches to achieve a co-constructed session. A comment that stood out to me in this section was *‘Don’t assume parent don’t already have*

other children in school. Don't assume parents won't (still) be very busy when child starts school looking after other sibling or working part/full time'. As most of the session was co-constructed, the 'assumptions made' were a collective assumption made by many of the parents and by not commenting on these 'assumptions' myself I in effect upheld them. This comment by a parent made me reflect on my role in coordinating a co-constructed session, in terms of improving my professional practice I need to be actively looking for assumptions or stereotypes being made and provide contrasting positions to help give the discussion balance to prevent some parents feeling isolated by the conversation.

4.5.4 Reflections and learning from cycle three

My reflections and learning during cycle two made me consider moving from a reliance upon questioning techniques to moving toward practice guided by principles in cycle three (Rees, 2008). The principles I chose provided me with more freedom in the conversations to work systemically, but still with guidance. When it came to preparing the parent session, I had thought thoroughly about principles 2,6,7,8 and 9 which led to me designing a co-constructive session with parents as opposed to delivering a 'training' to them. However, reflecting on the feedback from participant 22 (see Appendix XXXVIII) I considered that I had placed the value of these principles above other key principles such as Enabling dialogue and Attuned interactions. Which possibly led one parent to feel like the ideas were not in fact co-constructed because we had neglected to take into consideration her views. With regards to attuned interaction, I felt I had achieved this with many parents. However, with at least one parent I had missed the cues to notice that they perhaps did not feel included in the dialogue. In terms of implications for my future practice, it will be important for me to consider these principles together so that one does not lead to the exclusion of another.

Another area I reflected on in cycle three was how my practice has improved in terms of promoting ownership and participation in the systemic work we were doing together. I probably had the most success with this in cycle three since Claire had been proactive from the beginning of the cycle thinking about what systemic work we could do. There are many possibilities why Claire was more engaged in cycle three than previous cycles. On reflection, I believe it was an accumulation over time of areas such as: Claire understanding the process better, trust in our relationship, understanding what systemic working is, previous positive results from cycle one and two and because the parent session was something the Nursery wanted to do.

A final area I reflected on in cycle three was my relationships with new staff that joined the project. I found that on every new addition to the project I did not have to start a new relationship from scratch, instead I was building on the relationship I had already built with existing staff, in other words I had perhaps built a reputation of someone who can be trusted and who they could work positively with. This highlighted to me further the importance of the principles of attunement, as a key tool in my toolbox when working systemically.

So far, I have reflected on the challenges and facilitators to working systemically I have faced. Here I will reflect on the systemic work itself. Through the parent session, there was

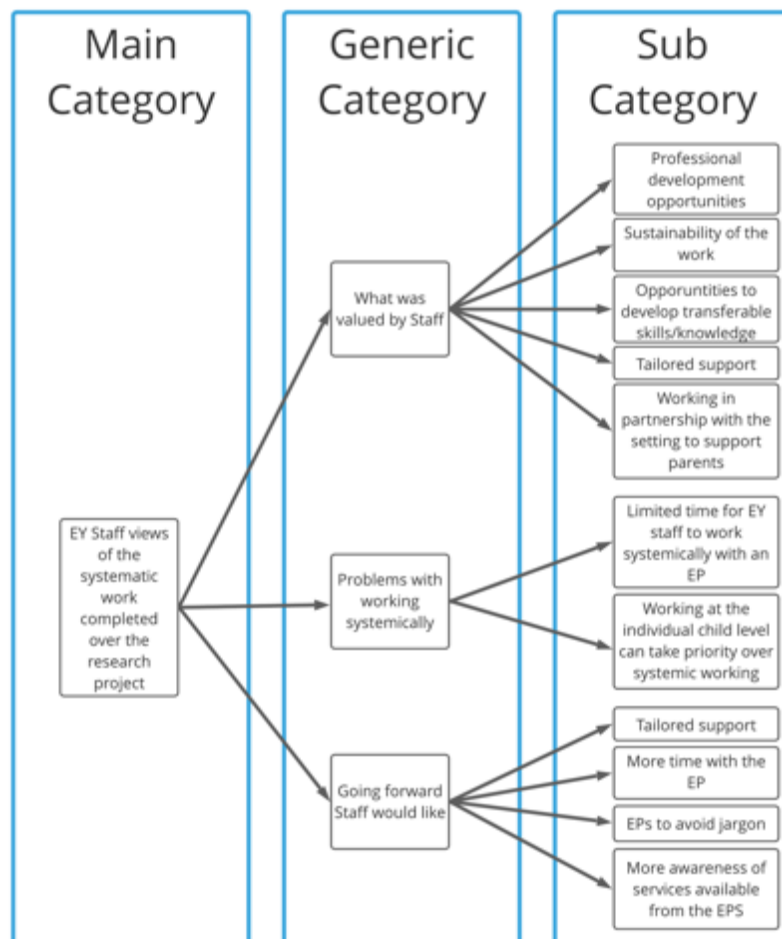
an opportunity to work more preventatively and use psychology to benefit a greater number of children by supporting parents. To do this, I attempted to co-construct ideas with parents and putting faith in their ability to create their own positive ways forward. An area for development was my ability to include all parents' views and circumstances so that it could be a more inclusive approach. In this cycle I attempted to work 'with' staff to deliver the session, as opposed to 'for' staff. Although within the one session, Bev and my sections were separate we had worked together to design the content and Bev was confident that my section could easily be done next year without my support.

4.5.5 Staff views of the systemic work completed over the research project

The staff I had worked with over the project were invited to a semi-structured focus group to discuss their views of the systemic work completed over the research project. Four EY staff attended, and three were unable to attend and were invited to express their views via a questionnaire with similar question areas. During the research project the staff were not able to commit the time to work with me to reflect on my research question 'How can I improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting?' and thus would not have had sufficient insight to answer questions about process of the techniques I used, as such the questions I asked focused on the work completed over the project and practicalities related to that. The findings from the focus group and questionnaire were combined and have been presented in a diagram (see Figure 4.3), and in prose. The diagram shows how the data was categorised into generic and sub-categories that derived from the QCA of the data. The analysis of the data sort to address the research question 'How can I improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting?'

Figure 4.3

Categories map showing staff views of the systemic work completed over the research project.



Here I will discuss each generic category and some of the more prominent subcategories further. Looking at the generic category ‘what was valued by staff?’ and the sub-categories connected, one area that was valued over the project was ‘professional development opportunities’. Examples of some prominent quotes included: *‘the team getting some professional development’* and *‘enhance their practice’*. Based on the QCA and my own reflections of the focus group and reading the questionnaires, it seemed staff felt that when an EP worked systemically it provided professional development to a wider group of staff. Although this does not relate directly to the research question, it may suggest that to improve my practice in working systemically a focus of providing professional development is important.

Another sub-category that emerged was ‘opportunities to develop transferable skills and knowledge’. Examples of some prominent quotes included: *‘Those skills from the bucket group can be used with other children’*; *‘Strategies that can be transferred or adapted’*; *‘Just shows, it’s all bits of knowledge and you can take bits frombut you can adapt it.’*; and *‘I*

can use the bucket intervention strategies in my EAL work with children too, it is all transferable and helpful'. Based on the QCA and my own reflections, developing transferable skills and knowledge was valued by staff. Again, although this does not relate directly to the research question, it may suggest that to improve my practice in working systemically a focus on providing transferable skills is important.

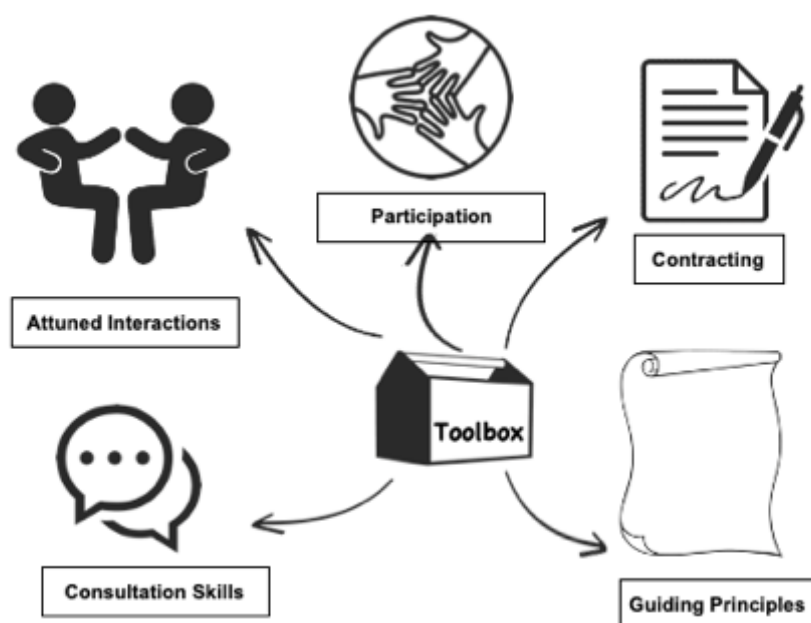
Turning to look at the generic category 'problems with working systemically' and the sub-categories connected, one area that was highlighted as a problem was 'limited time for EY staff to work systemically with an EP'. Examples of some prominent quotes include: '*Cover to attend the sessions.*'; '*we were down on staff numbers during the modelling.*'; '*It was difficult to attend the meetings*'; and '*Time and cover are real issues.*' This is important for me to consider when thinking about how I improve my practice in working systemically since allowing time for staff to work with me is key and could form part of the contracting of any systemic work.

Looking at the generic category 'going forward staff would like' and the sub-categories connected, one area that stood out was that the staff stated that they didn't realise '*all of this was available*' (referring to the systemic work completed over the project). This led me to reflect on how important it is to define the scope of my role clearly and to use written examples to help others understand the diversity of the role so that they can get the most out of working with an EP.

4.6 A toolbox for working systemically in the Early Years

This action research study explored how I improved my practice of working systemically with an EY setting. The methodology, data analysis and findings of this research allowed me to create a 'toolbox' of approaches that I can use when working systemically with an EY setting. In Figure 4.4 I have presented a visual representation of the toolbox, which comprises principles, theory, approaches, processes, and practical elements— each of which has a specific function that improved my practice when working systemically with an EY setting. I have outlined each of the tools briefly in the sections 4.6.1-4.6.3 below.

Figure 4.4
A toolbox for beginners: working systemically with an EY setting



4.6.1 Consultation skills

Consultation skills are essential tools for EPs, including when working systemically. Through this action research project, I have found some approaches more helpful than others. Linear questions were only helpful when trying to orient myself toward the specific circumstance. Such as, ‘who does what and when?’ by contrast, the limitation with this line of questioning was that it could lead to a linear perspective where problems were seen as within-child so they needed to be used sparingly (Tomm, 1987). On the other hand, circular questions orientated the focus towards interactions, providing information about the system to the system, such as ‘When you play like this, how do the children who are reluctant to talk respond?’. As such, I found this line of questioning one of the most conducive to systemic working, since it directed the EY staff to the systems around the child, avoiding a within-child focus. In addition, the focus on strength-based language and taking a solution focused approach also seemed to support my systemic working. For instance, in the reluctant talker’s session, I highlighted the good practice that already existed in the nursery which led to a positive conversation about enhancing what works. As a TEP, my consultation skills are not yet embedded in practice but are still developing. The consultation skills that I used and improve during this research include:

Reframing

Giving an alternative wider systemic perspective when conversations drifted towards the within-child explanation.

Strengths-based language

Using language to adjust how an issue constructed by focusing on strengths.

Paraphrasing

Summarising sections of a conversation so those you are working with feel listened to and could hear their thoughts back to enable them to expand their point.

Circular questions

To explore the patterns of behaviour between members of the system, and redirect thinking back out to the context and interaction of the system.

Feed-forward questions

To construct an alternative positive future regarding the interaction between systems.

Solution focused questions,

Promoting the EY staff to recognise their own skills and capacities and encourage them to do more of what is working.

4.6.2 Guiding Principles

By cycle three I considered moving from a reliance upon questioning techniques to moving toward practice guided by principles (Rees, 2008). This did not mean giving up on questioning techniques but using them as part of my overall practice that was guided by these principles. These principles were designed to underpin all parts of systemic working including what I thought about and how I chose to act. I found this way of working provided me with more freedom in my work, but still with guidance towards systemic working. However, a challenge I had with this approach was where I prioritised some principles at the expense of others, highlighting to me the importance of considering the principles together. Below I have a listed nine principles that resonated with my own values and interests, in how I want to work systemically with an EY setting. The nine principles I found helpful in working systemically with an EY setting include:

1. A pragmatic principle, beliefs are interpreted which led to actions, these actions are then interpreted to generate further beliefs and so on (Dewey, 1938).
2. A constructive principle, co-creating the social world (Wagner, 2008).
3. A self-reflexive principle, responding to the changing context (Wagner, 2008).
4. Systemic thinking, awareness of the circular patterns of relationships and influences (Gameson and Rhydderch, 2008).
5. Enabling Dialogue, where people feel engaged through collaborative working (Gameson and Rhydderch, 2008).
6. Creating lasting strategic changes as opposed to reactive ones.
7. If it works do more of it; if it doesn't, do something different (Rees, 2008).
8. People have unique solutions to their problems (Rees, 2008).
9. People have the necessary resources to make change possible (Rees, 2008).

4.6.4 Attuned interaction

Attunement refers to how an individual responds to another person, through language and behaviour that is responsive to the persons emotional state to enhance a positive relationship (Bakermans-Kranenburg et al. 2003). In my research I used Kennedy et al. (2010) six principles of attunement to guide my practice and found them helpful in developing positive relationships to creating change through systemic working with an EY setting. As such I have include them here in the toolbox:

Being attentive

Friendly posture; paying attention; leaving time for others to think/speak.

Encouraging initiatives

Active listening; showing warmth or playfulness through intonation; naming positively what you hear, think, or feel; looking for initiatives.

Receiving initiatives

Receiving with intonation, words, or body language i.e., returning eye contact, smiling, nodding in response, repeating words they used; being friendly and/or playful as appropriate.

Developing attuned interactions

Receiving them and responding; waiting for your turn; giving and taking short turns; giving them a second (and further) turn on same topic.

Guiding

Building on a response; giving information/help when needed; offering choices; making suggestions.

Deepening discussion

Collaborative discussion and problem-solving; naming it when opinions differ and managing conflict through restoring the earlier principles of attunement; investigating the intentions; reaching new shared understandings; supporting them to set goals.

I found that once positive relationships had been developed with staff, they were more willing to engage with a systemic approach. Possibly because I had created a safe and trusting atmosphere in which staff felt able to take risks with me to learn new ways of working. I also suggest that the focus on attunement and relationships in cycle one and its continued focus through-to cycle three was one of the reasons why it was easier to develop subsequent relationships with staff who joined the project later. Possibly because I was building on the relationships I had already created. In this research I needed to be reflexive and reflective to observe and analyse the effects of my attuned interaction skills and be able to respond in the moment to work with participants to create change.

4.6.5 Participation

I have called this subheading 'participation' as I believe it best encapsulates the areas of participation, ownerships, and collaboration which I explored in my research. I found systemic working was enhanced when participants actively participated in the research through for instance collaborative working or having control or ownership over the project. In my research, I tried to build in opportunities for EY staff to participate in the project, in the following ways:

- I used Arnstein's (1969) ladder of citizen participation (Figure 3.3), as a framework to help me reflect on the level of participatory work in the project and to make adjustments;
- I focused on the needs identified by the EY staff and tailored systemic work to them;
- I incorporated EY staff's opinions in decision making;
- I gave time to reflect on if I was working '*with*' the EY staff as opposed to '*for*' them;
- I co-constructed the aims and some of the content of the reluctant talkers training;
- In the Attention Autism intervention, I asked the TA how she wanted me to work with her and we co-designed the support she wanted and reviewed the process together.
- I also handed over some of the responsibility of setting up the Attention Autism intervention to the TA when another TA asked for support.
- In the Starting School session, I worked collaboratively with parents to promote the sharing of ideas so that we co-constructed ways forward together.

4.6.3 Contracting

In this research I worked collaboratively to complete a SLA and I found it a helpful process since it helped ensure that our expectations about the project were aligned and it enabled us to identify a misconception so that it could be rectified. The findings of this research also highlighted the importance of giving sufficient time to contracting so that it does not become tokenistic. I have included contracting in the toolbox to highlight the importance of giving time to contracting the systemic work before starting so that expectations can be clarified, and goals can be agreed.

4.7 Chapter summary

From the start of the research, the aim was to improve my practice as a TEP and future EP. In the introduction I discussed the development of my research idea and my aspiration to combine working with the EY and my passion to improve my systemic working with my

newly gained psychological knowledge as a TEP. This gave rise to the following research question: How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting?

The findings presented here have revealed how my practice has improved, resulting in the creation of a 'toolbox' of approaches that I used when working systemically with an EY setting. Each section of the toolbox had a specific function that improved my practice when working systemically with an EY setting. The implications of the findings will be discussed in the next chapter.

5. Chapter Five. Discussion

5.1 Introduction to chapter

This chapter will critique and discuss the findings relating it back to the literature review and my research question: How can I improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting? It also evaluates the research methodology and suggests areas for future research. The chapter concludes with proposed implications to EP practice.

5.2 Discussion of the findings in the context of existing research and theory

The main findings will be discussed by exploring the context of the toolbox and the systemic pieces of work conducted, relating it to existing research and theory. The first literature review highlighted that the role of the EP in the EY focuses primarily on individual casework, suggesting that some EPs are using a more traditional service delivery model in the EY (Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010). The literature review also highlighted that EPs want to be involved in systemic work in the EY (Shannon & Posada, 2007; Robinson & Dunsmuir, 2010). This disparity between what EPs would like to do and what they are doing could be explained by Dennis (2004) who predicted that the pressure on EPS following the National Childcare Strategy (Department for Education and Employment, 1998) will mean that EPS will put the same service delivery model in the EY as they have in schools, that is focused on individual casework, which could also explain why there is little research on EY working systemically in the EY. The second literature review then provided clear ideas about how EPs work systemically in other contexts. My research built on these findings by exploring how I could improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting. The findings of this research is that I have created a 'toolbox' of approaches that I can use when working systemically with an EY setting. I will discuss the content of the toolbox in relation to existing theory and research below.

5.2.1 Discussion of the contents of the toolbox in relation to existing research and theory.

5.2.1.1 Consultation skills

In this research, reflecting on and improving my consultation skills was key to improving my practice in working systemically with the EY setting. However, there is little research exploring the use of consultation skills when working systemically. Roffey (2015) states that

EPs do use consultation skills in systemic work, but that these skills are rarely explicitly referred to, as these skills are often embedded in EP practice, such as being skilled listeners, able to reframe situations, validating problematic feelings and using solution and strength focused questions. In the papers authored by Geiger et al. (2015), Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) research, EPs working as consultants or using consultation skills was highlighted as a key facilitator in systemic work. Geiger et al. (2015) stated that it is this consultation approach which demonstrates the distinct contribution that EPs can offer, compared to other professionals, in systemic work. Roffey (2015) adds to this by stating that as such EPs can be powerful role models of systemic working, including how they take account of contextual factors and promote inclusive practice. My research is therefore in-keeping with these previous findings.

Pellegrini (2009) states that consultation skills such as the questions asked are a key intervention in educational psychology in which to support positive change. Williams and Greenleaf (2012) highlight the importance of using discourse carefully since the language we use can shape how reality is perceived and how we act towards solving problems. The findings from my research are consistent with these ideas in that I had to think carefully how I used language to create a reality that moved away from the deficit model and instead took a more ecological approach (locating the problem in the interactions between systems such as family, peers, EY staff, resources in the EY setting and community factors).

5.2.1.2 Guiding Principles

During my research I moved from a reliance upon questioning techniques to practice guided also by principles (Rees, 2008) to support my systemic working with the EY setting. This is consistent with previous research by Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) who used a range of frameworks, models and principles to guide systemic working, for example they incorporated elements of soft systems method (Frederickson, 1990), problem analysis approach (Monsen et al., 1998) and consultation (Wagner, 2000) in the Coach Consult Method. In March and Moir's (2018) position paper, their review of the literature highlighted that EPs are working systemically by supporting the set-up of evidence-based interventions using the knowledge and application of implementation science principles, for example, through providing ongoing coaching; initial and follow-up training; quality assurance visits; a range of mechanisms to ensure sustainability; and monitoring the impact of the intervention. My findings are consistent with previous research and theory that having a framework, model or guiding principles is a key facilitator in improving systemic working.

5.2.1.4 Attuned interaction

In the literature review chapter, the article from Douglas-Osborn (2015) and Roffey (2015) highlighted the need for good working relationships between the EP and the setting to provide a foundation for work. In this research I used the principles of attunement (Kennedy et al., 2015) to support me to do this. Interventions focusing on these principles have been shown to be effective in enhancing positive relationships (Bakermans-

Kranenburg, et al., 2003). Furthermore, Hattie and Timperley (2007) highlight the importance of positive relationships when wanting to create change. Burden (1978), agrees suggested that staff will not change their expectations of an EP because they are told to but instead change needs to occur over time in the context of a positive relationship. In this research, it is argued that through the positive relationships created, staff were more inclined to take a systemic approach to working as the project progressed. This was evident by Claire taking more of a lead in the project as the research progressed. However, although some EY staff became more involved in the project over time, some had very little involvement throughout, it is possible that this could be linked to the relationships I was or was not able to develop with them. Murphy and Duncan (2007) highlight that in helping relationships specific techniques only account for a small percentage (15%) of the variation in the results, pointing towards client factors (40%) and relationship factors (30%) having more account for the effectiveness of the engagement. This seems consistent with my findings, in that attuned interactions were the foundation of all my interactions with the participant.

5.2.1.5 Participation

The title participation is used in the toolbox, as I believe it best encapsulates the areas of participation, ownership, and collaboration which I explored in my research. The literature review highlighted ownership as a key facilitator in working systemically (Geiger et al., 2015; Randall, et al., 2015; and Balchin, et al., 2006). Randall et al. (2015) and Balchin et al. (2006) promoted ownership of their research by asking schools to bid for the opportunity to be involved and by showing commitment to the project by putting it on the school development plan. In contrast, in Geiger et al. (2015) study, the senior EP initiating this work approached stakeholders to seek engagement in the project. They reported that this top-down approach made it a challenge to engage key decision makers throughout the project. In both Balchin et al. (2006) and Randall et al. (2015) studies, ownership was very much placed with the school and follow ups reported that most schools were continuing or had embedded the project they had started. In the current research, I approached one EY setting and asked them if they would like to be involved with no requirement to link the research to their school development plan. As such, the research predominantly bore out of the needs of the research, not the setting. It could be argued that some of the difficulties with the ownership and subsequent collaboration and participation within this study could be attributed to the initial top-down recruitment process, thus confirming what previous research had highlighted about the importance of participation, ownership and collaboration when working systemically with others.

Another issue with the current study was staff availability, leading me to work predominantly with only one member of staff. March and Moir's (2018) highlighted that the likelihood of misunderstandings will increase when only working with one person and that only the project lead will have a sense of responsibility for the project. March and Moir (2018) suggests that resistance to change can stem from this point, because there is not a space for collaborative working with other staff in the setting. Geiger et al. (2015), Burden (1978) and Randall et al. (2015) all highlighted the importance of this collaboration with staff and shared responsibility over the project in a setting. My findings were consistent

with these points raised, providing further evidence to suggest that participation, ownership, and collaboration are key facilitators in working systemically.

In this research I needed to be reflexive and reflective to observe and analyse the effect of these approaches and to respond in the moment. The steps taken to working collaboratively was considered an important aspect of the consultation involved in working systemically in this research, as it supported the relationships; encouraging flexibility and willingness to work in new ways. However, a significant criticism of the research is that the systemic work conducted was according to the views of the staff I worked with, predominantly the project lead, sometimes excluding the views of other staff in the wider school setting, parents, and the children. By not working with and seeking the views of the children, parents, and wider staff team I was potentially completing systemic work that was not the priority for these individuals and marginalising these key voices.

5.2.1.3 Contracting

Burden (1978), Balchin (2006) and Murphy and Duncan (2007) agree that contracting before beginning a project of this nature is key so that expectations can be clarified, goals can be agreed upon and a collaborative alliance can start to form. In March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature, they reported that common issues at the contracting and negotiation phases were not having a clear understanding of each other's roles and not agreeing how to communicate with each other. Burden (1978) suggests this can be resolved by having a written contract, so that it can be read and even signed giving the process weight. Murphy & Duncan (2007) also highlighted the importance of a positive working relationship in negotiations and contracting, which provides further support for the importance of the attuned interactions skills, as mentioned above. The contracting meeting in this project took place with the EY team at the start of the project by completing a SLA. This was done together so that there was agreement among the EY staff regarding the aims and expectations of the project. I found it a helpful process since it helped us ensure that our expectations about the project were aligned and it enabled us to identify a misconception so that it could be rectified. A limitation of this research was that I underestimated how long it would take and as such I did not dedicate enough time to the process, as such it could be argued that the SLA was somewhat tokenistic. Areas that I believe were not negotiated clearly enough were the EY staff time commitments to the project, understanding of each other's roles and lines of communication. March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature reported that these are common issues at the contracting and negotiation phase and on reflection, I should have revisited the SLA to provide more clarity in these areas as suggest by Burden (1978) who advocates for reviewing and modified contracts through out a project.

Another challenge I came across was in the first cycle, when it came to negotiating the first piece of systemic work, I realised Claire was still unsure what systemic working might look like. Although we had discussed this, Claire was not clear what this might look like in practice and asked for a list of examples. The language I had used had become a barrier to our negotiation and once I created a clear list of possibilities, Claire was better able to negotiate with me. Another possible limitation of this research was the lack of problem

analysis before starting each piece of systemic work, as suggested by Burden (1978). Instead, a solution focused approach was taken, with a focus on what is working and expanding on this. This approach was taken firstly due to time constraints in being able to undertake a problem analysis and because taking a solution focused approach is more conducive to positive working relationships (O'Connell, 2007).

5.2.2 The systemic pieces of work completed

In the literature review a range of systemic work was conducted or suggested that EPs could be more involved with, including: supporting staff/parents, training and coaching (Roffey, 2015; Dennis, 2004; March and Moir, 2018; Douglas-Osborn, 2015; Balchin et al., 2006 and Randall et al., 2015), interventions (March and Moir, 2018; Roffey, 2015 and Douglas-Osborn, 2015), monitoring and evaluation (Dennis, 2004), policy development (March and Moir, 2018 and Geiger et al., 2015) and conducting research (Geiger et al., 2015; Balchin, et al., 2006 and Randall, et al., 2015). During this action research process, I completed three pieces of systemic work: training, supporting parents and setting up and intervention.

5.2.2.1 Cycle one - reluctant talkers training

Limited training and poor pay and conditions are commonly associated with EY settings (Dennis, 2004). These external influences can serve to make staff feel that they do not have the skills or knowledge to meet the needs of some of the children. Dennis (2004) states that the role of the EP is to reaffirm this ability and help the staff recognise the potential and value of what they already do so that they are able to work more preventatively and use their skills to benefit all children they work with. In the literature review, training for staff was also one of the most common pieces of systemic work identified (Roffey, 2015; Dennis, 2004; March and Moir, 2018; Douglas-Osborn, 2015; Balchin et al., 2006 and Randall et al., 2015). In cycle one, the systemic piece of work negotiated was a training session for the EY staff on supporting reluctant talkers. I used the following approaches to improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting:

- I attempted to give staff greater ownership of the training by asking them to decide on the aims and content, increasing their engagement with the training (Geiger et al., 2015).
- I built on the positive practices that already exist to give the staff the confidence to develop their practice (Hammond, 1996).
- The training provided opportunities for EY staff to furnish their own solutions and develop an action plan.

A key strength identified from the training session was that staff identified that they received 'profession development' and that their skills had developed. A limitation of this systemic work is highlighted by Randall et al. (2015) who argues that one-off training is unlikely to lead to lasting change and that EPs instead should support staff to develop their skills in project management so that they are more able to solve their own problems. Another limitation is that by delivering a training session 'to' the staff, I had positioned

myself as an 'expert' working 'for' them and not 'with' them, which could have disempowered the staff, who may believe that they need to be 'experts' to work with some children. To improve my practice, when I delivered the session for parents in cycle three, I co-constructed much more of the content.

5.2.2.2 Cycle two - Attention Autism intervention

March and Moir's (2018) review of the literature highlighted that EPs are working systemically by supporting the set-up of evidence-based interventions. In cycle two, I supported two TAs to set up an Attention Autism intervention. Acting on my reflections from the training I delivered in the first cycle I attempted to improve my practice of working systemically by making our work more sustainable and I did this in the following ways:

- I compiled a written guide for setting up the intervention that could be used independent of my involvement.
- I gave greater ownership of the design and delivery of how I supported the TA to set up the intervention.
- The co-delivery of the intervention also offers opportunities for reflection in action.
- The reflective session encouraged a sense of partnership working and prepared them for taking more ownership of the intervention.
- The TA was 'promoted' to the position of trainer, supporting another TA to set up her own intervention.

An unexpected result of the project was that there was a level of up-scaling in every cycle, but particularly in the second cycle, where the Attention Autism intervention was set up in not just the EY class but in the reception class too. In the focus group with the EY staff a strength identified of this work was that the skills learnt were also transferable to other context and other children. A limitation in how I tried to work systemically here was that I prioritised giving the EY staff what I thought they needed so that they could run the intervention, such as the written guide, but by completing this for them I had taken away the opportunity for them to create their own resources tailored to their needs as opposed to a one-size fits all.

5.2.2.3 Cycle three - starting school session

Research suggests that the home environment is the most significant factor affecting a child's development (The EPPE Research project, 2004) and a key part of the EP's role includes supporting parents and carers (Farrell et al., 2006). Acting on my learning from cycle one and two I attempted to improve my practice of working systemically to support parents and carers in cycle three by:

- Attempting to work 'with' staff to deliver the session for parents, as opposed to 'for' staff.
- Co-constructing ideas with parents by supporting them to create their own positive ways forward.

- We discussed how this session could be completed next year when my involvement had ended.
- Change the language I used to describe the session. In cycle one I used the term 'training' and in cycle three I used the word 'session'. This language helped reframe my role in the process from 'expert' to 'facilitator'.

An area for development was my ability to include all parents' views and circumstances so that it could be a more inclusive approach. Another limitation of the session was that due to my low confidence in totally co-constructing all ideas with parent, I had 'hidden' answers ready. However, this may have prevented me being open minded with the parents' ideas and perhaps given a message that there was a 'correct' answer.

5.3 Critical Evaluation

In this section I will evaluate the research, looking at methodology and process.

5.3.1 Quality of the methodology

5.3.1.1 Action Research

The literature review highlighted several frameworks and models used by researchers when working systemically. Douglas-Osborn's (2015) study highlights the value of using action research as a framework to guide thinking. Geiger et al. (2015) reported that by using an action research design, it helped provide the EPs with a structure to promote cycles of planning, which enabled them to work towards their agreed aims for the project. In line with the research, I found that action research gave the research a structure, which was specifically helpful for reflective thinking. This model allowed me to improve my practice at different levels, improving my systemic working through everyday interactions using the smaller cycles but also through the systemic pieces of work themselves using the larger cycle. The action research framework was used flexibly, which fitted with my need to be flexible to work with the EY setting. The flexibility of action research is also a disadvantage. I had the freedom to change the design of the project as it progressed to meet the needs of the setting. While I see this as a positive, a limitation was that I was perhaps too flexible in meeting the needs of the setting at the expense of the research. For example, I did not have sufficient contact time with the EY staff to explore with them 'how' I worked systemically, for instance, discussing with staff the questioning techniques I used and how this may or may not have helped them think about a situation differently.

5.3.1.2 Use of audio recordings

I used an audio recording for one meeting and one focus group. The purpose of the audio recording in the first meeting with the EY staff was to capture the verbal interactions, this was of benefit since I was able to improve my practice based on reflections about what I heard.

However, having time to listen back to this and reflect on my practice before my next visit to the EY setting was challenging and would not be easily feasible in everyday practice as an EP. For the focus group the audio recording was critical since it enabled me to capture verbatim the EY staff's views for me to be able to complete further analysis.

I did not record other conversation during the research, this is because most of these were unplanned conversations and thus getting a device out and asking if I could record our conversation would have had stopped the flow of a conversation and impacted on the interactions. However, the limitation of not recording these conversations was that I am likely to have missed discrete elements of the interaction and need to rely on my memory of notes from the conversation to reflect on my practice. When considering this limitation, I rationalised that this is how an EP would have to reflect on their practice in everyday practice and thus this was a more realistic method of improving my practice in the future.

5.3.1.5 Use of questionnaires

A strength of using questionnaires is they can quickly collect large amounts of structured data, without the researcher and they are easy to analyse (Wilson and McLean, 1994). This was particularly useful during the research as I wanted to analyse the data within a day or so, so that I could use that information to reflect and possibly amend my practice before my next visit to the EY setting. This was presumably also helpful for the parent and EY staff who potentially would not have had the time for an interview or focus group to gather their views.

A limitation of the questionnaires used in this research, is that the questions were not aligned closely enough to the research question. As mentioned already, the EY staff I worked with had limited time to engage with the research and thus more surface level questions about the systemic work conducted were asked and perhaps with more engagement from the EY staff I would have asked deeper questions around 'how' I worked systemically. Another limitation of the questionnaires was that for the questions asking about improvements such as 'what could have improved the session?' many staff and parents did not answer these questions, thus limiting the amount of data that was collected about how the systemic work could have been improved. This problem may have been resolved with further scaffolding from myself about the importance of answering this question for my development.

5.3.1.4 Focus group

A limitation of the focus group in this research was the two teachers in the group dominated the discussion and it was more challenging to engage the TAs in the discussion. To improve the access to the TAs views, I should have targeted more questions directly at the TAs. Another limitation of the focus group was the questions did not address the research question as directly as had been hoped when planning this project. This limitation links to a point previous made regarding involving the staff more in a discussion of 'how' I worked systemically. For instance, discussing with staff the questioning techniques I used and how

this may or may not have helped them think about a situation differently. However, the reason this approach was not adopted was because staff were not able to commit the time to work with me to reflect on my research question 'How can I improve my practice at working systemically with an EY setting?' and thus did not have had sufficient insight to answer questions about process of the approaches I used.

5.3.1.3 Use of research diary

Mills (2003) talks about the importance of research diaries in action research, stating that they represent the thought processes of the researcher as they try to systematically reflect on their practice, which subsequently leads to action. The majority of my data set are made up of the problems I identified and anticipated and the solutions I developed; in order to record these, I kept a research diary. A limitation of this, is that my research diary is subjective and therefore the data gathered from it cannot be generalised. In this research I was investigating how I can improve my practice, and this would have been difficult to investigate in any other way.

5.3.2 Process

5.3.2.1 Quality of the data analysis

I used two main forms of data analysis in this research. For cycles one, two and some of cycle three I adopted a broadly ethnographic approach to data analysis and then for a section of cycle three I used QCA.

5.3.2.1.1 Broadly ethnographic approach

Guba and Lincoln (1994) argue that transparency, persuasiveness and coherence can be used to evaluate 'trustworthiness' of our analysis of qualitative data. I attempted to uphold transparency by making my epistemological assumptions and biases transparent through the process of reflection and reflexivity. I also attempted to make my data collection, analysis and interpretations clear. With regards to persuasiveness, I attempted to uphold this by providing quotes from my research diary and from the transcripts to support my interpretations. However, to improve my analysis I could have used a peer review method to provide me with feedback to check my interpretations. For coherence, I attempted to clearly state the research rationale so the reader can understand my reasons for the arguments presented for my interpretations. To improve this, I could have provided examples and explained more thoroughly how the interpretations were produced. However, due to space constraints, my explanations and interpretations were narrowed down.

5.3.2.1.2 Qualitative content analysis

The conclusions of this study can be regarded as reflecting one form of reality, since they are predominately my interpretations of the data. I made subjective choices of the codes and categories, which will have inevitably influenced the outcomes. I attempted to minimise these issues by following a systematic procedure (Elo and Kyngas, 2008), which is likely to have increased the reliability of the findings. To improve this, I could have sought to discuss and seek agreement from colleagues on the codes and categories generated. With regards to the QCA of the questionnaires, the brevity of many of the responses coupled with the subjective nature of QCA, means that the interpretations are open to criticism.

5.4 Further Research

As well as attempting to address the limitations described in this research, further researchers could explore not just an EPs developing practice but also the effectiveness of the systemic work conducted, including exploring if there is any lasting change because of working systemically, such as through additional follow-up questionnaires or interviews. Another possible area for future research is to explore systemic working when the EY setting has further involvement in the project and thus insight into the approach and techniques being used. This may enable the researcher to gain a better understanding of 'how' to work systemic from the staff/parents/carers/children's point of view. A final thought about further research is to explore the use of the toolbox by a another TEP/EP or in another setting. It would be interesting to explore both how and/or to what extent it works.

5.5 Implications for practice

This research was a needs-based, exploratory, action research study and so context will be key when thinking about its implications. Nonetheless, I believe this research can still provide useful suggestions for others wanting to work systemically with an EY setting. I have used the findings from this research in the context of surrounding literature and theory to make these recommendations. These recommendations have been categorised into suggestions for my continual professional develop and for other EPs.

5.5.1 Implications for my practice

The Health and Care Professionals Council (2008) and British Psychology Society (2017) states that EPs must stay up to date with their professional practice. In action research the researcher aims to improve their current practice and holds themselves accountable by evaluating their practice and making improvements (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Through the process of this research I believe my professional practice in working systemically with an EY setting has significantly improved and I have developed a toolbox of approaches to

working systemically with an EY setting. To continue to improve my practice in this area I would like to trial using this tool box with other EY settings, but also schools to see if the approaches in the tool box can be transferred to other contexts. I would also like to work with other EPs interested in improving their practice in this area, to discover their views on the usefulness of the toolbox and how the toolbox could be improved. I also think it would be helpful for me to produce a booklet or leaflet explaining the toolbox and how to use it, so that could be shared with EPs. Moving further into the future I see myself facilitate training or workshops on how the toolbox can be used to improve practice in working systemically with settings and encourage EPs to use this toolbox or develop their own.

5.5.2 Implications for Educational Psychology

A recommendation from this research is that TEPs or EPs with little experience of systemic working would benefit from using the toolbox when working systemically with an EY setting. I have suggested those new to systemic working and/or newer (in historical terms) to the EP profession specifically, since some of the items in the toolbox are 'tools' an experienced practitioner may already have embedded in their practice and as such would potentially not need to consciously think about these skills (Dreyfus and Dreyfus, 1987). Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1987) model of skill acquisition highlights that at the novice and advance beginner stage of developing a skill, rules and guidelines are used to guide developing practice. This toolbox thus provides guidance at this early stage of improving systemic working with an EY setting, until they are at a position where they can create their own toolbox or model of working. For practitioners with more advanced skills as per Dreyfus and Dreyfus' (1987) skill acquisition model, this toolbox may serve instead as a reminder or a starting point when thinking about a new piece of systemic work with an EY setting; these professionals may wish to adapt this toolbox to suit the context they will be working in, and their own existing skill set. Practitioners ultimately can choose how they use this toolbox in their unique circumstance. These tools are intended to be used reflectively and reflexively to guide practice. There is no prescribed order in which the tools should be used and no requirement that all tools should be used in each situation. I will briefly discuss each of the tools from the toolbox in turn making specific recommendations for each.

With regards to the guiding principle in the toolbox I suggest that a TEP/EP could use these as a starting point to guide their work, however, I would recommend that a TEP/EP develop their own list of principles to guide their practice based on their own values and interests once in the position to do so (Rees, 2008). The principles I used are not necessarily generalisable to all TEPs or EPs. This is because I chose these principles based on my own values in how I want to work and thus another TEP/EP may have a different list of principles that align better with their values and purpose.

From the findings of this study which built on existing theory and research, contracting was highlighted as key facilitators of systemic working. Burden (1978), Balchin (2006) and Murphy and Duncan (2007) state that contracting at the start of a project is key so that expectations can be clarified, goals can be agreed upon and a collaborative alliance can start to form. Burden (1978) highlighted the importance of having the contract in writing so that it can be reviewed and modified as needed. In this research we completed a SLA which

helped to resolve misconceptions from the start. Completing a written contract is thus a strong recommendation when working systemically with an EY setting. I also recommend to overtly advertise and promote the wider roles of the EP, providing staff in settings with examples of the types of works EPs can be involved with so that they they are made aware of systemic working as an option for service delivery. Building on this a further recommendation from this research is that EPS should reflect if their referral system predetermines EPs and school staff to refer children as opposed to asking for systemic work. By only working systemically in this project, staff started talking more about the concern they had with the systems around the child and less about concerns they had with specific children.

Consultation skills underpin all aspects of EP professional practice but are rarely mentioned in the literature since they are assumed to be embedded in practice (Roffy, 2015). However, as a TEP or newly qualified EP these skills are still developing and hence I believed it was important to recommend that it is important to consider which consultaion are most helpful when working systemically with an EY setting. This research made a distinction between systemic working and systemic thinking. However, over the course of the research, I have begun to see the two as very much interlinked in that to work systemically, systemic thinking is a core building block. In-keeping with previous research and theory I recommend that TEP/EP should think carefully how they used language to create a reality that moves away from the deficit model and instead takes a more systemic approach (locating the problem in the interactions between systems such as family, peers, EY staff, resources in the EY setting and community factors), such as the use of circular questions as opposed to linear ones.

With regards to participation, I recommend EPs use Arnstein (1969) ladder to support them to regullary reflect and respond to the level of participation those they are working with have. Since consistend with previous research and theory this research suggests that without the participation of those in the setting, systemic working is less likely to happen and less likely to be sustained when the EP leaves.

Attuned interactions are skills that can easily be assumed embedded in practice or not needing specific attention, however from this research and from previous literature, I learnt that attuned interactions can have as much as twice as much impact as any specific technique used (Murphy and Duncan, 2007). As such a key recommendation from this research would be that the EP / TEP uses the principles of attunement (Kennedy et al., 2015) to ensure they are responsive to the other persons' emotional state to enhance the positive working relationship, which is key for systemic working with an EY setting.

A further recommendation from this research is that EPS should reflect and discuss if their referral system predetermines EPs and school staff to refer children as opposed to asking for systemic work. By only working systemically in this project, staff started talking about other problems such as support for parents and not having an intervention to support ASC children's attention skills.

Finally, this research recommends EPs using a framework, such as action research, to to improve their practice and at the same time add to the research base. The British Psychology Society's (2017) cycle for professional practice draws a parallel to action

research with its focus on assessing, formulation, implementation, evaluation and reflecting on outcomes. Action research gave me a structure in which I could investigate and evaluate my own practice. The use of action research meant I could work flexibly as it allows for change throughout the process. This enabled me to improve my practice so that it was responsive to the needs of the setting and could deliver specific outcomes which were integral to the project. Action research is a process that promotes people interacting and learning from each other to problem solve and take action together which is also important in systemic working (McNiff, 2013; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011).

5.6 Conclusions

This action research study explored how I can improve my practice of working systemically with an EY setting. My knowledge and practice have improved so that I now have a toolbox of approaches and techniques I can use when working systemically with an EY setting and I hope to trail its use in other contexts too. This research also explicitly describes how I worked systemically, arguably using skills from everyday EP practice, that much of the literature neglect to mention. This research also highlights the importance of the action research framework in guiding reflection and action, and its benefit in supporting professional development at the same time as adding to the research base. It builds on existing research which has explored how to work systemically and how EPs work in the EY but has not combined the two to explore how to work systemically in the EY. At the same time this research has also highlighted the value some staff and parents place on a wide range of services that can be provided by an EP alongside traditional casework. This research has improved my practice in working systemically with an EY setting and I hope it will inspire other TEPs and EPs to consider more systemic work in their practice and to be aware and insightful of the professional toolbox that works. This would involve EPs using tools that they likely already possess since, as shown in this research, an extensive knowledge of systemic working was not required. What was required in this research was a toolbox of approaches so that I could be responsive to the needs of the setting.

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Appendix I - Inclusion and exclusion Table 1

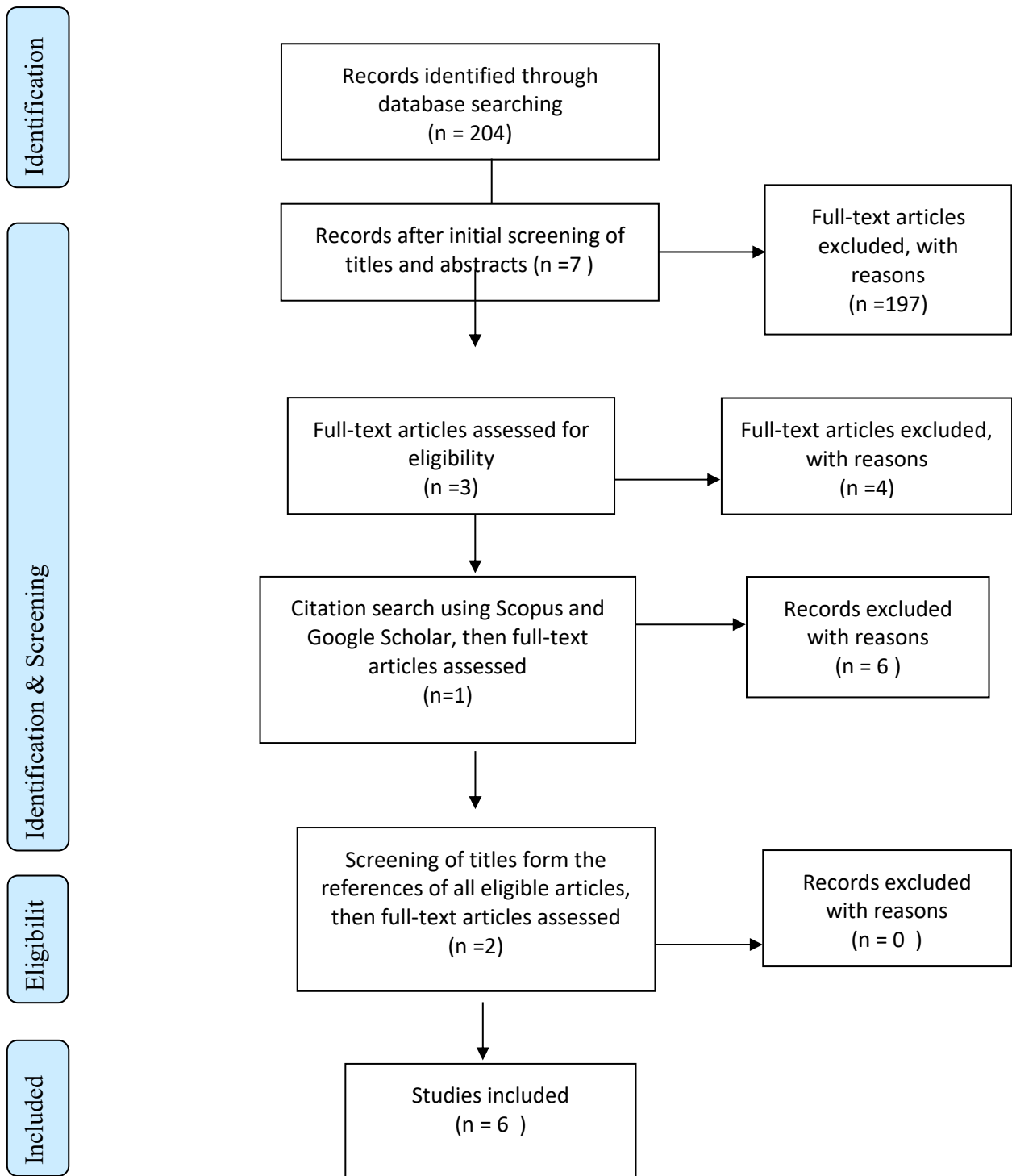
Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review - how do Educational Psychologist work in the Early years.

	Inclusion	Exclusion	Reason
Origin	UK	Not UK	This is because EPs work differently in different countries and understanding the article may rely on an understanding of how EPs work in that country.
Language	English	Not English	This is because translating articles will be timely and costly and perhaps will lead to misunderstanding through in correct translations.
Date of publication	Current and published between 2000-present.	Pre 2000	Only articles from the last 20 years were included since prior to this EPs had only just started working with EY setting and as such very little exists in the literature.
Publication	Peer reviewed journal, Scholarly, unpublished theses, opinion articles.	Non-fiction books, websites, autobiographical accounts.	The integrative review method allows for the combination of both empirical and theoretical literature which enabled me to identify a more comprehensive picture of the literature. Thus, keeping the articles as scholarly as possible whilst also not missing a relevant theses and opinion papers.
Topic of study	Early Years focused (0-5 years old attending the setting) and focused on EP practice.	EPs working in the EY but without a focus on developing practice. Papers without an EY focus.	So that only article based in the EY and focused on EP practice were included so as not to stray too far from the research question.
Accessibility	Articles accessible via UEL database search.	Articles not accessible via UEL database search.	This is because UEL has a good collection of articles available and going outside of UELs database would be timely and costly.

Appendix II- PRISMA flow Diagram 1

PRISMA flow Diagram PRISMA flow diagram detailing search completed on the 16/01/21

Search line: ("education* psycholog*" OR "school* psycholog*") AND ("early years" OR nursery* OR infant* OR "kinder garden" OR Preschool)
 Searching in subject terms and with 'Educational Psychology' selected as a major heading.



Appendix III – Literature review map 1

Literature review map for the research question ‘how do EP’s work in the Early years?’

Reference	Overview	Parti- pants	methodology of the study	Results, Implications, recommendations	Critical review Judgement (using Understanding Health Research: A tool for making sense of health studies, 2021)
Douglas-Osborn, E. (2015). Early Investment: The Role of Educational Psychologists in Supporting an Early Years Setting (Doctoral Thesis). Retrieved from EThOS database (uk.bl.ethos.666862).	This thesis research considers the role an EP could play within one early year setting over an academic year, using an Action Research and a Research and Development in Organisations framework.	11 EY practitioners; 13 parents; 1 Health worker	Pre and post questionnaires were given to EY practitioners. 3 semi-structured interviews with EP practitioners. Questionnaires used to evaluate specific aspects of work carried out.	Thematic analysis and Descriptive statistics were used to assess the effective of the EPs work and participants opinions about the role of the EP. This research suggests there is a greater role for EPs within early years, involving more than conducting casework, through providing a more holistic and intensive approach to supporting practitioners, parents/carers, and children.	POSITIVE SIGNS: peer review journal (the thesis was later published in 2017), ethical approval, clear research question, existing theory and research related to their work, sample justified, data collection and analysis explained, described the researcher(s) who analysed the data, discusses implications and findings, discusses limitations, addressed research question, acknowledged confounding variables, research findings only applies to groups that are similar, provides conflict of interest statement. NEUTRAL SIGNS: the research is not a review.
Dennis, R. (2003). Starting to Make a Difference: Responding to the challenges of recent developments in the Early Years. Educational Psychology in Practice, 19(4), 259-270.	In this paper, implications of EPs working with EY settings at the individual, service and systemic levels are examined and practice examples given of how an (EPS) respond.	n/a	Position paper focused on one line of argument. Using some research to support claims.	The paper concludes that a Senior Specialist EP should be charged with responsibility for drawing up the service development plan for the Early Years.	n/a
Dennis, R. (2004). Getting It Right from the Start: Developing a service delivery model for non-maintained Early Years settings. Educational Psychology in	In this paper, current service delivery to schools is examined and several difficulties identified. The legacy of previous EP	n/a	Position paper focused on one line of argument. Using some research to support claims.	Five key elements of service delivery in the EY are proposed: avoiding individualisation; empowering staff; training; systemic work; monitoring and evaluation;	n/a

Practice, 20(2), 91-102.	practice may represent a threat to its development.				
Shannon, D., & Posada, S. (2007). The educational psychologist in the early years: Current practice and future directions. Educational Psychology in Practice. 23(3), 257-272.	Exploratory research evidence of current models of service delivery and EP attitudes.	32 Eps	Questionnaires were completed by 32 EPs. interviews were conducted with three EPs. Quantitative data obtained were analysed using descriptive statistical analysis. Qualitative data were analysed using a constant comparative method.	whilst results suggest an increasing emphasis on early years work within EP services, results suggest dissatisfaction with current working models associated with high levels of individual casework. Implications for early years EP service delivery are discussed.	POSITIVE SIGNS: peer review journal, clear research question, Participants described, explained how sample was like wider population, sample size given, measurements used clearly described, addressed research question, acknowledged confounding variables, research findings only applies to groups that are similar. NEUTRAL SIGNS: the research is not a review. NEGATIVE SIGN: the paper does not mention receiving ethical approval, sample size was not justified, have not discussed the setting of data collection, no conflict-of-interest statement.
Robinson, M. & Dunsmuir, S. (2010). Multi-professional assessment and intervention of children with Special Educational Needs in their early years: The contribution of educational psychology. Educational and child Psychology, 27(4), 10- 21.	This paper describes current professional practice in assessment and intervention in the EY.	5 Eps, 11 EY staff across 3 focus groups.	Multi-professional focus groups held in three urban local authorities were used to explore the range of assessment and intervention practices in Children's Centres. one group considered the range of early years assessments carried out by different professionals. Transcripts were analysed using a qualitative procedure and a range of issues identified.	Themes that emerged included the variable nature and extent of change in practice because of Government initiatives, the impact on levels of general assessment activity and implications for assessment, operation of multiagency working and the role of specialists within integrated teams. The discussion explores the need to co-ordinate assessment practices across agencies, integrate these within cohesive intervention plans and routinely review outcomes using recognised evaluative frameworks.	POSITIVE SIGNS: peer review journal, carried out by a university, clear research question, described existing theory and research, Participants described, described how they recorded the focus groups, describes how the focus groups were structured, explained data analyses, describes the researcher who analyses the data, discusses implications of findings, addressed research question, research findings only applies to the people included in the research. NEUTRAL SIGNS: the research is not a review, qualitative findings generally cannot be confidently applied to large populations. NEGATIVE SIGN: the paper does not mention receiving ethical approval, limitations of research

					not discussed, confounding factors not discussed, have not discussed the setting of data collection, no conflict-of-interest statement.
Wolfendale, S., & Robinson, M. (2004). The developing role and influence of the Educational Psychologist working within early years. Educational and Child Psychologist, 21 (2), 16-25.	The paper describes the developing role of the EP in the EY. Consideration of theoretical foundations and perspectives is offered.	n/a	Position paper focused on one line of argument. Using available research to support claims.	A number of issues are identified, and ideas given for evolving practice: early intervention, a holistic approach to the identification of need, partnership with parents, equality of opportunity, multidisciplinary working, accountability and evidence based.	n/a

Appendix IV – Understanding Health Research tool

Understanding Health Research tool, review of Shannon, D., & Pasada, S. (2007).

2/13/2021

Understanding Health Research - Summary



Understanding Health Research

A tool for making sense of health studies

Check
Medical
Dictionary

Summary |



Positive sign



Neutral



Negative sign

Shannon, D., Pasada, S. (2007) The educational psychologist in the early years: Current practice and future directions. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(3), 257-272. 2007

Here is a summary of the answers you gave as a reminder:

You have finished reviewing the paper. Here is a summary of the answers that you gave, which you can print for future reference.

This summary is not a decisive judgement of the research paper, but is a tool to help you think critically about the strengths and weaknesses that you identified while reviewing the paper. When reading the summary, keep in mind that some of these points are more important than others, and it is important to consider what they might say about the quality of the paper.

Remember that even if research is good, it does not necessarily mean that the findings will apply to your particular circumstances. Individual studies only tell part of the whole evidence 'story' and it is important not to rely solely on the results of any one study. We recommend that you always consult a health professional before making any major decisions that may affect your health.



The paper was published in a peer-reviewed journal, which means that the paper was checked and accepted by other researchers. This is a good sign, but peer review does not necessarily guarantee that research is good, as the peer review process is only as good as the people who have been invited to review the paper.



The research was not formally reviewed by an ethics committee. This could be a bad sign, as ethics committees make sure that research methods do not cause any unnecessary harm. However, just because a paper does not explicitly mention received ethical approval does not necessarily mean that the researchers did not receive ethical approval.





The paper has clear research questions and aims, which helps readers to decide whether the paper is relevant and useful to them.





<https://www.understandinghealthresearch.org/summary/57/trial/>


1/3


 The research is not a review. Individual studies can be very useful, but systematic reviews are more reliable because they take into account all the research available about a topic. Perhaps you could search for systematic reviews on the topic that you are interested in.


 The researchers clearly describe the characteristics of the people who participated in the research. This is a good sign, as it indicates that the researchers have taken the characteristics of their sample into account when making conclusions about the findings of their research. Furthermore, it enables other researchers to repeat this research to check the findings.


 The researchers explained how their sample was sufficiently similar to the wider population they wanted to find out about. If the sample is representative then the findings are more likely to be applicable to the wider population.


 The researchers do not justify the size of their sample. This may mean that they have not considered the importance of sample size in their research, or that they think their sample is too small and do not want to draw attention to it. Alternatively, it could mean that the researchers have a very large sample, and they do not feel the need to justify it. Regardless, researchers should reassure readers by explaining why their sample is sufficient for their research.

 The number of people that took part in the research was discussed. This is a good sign, as it allows readers to decide for themselves whether data was collected from enough people for the research to be reliable.

 As the researchers have not discussed the setting of data collection into account, they may not have taken the circumstances of data collection into account, and it is possible that some bias has been introduced and the quality of the data has been affected.


 The researchers clearly describe the measurements that they used. This is a good sign as it allows the reader to judge whether those measurements were appropriate, and allows other researchers to repeat the research to test the findings. Appropriate measurements are essential for results to be valid.


 The paper adequately addressed the research questions or aims. This means that the researchers stated their questions, designed a study to answer those questions, and suggested answers to those questions in their findings. Research that gives you an answer to the research question is more likely to be valid and useful.

 It is a good sign that the researchers have acknowledged confounding factors and have considered the effect they might have on their findings.



<https://www.understandinghealthresearch.org/summary/57/trial/>

 The researchers only applied their findings to groups that are similar to the people included in the research. This is a good sign, as researchers cannot confidently apply their findings to groups that are different to those represented in their research sample.

 There is no conflict of interest statement, so you cannot tell whether the researchers have any conflicts of interest that could bias the research.

MRC/CSO Social and Public Health Sciences U



Appendix V – Inclusion and exclusion Table 2

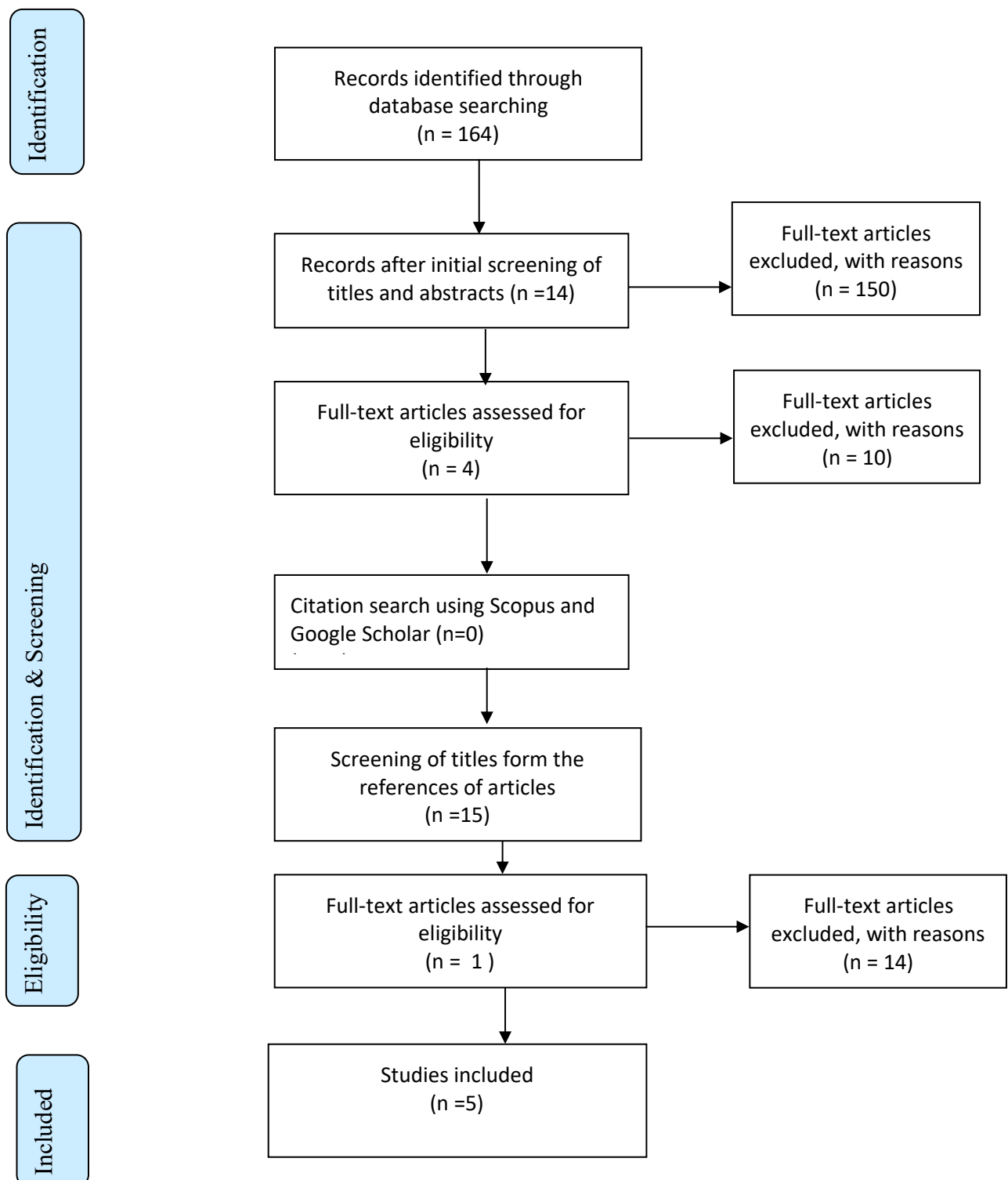
Inclusion and exclusion criteria for the literature review – How do Educational Psychologist work systemically?

	Inclusion	Exclusion	Reason
Origin	UK	Not UK	This is because EPs work differently in different countries and understanding the article may rely on an understanding of how EPs work in that country.
Language	English	Not English	This is because translating articles will be timely and costly and perhaps will lead to misunderstanding through in correct translations.
Date of publication	2000-present	Pre 2000	Only article from the last 20 years were include since to ensure the literature review was current.
Publication	Peer reviewed journal, Scholarly, unpublished theses, opinion articles.	Non-fiction books, websites, autobiographical accounts.	The integrative review method allows for the combination of both empirical and theoretical literature which enabled me to identify a more comprehensive picture of the literature. Thus, keeping the articles as scholarly as possible whilst also not missing a relevant theses and opinion papers.
Topic of study	A focus on EP's systemic practice; challenges and facilitators to working systemically discussed	EPs working systemically but it is not discussed how they achieved this and/or facilitators and barriers of working systemically are also not discussed.	So that only article with a focus on how EPs work systemically; including a discussion around the challenges and facilitators to working systemically are discussed, so as not to stray too far from the research question.
Accessibility	Articles accessible via UEL database search.	Articles not accessible via UEL database search.	This is because UEL has a good collection of articles available and going outside of UELs database would be timely and costly.

Appendix VI – PRISMA flow diagram 2

PRISMA flow diagram detailing search completed on the 06/02/21

Search: systemic AND DE "educational psychology" on 06/02/21



Appendix VII – Literature review map 2

Literature review map – How do EPs work systemically?

Reference	Overview	Partici-pants	Methodology of the study	Results and implications	Critical review Judgement (Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) Qualitative Checklist, 2021).
March, S. and Moir, T. (2018). The role of educational psychologists in supporting nurture-based practices and policy development at a local and national level in Scotland: A position paper. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i> , 35 (3), 32-43.	In their position paper, March and Moir (2018) explore how EPs are using systemic and universal ways of working to support nurture-based practices in Scotland.	n/a	Position paper focused on one line of argument. Using research to support claims. Limitations: This position paper is drawn from the Scottish education system and may not be fully representative of other contexts.	<p>This paper states that, while national and local policy have influenced the focus of EPs' priorities, so too has EPs' knowledge of psychology influenced national and local policy regarding nurturing approaches.</p> <p>There is an ongoing cycle of mutual influence, enabling the continual development of good practice within schools. This can offer a template of systemic working for the future development of the profession of the educational or 'school psychologist' on a wider scale.</p>	n/a

<p>Roffey, S. (2015). Becoming an agent of change for school and student well-being. Educational & Child Psychology, 32 (1), 21-30.</p>	<p>Roffey (2015) takes an ecological and optimistic position in her position paper on working at a systemic level to support student well-being. It summarises what it is possible to influence, and which practices and processes are effective.</p>	<p>n/a</p>	<p>Position paper focused on one line of argument. This paper is based in research on school change and student well-being.</p>	<p>There is an ethical issue about whether EPs acts in a pro-active way to advocate for the needs of vulnerable young people at a systemic level or is primarily reactive to demands.</p>	<p>n/a</p>
<p>Geiger, S., Freedman, R., & Johnston, L. (2015). Using action research to develop quality 16+ further education provision for young people with complex needs. Educational & Child Psychology, 32(1) 81-91.</p>	<p>a systemic approach to develop the quality of the educational offer for young people with complex needs at age 16+.</p>	<p>7 participants, including: local Authority manager (14-19), lead senior EP, 2 TEPs, members of SET from two secondary schools. Head of supporting learning at a local college</p>	<p>action research cycles completed through steering group attendance. Analysis - collaborative reflection analysis of SEND data. Qualitative</p>	<p>The project delivered several key outcomes, including: I A literature review was conducted to highlight national good practice I Transition processes and timings were evaluated to identify changes that would facilitate successful transition I Written guidance was developed to support local colleges in assessing and planning provision for individual pupils using evidence-</p>	<p>YES: statement of aims, qualitative methodology appropriate, design appropriate to address the aims, recruitment strategy appropriate, clear statement of findings PARTIALLY/ SATISFACTORY: data collected addressed the research issue, relationship between researcher and participants, research is valuable in relation to current policy. CAN'T TELL: if ethical issues have been considered, NO:</p>

				based strategies and interventions.	data analysis rigorous.
Balchin, N., Randall, L., & Turner, S. (2006). The Coach Consult Method: A model for sustainable change in schools. <i>Educational Psychology in Practice</i> , 22(3), 237–254.	This study used the coach consult method which combines effective aspects of coaching, project work and in-service training to enable schools to manage their own projects and to encourage sustainable change, embedded within the school system.	4 primary schools	Each school's Project manager met with the coach regularly to plan, implement, and review their project. Each school selected a range of measures appropriate to the specific school context to evaluate the effects on the school. An TEP conducted interviews of the project managers post intervention. Qualitative	The authors indicated that the coach consult method for delivering project work in schools has a positive impact. The schools used different measures to evaluate the project, so it is not possible to make comparisons.	YES: qualitative methodology appropriate, research design appropriate to address aims, recruitment strategy appropriate to aims, PARTIALLY/ SATISFACTORY: clear statement of aims, relationship between research and participants adequately considered, data analysis sufficiently rigorous, clear statement of findings, value of the research - CAN'T TELL: ethical issues taken into consideration, NO: data collect in a way to address the research issue,

<p>Randall, L., Turner, S., & McLafferty, L. (2015). A colourful dot on a dreary economic canvas: Building capacity for innovation in schools through the Coach Consult Programme. <i>Educational & Child Psychology</i>, 32 (4) 69-80.</p>	<p>An innovative method to promoting self-sufficient systemic change owned by school staff is the Coach Consult Programme - train teachers as Project Managers (PMs) to design, deliver, evaluate, and disseminate their own tailor-made school projects.</p>	<p>5 LA in Scotland</p>	<p>train teachers as Project Managers (PMs) to design, deliver, evaluate, and disseminate their own tailor-made school projects. Evaluation - Direct effects: direct impact upon the experiences of pupils' measure by schools as they see fit. Training effects: General effects: questionnaires and interviews – analysed via content analysis. Qualitative</p>	<p>Early results indicated that the Coach Consult Programme was effective in delivering change and had a positive impact on pupils, staff and at the whole school level. Long-term data demonstrated that it is highly effective as a method of professional development and that project management skills developed throughout the training were transferable to other problem areas within the school. There is also evidence that the impact of the projects was sustained in many schools. This demonstrates value for money as a method of continuing professional development, and effective use of EPs' time</p>	<p>YES: qualitative methodology appropriate, research design appropriate to address the aims, research strategy appropriate, PARTIALLY/ SATISFACTORY: clear statement of aims, data analysis sufficiently rigorous, clear statement of findings, value of the research, CAN'T TELL: ethical issues considered, NO: data collected in a way that addressed the research issue, relationship between researcher and participants adequately considered</p>
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Appendix VIII – Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP)

CASP Qualitative Checklist (2021) of Randall, L., Turner, S., & McLafferty, L. (2015).



Paper for appraisal and reference: **Randel, A colourful dot on a dreary economic canvas: Building**

Section A: Are the results valid?

1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- what was the goal of the research
 - why it was thought important
 - its relevance

Comments: partially - aims could be written more clearly to show that they were exploring preceptions.

2. Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- If the research seeks to interpret or illuminate the actions and/or subjective experiences of research participants
 - Is qualitative research the right methodology for addressing the research goal

Comments: The emphasis was on searching for perceptions of the project and reasons for the perceptions

Is it worth continuing?

3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

- HINT: Consider
- if the researcher has justified the research design (e.g. have they discussed how they decided which method to use)

Comments: Justified and appropriate

4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher has explained how the participants were selected
- If they explained why the participants they selected were the most appropriate to provide access to the type of knowledge sought by the study
 - If there are any discussions around recruitment (e.g. why some people chose not to take part)

Comments:	Schools invited
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5. Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the setting for the data collection was justified
- If it is clear how data were collected (e.g. focus group, semi-structured interview etc.)
- If the researcher has justified the methods chosen
 - If the researcher has made the methods explicit (e.g. for interview method, is there an indication of how interviews are conducted, or did they use a topic guide)
 - If methods were modified during the study. If so, has the researcher explained how and why
 - If the form of data is clear (e.g. tape recordings, video material, notes etc.)
 - If the researcher has discussed saturation of data

Comments:	It was not clear how data was collected, each school did it differently. The objectivity and rigour of the research methods used could be queried, since the participants themselves measured the direct effects.
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6. Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during (a) formulation of the research questions (b) data collection, including sample recruitment and choice of location
- How the researcher responded to events during the study and whether they considered the implications of any changes in the research design

Comments: this was not commented on

Section B: What are the results?

7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If there are sufficient details of how the research was explained to participants for the reader to assess whether ethical standards were maintained
- If the researcher has discussed issues raised by the study (e.g. issues around informed consent or confidentiality or how they have handled the effects of the study on the participants during and after the study)
- If approval has been sought from the ethics committee

Comments: No comment on ethics was mentioned and the paper was not in sufficient detail to make a judgement on this.

8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider

- If there is an in-depth description of the analysis process
- If thematic analysis is used. If so, is it clear how the categories/themes were derived from the data
- Whether the researcher explains how the data presented were selected from the original sample to demonstrate the analysis process
- If sufficient data are presented to support the findings
 - To what extent contradictory data are taken into account
- Whether the researcher critically examined their own role, potential bias and influence during analysis and selection of data for presentation

Comments: 'partially/satisfactory' - data analysis attempted to be rigorous but more details needed to be presented in order to confirm.

9. Is there a clear statement of findings?

Yes	<input type="checkbox"/>
Can't Tell	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

HINT: Consider whether

- If the findings are explicit
- If there is adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments
- If the researcher has discussed the credibility of their findings (e.g. triangulation, respondent validation, more than one analyst)
- If the findings are discussed in relation to the original research question

Comments: 'partially/satisfactory' - findings are presented clearly although there was not adequate discussion of the evidence both for and against the researcher's arguments.

Section C: Will the results help locally?

10. How valuable is the research?

HINT: Consider

- If the researcher discusses the contribution the study makes to existing knowledge or understanding (e.g. do they consider the findings in relation to current practice or policy, or relevant research-based literature)
- If they identify new areas where research is necessary
- If the researchers have discussed whether or how the findings can be transferred to other populations or considered other ways the research may be used

Comments: Some value - builds on existing evidence base and proposes how this work can be used.

Appendix IX – Ethics approval and change of title request form

School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

NOTICE OF ETHICS REVIEW DECISION

For research involving human participants

BSc/MSc/MA/Professional Doctorates in Clinical, Counselling and Educational Psychology

REVIEWER: Sophia Bokhari

SUPERVISOR: Janet Rowley

STUDENT: Samantha Simmonds

Course: Prof Doc in Child and Educational Psychology

Title of proposed study: The use of Action Research in implementing a systemic service delivery model with an early years setting

DECISION OPTIONS:

1. **APPROVED:** Ethics approval for the above named research study has been granted from the date of approval (see end of this notice) to the date it is submitted for assessment/examination.
2. **APPROVED, BUT MINOR AMENDMENTS ARE REQUIRED BEFORE THE RESEARCH COMMENCES** (see Minor Amendments box below): In this circumstance, re-submission of an ethics application is not required but the student must confirm with their supervisor that all minor amendments have been made before the research commences. Students are to do this by filling in the confirmation box below when all amendments have been attended to and emailing a copy of this decision notice to her/his supervisor for their records. The supervisor will then forward the student's confirmation to the School for its records.
3. **NOT APPROVED, MAJOR AMENDMENTS AND RE-SUBMISSION REQUIRED** (see Major Amendments box below): In this circumstance, a revised ethics application must be submitted and approved before any research takes place. The revised application will be reviewed by the same reviewer. If in doubt, students should ask their supervisor for support in revising their ethics application.

DECISION ON THE ABOVE-NAMED PROPOSED RESEARCH STUDY

(Please indicate the decision according to one of the 3 options above)

--

2. Approved with minor amendment

Minor amendments required (for reviewer):

You state: "Where the researcher will be working directly with children linked to the research, the parents consent will be gained via LA...."
It is unclear if the nature of this potential interaction with children is explicit to parents/carers/guardians – no mention in participant invitation letter. Please add. – happy for supervisor to oversee this amendment.

Major amendments required (for reviewer):

Confirmation of making the above minor amendments (for students):

I have noted and made all the required minor amendments, as stated above, before starting my research and collecting data.

Student's name (*Typed name to act as signature*): Sam Simmonds

Student number: u1724882

Date: March 2019

(Please submit a copy of this decision letter to your supervisor with this box completed, if minor amendments to your ethics application are required)

ASSESSMENT OF RISK TO RESEACHER (for reviewer)

Has an adequate risk assessment been offered in the application form?

YES / NO

Please request resubmission with an adequate risk assessment

If the proposed research could expose the researcher to any of kind of emotional, physical or health and safety hazard? Please rate the degree of risk:

HIGH

Please do not approve a high risk application and refer to the Chair of Ethics. Travel to countries/provinces/areas deemed to be high risk should not be permitted and an application not approved on this basis. If unsure please refer to the Chair of Ethics.

MEDIUM (Please approve but with appropriate recommendations)

LOW

Reviewer comments in relation to researcher risk (if any).

Reviewer (*Typed name to act as signature*):

Sophia Bokhari

Date:

26/2/19

This reviewer has assessed the ethics application for the named research study on behalf of the School of Psychology Research Ethics Committee

RESEARCHER PLEASE NOTE:

For the researcher and participants involved in the above named study to be covered by UEL's Insurance, prior ethics approval from the School of Psychology (acting on behalf of the UEL Research Ethics Committee), and confirmation from students where minor amendments were required, must be obtained before any research takes place.

For a copy of UELs Personal Accident & Travel Insurance Policy, please see the Ethics Folder in the Psychology Noticeboard



University of East London Psychology

REQUEST FOR TITLE CHANGE TO AN ETHICS APPLICATION

FOR BSc, MSc/MA & TAUGHT PROFESSIONAL DOCTORATE STUDENTS

Please complete this form if you are requesting approval for proposed title change to an ethics application that has been approved by the School of Psychology.

By applying for a change of title request you confirm that in doing so the process by which you have collected your data/conducted your research has not changed or deviated from your original ethics approval. If either of these have changed then you are required to complete an Ethics Amendments Form.

HOW TO COMPLETE & SUBMIT THE REQUEST

Complete the request form electronically and accurately.

Type your name in the 'student's signature' section (page 2).

Using your UEL email address, email the completed request form along with associated documents to: Psychology.Ethics@uel.ac.uk

Your request form will be returned to you via your UEL email address with reviewer's response box completed. This will normally be within five days. Keep a copy of the approval to submit with your project/dissertation/thesis.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTS

A copy of the approval of your initial ethics application.

Name of applicant: Sam Simmonds

Programme of study: Educational and Child Psychology

Name of supervisor: Helena Bunn and Janet Rowley

Briefly outline the nature of your proposed title change in the boxes below

Proposed amendment	Rationale
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Old Title: Action Research exploring the development of systemic working with an early years setting	Amendment suggested following viva to better reflect content of the thesis.
New Title: How can Educational Psychologists improve their practice of working systemically in Early Years settings? Evidence from Action Research in one Local Authority Nursery in the Southeast of England.	

Please tick	YES	NO
Is your supervisor aware of your proposed amendment(s) and agree to them?	/	
Does your change of title impact the process of how you collected your data/conducted your research?		/

Student's signature (please type your name): Sam Simmonds

Date: 24/12/2021

TO BE COMPLETED BY REVIEWER		
Title changes approved	YES	
Comments		

Reviewer: Glen Rooney

Date: 12/01/2021

Appendix X - Semi-structured preparation ideas

Semi-structured notes to prepare for the contracting and planning meeting

Agenda

- Getting to know the staff and nursery
- Planning the terms work
- Contracting

Getting to know the Nursery (20 mins)

- Can you tell me a little about the nursery?
- What are you proud of?
- What is your vision?
- Can you tell me about the children who attend the nursery?
- Can you tell me about the staff?
- Can you tell me about the community around the nursery?
- Anything else you think it would be important for me to know?

Planning the work for the term (25mins)

Hopes

What are your goals or hopes for the future?

Concern

Why do you feel that is needed?

- Why now?
- What other explanations might be relevant?
- Where does this issue usually present itself?
- Where does it rarely happen?
- Would that be something you would be interested in developing further?

Exceptions

Are there times when this is not a concern?

- What's making the difference?

What works

What have you done so far that's working?

Does what's already been tried provide ideas about what might be helpful now?

Future

- What would it look like when this isn't a concern?
- how could my involvement move us one step closer to this image?
- What will the children/parents/staff be doing differently when this image is achieved?
- What do you hope to achieve by the end of the project?

Project plan

Time (i.e. in number of sessions).

Content – (the what).

Process – (the how):-

Who

- Are there specific staff that can be used to help facilitate this project or continue it in the future?
- What realistically can we expect from involvement of staff, in terms of time and effort required to implement the plan.
- Have the staff involved had experience of delivering/supporting this type of project before?

Resources Required:

- Time needed (to include time to project manage, supervise staff, administration, if appropriate).

Venue (Where)

Monitoring and evaluation

- How would you envisage this project being monitored and evaluated?

Contracting (15 mins)


- Use Service level agreement template to prompt discussion.

Ending

Compliment efforts and review effectiveness of meeting

Appendix XI - Reluctant talkers training evaluation form

Reluctant talkers Evaluation



On a scale of 1-5 how useful was the session on reluctant talkers? (please circle)

1	2	3	4	5
Not useful				Very useful

What did you like about the session?

- Clarification of strategies to use to a variety of children
- New strategies to use.

What didn't you like?

Nothing - just would have found this very useful in previous years when I had a higher number of elective-needs reluctant talkers.

What could have improved the session?

- Maybe a follow up to help with specific children.

What will you do because of the session?

i.e. Key worker to have dedicated time to bond with child, setting up silent play activities

- Use strategies in the future and resist the training with new/returning members of staff.


Any other comments:

Thank you very much for all your time & advice!

Appendix XII - Evaluation form, Attention Autism Intervention

Example evaluation form following supporting staff to set up an Attention Autism Intervention

Attention Groups 'Bucket'
Evaluation of the session modelled
by the Trainee Educational Psychologist



1. Was the modelled 'Bucket' group, handouts and resources **helpful**?

1	2	3	4	5
Not helpful				Very helpful

2. What did you **find helpful** about the modelling, handouts or other?

I found the session very helpful. Seeing the group and how it works was really good.

3. What could have **improved** the modelled session, handouts or other?

4. What will you do differently because of the session with Trainee Educational Psychologist? *i.e. Run or support a 'bucket' group, use some of the techniques in your day to day practice*


I can now feel comfortable running a session myself and using some great techniques we learnt.

Any other comments:






Appendix XIII - Starting School session evaluation form

15

Evaluation



On the below scale how helpful was the session on Starting School? (please circle)

Excellent 	Good 	Ok 	Poor 	Terrible 
--	---	---	---	---

What did you like doing today?
Hearing about the ways the prepare for school. Getting them to think independently.

What didn't you like?
So quite tricky to hear due to kid's noise.

What could have improved the session?
Perhaps creche in another room?

What will you do to prepare for your child to start school?
i.e. reading stories about starting school, getting your child used to the routine
Discuss feelings, worry monster!

Any other comments:
Great, thanks for coming.

Appendix XIV – Questionnaire gathering staff views of the systemic work completed over the research project

Overall project Evaluation

1. Have you worked with an EP before and if so, what was the nature of their involvement?
2. When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what has its strengths been?
3. When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what have the limitations been?
4. Is there anything that could be improved?
5. Thinking beyond this project, in an ideal world what type of work would you like EPs be involved with?

Appendix XV – Prompt sheet for the semi structured focus group

Intro - Thank you...

Explain purpose of the focus group

Strengths and limitations of the systemic work in this project

How can I develop my practice at working systemically with a EY setting?

Also thinking about what type of work you would like EPs to be involved with.

Explain ethics

Recorded on a voice recorder, use of pseudo names in the write up

Within your right to withdraw reminder

Any Questions? Start audio recoding

Discussion Question and prompts

1. Have you worked with an EP before and if so, what was the nature of their involvement?

- What happened? **What did their work involve?**
- What was **good** about the EP support you have had in the past?

2. When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what has it's strengths been?

- I have mostly worked in a **systemic way** with your setting (i.e. working with you and parents and not with individual children)
- What are the **benefits** of working in this way?
- What do you think might have **supported you specifically in your role?**

3. When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what have the limitations been?

- What have been the **draw backs** of working in this way?

4. Is there anything that could be improved?

- What do you think might have **supported you better in your role?**

5. Thinking beyond this project, in an ideal world what type of work would you like EPs be involved with?

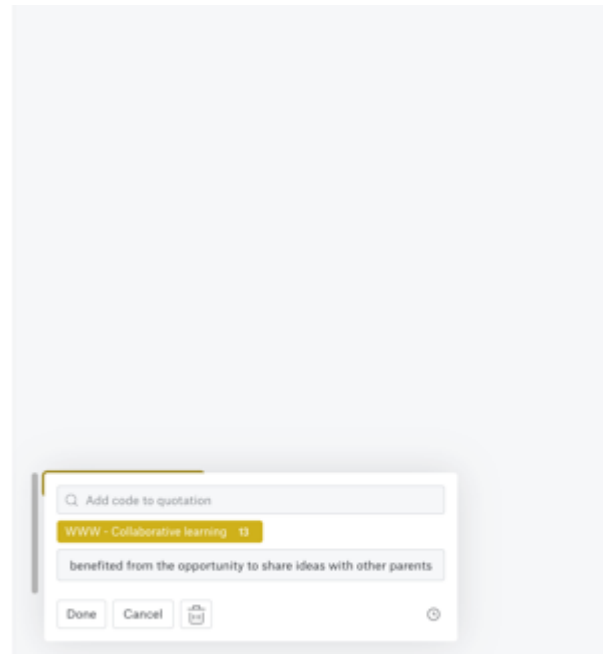
- - In an ideal world, how would you like an EP to support this setting?
- - How would you like an EP to support you and the setting?

Conclusion - Summarise discussion. Is there anything else you would like to add?

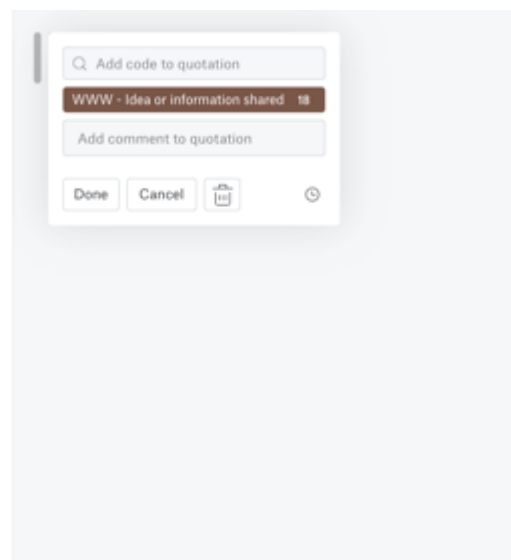
Thank you for participating

Appendix XVI – Photos of the open coding process using Atlas.ti Web on the data from the parent session questionnaire

Participant	How helpful was the session? Excellent, good, ok, poor, Terrible	What did you like about the session?	What didn't you like?	What could have improved the session?	What will you do to prepare for your child to start school?	Any other comments?
1	Excellent	Sharing ideas with other parents			Routine, stories, chat at home	Thanks!
2	Good					



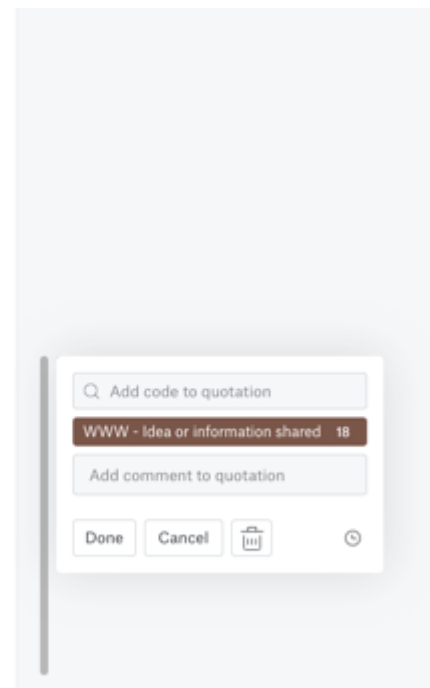
3	Excellent	Lot of ideas				Some of the suggestions given! Thank you for the ideas.
4	Excellent					
5	Good					Reading stories
6	Excellent					



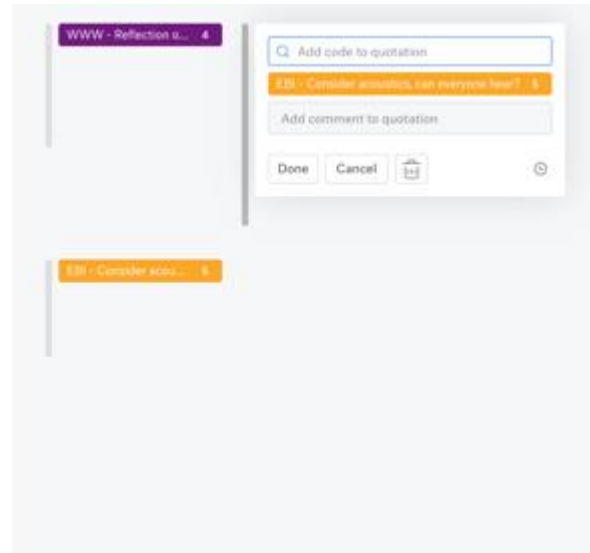
7	Excellent	Finding out about FS2, what it entails, managing emotions.			Talking about school, read stories
8	Good	Very interesting	Maybe no children. Very hard to hear at times.		Keep talking about school.
9	Excellent	Very informative			



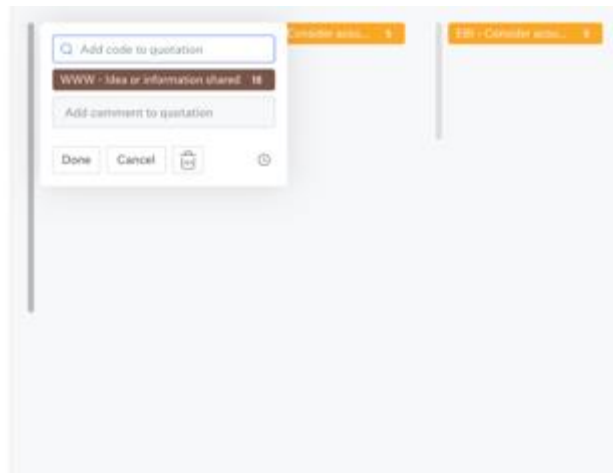
10	Excellent		Nothing	It was perfect	She is already very excited <u>coming school.</u>
11	Excellent		nothing	It was perfect	
12	Excellent	Everything - information about the school and preparation			



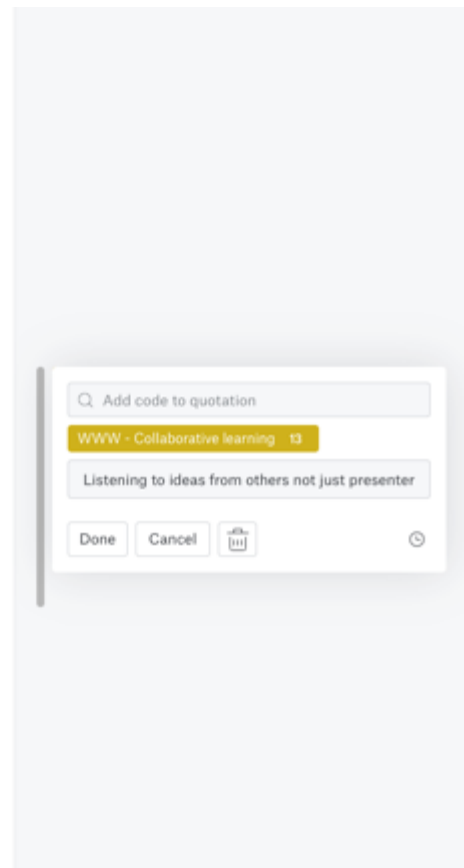
13	good	Thinking about my own emotions		It was very noisy in the room I could hardly hear.		
14	Excellent			Managing silence in the hall	Getting used to the routine and buy new things to look forward to school.	



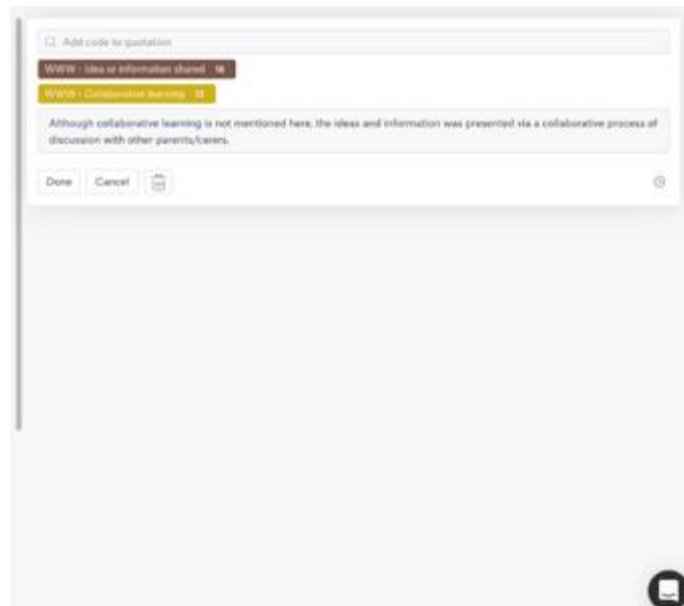
15	Excellent	Hearing about the ways to prepare for school. Getting them to think independently	Quite tricky to hear due to kids noise	Perhaps creche in another room	Discuss feelings, worry monster!	Great, thanks for coming!
16	Good	everything			Stories, loves reading and learning	



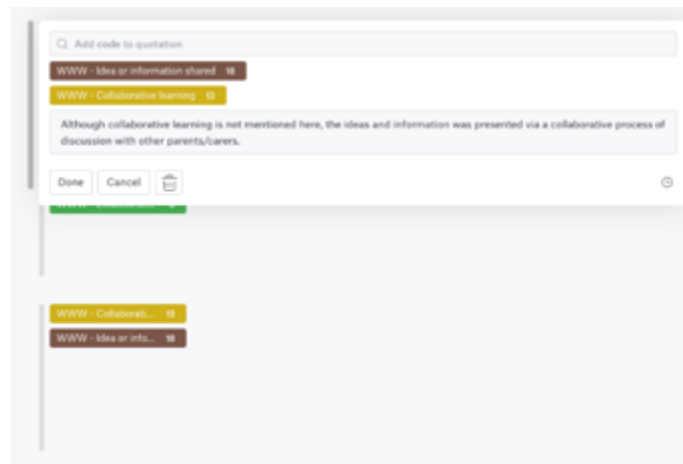
17	excellent			XX was excellent very helpful, super slidesho <u>w and</u> very inclusive .
18	excellent	I enjoyed listening to other people's ideas and opinions		Talk to them and reassure them and prepare them by making sure they are in a routine and <u>organise</u> d.



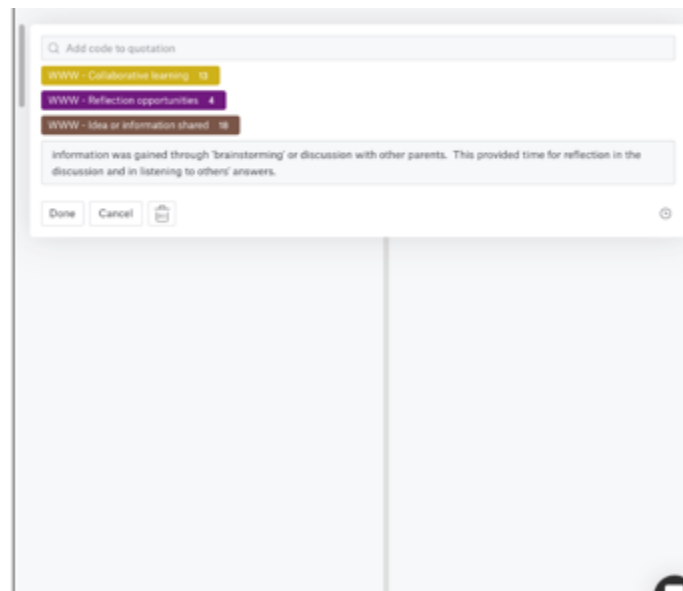
19	Excellen t	Learning how to support my child in starting school and hearing about ways to help them and myself with worries and anxiety.	Talk to them about worries, but also what they are looking forward to. Practice morning routine beforehand. Let them help pack their bag. Meet up with friends who will be in their class.
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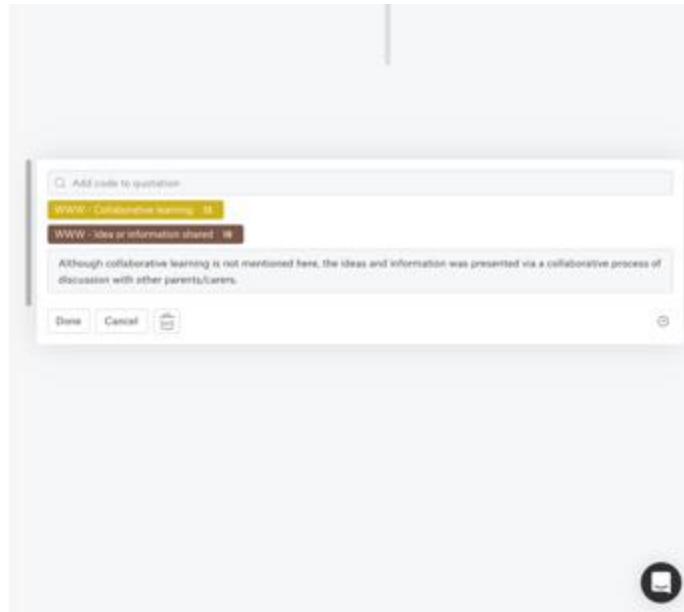
20	excellent	Preparing my child to the school. Good programmes. The meeting was effective		Getting my child used to the routine.	
21	excellent	Recommendations how to prepare child to school.	Everything was fine	Stories, Routine, making sure everything is ready.	



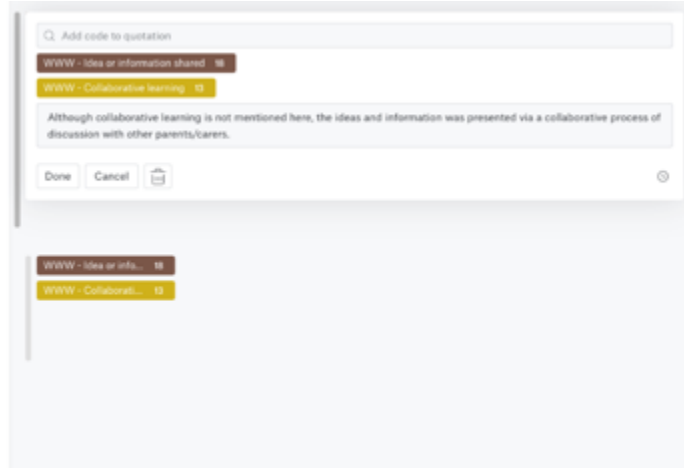
22.	O.K.	Some brain storming	Felt quite repetitive	Don't assume parent don't already have other children in school. Don't assume parents won't (still) be very busy when child starts school looking after other sibling or	Lots of positive communication and practicing routine.
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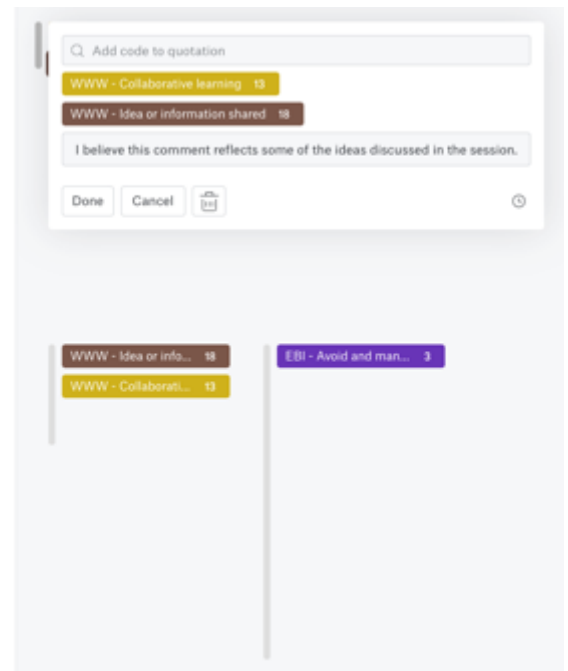
			working part/full time.	
23	Excellent			
24	Good	Imports it to get ready on the first day of school		Getting my son to go to bed early. Making him understand his going to other class and he will get lots of toys new activities and also new friends.



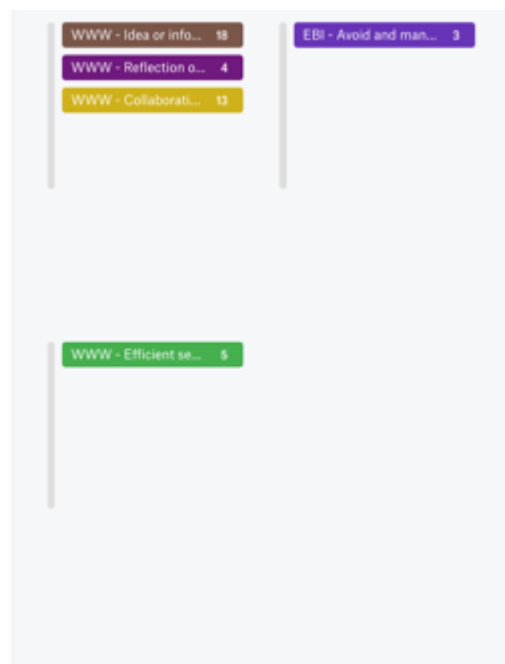
25	Good	Took a lot of information, introduce how the school team is working		Sleep routine.
26	Good	Meeting friends and tidying up		Explaining them to meet new friends, big play area, toys lots of fun.



27	Good	Meeting friends			Talking to them about school, friends and new teachers. Make them independent.
28	Good	Some good practical tips	Too much talk between yourselves. Some variation would keep it interesting.	See above. Good overall though	All the suggested tips. We do many already.



29	Good	Nice ideas and things to think about		Maybe slightly less discussion in pairs.	Read stories. Get bedtime and morning routine familiar. Walk to school.
30	good	Well explained and clear information			Talking a lot about starting a new school, meeting new friends, fearlessness.



31	Excellent	Good organisa tion	The meeting was weirdly efficient		Getting routine, talking about school, psychological preparation.	
32	Excellent	Learning about how my sons going to learn			Telling them about our school learning experience.	
33	Excellent	Interactive session				
34	Excellent	Learning about the school			Many changes suggested	👍 15

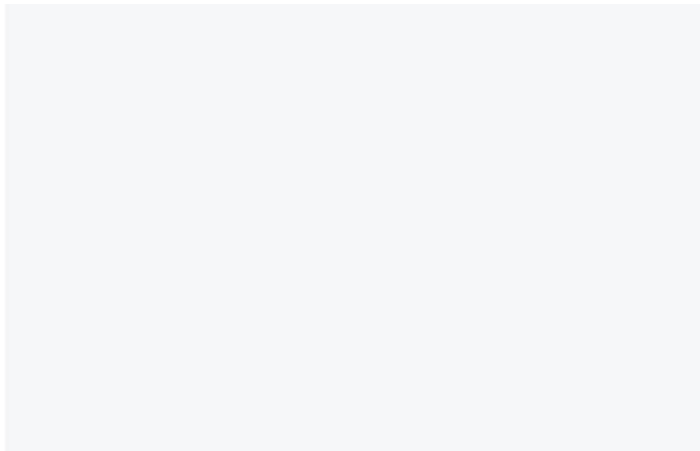
The screenshot shows a search interface with a search bar containing the text "Add code to quotation". Below the search bar, a dropdown menu displays a search result: "WWW - Efficient session 5". Below the dropdown, there are two buttons: "Done" and "Cancel".

Below the search interface, a list of search results is displayed. The results are:

- WWW - Efficient se... 5
- WWW - Idea or info... 18
- WWW - Collaborati... 13
- WWW - Reflection o... 4
- WWW - Efficient se... 5
- WWW - Idea or info... 18

Appendix XVII – Photos of the open coding process using Atlas.ti Web on the data from the staff questionnaires

Question	Bev (Reception teacher)	Suki (Reception TA)	Jenny (HeadTeach er)
Have you worked with an EP before and if so, what was the nature of their involvement?	Yes, EHCP assessments and discussing children's needs.	No	-Completing assessments for EHCPs -identifying children's needs -providing unique strategies for children with SEN -Training



When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what has its strengths been?	I was only involved with the transition session for parents - it was helpful for parents to have input on wellbeing. Also received the selective mutism information to share with the team.	I can use the bucket intervention strategies in my EAL work with children too, it is all transferable and helpful.	The foundation Stage Team to have some dedicated time to work with an EP to enhance their practice.
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When thinking generally about the work completed during this project what have the limitations been?		More time to practice the bucket intervention.	I know the team have found it hard to find the time to do this.
--	--	--	---



Is there anything that could be improved?	n/a	As above	
Thinking beyond this project, in an ideal world what type of work would you like EPs be involved with?	<i>More sessions supporting parents, it is helpful when it come from the LA not just the school.</i>	<i>I would like to attend sessions like the bucket intervention again to support my practice.</i>	<i>More time with the EP service!!</i>



Appendix XVIII – Photos of the open coding process using Atlas.ti Web on the transcript from the staff focus group

NB – the first coding example is on photo 11.

TEP 0:03

...yes, exactly....if I don't write notes and then I get home and none of its worked (laughing).

TEP 0:10

Right, so, I've got some questions.

It depends how much we talk, but I can't imagine it wouldn't take much more than half an hour.

But it might be quicker. We'll see how we go.

TEP 0:22

So first of all, I wanted to explain that this is an informal kind-of discussion.

I've got a semi structure and questions, but actually the conversation is free to go in other directions, where you feel that it'd be useful.

The first question I thought about was, have you worked with an EP before this?

And what did their involvement look like?

TEP 0:48

Natasha, you've just shook your head, is that a no? (pause) Right.

Laura 0:56

I've worked with them before, um, in when they've come in to make assessments and observed children, various different schools, and settings.

And I've also had some experience of working with EPs because I used to work for a local authority.

TEP

Okay.

Laura

Yeah, so I used to sit amongst the local educational psychologists.

So I know a little bit more about the different types of things that they may do.

And the different places where they were.

TEP 1:30

And your experience of them in school has been completing assessment?

Laura 1:35

Yeah, always.

Claire 1:35

Always

Bhavina 1:35

Always

TEP 1:37

Was that everyone?

All 1:39

Yeah, yeah.

Claire 1:40

My only additional one was when I went on the SEN conference.

TEP 1:45

Oh, yes.

Claire 1:46

Yes, because all the EPs ran all the training.

But other than that, all mine have been doing one assessments and follow up things.

TEP 2:01

Yeah. And you've been in the meetings,

Claire

Yes.

TEP

Finding out about strategies..

And have you had that experience of attending meetings?

Laura

I've been in on meeting

Unknown Speaker 2:12

Have you attended any feedback?

To find out about strategies that could work with a particular child?

Bhavina 2:20

Just when they have come in, they just talked verbally, what could you do? Not like, formally.

TEP

Okay. Yeah.

Laura 2:31

At previous school that I worked at, the class teacher always went to those meetings.

Each term it was discussed, the child was discussed and the funding that they were going to have and how their support is gonna be done.

I used to go to those with the SENCo and the head teacher and the parents and things.

TEP

Okay. Yeah.

Laura

And the other agencies that were involved.

TEP 2:57

How helpful have you found those kind of meetings with an EP, when they feedback their assessments and discuss strategies?

Claire 3:14

Most of the time they are, I think some of them were they've done the assessment and you know there is no funding....some of the suggestions are only practical if there's one to one support, and genuinely there isn't....

Laura

Yes I agree

Claire

....so even though the strategies and examples might be brilliant... actually finding the time or an adult to implement them is more tricky.

You know, for one of those reasons, you can't often implement all the lovely things.

So sometimes it would be lovely in the, you know, if they said to you, right, if you have support, and if you have time, do this....

TEP

Right, Yeah.

Claire

...If you haven't, this is the sort of thing you can do a little bit of all of the time.

So if we had a bit of the both that would help me as would actually feel that you are doing some of it, rather than worrying about the fact that you can't do all the bits, you know, they need on what you'd like to do.

TEP

Yeah.

Claire

Excuse me.

So for me, that would be useful, because you just think, I know, I can't do that at the moment, but I need to do something. What's that doable?

TEP

Yes.

Lou

I agree with that, as I've definitely had experiences, the same as that.

And I think the other thing which has only happened occasionally, has been where

sometimes the advice given has not always necessarily been age appropriate to nursery and reception age children.

So if they've been giving strategies for what you might do to support a child, they've not always necessarily been age appropriate age appropriate.

Yeah, I mean, that that's on occasion.

So it's not a regular thing.

Claire

Yeah. No, I mean, the ones that I found a really been not aimed appropriately, are more tend to be on speech plans more rather than an EP plan.....

TEP

Okay. Right.

Claire

...or advice? They tend to forget what little little ones are like.

TEP 5:23

And do you find when there's an EP meeting that your able to sort of explain this. Do you feel there's that you have a space to sort of say, or

Lou

No

Claire

Not generally.

Claire 5:43

Because often you have the chat when they come to do the assessment. And then you're given a report...

TEP

Right.

Claire

...and there's not often a follow up where the EP will go, you've got the report.

Is there anything we could talk about or find difficult whatever?

There's no follow up with the class teach,

TEP

Like a review of how the strategies are going?

Claire

Yeah, there's none of that.

TEP 6:10

Review meetings important.

Yeah, that's good to know.

Claire 6:18

Doesn't have to be anything major, but just a little or even a phone call.

How's it going anything I can help you with?

You know, any of this that you find really not doable? or Yeah.

Again, it's time and money.

But it would it be helpful?

TEP

Yes

Lou

I think possibly, sometimes that happens, because EPs would come and observe a child, say for half an hour. And then they go to the SENCo, or the head teacher to feed back. The class teacher doesn't necessarily get that.

TEP

Yes, so important it comes to the class teacher.

Laura

It doesn't come to us straight away.

Claire 6:51

Yeah, it's often delayed if it does come. Where the class teacher is the one doing it?

Lou

Yeah, again, yes...because sometimes the SENCo or the head teacher may not, or may not know the routines or the structure....

Claire

Yeah or might not know the child, might not know what's doable or not doable.

TEP

Yeah.

Claire

They'll probably go, 'Oh, yes, That's great idea', unless you got the class teacher to say, well how? Or we've already doing that.

TEP 7:21

That's really useful, kind of the importance of reviews and the class teacher being the key person, and not just the SENCO and head.

Lou

Yeah.

TEP 7:24

Ok so the next question I was going to ask was, when thinking generally about the work completed during this project what has it's strengths been?

(Quiet for a couple of seconds)

So I mostly worked, we could say, in a systemic way, which is like, with teachers, with staff, with parents, as opposed to kind of one to one with children, I was working with the adults.

As a recap, so the work I did, I did one training, one modelling and one with parents.

Laura 7: 45

I think not all of us, obviously, were at the parent meeting.

TEP

Of course, Yeah.

Bhavina

So it's difficult for us to comment.

Laura

You sent us the presentation, I can only really comment on that.

But of course, and from the feedback, I know that, that was really valued.

And I think it's really important sometimes, for parents to have that outside of the school perspective.

So you, they came to that meeting, and they heard from the school, but then there was also that acknowledgment from outside professionals.

TEP 8:05

Yes

Lou

...of all of those things that you talked about. And I think that was really, really valuable.

Um...I would definitely look into having something like that again, and possibly, you know, how it could work with, with the nursery parents, as well at some point?

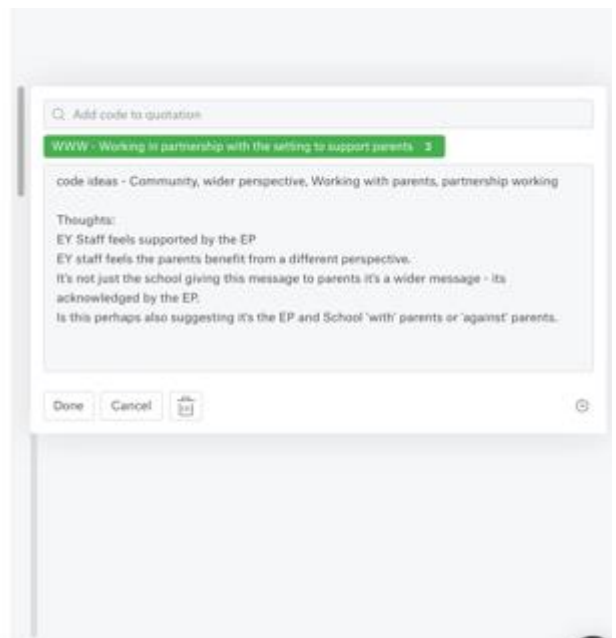
TEP

Yes, yeah. You have the PowerPoint for next year, feel free to use it.

Laura

I think that's the thing, we could adapt it.

It just validates those feelings from a different point of view.



Um...and then also, I think, just, you know, the modeling and everything that's, it was a really useful way of, you know, the team getting some professional development.

Natasha 8:35

Definitely, and the fact that those, you know, skills in the bucket group can be used with other children, rather than just SEN children because Laura was saying that you went on an SEN course, didn't you?

Laura

Yeah

Natasha

..A couple of weeks ago, where they suggested that all children could be using the bucket group.

TEP

Yes, Yes.

Claire

I think so. It's nice that it's not just for your special needs, or reluctant talkers.

Natasha

Strategies that can be transferred or are adapted to...

Laura

Add code to quotation

WWW - Professional development opportunities 10

Code ideas: professional development

comments

It was a really useful way of - suggesting its hard to provide professional development 'the team' - perhaps referring to TAs - since that's who I worked with

This links in with the literature suggests, EY practitioners have limited opportunities for CPD.

Done Cancel

WWW - Opportant... 10

So so they they're using it to promote listening and attention skills.

TEP

Yeah.

Laura

..because they're finding more and more children are entering nursery they've not been anywhere before. And they don't have that ability ..those skills, which I thought was really interesting.

And also Suki was saying that she found it really interesting with her EAL hat on.

TEP

Yeah.

Laura 10:15

And that she could definitely use all of those skills that she saw when she goes back to working with EAL children.

TEP:

Yeah

Bhavina

It just shows, doesn't it? You know, all, all bits of knowledge, you can take things from it. And it might not be the perfect mold of, of how it's always going to be used. But you, you can take those core bits out.

Add code to quotation

WWW - Opportunities to develop transferable skills / knowledge 10

Through supporting staff to set up an intervention - transferable skills were developed. Staff valued learning transferable skills that can be used or applied to many children.

Done Cancel

WWW - Opportant... 10

WWW - Opportant... 10

Laura

Yeah, And those principles and, and something that can be adapted.

TEP

Yes, to suit the setting?

Laura

Or just year on year to different individual children and the needs that are coming in.

Claire

As we said, you know, we've got some children that come in, and we've got a high number of like, last year, we had a really big issue with attachment and lots of problems with boys. We haven't had that this year.

Where the bucket's been more valuable now, the selective mute seems to be a recurring thing.

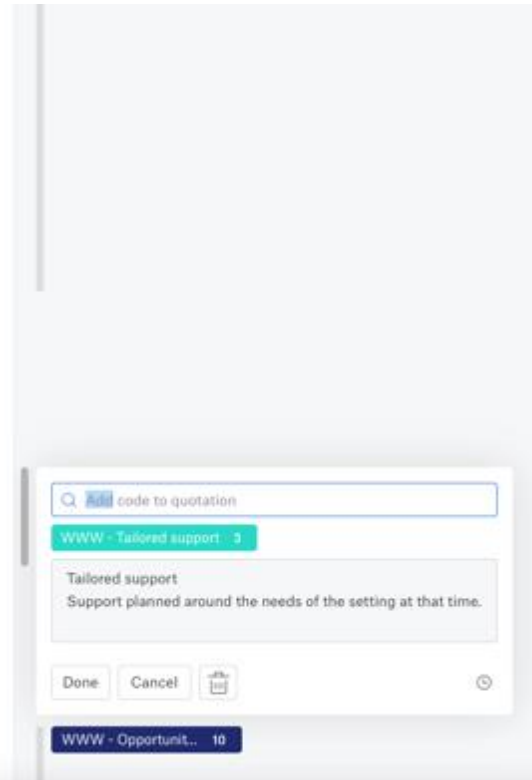
But that depends on your cohort?

TEP

Yes.

Claire

I'm just your eyes open to the fact of even if it isn't, you know, you're seeing children with behaviors that you're not sure of, but your like 'ah' on the basis of



training I've had, could either this be useful? Or could that be the reason for behavior?

TEP

Yes

Claire 11:44

Well, we can't always pinpoint it. And you know, thinking, well, you can apply theories on attachment or bereavement or, you know, some kind of trauma in their lives to understand them a bit better and such and often their family when you think you've got an odd parent or something that doesn't quite ring true.

Laura

Um (agreeing sound)

Claire

It all helps with all your relationships, not only with the child.

TEP

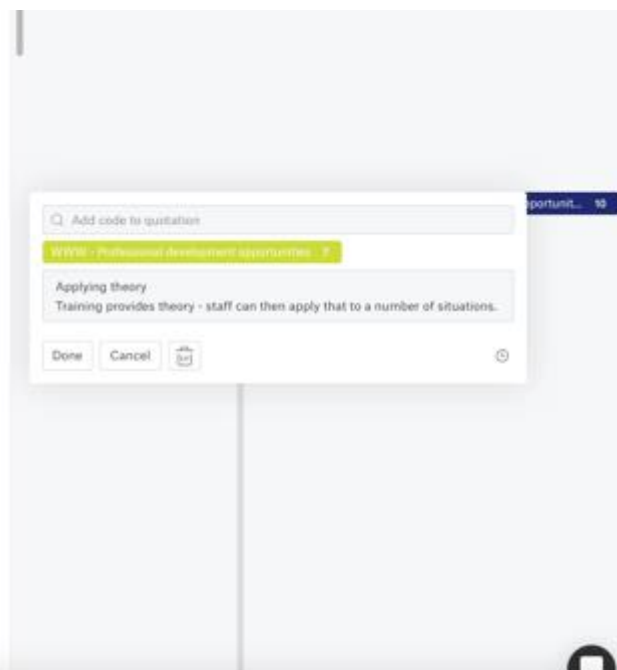
Yes.

Claire

With the families and how you deal with them.

I think that's quite useful.

(few seconds quiet)



IEP

Is there any other strengths, when thinking generally, about the work completed during this project you wanted to discuss?

All

(Couple of seconds quiet)

TEP

Great, thank you, um.

So, moving on, when thinking generally about the work completed during this project, what have the limitations been?

All

(Couple of seconds quiet)

TEP

Can you think of any drawbacks?

Claire

Well, then in systemic work, you wouldn't get advice tailored to that particular child.

Laura

Q Add code to quotation

Problem - Working at the individual child level can take priority over systemic working 2

I think assessment are really useful for getting the clarity of what the needs might be, particularly in those early stages, if there isn't necessarily a diagnosis or anything, obviously, an EP come and diagnose there and then, but sometimes just to have that professional conversation with someone about what you're seeing, and what it might mean.

TEP 13:05

So a new child, yeah, new condition?

Laura

Yes.

Claire

And you just think, I know something's not right. They're doing these behaviours, especially if it's ones you haven't seen before.

And you think, Sometimes you have an instinct of knowing that's ASD type traits.

That's whatever type, I've come across this before.

I know some strategies, some children are showing you things that you haven't come across, or the combination is very strange.

TEP

Yes, yeah.

Claire

Would like - tailored support... 1

Would like - More time with the EP 4

Thoughts:

- helpful to have a professional conversation about a child

Done

Cancel



So that concern, that dialog to say, you know, there's something here that's not quite right, but can't put my finger on it.

TEP

So it's kind of that problem solving, maybe?

Claire

Yep

TEP

That Professional Psychology and understanding that is, is helpful.

Laura

And just drawing on the experience of um an EP who has, you know, as much as experienced practitioners, we've all seen lots of children.

Um what EP is seeing is a lot more ...narrow.

TEP

They might have seen that in a different setting.

Claire 14:25

And yeah, I mean, you know, as we've said before, up until now, we didn't know all of this was available now.

Laura

Q Add code to quotation

Would like - More awareness of services available from the EPS 1

Code ideas: communication, overt advertising, menu

No (said in agreement).

Claire

We really didn't.

We thought ...it was just assessments.

TEP

it was just assessments (said in unison with Claire)

Claire

You know, EP is only really came in to do assessments and reviews, EHCP, etc.

TEP

Yes

Claire

We didn't really know, up until now, that the training and the other thing you've done, were available.

TEP

Okay.

Claire

You know, as we've probably mentioned...

Code ideas: communication, overt advertising, menu

EPs role and the ways they can become involved not fully known by school staff.

School staff aware of assessments, reviews and EHCPs as EPs main work.

Done Cancel

Laura

The systemic things like the modelling that you've done...

TEP

Yes

Laura

...would be definitely something that I would be interested in having again?

TEP

Yeah.

Claim

But again, you know, when the Head controls the budgets,

Obviously how the budgets are used. And we're not party to that information

Um, I'm assuming when we've highlighted children before, you know, you've had conversations like when there's not enough in the budget, not enough in the budget because I've got two children in this year group and two children in this group, and the head prioritizes.

And I would assume from a heads point of view.


TEP

Yes.

Q Add code to quotation

Problem - Working at the individual child level can take priority over systemic working 2

EY staff would like more choice over how EP time is used
Head prioritises assessments
systemic work might be useful for the class teacher but not a priority for the Head

Done Cancel 

Claire

.that the systemic work isn't on their priority list.

The assessing the children is.

So although it's useful to the class teacher, it might be one of our focuses, it certainly won't be a budget or a head teacher priority.

A few years ago, when we had XXXX (previous TEP).

He did assessment, not assessment, attachment theory with us.

And we had training for the whole staff. And there was also one on...that what's her name did...What that on was that on loss and bereavement?

Bhavina

Yeah

Claire

It was really useful, it was all our staff, staff, asked for attachment, but I think when we did bereavement and loss other schools were ur came as well, if I remember rightly. There were more people in the hall.

Because um.

Bhavina

One for year 3?

Claire 16:10

Q Add code to quotation

Staff seem to value the training provided by the EPS. this quote though doesn't directly relate to

Done Cancel 

Yeah. And then we did one in the hall, that's the one I'm remembering.

TEP

So training is something that is valued?

Claire

Yes, I mean, we've had training on dyspraxia and everything, but I don't I think that came from OT rather than the EP service.

But those those sorts of trainings are really useful. And then we almost don't, it's not that we don't need to involve you.

It's just that with the money and the resources, we can use you in a different way.

When we've got children that we can say, Oh, I think they're a bit...so and so it's not enough that's holding them back or whatever, you know, that there's a bit of something in there and if you had a bit more knowledge, you could help them.

TEP

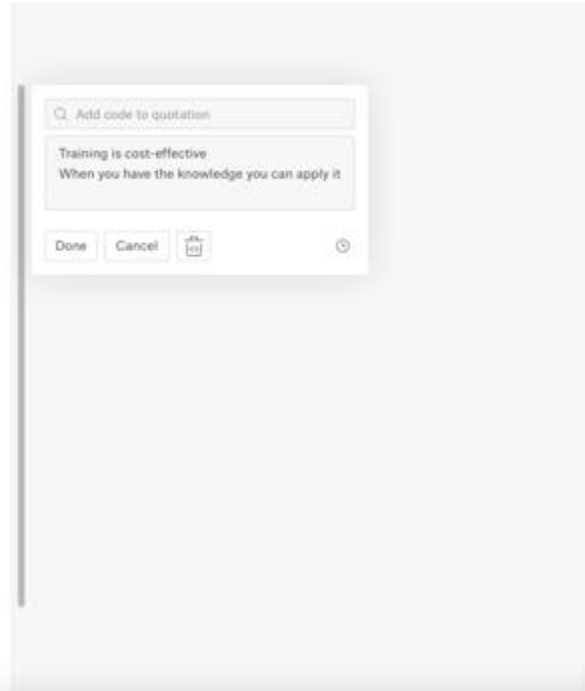
Yeah, so you could do something.

Claire 16:54

We could do something, rather than it being a big deal before someone did something.

(Quite for a couple of seconds)

TEP



Thank you, so if we think about the work completed during this project, what would you say the limitations have been?

Loa

I think um, another challenge, perhaps, of systemic work would be the timings of when that would happen, for example, you know, it was brilliant being able to have you guys come out and a model and observe, but there was implications, ratios, and things like that.

So, it would, that would be certainly something that would need to be looked at in terms of when those approaches are going to be done.

TEP

And that's the same with staff training as well?

Claire

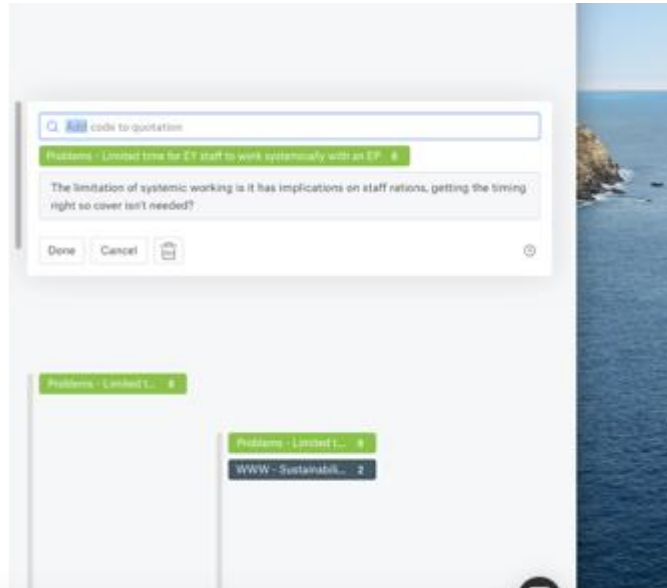
Yes, yeah. And whether, you know, some of the meetings we've had, there's been a TA session and a teacher session, so then you're without staff?

And again, it would be lovely, I haven't seen any of these lovely bucket activities, I would have liked to.

TEP

Yes, but when the timings don't work.

Claire



And again, it would be lovely. I haven't seen any of these lovely bucket activities, I would have liked to.

TEP

Yes, but when the timings don't work.

Claire

Yes. That would, I would have liked to have had that knowledge, for myself, I've only read about it.

I've never seen a whole session in action.

TEP

Natasha is able to model it for you.

Natasha

(Laughing)

TEP 18:59

(Laughing, together with Natasha).

No pressure.

Claire

Q Add code to quotation

Problems - Limited time for EY staff to work systemically with an EP 8

WWW - Sustainability of the work 2

Staff discussing that there wasn't time for everyone to work with me on setting up the Attention Autism intervention, some staff would have liked to have been involved but time meant they couldn't
Resource pack (notes) help to learn from
Other staff, who were involved with the setup can support other staff to learn - staff might not be confident about doing this.

Done Cancel

I could get myself through it, based on you're notes, but having not seen it in action myself. I wouldn't quite know....

Natasha

Finding time to demonstrate.

Claire

...But you know, I know it tends to be a TA thing that is doing it. But it would be lovely....

Laura

We will have to make it a performance management target for her..(supportive laughter)

Natasha

(Laughing with Laura)

Laura

..to cascade bucket knowledge.

TEP

Natasha now hates me (TEP laughing).

Natasha

(Laughing with TEP)

Laura

She will have to model to shine.

Claire

You will.

Natasha, I don't want to do it to shine or Claire.

Claire

Fine, right move those biscuits.

All

(laughing)

Natasha

You're all pressuring me to, because you're above me.

TEP

It is harder with your own colleagues.

Claire

It is more pressure, and you think, I'm not gonna see them again, so I don't care.

Natasha

Yeah, sometimes.

TEP

And the next question I was going to ask was, is there anything that could be improved?

Natasha

Cover to attend the sessions.

Laura

Yes, we were down on staff numbers during the modeling.

Claire

It was difficult to attend the meetings. Time and cover are real issues.

Laura

Also, if the project could be spread over a longer time frame...so that the meetings were further apart...or in the Autumn when the children are new.

(Quiet for a few seconds)

TEP

Is there anything else that could be improved?

(Quiet for a few seconds)

Claire

No, I think we spoke about other issues and improvements in the last question, didn't we.

TEP

OK, and then the last question is about the ideal, so thinking beyond this project, in an ideal world what type of work would you like EPs to be involved with?

(Quiet for a few seconds)

TEP

So if you had, you know, more choice about what it would look like and how you would work with EPs, what type of work would you like to see?

Claire

I'd like a bit of both.

Laura

Best of both worlds.

Claire 22:52

There are definitely times and children where you need that assessment and that individual feedback, but the general things that you can apply to all children is just as important.

So for me, it would be definitely a combination.

Laura

Definitely, I agree. Yeah

Claire

Yep.

(Quiet for a few seconds)

TEP

Are there other things that we haven't talked about, that I wish EPs could do more of these kind of things, maybe other services you've worked with, like speech and language or OT, or that they might work in a particular way? You think, actually, I wish they could come in and do more of that.

Claire

When I went on the OT courses at the very beginning of the year in relationship to my friend. They just, they were quite good, but they just really kept referring us back to the CYPIT website. And looking at it from there. When we've had speech

WWW - Tailored su... 3

Would like - More ti... 4

therapy advice, they've referred us back to that, as almost the fountain of all knowledge, but hasn't got everything that we would need on it.

Laura

But there's also, you know, because when you Google things, there's a lot of American rubbish.

Also I think you can read things and it's it's written as fact, and in that textbook type of way that makes it harder to relate, whereas having a person come in and meet children and meet, professional you..

Bhavina

Sometime, you could take it differently than it means.

Laura

Exactly, yes. It's open to interpretation.

Bhavina

Hum (said in agreement).

Laura

Whereas I think when if you had a series of sessions with an EP, you can kind of build that relationship and build up knowledge.

Code ideas - relationships, face-to-face

Having information on a website is not the same as building a relationship with an EP. Website can be confusing - 'educational babble'
"Having a series of sessions with an EP, you can kind of build that relationship and build up knowledge.

Done

Cancel



Bhavina

Get what you want to get...

Laura

Yeah, you can tailor it to...

Claire 24:40

And sometimes some of the things is very educational babble, isn't it?

Bhavina

Hum (said in agreement)

Laura

Lots of jargon

TEP

Too much jargon.

Claire

Yes a little less jargon would be lovely.

Even though you know, my daughter's had her own EP assessment done.

And even as a teacher who's read hundreds of EP reviews, I struggled to make sense of what it was actually saying. Let alone a parent with no background or knowledge.

And I think, actually, if this is written for practitioners and parents, it needs to be more friendly, simple and simpler.

You know, all if you need to use the technical jargon, put it in brackets or something.

TEP

Yep.

Claire 25:41

Yeah, and I think there'll be a lot less confusion and a lot less..... panic from some parents, because some parents just focus in on that jargon.

Don't know what it means and go into panic mode.

If you had an example of a behavior or what it meant, or whatever, and then that was in brackets, I think you would get less panic and less defensive behaviour for some parents.

I think it's very daunting very, very well, because you think of, you know, our friend's parents, when we sit in those meetings. Everybody is in, you know, jargon.

We're all as professionals talking in the same way, you can understand why you don't always have the best partnership with parents because of that.

TEP

It can reduce partnership.

Claire

Which I think is important.

TEP 26:31

Yeah.

Claire

If you think of the example of the meetings I've had previously with XXX parents, but we're all jargon. And then that meeting we had that day when we went through the sheet the difference? And how more open and friendly and productive that meeting was, was a classic example of how the two different meetings are. That can really help with relaxing families and making it really important.

Claire

Then EP reports, some they're too short. Sometimes they are too long. There are some that are a lot of scores...on this chart they come out as this, on that chart they come out as that.

I don't think there needs to be quite the focus on that.

The next steps and the strengths will probably be more useful and strategies than a lot of data of, you know, you could say that their communication skills or whatever falls roughly in this band. You don't need all the blurb and all the charts and everything that go with that. And sometimes they're all over them.

Sometimes, sometimes you get reports that aren't, others are just on this they are

this, and on this chart, on this score thing they fall in this.

Also, they're working at this age group on this section on this group for this, so you don't need all that.

TEP 28:52

Okay, is there anything else anyone wanted to say about in an ideal world what type of work EPs would be involved with? Or what you found helpful or not helpful in this project or anything else any wanted to say?

Laura

I think it's really valuable resource for schools, to have, to be able to have, somebody come in and either work with a group of children or, or to give that advice, I think, or even just for someone to be at the end of a phone to talk through things...it's a point of contact.

Again, I think, possibly, as class teachers, we wouldn't be allowed to ring an EP. It would be that would have to be done by the SENCO or the Head.

Claire

We wouldn't be able to do that.

Laura

I think I would find really useful if I knew that. It was okay to phone up and talk general....

Claire

Yeah if that was okay.

Laura

And that made more explicit that class teachers can call if they have, so maybe something on the report that makes it more

Claire

For example, when I went to the OT one, it says we have clinic open hours for parents and practitioners to phone with any questions, and we were given time and days to phone for parents and for us if we wanted any further advice.

That'd be nice.

If there was a similar thing that we knew, between these times, even if we didn't talk about specific children, whatever, we could turn to say, I'm sorry, can I just double check about, can I asked about this?

(Quite for a few seconds)

TEP 31:55

I think for now, that is everything. That's really really helpful thank you so much.

Laura

Thank you for all your help.

TEP

Yeah and yeah. I'm just going to be writing it up over the next um...I should probably stop this thing..

hopefully that has turned it off.....

over the next couple of years.....

Appendix XIX – Parent questionnaire data collected into coding sheets and categories and grouped under higher order headings.

quotation	Generic category	Sub-category codes	comment
Thinking about my own emotions	What went well (WWW)	Reflection opportunities	Time given to parents to think about self-care as well as their children.
Nice ideas and things to think about	WWW	Idea or information shared, Reflection opportunities, Collaborative learning	
Learning how to support my child in starting school and hearing about ways to help them and myself with worries and anxiety.	WWW	Idea or information shared, Collaborative learning	Although collaborative learning is not mentioned here, the ideas and information was presented via a collaborative process of discussion with other parents/carers.
Meeting friends and tidying up	WWW	Idea or information shared, Collaborative learning Social space	I believe this comment reflects some of the ideas discussed in the session.
Preparing my child to the school. Good programmes.	WWW	Idea or information shared, Collaborative learning	Although collaborative learning is not mentioned here, the ideas and information was presented via a collaborative process of discussion with other parents/carers.
Some good practical tips	WWW	Idea or information shared, Collaborative learning	
Took a lot of information, introduce how the school team is working.	WWW	Idea or information shared, Collaborative learning	Although collaborative learning is not mentioned here, the ideas and information was presented via a collaborative process of discussion with other parents/carers.

Learning about the school	WWW	Idea or information shared	This comment may relate specifically to the reception teachers' section of the session
Everything – information about the school and preparation	WWW	Idea or information shared	
Finding out about FS2, what it entails, managing emotions.	WWW	Idea or information shared Emotional preparation	
Hearing about the ways to prepare for school. Getting them to think independently	WWW	Idea or information shared	
Learning about how my sons going to learn	WWW	Idea or information shared Insights into child's learning	This comment may relate specifically to the reception teachers' section of the session
Lot of ideas	WWW	Idea or information shared	
Very informative	WWW	Idea or information shared	
Very interesting	WWW	Idea or information shared	
Good organisation	WWW	Efficient session	
The meeting was effective	WWW	Efficient session	
The meeting was weirdly efficient	WWW	Efficient session	assuming here that their use of the word efficient would fit under my code of effective
Well explained and clear information	WWW	Efficient session	
Some brain storming	WWW	Collaborative learning, Reflection opportunities, Idea or information shared	information was gained through 'brainstorming' or discussion with other parents. This provided time for reflection in the discussion and in listening to others' answers.

Interactive session	WWW	Collaborative learning, Reflection opportunities, Efficient session	this quote suggests the session was effective due to its collaborative and reflective approach.
Important tips to get ready on the first day of school	WWW	Collaborative learning, Idea or information shared	Although collaborative learning is not mentioned here, the ideas and information was presented via a collaborative process of discussion with other parents/carers.
Meeting friends	WWW	Collaborative learning, Idea or information shared	I believe this comment reflects some of the ideas discussed in the session.
Recommendations how to prepare child to school.	WWW	Collaborative learning, Idea or information shared	Although collaborative learning is not mentioned here, the ideas and information was presented via a collaborative process of discussion with other parents/carers.
I enjoyed listening to other people's ideas and opinions	WWW	Collaborative learning	Listening to ideas from others not just presenter
Sharing ideas with other parents	WWW	Collaborative learning	benefited from the opportunity to share ideas with other parents
It was very noisy in the room I could hardly hear.	Even Better if (EBI)	Consider acoustics, can everyone hear?	
Managing silence in the hall	EBI	Consider acoustics, can everyone hear?	
Maybe no children. Very hard to hear at times.	EBI	Consider acoustics, can everyone hear?	
Perhaps creche in another room	EBI	Consider acoustics, can everyone hear?	
Quite tricky to hear due to kids noise	EBI	Consider acoustics, can everyone hear?	

Felt quite repetitive	EBI	Avoid and manage repetitions	
Maybe slightly less discussion in pairs.	EBI	Avoid and manage repetitions	
Too much talk between yourselves. Some variation would keep it interesting.	EBI	Avoid and manage repetitions	
Don't assume parent don't already have other children in school. Don't assume parents won't (still) be very busy when child starts school looking after other sibling or working part/full time.	EBI	Avoid and manage assumptions made	As most of the session was co-constructed, the 'assumptions made' were a collective assumption made by many of the parents and by not commenting on these 'assumptions' myself I in affect also made this assumption. This comment by a parent made me reflect on my role in coordinating a co-constructed session, in terms of developing my professional practice I need to be actively looking for assumptions or stereotypes being made and provide contrasting positions to help give the discussion balance to prevent some parents feeling isolated by the conversation.

Appendix XX- Research diary extract March 2019

Research diary extract from the 8th March 2019 - First contact with the Headteacher of the EY setting.

The Headteacher was very interested in the research but unfortunately didn't have the time to be involved with the project herself. However, she suggested the EY staff would have time and would also be interested, especially as they do not currently do much systemic work with external professionals. It was agreed that I would contact the EY staff team to assess their interest further.

I have been thinking about how much more threatening working systemically could be for the EY staff compare to individual casework. There may be an assumption that the 'problem' has moved from being within child to the system and that the system is to 'blame'. I don't want staff to feel that I am passing the 'blame' onto them by working systemically.....I also need to plan carefully how I will build an atmosphere of safety and trust at the early stages of the research, with this in place staff may then feel safe enough to explore the impact of context further.

Appendix XXI - Research diary extract March 2019

Research diary extract from the 14th March 2019 - Following first contact with the EY staff team.

I wondered aloud about this reluctance and then reminded myself to wait and watch to allow others to speak. One of the EY teachers used this space to tell me that although they wanted to be involved, they were worried about time commitments. I used the principles of attuned interactions to listen attentively, show empathy and communicate understanding of their situation. With regards to their comment about time commitments, I reflected on the literature review and one of the barriers to systemic working noted was the limited time staff had to engage with the project. We agreed that as this was so important, that we should put it on the agenda for the planning and contracting meeting, where we can agree together how much time can be committed to this project so that it works for all of us. The EY team seemed happy that their concern had been acknowledged and would be taken forward as something that needed to be carefully planned.

Appendix XXII - Service Level Agreement

Service Level Agreement between(Trainee Educational Psychologist) andNursery School

The Service Level Agreement has been produced collaboratively between Nursery School andTrainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). This trainee will be supported and supervised by from The University of East London.

Name of Setting: Nursery School

Date: 14.03.2019

Address:

Post code:

Name of Headteacher:

SENCO:

Telephone number:

E-Mail:

Model of Services Delivery

This model has been developed in collaboration with Nursery School and(TEP). It is based on the EP working systemically and proactively (as opposed to case work around one child) with the EY setting to support the needs of children, parents, and staff. This work could include but is not limited to: delivering training or workshops, developing or reviewing policies, reporting on the evidence base and/or helping to set up an intervention. This is an offer of 2 hours a week or 20 hours total over the summer term of planned work. This includes: a planning meeting, observations, preparation time and a review meeting.

Goals

- To improve outcomes for the children.
- To allow staff the opportunity for professional development.
- To complete a piece of research, whereby(TEP) supports this setting according to the settings wants and needs by working systemically.
- For the TEP to improve her practice in working systemically.

Review details

This piece of research will be reviewed via:

- A review meeting at the end of the research.
- The TEP will keep a research diary to log information.
- Evaluation forms will be created for individual pieces of work.

Responsibilities of the setting

- To work collaboratively and engage with the support provided by the TEP.
- To highlight the needs of children, parents, and staff where appropriate.

- Inform the TEP in advance, if possible, of staff absence which prevents planned working going ahead.
- To provide a suitable space for the Trainee Educational Psychologist to work when in the Nursery.
-(EY Teacher) to be the project lead and main point of contact for(TEP) and they will liaise via phone, email and/or face-to-face meetings.

Responsibilities of the TEP

- To work collaboratively with all EY staff.
- To be punctual and prepared for all planned work.
- To highlight where casework might be more appropriate for the EY setting could refer that case to their link EP for the setting.

EY staff to lead the project's name:

.....

EY staff to lead the project's signature:

.....

Researcher's name:

.....

Researcher's signature:

.....

Date:

Appendix XXIII- Research diary extract March 2019

Research diary 21st March 2019- Strength, Weakness, Opportunity, and Threat Analysis

Strengths

- Beginning to develop a rapport with the EY staff
- I am more familiar with the who, what, where and how's of the nursery
- I am more aware of some of the EY practitioner concerns and areas for development
- SLA drafted and a misconception resolved
- The attunement principle of 'waiting and watching before speaking' gave the staff time to think what was and wasn't working and what they might want to work on.
- 'Wondering aloud', helped soften the start of sentences making them less direct.

Weaknesses

- An hour wasn't enough time, we didn't have time to plan the work for the term I was disappointed that we would not be able to meet more regularly to plan and review the ongoing systemic work together as a team. I had hoped for it to be a more collaborative process involving most of the team, but in reality, I should have realised that expecting staff to devote that much time would be challenging.'
- I wanted this research to be participatory and I took this into consideration when designing it. I wanted the staff I worked with to be active in the research process, I wanted to design a research study in which they could share their views and I would listen and act on them. However, the level of participation the EY staff wanted to have was lower than what I had hoped for. However, they were still interested in being part of the research, just not at the high rungs of Arnstein's (1996) ladder of citizen participation.
- Rogers (1992) highlights the importance of positive regard when working with a 'client' and I interpret this to mean, avoiding judgement. I tried not to pass judgement, although I did feel uncomfortable with one EY staff' comment that a parent's reason for not doing something was due to 'laziness'. In the moment, I was unsure how to challenge this without judgement or destroy the relationship that had begun to form. Now with time to think this through, I could have instead said, 'I wonder if there are any other reasons this child is not toilet trained?'. Going forward, I need to continue to think about how I can use language to both allow the speaker to feel comfortable and heard but at the same time move the thinking on when it might be limiting to making positive change.

Opportunity

- An opportunity that has arisen, out of not finishing to plan the work for the term, the EY staff now have time to stop and reflect on what they would like to work on, as opposed to being rushed into making a decision in the meeting.
- The invite to visit the nursery is a great opportunity to continue to build relationships with the team, see the nursery in action and have informal conversations with individual team members about their hopes for the project.

Threat

- Now I will be working predominantly with the project lead, March and Moir's (2018) highlights that the likelihood of misunderstandings will increase. There is also the threat that only the project lead will feel a sense of responsibility for the project. March and Moir's (2018) suggests that resistance to change can stem from this point, because there isn't a space for collaborative working. To tackle this going forward, I need to build in opportunities to involve the other EY Staff.

Appendix XXIV - Research diary extract 28th March 2019

Research diary extract – observation and reflections after my day at the nursery

Firstly, building on my reflection from the SWOT analysis, I focused in on building relationships with the staff. I was conscious that in the planning meeting one of the TA's, Natasha, was quiet and so I dedicated time to building a trusting relationship with her, with the hope of engaging her more in the project. I used the principles of attuned interactions 'encouraging initiative', 'showing emotional warmth through intonations' and 'listening actively' to do this. This approach helped establish the foundations of a trusting relationship which I was unable to build initially in the team planning meeting. Later that day, with some foundations in place, I was able to have a professional conversation with her. I noticed her gentle and playful approach with a group of children, and I asked a circular question along the lines of 'When you play like this, how do the children who are reluctant to talk respond?' I hoped from this circular question to orient her towards her interactions with the children. She responded that, when she is very gentle one or two of the children might whisper to her. This information had not been shared in the planning meeting making me reflect on how I managed the meeting to allow all voices to be heard, I need to reflect on how I can improve my practice in activating all voices.

Another area I observed and reflected on were the topics raised in the planning meeting. I listened back to the audio recording before my visit and noticed that the EY staff had spent a significant amount of time discussing the lack of support for parents in the community and its reported impact on the children in the nursery. I was therefore particularly interested in exploring this area further during my visit. One observation I made was that for one of the nursery classes one staff member was particularly active in talking with the parents during drop off and pick up. However, I noticed that in the other class staff were more reluctant to do this. If, as the EY team had suggested in the planning meeting, parents are lacking parenting support in the community, this opportunity to touch base with the EY staff might be one of the few opportunities to access support. I wonder how I could work systemically with the EY staff to support parents, so that they can support their children. Exploring this further with the EY staff might help develop a shared understanding, particularly regarding if the support the parents are already getting is sufficient to allow the children to succeed in the nursery. However, I also needed to be mindful that although the EY staff had highlighted the lack of support for parents as an issue for them, they had not committed to wanting to develop this area themselves. A way forward could be to keep this topic on the agenda, but to remember the importance that the EY staff choose what they want to focus on, if they are to take ownership of it. Perhaps in this first cycle it is more about sowing the seed for systemic change and that time will be needed for those idea to be put into practice.

Appendix XXV – Research Diary extract 28th March 2019

Research diary extract – observation and reflections after my planning meeting with Claire

In terms of Claire's hopes for the first piece of systemic work she wanted those children who were reluctant to talk to start speaking more freely. In the meeting I was trying to move from a more traditional role of working with children but I felt some resistance to this and so I agreed to an observation even though it doesn't really fit with the more systemic work I was hoping for. However, in the moment, I felt that move too quickly away from this traditional role could have affected our working relationship going forward.

In the end, the meeting did lead to a more systemic piece of work being planned, despite starting with a more child-focused concern at the start. The question that seemed to help me most was the feed-forward question where I tried to move the focus toward the interactions between the staff and the children. Whereas the solution focused question I used lead to an answer that reverted to a focus on the child as separate from the context. However, I was then able to use a reframe to broaden her perspective toward the context and interactions again. This has made me reflect on how much my choice of words was impacting on the construction of our work together.

Appendix XXVI – Research diary extract May 2019

12th May 2019 - Preparation to deliver training

What are my aims for this systemic work (training session) and how will I achieve them:

Aim: To encourage staff to take an attuned approach with the children in the nursery.

How:

- Theory behind reluctant talkers/ selective mutism
- Strategies related to reducing anxiety, increasing attachment, increasing attunement and child lead approaches

Aim: Staff to feel empowered, participate in the training and apply the learning from the training in their practice.

How:

- asked EY staff what their aims are for the training session and what content they want covering
- Time in the training session to complete a table of next steps - who, what, where and when's to generate specific actions.

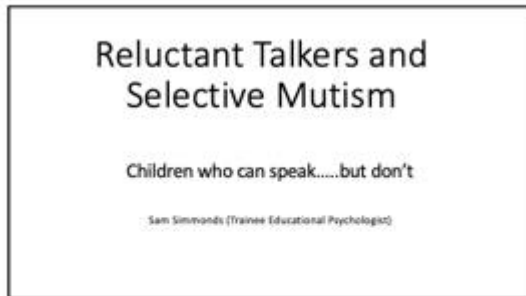
Aim: To create a space where all EY staff feel able to contribute their views.

How:

- valuing and building on positive practices that already exists to give people the confidence to move forward
- Support Natasha to contribute by asking questions about her positive practice I had observed

Appendix XXVII – Presentation training on reluctant talkers.

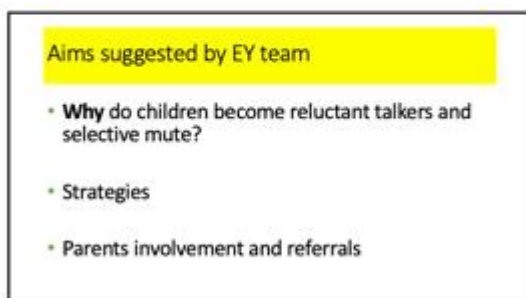
PowerPoint Presentation used to supplement the training delivered on supporting reluctant talkers.



1



2



3



4

Profile of Selective Mute

- Slightly more girls than boys
- Significant proportion have some speech, language and/or literacy difficulty
- Incidence higher in **migrant families** and geographically/ethnically separated communities
- Usually starts 3 - 5yrs
- Sometimes gradual
eg: shy... → very shy... → SM
- Underlined by anxiety



5

Selective mutism - Causality?

Combination of temperament and context

Personality?

- shy
- Sensitive
- Anxious
- compliant



Context?

- life events
- Separation
- Anxiety provoking environment
- shy, or anxious parents

Children with Selective Mutism:

- Can become increasingly **wary** of any form of communication which could lead to an expectation to speak

6

Strategies for reluctant talkers and Selective Mutism

The focus should be on **reducing their anxiety** not encouraging speech.

Stepped approach

1. Creating strong positive relationships
2. Creating Opportunities to speak
3. Involving others (parents, other staff and referrals)
4. Increasing speech

7

Step 1 - Relationships

All staff (specifically Key workers)

- Building strong trusting relationship (attachment) with the child i.e. having stories read to them 1-1.
- You can use speech, but show you don't mind if they don't respond.
- Follow the child's lead - showing an interest in their play.
- Acknowledge the difficulty directly with the child
- Naming what you see i.e. I can see you're sad, would you like a cuddle?

8

Step 1 - Relationships

Attunement

- **friendly intonation** and posture, lots of smiling and nodding
- **Respond** to all forms of **non-verbal communications**: eye contact, smiling, laughing and shaking head.
- **Sit alongside** rather than directly opposite during individual input, to put less pressure on eye contact.
- Subtly **mirroring** the child's body language

9

Step 2 - Opportunities

Plan non-verbal activities

- Music activity, painting etc – use this time to **show you enjoy their company**
- Decrease the child's sense of loneliness, i.e. encourage **silent games** they could play with others.

Reducing anxiety

- Communicate with parents to uncover what might be causing anxiety
- Talk in a calming tone
- Provide 'safe' places in the nursery for the children to use when needed
- Prepare them for change -using visuals, song and actions.

10

Follow their Communication Development:

- Provide opportunities to **succeed at lower levels**
- Increase confidence in other areas by using praise i.e. 'good listening', 'good sharing'



11

Strategies – increasing speech

1. Offer **symbols** to communicate
2. Direct questions raise anxiety. Try to use **remarks and statements** that may elicit a response but that don't require one. E.g. put **pictures** up of the child's favourite things and show an interest in these pictures.
3. Offer **two choices** (no pressure to use words)
4. When they speak **show a real interest** in what they say.
5. 'wh-' questions (no pressure to respond)



12

Involving others - Parents

Parents

- Ask parents what the child's speech is like at home, using the 'every children a talker' template – the child might have an **underlying** speech and language or cognitive difficult.
- Ask parents to bring in a 'all about me box' for children to show others.

Explanation for other children to stop it being a big deal

i.e. XXXX will talk when she's ready.

Staff with Speech and Language training – XXX, XXX

13

Involving others - Referrals

When to refer?

Present for at least a month

Having a **significant** impact on their **well-being or progress**

After a cycle of **Assess Plan Do Review**, involving parents, has been tried

Straight away if **totally mute or sudden** loss of speech

Who to refer to?

SALT - Speech and Language therapist.

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

CAMHS - If it is selective mutism linked to trauma and there seems to be significant anxiety present, Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) might become involved.

14

Next steps?

What and how	Who	When

15

Evaluation

- Did we achieve our Aims?

- WWW

- EBI

- Next steps

16

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Appendix XXVIII – Table of next steps complete by the EY staff

Table of next steps complete by the EY staff during the training on reluctant talkers

What and How	Who	When
Create individual strategies for children <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using the resources from today’s training to decide on 1-3 strategies for each reluctant talker. • XXXXX to talk to parents about the strategies. • XXX to put the strategies on the children’s Individual Education Plans (IEP). • All staff to use the strategies daily. • Strategies reviewed each month and changed if needed as part of the graduated approach. • XXXXX to update parents weekly with progress. 	XXX (EY teachers)	Start on 24 th May, review 24 th June.
All staff to employ at least 1 new strategy from the training in their daily practice.	All Staff	From tomorrow
To meet with the reception teacher to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • share the information from today’s training, • share the strategies for each child and discuss an enhanced transition for the children who are reluctant to talk. 	XXX (EY teacher) and XXX (reception teacher)	June/July

Appendix XXIX – Table of response from evaluation form

Table of response from the reluctant talkers training evaluation form

Participant	How useful was the training on a scale of 1-5. 1 – not useful 5- very useful	What did you like about the session?	What didn't you like?	What could have improved the session?	What will you do because of the session?
A	5	Clarification of strategies to use for a variety of children. New strategies to use	Nothing – just would have found this very useful in previous years when I had a higher number of elective mute/reluctant talkers	Maybe a follow up to help with specific children.	Use strategies in the future and revisit the training with new/returning members of staff
B	5	It was really interesting to learn about the differences between reluctant talkers and selective mutes. It was very relevant to many children in the current cohort.	-	N/A If anything – more time to delve deeper into the psychology behind it all!	Implement strategies given to promote talk or acknowledge reluctance to talk with the child. Tis could be in 1-1, small group work.
C	5	The strategies given to work with such children.	-	-	In the free setting approach those children and adapt to their

					individual needs.
D	4	It was interesting	-	-	It will help me play with a reluctant talker and bond with them.

Appendix XXX – Examples of systemics work

Examples of systemic work – this is not an exhaustive list but a taste of the possible ways of working systemically.

Service	Description
Training, workshops and signposting	Training, workshops or signposting on a range of topics relevant to supporting staff and/or parents/carers. For instance, a training session on ‘emotional regulation’. How staff/parents can support children who may be experiencing difficulties with managing their emotions.
Staff group supervision or consultation	Typically, a meeting with a number of staff or parents with a shared concern, to problem solve and think of ways forward together.
Coaching or supervision	Individual coaching or supervision sessions for staff or parents/carers to provide a space to reflect and discuss their professional/parental development and to plan positive ways forward.
Whole school projects	Working at an organisational level to create whole school change. For instance, working with leadership teams to building and maintaining resilience during Covid-19.
Policy review	Working with staff to reviewing policy and consider amendments in line with Psychology theory and practice. For instance, modifying behaviour management policies to ensure relationships and communication are at the heart.
Setting up interventions	Working with staff to set up an evidence-based intervention to support a number of children across the setting. For example, ‘Lego therapy’ to support children with social communication and interaction skills.
Research	To work with staff in school to conduct research to explore, explain, evaluate or describe something related to the setting to help shape its future.

Appendix XXXI – Semi structured script for second planning meeting

Semi structured script to plan for the second piece of systemic work

Planning the work for the term (25mins)

How the situation constitutes a concern/areas for development

Could you tell me about an area you would like to develop further or a concern you have that you would like to explore?

Why do you feel that is needed?

- Why now?
- When has it been better/worse?
- What other explanations might be relevant?
- Where does this issue usually present itself?
- Where does it rarely happen?
- How does ... view the concern?

Exceptions

Are there times when this is not a concern?

- What's making the difference?
- Are there specific people/or activities where this is less of a concern?

What works

What have you done so far that's working?

Does what's already been tried provide ideas about what might be helpful now?

Future

- What would it look like when this isn't a concern/ your goal is achieved?
- how could my involvement move us one step closer to this image?
- What will the children/parents/staff be doing differently when this image is achieved?
- What do you hope to achieve by the end of the project?

Project plan

Time (i.e. in number of sessions).

Content – (the what).

Process – (the how):-

Who

- Are there specific staff that can be used to help facilitate this project or continue it in the future?
- What realistically can we expect from involvement of staff, in terms of time and effort required to implement the plan.
- Have the staff involved had experience of delivering/supporting this type of project before?

Resources Required:

- Time needed (to include time to project manage, supervise staff, administration, if appropriate).

Venue (Where)

Monitoring and evaluation

- How would you envisage this project being monitored and evaluated?

Appendix XXXII – Example page from Attention Autism guide

Example page from the Guide to setting up an Attention Autism intervention

Attention Autism Strategy

Attention Autism is a strategy devised by speech therapist Gina Davis and brings together a lot of good attention building practice. The strategy is designed to build children's joint attention, turn taking and independent working skills and is presented in 4 stages.

The supporting adults act as model children throughout the stages e.g. demonstrating enjoyment and interest in the activities, not becoming distracted or talking to the child/other adults.

Stages:

At each stage a whiteboard and pen is used to inform the children what is going to happen in the session. Even if the child is able to engage with stage 4 you must also do stages 1,2 and 3. Make sure you plan enough time to be able to do the stages you plan to do.



Use of a whiteboard and pen to show each stage. When each stage is finished, use the pen to cross off the activity as a clear visual cue.

Stage 1 – The bucket

The aim of this stage is to build the child's focus on an object/activity shared with another person.

Stage 2 – the attention builder

The aim of this stage is to build the length of time the child can give attention to an adult led activity. These activities need to engage the child's attention and are often quite messy!

Stage 3 – the interactive game

The aim of this stage is for the child to be able to shift their attention to their own individual participation and then back to the group. These activities are short, motivating turn taking games where one child is at the front of the group, takes part in the game and then returns to their chair to give their attention back to the group.

Stage 4 – the table activities

The aim of this stage is for the child to focus their attention in a group to watch a demonstration, make a transition, focus attention on an individual task, return to the group and focus attention again to celebrate and/or review the task with the group. For example, an adult demonstrates how to make a pizza for the group, putting on the sauce, cheese and toppings. Each child then has a tray with all the necessary resources to transition to the table top, complete the task and then return to the group. Each child could then show everyone his or her pizza before being put in the oven to cook!

Good Attention Autism links

<http://qinadavies.co.uk/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qbOSctCL6bw>

<http://best-practice.middletonautism.com/approaches-of-intervention/attention-autism/>

<http://asdteacher.com/attention-autism-stage-1-attention-bucket/>

<https://en-gb.facebook.com/qinadaviesautism/>

Appendix XXXIII - Semi structured reflection prompts

Semi structured reflection prompts following the modelling of the Attention Autism intervention

Attention Autism – Reflection prompts

What did you learn about the Attention Autism intervention from the modelling session?

Any questions about the process?

How did you feel the session went?

What could be improved?

What would that look like?

How does that influence how you will set up your Attention Autism intervention?

Appendix XXXIV– Table of responses from the Attention Autism evaluation form

Table of responses from the ‘supporting staff to set up an Attention Autism Intervention’ evaluation form

Participant	Was the modelled ‘Bucket’ group, handouts and resources helpful? <small>Not helpful =1 Very helpful = 5</small>	What did you find helpful about the modelling, handouts or other?	What could have improved the modelling session, handouts or other?	What will you do differently because of the session?
A	5	I found the session very helpful seeing the group and how it works was really good.	-	I can now feel comfortable running a session myself and using some great techniques I’ve learnt.
B	4	It was really interesting to learn about the differences between reluctant talkers and selective mutes. It was very relevant to many children in the current cohort.	N/A	Run a Bucket group

Appendix XXXV – Research diary extract – During the negotiation of cycle 3

Research diary extract – During the negotiation of cycle 3

At the first contracting and planning meeting the EY staff had highlighted the lack of support for parents as an issue for them, however they had not wanted my involvement in this area. Why did the EY team change their mind about my involvement with parents/careers?

Possible reasons:

- In April it wasn't a priority for me to work with parents, now it links nicely in with the transition to school.
- Now that the EY team and I have developed a trusting relationship, they feel able to involve me in an area in which is potentially new for them.
- The EY staff have now developed a better idea of the type of work I can get involved with and now see the benefit of my work with parents.
- Influence from the headteacher and/or reception teacher who were interested in my involvement in this area.
- In April I had tried to suggest working with parents, however this time it was the EY staff's idea to work with parents. Therefore, the idea was not pushed on to them, they were now more involved and taking more ownership of the project.
- The EY staff didn't have much time available to work with me on the last cycle and the reception teacher did so by completing transition work this would in turn reduce their workload.

During Cycle one and two I had taken the lead on the project, however, now starting cycle 3, Claire has taken the lead in talking to colleagues about how best to involve me. What could have influenced this change? Possible reasons:

- Now that the EY team and I have developed a trusting relationship, they feel able to take more of a lead in the project.
- The Relationship I had built with Claire and the team, our attuned interactions, use of solution focused, feed-forward and circular questions to move attention to the wider context.
- Using the ladder of participation to reflect and improve my skills in working collaboratively
- Now that the EY staff have been through the cycle twice, they understood the next steps involvement and proceed to do this, not needing my support any more to help them think of projects I could become involved with.
- The EY staff also now have a better idea about the type of work I can get involved with and now see the benefit of my work.
- Coincidence
- They have more time now
- They saw an opportunity to pass the research project on to another staff member to reduce their own workload

Appendix XXXVI – Preparation notes to plan the starting school session

Structure used to prepare conversation with Bev and Claire to co-construct ideas for the 'starting school' session.

Note: All principles underpinning and influencing all aspects of the process, including what I think about, how I think about it and how I choose to act. Below I have highlighted where specific principles stand out:

Beginnings -

- Warm, gentle start – asking how people are, genuinely interested in how they are as a person not just as a social expectation.

Reason for meeting - constructive principle

- What are your hopes for the meeting?
- My hopes – co-construct ways forward to 'support parents and children' with the transition to school.
- Is there anything else you hope to achieve?
- Paraphrasing

Concern/reasons for the 'starting school' session

A constructive principle and Enabling Dialogue:

- What are you hoping to achieve through my working with you?
- You said in one of your emails you wanted 'support for parents', what would that look like?

Systemic thinking:

- What do you think the parents are hoping to get out of the session?
- If the parents were well 'supported' for their children to start school, what would you/staff see them doing?

Already tried/Prior resources/ doing more of what works

People have unique solutions to their problems

What have you done so far about to 'support' parents for their children to start school?

How did you do that?

What helped you?

People have the necessary resources to make change possible

When faced with a similar problem before how have you tackled it?

How could you do something similar in this instance?

What have others done or suggested doing?

What other things have you thought about trying?

If it works do more of it; if it doesn't, do something different

How did that strategy work?

What else have you done that has contributed towards some difference?

What things are happening that you would like to see continue?

Can you think of anything else that might help us work out what's making a difference?

A self-reflexive principle, Pragmatic principle, creating lasting strategic changes as opposed to reactive ones:

Imagine a time when this isn't a concern, what would be happening differently when things have changed?

How can you move one step towards this image?

Summarising –constructive, enabling dialogue

- Reframe the concern
- Compliments
- Actions

Appendix XXXVII - Presentation used in the 'Starting School' session

Starting School

Aims:

- To think about how to **prepare your child for school: physically and emotionally.**
- To thinking about your **emotions as parents.**



Preparing for school a month before

With the person next to you, talk about what you can do to **prepare your child for school a month in advance.**




- **Uniform and shoes**
- **Can dress themselves**
- **Looking after and carrying their things**
- **Sharing and turn taking**

Preparing for school a week before

With the person next to you, talk about what you can do to **prepare your child a week before**



- **Get your child used to the times they will need to get up in the mornings and go to bed.**
- **Plan to give your child 10-11 hours sleep**
- **Run through the morning routine**
- **Practice the walk to school**

Preparing for school – night before

Talk to someone different, what you can do to **prepare your child the night before:**




- **Packing their school bag with them.**
- **Laying out clothes ready with them.**
- **Early night.**

Helping your child look forward to school

On your own reflect on what can you do to help your child **look forward to school?**



- **Read a book** about starting school.
- **Share your positive memories** about your time at school.
- **Relaxed parent = relaxed child.**
- **Plan a treat for the end of the school day;** it's likely they will be tired so a simple trip to the local park or their favourite dinner.

How to reduce your child's worries

What can you do to **reduce your child's worries?**



- **Listening to any worries they may have** and reassure them.
- **Read a book about starting school and explain what will happen.**
- **Remind them it's ok to ask to go to the toilet – show them where the toilet is.**
- **When you drop your child off, help them engage in something fun, tell them you will see them later and go.**

Managing your emotions

- You may feel **sad** and be **worried** that your child will not make friends, or will not enjoy school.
- You may be trying to **support your child** while, on the inside, you are **feeling** just as nervous.
- It's worth remembering that **most children like school.**
- If you are feeling worried, make sure you have **someone to talk to**, so that your children don't pick up on your worries and remind yourself that it is perfectly normal to feel nervous.



Empty Nest feeling

- It's common for parents to feel **loss and loneliness** when their children start school.
- What can you do to help **reduce these feelings?**
- **Keep busy** – plan your first day/week out
- **Make a list** of things you would like to do when your child start school and tick one thing off your list each week.
- **Get social** - Arrange to meet a **friend.**
- **Take care of yourself** – have a bath or take a walk.




Clip while you fill in the Evaluation form

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HVpW0ofJwuk>

References

- <https://www.familylives.org.uk/advice/primary/learning-school/starting-primary-school/>

Appendix XXXVIII - Table of response from the 'starting school' parent evaluation form

Participant	1.How helpful was the session? <small>Excellent, good, ok, poor, Terrible</small>	2.What did you like about the session?	3.What didn't you like?	4.What could have improved the session?	5.What will you do to prepare for your child to start school?	6.Any other comments?
1	Excellent	Sharing ideas with other parents			Routine, stories, chat at home	Thanks!
2.	Good					
3	Excellent	Lot of ideas			Some of the suggestions given! Thank you for the ideas.	
4	Excellent					
5	Good				Reading stories	
6	Excellent					
7	Excellent	Finding out about FS2, what it entails, managing emotions.			Talking about school, read stories	
8	Good	Very interesting		Maybe no children. Very hard to hear at times.	Keep talking about school.	
9	Excellent	Very informative				
10	Excellent		Nothing	It was perfect	She is already very excited coming school.	
11	Excellent		nothing	It was perfect		

12	Excellent	Everything – information about the school and preparation				
13	good	Thinking about my own emotions		It was very noisy in the room I could hardly hear.		
14	Excellent			Managing silence in the hall	Getting used to the routine and buy new things to look forward to school.	
15	Excellent	Hearing about the ways to prepare for school. Getting them to think independently	Quite tricky to hear due to kids noise	Perhaps creche in another room	Discuss feelings, worry monster!	Great, thanks for coming!
16	Good	everything			Stories, loves reading and learning	
17	excellent					XX was excellent very helpful, super slideshow and very inclusive.
18	excellent	I enjoyed listening to other people's ideas and opinions			Talk to them and reassure them and prepare them by making sure they are in a routine and organised.	
19	Excellent	Learning how to support my child in starting school and hearing			Talk to them about worries, but also what	

		about ways to help them and myself with worries and anxiety.			they are looking forward to. Practice morning routine beforehand. Let them help pack their bag. Meet up with friends who will be in their class.	
20	excellent	Preparing my child to the school. Good programmes. The meeting was effective			Getting my child used to the routine.	
21	excellent	Recommendations how to prepare child to school.		Everything was fine	Stories, Routine, making sure everything is ready.	
22.	ok	Some brainstorming	Felt quite repetitive	Don't assume parent don't already have other children in school. Don't assume parents won't (still) be very busy when child starts school looking after other sibling or	Lots of positive communication and practicing routine.	

				working part/full time.		
23	Excellent					
24	Good	Important tips to get ready on the first day of school			Getting my son to go to bed early. Making him understand his going to other class and he will get lots of toys new activities and also new friends.	
25	Good	Took a lot of information, introduce how the school team is working.			Sleep routine.	
26	Good	Meeting friends and tidying up				Explaining them to meet new friends, big play area, toys lots of fun.
27	Good	Meeting friends			Talking to them about school, friends and new teachers. Make them independent.	
28	Good	Some good practical tips	Too much talk between yourselves. Some variation would keep it	See above. Good overall though	All the suggested tips. We do many already.	

			interestin g.			
29	Good	Nice ideas and things to think about		Maybe slightly less discussion in pairs.	Read stories. Get bedtime and morning routine familiar. Walk to school.	
30	good	Well explained and clear information			Talking a lot about starting a new school, meeting new friends, fearlessness.	
31	Excellent	Good organisation	The meeting was weirdly efficient		Getting routine, talking about school, psychological preparation.	
32	Excellent	Learning about how my sons going to learn			Telling them about our school learning experience.	
33	Excellent	Interactive session				
34	Excellent	Learning about the school			Many changes suggested	