"As a teacher, I think that you can feel really alone if you haven't got other people around to support…": **School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.**

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Abstract

Background: The increasing prevalence of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs among children and young people (CYP) (NHS England, 2023) and the subsequent pressures on school staff to provide adequate support (Lowry et al., 2022) highlight the necessity for more effective SEMH interventions. A systematic review of the literature suggests there is a scarcity of research exploring school staff experiences with group consultation models for supporting CYP with SEMH needs. Although Newton and Wilson's (2013) Insights and Solutions Circles (ISCs) are utilised by Educational Psychologists (EPs), there remains a gap in understanding school staff's real-life experiences with this consultation model.

Aim: This study aims to explore the experiences of both Problem Presenters (PPs) and Circle Members (CMs) participating in ISCs to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

Methodology: Four ISC sessions were implemented in three mainstream Primary schools. CMs completed a questionnaire immediately after the ISC sessions and PPs engaged in semi-structured interviews one to two weeks later. Qualitative data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis.

Constructed Themes: For PPs, ISC sessions enhanced their understanding and capacity to address SEMH needs, providing both immediate support and transferable professional skills. The ISC sessions also offered PPs emotional support, reducing professional isolation and fostering collegial collaboration. However, challenges included PPs feeling misunderstood and the presence of internal and external constraints. For CMs, ISCs improved their understanding of the focus child's SEMH needs and developed their own professional practice. The importance of listening to diverse collegial voices was also emphasised by CMs.

Implications: Structured group consultation models like ISC may be beneficial for EPs in supporting primary school staff to better manage the SEMH needs of CYP. These models may enhance understanding, practical skills and emotional support among staff. However, addressing internal and external challenges is necessary.

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List of Abbreviations

CM	Circle Member
CoP	Code of Practice
CYP	Children and Young People
DfE	Department for Education
EP	Educational Psychologist
GF	Graphic Facilitator
ISCs	Insights and Solutions Circles
NHS	National Health Service
PF	Process Facilitator
PP	Problem Presenter
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SEMH	Social, Emotional and Mental Health
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENDCo	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator
TA	Thematic Analysis
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
WofE	Weight of Evidence

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. First Person Language

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 128), *"using active first-person language when writing about your Thematic Analysis (TA) process keeps visible the active role of the researcher in producing the TA"*. Consequently, I have chosen to write this thesis in the first person. This approach aligns with contemporary best practices in qualitative research and promotes a clear narrative that presents my perspective, reflexivity and my active role in constructing meaning (Lazard & McAvoy, 2020).

1.2. Personal and Professional Research Interest

I am a 30-year-old Sikh woman from a working-class background currently in my third year as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) pursuing an Applied Educational Psychology Doctorate at the University of Nottingham. Before starting this doctoral program, I spent four years as a primary school teacher, mainly working with year 5 and 6 students in an inner-city primary school in the West Midlands. I began my teaching journey through the Teach First route, driven by a passion for providing quality education in disadvantaged communities.

As a teacher, I held key roles like Online Platforms Lead and Inclusion Lead, leading efforts in remote learning during the COVID-19 pandemic while advocating for inclusive practices, especially for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Being the Inclusion Lead gave me firsthand insights into the challenges faced by school staff, particularly in supporting children with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs, which often led to staff feeling isolated.

My experiences highlighted gaps in problem solving approaches within schools, motivating me to seek innovative strategies to support staff and vulnerable learners. As a TEP, I have explored and used various group consultation models, showing their effectiveness in addressing issues promptly and nurturing problem solving skills among staff. This exposure has fuelled my interest in integrating these methods more extensively into my practice.

Informed by these experiences and a deeper comprehension of collaborative problem solving methods, my research seeks to provide valuable perspectives on supporting school staff and improving their problem solving abilities. This effort is directed towards fostering more inclusive and supportive educational settings.

I chose to focus my research on primary schools instead of early years or secondary schools because of my direct experience and passion for this stage of education. Having worked closely with primary aged children and primary school teachers, I understand the unique challenges and opportunities that this developmental period presents. Primary schools can be pivotal in shaping a child's educational journey, and effective problem solving and support mechanisms at this stage may have lasting positive impacts.

Additionally, I wanted to explore the broader experiences of group consultations rather than specific stages of these processes to allow school staff to express their own individual experiences of participating in the group consultation sessions based on elements and aspects that felt important to them.

1.3.   Rationale and Aims of Research

There is currently a lack of research exploring school staff experiences with group consultation models aimed at supporting children and young people (CYP) with SEMH needs, indicating the necessity for further research. Despite Educational Psychologists (EPs) employing Newton and Wilson's (2013) Insights and Solutions Circles (ISCs), there remains a gap in understanding the real-life experiences of school staff engaging in this group consultation model. This study aims to explore the experiences of both Problem Presenters (PPs) and Circle Members (CMs) participating in ISCs, tailored for primary aged pupils with SEMH needs, to inform evidence-based practices and uphold professional standards in educational psychology (Health and Care Professions Council, 2023).

The increasing prevalence of SEMH needs among CYP (National Health Service (NHS) England, 2023) suggests the necessity for more effective support interventions. This need, highlighted by legal obligations, research into academic outcomes (Agnafors et al., 2021) and suggested difficulties in accessing specialised support services (Essau, 2005; Lowry et al., 2022; Shelemy et al., 2019), underpins the importance of focusing on this area for my research. Concentrating on primary aged pupils aligns with the need to engage in more early intervention strategies and recognises the unique environment of primary schools (Childs-Fegredo et al., 2021; Kipping et al., 2008). This focus is considered crucial for timely identification and intervention, bridging gaps in training and improving mental wellbeing support (Lowry et al., 2022).

Recognising the distinct roles of PPs and CMs within group consultation models suggests a previously unexplored gap in the literature. The lack of separate consideration into

their experiences may have limited nuanced insights into group consultation models, perhaps hindering evidence-based practices and a comprehensive understanding of their distinct challenges and contributions. This research aims to fill this gap by delving into PPs' and CMs' experiences individually, aiming to enrich ISC practices and promote a deeper understanding of effective support for CYP with SEMH needs.

This research endeavours to answer the following research questions (RQs):

1. RQ1: How do PPs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?
2. RQ2: How do CMs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?

1.4. Research Approach

Previous studies into group consultations have either focused solely on PPs' experiences or analysed data from all group members together. Recognising the unique roles of both participant groups, I conducted separate explorations. Following ISC sessions, CMs completed a questionnaire and one to two weeks later, PPs engaged in a semi-structured interview. Using Braun and Clarke's (2022) Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), I analysed PP and CM data separately to uncover nuanced patterns based on their distinct roles.

Chapter 2: Narrative Review

2.1.   Introduction to Narrative Review

This chapter provides a narrative review of the foundational literature underpinning this present research study. It explores SEMH prevalence rates, school staff responsibilities for SEMH support, related challenges and group consultation models as a potential solution, examining their theoretical underpinnings and the role of EPs.

2.2.   SEMH Context

2.2.1. SEMH and Wellbeing Definition

In an older version of the SEND Code of Practice (CoP), challenges related to emotions and behaviour were categorised under *"Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development"* (Department for Education (DfE), 2001, p. 85). The 2015 revised SEND CoP replaced this phraseology with SEMH, removing the word "*behaviour*" and adding the words *"mental health*." This latest statutory guidance defines SEMH needs as:

> *...a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder or attachment disorder. (DfE, 2015, p. 98)*

The revised phraseology seeks to redirect attention from overt, externalised behavioural displays to the acknowledgment of underlying SEMH difficulties (DfE, 2015; DfE; 2018). This change reflects a desire to achieve a more nuanced understanding of the diverse challenges that CYP may face, emphasising the importance of a holistic approach that considers external systems around the child (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cline & Frederickson, 2009) with a diminished emphasis on within-child attributions (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022).

It is important to consider the definition of wellbeing within this research, as the construct of mental health is often more closely associated with medical approaches (Rogers & Pilgrim, 2010). *"Wellbeing is defined as a positive and sustainable condition that allows*

individuals, groups, organisations, and nations to thrive and flourish" (Roffey, Nobel & Springer 2008, p.4). Roffey (2015) suggests that definitions of wellbeing are increasingly considering issues pertaining to equality and community. Debate surrounds whether wellbeing concerns hedonism, actualisation of one's potential or both (Ryan & Deci, 2001).

Acknowledging the inclusion of the phraseology SEMH in statutory guidance and widespread adoption by schools, alongside the perceived complexity of defining mental health more generally (Weare, 2013), this terminology and its corresponding definition were used throughout this research study. Moreover, it was acknowledged that EPs often adopt a psychosocial perspective when considering mental health and wellbeing, as suggested by Durbin (2010).

2.2.2. *Prevalence of SEMH Needs*

Data derived from the fourth follow-up of the 2017 Mental Health of CYP survey in England, conducted by NHS Digital, indicated that in 2023, 1 in 5 CYP aged from 8-to-25 years had a probable mental disorder (NHS England, 2023). Within this, 20.3% of 8-to-16-year-olds, 23.3% of 17-to-19-year-olds and 21.7% of 20-to-25-year-olds were considered to have a probable mental disorder (NHS England, 2023). While rates have remained stable across all age groups between 2022 and 2023, data obtained since the survey's inception indicates a general upward trend in CYP with probable mental disorders (NHS England, 2023).

There is a general consensus that the number of CYP with SEMH needs is on the rise (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020). Consequently, there is a recognised urgency to enhance efforts in delivering sufficient support to effectively address these needs (Lowry et al., 2022).

2.3. The Imperative for Schools to Support CYP's SEMH Needs

2.3.1. *Academic Outcomes*

Research indicates that CYP with SEMH needs are at a heightened risk of academic underachievement compared to their age-related peers, providing a compelling case for schools to prioritise SEMH support (Attar-Schwartz, 2009; Brännlund et al., 2017; Cheung et al., 2012; Crozier & Barth, 2005; Romano et al., 2015). A longitudinal study by Agnafors et al. (2021) supported this inverse relationship by examining mental health at age three and academic outcomes obtained at ages 12, 15-16 and 18-19. They found that CYP identified with early mental health problems in childhood were more likely to experience poorer academic

outcomes. Consequently, the researchers emphasised the imperative for early identification of mental health issues and advocated for equitable access to education for CYP with SEMH needs (Agnafors et al., 2021).

While the link between academic success and SEMH needs may encourage school staff to provide increased mental health support, there is concern that this emphasis on academic achievement may divert attention away from adequately addressing SEMH needs (Hutchings, 2015; Weare, 2015). This suggests the necessity for enhanced support for school staff in effectively balancing the academic and non-academic dimensions of their roles (Weare, 2015).

2.3.2. Legal and Ethical Responsibilities

The requirement for schools to offer support for CYP with SEMH needs is also mandated by government legislation and guidance.

The Equality Act 2010 mandates equal access to education for CYP with mental health difficulties, prohibiting discriminatory treatment and reinforcing the need for schools to make reasonable adjustments (DfE, 2013). The Children and Families Act (DfE, 2014) identifies schools' responsibility to support pupils with medical conditions, including mental health needs, promoting their active engagement in school life. The SEND CoP (DfE, 2015) aligns with these directives, emphasising inclusive practices and collaborative approaches. The Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools guidance (DfE, 2018) emphasises schools' pivotal role in fostering mental health awareness, early identification and preventive measures and aligns with the SEND CoP's (DfE, 2015) link between behavioural concerns and SEMH needs.

In addition, the green paper titled "Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision" (DoH & DfE, 2017) aims to enhance how early mental health issues are recognised and addressed within educational environments. It includes suggestions such as establishing mental health support teams and appointing a dedicated mental health coordinator in schools.

Within the above legislation and government guidance, it is possible to see an emphasis being placed on the importance of schools to promote mental health and wellbeing of CYP, while ensuring early intervention, reasonable adjustment and collaborative approaches.

2.3.3. Barriers to Accessing SEMH Support

Another influential factor emphasising the need for schools to provide SEMH support is the existence of barriers preventing CYP from accessing more specialised support services.

A government-backed report introduced a four-tiered model for CYP's mental health (see Figure 2.1) (Health Advisory Service, 1995). Tier one, overseen by non-mental health professionals such as school staff, provides universal provision. Tiers two and three, primarily outpatient services, involve mental health professionals, with tier three offering higher-level interventions. Tier four, typically involving inpatient care, provides highly specialised support.

Despite efforts, this model is often criticised for fragmentation and limited access (CAMHs, 2009; Prymachuk et al., 2024), increasingly pressuring tier 1 professionals (e.g., teachers) to bridge gaps (Lowry et al., 2022). A surge in referrals and a three-fold extension of wait times may exacerbate this situation (NHS England, 2023), with only 48% of CYP with mental health disorders having one meeting with CYP's mental health services in 2021-2022 (Children's Commissioner in England, 2022). Barriers like stigma, limited knowledge about mental health concerns and support and limited funding compound this (McGorry & Mei, 2018; Rickwood et al., 2007), suggesting the requirement for schools to address a broad range of SEMH needs (Essau, 2005; Lowry et al., 2022; Shelemy et al., 2019).

Figure 2.1

A Figure to Show the Four-Tiered Model for Children and Young People's Mental Health

Tier four	Often inpatient, highly specialist support e.g., CAMHs inpatient
Tier three	Outpatient, specialist support e.g., CAMHs
Tier two	Outpatient, specialist support e.g., counsellors
Tier one	Universal, non-specialised support e.g., teachers
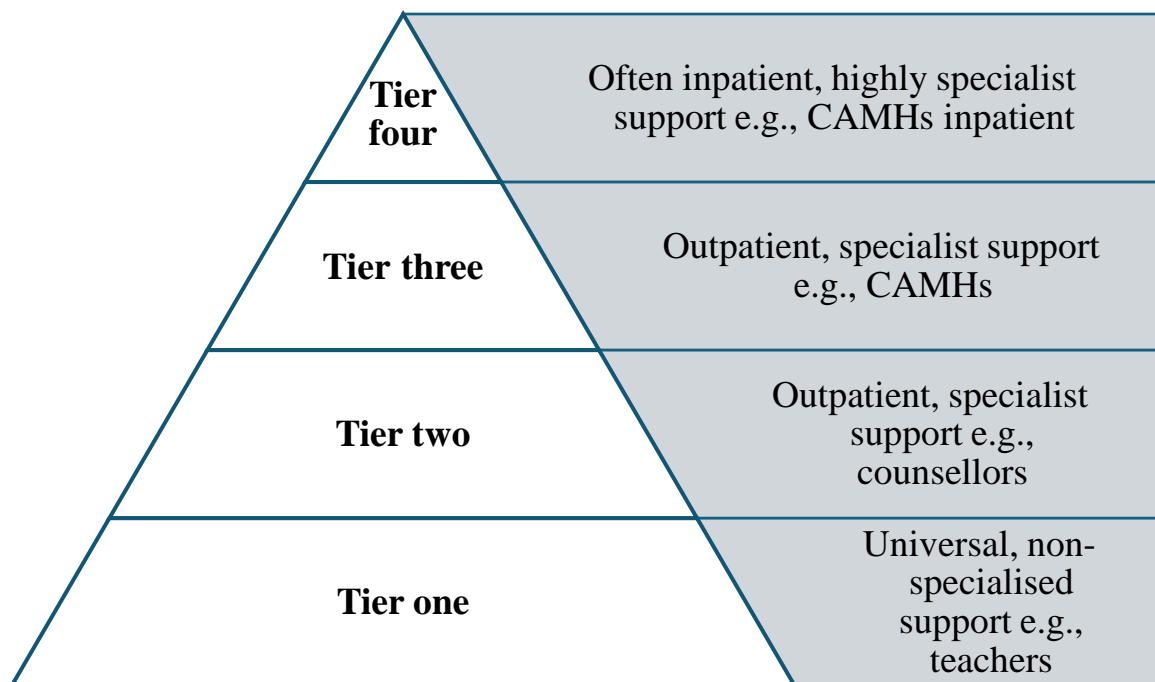
2.3.4. *Advocating for Early Intervention*

It is also emphasised that schools should actively engage in early intervention work to diminish reliance on reactionary measures, addressing the emerging SEMH needs of students more proactively (Duong et al., 2021; Fusar-Poli et al., 2021).

Research has shown that mental health disorders in adulthood often emerge early in life with 50% of mental health problems experienced in adulthood presenting by the age of 14 (Gibb et al., 2010; Jones, 2013; Mental Health Foundation, 2020). The implementation of early intervention strategies has been shown to have the potential to alter such a trajectory (Correll et al., 2018; Fusar-Poli et al., 2021). Consequently, more traditional service designs and resource allocation revolving around reactive and palliative responses to SEMH support are considered to no longer align with the acknowledged need for more early intervention work (McGorry & Mei, 2018). Therefore, efforts to provide more timely support prior to mental health problems becoming entrenched has resulted in a push for more early intervention work (DfE, 2017).

Moor et al. (2007) assert that schools, being significant environments where CYP spend a considerable amount of time, offer a unique setting for early identification and intervention.

School staff are increasingly likely to support CYP who may not meet diagnostic thresholds and, consequently, are ineligible for more targeted external support (Lowry et al., 2022). Weare (2015) suggests that providing early intervention mental health support should be integral to the school's role, with O'Reilly et al. (2018) finding that adolescents primarily rely on their teachers for mental health education and support.

Primary schools, especially, are considered ideal for early intervention due to age and close connections with CYP and parents/carers, further supported by their participation in existing health assessments (Childs-Fegredo et al., 2021; Kipping et al., 2008).

2.4. The Challenging World of Teaching

2.4.1. Reduced Teacher Wellbeing and Retention

"Teachers are at breaking point. It's time to push wellbeing up the agenda" (Stanley, 2018, article title).

There has been a noticeable decline in teacher wellbeing, a trend increasingly linked to heightened demands placed on school staff. According to the NASUWT's (2022) recent Teacher Wellbeing Survey, which included 11,857 participants, 90% reported heightened work-related stress, while 91% stated that their job had negatively impacted their mental health in the past year. Among these respondents, 52% attributed their elevated stress levels to an increased workload, 34% to the pandemic, 24% to concerns about pupil behaviour, 24% to pupil wellbeing, 22% to academic attainment and 11% to financial factors.

These heightened levels of stress are believed to be contributing to a significant exodus of teachers from the profession. In the last academic year alone, over 43,000 full-time, qualified teachers left their jobs, marking a substantial increase of 7,800 compared to 2021 (DfE, 2023). The Annual Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2022) highlighted alarming findings from a survey of 3,082 education staff respondents: a substantial 59% had contemplated leaving the profession in the past year due to increased pressure on their mental health and wellbeing, with 55% actively taking steps to exit their current role. Notably, 68% of these education staff identified workload as the primary factor motivating their desire to leave the profession (Education Support, 2022).

Given the reported decline in teacher wellbeing, increasingly attributed to heightened demands and workloads, there may be a need to consider providing additional support to alleviate stress and potentially address retention challenges among school staff.

2.4.2. Professional Isolation

Data from a survey conducted by Education Support (2022) found that 29% of teachers who reported having good in-school support, along with 81% of those working in negatively perceived teams, felt unable to discuss their stress and mental health difficulties with colleagues. Instead, they either refrained from seeking support altogether or turned to their external support networks (Education Support, 2022). This may suggest the presence of professional isolation among teachers, as indicated by the reluctance to seek out collegial support.

Professional isolation in the world of teaching may be conceptualised along two dimensions. The first is physical isolation, characterised by limited opportunities for interaction with colleagues (Flinders, 1988). The second is psychological isolation, wherein teachers may experience disconnection or lack of support in their professional environment, resulting in feelings of loneliness and alienation from their peers (Flinders, 1988). Professional isolation may arise due to physical barriers created by classrooms, attempts by school staff to minimise instances of judgment, limited opportunities to observe or interact with other colleagues and timetabling constraints that restrict such interactions (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Pedersen et al., 1979; Snow-Gerono, 2005).

While teaching staff may engage in cordial discussions with their colleagues, Hadar and Brody (2010) found that instances of professional discussions were significantly less frequent, contributing to feelings of professional isolation. Experiences of workplace isolation have been linked to feelings of burnout, leading to subsequent feelings of helplessness, withdrawal and frustration (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Gaikward & Brantley, 1992).

2.4.3. Challenges Providing SEMH Support

Addressing SEMH needs in schools is frequently identified as a significant concern for school staff, often leading to heightened feelings of inadequacy and professional isolation (Rothì et al., 2008). According to Smith et al. (2016), only 40% of teachers feel adequately prepared to teach pupils with mental health needs and a mere 32% express confidence in supporting students to access external mental health services.

Lowry et al. (2022) propose a bi-directional relationship between the wellbeing of school staff and that of pupils, suggesting the existence of a perpetuating system wherein teachers, despite facing escalating expectations to address SEMH needs in CYP, may not feel

sufficiently equipped. This lack of readiness can lead to heightened work-related stress among school staff, potentially negatively impacting the mental health of both teachers and CYP (Lowry et al., 2022).

This lack of preparedness is often attributed to insufficient knowledge on how to support CYP with SEMH needs (Byrne et al., 2015; Sibieta, 2021). Research has suggested that inadequate training, time constraints and insufficient resource allocations serve as significant barriers preventing school staff from adequately providing mental health support to CYP (Lowry et al., 2022; Reinke et al., 2011; Tucker, 2015; von der Embse et al., 2018). Together, these findings imply the critical need for comprehensive training programs and increased time and resource allocation to empower educators to effectively support the mental health and wellbeing of students with SEMH needs.

2.5. The Need to Work Collaboratively

2.5.1. *Training and Beyond*

As the demand for teachers to provide SEMH support continues to rise, a discernible gap persists in their knowledge and training (Lowry et al., 2022). This gap is suggested to be exacerbated by the omission of crucial training on mental health disorders and effective support strategies from initial teacher training programs (Shepherd et al., 2013). Nash et al. (2016) further assert that teachers often lack awareness of the connection between school exclusions and mental health difficulties. Moreover, according to Sharpe et al. (2016), the absence of supervision opportunities for teachers is suggested to impede their capacity to effectively understand and address the SEMH needs of CYP. Without adequate support, teachers may find themselves ill-equipped to identify and manage mental health difficulties in the classroom, potentially leading to heightened feelings of helplessness among school staff (Cohall et al., 2007; Kidger et al., 2010). These omissions suggest the pressing need for improvements to current SEMH training support.

Where training support is available, Rothì et al. (2008) identified that teachers expressed apprehension regarding its practical implementation. They cited concerns about time constraints within their busy schedules and challenges associated with effectively translating discussed methods into classroom practices. Research on teacher-led training programmes found low levels of adherence with the suggestion that such programmes lacked adaptability and recognition of teacher's own needs and time restrictions (Gillham et al., 2007; Sawyer et al., 2010)

Instead, it is suggested there is a need for greater collaborative and consultative approaches to assist teachers in providing CYP with SEMH support (Lynn et al., 2003). Dupaul et al. (2011) suggested that to ensure success of these consultative approaches, it is imperative that teachers are recognised as experts in understanding their classroom, the school more generally and the SEMH needs of the CYP they support.

2.5.2. Collective Responsibility

Research suggests the need for school staff to actively share the responsibility for supporting CYP with SEMH needs, establishing a more holistic and consistent approach to the CYP's wellbeing (Atkins et al., 2010; Blanchard, 2003; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Roffey, 2015).

Cefai and Cooper (2017) explored the perspectives of senior leadership regarding the factors contributing to the success of SEMH-based initiatives. They found success to be contingent upon fostering a shared vision, garnering commitment from all stakeholders and involving the entire school community in the implementation of initiatives, extending beyond the classroom to encompass school-wide engagement. This inclusive approach involved active participation from senior leaders, as well as parents/carers, emphasising the necessity of collective responsibility in fostering positive outcomes for students' SEMH needs.

From collective responsibility, it is thought that schools can better ensure that SEMH support is integrated across different environments, such as classrooms, extracurricular activities and social settings (Blanchard, 2003; Weare, 2010). Research has shown that in school settings where the responsibility to adopt consistent, non-coercive and humanistic approaches is shared by all school staff, SEMH support has been more effective (Hughes, 2012; Burton & Goodman, 2011). This holistic approach is suggested to foster a more comprehensive understanding of the CYP's SEMH needs, facilitating a more coordinated and collective effort to address them (Weare, 2010; 2013).

Distributing responsibility among staff members is believed to reduce individual workloads and stress, preventing any one teacher from bearing the full burden (Lowry et al., 2022). This collaborative approach has been suggested to not only enhance the effectiveness of selecting appropriate support but also foster a sense of shared responsibility among educators, reducing feelings of professional isolation and creating a more supportive and empathetic school environment for both CYP and teachers (DuFour, 2011; Leonard & Leonard, 2003; Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016). Gregory & Kuzmich (2007) suggest that this approach can elevate teacher morale and commitment to change.

When considering who should have such collective responsibility, Heikkinen et al. (2012) proposed that optimal learning and collaboration take place when teachers work with other, trusted teachers. Moreover, others have shown that the inclusion of senior leaders is key due to the pivotal role they play in facilitating a collective, whole-school response to SEMH needs, owing to their significant influence over school policy (Lavis & Robson, 2015; Roffey, 2007).

2.6. Group Consultations

2.6.1. Background

Working consultatively is not a new idea: for years, this interdisciplinary approach has been repeatedly advocated for by numerous researchers from various countries (Dawson et al., 2004; Kennedy et al., 2009; Kikas, 1999). Sheridan et al., (1996) define consultation as: "… *an indirect problem solving process between a specialist and one or more persons to address concerns presented by a client…"* (p. 341-342). Within this, the triadic relationship of a consultation is outlined: the consultant (e.g., the EP), the consultee (e.g., the parent/carer, teacher or other relevant practitioners) and the client (e.g., the CYP with SEMH needs) as detailed in Figure 2.2 (Kennedy et al., 2009).

Figure 2.2

A Figure to Show the Triadic Relationship Within Consultation
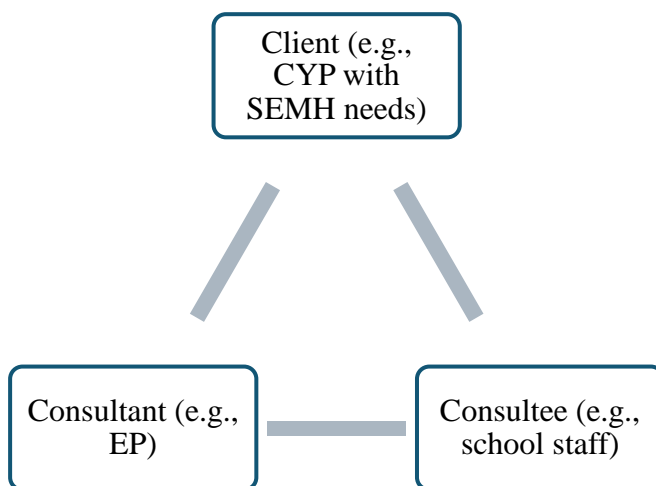
2.6.2. Definitions and Purposes

A variety of group consultation models are currently utilised by EPs nationwide. These models are founded on the principle that fostering a supportive environment promotes fruitful collaboration among school staff in addressing challenges (Cameron, 2006). Unlike traditional

consultation approaches, where consultant and consultee roles are distinct, group consultations occur within a collective context, distributing the roles among participants (Bozic & Carter, 2002). Recognising the imperative for initiatives that foster shared responsibility when supporting CYP with SEMH needs, adopting group consultation approaches emerges as a strategic avenue to align with this collaborative imperative (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014).

Research has shown that transparency in the purpose of consultation and clarity, yet fluidity, of assumed roles is fundamental to promoting a sense of shared responsibility (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Todd, 2006; Wilson & Pirrie, 2000). Moreover, it is believed that implementing group consultations is more cost-effective compared to traditional methods (Zins & Erchul, 2002).

Ostensibly, such engagement is thought to enhance reflection and understanding of the problems under consideration (Farouk, 2004). Beyond that, these approaches are considered to enhance objectivity (Brown & Henderson, 2012), draw on the perspectives and expertise of others (Martens & Ardoin, 2002), empower group members (Brown & Henderson, 2012) and result in a cultural shift in which seeking and providing collegial support is normalised (Farouk, 2004). Cameron (2006) has suggested that engaging in such practices can enhance the scope and efficacy of EP practice.

Annan and Moore (2012) propose several purposes for group consultations within educational settings. These include:

1. Collaboratively considering appropriate provision with the support of senior members of staff.
2. Presenting the perceived problem independently from the CYP and adults involved.
3. Sharing models of problem solving for generalisation to other situations and contexts.
4. Supporting the development of an objective understanding of the problem(s) within the appropriate context.
5. Aiding double-loop learning where group members provide and receive solutions, thus developing their competencies in problem solving (Argyris & Schön, 1978).

2.6.3. Group Consultation Models

This section explores six different group consultation models currently being used by EPs. Table 2.1 outlines general descriptions of various roles that may be discussed in these models. It is important to note that the roles listed in the table might not be universally

applicable across all models and their specific functions may vary slightly from one approach to another.

Table 2.1

A Table to Summarise Roles Assumed Within Group Consultation Models

Role	Description
Problem Presenter (PP)	A designated adult who possesses in-depth knowledge of the identified problem(s) and is willing to present to the group.
Circle Member (CM)	Individuals who may or may not have prior knowledge of the problem(s) but are willing to actively engage in collaborative discussions to explore and devise strategies to address the presented problem(s).
Process Facilitator (PF)	An individual responsible for guiding the collaborative problem solving process within a group.
Graphic Facilitator (GF)	A person tasked with visually recording the group's discussions and problem solving processes.

Collaborative Problem solving Groups. Hanko (1999) established collaborative problem solving groups to encourage school staff to provide one another with professional and emotional support. This eight-stage model is believed to draw upon psychodynamic and systemic approaches (Hanko, 2002). Hanko's approach typically involves a group of school staff joining together to discuss a presented problem with the EP acting as the PF. Within this, group problem solving is thought to identify systemic factors that may contribute towards or alleviate the problem(s)

Process Consultation. Whilst influenced by the work of Hanko (1999), Farouk (2004) critiqued Hanko's approach for neglecting the influence of the school's culture and group dynamics. Farouk adapted Hanko's approach to incorporate Schein's (1969) model of process consultation to produce a four-stage problem solving approach. This model enhances Schein's original framework by incorporating a more comprehensive view of organisational context, thus seeking to improve the effectiveness of problem resolution and strategic action (Farouk, 2004; Schein, 1969). Within this model, solution focused questioning is used to guide group members away from preoccupation with the problem(s) towards the generation of solutions.

Circle of Adults. Wilson and Newton's (2006) Circle of Adults seeks to foster inclusion by emphasising a clear problem solving structure and enhancing group reflection and objectivity. In this 10-step approach, the EP assumes the role of PF, while the GF visually records the group's discussions. The intention is to conduct a more ecological and holistic exploration into the focus child, delving into pupil and adult emotional responses. This approach is designed to alter and reframe negative perceptions about the perceived problem(s) through psychodynamic conceptualisations (Hanko, 2002; Wilson & Newton, 2006).

Staff Sharing Scheme. Gill and Monsen's (1995) Staff Sharing Scheme aims to develop school staff's capacity to reflect and develop strategies to support CYP. Within this, the school's current behaviour management processes are explored, staff training on behaviour and the use of behaviour observation and analysis is provided and an operational model of problem solving implemented where a group lead is selected and the EP acts as a content resource (Jones et al., 2013).

Solution Circles. Forest and Pearpoint's (1996, p. 41) Solution Circles seek to draw on *"tools of community capacity"* whereby those around the CYP, if asked, have the capacity to help. In this four-stage model, facilitated by a PF, the group discusses the problem(s), generates solutions, asks questions to clarify the problem(s) and considers the first steps. This approach is grounded in solution-oriented psychology, emphasising optimism and openness to potential solutions (Brown & Henderson, 2012).

Insights and Solutions Circles. ISC, a group problem solving process developed by Inclusive Solutions (Newton & Wilson, 2013), utilises an eight-step group consultation framework. This approach is thought to integrate aspects of Solution Circles (Forest & Pearpoint, 1996) and Circle of Adults (Wilson & Newton, 2006) (see Appendix 35 for a comparison of ISC with Solution Circles and Circle of Adults). The process involves presenting and clarifying the problem(s) before generating theories and subsequent solutions. Within this model, a designated individual acts as the PF, while another serves as the GF.

2.6.4. *Conceptual Underpinnings*

In this section, various conceptual foundations for group consultation models will be explored. It is important to note that not all underpinnings may be addressed and those discussed may not necessarily be applicable to all or may slightly differ across models. The roles and descriptions provided in Table 2.1 are identified as common elements found

throughout the literature on group consultation models (Brown & Henderson, 2012; Farouk, 2004; Forest & Pearpoint, 1996; Gill & Monsen, 1995; Hanko, 1999; Wilson & Newton, 2006)

Circular Models. Within many group consultation models, it is encouraged that the session be arranged in a circular formation. Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) point out that this circular model is present within group approaches such as Circle of Adults and Solution Circles. Mosley (1996) advocated for the explicit use of a circular arrangement due to their capacity to promote unity and power. Additionally, Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) suggest that such circles enable the formation of non-hierarchical relationships, where all members share a purpose, where equality and inclusion are promoted and collaborative problem solving occurs by listening and valuing everyone's contributions equally. Consequently, the circular formation may foster a sense of unity and interconnectedness, reinforcing the collaborative nature of the consultation process (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015)

Problem Presentation. Whilst many of the group consultations primarily focus on shifting thinking towards generating solutions, time is often protected to explore the perceived problem(s) from the PP's own perspective. By discussing the problem(s) initially, the PP is given the opportunity to verbalise their thoughts and beliefs related to the problem(s). In line with a psychodynamic perspective, here the opportunity for containment arises whereby the vocalisation of the PP's emotional responses and the subsequent support from others can lead to emotional growth and genuine learning (Hanko, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010). Containment refers to the process of providing a safe and supportive environment where individuals can express and manage their emotions, often leading to a reduction in anxiety and an increase in emotional resilience (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). This supportive process is suggested to facilitate subsequent emotional growth and genuine learning (Hanko, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010).

At this stage, while PPs vocalise their perceived problems, CMs remain quiet. This dynamic may contribute to the PP feeling heard, understood and validated through active listening and subsequent validation of their subjective experiences, fostering enhanced empowerment and connectedness (Hargie, 2021; Miles, 1952; Zimmerman, 1995). From a humanistic perspective, granting the PP an exclusive space to voice the problem(s) from their perspective may lead to greater potential for emotional expression and processing, which can be empowering and validating of their subjective experience, ultimately precipitating subsequent positive change (Cooper & Joseph, 2015).

Moreover, from a behaviourist perspective, this approach provides an opportunity to identify and explore observable behaviours and environmental factors that may contribute to or sustain the problem(s) (Armstrong, 2021).

Hypothesis Generation. Within many of the group consultation models (e.g., Circle of Adults and ISC) opportunity is provided for CMs to generate their own hypotheses to explain why the present problem exists.

When considering schema theory, the opportunities for CMs to ask clarifying questions or present their own hypotheses may encourage the assimilation or accommodation of prior schemas (the basic units of thinking) related to the focus child specifically and/or to other prior experiences, knowledge and values more generally (Truscott et al., 2012). Assimilation involves incorporating new information into what is already known, resulting in the prior thinking about the child to remain unchanged (Arbib, 1986). On the other hand, accommodation requires the individuals to change or replace existing knowledge, resulting in a transformed perception of the child (Arbib, 1986).

Truscott et al. (2012) propose that accommodation of information is an integral component of a successful consultation. By allowing CMs the opportunity to share their schemas, they may provide an insight into how they interpret and understand the world around them in relation to this incoming information, allowing others within the circle an opportunity to hear alternative perspectives (Truscott et al., 2012). This sharing of schemas may lead to a deeper understanding of the focus child and foster a more comprehensive understanding and collaborative approach to problem solving (Truscott et al., 2012).

Furthermore, the sharing of theories at this stage aligns with attribution theory. That is, a theory that is *"concerned with how individuals invoke causes and explanations for various phenomena and the effects of these 'cognitions' on their subsequent behaviour"* (Miller, 2008, p. 157). By listening to alternative perspectives, PPs are more likely to have multiple causal attributions regarding the CYP's needs. These insights may support with correcting misattributions and/or with moving away from reductionist, within-child causal hypotheses about the perceived problem(s), providing a more holistic account that considers the wider systems within the broader ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The sharing of alternative hypotheses may provide a more contained version of what was shared during the problem presentation stage, encouraging the PP to overcome their

emotional response to their perceived problem(s) (Hanko, 2002). In doing so, the intrinsic cognitive load due to the PP's initial emotional expression may be reduced (Fraser et al., 2015; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

Furthermore, according to Social Learning Theory, learning is suggested to occur within social contexts and is influenced by interactions with others (Bandura, 1985; Lave, 2009). Within group consultations, this theory would suggest that individuals may learn from each other through shared experiences, feedback and collaborative problem solving. Here, learning can occur because of social participation through the observation and subsequent imitation of such behaviours (Wenger, 1998). This learning may involve developing one's repertoire of strategies to support CYP through discussions of what others do or pertain to learning and development of one's capacity to engage in more effective problem solving discussions linking to Argyris and Schön's (1978) double-loop learning.

Double-loop learning, as articulated by Argyris and Schön (1978), extends beyond the mere correction of errors (single-loop learning) to questioning and altering the underlying assumptions and beliefs that lead to these errors. In the context of group problem solving, double-loop learning involves participants not only addressing the immediate issues but also reflecting on the deeper causes and the systemic factors that contribute to these problems (Argyris, 2002; Cartwright, 2002). This reflective process may encourage group members to re-evaluate their own and others' mental models and approaches, leading to more profound and sustainable solutions (Senge, 1990). By challenging existing norms and embracing innovative thinking, group members may begin to collaboratively develop new frameworks and strategies that improve their collective capacity for problem solving (Smith, 2001).

Generation of Solutions. Group consultations primarily aim to shift from dwelling on the perceived problem(s) towards a solution-oriented approach guided by de Shazer's (1988, 1994, 1997) solution focused approaches. In line with this shift, Rees (2008) outlines solution-oriented principles that are pertinent to this stage of group consultation. Firstly, the emphasis is on recognising successful strategies, urging the group to amplify what works and abandon what does not. Drawing on past successes, individuals within the group may share and recommend effective approaches. Simultaneously, if current strategies prove ineffective, the group can collectively explore alternative methods. The second principle advocates for the power of small changes in initiating solutions. By focusing on achievable and incremental

adjustments, the group can set realistic goals, fostering a sense of accomplishment for the PP, CMs and the focus child upon achieving these goals.

Another crucial principle acknowledges the inherent resources within the group, including unique strengths, skills and experiences. Leveraging on these resources enables the generation of creative and effective solutions. Shifting the focus to possibilities and solutions, as outlined in Rees' (2008) fourth principle, instils optimism, motivating the group to explore positive changes. The fifth principle identifies the necessity for individuals to actively participate and invest in the change process, with the PP bringing the issue to the circle anticipating support from group members.

The sixth principle highlights the importance of cooperation in effecting change, emphasising open communication and valuing everyone's input. Separating the focus child from the problem itself, as suggested in the seventh principle, mitigates blame and judgment, directing attention towards solution generation. Possibilities becoming infinite at this stage, as indicated in the eighth principle, fosters an open and creative atmosphere, offering hope in previously challenging situations.

Recognising the uniqueness of individuals' solutions, Rees' (2008) ninth principle identifies that there are no predetermined answers to the problem(s). The group's diverse perspectives contribute to the generation of various solutions. Lastly, the tenth principle encourages maintaining a balance between acknowledging the initial pain associated with the problem(s) and remaining open to exploring new possibilities in the form of solutions. Overall, these principles collectively guide the group towards a constructive and solution focused approach in addressing the identified concerns.

Selection of Strategies. Group consultations typically empower the PP to actively participate in the selection of strategies from those generated during the session.

Self-determination theory posits that people have three basic psychological needs— autonomy, competence, and relatedness—which are essential for fostering motivation, engagement, and well-being (Deci & Ryan, 2000). Autonomy refers to the need to feel in control of one's own behaviours and goals, competence involves feeling effective and capable in one's activities, and relatedness pertains to feeling connected and valued in relationships with others. When these needs are met, individuals are more likely to experience intrinsic motivation and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2017).

Aligned with Deci and Ryan's (2012) self-determination theory, providing the PP with autonomy in choosing from the identified strategies may enhance their internal locus of control and agency over the actions and decisions being made. This approach seeks to avoid imposing solutions by instead allowing PPs the opportunity to select strategies that align with their preferences and values, aiming to foster a sense of ownership and commitment to their implementation (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Truscott et al., 2012).

Granting PPs autonomy in selecting strategies may enhance their competence by increasingly viewing them as experts and if these strategies are implemented and succeed, feelings of competence are potentially further reinforced (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Truscott et al., 2012). By choosing from strategies collectively generated by the group, the PP may also experience heightened feelings of relatedness, benefiting from increased social support and the establishment of more meaningful connections within the consultation process (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Truscott et al., 2012). Enhancing competence, autonomy and relatedness has been suggested to improve consultee confidence, wellbeing and functioning (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Truscott et al., 2012).

2.6.5. *The Role of the Educational Psychologist*

A Departure from a Traditional Role. In recent times, strategies solely employing archaic unidimensional, direct service delivery models have been reformed to increasingly include multidimensional, indirect methods of service delivery for a number of reasons (Frank & Kratochwill, 2014; Scholten et al., 1985). Firstly, Gutkin and Conoley (1990, p. 212) refer to *"The Paradox of School Psychology"* whereby to provide CYP with the most effective support, EPs must work with the adults. This way of working may provide EPs with valuable insight into the context of the problem(s) and enhance teacher engagement. Secondly, Miller (1969, p. 1071) suggests that due to increased EP wait times, EPs are required to partake in the act of *"giv[ing] psychology away"*. That is, EPs share psychological knowledge with others, aiming to empower and enhance their capabilities within their respective roles. This effort is undertaken with the intention of broadening the scope of their impact, providing support and fostering a more preventative approach to their work (Miller, 1969).

Consequently, EPs are increasingly moving away from traditional notions of their expert role, recognising the impracticality of having an infinite number of solutions for each unique case (Gutkin, 1999). Instead, they may aspire to adopt more collaborative, non-hierarchical approaches to their work (Gutkin, 1999). Since EPs are typically not the ones

directly implementing classroom interventions, collaborating with those who will, may enhance understanding and intervention fidelity (Gutkin, 1999).

The Role of the Facilitator(s). In the establishment of an equitable and non-hierarchical setup during group consultations, it is recommended that the EP assumes the role of a PF rather than being introduced as an expert (Cameron, 2006). This approach, aligns with a collaborative and nondirective stance (Gutkin, 1999; Gutkin & Conoley, 1990), emphasising the utilisation of the EP's artful knowledge base to draw upon interpersonal and process-specific skills, guiding the group through the consultation process (West & Idol, 1987).

Within this PF role, the EP may be encouraged to *"one-down [their] status,"* effectively reducing hierarchical relationships (Newman & Rosenfield, 2018, p. 45). Achieving this may involve contracting roles and responsibilities, fostering a climate of trust, appreciating the consultee's complexities and work demands, leveraging the consultee's expertise and maintaining authenticity and openness about the limits of the EP's role (Schein, 2016; Newman & Rosenfield, 2018). This approach may encourage a seamless and collaborative dynamic during group consultations, promoting a supportive and constructive environment for effective problem solving. Farouk (2004) suggests the role of the EP as a PF extends further to them modelling desirable group member behaviours.

The use of a GF in some group consultation models can support with freeing up the EP to focus on facilitation, while allowing CMs and the PP to engage and contribute fully. As group consultations often involve the discussion of challenging situations, it is likely that they will elicit emotional responses in those involved. Research has suggested a link between emotion and cognition whereby increased emotional expression can serve as an intrinsic cognitive load (Fraser et al., 2015; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

Furthermore, engagement in a nondirective approach, where the consultee jointly partakes in the problem solving process, has been shown to require the *"need for cognition"* (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982, title). An abundance of literature has found the need for higher-order executive functioning when problem solving; these include working memory capacity (Kane & Engle, 2002), flexible/creative thinking (Schnotz et al., 2010), self-monitoring (van Gog et al., 2020), organising (Tsermentseli & Poland, 2016) and selective attention (Murray & Byrne, 2001). Therefore, the use of a graphic may enable thoughts and ideas to be visually

summarised, reducing cognitive demands whilst aiding the process of the intervention through the connection of ideas.

Such a process links with dual coding theory in which information is processed as two distinct yet functionally related systems: the verbal system and the non-verbal system (Paivio, 1990). According to Paivio's dual coding theory, combining verbal and visual information enhances cognitive processing because it engages both systems simultaneously, leading to better understanding and retention (Paivio, 1990). In the context of group problem solving, this means that using visuals, such as diagrams, charts, or mind maps, may help group members to organise and integrate complex information more effectively (Clark & Paivio, 1991). By reducing the cognitive load on working memory, visuals may help facilitate clearer communication and more efficient collaboration among group members (Schnotz, 2005). This multimodal approach is suggested to not only support individual cognitive processes but also foster a shared understanding and collective problem-solving capacity within the group (Sweller, Ayres, & Kalyuga, 2011).

Chapter 3: Systematic Literature Review

3.1.   Introduction to Systematic Literature Review

Following the narrative review, my interest centred around exploring the use of group consultation models with school staff to better support CYP with SEMH needs. Before determining specific research aims and questions for this study, a crucial initial step involved conducting a systematic literature review to examine existing research on school staff's engagements with group consultation models, as highlighted by Newman and Gough (2020).

Undertaking a literature review is a standard procedure in various research fields, defined as *"a review of existing research using explicit, accountable rigorous research methods"* (Gough et al., 2017, p. 4). While this process seeks to establish a broad understanding of current knowledge, it also serves to identify gaps in the literature, indicating potential areas for subsequent research (Newman & Gough, 2020).

This systematic literature review, therefore, sets the groundwork by providing insights into the existing landscape and then seeks to identify gaps in research to provide justification for subsequent research aims and questions.

3.2.   Rationale and Systematic Review Question

In February 2023, I conducted an initial scoping search across four databases: Scopus, Web of Science, Educational Psychology in Practice and Education Resources Information Centre. This search identified numerous studies examining the experiences of school staff involved in group consultation models, such as Staff Sharing Schemes and Solution Circles.

Additionally, I consulted an extant systematic review by Kemp (2020), delving into the experiences of school staff across different group consultation approaches. Kemp (2020) acknowledged a limitation in their review stemming from the inclusion of diverse group consultation models, which could potentially result in variations in the reported experiences of school staff.

During this preliminary literature scope, it became evident that there were insufficient papers to conduct a review focused solely on a specific group consultation model. Instead, I aimed to enhance coherence across the review by considering research that specifically delved into the experiences of school staff, where the group consultation models primarily addressed the SEMH needs of CYP.

Drawing on Lockwood et al.'s (2015, p. 181) suggestion that the utilisation of the PICO mnemonic aids in formulating a *"clear and meaningful question,"* such a tool was employed to assist in creating a review question for a qualitative synthesis (see Table 3.1). Consequently, the following question served as the foundation for this systematic literature review:

> What is presently known about the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support children and young people with social, emotional and mental health* needs?

Research papers exploring the use of group consultation to support CYP with behavioural based needs were also included.

Table 3.1

A Table to Show the Construction of a Systematic Literature Review Question Using the PICO Mnemonic Tool

PICO Tool	Review Question Implication
Population	School staff participating in a group consultation model to support CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs.
Phenomena of **I**nterest	A group consultation model facilitated or supported by an EP/TEP.
Context	Educational settings in the United Kingdom and Ireland.
Outcomes	School staff experiences have been described using some form of qualitative data.

According to Newman and Gough (2020), systematic reviews seeking to explore meaning and interpretation usually using qualitative data, typically adopt exploratory and iterative systematic review methods. Such a process involves a configurative synthesis logic approach whereby the heterogeneity of each study provides insight into patterns, aiding our understanding and interpretation of the world (Gough et al., 2012). The exploration into the experiences of school staff aligns with this exploratory and iterative systematic approach, which in turn lends itself to the completion of a qualitative synthesis.

3.3. Systematic Review Procedure

Although the value in synthesising research methods and results is vital to the development of many research fields, much like primary research, it relies on the integrity of those involved (Atkinson et al., 2015). As such, this research synthesis will explicitly detail the process of the literature search allowing for evaluation and replication of this work (Atkinson et al., 2015; Cooper, 2022).

3.3.1. Search Strategy

To encourage the return of a broad range of papers relevant to the research topic, search terms were kept simple. Due to the presence of different types of group consultation models, multiple terms were included to capture this approach fully. Furthermore, search terms that enabled the inclusion of synonyms for the term 'experiences' were utilised.

The search terms (see Table 3.2) were collectively entered into four electronic databases—Scopus, Web of Science, Educational Psychology in Practice and Education Resources Information Centre—in July 2023 to retrieve relevant studies. Subsequently, the search was repeated in February 2024 to identify any additional studies published since the initial search. The number of records returned from each database can be viewed in Table 3.3.

Table 3.2

A Table to Show Systematic Literature Review Search Terms Entered into the Four Databases

PICO Tool	Search Terms
Population	'Teachers' OR 'School Staff' OR 'School'
Phenomena of **I**nterest	'Group Consultation' OR 'Group Problem solving' OR 'Collaborative Problem solving' OR 'Solution Circles' OR 'Staff Sharing Scheme' OR 'Process Consultation' OR 'Circle of Adults' OR 'Insights and Solutions Circles' AND 'SEMH' OR 'Social, Emotional and Mental Health' OR 'Behaviour'
Context	This was achieved through filtering options on the databases and if not available, during the screening process.
Outcomes	'Know*' OR 'Understand*' OR 'View' OR 'Experience*' OR 'Opinion' OR 'Attitude' OR 'Perce*' OR 'Belie*' OR 'Feel*'

Table 3.3

A Table to Show the Filters Used and Number of Records Generated from the Four Databases in July 2023

Database	Filters Used	Records Generated
Scorpus	2012-2023 Articles English	138
Web of Science	2012-2023 Articles English	135
Educational Psychology in Practice	N/A	2
Education Resources Information Centre	2012-2023 Articles	333

To minimise bias and ensure that no key studies were overlooked, I adhered to Tawfik et al.'s (2019) guidance by conducting supplementary hand-searches for additional studies. This involved consulting the reference lists of studies identified through the systematic search.

Records generated from the four databases (n=608) were combined using EndNote X9 software, with a total of 75 duplicate items removed. Once these records (n=533) were identified, titles and abstracts were read and reviewed in terms of eligibility criteria.

3.3.2. Eligibility Criteria

Inclusion and exclusion criteria were considered to define the specific characteristics that would be used to select relevant studies within this systematic review (see Table 3.4). Such a step is thought to support the development of a high-quality review (Connelly, 2020; Patino & Ferreira, 2018).

For the purposes of this review, research studies located in the realm of grey literature, that is research not published in commercial publications, were not included. This included doctoral research such as, Kemp (2020) and Bartle and Trevis (2015). I made this decision due to concerns regarding quality and, rigour of non-peer reviewed literature.

Given my responsibility for independently screening for relevant literature, I completed the process across all databases in a single day. Following this, I conducted a second and third search without access to prior results to reduce the chances of overlooking crucial studies. Additionally, I replicated this screening process in February 2024 to increase thoroughness and comprehensiveness.

Table 3.4

A Table to Show Systematic Literature Review Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria and Rationale

Inclusion Criteria	*Exclusion Criteria*	*Rationale*
Participants: Educational staff members.	**Participants:** Non-educational staff members.	**Participants:** To place emphasis on experiences related to school professionals.
Topic/Intervention: Group consultations primarily used with school staff to support CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs. Group consultations facilitated/supported by an EP/TEP.	**Topic/Intervention:** Group consultations not primarily used with school staff to support CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs. Group consultations not facilitated/supported by an EP/TEP.	**Topic/Intervention:** To increase likelihood of findings reflecting the use of these models for supporting CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs. To explore school staff experiences in group consultations facilitated/supported by EPs/TEPs.
Data: Research findings produce some qualitative data.	**Data:** Research findings are only quantitative.	**Data:** To gain insight into school staff experiences.

Publication:	Publication:	Publication:
Published in or after 2012.	Published before 2012.	To capture sufficient and recent knowledge.
Research conducted either in the United Kingdom or Ireland.	Research not conducted either in the United Kingdom or Ireland.	To ensure relevance to current educational context.
Published in a peer reviewed journal.	Not published in a peer reviewed journal.	To enhance research quality and rigour.
Written in English.	Not written in English.	To aid accessibility.
Available to access in full.	Not available to access in full.	To facilitate a thorough examination of research methods, results and findings.

3.3.3. Search Outcomes

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) (Moher et al., 2009) flow diagram in Figure 3.1 illustrates my screening process. During this screening stage, most records (N=525) did not meet the inclusion criteria and were subsequently excluded from full-text screening. Various reasons led to their exclusion, such as items not being a research study, focusing on group consultation as a learning intervention for CYP, or being conducted outside the UK or before the inclusion date.

Following the screening of study titles and abstracts, eight papers proceeded to full-text screening, out of which six were ultimately included in the final review. The remaining two studies were excluded after full-text screening due to the following reasons:

1. The primary focus of the research was on the strategies and solutions generated from collaborative problem solving, rather than considering the experiences of the participating adults (Clements & Harding, 2023).
2. It was not clear whether the majority of Solution Circles were implemented to support CYP with SEMH/behavioural difficulties with the study detailing the circles were run

to support two pupils who lacked motivation and two were run to support pupils with dyslexia (Brown & Henderson, 2012).

Once these six studies were identified, their reference lists were examined for any additional relevant studies. Through this manual search, 18 articles were found, but after removing four duplicates, three previously excluded articles and five previously included articles, only six articles remained. These six studies underwent screening based on their titles and abstracts, resulting in the exclusion of five studies. Reasons for exclusion included the paper not researching group consultation models or not being a research study. One underwent full-text screening and met the inclusion criteria. Therefore, a total of seven studies were included in this qualitative synthesis (see Appendix 1 for a summary of the included studies).

Figure 3.1

A Figure to Show the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) Flow Diagram

Identification of studies via databases and manual searches

Stage 1	Stage 2

Idenfication

| 608 articles identified through four databases | 18 articles identified through reference lists |
| 75 duplicate articles removed | 4 duplicate, 3 previously excluded and 5 previously included articles removed |

Screening

| 533 articles screened at title and abstract level | 6 articles screened at title and abstract level |
| 525 articles excluded | 5 articles excluded |

Eligibility

| 8 articles assessed for eligibility at full-text level | 1 articles assessed for eligibility at a full-text level |
| 2 articles excluded following full--text appraisal | 0 articles excluded following full-text appraisal |

Included

| 6 articles included in the qualitative synthesis from databases | 2 articles excluded following full--text appraisal |

A total of 7 articles included in the qualitative synthesis

3.4. Synthesis Approach

3.4.1. *Quantitative Data Exclusion*

The review question's desire to explore contextualised versions of reality through school staff experiences lends itself to a critical realist stance (Bhaskar, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022). Such a stance welcomes participants' and my subjective interpretations and understandings of phenomena, encouraging active involvement in knowledge construction and recognising that knowledge is situated within specific contexts (Bhaskar, 2016; Pilgrim, 2019; Wiltshire, 2018). Consequently, any quantitative measures and subsequent findings from the selected research studies were not included within the synthesis (Mogashoa, 2014).

3.4.2. *Selecting a Synthesis Approach*

Qualitative synthesis methods are thought to still be undergoing development, as they lack the extensive history of implementation seen in their quantitative counterparts (Dixon-Woods et al., 2006; Sandelowski & Barroso, 2007; Thomas & Harden, 2008).

However, many qualitative synthesis approaches have been developed over the years, such as: Thematic Synthesis (Thomas & Harden, 2008), Grounded Theory (Eaves, 2001), Meta-Narrative (Greenhalgh et al., 2005) and Meta-Ethnography (Noblit & Hare, 1988).

When considering the most appropriate approach, I utilised Booth et al.'s (2018) RETREAT framework for guidance. For the purposes of this review, a Thematic Synthesis was deemed appropriate for the following reasons:

➤ The review question sought to explore the experiences of those partaking in a group consultation session, where such an exploration would be supported through such review means (Thomas & Harden, 2008).

➤ Due to limited time allocations, conducting a Meta-Ethnography that satisfied the reporting standards was not deemed to be feasible (Booth et al., 2018).

➤ Although Thematic Syntheses require "*methodological expertise*" (Booth et al., 2018, p. 46), Campbell et al. (2011) suggest that Meta-Ethnographies place greater demands on the synthesiser, requiring significant competencies in qualitative research skills. These skills were not deemed to be possessed by myself at the time of the review.

➤ As emphasised by Thomas and Harden (2008), Thematic Syntheses provide a structured and transparent framework that aids in leaving a clear trail of the analytical

procedures employed. This can not only enhance the evaluation of the research but also foster the replicability of the undertaken work. By opting for Thematic Synthesis, I sought to achieve synthesis rigour, ensuring that the systematic steps taken in synthesising qualitative data were evident and comprehensible, thereby contributing to the overall robustness and transparency of the review process.

3.4.3. *Appraisal of Included Studies*

There has been an ongoing debate regarding whether qualitative syntheses should utilise frameworks such as Gough's (2007) Weight of Evidence (WofE) to determine the quality of qualitative studies (Murphy et al., 1998; Seale, 2002). As I adhered to Thomas and Harden's (2008) Thematic Synthesis approach, their perspective on quality assessment was sought. Consistent with their views, quality assessment of qualitative research is encouraged as a means of enhancing the trustworthiness of the conclusions drawn and so was undertaken using Gough's (2007) WofE framework. Appendix 2 defines and outlines how judgements for WofE A to D were determined.

Given my role in independently appraising research, I completed the appraisal process for all studies within the same day. Subsequently, the appraisals were re-checked on a second occasion, without access to previous scores, to ensure consistency and enhance retest reliability. An overview of the WofE D for each study can be found in Table 3.5 and a detailed breakdown of individual WofE appraisal judgments can be found in Appendix 3.

Table 3.5

A Table to Show Overall Weight of Evidence D Scores and Ratings

Study	*WofE D Score*	*Rating*
Annan and Moore (2012)	2.0	Medium
Davison and Duffy (2017)	3.0	High
Grahamslaw and Henson (2015)	2.0	Medium
Hayes and Stringer (2016)	3.0	High
Jones et al. (2013)	2.3	Medium
Nugent et al. (2014)	2.3	Medium
Turner and Gulliford (2020)	3.0	High

Quality assessment ratings revealed three high-scoring studies (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Turner & Gulliford, 2020) and four medium-scoring studies (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014). Given that all studies attained at least a medium WofE D score and were published in peer reviewed journals, they were considered of sufficient quality and included in the subsequent qualitative synthesis.

3.5. Thematic Synthesis Procedure

According to Thomas and Harden (2008), relying solely on qualitative data from a study's results section may limit understanding. Thus, in this Thematic Synthesis, I synthesised qualitative data from both the results and findings sections of included studies.

I utilised QSR's NVivo software for qualitative analysis, directly uploading electronic PDF versions of all papers for verbatim accessibility. Thematic Synthesis involved:

- ➢ Line-by-line coding of each study to produce free codes
- ➢ Organisation of free codes into related descriptive themes
- ➢ Development of analytical themes

In step one, I iteratively reviewed codes three times to ensure they aligned with the intended meaning. Step two involved organising codes into descriptive themes, which I validated through multiple checks and supervision. In step three, I identified analytical themes, which were also validated through repeated checks and discussions in supervision.

3.6. Review Themes

Through Thematic Synthesis, I constructed the following three analytical themes from the studies:

1. Enhanced support and understanding for CYP with SEMH needs
2. Cultivated collaborative communities
3. Contingent success of group consultations

An overview of the descriptive themes within these analytical themes can be found in Figure 3.2. A detailed overview of each analytical theme and corresponding descriptive themes and free codes can be found in Figures 3.3 to 3.5.

The upcoming sections will delve into comprehensive discussions of each analytical theme and its related descriptive themes. These discussions will provide an overview of what

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is presently known regarding the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support CYP with SEMH needs.

Figure 3.2

A Figure to Show the Systematic Literature Review Question and Constructed Analytical and Descriptive Theme

Review question	What is presently known about the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs?

Analytical themes	Enhanced support and understanding for CYP with SEMH needs	Cultivated collaborative communities	Contingent success of group consultations

Descriptive themes	Holistic insight into the focus child	Enhanced collaborative perspectives	Structural integrity
	Affective changes towards the focus child	Collaborative resilience and wellbeing	The role of the EP
	Strategic change for the focus child	Extended collaborative practices	Navigating increased vulnerability
	Strategic generalisation		Unavoidable external constraints

3.6.1. Analytical Theme One: Enhanced Support and Understanding for CYP with SEMH Needs

In the context of group consultations seeking to address the needs of CYP with SEMH needs, analytical theme one explores the transformative impact of such approaches on supporting and understanding these individuals. This theme unfolds through four descriptive themes, each exploring unique aspects of the positive changes observed in the process.

Descriptive Theme One: Holistic Insight into the Focus Child. One way in which change occurred for the focus child was through the development of an increased holistic understanding of their needs. All studies suggested that the group consultations allowed participants the opportunity to reflect upon the problem(s) and this in turn deepened their understanding of the perceived problem(s) (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Turner and Gulliford (2020, p. 11) observed that this reflection was sustained with a participant commenting, *"I found myself thinking about it that night and the next day…"*.

Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015, p. 121) study highlighted how involvement in group consultation allowed participants to *"look at the child in a holistic way"* and consider *"the child's point of view"*. Similarly, Hayes and Stringer (2016) suggested that adopting this approach provided insights not only into pupils' behaviours but also their needs. Jones et al.'s (2013) study reported that teachers, after reflecting on the child's concerns, gained a deeper understanding of the causes and nature of their behavioural issues. Turner and Gulliford (2020), Jones et al. (2013) and Nugent et al. (2014) suggested that participants responded positively to focusing on one pupil at a time, emphasising the value of a holistic exploration of the CYP's needs. Davison and Duffy (2017) suggested that a holistic exploration of CYP's needs prompted adults to shift their perspective from viewing the child as the sole problem to considering the entire situation. This transformative process was thought to be facilitated by discussing the focus child with adults unfamiliar with them, minimising preconceived ideas. Annan and Moore (2012) suggested that such ways of working supported with identifying new aspects of the case that may not have been previously considered.

Descriptive Theme Two: Affective Changes Towards the Focus Child. Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) identified affective changes towards the focus child and the perceived problem(s). After the group consultation, participants gained an increased understanding of the focus child's needs, leading to heightened empathy (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Turner &

Gulliford, 2020). One participant in Turner and Gulliford's (2020, p. 11) study remarked, *"...try and walk in his shoes for a little while"*. Additionally, participants focused more on the positives within the situation (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Both Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) and Turner and Gulliford (2020) suggested increased enthusiasm and motivation towards the perceived problem(s) following the consultation.

However, Turner and Gulliford (2020) noted that some participants felt increased frustration and helplessness when agreed actions could not be implemented due to changes in the child's circumstances suggesting that initial enthusiasm can wane in the face of unforeseen challenges.

Descriptive Theme Three: Strategic Change for the Focus Child. Davison and Duffy (2017), Grahamslaw and Henson (2015), Hayes and Stringer (2016) and Nugent et al. (2014) all detailed that engagement in group consultations increased strategies of support for the focus child. For instance, one participant in Nugent et al.'s (2014, p. 266) study noted, *"Following the session, you were equipped with strategies to implement".* Davison and Duffy (2017) suggested that participants reported an increased sense of skill and competence attributed to the strategies deliberated within the group.

Moreover, the group consultations resulted in tangible changes, with senior staff adapting staff structures to address issues impacting the pupil's behaviour (Annan & Moore, 2012). Annan and Moore (2012) also suggested that the information generated during the group consultation could be effectively utilised in Annual Review meetings, benefiting both the child and the workload of the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Coordinator (SENDCo). Furthermore, Turner and Gulliford (2020) proposed that group consultations facilitated discussions on organisational factors contributing to the perceived problem(s). Consequently, the group were able to *"review [their] processes as a school and what works for [pupil] as an individual"* (Turner & Gulliford, 2020, p. 9). This indicates more systemic outcomes resulting from the collaborative work.

Participants in some studies identified specific changes they would implement in their own practices to better support the focus child. For instance, a participant in Turner and Gulliford's (2020) study expressed their intention to engage more with the focus child. Jones et al. (2013, p. 263) demonstrated that participants learned to *"step back"* and consider the effects of their actions on the child's behaviour, adopting a less reactionary approach in their behaviour management strategies. This shift in thinking extended to their own professional

practices, contemplating how they might impact the child and how modifications could be made accordingly. Moreover, Davison and Duffy (2017) suggested that attending group consultations sparked an increased interest in psychology among participants, evident in their willingness to explore recommended books and develop a deeper understanding of psychological principles and concepts.

However, Jones et al. (2013) observed that although participants reflected on their own practice and the child's behaviour, adaptations to their practice occurred only in a minority of cases. This suggests the need to not only consider whether participants desired to change but also whether they effectively implemented those desires.

Descriptive Theme Four: Strategic Generalisation. Four of the studies indicated that strategies generated from group consultations could be applied to others (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Turner and Gulliford (2020, p. 9) observed that participants considered how the strategies developed during group consultations could be beneficial for others, with one participant stating, *"...there are so many others who could benefit from the same strategy"*. Furthermore, Grahamslaw and Henson (2015, p. 122) reported a "*ripple*" effect, wherein the strategies discussed could be utilised by others. One participant mentioned, *"...even though not the Problem Presenter, [I was] able to link strategies to pupils I see"* (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015, p. 122). This suggests that group consultations have the potential not only to support the PP with the focus child but also to equip other group members with strategies for their own practice.

Figure 3.3

A Figure to Show Analytical Theme One and Corresponding Descriptive Themes and Free Codes

	A key to show a number assigned to each study
1	Annan & Moore (2012)
2	Davison & Duffy (2017)
3	Grahamslaw & Henson (2015)
4	Hayes & Stringer, 2016
5	Jones et al. (2012)
6	Nugent et al. (2014)
7	Turner & Gulliford (2020)

Analytical theme

Enhanced support and understanding for CYP with SEMH needs

What is presently known about the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs?

Descriptive themes

Holistic insight into the focus child

Increased reflection [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]	Deeper understanding [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]	Sustained reflection [7]
Focus on child [4] [6] [7]	In-depth thinking [1] [3]	New aspects [1] [2]

Affective changes towards the focus child

Increased empathy [3] [7]	Focusing on positives [3]	Increased enthusiasm [3] [7]
Increased motivation [3] [7]	Frustration and helplessness [7]	

Strategic change for the focus child

Strategies [2] [3] [4] [6]	Changes to staffing structure [1]	Informed annual review [1]
Organisation factors adapted [7]	Making extra effort [7]	Less reactionary [5]
Behaviour management changes [5]	Interest in psychology [2]	Limited actual changes [5]

Strategic generalisation

Linking strategies to other children [3] [4] [6] 7]	Using strategies with others [3] [4] [6] [7]	Ripple of strategy use [3]

Free codes

3.6.2. *Analytical Theme Two: Cultivated Collaborative Communities*

Analytical theme two unfolds through three descriptive themes. Each identifies unique aspects of the positive changes observed in fostering collaboration and community within educational contexts.

Descriptive Theme One: Enhanced Collaborative Perspectives. All seven studies identified the transformative impact of group consultations, providing participants with a platform to embrace diverse perspectives (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020).

Collaborative efforts also engendered a sense of collective response towards the perceived problem(s) (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). For example, a participant in Davison and Duffy's (2017, p. 398) study commented that the approach provided participants with a *"support network available for ideas, resources, help and encouragement"*. Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) observed that diverse viewpoints fostered collaborative sharing of information, views and strategies, fostering a rich tapestry of ideas. Jones et al. (2013) suggested that this exchange not only allowed participants to explore concerns but also facilitated collaborative reflection on what constituted challenging behaviour.

Moreover, five studies indicated that group consultations offered increased opportunities for collegial discussions (Annan & Moore, 2012; Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013). Annan and Moore (2012) suggested that participants valued this protected time, as it provided a rare chance to collaborate with colleagues on shared problems. Similarly, a participant in Davison and Duffy's (2017, p. 400) research commented that the session allowed them the *"time to just chat about issues with your group, the cluster was the only time you got the chance to do that"*. Similarly, Hayes and Stringer (2016) indicated that participants valued the time to discuss, share information and reflect with other group members.

Descriptive Theme Two: Collaborative Resilience and Wellbeing. Annan and Moore (2012) illustrated the positive impact of group consultations on teacher wellbeing, while Davison and Duffy (2017) suggested their stress-reducing effects.

The collaborative essence of these group consultations was suggested to mitigate feelings of isolation among participants (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014). A participant from Davison and Duffy's (2017, p. 398) study expressed the value of camaraderie, stating, *"the companionship…knowing we are all in the same boat together is truly beneficial"*. Additionally, in Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015, p. 122) study, a participant noted that this support network aided *"feeling[s of being] supported and included"*. Furthermore, participants found solace in shared experiences, realising they were not alone in navigating challenges (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Nugent et al., 2014; Jones et al., 2013).

Furthermore, two studies emphasised that feelings of reduced isolation arose from a collective sense of responsibility for the perceived problem(s) (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). Grahamslaw and Henson (2015, p. 119) suggested that this *"shared focus and unified purpose"* was more likely to occur when all group members knew or worked directly with the focus child. A participant from Jones et al.'s (2013, p. 263) study remarked, *"it's not my problem now, it's our problem and we all need to work on it"*.

Hayes and Stringer (2016) identified reassurance through mutual support and recognition of others' efforts and successes. Collaborative discussions further contributed to enhanced confidence (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014) and a culture of openness and honesty among participants (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). Jones et al. (2013) suggested that having time to reflect on behavioural concerns supported the creation of an open ethos within the school, where participants were more inclined to openly discuss the difficulties they were experiencing.

Moreover, the collaborative process facilitated the establishment of realistic expectations, as participants recognised the limits of their influence and the necessity for collective efforts (Davison & Duffy, 2017). A participant in Davison and Duffy's (2017, p. 398-9) study aptly commented, *"you realise you can't be the saviour to everybody…"* and emphasised that they refrained from *"beat[ing]"* themselves up when unable to implement strategies.

Descriptive Theme Three: Extended Collaborative Practices. Instances of increased collaborative practices extended beyond the group consultations. Annan and Moore (2012) noted that participants applied the problem solving structure in other situations. Grahamslaw and Henson (2015, p. 119) reported that participants recognised the applicability of

collaborative approaches in various settings, with one participant commenting, *"...this approach of solution circles could be used in a variety of situations in and out of school"*. Jones et al. (2013) observed that staff conversations became more structured and problem solving discussions occurred more frequently outside the consultations. Davison and Duffy (2017) exemplified this application with reports of improved communication between schools, as group clusters met outside the consultations to provide additional support. Furthermore, they suggested that the inclusion of teaching assistants within the group consultations enhanced their working relationships with nurture group teachers and contributed to an improved nurture group environment.

Figure 3.4

A Figure to Show Analytical Theme Two and Corresponding Descriptive Themes and Free Codes

Analytical theme	Cultivated collaborative communities	What is presently known about the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs?	A key to show a number assigned to each study	
			1	Annan & Moore (2012)
			2	Davison & Duffy (2017)
			3	Grahamslaw & Henson (2015)
			4	Hayes & Stringer, 2016
			5	Jones et al. (2012)
			6	Nugent et al. (2014)
			7	Turner & Gulliford (2020)

Descriptive themes			
Enhanced collaborative perspectives	Embracing perspectives [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]	Collaborative response [2] [3] [5]	Time to talk [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Collaborative resilience and wellbeing	Improved wellbeing [1]	Reduced stress [2]	Reduced isolation [2] [3] [5] [6]
	Sharing the problem [3] [5]	Reassuring [4]	Increased confidence [2] [5] [6]
	Increased openness [2] [3] [5]	Realistic expectations [2]	

Extended collaborative practices	Application of problem-solving structure [1] [3]	Structured conversations [5]	Improved communication between schools [2]
	Meeting outside of consultations [2]	Relationship building [2]	Nurture groups running smoothly [2]

Free codes

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3.6.3. *Analytical Theme Three: Contingent Success of Group Consultations*

In the context of utilising group consultations with school staff to support CYP with SEMH needs, analytical theme three unfolds through four descriptive themes. These descriptive themes delve into some key factors that shaped the effectiveness of these collaborative endeavours implying that success of these group sessions was not solely inherent to the collaborative nature of the group consultations.

Descriptive Theme One: Structural Integrity. All seven studies emphasised the value of the systematic structure as integral to the success of group consultations (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Davison and Duffy (2017) suggested that the structured approach altered how concerns were addressed, increased consultation fidelity and allowed for thorough problem analysis. Jones et al. (2013, p. 264) reported positive experiences with the structure, with one participant stating, "*having a structure, you know, identifying actually what you are looking at and thinking objectively about the targets you are going to set. I think that was really useful*". Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) observed that the process facilitated detailed problem analysis and increased motivation. Participants appreciated how it kept consultations on track, provided clarification, encouraged everyone's input and broke down the problem(s) (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015).

Although many participants appreciated the structured process, not all shared this view. Some found it disorganised and hindering the flow of ideas (Nugent et al., 2019). This suggests that although the structure of the group consultations was generally well received, this view was not shared by all and for some, the benefits of the structured process depended upon the discussions being had at that specific time.

Additionally, other structural elements of the group consultations were positively received. Turner and Gulliford (2020) reported that participants found the use of graphic representations helpful and focused. Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) highlighted the importance of appointing a mentor, which fostered shared responsibility, while the use of ground rules created a safe environment. Furthermore, non-hierarchical foundations in group consultations were considered to empower teaching assistants to feel more included (Davison & Duffy, 2017).

Descriptive Theme Two: The Role of the EP. EPs were believed to play a vital role in facilitating group consultations (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2014;

Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014). They were considered to help maintain focus and tone, assist in time allocation and provide valuable input (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). Some participants viewed EPs as experts, valuing their knowledge and advice (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). One staff member reported, *"...it's not very often I get to sit down with the EP, so to have one there once a month I find it very beneficial because she is an expert in it" (*Davison & Duffy, 2017, p. 401).

Hayes and Stringer (2013) observed that in a school where a more expert role of the EP was expected, more traditional ways of working were preferred. Moreover, resistance to change in schools with traditional views of EP service delivery was found to minimise the perceived benefits of the process (Hayes & Stringer, 2013; Jones et al., 2013). This suggests the need for an alignment in values between those attending the sessions and the school more generally, with the collaborative principles underpinning group consultation approaches.

Descriptive Theme Three: Navigating Increased Vulnerability. The challenge of acknowledging the presence of a problem, as highlighted in the studies by Davison and Duffy (2017) and Jones et al. (2013), was identified as a potential barrier to the success of the group consultation sessions. It was suggested that the discomfort and vulnerability experienced by some participants may hinder the open and honest sharing of concerns, thus impeding the collaborative problem solving process (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Jones et al., 2013).

However, it was proposed that collaborating with group members from different schools but with similar nurture setting experience could alleviate these feelings of vulnerability (Davison & Duffy, 2017). This implied that the composition and dynamics of the group, especially the inclusion of members in comparable roles, played a positive role in influencing the success of the group consultation sessions.

Descriptive Theme Four: Unavoidable External Constraints. External barriers were perceived to impact the effectiveness of group consultations. Difficulties in scheduling sessions and competing demands acted as hindrances (Annan & Moore, 2012; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Delays in scheduling follow-ups limited potential benefits as did inconsistent participant attendance (Annan & Moore, 2012). Absence of key professionals and external interruptions also reduced the success of group consultations (Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Hayes and Stringer (2016) suggested that other organisational factors such as a lack of time to prepare for the meetings and delayed start times were further external barriers. Rapidly changing

circumstances for the focus child led to challenges in implementing agreed-upon actions (Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Jones et al. (2013) also considered that the absence of support at a systemic level (i.e., from senior management) limited the effectiveness of the group consultations.

Figure 3.5

A Figure to Show Analytical Theme Three and Corresponding Descriptive Themes and Free Codes

Analytical theme	Contingent success of group consultations	*What is presently known about the experiences of school staff when engaging in group consultation models to support children and young people (CYP) with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs?*	**A key to show a number assigned to each study** 1 — Annan & Moore (2012) 2 — Davison & Duffy (2017) 3 — Grahamslaw & Henson (2015) 4 — Hayes & Stringer, 2016 5 — Jones et al. (2012) 6 — Nugent et al. (2014) 7 — Turner & Gulliford (2020)

Descriptive themes

Structural integrity	Valued the structure [1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]	Disorganised [6]	Structure was limiting [6]
	Use of graphics a strength [7]	Positive mentor appointment [3]	Supportive ground rules [3]
	Non-hierarchical [2]		

The role of the EP	EP as facilitator [2] [3] [4] [6]	EP as expert [2] [3] [4]	Resistance to change [4] [5]

Navigating increased vulnerability	Admitting the problem challenging [2] [5]	Similar role reduced vulnerability [2]	

Unavoidable external constraints	Difficulties scheduling [1] [4] [5] [6] [7]	Follow up delays [1]	Inconsistent participants [1]
	Absence of professionals [4] [7]	External interruptions [4]	Lack of preparation time [4]
	Delayed start times [4]	Changing circumstances [7]	Absence of senior staff support [5]

Free codes

3.7. Discussion

3.7.1. Summary of Synthesis

In summary, the synthesis of findings and discussions from seven research papers on the use of group consultation models with school staff to support CYP with SEMH needs highlights the transformative impact across three analytical themes. Analytical theme one suggests positive changes through four descriptive themes, showcasing how group consultations can deepen understanding, foster empathy and promote strategic support for CYP with SEMH needs. The collaborative efforts extend beyond immediate focus, demonstrating the potential for systemic change and strategy generalisation. Analytical theme two suggests the positive changes in cultivating collaborative communities within educational contexts, emphasising the value of diverse perspectives, improved resilience and wellbeing and the continuation of problem solving beyond the study. Analytical theme three explores contingent success factors, emphasising the value of systematic structures, the role of EPs and acknowledging challenges of vulnerability and external constraints. Overall, these findings demonstrate the multifaceted benefits of group consultations, ranging from individualised support and understanding to cultivating collaborative communities, with recognition of structural, professional and interpersonal challenges.

3.7.2. Limitations of Synthesis

Firstly, I screened the initial 608 articles alone, aiming to minimise errors by repeating the process multiple times. However, some studies may have been inadvertently overlooked. Secondly, excluding non-peer reviewed literature may have left out potentially valuable research. Rothstein and Hopewell (2009) and Paez (2017) argue for the inclusion of grey literature to reduce bias. Additionally, due to the review's epistemological standpoint, only qualitative data were included, possibly excluding relevant quantitative insights. Moreover, despite efforts to maintain synthesis continuity, diverse methodologies and tools used in the studies may have influenced reported experiences. Lastly, Thematic Synthesis, while chosen for its utility, relies on subjective interpretation and data synthesis, risking the omission of nuances.

However, to enhance quality, I frequently consulted original papers, sought supervision and engaged in journaling to foster diverse perspectives and reflexivity. These steps aimed to ensure a thorough and authentic synthesis of findings.

3.8. Gaps in Literature, Current Rationale and Research Questions

After conducting a systematic literature review, I decided that this present research would explore the experiences of both PPs and CMs participating in Newton and Wilson's (2013) ISC. This group consultation tool would be implemented to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

3.8.1. Why Insights and Solutions Circles?

More generally, the findings from this systematic literature review demonstrate a scarcity of research concerning the implementation of group consultation models with school staff to support CYP with SEMH needs. This provides rationale for further exploration into school staff experiences with group consultation models.

My next step was to deliberate on which group consultation model to research. While EPs may utilise Newton and Wilson's (2013) ISC as a group consultation model, no research exploring the lived experiences of participants engaged in these sessions exists, indicating a gap within the literature. The Health and Care Professions Council (2023), the regulatory body for EPs, emphasises the importance of practitioners engaging in evidence-informed practices to ensure high standards of care and support for individuals. As such, exploration and documentation of participant experiences within ISC sessions are crucial to inform evidence-based practices and uphold professional standards in educational psychology.

3.8.2. Why Primary Aged Pupils with SEMH Needs?

This present research centres on supporting school staff in addressing the escalating prevalence of SEMH needs in CYP (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Hanley et al., 2020; Lowry et al., 2022). The rise in SEMH cases from 2017 to 2023 suggests the urgency for effective support interventions, providing rationale for this study (NHS England, 2023). Legal obligations and the correlation between SEMH needs and academic outcomes (Agnafors et al., 2021) demonstrate schools' necessity to take action. Challenges such as limited access to specialised support and prolonged waiting times further demonstrate the need for schools to address a

range of SEMH needs promptly and increasingly engage in early intervention practices (Essau, 2005; Lowry et al., 2022; Shelemy et al., 2019). Despite these demands, school staff often lack adequate training (Lowry et al., 2022; Reinke et al., 2011; Tucker, 2015; von der Embse et al., 2018), often leading to stress and retention issues (Lowry et al., 2022), which this research seeks to address.

The focus on supporting primary aged pupils with SEMH needs, rather than secondary aged pupils, is driven by several key factors identified in the literature. The surge in SEMH prevalence rates and delays in mental health support signal an urgent need for tailored assistance within school environments (Lowry et al., 2022; Moor et al., 2007). The need for early intervention strategies aligns with research indicating that mental health issues often manifest early in life (Gibb et al., 2010; Jones, 2013; Mental Health Foundation, 2020). Primary schools are considered to provide a conducive environment for early identification and intervention, benefiting from closer connections with children and their families (Childs-Fegredo et al., 2021; Kipping et al., 2008).

3.8.3. *Why Problem Presenters and Circle Members?*

In the systematic literature review, a noteworthy observation emerged: previous studies had either gathered perspectives from PPs alone or combined the experiences of PPs and CMs. However, recognising the distinct roles and potential subsequent experiences of these two groups within group consultation models, I identified a gap in the literature and a rationale to explore their experiences separately. By delving into the unique experiences of both PPs and CMs, this research seeks to uncover nuanced insights into the experiences of ISC, bridging the identified gap and providing a rationale for this research.

3.8.4. *Research Questions*

This research endeavours to answer the following research questions:

1. RQ1: How do PPs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?
2. RQ2: How do CMs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?

Chapter Four: Methodology

4.1.   Introduction to Methodology

In this research, I adopted a critical realist ontology and a contextualist epistemology, using semi-structured interviews with four PPs and open-ended questionnaires with 18 CMs. The qualitative data from both methods of data collection were then analysed using RTA.

This chapter details the methodology used, including conceptual foundations (section 4.2), rationale for using RTA (section 4.3), research procedures and ethics (section 4.4) and aspects of RTA application and approaches to enhancing research quality (section 4.5).

4.2.   Conceptual Underpinnings

4.2.1. *Definitions*

Ontological assumptions are beliefs about the nature and structure of being and reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Crotty, 1998; Hitchcock & Hughes, 2002) or what knowledge of reality is acquirable (Snape & Spencer, 2003). When contemplating various ontological perspectives, it is beneficial to envision them along a continuum that ranges from a realist ontology to a relativist ontology, with critical realism occupying a central position (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

Epistemology is concerned with how such ontological beliefs can be researched and enquired into (Hitchcock & Hughes, 2002; Snape & Spencer, 2003). It involves looking at the world and making sense of it (Crotty, 1998). Similarly, when contemplating various epistemological perspectives, it is beneficial to envision them along a continuum that ranges from a postpositivist epistemology to a social constructionist epistemology, with a contextualist stance occupying a central position (Lincoln & Guba, 1989).

4.2.2. *The Need for Ontological and Epistemological Examination*

There is a necessity for researchers to understand and reflect upon the ontological and epistemological paradigms their research is grounded in due to their philosophical suppositions and methodological implications (Bracken, 2010). Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 166) place great emphasis on the *"deeply connected"* nature of ontology and epistemology. Furthermore, Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) explain that ontological assumptions inform epistemological assumptions; these, subsequently inform methodological considerations and these

considerations ultimately underpin decisions made regarding instrumentation and data collection. Furthermore, Grix (2002) suggested that neglecting or superficially examining ontological and epistemological underpinnings can lead to incoherent and often contradictory philosophies and methodologies, both ontologically and epistemologically. Consequently, it was crucial to conscientiously consider the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research.

4.2.3. Ontological and Epistemological Positions

Realism and Postpositivism. A realist ontology bestows that a single, true reality can be identified, measured and understood objectively to the researcher's reasoning and values (Park et al., 2020). Within this, truths can be obtained independently of the tools utilised by the researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Such a reality is believed to be mind-independent and understood through empirical investigation only (Tebes, 2005).

This realist ontology lends itself to the postpositivist doctrine which advocates for an epistemology that utilises objective, experimenter sensory experiences to gather ontological knowledge (Aliyu et al., 2014). It is grounded in Comte's philosophy that genuine knowledge can be obtained through the scientific method (Whewell, 2017). Natural science methods would be applied to posit, observe and derive nomothetical (general) truths (Hjørland, 2005) that can be generalised beyond the experimental population (Feyerabend, 1981). Postpositivist do, however, recognise that complete objectivity may not be achievable due to the influence of researcher perspectives (Haraway, 1988).

In its application, the researcher would attempt to function in duality with the observed phenomena where they are limited to data collection, remain objective, are solely externally directed, independent of human perceptions and constructs (Miller & Fredrickson, 2021). A researcher would work to enhance this external validity (generalisability) using large sample sizes because an increased sample size is suggested to produce data that is more likely to represent population characteristics and improve consistency (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020; Park et al., 2020).

Relativism and Constructionism. Unlike realists, those who subscribe to a relativist ontology reject the existence of a singular reality that is independent of human practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022). They argue against the ability to generate and generalise universal truth and

laws within social science and instead propose that personal, localised truths may be derived, with each individual's perception of a reality differing from another's (Cohen et al., 2017; Kvale, 1996). Here, there is recognition and appreciation for reality being influenced by individual interpretations and therefore, differing from individual to individual (Burr, 1998). The absence of universal laws, as posited by positivists, means that ontologies developed by researchers can be transferred rather than generalised to other contexts and populations (Gelo et al., 2009). This recognition of individuality and multiple realities has been praised for giving previously marginalised voices the scope to construct and co-construct their own knowledge (Engelkamp et al., 2017).

A social constructionist epistemological research approach aligns with such an ontology whereby endeavours are made to produce rather than reveal truths (Hibberd, 2005; Potter & Robles, 2022). Contrary to the positivist stance, ontological meaning is not found, rather it is constructed based on our social practices and social interactions with the world (Kim, 2001; Young & Collin, 2004). Therefore, one's epistemology is relativistic, voluntarily determined by free will and may be explored by idiographic qualitative methods (methodologies that produce data that cannot be counted and are reflective of the interpretive qualities of phenomena (Mogashoa, 2014). Here, the researcher is required to play an integrated, subjective role within their research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Critical Realism and Contextualism. Between a realist and relativist stance resides critical realism (Lincoln & Guba, 1989). Critical realism postulates that reality has ontological depth where some aspects of reality are observable and others are not (Pilgrim, 2019). Here, some elements of reality are considered intransitive, that is, they are unchanging and exist independently of our perceptions and experiences and others are transitive, that is they change and do not exist independent of human subjectivity (Joseph, 1998).

Critical realism withholds ontological realism where a transcendental reality may exist beyond the researcher (Bhaskar, 2016). However, critical realism acknowledges that one's experiences and perceptions provide only a contextualised version of reality that is mediated by language and cultural factors (Bhaskar, 2016; Braun & Clarke, 2022). As such, Bhaskar (2010; 2016; 2020) suggests that reality exists beyond our socially constructed and changeable ontology.

While critical realism posits a realist ontology, it recognises epistemic relativism (Pilgrim, 2019). Epistemologically, this means reality cannot be uncovered with certainty by the researcher because our knowledge of reality is fallible and mediated by culture and language (Bhaskar, 2016; Wiltshire, 2018). Rather, multiple interpretations of reality can be obtained due to the influence of differing perspectives and experiences. Such a stance rejects the view that reality is objectively observable and instead suggests that data obtained requires interpretation from the researcher (Bhaskar, 2016).

Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest that a contextualist epistemology aligns closely to critical realism. Such an epistemology supports the notion that multiple accounts of reality are possible and that such knowledge cannot be separated from the knower nor can it be absent of the researcher's own values (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Consequently, such an epistemology requires the researcher to remain reflexive, that is privy to the notions that guide them during meaning making (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

4.2.4. *Theoretical Underpinnings of this Research*

My research on the experiences of school staff participating in an ISC session was underpinned by critical realism and a contextualist epistemology. These theoretical frameworks were chosen purposefully to align with the nature and aims of this study.

Firstly, the focus on transitive aspects of reality within critical realism was crucial. Rather than aiming to uncover a singular, objective reality, this research sought to understand the contextualised versions of reality as perceived by the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2019). This approach acknowledges that reality is constructed through human interpretation and meaning-making processes.

Secondly, considering the complex and multifaceted nature of school staff experiences, a positivist approach was deemed inadequate. Positivist tools and methods often prioritise objectivity and generalisability, which may overlook the nuanced and subjective nature of participant experiences being studied.

Furthermore, adopting critical realism allowed for the recognition that knowledge is inseparable from the knower (participants). Therefore, this research aimed to explore multiple accounts and perspectives regarding participation in a group consultation approach, emphasising the co-construction of meaning between myself (the researcher) and participants.

In light of my roles as PF and researcher, operating in a purely objective or dualistic manner was not feasible. Instead, reflexivity played a pivotal role, facilitating an ongoing awareness of my own positionality, experiences and contributions to the meaning-making process throughout this study.

By grounding this research in critical realism and a contextualist epistemology, this study aimed to provide rich, nuanced insights into the lived experiences of school staff in an ISC session, acknowledging the complexities inherent in human experiences and interpretations.

4.3. Methodological Approach

4.3.1. Qualitative or Quantitative Approach

A quantitative research approach typically involves the collection and analysis of numerical data to address research questions and test hypotheses (Creswell, 2023). This method aligns closely with a realist ontology and postpositivist epistemology, employing a deductive approach to establish universal truths that can be generalised using objective tools (Creswell, 2023; Panhwar et al., 2017). However, for the present research, I considered quantitative approaches unsuitable for several reasons.

Firstly, the exploratory nature of this research aimed to delve into participant experience, which would be challenging to capture within the rigid structure of quantitative methods (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The depth and richness of individual perspectives, integral to this research's purposes, would have been compromised by adopting a quantitative approach (Creswell, 2023; Denzin et al., 2023)

Secondly, the lack of prior research on ISCs prompted the conclusion that formulating and testing hypotheses based on previously explored group problem solving approaches might overlook the unique and nuanced aspects of ISC.

Thirdly, the dynamic nature of this research topic, involving real-time interactions and evolving contexts, necessitated a more flexible and adaptable approach (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This flexibility may allow for easier integration of unexpected findings and facilitate adjustments to the research process as new insights emerge (Patton, 2023).

Qualitative approaches, in contrast, tend to utilise an inductive approach, where non-numerical data is collected using open-ended methods to derive meaning and interpretation from participants' experiences (Patton, 2023). I deemed these approaches more suitable because firstly, they provide a means for participants to express their experiences more freely (Creswell, 2023). Secondly, these open-ended approaches would support the exploration of unique aspects of ISC that had not been previously researched. Thirdly, such approaches value the subjectivity of participants and researchers alike (Patton, 2023).

4.3.2. *Qualitative Methodologies*

My research aimed to explore patterns of meaning within PP and CM participant groups, considering their experiences in a group consultation model aimed at supporting primary aged pupils with SEMH needs. When deciding on a qualitative approach, I started by considering which methods would not facilitate the co-construction of participant experience patterns.

Firstly, I did not consider Discourse Analysis and Conversational Analysis suitable due to their emphasis on language and communication patterns (Antaki, 2008), which, for the purposes of my research, did not align with the primary focus on exploring participant experiences.

Secondly, I did not consider qualitative approaches that aim to uncover stories, such as Narrative Analysis, because while Narrative Analysis is adept at capturing individual stories and personal narratives (Bamberg, 2012), it may not have been as well-suited for identifying patterns and themes within the context of my research.

While I will provide an explanation for choosing RTA over other pattern-based approaches, I acknowledge that this form of *"methodological survey"* may only demonstrate a surface-level understanding of each approach and it is hoped that this acknowledgment will reduce *"mis-characterisation"* (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 125). Furthermore, I recognise that it is rarely the case that there would be only one suitable approach to research and I was not on a "*quest*" for the perfect methodology (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 125). Instead, I considered which approach would best fit my research aims and purposes, given my limited experience as a researcher.

Qualitative Content Analysis is often considered the analytical approach that most closely resembles TA (Vaismoradi et al., 2013). While Qualitative Content Analysis does not exist as a singular approach, it can be seen as a method for identifying themes within qualitative data (Cho & Lee, 2014). Qualitative Content Analysis calls for the use of codebooks and encourages coding reliability through strategies such as the use of multiple, independent coders (Burla et al., 2008). Such an approach was not selected as Forman and Damschroder (2008) suggest that Qualitative Content Analysis is often presented as atheoretical and I had clear ontological and epistemological underpinnings for my research. Furthermore, the use of inter-rater reliability did not align with the critical realist and contextualist philosophical underpinnings of my research (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Instead, I advocated for my active and subjective role in the data analysis process. Moreover, my goal was not to uncover absolute truths within the data but rather to focus on developing themes that constructed contextualised realities.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis may have been considered suitable for this research, as it allows for the exploration of how individuals interpret the world, considers their personal experiences and encourages the subjective role of the researcher (Smith & Osborn, 2007; Tuffour, 2017). However, it was not selected because I did not seek to recruit a homogeneous group of participants, nor did I collect and analyse only interview data (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; Larkin et al., 2021). Moreover, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis seeks to identify themes within each case before considering themes across cases (Alase, 2017) and this level of analysis was not deemed to be required due to my research aims of identifying patterns across and not within the datasets. In addition, implementing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis demands a substantial investment of time and expertise (Braun & Clarke, 2021a), which posed a challenge given my limited time and experience in data analysis.

Within Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, phenomenology, defined as a philosophical framework centred on delving into the essence of lived experiences or, alternatively, the experience of living, delves into the essence of what experience entails rather than fixating on isolated activities within it (Frost, 2011). This approach not only offers insights into understanding human experiences but also provides a roadmap for investigating and comprehending human phenomena (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Consequently, examining the experiences of engaging in a one-time ISC session may not align closely with

such an approach. Instead, it may better suit a broader consideration of experiences and observed patterns within participant groups.

Grounded Theory seeks to gather and analyse data with the goal of generating theories grounded in the data (Glaser & Strauss, 2019). This approach was not utilised for this research because my research questions did not centre around social processes, nor did my research aims seek to generate theories. Instead, I aimed to describe patterns of experiences using a relatively small sample, where the use of such a sample size is not advisable within the framework of Grounded Theory (Boddy, 2016; Marshall et al., 2013).

4.3.3. *Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 4), TA can be defined as a *"method for developing, analysing and interpreting patterns across a qualitative data set, which involves systematic processes of data coding to develop themes."*. As my research sought to identify and interpret patterns across qualitative data, I considered developing my understanding of TA further. I evaluated the use of Coding Reliability TA, Codebook TA and RTA before ultimately selecting RTA as my method of data analysis.

Similarly to Qualitative Content Analysis, coding reliability TA is grounded in postpositivist notions of inter-rater reliability, where the data analysis aims to derive objective truths from qualitative datasets (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; 2022). To mitigate the impact of the researcher's subjectivity, multiple coders and a codebook would be utilised. The use of multiple coders addresses inter-coder reliability and the codebook guides the coding process by offering labels, definitions and instructions on identifying data items consistent with the assigned labels (Boyatzis, 1998).

Given that this research is underpinned by a critical realist and contextualist philosophy, emphasising the construction of contextualised realities from qualitative datasets through the active and subjective role of the researcher, this form of TA was deemed unsuitable for this research.

Other codebook approaches to TA, such as Template Analysis (King, 1998), Matrix Analysis (Cassel & Symon 2004), Framework Analysis (Ritchie et al., 2003) and Network Analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001), utilise a codebook to provide a more structured and less open coding framework. However, unlike coding reliability TA, measures of inter-coder reliability

are not encouraged. Such codebook approaches were not chosen because my experiential research questions were not focused and therefore, a structured method of analysis was not deemed suitable. It was considered that the use of a more structured TA approach may limit the depth of analysis by not exploring the nuances and complexities of participants' experiences in a more open-ended manner (Braun & Clarke, 2021a; 2022). Consequently, I decided that time would be better spent exploring the richness of the data as opposed to creating and implementing a codebook.

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p.247), RTA is *"the most 'fully qualitative' member of the [TA] family and thus most suitable for those who want to explore deep, complex nuanced meaning and understanding".* Whilst the phases of RTA will be discussed in detail in section 4.5.3, it is largely considered to be a flexible approach that provides tools and guidelines to allow the researcher to actively explore patterns across datasets. RTA was selected for the following reasons:

Firstly, RTA supported me to generate themes (patterns across the dataset). I sought to identify patterns regarding experiences of participating in a group consultation approach across PP and CM participant groups. Moreover, RTA values and utilises researcher subjectivity. RTA allowed me to play an active and subjective role in generating themes to present patterned meaning across the dataset in the absence of coding constraints present in codebook approaches. I did not believe this subjectivity required minimising but rather should be utilised as a tool for constructing knowledge. I believe that themes do not emerge from the data without the subjective role of the researcher.

Furthermore, consistent with my critical realist stance, I do not believe an absolute knowledge of reality is attainable. Instead, I believe that contextualised truths can be explored. RTA supported me to engage in reflexive practices, allowing me to consider how my approaches to data collection and analysis would support with generating rich and nuanced data. It encouraged me to consider how my own perspective might influence and shape my thinking throughout this research journey. Lastly, this approach was accessible to me as a novice researcher, who was completing data analysis independently.

4.4. Research Procedure

4.4.1. Recruitment

I initiated recruitment by emailing primary schools within the local authority, using opportunity sampling based on existing service level agreements (see Appendix 4 for recruitment email and Appendix 5 for attached school information letter). Opportunity sampling was utilised, as such an approach has been suggested to allow for easier access to participants (Neuman, 2014), where more targeted subsequent sampling strategies can be employed (Babbie, 2016).

Three schools responded positively, leading to scheduled virtual meetings with school SENDCos for further discussions (see Appendix 6 for the meeting agenda). All three schools agreed to participate, securing parental consent (see Appendix 7) and obtaining consent from PPs and CMs (see Appendices 8 and 9 for relevant forms). Adhering to the ethical guidelines of the British Psychological Society (2021a), I visited each school to address participant inquiries. Following these preparations, dates were confirmed for ISC sessions and follow-up interviews with PPs.

4.4.2. Focus Child

For the purposes of this research, the term focus child refers to a child with SEMH needs who will be discussed during the ISC session. While no data was collected from these individuals, the following selection criteria was used:

- Primary aged children (4 to 11 years old).
- Recognised SEMH needs by school staff and parents/carers.
- The headteacher and/or SENDCo will agree that the focus child is *"...withdrawn or isolated...displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained."* SEND CoP (DfE, 2015, p. 98)

Below, a brief description of the needs of the focus children is provided. The children are presented in a random order, and details have been kept brief to protect their anonymity.

- Focus Child A: A primary aged pupil who struggles to regulate their emotions and resolve conflicts with peers, often leading to disruptive behaviours or withdrawal.

- Focus Child B: A primary aged pupil who feels they cannot trust anyone at school and finds it difficult to open up about their feelings. Described as having low self-esteem and often feeling wronged by their peers, leading to increased isolation and withdrawal.

- Focus Child C: A primary-aged pupil who was previously a looked-after child, currently displaying disruptive behaviours both at home and at school.

- Focus Child D: A primary-aged pupil who is emotionally based school avoidant.

4.4.3. Participants

The term 'participant' refers specifically to PPs and CMs and not the focus child.

Sampling Methods. All three schools recruited through opportunity sampling were mainstream primary schools. Multiple schools were chosen to distribute the demands, facilitate the inclusion of different adults in each circle and explore more diverse participant experiences. Four ISC sessions were conducted: one each at schools A and B and two at school C, an all-through school with a broader pool of adults and children to draw from. Table 4.1 provides some contextual information about the three schools included within this research.

Table 4.1.

A Table Showing Contextual Information about Schools Participating in This Research

School	Age Range	Phase of Education	School Type	Urban/Rural Description	Gender of Entry	Number of Pupils
School A	2 to 11	Primary	Academy Converter	Rural Town and Fringe	Mixed	198
School B	4 to 11	Primary	Academy Converter	Rural Town and Fringe	Mixed	405
School C	4 to 19	All-through	Free School	Urban City and Town	Mixed	1453

A total of four PPs and 18 CMs were included within this research all of whom were selected using purposive and volunteer sampling strategies. Purposive sampling was implemented collaboratively with the school SENDCo's using the inclusion criteria presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2.

A Table to Show Participant Inclusion Criteria

Problem Presenter	Circle Member
Works at the school	Works at the school
Knows the focus child well enough to discuss their SEMH difficulties	May or may not know or be known to the focus child
Willing to present the problem to the circle	Willing to partake in collaborative problem solving discussions

Circle Sizes. Inclusive Solutions does not specify the exact number of participants needed for ISC sessions. I chose to recruit one PP and four to six CMs per session, falling within Solution Circles' recommendation of five to nine individuals, as suggested by Forest and Pearpoint (1996). This decision also accommodated staffing concerns in schools, as managing no more than seven participants was deemed feasible. Moreover, Braun and Clarke (2016) advocate for flexibility in sample sizes, reinforcing my decision.

Table 4.3 details participant numbers in each circle. Despite session two falling short on CMs due to staffing issues, ethical considerations and Braun and Clarke's (2016) advocacy for sample size flexibility led to its inclusion in data analysis.

Table 4.3

A Table to Show the Number of Participants in Each Insights and Solutions Circle

Circle Number	1	2	3	4	Total
Number of PPs	1	1	1	1	**4**
Number of CMs	4	3	5	6	**18**

Sample Sizes. Four PPs participated in interviews and 18 CMs completed questionnaires. No data pertaining to participant characteristics was collected to minimise the risk of identifying participants.

The concept of saturation, as originally proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) for the purposes of Grounded Theory, suggests that sample size should be determined with regards to deductions that the addition of any more participants would not provide additional contributions towards data analysis. However, Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 28) refer to such an approach as being *"deeply problematic"*. Saturation of data is underpinned by a positivist stance where themes are not considered to be constructed but rather revealed. As such, I did not use the concept of saturation to determine my sample size.

Instead, Braun and Clarke (2022) encourage those using RTA to consider Malterud et al.'s (2016) idea of information power to determine sample size. Within this, items such as: research aims, sample specificity, the existence of established theory, quality of dialogue and analysis strategy are utilised instead. During supervision and personal reflection, I utilised Malterud et al.'s (2016) information power items to consider the following:

- Whilst my aims of exploring school staff experiences was broad, the use of ISC with school staff to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs narrowed the focus, thus reducing the required sample size.
- There was greater sample specificity with PPs in comparison to CMs suggesting obtaining a smaller sample size of PPs may be suitable.
- As this research did not seek to engage in cross-case analysis between participant groups, a large sample size was considered not to be required.
- Due to limited theory underpinning ISC, a larger sample size may enhance information power. However, due to the openness of participants particularly during interviews, the quality of dialogue was enhanced and consequently during supervision it was discussed that running fewer ISC sessions may provide a starting point within this exploratory research.

From these reflections, I began to consider a small sample size suitable for my research. To determine the number, I consulted Kemp's (2020) doctoral research to consider what sample sizes have previously been used within similar explorations of group consultation models. Within this work, a total of five circles were run, with five PPs being interviewed at two time points. Consequently, I initially utilised supervision to deduce that implementing five circles would be suitable for my research focus. However, due to recruitment difficulties, the actual number of ISC sessions implemented was four. Using (Braun & Clarke, 2021c) considerations

of research as a pragmatic activity determined by time and resource availability, I decided that a sample of four ISC sessions was sufficient in the interest of adhering to my research timeline and minimising pressures placed upon the three schools.

4.4.4. *Preparation*

I received guidance from Inclusive Solutions by observing a remote ISC session and clarifying procedures in a meeting with their representative. Before starting ISC sessions, I briefed the GF, an assistant EP, on their role. Furthermore, the GF was tasked with preparing the paper rolls for the graphic component of the sessions. I had the opportunity to facilitate an ISC session in a non-participating school before conducting this research, which also informed this preparation phase. During this session, I worked collaboratively with school staff to support a child who was perceived to be socially isolated from his peers.

4.4.5. *The Intervention Process*

Once consent was obtained from parents/carers, CMs and PPs, Newton and Wilson's (2013) ISC sessions were implemented. Roles included PF (held by myself), GF (held by an assistant EP), PP and CMs (see role details table 2.1 and in Appendix 10). Figure 4.1 illustrates an operational model of the ISC process, while Appendix 11 outlines its stages and timings and Appendix 12 provides an overview sheet given to participants. Appendix 13 lists resources needed for sessions. Appendix 35 outlines the intervention process in comparison to Solution Circles and Circle of Adults.

Figure 4.1

A Figure to Show an Operational Model of the Insights and Solutions Circle Process

Setting the Stage	Problem Presentation	Questions Asked	Theories Shared	Strategies Listed	Dialogue	Next Steps	Round of Words
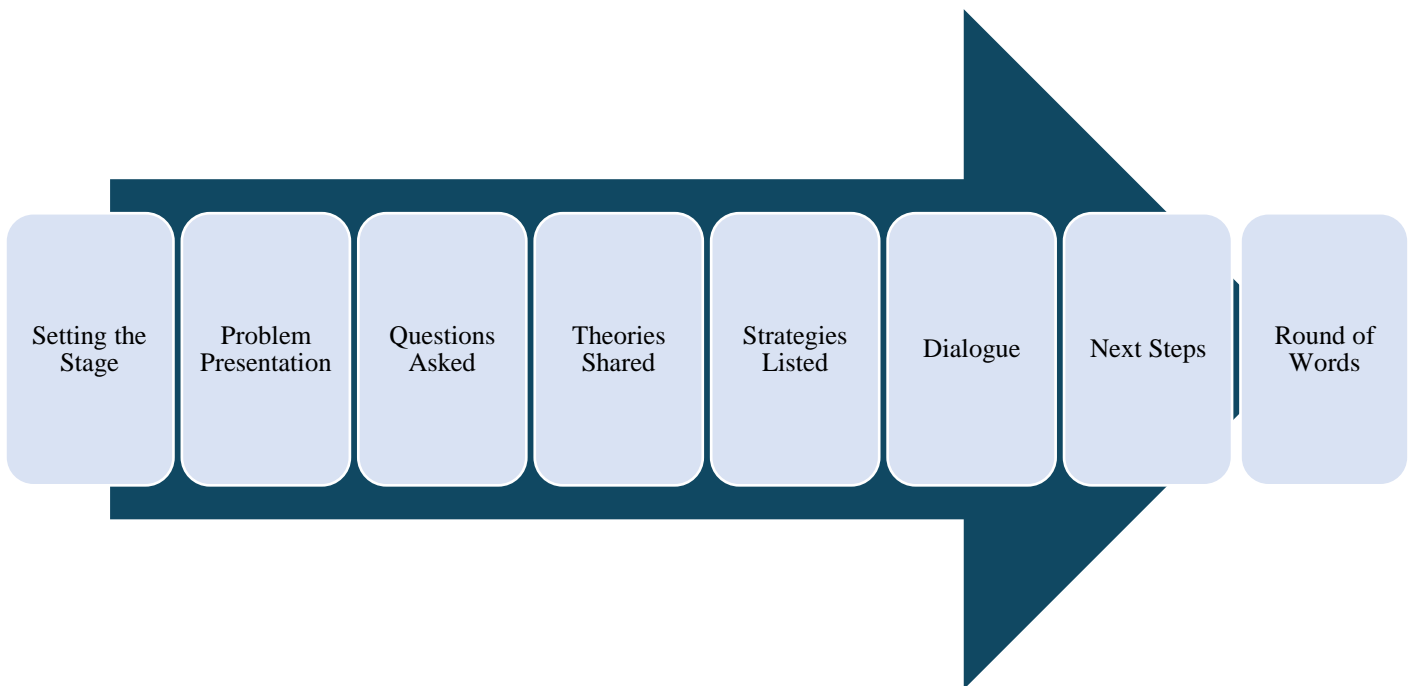
4.4.6. *Insights and Solutions Circle Sessions*

At the start of each ISC session, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw at any point and the session structure was outlined using an information sheet (refer to Appendix 12). Sessions were conducted in a circular seating arrangement, with myself (the PF), PP and CMs seated together facing the GF. Sessions typically lasted 50 to 60 minutes but varied slightly based on participant needs (refer to Appendix 14 for a session graphic). All participants were debriefed at the end of the session (refer to Appendix 15) and CMs completed questionnaires post-session (refer to Appendix 16).

Session one took place in a school staff room with measures taken to increase confidentiality, such as placing a sign on the door and informing others that the room was in use. Session two faced staffing challenges but proceeded as detailed in section 4.4.3. Sessions three and four occurred in a classroom, each lasting around 50 minutes. Reflections after each session guided subsequent improvements (refer to Appendix 17).

4.4.7. Data Collection

Questionnaires. Questionnaires (see Appendix 16) were given to CMs post-ISC sessions. PPs did not complete the questionnaire to reduce demands, as they were scheduled to participate in interviews. The questionnaire design was influenced by Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) research on participant reflections in similar contexts. Questionnaires took around 10 minutes to complete.

The decision to use questionnaires with CMs instead of interviews was guided by logistical convenience for schools, anticipated higher participation rates and considerations of dataset richness. Braun and Clarke (2021b, 2022) highlight the flexibility of RTA in analysing datasets from various methods. They note that while interviews provide detailed "*thicker*" data, questionnaires offer "*thinner*" data but when in larger quantities, contribute to data richness. The use of open-ended questions in the questionnaires aimed to effectively capture diverse perspectives.

The questionnaire contained five open-ended questions about strengths, challenges, valuable elements, lessons learned and participation impacts. Additional space allowed CMs to share unaddressed thoughts or reflections. Due to concerns about response influence, the GF and I left the room for 10-15 minutes during questionnaire completion in the last two sessions.

Interviews. Interviews with PPs occurred one to two weeks post-ISC to allow time for reflection and to overcome scheduling conflicts, such as my university commitments and participant holidays.

The use of semi-structured interviews provided flexibility in exploring participant experiences and perspectives while ensuring key topics were covered. This format allowed for a deeper understanding of each participant's viewpoint compared to focus groups (Harrell & Bradley, 2009). My interview schedule (see Appendix 18) included pre-prepared questions, but new questions were formed based on PP responses, aligning with Patton's (2014) advice on flexible scheduling for focused yet insightful interviews.

The interviews were conducted in person at each PP's school to promote comfort and openness (Denscombe, 2010; Galletta 2014). They took place in quiet, designated spaces to minimise disruptions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012) and were recorded using a portable voice recorder, lasting approximately one hour.

Providing participants with the interview schedule before the interview, as suggested by Seidman (2006), aimed to increase transparency, participant confidence and comfort. PPs were informed that the questions were prompts and that some questions may be omitted or new ones added based on their responses, enhancing informed consent. Providing the schedule right before the interview prevented participants from preparing answers, preserving the interview's semi-structured nature.

Following the first interview, I reflected that the participant appeared reliant upon the interview schedule as they kept looking at it throughout the interview. This may have disrupted the natural flow of the interview and limited the participants responses. As such, in the subsequent interviews, the interview schedule was given to participants initially and then taken away before the interview began.

There were numerous strategies I incorporated within my interviews to encourage participants to be increasingly open. Firstly, I attempted to show active listening through non-verbal cues (e.g., nodding and maintaining eye contact) and verbal cues (e.g., saying "I see") to demonstrate interest in what was being said (Kvale, 1996). I used open-ended questions throughout to encourage participants to discuss their experiences in more depth (Merriam & Tisdell, 2021). I utilised reflective statements that summarised and rephrased what was shared, not only to demonstrate understanding but also to encourage more information and clarity on what was said (Kvale, 1996). I used the ISC information sheet, which provided a simplified version of the ISC process, as a visual aid to prompt discussions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

The interview questions were refined during supervision and during and after the interviews, resulting in the use of fewer questions and more reflective statements. Each interview concluded with a debrief (refer to Appendix 19) outlining data usage and reaffirming participants' right to withdraw.

4.4.8. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was secured from the University of Nottingham's Ethics Committee, aligning with guidelines such as the British Psychological Society's (2021a) Code of Human Research Ethics, the British Psychological Society's (2021b) Code of Ethics and Conduct, the University of Nottingham's (2023) Code of Research Conduct and Research Ethics and the Council of the European Union's (2016) General Data Protection Regulation.

Informed consent procedures included tailored information sheets and consent forms (see Appendices 7 to 9), distributed to parents/carers and participants. Open communication channels were established, emphasising voluntary participation and addressing queries during pre-ISC sessions and initial meetings with SENDCos.

I adeptly managed my responsibilities as a TEP, PF and researcher, ensuring clear communication of their differences. SENDCos, participants and parents/carers were informed of their right to withdraw at various stages, with reassurance that their decision would not impact future support. Discussions with school staff emphasised respecting participants' and parents/carers' autonomy in this regard.

Measures to protect individuals from harm included selecting the focus child where there was an existing understanding of their SEMH needs, briefing on the discussion of emotional topics during the ISC session, establishing ground rules, offering post-session support information and limiting repeated exposure by only allowing participants to join one ISC session.

Anonymity measures ensured data protection through anonymous questionnaire completion and secure data storage protocols, minimising identifiable information.

Confidentiality protocols involved pre-session meetings with SENDCos to discuss the presence of any confidential information, emphasis placed on confidentiality rules during ISC sessions, with limited exceptions for action plans, feedback to parents/carers and safeguarding concerns.

Regarding the use of a commercial product, transparent communication with Inclusive Solutions ensured no cost involvement, limited data access and inclusion of all findings in research outcomes, with access to findings only being granted post-thesis completion.

4.5. Reflexive Thematic Analysis

4.5.1. Decisions within the Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Firstly, the choice of analysis approach was a key consideration, weighing between inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) approaches. Braun and Clarke (2022) explain that inductive methods develop themes from data, while deductive methods use existing theory. Typically, analyses combine aspects of both methods (Braun & Clarke, 2019,

2021a, 2022). Given the limited research on ISC and group problem solving more generally, an inductive approach was favoured for this study. Initial codes were open-coded without theoretical ties, aligning with Braun and Clarke's (2022) suggestion for richer data descriptions and capturing participants' intended meanings. Deductive analysis was later used to connect open codes with the research questions (Byrne, 2022).

Secondly, I needed to consider whether to engage in semantic or latent coding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Semantic codes are derived from analysis that considers meaning at an explicit or surface level. Byrne (2022, p. 1397) suggests that this provides a more *"descriptive analysis of data."* Conversely, latent coding considers the impact of meanings or underlying assumptions that may guide what has been said. Since I viewed language as intentional in this research, it was important that my data coding aligned with this perspective. Therefore, I mainly chose to utilise semantic coding in this research. However, instances where latent coding was applied, these items may have been double-coded to capture both the semantic meaning conveyed explicitly by the participant and the latent meaning as a product of my interpretations (Byrne, 2022; Patton, 1990).

Finally, I considered whether my approach to analysis would be more experiential or critical (Braun & Clarke, 2022). An experiential orientation prioritises participant experiences, considering the meaning they ascribe to what is being researched and how meaningful they consider it to be. Conversely, a critical orientation focuses analysis on the theoretical underpinning that language constructs reality rather than reflects it and allows researchers to consider the influence of social contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Terry & Hayfield, 2017). As this research sought to explore PP and CM experiences of participating within a group problem solving approach, an experiential orientation to data analysis was considered the best fit.

4.5.2. *Phases of Analysis*

Braun and Clarke (2022) characterise RTA as a multi-phase, recursive process. They provide guidelines that need not be strictly adhered to in a linear fashion. This flexible, iterative six-phase process is thought to support researchers in analysing data, as well as learning about the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). What follows is an outline of how these six phases were used within this research.

Phase One: Familiarisation with the Dataset. Braun and Clarke (2022) outline that this phase involves familiarising oneself with the dataset through the process of immersion. Once I had conducted my interviews and collected my questionnaires, I began the familiarisation phase by repeatedly listening to interviews and reading over questionnaires (see Appendix 20 and 21 for familiarisation notes). I then immersed myself within the interviews further by repeatedly re-listening to them and transcribing them verbatim (Braun & Clarke, 2006) (see Appendix 22 for transcript excerpt).

Once transcription was completed for all interviews, I printed off copies of my transcripts and re-read them numerous times while listening to audio-recordings. As I re-listened, I made notes on the physical transcripts considering analytical ideas and preliminary codes I had noticed now that I had listened to all recordings. Similarly, I made notes on the questionnaires regarding insights I was noticing because of immersing myself within participant data. To encourage reflexivity, I also made notes about my own thoughts and feelings about the data analysis process and the data itself. Some of my preliminary notes taken at this phase can be viewed in Appendix 23 and 24.

Reflexivity excerpt:

As I get to know the datasets, I'm overwhelmed by how much data there is. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe this phase as immersion and that's exactly how it feels—a deep dive into questionnaires and audio recordings. Transcribing each interview word for word, I see how important it is to capture every detail of what participants say. It takes time, but it's crucial for understanding their experiences and perspectives deeply. I find myself going over interviews multiple times as a routine. Working with the questionnaires is faster and I think most Circle Members are honest in their responses. Using questionnaires has been helpful in managing my workload at this stage, which I'm happy about.

Phase Two: Coding. The next phase involved labelling any data items that are relevant to the research questions using a more formal coding process. Within this phase, it was important that I worked through the entire datasets (interviews and questionnaires), giving equal consideration to all areas of the data. While I wanted codes to be brief to facilitate the formation of an organised and manageable coding system, I refrained from making them too

brief that the richness and depth of data were compromised (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Byrne, 2022). I completed coding for all the interviews first and subsequently for questionnaires.

I completed this process using line-by-line coding, where interviewer utterances were not coded. Repeated iterations of coding were implemented to improve the quality of the coding process to ensure codes possessed sufficient context and all data that related to the research questions were coded. As suggested by Braun and Clarke (2022), interview and questionnaire data were also considered in reverse order to facilitate the construction of further interpretations.

As recommended by Byrne (2022), progression of coding was achieved by maintaining records of coding evolution utilising Microsoft Excel (see Appendix 25 for excerpt). This was done to aid coding transparency and to document my thought progression as my thinking evolved with further data familiarisation. After up to four coding iterations, final codes and corresponding data segments were compiled into two Microsoft Excel sheets (see Appendix 26 for excerpt).

> **Reflexivity excerpt:**
>
> Navigating Phase Two brings challenges and insights, following Braun and Clarke (2012) and Byrne's (2022) focus on balanced and deep coding practices. I aim to balance brevity and rich data, grappling with fears of oversimplifying versus needing a clear coding system. Going through coding cycles helps codes evolve while keeping enough context. However, this process is taking longer than expected and I am concerned about timing constraints. I plan to discuss these concerns in supervision to ensure I stay on track.

Phase Three: Generating Themes. At this phase, my focus shifted from considering individual data items within the interviews and questionnaires to aggregating meaning across the datasets. (Please note, interview and questionnaire data were kept separate as they addressed different research questions.) To achieve this, I printed off codes and began to physically sort them into candidate themes (see Appendix 27).

Here, codes that were considered to relate to a specific topic in connection with the research question were compiled together. Braun and Clarke (2022) present this as an active process, where I constructed themes utilising the data, the research questions and my own

insights. This process involved collapsing multiple codes where there was a shared concept into a single code and there were instances where codes represented broader insights and were promoted to a theme. At this phase, it was important for me to note that the number of codes within a theme did not determine its salience but rather the pattern of the code or the data items themselves (Braun & Clarke, 2012). As suggested by Byrne (2022), I created a miscellaneous theme where codes that did not fit into these initial themes were stored.

Reflexivity excerpt:

Moving into Phase Three is a big change in how I analyse the data. I'm shifting from looking at small details to finding bigger themes across all the information. This phase requires me to see the connections and patterns that answer the main research questions. Sorting the codes into themes feels like solving a puzzle—it's organised but also creative. Braun and Clarke (2022) talk about actively creating themes, using not just data but also my own ideas. It's interesting to see how my experience as a teacher is guiding my interpretations. Some parts are tricky, like putting many codes into clear themes and figuring out which themes are most important based on patterns, not just how many times they appear.

Phase Four: Reviewing Candidate Themes. This phase involved consideration of whether my candidate themes fit with the data items and the dataset as a whole, while considering their relevance to the research question. To support this, I utilised reviewing questions proposed by Braun and Clarke (2012) (see Appendix 28). A dual-level review of the analysis was employed:

1. Reviewing the relationship among data items and codes that form the candidate themes.
2. Reviewing candidate themes in relation to the dataset as a whole and how well they answer the research questions.

To achieve this, I printed off and reviewed my Microsoft Excel sheets containing codes and data segments alongside the original questionnaires and interviews. Following this, two thematic maps were produced (see Figure 5.1 and 5.2, chapter 5).

Phase Five: Defining and Naming Themes. Patton's (1990) dual criteria suggest that each theme should provide an internally consistent account of the data that cannot be obtained from the other themes. Moreover, all themes should collectively form a narrative about the

whole dataset that is directly related to the research questions. To support this, I re-read codes and data items within each theme to consider whether themes told an individual story, whether data items, codes and overall themes linked together cohesively to represent the entire data set and to what extent the themes answered the research questions. See Appendix 29 and 30 for theme names and related codes.

Additionally, I wrote a brief synopsis of each theme and decided on informative, memorable names for each of the themes (see Appendix 31 and 32). At this phase, I also began to consider which data items I was likely to use within my results write-up (Byrne, 2022). I considered data items that provided a rich account of the narrative represented within the theme and ensured multiple items were chosen to demonstrate the variety of expressions and the cohesion within the theme.

> **Reflexivity excerpt:**
>
> Naming themes is both creative and purposeful, aiming for names that are clear, memorable and reflect the theme's main story. At the same time, I start thinking about how to write up the results, focusing on data that vividly captures each theme's essence and shows the narrative's diversity and unity well. Coming up with impactful names is challenging because they need to accurately represent the themes and grab readers' attention while showing the depth of insights in each theme.

Phase Six: Writing up. Informal writing began with reflexive journaling and with my notes recorded during the familiarisation phase. However, more formalised writing began at phase three where revisions were made as I engaged with the recursive phases of RTA.

4.5.3. *Supporting Research Quality*

Traditional criteria for validity, reliability and generalisability are considered less relevant to qualitative research due to differing epistemological groundings and research aims (Braun & Clarke, 2022). However, it remains essential for qualitative research to ensure quality and trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To support this, I drew upon Yardley's (2017) procedures for ensuring the quality of qualitative research, including: context sensitivity, commitment and rigour, transparency and coherence and impact and importance.

Context Sensitivity. Yardley (2017) highlights the importance of contextual considerations in enhancing qualitative research quality. In this study, participant demographic details were omitted to protect their identities due to the small sample size. To ensure anonymity, contextual data such as participant role, length of time at the school, total experience in education, direct involvement with the child, gender, and other relevant characteristics were not collected.

While the omission of this information was deemed necessary for confidentiality, it is important to acknowledge that these factors could have influenced the participants' experiences and perceptions within the ISC sessions. For instance, the role of a participant (e.g., teacher, teaching assistant), their tenure at the school, and their overall experience in the education sector could shape their contributions and engagement during the sessions. Additionally, whether or not a participant had direct involvement with the child in question might affect their insights and the relevance of their input.

Instead, a comprehensive literature review was conducted prior to the ISC implementation and data collection to provide necessary contextual background. The recruitment process was well documented in the research procedure. Participant perspectives were captured through tools like questionnaires for CMs and semi-structured interviews for PPs. Additionally, I employed reflexive journaling, supervision and peer discussions to critically evaluate how the research context may influence participant perspectives and my data interpretation, acknowledging my own positionality and vested interest in the research topic.

Commitment and Rigour. I ensured commitment and rigour in this research by employing Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA. I enhanced my proficiency through supervision, online RTA workshops, relevant publications, regular use of my reflexive journal and participation in a peer RTA support group. I allowed sufficient time for data analysis, engaging in the recursive process of RTA to construct and refine codes and themes over a few months. Throughout the data analysis, I created an audit trail to continually review and refine my analytical decisions.

Coherence and Transparency. I ensured transparency and quality throughout my research. This was achieved through clear consideration of ontological and epistemological foundations, documented data collection methods and recorded data analysis processes in my

reflexive journal and appendices (Mays & Pope, 2000). Transparency extended to addressing data outliers and refining analysis through exploration of *"negative cases"* (Byrne, 2022; Mays & Pope, 2000). I maintained an audit trail and showcased rich data examples in the results chapter to capture the essence of the themes. Reflexive practices were key, occurring during supervision, peer support groups and individual journaling to consider assumptions and guide research practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Nadin & Cassell, 2006).

Impact and Importance. The impact and importance of this research were demonstrated by identifying the limited existing research on group consultation models and the lack of exploration into participants' experiences with ISC. The research findings will be disseminated to participants, allowing them to access the implications. Further considerations about the impact and importance will be discussed in chapter 6.

4.6. Summary of Methodology

This chapter outlined the ontological and epistemological underpinnings of this research. An overview of the ISC process, methods of recruitment, data collection and analysis were presented. I provided justification for why RTA was selected and explained how the phases of RTA were utilised. Ethical considerations and strategies for enhancing the quality and trustworthiness of this research were also discussed.

Chapter Five: Research Themes

5.1.   Introduction to Research Themes

In chapter four, I detailed Braun and Clarke's (2022) six phases of RTA. Now, I will discuss the themes developed using RTA, focusing on phase six (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This chapter is titled 'Research Themes' and not 'Research Findings' to highlight that themes have been co-constructed by both myself and participants and not merely discovered (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Six themes were constructed to explore research question one: 'Gaining a Holistic Picture of the Focus Child', 'Embracing Effective Strategies', 'Feeling Understood and Supported', 'Needing Structure', 'Feeling Misunderstood' and 'Needing Time and Space for Next Steps'.

Three themes were constructed to explore research question two: 'Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child', 'Empowering Professional Development' and 'Valuing Diverse Voices.

Four PPs (PP01-PP04) and 18 CMs (CM01-CM18) took part in this study, each randomly assigned a unique identification code.

5.2.   Research Question One

Research question one sought to answer the following question: How do PPs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?

This section presents six themes constructed from the PP interview data (refer to Figure 5.1 for the related thematic map and Appendix 31 for a synopsis of themes). See Appendix 33 for excerpts from my reflexivity journal related to this research question.

Figure 5.1

A Thematic Map Related to Research Question One
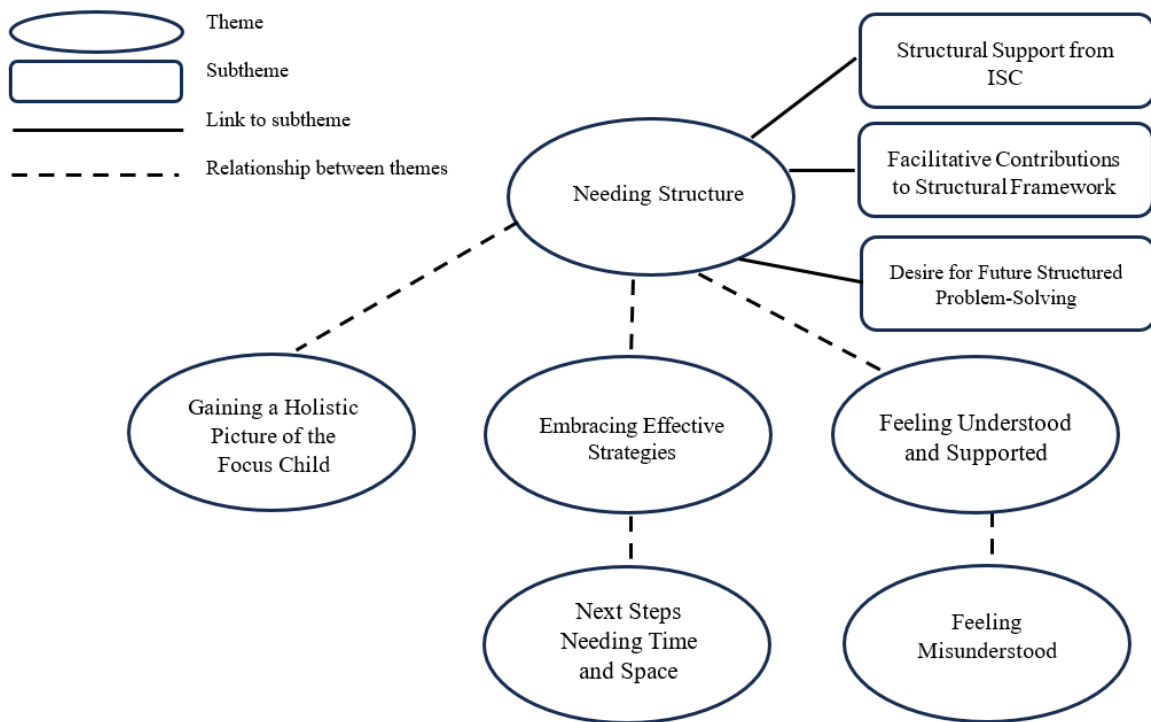
Note. In this figure, relationships between the themes are illustrated using dotted lines. The themes 'Gaining a Holistic Picture of the Focus Child,' 'Embracing Effective Strategies,' and 'Feeling Understood and Supported' are linked to the theme 'Needing Structure.' Problem Presenters found that success in the first three themes was facilitated by following a structured approach within the ISC sessions. The theme 'Needing Structure' is comprised of three subthemes (as indicated by the solid lines). Problem presenters experienced difficulties within the sessions, highlighting the themes of 'Feeling Misunderstood' and 'Next Steps Needing Time and Space'.

5.2.1. Theme One: Gaining a Holistic Picture of the Focus Child

This theme centres on the notion that participating in ISC facilitated PPs in gaining a holistic insight into the focus child.

> *I think the biggest benefit for us is having that time to really unpack, you know what the problem is. (PP02)*

PPs expressed the value they placed on having the opportunity to discuss the child during the ISC sessions. In the statement above, PP02 encapsulates this sentiment, emphasising the benefit derived from the dedicated time for unpacking and thoroughly understanding the nature of the problem. This suggests that PP02 valued space and time to discuss problems experienced for an individual child. It is implied that time to explore difficulties within a group setting was often not available, perhaps due to time pressures experienced by school staff.

Beyond this problem description, PPs regularly expressed the notion that ISC allowed them the chance to move beyond the immediate problem(s) to contemplate the underlying reasons behind the observed behaviours. Through this thoughtful reflection, they considered that their understanding of the child deepened.

> *I was just hoping or expecting to get some ideas around the child and what I could put in place which I did, but it was a lot more than that. It was more in depth with the sort of picking apart the problems and the issues and just going about it in a real meaty way, the whys [and] having the time and the expertise and the conversations around the whys. (PP01)*

PP01 acknowledged that ISC surpassed their initial expectations by not only offering strategies for supporting the focus child but also delving into the root causes of the presented difficulties. This suggests the PP valued the opportunity for CMs to explore the "*whys*" behind the challenges, emphasising the importance of dedicated time, expertise and meaningful conversations in understanding the root causes. I interpreted this to imply that the essence of moving beyond the problem within ISC extended beyond CMs merely presenting PPs with solutions. Instead, it also involved engaging in a collaborative process of hypothesising and collectively developing the PP's understanding to a deeper and more nuanced level.

> *I loved listening to their theories as they started to say what they think could be underpinning [the problem] especially because I've got quite a lot of the history. So actually their questions and how they were thinking about the situation made me look at it a little bit different and it gave me those new avenues to explore which we're doing. (PP04)*

Here, PP04 outlined how actively listening to the theories proposed by various CMs prompted them to contemplate the "*situation*" from different perspectives. It is implied that the extensive "*history*" PP04 shares with the focus child has presented a challenge in identifying new and alternative hypotheses, potentially influencing their approach. I inferred from this that when others offered their interpretations, it allowed PP04 to take a step back, fostering a deeper understanding and encouraging an alternative exploration of the situation. This not only suggests the value of allowing CMs the space to contribute their theories but also may provide justification for the value of not allowing PPs to present their own hypotheses or accept or reject presented hypotheses at this stage.

> *I think initially afterwards it really made me kind of study him a lot more and think about causes. Something else that had been mentioned about [specific hypothesis relevant to the focus child detailed here]…that wasn't something I'd necessarily seen as a big thing so it made me kind of fine tune more into those kind of things… (PP03)*

PP03's insight suggests that the introduction of alternative hypotheses by CMs not only sparked a heightened awareness but also prompted a more detailed analysis of the focus child's actions. The participant expresses a newfound diligence in studying the child's behaviour, particularly focusing on the specific hypothesis. This shift in attention suggests a transformative impact on the PP's perception, as they now acknowledge the significance of aspects they had previously overlooked.

5.2.2. *Theme Two: Embracing Effective Strategies*

PPs regularly expressed their positive experiences of ISC in allowing them to identify and develop ways forward. This was discussed in terms of the generation and generalisation of strategies.

> *[It was] really good for us to spend that amount of time talking about a child that we would not have spent that amount of time with normally. I think that's why we purposely chose him…there's lots of children whose needs are high, but we spend a lot of time on those already. (PP02)*

PP02 suggested that focusing on the selected child for ISC allowed them to consider strategies for a child with SEMH needs who might otherwise lack such support. The mention

of other children with high needs implies schools were under increased pressure to assist such students, perhaps limiting resources for preventative measures with those considered to have lower needs. Therefore, suggesting that ISC could serve as an early intervention for SEMH support.

> *...[ISC is] positive and [it is] good to be able to have sort of next steps to work on with [the focus child] and put in place…There were a sort of a couple of little steps to do initially with the child…(PP01)*

> *...the strategies [were] really helpful. I guess essentially that was what I came in with the hope that would be achieved so because there were some strategies in there that I thought, yeah, we could definitely implement these…I think that worked really well. (PP03)*

> *...when you're talking about [strategies for] one child, you think, OK, I'm going to do that with others. (PP04)*

Both PP01 and PP03 expressed positive experiences related to the formulation of strategies during the ISC session to support the focus child. PP01's reference to "*a couple of little steps*" and PP03's assertion that they would "*definitely implement*" the strategies suggest that the PPs not only positively received the generation of next steps but also appreciated the development of realistic and manageable actions. PP04 extended these positive experiences to imply that ISC not only provided support for the focus child but also suggested ways forward for other children with SEMH needs.

> *...I think for [CM's name] being an assistant head she taught him back in key stage one I think for her that probably will help her if I'm not in and she's needing to talk to [the focus child] about a significant event, she'll probably now approach it in a different way…(PP02)*

PP02 specifically references the positive influence on a CM, suggesting that the ISC experience enhanced their ability to engage in meaningful conversations, particularly when addressing significant events, even in the absence of PP02. I interpreted an implication of this to be that ISC may not only facilitate the formulation of individualised strategies for the PP to

implement but also contribute to a broader shift within the educational community towards more collective and effective approaches to supporting children with SEMH needs.

5.2.3. Theme Three: Feeling Understood and Supported

This theme highlighted the connection between ISC participation and PPs feeling understood and supported by other CMs. This theme emphasised shared responsibility for the focus child and reduced feelings of isolation, attributing these positive feelings to specific elements within the ISC process.

> *[ISC was] really beneficial. As a teacher, I think that you can feel really alone if you haven't got other people around to support, to chip in with their opinions and ideas and experiences. (PP03)*

Here, PP03 referred to how common feelings of isolation experienced by teachers were alleviated during the ISC session. This was achieved by others sharing their experiences and ideas. This suggests that through collaboration with others, PP03 felt less alone and subsequently understood and supported by their colleagues. I interpreted this to suggest that instances where teachers are exposed to others who have experienced similar situations can foster a sense of shared understanding, promoting not only a supportive community but also an environment conducive to mutual growth and learning.

> *...It felt like you were sharing the responsibility especially in this case when it's so intense with parents and him not being in. It was really nice to get other people and being able to share how you feel about it and how actually it is really tricky... (PP04)*

Discussions with both PP03 and PP04 shared a common thread, as both participants described a sense of diminished isolation stemming from direct engagement with other school staff and the establishment of shared responsibility. Additionally, PP04 emphasised how the opportunity to articulate their feelings played a key role in fostering a sense of being understood. This suggests that the provision of space during ISC for only the PP to speak not only allowed PP04 to share pertinent background information, but also served as a crucial platform for expressing their emotions, possibly contributing to increased feelings of being understood.

[Not speaking during problem presenting] it makes [CMs] active listeners, doesn't it? And I think when you're not asking questions, you've got to sort of retain [and] think about those questions, haven't you? But you've got to properly listen…I think the fact that they knew they could ask questions when they got to that bit was really good. Because it was like their bit was gonna come afterwards, whereas sometimes when you listen to presentations, you sort of switch off a bit, don't you? But I didn't really feel that they did. (PP04)

In addition to facilitating the presentation of the focus child's background information and offering space for the PP's emotions during the problem presenting stage, PP04 suggested that this environment encourages CMs to actively listen. It can be inferred that this engagement and heightened focus supported CMs in formulating pertinent questions for the next stage, consequently deepening PP04's sense of being understood. The comparison between ISC and traditional "*presentations*" implies that ISC, in contrast, cultivates increased participation and subsequent questioning, potentially leading to heightened feelings of being understood and supported.

…I think also having those other people in the circle, although I might not work directly with them, they all have a role within education. They all have an understanding of working with children so I know that their input and their presence wouldn't be judgmental…I knew that because even though I might not know them personally, they're a familiar face and I know that they have training and experience with children. (PP03)

In the provided extract, PP03 expressed how the presence of familiar CMs contributed to feelings of being understood and supported during the ISC session. It may be inferred that familiarity with these CMs, along with their shared training and experience in working with children, created a non-judgmental, open atmosphere. Coupled with this lack of judgment from CMs, PP03's assurance that input from CMs is informed by expertise may be indicative of a culture of mutual respect and empathy amongst familiar colleagues. This implies the benefits of including CMs from the same school in the ISC session.

[ISC] kind of triangulates - the problem presenter speaks and then you've got the graphics which echoes that, but then you've got [CMs] coming in with their theories, which also reaffirms that. So, yeah, I think it is quite important because otherwise I

could have come away from it going, oh that was misinterpreted or I didn't quite get that point across. And whilst there were parts in there where I couldn't speak, my role was to listen, hearing what they were saying, I could say like no, they understand me. (PP03)

Here, PP03 referred to how alongside the space to present the problem, the use of graphics and time for CMs to theorise increased feelings of being understood and reaffirmed existing ideas held by the PP. The "*triangulation*" or repetition of ideas may have reinforced the PP's thinking, encouraging feelings of validation of existing practice and/or thinking. PP03 acknowledged that the presence of space where they too could not speak encouraged them to listen to others and having this space may have supported them in acknowledging they were being understood by others.

[A strength was] the fact that as a group we got to the all the things that I thought you know were potentially the cause of [the behaviours]. Yeah, I think I'd have found that hard if there was something that I thought was really important and it hadn't been mentioned. (PP02)

Based on PP02's insights, it is apparent that when theories held by the PP are deliberated and presented by CMs, it can contribute to an elevated sense of being understood by others. This interpretation implies that while ISC is designed to aid in the development of solutions for the benefit of the focus child, it may concurrently serve as a process through which the thoughts and feelings held by PPs find validation.

5.2.4. *Theme Four: Needing Structure*

This theme was developed under the premise that PPs experienced positivity towards the use of a structured problem solving approach. Three subthemes constitute this theme, including ISC providing structure, facilitators aiding the structure and a desire for future structured problem solving.

Theme Four, Subtheme One: Structural Support from ISC. PPs expressed that ISC sessions offered a structured framework for their group problem solving interactions. The adherence to timings and the incorporation of visual graphics were identified as notable strengths of the process.

I think it logically went through each of those sections. To me, that kind of made sense. You need your opportunity to ask your questions after presenting in case people need clarification. (PP02)

...the format of [the session was clear] so you knew the problem was going to be presented...yeah, it was just really clearly explained and everybody's roles being outlined. (PP03)

In this context, PP02 and PP03 articulate the idea that adhering to a structured process for problem solving not only appeared "*clear*" and "*made sense,*" but also underpinned the systematic and methodical nature of ISC. PP02's emphasis on the logical progression within ISC reflects a preference for a methodical approach that encourages a deeper understanding of the problem context before delving into questions, thus implying that such structure facilitated a more nuanced problem solving experience. Moreover, PP03's perspective adds depth to the discussion by emphasising the practical benefits of having the session's structure outlined in advance. The acknowledgment of the predetermined structure, coupled with clearly defined roles within that structure, suggests that PP03 found comfort and utility in knowing the organisational framework beforehand. I interpreted this to imply that a pre-established structure may not only foster a sense of predictability but may also allow participants to navigate their roles with a clearer understanding, fostering a more efficient and purposeful problem solving environment within the ISC sessions.

I think it's good to have timings in place otherwise people can waffle but we want to move each of those sections forward. There's an ultimate aim to have a plan of action in place to support that child. If you didn't have your time in place, that very session could have easily added half an hour to it. Whether that half an hour would have added anything of value, that's your question, isn't it? (PP02)

PP02 expresses the importance of having specific timings to maintain the structured nature of ISC, thereby facilitating the accomplishment of the goal to generate an action plan. PP02 highlights that, in the absence of these predetermined timings, discussions could have extended beyond the allotted time, potentially resulting in sessions that were not significantly more beneficial. I interpreted this to imply that PP02 recognises the pivotal role that time management plays in ensuring the efficiency and effectiveness of ISC sessions. By

emphasising the potential for extended and less focused discussions without designated timings, PP02 suggests the practical necessity of adhering to a structured timeline.

> *[The use of a graphic] linked to this insight solution circle format. You could clearly see how it was all separated and it also gives you an idea of OK, so we started here, we've done one chunk and then there's the next chunk…(PP03)*

PP03 outlines how the visual graphic utilised during the ISC session supported adherence to and navigation of the ISC process. It is suggested that it allowed them to "*separate*" out the different sections and consider which "*chunk*" had been completed and what was next. I interpreted this to suggest that the visual aid not only served as a practical organisational tool but also enhanced PP03's value in the structured nature of ISC sessions. By visually breaking down the components of the session, PP03 found it easier to comprehend the sequence of tasks and actively engage in each stage of the problem solving process.

Theme Four, Subtheme Two: Facilitative Contributions to Structural Framework. I developed this subtheme after noticing a consistent pattern in the data, suggesting that participants viewed the role of external facilitators as crucial for implementing the structured framework of ISC.

> *…you [the PF] facilitated that discussion really. I mean, we led that discussion, we're the ones with the knowledge about [the focus child]. We wouldn't have kept to timings if you weren't there because we like to talk. (PP02)*

> *…I thought an EP came in, assessed a child and said they've got ADHD or they've got this. Sign it off. Have your medication if you want it. There's your label… it's not just simple as just saying yes, it's.... But yeah, I mean, wouldn't it be simple if you just said that child's got that and here's the magic fix. ISC is a lot more in depth and personal to that child and helpful. (PP01)*

> *You (the PF) sort of kept that structure. It's whether if an external person isn't there, then things like the asking the problem presenter more questions during or when they're meant to talk or... I don't know whether it would be as easy to stick to the structure. [With an external facilitator] it feels more formal and official. (PP04)*

PP02 articulates that, in my capacity as a PF, my primary role was to guide discussions during the session, acknowledging CMs and PPs as the ones possessing the "*knowledge.*" This suggests that PP02 viewed school staff as the experts within the session, while the PF's responsibility was to ensure adherence to the session's timings. Similarly, PP01 reflects evolving perspectives on the role of the EP, shifting from a more traditional and medically oriented model towards a collaborative approach. Although PP01 acknowledges the effectiveness of this increased collaboration, I interpreted a nuanced contradiction: while the non-expert role is well-received, there appears to be a recognition that EPs providing diagnoses and subsequent "*magic fix[es]*" are seen as "*simple,*" possibly indicating an awareness of the time pressures faced by school staff.

Similarly, PP04 recognises the pivotal role played by the PF in upholding the structural integrity of the session. According to PP04, the presence of an "*external*" PF contributes to a heightened sense of formality within the session, thereby encouraging attendees to conscientiously adhere to the predefined structural components. I interpreted this to suggest the PF may play a key role in shaping the dynamics of the session and promoting purposeful engagement with the structured components of the ISC process.

Theme Four, Subtheme Three: Desire for Future Structured Problem solving. Within this subtheme, it was constructed that positive experiences with the ISC process sparked a desire among all PPs to use structured problem solving approaches again in the future, in some capacity.

> *I can use this process with other children that I have in class now or in the future that have issues…and I guess even if I can't do it in the same way as in, I can't get those group of people together, it's given me a sort of a push to go to the SENDCo and ask for some time with her. (PP01)*

> *[It can be used for children with] communication and language difficulties. I think [ISC] would be quite useful for those attitudes towards learning. (PP03)*

In the aforementioned excerpts, PP01 and PP03 conveyed the notion that ISC sessions have broader applicability to other children. PP01 noted that, even if an identical version to the one implemented is not feasible, they have grown more confident in seeking support from

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colleagues to engage in more shared problem solving interactions. Furthermore, PP03 suggested that ISC can extend its utility beyond children with SEMH needs, becoming a valuable resource for supporting children facing challenges in other areas. Both PP01 and PP03 shared the perspective that ISC can be adapted and integrated to facilitate subsequent problem solving beyond the sessions in which they participated.

> *...sometimes when we have our [teaching assistant] meetings if it's them talking about their learners, they'll talk a lot but other people will start talking. So I think sometimes we do too much, so it's breaking it down but actually this structure is so good because you're involving everybody, even if you're not done talking, you've got to be listening to the questions, you've got to be offering theories as to why this is happening and I just think it's something that we need to do more of and I think we will try and do something like it. (PP04)*

> *...if I had the cash, it'd be [used with] lunchtime supervisors. They're the ones with the weakest connections to the children at times...doesn't matter how much training I do on our behaviour policy and how to approach [children]... I think it's just getting them to understand the complexities of these children, you know, rather than well, that's just [child's name] and he's just rude... (PP02)*

> *Definitely in the future would like to use [ISC]...because class teachers come all the time. [They say] they don't know what to do and then it's on you to give them all the answers. (PP04)*

PP04 suggested that ISC can be employed in the future to facilitate more structured conversations among TAs, ensuring that everyone's perspectives are considered and active listening is encouraged. This implies an acknowledgment of the value placed on structured dialogues among school staff to promote inclusivity and reduce dominance, especially concerning the individual presenting the issue. PP02's contemplation of how such an approach can be applied to lunchtime staff implies its relevance beyond teaching staff. I interpreted this as an indication of a desire for a consistent approach for all staff working with children experiencing SEMH difficulties. Lastly, PP04 proposed that this approach can be applied to teaching staff, aiming to shift the current dynamic from teachers solely seeking solutions from the PP to a more collaborative problem solving approach. These excerpts highlight the

adaptability of ISC across various school staff roles and the consistent consideration of schools' needs when contemplating the future application of such a framework.

5.2.5. *Theme Five: Feeling Misunderstood*

While theme three identified a pattern of PPs feeling understood and supported during ISC, a contradicting theme emerged among PPs indicating that they experienced feelings of being misunderstood during the ISC session.

> *The most difficult thing…the part where the rest of the people were feeding back and sometimes because they might have come up with theories and/or strategies and because I'd hadn't said something, I knew then that that wouldn't work, or actually we've done that. Because it was such a good thing to be able to do and listen to them, I didn't want them to waste any time talking about things that had already been done. But yeah, that was a little bit frustrating. (PP01)*

While PP01 acknowledges the value of listening to other CMs, frustration is conveyed regarding having to listen to theories and strategies that were not deemed correct or applicable for the focus child. PP01 recognises that these feelings of being misunderstood were, in part, a result of not providing important information and not being able to speak at specific points during the session. This instance highlights the complexity of the ISC dynamic, where the exchange of ideas and information may not always align with the PP's expectations, potentially leading to moments of perceived misunderstanding. I interpreted PP01's discussion here to reflect the value placed upon the ISC session, where instances of misunderstanding may result in feeling as though time is being wasted and not being used efficiently. These feelings may have been exacerbated by ISC's use of timings at each stage.

> *…I could hear certain things that people were saying and [I wanted to] just give them that little bit of information that's going to move on that point. I think that's the bit that I found…I suppose frustrating. (PP02)*

Similarly to PP01, PP02 expressed frustration when unable to provide additional information during the ISC session. This suggests they experienced feelings of being misunderstood due to limitations in sharing crucial details. PP02 emphasises the importance of efficient information exchange, highlighting that specific insights could significantly impact

the discussion. The frustration aligns with the sentiment that instances of misunderstanding or constraints on information flow may hinder the overall effectiveness of the ISC session.

> *...there are times where your problem presenter can't talk and if my group hadn't got the bits out that I wanted to I probably would have...still said it anyway when it got to the end...because it would have affected the next sections...I can see why it's there but I think there needs to be a point for me to add in missing information...particularly when you look at the theory side of things if the other staff hadn't got to that because I think the theories influence so much of everything else that you're putting in place. (PP02)*

PP02 expressed that, although CMs did eventually formulate theories held by them, they experienced apprehension and uncertainty about whether this achievement would occur. I interpreted this to suggest that PPs may feel misunderstood when other theories or strategies are suggested before their ideas are presented by CMs, indicating the necessity for PPs to have their views validated. Failing to do so may risk PPs feeling that the effectiveness of subsequent stages has been compromised. PP02 further expresses that if these feelings had persisted, they would have deviated from the ISC process to assert their input, implying the importance they place on others hearing and understanding them. PP02 emphasises the need for ISC to include space for the PP to add additional information to reduce instances of being misunderstood.

5.2.6. *Theme Six: Next Steps Needing Time and Space*

Whilst theme two considered the embracement of effective strategies, a further theme constructed from PP data was based upon experiences that more time was required to consider and implement agreed next steps.

> *It was tricky to identify the next steps...It was almost like I needed a little bit more time to really think and process what would be effective and practical and consider everything...(PP03)*

In the discussion above, PP03 mentioned how challenging it was to select appropriate next steps suggested by CMs. PP03 expressed they needed more time to think about what would work best, implying the importance of taking a step back to consider the potential impact and practical feasibility of the strategies carefully. This suggests that deciding on the next steps

was a complicated process and taking the time to think things through was crucial for making the right choices.

This sentiment of requiring more time to contemplate the next steps extended beyond the ISC session. PPs also mentioned that right after the session, they needed time to reflect on what had been discussed either individually or in collaboration with their colleagues.

> *…I definitely needed that time afterwards. To go back and teach would have been quite tough because actually you wanted to do things with all those ideas… (PP04)*

> *…I stepped back in the classroom and it was back to the children and then it just pushes it [ISC] out your head and you're trying to still think about…I think I was a little bit flustered, a little bit stressed, but that wasn't due to the [Insights and] Solution Circle that was due to what I had to go and do afterwards. I felt like if I'd have had that time to sit and think and maybe even time to sit with those people…and have a chat about it together and continue with those discussions really informally…(PP03)*

> *…that's school life and you kind of move on….new day, new set of issues, isn't it usually? (PP02)*

From the excerpts above, I interpreted that dedicated time and space for PP reflection was crucial for translating the insights gained during the ISC session into practical actions. PP04's mention of the difficulty in immediately returning to teaching indicates the need for a transitional period to process and internalise the discussed ideas. On the other hand, PP03's desire for informal discussions with colleagues suggests the importance of collaborative reflection, potentially allowing for a more comprehensive exploration of potential strategies. PP02 refers to how other pressures and "*issues*" interfered with their capacity to reflect upon discussions and agreed next steps. I interpreted this to suggest the value of post-ISC reflection to be twofold: it may provide individuals the mental space to consider and plan, as expressed by PP04 and it may foster collaborative dialogue, as highlighted by PP03.

> *…the slight anxiety is just having that time to do that [implement strategies] but again, that's just teaching. [PP01]*

PP01, in the excerpt above, also articulated concerns about finding time to put those next steps into action. The sentiment conveyed through the phrase *"…that's just teaching"* led

me to interpret that, despite acknowledging time pressures, there may exist a certain level of acceptance among teaching staff that such time constraints are inherent to the profession.

No, we're on the pathway to [implementing strategies], so I have said to partner teacher about meeting and going over everything together. I think that's the first step and sharing those solutions that we came up with...but other than that, nothing else has been implemented yet because we're trying to get a meeting in where we can sit. (PP03)

To be really honest, no [we haven't implemented the next steps]...I've not seen the child apart from this week. The only thing I have done is had a conversation with the child. (PP01)

Both PPs described that either none or only an initial step had been implemented since the ISC session. PP03 hinted at challenges in finding time to sit with their partner teacher to discuss the ISC session discussions. Additionally, PP01 implied that they had limited interaction with the focus child since the session. I interpreted this to suggest that PPs may need more time to implement the next steps due to other, conflicting demands. Extending the one-week gap between the ISC session and the ISC coach checking in with the PP may be beneficial here.

5.3.   Research Question Two

Research question two sought to explore: How do CMs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?

This section presents three themes constructed from the CM questionnaire data (refer to Figure 5.2 for the related thematic map and Appendix 32 for a synopsis of themes). Please see Appendix 34 for excerpts from my reflexivity journal related to this research question.

Figure 5.2.

A Thematic Map Related to Research Question Two
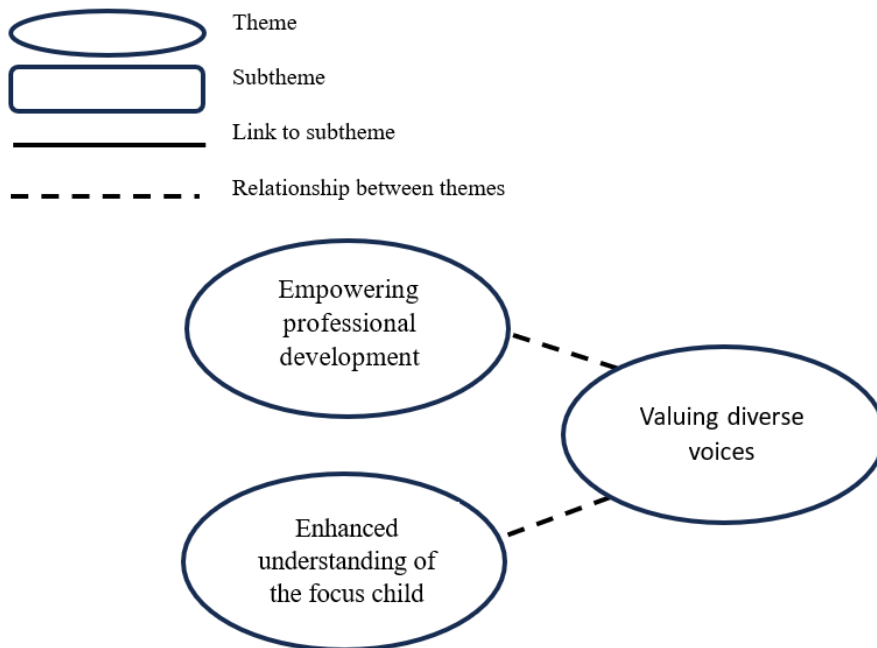
Note. In this figure, relationships between the themes are illustrated using dotted lines. The themes 'Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child' and 'Empowering Professional Development' are linked to 'Valuing Diverse Voices.' Circle Members believed that success in the first two themes was aided by the inclusion of diverse members within the ISC sessions.

5.3.1. Theme One: Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child

CMs regularly evoked the notion that engagement with ISC sessions supported them in cultivating a more insightful understanding into the focus child's SEMH needs. This increased understanding was positively received by CMs and suggested to support with gaining better subsequent support for the young person.

Presenting the problem allowed me to get to know the child – especially as I know nothing about the child/family. (CM08)

Informative to know more about target child and family background. (CM13)

It has given me a greater understanding of the child we spoke about as a whole. (CM03)

I feel like I know the target child better and understand his problem more. (CM17)

The idea of an enhanced understanding was interpreted to mean that, prior to the ISC session, many CMs did not have a good understanding of the focus child's needs. The notion of knowing the child as a "*whole*" and references to knowing more about the child's family suggest the value CMs placed on gaining a holistic insight into the child beyond what was presently known within a school context. This suggests that through engagement in the ISC session, CMs experienced an increased holistic understanding of the focus child in the context of school and beyond and this was valued by CMs.

When considering how this enhanced understanding was achieved, CMs described that having time devoted to discussing the focus child was key.

[A strength was] having enough time to really think about and then talk about the child. (CM04)

[I have learnt] to take the time to use this method to get to know the child. (CM06)

CM04 alluded to how it was not just having some time that was important, but it was having sufficient time to consider the child. CM06 suggested that ISC could be utilised to get to know the child and implied that those participating should *"take the time,"* suggesting the process should not be rushed through. From this, it was interpreted that both CMs valued using ISCs to take the time to get to know and understand the focus child's SEMH needs.

CMs implied that this journey toward increased understanding began with a clear definition of the problem.

[We were] able to untangle the difficulties and define them more clearly. (CM05)

It was really clear what the problems were and what our purpose was. (CM18)

Here, both CMs outlined their experience of ISC, emphasising that it afforded them the opportunity to consider and define the intricacies of the difficulties, ultimately leading to a more coherent perspective on the challenges faced by the focus child. CM18 evoked the idea that through defining the problem, CMs were increasingly aware of their purpose which aided the subsequent stages of the ISC session. From this, it was understood that for CMs, it may not always have been clear what the difficulties were nor what their role was with supporting the child. Thus, suggesting that taking time in the ISC sessions to define the difficulties and the purpose may support more positive CM experiences.

With an enhanced understanding of the focus child, CMs elaborated on how this insight encouraged them to begin to hypothesise why the child exhibited those behaviours.

[A strength was] being able to think beyond the 'problem' and think why it was happening and what we could do. (CM05)

[A strength was] understanding theories related to what and why it is happening… (CM16)

It has made me think more about the reasons behind certain behaviours. (CM01)

Here, CMs implied value in not only knowing what was happening but also with considering why it was happening and therefore moving beyond merely describing the problem. From this, it was interpreted that CMs value encouragement in moving beyond descriptions of the problem to engagement in a deeper analysis of the underpinnings of such behaviours. It was further interpreted that such theorising may support CMs with developing an increased understanding of the child's need, thus supporting them with considering the most appropriate solutions.

Alongside time, clarification of the problem and hypothesising, the utility of a scribe (the GF) was also suggested to support CM's understanding of the focus child.

[A strength was] having everything written down in sections gave a clearer understanding of the child. (CM03)

[A strength was] having someone to scribe so you aren't thinking and writing. It freed me up to think and understand. (CM04)

CM03 referred to the scribe's use of "*sections*" as a tool for organising and subsequently aiding their understanding of the focus child. This was considered to suggest the value placed on the visual organisation of information to better understand a child's SEMH needs. CM04 considered how the use of a GF supported in reducing the demands placed upon CMs. This may suggest the importance of streamlining cognitive processes by offloading the task of note-taking to a scribe, potentially allowing CMs to be increasingly cognitively available for participating in a group problem solving session.

5.3.2. Theme Two: Empowering Professional Development

This theme focused on CM perceptions that ISC aided their own professional development. Most CMs evoked the notion that they wanted to partake in ISC sessions again.

I think there are a number of children and staff members who would benefit from this approach to problem solving. (CM06)

I can see this being useful for a lot of young people with SEMH-based needs I work with. (CM11)

I would like to work this way again as it is a great way to solve a complicated problem. I have a child in my class that I'm stuck with and I'd like support with and this may help. (CM17)

CM06, CM11 and CM17 expressed that they would like to utilise ISC again while implying that they had children in mind who would benefit from its use. CM06 alluded to how the process was not only of value to the young person but also for the adults involved. This was interpreted as an acknowledgment of the impact and challenges faced by school staff in supporting CYP with SEMH needs and the positive outcomes that collaborative problem solving sessions can yield for both the child and the support staff engaged in the process. CM11's use of *"a lot of young people with SEMH-based needs"* may indicate the growing number of CYP with SEMH needs that school staff are having to support.

CM17's recognition of how such a process could *"solve a complicated problem"* they were currently "*stuck with*" implied feelings of empowerment and effectiveness in addressing challenging situations through the ISC session. Here, the use of the word "*solve*" was interesting as it suggested the need for school staff to resolve and fix concerns and challenges they face when supporting children with SEMH needs. It suggested that the ISC framework could serve as a valuable tool to enhance their professional development by addressing complex issues and finding effective solutions. The use of "*solve*" conveyed CM17's proactive and problem solving mindset, possibly emphasising their desire to overcome difficulties and provide meaningful support to the children they worked with.

While recognising the value of utilising the whole process of ISC, CMs also recognised how aspects of the process could be engaged with to enhance their capacity to problem solve.

This structure gives us a framework to help us solve problems next time too and I can use elements when I speak to my colleagues on a daily basis. (CM05)

It's given me some steps I can think about when problem solving during more informal discussions. (CM08)

Both CM05 and CM08 detailed how aspects of ISC could be utilised during less formalised interactions with colleagues to consider problems. This may suggest that ISC sessions provided CMs with insight into structuring problem solving interactions where elements could be used in daily interactions with colleagues. This indicated that CMs may have felt that their current problem solving conversations were not as effective as the ISC session. It may also suggest that CMs would like to utilise this "*framework*" or "*steps*" to increasingly formalise daily problem solving interactions. The suggestion of using only certain parts of the session may be indicative of difficulties associated with implementing the ISC session in full and may be a result of conflicting pressures that CMs experience.

It was also recognised that beyond SEMH support, ISC sessions could have broader applications.

...this would be a really useful process for identifying support for a range of children with a range of challenges e.g., difficulties with reading or maths. (CM18)

...this is something that would benefit in other areas of the curriculum and overcoming/brainstorming areas that are problematic. (CM10)

CM18 alluded to the application of ISC to a *"range of children with a range of needs"* and provided examples relating to academic progress. This implied that CMs saw the value in applying such a problem solving approach to learning-based concerns. These "*curriculum*" concerns were also considered by CM10. This suggested the broad and varied difficulties school staff encounter with the CYP they support and how CMs experienced positive feelings of valuing an approach that offers flexibility in its use. In terms of SEMH needs, it was interpreted that while tackling SEMH concerns, there may remain a prioritisation of academic-

based issues, potentially reflecting the pressures on teaching staff to demonstrate academic progress for the CYP they are teaching.

Some CMs referred to how experiences of participating in the ISC session aided their professional development by providing them with strategies that could be implemented with other pupils they were supporting.

[ISC] helped to gain insight into others' solutions... and what I can use with my own class. (CM09)

I will look at other learners in my own class and implement strategies to help understand and develop them. (CM10)

Good to pinch the strategy ideas for my own list! Ta! (CM15)

It has given me a wider insight on how I can support learners in the future if they are dealing with similar struggles. (CM16)

CM09 and CM10 alluded to how strategies discussed could be considered concerning the children in their respective classes. This may imply the value experienced in recognising shared difficulties and subsequent strategies of support when participating in the ISC sessions. It was interpreted as meaning that CMs valued not only participating in the sessions and supporting the focus child but also in recognising commonality between their situation and the PP's and subsequently with considering the use of discussed solutions to aid their practice.

While CM15 did not suggest direct use of strategies at present, it was implied that hearing and learning about different strategies was a useful approach to enhancing their repertoire of strategies. In line with this, CM16 recognised the value of understanding commonality between the focus child and future children they may work with who may have similar needs through the generalisation of strategies discussed within the session. This may suggest the need for school staff to not only develop their practices to support CYP with SEMH needs they are currently working with but to also continually develop their capacity to support CYP they may work with in the future.

5.3.3. *Theme Three: Valuing Diverse Voices*

Most CMs conveyed the idea that within their experience of ISCs, they valued the variation in views that were present.

[It was] helpful having a range of people not all from the same team. (CM09)

[A strength was having] different ideas from colleagues that I might not usually speak to. (CM13)

[A strength was having] other people's theories and ideas around the problem. It opened up new information/a new way of looking at the bigger picture. (CM01)

Having a range of ideas on how to support the family that were not previously discussed. (CM18)

Sharing ideas and getting viewpoints from a range of expertise. (CM12)

[I learnt about] some of the specialist knowledge that my colleagues have. (CM11)

CM09 and CM13 highlighted the benefits of engaging with colleagues from different teams or those they did not typically interact with, emphasising the supportive nature of cross-team collaboration. It was interpreted that ISC may encourage diverse perspectives from colleagues with varied experiences within different teams, enabling school staff to tap into a broader range of viewpoints and enrich their problem solving approaches. CM01 and CM18 further contributed to this by suggesting that the inclusion of diverse voices provided new insights and allowed for a different perspective on the perceived problem. Additionally, CM12 and CM11 built on this by highlighting that it was not just diversity in experience but also diverse expertise that added value to the problem solving process. This implied the value CMs placed on involving a variety of individuals in the ISC session to encourage a nuanced consideration of the situation.

In line with this, some CMs also voiced that the inclusion of diverse voices, specifically those who did not know the focus child, aided the problem solving process.

I do think it was good for me to be there as I didn't have biases about the child and could take a bit of a step back. (CM08)

Not having any connection to the child being discussed allowed me to be impartial. (CM10)

References to taking *"a step back"* and being "*impartial*" suggested the value placed on including CMs who did not know the focus child because their lack of prior connection or biases may have allowed for an objective and unbiased perspective. It was interpreted that this impartiality, coupled with not having an emotional connection or direct investment in the situation, may contribute to a more thorough and objective evaluation of the focus child's needs during the problem solving process. This absence of emotional ties may support CMs to provide insightful contributions and solutions, enhancing the overall effectiveness of the ISC session.

Within this theme of valuing diverse voices, CMs also considered their experiences of how ISC encouraged CMs to openly share their individual perspectives and expertise.

Comfortable environment (e.g., sat in a circle with process facilitator and CMs and with biscuits) made me speak and share my different thoughts. (CM07)

Insightful – everyone was able to freely share any ideas they had because they were encouraged, we set ground rules and were sat in a circle - made us feel less judged and more open. (CM09)

Both CM07 and CM09 pointed to the structural elements within ISC, such as the seating arrangement, provision of snacks and establishment of ground rules, as factors that supported a more open and non-judgmental space. This suggested that these structural elements may play a crucial role in fostering an environment where CMs feel encouraged to share diverse views, even when their perspectives differ from the ongoing discussions.

5.4. Research Themes Summary

The themes constructed from PP data shed light on the rich experiences and insights gained from participating in ISC sessions. 'Gaining a Holistic Picture' showcases ISC's role in fostering comprehensive understanding through in-depth discussions. 'Embracing Effective

Strategies' suggests positive experiences in strategy development and broader community impact. 'Feeling Understood and Supported' delves into the interpersonal dynamics and emotional support within ISC. 'Needing Structure' reflects positive perceptions of ISC's problem solving approach. 'Feeling Misunderstood' highlights frustrations around information constraints. 'Next Steps Needing Time and Space' emphasises post-ISC challenges and planning needs.

On the other hand, themes from CM data emphasise 'Enhanced Understanding' through structured discussions, 'Empowering Professional Development' via collaborative approaches and 'Valuing Diverse Voices' for enriched problem solving discussions.

Chapter Six: Discussion

6.1. Introduction to Discussion

This research explores the experiences of both PPs and CMs following participation in a group consultation model aimed at supporting primary aged pupils with SEMH needs. I sought to answer the following questions:

1. RQ1: How do PPs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?
2. RQ2: How do CMs experience participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs?

This chapter aims to discuss each of these questions in turn, considering patterns within data sets and contextualising constructed themes using existing literature explored in Chapters Two and Three. Following this, implications and reflexive discussions pertaining to the research methodology will be explored.

6.2. RQ1: How do Problem Presenters Experience Participating in a Group Consultation Model to Support Primary Aged Pupils with SEMH Needs?

Overall, PP experiences of engaging in the ISC session suggested it to be a valuable endeavour with considerable promise. For PPs, the support provided by ISC was experienced across two dimensions (see Figure 6.1).

The first dimension, closely aligned with the session's stated aims, to support CYP with SEMH needs. This dimension was experienced through both understanding and addressing the focus child's needs, as well as the process facilitating considerations both now and potentially in the future for other children with SEMH needs. This implies a learning capacity may be inherent within the approach, which extends beyond immediate circumstances.

The second dimension lies in ISC's capacity not only to acknowledge but also to alleviate the pervasive sense of isolation often encountered by PPs when assisting CYP with SEMH needs, while also offering them a platform to express their emotions freely. Overall, this suggests that the PPs in this research perceived ISCs as beneficial not only for addressing

the SEMH needs of the CYP they work with, but also for attending to their own emotional needs.

PPs expressed that with the structural support provided by the ISC framework and guidance from facilitators, they navigated through both dimensions effectively. However, while PPs acknowledged these promising dimensions, they also recognised that ISC was constrained by both internal and external factors, likely influenced by broader systemic pressures.

Figure 6.1

A Figure to Show the Dimensions of Support for Problem Presenters Provided by the Insights and Solutions Circle Session
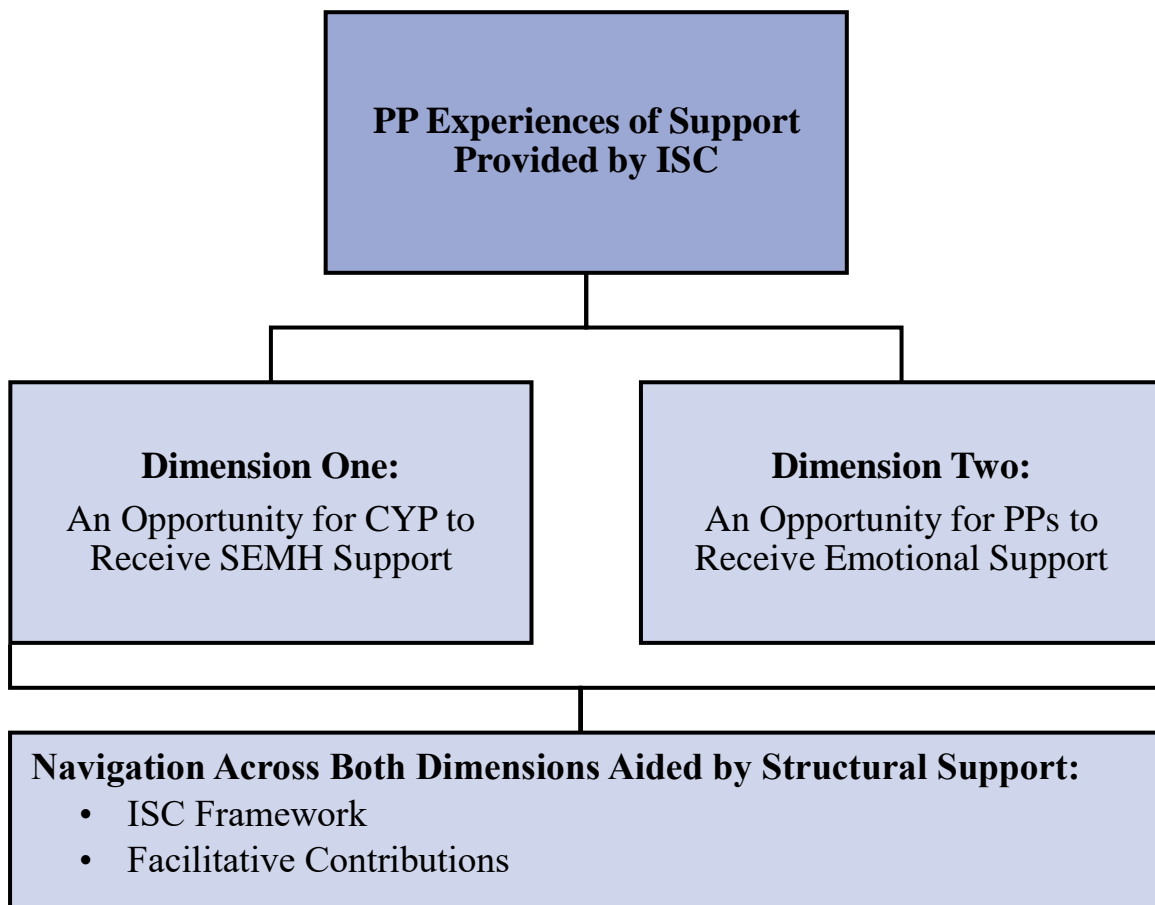
Note. This figure illustrates that PPs experienced benefits from the ISC process in two key domains: as an opportunity for CYP to receive SEMH support and as a chance for PPs themselves to receive emotional support. Success in both areas is believed to be facilitated by the structural support provided by the process.

6.2.1. Dimension One: As an Opportunity for CYP to Receive SEMH Support

PPs expressed that engaging in ISC supported them in better meeting the SEMH needs of the children they support. This occurred in two ways (see Figure 6.2). Firstly, PPs felt increasingly capable of understanding and addressing the needs of the focus child after the ISC session. This was attributed to a better comprehension of the child's needs (PP Theme One) and consideration of next steps for the focus child (PP Theme Two). Secondly, PPs experienced that engaging in ISC provided them with the opportunity to address the SEMH needs of other children they work with, both presently and in the future, by extrapolating strategies generated during the sessions (PP Theme Two) and by expressing a desire to partake in structured problem solving with colleagues in the future to support other children (PP Theme Four, Subtheme Three).

Figure 6.2

A Figure to Show Two Ways Insights and Solutions Circles Provided Support for Problem Presenters in Addressing Children's Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs

- Developing a Comprehensive Understanding of the Focus Child's SEMH Needs
- Developing Solutions for Supporting the Focus Child

Supporting the Focus Child

- Acquiring Transferable Strategies
- Fostering Collaborative Problem Solving in the Future

Supporting Other Children
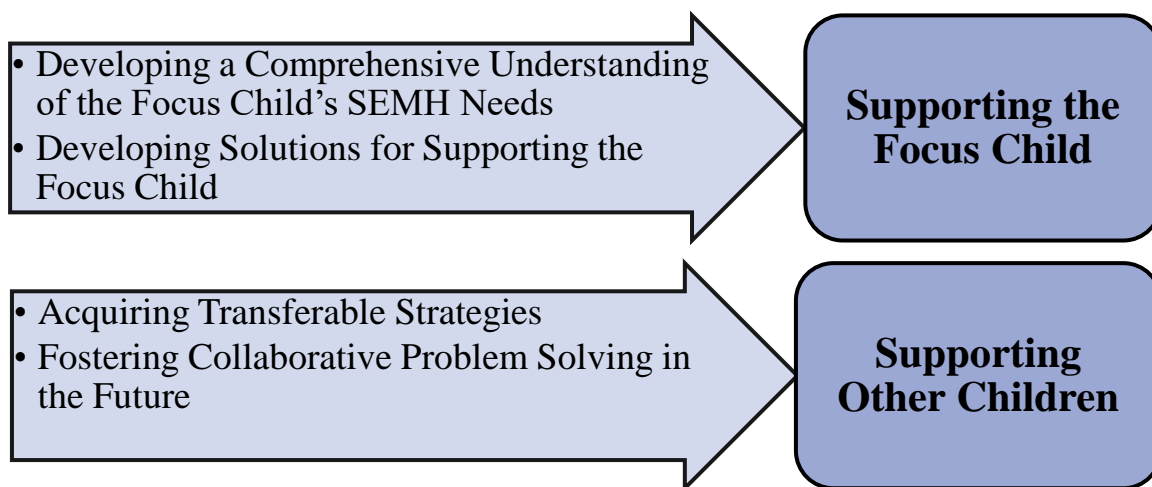
Note. For PPs, supporting CYP was experienced in two distinct ways: directly supporting the focus child and providing support to other CYP.

As an Opportunity to Support the Focus Child. PPs expressed that their engagement in ISC facilitated a more effective support approach for the focus child, starting with the development of a comprehensive understanding of the child's needs (PP Theme One) before exploring potential pathways forward (PP Theme Two) (refer to Figure 6.3).

Figure 6.3

A Figure to Show the Process for Providing Effective Social, Emotional and Mental Health Support for the Focus Child
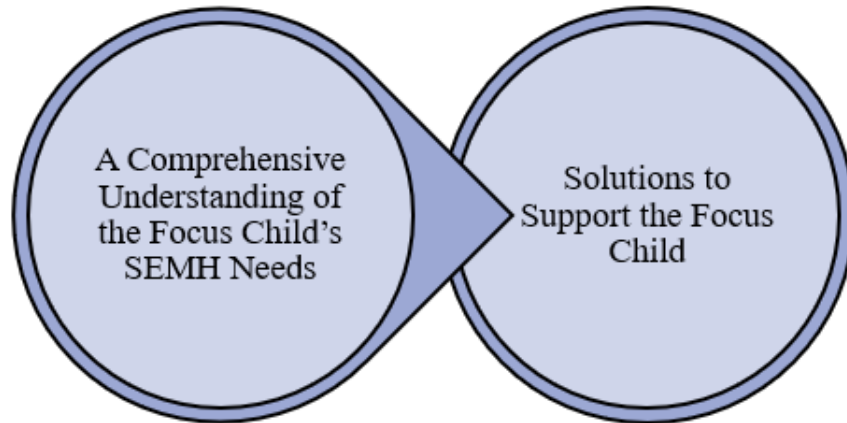
Note. PPs experienced that providing support for the focus child's SEMH needs was achieved by initially developing a more comprehensive understanding of their needs and then, generating appropriate solutions to support these needs.

  As a Chance to Develop a Comprehensive Understanding of the Focus Child's SEMH Needs. PP Theme One centres around PP perspectives that engaging in ISC supported them in developing a more comprehensive understanding of the focus child. PPs articulated how the process aided them in defining the perceived problems in greater detail and exploring the underlying factors from diverse viewpoints.

  PPs expressed that participation allowed them more time to explore and contemplate the nature of the focus child's SEMH difficulties. This outcome is consistent with existing research on group consultations, where it has been suggested that participation can allow participants time to reflect upon the problem, leading to an enhanced holistic understanding (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Similarly to findings by Jones et al. (2013), Nugent et al. (2014) and Turner and Gulliford (2020), there is an expression of appreciation for the opportunity to delve deeper into the individual needs of a single child. The need for this exploration may be considered from a psychodynamic perspective that until the

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perceived problem is fully explored, PPs may not be able to engage in subsequent emotional growth and genuine learning (Hanko, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010).

PPs expressed how the development of a holistic understanding of the focus child was further enhanced through hypothesising the root causes of the SEMH needs. This aligns with previous research suggesting that engaging in group consultations can shed light on underlying unmet needs (Hayes & Stringer, 2016) and the causes of behavioural concerns (Jones et al., 2013).

The potential for ISC to support PPs in moving beyond solely overt behavioural displays to consider the underlying SEMH needs may align practice more closely with the ambitions outlined in the SEND CoP (2015) to provide comprehensive support that addresses the root causes of challenges faced by students. In doing so, one may consider that PPs may be increasingly able to consider the systems around the child, potentially resulting in a diminished reliance on within-child attributions (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Cline & Fredrickson, 2009; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). This suggests that the purpose of engaging in group consultation may extend beyond the generation of solutions, but also include scope to contemplate root causes at a more nuanced level.

PPs emphasised that developing a holistic understanding of the focus child's SEMH needs was enhanced by involving CMs who offered diverse viewpoints, including those unfamiliar with the child. Consistent with this, prior research has suggested that collaborating with others can shift the perspective from viewing the child as the sole problem to considering the entire situation and this shift is particularly pronounced when collaborating with adults who are unknown to the focus child (Davison & Duffy, 2017). Furthermore, working with various individuals has been found to encourage the exploration of novel aspects of the situation (Annan & Moore, 2012). It is possible that PPs in this present study found the experience of hearing alternative viewpoints from different perspectives beneficial, as it may have provided them with a more contained version of their viewpoint shared during the initial problem presenting stage, as suggested by Hanko (2002). This emergence of a contained version may work to minimise the intrinsic cognitive load thought to be associated with engaging in emotional expression (Fraser et al., 2015; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

When considering why diverse perspectives may have aided the formation of an increasingly holistic understanding, one may turn to schema theory. Within this, Truscott et al. (2012) suggest that alternative viewpoints shared by others within the group consultation have the capacity to allow the PP to hear alternative interpretations of their worldview. This may result in accommodation of existing schemas resulting in a new understanding of the CYP's needs that may not have previously been considered and may more accurately explain the focus child's needs (Truscott et al., 2012). Alternatively, attribution theory may explain how allowing PPs to hear alternative perspectives can provide them with multiple causal attributions towards the perceived problem, minimising subsequent misattributions (Miller, 2008), potentially amplifying holistic accounts that consider the broader, ecological context (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

As an Avenue to Develop Solutions for Supporting the Focus Child. PP Theme Two captures the positive experiences expressed by PPs, showcasing how their involvement in the ISC sessions enabled them to formulate effective strategies for supporting the SEMH needs of the focus child.

PPs responded positively to the formulation of strategies for the focus child, aligning with existing research on group consultation models (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014). This supports the advocacy put forth by de Shazer (1988, 1994, 1997) for the need to transition away from fixation on perceived problems toward exploring potential solutions, a principle echoed in Rees' (2008) solution-oriented approach. Drawing upon Rees' (2008) principles, it can be suggested that through participation in ISC, PPs may have gained enhanced exposure to group resources and experiences, fostering the exploration of creative and fitting solutions. This may have resulted in heightened optimism and hope, stemming from the realisation of boundless possibilities and subsequent generation of solutions, marking a discernible shift away from blame and judgment toward the potential for constructive change (Rees, 2008).

PPs acknowledged that engagement in ISC provided them with the opportunity to successfully engage in more early intervention SEMH-based work, considering the needs of focus children who would not otherwise receive support. This suggests that group consultation approaches, such as ISC, may have offered PPs a pathway towards moving away from more

traditional service designs and resource allocations, where SEMH-based support is less reactionary and is provided in an increasingly timely manner, as advocated for by government policy and existing literature (Correll et al., 2018; DfE, 2017; Fusar-Poli et al., 2021; McGorry & Mei, 2018). The perceived success of this early intervention work may support existing literature suggesting the possibility for group consultation models to aid schools in their capacity to provide adequate support for CYP who do not meet diagnostic thresholds (Moor et al., 2007; Lowry et al., 2022; Weare, 2015). Given the context of this research taking place within primary schools, it may be suggested that for these PPs, conducting early intervention work in their primary school was suitable (Childs-Fegredo et al., 2021; Kipping et al., 2008).

With the generation of strategies, PPs' experiences suggested that the strategies felt realistic and achievable. PPs expressed that having a couple of smaller next steps that felt manageable was important. Consistent with this, Rees (2008) advocates for the power of considering and subsequently implementing small, incremental changes that enhance realistic goals for those involved and foster feelings of accomplishment when implemented. Such small changes were identified in existing research on group consultation models, such as increasing interactions with the focus child (Turner & Gulliford, 2020), adopting less reactionary measures regarding one's own behaviour management (Jones et al., 2012) and engaging in reading psychological literature (Davison & Duffy, 2017).

From a psychological lens, the positive experiences associated with the adoption of small, achievable next steps may align with Deci and Ryan's (2012) self-determination theory. PPs commonly expressed feelings of agency and confidence not only in the selection of strategies but also in their capacity to implement agreed-upon strategies. This may support existing research suggesting that increasingly viewing school staff as experts may not only enhance feelings of autonomy and competence during group consultation but can also extend further if agreed strategies are successfully implemented (Dupaul et al., 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2001; Truscott et al., 2012).

PPs expressed that strategies agreed upon by them could also be embraced by CMs, perhaps suggesting the emergence of a broader cultural shift and systemic response toward meeting the focus child's SEMH needs across the school. It may be inferred that CMs adopting strategies within their own practice may evidence coordinated and collaborative efforts to meet

needs, suggesting an enhanced understanding of SEMH needs (Weare, 2010; 2013). These findings parallel existing research suggesting that participation in group consultation models enhanced coordinated responses through the adaptation of staffing structures (Annan & Moore, 2012) and consideration of necessary organisational changes (Turner & Gulliford, 2020). This may suggest that the collaborative efforts between these PPs and CMs has the potential to catalyse systemic shifts within the educational setting, fostering a more comprehensive approach to addressing SEMH needs.

      As an Approach to Assist Other Children. PPs experienced that engaging in ISC provided them with the opportunity to address the SEMH needs of other children they work with, both presently and in the future, by extrapolating strategies generated during the sessions (PP Theme Two) and by expressing a desire to partake in structured problem solving with colleagues in the future to support other children (PP Theme Four, Subtheme Three).

      As a Pathway to Acquire Transferable Strategies. PP Theme Two captures PP experiences that engagement in ISC provided them with strategies that could be transferred to other children with similar SEMH needs, consistent with existing research into group consultation models (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Better understanding the focus child (PP Theme One) led to better strategies to support the focus child (PP Theme Two), where the strategies could then be generalised to other children (PP Theme Two) (see Figure 6.4). The capacity for ISC to provide PPs with support not only for the focus child but for others may suggest that for these PPs, ISC had the potential to foster a ripple effect of positive change within their educational settings, extending beyond individual cases to benefit a broader spectrum of students with SEMH needs.

      These findings support Gutkin and Conoley's (1990) assertion that to support CYP, EPs must work with the adults supporting them and Miller's (1969) advocacy for the need to *"give psychology away"* (p. 1071) to enhance teacher competence and professional development beyond supporting the individual child. Consequently, engagement in ISC may have the potential to alleviate concerns regarding the practical implementation and adaptability of learning, which is suggested to be commonplace within more traditional training support (Gillham et al., 2007; Rothì et al., 2008; Sawyer et al., 2010).

Figure 6.4

A Figure to Show the Process for Transferring Strategies from the Focus Child to Other Children
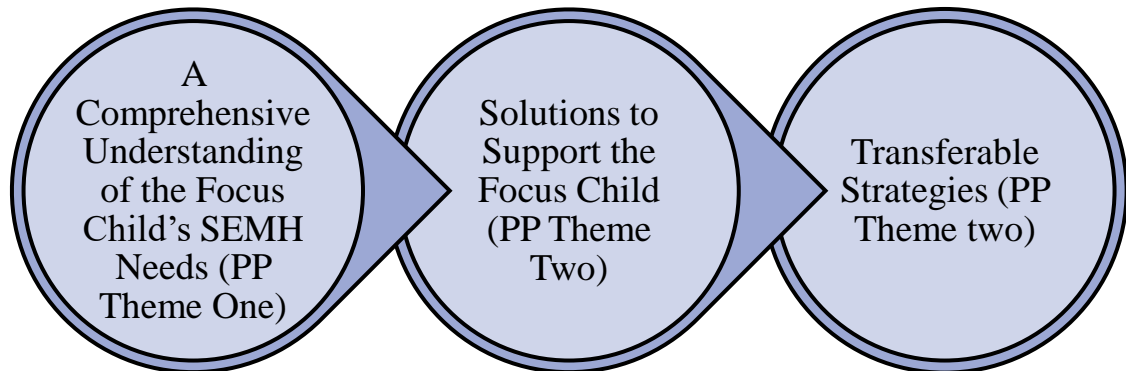
Note. PPs found that effectively supporting other children's SEMH needs involved first developing a comprehensive understanding of the focus child's needs. This was followed by generating appropriate solutions for those needs, which could then be adapted and applied to support the SEMH needs of other children.

> ***As an Avenue to Foster Collaborative Problem solving in the Future.*** Within PP Theme Four, Subtheme Three, the focus is on PPs articulating their aspirations to partake in future structured approaches to problem solving. PPs expressed that they saw the value of utilising ISC with other children both with SEMH needs and those with difficulties in other areas. A desire to partake in subsequent structured group problem solving was also expressed in previous research on group consultations (Annan & Moore, 2012; Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). Whilst this broader application of ISC to the use of children experiencing difficulties beyond SEMH needs is positive, a reversion to the use of approaches for academic gain may divert attention away from supporting SEMH needs as suggested by Hutchings (2015) and Weare (2015).

PPs expressed that on occasions where it was not possible to engage in all stages of ISC, they were keen to draw upon elements of the structured approach to support their problem solving interactions with colleagues. This mirrors research by Jones et al. (2013), who found that after engaging in group consultation, collegial conversations became more structured and

occurred more frequently. A desire to partake in more structured professional discussions may support with alleviating instances of professional isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010).

A desire to apply features of the session or the session in its entirety may be underpinned by Argyris and Schön's (1978) concept of double-loop learning, wherein group members work together to overcome a problem and, in doing so, develop their problem solving competencies. It may be considered that developing these competencies could encourage subsequent use of such skills in future interactions.

From a psychological perspective, a cultivated inclination to engage in future structured problem solving interactions, both formally and informally, may be rooted in Social Learning theory (Bandura, 1985). Within the ISC session, shared social opportunities for problem solving, observation and learning how to solve problems may have occurred, leading to an increased desire for subsequent imitation (Lave, 2009; Wenger, 1998). This supports Farouk's (2004) suggestion that EPs, when assuming the role of a PF, should model desirable group member behaviours to encourage instances of subsequent behavioural imitation.

6.2.2. *Dimension Two: As an Opportunity for PPs to Receive Emotional Support*

PPs experienced that ISC provided an opportunity to recognise and meet their own emotional needs, as explored in PP Theme Three. Prior to engaging with ISC, PPs acknowledged that providing support for the focus child's SEMH needs made them feel isolated. This sentiment is consistent with existing findings (Carlson & Thomas, 2006; Education Support, 2022; Gaikward & Brantley, 1992; Hadar & Brody, 2010; Rothì et al., 2008).

However, PPs expressed that participation in ISC provided them with a promising strategy to begin to alleviate these feelings. This parallels existing research indicating that participation in group consultations can reduce feelings of isolation when supporting CYP with SEMH needs (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014).

PPs expressed that increased awareness that others had experienced similar difficulties was key to reducing feelings of isolation, alongside collaborative efforts to consider paths forward based on the experiences and perspectives of others, aligning with findings from

studies by Davison and Duffy (2017), Jones et al. (2013) and Nugent et al. (2014). This suggests the importance of collaboration and acknowledgment of shared experiences in helping PPs to feel understood and supported. A reduction in feelings of isolation were also suggested to occur through ISC fostering an environment where responsibility for the problem was shared among session attendees. Research by Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) and Jones et al. (2013) similarly highlighted positive experiences stemming from the establishment of collective responsibility for identified issues.

Previous research has indicated the positives of establishing this sense of collective responsibility when supporting CYP with SEMH needs to aid the development of a more holistic and consistent approach (Atkins et al., 2010; Blanchard, 2003; Bradshaw et al., 2012; Cefai & Cooper, 2017; Roffey, 2015), integrate support across various school environments (Blanchard, 2003; Weare, 2010) and reduce individual workloads and professional isolation (Lowry et al., 2022). This suggests that participation in ISC could potentially be the beginning of a transformative journey towards comprehensive support frameworks in these educational settings that not only meets the SEMH needs of CYP but the needs of school staff.

PPs expressed that having the time and space to outline not only the problem but feelings towards the problem encouraged feelings of being understood and supported. This suggests that PPs felt able to voice their concerns and feelings openly at the problem presentation stage suggesting this to be a safe space for them. These findings resonate with previous research indicating the capacity of group consultations to cultivate openness and honesty (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Additionally, PPs' positive experiences in exploring the problem align with Jones et al.'s (2013) findings that such approaches can nurture a more transparent ethos where participants feel increasingly comfortable discussing their challenges.

Explanations for why exploring feelings related to the perceived problem was positively experienced by PPs can be considered through different psychological lenses. Firstly, from a psychodynamic perspective, this opportunity may have provided PPs with the space to have their feelings contained, a suggested requirement prior to engaging in group problem solving where emotional growth and genuine learning are required (Hanko, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010). Secondly, from a humanistic perspective, such space may have allowed PPs the capacity to

engage in emotional expression and processing which could have empowered and validated their existing experiences, allowing them greater capacity to engage in subsequent positive change (Cooper & Joseph, 2015).

During problem presenting, PPs valued the quiet presence of CMs and suggested it contributed to CMs actively listening, creating a supportive atmosphere where PPs felt genuinely heard and understood. While active listening was not constructed as a pattern emerging from existing literature on group consultation models, these findings do resonate with research suggesting that perceptions of others actively listening can heighten feelings of being heard, valued, understood and validated, leading to increased empowerment and connectedness to others (Hargie, 2021; Miles, 1952; Zimmerman, 1995). This suggests that fostering an environment of attentive listening may contribute to the sense of support and understanding experienced by PPs.

Moreover, PPs suggested that the silent participation of CMs during this initial stage, encouraged increased active listening which facilitated greater subsequent engagement from all participants in the ISC session compared to more traditional teacher-led training. This supports existing literature indicating that participation in more traditional training presentations may lead to lower levels of adherence and that approaches that require more active participation may be more effective (Gillham et al., 2007; Sawyer et al., 2010). Encouraging CMs to participate in a stage of active listening, followed by space for theorising, may encourage CMs to be increasingly regarded as experts (Dupaul et al., 2011; Lynn et al., 2003), which may result in PPs experiencing elevated feelings of trust towards CMs and subsequent feelings of being better understood and supported.

PPs experienced that collaborating with familiar CMs from the same school supported the creation of a more non-judgmental and empathetic atmosphere, as previously suggested by Heikkinen et al. (2012). They expressed feelings of reassurance due to the shared training and experience of these colleagues, contributing to a culture of mutual respect and understanding. Unlike Davison and Duffy (2017), these findings suggest that PPs valued working with others from their own schools; however, similarly to Davison and Duffy (2017), it was important to PPs that those involved had similar levels of training and experience. This suggests that establishing familiarity and similarity among colleagues within the same school setting may foster a supportive environment conducive to effective collaboration and problem solving.

6.2.3. As an Opportunity That Necessitates Structural Support for Navigation

PPs experienced that their capacity to successfully navigate through both dimensions was aided by structural support provided by the ISC framework (PP Theme Four, Subtheme One) and through contributions made by the process facilitator (PP Theme Four, Subtheme Two) (see Figure 6.5).

Figure 6.5

A Figure to Show the Structural Support Aiding Problem Presenters Through the Insights and Solutions Circle Process

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          ┌─────────────────────┐
          │  Structural Support │
          │  Aiding Navigation  │
          │   Through Both      │
          │    Dimensions       │
          └─────────────────────┘
            /                 \
┌──────────────────┐   ┌──────────────────┐
│ Assistance Provided │   │   Facilitative   │
│  by ISC Framework   │   │  Contributions   │
└──────────────────┘   └──────────────────┘
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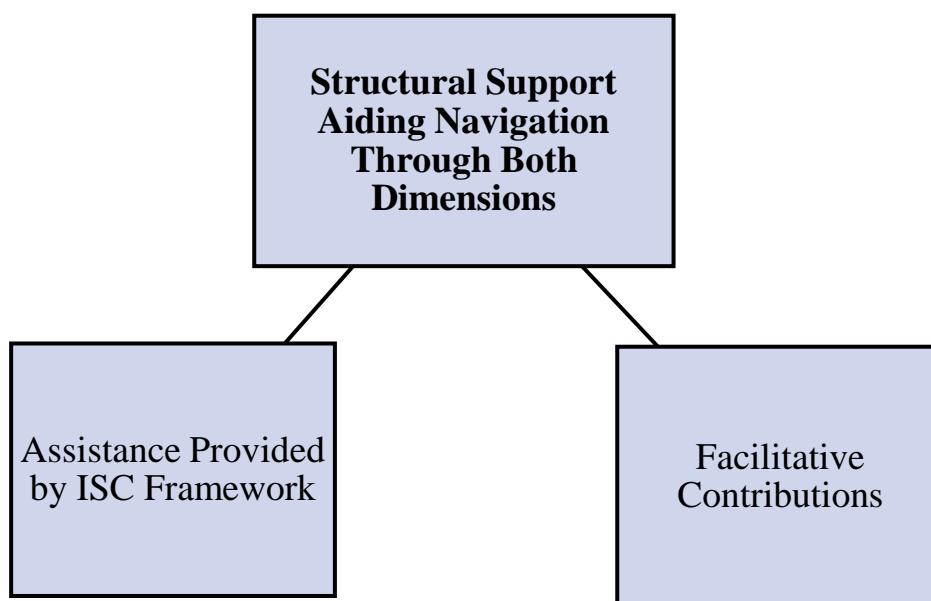
Note. For PPs, success within the ISC was facilitated by structural support in two key ways: adherence to the structured framework and the facilitative contributions that offered ongoing guidance throughout the process.

As an Opportunity Supported by a Structural Framework. Within PP Theme Four, Subtheme One, PPs expressed their positive experiences of utilising a structured framework to guide their problem solving interactions. They articulated that adhering to a predetermined structure with set timings provided them with predictability as well as the opportunity to delve deeper into the problem with acknowledgement that the purpose of the session was to create a plan of action. Previous literature also found that following the structured process within other

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group consultation models aided the success of the sessions (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Similarly to Davison and Duffy (2017) and Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) research, this present study suggested that utilising a more structured approach aided a more thorough analysis of the problem. Adhering to a structured framework may be considered to support PPs to move beyond the problem to enhance the solution orientated nature of the problem solving process as advocated for by de Shazer (1988, 1994, 1997). One may consider that through adherence to a structured approach, PPs were increasingly likely to implement Rees' (2008) solution-oriented principles.

Moreover, PPs expressed that having predetermined roles for the session supported them in understanding their role within the structured session. Drawing on research from Grahamslaw and Henson (2015), it may be considered that through the identification of roles, equality and inclusion are increasingly promoted, whereby listening to and valuing the contributions of all attending the session are valued equally. Drawing upon self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2012), the use of roles and responsibilities within the session may have encouraged PPs to feel increasingly autonomous and competent within their own role, perhaps leading to an enhanced understanding of what was required from them at each stage and subsequent feelings of relatedness to CMs who assumed their own roles.

PPs acknowledged that the use of graphical representations of the discussion topics enhanced their adherence to and capacity to navigate through the ISC process. They suggested that these visual depictions encouraged them to separate out the individual stages of the session and consider what would be coming next. These findings are consistent with Turner and Gulliford's (2020) research, which found that graphical representation supported the group consultation session to remain focused. It may be considered that the use of a graphic may support the structure of the process by visually connecting discussed ideas. From the perspective of dual coding theory, such visual aids may allow PPs to process information through both verbal and non-verbal channels, thereby enhancing their understanding and adherence to the structured framework of the ISC session (Paivio, 1990).

In relation to double-loop learning, the graphical representations may have facilitated a deeper level of reflection by visually mapping out the problem solving process. This visual

approach may have encouraged PPs not only to address immediate issues but also to examine and question the underlying assumptions and systemic factors contributing to the problems discussed. By integrating visual aids with verbal information, participants may be better equipped to engage in double-loop learning, challenging their existing mental models and collaboratively developing more effective and innovative solutions (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Senge, 1990).

Moreover, considering existing literature about the increased cognitive load experienced during emotional expression, visual depiction of PPs' thoughts and feelings from the problem presenting stage may have not only validated thoughts and feelings held by PPs but possibly reduced the intrinsic cognitive load allowing them to engage more successfully in the subsequent problem solving stages of the session (Fraser et al., 2015; Plass & Kalyuga, 2019).

As an Opportunity Supported by Facilitative Contributions. Theme Four, Subtheme Two revolves around PP experiences of perceiving the presence of a PF in the session as advantageous, expressing that it aided them in maintaining adherence to the structured framework, consistent with findings from existing research into group consultation models (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2014; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014). PPs explored that the PF's role was contained to outlining the session structure and encouraging attendees to adhere to the session timings, as suggested in previous research (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). Conversely, PPs considered their role and the role of CMs as to provide knowledge and engage in problem solving as the experts, suggesting a shift in more traditional power dynamics.

Appreciation for the facilitative role of the PF may align with EP aspirations to move away from more archaic, expert perceptions of their role to increasingly adopt collaborative, non-hierarchical approaches (Gutkin, 1999). This supports suggestions for the need for EPs to refrain from being introduced as the expert and instead, draw increasingly upon their artful knowledge base to utilise interpersonal and process-specific skills to facilitate group consultation sessions (West & Idol, 1987).

The role of the EP perceived here by the PPs aligns with Newman and Rosenfield's (2018) advocacy for EPs to *"one-down [their] status"* to increasingly leverage consultee

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expertise and maintain authenticity and openness about the constraints of the role of the EP (p. 45). Where instead, viewing those directly involved in implementing such actions increasingly as experts may support with enhancing intervention understanding and fidelity (Gutkin, 1999). Moreover, PPs voicing their role and the role of CMs as the experts may support existing literature on how engagement in the session may have met their innate psychological needs for autonomy and competence (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

6.2.4. As an Opportunity with Constraints

Whilst PPs experienced the potential of ISC to support in meeting the SEMH needs of CYP, as well as their own emotional needs, engagement was not without its constraints. These constraints can be considered in two ways: internal and external. Internal constraints pertain to difficulties PPs encountered that were specific to the ISC process itself, while external constrains refer to broader restrictions within the educational context in which the ISC process operated (see Figure 6.6). Discussions here related primarily to PP Theme Five and Six with some reference made to PP Theme Four.

Figure 6.6

A Figure to Show Problem Presenter Views on the Constraints of the Insights and Solutions Circle Process

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            ┌─────────────────────┐
            │  Constraints of ISC │
            └─────────────────────┘
              /                 \
┌──────────────┐          ┌──────────────┐
│  Internal    │          │  External    │
│  Limitations │          │  Challenges  │
└──────────────┘          └──────────────┘
```
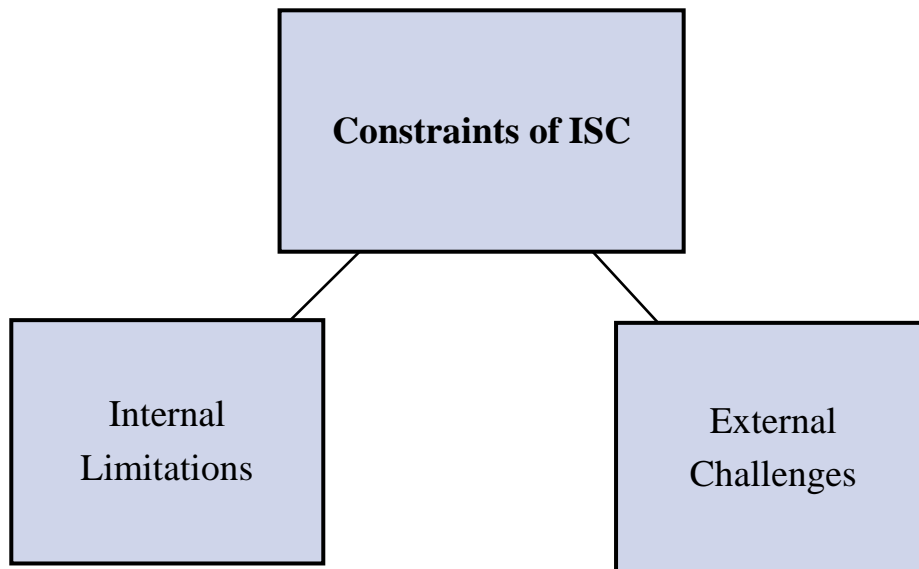
Note. PPs found that participation in ISC was constrained by both internal and external factors. Internal constraints were related to the ISC process itself, while external constraints involved broader issues within the context in which the process was conducted.

As an Opportunity with Internal Limitations. PP Theme Five explores PPs' frustrations stemming from their inability to present their own theories or strategies, especially when they felt that CM theories inadequately explained the situation or when CMs proposed strategies that had previously been attempted or were deemed ineffective by the PPs. This was suggested to lead to feelings of disillusionment, frustration and a sense of being misunderstood, as PPs perceived a lack of responsiveness to their unique needs and challenges. The generation of incompatible strategies can be considered to contradict Rees's (2008) first solution focused principle that while what works should be amplified, what does not should be abandoned. PPs suggested the need for space and time for PPs to add additional hypotheses and strategies missed by CMs; this may support with implementing Rees's (2008) first principle more successfully.

Furthermore, it may be considered that while physical isolation was reduced by assembling colleagues, not allowing PPs to present their own theories and ideas allowed the potential for psychological isolation to remain (Flinders, 1988). In such cases, contributions from CMs perceived as irrelevant to PPs could have led to feelings of disconnection and a subsequent lack of support (Flinders, 1988). This suggests the need to consider minimising isolation across two dimensions during group consultation: both physically and psychologically (Flinders, 1988).

PPs expressed that feelings of being misunderstood were exacerbated by PPs being unable to provide CMs with additional information throughout ISC. Similarly to findings from Nugent et al.'s (2014) research, such rigidity in the structural components of the group consultation model were not always well received, particularly when new information was thought of by PPs and when discussions were being had that were perceived to benefit from deviating from it.

Moreover, PPs experienced some frustration when unsuccessful attempts were made by CMs to accommodate PPs' existing schemas (Arbib, 1986). This may suggest the need for PPs to be in agreement with CMs when alternative hypotheses and strategies are presented by CMs. Some PPs expressed that these feelings of being misunderstood declined once CMs had presented theories or strategies that were previously held by the PP. This may suggest that when novel hypotheses and strategies are presented by CMs prior to those already held by PPs, increased feelings of being misunderstood may emerge. It may be considered here that there is a need for assimilation of existing schemas to occur before accommodation (Arbib, 1986), suggesting from a humanistic perspective, the potential need for emotional validation for PPs to occur beyond the initial problem presenting stage to subsequent stages of the group consultation process (Cooper & Joseph, 2015).

Within PP Theme Six, some PPs voiced that during the ISC sessions, they would have benefited from more time to consider the generated strategies before selecting suitable next steps. Considering existing research into how teachers frequently report feeling unprepared and lacking in confidence to meet CYP's needs (Smith et al., 2016), it is important to consider how PPs feeling as though they have been rushed into making a decision has the potential to perpetuate these negative feelings. These considerations are supported by Lowry et al.'s (2022)

suggestion of a bi-directional relationship between staff and pupil wellbeing, wherein if PPs experience feelings of a lack of readiness, there is potential for further heightened work-related stress.

Moreover, PPs suggested that the ISC process requires the inclusion of time and space after the session to reflect upon discussions and next steps considered during the session. This supports Turner and Gulliford's (2020) findings that reflection continued for participants beyond the group consultation session. It may be considered that the potential accommodation of existing schemas (Arbib, 1986) through alternative interpretations and ideas during the ISC session may have required additional reflective time to further internalise such schematic changes. Alternatively, research into non-directive consultative approaches suggests that engagement can place enhanced cognitive demands on those involved (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; Kane & Engle, 2002; Murray & Byrne, 2001; Schnotz et al., 2010; Tsermentseli & Poland, 2016; van Gog et al., 2020), providing alternative justification as to why PPs may have required more time following the session.

As an Opportunity with External Challenges. PPs encountered the impact of external challenges during their engagement in ISC, aligning with prior research findings (Annan & Moore, 2012; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020).

Previously discussed internal constraints, such as PPs feeling that time was being wasted due to their inability to provide additional pertinent information at certain points of the session, may reflect broader external constraints. This consideration is supported by existing literature suggesting that limited time allocations available in schools can hinder school staff in obtaining appropriate support to meet the SEMH needs of the CYP they work with (Lowry et al., 2022; Reinke et al., 2011; Rothì et al., 2008; Tucker, 2015; von der Embse et al., 2018). Consequently, when time is made available, PPs may feel pressured to use it efficiently.

Moreover, despite PP Theme Six suggesting that PPs recognised that additional time was needed to reflect upon agreed next steps, they expressed that this was not always possible, with references made to this being inherent within the world of teaching. Feelings of not having sufficient time due to demands were also expressed by PPs through concerns about whether they would have sufficient time to implement agreed strategies. These experiences are

consistent with existing evidence about the presence of work-related pressures within teaching (Education Support, 2022; Lowry et al., 2022; NASUWT, 2022), suggesting the potential for entrenched pressures relating to workload expectations to limit the full potential benefits of engaging in group consultation sessions.

PPs commonly shared that either non or limited next steps had been implemented following the ISC session. While all PPs remained positive that next steps were to be implemented, this may suggest the need for more time. Again, this may support existing evidence regarding work-related pressures within the profession (Education Support, 2022; Lowry et al., 2022; NASUWT, 2022), or be indicative of broader difficulties in terms of resource allocations (Lowry et al., 2022; Reinke et al., 2011; Tucker, 2015; von der Embse et al., 2018). Alternatively, this may further be indicative of the need for PPs to have additional time to consider which next steps would be easily implementable within the given timeframe.

Similarly to these findings, Jones et al. (2013) found that despite participants expressing a desire to implement change, adaptations occurred for only a minority of cases, suggesting the need to distinguish between a desire to change and the feasibility of such change. When considering these present findings in light of Deci and Ryan's (2012) self-determination theory, a conflict between a desire to change and the feasibility of change may highlight the interplay between intrinsic motivation and external constraints. While a desire to change may reflect intrinsic motivation stemming from innate psychological needs, the feasibility of change may depend on external factors such as resources, support and environmental constraints. Therefore, suggesting the need to address not only the motivational aspects but also the contextual factors influencing the feasibility and sustainability of change efforts related to SEMH support.

Within PP Theme Four, Subtheme Two, despite PPs recognising the EP's role as a facilitator and acknowledging school staff as the experts, PPs expressed a desire for the EP to offer quick remedies to complex situations due to existing time pressures. One might consider that despite a shift away from viewing EPs as the sole experts employing unidimensional, direct service delivery models to support school staff (Frank & Kratochwill, 2014; Scholten et al., 1985), lingering legacies and external demands on school staff may continue to shape PPs' expectations regarding the role of the EP (Hayes & Stringer, 2013).

6.3.   RQ2: How do Circle Members Experience Participating in a Group Consultation Model to Support Primary Aged Pupils with SEMH Needs?

Like PPs, CMs participating in the ISC session also found it to be a valuable experience. CMs perceived ISC support across two key dimensions (see Figure 6.7).

Figure 6.7

A Figure to Show the Dimensions of Support for Circle Members Provided by the Insights and Solutions Circle Session
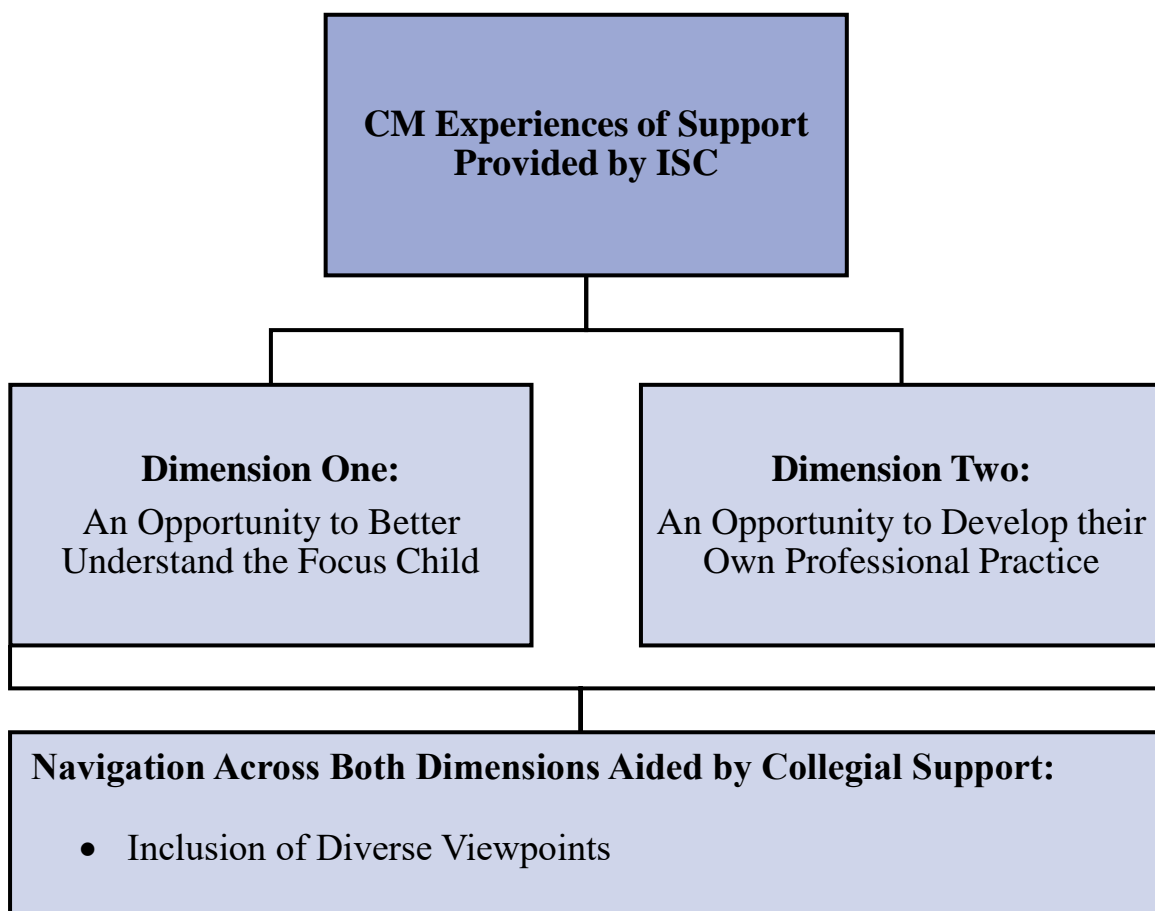
Note. This figure shows that CMs gained benefits from the ISC process in two key areas: gaining a deeper understanding of the focus child and enhancing their own professional practice. Success in both areas is thought to be supported by the inclusion of diverse viewpoints.

In the first dimension, closely aligned with the session's stated objectives, CMs reported gaining deeper insights into the focus child, regardless of whether they were previously acquainted with them or not. In the second dimension, CMs viewed ISC as a valuable opportunity for their own professional growth through their expressed interest in increasingly using structured problem solving methods in the future and contemplated the applicability of generated solutions in their own professional practices. Therefore, CMs highlighted ISC's value as a platform for their own growth. CMs experienced that the inclusion of diverse perspectives during ISC sessions greatly contributed to their development across both dimensions.

6.3.1. *Dimension One: As an Opportunity to Better Understand the Focus Child*

In CM Theme One, many CMs expressed that before participating in ISC, they lacked a thorough understanding of the focus child's needs. This is especially relevant given the reported rising prevalence rates of SEMH needs in CYP (Lowry et al., 2022; NHS Digital, 2023). It can be considered unrealistic to expect all CMs to possess comprehensive knowledge of every child with SEMH needs in their school, especially those with whom they do not have direct interaction, a situation commonly observed among many CMs included in this research. This lack of comprehensive understanding may also indicate a lack of previous opportunities for CMs to engage in professional discussions with colleagues, a factor often associated with feelings of professional isolation (Hadar & Brody, 2010).

However, following the ISC sessions, the majority of CMs reported a notable improvement in their understanding of the focus child's needs, a sentiment supported by findings from previous research studies (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). The ability of ISC to offer CMs, including those with no prior knowledge or direct contact with the focus child, a better understanding of the child within a relatively short timeframe, may align with Zins and Erchul's (2002) proposition that group consultations provide a more cost-effective approach compared to traditional methods. Moreover, this supports Cameron's (2006) suggestion that group consultations can enhance the scope and efficacy of EP practice.

CMs expressed that ISC supported them in gaining valuable insight into the focus child's needs beyond their immediate context, extending to considerations of the child's home environment. This recognition highlights the positive impact ISC can have in providing a more

comprehensive understanding of the broader ecological context influencing a child's wellbeing and development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

The improved understanding among CMs was attributed to having sufficient time during ISC sessions to listen to the PP outline the problem, a luxury suggested to be limited in typical professional interactions (Ostovar-Nameghi & Sheikhahmadi, 2016; Pedersen et al., 1979; Snow-Gerono, 2005). This collaborative approach, where PPs are seen as experts in understanding the problem, aligns with Dupaul et al.'s (2011) advocacy for teachers to be recognised as experts in their own right.

The structured time for discussion within ISC was suggested to support CMs to gain a clearer definition of the problem situation and understanding of their roles and contributions within the session. This transparency aligns with existing literature advocating for clarity regarding purpose and roles within consultation processes (Dobson & Gifford-Bryan, 2014; Todd, 2006; Wilson & Pirrie, 2000).

By establishing a clearer problem definition, CMs expressed increased confidence in supporting PPs by hypothesising the origins of the child's needs and proposing solutions that more accurately addressed those needs. This shift towards a more solution-oriented approach (de Shazer, 1988, 1994, 1997) suggests a more positive and optimistic change in professional practice.

This improved understanding also aligns with attribution theory, suggesting that a deeper understanding of the child's needs may enhance CMs' ability to attribute correct causes to perceived problems (Miller, 2008). Furthermore, this may be indicative of CMs beginning to view themselves as experts (Dupaul et al., 2011), supporting Brown and Henderson's (2012) notion that group consultations can be empowering for all participants. This empowerment aligns with self-determination theory, suggesting that such experiences may help CMs fulfil their own needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness within their professional roles (Deci & Ryan, 2012).

Practically, CMs found that using visual representations during ISC aided their understanding of the focus child's situation. Recognising the cognitive demands of problem solving interactions (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), reducing CMs' cognitive loads through the use of visuals possibly contributed to more efficient and effective decision-making processes.

Additionally, dual coding theory may suggest that processing information from two distinct, yet functionally related systems had the potential to enrich discussions, potentially leading to better information retention and more successful problem solving outcomes (Paivio, 1990).

6.3.2. Dimension Two: As an Opportunity to Develop their Own Professional Practice

Dimension two delves into CM experiences within CM Theme Two, exploring how participation in ISC enhanced their professional practice, indicating the potential benefits for not only the PP but also other school staff involved.

CMs expressed a desire to participate in future collaborative sessions to support other children they directly work with. They believed that such participation would benefit not only the children they support but also themselves and other adults involved in the child's care. CMs saw these sessions as opportunities to enhance their problem solving skills, suggesting growing confidence in the ISC process. Such experiences may indicate cultural shifts where seeking collegial support is increasingly normalised (Farouk, 2004).

Participation in ISC empowered CMs to believe that future collaborative efforts could lead to effective solutions for supporting children with SEMH needs, indicating a growing sense of optimism. This shift toward solution-oriented practices may create ideal environments for Rees' (2008) solution-oriented principles to flourish. Additionally, the importance CMs placed on addressing SEMH concerns for the children they support may reflect the increasing role and importance that school staff have in meeting the SEMH needs of their students, consistent with existing findings (Essau, 2005; Lowry et al., 2022; Shelemy et al., 2019).

In its application, CMs recognised that ISC had the potential to be used to support not only CYP with SEMH needs but also those experiencing academic difficulties. While this suggests the applicability of such a problem solving approach, it may also indicate the academic-based pressures experienced by school staff (Hutchings, 2015; Weare, 2015). This suggests the importance placed by school staff in addressing broader academic challenges alongside SEMH needs, highlighting the multifaceted nature of support required in educational settings.

Although CMs saw value in implementing ISC, they recognised the presence of time constraints limiting their capacity to fully engage in such a process, suggesting broader

pressures that could hinder the regular use of ISC, consistent with existing research (Lowry et al., 2022; Reinke et al., 2011; Tucker, 2015; von der Embse et al., 2018).

However, many CMs suggested that when external constraints prevented implementation of the entire process, they could still draw upon elements of it to enhance the problem solving orientation of informal discussions with colleagues. This need to adapt collegial interactions may suggest that current problem solving discussions are perceived as inadequate and in need of change consistent with Hadar and Brody's (2010) findings. Moreover, these experiences may demonstrate the applicability of skills acquired from ISC sessions to everyday interactions among colleagues, indicating a scope for integrating elements of problem solving approaches more informally into professional settings.

An increasing desire to engage with ISC, whether in its entirety or partially during subsequent collegial interactions, may be indicative of Argyris and Schön's (1978) concept of double-loop learning. This phenomenon, suggesting enhanced CM competencies in future problem solving interactions, may also align with Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 1985; Wenger, 1998), emphasising the crucial role of observation and imitation in learning problem solving skills beyond the ISC session.

Beyond the implementation of the problem solving structure, CMs experienced professional development through the potential to transfer strategies generated during ISC with the CYP they were supporting. Such experiences are consistent with existing research into group consultation models (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Through collaborative problem solving with colleagues for the focus child, CMs recognised similarities in difficulties faced by other children and the applicability of these approaches. This suggests that CMs may have acknowledged not only the shared challenges experienced by others but also the potential to apply solutions to their own situations. Such recognition of successful collaborative engagement may indicate reduced isolation among colleagues, both physically and psychologically, as advocated for by Flinders (1988).

Some CMs pinpointed specific children who could benefit from these approaches immediately, while others appreciated learning about these strategies in anticipation of encountering children with similar needs in the future. This indicates the potential for acquired

knowledge to be applied promptly or at a later time as needed, suggesting how EPs facilitating such group consultations may broaden the scope of their practice (Gutkin & Conoley, 1990; Miller, 1969).

6.3.3. As an Opportunity That Necessitates Diverse Collegial Support for Navigation

CMs experienced that navigating through both dimensions was facilitated by collaborating with a diverse range of CMs, each contributing unique perspectives and expertise to the session (CM Theme Three).

CMs expressed an appreciation for the opportunity to hear these diverse viewpoints during the group consultation session, a sentiment corroborated by existing research (Annan & Moore, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). CMs experienced value in working with colleagues from different teams, suggesting it provided fresh insights and perspectives not typically encountered within their own teams. This suggests that for these CMs, achieving diversity within group consultation models can be accomplished by collaborating with less familiar colleagues, without necessarily needing external involvement from individuals outside the school (e.g., parents/carers or professionals from other agencies).

The collaborative nature of this dynamic was previously seen as uncommon, suggesting the novelty and effectiveness of this approach in fostering comprehensive understanding and promoting innovative problem solving within the CM community. This novelty aligns with existing research suggesting that prior to engaging in group consultation, school staff often lacked frequent opportunities for collaborative professional discussions (Annan & Moore, 2012; Davison & Duffy, 2017; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013).

For CMs, possessing prior knowledge of the child was not considered necessary and was frequently experienced as advantageous. Many CMs found that their lack of prior knowledge allowed them to maintain increased objectivity during the session, enabling more impartial and unbiased contributions. Including CMs with limited or no knowledge of the focus child may contribute to the construction of new knowledge, assimilating existing schemas of those familiar with the child with potentially new perspectives and insights (Arbib, 1986). This

aligns with Truscott et al.'s (2012) advocacy for group consultations to promote the sharing of diverse perspectives, including those from CMs who do not have prior knowledge of the child.

While CMs recognised the importance of including individuals with diverse experiences and expertise, they also emphasised the significance of creating a safe and non-judgmental environment to encourage CMs to express their diversity openly. The capacity for ISC to facilitate open communication aligns with Rees' (2008) sixth principle, emphasising that cooperation is pivotal for effecting change.

For CMs, this cooperative environment was fostered through various means, including seating arrangements in a circular format, providing refreshments and establishing ground rules at the beginning of the session. Positive experiences with a circular seating arrangement may resonate with Mosley's (1996) suggestion that such arrangements can promote enhanced unity and empowerment, as well as with Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) notion that they can help encourage non-hierarchical, collaborative relationships where everyone's contributions are valued and heard.

6.4.   Implications

When considering the research themes developed in this study for broader use, it's crucial to move beyond seeking generalisability (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Instead, focus should be on the potential transferability of these contextualised realities to different settings (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014). Therefore, these themes may be transferable to other primary school contexts, particularly when using ISC with school staff to support children with SEMH needs.

6.4.1.   *Implications for Educational Settings*

Supporting Children with SEMH Needs. This research suggests that participating in ISC is beneficial for both PPs and CMs. There is a suggested benefit for primary settings to increasingly engage in group consultation models to enhance PPs' and CMs' capabilities in understanding the SEMH needs of children before considering solutions to better support them. This structured approach may allow for a comprehensive exploration of the child's difficulties, fostering a deeper understanding of root causes and contributing factors (Bronfrenbrenner, 1994). Such a nuanced understanding aligns with contemporary statutory requirements,

particularly emphasising the need to move beyond surface-level behavioural interventions to effectively address underlying SEMH needs (DfE, 2015). Beyond focus children, there is a suggestion that strategies and problem solving approaches from the session may be generalised to support other children with SEMH needs.

Early Intervention and Systemic Work. ISC sessions have potential to empower PPs to develop realistic strategies tailored to the focus child's needs. This may not only promote early intervention practices as advocated for by existing research and policy (Correll et al., 2018; DfE, 2017; Fusar-Poli et al., 2021; McGorry & Mei, 2018) but also encourage a shift towards systemic responses to SEMH needs across educational settings. The collaborative nature of ISC may foster a culture of shared responsibility among educational practitioners, leading to coordinated efforts in implementing effective support strategies.

Providing Staff with Emotional Containment. This research suggests implications for educational settings concerning the need to provide emotional support for those working with CYP with SEMH needs. It is important this opportunity is provided before school staff are required to engage in problem solving efforts (Cooper & Joseph, 2015). ISC emerges as a promising strategy to address the emotional needs of PPs, particularly regarding feelings of isolation often experienced when supporting children with SEMH needs.

Encouraging Collaborative Efforts. This study suggests the importance of fostering collaborative environments in schools based on the collaborative nature of ISC. These sessions may provide a safe space for PPs to openly discuss concerns, encouraging honesty and emotional expression crucial for genuine learning and positive change for the focus child, PPs and CMs (Hanko, 2002; McLoughlin, 2010). Active listening and empathetic collaboration, especially among familiar CMs should be encouraged by schools due to their potential to contribute to a supportive and understanding atmosphere.

Addressing Constraints. Educational settings should continue to proactively address external constraints to optimise the effectiveness of the ISC process in supporting SEMH needs of CYP. External constraints such as limited time, workload pressures and resource shortages can hinder the successful implementation of collaborative problem solving initiatives like ISC. Firstly, schools could allocate dedicated time and resources specifically for ISC sessions, integrating them into regular professional development schedules or designating specific days

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for collaborative problem solving activities. Secondly, addressing workload pressures through workload audits, task prioritisation and team-based approaches may alleviate individual burdens and promote sustained engagement during ISC sessions. Finally, providing adequate resources and support systems, including access to relevant materials, training opportunities and external support networks, could improve scope for translating ISC outcomes into actionable interventions within educational settings.

6.4.2. *Implications for Educational Psychologists*

Assuming the Role of Process Facilitator. EPs within the ISC process are encouraged to assume a facilitative, collaborative and non-hierarchical role. Acknowledging the expertise of all participants, including PPs and CMs and refraining from solely assuming expert roles may foster a more inclusive and effective problem solving environment. EPs should leverage their artful knowledge base and interpersonal skills to guide sessions and encourage active participation from all stakeholders (West & Idol, 1987). This shift in the EP's role may enhance intervention understanding and fidelity by valuing consultee expertise and promoting autonomy and competence among participants (Dupaul, 2011; Lynn et al., 2003; Newman & Rosenfield, 2018). EPs may facilitate meaningful problem solving experiences by maintaining authenticity and openness about the constraints of their roles while empowering others to contribute meaningfully to the process.

Modelling Desirable Behaviours. EPs should use ISC sessions to model desirable group behaviours, encouraging subsequent imitation and promoting continuous learning (Farouk, 2004). EPs should emphasise active listening and empathetic collaboration in ISC sessions, contributing to practitioners feeling heard and valued.

Supporting PP's Emotional Needs. This research suggests the scope for ISC in addressing not only children's SEMH needs but also practitioners' emotional wellbeing. ISC sessions offer a structured yet empathetic environment for PPs to explore their feelings related to supporting SEMH needs, fostering emotional expression and processing essential for subsequent positive changes (Cooper & Joseph, 2015). EPs should consider the appropriateness of implementing ISC when school staff require emotional support.

Subsequent Problem solving. EPs should encourage PPs and CMs to explicitly consider the adaptation and integration of problem solving skills acquired during sessions into

everyday interactions among colleagues. This adaptive approach reflects ongoing learning and development, aligning with principles of double-loop learning and Social Learning Theory, potentially enhancing collaborative problem solving competencies beyond ISC sessions (Argyris & Schön, 1978; Bandura, 1985)

6.4.3. *Implications for Insights and Solutions Circle Model*

Increasing Opportunity for PP Contributions. Addressing the internal limitations encountered within the ISC process requires thoughtful changes aimed at fostering a more inclusive and flexible problem solving environment. One approach could involve revising the session structure to allow for a more iterative and collaborative exchange of ideas between PPs and CMs, emphasising the importance of accommodating diverse perspectives and strategies. Providing designated time within sessions for PPs to present their theories or strategies, even if initially perceived as incompatible, may encourage constructive dialogue and the exploration of alternative solutions.

Time for Reflection. Incorporating regular moments of reflection and feedback after ISC sessions may promote continuous learning and improvement. This could involve dedicating time at the end of sessions for PPs and CMs to review and discuss the generated strategies, clarify any misunderstandings and identify areas for further exploration or refinement. Post-session reflection periods, whether individually or in small groups, may also offer valuable opportunities for PPs to internalise insights, assess the feasibility of proposed strategies within their contexts and plan actionable next steps collaboratively.

Increased Time. PPs may benefit from more time to contemplate and refine next steps before making decisions. Rushing into decisions during the session could lead to feelings of unpreparedness and exacerbate negative emotions such as stress and frustration among PPs (Lowry et al., 2022). Therefore, incorporating dedicated reflection periods (e.g., a short break or post-session time to mull over generated strategies) may enhance decision-making quality and promote a sense of readiness and confidence among participants. Additionally, it may be important to allow PPs more time to implement agreed-upon next steps before the designated coach checks in with them. This extended timeframe may not only support effective strategy implementation but could also provide an opportunity for PPs to experience the outcomes of

their decisions, fostering a deeper understanding of their effectiveness and promoting continuous learning within the ISC process.

6.4.4. Professional Implications

Professional. This research has led to many implications for me, both currently as a TEP and in the future as a newly qualified EP. Firstly, it allowed me to develop my research skills as a scientist-practitioner, bridging the gap between theory and practice. Secondly, this study implied the value of engaging in more collaborative work with school staff by recognising them increasingly as experts, thus fostering a culture of mutual respect and creating more equal power dynamics within professional relationships. Additionally, this research highlighted the importance of listening to those we work with to understand what has worked and what has not about approaches in an idiographic way, considering unique and individual experiences. Furthermore, it emphasised the valuable role EPs can play in facilitation, particularly in facilitating discussions and problem solving sessions. Lastly, this study suggests the necessity of checking in with school staff after working with them to review strategies discussed, identify potential barriers and collaboratively plan next steps, thus potentially ensuring sustained support and more meaningful implementation of interventions.

Present Research. Disseminating findings is considered essential to building on existing knowledge and enhancing intervention quality (Monsen, 2018). I intend to present constructed research themes at a service team meeting, aiming to facilitate knowledge exchange within the professional community. In addition, copies of the thesis will be sent to parents/carers, CMs and PPs who provided their contact details on the consent form, ensuring transparency and accessibility for those directly involved. I will share the thesis with Inclusive Solutions, emphasising inclusivity and broader engagement. Finally, I aspire to contribute to the academic discourse by seeking publication of my research findings in a peer reviewed journal, thereby extending the broader dissemination within academic and professional circles.

6.4.5. Implications for Future Research

CM Interviews. Recognising the limitations of the current study, upcoming research could enrich their outcomes by integrating "*thicker*" data elements obtained from semi-structured interviews with CMs (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This approach could lead to a more thorough and nuanced exploration of the insights and perspectives held by CMs.

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ISC with Parents. As highlighted in the SEND CoP (2015), involving parents/carers in planning student support is essential, along with their engagement in reinforcing interventions or contributing to progress at home. Building on this principle, future research endeavours could examine the effectiveness of group consultations involving both school staff and parents/carers to gain a comprehensive understanding of their respective experiences (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Integrating the viewpoints of educators and parents/carers within these consultations may yield valuable insights into the synergies and challenges faced by these critical stakeholders. Such an approach has the potential to provide a holistic view of the support systems surrounding CYP with SEMH needs, thus the potential for improving the efficacy and relevance of tailored interventions.

Regular ISC Sessions. Future research could explore the sustained impact of regular group consultations. These consultations, perhaps conducted fortnightly, could involve primary school staff in supporting CYP with SEMH needs. Implementing regular sessions may align well with the principles outlined in the SEND CoP (2015), which emphasises the importance of continuous professional development for educational staff. By taking a longitudinal approach, researchers may gain insights into the ongoing benefits and challenges associated with frequent collaborative problem solving sessions.

6.5. Reflexive Considerations of the Current Study

6.5.1. *Participants*

I utilised opportunity sampling effectively to recruit participants from primary schools with prior professional engagements through local authority service level agreements. This method ensured efficient recruitment (Neuman, 2014) and included three different schools to diversify contexts and participant experiences. Ethical considerations were paramount, including obtaining parent/carer consent, addressing participant queries personally and providing clear information sheets and consent forms, adhering to ethical guidelines (British Psychological Society 2021a; 2021b; Council of the European Union, 2016; University of Nottingham, 2023). My adaptability in sampling strategies maintained ethical integrity and maximised data collection opportunities, responding effectively to unforeseen circumstances.

However, the sampling methods had limitations. While opportunity sampling expedited initial contact with schools, it may have limited participant diversity, potentially excluding

those not fitting within existing SLAs. In one ISC session, low CM numbers may have affected problem solving dynamics and data richness. Not collecting participant characteristics limited contextualisation and understanding demographic influences on ISC experiences, prioritising ethical considerations and participant anonymity.

6.5.2. Procedure

I received support and guidance from Inclusive Solutions, enhancing my understanding of the ISC procedure. A detailed ISC overview sheet was created and distributed, increasing clarity and consistency throughout sessions.

However, limitations are apparent, primarily concerning session logistics and participant availability. Variability in session durations and attendance rates may have influenced intervention consistency and completeness. Despite efforts to maintain confidentiality, session location choices, like using a school staff room, could have limited participant openness during discussions.

Another limitation was the prevalence of linear text captured on the graphic during group consultations. This approach may have led to information overload, potentially overwhelming participants with excessive textual content. Such an overload could have hindered their ability to process and integrate the information effectively. As a result, participants might have struggled to link their contributions cohesively, impacting the overall quality and coherence of the feedback collected.

6.5.3. Data Collection

Both questionnaires and interviews captured diverse perspectives and insights. Questionnaires after ISC sessions potentially minimised recall bias, providing timely feedback, while interviews with PPs possibly delved deeper into experiences. Adaptability was shown by adjusting data collection based on reflections and feedback, like leaving during questionnaire completion to reduce influence and modifying interview schedules for engagement. Strategies during interviews, like active listening and open-ended questions, may have encouraged openness and trust, potentially enhancing data quality.

However, the data collection process had limitations. The varying time intervals between ISC sessions and subsequent PP interviews, ranging from one to two weeks, may

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introduce recall bias, impacting the depth of PP recall. Using questionnaires for CMs, although practical, may have limited their ability to provide nuanced insights into ISC experiences due to the structured format.

6.5.4. *Data Analysis*

RTA offers flexibility in data analysis, adapting to specific research needs (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Its multi-phase, recursive approach enabled a thorough exploration of qualitative data, from familiarisation to coding, theme generation and findings. This iterative method deepened analysis and fostered a nuanced data understanding. RTA also promoted reflexivity, ensuring transparency and coherence. I documented analytical decisions and engaged in reflexive practices (e.g., journaling, supervision and RTA support groups) to consider what was guiding my interpretations.

My background influenced my subjective interpretations during data analysis. Pre-existing relationships within the school community and experience as a former teacher likely shaped my perceptions. My familiarity with existing research from a thorough literature review also likely influenced data interpretation. Journaling and supervision aided in considering these influences.

Moreover, RTA required substantial time, particularly in terms of data familiarisation, coding and theme generation (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This intensive process resulted in the analysis taking longer than initially anticipated, but it was important not to rush the analysis to ensure thoroughness.

6.5.5. *The Researcher's Role*

My various roles within this research may have influenced my interpretations. Firstly, acting as a link psychologist between the schools and the Educational Psychology Service, my relationships with the schools may have influenced which schools were selected and how engaged participants were. Additionally, facilitating the ISC session added another layer of involvement, potentially impacting how participants responded during discussions. Lastly, my dual role in both data collection and analysis could have influenced participant responses and shaped how data was interpreted.

To address these potential influences, deliberate measures were taken. For example, I invited all schools with a service level agreement for which I was the link TEP to participate. I engaged in supervision to critically consider decisions being made, sought to ensure participants felt comfortable and were open during discussions, clarified and distinguished between my roles as the researcher and as a TEP and allowed participants increased independence during questionnaire completion after the first two ISC sessions. These steps were essential to increase the trustworthiness and integrity of this research.

Chapter Seven: Conclusion

7.1.   Concluding Remarks

This study sought to delve into the experiences of both PPs and CMs during their involvement in ISC sessions aimed at supporting primary aged children with SEMH needs. PPs' and CMs' experiences were explored separately given the distinct roles they played within ISC. Semi-structured interviews were used to explore PPs' experiences, while questionnaires were employed for CMs. Data items were analysed for both groups separately using Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA. Through analysis, six PP themes and three CM themes were constructed.

PPs found ISC sessions supportive across two dimensions. They experienced ISC's role in enhancing their comprehension and capacity to address the focus child's SEMH needs. ISC not only supported with tackling immediate concerns but also imparted transferable skills crucial for wider professional practice. Delving deeply into problems and collaborating on solutions allowed ISC to support with developing realistic strategies and increasingly systemic responses tailored to meet the focus child's SEMH needs.

The second dimension emphasised ISC sessions as not only a professional development platform but also as a source of emotional support for PPs, addressing their isolation and fostering collaboration. The safe space provided during ISC sessions encouraged open expression, validation of experiences and active listening among CMs. Collaborating with familiar colleagues further enhanced this supportive environment, emphasising the importance of empathy and shared experiences in educational settings.

While ISC provided structural support for effective navigation and problem solving across both dimensions, it also posed internal and external constraints for PPs. Internally, frustrations arose when PPs' ideas were not considered, highlighting the need for flexibility and inclusion in problem solving sessions. Externally, time constraints and workload pressures impacted thoroughness and implementation post-ISC, emphasising the need to balance intrinsic motivation with external realities for sustainable SEMH support efforts in schools.

The current study suggested that CMs found engagement in ISC beneficial across two key dimensions: understanding the needs of focus children and enhancing their professional practice. Before the ISC session, CMs often expressed that they lacked comprehensive

knowledge of the focus child's SEMH needs, but ISC led to improvements in their understanding. This improvement was suggested to be due to structured discussion time during ISC, allowing for clearer problem definitions and role understanding. CMs also gained insights into the influence of the focus child's broader ecological context. ISC empowered CMs to propose more accurate solutions and view themselves increasingly as experts, enhancing their problem solving skills and professional confidence. This research also highlighted the importance of diverse collegial support during navigation through both dimensions, fostering open communication and innovative problem solving.

This research highlights the transformative impact of collaboration and empathy, benefiting both children with SEMH needs and school staff. Let us continue to harness this power to embrace structured approaches and diverse perspectives to collaboratively craft inclusive, effective solutions for those who need them most!

7.2. Original Contribution of Current Research

This research makes a distinctive contribution by being the first study to explore the experiences of school staff participating in Newton and Wilson's (2013) ISC. Such an exploration supports EPs with engaging in subsequent evidence-informed practices.

Furthermore, this study is unique in its exploration of the application of the ISC group consultation model in primary schools, specifically aiming to understand how it supports school staff working with children exhibiting SEMH needs. This emphasis on primary school contexts adds a valuable layer of insight into the potential effectiveness of more early intervention work, aligning with a broader goal of fostering positive outcomes for all children with SEMH needs.

The uniqueness of this research also lies in its explicit focus on discerning the individual experiences of both PPs and CMs within these sessions. By separately considering the perspectives of PPs and CMs, this research recognises the distinct roles they play in the collaborative problem solving process, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of their participation.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Systematic Literature Review Study Summary Table

Citation and Location	Group Consultation Model	Link to SEMH/Behavioural Needs	Role of the EP	Setting	Sample	Methodology	Findings
Annan and Moore, 2012, London, UK	Staff Sharing Scheme – 17 sessions held	Scheme used to support staff with managing challenging behaviours	EP initially facilitated and later became a content resource	Applied in primary, secondary and specialist provisions	17 Staff Sharing Scheme sessions run involving teachers and other school staff, but sample size not specified	Mixed methods data collection: Qualitative feedback collected at 'Meta-evaluation stage' focus group Quantitative data obtained using an evaluation tool that drew upon TME and solution focused rating scales (collected at three time points)	Staff Sharing Scheme suggested to provide the opportunity to: o Have time and space to think about the problem o Listen to different perspectives o Consider new aspects to the case that may not have previously been considered o Improve teacher wellbeing o Find a structure to problem solve that can be used in other contexts
Davison & Duffy, 2017, Northern Ireland	Farouk's (2004) Process Consultation Groups – 12 sessions held in 6 months	Approach used to support nurture group staff in managing challenging behaviour	EP provided initial training on Farouk's group consultations and then facilitated the	Nurture groups within 11 primary schools	22 school staff participants (11 teachers and 11 teaching assistants)	Mixed methods data collection: Repeated Likert scales (Levels of concern, confidence and teacher self-efficacy scales)	Working collaboratively was suggested to: o Reduce levels of concern o Aid reassurance o Reduce unrealistic expectations

		group consultation sessions				Post-program consultation questionnaire Post-intervention focus group Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and t-tests	o Reduce anxiety and stress levels o Aid behaviour management o Increase reflection o Increase self-confidence and self-efficacy o Improve teacher and TA relationships
Grahamslaw and Henson, 2015, Surrey, UK	Rees' (2009) adapted Solution Circles and Wilson and Newton's (2006) Circle of Adults	Some Solution Circles were facilitated during ELSA supervision sessions and four Circle of Adults sessions were facilitated to support pupil integration from a short stay school to a mainstream setting	Solution Circles were facilitated by one EP, while Circle of Adults was facilitated by two EPs	Solution Circles were held during ELSA supervision, primary school staff meetings, SENCo partnership meetings and EP peer supervision Circle of Adults sessions were held within a specialist setting for pupils with SEMH-based needs	A total of 10 Solution Circles were held, with 62 school staff participating Four Circle of Adults sessions took place, with 31 school staff participating	Qualitative data collection involved a questionnaire completed post-intervention and thematic analysis	Regarding Solution Circles, participants mentioned that solutions could be generalised and more solutions were generated by working in a group For Circle of Adults, participants reported an increased understanding of the problem, increased empathy toward the focus child and found EP facilitation useful

Hayes & Stringer, 2016, Ireland	Farouk's (2004) Process Consultation Groups	Approach introduced to help staff manage pupil behaviour over the course of a year	EP acted as the consultant and facilitator	Implemented in three mainstream primary schools	26 school staff participants involved, with data collected from the school principal and a core group member at each of the schools (totalling 6 interviews)	Mixed methods data collection included pre- and post-intervention quantitative Teacher Questionnaires, a second post-intervention Teacher Questionnaire, post-intervention group member and facilitator reflective evaluation forms and post-intervention semi-structured interviews Thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) was employed	o Key elements identified for effective group consultation: planning, organisation, willingness to change, relationships, composition of the group and effectiveness of the facilitator o The intervention allowed time for reflection, sharing information and strategies with colleagues o Improved behaviour management and generalisation of strategies were observed o The benefits of an external facilitator were recognised o Two schools preferred this form of EP support, while one school preferred more traditional EP ways of working o EPs were still generally perceived as the expert
Jones et al., 2013, Kent, UK	Staff Sharing Scheme	Approach introduced to help staff manage challenging pupil behaviour	EP provided Staff Sharing Scheme training (5	Implemented in a two-form entry shire primary school	20 school staff participants were involved	Mixed methods data collection included pre- and post- Staff Sharing Scheme quantitative questionnaires and	o Observed outcomes: increased reflection on causes of behavioural difficulties and increased

			sessions, 1.5 hours each)			post- Staff Sharing Scheme qualitative semi-structured interviews with 6 participants There was a 6-week gap before post-intervention data collection to allow participants time to reflect and engage in peer support Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and t-tests were utilised	coherence in problem solving o Concerns related to trust and timings were raised during the study
Nugent et al., 2014, Ireland	Waterford Model of group consultation - utilises aspects of process consultation, problem solving and solution-oriented approaches	Over 74% of cases related to behavioural and emotional difficulties	Consultations facilitated by two EPs	Implemented in both secondary and primary school settings	12 cluster groups ran from 2011-2012 and 10 cluster groups from 2012-2013 involving teachers	Mixed methods data collection included quantitative methods such as post-consultation questionnaires for psychologists, group consultation records and post-consultation teacher evaluation forms	o Suggested that group consultations are an effective model of service delivery, particularly for clusters of small, rural schools o Learning support and resource sharing received the highest rating o Participants attending more sessions were more likely to want the sessions to continue

						Qualitative methods included post-consultation questionnaires for psychologists and end-of-pilot phase evaluation forms for principals and teachers Analysis methods included content analysis and descriptive statistics	o Participants who attended the training session reported higher levels of satisfaction, particularly liking the structure of the sessions and feeling supported by the group
Turner & Gulliford, 2020, Nottingham, UK	Wilson & Newton's (2006) Circle of Adults	Implemented to support looked after children at risk of exclusion and displaying challenging behaviour	Facilitated by a trainee EP	Implemented in four mainstream secondary schools	Complete data obtained from 10 participants in CoA and 5 participants in the control group	Mixed methods data collection included pre-intervention attribution and self-efficacy measures, post-intervention target monitoring and evaluation measures and a focus group Analysis methods included thematic analysis, ANOVA and Wilcoxon Signed Rank test	o No significant effect on causal attributions or self-efficacy found from participating in the Circle of Adults o However, increased self-efficacy and success were observed following the implementation of actions o Identified value in the Circle of Adults process, highlighting group cohesion and task focus during Circle of Adults sessions

	o Participants reported increased empathy and gained insights into the focus child, as well as increased awareness of group processes and reflection

Appendix 2 – Weight of Evidence A to D Definitions and Corresponding Checklists/Criteria

Weight of Evidence	Definition	Weight of Evidence Checklist/Criteria
WofE A	A generic assessment of research coherence and integrity, independent of other included evidence in the review.	The CASP checklist (2018) was utilised without modification, consisting of 10 questions. Post-checklist engagement, ratings were assigned following Florisson et al.'s (2021) guidance: **High (3)** for scores eight to 10. **Medium (2)** for scores five to seven. **Low (1)** for scores one to four.
WofE B	Review-specific assessment of evidence appropriateness for answering the review question.	The following ratings were assigned: **High (3)** In-depth interviews or focus groups, qualitatively capturing school staff experiences with clear and consistent data collection and analysis approaches. **Medium (2)** Less in-depth qualitative data or unclear/inconsistent approaches in data collection and analysis to capture school staff experiences. **Low (1)** Sole reliance on open-ended questionnaires to capture school staff experiences with unclear/inconsistent data collection and analysis methods.
WofE C	Review-specific assessment of evidence focus for addressing the review question.	The following rating were given: **High (3)** Focus solely on perspectives of school staff in a group consultation model designed to support CYP with

		SEMH/behavioural needs, facilitated by EP(s)/TEP(s). **Medium (2)** Predominant emphasis on school staff experiences in a group consultation model, primarily focused on supporting CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs with some EP/TEP support. **Low (1)** Loose or limited focus on school staff experiences in a group consultation model, with majority of sessions not addressing SEMH/behavioural concerns and minimal or no EP/TEP support.
WofE D	Overall judgment derived from a mean combination score of Weight of Evidence A, B and C.	Mean score from WofE A-C determined WofE D scores: **High (3)** Mean score of 2.5 and above. **Medium (2)** Mean score between 2 and 2.4. **Low (1)** Mean score of 1.9 or less.

Appendix 3 - A Breakdown of Individual Weight of Evidence A to D Appraisal Judgments

1. *Weight of Evidence A*

WofE A for each study was considered using the CASP checklist (2018). This checklist is comprised of ten question items and was not modified in any way. Each item was labelled with either "yes", "no" or "can't tell". Studies were awarded one point for each item that was labelled as yes. Based on overall items scoring, studies that achieved a categorisation label of high (score of 8 to 10), medium (score of 5 to 7) or low (score of 1 to 4).

CASP Checklist	*Annan and Moore (2012)*	*Davison & Duffy (2017)*	*Grahamslaw and Henson (2015)*	*Hayes & Stringer (2016)*	*Jones et al. (2013)*	*Nugent et al. (2014)*	*Turner & Gulliford (2020)*
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes (page 90)	Yes (page 391)	Yes (page 116)	Yes (page 145 – 146)	Yes (page 261)	Yes (page 255)	Yes (page 5)
Is a qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes - to gather views about strengths and improvements of the process.	Yes - it allowed researchers to consider participants' perceptions during group problem solving.	Yes - it allowed researchers to explore participants' perceptions in Solution Circles and Circle of Adults.	Yes - qualitative data was utilised to answer the four research questions.	Yes - qualitative data allowed researchers to consider staff perceptions of the Staff Sharing Scheme.	Yes - qualitative data allowed researchers to explore participant perceptions of useful aspects and improvements.	Yes - to support gaining participant views about the Circle of Adults' process and outcomes.
Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Can't tell – design not clearly outlined.	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes – allowed for comparison with the control group.

Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Can't tell – schools taking part in TaMHs work with the local authority – opportunity sampling. However, it is unclear how these schools were recruited.	Can't tell – primary schools selected from across the city and representative of cultural diversity. However, how schools and staff were recruited is not detailed.	Can't tell – who was recruited is detailed, but the recruitment strategy is not given.	Yes – clearly outlined in terms of schools selected (referral rates) and participants being self-selected.	Can't tell – detailed why the school was selected and that participants were selected through purposive sampling but not clear how the school was initially recruited.	Yes – opportunity sampling.	Yes – convenience sampling.
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Yes – focus group at the end of the Staff Sharing Scheme allowed consideration of their experiences with the approach.	Yes – after the final consultation session, focus group including teacher and TA representatives.	Yes – questionnaire post Solution Circle and Circle of Adults to explore participant perceptions.	Yes – post-session interviews and questionnaires containing some open-ended questions.	Yes – post-training semi-structured interviews.	Yes – open-ended questions contained within the questionnaires.	Yes – semi-structured focus group.
Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	Can't tell – no details given.	Yes – researcher who did not facilitate led the focus group.	Can't tell – no details given.	Yes – role of researcher as researcher and allocated EP outlined.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.

Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Can't tell – no details given.	Yes (page 6).
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	No – no qualitative analysis took place.	Yes – use of thematic analysis.	Yes – use of thematic analysis.	Yes – use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Yes – use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Yes – content analysis.	Yes – use of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.	Yes – findings outlined clearly.
Is the research valuable?	Yes – first paper to use a revised form of the Staff Sharing Scheme.	Yes – limited research in this area.	Yes – limited research in this area and no research had compared these approaches.	Yes – first research looking at group problem solving in Irish schools.	Yes – part of a local initiative and enhancing limited research on Staff Sharing Schemes.	Yes – part of a local initiative.	Yes – comparison provided with the control group and supportive local initiative.
Overall Weight of Evidence A	5	8	7	9	7	8	9
Overall rating	Medium (2)	High (3)	Medium (2)	High (2)	Medium (2)	High (3)	High (3)

2. *Weight of Evidence B*

Ratings of WofE B were based on the following judgements:

High (3) In-depth interviews or focus groups, qualitatively capturing school staff experiences with clear and consistent data collection and analysis approaches.

Medium (2) Less in-depth qualitative data or unclear/inconsistent approaches in data collection and analysis to capture school staff experiences.

Low (1) Sole reliance on open-ended questionnaires to capture school staff experiences with unclear/inconsistent data collection and analysis methods.

Study	*WofE B*
Annan and Moore (2012)	2 - Focus groups, but analysis not clearly defined.
Davison and Duffy (2017)	3 - Data collection and analysis are clearly outlined.
Grahamslaw and Henson (2015)	2 - Questionnaires were used, but the use of TA was outlined.
Hayes and Stringer (2016)	3 - Data collection and analysis are clearly outlined.
Jones et al. (2013)	3 - Data collection and analysis are clearly outlined.
Nugent et al. (2014)	2 - Only two questions in the questionnaire addressed participant experiences.
Turner and Gulliford (2020)	3 - Focus group and the use of TA are outlined clearly.

3. Weight of Evidence C

Ratings of WofE C were based on the following judgements:

High (3) Focus solely on perspectives of school staff in a group consultation model designed to support CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs, facilitated by EP(s)/TEP(s).

Medium (2) Predominant emphasis on school staff experiences in a group consultation model, primarily focused on supporting CYP with SEMH/behavioural needs with some EP/TEP support.

Low (1) Loose or limited focus on school staff experiences in a group consultation model, with majority of sessions not addressing SEMH/behavioural concerns and minimal or no EP/TEP support.

Study	*WofE C*
Annan and Moore (2012)	2 – All sessions were focused on behavioural concerns, with the EP transitioning from a facilitator role to a content resource.
Davison and Duffy (2017)	3 – All sessions were conducted to support behavioural concerns and were facilitated by the EP.
Grahamslaw and Henson (2015)	2 – It's unclear if the SENCo 'partnership meetings' or EP peer supervision sessions were focused on SEMH concerns.
Hayes and Stringer (2016)	3 – All sessions were conducted to support behavioural concerns and were facilitated by the EP.
Jones et al. (2013)	2 – All sessions were geared towards supporting behavioural needs. The EP provided training but did not facilitate subsequent problem solving sessions.
Nugent et al. (2014)	2 – Over 74% of the cases were related to behavioural and emotional difficulties.
Turner and Gulliford (2020)	3 – Sessions were used to support children at risk of exclusion and all were facilitated by the researcher, who was a TEP.

4. *Weight of Evidence D*

Ratings of WofE D were based on the following judgements:

High (3) Mean score of 2.5 and above.

Medium (2) Mean score between 2 and 2.4.

Low (1) Mean score of 1.9 or less.

Study	WofE D Score	Rating
Annan and Moore (2012)	2.0	Medium
Davison and Duffy (2017)	3.0	High
Grahamslaw and Henson (2015)	2.0	Medium
Hayes and Stringer (2016)	3.0	High
Jones et al. (2013)	2.3	Medium
Nugent et al. (2014)	2.3	Medium
Turner and Gulliford (2020)	3.0	High

Appendix 4 - School Recruitment Email

Dear _____(Headteacher/SENDCo),

My name is Aman Dhaliwal. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Nottingham. I am currently working at _____ **Educational Psychology service.** As part of my doctoral programme, I am completing a research project exploring school staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles.

Research title: School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

The research seeks to consider school staff experiences of participating in this group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The school will not incur any charges for participating within this research.

Please find attached an information sheet to find out further information about this research project. If you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor via the following email addresses:

Researcher: Amandeep Kaur Dhaliwal
Researcher's email address: Amandeep.dhaliwal@nottingham.ac.uk
Supervisor: Maria Abijah-liburd
Supervisor's email address: Maria.abijah-liburd1@nottingham.ac.uk

Yours Sincerely,

Aman Dhaliwal

Aman Dhaliwal
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

Appendix 5 – School Information Letter

School of Psychology

Information Sheet – School

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Dear _____ (Headteacher/SENDCo),

My name is Aman Dhaliwal. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Nottingham. I am currently working at _____ **Educational Psychology service**. As part of my doctoral programme, I am completing a research project exploring school staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles.

I am writing to invite you to take part in the research. This research project will involve the implementation of a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles. The research seeks to consider school staff experiences of participating in this group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Research title: School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Insights and Solutions Circles is a group consultation model which expands on traditional Solution Circle methods by drawing on elements from Circle of Adults. Such an approach seeks to provide those working with children and young people with strategies of support. This programme has been created by Inclusive Solutions (https://inclusive-solutions.com/). The

whole process lasts around 50 minutes. The programme involves the following steps: problem presentation, questions asked, theories shared, strategies listed, dialogue regarding selected strategies and consideration of the next steps.

You will be required to identify a young person who is experiencing SEMH needs. Parents/carers should have shared understanding that their child has SEMH based needs i.e., invitation to participate in this research should not be the first they hear of these needs. In line with the SEND Code of Practice (2015), the focus child may be described as withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. Adults working with the identified child may currently feel unsure of what to do next. Once the focus child has been selected, we would require inclusion of the following roles:

o Problem Presenter (an identified adult who knows the child's SEMH needs the best and is willing to present the problem to the circle).

o The creative thinking team (Circle Members) made up of 4-6 others (these individuals do not have to know the child but must be willing to partake in collaborative discussions to consider strategies to support the identified child. These individuals will work at the school).

The Problem Presenter should be an adult who knows the child well but does not necessarily have to be the child's class teacher. Following implementation of the Insights and Solutions Circle, Circle Members will be asked to complete a questionnaire to find out about their experiences of participating in a group consultation model. Furthermore, one to two weeks after the Insights and Solutions Circle session, the Problem Presenter will be invited to attend an interview. The interview should last no more than one hour and will be held in person at your school. Interview sessions will be audio recorded for transcription and analysing for the purposes of this research. Due to time commitments and staff timetabling, it is possible for the Insights and Solutions Circles sessions and interviews to occur at any point in the day e.g., lunch times and afterschool.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and your school is under no obligation to take part. Your school, participants and parents/carers are free to withdraw at any point before or during the research. It is worthy to note, participation or non-participation will not impact the service and support you receive from _____ **Educational Psychology service**.

Parental/carer consent will be required before informed consent from the Problem Presenter and Circle Members is obtained.

It is important to note that if school interest is registered and parental consent is obtained, Problem Presenters and Circle Members remain under no obligation to provide their consent. It should not be made known to parents/carers which school staff provide consent, do not consent, or withdraw from the research project unless chosen to do so by the individual school staff concerned. It will not be made known if Problem Presenters choose to withdraw from the interview stage of the project unless chosen to do so by the individual concerned.

Once the Insights and Solutions circle session has been implemented, it will be important for someone in school to feedback to parents/carers about some of the agreed actions. It is however, up to your school to determine when and where this will happen and who will be involved within this conversation.

All data collected will be anonymised and used for research purposes only. Data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act and the University of Nottingham's ethical and data guidance. Data included within the written research projects will be completely anonymised.

Your school will not incur a charge for participating within this research. If you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please don't hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor via the email addresses above. We can also be contacted during and after participation at the above addresses.

Yours Sincerely,

Aman Dhaliwal

Aman Dhaliwal
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)
<div align="center">
If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk
</div>

Appendix 6 - Special Educational Needs Coordinator Initial Meeting Agenda

Meeting agenda items:

Topic	Prompt
The ISC process and its origins	Utilise the Inclusive Solutions website as a resource: https://inclusive-solutions.com/
The criteria for pupil selection	Refer to the SEND Code of Practice (2015) here. Encourage the SENDCo to consider whether there is any sensitive or confidential information about the focus child that should not be disclosed during the ISC session.
The role and commitment of the Problem Presenter and Circle Members	Discuss the differences in the roles and the inclusion criteria. Review the different consent forms and consider their roles during the ISC session and in terms of data collection.
My role as the researcher in facilitating the ISC session and how this differs from my existing role as the school's link with the EPS	Discuss how this work is separate from service level agreement work.
The data collection methods	Detail the use of interviews and questionnaires, including how they will be administered and describe my involvement.
The process for obtaining informed consent	Present consent forms and highlight that parental/carer consent is required first. Even with consent, PPs and CMs are under no obligation to participate.
The right to withdraw	Reiterate that participation can occur at any time point without parents/carers or participants needing to provide a reason.

Appendix 7 - Parent/Carer Information Letter and Consent Form

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Dear Parent/carer,

My name is Aman Dhaliwal. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Nottingham. I am currently working at _____ **Educational Psychology service**. As part of my doctoral programme, I am completing a research project exploring school staff experiences of a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles. This programme has been created by Inclusive Solutions (https://inclusive-solutions.com/).

Your child's school has expressed an interest in being involved within this research. This research project will involve the implementation of a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles. This research seeks to consider school staff experiences of participating in this group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

I am writing to you today to request consent for your child to be discussed within this group consultation session. It is hoped that being discussed as part of this session may be of benefit to your child by:

1. Providing school staff with a clearer understanding about your child's needs.
2. Providing school staff with strategies that can support your child's needs.

Once the session has been implemented, questionnaires will be completed by the adults attending the circle and an interview will be held with one of the Circle Members to gain feedback on the group consultation model; at this point, your child will no longer be discussed. Please note that your child will not directly partake in the Insights and Solutions Circle session,

rather their needs and strategies to support them will be discussed by the adults attending the session.

Participation in this research is totally voluntary and you are under no obligation to give permission for the session to take place. You are free to withdraw your consent at any point before or during the research. It is worthy to note, participation or non-participation will not impact the service and support you receive from _____ **Educational Psychology service** .

It is important to note that if your consent is obtained, school staff remain under no obligation to provide their consent. School staff are free to withdraw at any time. It will not be made known by the researcher which school staff provide consent, do not consent, or withdraw from the research project unless chosen to do so by the individual concerned.

Following the implementation of the Insights and Solutions circle session, your child's school will be encouraged to feedback some of the agreed actions to you. It is however, up to the school to determine when and where this will happen and who will be involved within this conversation.

All data collected will be anonymised and used for research purposes only. Data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act and the University of Nottingham's ethical and data guidance. Data included within the written research projects will be completely anonymised.

If you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please don't hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor via the email addresses above. We can also be contacted during and after your participation at the above addresses.

Yours Sincerely,

Aman Dhaliwal

Aman Dhaliwal
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)
If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Psychology

Consent Form – Parent/Carer

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

The parent/carer 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 research?	**YES/NO**
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?	**YES/NO**
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw your consent at any time and without giving a reason?	**YES/NO**
I give permission for my child's data from this research to be shared with other researchers provided that their anonymity is completely protected.	**YES/NO**
Do you agree for your child to be discussed during the Insights and Solutions Circles session to identify strategies to support him/her?	**YES/NO**

Signature of the parent/carer: ———————————— **Date:** —————

Name (in block capitals): ————————————

Relationship to child: ————————————

If you would like to receive the results* from this research, please provide your email address below:

_____

(Please note, these results will detail findings from the project relating to school staff experiences about participating in a group consultation model. This summary will differ from the individual feedback specifically relating to your child that your child's school can provide following the Insights and Solutions Circle session.

I have explained the research to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: **Date:**

Privacy notice

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are to utilise questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. It is hoped that data collected within this research will explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include the removal of real names and replacement with pseudonyms, removal of any identifiable characteristics and personal information from data collected, encryption to safely store data, regular backups of data to protect against accidental and/or malicious data loss and any paper-based data being filed away in a secure, locked cabinet.

Appendix 8 - Problem Presenter Information Letter and Consent Form

University of Nottingham
UK | CHINA | MALAYSIA

School of Psychology
Information Sheet – Problem Presenter

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

You have been invited to take part in a doctoral research project. This research project will involve the implementation of a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles. The research seeks to consider school staff experiences of participating in this group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Your school have expressed an interest in this research. Parental consent has been obtained.

Insights and Solutions Circles is a group consultation model which expands on traditional Solution Circle methods by drawing on elements from Circle of Adults. Such an approach seeks to provide those working with children and young people with strategies of support. This programme has been created by Inclusive Solutions (https://inclusive-solutions.com/). The whole process lasts around 50 minutes. The programme involves the following steps: problem presentation, questions asked, theories shared, strategies listed, dialogue regarding selected strategies and consideration of the next steps. Each circle is comprised of the following roles:

o   Problem Presenter – This will be your role. You have been identified as an adult who knows the child and their SEMH needs the best. You will need to present the child and their SEMH needs to the circle, answer clarifying questions and consider which of the generated strategies you would like to implement next.

o   The creative thinking team made up of 4-6 others (These individuals do not have to know the child but must be willing to partake in collaborative discussions to consider strategies to support the child. These individuals will work at your school).

Following implementation of the Insights and Solutions Circles, you will be invited to attend an interview. This interview will explore your experiences of partaking in the group consultation session. The interview should last no more than one hour and will be held in person at your school. Interview sessions will be audio recorded for transcription and analysing for the purposes of this research. Due to time commitments and staff timetabling, it is possible for the Insights and Solutions Circles sessions and interviews to occur at any point in the day e.g., lunch times and afterschool.

It is important to note that although school interest has been registered and parental consent obtained, you are under no obligation to provide consent. The researcher will not make it known to parents/carers whether you provide consent, do not consent, or withdraw from the research project unless chosen to do so yourself. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the research. It will not be made known to your school if you choose to withdraw from the interview stage of the project unless chosen to do so by yourself. It is worthy to note, participation or non-participation will not impact the service and support you receive from _____ **Educational Psychology service.**

All data collected will be anonymised and used for research purposes only. Data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act and the University of Nottingham's ethical and data guidance. Data included within the written research projects will be completely anonymised.

If you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor via the email addresses above. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above address.

Yours Sincerely,

Aman Dhaliwal

Aman Dhaliwal
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)
If you have any complaints about the study, please contact:
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

School of Psychology

Consent Form – Problem Presenter

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Role: Problem Presenter

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 research?	**YES/NO**
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?	**YES/NO**
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the research? (at any time and without giving a reason)	**YES/NO**
I give permission for my data from this research to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected.	**YES/NO**
Do you agree to take part in the research comprising of an Insights and Solutions Circles session to support _____ **(Insert child's name)** and a one-to-one interview with the researcher?	**YES/NO**
Do you agree to the interview being audio recorded for research purposes?	**YES/NO**

Signature of the Participant: **Date:**

Name (in block capitals):

If you would like to receive the results* from this research, please provide your email address below:

_____

(Please note, these results will detail findings from the project relating to school staff experiences about participating in a group consultation session.)

I have explained the research to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: **Date:**

Privacy notice

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are to utilise questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. It is hoped that data collected within this research will explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include the removal of real names and replacement with pseudonyms, removal of any identifiable characteristics and personal information from data collected, encryption to safely store data, regular backups of data to protect against accidental and/or malicious data loss and any paper-based data being filed away in a secure, locked cabinet.

Appendix 9 - Circle Member Information Letter and Consent Form

School of Psychology
Information Sheet – Circle Member

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

You have been invited to take part in a doctoral research project. This research project will involve the implementation of a group consultation model called Insights and Solutions Circles. The research seeks to consider school staff experiences of participating in this group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. Your school have expressed an interest in this research. Parental consent has been obtained.

Insights and Solutions Circles is a group consultation model which expands on traditional Solution Circle methods by drawing on elements from Circle of Adults. Such an approach seeks to provide those working with children and young people with strategies of support. This programme has been created by Inclusive Solutions (https://inclusive-solutions.com/). The whole process lasts around 50 minutes. The programme involves the following steps: problem presentation, questions asked, theories shared, strategies listed, dialogue regarding selected strategies and consideration of the next steps. Each circle is comprised of the following roles:

o   Problem Presenter (an identified adult who knows the child's SEMH needs the best and is willing to present the problem to the circle).

o   The creative thinking team made up of 4-6 others. You will be one of the members of the creative thinking team. You do not have to know the child but you must be willing to listen to the Problem Presenter's description of the child's difficulties and partake in collaborative

discussions to consider strategies to support him/her. You must work at the child's school.

Following implementation of the Insights and Solutions Circles session, you will be invited to complete a questionnaire. This questionnaire will seek to your experiences of partaking in a group consultation model.

It is important to note that although school interest has been registered and parental consent obtained, you are under no obligation to provide consent. The researcher will not make it known to parents/carers whether you provide consent, do not consent, or withdraw from the research project unless chosen to do so yourself. You are free to withdraw at any point before or during the research. It is worthy to note, participation or non-participation will not impact the service and support you receive from _____**Educational Psychology service**.

All data collected will be anonymised and used for research purposes only. Data will be stored in compliance with the Data Protection Act and the University of Nottingham's ethical and data guidance. Data included within the written research projects will be completely anonymised.

If you have any questions, concerns or require further information, please do not hesitate to contact myself or my supervisor via the email addresses above. We can also be contacted after your participation at the above addresses.

Yours Sincerely,

Aman Dhaliwal

Aman Dhaliwal
(Trainee Educational Psychologist)

<div align="center">

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

Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee)

stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

</div>

School of Psychology

Consent form – Circle Member

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Role: Circle Member

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 research?	**YES/NO**
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily (if applicable)?	**YES/NO**
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw from the research? (at any time and without giving a reason)	**YES/NO**
I give permission for my data from this research to be shared with other researchers provided that my anonymity is completely protected.	**YES/NO**
Do you agree to take part in the research as a Circle Member where you will be involved with the Insights and Solutions Circles session and to complete a questionnaire following the session?	**YES/NO**

Signature of the Participant: **Date:**

Name (in block capitals):

If you would like to receive the results* from this research, please provide your email address below:

_____

(Please note, these results will detail findings from the project relating to school staff experiences about participating in a group consultation session.)

I have explained the research to the above participant and he/she has agreed to take part.

Signature of researcher: **Date:**

<div align="center">**<u>Privacy notice</u>**</div>

<u>Privacy information for Research Participants</u>

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are to utilise questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

**Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR**

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1e) processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest. It is hoped that data collected within this research will explore school staff experiences of using a group consultation model (specifically Insights and Solutions Circles) to support primary aged pupils with SEMH needs.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research. Measures to safeguard your stored data include the removal of real names and replacement with pseudonyms, removal of any identifiable characteristics and personal information from data collected, encryption to safely store data, regular backups of data to protect against accidental and/or malicious data loss and any paper-based data being filed away in a secure, locked cabinet.
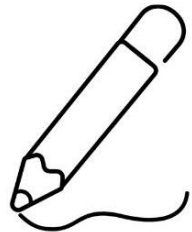
Appendix 10 - Insights and Solutions Circle Role Overview

INSIGHTS AND SOLUTIONS CIRCLE ROLE OVERVIEW
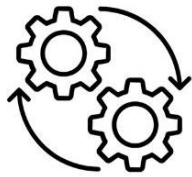
PROCESS FACILITATOR

They are responsible for outlining the process, managing timings and discussions during the circle, demonstrating active listening skills, asking open questions, and summarising and synthesising key points.

GRAPHIC FACILITATOR

This individual uses visual techniques such as drawings, symbols, and text to capture the content discussed during the session. They actively listen and summarise the discussions using visual representations.

PROBLEM PRESENTER

This individual is someone who is familiar with the focus child and who can identify and articulate the perceived problem accurately. They answer questions and seek input and collaboration from the group to select and implement the next steps.

CIRCLE MEMBERS

These individuals are either familiar or unfamiliar with the focus child. They actively listen to the problem, ask clarifying questions, and provide input in the form of hypotheses and solutions.

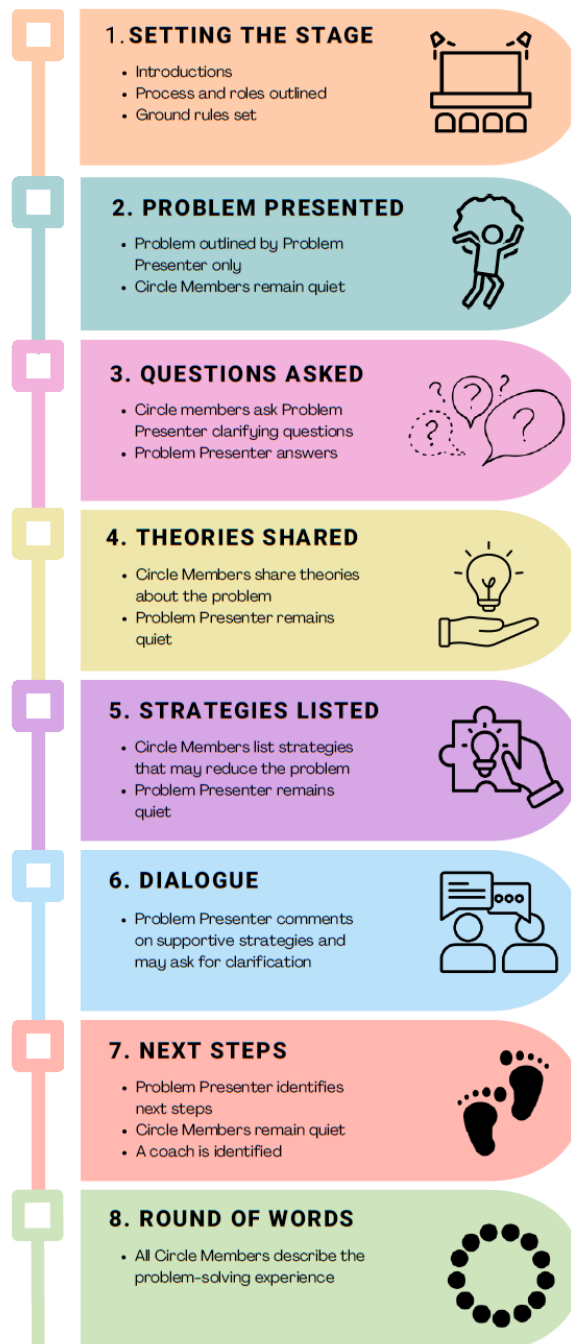**Appendix 11 - An Overview of Insights and Solutions Circle Stages**

Step	Description
Setting the Stage 5 minutes	- Introductions including names, roles beyond the ISC and roles within the ISC are given. - The Process Facilitator outlines the concept of ISC in terms of the purpose and process. - Ground rules are identified. - The Graphic Facilitator records the group rules on a large paper roll.
Problem Presented 6 minutes	- The Problem Presenter presents the problem/challenge that needs to be addressed. - Circle Members remain quiet and if, the Problem Presenter finishes ahead of time, they utilise this time to quietly reflect upon the problem. - The Process Facilitator ensures there are no interruptions and keeps track of the time. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on a large paper roll.
Questions Asked 6 minutes	- Circle Members are given time to ask any questions they would like clarifying. - The Problem Presenter answers these questions. - The Process Facilitator keeps track of the time. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on large paper rolls.
Theories Shared 10 minutes	- Circle Members formulate hypotheses on why the problem is occurring. - The Problem Presenter remains quiet. - The Process Facilitator keeps track of the time. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on large paper rolls.
Strategies Listed 10 minutes	- Circle Members contribute solutions that may support with addressing the perceived problem. - The Problem Presenter remains quiet. - The Process Facilitator keeps track of the time. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on large paper rolls.

Dialogue 6 minutes	- The Problem Presenter comments on which of solutions generated would be supportive. - The Circle Members may contribute here providing more information about the solutions commented upon. - The Process Facilitator keeps track of the time and prompts the Problem Presenter to consider which strategies will work. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on large paper rolls.
Next Steps 5 minutes	- The Problem Presenter identifies their first steps from the solutions generated. - The Circle Members remain quiet. - The Process Facilitator keeps track of the time. - A Coach is appointed from the circle who will check-in on the Problem Presenter's progress in 7 days. - The Graphic Facilitator records pertinent information using key words and graphics on large paper rolls.
Round of Words 2 minutes	- All members of the circle do a round of words to describe their experience of participating in the ISC.

Appendix 12 - Insights and Solutions Circle Overview Sheet Given to Participants

INSIGHTS AND SOLUTIONS CIRCLE

Roles: Process Facilitator, Graphic Facilitator, Problem Presenter and Circle Members

1. **SETTING THE STAGE**
   - Introductions
   - Process and roles outlined
   - Ground rules set

2. **PROBLEM PRESENTED**
   - Problem outlined by Problem Presenter only
   - Circle Members remain quiet

3. **QUESTIONS ASKED**
   - Circle members ask Problem Presenter clarifying questions
   - Problem Presenter answers

4. **THEORIES SHARED**
   - Circle Members share theories about the problem
   - Problem Presenter remains quiet

5. **STRATEGIES LISTED**
   - Circle Members list strategies that may reduce the problem
   - Problem Presenter remains quiet

6. **DIALOGUE**
   - Problem Presenter comments on supportive strategies and may ask for clarification

7. **NEXT STEPS**
   - Problem Presenter identifies next steps
   - Circle Members remain quiet
   - A coach is identified

8. **ROUND OF WORDS**
   - All Circle Members describe the problem-solving experience

Appendix 13 - A List of Resources Used During Insights and Solutions Circle Sessions

During each of the sessions, the following resources were used:

Item	✓
Labels for writing down names	
A paper roll containing pre-written headings as detailed (see Appendix 12 for headings)	
An information sheet that provided a simplified version of the ISC process (see Appendix 12)	
A stopwatch to keep track of timings	

At the end of each session, the following resources were used:

Item	✓
A debrief sheet containing the contact details of various professionals and the researcher's email address to provide further support to participants following the session (see Appendix 15).	
Questionnaires to gather Circle Member views (see Appendix 16).	

Appendix 14 - Example Graphic Produced During Insights and Solutions Circle Session

To ensure confidentiality, identifiable information in the graphical example has been removed by intentionally omitting names from the graphic during the session. If names were present, they were crossed out prior to photographing the images.
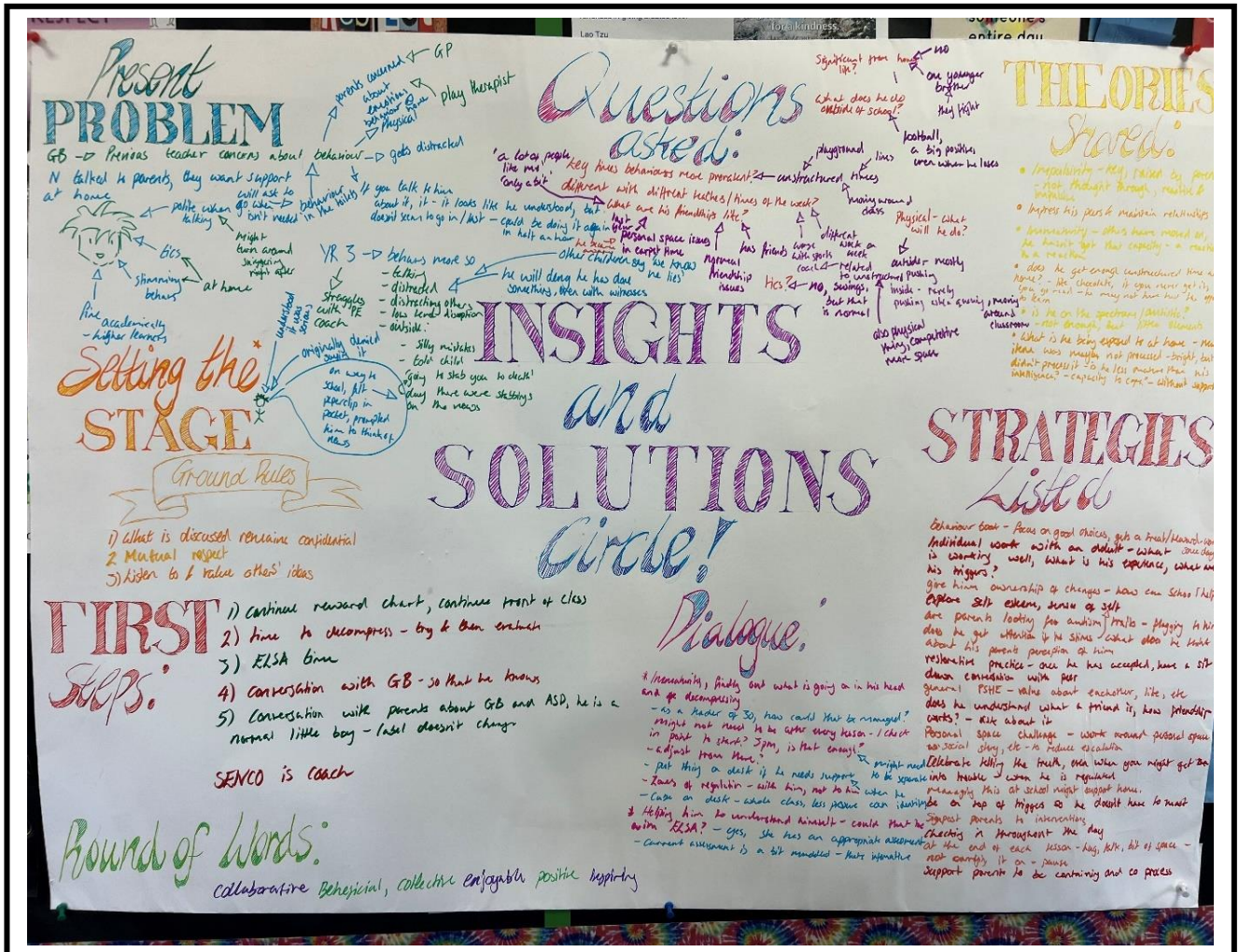
Appendix 15 - Debrief Procedure Following Insights and Solutions Circle Session

Insights and Solutions Circles Debrief

Ethics Approval Number: S1518R

Researcher: Amandeep Kaur Dhaliwal

Amandeep.dhaliwal@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Maria Abijah-liburd

Maria.abijah-liburd1@nottingham.ac.uk

Debrief Procedure – following group consultation session

NB: Here, Circle Members refer to both the Problem Presenters and the creative thinking team. The debrief procedure will involve the following steps after the Insights and Solutions Circles session:

- The researcher will explain that the Insights and Solutions Circles session has finished and thank the Circle Members for their time.
- Circle Members will be invited to complete a round of words regarding their experience with the session as part of the programme.
- Circle Members will be reminded that any confidential discussions should not be spoken about beyond the Insights and Solutions Circles session.
- The researcher will check on the Circle Member's wellbeing, asking them sensitively:
  - ➢ How they found the session
  - ➢ Whether any of the topics discussed were upsetting or uncomfortable for them
- The researcher will signpost Circle Members to support as required and make Circle Members aware that they will remain in the room after the session if they would like to speak to them individually.

1. **Education Support (All school staff)**

   Contact number: 08000 562 561

   Website: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/

2. **Mind (All ages)**

   Contact number: 0300 123 3393

   Email: info@mind.org.uk

3. **Samaritans (All ages)**

   Contact number: 116 123

   Email: jo@samaritans.org

4. **YoungMinds (Young people and parents)**

   Contact number: 0808 802 5544

5. **Shout (All ages)**

   Contact number: 85258

6. **The Mix (Under 25s)**

   Contact number: 0808 808 4994

- The researcher will invite Circle Members to complete a questionnaire to find out more about their experiences of participating in a group consultation session. Circle Members will be reminded of their right to withdraw at this stage.
- The researcher will explain the next steps of the research and how a subsequent interview will be completed with the Problem Presenter to consider their experiences of the Insights and Solutions Circles session.
- Circle Members will be given the opportunity to ask any questions and an email address will be provided.
- Circle Members will be offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the completed research.

Appendix 16 - Circle Member Questionnaire

Circle Member Questionnaire

Thank you for participating in our group consultation session.
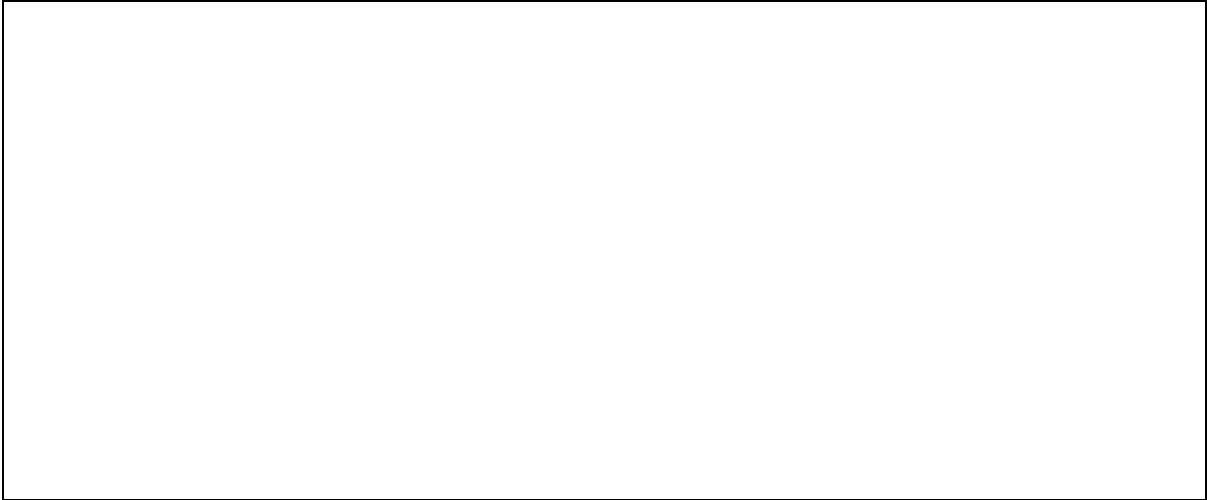
This questionnaire is designed to gather your views and insights about your experiences during the group consultation process. Your honest and open responses will help us to better understand your perspective and experience of the process.

Please be assured that your responses will remain completely anonymous. Your individual responses will not be associated with your identity in any way. Participation in this questionnaire is entirely voluntary and you have the right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

1. What were the strengths of the process you took part in today?

2. What were the difficulties of the process you took part in today?

3. What do you feel were the most useful aspects of today's problem solving discussion and why?

[ ]
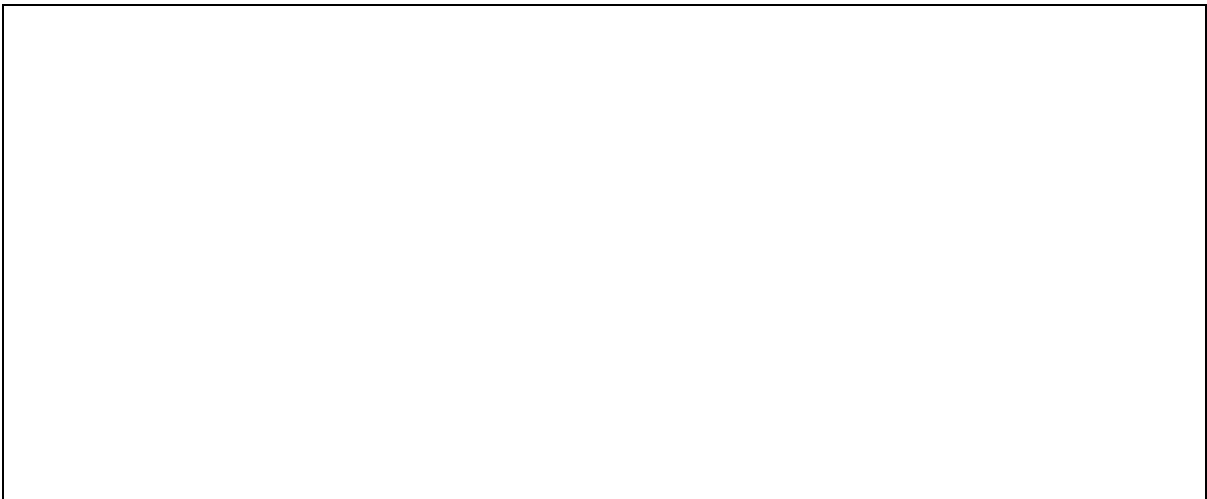
4. What have you learnt?

[ ]

5. What impact has participating in this circle had on you?

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6. Please add any additional thoughts or reflections in the space provided below.

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Appendix 17 - Post-Insights and Solutions Circle Reflections

Reflection	Subsequent action
One Circle Member found it difficult to refrain from adding their own ideas during the Problem Presented Stage. It appeared that they knew the child extremely well—perhaps better than the Problem Presenter.	I will emphasise more clearly who should be speaking at each stage. Before the next sessions, I need to speak with school staff to verify if the Problem Presenter indeed possesses the best knowledge of the child or if another staff member might be more suitable for this role.
At the Questions Asked Stage, participants seemed ready to ask questions. However, more questions did appear later on too. *During the Dialogue Stage, there was some engagement in problem talk again.*	During the Setting the Stage Stage, I should provide additional details about the individual steps, how they build upon one another and how they differ. The shared purpose of moving beyond the problem should be included in the group rules by me as the Process Facilitator. I can then refer to this throughout the session if necessary.
At the Next Steps Stage, too many solutions were chosen, some of which cannot be implemented within a week or two	I will encourage the Problem Presenter to limit their selection of solutions to only 2-3 from those generated.
One member of the circle arrived late, which may have limited their capacity to fully engage with the process	I will wait to commence the session until all staff members are present in the room, ensuring that everyone is included in the process from the beginning.

Appendix 18 - Problem Presenter Interview Schedule

Ethics Approval Number: S1518R

Researcher: Amandeep Kaur Dhaliwal

Amandeep.dhaliwal@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Maria Abijah-liburd

Maria.abijah-liburd1@nottingham.ac.uk

Research Title

School staff experiences of participating in a group consultation model to support primary aged pupils with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

Interview schedule

This schedule details an overview that is likely to be followed during the interview. It is worthy to note that it may be further refined with the review of literature. The interview will be semi-structured and therefore, there will be variations in questions asked based on participant's answers.

Introduction

- Revisit consent letter and information from the Participant Information Sheet.
- Remind participant of their right to pause, stop or withdraw at any time. Reiterate here that withdrawing from the research project is possible and that the participant's school will not be made aware of their withdrawal unless they chose to disclose this information.
- Explain my role as a research-practitioner and how this role differs from my role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist.
- Allow participant time to ask any questions.

Overview before the interview:

The purpose of this interview is to gain an in-depth understanding of your experience with Insights and Solutions Circles. I am interested in exploring your thoughts, feelings, perceptions and reflections. There are no right or wrong answers and I would like you to be as open and honest as possible. I may say very little because I am interested in listening to your views. Some questions may seem obvious but this is because I am interested in hearing your personal

thoughts and feelings. Please take your time in thinking and talking. Please also remember that you can pass any of the questions asked, request a pause or stop the interview at any point.

Questions:

1. **Can you tell me how you came to be involved in the Insights and Solutions Circles session?**
   - What is your role with the child? How often do you interact with them?
   - What did you expect from the Insights and Solutions Circles session? What may this expectation have been based off?

2. **Can you tell me about your experience during the Insights and Solutions Circles session?**
   - What did you think worked well?
   - What did you find difficult?
   - What was your experience with presenting the problem?
   - Did your experience of the Insights and Solutions Circles match with your initial expectations?
   - Did anything surprise you?
   - How did you find working with other colleagues?

3. **Can you tell me about your experience immediately after the Insights and Solutions Circles session ended?**
   - What were your thoughts?
   - How did you feel?
   - How did others respond?
   - What did you think went well and what did you find difficult?
   - What were your views about the Insights and Solutions Circles?

4. **Can you tell me about your experiences over the first week since the Insights and Solutions Circles?**
   - Have any strategies been implemented?
   - If so, has anything changed?

- If so, has anything worked?
- If so, has anything not worked?
- What are your views about Insights and Solutions Circles?
- Can you tell me about your own wellbeing, efficacy and professional practice following the session?

5. **Can you tell me about your experience of the Insights and Solutions Circles session in comparison with other SEMH support tools?**
   - Are there advantages of Insights and Solutions Circles in comparison?
   - Are there disadvantages of Insights and Solutions Circles in comparison?
   - How did you feel being a part of those approaches in comparison to Insights and Solutions Circles?

6. **Can you tell me about your next steps with Insights and Solutions Circles?**
   - What will you do over the next weeks?
   - How will you do this?
   - Can you see Insights and Solutions Circles being used in primary schools?

Appendix 19 - Debrief Procedure Following Problem Presenter Interview

Interview Debrief

Ethics Approval Number: S1518R

Researcher: Amandeep Kaur Dhaliwal

Amandeep.dhaliwal@nottingham.ac.uk

Supervisor: Maria Abijah-liburd

Maria.abijah-liburd1@nottingham.ac.uk

Debrief Procedure – following interview

NB: Here, participant refers specifically to the Problem Presenter.

The debrief procedure will involve the following steps after the semi-structured interview with the Problem Presenter:

- The researcher will explain to the participant that the interview has finished and thank the participant for their time.
- The researcher will outline the topics discussed during the interview.
- The researcher will check on the participant's wellbeing, asking them sensitively:
  ➢ How they found the interview
  ➢ Whether any of the topics discussed were upsetting or uncomfortable for them
- The researcher will signpost the participant to support as required and remind them that they can email them if they would like further support/signposting.

1. **Education Support (All school staff)**
   Contact number: 08000 562 561
   Website: https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/

2. **Mind (All ages)**
   Contact number: 0300 123 3393
   Email: info@mind.org.uk

3. **Samaritans (All ages)**

Contact number: 116 123

Email: jo@samaritans.org

4. **YoungMinds (Young people and parents)**

   Contact number: 0808 802 5544

5. **Shout (All ages)**

   Contact number: 85258

6. **The Mix (Under 25s)**

   Contact number: 0808 808 4994

- The research will explain the next steps of the research (e.g. transcription, data analysis and result write up).
- The researcher will remind the participant of their right to withdraw from the research even after the completion of the interview. Reiterate here that withdrawing from the research project is possible and that the participant's school will not be made aware of their withdrawal unless they chose to disclose this information.
- The researcher will tell the participant that their recordings will be transcribed and analysed and inform them that they can review their transcriptions and subsequent analysis to provide feedback.
- The participant will be offered the opportunity to receive a copy of the completed research. Their email address will be taken. If already given on the consent form, it will be verified.

Appendix 20 – RTA Phase One: Problem Presenter Familiarisation Notes

Appendix 21 – RTA Phase One: Circle Member Familiarisation Notes

STRENGTHS

USEFUL ASPECTS

IMPACT

CIRCLE MEMBERS

Learning

DIFFICULTIES

OTHER COMMENTS

Appendix 22 – RTA Phase One: Transcript Excerpt

Researcher:

And have you had any conversations with anyone else about the process?

Problem Presenter:

Oh yeah, I have so CIRCLE MEMBER caught me in the lunch hall and she was like that was really helpful, wasn't it? And I was like oh, I've done it before…like they are good aren't they? Because that was really helpful, wasn't it useful? So even they found it useful, which I thought was quite interesting, even though they weren't presenting a problem. I know that she found that really useful just being in there…her, she's a class teacher as well. So that was interesting for her. And then I saw CIRCLE MEMBER in the corridor and she was like, oh, it's so busy at the minute, isn't it? This was like, was it yesterday? And I was like, yeah. She was like, I'll come and catch up with you. I'll come and see you because that's who's gonna come touch base.

Researcher:

And why do you think circle members would find it useful? What might they gain from it?

Problem Presenter:

I think we, I think it's a really natural thing to relate back to your own experiences and your own problems and that for them…I think that they would have been sitting there probably you know, kind of trying to think…ohh that…that child sounds just like blah blah in my class or I know I've got such and such coming up to me next year and I know that. It might even be, for example, again, CIRCLE MEMBER, she's a YEAR GROUP STATED teacher so FOCUS CHILD could be in her class next year so that's helpful for her from her perspective, CIRCLE MEMBER with well-being, she's probably sat there thinking I'm probably going to end up picking this child up and, you know and however long for whether it be the sand draw, talk thing and you know what I mean? Well, I think for them, it's yeah, linking back to their own as well, at some point, I probably am going to come across this child.

Researcher:

And has it supported you firstly, with the focus child?

Problem Presenter:

It has…it's definitely made me think about the importance of making sure we get that background information because…and I thought that was something that we were really good at because, you know, when we go and do the home visits and etcetera, we have, you know, we fill out the forms and there's lots of discussion. But as I said, we've never really come across anybody say that they don't…they don't want that and that really made me think, well, actually we need to think of ok, well, they have every right to say that, but then what are we going to do to ensure we still capture that background information and obviously as a school they fill out all the forms so they'll, you know there will be information in terms of the SENSITIVE INFORMATION etcetera cause as a school they gather that kind of data that then that's not freely shared with the class teacher and it's kind of made me think you know, should we as a class teacher, should I then dig further and say like you know, is there any? Can you give me any information? So it's made me think about that definitely.

Researcher:

And anything with your approach with the child themselves?

Problem Presenter:

I think initially afterwards it really made me kind of study him a lot more and think about causes. Something else that had been mentioned about [SPECIFIC HYPOTHESIS RELEVANT TO THE FOCUS CHILD DETAILED HERE]…that wasn't something I'd necessarily seen as a big thing so it made me kind of fine tune more into those kind of things…

Appendix 23 – RTA Phase One: Problem Presenter Preliminary Notes
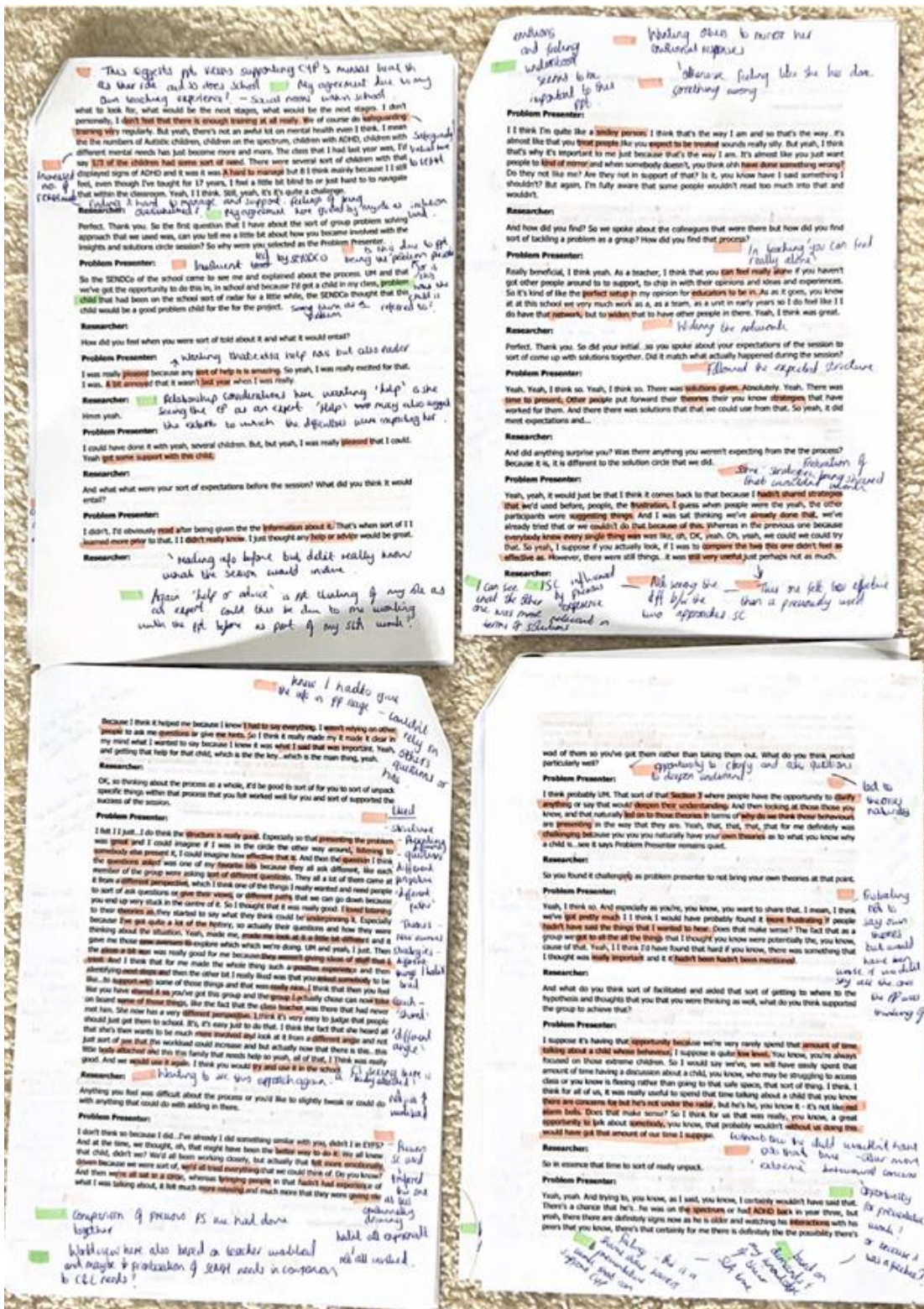
Appendix 24 - RTA Phase One: Circle Member Preliminary Notes

Circle Member Questionnaire

Date of the group problem-solving session: 19/10/23

Thank you for participating in our group problem-solving session.

This questionnaire is designed to gather your views and insights about your experiences during the group problem-solving process. Your honest and open responses will help us to better understand your perspective and experience of the process.

Please be assured that your responses will remain completely anonymous. Your individual responses will not be associated with your identity in any way. Participation in this questionnaire is entirely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw at any time without providing a reason.

1. What were the strengths of the process you took part in today?

→ linked to my expectations and hopes for the session

It was really collaborative and supportive, positive and very helpful

2. What were the difficulties of the process you took part in today?

→ I noticed this during — I also found this tricky as I wanted to add things throughout

It was difficult to stay quiet at times, and not being able to add things in to previous steps.

3. What do you feel were the most useful aspects of today's problem-solving discussion and why?

The strategies step, looking at how can actually take actions in the classroom.

Difficulty for staying quiet due to reviewed people having discussions

Appendix 25 - RTA Phase Two: Excerpt from Microsoft Excel Coding Document for Research Question One and Research Question Two

Research Question One

	A	B	C	D	E
352	PP01	In that moment, the the positive of of being able to listen. Yeah, just it just sparked things off for me. But not all, but not just for that child then. It was then sort of it just then got me thinking about other children with similar things and it's reinforcing some things that I might have already known or giving new ideas. And even if I was thinking ohh no, I know that that wouldn't sort of work or that's not right. Or I no, I wasn't able to tell you that, but I forgot to tell you that bit that wouldn't work. It was then. But then I was thinking, oh, but that would that would really work for this child. And that would really help them more. That's similar to that. Yeah. So as yeah, as a class teacher and having sort of, yeah, several children that that need different that yeah have different needs it was just helpful. Yeah. In general not just for that problem child.	Inapproprate strategies	Strategies suggested that wouldn't work	Strategies suggested by CMs that wouldn't work
353	PP01	The most difficult thing was, yeah, not being able to talk in that in the part where the rest of the people were feeding back and sometimes because they might have come up with theories and or strategies and because I'd hadn't said something. I knew then that that wouldn't work, or actually they've done that so and that and therefore because it was such a good thing to be able to do and listen to them I didn't want them to waste any time talking about things that had already been done. Or so it was. Yeah, I just want to say, oh, we've tried that it doesn't work. Carry on talking. But yeah, that was that was a little bit frustrating	Inapproprate strategies	Strategies suggested that wouldn't work	Strategies suggested by CMs that wouldn't work
354	PP03	I would say it was a little frustrating when people were giving their strategies, kind of the theory and strategies and and then you can't speak and I just wanted to say, but we've tried that or we've done that and that's that then made me think I should have put that in to the setting the stage part and so that I could have said that because I was conscious that it was timed and so it was almost I was sit there thinking oh gosh, you're wasting a minute here because...but then a lot of the time, people would bounce off each other and if they hadn't have had that opportunity to say that, then the next person might not have chipped in with their solution or their theory. So there is value in it but for me to sit and be quiet, I found that a little bit yeah, I think. frustrating is the word. I mean I wasn't fuming or anything. I was just like I've already tried that. And I started thinking I should have said that then and then, you know, then could be thinking about other things. But yeah.	Inapproprate strategies	Strategies suggested that wouldn't work	Strategies suggested by CMs that wouldn't work
355	PP03	OK, I think it was...I think it was fine. I don't think it mattered as such until it came to again the theories and the strategies part. Because when I think back to the when we first did a solution circle, when you came in everybody that was involved was within the early years team, so therefore nobody suggested or came up with a theory or a strategy that they knew we'd already explored because they had, we work as a team. So no, I think it was OK that some people knew him and some people didn't.	Inapproprate strategies	Strategies suggested that wouldn't work	Strategies suggested by CMs that wouldn't work
356	PP03	Yeah, yeah, it would just be that I think it comes back to that because I hadn't shared strategies that we'd used before, people, the frustration, I guess when people were the yeah, the other participants were suggesting things. And I was sat thinking we've already done that, we've already tried that or we couldn't do that because of this. Whereas in the previous one because everybody knew every single thing was like, oh, OK, yeah. Oh, yeah, we could we could try that. So yeah, I suppose if you actually look, if I was to compare the two this one didn't feel as effective as. However, there were still things...it was still very useful just perhaps not as much.	Inapproprate strategies	Strategies suggested that wouldn't work	Strategies suggested by CMs that wouldn't work
357	PP03	So yeah, again, I feel that the setting the stage worked really well even down to we sit in a circle. I really liked GRAPHIC FACILITATOR with the with the what do you call the graphic...that kind of element that she recorded as I spoke as well, I probably skipped a bit there and I, but I liked that she was there anywhere to record and you could visually see that we could all see it. That the rules were kind of laid out and it was all very clear to everybody. Yeah. So I think that worked really well. The problem presenting, as I say, I felt confident in in speaking I probably 6 minutes is not as long as it seems. That's the only thing, but then I appreciate you have to have the cut offs. Yeah, I probably would have liked longer, maybe 10 minutes. Umm. But I did like how when you presented the problem, GRAPHIC FACILITATOR would then read it back. Which gave you then time to go. Oh, I didn't say this or I didn't quite phrase that right or you know, so I did like that. I think that worked really well. And I do think that it's really effective that everybody else listens because otherwise, well, I wouldn't have sort of chance to fit everything in the six minutes and you can easily go off on a tangent so I do think that works well that everybody else sits and listens. I think the only thing, did you just want me to say what worked well.	The need to listen	Strength for others to listen during PP stage	Strength for others to listen during PP stage
358	PP04	I think for them it makes them active listeners, doesn't it? And I think when you're not asking questions, you've got to sort of retain, you've gotta think about those questions, haven't you? But you've got to properly listen. And the fact that you know you can't ask questions, I think the fact that they knew they could ask questions when they got to that bit was really good. Yeah, but again, I just felt like they all were all really engaged and focused, which I think then helps as well. Because it was like their bit was gonna come afterwards, whereas sometimes when you listen to presentations, you sort of switch off a bit, don't you? But I didn't really feel that they did.	The need to listen	Strength for others to listen during PP stage	Strength for others to listen during PP stage
359	PP04	Because I think it helped me because I knew I had to say everything. I wasn't relying on other people to ask me questions or give me hints. So I think it really made my it made it clear in my mind what I wanted to say because I knew it was what I said that was important. Yeah, and getting that help for that child, which is the key...which is the main thing. yeah.	The need to listen	Strength for others to listen during PP stage	Strength for others to listen during PP stage
	PP02	It's always better if you've got somebody to scribe who isn't participating. It's a bit like a minute taker, isn't it? In a meeting. If you've got somebody you. Doesn't matter how good you are at taking notes, if you're trying to be part of a conversation and I know that from my years at SENDCo when you're trying to take minutes TAF meeting or things like that you you you can't get everything, particularly if you're	Strength of GF not participating	Strength of GF not participating	Strength of GF not participating

Research Question Two

17	CM01	It has made me think more about the reasons behind certain behaviours.	Process encouraged CM to consider why behaviours were presenting	Increased considerations about why behaviours are presenting	Increased considerations about why behaviours are presenting
18	CM04	Allowed me time and space to think about a specific child before sharing my views with others.	Process increased the time devoted to dicussing an individual child	Increased time devoted to an individual child	Increased time devoted to an individual child
19		Wider lens on child as all see and spot different aspects that I didn't know before from other people in the circle. It's helpful to have time to discuss the child and listen to others (knowledge, strategy, theory)			Increased time devoted to an individual child
20		Good range of strategies moving forward. It's good to have some kind of plan.			ISC supports the generation of different solutions
21	CM13	To hear of different strategies.	Sharing different strategies is valued	ISC supports the generation of useful ideas/solutions	ISC supports the generation of different solutions
22	CM03	This concept is easier than speaking to people individually.	ISC viewed as a productive use of time to support school staff	ISC viewed as a productive use of time	ISC viewed as a productive use of time
23	CM05 (1)	Feel reassured that as a team, we share the ethos and desire to support the children and their families.	Feelings of a shared ethos to support CYP and their families	Positive feelings of a shared ethos to support CYP and their families	Positive feelings of a shared ethos to support CYP and their families
24	CM02 (1)	It has increased my understanding and given me a framework of looking at each child analytically and that employing a range of perspectives is highly effective. It's given me a framework for future problem solving.	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
25	CM03	It has given me a greater understanding of the child we spoke about as a whole.	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
26	CM06 (1)	Made me realise how important it is to work as a team and how little I know about the child and how I would support him much better now.	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
27		It's reminded me of the difficulties that LAC/PLAC children or those with attachment difficulties may have.	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
28	CM12	Awareness of learner needs and background	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
29	CM12 (1)	Wider lens on child as all see and spot different aspects that I didn't know before from other people in the circle. It's helpful to have time to discuss the child and listen to others (knowledge, strategy, theory)	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
30	CM17	I feel like I know the TC better and understand his problem more.	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child	Process increased understanding of the child
31	CM11	It's reminded me of the difficulties that LAC/PLAC children or those with attachment difficulties may have.	Process reminded CM of previous training	Process reminded CM of previous training	Process reminded CM of previous training
32	CM09	Given me some new strategies to keep in mind for other learners.	Process provided CM strategies to try with their own pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
33	CM10 (2)	A further understanding of collaborating with other childcare professionals. I will look at other learners in my own class and implement strategies to help understand and develop them.	Process provided CM strategies to try with their own pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
34	CM15	Good to pinch the strategy ideas for my own list! Ta!	Process provided CM strategies to try with their own pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
35	CM16	It has given me a wider insight on how I can support learners in the future if they are dealing with similar struggles.	Process provided CM strategies to try with their own pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
36	CM18 (3)	I feel as though if not time constrained, this would be a really useful process for identifying support for a range of children with a range of challenges. Time constraints meant we didn't always get to say everything we want to say.	Timings were difficult to stick to	Timings constraints limited discussions	Timings were difficult to stick to
37	CM07	Good range of strategies moving forward. It's good to have some kind of plan.	Value placed on the creation of an action plan	Value placed on the creation of an action plan	Value placed on the creation of an action plan

Appendix 26 - RTA Phase Two: Final Coding Excerpts for Research Question One and Research Question Two

## Research Question One

	A	B	C
155	PP02	I think for SENDCo, who probably knew CHILD, the least, I think it's she found that really valuable because obviously he isn't somebody she's working predominantly with. She's aware of of of him, but not to the length of that. And so I think and and for again for CIRCLE MEMBER, being an assistant head, you know, she taught him back in key stage one I think for her you know, that probably will help her. You know, if I'm not in and she's needing to talk to him about a significant event, she'll probably now approach it in a different way because she's had that opportunity to to talk to staff and understand, you know, a little bit more in depth in terms of what he needs to facilitate those conversations.	Increased understanding about the focus child
156	PP02	Yeah. Just I think just generally sort of positive really. I mean as I said, you know, SENDCO one I spoke to at length because you know she sort of said, you know I didn't, you know I didn't understand how complex he was, you know that. Kind of thing and and I was like	Increased understanding about the focus child
157	PP02	Yeah, yeah. And and I was just sort of said, yeah, they're an interesting year group. There are a lot in there that have got, you know, this level of need. And we, you know we just don't have the staff in to put the time in for them	Increased understanding about the focus child
158	PP03	Yeah. I think with the theories, it's almost quite like that people were thinking about the story behind. It's almost like they're piecing together that information that I had said at the beginning with the problem, because I gave that background on the child and the what I knew about the child and what I'd experienced with the child and you could see and hear them piecing all that together to create stories with how it could be, how it might be, what it might not, what it might not be as well, but it kind of reaffirmed that what I'd said had been heard and listened to, and they were trying to connect the dots, to come up with an effective solution that then followed on from that.	Increased understanding about the focus child
159	PP03	I think initially afterwards it really made me kind of study him a lot more in his actions and think about cause something else that had been mentioned was about like the weight of him. How he would. And as I said, that wasn't something that necessarily I'd seen as a big a big, big thing. Big deal. It was for me. It was more this the the everything in his mouth. Ohh gosh, that's a really big. So it made me kind of fine tune more into those kind of things and look at when he does that and perhaps the reason why he is doing that to see if there's patterns and things like that	Increased understanding about the focus child
160	PP04	I felt I I just...I do think the structure is really good. Especially so that presenting the problem was great and I could imagine if I was in the circle the other way around, listening to somebody else present it, I could imagine how effective that is. And then the question I think the questions asked was one of my favorite bits because they all ask different, like each member of the group were asking sort of different questions. They all a lot of them came at it from a different perspective, which I think one of the things I really wanted and need people to sort of ask questions or give their views, or different paths that we can go down because you end up very stuck in the centre of it. So I thought that it was really good. I loved listening to their theories as they started to say what they think could be underpinning it. Especially because I've got quite a lot of the history, so actually their questions and how they were thinking about the situation. Yeah, made me, made me look at it a little bit different and it gave me those new avenues to explore which which we're doing. UM and yeah, I just. Then the ideas a bit was really good for me because they weren't giving ideas of stuff that I tried. And I think that for me made the whole thing such a positive experience and then identifying next steps and then the other bit I really liked was that you asked somebody to be like...to support with some of those things and that was really nice. I think that then you feel like you have shared it so you've got this group and the group I actually chose can now take on board some of those things, like the fact that the class teacher was there that had never met him. She now has a very different perspective. I think it's very easy to judge that people should just get them to school. It's, it's easy just to do that. I think the fact that she heard all that she's then wants to be much more involved and look at it from a different angle and not just sort of see that the workload could increase and but actually now that there is this...this little body attached and this this family that needs help so yeah, all of that, I Think was really good. And we would use it again. I think you would try and use it in the school.	Increased understanding about the focus child
161	PP04	Yeah, really good, I think. Yeah. It's like I say, it was very much responsibility was on me, whereas now I feel that others are keen to take some of that responsibility and keen to come with ideas. And I think otherwise if they just heard the problem, it's just quick to...quick to judge, like I said and just say all parents need to get them to school. Do you know what I mean, it's that quick... why can't they just get in here and then go? Whereas now I think they've got that better understanding of the situation. It's not as black and white as it appeared. So now they've got some understanding, which again is that value of presenting for that time without anybody saying anything	Increased understanding about the focus child
162	PP04	I don't. I don't think it would be nice to hear...it would have been nice for her to see it through to the end but she's one of the ones now that I work quite closely with to with trying to find like support, and she's very good at the outside agencies to get in so actually because she knows now the background she's very good at saying I should try this and try that. So actually the involvement that she's brought is really good, but it would have been nice if she had stayed to the end. I think for her to see the whole cycle through, hmm. Think. Yeah, it. Yeah	Increased understanding about the focus child
		No, I think for I I I I think the process itself is fine. Our difficulty was making sure we had enough members of staff in there in order for it to be you know. It would have been lovely either to have had Class teacher, who's	

146	1	CM05 (2)	Gave opportunities to think carefully about the child and consider all aspects of care.	Process increased understanding of the child
147	1	CM08	Having pros/cons of the child. I didn't know all the cons and any of the pros.	Process increased understanding of the child
148	1	CM13	Informative to know more about TC and family background.	Process increased understanding of the child
149	1	CM14 (1)	To understand background information as to why the child has the struggles.	Process increased understanding of the child
150	3	CM01 (2)	Other people's theories and ideas around the problem. It opened up new information/ a new way of looking at the bigger picture.	Process increased understanding of the child
151	3	CM06	Getting to know the child in more depth.	Process increased understanding of the child
152	3	CM07 (2)	Deeper thoughts into reasons behind the problems seen and ways to resolve.	Process increased understanding of the child
153	3	CM08 (1)	Presenting the problem to allow me to get to know the child – especially as I know nothing about the child/family. I do think it was good for me to be there as I didn't have biases about the child and could take a bit of a step back.	Process increased understanding of the child
154	4	CM04 (2)	A clear structure for thinking more deeply about a child.	Process increased understanding of the child
155	4	CM06 (3)	To identify the problem but focus on the solution. To take the time to use this method to get to know the child.	Process increased understanding of the child
156	4	CM07 (2)	How to discuss a child and produce a range of strategies quickly and how to get to know a child quickly and effectively.	Process increased understanding of the child
157	4	CM12 (1)	Identifying barriers and what has been tried to better understand the child	Process increased understanding of the child
158	4	CM13	Issues for TC and family – mental health issues	Process increased understanding of the child
159	4	CM17	A lot about TC and the problem he is having.	Process increased understanding of the child
160	5	CM02 (1)	It has increased my understanding and given me a framework of looking at each child analytically and that employing a range of perspectives is highly effective. It's given me a framework for future problem solving.	Process increased understanding of the child
161	5	CM03	It has given me a greater understanding of the child we spoke about as a whole.	Process increased understanding of the child
162	5	CM06 (1)	Made me realise how important it is to work as a team and how little I know about the child and how I would support him much better now.	Process increased understanding of the child
163	5		It's reminded me of the difficulties that LAC/PLAC children or those with attachment difficulties may have.	Process increased understanding of the child
164	5	CM12	Awareness of learner needs and background	Process increased understanding of the child
165	5	CM12 (1)	Wider lens on child as all see and spot different aspects that I didn't know before from other people in the circle. It's helpful to have time to discuss the child and listen to others (knowledge, strategy, theory)	Process increased understanding of the child
166	5	CM17	I feel like I know the TC better and understand his problem more.	Process increased understanding of the child
167	5	CM11	It's reminded me of the difficulties that LAC/PLAC children or those with attachment difficulties may have.	Process increased understanding of the child
168	4	CM08	How many strategies we all know to support the individual children it is easy to forget some when there are so many!	Process provides reassurance of exisiting good practice
169	6	CM07	Very useful, reassuring to know what we already have in place and what we already know.	Process provides reassurance of exisiting good practice
170	2	CM04	Having capacity in school to free up that many people at the same time and not having information from the previous class teacher as the PP hadn't know the child for long.	Requiring previous class teacher's knowledge
171	2	CM16	Coming up with different strategies that weren't already said by others or hadn't already been tried and didn't work. Needing info from previous class teacher as PP hadn't known the child for long.	Requiring previous class teacher's knowledge
172	1	CM03	Having everything written down in sections gave a clearer understanding of the child.	Scribe supported the process
173	1	CM04	Having some one to scribe so you aren't thinking and writing. It freed me up to think and understand.	Scribe supported the process
174	6	CM14 (2)	Really useful session for everyone to offer strategies and end with a plan to support to the child and to better support the staff involved.	Session provided support for school staff involved
175	2	CM13	To implement the strategies due to insufficient funding or not enough staff all mean there is no time for anything. It's frustrating!	Solutions difficult to implement due to practical challenges
176	2	CM17	Not always having the funding or the time to implement the strategies discussed.	Solutions difficult to implement due to practical challenges
177	6	CM18 (2)	Some ideas that came out sound really good and useful. My concern is the suggested ideas will be met with resistance to implementing e.g., costing, staffing and time. It always comes back to us never having enough time in teaching. Time is of the essence.	Solutions difficult to implement due to practical challenges
178	3	CM09 (3)	Helped to gain and insight into others solutions, share what works well for them and what we can implement and what I can use with my own class.	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
179	5	CM09	Given me some new strategies to keep in mind for other learners.	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
180	5	CM10 (2)	A further understanding of collaborating with other childcare professionals. I will look at other learners in my own class and implement strategies to help understand and develop them.	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
181	5	CM15	Good to pinch the strategy ideas for my own list! Ta!	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
182	5	CM16	It has given me a wider insight on how I can support learners in the future if they are dealing with similar struggles.	Strategies generated can be used with other pupils
183	1	CM07	Comfortable environment (e.g., sat in a circle with process facilitator and CMs and with biscuits) made me speak and share my different thoughts	Supportive environmental factors encouraged openness

Appendix 27 - RTA Phase Three: Generation of Candidate Themes via Manual Sorting
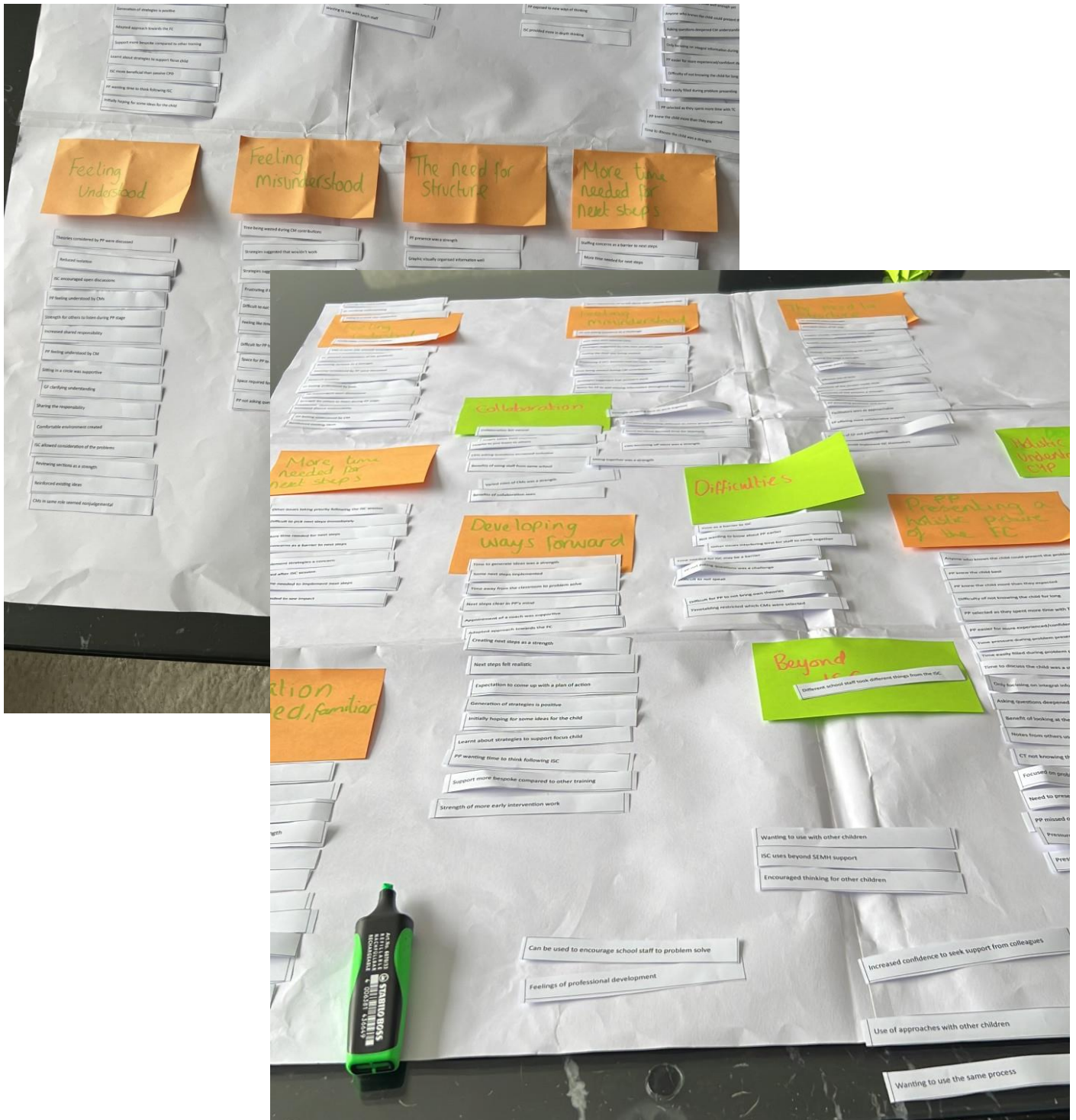
Appendix 28 - RTA Phase Four: Braun and Clarke (2012) Candidate Theme Reviewing Questions

Could this be considered a theme, or a code?

1. In the case that it is a theme, what level of quality does this theme hold? Does it provide valuable insights into the dataset and my research question?

2. What are the boundaries of this theme? What does it include and what does it leave out?

3. Is there sufficient (meaningful) data available to substantiate this theme, or is the theme relatively unsubstantial (is the theme thin or thick)?

4. Do the data exhibit excessive diversity and broad scope, leading to a lack of coherence?

Appendix 29 - RTA Phase Five: Research Question One Theme Names and Related Codes

Theme	Subtheme (If Applicable)	Codes
Gaining a Holistic Picture Focus Child	N/A	Increased understanding about the focus child
		Strength of hypothesising the why
		Helpful to just listen to others
		PP exposed to new ways of thinking
		Listening to ideas and theories before solutions a strength
Embracing Effective Strategies	N/A	Strength of more early intervention work
		Creating next steps as a strength
		Next steps felt realistic
		Encouraged thinking for other children
		Adapted approach towards the focus child
Feeling Understood and Supported	N/A	Reduced isolation
		Increased shared responsibility
		Strength for others to listen during problem presentation stage
		CMs in the same role seemed nonjudgemental
		CMs were familiar
		Graphic Facilitator clarifying understanding
		CMs reaffirming PP's thinking
		Theories considered by Problem Presenter were discussed
Needing Structure	*Structural Support from ISC*	Structure of the process a strength
		Timings supported achieving ISC purpose
		Graphic visually organised information well
	Facilitative Contributions	EP providing guidance and time
		EP offering more collaborative support
		EP as the facilitator

	to Structural Framework	Strength of the graphic facilitator not participating
	Desire for Future Structured Problem solving	Wanting to use with other children
		ISC uses beyond SEMH support
		Wanting to use the same process
		Wanting to use with TAs
		Wanting to use with lunch staff
		Can be used to encourage school staff to problem solve
Feeling Misunderstood	N/A	Time being wasted during Circle Member contributions
		Strategies suggested by Circle Members that would not work
		Difficult to not speak
		Space required for Problem Presenter to add missing information throughout
		Difficult for Problem Presenter to not bring own theories
Next Steps Needing Time and Space	N/A	Difficult to pick next steps immediately
		PP needing time to think following ISC
		Other issues taking priority following the ISC session
		More time needed to implement next steps
		Time to implement strategies a concern

Appendix 30 - RTA Phase Five: Research Question Two Theme Names and Related Codes

Theme	Subtheme (If Applicable)	Codes
Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child	N/A	Process increased understanding of the child
		Increased time devoted to an individual child
		Problem defined more clearly
		Increased considerations about why behaviours are presenting
		Scribe supported the process
Empowering Professional Development	N/A	CM seeing the value in using ISC again to solve problems
		Strategies generation can be used with other pupils
		Framework for future problem solving
		CM seeing ISC as an approach that can be used beyond SEMH support
Valuing Diverse Voices	N/A	Hearing different ideas and perspective is valued
		Hearing the expertise of others is valued
		Not knowing the child can increase impartiality
		Supportive environmental factors encouraged openness

Appendix 31 - RTA Phase Five: Research Question One Theme Names and Synopses

Theme	Subtheme (If Applicable)	Brief Synopsis
Gaining a Holistic Picture of the Focus Child	N/A	PPs describe how they gained a holistic insight into the focus child through their collaboration with CMs.
Embracing Effective Strategies	N/A	PPs express positivity towards the generation of supportive strategies during the ISC session.
Feeling Understood and Supported	N/A	PPs discuss their experiences of heightened understanding and support, attributing it to the collaborative nature of ISC sessions.
Needing Structure	*Structural Support from ISC*	PPs express that ISC provided them with a structured approach to problem solve more effectively.
	Facilitative Contributions to Structural Framework	PPs explain that the facilitators maintained the structural integrity of the ISC session.
	Desire for Future Structured Problem solving	PPs discuss their desires to engage in more structured problem solving in the future.
Feeling Misunderstood	N/A	PPs express frustration and a sense of being misunderstood, citing challenges in PPs providing crucial information and concerns about the timely presentation of their theories.
Next Steps Needing Time and Space	N/A	PPs articulate the necessity for additional time and space to contemplate strategies both during and after ISC sessions, both individually and collaboratively, as well as the requirement for extended time to effectively implement these strategies.

Appendix 32 - RTA Phase Five: Research Question Two Theme Names and Synopses

Theme	Subtheme (If Applicable)	Brief Synopsis
Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child	N/A	CMs describe their experiences of increased clarity resulting from having the space and time to contemplate the focus child.
Empowering Professional Development	N/A	CMs discuss their experiences of how partaking in ISC sessions can aid their own professional development.
Valuing Diverse Voices	N/A	CM discuss their positive experiences of a range of viewpoints being present and heard within the ISC sessions.

Appendix 33 – Research Question One Reflexivity Journal Excerpts

Reflexivity Box

Theme One: Gaining a Holistic Picture of the Focus Child

Throughout the development of this theme, I resonated with school staff regarding the importance of understanding why a behaviour occurs before identifying possible solutions for support. Reflecting on my teaching journey, the urgency of managing daily challenges often left me with little time or space to deeply contemplate the reasons behind certain behaviours. The fast-paced nature of the classroom environment demanded quick solutions, leaving scarce moments for extended reflection. In this hustle, I would respond swiftly, driven by the need for immediate solutions, without the luxury of delving into the root causes of behaviours. Unfortunately, this fast-paced approach sometimes resulted in surface-level fixes rather than addressing the underlying issues.

It was pleasing to observe that in the context of group problem solving, as seen in the ISC sessions, school staff were better equipped to understand why behaviours may be presenting. Drawing from my experiences, the collaborative setting provided the time and space that was often lacking in the daily classroom hustle, allowing for a more thoughtful exploration of why behaviours manifested and fostering more comprehensive solutions.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Three: Feeling Understood and Supported

During the construction of this theme, I considered my past experiences as a teacher. I often found myself feeling isolated, as if I were the sole person responsible for resolving perceived 'problems' related to a child's SEMH needs. I believe this sentiment was influenced by the significance I attached to supporting the children I worked with, along with the inherent pressure in teaching to demonstrate competence and control over challenges encountered within the classroom.

While engaging in the phases of RTA, I experienced a sense of relief and happiness knowing that Problem Presenters felt understood and supported. I believe such support would have greatly benefited me during my teaching career.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Two: Embracing Effective Strategies

As I delved into the responses regarding the experiences with ISC sessions, a pattern emerged that highlighted the transformative impact of collaborative problem solving on strategy development for children with SEMH needs. The acknowledgment of deliberately focusing on specific students during ISC sessions resonated with me, reflecting the common challenge in schools where urgent, high-needs cases often dominate attention, leaving other important cases under-addressed. This realisation shifted my perspective on ISC from merely a strategy-generating platform to a crucial early intervention mechanism for SEMH support, aligning with my experiences and concerns as a class teacher.

The positive reception of ISC-generated strategies by educators further reinforced the notion that effective strategies go beyond ideation to practical implementation in dynamic classroom settings. This resonated with my belief that sustainable interventions require not only insightful planning but also seamless integration into daily teaching practices.

Moreover, the recognition that insights gained from ISC discussions can benefit a wider range of students with SEMH-based needs suggested the systemic impact of collaborative problem solving. This expanded understanding of ISC as a catalyst for systemic change aligns with my professional aspirations to create inclusive and impactful learning environments for all students.

Additionally, the observation of ISC's influence on approaching sensitive conversations reflected the broader shift in attitudes and practices towards empathetic and inclusive support systems. This resonated deeply with my teaching philosophy, emphasising the importance of holistic student support beyond academic achievements.

In essence, my reflections on Theme Two reaffirmed my belief in ISC as not just a process but a mindset shift towards proactive and comprehensive support strategies for children with SEMH needs within educational settings.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Four: Needing Structure

Theme Four resonated with my experiences and beliefs as a class teacher and now as a TEP. The recognition of ISC sessions providing a structured framework for group problem solving interactions was not only affirming but also shed light on the significance of organised processes in addressing complex issues such as SEMH needs.

The emphasis on the logical progression within ISC sessions highlighted the importance of a methodical approach, allowing for a deeper understanding of problem contexts before delving into discussions. Rushing into solutions without understanding the root causes can lead to superficial fixes rather than sustainable interventions, a lesson I have learned through experience.

Moreover, the clarity and explanation of roles within ISC sessions suggested the practical benefits of having a predefined structure. Clear guidelines not only streamline discussions but also ensure that everyone contributes meaningfully and feels valued within the process, promoting a collaborative and inclusive environment.

The mention of specific timings to maintain the structured nature of ISC sessions resonated deeply with me. Time management within the classroom, especially during collaborative problem solving, is crucial to ensure focused discussions and meaningful outcomes. Structured approaches may facilitate more purposeful engagements and better use of limited time resources, aligning with my experiences as a teacher.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Five: Feeling Misunderstood

Throughout the development of this theme, I was mindful of the significant value that time holds for school staff. When they perceived time as being wasted, it led to feelings of being misunderstood. This experience is similar to my firsthand experience as a teacher, where I often felt that others were not truly listening to what I was trying to convey.

Additionally, during my teaching career, I encountered negative emotions when strategies I had attempted to implement were repeatedly suggested by others. This intensified my own sense of being trapped with no apparent way out and left no room for innovative approaches. It reinforced the feeling of being stuck with the 'problem'.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Six: Next Steps Needing Time and Space

The theme of needing more time to consider and implement agreed next steps resonates with my understanding of the pressures school staff face, especially concerning time constraints. Previously as a teacher, I often felt the weight of balancing immediate classroom needs with the necessary time for thoughtful planning and implementation of strategies.

Expressions of slight anxiety about finding time to implement strategies are entirely relatable. It's common among educators, myself included, to acknowledge the time pressures inherent in the profession while recognising the crucial need for effective time management strategies. This has been an ongoing learning process for me, finding ways to work with school staff to prioritise tasks without sacrificing the quality of interventions and support for students.

This reflection deepens my understanding of the interconnectedness between time constraints, thoughtful planning and effective implementation in educational contexts. It highlights the ongoing need for improvements and support mechanisms to help educators manage these challenges within and beyond ISC frameworks effectively. It's a reminder of the constant learning and adaptation required to navigate the complexities of supporting student success while managing time pressures in our roles.

Appendix 34 – Research Question Two Reflexivity Journal Excerpts

Reflexivity Box

Theme One: Enhanced Understanding of the Focus Child

As the researcher interpreting the data on CMs' experiences with ISC sessions, several factors guided my interpretations, drawing from both previous research and personal experiences in educational settings.

My experiences as a teacher have taught me that those who do not know a child well often struggle to understand the root causes of their behaviour, often focusing only on the observable actions rather than seeing the holistic picture. This insight is crucial because it highlights the importance of gaining a comprehensive understanding of the child to address their needs effectively. Therefore, I was particularly pleased to observe in the data how ISC sessions supported CMs in developing a deeper understanding of the focus child's SEMH-based needs. This increased understanding was positively received by CMs and suggested to support better subsequent support for the young person.

The emphasis placed by CMs on the need for sufficient time during ISC sessions resonates with my awareness of the time constraints faced by school staff. Previous experience has given me an awareness into the pressures educators experience, especially regarding the balancing act between immediate classroom demands and the need for in-depth understanding and intervention planning for students with complex needs. This awareness guided my interpretation towards valuing structured time within ISC sessions as crucial for meaningful problem solving and insight generation.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Two: Empowering Professional Development

The theme of empowering professional development resonates deeply with my own professional ethos and experiences. The expressions of CMs wanting to partake in ISC sessions again echo my observations regarding the gaps in problem solving approaches within schools. My previous roles as an Inclusion Lead and Online Platforms Lead have exposed me to the complexities of supporting students with diverse needs, including SEMH needs. Therefore, I interpret CMs' desire to engage in ISC as a testament to the efficacy and value they perceive in this collaborative problem solving approach, mirroring my own recognition of the need for innovative strategies to support staff and vulnerable learners.

CMs' recognition of ISC's potential beyond SEMH support aligns with my broader view of inclusive practices in educational settings. Their acknowledgment of the applicability of ISC to academic concerns highlights the holistic nature of educational support. This resonates with my belief in nurturing inclusive and supportive educational environments that cater to diverse needs comprehensively.

Furthermore, the insights shared by CMs regarding gaining strategies from ISC sessions for broader implementation demonstrate a proactive approach to professional growth. This mirrors my belief in continuous development and the importance of sharing effective strategies across contexts to benefit a wider range of learners.

Reflexivity Box

Theme Three: Valuing Diverse Voices

The theme of valuing diverse viewpoints within ISC sessions resonates with my understanding of collaborative problem solving and group dynamics. I recognise the inherent value of bringing together individuals with varied experiences and expertise to tackle complex issues. The sentiments expressed by CMs regarding the benefits of engaging with colleagues from different teams or those with diverse backgrounds align with my belief in the power of collaboration and inclusive problem solving approaches.
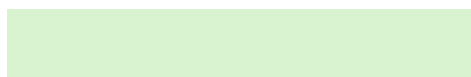
Furthermore, the recognition of the value of including individuals who did not have prior connections or biases toward the focus child reflects my understanding of the importance of objectivity and impartiality in assessment and intervention planning. My experiences working with diverse student populations have taught me the importance of considering multiple perspectives to develop comprehensive and effective strategies tailored to individual needs.

The insights shared by CMs regarding the structural elements within ISC sessions, such as seating arrangements, provision of snacks and established ground rules, resonate with my understanding of creating supportive and non-judgmental environments for collaborative work. These elements may facilitate open communication and also foster a sense of psychological safety, allowing participants to express diverse ideas and viewpoints without fear of criticism or judgment.

Appendix 35 – A Comparison of the Stages Involved in Insights and Solutions Circle Sessions with Solution Circles and Circle of Adults

Key

Stage included in ISC	
Stage not included in ISC	

Insights and Solution Circles	Circle of Adults	Solution Circles
Stage One: Setting the Stage – Roles and purpose of the session are outlined, along with collaboratively setting ground rules.	**Stage One: Setting the Stage -** Roles and purpose of the session are outlined, along with collaboratively setting ground rules.	
Stage Two: Problem Presented - Problem Presenter presents the problem/challenge that needs to be addressed. Everyone else remains quiet.	**Stage Two: Problem Presentation -** Problem Presenter presents the problem/challenge that needs to be addressed. Everyone else remains quiet.	**Stage One: Problem Presentation –** Problem Presenter presents the problem/challenge that needs to be addressed. Everyone else remains quiet.
.	**Stage Three: Exploration of Relationships –** The facilitator asks questions to encourage the Problem Presenter and Circle Members to consider the quality of their relationships with the young person.	
	Stage Four: Considering Organisational Factors – The group will collectively identify organisational factors that may be 'helping 'or 'hindering' the current situation.	
	Stage Five: Listening to the Child's Voice – A volunteer from the circle will present the young person's voice	

	to consider what the child might say if they had been present in the previous three stages.	
	Stage Six: Synthesis – The Graphic Facilitator provides an overview of the discussions had so fair.	
Stage Three: Questions Asked – Circle members ask questions to clarify the problem, and the problem presenter provides answers when possible.		
Stage Four: Theories Shared – Circle Members hypotheses on why the problem is occurring and the Problem Presenter remains quiet.	**Stage Seven: Generation of Hypotheses** – Members of the group share hypotheses/theories they feel are relevant to the situation.	
Stage Five: Strategies Listed - Circle Members share creative solutions and the Problem Presenter listens.	**Stage Eight: Generation of Strategies -** Circle Members share creative solutions and the Problem Presenter listens.	**Stage Two: Strategies Listed** – Circle Members share creative solutions and the Problem Presenter listens.
Stage Six: Dialogue – The Problem Presenter comments on which solutions would be supportive and Circle Members provide more information on those strategies.		**Stage Three: Dialogue** – The Problem Presenter and Circle Members engage in dialogue to explore and clarify the problem.
Stage Seven: Next Steps - The Problem Presenter decides on first steps to implement over the next few days and a coach is appointed.	**Stage Nine: Next Steps -** The Problem Presenter decides on first steps to implement over the next week and other members will be encouraged to support the Problem Presenter to implement the strategies.	**Stage Four Next Steps** – The Problem Presenter decides on first steps to implement over the next few days and a coach is appointed.
Stage Eight: Round of Words – All members of the circle do a	**Stage Ten: Round of Words** – All members of the circle do a round of	

round of words to describe their experience of participating in the session.	words to describe their experience of participating in the session.	