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**Support For The Supporters: Perceptions Of Support
For Support Staff In Comprehensive Schools And The
Role Of The Educational Psychologist**

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ABSTRACT

Support staff are perceived to be highly important to schools in Britain (Department for Education (DfE), 2011; Department for Educational and Skills (DfES), 2000). The dramatic increase in support staff within schools has led to a range of roles being developed, impacting on their training and development needs (Training and Development Agency (TDA), 2010a), and those “involved in employing, managing, supporting and training them” (Alborz et al., 2009, p.4). Whilst guidance is available to schools (for example, Training and Development Agency (TDA), 2010c) there is a lack of evidence regarding the forms of support available to support staff in schools, or what is helpful, in order to carry out their role effectively and develop professionally.

A qualitative approach was adopted to explore perceptions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists. Questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews were utilised to gather the views of secondary school support staff, senior management team members and educational psychologists. Thematic analysis identified key themes relating to enabling support staff to feel supported within their roles, and the role of educational psychologists in working with support staff. Findings suggest that, being valued, included and involved is important to support staff feeling supported. Relationships with other members of support staff and school staff in addition to a school’s overall ethos were identified to have considerable influence on facilitating these aspects. Lack of clarity regarding the role of educational psychologists and their role in supporting support staff was also identified. Tentative suggestions are made regarding how schools might enable support staff to feel supported, and how EPs might widen their roles with support staff. In light of the findings, areas for further research are considered.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DCSF	–	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfE	–	Department for Education
DfEE	–	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	–	Department for Education and Skills
EP[s]	–	Educational psychologist[s]
EPS[s]	–	Educational psychology service[s]
HLTA[s]	–	Higher level teaching assistant[s]
IPA	–	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
LA	–	Local authority
LA1	–	Local authority 1
LA2	–	Local authority 2
LSA(s)	–	Learning support assistant(s)
NA	–	National Agreement
SD	–	Self determination
TA[s]	–	Teaching assistant[s]
TDA	–	Training and Development Agency for Schools
WPR	–	Wider pedagogical role

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Support staff provide the backbone of our schools...It is essential that we invest in and support their unique roles in schools.... (DCSF, 2009c, p.80).

1.1 Overview

As the quote above illustrates, support staff are perceived to be highly important to schools in Britain. This view appears to remain consistent even under the direction of different Governments (for example, DfE, 2011; and DfES, 2000) and support staff are considered central to the school workforce and raising standards (DCSF, 2007; DCSF, 2009c; DCSF, 2010a). It is important therefore, to consider how this group are supported within schools in order for them to perform their roles effectively and develop professionally. This study explored perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings, and the role of educational psychologists in providing support to staff and schools. A qualitative approach was adopted to investigate the views of support staff, members of senior management teams and educational psychologists regarding support for support staff.

Within this study, support staff were considered to be individuals who were paid members of school staff, employed to directly support the work of teachers and/or pupils on a daily basis.

In the past two decades the school workforce has undergone a steady transformation and there has been a significant increase in the number of support staff in schools (Blatchford et. al., 2009; DCSF, 2009; Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, & Bassett, 2010) particularly in comprehensive schools (e.g., Welsh Government, 2011). The majority of research pertaining to support staff focuses on their functions and impact within school settings, with an emphasis on how they contribute to raising standards, and little attention has been given to the support received by support staff.

The diverse roles and responsibilities of support staff impact on their training and development needs (TDA, 2010a), and on those “involved in employing, managing,

supporting and training them” (Alborz et al., 2009, p.4). As they comprise a significant proportion of the school workforce, attention should be given to the availability of training and additional support for support staff in schools, to enable them to support teachers and pupils to the highest standard. Additionally, similar to the increased awareness of the importance of pupil well-being, staff well-being and a ‘workforce fit for purpose’ are becoming increasingly more pertinent (National Health School Standard (NHSS), 2002; WAG, 2008). Furthermore, as schools and other services are increasingly required to demonstrate effectiveness with fewer resources, a staff team that feels well supported is likely to be required for staff to perform their roles effectively, and for the maintenance and development of skills.

It is important that schools have an understanding of the needs of support staff in order for them to perform effectively their role and develop professionally. This research study presents findings of an exploration of perceptions regarding support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists. Specific types of support are identified within the research findings in enabling staff to feel supported within their roles. Key roles of educational psychologists were also identified.

1.2 Research Design and Epistemological position

A qualitative research design to explore perceptions regarding support for support staff in comprehensive schools was adopted. Qualitative approaches seek to develop ‘knowledge’ regarding “the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations” (Elliot, Fischer & Rennie, 1999, p.216). Thus, this study aimed to acknowledge and reflect on the perceptions of support staff, senior management team members and EPs regarding support for support staff in comprehensive schools, and did not seek to identify one objective truth. The current research project adopted an ecosystemic social constructionist epistemological position, which recognised the social construction of perspectives through the interaction between the individual and the environment. Thus, acknowledging the development of different perspectives and ideas.

1.3 Relevance to support staff and schools

Blatchford et al., (2009c) identified that compared to teachers, support staff were less satisfied with training and development opportunities available to them and that support staff within comprehensive schools were less satisfied, compared to support staff in primary schools and special schools. This suggests that the training and development opportunities available to support staff is different to teachers, and that opportunities may be limited or inappropriate for support staff in comprehensive schools. Furthermore, there appears to be a difference or conflict between government rhetoric regarding the importance of training and support for support staff (DCSF, 2009a; DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2011b) and practice in schools. This provides an opportunity to develop knowledge regarding how support staff are supported in schools and what support staff perceive to be important in terms of support for them within their roles. In addition, perceptions of senior management team members are important to gain, due to the important role they have in managing support staff within schools (DfE, 2011c).

Developing a greater understanding of the needs of support staff and appropriate support structures may be helpful to managing issues related to staff recruitment and retention. Well supported staff members are more likely to perform more effectively, have a greater sense of well-being and are more likely to remain in their position (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Firth et al., 2004). Leach (2009) recognises that the pastoral care staff receive is likely to impact on the care and support they provide to children and young people. It can be argued that, without appropriately trained and supported staff, teaching and non-teaching, it is ultimately the pupils that are affected.

Guidelines inform schools about training and support for staff (e.g., TDA, 2008; 2010a; 2010b) however, ultimately, it is up to schools to interpret these. There is a lack of evidence regarding the forms of support available to support staff in schools, or what is helpful, in order to carry out their role effectively and develop professionally.

1.4 Voice of support staff

A significant proportion of the research literature related to support staff focuses on what they do, for example, their role and their impact on pupils (Alborz et al., 2009a; Blatchford et al., 2009c; Burton, 2008; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001;

Groom & Rose, 2005; Muijs, & Reynolds, 2003; Symes & Humphrey, 2011). Whilst these are relevant research areas and require further investigation, few studies have enabled support staff an opportunity to have a ‘voice’ and express their opinion about their roles within schools (for exceptions see O’Brien & Garner, 2002; Lewis, 2003; Mansaray, 2006). As Barkham (2008) argues:

...the rhetoric of government, some teachers’ unions and some school communities denies these professionals a voice in making decisions concerning their work. Their views are rarely heard amongst the voices of the privileged and the powerful. (Barkham, 2008, p.852)

This research study aimed to utilise support staff ‘voices’, in order to explore perceptions regarding the types of support they receive, and would like to receive, within specific local authority and school contexts. The ‘voices’ of other key stakeholders such as senior management team members and educational psychologists were explored also to gain further insight into perceptions of support for support staff, and enabled a more holistic approach to be adopted.

1.5 Relevance to the Educational Psychologist’s Role

Educational psychologists have an important role in working with children, families and schools (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2001; Gersch, 2004). The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfES, 2001) recognises the role educational psychologists (EPs) can have in working with school staff to develop knowledge and skills. More recently, the current coalition government has highlighted the role EPs can play “to develop the skills of teachers and other professionals working with pupils...” (DfE, 2011, p.105, paragraph 5:45). This suggests that EPs have a unique contribution to make in working with the wider school workforce.

There is a limited amount of published research relating to the role of the EP working with support staff in schools. Farrell, Balshaw and Polat published an article in 2000 on the work of learning support assistants and the implications for EPs. Since then, there has been surprisingly little literature directly related to the role of the EP working with support staff, considering the increased prevalence of support staff in schools. There is therefore, an opportunity to contribute to new knowledge with regard to the support staff receive in schools and the role of the EP. If support staff are well

supported and encouraged to develop professionally, the quality of the support they provide in schools, to pupils, teachers and parent/carers, is likely to be improved (Leach, 2009). It is important to draw from research in order to “find further ways of improving the quality of support offered to all children in schools and ensure that this brings the maximum possible benefits” (Farrell et. al., 2010, p.447).

1.6 Contribution to New Knowledge

The current study contributes new knowledge by exploring support for support staff in comprehensive schools in two local authorities in South Wales, and the role of EPs. The views of support staff in schools have not been utilised previously to explore structures of support. Support staff in this study identified particular forms of support that they valued which enabled them to perform their roles. Additionally, the views of senior management team members and educational psychologists were sought to further inform insight into the support available for this particular group of individuals. Perceptions regarding the role of EPs providing support to support staff and to schools were explored also.

1.7 Summary

The increase in support staff in schools (Blatchford et. al., 2009c; Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010; Rubie-Davies, Blatchford, Webster, Koutsoubou, & Bassett, 2010) and in particular comprehensive schools (Office for National Statistics, 2011) has led to a change in the school workforce and the support, training and development needs of staff. Whilst guidance is available to schools (for example, TDA, 2010c) to help direct decisions regarding professional development opportunities and training, there is a lack of evidence regarding the forms of support available to support staff in schools, or what is helpful, in order to carry out their role effectively and develop professionally.

The current research study is unique, in that support staff views regarding the support they receive have not been explored previously. Additionally, there is a lack of up to date research relating to the role of the EP working with support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools. The present research aimed to contribute new knowledge regarding support for support staff in comprehensive schools and the role of the EPs in supporting support staff.

It is recognised that the outcomes of the present research study are limited to particular school and local authority contexts. However, the intention was not to provide a generalised conclusion, but to provide some insight into perceptions regarding support for support staff within specific contexts at a particular moment in time. Literature suggests that support staff roles are subtle, nuanced (Howes, 2003) and are constructed within the contexts of each specific school (Watkins & Hill, 2000). Therefore, an in-depth exploratory study with a small number of schools to explore perceptions regarding support for support staff was preferred.

The current research study will be presented in six chapters. An outline of the forthcoming chapters is presented below.

1.8 Outline of the Forthcoming Chapters

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two provides a review of the literature pertinent to support staff in comprehensive schools. Literature regarding the role and impact of support staff in schools is reviewed and the chapter explores structures of support and psychological theory pertaining to support and training. The role of the educational psychologist in relation to support staff in school is discussed. The chapter concludes with a set of research aims and questions.

The methodology used to conduct this study is described in chapter three. Details and justification for the use of a qualitative research design and an ecological/social constructionist epistemological position are discussed. Information regarding participants, ethical considerations and the procedure followed are described. The method chosen for data analysis and the process followed are outlined.

Chapter four presents the research findings. Details of the outcomes of each wave of the research and the over-arching main themes are presented. Extracts from the data are utilised to clarify and support the themes identified.

A discussion of the research findings in relation to relevant literature and theoretical positions presented in chapter two is provided in chapter five. Some of the limitations associated with the current research study are identified and discussed.

The sixth, and final chapter outlines a summary of the research findings and conclusions are drawn. The chapter tentatively explores the implications of the findings in relation

to the role of the educational psychologist, educational psychology and education. In addition, directions for possible future research are identified in view of the current research findings.

Appropriate references and appendices can be found appended.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter seeks to review the most pertinent literature relevant to the present research study. The literature review provides an overview of information relevant to supporting support staff in comprehensive schools. It is organised into eight sections which focus on the following:

- definition of support staff;
- definition of support;
- the historical and government context of support staff in comprehensive schools;
- the role, impact and deployment of support staff in schools;
- the management and development of support staff;
- psychology which can inform support;
- types of support in schools; and
- the role of educational psychologists working with support staff.

A summary of the literature and the current study's research aims and questions are presented at the end of the chapter.

A search for literature was conducted through key research search databases, including PsycInfo, PsycArticles, Web of Science via Web of Knowledge, JSTOR, ScienceDirect and Google Scholar, using key search terms such as, 'support staff', 'teaching assistant support', 'staff support' and 'educational psychologist and support staff'. Terms for support staff, for example, 'teaching assistant', 'learning support assistant' and 'learning mentor' were used as search items. Research relevant to support staff in schools was identified, in addition to research related to professional development and support structures in schools. Reference lists at the end of journal articles, as well as government websites were also utilised.

Prior to discussing the literature relevant to support staff in comprehensives schools, it is necessary to define what is meant by 'support staff' and 'support'.

2.1 Support Staff Definition

A plethora of terms are used to define support staff in schools. Most common are those who denote support staff employed to work alongside teachers in classrooms, for

example ‘teaching assistant’, ‘classroom assistant’, ‘learning support assistant’, ‘teaching aide’, ‘auxiliary support’, ‘associate professional’ and ‘paraprofessional’. According to Bach, Kessler and Heron (2004), the range of titles utilised reflects the ad hoc way in which non-teaching roles have developed over time.

Historically, the term ‘classroom assistant’ referred to individuals who supported the teacher by reducing administrative burdens, and ‘learning support assistant’ referred to individuals who supported individual pupils with special educational needs. The term ‘non-teaching’ staff has been used also (National College for Leadership of Schools and Children’s Services, 2011), however, given the increasing pedagogic element to many support roles (DfE, 2011c; Fraser & Meadows, 2008; Moyles & Suschitzky, 1997; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010), this seems inappropriate. The generic term ‘teaching assistant’ is utilised frequently to cover those who undertake classroom-based positions (Blatchford et al., 2011) and is the term that is most commonly employed within the research literature.

The increased prevalence and diversification of support roles within schools, particularly within comprehensive schools, has led to a burgeoning of terms for support staff being created. Titles such as ‘learning mentor’, ‘academic coach’, ‘pastoral support’, ‘behaviour support’ and ‘cover supervisor’ have become more familiar in recent years. The flexibility available for schools to create support roles and titles suitable to their needs can be considered to be beneficial, however, this provides a challenge in terms of research which aims to capture information regarding roles and responsibilities of support staff.

The working definition for support staff in the current research project covers individuals who are paid members of school staff, employed to directly support the work of teachers and or pupils on a daily basis. Except in reference to specific studies, the term ‘support staff’ will be used hereafter, to encompass all job titles that describe individuals who provide direct support to teachers and pupils within schools.

2.2 Definition of Support

Support can take many forms and be defined in a number of ways. For example, the term support can be used to describe: something that bears hold; the act of providing assistance (e.g., financial); advocating; and corroboration (e.g., opinions) (Definitions.net, 2012). Additionally, different types of support can be identified such as social support, financial support, emotional support and technical support. Vaux (1988) suggests that support can be considered a transactional process between an individual and the environment which is consistent with an ecological perspective (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Furthermore, a developmental view would suggest support needs change overtime, as circumstances and roles alter (Vaux, 1988). Thus, adopting these perspectives would suggest that support processes take place in fluctuating contexts and are influenced by a variety of personal and contextual factors, including previous experiences and appraisals or perceptions of support.

The term support in the present research study is utilised to describe the action of providing assistance. It is used in reference to staff providing it to pupils, and staff receiving it. This study aimed to explore what actions or structures are relevant to a specific group of school staff that enables support staff to feel supported to effectively perform their role and develop professionally.

2.3 Historical and Government Context of Support Staff in Mainstream

Schools

There has been a significant increase in the number of support staff in schools in Britain (Blatchford et. al., 2009c; Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012; Farrell, Alborz, Howes, & Pearson, 2010; Rubie-Davies et al., 2010) and in particular in comprehensive schools (Office for National Statistics, 2011). According to statistics released by the Department for Education, there were 213,900 full-time employed teaching assistants (TAs) and 188,100 other support staff, in schools in England, in November 2010 (DfE, 2011), increases of 72% and 54% respectively since 2000. In Wales, there were 15,456 teaching assistants across nursery, primary, secondary and special school settings between 2009 and 2010, with approximately a fifth being employed in comprehensive schools (Welsh Government, 2011). The total number of support staff, which includes TAs, has risen by approximately 22% since 2006, from 15,834 to 20,409. The blurring

of support staff roles and the different terms applied to staff in the same role (Kerry, 2005), in addition to establishing full-time equivalents can provide a challenge in identifying specific details of increases of support staff. These are the only national figures available and provide a guide as to the increase in support staff in schools. A number of explanations for the increase in support staff in schools are outlined below.

2.3.1 Explanations for the Increase in Support Staff in Schools

The introduction of the Foundation Phase can in part account for the increase of support staff in nursery and primary school settings in Wales (Welsh Government, 2011). However, major political influences have impacted on the composition of the school workforce as a whole; the introduction and implementation of the now obsolete national strategies; the inclusive schools movement; and workforce remodelling. The *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b) agenda has also impacted on the school workforce in terms of structure and practice. New job roles have been created in order to help support schools in meeting the five outcomes of *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b), in England, and the seven outcomes of *Children and Young People: Rights to Action* (WAG, 2003) in Wales. The two main political influences which have impacted on support staff roles are the inclusive schools agenda and workforce reform (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012) and are considered in turn below.

2.3.1.1 Inclusive schools agenda

Following the Warnock Report (1978), the 1981 Education Act (McFarlane, 1981) proposed that all children with special needs ought to be educated in mainstream schools where possible. The number of support staff (for example, TAs) therefore, has increased to cater for a range of pupils' needs (Farrell, Balshaw & Polat, 2000; Alborz, Pearson, Farrell & Howes, 2009a), and this has been accompanied by an increase in the funds available for staff to support them (Blatchford et al., 2011). Other publications have highlighted the increase of support staff in mainstream schools that is not restricted to pupils with special educational needs (for example, DfEE, 1997a; DfEE, 1998). Thus, support staff are considered to enable the inclusion of all pupils and not just those with special educational needs.

2.3.1.2 Workforce reform

Since 2003, schools have employed a wider range of staff to meet the requirements of the National Agreement (NA) (DfES, 2003c). This workforce reform was an agreement between the central Government, local government employers and school workforce unions to raise standards, to reduce teacher workload, and to review support staff roles (Blatchford et al., 2009c). Significantly, the National Union of Teachers (NUT) did not sign the agreement, considering it to de-professionalise teacher roles (NUT, 2003).

A significant change within the agreement was the “reform of support staff roles to help teachers and support pupils” (DfES, 2003c, p.2) and the introduction of “personal administrative assistants for teachers, cover supervisors and high level (sic) teaching assistants...” (DfES, 2003c, p.2). This led to a rise in the recruitment of support staff in schools. Although schools were statutorily bound to implement changes in teachers’ workload, there was a degree of flexibility in how schools interpreted the remodelling, resulting in different titles and roles being developed for support staff.

Further publications, such as the *Children’s Plan* (DCSF, 2007), *Building 21st Century Schools* (DCSF, 2009c), and *Building Parental Confidence in the Special Educational Needs System* (DCSF, 2010a) highlight the value of support staff, and place them as having a key role in helping schools to raise standards, contributing to the continued increase of support staff roles. What support staff do and how effective they are, is therefore, an important facet to understanding how they are able to contribute to raising standards and to understanding what support needs they may have.

2.4 The Role, Deployment and Impact of Support Staff

Following the National Agreement in 2003 the DfES stated:

Support staff will be increasingly recognised for the contribution they make to raising pupil standards and they will have access to expanded roles and improved career opportunities. (DfES, 2003a, p.11).

Simultaneous with an increase in support staff in schools, expansion and diversification of roles have occurred. The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) estimate there are fifty different support staff roles (Ofsted, 2008), demonstrating the

range of roles within schools. Two reviews of the role and impact of support staff have been conducted and are considered below.

2.4.1 Reviews of the role and impact of support staff

Within the UK, two major reviews have been undertaken in an attempt to draw together information regarding the role and impact of support staff; the Deployment and Impact of Support Staff (DISS) project conducted by Blatchford et al., (2008, 2009a, 2009c); and a systematic literature review by Alborz et al., (2009). Giangreco, Suter and Doyle (2010) provide an overview of American literature relating to support staff and highlight a number of similarities between American and British research, which may suggest that issues relevant to support staff are not unique to the UK. However, whilst it is useful to draw from American research it is necessary to acknowledge differences in education systems between America and the UK, and that reasons for similarities may arise from different aetiologies.

Blatchford et al's., (2009b) study is based on information collected between 2003 and 2008 and it can be argued to be the first comprehensive study of support staff roles. Longitudinal data from England and Wales were gathered, regarding all categories of support staff, across all school sectors (primary, secondary and special). Additionally, a range of information was gathered from support staff, teachers, and pupils, through questionnaires, observations and interviews. Due to the scope of the study, and the nationally representative sample, findings from the DISS project are likely to be generalisable, and provide insight into the characteristics, conditions of employment, preparedness, deployment and practice of support staff.

Briefly, Blatchford et al., (2008, 2009a, 2009c) identified that the demographic of support staff is white, female and over the age of thirty six, with the majority of support staff time spent supporting pupils rather than teachers. An unsettling finding, however, was that “the more support pupils received, the less progress they made” (Blatchford et al., 2009b, p.2), raising questions about the deployment of support staff. Explanations for this negative finding could be assigned to pupil and individual factors (e.g., TA

qualifications), however, Blatchford et al., (2012)¹ argue this not to be the case, as this underplays the situational and structural factors that support staff have to work within.

Alternatively, Alborz et al., (2009a, 2009b) identified that support staff had a positive impact on pupil progress when they were appropriately prepared and trained to deliver specific interventions. Differences in these findings compared to those of the Blatchford et al., (2009b) study may be a result of Alborz et al's., (2009a) literature review being based on studies in the UK and the USA, as opposed to covering research within the UK. Additionally, Alborz et al's., (2009a) review focussed on the impact of support staff on 'underachieving' or disabled pupils, therefore overlooking the impact of support staff on other pupils. Furthermore, differences may have occurred due to the reviews examining different types of support by staff. Alborz et al., reviewed targeted interventions undertaken by support staff, whereas Blatchford et al., assessed support in 'everyday' conditions. This suggests that when trained and appropriately supported, support staff can have a positive impact. Both studies provide useful insight into support staff's work, and illustrate that further research is required into the role and impact of support staff.

2.4.2 The Role of Support Staff

Support staff have been described as 'Jills of all trades' (Moyle & Suschizky, 1997) and have been considered to have a "glueing, quilting and genuinely cementing role" (Dyer, 1996, p.191). There is huge variation between schools in how support staff are described, deployed, trained and managed (Butt & Lance, 2009) and this, therefore, provides a challenge in synthesising information regarding the role of support staff.

An array of literature has explored support staff roles and/or aspects of working with particular groups of pupils and their impact (e.g., Fox, Farrell & Davis, 2003; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer & Doyle, 2001; Groom & Rose, 2005; Jarvis, 2003; Muijs, & Reynolds, 2003; Pimley & Bowen, 2006; Savage, Carless, & Erten, 2009; Symes &

¹ The 'Wider Pedagogical Role' (WPR) (Blatchford, Russell & Webster, 2012) is proposed as a model which combines the characteristics: conditions of employment, preparedness, deployment, and practice of support staff. The WPR model utilises these characteristics to suggest explanations for the negative impact of support staff on pupil's academic progress. A summary of the model is provided in Appendix A1.

Humphrey, 2011). However, much of this research is descriptive and prescriptive, and there remains a lack of understanding regarding the role and impact of support staff (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010), particularly within secondary school settings.

Six types of support staff activities were derived by Blatchford et al., (2008) and these can be considered to fall into four broad categories: supporting pupils, supporting teachers, supporting the whole school and supporting the curriculum (Balshaw, 2010). Teaching assistants (TAs) are the largest body of support staff within schools (DfE, 2011c; Welsh Government, 2011) and it could be argued that they (and other support staff) contribute to these four areas, suggesting their roles are multifaceted (Moran & Abbott, 2002). Support staff contribute to both the academic, and social emotional development of pupils (Powell & Tod, 2004). TAs' roles (and others') may change throughout lessons and throughout the day as the focus of their support alters in response to changing situations and pupils (Mansaray, 2006). Whilst it is difficult to clearly define TA roles, Wilson et al., (2003, p.203) suggest that "the broad and flexible nature of the role is its strength" (Wilson et al., 2003, p.203).

2.4.3 Deployment of support staff

Historically, support staff were employed to provide one-to-one support to pupils identified with special educational needs (SEN) (Groom, 2006). Some roles have developed to encompass a range of tasks with whole classes, groups and individuals, with and without special educational needs, both inside and outside the classroom (Groom, 2006). However, research suggests that the majority of support staff continue to be assigned to work with pupils with the most need (Blatchford et al., 2009c; DfE, 2011c; Giangreco et al., 2001; Russell et al., 2005) and are less likely to support pupils who are considered to be, 'high' or 'middle' ability (Webster, Russell & Blatchford, 2009). Support staff in comprehensive schools are more likely to support on a one-to-one basis compared to their counterparts in primary schools, who support pupils in groups (Blatchford et al., 2012). This difference may arise from the different environments, with support staff in secondary schools moving around with individual pupils to different classes, rather than remaining in one classroom with the same pupils and the same teacher.

Many support staff have been employed to support inclusion (Farrell et al., 2000; Alborz et al., 2009a). Support provided in groups or within the context of groups has been found to be beneficial to inclusion (Howes, 2003), which runs counter to how most support staff are deployed in comprehensive schools (Blatchford et al., 2009b); suggesting there is a discrepancy between research and practice. Blatchford et al., (2006a, p.22) identified that teachers believed delegating the ‘neediest’ pupils to support staff allowed them to focus attention on the rest of the class. This can result in pupils considered to have the most need becoming separated from the teacher and the curriculum. This raises ethical issues and according to the DfE it is not acceptable for pupils with the most need to spend less time with more skilled, qualified teachers (DfE, 2011c).

2.4.3.1 Deployment within classrooms

The national agreement, the introduction of accredited training courses (e.g., for Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA) status), and government proposals suggested support staff should have direct impact on pupil attainment (DfES, 2002b), and as a result many support staff roles, particularly TA’s, have become more pedagogical in nature (Blatchford et al., 2009b; Edmond & Price, 2009; Eyres, Cable, Hancock & Turner, 2004; Hancock, Hall, Cable and Eyres, 2010). This has developed TA role from “classroom ‘helper’...to one that is more specifically directed to support the teaching and learning process” (Groom, 2006 p. 199). Some view the development of pedagogical roles for support staff as de-professionalising teacher roles (NUT, 2003; Thompson, 2006; Yarker, 2005). There may also be tensions for support staff in taking on pedagogical roles, in terms of not wanting to become teachers or have additional responsibilities (Abbott, McCokey & Dobbins, 2011; Barkham, 2008).

The Training and Development Agency for Schools (TDA) promoted the following criteria on their website as essential to the effective deployment of support staff in the classroom:

- clarity of teacher and TA roles;
- teachers and TAs planning together;
- professional development of support staff; and
- encouragement of the effective deployment of support staff through the performance review process. (TDA, 2012).

The points above are consistent with literature which highlights the need for clarity of roles, planning time and effective professional development as essential to effective deployment of staff (e.g., Balshaw, 2000; Cremin, Thomas & Vincett, 2005; Groom, 2006; Moran & Abott, 2002) and in maximising the effectiveness of staff (Farrell et al., 1999).

Moran and Abbott (2002) suggested teachers are often ill prepared to manage the often complex roles and varied deployment of teaching assistants. Despite the increase in support staff in schools, many teachers have not been trained in how to work effectively with support staff (Blatchford et al., 2009b). Additionally, differences in practice between support staff and teachers have been identified; with TAs being more concerned with task completion rather than learning and understanding, compared to teachers; which can have a negative impact on pupil progress (Blatchford et al., 2009c). Therefore, support staff require support and training also in order to develop pedagogical roles and enable successful deployment (Blatchford et al., 2012). This also highlights the need for effective collaboration between teachers and support staff (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010).

2.4.3.2 Support staff status

As many support staff do not require specific qualifications (Edmond & Price, 2009) this may generate a view that support staff are lower in ‘status’ compared to teachers and this is reflected in the pay they receive. The deployment of support staff offers significant savings for schools; Marr (2000) suggests that the overall cost of employing support staff is two-thirds of that of teachers and concerns regarding support staff pay are well documented (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009b; Farrell et al., 1999; Russell et al., 2005). Howes (2003) argues the National Agreement embedded the notion of a deficit model of support staff, in that support staff are seen as useful for roles “peripheral to the core of teaching and learning, and properly gain a role within the core only when they have been trained to do so” (p.148). This clearly has implications for how staff roles are conceptualised and treated within schools and the status afforded to support staff roles. Hammett and Burton (2005) identified that low morale and low perceived status were attributed to a lack of appropriate induction, training and limited prospects of progression. Additionally, a lack of perceived status may lead to a perception that

support staff have no ‘power’ within schools (Lowe & Pugh, 2007) and are therefore placed in a ‘weakened’ role.

The current Green Paper, *Support and Aspiration: a new approach to special educational needs* (DfE, 2011c) places emphasis on development for teaching staff. Support staff are barely recognised, with no more than six citations, which could suggest they continue to remain the ‘forgotten profession’. However, it is recognised within the document that support staff “can make a real difference to the achievement of pupils with SEN” (p.63), and that in order for “teaching assistants to have a positive impact they need to be trained, supported, deployed and managed effectively” (DfE, p.64). Whilst this may be in line with Howes’ (2003) ‘deficit model’, it seems that greater emphasis is being placed on reducing overreliance on support staff (Burton & Goodman, 2011), enabling teaching staff to meet the needs of pupils and ensure schools are skilled in the deployment of support staff to maximise the benefits for all - pupils and staff. This may suggest that the way in which support staff are deployed may change. This is consistent with perspectives of inclusion which emphasise the roles of all staff in schools in supporting pupils (Ainscow, 1999; DfES, 2001).

2.4.4 Summary of Support Staff Roles and Deployment

Support staff work within a range of contexts and undertake a variety of roles within schools, and in particular within comprehensive schools, to support teachers and pupils. Support staff time is mainly spent supporting pupils rather than teachers (Blatchford et al., 2009a). Support staff roles are generally personally and socially constructed within schools. This results in an assortment of terms for staff, and diversity in the deployment of them, contributing to the complexity of issues regarding support staff. Further research is required, particularly in comprehensive schools, to understand the roles and deployment of support staff.

2.4.5 The Impact and Effectiveness of Support Staff in Schools

The rise in support staff in schools occurred with the assumption and expectation that utilising support staff would benefit teachers and pupils, helping to raise standards in schools. Recent research has tried to reduce this gap in knowledge following the suggestion, “...that support staff did have an impact on pupil attainment, behaviour and attitudes; the problem headteachers faced was proving it” (Blatchford et al., 2008, p.13).

Whilst publications by the previous Labour Government in 2000 and the current Coalition Government recognise the role of support staff and their contribution within mainstream schools (DfE, 2011c; DfES, 2000), there is continued disparity within the research literature regarding the impact and effectiveness of support staff in schools in the UK and abroad. Studies have demonstrated both a positive (e.g., Alborz et al., 2009a) and negative impact (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009b). A positive impact has been noted on teacher workload, stress and job satisfaction (Alborz et al., 2009b; Blatchford et al., 2009c), although other studies have suggested the opposite is the case (Fletcher-Campbell 1992; Lee 2002; Estyn 2007), as a result of the pressure placed on teachers to manage an ‘additional’ adult. Positive influences in liaising with parents and engaging them in schools have been documented (Alborz et al., 2009a). Support staff are cited also to have a positive impact on inclusion and pupil’s behaviour (Blatchford et al., 2009c; Burton & Goodman. 2011; Groom & Rose, 2005; Logan, 2006; Moran and Abbott, 2002). However, some argue that the role of support staff can be contradictory for pupils with special educational needs and create a barrier to inclusion (Ainscow, 2000; Dyson, 2000).

Although research regarding the impact of support staff can be considered contradictory and inconsistent, this should not detract from the important role support staff have to play in schools (Blatchford et al., 2009b). Research suggests that support staff can be seen to be effective at whole group, small group and individual levels, when they are appropriately trained and supported (Alborz et al., 2009a; Blatchford et al., 2009b). There is a significant lack of research in secondary schools, and more research regarding the impact of support staff on all pupils as well as specific groups is required. Further research is required to understand the impact of support staff within ‘everyday’ conditions (Blatchford et al., 2011; Howes et al., 2003). Additionally, the impact of support staff on the wider curriculum is necessary, as most studies focus upon literacy.

Appropriate training and support for staff is critical to the effective development, deployment and impact of staff (Alborz et al., 2009b). In considering how support staff may be supported or enabled to feel supported, attention will now be given to the literature pertinent to the management and professional development of support staff.

2.5 Management and Professional Development of Support Staff

Learning ‘in-situ’ appears to be a key feature of support staff roles (Hancock et al, 2010). Often, employers and employees respond to the unanticipated needs of the working environment (Hancock et al., 2010) and there is often dissociation between the formal conception of a job and the way individuals perform a role. This has clear implications for the support, training and continuing development opportunities of support staff.

Ongoing training and professional development opportunities for support staff are recognised to be important to raising standards and improving support for pupils in schools (Ofsted, 2010; TDA 2010b). Government guidance and academic research suggests that TAs, and other support staff, need to be appropriately trained and supported (Blatchford et. al., 2009; DCSF, 2009a; DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2011c; Farrell et al., 2010). However, there is insufficient detail as what constitutes ‘appropriate’ training and support or how it is to be provided and headteachers are often left to decide what is best for their school (DCSF, 2009a; DCSF, 2009b; DfE, 2011c). The wide range of contexts which support staff work within and the diverse tasks carried out by them, further complicate training and development issues (O’Neill, 2010).

The following sections provides an overview of literature relevant to of the management and professional development of support staff and what these might offer in terms of providing support to support staff in schools. The issues presented in each subdivision are interlinked and should not be considered to be independent of one another.

2.5.1 Management of Support Staff

The statement from the DfE below signifies the importance of effective management and leadership for support staff:

For teaching assistants to have a positive impact they need to be trained, supported, deployed and managed effectively. This is not only a matter for the teaching assistants, or the class teachers working with them in the classroom, but one of effective school organisation and, crucially, leadership. (DfE, 2011c, p,64).

In considering the role of SENCOs, Gerschel (2005, p.70) identified the following as being essential to the effective management of TAs:

- a viable organisational structure within the school, with clearly defined roles and responsibilities for TAs, their managers, including the SENCO, and the teaching staff with whom they work; and
- active support, training and direction for schools from the Local Education Authority (LEA). (Gerschel, 2005, p.70)

Gerschel's suggestions could extend to the role of schools in managing other support staff, and highlighted the need for definition of roles and responsibilities and support from LEAs. Furthermore, the organisational structure of schools and role of managers are also identified in being essential to the effective management of support staff. These are considered below in the following sub-sections: definition of roles and responsibilities; role of immediate supervisors; and whole school approach. The present research was concerned with how schools are able to support staff and therefore, it is not within the scope of this review to include the role of the LEA. However, consideration of the role of EPs in providing support to staff and schools is provided in a later section (2.8).

2.5.1.1 Definition of roles and responsibilities

Defined roles enable staff to have a clear understanding of what is expected of them and how they are to meet these expectations (Balshaw, 2000; Giangreco & Doyle, 2007; Groom, 2006). Flexibility in roles is also required (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010), thus, managers need to set up opportunities for roles to be identified and defined to support the development of a clear understanding of objectives through a shared vision (Bolam, Stoll & Greenwood, 2007). There is consensus in the research that training is required for teachers and support staff to support collaborative working (Blatchford et al., 2009b; Butt & Lance, 2005; Cremin, Thomas & Vincett, 2005; Faraday, 2010; Farrell et al., 1999; Moran & Abbott, 2002).

2.5.1.2 Role of immediate supervisors

Within the context of devolved leadership, whereby leadership roles are distributed, extended and shared across a team of individuals (Harris, 2009), support staff are likely to have an immediate supervisor or manager, who can serve as a source of support. Depending on the school and its organisation, this could be a HLTA, SENCO, assistant

headteacher or another identified member of staff. Having clear definitions of roles and responsibilities and identified systems of communication are likely to be important to ensure staff know ‘who to go to for what’.

Many SENCoS are given responsibility for support staff, particularly TAs/LSAs (DfES, 2001; Gerschel, 2005). However, SENCo roles can vary in accordance to a number of factors, such as context (primary or secondary), time allocation and whether they are members of senior management (Mackenzie, 2011). SENCoS being members of senior management teams is perceived to be important to decision making and effectively managing support staff (Gerschel, 2005; Layton, 2005). However, it cannot be the sole responsibility of one person to manage such a significant proportion of the school workforce, and the importance of a whole school approach is required.

2.5.1.3 Whole school approach

Culture in an organization is very important, playing a large role in whether or not the organization is a happy, healthy place in which to work. Kane-Urrabazo (2006, p.193).

A number of authors have identified that, when support staff are made to feel part of a team and are valued by other school staff, their effectiveness is enhanced (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Fox, 1998; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Lorenz, 1998; Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998). Enabling support staff to feel a sense of ‘belonging’ and valued, suggests that the overall climate and ethos of schools is crucial to the management and supporting of support staff. How this is achieved, however, is more difficult to identify.

Kellerman (2007, p.87) writes:

Every environment is sending a subliminal message to us, indicating that we are either part of it or separated from it.

Thus implying that there are subtle ways in which schools communicate to staff that they are included. Farrell et al., (1999) identified that the process of being appraised, for a group of LSAs, was a symbol of their acceptance as professionals within the school. This is consistent with research that suggests that recognition of roles is important to integrating support staff into staff teams, enabling them to feel valued (Abbott et al., 2011; Burton & Goodman, 2011).

Rhodes, Nevill and Allan (2004) identified the importance of interpersonal relationships in offering affiliation and support to teachers and suggest that schools that foster mutual respect, consultation and collaboration, are likely to have a positive impact on the intrinsic motivation of staff. Although a small study of primary school TAs, the importance of relationships between adults in schools is highlighted and is consistent with other research (e.g. Blatchford et al., 2009c; Groom 2006). Similarly, Russell et al., (2005) found that TAs who identified themselves to be ‘satisfied’ within their roles made greater reference to their relationships with teachers, using terms such as ‘respect’, ‘valued’ and ‘appreciated’, which engendered feelings of being part of a team.

The climate and ethos of a school can impact on the development and effectiveness of staff (Watkinson, 2008). Frieberg and Stein (1999 as cited by Watkinson, 1999, p.62) offer a helpful overview of school climate.

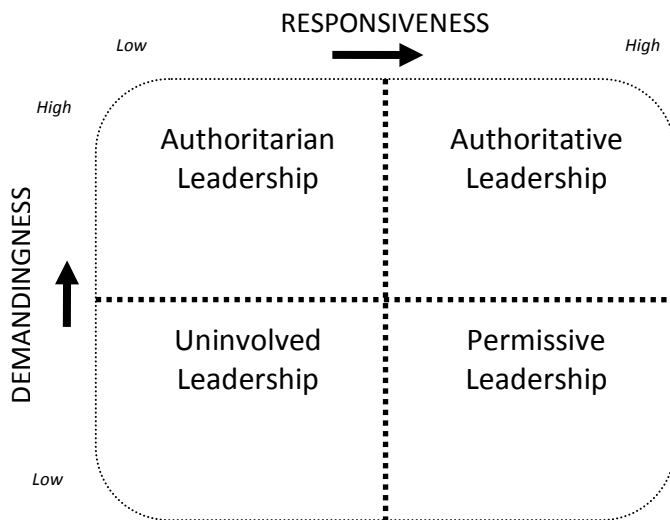
School climate is at the heart and soul of schools. It is about the essence of a school that leads a child, an administrator, a member of staff, to look forward to being there each day. School climate is about that quality of a school that helps each individual feel personal worth, dignity and importance, while simultaneously helping to create a sense of belonging to something beyond ourselves. (Freiberg & Stein, 1999 as cited by Watkinson, 1999, p.62).

Promoting a school ‘climate’ and ‘ethos’ that values staff and includes them into the school culture, is often perceived to be developed through the school’s leadership (Kane-Urrbazo (2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Watkinson, 2008; West-Burnham, 1997; Robinson, 2011). The following sub-section considers a specific leadership style which may enable school leaders to promote a ‘climate’ which enables support staff (and others) to feel supported.

2.5.1.4 Leadership style

Relationships underpin how effective schools are (Watkinson, 2008) and are essential to effective leadership (Dinham, 2008). Dinham and Scott (2008) proposed leadership styles relate to how demanding and responsive leaders are towards staff and draw similarities to the work of Baumrind (1989, 1991) on parenting styles. Dinham and Scott (2008) apply four parenting styles; uninvolved, authoritarian, permissive and authoritative; to leadership, which are represented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Leadership Style (adapted from Dinham & Scott, 2008)



Uninvolved leaders are low on demandingness and responsiveness. Authoritarian leaders are highly demanding but less responsive, whereas permissive leaders are less demanding but highly responsive. Finally, authoritative leaders are both highly demanding and highly responsive and are considered most effective. Further details regarding each leadership style can be found in Appendix A3.

Authoritative leaders are responsive to the needs of their staff and pupils. They make standards and expectations clear, provide effective feedback and build consensus and commitment collaboratively. Through being both responsive and demanding, authoritative leaders are able to empower individuals, impacting positively on school culture and climate (Dinham & Scott, 2008). According to Goleman (1995), successful implementation of leadership styles is dependent on the emotional intelligence (EI) of the leader. Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee (2004) identify four aspects of EI, self-awareness, self-management; social awareness and relationship management, which could all be considered aspects of an authoritative leader's behaviour.

2.5.2 'Professionalisation' and Professional Development of Support Staff

Professional development is defined by Groom (2006) as:

...any activity that increases the skills, understanding, experience, knowledge and effectiveness of teachers and others working in school. (Groom, 2006, p.202).

Whilst there are publications to aid schools in identifying professional development routes (e.g., DfES, 2002a), both the TDA and Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) overlap in their responsibilities regarding professional development of staff, which can result in confusion for schools and staff when trying to negotiate professional development opportunities. It could be argued that the status of support staff is impacted upon by a lack of perceived professionalism. Lack of accreditation not only contributes to the image of support staff roles as being unskilled but also leads to difficulties for schools wishing to employ high quality support staff (Burton & Goodman, 2011).

Developing professional development routes for support staff, and the increasing blurring of roles between support staff and teachers, create a tension between the professionalization of support staff roles and what some perceive to be the de-professionalization of teaching roles (NUT, 2003; Thompson, 2006; Yarker, 2005). Additionally, the professional development of support staff appears to be combined with a view that it should lead to a teaching qualification (e.g., Pye Tait Ltd, 2006). However, many support staff do not want to become teachers (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Farrell et al., 1999; Butt & Lance, 2009). Schools need to consider what support staff know, want, and need, in order to identify appropriate development activities (Howes, 2003) and tailor them to the needs of the school, pupils and individual. Thus, acknowledging "a single approach, resource, course or award will not meet all identified needs: one size does not fit all" (Faraday, 2010, p.30).

There are limited professional development opportunities for support staff, compared to those available to qualified teaching staff (Abbott et al., 2011) and there remains a lack of research on which to draw. The Welsh Government and UK Government both have publications, which outline occupational standards for TAs and HLTAs (DCSF, 2009b; TDA, 2010b; WAG 2011), however, Butt and Lance (2009, p.229) argue that these "do not recognise the changing development needs of all TAs". In addition to this, other support staff roles seem to be forgotten and are not afforded the same prospects.

Within the research there appears to be dissatisfaction amongst support staff, regarding career progression and the availability of appropriate courses, as the majority of courses are viewed as ineffective (Bubb et al., 2008; Farrell et al., 2000; Teeman et al., 2009).

Additionally, Morris (2010) and Dunne, Goddard & Woolhouse (2008) identified that undertaking of additional qualifications (foundation degree) did not necessarily lead to acknowledgement within the workplace, through financial recompense or increased status. These studies were limited by small sample sizes, however, highlighted potential issues regarding how schools acknowledge the skill sets of support staff.

Developing a collaborative school culture is referenced as important to facilitating professional development in schools (Groom, 2006, p.202). Allowing time for group discussion and reflection can enable opportunities to share good practice and build team collaboration (Day, Hadfield & Kellow, 2002). Shadowing activities, short planned in-house training sessions, and observations may offer ways in which schools can develop their in-house capacity to create development opportunities (Groom, 2006). These activities may also lend themselves to developing a school culture and ethos that enables staff to feel valued (Watkinson, 2008).

2.5.3 Overview of Management and Professional Development of Support Staff

Within the literature, support for staff in schools, together with continued training and professional development, is recognised as important to raising standards and improving support for pupils. However, there appears to remain a discrepancy between Government rhetoric and practice in schools. Research presented within this section suggests that the successful management of support staff is based on clear definition of roles and responsibilities, implemented flexibly (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Farrell et al., 2000 Groom, 2006), combined with a whole school approach that values all staff roles (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Fox, 1998; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Lorenz, 1998; Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998). Further research is required into the role of all members of support staff in order to adequately address their management and further professional development. Additionally, consensus on appropriate training is required.

2.6 Psychology of Support

The psychological processes involved in enabling support staff feel supported can help to provide insight into what enables support staff to feel supported within

comprehensive schools and how schools and educational psychologists may contribute to facilitating this process.

Self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) offers a helpful lens which to view support for support staff as it recognises the dynamic interplay between the individual and the social-contextual factors that influence motivation and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). This is consistent with an ecological/social constructionist approach adopted for the present research. Thus, it provides a useful framework in which to consider how schools meet motivational needs to enable support staff to feel supported within their roles. Self-determination theory purports that:

Human beings can be proactive and engaged or, alternatively, passive and alienated, largely as a function of the social conditions in which they develop and function. (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.68)

Ryan and Deci (2000) identify three psychological needs; competence, autonomy, and relatedness; which “when satisfied yield enhanced self-motivation and mental health and when thwarted lead to diminished motivation and well-being” (p.68). It is suggested that, if social contexts in which individuals are embedded are responsive to these basic needs, they foster integration, promoting performance and well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2000). These are comparable to McLean’s (2009) description of the three As of motivation, agency, affiliation and autonomy. Affiliation refers to a sense of connectedness or sense of belonging and agency relates to self-belief and “I can” feelings. Affiliation and agency mediate autonomy, which generates ‘I’m trusted’ feelings. It is these three needs that are considered here, regarding enabling support staff to feeling supported within their roles.

2.6.1 Motivational needs: agency, affiliation and autonomy

2.6.1.1 Affiliation

The need to belong is a pervasive motivation (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) and affiliation helps to develop a sense of security (McLean, 2009). This links with Maslow’s (1970) safety and belonging stages, whereby individuals need to feel safe and have a sense of belonging. Affiliation is feeling an emotional bonding, and a sense of feeling valued and understood. Developing relationships between people is key to

enabling affiliation (McLean, 2009) and the development of social identity provides a connection with others.

Social identity theory (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and the complementary self-categorisation theory (Turner, 1985, Turner et al., 1987) help to explain the psychological underpinnings of individual behaviours within groups. A key feature of social identity theory is that a person's identity consists largely of his or her "knowledge that he [or she] belongs to certain social groups" (Tajfel, 1982, p. 31). Self-categorisation theory involves the categorisation of the self into in-groups and out-groups, leading to "accentuation of intra-category similarities and inter-category differences" (Sanders, 2004, p. 139). This results in the self and others being stereotyped in terms of attributes that define the in-group and out-group. Within a school environment staff may have numerous social identities, for example, identifying themselves within particular departments, management or social groups. Lewis and Crisp (2004) suggest that individuals who identify highly with a group gain a source of satisfaction and esteem, which may provide a supportive function for support staff. Additionally, development of social identities and 'communities of practice' (Wenger, 1998), may aid to support the development of affiliation for support staff.

There is a profound connection between identity and practice. Developing a practice requires the formation of a community whose members can engage with one another and thus acknowledge each other as participants. (Wenger, 1998, p.149).

Thus, developing identity within social contexts has implications for both affiliation and practice.

In addition to close relationships, McLean (2012) suggests that 'superficial' relationships are important to feelings of connectedness; suggesting that the development of broader social relationships within schools could be important to meeting support staff's affiliation needs and enabling a sense of belonging. Research regarding the impact and effectiveness of support staff highlighted the development of relationships between teachers as being a key factor (Balshaw, 2000; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Groom, 2006). This may serve to meet affiliation needs for support staff, enabling them to feel more supported within their roles. Haslam, Reicher and Platow (2011) highlight the role of leadership in developing social identities, creating a sense of

‘we-ness’ for a common goal, suggesting that a whole school approach may be important to developing social identities and promoting affiliation. Collaborative climates may prevent ‘stressed groups’ forming, in which members narrow their affiliation and stop being part of the wider groups, thus preventing the formation of separate groups (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

2.6.1.2 Agency

Agency refers to ‘self-belief’ and feeling confident, and ‘up to’ a task. McLean (2009) suggests that a “sense of high agency is reflected in a desire to experiment and innovate and, is marked by curiosity and creativity” (p.20). Agency is closely linked with self-efficacy as described by Bandura (1986, 1997) and individuals’ perceptions of their capabilities to perform tasks. There is an abundance of research regarding self-efficacy, however, published research regarding support staff’s agency beliefs cannot be identified and more research is required to understand the sources of teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs (Klassen, Tze, Betts & Gordon, 2011; Labone, 2004).

Self-efficacy is context specific (Bandura, 1997), therefore teachers’ and support staffs’ perceptions of agency can alter depending on the task at hand. Additionally, individual efficacy beliefs have been found to be mediated by collective efficacy² beliefs (Gibbs, 2011; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Jordan & Stanovich, 2003). Friedman and Kass (2002) suggest that individuals’ sense of membership to an organisation may be a mediating factor in individual and collective efficacy beliefs. This may suggest a relationship between agency and affiliation. These findings may also imply that the nature and management of a school is highly influential on efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Gibbs & Powell, 2011). This further places school ethos and management as key players in contributing to staff feeling valued. Gibbs (2011) suggests that the influence of staff and school ethos can induce ‘virtuous cycles’ through the endorsement of practices and systems. Therefore, collective efficacy can lead to a positive school ethos, which in turn can lead to increased efficacy beliefs.

² Collective efficacy refers to a belief about the capability of the group to bring about desired ends (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007).

In terms of enabling support staff to feel supported, agency could be developed in a number of ways. Collaboration between staff is noted elsewhere in having a positive impact on support staff effectiveness, and it may also lead to the development of collective and individual self-efficacy due to what Gibbs (2011, p.15) describes as a “synergistic relationship”. Thus, collaboration between staff may enable staff to develop confidence in carrying out specific tasks and trying new practices. Morris (2010) identified that completion of a foundation degree had a positive impact on TAs’ confidence in performing their roles. Albeit a small study, it suggests agency beliefs may develop from accessing skill development type support. Furthermore, involvement in decision making is likely to lead to increased confidence in performing roles (Goddard, Hoy, Woolfolk Hoy, 2004).

Factors which diminish a teacher’s sense of efficacy were identified by Webb and Aston (1987 as cited by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007), these included, “excessive role demands, poor morale, lack of recognition, inadequate salaries, and low status” (p.946). Although the research is dated, these may also be of relevance to support staff and perhaps should be considered when identifying how support staff might be supported in schools. Indeed, recognition of roles has been highlighted elsewhere in aiding support staff effectiveness (e.g., Balshaw 2000; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010) and this may occur through the development of agency.

2.6.1.3 Autonomy

Autonomy refers to how much staff feel they are able to take control and the capacity to take responsibility. “Autonomous behaviour feels freely chosen and reflects personal values and self-determination” (McLean, 2009, p.20). Thus, autonomy for support staff is the extent to which they can assert themselves to achieve their own goals within the requirements to conform to the key aspects of success in school. The Needs Matrix proposed by McLean (2012) asserts that autonomy benefits from the perceived support of others (affiliation) and developing competencies (agency), and in turn both benefit from autonomy. Thus, actions which aid the development of agency and affiliation are likely to influence autonomy. For example, involvement in decision making has been identified as being important to developing support staff roles within classrooms (Blatchford et al., 2012; Farrell et al., 1999; Goddard, et al., 2004). This may contribute to developing support staff’s sense of belonging to the school (affiliation) and positively

impact on their beliefs of their ability to perform certain tasks (agency), and therefore, increase their capacity to take control and responsibility (autonomy).

Attention has been given to *how* support staff may feel supported. Consideration is now given to *what* happens as a result of support staff feeling supported, through the lens of social exchange theory.

2.6.2 Social Exchange theory

Social exchange theory (Blau, 1964) can be applied to organisations to understand the reciprocal relationships between employees and employers (for example, Wayne et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Adopting a social exchange perspective suggests that, when an employer provides employees with fair treatment, and values their contributions and well-being, employees perceive high levels of support and thus feel obligated to reciprocate (Dawley et al., 2008). This has been described as organisational support theory³ (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). Through the lens of organisational support theory, perceived organisational support (POS) is valued as assurance that support will be available from the organisation when it is needed (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). POS has been associated with organisational commitment (OC)⁴ and suggests that when employees feel supported by an organisation they reciprocate feelings of commitment to the organisation and are less likely to seek out new job opportunities. Firth et al., (2004) identified that when employees experience low organizational support through high levels of role stress and/or job dissatisfaction, they are more likely to search for a new job. Adopting this perspective, therefore suggests that within a school context, increasing organisational support, that is, staff perceptions of the extent to which the school values their contribution and cares about their well-being, is important to staff feeling supported and in turn, staff retention. In discussion of the roles of support staff who support pupils with BESD, Burton & Goodman (2011) identified the absence of support, for example, in terms of appraisal, poor status and low

³ Organisational support refers to employees global beliefs regarding the extent to which an organisation values their contributions cares about their well-being (Eisenberger et al., 2002; Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002).

⁴ Organisational commitment is “the relative strength of an individual’s identification with and involvement in a particular organization” (Mowday, Porter, & Steers, 1982, p.27 as cited in Payne & Huffman, 2005).

wages, as possible factors in contributing to the loss of key members of staff. This suggests that appraisal, status and wages are important to enabling some staff to feel valued and recognised within their roles. Similar findings have been documented elsewhere (e.g., Giangreco et al., 2002; Giangreco et al., 2010; Tillery et al., 2003; Westling & Whitten, 1996).

Additionally, it has been suggested that, since supervisors act on behalf of the organisation, favourable treatment by a supervisor contributes to POS (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). However, the strength of this is determined by the how much employees identify the supervisor with the organisation (Eisenberger, Stinglhamber, Vandenberghe, Sucharski, & Rhoades, 2002). This may have implications for how SENCo roles or other supervisor roles are constructed and perceived within school environments and highlights the role supervisors could possibly have in enabling support staff to feel valued.

2.7 Types of support in schools

The previous government considered support staff to “provide the backbone of our schools” (DCSF, 2009b, p.80) and therefore, it was seen to be essential to support their roles within schools. Furthermore, well-being in schools is high on the agenda for pupils and staff (Department of Health (DoH), 1998a), thus, enabling staff to feel supported is important to supporting their roles and well-being in schools. The role of management in providing support to support staff has already been identified (section 2.5.1). Other forms of support in school, social support, training and supervision, are considered below.

2.7.1 Social Support and Support from Colleagues

Social needs and developing a social identity are important to a person’s sense of well-being (McLean, 2009) and social support may contribute to affiliation, agency, and autonomy (see section 2.6.1). This section provides an overview of models, conceptualisations and research pertaining to social support, to further understand the functions of social support and consider how colleague support may act as a support structure for support staff in secondary schools.

2.7.1.1 Models and conceptualisations of social support

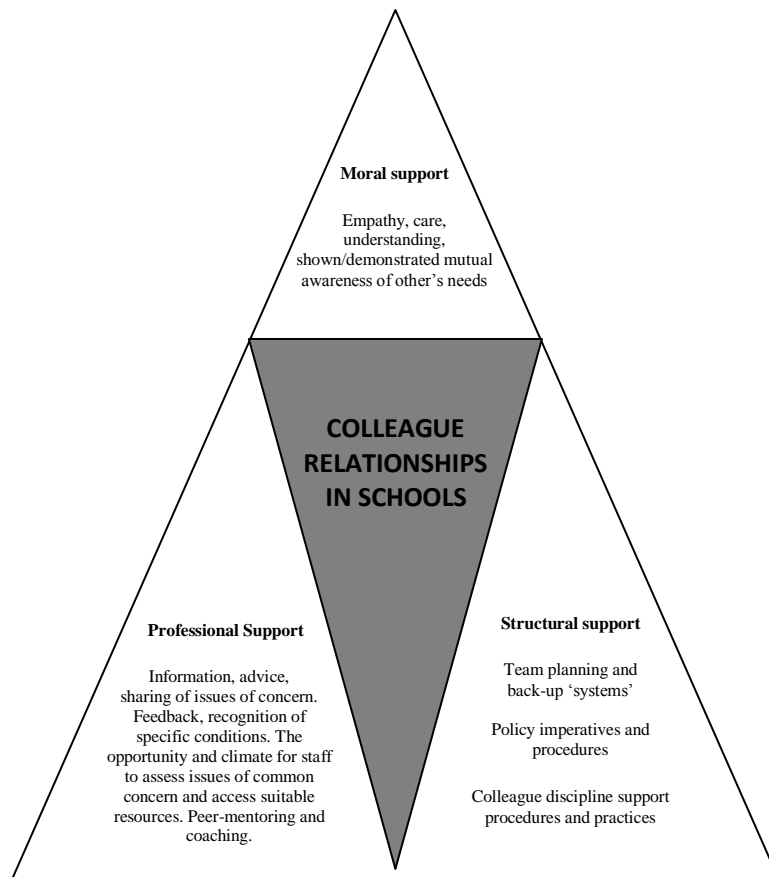
Malecki and Demaray (2002) view social support as:

an individual's perceptions of general support or specific supportive behaviours (available or enacted upon) from people in their social network, which enhances their functioning and/or may buffer them from adverse outcomes. (p.2).

Malecki and Demaray (2002) draw from Tardy's (1985) model of social support which identified five dimensions in the conceptualization of social support: direction, disposition, description/evaluation, content, and network. Within the content dimension, there are four types of support; emotional, instrumental, informational, and/or appraisal. Emotional support consists of emotional supports, such as, trust, love, and empathy. Instrumental support includes resources (for example, money and time). Informational support is the provision of information or advice, and appraisal support is evaluative feedback to individuals. Network is the final dimension of Tardys' model and is the source(s) or the member(s) of an individual's support network.

The 'content' element of Tardy's model is useful to draw from, within the context of the current research study, in identifying elements which may enable support staff to feel supported through emotional, instrumental, information and/or appraisal support (Malecki & Demaray, 2002). These can be linked to Rogers' (2006) dimensions of colleague support in schools; moral, professional and structural support. A visual representation of Rogers' model is presented below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Visual representation of colleague support (adapted from Rogers, 2006, p.xiv)



Rogers (2006) draws on experiences and research into teacher support within Australian school settings and, whilst there are differences between the British and Australian education systems, Rogers' model is helpful to understanding dimensions of colleague support in schools. Drawing from Rogers' and Tardy's models it seems that factors that are likely to support staff in schools relate to: emotional support, such as empathy and understanding from colleagues; structural support, for example, working environments, resources, and policies; informational support, such as sharing information, and inclusion in decision making; and finally appraisal, in the receipt of feedback from colleagues. These appear to be consistent with research regarding elements which enable support staff to feel valued, and increase their effectiveness (Abbott et al., 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Blatchford et al., 2009c; Groom, 2006; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Watkinson, 2008).

2.7.1.2 Research regarding colleague support

According to Reid et al., (1999) support from colleagues is a major source of support and social support has been identified to be a critical factor in ‘mitigating stress’ (Kyriacou, 1981) in the workplace. ‘Incidental’ social support from colleagues in school can “temporarily buoy up the spirit and re-engage daily motivation” (Rogers 2006, p.21). Furthermore, Boyle, Topping, Jindal-Snape & Norwich (2012) suggested, peer support superseded support from managers. This suggests that support from colleagues (e.g., talking and developing a shared understanding) is critical to enabling staff to cope with the everyday demands of their roles.

Rhodes, Nevill and Alan (2004) place responsibility on school’s leadership to promote collaboration between staff and Hart et al., (1995) suggest that supportive leadership is the “anchor variable that can increase or decrease general staff morale” (p.31). Rogers (2006) also gives precedence to the role of management as an important feature to influencing perceptions of colleague support, which highlights the role of management in creating the overall culture and ethos of a school to enable staff to be included and feel valued.

Where schools consciously utilise ‘structure’ and ‘processes’ to enhance support they are also conscious of certain ‘protocols’ that typify the expression of that support – so what emerges is ‘an ecology’, or culture, built around shared ways of believing, valuing, affirming and ‘doing’ colleague support. (Rogers, 2006. p.179).

2.7.2 Skill development (training)

Patrick (1992) defined training as:

...the systematic acquisition of skills, rules, concepts or attitudes that result in improved performance in another environment. (Patrick, 1992, p.1).

Both the Plowden Report (1967) and Warnock Report (1978) recommended training for TAs and it remains an important issue for all staff in schools. As there is no entry qualification necessity for the majority of support staff, headteachers are placed in a difficult position with regard to recruitment and requirements for roles, and support staff are placed in a weaker position in terms of career progression (Russell et al., 2005). With increasing role diversity and additional duties performed by support staff

(Hancock et al., 2010) it can be argued that training within post is vital (Russell et al., 2005).

Research suggests that support staff appear to be generally dissatisfied with the training and support provided to them. Through the comprehensive DISS project, Blatchford et al., (2009) identified that support staff attended training events, with the most common attendance at school-based INSET. Additionally, it was found that, compared to teachers, support staff were less satisfied with training and development opportunities available to them and that staff within comprehensive schools were less satisfied compared to staff in primary schools and special schools. This suggests that the training and development opportunities available to support staff is different to that teachers, and that opportunities may be limited or inappropriate for support staff in comprehensive schools. These outcomes are supported by research conducted on behalf of the TDA which identified that, although support staff were generally satisfied with the quality and relevance of training received, few reported it resulted in improved outcomes for pupils (Bubb et al., 2008; Teeman et al., 2009). These TDA studies are limited to English school samples, therefore, may not be representative of the wider UK demographic. However, it seems that training for support staff is not well tailored to them or the pupils they support.

Robinson et al., (2008) identified that leaders responsible for overseeing CPD opportunities were less likely to keep up-to-date with developments relevant to support staff compared to those for teachers and only 50% of respondents reported that they always evaluated the impact of training. This suggests that training for staff is not particularly valued (Bubb et al., 2008) and that there could be a potentially misplaced view that training enhances practice. A synthesis of the research suggested that support staff training is “patchy” (pg.1) and there is little understanding of its impact (Cajkler et al., 2007).

Conversely, recent studies suggest that undertaking training has a positive influence on support staff’s confidence in roles (e.g., Abbott et al., 2011; Bubb et al., 2008; Hayes, Richardson, Hindle & Grayson, 2011; Morris, 2010) and may be perceived as a way to enhance support staff’s visibility and raise awareness of their roles (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). This may contribute to developing feelings of agency and autonomy within roles.

Conducting research on behalf of the TDA, Teeman et al., (2009) asked school leaders about the barriers to support staff training. The issues that were most often mentioned as being frequently a problem were:

- releasing support staff when several need the same training (74%);
- training taking place within support staff contracted hours (73%);
- cover not available (69%);
- organising cover (68%);
- finding sufficient time for training within part-time support staff hours (65%); and
- difficulty in locating alternative funding sources (63%) (adapted from Teeman et al., 2009)

These suggest that the financial implications for schools in enabling staff to access training present as a barrier. Development for staff may require more creative activities that are not limited to costly INSET or external courses (Ofsted, 2008).

Training needs to consider the relevance to those accessing it, applicability to ‘real life’ and acknowledge specific contexts (Bubb & Earley, 2009; Burgess & Shelton Mayes, 2009) and therefore, start from a position of identifying ‘what support staff know’ in order for training and development to be effective (Howes, 2003).

However, where support staff do receive training, Giangreco (2003) warns of the ‘training trap’, which refers to teachers relinquishing responsibility for teaching pupils with SEN to support staff who have had received little or no training; thus, continuing to enable pupils with the most need to be supported by the least trained individual (Blatchford et al., 2009c). Blatchford et al., (2012) suggested that the use of ongoing feedback and supervision of support staff is required for this to be avoided, to enable staff’s ‘preparedness’ for roles (Blatchford et al., 2012). To assist this, much of the literature advocates combined training for support staff and teachers regarding effective joint working practices (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009b; Blatchford et al., 2012; Groom, 2006; Howes, 2003).

2.7.3 Supervision (reflexivity)

Supervision is an accountable process which supports, assures and develops the knowledge, skills and values of an individual, group or team. The purpose is to improve the quality of their work to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes. (CWDC, 2007, p.4).

Awareness of ‘professional supervision’ appears to be limited in schools (Burton & Goodman, 2011) and lack of professional supervision may impact on staff’s ability to manage emotive aspects of the role. Burton and Goodman (2011) reported on the views of four SENCOs and eight support staff who supported pupils with BESD. Participants identified that within other fields they would receive formal supervision and appraisal in order to cope with the demands of their roles, however, for them this was lacking. Although a small scale project based upon self-report data, it highlights that schools need to recognise the demands of staff roles, and provide opportunities to help enable staff to manage these.

Professional supervision enables reflection and reflexivity regarding practice (CWDC, 2007) and this may be established under different guises in schools, for example, through informal discussions between staff, team meetings and formal development meetings; thus, serving both developmental and supportive functions. Day et al., (2002) identified, that enabling teachers opportunities to discuss and reflect on practice was beneficial to motivation and commitment. Additionally, Groom (2006) advocates group discussion and reflection in order to develop collaboration with teachers, suggesting that reflective practices need to be fostered in schools (Farrell et al., 1999).

Consideration to how schools may support staff has been given. Attention now turns to the role of EPs in working with support staff. Brief consideration is given to the role of the EP and how EP roles may be constructed by school staff. Some research regarding EPs working with support staff is identified.

2.8 Educational Psychologist’s Role in Working with Support Staff

EPs have been accused of an “almost perennial obsession with reflecting on their role” (Boyle and Lauchlan, 2009, p.71) and the role of the EP can be considered one of the most enduring debates within educational psychology (MacKay, 1997). Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) propose that the susceptibility for self-scrutiny may arise from the

profession being relatively small and therefore, “many potential users of, or stakeholders in, the profession may have relatively less well developed understandings of the EP role” (p.1). Additionally, the increased accountability of public services may contribute to greater introspection (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

In his seminal 1978 text, *Reconstructing Educational Psychology*, Gillham suggested that, as a profession, EPs maybe “somewhat confused” (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009, p.71) about their role. Over thirty years on, there is evidence that some confusion still exists regarding the role of the EP (Farrell et al., 2006). Confusion may arise from ‘role conflict’ (MacKay, 2002) and defining “to whose advantage the role should work” (Ashton & Roberts, 2006, p.112). Children, schools, parents and LAs could all be considered as EP clients and yet their demands may conflict with one another (MacKay, 2002). Additionally, research has highlighted conflicts between what schools are looking for and what EPs want to offer (e.g., DfEE, 2000; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009). Further consideration to this research is given below (section 2.8.1).

Publications by the present Government, (e.g., DfE, 2011a; DfE 2011c) suggest the way in which EPs are employed and how they deliver services are changing, implying that EP roles may alter as a result.

EPs are moving to a more varied pattern of employment – some with private sector providers of education services, and into private practice with the potential also to form social enterprises commissioned to run services, similar to those being developed under the pilots of social work practices. (DfE, 2011a, p.6).

This may create further confusion regarding EPs’ roles. How EPs’ roles are constructed by themselves and others is important to understanding how EPs can make a positive contribution. Exploring support staffs’ constructions regarding EPs’ roles is helpful to developing insight into how EPs may be able to support staff and schools.

2.8.1 Construction of EP’s roles

EPs are considered to have a “unique contribution to make for children, families, schools, LEAs and communities” (Gersch, 2004 p.142) and the aim of EPs has been defined as:

To promote child development and learning through the application of psychology by working with individuals and groups of children, teachers and other adults in schools, families, other LEA officers, health and social services and other agencies. (DfEE, 2000, p.5).

The above statement identifies key features of the EP contribution to be the application of psychology and the capacity to work across different levels with different individuals, such as support staff. The Scottish government has defined five core functions for EPs as: consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research; with these to be performed at three levels: the child (or family), the school (or other establishment), and the education authority (Scottish Executive, 2000). Similar functions were identified by Farrell et al., (2006) to include: individual child work; working with parents; training; general consultation; pupil group work; one-to-one therapy; and research. Individual work with children was the most cited as distinctive EP practice in this research, and was identified to include “statutory assessment, attending review meetings, providing advice to teachers and parents and pre-referral discussions with teachers” (Farrell et al., 2006, p.25). It is unsurprising that similar functions were identified by Farrell et al., (2006) and the Scottish Executive, as Farrell et al., (2006) asked respondents to classify EP work using the categories suggested by the Scottish Executive, therefore, providing a pre-determined structure, which, it may be argued, reflect the constructs of the researchers as opposed to the perceptions of participants.

Within the profession debates have developed regarding the ‘traditional’ roles of conducting individual casework and assessment and developing wider systemic practice (e.g., Boyle & Lauchlan 2009; Cameron, 2006; Farrell, 2004). Farrell (2004) advocates the use of systemic practices by EPs to enable staff to “reflect on their practice, plan and implement change and hence bring about whole school development for the benefit of all children, not just those with special educational needs....” (p.13). Similarly, other authors promote a systemic, community-based approach (Cameron, 2006; Gersch, 2009; MacKay, 2006; Stringer, Powell & Burton, 2006). However, Boyle and Lauchlan (2009) argue that individual casework still has a place in EP practice. Compromise is found by Stobie (2000b) who states, that “many of the features of traditional practice are still alive alongside aspects of ‘reconstructed’ practice” (p.231). Thus, in different local authorities, and in different contexts, EPs could be considered as being

professionals who conduct traditional child-focused assessment and interventions, as being consultants, facilitators, or trainers, or evaluators of shared and delegated intervention approaches (Stobie, 2002).

2.8.1.1 School perceptions of EP roles

The majority of research pertaining to the EP role has come from the profession itself and there is currently no published research regarding support staff perceptions of EPs. Therefore, it is necessary to look toward other members of school staff to inform how support staff might construct the EP role.

The present government suggests that EPs “can make a significant contribution to supporting families and enabling children and young people to make progress with learning, behaviour and social relationships” (DfE, 2011c, p.104). However, it is unclear whether this view permeates schools. As identified previously, differences in practices between local authorities (DfE, 2011a, 2011c) and EPs themselves (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), may impact on how EPs’ roles are perceived by school staff.

MacKay and Boyle (1994) interviewed head teachers in 115 schools across Scotland and noted that,

...after more than a decade of reconstruction of psychological services in which a major theme has been reduced emphasis on direct work with individual children, the traditional role of individual assessment and counselling is one which continues to be strongly endorsed by teachers. (MacKay & Boyle, 1994, p.187)

This suggests that there was a mismatch between what schools expected and the activities enacted by EPs. Additionally, this research identified a general dissatisfaction with the contribution of EPs, particularly in secondary schools, indicating perhaps that schools wanted more systemic, consultative work from EPs. A follow-up of this research was conducted by Boyle and MacKay in 2007. 112 questionnaires were completed by headteachers of primary (91) and secondary schools⁵ (21) in Scotland. Five-point Likert scales were used to gather views regarding EPs involvement within specific roles, such as assessment, training, working with parents and provision of

⁵ Within secondary schools, principal teachers of learning support completed questionnaires.

advice. Results indicated that EPs were viewed to be integral in contributing to schools' pupil support strategies. Boyle and MacKay (2007) suggested that this provided evidence that involvement at a systemic level had led to more highly-valued perceptions by schools regarding the overall contribution made by EPs. Although 'other' roles accounted for the variance suggesting that more 'traditional' roles continued to be valued by schools. The multiple regression analysis conducted by Boyle and MacKay collapsed results from both primary and secondary schools therefore, between-sector differences cannot be established. Furthermore, if there were differences, the outcomes are likely to be more representative of primary schools, due to the sample sizes included.

Key findings of a national working party (DfEE, 2000) conducted on behalf of the Government regarding the role of EPs, good practice and future directions suggested that EPs' knowledge and skills on the whole were highly regarded by service users. Postal questionnaires were sent to 150 LEAs and EPSs in England and 500 schools in England (200 secondary, 200 primary and 100 special schools). A response rate of 98% and 70% respectively was gained. Questionnaires were followed up by 12 LA case studies. Schools reported that EPs provided work in, early intervention, Code of Practice work, behaviour support, wider school development and training. EPs reported a wider range of services than schools reported, suggesting a discrepancy between what EPSs espoused and what was enacted in schools. Whilst it was found that EPSs were not active in marketing their functions, services provided to schools were "largely determined by particular issues and circumstances facing that school and by the competence and experience of the educational psychologist" (p.31) therefore, schools might not receive the full range of services. These outcomes reflected the views of 500 schools (obtained via questionnaires), and 12 LEAs (obtained through follow-up case studies) across England, and therefore may not represent the view of schools and EPs within Scotland or Wales; however, provides evidence which suggests that schools and EPs emphasise different working practices of EPs.

A small scale study, conducted by Ashton and Roberts (2006), compared SENCo's and EPs' opinions, regarding what was most valuable about the role of EPs. Findings suggested that EP responses were more varied and "reflected the consultative, interactionist, systemic perspective..." adopted by the EPS (p.118). Whereas, SENCo's

responses indicated that they valued more ‘traditional’ roles such as assessment and advice giving. The study is limited to primary school contexts and by the few responses received from SENCOs (22), however, it highlights a discrepancy between how EPs and school staff constructed EP roles. As SENCOs often have a key role to play in managing support staff (particularly TAs), this difference may impact on how EPs are perceived to be able to contribute to supporting support staff or aiding schools to support staff.

How EPs communicate with schools is important to their roles being understood (DfEE, 2000) and feedback can play a crucial part in the perceived effectiveness of EPs (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009). Thomson (1996) indicated that teaching staff did not always value the direct work of EPs favourably and were often dissatisfied with receiving a report which only included a description of the issue. Rather, teachers wanted strategies and/or advice from the EP which they could implement in the classroom. This suggests therefore, that EPs need to be mindful of how they communicate with school staff and that “EP feedback should be meaningful and comprehensible to the audience to whom it is intended...” (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009, p.72).

Research suggests there are often mismatches between what schools are looking for and what EPs offer (DfEE, 2000). EPs tend to promote a more varied systemic perspective (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Kelly & Gray, 2000; Cameron, 2006; MacKay, 2006) whilst schools seem to tend to value the more ‘traditional’ roles of EPs. An alternate view, however, is presented by MacKay and Boyle (1997), who suggest that, although schools may place emphasis on individual work with pupils, this is not to say that wider roles (such as research and INSET), are not valued, and that perhaps what teachers and schools are communicating is a desire for “more of everything” (p.169). How EPs communicate and ‘market’ (DfEE, 2000) their roles, therefore, is important to clarifying roles and expectations (Boyle & MacKay, 1994) and developing a shared understanding. Working with support staff could be considered a feature of the wider, systemic role of the EP. How the role of EPs is constructed within authorities, by services, by schools and by school staff is likely to have implications regarding how support staff understand and construct the EP role. Further research is required to understand what EP roles are valued by school staff and how best these can be promoted with schools.

2.8.2 Research relevant to EPs working with support staff

Support staff are one group that EPs work with as part of their role, however most research focuses on EPs working with teachers (for example, Atkinson, Regan & Williams, 2006; Doveston & Keenaghan, 2010). Following a Government funded project regarding the management, role and training of LSAs, Farrell et al., published an article in 2000 on the work of learning support assistants and the implications for EPs. Since then, there has been little literature which focuses on the collaboration between EPs and support staff, which is surprising considering the increased prevalence of support staff in schools. This may add further weight to the position that support staff are the ‘forgotten profession’. It may suggest also that work with support staff is not considered important by EPs or that little work is undertaken with support staff. However, conclusions from Farrell et al., (2000) suggest this is not the case and propose that EPs can play a key role in the development of support staff roles to benefit teachers, pupils, schools and parents. Five areas in which EPs could contribute were identified, which included: the recruitment and selection of LSAs; providing effective classroom support; consulting LSAs on the planning and review of pupils’ programmes; facilitating effective teamwork; and training LSAs.

Thus, EPs can have a role in ensuring the effective deployment and training of support staff. Liaison with support staff and including support staff in decision making was identified to being important to LSAs (Farrell et al., 2000). Consultation (Wagner, 1995) models of service delivery have been adopted by many educational psychology services (Kennedy, Frederickson, Monson, 2008), and may be a way to engage support staff in reviewing practices and decision making. Hammett and Burton (2005) identified that a group of LSAs within one secondary school valued working with outside agencies such as EP’s, as a result of providing input into discussions as the member of staff who spent the most time with a particular pupil. This enabled LSAs to feel ‘equal’. Although Hammett and Burton’s findings are limited to a single school context, it highlights the value of enabling staff to be included in conversations about pupils, which may help to improve their status.

Training has been identified as a key function of the EP role (Scottish Executive, 2000) and the delivery of INSET to schools is a common feature of EP’s roles. Dew-Hughes et al., (1998) identified specific training areas LSAs wanted, with the most requested

training areas being emotional and behavioural difficulties and dyslexia. Although this research is dated and opinions may have changed, these are areas in which EPs can contribute to developing knowledge and to providing training. The Emotional Literacy Support Assistant (ELSA) training programme (Burton and Shotten, 2009; Shotten & Burton, 2008) is an example of how EPs can provide training and support to support staff. The ELSA training involves training teaching assistants (or equivalents) to support the social and emotional development of pupils. Unique to this training is the ongoing supervision provided by EPs (Burton, 2008), suggesting that EP's roles can extend beyond training roles with support staff. Burton (2008) reports on the positive impact ELSA training and supervision had on 13 LSAs in Hampshire. As a result of training and supervision, LSAs felt more empowered and valued within their roles. In addition to training and supervision, Burton outlines how ELSAs are encouraged to contact their link EP in the event of any additional need and suggests that LSAs feel supported by this direct access to EPs. Furthermore, it is suggested that ELSA training has increased capacity in schools, leading to decreased requests for consultations with EPs regarding individual pupils. This implies that work conducted by EPs with support staff indirectly benefits pupils and enables more pupils to be supported than would be possible through individual referrals. Due to the small sample size the generalisability of the outcomes are limited. Also, it may be that questionnaires were only returned by ELSAs who had a positive contribution to make; others may have been concerned about the ramifications of providing negative responses.

Increasing teachers capacity to work with support staff is prevalent within the literature as important to improving practices within schools (Alborz et al., 2009a; Blatchford et al., 2009c; DfE, 2010a; DfE, 2010b; Farrell et al., 2000). Doveston and Keenaghan (2010) describe EPs training teachers in a collaborative consultation approach to empower teachers to support colleagues in identifying priorities for emotional and social development. Teachers trained in this approach valued learning about the psychological underpinnings, and this may suggest other staff would benefit from receiving similar training. The dissemination of psychology by EPs in order to empower individuals who work with children and young people is promoted by Cameron (2006). However, training is not the only way this can be accomplished. Balchin, Randall and Turner (2006, p.251) suggest "EPs should review their methods of delivering CPD to ensure maximum effectiveness."

Following a small scale study of eight TAs in a research programme using precision teaching, Roberts (2011) suggested that involvement in the project influenced the thinking and practice of TAs. It was concluded that engaging TAs in practitioner-based research projects is an effective use of EP resources in offering an effective contribution to staff development. Roberts' (2011) study is limited due to the small number of participants, and TAs developments in understanding may have arisen from their general working practice and other development opportunities. However, it provides an example of EP practice which could be used with support staff.

Another, alternative way to support support staff is the use of video interaction guidance (VIG). VIG has been used to develop and analyse effective teacher interaction (Kay, Forsyth & Simpson, 2000) and more recently it has been used by EPs to support TAs skills in managing behaviour. Hayes et al., (2011) describe a small scale study whereby VIG was shown to be beneficial in bringing about change in the interactions between TAs and pupils, impacting positively on TAs management of behaviour in a secondary school. The use of creative methods, such as VIG, could be widened to use with groups of support staff and provide CPD opportunities not only for school staff but for EPs also.

SENCOs have been identified as important to the management of support staff (Gerschel, 2005). EPs work closely with SENCOs and could have a role in helping to facilitate the management of support staff and identifying training needs (Farrell et al., 2000). Additionally, SENCOs' constructions of both EP roles and support staff roles are likely to influence the type of work conducted by EPs with support staff.

Watkins and Hill (2000) propose that the performance of roles is dependent on the context, which is shared by the events, circumstances and general culture in which a person works. This suggests that individual school contexts are likely to influence EP's roles and the duties they perform. Furthermore, EPs are challenged with working across contexts and negotiating different expectations of a variety of service users (MacKay, 2002).

The recent Green paper published by the Government highlighted the role EPs can play in developing school staff skills (DfE, 2011), particularly in relation to special

educational needs. However, the role of EPs can extend further than developing staff skills in SEN, and it draws attention to the needs of all pupils (Farrell, 2004). Furthermore, EPs can work at a strategic level to help to facilitate improved structures of support in schools.

If support staff are well supported and are able to access development opportunities, the quality of the support they provide in schools, to pupils and teachers, is likely to be improved. Farrell et. al., (2010) highlight the need to draw from research in order to “find further ways of improving the quality of support offered to all children in schools and ensure that this brings the maximum possible benefits.” (p.447).

2.9 Relevance of the current research study

The increase in support staff and developments in support roles within schools pose a challenge for staff themselves and “for those involved in employing, managing, supporting and training them” (Alborz et al., 2009a, p.4). The designations and responsibilities of support staff have expanded considerably and are likely to become ever more complex (Howes et al., 2003). In order to be effective, the literature highlights the need for staff to be appropriately trained and supported within their roles. The current research study sought to explore perceptions of support for support staff. It is unique in that the views of support staff, senior managers and educational psychologists regarding support for support staff have not been explored previously. Additionally, the project aimed to explore the role of EPs in working with support staff in comprehensive schools and their contribution to enabling support staff to feel supported, thus contributing new knowledge to this under researched area.

This research is particularly pertinent within the current economic climate. It could be argued decreases in funding to school budgets may impact on the types of services schools are able to access, for example in the case of buying in training. Support for staff, particularly non-teaching staff, may also become less of a priority for schools, compared to resources for pupils. However, it could be argued that, without appropriately trained and supported staff, teaching and non-teaching, ultimately it will be the pupils that are affected. Similarly, professionals such as EPs, face increasing pressure to define their roles, to demonstrate effectiveness and to offer ‘value for

money' (Gersch, 2004, p.144). Changes to EP services to manage and compensate for cut-backs will also impact on schools, for example through time allocation. This research aimed to developing some insight into the support available to a small number of support staff and the types of support which are relevant to them, within a particular context at a particular point in time. It also aimed to explore how EPs can support support staff.

It is recognised that teachers' views regarding the support available to them could have been included in the present research study. However, support staff are a relatively under researched group (Milner, 2008, as cited in Butt & Lance, 2009) and it was decided to focus on the views of support staff in order to gain more in-depth information than would have been possible if teachers' views were also included.

The research aims and associated research questions are presented below.

2.10 Research Aims

The research project had three main aims.

1. To explore the perceptions of support staff within mainstream comprehensive schools settings, within two local authority contexts, regarding the forms of support available to them and the types of support they would like to receive.
2. To compare the perceptions of support staff and management teams regarding the types of support available to support staff in schools.
3. To explore the role of the educational psychologist in supporting support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools.

Following the aims of the research, four research questions were developed.

2.11 Research Questions

- How are support staff supported? What are the perceived support structures that are currently available to support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools, within two specific local authorities?
- Of the perceived support structures, which are considered to be the most valuable/important?
- What forms of support would support staff like, to enable them to carry out their role more successfully and/or to develop professionally?
- What is/could be the role of educational psychologists in providing support to support staff?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The information provided in this chapter details the methodology selected, the processes involved in designing the study, and the collection and analysis of the data. Firstly, justification for the types of methodology selected and the epistemological position are discussed. The subsequent sections describe: participant selection and recruitment; ethical considerations; and details of the procedure implemented, including data collection and analysis.

3.1 Justification for a Qualitative Research Design

Willig and Stainton-Rogers (2008) suggest there is no need to debate whether quantitative or qualitative methods are “better, more valid or a more useful route to knowledge” (p.5). However, it is necessary for researchers to be explicit about the assumptions and beliefs that underpin their research (Holloway & Todres, 2003). The following sections aim to outline the rationale for adopting a qualitative research design and a particular epistemological position.

Silverman (2010) states the importance of choosing a methodology based upon the research questions being asked. The research questions posed by the present study were exploratory in nature, aimed to elicit perceptions regarding support for support staff within comprehensive schools in two local authority contexts, and the role of the educational psychologist in this context. This was consistent with the principles of qualitative research, which is concerned with meaning, and understanding how people experience, and make sense of the world (Willig, 2001). Elliot, Fischer and Rennie (1999) state that “the aim of qualitative research is to understand and represent the experiences and actions of people as they encounter, engage, and live through situations” (p.216). This research study aimed to present the perceptions of support staff, senior management team members and educational psychologists, in exploring support for support staff.

There are several approaches within qualitative psychology, however, there is one common feature linking all approaches together, which is a “concern with people’s grasp of their world” (Ashworth 2008, p.4). Robson (2011) acknowledges the role of individuals in qualitative research as “conscious, purposive actors who have ideas about

their world and attach meaning to what is going on around them” (p.17). The present research study was exploratory in nature; concerned primarily with the meanings of personal experiences constructed within a social world regarding issues of support for support staff and the role of the educational psychologist.

3.2 Epistemology

Epistemology is “concerned with the theory of knowledge. It attempts to answer the question, ‘how, and what, can we know?’” (Willig, 2001, p.2). When conducting research, it is necessary to be clear about its objectives, scope, reliability and validity, in order to have a sense of what is possible to ‘find out’. Thus, an epistemological position is required.

There are a range of different epistemological positions, and different research methodologies will be informed by the researchers’ epistemological view (Willig, 2001). Methodology refers to a general approach to research whereas method refers to specific research techniques, thus particular epistemological positions will inform methodologies but will not necessarily determine the method (Willig, 2001). As described previously, the present research study adopted a qualitative methodological approach which was informed by an ecosystemic social constructionist epistemological position. Reasons for adopting this approach are discussed below. Firstly, other epistemological viewpoints are outlined and reasons for discounting these, presented.

Positivism (or realism) is one epistemological position. Positivism posits that there is an absolute observable reality that exists and suggests that there is a direct correspondence between the world and perception or understanding of it (Willig, 2001). Positivist research aims to provide objective knowledge, rejecting the influence or distortion exerted by perception, and “takes the stance that social relationships are to be regarded as ‘facts’, ‘things’ to be investigated in an object like manner” (Sciarra, p.38). Positivist research attempts to control variables, which is not often possible within social (‘real world’) research and Rennie (1999, p.4) argues that “all knowledge production is relative to frames of reference”.

Broadly, qualitative research rejects positivist approaches (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Robson 2011; Willig, 2001) in order to search for “meaning in the accounts and/or actions of participants” (Holloway & Todres, 2003, p. 345). However, there are differences of opinion regarding the extent to which an understanding of ‘truth’ or objective knowledge may be developed, resulting in a continuum of epistemological positions, from realism to relativism, with positions such as naive realism, critical realism and social constructionism in between. For the purposes of the present research study, a positivist epistemology was rejected as it disregards the involvement of the researcher and aims to provide objective knowledge. This approach, therefore, did not suit the aims of the study in exploring perceptions of support for support staff and the role of the educational psychologist.

In contrast to positivism, relativism takes the position that knowledge and understanding are interpreted by individuals in terms of their own perspectives, negating the existence of an absolute reality. This is consistent with social constructionism (see Burr, 2001), which, holds that individuals are ‘experts’ of their own experiences, and individuals, groups, and organisations interpret the world in reference to their own interpretations of events. These constructions are based upon frames of reference which are chosen to inform their perspectives, such as assumptions, expectations, theories, concepts and language. Thus, “...what we perceive and experience is never a direct reflection of environmental conditions but must be understood as a specific reading of these conditions...”and this “suggests there are ‘knowledges’ rather than ‘knowledge’” (Willig, 2001, p.7). Thus, the same phenomenon or event can be described in different ways, giving rise to different perceptions and understanding. These different perceptions are not ‘right’ or ‘wrong’, just different. Research from a social constructionist perspective seeks to understand the multiple social constructions of meaning and knowledge, and participants are seen to assist researchers construct ‘reality’ (Robson, 2011).

A broad social constructionist epistemological position was appropriate for the present research study as multiple, constructed views of reality were sought. For example, data was collected from support staff, members of senior management teams and educational psychologists, to gain perspectives regarding support for support staff and the role of educational psychologist’s.

Qualitative research can be considered to be iterative in nature and this was relevant to the development of the epistemological position of the current research study. Braun and Clarke (2006) recognise epistemology is usually determined during the conception of a project, however, may also “rear its head again during analysis...” (p.85). Willig (2001, p.149) proposes that “most approaches combine a number of features that are compatible with more than one epistemological position” and Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecosystemic approach combined with a social constructionist perspective was considered helpful to apply in this instance. An ecosystemic approach enabled recognition of the role of the environment in influencing participants’ constructs, further informing understanding of perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive schools.

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) model acknowledges the interaction between individuals and their environment in shaping individual experiences. Bronfenbrenner describes the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem and macrosystem as environmental structures which interact, and influence the individual. A diagrammatical representation and a description of each structure with reference to the specific research study are presented in Appendix C2. This model provides a useful tool to understand perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive schools. Within the context of the current research study the ecosystemic approach recognises the interaction between individuals and their environments and suggests that if individuals were placed in another environment (e.g., a different school or local authority), their perspectives and responses might change. Additionally, individual factors and experiences are likely to impact on their perceptions of support and their experiences within their schools.

The current research project adopted an ecosystemic/social constructionist epistemological position, which recognised the construction of perspectives through the interaction between the individual and the environment.

Consistent with a qualitative research and ecosystemic/social constructionist position, hermeneutic research is concerned with meaning. “Hermeneutic researchers investigate how people interpret their experience” (Hayes, 2000, p.9). It can be argued the present research study utilised a doubly hermeneutic approach, as participants’ perceptions are presented through the perception and interpretation of the researcher (Sikes, Lawson, &

Parker, 2007). Therefore, it is necessary to be explicit about the position and assumptions which guided the research.

Interpretative paradigms such as social constructionist approaches have been criticised for lacking the ability to provide verification for the discoveries and conclusions, and prevent generalisations to be made (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative research has been criticised also for lacking 'scientific rigour' (Horsburgh, 2003). Various authors have presented criteria and guidelines to improve the validity of qualitative research and issues relating to the credibility of the current study are addressed in Chapter 5 (sections 5.7.6-5.7.8).

3.3 Researchers' Position

Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the need for researchers carrying out qualitative research to be transparent about the knowledge and assumptions they bring to the research. The researcher had previous experience of working as an employed member of support staff (outside of the local authorities the present study was conducted) and therefore, brought this prior experience to the research study. The researcher was aware of the possibility of being sympathetic to the views of support staff and tried to remain as objective as possible when collecting and analysing the data, to ensure it was the participants' views which guided the research, and those that are reported within this study. Attempts were made to ensure the views of all participants were given an equal opportunity to be heard.

Popay, Rogers and Williams (1998) suggested:

Given the involvement of the researcher in the research process, the question is not whether the data are biased, but to what extent has the researcher rendered transparent the processes by which data have been collected, analysed and presented. (p. 348).

Consequently, examples of transcripts, codes and themes are provided in the appendices of this thesis as a means to be transparent about the outcomes generated by the researcher from the data collected.

3.4 School Selection

Participants were recruited from six mainstream comprehensive schools within two local authorities in Wales. This was a convenience sample, as the researcher completed placements within the authorities as part of her educational psychology training. The first local authority was densely populated and comprised a large geographical region, consisting of rural, urban and semi-urban communities. The second neighbouring local authority was a smaller urban region in comparison, with an ethnically diverse population. The terms local authority one (LA1) and local authority two (LA2) and associated abbreviations will be used to represent the authorities respectively.

For the purposes of the current research project, inclusion and exclusion criteria for participating schools were developed, and are described below.

3.4.1 School Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The current research project aimed to seek the views of support staff within mainstream comprehensive schools. Blatchford et al., (2009c) report that support staff in comprehensive schools were less satisfied with training and development opportunities compared to their counterparts in primary and special schools, suggesting that support staff in comprehensive schools may not have the same access to appropriate training opportunities. Furthermore, the researcher viewed it to be beneficial to carry out the research with comprehensive schools because there would be a greater range and number of support staff available to participate.

For the purposes of this study, a mainstream comprehensive school was defined as a school that is government funded and caters for the education of children of compulsory school age within their locality. Special schools were not included in selection for participation in the current study as previous research suggests support staff in special schools have access to different support opportunities compared to their counterparts in other school settings (Blatchford et al., 2009c). Welsh medium schools were not included for selection initially as the researcher was not a Welsh speaker. However, one Welsh medium school in LA2 expressed an interest in participating in the project and was included in the study. This school agreed to participate in the project through the medium of English.

3.4.2 Procedure for Contacting Schools

In LA1, fifteen schools met the inclusion criteria, from a total of nineteen comprehensive schools. The headteachers of these comprehensive schools received a letter in May 2011 describing the nature of the research study (see appendix C3). The researcher contacted headteachers by telephone, within a week of the letter being posted, to discuss any questions.

In total, three schools agreed to participate in the research study. Six schools responded, explaining they did not wish to participate. Three schools asked to be contacted in September 2011 to participate and three schools did not respond to contact made by the researcher. The researcher contacted the schools that did not wish to participate and those who had not responded, by email, asking them to complete a very brief feedback form (see Appendix C4) to inform the reasons for not participating. Three schools responded to this email; time constraints and participation in other research projects were explanations that were provided for not participating in the research. The three schools that wished to participate in September 2011, were contacted by email in July 2011 to arrange a suitable contact date and time to discuss the research in September 2011. The schools were contacted in September 2011 by telephone by the researcher. All three schools chose not to participate and did not provide an explanation for this decision.

Within LA2, nineteen schools met the inclusion criteria. Due to time constraints, a decision was taken by the researcher to randomly select six schools. If all eligible schools had been contacted and agreed to participate, the researcher would have been unable to conduct the research within time constraints. The six schools were approached by their link EP with information about the research project in September 2011. Following this, the researcher contacted the headteachers of the schools by telephone. Three schools agreed to participate in the research study and three schools did not respond.

In total, three schools from LA1, and three schools from LA2, participated in the research study. There are a total of 222 maintained secondary schools in Wales. Schools in LA1 and LA2 represent approximately 18% of secondary schools in Wales. In total six school across two local authorities participated, which were representative of

approximately a fifth and one fifteenth of the eligible schools in LA1 and LA2 respectively.

Data from schools was collected via four different means. Table 1 below provides an overview of the aspects of the research each school participated in. Further details of each individual school including demographics can be found in Appendix G.

Table 1: Overview of the aspects of research each school participated in

Local Authority	School	Aspect of research school participated in				Total Number of Participants
		Support staff Questionnaire	Senior Management Team (SMT) Questionnaire	Support staff Focus Group	SMT Interview	
LA1	1	✓				7
	2	✓	✓	✓		12
	3	✓	✓			14
LA2	4	✓	✓	✓	✓	6
	5	✓		✓		5
	6			✓		5

As Table 1 illustrates, of the six schools that participated in the research, five schools completed support staff questionnaires, three schools completed senior management questionnaires, four schools participated in support staff focus groups and one school participated in senior management interviews. Focus groups were conducted with schools 2, 4, 5 and 6. One school from LA1 and three schools from LA2 participated in focus groups. Only school 4 participated in all aspects of the research study. The following sub-sections outline the participants who took part in the research which included support staff, senior management team members and educational psychologists. Further information regarding participants' details can be found in Appendix G.

3.5 Participants

3.5.1 Support Staff

Within the current research project, support staff were paid members of staff, employed by a mainstream comprehensive school (or local authority), who directly supported pupils and/or teachers daily.

Blatchford et al., (2009c) derive six types of support staff. For the purposes of this study support staff were required to provide one of the following three: support for teachers and/or curriculum; direct learning support for pupils; or direct pastoral support for pupils. It is of note that some support staff performed all three of these supporting roles, as well as additional duties, as part of their everyday role.

Support staff included learning support assistants (LSAs), teaching assistants (TAs), higher level teaching assistants (HLTAs), learning coaches and pastoral support staff. Details of the specific job titles and the number of participants for each participating school are provided in appendix G2.

Members of staff who provide ‘indirect’ support to pupils and teachers, such as administrative staff, librarians, lunchtime supervisors, technicians and business managers were not included in the research. The focus of the present study was to explore the views of support staff who provide direct support to pupils and teachers to improve outcomes for pupils, regarding the types of support available to them.

It was each school’s responsibility to identify staff members who met the inclusion criteria to participate in the research. The researcher did not personally identify any participants to be included in the research study. In total, 38 members of support staff completed questionnaires, and 21 members of support staff participated in focus groups.

3.5.2 Senior Management Team (SMT) participants

With specific reference to supporting pupils with special education needs, Tennant (2001) suggests it is important to consider the role of SMTs. For the purposes of the present research study, it was deemed important to gain the views of senior members of staff to develop further insight into support structures within particular school contexts.

Members of staff that comprised the senior management/leadership teams of each participating school were asked to complete an open ended questionnaire (see Appendix F2), regarding the forms of support available to support staff within their school. Members of senior management/leadership teams included headteachers, deputy headteachers and assistant headteachers. Three out of the six schools who participated in the project completed senior management/leadership questionnaires. Two members of staff from one school in LA2 participated in a follow-up interview. Further details of the senior members of staff who participated in the research are provided in Appendix G.

3.5.3 Educational Psychologists (EPs)

Educational psychologists (EPs) were recruited from two educational psychology services (EPSs) based within the same local authorities as the participating schools. EPs volunteered to participate in a focus group, following being informed of the project. Two focus groups were conducted; one with EPs from LA1, and the second with EPs from LA2. The EPSs will be referred to as EPS 1 and EPS 2, respectively, hereafter. A total of 9 EPs from EPS 1 participated in the focus group, which was representative of nearly half the EPs within the service. In LA2, 4 EPs participated in the EPS 2 focus group, representing approximately one sixth of the service. The EPs who participated in the research ranged in experience, from newly qualified (6 months) to 17 years of experience.

3.5.4 The parent population

The ‘parent population’ consisted of all support staff who support pupils and teachers on a daily basis within secondary schools and all EPs within Wales. At the time of data collection there were approximately 12,000 secondary school support staff (TA equivalent) in Wales (WG, 2011). The study collected data from six schools in Wales from a total of 222 secondary schools (WG, 2011) in Wales and a total of 3,956 (DfE, 2011b; Scottish Government, 2010; WG, 2011) schools in the UK. The participating schools represented 15-20% of schools in each participating authority.

At the time of data collection there were approximately 146 EPs (WG, 2011) working in Wales. 13 EPs across two authorities participated in the study representing approximately 9% of EPs in Wales.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethically sound procedures were followed during the research project. A research proposal was approved by Cardiff University's School of Psychology Ethics Committee prior to data collection. The British Psychological Society (BPS) (2004) guidelines regarding ethical standards expected when conducting psychological research. The Code of Ethics and Conduct (2009) and Code of Human Research Ethics (2011) were followed. A summary of actions taken to comply with the principles outlined in the BPS (2004) ethical guidelines is described below. Further details regarding actions taken to comply with specific principles are provided in Appendix B.

Participants were fully informed about the aims of the research and the research procedure prior to providing their written consent and data collection. The contact details (University address, email address and telephone number) were provided on the consent and debriefing forms for all participants (see Appendices D & E).

Participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and they could ask for their data to be destroyed up until the data was anonymised. Participants were fully debriefed at the end of each stage of the research (see Appendix E).

All participants were informed that data collected would be confidential and, later, anonymised. The information gathered during each aspect of data collection was initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher could trace this information back to individuals. Within two weeks of data collection, the information was coded and anonymised so that the information could not be traced to the individuals involved. Anonymisation was usually completed on the day of data collection. Information contained in paper form was stored in a locked cupboard. Recorded information from focus groups and interviews were stored anonymously in an electronic format, on a password protected data stick and will be destroyed in August 2012. Names of people, places and events that were mentioned during the focus groups and interviews, which could identify either participating schools or the participants were deleted from recordings once the data was transcribed. The researcher transcribed the data, rather than a third party, which further ensured confidentiality of the data.

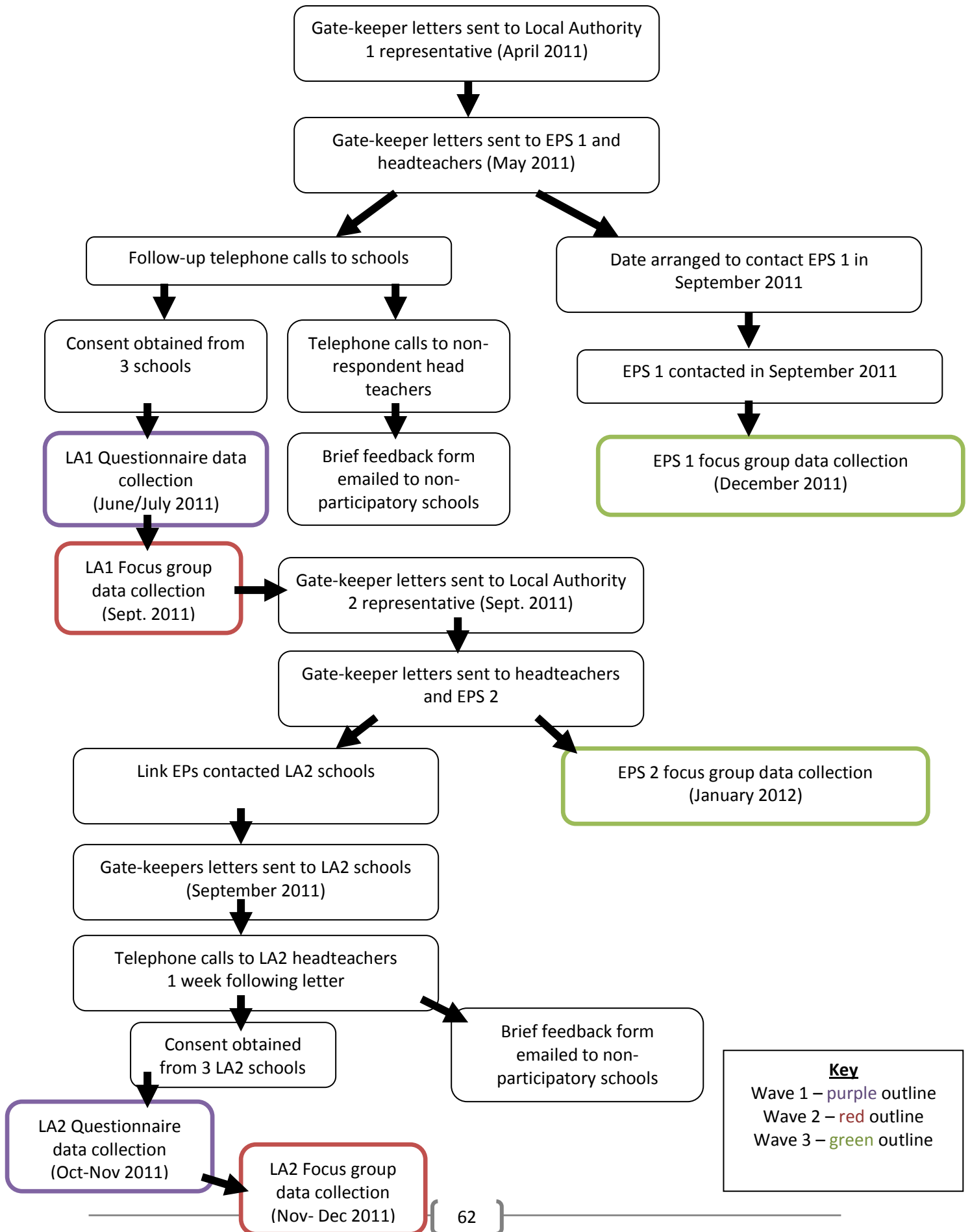
Consideration was given to the potential issues that could be raised by the research and the possible drawbacks of enabling participants a ‘voice’. Expectations may have been raised and participants might have assumed that changes to the support that they received, should and would change as a result of participation in the study. Furthermore, changes to support that participants suggested may not necessarily be welcomed if implemented in actuality. Participants were informed that the aim of the research was to gather perceptions of support for support staff, and would not have a direct impact on what occurred in participating schools. Additionally, steps were taken to clarify viewpoints and identify areas of consensus and disagreement between participants within focus groups. Thus, the research was conducted in manner that was explicit in there being no implication that there would be, or should be, changes to the support available to staff in the participating schools as a result of the current research project.

It was agreed a summary report of the present research study would be made available to each of the participating schools and EPSs who participated in the research, following the completion of the research project. It was agreed the outcomes of the study as a whole would be reported and limited contextual information would be provided in order to preserve the confidentiality of the schools, participants and services who participated in the research.

3.7 Procedure

Details of the procedure employed to collect and analyse data will be presented in chronological order. This is divided into five stages: pre-data collection; questionnaire design and pilot study; wave 1; wave 2; and wave 3. Wave 1 refers to questionnaire data collection. Wave 2 refers to support staff focus group and SMT semi-structured interview data collection. Wave 3 refers to educational psychologist focus group data collection. A diagrammatical representation of the research process is presented in Figure 3 below.

Figure 3: Flow chart illustrating the research process



3.7.1 Pre-Data Collection

Following approval from Cardiff University's School of Psychology Ethics Committee, letters were sent to the local authority and the Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) where the research was conducted and written consent was provided. Please refer to Appendix C for example letters sent to the local authority and EPSs.

As detailed in section 3.4, headteachers were sent a letter describing the nature of the research study (see appendix C3) and this was followed up by a telephone call. In total, written consent for the school's participation was received from six headteachers.

3.7.2 Questionnaire Design

It was considered important that the participants guided the research. Bailey (1994) suggests that open questions are useful when the study is exploratory and when the possible answers are unknown. Additionally, it can be argued that open ended questions, in contrast to closed questions, have greater ecological validity and allow aspects that are pertinent to participants to be identified (Hayes, 2000). An open-ended questionnaire design was adopted to initially elicit participants' views, enabling participants to provide their 'true' opinions without being confined to pre-existing categories. This approach was consistent with the epistemological view adopted for the study, enabling the research to be guided by the constructs of the participants.

3.7.2.1 Support Staff Questionnaire

The eight stages of questionnaire design as outlined by Hayes (2000) were followed, these were: defining the aims of the questionnaire; selecting the question style; designing the questionnaire; piloting the questionnaire; revising the questionnaire; administering the questionnaire; analysing the data; and reporting the study.

Six open-ended questions were developed in line with the overall aims of the research. The aim of the questionnaire was to provide preliminary data regarding support staff participants' perceptions of the support available to them and forms of support they would like to receive, which could then be explored further via focus groups.

For the purposes of the questionnaire, support was framed in terms of 'skill development' and 'personal' support. Support was initially differentiated in terms of formality within schools, for example, 'formal support' and 'informal support'.

However, some forms of personal support may be achieved through the formal systems of an organisation for example training, and through informal structures such as social relationships. Skill development and personal support were chosen in order to delineate the different functions support can serve.

Support in the form of skill development relates to the support provided to staff that enables them to enhance their skills specifically for their role. Personal support refers to support that is personal and/or supports personal development.

3.7.2.2 Senior Management Team Questionnaire

Research regarding the role and impact of support staff highlights the need for effective management and leadership and draws attention to the importance of the SENCo role in decision making and the effective management of support staff (Gershcel, 2005; Layton, 2005). A questionnaire for senior members of staff was devised in order to gain their views about the support available to the support staff within their school. This enabled another view of the support available to staff to be explored. This questionnaire followed the same format as the support staff questionnaire. Minor alterations were made to the wording in order for it to be suitable for this group of participants.

3.7.2.3 Questionnaire Pilot

The support staff questionnaire (see Appendix F1) was completed by five members of support staff as a pilot. These support staff were employed in a different local authority to where the main research study was conducted. The pilot study participants volunteered to complete the questionnaire and were informed that they could ask for their information to be destroyed at any time. The aim of the pilot study was to gain relevant feedback regarding the questionnaire and to inform any potential changes that could improve the questionnaire.

Feedback regarding the questionnaire was considered in line with the main aims and research questions of the research study. The participants of the pilot study were invited to suggest changes to the questionnaire, such as recommendations on layout, content and ease of completion. The pilot study participants completed the questionnaire but did not provide feedback regarding changes that could be made. Following this, the

questionnaire was considered to be appropriate to distribute to participants, and no changes were made to the questionnaire.

3.7.3 Wave 1: Questionnaires

Questionnaires (Appendices F1 & F2) were distributed to support staff and senior management teams in six mainstream comprehensive schools in two local authorities. Five out of the six comprehensive schools completed support staff questionnaires. School 6 chose to participate only in the support staff focus group. Schools 2, 3 and 4 completed senior management questionnaires. Questionnaires took no longer than fifteen minutes to complete. Questionnaires were provided and collected in person as this has been shown to improve response rate (Edwards et al., 2002).

The recruitment and selection of questionnaire participants is detailed in the previous sections above (section 3.5). Participants were provided with written information regarding the nature and purpose of the research (see Appendix D). Each participant was informed that he or she could withdraw from the study at any time, without giving a reason. All participants provided written consent following being provided with information about the research project. Participants were reminded they could remove themselves from the research at any time.

At the end of the questionnaire, support staff participants and senior management team members were asked whether they would be willing to participate in a follow-up in the future. Appendix G details the participants who volunteered to participate in follow-up stages of the research. Participants were fully debriefed at the end of their participation in the research (see Appendix E).

The data from Wave 1 was analysed using thematic analysis. The rationale for selecting thematic analysis is discussed in detail in section 3.8. Key themes relevant to the support that support staff receive, and would like to receive, were developed. The outcomes of this wave of the research informed focus group prompts and semi-structured interview questions for Wave 2.

3.7.4 Wave 2: Focus Groups and Semi- Structured Interviews Design and Procedure

3.7.4.1 Rationale for utilising focus groups for data collection

A ‘group interview’ (Robson, 2011) or focus group was considered appropriate to further explore the information gathered from questionnaires with support staff. Focus groups can be used to “amplify and understand the findings from a survey” (Robson, 2011, p.296), and this was the aim of the focus groups in the present research study. Due to the number of support staff willing to participate in a follow-up, focus groups were utilised as a way to gather a range of views simultaneously, in contrast to individual interviews. Individual interviews were not possible to conduct with support staff due to time constraints. Furthermore, Willig (2001) suggests that focus groups may provide a less artificial environment compared to individual interviews, enabling the data to have high(er) ecological validity.

Focus groups have a number of advantages, which are listed below.

- Focus groups are efficient at generating a substantial amount and range of data from several participants concurrently.
- Important topics are focussed upon enabling shared and consistent views to be easily identified, with extreme views often being extracted.
- Participants can make comments of their own, in addition to being inspired by others’ thoughts and remarks.
- Participants who do not feel they have anything to contribute or are reluctant to participate in an individual interview can be encouraged to voice their opinion.
- Participants who have specific difficulties are not discriminated against.
- Focus groups are flexible. (adapted from Robson, 2011, p.294).

Focus groups also have some disadvantages. For example, the number of questions which can be covered in a focus group is limited. Facilitating the process requires expertise and needs to be well managed to ensure the group is not dominated by individuals (Kidd & Parshall, 2000), and all participants have the opportunity to contribute. Group dynamics may interfere with the group and the discussion (Carey & Smith, 1994), in addition to conflicts which may detract from purpose of the group. Confidentiality can also be an issue. Data gained from focus groups can be difficult to generalise to other contexts. However, data was gathered from four different schools enabling perceptions to be gathered from different school contexts. The advantages of

focus groups and the suitability to the present research study were considered to outweigh the disadvantages. Furthermore, steps were taken in an attempt to minimise negative group effects and maximise the quality of the information from participants.

It was considered necessary for the focus groups in the present study to be manageable and 'safe' to enable voices to be heard, but to include a variety of voices in order for thoughts to be built upon and/or contradicted. Research differs on the appropriate size of focus groups, with the minimal being 4 and the maximum being 12 (Morgan, 1988, p.43 as cited in Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Morgan, 1998; Stewart and Shamdasani, 1990). Focus groups in the present research consisted of between 4 and 10 individuals apart from one, which comprised one individual.

A 'focus group of one' was conducted with a participant from school 4, as they were the only volunteer from their school. Additionally, it was conducted in the latter part of the research process and was informed by understanding what other participants had communicated. Although a 'focus group of one' can be thought of as an individual interview, it is referred to as a 'focus group of one' as it followed the same structure of the focus group utilised with the other support staff participants. Johnson and Johnson (2009) suggest that a "small group may be defined as two or more individuals in face-to-face interaction...(p.8). The 'focus group of one' fulfilled this criterion through the interaction between the researcher and participant in the co-construction of ideas regarding support for support staff in comprehensive schools. Morgan (1998) identifies three components of focus group research which recognise the role of the researcher in creating a discussion for data collection and interaction as a source of data. These components were achieved in the 'focus group of one', with the researcher taking an active role in creating a discussion and interaction taking place between the researcher and the participant.

The rationale for conducting a 'focus group of one' was to ensure that all participants who had volunteered to partake in a follow-up were afforded the same opportunity as each other. Thus, the participant in school 4, where there were no other volunteers, participated in an individual focus group. Quality of information rather than quantity was considered important for the present research project and a 'focus group of one' added to the depth and breadth of the study. It can be argued that a 'focus group of one'

may promote a minority view. However, the participants' views remain valid as they were the construction of the individual at that moment in time. Furthermore, the 'focus group of one's' views were collected in addition to the views of other participants and contributed to understanding perceptions of support for support staff. Thus, although a minority view may have been gained it enabled a voice to be heard and was not inappropriately utilised. Themes represented by minority views or group views are acknowledged in the results and discussion sections, particularly where there are differences of opinion.

The support staff focus groups in the present study comprised pre-existing support staff groups. This was beneficial as the participants in each school had similar positions within their school and therefore similar experiences of support. Groups where members already know each other are thought to facilitate communication, promote the exchange of ideas and experiences and may enable conflicts or concerns to be expressed by providing a sense of safety (Brown, 1999 as cited in Robson, 2011). However, contrastingly, it may also prevent concerns being expressed and limit the questioning of views, promoting similar positions or views. Participants in each group were all support staff from the same school, which enabled rich discussion of issues, pertinent to their experiences of support in their school. As some staff did not have exactly the same role within the schools, this encouraged different views and opinions to be expressed, in addition to identifying shared views.

Krueger and Casey (2009, p.15) recognise that confidence in focus groups increases "when multiple forms of inquiry yield overlapping and confirming results." By collecting data from three different groups via questionnaires, focus groups and interviews, findings were able to be triangulated through the different methods utilised, adding to the depth and breadth of the research study.

3.7.4.2 Support staff focus group prompt design

Using questionnaire data, a focus group prompt was developed. There were three aspects to support staff focus groups. Firstly, a nominal group approach was adopted for the initial stage of the discussion. Nominal group techniques enable individual contributions to be included within a group response. Individuals are provided with an opportunity to voice an opinion regarding a particular topic, and a group view is

developed through the prioritisation of individuals' views. The nominal group technique offered the opportunity to feedback questionnaire data to participants, in addition to further exploring and clarifying support staff views regarding particular support structures. Utilising categories developed from questionnaire data was consistent with the epistemological position adopted, allowing the research to be guided by participants' views. In addition, nominal group techniques award equal status to all participant views and thus, "all participants have a voice and are heard" (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007, p.309).

The second part of the focus group adopted a solution focussed approach using the 'miracle question'. This solution focussed technique was not used to imply that changes to support were required, rather it was utilised as a tool to encourage participants to think outside the current parameters of their situation, and to identify key features of support they would like to receive. A solution orientated approach was used in order to develop open ended prompts to explore participants' views and enable participant constructs and group views to be developed.

The concluding element of the focus group explored responsibilities and roles for support structures in schools and the role of educational psychologists in providing support to support staff. Participants were invited to consider the difference in the depth of information offered in the questionnaires compared to the focus group, and offer any concluding thoughts or comments regarding support for support staff in secondary schools also.

As focus groups were conducted with schools at different times, this enabled an iterative process to be adopted allowing a reflective approach. As new issues came to light the focus group prompt developed over time. Although the structure of the focus groups remained the same (i.e., nominal group approach followed by questioning), an awareness of similar issues being brought to light by participants was developed.

3.7.4.3 Support staff focus group procedure

Thirty-eight members of support staff, from schools 1-5, completed questionnaires. Of this number, 28 participants from these schools volunteered to participate in a follow-up. Schools 1 and 3 decided to withdraw from the focus group aspect of the research

study without providing an explanation. School 6 chose not to complete questionnaires, however volunteered to participate in a focus group, thus, in total four focus groups were conducted with schools 2, 4, 5 and 6. Table 2.3 in Appendix G provides an overview of the participants who were included in the focus groups.

Focus groups were conducted during school time at a time agreed with participants. Small snacks and drinks were provided during focus groups as a way of thanking participants. Participants were provided with written information regarding the nature and purpose of the research (see Appendix D) and were fully debriefed at the end of their participation in the research (see Appendix E).

Focus groups were conducted for approximately one hour, ranging between fifty-two and eighty-three minutes in length. Focus groups were recorded with a digital voice recorder and detailed notes were taken during the group. All focus groups were scribed by the researcher. At the end of each focus group researcher reflections were noted. This enabled reflections regarding how the group was conducted and changes which could be implemented to improve data collection to be considered, in addition to reflecting on issues discussed by participants.

3.7.4.4 Semi-structured interview rationale and design

As there were limited numbers of senior management volunteers for questionnaires and a follow-up, individual interviews were adopted with members of senior management. Furthermore, there were challenges to accessing senior management team members simultaneously to conduct a group discussion. In total, six members of senior management from three schools completed questionnaires, and of these, three volunteered to participate in a follow-up interview. One member of senior management chose not to participate further, when contacted to arrange a follow-up interview. Two individual interviews were conducted with senior members of staff in school 4. Interviews were conducted at an arranged time convenient to the member of staff during school time. Small snacks were provided in the interviews.

Semi-structured interviews were adopted as opposed to structured interviews, to provide flexibility, and to enable the constructs of senior management participants to be elicited. Interviews were approximately thirty minutes in length. Participants were provided with

written information regarding the nature and purpose of the research (see Appendix D) and were fully debriefed at the end of their participation in the research (see Appendix E).

The semi-structured interviews were recorded with a digital voice recorder and were transcribed by the researcher who conducted the interviews. The transcriptions were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Further details regarding data analysis are presented in section 3.8 onwards.

3.7.5 Wave 3: EP Focus Group

Educational psychologists from EPS 1 and EPS 2 participated in separate focus groups. EPS 1 and EPS 2 were aware of the nature of the research and its aims in May 2011 and September 2011 respectively. It was agreed with EPS 1 that the focus group would be conducted following data collection with support staff and SMT participants.

Each EPS was contacted by email in September 2011. An email was sent to all the educational psychologists (EPs) within the EPS, requesting volunteers for a focus group regarding support for support staff in comprehensive school.

As described previously (section 3.5), in total, 9 EPs from EPS 1 and 4 EPs from EPS 2 participated in the focus groups. The duration of the focus groups was approximately fifty minutes, ranging between, forty-six and sixty-two minutes in length. EPs were informed of the nature and purpose of the focus group and provided with information about the research project and provided written consent to participate in the focus group (see Appendix D) and were informed they could remove themselves from the research at any time without giving a reason and ask for their information to be deleted/destroyed up until the data were anonymised.

EPs were asked to discuss, in their view, what support would be helpful to support staff and the EP role in delivering services specifically for support staff. Some of the initial findings from waves 1 and 2 were shared with EPs. The focus group sought to explore EP perceptions of support for support staff and perceptions of the role of the EP in providing support to this group. EPs were fully debriefed at the end of the focus group (see Appendix E).

3.8 Data Analysis

A number of methods of analysis, such as content analysis, discourse analysis, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) or grounded theory would have been appropriate to use to analyse the data from each wave of the research. Following careful consideration of the advantages and disadvantages of each of these approaches, thematic analysis was selected. Thematic analysis was utilised to analyse the outcomes of the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. Themes were generated directly from focus groups with support staff and will be described in detail in the results chapter. Reasons for selecting thematic analysis over other methods are outlined below.

3.8.1 Justification for Adopting Thematic Analysis

The present study explored the perceptions of support staff, senior management team members and educational psychologists through three different methods, questionnaires, focus groups and interviews. To analyse the data, thematic analysis was chosen as it provides a “useful and flexible method for qualitative research” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.77), enabling the data from questionnaires, focus groups and interviews to be subjected to the same analysis.

Thematic analysis has been criticised for being poorly defined yet widely utilised, with little information available regarding how to implement it (Boyatzis, 1998; Roulston, 2001). Rather than being a specific approach in its own right, as is grounded theory, some consider thematic analysis to be a process which is performed within analytical approaches, aiding the researcher to search for meaning and insight (Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Benard, 2000). Holloway and Todres (2003) suggest ‘thematizing themes’ is a common feature of all qualitative approaches and thematic analysis can be considered to be the foundation on which other qualitative methods are founded (Roulston, 2001). Braun and Clarke (2006) argued thematic analysis offers an accessible and theoretically flexible approach to analyse qualitative data, and should be considered a method in its own right.

Thematic analysis offers a flexible approach that can be used within existing psychological theories and epistemological positions, unlike other approaches, such as grounded theory and interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), which are

theoretically bound (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This ‘theoretical freedom’ enables an adaptable research tool, which can potentially provide a “rich and detailed, yet complex account of data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78). Thematic analysis was deemed appropriate for the present research study, as the information required needed to be detailed and to identify common patterns in people’s perceptions.

Content analysis, in contrast to thematic analysis, tends to focus on the micro level and produces a frequency count (Wilkinson, 2000), for example, counting up items relevant to pre-existing categories. Thus, initial qualitative data can be subjected to quantitative analyses (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Although this could have been applied to the questionnaire data, content analysis was unsuitable for the overall purposes of the present research, which sought a more in-depth analysis of issues as described by participants.

Unlike IPA and grounded theory, thematic analysis is not theoretically bound and therefore, provides an opportunity for flexibility. The purposes of grounded theory are prescriptive. Grounded theory seeks to impose theory upon the interpreted data and the role of the researcher is to “organise, select and construct explanation” (Daly, 1997, p.350). There is also a pressure within grounded theory to develop a model to explain phenomena (Robson, 2011; Willig, 2001). Thematic analysis enables an opportunity to look at themes or patterns across data sets, rather than within. This approach suited the current research project, which gathered the perceptions of different individuals.

IPA provides insight into the subjective perceptions of participants whilst acknowledging the role of the researcher, however, IPA typically focuses on the experiences of a homogeneous group. The current research project explored the perceptions of different individuals; support staff, senior management members and educational psychologist all of whom undertook different roles within the participating schools and authority and were therefore, not a homogeneous group. In addition, IPA is attached to a phenomenological epistemology (Braun and Clarke, 2006), which gives experience primacy. Whilst this approach could have been used, particularly in relation to support staff specifically, it was considered important to subject all of the data to the same analysis. Furthermore, the researcher chose to focus on individuals’ perceptions of

support and beliefs regarding what is helpful within their role as opposed to individuals' experiences of support.

Braun and Clarke (2006) provide an evidence-based argument for the use of thematic analysis and have produced a useful step by step guide on how to conduct thematic analysis. By adopting Braun and Clarke's (2006) template for analysis it was hoped that the methodology would be transparent and robust. In qualitative research it is paramount that the researcher acknowledges the active part he or she plays (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun & Clarke, 2006; Holloway & Todres, 2003; Willig 2001) and recognises the assumptions, beliefs and values he or she brought to the research. This reflexivity can be considered as a step toward ensuring validity and reliability within qualitative research (Holloway & Todres; Horsburgh, 2003; Willig 2001). Further discussion of validity and reliability is presented in Chapter 5.

3.8.2 Thematic Analysis Decision Points

Qualitative researchers ought to be clear about what they are doing and why, and include 'how' the data analysis was conducted (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The six stages of thematic analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) were followed to analyse questionnaires, focus groups and transcribed interview data. Prior to a description of the process followed, important decisions made by the researcher regarding data analysis are presented, as a means to present transparent findings in line with Attride-Stirling's (2001) view.

3.8.2.1 Decision 1: A rich description of the data versus a detailed account of one particular aspect

A rich thematic description enables the reader to gain a sense of the predominant themes across the entire data set, as opposed to a detailed nuanced account of one particular theme or group of themes within the data. Potentially, some depth and complexity can be lost with a rich description, however, in a large scale project such as this, it is less likely this type of dilution would occur. Overall, a rich description is maintained and this is a useful method when investigating an under-researched topic (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The current research study was exploratory in nature and had broad research questions and, thus, a rich description of the data was deemed to be more suitable. This also offered themes to be generated from the data itself rather than being imposed by the researcher.

3.8.2.2 Decision 2: Inductive versus theoretical thematic analysis

Inductive analysis is a ‘bottom up’ process (Frith and Gleeson, 2004). The themes identified through inductive analysis are not coded into pre-existing categories and are strongly linked to the data themselves. A theoretical thematic analysis adopts a ‘top down’ approach (Boyatzis, 1998), and is driven by the researcher’s theoretical interest in the area. This can provide a less rich description of the data as a whole, and a more detailed analysis of an aspect of the data.

Boyatzis (1998, p.30) suggests that “working directly from the raw information enhances appreciation of the information”. The present research study was exploratory in nature and sought the perceptions of a range of individuals regarding support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists. It was deemed important for participants to guide the research, and therefore, the themes, which is consistent with an inductive approach. In addition, an inductive analysis was more compatible with the first decision point.

Although a theoretical approach was rejected, it is important to note the active role of the researcher. The researcher cannot be completely free from his or her values and beliefs, therefore data sets cannot be coded in an “epistemological vacuum” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). The researcher had prior knowledge of relevant literature which may have impacted on an inductive approach. However, Tuckett (2005) argues “engagement in the literature may enhance the analysis by sensitising the researcher to subtle features of the data”.

3.8.2.3 Decision 3: Semantic versus latent themes

This decision point was concerned with the level at which themes were identified. A semantic approach identifies themes at an explicit or surface level of meaning, and focuses on what the participant has said or written. This involves progressing from a description of the content of the data, to summarisation, which attempts to theorise the

significance of the patterns and their broader meanings. Previous literature is usually considered during this process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Alternatively, latent themes examine the underlying ideas or conceptualisations that are theorised as shaping the semantic content of the data. The development of the latent themes involves interpretative work thus, the “analysis that is produced is not just a description, but is already theorised” (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The overlap between the two processes is recognised by Boyatzis (1998) who describes them as ‘manifest’ and ‘latent’ and suggests that they can be used at the same time. This was the approach adopted in the present study, however, remains consistent with a latent approach described by Braun & Clarke (2006). Themes were identified and recognised at a surface level and interpreted within the context of the research questions. This provided an opportunity to describe and tentatively interpret the perceptions of the participants involved. This was consistent with a social constructionist approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006) and the previous decision points.

3.8.2.4 Decision 4: Epistemology

For the purposes of the present research project, an inductive thematic analysis, searching for latent themes from an ecological social constructionist epistemological view to obtain a rich description of the data set, was selected. The decision points discussed above helped to justify the methodology and analysis for the purposes of the present research study.

The thematic analysis was conducted using the six steps outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). It is important to note that qualitative analysis guidelines are not rigid rules and the flexibility offered by thematic analysis enabled the analysis to be fitted to the research questions and data. Analysis was a recursive process which involved moving back and forth between the entire data set and coded extracts.

The process of thematic analysis followed is outlined below. This process was conducted to analyse data obtained from questionnaires, focus groups and interviews.

3.8.3 Thematic Analysis Process

Below outlines the sequential process of thematic analysis followed as described by Braun and Clarke (2006).

3.8.3.1 Familiarisation with the data

Data was collected through interactive means, therefore, the researcher had prior knowledge of the data preceding analysis. The data from the questionnaires and semi-structured interviews were anonymised and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. Transcripts from the semi-structured interviews were checked against the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy. Detailed notes supplemented by listening to the audio recordings from focus groups were used for focus group data.

Familiarisation with the data involved immersion in the data. All transcripts were read and re-read, and initial notes were made, prior to the generation of codes. It is recognised that this aspect of the process was time consuming, however, it was integral to analysis as it formed the foundation for the remaining process.

Transcription can be considered an interpretative act (Bird, 2005; Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999), and there is no one set of rules for transcription for thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the need for transcripts to retain their original nature and the meaning of what was said. Thus, semi-structured interview transcripts for this study included relevant punctuation and grammar that could affect meaning, for example, pauses and laughter. Transcripts from focus groups were an accumulation of detailed notes taken during the focus group, with supplementary detail added, following listening to audio recordings of each focus group.

3.8.3.2 Generating initial codes

Following familiarisation with the data, the second phase involved generating initial codes from the data. This involved coding interesting aspects of the data in a systematic way throughout the entire data set, and collating extracts applicable to each code generated. It is common for inconsistencies and contradictions to emerge during coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006) and these were acknowledged during the process. Code names often comprised of frequently used phrases used by the participants themselves. Some extracts of data were uncoded, some were coded once, and some were coded a number of times. Microsoft Excel was used for the initial stages of coding as this

enabled the researcher to organise codes and extracts into tables in preparation for collating codes together to develop themes.

3.8.3.3 Searching for themes

The coded data were collated into potential themes and relevant extracts to support themes were gathered. Analysis during this phase considered how codes could be combined to produce an overarching theme. The researcher found it useful to use visual representations, such as mind maps and tables, to establish relationships between themes, and identify relevant codes, so that overarching themes could be identified.

Relationships between codes, themes and sub-themes started to be identified during this process. A number of codes appeared to be incompatible with the themes identified and were labelled miscellaneous. Consistent with Braun and Clarke (2006), these codes were retained for the fourth phase of the process.

3.8.3.4 Reviewing the themes

This phase involved reviewing the identified themes, to consider whether themes should be retained, combined, refined or discarded. “Data within themes should cohere together meaningfully, while there should be clear and identifiable distinctions between themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). Thus, it was important to consider if there was sufficient evidence for a particular theme and to consider extracts that might contradict a potential theme. The entire data set was re-read and coded extracts were checked against the proposed themes and the entire data set, ensuring they formed a coherent pattern and a thematic map was generated. Any additional data that was identified was coded. The need to re-code is to be expected, as coding is an iterative “ongoing organic process” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.91). Consequently, coding data and producing themes is a process that can continue indefinitely. However, the coding process was discontinued when the coding frame and thematic map were considered to accurately reflect the data.

3.8.3.5 Defining and naming themes

The penultimate phase involved identifying the ‘essence’ of each theme, and capturing what each theme represented. Each theme was named and defined, and refinements to

the thematic map were made. The final thematic maps for each wave of the research are presented in the results section of Chapter 4.

3.8.3.6 Producing the report

The aim of the report is to construct an account which remains true to the data and the participants, but is also subject to analysis and interpretation by the researcher (Daly, 1997). Examples of data extracts, which capture the essence of themes, are utilised to communicate findings in relation to the research questions. The themes identified and accompanying data extracts from each wave of the current research study are presented in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 discusses the research findings with regard to literature presented in Chapter 2.

3.8.4 Focus Group Analysis

Patton (2002, as cited in Krueger and Casey, 2009) in reference to focus group analysis stated:

Do your best with your full intellect to fairly represent the data and communicate what the data reveal given the purpose of the study. (p.434).

The purpose of the focus groups within the present research study sought to identify perceptions of support staff and EPs regarding support for support staff in secondary schools. The aim of the focus groups was to further explore issues identified through questionnaires, ascertaining types of support that are important to staff and issues related to staff feeling supported in schools within two particular local authority contexts. The analysis of each focus group, therefore, aimed to capture the views of participants in answering the research questions.

Krueger and Casey (2009) suggest:

Focus group analysis begins in the first focus group. Data collection and analysis are concurrent. (p.116).

Detailed, verbatim notes were taken during each focus group, which the participants were able to view. Participants were encouraged to correct the researcher if the meaning of what they had said was not reflected in the notes. The researcher recorded observation notes at the end of each focus group. Documentation of verbatim notes and

observations aided the researcher to reflect on each group and the impact on the aims of the research study.

Focus group data was analysed using thematic analysis, however, differed slightly from that described in the previous sections. Focus group thematic analysis was conducted from a combination of notes taken during the focus groups and notes created from listening to the audio recordings of groups. Cohen et al., (2007) argue that “transcriptions inevitably lose data from the original encounter” and suggest “there is no single ‘correct’ transcription; rather the issue becomes whether, to what extent, and how a transcription is useful for the research.” (p.367). Kvale (1996) proposes that transcripts can become an opaque screen between the researcher and the original live interview. These issues seemed prevalent to the current research study, therefore, a decision was taken not to fully transcribe focus group data. Furthermore, there were difficulties differentiating between different participants’ voices, particularly in larger groups.

Detailed notes supplemented by listening several times to the audio recordings of focus groups were utilised to generate themes. Listening to the audio recordings enabled the researcher to gain an understanding of participants’ perspectives and to identify key aspects of data, assisting in presenting data that fairly represented the views of participants in relation to the present research study, as described by Patton (2002 as cited in Krueger & Casey, 2009) above.

Furthermore, listening to the audio of focus groups captured aspects of the groups that would have been lost in transcripts, (e.g., tone of voice, silences). Listening to the audio recordings enabled the researcher to recognise the impact of these aspects on participants’ responses, adding another dimension to the interpretation of the data.

Once themes were created and defined, they were checked against the original audio recordings and detailed notes. Extracts from the recordings which captured essences of the themes were documented also. Within social constructionism it is recognised that views are constructed within specific frames of reference, therefore it was not appropriate for themes to be clarified with another researcher. In qualitative research data can be returned to participants for validation. Horsburgh (2003) argues that this can

be problematic as the researcher and participants are likely to have different agendas and perspectives. In the current research study, participant checking took place during focus group and interview processes. Further exploration of questionnaire data was carried out within focus groups and interviews. Participant responses were scribed verbatim and participants were invited to correct the researcher if the meaning of what they had said was not reflected in the notes. Additionally, responses were often summarised and reflected back to participants to ensure these were understood by the researcher. Themes created from focus group data are presented in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter outlines the outcomes of the research study. An overview of the findings is presented, followed by details of the themes generated from each wave of data collection. Similarities and differences between focus groups are identified and the chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

4.1 Overview

The outcomes of data gathered from questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews from six mainstream comprehensive schools across two local authority settings in Wales are outlined. All forms of data collection informed the research questions presented in Chapter 2, with the exception of research question 1 which was mainly informed by questionnaire data. To illustrate the idiosyncratic nature of the groups, each focus group was analysed separately. Similarities and differences between the constructions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists are summarised. The implications of the findings are discussed in Chapter 5.

4.2 Support Staff and SMT Questionnaires

As described in detail in Chapter 3, questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An example of a coded questionnaire and questionnaire data organised into codes and extracts can be found in Appendix H. A summary of the main themes is presented following a description of the question three responses to the questionnaires, which were subject to a partial thematic analysis. Question three asked participants to rank answers they had provided in questions one and two in order of importance.

In total, 38 support staff participants completed questionnaires of these, eight participants did not answer question three. All SMT members (a total of six) answered question three. The initial stages of thematic analysis were utilised to analyse data gathered from responses to question three of the support staff and senior management questionnaires.

Participant responses for question three of the questionnaire were coded and entered into a Microsoft Excel file. Many of the coded responses became categories in order to represent the range of responses provided by participants, and to represent participant views as explicitly as possible, thus, some categories include only one response. This also enabled the data not to become too specific at this stage of the research process. Table 2A illustrates categorised support staff responses to question three of the questionnaire and Table 2B presents categorised responses from senior management team (SMT) members. Support staff and SMT responses remained separate as they presented views from two different groups. The numbers presented alongside the symbols within the tables represent participant rankings. A ranking of 1 represents the most important form of support as perceived by participants. Two participants (Sch2-5 and Sch2-9) did not provide rankings for their responses. Frequency of responses is presented at the end of each column.

4.2.1 Support staff question three responses

The range of responses suggests that participants valued a wide range of aspects which enabled them to feel supported within their roles. The most prevalent responses related to training, colleague support and support from managers (e.g., SENCo and SMT).

Table 2A represents training and manager support to be clearly relevant to support staff participants, illustrated by the frequency of responses and rankings used by participants. Aspects of training, such as INSET and external training, were separated as these appeared to provide different functions for participants. The ‘training’ category included named training for example, ‘ADHD training’. The term INSET (role specific) remained a category of its own, as some participants highlighted the need for INSET to be relevant to their roles and separate from whole school INSET. Manager support was ranked highly by the majority of participants. Consistent with this are responses for SENCo support, which was also ranked highly by participants. For many of the support staff participants, their manager was the SENCo, therefore these two categories could have been merged together. A decision was taken to keep them separate as some participants ranked both manager support and SENCo support, indicating different forms of support. Additionally, support from senior management (SMT support) was identified also to be important for some participants.

Support from colleagues was often ranked lower than other forms of support (e.g., training and manager support) however, it appeared relevant to staff due to the combined frequency of responses. Support staff named different colleagues that provided support, which was interpreted to suggest differences in the perceived value of support from various colleagues, as shown by participant rankings. Thus, colleague support was separated in different categories. The general category ‘colleague support’ remained as not all participants named specific colleagues that they valued support from. Additionally, ‘teacher support’ could have been placed within ‘colleague support (other role)’ however, it seemed pertinent that some support staff named teachers as supportive colleagues. Additionally, ‘other colleagues’ often included other members of ‘auxiliary’ staff such as pastoral support staff and school nurses.

Other forms of support that were identified, but received fewer responses, were team meetings/briefings, personal support, and outer agency support. Outer agency support encompassed support from unions and specialist teachers.

Table 2A: Support staff question three questionnaire responses

School	Participant		Training	Training (role specific)	External Training	INSET	Outer agency support	Contract Terms	School Support	Manager support	SENCo support	SENCo Admin Support	Colleague support	Colleague support (same role)	Colleague support (other role)	SMT support	Teacher support	Communication	Relationships	Team meetings	Daily Briefings	Sharing Information	Personal support	Performance Management	Individual Skills / Experiences	Guidance	Advice	Resources	Job satisfaction	Internet	Support from parents/staff			
1	1	Sch1-1	✓ ₃	✓ ₁			✓ ₂																											
	2	Sch1-2		✓ ₁			✓ ₂																											
	3	Sch1-4			✓ ₂	✓ ₁	✓ ₄							✓ ₃																				
	4	Sch1-7	✓ ₃	✓ ₁			✓ ₂																											
2	5	Sch2-1								✓ ₁₊₂			✓ ₃																					
	6	Sch2-2								✓ ₁	✓ ₂		✓ ₃				✓ ₄																	
	7	Sch2-5	✓								✓			✓	✓		✓								✓					✓				
	8	Sch2-6					✓ ₃		✓ ₂	✓ ₁																								
	9	Sch2-7	✓ ₁							✓ ₆				✓ ₅		✓ ₇				✓ ₄	✓ ₃	✓ ₂	✓ ₅											
	10	Sch2-8			✓ ₃	✓ ₁								✓ ₂																				
	11	Sch2-9								✓	✓			✓	✓		✓																	
	12	Sch2-10	✓ ₃₊₄									✓ ₂		✓ ₁₊₅		✓ ₆																		
	13	Sch2-11										✓ ₁	✓ ₂		✓ ₃	✓ ₄																		
	14	Sch2-12										✓ ₁		✓ ₃		✓ ₂																		
3	15	Sch3-1			✓ ₂	✓ ₃				✓ ₁						✓ ₅							✓ ₄											
	16	Sch3-2		✓ ₄						✓ ₂				✓ ₃	✓ ₆					✓ ₁		✓ ₅												
	17	Sch3-3		✓ ₁						✓ ₂																								
	18	Sch3-4	✓ ₂							✓ ₁							✓ ₃									✓ ₄	✓ ₅	✓ ₆						
	19	Sch3-5	✓ ₃					✓ ₁													✓ ₂													
	20	Sch3-6	✓ ₁₋₃																				✓ ₄		✓ ₅									
	21	Sch3-7		✓ ₁																														
	22	Sch3-9																					✓ ₂							✓ ₁				
	23	Sch3-10								✓ ₁																								
	24	Sch3-11																					✓ ₂							✓ ₁				
25	Sch3-12		✓ ₅		✓ ₄													✓ ₂	✓ ₁													✓ ₃		
4	26	Sch4-3					✓ ₆						✓ ₁₊₃	✓ ₅		✓ ₁					✓ ₄	✓ ₁							✓ ₂					
5	27	Sch5-2	✓ ₂							✓ ₁											✓ ₂													
	28	Sch5-3				✓ ₁				✓ ₁																								
	29	Sch5-4	✓ ₃		✓ ₁	✓ ₄				✓ ₂																								
	30	Sch5-5								✓ ₃				✓ ₂	✓ ₁																			
	Frequency		10	7	4	6	6	1	1	14	6	2	7	6	7	4	4	1	1	4	1	3	5	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	1	1		

Table 2B: Summary of SMT question three questionnaire responses

Local Authority	School	Participant		Training	External Training	INSET	Outer agency support	Manager support	Colleague support (same role)	SMT support	Performance Management	Shadowing	Lesson Observation	Support from health
LA 1	2	1	SMT Sch2-1	✓ ₅	✓ ₄	✓ ₃					✓ ₂	✓ ₁		
		2	SMT Sch3-1	✓ ₄₊₅			✓ ₃	✓ ₂			✓ ₁			✓ ₆
	3	SMT Sch3-2		✓ ₃	✓ ₂		✓ ₁							
LA 2	4	4	SMT Sch4-1					✓ ₁	✓ ₂	✓ ₃				
		5	SMT Sch4-2	✓ ₆		✓ ₅			✓ ₂		✓ ₃	✓ ₁	✓ ₄	
		6	SMT Sch4-3	✓ ₂							✓ ₁			
		Frequency⁶		4	2	3	1	3	2	1	4	2	1	1

⁷ Numbers presented alongside the symbol ✓ represent the order ranking allocated by the participant.

4.2.2 SMT question three responses

A total of six SMT members from three schools completed questionnaires. From the perspectives of SMT participants, Table 2B suggests that performance management is of most importance in terms of providing support to support staff, as represented by the frequency and rankings. Training received a high frequency of responses, suggesting it is also important, however, manager support received higher rankings, suggesting that this is of relevance to supporting staff in schools. It is noticeable that there are fewer categories within the SMT table in comparison to the support staff table, however, this is likely to be representative of the number of participants who completed questionnaires. ‘Performance management’ was only mentioned by one support staff participant and was ranked fairly low, suggesting there is a difference in how support is perceived by support staff and senior managers. However, there was more consensus between both groups with regard to valuing training and support from managers.

The remaining questions on the support staff and SMT questionnaires were analysed using thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). The following two sections outline the themes developed from this process.

⁶ Frequency refers to the total number of responses for each form of support identified by SMT participants.

Horsburgh (2003, p.309) suggests that “imposition of a neat structure upon data has the potential to create order at the expense of accuracy and it may be misleading to view categories as discrete, self-sufficient entities...” Thus, attempts are made within visual representations of themes for questionnaire, focus group and interview data, to illustrate connections and relationships.

4.2.3 Support staff and SMT questionnaire themes

Questionnaire responses were read, re-read, and coded. Codes and extracts were placed in a Microsoft Excel file and colour coded to the different aspects of support they represented. An example of questionnaire codes and extracts can be found in Appendix H. Five major themes were generated from support staff questionnaires. These were named, access to support, colleague support, working relationships, training and EP role. Three major themes were generated from SMT questionnaires: training, colleague support and continuing professional development (CPD). As the major findings of the study were generated from focus group data a summary of the themes created from support staff and SMT questionnaires is presented here. The reader is directed to Appendix H for a detailed synopsis of the themes generated from questionnaire data.

4.2.3.1 Summary of questionnaire themes

Questionnaire data indicated particular forms of support valued by support staff. Both support staff and SMT participants appeared to consider training and colleague support to be particularly relevant to enabling support staff to feel supported within their roles. Specific types of these forms of support were identified, for example, INSET and support from colleagues in the same role. Colleague support was considered to support both personal and skill development, whereas training mainly supported skill development. Training was the most frequently cited form of support that participants would like to receive more of.

Support from colleagues was closely related to working relationships, and aspects which seemed to support these were identified, for example, regular contact and communication between staff. Having opportunities to access support, access to information and opportunities to access development opportunities were important to support staff. Financial constraints appeared to be the greatest barrier to accessing opportunities.

SMT participants appeared to consider CPD opportunities to be more relevant than support staff, however, support staff considered sharing knowledge and information as important, which could be similar to SMTs' views of sharing good practice.

Focus groups were conducted with support staff from four schools, and two individual interviews with SMT participants from school 4, to further explore information gathered from questionnaires. The sections below outline the themes created from data gathered from focus groups and individual interviews.

4.3 Support Staff Focus Groups

Firstly, data generated from nominal group and ranking questions during support staff focus groups and SMT interviews will be presented. Secondly, themes created from support staff focus groups will be illustrated individually, followed by themes developed from SMT interview data.

4.3.1 Nominal group and ranking question responses

Participants in focus groups and interviews were provided with a selection of ten different forms of support and asked to rank them in order of importance/value to them. The ten examples of support were generated from responses to questionnaires. The aim was to further explore support staff and senior management views regarding particular types of support, and to use the nominal group approach to facilitate discussion, in addition to gaining a group consensus regarding types of support that were particularly valued.

Table 3 represents the accumulated responses generated by each focus group, illustrating group decisions regarding the importance of different forms of support. Senior managers were asked to rank responses to gain an understanding of their perceptions regarding what is important in terms of support for support staff, and to identify shared and conflicting views between the two groups. SMT responses are included in Table 3 alongside support staff focus group responses. Individual ranked responses for each focus group are presented in Appendix I. The numbers represented in square brackets refer to the number of participants in each focus group.

Table 3: Ranked responses from focus groups and semi-structured interviews

Type of Support	Focus Group 1 (School 2) [10]	Focus Group 2 (School 5) [5]	Focus Group 3 (School 4) [1]	Focus Group 4 (School 6) [5]	SMT Interview 1 (School 4)	SMT Interview 2 (School 4)
Training specifically related to role	1 st	4 th	6 th	3 rd	3 rd	2 nd
Support from manager (e.g., SENCo)	2 nd	4 th	2 nd	4 th	1 st	1 st
Support from colleagues (e.g., talking during lunch/break times)	3 rd	2 nd	3 rd	2 nd	6 th	6 th
Opportunities to share knowledge and information (e.g., via team meetings)	4 th	1 st	4 th	1 st	4 th	3 rd
Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers or those who have a different role)	5 th	3 rd	1 st	5 th	8 th	8 th
External training out of school	6 th	8 th	7 th	7 th	9 th	5 th
Internal training in school (e.g., INSET)	7 th	6 th	8 th	5 th	2 nd	4 th
Performance Management	8 th	9 th	5 th	9 th	5 th	9 th (1 st)
Support from family/friends	9 th	7 th	9 th	8 th	7 th	7 th
Outer Agency Support (e.g., Union/Local Authority)	10 th	10 th	10 th	10 th	10 th	10 th /3 rd

Table 3 illustrates a mixed response in relation to the importance of different types of support. A number of participants commented on the difficulty of ranking forms of support in order of importance, as they viewed many of them to be of equal value. In addition, participants identified a discrepancy between what they found important and what they received within their schools. For example, for Focus Group One participants, support from managers, particularly the SENCo, was highly valued, however, participants perceived this to be a form of support that was limited and an area to be developed within their school.

Participants were invited to identify forms of support that they thought should be included in the list. ‘Support from pupils’ families’ was proposed by one participant. Another participant suggested a category pertaining to ‘personal/emotional support’ however, they reported that this could be encompassed within the ‘support from colleagues’ category. An SMT participant suggested access to the school counsellor and an ‘environment’ category in terms of school ethos and valuing staff through facilities and resources.

Outside agency support was consistently ranked as least important, however most groups acknowledged that, depending on the situation, support from outside agencies, such as unions may be more valued. SMT interview 2 participant changed her ranking when she considered other forms of outside agency support, such as EPs and specialist teachers, and felt that they should be ranked much higher (for example, third). The majority of participants focussed on what was important to them on a daily basis, therefore it is not surprising that outside agency support was ranked least important, as staff are unlikely to receive this form of support daily.

Focus groups interpreted the forms of support on the list provided by the researcher, in reference to what was relevant to them in their school. For example, focus group 2 participants considered support from their manager to be from the HLTA as opposed to the SENCo and chose to interpret ‘support from other colleagues’, as individuals outside the school (e.g., specialist teachers) and did not include them in outside agency support.

Performance management appeared to be more important for school 4 participants, suggesting that performance management is more highly valued within this school, which may be unique to this school compared to the other schools that participated.

Table 3 illustrates some consensus between support staff across the different schools that participated. Support staff seemed to value: support from colleagues, support from manager, training related specifically to role, and opportunities to share knowledge and information. These forms of support appeared in the top five responses for each group, albeit in a different order, which suggests that these types of support are most valuable to the support staff included in the study in feeling supported.

SMT responses differed from support staff feedback, with SMT participants ranking ‘support from manager’ as most important and ranking support from colleagues lower down the scale. SMT participants considered this the most important form of support and this may reflect the roles they play or perceive themselves playing in supporting staff. However, focus groups 1 and 3 ranked support from manager as second most important, suggesting that support staff in these schools value support from managers highly.

There was greater consensus between SMT and support staff responses with regard to training and opportunities to share knowledge and information, which were perceived by both groups to be important aspects to supporting support staff.

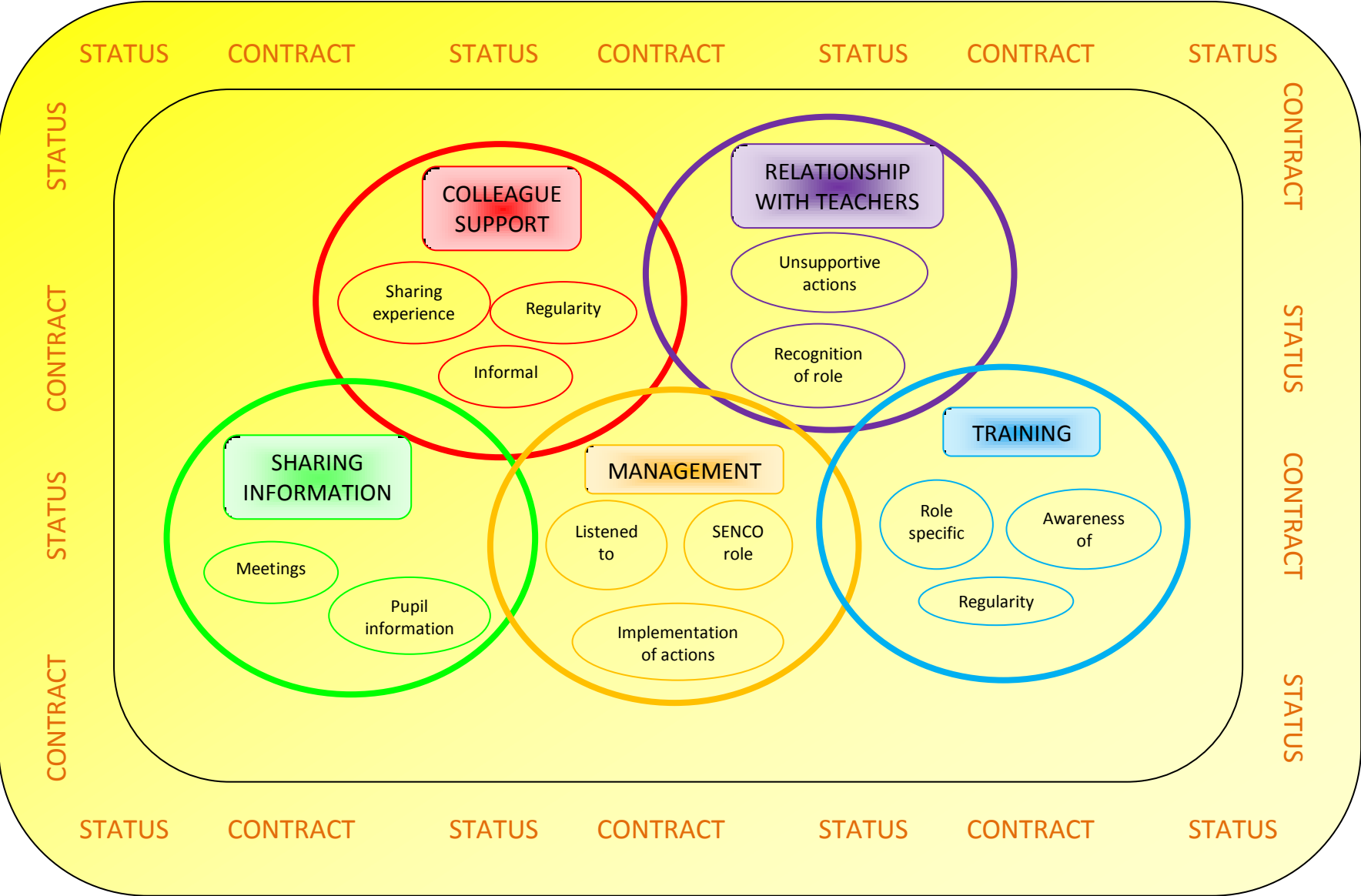
4.3.2 Themes developed from support staff focus groups

Chapter 3 outlined the process followed to analyse focus group data. The following section presents the themes generated from support staff focus groups.

4.3.2.1 Support staff focus group 1 themes

Six themes were generated from focus group 1 data. Each theme will be considered in turn, however, it is necessary to note the relationship between themes, as represented by the overlapping of themes in Figure 4.

Figure 4: Visual representation of themes generated from focus group 1 data



Status and Contract

Status and contract terms seemed to impact on all of the other themes generated, and is visually represented by the outer circle encompassing the other five themes.

Participants referred to being the 'lowest down in ranks' and 'not a high priority'. Contract terms such as, annual contracts and changes to job descriptions appeared to impact on how support staff perceived support in their school. Support staff commented that they perceived that they were seen to be disposable, and therefore were not invested in as a group.

Focus group 1: ...we're not expected to stay here very long, it's not like teachers who are expected to stay for a number of years, most of us haven't been here for that long and aren't expected to stay that long so don't bother training us.

Participants discussed the impact of annual contracts and the uncertainty of having to re-apply for their jobs. This was perpetuated by a view that they could be replaced easily by other individuals.

Focus group 1: ...they actually said that to us well its easy to get someone else...who'll come and do the job, if you don't want to do it.

This appeared to contribute to feelings of being undervalued as professionals. It appeared also to engender feelings of 'helplessness' and a view that there was little that participants could do to change their situation.

The negative impact of status and contract terms seemed to have bearing on the other themes, particularly with regard to colleague support and relationships with teachers. The perceived status of support staff in this particular school appeared to encourage a 'them and us' culture, so that support staff bonded together and supported one another, with relationships with teachers and managers being fractured. Furthermore, as a result of their perceived lack of status in school, there was a sense of absolution of responsibility, with participants remarking:

Focus group 1: ...they're lots of things we can't deal with can we, we just pass it onto appropriate people and then assume they're acting on it.

A lot of things are nothing to do with us are they?

Staff recognised they had some responsibility in terms of communicating their support needs, however, felt they were not listened to and therefore felt nothing could change as a result. This appeared to contribute further to state of ‘helplessness’ and a ‘them and us’ culture within the school.

Training

Training was highly valued by support staff in focus group 1 and was considered crucial to staff being able to perform their roles.

Focus group 1: Well if you don’t get the proper training or if you know there’s a specific training you want training for, you’re not gunna do your job are you?

The training theme referred to participants increasing their knowledge of ‘conditions’ in order to develop understanding of pupils’ needs and to enhance support provided to pupils.

Sub-themes included ‘role specific’, ‘regularity’, and ‘awareness of training’. Participants identified training specific to their role as helpful to enabling support for pupils to be improved. Participants perceived INSET in school to be aimed at teachers, which did not relate to them, however, they felt that if INSET catered for their roles, this would be of value. Within this sub-theme, issues regarding the suitability of training arose and the need for participants’ stage of development and knowledge to be considered prior to training. Participants discussed the irregularity of training and the need for training to be updated in order for staff to be aware of changes in approaches and legislation. It was suggested that if training was not updated this could leave staff vulnerable in terms of accountability. Again this seemed to contribute to staff feeling ‘alone’ and engendering feelings of being undervalued as professionals.

Focus group 1: ...if you’re not constantly aware of the changes in the laws you know something could happen and well you could turn round and say I didn’t know that...but who does the buck fall with then?

The irregularity of training linked with staff status. As previously mentioned, participants believed they were not invested in, as they were not expected to remain in their roles for a substantive amount of time. A comment made by a participant suggests staff do remain in their roles, potentially adding to feelings of being unrecognised and undervalued.

Focus group 1: I've been on two courses in five years.

Additionally, awareness of training was necessary for staff to identify appropriate training opportunities in performance management reviews. Participants communicated that they would like to receive more training, however, thought that, if they did, it could be perceived negatively by other staff. This was related again to their perceived status in school.

Colleague support

Participants valued support from colleagues. The majority of the group perceived support from colleagues (e.g., other LSAs) as more important than support from other colleagues (e.g., teaching staff). A minority view within the group perceived it to be the opposite of this, as more time was spent with teaching staff within lessons. The sub-theme, 'sharing experience', refers to shared experiences within roles, and participants being able to relate to one another's experiences. As one participant commented:

Focus group 1: We all know what each of us have to put up with in the day...

Sharing ideas, strategies and previous experiences in other roles was also important to colleagues feeling supported. Colleague support in this school appeared to be facilitated by participants regularly meeting informally, during break and lunch times, enabling participants, opportunities to talk. No formal arrangements were in place for participants to meet together and participants in this school did not have team meetings due to contractual hours. Participants commented that this was currently not an issue for them, reporting that if they did not have the same breaks, team meetings might become a necessity and therefore, become valued as a support system.

Relationship with teachers

Participants shared the view that support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers) was important to feeling supported within their roles, as they worked with them daily. Participants' relationships with teachers appeared to impact greatly on their role and their feelings about their roles. Participants discussed the lack of recognition and understanding of their roles by teachers, and this was an aspect that participants wanted to be different.

Participants seemed to feel unsupported by teachers in their school. Participants referred to feeling "unwelcome" and being seen as a "nuisance" in some classrooms, which impacted on their relationships with teachers. Participants suggested that teachers did not understand their roles, and could feel threatened as a result.

Focus group 1: ...perhaps 'cos they don't understand why we're there they feel slightly threatened perhaps.

This could reflect teachers' concerns about their roles being de-professionalised (NUT, 2003; Thompson, 2006; Yarker, 2005).

Participants felt that there was a perception that they were "untrained". Participants felt unappreciated by teachers, although this was not consistent across the school, with some commenting that some teachers were "*grateful*" for their support. Participants disliked the inconsistency between teachers and wanted to be treated more fairly across the school.

Focus group 1: ...get it from some, don't get it from others and I think that's when you can see the really big difference.

This seemed to capture the essence of what support staff wanted to receive. Support staff within this school wanted their roles to be understood and recognised consistently across the school.

Relationships with teachers seemed to contribute to a 'us and them' culture and participants appeared to talk about teachers fairly negatively. This negativity seemed to be generated from feelings of being undervalued and unappreciated, impacting on participants' perceptions of being supported by teaching colleagues.

Management

Support from managers was identified as highly important by participants in focus group 1. Participants referred to the lack of support from managers, and in particular the SENCo, and a desire to have more.

Participants wanted managers such as the SENCo and senior managers to be more readily available, referring to the need to “make an appointment”. Being listened to and actions being implemented were considered important in terms of management.

Focus group 1: We’re not always listened to as to what we need.

Participants’ perceived themselves to be considered the ‘lowest rank’ therefore, there was a reliance, and need for actions to be implemented by senior members. For example, although there was a minority view that performance management was important as it enabled participants to communicate their views, the majority of participants viewed performance management as unimportant, as no actions were acted upon as a result. Actions not being implemented impacted negatively on staff and contributed to them feeling undervalued.

Focus group 1: ...if they’re not acted on you can feel a bit disheartened really.

Issues regarding the role of the SENCo were identified by participants. Participants viewed the SENCo to be the person responsible for implementing support structures. The team leader was identified as the person who disseminated information to support staff, however, participants reported that this should be the role of the SENCo. Participants were unsure how an EP could provide support to them, although, they identified that the SENCo should be the individual responsible for liaising with the EP and cascading information down to staff. Furthermore, participants highlighted the importance of the role of the headteacher in supporting staff, and the need for him/her to be aware of situations. This seemed to stem from a desire for other members of staff to have some empathy and understanding regarding support staff participants’ roles.

Focus group 1: ...head should play a part cos sometimes I don't find that she's knows the extent of some of the things that we do put up with...

Sharing information

Sharing information was relevant to staff and was linked to the themes 'support from colleagues' and 'management'. Participants believed sharing knowledge and information was achieved within their team through their informal meetings with colleagues. Whole school meetings were not attended by participants due to contract hours, thus they were reliant on other staff to share information.

Participants identified the need for pupil information to be more readily available. Participants referred to having access to pupil individual education plans (IEPs) but these were considered limited in terms of providing information about individual pupils and how to support them. Participants referred to being told "they've had a bad time and have got lots of problems" (focus group 1 participant) and believed that this was not sufficient information to support pupils. Participants suggested that in order to support pupils effectively information needed to be shared with them and teachers.

Focus group 1: ...how can you give them what they need, how can you deal with them individually when you know nothing about them?

Participants identified the need for there to be feedback between staff, for example, being informed of the outcomes and the actions taken as a result of passing on information regarding an incident.

Summary of focus group 1 themes

For focus group 1 participants, their status and contract terms appeared to impact greatly on all aspects of their role and how supported they felt within their roles. Participants perceived themselves to have little status within the school and as a result an 'us and them' culture appeared to have developed. Uncertainty in participants contracts engendered feelings of being undervalued as professionals. Support from colleagues was valued by the participants, and this was related to receiving support from each other within their team as their perception was that they did not receive support from colleagues elsewhere in the school (e.g., managers and teachers). As a result, relationships with teachers and managers in this particular school

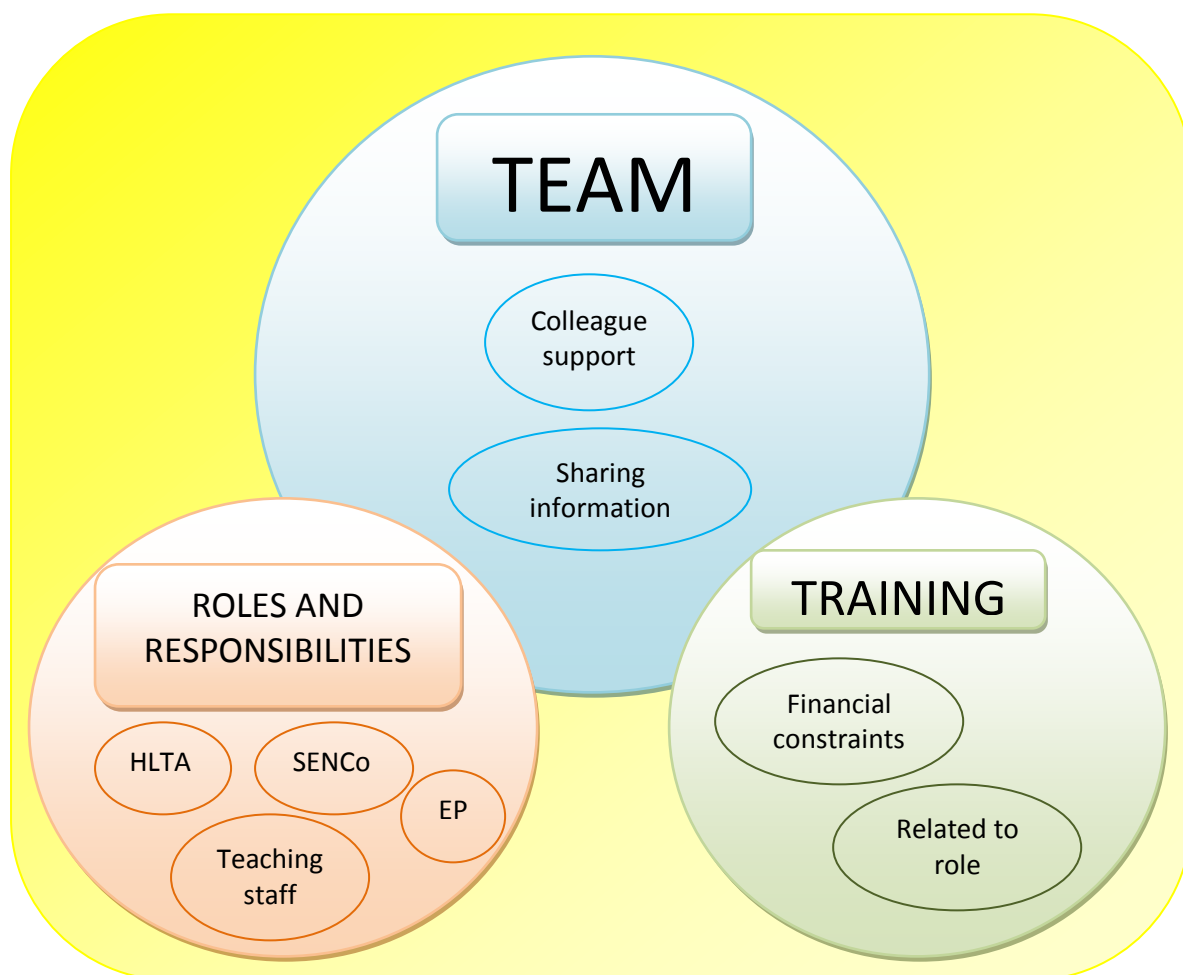
appeared fractured. It seemed that if this was resolved, support from managers and teachers would contribute to staff feeling valued within their roles and supported.

Participants in this school were unsure how an EP could provide support and did not seem to believe they were valued enough to warrant EP time. Due to their perceived lack of status there appeared to be an absolution of responsibility and it was considered the SENCo's role to liaise with the EP and cascade information down.

4.3.2.2 Support staff focus group 2 themes

Figure 5 provides a visual representation of themes generated from focus group data. Each theme will be considered in turn. It is important to note that a HLTA participated in the focus group alongside support staff they led within a team, which may have impacted upon participants' responses.

Figure 5: Visual representation of themes generated from focus group 2 data



Team

Information from focus group 2 suggested that participants had an enormous ‘sense of team’ which comprised of two sub-themes (‘sharing information’ and ‘colleague support’). The participants within the focus group appeared to have a sense of belonging to the learning support team, and this was dissociated from a sense of a belonging with the whole school. A participant commented that the team were, “a little world up here that goes alongside other things, rather than part of it”. Although participants seemed to want to be a part of the whole school, this perception appeared to facilitate group cohesion and encourage autonomy from the SENCo and the rest of the school. Concurrently, this autonomy and ‘sense of team’ seemed to be maintained by a view of:

Focus group 2: We just get on with our job...we're in it and it's quite hard to sort of see what might be.

Participants wanted to be appreciated, valued and respected and suggested that this is what 'anyone would want in any role'.

Opportunities to share knowledge and information were identified by participants as the most valuable in terms of support. For the participants in focus group 2, this was achieved through regular team meetings (between the HLTA and LSAs) after school, providing participants with a "way of offloading" and enabling participants to have "a voice". Participants reflected that changes to the team structure had been recently implemented (approximately a year), which had impacted positively on them as a team, and enabled them to feel more valued.

Focus group 2: ...we're valued more, now, we have more of a voice and er and er, we're recognised more now than we have been ever before..."

Participants reported that team meetings provided an opportunity to share strategies and "best practice", enabling staff to feel less isolated. Having a safe environment to share information was recognised to be important in supporting participants to raise issues prior to them escalating into major concerns.

Focus group 2: Don't feel like your failing, you you you feel you're voicing a concern rather than failing which is a positive...

Sharing knowledge and information in meetings was closely linked with support from colleagues. Informal support, during breaktimes, as opposed to structured, formal situations, was identified by participants as helpful to feeling emotionally supported by colleagues. Participants believed these informal times provided 'immediate' support to discuss matters unrelated to work, enabling participants to have a "mental break" and show that they have "a life". Participants felt these opportunities helped to "build them as a team", however, it was noted by one participant that informal sharing of information could potentially lead to important matters not being referred on.

Related to the 'team' theme were the themes 'roles and responsibilities' and 'training', as represented visually by Figure 5.

Roles and Responsibilities

Participants emphasised that there was a clear hierarchy and understanding of what was expected from particular individuals within the school. The 'roles and responsibilities' theme links with the 'team' theme as aspects of the HLTA role and SENCo role seemed to maintain a 'sense of team' and in turn provided support to staff.

There was a clear team structure and the role of the HLTA appeared to be central to supporting staff and ensuring structures were in place and procedures were followed. Participants discussed the role of the HLTA in liaising with the SENCo and participants perceived there to be a clear line of communication between the two. Participants suggested the SENCo would be "*bombarded*" if this system was not in place and perceived that it was easier for the HLTA to liaise with the SENCo.

Focus group 2: ...easier for one person to track her down I suppose...than it is for fifteen people to get her at different times.

Participants commented that this structural arrangement within the department was helpful to them and enabled participants to know "*who to go to, for what*". The HLTA appeared to take responsibility for ensuring staff felt a 'sense of belonging' to the team and organising team meetings, enabling staff to feel more supported in school.

Focus group 2: I would hope now...and you asked an LSA if they felt a valued member of the team, I'd hope that everybody would say yes, cos that's certainly what I try that's how I want people to feel...

These clear roles and responsibilities helped to maintain a 'sense of team' and seemed to encourage dissociation from the SENCo. Participants held clear views regarding the SENCo and EP role and how these should function within the school. There were clear lines of communication and responsibility and it was expected that the SENCo would liaise with an EP and any information would be cascaded down to staff.

Participants were unsure of the role of EPs and thought that support staff did not necessarily need to be involved in liaison with an EP. Participants were content with receiving information second hand from EPs and did not see the benefit in liaising directly with an EP.

Focus group 2: Not everybody needs to know all the issues going on for a certain child.

Furthermore, staff status was perceived to have a bearing on liaison with an EP.

Focus group 2: I wouldn't expect any of the level ones to have to discuss things like that with an Ed Psyc that's that's something that would be passed on...

The comment above could suggest that support staff are not 'qualified' enough to discuss issues with an EP and are perhaps not 'worthy' of EP time. Alternatively, it could reflect a desire to retain clear roles and responsibilities and ensure members of support staff are not 'put upon'.

Roles within classrooms appeared to be relevant to participants in terms of feeling effective within their role. Participants referred to a desire for teachers to differentiate work more readily for pupils and this was associated with them being able to perform their role more effectively. Participants communicated feelings of uncertainty regarding their perceived ability to differentiate pupil work adequately so that teaching aims would be achieved, suggesting that roles were not clearly defined within the classroom. Participants wanted teachers to have a greater understanding of pupils' needs and this was associated with a view that teachers did not take notice of information provided to them. Being recognised and valued for their contribution in supporting pupils' learning in classrooms also appeared important to participants.

Focus group 2: I wouldn't like to go into a classroom and not be appreciated by the teacher and that doesn't mean oh well done you, that means an acknowledgement that I'm there to assist in the learning of the pupil and that it's valuable...

Training

Training was identified as another area of support that helped support staff. Participants emphasised that training needed to be tailored to their roles. Financial constraints were cited as a barrier to training. Notably, however, participants seemed to value other aspects of support, such as colleague support and sharing information which was:

Focus group 2: ...the stuff that doesn't cost the school anything.

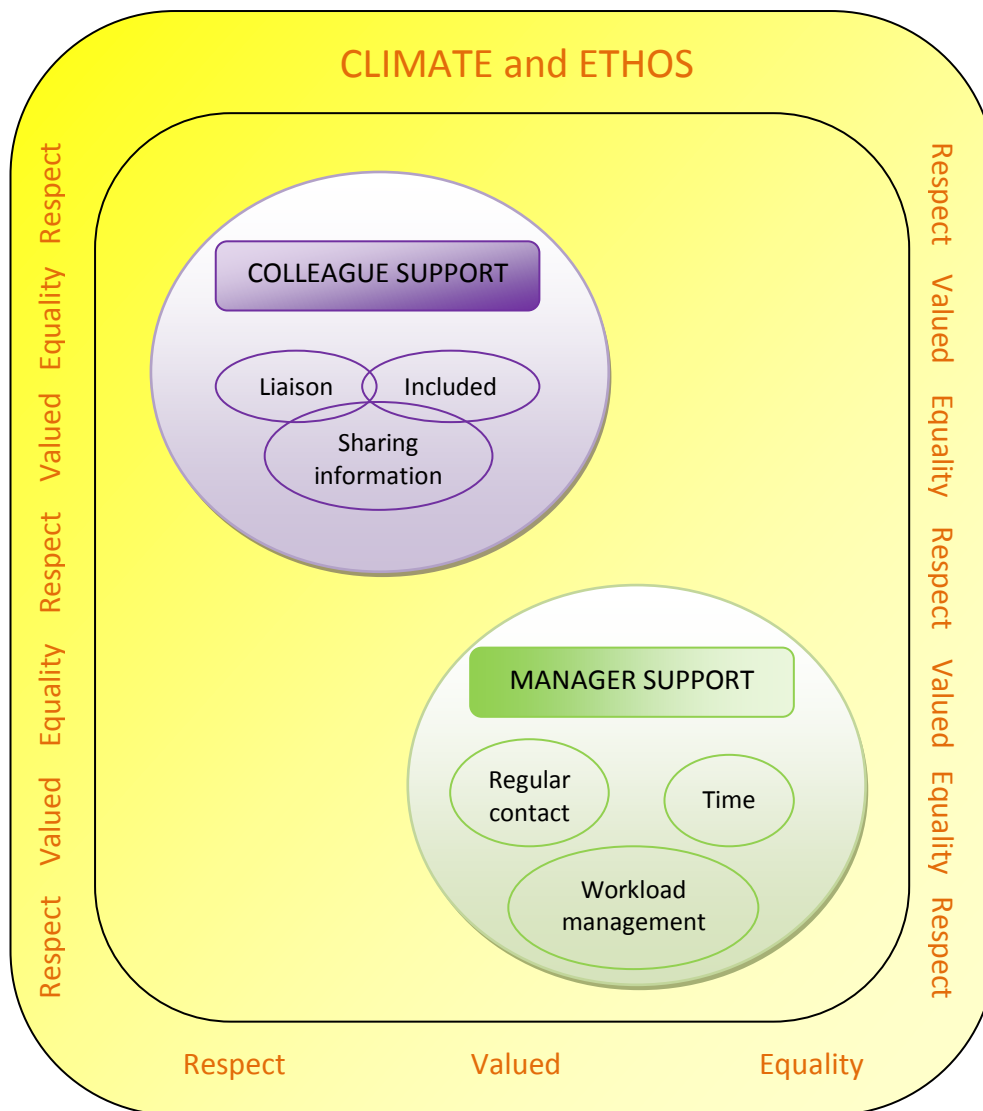
Focus group 2 summary

For focus group 2 participants, having a 'sense of team' and belonging to the learning support team seemed to be particularly important to feeling supported within their roles. This 'sense of team' was directly generated through opportunities to share information during team meetings and receiving informal support from colleagues during breaks. Clear roles and responsibilities within the team, particularly relating to HLTA and SENCo roles, contributed to creating this 'sense of team' and generating a dissociation between the LSA team (including HLTA), the SENCo and the rest of the school. Additionally, issues regarding their roles within classrooms and teachers recognising their role were raised, which seemed to impact on participants' perceptions of how well they could perform their roles and contributed also to bringing the team together. Consideration of the role of the EP regarding supporting staff was limited and was reflected in a view that it was not the role of support staff to liaise with EPs.

4.3.2.3 Support staff focus group 3 themes

Figure 6 provides a visual representation of the themes generated from focus group 3 data. Each theme is considered in turn. It is important to note that themes presented for this focus group are limited to representing the views of only one participant.

Figure 6: Visual representation of themes generated from focus group 3 data



Climate and Ethos

The focus group 3 participant identified the climate and ethos of her school as being valuable to her feeling supported within her role. The caring nature of the school and staff respecting one another were cited as aspects of the climate and ethos. The participant suggested that being treated respectfully and as a professional encouraged others to act in this way also, generating a positive cycle. The participant perceived there to be clear hierarchies within the school, however, the participant thought that all staff were considered equal, which helped to generate feelings of being accepted and valued within the school.

Additionally, the participant discussed being provided opportunities to discuss her role with staff and new staff and for them to be aware of her role, contributing to her feeling valued and respected within her role. For the focus group 3 participant, the role of the headteacher seemed to be highly important in enabling staff to feel equal and generating a positive climate and ethos, which contributed to her feeling valued within her role.

Focus group 3: The pastoral side of, umm manage of staff, cos it comes from the top in this school...it's something he clearly puts on the top of the agenda as well, I think it comes right the way down then, that cascades down through the staff, it cascades down through the pupils and and I think umm so it is important to this school.

Colleague Support

Colleague support refers to support from colleagues in the form of liaison, sharing information and feeling included. For the focus group of one participant, support from colleagues was extremely important and was related to feeling respected within her role.

Focus group 3: I think that staff to staff support is crucial and really whatever your role...to be treated with respect by other people and to have your role treated, you're a professional, I respect it, that is the most important thing...everybody's valued, the minute you have people that don't feel valued you have problems...that works in this school, everyone's valued.

For the focus group 3 participant support from colleagues referred to all other members of staff in school, as there were no other Key Stage 4 learning mentors. Staff liaison was important to the focus group 3 participant feeling supported within her role and was linked to perceptions of being valued. Liaison between colleagues was facilitated by geographical placement of staff, enabling both formal and informal opportunities to liaise, share information and be included within teams in school. This seemed to engender feelings of being part of something and enabled the participant to feel supported within her role. Additionally, the personal and emotional support provided by colleagues was seen as a strength of focus group 3 participants' school.

Focus group 3: ...lots of liaising really and informal sharing of information which again makes you feel part of it and useful, which is crucial isn't it?

Manager Support

‘Support from manager’ was identified as an important area of support in providing both professional and personal support. Regular contact with a manager and the manager providing time was considered valuable. The focus group 3 participant appreciated the role her manager played in ensuring her workload was manageable and that the aims of her role corresponded with whole school aims, enabling the focus group 3 participant to feel part of the school.

Focus group 3: ...so very caring but also at the same time then, you know will be the person to sit down and say right, you need to have, to fit in with the school management, school development plan and everybody’s sort of personal development you need to also have your goals and how you want to move the role forward this year, so she’s coming at it from all angles, really and doing it very efficiently.

EP role

Although the EP role did not develop into a theme, it is worth including the perceptions of the focus group 3 participant as this was an exploratory study and this was a research question to be answered. The focus group 3 participant felt that it was the role of the SENCo to liaise with an EP and the current system in place in her school was satisfactory, however issues were identified regarding understanding what an EP does.

Focus group 3: ...at the moment I see the role of the EP as someone that comes in from externally when required, when requested, works predominately with the SENCo, and works with you know, I don’t know the children that are really at the edge of behaviour bordering on statements and that sort of thing I imagine but I’m imagining that and that’s with twenty years teaching experience so if I’m imagining that after twenty years experience it’s not that explicit.

The participant considered that it would be interesting to liaise with an EP, however, the participant felt that EP involvement did not necessarily link with the learning coach role and had implications for overstepping boundaries and roles.

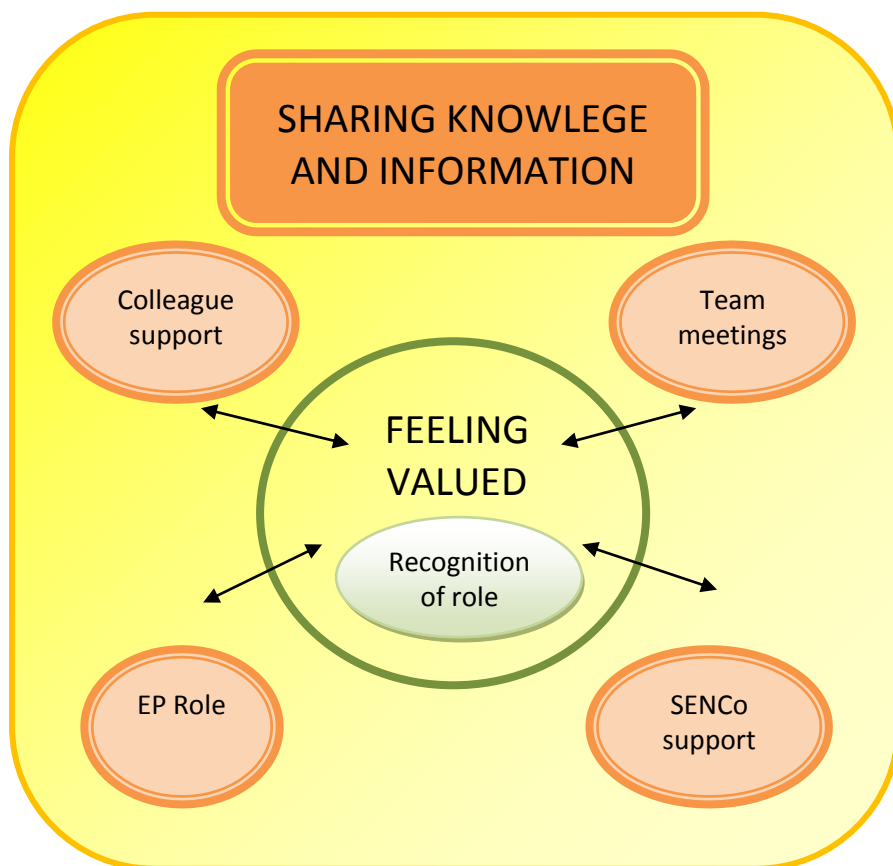
Focus group 3 summary

For the focus group 3 participant, feeling valued and respected within her role was particularly important to feeling supported in school. Support from colleagues and support from manager helped to contribute to feeling valued and respected, and these were considered to ultimately be part of something greater - the school ethos.

4.3.2.4 Support staff focus group 4 themes

Figure 7 provides a visual representation of themes created from focus group 4 data. Sharing knowledge and information was a high priority for the participants in this school and this was closely linked with feeling valued within their school. The sub-themes, 'colleague support', 'team meetings', 'SENCo support' and 'EP' represent different platforms to share information.

Figure 7: Visual representation of themes generated from focus group 4 data



Sharing knowledge and information

Sharing knowledge and information was particularly important to focus group 4 participants. Participants suggested that it was crucial to their role within the school, and participants associated having information about pupils with being more efficient in their roles. A participant commented:

Focus group 4: ...because without all that you can't really function that, you know you can do your job better if you know more about people you're working with an' all that.

How staff were deployed within the school meant that support staff did not always support the same pupils, therefore sharing information between each other was of particular relevance. Participants commented that without up to date information they were required to manage potentially emotive situations 'ad hoc'. Furthermore, lack of information seemed to impact on participants' perceptions of how well they were performing their roles.

Focus group 4: If you know information you can be proactive whereas we're being reactive often and sometimes it's a little too late.

Participants emphasised that they would like to receive information about pupils more frequently. Sharing knowledge and information appeared to enable participants to develop self-efficacious beliefs about their ability to support pupils, thus impacting positively on pupils.

Focus group 4: Because if you've got the information you'll get better results...

Additionally, roles were perceived to be more rewarding as a result of having access to information.

Focus group 4: Feel like you've actually achieved something.

Sharing knowledge and information encompassed issues regarding support from colleagues and team meetings. 'Colleague support' for focus group 4 participants refers to the professional and personal support received from each other during break and lunchtimes. Participants suggested that the opportunity to meet during breaktimes was helpful to

discussing any difficulties and sharing information about potential strategies that might be helpful. Opportunities to discuss aspects outside of school were important also to participants.

Focus group 4: We all share bits of our lives with each other because it's nice to have that support you know.

Sharing information and support from colleagues was closely related to team meetings. Participants shared that they did not have team meetings but had team briefings twice a week instead. Participants reported these were insufficient in meeting their needs as the briefings did not provide them with an opportunity to share and discuss their views. It was perceived as a platform for the SENCo to 'give' information.

Focus group 4: Don't really get an opportunity to share our concerns about the pupils...it's too brief a meeting.

The move from team meetings to 'briefings' may suggest a loss of 'thickening' of relationships that occurs within meetings, through learning about each other. Thus, the relationships within this team have become more functional, which may indicate a loss of depth and breadth, affecting feelings of affiliation and autonomy. Additionally, the emphasis on the information 'give' by the SENCo may be suggestive of an authoritarian type approach, which seemed to disempower participants.

Participants expressed that they would like to have weekly team meetings to discuss matters and believed this would provide a private platform to discuss issues. Participants discussed that pupils could often overhear conversations during break and lunchtimes and thus there was potential for private information to be unintentionally shared with pupils. Furthermore, participants reported that less information was being shared with them, which appeared to generate feelings of being undervalued.

Focus group 4: ...as the years have gone on we're getting told less and like our meetings have stopped and we're being told less as well and we're dismissed if we ask a question.

Participants were not always privy to the same information as a result of not having a formal platform to share information. It was reported that instead, information was shared

inconsistently between participants during breaktimes, thus some staff felt “foolish” when they were unaware of information.

Within sharing information, issues regarding ‘SENCo support’ and ‘EP role’ were discussed. Participants believed ‘support from manager’ was highly important as he or she was the person who could implement actions. Participants found it helpful to be able to check out practice with the SENCo and to be able to pass on information, in order for further action to be taken.

Focus group 4: ...you think did I do right on that time and they could say yes you did or no you didn’t.

Participants reported that information from the SENCo was insufficiently communicated, thus believed that they should be included in meetings with the SENCo and an EP.

Focus group 4: ...or we get snippets of information and when I’ve read the EP report afterwards I’ve been flabbergasted that the information hasn’t been given.

Additionally, participants believed they had a lot of valuable information about pupils that would be helpful for EPs. Participants felt undervalued as a consequence of not being included in meetings with EPs.

Focus group 4: It comes down to being valued enough doesn’t it, if we’re valued enough that would all happen, but we’re not really.

Participants wanted EPs to share strategies regarding particular pupils which they could implement and discussed receiving a separate report from EPs with strategies for individual pupils that could be distributed to staff. Focus group 4 participants constructed the role of the EP in terms of sharing information and strategies regarding specific pupils or groups of pupils.

Feeling valued

As discussed above, 'sharing knowledge and information' was particularly relevant to participants in focus group 4 feeling supported within their school and this impacted on feeling valued. Additional issues were identified which also impacted on staff feeling valued and was mainly related to participants' roles being recognised. Being listened to was also identified as an area which contributed to feeling valued.

Participants suggested that INSETs were inappropriate for them and reflected "tick boxes" that senior management had to fulfil. Thus, participants' perceived that their roles were not recognised, potentially contributing to staff feeling undervalued.

Having roles unrecognised by other staff members appeared to generate feelings of being undervalued. Participants reported the headteacher did not "*see the value of a SEN department*" and commented that staff did not understand their roles. Participants felt that some teachers did not want their support in classes.

Focus group 4: some teachers don't even want you in there, there's not many but there are a few and they're the ones that don't see the value of you being in there.

Participants recognised that this view was not shared across all teachers, however, they felt that many, particularly newly qualified teachers, did not know how to work with support staff effectively. Ultimately, participants wanted to feel that they were making a difference and to be recognised for it.

Focus group 4: ...the last thing we want to do is walk out of a class and think well what was I in there for 'cos I didn't do anything and yet you come out of most lessons and think yeah I think I made a difference to that lesson, I think I helped you know that's how you want to feel.

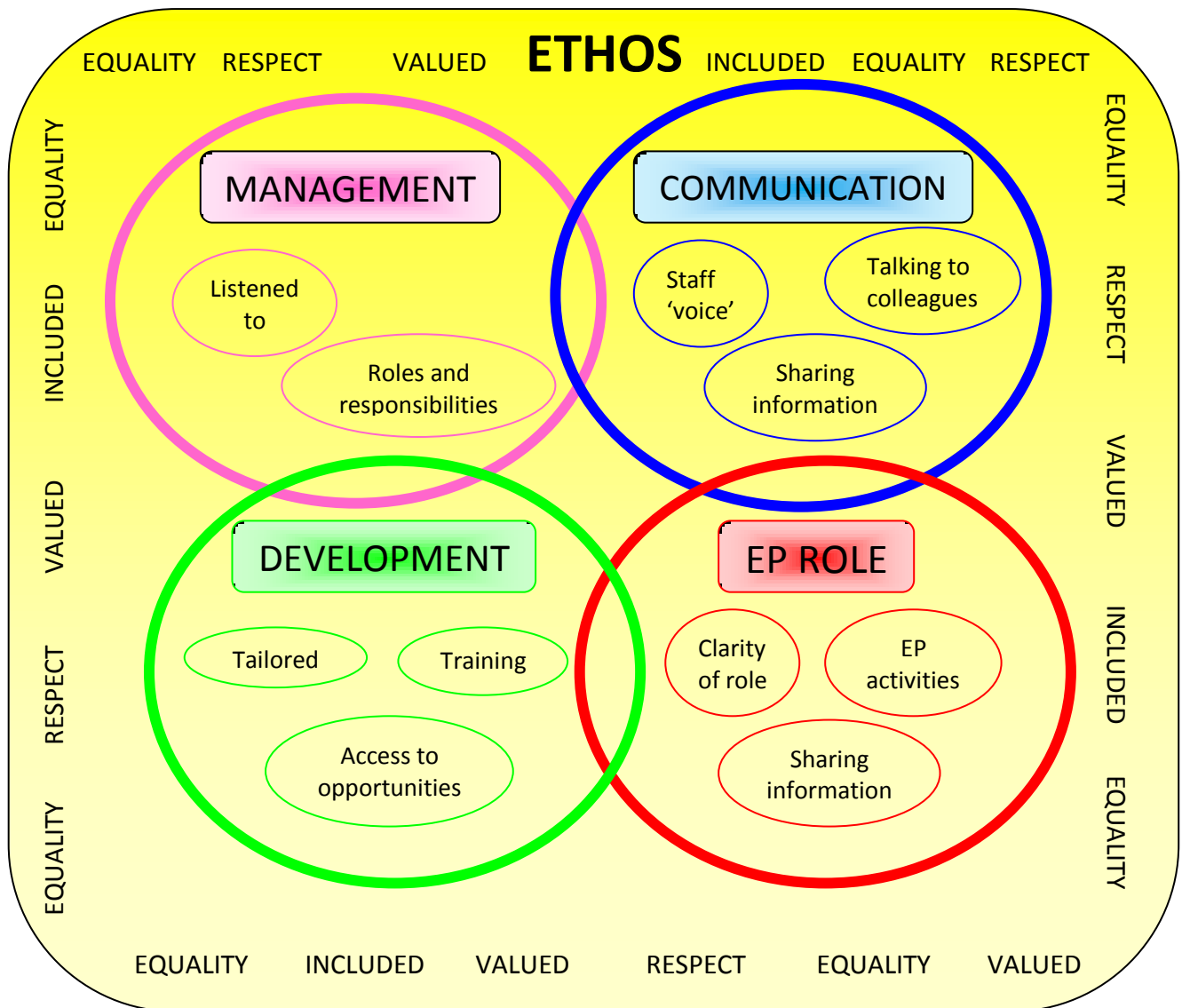
Focus group 4 summary

Sharing knowledge and information was of particular relevance to focus group 4 participants feeling supported. Participants appeared to make a direct link between sharing knowledge and information and being valued. Participants perceived that they were not valued as professionals as information was not shared with them. There appeared to be a collective view that sharing information between colleagues and the team would enable participants to feel more supported within their roles and would have a positive impact on how they performed their roles. Support staff roles being recognised by other members of staff appeared also to be linked with feeling valued.

4.3.3 Senior Management Interview Themes

Individual semi-structured interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke (2006). Appendix J provides an example of codes and associated extracts generated from semi-structured interview transcripts. Figure 8 provides a visual representation of the main themes developed from semi-structured interviews with two SMT participants from school 4. Similar to support staff themes, the overlap between themes is representative of a relationship between them. It is necessary to highlight that the following themes were generated from two SMT interviews, and both participants were members of the same school (school 4), therefore, are only representative of the combined views of these members of staff.

Figure 8: Visual representation of themes generated from SMT interview data



Ethos

The ethos theme represents how the ethos of the school impacts on support for staff. Being valued, respected, included, and treated with equality were subthemes generated from SMT participant data, which were interpreted as creating the ethos of the school. The impact of school ethos on support for staff is visually represented, in Figure 8, by the words encircling the other themes.

SMT participants suggested that the ethos of the school was particularly important to enabling support staff to feel supported. One participant stated:

SMT 1: I think the ethos of the school in terms of valuing support staff has to be the number one.

Being included in all aspects of school activities, such as INSET, and being included in social aspects, were considered to enable, staff to feel part of the school and feel like a ‘full’ member of staff.

SMT 2: I just think that they need to be made to feel that they are complete members of staff.

Being included was related to feeling part of a team and participants made reference to geographical arrangements which enabled support staff to be in one area together, which was included as part of the whole school.

SMT 2: ...they’re all sort of all together in one area which is, even, even though it sounds as if it’s just one part of the school it isn’t, it’s part of the school. And it’s included...

Valuing staff was considered important by SMT participants. Participants referred to valuing staff through resources and facilities and this appeared to be linked with a perception that this would benefit staff performance.

SMT 1: ...where they’re being felt, you know undervalued um then they’re not going to contribute to the tasks, the job in hand, your not getting the best out of them.

Respect was considered important to supporting staff roles within schools and was closely linked to equality; both of which had implications for how pupils perceived support staff roles.

SMT 1: Er there is a tendency possibly with support staff that children will look down at them and think they are not as important as teachers, well we have to work against that and instil that's the environment of equal, equality for all.

Management

The management theme represents the role of management in supporting staff in school. Managers were considered to provide support both in terms of professional practice, and personal support. The sub-themes 'listened to' and 'roles and responsibilities' refer to the role of managers in listening to support staff and the specific roles they have in supporting staff.

SMT participants referred to support staff having a senior member of staff to listen to their views and this related to enabling support staff to feel part of the school.

SMT 1: ...it's important that they feel that they have someone to turn to of seniority. That, um it's valuing their voice it's it's an opportunity for them to offload, it's an opportunity to ask for advice, erm, you know crucially important again for them to feel they are part of the school.

SMT participants perceived it was the role of senior managers in school to ensure staff were supported and the need for SMT to be aware of situations so that they could influence support in school was highlighted. Although participants confided that it was ultimately the headteacher's responsibility to ensure support was in place for staff, it was recognised that responsibility was devolved to other senior members including SENCOs.

SMT 2: Because senior managers have a role in making sure that all staff are supported.

SMT participants believed that having clear roles and responsibilities was important to enabling staff to know who to contact, and these structures fostered a sense of support. Performance management was closely linked to management and needed to be targeted for it to be supportive.

SMT 1: Performance management if it is done well if it's again targeted at er professional development and improvement and supporting people.

Communication

This theme represents communication as a support structure for staff. Communication refers to talking with colleagues, staff 'voice', and sharing information. Opportunities to talk with colleagues were considered beneficial by SMT participants to supporting staff.

SMT 1: ...you know, yes those those opportunities to have a quick coffee and have a chat...and talk to each other is is important...

Sharing information was an important facet of communication, in terms of sharing good practice and sharing information between staff and managers. SMT participants thought that it was important that support staff had a 'voice' and that this was 'heard' by senior members of the school. This seemed to be achieved mainly through staff meetings. Having voices 'heard' appeared to suggest that further actions were required to be taken by senior members in order to reflect that staff had been listened to.

SMT 2: ...that they, that their voice is being heard really.

The busyness and unpredictability of schools were identified as potential barriers to staff communication. It seemed that, clear systems of communication, opportunities to share information and be listened to, were perceived by SMT participants to be important to supporting support staff.

Development

The development theme represents opportunities for support staff to access continuing professional development tailored to pupil and staff needs. SMT participants believed that it was necessary for support staff to access training and additional qualifications. It was noted by the headteacher that staff would be likely to leave if opportunities were not made available and that additional qualifications should be recognised within pay scales.

SMT 1: And you know as headteachers we should be encouraging learning support assistants to develop on those routes or otherwise we'll lose them, umm, and they'll go off to other places...

Internal training appeared to be more valued by SMT participants than external training, and this seemed to be related to a view that the school was in a better position to manage training for the staff in school than were external trainers. It was recognised that internal training such

as INSET may not always be appropriate for support staff and that training should be tailored to roles and needs. Related to this was a view that teachers could benefit from training on how to use support staff in classrooms, which consequently would help to support both pupils and support staff in school.

SMT 2: Yes. Because you know you've got an extra of staff there and you know it's a waste if you're not making the most out of that second person within the classroom.

EP role

The 'EP role' theme reflects issues regarding the clarity of the EP role, EPs role in sharing information with staff and activities conducted by EPs. There appeared to be confusion regarding the role of the EP and SMT participants were uncertain how an EP could provide support to support staff, or provide support to schools to support staff. Participants suggested that EPs could be more open about what they do and how they contribute, as the headteacher noted:

SMT 1: ...there's a little bit of unclarity of what the role of the educational psychologist is. You know it's they come in, they spend a few hours with an individual and they waltz out. What do they do? What's their contribution?... Rather than appearing to be a little bit sort of cagey about their work, and come in and do some work with individuals and then. Spread the word.

There was recognition that the school had a role in enabling EPs to do this.

SMT 1: ...that's to do with working with the assistant head teacher or the SENCo in terms of giving the EP that opportunity and that's not the it's not a criticism of the EP.

EPs were considered to work mainly with individual pupils and to be involved in training. Areas for the development of the EP role included cluster work, observation, and a counselling type role for school staff.

SMT participants believed that the EP's role should involve sharing information regarding pupils' needs, to develop staff knowledge and understanding. There was a belief that it would be helpful if 'reasons' behind particular pupils' needs and how these relate to support in a classroom were communicated. There was also a suggestion that all staff could benefit from this information. Additionally, a participant reported that it was good practice for support

staff to be included in meetings between the EP and SENCO, particularly when discussing a pupil they supported.

SMT 2: ...explain the reasoning behind why a child may be, this, or this, and what they can do in the classroom setting to help.

SMT interview summary

A range of areas were identified by SMT participants that contribute to supporting support staff within their school. The ethos of the school, in terms of enabling staff to feel valued, respected, and included, appeared to be at the forefront for both SMT participants in enabling staff to feel supported. The role of managers appeared to be particularly valued by SMT participants, and may be more relevant to these participants as they have management positions. Additionally, enabling support staff to have a ‘voice’ and be heard by managers and was also considered important to supporting support staff within this particular school.

4.4 EP Focus Groups

The third and final wave of the research study involved focus groups with EPs. The aim of these focus groups was to explore EPs’ views regarding support for support staff in comprehensive schools and perceptions of the role of the EP in supporting support staff.

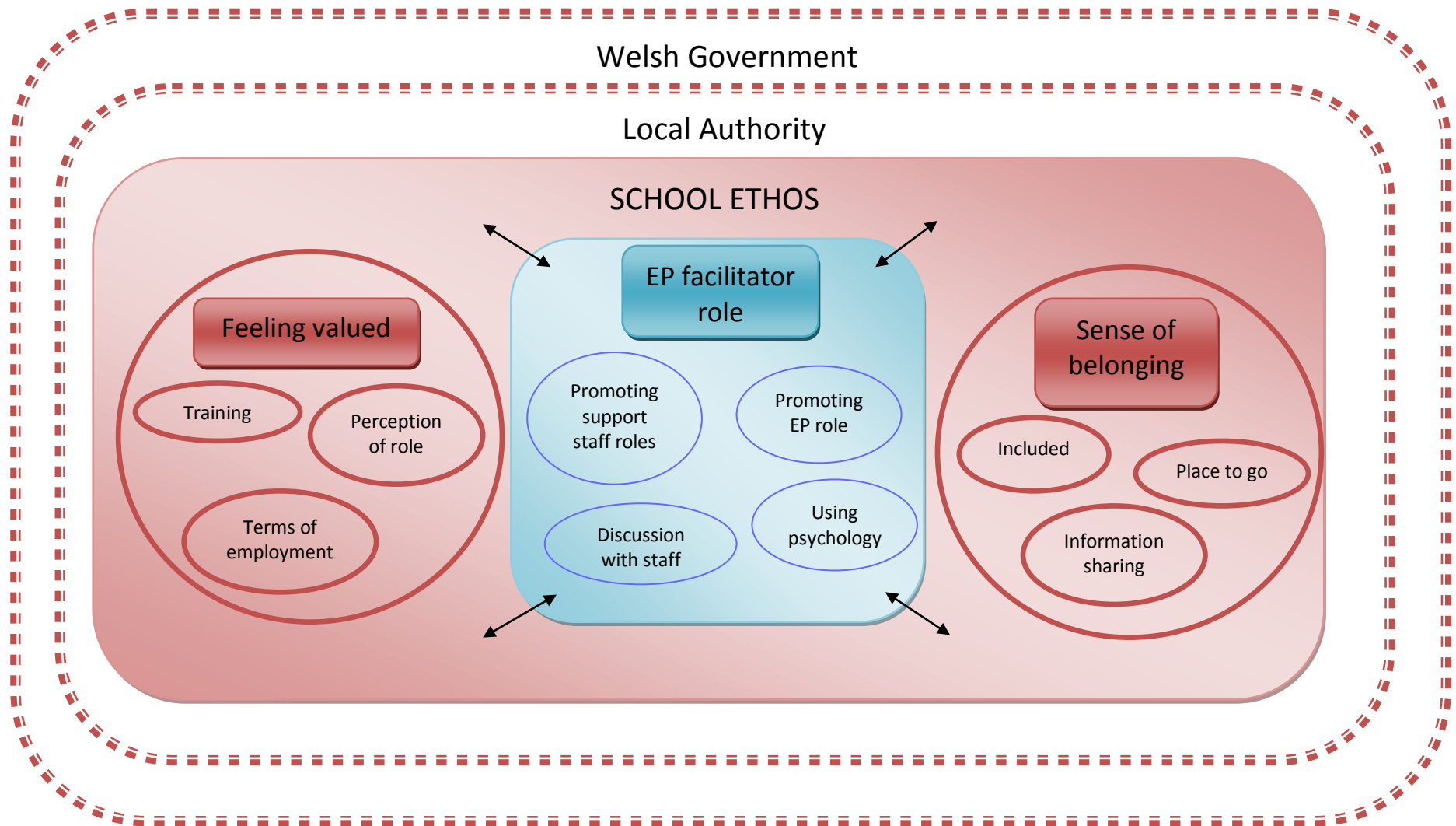
Focus groups were conducted with EPs from the two local authorities where the participating schools were situated. Below outlines the themes developed from each focus group.

4.4.1 EPS 1 focus group themes

Figure 9 provides a visual representation of the themes created from EPS 1 focus group. Participants in EPS 1 seemed to adopt an ecosystemic approach to thinking about support for support staff and influences upon this. School ethos was perceived by EPS 1 participants to have a major influence on support staff and this could be influenced by wider systems including the local authority and Welsh Government. However, the group suggested that school ethos had a larger bearing on perceptions of support and the role of the EP, and that school ethoses are not determined by the Welsh Government or local authority. This is visually represented by the dotted lines of the Welsh Government and local authority shapes within Figure 9.

School ethos was interpreted to encompass feeling valued and sense of belonging, as participants emphasised these to be important in creating and influencing the school ethos. The role of the EP seemed to be perceived by EPS 1 participants as a facilitating role and to be able to influence, and be influenced, by the school ethos. Each theme will be considered in turn.

Figure 9: Visual representation of themes generated from EPS 1 focus group data



Feeling valued

EPS 1 participants suggested that feeling valued was an important aspect of the school ethos and enabled support staff to feel supported. The ‘feeling valued’ theme encompassed aspects including: perception and recognition of support staff roles; relationship with teachers; contract terms; and training.

The perception of support staff roles within schools was seen to be important in enabling staff to feel valued as individuals and as members of staff. EPS 1 participants discussed hierarchical systems in schools and how these can promote a view that support staff are ‘lower down’ the hierarchy, thus are not ‘full’ members of staff, impacting on their status within schools and generated a view that they are less valued. Participants suggested this could have implications on how pupils view support staff, and support staff’s perceived ability to manage certain situations, such as behavioural incidents.

Deployment of school staff was seen to contribute to how support staff roles are recognised, and thus perceived, within schools. Participants discussed the changing roles of support staff within comprehensive schools and how this impacts on the perception of support staff roles. For example, reactionary actions such as removing a member of support staff from one activity to another following an incident within the school day, which could promote a view that what they were doing previously was not valued.

Deployment in classrooms was identified also by participants as contributing to feelings of being valued within schools. Participants identified a that support staff could be both sometimes taken advantage of and go unrecognised within classrooms, impacting on support staff’s relationships with teachers. The use of HLTAs in place of teacher was also identified as a contentious issue and one which could be perceived positively and negatively.

Training was perceived to be an activity which can empower support staff, and it was considered by EPS 1 participants to be important to support staff developing self-efficacious beliefs regarding specific duties for their role, such as managing behaviour.

EPS 1 participants considered employment terms to impact greatly on support staff and perceptions of how valued they are.

EPS 1 focus group: ...the whole system is telling them they are not valued.

Here, the participant identified that support staff's security of employment impacted on how valued they are likely to feel. Temporary contracts, term time contracts and lower pay were all considered to promote a view of being undervalued and to have a bearing on how support staff are perceived by themselves and others. Participants emphasised the impact contract terms have for support staff in terms of accessing training such as INSET, as some are not paid for INSET days, impacting on feeling a sense of belonging.

Sense of belonging

'Sense of belonging' refers to how much support staff feel part of the school. EPS 1 participants referred to staff 'having a place to go' and being involved in aspects of the school, such as team meetings, to enable them feel a sense of belonging. How information was shared with staff was identified also as pertinent to developing a sense of belonging. Participants raised the issue of sharing information from EPs and other agencies with support staff and whether it is disseminated to them. It was suggested that lack of information sharing could impact on staff's sense of belonging.

It was suggested by participants that, ultimately, it was the ethos of the school that had a bearing on whether support staff felt valued and had a sense of belonging. Schools prioritising support staff was seen to contribute to this. Participants suggested that there were differences in how schools value and include staff, and alluded that 'some manage it better than others.'

EP Facilitator Role

EPS 1 participants suggested that EPs were seen to be facilitators and their role in relation to support staff was to apply psychology to facilitate change. Four sub-themes were created within the EP facilitator role which describe functions of the facilitator role: discussion with staff; promoting staff roles; using psychology; and promoting EP role.

EPS 1 participants suggested that support staff have valuable information about pupils, which can be helpful to obtain. It was identified that facilitating discussion with support staff

enables EPs to gain important information about pupils, whilst at the same time enabled support staff to feel valued, as they are included.

EPS 1 focus group: ...helpful to talk to support staff...they're often the ones with the best information about the child, and they often say to me, you do know I'm not the teacher...and I think that makes them feel valued really that just that you're asking for them their opinion and information from them..."

Providing feedback and reassurance to staff about practice was considered important also in developing relationships and promoting support staff roles. Participants implied that information from EPs is not always cascaded to support staff, impacting on the support provided to pupils. This was perceived to be an area of development for EPs.

EPS 1 focus group: We can be involved at a higher level than that in changing the system and the way that works so that staff do get that information...but that's what makes the change in the end is changing that whole system. It's about getting into that ethos isn't it...

This implied a wider role for EPs in terms of working systemically to promote change. There was a perception by EPS 1 participants that EPs adopt a broader view of support staff roles and are able to recognise the value of their roles within schools; therefore, suggested that part of the EP role is to promote support staff roles to raise awareness of their importance and impact on pupils. Involving support staff in meetings and making explicit recommendations within EP reports to share with support staff, were proposed as possible ways to include support staff. Participants also identified a need to promote support staff roles with pupils, so that pupils could develop an understanding and appreciation of support staff roles. Participants identified that a role of the EP could be to discuss with school managers the deployment of support staff.

Participants suggested that EPs needed to be proactive to seek support staff out and discussed providing support staff with feedback about their practice as a way to recognise their roles and enable them to feel valued.

A key element of the 'EP facilitator role' appeared to be the application of psychology to promote change and facilitate discussions with support staff and other members of school staff. There was a dichotomy between the explicit and implicit use of psychology. EPS 1

participants recognised the benefits of applying psychology explicitly with support staff and one EP gave an example of applying solution focussed approaches to facilitate discussion between staff during INSET. However, there was also the recognition that implicit use of psychology could be utilised to foster relationships informally with individuals, in order to facilitate change within schools. This is illustrated in the quote below.

EPS 1 focus group: I make the point of going and having a cup of tea with them so that they know I'm approachable...your using your psychology in a much less formal way...

Communicating and demonstrating the role of the EP were considered important to promoting the EP role. EPS 1 participants provided suggestions of different ways in which EPs could communicate their role to school staff. It was acknowledged that 'doing the job' enabled individuals to see the role of the EP firsthand.

There appeared to be a contradictory perception within the EP facilitator role. Participants suggested EPs are in a unique position to 'penetrate' school ethos's and influence activities, however, EPs are themselves influenced by the school ethos, suggesting that there are limits to EPs as facilitators within particular environments. As a group member commented:

EPS 1 focus group: We're only as good as the schools let us be.

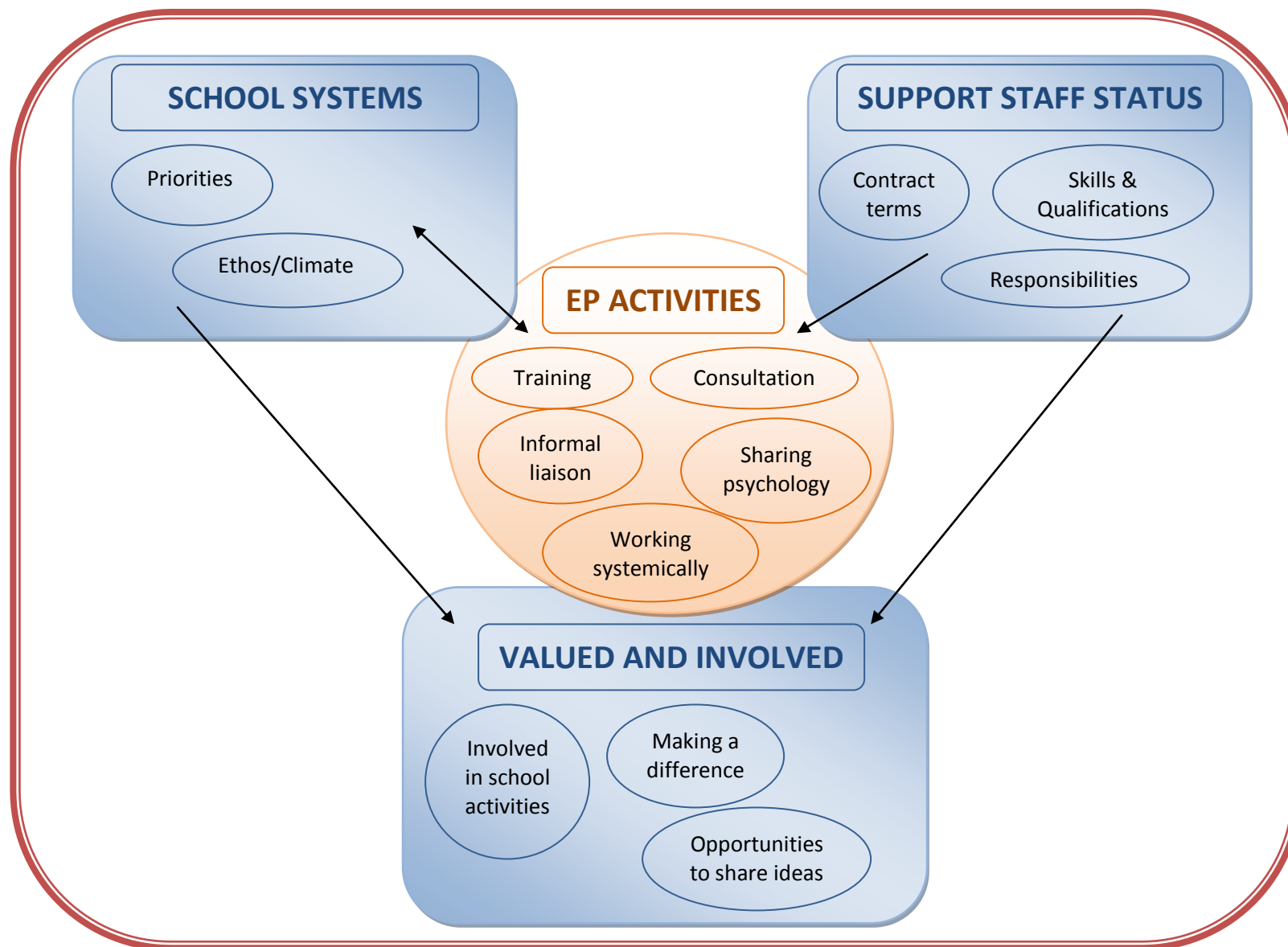
4.4.2 EPS 1 focus group summary

EPS 1 participants identified that enabling support staff to feel valued and have a sense of belonging were important to facilitating feelings of being supported. It was suggested by participants that this was ultimately a function of the school ethos and how support staff are prioritised. The role of the EP was constructed as a facilitator to promote the roles of support staff. EPs were perceived to be able to effect change by adopting an holistic overview and working across different levels. The application of psychology, both implicitly and explicitly, was considered important to facilitating these processes.

4.4.3 EPS 2 focus group themes

Figure 10 provides a visual representation of the themes created from the EPS 2 focus group. Four key themes were generated: support staff status, school systems, valued and involved and EP activities.

Figure 10: Visual representation of themes generated from EPS 2 focus group data



Valued and involved

Being ‘valued and involved’ was perceived by EPS 2 participants to be a key component in enabling support staff feel supported. Participants thought it was important that support staff felt “that their role is important within the organisation” and were “valued as part of a team” (EPS 2 participants). Being involved in school activities was linked with morale, motivation, self-esteem and sense of belonging.

‘Opportunities to share ideas’ was also considered important to engendering feelings of being valued and involved. The sharing of ideas was associated with support staff receiving reassurance in, “what they’re doing is ok” (EPS2 participant) and was linked also to ‘checking out’ ideas with a manager or supportive colleague.

Being ‘involved’ was associated with being included in decisions, for example, regarding CPD. Emphasis was placed by participants on support staff feeling that they have agency, which was described as ‘trust’ to do what they have been assigned to do, but simultaneously to be trusted to share opinions when difficulties arose. Participants acknowledged the importance of support staff feeling as though they are making a difference and contributing to the organisation as a whole.

EPS 2 focus group: ...that they can make a difference, that they are actually achieving something with people rather than being put in a situation that they are just kind of ‘babysitting’ someone or you know, that they actually they’re actually going to make a difference, so they have targets and goals and things, that they have to set.

Feeling valued and involved appeared to be influenced by two other themes, school systems and support staff status, which were linked also to EP activities.

School systems

The ‘school systems’ theme refers to the school as a whole and the influence of the school’s climate or ethos on support staff feeling valued and supported. EP activities were considered by participants to be influenced by, and have influence on, the school ethos. Participants acknowledged that different schools managed support staff and issues around support staff differently. A participant alluded to some schools being ‘emotionally literate’ which enabled them to better support support staff and involve them as members of staff. It was implied that it was the role and responsibility of the leadership/management to create an ‘emotionally literate’ climate within the school and that EPs perhaps have a role in helping schools achieve this. However, participants

emphasised that schools would have to prioritise support staff for EP input and it was acknowledged that other initiatives and priorities may take precedence for EP time. Although, prioritising input for support staff may be of importance as, “*in order for it [initiatives] to work, they’re [support staff] a key part*”.

Support staff status

This theme referred to the status of support staff and the impact this had for schools supporting them and for EPs working with support staff. Participants referred to the range of skills and qualifications of support staff.

EPS 2 focus group: There’s such a range of skills and levels within teaching assistants, you get some that are so well qualified and able people and then there’s another end of the spectrum isn’t there really. Which is different to teaching staff isn’t it, the range of skill level is very different to teaching staff.

The participant here alluded to the impact of skill level of support staff on professionalism, and their perceived status within schools.

The status of support staff was closely linked to EP activities and EPS 2 participants perceived support staff to be in a “*low position of power*”, resulting in it being necessary for other members of school staff to be present during consultations.

EPS 2 focus group: ...our work with them, because of their status is is fairly limited in, cos I suppose if your thinking about a consultation and you want to involve the people who can influence the most change and it’s not always the teaching assistant who can do that, so, there’s there’s a limit within their status as well...

Additionally, participants discussed a ‘moral obligation’ in ensuring support staff did not take on too much, due to the little recompense they received in pay. Additionally, the range of skill level identified previously was suggested to have implications for the range of work conducted by support staff. Furthermore, participants highlighted that it was ‘everyone’s responsibility’ in schools to support pupils, thus, it was important that responsibility was not devolved to a minority of staff.

Contract terms were perceived to be a considerable barrier to support staff roles and enabling them to feel supported; for example, the inflexibility of contractual hours

impinging on access to training and school briefings. Although, it was implied that “some schools work round it better than others”, suggesting that some schools are more able or more willing to overcome these issues than others. Participants discussed the impact of the recently implemented ‘single status’ actions, and the impact this had on the status of support staff and the activities which can be conducted by staff as a result. It was suggested that this further contributed to a view that undervalues support staff.

EP activities

Participants identified activities which EPs are currently engaged in with support staff, citing training and consultation as most common. EPS 2 participants suggested that it was helpful for support staff to attend consultations, particularly when they are the person working directly with a pupil or group of pupils. Although, it was highlighted that this was dependent on how ‘good’ a school was at releasing staff. Participants reported that it was dissatisfying when no other member of staff attended with a member of support staff. This was related to support staff status and a perception that support staff have little influence in effecting change within a school.

More ‘informal’ activities conducted by EPs with support staff were identified, for example, problem solving groups, ‘drop-ins’ and informal training. Participants suggested that EPs might be able to offer “something objective/impartial” when staff are having difficulties and that it may be helpful not to have other members of staff present during these times.

Participants acknowledged the ability of EPs to work across different levels. EPs were perceived to have a role in disseminating psychology and increasing awareness of the value and impact of support staff in schools. Working systemically was identified as an area that could be developed within the EP role with regard to support staff.

EPS 2 focus group: Sharing psychology at higher levels might be something we could do.

However, a participant acknowledged the potential drawbacks of working too systemically and becoming removed from the ‘grass roots’, suggesting that the EPs within the focus group wanted to retain working across different levels.

It was suggested that EPs could have a role in working with management and be a ‘sounding board’ regarding how to co-ordinate and utilise staff. This was pertinent to this particular EPS and a specific opportunity which could be utilised to raise such issues was identified.

EPS 2 focus group: ...now we’ve got the ‘team around the schools’ meeting, that might be more of a forum for doing that kind of thing.

The group identified that the challenge for EPs was to make support staff a priority for the school and that other activities/initiatives might take precedence. Issues regarding the perceived cost effectiveness of EPs were identified as a barrier also.

In discussion regarding how EPs could be more effective at disseminating information about their role, it was suggested that there could be confusion about the EP role as support staff are “not the first port of call” and communication with the EP is usually indirect, with information being cascaded down from the SENCo. There was the suggestion that support staff do not see it as their place to request EP time and it is seen to be the role of SENCo and teachers to prioritise and request support.

Increasing the visibility of EPs was suggested as a way to break down the barriers between EPs and support staff. An EP provided an example of implementing this and going from being called ‘the EP’ to being called by name. Additionally, participants identified the introduction of ELSA training into their authority and wondered whether this may help to raise awareness of their roles and influence on how they are perceived within the authority.

Similar to EPS 1, EP activities were perceived to be able to impact on and be influenced by ‘school systems’.

4.5 Similarities and differences in constructions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists

In an attempt to draw together the outcomes of the present study, some of the similarities and differences in the constructions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists are outlined below. The final chapter, Chapter 5, will discuss the findings in relation to the research questions posed in Chapter 2, and in light of relevant literature.

The range of responses within the questionnaire data identified a number of activities and structures that support staff find helpful in feeling supported. This may reflect differences between schools in the activities/structures that are provided, and may also reflect the differing roles of support staff and the duties they are expected to fulfil, leading to different support structures being valued. Questionnaire data identified a number of commonalities in how support staff are supported within the schools included in the study. Support staff reported a range of activities that provided support in terms of personal and skill development: training, support from colleagues, and support from managers, were the most cited responses by support staff. These aspects were identified also by SMT participants. SMT participants focussed more upon manager support and performance management, which may reflect the roles they are within, and the role they have or perceive themselves playing in supporting staff. Furthermore, SMT participants may have felt an expectation to report performance management as an activity. Participants from school 4 (support staff and SMT) appeared to value performance management more than other participants, which may reflect a distinctive feature of this school.

Whilst support staff participants and SMT participants appeared to view training, support from colleagues, sharing information and support from managers as most important, there were differences in the ranking of these, which may reflect different cultures and issues within the participating schools. Differences in the construction of what is most valuable or important may be a reflection of different school cultures and the issues pertinent to the staff within those schools, at that particular moment in time. Additionally, support staffs' perceptions of what they would like to receive were related to what was relevant to them within their particular school culture. Furthermore, participants acknowledged that what they consider valuable or important might change depending on their circumstances.

Training was cited regularly in questionnaire feedback by support staff and SMT participants as an important form of support, with financial constraints being identified to be a barrier to accessing it. On further exploration during focus groups, however, training appeared to become less important in terms of support staff feeling supported within their roles on a daily basis. Training was constructed as an activity that was necessary and helpful to performing roles and developing skills, but not necessarily crucial to feeling supported on an everyday basis within roles. Both support staff and

SMT participants highlighted that training was most successful when it was tailored to support staff roles.

Training was the most cited form of support that support staff wanted to receive more of. Further exploration within focus groups seemed to suggest, however, that other supportive activities were more pertinent. Activities or actions which engendered feelings of value and belonging appeared to be more relevant to participants. Sharing information did not feature prominently in questionnaire feedback, however, it was consistently reported in support staff focus groups to be an important facet to feeling supported. Furthermore, recognition and understanding of roles appeared to be a pertinent issue for support staff. The majority of support staff identified wanted to be recognised for their role and issues regarding lack of understanding alluded to feelings of being undervalued. These aspects were closely related to colleague support.

Support from colleagues seemed to be particularly relevant for support staff and this highlighted the importance of relationships between colleagues in enabling staff to feel supported. Colleague support appeared to be constructed in a number of ways and include a range of activities, however, for the majority of support staff participants, colleague support seemed to reflect sharing information and experiences. Colleague support was interpreted to engender feelings of affiliation and belonging within teams and it enabled support staff to feel part of something. There seemed to be dissociation between colleague support from those within the same roles and those in other roles (e.g., teachers). In some schools fissures in relationships were expressed which was interpreted to create an ‘us and them’ culture. This appeared to be facilitated by good working relationships, or supportive cultures between members of support staff, combined with a simultaneous perception of being unsupported by other members of staff. Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers) appeared to be closely related to support staff roles being recognised and understood.

SMT participants and EPs placed less emphasis on colleague support, and did not often couch it in this way. However, it could be argued that support from colleagues was encompassed in other aspects of support identified by these groups, for example, in discussion about the ethos of the school, feeling valued and involved, and communication between staff. This might reflect SMT participants and EPs adopting a broader view of support for support staff, made possible by their roles not being

directly involved. Additionally, it might reflect a need for other structures such as ‘school ethos’ to be in place in order to facilitate colleagues support. Indeed, only the participant in focus group 3 explicitly identified the overall school ethos in being important to feeling supported within her role, although it was evident in issues raised by other groups.

A similarity which could be drawn between support staff focus groups responses was the difficulty in seeing beyond one’s circumstances to consider alternatives to the present situation. Some participants reported finding it difficult to consider ‘how it could be’ which suggested participants did not appear to consider themselves able to effect change. This may reflect a perceived lack of control or agency within school environments, which could be related to the perceived status of support staff within schools.

One of the aims of the study was to identify commonalities and differences between support staff and SMT views. Whilst similarities have been identified, it is difficult to draw concrete conclusions due to the limited number of SMT participants. However, the views of the SMT participants and one member of support staff were employed within the same school (school 4), which may offer some insight, and there appeared to be consensus between their views. Clear lines of support and communication were suggested to be a feature of this school and it appeared that what was valued by the member of support staff (supportive ethos/culture of the school with everyone being treated as professionals) was echoed by the views espoused by the SMT participants. This could suggest that the impact of a school’s culture and how much staff affiliate with it is critical to enabling staff to feel supported.

The role of the EP was constructed differently by school staff and EPs. There appeared to be confusion regarding the EP role for support staff and SMT participants and participants were unsure what the role of the EP could be in terms of supporting support staff or in helping schools support staff. This could relate to the above point about being unable to see beyond one’s immediate circumstances. Support staff and SMT participants constructed the EP role in terms of working with individual pupils and providing information about ‘conditions’. EPs appeared to adopt a more holistic perspective focussing on applying psychology and working systemically.

Confusion regarding the EP role may arise from support staff having limited experience of working with EPs. Furthermore, EPs were perceived to liaise mainly with SENCOs by support staff and SMT participants, suggesting that information from EPs is cascaded through the SENCOs within these schools. Additionally, for some participants, liaison with an EP was seen to be outside the remit of support staff and this was closely associated with staff status and pay, suggesting that support staff see themselves as less 'worthy' of EP time. This was further supplemented by support staff in school 6 who welcomed liaison with EPs, but, however, saw the lack of involvement or lack of information shared from the EP as a reflection of being undervalued within the school.

4.6 Summary

The present chapter aimed to outline the findings of the research study. Findings suggest that, being valued, included and involved is important to support staff feeling supported within their roles. Relationships with other members of support staff and school staff, in addition to a school's overall ethos, were identified to have considerable influence on facilitating these aspects. Lack of clarity regarding the role of educational psychologists and differences in constructions regarding EPs' roles were also identified. The final chapter will tentatively discuss the outcomes in relation to relevant literature and research. Implications for educational psychologists and directions for future research are summarised, and consideration is given to the limitations of the research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

This chapter aims to tentatively interpret the key findings of the present research study in light of relevant literature and theory. Implications for educational psychology and directions for future research are described. Consideration of the limitations of the research study is provided at the end of the chapter.

This research aimed to conduct an exploratory study regarding support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists. Adopting a qualitative approach enabled the perceptions of support staff, SMT members and educational psychologists to be explored. A prominent outcome of the study was the value of gaining support staff ‘voices’ in addition to the ‘voices’ of other participants, whilst acknowledging that participants’ ‘voices’ are presented through the interpretations of the researcher (Sikes et al., 2007). Gathering staff ‘voices’ is important to understanding their needs (Mackenzie, 2011) and the need to obtain support staff perceptions regarding their roles has been documented elsewhere (Abbott et al., 2011; Milner, 2008 as cited in Butt & Lance, 2009).

Within this study, questionnaires identified support structures that were available to support staff and to some extent how much staff valued these. However, it was focus groups that brought to light issues relevant to support staff, enabling insight into specific structures and actions that were supportive for staff. Furthermore, focus groups identified differences between questionnaire responses highlighting, what support staff valued day to day within their roles, and the importance of clarifying issues through discussion. Involving support staff in decision making and planning have been shown to be helpful in their deployment and maximising their effectiveness (Blatchford et al., 2012; Farrell et al., 1999; Goddard, et al., 2004; Hart et al., 1995). Anecdotally, support staff seemed to enjoy the opportunity to express their views, suggesting that this is something that they are not always afforded (Barkham, 2008). The following sections aim to illuminate support staff ‘voices’ in-light of relevant research. The four research questions presented in chapter 2 are utilised to guide the discussion.

5.1 Research question 1: How are support staff supported? What are the perceived support structures that are currently available to support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools, within two specific local authorities?

Support staff identified a wide range of support structures that supported them in their roles, as represented by responses within questionnaires, suggesting that there is a vast armoury of ways in which schools may be able to support support staff within their roles. The majority of responses suggested that support was achieved through training, colleagues, managers, meetings and outside agencies. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009c), further exploration during focus groups appeared to suggest that support staff were dissatisfied with the support and development opportunities available to them. This dissatisfaction seemed to narrow support staff's focus on key areas of support (e.g., training, colleague support, and manager support) with related issues regarding, information sharing and role recognition coming to light through discussion. Support staff therefore, appeared to feel themselves to be supported through limited structures and actions, and dissatisfaction with these was apparent.

5.1.1 EPs' perceptions of support for support staff

EPs in the study adopted a broader perspective compared to support staff and SMT participants and tended not to focus on specific activities which might help to support support staff. Rather, EPs seemed to adopt a systemic approach, which may be indicative of the EPs working across contexts (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2001) and having experiences across schools, enabling a wider perspective to develop (Cameron, 2006). EPs suggested that it was likely to be important for support staff to have a 'sense of belonging' and feel valued within their roles. This seemed to reflect a psychological stance adopted by EPs to draw from psychology to inform their perspectives (Cameron, 2006). This could provide evidence against what some have argued to be a loss of psychology from practice (e.g., Thomson, 1996) and a return to the application of psychology (MacKay, 2002; Thomson, 1996). EPs identified activities that may help staff have a sense of belonging and to feel valued, for example, sharing information, being involved in school activities and decision making, and having their roles recognised. Further consideration to the role of the EP and what support support staff valued and how these may relate to meeting motivational needs (affiliation, agency and autonomy), is provided in the following sections.

5.2 Research question 2: Of the perceived support structures, which are considered to be the most valuable/important?

Differences in the perceived value or importance of forms of support were identified between schools. These may have arisen out of the different contexts, which are influenced by the events and circumstances within which individuals work (Watkins & Hill, 2000). It was recognised by participants that their responses might alter depending on their circumstances, suggesting that support needs are ever-changing and structures of support need to be flexible. Despite differences in the value or importance of particular support structures being identified, a number of similarities were identified, suggesting some consensus between school contexts.

5.2.1 Colleague support

Support from colleagues was particularly important to support staff. Relationships between themselves and with teachers appeared to be pertinent to enabling support staff to feel supported. Less emphasis was placed on colleague support by SMT and EP participants. However, colleague support appeared to be encompassed in wider issues of school 'ethos' and 'culture' which will be discussed in section 5.2.7. Communication between staff, constructed in terms of sharing information (e.g., good practice) and having 'good working relationships' with members of staff, appeared to be relevant to enabling staff to feel supported. Colleague support seemed to aid affiliation within schools, engendering feelings of belonging and providing a sense of safety through the development of social identities (McLean, 2009), which could be considered to meet Maslow's (1970) safety, belonging and esteem needs. Cohesiveness within teams also appeared to be enhanced through identity with that team (Hogg, 1993; Hogg & Terry, 2000).

Support staff participants' affiliation tended to be narrowed toward their immediate colleagues (e.g., other LSAs, or TAs within a learning support team), which may reflect stress within the wider group context (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Certainly, within some focus groups there appeared to be fractured relationships between members of support staff and other school staff. However, differences between support staff and other staff, and the impact on relationships, may have been overemphasised by participants as a means to maintain 'in-group identity' (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). The perceived status of support staff appeared to impact greatly on support staff relationships with teachers. However, this may have simultaneously offered an opportunity for support staff to have

identity within a particular group, and meet affiliation needs, through dissociation from the wider school system. For one particular focus group, focus group 2, a perceived lack of support from other colleagues appeared to perpetuate withdrawal from the wider school system and emphasise affiliation and cohesiveness with the learning support team. Affiliation with the wider school system appeared to be an area which was valued by all support staff participants but to be an area lacking for some. Relationships with colleagues within the same role and other roles were identified to be important to enable staff to feel valued and have a sense of belonging, and therefore, appeared to support staff's affiliation needs (McLean, 2009).

Applying Rogers' (2006) model of colleague support, moral and professional support appeared to be achieved through support from colleagues within the same roles. For example, through empathy, understanding of "what each of us have to put up with" (Focus group 1 participant), and sharing of issues or concerns. Structural support appeared to be supported through support from other colleagues and manager support, although moral and professional support appeared relevant from these also. All three elements, moral, professional and structural support appeared to be lacking for support staff participants with regard to support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers and managers), apart from focus group 3 participant. Focus group 3 participant alluded to 'virtuous cycles' (Gibbs, 2011) in enabling her to feel supported, so that being treated with respect encouraged others to enact respect. Additionally, a whole school approach was advocated in enabling positive colleague support, which is consistent with other research which advocates whole school approaches in promoting colleague collaboration (Abbott et al., 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). Although overall school ethos was an important factor in contributing to support staff feeling supported, support from colleagues within the same role, for some participants, appeared to provide a form of support that was distinct, and almost detached, from the school ethos, suggesting that this superseded other elements (Boyle et al., 2012). This may indicate that when other areas of support are lacking, support from close colleagues becomes ever more important.

5.2.1.1 Relationships with teachers

Relationships with teachers and other staff appeared to be particularly important to support staff, and seemed to be greatly influence their perceptions of support. In contrast to Devecchi and Rouse (2010), but similar to Mackenzie (2011), positive

collaboration between teachers and support staff was perceived to be deficient, impacting on support staff's perceptions of support from colleagues in other roles. It was alluded to in focus groups that teachers did not manage support staff roles effectively, which is consistent with Moran and Abbott's (2002) findings. Support staff in the present study suggested that lack of recognition and understanding of their roles contributed to feeling undervalued by teachers, which could impact on staff's affiliation and autonomy needs. However, exceptions to the mean were identified, implying that support staff wanted consistency in approaches in their schools. This highlights the need for training to be provided for teachers and support staff regarding how to work effectively together and activities to foster collaboration (Farrell et al., 1999; Blatchford et al., 2012; Groom, 2006; Mackenzie, 2011).

From a teachers' perspective, support staff may present as lacking initiative and reluctant to complete tasks (Blatchford et al., 2012), impacting on the relationship between the teacher and TA. Additionally, some suggest that support staff are taking on more pedagogical roles leading to the deprofessionalisation of teacher roles (NUT, 2003; Thompson, 2006; Yarker, 2005) which could leave some teachers feeling threatened, impacting further on relationships between staff. It is not the intention to suggest here that this is what was occurring in the participating schools, rather to highlight the interaction of personal characteristics and school contexts and the influence this may have on working relationships.

For support staff roles outside classrooms, relationships with teachers were also important. This was highlighted by the learning mentor participant (focus group 3), who suggested that recognition of her role within the school was important to her feeling supported and valued. Thus, opportunities for staff who are not deployed within classrooms to develop relationships with other members of staff and training for teachers on how to utilise these staff, are likely to be beneficial in enabling other members of support staff to develop feelings of affiliation and agency within their roles.

5.2.1.2 Recognition of roles

A pertinent facet to colleague support was the recognition of roles. Support staff roles being recognised and understood were of particular relevance to participants, enabling acknowledgement of their participation within schools, which is recognised by Wenger (1998) to be important to developing communities of practice. Respecting skills and

abilities was identified by Russell et al., (1987) in lessening ‘emotional exhaustion’ of teachers; suggesting that understanding of roles, may lead to greater empathy expressed by colleagues to each other, developing affiliation between staff. Hierarchical systems in some schools provided a sense of purpose and provided clear definitions of roles and responsibilities, which have been found to be important to the deployment and effectiveness of support staff (Balshaw, 2000; Blatchford et al., 2009c; Groom, 2006). However, in other schools, hierarchical structures encouraged an authoritarian approach which seemed to limit participant’s contributions, impacting on their affiliation, agency, and autonomy.

Findings of the present study reinforce previous research findings which suggest the deployment and effectiveness of support staff is enhanced through: the definition of roles and responsibilities (combined with flexible implementation); opportunities to plan together; and opportunities to feedback and reflect with one another (Balshaw, 2000; Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Farrell et al., 1999; Groom 2006; Moran & Abobtt, 2002). This could suggest that the effective deployment of staff not only leads to better outcomes for pupils (Alborz et al., 2009a; Blatchford et al., 2012) but can contribute to support staff to feeling supported within schools. This further highlights the need for: opportunities for training teachers to work with support staff (Blatchford et al., 2009c; DfE, 2010a; Farrell et al., 1999); opportunities to maximise relationships between support staff and teachers; and developing and maintaining support staff’s preparedness for roles (Blatchford et al., 2012).

Tensions with identifying clear roles may have contributed to issues regarding role recognition. Development of roles from a “classroom ‘helper’...to one that is more specifically directed to support the teaching and learning process” (Groom, 2006 p. 199) may impact on how roles are constructed within schools. Tensions between wanting to contribute to the learning process but not being, or wanting, to be the teacher (Butt & Lance, 2009) were identified by support staff; further reinforcing a need for more collaboration and planning time for teachers and support staff (Farrell et al., 2000).

For support staff participants within the present study, colleague support appeared to be greatly valued in enabling them to develop affiliation with each other and feelings of agency to perform their roles. Recognition and understanding of roles appeared to be pertinent to facilitating this process. This suggests that schools need to promote

collaboration between staff, particularly between support staff and teachers to build relationships. A combination of both formal (e.g., training) and informal opportunities (e.g., social events) to develop relationships may be helpful to achieving this.

5.2.3 Manager support

Information from questionnaires indicated support from managers was considered important to support staff and SMT participants. SMT participants focussed more heavily on support from managers, and this may reflect the role they have, or perceive themselves playing, in supporting support staff in schools. Within focus groups, key features of manager's roles in providing support to staff appeared to include: enabling support staff to have a 'voice'; listening to staff; implementing actions; and providing feedback (reassurance). These were suggested to enable managers to develop an understanding of support staff roles, which was identified to be important to support staff feeling supported within their roles. Support staff expressed dissatisfaction with manager support, and similar to Mackenzie (2011), tensions regarding 'ineffective' SENCOs were suggested within some focus groups. This suggested that SENCOs have an important role to play in enabling support staff feel supported within their roles.

EPs did not talk explicitly about support from managers in enabling support staff to feel supported, however, EPs appeared to construct the role of managers and leadership broadly, with an emphasis on their responsibility to create the 'climate and ethos' of the school, as a way to support support staff. Literature promotes the role of managers and leaders in creating whole school approaches and ethos's in developing 'positive' school climates (Kane-Urbazzo, 2006; PricewaterhouseCoopers, 2007; Robinson, 2011; Watkinson, 2008; West-Burnham, 1997). Additionally, other responsibilities are placed on managers, for example, promoting collaboration between staff (Rhodes et al., 2004), influencing colleague morale (Hart et al., 1995) and enhancing colleague support (Rogers, 2006). This highlights the hierarchical nature of schools and the power and influence given to individuals higher up the hierarchy. It seems important therefore, to ensure that despite the existence of hierarchies, support staff are still made to feel equal and included within schools systems (Abbott, et al., 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Fox, 1998; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Lorenz, 1998; Thomas et al., 1998). This was highlighted by the focus group 3 participant who acknowledged the presence of hierarchies, but felt valued as a result of being made to feel equal. Actions identified by the participants in this research, such as listening to support staff, and enacting actions,

may contribute to staff feeling equal and valued by managers, and therefore, included within the whole school.

The role of managers in contributing to the school ethos/climate suggests a particular leadership approach is required. An EP participant alluded to schools which were ‘emotionally literate’ were more likely to be able to support staff. Similarly, Goleman et al., (2004) propose that successful leaders are required to be emotional literate, suggesting this enables them to create successful working environments. This was suggested to be achieved within focus group 3 participant’s school; she identified that her headteacher placed pastoral support (for staff and pupils) at “the top of the agenda” (focus group 3 participant), and implied that an emotionally literate climate had been established within her school. The participant perceived this to be a result of particular approaches being cascaded ‘down from the top’. Emotionally literate actions may be associated with behaviours shown by authoritative leaders (Dinham & Scott, 2008), for example, being highly responsive to staff needs’ and inclusive, whilst simultaneously demanding, through setting high expectations. For the participants in the current study, apart from the focus group 3 participant, leader’s actions which were both, demanding and responsive, (Dinham & Scott, 2008) appeared to be lacking.

5.2.4 Sharing information

Sharing information was particularly important to support staff and seemed to be a major function of colleague and manager support. For the majority of participants sharing information was linked to being valued within the school system; it seemed to be associated with a perception that ‘knowledge is power’ and ‘those with power have knowledge’. The status of support staff, therefore, appeared to influence how information was shared with them. Participants perceived that they were lower in status and not valued enough to warrant information to be shared with them.

Through the sharing of information and experiences, colleagues could get to know each other and develop knowledge about practice, influencing feelings of affiliation and agency (McLean, 2009). Lack of information was clearly associated with feelings of being undervalued in schools and participants suggested it reduced their capacity to manage situations, impacting on their feelings of agency. Affiliation and agency are two mediating factors of autonomy and are critical in meeting motivational needs (McLean, 2009). Thus, schools need to be mindful of enabling support staff opportunities to share

knowledge and experience, to enable them to feel a sense of belonging, feel purposeful and that they have something meaningful to contribute to the organisation.

5.2.5 Training

Training was the most common cited form of support within questionnaire responses. Training was associated with developing knowledge, particularly regarding understanding pupils' needs and responses reflected a desire to have a greater understanding of the "conditions and syndromes (sic)" they encountered (Abbott et al., 2011, p.222). This may reflect a medicalised, individualised model of supporting pupils (Mackenzie, 2011) adopted by participants. Additionally, training may have been perceived as a way to become visible and breach the gap with teachers (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010).

Consistent with previous studies (Blatchford et al., 2009c; DfE, 2010a; Farrell et al., 2000), dissatisfaction with training was evident across support staff participants. Specific training which was related to support staff roles was considered most successful and valued, suggesting a need for training to be related, and applicable for support staff (Farrell et al., 1999). Training appeared to be more valued by SMT participants, which may be a reflection of the control they have in enabling staff to access training and the responsibility placed on them to create development opportunities (Bubb et al., 2008; Teeman et al., 2009; TDA 2010c).

Cajkler et al., (2007) identified, training had positive influences on job satisfaction, morale, confidence and self-esteem. Similarly, EPs within the present study suggested that training is likely to aid the development of support staff's self-efficacy in activities pertinent to their roles, such as behaviour management. Whilst the impact of training was not assessed within the present study, support staff participants reported that training enabled them to 'do their job' and have a greater understanding of pupils' needs. Similar to Morris (2010) and Dunne et al., (2008), this was interpreted to suggest that training increased participants' sense of agency and their perceived ability to carry out their roles. This is in contrast to other literature (e.g., DfE, 2010a) and further research is required to explore links between training and practice (Cajkler et al., 2007).

The role of management in supporting training is seen to be vital to training success (Bubb et al., 2008; DfE, 2011c; Cajkler et al., 2007) and participants raised this issue

with regard to knowing what training was available to them, being provided with time to access training, and ongoing training opportunities to ‘top up’ knowledge. This support from managers was interpreted to be related to feeling valued within the school, and further emphasises the role which managers have in enabling staff to access opportunities of development and feel part of the school (Kane-Urrabazo, 2006).

As with other research (e.g., Abbott et al., 2011; DfE, 2010a; Teeman et al., 2009) financial constraints were cited by both support staff and SMT participants to impact on access to training. Consistent with Russell et al’s., (2005) view, SMT 1 participant highlighted the importance of in-school training and suggested it was more valuable than external training. It could be suggested that conducting in-school training may help to ease financial limitations as outside agencies will not be required to be brought in and paid for. It also suggests that building school’s capacity to ‘self-improve’ (DfE, 2010b) could perhaps be a way forward to ensuring support staff are appropriately supported, which EPs may have a contribution to make toward. Blatchford et al., (2012) advocated for ongoing support and feedback to ensuring support staff ‘preparedness’ for roles, and this may help to avoid what Giangreco (2003) describes as the ‘training trap’, and overreliance upon individuals with little training to support pupils.

Although training was identified to be important to supporting support staff, other forms of support were considered more important, suggesting that it may not be critical to enabling support staff to feel supported within their roles on a daily basis. However, lack of access to training may limit feelings of agency, ultimately impacting on support staff’s well-being (McLean, 2009). Additionally, ongoing support and feedback appears to be more pertinent to developing and enabling feelings of affiliation and agency, which could also be seen as contributing to effective collaboration between staff, and generate ‘virtuous cycles’ (Gibbs, 2011).

5.2.6 Status of support staff

Support staff status was prevalent within all focus group discussions, across all three participant groups, suggesting that their status has a huge impact on enabling them to feel supported within schools. How support staff were perceived in schools appeared to be important to enabling them to access support and feel supported within their roles. Their status seemed to influence their interactions with other staff (affiliation), their agency to perform tasks, and their autonomy to have control and take responsibility.

EPs identified that support staff are helpful to liaise with, due to the information they often hold regarding pupils, however, the status of support staff in schools, and EPs perception of how much change they could effect as a result, appeared to limit EPs roles in working with support staff. This appeared to uphold Howes' (2003) deficit model of support staff.

Similar to previous studies (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009c; Farrell et al., 1999; Mackenzie, 2011), concerns regarding pay for support staff were raised by EPs and lack of financial recompense provided to staff who take on additional responsibilities was raised. Pay appeared to be less of an issue for support staff participants, and this could be a reflection of the perceived lack of control they had over this element of their role. Although it is unlikely that the support staff would decline a pay rise, contractual issues appeared to be more important to them. 'Single Status' (LGE, 2010) issues were highly relevant at the time of data collection and many staff had had changes to their contractual arrangements, thus perhaps impacting on the information reported by staff. EPs perceived that some schools were able to manage contractual arrangements 'better than others', suggesting that some schools were more able and willing to support staff through more flexible working arrangements. This may reflect different school cultures and the value placed on support staff roles. Further consideration of school cultures is provided in section 5.2.7.

5.2.7 Influence of school contexts

EPs and SMT participants placed greater emphasis on the overall school climate/ethos in contributing to supporting staff. Whilst this was something that was elicited from focus groups with support staff, SMT and EP participants were more explicit about its influence. This may have arisen from the different roles of participants. For SMT participants it may reflect a responsibility for school culture and ethos⁸. EPs are recognised to adopt holistic perspectives on situations (Cameron, 2006), and are not part of the school system daily, therefore, this may have enabled them to adopt a wider perspective.

Support staff appeared to extrapolate aspects of support to a wider perception of how the school valued them as professionals, which is consistent with social exchange theory

⁸ See section 5.2.3 for the role of manager on school ethos/climate.

(Blau, 1964) and organisational support theory (Rhoades & Eisenberger, 2002). The majority of support staff perceived that their support and/or development needs were not valued, which led to a global perception that they were not valued as professionals within their schools. Thus, the overall school cultures and the “subliminal message[s]” (Kellerman, 2007, p.87) communicated to staff, appeared to influence support staff’s constructions of how supported they felt. This is consistent with Bubb et al’s., (2008) findings and highlight the influence of generating school ethos’ and climate that value all staff.

Studies have suggested a link between perceived organisational support (POS) and job satisfaction (Firth et al., 2004). Whilst this was not the focus of the present research study, there was a suggestion that support staff might have greater satisfaction if they perceived schools to be more supportive (e.g., felt more valued as professionals). Being valued, for the participants in the present study, appeared to arise from their roles being recognised, having a sense of belonging, and good working relationships with colleagues. Similarly, Ofsted (2005) identified job satisfaction was high when support staff were fully integrated in teams, encouraged to take on greater responsibilities and had good quality training. Thus, it seems that if support staff have access to high quality support, this might lead to greater job satisfaction.

5.3 Research question 3: What forms of support would support staff like, to enable them to carry out their role more successfully and/or to develop professionally?

Outcomes regarding question 2 are very closely related to question 3. As already identified in section 5.1, there was a discrepancy between what support staff valued in terms of support and what they currently perceived to receive, with the exception of the focus group 3 participant; suggesting that the majority of support staff participants were dissatisfied with the support they currently received. In discussion with support staff, therefore, what they considered valuable was very much related to what they wanted to receive in order to perform their roles more successfully.

Professional development became less of a focus within the research and this may have arisen from a number of factors, for example: support staff constructions regarding professional development, and the value placed on it by participants; limited emphasis of professional development by schools; and/or a lack of direct questioning to elicit

views pertaining to professional development. Ofsted (2008) suggested that professional development should not be viewed narrowly in terms of attending external courses or school-based training, therefore suggesting that other activities need to be made available, or that people's perceptions regarding what constitutes professional development require widening. Thus, other support structures identified by support staff in the present research, such as support from colleagues and support from managers and elements associated with these, for example, sharing knowledge and experience, may contribute to their professional development.

Within questionnaire responses, training was the most cited form of support, that support staff wanted to receive more of. This is consistent with Russell et al., (2005) who identified a lack of training provided to support staff. Support staff reported wanting to understand 'conditions' more and felt that gaining knowledge would be helpful to apply within their roles. Furthermore, this highlights a discrepancy between the way in which staff are deployed and their 'preparedness' for roles (Blatchford et al., 2012). Although training was the most cited form of support that support staff wanted to receive more of within questionnaires and was identified to be valued within focus groups, further exploration within focus groups seemed to suggest, however, that other supportive activities were more pertinent. Activities or actions which engendered feelings of affiliation, agency and autonomy appeared to be more relevant to participants. Sharing information did not feature prominently in questionnaire feedback, however, it was consistently reported in support staff focus groups to be an important facet to feeling supported. As discussed in the previous sections, supportive actions and structures which meet motivational needs (agency, affiliation and autonomy) appear to be helpful in enabling staff to feel supported.

What support staff valued and wanted to receive was constructed in terms of what was important to them within their schools at that particular moment in time. Thus, the idiosyncratic nature of schools was highlighted. This suggests that a 'one size fits all' approach to improving support in schools is likely to be inappropriate (Faraday, 2010; Rose, 2000), given the complex interplay of situational and structural factors upon support staff roles (Blatchford et al., 2009b), and the different contexts that arise as a function of the individuals and experiences that make up the organisation (DfEE, 2000; Watkins & Hill, 2000). Ultimately, however, what could be considered the less tangible elements of support appeared to be what was important to support staff in performing

their roles such as: feeling a sense of belonging; feeling valued; and being recognised as professionals. These were identified by participants across all three data sets, suggesting that these aspects may not be exclusive to support staff and that all individuals require these needs to be met. Training, support from colleagues, support from managers and opportunities to share knowledge and information were identified as actions which may contribute to enabling these feelings. Within the context of the present study these have been interpreted to promote, feelings of agency, affiliation and autonomy (McLean, 2009). How agency, affiliation and autonomy needs are met within distinctive school contexts may be helpful to bear in mind when considering how to effectively support support staff in schools. If staff are appropriately supported though being valued members of a whole school team they are likely to be more effective (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Fox, 1998; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Lorenz, 1998; Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998).

5.4 Research question 4: What is/could be the role of educational psychologists in providing support to support staff?

Despite differences in the constructions of EPs roles between EPs and schools staff, there appeared to be some consensus between school staff (support staff and SMT participants) that involvement from EPs was, and would be, beneficial. This is consistent with previous research which has identified that EP involvement is valued (e.g., DfEE, 2000; Hammett and Burton, 2005; MacKay & Boyle, 2007), but is in contrast to other studies (e.g., MacKay & Boyle, 1994). Furthermore, it seemed that for the majority of support staff participants, schools enabling staff to liaise with EPs may contribute to staff to feel valued as part of the school, which is consistent with Hammett and Burton's (2008) findings. The sections below outline aspects related to the role of the EP working with support staff.

5.4.1 Clarity of EP role

Similar to previous research, the role of the EP was constructed by school staff (support staff and SMT participants) in this study to focus upon more "traditional" (MacKay, 2002, p.250) EP roles such as individual work with pupils. Participants placed EPs in an 'expert' 'advice giving' role and did not perceive a wider role for EPs. This may reflect participants' medicalised, individualised views of SEN (Mackenzie, 2011) as well as their constructions of EPs roles. Additionally, consistent with other research findings (e.g., Ashton & Roberts, 2006; DfEE, 2000; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), a mismatch

between school's and EPs' constructions of the EP role were identified, with EPs appearing to place greater emphasis on working systemically, and adopting a more holistic view. Within the present research, the perceived status of support staff and hierarchical structures within schools appeared to impact on support staff's contact with EPs; it is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that a limited view of EP roles was communicated. This is consistent with Ashton and Roberts (2006) who acknowledged that narrow views of EPs roles are likely to develop from limited opportunities and experience of EPs. The SMT members included in the study were not SENCOs and it was apparent that they had had limited experience of working with EPs, therefore, again, opportunities for them to develop an understanding of EPs roles is likely to have been limited. It seemed also that many support staff supported individual pupils which may encourage staff to construct EP support in terms of information about individual pupils, as this is how they were deployed. This also supports Blatchford et al's., (2009c) findings that support staff continue to support one-to-one, which has been shown to have a detrimental impact on pupils' attainment.

Furthermore, support staff perceptions may have been influenced by how EP roles were constructed within their school contexts. As EPs are most likely to liaise with SENCOs, particularly within secondary schools contexts, how SENCOs construct the role of EPs is likely to be important to how others perceive it. For example, if a SENCO perceives the role of the EP to conduct individual assessments with pupils, and place them in an advice giving role, other members of staff are likely to do the same. Furthermore, if these are the roles EPs are seen to be performing in schools, a wider view of the role is unlikely to develop. As SENCOs were not included within the study it is not possible to comment authoritatively if this had any bearing on the participants' views within the current research.

Clarity of EPs' roles was related to communication by EPs. How EPs communicate with support staff was raised by both some support staff participants and EPs. Whilst research has identified teachers' dissatisfaction with EP reports (e.g., Thomson, 1996), support staff participants in the present study expressed discontent at not having access to information from EPs (e.g., EP reports). This was identified to be a function of relationships within schools and issues regarding information sharing, however, it has important implications for EPs and ensuring information is meaningful, comprehensible (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009) and reaches the individuals that require it. EPs identified

ways in which they might be able to communicate more effectively with support staff and provide feedback to them, for example, being explicit in reports about which individuals the report is to be forwarded to, and communicating directly with support staff, which is consistent with actions proposed by Farrell et al., (2000).

5.4.2 EP's training role

Although training was identified by support staff and SMT participants as being an important feature of support, this was generally not identified by them as being part of the EP role. Additionally, EPs, particularly in EPS 2, emphasised training as a main activity conducted with support staff and perceived this to be way to support staff in schools. This perhaps highlights differences in the services offered by EPSs and those accessed in schools. This could reflect the needs of the school (DfEE, 2000), and a lack of opportunity or experience of EP work leading to a narrower view of EP roles (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Furthermore, it may have implications for how EPs communicate their roles and activities to schools and members of school staff. In stating “spread the word”, SMT 1 participant highlighted the lack of communication from EPs, however, they acknowledged the role schools have to play in providing EPs a platform to raise awareness of their role. This suggests that not only do EPSs need to ‘market’ (DfEE, 2000) their activities, there needs to be greater collaboration between EPs and key members of school staff to clarify expectations (MacKay and Boyle, 1994) and promote roles with a range of staff members.

EPS 2 participants considered the influence of ELSA training on support staff within their authority, not only in terms of increasing capacity (Burton, 2008) but in terms of the influence it could have on raising the profile of the EPS and altering constructions of the EP role. The opportunity for support staff to be exposed to EPs in a different capacity may expand individuals’ perceptions of the EP role (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Combined, these suggest that by engaging in systemic work and indirect work with support staff, EPs are more able to have a wider impact on pupils (DfE, 2011a) and raise awareness of the profession.

5.4.3 Application of psychology

EPs highlighted the influence of applying psychology in working with support staff and suggested it occurred implicitly and explicitly. Inferring information from EP participants, explicit sharing of psychology appeared to occur more readily in training,

whereas implicit use of psychology was utilised to adopt an interactive approach to understanding situations (Cameron, 2006). It was recognised by EP participants that “more could be done” (EPS 2 participant) to share psychology on a range of issues in order to support staff and to support schools in managing staff. This suggests that training may not be the only way for EPs to disseminate psychological principles. Doveston and Keenaghan (2010) identified the value teachers gave to developing understanding from a psychological perspective and it seemed that support staff within the present research would also welcome this opportunity.

5.4.4 Relationship between EP role and school ethos

The influence of school ethos/climate on support staff has already been identified in section 5.2.7 and it was also identified by EP participants to influence EPs work with schools. It was alluded to that EPs were facilitators, therefore, had the capacity to penetrate school ethos's, and subsequently effect change. Thus, it was identified that EPs could perhaps have a role in raising the profile of support staff and promoting their statuses within schools. Although, concurrently, there was a view that ultimately it was the school which would decide what work would be undertaken by EPs (Ashton & Roberts, 2006), suggesting the potential impact or influence of EPs could be limited.

5.4.5 Emergent roles for EPs: Implications for EPs/Educational psychology

EPs have been identified to work with a range of individuals, groups and organisations (DfES, 2001) and there is increasing emphasis on building capacity in schools to meet the needs of all pupils, not just those considered to have SEN (DfE, 2010b; Farrell 2004; Norwich, 2000). As support staff make up a significant proportion of the school workforce (DfE, 2011b; WG, 2011), working with support staff and enabling support staff to feel supported may be one way to contribute to achieving this.

Consistent with previous research (e.g., Ashton & Roberts, 2006; DfEE, 2000), differences in the constructions of EPs roles between school staff and EPs were evident. Possible explanations for these differences have already been described in section 5.4.1. However, this has implications for how EPs currently conduct their roles within schools and their potential roles (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

Within the present study, EPs identified ways in which they currently worked with support staff. These included activities such as consultation, training, and working at a systemic level (e.g., discussion with SMT regarding contracts and competencies) which

are comparable to some of the activities suggested by Farrell et al., (2000). Additionally, a number of emerging roles were identified by EPs which included: promoting support staff roles within schools (e.g., actively inviting and involving support staff in meetings); working systemically to promote and enhance support staff roles; and providing feedback to support staff. These could be considered also to parallel Farrell et al's (2000) list suggesting that perhaps there are core functions to EPs working with support staff, but that they require expanding, deepening and developing.

It could be suggested also that, currently, EPs activities with support staff arise from other work (e.g., consultation regarding an individual pupil or training as identified by school managers) and are not directly aimed at supporting them or their development. Apart from training directly aimed at support staff (e.g., Burton, 2008), there were few activities which were identified by participants to contribute directly to supporting staff within their roles. Thus, there appears to be much scope for EPs to develop work with support staff. For example, 'building capacity' in support staff roles, improving support provided in schools and developing collaboration between teachers and support staff.

Conversely, it was identified by some participants in EPS 2 that there may not be a role for EPs to work with support staff in some situations. Whilst it was identified by EPs in both focus groups that working with support staff could be beneficial, there were also restrictions to this type of work, with possible negative connotations, for example, other staff disengaging from the process and devolving responsibility to support staff, and support staff being limited within their statuses to effect change. There appeared to be a 'moral obligation' by EPs also to ensure that support staff were not taken 'advantage' of and to ensure that responsibility for implementing initiatives/actions did not rest with one person. Furthermore, a participant highlighted that, if a school was capable of meeting the needs of support staff itself, EP involvement was unlikely to be required. This could suggest that if a school's capacity is built up so that the school can support staff appropriately, input from EPs may be unnecessary. However, there is perhaps a role for EPs to aid schools in reaching this point, and in providing ongoing support in order to maintain this position.

EP focus groups suggested that EPs have a role in working with support staff and that, perhaps, more could be done to extend this role to raise awareness of the value of support staff and to improve the deployment of support staff. This could be achieved through working systemically at the organisational level but also at individual and

group levels. Focussing upon systemic work may lead to removal from understanding of individual factors in creating environments (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), and, as one participant put it, removal from the ‘grass roots’, suggesting that EP’s ability to work across levels is not only relevant but something that needs to be maintained. Differences in the constructions of EPs roles and communication regarding roles and clarity of expectations may provide as barriers to this (DfEE, 2000), therefore promoting a need to clarify roles and expectations (MacKay, 1994). Furthermore, whilst EPs were considered to be in a position to penetrate the ‘ethos’ of schools, there was a perception that EPs were ultimately restricted by the school contexts and what schools choose to prioritise, suggesting there is a limit to the influence EPs can have. How EPs can overcome this is an area for future development.

Despite it being suggested that EPs spend just under half their time in schools (DfEE, 2000) it is surprising that there remains such confusion regarding EPs roles (Farrell et al., 2006). This research has further highlighted confusion and lack of clarity surrounding roles of EPs and suggests that more needs to be done to address this issue. How EPs construct their own roles and enact them is likely to be important to this, and this has proved challenging to define (e.g., Ashton & Roberts, 2006; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Cameron, 2006; MacKay, 1997).

Raising visibility within schools was identified by EP participants as one way to achieve greater clarity, suggesting ‘doing the job’ is sufficient to reducing confusion, however, this could lead to lack of innovation (Ashton & Roberts, 2006). Within the present research it has been suggested that how EPs communicate with schools, through ‘marketing’ their services (DfEE, 2000), and providing feedback to staff (Farrell et al., 2000) will be important to providing clarity. How schools interact with EPs is also of importance, and this perhaps highlights a need for greater collaboration between EPs and a wider range of school staff, such as headteachers, teachers and support staff in order to raise awareness of their roles. ‘Team around the school’ meetings identified by EPS 2 participants in the present study offered a suggestion as to how this may be achieved. Additionally, in addition to raising awareness of what services might be available to schools, schools, staff and pupils need to value the input provided by EPs. Thus, how roles are constructed and valued has important implications for how EPs might develop their roles (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) in working with support staff.

The sharing of psychology was identified to be important to EPs roles within the present study, and offers not only an avenue to explore further work with support staff and enabling schools to support staff more effectively but to raise the profile of the profession.

5.5 Directions for future research

The present study presents exploratory findings regarding support for support staff. A range of future research could be conducted and the need for additional research regarding support staff as a whole, is “substantial and wide ranging” (Giangreco et al., 2010, p.53) as identified in the literature review in chapter 2. The present section aims to offer suggestions for future directions in light of the outcomes of the current research project.

The small sample size of the present research study limits its generalisability (see section 5.7.7), therefore, a larger, more in-depth study across a greater number of participants, schools, authorities and EPSs may provide further insight into support structures for support staff and the roles of EP’s. Additionally, a greater range of support staff roles may have enhanced findings.

It has been acknowledged that a ‘one size fits all’ (Faraday, 2010) approach to supporting staff may not be helpful to adopt, and the individual nature of schools has been highlighted. Thus, action research undertaken by EPs and EPSs may serve to be helpful in identifying specific structures within schools, which enable support staff to feel supported. Furthermore, it may enable schools and EPs to identify new ways of working in order to benefit both pupils and staff.

It has been proposed that structures and actions that support staff find supportive, are comparable to actions identified in deploying support staff successfully and maximising their effectiveness. Future research could look to explore the mutuality of this relationship and how it might be maximised for the benefits of pupils and staff. Additionally, the specific psychological underpinnings that enable support staff to feel supported could be further investigated. Within the present study particular types of support have been interpreted to contribute to fulfilling agency, affiliation and autonomy needs, however, further research is required to explore these in more depth.

Due a lack of participant volunteers, SENCOs' perspectives regarding support for support staff and the role of EP's were not gathered. Future research could explore SENCOs' perceptions regarding support for support staff and the functions it serves in enabling support staff to support pupils in schools, to inform further developments. Furthermore, examination of the specific roles of SENCOs in providing support to staff could be explored. This could be extended to investigating the role of leadership and SMTs to further establish their influence on creating the overall 'ethos' and 'culture' of the school, as this was suggested to influence how supported staff felt. Additionally, more research is required to understand SENCO's perceptions of EPs roles (Ashton & Roberts, 2006).

Support staff constructed support in terms of what was important and valuable to them in the everyday performance of roles. If the focus was on longer term objectives participants may have provided different responses. Longitudinal research data regarding support staff may be helpful to informing future developments and to gathering information as to the impact of specific support staff structures on staff roles.

This research study modestly contributes to developing knowledge regarding EP's roles in working with support staff, however, there remains a paucity of research in this area. Research could provide more in-depth studies regarding specific activities conducted by EPs with support staff and with schools to support support staff, and the implications for pupils and schools. Further research is required also to explore what is valued about the EP role by different members of staff, and how EPs might improve their communication with schools and school staff, to widen understanding of their roles.

5.6 Limitations

The following sub-sections aim to recognise the limitations of the present study. General limitations are presented prior to limitations pertaining to the methods implemented. Limitations regarding the generalisability of the study are outlined and reflections on the research are described. Prior to consideration of the limitations, some of the challenges faced when conducting 'real world research' and how these impacted on the present study are outlined.

5.6.1 Real World Research

Trouble awaits those unwary souls who believe that research flows smoothly and naturally from questions to answers via a well organized data collection system. (Robson, 2011, p.406).

This quote acknowledges the challenge of conducting ‘real world research’ and is applicable to the present research study where a number of challenges were faced and overcome.

The recruitment of schools and participants offered the largest challenge and may be a reflection of the ‘invisible power systems’ (Lowe & Pugh, 2007), in preventing a researcher’s access to the wider workforce. Schools were less willing to participate in the research than expected and gaining access to support staff within schools was more challenging than anticipated. Some schools may have not wished to participate due to the nature of the research study, perhaps raising contentious issues regarding support for staff. This was not the intention of the research and actions were taken to ensure the purpose of the research study was made explicit. The financial implications of staff being removed from their duties to participate in the research, may have also limited participation in the project (Lowe & Pugh, 2007).

The use of multiple data gathering methods may have provided a barrier to some schools and participants. Time in schools is limited, thus, participation in two sets of data collection may have been too imposing on participants. Robson (2011) acknowledges the helpfulness of a flexible research design and this enabled sufficient data to be gathered from three different groups.

5.6.2 General limitations

The small sample of participants may be viewed as a major limitation. Additionally, all aspects of the research were not participated fully in by all the schools and participants. The reliability of the project might have been enhanced by an increased number of participants in all aspects of data collection. The SMT data is particularly limited due to the few questionnaire responses received, and the interview data being limited to one school setting. Additionally, the views of SENCOs might have provided further insight regarding support for support staff and the roles of EPs, particularly due to the importance of the role of SENCOs in managing support staff (Gerschel, 2005).

It is acknowledged that TAs and LSAs were easier to recruit compared to other members of support staff, such as pastoral staff. This was an indication of the greater number of these members of support staff in schools, as well as the ease of accessing these staff through individuals such as the SENCo. Pastoral staff, learning mentors and behaviour support workers were more likely to be managed by another member of staff other than the SENCo and were harder to access.

School 4 participants completed the study through the medium of English. It might have been less imposing for participants if the study were conducted through the medium of Welsh. However, participants provided their consent to communicate through English and did not appear to see this as a constraint.

5.6.3 Limitations pertaining to questionnaires

Questionnaires provide a fairly non-intrusive approach to gathering data and are comparatively straightforward to analyse (Wilson & McLean, 1994). A disadvantage of questionnaires is their inflexibility; respondents are not always able to develop their responses which can result in the loss of 'richer' data (Cozby, 1997). As the present study was exploratory, open questions were utilised, allowing for developed responses. Open questions are useful when the study is exploratory and when the possible answers are unknown (Bailey, 1994). This was relevant to the present study, therefore, the imposition of a strict structure was deemed unsuitable. Some structure was provided by adopting the terms 'skill development' and 'personal support' within questionnaires, in order to define different forms of support. However, it is acknowledged that these were imposed by the researcher, and it might have been more suitable for participants to have created their own distinction between different types of support.

Arranging to collect questionnaires has been shown to improve response rate (Edwards et al., 2002). In the current study, the researcher distributed questionnaires and collected them in person. However, due to difficulties associated with recruiting schools and issues in locating staff, fewer responses were received than expected. In total, thirty eight questionnaires were completed by support staff from four schools, eight of which were completed in schools in LA2, and thirty in LA1, thus, the questionnaire data is biased toward the views of LA1 participants. However, focus groups were conducted across LA1 and LA2 which supplemented and confirmed data gathered from questionnaires, suggesting consensus between viewpoints.

5.6.4 Limitations pertaining to semi-structured interviews and focus groups

Focus groups and semi-structured interviews may be seen as incompatible with a social constructionist epistemological stance due to the provision of a pre-determined agenda. However, both the focus group and interview prompts were sufficiently flexible to enable development on the participants' comments and flexibility in the response to these.

Focus groups and interviews provided a platform for support staff, members of SMT and educational psychologists to share their views regarding support for support staff. The nominal group technique adopted with support staff in focus groups enabled all participants' views to be shared and heard. However, it was apparent that individuals in some groups dominated discussions, preventing other members of the group from voicing their opinion (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Additionally, it was also observed that larger groups enabled some participants to rely on other group members to answer questions and provide feedback. Few conflicts of opinion were noted during focus groups. As focus groups were conducted with colleagues, participants may have been reluctant to challenge views or voice an opinion that was divergent from the group. Therefore, some responses may have arisen from conformance, censoring (Carey & Smith, 1994), coercion and/or conflict avoidance (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Individual interviews might have enabled participants to voice differences of opinion and might have enabled 'quieter' participants an opportunity to share their views more openly. However, focus groups seemed to enrich the discussion regarding support for staff, and identify aspects that were pertinent to groups within their schools. Additionally, the group facilitator attempted to encourage the quieter members of the group to contribute, whilst demonstrating a commitment to the authenticity of the natural group processes (Bloor, Frankland, Thomas & Robson, 2001).

Conducting focus groups consisting of participants from different schools or EPSs, might have added to the 'depth' and 'richness' of the data. However, due to practical constraints, this was not possible.

Whilst the nominal group technique enabled all members of support staff to voice their opinion in one focus group, the rankings utilised by two participants may have skewed the rankings. Participants gave the same rankings to a number of different support

structures (e.g., ranking three different types of support as the most important), impacting on the overall ranking. However, the overall rankings provided by the group were checked with participants and consensus regarding structures perceived to be most important were clarified.

Additionally, the skills of the group facilitator may have impacted on the focus group participants (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). For example, inexperienced facilitators are more likely to reduce spontaneous discussions between participants in order to maintain control of group (Bloor et al., 2001). The researcher was mindful of this challenge and sought to reduce potential bias by encouraging participants to engage in self-directed informal discussions and enabled participants to expand on their viewpoints.

Focus groups and interviews may be subject to researcher subjectivity resulting in bias. The researcher decides what is relevant and what is irrelevant and therefore, decides what is included and excluded. In an attempt to be transparent about how the outcomes of the research were achieved, details regarding the methodology and methods followed were described in detail in Chapter 3. Further consideration to this issue will be developed in a subsequent section (5.7.8) relating to the position of the researcher.

5.6.5 Advantages and Disadvantages of Thematic Analysis

Some authors argue thematic analysis is not a specific ‘branded’ qualitative approach (Boyatzis, 1998; Ryan & Bernard, 2000). However, Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is a flexible approach that can produce an insightful analysis. It is important for the method to be appropriate to the research question (Holloway & Todres, 2003; Silverman, 2010) and for analysis to be driven by both the research questions and epistemological position. Following careful consideration the researcher concluded that the method and analysis were appropriate for the research questions. Thematic analysis can usefully summarise large amounts of data and offer a ‘rich’ description across data sets. Similarities and differences can be highlighted and unanticipated insights can be generated (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These elements were useful in generating the findings of the present study.

The decisions described in Chapter 3 illustrated how the flexibility of thematic analysis was adapted to maximise robust results for the purposes of the present research study. This would have not been possible with more prescriptive techniques such as IPA or

grounded theory. Whilst the flexibility of thematic analysis is an advantage it can be a disadvantage due to its lack of rigid guidelines for analysis. It can be challenging for the researcher to decide what aspects to focus on and the course the research should take (Roberts, 2011).

Thematic analysis offers a number of advantages providing the researcher is clear and explicit about what he or she is doing. Attempts have been made within the present research study to be transparent about the assumptions, beliefs, and approaches adopted by the researcher, and how outcomes were reached in order to conduct a robust research study (see Chapter 3).

5.6.6 Validity and reliability

Qualitative research has been criticised for its lack of ‘scientific rigour’, as it is compared to frameworks which are used to evaluate quantitative methods, such as validity and reliability, which “were not devised for this purpose” (Horsburgh, 2003, p.307). Reliability refers to the possibility of the results being repeated and validity to the results being ‘correct’. However, for research conducted from a social constructionist position, which acknowledges that all knowledge is constructed as a product of culture, history and politics, mediated by language (Burr, 2003), no absolute ‘truth’ can be pursued. Furthermore, the terms reliability and validity are socially constructed. Despite this, there remains a need to make reference to reliability and validity when justifying research (Burr, 2003).

Hammersley (1990) provides broad definitions of validity and reliability:

By validity, I mean truth: the interpreted as the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers. (Hammersley, 1990, p.57).

Reliability refers to the degree of consistency with which instances are assigned to the same category by different observers or by the same observer on different occasions. (Hammersley, 1990, p.67).

Thus, reliability can be thought of to measure consistency (Merriam, 1998; Silverman, 2010). Merriam (1998) proposes three types of consistency, by which the reliability of the present study is judged.

1. Theoretical consistency is the degree to which the researcher explains the theories and assumptions underlying the study.
2. Data consistency refers to the congruence of data collection with the theoretical and epistemological perspective.
3. Procedural consistency is the provision of a detailed account of how the study was conducted.

In terms of procedural and theoretical consistency, the framework, methodology, epistemology and methods have been described in detail, particularly in Chapter 3. Decisions taken to guide the research have been made explicit in addition to a detailed account of data analysis. Data gathered via questionnaires, focus groups and semi-structured interviews were appropriate for the purposes of the present study and were analysed using techniques consistent with a social constructionist position, thus achieving data consistency.

The validity of the present study could be considered to be threatened by the subjectivity inherent in data analysis processes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher is placed as an ‘active’ participant within the research process and themes do not just ‘emerge’ from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Meanings and themes were checked with participants during data collection in order to reduce researcher bias and to promote the views of participants as explicitly as possible. Furthermore, transparency regarding the methods and methodology has been demonstrated. Seale (1999) suggests that to achieve validity the researcher should provide compelling evidence in support of the study’s key claims. Data was gathered from three different groups of participants. Commonalities between views have been identified and have provided evidence regarding constructions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists within a particular place and point in time. Additionally, differences in constructions have been identified and attempts have been made to consider explanations for these. Extracts from the data provided evidence for the key claims.

5.6.7 Generalisability

Social constructionism (Burr, 2003) denies the existence of an absolute, knowable, objective reality, and posits that experiences and ‘knowledges’ are culturally-, historically- and linguistically mediated constructs. This would suggest that generalisations regarding the constructions of support cannot be made as they are bound within a specific time and location. The present study is a small-scale project, located in a specific time and place and, therefore, the ability of the present study to make general

statements regarding how support for support and the role of educational psychologists is constructed in different schools, EPSs, LAs and countries is limited. With regard to generalisability, Willig (2001) suggests:

...even though we do not know who or how many people share a particular experience, once we have identified it through qualitative research, we do know that it is available within a culture or society. (Willig, 2001, p.17).

The themes and ideas presented as the perspectives of participants within the current research study, regarding support for support staff, suggest that they were available within a particular context, at a particular moment in time. Similarly, Horsburgh (2003) presents a view that generalisability in qualitative research is:

The extent to which theory developed within one study may be exported to provide explanatory theory for the experiences of other individuals who are in comparable situations. (Horsburgh, 2003, p. 311).

This suggests that whilst the findings are specific to its own situation, they may inform similar or related research. Although it is conceded that the findings of the current study have limited generalisability, it is reinforced that achieving this was not the intention of the present research. Furthermore, utilising Horsburgh's (2003) definition of generalisability may prove to be helpful to informing other studies.

5.6.8 Reflexivity

Qualitative research is a creative, reflexive process (Roulston, 2001; Willig, 2001) and it is assumed that "detachment on the part of the researcher is unattainable" (Horsburgh, 2003, p.308). Thus, it is necessary to acknowledge the position of the researcher through providing reflections on the present study. Willig (2001) offers a description of what reflexivity entails.

Reflexivity requires an awareness of the researcher's contribution to the construction of meanings throughout the research process, and an acknowledgement of the impossibility of remaining 'outside of one's subject matter while conducting research. (Willig, 2001, p.10).

Details of the researcher's position and presentation of decisions taken by the researcher during data collection and analysis were provided in Chapter 3 (sections 3.3 and 3.8.2) to acknowledge the role of the researcher.

Willig (2001) asserts there are two different types of reflexivity, personal and epistemological. Some consideration of both of these forms of reflexivity is provided below.

Adopting an ecological/social constructionist perspective enabled the researcher to acknowledge the views of participants through the interpretations of the researcher and the impact of different environments on perspectives. A different approach might have led to different methods being implemented and a different focus being adopted. For example, a phenomenological approach would have focussed more upon support staff's experiences of support, and EPs' experiences of providing support to schools, rather than their constructions of support. A social constructionist perspective was helpful to adopt due to the study being exploratory, and providing general insight into the views of the participants included.

Reissman (1993, p.11) states, "it [the interview] might have taken a different form if someone else were the listener". Thus, the identity of the researcher can influence the data that is generated within interviews and, potentially, focus groups. The researcher who undertook the present study was a white, female in her mid-twenties with a background of working as a member of support staff at secondary school level. Furthermore, the researcher was a trainee EP at the time of undertaking the study. The trainee was known to all the EPs involved in the study but was unknown to all the support staff and SMT participants. Being known to EP participants may have led to a reduction in the 'richness' of data collected due to assumptions being made regarding understanding of current working contexts.

The researchers' prior experience of being a member of support staff may have influenced data collection and analysis. Additionally, prior reading of research that informed the project may have led the researcher to possess preconceived expectations of the participants' responses and experiences. The researchers' role as a trainee EP may also have encouraged preconceptions regarding responses relating to the role of the EP in working with support staff. Whilst the researcher actively tried to avoid guiding participants to answer in a particular way and to interpret the data objectively, it is acknowledged that the researcher may have inadvertently prompted participants, for example through non-verbal communication, when a participant responded in a way that supported her expectations. During data analysis the researcher may have searched

for themes, or given precedent to themes that reinforced her own constructs. Actions such as being transparent about the researchers' perspective and clarifying responses with participants were taken to minimise researcher bias.

5.7 Summary

The present chapter aimed to provide an overview of the research findings in light of relevant literature. In addition, a description of implications for educational psychology and directions for future research were provided. The limitations of the present study have been outlined and some consideration to this issue of conducting 'real world research' has been given. Whilst the limitations should not be overlooked, it is important to note that there is no published literature pertaining to support for support staff in secondary schools, therefore, this research contributes to new knowledge, albeit modestly. Furthermore, it highlights the need for additional research to be conducted in order to further explore the issues raised. In drawing this thesis to a close, conclusions from the research are presented in the final chapter.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This research aimed to conduct an exploratory study regarding perceptions of support for support staff and the role of educational psychologists. A qualitative approach was adopted, and the views of support staff, SMT members, and educational psychologists, were explored through questionnaires, focus groups and individual interviews.

Differences in the issues raised between support staff focus groups highlight the individualistic cultures of schools, as a result of the pupils and staff that occupy them (Watkins & Hill, 2000). In order for staff to feel supported it is necessary for schools to consider the needs of the whole school, staff and pupils. Opening a dialogue with individuals in schools and valuing their perspectives appears pertinent to addressing support issues (Barkham, 2008).

Despite the idiosyncratic nature of schools, and the issues raised by support staff within specific schools contexts, commonalities between what support staff find helpful and value within their roles were identified. Key findings of the research suggest that support staff value support from colleagues, support from managers and training; with relationships and communication between staff being key elements in facilitating these, and enabling support staff to feel supported. Perceptions of support were closely aligned with feeling valued within schools. Consistent with previous research (e.g., Blatchford et al., 2009c; DfE, 2010a; Farrell et al., 2000) dissatisfaction with support and development opportunities available to staff were evident. This suggests that much more needs to be done to ensure that this significant proportion of the school workforce do not go unnoticed, and are provided with opportunities which enable them to feel valued and supported.

The overall school ethos/climate was identified to be critical in engendering feelings of value and respect, enabling staff to feel supported. The ‘subliminal messages’ (Kellerman, 2007) communicated through schools ethos’s/climates influenced how support staff roles were perceived within schools, and therefore, their status; for example, the inclusion of staff within the whole school and the value afforded to particular roles. Support staff status presented as a huge barrier to enabling support staff to feel supported, and influenced their own and others’ perceptions of them and their role. This suggests that schools need to create environments which enable all members

of staff to feel valued, respected and included (Abbott et al., 2011; Burton & Goodman, 2011; Russell et al., 2005). Clear roles, communication and collaboration between staff appear to be important to promoting these feelings.

A link between meeting the motivational needs, affiliation, agency and autonomy (McLean, 2009) and fulfilling these as enabling support staff to feel supported has been made. Schools which are responsive to these needs are likely to positively impact on staff's well-being (McLean, 2012) and effectiveness (Abbott, McConkey & Dobbins, 2011; Balshaw & Farrell, 2002; Fox, 1998; Howes et al., 2003; Lacey, 2001; Lorenz, 1998; Thomas, Walker & Webb, 1998). Actions and structures which limit meeting these needs, for example: limited colleague support; lack of role recognition and understanding; lack of opportunities to share knowledge and experience; and lack of managerial support; have detrimental effects on support staffs' perceptions of their roles and their overall perceptions of their school. Promotion of affiliation, agency and autonomy needs for staff and pupils, may be helpful to promoting well-being and raising standards.

Corresponding with previous research (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; DfEE, 2000; Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009), different constructions of the role of the EP between EPs and school staff have been illustrated. Differences in constructions may arise from participants' limited experiences of EPs, highlighting the need for EPs to be more visible and promote their roles with a range of staff. Furthermore, the school's ethos was implicated in impacting on the work currently conducted by EPs with support staff, and the potential roles which they could fulfil, suggesting that greater collaboration between EPs and a range of school staff (e.g., headteachers, teachers, and support staff) is required in order for roles and expectations to be clarified (MacKay, 1994). There appears to be much scope for EPs to extend and expand their roles in working with support staff and schools to support staff, as means to improve outcomes for staff and pupils. How EPs define and communicate their roles, in addition to how schools and staff interpret and respond to these will impact on how EP roles are developed in this area. Further research is required to understand what is valued about the EP role and how EPs can effectively contribute to working with support staff.

Support for support staff is largely underdeveloped and presents a timely opportunity for further exploration. This study has provided an exploratory basis on which it is

hoped future research can build. A flexible, tailored approach to support, which recognises the contribution made by support staff, may be helpful for schools to adopt. Equally, EPs need to illustrate, through visibility, accessibility, and role expansion, the valued and unique contribution they can make in supporting schools, support staff and ultimately pupils. Finally, the fundamental aspect of supporting support staff seemed to be what every individual requires, a sense of belonging and to feel valued. This was succinctly acknowledged by one participant to be:

Focus group 2 participant: “...the stuff that doesn’t cost the school anything.”

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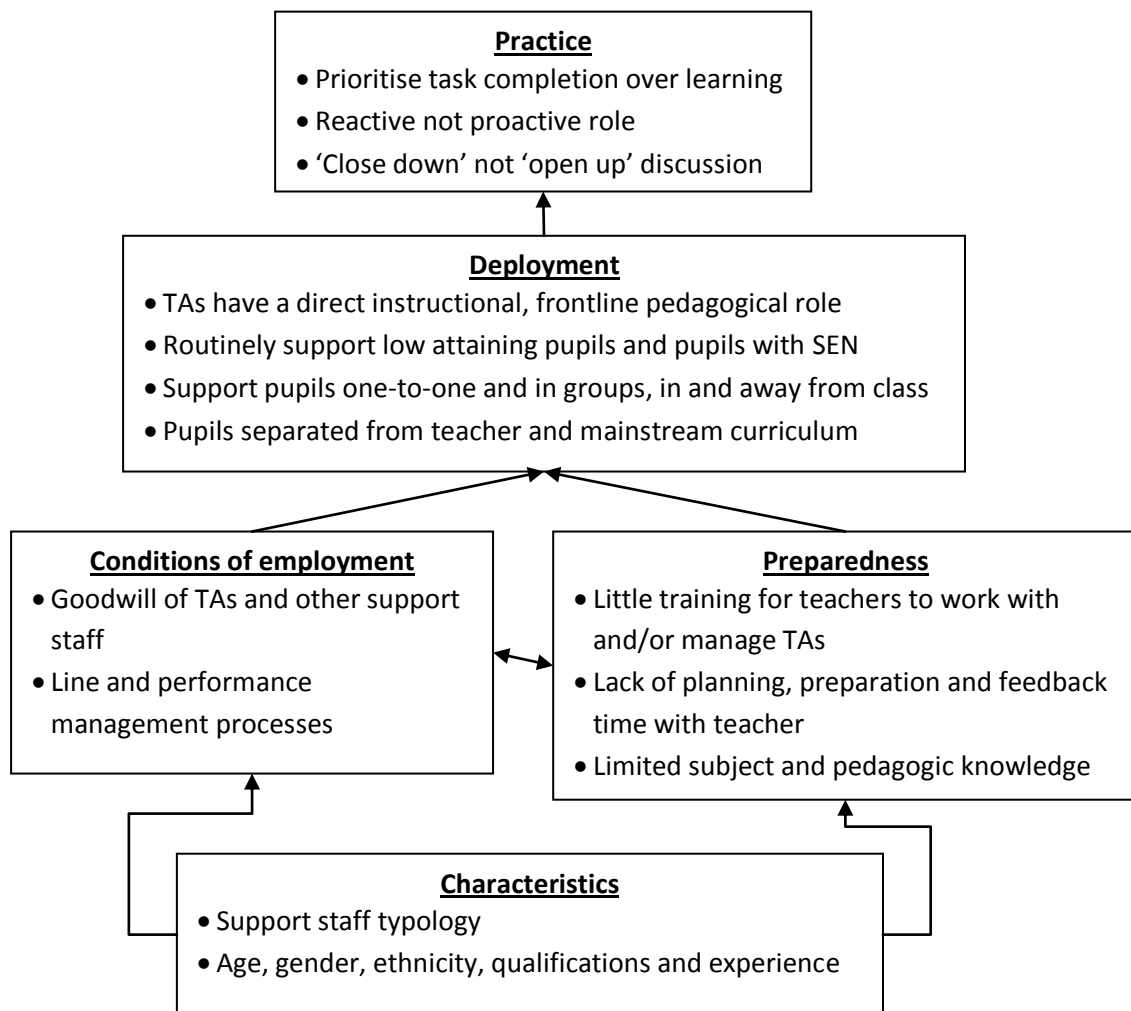
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APPENDICES

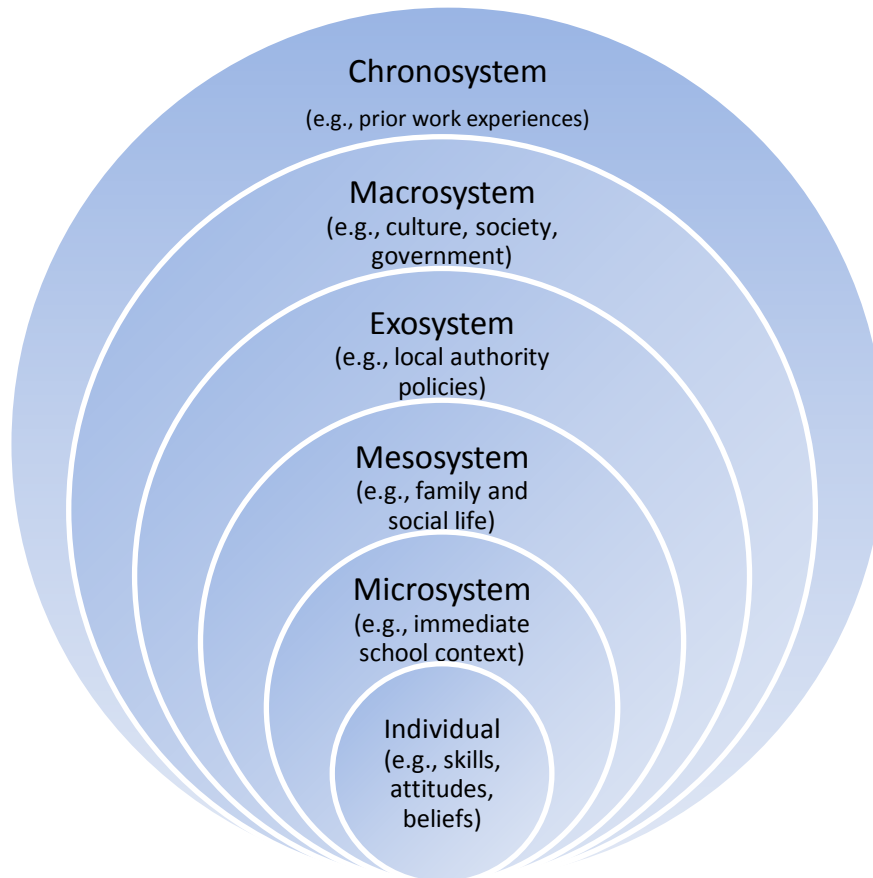
Appendix A1: Wider Pedagogical Role of support staff (Blatchford et al., 2012, p.119).



Appendix A2: Characteristics of leadership styles based upon parenting styles.
Adapted from Dinham & Scott (2008)

<p>Authoritarian</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demandingness, low responsiveness. • Traditional approach to leadership based upon obedience and respect. • Staff and pupils are expected to comply with orders and there is little negotiation or consultation with others. • Procedures are focused upon at the expense of people. • Standards and expectations may be high. • Control and consistency are emphasised. • The leader is depended on by others. • Some may appreciate the strength of the leader while others may feel frustrated by being stifled. 	<p>Authoritative</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High demandingness and high responsiveness. • Authoritative leaders share the positive attributes of authoritarian and permissive leaders. • They are warm, responsive and supportive. • They are sensitive to a diversity of individual and collective needs and are inclusive. • They collaboratively build consensus and commitment. • Standards and expectations are high and are communicated to staff and pupils. • Appropriate feedback is given to staff and pupils. • Positive school climates and cultures are established.
<p>Uninvolved</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low responsiveness and low demandingness. • Staff receive little direction or support. • Feedback and recognition of staff is lacking. • Sub-groups may form and other leaders or groups may attempt to maintain the organization with difficulty. • Standards or expectations are not communicated. • Good practice may be evident in other areas of the school (e.g., classrooms) but overall the organization is failing to fulfill its potential. 	<p>Permissive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Highly responsive and low demandingness. • The leader has good people skills and is responsive to others' needs. • The leader tries to keep everyone 'on side'. • Standards and expectations can be unclear, contradictory and too low. • The input of others is valued and the leader may find it difficult to be decisive. • A reluctance to reinforce rules or intervene may be demonstrated by the leader. • The trust of the leader may be exploited. • A lack of individual and collective responsibility may occur resulting in a 'degree of disorder'.

Appendix A2: Diagrammatic representation of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological model



Bronfenbrenner's Definition
Microsystem: a pattern of activities, roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given setting with particular physical and material (e.g., individual school setting)
Mesosystem: comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates.
Exosystem: refers to one or more settings that do not involve the developing person as an active participant, but in which events occur that affect, or are affected by, what happens in the setting containing the developing person.
Macrosystem: refers to consistencies, in the form and content of lower-order systems (micro-, meso-, and exo-) that exist, or could exist, at the level of the subculture or the culture as a whole, along with any belief systems or ideology underlying such consistencies.
Chronosystem: was proposed by Bronfenbrenner in 1986. This refers to the influences of changes over time (e.g., changes within the individual and changes within their environments)

Appendix B: Ethical considerations

Appendix B: Actions taken to comply with the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2004) guidelines regarding ethical standards expected when conducting psychological research.

Guideline	Action taken
<p>Principle 3.2 refers to the protection of participants stating:</p> <p><i>“all researchers are obliged to protect their participants from possible harm, to preserve their dignity and rights, and to safeguard their anonymity and confidentiality.”</i> (BPS, 2004, p.4).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The aim of the research was explained to participants. • Participants were informed that the research did not imply that changes to the support, staff currently received should be, or would be changed, as a result of the current research project. • Support staff focus groups took place during school time, as agreed with staff prior to data collection. One focus group was conducted after school, through agreement with support staff. Interviews and EPs focus groups took place at a time agreed with participant volunteers. A selection of small snacks and drinks were provided for participants, to thank them for their participation.
<p>Principles 3.3,</p> <p><i>“No research on a person may be carried out without the informed, free, express, specific and documented consent of the person.”</i> (BPS, 2004, p.4).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants were fully informed about the research procedure and gave their written consent to participate in the research prior to data collection. • Participants were informed of the right to withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason and they could ask for their data to be destroyed up until the data was anonymised. • All participants were informed that data collected would be confidential and anonymised. Anonymisation was usually completed on the day of data collection. All participants were informed that they could have access to any of the information they provided, and ask for it to be deleted, or destroyed, up until the information was anonymised.
<p>Principle 3.6,</p> <p><i>“Participants must be assured that all information they give will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and that their anonymity will be respected at all times unless otherwise determined by law (for example, in the case of records maintained by the Prison Service).”</i> (BPS, 2004, p.5).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • All participants were informed that they could have access to any of the information they provided, and ask for it to be deleted, or destroyed, up until the information was anonymised. • Names of people or places or events were deleted from recordings once the data was transcribed. • The researcher transcribed the data, rather than a third party, which ensured further the confidentiality of the data. • Participants were fully debriefed at the end of each stage of the research. • The contact details of the researcher and her supervisor were provided on the consent and debriefing forms for all participants. • Details of Cardiff University’s Ethics Committee were provided pre- and post-data collection, to

<p>Principle 3.9,</p> <p><i>“There is a duty of care on researchers to ameliorate any adverse effects of their research on participants (either personally or by referral to an appropriately qualified person). As a general rule, researchers should debrief participants at the end of the research either verbally or in writing.”</i> (BPS, 2004, p.5)</p>	<p>participants with information of whom to contact in the case of complaints.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Schools were responsible for identifying staff members who met the criteria to participate. • The names of participants participating in the research were not disclosed to the named member of staff with whom the researcher liaised, to preserve participants’ confidentiality. • Individuals not participating in the research study (for example, other members of school staff) were not present during the focus groups or individual interviews, to further ensure participants’ confidentiality. • Recorded information from focus groups and interviews were stored anonymously in an electronic format, on a password protected data stick and will be destroyed in August 2012. • A summary report with limited contextual information will be provided to each of the participating schools and EPSs.
<p>Principle 3.12,</p> <p><i>“Student investigators must be under the supervision of a member of Academic Staff.”</i> (BPS, 2004, p.5)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A member of academic staff at Cardiff University supervised the current research study.

Appendix C: Gatekeeper letters

Appendix C1: Example gatekeeper letter to local authorities

September 2011



To whom it may concern,

I am a trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University. As part of my training I am carrying out a research project, on support staff views regarding the types of support/training/supervision they currently receive and would like to receive.

I am writing to inform you of the study and to request Local Authority permission to conduct the project. I hope to distribute questionnaires to support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools. I also intend to distribute questionnaires to members of senior management teams within the selected comprehensive schools, regarding their views of the forms of support available to support staff.

Participants will be asked to complete a short written questionnaire during school hours, regarding their views on the types of support currently available to them and the forms of support they would like to receive. Support staff and senior management team participants will be asked whether they would be willing to be involved in a follow-up focus group or interview. A follow-up focus group or individual interviews will be conducted following analysis of the questionnaire data, with participants that express an interest in doing so. A further focus group will be conducted with Educational and Child Psychologists (ECPs) to gain ECPs views regarding the role of educational psychologists in supporting support staff.

I am writing to request permission to conduct this research project. The name of the local authority, the names of the schools and the names of the individuals involved in the research will remain anonymous throughout the study. The information gathered from the questionnaires and follow-up focus groups/interviews will, at first, be held confidentially by the researcher, and within two weeks after data collection, it will be anonymised, so that the information cannot be traced back to the individuals involved.

Full ethical approval to conduct the project has been granted by Cardiff University. I, Laura Heslop will conduct the project under the supervision of Simon Claridge, Professional Tutor DEdPsy Training Programme (full contact details below).

Please could you provide consent for the study to be conducted using the contact details below. If you would like any additional information or would like to discuss any issues regarding the research project, please feel free to contact me.

Many thanks in advance for your co-operation.

Regards,

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Contact details:

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
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Supervisor:
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In the case of complaints, please contact:
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Appendix C2: Example gatekeeper letter to EPSs

Dear [NAME],

As you are aware, as part of my training I am carrying out a research project regarding support staff views on the types of support they currently receive and would like to receive. The aim of the research is to explore support staff views regarding the types of support (training/supervision/informal support) available to them and the forms of support they would like to receive. I also hope to explore the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in working with support staff in mainstream schools.

I plan to distribute questionnaires to support staff in five mainstream comprehensive schools. I also intend to distribute questionnaires to management teams within the selected comprehensive schools regarding their views of the forms of support available to support staff. Participants will be asked to complete a short written questionnaire during school hours regarding their views on the types of support currently available to them and the forms of support they would like to receive. Support staff participants will be asked whether they would be willing to be involved in a follow-up focus group or interview. A follow-up focus group or individual interviews will be conducted following analysis of the questionnaire data, with participants that express an interest in doing so.

Following data collection from the comprehensive schools I hope to conduct a focus group with the Educational and Child Psychologists (ECPs) within your service, to gain their views regarding the role of educational psychologists in supporting support staff in schools.

I am writing to request permission to conduct this research project and to request permission to conduct a focus group with all of the ECPs within the ECPS in September 2011. The name of the local authority, the names of the schools and the names of the individuals involved in the research will remain anonymous throughout the study. The information gathered from the questionnaires and focus groups will, at first, be held confidentially by the researcher, and within two weeks after data collection, will be anonymised, so that the information cannot be traced back to the individuals involved.

Full ethical approval to conduct the project has been granted by Cardiff University. I, Laura Heslop will conduct the project under the supervision of Simon Claridge, Professional Tutor DEdPsy Training Programme (full contact details below).

Please could you provide written consent for the study to be conducted using the contact details below. If you would like any additional information or would like to discuss any issues regarding the research project, please feel free to contact me.

Many thanks in advance for your co-operation.

Regards,
Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Contact details:

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

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Appendix C3: Example gatekeeper letter to headteachers



Dear Headteacher,

I am training to be an Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University and I am currently completing a placement with Cardiff Educational Psychology Service. As part of my training I am carrying out a research project. The project seeks to explore the views of support staff regarding the types of support (training/supervision/informal support) they currently receive and the forms of support they would like to receive. I also hope to seek the views of the senior management team regarding the types of support currently available to support staff.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing to grant me permission to ask members of your staff who are currently within a supporting role (for example, TAs, LSAs, pastoral support staff, learning mentors, cover supervisors) to complete a short questionnaire, regarding their views on the types of support they receive and the forms of support they would like to receive. I am also seeking permission for members of your senior management team, including yourself, to complete a short questionnaire. The questionnaire should take no longer than 10 minutes.

Following the questionnaires, I would like to conduct a follow-up with members of staff who volunteer to do so, ideally during school time. This will involve either individual interviews or a focus group. I would like to be as least disruptive to the school day as possible, therefore I will conduct the follow-up during a lunchtime and provide lunch for the individuals who participate.

If you are willing for the research to proceed, I could visit the school during a school briefing (or any other convenient time) to explain the project further and to distribute the questionnaires. I would also be able to provide an electronic copy of questionnaires, if that were more convenient. I would like to emphasise that the project aim, is to seek the views of staff in secondary schools and does not intend to infer that changes to the support staff receive, will be, or should be made. I would be happy to feedback the outcomes of the project.

Full ethical approval has been granted by Cardiff University and permission to conduct the project has been given by the local authority and local Educational Psychology Service. I, Laura Heslop will conduct the project under the supervision of Simon Claridge, Professional Tutor DEdPsy Training Programme (full contact details below).

The name of the local authority, the name of the school and the names of the individuals involved in the research will remain anonymous throughout the study. The information gathered through the questionnaires and follow-up will, at first, be held confidentially by the researcher and within two weeks after collecting the data it will be anonymised, so that the information cannot be traced back to the individuals involved. Each participant will be informed that they can withdraw from the study, at any time, without giving a reason.

Please could you provide permission for me to distribute questionnaires to members of support staff and senior management team and conduct a follow-up with support

staff in your school. Please could you provide a named member of staff, with whom I can liaise with throughout the project. I will follow up this letter with a telephone call, within one week after sending you this letter.

If you would like any additional information regarding the project or would like to discuss any issues, please do not hesitate to contact me using the contact details below.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project.

Regards,

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Contact details:

Laura Heslop
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Appendix C4: Feedback form sent to schools unable to participate in the research



I recently contacted you regarding a research project, exploring the views of support staff on the types of support they currently receive and would like to receive.

I understand at this time you are unable to participate. In order to inform the research and future projects, I would be most grateful if could you select from the boxes below reasons for not participating. Completing this very short questionnaire will help me identify the reasons for not being able to participate and thus help me complete my research.

Many thanks in advance of your comments.

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Time constraints	
Currently participating in other research projects	
Content with the support staff receive	
Did not want to heighten expectations for change (e.g., infer to staff that by participating, changes would be made to support structures)	
Other (please specify)	

Additional Comments

Contact details:
Email: heslopla@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix D: Consent forms

Appendix D1: Support staff questionnaire consent form

School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a short written questionnaire regarding my views on the forms of support I receive in school and the types of support I would like to receive.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and I am free to withdraw or discuss any concerns with the researcher (Laura Heslop) or her University supervisor Dr. Simon Claridge.

I understand that the information provided by me, will be initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. Within two weeks of data collection my information will be anonymised. Up until the information is anonymised, I understand that I can have access to the information, I provide, and ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed.

I understand the information will be retained in a safe and secure environment until the end of the research project. I understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a debriefing.

I also understand that participation in the study does not mean that changes to the support available to me, should, or will be made.

I, _____ consent to participate in the study conducted by Laura Heslop, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Supervisor:

Dr. Simon Claridge
Professional Tutor DEdPsy Training Programme

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Appendix D2: SMT questionnaire consent form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a short written questionnaire regarding my views on the forms of support, support staff in school receive.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and I am free to withdraw or discuss any concerns with the researcher (Laura Heslop) or her University supervisor Dr. Simon Claridge.

I understand that the information provided by me will be initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. Within two weeks of data collection my information will be anonymised. Up until the information is anonymised, I understand that I can have access to the information, I provide, and ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed.

I understand that participation in the study does not mean that changes to the support available to support staff, should, or will be made. I understand the information will be retained in a safe and secure environment until the end of the research project.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a debriefing.

I, _____ consent to participate in the study conducted by Laura Heslop, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

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Appendix D3: Support staff focus group consent form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve participating in focus group lasting approximately 40 minutes and sharing my views regarding the types of support available to me and the forms of support I would like to receive in school.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and I am free to withdraw or discuss any concerns with the researcher (Laura Heslop) or her University supervisor Dr. Simon Claridge.

I understand that the information provided by me will be initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. Two weeks after collection my information will be anonymised. Up until the information is anonymised, I understand that I can have access to the information I provide and ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed.

I understand the information will be retained in a safe and secure environment until the end of the research project.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a debriefing.

I, _____ consent to participate in the study conducted by Laura Heslop, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Laura Heslop
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Appendix D4: SMT interview consent form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve participating in an interview lasting approximately 30 minutes regarding my views of the forms of support, support staff in school receive.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and I am free to withdraw or discuss any concerns with the researcher (Laura Heslop) or her University supervisor Dr. Simon Claridge.

I understand that the information provided by me will be initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. Within two weeks of data collection my information will be anonymised. Up until the information is anonymised, I understand that I can have access to the information, I provide, and ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed.

I understand that participation in the study does not mean that changes to the support available to support staff, should, or will be made. I understand the information will be retained in a safe and secure environment until the end of the research project.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a debriefing.

I, _____ consent to participate in the study conducted by Laura Heslop, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

Laura Heslop
Trainee Educational Psychologist

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Appendix D5: EP focus group consent form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Consent Form

I understand that my participation in this project will involve participating in focus group lasting approximately one hour and sharing my views on how Educational Psychologists can work with support staff in mainstream comprehensive schools.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time and I am free to withdraw or discuss any concerns with the researcher (Laura Heslop) or her University supervisor Dr. Simon Claridge.

I understand that the information provided by me will be initially held confidentially, such that only the researcher can trace this information back to me individually. Two weeks after collection my information will be anonymised. Up until the information is anonymised, I understand that I can have access to the information I provide and ask for the information I provide to be deleted/destroyed.

I understand the information will be retained in a safe and secure environment until the end of the research project.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with a debriefing.

I, _____ consent to participate in the study conducted by Laura Heslop, School of Psychology, Cardiff University with the supervision of Dr. Simon Claridge.

Signed:

Date:

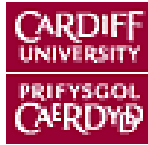
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Appendix E: Debrief forms

Appendix E1: Support staff questionnaire debrief form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Debrief

Support for the supporters: perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings and the role of the Educational Psychologist.

Many thanks for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to gain the views of support staff regarding the forms of support they currently receive in school and the types of training or other support they would like to receive.

The aim of the research project was to explore staff views about the types of support they regard as helpful and the forms of support they would like to receive, in aiding their current role and professional development.

Support staff from six secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their views of support in school. Management teams also completed questionnaires regarding the types of support available to support staff in school. Participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in the study further.

All of the information gathered during the project has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to individuals who took part in the project. All of the information has been held in a safe and secure place.

Participants can ask to remove themselves from the project at any time, without giving a reason.

If you would like more information about the project you may contact the researcher.

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Appendix E2: SMT questionnaire debrief form



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Debrief

Support for the supporters: perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings and the role of the Educational Psychologist.

Many thanks for completing the questionnaire. The questionnaire sought to gain the views of senior management team members regarding the forms of support available to support staff in school.

The aim of the research project was to explore staff views about the types of support they regard as helpful and the forms of support they would like to receive, in aiding their current role and professional development. The research also aimed to explore how Educational Psychologists can support support staff.

Support staff from secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their views of support in school. Management teams also completed questionnaires regarding the types of support available to support staff in school. Participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in the study further.

All of the information gathered during the project has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to individuals who took part in the project. All of the information has been held in a safe and secure place.

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Appendix E3: Support staff focus group debrief



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Debrief

Support for the supporters: perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings and the role of the Educational Psychologist.

Many thanks for taking part in the focus group. The aim of the research project was to explore support staff views about the types of support they regard as helpful, and the forms of support they would like to receive, in aiding their current role and professional development. The study also aimed to explore how Educational psychologists can support support staff in school.

Support staff from five different secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their views of the forms of support available in school. Management teams also completed questionnaires regarding the types of support available to support staff in school. Follow-up focus groups were then conducted with support staff and educational psychologists to further explore themes identified in the questionnaires.

All of the information gathered during the project has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to individuals who took part in the project. All of the information has been held in a safe and secure place.

Participants can ask to remove themselves from the project at any time, without giving a reason.

If you would like further information about the research project you may contact the researcher.

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Appendix E4: SMT interview debrief



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Debrief

Support for the supporters: perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings and the role of the Educational Psychologist.

Many thanks for participating in the interview. The interview sought to gain the views of senior management team members regarding the forms of support available to support staff in school.

The aim of the research project was to explore staff views about the types of support they regard as helpful and the forms of support they would like to receive, in aiding their current role and professional development. The research also aimed to explore how Educational Psychologists can support support staff.

Support staff from six secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their views of support in school. Management teams also completed questionnaires regarding the types of support available to support staff in school. Participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in the study further.

All of the information gathered during the project has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to individuals who took part in the project. All of the information has been held in a safe and secure place.

Participants can ask to remove themselves from the project at any time, without giving a reason.

If you would like more information about the project you may contact the researcher.

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Appendix E5: EP focus group debrief



School of Psychology, Cardiff University

Debrief

Support for the supporters: perceptions of support for support staff in comprehensive school settings and the role of the Educational Psychologist.

Many thanks for taking part in the focus group. The aim of the focus group was to explore the Educational Psychologists role in working with support staff.

The aim of the research project was to explore support staff views about the types of support they regard as helpful, and the forms of support they would like to receive, in aiding their current role and professional development. The study also aimed to explore how Educational psychologists can support support staff in school.

Support staff from five different secondary schools were asked to complete a questionnaire regarding their views of the forms of support available in school. Management teams also completed questionnaires regarding the types of support available to support staff in school. Follow-up focus groups were then conducted with support staff and educational psychologists to further explore themes identified in the questionnaires.

All of the information gathered during the project has been anonymised and cannot be traced back to individuals who took part in the project. All of the information has been held in a safe and secure place.

Participants can ask to remove themselves from the project at any time, without giving a reason.

The attached document provides additional information and relevant references to the research. If you would like further information about the research project you may contact the researcher.

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Appendix F: Sample questionnaires

Appendix F1: Support staff questionnaire

The following questionnaire aims to seek your views about the types of support available to you, within your current role, and the forms of support you would like to receive.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, support related to skill development, is considered to be any form of support that is provided to you within your role, which enables you to develop specific skills for your role.

Personal support relates to any support that is provided to you that supports you in a personal way and/or your personal development.

School:	Job title:
----------------	-------------------

- 1. What forms of support are currently available to you that enable you to develop specific skills for your role?**

- 2. What types of personal support are currently available to you?**

- 3. Please rank the forms of skill development support and personal support above, in order of importance/value to you, starting with the most important/valued. (Please feel free to add more, if required).**

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

4. Are there any other forms of support you receive, that you find helpful?

5. What kind of support would you like to be available to you, in order for you to carry out your role more effectively and/or to develop professionally?

6. In your opinion, how could an Educational Psychologist provide support to you?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

I would be very grateful for volunteers to participate in a follow-up to further discuss their views. Please tick the box below and print your name, if you would be happy to be included in a follow-up, focus group or interview.

Yes I would be happy to be included in a follow-up interview or focus group.

Name:

Appendix F2: SMT questionnaire

The following questionnaire aims to seek your views about the types of support available to the support staff within your school.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, support related to skill development, is considered to be any form of support that is provided to support staff, which enables them to develop specific skills for their role.

Personal support relates to any support that is provided to support staff that supports them in a personal way and/or their personal development.

School:	Job title:
----------------	-------------------

- 1. What forms of support are currently available to support staff in school that enables them to develop specific skills for their role?**

- 2. What types of personal support are currently available to support staff?**

- 3. Please rank the forms of skill development support and personal support above, in order of how important or valuable you believe them to be to support staff, starting with the most important/valued. (Please feel free to add more, if necessary).**

1.
2.
3.
4.
5.
6.
7.
8.
9.
10.

4. Are there any other forms of support available to the support staff?

5. What kind of support would you like to provide to support staff, to enable them to carry out their role more effectively and/or develop professionally?

6. In your opinion, how could an Educational Psychologist provide support to support staff?

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

I would be very grateful for volunteers to participate in a follow-up to further discuss their views. Please tick the box below and print your name, if you would be happy to be included in a follow-up interview.

Yes I would be happy to be included in a follow-up interview.

Name:

Appendix G: Participant details

Appendix G1: Individual school information

The table below provides details of the individual schools that participated in the research study. The information included in the description section of the table is information collated from Estyn reports and information gathered by the researcher through discussion with school staff.

Local Authority (LA)	School	Description
LA 1	School 1	This is a mixed comprehensive school that caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years old. The school has a falling role and the school's catchment falls within designated Communities First areas. This means that the majority of pupils attending come from areas of high levels of child poverty. The number of pupils in receipt of free schools meals is above the national average. The SEN department consists of a SENCo and a small group of LSAs who provide support to individuals and small groups. The SENCo manages the LSAs. The SENCo is not a member of the senior management team. There are additional support staff including learning mentors employed within the school.
	School 2	This school caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18. Pupils attending the school come from a range of socio-economic circumstances. LSAs employed within the school generally support individual pupils or groups of pupils within classrooms. There are a number of additional support staff roles, including a pastoral team and a learning coach. The SENCo manages the LSA team and is a member of the senior management team.
	School 3	This is a mixed comprehensive school that caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years old. The local area the school serves suffers a degree of economic and social disadvantage. There are approximately 14 members of support staff that make up the learning support team who are immediately managed by a HTLA. The SENCo oversees all ALN provision and is not a member of the senior management team. There are a number of other support staff roles including learning coaches, and pastoral staff.
LA 2	School 4	This school is a mixed, Welsh medium comprehensive school that caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18. The school has a varied intake, with pupils coming from socially disadvantaged and advantaged backgrounds. There is a learning support department which is managed by the SENCo. The SENCo is a member of the senior management team. There are additional support staff roles in the form of a learning coach and pastoral staff within the school also.
	School 5	This comprehensive school caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years old. The school has a diverse intake and the majority of pupils come from socially and economically advantaged areas. There is a team of LSAs who are directly managed by an HTLA. The SENCo oversees ALN provision and is not a member of the senior management team. There are additional support staff within the school, including pastoral staff.
	School 6	This school caters for pupils aged between 11 and 18 years old. The school is situated in a suburban area and serves a compact geographical area that includes both affluent and relatively non-affluent communities. The SENCo manages a small team of TAs and LSAs. The SENCO is a member of the senior management team.

Appendix G2: Participant details

Table 2.1: Questionnaire participants

Local Authority	School	Support Role Job Title	Total	School Total	SMT Job Title	Total	School Total
Local Authority 1	School 1	LSA	5	7	No responses		
		Senior LSA	1				
		Lead LSA	1				
	School 2	Special Needs Support Assistant (SNSA)	3	11	Deputy Head	1	1
		LSA	6				
		Pastoral Support Worker	1				
		Pastoral Team Leader	1				
	School 3	Welsh Baccalaureate Co-ordinator	1	12	Business and Facilities Manager	1	2
		LSA	4				
		Learning Coach	2		Deputy Head	1	
Youth Coach		1					
Special Support Assistant (SSA)		3					
Guidance and Learning Support Officer (pastoral care)		1					
Local Authority 2	School 4	TA	1	3	Assistant Head	2	3
		LSA	1		Headteacher	1	
		Learning Coach	1				
	School 5	HLTA	1	5	No responses		
		LSA	4				
	School 6	No responses			No responses		
TOTAL support staff questionnaires completed			38	TOTAL senior management questionnaires completed			6

Table 2.2: Total Number of Questionnaire Participants

Support Staff Participants	Total (across all schools)	SMT Participants	Total (across all schools)
LSA (or equivalent)	27	Headteacher	1
Senior/Lead LSA/HLTA	3	Deputy Head	2
Pastoral support/leader	3	Assistant Headteacher	2
Learning Coach (or equivalent)	4	Business Manager	1
Welsh Bacallaureate Co-ordinator	1		

Table 2.3: Support Staff Focus Group Participants

Local Authority	School	Number of questionnaires completed	Number of focus group volunteers	Total focus group participants	Role title of focus group participants
1	School 1	7	7*	0	N/A
	School 2	11	10	10	LSAs (x10)
	School 3	12	5*	0	N/A
2	School 4	3	1	1	Learning Mentor (x1)
	School 5	5	5	5	TAs (x4) HLTA (x1)
	School 6	0	5**	5	LSA (x3) TA (x2)

*school 2 and school 3 decided not to participate further in the research following completion of the questionnaires.

**school 6 chose not to complete questionnaires but volunteered to participate in a support staff focus group.

Table 2.4: Senior Management Individual Interview Participants

Local Authority	School	Number of SMT questionnaires completed	Number of follow-up volunteers	Total number of interview participants
1	School 1	0	0	0
	School 2	1	1	0
	School 3	2	0	0
2	School 4	3	2	2
	School 5	0	0	0
	School 6	0	0	0

Table 2.5: Educational Psychologist Participants

Local Authority	EPS	Number of participants
1	1	9
2	2	3

Appendix H: Example coded questionnaire, codes, extracts and themes

Appendix H1: Example coded questionnaire

The following questionnaire aims to seek your views about the types of support available to you, within your current role, and the forms of support you would like to receive.

For the purposes of this questionnaire, support related to skill development, is considered to be any form of support that is provided to you within your role, which enables you to develop specific skills for your role.

Personal support relates to any support that is provided to you that supports you in a personal way and/or your personal development.

School: 1	Job title: Learning support assistant (LSA)
------------------	--

1. What forms of support are currently available to you that enable you to develop specific skills for your role?

None at present due to finances within the LEA. Other than inset – predominantly in house.
--

Lack of skill development support

Financial constraints on skill development

2. What types of personal support are currently available to you?

Informal colleague support within the team. Counselling if any disclosures are made.

Colleague support (informal)

Counselling

3. Please rank the forms of skill development support and personal support above, in order of importance/value to you, starting with the most important/valued. (Please feel free to add more, if required).

1. Support staff related inset	11.
2. outside agency support	12.
3. further training courses	13.
4.	14.
5.	15.
6.	16.
7.	17.
8.	18.
9.	19.
10.	20.

INSET (support staff specific)

Outer agency support

Training

7. Are there any other forms of support you receive, that you find helpful?

None

8. What kind of support would you like to be available to you, in order for you to carry out your role more effectively and/or to develop professionally?

LSA conference

Support staff specific conference

9. In your opinion, how could an Educational Psychologist provide support to you?

When dealing with stressful or difficult situations, a chance to talk

Opportunity to talk to EP.

Thank you for completing this questionnaire.

Please tick the box below and print your name, if you would be happy to be included in a follow-up, focus group or interview.

Yes I would be happy to be included in a follow-up interview or focus group.

Name:

Appendix H2: Example of support staff questionnaire initial codes and extracts

Key

Yellow = skill development support (SD)

Blue = personal support (PS)

Orange = other forms of support (OS)

Green = support, staff would like to receive (W)

Pink = EP role (EP)

Colleague support (informal)	Informal colleague support within the team.
Counselling	Counselling if any disclosures are made
Support staff specific conference	LSA conference
Opportunity to talk to EP	When dealing with stressful or difficult situations, a chance to talk.
INSET only skill development support	None at present other than inset
Colleague support (department)	Personal support is currently available from work colleagues within our department.
SMT support	Further support from senior members of staff within the school.
INSET	Inset training
Union	Union
Training (skill development)	More training courses to develop education skills.
EP advice giver	Advice
EP expertise	Expertise
INSET	Inset training
teacher support	Teachers are always helpful
Financial constraints on training	Local authority training – as funding allows
Union	Union
Colleague support (department)	Informal support of faculty/team
Training (CPD)	More training courses available to continue professional development

Appendix H3: Example of coded support staff question 3 responses

Key: **Yellow**= skill development, **Blue** = personal support, **Red**= skill and personal

Questionnaire Response	Coded Response and Category	Ranking
Support staff related inset	training (role specific)	1
outside agency support	outer agency support	2
further training courses	training	3
Support staff related inset days	training (role specific)	1
outside agency	outer agency support	2
INSET	INSET	1
LEA training	External training	2
faculty support	Colleague support	3
Union	outer agency support	4
support staff related inset	training (role specific)	1
outside agency support	outer agency support	2
further training courses	training	3
Line manager	manager support	1
LSA leader support	manager support	2
colleagues	Colleague support	3
Team leader	manager support	1
SENCo	SENCO support	2
colleagues/LSA team	Colleague support	3
teaching staff	teacher support	4
SENCo	SENCO support	no ranking
LSAs	Colleague support (same role)	no ranking
Class teachers	teacher support	no ranking
Nurse, pastoral	Colleague support (other role)	no ranking
courses	Training	no ranking
internet	internet	no ranking
personal training	Individual skills/experience	no ranking
personal experiences, previous jobs	individual skills/experience	no ranking
Manager support	manager support	1
School support	school support	2
library	outer agency support	3
On-going training	training	1
sharing of information	sharing information	2
Daily briefing	daily briefing	3
full team meetings	team meetings	4
personal support from team	Colleague support (same role)	5
personal support line manager	manager support	6
personal support deputy head and head	SMT support	7
INSET training	INSET	1
talking to staff	Colleague support	2

Appendix H4: Amalgamated support staff questionnaire codes

Initial Code	Amalgamated code
Sharing information with experienced colleagues	Sharing knowledge and information
Sharing ideas/strategies with colleagues	
Sharing good practice	
Opportunities to share knowledge with team	
Teachers and colleagues provide information	
Access to pupil IEPs	Access to information
Access to information about pupils	
Access to information	
Colleague support (department)	Colleague support (team)
Colleague support (team)	
Colleague support (informal)	Colleague support
Colleague support (personal)	
Supportive colleagues	
Support from colleagues with specific knowledge relevant to role	
Advice from experienced staff	
Line manager support	Manager support
Manager support	
Talking to colleagues at breaktimes	Talking
Talking to leader	
Talking to colleagues	
Discussion with HLTA	
Allocated time to talk	
Opportunity to talk	Opportunity to talk
Opportunity to talk to senior members of staff	
Opportunity to talk to someone before manager	
Opportunity to talk to someone who isn't manager	
Opportunity to talk to EP	
Financial constraints on training	Financial constraints on training
Finances required for training	
Local authority training dependent on funding	
Lack of skill development support	Lack of support
No skill development support	
Lack of structured support	
Learn on the job	
Able to talk to SENCo	SENCo support
SENCo encouragement	
Knowledge of basic skills to apply with SEN pupils	Personal qualities
Personal qualities in seeking information	
Access to appropriate equipment	Access to resources
Access to better resources	
Access to books related to role	
Resources	
Access to courses limited	Access to training
More training opportunities	

INSET (internal)	INSET
INSET only skill development support	
Other training	Training
Training (CPD)	
Courses	
Departmental training	Training (external)
INSET (external)	
Training (external)	
Training out of school	Specific training
Specific training related to role	
Specific training	
Specific training (behaviour)	
Specific training (learning)	
Specific training (medical)	
Specific training for additional duties	
Development of skills to support pupils	
Joint training with teachers	Outer agency support
Library service support	
Specialist teacher support	
Time to speak to staff	Time to talk to colleagues
Time constraints	Team meetings
Departmental meetings	
Team meetings	
Daily briefings	
Union	Union support
Knowing support from union is there	
Communication with other staff	Communication between staff
Communication with line manager	
Communication and liaison between staff	
Information regarding individual pupils	Information about individual pupils
Help with individual pupils	
Liaise with EPs regarding individual pupils	
Discussion of individual pupils	
Support pupils with a diagnosis	
Feedback from EP	
Strategies for managing SEN	Strategies to support pupils
Strategies for managing behaviour	
Information regarding SEN pupils	Information about particular needs
Information about disabilities	
Information on how to support pupils in care	
Provide information about conditions	
Advice regarding specific pupil needs	
Access to EP when required	Contact from EP when required
Contact from EP when it affects pupil being supported	

Appendix H5: Deleted support staff questionnaire codes

Role funded by LEA

SENCo admin support

In school support important

Cluster group meeting

Internet

Advice

Information and resources

Support from schools is a privilege

Questioning decisions anonymously

Monthly visit with LSAs

Guidance in unfamiliar situations

Appendix H6: Support staff and SMT questionnaire themes

Support staff questionnaire themes

Figure 1A provides a visual representation of the final themes and associated sub-themes generated from support staff questionnaires. Each theme will be considered in turn. The overlap between the themes is representative of a relationship between themes.

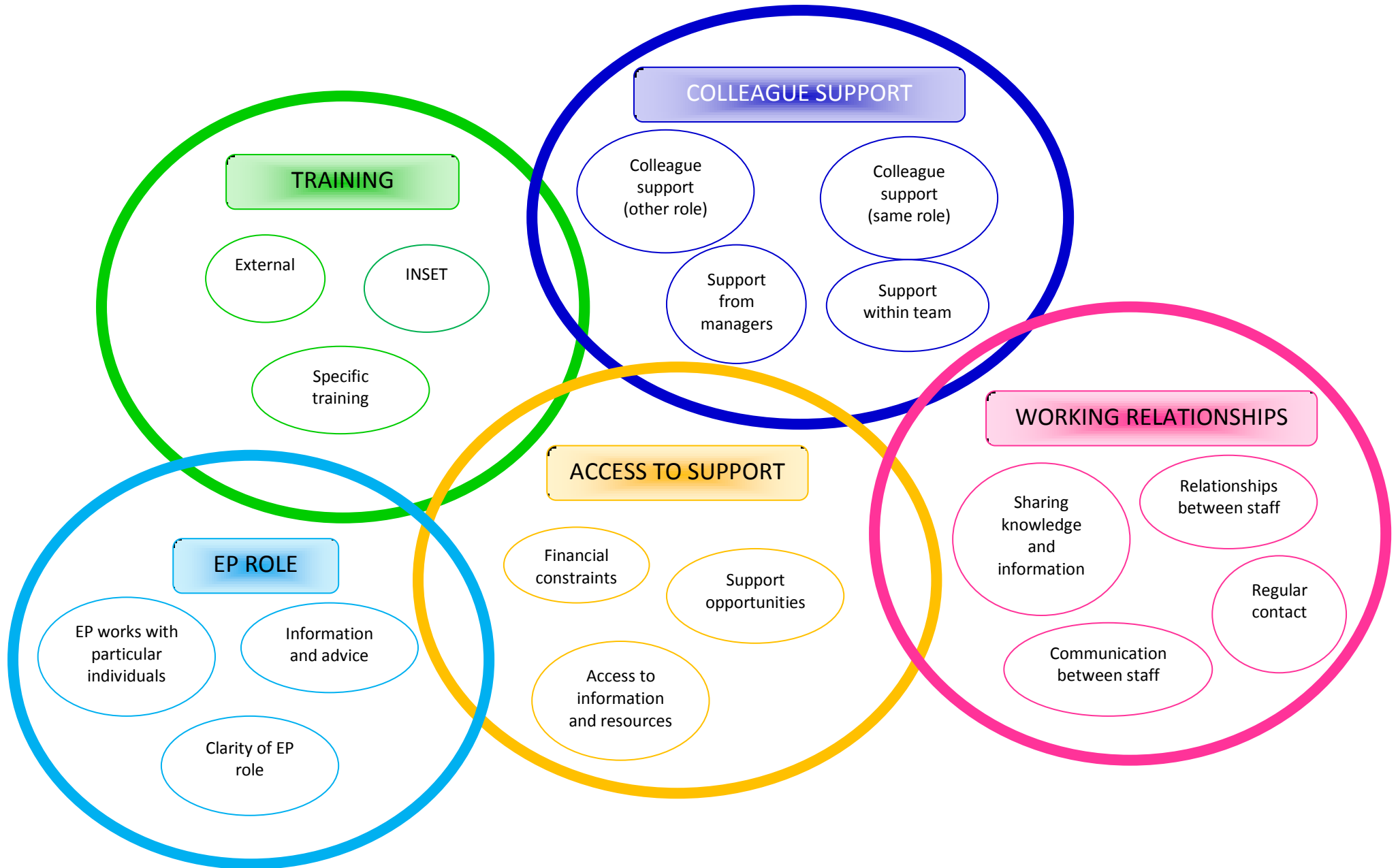
Access to support

The ‘access to support’ theme reflects participant’s responses regarding accessing opportunities that enabled them to feel supported. Responses included aspects that helped to provide personal support, and skill development support, in addition to identifying aspects of support staff wanted to receive. The sub-theme ‘financial constraints’ relates to the impact of financial constraints on accessing support such as training. ‘Support opportunities’ refers to schools making development opportunities available to staff, for example opportunities for staff to talk to each other and an EP, and time for development and planning. Access to information and resources was identified to be important also to participants within their roles.

Colleague support

‘Colleague support’ refers to participants receiving support from colleagues. Responses suggested that participants considered support from colleagues enabled both skill development and personal support. Some participants referred to it as an ‘other’ type of support. Colleague support was highly prevalent within support staff questionnaires, suggesting that it was highly important to participants in feeling supported. The sub-themes reflect colleagues who provide support, such as colleagues in other roles (i.e., teachers) and colleagues that had the same role as themselves (i.e., other LSAs). Support within teams was valued also and seemed to provide a different type of support than support from individual colleagues.

Figure 1A: Visual representation of themes generated from support staff questionnaire data



Working relationships

Working relationships linked closely with colleague support and refers to the relationships between individuals in providing support to staff within their roles and may provide insight into how staff support each other. For example, the sub-theme ‘sharing knowledge and information’ refers to participants sharing good practice and sharing information during team meetings. Communication between staff and regular contact appeared to be relevant to supporting working relationships. Participants referred to being included by staff and having “good relationships” with particular members of staff, which inferred that relationships between staff were important.

Training

Training featured heavily within questionnaire responses and seemed to be considered by most participants as a form of support that supported skill development. A considerable amount of participants referred to wanting to receive more training. INSET and specific types of training relevant to support staff roles (such as ‘behaviour’ and ‘dyslexia training’) were commonly reported by participants as a form of support.

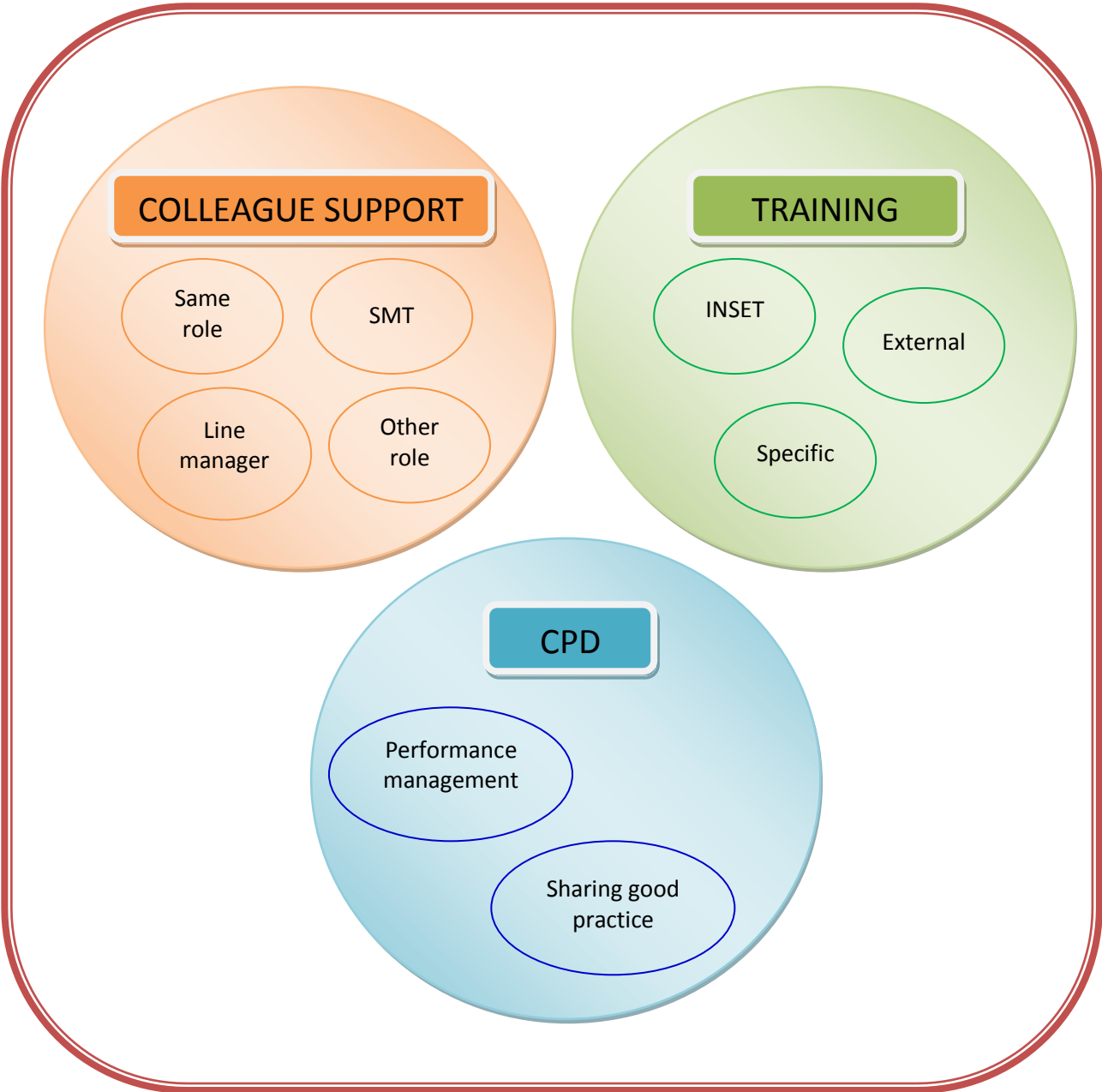
EP role

The fifth theme refers to the role of the EP. There was a mixed response in terms of what participants considered what the role of the EP could be in terms of providing support, and this is reflected by the sub-theme ‘clarity of EP role’. Participants appeared unsure of the role of an EP and the majority of participant responses referred to receiving or wanting information and advice from EPs, particularly with regard to individual pupils. There was a perception also that EPs work with particular members of staff in school. Other aspects of EP roles were identified, that were not sufficiently prevalent across questionnaires to warrant creating a sub-theme. However, due to this being an exploratory study are important to mention. Other EP roles identified included; delivery of training and workshops; providing reassurance to support staff regarding how they manage particular situations; and providing understanding from the child’s perspective.

SMT questionnaire themes

Three themes were generated from SMT questionnaire data; training, colleague support and continuing professional develop (CPD). Figure 2A provides a visual representation of the themes and associated sub-themes.

Figure 2A: Visual representation of SMT questionnaire themes



Training

Similar to support staff data, training was reported by SMT participants to provide skill development and personal support. Some respondents referred to wanting to be able to provide more training to staff. Training in the form of INSET was most widely referred to, with training related specifically to roles and external training being referred to also.

Colleague support

From an SMT perspective, colleague support for support staff was mainly related to support from managers and SMTs. However, support from colleagues within the same

role and those in other roles were identified also. Colleague support was considered to provide personal support.

CPD

The CPD theme refers to development opportunities for staff to enable them to feel supported within their roles. This theme encompassed performance management and sharing good practice. Sharing good practice included aspects such as shadowing and visits to other schools. CPD was considered to support skill development and personal support, and was referred to in questionnaires as an area which SMT would like to develop for support staff. The CPD theme may also reflect the researchers' construction of CPD activities. It is acknowledged that CPD can include a range of the activities, however, within the present study CPD was constructed as activities that were in addition to practices within the 'usual' school day. Thus, represents a limited perspective of CPD.

Appendix I: Individual support staff nominal group rankings

Appendix I1: Focus group 1 nominal group rankings of support

Type of Support	Individual Rankings	Total Score	Group Ranking
Training specifically related to role	6,8,7,7,10, 10,6,10,10,10	84	1 st
Support from manager (e.g., SENCO)	8,10,8,8,9,9,8,7,5,8	80	2 nd
Support from colleagues (e.g., talking during lunch/break times)	9,9,9,5,4,3,10,8,9,9	75	3 rd
Opportunities to share knowledge and information (e.g., via team meetings)	10,5,6,9,8,6,7,5,6,6	68	4 th
Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers or those who have a different role)	7,4,10,10,2,5,9,6,3,7	63	5 th
External training out of school	3,7,5,4,5,7,5,9,8,3	56	6 th
Internal training in school (e.g., INSET)	4,6,4,3,7,8,3,3,7,1	46	7 th
Performance Management	1,3,3,6,3,4,4,4,2,1	31	8 th
Support from family/friends	5,1,2,1,6,1,2,2,2,5	27	9 th
Outer Agency Support (e.g., Union/Local Authority)	2,2,1,2,1,2,1,4,1,4	20	10 th

Appendix I2: Focus group 2 nominal group rankings of support

Type of Support	Individual Rankings	Total Score	Group Ranking
Opportunities to share knowledge and information (e.g., via team meetings)	7,9,9,9,10	44	1 st
Support from colleagues (e.g., talking during lunch/break times)	10,8,8,6,8	40	2 nd
Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers or those who have a different role)	8,6,7,8,9	38	3 rd
Training specifically related to role	6,10,6,9,6	37	4 th
Support from manager (e.g., SENCO) <i>NB: manager was HLTA</i>	9,7,10,4,7	37	4 th
Internal training in school (e.g., INSET)	3,5,4,7,5	24	6 th
Support from family/friends	4,1,5,10,1	21	7 th
External training out of school	2,4,3,5,4	18	8 th
Performance Management	5,3,2,3,2	15	9 th
Outer Agency Support (e.g., Union/Local Authority)	1,2,1,2,3	9	10 th

Appendix I3: Focus group 3 nominal group rankings of support

Type of Support	Individual Ranking	Total Score	Group Ranking
Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers or those who have a different role)	1	10	1 st
Support from manager (line manager)	2	9	2 nd
Support from colleagues (e.g., talking during lunch/break times)	3	8	3 rd
Opportunities to share knowledge and information (e.g., via team meetings)	4	7	4 th
Performance Management	5	6	5 th
Training specifically related to role	6	5	6 th
External training out of school	7	4	7 th
Internal training in school (e.g., INSET)	8	3	8 th
Support from family/friends	9	2	9 th
Outer Agency Support (e.g., Union/Local Authority)	10	1	10 th

Appendix I4: Group 4 Nominal group rankings of support

Type of Support	Individual Rankings	Total Score	Group Ranking
Opportunities to share knowledge and information (e.g., via team meetings)	10,10,10,10,10	50	1 st
Support from colleagues (e.g., talking during lunch/break times)	7,7,8,10,10	42	2 nd
Training specifically related to role	6,5,9,10,8	38	3 rd
Support from manager (e.g., SENCO)	8,8,7,10,2	35	4 th
Internal training in school (e.g., INSET)	4,4,5,10,9	32	5 th
Support from other colleagues (e.g., teachers or those who have a different role)	9,9,2,9,3	32	5 th
External training out of school	5,3,4,10,5	27	7 th
Support from family/friends	3,6,3,9,1	22	8 th
Performance Management	2,2,6,5,0	15	9 th
Outer Agency Support (e.g., Union/Local Authority)	1,1,1,0,0	3	10 th

Appendix J: SMT interview codes, extracts and themes

Key:

YELLOW fill: ethos **BLUE fill:** colleague support **LIGHT BLUE fill:** development **PINK fill:** sharing knowledge and information
GREEN fill: deployment **ORANGE fill:** EP role **LIGHT PURPLE fill:** SENCo role **LIGHT GREEN fill:** constraints **VANILLA fill:** Headteacher role:
blue text: respect **pink text:** valued **purple text:** aspects related to manager red **red text:** training **dark green text:** talking
orange text: performance management **burgundy text:** family/friends **light blue text:** outer agency support
dark orange text: meetings **bold:** included **underline:** 'voice' **italics:** listened to **No colour:** MISC

Extract	Code	Theme
valuing them in terms of the workplace er facilities, resources	<i>Resources and facilities supporting roles</i>	ETHOS
facilities, resources, umm which makes their life you know a) a little bit more pleasant in school and secondly erm to assist them in their work.	Resources and facilities supporting roles	
I think the ethos of the school in terms of valuing support staff has to be there number one.	<i>Ethos of school is most crucial to valuing staff</i>	
Well I think you know that its its its, its a respect um issue.	Ethos of school is related to respecting staff	
And as a school we think that respecting others, irrespective of their role in school or who they are in school is vitally important	All roles respected within school	
every member of the school staff be it that your a cleaner, a lunchtime supervisor, you know they're adults, they're professionals their working within the learning community of the school they have equal value.	<i>Staff having equal value regardless of role</i>	
Erm hence it is important to educate children that every member of the school staff be it that your a cleaner, a lunchtime supervisor, you know they're adults, they're professionals their working within the learning community of the school they have equal value.	Educating pupils to respect roles	

Er there is a tendency possibly with support staff that children will look down at them and think they are not as important as teachers, well we have to work against that and instil that the environment of equal, equality for all.	Pupils looking down on support staff	
instil that the environment of equal, equality for all.	Environment of equality	
And that the same you know when we deal with children, its everybody is valued the same. The same should be for staff as well.	Staff should be valued, how all pupils are valued	
And things like, um, making them feel welcome in um all school activities	Including staff in all school activities	
them feel welcome um if its a school INSET day	Including staff in INSET	
Err making them feel as important that if there is a recreational or leisure activity that staff arrange that they're, as welcome as any other member of staff to be there.	Included in social activities	
Err making them feel as important that if there is a recreational or leisure activity that staff arrange that they're, as welcome as any other member of staff to be there.	Making staff feel welcome	
And things like, um, making them feel welcome in um all school activities, making them feel welcome um if its a school INSET day	Making staff feel welcome	
Umm they must feel that they have a part to play in moving the school forward. Making them parts of and inviting them to be parts of learning communities is vitally important.	Feeling part of the school	
it has to be fundamentally within the school	School ethos	
you know that ethos of value and your jobs important has to be number one.	Valuing role crucial to supporting staff	
where they're being felt, you know undervalued um then they're not going to contribute to the tasks, the job in hand, your not getting the best out of them	Undervaluing staff effects performance	
I fitted into the team, I knew how the team worked	Feeling part of a team	
I think it has to be part of the whole school ethos	School ethos	
equality, erm for all, irrespective of what role you play in the school is vitally important	Equality for all roles	
need to be valued	Feeling valued	
unless they are happy and content in their role, we wont get the best out of them	Happiness within role linked to effectiveness	
so to get the best out of them we need to treat them as professionals and and value them as professionals	Treated as a professional	

so to get the best out of them we need to treat them as professionals and and value them as professionals	Valued as a professional	
making the member of staff feel valued	Feeling valued	
part of a team yeah	feeling part of a team	
everybodys there, the SENCo, umm, the assistant SENCo, theres an assistant head there, all the LSAs, the HLTAs, umm, all the support staff, outside staff that come in, they're they're all sort of all together in one area	Staff together in one area	
even though it sounds as if it's just one part of the school it isnt it's part of the school. And it's included, you know,	Area part of whole school	
And you know they are treated as members of staff you know.	Treated as members of staff	
Everything that happens, all the social aspects of school life, umm you know they're just another member of staff really.	Included in social activites	
I just think that they need to be made to feel that they are complete members of staff.	Feeling like a member of staff	
And they're they're part of the staff in school.	Feeling part of the school	
And involved in everything.	Involved	
<i>its important that they feel that they have someone to turn to of seniority.</i>	<i>Having a senior member of staff to listen</i>	MANAGEMENT
I think its both isn't it. Its certainly the professional support and you know ensuring that they are fulfilling their um job description requirements etc. and fulfilling our needs but also on a personal level that you know, if they have any issues that they feel confident enough and safe enough to talk to somebody about how they are feeling about work or their personal life or whatever.	Support from manager linked to personal and professional support	
Performance management if it is done well if its again targeted at er professional development and improvement and supporting people	Performance management valued if it is done well	
its an opportunity for them to offload, its an opportunity to ask for advice,	Opportunity to offload and ask for advice	
, its important that they feel that they have someone to turn to of seniority. That, um its valuing their voice its its an opportunity for them to offload, its an opportunity to ask for advice, erm, you know crucially important again for them to feel they are part of the school	Being part of the school linked to being listened to by SMT	
<i>theres theres somebody there to listen to them as well.</i>	<i>Somebody to listen to staff</i>	

discuss, you know, practice and have managers um put their input in as well and listen to what the the support teachers are saying is is yeah its good practice, very good practice.	manager listening	
you know a managers ear you know and time,	Being listened to by manager	
you know a managers ear you know and time,	Manager providing time	
And I knew that if I were to communicate with somebody senior then I knew which lines of communication what channels I would use.	Roles and responsibilities	
Systems definitely, er yeah. Clear systems um, and support you know	Clear systems of support	
Well the Headteachers responsibility	Headteachers responsibility to support staff	
the headteacher will sort of devolve responsibilities to assistant heads,	Responsibility devolved	
she will work very closely with them team leaders such as the special needs co-ordinator etc. to ensure that training is in place, the schedules are in place, the lines of communication are in place, strategies are in place, the working practices are in place,	Links with SENCo to arrange support structures	
but its its making it sure that there is a senior voice of the senior leadership team very much part of that [R] Mmm. [SMT 1] and its keeping, you know tabs on whats going on, abreast of the situation and can actually influence what goes on and what sort of level of support is required.	Influence of SMT on support	
but its its making it sure that there is a senior voice of the senior leadership team very much part of that [R] Mmm. [SMT 1] and its keeping, you know tabs on whats going on, abreast of the situation and can actually influence what goes on and what sort of level of support is required.	awareness of situations	
Because senior managers have a role in making sure that all staff are supported	Support from senior managers	
the SENCo is on the management team	SENCo part of management team	
Umm. I think it's the SENCos role to umm 1) offer the support, guidance and feed feedback	SENCo role to provide support and guidance	
[R] HLTA [SMT 2] Thats it. [Laughing] It's um I think they're also responsible for their professional development as well.	HLTA responsible for professional development of staff	
Umm and for their well-being as members of staff.	HLTA responsible for staff well-being	

And the SENCo should be aware of all the childr pupils' needs umm whether their on school action, school action plus or or stated.	SENCo aware of pupils' needs	
because the SENCo is aware of everything	SENCo awareness of situations	
because the SENCo is aware of everything they they should have umm close liaison with the LSAs.	SENCo liaison with staff	
it's it's about that balance of being managed and but also being heard and that they can voice their opinions,	Balance between being managed and sharing opinions	
so it's strange cos i've put that performance management as a nine but it sort of comes naturally in with this first	Performance management linked to support from manager	
[SMT 2] but very rewarding [R] mmm [SMT 2] because, umm it works both ways. Umm your able to keep an eye on how effective things are happening but also your making the member of staff feel valued	Helpful for manager to liaise closely with support staff	
HLTA that's it. Are there keeping an eye.	HLTA aware of situations	
The SENCo.	SENCo most important to supporting staff	
If they are not managed well	Management of staff	
I think if they didn't have anybody to talk to, so if they didn't have a clear line management really.	Management of staff	
Ultimately the head. Through the SENCo.	Headteachers responsibility to support staff	
Ultimately the head. Through the SENCo.	Responsibility devolved	
hearing sounding board so that someone can listen to them.	Somebody listening	
And ultimately that is either the SENCo or the HLTA in our school who actually organises umm their timetable.	Timetable organised by manager	
its the SENCo's role isn't it	SENCo role to liaise with EP	
Well it goes down to lines of communication	Communication with manager	
Communication, that they are, in the know of on what goes on in school so that you ensure the lines of communication are are open	Open communication with staff	
ensure the lines of communication are are open and they have voice also	Ensuring staff have 'voice'	
That. um its valuing their voice	Valuing 'voice' of staff	

You know that they're voice is important	Valuing 'voice' of staff
safe enough to talk to somebody about how they are feeling about work or their personal life or whatever.	Feeling safe to talk
Well I suppose support from colleagues comes, you know at breaks, at the beginning of the day, at that end of the day	Support from colleagues during unstructured times of the day
opportunity to sit down and thrash things out and you know, chew the cud on things.	Opportunity to talk
[SMT 1] ...you know, yes those those opportunities to have a quick coffee and have a chat and [R] Mmm. [SMT 1] and talk to each other is is important...	Opportunity to talk
...erm but possibly in terms of making sure that they are feeling part of the school there are other things which actually I I deem to be ranked higher than that.	Talking to colleagues less important than other support structures
Yeah, and its its giving ample time in training days, and staff meetings and team meetings to share information about individual pupils, what works well, what doesn't, sharing good practice.	Sharing knowledge and information
Does that go back to like lines of communication again and [SMT 1] Yeah,	Sharing knowledge and information linked to communication
coming back to a base where there are others there and being able to turn professional dialogue, discuss, you know, practice	Opportunity to talk
discuss, you know, practice and have managers um put their input in as well and listen to what the the support teachers are saying is is yeah its good practice, very good practice.	Good practice to share information between staff and managers
the opportunities to discuss, the opportunities to talk	Opportunity to talk
And I knew that if I were to communicate with somebody senior then I knew which lines of communication what channels I would use.	Channels of communication
the busyness of a school day and a school week might make the communication between individuals unclear or you know not there	Busyness of school impacting on communication
that's the situation your in so those sorts of barriers can crop up, um, unexpected events um which hinder the opportunity to talk or discuss.	Unpredictable environment of school impacting on opportunities to talk
that they that their voice is being heard really.	'Voice' being heard
I think this is important umm not just for the LSAs umm,	Sharing knowledge and information helpful for all staff
weekly basis going through school systems etc etc. [R] Mmm. [SMT 2] it it does seem to be of benefit, they feel umm, that we feel that we're on top of things, that we can review situations on a weekly basis, their voice is heard again	Regular meetings enable situations to be reviewed

their voice is heard again	Regular meetings enable 'voice' to be heard	
and you you get their opinions their opinions are heard	Gaining opinions	
that their there every morning, having a cup of coffee	Opportunity to have a coffee together	
a regular umm you know conversation going on	Regular opportunities to talk	
team meetings I think that's important	Team meetings important	
and asking if they're not sure of something	Opportunity to ask questions	
a lot of the time they may be doing things and not sure what what they're doing is the correct way etc so it's just a chance for them to ask if they're not sure of anything really.	Reassurance in actions taken	
it's just a chance for them to ask if they're not sure of anything really.	Opportunity to ask questions	
I think if they didn't have anybody to talk to	Someone to talk to	
So, umm in a way but that's all, that's yet again giving them a voice	Giving a 'voice'	
So top of the list, top of the ranks would be erm support from manager and in school training. And that training related specifically to roles, id put those toward the top.	School training and training related to role important	DEVELOPMENT
Training out of school is a difficult one because it depends totally on the nature of the training provider and actually er the nature of what that training is	Training out of school dependant on training provider and type of training	
Training out of school is a difficult one because it depends totally on the nature of the training provider and actually er the nature of what that training is hence I would put in-service training in school at a greater ranking than that.	Training in school more valued than external training.	
its a school INSET day, and if its appropriate for them to be there	May not always be appropriate for staff to attend INSET	
Umm so that they share good practice and ideas with umm LSAs from other schools.	Sharing good practice with other LSAs	
some need more training perhaps than others	Some staff need more training than others	
depend cos some will take to it naturally some not some will need guidance as to what they're role is within their classroom	Some staff need more guidance than others	
[R] So kind of like joint training [SMT 2] Yes. [R] with regard to working collaboratively in a classroom. SMT 2] Yes. Because you know you've got an extra of staff there and you know it's a waste if your not making the most out of that second person within the classroom.	Training of teachers to understand LSA role	

And that actually would be a good training facility I think because I think a lot of members of staff do use ours effectively but I think some need reminding	Training of teachers to understand LSA role	
Ooo. I think that they need training related specifically for their role before anything else.	Training related to role necessary before other training	
the training and the specific roles of an LSA within a classroom and the guidelines and things like that, it sort of just reminds teaching staff actually, that they also need support in a way.	Training of teachers to understand LSA role	
Umm, yeah with the training to staff and the effective use of LSAs within the classroom.	Training of teachers to understand LSA role	
the opportunity to be given training,	Opportunity to access training	
we then as a staff and we as leaders look at right who could benefit from that level of expertise.	Matching support with staff	
I think offering them a umm you know a learning pathway in terms of you know a learning route in terms of qualifications	Access to qualifications	
allowing them to access those qualifications and improve themselves professionally is vitally important as well.	Access to development opportunities	
And you know as headteachers we should be encouraging learning support assistants to develop on those routes	Headteachers to encourage development	
otherwise we'll lose them, umm, and they'll go off to other places	Losing staff due to lack of development opportunities	
if they're particularly good you'd want to keep them in place	Want to retain good staff	
you know they gain additional qualifications then should be reflected in terms of umm remuneration and you know their pay scales	Qualifications recognised through pay	
I think if it's tailored to what they are doing	Qualifications tailored to role	
if you have an LSA whose working very closely with a visually impaired or a learning or hearing impaired pupil then it would be you know of value to us, if they had specialist training in that field	Qualifications tailored to role	
So you know there are examples of where qualifications would actually assist in their own professional day to day work.	Qualifications tailored to role	
But its not a case of going out and picking up a qualification and thinking ahh I'm going to get paid more, it has to be tailored to needs.	Qualifications tailored to needs	
so they have the opportunities to have professional development	CPD opportunities	
So if they have an interest in certain areas, then they can develop further	Interests of staff used to guide development	

I think, if it it would have to be quite clear what that role would be. Err I'm a little unclear at the moment in terms of what level of support that could be provided.	Uncertainty of EP role	EP ROLE
Im familiar of the role of the educational psychologist in terms of working with children,	EP works with individual pupils	
and assessing needs	EP assess pupils' needs	
Umm, how that would work in terms of working with support staff, I am unclear	uncertainty of EP role	
Umm, again if it was related to, um, training	EP providing training	
in terms of somebody external to listen to, in terms of a counsellor type role, well yes.	EP in counselling role	
But in terms of why would it need to be an educational psychologist.	Support for staff may not need to come from EP	
but if they are working with individual children who have learning difficulties, possibly, the educational psychologist could could assist in training those support assistants in understanding a little bit better, erm what the needs of those children are	Increasing understanding of learning difficulties	
it could well be you know working together in a close proximity of a classroom where er the educational psychologist is observing a particular student and is working closely with the LSA in terms of picking up signs, picking out what works and what doesn't work.	Classroom observation with LSA	
but in terms of providing a support for, umm, the LSA person, himself or herself, apart from it was in a training situation and educating sort of situation I am not entirely sure how we'd look at that then.	Uncertainty of EP role	
unclear of what the role of the educational psychologist is	Clarity of EP role	
You know its they come in, they spend a few hours with an individual and they waltz out.	EP works with individuals	
What do they do? Whats their contribution?	Clarity of EP role	
could they then feedback far more because if we're talking about the needs of individual children and its important that the whole school staff are aware of those particular needs and can we benefit from that.	EP sharing information with staff	
Could they talk far more to the whole staff in terms of what they are trying to do,	EP sharing information with staff	
its important that the whole school staff are aware of those particular needs and can we benefit from that.	All staff could benefit from EP feedback	
because if we're talking about the needs of individual children and its important that the whole school staff are aware of those particular needs and can we benefit from that	Increasing awareness of pupils' needs	

Rather than appearing to be a little bit sort of cagey about their work	Cagey about work	
Spread the word.	EP sharing information with staff	
being far more open	Openness about EP role	
everybody knowing what actually the role and the EP plays	Knowledge of EP role	
thats to do with working with the assistant head teacher or the SENCo in terms of giving the EP that opportunity and thats not the its not a criticism of the EP.	Opportunity for EP to communicate role	
I would say when an when an Ed Psyc coming in to talk about a specific child	EP works with individual pupils	
I would think that it would be good practice that the SENCo and the LSA if theres only one LSA with that child would be part of that discussion.	LSA present with EP and SENCo	
What they do when they assess children, you know just things like this.	Developing understanding of EP role	
perhaps to go into specifics explain, umm perhaps what the Ed Psycs you know do	Clarity of EP role	
LSAs should be always be err in the conversation with the Ed Psyc and SENCo when discussing a child.	LSA present with EP and SENCo	
explain the reasoning behind why a child may be, this, or this, and what they can do in the classroom setting to help.	Developing understanding of pupil	
and what they can do in the classroom setting to help.	Providing strategies to support pupil	
giving them some information they can do soo much within that classroom to help that child,	Providing information	
Umm, INSETs.	EP providing training	
And whole school cluster INSETS	EP working with school cluster	
So, umm, the the same sort of guidelines are given to both primary and secondary so when a child goes through the transition period from primary to secondary its sort of the same	EP working with school cluster	
What what I have found that if the Ed Psycs has gone round and found a specific problem in a few of the cluster schools around, then its more effective instead of doing going to this school umm once a term, then this one, it's far more effective having the whole cluster together and doing something, together to tackle an issue	EP working with school cluster	

