"…we have a lot to offer, but our hands are tied"

Principal Educational Psychologist's Perspectives of Educational Psychology Service

Delivery in relation to supporting the Mental Health Needs and Emotional Wellbeing

of Children and Young People in Wales

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Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

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List of Abbreviations

ALNCo(s)   **Additional Learning Needs Coordinator(s)**

ALN   **Additional Learning Needs**

BPS   **British Psychological Society**

COMOIRA   **Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action**

CYP   **Children and Young People**

DEdPsy   **Doctorate in Educational Psychology**

EP(s)   **Educational Psychologist(s)**

EPS(s)   **Educational Psychology Service(s)**

HCPC   **Health and Care Professions Council**

LA(s)   **Local Authority (authorities)**

MH   **Mental Health**

PEP(s)   **Principal Educational Psychologist(s)**

RTA   **Reflexive Thematic Analysis**

RQ(s)   **Research Question(s)**

SEMH   **Social, Emotional and Mental Health (needs)**

SENCo   **Special Educational Needs Coordinator**

TA   **Thematic Analysis**

TEP(s)   **Trainee Educational Psychologist(s)**

UK   **United Kingdom**

WG   **Welsh Government**

Summary of Thesis

This thesis is presented in three main sections. Firstly, a major literature review; secondly, an empirical research paper; and thirdly, a critical appraisal. Below is a summary of the content for each section.

Introduction: This section provides a brief introduction of the rationale and aims of the current research. This includes an overview of the professional context which informed the research area.

Part One: Major Literature Review: This section is divided into two parts. Part One A aims to provide an overview of the contextual literature relevant to the current research. Part One B provides a systematic literature review relating to the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK. In Part One B, literature is discussed through a critical lens to provide rationale for the current research. Four research questions for the current research are also presented.

Part Two: Major Empirical Paper: This section is divided into four parts. Part Two A, the introduction, aims to provide a brief overview of the existing literature. Part Two B presents a description of the methodology used in the current research, and Part Two C details the findings. Finally, Part Two D presents a discussion.

Part Two details the research paradigm and its underpinning philosophical assumptions. It details the method of participant recruitment, data collection and analysis, and how ethical considerations were addressed. The research data is presented with consideration to the four research questions and direct quotations from participants are provided to illustrate themes and related subthemes. Themes and subthemes constructed through the analysis are discussed in relation to the current literature as well as proposed implications for the educational psychology profession and wider systems. Finally, perceived strengths and limitations relating to the methodology of the current research are explored and possible scope for future research is suggested.

Part Three: Critical Appraisal: This section comprises a reflective account of the research process and the researcher's professional development. It is presented in two parts. Part Three A provides an analysis of the research process, its contribution to knowledge and dissemination. Part Three B provides a critical account of the development of the research practitioner. Throughout Part Three, extracts from the researcher's research diary are provided to demonstrate reflexivity and to support transparency in relation to the decisions made throughout the process.

Introduction

1. Thesis Rationale

This Thesis was completed as part of Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy). It aims to explore Principal EP's (PEP's) perceptions of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery in relation to supporting the mental health (MH) needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) in Wales.

The rationale for engaging in research in this area can be attributed to two factors. Firstly, the researcher's reflections of working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) in Local Authority (LA) EPSs in Wales and, secondly, the dearth of existing literature that explores PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. These are now explored in more detail.

2. Professional Interests

Throughout the Doctorate in Educational Psychology, which commenced in September 2021, the researcher engaged in three separate Local Authority (LA) EPS placements in Wales. During this time, many Additional Learning Needs Coordinators (ALNCos) highlighted concern regarding the MH of CYP within their school communities following the COVID-19 pandemic. They turned to the EPS for support, and the researcher became interested in the current role of EPSs, and individual EPs, in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing.

The researcher felt passionately about working to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. However, whilst working as part of an EPS and engaging in dialogue with other TEPs and EPs, it was noted that there were numerous barriers (and facilitators) in working towards this aim. The researcher also recognised that variations existed in relation to the service delivery of different EPSs across Wales which ultimately impacted how EPs worked within the LA. This inspired the exploration of current EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP, the barriers and facilitators to supporting said needs from a service level and

wider, socio-political context, as well as how EPSs may support these needs in the future.

3. Research Context

This research was conducted with PEP participants of LA EPSs in Wales. The decision to focus the research on PEPs and / or Deputy PEPs was made based on two factors. Firstly, the recognition of the leading role of PEPs in EPS delivery (Hardy et al., 2020) and, secondly, the lack of existing literature focussed on their views within this research area.

The decision to focus the research within a Welsh context was also based on two factors. Firstly, there are differences across the devolved governments within the UK in relation to curriculums, legislation, guidance, funding, and service commissioning structure. For example, the roll-out of a new curriculum for Wales (Welsh Government [WG], 2017), and the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) transformation, also specific to Wales (WG, 2018).

Secondly, in England, a significant proportion of LA EPSs have moved towards a part-traded or traded model of service delivery which undoubtedly influences how work is commissioned and by whom (Department for Education [DfE], 2023; Marsh & Higgins, 2018). As EPSs in Wales fall under the jurisdiction of Welsh Government (WG), it was felt that gaining a Welsh perspective would provide an appropriate starting point on this topic. In this way, it is hoped that the current research will encourage discourse for PEPs within and between devolved nations in the UK.

Major Literature Review

Part One A: The Significance of the Topic Area

Part One B: Systematic Literature Review

Word count: 10,124

Part One: Major Literature Review

1. Introduction

The aim of this literature review is to analyse existing literature relating to the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) and Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) in supporting the mental health (MH) needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) in the United Kingdom (UK). It is comprised of two parts.

Part One A provides a narrative review which offers theoretical and contextual information highlighting the importance of the topic area. Definitions of MH needs and emotional wellbeing, and the significance of supporting CYP's MH following the COVID-19 pandemic are explored. A discussion of relevant policy, legislation and Government publications is also provided, followed by a general discussion of the role of the EP. Finally, information pertaining to EPS service delivery ('EPS delivery') and the Principal EP (PEP) role is offered. Greater focus is placed on WG publications given the Welsh context of the current research.

Part One B provides a systematic review of the literature specifically relating to the role of the EP which aims to answer the question; *'What is the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK?".* A critical review of the literature is provided, followed by details of the remaining questions that led to the current research.

Several search approaches were utilised to retrieve relevant literature. These included accessing databases via Cardiff University's online Library Search. A 'snowballing' technique was used in Part One A to support the contextual narrative. Detail of the systematic search used for Part One B is detailed within the corresponding section.

2. Research Terminology

The focus of the current research is to explore PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. The

term 'children and young people' (CYP) is used to refer to those from birth to twenty-five. This is in recognition of the extended role of the EP in Wales in light of the Additional Learning Needs (ALN) transformation (WG, 2018).

Within the literature, several terms are used to describe the MH needs of CYP (e.g., emotional wellbeing / wellbeing needs) which are often used interchangeably (Price, 2017). Within this thesis, the broad term *'mental health needs'* (MH needs) is adopted which has been defined by WG as a *"range of emotional or behavioural difficulties that may cause concern or distress"* (Welsh Assembly Government [WAG], 2001, p. 14). The term 'emotional wellbeing' is also used in light of the increasing use of the term within educational contexts.

Within this thesis, MH needs and emotional wellbeing are constructed as interrelated entities. The current author posits that supporting both not only provides the necessary support to those experiencing distress but may also prevent the development of MH needs (Ekornes, 2015; Keyes et al., 2010). Further exploration of these terms can be found in Part One A of the thesis.

In addition, the term 'post (and 'following') COVID-19' is used to refer to the time period from March 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic was officially declared (World Health Organisation [WHO]) to the present day. The current author acknowledges the difficulties in time-stamping a pre- and post- COVID-19 world (Carletti et al., 2020) and has chosen to adopt this definition to reflect any changes that EPSs have undergone since the start of the pandemic.

Lastly, throughout Part One, when referring to the self, the term 'author' or 'current author' is used. This is in contrast to Parts Two and Three within which, the term 'researcher' and 'current researcher' is used. This is to reflect the focus on literature within Part One, and the empirical study within Part Two and Three.

3. Part One A: The Significance of the Topic Area

3.1. The Mental Health Context

Recent statistics reveal that one in six children and young people (CYP) in Wales are experiencing a diagnosable MH need such as anxiety and depression (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023). The MH needs of CYP across the UK have steadily increased over the last decade (Kauhanen et al., 2023), with the most significant increase attributed to the COVID-19 pandemic (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023; Pierce et al., 2020). This is of concern in light of the outcomes associated with CYP with MH needs including poorer educational engagement, attainment (Brännlund et al., 2017) and health (Busch & Barry, 2007).

3.2. The Role of Schools

Growing pressures in public support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) has shifted attention towards a preventative, multi-agency approach to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Ellis et al., 2021). Initiatives such as the use of whole-school approaches to wellbeing across the UK (Department for Education [DfE], 2021), and the new curriculum for Wales (WG, 2017), have been rolled out in-line with the national agenda to promote the MH of CYP (National Assembly for Wales, 2018).

3.3. The Role of the Educational Psychologist

The professional competencies for practitioner psychologists, as set out by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (HCPC, 2016) state that psychologists should develop and apply effective interventions to promote psychological wellbeing as well as social, emotional, and behavioural development. In light of these responsibilities, the EP has been construed as a professional that has a role in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Eldred, 2021; Hulme, 2017; Price, 2017).

A body of research such as Eldred (2021), Hulme (2017) and Price (2017) has argued that EPs are ideally placed to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the

UK. In light of legislative and policy changes such as the ALN transformation (WG, 2017), which has extended the role of the EP to support those from birth to age twenty-five, and the new curriculum (WG, 2018), which places the emotional wellbeing of CYP as an area of focus, this may be particularly true for, and relevant to, EPs working in Wales (Slade, 2019). However, barriers to the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice have been identified within the Welsh (Price, 2017; Slade, 2019), and wider UK context (Andrews, 2017; Crosby, 2022; Davies, 2020; Eldred, 2021; Hulme, 2017; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). These include barriers related to service delivery models adopted by EPSs (Andrews, 2017; Hulme, 2017).

3.4. Educational Psychology Services

The vast majority of EPs in the UK work within publicly funded LA Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) (DfE, 2023) which offer a range of support through a variety of service delivery models (Marsh & Higgins, 2018). Marsh and Higgins (2018) noted that models of service delivery may hinder EP's ability to fulfil their ethical responsibility in being a responsive practitioner (HCPC, 2016). However, a dearth of research has explored EPS delivery in relation to supporting the national agenda to improve the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP within the UK.

3.5. Defining Mental Health

The construct mental health may be difficult to define (Thirunavurakasu et al., 2013) and terminology such as 'mental health' and 'emotional wellbeing' have been used interchangeably within policy documents (Department for Children Schools and Families [DfCSF] & Department of Health [DoH], 2008). The current research is based within a social constructionist framework (Burr, 2015) which views an individual's reality, or 'truth' as being created as opposed to discovered (Schwandt, 2003). As such, the current author posits that individuals will likely construct their own understanding of the construct 'mental health' based on their social, political, and cultural context (Bradley, 2023).

3.5.1. Mental Health Needs

The terms 'MH needs' and 'MH difficulties' are used frequently within the literature pertaining to educational psychology. This suggests that an element of shared understanding may exist within the literature when conceptualising said needs. This may be due to the increased use of the terms 'mental health', 'mental health needs' and 'mental health difficulties' within the mainstream media cross culturally (Pavlova & Berkers, 2020). However, in adopting a social constructionist approach, one must be cautious in assuming that any two individuals hold a similar construction of the same term (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017). Rather, it may be more appropriate to state that there appears to be shared *use* of terminology pertaining to some of the literature within Educational Psychology, rather than a shared *understanding,* per se.

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) (WAG, 2001) have defined MH needs as:

> "*a broad range of emotional or behavioural difficulties that may cause concern or distress*" which may be *"reflected in difficulties and / or disabilities in the realm of personal relationships, psychological development, the capacity for play and learning, development of concepts of right and wrong and in distress and maladaptive behaviour"* (WAG, 2001, p. 14).

3.5.2. Emotional Wellbeing

The term 'emotional wellbeing' is used increasingly within education and is viewed as an important dimension of our capacity to interact with the world (Eldred, 2021). Wellbeing is a dynamic and multifaceted process that affords individuals with a sense of how their lives are going through the interaction between their perceived circumstances and culture (Forgeard et al., 2011; McGillivray, 2007). Emotions have been characterised by attitudes, beliefs and judgements which are determined by the systems, cultural beliefs, and moral values of particular communities (Armon-Jones, 1986). As such, it has been argued that like MH and MH needs, the construct emotional wellbeing is also likely to be socially constructed (Armon-Jones, 1986).

It is beyond the scope of the current narrative to explore the constructs MH, MH needs and emotional wellbeing further. Rather than viewing MH needs and emotional wellbeing as distinct entities, the current author posits that they are interrelated, and supporting both not only provides the necessary support to those experiencing distress but may also prevent the development of MH needs (Ekomes, 2015; Keyes et al., 2010).

3.6. Terminology adopted in the Current Research

Due to the Welsh context of the current research, the term 'mental health needs' (MH needs) is understood in line with the definition provided by WAG (2001). The term 'emotional wellbeing' is also used to acknowledge an increased use of the terms 'emotional (or 'mental') wellbeing' within the education system (Hulme, 2017). It is understood that MH needs and emotional wellbeing are a product of a person's interactions with their culture at any one time. Thus, the current author acknowledges that there are likely complex, influential interactions with the external environment and considerable overlap with each.

3.7. A Biopsychosocial Perspective of Mental Health

In light of the shift away from a within-child, deficit model of MH, several authors have explored a biopsychosocial perspective to understanding the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Eldred, 2021; Hulme, 2017; Price, 2017). The biopsychosocial perspective of MH refers to the notion that there are biological, psychosocial, and social determinants of mental health needs (Kirana et al., 2009) which likely interact with each other to contribute to one's experience of MH and emotional wellbeing (Babalola et al., 2017).

Price (2017) argued that this biopsychological perspective is likely underpinned by the theoretical work of Bronfenbrenner (2005). Indeed, Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory has been used to advocate a holistic approach to supporting others. Maintaining a holistic approach to supporting CYP with MH needs, which focusses on the whole person, as well as their social and cultural context systems surrounding them (Weare, 2006), has been identified as good practice for professionals working

with CYP (Department for Children, Schools and Families [DCSF] & Department of Health [DoH], 2008).

As stated within a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) review in 2008:

"In reality, good practice in any discipline will consider the individual's situation, their strengths as well as their problems, and their sources of resilience alongside risk factors. The most effective approach is one that considers all aspects of need – in effect, a biopsychosocial approach. Where the biological, psychological or social needs are paramount, particular emphasis is given to addressing these aspects" (DCSF & DoH, 2008, p. 61)

3.8. Bronfenbrenner's Bioecological Model

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model highlights the relationships between the environmental systems that impact on CYP's development. The theory highlights the importance of proximal processes; the regular reciprocal interactions between an individual and the objects, people, and symbols in the environments around them (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000). These processes have been described as *"the engines of development"* (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118).

Bronfenbrenner (2005) outlined the multiple systems surrounding CYP who are positioned at the centre of a series of increasingly broad, influential systems (see Figure 1 below). Descriptions of each system encompassed within Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model can be found in Table 1 below.
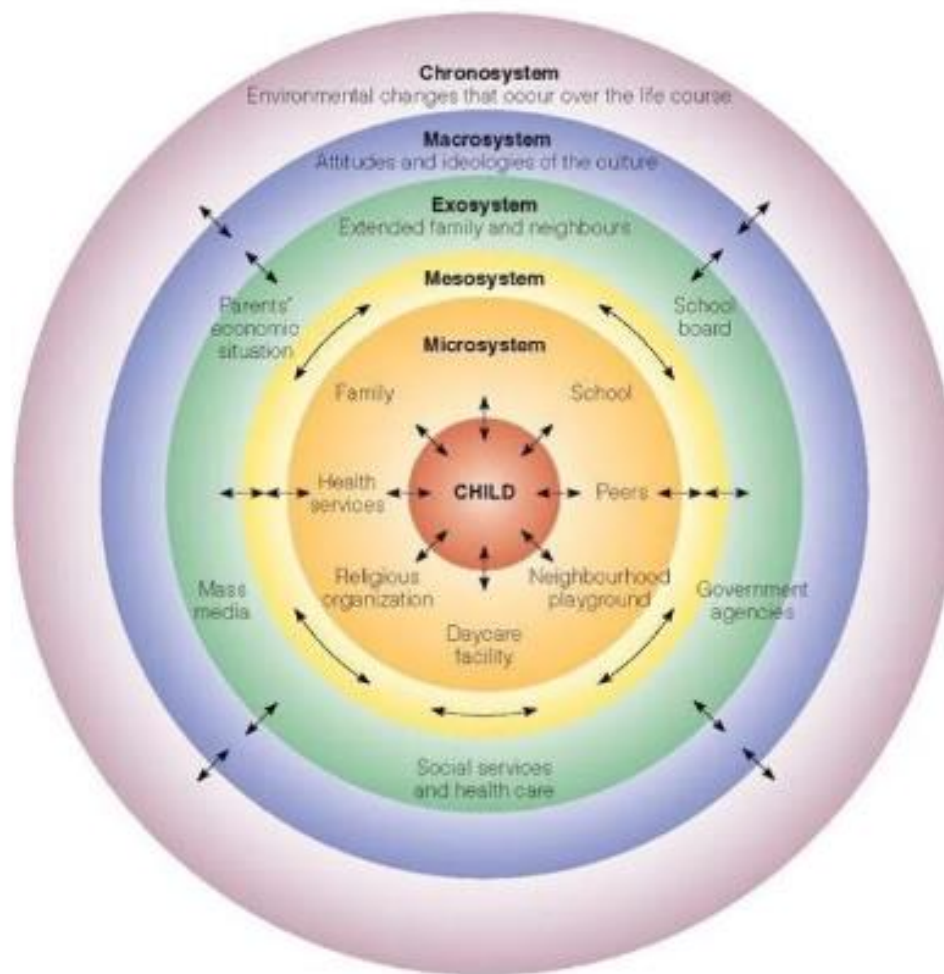
Figure 1. *Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model (Retrieved from [Evans, 2020]).*

Table 1. **Description of Systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005)**

System	Description
The microsystem	The microsystem is the immediate environment in which an individual lives and contains persons they regularly interact with (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These include parents and carers, peers, and school staff. The microsystem may have the most immediate impact on CYP due to their level of proximity with CYP positioned at the centre (Feriver et al., 2022).
The mesosystem	The mesosystem refers to the relationships and interactions between those within the microsystem. These include interactions between CYP and their parents, peers, and other

	key persons within their proximal environment (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).
The exosystem	The exosystem outlines the link between CYP and their wider environment such as social settings and the services around them. These include their neighbours and community services, the employment context of their family members as well as mass media (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).
The macrosystem	The macrosystem concerns the broader social, cultural, and political context which indirectly influences and impacts an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These may include changes in legislation as well as the attitudes and ideologies of the culture.
The chronosystem	The chronosystem refers to the changes and consistencies in experiences of the individual over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These may include major events such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Painter et al., 2023).

The bio-ecological theory, also encompassed as 'systems theory' or a 'systems approach' in practice (Underwood, 2022), suggests that within-person experiences, such as MH and emotional wellbeing, are impacted by the complex interactions within, and between, the wider systems surrounding the individual positioned at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) (see Figure 1 above). This has implications for support and intervention, highlighting the importance of considering the level at which to concentrate one's efforts to promote and facilitate change (Lee & Woods, 2017; Price, 2017).

Authors have purported that whole-community and whole-school approaches may be more impactful in promoting emotional wellbeing for *multiple* CYP compared with the use of individual interventions (Brown et al., 2023; Lee & Woods, 2017). However, it has also been noted that there may be few professions that are well-placed to engage in said 'systems work' (Slade, 2019). Further, the bio-ecological theory is not without its limitations. It has been noted that the theory may lack clear boundaries between systems (Tudge et al., 2022). Proponents of a more medicalised, within-person view

of MH and emotional wellbeing have also argued that the theory places insufficient emphasis on internal factors situated within the child themselves (Ryan, 2001).

3.9. The Impact of COVID-19 on CYP's Mental Health

In Spring 2020, COVID-19 was declared a pandemic (WHO, 2020) which resulted in many countries worldwide calling for national lockdowns (Cucinotta & Vanelli, 2020). In the UK, this included a series of stay-at-home orders where social distancing measures were enforced. Most educational provisions closed, and individuals were prevented from visiting public places or from meeting those from other households (Larsen et al., 2020).

There is a growing body of literature focussed on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on CYP's MH. During this period, Panchal et al. (2023) noted that symptoms of depression and anxiety were the most commonly reported in CYP cross culturally. Bignardi et al. (2021) also found that MH needs such as depression and PTSD increased in CYP aged between seven and twelve years old during, compared to immediately prior to, the COVID-19 pandemic.

3.10. The Political Context: A Focus on Schools

Supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing appears to be high on the UK Government's agenda and the role of schools in this clearly outlined. In the 2017 Green Paper 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' (DoHSC & DfE, 2017) it was suggested schools and colleges should be *"at the heart"* of early identification and prevention (p. 3). The DfE's 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' document (DfE, 2018) also identifies early years provisions, schools and colleges as having a responsibility for *"prevention, identification, early support and providing access to specialist support"* (p. 6).

In 2018, the WG committed to the adoption of a whole school approach to MH and emotional wellbeing; culminating in the 2021 'Framework on Embedding a Whole School Approach to Emotional and Mental Well-Being' (WG, 2021). The whole school approach aims to promote co-ordinated working, both within schools and with

supporting external parties, to develop and implement data-driven practices to reflect the needs of each school system (Brown et al., 2023). It is now a statutory requirement for all educational settings to work towards taking a whole school approach within their everyday practices to support MH and emotionally wellbeing (Brown et al., 2023).

In addition, a new curriculum for Wales has been developed. This places health and wellbeing as an 'Area of Learning' and 'Experience' on par with all other curriculum subject areas for the first time (WG, 2017). Together, these indicate a greater focus on supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing within the Welsh education system.

However, previous questions have been raised about teachers' knowledge of MH needs. Indeed, the Mental Health Foundation (2018) called for designated leads to 'cascade' training to other staff to address "the gap in the capacity of teachers to support the mental health of pupils" (p. 1). This, in turn, has raised questions about teachers' perceptions of their ability to support children's MH needs and emotional wellbeing effectively (Hulme, 2017).

3.10.1. The Role of the Educational Psychologist

Although EPs may be overlooked in key Government documents outlining plans to support MH needs and emotional wellbeing in schools (DfE, 2017; MacKay 2007), they have been identified by teachers as the key providers of specialist support (Rothi et al., 2008; Sharpe et al., 2016). Further, authors have purported that EPs in Wales are well-placed to support the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP due to their capacity to work across systems and their distinctive contribution relating to their educational background in psychology (Price 2017; Slade, 2019).

The role of the EP includes assessment, intervention, supervision, training, and research (Fallon et al., 2010). It has been argued that the distinctive contribution of the role of the EP is related to the key skills developed through psychology training which are deemed invaluable when working with CYP, key persons within CYP's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and other relevant professionals (Farrell et al., 2006). This may underpin previous assumptions that EPs are well positioned to

support CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing (Price, 2017; Slade 2019). However, as previously noted, Marsh and Higgins (2018) highlighted that the delivery of LA EPSs; influenced, in part, by the strategic role of PEPs within the wider LA system, may be a barrier to EPs fulfilling their ethical duty to practice in a responsive manner (HCPC, 2016).

3.11. Educational Psychology Service Delivery

Within the literature pertaining to educational psychology, the term 'service delivery' has been used to allude to the models and frameworks used within EP practice (Kelly, 2008; Leadbetter, 2000;). However, in a systematic review of the literature pertaining to EPS delivery from 1978 to 2013; an explicit definition of the term 'service delivery' was not identified (Islam, 2013). As such, that the term, although widely discussed within Educational Psychology literature (e.g., Leadbetter, 2000; Lyons, 1999; Marsh & Higgins, 2018), may have an implicit as opposed to an explicit meaning (Islam, 2013). As highlighted by Islam (2013), this contrasts with educational psychology literature which highlights the significance of the responsibility of the EP community in providing *"coherence and transparency in EP practice"* (p. 9).

In adopting a social constructionist stance and in acknowledging the ambiguous nature of the term 'service delivery', the current author adopts the stance of Islam (2013) who suggests that the term is likely a social construct (Burr, 2015). This stance suggests that service delivery may be represented and understood in a variety of ways both within, and across systems.

3.11.1. The Pressure on Local Authority EPSs

The 2010 Spending Review of the Coalition Government (HM Treasury, 2010) had a significant impact on budgets for Local Authority (LA) EPSs across the UK (Islam, 2013). This led many EPSs to develop a variety of fully or partly traded models of service delivery (Fallon, 2016; Lee and Woods, 2017). The continuing pressure on budgets and the financial sustainability of local authorities has continued to rise (HM Treasury, 2010). Nevertheless, EPSs still provide a core delivery to schools and other

settings for statutory and pre-statutory work which need to be both equitable and responsive to community need (Marsh & Higgins, 2018).

3.11.2. Models of Service Delivery

Within the UK, research conducted into the models of service delivery adopted by LA EPSs highlight common approaches which are used to structure how EP services are delivered (Islam, 2013). Islam (2013) noted that time allocation, service level agreements and consultation models may be the most commonly adopted. However, more recently, Marsh and Higgins (2018) explored the use of a 'work allocation' model which stands in contrast to the time allocation model and has been developed to accommodate changes in ALN policy and LA practice (Buck, 2015; Fox, 2015). Across three LA EPSs, the work allocation model was perceived favourably by PEPs, EPs and LA managers (Marsh & Higgins, 2018). This may suggest that a work allocation model may become another commonly reported model of service delivery within the educational psychology literature in the future.

A brief description and appraisal of the time allocation, service level agreements and consultation models of service delivery, as suggested by Islam (2013), can be found in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Models of EPS Service Delivery (Islam, 2013)

Service delivery model	Description using direct quotes from Islam (2013)	Critique as noted by Islam (2013) with added comments by the current author
Time allocation	*"The time allocation model of EP service delivery involves the application of complex formulae and weightings in order to allocate EPs' time within the service (Leadbetter 2000; 2002)"* (Islam, 2013, p. 17).	Fallon et al. (2010) argued that the time allocation model may afford EPSs the ability to manage increasing demands such as bureaucracy, statutory work and report writing. However, Fallon et al. (2010) also noted that the time allocation model is perceived as a barrier by school systems who receive support from EPSs. Specifically, they found that the most commonly cited barrier to effective practice as *"the limited contact time with EPs"* (Fallon et al., 2010, p.9).
Service Level Agreements (SLAs)	*"SLAs are statements of principles, rights and responsibilities which provide schools and other service users with standards for the service being provided, which ensure quality, performance and enhance the accountability of professional activity (Wolfendale et al., 1992). SLAs developed from the position that in order to provide a high-quality service, EP services needed to strive towards transparent*	Service level agreements may restrict the autonomy of EPSs and individual EPs (Islam, 2013). Educational Psychologists are required to be responsive and adaptable practitioners (HCPC, 2016). However, SLAs may confine EPs to specific ways of working (Islam, 2013).

	practice by demonstrating and evaluating the effectiveness of the delivery of services (DfEE, 2000)" (Islam, 2013, p. 21)	
Consultation	*"Consultation as a model of EP service delivery originates from a social psychological perspective (Kelly, 2008), where the emphasis is placed upon understanding that behaviour is intrinsically linked to the context in which it occurs, thus in order to fully comprehend an action, it needs to be viewed in relation to the social circumstances that impinge on an individual."* (Islam, 2013; p. 24).	Islam (2013) noted that the consultation model of service delivery *"enables the exploration of a concern with service users, through a collaborative approach, which aims to gradually shift from the expert-consultee model of working to one where a shared understanding of the concern is developed collaboratively (Kelly, 2008)"* (Islam, 2013, p. 25). The current author pertains that through working with those within CYP's microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), a consultation model of service delivery appears to support a biopsychosocial approach to supporting MH. In this way, consultation model of service delivery appears to fulfil constructions of *"good practice"* in relation to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing (DCSF & DoH, 2008, p.61)

3.11.3. The Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action

It is perhaps important to consider the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008; Rhydderch & Gameson, 2010) when discussing EPS in Wales (Davies, 2023). As previously noted, EPS delivery may be best understood as the models and frameworks utilised in delivering EP services (Marsh & Higgins, 2018). One framework that may be adopted within EPSs, particularly those in Wales (Davies, 2023), is the COMOIRA framework (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008; Rhydderch & Gameson, 2010) (see Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. *The COMOIRA framework (retrieved from Rhydderch & Gameson [2010]).*

As shown in Figure 2 above, the COMOIRA framework comprises of a 'core' set of principles and concepts in addition to eight key decision points, each of which have a set of functions that have been considered helpful when working with others to promote change (Kelly, 2008). Within the COMOIRA framework, movement between key decision points always occurs through the core (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008).

The COMOIRA framework has been praised for its flexibility (Kelly, 2008). Within the framework, key decision points are not ordered, allowing one to start at any point and to consider each decision point in isolation (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008). Further, the model can be used to support practitioners to engage in change themselves, to support stakeholders to engaging in change, as well as understanding the change process for an *"infinite diversity of issues or needs"* (Kelly, 2008, p. 125). As such, the current author purports that the COMOIRA framework may be a useful tool for EPSs in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP.

In a critical synthesis of professional frameworks pertaining to educational psychology practice, Sedgwick (2019) provided a critique of the COMOIRA framework by exploring its *"most useful"* and *"least useful"* aspects (p. 6). The views of Sedgwick (2019) are explored in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Critique of the COMOIRA model (Sedgwick, 2019)

Most Helpful Aspects	Least Helpful Aspects
• Sedgwick (2019) noted a strength of the COMOIRA framework is its *"emphasis on managing effective change"* (p. 6) as opposed to a greater emphasis on hypothesis formation with other frameworks such as the Division of Educational Psychologist's Framework for Psychological Assessment and intervention (British Psychological Society [BPS], 1999).	• Due to its iterative nature, COMOIRA does not encompass a prescribed set of instructions (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2010). Sedgwick (2019) suggested that this may be counterintuitive in the way that the model pertains that change can be evaluated prior to the clarification of key change issues. The current author notes that COMOIRA may be perceived

- Further, Sedgwick (2019) noted that within EP practice, this may support the scientist-practitioner role by affording the consideration of within-child factors with the eco-systemic context within which, CYP are positioned.
- In other words, Sedgwick (2019) perceives the COMOIRA framework as one that supports a bio-ecological approach to supporting MH and emotional wellbeing.

as counterintuitive as there is no prescriptive start and end point; perhaps particularly for EPs who are used to working with more linear models.
- Further, Sedgwick (2019) suggested that the framework may be overly complex which may not be helpful when sharing it with service users. It was noted that key decision points are likely implicit in nature for EPs, and a simplified version of COMOIRA was thus suggested as both possible and perhaps more helpful for the change process in considering collaboration (Sedgwick, 2019).

- Sedgwick (2019) noted that with its emphasis on 'enabling dialogue' which is positioned at the core, the COMOIRA framework ensures a level of focus remains on *"developing relationships, thus fostering transparency by applying psychology relevant and accessible to service-users"* (p. 6).
- Further, it was suggested that said focus supports the avoidance of the 'expert model' which was constructed as helpful within EP practice.

- Sedgwick (2019) noted that due to its social constructionist underpinning, the COMOIRA framework pertains that no objective truths exist (Burr, 2015). However, it was noted that *"searching for an objective explanation for observed behaviours"* (p. 6) may be an essential element to *"facilitate the systematic and rigorous evaluation of interventions, or 'informed and reasoned actions'"*. Further pertaining to this point, Sedgwick (2019) noted the following:

	"It is difficult for COMOIRA to facilitate this scientific approach because there is no specific decision point regarding evidence gathering and analysis." (p. 6).

3.11.4. Principal Educational Psychologists

Marsh & Higgins (2018) noted that a 'fit for purpose' model of service delivery that can be refined and adapted in response to changing needs and pressures is a challenge for those involved in the planning of service delivery. These include PEPs and their deputy counterparts (Hardy et al., 2020).

Within literature pertaining to educational psychology leadership, Hardy et al. (2020) provided an overview of the responsibilities encompassed within the role of the PEP as a strategic leader of an EPS. An example of the responsibilities of the PEP role, as alluded by Hardy et al. (2020) is provided below.

- Navigating pressures from national policy and local practice in a time of great austerity;
- Engaging in 'participatory leadership' by engaging with all members of an EPS to develop a *"shared understanding of the aims and purpose of the EPS"* (Hardy et al., 2020, p. 4) and;
- Reflecting and revisiting practice and EPS delivery and to develop positive relationships within their EPS and across the wider LA.

3.12. Part One A Chapter Summary

In summary, Part One A briefly explored the constructs mental health, emotional wellbeing and Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological theory. A brief overview of the significance of the COVID-19 pandemic on CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing was provided, followed by an overview of key policy and legislation within the UK and Welsh education system. In light of the increasingly holistic approach to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing in Wales and the UK, the role of school systems and EPs was also explored.

Finally, consideration is given to EPS delivery. Models of service delivery, including the COMOIRA framework (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008) were explored as well as the role of PEPs as strategic leaders of EPSs. These areas are considered as areas requiring further exploration.

4. Part One B: Systematic Literature Review

4.1. Overview

The purpose of this literature review was to explore and critically review the current literature pertaining to the role of the EP and EPS in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19. To support the trustworthiness, transparency and applicability of the literature review, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidance was adopted (Page et al., 2021).

4.2. Formulation of Review Question

The initial question posed for this literature review was '*how are educational psychology services (EPSs) supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19?*'. However, following an initial systematic search of several databases, using the search terms 'Educational Psycholog*' or 'EPs' *and* 'mental health' *or* 'well-being' *or* 'wellbeing' *and* 'service' *and* 'covid-19' **or** '*pandemic*', it became apparent that there were no results that specifically discussed how EPSs are supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following the COVID-19 pandemic. Further, only one result focussed a discussion on EP *services* in relation to supporting MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Greig et al., 2019).

A subsequent, broader systematic search with the absence of 'service', 'COVID-19' and 'pandemic' yielded more results, several of which discussed the role of the EP in supporting MH and emotional wellbeing more generally. Subsequently, a more comprehensive review question was posed; '*what is the **role** of the Educational Psychologist and Educational Psychology Service in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP **within the UK**?*' An expanded search was used to generate a larger scope for the review (see Table 4 below for all included search terms).

Table 4. Systematic Literature Review Search Terms

Search Terms One		Search Terms Two		Search Terms Three
"Educational psycholog*" "EP*"	**AND**	"Mental health" "emotional*" "Wellbeing" "Well-being" "Well being"	**AND**	"EP role" "Role" "Contribution" "involvement" "Research" "Assessment" "Intervention" Consultation" "Supervision" "Training"

To support the relevance of papers chosen for critical examination, the inclusion and exclusion criteria detailed in Table 5 below was applied. Journal articles published from 2014 onwards were considered in the first instance to narrow the search to articles published within the last decade. Following the review of key legislation, articles published prior to 2017 were excluded as this was the year of the publishing of The Green Paper (DoHSC & DfE, 2017) which may have had implications for the EP role within this area of practice (Lee & Woods, 2017).

Table 5. Systematic Literature Review Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
Design: Empirical studies.	Opinion pieces, reviews, and position papers.	To support the review's aim of exploring the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP within the UK with verifiable data.
Quality / Peer Review: Articles were included if they were published within an academic journal. Unpublished doctoral theses (that had undergone the Viva process) were included.	Articles not published within an academic journal.	The quality of studies would have been peer-reviewed if published within an academic journal or through a voce viva examination.
Location: Practice within the UK.	Outside of the UK.	Due to variations in legislation, policy, and service delivery models.
Participants: Articles were included if participants were related to the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs (e.g., PEPs, EPs, ALNCos and ELSAs).	Articles were not included if participants were not related to the role of the EP.	To support with the reviews aims of exploring the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing.

Relevance to the role of the EP: Articles were included if they discussed the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs.		Articles were not included if they did not refer to the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs. Articles were excluded if they focussed on the roll out of a specific wellbeing intervention unique to one specific UK context (e.g., a 'well-being toolkit' and a training programme unique to Scotland).	To support with the review's aim of exploring the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK.
Initial search	**Date:** 2014	Pre 2014	To narrow the search to articles published within the last 10 years within the first instance.
Further screening	**Date:** 2017	Pre 2017	To reflect any changes in the EP role in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following the publishing of the Green Paper in 2017 (DoHSC & DfE, 2017).

4.3. Review Strategy

A systematic review was used to critically appraise literature relating to the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK. As the question posed of the literature was specific, and a broader review of the literature was not required, a systematic review was deemed appropriate (Rother, 2007).

Several databases were searched based on their relevance to educational psychology, education, and mental health. These included PsychInfo®. SCOPUS, and ProQuest. An initial search was conducted in August 2022. Additional searches were conducted in October 2023 and December 2023. Each database search is illustrated in Appendix 1.

During an initial search, it became clear that there was an abundance of literature relating to CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. As such, it was decided that the search should include literature that was pertinent to EPs in order to provide results more specific to the review question. Therefore, initial terms were relating to *"Educational Psycholog*"* and *mental health*. The asterisk used in the former term was used to yield results relating to both EPs and EPSs. Equivalent words relating to each of these subject headings were combined using Boolean operators. For example, "OR" was used to widen the search, and "AND" was used to combine search terms to ensure the results were specific to the review question (see Appendix 1).

To further narrow the search to improve the relevance of the search results to the review question, a search was conducted for papers with terms "Educational Psycholog*", "mental health" (and equivalent terms) in their *titles.* A set of third research terms relating to the role of the EP; assessment, intervention, consultation, training, and research (Fallon et al., 2010) were also used (see Appendix 1). A list of all search terms used can be found in Table 4.

4.3.1. Search Outcomes

In total, 12 articles were retrieved through the systematic literature search. Articles included 8 qualitative, 1 quantitative and 3 mixed-methods studies. The screening

process for inclusion is outlined using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA), which can be found in Appendix 2. The full list of included articles can be found in Appendix 3. A sample of articles *not* included within the review from one database search (PsychInfo®), and the reasons for their exclusion can be found in Appendix 4.

4.3.2. Quality Appraisal

Twelve papers were examined using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018). The MMAT was utilised as it is designed for the critical appraisal of qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods studies. Consideration was given to relevant questions for each article. An overall quality score was not provided due to the limited results obtained from the literature search. As such, all 12 articles were included in the review. For an example of a completed MMAT checklist for a sample of 3 articles (1 qualitative, 1 quantitative and 1 mixed methods study), see Appendix 5. A reflexive account of the researcher's experience of using the MMAT can be found in Part Three A of the thesis.

4.4. Critical Review of the Literature

4.4.1. Structure of the Review

In order to organise the structure of the systematic literature review, themes were constructed for each article through the process of a thematic synthesis (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Themes are offered as subheadings to support navigation of the literature review.

The 12 selected research papers are now discussed in relation to themes that explore the following literature review question: ***What is the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK?***

4.4.2. The Role of the Educational Psychologist

A consistent theme across the selected review articles is the discussion of the ambiguity surrounding the role of the EP in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP. Numerous studies discuss the debate as to whether this area of practice is a role of the EP (e.g., Davies, 2020; Eldred, 2021; Price, 2017; Slade, 2019; Underwood, 2022). Davies (2020) explored this further by focussing on *how* EPs construct their role within this area.

Davies (2020) aimed to explore EPs' sensemaking pertaining to their role in supporting CYP's MH. Within this research, EP and TEP participants employed within four LA EPSs in England took part in semi-structured interviews which explored their construction of their role in relation to this area (Davies, 2020). A metaphorical analysis of the sensemaking accounts generated two contrasting, overarching themes *"Heir-apparent"* and *"Outsider"* (Davies, 2020, p. 82). Subthemes, constructed as metaphors, were positioned in relation to whether they related to one of the two opposing, over-arching themes.
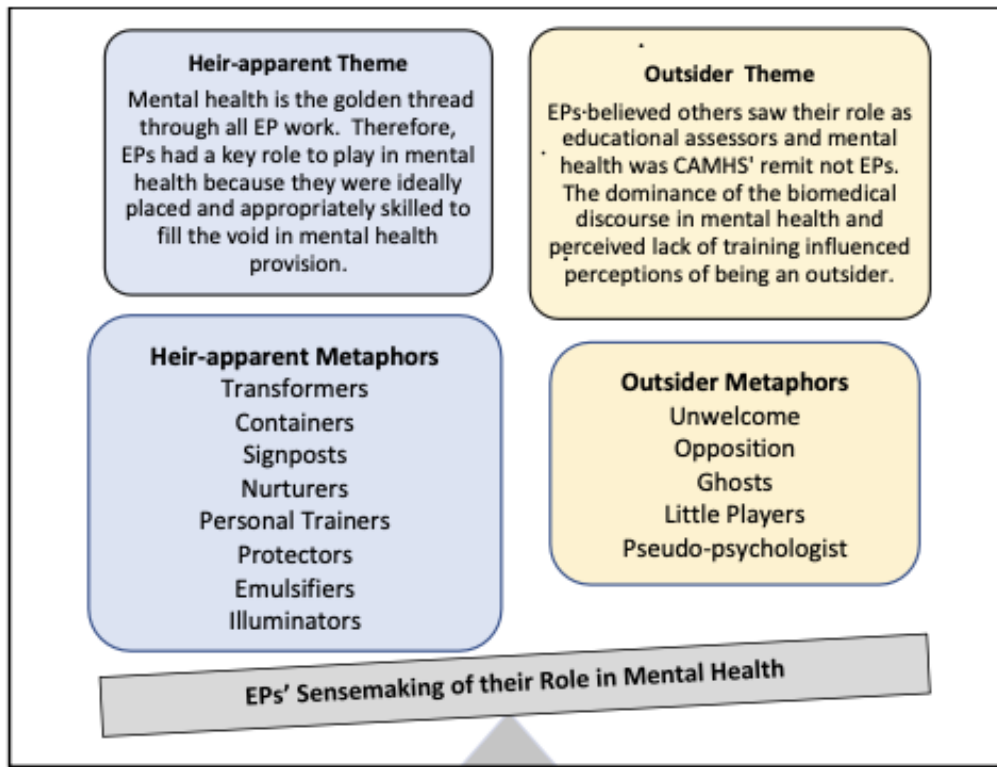
Figure 3. *The Findings of Davies (2020) (retrieved from Davies [2020]).*

As depicted by Figure 3 above, Davies (2020) found that EPs *do* recognise supporting CYP's MH as part of their role, with the metaphorical weight of the 'heir-apparent' theme greater than that of the 'outsider'. Participants encompassed their role as an agent of change ('Transformers'), to emotionally hold ('Container') support ('Nurturers') and guide adults ('Personal Trainer') to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP, indirectly. Further, participants felt that the role of the EP in this area is to shine a light on what needs considering ('illuminators') and to bridge the gap between systems ('Emulsifiers') whilst functioning akin to an emergency service ('Protectors'). Participants also acknowledged aspects of this area of practice that may be outside of the realm of the EP role (Davies, 2020).

The findings of Davies (2020) may suggest that a dichotomy exists between EPs' (and TEPs') view of the EP role. The current author posits that this may be perpetuated by the configuration of the overarching themes as distinct entities (as shown in Figure 3). However, Davies (2020) argues that the heir-apparent-outsider dichotomy should be viewed as opposite ends of a continuum, rather than independent constructs. This suggests that the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice is dynamic, interwoven and likely influenced by the social and cultural context (Burr, 2015).

The research of Davies (2020) and the documented ambiguity surrounding the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing is perhaps important to consider before exploring research articles focussed on exploring specific aspects of the EP role in relation to this area of practice. In considering the findings of Davies (2020), the reader is encouraged to hold in mind that the view of the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing will likely differ between individuals positioned within different systems (Davies, 2020).

4.4.3. Working with Adults around CYP: The Microsystem

Another clear and consistent theme in relation to the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing is related to working with adults in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Underwood (2022), Eldred (2021), Wright (2020), Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) and Price (2017) provide evidence of the EP role in working with parents and school staff with the aim of supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. This research can be considered in relation to core functions of the EP role; consultation, supervision, and training (Fallon et al., 2010).

4.4.3.1. Consultation

Research conducted by Underwood (2022) suggests that consultation, and the use of collaborative, solution-focussed language within the consultative space is a key role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP. Within this research, interactions between EPs and caregivers within three consultations focussed on social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs were analysed using discursive psychology and conversational analysis. Underwood (2022) found that EPs use of language within each consultation supported their scaffolding and solution focussed containment of key adults through identifying positives, reframing constructions, and using "*collaborative 'we' language*" (p. 172). Further, EPs supported collaboration by offering examples and evidence to support constructions whilst downplaying their status and utilising active listening techniques (Underwood, 2022).

Underwood (2022) suggests that the role of the EP within joint consultations is to facilitate collaboration through language akin to key functions, for which, the current author has made parallels with the COMOIRA framework (Gameson & Rhydderch,

2008). For example, 'enabling dialogue' to create a safe, supportive space to 'reflect, reframe and reconstruct' whilst providing rationale and utilising solution-focussed approaches ('informed and reasoned action') (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008; Underwood, 2022).

The findings of Underwood (2022) provide a unique insight into the language EPs use to facilitate collaboration and support the change process within consultations with adults positioned in the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The research methodology coincides with the social-constructionist framework adopted by Underwood (2022), within which, language is positioned as a central component to understanding (Burr, 2015). It also coincides with the more general view within MH literature that MH and emotional wellbeing are socially structured phenomena (Armon-Jones, 1986).

However, Underwood (2022) identified elements of the research that may not reflect the every-day practice of EPs. Underwood (2022) suggested that the consultations analysed within the research were largely positive, with key persons presenting as agreeable with a desire (or 'intention') to change (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008). As such, Underwood (2022) identified that the language used by EPs within their research may differ from that used in consultations which involve resistance to change and conflict.

Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) also highlight consultation as an integral role of the EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. Within an examination of EP casework through semi-structured interviews with EPs employed by an LA in England, Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) concluded that the role of the EP within 'MH casework' can be considered in relation to two *"interacting processes"* (p. 422). These include the facilitation of a 'secure base' which provided adults at the microsystemic level (e.g., parents and teachers) with emotional containment (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). This was perceived as supporting engagement in problem-solving activities which ultimately challenged others' constructions related to a problem (or 'key change issue') (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020).

The emerging theory constructed by Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) support the findings of Underwood (2022) as well as those of Davies (2020). In particular, the findings of Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) appear to support the view that the role of the EP in this area of practice is one who provides a safe space whilst utilising specialist skills such as active listening and informed and reasoned action such as solution focussed approaches (Davies; 2020, Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008; Underwood, 2022). This coincides with the 'Container' metaphor offered by Davies (2020); further supporting the role of the EP in 'enabling dialogue' and providing a safe space for adults to engage in the change process (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008; Underwood, 2022).

Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) offer further insight into the role of the EP in working with the microsystem to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. They highlight the role of the EP in providing specialist support to teaching staff akin to the 'Emergency service' metaphor offered by Davies (2020). Indeed, Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) noted:

> *"When schools and parents contacted the EP, they communicated a sense of urgency and had already taken other actions towards resolving their problem, but remained in need of additional support."* (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020, p. 427).

This suggests that the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP is to provide specialist support to the microsystem once attempts to support or engage in a change have already occurred (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). As such, this may indicate that the role of the EP within this area is one that is dependent upon the complexity of the 'case' (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020).

However, the findings of Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) appear to be reflective of current EP practice, rather than how EPs construct their role, or believe their role *should* be in relation to this area of practice. As noted by Price (2017), Morris and Atkinson (2018) and Slade (2019), differences may exist between current EP practice and EP's hopes for this area of practice for the future.

Further, although it is recognised that Grounded Theory methodology may afford researchers with the opportunity to approach research without predetermined ideas in

relation to social phenomena (Holton, 2008); it is not without its limitations. The methodology supports the researcher's 'bracketing' off of prior knowledge and assumptions (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). However, it has been argued that it is not possible for the researcher to assume the role of an objective outsider due to the inevitable influence of their own experiences on the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Thus, it is possible that the dual process described by the researchers, which they describe akin to existing psychological theory (e.g., attachment theory), may have been implicitly imposed on the research data, rather than constructed *from* it.

4.4.3.2. Supervision

Eldred (2021) suggests that the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing is through providing Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) with a *"safety net"* (p. 3) through group supervision. Emotional Literacy Support Assistants refer to school staff trained to deliver an intervention to support CYP's emotional wellbeing (Burton & Okai, 2018). In following the ELSA programme, ELSAs are to be provided with half-termly supervision from an EP (ELSA Network, 2017). As such, ELSA supervision has become a large part of the EP role for EPs across the UK (Eldred, 2021).

Eldred (2021) explored the role of the EP in supporting ELSAs through group supervision. Within the research, a qualitative approach was used to explore the perspectives of EPs, ELSAs and Special Educational Coordinators (SENCOs); (known as Additional Learning Needs Coordinators [ALNCos] within the Welsh education context [WG, 2018]), on the role of the EP within the ELSA supervisory space. Eldred (2021) found that EPs support ELSAs by providing emotional containment; a safe, 'holding' space within which ELSAs feel supported to discuss safeguarding queries and to discuss, problem solve and prepare for complex ELSA case work (Eldred, 2021). This coincides with the findings of Underwood (2022) and the 'Container' metaphor constructed by Davies (2020).

The findings of Eldred (2021) expand on those of Underwood (2022). They suggest that an important element of the role of the EP when working with the microsystem to support CYP MH and emotional wellbeing needs, is not only what EPs say within their

interactions (Underwood, 2022), but *how* they say it (Eldred, 2021). The subtheme *"consistent, warm attuned relationships"* (Eldred, 2020, p. 82) encompassed within the overarching theme *"EPs provide a safety net"* (p. 82) highlights the value ELSAs place on the implicit, non-verbal aspects of the role. The findings also suggest that EPs may be viewed as a 'crutch' for ELSAs. Further, Eldred (2021) noted that were some tensions between ELSAs' and EPs' constructions of the EP role in this area; perhaps perpetuated by the theme which conceptualises the EP as a *"Font of Knowledge"'* (p. 90).

However, Eldred (2021) identified that social desirability may have influenced ELSA participants' responses. Indeed, Eldred (2022) discussed the long-standing nature of the ELSA programme within the one English LA within which, all participants were employed. Further, the researcher was working as a TEP within the same LA as the ELSA participants. As such, it is possible that ELSA participants may have offered more positive accounts of their experiences of supervision. Indeed, Eldred (2021) noted that *"the impact of power dynamics should be considered"* when considering the validity of the research (p. 149).

4.4.3.3. Supporting with the Implementation of Interventions

The research of Eldred (2021) can also be used to evidence the role of the EP in supporting the microsystem with the implementation of MH and emotional wellbeing interventions. Indeed, within the ELSA programme, supervision occupies a dual role of providing a safe, containing space whilst facilitating discussion pertaining to the implementation of the ELSA model (Eldred, 2021). Research which has specifically focussed on the role of the EP in supporting the implementation of intervention (Wright, 2020) is now explored.

Wright (2020) explored the role of the EP in supporting school systems with the implementation of a positive psychology intervention (PPI). Within this research, which adopted a Q methodology, Wright (2020) provided twenty-four EP participants with forty statements relating to the implementation of PPIs which they were tasked to sort in a *"forced choice quasi-normal distribution"* (p. 85). Following a 'Q sort' analysis, Wright (2020) found that participants significantly loaded onto four factors in relation to their role in supporting the effective implementation of PPIs in schools. These

included *"working strategically, working systematically, supporting a whole-school approach and providing training and supporting high-quality implementation"* (Wright, 2020; p. 85).

Wright (2020) concluded that a role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH is through the implementation of wellbeing interventions; supported by their knowledge of psychology and implementation (or 'informed and reasoned action') (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008) through consultation, supervision, *and* training. However, the use of Q methodology and the forced-choice component of the research means that the findings of Wright (2020) may not be sufficiently rich in capturing participants' subjective perspectives, viewpoints, and constructions. As previously noted, the EP role is likely socially constructed (Burr, 2015; Davies, 2020). Within this research, participants were not permitted to use language to convey their constructions. Since language is considered an integral element in developing constructs (Burr, 2015), Wright (2020) may provide a narrow, restricted view of the EP role in relation to this area of practice.

4.4.3.4. Supporting Whole-School Approaches

The findings of Wright (2020) provide evidence for the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP by supporting changes pertaining to culture and ethos within the school system. Wright (2020) concluded that one way in which EPs support the implementation of school-based interventions (such as PPIs) is through supporting a whole-school approach to wellbeing. Wright (2020) also concluded that EP participants felt that supporting whole-school approaches are the most practical and effective way to support the MH of CYP. This included raising awareness of the importance of supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing as well as supporting persons in leadership positions within the school system to develop aims pertaining to the culture and ethos of the school (Wright, 2020).

Further, Wright (2020) suggests that the EP is well placed to engage in this role due their knowledge of systems theory (e.g., bio-ecological systems model) (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and approaches such as Strengths Weaknesses

Opportunities and Threats [SWOT] analysis, appreciative inquiry, and Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope [PATH]).

4.4.3.5. Training

Price (2017) used a mixed methods design to gather ALNCo and EP participants' views of the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs of school aged CYP in Wales. Price (2017) noted that the findings, which included themes and subthemes derived through a thematic analysis of interview data, suggest that the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice is in providing training to school staff. Indeed, Price (2017) noted that some EP participants stated that they had recently delivered training related to MH needs such as self-harm and suicide. This was constructed by Price (2017) as supporting the MH of CYP through supporting greater awareness and understanding of MH needs for those who interact with CYP more directly.

The findings of Price (2017) provide support for the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP by facilitating change through the delivery of training. However, as noted by Price (2017), participants were a convenience sample who may have had *"strong opinions on the topic"* (p. 85). As such, the current author posits that the participants within Price (2017) may have been positioned more towards the 'Hier-apparent' end of the role continuum offered by Davies (2020). Thus, the current author posits that participants of Price (2017) may have been more likely to view supporting CYP's MH needs as a role of the EP and may be more inclined to deliver training as a result. However, across numerous review articles, training has been a commonly reported function of the EP role in relation to this area of practice (Andrews, 2017; Crosby, 2022; Wright, 2020).

4.4.4. Direct Work with CYP at the Centre

In addition to the role of the EP in engaging in indirect, systemic work, another clear theme across review articles was the role of the EP in engaging in direct work with CYP positioned at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). These include assessment and therapeutic intervention (Morris & Atkinson, 2018; Price, 2017; Slade, 2019).

4.4.4.1. Assessment and Intervention

As discussed, Price (2017) explored the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs of school aged CYP in Wales. Within this research, the theme 'Individual Casework' and 'Assessment' was used to illustrate EPs construction of their role in relation to this area of practice (Price, 2017). Educational Psychologist participants felt that their role was to engage at the level of the individual child through therapeutic work. Further, therapeutic work was discussed as underpinned by Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches; highlighting the role of the EP in utilising 'informed and reasoned action' (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008). This level of work was described as being driven by assessment which was perceived as a key function of the EP role by both EP and ALNCo participants (Price, 2017).

Morris and Atkinson (2018) used an appreciative enquiry to explore the role of the EP in supporting the MH of young adults within further education (FE) through four focus groups of EP participants. In addition to the theme "*Building capacity*" (p. 298), Morris & Atkinson (2018) constructed the theme "*Therapeutic Support*" (p. 301) to illustrate participants' perceptions of their role in this area of practice. They noted that EPs discussed the *"potential"* (p. 301) of extending therapeutic support to build resilience and to support young people experiencing anxiety within FE settings (Morris & Atkinson, 2018). The use of the term 'potential' here highlights how providing therapeutic support to young people within FE may not be a current role of the EP in this area of practice. Rather, this may reflect participants' construction of what the EP role *should* or *could* become in relation to working with FE systems, which is acknowledged by Morris and Atkinson (2018) as less established within the current literature.

Within research conducted in Wales, Slade (2019) also provided evidence of individual assessment and direct, therapeutic work as part of the role of the EP in supporting the emotional wellbeing of CYP. Slade (2019) focussed on the role of the EP in relation to supporting the 'mental and emotional wellbeing (MEWB)' in the early years. Within the quantitative aspect of this mixed-methods research, forty-one EP participants completed a questionnaire relating to details of their current role in relation to supporting MEWB within this population. Based on the descriptive statistics obtained

through the completion of questions pertaining to the role, Slade (2019) noted the following:

> *"The majority of EPs reported to work at the individual level when promoting MEWB in the pre-school years (63% of those who answered the question), however some EPs work at the systemic level too (33% of those who answered the question)."* (Slade, 2019, p. 93)

The above finding may suggest that the role of the EP is more focussed on direct work with infants and children in the early years compared to those of a school age. However, Slade (2019) also noted the following in relation to the same finding:

> *"Importantly, only 21 of the 41 participants completed this question, possibly suggesting that EP's work is difficult to classify into discrete types of work as often work may take place at individual and systemic level."* (Slade, 2019, p. 94)

Thus, whilst individual, direct work within the early years is deemed an aspect of the role of the EP supporting MEWB, Slade (2019) highlights the possible overlap involved when working at multiple levels. This was also identified by Wright (2020); indicating that the role of the EP in working across multiple levels may not be clear cut.

Price (2017) and Slade (2019) explored EPs' constructions of their role based on current practice and how they wish to work in relation to promoting the MH needs and MEWB of school aged CYP and those within the early years, respectively, in the future. Both studies highlighted collaboration and multi-agency working as a facilitator within their current practice and as an area of focus for EPs in relation to this area of practice moving forward.

4.4.5. Collaboration as Essential

The research of Hulme (2017) provides evidence that collaboration is an integral aspect of the EP role in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. Participants, which included EPs, MH professionals within CAMHS and SENCos (ALNCos), participated in individual, semi-structured interviews, within which, they discussed their

construction of joint working within the context of supporting CYP (Hulme, 2017). Three main themes were identified through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); including *"Joint Working"* (Hulme, 2017, p. 4). Hulme (2017) noted that all groups of participants viewed joint working as an essential component of each of their roles. Further, participants noted that a lack of time available hindered collaboration; perpetuated by the volume of *"inappropriate referrals"* (Hulme, 2017, p. 64) received by CAMHS, the demand of statutory work for EPs, and the pressures of the school system imposed on SENCos.

Hulme (2017) also noted that EP and CAMHS participants felt that they lacked confidence in each other's roles. Further, within the subtheme "*Communication (lack of)"* language was considered a *"barrier to communication"* (Hulme, 2017, p. 68). Hulme (2017) found that term 'psychologist' within the 'educational psychologist' role may have led school staff to believe that the role is akin to that of a Clinical Psychologist who provides individual, therapeutic intervention. In contrast, the EPs in the research largely constructed their role in supporting the MH of CYP as more systemic than individual (Hulme, 2017).

Further (Hulme, 2017) noted that participants felt that variations between the functions of the EP, CAMHs professionals' and ALNCo role was a barrier to effective communication between these professionals. Hulme (2017) noted that EPs strived to facilitate communication, understand others' roles and to cultivate a sense of shared motivation and purpose in supporting the MH of CYP. This provides evidence of the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing through collaboration.

Crosby (2022) explored EPs' and Primary Mental Health Care Workers' (PMHWs) construction of their own, and each other's roles in relation to supporting 'SEMH' needs in CYP. Educational Psychologist's and PMHWs who were employed and working within the same LA in England participated in semi-structured interviews about their construction of the EP and PMHW role. Similar to Underwood (2022), Eldred (2021), Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020 and Price (2017), Crosby (2022) found that EPs constructed their role as working indirectly to support CYP's MH and wellbeing through consultation and training to support adults within the microsystem. Within the research, systemic work was emphasised as an important, valued role of the EP. This was

constructed by both EP and PMHW participants as being a distinguishing factor between the EP and PMHW role, with the latter role constructed as encompassing longer term, direct intervention work compared to the former (Crosby, 2022).

Further, Crosby (2022) found that across both EP and PMHW participants, greater collaboration between the two professions were deemed an integral aspect to supporting both roles within this area of practice in the future. Indeed, Crosby (2022) noted that participants called for "*more liaison"* (p. 118). Further, it was noted that whilst there has been a drive for multi-agency working within the educational psychology literature pertaining to the EP role in SEMH, and the EP role more broadly, the current collaboration between EPs and other professionals may be lacking (Crosby, 2022).

It should be noted that the findings of Crosby (2022) and Hulme (2017) may only be representative of the EP role within the English educational system. The commissioning of the PMHW role is one unique to England (Crosby, 2022); suggesting that there may be a lesser focus on the need for collaboration for the EP role when situated in Wales. However, research conducted in Wales has also emphasised the importance of collaboration within this area of practice (Price, 2017; Slade, 2019).

4.4.6. (Other) Barriers and Facilitators

Across all twelve articles selected for review, barriers and facilitators pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP were explored. These include collaboration, knowledge and confidence of EPs and EPS delivery.

Whilst collaboration has been explored within this review through the research of Crosby (2022) and Hulme (2017), other review articles have also suggested that collaboration between professionals, or a lack of, can be both a facilitator and barrier within this area of practice, respectively (Underwood, 2022; Price, 2017; Andrews, 2017; Morris & Atkinson, 2018). Greig et al. (2019) and Andrews (2017) are now discussed in relation to *other* barriers and facilitators of the EP role within this area of practice.

Greig et al. (2019) aimed to explore the role of the EPS in supporting the MH needs of CYP in Scotland. In a survey distributed to PEPs of all thirty-two LA EPSs across Scotland, participants were asked a series of questions pertaining to their current practice in relation to this area of practice. Twenty-one respondents completed the survey (Greig et al., 2019) and the following was found:

> *"15 out of 21 respondents (71%) reported that their capacity in terms of knowledge and skills presented little or no barrier to meeting mental health needs. Only one service reported this to be a considerable barrier."* (Greig et al, 2019, p. 265)

> *"However, the majority of respondents reported that capacity in terms of time and levels of staffing (16 out of 21, 76%) would be a considerable or very considerable barrier."* (Greig et al, 2019, p. 263)

Greig et al. (2019) concluded that participant's capacity in terms of knowledge and skills may be constructed as a facilitator in engagement in work to support the MH needs of CYP. However, the current author notes that in light of the apparent lack of engagement in direct work across participants as noted by Greig et al. (2019), this may only be true for engagement in indirect work such as those previously explored (e.g., consultation, supervision, and training). Further, the findings of Greig et al. (2019) suggest that aspects of EPS delivery such as time, capacity and / or staffing levels may pose barriers to the role of the EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP.

Similarly to Price (2017), Andrews (2017) used a qualitative approach to explore four EPs' and three SENCos' (ALNCos') constructions of the EP role in relation to this area of practice. Following individual semi-structured interviews, five themes and fifteen subthemes were constructed through a thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) relating to the following two, broader overarching themes; *"important contextual factors relevant to the EP role"* and *"SENCo views of the EP role in supporting MH and psychological wellbeing in schools"* (p. 76). Subthemes pertaining to the *"challenges to EPs working in the field of MH and wellbeing"* (p. 12) (see Figure 4 below)

encompassed within broader themes illustrate the perceived barriers to the EP role in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP.
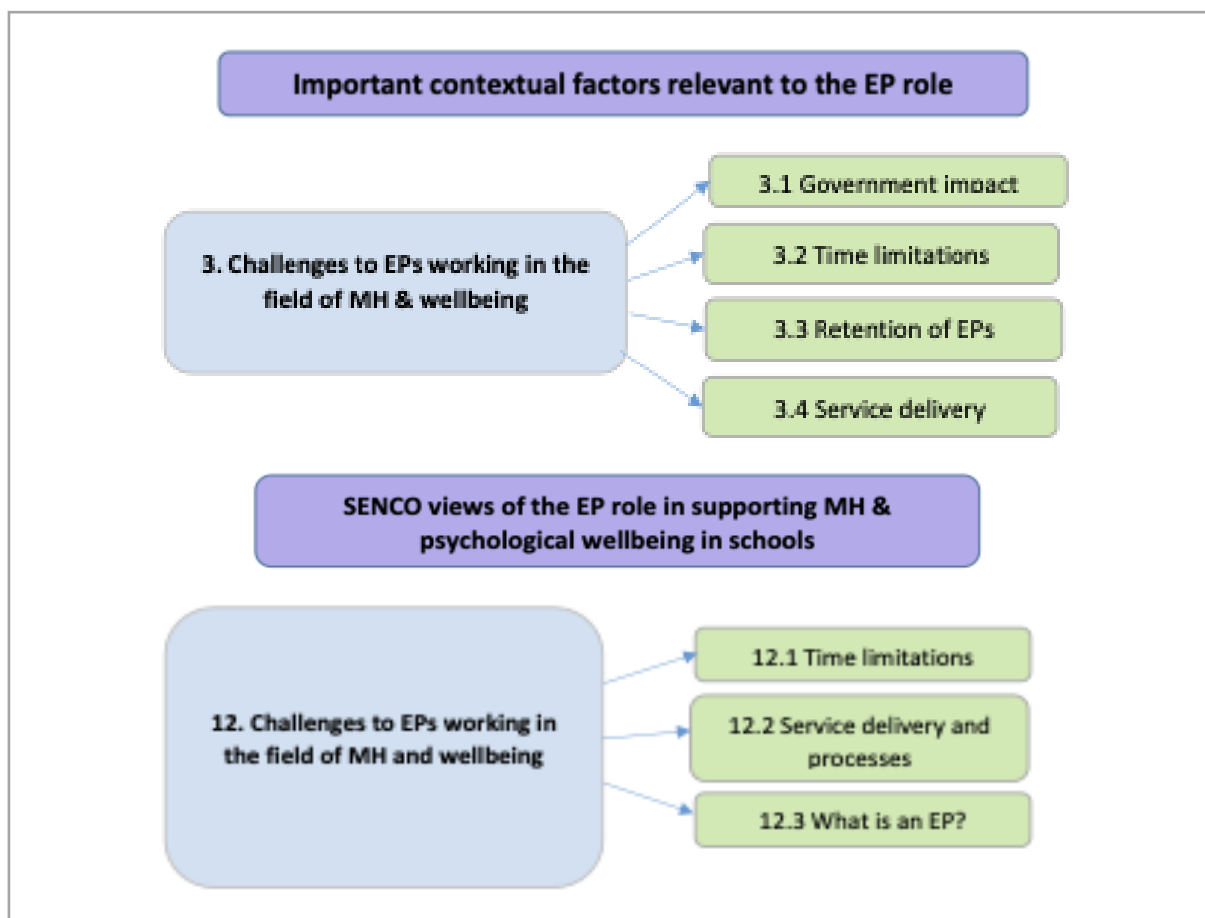
Figure 4. Barriers to the EP Role Identified by Andrews (2017) (retrieved from Andrews [2017]).

In accordance with the findings of Greig et al. (2019), Andrews (2017) found that across EP and SENCo (ALNCo) participants, a lack of time was perceived as a barrier of the EP role (see Figure 4 above). Andrews (2017) noted that EP participants attributed this to the restraints of the time allocation model adopted by the EPS of the LA in which participants were employed. Further, ALNCo participants felt that they needed more regular support from the EP which they perceived as being outside of the remit of the EP role due to said time constraints. Andrews (2017) noted that some EP participants expressed a preference for the EPS to have a trading capacity; highlighting the barrier of the non-traded, time-allocation model adopted.

Further, as represented by subtheme 12.3 (see Figure 4), ALNCo participants expressed the lack of clarity and ambiguity surrounding the EP role as a barrier of the EP in working in the field of MH and wellbeing (Andrews, 2017). In addition, participants felt that there were issues pertaining to funding and the construction of the EP role within government legislation, which they felt perpetuated the ambiguity surrounding the EP role (Andrews, 2017). Issues pertaining to the recruitment and retention of EPs were also discussed by EP participants which was perceived to perpetuate the time constraints within the EP role (Andrews, 2017). As such, Andrews (2017) noted that a role of the EP in this area of practice should involve the active defining of their role whilst promoting collaboration and communication between professionals including government bodies.

The research of Andrews (2017) appears to support those of other review articles which have highlighted EPS delivery when discussing the role of the EP in this area of practice (Hulme, 2017). Hulme (2017) noted that EP participants felt that their ability to engage in collaborative work to support the MH needs of CYP was constrained by factors pertaining to EPS delivery such as the time-allocation model. Hulme (2017) noted that one participant felt that there was no provision made for collaboration with other professionals within their time allocation. Other research noted that a consultative model of service delivery is perceived as a facilitator to the EP role in this area of practice (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020; Wright, 2020).

Similar to Andrews (2017), Hulme (2017) found that perceptions of the EP role could be a barrier in working to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. Within the research of Hulme (2017), some SENCos (ALNCos) noted that they would only consider seeking support from the EP for learning-related needs as they felt that seeking support from CAMHS would be more suitable. Pertinently, some EPs felt that CAMHs 'own' MH, which was perceived as perpetuating the debate as to whether EPs have a role in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing (Hulme, 2017).

Clear parallels appear to exist between the research of Andrews (2017), Hulme (2017) and Davies (2020). The metaphor 'Opposition' offered by Davies (2020) was used to illustrate participants' construction of their role in relation to this area of practice as one in opposition with CAMHS. The research of Hulme (2017) also appears to support the

metaphor 'Little Player' and 'Ghosts' which illustrate EPs' view of their role as being less powerful that other roles (e.g., those within CAMHs) and one that may be forgotten within this area of practice, respectively (Davies, 2020).

4.4.6.1. Limitations of the Research

Although the findings of Andrews (2017) support those of other review articles (Davies, 2020; Hulme, 2017), it is not without its limitations. Andrews (2017) noted the following:

> *"This qualitative research was not intended to produce measurable, significant results that could be generalised to a wider population such as all EPs and SENCOs. Rather it aimed to explore the views of EPs and SENCOs in one particular LA at one particular point in time, in order to increase understanding of the EP role in relation to MH and psychological wellbeing and inform future practice. The implications of the findings are, therefore, limited to the LA in which the research took place."* (Andrews, 2017, p. 110).

Further, the current author posits that the findings of Andrew (2017) as well as many other review articles (excluding Greig et al. [2019]) fail to consider the views of PEPs who have a key role in the strategic direction of EPSs including the review and development of service-delivery (Hardy et al., 2020). Andrews (2017) and Hulme (2017) identified barriers pertaining to EPS delivery in relation to the role of the EP in this area of practice. However, only one article explored the view of PEPs (Greig et al., 2019) which is not without its limitations.

Greig et al. (2019) recruited PEP participants to complete a survey to represent the EPS they manage. It is plausible that the participants may, therefore, have different perceived levels of confidence and knowledge pertaining to supporting the MH needs of CYP. Further, similar to Wright (2020), due to the quantitative nature of the methodology employed, the findings of Greig et al. (2019) may not offer a rich perspective of PEP's, nor individual EPs', constructions of their role in relation to this area of practice. As such, the research should be used to highlight PEP's views of their EPS, rather than the view of the EPS as a whole.

4.5. Part One B Chapter Summary

This systematic literature review aimed to explore current studies pertaining to the role of the EP in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK. Although research provides evidence of the role of EPS delivery in relation to the role of the EP within this area of practice, there is a lack of current literature exploring EPS delivery, or the views of those who steer EPSs (i.e., PEPs or Deputy PEPs) in relation to this area of practice.

The current research recognises the ambiguity pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK, whilst suggesting that EPs *do* have a role in this area of practice. It suggests that the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs of CYP in the UK is predominately focussed on the microsystemic level through functions of the EP role such as consultation, (group) supervision and training. Through these core functions, the role of the EP is one akin to a 'Personal Trainer' (Davies, 2020) that utilises elements of the COMOIRA framework such as 'informed and reasoned action' to indirectly support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing by supporting the adults around them to 'facilitate change(s)' (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008).

The current review also suggests that a less pertinent role of the EP in this area of practice is also one that utilises elements of the COMOIRA framework (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008) to support CYP directly, through individual work such as assessment and therapeutic intervention.

Finally, the current review indicates numerous barriers and facilitators pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. It highlights the importance (and challenges) of promoting collaboration in facilitating the role of the EP in this area of practice, as well as the barriers pertaining to systemic factors such as those related to government funding, legislation and recruitment and retention difficulties. Further, it also highlights the impact of internal factors such as perceptions of the EP role in this area, and the assumption that EPs may be 'Little Players' and 'Unwanted' within the MH and emotional wellbeing space.

Following this review, the subsequent questions remain:

- What is the role of EPSs, and EPS delivery in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP?
- What is the view of PEPs in relation to EPS delivery in supporting the MH and wellbeing of CYP, given their strategic role in EPSs?
- What is the view of PEPs in relation to EPS delivery to support the wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19, specifically?

4.6. The Current Research

Principal Educational Psychologists have a key role in the leadership of EPSs which includes the review of EPS delivery in meeting the ever-changing needs of the population it serves (Marsh & Higgins, 2018). Despite this, there is a paucity of research which has focussed on the views of PEPs, and *no* current research which has explored PEP's views of EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. The current author considers this important to inform current and future practice and to contribute to the knowledge base.

4.6.1. Research Questions

The current research aimed to contribute to the knowledge base within this research area through four research questions (RQs) (see Table 6 below).

Table 6. Current Research Questions (RQs)

RQ1	What are PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
RQ2	What are PEP's perspectives of the barriers to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
RQ3	What are PEP's perspectives of the facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
RQ4	What are PEP's hopes for EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales in the future?

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Part Two

Major Empirical Paper

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Part Two: Major Empirical Paper

1. Abstract

Rationale: Over the last decade, the mental health (MH) needs of children and young people (CYP) have continued to rise, with the most significant increase occurring following the COVID-19 pandemic. A growing body of research has explored the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK. However, a dearth of research has explored Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery, or the views of those who steer it (Principal EPs [PEPs]), in relation to this area of practice.

Aim: The aim of the current research was to explore PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales in a post-COVID-19 era.

Method and Analysis: Four research questions pertaining to current EPS delivery, including perceived barriers, facilitators, and future hopes for this area of practice were explored. Six PEPs across six different Local Authority (LA) EPSs in Wales participated in individual, semi-structured interviews online. Interviews were transcribed and analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) and nine overarching themes and seven subthemes were constructed in relation to the four research questions.

Findings: The findings suggest that EPSs across Wales adopt a systemic approach to supporting CYP's MH needs with a particular focus on 'Capacity Building' at the microsystemic level. Barriers of EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice are represented by the themes 'Limited Capacity' and 'Tensions'. Facilitators are denoted by the themes 'COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change', 'EPS Factors' and 'Socio-political Factors'.

Limitations and Implications: Limitations pertaining to the methodology of the current research are explored. Implications of the findings are also discussed in relation to EPs, EPSs, and wider systems.

2. Part Two A: Introduction

The mental health (MH) needs of CYP across the UK have steadily increased over the last decade, with the most significant increase during the COVID-19 pandemic (Kauhanen et al., 2023). This is of growing concern in light of the increasing pressures on public support services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and outcomes associated with CYP with MH needs including poorer educational engagement, attainment (Brännlund et al., 2017) and health (Busch & Barry, 2007).

2.1. Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing

The term 'mental health' is likely constructed within a social and cultural context (White, 2017). As such, the construct may be difficult to define (Price, 2017). Further, the terms 'mental health', 'mental wellbeing' and 'emotional wellbeing' have been used interchangeably within government policy documents (Department for Children Schools and Families [DfCSF] & Department of Health [DoH], 2008), literature pertaining to MH (Herron & Trent, 2000) and the educational psychology profession (Price, 2017; Slade; 2019).

Definitions of the terms 'MH needs' and 'emotional wellbeing', as adopted within the current research, are now explored.

2.1.1. Mental Health Needs

The Welsh Assembly Government (WAG) have defined MH 'needs' or 'difficulties' as:

> "*a broad range of emotional or behavioural difficulties that may cause concern or distress*" which may be "*reflected in difficulties and / or disabilities in the realm of personal relationships, psychological development, the capacity for play and learning, development of concepts of right and wrong and in distress and maladaptive behaviour*" (WAG, 2001, p. 14).

2.1.2. Emotional Wellbeing

The term 'emotional wellbeing' is used increasingly within education and is viewed as an important dimension of our capacity to interact with the world (Eldred, 2021). Wellbeing is a dynamic and multifaceted process that affords individuals with a sense of how their lives are going through the interaction between their perceived circumstances and culture (Forgeard et al., 2011; McGillivray, 2007).

Due to the Welsh context of the current research, the term 'mental health needs' (MH needs) is understood in line with the definition of provided by WAG (2001). The term 'emotional wellbeing' is also used to acknowledge an increased use of the terms 'emotional (or 'mental') wellbeing' within the education system (Hulme, 2017). It is understood that MH needs and emotional wellbeing are a product of a person's interactions with their culture at any one time. Thus, the current author acknowledges that there are likely complex, influential interactions with the external environment and considerable overlap with each.

2.2. The Current Legislative and Political Context

Supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing has been high on the UK Government's agenda and the role of schools has been clearly outlined. In the 2017 Green Paper 'Transforming Children and Young People's Mental Health Provision' (Department of Health and Social Care [DfHSC] and Department for Education [DfE], 2017) it was suggested schools and colleges should be *"at the heart"* of early identification and prevention (p. 3).

Further, in 2018, the Welsh Government (WG) committed to the adoption of a whole school approach to MH and emotional wellbeing (WG, 2021). A new curriculum for Wales has also been developed which places health and wellbeing as an 'Area of Learning and Experience' on par with all other curriculum subject areas for the first time (WG, 2017). Together, these indicate a strengthened focus on MH needs and emotional wellbeing within the education system across the UK, and Wales, in particular.

2.3. The Role of the Educational Psychologist

Although EPs may be overlooked in key Government documents outlining plans to support MH needs and emotional wellbeing in schools (MacKay, 2007), they have been identified by teachers as the key providers of specialist support in schools (Sharpe et al., 2016; Rothi et al., 2008). The professional competencies for practitioner psychologists, as set out by the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (HCPC, 2016), state that psychologists should adopt a proactive and preventative approach to promote the psychological wellbeing of service users (HCPC, 2016). This has been used to suggest EPs *do* have a role in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP (e.g., Andrews, 2017; Eldred, 2021; Hulme, 2017).

2.4. Educational Psychology Services

The vast majority of EPs in the UK work within publicly funded LA Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) (DfE, 2023) which offer a range of support through a variety of service delivery models (Marsh & Higgins, 2018). Barriers related to EPS delivery in relation to the role of the EP In supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP have been identified within the Welsh (Slade, 2019; Price, 2017) and wider UK context (Andrews, 2017; Crosby, 2022; Davies, 2020; Eldred, 2020; Hulme, 2017; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). These include time constraints imposed by time allocation models, and non-traded aspects of service delivery (Andrews, 2017; Hulme 2017).

2.5. Principal Educational Psychologists

Models of service delivery adopted by Local Authority (LA) EPSs across the UK are influenced by Principal and Deputy Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs and Deputy PEPs, respectively) (Hardy et al., 2020). However, currently, only one study has focussed on PEP's views of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Greig et al., 2019). This may be of particular interest in light of the increasing MH needs and poorer emotional wellbeing of CYP documented during (Panchal et al., 2023) and following, the COVID-19 pandemic

(Health and Care Research Wales, 2023). This provided rationale for the current research.

3. The Current Research: A Welsh Context

The current research was conducted in Wales, with PEP participants working within a Welsh context. This decision was made based on two factors. Firstly, the differences across the devolved governments within the UK in relation to legislation, guidance, funding, and service commissioning structures. Secondly, the differences in models of service delivery adopted by LA EPSs in England and Wales. Indeed, in England, many LA EPSs have moved towards a traded or part-traded models of service delivery, influencing how work is commissioned and by whom (DfE, 2023).

3.1. Research Questions

Following a review of the literature pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK, the subsequent questions remained:

1. *What is the role of EPSs, and EPS delivery in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP?*
2. *What is the view of PEPs in relation to EPS delivery in supporting the MH needs and wellbeing of CYP, given their strategic role in EPSs?*
3. *What is the view of PEPs in relation to EPS delivery to support the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19, specifically?*

Consequently, the following four research questions (RQs) were posed:

RQ1) What are PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ2) What are PEP's perspectives of the barriers to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ3) What are PEP's perspectives of the facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ4) What are PEP's hopes for EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales in the future?

4. Part Two B: Methodology

4.1. Theoretical Framework

A theoretical framework outlines the researcher's approach or "*blueprint*" (Grant & Osanloo, 2014, p. 12) to addressing research questions (Lederman & Lederman, 2015). The theoretical framework which guided the current research is shown in Figure 5 below.

Ontology Relativist	→	**Epistemology** Social Constructionist	→	**Theoretical Base** Reflexive Thematic Analysis	→	**Method** Semi-structured interviews
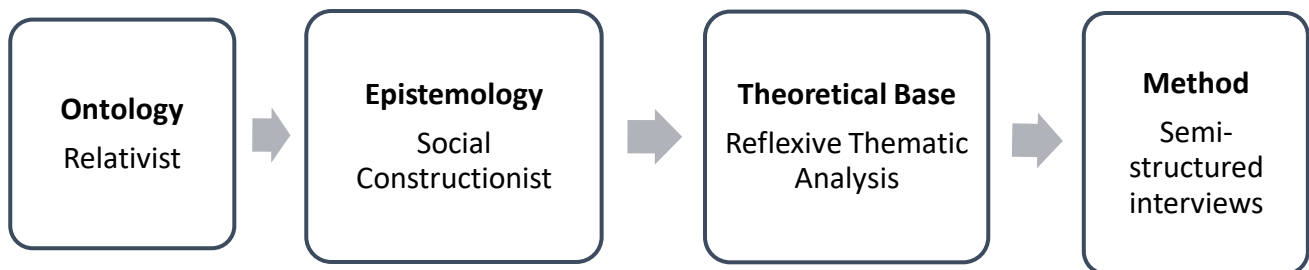
Figure 5. *Theoretical Framework of the Current Research.*

4.2. Ontological and Epistemological Position of the Research

Ontology and epistemology are considered interconnected meta-theories that form the foundation of research practice (Braun & Clarke, 2022) and are important to consider since the philosophical position not only provides the theoretical basis for the research, but also justifies the research methodology and methods employed (Spencer et al., 2014).

The current research adopts a relativist ontological position which acknowledges that an individual's reality is dependent upon their unique interpretation of the world (O'Grady, 2014). According to this position, there is no one 'truth' (O'Grady, 2014) or objective facts to be found (Burr, 2015). Rather, a relativist ontological position argues that multiple realities, or 'truths' exist within the human experience (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Burr, 2015). A relativist ontological position was adopted in recognition of the subjective nature of the current research context; PEPs were asked to share their constructions of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of CYP through the 'lens' of their own worldview (O'Grady, 2014).

The current research adopts a social constructionist epistemology as it acknowledges that *"knowledge is sustained by social processes"* (Burr, 2015, p. 4). This position suggests that our perceptions, understanding, and experiences are mediated by historical and cultural contexts and our social interactions within them. Within this process, language is considered a central component (Burr, 2015). This epistemological position assumes that the data gathered in this research will be derived through participants' constructions of their experiences as a strategic leader of an EPS; influenced by the accumulation of their social interactions, the language used within said interactions and within the wider social, and cultural context.

The relativist-social constructionist orientation of the research posit that events can be described in various ways depending on how they are perceived and understood within our social interactions (Willig, 2013). This orientation therefore recognises that PEPs may have varying constructions of how current EPS delivery supports the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP, the barriers, and facilitators for EPSs in supporting said needs, as well as their hopes for future EPS delivery in relation to this area.

4.3. Aims of the Current Research

The current research aims to explore and interpret PEP's perceptions of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. This includes their perceptions of current EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice, the barriers and facilitators to supporting said needs from a service-level and wider, LA perspective, and, finally, their hopes for EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice in the future. In this way, the knowledge and concepts explored are underpinned by participants' understanding of their unique experiences of the PEP role within their LA, their social construction of the role of the EP and EPSs and the meaning attributed to those experiences / constructions.

4.4. The (Central) Role of the Researcher: Social Constructionism

The social-constructionist position adopted acknowledges the central role played by the researcher throughout the entire research process. It is acknowledged that the

researcher cannot completely detach their subjective values, interests, experiences, and beliefs from the process (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Burr, 2015). These factors inevitably influence how the research questions were formulated and how data were gathered, analysed, and perceived (Maxwell, 2022). Willig (2013) suggests that whilst it is not possible to detach from this, it is important to acknowledge and reflect upon these influences throughout the research process. Instances of researcher reflexivity throughout the research process can be found in part three of the thesis.

4.5. Research Design

4.5.1. A Qualitative Approach

Qualitative research, also known as interpretative research (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015), tends to be concerned with exploring the meaning individuals attribute to their experiences and how they make sense of them (Gough & Madill, 2012). Rather than seeking objective causal relationships between variables, qualitative approaches emphasise detailed descriptions of subjective experiences and perspectives (Gough & Madill, 2012). A qualitative research design is adopted for the current research as it is considered consistent with a relativist-social constructionist orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

4.5.2. Semi Structured Interviews

In considering the study's aims, semi-structured interviews were deemed the most appropriate and ethical approach for data gathering. Kidd and Parshall (2000) noted that individuals within groups do not respond to questions in the same way as in other situations; possibly due to the complex, multifaceted nature of group dynamics (Belzile & Öberg, 2012; Bion, 2018; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). Accordingly, individual, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for collecting data to allow the researcher to explore the subjective constructions and experiences of participants in depth (Clarke & Braun, 2013; Flick, 2018). Semi-structured interviews were considered to align with the research aim and the philosophical assumptions of the research.

A focus group was considered as an alternative method to data gathering. However, there were concerns about potential variations in experiences among participants and the potential impact of group dynamics on the data gathered (Belzile & Öberg, 2012; Kidd & Parshall, 2000). There was also a recognition that the topic at hand may be contentious for some participants due to issues of role ambiguity. The researcher was aware of the documented "*identity crisis*" in relation to the role of the EP (Love, 2009, p. 3) and, thus, the possibility that PEPs may have different constructions of the role of an EPS / an EP within this area of practice.

4.6. Method

4.6.1. Ethical Considerations

The current research gained ethical approval from Cardiff University's Ethics Committee in April 2023. The research adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (BPS, 2021) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). Ethical considerations and how they were managed by the researcher can be found in Table 7 below

Table 7. Ethical Considerations

Ethical Consideration	Method to Manage
Ensuring appropriate informed consent.	• Gatekeeper consent was gained from the Chair of NAPEP Cymru via a gatekeeper letter sent via email (see Appendix 6). • Participants were asked to read the participant information sheet (see Appendix 8) and consent form (see Appendix 10) prior to engaging in an interview held via Microsoft Teams. Participants were required to tick boxes to confirm their agreement with participation statements as well as providing their electronic signature. Participants were required to email the researcher with their

	completed consent form prior to engaging in an interview.
	• Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw up to two weeks following the interview via the consent form (see Appendix 10) as well as verbally by the researcher at the start of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11).
	• Participants were notified when the researcher began and ended the recording of the interview.
Participant welfare and the right to withdraw.	• During the 'warm up' period of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11), participants were encouraged to share only as much as they felt comfortable with when answering questions in the main body of the interview schedule.
	• Participants were informed that the interview would be recorded with the use of a secure, password protected recording device and stored within an encrypted file until it was transcribed and anonymised, and subsequently deleted (up to two weeks post interview). The process for secure storage and timescale of deletion was shared via the participant information sheet, consent and debrief form (see Appendix 8, 10 and 12, respectively).
	• Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, both in the interview and via the debrief form (see Appendix 12) up to two weeks following the interview without giving a reason.
Online security.	• Interviews took place in a password protected virtual meeting room whilst connected to the researcher's secure home network to ensure confidentiality (BPS, 2021). The researcher used a private room to complete the interviews.

The right to refuse to answer any questions.	• Participants were made aware of their right to refuse to answer any questions via the consent form (see Appendix 10). Participants were also verbally reminded of this during the 'warm up' period of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11).
Maintaining anonymity and confidentiality.	• The audio recordings of the interviews were kept confidential and stored on a password protected device only accessible to the researcher. • Participants were informed that their data would be kept confidential until the point of transcription (up to two weeks post interview). They were also informed that following transcription, their data would be anonymised via the random allocation of a participant number to represent each participant and any personally identifiable information within the transcript would be removed. Participants were informed of this via the consent form (see Appendix 10) and were also reminded of this verbally during the 'warm up' period of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11). • Participant identifying information was anonymised or replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. This included all details of colleagues, LAs and geographical areas. Quotations that were chosen to share within the research were carefully anonymised to ensure that participants could not be identified (BPS, 2021). • Participants were informed that this process will render the data anonymous; meaning that they will be unable to withdraw their data from the research. Participants were informed that they may withdraw their data up until the point at which it is

	anonymised by contacting the researcher via email. This information was provided to participants via the consent form (see Appendix 10) and debrief form (see Appendix 11).
	• To protect the identities of the participants, all identifying information was anonymised or replaced with pseudonyms during transcription. This included all details of families, friends, tutors, colleagues, Universities, Local Authorities, and geographical areas.
Adequate debrief.	• Participants were provided with the opportunity to ask questions through the 'clean up' question (McCartan & Robson, 2016) at the end of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11).
	• Participants were provided with a debrief form (see Appendix 12) via email at the end of the interview. The debrief form included the contact details of the researcher, their research supervisor as well as Cardiff University's Ethics Committee.
Maintenance of integrity whilst analysing interview data.	• Participant data was analysed through Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) via the 6 stages of analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021).
	• Examples of the researcher's engagement in each stage of data analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) can be found in Appendix 14 - 18.
	• Participant data will only be used for reasons set out in the research aims and purpose.

4.6.2. Participant Sampling

A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure participants had relevant experience on the topic being explored.

Braun and Clarke (2022a) emphasise that there is complexity in establishing the correct dataset size. Further, they caution against concepts like 'sample size' which align more with positivist values and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). Rather, researchers are encouraged to reflect on the *"information power"* of the dataset (Malterud et al., 2016, p. 1753). Further, Malterud et al. (2016) suggest that smaller datasets will need to be information rich, or *"dense"* (p. 1756) to achieve information power. Further, Braun and Clarke (2022a) stress the importance of reflexivity in both data generation and analysis, to assess the quality and richness of the data and determine the dataset composition. This provides a framework for the researcher to consider the richness and quality of the data in relation to the research aims, requirements, and questions.

4.6.3. Rationale for Sample Size

Interviews were scheduled in a way to allow for reflection in relation to whether the data gathered was of suitable quality and richness, and to determine information power between each interview. As the data was gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, a dense and rich data set was deemed to be achieved. Therefore, flexibility of dataset size was accommodated, and a smaller dataset was assessed to be appropriate for this research (Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

There are approximately twenty-two PEPs across Wales and the dataset or sample size for the current research included six participants. All participants were PEPs of LA EPSs across the geographical breadth of Wales. As such, the participant sample achieved geographical breadth and thus, was deemed to be reflective of the Welsh context.

4.6.4. Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria was created to ensure that participants had, what the researcher deemed as, sufficient experience of working at a strategic level within their current LA. It was hoped that said experience would mean that participants would have adequate knowledge of the service demands within their LA, affording them to engage in discussion around the questions in the 'main body' (McCarten & Robson, 2016) of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11). This increased the construct validity of the research (Grimm & Widaman, 2012). The inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants in the current research can be found in Table 8 below.

Table 8. Participant Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion criteria:	Exclusion criteria:
In order to participate in this research; participants were required to:	Participants could not participate in this research if they:
Work as a PEP or Deputy PEP of an LA EPS in Wales.	Did not work as a PEP or Deputy PEP of an LA EPS in Wales.
AND; have worked as a PEP / Deputy PEP of an in their current LA for at least one academic year.	Have worked as a PEP or Deputy PEP of an LA EPS in Wales for less than one academic year.

4.6.5. Participant Recruitment Strategy

The recruitment of participants was via a Gatekeeper Letter (see Appendix 6) to the Chair of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists in Wales (NAPEP Cymru) in the first instance, followed by a follow up / reminder email sent directly to potential participants by the researcher. Participation was voluntary and based on informed consent. No incentives or payment was given for participation. Detail of the recruitment process is shown in Figure 6 below.

A Gatekeeper Letter (see Appendix 6) was disseminated to the Chair of NAPEP Cymru (via email), along with a copy of the Participant Recruitment Poster (see Appendix 7) and a Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 8) via email.

The gatekeeper was asked if they were willing to disseminate research and recruitment information to all PEPs across Wales.

The Gatekeeper contacted the researcher (via email) to infom of their dissemiation of the research and recruitment information to all PEPs across Wales. They also provided the researcher with the email addresses of all PEPs across Wales.

The Gatekeeper was thanked for their involvement in the research.

Four days following the Gatekeepers' dissemination of the research and recruitment information to potential participants, two participants had contacted the researcher (via email) to express their interest in taking part in the research.

The two potential participants that had expressed an interest in taking part in the research were contacted by the researcher (individually, via email) to thank them for their interest.

The potential participants were provided with a copy of the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 10) and were asked to complete this prior to arranging an interview. Once completed, consent forms were recieved by the researcher and a suitable time and date for an online, or in-person, individual interview was scheduled with both participants.

Two weeks following the initial Gatekeeper email, potential participants (all PEPs of LA EPSs in Wales), excluding the 2 that had already scheduled a date and time for an interview, were sent a follow-up / reminder email (see Appendix 9) which included the dissemination of the Participant Recruitment Poster (see Appendix 7) and the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 8).

Three weeks following the reminder email, four participants has expresssed their interest in taking part in the research (via email).

Each potential participant was provided with a copy of the Paticipant Consent Form (see Appendix 10) and were asked to complete and return this to the researcher (via email) prior to arranging an interview.

Once completed consent forms were recieved, a sutable time and date for an in-person or online interview was scheduled with each participant (individually).

Figure 6. *Participant Recruitment Strategy.*

4.6.6. Procedure

A summary of the research procedure, including timescales, is shown in Figure 7 below.

Gatekeeper Consent (June 2023)

Following ethical approval (April 2023), a Gatekeeper Letter (email) (See Appendix 6) was sent to the Chair of NAPEP Cymru via email to gain gatekeeper consent (June 2023).

The email included the Recruitment Poster (Appendix 7) and Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 8) which the gatekeeper was asked to share with all PEPs in Wales.

A follow-up / reminder email was sent to prospective participants 2 weeks following the gatekeeper letter (email).

Expressions of Interest and Participant Consent (June - July 2023)

As and when potential participants expressed interest in participating in the research (through contacting the researcher via email), they were re-provided with the Participant Information Sheet (see Appendix 8) and a Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 10) by the researcher.

Potential participants were asked to provide a signed copy of the latter (via email) prior to arranging a suitable date / time for an interview.

Scheduling Interviews (June-July 2023)

On receipt of completed participant consent forms, participants were given the option (via email) to arrange an interview online (via Microsoft Teams) or in-person.

All participants opted to conduct the interviews via Microsoft Teams.

Data Analysis and Write Up (September - December 2023)

The anonymised interview transcripts were analysed using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021), as outlined in Figure X and evidenced in Appendix 14 - 18. A checklist for RTA was also used (Braun & Clarke, 2022) (see Appendix 19).

The data were written up in relation to their percieved relevance to the research questions.

Transcription (June - August 2023)

The audio recordings of each interview were transcribed and anonymised. The recordings were deleted upon completion, up to two weeks following each interview.

Conducting the Interviews (June - August 2023)

During the introductory period of interview schedule (Appendix 11) participants were reminded of the aims of the research and their right to refuse to answer any questions as well as their right to withdraw their data from the research.

The interviews were conducted and were approximately 60-75 minutes in duration.

Figure 7. Summary of Research Procedure.

4.6.7. The Interview Schedule

An interview schedule (see Appendix 11) was developed to guide the interviews, as encouraged by Clarke and Braun (2013). Interview schedules can help develop rapport between the interviewer and interviewee; a key component in interactive data collection (Reinharz,1993). The interview schedule (see Table 9 below) was structured

in-line with the "*sequence of questions*" suggested by McCarten and Robson (2016, p. 290) for semi-structured interviews (and focus groups):

Table 9. Structure of the Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule	
1)	An Introduction
2)	A 'warm up' period
3)	'Main body' of the interview
4)	A 'cool off' period
5)	Closing statements

Interview questions were developed in-line with the research questions (Clarke & Braun, 2013) (see Appendix 11). A 'clean up' question was also added to the end of the interview schedule to allow participants to raise any issues they felt were important to the subject matter but had not been covered during the interview (Clarke & Braun, 2013). The interview schedule (see Appendix 11) was developed and piloted within the researcher's supervisory space and with a fellow Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) on Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) course. The pilot was used to reflect on the sequencing of questions and to aid in the process of developing prompts and probes. Prompts and probes can be found in Appendix 11 and were used where the researcher felt it necessary to attempt to encourage participants to expand upon their responses (Clarke & Braun, 2013; McCartan & Robson, 2016).

4.6.8. Data Gathering

Data gathering took the form of an individual, semi-structured interview between participants and the researcher online, via Microsoft Teams. Participants were given the choice as to whether the interview took place in person or online as it was recognised that participant choice in the data-gathering process can facilitate the "*reaching of participants where they are most comfortable*" (Shapka et al., 2016, p. 2062). All participants opted for the latter, possibly due to the geographical spread of participants across Wales. Participants may have wanted to reduce the possibility of

logistical difficulties that may have arisen if the process was conducted in person, such as travel difficulties and time allocation (Hanna & Mwale, 2017).

A rapport was established with participants prior to the commencement of the interview. This was achieved through initial introductions and providing a brief overview of the research aims and the opportunity for participants to ask questions. Rapport was facilitated through a sensitive and an appreciative approach to participant responses. The researcher employed active listening techniques and consideration to the conversational throughout each interview (Magnusson & Marecek, 2015).

4.6.9. Transcription

The Microsoft Teams programme generated transcripts automatically. These transcripts were downloaded and scrutinised by the researcher to ensure accuracy. As part of this process, each interview recording was listened to at least three times, from start to finish, to ensure that they were transcribed verbatim to allow a thorough analysis of the data (Willig, 2013). All identifying information such as names of colleagues, LAs and geographical areas were removed to ensure the anonymity of the transcripts. All participants were randomly allocated a participant number (PP1 – PP6) via an online, random generator, to represent each participant.

4.7. Data Analysis and Rationale

4.7.1. Reflexive Thematic Analysis: What is it?

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was selected as an appropriate approach to data analysis as its theoretical flexibility makes it compatible with the analysis of semi-structured interviews within a social constructionist orientation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2019; 2021; 2022a). Thematic analysis (TA) was first outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) as *"a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data"* (p. 79). More recently, Braun and Clarke have used the term 'reflexive' TA to describe their approach, highlighting the importance of the researcher in the process of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021). The process of RTA involves the active

construction of data codes and theme development, which are based on patterns of shared ideas and concepts built from the coded data (Braun and Clarke, 2022a).

Within RTA, reflexivity is a fundamental characteristic, which involves the researcher critically reflecting on their role within the research process and practice. The flexible application of RTA means that it is suitable to analyse the subjectivity of people's experiences and perspectives relating to an issue, factors, and/or processes (Braun et al., 2016).

4.7.2. Reflective Thematic Analysis: The Rationale

The researcher felt that researcher subjectivity was important for the current research. As a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) working in Wales, the researcher holds the position that EPSs have a responsibility to support the mental health and wellbeing needs of CYP following COVID-19, and that there are both barriers and facilitators at the service-delivery level and wider LA level in fulfilling this responsibility. Reflexive TA allowed the researcher to continue to hold and embrace this subjective position whilst reflecting on its potential impact on data analysis, rather than viewing it as something to be controlled (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). This is explored in greater detail in Part Three A of the thesis. A summary of the rationale to utilise RTA as a method of analysis is presented in Table 10 below.

Table 10. Rationale for Utilising RTA as a Method for Data Analysis

Rationale for Utilising RTA as a Method for Data Analysis
• RTA offers the researcher a high degree of flexibility; it can be used with any theoretical approach or epistemological and ontological stance (Braun & Clarke, 2021). • RTA embraces and values researcher subjectivity and views this as a key tool in the process of data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021). This coincides with the social-constructionist epistemological position adopted by the current research (Braun & Clarke, 2022a; Burr, 2015). • RTA allows themes to be generated from the data in an inductive way, rather than from existing theory or research as data is analysed from the 'bottom up' (Braun & Clarke, 2021). In the context of exploring PEP's perceptions of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19, this was useful as there is a dearth of literature that has previously explored this area. • RTA encouraged themes to be developed to provide an overview of group experiences (Clarke & Braun, 2013).

The researcher followed the six phases of analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (see Figure 8 below) to conduct the analysis of the interview transcripts (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). The process of data analysis is outlined in Figure 8 below, and, whilst each phase is presented in a way that suggests the process is progressive and linear, it is perhaps important to note that data analysis involved the researcher shifting back and forth between phases (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Further, critical discussion of the data-analysis process can be found in Part Three of the Thesis.

Phase 1

- *Data Familiarisation*
- Automatically generated transcriptions were imported into Microsoft Word. The transcriptions were read alongside the recordings and amended where necessary.
- Each interview recording was listened to several times to ensure accuracy of the interview transcipt and the researcher's familiarisation with the data.

Phase 2

- *Data Coding*
- Each ammended interview transcript was systematically worked through and extracts that the researcher percieved as interesting and meaningful to the research questions were identified.
- Meaningful code labels were applied to the corresponding data to form codes. An example of the coding process can be found in Appendix 14. A full list of codes generated can be found in Appendix 15.

Phase 3

- *Generation of Initial Themes from the Data*
- Codes were colour-coded and transferred into a table and printed out. Relationships and connections within the data were manually identified and developed manually by the researcher. Colour-coded codes can be found in Appendix 16. Codes were manually organised by hand into clusters that appeared to share a core idea that the researcher deemend relevant to the research questions. Example photographs of this process can be found in Appendix 17.

Phase 4

- *Developing and Reviewing Themes*
- From initial codes, catgeories were generated. The researcher reflected on the dominant theme amongst each catgeory and initial themes were generated.
- Research supervsion was used as a reflective space to check that initial themes were appropriate in relation to the coded extracts and the full dataset.

Phase 5

- *Refining, Defining and Naming Themes*
- Themes were refined through a fine-tuning of the analysis. This process occured through the development of the initial themaptic map (See Appendix 18) where theme names were developed and links between themes and subthemes were made. Theme names and definitions were discussed in the researcher's supervisor space and continued to evolve during the write-up phase of analysis.

Phase 6

- *Write Up*
- In RTA, the write-up is considered a key part of the analytic process.
- During the write-up process, links with research questions, existing literature and theory were made. Implications for EPS and EP practice were also developed.
- The final analysis and write-up of the data can be found in Part Two C of the thesis.

Figure 8. The Six Phases of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2021).

4.7.3. Approach to Reflexive Thematic Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis can be approached in numerous ways (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). However, the approach to data coding within this research was considered inductive and semantic. Whilst adopting an inductive orientation, the development of codes and themes are driven by the data content. A semantic focus involves exploring meaning at a surface or explicit level. However, due to the adoption of a reflexive approach, Braun and Clarke (2022a) suggest that data analysis cannot be purely inductive or semantic. Rather, they suggest that the researcher will have individual subjective interpretations and existing perspectives that inevitably shape the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). To support the fidelity of the RTA process, consideration was given to the RTA Checklist proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022a, p. 269) (see Appendix 19).

4.8. Reliability and Validity

The validity and reliability of the current research was assessed using criteria proposed by Yardley (2000; 2015). An overview of this process is outlined in Appendix 13.

4.9. Summary

In sum, the methodology of the current research reflects the assumption that both the participants and the researcher will bring their own perceptions of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the mental health needs of CYP following COVID-19, which are situated in their social and cultural context. The subjective experiences of the participants and researcher, and the meaning attributed to these experiences will influence both the data collected, as well as the interpretation of said data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021; 2022a).

5. Part Two C: Analysis

5.1. Overview of Analysis

The analysis presents each of the themes developed through the RTA process with consideration of how they answer the research questions. A thematic map is presented to provide a visual representation of the nine themes and seven sub-themes constructed from the data by the researcher. Themes and related subthemes are organised in relation to the research questions they address within both the thematic map, and subsequent tables which explore themes and subthemes in greater depth. Finally, the researcher's construction of the relationship between themes, as denoted by dashed lines within the thematic map, are also explored.

Each of the nine themes represent a distinct entity which is characterised by a *"central organising concept" (*Braun & Clarke, 2022a, p. 77). Subthemes, which exist underneath a broader theme, share the same central organising concept as it's overarching theme, whilst focussing on a notable, specific element (Braun & Clarke, 2022a). The central organising concept for each theme is highlighted at the beginning of the tables for each corresponding theme. Within the Findings section, themes and subthemes are explored through a descriptive illustration. This is followed by an analytical account within the 'Discussion' section. Themes and subthemes are explored through supporting quotes which provide evidence for each (Flick, 2018).

Both descriptive and interpretive aspects supported the analysis process of developing codes and then themes. Most of the descriptions offered are based on what participants explicitly said, whilst others may provide more interpretive meaning based around implicit patterns within the dataset. Quotations are presented in the words of participants, with minor adjustments to aid readability. The use of ellipses (...) illustrates where part of the text has been omitted to be concise and aid clarity. Similarly, the use of brackets illustrates information the researcher deems contextually relevant to quotes, again, to aid with clarity.

5.2. Participant Information

Participant information, such as the number of years' experience participants had in the PEP role within their current LA and as an EP more generally (irrespective of LA), was obtained from all participants during the 'warm up' phase of the interview.

At the time of interviewing, all participants had between 1- and 10-years' experience as a PEP within their current LA. Participants also had between 10- and 20-years' experience working as an EP.

5.3. Themes

Nine themes and seven subthemes are presented in a thematic map in Figure 9 below and are explored in more detail in Tables 11 - 14. Themes were generated in-line with Braun and Clarke's (2021) six phased approach to RTA (see Figure 8). Examples of the initial development of themes from the coded data can be found in Appendix 17. Examples of phase four and five (developing and reviewing themes and refining, defining, and naming themes, respectively) through the development of the thematic map can be found in Appendix 18. A description of the relationships, constructed between themes and subthemes, can be found in Table 15.
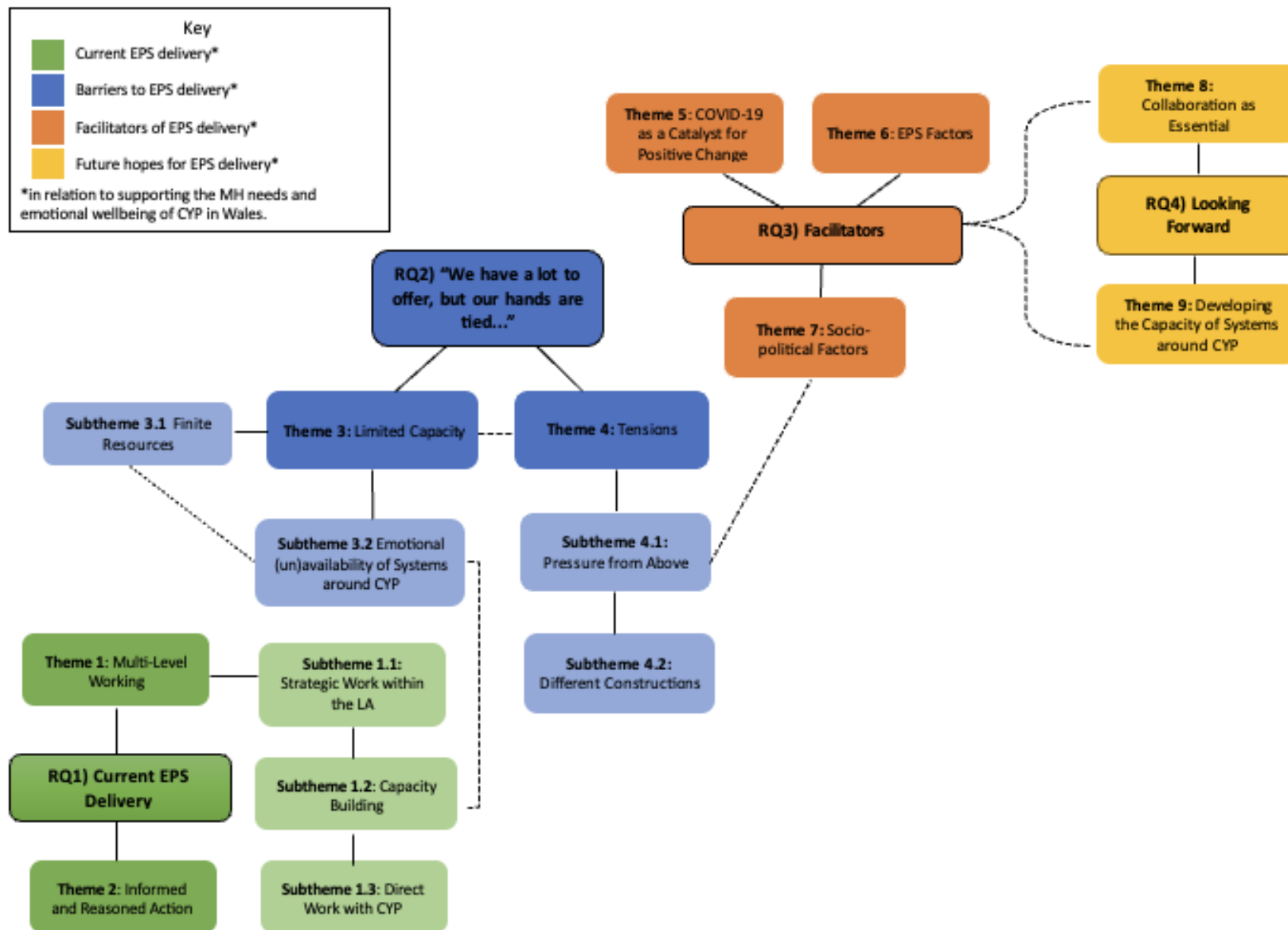
Figure 9. *Thematic Map of Themes and Subthemes.*

5.3.1. Themes Related to RQ1

RQ1) What are PEP's perspectives of current EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
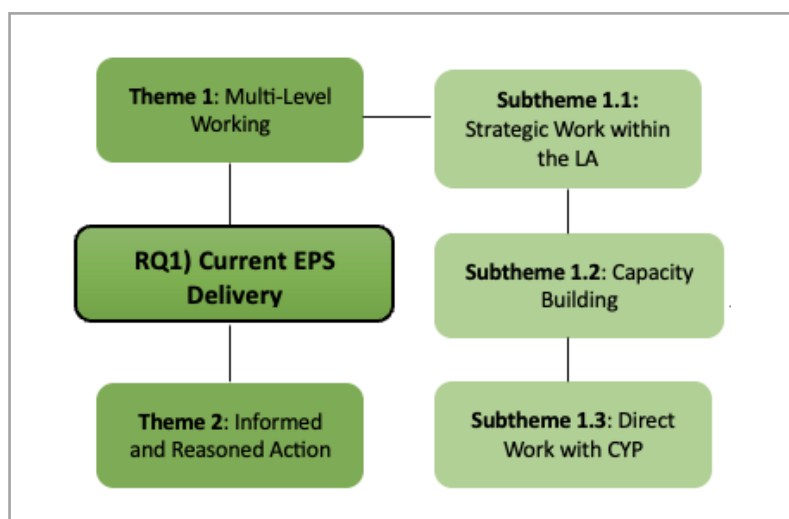
Figure 10. *Themes 1 and 2.*

Table 11. Description of Themes 1 and 2 (and related subthemes)

Theme 1: Multi-Level Working
The theme 'Multi-Level Working' reflects participants' view that their current EPS adopts an *"ecosystemic model"* (PP2) of service delivery; EPs working within EPSs in Wales are encouraged to, and actively engage in, supporting the MH needs of CYP through participation in strategic work at the LA level, engagement with adults around CYP and by engaging in direct work with CYP. The theme 'Multi-Level Working' was chosen as it highlighted participants' construction of the multi-faceted / multi-layered role of EPSs / EPs and current EPS service delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales.

Subthemes	Illustrative Quotes
1.1: Strategic Work within the LA Participants noted that EPSs in Wales are currently engaging in strategic work at the level of the LA to support the MH needs of	*PP2: "With the funding… we have a strategic group, which is multi-agency. I guess that looks around well-being and we have a well-being strategy, and we [PEP and Senior EP] are key in terms of developing that wellbeing*

CYP. This includes engagement with a well-being strategy group, the setting-up of projects around EBSA, trauma informed schools and strategic support for the schools in-reach service.	*strategy in terms of educational psychologists".* ***PP3:*** *"We're [EPS] setting up projects within the local authority to develop... like we have done... around EBSA, and we're doing quite a lot of work around trauma informed schools. I guess it comes in different layers, doesn't it?"* ***PP4:*** *"As part of our time allocation, we're also providing support for strategic meetings like the schools-in reach service you might be familiar with"*
1.2: Capacity Building EPSs are currently supporting the adults around CYP to support CYP's MH needs. EPSs are building the capacity of adults around CYP through consultation, by providing support for school staff to deliver specific interventions through training and supervision, as well as staff well-being groups. Participants discussed this level of work as being child-centred, with a focus on supporting the emotional capacity, confidence, and competency of adults to support CYP positioned at the centre of the system. Several participants referenced a 'phased' approach to service delivery which encourages EPs' engagement with adults	***PP2:*** *".... in order to support a young person's mental health and well-being, you have to support the adults around them to be emotionally secure and regulated. Because, even if you've got the best skills in the world, right? If you're dysregulated as an adult... you know… you're not going to meet that child's needs"* ***PP3:*** *"We are at a level where it's mostly about supporting schools to do those interventions… and that's great because... you know… there's value to be had in empowering the emotionally available adult to deliver those interventions"* ***PP6:*** *"We also, for instance, do a staff wellbeing group and staff wellbeing training at a whole-school level as well so that we can*

around CYP through consultation prior to engaging in any direct work with CYP. Participants noted it may not be necessary for an EP to engage in direct work with CYP whilst following a phased approach to service delivery to empower adults around CYP through consultation. As such, supporting adults around CYP appeared to be viewed as the gold standard to support CYP's MH needs.	*support staff because what we know is if that staff's mental health is not where it should be…"* *PP1: "It's anonymous, so wouldn't be about a young person individually, it would be around the system that's supporting that young person…. I mean, ultimately, many cases stay at a consultative level because the consultation itself enables the adults around that child to see them differently to think about what they could do differently".*
1.3: <u>Direct Work with CYP</u> Participants noted that their EPS supports the MH needs of CYP in Wales through direct work at the level of the CYP. This includes engagement in therapeutic assessment, eliciting pupil voice whilst utilising solution-focussed approaches. Participants acknowledged that direct work with CYP is often conducted following a consultation where consultees appear uncertain about the CYP's views. In this way, direct work with CYP is construed by participants as a means of seeking additional information deemed necessary to support CYP following a consultation. As such, the decision to engage in direct work with CYP varies on a case-by-case basis and is intended to be used to support the adults around the CYP in better understanding their needs.	*PP3: "We do have a consultation model... but we do become involved with young people directly where it's needed... we'll use techniques like therapeutic assessment to make sure that we're fully understanding the views of the young people"* *PP5: "But if the adults aren't sure and don't know, then that's when I would probably go in to get the pupils perspective so that I could feed that back to the adults."* *PP1: "Other times it's like, 'well, actually, there is an unanswered question here that actually the EP is best placed to explore'. It's about providing the most effective and efficient piece of work for that case at that time".*

Theme 2: Informed and Reasoned Action
The theme 'Informed and Reasoned Action' reflects the psychological theories / models and problem-solving frameworks EPSs currently adopt to ensure their EPS delivery is underpinned by informed and reasoned action. Participants construed this as an active process and an integral role of an EPS (and EPs) and noted how EPSs are currently engaging in explicit discussions around the psychology they use to inform their practice. These include solution focussed approaches, elements of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT) and problem-solving frameworks such as the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008) which are utilised when working across different levels.
Illustrative Quotes
PP2: "We try to understand *what* is the theory, *what* is the framework which underpins our thinking here?... which is underpinning what it is that I'm doing? and they should always be explicit, or at least it should always be able to be explicit if we need it to be". *PP3: "I wouldn't say that we deliver CBT as in a 'therapeutic' kind of situation…. But the principles on the understanding of anxiety, how we can help young people… we've got that background to understand that… to try and support them with that"* *PP1: "And we work through a consultative model… we don't see young people without having had a consultative process where we're really looking at what are the key change issues there and what are the hypotheses that what's going on. So, in terms of COMOIRA [Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action]… you know, our work is informed and reasoned"*

5.3.2. Themes Related to RQ2

RQ2) What are PEP's views of the barriers to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
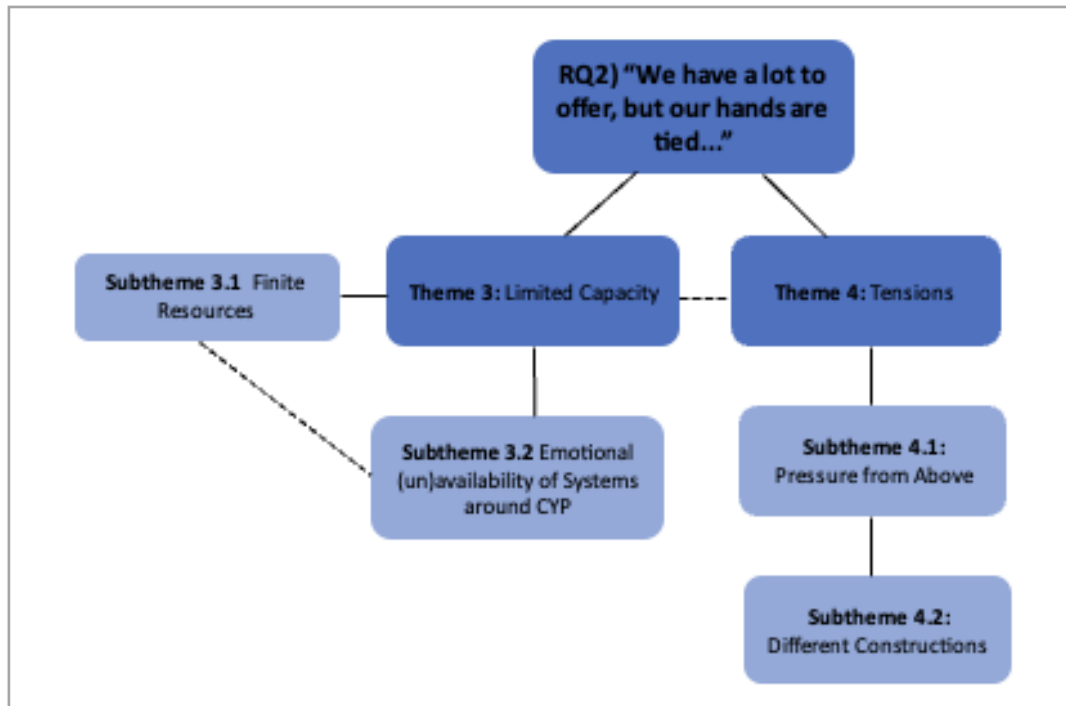
Figure 11. *Themes 3 and 4.*

Table 12. Description of Themes 3 and 4 (and related subthemes)

Theme 3: Limited Capacity
The theme 'Limited Capacity' illustrates participants constructions of the constraints faced by EPSs and the wider education system in supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales. This theme encompasses participants' constructions of the finite nature of the currently available resources such as EPS and school staffing levels, funding, as well as the currently limited emotional and cognitive capacity of the adults around CYP. Several participants discussed the impact of COVID-19 within this theme; both in relation to a reduction in LA funding following COVID-19, and the perceived impact of COVID-19, among other stressors (e.g., finite resources), on the adults surrounding CYP.

Subtheme	Illustrative Quotes

3.1: **Finite Resources**	**PP5:** *"We are quite open when we go to NAPEP Wales. It's laughable, really, because we've come to the point where we're quite openly... you know… acknowledging that we are stealing people [EPs] from each other [EPSs], because they just aren't there".*
Participants emphasised the finite nature of current EPS (and school) staffing levels, available funding, and the consequential lack of time EPSs and school staff are able to provide to support the MH needs of CYP.	
	PP6: *"Welsh Government have recently cut the whole school approach to wellbeing grants and they previously showed us the projected amount and that was increasing each year. So, the cut wasn't just a cut on the previous amount… it was a massive cut because we were expecting a higher amount again. So, we've had to reduce the service that we can provide around emotional well-being".*
Several participants discussed Welsh Government's cut to EPSs funding and their current challenge to be responsive to said cuts. Participants also noted how it may be difficult to ensure that EPs are engaging in work to support the MH needs of CYP due to the competing demands of the EP role and individual EPs' professional priorities when working within a time-allocation model. Professional reflection spaces were deemed important for EPSs to engage in work to support CYP's MH, and these were also deemed difficult for EPSs to prioritise time for.	**PP1:** *"Our capacity as a team is reduced, and we haven't got the capacity to be able to maybe spend extensive lengths of time visiting children, going back, and revisiting it"*
	PP3: *"There's a barrier in terms of the amount of time that we [the EPS] can get together to support each other in terms of reflection. I mean, it's… that's very much needed… we need to support each other we need to have space to be emotionally available for the people we're working with".*
Further, participants discussed the lack of funding support offered for TEPs, and the negative impact of having only one DEdPsy training	**PP4:** *"At the end of the day.. the bursary of the [DEdPsy] course.. it's diabolical. What does it communicate? It stops people applying… we need at least one additional [DEdPsy] course.. at least. We need one in the North if we are to attract EPs across"*

course within Wales related to recruitment and retention.	*Wales, not just the South, because that's not happening.*
3.2: <u>Emotional (un)availability of Systems around CYP</u> Participants discussed the difficulty of supporting the MH needs of CYP when adults around them are emotionally dysregulated. Further, participants construed the effectiveness of EPSs in supporting MH needs of CYP as being dependant on the emotional and cognitive capacity of the adults around CYP. Participants construed adults around CYP as sometimes needing greater emotional and cognitive capacity to be able to engage in a change process to support CYP within their care. This was attributed to the emotional impact of COVID-19 in addition to other socio-political factors.	**PP1:** *"I think one of the big challenges that we've got is applying that service delivery model [phased approach] in a space where people are very dysregulated. So, you might have a school or a parent, or a school system... their viewpoints become very polarised in terms of 'this child is not in the right place… they shouldn't be in this place' or and 'it's not my responsibility to make this your responsibility'… their view become very polarised, right?"* **PP6:** *"Staff's mental health is not where it should be and so their ability to be empathic and see things from a child's perspective is really quite limited. So, I think it would be great if we had more capacity to do more around that… our staff wellbeing group, we know schools want it. We know staff want it, but they can't get the release time".* **PP1:** *"The system is traumatised right now… since COVID-19, with the cost-of-living crisis... and so is people's ability to… their tolerance for ambiguity… it's very difficult"*

Theme 4: Tensions
The theme 'Tensions' highlights the competing demands, priorities and constructions imposed on and held by LAs, EPSs, multidisciplinary professionals, and school staff across Wales. These included pressure on LAs and school systems on meeting attainment and improvement targets, adapting to new legislation as well as variations in others' construction of the EP role and the concept of 'multiagency working'. These factors were referred to by all participants as a barrier to EPS delivery to support the MH needs of CYP in Wales.

Subthemes	Illustrative Quotes
4.1: <u>Pressure from Above</u> Participants discussed the pressure imposed on EPSs and school systems by education inspectors (Estyn) as well as the LA. Further, participants construed this pressure as negatively impacting EPSs and school systems in supporting the MH needs of CYP. One participant constructed this tension as reducing the EPSs ability to engage in informed and reasoned action. Across all interviews, participants construed the pressure imposed on school systems as being unnecessary and unrealistic. Further, participants felt that legislative changes, such as the new curriculum in Wales has also hindered schools' ability to engage in supporting the MH needs of CYP.	*PP3: "… the pressure around the expectations of schools when it comes to things like Estyn... you know… the competing demands on our schools. You've got to be shown... to be seen to be doing and producing certain results in a school".* *PP6: "So, key drivers in the local authority are always exclusions and attendance and well-being as well. Simply because they are on the Estyn framework. So, from a LA, it is 'what are you doing to bring down exclusions?', 'what are you doing to increase attendance and support well-being?'.. it's being able to actually demonstrate that those figures are improving, especially around exclusions, it's really hard."* *PP5: "I think the schools have been under so much pressure because of the new curriculum and everything. I'm not sure… generally…. how much wellbeing kind of stuff really goes on now. I think I think schools are under pressure to get standards back up, which is… yeah…. it's ridiculous."*
4.2: <u>Different Constructions</u> Participants noted that key people may not understand the scope of the EP role. Some participants indicated that this may be	*PP4: "I don't think Welsh Government really understand what their EPS can do… they think we just do learning".* *PP5: "there has become maybe some confusion in that in that mental health and wellbeing space around*

| contributing to the uncertainty experienced by school systems as to who to seek support from for CYP in their care with MH needs.

Participants referred to the varying constructions that other professionals hold regarding the concept of 'multi-agency working' which was construed by all participants as being an essential component in order to support the MH needs of CYP. | *who is best placed to support children, young people in their families. That is a challenge in terms of helping schools to understand who is… you know…. who to go to, in terms of the issues that they're facing and when to go to them and when to you know, when to have their involvement… and I'm not sure that professionals around you have worked that out either".*

PP1: *".… often one of the barriers is where you have individual services or misinterpretation of multi-agency working. So, you have… you might have multiple agencies working around a case or a school or whatever it might be, but that could not be multi-agency working. It's just multiple agencies working"* |

6.5.3.3. Themes Related to RQ3

RQ3) What are PEP's views of the facilitators of supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?
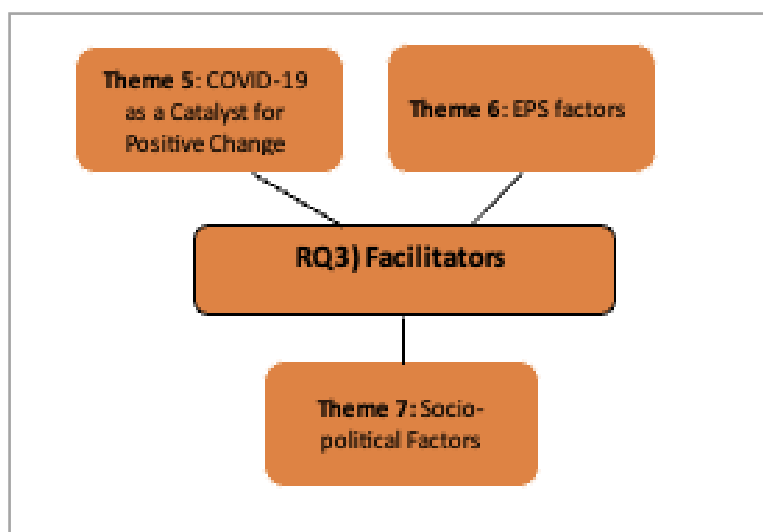
Figure 12. *Themes 5, 6 and 7.*

Table 13. Description of Themes 5, 6 and 7 (and related subthemes)

Theme 5: COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change
The Theme 'COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change' illustrates the facilitative effect participants believe the COVID-19 pandemic has had on improving EPS delivery as well as others' construction of the importance of supporting CYP's MH and wellbeing. Participants indicated that the impact of COVID-19 has provided EPSs with opportunities to enhance their service delivery in relation to supporting CYP's MH needs. They described how the COVID-19 pandemic offered EPSs the space and time required to enhance their services; specifically, through the enhanced use of technology to support online training for school staff and the opportunity to develop communication between key sub-systems within the wider education system.
Illustrative Quotes
PP1: "I think we were already in we were already in the process of changing our model of service delivery prior to the pandemic. We started to build our phased model prior to COVID. I think, if anything, COVID just sped that up in terms of gave us even more impetus to make that change quickly. So, the things that we were able to bring in then in terms of 'okay, well, now we've got the use of video call', there is potential to be able to be in contact with more people more effectively, more efficiently." *PP5: "I think COVID really made people develop their training arm potentially – that definitely came out of COVID. Schools seem to really appreciate being able to send staff on online training. The time demand is less, and schools can actually release the staff now."* *PP1: I think one of the things that COVID-19 definitely brought around as well is an increased acceptance around the importance of people's mental health and well-being, particularly in terms of their learning".* *PP2: "I think the COVID-19 pandemic… it's now allowed some more / better dialogue and communication with local authority leads and with schools, around what mental health and well-being is about in schools and the importance of it. All of a sudden, it's allowed for*

that… so we are now able to work at a quicker pace, and people are getting it and understanding and listening now and putting things in place."

Theme 6: EPS Factors
The theme 'EPS Factors' represents facilitative factors to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP at the wider EPS system. This theme highlights the unique elements of EPSs across Wales, including the existence of senior EP roles within some EPSs which are deemed crucial to supporting MH and wellbeing strategy within the EPS and the wider LA system, and the use of Assistant EPs to facilitate interventions for CYP in others. Several participants noted that they feel that having PEPs within higher-level strategic positions within the LA is important for a top-down approach to supporting MH and wellbeing.
Illustrative Quotes
PP2: *"We have the senior post, which is critical to developing, you know… different approaches within schools and strategy around emotional health and well-being. We also have an element of funding which helps support that role in terms of delivering best practice".*
PP5: *"I mean… capacity wise… and because we're not tied up just in statutory work like some local authorities…. we can engage in more work around supporting mental health needs".*
PP6: *"Facilitators would probably be having… having PEPs at sort of DMT [Directorate Management Team] level [in the LA] and having PEPs in positions like inclusion leads. I think that's a facilitator because that's obviously always gonna be really important to us and so that will filter through our kind of inclusion strategy, which would be around emotionally available adults and, you know, cultural ethos in our schools that facilitate wellbeing for staff and young people… about relationship policies… you know, it's got… it's got to filter through you know."*
Theme 7: Socio-political Factors
The theme 'Socio-political Factors' encompasses the wider socio-political factors participants discussed as facilitators of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales. Several participants construed the wider LA as valuing their EPS which enables EPSs more autonomy and scope in enhancing their service delivery in

relation to supporting CYP's MH and wellbeing. Participants referenced the importance of more senior members of the LA in supporting the MH and wellbeing agenda. Finally, participants discussed the impact of legislative changes such as the ALN reform in Wales in encouraging pupil voice.

Illustrative Quotes
PP2: *"It's always good to know that the local authority has value for the educational psychology service, and… as such, we are given the biggest brief if you like, around emotional health and well-being and funding. So, in terms of our service delivery now, and this is over the last probably two years I think we have developed a new post, which is a specialist senior educational psychologist in wellbeing".* **PP5:** *"I would say that… it is a priority. The local authority, you know… do recognise the importance of mental health support for children and young people... especially now... And when you go to a political level…when you go to the counsellors…. they're always, always, always very concerned about the mental health of children and young people. They're always very willing… you know, when grants and things come out... they're always willing to prioritise mental health and wellbeing."* **PP6:** *"I think pupil voice has become much more central. I mean, that's not just due to COVID-19… obviously, that's linked to the ALN reform. But the two things have kind of coincided."*

5.3.4. Themes Related to RQ4

RQ4) What are PEP's hopes for EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales?
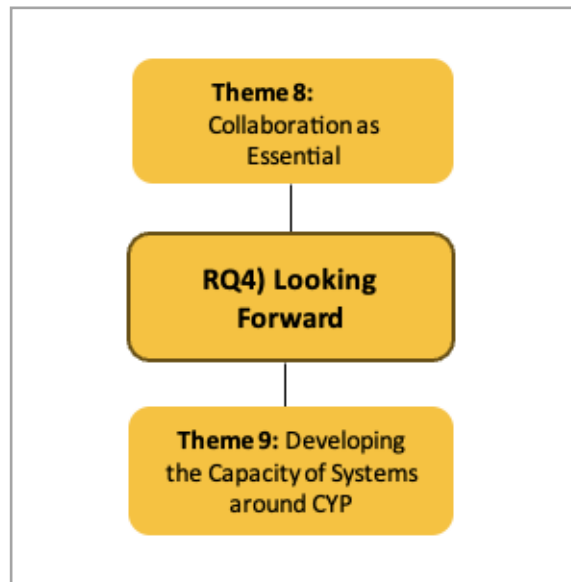
Figure 13. *Themes 8 and 9.*

Table 14. Description of Themes 8 and 9 (and related subthemes)

Theme 8: Collaboration as Essential
The theme 'Collaboration as Essential' illustrates participants' desire for more joined up working with key professionals and adults around CYP in the future. Participants made a distinction between communication and 'true' collaboration; with the latter construed as most desirable for EPSs. Participants indicated that collaboration is essential for co-constructing professional roles to ensure that support for CYP is coordinated and appropriate. Collaboration with parents was also deemed important for EPSs moving forward with a focus on facilitating person-centred practice.
Illustrative Quotes
PP1: *"One of things we want to focus on is definitely collaboration… really coming together, understanding each other's roles, understanding each other's… you know… kind of expertise and availabilities, and co-constructing a way forward together"*

PP5: *"we will always want to be doing that preventative work… that upstream stuff. I think we need to continue to collaborate with our colleagues and health to work *truly* collaboratively… *truly*."*

PP2: *"And, also, children and young people's views? How do we gather that rich information in people's voice around emotional health and well-being from their perspective? What do they feel would be helpful, and importantly, working with parents because parents are often forgotten."*

Theme 9: Developing the Capacity of Systems around CYP

Finally, the theme 'Developing the Capacity of Systems around CYP' illustrates participants' desire to continue to develop the competency and confidence of the EPS (including individual EPs) as well as school staff and parents. Some participants discussed specific actions that they felt would support with this, such as continuing to work in a strategic manner, funding for permanent Assistant EP posts as well as the use of implementation science principles following training to further develop the capacity of adults around CYP. The term '*developing*' is purposefully used to reflect participants' hopes to advance the pre-existing skillset of EPSs as well as the skills they feel they have already supported adults around CYP to build via their multi-level working.

Illustrative Quotes

PP4: *" … I would think that we would continue to focus on supporting the mental health needs of young people and supporting our schools, their culture and ethos and focussing on their skills and confidence to meet the varying needs of young people. Ummm… that we will continue to do that and maybe do that more".*

PP2: *"So, I think we would continue to be… to use our time to work strategically in the local authority and in our schools and supporting the confidence and the skill set of staff and continuing to embed approaches."*

PP3: *"I think it'd be really good to have a permanent Assistant post… because what they're able to do is bridge that gap between 'here's the intervention, here is the hypothesis that the EPs have created for you'… and 'I've done some training in it, but I just… I've got no idea what I say next to this'. Then they have somebody who becomes a skilled or more skilled practitioner."*

PP1: *"In terms of when we're delivering training, not just delivering one off trainings, but actually following up and offering reflective spaces where people can think about how they use the skills that they've developed."*

5.3.5. Relationships Between Themes and Subthemes

The themes and subthemes constructed from the data may be understood as interacting entities rather than distinct, independent concepts. The use of dashed lines and arrows within the thematic map (see Figure 9) denotes the researcher's construction of the relationship between themes and subthemes. The researcher acknowledges that theme development and refinement is an ongoing process (Braun & Clarke, 2021), and posits that there are likely many complex interactions between the gathered data. However, due to the scope of the current research, the most pertinent interactions within the dataset are explored in Table 15 below.

Table 15. Relationships between Themes and Subthemes

Themes / Subthemes	Relationship (as denoted by dashed lines / arrows within the thematic map - see Figure 9)
• **Theme 3:** Limited Capacity • **Theme 4:** Tensions	An adjoining line between Theme 3 and 4 is used to illustrate how aspects of the theme 'Limited Capacity' may be influenced by the theme 'Tensions', and vice versa. Participants noted how the reduced capacity of school systems; both in relation to physical resources (e.g., school staffing levels) and the emotional capacity of staff may be exacerbating the tension experienced by school systems between meeting attainment targets from 'above' (e.g., the wider LA and Estyn) and in engaging in work to support the MH needs of CYP in their care. It was suggested that this heightened tension may be further reducing the emotional

	and cognitive capacity of staff, perpetuating difficulties associated with limited capacity.
• **Subtheme 3.1:** Finite Resources • **Subtheme 3.2:** Emotional (un)availability of Systems around CYP	Subthemes 3.1 and 3.2 are adjoined to illustrate the bi-directional relationship between the finite resources available within the education system and emotional capacity of adults within said system (e.g., school staff) as well as those who interact with it (e.g., parents). For example, participants discussed the stress school staff are currently under in light of school staffing shortages due to funding cuts. Participants noted that increased pressure on remaining school staff in light of staffing cuts is contributing to some school staff opting to leave the profession; thereby perpetuating the difficulties associated with finite resources.
• **Subtheme 3.2:** Emotional (un)availability of Systems around CYP • **Subtheme 1.2:** Capacity Building	Concepts encompassed by subtheme 3.2 were discussed by participants when referring to current EPS delivery; specifically, the emphasis on building the capacity of adults around CYP. Participants discussed the current importance of building the emotional capacity of systems around CYP due to the recognised barrier of the emotional unavailability of adults existing within a traumatised system.
• **Subtheme 4.3:** Pressure from Above • **Theme 7:** Socio-political Factors	Subtheme 4.3 and theme 7 are adjoined to denote how two similar concepts (e.g., wider, mesosystemic factors) are construed as both barriers and facilitators to EPS delivery. When pressure to meet attainment targets from 'above' is high, participants feel that EPSs and school systems have less autonomy and scope to engage in work to support MH needs. By contrast, participants noted that within LAs that value EPSs, EPSs and school systems feel that they have wider scope to engage in said work.
• **RQ3)** Facilitators • **Theme 8:** Collaboration as Essential	Themes 8 and 9 are connected to themes that relate to RQ3), '*Facilitators',* as they were construed by participants as being positive steps forward for EPS delivery to support the MH needs of CYP and were also discussed in relation

• **Theme 9:** Developing the Capacity of Systems around CYP	to their facilitative effect in offering said support. Whilst theme 8 and 9 were not explicitly discussed by participants when asked about the facilitators to EPS service delivery, they were discussed in a way that suggests they construe these concepts as key components to enhance EPS delivery in the realm of MH and wellbeing in the future.

6. Part Two D: Discussion

6.1. Overview

The current research aimed to explore PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19. Within this section, the analysis of the research data will be discussed in relation to the four research questions and its relevance to theory and research collated within Part One of the Thesis. Visual representations of data are provided to aid with understanding. Implications for practice in light of the new insights gained from this research will also be discussed, followed by a consideration of the strengths and limitations of the current research. Finally, areas for possible future research are explored.

6.2. Addressing RQ1

RQ1) What are PEP's perspectives of their current EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

Following the completion of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), a summary and visual representation of the findings in relation to RQ1 was created and is provided within Figure 14. The Figure aims to illustrate current EPS delivery to support the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP across Wales .
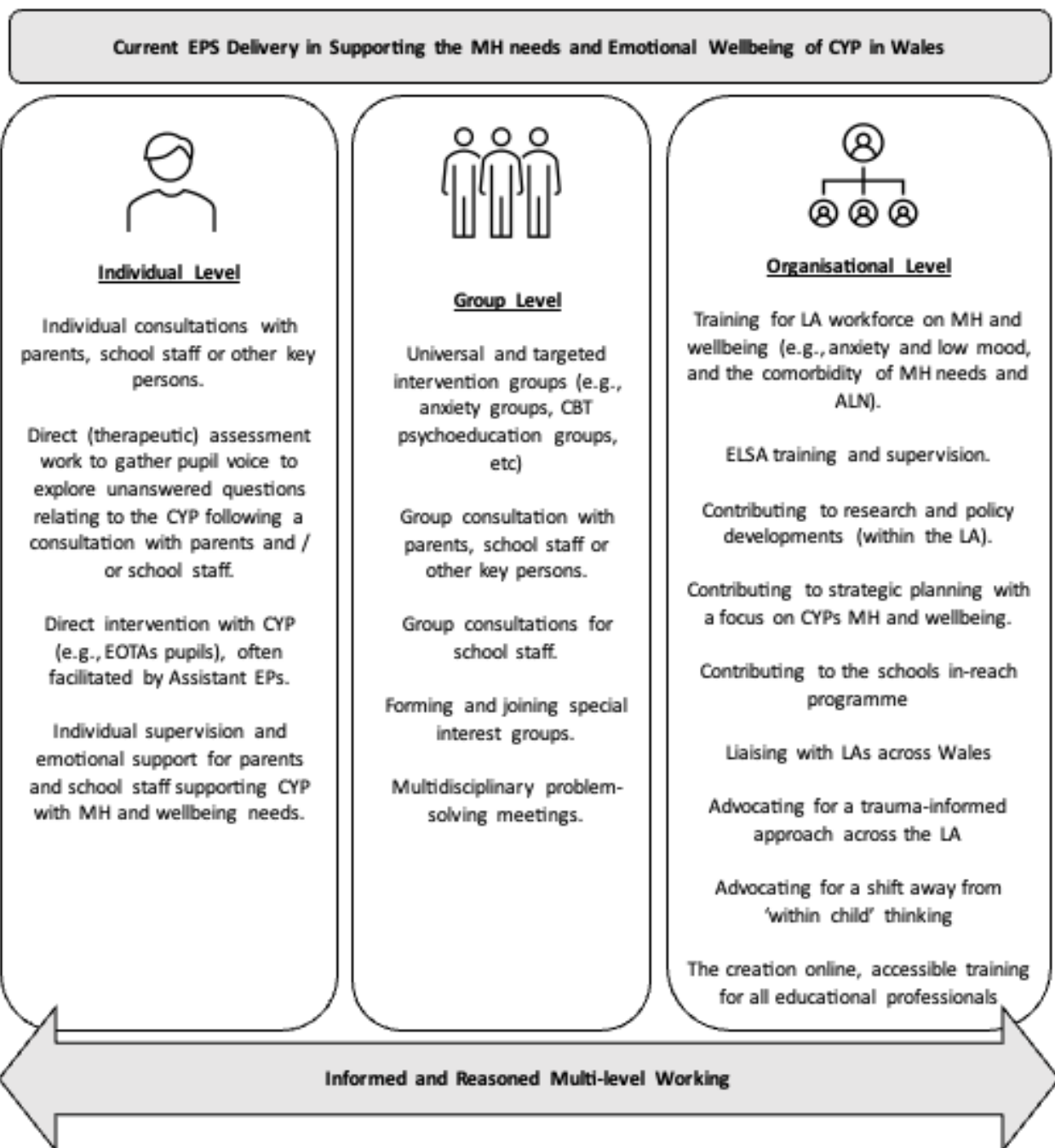
Figure 14. *Current EPS Delivery.*

6.2.1. Constructions of the Role of the EPS

Across all PEP participants, there was a strong consensus that EPs, and thus, EPSs, *do* have a role in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19. This supports the research of Davies (2020) who offered the opposing metaphors 'heir-apparent' and 'outsider' to illustrate EP participants' views of the EP role in this area of practice; with the metaphorical weight of the former greater than the latter (see Figure 3). However, in the current research, PEP participants appeared to adopt a stronger stance in favour of the 'heir-apparent' metaphor

compared to the EP participants in England within Davies (2020). This may suggest that PEP's views in relation to this area of practice may be more unified than those of main grade EPs; perhaps due to their role in advocating for, and showcasing the skillset encompassed within LA EPSs (Hardy et al., 2020).

6.2.2. Multi-Level Working

6.2.2.1. Bronfenbrenner's Bio-ecological Model

Akin to a body of research which has explored the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice, the current research suggests that EPSs are supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing by engaging in work to facilitate change across multiple levels. As such, current EPS delivery across Wales appears to be underpinned by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological systems theory; with participant two (PP2) describing more recent changes in EPS delivery as adopting an *"ecosystemic approach"* when making explicit parallels with the theory. This coincides with the notion of 'good practice' suggested by the DCFE and DoH (2008). It also coincides with the need for EPS delivery to support the ever-changing demands of the population it serves in a time-efficient, equitable manner (Marsh & Higgins, 2018).

Across all interviews, facilitating change at the exosystemic or 'organisational' level was viewed as an effective use of EPSs time in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP through a 'top-down' approach. This coincides with the notion that facilitating change at the wider, systemic level may facilitate ripples of change for *multiple* CYP compared to facilitating change at the individual level which may only benefit a select few (Lee & Woods, 2017).

However, one PEP participant noted that engagement in strategy meetings pertaining to MH and emotional wellbeing policy within the LAs education directorate was restricted to the PEP and senior EP role. As such, the time constraints and hierarchical, managerial structures within the EPS may be viewed as barriers for main grade EPs to engage in some aspects of strategic work. This appears to coincide with the barriers of the EP role related to time constraints suggested by Andrews (2017), Hulme (2017)

and Greig et al. (2019). It also appears to support the unique, strategic role of senior members of EPSs as suggested by Hardy et al. (2020).

6.2.2.2. The Gold Standard: The Microsystemic Level

Supporting the microsystem by building the capacity of adults around CYP was perceived as the gold standard to supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing. The current research supports the findings of Underwood (2022), Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020) and Eldred (2021) who found that core functions of the EP role, such as consultation and supervision (Fallon et al., 2010), were used to support the MH of CYP by EP participants. Underwood (2022) and Eldred (2021) noted that through the use of consultation and supervision, respectively, EPs were able to build the emotional and cognitive capacity of adults around CYP who were then, in turn, better positioned to support the MH needs of CYP more directly.

Similar to the findings of Eldred (2021) and Underwood (2022), the current research appears to support the metaphor of a 'Container' and 'Personal Trainer' constructed by Davies (2020). Indeed, a key emphasis was placed on the EPS in 'holding' others whilst challenging their assumptions and supporting them to reframe their thinking whilst adopting a solution-focussed approach. This may be understood as EPSs engaging in indirect work to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing through supporting key adults to fulfil mid-order (psychological) needs such as self-efficacy (or self-esteem) (Maslow, 1943).

6.2.2.3. Direct Work as Limited

The current research also suggests that current EPS delivery supports CYP directly through engaging in direct work such as therapeutic assessment. However, similar to the findings of Price (2017) and Greig et al. (2019), this appeared to be of a lesser focus for EPS delivery. Interestingly, one participant in the current research discussed how they felt that working with CYP directly was outside of the realm of the EP role which, similar to the findings of Andrews (2017) and Hulme (2017), appeared to support the metaphors 'Unwanted' and 'Little Players' offered by Davies (2020). Indeed, this participant noted that they that felt direct work with CYP may be

counterproductive by de-skilling adults around them (e.g., class teachers) and in adhering to a within-child understanding of MH and emotional wellbeing. This was alluded to by other participants as a rationale for a 'phased' approach to service delivery which encompasses a greater emphasis on consultation, with a lesser focus on other key functions of the EP role such as assessment and individual intervention (Fallon et al., 2010). This appears to coincide with the bio-psychosocial model of MH and emotional wellbeing; an approach viewed as best practice in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing needs of CYP (DCSF & DoH, 2008).

6.2.3. Informed and Reasoned Action

6.2.3.1. The COMOIRA Framework

Finally, the findings of the current research related to RQ1 suggest that EPS delivery across Wales is considered in relation to the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) framework (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008). The majority of participants made explicit reference to COMOIRA, specifically, the core component 'informed and reasoned action' when describing current EPS (Rhydderch & Gameson, 2008). Similar to the findings of Underwood (2022), participants in the current research discussed the use of solution-focussed approaches and elements of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) when working at both the group and individual level. The bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) was discussed as an influential theory in advocating for wider systemic work. However, in contrast to Wright (2020), specific tools to supporting systemic change such as a SWOT analysis and PATH were not discussed.

6.3. Addressing RQ2

RQ2) What are PEP's views of the barriers to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales?

Following the completion of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), a summary and visual representation of the findings in relation to RQ2 was created and is provided within Figure 15 below. The Figure aims to illustrate PEP's

perspectives of the barriers to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP across multiple levels encompassed within the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Within Figure 15, an example of the perceived impact of exo-systemic factors (e.g., 'government funding cuts') on the meso- and microsystem, as discussed by participants in the current research, is denoted by arrows.
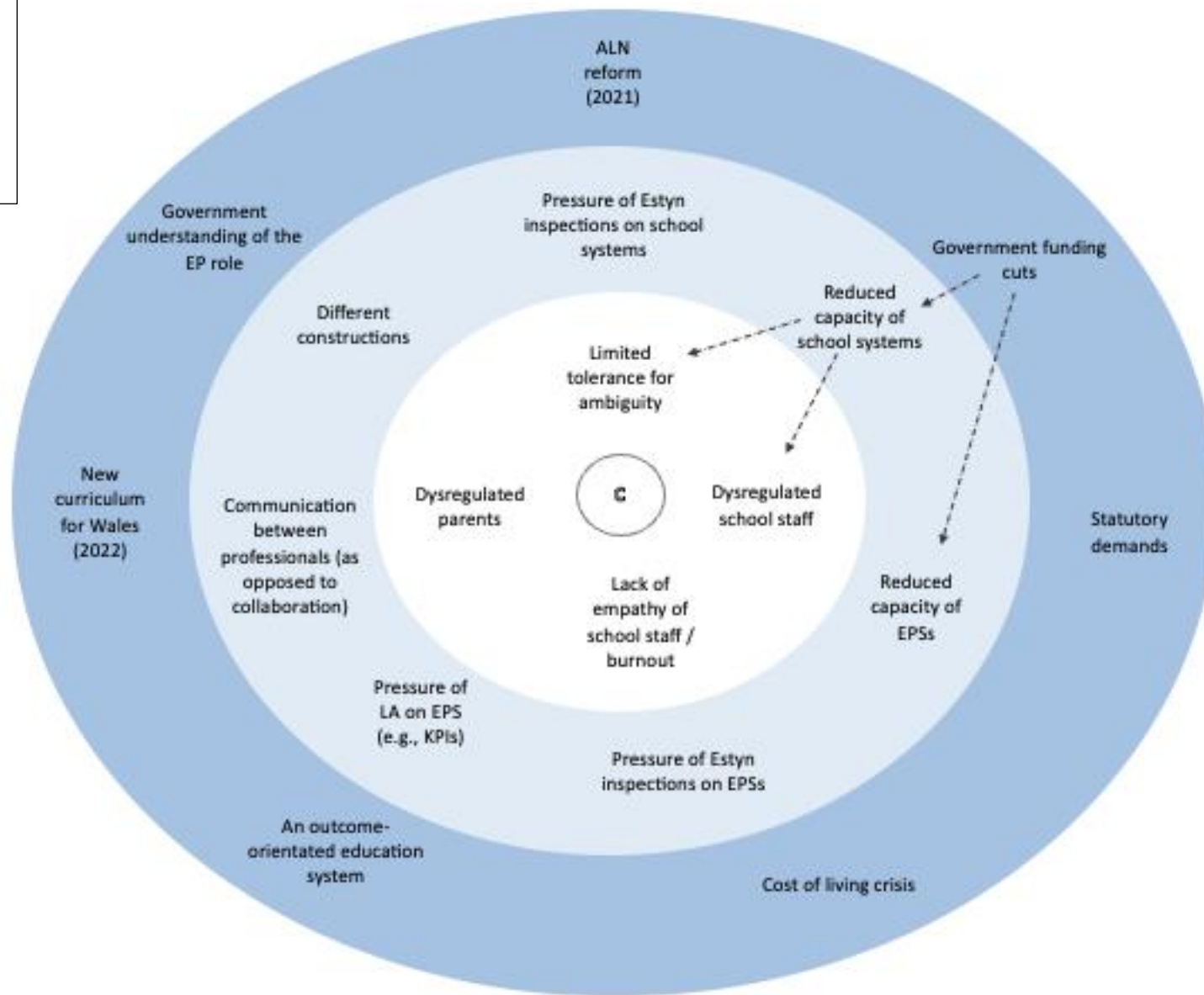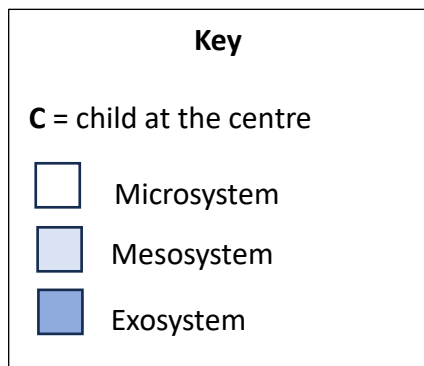
Figure 15. *Perceived Barriers to EPS Delivery.*

6.3.1. The Impact of the Exosystem

One of the most pertinent barriers discussed pertaining to EPS delivery in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales was the impact of systems positioned 'above' the EPS and LA. Across all interviews, participants discussed the impact of the exosystem; specifically, changes in legislation and policy and funding cuts from Welsh Government as key barriers to current EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice (see Figure 15 above). This provides a greater insight into the wider, *systemic* barriers in relation to this area of practice comparison to other research which has highlighted barriers largely pertaining to the microsystemic and mesosystemic level (e.g., Andrews, 2017; Hulme, 2017 & Price, 2017). This may reflect the wider, systemic insights afforded by the PEP, compared to the EP role (Hardy et al., 2020).

The findings of the current, qualitative research expand on those by Greig et al. (2019) by gaining insight into PEP's perceptions of *how* barriers pertaining to the exosystem are impacting on EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. The example depicted within Figure 15 is now discussed.

Funding cuts were viewed as having significant, wide-reaching ripples of impact across the LA, perpetuating the *'Tensions'* (Theme 4; see Table 12) felt by both the EPS and school systems positioned within an outcome orientated education system. Participants felt that this was detrimental to CYP's MH and wellbeing through its impact on the emotional wellbeing of school staff positioned within the microsystem. This is in addition to the prioritisation of 'learning outcomes' in school which see MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP being *"put on the backburner"* (PP3). In relation to the latter, some PEP participants perceived school and LA systems as viewing CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing as something distinct, and unrelated to their learning. This may be of concern in light of the association between CYP's emotional wellbeing and their educational engagement and attainment (Brännlund et al., 2017).

6.3.2. The Impact of the Microsystem

The emotional wellbeing of school staff and parents was viewed by *all* participants as an integral aspect to CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. This can be explained in

relation to Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bio-ecological model. It has been argued that those within the child's microsystem, and thus, within greater proximity of individual CYP at the centre (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), have greater impact on CYP (Lee & Woods, 2017). This also coincides with the central tenets of attachment theory (Ainsworth, 1978). Indeed, the development of secure attachments is purported to support CYP to develop emotional intelligence, strong social skills and *"robust mental health"* (Howe, 2011, p. 1).

Indeed, the work of Bowlby (1988) has been used to illustrate the importance of class teachers in forming secure attachments with CYP, and thus, affording CYP a 'secure base' from the early years (Sierra, 2012) through to adolescence (Aditama et al., 2023). This also appears to be supported by Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs which views psychological safety as an essential need in order for one to develop self-esteem, and to fulfil their true potential ('self-actualisation'), for which, parallels have been made with the constructs MH and emotional wellbeing (Ivtzan et al., 2013).

6.3.3. Further Parallels with Previous Research

When discussing barriers relating to the exosystem, including fundings cuts by Welsh Government, some participants appeared to describe the 'Little Players' metaphor offered by Davies (2020). Although participants held the view that EPSs *do* have a role in supporting CYP's MH and wellbeing needs, they also viewed the EPS as having limited influence on wider systems (or those positioned 'above'). This may be of concern considering PEP's strategic leadership role; if PEPs have limited influence in wider systems, then *who does?* This was further explored by several participants when voicing their frustrations pertaining to the lack of representation for educational psychology in Welsh Government. Indeed, one participant noted the following:

"Who is representing us in government? They're all from health... with health backgrounds. There's no wonder all the funding goes to CAMHS... they don't know what we do, and no one is there to advocate for us, so why would they?" (PP5).

As illustrated by Figure 15, the current research identified numerous barriers to EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. Participant responses represented by the subtheme *'Different Constructions'* (4.2) (See Table 12) coincide with themes pertaining to others' constructions of the EP role as constructed within Slade (2019), Price (2017), Crosby (2022), Andrews (2017) and Hulme (2017). Similar to the participants of Andrews (2017) and Hulme (2017), PEP participants in the current research felt that the scope of the EP role was not fully understood by school staff, including ALNCos. The current research builds on these findings by suggesting that this may also be the case in wider systems such as within government. Indeed, several PEP participants noted that government may construe the EP role as one concerned with learning; further perpetuating the over-looking of EPs within plans to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in schools (MacKay, 2007)

Further, issues pertaining to EP recruitment and retention were used to support participants' frustration with the lack of EPs training and working in Wales post qualification. In this way, LA EPSs across Wales, especially those in closer proximity with each other, were discussed as competing against each other, 'poaching' EPs in order to meet service delivery demands. This builds on the research of Greig et al. (2019); whilst highlighting the extent of the current recruitment and retention crisis documented across the UK (Lyonette et al., 2019).

6.3.4. A Call for Change

It is beyond the scope of the current Discussion to further explore the findings relating to RQ2 which highlighted the many, multifaceted factors posing significant difficulties to EPSs across Wales. Findings pertaining to RQ2 may be of concern in light of a body of research which suggests that supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing is arguably more important now than it ever has been (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023). All participants noted that systemic change is needed. This is further explored when discussing implications for practice and wider systems (See Table 17).

6.4. Addressing RQ3

RQ3) What are PEP's views of the facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales?

Following the completion of the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022a), a summary and visual representation of the findings in relation to RQ3 was created and is provided within Figure 16. The Figure aims to illustrate PEP's perspectives of the facilitators of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP across multiple levels encompassed within the bio-ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Within Figure 16 below, an example of the perceived impact of exosystemic factors (e.g., 'government funding') on the meso- and microsystem, as discussed by participants in the current research, is denoted by arrows.
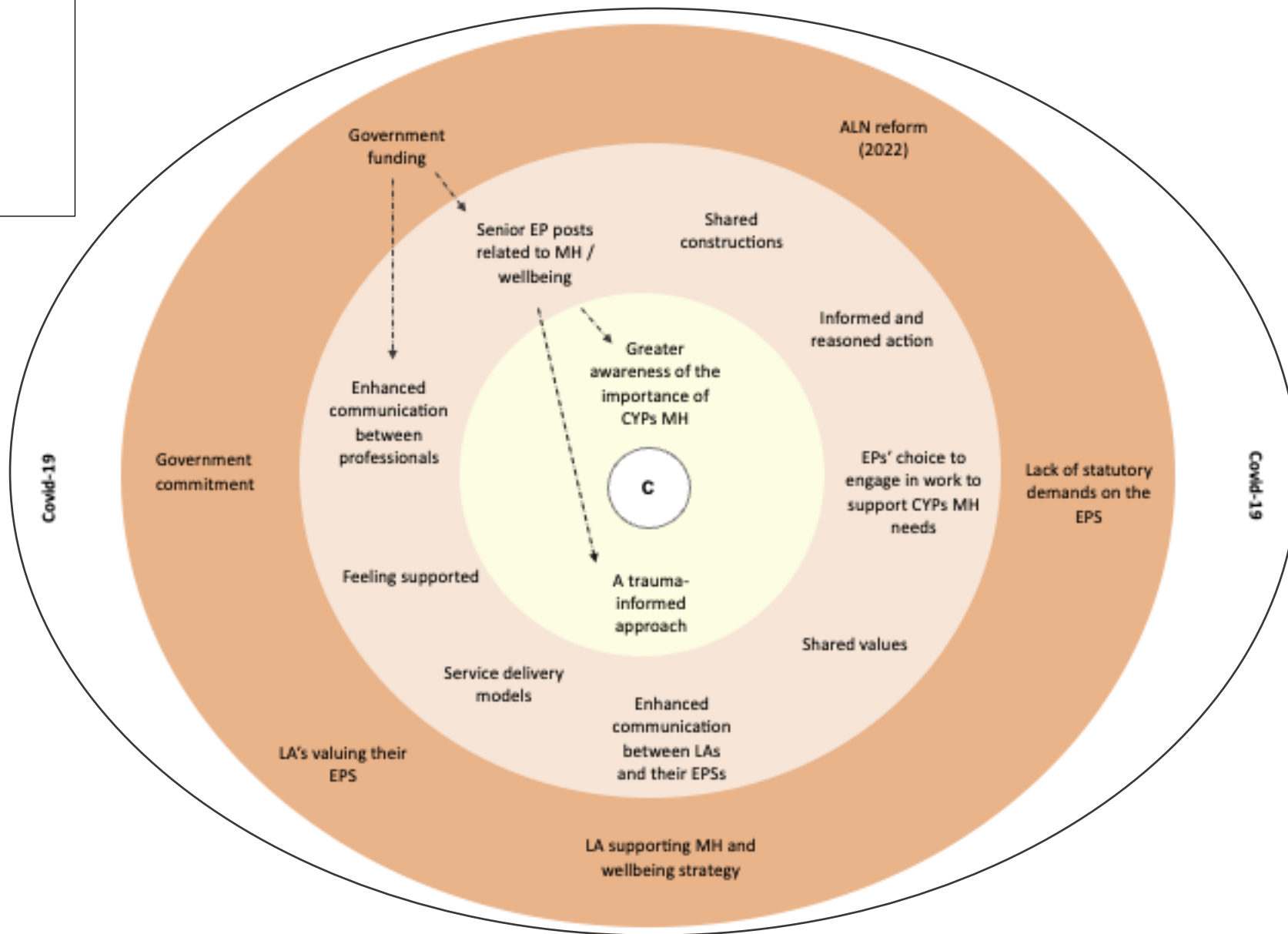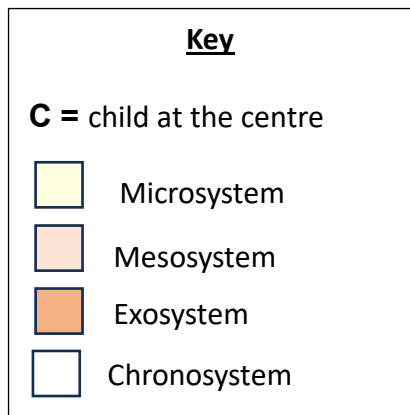
Figure 16. *Perceived Facilitators of EPS Delivery.*

6.4.1. The Exosystem: The Other Side of the Same Coin

Similar to themes pertaining to RQ2, the findings of the current research suggest that 'Socio-political Factors' (Theme 7; see Table 14), encompassed by the chronosystem, are highly influential factors to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. In light of RQ3, one prominent facilitator discussed pertaining to EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice was the increase in Welsh government funding to LAs. The whole-school approaches to wellbeing grant and the increased funding received by LAs during the COVID-19 pandemic was discussed by *all* participants as being integral in enhancing EPS delivery within this area of practice. Increased funding afforded the creation of senior EP roles pertaining to emotional wellbeing which has enabled enhanced engagement in strategy work alongside 'key players' within the LA. Other participants noted that this also afforded the employment of Assistant EPs which was deemed integral in the creation of an EPS 'wellbeing offer'. This highlights a shared understanding of the value of physical resources, such as funding, on EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. The increase in funding received by LAs, and thus, EPSs during COVID-19 is also illustrated by the theme 'COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change' (See Table 13); which is now discussed.

6.4.2. COVID-19: A Catalyst for Service Development

The findings of the current research coincide with a body of research which has viewed the COVID-19 pandemic as a catalyst for service-improvement across public and private organisations (e.g., Agostino et al., 2021; Cortis et al., 2021; Davenport et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic was discussed positively by the majority of participants; specifically in relation to improving EPS delivery through the enhanced use of technology. This was perceived by participants as improving the accessibility and subsequent use of information (e.g., training content) created to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. In this way, the findings of the current study support a growing body research that has referred to the COVID-19 pandemic as an accelerator of digital transformation in public service delivery (e.g., Hutchings, 2020; Taylor et al., 2020).

6.4.3. Service Delivery Models

Across all participants, models of service delivery adopted within their EPS was discussed as a facilitator to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP. Interestingly, this was the case regardless of the service model adopted. Similar to the findings of Islam's (2013) systematic review; consultation and time allocation models were the most commonly discussed models of service delivery within the current research. Participants held the view that the consultative model affords EPs to support adults within the child's microsystem which was alluded to as the 'gold standard' to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. As previously discussed within the discussion pertaining to RQ1 and RQ2, this may be further understood by Bronfenbrenner's (2005) Bio-ecological model, theories pertaining to attachment (e.g., Ainsworth, 1978; Bowlby, 1988) as well as Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs.

Within the current research, the majority of participants cited the use of a time-allocation model as the adopted model of EPS delivery; which, in contrast to the research of Andrews (2017) and Hulme (2017), was discussed positively in relation to EPS delivery to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. In the current research, whilst a lack of resources including time was identified as a barrier to EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice, the time allocation model was discussed by some participants as a facilitator to EPS delivery by supporting the consultative model and in discouraging a focus on direct work which has also been perceived in previous research as more time consuming (Cameron & Stratford, 1987).

As discussed above, some participants within the current research appeared to hold contradictory views related to the facilitative effects afforded by a time allocation versus a work allocation model. The research also contrasts with research within which, EP participants have discussed the use of a time allocation model as a barrier to engaging in work to support the MH of CYP (Andrews, 2017; Hulme, 2017). This may reflect differences in the constructions of PEPs and EPs, with the role of the former affording a greater systemic insight than perhaps that of the latter. Further, PEPs in the current research may have been more inclined to construe this in a positive manner to avoid cognitive dissonance; the experience of psychological

discomfort when one's behaviour (i.e., development of a service delivery model) does not align with one's beliefs (i.e., perceived effectiveness of the chosen service delivery method for EPS delivery) (Festinger, 1957). However, this is not to say that the responses provided by PEPs were not authentic. Rather, it may instead highlight some differences between EP and PEP perspectives as constructed within their social context; within which, differences pertaining to leadership responsibilities may play a role.

Interestingly, a work allocation model, which stands in contrast to a time-allocation model (Marsh & Higgins, 2018), was also discussed as being adopted within some EPSs. Similar to the findings of Marsh and Higgins (2018), the work allocation model was perceived as a facilitator to EPS delivery by enabling individual EPs to adopt a flexible approach to casework. This coincides with the research of Marsh and Higgins (2018) who found that across three LAs in the UK, the work-allocation model was perceived by PEP participants as affording the ability to *"adapt and vary components of the service work allocation model to suit different needs of an LA"* (p. 22).

6.4.4. Communication

Finally, the findings of the current research in relation to RQ3 support a body of literature which has highlighted the construct 'collaboration' as a pertinent facilitator of the EP role in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. This includes research conducted by Crosby (2022); which found that both EP and Primary Mental Health Care Workers (PMHWs) felt that collaboration across the professions was essential to facilitating both roles in supporting the MH needs of CYP. Within the current research, four participants discussed the benefits of increased communication between the EPS and LA during, and prior to, the COVID-19 pandemic. Participants felt that they have been able to communicate more effectively and efficiently with multidisciplinary professionals afforded by the widespread use of online platforms to communicate with professionals situated outside of the education system (e.g., those within CAMHS). Interestingly, two participants explicitly discussed the distinction between communication and 'true' collaboration; with the latter viewed as facilitating multi-agency working and in developing shared constructions of professional roles, and the former, the mere sharing of information.

6.5. Addressing RQ4

RQ4) What are PEP's views on how EPS delivery may look in the future in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales?

The findings pertaining to RQ4 suggest that PEPs believe that there is scope for improvement for EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. The themes 'Collaboration as Essential' and 'Building the Capacity of Systems Around CYP' are now discussed.

6.5.1. Collaboration As Essential

As previously explored in relation to the findings pertaining to RQ3, collaboration was a prominent theme across *all* interviews in the current research. Collaboration was alluded to when participants discussed current EPS delivery, and was discussed more explicitly pertaining to the barriers, facilitators, *and* future hopes for EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. This supports the findings of Crosby (2022) and Hulme (2017), which, together, highlight the role of the EP in promoting collaboration. Thus, it has been considered a key role of the EP within this area of practice (Underwood, 2022). It also builds on participants' distinction between communication and 'true' collaboration. Participants within the current research wish to 'truly' collaborate moving forward which was viewed as a vehicle to more joined-up working with services such as CAMHS to support with the more efficient use of resources. This supports the findings of Crosby (2022) who found that EP participants felt that greater collaboration between EPs, ALNCos and PMHWs in relation to understanding each other's role was essential in order to support the growing 'SEMH' needs of CYP in the future.

The term 'true collaboration' as constructed by one participant, was believed to occur through the process of *co-constructing*, rather than *communicating* the EP and other professional roles (such as the roles of those within the CAMHS school in-reach service). This included those within the micro, meso- *and* exosystem, with the focus on developing an 'in' to collaborate with Welsh Government to mitigate the barriers associated with EPS delivery within wider, socio-political systems. This suggests that PEPs of LA EPSs in Wales wish their EPSs to involve themselves, and individual EPs

to communicating *with* as opposed to communicating *to* others to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. This supports research which has purported that developing co-constructed solutions is a key element of the EP role (McNab, 2008; Hobbs et al., 2000; Atkinson et al., 2006). It also supports the drive for a multi-agency, holistic approach to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing (WAG, 2001).

6.5.2. A Focus on Parents

The importance of engaging with individuals closest to the child is well established (Dowling et al., 2003) due to the fundamental significance of those within the child's microsystem to change processes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Research pertaining to the role of EP in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP has highlighted the role of EPs in working to support school staff through a variety of role functions including consultation (Underwood, 2022), supervision (Eldred, 2021) and training (Wright, 2020). Existing research may thus suggest that up until this point, there has been a greater focus on supporting school staff compared to parents and carers. This is also reflected in the findings of the current research.

The findings of the current research suggest that PEPs in Wales hope to improve their EPS delivery in the future through greater collaboration with parents. Several participants noted that they felt that parents are often forgotten about within EPS delivery, and within education more broadly. It was noted that this may be due to difficulties in time constraints, and the role of the school as a gatekeeper to parents. This may be particularly pertinent in relation to the practice of EPs in Wales, within which, the concept of partnership working with parents, carers and families is not only foundational to meet the *"holistic approach"* to practice advocated by WG (2001 p. 3), but also essential to meet broader ethical responsibilities towards service-users as set out within the statutory requirements of the ALN transformation (WG, 2018) Health and Care Professionals Council (HCPC) Standards of Proficiency (SoP) (HCPC, 2015), Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics (HCPC, 2016), and the more generally applicable BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct (2018).

6.5.3. Building the Capacity of Systems around CYP

Participants within the current research would like to improve EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales through the development of the skill set, self-efficacy and emotional containment of the EPS. Within this theme, internal factors pertaining to individual members of the EPS such as their perceived knowledge and confidence to engage in supporting the MH needs of CYP was highlighted. Participants noted that the level of engagement in MH casework likely varies between EPs based on personal and professional interests as well as their knowledge and confidence in relation to this area of practice. This coincides with the findings of Slade (2019) which highlighted the individual nature of EPs in engagement in work to support the MEWB within the early years.

Participants in the current study discussed how they felt that the wellbeing of the EPS may impact on their ability to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP effectively. This highlighted the findings of Crosby (2022) who found that EPs noted that they do not always feel contained. Two PEPs in the current research noted that EPs contain or 'hold' others yet may not always feel contained themselves. This is in-line with Bion's theory of container-contained (Bion, 1970) which, as noted by Crosby (2022), demonstrated the *"importance of the professionals supporting others' MH to be supported for their own MH"* (p. 114). Further, participants in the current research suggested that prioritising peer supervision would be one possible way of supporting EPSs in feeling contained, and thus, being able to provide containment for others. This was also suggested by Crosby (2022) as a possible implication for EPs in light of the finding that the wellbeing of EPs may act as a barrier within this area of practice.

6.6. Implications for Practice

Table 16 below suggests implications of the current research for practice at the level of the EP, EPS and for wider systems such as WG.

Table 16. Implications for Practice

	Implications for EPs and EPSs
The Level of the Microsystem	As highlighted throughout this research, it is important for professionals, including EPs, to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing at a variety of levels in different systems (e.g., Andrews, 2017; Eldred, 2021; Hulme, 2017; Underwood, 2022). One of these levels is the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) which includes parents and carers as well as teachers. Participants in the current research felt that parents may currently be overlooked in current EPS delivery; with only one element of the EP role currently involving parents (consultation) (Fallon et al., 2010). As such, greater collaboration with parents was included within participants' future hopes for EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. Educational Psychologists and EPSs may seek to facilitate greater collaboration with parents and carers through the use of parent drop-in sessions related to MH and emotional wellbeing, which may be absent from current EPS delivery in Wales. The subtheme 'Emotional (un)availability of Adults Around CYP' within the current research highlights the extent of the pressure experienced by school staff across Wales in light of the 'Finite Resources' (Subtheme 3.1; see Table 12) and ongoing 'Tensions' (Theme 4, see Table 12) within the education system. In-light of the extent of the influence of the microsystem on CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing, the current findings suggest that in order to improve this area of practice in the future, EPSs may support settings to use their resources most effectively, targeting specific issues identified and exploring how resources could be pooled and training provided through online mediums.

The Level of the Mesosystem	The current research highlights possible differences in PEP's views of different models of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP. In previous research, the adoption of a time-allocation model has been construed as a barrier to EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice (Andrews, 2017; Hulme, 2017). However, PEP participants within the current research discussed the adopted models of service delivery, including the time allocation model, as a facilitator in relation to this area of practice. This may suggest that PEPs may not necessarily understand the current challenges experienced by EPs who engage in more work 'on the ground'. The use of EPS reflective sessions may be helpful in facilitating open and honest communication between assistant, main grade, senior and principal EPs pertaining to current models of service delivery so that PEPs can be adopt a responsive and dynamic approach to service delivery that it not only responsive to external demands, but the experiences and needs of those who work within it (Hardy et al., 2020; Marsh & Higgins, 2018).
The Level of the Exosystem	The current findings pertaining to RQ2 suggest that there is scope for PEPs and EPs to become involved in policy and decision making at the exosystemic level within WG. Participants highlighted that educational psychology may be overlooked within the Welsh and UK governments which they attributed to differences between PEPs (or EPs) and governments' constructions of the EP role. The current research suggests that PEPs and / or EP involvement at the level of the exosystem may be helpful in affording the opportunity to co-construct an understanding of the EP role that shifts the narrative away from the role of the EP as one that is solely concerned with learning. This may help EPSs in securing funding to assist with supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales.

Implications for Wider Systems
The findings of the current research; particularly the theme 'Limited Resources' (see Table 12) highlight the current challenges faced by EPSs in light of the documented recruitment and retention crisis of EPs across the UK (Lyonette et al., 2019). Some participants jokingly discussed the need to 'poach' EPs from neighbouring LAs, pertaining to the very real and significant difficulties associated with many EPSs across Wales not being at full capacity. Several participants attributed this to the limited number of places available on Cardiff University's DEdPsy; the sole educational psychology doctoral training programme in Wales (WG, 2015). This suggests that immediate discussions with the Welsh Local Government Association (WGLA); the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW) and Cardiff University are required to develop enhanced provision for the training of educational psychologists in the future. Further, some participants discussed the financial challenges experienced by TEPs, or prospective TEPs of the training programme, which were felt to be more pronounced for those within North Wales due to the financial implications of travel and / or relocation. As such, some participants felt that many Welsh-speaking TEPs; a highly desirable potential employee for many PEPs, were more inclined to train, and, consequently, work, in England, with some English courses being significantly closer to those within North Wales than the Cardiff DEdPsy. One clear implication of this is the development of an additional DEdPsy course in Wales in the North of the country. This also highlights the need for the bursary received by TEPs on the DEdPsy in Wales to increase to be at least in-line with that received by TEPs training in England and for TEPs to be provided with travel and relocation costs. If we are to successfully recruit and retain EPs in Wales, it is the researcher's view that TEPs need to be provided with significantly greater financial support.

6.7. Strengths and Limitations

Table 17 below outlines the strengths and limitations of the current research. It also suggests areas for future research based on the current findings.

Table 17. Strengths, Limitations and Future Research

Strengths	Limitations
• This small-scale research focussed on current EPS delivery within Wales. Participants were PEPs of six different LA EPSs across the country. As such, a wide exploration of perspectives across different LA EPS systems were gained, reflecting the varying practices and systems across Wales. As such, the research provides an insight into how EPSs in Wales are supporting CYP's MH needs. It also offers an opportunity and welcomes PEPs to reflect on the similarities and differences within their own EPS, in hope that it inspires discourse within the EP community around the support that is currently being offered to support CYP's MH needs in Wales. • The use of semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher the opportunity to gain an in-depth insight into EPS delivery to support the MH needs of CYP in Wales. Engaging in semi-structured interviews, as opposed to an alternative method	• The research gathered the views of PEPs of LA EPSs in Wales. As such, due to the varying / differences in service delivery between Wales and the rest of the UK (e.g., the adoption of traded services within England) (Lee & Woods, 2017), the research cannot be generalised outside of the Welsh LA context. That is, the research does not reflect the varying practices and systems across the UK more widely. • The position of the researcher as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) may have led participants to construe their EPS delivery in a way they may construe desirable for a potential future employee. The researcher will be working in an LA EPS within Wales following the completion of their studies. Due to the historic recruitment and retention difficulties faced by LA EPSs across the UK (Truong & Ellam, 2014) it is possible that participants may have described their EPS in a more positive light

such as a focus group, may have allowed participants to discuss their perspectives more freely. This is due to the absence of multi-faceted group dynamics such as the impact of power dynamics, and a group's tendency to search for a group consensus (Belzile & Öberg, 2012; Kidd and Parshall, 2000),

- The researcher provided participants with time at the start of each interview for introductions, to discuss the research aims and to enable participants to ask any questions they wished; to discuss ethical procedures in relation to consent, anonymity and participant withdrawal from the research. Some participants noted that they felt well informed and able to discuss their perspectives in an open manner. Indeed, one participant noted *"I have really enjoyed talking to you about this today. I have felt listened to and it's been helpful to talk about these things, you know?"* (**PP3).**

than if the researcher was a true 'outsider' (Breen, 2007).

- The use of RTA means that it is possible that other researchers may interpret the data differently. Although this is not considered a limitation within the research paradigm, per se, as different constructions invite different possibilities for action, it is perhaps important to acknowledge. This research does not attempt to control for researcher subjectivity or discover a singular truth.
- An online modality was used to facilitate the recruitment of potential participants located across the breadth of Wales. This was helpful in enabling participants to engage in the research where they may be most comfortable (Shapka et al., 2016). However, a key element of the interview process is in developing rapport. Physical proximity: a key component in developing rapport (Guest et al., 2020) was inhibited between the researcher and participants due to the use of the online platform. Consequently, the use of the online platform may have

	impacted participants' responses (Varma et a., 2021). Further, it is possible that participants' non-verbal cues may have been missed; impacting on the data generated (Carter et al., 2021).
Future Research	
The current research was based on PEP's perspectives on EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. As such, the views of EPs working within LA EPSs in Wales, and other related professionals were not sought, and thus, their constructions of current service delivery models and the effectiveness of these in supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales remains unclear. It may therefore be of interest to consider future research to enable an exploration into other key person's views of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP. This may be from the perspectives of EPs and / or school staff which could support services to develop methods for gathering data that enables them to understand and evaluate the impact of the service they provide for CYP with MH needs and the adults around them. It may also be of value to compare the findings of the current research with similar research conducted within the rest of the UK. However, in order for a comparison to be made, there first must be research conducted focussed on this specific area of practice within England and Scotland. There may also be scope for a pilot study (or studies) to enact changes based on the findings of the current research. This could take the form of a piece of action research within individual LA EPSs, insights from which could be shared across EPSs in Wales (via NAPEP Cymru) and more widely with EPSs throughout the rest of the UK.	

6.8. Conclusion

A body of research has explored the role of the Educational Psychologist (EP) in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK. Within existing literature, factors pertaining to Local Authority (LA) Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery were identified as possible barriers to the role of the EP in relation to

supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP (Andrews, 2017; Greig et al., 2019; Hulme, 2017). However, a dearth of research had explored EPS delivery, or the views of those who steer it (Principal Educational Psychologists [PEPs]) (Hardy et al., 2020) in relation to this area of practice. Further, a dearth of research has explored the responsiveness of EPSs in light of the *"mental health crisis"* in CYP following the COVID-19 pandemic (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023, p. 1).

The current research aimed to gain an in-depth insight into PEP's perspectives of LA EPS delivery in relation to supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing in Wales following COVID-19. Six, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted online, with PEPs of LA EPSs across the breadth of Wales. Information gathered suggest that EPSs across Wales are adopting a systems approach to supporting CYP's MH needs, with a particular emphasis on providing support to the adults around CYP on a microsystemic level (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). It also suggests that EPSs are actively utilising their psychological skills and knowledge when working across multiple levels to support the wider LA, school systems, parents and CYP to support the MH needs of CYP in Wales. However, participants suggested that there is still more that could be achieved. All participants indicated a desire to provide greater support for CYP's MH needs by further developing the capacity of systems around CYP, including the skills of the EPS through enhanced CPD, and the capacity school staff and parents to support CYP with a greater focus on a multi-agency approach.

The current research is considered to provide a unique contribution within the area of EPS delivery to support CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing. It is hoped that this research will encourage further discourse on how EPS delivery can support the MH needs of CYP across Wales, and within the wider UK context in light of the reported increase in MH needs of CYP during (Panchal et al., 2023) and following the COVID-19 pandemic (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023) with the assumption that EPs *do* have a role in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP, and being responsive to the population it serves.

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Part Three

Critical Appraisal

Word Count: 7,653

Part Three: Critical Appraisal

1. Introduction

This critical appraisal provides a reflective and reflexive account of the research process through the consideration of two main elements; firstly, the contribution to knowledge and dissemination; and, secondly, a critical account of the development of the research practitioner. This section is written in the first person to support a reflective account of my thoughts and reasons for the decisions made throughout the research process (Willig, 2017). It also provides extracts from my research diary to support reflexivity and to provide further transparency of the research process.

2. Part Three A: Contribution to Knowledge and Dissemination

2.1. Inception of the Research Area

This thesis was completed in partial fulfilment of Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy). It aimed to explore PEP's perspectives of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) delivery in relation to supporting the mental health (MH) needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people (CYP) in Wales in a post COVID-19 era. The rationale for this research area developed from several reflections of working as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP) within three different Local Authority (LA) EPSs in Wales, coupled with my experience of working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist (AEP).

2.2. Professional Interests

In 2020, I gained a role as an AEP within a Welsh LA. During this time, the UK were governed to national and local lockdowns due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the EPS were inundated with requests to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing. The EPS adapted their service delivery to meet these needs, and I wondered about the impact of COVID-19 on EPS delivery longer term. This sparked my interest in EPS delivery, and the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing more generally.

Upon commencing the DEdPsy in 2021, I was required to engage in three separate LA placements within different EPSs in Wales. During this time, I became further interested in the role of the EP, and EPS delivery, in supporting the MH needs of CYP. I attribute this to two observations which are now discussed in turn.

Firstly, I noticed that each LA adopted slightly different models of service delivery which impacted the services they were able to offer to schools. Some service delivery models appeared to support the shift *away* from the 'traditional' role of the EP; one that has been argued to be more focussed on supporting CYP's learning needs (Cameron, 2006), more than others. I reflected on how the different models of EPS delivery impacted on my day-to-day role as a TEP; and, ultimately, my construction of the role of the EP in relation to supporting CYP with a range of needs, including those related to CYP's MH.

Secondly, I also noticed that many of the school ALNCos I worked with were concerned about the MH of CYP within their school communities. School ALNCos attributed their observed increase in emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA) due to anxiety fuelled by the COVID-19 pandemic. The ALNCos turned to the EPS for support, and I became interested in *how* EPSs were supporting these increasing needs.

As discussed within Part One and Two of the thesis, the current political context has placed emphasis on a whole-school approach to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing (Department for Education [DfE], 2015; Welsh Government [WG], 2021). Educational Psychologists have also been identified as key professionals in providing support to schools within this area of practice (Rothi et al., 2008; Sharpe et al., 2016). As such, I deemed the research area to be relevant at a policy *and* professional level, whilst also satisfying my professional interests. An initial scoping review of the literature revealed a dearth of literature exploring PEP's views in relation to the research area. This provided a clear foundation for the research which was developed within my supervisory space.

As previously noted, to support with reflexivity throughout the research process, I utilised a research diary to reflect on my initial and evolving thoughts. I engaged in

both structured *and* unstructured approaches to reflection through the use of Gibb's Reflective Cycle (Gibbs, 1988), and more free-flowing, narrative approaches to allow for a deeper exploration of the self as a developing research practitioner (Johns, 2011), respectively. Less structured and more free-flowing diary entries are offered throughout this critical appraisal to provide transparency of the development of the researcher (Yardley, 2000).

Within my research diary, I reflected on the experience of identifying a research area:

Research Diary Extract (04/01/23):

Engaging in discussions with previous TEPs regarding the completion of the thesis has been hugely valuable. A common piece of advice I have received from several previous TEPs has been to focus on a research area that I am interested in. I have decided to step back from the pressure of identifying a research area over the last few weeks to ask myself the following:

- *What is important to me and what are my values as a TEP?*
- *What questions do I feel are important to answer in relation to my day-to-day practice as a TEP?*
- *What literature do I enjoy reading related to the educational psychology profession?*

In considering these questions, I have found myself most engaged with literature surrounding MH and emotional wellbeing. This has prompted some reflection on my previous experiences in working as TEP and Assistant EP. I feel sufficiently interested and competent enough to discuss MH and emotional wellbeing. This may be the way to go!

2.3. Exploration of the Existing Literature

The initial aim of the literature review was to explore EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP. This was further refined to the *role* of EPS delivery in relation to this research area. To my surprise, there was a dearth of literature that explored EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP. In addition, only one article appeared to explore PEP's perspectives of EPS

delivery in relation to this area of practice (Greig et al., 2019). As noted within Part One B, this research was conducted within Scotland, which has distinct differences to the education system in Wales (Education Policy Institute, 2021). Further, Greig et al. (2019) utilised a quantitative approach to obtain responses from PEPs to represent EPSs as a whole. As such, I concluded that a rich picture of PEP's sensemaking of EPS delivery in relation to supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing had not yet been gained.

Research Diary Extract (10/10/23):

I find myself wondering why PEP's views of EPS delivery in relation to supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing have not yet been explored through a qualitative lens. I wonder whether PEPs have been recognised as influential stakeholders in relation to the role of the EPS and EP in relation to this area of practice. I also wonder whether PEPs have been construed as outsiders in relation to this area of practice as they are perhaps more removed from the day-to-day role of the EP within their services. Currently, it appears that PEP's experiences and perspectives of EPS delivery is unknown; research that has used PEP participants has aimed to gain an overview of EPSs more generally, as opposed to recognising the value of PEP's perspectives in their own right. This will form part of the rationale for my research.

Due to the dearth of search results related to the role of the EPS, or EPS delivery in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing, I decided to focus my search on the *role* of the *EP* in relation to this area of practice. This provided several results which I deemed to be relevant to the research area. However, I acknowledged that the results were inevitably more relevant to the role of the EP, as opposed to EPS delivery more generally. In addition, although many of the articles did appear to discuss EPS delivery, this did not appear to be a focal point for the many of research articles.

I decided to divide my literature review into Part One A; a contextual narrative review and Part One B, a systematic review. I felt that it would be critical to provide a contextual overview of the relevance of the research area in a way that would allow me to explore all 'characters' within my research (Part One A). This included the exploration of the constructs MH and emotional wellbeing, the impact of COVID-19 on

CYP's MH, relevance to EPSs, and models of EPS delivery. Relevant policy and legislation were explored as well as the unique role of the PEP in relation to EPS delivery. I also felt that it was important to complete a systematic literature review (Part One B) to provide a critical appraisal of the existing literature pertaining to the *role* of the *EP* in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK.

Research Diary Extract (16/11/23):

*One of the challenges I am currently facing is ensuring that I provide enough context for all elements encompassed within my research. There are numerous characters in my research story; EPS delivery, the MH neds and emotional wellbeing of CYP, the impact of COVID-19 on CYP's MH, and PEPs as strategic leaders of EPSs. I have deliberated how I will cover each of these areas to provide sufficient context for the reader. I think I may need to construct a narrative **and** systematic review. This will allow me to conduct the focussed, systematised review I desire whilst allowing for the discussion of other characters (e.g., COVID-19) to provide the context necessary to support the rationale for the empirical study.*

To support with the structure of Part One B, I engaged in a thematic synthesis of themes across review articles (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Following further consideration of the structure of the systematic review, I decided to begin by exploring themes in relation to the role of the EP, whilst then offering insight into the perceived barriers and facilitators to the EP role in relation to this area of practice at the level of individual EPs, and crucially, at the level of the EPS. The latter provided rationale for the current research's focus on *EPS delivery* and was therefore deemed to offer a funnel method which has been viewed as good practice as a method for structuring a literature review (Hofstee, 2006) (see Figure 17 below).
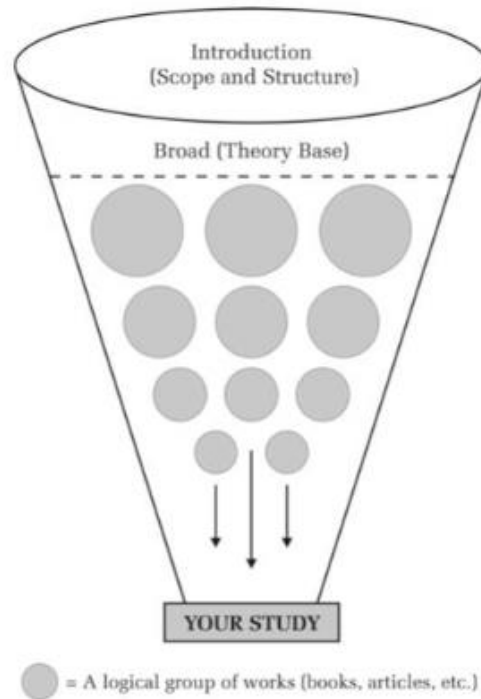
Figure 17. *The Funnel Method of Structuring a Literature Review (retrieved from Hofstee [2006]).*

To support the transparency and applicability of Part One B, the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRIMSA) guidance (Page et al., 2021) was adopted to support the process. During the initial stages of conducting the literature review, I felt overwhelmed and daunted at what felt like an enormous task. Engagement in peer supervision and individual support from Cardiff University's Library Service was crucial in breaking down the task into smaller, more manageable steps.

Within my individual sessions with the School of Psychology's subject Librarian, I began to develop skills to support my completion of a literature search. I felt more confident in understanding the subtle differences between a narrative and systematic literature review. I noticed that I had previously underestimated the importance of carefully considering key search terms. Specifically, I reflected on how the complexity and nuance of the EP role made it difficult to describe and understand. As such, I opted to use Fallon et al's. (2010) description of the EP role to help guide my search (see page 22 for Table 4 within Part Two B of the thesis).

2.4. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

As suggested by Siddaway et al. (2019), the inclusion and exclusion criteria for reviewing the literature in Part One B was reviewed throughout the process of conducting the systematic literature review. Initially, I decided to exclude articles that were published prior to 2014 to support with identifying articles published within the last decade. This decision was made based on the increasing agenda to support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing in the UK over the last ten years (Health and Care Research Wales, 2023).

Interestingly, I noticed that the vast majority of relevant search results were published between 2017 and 2022. Upon further reading of relevant search articles, I became aware of the Green Paper, published in 2017 (Department of Health and Social Care [DoHSC] & Department for Education [DfE], 2017). I decided to further exclude articles published prior to 2017 to reflect any changes to the EP role in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following this publication (Lee & Woods, 2017). This provided rationale for the updated inclusion criteria.

Further, I noticed that several articles yielded from the search result explored *specific* interventions, which, from my experience as a TEP and in scoping the literature related to the role of the EP more generally, appeared to be unique to specific contexts (e.g., Scotland). Whilst I acknowledged that intervention *is* part of the EP role (Fallon et al., 2010), papers were excluded if they explored the *roll-out* of the intervention as opposed to the role of the EP specifically. This decision was made to support the aim of the systematic review in offering a critical appraisal of literature reflective of, and specifically related to, the *role* of the EP in relation to this area of practice within the UK.

Research Diary Extract (10/12/23):

I've been grappling with the decision as to whether to include or exclude articles that have focussed on the roll-out of a specific intervention. There are two articles that have explored the use of an intervention. Initially, I felt that these were relevant to the role of the EP, however upon further screening the research through reading its abstract, I have realised that the research appears to be more concerned with the more practical and logistical implementation of the intervention across a region as opposed to the role of the EP in delivering it. I have therefore decided to exclude these articles in my endeavour to construct a focussed review on the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing specifically. At the same time, I acknowledge that this decision is likely influenced by my own construction of the EP role and what is or isn't useful in supporting a 'focussed' exploration on the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice.

As shown in Table 5 within Part Two A of the thesis, the systematic search explored within Part One B included unpublished theses. Interestingly, nine of the twelve chosen articles for review were unpublished doctoral theses. I was initially daunted by this finding due to the sheer size of doctoral theses compared to published journal articles. However, upon becoming more familiar with these documents, the level of transparency and thus, rigour offered by these papers (Coombs, 2017) allowed me to develop a comprehensive understanding of their methodologies and relevant findings. This aided with the critical discussion of the papers within Part One B. It also supported my development as a researcher in relation to the process of writing up; I became more familiar with the structure of doctoral theses and used this exercise to reflect on how I may communicate complex ideas within my own writing.

The number of doctoral theses which has explored the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing in the last 5-7 years is an interesting finding. I wonder whether this reflects the professions shift away from the more traditional role of the EP to one that is more open to, and passionate about supporting a wider range of needs such as those associated with MH and emotional wellbeing.

*I can't help but feel overwhelmed by the fact that the majority of my articles selected for review are doctoral theses. These are huge documents and I will need to be highly selective in my search for relevant information for the review. Again, I find myself reflecting on my personal constructions of what **is** relevant. I feel a responsibility to offer a comprehensive critical appraisal of each article in turn, however, this is likely beyond the scope of the current systematic review. In this way, it feels like there is some trade-off between splitting my literature review into two elements; Part One A and Part One B, whilst also exploring all relevant findings pertaining to each review article. I will continue to reflect on this within supervision.*

2.5. Quality Appraisal

The decision was made to appraise the selected articles for review using the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) (Hong et al., 2018) to reflect the range of methodologies adopted. When using the MMAT, I found it difficult to separate my thoughts relating to the appropriateness of quantitative and mixed-methods methodologies in relation to the research questions posed by the papers, even when research papers provided an explicit rationale for their use. Despite my thoughts pertaining to the use of mixed methods and quantitative methodologies, all twelve articles were included in the review following their appraisal using the MMAT. This was due to the limited results obtained from the literature search, and my perceived relevance of the articles in relation to the review question, despite my view of their chosen methodologies.

2.6. Gaps within the Literature

As previously noted, although literature was sought pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing, there was a lack of literature that explored EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice, specifically. Therefore, the literature review did not provide an answer to my original review question regarding the role of EPS delivery in supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing. Further, as also previously noted, only one research article; Greig et al. (2019), explored the views of PEPs in relation to this research area, through a quantitative, positivist lens. This indicated a gap in within the literature which I considered worthy of further exploration.

2.7. Development of Research Questions

As previously noted, a dearth of literature had explored EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP. I was aware of some EPSs that had evolved their service delivery to enhance the support offered to schools following the COVID-19 pandemic. I was also familiar with some of the barriers I have experienced as a TEP regarding EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice and I wondered whether PEPs would have similar views. This became a starting point for the development of the research questions which were further developed through engagement with existing literature.

I felt that it could be helpful to gain the views of PEPs; influential stakeholders as strategic leaders of EPSs (Hardy et al., 2020), whose rich perspectives had not yet been gained within the current literature. Research questions were developed within the supervisory space and were related to how PEPs perceive current EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP following COVID-19, their perceived barriers, and facilitators of EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice, and, finally, their hopes for EPS delivery in the future. This aimed to build on the findings of Greig et al. (2019) through consideration of a different methodology which would enable a richer insight of PEP's perspectives and for a knowledge base to be generated within a Welsh context.

Through reflective discussions within my supervisory space, the following research questions were constructed based on the questions that remained unanswered following Part One A and B:

RQ1) What are PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ2) What are PEP's perspectives of the barriers to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ3) What are PEP's perspectives of the facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19?

RQ4) What are PEP's hopes for EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales in the future?

2.8. Philosophical Assumptions

As I was interested in making sense of PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP, the research adopted a social constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2015). A qualitative methodology was also adopted as it was considered most aligned with this chosen epistemological stance (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I felt that a positivist ontology would have limited and simplified responses based on what I was able to 'measure', rather than providing an opportunity for PEPs to freely discuss their experiences, which to some degree, was led by them. As such, a positivist approach did not fit with my own assumptions in relation to the research area and would not have been consistent with the research aims and questions.

Further, as discussed within Part One A of the thesis, the constructs MH, emotional wellbeing, and the term 'service delivery' are likely socially constructed (O'Reilly & Lester, 2017). Therefore, it felt important that the research acknowledged the social constructionist underpinnings of the main 'characters' explored within the research. In addition, as Cardiff University's DEdPsy is underpinned by the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008); a change framework within which, social constructionism is positioned at the core, I felt familiar and more confident in adopting this epistemological stance. This also contributed to my decision to adopt a social constructionist epistemology for the research.

A relativist ontology and social constructionist epistemology was adopted as I perceived these to compliment the research aim well. This position suggests that our perceptions, understanding, and experiences are mediated by the historical and cultural contexts as well as our social interactions within them (Burr, 2015). As such, the social constructionist stance suggests that there is no *one* 'truth' and, rather, *multiple* truths exist which can be described in various ways depending on how they are perceived and understood within our social interactions (Willig, 2013).

Within a social constructionist paradigm, it is acknowledged that the researcher cannot completely detach their values, interests, experiences, and beliefs from the research process (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Burr, 2015). In pertaining to this paradigm, it is also acknowledged that the researcher plays a central role throughout the entirety of the research process. Although I *did* consciously attempt to mitigate the possible impact of my beliefs and experiences on the research process through engagement in peer and professional supervision as well as utilising my research diary, I was aware that the impact of myself, as a researcher, would be unavoidable. How questions were asked and how participants' responses were interpreted would inevitably, and, unavoidably, have been influenced by how I was constructing and responding to their answers (Maxwell, 2022).

Research Diary Extract (25/08/24):

Learning to embrace researcher subjectivity as per the philosophical underpinnings of the research is an enjoyable experience. It has prompted me to reflect on my previous experience of conducting research; particularly at an undergraduate level where researcher subjectivity was viewed as something to be avoided, and a limitation of qualitative research. Whilst I do still feel some level of uncomfortableness in recognising that the research is still largely influenced (and constrained by?) my own experience and current knowledge, I am using supervision to clarify these thoughts and to continually reflect on them throughout the research process. There is an element of 'unlearning' here and I continue to wonder about and challenge the positivist-is-best narrative that I feel may be pertinent within academia more generally. This is perhaps a good example of how I have developed as a researcher over the last three years and throughout the completion of the thesis more specifically.

2.9. Positioning of the Researcher

Throughout the research process, I acknowledged my positionality within the research in order to support its integrity (Mosselson, 2014). Bryman (2016) argued that researcher positionality has important ethical considerations as it inevitably impacts the nature of the observations and interpretations made. Throughout the research process, I have considered myself to be both an insider and outsider researcher.

Although the insider-outsider positionality is often construed as a dichotomy (Breen, 2007), I consider myself to have elements of both an insider *and* outsider researcher in relation to the research. As such, throughout the research, I have viewed the insider-outsider positioning as one that exists on a continuum; my position on which has shifted, both within and between different stages of the research.

I considered myself to be an insider researcher as the research aligns to my personal and professional interests (Jacobson & Mustafa, 2019). The inception of the research idea was initiated by my ongoing interest in MH and was supported by my professional experience of working across multiple LA EPSs as a TEP as well as my previous experience of working as an AEP. Within the data gathering stage of the research, several participants alluded that they felt a sense of shared understanding of the topic at hand (e.g., *"…you know what I mean, don't you?"* [PP1] and *"...you're bound to have experienced this too"* [PP4]). Indeed, it has been argued that an insider positionality may facilitate more nuanced perspectives which can build credibility with participants and rapport between the researcher and participants (Bukamal, 2022). This reflects my experience of conducting interviews; especially with participants who were known to me and I have had professional relationships with previously.

However, when engaging in literature more pertinent to the PEP role, such as Hardy et al's. (2020) Leadership for Educational Psychologists: Principles and Practicalities, I viewed myself as more of an outsider researcher who does not belong to the group to which research participants belong (Clarke & Braun, 2013). I used supervision and my reflective diary to reflect on my experience of feeling like an outsider within some interviews, especially when participants discussed more LA-specific management structures and aspects of their role (e.g., service planning). During and immediately following the interviews, I viewed this as a limiting factor in relation to how I responded to participants during each interview and my subsequent analysis of the research data.

As has been noted for 'outsider' researchers, it is possible that I may have misinterpreted the research data. However, it is perhaps important to consider that Breen (2007) noted that the insider-outsider researcher dichotomy may be reductionistic. Further, the social constructionist epistemology and method of data analysis method embraces the role of the researcher and their experiences as part of

the research process. Therefore, I no longer consider this to be a limitation of the research process. Rather, I view this reflection as one that is relevant to *all* qualitative research.

Research Diary Extract (10/09/23):

It has been interesting to engage in a piece of research focussed on the perspectives of a participant sample which I have, at this point in my career, relatively limited insight into. During my placements across the DEdPsy, I have become familiar with different models of service delivery, however, I believe I have become less familiar with the PEP role. In my experience, the PEP role appears to be one that is less accessible to TEPs (and EPs?) perhaps due to their leadership role which means that they operate within the LA in distinct ways compared to main grade EPs; the role of which I am much more familiar with. Because of this, to some extent, I feel like an outsider researcher in relation to the role of the PEP.

I am less familiar with the language used within these social context (e.g., management and leadership within the LA), and, although I have engaged in literature regarding the role of the PEP, I am aware that my current understanding of the role lacks some experiential context. Relating the data to my current knowledge of EPSs, EPS delivery and the role of the EP will be crucial in supporting my interpretation of the data. I will continue reflect on how the data gathered may have been perhaps much different if the researcher was a PEP as opposed to a TEP and the implications of my researcher position on the constructed findings and implications of the research.

2.10. Qualitative Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative framework to guide the research process, including the formulation of research questions, interview schedule and the approach to conducting interviews. I decided that a qualitative approach would be appropriate for this research as it acknowledges that researchers bring their own subjectivity to the research process (Robson, 2017) which is aligned with my relativist (Clark, 1994) and social constructionist (Braun & Clarke, 2022) positioning.

2.11. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria of Participants

In line with Shuayb et al's. (2009) suggestion of participants needing relevant experience, participants were required to have worked as a PEP in their *current* LA for at least one academic year. Participants could be PEPs *or* Deputy PEPs in recognition that the Deputy PEP role also encompasses strategic responsibilities such as the on-going development of EPS delivery (Hardy et al., 2020). This was considered to provide some basis for 'relevant experience' with the recognition that different LA EPSs will likely have distinct differences pertaining to its organisational structure, funding, EPS delivery and needs of the population it serves (Hardy et al., 2020; Marsh & Higgins, 2018).

The inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants was aligned with the four research questions (see page 72 within Part Two B of the thesis). Given that I was interested in PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales, participants needed to be PEPs (or Deputy PEPs) working within a Welsh Local Authority (LA) EPS. However, working with systems around CYP such as the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) (e.g., schools and parents) appeared to be a significant component of current EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice; captured by subtheme 1.2; *'Capacity Building'.* Therefore, I feel that exploring the views of those who have engaged with EPSs to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP would be of use to explore in the future.

2.12. Recruitment Strategy

All PEPs of the twenty-two LA EPSs across Wales were invited to take part in the research via the dissemination of the information sheet and recruitment poster through via the Chair of the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists in Wales (NAPEP Cymru). A gatekeeper letter was sent to the Chair of NAPEP Cymru (see Appendix 6) with the acknowledgement that all PEPs across Wales are required to be a member. Prospective PEP participants were encouraged to email myself if they were interested in taking part in the research. They were then required to provide their

informed consent via a Microsoft Word document which was also used to check that participants met the inclusion criteria for the research.

Two prospective participants contacted me immediately following the gatekeeper's dissemination of the information sheet via email. However, no other responses were received. This initially caused some concern as to whether I would achieve a sample of eligible participants. Following discussions within supervision, I decided to send individual emails directly to prospective participants whose emails were provided by the gatekeeper. This led to a greater number of responses and I felt satisfied that I would be able recruit a sufficiently broad sample of eligible participants.

Offering data collection to take place in-person *or* online appeared to support the recruitment process and afforded me the ability to gather the perspectives of participants across the breadth Wales. I deemed it to be important that the research findings would be reflective of LA EPSs *across* Wales rather than just those within greater proximity to the researcher.

It was relatively straight forward to arrange a date and time for each interview; prospective PEP participants offered flexibility and consideration of the timescales of the research. Through supervision, I wondered whether the level of flexibility prospective participants demonstrated was afforded by the fact that the data gathering stage took place within the summer period. From my experience, this period is typically a less busy and more reflective period for EPSs with a focus on development. As such, I felt that the timescales of the data-gathering period coincided with PEP responsibilities well; possibly facilitating their intention *and* ability to engage in the research (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2008).

The process of recruiting participants was supported by my creation and use of an excel spreadsheet for recruitment tracking. As recruitment took place in the Summer of 2023, many prospective participants responded with an out-of-office response. I felt it that it was important to keep track of these responses, and I made a note to re-contact these participants on their return date. Following discussions within supervision, I concluded that the process of utilising a spreadsheet to manage the recruitment process was integral in maintaining a sense of control throughout this

process. As such, this is a strategy I endeavour to adopt to support the participant recruitment process within any future research.

Research Diary Extract (27/07/23):

I have been pleasantly surprised with how quickly I have been able to recruit participants. I have interviews booked in for all six participants which feels like a huge milestone in the research process. Organising myself with the use of the excel spreadsheet has been really helpful in organising myself and knowing who I need to email back and when, and the completed and outstanding consent forms. I will continue to use this approach when immersed with the data analysis stage of the research. I plan to create a column to keep track of the interviews I have transcribed, familiarised myself with, and coded.

2.13. Sample Size

The dataset or 'sample size' for the current research included six participants. Braun and Clarke (2022) emphasise that there is complexity in establishing the 'correct' dataset and size and that concepts such as 'sample size' should be considered with caution as it is more aligned with positivist values and assumption. As such, I decided to reflect on the 'information power' of the dataset (Malterud et al., 2016) which has been considered as a more appropriate approach to the participant sample than 'sample size' (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

In adopting a focus on the information power of the dataset, I engaged in reflection of my construction of the richness and quality of the data in relation to the research questions. Specifically, I considered whether I believed the data to be dense and having a suitably narrow focus supported by a strong dialogue (Malterud et al., 2021). Within this process, supervision was integral in ensuring reflexivity and in assessing the quality and richness of the data gathered.

2.14. Data Gathering

As discussed within Part Two of the thesis, semi-structured interviews were used as the chosen method for data gathering as this approach aligned with the overall

philosophical orientation and research aim. The interview schedule was designed to prompt responses I deemed to be relevant to each of the four research aims.

As the interviews were semi-structured, it is likely that my own values and beliefs influenced my responses to participants. These include my verbal and nonverbal communication which may have influenced the interaction between myself and participants and, thus, the data gathered. I ensured that the questions I posed to participants were open ended and that I avoided amplified statements or dialogue that might lead participants to answer in ways they thought were desirable. In this way, I engaged in efforts to reduce the impact of my values, beliefs, and constructs as a researcher on the data gathered. This was further supported by the use of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11) to support in ensuring some consistency across interviews so that the research questions were addressed. However, I acknowledge that in adopting a qualitative paradigm, my subjectivity is viewed as an asset in relation to the research process as it is considered to enable deeper engagement of the research area (Elliott et al., 1999; Braun & Clarke, 2022a).

As previously noted, in the interest of transparency (Yardley, 2000), it is important to acknowledge that two participants who took part in the research were previously known to the researcher in a professional capacity. Following discussions within professional supervision, I decided that because the relationship was not personal and ongoing, that these two participants would be appropriate to include within the research (McConnel-Henry et al., 2010).

McConnel-Henry et al. (2010) suggested that when there is a pre-existing relationship between the researcher and participant, rich data is likely to be collected. This *does* appear to reflect my experience of conducting the interviews. Further, within supervision, I reflected on how I felt like more of an insider researcher when interviewing participants known to me compared to interviewing participants I did not. This may be due to the participant already having built a rapport with the researcher which is vital within qualitative research and encourages participants to share their experiences (Hollway & Jefferson, 2013). It may also be due to these participants making explicit reference to us in having a shared experience (e.g., of working within the same EPS as a TEP).

Research Diary Extract (29/09/23):

*Interviewing PEPs as a TEP has been an interesting experience. It was sometimes difficult to maintain my position as a researcher versus my position as a TEP. Several participants were curious about my experiences as a TEP, and thus, I was required to revert the focus of the interview about **their** experiences and perceptions. This may reflect my stance as an insider researcher. However, I didn't always feel this way. At times, within each interview, I felt more of an outsider researcher than others. I noticed that across interviews, I felt more of an outsider when participants discussed the intricacies of EPS funding which, prior to the interview, I was not aware of. This inevitably impacted on my responses and follow up questions. There are some responses that I wish I had followed up on more, and these were perhaps the responses that I felt more of an outsider to. This is an important reflection for my development as a research practitioner.*

2.15. Interview Schedule

As explored within Part Two of the thesis, the interview schedule was based on McCartan and Robson's (2016) sequence of questions; the development of which was supported by engagement in peer supervision. When developing the interview questions, both the thematic dimensions and dynamic dimensions of the interview was considered (Kvale, 2007). These refer to the content of the interview (the 'what') as well as the manner within which the content was facilitated (the 'how') (Kvale, 2007). Careful consideration was given to ensure naturally flowing dialogue between the researcher and participants was supported to facilitate detailed responses to address the research questions. In pertaining to the sequence of questions proposed by McCartan and Robson (2016), the following types of questions and responses were used:

- Introductory or 'rapport building' questions *("can you tell me about your role?")*
- Direct questions *("What do you think the barriers are of…?")*
- Probing questions *("can you tell me more about...?")*
- Interpreting questions *("do you mean…?")*

To support with the process of constructing the interview schedule, I read through each question to a TEP colleague who assumed the role of a participant and considered the schedule through a critical lens. The insight offered by my TEP colleague allowed me to engage in subsequent, deeper reflection on the interview questions within my supervisory space. Specifically, I reflected on how altering the order of questions within the schedule may help support the 'flow' of the interview. Revisions were made following this exercise and I felt more confident in engaging in my first interview.

2.16. Data Analysis

Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) was selected as an appropriate approach to data analysis as its theoretical flexibility is compatible with the analysis of semi-structured interviews within a social constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Within RTA, flexibility is a fundamental characteristic which involves the researcher critically reflecting on their role within the research process and practice. I also had previous experience of conducting RTA through other projects I had completed as part of the DEdPsy and thus, I felt somewhat familiar with RTA as a method of data analysis.

Although I had previous experience of utilising RTA as a method of data analysis in the recent past, I underestimated the amount of time required to engage in the analysis stage of the research. I believe this may be due to the fact that my previous experience of using RTA was with a much smaller dataset. During the data analysis stage of the current research, I felt overwhelmed by the vast amount of rich data collected, particularly at the familiarisation stage.

Research Diary Extract (23/12/23):

I am overwhelmed by the sheer amount of rich data I have gathered. On reflection, with regards to achieving sufficient 'information power' I perhaps could have stopped data collection after interviewing Participant 4. However, as I had already scheduled interviews for Participant 5 and 6, it did not feel ethical to deny these participants the opportunity to participate in the research when they had already provided informed consent via the consent form. All participants were passionate to get their views across which were rich, complex, and highly relevant to the research questions. Now I am faced with the daunting task of condensing the research and in constructing themes to represent it.

One pertinent challenge of the data analysis regarded reaching the point that I felt the analysis was "good enough" (Braun & Clarke, 2022 p.71). Braun and Clarke (2022) acknowledge the importance of recognising the point at which the researcher may conclude their analysis when it is felt to be good enough. They note that as reflexivity is never final and that there is always potential for new or different ways of understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I found this difficult as I experienced a tension between finding new insights within the data and in achieving an 'end point' within the timeframes of the research.

Engaging in supervision during the analysis stage of the research was crucial in supporting my sense making of the data. Verbalising my thoughts out loud to my supervisor was hugely beneficial in solidifying my understanding of my data and in determining *when* I felt that my analysis was good enough. Reflective discussions within supervision were also integral in defining and refining themes. I felt reassured when my supervisor agreed that my analysis appeared to reflect my data and made sense in relation to the four research questions. This perhaps reflects some of the difficulty I had in embracing the philosophical assumptions of my research. Despite the relativist-social-constructionist positioning of the research, I often found myself seeking validation from my supervisor to fulfil my desire to be 'right'.

Talking about my analysis with my supervisor and sharing images related to the research process (see Appendix 17 & 18) was invaluable in remaining reflexive to improve the quality and validity of the research whilst also acknowledging the limitations of the insights generated (Berger, 2013). It was also integral in working through and letting go of my need to discover an objective 'truth', as per the philosophical assumptions of the research.

> **Research Diary Extract (14/01/24):**
>
> *Knowing when to finalise the six phases of RTA has been more difficult than I had anticipated. I have voiced these difficulties within supervision which has been a valuable experience on reflecting on Braun and Clarke's (2022) notion of analysis being 'good enough'. Whilst I recognise that a 'good enough'; analysis may look and feel differently for researchers, following discussion within supervision, I feel the main indications of a 'good enough' analysis, for me, is the point at which I am able to:*
>
> - *Discuss my themes and subthemes to my supervisor with confidence;*
> - *Clearly justify the decisions made throughout the analysis (e.g., why subthemes aren't themes, and vice versa);*
> - *Communicate a clear rationale for the specificity or broad nature of themes;*
> - *Discuss the relationship between themes and subthemes;*
> - *Evidence a process of ongoing development and refinement of themes.*

An inductive approach to data analysis was considered appropriate as I was interested in participants' perspectives (Braun and Clarke, 2022). I decided to code the data to explore meaning at the surface of the data and thus, staying close to the specific language participants used (Braun & Clarke, 2022). In this way, I adopted a semantic approach to coding. This approach appeared to coincide with my own competency with RTA and in the timeframe of the research. I felt that a more latent approach to coding would have been outside of the scope of the current research with its vast, rich data and in considering the tight time frame within which the research needed to be written up. It is thus acknowledged that different themes and subthemes may have been constructed from the data if I had adopted a latent approach to analysis.

During the coding phase of the analysis, I continually reflected on the specificity of the codes I created. Originally, I created broad, one and two-word codes to reflect participants' responses. However, upon reflection within supervision, I felt that these original codes were too broad and, thus, difficult to understand what they were constructed to conceptualise at times. As such, I decided to re-code my data which I perceived to be a highly valuable but time-consuming decision. My new approach to coding the data was more specific, with the aim of representing the data whilst also serving to aid the construction of themes.

My approach to coding the data evolved with the support of the reflective discussions afforded within my supervisory space. However, one element of the coding process that remained consistent was my approach to addressing research questions. Across all participants, research questions were answered through their corresponding questions within the interview schedule in a clear and relatively straight forward fashion. As such, in contrast to my previous approach to the coding process within RTA, I did not approach the data with the hopes to capture meaning within the dataset that had relevance to all four research questions at the same time. Rather, I focussed on each research question in turn to consider what I perceived to be relevant or potentially relevant within the data.

This process was further supported by my decision to colour code each code in relation to the research questions which they appeared to be most relevant to (see Appendix 16). Colour coding the codes was a highly valuable decision with regards to the process of constructing themes. I was able to construct themes, which were developed, rather than emergent (Braun & Clarke, 2022) through the manual exercise of sorting the colour coded codes into themes to represent each research question. This afforded a clear and focussed discussion relevant to the research questions within the write up of the research.

2.17. Writing Up

The process of writing up the research alongside managing ongoing placement demands was perhaps the most challenging aspect of the research. I felt daunted by the task of formulating and communicating my thoughts clearly on paper. I engaged in professional supervision and it was through this reflective space that I continued to work through the positivist stance I appeared to be viewing the thesis through (i.e., that there is a 'right' or 'wrong' way communicate my research). Through this process,

I began to view the write up as an evolving process. I reflected on the iceberg metaphor offered by my research supervisor which appeared to represent the Thesis well; with the finished article (the 'tip of the iceberg') comprising of many complex and sometimes difficult processes that are not always visible within the finished article (i.e., beneath the surface of the water).

I felt pressure to ensure that the analysis was a 'true' reflection of participants' views. In order to support my write-up of the findings and discussion; I reminded myself that I was not trying to report *everything* participants said, but, rather, to report on and offer a discussion around the findings that I felt were particularly pertinent in addressing the research questions. Further, acknowledging and reflecting on the philosophical assumptions underpinning the research was also helpful in recognising that a 'true' reflection of participants' views may not exist, and, rather, only a subjective interpretation.

Research Diary Extract (24/01/24):

*It is a challenge to not feel pressured to cover **everything** that participants discussed. I want to represent the data as accurately as I can. At the same time, I must remind myself that my role as a researcher is not to cover every base within the data, but, rather, covering the bases which are most relevant in addressing the research questions. This is a difficult tension to face, especially with such vastly rich data. In order to support with maintaining 'accuracy' with the dataset, I have re-visited codes consistently throughout the process of developing, reviewing and refining themes when constructing the thematic map. This has enhanced my confidence in my findings in not only addressing the research questions, but also in ensuring that my findings represent the dataset.*

2.18. Contribution to the Literature

The aim of the research was to explore PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19. This builds on Part One A of the Thesis which offers a contextual narrative surrounding the current research area, including the impact of COVID-19 on CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing and information related to EPS delivery and the

PEP role. It also builds on Part One B which critically explores literature pertaining to the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in the UK.

The current research builds on Part One A and B by offering an insight into PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to this area of practice. This is in recognition of PEPs as strategic leaders of EPSs and EPS delivery (Hardy et al., 2020) (explored in Part One A) and EPS delivery as an influential factor in enabling EPSs (including individual EPs) to support the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP within the community it serves (Hulme, 2017; Wright, 2020; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2022) (explored in Part One B of the thesis). Due to the absence of research in this specific area, the findings thus offer an initial understanding of the perspectives of PEPs in relation to EPS delivery and a basis on which to build future research.

Specifically, the current research contributes to the literature by offering the following insights of PEP's perspectives in relation to the research questions (RQs):

RQ1) Current EPS delivery:
- EPSs across Wales appear to adopt a multi-level or 'ecosystemic' approach with micro-systemic working viewed as the gold standard.
- EPSs across Wales primarily adopt a consultative, solution-focussed approach to service delivery. A time allocation model is most commonly adopted, with the more recent shift from a time-allocation to a work-allocation model within a minority of services.
- EPSs across Wales place less emphasis on individual, 1:1 work with CYP with the view that this is a less effective use of EPs time, and in working *against* the philosophy underpinning EPSs that MH and emotional wellbeing is best supported by supporting the systems around *multiple* CYP (and thus, perhaps more pertaining to the within-child model of MH which the profession seeks to avoid).
- Within some EPSs, Assistant EPs (AEPs) are offering therapeutic support at a group *and* individual child level. Further, AEPs are identified as contributors to service delivery in some EPSs in the recognition of the recruitment and retention crisis of EPs.
- EPSs across Wales have evolved aspects of their service delivery following the COVID-19 pandemic. More support is offered to support school staff in supporting these needs through a consultative approach.

RQ2) Barriers to EPS delivery:

- Recruitment and retention crises within EPSs *and* schools are significant barriers; PEPs across Wales believe that supporting these needs are an integral role of the EP; but that their 'hands are tied' which is due, in part, to the ongoing recruitment and retention crisis experienced within the educational psychology profession and within the educational workforce more broadly. Some feel that the EPS can become 'tied up' in statutory work which reduces their capacity to support this area of practice.

- Perhaps due to the extent of the current recruitment and retention crisis, and ongoing pressures on LAs and individual EPS and school systems in meeting key performance indicators (KPIs) from 'above', staff within education (including those within EPSs) have limited cognitive and emotional capacity. These were perceived as important factors in facilitating meaningful change in this area of practice.

- There is a lack of understanding about, and recognition of the EP role in supporting these needs. The educational psychology profession and the possibilities for its contribution to this area of practice may be overlooked by those working within policy and wider government bodies more generally. It may also be overlooked by other stakeholders such as those working within CAMHS.

RQ3) Facilitators to EPS delivery:

- Increased funding of EPSs afforded by the COVID-19 pandemic and the whole-school approaches to wellbeing grant.

- Increased efficiency due to changes made following the COVID-19 pandemic such as online working and increased communication between services during this period.

- A greater recognition of the importance of this area of practice following the COVID-19 pandemic.

- Current models of service delivery.

- Reflective spaces for EPs to feel emotionally held, with the recognition that this area of practice can impact EPs' wellbeing through continually 'containing' others.

- Continuing Professional Development (CPD) opportunities within the EPS.

- Professional interest of individual EPs within this area of practice.

RQ4) Future hopes for EPS delivery:

- A focus on further developing the capacity of the EPS and the microsystem, with an enhanced focus on parents who may be 'forgotten' in current EPS delivery.

- A focus on 'true' collaboration with stakeholders with the aim of co-construction.

In light of these findings, this research invites PEPs and EPs to reflect on the following:

- Do the findings apply to their services?
- Does EPS delivery support CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing? If not, is there more that could be done in order to support these needs now and in the future?
- Are EPSs / EPs discussing their role in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing with stakeholders? If so, how? Is the role merely communicated or is it co-constructed? How can we do more of the latter?
- Are EPSs / EPs actively engaging with other professionals to support more joined-up working in relation to this area of practice?
- Are EPSs providing the conditions to ensure that individual EPs' wellbeing is supported?
- Are EPSs and EPs engaging with parents? How may EPSs delivery be enhanced to support parents?

2.19. Contribution to Professional Practice

The current research contributes to professional practice largely at the wider level relating to the educational psychology profession. However, it is acknowledged that there are also some contributions to professional practice at the level of individual EPSs.

The current research highlights the current pressures on public services within the UK, and the education system more specifically. The research indicates that the increasing pressure on, and lack of capacity within EPSs, schools, and wider LAs is a significant barrier to EPS delivery in supporting the increasing MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. Participants discussed these barriers specifically in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP, but also in relation to EPS delivery more generally. This suggests that significant changes are to be made, if EPSs are to provide a service which fulfils its duty to meet the needs of the community it serves (Hardy et al., 2020).

The findings of the current research highlight a need for the educational psychology profession to raise its profile and participation in the creation and implementation of

policy and initiatives to support CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing. The educational psychology profession needs to be better understood and represented within government, in order to change the current 'overlooking' of the profession within key government policy (MacKay, 2007) and in the hopes of securing more substantial funding. At the same time, it acknowledges that EPSs would likely still be constrained based on the current recruitment and retention crisis within EPSs and within the education system more broadly. This highlights the complexity of the current barriers experienced by EPSs in Wales, and perhaps, across the UK more broadly.

The findings may suggest that the educational psychology profession needs to raise its profile in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP, and perhaps, the profession more broadly. Discourse is needed between the directors of Cardiff University's DEdPsy and their commissioners (WG) to enhance the current provision of training EPs within Wales. Similarly, there is also a need for representing bodies of the educational psychology profession such as the British Psychological Society (BPS) and the Association for Educational Psychologists (AEP) to enhance their representation of the profession more broadly. If there are such varied constructions of the EP role within and across systems, how *able* are *individual* EPSs to co-construct the role and value of the EPS in supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP with its stakeholders to promote widespread change? Wider, systemic change at the level of the profession is needed.

The findings of the current research highlight some distinct differences between the EP and PEP role. All PEPs in the current research perceived their current model of EPS delivery in supporting the EP role, whilst other research has highlighted EPs' perception of these same models of delivery as barriers to the role in relation to this area of practice. Reflection spaces dedicated to open and honest discussions between members of EPSs regarding EPS delivery may be beneficial in supporting PEPs to consider EPS delivery with the views of the EPS in mind which has been discussed as one of the many important aspects in the development of EPS delivery (Hardy et al., 2020).

Further implications of the current research are discussed within Part Two of the Thesis.

2.20. Contribution to Future Research

As previously discussed within Part Two of the thesis, this research was focussed on PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales in a post COVID-19 era. As such, it may be of benefit to expand the perspectives of other stakeholders who are supported by EPSs such as school staff, parents, and other LA agencies. Specifically, it may be interesting to consider stakeholder views pertaining to the effectiveness of current EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. This may support with providing PEPs and LAs more generally with informed and reasoned action for any changes or developments to EPS delivery to best support those who use its services.

2.21. Dissemination

The research will be disseminated in order to share the insights and perceived implications of the findings (McCartan & Robson, 2016) with the wider educational psychology profession and broader systems. During participant interviews, I was asked by some PEP participants to share the completed Thesis with the EPS. This is an opportunity I hope to pursue open completion of the DEdPsy and when I am a qualified EP. I also hope to disseminate my research in terms of general conversations with TEP colleagues, EPSs, and other services more widely with the hope of facilitating general conversations around EPS delivery in relation to supporting the MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales and across the UK more widely. The dissemination plan for the research is outlined in Table 18 below.

Table 18. Dissemination Plan

Action(s)	Initial steps	Timescale
To share findings with the research participants.	Create an infographic of the findings to share with the research participants via email and offer to feedback verbally via phone call or online video call.	September 2024.
To share findings with the EPS I am working in from September.	Develop a presentation before commencing the role to be ready to present to the EPS within a Team meeting.	Begin presentation in August 2024.
To share findings with NAPEP Cymru.	Contact the Chair of NAPEP Cymru to organise.	On-going.
To share findings with Association for Educational Psychologists (AEP) officers.	Contact the General Secretary of the AEP to organise.	August 2024.
To discuss the research on a podcast aimed at aspiring and current EPs.	Contact the owner(s) of Agents of Hope and PsychBites podcast.	August 2024.
To share findings with Cardiff University's DEdPsy tutor team and TEPs.	Contact the course directors of Cardiff DEdPsy.	June – July 2024.
To submit my abstract for consideration to present at the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) annual TEP conference in January 2025.	Contact the DECP.	January 2025.
Publish research in a peer-reviewed journal.	Contact editors of relevant journals.	January 2025.

3. Part Three B: Development of the Research Practitioner

The research has reaffirmed my belief that supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP is an integral role of the EP and should be *everyone's* business (Welsh Assembly Government [WAG], 2001). It has also enabled me to reflect on the role of EPs within the current context of ongoing budget cuts and a well-documented recruitment and retention crisis for EPs within Wales and across the UK more broadly.

The findings of the research have encouraged me to reflect on my own practice and consider how I may use the findings in my work as a qualified EP working in Wales in the future. I believe that by having an awareness of current EPS delivery has enabled me to better understand the role of EPSs, and thus, EPs in supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP.

I feel more confident in explicitly recognising how I am currently supporting CYP's MH needs and emotional wellbeing within my current practice and have reflected on different ways in which I may do this in the future. I also believe that having a greater awareness of the possible barriers and facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to this area of will enhance my intention and ability to challenge said barriers and to work to promote said facilitators in the future.

Throughout this research journey, I have developed my skills, knowledge and understanding of what it means to conduct a thorough and rigorous piece of research. Initially, I grappled with the role of the researcher and I self-identified a sense of conscious incompetence (Howell, 1982) in relation to some aspects of the research process, such as the literature review.

Perhaps the most salient reflection on the research process was the value in engaging in supervision. Supervision was integral in co-constructing the research from the inception of the research idea through to the writing up. It was also crucial in recognising my tendency to internalise some of the difficulties I faced throughout the research process. This has enhanced my confidence and competency as a researcher.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 - Database Searches

Key	
	Articles identified as relevant for the focussed review

Database	Search Terms and Results	Additional Information re. the Search Process
APAPsychInfo **(October 2023)**	**1.** "educational psycholog*".mp. **27132** **2.** ("mental health" or "well-being" or "wellbeing" or "emotional*").mp. **727555** **3.** ("service delivery" or "service" or "delivery").mp. **263245** **4.** ("covid-19" or "covid" or "coronavirus" or "pandemic").mp. **48026** **5.** 1 and 2 and 3 and 4 **2** **6.** 1 and 2 and 3 **191** **7.** "educational psycholog* ".m_titl. **2322** **8.** 2 and 7 **201**	Subsequent searches did not use terms related to "covid-19" due to the lack of literature in this area. Subsequent searches did not use terms related to "service delivery" as it appeared that the term "Educational Psycholog*" was sufficient in yielding results related to EPS delivery. Refinement of the search with the requirement of the terms "educational psycholog*" and "well-being" (and related search terms) in the *title* was used to improve the relevance of search results.

	9. ("mental health" or "well-being" or "wellbeing" or "emotional*").m.titl. **161408** **10**. 7 and 9 **22** **11.** ("role" or "contribution" or "involvement" or "assessment" or "intervention" or "research" or "supervision" or "training").mp. **2315218** **12.** 7 and 9 and 11 **20** **13.** limit 12 to yr="2014 -Current" **9**	A third set of search terms were introduced to further filter research results. This narrowed down the search by 2. The search was further filtered via the criteria of being published no earlier than 2014; ten years from the current date in light of the social, political and legislative changes since this date. This narrowed down the search by over half.
Further refinement via inclusion and exclusion criteria	The abstracts of the **9** search results were screened for their relevance to the research area. Specifically, the search was refined by the researcher via the process of identifying whether each met inclusion criteria of being related to **1)** the *role* of EPs / EPSs in supporting the mental health needs of CYP, **2)** being based within the UK context. Through this process, **4** search results from this database were deemed relevant to the literature search. Following further screening, the following **2** articles were deemed relevant to the focussed review: **Greig, A., MacKay, T., & Ginter, L. (2019).** Supporting the mental health of children and young people: a survey of Scottish educational psychology services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *35*(3), 257-270.	

Database	Search Terms and Results	Additional information re. the search process
	Zafeiriou, M. E., & Gulliford, A. (2020). A grounded theory of educational psychologists' mental health casework in schools: connection, direction and reconstruction through consultation. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *36*(4), 422-442.	

Database	Search Terms and Results	Additional information re. the search process
SCOPUS **(October 2023)**	1."educational psycholog*" (article title) **1829** 2. "mental health" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "emotional*" (article title) **256333** **3**. "educational psycholog*" (article title) **AND** "mental health" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "emotional*" (article title) **27** **4.** educational psycholog*" (article title) **AND** "mental health" OR "well-being" "wellbeing" OR "emotional*" (article title) **AND** "role" OR "contribution" OR "involvement" OR "intervention OR "training" OR "supervision" OR "research" (article title, abstract, keywords) **26**	Search 4 was further filtered to articles published from 2014 to the current year (2023). This reduced search results to **13**.
Further refinement via inclusion and exclusion criteria	The abstracts of the **13** search results were screened for their relevance to the research area. Specifically, the search was refined by the researcher via the process of identifying whether each met inclusion criteria of being related to **1)** the *role* of EPs / EPSs in supporting the mental health needs of CYP, **2)** being based within the UK context. Through this process, **9** duplicates were removed and **3** articles were excluded. As such**, 1** article was deemed relevant to the literature search: **Morris, R., & Atkinson, C. (2018).** How can educational psychologists work within further education to support young people's mental health? An appreciative inquiry. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *23*(3), 285-313.	

Database	Search Terms and Results	Additional information re. the search process
ERIC (October 2023)	**S1.**title("educational psycholog*") **668** **S2.** title("mental health" OR "wellbeing" OR "well-being" OR "emotional*") **20555** **S3.** [S1] AND [S2] **11** **S4.** [S1] AND [S2] AND ("role" OR "contribution" OR "involvement" OR "intervention OR "training" OR "supervision" OR "research") **11** **S5.** S4 AND limits applied **7**	Date limits were applied to search 4 to further filter search results. Search results were required to be published from 2014 to the current year (2023).
Further refinement via inclusion and exclusion criteria	The abstracts of the **7** search results were screened for their relevance to the research area. Specifically, the search was refined by the researcher via the process of identifying whether each met inclusion criteria of being related to **1)** the *role* of EPs / EPSs in supporting the mental health needs of CYP, **2)** being based within the UK context. Through this process, **no additional articles** were identified as relevant for the focussed review.

Database	Search Terms and Results	Additional information re. the search process
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global (with filter applied – 'doctoral dissertations only') **(October 2023)**	S1. title("educational psycholog*") **479** S2. title("mental health" OR "well-being" OR "wellbeing" OR "emotional*") **30879** S3. [S1] AND [S2] **24** **S4.** [S3] AND ("role" OR "contribution" OR "involvement" OR "intervention OR "training" OR "supervision" OR "research") **22** **S5. [S4]** limits applied **16**	Search 4 was further filtered to doctoral theses published from 2014 to the current year (2023).
Further refinement via inclusion and exclusion criteria	The abstracts of the **16** search results were screened for their relevance to the research area. Specifically, the search was refined by the researcher via the process of identifying whether each met inclusion criteria of being related to **1)** the *role* of EPs / EPSs in supporting the mental health needs of CYP, **2)** being based within the UK context. Through this process, **12** search results from this database were deemed relevant to the literature search. One article was not accessible, and a further **2** articles were excluded following a revised date range. This led to **9** articles being identified as relevant to the focussed review: **Andrews, R. (2017).** *Reaching for a shared understanding: Exploring the views of Educational Psychologists (Eps) and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) about the role of the EP in supporting mental health and psychological well-being in schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East London).

Crosby, E. (2022). *Applying a cultural historical activity theory approach to explore the tensions within and between the roles of educational psychologists and primary mental health workers when supporting mental health needs in schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/University of Essex).

Davies, C. (2020). *Heir-apparent or Outsiders? An Exploration into Educational Psychologists' Sensemaking of their Role in Mental Health* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).

Eldred, K. C. (2021). *"My EP is a safety net": An exploration of the support Educational Psychologists can provide for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants working with children who have experienced Domestic Abuse* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).

Hulme, H. (2017). *How can Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services and Educational Psychology Services work together more effectively to address the mental health needs of young people in school?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield).

Price, R. (2017). *The role of the educational psychologist in children and young people's mental health: an explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Slade, R. (2019). *Educational psychologists' role in promoting children's mental and emotional well-being during the pre-school years: An explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Underwood, C. (2022). *Conversations about social, emotional and mental health needs: educational psychologists' facilitation of a collaborative joint consultation process*(Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).

Wright, D. (2020). *Implementing effective positive psychology interventions to support the well-being of young people in schools: A meta-analysis of randomised and non-randomised interventions and a Q study of educational psychologists' perceptions regarding effective implementation* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Appendix 2 - Prisma Diagram

Identification of Studies via Databases and Registers (PRISMA, 2020)

Identification

Records identified through the following databases:

APAPsychInfo **(n = 22)**
SCOPUS **(n = 27)**
ERIC **(n = 11)**
ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global **(n = 24)**

Total n = 84

The search terms ("educational psychology*) AND ("mental health" OR "wellbeing" OR "well-being OR "emotional*) as *article titles* generated these results (see Appendix A for each database search).

Records excluded: Those published prior to 2014 and those without a third set of search terms relating to the EP role ("contribution" OR "involvement" OR "assessment" OR "intervention" OR "consultation" OR "supervision" OR "training' OR "research").

n = 39

Duplicate results removed **(n = 17)**

Screening

Records screened (title and / or abstract);
(n = 84)

Records (i.e., journal articles) sought for retrieval;
(n = 28)

Records assessed for eligibility;
(n = 27)

Full text not available **(n = 1)**

Reports excluded:

1) Publications without relevance to EP practice in relation to MH needs of CYP (assessment, intervention, consultation, supervision, training, and research);
2) Those evaluating phenomena related to a specific context (e.g., the use of EPs in the roll-out of a training programme specific to Scotland);
3) Not describing empirical papers;
4) Not based on practice being carried out in the UK.

n = 12

Included

Studies included in review;

n = 12

Articles were further screened and excluded if they were published prior to 2017 in light of the publishing of the Green Paper in 2017 which may have had implications on the EP role in supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing **(n = 3)**

180

Appendix 3 - Articles Included in Focussed Review

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Greig et al. (2019) Greig, A., MacKay, T., & Ginter, L. (2019). Supporting the mental health of children and young people: a survey of Scottish educational psychology services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *35*(3), 257-270.	Scotland	To explore the views of, and information related to, Scottish EPS delivery in meeting the MH needs of school aged CYP. To explore current practice of EPSs across Scotland in supporting the MH needs of school aged CYP via 1) identification of areas of best practice, 2) barriers to meeting MH needs of CYP and 3) exploring, developing, and promoting the role of EPs in supporting MH needs of CYP and identifying areas for future development.	Survey	PEPs of EPSs across 32 LAs in Scotland.	A comparison of the descriptive statistics of responses provided.	EPSs across Scotland primarily work with CYP, schools, and parents/carers, focusing on direct support relating to MH needs, rather than conducting mental health assessments or engaging in policy development. Services felt least confident with mental health risk assessment and most confident in delivering training to school staff.	The research focusses on quantitative data only. As such, in-depth data in relation to EPSs in supporting MH needs of CYP was not sought. This may lead to actions not being fully understood (Burr, 2015). The researcher acknowledged that Scottish EPSs may have a wider range of statutory functions and a strong clinical and educational focus, which may contribute to a greater emphasis on mental health interests among Scottish educational psychologists compared to the rest of the UK. Therefore, the results cannot be generalisable to other UK contexts due to variations in Scotland's education system, legislation, and policy.

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Morris and Atkinson (2018). Morris, R., & Atkinson, C. (2018). How can educational psychologists work within further education to support young people's mental health? An appreciative inquiry. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 23(3), 285-313.	England	To explore a gap in the literature relating to the role of the EP in supporting MH needs within the post-16 sector. Specifically, to gather EPS' views on how EP practice can be extended to support MH needs of young people in further education (FE).	Appreciative inquiry (AI) through a series of four focus group discussions.	Six members of an EPS in England: 2 x Senior Specialist EPs 1 x Specialist EP 2 x Main grade EPs 1 x TEP	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Across all four AI focus groups discussions, five themes (and related subthemes) were developed. Themes included: 1. 'Supporting transition'; 2. 'Building capacity'; 3. 'Therapeutic work'; 4.'Commissioning'; 5. 'Involving young people'.	The researchers identified that the research lacks generalisability due to the small-scale nature of the research and possibly due to the self-selecting nature of the participant sample. Further, the research was carried out as a piece of action research in only one LA in England. Due to contextual differences in the education system in England and Wales (Education Policy Institute, 2021) the results may not be generalisable to a Welsh context.

References (not already included within Parts One, Two or Three the Thesis):

Education Policy Institute. (2021). A comparison of school institutions and policies across the UK. Retrieved from https://epi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/EPI-UK-Institutions-Comparisons-2021.pdf

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Zafeiriou and Gulliford (2020). Zafeiriou, M. E., & Gulliford, A. (2020). A grounded theory of educational psychologists' mental health casework in schools: connection, direction, and reconstruction through consultation. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *36*(4), 422-442.	England	To examine the processes EP's use when working at a *"targeted or specialist level"* (p. 425) to support CYP's MH needs through individual casework. The research aimed to adopt a strengths-based approach to address the following research questions (RQs): **RQ1:** *"How do EPs support children and young people's MH when they become involved in casework in schools?"* (p. 425) **RQ2:** *"Which factors and processes contribute to educational psychology MH casework in schools that is perceived as successful?"* (p. 425)	Semi-structured interviews following an *"intensive interviewing"* approach (p. 245).	Five EPs working within the same LA EPS in England.	Constructivist grounded theory (GT) methods.	Across all semi-structured interviews, four categories were developed; 1. 'Responding to adults' difficult emotions'; 2. 'Joining theory with evidence'; 3. 'Sharing hypotheses and challenging perceptions'; 4. 'Planning'. The researcher's concluded that role of EPs when working to supporting MH needs of CYP is through the use of specialist consultative skills, child development and organisational knowledge.	The researchers identified that due to the small participant sample, within a single LA, it's resulting theory should be treated with some caution in relation to generalising across professional groups and across LA contexts. Since the research was conducted with EPs working within the English LA EPS context, the findings may not apply to EPs and EPS in Wales.

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Andrews, R. (2017). Andrews, R. (2017). *Reaching for a shared understanding: Exploring the views of Educational Psychologists (Eps) and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) about the role of the EP in supporting mental health and psychological well-being in schools* (Doctoral dissertation, University of East London).	England	The research aimed to explore EPs and SENCos' perceptions of the EP role in relation to *"supporting MH and psychological wellbeing in schools"* (p. 25). Through exploring this main research aim, the research also aimed to address the following, subsidiary research questions (RQs): *"Do EPs and SENCos believe addressing MH and psychological wellbeing in schools is part of their role?"* (p. 26) *"What value do EPs place on MH and psychological wellbeing work in schools?"* (p. 26)	Semi-structured interviews utilising *"elements of a cooperative inquiry; a type of action research"* (p. 27) and the development of a working party. **Stage 1;** Active exploration of services available to schools through researcher's participation in an EPS working group. **Stage 2;** recruitment of 4 EP participants. **Stage 3/5;** pre-interview	Stages 2-5 involved 4 EPs. Stage 7 involved 3 SENCos recruited via the EPs who took part in Stages 2-5. All participants worked within the same LA in England.	Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Two overarching themes were constructed from the EP interviews (phases 2-5); 1) contextually factors relevant to the EP role in supporting MH and 2)psychological wellbeing and the EP role in supporting said needs. **Within 1); the following themes were noted:** *"Understanding MH and psychological wellbeing"* (p. 51) *"School values and ethos"* (p. 51) *"Challenges to EPs working in the field of MH and wellbeing"* (p.51) **Within 2), the following themes were noted** *"Differing perceptions of the EP role"* (p. 53)	The researcher identified that the research aimed to *"explore the views of EPs and SENCOs in one particular LA at one particular point in time, in order to increase understanding of the EP role in relation to MH and psychological wellbeing and inform future practice. The implications of the findings are, therefore, limited to the LA in which the research took place. However, they are indicative and may be of interest to other EP services in England who wish to stake a claim in this field."* (p. 110).

	"What examples are there of MH and psychological wellbeing support in schools from EPs at an individual, group and whole-school level?" (p. 26) "How can EPs support the MH and psychological wellbeing of staff in schools?" (p. 26) "Are there any barriers to EPs offering this type of work?" (p. 26) "How do EPs and SENCOs think the role of the EP could develop further to include MH and psychological wellbeing?" (p. 26) "What training, skills and resources do EPs need in order to deliver this wellbeing agenda?" (p. 26)	activity and individual, semi-structured interviews with EPs. **Stage 6;** 6-step TA, creation of 2 thematic maps and member checks **Stage 7;** Working party with researcher and 3 "SENCo co-researchers" (p. 27)		"General aspects of the Ep role in relation to MH and wellbeing" (p. 53) "Examples of EPs supporting MH and wellbeing in schools" (p. 53) "Vision for EPs supporting MH and wellbeing in schools" (p. 53) Subthemes were also identified. **Findings from the working group included;** An agreed action plan to address 4 main agreed outcomes relating to the role of the EP in supporting MH and wellbeing needs.	

References (not already included within Parts One, Two or Three the Thesis):

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative research in psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

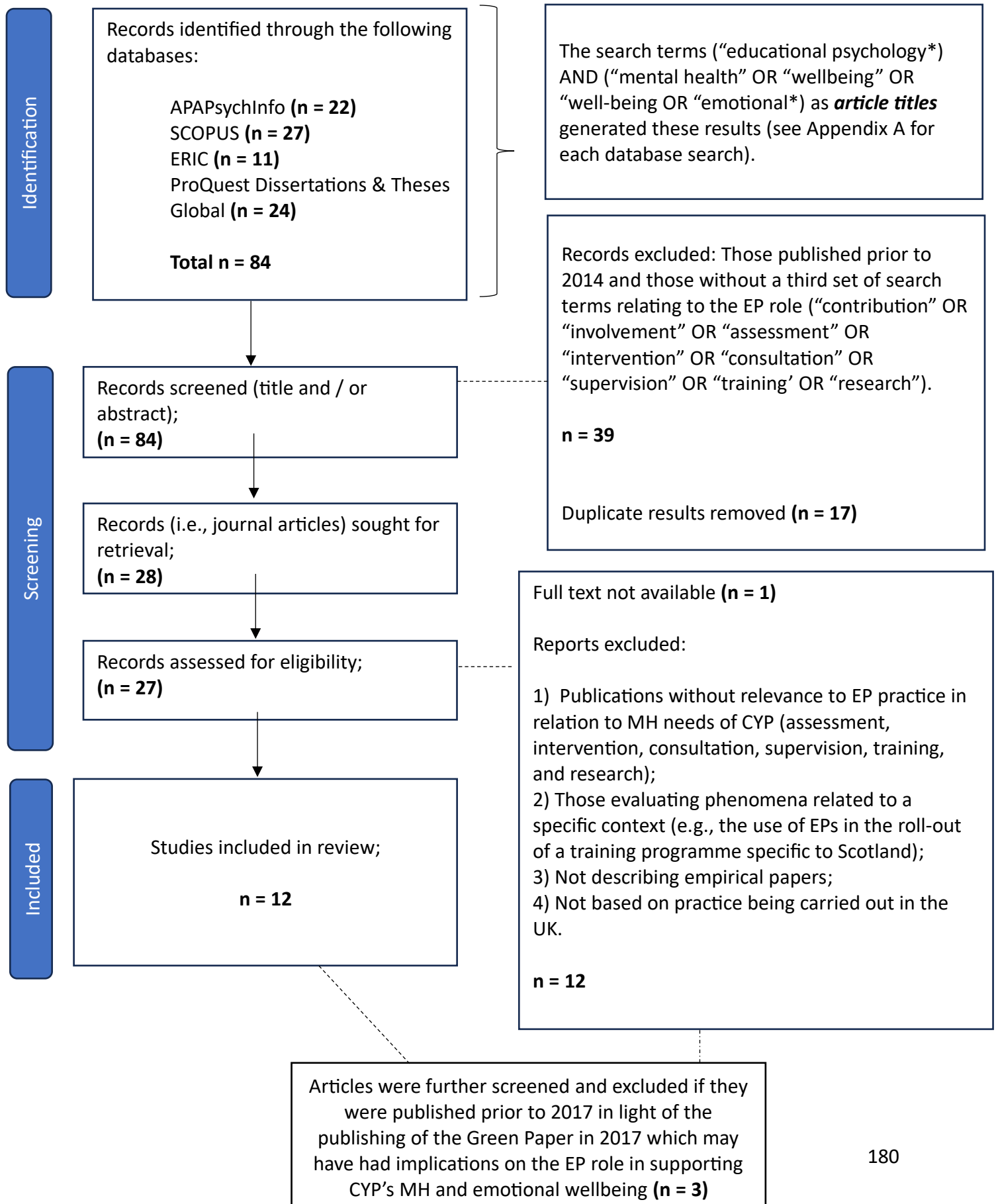| Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Price (2017). Price, R. (2017). *The role of the educational psychologist in children and young people's mental health: an explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).	Wales	The research aims to address a gap in the literature in relation to the role of the EP in supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales. **Strand 1** focusses on EPs, and **strand 2** focusses on ALNCos. **Strand 1:** **RQ1:** *"What is the current role/practice of EPs in CYP mental health?"* (p. 53). **RQ2:** *"What the facilitators and barriers to EPs work in CYP mental health?"* (p. 53). **RQ3:** *"Is there a current pressure on EPs work in CYP mental health?"* (p. 53). **RQ4:** "*How can CYP mental health intervention be*	Mixed methods. The completion of a questionnaire followed by a semi-structured interview for participants in both strand 1 and strand 2 of the research.	**Strand 1:** 17 EPs across 9 different LA EPSs completed the "EP questionnaire" (p. 56). 6 EPs across 3 different LAs participated in a semi-structured interview. **Strand 2:** 11 (primary school based) ALNCos across six LAs completed the "*ALNCo questionnaire*" (p. 56).	Questionnaires were analysed using descriptive statistics which are presented in graph form. Semi-structured interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	Educational Psychologists (EPs) engage in consultation and play various roles in CYP's MH including assessment, intervention, and collaboration with multiple agencies. Facilitators for engagement in CYP mental health intervention include EPs having skills and expertise in this area. ALNCos viewed EPs as having expertise in this area, and EPs noted that they have skills to allow them to work "confidently and competently" in supporting CYP's MH needs (p. 81). However, more EPs reported a lack of confidence and competence in working with CYP with MH needs than those that	The researcher acknowledged that whilst they did not set out to only recruit primary school ALNCos, the use of a convenience sample meant that they were only able to recruit primary ALNCos. Consequently, since MH needs may be more prevalent in adolescence (Blakemore, 2019) the research may not provide an accurate insight into the role of the EP in working with MH needs as it is possible that the majority of this type of work may be

		improved through EPs/education?" (p. 53). **Strand 2:** **RQ5:** *"How do schools perceive the EP role in relation to CYP mental health?"* (p. 53) **RQ6:** *"What are the facilitators and barriers to schools working with EPs in relation to CYP mental health?"* (p. 53) **RQ7:** *"How do schools think CYP mental health practice can be improved?"* (p. 53)	6 ALNCos across 4 different LAs participated in a semi-structured interview.	indicated feeling confident and competent. A barrier highlighted by EPs and ALNCos was constructions of the EP role, with both highlighting schools constructing a limited role for EPs in mental health. EPs and ALNCos noted that they feel there should be clearer guidelines regarding the involvement of educational psychologists in CYP's MH in schools.	conducted in secondary schools.

References (not already included within Parts One, Two or Three the Thesis):

Blakemore, S. J. (2019). Adolescence and mental health. *The lancet*, *393*(10185), 2030-2031.

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Underwood (2022). Underwood, C. (2022). *Conversations about social, emotional and mental health needs: educational psychologists' facilitation of a collaborative joint consultation process* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Nottingham).	England	The thesis aims to examine how EPs facilitate collaboration in joint consultations when exploring CYP's SEMH needs. Specifically, the research aims to explore how EPs use language to foster collaboration, to construct events and their roles as well as to develop shared understandings and *"create supportive strategies"* (p. 90) when working to support said needs.	A "flexible research design" (p. 82) was used which involved recording three (separate) consultations facilitated by an EP relating to the following three concerns held by adults: 1. Emotional wellbeing concerns 2. EBSA 3. Behaviour challenging adults. **The research involved:** 1 x audio recording of an in-person consultation. 2 x Microsoft Teams video recording of an online consultation.	Two EPs across two different LA EPSs in England recorded their joint consultations with school staff and parents.	A discourse analysis, drawing on Discursive Psychology and Conversation Analysis, was used to analyse the language and styles of interaction the EPs demonstrated within each consultation.	The analysis highlighted EPs' use of a solution focused approach to containment and for scaffolding strategies within the interactions. This appeared to lead to changes in the way events and others were described within the consultations (developing a shared understanding) and led to agreements over next steps, including strategies to support the CYP.	The researcher identified that; *"Due to the small sample size of three consultations included in this study, care must be taken when generalising the results. This is particularly the case with a small number of participants – with two consultations featuring the same EP , parent and member of school staff."* (p. 176).

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Slade (2019). Slade, R. (2019). *Educational psychologists' role in promoting children's mental and emotional well-being during the pre-school years: An explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).	Wales	The research aims to explore the role of EPs in promoting emotional well-being during the pre-school years in Wales. Specifically, the research aims to understand EPs' current work in this area, facilitators and barriers to this work as well as EPs hopes for future practice.	Mixed methods consisting of quantitative and qualitative data derived gathered via a questionnaire.	**Strand 1:** 41 EPs working in LA EPSs in Wales completed a LA EP questionnaire. **Strand 2:** 8 EPs working in Flying Start in Wales completed an adapted version of the questionnaire used in strand 1 (a Flying Start EP questionnaire).	Descriptive statistics were used to examine the responses provided to the closed- ended questions. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the answers given to the open-ended questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	The analysis highlighted that EPs engage in a range of work, including systemic work, therapeutic interventions, multi-agency work, and policy work for the LA, all aimed at promoting MEWB. Barriers and facilitators of working to support MEWB in the early years are represented by the following themes: 1. EP factors (subthemes: 'perception of role', 'EP skillset' and 'support'); 2. Potential collaborators (subthemes: 'others perception of role' and 'collaborators') 3. Service factors ('model of service delivery' and	The researchers "limited involvement" (p.127) was considered strength of the research and research bias considered a weakness. However, this does not align with Braun and Clarke's principles of TA where the researcher is key part of the research process which is considered to contribute to the richness of the analysis. The method provides less of an in-depth exploration, leading to actions not being fully understood (Burr, 2015). The author acknowledges that it is possible that those who have an particular interest in Mental Emotional Wellbeing (MEWB) as a topic area were perhaps more likely to respond. This may have

						'stretched by other demands of the role'). To improve promotion of MEWB in the pre-school age group, the following themes were developed from the dataset; 1.'Increase breadth of work'; 2.'Using a holistic framework and model for practice'; 3.'Increased multi-agency working'.	resulted in in biases within the responses.

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Wright, D. (2020). Wright, D. (2020). *Implementing effective positive psychology interventions to support the well-being of young people in schools: A meta-analysis of randomised and non-randomised interventions and a Q study of educational psychologists' perceptions regarding effective implementation* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).	Participants were recruited via EPNET and demographic information such as location of practice was not obtained.	The research is split into two parts. **Part 1** focusses on the use of a specific positive psychology intervention (PPI) within schools. **Part 2** aims to explore the role of the EP in supporting schools to implement effective positive psychology interventions. **Part 2 is the focus of the current critical appraisal.**	**Part 2** Mixed-methods. Q Methodology which involves *"a series of steps which ultimately measure subjective viewpoints regarding a chosen topic"* (p. 89)	**Part 2** 24 participants consisting of: 7 X TEPs 9 X main grade EPs 4 X senior EPs 3 X PEPs 1 X 'other' EP Participants were recruited via EPNET.	**Part 2** 'Q sorts' were analysed using a computer software programme.	**Part 2** Four factors were deemed significant for participants regarding the role of the EP in supporting schools to implement PPI's. These included the following: 'Working strategically'; 'Working systemically'; 'Whole school approach'; 'Training and implementation'.	**Part 2** The use of Q methodology means that participants were provided with "biased statement information" (p. 110), as noted by the researcher. Thus, conclusions drawn from part 1 may not be representative of participants' true perspectives.

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Davies, C. (2020). **Davies, C. (2020).** *Heir-apparent or Outsiders? An Exploration into Educational Psychologists' Sensemaking of their Role in Mental Health* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).	England.	The research aims to explore EPs' "sensemaking" (p. 4) of their role in supporting CYP's MH. Specifically, the research aims to answer the following research questions (RQs): RQ1) *"What are EPs' sensemaking accounts of their role in mental health?"* (p. 4) RQ2) *"What are some of the key factors influencing EPs' sensemaking of their role in mental health?"* (p. 4)	Semi-structured interviews.	16 EPs across four different LAs.	A "novel methodological approach" was used (p. 4), during which, metaphors elicited in EPs' sensemaking were analysed using a metaphorical analysis.	The study identified two main themes for the metaphors generated: 'Heir-apparent' and 'Outsider' which reflect the complex identity construction of the EP role in mental health. The sensemaking accounts of EPs were shaped by personal, contextual, and mental health discourses.	The researcher identified the following limitation: *"Another limitation relating to the sample was that this research included only EPs as participants. It could have been useful to adopt a multi-informant approach to examine how other professionals and service users make sense of the EP role. This could have provided a richer understanding of the sociological ambivalence around the EP role, which was a key issue in this research."* (p. 138)

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Eldred, K. C. (2021). Eldred, K. C. (2021). *"My EP is a safety net": An exploration of the support Educational Psychologists can provide for Emotional Literacy Support Assistants working with children who have experienced Domestic Abuse* (Doctoral dissertation, UCL (University College London)).	England	The research explores how EPs can support Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) working with CYP who have experienced Domestic Abuse (DA) through the following research questions (RQs): **RQ1)** *"What role do EPs currently play in supporting ELSAs who are working with CYP that have experienced DA?"* (p. 24) **RQ2)** *What role do ELSAs and SENCos currently play in supporting CYP who have experienced DA through the ELSA programme?"* (p. 25) **RQ3)** *"What are the barriers to using the ELSA programme with children who have experienced DA?"* (p. 25) **RQ4)** *"What are the implications of the findings of RQ1-RQ3 for EPs who are involved now, or in the future, in the ELSA programme?"* (p. 25)	Semi-structured interviews and a focus group.	Key persons involved with the delivery of ELSA; 4 X EPs 4 X ELSAs 2 X SENCos **Semi-structured Interviews:** All of the above. All participants were working in the same LA in England. **Focus group:** The 4 X EPs who participated in the interview stage.	Soft Systems Methodology (SSM). The 4 X EPs who participated in the **focus group** *"co-analysed initial themes, created a Rich Picture and a CATWOE analysis"* from the interview stage (p. 68).	The research findings indicated that EPs act as a *"safety net"* for ELSAs (p. 5) by providing emotional containment, supporting ELSA practise, and supporting ELSAs to *"bridge psychological theory to their practise"* (p. 5) Other findings specifically relate to the use of ELSA intervention in schools.	The research focussed on the views of participants working within one LA in England. The research may therefore not generalise to other LAs with differing service delivery models. *Further, the researcher noted:* *"The ELSA and SENCo participants may not be representative of London Borough X as it is likely that those who chose to give up their free time to participate in this research were broadly enthusiastic about the ELSA programme, which may have led to a more positive perspective of the ELSA programme being presented."* (p. 148)

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Crosby, E. (2022). Crosby, E. (2022). *Applying a cultural historical activity theory approach to explore the tensions within and between the roles of educational psychologists and primary mental health workers when supporting mental health needs in schools* (Doctoral dissertation, Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust/University of Essex).	England	The research aims to explore the role of EPs and Primary Mental Health Workers (PMHWs) when working in an LA to provide support for CYP's MH needs within the school context. Further, the research aims to explore the following research questions (RQs): RQ1) What do EPs and PMHWs hope to achieve when working in their services to support CYP's MH needs in schools? RQ2) What factors facilitate or hinder effective practice for EPs and PMHWs when supporting CYP's MH needs in schools? RQ3) How have EPs and PMHWs worked with each other in a LA and how do they perceive each other's roles in supporting CYP's MH needs in schools and what factors affect this?	Semi-structured interviews.	Participants were EPs and PMHW's working within the same LA in England. 6 X EPs 5 X PMHW's	Third-generation Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was used to collect and analyse the interview data. Further, Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was used to *"identify themes which were then mapped onto each of the nodes on the CHAT framework"* (p. 4).	Themes and subthemes generated by the researcher suggest that there are both similarities and differences between the role of EPs and PMHWs in supporting the MH needs of CYP in schools. Similarities included the use of consultation, multi-level working and the delivery of training to school staff. By contrast, differences included the length of time EPs and PMHWs would engage in direct work with CYP, and EPs views that systemic work should be of a particular focus within this area.	The researcher acknowledged that *"though CHAT can be credited for offering new opportunities in EP research and other systemic issues, CHAT as a theoretical and analytic tool has been challenged by other researchers"* (p. 125). Further, it has been argued that CHAT may reduce complex human processes; and, thus, may only offer a reductionist understanding of participants constructions (Bakhurst, 2009).

Author(s) and Reference	Location	Aim(s)	Design	Participants	Analysis	Findings	Critique
Hulme, H. (2017). *How can Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services and Educational Psychology Services work together more effectively to address the mental health needs of young people in school?* (Doctoral dissertation, University of Sheffield).	England	Research aims included the following: *"What affects the mental health of CYP?"* (p. 4) *'What is effective support for CYP's mental health needs?"* (p. 4) *"What are the barriers to effective joint work?"* (p. 4) *What are the facilitators of effective joint work between school, CAMHS and EPS?* (p. 4) *"What implications do examples of effective practice in joint work have for EPs?"* (p. 4)	Semi structured interviews.	Stakeholders within three different groups (CAMHS, EPs and school) working together as part of a school's link project. These included: 2 X EPs 2 X 'CAHMS worker' 2 X 'School worker'	Thematic Analysis (TA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006).	The research constructed three themes through the TA of the interview data. Themes represent facilitators and barriers to joint work (**'joint working'**), the stressors and supporters of CYP's MH (**'CYP's mental health'**) and the functions and others' understanding of the role of the EP **('EPs role in supporting mental health')**. One of the conclusions made by the researcher included the following; *"the data from this research would suggest that issues of language, understanding of one another's roles and professional boundaries (Salmon, 2004) can be overcome through joint work and consultation". (p. 4-5).*	The researcher identified the following limitation of the research; *"In order for any evaluation of effective practice to be valid, the voice of the service user must be heard. This research was designed to provide answers as to how professionals might more effectively deliver support for young people and consequently it focused on the views of those professionals. That is not say that children and their parents and carers wouldn't have valid views on these processes, but that they may have had different terms of reference and no direct experience of the joint working involved in delivering support."(p. 123)*

References (not already included within Parts One, Two or Three the thesis):

Bakhurst, D. (2009). Reflections on activity theory. *Educational review*, *61*(2), 197-210.

Appendix 4 – Articles from PsychInfo not Included in Focussed Review

Database Search	Reference of Article	Reason(s) for exclusion from focussed literature review
PsychInfo	**Corlett, L. (2015).** Future models of supervision: supporting practice and promoting professional growth and well-being in educational psychology through Collaborative Peer Support (CPS). *Educational and Child Psychology*, *32*(3), 90-104.	The article focusses on the use of supervision in supporting the **wellbeing of EPs** rather than the role of the EP in supporting the wellbeing of CYP.
	Currie, R., & Davidson, K. (2015). An evaluation of the initial impact of using educational psychologists to deliver NHS Scotland's "Scottish Mental Health First Aid: Young People" training programme. *Educational and Child Psychology*, *32*(1), 42-48.	The research was deemed relevant to the topic area. However, it was excluded due to its focus on evaluating the use of EPs in a training programme **specific to Scotland.**
	Gibbs, S., & Miller, A. (2014). Teachers' resilience and well-being: A role for educational psychology. *Teachers and Teaching*, *20*(5), 609-621.	The article focusses on the EP role in relation to supporting the **well-being of teachers** as opposed to the EP role in supporting the MH / wellbeing needs of CYP.
	Kitching, A. E. (2018). Mind-shifts for enhancing the engagement of educational psychologists in the promotion of holistic school wellbeing. *Educational and Child Psychology*.	The article focusses on the role of EPs in supporting others to engage in 'mind-shifts' to promote holistic school wellbeing in **South Africa** as opposed to the UK.
	Shield, W. (2023). The role of academic and professional tutors in supporting trainee educational psychologist wellbeing. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *39*(1), 1-18.	The article focuses on the role of academic and professional tutors in supporting the **well-being of Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs)** as opposed to the role of the EP in supporting the MH / wellbeing needs of CYP.
	Osborne, C., & Burton, S. (2014). Emotional Literacy Support Assistants' views on supervision provided by educational psychologists: what EPs can learn from group supervision. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *30*(2), 139-155.	The article was deemed relevant to the topic of the focussed review. However, following a review of the literature pertaining to legislative and policy changes with regard to CYP's MH and wellbeing, the decision

		was made to **exclude articles prior to 2017**. This was to reflect any changes to the EP role in relation to supporting CYP's MH and emotional wellbeing following the Green Paper published in 2017.
	Bunn, H., Turner, G., & Macro, E. (2019). The Wellbeing toolkit training Programme: a useful Resource for educational Psychology services? *Psychology in Russia: State of the art*, *12*(4), 210-225.	The research was deemed relevant to the research topic area. However, it was excluded due to its focus on evaluating the use of a **specific** training resource within one LA.

Appendix 5 - Completed MMAT Checklist for 3 Articles

Category of study design	Methodological quality criteria	Responses				
		Yes			**No**	**Can't tell**	**Comments**

Category of study design	Methodological quality criteria	Yes			No	Can't tell	Comments
Screening questions (for all types)	1. Are there clear research questions?	X	X	X			All articles provided clear research aims.
	2. Do the collected data address the research questions?	X	X	X			All articles collected data relevant to research questions.
	Further appraisal may not be feasible or appropriate when the answer is 'No' or 'can't tell' to one or both screening questions.						
Article for quality review	**Morris, R., & Atkinson, C. (2018).** How can educational psychologists work within further education to support young people's mental health? An appreciative inquiry. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, *23*(3), 285-313.						
1. Qualitative	1. Is the qualitative approach appropriate to answer the research question?	X					Appreciative inquiry (AI) was used to explore the research question through four focus groups.
	1.2. Are the qualitative data collection methods adequate to address the research question?	X					Data were analysed through narrative discussions and a Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).
	1.3. Are the findings adequately derived from the data?	X					An overview of the AI sessions and themes and subthemes derived from the data is provided. Direct quotes are used to illustrate themes and subthemes.

	1.4. Is the interpretation of results sufficiently substantiated by data?	**X**			Direct quotes are used to illustrate themes and subthemes.
	1.5. Is there coherence between qualitative data sources, collection, analysis and interpretation?	**X**			Yes.
2. Quantitative randomised controlled trials	2.1. Is randomization appropriately performed?				
	2.2. Are the groups comparable at baseline?				
	2.3. Are there complete outcome data?				
	2.4. Are outcome assessors blinded to the intervention provided?				
	2.5 Did the participants adhere to the assigned intervention?				
3. Qualitative non-randomised	3.1. Are the participants representative of the target population?				
	3.2. Are measurements appropriate regarding both the outcome and intervention (or exposure)?				
	3.3. Are there complete outcome data?				
	3.4. Are the confounders accounted for in the design and analysis?				
	3.5. During the study period, is the intervention administered (or exposure occurred) as intended?				
Article for quality review	**Greig, A., MacKay, T., & Ginter, L. (2019).** Supporting the mental health of children and young people: a survey of Scottish educational psychology services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, *35*(3), 257-270.				
4. Quantitative descriptive	4.1. Is the sampling strategy relevant to address the research question	**X**			All PEPs across Scotland were sent a survey. The study aimed to establish current practice in supporting CYP's MH and wellbeing. By identifying

		X			best practice and key barriers to supporting said needs.
	4.2. Is the sample representative of the target population?	X			Yes. All PEPs across Scotland were invited to take part in the study.
	4.3. Are the measurements appropriate?	X			The survey allowed the researchers to gather data from 19 LAs across Scotland.
	4.4. Is the risk of nonresponse bias low?			X	Nonresponse bias is not explicitly discussed within the article.
	4.5. Is the statistical analysis appropriate to answer the research question?	X			Descriptive statistics are used to answer the research question.
Article for quality review	**Price, R. (2017).** *The role of the educational psychologist in children and young people's mental health: an explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).				
5. Mixed methods	5.1. Is there an adequate rationale for using a mixed methods design to address the research question?			X	However, rationale for utilising mixed methods is discussed.
	5.2. Are the different components of the study effectively integrated to answer the research question?	X			A synthesis of quantitative and qualitative data is provided within the discussion.
	5.3. Are the outputs of the integration of qualitative and quantitative components adequately interpreted?	X			The relationship between descriptive statistics and

				themes and subthemes are discussed.
5.4. Are divergences and inconsistencies between quantitative and qualitative results adequately addressed?	X			Perceived discrepancies are discussed within the discussion section.
5.5. Do the different components of the study adhere to the quality criteria of each tradition of the methods involved?	X			Each component appears to adhere to the quality criteria for each method employed,

Qualitative		**Morris, R., & Atkinson, C. (2018).** How can educational psychologists work within further education to support young people's mental health? An appreciative inquiry. *Research in Post-Compulsory Education*, 23(3), 285-313.
Quantitative		**Greig, A., MacKay, T., & Ginter, L. (2019).** Supporting the mental health of children and young people: a survey of Scottish educational psychology services. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 35(3), 257-270.
Mixed methods		**Price, R. (2017).** *The role of the educational psychologist in children and young people's mental health: an explorative study in Wales* (Doctoral dissertation, Cardiff University).

Appendix 6 - Gatekeeper Letter (email)

Dear Chair of the National Association for Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) Wales,

My name is Eve Munkley and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist on Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy). I am writing to you, as chair of NAPEP Cymru, to ask whether you would consider disseminating the attached information sheet regarding my doctoral thesis research to Principal Educational Psychologists (PEP) within Wales.

My research is concerned with gathering PEP's perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting MH and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. It is hoped that these findings will add an additional dimension to research which has previously explored the role of the EP in supporting the mental health needs of CYP in Wales (Price, 2017) by exploring the views of PEPs as strategic leaders for EPSs and within the wider Local Authority (LA) education directorate.

I ask whether, following the dissemination of my research information sheet and recruitment poster (attached), you are able to provide me with the email addresses of those who express interest in taking part in my research. This will allow me to provide them with a consent form and to organise a date/time for an interview.

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely,
Eve Munkley

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Are you a Principal / Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist of an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in Wales?

This research is being carried out as part of a doctoral thesis by Eve Munkley, a Trainee Educational Psychologist at Cardiff University. The research aims to explore Principal / Deputy Principal Educational Psychologists' views of EPS service delivery in relation to supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of Children and Young People (CYP) in Wales following COVID-19.

WHO CAN PARTICIPATE?

- Principal / Deputy Principal Educational Psychologist's of an EPS in Wales who have worked in their current role (within the same Local Authority) for at least one academic year

WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?

- A 40–60 minute semi-structured interview in-person OR via Microsoft Teams (dependant on participant preference)

How do I participate?

If you would like to participate in this research, please contact the researcher to arrange an interview:

Researcher: Eve Munkley

MunkleyEC@cardiff.ac.uk

This research is being supervised by Dr Ian Smillie (**smillie@cardiff.ac.uk**) and has been approved by Cardiff University's Ethics Committee (23.02.07.6746)

Appendix 8 – Participant Information Sheet

Information Sheet

Principal Educational Psychologist's (PEP's) Perspectives of Educational Psychology Service Delivery to Support the Mental Health Needs and Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People (CYP) in Wales

This research is concerned with gathering the Principal Educational Psychologist's (PEP's) perspectives of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the mental health and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19. It is hoped that these findings will add an additional dimension to research which has previously explored the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice in Wales (e.g., Price, 2017; Sade, 2019) by exploring the views of PEPs as strategic leaders of EPSs.

What is the purpose of this study?

This research is concerned with gathering the perspectives of PEPs as strategic leaders concerning EPS delivery to support the mental health and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate because you are either a PEP or Deputy PEP of an EPS within a Local Authority in Wales. In order to participate, you must have held this role within your current LA for at least one academic year.

What happens if I decide to participate?

If you would like to participate in the research, please email the researcher (munkleyec@cardiff.ac.uk) who will then contact you to arrange a date/time for a **face-to-face** semi-structured interview **or** provide you with a **Microsoft Teams** link should you wish to complete the interview virtually.

The semi-structured interview is expected to last approximately **40 – 60 minutes** and will involve the researcher guiding a discussion around your views on EPS service delivery in relation to supporting the mental health and wellbeing needs of CYP in Wales following COVID-19. As the interview is semi-structured in nature, the interviewer has some pre-set questions to guide a discussion but is also able to follow-up on points of interest.

Face-to-Face interview

If you opt for a face-to-face interview, the interview will be recorded with the use of a password secure recording device (the researcher's phone) where it will be stored in an encrypted file. Up to two weeks following the recording of the interview, the recording will be transcribed and made anonymous with the use of a participant number to replace your name, and the removal of any personally identifiable information. Following transcription, the recording will be deleted.

Should you wish to withdraw your data for any reason, you are able to contact the researcher to redact your data up to two weeks following the interview. After the two-week period, when the interview data will be transcribed and anonymised, you will not be able to withdraw your data as it will not be possible to personally identify individual participants via the data beyond this point. Following transcription and anonymisation, the recording will be deleted.

OR..

Online Interview

If you opt for a Microsoft Teams interview, you will be sent a Microsoft Teams link connected to the researcher's university account. The interview will be recorded both visually and auditorily, as to the researcher's current knowledge, this is the only available recording function on Microsoft Teams. However, you will be given the choice as to whether you keep your camera on or off during the interview should you wish not to be visually recorded.

The recording will be stored anonymously in a password-protected electronic file on the researcher's password-protected laptop which only the researcher has access to. The Microsoft Teams recording will be transcribed (written up) and anonymised by

randomly allocating each participant a number to represent them for the purpose of analysis (i.e., knowing who said what within the transcription) and by removing any personally identifiable information (i.e., names of colleagues, geographical areas, etc) discussed during the interview.

Should you wish to withdraw your data for any reason, you are able to contact the researcher to redact your data up to two weeks following the interview. After the two-week period, when the interview data will be transcribed and anonymised, you will not be able to withdraw your data as it will not be possible to personally identify individual participants via the data beyond this point. Following transcription and anonymisation, the recording will be deleted.

What are the benefits or risks of taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you taking part in this research. However, your data will be used to contribute to an increased understanding of how EPS delivery can support the MH needs of CYP in Wales.

I do not foresee any risks to yourself from participating in this research, however you can find my contact details below if you have any questions before or after the research has taken place.

This project has been reviewed and ethically approved by the Cardiff University's School of Psychology Ethics Committee.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any point up until the transcription process (up to two weeks following the interview). This is because, after this point, your data will be made anonymous via the use of a participant number to replace participant names, and the removal of any personally identifiable information. As such, when your data has become anonymised, it can no longer be traced to you and cannot, therefore be removed from the research.

What will happen to my information?

The interview which will take place either face-to-face or online via Microsoft Teams will be securely stored either on the researcher's secure, password protected

recording device (phone) within an encrypted file **OR,** securely stored on the researcher's secure, password protected laptop until it has until it has been transcribed, anonymised, and destroyed. The anonymous transcript, as well as your consent forms (which are not linked to your data in any way) will be stored per the Research Records and Retention Schedule (a minimum period of 5 years following the end of the project or following publication of the findings – whichever is later) following which, it will be deleted.

How do you protect my privacy?

Participant email addresses and consent forms will be stored on the researcher's password-protected secure laptop in a password-protected electronic file. Only the researcher will have access to this laptop. Email addresses and consent forms will be securely stored (on the researcher's password-protected secure laptop) per the Research Records and Retention Schedule (a minimum period of 5 years following the end of the project or following publication of the findings – whichever is later) following which, it will be deleted. All names and personal information will be removed from the interview transcript and participant names will be replaced by a randomly allocated research number. Any identifiable information (e.g., names) discussed during the interview will be removed during transcription. As such, following the point of transcription, it will not be possible to identify an individual from the transcript. Additionally, no individuals will be identifiable in the final report.

How do I find out about the results?

This research is to be used as a course requirement on the DEdPsy course at Cardiff University. The findings will be submitted to Cardiff University and may be disseminated in the form of an academic journal.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact details of Researcher:

Eve Munkley, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: munkleyec@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of Research Supervisor:

Dr Ian Smillie, Course Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: smillie@cardiff.ac.uk

Privacy Notice:

The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and Matt Cooper is the data protection officer (inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for processing this information is public interest. Information is being collected by Eve Munkley.

The information on the consent form that you will be provided will be held securely and separately from the research information. Only the researcher will have access to this form and it will be destroyed after 7 years.

The research information you provide will be used for the purposes of research only and will be stored securely. Only the researcher will have access to this information.

If you would like to make a complaint about the study, further contact details can be found here:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 2087 0707
Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be

contacted at inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk. Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/supporting-your-work/manage-use-and-protect-data/data-protection

Appendix 9 – Follow-up / Reminder Recruitment Email

Dear Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) of X [name of LA] Local Authority,

My name is Eve Munkley and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist on Cardiff University's Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy). I have recently been provided with your contact details, as a PEP of an LA EPS in Wales, by the Chair of NAPEP Cymru.

I am writing to you, as the PEP of X [name of LA] to invite you to take part in my doctoral research which is focussed on PEP's perceptions of EPS delivery in relation to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales. It is hoped that my research will add an additional dimension to research which has previously explored the role of the EP in relation to this area of practice, within Wales (e.g., Price, 2017; Slade, 2019), by exploring the views of PEPs as strategic leaders for EPSs.

I have attached a recruitment poster and participant information sheet to this email for more information. Please do not hesitate to ask any questions.

If you would like to arrange an interview sometime over the coming weeks, either in-person or online, please do get in touch and we can begin to arrange a date and time for an interview. I will also provide you with the participant consent form should you wish to participate in the research.

Thank you very much in advance and I look forward to hearing from you.

Best wishes,

Eve Munkley

Appendix 10 – Participant Consent Form

Consent Form

Principal Educational Psychologist's (PEP's) Perspectives of Educational Psychology Service Delivery to Support the Mental Health Needs and Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People (CYP) in Wales

	Please tick if you agree
I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I confirm that I am a Principal Educational Psychologist (PEP) or Deputy PEP of an Educational Psychology Service within a Local Authority (LA) in Wales.	
I confirm that I have worked as a PEP / Deputy PEP within my current LA for at least one academic year.	
I confirm that I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I confirm that I understand that the researcher would like to conduct a semi-structured interview with myself either in person, or via Microsoft Teams which should last approximately **40-60 minutes** and will be recorded to aid with the transcription and analysis of the data. I understand that interviews conducted via Microsoft Teams will be recorded both visually and auditorily.	
I understand that I do not have to answer all (or any) of the questions during the semi-structured interview.	

If I wish the interview to be conducted via Microsoft Teams, I confirm that I understand that I have the choice as to whether I leave my camera on or turn if off prior to the Microsoft Teams call being recorded.	
If I wish the interview to be conducted via Microsoft Teams, I confirm that I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially by the researcher via a password protected file on the researcher's secure, password protected laptop until the interview is transcribed (up to 2 weeks following the interview). Following transcription, my data will be made anonymous via the use of research numbers to represent each participant and the deletion of any identifiable information such as names of colleagues, geographical areas, etc. **OR; If I wish the interview to be conducted in-person,** I confirm that I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially by the researcher using a secure, password protected recording device (researcher's phone) and stored within an end-to-end encrypted file until the interview is transcribed (up to 2 weeks following the interview). Following transcription, my data will be made anonymous via the use of research numbers to represent each participant and the deletion of any identifiable information such as names of colleagues, geographical areas, etc.	
I understand that my data from the interview will be transcribed and anonymised within two weeks following the interview. I understand that I can ask for the information I have provided to be deleted/destroyed up until the time the data has been transcribed and anonymised. I understand that after this time, the information will no longer be identifiable to myself, and, thus, will not be possible to withdraw.	
I understand that the researcher's supervisor may have access to anonymised data during supervision. However, other than the researcher and research supervisor, the anonymised data will not be available to anyone else.	

I understand that the personal data will be processed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).	

Participant Signature: _____   Date: _____

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN MY RESEARCH!

Contact details of Researcher: Eve Munkley, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
Email: munkleyec@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of Research Supervisor: Dr Ian Smillie, Course Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: smillie@cardiff.ac.uk

If you would like to make a complaint about the study, further contact details can be found here:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 2087 0707
Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

Cardiff University is the Data Controller and is committed to respecting and protecting your personal data in accordance with your expectations and Data

Protection legislation. The University has a Data Protection Officer who can be contacted at <u>inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk</u>. Further information about Data Protection, including your rights and details about how to contact the Information Commissioner's Office should you wish to complain, can be found at the following: https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/supporting-your-work/manage-use-and-protect-data/data-protection

Appendix 11 - Interview Schedule

<div style="text-align: center;">

Interview Schedule

</div>

This interview guide is based on McCartan and Robson's (2016) schedule of interview questions. As this is a guide, it does not, therefore, need be strictly adhered to.

1) Introductory Period

- Introduce myself and explain why I am conducting the research.

"I'm interested in talking today about Educational Psychology Service delivery in relation to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Wales following COVID-19. I am really interested in your perspective and experience as a strategic leader of an Educational Psychology Service; particularly in relation to how you feel your service has or hasn't changed in relation to the increasing mental health needs of children and young people following the covid-19 pandemic."

Provide definitions of mental health and emotional wellbeing as per WG (2001) and ask if further clarification is needed.

"I am hoping that you have had a chance to read the information sheet and consent form that was sent to you, and I would like to remind you that anything we talk about will remain confidential up until the point that this interview recording is transcribed, at which point all data will be made anonymous. There are no right or wrong answers so please don't worry about the responses you give. I'm only interested in your experiences and opinions. As this is a semi-structured interview, I have some pre-set questions that I have prepared to guide our conversation. However, due to the semi-structured nature, there is scope for us to expand on elements of the interview that may be of interest. You are in no way obliged to answer all questions."

- Give participants opportunity to ask any questions that they might have.
- Inform the participants that they can take a break at any time should they wish, and they can withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of transcription (up to 2 weeks post-interview).
- Ask permission to record the interview and make the participants ware that I may make some notes throughout.

2) 'Warm-up' Period

- Would you like to start by introducing yourself?
- How long have you worked as a PEP / Deputy PEP for [insert name] local authority?
- How long have you worked as an EP?

3) Main Body of the Interview

Main questions are presented in bold.

Prompts are listed in Italics.

1. **What is your view of the role of the EP in relation to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people?**

   a) *Has this changed over time? How about following COVID-19?*
   b) *How has the role of the EP has changed following covid-19?*

2. **What does your current model of service delivery look like and what are your thoughts on how it contributes to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Wales following COVID-19?**

   a) *Why do you think this?*

3. **Do you think the delivery of your educational psychology service has changed following the COVID-19 pandemic?**

   a) *In what way?*
   b) *How about in relation to the increase in children and young people's mental health needs?*

4. **From a service-delivery point of view, what do you think the barriers are to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Wales following COVID-19?**

   a) *Why do you think this?*
   b) *Do you feel this is unique to Wales?*
   c) *How about the facilitators?*

5. **From a wider LA point of view, what do you think the barriers are to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of children and young people in Wales?**

   a) *Why do you think this?*
   b) *Do you feel this is unique to Wales?*
   c) *How about the facilitators?*

6. **What are your thoughts on how your educational psychology service may look in the future in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP following COVID-19?**

   a) *Short term v long term plan?*

Generic prompts

- *How?*
- *Can you say a bit more?*
- *Can I push you a bit further?*
- *What was that like?*

- *What do you mean by…? What did that mean to you?*

4) *'Cool-off' period*

"Thank you so much for sharing your thoughts. That's everything that I had ask you about today"

'Clean up' question: *is there anything anyone would like to say or any things you'd like to follow up on that I haven't asked you? Do you have any questions?*

5) *Closure period*

"Thank you so much for allowing me to talk to you about this today, if you have any further questions or queries, please don't hesitate to contact me or my research supervisor, both of our details can be found on the debrief form which will be emailed to you shortly".

Appendix 12 - Participant Debrief Form

Debrief Form

Principal Educational Psychologists (PEP's) Perspectives of Educational Psychology Service Delivery to Support the Mental Health Needs and Emotional Wellbeing of Children and Young People (CYP) in Wales

Thank you for participating in this research project. The aim of this research is to explore Principal Educational Psychologist's (PEP's) perspectives of Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in relation to supporting the mental health needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales following COVID-19.

As this is an exploratory study, I have no specific hypotheses to explore. I aim to interpret the data obtained during the interviews using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This will enable me to generate themes to form a deeper understanding of your perspective.

Before participating in this research, you were provided with an information sheet and were asked to provide signed informed consent. This included providing a consent for you to be recorded (both visually and auditorily) for the researcher's use as an aid for analysing and interpreting the data.

All responses given by yourself will be held confidentially in a password-protected electronic file on the researchers secure, password protected laptop until the interview has been transcribed (up to 2 weeks following the interview). Once transcribed, the Microsoft Teams recording will be deleted and the transcript will be made anonymous with the use of research numbers to replace names, and the removal of any personally identifiable information.

Please note that you can withdraw your data at any time up until the interview has been transcribed, which will be approximately up to 2 weeks after the interview. Following this period, you will not be able to withdraw your data as it will not be identifiable and therefore cannot be destroyed.

This research is to be used as a course requirement on the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) course at Cardiff University. The results will be submitted to the university and may be published in an academic journal.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact details of Researcher: Eve Munkley, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
Email: munkleyec@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of Research Supervisor: Dr Ian Smillie, Course Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: smillie@cardiff.ac.uk

If you would like to make a complaint about the study, further contact details can be found here:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology
Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT
Tel: 029 2087 0707

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

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Appendix 13 - Criteria for Validity (Yardley, 2000; 2015)

Core Principles and Criteria for Validity of Research (Yardley, 2000; 2015)	Steps to Satisfy Criteria
Sensitivity to Context.	- A research proposal was submitted and ethical approval was gained from Cardiff University's Ethics Committee. - A thorough narrative literature review was conducted to support the researcher's understanding of the topic through previous, relevant literature (see Part One of the Thesis). - Participants provided informed consent prior to partaking in an individual, semi-structured interview. Participants were given the choice as to whether the interview was conducted in-person, or online via Microsoft Teams via the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 10). Participants were also given the opportunity to ask questions directly before the main body of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11). - Participants were informed that their in-person or Microsoft Teams interview would be recorded (the latter being recorded both visually and auditorily). Participants were given the choice to turn their cameras off should they wish via the Participant Consent Form (see Appendix 10). Participants were also reminded of this during the 'introductory period' (McCartan & Robson, 2016) of the interview schedule (see Appendix 11). - The interview schedule was used as a guide to allow space for participants to share relevant information, to resemble a flowing conversation (Choak, 2012).

	• Participants were debriefed both verbally during the 'Closure period' of the interview schedule (McCarten & Robson, 2016) and via the debrief form (see Appendix 12). The debrief form (see Appendix 12) included information about the data transcription and anonymisation process as well as how participants could withdraw their data from the research. • The relevance and contribution to EP practice is discussed along with implications for EPSs and wider systems (see Table 16 in Part Two D of the thesis).
Commitment and Rigour.	• A reflexive research diary was used (see Part Three of the thesis) which allowed the researcher to reflect on the research process, from the inception of the research idea through to the process of writing up. • The researcher engaged in regular supervision throughout the research process. • Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2021) was used to analyse the data. This involved the researcher utilising the guidelines and six-phased approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2022a). Details of this process can be found in Part Two and Part Three of the Thesis. • The interview schedule (see Appendix 11) was developed through discussion with the researcher's research supervisor. The interview schedule was also piloted with a fellow Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP). • An inductive approach was adopted to limit researcher bias. The narrative literature review presented in Part One of the Thesis was formulated following the completion of data analysis. This allowed the researcher to remain close to the data. The researcher also

	revisited the original dataset following theme development to ensure that themes felt representative of participants' narratives. • The researcher remained immersed in the data through transcription and coding / theming. Substantial time and commitment were given to data analysis to enhance its rigour. • Further evidence of analysis can be found in Appendix 14 - 18.
Coherence and Transparency.	• A clear rationale for the current research was provided through a narrative literature review. • The researcher reflected upon their own positioning and how this may have impacted upon the research (see Part Three A of the thesis). • Each step of the research process has been outlined in detail in Part Two and Three of the Thesis and throughout the Appendices. • A clear account of the research has been offered through the Appendices of the Thesis. A critical reflection of the decision making involved throughout the current research can be found in Part Three of the Thesis. • The epistemological and ontological perspectives were carefully considered and reflected on during supervision before the research design was developed. • Two participants were previously known to the researcher in a professional capacity. This was highlighted in research supervision by the researcher. Steps were taken to ensure the role of the researcher was maintained. Confidentiality and anonymity of the participant was ensured throughout the transcription process. • For transparency, an example of coding during the familiarisation stage of RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022) can be found in Appendix 14.

	• The development of the thematic map is illustrated in Appendix 18. The final thematic map is provided within Part Two C of the thesis (see Figure 9). Further reflections on this process are offered in Part Three A of the thesis.
Impact and Importance.	• A significant gap in the literature was identified after a comprehensive search of databases and grey literature. • The current research and research questions were developed to gain an initial understanding of the topic. • The researcher considered the importance of the current research as well as implications for Educational Psychology Services (EPSs), Educational Psychologists (EPs) and wider systems. These are discussed in Part Two D of the thesis (see Table 16) along with the acknowledgement of the limitations of the current research (see Table 17). • The researcher's dissemination plan of the findings is explored in Part Three A (see Table X) alongside an exploration of the impact of the findings on the researcher's professional practice.

References (not already included within Parts One, Two or Three the Thesis):

Choak, C. 2012. Asking questions: Interviews and evaluations. In: *Research and research methods for youth practitioners*, S. Bradford and F. Cullen, eds. London: Routledge, 90-112.

Appendix 14 - Familiarisation of the Dataset (Stage 1 of RTA)

374
375 So, I think…. yeah, I think the emotional well-being of school staff is a bit of a barrier and it
376 would be great if we had more capacity to do more around that. I mean, we, I don't know
377 whether this is going to go into your second question, but our staff wellbeing group, we
378 know schools want it. We know staff want it, but they can't get the release time.
379
380 So, for the interventions, we always want to have a member of school staff present so they
381 can continue that work, you know, the group interventions, and often schools can't… staff
382 can't get the release time because we've got a shortage of TAs in South Wales, possibly
383 across Wales. So, it feels as if we have a lot to offer. But our hands tied which is linked to
384 things like staffing levels in schools.
385
386 And then we've got a recruitment issue for EPs, particularly in South Wales, but it's actually
387 across all of Wales. So, if we can't get the EPs, we have to change our allocation to schools
388 at a time that schools are in desperate need of our service. So yeah, so that's, I suppose the
389 biggest one from the service delivery point of view.
390
391 We do as much we… we probably do more work than any other LA in Wales around EBSA
392 and more direct pupil work. But, if it's become such an entrenched issue for the child or
393 young person, that they're not leaving the house, not having any social contact, even online,
394 then it's beyond the remit of our service…and then we have the barrier where it's really a
395 CAMHS issue…. but if the child or young person doesn't engage with CAMHS… they're just
396 struck off a list. So yeah…. it's those sorts of things that are barriers for us to supporting
397 children's mental health needs.
398
399 **Researcher:**
400 Okay, thank you. Very much. I'm kind of on that same kind of level. How about the
401 facilitators to that from that service level point of view?
402
403 **PP6:**
404 I think all the training we provide helps to support staffs' understanding and helps to give
405 them the skills or the tools to support children and young people's mental health needs. I
406 think we work closely with other teams… so we work closely with CAMHS in-reach service,
407 luckily, in all of our schools, to look at how we can work together about what's more a
408 CAMHS role and what's more of an EPS role, and to ensure that the information that schools
409 are getting is consistent, not contradictory.
410
411 I chair a pastoral lead… secondary pastoral leads Forum, which is a termly meeting… so that
412 that helps for me to hear what's going on, on the ground… and it helps in the sense that
413 they share what's working in their schools. They can showcase what they're doing around
414 pupil's emotional well-being and then schools can pick up ideas…. we have speakers in but
415 what schools appreciate the most is that opportunity to discuss ideas with their colleagues.
416 So that that that's quite a facilitator,
417
418 And… obviously…. as a service, but we've had to have quite a lot of training. ourselves to
419 look at increasing our own understanding so that we can then support schools in terms of
420 their awareness.

Eve Munkley
Staff wellbeing as a barrier to
effective EPS delivery to
support MH needs of CYP

View 1 more reply

Eve Munkley
Schools find it difficult to
release staff

Eve Munkley
Schools find it difficult to
release staff

Eve Munkley
Recruitment and retention
difficulties as a Barrier to EPS
delivery

Eve Munkley
EPSs are not at full capacity
(EP staffing)

Eve Munkley
EBSA as a barrier to EPSs
supporting MH needs of CYP

Eve Munkley
EPSs in opposition with
CAMHs

Eve Munkley
EPSs work closely with
CAMHS

Appendix 15 – Generation of Initial Codes (Stage 2 of RTA)

EPSs to be more person-centred.	Knowing where to signpost as a facilitator.	Supporting MH needs as an integral.	A focus on implementation science in the future.
A focus on emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).	Online working as a facilitator.	EPSs focus as preventative.	The pressure to be outcome orientated as a barrier.
EPSs contribution to LA strategy as a facilitator.	Online working has improved communication between services.	COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. EPS delivery.	A focus on skill development following COVID-19.
Online working has improved training.	EPSs are more explicit in their application of psychology.	Pressure is placed on EPSs from 'above'.	EPs empower adults around CYP
Team cohesion as a facilitator.	Whole-school approaches as a facilitator.	EPS reflection spaces as a facilitator.	A faster pace of EPS delivery.
EPSs to continue to focus on EBSA.	PEP support system as a facilitator.	Co-construction as a goal moving forward	Collaboration as opposed to communication.
Online working has increased efficiency.	Online working has increased efficiency.	Different constructions of the EP role.	EPSs to focus on being more person-centred.
EPSs to focus more on supporting parents.	Trauma-informed training within the EPS as a facilitator	EPs as well-positioned to support MH needs	Consultation at the core.
EPSs to focus on improving efficiency.	EPSs to continue to build capacity of school staff.	The development of staff wellbeing groups.	EPs as collaborative.
EPSs to collaborate more with other services.	EPSs to be responsive to changes in funding.	Emotionally available adults.	Low levels of statutory work as a facilitator.

COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. the EP role.	EPs as individuals with unique interests.	EPSs to support the enhancement of EP competency.	Increased focus on upskilling school staff.
EPSs to focus on creating online training.	Trauma-informed training across the LA as a facilitator.	Trauma-informed approaches as a facilitator.	Assistant EPs as integral.
Implementation science within EPSs.	Online training as more effective.	EPs identify need.	EPs impact as indirect.
EPs as psychologically informed practitioners.	EPSs to focus on collaboration rather than communication.	Recruitment and retention as a barrier.	Group consultation.
Uncertainty about future EPS delivery based on uncertain funding.	An increased focus on pupil-voice. Stressed school systems as a barrier.	Capacity building as important. Insufficient funding as a barrier EPS delivery.	A focus on capacity building. EPs challenge the 'within-child' model
PEPs are not always emotionally available for their team.	A focus on cultivating emotionally available adults.	Direct work with CYP as a challenge for EPs.	EPSs work in a traumatised system.
Collaboration with health.	EPSs as actively trying to find time.	EPs promote pupil voice.	Assistant EPs engagement in direct work with CYP.
Multi-level working.	Relational approaches as a focus.	EPs as individuals with unique experiences.	Multi-level working.
EPSs as actively encouraging a gradual response	The ALN Code (2021) and the new Curriculum for Wales as stressors for schools.	Bespoke training offer.	Assistant EPs delivery of training.

EPSs as advocates for trauma-informed approaches.	PEPs with one foot in management and another on the ground.	EPs refer on.	Statutory work as a barrier.
Ringfenced time for project work.	Solution focussed approaches are adopted.	Multidisciplinary working.	EPs engage in direct work.
Online, recorded training.	EPSs as advocates for the whole-school approach to wellbeing.	Working with systems around CYP.	Trauma-informed schools as a focus.
Closed systems as a barrier.	The construction of the EP as a gatekeeper.	Pressure on schools to meet attainment targets	A wellbeing training offer.
Therapeutic approaches are embedded.	EPSs in opposition with CAMHS.	EPSs are engaging in research.	ESTYN as a barrier.
Time allocation model as a challenge for responsiveness.	Trauma-informed approaches are embedded.	EPSs evaluate the impact of their work	EPSs work in an under-resourced system.
Skill development of EPS staff as important	The EP role has evolved.	EPSs use a time allocation model.	EPs can't give enough time.
Collaboration with other services.	Individual consultation.	LAs valuing EPSs.	Delegation of responsibility.
Increased focus on supporting school staff.	Increase in project work around MH needs.	Systems want EPs to solve problems. EPs work with adults around CYP.	Recruitment and retention as a barrier.
Fixed mindsets as a barrier.	EPs work preventatively.	Whole-school approaches grant as a facilitator.	Early intervention as a focus.
Working with systems around CYP.	EP as the expert as problematic	EPSs have finite resources.	Specialist EP roles.

School recruitment and retention difficulties as a barrier.	The EP role as unclear.	ELSA training and supervision as integral	Assistant EPs delivery of interventions with CYP
EPSs as advocates for relational approaches.	Stressed school systems as a barrier.	Strategic work in the LA.	A phased approach to service delivery.
EPs contribution is via consultation.	CYP's MH / wellbeing and their academic ability are enmeshed.	COVID-19 is not solely responsible for CYP's current MH / wellbeing needs.	COVID-19 has highlighted the MH / wellbeing needs of CYP.
COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of MH / wellbeing.	CYP's MH / wellbeing influences their ability to utilise their skills.	EBSA as an example of MH needs.	Adults' MH / wellbeing influences CYP's MH / wellbeing.
Increased complexity of need following COVID-19.	COVID-19 offered a breathing space for the development of EPSs.	COVID-19 coincided with significant changes in the education system.	EPSs are noticing an increase in attendance difficulties in CYP.

Appendix 16 – Colour Categorisation of Codes

Role of EP/EPS in supporting MH needs of CYP	Current EPS delivery and how this supports MH needs of CYP	Current EPS delivery following COVID-19 (any changes, etc)	Barrier to EPS delivery in meeting the MH needs of CYP	Facilitators to EPS delivery in relation to meeting MH needs of CYP	Future hopes for EPS delivery in relation to meeting MH needs of CYP
Supporting MH needs as an integral. The EP role has evolved. EPs empower adults around CYP. EPs as well-positioned to support MH needs. EPs as collaborative. EPs identify need. EPs impact as indirect.	EPSs focus as preventative. Early intervention as a focus. EPSs use a time allocation model. The absence of a time allocation model. Consultation at the core. Individual consultation. Group consultation. A phased approach to service delivery. Assistant EPs as integral.	COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. EPS delivery. A focus on skill development following COVID-19. A faster pace of EPS delivery. Increase in project work around MH needs. The development of staff wellbeing groups. Increased focus on upskilling school staff.	Pressure is placed on EPSs from 'above'. The pressure to be outcome orientated as a barrier. Delegation of responsibility. Different constructions of the EP role. Systems want EPs to solve problems. EPs can't give enough time. Insufficient funding as a barrier EPS delivery. Recruitment and retention as a barrier.	EPS reflection spaces as a facilitator. Collaboration with other services. Collaboration as opposed to communication. LAs valuing EPSs. Emotionally available adults. Low levels of statutory work as a facilitator. Whole-school approaches grant as a facilitator.	Co-construction as a goal moving forward. A focus on implementation science in the future. Skill development of EPS staff as important. EPSs to focus on being more person-centred. EPSs to support the enhancement of EP competency. EPSs to support the enhancement of EP confidence. EPSs to adopt multiple lenses to their work.

Capacity building as important.	A focus on capacity building.	Increased focus on supporting school staff.	EPSs work in a traumatised system.	Trauma-informed approaches as a facilitator.	EPSs to use pupil voice to steer their service.
EPs work preventatively.	Assistant EPs engagement in direct work with CYP.	A focus on emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).	EPSs work in an under-resourced system.	Trauma-informed training across the LA as a facilitator.	EPSs to be more person-centred.
EPs challenge the 'within-child' model.	Assistant EPs delivery of training.	EPSs are more explicit in their application of psychology.	EPSs have finite resources.	Trauma-informed training within the EPS as a facilitator.	EPSs to continue to build capacity of school staff.
EPs promote pupil voice.	Assistant EPs delivery of interventions with CYP.	Online working as a facilitator.	Stressed school systems as a barrier.	Whole-school approaches as a facilitator.	EPSs to focus more on supporting parents.
EPs contribution is via consultation.	A wellbeing training offer.	Online working has increased efficiency.	School recruitment and retention difficulties as a barrier.	The use of therapeutic approaches as a facilitator.	EPSs to continue to focus on EBSA.
Multi-level working.	Working with systems around CYP.	Online working has improved training.	Time allocation model as a challenge for responsiveness.		EPSs to be responsive to changes in funding.
EPs work with adults around CYP.	ELSA training and supervision as integral.	Online working has improved communication between services.	Pressure on schools to meet attainment targets.	EPSs contribution to LA strategy as a facilitator.	EPSs to focus on creating online training.
EPs engage in direct work.	Bespoke training offer.		EP as the expert as problematic.	Knowing where to signpost as a facilitator.	EPSs to focus on improving efficiency.
Direct work with CYP as a challenge for EPs.	Strategic work in the LA.	Online working has improved communication between services.	Closed systems as a barrier.		EPSs to collaborate more with other services.
	Trauma-informed schools as a focus.		Statutory work as a barrier.	PEP support system as a facilitator.	
EPs refer on.	Multidisciplinary working.	Online training as more effective.			

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The EP role as unclear.	Specialist EP roles.	An increased focus on pupil-voice.	ESTYN as a barrier.	Team cohesion as a facilitator.	EPSs to focus on collaboration rather than communication.
EPs as individuals with unique experiences.	A focus on cultivating emotionally available adults.		A need for equitability as a barrier.	LAs recognition of the need to support CYP's MH needs.	Trauma-informed schools as a priority moving forward.
EPs as individuals with unique interests.	Collaboration with health.		Welsh Government do not understand the EP role.	EPs in positions of managerial responsibility within the LA.	All schools will receive trauma-informed training next year.
EPs as psychologically informed practitioners.	Implementation science within EPSs.		Construction of the EP as an expert.	Professional autonomy within the LA.	EPSs to engage in more research.
COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. the EP role.	EPSs as actively trying to find time.		Staff wellbeing as a barrier.	LAs valuing person-centred work.	EPSs to continue with holistic approach.
	Relational approaches as a focus.		Difficulties to engage in direct work as a barrier.	A shared vision of the EPS.	EPSs to ensure service delivery is informed by research.
	EPSs as advocates for relational approaches.		Fixed-term contracts as a barrier.	Shared understanding of the EP role.	The hope for fewer fixed-term contracts.
	EPSs as advocates for the whole-school approach to wellbeing.		Schools' difficulty releasing staff.	Shared understanding of the EPS	
	EPSs as advocates for trauma-informed approaches.		School budget cuts as a barrier.		
	Multi-level working.		EPs will work as well as the EPS is treated within the LA.		

	Solution focussed approaches are adopted.

Therapeutic approaches are embedded.

Trauma-informed approaches are embedded.

Online, recorded training.

PEPs with one foot in management and another on the ground.

Ringfenced time for project work.

EPSs are engaging in research.

EPSs evaluate the impact of their work.

EPSs as actively encouraging a gradual response | | EPSs can be isolated from other related services.

Fixed mindsets as a barrier.

The ALN Code (2021) and the new Curriculum for Wales as stressors for schools.

Uncertainty about future EPS delivery based on uncertain funding.

PEPs are not always emotionally available for their team.

The construction of the EP as a gatekeeper.

EPSs in opposition with CAMHS. | | |

Constructions of MH / Wellbeing	Constructions of Impact of COVID-19 on MH
CYP's MH / wellbeing and their academic ability are enmeshed.	COVID-19 has highlighted the MH / wellbeing needs of CYP.
CYP's MH / wellbeing influences their ability to self-actualise.	COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of MH / wellbeing.
CYP's MH / wellbeing influences their ability to utilise their skills.	COVID-19 is not solely responsible for CYP's current MH / wellbeing needs.
Adults' MH / wellbeing influences CYP's MH / wellbeing.	EPSs are noticing an increase in attendance difficulties in CYP.
EBSA as an example of MH needs.	Increased complexity of need following COVID-19.
	COVID-19 offered a breathing space for the development of EPSs.
	COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change.
	Online working as a facilitator.
	Online working has increased efficiency.
	Online working has improved training.
	Online working has improved communication between services.
	Online training as more efficient.
	Increased demand for MH support following COVID-19.
	COVID-19 coincided with significant changes in the education system.

Ringfenced time for project work.

PEPs with one foot in management and another on the ground.

Strategic work in the LA.

Direct work w/ CYP

Relational approaches as a focus.

Trauma-informed approaches are embedded.

rauma-informed schools as a focus.

EPSs as advocates for trauma-informed approaches.

EPSs as advocates for relational approaches.

EPs challenge the 'within-child' model.

Implementation science within EPSs.

Therapeutic approaches are embedded.

Solution focussed approaches are adopted.

role of the EP

EPs build capacity

Capacity building as important.

EPs empower adults around CYP.

EPs contribution is via consultation.

EPs as individuals

EPs as individuals with unique interests.

EPs as individuals with unique experiences.

MH needs as an integral.

EPs as well-positioned to support MH needs.

The EP role has evolved.

EPs as psycho...

Multi-level working.

EPs work with adults around CYP.

EPs prom...

EPs are perso...

EPs impact as indirect.

EPs as collaborative.

EPs engage i...

EPs identify need.

EPs refer...

Pressure fr... above...

Assistant EPs engagement in direct work with CYP.

Assistant EPs delivery of interventions with CYP.

Assistant EPs as integral.

Multi-level working.

A wellbeing training offer.

Working with systems around CYP.

Multidisciplinary working.

A focus on capacity building.

Assistant EPs delivery of training.

Group consultation.

Capacity building

EPSs as advocates for the whole-school approach to wellbeing.

Collaboration with health.

ELSA training and supervision as integral.

A focus on cultivating emotionally available adults.

Bespoke training offer.

Individual consultation.

Online, recorded traini...

Enhanced following covid-19

The development of staff wellbeing groups.

Increased focus on upskilling school staff.

A focus on skill development following COVID-19.

Increased focus on supporting school staff.

Finite Services

Funding

Insufficient funding as a barrier EPS delivery.

EPSs work in an under-resourced system.

Schools' difficulty releasing staff.

School budget cuts as a barrier.

Recruitment

Recruitment and retention as a barrier.

School recruitment and retention difficulties as a barrier.

Fixed-term contracts as a barrier.

Uncertainty about future EPS delivery based on uncertain funding.

Time

EPSs have finite resources.

Time allocation model as a challenge for responsiveness.

Direct work with CYP as a challenge for EPs.

Difficulties to engage in direct work as a barrier.

Pressure is placed on EPSs from 'above'.

Pressure on schools to meet attainment target...

The ALN Code (2021) and the new Curriculum for W... for schools.

The pressure to be outcome orientated as a b...

A need for equitability as a barrier.

ESTYN as a barrier.

Imp a... covi...

Ten...

EP role

EP as the expert as problematic.

Different constructions of the EP role.

Systems want EPs to solve problems.

The construction of the EP as a gateke...

Construction of the EP as an exp...

Welsh Government do not understand th...

...phased approach to service delivery.

EPSs focus as preventative.

EPSs as actively encouraging a gradual respons...

Consultation at the core.

Specialist EP roles.

The absence of a time allocation mod...

Early intervention as a focus.

EPSs as actively trying to find time.

EPs work preventatively.

Approaches to service delivery

Wellbeing of adults around CYP

Delegation of responsibility.

EPSs work in a traumatised system.

Stressed school systems as a barrier.

Staff wellbeing as a barrier.

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EPs build capacity

Capacity building as important.

EPs empower adults around CYP.

EPs contribution is via consultation.

EPs as individuals

EPs as individuals with unique interests.

EPs as individuals with unique experiences.

Finite Services

EPs as well-positioned to support MH needs.

The EP role has evolved.

Multi-level working.

EPs work with adults around CYP.

EPs impact as indirect.

EPs as collaborative.

EPs identify need.   EPs refer on.

EPs as psychologically informed practitioners.

EPs promote pupil voice.

EPs are person-centred.

EPs engage in direct work

Pressure from 'above'

Pressure is placed on EPSs from 'above'.

Pressure on schools to meet attainment targets.   Statutory work as a barrier.

The ALN Code (2021) and the new Curriculum for Wales as stressors for schools.

The pressure to be outcome orientated as a barrier.

A need for equitability as a barrier.   A faster pace of EPS delivery.

ESTYN as a barrier.

Impact of Covid-19

COVID-19 has highlighted the MH / wellbeing needs of CYP.

Increased demand for MH support following COVID-19.

COVID-19 coincided with significant changes in the education system.

Tensions

Recruitment

Recruitment and retention as a barrier.

School recruitment and retention difficulties as a barrier.

Fixed-term contracts as a barrier.

Uncertainty about future EPS delivery based on uncertain funding.

EPS delivery.

sourced system.

releasing staff.

uts as a barrier.

Time

EPSs have finite resources.

allocation model as a challenge for responsiveness.

rect work with CYP as a challenge for EPs.

Difficulties to engage in direct work as a barrier.

EP role

EP as the expert as problematic.

Different constructions of the EP role.   The EP role as unclear.

Systems want EPs to solve problems.

The construction of the EP as a gatekeeper.

Construction of the EP as an expert.

Welsh Government do not understand the EP role.

Delegation of responsibility.

EPSs work in a traumatised system.

Stressed school systems as a barrier.

Staff wellbeing as a barrier.

PEPs are not always emotionally available for their team.

Systems (between)

EPSs in opposition with CAMHS.

Adults' MH / wellbeing influences CYP's MH / wellbeing.

EPSs can be isolated from other related services.

Systems (within)

Closed systems as a barrier.

Fixed mindsets as a barrier.

EPs will work as well as the EPS is treated within the LA.

Funding

The hope for fewer fixed-term contracts.

EPSs to be responsive to changes in funding.

Systems (Micro + Meso)

school system

nally available adults as a facilitator.

Whole-school approaches as a facilitator.

Shared understanding of the EP role.

Collab.

llaboration with other services as helpful.

Collaboration as opposed to communication.

Shared understanding of the vision of the EPS.

The use of therapeutic approaches as a facilitator.

Trauma-informed approaches as a facilitator.

Knowing where to signpost as a facilitator.

A clear vision for the EPS.

EPS reflection spaces as a facilitator.

Team cohesion as a facilitator.

Trauma-informed training within the EPS as a facilitator.

EPS level

Trauma-informed schools as a priority moving forward.

LA level

EPs in positions of managerial responsibility within the LA.

PEP support system as a facilitator.

LAs increased recognition of the need to support CYPS MH need.

Low levels of statutory work as a facilitator.

EPSs contribution to LA strategy.

LAs valuing person-centred work.

LAs valuing EPSs.

Whole-school approaches grant as a facilitator.

COVID-19 offered a breathing space for the development of EPSs.

COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. EPS delivery.

COVID-19 as a Catalyst for (pos) change.

online working

Online working as a facilitator.

Online training as more effective.

Online working has improved training.

Online working has increased efficiency.

Online working has improved communication between services.

increased focus on MH

Increase in project work around MH needs.

A focus on emotionally based school avoidance (EBSA).

COVID-19 as a catalyst for positive change re. the EP role.

COVID-19 has highlighted the importance of MH / wellbeing.

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Time } Resources?
? Funding }
(LACK OF) → Emotional capacity?

Theme 1: (Lack of) Resources OR "CAPACITY"

Current EPS delivery

CHANGES TO EPS DELIVERY IN LIGHT OF COVID-19

OR "SYSTEMIC FACTORS"?

"We have a lot to offer, but our hands are tied.."

Theme 1: Multi-Level working

Theme 2: Informed and Reasoned Action

Theme 1: COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change

Theme 2: LA Factors

Theme 2: Emotional (un)availability of systems around CYP

Theme 3: Tensions

Subtheme 1.1: Strategic work within the LA

Facilitators of EPS delivery in meeting the MH needs of CYP

OR

→ 'Emotional Capacity of adults around CYP?"
→ "Cognitive Capacity."
→ "Capacity of adults around CYP?"

Subtheme 3.1: Pressures from above

Subtheme 1.2: Building capacity of systems OR "Building Capacity of adults around CYP"? around CYP?"

Theme 3: EPS factors

Subtheme 3.2: Others' construction of the EP role

Subtheme 1.3: Direct work with CYP

Subtheme 1.1. Systems around CYP

Subtheme 1.2: EPSs and EPs as individuals

? subtheme 1.2
"EPS focus"
OR
"EPS level"

OR "Intervention"?
"Therapeutic work?"

OR

Subtheme 3.3: Tensions within and between systems

Is this circular?
(↻) OR is Theme1 potentially respons-ible for 2 + 3.2 + S.3?
Theme

Theme 1: EPs as well-positioned

"impact of covid-19?"

Theme 1: Capacity Building

subtheme 1.3 "EPs as individual"

The integral role of the EP in supporting MH needs

Theme 2: EPs as psychologically informed

Looking forward

Theme 2: Increased use of Psychology

Theme 3: Collaboration as essential

Key

Barriers to EPS delivery

Current EPS delivery

Facilitators of EPS delivery

Future hopes for EPS delivery

Role of the EP

Theme 3: EPs as individuals

How does this inform other themes?

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Key

- Current EPS delivery*
- Barriers to EPS delivery*
- Facilitators of EPS delivery*
- Future hopes for EPS delivery*

*in relation to supporting the MH needs of CYP in Wales.

RQ2

"We have a lot to offer, but our hands are tied..."

GR 'FINITE'?

Subtheme 3.1 (Lack of) Resources

Theme 3: Limited Capacity

Subtheme 3.2 Emotional (un)availability of systems around CYP

Theme 4: Tensions

Subtheme 4.1: Pressure from above

Subtheme 4.2: Different Constructions

RQ1

Theme 1: Multi-Level Working

Current EPS Delivery

Theme 2: Informed and Reasoned Action

Subtheme 1.1: Strategic work within the LA

Subtheme 1.2: Capacity Building

Subtheme 1.3: Direct work with CYP

CURRENT EPS DELIVERY ADDRESSING BARRIERS? / ENABLED RECOGNITION OF BARRIERS?

RQ3

Theme 5: COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change

Theme 6: EPS factors

Facilitators of EPS delivery in meeting the MH needs of CYP

Theme 7: Socio-political factors

RQ4

Theme 8: Collaboration as essential

Looking forward

Theme 9: Developing Practise

Subtheme 9.1: EPSs and EPs as unique

Subtheme 9.2: Developing the capacity of systems around CYP

DISTINCT ENOUGH?

GR

THEME 9: "DEVELOPING THE CAPACITY OF SYSTEMS AROUND CYP"? MORE ENCOMPASSING?

The Final Thematic Map

Key

- Current EPS delivery*
- Barriers to EPS delivery*
- Facilitators of EPS delivery*
- Future hopes for EPS delivery*

*in relation to supporting the MH needs and emotional wellbeing of CYP in Wales.

Theme 5: COVID-19 as a Catalyst for Positive Change

Theme 6: EPS Factors

Theme 8: Collaboration as Essential

RQ3) Facilitators

RQ4) Looking Forward

Theme 7: Socio-political Factors

Theme 9: Developing the Capacity of Systems around CYP

RQ2) "We have a lot to offer, but our hands are tied…"

Subtheme 3.1 Finite Resources

Theme 3: Limited Capacity

Theme 4: Tensions

Subtheme 3.2 Emotional (un)availability of Systems around CYP

Subtheme 4.1: Pressure from Above

Subtheme 4.2: Different Constructions

Theme 1: Multi-Level Working

Subtheme 1.1: Strategic Work within the LA

RQ1) Current EPS Delivery

Subtheme 1.2: Capacity Building

Theme 2: Informed and Reasoned Action

Subtheme 1.3: Direct Work with CYP

Appendix 19 - Checklist for RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022)

Checklist Item	How the Checklist Item is Met
Transcription	• The data was transcribed verbatim. • All transcripts were checked against original recordings for 'accuracy'. This process involved re-reading the interview transcript at least three times, from start to finish, alongside the interview recording. This process aided with familiarisation of the data.
Coding and Theme Development	• Data items were given the same level of thorough attention during the coding process. The researcher took regular breaks during the coding process to support this.
	• The coding process was thorough, inclusive, and comprehensive. • Themes and corresponding subthemes were not developed from a select number of vivid examples.
	• All relevant extracts for each theme were collated.
	• All themes and corresponding subthemes have been checked against coded data and the original dataset.
	• Themes are internally coherent, consistent, and distinctive; each theme contains a well-defined central organising concept; corresponding subthemes share the central organising concept of the theme.
Analysis and Interpretation	• Data was analysed, interpreted, and made sense of rather than merely summarised, described or paraphrased.
	• Analysis and data match each other - the extracts evidence the analytic claims.

	• Analysis tells a well-organised story about the data and topic. Analysis addresses the research question.
	• An appropriate balance between analytic narrative and data extracts is provided.
Write-up / Written Report	• The specific approach to Thematic Analysis, and the particulars of the approach, including theoretical positions and assumptions, are clearly outlined in Part Two and Part Three of the thesis.
	• There is a good fit between what was claimed and what was done.
	• The language and concepts used in the report are consistent with the ontological and epistemological positions of the analysis.
	• The researcher was positioned as an active participant in the research process; themes did not just 'emerge'; they were developed by the researcher. See Appendix 17 and 18 for a visual illustration of the process of developing themes from the coded data.
Overall	• Enough time has been allocated to complete all phases of the analysis adequately. No phase of analysis has been rushed.