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**Knowledge is the key... A grounded theory study exploring  
parent carer experiences of an Educational Psychology  
Service within pre-statutory stages of early intervention.**

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## Glossary of terms

<b>APA</b>	American Psychological Association
<b>ADHD</b>	Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
<b>BPS</b>	British Psychological Society
<b>CoP</b>	Code of Practice
<b>DA</b>	Discourse Analysis
<b>DECP</b>	Division of Educational and Child Psychology
<b>DfE</b>	Department for Education
<b>DfES</b>	Department for Education and Skills
<b>DfESc</b>	Department for Education and Science
<b>DoH</b>	Department of Health
<b>ECM</b>	Every Child Matters
<b>EHCP</b>	Education, Health and Care Plan
<b>EP</b>	Educational Psychologist
<b>EPS</b>	Educational Psychology Service
<b>GDPR</b>	General Data Protection Regulation
<b>GT</b>	Grounded Theory
<b>HCPC</b>	Health and Care Professions Council
<b>IPA</b>	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
<b>LA</b>	Local Authority
<b>SEN</b>	Special Educational Needs
<b>SEMH</b>	Social, emotional and mental health difficulties
<b>SENCO</b>	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
<b>SEND</b>	Special Educational Needs and Disability
<b>SLT</b>	Senior Leadership Team
<b>TA</b>	Thematic Analysis
<b>TEP</b>	Trainee Educational Psychologist
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNICEF</b>	United Nations Children's Fund
<b>ValO</b>	Voice and Influence Officer
<b>YP</b>	Young person

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## **Abstract**

Parental engagement is recognised as a key factor in improving educational outcomes and achievement for young people (YP) (Harris & Goodall, 2011). Legislative policy and literature provide an on-going emphasis for involving parents and carers to support pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (DfE, 2011; DfE & DoH, 2015). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are ideally placed to facilitate this, with parental engagement being a fundamental aspect of EP practice (Byrnes, 2012). Engaging collaboratively with parents and carers is integral to Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), yet challenges in achieving an effective partnership are widely reported (Hart, 2011; McGuiggan, 2021).

The present study aims to extend the existing research landscape to better understand mechanisms that underpin parental engagement with a local authority (LA) EPS with hopes of improving practice and policy development to increase parental engagement to better support YP and wider service users.

Taking an inductive, exploratory approach, the current study explored parent carer experiences of an LA EPS within pre-statutory stages of early intervention. Data collection employed constructivist grounded theory methodology (Charmaz, 2014) through semi-structured interviews with five parents of pupils with SEND. Theoretical sensitisation, through the combination of data analysis and findings within a review of pertinent literature, assisted the generation of a conceptualised theoretical framework to better support effective parental engagement with an EPS. The study's grounded theory is a product of complex interactions and layers of underlying processes with an overarching focus on knowledge, parents being informed, EPSs being responsive, striving for early intervention and working to diminish parental battles to access support.

Findings provide suggestions and implications for improving parental engagement within the professional practice of EPs and EPSs, with potential applicability to wider LA service development within the local context. Limitations of the study are acknowledged, with recommendations for further research to address these presented.

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Context and positioning of the current study**

The current research was undertaken within the professional training for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at the University of Nottingham. Parental engagement has been shown to make a significant difference to educational achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007) and is considered a fundamental aspect of Educational Psychology practice (Fox, 2009). Wider legislative policy and literature provide an on-going emphasis of involving parents and carers, especially those of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (DfE, 2011, 2014, 2023).

Through the social constructionist paradigm, the present research aimed to explore parental experiences of involvement with a local authority Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to identify influential factors, providing an understanding of mechanisms that enable or hinder parental engagement and subsequent involvement. The study is believed to be the first to explore parental experiences of engagement with an EPS within early intervention stages through the employment of grounded theory methodology. The study reflects current legislation and national policy around services' collaborative approaches to support pupils with SEND and parental decline in their confidence to do this (DfE, 2023).

### **1.2 Researcher's background and interests**

Following their undergraduate degree in psychology, the researcher completed teacher training with a specialism in early years. Having spent much of their career teaching nursery and reception pupils, and being a parent themselves, the researcher understood the importance of connection and building relationships when parents entrust their children to professionals. From 2012-2019 the researcher worked as a primary school SENCO where the skills required to cultivate meaningful relationships with parents and carers, established within early years teaching, were transferred to whole-school support.

Parental engagement became an area of the researcher's interest having observed variations in backgrounds, priorities, capabilities and mechanisms enabling or disabling parental involvement, and experiencing the resulting dissimilarity in provision secured for pupils. Many parents in their setting, without the prolonged

relationship building with the researcher, may not have felt able to seek support, particularly those with literacy, mental health and language difficulties. The researcher found the discrepancy in access to support, that could occur between families with differing levels of capacity, concerning. This persisted in their time as an assistant psychologist and has continued as an area of interest, with an aim to diminish inconsistencies, during their training as an Educational Psychologist. It is hoped that the present study may contribute towards the exploration of how EPSs can best serve communities and service users by exploring experiences to improve practice and increase parental engagement.

### **1.3 Chapter overview**

Chapter 1: introduces the thesis and offers an impression of the research context and an overview of chapters.

Chapter 2: presents an initial and purposefully broad literature review, conducted prior to the research process, providing background and contextualisation for the rationale and aims of the study.

Chapter 3: provides details of the methodology for the study. Philosophical positioning is discussed with details of constructivist grounded theory data collection and analysis procedures. An evaluation of the study's quality and ethical considerations is also presented.

Chapter 4: illustrates the results from the researcher's analysis of data. Conceptual categories are presented, supported by excerpts from interview transcripts.

Chapter 5: locates the study's findings within a second review of literature to provide insight and understanding into areas considered pertinent to the study's analysis.

Chapter 6: presents the study's developed grounded theory as an integration of data analysis and existing literature discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter 7: details the discussion with critical reflection of the grounded theory in relation to the existing literature and research. An evaluation of the study's quality,

distinct contribution, suggestions for future research, implications for practice and the researcher's personal reflections are presented.

Chapter 8: provides the conclusion for the study.



## **2 Literature review – part 1**

### **2.1 Introduction**

Parental engagement in education is a widely documented area (Christenson et al., 1992; Day, 2013, Epstein, 1992; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Pugh, 1984). Research demonstrates that parental engagement makes a significant difference to educational achievement (Harris & Goodall, 2007) with young people (YP), whose parents are actively involved in their education, experiencing increased positive outcomes (Day, 2013; Fan & Chen, 2001). Wider legislative policy and literature provide an on-going emphasis on engaging and involving parents and carers to support YP, especially those of pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) (DfE, 2011; DfE & DoH, 2015). Studies show that successful engagement to improve outcomes requires a connection between parents and learning and that the quality of this interaction is key to improving educational achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2008). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are ideally placed to support this, with parental engagement being a fundamental aspect of Educational Psychology practice (Fox, 2009).

Engaging collaboratively with adults closest to YP is integral to EP work, with the acknowledgement that these adults, often parents or carers, have the most insight and influence to create change (Pellegrini, 2009). Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) involving parents and families in their work is clear within policy and literature yet challenges in achieving this are widely reported (DfE, 2014, 2022).

To explore these concepts further, a narrative literature review was conducted. Its purpose was to explore and explain the background and current context that surrounds parent carer involvement with education in its broadest terms, focusing on the wider involvement of parent carers with EPs and EPSs.

The review begins by explaining the rationale behind adopting a narrative approach and the justification for this within the intended research method: grounded theory. It defines aspects that underpin the focus of the review, exploring literature and legislation to create an overview of the landscape covering the defined terms.

A systematic search identified existing literature which supports the rationale for the current study and subsequent research question. It concludes with an explanation of research aims, acknowledgement of personal and professional views and why this topic is pertinent to the field.

## **2.2 Grounded theory**

When grounded theory (GT) was established (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), there was explicit instruction around the importance of researchers avoiding exposure to literature in the area of study, prior to conducting research. This was to ensure theory was construed naturally from collected data, avoiding the researcher being influenced by existing work (Dey, 2007; Dunne, 2011). This was a fundamental aspect of GT and deviation was proposed to reduce the quality of the research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Whilst some contemporary grounded theorists have maintained this fixed position (Glaser, 1999; Holton, 2007), others have moved away from purist views and believe that there is a place for a review of literature prior to commencing GT research (Charmaz, 2006; Stern, 2007; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This is especially pertinent for those that require a theoretically informed research design as part of funded or doctoral research (Birks & Mills, 2015; Dunne, 2011; Nathaniel, 2006). Additionally, prior investigation can be required to ascertain that a gap in research exists for a unique contribution to be made (Stern, 2007) and to determine whether GT is an appropriately selected research method (McGhee et al., 2007). The present research met all these recognised exceptions and, thus, a review of existing literature was conducted.

Exploring literature supports the researcher to be versed in language used within the field as well as generating awareness of potential unhelpful preconceptions or standpoints (McGhee et al., 2007). No researcher engages in research without some level of prior knowledge (Charmaz, 2006; Dey, 2007) and when exploring social phenomenon, a knowledge of existing complexities can facilitate understanding and support the process (Dunne, 2011). Reviewing existing work supports the researcher to situate themselves within the current dialogue (Charmaz, 2006) and alerts them to any shifts in discourse (McGhee et al., 2007).

Whilst literature reviews are accepted within a more contemporary approach to GT, Charmaz (2006) advocates for a delayed literature review to enable concepts to be formed within the research itself, avoiding preconceived ideas, to enhance the authenticity of findings. This approach was followed in the present study. A deliberately broad narrative literature review was conducted initially, to create an overview of the concept landscape prior to the application of GT. A second literature review was completed, post data collection and analysis, to promote theoretical sensitisation of codes and subsequent findings (Charmaz, 2014). Completing the

initial broad literature review enhanced the researcher's understanding of the current and historical context of the research area and generated a rationale for the focus and justification for the chosen methodological approach, whilst limiting the impact of previously conceptualised theories (Birks & Mills, 2015). It also enabled the defining of key terms identified within the research area and explored its place in the historical and contemporary context including legislative changes and amendments to national policy.

### **2.3 Define and explore**

Language is considered more than a means of verbal interaction but rather the method through which people determine meaning, acquire knowledge, generate perceptions and create a shared understanding of social concepts and constructed realities (Burr, 2015). As such, an exploration of the key concepts and terminology within the research area was explored to generate clarification and a shared understanding of the terms identified. The current study aims to explore parental experience with an EPS within early intervention stages. As such, the key terms explored are: Educational Psychologist, Educational Psychology Service, parent carers and early intervention.

#### **2.3.1 Educational Psychologist role**

The EP role is elusive and is considered difficult to define (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Burnham, 2013). Potential explanations for this include conflicts occurring through a lack of clarity around who the client is and their differing agendas (MacKay, 2002). This can occur through a discrepancy between educational setting expectations and those of the EP (Kelly & Gray, 2000) and differences within the profession itself, with a lack of an agreed conceptualisation of the role (Burnham, 2013; Stobie, 2002). Within this ambiguity, the profession is continuously evolving in line with national changes to the social and political landscapes (Fallon et al., 2010).

Despite the lack of clarity about an agreed definition, the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2022) offers the following to describe the role of an EP:

*“EPs work with children and young people from 0–25 years of age. To do this successfully involves working with adults, teachers, other professionals, parents and carers, families and groups, and with organisations and communities. EPs work in specialist and generic services, with a wide range of education, health, and social care providers (e.g. local authorities, schools, preschool settings, social care, third sector and independent providers), and in a variety of settings. EPs have statutory*

*duties in relation to individuals with special educational needs and disability. EPs are mindful of the legitimate right of all service users to have access to continuing education, employment and leisure activities, and the importance of social and educational inclusion.*

*The key foundations for all services provided by EPs are therefore:*

- to develop and apply psychological theories and research that relate to practice*
- to promote improved outcomes for all service users taking account of their context and needs*
- to share an interactionist understanding of diversity in development and learning; and*
- to adhere to professional practices that are legal, ethical and informed by the best standards of evidence available at the time.”*

*(BPS, 2022, p.7)*

The Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) (2022) offers the following to further describe the EP role: *“Educational Psychologists look at how children and young people experience life within the context of their school and home environment and how different factors in these environments interact with each other.*

*Much of an Educational Psychologist's work is focused on supporting children and young people in educational settings however Educational Psychologists can also offer support to parents to help meet their children's needs at home and to schools and local authorities to help them develop and improve their systems.”*

*(DECP & BPS, 2022)*

These descriptions support the conceptualisation of EPs for the present study and illustrate that they have a vast and varied role which is difficult to define. EPs are agents of change, striving to improve outcomes for YP and families through collaborative work and applied psychology to support educational and social inclusion.

### **2.3.2 Educational Psychology Services**

EP involvement with families and YP can be brokered in different ways such as school, Local Authority (LA), or larger commissioned services when a need is identified (Fallon et al., 2010). Whilst some EPs work in the independent sector, most practicing EPs are employed by an LA in a commissioned specialist service known as an EPS (Birch et al., 2015). EPSs work in a variety of contexts including social care services, mainstream and alternative education providers, voluntary and private sectors and wider LA services enabling inter-disciplinary working (Lee & Woods, 2017). Like the role of the EP, EPSs have evolved over time following legislative and political changes (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). A recent development was the adoption of a partial or fully traded model of service delivery as a means of generating income following budget cuts due to economic recession (Lee & Woods, 2017). Fallon et al. (2010) found that the model of service delivery shapes the work EPs do and the skills they can utilise. This gives further uncertainty to the role of the EP as different EPSs will operate in different ways, generating different offers and means of support.

Whilst EPS models can vary, all EP work is underpinned by the same key principals with all EPs and EPSs held to the same account. EPs can have individualised approaches to practice but all must adhere to the relevant statutory codes of conduct, performance and ethics (BPS 2019), Health and Care Professions Council requirements (HCPC, 2016) and relevant international legislation, e.g. the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNICEF, 1989). The above context and commonalities across the profession will be maintained when considering EPSs in the current study.

### **2.3.3 Parent carers**

The DfE (2022), under Section 576 of the Education Act (1996), describes the term 'parent' to include any person who holds responsibility for a YP, or who provides recognised care.

Extending beyond the concept and identification of the 'mother' and 'father', the Children Act (1989) outlined the ways in which parental responsibility could be shared or transferred. The appointments of guardians were recognised when circumstances require alternative arrangements to be made, which involved creating 'carers' for YP for whom they would have legal parental responsibility, in conjunction

with the LA. Parental responsibility is defined under Section 3 (1) of the Children Act (1989) as meaning all the duties, rights, powers, responsibilities, and authority which parents have with respect to their children and their children's property.

Within this study, anyone considered to be holding parental responsibility for a YP will encompass all the possible parent positions outlined in the Children Act (1989). Through this report, in line with previous literature, the researcher will use 'parents' to refer to parents, carers and all those identified as having parental responsibility.

#### **2.3.4 Early intervention**

The term 'early intervention' is used to understand the timing in which EP involvement occurs within the present study. Within SEND, early intervention refers to involvement from services early in the life of the problem (rather than early in the life of the YP) and is considered essential in meeting the needs of YP with additional needs (DfE, 2011, 2014). To position the timing of intervention, the Code of Practice (CoP) outlines the notion of a 'graduated response' to understand pupils' needs through a cyclical approach of 'assess, plan, do, review' (DfE & DoH, 2015). From this process, pupils can be understood as requiring 'SEN support,' which refers to SEND needs that can be met, within this cycle, using the school's delegated resources. For pupils with more complex needs, an education, health and care plan (EHCP) may be required which identifies educational, health and social care needs, set out in a statutory document, with additional support to meet needs identified. For the present study, the term 'early intervention' will refer to any EP involvement that took place within the cyclical stages of school 'SEN support,' prior to the EHCP statutory assessment process.

#### **2.4 Parental engagement in education**

Parental engagement contributes significantly to educational outcomes with evidence showing that parents have a key role in raising educational standards for YP (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) propose that parental engagement in education includes: learning at home; communication between home and school; involvement in on-site activities; involvement in wider school decisions and making community contributions.

The impact of parents' attitudes and involvement in their children's education is well documented (Fan & Chen, 2001) with engagement in learning shown to have significant influence across all age ranges (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Parental educational attitudes are proposed to be essential in supporting emotional and personal development for YP as well as being protective factors in minimising future risk to these areas (Taylor & Gulliford, 2011). Research acknowledges that parental engagement is one of many factors which influence educational achievement (Fan & Chen, 2001) and, whilst meaningful engagement can be difficult to secure, it has been shown to be the main contributor in raising pupil performance (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall, 2008).

Parental engagement is not the sole responsibility of the parent and research has shown that failures to effectively engage parents can be resultant from errors made by those seeking its generation (Crozier & Davis, 2007; Harris & Goodall, 2008). Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) found that there can be a difference in what is understood as 'parental engagement' between parents and school and that conceptualisations of parental engagement with education can mean different things to either party (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris et al., 2009). Education systems are encouraged to review their practices and policies concerning parental engagement and move away from terms such as 'hard to reach' (Crozier & Davis, 2007; Day, 2013) and towards policies that encourage and better enable meaningful involvement. This may involve removing existing procedures that generate barriers that perpetuate the situation where engagement is not as high as desired. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) offer a continuum to understand parental engagement and proposed that it occurs as a negotiation between parents and school. This suggests that, to establish a meaningful school and family partnership, engagement requires more than involvement within the setting but, instead, necessitates some sense of collaborative ownership in parents' involvement in the learning that takes place (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014). EPs are well positioned to support the development of this meaningful, collaborative way of working.

## **2.5 Government legislation and historical landscape**

Whilst the importance of parental engagement in education is recognised, it is acknowledged that it brings many challenges (Harris & Goodall, 2008). Meaningful engagement can be difficult to secure yet it is considered the most effective means of raising student performance (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; Harris & Goodall,

2008). As such, UK legislation and policy has strived to engage and involve parents to support YP, especially parents of pupils with SEND (DfE, 2011; Lamb, 2009).

The Warnock Report (1978) placed emphasis on “parents as partners” (p.150) and insisted that the successful education of children with additional needs was dependent upon the full involvement of their parents. The report proposed that parents were to be seen as equal partners in the educational process and that they should be advised, encouraged and supported to effectively help their children. The Education Act (1981) followed recommendations from the Warnock Report (1978) and created a duty for health professionals to inform parents if they believed a YP may have additional needs, with the requirement to discuss this with parents and notify the relevant education authority. Legislation continued this trajectory where the Education Act (1993) stipulated the involvement of parents and their views within decision making for the wider school and established the special educational needs tribunal to enable parents to appeal against decisions made by their LA. The Education Act (1996) created a motion towards improving school attendance through a suggested parent partnership and the 2001 Special Educational Needs CoP (DfES, 2001) captured the vital role that parents play in supporting their child’s education. This led to the Disability Discrimination Act (2005) which created provision for parents to challenge situations in which they felt their child was experiencing mistreatment in relation to their needs. Historic legislation illustrates that parental involvement in education has been highly regarded, with national policy recognising parental contributions and the need to generate provision for them to voice their views, striving for partnership using the means considered appropriate at the time.

Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2005) built on the 1996 Education Act, stipulating a stronger focus on parenting and families to support educational attainment. The ECM agenda put emphasis on parents accessing services to increase partnerships between families and schools due to findings illustrating that parental involvement was more important in improving outcomes compared to other external factors such as poverty, school environment and the influence of peers (DfES, 2005). The guidance paper Every Parent Matters (DfESc, 2007) was created in response to challenges in securing an effective parent partnership and highlighted the role of local government



services to adapt their approaches to creatively encourage engagement with parents deemed 'hard to reach.'

The Lamb Inquiry (2009) created a powerful shift in the landscape and identified improvements for involving and engaging parents, including gathering their views. It talked about the importance of transparency, information sharing, establishing a key contact and explaining provision identified for children. Lamb (2009) recognised the significant reciprocal role that the relationship between parents and educational settings creates, and the positive impact this two-way information sharing can have. Following the Lamb Inquiry, the political landscape continued to work to empower parents, giving voice, control and choice within legislative policy through the publication of the SEND Green Paper (DfE, 2011).

The 2014 SEND Reform, that encompassed the Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) and revised SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), created a change in national policy for parental voice and collaborative approaches to support pupils with SEND. The 2014 SEND Reform instructed LAs to consider the views, wishes and feelings of parents when making decisions around their children. Parental control was a central focus with access to local SEND information becoming a requirement. The Reform introduced the option of parents having control over the personal funding for their children, enabling parents to have greater say and power over the support their child received (DfE & DoH, 2015). The Reform gave parents a clear choice of schools and created a less adversarial way of finding a resolution when the LA and parents struggled to agree on a suitable setting (DfE & DoH, 2015). This was a huge shift in national policy with parental voice and collaborative approaches to support pupils with SEND being at the heart.

Parents were encouraged to share concerns with education settings and inform schools if they believed their child may have SEND or require additional help. Parents were actively supported in contributing to needs assessments, including the development of EHCPs. This acknowledged that parents know their children best and highlighted the importance for all practitioners to listen when parents express concerns about their child's development (DfE & DoH, 2015).

LAs were instructed to involve parents in the design or commissioning of services with information, advice and support services directed to be trained to support, and work in partnership with, parents to enable the best possible outcomes for YP (DfE &

DoH, 2015). The CoP (2015) made it compulsory for schools to record and inform parents if they had assessed a pupil, which included information around any special educational provision being made. It went on to say that, where appropriate, schools should seek parental involvement to reinforce or contribute to progress at home. The 2014 SEND Reform felt that a meaningful shift had taken place in legislation for parents of pupils with SEND. Parents' importance and unique contributions seemed acknowledged, and families were given the means to effectively engage and improve outcomes for children. However, whilst legislation reflected these ideals, recent research has shown that these aims did not come to fruition.

The publication of the recent review of the 2022 Green Paper (DfE, 2022) emphasises coproduction with parents and, again, recognises parents as valued partners in decision-making and acknowledges the frustrations that parents have experienced since the 2015 CoP and 2014 SEND Reform. It reports a decline in parents' confidence for their children's needs to be met which has become a narrative amongst parents of pupils with SEND (DfE, 2022). Parents' experiences were explored within the review and consistently revealed that challenges appear to be driven by a cycle of late intervention, inefficient allocation of support and subsequent inability to meet the rising costs within the system (DfE, 2022). As with legislation over the last five decades, the review recognises the importance of parental involvement in education and advocates for services to strive for genuine and continual co-production with families (DfE, 2022).

The importance of involving parents and carers, as evidenced in the historical legislative landscape, is recognised in Educational Psychology as being crucial to information gathering, defining difficulties and identifying strengths and needs for YP (Fox, 2009). This view of coproduction with parents is an existing fundamental aspect of EP work and is considered central to good EPS practice (Dunsmuir at al., 2014) and fits with the focus of the current research where the aim is to explore parental experiences with the hopes to improve parental engagement with EPSs.

## **2.6 Parental engagement within Educational Psychology**

'Engagement' in the current context refers to EPSs' ability to generate and retain parental attendance and continual involvement once initial contact has been made and extends to the processes which contribute to participation and potential

outcomes (Davis et al., 2012). Engaging collaboratively with adults closest to YP is integral within EP practice, with most service delivery models acknowledging that those adults, most often parents, have the greatest power to create change (Fox, 2009; Pellegrini, 2009). Understanding this context is held at the heart of EP assessment and formulation, to ensure that interventions are relevant and feasible (Dallos & Draper, 2010). This collaborative model is supported by extensive research and is viewed as a fundamental aspect of EP practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2014; Fox, 2009; Pellegrini, 2009).

Ecological Systems Theory, developed through the work of Bronfenbrenner (1979) and originating from General Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 1950), is central to EP involvement with parents and reflects the important influence families have on YP's education. Parental engagement with EPs promotes multiagency working through the creation of a temporary system (Miller, 2003) and can be highly effective in supporting schools, services and parents to engage and work collaboratively. EP involvement has been shown to generate an additional metaphorical boundary which integrates the systems in which a young person operates and, through the engagement of parents and settings, can create new understanding within the systems, bridging the gap between home and school (Miller, 1996, 2003).

The involvement of parents within EPS work has become integral, not only through legislation and policymaking, but through a recognition that parents have thorough and relevant knowledge about their children's strengths and weaknesses (Dunsmuir et al., 2014). Inclusion of parents within SEND services, such as an EPS, requires them to have a basic level of knowledge of the systems that make provision for their children, opportunities to state their views and to have faith that their opinions receive consideration (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). EP expertise in applied psychology and relational approaches can support parents to share their views and discuss concerns (Evans, 2005), giving them reassurance that their opinions and contributions are a valued part of the process when generating provision to meet children's needs.

## **2.7 Literature landscape and the current study**

The current study concerns parental engagement with EP practice within early intervention stages and intends to investigate parental experience with EPs via EPS

engagement. Having used this review to explore identified areas in broader terms, research that specifically reviewed parental involvement with EPs or EPSs was purposefully avoided in line with recommendations for GT.

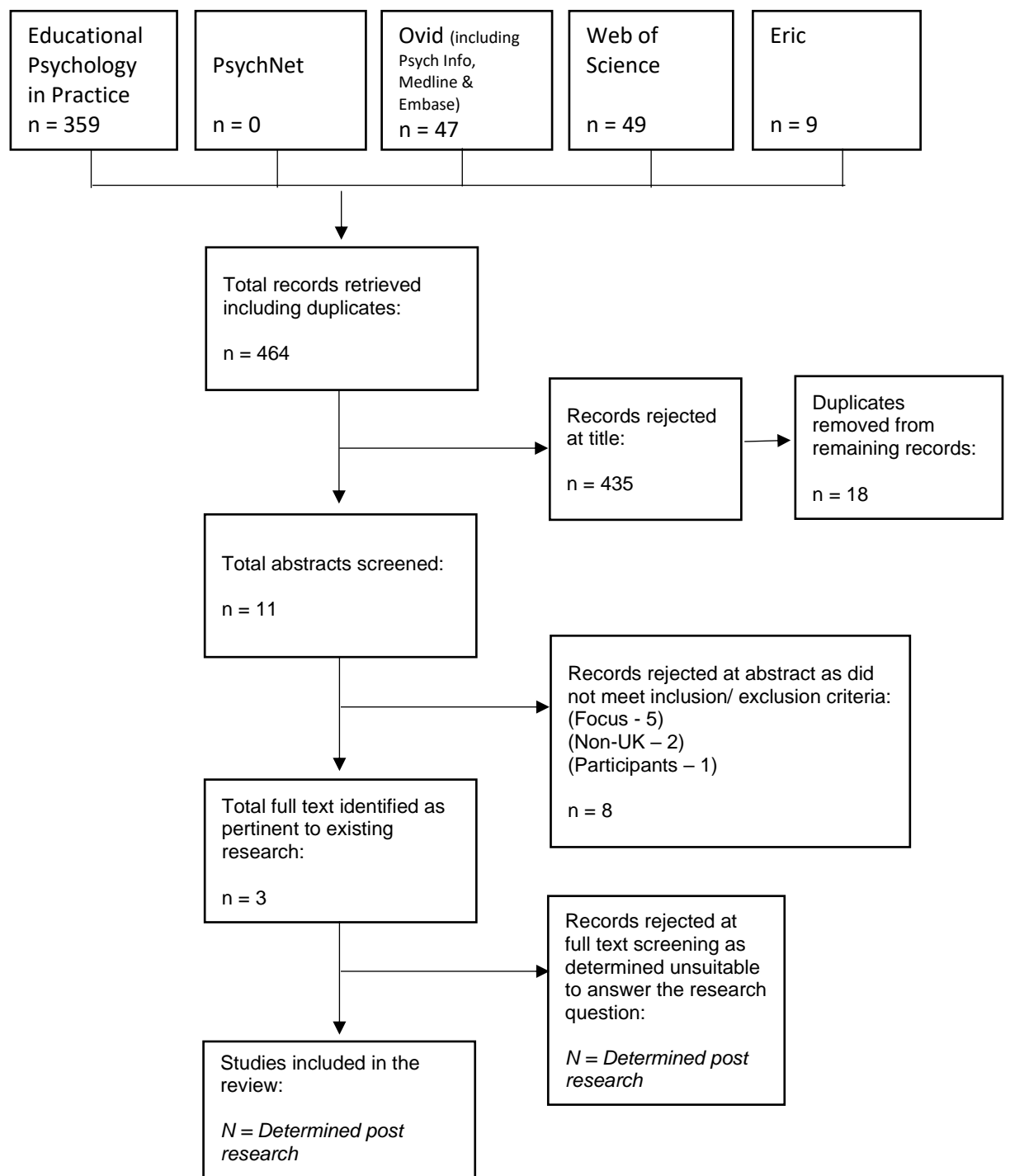
The reviewed literature landscape illustrates that there have been significant changes over the last five decades regarding parental engagement. The SEND Green Paper (DfE, 2011) created huge shifts in practice for professionals in terms of parental rights and expectations. However, the biggest contemporary changes influencing current EP practice occurred in the 2014 SEND Reform with the Children and Families Act and SEND CoP (DfE, 2014; DfE & DoH, 2015).

## **2.8 Systematic search**

To review the scope of the literature to ensure that the proposed study was not replicating recent research and was providing a unique contribution to the field of Educational Psychology, a systematic search was completed to identify relevant papers. Following the acknowledgement that research needs to reflect contemporary professional, social, economic, and legal positions (Dunsmuir et al., 2014), the decision was made to only include literature published after the most recent significant changes in the 2014 SEND Reform. This follows recommendations within the use of GT whereby topics that have been subject to limited prior research increase the justification for the approach (McGhee et al., 2007). To establish if parental experience of an EPS within early intervention stages was an identified gap and subject to minimal existing research, a systematic search was conducted on 21.07.2022.

From the literature reviewed thus far, a research strategy was developed using The University of Nottingham guidance document, where search terms were generated (see Appendix 1). Searches were conducted using Educational Psychology in Practice, PsychNet, Ovid (including Psych Info, Medline and Embase), Web of Science and Eric databases using the key terms outlined in Appendix 2. Searches were not exhaustive, but rather sufficient and appropriate to explore the described phenomena to ensure the search was valuable and meaningful to inform the present study (Booth, 2016). Searches using synonyms outlined in Appendix 1 were also applied in the same manner to ensure that no relevant studies were missed.

Studies pulled from the systematic search were screened, first by title, followed by abstract. From this initial screening, 29 studies were selected for scrutiny with more in-depth inclusion and exclusion criteria applied. The inclusion and exclusion criteria used to screen the studies is presented in Appendix 3. Of the 29 studies, 18 duplicates were removed, and eight results that did not meet the inclusion criteria were eliminated from the collection. This generated three studies that met all the inclusion criteria and were deemed pertinent to the current area of research. A flow diagram depicts the systematic search process undertaken in Figure 2.1.



**Figure 2.1 - Flow chart depicting database search and screening process.**

Details of the three appropriate studies selected are presented in Table 2.1. Due to the nature of this literature review, and the acceptance that GT should avoid the researcher being influenced by existing work in the identified field (Dey, 2007), no further reading of these studies took place beyond scrutiny of abstracts for suitability.

<b>Author, date and title</b>
McGuiggan, C. (2021). Stepping over the boundary: an exploration of Educational Psychologists' work with families.
Lawrence, Z. (2014). Black African parents' experiences of an Educational Psychology Service.
Dawson, L. (2021). An Educational Psychology service's contribution to supporting families formed by adoption.

**Table 2.1. Three studies identified for review post data collection and analysis**

Based on the studies identified, little work has been completed around parental engagement with EPs or EPSs since the 2014 SEND Reform. For interest, the researcher extended the search to include papers published post 2011 SEND Reform and found the few studies that existed focused on parental involvement within statutory assessment. Of the three studies that met the inclusion criteria, one paper focused directly on Black African parent experiences (Lawrence, 2014); however, data collection took place in 2011, prior to the 2014 SEND Reform, so was not considered to reflect recent legislation or practice. The second paper explored the EPs' perceptions and experiences of parental engagement, not parental views (McGuiggan, 2021) and the third focused on EP support with potential stresses that can exist for adoptive parents in supporting their child's educational experience (Dawson, 2021). None of the identified studies focus on EPS' work through parents' direct experience in the stages of early intervention. This suggests that the present study may work towards addressing an identified gap in existing research and indicates that it will be making a unique contribution both in terms of exploring parental experiences with an EPS post SEND Reform and in looking at this within the frame of stages of support outside the statutory assessment process.

## **2.9 Rationale for the study**

As outlined within this review, parental engagement with EPs in education has been a historical area of interest and has been widely researched with extensive focus in government legislation (DfE 2014; Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011; Miller, 1994; Pugh, 1984). However, a systematic search identified that little work has been completed since the 2014 SEND Reform, yet parental engagement with EPs remains an identified area for development and a noted requirement for improving outcomes for pupils (DfE, 2022). In addition, there does not seem to be existing research that focuses on parent experiences of EPs within earlier stages of intervention, another area identified as essential for improvements for SEND pupils today (DfE, 2022).

## **2.10 Personal interest**

Parental engagement became an area of interest for the researcher during their years as a mainstream special educational needs coordinator (SENCO) and increased during their doctoral training as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). Observing variations in parental engagement (in terms of differing backgrounds, priorities and mechanisms enabling or disabling involvement), and experiencing the dissimilarity in provision as a result, have influenced their interest. Sacker et al. (2002) highlighted the inequality that pupils can experience based on social mechanisms such as economic status and disadvantage. Reay's (2000) work on parents' emotional capital demonstrates the advantages that economically privileged parents can have in securing better educational provision and outcomes for their children. This discrepancy continues to be an ongoing concern for families with pupils of SEND as the recent Green Paper Review (DfE, 2022) proposes that the systems that parents and YP encounter are not equally accessible and suggests that parents with access to financial and social resources are often better placed to navigate systems and secure support for their child. This inconsistency in accessibility and subsequent provision for YP is the position behind which the current research is shaped.

## **2.11 Current research position**

Previous research has established that parental involvement has a significant positive impact on outcomes for YP and political legislation outlines the responsibility of EPSs to support and develop engagement with parents (Davis et al., 2012; Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003; DfE, 2022; DfE & DoH, 2015; Goodall & Vorhaus,

2011). Successful and meaningful parental engagement presents as integral to making a significant difference to YP's educational attainment and subsequent opportunities (Harris & Goodall, 2008; Taylor & Gulliford, 2011). Whilst this is the case, other research has highlighted potential barriers to involvement and, in some instances, illustrated that parents feel it is not worthwhile (DfE, 2022). If these positions are accepted, EPSs must strive to include parents and families in their work and the task, therefore, lies in generating and supporting this engagement. EPSs have an obligation for their practice to reflect ways to enhance and maximise parental engagement to enable the positive impact reflected in literature and legislation. As such, it can be considered necessary to identify factors that facilitate engagement through best practice and challenge the barriers to EP-parent collaboration.

The researcher's interest and current study involves the basis of the Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) and SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and the concepts for development outlined in the Green Paper Review (2022) for parental voice and collaborative approaches to support pupils with SEND. The study may contribute towards the exploration of how EPSs can best serve communities and service users by exploring experiences to improve practice.

## **2.12 Research aims and question**

The present study's intention is to focus on parental engagement with an EPS during early intervention stages and make a unique contribution to the existing research base, both in terms of exploring parental views post SEND Reform and in looking at intervention stages positioned within SEN school support rather than at a statutory level.

The SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) highlights the importance of early intervention within EP practice to facilitate the development of YP, to help them progress educationally and personally and to achieve the best possible outcomes. The recent Green Paper Review (DfE, 2022) emphasises the need for EPSs to focus on and strengthen their early intervention processes, recognising the current demand for EHCPs reducing the capacity for much needed early intervention work.

'Engagement' has been the predominant focus within this chapter and is an identified area of development for the researcher's placement EPS, which is a key stakeholder



in the research. Through discussions and reflections by the researcher, and scrutiny of the supporting literature, the term 'experience' will be used in the present study to capture a variety of parent-EP involvement whilst incorporating the concept of 'engagement.' Goodall & Montgomery (2014) propose that parental engagement occurs along a continuum and that involvement is distinguishable from engagement with the latter having the additional sense of agency with greater commitment and ownership of action. Whilst this distinction is recognised, for the purpose of creating a common language, parental engagement, experience and involvement will be used interchangeably to remain consistent with original sources.

Whilst the researcher needs to consider and acknowledge that stakeholders want to improve parental engagement and are supportive of this research, the aim is to complete a truly exploratory study. By exploring 'experience' the study hopes to cover, but not be limited to, parental 'engagement' and hopes that, by creating a wide space for discussion, outcomes may provide insight into a much broader field. The study will be open in asking, 'what can we learn?' and will support stakeholder priorities as well as wider political positions such as the SEND CoP (2015) and the parental narratives within the Green Paper review (2022). Consequently, the study's research question is: *What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?*

### **2.13 Chapter summary**

Having established the importance of parental engagement in education and acknowledged that partnership working with parents is central to good EP practice, it is hoped that this research can broaden the evidence base for collaborative work for EPSs and parents.

The study intends to follow the basis of the Children and Families Act (2014), SEND CoP (2015) and the Green Paper Review (2022), where parental voice, collaborative approaches and support for pupils with SEND are held at the core. Through the open exploration of parental experiences within an EPS, it is hoped that findings may support conversations around the improvement of practice and contribute towards developing policies around how EPSs can increase parental engagement to best support YP, families, communities and wider service users.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Overview**

This chapter outlines the methodological procedures and stages of research within the current study. It reviews philosophical considerations, with key theoretical paradigms presented, followed by a rationale for the study's adoption of constructivism. Justification for the employment of grounded theory methodology and consideration for alternative approaches with measures to improve validity and quality are presented. Data gathering and analysis processes conclude this section with frequent references to appendices illustrating clear steps implemented to ensure transparency and replicability of procedures.

#### **3.2 Philosophical considerations**

Research can be conducted from a variety of philosophical stances and methodological positions (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Consideration of theoretical paradigms, ontology, epistemology and methodology are necessary for researchers to obtain new knowledge in an attempt to generate new understanding (Mertens, 2015). A *paradigm* is regarded as a philosophical way of looking at the world (Mertens, 2015) and, within research, refers to the underpinning beliefs, values, assumptions and practices adopted (Braun & Clarke, 2013). *Ontology* refers to the nature of reality, *epistemology* is concerned with the nature of knowledge and how knowledge can be justified and *methodology* refers to the ways in which researchers obtain new knowledge and understanding (Mertens, 2015).

Mertens (2015) outlines four key paradigms that underpin Educational Psychology: postpositivism, constructivism, transformative and pragmatic.

##### **3.2.1 Positivism and Postpositivism**

Positivism considers the social world to be studied in the same way as the natural world (Mertens, 2015). Using predominantly quantitative methods, its ontology is naïve realism, believing a single discoverable truth exists, and its epistemology is objectivist believing that knowledge is discoverable within experimental pursuit (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Positivism has faced criticism for being overly reductionist and deterministic and has been considered unsuitable for the pursuit of human subjectivity in applied research of real-world situations (Mertens, 2015).

Postpositivism ontology takes a realist position of an objective reality existing but

speaks of an imperfect discovery rather than absolute truth (Mertens, 2015).

Postpositivist epistemology searches for empirical laws and theories to understand the social world that are based on objective probability (Robson, 2011).

Postpositivists favour fixed quantitative studies with rigorous statistical analysis and deductive methodology where hypotheses are tested and either supported or rejected (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Postpositivism rejects the notion of reflexivity and researchers operate with objective neutrality (Cohen et al., 2011).

### **3.2.2 Constructivism**

Constructivism is positioned within the postmodernism movement and is concerned with explorations of language, power and social context (Moore, 2005). It rejects the postpositivist view of one objective reality and believes the relativist ontological notion that multiple socially constructed realities exist (Cohen et al., 2011) and that these are constructed through dialogue, interactions and individual perspectives (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Constructivism epistemology is subjectivist and regards knowledge as constructed through social discourse (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Accessing knowledge is an interactive process with reciprocal construction of confirmation rather than objective proof (Mertens, 2015). Within research, the acquisition of knowledge is socially constructed and occurs through an interaction between researcher and participants (Mertens, 2015). This epistemology requires the researcher to acknowledge their involvement in the research process (Cohen et al., 2011) and recognise their role in the construction and interpretation of data gathered with methodology encouraging reflexivity (Gulliford, 2015). Traditionally associated with qualitative research, constructivism is concerned with description and the illumination of complex social phenomena with multiple perceptions gathered (Gulliford, 2015). Methodology is naturalist (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), fluid and flexible in response to the research (Robson, 2011) and applies an interpretive, inductive design where theory is generated from data rather than data used to test an existing theory (Gulliford, 2015).

### **3.2.3 Transformative**

The transformative paradigm positions its research in the pursuit of social justice and seeks to challenge political, social and economic issues to reduce oppression, conflict and power imbalances (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It embodies a transactional epistemology (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017) with the discovery of knowledge seen as an

interactive process between the participants and the researcher (Mertens, 2015). It holds an ontology of historical realism (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), believing that knowledge is socially and historically situated and concerned with the power relationships set up within social structures (Mertens, 2015). Deliberate efforts from the researcher are made to address issues of power, oppression and trust among research participants (Mertens, 2015), utilising the interaction between researcher and participants to bring change in favour of underrepresented groups (Cohen et al., 2011). The treatment of research is an act of construction rather than discovery (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), and a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods is common within this paradigm (Mertens, 2015).

### **3.2.4 Pragmatic**

Born out of the rejection that real world truth is accessible through a single line of enquiry (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), pragmatists are concerned with generating appropriately selected research methods that best explore a presenting phenomenon (Robson, 2011). Pragmatic researchers believe knowledge is discoverable and can be acquired through interaction between researcher and communities (Mertens, 2015), rejecting the notion that behaviour can be measured without interactive context consideration (Robson, 2011). Ontologically, it believes that there is a single reality, of which all individuals have their own unique interpretation (Mertens, 2015). Pragmatism is democratic, seeking views from communities and stakeholders, generating a consensus of 'what works' to establish a potentially agreed truth which is open to change (Burnham, 2013). It calls for quantitative research to be supplemented by qualitative data applying a mixed-methods approach where the design of a study is determined by the purpose of the research (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

### **3.2.5 The present study's epistemological position**

The purpose of this research was to explore parent experiences of engagement with an LA EPS during early intervention stages. The exploratory nature of the research aim, focusing directly on parent perceptions as a result of their experiences with EPs, fits closest with the constructivist paradigm which favours an idiographic and qualitative methodology in obtaining knowledge and understanding of the world from the interpretation of others' perspectives (Cohen et al., 2011).

Positioning the present study within the constructivism paradigm enables the researcher to access knowledge and information as constructions through social discourse via an interaction between the participants and the researcher (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). It acknowledges that research is a product of the values and experience of the researcher and accepts that enquiry cannot be independent of them (Mertens, 2015). Due to the exploratory nature of the present study, the fluid and flexible approach to research within constructivist methodology supports the aim of theory being generated from data (Gulliford, 2015), as discovered directly from the experience of those within the phenomena.

By focusing on parental voice, perceptions and constructions, to work towards the aim of improving parental engagement, and by acknowledging that people's interpretations of events and interactions are situational and that their experience of it cannot be replicated, the current research also incorporates elements of the transformative paradigm.

### **3.2.6 The present study's ontological position**

Aligned with the constructivist paradigm, the study is positioned within a relativist ontology. This led to the adoption of an inductive (theory built from the data itself) approach, acknowledging that, within parental experiences, multiple socially constructed realities will exist (Cohen et al., 2011) and that these are created through dialogue, interactions and individual perspectives (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). As such, a flexible, qualitative research design was felt most appropriate to explore the experiences of parent involvement with an EPS.

### **3.3 Qualitative research methods**

Qualitative research is concerned with how individuals construct and attribute meaning to make sense of the world (Willig, 2013). Broadly speaking, it uses words as data which are collected and analysed through a variety of approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Qualitative research methods are concerned with exploring meaning by understanding social phenomena through the interpretation of participants' experiences and perspectives (Mertens, 2015). Consideration was given to different qualitative research approaches to identify the most appropriate way to answer the current research question. Validity and reliability concerns within qualitative research are discussed in section 3.7.

### **3.3.1 Interpretive phenomenological analysis**

Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) seeks to generate detailed examinations of a phenomenon through comprehensive exploration of an individual's lived experiences and how they make sense of their world (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Mertens, 2015). IPA creates a deep and rich description of participants' experience but does not have the application to generate an underlying explanation for a phenomenon (Willig, 2013). IPA limits a greater depth of understanding of wider context exploration and can inhibit researchers' potential to move towards complex phenomenological explanations (Willig, 2013).

### **3.3.2 Discourse analysis**

Discourse analysis (DA) is a qualitative method concerned with the detailed and precise examination of language to construct reality (Robson & McCartan, 2016; Willig, 2013). It is concerned with identifying patterns by exploring language to determine the social production of a reality (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It does not give consideration to the wider context or the nuances of non-language based underlying procedures occurring within reciprocal communication such as emotions, attributions, self-awareness and meta-cognition (Burr, 2015).

### **3.3.3 Thematic analysis**

Thematic analysis (TA) involves the process of identifying patterns or themes within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006) to draw out meaning in relation to a research question (Braun & Clarke, 2013). TA adopts a linear approach of analysis focusing solely on individual experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is proposed to lack depth and rigour with TA procedures being fewer and less complex than alternative qualitative methods (Braun & Clarke, 2020).

### **3.3.4 Grounded theory and the present study**

The present study aims to deliver an in-depth exploration and interpretation of qualitative data to provide conceptualised understanding of parental engagement. Consequently, it was deemed that IPA, DA and TA would not provide the level of exploration required to fully understand the complexity of parent engagement and the wider social processes involved in the context of EPS involvement, and would subsequently limit the potential to improve future engagement.

Grounded theory (GT) is a flexible, systematic method for collecting qualitative data to support the generation of theories through iterative stages of analysis, encouraging the researcher to interact and remain involved with the data (Charmaz, 2014). It supports the exploration of research questions that consider processes and factors which influence or underpin different social contexts and phenomena (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). It is well-placed to support the discovery or generation of new theory from data compared to methods that aim to support or extend existing theories (Clarke, 2005; Sutcliffe, 2016). The analytic process of GT involves rigorous stages of coding practices that can be flexible to meet the aims and purpose of the presenting research (Birks & Mills, 2015) and is documented to be well positioned in realising research by psychologists working in education (Sutcliffe, 2016).

A criticism of GT is the potential to create localised explanations of wider processes which may not be applicable when transferring theory to differing contexts (Miller, 1995; Turner, 1992). Experienced practitioners issue caution around novice researchers employing GT methodology due to the complexity of the approach (Birks & Mills, 2015). Additionally, potential influence of personal views and preconceptions of the phenomenon is a potential limitation of GT (Anderson, 2010), where researcher bias has the capability to influence analysis and findings. Despite these concerns, constructivist GT is advantageous in affording rich data into complex research areas, providing direct insight into the experiences and associated processes of social phenomenon (Birks & Mills, 2015).

The present study aims to explore parents' experience with an EPS to generate findings that can work towards increasing engagement. A qualitative methodology that incorporates relationships between the experiences of individuals and wider systems would be best placed to explore the research question. Compared to TA and IPA which focus solely on individual experience, and DA which is concerned with patterns in language rather than experience and wider structures, GT places emphasis on the social processes as well as individual experience, considering wider influencing factors (Braun & Clarke, 2013). GT is an inductive method that is considered effective in the potential development of professional policy and practice (Charmaz, 2012) and is appropriate for doctoral thesis research in generating new concepts within a larger research area and making new theoretical contributions (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Whilst criticisms of GT are acknowledged, efforts to mitigate potential bias and impact of inexperience will be employed throughout the

study (see Chapter 7). As such, GT is determined the most suitable method of data collection and analysis for the present study, aligning with the aim of improving practice and policies within an EPS to support parental engagement.

### **3.4 Grounded theory methodologies**

GT was first established by sociologists Glaser and Strauss (1967) with multiple recognised variations existing today (Braun & Clarke, 2013). There are three main approaches considered within GT (Willig, 2013): 'classical' Glaserian version (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Straussian GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), and Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2000). Mills et al. (2006) stress the importance of potential grounded theorists carefully examining their own ontological and epistemological positioning and matching this with the appropriate GT approach. This is to ensure a clear theoretical underpinning for methodological choices throughout the research process (Mills et al., 2006).

#### **3.4.1 Classical GT**

Glaser and Strauss (1967) developed GT as an alternative approach to existing research methods to support the development of theory arising from research rather than using research to test a theory (Birks & Mills, 2015; Howard-Payne, 2016). Classical GT is positioned within the postpositivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006; Howard-Payne, 2016) with critical realism as its ontological position (Howard-Payne, 2016), declaring that an objective truth or reality could be found through systematic data collection and analysis (Glaser & Holton, 2004). Classical GT positions the researcher separate from the participants and their realities, and considers them to be an unbiased observer within the process (Charmaz, 2006; Howard-Payne, 2016).

#### **3.4.2 Straussian GT**

Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1998) developed an adaptation of classical GT that adopted a more structured approach with prescriptive guides to its execution. This deductive style included a specific coding paradigm to support the discovery of emerging categories in theory generation, rather than starting with the data itself (Willig, 2013). Strauss and Corbin's approach to GT received criticism for being inflexible and too far removed from the inductive nature of classical GT (Willig, 2013). Unlike Classic GT, Straussian GT directs the researcher to be personally engaged with the research to equip them to better understand the world as perceived by participants (Howard-Payne, 2016). Whilst moving towards a more



reflexive approach to the positioning of the researcher, Straussian GT remains strongly linked with the postpositivist paradigm (Charmaz, 2006).

### **3.4.3 Constructivist GT**

Constructivist GT, the most contemporary GT approach, was introduced by Charmaz (2000) and is built on earlier GT strategies. It accepts a subjective position and acknowledges the active role the researcher has within the process and in the construction and interpretation of data (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist GT assumes a relativist ontology, acknowledging the importance of the multiple perspectives and realities of participants (Allen & Davey, 2018; Charmaz, 2017). It recognises the relationship the researcher has with participants and adopts a reflexive stance towards the researcher's existing background, values and experiences (Allen & Davey, 2018; Charmaz, 2017). Constructivist GT challenges the notion that a discoverable truth exists and, instead, focuses its methodology on capturing the voice of participants through their experiences (Charmaz, 2006), whilst situating itself within in the historical, social and situational conditions of the studied phenomena (Charmaz, 2017).

### **3.4.4 Constructivist GT and the present study**

Constructivist GT was regarded to be closest aligned with the researcher's constructivist epistemological paradigm and relativist ontological positioning. By adopting one GT methodology, and by selecting the one most compatible with the researcher's philosophical positioning, it was hoped that the credibility and quality of the study would be reinforced (Birks & Mills, 2015). Adopting the constructivist GT approach also felt that it would combine the inductive data-driven approach offered by classic GT (Glaser, 1999) and would have the rigour of process offered by Straussian GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), whilst enabling a less prescriptive and more flexible approach to explore the present topic. Constructivist GT would support the researcher in capturing and exploring participants' experiences and enable them to utilise their unique and valuable perspective. It would support researcher reflexivity and reflection of their own involvement within a social context (Charmaz, 2006), in the case of this research: their involvement within an EPS.

### **3.5 Design**

#### **3.5.1 Stakeholders**

Stakeholders are those considered to have an investment in the outcomes of a piece of research and will be affected or influenced by the results (Mertens, 2015). In the current study the stakeholders include: the researcher, The University of Nottingham, the LA EPS and the participants who took part in the research.

The current research was undertaken as a thesis project within the final year of the researcher's Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at The University of Nottingham. The research was conducted in partnership with the EPS which was the researcher's placement authority during their second and third years of training.

Discussions took place between the researcher, the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) of the EPS and the Voice and Influence Officer (ValO) (a role within the placement LA that coordinates opportunities for YP and families to have voice and influence in decision making, ensuring that services and decisions are informed by the views of YP and families). The research aligned with an aspect of the services' priorities for development: improving parental engagement. The parents that participated in the research were also considered key stakeholders as they generated the data for analysis within the study. Overall findings, conclusions and potential policy and practice implications for the research were committed to be shared with the EPS, ValO and participants upon completion of the thesis.

#### **3.5.2 Sampling of participants**

Constructivist GT states that sampling should be guided by knowledge of where the data is most likely to be found (Charmaz, 2014). For the present study, consideration was given towards different populations involved in the process of parents' engagement with an EPS as potentially suitable participants to meet the aims of the research. These included EPs, SENCOs and wider professionals within the educational sector of the LA. However, in line with the current study's association with the transformative paradigm, the researcher wanted sampling that was centred around the direct experiences of the community which the study was representing (Mertens, 2015). The researcher was committed to adopting a collaborative approach, informed and guided by those about whom the research was concerned. As such, parents were selected as the appropriate participants within the current research with a focus of exploring their experiences with an LA EPS.

### 3.5.3 Sampling to generate interview questions

In line with the transformative paradigm, and to work towards research being a collaborative process rather than 'done to' participants, a focus group method was used to generate questions for parent interviews. Focus group participants were identified through GT purposive sampling techniques using the researcher's existing knowledge of their TEP placement service (Charmaz, 2014). The inclusion criteria for the focus group sample was: parents or carers of SEND pupils of any age. Participants did not need to have experienced EP involvement as the researcher wanted to gain insight from participants' knowledge of engaging with support services in general. Following discussions with the ValO within the researcher's LA, the researcher was invited to join the LA's SEND Parent and Carer Support Group Network and 45 minutes of a meeting was dedicated to the focus group. A poster outlining the details of the focus group (Appendix 4) was shared within the correspondence for the SEND Parent Network, as well as shared within the local offer parent groups and the local offer Facebook page. Information sheets (Appendix 5) were shared by the ValO with all attendees at the previous meeting, six weeks before the focus group, and with anyone that expressed an interest from Facebook or the local offer group. Online consent forms were created using the LA's secure network and were distributed and collected by the ValO (see Appendix 6). All attendees consented to participate in the focus group which took place with eight participants online using Microsoft Teams.

### 3.5.4 Semi-structured Interviews

Data collection involved individual semi-structured interviews with parents that had experience of EP involvement within an LA EPS. Purposive sampling techniques were repeated with specific inclusion and exclusion criteria for sampling of participants outlined in Table 3.1.

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Parents that have accessed EP support via an LA EPS.	Parents that have accessed independent EP involvement outside an LA EPS.	This study is concerned with experiences that took place within an LA EPS.
Parents of children with SEND that have been offered or accessed LA	Parents of children with SEND that have been offered or accessed LA	Within this study, the term 'early intervention' refers to support that took place

EP support within early intervention stages, understood as requiring SEN support, outside of the statutory EHCP assessment process (key term definitions see section 2.3).	EP involvement and have an EHCP for their child or are involved in an ongoing EHC needs assessment.	within the school's graduated approach, outside of statutory involvement. EP support offered to, or accessed by, parents as part of the EHC needs assessment process is not considered to be within early intervention stages.
Parent of children aged 3-16 years.	Parents of children that are outside the ages of 3-16.	This age range will be most likely to have access to the EPS' traded or core offer as they are within schooling age. Post-16 and early years settings only have access to statutory services within the researcher's placement EPS.
Parents of children where support took place within the last 18 months.	Parents of children where support took place more than 18 months ago.	It was felt that recent experience would generate the richness in detail wanted within the data, as well as being reflective of contemporary practice and recent LA EP offer.

**Table 3.1 – A table illustrating the initial inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants**

Recruitment of semi-structured interview participants began through links with ValO. The officer that supported the recruitment for the focus group worked with the researcher and the EP SLT to identify schools that were demographically positioned to have a greater allocation of EP time, through the core offer and traded

agreements. This was to increase the likelihood of accessing EP involvement within schools' earlier cyclical stages of SEN support. Consideration was given to identifying varying geographical areas to give a broad range of cultural, heritage, social and economic diversity using existing data sets available to the EPS. Trading schools were identified and the ValO sent emails to SENCOs, explaining the research and to ask if the SENCOs could identify parents that met the inclusion criteria (Appendix 7). Emails were sent out to 43 schools without response. Recruitment scope was extended to schools that do not access the EPS' traded offer and was re-emailed to the 43 originally identified with the addition of 35 schools accessing only the core offer. No replies were received and no participants were recruited.

Further discussions with the EP SLT resulted in a decision to go directly to EPs within the team and ask if they could support identification and recruitment based on their working knowledge of schools. EPs within the researcher's placement EPS were asked to identify casework that met the inclusion criteria. This involved an overview discussion of the research aims and requirements within a whole team meeting with a follow-up email asking EPs to use their knowledge of schools to identify SENCOs that have coordinated non-statutory EP support for pupils aged 3-16 years within the last 18 months (Appendix 8). It was explained that no individual EPs would be identified and that the research was not concerned with EP work that took place, but would reflect parents' engagement and the mechanisms that facilitated or hindered their involvement. EPs that could identify parents or carers that met the inclusion criteria were asked to contact identified SENCOs to request permission for the researcher to contact them to explain the research (Appendix 7). The EP identified SENCO would then become the secondary gatekeeper to recruitment.

EP-identified SENCOs were asked to approach parents that met the inclusion criteria and request consent for the researcher to contact them to explain the study further. It was made clear, at every stage, that this was voluntary and that everyone could decline or cease involvement at any level or time.

Five SENCOs were identified through EPs. Of the five SENCOs identified, two parents declined consent to be contacted or involved. Three parents agreed and the researcher made contact. Three participants was not considered enough for the rich

data required for the research and, following discussions with the researcher's university tutor, the inclusion criteria for participants was extended. The extension involved the inclusion of participants that have accessed EP involvement within the school's graduated response cycle and have since applied for an EHCP but have not yet had EP involvement as part of the statutory assessment process. It was hoped that this would broaden the potential for the criteria to be met and, from this, a further participant was secured.

At the point of theoretical sampling (see section 3.9.6) the researcher approached two neighbouring EPSs, outside their placement service, in the hopes of widening the scope for recruitment. By extending the criteria to include neighbouring services, a fifth participant was secured.

Parents were contacted via their preferred method (phone or email) and were asked to carefully read the Parent Information Sheet (Appendix 9) which explained that data collection would take the form of individual interviews being audio recorded. All participants agreed with informed consent obtained at the point of interview (Appendix 10). A flexible choice of interview was offered to support participation, including all days of the week, out of office hours and a choice of location including home visits. A date, time and location was agreed for each participant.

A final sample of five parents was obtained across two LAs in four different settings with the fifth pupil now electively home educated. To ensure anonymity, participants were allocated a number that represents the order in which interviews took place. Participant details are presented in Table 3.2. Due to the relatively small sample size and the requirement for anonymity of participants, limited details are presented.

<b>Participant number</b>	<b>Relationship to child</b>	<b>Ethnicity of participant</b>	<b>Age of pupil when involved with EP</b>	<b>Parents construction of child's need</b>	<b>Setting type</b>
1	Mother	White-British	11	ADHD	Mainstream primary school at

					the time, now in secondary
2	Mother	White-British	11	Moderate learning difficulty	Maintream secondary school accessing resourced provision
3	Mother	White-British	8	SEMH with suspected autism	Mainstream primary school
4	Mother	White-British	9	Autism	Mainstream primary school
5	Mother	White-British	5	Autism	Primary at the time, now electively home educated

**Table 3.2. A table illustrating the key information of participants relative to the context in which EP involvement occurred**

### **3.5.5 Sample size**

GT approaches do not specify an optimal number of participants required and, instead, proposes that sample size should be guided by the data itself (Charmaz, 2006). GT outlines that the sample size aim is to include as many participants as necessary to achieve theoretical saturation or theoretical sufficiency (Dey, 1999; Maz, 2013; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). This involves data being collected, and sample sizes expanded, until the researcher is confident that no new or relevant patterns or theories are emerging (Charmaz, 2014; Maz, 2013), with generated codes accounting for the variation in the data, despite further research being possible (Miller, 1995).

When reviewing existing research to explore sample sizes within studies that adopted similar data collection approaches, and acknowledging the challenges that can occur within recruitment and time pressures of a doctoral thesis, it was

determined that six participants would be the aim for enlistment in the present study (Akbar & Woods, 2019). This was in line with existing research recommendations (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) and would also support a rich and varied sample to enable sufficient data collection (Fugard & Potts, 2015). Reflecting on the notion of saturation, the researcher held this number as a guide, remaining open to the potential to recruit fewer or a greater number of participants, dependent upon the data produced.

Whilst more participants, with varying diversity, would have been highly welcomed, the narrow timeframes surrounding thesis submission, combined with recruitment challenges and the scrutiny required within the selected analytical process, further enlistment of participants would have been impractical. Consistent with this, constructivist grounded theorists understand and accept that, within real world research, saturation can be presented as theoretical sufficiency where saturation is suggested by data rather than reaching an absolute (Dey, 2007). In addition, when research is conducted via interview, focused upon an area of practice within an applied field, small sample sizes are considered appropriate (Charmaz, 2012). Considering factors that surrounded the current research, and reflecting on the acceptance that time constraints and availability of participants can influence a researcher's recruitment decisions (Bonde, 2013), the researcher rationalised that the final sample size was appropriate for the context of the study.

### **3.6 Procedure**

#### **3.6.1 Focus group**

An initial focus group was used to support the development of questions to be asked within individual semi-structured interviews. Focus groups are considered a form of group interview where a topic, provided by the researcher, is discussed and a collective perspective is gathered (Cohen et al., 2011). The focus group in the present study was selected to work towards the researcher avoiding operating from a potential position of privilege or perceived power with the line of exploration guided by parents and their experience from the outset. The researcher wanted to give voice to parents and use their experience to guide what should or should not be asked, striving for a collaborative approach of parental representation. This also supported the researcher in being mindful of their reflexivity, using a focus group to help generate questions, to avoid the potential influence of their prior experience.



The researcher explained the purpose of the focus group and invited the participants to an open discussion. The researcher had prepared questions to support the discussion which were not needed due to the rich detail of opinions shared within the session. The researcher typed notes as the discussion took place and the ValO took minutes as part of the group's standard processes. The researcher collated the minutes and the notes and tabulated them into two broad categories that could loosely be related to barriers and supportive mechanisms when engaging with services in line with the aim of the research question (Appendix 11). These themes were transferred into questions with each comment or theme included and represented somewhere within the initial set of questions (Appendix 12). This led to the generation of an initial semi-structured interview schedule with seven questions (Appendix 13).

### **3.6.2 Semi-structured interviews**

The current research used semi-structured interviews to collect qualitative data. Semi-structured interviews, where researchers have a list of prepared questions with the scope for the interviewer to raise aspects not anticipated by the researcher, are considered the dominant form of qualitative interview (Braun & Clarke, 2013). They provide the scope for large amounts of data to be produced (Braun & Clarke, 2013) and, due to the reciprocal approach, support interaction and empathy to build rapport with participants when discussing sensitive subjects (Edwards & Holland, 2013). Semi-structured interviews are often selected within GT research (Birks & Mills, 2015) with Braun and Clarke (2013: p186) explicitly writing, "the interview is a key method of data collection within grounded theory." In the present study, data collection and analysis from semi-structured interviews followed the constructivist GT model outlined by Charmaz (2014) (see section 3.9.2).

An initial interview schedule was generated as outlined in the focus group procedure section above. GT offered the researcher the fluidity to alter questioning based on that which emerged from the data (Chapman et al., 2015) and removed the need for a pilot group to trial questions generated from the work with the focus group. Applying constructivist GT methodology, the researcher explored data early within the research process and synthesized primary themes through initial qualitative coding (Charmaz, 2014). This supported provisional themes to be identified and raised questions about data already collected and subsequently altered the next

interview schedule to shape the data the researcher wished to obtain (Charmaz, 2014). Evolving interview schedules are presented in Appendices 13-17.

Intensive interview techniques were adopted to direct the focus of the topic where required whilst facilitating exploration of parental experience to provide an interactive space that enabled the participants' perspectives and insights to emerge (Charmaz, 2014). Key characteristics of intensive interviewing adopted were (Charmaz, 2014; p56):

- Selection of participants with first-hand experience that fits the research topic
- In-depth exploration of participants' experience and situations
- Reliance on open-ended questions
- Seeking to obtain detailed responses
- Understanding the research participants' perspective, meanings and experience
- Following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints and implicit views and accounts of actions.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted individually with participants at a location of their choice. Four interviews took place in participants' homes and one took place in a private room at a participant's place of work. The interviews were proposed to take around an hour and lasted between 50 and 120 minutes. This is considered appropriate within research conducted in the participant's home (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Interviews were audio recorded using a secure device within the researcher's placement authority that met GDPR requirements.

### **3.7 Considerations for validity and quality**

Qualitative research has historically faced criticism with quantitative researchers viewing qualitative inquiry as lacking objectivity, validity, reliability, and replicability (Charmaz, 2006). Postpositivists argue that postmodern research cannot be validated due its basis in opinion (Mertens, 2015) and, therefore, causal relationships cannot be claimed. Whilst findings may be challenged for their external validity or reliability, efforts can be made to ensure findings of qualitative research are trustworthy, authentic, credible and transferable (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Rejected as bias within quantitative research, reflexivity and reciprocity are key elements in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Researcher reflexivity

ensures that the research process is scrutinised throughout and improves the validity of a study (Willig, 2013). Within GT, transparency and reflexivity increase the quality of research with constructivist GT requiring strong reflexivity throughout (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Researchers need to make their thoughts, ideas and assumptions explicit and work towards ‘methodological self-consciousness’ (Charmaz, 2017) to avoid hidden beliefs or preconceptions entering the research process. This conscious awareness and acknowledgment of their own assumptions removes the need to attempt to assert objectivity (Charmaz, 2014).

Glaser and Strauss (1967) rejected quantitative notions of adhering to principles of objectivity and, instead, declared that inductive qualitative research, with rich first-hand data, would be better placed to lead to theory construction. Glaser and Strauss (1967) argued that, to achieve this, studies of direct experience would need to be conducted with rigour. Rigour has become the means through which qualitative research designs increase their reliability and validity (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) along with considerations around sincerity, credibility, resonance, ethics, consistency and making a significant contribution within a valuable area (Tracy, 2010).

To support considerations of rigour, validity and reliability in the current research, evaluation criteria proposed by Charmaz (2014) and Birks and Mills (2015) was employed. Measures taken to improve the research design, data collection and analysis, supported by criteria proposed by the authors above, are summarised in Table 3.3.

<b>Evaluation criteria (Charmaz, 2014)</b>	<b>Measures taken</b>
Credibility	<p>Familiarity with the research topic was achieved through engagement in related teaching and experiences in their competency requirements as part of the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology. The initial literature review brought insight and familiarity with the wider phenomenon along with discussions with professionals in the LA placement including EPs and ValOs.</p> <p>Research being carried out in LAs in which the researcher was or had previously been a TEP resulted in high levels of familiarity with the settings.</p>

	<p>Participants were sampled from a range of ages and needs of children across two different LAs. Data saturation checks were used by the researcher to ensure that data collected was rich and sufficient. Interviews were of adequate length (50-120 minutes) to generate in-depth exploration, contributing to the wealth of data.</p> <p>Constant comparative analysis was employed from the outset of data scrutiny (see section 3.9.7). This was supplemented by ongoing memoing (see section 3.9.5) to generate a transparent and reflexive audit trail of analysis, illustrating procedural logic throughout the process of analysis and theory generation.</p>
Originality	See Chapter 7.
Resonance	
Usefulness	
<b>Evaluation criteria (Birks and Mills, 2015)</b>	<b>Measures taken</b>
Researcher expertise	<p>The researcher's scholarly writing skills were enhanced by reading existing qualitative research along with the completion of academic coursework whilst studying for the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology.</p> <p>Reading around qualitative analysis methods, with extensive reading of GT approaches, familiarised the researcher with the methods of data collection, analysis and theory building within constructivist GT.</p> <p>GT and qualitative research guides and resources were consulted and cited where relevant to support the application and justification of methodological choices.</p> <p>Limitations to the study were considered and acknowledged within memos and formally within the evaluation of the study.</p>
Methodological congruence	The researcher presented detailed discussion of their philosophical considerations within the current study,

	<p>including comparisons with alternative paradigms and justification for the epistemological position adopted. Alternative qualitative research strategies were considered and presented with justification of the suitability for the adoption of the constructivist GT approach. References between the philosophical position, research aims and the methodology were made where relevant.</p> <p>Outcomes, aims achieved and production of a grounded theory appear in Chapter 6.</p>
Procedural precision	<p>The researcher employed memoing throughout the analysis and presents these for review in Appendix 22. Stages, procedures and processes for data collection and analysis within the current study followed those outlined by Charmaz (2014). Application of these methods are evidenced in the stages of abstraction with examples presented in Appendices 20 and 21.</p> <p>Reflexivity was maintained throughout the analysis process with peer and tutor supervisions and discussions taking place, increasing the researcher's reflexive skills, and widening their considerations.</p> <p>The analysis method utilised sequential abstraction through the stages outlined (Charmaz, 2014) with logical connections between data, codes, category and theory. Credibility of the final theory and potential applications appear in Chapter 7.</p>

**Table 3.3 - A table showing measures taken to improve the quality of the current grounded theory study, based on evaluation criteria outlined by Charmaz (2014) and Birks and Mills (2015)**

### **3.8 Ethical considerations**

Ethical approval for the present study was gained in June 2022 the from the Ethics Committee at The University of Nottingham (Appendix 18). The current study adhered to principles outlined in the university's Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics document (Nottingham, 2021) with consideration to the BPS's Code

of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021a) and the Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021b).

### **3.8.1 Informed consent**

Written consent was obtained from all participants prior to taking part, including consent to record. Following an expression of interest via SENCOs, EPs or ValOs, the researcher provided detailed information letters to participants (Appendices 5 & 9) that were specific to their involvement. Written information included the research aims and hopes for findings and explained how data would be used and stored. This occurred prior to the focus group taking place and before arranging an interview date, giving participants time to process the information and consider any questions or queries before giving written consent. When meeting in online or in person, before commencing the focus group or interview, the researcher reviewed the contents of the information sheets with participants, highlighting ethical considerations such as confidentiality, anonymity, the right to withdraw and data protection. When participants were happy to proceed, explicit consent was gained through the discussion and completion of a consent form (see Appendices 6 & 10). Regular check points were made to ensure participants were happy to continue.

### **3.8.2 Confidentiality**

Anonymity was ensured throughout the process including storage of records, recordings, transcripts, reflections and memos. Pseudonyms for people and settings were used to maintain meaning within the different contexts. In accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), all information was stored on password-protected devices. To ensure protection of participants' confidentiality and the people about whom they spoke, full transcripts are not included in the thesis. Interviews were conducted at participants' homes or private office with confidentiality maintained throughout. Should safeguarding or malpractice concerns have been raised, confidentiality would have been overruled and EPS safeguarding procedures followed.

### **3.8.3 Debriefing**

Participants were given space for reflection at the end of the focus group and individual interviews with the opportunity to raise questions or share any further comments. Interview participants were provided a debrief form (Appendix 19) and were advised that they could contact the researcher at any time if any further

questions arose. Participants were thanked for their involvement and were invited to a follow-up phone call to share the findings of the study. Participants were reminded that all information would be kept confidential and reinforced that their right to withdraw remained intact until the study was complete.

#### **3.8.4 Minimising harm**

Interviews adopted a reciprocal, conversational approach which supported interaction and empathy to build rapport with participants when discussing sensitive subjects. Research-free discussion at the beginning of interviews aimed to reduce potential feelings of anxiety and worked towards putting both the researcher and participants at ease. It was made clear to participants that they could stop or pause the interview at any time and the researcher remained mindful of the possibility of needing to terminate the interview if participants became anxious or distressed. One participant became upset during an interview and the session was momentarily paused until the participant gave explicit instructions that they were happy to continue.

All participants expressed positive thoughts about their interviews and talked about valuing the opportunity to reflect and talk about their experiences with someone conversant in the field of Educational Psychology.

#### **3.8.5 Right to withdraw**

Prior to commencing the focus group and interviews, participants were emailed a copy of the participant information sheet which detailed their right to withdraw. For semi-structured interview participants, this extended to withdrawal of their data up until the research was complete. Participants were reminded of this when completing consent forms, during the debrief at the end of the interview and in the debrief letter shared following their involvement. It was made clear to participants that they did not need to provide a reason or justification for their withdrawal and that there would be no negative consequences occurring as a result.

#### **3.8.6 Further considerations**

The potential to create a power imbalance within the research process, in which the researcher operates from a perceived position of privilege or control (Robson, 2011), was of high consideration in the current study. The inclusion of a focus group was a deliberate attempt from the researcher to avoid operating from this position, striving

for an equal relationship with a collaborative approach. When endeavouring to replicate the same egalitarian relationship with interviewees, the researcher followed steps outlined by Birks and Mills (2015):

- allocating time for rapport building prior to commencing the interview;
- using interpersonal skills employed within consultation e.g. active listening, empathy, reflection, open body language, reframing and reflecting;
- maintaining a warm and welcoming tone of voice;
- incorporating laughter and light-heartedness where appropriate;
- allowing participants the time and space to express themselves and share what they felt was important;
- maintaining a reflective stance and a meta-awareness of self-reflection whilst remaining present and attentive;
- offering the participants the opportunity to ask questions or share their own reflections on matters discussed.

### **3.9 Data analysis**

#### **3.9.1 Transcription**

To prepare the data for analysis, interviews were transcribed by the researcher. Recognising that the transcription is a product of the interaction between the recording and the transcriber, and acknowledging that when making a transcript the end product is two steps away from the original interview experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the researcher immersed themselves in the data to create the closest representation possible. The researcher listened to the recordings multiple times and transcribed the data by hand to ensure that the substance of the interviews, including the implicit meanings and shared perceptions created during dual-experienced conversations, were captured in line with GT methodology (Oliver et al., 2005).

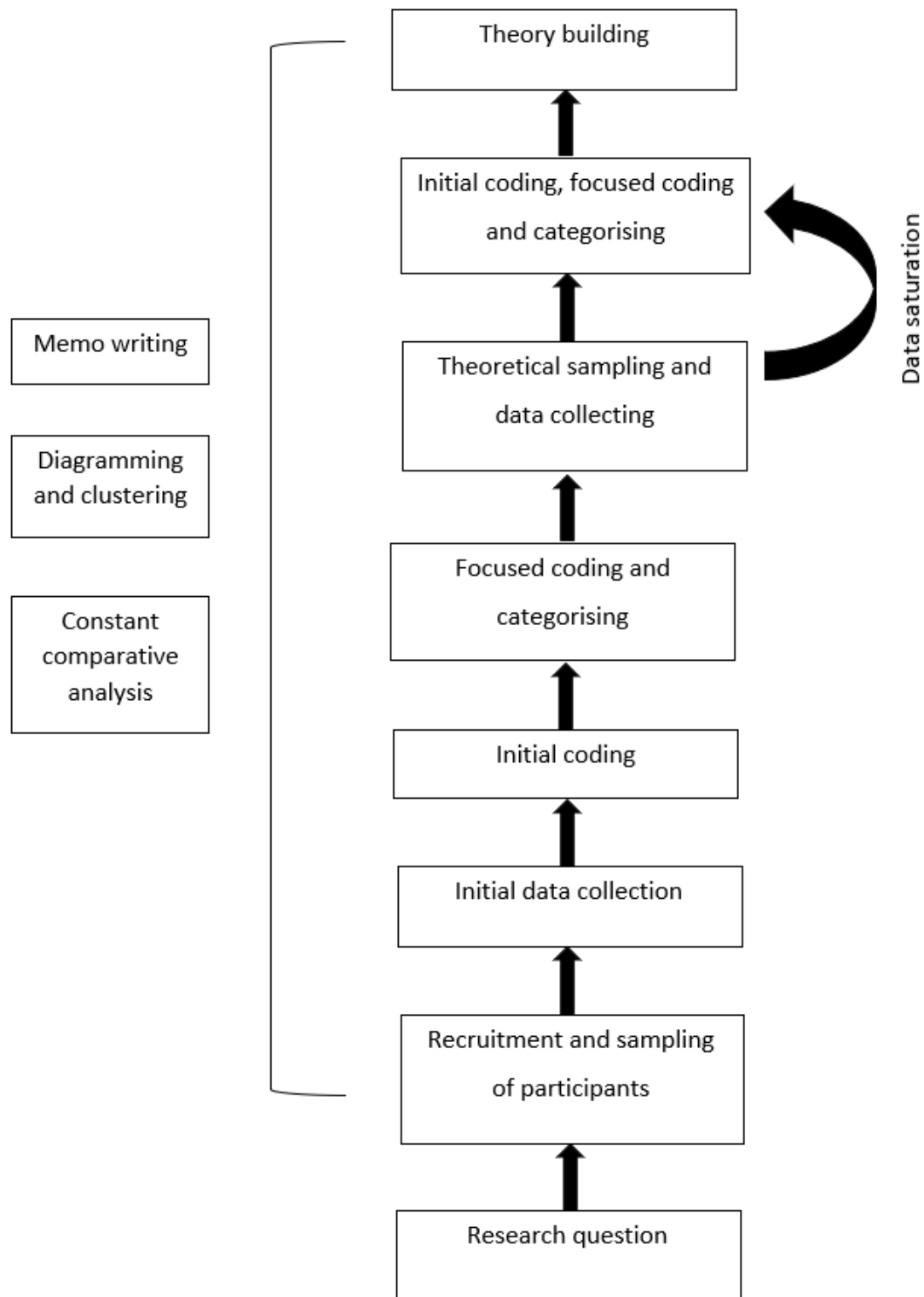
#### **3.9.2 Constructivist GT analysis**

GT supports researchers in the process of data analysis by providing explicit guidance procedures (Charmaz, 2006; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Coding is a process within constructive GT that is considered essential and is a means of identifying important words, groups of words or phrases that are labelled accordingly (Birks & Mills, 2015). Labels are attached to segments of data that illustrate and summarise what each segment represents (Charmaz, 2006). Coding provides a fundamental link between data collection and data analysis that supports the



researcher to explore what is happening in the data, define its meaning and begin to construct a theory (Charmaz, 2014). The current research followed constructivist GT procedures outlined by Charmaz (2014) with analysis beginning with initial coding followed by focused coding and categorising. A visual representation of the stages and processes involved in data collection and analysis using constructivist GT is outlined in Figure 3.1.

Unlike alternative qualitative methods in which analysis begins once all data has been collected, GT adopts an iterative approach to collection and analysis (Robson & McCartan, 2016). This involves analysis commencing as soon as data is collected with coding taking place before further data is obtained (Birks & Mills, 2015). The researcher managed this aim with four of the five interviews. However, following the recommendation for meeting interviewees at a time and date that was most suitable for them (Braun & Clarke, 2013), the gap between the second and third interview did not give enough time for transcription and subsequent analysis to take place before the next interview. To compensate, the researcher listened to the interview multiple times and noted down broad themes to guide the next interview schedule. All other interviews followed the process outlined in Figure 3.1 with the final schedule enabling theoretical saturation (see section 3.5.4).



**Figure 3.1 - A visual representation of the stages and processes involved in data collection and analysis within the current study, adapted from Charmaz (2014).**

### 3.9.3 Initial coding

Charmaz's (2014) constructivist GT states that the first stage in data analysis is initial coding. Within initial coding, the researcher studies fragments of data identifying important words or phrases, attributing a label (Birks & Mills, 2015). This fracturing of the data enables the researcher to make comparisons, identify phenomena and begin to recognise patterns (Birks & Mills, 2015). Initial coding involves the researcher interacting closely with the data by coding lines and segments to capture meaning and support analysis (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Within initial coding, the researcher is advised to move quickly to open up the data to generate conceptual possibilities (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). Researchers are encouraged to use simple and short codes, and as many as possible, to protect against data being forced to fit codes (Charmaz, 2006). It requires reflexivity on behalf of the researcher to ensure that they are undergoing self-interrogation around the labels they generate and the analytical reasons behind them, accounting for the influences on their thinking that brought them to that point (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Charmaz (2014) stated that line-by-line coding is one of the main distinguishing features of GT. Line-by-line coding is recommended for novice grounded theorists (Charmaz, 2014) and supports researchers to examine in detail whilst simultaneously asking questions of the data and themselves (Birks & Mills, 2015). It encourages the researcher to examine how past experience can influence their world view and how they interpret the data (Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding supports the researcher to identify gaps and new lines of enquiry to inform focus in future interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Initial line-by-line coding was used by the researcher for the analysis of interview data within the present study.

Charmaz (2006, 2014) advises coding data using language associated with actions, or words that reflect actions, wherever possible within initial coding. Coding in this way is referred to as using gerunds (where a noun is turned into a verb). Applying gerunds keeps researchers close to the data, supporting them to explore what is happening, to reduce the possibility of making conceptual leaps and adoption of theories before sufficient analytic work has taken place (Charmaz, 2014). Initial codes, ground from the data, are provisional and remain open to further analytic possibilities and future rewording (Charmaz, 2014). In vivo codes (when quoted words are used as labels themselves) were used where appropriate (Birks & Mills,

2015) to succinctly summarise the experience or views of a participant. Charmaz (2014; p120) advises the following within initial coding:

- Remain open
- Stay close to the data
- Keep your codes simple and precise
- Construct short codes
- Preserve actions
- Compare data with data
- Move quickly through the data

The researcher coded using an Excel spreadsheet to support organisation of codes. The coding was done with speed to support spontaneity of ideas with awareness maintained that codes generated within this first stage of analysis were provisional (Charmaz, 2014). The flexibility awarded within GT enabled the researcher to add multiple codes to data that conveyed numerous meanings and temporarily leave data that they felt unable to code (Charmaz, 2014). This data was re-analysed with a clear mind to support the generation of new insight and ideas. Initial codes were not considered exhaustive and were reflective of the researcher's initial interaction and interpretation of the data. An example of initial coding within the present study can be seen in Appendix 20.

### **3.9.4 Constant comparative analysis**

Throughout the analytical process, the researcher remained open to new interpretations with codes adapted or new codes created from fresh insights emerging as more data was collected and areas of enquiry followed. This inductive process of ongoing comparison of data is referred to as constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2006, 2014). Through an iterative process, new data was compared and old data was reviewed with comparisons occurring within and between interviews. This method supported the uncovering of properties that led to the discovery of underlying concepts and theories (Charmaz, 2014). Constant comparative analysis continued throughout all stages of the process until a grounded theory was integrated (Birks & Mills, 2015).

### **3.9.5 Focused coding and categorising**

Following the initial coding stage, the researcher embarked upon focused coding and categorising which meant scrutinising, sorting and synthesising the initially coded

data. Focused coding involved the researcher looking for repeated similarities or patterns within initially coded data (Charmaz, 2014), seeking to define the most important codes as focused codes, making decisions around which initial codes were considered to hold the greatest significance for the research question (Charmaz, 2014). The process of focused coding guided the researcher towards a more abstract level of interpretation by synthesising and analysing large units of data (Birks & Mills, 2015). Appendix 21 demonstrates the focused coding of the interview extract used in Appendix 20.

Focused coding led to codes being grouped to form higher-level concepts called categories (Birks & Mills, 2015). This involved studying the codes and asking what analytic story the group of codes was indicating (Charmaz, 2014). Focused codes that synthesised multiple layers of meaning or held higher conceptual values were raised to tentative categories (Charmaz, 2014). These tentative categories were tested against large batches of data to review their analytical strength (Charmaz, 2006). This abstraction of concepts into categories raised the conceptual level of analysis from description to a more abstract, theoretical level (Charmaz, 2014). The researcher tried to define the properties of a category and its relation to other categories (Charmaz, 2014) whilst continually applying the constant comparison method asking if the categories held up, if they were able to account for the data, or querying if an alternative was needed (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

### **3.9.6 Theoretical sampling**

Theoretical sampling is a type of GT sampling where participants are recruited to support constant comparative analysis (Birks & Mills, 2015), specifically to develop an existing category or theory (Charmaz, 2014). Operating within the practical limitations and time pressures of the doctoral thesis, theoretical sampling formed part of the later iterative process for the present study, guiding their final interview when seeking to further explore gaps in data (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Tentative hypotheses had been formed through memoing with questions raised during initial analysis, which were tested through the later interviews. This abductive reasoning guided theoretical sampling through further data collection and analysis (Charmaz, 2014).

Following analysis within focused coding and the categorising process, two categories required further exploration: 'parents having to fight' and 'knowledge' (see memo 32, Appendix 22). Considering the challenges experienced around participant

recruitment (refer to section 3.5.3), the researcher pursued theoretical sampling by contacting two neighbouring authorities. Recruitment and procedures replicated those originally used in purposive sampling and a further participant was secured from a neighbouring LA. An interview schedule was created that reflected the focus aims and was flexible, in line with previous methodology, where the participant was free to raise aspects not anticipated by the researcher (Appendix 17). The semi-structured interview took place at the participant's home with the interview audio recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Data was analysed using the process outlined in Figure 3.1. Codes were generated and examined against existing data providing additional analytical consideration to the categories which required further exploration. No new categories emerged from the data following theoretical sampling.

### **3.9.7 Memos**

The process of coding and developing categories is supported by the writing of memos (Maz, 2013). Memos are informal written records that capture an idea or an aspect of researcher's thinking (Charmaz, 2006). They have been considered to be the foundation of quality in GT (Birks & Mills, 2015), providing explanation and discussion of the thought processes, building transparency and trustworthiness (Maz, 2013).

In the current research, memos were used to ask questions, consider the potential meanings of interview statements and compare concepts identified in interview transcripts (Maz, 2013). Memos supported the researcher to reflect on the interviews, codes and subsequent analysis and make sense of the collected data (Charmaz, 2014). Memoing in the current study (Appendix 22) included ideas around initial codes which led to analytic and methodological scrutiny as well as comparisons between fragments of data leading to the final categories forming the construction of the study's grounded theory. Memo writing supported the researcher in their reflexivity, keeping them involved in analysis and close to the data, increasing the level of abstraction of their ideas and supporting their overall research process (Charmaz, 2014).

### **3.9.8 Diagramming and clustering**

Clustering is a visual, and flexible approach of organising and understanding data (Charmaz, 2006). Diagramming is a means of generating images or visual

representations of ideas to provide an additional method for framing or interpreting data (Charmaz, 2014). Within GT, diagramming and clustering support data analysis to generate conceptual categories facilitating sense-making through the identification of relationships within and between them, deepening understanding of their scope and direction (Charmaz, 2014).

Clustering within Excel was used to sort and organise focused codes generated across all five data sets in the current study. Clustering and diagramming techniques established relationships between the focused codes to generate broad, collective categories (Appendix 23). Focused codes were transferred from Excel as PDF documents to Nvivo software where broad categories were synthesised to become final focused codes and conceptual categories (see Chapter 4). Examples of diagramming in the current study can be seen in Appendix 24.

Diagramming and clustering methods were used flexibly within analysis resulting in the addition, removal, collapsing, expanding and rearranging of codes to support the researcher in the generation and analytical consideration of the properties of conceptual categories.

### **3.10 Chapter summary**

This chapter outlined the details of the methodology for the current study. Philosophical position, rationale for qualitative design and the employment of constructivist GT data collection and analysis procedures were presented. An evaluation of the study's quality and ethical considerations are also included. The next chapter will present the data and findings for the current study.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Introduction

The following chapter presents the analysis of data obtained through semi-structured interviews using the rigorous and immersive constructivist GT processes described in section 3.9, as outlined by Charmaz (2014).

The results will be presented by first highlighting each overarching 'conceptual category' (higher-level concepts discovered by constant comparing of theoretically sampled data) followed by an exploration of 'focused codes' (repeated similarities or patterns within initially coded data) from which each category was constructed. To support analysis, excerpts from the interview transcripts are provided.

Categories were generated using analysis of data from four purposively sampled participants and one final theoretically sampled participant, where two categories required further exploration (section 3.9.6). Final analysis of all data led to the construction of seven categories identified as having the highest analytical value by demonstrating overriding significance and relevance to the research question: *What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?* A full list of focused codes that were synthesised and analysed leading to the final focused codes underpinning each category can be seen in Appendix 25. The seven constructed categories are outlined in Table 4.4.

Category number	Conceptual category
Category 1	Emotional strain creating a barrier to EPS engagement
Category 2	<i>Feeling uninformed - unless you're in the know, you can't access that help (in vivo code)</i>
Category 3	<i>It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all (in vivo code)</i>
Category 4	Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle - schools acting as gatekeepers to support
Category 5	Elusive EP role and the unknown reality – contrasts in expectations and involvement.
Category 6	Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement



Category 7	Parents know what they want: earlier support, clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness
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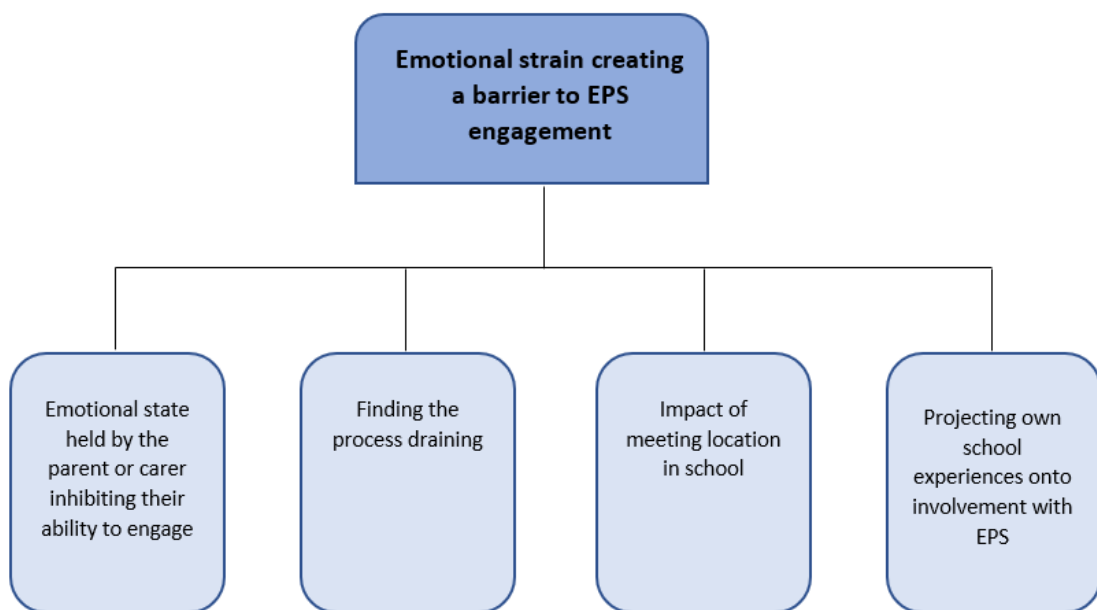
**Table 4.4 – A table illustrating the seven conceptual categories constructed during data analysis**

Categories are presented in turn with the understanding that they should be perceived as interactional and should not be seen as separate or be considered in isolation (Charmaz, 2014). Interactions between categories are acknowledged, highlighting their significance as part of the total analysis in answering the research question.

Within some conceptual categories there are focuses on wider SEND systems which are not limited to EPSs but were significant within parental experiences. Whilst the term ‘barrier’ is used, the researcher remained mindful that all participants in the present study were able to engage with an EPS. ‘Barrier’ was language that occurred in the interviews when identifying areas of challenge and development for engagement and will be used to represent views in this chapter.

**4.2 Category 1: Emotional strain creating a barrier to EPS engagement**

All participants described experiencing emotional challenges prior to or during their engagement with an LA EPS and expressed that the emotional strain impacted their ability to engage. Figure 4.1 provides a visual representation of the overarching conceptualised category and final focused codes from which it was constructed.



**Figure 4.1 – Category 1: Emotional strain creating a barrier to EPS engagement.**

#### **4.2.1 Focused code: Emotional state held by the parent or carer inhibiting their ability to engage**

The emotional state of the parent whilst engaging with an EPS was referred to by all five participants. Participants reflected how their emotional position inhibited their ability to engage with discussions as effectively as they would have hoped.

Participants described experiencing a sense of being overwhelmed which impacted their involvement and ability to hear information being shared. This is illustrated in the following excerpt:

*[...] sometimes you don't always take everything in because there's emotions, is what I'm trying to say. The EP could have said stuff about her involvement and how prolonged... but I haven't absorbed it all because they're quite emotional meetings. I could nearly cry now thinking about it, but I just meant like, I'm not saying that it wasn't said. Because you're just... you're emotional and you sort of can't see... so you don't always take in the information.*

Participant 2, p.12, 458-463

#### **4.2.2 Focused code: Finding the process draining**

The emotional difficulty participants experienced led to them finding the process of engagement highly draining. Parents described experiencing significant upset prior to their involvement with an EPS which included grieving for their child and a feeling of battling for support amongst other areas outlined in Categories 4 and 6. The challenges from prior experiences and subsequent emotional upset during EP involvement were referenced by all participants and led to the generation of this focused code.

*[...] you can get quite emotional and... not that anyone's said anything bad... It's just that realisation sometimes, especially with when you have... for me... It is quite hard to understand that I've got a child with additional needs... It's been quite hard.*

Participant 2, P12, 472-474

*And I was a bit like, so why has every day of his school life and my life with him at school been so traumatic? If there's not enough evidence here for extra support, why is it all so hard?*

Participant 1, p.18, 675-677

#### **4.2.3 Focused codes: Impact of meeting location in school and projecting own school experiences onto involvement with EPS**

Within their interview accounts, participants talked about the impact of meeting in school and them projecting their own experiences of school onto their involvement with an EPS. Some parents talked about the negative experiences they had encountered with their child's school (linked to Category 4) which impacted their perception of the EP role and the EP's positioning (linked to Category 5). Others found it generated a power imbalance in favour of the school in an already emotional and draining situation, inhibiting their ability to engage further. One parent shared that she reverted to her own childhood and reflected on both the impact of the meeting location being in school and how the process pushed her to project and relive her own school experiences onto EP involvement.

*[...] and if they're anything like me as a parent, having been at a Catholic school my whole life as well, I quite often would go into these meetings and it would just bring me back to when I was at school and I'd just be really quiet and just let them take the lead. I felt like I was a kid again in that school environment as well. So, you know, even if you could do it outside of the school grounds not always after meetings in the head teacher's office because I think for some parents as well, you just feel a bit... "Oh god... This is really intense."*

Participant 1, p.19, 719-724

*[...] because it got to the point for me, going up and down that school hill was just traumatic. Always. And then you're bumping into other parents on the hill and they all know "ohh God," y'know, "she's going in for another meeting," y'know, all of that adds to the anxiety.*

Participant 1, p.19, 743-745

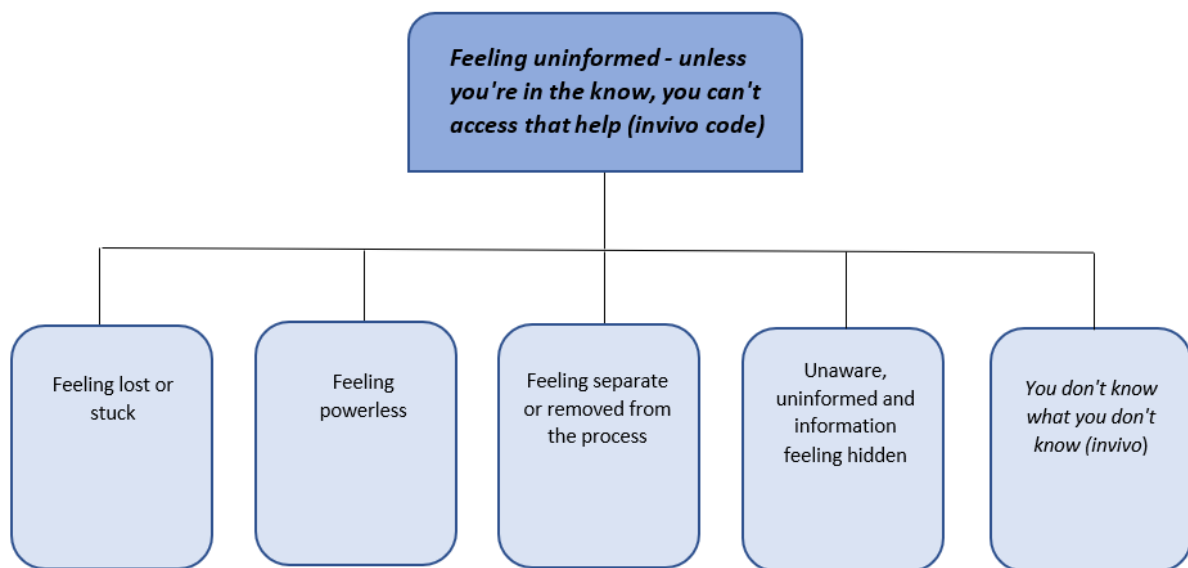
#### **4.3 Category 2: Feeling uninformed - *unless you're in the know, you can't access that help (in vivo code)***

The title of Category 2 was constructed from an in vivo code as a direct quote from Participant 5 and the first sentence she said to the researcher when meeting:

*Unless you're in the know, you can't access that help...*

Participant 5, p.1, 6

Feeling uninformed was the strongest narrative throughout participants' accounts with all recounting it as a barrier to accessing, and subsequently, engaging with an EPS. When initial coding Participant 1's transcript, this repeated undertone of feeling uninformed was noted in memo 6 (Appendix 22) and became part of future interview schedules. All participants described the experience of feeling uninformed, of holding an awareness that they were uninformed and talked about the sense of feeling lost and powerless as a result. The focused codes used to construct Category 2 are presented in Figure 4.2.



**Figure 4.2 – Category 2: Feeling uninformed - *unless you're in the know, you can't access that help (in vivo code)***

#### **4.3.1 Focused codes: feeling lost or stuck and feeling powerless**

The two focused codes 'feeling lost or stuck' and 'feeling powerless' appeared separately and together and, through constant comparative analysis, presented as intertwined. Whilst parents felt lost and stuck within the processes of accessing an EPS and with wider SEND support, this inability to find direction left them feeling powerless. The researcher repeatedly reviewed the transcripts, initial codes and focused codes and concluded that they needed to be kept partially separated as concepts but be represented within the same focused code to acknowledge that they did not occur in isolation.

*[...] there was times when I literally felt like I was on the floor, like... I didn't know where to turn. And obviously because of all the years of it, just continuing and continuing and continuing... I was a bit like... just kind of a bit*

*lost. Felt like I was in no man's land with it all. And yet, just that again, I guess, not knowing what you could ask for at school, what can I ask to be put in place? What are my rights here as the parent? Because I didn't feel like I kind of had any.*

Participant 1, p.17, 638-642

*And it was like I just don't, I don't know what else to do. Where do we go from here? And it was just a case of all the teachers making the decisions and no extra support coming in.*

Participant 5, p.11, 374-376

#### **4.3.2 Focused code: Feeling separate or removed from the process**

Participants spoke about feeling separate or removed from the processes leading up to meeting with the EPs. All participants were involved with the EP once the EP involvement began, but parents felt separate or removed from the process up until then. This links to Category 4 where parents were requesting EP involvement for prolonged periods prior to securing the intervention and felt separate from the process as if it was permitted and done to them, rather than for or with them. One parent spoke about a conversation the SENCO had with an EP about their child, with the planning of the EP intervention decided without the parent's involvement:

*I've been a step away from it the whole time and not being asked or not had the opportunity because obviously I would have been involved and I would have been happy to speak to them [school and EP]. I would have liked to have been... have had more involvement because I've been trying to push for that...*

Participant 2, P.3, 91-95

Similarly, another parent felt removed from decision making and processes prior to the EPs arrival:

*Who gets contacted and what is my involvement as a parent in this? Because I think a lot of the things that were brought in, I never knew anything really about it. It was almost like it was done behind closed doors.*

Participant 1, p.11, 406-408

#### 4.3.3 Focused code: Unaware, uninformed and information feeling hidden

As illustrated with the description of the overall category, all participants experienced a feeling of being uninformed within their experiences with an EPS. The focused codes within this wider category all depict different ways this happened for parents and this focused code captured their experiences of feeling uninformed and how the lack of information available to them created an overall unawareness of the process.

*I think it's just a really difficult with SEND kids. It's just... unless you're an expert as a parent, you haven't got a clue.*

Participant 4, p.16, 630-631

The lack of awareness described in this quote shows how she positions the requirement of being an expert as the only means of having sufficient awareness to navigate the process. This links to Category 1 around the draining process that parents face when accessing support for a child that is considered SEND.

*I'm not aware of what I could access or that I could interact with an EP. I had no idea. I've never been spoken to about anything like that. I'd have thought that I couldn't ever speak to an EP.*

Participant 2, p.10, 401-404

This quote depicting the participant being unaware and uninformed of the process also ties into her feeling separate from the process as illustrated in the focused code above. She was unaware that the process could involve her and felt uninformed as information of the process had not been shared.

Information feeling hidden applied to situations where parents felt uninformed through information not being available:

*What's school's responsibility? What's mine? What's yours? I don't know. I'm going into this whole thing and it's like a minefield and I'm wondering about in the dark because I just know. How do you reach out? Who do you reach out to? It wasn't made... and I don't know if it is mine... It wasn't made clear...*

Participant 2, p.15, 593-595

It also spanned to parents feeling information was hidden around the involvement itself:

Researcher: *I wonder... do parents know? When schools say "we're gonna get the EP involved," do parents know what that's going to look like?*

Participant 1: *No, I had no idea. I had absolutely no idea. And like I said, she came in, she sat there, she took some notes, she gave some suggestions. And then that was it.*

Participant 1, p.10, 387-390

Researcher: *So did you know how long the EP would be involved for? What they would do with Ben? Did you know they would meet him?*

Participant 5: *No. No one said anything. He [the EP] said, "I've chatted to him." I was like, "oh really?" I thought he was gonna assess from afar.*

Participant 5, p.6, 194-196

#### **4.3.4 Focused code: *You don't know what you don't know (in vivo code)***

This focused code was an in vivo code and a direct quote from Participant 4. This made the narrative of being uninformed and a lack of clarity deeper where it became a potentially disabling aspect. Not only were parents uninformed around the process with which they were trying to engage, parents were limited before that in that they did not have the awareness that information was lacking.

*[...] it never occurred to me to ask. Why would I? You don't know what you don't know. Maybe if, I mean, I don't know what processes schools have in place, but if you're put on the SEN register... Would it be acceptable or just even to explain that these are the kind of additional services? I don't know if that's the schtick. I don't know. But even just to know that it's there, it's like anything in life... you don't know you don't know.*

Participant 4, p.17, 648-652

*Parents don't know what questions they need to be asking because we don't know who you're supposed to reach out to [...] Parents don't know what they can go in armed with. [...] Parents don't know what they don't know. And I think they like it that way, don't they?*

Participant 1, p.19/20, 717-718/764/766

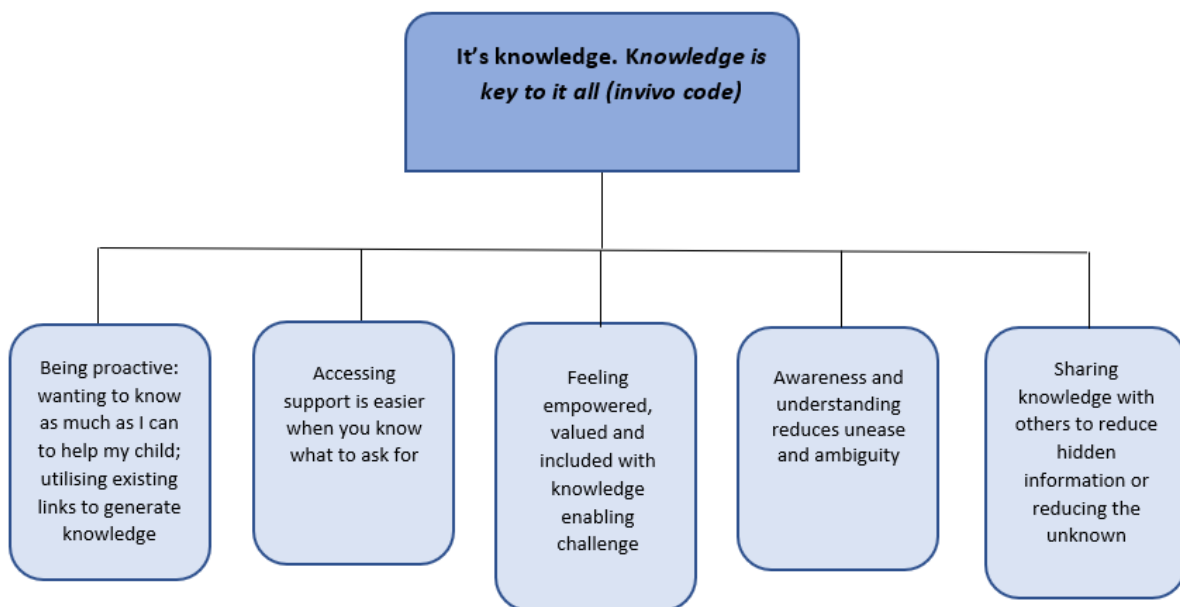
This notion of hidden information, in which parents are unaware that information is even available and suggesting that another party would want or benefit from parents sitting in the unknown links with the perceived battles parents recounted that are captured in Category 4.

**4.4 Category 3: *It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all (in vivo code)***

Strongly linked to Category 2, Category 3 is named from an in vivo code as a direct quote from Participant 4. Participant 4 captured the counter position to Category 2 where, if a lack of information is identified as a significant barrier to accessing and engaging with EPS support, knowledge becomes the requirement to counteract this. Whilst Categories 2 and 3 are closely linked, parents' constructions of the two were distinct due to the positioning parents held: Category 2 was a barrier whereas Category 3 enabled success.

*I mean, it [knowledge] opens up a whole other sort of aspects of life that you never knew existed, doesn't it? It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all.*

Participant 4, p.17, 652-654



**Figure 4.3 – Category 3: *It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all (in vivo code)***



#### **4.4.1 Focused codes: Being proactive: wanting to know as much as I can to help my child; utilising existing links to generate knowledge**

The researcher was interested in exploring how parents knew about Educational Psychology when information around it seemed unavailable. All five participants spoke about being proactive and using their own means to increase their knowledge and awareness. Participants conducted their own research, applied knowledge gained through other support services and used existing links within the field to increase their understanding.

*I've done a lot of reading up on things anyway leading up to this because now we suspect that she's maybe got autism so I've spent hours reading things online and looking at things. So I'm quite well informed now.*

Participant 3, p.7, 207-209

*And I was doing everything I could, you know? Like I said, I did that Incredible Years course and I did it back-to-back. I then did the teenage one straight after that. I'd joined the ADHD support group. I did as much learning as I could.*

Participant 1, p.10, 361-363

*I think there's a lot of confusion for parents. Like, you know, I feel like I've known a little bit more because I work vaguely in education. I've heard of EPs and I've heard of an EHCP. I know what the support is and know what the actual reason for it is but there must be a lot of people that haven't got a clue. And it's daunting, it's really daunting to think. You know, it's a very unclear process from a parent's point of view.*

Participant 2, 15, 604-609

#### **4.4.2 Focused code: Accessing support is easier when you know what to ask for**

Participant 2 describing her awareness of EPs occurring through her employment links to the focused code 'accessing support is easier when you know what to ask for.' Participants 1 and 3 illustrated the link between this focused code and 'using existing links to access knowledge' where the knowledge they gained enabled them to request and access support.

*Researcher: Did you know what an Educational Psychologist was or what their role was?*

Participant 3: Yes. I did, I knew because my mum worked in schools and we've got quite a lot of people that we know of, like family wise, who work within schools, so I know of the roles and that's why we kept asking for it... For the EP. So we knew that we needed that input.

Participant 3, p.5, 134-138

Researcher: So you'd ask for EP support, how did you know they were a thing? How were you aware they existed?

Participant 1: I think it probably just came to my thoughts having gone through his ADHD assessment and just learning about that word 'psychologist,' basically. And then thinking back through the process of him going through school that an EP had never been brought in, and I started thinking, surely that's the person that watches him for a day, looks at the environment that he's in, sees what suits what doesn't suit, where he struggles where he doesn't. Because I'd had that with the ADHD assessment.

Participant 1, p.11-12, 425-432

#### **4.4.3 Focused codes: Feeling empowered and knowledge enabling challenge**

Participants spoke about knowledge empowering them, enabling them to challenge views or positions they did not feel were in the best interests of their child.

*[...] because if I'd not had James, her brother, then I wouldn't have known and we'd be a year later and I wouldn't have kept pushing. I wouldn't have complained to school. I wouldn't have had this.*

Participant 3, p.10, 322-324

*I said I understand that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing but I've been reading about funding for inclusion so I think will Henry will qualify. [School] "No. He won't qualify because he's meeting all his targets. There's no point even thinking about it." But then I mentioned the funding again and explained what I'd read. Well then 24 hours later the SENCO rang me and said, "we've had an SLT meeting this morning we think we're gonna put Henry forward for the lower tier of funding."*

Participant 4, p.9/9, 316-318/326-329

This empowerment from knowledge for parents to step forward and bring challenge links to Category 4.

#### **4.4.4 Focused code: Awareness and understanding reduces unease and ambiguity**

Considering the quotes from Category 2 where participants spoke about feeling in “no man’s land” and “wandering around in the dark,” the researcher explored the counter point again and found that participants with increased awareness and understanding experienced reduced levels of ambiguity and anxiety.

*Researcher: Did you know what the EP involvement process was going to look like?*

*Participant 3: Not initially because... Obviously my mum working in a school, it was always the EP coming in to see the child so, initially, for them not to see her... I was surprised and I thought it would go on for a while.*

*Researcher: So did that awareness change?*

*Participant 3: Yes, I was given a leaflet when it was booked about what it would involve and stuff...so I knew that it was just a one-off and that outlined what the expectations were cos I got the leaflet before.*

Participant 3, p. 5-6, 162-174

#### **4.4.5 Focused code: Sharing knowledge with others to reduce hidden information or reducing the unknown**

Participants spoke about the difficulties they encountered around a lack of knowledge and reflected the positive differences that occurred when they had increased awareness of information. This led to them generating support networks of their own, sharing information, giving tips to other parents, becoming the knowledgeable informant for others in a similarly unaware situation.

*I guess it was that from the very beginning of not really knowing what, as a parent, I needed to be doing and I just let school take the lead. Whereas now I have so many of my clients or other parents or whatever saying you know, ‘we’re having issues at school’ and I can say, “well we had cluster involvement, we had this involvement, we did this, we asked for that. You*

*can ask for this, you can ask for that. Chase up this. Search up this course. Go on this course.”*

Participant 1, p. 16, 618-624

*And I was talking to another mum whose daughter had a diagnosis in Henry's year and she talked about going to the GP. She said, “I'm sorry you are going to have to as well.” She said, “because, you know, apparently it's the only way.” So she got told or she knew, I said, “well, nobody told me!” So off we went to the GP.*

Participant 4, p.16, 626-630

#### **4.5 Category 4: Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle – schools acting as gatekeepers to support**

The researcher gave significant levels of consideration to this category (see memos 32, 41, 43, 44, 46 and 47 in Appendix 22). This category was the second strongest narrative within the data analysis with all five participants describing experiencing a fight or battle with schools to be heard and access support for their children. The researcher recognises that, the battle to which participants were referring was not with an EPS, but rather with the educational setting. However, due to the frequency with which this concept occurred and its prominent position across all five accounts, the researcher could not justify excluding it from the results and potential contribution to the generation of a grounded theory. In addition, the battles were positioned by participants as barriers to accessing and subsequently engaging with an EPS which supported the decision to position this as a conceptual category.

There was a narrative amongst participants around schools acting in a position of gatekeeper and either enabling or being a barrier to accessing support from an EPS.

*Like even last year it was like when I asked for the EP what I got told was “what do you hope to get out of EP involvement?” And I tried to explain, “for her to want to come to school and not have terrible mental health...” and they were like, “Oh well, I don't think we're at that stage yet.”*

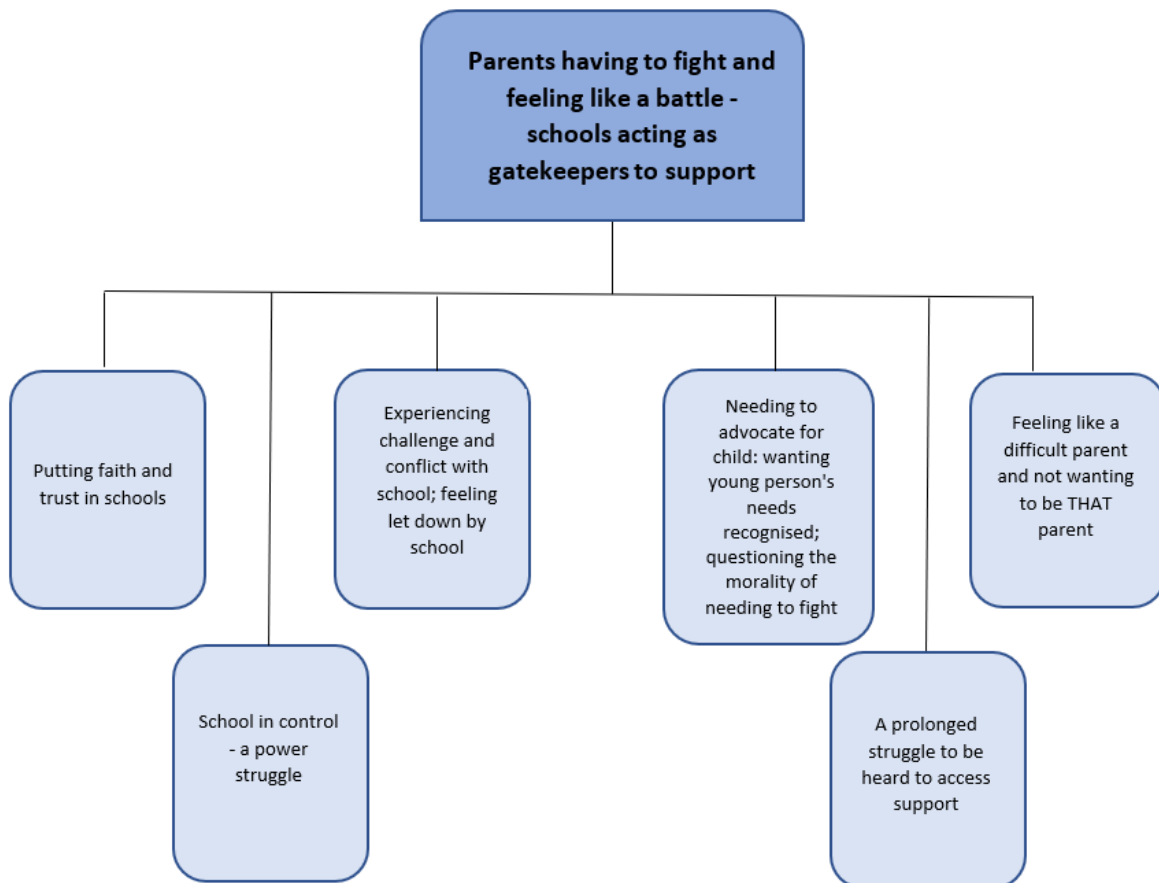
Participant 3, p.8, 263-265

Participant 5 described her ongoing EP involvement coming to a sudden stop at the point at which she decided to electively home educate.

Researcher: And have you had any involvement with an Educational Psychologist since he was at school?

Participant 5: No, I can't access it apparently is what I've been told. I don't think it's entirely true, but that's what I've been told. Because it needs to be through school.

Participant 5, p.2, 67-69



**Figure 4.4 – Category 4: Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle**

#### **4.5.1 Focused code: Putting faith and trust in schools**

*I put my trust in them, I trust them... because you have to...if you go to parents evening they say, “well, he's a bit behind, but he's catching up” and that's it. I took it because you would... I took that on value. And I read with him and I'm like, “well, he's not progressing with his reading” and they were like, “yeah, but he's doing better.” And I'm like, “alright, OK, I'll trust you that you, you're the expert.” You studied this. You're teaching all these kids, you know? I don't know. Unless you're a primary school teacher*

*yourself, you're not going to spot that, and sometimes your blinkers are on anyway.*

Participant 2, p.14, 557-564

This quote and focused code links with Category 2. Parents talked about being reliant upon schools and putting their faith and trust in them, considering schools knowledgeable or, as the parent above positioned them, experts. Even though participants spoke about holding concerns, their faith and trust placed in school overrode them.

Participant 3 felt knowledgeable in the field of education and spoke about expecting to trust schools and finding that she did not due to her own knowledge. Linking to Category 3, she reflected that, without the knowledge, she would have taken what school said without dispute.

*And I had that like benchmark to work from. Whereas if I'd not had him, I probably would have trusted them. And it's just me. I'm... I'm overreacting. I'm the problem... not... cos you expect to trust someone. You send them to school trusting that they're going to have that input, and that's the role they're in.*

Participant 3, p.9, 309-312

#### **4.5.2 Focused codes: Experiencing challenge and conflict with school; feeling let down by school**

All participants described experiencing challenge and conflict with their child's school and feeling let down as a result. Participant 4 spoke about experiencing conflict with school from school's position of experiencing difficulties with them as parents.

*I think sometimes school struggle with me and husband and I don't go in like all... y'know. But because we can express ourselves, and because we'd advocate for Henry, sometimes they find us difficult.*

Participant 4, p.8, 283-286

Participants talked about experiencing conflict with school and parents raising challenge based on the conflict they were experiencing.

*That teacher when she said, "is it not just barefaced insolence and rudeness?" Those were the words that she chose. She said them directly to me, as close as you are sat to me now, and how I restrained myself..? It was kind of like that [fingernails on the table], you know? I mean, I just thought, 'how dare you?' And I just said, "well that might be your interpretation of the situation, but it's certainly not mine."*

Participant 4, p.7, 267-276

Participant 1 reportedly experienced conflict between school staff opinions and explained how that hindered support accessibility for her son.

*I went, "you know... Back in year two when the SENCO was his teacher, and I know that Miss B has done everything that she can for Michael. But the head of the school was asking for assessments back then and the SENCO was saying no. And three years later we're at the stage where we've had to have assessments. So we've not really gone down the right paths. Where is all the support? Where is Ed Psych in all of this?"*

Participant 1, p.8, 286-290

#### **4.5.3 Focused codes: Needing to advocate for child: wanting young person's needs recognised; questioning the morality of needing to fight**

All five participants spoke about championing for their child and needing to advocate for their support.

*[...] if me and Husband don't stick up for him and say it, who is going to fight his corner, who is going to do it?*

Participant 4, p.8, 312-313.

Participants also talked about having a different construction of their child's needs compared to school and that they felt they needed to purposefully pursue school to acknowledge the needs that their child had.

*I had photos, I had videos and my mum had picked him up once before and she said, "you know, he's completely different." You'd pick up from school and he was silent the entire way home... didn't speak. He used to go into sort of like a shutdown. I was telling them... they were like, "oh, it's*

*not like that here.” [...] And when I continued to ask she said “are you a first time parent?” [sharp intake of breath] And I said “no, actually I'm not.” It was one of those you want to take a breath and go [growl] “and calm.”*

Participant 5, p.7, 245-250

All participants spoke about battles in having their child's needs recognised and all insinuated the exasperation they felt with this. Participant 2 gave a poignant explanation of her exasperation by questioning the morality of the battles she had faced and was expecting to face in the future.

*Everyone's like “it's a fight, you're fighting to fight. Be ready for the fight.” And I'm like, “why?” You know he's got a need! It shouldn't be like that. Why should it be a fight? Peter's got a need, why should I be fighting for anything?*

Participant 2, p.15, 601-604

#### **4.5.4 Focused codes: Feeling like a difficult parent and not wanting to be THAT parent**

Parents spoke about an inner conflict they experienced around wanting to advocate and fight for their child whilst, simultaneously, not wanting to be perceived as a difficult parent.

*I don't want to be one of those parents. I say that line first. I'll say it all the time. I always do, it's always there. Say that first. “I don't wanna be THAT parent.”*

Participant 4, p.8. 313-315

Being ‘that parent’ seems to be a common narrative that all participants experienced, suggesting that this persona exists as part of the wider parents-in-education culture. This seemed to be further reinforced when Participant 1 recounted the school's surprise when her shift in attitude occurred, inferring that school placed value on parents being ‘easier to work with.’

*I was getting really frustrated. It was the first time I'd ever kind of got animated with school and I think they were taken aback by that as well because I'd always just kind of been really placid and they'd always said, you know, “you'd been one of the easiest parents to work with.”*

Participant 1, p.19, 753-756



Participant 3 recounted experiencing school as a barrier to support, feeling that they were denying her access whilst simultaneously being made to feel like a hindrance, causing her potential self-doubt.

*[...] but school wouldn't refer. They were almost like a barrier. That it was more like denying that... Making me feel like I was being over the top asking. I was being 'that parent' of my 'precious' daughter, but... You know, you can see when something's wrong and, well, I think they make you doubt yourself.*

Participant 3, p.9, 292-295

The barrier Participant 3 described links to the next focused code where participants positioned schools as gatekeepers to support and access to an EPS.

#### **4.5.5 Focused code: School in control - a power struggle**

Participants gave the researcher a collective feeling of school being in control and parents struggling against this for access to support.

*You feel like you're one voice amongst quite a well-established... you know, especially when you've got a school where the teachers are every established. They've all been there a long, long time.*

Participant 1, p.14, 541-543

Participants also spoke about schools extending their gatekeeper position, holding control over the information that was shared.

*[...] So a lot of the things that I've had are passed on from what the school has said. I don't know, I don't know if it's right or how I would check.*

Participant 2, p.2, 6-7

*Yeah, there was never enough feedback from that body to me, it always went kind of that way so you're almost relying on school actually getting any information and it was reliant upon the school and whether they gave it to me or not. [...]and then if school decided to relay something back to me. I got it. But most of the time I didn't.*

Participant 1, p.17, 630-636

#### **4.5.6 Focused code: A prolonged struggle to be heard to access support**

Capturing all aspects within this category, parents spoke about an overall prolonged struggle to be heard and to access support.

*So with all this it was all a massive battle and then finally in year 6 they're like "ohh yeah he's got quite bad learning needs" and I was like "well I have been trying to say this for a while!"*

Participant 2, p.1, 15-17

*Yeah, when you're saying things over and over and nobody listens. And you're having to send her... everyday to a place... it's really hard.*

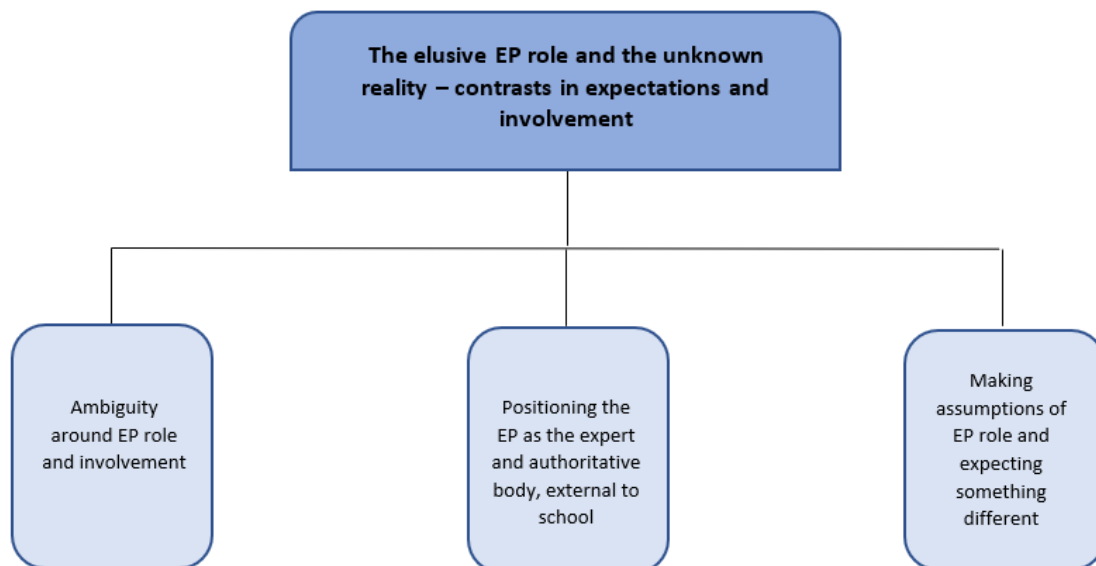
Participant 3, p.3, 91-92

*It was a meeting at the end of Year 6, so you know, that was on my request, my years of battling and not really getting anywhere and all the dramas and the traumas and the exclusions and all of this.*

Participant 1, p.1, 13-15

#### **4.6 Category 5: The elusive EP role and the unknown reality – contrasts in expectations and involvement.**

Throughout the accounts, no participant had a clear understanding of the EP role. All five participants reflected that they wanted EP involvement (whether self-requested or recommended by school) but spoke about the ambiguity they held around the role and assumptions they made based on the title.



**Figure 4.5 - Category 5: The elusive EP role and parents making assumptions as reality is unknown - contrasts in expectations and involvement**

#### **4.6.1 Focused code: Ambiguity around EP role and involvement**

All five participants spoke about experiencing ambiguity around the role of the EP and four participants spoke about ambiguity around the involvement the EP had with their child. Participant 3 shared that she was aware of the involvement for her child as she had received a leaflet detailing what the process would look like (see Category 3).

*Researcher: So did you know what the Educational Psychologist role was or what it would involve?*

*Participant 1: No, I didn't know what they would involve or what they would be able to enforce or anything. I didn't know anything.*

Participant 1, p.12, 443-444

*I don't know much about what an EP does or how I can access it as a parent. [...] Like I said, it's getting to you and understanding what your role is has been the biggest problem for me because I'm not aware of what support you can give.*

Participant 2, p.10/15, 395-396/591-593

*The only thing that I knew was 'this is the person that can help get the support.' I don't know how they manage to do that. I don't know what training they've got or anything like that. All I know is that this is the person*

*that can help him get the support that he needs, but... how they do that..?*  
*No idea.*

Participant 5, p.5, 164-167

#### **4.6.2 Focused code: Positioning the EP as the expert and authoritative body, external to school**

Within the ambiguity around the EP role, parents all spoke about holding the EP in high esteem. Despite limited understanding of the role, all parents positioned the EP as the expert or in an authoritative role, external to school.

*They're the experts, the EPs are the experts. [...] I had no idea what an Educational Psychologist does, I just know this person that can get support and it's got a really, really good title. It sounds really, really, really good.*

Participant 5, p.10/5, 372-373/172-173

*I just felt like that title, 'Educational Psychologist,' was just a band above everything else that they tried to approach. It just sounds a bit more kind of authoritative, doesn't it? Like, they're gonna come in and analyse school almost and question what school are doing. And that's how I felt it was and that's how I maybe what I thought when it hadn't been brought in.*

Participant 1, p.12, 147-152

#### **4.6.3 Focused codes: Making assumptions of EP role and expecting something different**

Due to the ambiguity around the EP role and positioning the EP as an expert and authoritative body, some parents made assumptions and found a difference between what they expected and that which occurred.

*[...] when they said 'Educational Psychologist' I thought, "at last!" You know, something that's gonna kind of tip the balance and it didn't really. It didn't. I just felt that. I think. And I guess if my... If we'd had a bit more information beforehand, I would have been able to manage my expectations of the outcome. But I think, like everything along this journey, I had sort of ideas of what would happen which were kinda dashed. That*

*sounds a bit dramatic, but it's not... the outcome wasn't... I don't know what I expected the outcome to be, but it... it was more than what I got.*

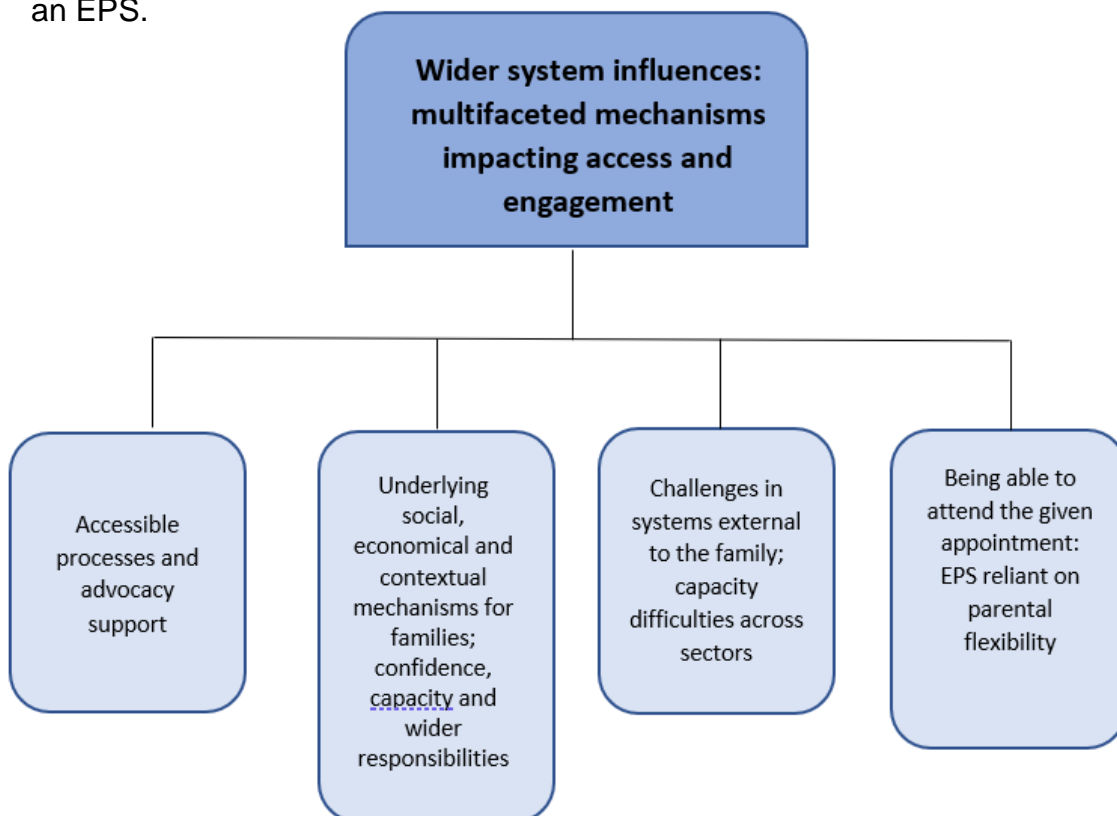
Participant 4, p.10, 373-380

*I would think it [an EPS] was a function that we would access as a college [referring to her place of work], that we would access to speak to you, not that a parent, not that you'd speak to parents. I think it's because it's the 'educational' part. You just think that they're assessing and they're helping the school to deal with that student, not the rest.*

Participant 2, p.11, 420-424

#### **4.7 Category 6: Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement**

Throughout all the participant interview accounts, different mechanisms were raised that influenced, supported or challenged parents' access to EPS support. The strongest commonalities and frequently occurring influences became the focused codes that generated this over-arching category which captures the wider system influences around a family or YP that impacted parental access or engagement with an EPS.



**Figure 4.6 - Category 6: Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement**

#### **4.7.1 Focused codes: Accessible processes and advocacy support**

Participants spoke positively about the accessibility of processes once EP involvement was secured.

*Researcher: Did you find the process accessible?*

*Participant 1: I can't remember to be honest with you so it can't be horrendous.*

*Researcher: Was the language accessible?*

*Participant 1: Yeah, I can't remember it throwing me at any point.*

Participant 1, p.15 580-584

Participant 3 spoke positively about having her consultation with the EP online.

*I think, from my point of view, with working, it's easier to fit that into my day that I don't have to... I'm lucky I only work, like, 10 minutes down the road, but meeting online... it doesn't take a whole day off or a whole morning off just to do a single phone call. In theory, I could have done it from the office if I needed to.*

Participant 3, p.11, 355-358

The second part of this focused code supports a phenomenon captured within Category 1 where parents experienced a sense of overwhelm due to emotional responses to the situation. Two participants spoke about the supportive power of having an advocate present and explained how they found this a supportive mechanism when engaging with an EPS.

*And you're not taking in everything they're saying, but the person next to you does and between the two of you, you can focus on different bits and take other bits in and you piece it together.*

Participant 5, p.11, 390-392

#### **4.7.2 Focused codes: Underlying social, economical and contextual mechanisms for families; confidence, capacity and wider responsibilities**

Participants within this study all had supportive social, economical and contextual mechanisms surrounding them, yet they still found access to an EPS challenging. Whilst the participants openly reflected on the resources and structures they had

access to, they were able to identify some of these as potential barriers in other situations.

*I can be proactive, I have the capacity to campaign for my son whereas somebody else might not. It's not fair. It's not fair at all. And I think that's what it does boil down to and especially when it's, you know it, it's your child. And I think if you haven't had a positive experience in education yourself and then, you know, your children go and they're struggling and you have nothing to fall back on. You have nothing. And I don't think that a process like this should have anything to do with how eloquently you can speak or how much research you can do. You know, it should be a level playing field for everybody.*

Participant 4. 16, 615-622

*Don't get me wrong, we're not minted or anything but I do what I can to make sure he's OK and we've had really hard times but, what is a family like? If I was thinking 'how the hell we're gonna feed and pay the gas bill' or whatever, because that means other things go to the bottom of the pecking order, it does because they've got more pressing things to worry about. How are they gonna fight?*

Participant 1, p.20, 770-774

*I suppose, I had the option of home-educating and I can still articulate and advocate for Ben, I could email the EP when I had the option. What about other families that can't? Or the families who can't read or don't have the capacity?*

Participant 5, p.11, 391-393

#### **4.7.3 Focused codes: Challenges in systems external to the family; capacity difficulties across sectors**

Participant 1, whilst speaking at length about the battle she had to have her son's needs understood and in accessing EPS support, also acknowledged the good intentions of school and the limitations in school staff capacity that contributed towards this.

*And they did have the best intent. They could only do what they could do with what they were armed with doing and the knowledge that they had. I just think the knowledge needed to be expanded upon.*

Participant 1, p.9, 343-345

Similarly, Participant 3 spoke about battling for her daughter's needs from reception to year 4 and she reflected compassion around the capacity strains on EPSs themselves.

*I know that the funding that schools get for the time with an EP each term is so limited.*

Participant 3, p.5, 166-167

#### **4.7.4 Focused code: Being able to attend the given appointment: EPS reliance on parental flexibility**

All five participants spoke about needing to be flexible to attend the EP appointment, with all describing the mechanisms they, themselves, had which enabled this. Whilst recognising their advantage, three participants reflected that this might not be the case for other people.

*I mean, I was able to be available because I had to come back. That's when he was on the residential. So I was up in Northumberland on the day that we were having the meeting and just had to come down. [...] A lot of parents are really stuck in no man's land there, aren't they? I mean, I'm self-employed, so I can do it to suit me, but I think for a lot of parents it's not easy is it because they're having to book time out of work and that's all stressful in itself, isn't it? Or if you've got other kids at home and all of that, kind of stuff, but I... How else do you do it? So you just kind of have to make it work.*

Participant 1, p.15, 585-593

Participant 1 travelled back from Northumberland for the meeting as it was arranged during the week of her son's residential and she had been requested to join the trip to support his inclusion. This appeared to be a significant challenge which was overcome by the parent fulfilling the expectation. This links to the fight, gatekeeping



and capacity difficulties across different Categories. This flexibility requirement for parents was also reflected in Participant 4's and 5's accounts:

*We were given specific dates and I was just told this is the date that they'll be available. Which again, for us was OK, because I can make things right with work, I've got a certain amount of leeway for that, that didn't matter to us because we would have made that work, but that might not necessarily be the case. And if you're self-employed and your earnings will suffer, how do you do that, hmm?*

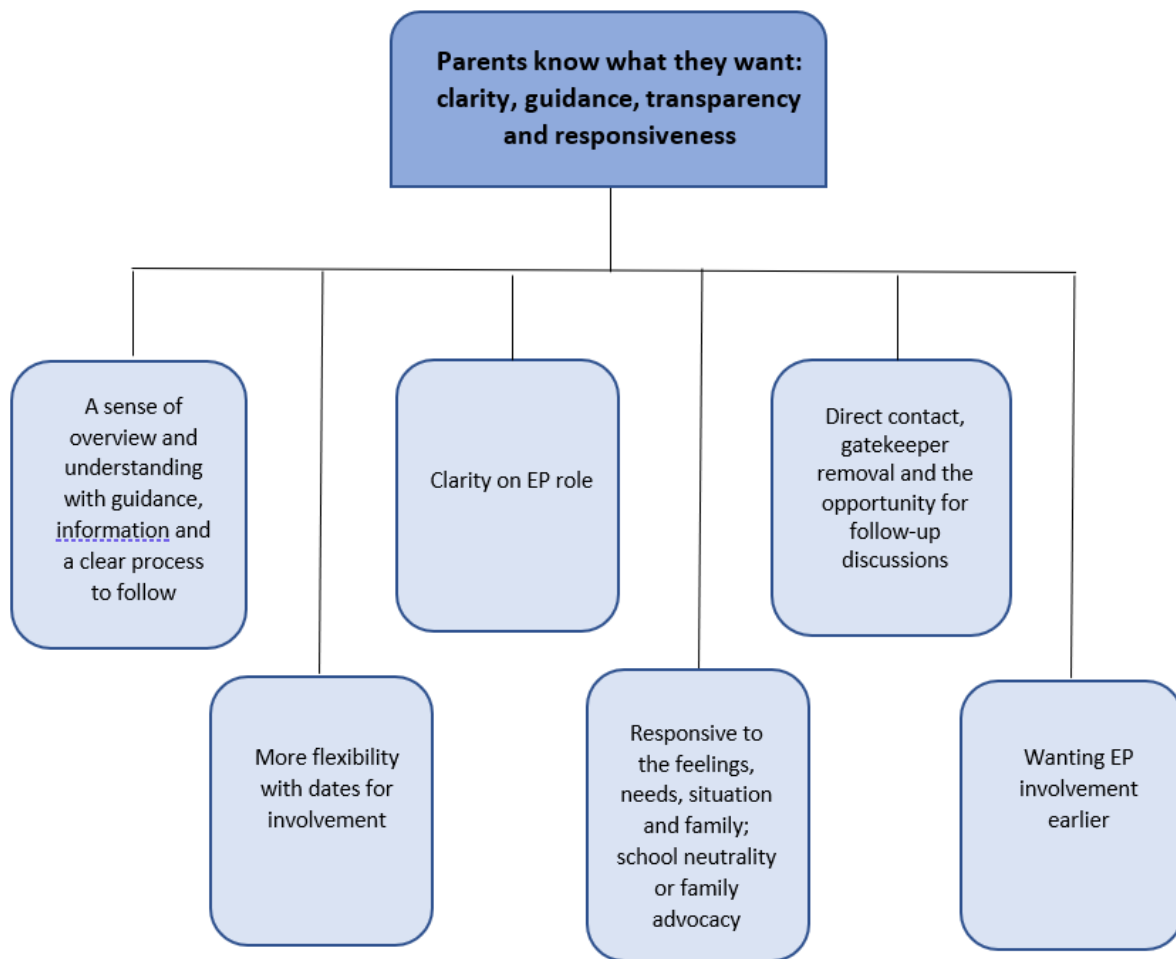
Participant 4, p.15, 556-570

*[...] sometimes these meetings are made like 'this is the day. This is the only day you can have.' And my husband's auntie would normally come in with me. You know, she works full time sometimes. She couldn't make it so if they're a bit more flexible with the dates, so like, "Oh well, these are three or four dates - are these any better?" Rather than 'this is the one date, the one time. Be there be or square.' Because what if you know, you can't get the time out to get there? And then there's the person supporting you needs to be available.*

Participant 5, p.10, 356-362

#### **4.8 Category 7: Parents know what they want: clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness**

Woven throughout each account, through coding, memoing and constant comparative analysis, participants were able to demonstrate what they would like to have when accessing and engaging with an LA EPS. Category 7 captures the participants' aspirations for an EPS through the synthesis of identified barriers, supporting mechanisms and open requests or suggestions for improvement.



**Figure 4.7 – Category 7: Parents know what they want: clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness**

**4.8.1 Focused codes: A sense of overview and understanding with guidance, information and a clear process to follow**

Linking to Categories 2 and 3, participants shared a commonality of all wanting to have an overview of the situation, for information to be available and for them to understand the support with a clear process to follow.

*I almost feel like... When he started primary school I needed to be given a handout of 'these are our processes.' If a child starts developing these kind of behavioural issues or whatever, these are where we would go to for support. Or this, as a parent, is where you should apply for support.*

Participant 1, p.11, 402-405

*I suppose what I'd like is more information up front. Obviously, I've signed to say it's OK to pass his information on to an EP, but that was it. I didn't know anything else, and maybe, you know, having some information*

*about what their involvement is. Some information, even if it's like a leaflet on what the process is, what your role in that is. Can we contact you? Do we go through school? If we want to know anything, that sort of thing.*

Participant 2, p.14, 567-571

Linking to Category 5 and Category 2, the recommendation of information to manage expectations and keep parents knowledgeable was made.

*If we had have had a bit more information beforehand, I would have been able to manage my expectations of the outcome.*

Participant 4, p.10, 375-376

#### **4.8.2 Focused code: Clarity on EP role**

Participant accounts created a whole category dedicated to the elusiveness of the EP role (Category 5). The ambiguity that surrounds EPs did not deter parents from wanting support, but it was raised as a potential barrier by Participant 2 and all parents talked about wanting a greater understanding of the role and involvement from an EP.

*[...] but for me, like I said, it's getting to you and understanding what your role is has been the biggest problem for me because I'm not aware of what support you can give.*

Participant 2, p.15, 591-593

#### **4.8.3 Focused codes: Direct contact, gatekeeper removal and the opportunity for follow-up discussions**

Linking to Category 4 and parents perceiving schools as gatekeepers, experiencing prolonged battles for understanding and to accessing support, parents shared that they would like direct contact with an EPS.

*Researcher: Is there anything that you think could be improved for parental engagement?*

*Participant 3: Maybe if there was some direct access to it that you wouldn't have to go through school so that you can measure concerns and see if they're justified.*

Participant 3, p.10-11, 315-318

Participant 5 had an EPs email address shared which she found very useful, particularly to manage the difficulties raised in Categories 1 and 4 when experiencing overwhelm within a session. This follow-up access also worked towards neutralising the power dynamic she describes that occurred with school.

*I'd never had any e-mail address from an EP before, so that was quite nice to have. And it did help with Ben, especially at (new setting) because, with the sort of meetings that we had, the discussion, there'd be a headteacher, class teacher, the SENCO, the Educational Psychologist and me. And you know when the three teachers are sort of going "and you know he's absolutely fine and da da da" and you're just sat. And then afterwards I just e-mail him [EP] and go, 'just so you know' [miming typing fervently].*

Participant 5, P6. 215-220

The description of contacting the EP after a meeting to follow-up on her views in a situation where she felt more comfortable connects to the next focused code.

#### **4.8.4 Focused codes: More flexibility with dates for involvement and the opportunity for follow-up discussions**

Linking to Category 1 and a feeling of overwhelm limiting parental capacity to effectively engage with an EPS, participants requesting the option for follow-up contact was raised as a recommendation.

*But like I said, when you actually get in, when it's just focused on your child... sometimes you need the time to go back and reflect on what was said, or read something again and come back because, you know, like I said, you can get quite emotional...*

Participant 2, p.12, 469-472

Parental flexibility was raised by all participants and four out of five participants raised this as a recommendation to improve engagement with an EPS.

*[...] sometimes these meetings are made like this is the day. This is the only day you can have. [...] so if they're a bit more flexible with the dates, so like, "Oh well, these are three or four dates - are these any better?"*

Participant 5, p.10, 355-359

*I'm better afterwards, you know, anything afterwards. I should have said this, I should have said that. I'm very much about thinking of things afterwards.*

Participant 5, p.10,366-367

Participant 5 has linked the flexibility recommendation to the sense of overwhelm reported by parents in Category 2 and with the supporting mechanism for engagement captured in Category 6. This can be coupled with consideration for accessing parent advocacy support which also links to the next focused code.

#### **4.8.5 Focused codes: Responsive to the feelings, needs, situation and family; school neutrality and family advocacy**

Categories 1, 4 and 6 documented the negative impact of the location when meeting with an EP in school, and Participant 1 made a recommendation for EPSs to neutralise the situation and consider selecting a meeting location external to the education setting.

*I think just meeting in a different place, especially for the EP, then you feel more like they're on your side. Yeah, they're not there to just back the teachers up or be part of the day-to-day school running.*

Participant 1, p.19, 747-749

The power of advocacy was represented across multiple categories with parents recognising this as a supportive mechanism, wanting knowledge of this to be made clear to everyone to ensure that advocacy awareness is raised.

*And also, bearing in mind the strength of having an advocate with you, I think that needs to be made more clear, just so you know, you are allowed to bring someone because I wasn't told, I just knew that I could.*

Participant 5, p.11380-382

*I didn't learn the word advocate until he was in Year 5, but being told that, as a parent, "oh we're gonna have this meeting if you want to bring somebody with you to be your eyes and ears..." I've never knew that that was an option, if that makes sense?*

Participant 1, p.19, 732-735

Responsiveness to the individual needs of parents and families was highlighted with the acknowledgement that all situations are different.

*[...] and I think that's it with parents, like I said, no matter what your... you can have parents of all different levels of involvement with the children. So we have it here where we have some that are super involved and some are like "oh, whatever," you know, do whatever. And some have different levels of understanding.*

Participant 2, p.12, 466-496

#### **4.8.6 Focused code: Wanting EP involvement earlier**

Whilst all participants met the recruitment criteria of the study's conceptualisation and rationale for accessing EP support within early intervention stages (Table 3.1), all participants talked about wanting support sooner with three out of five asking for EP support for years. This suggests that, despite accessing EP support within the schools' graduated response cycles of SEN support, EP involvement did not occur early in the life of the problem.

*How can he only just be seeing an EP, he's been on a SEND action plan since year one?! [Participant 2 YP was seen by an EP in Year 7.]*

Participant 2, p7, 254-255

*I think the be all and end all is if Ed Psych would come in sooner, the minute children start to, you know, showing signs of needs or behavioural issues or whatever. School would be more inclined to be more proactive.*

Participant 1, p.18, 710-712

#### **4.9 Summary of the chapter**

Chapter 4 presented the constructed analysis of data gathered during the phases of purposive and theoretical sampling, using accounts from five participants' semi-structured interviews. Seven key interactive categories were generated, constructed from focused codes, with supporting excerpts provided to illustrate how focused codes related to the overarching conceptual categories. The following chapter will focus on implications of this analysis, pursuing the next stage of theoretical sensitisation using literature already available within the field.

## 5 Literature review – part 2

### 5.1 Introduction

Chapter 2 presented a purposefully broad literature review to provide context and rationale for the current study. Following completion of data analysis and the development of conceptual categories presented in Chapter 4, a second literature review was conducted. This was to facilitate construction of a grounded theory by enhancing the data analysis through theoretical saturation based on the incorporation of existing, relevant literature (Charmaz, 2014). The consideration of existing research is argued to provide an eventual theory that is concerned with wider elements of the area of study, giving the research greater theoretical integrity (Charmaz, 2014).

The researcher explored topics related to categories and focused codes developed from the data analysis that were considered to have the highest importance for the study's aims and development of the emergent theory. Literature pertinent to the following categories and focused codes was included:

- It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all;
- Feeling uninformed;
- Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle;
- The elusive EP role and the unknown reality – contrasts in expectations and involvement;
- Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement;
- Parents know what they want: earlier support, clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness.

Due to the interacting nature of the categories and focused codes, as acknowledged in the previous chapter, literature is discussed and considered as an integration in relation to the category connections and existing links. For the purposes of this chapter, the words 'parent' and 'carer' will be used interchangeably in line with the literature explored.

Given the exploratory nature of the current study, this chapter outlines engagement with relevant research by employing a narrative literature review that prioritises thinking and interpretation over mechanistic search criteria (Greenhalgh et al., 2018). This approach supports the researcher's critical reflection and involves a process of engagement with concepts and ideas within existing literature which fits with the

nature of this study. Greenhalgh et al (2018) refer to this as an 'evidence informed,' rather than 'evidence based,' review.

Whilst it is acknowledged that there can be a criticism of narrative reviews warning against 'cherry picking' evidence to strengthen a particular perspective, literature reviewed in this manner is in line with GT methodology (Charmaz, 2014). Within this evidence-informed narrative approach, identified literature is deemed purposeful and relevant to the study's aims where theory is ground from data (Charmaz, 2014). This is based within constructivist GT principles of theory development in which findings and identified central concepts are critically reviewed, compared and contrasted against those in existing research and literature (McGhee et al., 2007). Using this approach, criticality lies in the review of the study's analysis and interpretations captured within categories and codes and not the identified literature itself (Dunne, 2011). This results in the researcher testing out their hypotheses against a wider dataset, depicted within existing literature, facilitating further theoretical sensitisation (Charmaz, 2014).

For the present research topic, it is important to acknowledge an aspect which was outlined in section 2.8 whereby few studies exist that have focused on parental involvement with EPs since 2011 and no studies have been identified that focus on parents' views and experiences of EPS work in the stages of early intervention. This limits the degree to which contrary findings will be available as such content is lacking amongst literature in general, and therefore is not cited.

## **5.2 Knowledge bringing power and support to parents when accessing and engaging with services**

Guided by the strong narrative drawn from analysis of data occurring across all five participants' accounts, the following reviewed literature relates to the in vivo codes '*unless you're in the know, you can't access that help*' and '*knowledge is key to it all*' and focused code '*unaware, uninformed and information feeling hidden.*' Participants recounted lacking information or knowledge around the processes of available support as a barrier to accessing, and subsequently engaging with, an EPS. Similarly, current participants positioned holding knowledge and an awareness of information as a supportive mechanism to accessing and engaging with EPSs.



Parents feeling uninformed and wanting more involvement or information has been historically captured in literature across education and SEND (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000) with limited access to information and lacking parental knowledge continuing to be a significant barrier to accessing EP support (Day, 2013; La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). In the most recent national review of parental experience of SEND services as part of the White Paper (DfE, 2023), parents reported that they find processes difficult and that they struggle to access information and support.

Literature shows that parents have expressed dissatisfaction around information sharing for many years, mainly concerning a lack of information about procedures and length of involvement (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). Research in Northern Ireland showed that a lack of information often resulted in parents feeling alienated and insufficiently informed, which subsequently rendered them feeling unable to make meaningful contributions to discussions around their children's needs (O'Connor, 2008). Parents expressed that this disabling element could be shifted by sufficient information sharing.

Clarity around involvement was raised within the current participants' experiences and has been reported across literature with parents finding engaging with an EPS confusing and the lack of information sharing unhelpful (Anthun, 2000; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). More recently, literature demonstrates that parents have experienced contrasting levels of information sharing around an EPS and noted a difference between initial information dissemination, describing how and where to access the service, and continual information sharing through the process of their involvement (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). The manner in which information is shared has been shown to have an impact on parents' ability to be involved (Hart, 2011), with parents encountering a feeling of reluctance on the part of professionals to share information with them (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Consistent with information and awareness reducing ambiguity and unease as raised in the current study, research has found that parents reported higher levels of satisfaction with an EPS when they received clear information as this aided their perception of working in partnership (Lawrence, 2014). Literature demonstrates an increase in parents feeling empowered by having access to knowledge and, as illustrated in the accounts from the present study, that parents were able to use this knowledge in their interactions with their child's school (Dawson, 2021). Linking with Category 4 (*Parents having to*

*fight and feeling like a battle – schools acting as gatekeepers to support*) and the section below with participants holding concerns around being ‘that parent,’ Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) found that, despite craving more information and feeling better when more informed, parents resisted requesting it for fear that they would be categorised as ‘difficult’ and that such perceptions may hinder further support for their child.

One study solely exploring paternal engagement with an EPS during statutory assessment found that information sharing difficulties occurred within a role discrepancy (Hart, 2011). Mothers tended to have more regular informal contact with schools and were used as the means of information sharing, with most fathers reporting becoming aware of EPS involvement through their wife or partner (Hart, 2011). Literature outlines a need for procedures to be clearly explained to parents and recommends schools as the link in achieving this (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). Following from this and linking to the focused code of EP being an elusive role, research has suggested utilising a named person with responsibility for liaising between parents and the EPS, feeling that this could help with initial information dissemination and during the process of delivering services to families (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). Reflecting findings in the previous chapter, considerations would need to be made around the potential implications of this person controlling who does or does not have access to information.

Following from this and linking to the strong narrative raised by participants in the current study, existing evidence shows parents experiencing professional gate-keeping, where limited communication relegated parents to the periphery of decision-making processes for their children’s education (O’Connor, 2008). This also ties into parents feeling powerless, resultant from unawareness or lacking information, and is a finding that reiterates parents often being unaware of, or confused by, the range of services available to them. In an interesting shift, when exploring alternative ways of increasing parental engagement with an EPS, one head teacher raised a concern around feeling less informed about group discussions when they were not held on the school premises (Hogg et al., 2014). The head shared that they felt a summary sheet following home sessions would provide useful information about aspects that had been covered, and any issues raised could be shared with school to keep them informed (Hogg et al., 2014). This shift where

schools felt excluded with information hidden was an interesting spin on the parental notion of feeling uninformed and could be helpful to raise awareness and empathy for schools around parental experiences.

Parents report experiencing frustration at not being able to share their own information with professionals and expressed that they felt their in-depth knowledge of their child was devalued with professional knowledge privileged (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Similarly, the study exploring paternal involvement with an EPS through statutory assessment, found that fathers felt they had less knowledge than their female partners in relation to their child's needs and that, any information they had, was less relevant in comparison (Hart, 2011).

Parents in the current study proactively engaged in learning about their child's difficulties to become well-informed on the subject. Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) found that some parents felt compelled to take this further to become a self-elected authority on their child's difficulties. This served to position the parent as an expert and elevate them to a point where they felt empowered to challenge the LA based on dissatisfaction for their child's provision (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Similar to concerns raised by Participant 1 and 4, literature acknowledges that some parents are vocal and able to access knowledge for themselves, but many are not and their needs should be considered and addressed. One approach parents have taken to rectifying this involves them looking to other parents for information and support, coherent with the focused code around sharing knowledge (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). As reported by participants in this study, research describes parents utilising each other as informants to reduce hidden information and found that parental knowledge of agencies was often limited to word of mouth or other casual recommendations (O'Conner', 2008).

When exploring engagement dimensions, an information barrier highlighted was a family's lack of knowledge of the local services that could be accessed to generate support (Katz et al., 2007). Whilst national information is available and, following the 2014 SEND Reform, LAs are required to share information within their published local offer (SEND information to support families to find the right help in their area), La Placa and Corlyon (2014) found that information was more effective for parents when it reflected the parents' locality and was culturally and contextually specific.

Recent legislation requires local authorities to improve information available to families and provide a tailored list of suitable settings informed by the local inclusion plan (DfE, 2023). However, the findings of La Placa and Corlyon (2014) suggest that broad-brush information related to national policy is not as effective in generating knowledge for parents as information shared that directly relates to their situation. This would suggest that information will need to be generated around specific needs and local contexts.

### **5.3 Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle – schools acting as gatekeepers to support**

The importance of partnership working between family and school systems is emphasised throughout previous research (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008; Hornby & Blackwell, 2018; Tett, 2010). Schools' practice toward pupils with SEND is governed by the SEND CoP, which specifies the requirement to consider the "views, wishes and feelings" of parents (DoH & DfE, 2015, p.19). However, difficulties with parent-school workings have consistently been identified in literature with parents feeling judged and disparaged by school staff (McCarthy et al., 2022; Meehan & Meehan, 2018). Previous research illustrates that parents feel unheard with their views and expertise unacknowledged, leading to a sense of unauthentic participation (Meehan & Meehan, 2018; Tett, 2010). Whilst external challenges to reaching parents exist, frequently schools themselves can inhibit accessibility (Day, 2013).

Parents in literature mirror the experiences of parents within this study, having requested support for years prior to securing external involvement (McCarthy et al., 2022). Obstacles in accessing support are documented with parents expressing frustration and distress at having their concerns dismissed by school for prolonged periods, encountering resistance when requesting access to support (McCarthy et al., 2022). This was a strong theme in the present study which referred to parents having to fight to have their children's needs met and them engaging in, what felt like, a battle with school to access EPS support. Similar experiences have been historically reported in literature with parents experiencing a battle with schools, feeling ignored or that their views and preferences were not given proper consideration, subsequently having to actively pursue an understanding from school to recognise their children's needs (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Hart, 2011). The 2014 SEND Reform outlined encouragement for parents to share their concerns with

settings and inform schools if they believed their child may have SEND or require additional support. However, the most recent national picture illustrates that this battle has not subsided and parents are still advocating for access to support and provision without needing to fight (DfE, 2023). Research found that parents have encountered reluctance from school staff to refer or provide adaptations without a formal diagnosis (McCarthy et al., 2022). McCarthy et al. (2022) described one parent using a metaphor of encountering a 'brick wall' when trying to get school to acknowledge that their child was struggling or when attempting to access support. A position shared by participants in the current study.

Parents finding the process hard, as was referenced in the participant accounts for this research, is reflected in wider literature with difficulties in accessing support negatively impacting family well-being (Newland, 2014). Adoptive parents working with an EPS reported frustration within a system where their child's needs were often failed to be addressed resulting in them being unacknowledged and unsupported (Dawson, 2021). Schools failing to identify children's needs, inhibiting access to additional support, increases the risk of developing complex secondary mental and physical health issues that may have been preventable had their needs been detected and met earlier (APA, 2013).

Mistrust of schools to action their promises and share information honestly and authentically is reported in literature where, like the accounts from the current study, family-school interaction was hindered by issues relating to trust (McCarthy et al., 2022). Dawson (2021) found that parents accessing support groups organised by EPs spoke positively about schools when they perceived they were working in partnership and the study concluded that partnership working was essential when building trust.

Meehan & Meehan (2018) discuss the ways in which schools and education have been constructed and the impact of parents positioned as carers and agents of socialisation, and education staff positioned as experts. This can create shifts in power and knowledge between home and school, undermining the nature of a partnership, creating a possible imbalance of power. This potential inequity, linking to the control element identified within this wider category, is referenced by Tett (2010) who argues that parent-professional relationships take place on the professional's

terms, conceptualised through professional language and processes which can create further barriers for parents. A potential power imbalance with EPS work has been documented where EPs would frequently see the child and speak with school staff before speaking to the parent (McGuiggan, 2021; Peake, 1999). Literature suggests that potential power imbalances occurring within conflicts of the parent-school partnership can be counteracted by constructive relationships between home and school where parents feel that the school is approachable and responsive to them (Day, 2013). This equality and partnership is important for creating parental empowerment to enable shared ways of working with parents voicing that they want to be treated as equals by schools and wider professionals (Day, 2013).

Perceived fears and battles between schools and parents exist where parents voicing their views can be regarded as confrontational (Day, 2013). As mentioned in the previous section, with a reluctance to ask for further information for fear of reducing future potential for support (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008), parents feel that they have to balance their efforts to improve professional understanding between wanting to secure the best provision for their child with the potential of being viewed as 'pushy' (O'Connor, 2008). As highlighted by Hodge and Runswick-Cole (2008) this was born from a concern that any assertiveness might impact negatively on subsequent provision for their child (O'Connor, 2008).

In a previous study, parents commented that they needed more information about how to access EPs (Squires et al., 2007) with some parents wanting more direct work with EPs, avoiding school involvement. Direct parental access seems to occur within the very early years of a child's life, yet once a child is in an educational establishment, the setting is commonly placed at the centre of EP involvement, where parents are involved as a secondary process with arrangements agreed between the EP and the school (McGuiggan, 2021). La Placa and Corlyon (2014) argued that referral routes constitute an important contributor to successful parental engagement. Peake (1999) raised referral pathways as a focus area for the EP profession, imploring EPSs to ensure that parents have direct access and that time is allocated for parental referral. Islam (2013) reported that he found no parental referral routes to LA EP involvement outside statutory assessment and a study involving four LA EPSs, found that schools control referrals to EPSs and are typically

perceived as the problem holder (McGuiggan, 2021). As such, the EP role can be positioned as part of the school system above the family system.

Research in Northern Ireland revealed tensions between parental and professional opinions, particularly where there were disputes over the initiation of an assessment or a diagnostic outcome (O'Connor, 2008). Parents in the current study reported feeling that schools acted as a barrier to accessing EP support which has been supported by contemporary research that illustrates schools often function as gatekeepers to EPs (McGuiggan, 2021). This notion has been longstanding with Peake (1999) arguing that EPSs had become increasingly inaccessible to families, with only children with high levels of need receiving support, and EP work focussing almost entirely on assessments and consultation work with teachers, driven by LA and school procedures. Schools as gatekeepers and the perception of a power imbalance has been reported to be exacerbated by the shift in EPS delivery models moving to a traded model (McGuiggan, 2021; Stringer et al., 2006). Stringer et al. (2006) described the traded model of time allocation creating an impression amongst schools that they could dictate the focus and work from an EPS. This consumer-provider dynamic between school and EPSs is reported to have placed schools being more directive of EP work, having the potential to generate a reduction in autonomy for EPs to direct their time to see parents if the school thought it unnecessary (McGuiggan, 2021). This finding supports those of Islam (2013) who found, in a study of EPs' perceptions of working within a traded service, that EPs perceived themselves to have less autonomy and control over their work since moving to a traded model and felt that schools had greater control and power in terms of directing EP time.

A recent large scale consultation of parental views revealed the rhetoric of parents having to fight to have their children's needs met (DfE, 2022) with parents facing difficulty and delay in accessing support for their child, and having to battle the system to access support (DfE, 2023). Whilst literature outlines the many ways in which conflict between families and professionals can occur, there is acknowledgement that such conflict can be inevitable when parents are asking for provision and support above that which an LA can reasonably offer. Within the real world, professionals are bound by policy and political contexts rendering some parental requests unachievable (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). However, the

government's national agenda aims to build parents' trust and create fairer, easily navigable systems to restore their confidence, helping YP get the right support, in the right place, at the right time (DfE, 2023). A proposal for clarity about services available and what support children should be receiving, without needing to fight to secure provision and without needing to navigate a complex inaccessible system, is documented as part of new national policy (DfE, 2023).

#### **5.4 The elusive EP role and contrasts in expectations and involvement**

Closely linking with the area explored above, when engaging with support services, success can be dependent on whether parents can construct trusting, consistent relationships with services, and the degree to which they feel that they are in control of the help they receive (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). As illustrated by the participants' experiences in the current study, research has shown that an additional factor preventing parental engagement relates to the discrepancy between the parents' perception and what a service is able to offer (Katz et al., 2007) and how professional services are intended compared to how they are experienced (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). Both these barriers are reflected in contemporary literature with parents reporting that they are not always made aware of the support that their child is accessing (DfE, 2022).

Parents in the current study felt that EPs were powerful professionals within education and wanted the authoritative role to support them in the challenges they faced. This relates to the wider view that EPs are often positioned as experts (Frederickson et al., 2015). This appears to be a contradiction between EPs endeavouring to position themselves as 'non-experts' in casework and adopting a position of expertise when striving to improve outcomes, giving recommendations for YP (Beal, 2016).

The available evidence indicates that, although some parents seem resistant to services, a process preventing access and engagement could be the mismatch between parents' perceptions of their needs, what the service provides and how it is delivered (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Further to the challenges around EP expectations, literature recounts some parents experiencing delays in accessing EP involvement compared to that which they expected and other parents expecting more direct intervention by the EP (Squires et al., 2007). In contrast, research describes parents experiencing satisfaction with an EPS when they received clear



information on the EP role, resulting in meaningful partnership working (Lawrence, 2014).

EPs need to hold an awareness of parental expectations and, as outlined in section 5.2 of this chapter, parents need to be given sufficient information to understand the process, what involvement will look like, and how long it will last, with clear explanations around the reasons for it (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000). This was extended to include recommendations for EPs to clearly explain their role and involvement using accessible concepts and language (Burnham, 2003). Ambiguity around EPs continued in literature with parents reporting an unclear understanding of the role (Squires et al., 2007). In-keeping with the findings in the current research, the EP role has remained elusive with services not being transparent and parents not understanding what the EP role involves (Lawrence, 2014).

Similar to Participant 2, parents in wider literature linked EPs solely to supporting schools with confusion arising as a result of EPs not working directly with YP (Lawrence, 2014). This suggests that clarity around the EP role and involvement were lacking, and expectations remained in place around what involvement should look like. This discrepancy led to confusion around the remit of the EP and who they were supporting. The parental expectation for continuing direct intervention from EPs highlights the importance of being clear about the nature and possible extent of the EP's involvement (Squires et al., 2007). This is consistent with findings in the current study where parental expectations, based on involvement with other professionals, led to parents feeling a sense of disappointment that EP involvement did not reflect the on-going nature of care provided by other services.

The elusiveness of the EP role and the lack of clarity about the agreed definition has been postulated for decades (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Birch et al., 2015). When asking why the EP role is so hard to define, literature suggests that it is due to a lack of clarity around who the client is and for whom the work should be conducted, the variety of views held by EPs about what the service should look like and the diversity of practice delivered by individual EPs (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009). It is inevitable, therefore, that this lack of clarity within the EP profession, and the diversity of views within the field (Burnham, 2013), will lead to EP expectations being at odds with that which schools and parents expect (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009). Clarity in involvement

has been suggested to increase engagement with SEND services where fathers felt more willing to be involved when they were clear about the specific purpose of the meeting or assessment, but less so when the purpose was unclear (Hart, 2011).

### **5.5 Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement**

Literature outlines common practical barriers for parental engagement which include factors and logistics relating to time, work, transport, childcare and wider family responsibilities (Day, 2013; Hogg et al., 2014). Coherent with the findings in the current study, parental availability, and subsequent requirement for flexibility, were reported as barriers for parental access to support (Day, 2013). When exploring paternal views, fathers recount that their absence in EPS engagement was due to contact hours coinciding with employment commitments, making attendance difficult (Hart, 2011; La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Fathers that felt able to be involved stated this was either due to holding unemployment status or because shift patterns meant that they were available during the daytime (Hart, 2011). Self-employed parents encountered both benefits and barriers to their employment position, with some citing flexibility whilst others felt unable to deviate from their work day due to the financial loss that would occur if they attended a meeting with an EP (Hart, 2011). Research has shown that some LA EPSs directed meeting dates and times, even if they were undesirable or inaccessible to parents (Hodge & Runswick-Cole, 2008). EPs working flexibly and collaboratively to meet the needs of their communities was referenced in national policy (DfE, 2011) to enable greater accessibility for parents. Findings from the current study suggest that this may not be the case.

In addition to practical barriers such as transport and availability, literature outlines economical and social barriers that can become obstacles in parental engagement (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). These include broad elements such gender, ethnicity and social perception, with parents holding fears around being judged inadequate or being the cause of a child's difficulties (Katz et al., 2007). Acceptance of being a parent of a child of SEND, or acknowledging the difficulties they may face, has been found to be too challenging to parental identity or their level of tolerance which has subsequently become a barrier to engagement with an EPS (Lawrence, 2014). This links to the emotional overwhelm aspect raised in Category 1 (*Emotional strain creating a barrier to EPS engagement*). Cole (2005) hypothesised that parents in

professional roles were more proactive in seeking help and this is still reflected today. Recent findings illustrate that support systems are not equally accessible where parents with underlying access to financial and social resources are better placed to navigate systems and secure support for their child (DfE, 2022). Research has shown that the comparative reduction in access to and use of targeted services by families that are typically harder to engage or experiencing socioeconomic difficulties is a significant mechanism in reducing health and social disparities (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014) suggesting services should strive to encourage their involvement. Families living in poverty feature strongly within demographics that experience difficulties with engagement and are proposed to have a greater likelihood in experiencing stress or depression, compared with more affluent families (Katz et al., 2007). In terms of engagement with an EPS, research suggests that parents with lower socioeconomic backgrounds have less involvement in their children's education and the lack of social and economic capital diminishes their opportunity to access and engage with preventive and supportive services (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014; Owen et al., 2022). When exploring views of parents, recent findings have shown that access to systems is not always equitable, with carers who have access to financial and social resources often being better placed to secure support for their children (DfE, 2022).

Research into particular heritages and ethnicities found that parents from groups determined 'hard to engage' (Crozier & Davies, 2007), required more exploration than broad brush strategies as they do not take account of the complex and diverse cultural and contextual experience of parents within groups that do not fit White-British heritage (McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). Community, religion and culture have been notable in influencing parental involvement with services as engagement with an EPS is affected by family's understanding of their child's behaviour and the difference between their views and those expected within British culture on which EPSs are based (Lawrence, 2014). To combat this, research recommends EPs engage in community outreach to better understand the population they support (Lawrence, 2014). An EPS review highlighted the formality of EPSs creating engagement barriers for parents and a project was commissioned for an EPS to engage with families on a more personal, informal level, providing the opportunity for parents to become familiar with EPs which enabled them to make connections and explain the role (Byrnes, 2012). The project concluded that the informal nature of the repeated contact with a link EP had a positive impact on parental accessibility to the

service and increased parental confidence in LA professionals in general (Byrnes, 2012).

Geographical location of services has been shown to have a profound impact on parental access and engagement with services (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Parents' perceptions of a service's location, in regard to quality of environment and safety, are factors which hinder or support engagement with evidence highlighting that locations where services are accessed is a need for consideration (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). This links to findings in the present study where participants encountered negative experiences meeting in school, wanting to meet at home or in a more neutral location. Conveniently located, easily accessible, comfortable and non-stigmatising premises have been found to be most conducive in maintaining engagement with parents (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Parents can view schools as places where they experienced failure or conflict which can increase their feelings of protection for themselves and their children (Harris & Goodall, 2007) and can generate a sense of inadequacy and incapability due to their own educational needs (Hart, 2011). Parental confidence in understanding school structures, comfort levels with formal aspects of meetings and the language used have also shown to be significant barriers (Day, 2013). Linking with the practical barriers raised earlier in this section, fathers interviewed in literature stated that EP meetings took place at school, immediately before, during or after the school day to tie into school hours which invariably created a difficulty in getting out of work (Hart, 2011). Some schools have acknowledged these difficulties and have expressed enquiries around sessions between EPs and families being held in the evening (Hogg et al., 2014). Parents have been reported to find it beneficial to engage with an EP within an informal, relaxed atmosphere where families felt more comfortable, reflecting that they talked more than they would have done had they encountered the EP in a formal setting (Byrnes, 2012).

Along with reluctance from schools to refer, and resistance from parents' readiness in seeking help, challenges to engagement can also include difficulty accessing external professionals due to local variations in availability and thresholds (McCarthy et al., 2022). This links to findings within the current study regarding referral processes where capacity difficulties hindered participants' involvement. Budget cuts, national EP shortages and increasing workloads have resulted in a greater

demand for EP support than services are able to offer (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). EPs voiced their own concerns in a workforce survey which outlined that EP shortages, recruitment challenges and retention difficulties along with a rise in statutory assessments resulted in the demand for EP support far exceeding services' ability to supply (Lyonette et al., 2019). This appears to have created an additional barrier to parental access and engagement with EPSs and feels reflected in the recruitment difficulties encountered in this study.

### **5.6 Parents know what they want: earlier support, clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness.**

Consistent with views expressed by the participants in this study, research suggests that parents want services that are reliable, accessible, organised and responsive to the individual needs of families (Katz et al., 2007; Owen et al., 2022).

The desire for earlier involvement of EPSs has been a view expressed by parents for decades (Byrnes, 2012; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; DfE, 2023). In the most recent screening of accessibility to services, findings show that YP's needs are identified too late resulting in difficulties becoming increasingly embedded (DfE, 2023). Directly regarding EPS involvement, the recent White Paper consultation found that families experienced difficulties in securing timely access to EPs (DfE, 2023), something that was noted in literature 23 years earlier (Cuckle & Bamford, 2000).

The vital role that EPs play in supporting SEND is well established with recognition that early identification and intervention from EPs leads to more effective support and the prevention of need escalation (DfE, 2023). Involvement of EPs at the earliest stage has long been recognised as an effective use of time allocation (Byrnes, 2012). This feels particularly pertinent considering the ongoing budget cuts and capacity constraints as a result of austerity through government reductions to public spending (Schulze et al., 2019). EPs play a vital role in shaping the assessment and understanding of children and it is recognised that becoming involved at the earliest possible stage leads to more constructive use of EP time (Byrnes, 2012). This suggests that EPs working earlier in the life of the problem will benefit both service users and EPSs. Currently, despite the desire from both EPSs and parents, families are facing long wait times to access support from professionals such as EPs (DfE, 2023). The inquiry from the Green Paper (2022) found that the impact of the pandemic has disproportionately affected YP with SEND, exacerbating the

challenges that already existed within the system (DfE, 2022). Impact from the COVID-19 pandemic is documented in research where there is an acceptance of longer wait times for services, resulting in a reluctance to push for a referral knowing delays are ever-increasing (McCarthy et al., 2022). The recent White Paper intends to deliver a new national system where children's needs are identified earlier and met more effectively (DfE, 2023).

Parents in the current study spoke about wanting clarity of involvement when collaboratively engaging with an EPS which has been shown to be lacking in EP work with families within contemporary literature, despite its recognition to promote positive outcomes (McGuiggan, 2021). Parents wanting clear, understandable language and information available in a range of accessible contexts has been highlighted for years (Parsons et al., 2009). The inconsistency across the SEND systems and supportive services experienced by parents can result in families not knowing what to reasonably expect from their local settings and low confidence in their ability to have their children's needs met (DfE, 2023). The desire and need for parents to have clarity around support has been acknowledged in national policy with the declaration that changes will be implemented to provide them clarity, consistency and confidence and for services to be responsive in meeting the needs of children and families (DfE, 2023).

Following the experiences of participants in the current study feeling that information was hidden, ambiguity around the EP role and having to navigate systems for which they felt 'in the dark,' it is unsurprising to find that transparency is a common theme amongst parental wishes in wider literature. Research has identified professional practice implications which included the recommendation of making the contexts EPs work within transparent, suggesting that families should have information on the EP role provided prior to a referral (Lawrence, 2014). Further literature has advised role transparency, as documented in the findings in this study, with trust, authority and accountability being key principles that enhance relations between service providers and users (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014; Marsh & Higgins, 2018).

Parents' views represented in literature and in the current study seek clear guidance on processes and information around navigating systems within an EPS and wider SEND services. They want clarity on what support they can expect and guidance on

how to navigate and make use of support with improved transparency of local offers and services (DfE, 2023). Parents want to understand and assess options available to them in order to make an informed decision where they feel involved in the process (DfE, 2023). Parents and carers want accurate guidance and information from professionals and to have a collaborative role in determining arrangements for supporting their child (DfE, 2022). However, research has shown that this is not always the case (DfE, 2022).

Parents feeling included, heard and valued has been shown to be an effective means of generating engagement, with services being increasingly responsive and flexible in meeting the diverse needs of families (Byrnes, 2012; La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Responsiveness was raised as a recommendation for EPSs in the findings of the current study with recent consultations suggesting this is commonplace in family views where parents' confidence in support services is in decline due to them being insufficiently responsive (DfE, 2023). Linked to the previous section, an existing poor relationship with school acted as a barrier to some parents' engagement when services were perceived as unresponsive and insensitive to users' individual views and needs (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Research has found that a flexible, individually tailored approach from an EPS, that fits the unique profiles of families, can increase engagement, particularly for those experiencing challenges in involvement (Day, 2013; Owen et al., 2022). Responding to findings exploring paternal views, recommendations were made to be responsive to particular demographics such as communicating directly with families, using email or digital methods to share information and arranging meetings out of work hours and in more informal settings (Hart, 2011). Whilst these recommendations were specific to fathers, the findings suggest EPs striving for an understanding for the context in which families exist, and utilising this to improve engagement and outcomes, can be applicable universally (McGuiggan, 2021). As EPs are not based within schools, they have the potential to achieve this and work flexibly to apply psychology within family settings and also within the community (McGuiggan, 2021; Owen et al., 2022).

The White paper (2023) stated that the national agenda is committed to ensuring that SEND support services are responsive to the individual needs of families and, following processes based in evidence, espouses to work closely and openly with YP

and their families within systems that are fair, consistent and sustainable (DfE, 2023).

### **5.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter presented a second literature review aiming to contextualise the analysed data in the study following the development of conceptualised categories. The incorporation of existing research assisted the researcher's theoretical sensitisation and subsequent development of the study's grounded theory. Chapter 6 will present the study's grounded theory framework as an integration of relevant existing literature, data analysis and concepts discussed in this chapter.



## 6 The grounded theory

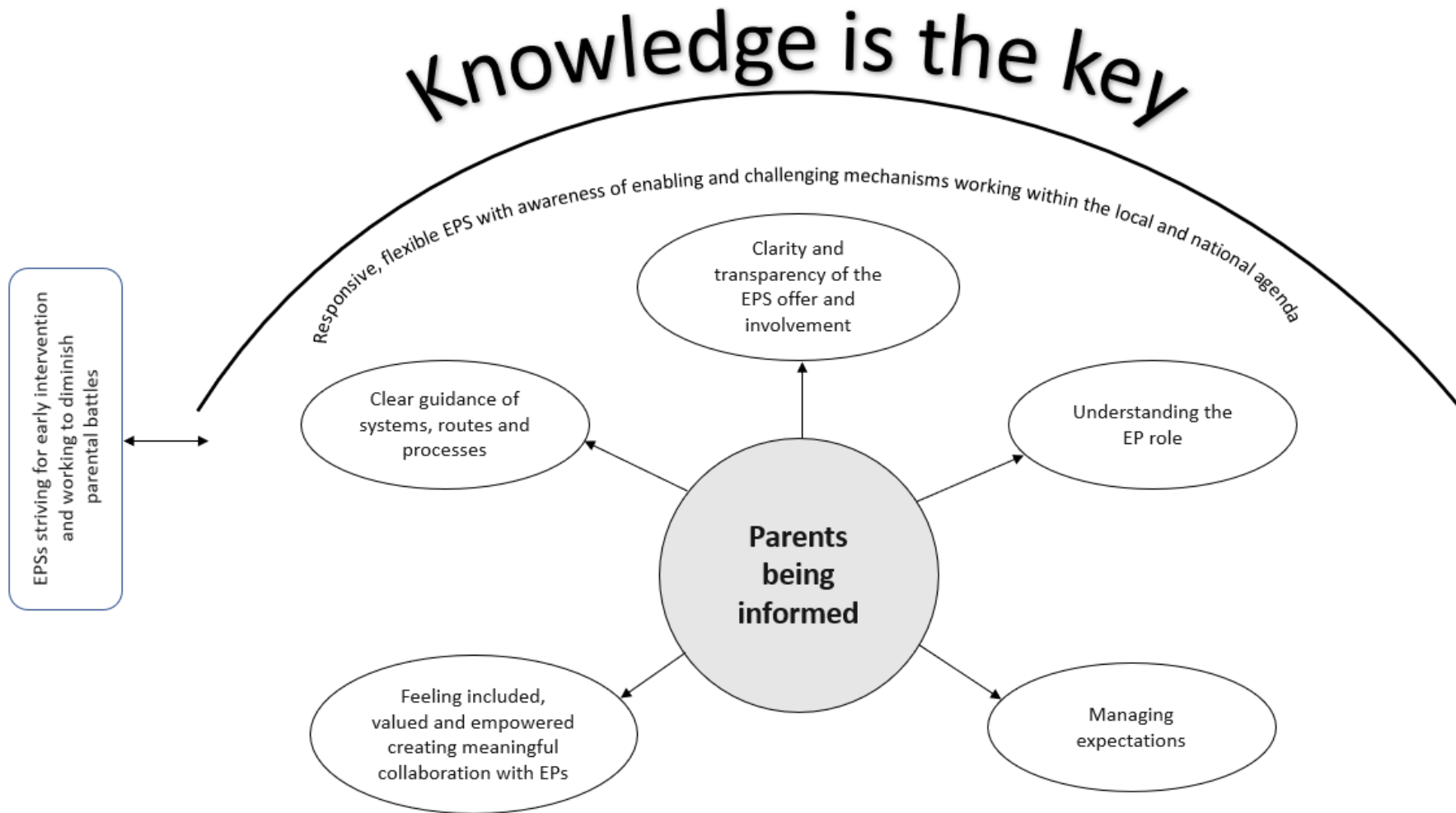
### 6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the grounded theory for the current study as developed from the combined analysis of data outlined in Chapter 4 and the literature reviewed in Chapter 5. The developed grounded theory provides conceptual understanding of the experiences of parents captured within this study. It evolved from categories and focused codes that were deemed to be most important in the exploration and understanding of parental experiences engaging with an EPS within stages of early intervention. The grounded theory evolved from the following categories:

- *'It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all'* (Figure 4.3),
- *'Feeling uninformed'* (Figure 4.2)
- *'The elusive EP role and the unknown reality – contrasts in expectations and involvement'* (Figure 4.5),
- *'Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement'* (Figure 4.6)
- *'Parents know what they want: earlier support, clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness'* (Figure 4.7),
- *'Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle'* (Figure 4.4).

As outlined in Chapters 4 and 5, it is understood that categories, focused codes and findings do not occur in isolation and that any conceptualisation or theory generation is the product of complex interactions and layers of processes in which all contributing elements are combined. All categories, codes and related literature play an interconnected role in understanding the presented theory.

A series of visual representations depicting the relationships between the categories and factors highlighted within the data were created to support the theory's development (Appendix 24). A visual illustration of the final grounded theory is presented in Figure 6.1. This framework represents the complexity and fundamental facets that underpin the wider elements of the overall constructed theory: *Knowledge is the key: parents informed, supported by EP responsiveness, are the central aspects influencing and supporting engagement with an EPS.*



**Figure 6.1 – A visual representation of the study’s grounded theory: Knowledge is the key: parents being informed, supported by EP responsiveness, are the central aspects influencing and supporting engagement with an EPS.**

## **6.2 The study's grounded theory**

The grounded theory presented in this chapter conceptualises that successful parental engagement with an EPS within early intervention stages is influenced by, and resultant from, multiple interacting internal aspects and external processes. The current grounded theory has an overarching concept of knowledge being key and has information sharing at the centre with EPS responsiveness permeating all aspects of involvement.

### **6.2.1 Knowledge is the key and being informed**

The in vivo code '*Knowledge is key*,' that became Category 3, permeated all other categories within the analysis of data in the current study. This reflects internal and external aspects as parental knowledge is an internal concept that can be held both collectively and individually but, in terms of engagement with an EPS as shown in the data and literature review, requires external input to generate knowledge to enable parental acquisition of information.

As outlined in Category 2, parents feel uninformed with the view that they are unable to access knowledge, unless an expert themselves, which participants felt was required for them to successfully engage with support. Findings within the present study illustrated that parents are sometimes unaware that supportive mechanisms, such as access to an EP, are even possible; a position poignantly captured within the in vivo code '*you don't know you don't know*.' It needs to be acknowledged that parents within the current study had all engaged with an EPS as their experiences reflected their involvement. However, within this, some participants were unaware that EP services were available and all recounted difficulties in their knowledge around expectations, referral processes, understanding of the EP role or their involvement within the support.

The findings in the current study are supported by existing research where parents felt uninformed which impacted the degree to which they felt they could effectively engage (Day, 2013; Hart, 2011; La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Participants and literature positioned knowledge and being informed as supportive mechanisms to accessing and engaging with EPS support. Within the present grounded theory,

notions of hidden information and unawareness of processes available can be counteracted by ensuring parents have knowledge, enabling them to be informed through the receipt of information.

Parents in the current study conceptualised having knowledge and being able to access information as vital in having an aware of an EPS and subsequently effectively engaging with an EP. This is reflected in the current theory which outlines parents gaining knowledge as key to them being informed, supporting effective EPS engagement.

### **6.2.2 Extending factors within ‘knowledge is key’ and ‘being informed’**

Directly integrated with the overarching and central notions of ‘knowledge’ and ‘parents being informed’, are five related conceptualised elements:

- Clear guidance of systems, routes and processes,
- Clarity and transparency of the EPS offer and involvement,
- Understanding the EP role
- Managing expectations
- Feeling included, valued and empowered creating meaningful collaboration with an EPS

All these elements are intrinsically connected to parental clarity within an EPS with the grounded theory advocating that this is made possible through information sharing and parents having knowledge.

Parents in the current study, and findings with the literature review, spoke about wanting to have an overview of an EPS in relation to SEND support to assist their understanding of involvement to better enable their engagement. Parents want to know what provision is on offer, to understand the role and remit of an EP, how they can access an EP, the referral routes available, what systems they need to navigate and how to do this with transparency at every stage through clear guidance and accessible information (DfE, 2022).

Parents receiving guidance of systems, processes, and the EP role may help to reduce ambiguity around EPS involvement which, in turn, could work towards

managing expectations, another element raised within the data analysis and literature review as an area that can impact effective engagement. All parents in the present study consented to EPS involvement for their child, yet all spoke about some level of ambiguity around the role with four parents having minimal understanding of an EP other than wanting to access a new avenue to support their child. This raises questions around whether authentic informed consent took place, which transparent information sharing could eradicate. Consistent with this, guidance, clarity and transparency around EP involvement could support a reduction in the unease that was documented as occurring due to lacking or misinformation. This could support parents in feeling included, valued and empowered to contribute to EP involvement, which is also captured in the grounded theory framework, promoting creative collaborative relationships with EPs to generate improved outcomes for YP (Lawrence, 2014; O'Connor, 2008).

Parents having knowledge about the EP role, having clarity and transparency around the offer of an EPS with clear guidance around systems, routes and processes, all work towards enabling parents to be informed and hold knowledge about what is available. This occurring without information hidden could better enable effective engagement with an EPS, which is reflected in the presented grounded theory.

### **6.2.3 Responsive EPS**

Incorporating Category 6 and the findings in the second literature review, to engage effectively before, during and after elements discussed above, parents need an EPS that is responsive to individuals, that holds an awareness of mechanisms that work as enablers or barriers to parents' ability to engage whilst acknowledging that EPs need to work within local and national agendas. The parents within this study, and research drawn from the literature review, illustrate a wide range of aspects that can influence engagement with an EPS. Participants and literature outline intrinsic elements that require EP responsiveness which include: culture, religion, heritage, self-perception, acceptance, past experience, socio-economic positioning, gender and emotional overwhelm (Katz et al., 2007; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014). External factors linked to internal influences include community perception, access to support networks, existing associations with the school site, formal aspects of involvement

and language difficulties (Hogg et al., 2014). Practical, external factors and logistics relating to the date and time of appointments, location of meeting, work commitments, transport, child care and wider family responsibilities are reported by participants in the current study and within literature (Day, 2013; Hogg et al., 2014). Flexibility requirements on behalf of parents were documented as enablers for EPS engagement with participants and literature, both calling for increased flexibility from EPSs.

Due to the complexity and variety of potential mechanistic barriers and enablers to engaging with an EPS, the present grounded theory incorporates EP responsiveness as an ongoing requirement to enable individual needs to be met. It suggests that EPSs need meaningful awareness of the communities they serve to better understand the population they support and adapt as required within each individual situation.

#### **6.2.4 Striving for early intervention and working to diminish parental battles**

The inclusion of 'EPs striving for early intervention' was incorporated into the constructed grounded theory to reflect the findings that arose from participants' experiences as well as acknowledging the difficulties that the researcher encountered when attempting to identify participants that had accessed EP involvement within early intervention stages. This narrative was further supported within literature explored as part of the critical theoretical sensitisation in section 5.6 which described difficulties that families had experienced in securing timely access to EPs (Byrnes, 2012; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; DfE, 2023). As such, the grounded theory proposes that EPSs need to strive for early intervention when working with children and families. This would be conceptualised as EPSs providing support to YP, early in the life of presenting difficulties, to enable effective and timely intervention to assist schools and families in generating positive outcomes. Closely linked to this, and acknowledging the prolonged wait for EP intervention recounted by participants in the current study, EPs working with settings to diminish battles in accessing EPS engagement is also included in the grounded theory framework.

### **6.3 Chapter summary**

Chapter 6 presented the grounded theory framework constructed within the current study. It seeks to explain and illustrate means of generating effective parental engagement with an EPS. The theory proposes that parents having knowledge, being informed and encountering a flexible and responsive approach from an EPS are key to underpinning successful parental engagement. Additionally, the theory reflects EPSs holding a critical role in striving for early intervention within the constraints of local and national agendas and utilising their position to support settings to review processes to diminish battles that parents experience.

Chapter 7 details the discussion for the present study where the grounded theory is considered in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter 2. An evaluation of the study's quality, distinct contribution, suggestions for future research and implications for practice are presented.

## **7 Discussion**

### **7.1 Introduction**

This chapter considers the study's grounded theory in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2 in response to the research question: What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages? Key findings of the research will also be interwoven within implications of the study.

Whilst early intervention was the intended framing of the original research question (with EP involvement occurring early in the life of the problem), to be congruent with participant experiences and the research findings, pre-statutory intervention within SEN support stages is the conceptualisation of early intervention for the positioning of EP involvement within the present study.

Findings indicate that knowledge is a key, overarching concept for enabling effective parental engagement with information sharing at the centre. EPS responsiveness was found to permeate all aspects of involvement with families, with EPs striving to deliver intervention early in the life of the problem, aiming to diminish potential parental battles to access support.

An evaluation of the study takes place with the study's distinct contribution, implications for practice and future research discussed. The chapter concludes with a review of the researcher's reflexivity and reflections upon the research journey.

### **7.2 Alignment with the initial literature review**

The initial literature review in Chapter 2 presented the current perspective for parental engagement in educational contexts. The body of research illustrates the significant impact parental engagement can have on YP's education (Day, 2013; DfE, 2014; Fan & Chen, 2001; Harris & Goodall, 2007) and the necessity for this to occur within EP practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2014; Fox, 2009; Pellegrini, 2009).

The study's findings and subsequent grounded theory framework provide inductive, real-world evidence for the critical role that knowledge and information sharing can



have in supporting effective parental engagement with EPSs. Key findings from this study are consistent with literature in Chapter 2, indicating that parents require a basic knowledge of systems that make provision for their children (Desforges & Abouchar, 2003). Parents require accurate information from their involvement with professionals that support their child (Lamb, 2009), yet literature and findings suggest that this is not always the case (DfE, 2022).

Previous commentary around the elusiveness of the EP role (Burnham, 2013), and its influence on engagement, are reflected in the findings within the study's focused codes and conceptual categories. Difficulties surrounding the definition of the EP role can occur due to discrepancies between expectations (Kelly & Gray, 2000), as was evidenced within the accounts from participants within the present study. Differences between EPSs can further this through varying service delivery models, generating different offers and means of support (Fallon et al., 2010).

Connections can be drawn between the study's grounded theory and the literature presented in Chapter 2 outlining the need for transparency, information sharing, managing expectations and identifying provision available (DfE, 2011, 2014; Lamb, 2009). Focused code '*Feeling empowered, valued and included*' is recognised in literature with stipulations that parents need to experience these to effectively share their expertise of their children's strengths and weaknesses (Dunsmuir et al., 2014). Literature illustrates findings consistent with those incorporated in the grounded theory where parents need reassurance that their opinions and contributions are a valued part of the partnership, with EPSs encouraged to identify factors that facilitate this (DfE, 2014; Evans, 2005). The necessity to generate inclusive mechanisms and challenge barriers to collaboration (Dunsmuir et al., 2014; Pellegrini, 2009) were found in the current study and supported within the second literature review (McGuiggan, 2021; O'Connor, 2008) that contributed to the study's grounded theory framework.

A prominent finding from the current study was the timing of intervention from EPs. The current study captured difficulties relating to EPs engaging in early intervention practices which were reflected in the challenges encountered in securing participants that met early intervention criteria (see section 7.6). The potential implications drawn from these recruitment challenges, the views expressed around waiting and battling

for EP involvement within participants' accounts, along with contemporary literature in Chapter 5, led to the inclusion of EPSs striving for earlier intervention within the grounded theory framework. Focused code '*wanting EP involvement earlier*' is reflected in legislation included in Chapter 2 with the need for early intervention captured in policy shifts as an emphasis on prevention of further difficulties (DfE, 2014, 2022). EHCPs reducing the capacity for early EP intervention was reflected in the initial literature review (DfE, 2022) and, within the second literature review, as part of the construction of the grounded theory. Research in Chapter 5 illustrated that EP work is dominated by statutory assessments (McGuiggan, 2021) and that this is inhibiting opportunities for wider involvement giving minimal time for early intervention work (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). The need for EPSs to ensure a balance of statutory work with early family support was raised by Peake (1999) yet legislative consultation (DfE, 2023) and the present study's findings suggest that this has not happened.

Parents have been encouraged to share concerns with education settings and inform schools if they believe their child may have SEND or require additional support, with legislative policy acknowledging that parents know their children best (DfE & DoH, 2015). However, a strong narrative in the current study, and an incorporated element in the constructed grounded theory, is parents' experience of battling with schools to have their child's needs understood and recognised, despite raising concerns, which was not documented in the initial literature review. Parents expressing frustration and distress having their concerns dismissed by school for prolonged periods was documented in historic literature within the second review (O'Connor, 2008; Peake, 1999) and represented in focused code '*a prolonged struggle to be heard to access support*'. The focused code '*schools as the gatekeeper*' is supported by contemporary research with EPSs reportedly becoming increasingly inaccessible to families (McCarthy et al., 2022). The perception of a power imbalance in favour of schools has been reported to be exacerbated by the shift in EPS delivery models moving to a traded model (Islam, 2013; McGuiggan, 2021; Stringer et al., 2006).

Whilst the researcher recognises that the inclusion of the degree to which parents experience school battles is not directly associated with EPS experience, it remains highly relevant for EPS consideration as it acknowledges the context within which

EPs work. This was documented in reflections during data analysis (see memoing diary, Appendix 22) and was incorporated into future interview schedules with attempts to steer subsequent questions back towards EPS mechanisms having acknowledged the battles parents were describing (see Appendices 13-17). This approach aligned with the researcher's intentions of exploring 'experience' and not being limited to 'engagement,' creating the wide space for discussion, resulting in the intended insight into the broader EP field. This strong narrative in the results, and findings within the second literature review, resulted in the inclusion of EPSs using their position to diminish battles parents experience in the grounded theory framework.

### **7.3 Implications of the present study**

#### **7.3.1 Distinctive contribution**

The study's findings and presented grounded theory provide insight into mechanisms that influence parental engagement with an EPS in pre-statutory stages of early intervention, discovered by exploring parental views specifically related to experiences with an LA EPS. Inclusion and engagement in SEND services is a key issue for policy makers and service providers which rely upon parents to actively participate (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Reflecting the current political position around services and parental decline in their confidence to support SEND (DfE, 2023), the researcher considers the study to have made an original contribution by identifying influential factors, proposing an understanding of mechanisms that can enable and hinder parental engagement.

The inductive study design proposes an understanding into the various thoughts, actions and processes involved in parental engagement with an EPS. It utilised a rigorous methodology offering valuable insight into the interactional nature of processes that contribute to, and impact upon, parental engagement. The approach was deliberately exploratory and responsive to findings, not limited to specific questions or areas of focus. It utilised the experiences of parents through the exploration of their voices rather than views of EPs, teachers, or professionals giving direct representation of those with whom engagement was trying to be enhanced. To the researcher's knowledge, no other study has focused on developing an understanding of parental experiences with an EPS to better comprehend

engagement mechanisms through the production of a theoretical model that is grounded in data. As far as the researcher is aware, this is the first study to employ constructivist GT to investigate the subject area and, therefore, brings an original contribution by providing a new approach to better understand the processes involved in parental engagement with EPs. This is the first study to focus on early intervention stages, which provides another unique contribution to better understand the phenomena.

Findings support national guidance and policy which stipulates the need for early intervention, clarity, information sharing and parent partnership. It provides an explanation for the overarching catalyst of knowledge supporting effective engagement with further insight into the finer aspects of information dissemination plus the recommendation for responsive EPSs and the potential indirect influence of schools on EPS engagement. The current study adds weight to existing research, utilising the parental perspective, providing insight for policy and practice development for both individual EPs and wider EPS strategic level approaches.

Whilst the focus was on EPSs, findings form valuable implications that can be applied at a wider LA service level with implications for schools and educational settings, timed with the release of the confirmed White Paper (DfE, 2023) reviewing parental involvement with systems and services supporting pupils with SEND. It has the potential to be applied to school processes, supported by EPs, and may contribute to strategic policy development within the local and wider LA context.

### **7.3.2 Implications for practice**

The current study's findings offer a range of implications for the professional practice of EPs and EPSs which are aligned with government publications and policy that stipulate the need for parental partnership. The grounded theory framework is reflective of contemporary national policy and focus for early intervention, transparency of processes and the vital role knowledge and information sharing play (DfE, 2023). EPs are well positioned to bridge the gap between policy, legislation, school practice and LA services with the presented framework generating clear points for practice development. The study's grounded theory provides a model through which we can understand the integration of knowledge and information

sharing with a responsive EPS that puts the needs of its service users at the heart of their work, while simultaneously adhering to local and national agendas and boundaries.

Responsiveness, as identified in the study's findings and grounded theory, is suggested to underpin all aspects of EP work, proposing the adoption of person-centred, individualised approaches to best meet the needs of service-users. This may involve building a rapport and relationship with parents to enable an effective information exchange with EPs adapting their practice to be responsive to the individual needs of families and their circumstances. Using the skills and knowledge acquired through their professional training, EPs are highly adept in creating an environment in which parents feel included, valued and empowered to work collaboratively. Employing existing practice of consultation (Wagner, 2000), EPs can use interpersonal skills to apply relational approaches with families to generate a sense of connection to ensure parents feel valued, emotionally safe and heard (Nolan & Moreland, 2014) to facilitate meaningful engagement.

EPs striving to offer flexible dates, times and locations for parents, following initial responsive discussions to meet families within their current context, may work towards supporting parental engagement within the remit that exists for working hours within an EPS. Following views from participants in the current study, EPs could maintain a responsive link with parents by sharing their professional contact details and remaining open to interaction during the period of their involvement. EPs holding the YP and family as central aspects in their practice could work towards supporting the best outcomes for YP (McGuiggan, 2021).

Wider alterations around EPS policy and practice may support additional elements identified within the grounded theory framework. Incorporating a practice expectation for EPs to introduce themselves and explain their role when beginning involvement with a family could combine a reduction in ambiguity around the EP role, diminish discrepancies in expectations, provide clarity around involvement and generate an opportunity for information sharing and question answering.

As illustrated in literature, present findings and grounded theory, lacking knowledge can be a significant barrier to parental inclusion. A successful engagement strategy could involve user-friendly information, disseminated in appropriate ways and locations, to maximise take up (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Knowledge sharing through school links, parental groups, LA information sessions, websites and social media are some ways in which information could be more adequately shared. EPSs may need to adapt their practice to ensure information is accessible for all and might need to consult with existing parental groups to determine the best means of achieving this within their local context. Drop in sessions have proved successful for some EPSs with a less formal opportunity generating increased uptake (Byrnes, 2012). The use of Assistant EPs to share key messages could combat capacity difficulties already acknowledged based on EHCP workload (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019).

Findings suggest that EPSs need to actively generate understanding of the EP role for service users which could involve attending teacher training, SENCO forums, parent carer forums, sharing information leaflets as shown to be successful for Participant 3, providing links to email addresses, online explanation and information sessions at local service hubs and children centres. Findings suggest that a main source of knowledge generation and information sharing is between parents themselves, with findings indicating that the more knowledge and information of the role is disseminated, the more understanding can spread.

Findings indicate that clarity around the EP role and embedded transparent information sharing for involvement could work towards managing the expectations of parents. Clarity and transparency could be achieved at a service level with a distinct offer for schools and parents available, including routes and referral pathways with consideration for alterations to existing practice. To respond to findings, a direct access route for parents may increase engagement and information sharing through potential drop-in support. This could involve a surgery for parents to check their views as advised by Participant 3. Owen et al. (2022) found a 121% increase in parental engagement through telephone consultation service which fits with historical recommendations around EPSs adopting a community psychology

approach (Byrnes, 2012; Lawrence, 2014). EPSs more active in communities, generating links between EPs and families in an informal context relevant to service users, has been shown to be highly effective in increasing engagement (Byrnes, 2012; Cuckle & Bamford, 2000; Owen et al., 2022). Practices such as this have inevitable implications for costs and capacity of EP services, which will need to be balanced against the positive value of increased engagement.

Whilst recommendations for EPSs to alter practice to better engage parents are acknowledged, research has emphasised the importance of 'keeping schools happy' recognising that EPSs need to consider their position in providing a service that schools value and want to endorse (McGuiggan, 2021). This consideration will need to be maintained whilst trying to incorporate alterations to delivery models and service approaches. This is particularly necessary for services that operate under a traded model where EPs can feel under the control of schools (Islam, 2013). EPSs may benefit from reflecting on their priorities, aims and values to ensure that they continue to be represented within a traded model of service delivery. A balance may need to be sought to meet the expectations of schools to maintain traded agreements, with the aim of providing psychological services that meet the needs of EPs, YP and families (McGuiggan, 2021).

An associated implication captured in the grounded theory framework relates to early intervention which is widely regarded as essential and is a current drive within national policy (DfE, 2023). Whilst this is not directly related to improving engagement, it was prominent in parental experiences, present within difficulties recruiting participants and remains an area of focus and development for EPSs. The acknowledgement of the national EP shortage and implications for subsequent early intervention at a national level is reflected in current national policy with outlined investment and commitment to increase the EP workforce (DfE, 2023). Within this, EPSs may need to creatively explore their service delivery models to strive for early intervention wherever possible whilst attempting to manage the ever-growing demand for EHCPs.

Findings indicate that parents experience challenge with schools to access support and gain recognition for their children's needs with research suggesting that not enough has been done to bring family and school systems together (McGuiggan,

2021). EPs are well placed to bridge this gap and support schools to consider their position and apply psychological knowledge and interpersonal skills within a systems approach to promote and facilitate organisational change at a school level. Systemic change and organisational psychology can work towards supporting schools to better understand the parental position whilst managing their own context within the boundaries of the available capacity of wider services. This change could aid development of processes that are conducive to promoting parental engagement at a school and external services level. EPs may also be able to support schools to audit their referral systems, information sharing processes and means of ensuring parents feel heard.

Findings such as knowledge and information sharing, clarity and transparency supported by flexible, responsive approaches could be adopted by wider LA services that encounter parental partnership working, particularly those related to education. It could be an interesting continuation or extension of the study to explore experiences of parents accessing alternative EP services and see if the implications recommended for LA EPSs also apply to the independent sector. Although it may not be a straightforward matter to generalise the results presented here to wider services, it is hoped that the issues raised will make a helpful contribution to professional debates about ways of engaging more effectively with parents of the YP with whom all services work.

### **7.3.3 Dissemination of research findings**

As outlined in Chapter 3, conclusions and potential policy and practice implications for the research were committed to be shared with the EPS, VaIO and participants upon completion of the thesis.

Following participant interviews, an email was sent offering a follow-up phonecall during which overall findings and practice implications would be shared.

Within discussions with SLT, the EPS made a request for the researcher to present an overview of the study, with findings and implications for practice, as part of a scheduled Psychological Interest Group that meet once a month. The researcher agreed and this invitation will be extended to teams within wider LA services to share



findings with a broader audience that may benefit from the framework conceptualising parental engagement experience.

During a meeting with the ValO, it was proposed that findings would be shared upon completion of the thesis. The ValO requested that a condensed version of the research be produced and shared within the local offer, parent groups and Facebook page, to which the researcher happily agreed.

#### **7.4 Considerations of the validity and quality – part 2**

Continuing the steps outlined in Table 3.3, an evaluation of the constructed conceptual categories and subsequent grounded theory is presented. The evaluation offered in Table 7.1, adapted from criteria outlined by Charmaz (2014), considers the quality of the study including credibility and trustworthiness in addition to aspects reviewed in Table 3.3.

<b>Evaluation Criteria</b>	<b>Outcome</b>
Credibility	The developed theory is firmly grounded in data, constructed through various coding processes and analysis strategies that can be traced back through the previous levels (see Appendices 20-25).
Originality	The study provides a unique exploration of parental engagement experiences with an EPS with its distinct contribution discussed in section 7.3.1. The study offers conceptual understanding of the research topic from an original, direct viewpoint; the first to produce a theoretical model that is rigorously grounded in data, offering new insights to EPS parental engagement in pre-statutory stages of early intervention.  The pertinence of the constructed grounded theory in relation to existing literature is discussed in section 7.2. Theoretical significance and professional implications for practice and policy are discussed in section 7.3.2.
Resonance	The grounded theory conceptualises mechanisms to understand and enhance parental engagement with an

	<p>EPS in pre-statutory intervention stages within the context of the direct experience of the five participants across two LAs.</p> <p>The constructed categories add depth and clarity to the body of research, existing literature and national policy from the voice and perspective of parents of children with SEND.</p> <p>At the time of writing the thesis, the researcher had shared the constructed grounded theory with TEPs, EP colleagues and university tutors, all of whom felt the findings resonated with their professional and personal experience of the explored topic.</p>
Usefulness	<p>Professional practice implications, resultant from the constructed grounded theory, are discussed in section 7.3.</p> <p>The dissemination of findings and implications to stakeholders and wider LA services are discussed in section 7.3.3.</p> <p>The study is unique in employing constructivist GT to the phenomena and provides a new approach to better understand the processes involved in parental engagement with an EPS.</p> <p>The analysis offers an inductive interpretation of parental engagement with an EPS and provides readers with a conceptual model to consider challenges raised within recent national policy. It exposes previously conceptualised areas that require further focus and development with guidance from findings on how this could be achieved.</p> <p>Opportunities for future research are outlined in section 7.5.</p>

**Table 7.1 – Further measures taken by the researcher to improve the quality of the study based on evaluation criteria outlined by Charmaz (2014)**

## **7.5 Strengths, limitations and future research**

The constructivist GT approach facilitated the exploration of parental experience, perceptions and understanding to generate a theory around enhancing parental engagement with an EPS. Such methodology provides an understanding of social phenomena that is grounded in data, rather than being developed from pre-existing theories or frameworks. Unlike other qualitative research methods, such as those discussed in section 3.3, constructivist GT was advantageous in affording rich data into the complex research area, providing direct insight into the experiences and associated processes of sampled parents of children with SEND when encountering EPS support. The researcher's choice to develop a theory through the exploration of experiences to better inform policy and practices is endorsed by La Placa and Corlyon (2014) who outlined that such an approach would assist policy makers and practitioners to develop interventions to reduce potential barriers and facilitate successful engagement, grounded in users' experiences.

The focus group used to generate questions supported an inductive research approach with parents guiding exploration and data gathering from the outset. As the research was deliberately exploratory in nature, it was not limited to exploration of parental engagement and enabled general experience to be highlighted. The explorative nature of the study and the flexibility of GT gave participants the freedom to raise experiences they considered important. Whilst open research questions can lead to a limitation in the depth and complexity of themes and analysis (Smaling, 2003), this approach was appropriate for the present study, which intended to maintain a broad focus, allowing participants to define for themselves the scope and meaning of EPS involvement and for this to emerge within findings.

Purposefully, due to its epistemological links to the transformative paradigm, the current study only explored parents' views and did not include other groups associated with the area of research. A research design that employs activity theory could provide a conceptual framework from which parental engagement with an EPS can be explored by incorporating the complexity of the inter-relationships within the sociocultural context in which engagement with services take place (Greenhouse, 2013). This could involve perspectives from YP, schools, family and EPSs to generate a deeper understanding of interacting systems.

The use of intensive interviewing allowed the flexible pursuit of topics that arose in data collection through a deep exploration of the participants' constructed experiences. The approach facilitated unrestricted questioning, allowing the researcher to pursue areas of interest in relation to emerging information and analytical concepts (Anderson, 2010). Whilst interviewing was determined appropriate for the current study, this approach has been criticised due to potential deficiency in accuracy due to retrospective accounts of participant narratives (Miller & Glassner, 2011). However, credibility was enhanced through the employment of constructivist GT, which embraces the subjectivity of interviews and supports the co-construction of data collection between interviewer and researcher (Charmaz, 2006). Future studies could employ a variety of methods to compliment interview data, such as focus groups, observations or written records to generate a more holistic approach, adding to the depth and quality of the GT analysis (Birks and Mills, 2015).

A considered limitation of the present study is the small sample size and the narrow range of LAs from which data was obtained (Charmaz, 2014). Bound by time and capacity pressures of the doctoral thesis, the challenges faced in securing participants and the subsequent range of data obtained, could pose a threat to the study's credibility (Charmaz, 2014). All participants were female, White-British and, other than potential religious differences, were culturally and ethnically unified. The notion of 'parents' as a homogeneous group has been criticised as ignoring idiosyncrasies of race, class and gendered identities (Crozier, 2012; McQueen & Hobbs, 2014), yet the participants in the present study go further than this caution around generalisability and represent an almost uniformed group.

In addition to participants presenting as a potentially homogenous ethnic and cultural group, they all shared similar social and economic characteristics. All participants were articulate, educated and employed with access to resources and capabilities that enabled them to advocate effectively for their children. This may have influenced the findings, particularly regarding those that the researcher was anticipating around disabling mechanisms that could occur based on background, priorities and capabilities, prior to securing access to an EP. This limitation needs to be acknowledged with the recognition that different participants may have resulted in

contrasting findings, particularly if it had been possible to include parents that did not have access to the same social, economic and political resources.

Whilst the current study only secured mothers as participants and this is a recognised criticism, it is consistent with existing research which has found a prevalence of mothers engaging in educational services with evidence suggesting that mainstream services fail to successfully engage fathers due to a potential construction of gender traditionally allocating parenting and childcare to women (La Placa & Corlyon, 2014). Future research could focus on paternal involvement and explore the proposed impact of this social and institutional construction whilst aiming to increase paternal engagement.

Although attempts were made to recruit participants in areas identified as challenging to engage, families were unaware or did not take advantage of opportunities to be involved and those considered disadvantaged or disaffected remained difficult to access. It would be wrong, therefore, to assume that conclusions drawn from the present study are widely generalisable to populations that experience significant engagement difficulties.

The difficulties experienced in recruiting participants that met the inclusion criteria also reflect the current EP field. Finding EP involvement that occurred within the pre-statutory SEN support stages of a school's graduated response cycle was incredibly difficult in the placement EPS and the two approached neighbouring services. Of the pre-statutory intervention work that did take place, almost all had complex needs that had resulted in subsequent progression to statutory assessment. This created a limited scope for sampling and time constraints related to the doctoral process meant that the participants identified and consented, encompassed all those that took part in the study.

As noted by Burnham (2013), differences occur between EPs within the profession itself which can limit the generalisability of the findings from this research. Whilst lessons can be learned from the experiences of participants in the study, it is evident that there are different approaches and rationales for EP work (McGuiggan, 2021). Despite the hesitations of conclusions being drawn from a relatively small-scale

project, findings offer useful insights into the value and mechanisms of engaging with parents in EPS support.

Whilst the sample size was small and was not representative of those that felt entirely unable to engage with an EPS, the constructivist underpinnings of the research design enabled the researcher to attribute credibility to the strength of the overarching categories and constructed grounded theory due to the rigorous analysis methods employed within GT methodology (Charmaz & Bryant, 2011). The researcher aimed to enhance the credibility of the study further by engaging in theoretical sampling which enabled exploration to check if findings were LA specific or occurred in a wider context. Whilst findings may not be generalisable to all parents and EPSs, it is hoped that they will support EPs and EPSs to reflect on their own practices and processes to enhance parental engagement.

Although theoretical sensitisation was achieved, the codes and categories that led to the grounded theory were bound by the limitations and pressures of a doctoral thesis. Small samples, narrow geographical variation and similar participants raise questions around the plausibility of true theoretical sensitisation (Maz, 2013). Attempts were made to ensure theoretical sufficiency through the flexible nature of extensive interviews and the researcher asking analytically guided questions, exploring areas of theoretical relevance. Sufficient analysis and saturation were facilitated through the employment of the constant comparison method, reflective memoing and the development of subsequent questions to explore identified areas. Thus, despite potential limitations, rigorous processes supported theoretical saturation and the development of theory firmly grounded in data. Future research, that can afford greater flexibility in timescales, could include a variety of data collection methods, incorporate greater levels of theoretical sampling to support the development of additional or more detailed categories which could lead to a richer understanding of parental engagement.

Whilst the adoption of constructivist GT enabled the creation of conceptual categories emergent from data to provide valuable insight and a distinct contribution to the explored phenomena, a limitation of the study could be the researcher's

inexperience in the application of GT methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015). Whilst this is acknowledged, the researcher improved the methodological credibility by engaging in extensive reading around GT prior to and throughout the research process and by adhering to outlined methodological strategies, processes and remaining close to the acquired data (Charmaz, 2006). In addition, the researcher followed recommendations by Charmaz (2014) and adopted the method of line-by-line coding to protect the integrity of the data and account for the influences on their thinking that brought them to coding decisions (Birks & Mills, 2015).

Miller (1995) proposes that the phrasing 'grounded theory' is inaccurate and, instead, suggests that GT studies provide localised examples of wider processes. This critique seems pertinent to the current study, where findings may be limited to the context in which data collection took place. This suggests caution may be required if applying findings or the grounded theory framework to other EPSs. Extending the sample to include a range of LAs, incorporating the potential for geographical, population and practice variations, could enable a broader collection of experience and practice in future research.

Another aspect considered in relation to strengths and limitations of the present study is research rigor and potential bias. In the current study, strategies were followed to enhance rigor and ensure that analysis was protected against potential influence of personal views (Anderson, 2010). Employing principals outlined by constructivist GT, the researcher was actively involved, throughout all stages of data collection and analysis, with GT research recognised as a co-constructed process between researcher and participants (Charmaz, 2014). As such, the researcher deliberately suspended their preconceptions ensuring they were led by the data to arrive at new theoretical insights (Allen & Davey, 2018). The researcher purposefully used a focus group to generate interview questions, hoping to avoid the potential influence of their prior experience within early stages of data collection. Furthermore, GT methodology recognises the subjectivity of analysis, acknowledging that researchers apply their own interpretation to their data, whilst remaining mindful of their reflexivity. To support this, the researcher ensured that they safeguarded against their own preconceptions, existing knowledge, and experience by employing

strategies to support their reflexivity. These included ongoing memo-writing, regular supervision, rigorous coding processes, and application of the constant comparative method. Such strategies enabled the researcher to maintain scrutiny over their research experience and provide transparency of their approach and decisions by purposefully documenting their reflections, decisions and interpretations (Charmaz, 2014).

Reflecting national policy and exploration of wider service involvement (DfE, 2023), future research may extend the current study by exploring experience and perceptions of parents that were unable to engage in EPS support, either through refusal or by those who wanted involvement but were unable to secure it. In addition, exploring service users from multiple genders and varied cultural, social and economic backgrounds may give a deeper understanding of mechanisms which influence engagement. Targeted inclusion of carers within research would be beneficial as they may encounter alternative avenues for support access via additional support services related to care placements.

The study's epistemological and ontological underpinnings were consistent with the selected methodology which supported the development of a constructed framework that may better support effective parental engagement with an EPS. However, future research could benefit from the application of the model through deductive methodologies, such as mixed methods approaches, which may help to test the applicability of this theoretical framework in practice (Birks and Mills, 2015).

Employment of constructivist GT methodology provided valuable theoretical insight into parental engagement within an EPS in its local context. GT was appropriate for doctoral thesis research, generating new concepts within a larger research area and making new theoretical contributions (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The limitations acknowledged are characteristic of qualitative research and imply that the results may not be generalisable to wider EPSs and all parental experience. Nevertheless, studies investigating parental involvement outside statutory assessment are rare, and this study capitalised on an opportunity to explore parents' engagement experiences, thus making a novel contribution to the literature.



## **7.6 Researcher reflexivity**

The doctoral thesis was a process of many ups and downs. One of the main challenges encountered by the researcher was the recruitment of participants which, for months, seemed an impossible task. However, EPs within the placement EPS and links the researcher had with previous TEP placements, were extremely supportive in providing suggestions for potential participants which led to successful recruitment.

Linked to the recruitment difficulties, the researcher faced challenges when critically reflecting on the outcomes of the study. The study was designed to explore parental experiences of an EPS within 'early intervention' stages. Acknowledging the historical and contemporary recognition for the importance of accessing support early in the life of the problem, the researcher was keen to explore engagement mechanisms within early stages of school support. However, the researcher critically reflected that the challenges in recruiting participants due to the limited number that met the criteria of involvement, and the direct experiences gathered from participants in the study where years of battling had taken place, meant that the findings from the study could not authentically be positioned within 'early intervention' stages (see memo 50, Appendix 22). The researcher reflected that, whilst pre-statutory work for EPs may be conceptualised as early intervention work within a real-world EPS context, it would be unlikely for the EP involvement in this study to be categorised as 'early' in the constructions of participants. The researcher continued to reflect that the views of participants may be different had they accessed early EP intervention, acknowledging the potential for experiences to be altered had the involvement occurred earlier in the life of the problem.

The difficulties that the researcher encountered when attempting to explore early intervention stages are mirrored in existing literature and practice explored in section 7.2 (McGuiggan, 2021; Peake, 1999; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019).

Whilst the researcher was happy with the interview schedule as it was generated from parental views, the researcher held apprehension around the interviews themselves. However, the interview process was exhilarating and the researcher relished the opportunity to engage with a range of people, enthralled by the privilege

of hearing their experiences. Participants reported feeling heard and commented on the usefulness of the interviews in allowing them to reflect on their experience and feel a resolution in speaking about it with someone who was interested and versed in the subject.

Another difficulty the researcher encountered was managing thesis writing deadlines with placement obligations and balancing wider family responsibilities. Whilst challenging, this has supported the researcher to develop high focus working and generate boundaries around work time and family time.

The analysis of data was rigorous and intense and the researcher spent weeks fully immersing themselves in coding, grouping, scrutinising, recoding, rereading, clustering, diagramming and repeating the process until finally generating the seven categories. The researcher was continuously aware of their existing views and the reflexivity necessary to manage their prior experience around social and economic processes influencing engagement. The researcher brought their own preconceptions based on their previous SENCO role and had to be continuously mindful that they did not influence the focus or line of enquiry. The processes of memoing, constant comparative analysis and sequentially increasing the level of abstraction increased reflexivity and worked to safeguard the analysis from preconceptions and assumptions.

The researcher's practice has already changed having engaged in this study and the researcher now follows recommendations above, telephoning parents to introduce themselves, explaining their role, outlining their involvement and answering any questions. The researcher also shares their EPS email address with families should they have additional questions or wish to make follow-up statements.

Finally, the potential future research to explore the applicability of the grounded theoretical framework using a mixed methods approach is something that the researcher would relish the opportunity to conduct.

## **7.7 Chapter summary**

This chapter contextualised the study's key findings in the light of the literature reviewed and considered its distinctive contribution to the field. Practice implications were suggested with considerations made for the quality of the study, exploring strengths, limitations and areas for future research. The chapter concluded with the researcher's personal reflections of the research process. Chapter 8 will provide a summary the paper.

## 8 Conclusion

This study sought to explore parental experiences to identify mechanisms that influence engagement with an LA EPS by answering the research question: *What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?* Located within the current national SEND context, its purpose was to enrich EPS practice, learning from parents' experiential accounts, providing an inductive and rigorous exploration of mechanisms that enable or hinder engagement. Through the employment of constructivist GT methodology, the study aimed to extend understanding of parental engagement and provide a distinct contribution that could inform practice for EPs and strategic LA EPS development.

Whilst pre-statutory intervention within SEN support stages is the conceptualised positioning of EP involvement within early intervention stages for the present study, the researcher acknowledges the current political context where intervention early in the life of the problem is the place in which services should be striving for involvement (DfE, 2014, 2023). However, the contemporary landscape of EP work does not typically reflect early intervention with the demand for EHCPs reducing the capacity for much needed, and highly recognised, early intervention work (DfE, 2022; McGuiggan, 2021). A position congruent to findings in this study.

The study illustrates the importance of parental engagement with educational services whilst illuminating the difficulties that have presented in securing effective partnerships between services and families. Through consideration of literature and legislation in education, existing research and findings from the present study, the construction of a grounded theoretical framework is provided. Within the conceptualised grounded theory, the importance of parents having knowledge, being informed and having a responsive approach from a flexible EPS are highlighted as being the key areas underpinning successful parental engagement within pre-statutory stages of early intervention. The grounded theory seeks to illuminate the multiple factors that intersect when considering parental engagement, generating clear points for practice development.

The quality of the study is evaluated against criteria suggested by Charmaz (2014) and Birks and Mills (2015). The study is evaluated to have achieved credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness with reflexive measures discussed to enhance the study's validity and quality (Charmaz, 2014). Limitations are acknowledged, with recommendations for further research to address these suggested. The small, uniform and geographically narrow sample of participants forms a threat to the credibility of the study (Charmaz, 2014) and, whilst attempts were made to involve participants that had not been able to engage with an EPS, time constraints and accessibility inhibited their inclusion in the study. Future research would benefit from incorporating experiences of a larger sample size from a broader range of EPSs, genders, social and cultural backgrounds, across wider geographical areas including perceptions of those that were unable to engage in EPS support.

Findings from the current study provide suggestions and implications for the professional practice of EPs and EPSs with potential applicability to wider LA service development within the local context. The study provides a theoretical framework that can support developments to improve the effectiveness of parental engagement with EPSs, leading to better outcomes for children and YP with SEND. EPS policy recommendations are made that could be conducive to improving parental engagement, highlighting the valuable role that EPs can play in supporting parental engagement through direct involvement or through supportive mechanisms at a school level. It is advocated that EPs are well-placed to support collaboration between school and family contexts, to generate effective partnership working and bridge gaps between systems around a YP.

The current study offers new insight into parental engagement and extends the existing evidence base that has focused on EP partnership working to better support families and YP. Whilst the limited sample requires caution for the generalisability of conclusions drawn, it is hoped that, in the context of an ever-evolving legislative and societal backdrop, this study offers a unique and positive contribution to the literature that facilitates understanding and practice in relation to promoting effective parental engagement with an LA EPS.

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## Appendices

### Appendix 1. Developing a search strategy

Plan a search strategy using your own area of research interest



**University of  
Nottingham**

UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

#### Topic/question/problem

*What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?*

#### Synonyms

Write a key concept into each box in the top row, and in the column beneath, list as many synonyms/alternatives you can think of. Remember to include singular/plural, acronyms, newer/older terminology, US/UK spellings/terminology and technical terms.

"Educational psychologist"	Parent	"Educational Psychology service"	"Early intervention"	Experience
"Educational psychologists"	Carer	"Educational Psychology services"	"Early support"	Involvement
EP	Mother	EPS	"Early involvement"	Engagement
EPs	Father	"Education* psycholog* service*"	"Early identification"	Interest
"Education* psychology*"	Caregiver		"Pre-statutory"	support
	Home		"SEN support"	collaboration
	Family			partnership

## Search operators

Look at your synonyms above and consider how you might streamline the search to combine with Boolean operators (AND, OR, NOT). Consider other techniques, such as:

- truncation/word stemming (e.g. analy\*)
- wildcards (e.g. wom#n, organi#ing, p?ediatric, tumo?r)
- exact phrase searching “...” (e.g. “modern slavery”, “ethnic minority”)
- word adjacency/proximity searching: NEAR/*n*, ADJ*n* (e.g. cancer NEAR/2 therap\*)

## Limits

Think about any limits that might apply to your topic/question/problem.

Date range	Language	Material type	Country
2014 onwards	English	Peer reviewed articles	UK

## Broadening/Narrowing

Consider how you might broaden/narrow your search if you find too few/too many references.

Broadening search	Narrowing search
e.g. think of more synonyms, remember to use truncation	e.g. add more precise concepts, apply more limits (e.g. age/review articles)

Now you are ready to start entering your search on the database(s) of your choice.

See [NUsearch](#) to find which databases we have access to for your subject area.

Remember to keep accurate records of what you have done, and why!

**Appendix 2. Search terms and returns for databases searched on 21.07.2022**

Database	Search terms	Returns	Total records returned	Records rejected at title	Records accepted at title	Total records accepted from database at title	Duplicates removed (within this database)	Total studies for abstract screening
<b>Educational Psychology in Practice (21.07.2022)</b>	"educational psychology service" AND parent	158	359	152	6	15	9	6
	"educational psychology service" AND carer	0		0	0			
	"educational psychology service" mother	27		26	1			
	"educational psychology service" AND father	15		13	2			
	"educational psychology service" AND caregiver	17		17	0			
	"educational psychology service" AND family	141		135	6			
	"educational psycholog" AND early intervention	0		0	0			
	"educational psycholog" AND pre-statutory intervention	0		0	0			
	"educational psycholog" AND SEN support	0		0	0			
	"educational psycholog" AND engagement	1		1	0			
<b>PsychNet (21.07.2022)</b>	"Education* psychology service" AND parent OR carer OR mother OR father OR caregiver OR family OR home	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	"Educational psychology" AND parent OR carer OR mother OR	0		0	0			

	father OR caregiver OR family OR home							
	"Educational psychologist service" AND parent OR carer OR mother OR father OR caregiver OR family OR home	0		0	0			
	"Educational psychologist" AND parent OR carer	0		0	0			
<b>OVID/ PsychINFO (21.07.2022)</b>	((Parent* or carer* or mother or father or family or home) and education* psycholog* service*)) – all fields	13	47	9	4	8	1	7
	((Parent* or carer* or mother or father or family or home) and (education* psycholog*) - title	7		3	4			
	((Parent* or carer* or mother or father or family or home) and (education* psycholog*)) in title	27		27	0			
<b>Web of science** (21.07.2022)</b>	"Education psycholog* service**"	49	49	48	1	1	0	1
<b>Eric (21.07.2022)</b>	((Parent* or carer* or mother or father or family or home) and education* psycholog* service*))	1	9	0	1	5	1	4
	((parent OR carer OR mother OR father OR caregiver OR family OR home) AND "Education* psycholog*"))	8		4	4			

<b>**Web of Science initial return</b>	((Parent* or carer* or mother or father or family or home) and education* psycholog* service*)) – all fields	1357118	Unusable amount of returns - numbers not included in search output
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<b>Combined results (excluding 1357118 return)</b>	Total records returned	Records rejected at title	Records accepted at title	Duplicates removed across all databases	Studies removed following inclusion and exclusion criteria	<b>Total studies for abstract screening</b>
	431	435	29	18	8	<b>3</b>



### Appendix 3. Inclusion and exclusion criteria used to screen the studies

Study feature	Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria	Rationale
Date of publication	Papers published during or after 2014	Papers published prior to 2014	The review focuses on what we can learn from parent carer experiences of an Educational Psychology service. Reviewing the literature landscape of parent carer involvement in education, there have been huge shifts in practice in terms of parental rights and expectations. This meant that literature had to be relevant to current practice. The Lamb report (2009), SEND Green Paper (2011) created huge shifts in practice for professionals in terms of parental rights and expectations. However, the biggest contemporary changes occurred in the 2014 SEND Reform with the Children and Families Act and SEND CoP.
Country of study	Study conducted within the UK	Study conducted outside the UK	UK papers were selected to reflect our education system and political landscape which heavily influence UK LA EP practice.
Type of study	Studies generating and exploring qualitative data	Studies only exploring quantitative data	The review is exploratory in nature, seeking experiences and perceptions to answer the question through inductive methods. Exploring qualitative literature will help gain insight into underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations for parental engagement and may help to develop ideas or hypotheses for potential improvements in practice.
Participants	EPs parents or carers	Broader professionals involved in education	The review focuses on EPSs and parental experiences. Other professionals may have insight but this will be conjecture rather than lived experience.
Focus	EPs or EPS AND exploring their involvement or experience with parents or carers or families	Just EPs Just parents, carers or families. Not reviewing the experience.	I want to explore the experience of parents' involvement with an EPS and for that to occur, interaction between the two needs to be present, even if only one set of participants is present e.g. EPS or parents, if they are reflecting on partnership, involvement or collaboration between the two, the content is relevant.

Appendix 4. Focus group poster



**PARENT OR CARER OF A YOUNG PERSON WITH  
SEND**



**FOCUS  
GROUP**

*We want to hear from you...*

**Join us for a focus group discussion on  
parent carer engagement with support  
services.**

We are looking for volunteers to support the development of questions to be used in research to explore engagement with Educational Psychology services to improve future practice.

Please contact Jennifer Winstanley or speak with KXX TXX to register your interest or ask any questions.

[jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk)

DATE: 22nd November, 2022

TIME: 10:30AM

LOCATION: Online via

Microsoft Teams

## Appendix 5. Focus group information sheet

School of Psychology  
Information Sheet



The University of  
**Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

*Title of Project:* What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?

*Ethics Approval Number:* S1430

*Researcher:* Jennifer Winstanley

*Supervisor:* Victoria Clarke

*Contact Details:* Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk  
Victoria.clarke@nottingham.ac.uk

This is an invitation to take part in a focus group to support the development of questions to be used in future interviews to explore parents' and carers' experiences of working with educational psychologists within early intervention stages.

Before you decide if you wish to take part in the focus group, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

If you participate in the focus group, you will be asked to share your views of what would be helpful questions to ask parents and carers to explore their experience of working with professionals that have been involved in supporting pupils with additional needs. This will be part of a group discussion to help the researcher generate meaningful questions to be used in future semi-structured interviews. The focus group will not ask parents or carers to share their own personal experiences. The researcher wants the interview questions to be guided by parents and carers and their experiences, creating an informed, collaborative approach to what should or should not be asked.

The whole procedure will last around 45 minutes.

Participation in this focus group is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the discussion. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to ask. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

If you have any complaints about the focus group, please contact:

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

[stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Appendix 6. Focus group consent form

<p><b>School of Psychology</b></p> <p><b>Consent Form</b></p>
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*Title of Project:* What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?

*Insert Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number:* S1430

*Researcher:* Jennifer Winstanley

*Supervisor:* Victoria Clarke

*Contact Details:* [Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk)

[Victoria.clarke@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Victoria.clarke@nottingham.ac.uk)

The participant should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet? YES/NO
- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the focus group?  
YES/NO
- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO
- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the focus group?  
(at any time and without giving a reason) YES/NO
- I give permission for my data from this focus group to be shared with other  
researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected. YES/NO
- Do you agree to take part in the focus group? YES/NO

"This focus group has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time."

YES/NO

Signature of the Participant:

Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant and they have agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher:

Date:

## **Appendix 7. Email to SENCOs explaining the research to support identification of parents**

To XXXX,

Good morning/ afternoon,

I am emailing on behalf of Jennifer Winstanley who is a trainee Educational Psychologist at the University of Nottingham, currently on placement and working within XXX Educational Psychology Service. I am contacting you regarding a research study which Jennifer is undertaking to support in the potential recruitment of parents or carers to take part. Jennifer is hoping to explore parents' and carers' experience of working with a local authority Educational Psychology Service within the stages of early intervention. Semi-structured interviews will take place with identified parents and carers that have been offered or accessed Educational Psychologist support with the **involvement taking place outside of the statutory EHCP process in the last 18 months.**

I am emailing to ask if there are parents or carers of pupils in your setting that meet this criteria and that you think would be happy for Jennifer to contact them to ask if they would like to take part? Their participation in this study would be totally voluntary and they would be under no obligation to take part. If parents and carers are interested and consent to being contacted, we will share a more detailed information sheet, outlining the procedure, what their involvement would look like and hopes for the outcomes of the research. They would be free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you have any questions or concerns or would like any additional information, please don't hesitate to ask.

Thank you and best wishes,

*Insert name and role*

On behalf of

Jennifer Winstanley

Trainee Educational Psychologist

## **Appendix 8. Email sent to EPs within the EPS at the stage of purposive sampling**

Hi all, I hope you're well.

Following on from the discussion in our team meeting, and as part of my doctoral training with the University of Nottingham, I am intending to carry out a piece of research exploring parents' and carers' experiences of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages.

It is an exploratory piece of research aiming to see what we can learn from parents' and carers' experience of an EPS which may support conversations around how an EPS can consider how they support their communities and service users and lead to potential improvements in practice.

I am emailing to enquire as to whether you could help to identify some SENCOs that have coordinated non-statutory EP support for pupils aged 3-16 years within the last 18 months?

My research is not concerned with the work that took place but will reflect parent carer engagement and mechanisms that facilitated or limited their involvement looking at equitability of accessibility.

I am hoping to recruit 6 participants to take part in the study.

I would initially ask for you to please contact the identified SENCOs to request permission for me to send a letter to them further explaining my research and what would be asked of parents or carers. My research does not involve SENCO participation. It will be semi-structured interviews with parents or carers that have been offered or have accessed EP involvement within early intervention stages in the last 18 months.

At this point, I am looking for suggestions only and therefore please ask that guarantees to take part in the research are not provided to schools. I am also aware of the challenges that often arise in securing parent and carer participation so would be extremely grateful for your suggestions of SENCOs that you think would be willing to support the identification of participants to become involved as part of this research.

I would be very grateful if you could contact me via this email address and please do get in touch if you have any other queries or questions around the research.

Thank you for taking the time to read this email and considering SENCOs that you think may be able to identify parents or carers that would be willing to take part in my research. I would be greatly appreciative of any suggestions.

Thanks and best wishes,  
Jennifer Winstanley  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

## Appendix 9. Parent carer information recruitment sheet

**School of Psychology**  
**Information Sheet**



The University of  
**Nottingham**

UNITED KINGDOM · CHINA · MALAYSIA

*Title of Project:* What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?

*Insert Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number:* S1430

*Researcher:* Jennifer Winstanley

*Supervisor:* Victoria Clarke

*Contact Details:* [Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk)  
[Victoria.clarke@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Victoria.clarke@nottingham.ac.uk)

This is an invitation to take part in a research study to explore parents' and carers' experiences of accessing Educational Psychology support within early intervention stages.

Before you decide if you wish to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully.

Parent or carer engagement is widely recognised in making a significant difference to educational achievement for pupils, especially for those pupils with additional needs. This research project hopes to explore parents' and carers' experiences of engaging with a local authority Educational Psychology service to help Educational Psychology services to consider ways in which they support their communities and generate potential improvements in practice.

It is an exploratory piece of research aiming to adopt a collaborative approach that helps to give voice to parents and carers and understand their experiences.

The research is looking for a number of parents or carers that have been offered or accessed Educational Psychologist support with the involvement taking place outside of the statutory Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) process. This research is being carried out as part of a doctorate training programme and is expected to come to an end by August 2023.



If you agree to participate in the study, you will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview with the researcher, during which you will be asked to share your experiences of your involvement with the Educational Psychology team and think about your engagement and aspects that helped or limited your involvement. We would arrange a mutually convenient time and date to meet at a mutually convenient location. The whole procedure should last around one hour.

The interviews will be recorded using a digital voice recorder and will then be transcribed by the researcher. The information collected will be completely anonymised and securely stored.

At the end of the research, you will be invited to have a telephone conversation to share the overall research findings. This will be a voluntary conversation and you will have a chance to say yes or no to this at the time.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the study. All data collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. It will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act.

If you are happy to take part in this study, please inform either myself (Jennifer Winstanley) or your school SENCO and we will arrange for you to complete and sign the necessary consent form.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to ask. The researcher (Jennifer Winstanley) and supervisor (Victoria Clarke) can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

[stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk)

## Appendix 10. Parent carer consent form

<p><b>School of Psychology</b></p> <p>Consent Form</p>
--



*Title of Project:* What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?

*Insert Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number:* S1430

*Researcher:* Jennifer Winstanley

*Supervisor:* Victoria Clarke

*Contact Details:* [Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk)

[Victoria.clarke@nottingam.ac.uk](mailto:Victoria.clarke@nottingam.ac.uk)

The participant should answer these questions independently:

- Have you read and understood the Information Sheet? YES/NO
- Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the study? YES/NO
- Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)? YES/NO
- Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the study? YES/NO  
(at any time and without giving a reason)
- I give permission for my data from this study to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected. YES/NO
- Do you agree to take part in the study? YES/NO
- "This study has been explained to me to my satisfaction, and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw at any time." YES/NO

Signature of the Participant:

Date:

Name (in block capitals)

I have explained the study to the above participant and they have agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher:

Date:

## Appendix 11. Focus group comment sorting

Supportive mechanisms	Barriers experienced in accessing support services
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personable and felt listened to</li> <li>• EP is going to work collaboratively – not a snapshot.</li> <li>• Taking in a much wider approach – not one day snapshot and that determine what it means for the child.</li> <li>• All opinions are valid.</li> <li>• EPs providing that support so parents are aware of their rights.</li> <li>• Previous positive experiences with services and schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Feeling distanced from the process</li> <li>• Don't know what the EP is going to do</li> <li>• Comments that they are working for the local authority anyway</li> <li>• Someone else they've got to battle.</li> <li>• Role is new and scary</li> <li>• Fearful and apprehensive</li> <li>• Constantly feel like they're having to fight.</li> <li>• EHC process is so hard anyway and then the term psychologist thrown in is scary.</li> <li>• Language barrier – parental deprivation and lack of understanding around what they do.</li> <li>• Barriers – terminology</li> <li>• Parental capacity, experiences differences.</li> <li>• Variation in roles within school and previous negative experience.</li> <li>• Parents not feeling listened to by school and this extending to their perception of EPs.</li> <li>• Parents being scared they won't feel heard.</li> <li>• Barriers based on prior experience.</li> <li>• More complex children - parents don't know how to communicate with the child.</li> <li>• Diagnosis doesn't mean that parents are an expert.</li> <li>• Parents not always knowing how best to get the best from their child and not taking it as read that what we see in school is the norm.</li> <li>• Discrepancy between the school's view and the parents' view.</li> <li>• Parents can be scared that something might be removed.</li> <li>• Totally honest – for what EPs can and cannot do. Clear that it's only a recommendation – schools don't have to do this. Be really clear about what will and will not be essential.</li> <li>• Nothing changing following involvement - What was the point?</li> <li>• Parents are under the influence and mercy of schools and whatever they are told.</li> <li>• Working with schools to get that message over – something around having to convince schools for involvement and them brokering the work.</li> </ul>

## Appendix 12. Incorporation of focus group views in generating interview questions

Focus group comments/ views incorporated	Interview question
Distanced from process, battle, fight, hard process Having to convince schools in order to broker involvement	Can you tell me how the EP became involved with your child, what was the process leading up to their involvement?
Don't know what they're going to do	What were you hoping to get from an EP, what were your expectations?
Perception of the role, lack of understanding of role, who they work for/ with	Did you know what an EP was and what their role would involve/ support it would bring?
Scary, previous experience, perception based on school, feeling heard, fear of judgement, fear of school having influence, fear provision may be removed, feeling 'what was the point?'	How did you feel about having EP involvement? Can you remember how you felt before? And afterwards?
Barriers, language, capacity difficulties	How accessible did you find the language and processes?

### **Appendix 13. Initial interview schedule**

*Give thanks and explain that I'm exploring parent and carer experience of an EPS and I'm particularly interested in looking at aspects that supported or hindered access to EP involvement but I'm keen to hear any and all aspects you wish to share.*

*Name of pupil:                      Age of pupil when seen:                      Age now:                      Area of need:*

Question 1: (grand tour question) can you describe/ tell me about your experience with an educational psychologist that you had for your child?

Question 2: Can you tell me how the EP became involved with your child? What was the process leading up to their involvement?

Question 3: What were you hoping to get from an EP? What were your expectations?

Question 4: Did you know what an EP was and what their role would involve/ support would bring?

Question 5: How did you feel about having EP involvement? Can you remember how you felt before? And afterwards?

Question 6: Did you find the language and processes accessible?

Question 7: (mop up) we've talked about a lot of things today and I'm very grateful for your time and insight. I wanted to ask if there was anything that really helped your engagement with the EP and if there was anything that could have been better or improved? What went well... even better if..?

*Ask if they have any questions for you. Explain next steps.*

## Appendix 14. Second interview schedule

Name of pupil:

Age of pupil when seen:

Age now:

Area of need:

Question 1: can you describe/ tell me about your experience with an educational psychologist that you had for your child?

Question 2: Can you tell me how the EP became involved with your child? What was the process leading up to their involvement?

Question 3: What were you hoping to get from an EP? What were your expectations? Did it meet your expectations?

Question 4: Did you know what their involvement would involve/ look like? For you and your child? How long it would be, amount of visit etc?

Question 5: did you know what an EP was and what their role would involve/ support would bring?

Question 6: Did you get a guide to the support or information around EP involvement?

Question 7: how did you know about EPs and the potential for their involvement? *(further checks on available info.)*

Question 8: How did you feel about having EP involvement? Can you remember how you felt before? And afterwards?

Question 9: was the language and were the processes accessible?

Question 10: (mop up) we've talked about a lot of things today and I'm very grateful for your time and insight. I wanted to ask if there was anything that really helped your engagement with the EP and if there was anything that could have been better or improved? What went well... even better if...

*Make sure to find out how long the parent had wanted EP involvement as a follow-up question if required.*

## Appendix 15. Third interview schedule

Name of pupil:

Age of pupil when seen:

Age now:

Area of need:

Question 1: can you describe/ tell me about your experience with an educational psychologist that you had for your child?

Question 2: Can you tell me how the EP became involved with your child? (*Whose suggestion and how long had it been wanted? School battle element?*)

Question 3: (*If battle did take place – explore – then bring focus back to EPS*) What was the process of getting EP involvement like? (*Paperwork? Phone calls? Meetings in school?*)

Question 4: did you know what an EP was and what their role involved? (*Any information shared or needed?*)

Question 5: What were you hoping to get from an EP? What were your expectations? Did it meet your expectations?

Question 6: Did you know what their involvement with your child would look like? How long it would be, amount of visit etc? (*Information available/ shared.*)

Question 7: how did you know about EPs and the potential for their involvement?

Question 8: How did you feel about having EP involvement? Can you remember how you felt before? And afterwards?

Question 9: was the language and processes accessible?

Question 10: (mop up) we've talked about a lot of things today and I'm very grateful for your time and insight. I wanted to ask if there was anything that really helped your engagement with the EP and if there was anything that could have been better or improved? What went well... even better if...

How long had you wanted EP involvement? (*If this doesn't come up naturally – ask this within the interview at some point.*)

## Appendix 16. Fourth interview schedule

Name of pupil:

Age of pupil when seen:

Age now:

Area of need:

Question 1: can you describe/ tell me about your experience with an educational psychologist that you had for your child?

Question 2: Can you tell me how the EP became involved with your child? (*Whose suggestion and how long had it been wanted? School battle element?*)

Question 3: (*If battle did take place – explore – then bring focus back to EPS*) What was the process of getting EP involvement like? (*Paperwork? Phone calls? Meetings in school?*)

Question 4: did you know what an EP was and what their role involved? (*Any information shared or needed?*)

Question 5: What were you hoping to get from an EP? What were your expectations? Did it meet your expectations?

Question 6: Did you know what their involvement with your child would look like? How long it would be, amount of visit etc? (*Information available/ shared.*)

Question 7: how did you know about EPs and the potential for their involvement?

Question 8: How did you feel about having EP involvement? Can you remember how you felt before? And afterwards?

Question 9: was the language and processes accessible? Were there barriers or helping aspects e.g. meeting online, time out of work, childcare etc?

Question 10: (mop up) I wanted to ask if there was anything that really helped your engagement with the EP and if there was anything that could have been better or improved?

Explore if the construction of YP's need: was it agreed/ the same between school, parents and EP? Did it change over time? (*If this doesn't come up naturally – ask this within the interview at some point.*)



## Appendix 17. Fifth (final) interview schedule using theoretical sampling

*Name of pupil:            Age of pupil when seen:                            Age now:    Area of need:*

Question 1: can you describe/ tell me about your experience with an educational psychologist that you had for your child?

Question 2: How did the EP become involved with your child, did you ask for it or was it school's suggestion? (*'parents fighting' category follow-up: did you feel that you needed to convince school? Whose suggestion and how long had it been wanted? - Explore then bring focus back to EPS.*)

Question 3: What was the process of getting EP involvement like? (*knowledge and parents fighting follow-up with alternative LA EPS.*)

Question 4: Did you know what an EP was and what their role involved? (*Any prior knowledge there? Any information shared or needed?)* How did you know about EPs?

Question 5: What were you hoping to get from an EP? What were your expectations? Did it meet your expectations? (*EP role exploration.*)

Question 6: Did you know what their involvement with your child would look like? How long it would be, amount of visit etc? (*Knowledge, information shared/ available and EP role follow-up.*)

Question 7: Did you feel heard by school? Did they share your concerns? (*Did you trust schools as the experts? Or did you know your child needed support? 'Parent battle follow-up and construction of need exploration.*)

Question 8: Did you feel the EP was there to support the school or your child? (*EP role perception, knowledge and 'Parent battle' follow-up.*)

Question 9: Were there any barriers to get to accessing the support from the EP?

My last question is, it's like a mop up question. You're insight has been amazing. Thank you so much. Is there anything that you think... From the entire process thinking about school as well, not just the EP's, but is there anything that would have made it better or easier? Or you think that could be improved for parental access?

## Appendix 18. Ethics approval letter



*School of Psychology*

The University of Nottingham  
University Park  
Nottingham  
NG7 2RD

T: +44 (0)115 8467403 or (0)115 9514344

SJ/tp

Ref: **S1430**

Monday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2022

Dear Jennifer Winstanley and Vicky Clarke,

### **Ethics Committee Review**

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research 'What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?'

That proposal has now been reviewed by the Ethics Committee and I am pleased to tell you that your submission has met with the committee's approval.

Final responsibility for ethical conduct of your research rests with you or your supervisor. The Codes of Practice setting out these responsibilities have been published by the British Psychological Society and the University Research Ethics Committee. If you have any concerns whatever during the conduct of your research then you should consult those Codes of Practice. The Committee should be informed immediately should any participant complaints or adverse events arise during the study.

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely



*Professor Stephen Jackson  
Chair, Ethics Committee*

## Appendix 19. Debrief letter



<p><b>School of Psychology</b></p> <p>Debrief Form</p>
--

*Title of Project:* What can Educational Psychologists learn from parents' and carers' experience of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages?

*Insert Ethics Approval Number or Taught Project Archive Number:* S1430

*Researcher:* Jennifer Winstanley

*Supervisor:* Victoria Clarke

*Contact Details:* [Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk)

[Victoria.clarke@nottingam.ac.uk](mailto:Victoria.clarke@nottingam.ac.uk)

Date ...

Dear ...

Thank you for taking part in the research study exploring parent and carer experiences of an Educational Psychology Service within early intervention stages. It was a pleasure to meet with you and hear about your experiences.

As I mentioned at the end of our interview, if you think of any additional information or would like to discuss any of the topics we talked about during the interview further, please do not hesitate to contact me by email at [Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk](mailto:Jennifer.winstanley@nottingham.ac.uk).

Once the research project is complete, I will invite you to a follow-up phone call to share the overall findings of the study. This is a voluntary conversation and there is no obligation to accept.

Participation in this study is totally voluntary and you are free to withdraw your contribution at any point until the research is complete and submitted for marking. All data you have provided will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only.

Yours sincerely,

Jennifer Winstanley  
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Supervisor:

Dr Victoria Clarke  
(University of Nottingham Supervisor)

## Appendix 20. Initial coding extract (in vivo codes highlighted in yellow)

Participant 1 P1: And I'm trying to say all the right things and just nod and listen. I didn't learn the word advocate until he was in Year 5, but being told that as a parent "oh we're gonna have this meeting if you want to bring somebody with you to be your eyes and ears..." I've never knew that that was an option, if that makes sense?	Reverting to obedience		
	Learning about advocates late		
	School informing parent of meeting	School in control	
	School recommending advocate	Advocate bringing support	unaware of advocate option
	Feeling unprepared		
Researcher R: If you've not had it, and it hasn't been mentioned, why would you? I imagine it can feel so brand new and a bit stressful.			
Participant 1 P1: It. Yeah, that's it. At a time when, actually, you're already really quite stressed. Yeah, that's it. That's a brilliant way of putting it. Yeah, yeah, really stressed. But everything's brand new, so you're just like a deer in head lights. Asking "where will you be most comfortable?" Yeah, I think that might make a massive difference for people.	Navigating in a stressed state		
	Experiencing everything as new	Agreeing with researcher's framing	
	like a deer in head lights	Feeling stressed	feeling inexperienced
	wanting provision to make parents feel comfortable		
	considering parental comfort	comfort bringing a difference to parents	
Researcher R: Even just asking that, I think might set the tone. "Yeah, I'm here for you, I'm going to try to make it easier for you."			
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, because it got to the point for me, going up and down that school hill was just traumatic. Always. And then you're bumping into other parents on the hill and they all know "ohh God." Y'know "she's going in for another meeting," y'know, all of that adds to the anxiety which ultimately will play through on to your child won't it? It does. It does all of those kind of things as well. So. I mean, I don't know how you change that either, but yeah, I think just meeting in a different place, especially for the EP, then you feel more like they're on your side. Yeah, they're not there to just back the teachers up or be part of the day-to-day school running. They're there for the nurture side of your child, if that makes sense? So, not a teacher and they're not there for the school. And I think maybe earlier I probably would've thought they were for the school I would have done that as well having not known what all the avenues and the branches are. But by that point... by that point. Then I knew. And I knew the minute I remembered saying it. And I was because I was getting really frustrated. It was the first time I'd ever kind of got animated with school and I think they were taken aback by that as well because I'd always just kind of been really placid and they'd always said, you know, "you you've been one of the easiest parents to work with."	Describing going to son's setting	Questioning suitability of school as meeting place	Reaching a notable point
	considering existing associations	creating embarrassment for parents	Experiencing trauma through location
	Feeling judged by other parents	Others knowing purpose of meeting	
	adding to difficult situation	Experiencing anxiety	
	Transferring stress to child		
	Changing power dynamic in school	Wanting to change dynamic	Not knowing how to create change
	Suggesting offering meeting in a different place - EP		
	suggesting setting a supportive neutral tone - EP	Wanting to feel that EP is on side of parent	
	suggesting positioning more on parents' side - EP	Positioning EP separate to school	suggesting challenging notion of backing up school
	suggesting positioning more on parents' side	neutral position - EP	
	Suggesting stating working from a place of neutrality		
	Previously presuming EP worked for school	suggesting positioning EP outside of school affiliation	
	Discovering EP neutrality in own research	unaware of avenues for support	
	Reflecting on knowledge now held		
	Remembering speaking out		
	feeling frustrated	Insisting on involvement	initiating forceful stance
	School experiencing surprise when parent spoke out		
	Parent previously acting placidly	avoiding conflict	
	Being an easy parent		
	Researcher R: Yeah.		
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, yeah of course, f*cking door mat, catholic terror. Yeah. But that day I got quite animated. I've just been learning so much about ADHD as well. And I remember when I just used... I said you know, where is, why didn't we do assessments earlier on? Where is Ed Psych? We've never had Ed Psych involvement and there was a bit of and they were like 'ohh, she knows her sh*t now,' you know, that kind of look. Ohh actually. Yeah, we need to like pull our finger out a bit.' That was the look I got. You know, when you get that that kind of look. Yeah. And yeah, and that's it's that, isn't it? Parents don't know what they can go in armed with.	Carrying own fears of school	Feeling like a pushover	
	feeling enough is enough	Knowledge creating empowerment	
	Feeling empowered by knowledge – mum		
	Questioning schools decisions	questioning schools approach	Wanting earlier assessments
	asking for EP involvement - parent		
	Presenting as knowledgeable	School recognising parental knowledge	
	feeling pressure to deliver – school		
	fearing knowledgeable parents – school		
	Knowledge bringing power		
	Parents don't know what they can go in armed with.		
Researcher R: Parents not knowing their options?			
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, exactly. Parents don't know what they don't know. And I think they like it that way, don't they?	Parents don't know what they don't know. Liking parents in th		
	School liking having power and knowledge		

## Appendix 21. Focused coding extract (in vivo codes highlighted in yellow)

Participant 1 P1: And I'm trying to say all the right things and just nod and listen. I didn't learn the word advocate until he was in Year 5, but being told that as a parent "oh we're gonna have this meeting if you want to bring somebody with you to be your eyes and ears..." I've never knew that that was an option, if that makes sense?	Reverting to obedience from own school experience		
	Relying on school to share info	school may be assuming all parents know info	
	advocate bringing support		
	Unaware of advocacy option		
Researcher R: If you've not had it, and it hasn't been mentioned, why would you? I imagine it can feel so brand new and a bit stressful.			
Participant 1 P1: It. Yeah, that's it. At a time when, actually, you're already really quite stressed. Yeah, that's it. That's a brilliant way of putting it. Yeah, yeah, really stressed. But everything's brand new, so you're just like a deer in head lights. Asking "where will you be most comfortable?" Yeah, I think that might make a massive difference for people.	Navigating in a stressed state		
	Experiencing everything as new		
	like a deer in head lights		
	comfort positively enabling parents		
Researcher R: Even just asking that, I think might set the tone. "Yeah, I'm here for you, I'm going to try to make it easier for you."			
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, because it got to the point for me, going up and down that school hill was just traumatic. Always. And then you're bumping into other parents on the hill and they all know "ohh God." Y'know "she's going in for another meeting," y'know, all of that adds to the anxiety which ultimately will play through on to your child won't it? It does. It does all of those kind of things as well. So. I mean, I don't know how you change that either, but yeah, I think just meeting in a different place, especially for the EP, then you feel more like they're on your side. Yeah, they're not there to just back the teachers up or be part of the day-to-day school running. They're there for the nurture side of your child, if that makes sense? So, not a teacher and they're not there for the school. And I think maybe earlier I probably would've thought they were for the school I would have done that as well having not known what all the avenues and the branches are. But by that point... by that point. Then I knew. And I knew the minute I remembered saying it. And I was because I was getting really frustrated. It was the first time I'd ever kind of got animated with school and I think they were taken aback by that as well because I'd always just kind of been really placid and they'd always said, you know, "you you've been one of the easiest parents to work with."	Considering negative impact of meeting EP in school environment		
	traumatic to meet EP in school		
	creating embarrassment for parents		
	location in school adding to existing stressful environment		
	Want to reduce stress experienced by parents - recommendation		
	Considering location changing power dynamic in school - recommendation		
	Neutral setting sets neutral position of EP - recommendation		
	Parents needing neutral position from EP		
	Parents need to know EP is not on the side of school		
	suggesting positioning EP outside of school affiliation		
	Presuming EP worked for school		
	Discovering EP neutrality in own research		
	initiating forceful stance created EP involvement		
	Acting placidly	avoiding conflict	
	Being an easy parent		
	Researcher R: Yeah.		
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, yeah of course, f*cking door mat, catholic terror. Yeah. But that day I got quite animated. I've just been learning so much about ADHD as well. And I remember when I just used... I said you know, where is, why didn't we do assessments earlier on? Where is Ed Psych? We've never had Ed Psych involvement and there was a bit of and they were like 'ohh, she knows her sh*t now,' you know, that kind of look. Ohh actually. Yeah, we need to like pull our finger out a bit.' That was the look I got. You know, when you get that that kind of look. Yeah. And yeah, and that's it's that, isn't it? Parents don't know what they can go in armed with.	Own fears of school keeping parent oppressed		
	feeling enough is enough	Feeling empowered by knowledge – mum	
	Presenting as knowledgeable to question school practice		
	fearing knowledgeable parents – school		
	Knowledge bringing power/ influence to parents		
	Parents don't know what they can go in armed with.		
Researcher R: Parents not knowing their options?			
Participant 1 P1: Yeah, exactly. Parents don't know what they don't know. And I think they like it that way, don't they?	Parents don't know what they don't know.		
	Liking parents in the unknown - school		

## Appendix 22. Memoing diary

Memo number	Memo
1	<p>26.01.2023 – initial coding P1.</p> <p>P1 transcript done and I'm ready to start initial coding! She was so brilliant to meet and she gave SUCH rich information and such a brilliant perspective of her account and experience. What a bloomin' privilege!!</p> <p>So, coding. I've taken advice from someone who works regularly in data collecting and synthesising and I'm using Excel. I tried using Word but I couldn't get the lines of text to line up and was getting increasingly frustrated just trying to generate the template. Excel keeps everything neat and tidy.</p> <p>The reason why I'm coding through typing and not hand writing is cos it ensures I can't lose the work as all my thesis-related activity is stored securely on the university cloud whereas I could easily misplace a piece of paper or have one of my children spill on it. AND I think it will be easier to organise them digitally later. I use the search function constantly in my placement and academic work and I think I will need this option to support thinking and locating of sections. This will particularly be the case when applying the constant comparison method.</p>
2	<p>I'm feeling hesitant to start... I'm aware I need to use gerunds (action words) but I seem to be creating short sentences to make gerunds work rather than short, quick codes as Charmaz recommends when initial coding. I'm going to refer back to previous GT theses for inspiration and review their appendices to see how they used gerunds in initial coding.</p>
3	<p>I'm happy these codes are not fixed or definite. Feeling pressure to represent P1's views, capturing well and not missing anything. I feel comforted that it's a flexible, iterative process and I can come back and review these coding decisions.</p>
4	<p>I'm going to use a hyphen and the person when there may be ambiguity around the subject that a code concerns e.g. – school, - pupil, - parent.</p>
5	<p>31.01.2023</p> <p>I'm feeling insecure about my initial coding - I'm going to seek supervision from VL (university tutor that taught the GT session for our cohort) as she is the guru on GT.</p>
6	<p>Potential focused code - feeling uninformed - felt like a lightbulb moment - include in future interview schedule.</p>
7	<p>5.02.2023</p> <p>I couldn't get P2's interview transcribed before meeting P3 so I've read through the notes I made, starred key themes and I've listened to it in the car on every journey without the children. I feel OK with knowing the content and next focus for P3's interview questions even though it's not strictly following Charmaz's instructions.</p>
8	<p>12.02.2023</p> <p>Initial coding P2 - school as gatekeeper is a strong theme. This came up in initial coding for P1. P2 felt very strongly that school had hindered her son's access to support which was intensified when arriving at high school and staff there supported her view and got the EP involved right away. Her son received EP involvement in the first term at high school having not had EP involvement for the 8 years at primary. I need to be aware that, whilst for her this was a strong narrative, it doesn't mean it will have the same strength across all accounts. I will use the interview schedule to explore this in future</p>

	<p>(and did include it in P3s because P2 was so adamant about it, initial coding wasn't required to spot that analytical pattern).</p> <p>P2 supports the uninformed theme from P1 with more of a separated knowledge and information narrative. She has a strong feeling of being powerless or at the mercy and the whim of school. This seems a strong theme. Nothing much about socio-economic or wider capacity outside of school as a barrier and information.</p> <p>Trusting what school say even though in contrast to own view - this also came up in interview 1.</p> <p>Feeling removed again.</p>
9	<p>16.02.2023</p> <p>I'm trusting the open coding as outlined in the process by Charmaz and I feel like I'm getting better at framing my interpretation in relation to the question and acknowledging that this is already an abstraction and interpretation and how my views as researcher are already, in this basic level, influencing the analysis. I need to keep remembering to be reflexive - why do I think this, is there more going on? Having coded P2, I would like to go back and code the first again but will wait until my data is fully collected and just use open coding within this stage - both due to time constraints and following the process. "Trust the process" as Anthea would say!</p>
10	<p>Initial coding P3</p> <p>I'm spending less time agonising over codes that are not relevant to the study.</p> <p>Trust again and placing faith in schools was a theme. These have come up repeatedly in all participants' accounts.</p> <p>Initial code: feeling relief knowing EP support was coming - Reminds me of Andy Miller's work around temporary systems and the impact the knowledge of an EP coming in can have on practice and parents... Andy Miller did research on this with teachers.</p> <p>Gatekeeper again. School denying access to support - acting as a barrier, wanting direct access to EPs. All repeating themes from the three participants.</p>
11	<p>All participants so far have remarked on a new school perspective being the shift for change and access to support. I think this is noteworthy!!</p> <p>All three EP involvement (all participants so far) has involved a one-off consultation and no direct involvement with YP – discovered through constant comparative analysis and looking for commonalities.</p>
12	<p>Real difference between the previous two participants (that were not CWC and part of universal offer). No info shared and no clarity around involvement for other two. This participant had a leaflet as it's a set process and parents felt secure in knowledge – real shift from the previous two participants.</p> <p>Again - a recurring theme - knowledge creating power and lack of knowledge removing it.</p> <p>Sudden shift in school construction - acknowledging large gap and on SEND register (P3) - This mirrors participant 2 where school continued to say 'just a bit behind' despite parent raising concern then suddenly acknowledging acute need. Constant Comparative Analysis.</p>

	<p>Changing times - online is the norm. Whilst online is the norm - socioeconomic circumstances need to be considered - technology, access to decent Wi-Fi, electricity to charge device etc could hinder equity to access for different families.</p>
13	<p>22.02.2023</p> <p>Initial coding P4. Initial code: EP not accessed liked other professionals - this is where I thought the data would take me (reflexivity) trust in schools and feeling removed wasn't on my radar.</p> <p>Initial code: Anything is better than this – parents feeling that anything is better than maintaining the status quo - don't know what EP involvement is but something is better than nothing.</p> <p>This is the first parent where school have wanted EP and they haven't been pushing for support. Happy to have it, not a fight/ battle to get to EP (although experienced battles to have needs understood).</p> <p>This trust in school was in allowing EP in, not trusting not to have EP in - still around school trust around SEND but slightly different position.</p>
14	<p>24.02.2023</p> <p>Initial code(P4): not wanting to be "one of those" parents - This awareness of a narrative around difficult/ fussy/ irksome parents came up in interview 1. I feel like this with my own children but assumed it was because I had taught. It seems this narrative extends beyond the profession (which isn't surprising). We all have an in-built desire to be liked and accepted yet our children are so precious and we feel compelled to support or advocate - this narrative seems to be those two aspects colliding.</p> <p>Initial code: Worrying about next phase for YP - This feels a bit like participant 2 - not wanting to fight, just wanted needs to be recognised and supported.</p> <p>Initial code: Questioning provision security for those unable to advocate - Precisely my concerns and why I chose this area of research.</p> <p>Initial code: Shouldn't require parental advocacy for support - This is why I chose this area for my thesis. I believe this so strongly – but need to be reflexive and be mindful that whilst I believe this (and so does this participant) it is not a direct experience of hers, it is her perception of the wider context, not her lived experience.</p> <p>Initial in vivo code: You don't know what you don't know - I think this a really key message coming though!! I'm glad this is an in vivo code.</p>
15	<p>26.02.2023</p> <p>Focused coding</p> <p>Focused coding (where I just look at things relevant to the research based on the themes and refined abstraction of codes already drawn out) seems to be MUCH less. Lots of this isn't relevant to the research but was required for rapport building.</p> <p>Next level of abstraction - don't need to be as close to the data anymore. Reflexive thinking and going back (p92) through the data and considering nuisances whilst refining. Really thought about what they meant.</p>



	<p>In vivo focused code: wandering about in the dark - If this parent feels like this... who works in education, is white, British middle class, and she's feeling marginalisation and exclusion within this community and if that's the case for these people, what for those who don't have access to these social, economical and political resources?</p> <p>Focused code: really hard work - Hard work with all her social mechanisms available - what about others?</p> <p>Focused code: Stating he has a need, no fight should be necessary - I really like this framing - he does have a need, so many do. There shouldn't be the added layer of a fight. It should be accepted and supported - the budget cuts and capacity difficulties have created this issue and it doesn't feel fair.</p>
16	<p>28.02.2023</p> <p>Focused coding: 'You don't know what you don't know' inexperience bring minimal knowledge is a strong narrative that feels an overarching focused code.</p> <p>Knowledge is power - this is what I'm gathering at this point in the focused coding! This seems to be a strong theme.</p> <p>Feeling powerless or at the mercy and whim of school seems a strong theme</p> <p>School controlling access - School as gatekeeper to support and info. School in control and parents fighting seems a strong narrative.</p> <p>Educating others focused code - information seems to be hidden, let's share it!</p>
17	<p>Sometimes I need to go back to the initial coding and raw data to remember what the codes were as context influences the analysis and interpretation. I'm also going back through each data set, refining codes so that they can be understood out of context and checking and comparing for consistency through analysis.</p> <p>I've been feeling that some coding doesn't quite fit into my focused codes so I've added a 'EP involvement' focused code to support my organisation of codes when clustering.</p> <p>Lots of checking back against initial codes.</p> <p>Focused code: knew what EP support would involve - I'm wondering if expectations and knowledge could go together as a focused code... they feel linked with certain codes.</p>
18	<p>Constant comparison analysis - light bulb moment!!! The additional focused codes that I've generated in this analysis will need to be applied to participant 1 (which I've done one round of focused coding). Yay!! That feels correct and purposeful and the proper use of constant comparison analysis. TRUST THE PROCESS (although quite hard to do when worrying about passing a doctorate).</p>
19	<p>Really strong theme in focused coding around lack of info or not knowing. I know that isn't necessarily directly related to EPS, when asking 'what can we learn from parental experience of an EPS' but it seems it's that parents have information missing/ hidden/ unaware and that they don't know processes, roles or how to access support. I suppose this is the beauty of grounded theory and me acknowledging</p>

	reflexivity - I was expecting to explore supportive mechanisms/ hindering aspects and it seems the difficulties lie in a system before the EPS.
20	I like that all of this coding and analysing can be traced back. No ambiguity. This method and use of excel shows the full trail of how I am working my way through this process.
21	Just had a thought - whilst school in control or as gatekeeper is a highly recurring theme, is it relevant to my research? I feel like if that's what parents are telling me then it is, but it isn't directly to do with EPS - I will raise this in supervision.
22	Focused code: Conflicting views with school – parents - This needs a new category/ focused code/ theme. I've been wondering for a while and I think a theme around experiencing conflict with school is needed. I'm not yet sure if this fits with my research question but as I'm grounding a theory from data - this is what the data is telling me so I'm going to capture it (for now at least). I will take this to supervision.
23	<p>Strong narrative around info not shared within EP involvement and wanting more, outlining why this would help. Lots of barriers to being present for parents, info to read back would support this.</p> <p>Focused code: Experiencing overwhelm and reduced parental cognitive capacity when discussing own child - Need a new conceptualised theme - issues/ barriers to engagement. I think this one will need to be linked to 'issues with EP.'</p> <p>Focused code: Lack of info creates fear - This is a really strong theme - parents want the support but they don't really know what it is due to (main theme) information feeling hidden or completely unknown.</p> <p>In vivo code: step away from it - I think this is another biggy - feeling removed from process.</p> <p>P4 focused code: requesting EP not on parent radar - This is a contrast to all previous participants.</p>

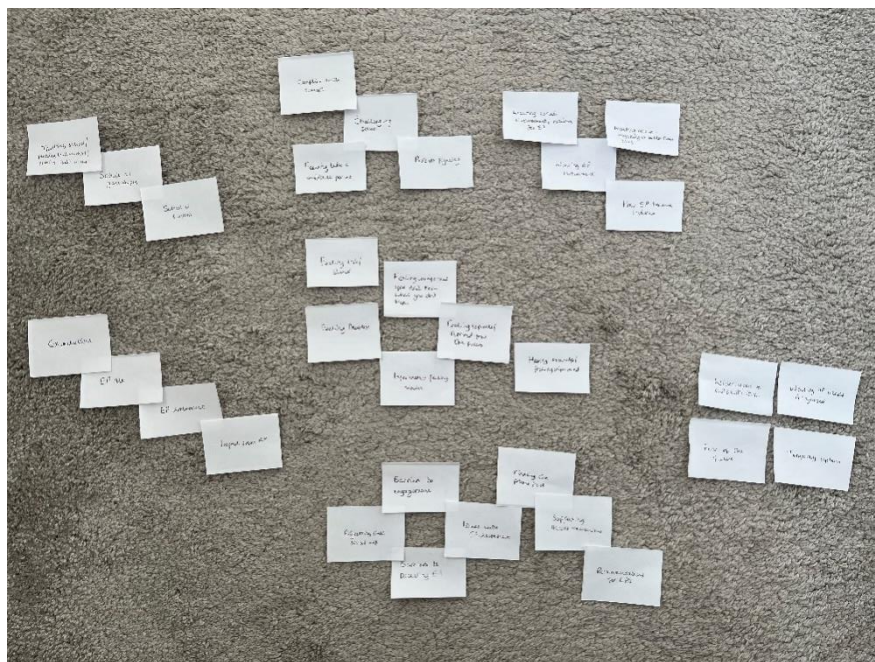
24	<p>02.03.2023</p> <p>Synthesising focused codes using clustering methods of sorting, reviewing and listing using Excel. Using constant comparative analysis - going back through previous focused coding synthesis and comparing focused code interpretation with similarly presenting codes. Ensuring consistency and continuously refining to support pulling out higher-order constructs.</p>
25	I feel like, at the minute, at this point in my focused coding that I'm refining and organising my codes... I'm not 100% sure I'm creating higher order focused codes or constructing categories yet. I'm assuming that will come once I've identified significant codes through this current process and I go through the data again.
26	<p>Focused code: having knowledge feeling informed - Within this focused coding round I've kept feeling like it needed a 'feeling informed' element. This may link with 'feeling uninformed' or 'information hidden' and I will use constant comparison analysis to check this against two previously focused coded data sets and future ones.</p> <p>And gone back through this data set for constant comparative analysis. I'm going through and checking codes to refine them and ensure they accurately reflect the data.</p>

27	<p>Focused coding participant 3: Only one additional theme added when synthesising through clustering for constant comparison analysis - feel like I'm working towards the saturation point.</p> <p>Just realising that 'supporting temporary system' which I thought was a theme hasn't come up outside that one interview.</p> <p>I think issue with EP, barriers to access, barriers to engage and recommendations will need to go together.</p> <p>Supporting access and recommendations need to go together.</p>
28	<p>Really going through and refining codes - I can hear my tutor saying 'trust the process' because when you start each new part of the Charmaz process it feels scary and entirely unfamiliar and you really question what on earth you're doing... am I time wasting (when there is no time)?? Am I doing something wholly irrelevant? Am I doing it right? I keep going back to the book and in theory it reads OK but in application it's really hard. However, as with initial and focused coding, once you get into comparison, clustering and diagramming it begins to flow. Hard to conceptualise though... that'll be fun in my methodology when I'm striving to write with replicability!</p>
29	<p>This repeated analysis of data that is the process of grounded theory <i>REALLY</i> makes you analyse and extract meaning that I didn't do when using TA. The rigour and the iterations of analysis really supports a deeper and more complex analysis of the data whilst the process keeps you so close to the data due to initial and focused coding (both done with raw data not with secondary analysis data) that you aren't distorting the original accounts - CGT enables really in-depth analysis and reflection with the data and accounts.</p> <p>This is also the case through constant comparative analysis - it brings more insight and enables additional lenses to be used when scrutinising the data as the data becomes a whole and the different accounts and the understanding that each one adds, is then applied to the other accounts/ data and it becomes so rich and deep!</p>
30	<p>Look for consistencies/ similarities across different participants – do I need something about them becoming a homogenous group?</p> <p>I think, to organise these codes, I'm going to create a list then put them in Nvivo to manipulate and move around to support further analysis and synthesis.</p> <p>I feel like I'm continually refining the higher order focused codes, going back to the original data to ensure no ambiguity and truly representing the data ensuring meaning is not lost in abstraction.</p> <p>I think, now when clustering, challenging school and conflict with school will need to merge.</p> <p>Wanting EP involvement and how EP became involved will need to merge when clustering and diagramming.</p>
31	<p>05.03.2023</p> <p>Sat on James' floor while he creates me yet more excel wizardry, I used diagramming to sort my broad, overarching themes to try to begin to elevate my focused codes to conceptual categories (or starting the process, at least). And of the 33 (very) broad themes drawn out from focused coding, I laid them out on bits of paper (because mind-mapping was too fixed even for this rudimentary early stage) and I needed to be able to move them around, consider their positioning and relationship with each other</p>

and required flexibility to follow my train of thinking which would be too hard for me to do with static labels.

I began to group and consider the themes' inter-relationships and consider which might go together or be linked or where one might lead to another and... I kind of did it! Or I think I did, in this very early, basic format. I had a little cry of relief, heard my tutor in my head say "trust the process" and could see how the themes I had drawn out from synthesising data through initial coding, initial coding refining, focused coding, focused coding refining and constant comparison analysis created a strange but quite visible journey of a parent's engagement with an EPS. I also identified four outlier themes which, further analysis on my quest to generate conceptual categories, should create space for them to be included or captured.

I had a little cry because I think it might be something... I knew I'd gotten so much from each interview, I knew I'd gotten so much from each iteration of coding and analysis but I couldn't see how to could be pulled into a... a thing... a constructed piece of research that might inform or interest someone else. It obviously still is WAY off achieving that, and there's still the fear that it won't be... but at that moment, sat on James' landing... was the first time I thought I might have actually got something worthwhile to someone else. I could see how I could already relay some of this to the stakeholders. So I took a photo and here it is:



32      06.03.2023

I'm still holding reservations around the potential category and school focus of parents having to fight. I worry if four is too few participants and I also worry that all perspectives are from the same LA and so the same pathways, structures and systems. I'm also not certain around having two separate conceptual categories around knowledge, as well. I keep going back and forth but have analysed the existing data to a point at which no further abstraction can be made whilst staying close to the data. I'm hoping that another participant reviewing knowledge and school dynamics through theoretical sampling from an alternative LA will resolve this and provide the additional data necessary to develop my overarching conceptual categories.

	I'm going to try and source an additional final participant (I'd love to continue and have more but it's March and I'm limited by time constraints of the thesis) from a neighbouring LA as part of theoretical sampling with a focus around the two areas I'm grappling with. I will keep the interview open, like previous schedules, but will devise my interview schedule to represent the lines of enquiry needed for my outstanding data saturation. I will approach two LAs where I have existing links as I have already exhausted the participant search in my placement LA.
33	15.03.2023 Participant 5 coding I need to be really aware and careful that I'm not solely looking for confirming codes that match my existing analysis. However, this is all mirroring findings thus far.
34	No new or relevant patterns or theories emerged. Stronger emphasis on knowledge and battles with schools. Lots more evidence to add to existing synthesis plus she spoke so positively about actually having EP contact details. All other participants wanted direct contact options and she had them and found them invaluable. This is a great extension of findings already generated and I feel happy to stop sampling as a result. Phew!

35	19.03.2023 I <i>think</i> I've got 3 conceptual categories. I've incorporated 3 of my outliers into existing areas. I need to sort out two more conceptual categories cos I can't quite work out how they fit together. They all feel linked yet slightly separate and they all fit into each other at the same time. I need to do more sorting, listing and diagramming I think.
36	I spoke about it before but I'm now definitely going to move to Nvivo. I think I need to keep analysing, moving and adapting the higher order focused codes to help determine my remaining conceptual categories and to check that the ones I've generated within the diagramming above actually work by going through the focused codes again and trying to elevate them to a more conceptual level (I also can't believe that I'm writing these things as they occur to me and not having to keep rereading the Charmaz book – these concepts and processes are actually in my head!).  At this point I'm also wondering if the one remaining outlier will be deemed irrelevant to the research. I'm not prepared to do it yet, I can't quite see where it fits in but I had four outliers yesterday and today I've incorporated three of them. If after this fourth level of analysis it doesn't fit, I'll feel secure in its removal.
37	Off to Nvivo I go! (Which I'm doing by exporting the 33 pages of broad themes with all focused codes from excel to PDF and using the PDF as a file to then recode by sorting into more detailed analysed categories). I'm also having the diagramming paper next to me to cross reference against and make notes on. It already has a fair amount of crossing out.
38	Before I started, I thought the focused would be social mechanisms and structures surrounding capacity being barriers to engagement. When doing the first two interviews I thought it was all about wanting change, wanting 'anything even if I don't know what it is because anything has to be better than this.' Then when in the early stages of initial coding I thought it was all about feeling removed from the process. I kept this in mind and kept going back to the data itself, the line-by-line coding helped with this enormously. Then the synthesising and

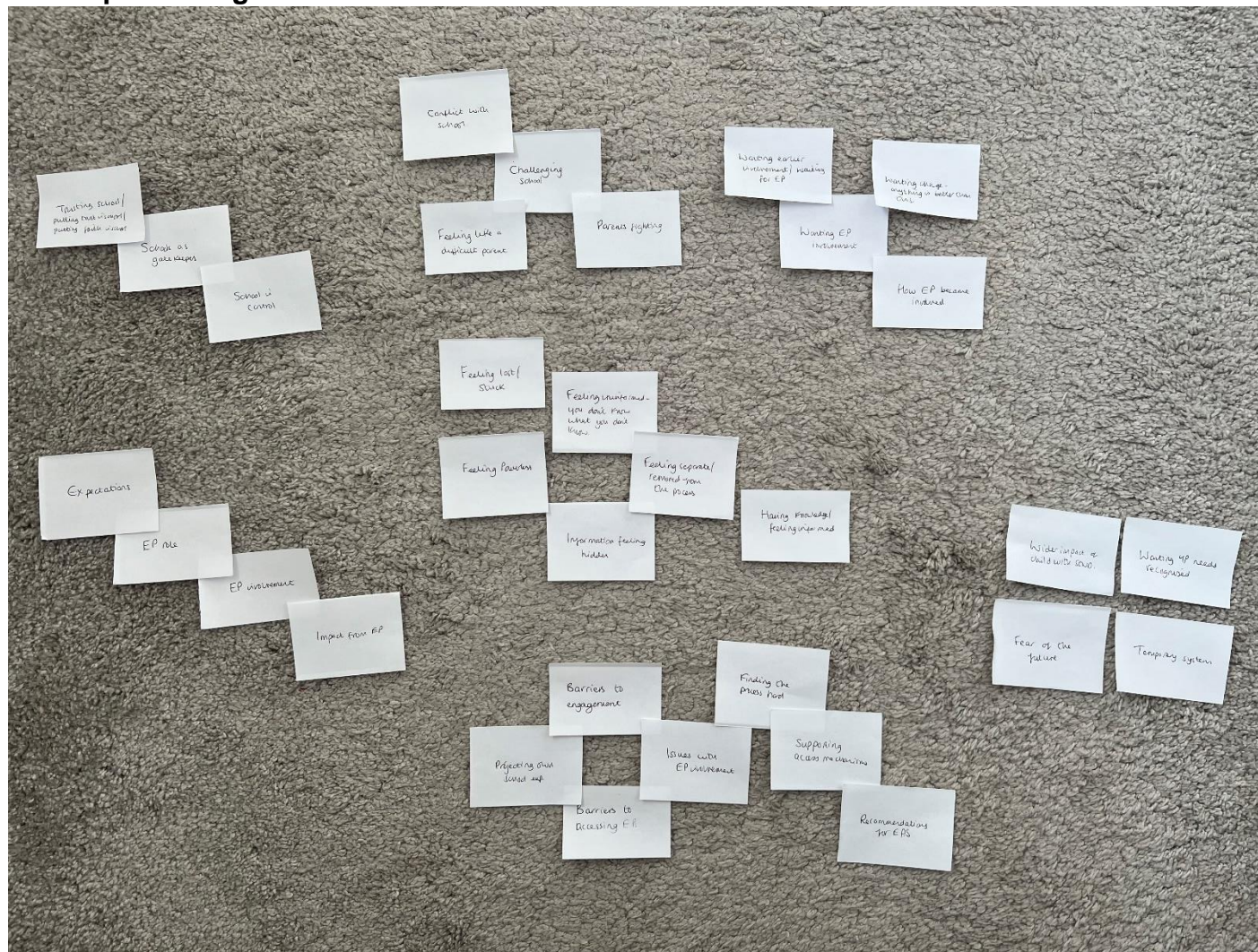
	checking/ reviewing my initial codes helped to immerse me even more in what the parents were actually saying, not me sifting through like an echo chamber and pulling out the bits that resonated with me (reflexivity). Then the focused coding and the refining and theming of the focused coding before heading into elevating focused codes into conceptual categories and that final analysis sorting, diagramming, clustering has enabled me to really review the data, focused and initial coding keeping me in tune with the original accounts and the conceptual categories that have come out are not at all what I expected. Gotta love grounded theory!
39	I just named a conceptual category and I'm so immensely proud of it that I think it might become the title of my thesis!!!!!!!!!!!!!! <i>Feeling uninformed – if knowledge is the key then parents are locked out.</i>
40	Critically reflecting on my findings, the change on focus might be due to participants rather than it not being what I originally thought – social mechanisms and privilege. Perhaps it is simply that those parents find engagement with services so challenging that they are inaccessible for this kind of research? If every parent had the knowledge the other barriers would cease to have the same impact. It would support a more level playing field – things such as being articulate and literate would not be as significant if all parent were informed of options and routes etc.
41	I think, if I had more time or could continue with research, I'd like to look into the power dynamics of school staff with parents. It isn't fitting for this research (as this is focused on EPS) but I would like to explore this as all participants have described it and I'd like to explore it more with a direct focus of inquiry.
42	Supervision - Through constant comparative analysis – every parent felt knowledge was key. Unsure how I transfer 9 conceptual categories to a theory. Do I have to research all 9 within my second lit review? They're quite disparate. Knowledge is my line of inquiry due to being in vivo codes and stakeholder involvement. Other areas may be relevant but are beyond the scope of the study but worthy of further investigation for future research. This seems particularly relevant to school in control, battles and gatekeeper. Tutor advice was 'stick with the process and don't try and make something fit.'
43	23.03.2023 – selecting categories for the second literature review – I need to select those which I perceive as having the highest value for the development of a theory linked to answering the research question. I have talked this through in supervision and considered stakeholder involvement and expectations and, as such, even though 'Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle' was such a frequently occurring aspect of the data and analysis, it was all surrounding battling with schools and having their children's needs recognised. Whilst this is highly pertinent to the wider picture, it seems beyond the scope of the present study but worthy of further investigation for future research.
44	24.03.2023 Whilst 'battling with schools and schools feeling like a gatekeeper' were worthy of acknowledging and representing the strong narrative for the parents as stakeholders and my desire to capture their voices, it was not deemed vital in answering the research question (learning from experiences of an EPS) because it wasn't part of their EPS experience. It was a strong narrative that occurred before. The study was commissioned to explore parent carer experiences of an EPS, and whilst I wanted to honour their voices as stakeholders themselves, the school in control or as

	gatekeeper could not be brought forward for theory generation as it was not vital or in keeping with the original research question and purpose of the study.
45	Reading for my second literature review has already opened up a lot of thinking and has also created a broader language base - enablers and barriers! I've been using 'supportive mechanisms' but enablers is a much more succinct way of saying it.
46	<p>26.03.2023</p> <p>I can't stop thinking about the category of parents having to battle. I keep waking up in the night thinking about it and then my stomach churns and I can hear myself talking and positioning myself in the transformative paradigm and wanting so much to replicate parental and participant voice and not dictate my own agenda – I'm dreadfully uncomfortable not including it. Whilst it may not be directly related to EPSs, excluding views from those about whom the research is conducted feels a whole lot more unjustified!</p> <p>This was the second strongest narrative in the data analysis and, whilst not directly related to an EPS, it is what I learned from parental experiences of an EPS and I was positioning my research as the voice of parents and done with not to and parents (or participants) are one of my stakeholders. It is also a strong theme in the second lit review which is also conducted to support theoretical saturation. So... I have grappled with this a lot and I have reflected that it feels like a disservice to the participants to exclude it and that the lit review is endorsing it as part of theoretical sufficiency. I just don't feel that I can leave it out. In addition, when critically looking at its application to the research question, this is what I learned from parental experiences AND EPs need to be aware of the wider context they work in. Context is everything and working holistically within systems are the bread and butter for EPs – this feels justifiable for its inclusion in the grounded theory.</p>
47	<p>29.03.2023</p> <p>I'm feeling really happy to have reintroduced the school battle/ control/ gatekeeper aspect. It was so strong within participant accounts and so prominent in literature and I haven't lost sleep since I did! It really felt like a disservice to the participants to exclude it which was the opposite of what I was trying to achieve in my approach – not transformative at all! Luckily my overactive brain, conscience and inner turmoil, fortunately, didn't allow it. I also ran findings by some of my fellow TEPs, closer EP colleagues and my university tutor, who all agreed it was pertinent to the research question so that we understand the wider system in which we work and the potential we may have to support this in our linked schools.</p>
48	<p>30.03.2023</p> <p>Following my second literature review - I agree with the category that parental engagement has barriers and enablers that are multifaceted but, fundamentally, the overarching element is knowledge and information. I think this is the basis of the theory and that the other aspects contribute and need acknowledging but are underwritten by an all-encompassing notion of the need for knowledge and information.</p> <p>I want to try to create a pictorial representation, similarly to diagramming used in data analysis to formulate my grounded theory as a framework for understanding parental engagement with an EPS gained from exploring parental experience.</p>
49	<p>31.03.2023</p> <p>I think I've created my grounded theory representation with the overarching aspect of Knowledge is the key. I'm going to try and recreate it in PowerPoint to then put it in the body of my thesis – I can't take a photo of my terrible drawing and use that!</p>

50	<p>28.04.2023</p> <p>During supervision when critically reflecting on my whole study, it became apparent that, whilst I intended to explore parental experiences of an EPS within early intervention stages... considering the data, findings, strong narrative and anguish around parental battles and years of delay in accessing EP support, the EP involvement captured via experiences gained in this study is unlikely to be positioned in a timeframe that would be termed 'early.' Whilst I may have defined 'early intervention' as 'pre-statutory work' due to my working knowledge and involvement within the field of Educational Psychology and the experiences I have had within LA EPSs, I do not think that any of the participants would position their experiences with EPs as occurring 'early in the life of the problem' even though they did occur within schools' graduated response cycles of SEN support. All but one participant described the lengthy battle they had encountered when trying to access EP intervention or receive support for their child and three described years of waiting for an EP. As such, I feel that I need to reflect this positionality in my study. To be representative of the findings, study's recruitment difficulties and participant constructions of intervention positioning, I have altered my study's title from that which was included in my 'intention to submit' form. My research question will remain the same as the line of enquiry didn't change but as my research aim has been around striving to have parents' voices at the heart of my study, and reflecting that the parents would not describe their EP involvement as 'early intervention,' it felt necessary to change the positioning of the study's title to be representative and in line with (what I believed would be) their conceptualisation.</p> <p>The justification of focus for the study and acknowledgement of the importance for early intervention will remain, along with the rationale for positioning the study in early stages of work within the EPS context, but this representative repositioning will require a change to my title from: <i>A grounded theory study exploring parent carer experiences of an Educational Psychology Services within early intervention stages.</i> To: <i>Knowledge is the key... A grounded theory study exploring parent carer experiences of an Educational Psychology Services within pre-statutory stages of early intervention.</i></p> <p>This doesn't alter my findings or my unique contribution of my study. For my own perspective, this still meets my remit of EPs not having a statutory duty to engage with parents which is why I wanted to explore pre-statutory work; I wanted to review engagement when it wasn't a statutory duty for either the EP or the parent to try to improve involvement for those who may find it more challenging and where it isn't a requirement to include them beyond consent.</p>
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## Appendix 23. Diagramming of categories created from focused codes using clustering techniques to organise data.

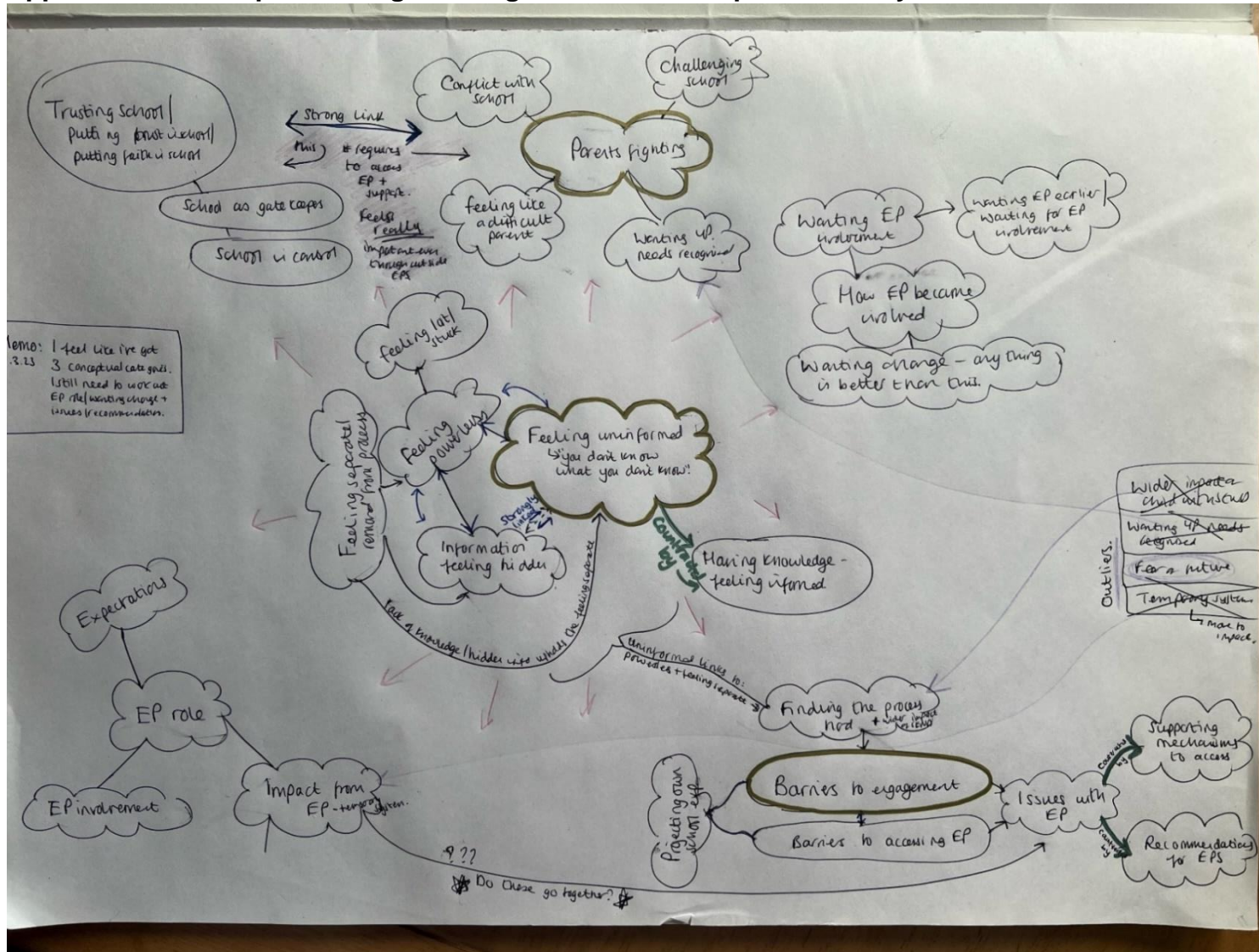


See memo 31, Appendix 22 for how this process took place.

A list of the 32 broad categories created from 1208 focused codes using clustering organising techniques:

- Barriers to accessing EP
- Barriers to engagement
- Challenging school
- Conflict with school
- EP involvement
- EP role
- Expectations
- Fearing for the future
- Feeling like a difficult parent
- Feeling lost/ stuck
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling separate/ removed from the process
- Feeling uninformed - you don't know what you don't know
- Finding the process hard
- Having knowledge/ feeling informed
- How EP became involved
- Impact from EP
- Information feeling hidden
- Irrelevant to research question
- Issues with EP involvement
- Parents fighting
- Projecting own school experience
- Recommendations for EPS
- School in control
- Schools as gatekeepers
- Supporting access mechanisms
- Temporary system creation
- Trusting school/ putting trust in school/ putting faith in schools
- Wanting change - anything is better than this
- Wanting earlier involvement/ waiting for EP
- Wanting EP involvement
- Wanting YP needs recognised
- Wider impact of SEND child

Appendix 24. Examples of diagramming used within the present study



Knowledge is the Key to it all

Responsive EPS to individuals, families, local  
awareness of mechanisms, enables + bodies  
duty + transparency  
of EPS etc +  
inherent  
context +  
of kind.  
of aims.

Parents having deep  
guidance + notes to support  
of their knowledge  
of their available  
options

Information

~~Understanding~~  
Understanding  
EP role

feeling included,  
valued +  
empowered  
creating a collaborative  
EPS

managing expectations

enabling parents to be informed  
+ know what is available  
to pursue

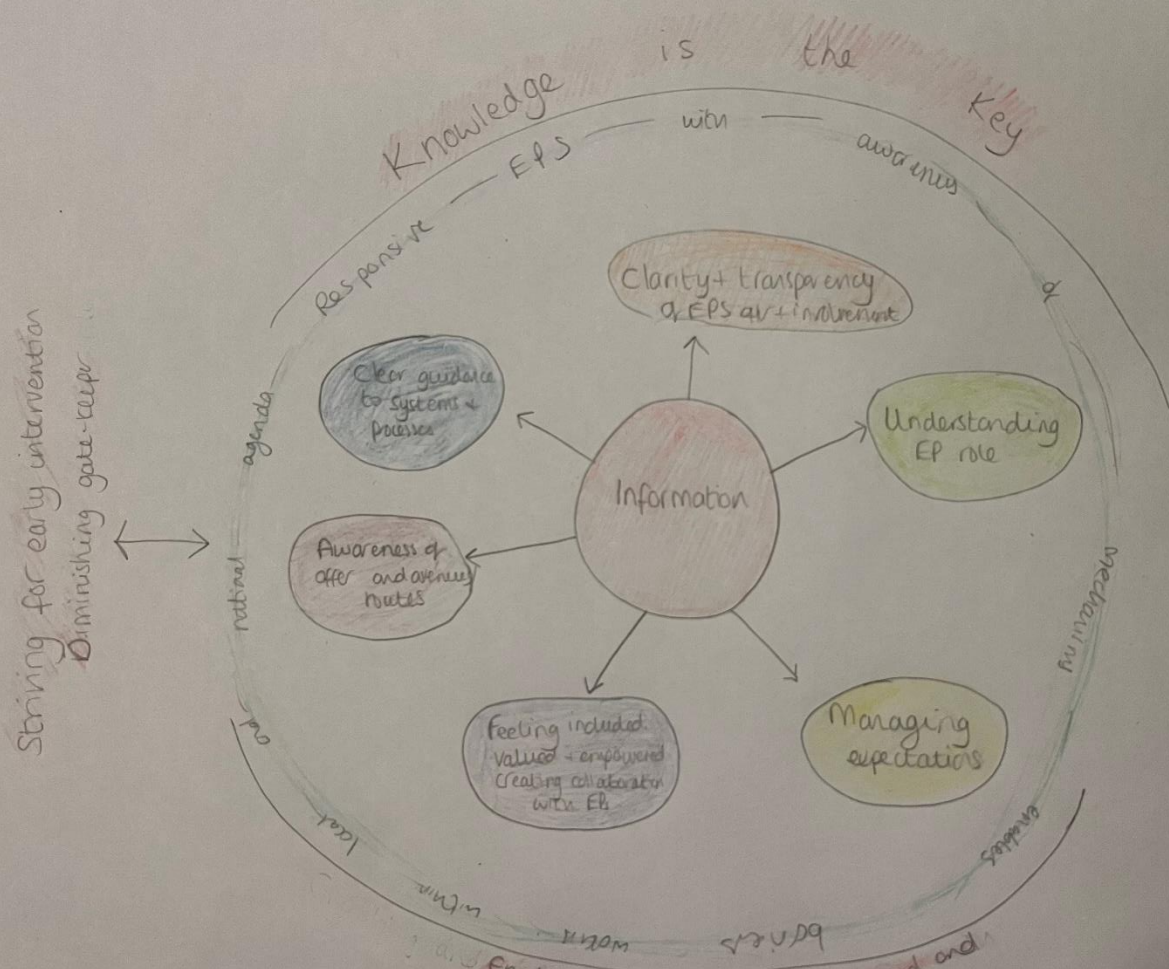
(imp: no information hidden - center is you don't know  
you don't know)

Maintaining  
awareness of

diminishing gate-keeper role/parent

Early intervention, diminishing gate

Grounded Theory Representation: Knowledge is the Key



Enabling parents to be informed and know what is available - (no onto hidden - counter to go down your door)

**Appendix 25. Tabularising of focused codes, final focused codes and conceptual categories (in vivo codes are in italics)**

<b>Conceptual category 1</b>	
Emotional strain creating a barrier to EPS engagement	
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>	
Emotional state held by the parent or carer inhibiting their ability to engage Finding the process draining Impact of meeting location in school Projecting own school experiences onto involvement with EPS	
<b>Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis</b>	
<p>Contemplating may have missed vital info <b><i>don't always take everything in because there's emotions - with EP</i></b> <b><i>don't always take in the information</i></b> <b><i>Emotional meetings - with EP</i></b> Experiencing overwhelm and reduced parental cognitive capacity when discussing own child Experiencing upset over flippant or comparative comments feeling intense Feeling overwhelmed with emotion due to challenges - parent <b><i>It's daunting</i></b> feeling scared Getting upset discussing needs and difficulties of own child Grieving for their child Holding fears around accessing support, hearing negative messages about child, child failing Lack of info creates fear Missing opportunities due to feeling overwhelmed Navigating in a stressed state Not knowing is unnerving Parents sensitive to any negativity in meetings Struggling to articulate due to emotions - mum with EP unable to focus due to managing emotions Unable to remember what was said with EP due to parental emotion/ upset unable to take in information in meeting unsure if EP contact was shared due to overwhelm advocate can compensate for parental overwhelm Emotional overwhelm may result in missed information from EP involvement Parent crying often Advocate bringing support parent needing supporting adult due to own overwhelm parent regretting being unable to share views due to overwhelm reliving own school experience</p>	<p><b><i>I used to get so overwhelmed</i></b> Too much to process - option for later contact would help Unable to absorb all info due to emotion and overwhelm unaware of clarity of EP involvement - could be due to overwhelm wanting time to process meeting <b><i>Wanting to go back and reflect on what was said</i></b> Blaming self - mum <b><i>doing everything I could – mum</i></b> <b><i>done everything that I possibly can</i></b> experiencing challenges - describing LT difficulties Experiencing stress Finding being a parent of SEND challenging Finding process difficult If they're finding it hard, how are others managing? It's daunting <b><i>knew it wasn't going to be very easy</i></b> No positive SEND parent stories reflecting how hard it has been – mum Struggling to accept/ understand having a child with SEND - EP reinforces this Surrounded by negative narrative from other parents of SEND Considering negative impact of meeting EP in school environment creating embarrassment for parents Creating power imbalance meeting in school Dreading contact from school Feeling power dynamic in favour of school location in school adding to existing stressful environment <b><i>not a level playing field - meeting in school</i></b> traumatic to meet EP in school Acknowledging impact of own schooling experience impacting capacity to advocate Becoming quiet becoming submissive distrusting of school due to prior experience</p>

Reliving/ applying negative past school experience Reverting to child-like position Reverting to obedience from own school experience reverting to school self	Needing to consider parental experiences of education - recommendation Own fears of school keeping parent oppressed projecting own school experiences
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<b>Conceptual category 2</b>	
<i>Feeling uninformed - unless you're in the know, you can't access that help (in vivo code)</i>	
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>	
Feeling lost or stuck Feeling powerless Feeling separate or removed from the process Inaccessible language and terminology used Information feeling hidden Unaware, uninformed and lacking information You don't know what you don't know (in vivo)	
<b>Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis</b>	
<b><i>Unless you're in the know, you can't. You can't access that help...</i></b> <b><i>As a parent you have to be guided</i></b> Critical level/ acute need generated support <b><i>didn't know where to turn</i></b> Exhausting avenues available - parent Feeling exhausted all avenues available Feeling lost Feeling stuck <b><i>Felt like I was in no man's land</i></b> <b><i>Left in no-man's land</i></b> <b><i>like a deer in head lights</i></b> <b><i>Like a minefield</i></b> Longevity of fight created a sense of being lost looking for direction looking forward to EP involvement as feeling stuck Needing support to find something new to try - existing practice not working Not having peer support - parent Not knowing how to support - parent Not knowing to what to do – mum Not knowing what to do – school <b><i>Not really knowing what I should be doing</i></b> Parents in the unknown School unsure how to support YP Unaware of advocacy option seeking direction for support access <b><i>stuck in no man's land</i></b> Stuck in unknown <b><i>wandering about in the dark</i></b> wanting guidance of indicators Wanting guidelines for parents to navigate process Wanting help locating support <b><i>Who do you reach out to?</i></b> Willing to do anything	Blinkered by lack of knowledge as a parent Concern parent will hinder process feeling defeated Feeling heartbroken over child's distress Feeling helpless Feeling helpless - not knowing what to do Feeling not getting right support but no awareness of alternative options Feeling overpowered by schools feeling powerless Feeling repeatedly let down <b><i>How do you reach out?</i></b> Lack of info creates fear <b><i>let down by everybody</i></b> Liking parents in the unknown - school Limited by limited knowledge - parent <b><i>Nobody listens</i></b> not knowing how to support Not knowing is unnerving Parent feeling incapable to apply for EHCP Repeating messages but not being heard - parent <b><i>Unless you're an expert, you haven't got a clue</i></b> Wanting info to ensure parents have done all they can would feel nervous if no prior EP experience Assuming parents have nothing to do with EP communicating decision making through letter - school Despite wanting to be involved - removed - school EP remit not communicated to parents feeling omitted from process feeling separate from EP process Feeling uninvolved in school provision/ decisions First interaction in consultation - EP HS invited mum to EP meeting

<p>School go off and do something - parent not involved  SENCO relayed process of involvement  <b>step away from it - EP</b>  Step removed - school speak to EP and relay info  <b>they've done this - school securing EP</b>  Unaware of what consenting to with EP involvement  Unclear if EP is finished  Unclear on future involvement  <b>School go off and do something - parent not involved</b>  <b>Very much removed from the process</b>  Wanting a means of contacting EP  wanting direct contact with EP after involvement  Wanting guidance on parental steps in support  wanting more involvement - EP &amp; school  Wanting to be included in PS process, not given opportunity  wanting to be involved - EP  <b>would have liked more involvement with the educational psychologist</b>  <b>Layman trying to understand</b>  meaning of language not shared  no one explaining terms/ language/ meaning  Not knowing terminology  Unaware of meaning of terminology  unaware of terminology  Unfamiliar terminology  <b>A lot of confusion for parents</b>  Assuming support available through LA, wouldn't know it was an EP  Aware support is available (just not how to access)  Covert information sharing operation  <b>done behind closed doors</b>  Don't know how to access EP  EP working for child in unknown by parents  Hearing things for the first time  Information around EP not given  Information known is from employment role  Knowing school processes might help  Lack of knowledge or access to information around EPs is the biggest barrier  Learning about options and info from other parents  No information at all about EP  No information shared about EPs  Not hearing updates from school  no EP information shared  no idea how EPs secure support  No information about EP shared  Not aware of what EP involvement would look like  Not feeling informed of options  not knowing alternatives to school view  Not knowing what was typical development  Not knowing what's right for SEND  Parent unaware of expected academic levels</p>	<p>just told EP was coming in  Limited direct involvement with EP  Never considered parents could interact with EP, even via school  Not knowing what EP support will look like  not understanding change in EP perspective  Not understanding purpose limiting parents' view of impact  Parent not understanding what happened - EP processes separate to parent  Questioning can parents contact EP  Removed from process - school  not initially aware of process for EP involvement  parent not told she could bring advocate  Parent not understanding thinking behind the EP involvement  parents aren't told information  Parents needing to be informed of available support to make an informed decision  Parents wanting information  Questioning how parents would know about options without mechanisms to research  Receiving no record of involvement  School having the power of information  school may be assuming all parents know info  Trusting if info isn't shared, there's nothing to tell - school  Unaware of what EP involvement would be  Unaware what EP involvement would look like  <b>Very unclear process from a parents' point of view</b>  Wanting a clear guide  Wanting clarification of length and type of involvement  Wanting disseminating information – mum  Without insider knowledge, how do parent know what's available?  agreeing to EP without knowing about EP role  EP involvement not made clear to parent  Experiencing everything as new - no frame of reference for involvement  Feeling uninformed  Feeling uninformed as a parent of SEND  Feeling uninformed by school  <b>I didn't know anything</b>  <b>I had no clue</b>  Not all parents have same level of SEND knowledge  Not knowing what's possible  Not occurring to ask for support  Parent not knowing how or why EP generates support for YP  <b>Parents don't know what they can go in armed with.</b>  <b>Parents don't know what they don't know.</b>  Parents need to know EP is an option  parents not knowing who to ask</p>
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<p>Parent unaware of severity of delay  Parent unaware of training for EP  querying rights  solely knowing EP can help secure support  Trying to understand EP process by comparing to SaLT process  Unaware if her process in the norm  Unaware of brokering process  unaware of length of involvement  unaware of options  Unaware of parental role in support  Unaware of precise involvement process  Wanting information around the EP's involvement  <b>Wanting more information up front</b>  <b>Didn't really have any expectations</b>  Don't know what is available to ask for  inexperience limited knowledge - parent  <b>Never occurred to me to ask [for EP]</b>  No in-depth knowledge of norms in education  Not knowing entitlement  Not knowing what to ask for  <b>Not knowing what you could ask for at school</b>  Wanting info on the process for EPs</p>	<p>Questioning if expectations were ever there - mum  <b>there must be lots of people that haven't got a clue</b>  unaware could have advocate  unaware of potential support available  Wanting EP information before hand to manage expectations  <b>You don't know what you don't know</b>  <b>You don't know you don't know</b>  Unaware of rights  Unaware of support EP can provide  Unaware of support for a parent  Unaware of thresholds to access support  unclear information  Unclear of responsibility of roles  Uninformed of EP remit  Wanting clarity on process  Wanting explanation of EP involvement process  <b>Unless you're in the know, you can't. You can't access that help...</b>  Wanting explanation of expectations - school, YP, parent  Wanting guidance on the parents' role within EP support  Wanting info on the EP role  Wanting information on parent role in</p>
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<b>Conceptual category 3</b>	
<i>It's knowledge. Knowledge is key to it all (in vivo code)</i>	
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>	
<p>Accessing support is easier when you know what to ask for  Being proactive - wanting to know as much as I can to help my child  Feeling empowered  Generating awareness and understanding whilst reducing unease and ambiguity  Information reducing ambiguity  Knowledge enabling challenge  Sharing knowledge with others to reduce hidden information or reducing the unknown  Utilising existing links to generate knowledge</p>	
<b>Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis</b>	
<p>Aware of EP existence due to work  Ensuring parents know support available  Knowledge is key to accessing support  Knowledgeable teacher and knowledgeable parent created EP involvement  opening up possibilities with knowledge  Parent knowing roles and asking for support  Realising EP existence through diagnosis experience  Recognising ability to search for and secure alternative support  Reliant upon parent knowledge to push for EP support  Research capabilities shouldn't influence access to support</p>	<p>fearing knowledgeable parents – school  Gaining knowledge creating school challenge opportunity  Knowledge bringing power/ influence to parents  Mum's knowledge of typical development created knowledge YP was behind Parent knowing roles and asking for support  Knowledge enabling raising disability concerns  Knowledge fuelled complaint which generated EP support  Parent feeling a dig from school around doing own research  Presenting as knowledgeable to question school practice  Questioning school based on new expertise – dad</p>



<p>Without insider knowledge, how do parent know what's available?          Accessing expert ADHD information  <b>As much learning as I could</b>          Both parents increasing their knowledge          Discovering EP neutrality in own research          Knowledge coming from ADHD parent support groups          Mother being knowledgeable of ADHD          Mother knowing more than school around ADHD          Parent accessing course to build own understanding          Parent actively seeking greater expertise          Parent researching EHE          Parents doing own research to request support and funding          Recognising own knowledge limitations          Spending hours researching and feeling well-informed - mum          terminology understood due to own wide research - mum          Becoming the informed parent          Knowledge fuelled complaint which generated EP support          everyone should know they can bring someone          Feeling armed with knowledge – mum and dad          Feeling empowered by knowledge – mum          Feeling validated by others whilst gaining knowledge          Gaining knowledge empowering parents          Knowledge of ADHD empowering parents          Mum suggesting suitable provision in EP meeting          Now recommending pathways – mum          Supporting adult using expertise to challenge school          Clear understanding second EP involvement was one off intervention (CWC)          Disabused of hope second time so not disappointed          Feeling experience brings understanding of SEND - school          Feeling secure around knowledge of EP process - CWC leaflet          Fully aware stand-alone consultation          Increased knowledge created positive experience          Knew what the EP involvement would involve due to leaflet          Knowing school processes might help          Leaflet outlined expectations</p>	<p>Recognising absence of EP as own experience/ knowledge increased          Recognising their strengths to advocate without knowledge wouldn't fight          Without own knowledge would have trusted school          Covert information sharing operation          Parent has become knowledge sharer to other families          Sharing insider knowledge with others          Sharing knowledge between parents          Acknowledging life experiences helping mum and dad          Information known is from employment role          Knowing education trajectory through work role          Knowing field of education through employment          Knowledge of EP through family links that work in education          Knowledge of role through family links          Knowledge of sibling created knowledge YP not typically developing          Knowledge of typical dev. Created understanding - mum          Knowledgeable family members offering info          Learning about options and info from other parents          Seeking information from peers with knowledge          Some awareness due to own profession          Talking to peers experienced in education          Using parental knowledge to support process/ understanding - EP          Understanding education field through work role          Using experience with different professions to understand/ navigate EP role          using insider work knowledge to understand SEND          Using knowledge from family links, assumed EP would work with child          Using knowledge from other sources [governor] and that services exist          Given a leaflet outlining process          support to make an informed decision          Receiving report with breakdown of discussion EP          Parents needing to be informed of available</p>
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<b>Conceptual category 4</b>
Parents having to fight and feeling like a battle – schools acting as gatekeepers to support
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>
<p>Experiencing challenge and conflict with school          Feeling let down by school          Feeling like a difficult parent and not wanting to be THAT parent          Needing to advocate for child: wanting young person's needs recognised</p>

Putting faith and trust in schools  
 Questioning the morality of needing to fight  
 School as the gatekeeper: school in control - a power struggle  
 A prolonged struggle to be heard to access support

**Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis**

<p><b><i>battle we had through primary school</i></b>          Battling with school for recognition of need          EP agreeing with school construction of need          feeling enough is enough          hadn't been waiting or asking for EP involvement          Parent requesting EP support          Parents wanting external input          Pushing to be involved - EP          Rhetoric of preparing for a fight          Rhetoric of requiring a fight          without knowledge wouldn't fight          Beginning to question school's provision          challenging established roles – PS          Challenging perceptions of school - parent          challenging powerfully positioned views – PS  <b><i>clarifying moment - where is Ed Psych in all this?</i></b>          Conflicting staff opinions causing delays in support          Correcting SENCO assumptions          Disagreeing with construction of need          Disagreeing with school's construction          Disagreeing with school's view of needs          Feeling let down by school and raising a complaint          Gaining knowledge creating school challenge          opportunity          initiating forceful stance created EP involvement          Insisting on EP as no improvements had occurred          Knowledge fuelled complaint which generated EP          support          Mum challenging school resulted in EP involvement          parent challenging school provision  <b><i>Parent questioning - how have we got here?</i></b>          pointing out discrepancy of no evidence and          longevity of support          Querying discrepancy between difficulties and          provision          Questioning absence of EP          questioning school's actions          Questioning what school say          Questioning why no EP involvement          Questioning why school haven't involved EP          Raising concerns sparked dialogue with school          Challenging school's insolent construction - parent  <b><i>You feel like you're one voice amongst well          established [voices]</i></b>          Acknowledging school may hold different          construction of second involvement          Aghast at lack of evidence from school          At the point of extreme exasperation insisting on          support</p>	<p>Questioning effectiveness of SENCO holding all          knowledge          Repeating messages but not being heard - parent          repeating messages to school          School choices causing distress          School conceptualising need as naughty not ASC or          communication          School holding different construction          School reporting different presentation          supporting adult able to advocate and share          conflicting views on behalf of parent          Trying to understand school perspective          Worrying needs not being met - in school          Considering EHE due to needs not being met          Feeling let down by staff not seeking support          Feeling let down by staff's lack of expertise or          seeking support          in the back of my mind I knew          Looking for assurances from school          parent not understanding school's position          School disregarding parent toileting provision for YP          School feeling ill-equipped          School meeting some, not all, needs          School not meeting need          SENCO dismissing parent concerns          Acting placidly          Articulate parents causing school difficulty          Avoiding complaining as parent          Aware of being a potential annoyance - parent          Being an easy parent  <b><i>Being 'that parent'</i></b>          Conforming to all school requests          considered overreacting by school  <b><i>Don't wanna be that parent</i></b>          Feeling an annoyance to school          Feeling conflict with school framed as difficult          parents          Feeling like a nuisance - mum          Feeling need to justify herself - mum          Feeling school putting parent in her place with EP          Feeling undertones of conflict with school due to          feeling like challenging parents  <b><i>I don't want to be one of those parents</i></b>  <b><i>I'm not a pushy mother</i></b>          Mum feeling difficult          not challenging school  <b><i>not one of those mums</i></b>          Not wanting to cause difficulty to school          Parent feeling a dig from school around doing own          research</p>
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<p>Blaming primary school for difficulties now in secondary due to needs not known or communicated</p> <p>Challenging school's insolent construction - parent conceptualising need as insolence and rudeness - school</p> <p>Concerned school not supporting YP</p> <p>Conflicting views between school and home</p> <p>EP holding concerns around insufficient evidence</p> <p>Experiencing conflicting presentation to school</p> <p>Feeling aghast at the nerve of hearing school's insolent construction</p> <p>Feeling annoyance towards school</p> <p>Feeling compassion for school</p> <p>Feeling confused - contrast in own view and school's view</p> <p>feeling difficulties experienced lay with primary school</p> <p>Feeling dismissed by school</p> <p>feeling dismissed in PS</p> <p>feeling failed by school</p> <p>Feeling not taken seriously as needs not acute</p> <p>Feeling rage at school construction of need</p> <p>Feeling school using EP to further their position and dissuade EHCP</p> <p>feeling unheard by school</p> <p>Insulting phone call punctuated parent view</p> <p>Mum holding different priorities to school</p> <p>New SENCO acknowledged YP was behind, previous SENCO did not</p> <p>New SENCO expecting previous EP involvement</p> <p>New setting unhappy about ASC assessment</p> <p>Not aligning with school view or provision choices</p> <p>Not providing provision agreed - setting prior to EP</p> <p>Not trusting school</p> <p>Parent feeling anger toward SENCO's comments</p> <p>Parental concerns confirmed by SEND section of Ofsted report</p> <p>Parents strongly disagreeing with school construction of naughty</p> <p>Perceiving primary school as lacking in SEND expertise</p> <p>Positioning challenges on school failures</p> <p>Longevity of fight created a sense of being lost</p> <p>Ongoing issues for four years</p> <p>Prolonged struggle</p> <p>Repeating requests to school</p> <p>requesting EP for over a year - parent</p> <p>Seven years waiting for EP, seen one month after referral</p> <p>Unsuccessful requests for support</p> <p>Very late EP involvement</p> <p>Waiting for EP support for 7 years</p> <p>Wanting EP earlier</p> <p>wishing for earlier EP access</p>	<p>Parent feeling unable to share conflicting views with school</p> <p>Parents using caveat to avoid being potential annoyance</p> <p>Portrayed as issue creator - mum</p> <p>Purposefully avoiding conflict</p> <p>School dreading mum</p> <p>School insinuating I was being 'over the top'</p> <p>School wanting external perspective to dissuade EHCP</p> <p>SENCO blaming parent concerns on parenting inexperience</p> <p><b><i>Shut me up - underlying purpose of second EP involvement</i></b></p> <p>Wanting to advocate yet waiting for instruction</p> <p>wanting to be asked for opinion – with EP</p> <p>Advocating for YP</p> <p>Asking for EP support</p> <p>Feeling she needs to rely on herself to have needs met</p> <p>Feeling the need to advocate for son</p> <p>hitting incident instigating SENCO suggesting EP involvement</p> <p>Mum imploring need</p> <p>Mum providing evidence</p> <p>parent feeling the need to prove presentation</p> <p>parent reminding school of diagnosis</p> <p>Parents being YP advocate</p> <p>parents fighting YP corner</p> <p>pushing for support</p> <p>Reliant upon parent knowledge to push for EP support</p> <p>Request fuelled by wanting to protect child</p> <p>School avoidance sparking EP referral</p> <p>Striving for the best for child</p> <p>Suicidal thoughts triggering support</p> <p>Wanting EP involvement earlier and waiting for EP involvement</p> <p>Championing for support for three years until need recognised</p> <p>championing for support since 2019</p> <p>Concerns raised to school 6 years ago</p> <p>Continually asking for support for years</p> <p>EP involved via new SENCO following parent requests</p> <p>Experiencing exasperation having been asking for EP for years</p> <p>Fundamentally want/ recommend EP support sooner</p> <p>accepting school's view</p> <p>believing the SENCO</p> <p>Dismissing own concerns and believing/ trusting school</p> <p>distrusting of school due to prior experience</p> <p>Expecting school to do their role</p>
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<p>Wondering if earlier EP would've made school self-reflective earlier</p> <p><b>Years of battling</b></p> <p>Years of fighting for support</p> <p>Accepting and following school advice</p> <p>Accepting assurances from school but them being incorrect</p> <p>Putting trust/ faith in school</p> <p>School downplaying/ unaware of difficulties and incorrectly assuring all fine</p> <p>Seeking advice from schools as they're the experts</p> <p>Trusting if info isn't shared, there's nothing to tell - school</p> <p>Trusting of school's expertise</p> <p>Trusting school and accepting view</p> <p>Trusting school as experts</p> <p>Trusting school due to time spent with child</p> <p>Trusting school more than self</p> <p>Trusting school that EP intervention was appropriate</p> <p>Trusting school to keep parent informed</p> <p>Trusting schools to share information</p> <p>Trusting staff with strongest connection</p> <p>Trusting what school say</p> <p>trying school suggestions</p> <p>Feeling uninformed by school</p> <p>Knew about EP role through SENCO</p> <p>Needing to ask to access support</p> <p>No means of access to EP other than through school</p> <p>not accessing support - school</p> <p>Power dynamic - school holder of info and parent wanting info</p> <p>Provision and information not shared between settings</p> <p>Receiving inaccurate information from school</p> <p>Relying on school to share info</p> <p>school asking for EP involvement</p> <p>School asking for reasoning/ justification for parent wanting EP</p> <p>School contacting EP team</p> <p>School deciding what information to share</p> <p>School felt like gatekeepers</p> <p>school holding all the information</p> <p>School imposing specialist as remit for EHCP</p> <p>School made use of EP universal offer available - CWC</p> <p>School never suggesting/ mentioning EP</p> <p>School relaying view of EP</p> <p>School sent EP provided leaflet</p> <p>School unwilling to apply for EHCP</p> <p>School were barrier to referring or access to EP support</p> <p>SENCO relayed process of involvement</p> <p>single point of contact – school</p> <p>Step removed - school speak to EP and relay info</p> <p>Wanting support and school denying access</p>	<p>expecting to trust school</p> <p>Feeling child understood created trust in school</p> <p>Feeling connected to teacher created trust in school</p> <p>Following advice from school</p> <p>Following school advice and pupil subsequently failing</p> <p>Following school hypothesis</p> <p>following school recommendations</p> <p>Following school requests and requirements</p> <p>Following/ believing opinions of school staff</p> <p>Guilt retrospectively wishing they'd asked for second opinion to school</p> <p><b>hoping that the school are doing what they say</b></p> <p><b>I tried everything they said</b></p> <p><b>Make you doubt yourself</b></p> <p>New setting responsive to need</p> <p>No alternative but to believe school</p> <p>No option but to trust school</p> <p>not questioning school</p> <p>Positioning school as experienced</p> <p>Positioning teacher in the know – parent</p> <p>PS not providing support they espoused</p> <p><b>Putting all my trust into what schools tell me</b></p> <p>Putting faith in school to secure evidence</p> <p>viewing school as experts</p> <p>Without own knowledge would have trusted school</p> <p>Questioning the morality of needing to fight</p> <p>Acting as gatekeeper for EHCP</p> <p>Acting as gatekeeper to support - school</p> <p><b>Almost like a barrier</b></p> <p>Being told EP view through school</p> <p><b>Don't feel like it's forward facing</b></p> <p>EP feedback passed on from school</p> <p>EP remit not communicated to parents</p> <p>Feedback from professionals relayed by school</p> <p>Feeling like school as gatekeeper</p> <p>Not feeling heard</p> <p>Not hearing updates from school</p> <p>Pathway to EPs avoiding school - recommendation</p> <p>Positioning school as experts</p> <p>Positioning school as knowing best</p> <p>Relying on school for info</p> <p>relying on school info</p> <p>Parent feeling overpowered by school staff ratio in meeting</p> <p>Parent unaware of expected academic levels</p> <p>Parent unaware of severity of delay</p> <p>Previous school staff denying YP need</p> <p>Primary school seeking control</p> <p>Questioning school influence on EP</p> <p>School asking for permission to involve EP</p> <p>school calling parent to meeting</p> <p>school controlling access to info and support</p> <p>school controlling information sharing</p> <p>School declaring EP meeting</p>
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<p>Worrying around no contact – school</p> <p>Contrast in EP messages - previous EP information had been negative and relayed by PS (no direct message from EP), direct EP</p> <p>EP positioning changing with new setting</p> <p>EP timing felt opportune - for school</p> <p>Feeling EP used to halt EHCP queries</p> <p>Feeling like a lone voice</p> <p>Feeling overpowered by schools</p> <p>Feeling power dynamic in favour of school</p> <p>feeling silenced</p> <p>Fixed mind-set - school</p> <p>Framing as potential follow-up, reality dissuading EHCP</p> <p>Happy for EP involvement once suggested - parents</p> <p>Hitting incident punctuated ad creating a change in thinking - school</p> <p>Holding a fixed mindset – school</p> <p>HS invited mum to EP meeting</p> <p>Hypothesising quick response to finally access EP due to Ofsted concerns for SEND</p> <p>illustrating professional to parent ratio as 4:1</p> <p>Information around EP not given</p> <p>letting school lead</p> <p>Liking parents in the unknown - school</p> <p>Limited options now due to no EHCP - application having been denied by school</p> <p>needing a label – school</p> <p>New setting wanting to generate own construction of YP</p> <p>EP not involved in area parent wanted as not area of need</p> <p>EP support not tackling issues/ area of need</p> <p>Experiencing continued challenge due to YP academic progress</p> <p>Feeling exacerbated school don't know/ understand him</p> <p>High staff turnover meant no continuation of understanding</p> <p>No label means no understanding</p> <p>Not feeling pupil was understood in school</p> <p>Not understanding need created failure in school</p>	<p>School declaring secondary SENCO would attend EP meeting</p> <p>School dissuading against EHCP</p> <p>School downplaying need</p> <p>School downplaying severity of need</p> <p>school framing need as 'just a bit behind'</p> <p>School generating invite list for EP session</p> <p>School having the power of information</p> <p>School informing parent of rights</p> <p>School needing their own evidence of need</p> <p>School relaying EP message to validate their position</p> <p>School reluctantly sharing parental request option for EHCP</p> <p>School suggesting they wouldn't support EHCP application</p> <p>School suggesting to discuss EHCP at EP consultation</p> <p>School using experience to dissuade EHCP</p> <p>School wanting EP for their support</p> <p>School wanting to better understand and support needs - wanting EP</p> <p>school withholding information</p> <p><b>Set in their ways - school</b></p> <p>Sudden change of view - school</p> <p>Sudden opportunity to see EP - felt manufactured for school's agenda</p> <p>Sudden shift in school construction - acknowledging large gap and on SEND register</p> <p><b>teachers making the decisions</b></p> <p>Three teachers holding conflicting narrative to parents</p> <p>Direct EP involvement not related to areas of need/ difficulty</p> <p>Downplaying need in school</p> <p>EP didn't see areas where support is needed</p> <p>EP involvement ticked box for ASC assessment process</p> <p>school not recognising as SEND</p> <p>School still not understanding child after 7 years</p> <p>School suddenly shifting construction to more severe</p> <p>School unable to see need due to YP academic capability</p> <p>Unsurprising superficial recommendations due to positive involvement context</p> <p>viewing diagnosis as helpful</p> <p>Wanting EP to support acceptance of him</p> <p>Parent felt EP involvement in wrong context</p> <p>Questioning benefit of EP involvement</p> <p>School not acknowledging diagnosis</p>
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### Conceptual category 5

The elusive EP role and the unknown reality – contrasts in expectations and involvement.

#### Focused codes after analysis

Ambiguity around EP role and involvement

Making assumptions of EP role and expecting more  
 Positioning the EP as the expert and authoritative body, external to school  
 Wanting a change - anything is better than this

**Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis**

<p>Ambiguity around EP involvement          Didn't really have any expectations          EP framed as person that can help get support - school          EP keeping case open          Having single EP meeting  <b><i>I had no idea what an educational psychologist does</i></b>          Not aware of length of EP involvement          Questioning benefit of EP involvement          questioning impact of short EP involvement          Unaware EP would talk to YP          unaware of length of involvement          unaware of length of involvement even after meeting EP          Uninformed of EP remit          Ambiguity around EP role          Aware EPs existed but not on radar to pursue - parent          Didn't know title would be EP but aware support existed          Don't know what an EP does          EP working for child in unknown by parents  <b><i>I had no idea [what EP was]</i></b>          Issues are with understanding EP role          Not knowing what EP role involves          Not really knowing EP role despite previous EP involvement          not really knowing what an EP was          Not understanding purpose limiting parents' view of impact          Parent not understanding thinking behind the EP involvement          Parent unaware of EP role          Relying on prior experience to guide expectations          Unaware of support EP can provide          Unaware of thresholds to access support          Unaware of what consenting to with EP involvement          Unsure what EP support would achieve          Wanting info on the EP role          Assuming funding would follow EP          Comparing EP involvement to counselling and favouring counselling          considering EP involvement short - YP          Couldn't see potential impact of such brief involvement from EP          Disappointed with EP involvement          Emphasising only one meeting with EP  <b><i>EP felt more like a snapshot</i></b>          EP snapshot feels suitable for EHCP assessment          EP snapshot feels unsuitable to provide support</p>	<p>Positioning EHCP as key to provision and success          Positioning EP as authoritative          Positioning EP as expert  <b><i>Question what school are doing - expectation of EP School to have someone to answer to</i></b>          Unaware of EP's ability to enforce to schools          Wanting quality assurance in school - parent          Wanting reassurance from those more knowledgeable          EP request to identify support for YP in school          Expecting a plan of action          expecting EP to evaluate environment          Expecting EP to support YP interaction, self-expression and regulation          Expecting EP to support YP's emotional literacy          Hope EP would identify new provision          Hoped EP would review provision  <b><i>needed something to change</i></b>          Needing support to find something new to try - existing practice not working          Recommendations to help self-expression and regulation – EP          Seeking a better approach          supporting school – EP recommendation          Thought EP involvement would change level of support in school          Wanting a change in approach          Wanting a plan of action          Wanting all support available  <b><i>Wanting any support I can get</i></b>          Wanting as much support as is available          Wanting EP support to find a way forward for YP          Wanting EP to help generate success          Wanting EP to support acceptance of him          Wanting EP to support allowances/ adjustments          Wanting EP to support identification of suitable provision          wanting more support          Wanting something new          Wanting to access whatever support he needs - parents          Wanting to diminish difficulties and generate success  <b><i>we just want her to be happy.</i></b>          Assuming EPs assess children and generate levels          Assuming EPs diagnose need          Assuming EPs support struggling children          Assuming EPs support struggling pupils          Assuming EPs work internally in education          Assuming parents have nothing to do with EP          Aware EPs are part of EHCP process</p>
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<p>Expectations based on prior experience with outside agencies</p> <p>expectations were to get an EHCP</p> <p>Expected longer EP involvement</p> <p>expecting little information (based on prior exp.)</p> <p>Expecting lots of support and opportunity with EP involvement</p> <p>Expecting more EP involvement</p> <p>Expecting more from EP involvement</p> <p>Incorrectly presuming ongoing involvement</p> <p>Naïve first time so disappointed with first EP involvement</p> <p>No direct work with YP was initially surprising and against expectations</p> <p>Nothing helpful from second EP involvement</p> <p><b>our perspective too brief</b></p> <p>Presumed EP involvement would be longer - over a number of sessions</p> <p>Pupil not seen by EP</p> <p>Reflecting on naivety of optimism held prior to experience</p> <p>surprised by brevity of EP involvement</p> <p>Targeted prolonged emotional intervention more beneficial than EP involvement</p> <p>Unsure of impact with such short involvement</p> <p>Unsure of what expectations were but knew they were more than what they got</p> <p>Using knowledge from family links, assumed EP would work with child</p> <p>Wanted to feel more in control - EP expectations</p> <p>Wanting EP information before hand to manage expectations</p> <p>Appreciating external involvement</p> <p><b>come in and analyse school - expectation of EP</b></p> <p>Knew EP would review school practice</p> <p><b>Outside input would be useful - school</b></p> <p>Liking EP external to school and potential to hold school to account</p> <p>Pleased EP as someone external was involved</p> <p>School framing EP as 'having a look'</p> <p>suggesting positioning EP outside of school affiliation</p> <p>Wanted external perspective from EP</p> <p>Wanting alternative, external perspective from EP</p> <p>anticipating EP to have similar process to ADHD assessment</p> <p>Assumed unable to speak to EP</p> <p>assuming EP assesses from afar</p>	<p>EPs help schools 'deal with' YP</p> <p>EPs should be supportive of the child</p> <p>Expecting EP to identify difficulties</p> <p>Expecting EP to identify provision</p> <p>expecting EP to observe</p> <p><b>Function that supports schools - EP</b></p> <p>Guessing EP looks at a child</p> <p>Guessing EP role explores their access to education</p> <p>Knew EP was a support for pupils</p> <p>Knowing parent would meet EP</p> <p>linking EP role to existing perceptions and existing knowledge</p> <p>Making assumptions around EP involvement as reality unknown</p> <p>misleading EP title suggests school only involvement</p> <p>Never considered parents could interact with EP, even via school</p> <p>Only knowing EP assesses YP</p> <p>Position EPs as a function solely for, and interacting with, settings - assume no interaction with parents</p> <p>Presuming EP is an assessment process</p> <p>Presuming EP supported YP</p> <p>Presuming EP works for school</p> <p>Recognising relationships between SENCO and EP</p> <p>assuming continued discussion of YP</p> <p>Thinking EPs are on panels</p> <p><b>a band above anything else they tried</b></p> <p><b>EP - authoritative body</b></p> <p>EP bringing accountability</p> <p>EP bringing challenge</p> <p>EP framed as supporting school (by school)</p> <p>EP sounds an impressive title</p> <p>Expecting EPs to enforce adjustments</p> <p>Expecting EPs to hold school to account</p> <p>Expecting EPs to scrutinise settings</p> <p>Feeling EP is expert yet not understanding their position</p> <p>Holding EP title in high regard</p> <p>Holding high expectations for EP involvement</p> <p>Perceiving EPs above other professionals</p> <p>Assuming EP assessing if someone has needs</p> <p>Assuming EP is around school support and school improvement</p> <p>Assuming EPs are a support solely for schools</p> <p>Assuming EPs are there for schools</p> <p>Assuming EPs ascertain if YP need help</p>
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<b>Conceptual category 6</b>
Wider system influences: multifaceted mechanisms impacting access and engagement
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>
Being able to attend the given appointment - EPS reliant on parental flexibility

<p>Challenges in systems external to the family</p> <p>EPS capacity difficulties</p> <p>Referral pathway</p> <p>School capacity difficulties</p> <p>Underlying social, economical and contextual mechanisms for families</p> <p>Wider responsibilities inhibiting attendance to EP involvement</p>	
<p><b>Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis</b></p>	
<p>Barrier of needing to book time off work</p> <p>EP reluctant to deviate from desired time of involvement</p> <p>EPs relying on parental flexibility</p> <p>meetings with EP on fixed days - barrier</p> <p>Needing to make herself available for EP</p> <p>No flexibility with EP dates</p> <p>Parent being given a date for EP</p> <p>Setting having difficulty with EP fixed timing for referrals</p> <p><b><i>the one time - be there or be square</i></b></p> <p>Travelling from Northumberland for EP visit</p> <p>Acknowledging challenges in school</p> <p>Acknowledging good intentions of school</p> <p>Challenges in wider school context hindering SEND provision</p> <p>Considering previous SENCO out of depth</p> <p>Contrast in EP messages - previous EP information had been negative and relayed by PS (no direct</p> <p>Contrasting view between EP and school</p> <p>Difficulties and inconsistencies in wider school system may be why needs not picked up or met</p> <p><b><i>Don't feel like it's forward facing</i></b></p> <p>Feeling dismissed by school</p> <p>EP snapshot feels unsuitable to provide support</p> <p>Feeling insufficient EP time spent with YP</p> <p>Knowing finite capacity but wanting best for YP</p> <p>questioning impact of short EP involvement</p> <p>Referral too late in the year so no appointments left</p> <p>Worrying about accessibility to EPs due to high levels of need</p> <p>Feeling schools are underfunded and ill-equipped</p> <p>Feeling schools not equipped for rising levels of need</p> <p>Accepting LA pathway reasons</p> <p>Don't know how to access EP</p> <p>Dreading contact from school</p> <p>EHE being barrier to EP involvement</p> <p>EHE ceasing EP involvement</p> <p>EP not accessed liked other professionals</p> <p>fixed referral timing was a barrier</p> <p>Issues are with access to EP</p> <p>Knowing school processes might help</p> <p>Lack of knowledge or access to information around EPs is the biggest barrier</p> <p>needs to be in a school to access EP</p> <p><b><i>never heard from them again - EHE</i></b></p> <p>No NHS referral for EPs</p>	<p>Questioning how families without social and economical mechanisms get support</p> <p>Questioning how parents would know about options without mechanisms to research</p> <p>Questioning provision security for those unable to advocate</p> <p>Recognising others don't have same privilege for mechanisms to support</p> <p>Recognising increase in learning needs in schools</p> <p>Reflecting on challenge to consider school support if family are fearing economic survival</p> <p>Research capabilities shouldn't influence access to support</p> <p>Should be a level playing field</p> <p>Should be equity of access in spite of capacity/ family context</p> <p>Stating unfairness for those without capacity to be proactive</p> <p>Covering childcare creating difficulty</p> <p>Home circumstances alone can be a barrier to access support</p> <p>Self-employed or earning needs might hinder access</p> <p>High staff turnover meant no continuation of understanding</p> <p>Inexperience may have hindered teacher's ability to identify, understand and support need</p> <p>Liking parents in the unknown - school</p> <p>More acute needs taking priority in school capacity</p> <p>No consistency in school hindered understanding and subsequent access of support</p> <p>Previous school staff denying YP need</p> <p>Pupil needing to fail to access support</p> <p>Reflecting challenges of context with EP</p> <p>Reliant upon parent knowledge to push for EP support</p> <p>School not understanding need</p> <p>School were barrier to referring or access to EP support</p> <p>SENCO far too busy</p> <p>Short EP involvement may be due to phase transfer timing</p> <p>Talking about budget cuts influencing support available</p> <p>Timing of involvement influenced expectations</p> <p>Acknowledging capacity limitations of EPs - family links to education</p> <p>Continuity and relationship building lacking with EP</p> <p>Asking how less confident families access support</p>



<p>No parental referral pathway for EPs  Not aware of any way to interact with EP  Not hearing from EP post EHE  Parents need to know EP is an option  Pathway to EPs avoiding school - recommendation thinking about submitting EHCP request to gain EP involvement  unable to access EP as EHE  Unaware of brokering process  Unaware of thresholds to access support  Wanting a process to follow  Acknowledging impact of own schooling experience impacting capacity to advocate</p>	<p>Capacity to be proactive is required for accessing support  Continually questioning how less fortunate parents would manage  Different parents have different levels of understanding of SEND processes differing circumstances influencing availability – parents  If they're finding it hard, how are others managing?  Level of eloquence shouldn't influence access to support  Questioning how families with limited capacity access help</p>
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<b>Conceptual category 7</b>	
Parents know what they want: clarity, guidance, transparency and responsiveness	
<b>Focused codes after analysis</b>	
<p>A sense of overview and understanding  Clarity on EP role  Direct contact or gatekeeper removal  Guidance, information and a clear process to follow  Information captured and shared - no information hidden or kept aside  Means for follow-up contact to compensate for impact of emotional overwhelm  More flexibility with dates for involvement with consideration for family availability  Responsive to the feelings, needs, situation and family  School neutrality or family advocacy  Wanting more time  Wanting support earlier; wanting EP involvement earlier; waiting for EP involvement</p>	
<b>Focused codes from all five data sets before analysis</b>	
<p>Wanted to feel more in control - EP expectations  Issues are with understanding EP role  Not aware of what EP involvement would look like  Wanting clarity on parent role in EP involvement  Wanting info on the EP role  Direct access for parents to EPs - recommendation  Enabling concerns to be reviewed by external not simply dismissed by school - recommendation of direct EP contact  EP sharing their email address Novel to have EP email address  liking having EP contact details  Pathway to EPs avoiding school - recommendation  praising having EP contact details  Questioning can parents contact EP  Wanting a means of contacting EP  wanting direct contact with EP after involvement  Wanting direct contact with EPs  Ensuring parents know support available  Explaining support options/ additional services to parents - recommendation  Information leaflet would've been helpful  opening up possibilities with knowledge</p>	<p>Wanting guidelines for parents to navigate process  Wanting help locating support  Wanting info on the process for EPs  Wanting info to ensure parents have done all they can  Wanting information on parent role in process  Wanting information around the EP's involvement  <b>Wanting more information up front</b>  wanting right to advocate more clear  Having info written down to take away  <b>Having something to take away and reflect on would be quite good</b>  Wanting disseminating information – mum  wanting opportunity to read back over info  Wanting something to take away from EP involvement to support reflection  parent has valuable thoughts after processing meeting with EP  parent regretting being unable to share views due to overwhelm  parent wishing she'd said things in EP meeting  Too much to process - option for later contact would help</p>

<p>Wanting a clear guide</p> <p>Wanting a handout</p> <p>Wanting a process to follow</p> <p>Wanting clarification of length and type of involvement</p> <p>Wanting clarity on process</p> <p>Wanting clear instruction and to build own understanding - parent</p> <p>Wanting EP information before hand to manage expectations</p> <p>Wanting explanation of EP involvement process</p> <p>Wanting explanation of expectations - school, YP, parent</p> <p>wanting guidance of indicators</p> <p>Wanting guidance of processes</p> <p>Wanting guidance on parental steps in support</p> <p>Wanting guidance on the parents' role within EP support</p> <p>Want to reduce stress experienced by parents - recommendation</p> <p>wanting to meet at home</p> <p>Considering location changing power dynamic in school - recommendation</p> <p>considering location's influence on the meeting</p> <p>EPs should consider home and school view together</p> <p>Would want longer EP involvement.</p> <p>Hypothesising early EP involvement would lead to earlier support</p> <p>Involving EP early in the problem</p>	<p>wanting opportunity to follow-up</p> <p>wanting opportunity to add more thoughts</p> <p>wanting time to process meeting</p> <p>consider availability of support network of family</p> <p>EP reluctant to deviate from desired time of involvement</p> <p>EPs being more flexible with dates - recommendation</p> <p>meetings with EP on fixed days - barrier</p> <p>No flexibility with EP dates</p> <p><b><i>the one time - be there or be square</i></b></p> <p>wanting multiple dates offered</p> <p>wanting parental availability considered</p> <p>comfort positively enabling parents</p> <p>EPs shouldn't accept school's view as true</p> <p>meeting outside of school - recommendation</p> <p>Neutral setting sets neutral position of EP - recommendation</p> <p>Parent feeling overpowered by school staff ratio in meeting</p> <p>Parents need to know EP is not on the side of school</p> <p>Parents needing neutral position from EP</p> <p><b><i>trust the parents [recommendation]</i></b></p> <p><b><i>trust what parents are saying [recommendation]</i></b></p> <p><b><i>Wanting to go back and reflect on what was said would have liked more involvement with the educational psychologist</i></b></p>
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