# The Role of an Educational Psychologist in a Multi-agency Team Supporting Families

## Part One: Introduction and Literature Review

## Part Two: Empirical Study

Naomi Erasmus

**Cardiff University**

**Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)**

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# Summary

This thesis is formed from two papers: a systematic literature review and an empirical research study. The first, a systematic literature review, explores and critically discusses the current research evidence assessing the roles that educational psychologists (EPs) have held in various multi-agency teams.

The second, an empirical research study, explores the perceptions of an EP's role currently held by other team members in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF). For example, other team members' constructions of: the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP. MATSF team members' views were obtained using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The study found that some team members did still hold 'traditional' constructions about the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP, despite the theoretical underpinnings of the MATSF under consideration being Motivational Interviewing (MI), Solution-Focused and Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches. The study also found that the majority of team members had a limited knowledge of, and understanding of, the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP. The thesis concludes with a discussion of some of the emerging themes that were generated, and the implications for future educational psychology practice in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts. Some suggestions for further research and expansion of the role played by an EP in a MATSF are presented.

## Declarations and Statements

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, not is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award.

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This thesis is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of ................................. (insert MCh, MD, MPhil, PHD etc, as appropriate).

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### STATEMENT 2

This thesis is the result of my own independent work/investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references. The views expressed are my own.

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## Acknowledgements

In memory of

Minnie Sylvia Grove

1926-2012

This thesis is dedicated to my nannie, a woman who changed lives for the better and who inspires me to try to do the same. Then, to my faithful, understanding, caring husband and family, who so generously allowed me the time needed to write, my deep and heartfelt gratitude and love.

**List of Abbreviations**

| | |
|---|---|
| ADHD | Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder |
| ASD | Autistic Spectrum Disorder |
| BEST | Behaviour and Education Support Team |
| BPS | British Psychological Society |
| CAMHS | Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services |
| CBT | Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy |
| DA | Discourse Analysis |
| DCSF | Department for Children, Schools and Families |
| DfEE | Department for Education and Employment |
| DfES | Department for Education and Skills |
| ECM | Every Child Matters |
| EP | Educational Psychologist |
| EPS | Educational Psychology Service |
| HCPC | Health and Care Professions Council formerly the Health Professions Council (HPC) |
| IEPs | Individual Education Plans |
| IFSS | Integrated Family Support Service |
| IFST | Integrated Family Support Team |
| MATSF | Multi-Agency Team Supporting Families |
| MAW | Multi-Agency Working |
| MI | Motivational Interviewing |
| NHS | National Health Service |
| PCP | Personal Construct Psychology |
| SPSS | Statistical Package for the Social Sciences |
| TA | Thematic Analysis |
| UK | United Kingdom |
| WAG | Welsh Assembly Government (renamed Welsh Government in May 2011) |
| YOT | Youth Offending Team |

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Part One: Introduction and Literature Review


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## 1. Introduction

This systematic review of literature aims to explore the roles that educational psychologists (EPs) have held in various multi-agency teams and the potential roles EPs could have within them. To meet these ends, firstly the theoretical significance and rationale of the topic chosen to be explored will be demonstrated. Secondly, the origin of multi-agency working will be described. Thirdly, terminology pertaining to multi-agency working will be defined. This will lead into specific consideration of the role EPs have held in multi-agency teams: looked-after children; child protection; early years; and youth offending teams. This will be followed by discussion of the role EPs have taken in multi-agency, supervision and consultation groups and intervention programmes. Finally, the effect this way of working has had on EPs' professional identity will be explored. Consideration will also be given to factors which pose a barrier to effective multi-agency working.  In summary, the review focuses on bringing together qualitative and quantitative data from a range of studies in a variety of established multi-agency teams and community-wide projects in the UK; a total of nine studies will be included for in-depth review. In light of the evidence discussed, a new viewpoint for researchers and EPs to approach multi-agency working is presented.

### 1.1. The theoretical significance of the topic.

Complications occur in multi-agency teams because of differing conceptions of the issue of concern and of the possible solution (Wagner, 2008). In the following section the researcher will consider four theoretical perspectives (social constructionism, personal construct psychology (PCP), solution-focused thinking and psychology of systems) which highlight the potential, unique contribution and perspective of the EP in multi-agency practice (Farrell et al., 2006).

These four topics were chosen because Kennedy, Frederickson and Monsen's (2008) research found that the majority of British EPs used solution-focused approaches and the framework of Patsy Wagner (1995; 2000) when consulting, which included PCP, social-constructionist and systemic principles.

### 1.1.1. Social constructionism.

Within constructionist thought, a social construction (or social construct) is a concept or practice that may appear to be natural, objective and valid to those who accept it, but which, in reality, is an invention or artefact of a particular culture or society (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

The major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the development of their perceived social reality. For example, in the professions of health and social care, there can be a tendency for the problem to be located in the child or family and for the solution to be similarly focused, which means that medical, pathologising and 'within-the-person' models can dominate the picture (Lobianco & Sheppard-Jones, 2007). Workers in educational settings can feel overwhelmed and impotent (Wagner, 2008) due to different conceptions of what constitutes the problem and the solution. A solution in such a case might be to develop more of a shared language of multi-agency working, and the EP is well placed in the system to facilitate such a development. For example, in meetings in educational settings, consultation models and solution-focused thinking have made significant contributions to helping different agencies communicate more effectively (Harker, 2001).

In summary, social constructionism is about dynamic and transactional models of shared or negotiable meaning, as opposed to static and objective models of social and interpersonal experience. Each individual has his/her own perception of what the issues and possible causes are, which are derived from and maintained by social interactions.

### 1.1.2. PCP.

PCP proposes that individuals have their own personal 'constructs' and ways of making sense of the world, and that their constructions of situations are influenced by their own personal experiences (Kelly, 1955). The way in which people think, feel about and understand the world around them depends on the nature of the system of personal constructs they have devised. Therefore, in order to make sense of the behaviour of another

person an individual has to begin by understanding his or her personal constructs. This means talking to a person and giving opportunity for self expression. An EP, aware of psychological theory, such as PCP (Kelly, 1955), realises that it is essential to listen to all relevant people involved to facilitate making sense of what is going on within any context or situation (Hardman, 2001).

### 1.1.3. Solution-focused thinking.

Solution-focused thinking is a way of looking at the world, at situations and people that is associated with change and with hope (Ajmal & Rees, 2001). It is an approach that has been used by EPs for consultation with teachers and children and during multi-agency meetings (Redpath & Harker, 1999). The notion of solution-focused thinking is that by focusing on strengths, rather than just on the problems, a person is able to move forward and find solutions.

### 1.1.4. Psychology of systems.

Ideas from Systems Theory and Family Therapy (Burnham, 1986; Hoffman, 1981) help EPs consider the inter-relating systems around the child, and possible conflicting expectations and their effects and how these can be addressed. Systems thinking can change destructive relationship patterns by encouraging people to see things from new perspectives. Thus perception change can bring about the possibility of a change that can affect a system, such as the family or the school. It also considers how these different systems interact.

## 1.2. The relevance of the topic to educational psychology.

This research is relevant to EPs and the educational psychology profession because recent government policy and legislation have reaffirmed the need for EPs to work collaboratively with other disciplines within community contexts (Stringer, Powell & Burton, 2006; Farrell et al., 2006; Booker, 2005; DfEE, 2000).

Leadbetter (2006) proposed:

> The work of EPs is likely to shift with an emphasis on multi-professional teams, with common assessment approaches, joined-up services, and more flexible ways of engaging with a range of clients, including children and families.
>
> (Leadbetter, 2006, p.27)

This research is also relevant to EPs and the educational psychology profession because the proposed realignment to working more closely with multi-agency colleagues heralds a departure from more traditional models of service delivery which focus on providing detailed assessments of special educational needs for a small number of pupils (Frederickson & Miller, 2008; Stobie 2002; Dessent, 1988).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Systematic review of the evidence base.

In July 2012, the database 'PsycINFO' was used to identify relevant studies using the search terms 'educational psychology' or 'educational psychologist' AND 'multi-agency' or 'multi-disciplinary' or 'multi-professional'. Internet search engines were also utilised to access relevant government documents and recent developments in the area. The systematic review of the evidence base ended in August 2012. The key research studies relating to the purpose of this study (N=23) were then screened using inclusion/exclusion criteria, see Appendix A. This process left 9 articles eligible for inclusion and further critique. Full texts of these studies were obtained and assessed for their methodological quality according to the guidelines developed by Gough (2007), see Appendix B. This systematic review rated the weight of evidence of four studies as high and the remaining five studies as medium, see Appendix C.

### 2.2. Introduction to the systematic review of the evidence base.

The purpose of this review of the evidence base is to systematically evaluate evidence relating to the role of an EP in a MATSF. To meet this end, the key principles of multi-agency partnership working (Cheminais, 2009) will be presented and different constructions of the role of an EP, in a multi-agency team, will be described. These constructions will be discussed in terms of identifying the elements of educational psychology practice that may benefit a MATSF and what these benefits are. This will lead into specific consideration of the potential barriers to effective multi-agency working and how different 'languages', cultures and codes of practice may impact on this. The evidence presented will be explored and critically discussed. The relevance of these findings will be used to explain why this area is of importance to educational psychology practice.

#### 2.2.1. The origin of multi-agency working.

Multi-agency working is not a new idea. As early as the mid twentieth century, health and

social services were joining together in an attempt to reduce deprivation and poverty in the UK. However, it was not until the 1980s that the foundations of multi-agency working were laid. The Children Act 1989 (Her Majesty's Government, 1989) secured the statutory requirement for inter-agency collaboration and joint-working in relation to children and young people, requiring professionals to "work together better" (Cheminais, 2009, p. 1).

The last two decades have seen numerous government-funded initiatives aimed at furthering integrated services and more co-ordinated partnership working (Cheminais, 2009). For example, Sure Start, Children's Fund, Youth Offending Teams and Behaviour and Education Support Teams, have all promoted multi-agency working. Nonetheless, despite the launch of government legislation and initiatives during this time to foster closer multi-agency working, there existed:

- a lack of information sharing across agencies and services;
- duplicated assessments to identify needs and subsequent provision;
- poorly co-ordinated integrated activities across agencies;
- too much 'buck passing' and referring on of clients between agencies;
- a lack of continuity and inconsistent levels of service provision; and
- unclear accountability.

(Cheminais, 2009, p. 2)

As part of the Every Child Matters agenda (ECM) (DfES, 2003), the Children Act 2004 (Her Majesty's Government, 2004) reinforced the requirement for agencies to operate together more closely in multi-disciplinary teams, in order to improve the five ECM well-being outcomes for children and young people. This significant piece of legislation responded to the Lord Laming inquiry into the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, which, it was argued, was the result of poor co-ordination and the breakdown of inter-agency communication in sharing information across agencies. For the interested reader, the five ECM well-being outcomes for children and young people are: being healthy; staying safe; enjoying and achieving; making a positive contribution; and achieving economic well-being.

### 2.2.2. The concept of multi-agency working.

Multi-agency working is where practitioners from more than one agency work together, sharing aims, information, tasks and responsibilities in order to intervene early to prevent problems arising, which may impact on children's learning and achievement. Multi-agency working involves the joint planning and delivery of co-ordinated services that are responsive to children and young people's changing needs (Cheminais, 2009).

As one practitioner comments:

> [Multi-agency] Inter-agency working is about making sure that people are regularly talking about their work, understanding each others' roles and sharing with other agencies and service users. It is about working together toward commonly agreed aims and objectives.
>
> (McInnes, 2007, p. 5)

### 2.2.3. Definition of terms.

There are a number of related terms and concepts that are used interchangeably in documentation, which reflect a range of structures of, approaches to, and rationales for, multi-agency working, as proposed by Cheminais (2009).

- **Inter-agency working** is where more than one agency work together in a planned and formal way.
- **Integrated working** is where practitioners work together, adopting common processes to deliver front-line services, co-ordinated and built around the needs of children and young people.
- **Multi-professional/multidisciplinary working** is where staff with different professional backgrounds and training work together.
- **Joint working** is where professionals from more than one agency work together on a specific project or initiative.

- **Partnership working** refers to the processes that build relationships between different groups of professionals and services at different levels, to get things done. It entails two or more organisations or groups or practitioners joining together to achieve something they could not do alone, sharing a common problem or issue and collectively taking responsibility for resolving it. 'Partnership' therefore refers to a way of working as well as to a form of organisation.

(Cheminais, 2009, p. 5)

### 2.2.4. Models of multi-agency working.

There is no one prescribed way for multi-agency working. The Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) offers three different models for setting up multi-agency services to support educational settings in improving ECM outcomes for children and young people. Table 1 describes the characteristics of the three models, which are: the multi-agency panel; the multi-agency team; and the integrated service.

**Table 1**

*Characteristics of the three models of multi-agency working as proposed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (2007)*

| Model | Key characteristics |
|---|---|
| Multi-agency panel | <ul><li>Panel is co-ordinated by a chair.</li><li>Most meetings are arranged by the panel manager.</li><li>There is usually a good mix of agencies represented.</li><li>Practitioners remain employed by their home agency.</li><li>The panel or network meets monthly or</li></ul> |

| | |
|---|---|
| | every term to discuss children with additional needs who would benefit from multi-agency input, and to review their work. |
| | • Panel members may carry out case work themselves, or employ key workers to lead on case work. |
| | • An example of this type of model is a 'Youth Inclusion and Support Panel', or 'Team Around the Child'. |
| Multi-agency team | • There is a delegated team leader who works to a common purpose and common goals. |
| | • There is a good mix of staff from different disciplines who are seconded or recruited into the team. |
| | • There is a strong team identity. |
| | • Practitioners may maintain links with their home agencies for supervision and training. |
| | • There is scope to engage in work with universal services and at a range of levels - not just with individual children and young people, but also small group, family and whole-school work. |
| | • Examples of this type of model include 'Behaviour and Education Support Teams' (BEST) and 'Youth Offending Teams' (YOTs). |
| Integrated service | • Acts as a service hub for the community, usually located at one site. |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Usually delivered from school/early years settings. |
| | • A range of separate services share a common location, vision and principles in working together. |
| | • Commitment by partner providers to fund/facilitate integrated service delivery. |
| | • Services usually include health, specialist advice and guidance, outreach and adult learning. |
| | • Collective inter-professional training strategies are often present. |
| | • Examples include children's centres and extended schools offering access to integrated, multi-agency services. |

(Children's Workforce Development Council, 2007, pp. 1-2)

Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott, Doherty and Kinder (2002) provide five models of multi-agency activity as listed below.

- **Decision-making groups**, which provide a forum in which professionals from different agencies meet and discuss issues and make decisions, largely at a strategic level.
- **Consultation and training**, whereby professionals from one agency enhance the expertise of those from another, usually at the operational level.
- **Centre-based delivery**, gathering a range of expertise on one site in order to deliver a more co-ordinated and comprehensive service. Services may not be delivered jointly, but exchange of information and ideas is facilitated.
- **Co-ordinated delivery**, whereby the appointment of a co-ordinator to pull together disparate services facilitates a more cohesive response to need

through a collaboration between agencies involved in the delivery of services. Delivery by professionals is at an operational level, while the co-ordinator also operates strategically.

- **Operational team delivery**, is where professionals from different agencies work together on a day-to-day basis forming a cohesive multi-agency team delivering services directly to clients.

(Atkinson et al., 2002, pp. 11-23)

### 2.2.5. The role of an EP in a multi-agency team.

For many years, researchers have posed questions about what can be regarded as distinctive about the work of EPs and how their contributions differ from those of clinical psychologists and other applied psychologists, on the one hand, and specialist teachers and professionals, such as social workers who have received some training in psychology, on the other (Boyle, Mackay & Lauchlan, 2008).

The British Psychological Society (BPS) has made a noteworthy contribution to this debate by developing the National Occupational Standards to define the particular skills, knowledge and understanding of applied psychologists. A crucial purpose of these standards is to support the clarification of organisational goals and service provision. The Society offers the following six `key generic roles', which may be useful in identifying with stakeholders the distinctive contribution that EPs make through activities planned to enhance outcomes for children who are the priority of their work (BPS, 2006a). The six key generic roles are listed below.

- Develop, implement and maintain personal and professional standards and ethical practice.
- Apply psychological and related methods, concepts, models, theories and knowledge derived from reproducible research findings.
- Research and develop new and existing psychological methods, concepts, models, theories and instruments in psychology.

- Communicate psychological knowledge, principles, methods, needs and policy requirements.
- Develop and train other professionals in the application of psychological skills, knowledge, practices and procedures.
- Manage the provision of psychological systems, services and resources.

(BPS, 2006a, p. 16)

The key theme running through all these standards is the knowledge of, and ability to apply, psychology. In a similar vein, a large research project by Farrell et al. (2006) into the future role of EPs within the new Children's Services, indicates clearly that, where EP work was viewed as effective and distinctive, the EPs and other professionals had no difficulty in identifying one or more of the psychological functions used by the EP in his/her work. The most commonly identified functions across all areas were the following.

- Application of psychological methods, concepts, models, theories or knowledge.
- Communication of psychological knowledge, principles, methods or needs and their implications for policy.

(Farrell et al., 2006, p. 30)

### 2.2.6. The national agenda.

The importance of interventions rooted in psychology was recently highlighted by the UK government launch of the 'No Health Without Mental Health' strategy (Her Majesty's Government, 2011). On 02 February 2011, the Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, the Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley and Paul Burstow from the Department of Health announced new plans to transform the mental health and well-being of the nation. Andrew Lansey quoted from the strategy document that, "The strategy commits to beginning to expand provision of psychological therapies to children and young people" (Her Majesty's Government, 2011, p. 82).

Whilst it is acknowledged that the term 'therapy' may be viewed as medical in origin, it could be argued that, in some circumstances, EPs may be better placed to offer therapeutic interventions to children and young people than colleagues from other branches of psychology because, by working with schools, EPs can develop a more sophisticated understanding of behavioural and emotional problems within the school context.

On an encouraging note, research suggests that a wide variety of psychotherapeutic approaches are being considered and utilised by EPs in school settings. Pugh (2010) identified that the most common theory-based psychological interventions used in school and educational psychology are:

- solution-focused;
- person/client centred; and
- Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

The focus for this research project is a MATSF that espouses the use of Motivational Interviewing (a person-centred approach), solution-focused and CBT approaches (Welsh Assembly Government (WAG), 2010), which are used widely in the field of educational psychology (Pugh, 2010). It could be argued that, as the MATSF work is underpinned by the most common, theory-based psychological interventions used in schools and educational psychology, that there is a role for the EP, as a resource for system change, through research and development, training and supervision and carrying out monitoring and evaluation.

 Baxter and Frederickson (2005) proposed that:

> It may be unrealistic on economic grounds for EPs to deliver primary and secondary preventative work directly to children and families, other than as pilots aimed at research and development. However, EPs are likely to be among the best qualified professional groups to undertake research and development, training and supervision of staff who are delivering directly.   They are, in addition, well placed to carry out monitoring and evaluation – that is, the quality

assurance of new initiatives – and thereby to advise commissioners on how to maximise "value-added" with available resources.

<div align="right">(Baxter & Frederickson, 2005, p. 99)</div>

It is intended that this piece of research will help to answer these questions and show what EPs need to do to make their role, values and perspective clear to other members of the team.

Walter and Petr (2000) propose that:

An explicit and shared value base is not merely one dimension of inter-agency collaboration, but, rather, it constitutes its very core.

<div align="right">(Walter & Petr, 2000, p. 496)</div>

The results of the Farrell et al. (2006) survey also suggest that, in addition to the EPs' distinctive knowledge and skills in psychology, a large number of respondents commented on the distinctive nature of the EPs' contribution that relates to their role and status in the local authority. Typically, EPs work across multiple settings, such as the school, the home, family centres and child development centres, and so they develop a detailed knowledge of the range of resources that exist in and outside the authority, the procedures that need to be followed in order for pupils to access these, and of the role and function of other professional groups who work in the area.

In light of the findings discussed thus far, it is conceivable that EPs' professional training and background in psychology, together with their position in local authorities, enable them to make a highly distinctive contribution within the developing Children's Services and hence a MATSF. It might also be argued, based on the evidence presented, that this may be through supporting 'therapeutic work', given the UK Government's agenda to expand the provision of psychological therapies to children and young people.

**2.3. Critical review of the evidence base: key research studies relating to the purpose of this study.**

In this section nine research studies, conducted during or after 2000, on the role of an EP in a multi-agency team supporting families will be considered and explored. Implications for the present study will be discussed.

*2.3.1. EPs and children in care.*

Norwich, Richards and Nash (2010) point out there have been few published papers about EPs' work with, or related to, children and young people in public care. Based on findings from their survey of practices and issues relating to children in care in five local authority educational psychology services in the south-west of England, Norwich et al. (2010) drew some practical conclusions, including the need to develop specialist roles for EPs in supporting staff working with children in care and the sharing of good practice through working groups. However, their major recommendation was that "educational psychology services need to clarify the distinctiveness of the kinds of contributions that EPs can make compared with other services, while welcoming opportunities to develop joint work with other services and professionals" (p. 388).

These findings challenge Farrell et al.'s (2006) review findings that argued that "EPs are extensively involved with and suited to working effectively with other agencies" (p. 103). However, on a cautionary note, Norwich et al.'s (2010) sample was relatively small (N=107) and, therefore, might not reflect wider national practices and perspectives. It is also important to note that, despite a fairly high response rate to the survey, some respondents did not answer all the questions. It is conceivable that anonymity might have been a concern for some participants and hence specific details about the work they were currently engaged in, with regards to children in care, were not disclosed, reducing the validity of the findings. It is also important to note that other stakeholders' perceptions about the EP role, for children in care, were not sought, which could have given a more balanced and helpful picture of the profession's development and status at the current time.

An additional limitation of the study under review, was that the data were collected by a web-based questionnaire (Limesurvey, 2010) as opposed to paper and pencil. This does have some advantages of being inexpensive, can result in larger samples and high statistical power, and allows researchers to include participants from distant geographical areas (Birnbaum, 2004a; Reips, 2000). However, it could be argued that when several people use the same computer, concerns might be created about confidentiality (Barchard & Williams, 2008) for the following reasons.

- First, Web browsers often save Web pages, and these pages could contain participants' responses.
- Second, businesses/local authorities often have a legal right to review information stored on company computers. This would include cached page, Web addresses, and business and personal emails.

It is suggested that, if any answers could be damaging to participants if seen by their employers, the researchers should warn participants about this threat to confidentiality and may want to suggest that they complete the study at home or use an alternative method of responding (e.g., print the questions and mail them). It is suggested that, without careful consideration of the implications of such methodological differences, researchers who are new to online research (and the number of such researchers increases each year) are likely to design studies that fail to meet accepted ethical standards (Mathy, Kerr & Haydin, 2003).

### 2.3.2. EPs and pre-school children in kinship care.

Cunningham and Lauchlan (2010) considered how EPs could better meet the needs of kinship carers and their families. The context of the study was a pre-school extended day care establishment situated within a large multicultural authority. Questionnaire data sampling the views and experiences of thirty-nine participants (EPs, social workers and kinship carers), as well as in-depth case studies of two pre-school children in kinship care, were analysed. The findings offer a number of suggestions about approaches to develop the EP role.

Overwhelmingly, the suggestion offered most frequently by social workers and kinship carers was the provision of support to help children manage their emotions. Providing support to kinship carers was also cited. Raising awareness of issues with school staff was also highlighted, as was the need to explain to kinship carers the potential implications that children face regarding their education, for example, highlighting the need for Individual Education Plans.

Kinship carers expressed that their primary concerns were the bullying and stigmatisation of the children at school. The authors propose that the possibility of bullying towards children in kinship care needs to be emphasised and EPs could have a key role in highlighting this and assisting in promoting anti-bullying practices.

Other suggestions for EPs to meet the needs for kinship carers better included: support and intervention targeted at loss and bereavement; assessment and help to address additional support needs; clearer explanation to kinship carers of the EP's role and responsibilities; improved multi-agency liaison; and the provision of positive feedback to kinship carers and generally listening to them more. However, social workers and kinship carers were aware of the difficulties there are in providing these supports with "budgetary problems", "time", and "staffing" cited (Cunningham & Lauchlan, 2010, p. 84), all of which are inextricably linked to resources (or lack thereof).

Interestingly, of the EPs sampled, although most had experience of working with a kinship family, the majority did not elaborate on any specific supports that they provided. However, two EPs did highlight the therapeutic support offered by external agencies to kinship care families and the importance placed on multi-agency working (by social workers and EPs) in addressing the needs of kinship care families.

It is important, however, to note the limitations of the methodology used in this study. Firstly, the data was collected by open-ended questions in a mailed questionnaire, which could have provided somewhat scarce answers and made interpretation more challenging.

The research literature also suggests that:

- respondents may find open questions more difficult to answer so that item non-response tends to be higher compared to closed questions (Griffiths et al., 1999);
- more people abandon the survey (Crawford, Couper & Lamias, 2001); and
- open-ended questions in a questionnaire may be affected by guessing and therefore estimation is likely to be used (Tourangeau, Rips & Ransinki, 2001).

Another limitation of the study is that the demographics of the respondents are not known, other than occupation. A number of recent studies have shown gender to have an effect on response prospensities. Specifically, it has been found that females are more likely to respond to a mailed questionnaire than males (Collins, Ellickson, Hays & McCaffrey, 2000). For example, one study reported that only 31% of males responded to a mailed questionnaire as compared to 49% of females (McCabe, Boyd, Couper, Crawford & D'Arcy, 2002).

### 2.3.3. EPs and child protection.

A review of EP practice in relation to child protection was undertaken by German, Wolfendale and Mcloughlin (2000). This aimed to look at the range of work undertaken by EPs following the 1989 Children Act. German et al.'s (2000) questionnaire surveyed all principal EPs and interviewed, from across England, nineteen EPs with posts of responsibility for child protection; eleven senior education welfare officers; and eleven senior social workers were also surveyed on their views about the role of EPs in relation to child protection.

The postal questionnaire of principal EPs had a high return rate and showed that 39% of services had EPs with specific child protection responsibilities, 39% of services had their own child protection policy and 24% followed local authority procedures. Of the EPs who had specialist posts, three quarters had additional training in areas such as counselling, child protection and child protection law. The majority of the specialist EPs questioned saw the 1989 Children Act as having a positive impact on multi-agency working.

With regard to intervention, the EPs were involved in a wide range of work, from joint planning with other professionals and child protection training, to areas of 'safeguarding' such as family work and bullying. There was some work by EPs about institutional abuse but little mention of work with disabled children who had been abused. Two-thirds of the specialist EP group had been actively involved in court work and three-quarters had compiled reports for court. The majority of specialist EPs were becoming involved in more child protection work although a concern was raised that, as a result, generic EPs might avoid child protection issues. Most thought that the major contribution of EPs to child protection work was "...knowledge of intellectual, emotional, social and physical development, and a psychological perspective..." (German et al., 2000, p. 269).

Half of those sampled in the German et al. (2000) survey considered that a limitation in developing this work was that generic EPs did not have enough training in relation to child protection and that educational psychology services needed to provide time to develop these skills. When asked about the future development of the EP child protection role, the majority of the sample felt that there would be an increase in joint posts with health and social care. Two-thirds saw this role being legitimised within local authority structures. With a growth in specialist posts, EPs considered that there would be more involvement in intervention projects with abused children and an increased training role.

German et al.'s (2000) questionnaire to social workers and education welfare officers indicated that EPs were perceived as having skills to offer in relation to therapeutic work, consultation and multi-disciplinary liaison but were not seen to be as involved as they could be in child protection work. The researchers recommended further research into the views of generic, newly qualified and trainee EPs in relation to their level of competence in child protection issues.

The strength of this particular piece of research is the potential generalisability of the results, as the questionnaire was administered to a large number of participants. The weakness, however, of this study's methodology is that the themes that emerged from the individual questionnaires were not investigated further to include any other relevant commentary, as the questions on the questionnaire may have been interpreted differently

by different participants. It is possible that the use of triangulation (e.g., using questionnaire and interview) to collect information could have increased the reliability of the findings.

### 2.3.4. EPs and children under the age of 5 years old.

Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010) sought to establish the role of the EP in work with children in the early years. Focus groups were undertaken with Children's Centre staff in three local authorities. Participants were chosen using purposeful, non-random selection procedures (Flick, 2009) and included EPs, Children's Centre managers, early years peripatetic teachers and play leaders. The results of this study found that focus group contributors showed a lack of clarity about the role of the EPs and their potential input to work with children in the early years. Robinson and Dunsmuir identified that the potential of psychology to inform early years practice was not mentioned during focus group discussions. Moreover, a key issue that arose from the EPs' responses was that the requirements on them to provide psychological advice, as part of the statutory assessment process, inhibited wider practice.

Shannon and Posada (2007) examined current models of service delivery in early years. They found that individual-based casework was the primary area of EP work in early years, with 59% of EPs spending over half their early years time engaged in individual work, compared with 31% spending the majority of their early years time engaged in organisational level work. The most frequent type of EP involvement in organisational level work was working with practitioners to develop Individual Education Plans (IEPs). These results highlight that individual work is given a greater degree of priority than organisational work.

The emphasis on special educational needs in EP's work in the early years was evident also in Dennis's (2003, 2004) articles. Dennis (2003) recognised that the high likelihood of early years practitioners envisaging a traditional role for EPs, based on assessment and individual intervention, could mean that EPs replicate the statutory assessment role undertaken in schools. Dennis (2003) calls the growth of early years provision a 'golden opportunity' for educational psychology services to work with the private, voluntary and independent sectors of early years provision, and proposes a broader model of service delivery by EPs in

early years work. Nevertheless, the focus in her articles remains on EPs supporting early years practitioners in their work with children who have special educational needs.

In contrast, Wolfendale and Robinson (2001) suggest that, whilst the EP contribution may be at an individual level, EPs also have a role at an organisational level. Indeed, they consider that EPs can provide training and interventions that promote child development and learning and can thus provide support for all early years children.

These findings, and those of Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010), support the view that the potential for working with parents and children with problems, that can cause families and early years staff concern and distress (such as with sleeping, eating and toileting), is not fully realised within the practice of many EPs working with young children. This is despite the fact that psychological theory and research have made a significant contribution to the understanding of how these difficulties can be best understood and managed (Douglas, 1989, 2005; Herbert, 1996). The authors put forward a suggestion that EPs need to ensure that knowledge and evidence based on psychological theory and research are employed in planning and reviewing interventions in order to achieve the best outcomes for children.

Robinson and Dunsmuir's (2010) study, however, has a number of limitations which should be taken into account when interpreting the findings, the most obvious being how the focus groups were set up. Participants were selected from different professions and backgrounds and consequently some voices and perceptions may have been more dominant than others because of a perceived hierarchy of status. It could be argued that the amount of discussion generated in a focus group depends largely on group dynamics, which can either promote or hinder discussion (Leong & Austin, 2006). It is possible to argue that, had one-to-one interviews been used, in the place of focus groups, then the likelihood of participants providing their objective opinions could have been increased and the influence of dominant voices in the data could have been minimised. Alternatively, it could be argued that participants' involvement in a focus-group could have increased their confidence, been less anxiety provoking and thus more empowering for individuals through the perception of a shared voice.

A further weakness of this study was that the sampling was not random, meaning the results may not be representative of this population as a whole. For example, other Children Centre staffs' responses might have been very different. It is also important to note that parents' views were not sought to gain a more comprehensive picture.

Interestingly, despite the methodological flaws apparent in the Robinson and Dunsmuir study, the findings are supportive of the findings of the DfES (2006b) Review of the Functions and Contribution of Educational Psychologists in England and Wales. The DfES (2006b) Review found that, whilst EPs do work within multi-agency teams in early years through Child Development Teams, Sure Start, Portage and Early Support Teams, detail is not offered on the frequency of EPs' involvement or the roles played by EPs within these teams, thereby, endorsing Robinson and Dunsmuir's findings.

Shannon and Posada (2007) highlight that the major theme for change in reviews of the role of EPs has been to move away from statutory assessment and individual work towards a greater emphasis on consultancy, problem solving and organisational work (DfEE, 2000; DfES, 2006a).

Additionally, there are some reported examples of EPs working outside the special educational needs field in early years. Warner and Pote (2004) discuss their role in an early years behaviour support service, supporting parents in understanding and managing their children's behaviour. Similarly, Laffan and Synmoie (2004) describe the development of parenting sessions, through consultation with parents to develop sessions that meet parental needs, and the use of evaluation to examine the impact of the sessions. These projects exemplify how psychology can be used with families and are not focused on special educational needs.

This section illustrates the nature of the role that EPs have tended to take in early years work. It highlights the focus on work within the special educational needs field at an individual level, whilst acknowledging that there are opportunities to work in an alternative way. It would appear that this focus on special educational needs work at the individual level is one of the challenges faced by EPs in developing different roles in multi-agency

teams. However, it could be argued that the opportunities presented are exciting and have potential for all EPs. For example, Dennis (2003) advocated the creation of a senior, specialist EP for early years, and Shannon and Posada (2007) identified that many services had already created this role.

### 2.3.5. EPs and young offenders.

EPs are increasingly becoming involved in elements of practice that take them beyond working with schools and into working in the community and, in particular, with individuals engaging in offending behaviour. Ryrie's (2006) discussion paper presents one case study that highlights a number of challenges and opportunities that are faced by an EP working in a Youth Offending Team (YOT).

Ryrie (2006) found that most YOT workers had little or no previous knowledge of the work of an EP and so tended to report a number of commonly occurring misconceptions of the role. Particularly, these included an image of EP work as focusing solely on the assessment or testing of individual young people, often with the identification of dyslexia as a focus.

In contrast to these views, Ryrie (2006) reported that, from his perspective (an individual case study), the range of knowledge and skills that EPs are able to apply in a YOT setting, and, therefore, in other, similar, multi-agency contexts are:

- consultation;
- assessing motivations;
- active listening;
- solution-focused interviewing;
- person-centred approaches;
- joint working;
- personal construct psychology;
- group work;
- participation in training;

- knowledge of educational systems;

- knowledge of normal and atypical child development;

- knowledge of the relevance of concepts such as dyslexia and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder; and

- participation in parenting courses.

Ryrie's (2006) paper concludes with the argument that EPs could have a considerable role to play in working not only with young people who offend but also with the teams created to work with offenders. It is, however, recognised by Ryrie that the YOT works in a context where events can occur suddenly and unexpectedly leading to a way of working which offers considerable contrast with standard EP practice, "which takes pride in eschewing crisis response and places great value on carefully planned and considered reflective action" (Ryrie, 2006, p.10).

The limitations of this discussion paper are that it is based on one EP's experiences of working with one YOT and, therefore, the findings will inevitably be subject to researcher bias and subjective selection and interpretation of the case study presented. Moreover, it is also important to note, the author has not sought views or evidence from other stakeholders and hence the views presented are not representative of the YOT perspective on the opportunities for the practice of educational psychology in the case study described. A further weakness of the study is that no outcomes are reported as a result of the EP's input, e.g., the young offender's progress. The existing research could be significantly improved by the inclusion of a validated pre- and post-intervention measure, with some statistical analysis of the data presented and the use of a control group.

In summary, case-studies, although interesting, can be problematic in terms of generalising the findings (Dorwick, 1999) and the methodological difficulties "severely limit the statements that can be made regarding therapeutic outcomes" (Kratochwill, 1981, p. 140). Furthermore, case-studies are often narrative in nature and researchers commonly omit detail about how the child presented initially, if the case study involves one child, the

intervention procedure, how and in what settings behaviour changed (Cline & Baldwin, 2004).

However, despite these weaknesses, Lowman (2005) persuasively argues that case studies are a useful starting point when developing new and innovative approaches in an applied setting and thus the approaches described in this paper (Ryrie, 2006) are potential ways forward for an EP in a multi-agency team. However, it is recognised that a much more robust evidence basis is needed before Ryrie's approaches can be developed further.

### 2.3.6. EPs and group supervision approaches.

Farouk (2004) proposed that, as psychologists, EPs should be at the forefront of alerting those in the authority to the importance of supervision – both individual and team – and even acting in some supervisory capacity to those teams of people who do not have supervision as an inbuilt aspect of their work (such as teachers). As practitioners, EPs can provide a forum for case discussions and problem solving.

Alexander and Sked (2010) conducted interviews with a core group of professionals who attended their Educational Psychology Service's solution-focused, multi-agency supervision meetings. The aim of the meetings was to provide co-ordinated support for families as part of a staged intervention process by the education service. Alexander and Sked found that the role of the EP had been crucial in the effective running of the meetings, as skill and knowledge of emotional-literacy strategies for managing behaviour and solution-focused principles were important for successful meetings.

It could, however, be argued that, because the respondents were also colleagues of the researchers, they may have been unwilling to divulge negative attitudes because they did not want to jeopardise good working relationships with the researchers. Another weakness of this study's design is a lack of objectivity. How were the researchers able to analyse the data collected without confirming everything they initially thought, especially when engaging in an inductive, latent, constructionist content analysis approach, which relies heavily on interpretive work? One way this weakness could have been overcome is if the

researchers included extracts of the participants' data to show how their interpretations were made.

It is also important to note that, whilst the professionals interviewed found the solution-focused framework of the meeting helpful, the long term effectiveness of this method of addressing difficulties, for children and families, was not explored and hence 'real world' outcomes are not known. Moreover, the authors reflected, despite training in solution-focused principles, that not all head teachers, paediatricians or social workers were comfortable putting them into practice when facilitating change. The authors acknowledge that this apparent 'learned helplessness' amongst other professionals might be an issue and a possible threat to the sustainability of the approach.

### *2.3.7. EPs and consultation.*

Leadbetter (2006), in her review of the literature, suggests that there are three ways in which the term consultation is used within educational psychology.

1. As a model of service delivery, where she finds that huge variation is apparent in delivery.

2. As a defined task, with agreed characteristics representing the indirect application of psychology by the EP. Particular theoretical approaches may be used, such as environmental, solution-focused or more eclectic models of problem-solving.

3. As a specific activity or skill. Within this type of activity, there can be information seeking or eliciting, information sharing, advice eliciting and advice giving.

Leadbetter argues that, understood in this last way, consultation can make the difference between an effective applied psychologist and one who is not listened to or valued by others with whom he/she works. In light of the evidence discussed, it is proposed that without positive consultative skills, EPs' best efforts in multi-agency teams may not be paid attention to.

The limitations of this discussion paper are that Leadbetter (2006) uses Discourse Analysis (DA) to highlight the themes which emerged in the consultation meetings. Potter, Wetherall, Gill and Edwards (1990) argue that DA is not a value-free technology, it cannot be thought of as an 'it', and the researcher cannot escape involvement in the study at all stages. More generally, Parker and Burman (1993) state that, unlike pressing buttons in SPSS, discourses are not there waiting to be 'found' but must be interpreted by the researcher in a constructive and interactive process.

A further weakness with this study is that, despite some attempts at constructing methods for the validation of DA (Potter & Wetherall, 1987), perhaps, as with all interpretative methodologies, the only fruitful approach is to draw on Thompson's (1990) three categories of insight as listed below.

- Conceptual insight, which allows the reader to see a coherent pattern in the data.
- Phenomenological insight, which provides an interpretation which resonates with the reader.
- Paradigmatic insight, which allows the reader to see the world in an entirely new way.

In summary, it could be argued that DA is capable of providing all three of these insights, but not without the active interpretation of both researcher and reader who co-construct meaning.

### 2.3.8. EPs and multi-agency intervention.

In a study undertaken by Maddern, Franey, McLaughlin and Cox (2004) the effects of a multi-agency social skills programme, designed to promote co-operative skills and anger management in Year 5 and 6 children, was evaluated. Eight children with severe emotional and behavioural difficulties participated in, and completed, the programme. The programme was taught for 90 minutes per week, for twenty weeks, by a team including a clinical psychologist, EP, community psychiatric nurse and assistant psychologist.

Maddern et al. (2004) assessed the impact of this intervention using an extensive battery of measures, administered pre- and post-intervention. No significant change in self-esteem or social competence were reported following the intervention as measured by the Culture Free Self Esteem Questionnaire (CFSEQ; Battle, 1992) and the Social Competence with Peers Questionnaire (SCPQ; Spence, 1995). However, a significant reduction was noted in anxiety, using the Spence Children's Anxiety Scale (SCAS; Spence, 1997), and a significant improvement in anger management, as assessed using the teacher-rated Observation Checklist - Primary (OC-P; Faupel, Herrick & Sharp, 1998).

The Connor's Rating Scale-Revised (CRS-R; Conners, Sitarenios, Parker & Epstein, 1998) was used as a measure of general behaviour, and was completed by both parents and teachers. Of the four subscales, a significant improvement was reported by both teachers and parents on the 'oppositional' scale. However, only the teachers observed a significant improvement on the 'hyperactivity' and 'ADHD' scales. Neither group of respondents reported a significant post-intervention difference on the 'cognitive problems' scale.

Maddern et al. (2004) discuss the success of the programme in light of the need for shared understanding and language for the co-ordination of joint planning and provision. The authors argue that one of the many challenges facing multi-agency working is how to avoid and overcome misunderstandings which stem from professionals' use of language, which reflects different backgrounds and orientations. Maddern et al. suggest that "terminology often confuses and divides" (p. 152) because all professional groups have a language that defines them as different from other groups. Terms such as 'mental health problems' and 'mental health difficulties' are as elusive in meaning as 'emotional and behavioural difficulties.' Maddern et al. (2004) also propose that "EPs are often uneasy with 'medical language' associated with mental health, perhaps tending towards more developmental-behaviourist approaches" (p. 152). Indoe (1998) goes further and argues that the professional world of educational psychology denies that the literature and substance of mental health exists.

Maddern et al. (2004) conclude that:

> Unless the professional groups effectively communicate with one another there runs the risk of schools becoming ideological battlegrounds for professional rivalries with each group offering competing services.
>
> (Maddern et al., 2004, p. 152)

### 2.3.9. EPs and professional identity.

Gaskell and Leadbetter's (2009) study based upon the Activity Theory Framework aimed to explore the changes in views about the professional identity of ten EPs who worked part of the week in a multi-agency team and the other part in an educational psychology service (EPS). Gaskell and Leadbetter (2009) hoped that, in a time of change within the EP profession, the study would provide insights into a new form of practice.

The results highlighted a value associated with increased 'opportunities to engage in creative ways of working' and to be 'flexible' as two of the factors influencing professional identity for EPs. They described being able to engage in preventative work and action research projects, which was not possible when they had a responsibility to a 'patch' of schools. A number of participants appeared to appreciate the opportunity presented despite an initial lack of clarity, apparent "blurring of roles" and personal questioning relating to "what (they had) to offer over and above what was already there (in the multi-agency team)" (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009, p. 104).

In addition, the EPs saw, "engaging in new ways of working (in multi-agency teams) as a chance to realise, validate and develop skills and knowledge" (Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009, p. 105), in addition to being allowed the space which enabled them to reconsider their contribution. Skills which were taken for granted in single-agency working were valued highly in multi-agency teams. This was shown to enhance EPs' perception that their contribution was valued by other team members in the multi-agency team. Moreover, participants valued opportunities to apply and validate psychological skills and to practise as a 'Child Psychologist' as opposed to an 'EP'. Some were seen to value exploring alternative

paradigms, whilst others felt more able to realise their individual psychological skills and develop these (potentially, into a specialism).

In summary, Gaskell and Leadbetter's study provides an alternative view of the implications which rapid rates of change can have on EPs (Gaskell and Leadbetter, 2009). It moves EPs away from topics such as 'identity issues' and 'threats to identity' (Booker, 2005; Branscome, Ellemers, Spears & Doosje, 1999), which appear to dominate narratives associated with the integration of EPs into multi-agency teams and new ways of working.

It is important, however, to note the limitations of the methodology used in this study. Activity Theory does not have clearly defined and specific research procedures and methods (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008), which could consequently result in a level of subjectivity in the findings presented. Furthermore, Activity Theory is limited in its analysis of mental phenomena, particularly emotions (Toomela, 2000) and does not consider sufficiently the influence of an individual's affect, motivation and identity on an activity (Roth, 2007). To illustrate this point further, the study does not detail in its findings whether the EPs participating in the multi-agency teams chose to take on their multi-agency role and hence had some choice concerning the teams they joined. All these variables need to be taken into consideration when looking at factors influencing positive professional identity for EPs working in multi-agency teams.

A further weakness with this study is that it only describes how a small sample (N=10) of EPs perceive their own situation. It could be argued, from a social constructionist perspective, that other EPs' viewpoints and perspectives are equally valid and, therefore, these responses should not be presented as the only viewpoint but just one construction.

**2.4. Potential barriers to effective multi-agency work.**

Sloper (2004) found that differing professional ideologies could act as a barrier in multi-agency work. For example, EPs need to ensure that they are able to deliver an effective service, whilst at the same time ensuring that their Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (BPS, 2006b) is adhered to. The British Psychological Society's (BPS, 2006b) Code of Ethics and Conduct notes that nothing should:

...replace the need for psychologists to use their professional and ethical judgement...

(BPS, 2006b, p. 5)

Interestingly, despite many EPs integrating family assessment and intervention into their roles, the ethical issues related to EPs working with families in multi-agency teams have not been discussed widely in the educational psychology literature. In light of this finding, it is argued that as EPs increase their contact with families, whether in direct or indirect services, there is a need to examine the potential ethical issues that could arise, from the perspectives of the other professionals in the team.

This research is relevant to EPs and the educational psychology profession because, within education, health and social care, it has been widely recognised that professional practice brings with it different types of ethical challenges. Ethical challenges have become an unavoidable part of all professionals' practice. Henry (1995; p. 132) suggests that ethics, "assess the ways in which we behave and the quality of moral values that we have." In summary, a code of ethics is a statement about the guiding principles as to how a person should behave ethically with regard to the domain of concern.

With this definition in mind, it could be argued that ethical conflicts may occur in a multi-agency team because of different ethical beliefs, duties, principles and theories in which each side of the conflict takes a morally defendable position (Mitchell, 1990).

Moreover, Cigno and Gore (1999) proposed that differences in training, focus, status and

allegiance to different validating and professional bodies can all hinder inter-agency working.

Wilson and Pirrie (2000) argue:

> In practice, there is little liaison between different professional bodies, some of whose members may work in proximity to each other with the same client groups; this has led to the growth of unsynchronised validation cycles and profession accreditation of competence.
>
> (Wilson & Pirrie, 2000, p. 18)

Dessent (1996), in a discussion of the obstacles and relationships between services that can hinder inter-agency collaboration, identifies the fact that professional groups have separate backgrounds and training experiences and develop distinctive professional cultures and conceptual frameworks that can lead to rivalry with other groups. Furthermore, Easen, Atkins and Dyson (2000) and Anning (2005) point out that different professional groups may have quite different ways of conceptualising their practice.

Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010), in their discussion of the developing role of EPs within Children's Services, argued:

> The challenge of collaborating closely and formally with a range of agencies demands that time be spent learning each other's "language" and cultures, codes of practice and legislative imperatives.
>
> (Fallon et al., 2010, p. 13)

Research into the cultures, including the approaches to ethics, of the different agencies working in multi-agency teams is relevant to EPs because knowledge of the cultures of different agencies has been found to assist multi-agency work (Hamill & Boyd, 2001). It could be argued that lack of awareness (or understanding) of different agencies' professional standards (cultures or ethos) could result in ineffective multi-agency working.

Furthermore, it could be argued that, as EPs become increasingly involved in multi-agency family work, there is a need to examine potential ethical issues that might arise due to different and perhaps conflicting, professionals' codes of conduct. Two of the questions posed by Leadbetter (2006) in her consideration of the role of the EP in multi-agency work were: how to work alongside colleagues from different professions and agencies who are often coming from very different perspectives in terms of their views on aetiology, causality and intervention; and how to maintain an interactional approach when the dominant model within many other services is the 'medical' model with its accompanying discourses of referral, diagnosis and deficit.

Additionally, a case could be made that there is a need to ask others in the MATSF (which is the subject of the current research) what their perceptions of the role of an EP are, given that previous research has found that the constructions held about the role, by other professional groups, can be very different to the constructions held by the profession itself. For example, MacKay and Boyle (1994) found that teachers and school staff viewed EPs as providing a valuable role regarding individual casework and psychometric testing, an area of work EPs were trying to steer themselves away from (Thomson, 1996). In light of the previous research findings, it is conceivable that other team members may hold 'traditional' constructions about the role of an EP, despite the theoretical underpinnings of the MATSF model being Motivational Interviewing, solution-focused and CBT approaches (WAG, 2010).

Furthermore, it could also be argued that it is important to explore other team members' constructions of the role of an EP, given that "educational psychologists have an almost perennial obsession with reflecting on their role" (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009, p. 3).

**2.5. The current study.**

The current study seeks to explore the perceptions of an EP's role currently held by other team members in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF). The current research will take place within one MATSF in one local authority. The aim of the team is to provide a 'whole family' response to families with complex needs through a multi-agency team of practitioners utilising evidence-based interventions.

### 2.5.1. What is a MATSF?

The MATSF, in the current study, was developed in response to: (1) an identified need in the local authority where the research is being conducted; and (2) a Welsh Assembly Government proposal to place new statutory duties on local authorities and the National Health Service (NHS) to establish prescribed multi-agency, Integrated Family Support Teams (IFST), for vulnerable families, as a core service function within each local authority area by 2015. There are currently three Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) pioneer areas in Wales; all have been in operation since 1st September 2010 (WAG, 2010).

It is important to note that the MATSF in the current study is not one of the three IFSS pioneer areas, although the Integrated Family Support Services: Statutory Guidance and Regulations (WAG, 2010) do inform service delivery. For example, the first phase, of the MATSF programme, is underpinned by a four to six week crisis intervention model, developed by Option 2 in Wales, drawing from theoretical models such as Motivational Interviewing, solution-focused and CBT approaches (WAG, 2010).

### 2.5.2. What is Option 2?

Option 2 is an intensive method of working with families affected by serious issues relating to parental use of drugs or alcohol (Forrester & Williams, 2010). It was created, in part, to provide an alternative to placing children in care which might be considered to be 'Option 1'. The approach is a key element of the Integrated Family Support Service (IFSS) that the

Welsh Assembly Government is piloting prior to introducing this approach throughout Wales.

### 2.5.3. Amplification of the title.

In light of the Welsh Assembly Government's proposal, it is suggested that it would be valuable to conduct research into what an EP can contribute to a MATSF because it seems likely, given the national agenda for integrated services and the professional drive for a community based service, that an increasing number of educational psychology services will adopt a model of work similar to that being introduced in the three pioneer areas in Wales.

### 2.5.4. Research objectives.

The research objectives of the current study are the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.
- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  - the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  - the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

### 2.5.5. Research questions.

The research will address the following questions.

1. *How do the team members construct the role of an EP?*
2. *How do the team members construct the methods, tools and techniques underpinning an EP's practice?*

3. *How do the team members construct the ethical guidelines governing an EP's practice?*

4. *How do these constructions contribute to current practice in this area and what are the implications for future practice for EPs in multi-agency teams?*

It is important to note that this research related to an EP's role in general and not to the EPs in the team.

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# The Role of an Educational Psychologist in a Multi-agency Team Supporting Families

## Part Two: Empirical Study

## Naomi Erasmus

## Cardiff University

## Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy)

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## Abstract

There has been an increasing interest in multi-agency working (MAW) as an approach to meeting families' needs. Reflecting the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda (DfES, 2003), the Children Act (Her Majesty's Government, 2004) reinforced the necessity for agencies to operate more closely together in multi-agency teams in order to promote the five ECM well-being outcomes for children and young people. This recently completed study used questionnaires and semi-structured interviews to investigate the perceptions of an educational psychologist's (EP's) role currently held by other team members in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF). This paper explores the variety of views expressed, and concludes that some team members do still hold 'traditional' constructions about the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP, despite the theoretical underpinnings of the MATSF under consideration being Motivational Interviewing (MI), Solution-Focused and Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT) approaches. The study also found that the majority of, team members had a limited knowledge and understanding of the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP. However, it is acknowledged by the researcher that the sample is small, localised and probably community specific. Hence, the results should be regarded as preliminary, and indicative of the need for further research in other geographical areas and with other multi-agency teams.

## 3. Empirical Study

### 3.1. Introduction.

The main objectives of this research paper are to provide an overview of the literature on what is known about the role of EPs in multi-agency teams. To meet this end, MAW will be described. This will lead into specific consideration of the elements of educational psychology practice that might benefit a MATSF. Potential barriers to effective MAW will also be outlined. In light of the evidence discussed, a new viewpoint for EPs to approach MAW is presented.

#### 3.1.1. MAW.

MAW is where practitioners from more than one agency work together, sharing aims, information, tasks and responsibilities in order to intervene early to prevent problems arising, which may impact on children's learning and achievement (Cheminais, 2009).

#### 3.1.2. The roles and functions of EPs.

Farrell et al. (2006) carried out research into the role and functions of EPs in light of the ECM initiative. They observed that:

- the work of EPs supported the five key outcomes for children;
- they were well positioned to develop MAW; and
- EPs were actively engaged with capacity-building.

Factors and principles that Cameron (2006) felt were critical to this work were that EPs use an evidence-based psychological perspective within a well-defined problem-solving framework.

**3.2. Literature review.**

*3.2.1. EPs and children in care.*

Norwich, Richards and Nash (2010) explored the kinds of issues and tensions experienced by EPs in their MAW with children in care. The main issues reported were:

- tensions between social care and educational expectations;
- others' clarity about roles; and
- others' knowledge about what EPs can do.

Some EPs commented that they were not always able to use their psychological skills and knowledge (expertise issues) because other professionals were also using approaches they used. Expertise issues were also conceptualised in terms of not having enough time for intervention or therapy work. Two proposed solutions to the issues presented were recognising and resolving the dilemmas that arise in these groupings through developing and maintaining shared goals and values and complementary practices (Anning, Cottrell, Frost, Green & Robinson, 2006).

*3.2.2. EPs and children in kinship care.*

Cunningham and Lauchlan (2010) considered suggestions from social workers and kinship carers to help EPs better meet the needs of kinship children/families. Some suggested additional supports, included:

- strategies to support and control emotions, e.g., anger management, self-esteem;
- raising awareness of issues and needs with school staff;
- explaining potential implications of issues on children's education to carers, e.g., highlight, need for I.E.P;
- loss and bereavement support and interventions;
- assessing and helping address additional support needs;

- improving multi-agency liaison; and

- providing more training opportunities e.g., on attachment and resilience.

It is important to consider at this point that, of the EPs sampled, although most had experience of working with a kinship family, the majority did not elaborate on any specific supports that they provide. However, both social workers and EPs articulated the importance of MAW in addressing the needs of kinship care families.

### 3.2.3. EPs and child protection.

German, Wolfendale and Mcloughlin's (2000) review found that EPs were becoming increasingly involved in developing multi-agency links in the area of child protection and that this had introduced a need to address how all EPs can increase their knowledge base and become more effective in applying their skills in this area. In response to their own question, the authors suggested, "an increase in the development of specialist roles and an increase in the number of joint posts between health, education and social services" (p. 270).

### 3.2.4. EPs and children under the age of 5 years old.

Robinson and Dunsmuir (2010) considered the actual and potential contribution of the EP to work with children in the early years. The researchers found the potential of psychology to inform early years practice was not mentioned by Children's Centre staff during the focus group discussions. The Children Centre staff indicated a lack of clarity about the role of the EP.

A key issue that arose from the EPs' responses in this study was that the requirement on them to provide psychological advice as part of the statutory assessment process inhibited more varied practice.

These results support Shannon and Posada's (2007) findings. They found that individual-based casework was the primary area of EP work in early years, with 59% of EPs spending

over half their early years time engaged in individual work, compared with 31% spending the majority of their early years time engaged in organisational level work.

### 3.2.5. EPs and young offenders.

Ryrie (2006) found, through his time spent in a Youth Offending Team (YOT), that EPs could have a considerable role to play in working not only with young people who offend but also with the teams created to work with offenders. He argued that, "the skills of careful assessment and collaborative problem-solving, carried out on the foundations of a knowledge base that includes normal and atypical development as well as the nature of learning and of individual and group behaviour, are extremely valuable and can be applied in a range of settings, not just in schools" (pp. 13-14).

Bearing this definition in mind, it could be argued that this would require the management team of that service to have an articulated understanding of what the role of the EP in the YOT is intended to achieve. Ryrie proposed that a lack of understanding of what an EP's skills and competencies are can result in expectations of only a restricted range of activities, e.g., dyslexia assessments.

### 3.2.6. EPs and consultation.

Wagner (2005) described the consultation framework she developed as seeking to prevent difficulties arising, and thus reflected the early objectives outlined by Gillham (1978) of 'reconstructing educational psychology' and 'giving psychology away' by training teachers and parents to identify difficulties and promote change from a more detatched, consultative role.

Alexander and Sked (2010) evaluated an educational psychology services (EPS's) solution-focused consultation meetings as part of a staged approach aimed at supporting families and children. They found that the EPS, regularly scheduled multi-agency meetings ensured school staff and core-group professionals got to know and trust each other well and that communication and collaboration also improved. Two reasons offered for this were: the

feeling of generating solutions helped promote self-efficacy; and the solution-focused framework stopped the rehearsing of difficulties and allowed the group members to focus on the child's positive attributes and hence feel more optimistic.

### 3.2.7. EPs and multi-agency intervention.

Maddern, Franey, McLaughlin and Cox (2004) describe in their paper a successful, school-based multi-agency intervention involving an EP. The authors found that open discussion and the encouragement of listening and dialogue between agencies helped avoid unnecessary misunderstandings in the initial development of the work. However, it was acknowledged by the authors that, "...this is often not without difficulties and compromises amongst all those involved ...often requiring the development of new understanding and ways of working between the different professionals..." quoting from the DfEE document, (DfEE, 2001, p.2).

### 3.2.8. Potential barriers to MAW.

Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) in their discussion of the developing role of EPs within Children's Services proposed, "the challenge of collaborating closely and formally with a range of agencies demands that time be spent learning each other's "language" and cultures, codes of practice and legislative imperatives" (p. 13).

**3.3. The current study.**

Taking into account the findings of the literature review it is proposed by the researcher that considerable research has taken place into the role of an EP in a multi-agency team but, from what could be found, there is not a case study that explores the role of an EP in a MATSF that espouses the use of MI (a person-centred approach), solution-focused and CBT approaches, which are used widely in the field of educational psychology (Pugh, 2010). There is also not a study that reports on the ethical issues related to EPs working with families in multi-agency teams.

This research is relevant to EPs and the educational psychology profession because the proposed realignment to working more closely with multi-agency colleagues heralds a departure from more 'traditional' models of service delivery which focus on providing detailed assessments of special educational needs for a small number of pupils (Frederickson & Miller, 2008).

### *3.3.1. Research objectives.*

The research objectives of the current study are the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.

- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  ➢ the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  ➢ the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

### 3.3.2. Research questions.

The research will address the following questions.

1. *How do the team members construct the role of an EP?*

2. *How do the team members construct the methods, tools and techniques underpinning an EP's practice?*

3. *How do the team members construct the ethical guidelines governing an EP's practice?*

4. *How do these constructions contribute to current practice in this area and what are the implications for future practice for EPs in multi-agency teams?*

It is important to note that this research relates to an EP's role in general and not to the EPs in the team.

**3.4. Design of the study.**

*3.4.1. Research paradigm.*

The aim of this study was to elicit other team members' perceptions of the role of an EP in a MATSF. A qualitative research paradigm was considered to be the most appropriate method to meet this objective, though parts of the data gathered were considered better suited to quantitative analysis. For example, where the data allowed, frequency counts were used (Robson, 2002).

The justification for selecting a combination of both quantitative and qualitative research methods, according to Miller, Hubble and Duncan (1996) is that:

> The distinction between quantitative and qualitative research is a false dichotomy; most studies can be strengthened by using qualitative and quantitative research strategies. A marriage of these two approaches will allow the consumer of the research to benefit from the rich qualitative descriptions as well as to gain from the information about generalisability that quantitative studies provide.
>
> (Miller et al., 1996, p. 226)

*3.4.2. Ethical considerations.*

The researcher referred to the British Psychological Society's (2006) Code of Ethics and Conduct to guide the ethical considerations of this study. Prior to the commencement of field work, an ethical research proposal was submitted to, and approved by, the Cardiff University Ethics Committee. For a complete consideration of all ethical issues and examples of the consent forms, questionnaire, semi-structured interview schedule, debrief sheet and gatekeeper letter please refer to Appendices, D to J.

### 3.4.3. Pilot study.

Following ethical approval being granted, pilot questionnaires and interviews were conducted with two professionals in another multi-agency team. From these, it was decided that no changes were needed to existing questions and no further questions needed to be added. The language of the questions was easily understood by participants and the data gathered provided material in line with the research objectives.

### 3.4.4. Sampling and participants.

The participants in this study were all professionals currently working in a MATSF. A gatekeeper letter (see Appendix J), outlining the main aims and objectives of the research was sent to the Service Manager in order to gain permission to conduct the research. Once the Service Manager approved the research and gave consent for team members (N=19) to be approached, all team members (excluding the EPs) working for the MATSF who wished to participate were included in the sample.

Thirteen team members responded by returning their questionnaire. Ten follow-up interviews were conducted with a random sample of consenting MATSF team members. In light of the ethical assurance made to participants and in view of the small numbers, a more detailed breakdown of participant information is not appropriate, in case it could lead to identification. However, for the interested reader, team members came from the following areas:

- the local authority (education, housing, social work);
- police,
- health; and
- other organisations within the public, health and voluntary sectors.

### 3.5. Methodology.

#### 3.5.1. Methods.

The study had two inter-related parts. Firstly, a questionnaire (see Appendix G), containing both open and closed items relating to the role of an EP was administered by the researcher to all consenting participants (apart from the EPs) at a MATSF team day, eliciting both quantitative and qualitative data.

Following completion of the individual questionnaires, and Thematic Analysis (TA) of the responses by the researcher, ten semi-structured interviews (see Appendix H) were conducted with a random sample of consenting MATSF team members who had already completed questionnaires. The rationale for these semi-structured interviews was to create an opportunity for the themes that emerged from the individual questionnaires to be investigated further. This approach was adopted by the researcher in acknowledgment that qualitative research may lack inter-observer reliability and that interpretation of findings can be strengthened through triangulation (carrying out more than one type of data collection). According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2001) the advantage of collecting information through two or more methods is that it increases the reliability of the findings.

#### 3.5.2. Epistemology.

A mixed methodological design was chosen for the study, which combined the use of both quantitative and qualitative research. The epistemology of the study, therefore, drew upon both relativism and positivism. The main rationale for the use of the mixed methodology was in terms of completeness, so that a more comprehensive picture could be generated (Hammersley, 2002). For example, the researcher's analysis of the qualitative data comes from a constructionist perspective because interpretation is based on the experience of the social constructions that the participants hold.

### 3.5.3. Analysis.

TA, following the approach outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied to the data, see Appendix K.

The analysis of the open reflective questions involved the identification of common themes across the dataset as a whole. This method was chosen because Braun and Clarke (2006, p. 82) state that TA is flexible, in that it allows the researcher to determine themes and 'prevalence' in a number of ways or at a range of different levels, as indicated in the following questions.

1. Did the themes appear in each individual data set?
2. What number of different participants articulated the theme across the entire data set?
3. What is the occurrence of the theme across each of the data sets and the data set as a whole?

The researcher considered that focusing on the first and second levels of measurement for thematic prevalence, indicated above, could be problematic in this piece of research, due to the small number of participants contributing to each dataset. Therefore, prevalence was measured with regards to the participant group as a whole, rather than the individual participants. This was chosen because it is possible that a participant repeating an 'idea' could be representative of the importance of that 'idea' to him/her. It could be argued that, if researchers are hoping to learn from the constructs of participants, it is important to listen to these potential cues.

A timeline of the research-activities is presented in Appendix L.

### 3.6. Results.

The following section presents a summary of the questionnaire responses. Each questionnaire question is presented and quotes are given when appropriate. Although there were a number of issues raised in the questionnaires, only the common ones are discussed here (i.e., the themes that were articulated five or more times). Conflicting interview responses are also reported.

**Question 1 (a): What is educational psychology?**

TA of the data from question 1(a) gave the following results, which, after coding, were grouped under 3 main positive themes (each code heading is illustrated by examples of direct quotes from the responses, given below in italics).

**The study of how people (children) learn within educational settings such as schools, colleges and universities (17)**

> **...**_educational psychology is concerned with how we all learn... (Participant 8)_

**It focuses on identifying appropriate support to assist certain groups of children experiencing problems/difficulties/disabilities (14)**

> **...**_what tools can be brought in to support these individuals... (Participant 7)_

**Specific educational needs are examined (5)**

> _...system of assessment to identify educational needs... (Participant 4)_

The interview responses verified the questionnaire results. However, there was some additional commentary pertaining to the level of work EPs do and the groups of children worked with.

**Not just individual work**

*...I don't think it's just, maybe for certain groups of children, I think it's for the school in general...they can give advice, can't they, on any child really, not just on those children with diagnoses of things... (Participant 15)*

*...I think you offer a lot more kind of consultation and possibly training...for er, schools, and kind of on different themes, so it's not, for me just individual children, it's...you know, it's a little bit wider... (Participant 16)*

**Gifted pupils**

*...the only thing I thought, educational psychology was as well, is you know if you've got gifted children, I don't know...would they examine that as well?...Because they've got, like, different educational needs as well... (Participant 14)*

*...yes I think specific difficulties, but I have obviously heard there's children who have like outstanding abilities, isn't there as well?...But I think generally it tends to be...have disabilities, yeah... (Participant 17)*

**Question 1 (b): What does an EP do?**

TA of the data from question 1(b) gave the following results, which, after coding, were grouped under 6 main positive themes (each code heading is illustrated by examples of direct quotes from the responses, given below in italics).

**Assessments (15)**

*...they assess how children learn or think... (Participant 13)*

**Advice and Support (12)**

*...they provide advice to teachers and can sometimes liaise and offer techniques to parents and carers... (Participant 8)*

**Training (7)**

*...disseminate expert knowledge of conditions/disorders which may impact on learning and development.... (Participant 12)*

**Multi-agency working (5)**

*...work with other agencies who provide services to children... (Participant 4)*

**Enhance learning (5)**

*...raise educational standards... (Participant 2)*

**Look at the whole child (5)**

**...***they help children deal with feelings, low motivation etc... (Participant 6)*

The interview responses verified the questionnaire responses with the exception of three themes, '**assessment**', '**look at the whole child**' and '**multi-agency working**', where there was some disagreement about what an EP does. In response to the '**assessment**' theme, some alternative constructions of what an EP does were as follows.

**Observations**

*...Er, so to me, what I know, of what I've seen, it would be more observations...than, er, assessments... (Participant 19)*

> *...I think a lot of it's observational... (Participant 14)*

**More consultation-led**

One participant reflected on whether EPs should be working using assessment or consultation, as though consultation excluded assessment.

In response to the '**look at the whole child**' theme one alternative construction was the following.

**Role for CAMHS**

> *...I suppose you'd look at the whole child, but I'd assume also that that would be done through CAMHS as well, wouldn't it? How come we have a psychologist in CAMHS then?... (Participant 17)*

In response to the '**multi-agency working**' theme some alternative constructions of what an EP does were as follows.

**Not working together**

Five participants commented that they did not think EPs worked with and through other agencies and services, to help families to develop solutions.

**Question 2: What methods, tools and techniques do you perceive an EP uses, in working with families?**

TA of the data from question 2 gave the following results, which, after coding, were grouped under 7 main positive themes (each code heading is illustrated by examples of direct quotes from the responses, given below in italics).

**Offer support through brief solution-focused therapy and knowledge of different psychological theories/models (14):**

- *...problem-solving solution-circle... (Participant 2);*
- *...systemic theory... (Participant 3);*
- *...attachment theory... (Participant 12); and*
- *...brief solution therapy... (Participant 13).*

**Assessment (13)**

*...assess cognitive ability... (Participant 7)*

**Observations - different settings (11)**

*...observing a child interacting with peers, teachers, parents etc in different environments to establish if there are any obvious factors influencing behaviour, self-esteem or educational ability... (Participant 11)*

**Interventions (10)**

*...aids adapted for specific communication needs... (Participant 1)*

**Interview people connected to the child (7)**

*...interviews... (Participant 2)*

**Work directly with families (5)**

*...family/individual exercises... (Participant 3)*

**Provide counselling (5)**

> ...1:1 counselling... (Participant 10)

The interview responses verified the questionnaire responses with the exception of two themes, '**offer support through brief solution-focused therapy**' and '**provide counselling**', where there was some disagreement about whether these were methods, tools and techniques used by an EP, working with families.

Some responses to the theme '**provide support through brief solution-focused therapy**' were as follows.

> ..."They offer support through brief solution-focused therapy." I don't know about that, that doesn't sound...right to me. I don't know. I would be doubtful about that... ...definitely "an understanding of different psychological theories and models." I'm not sure about the brief solution-focused therapy. I think I would actually be tempted to take that out... (Participant 23)

> ...I think that it's, er, on other support, more, I don't think it's completely focused on brief solution at all, I don't think... (Participant 21)

Some responses to the theme '**provide counselling**' were as follows.

> ...I think that might blur the boundaries of an EP, if they do provide counselling to families...I suppose they could offer counselling in the sense of having a meeting with the family and that, and airing issues out I suppose and using those skills in that... (Participant 15)

> ...I don't know about the counselling. I was unsure they provided counselling... because within schools they've got counsellors and everything now, haven't they? I know they've got counselling skills and, you know, because it's psychology, isn't it? But I didn't know they provided counselling as part of the

*service. Maybe, in a group setting with children? They might do group work or whatever, and use those counselling skills... (Participant 21)*

**Question 3: What ethical principles guide an EP when he/she is working with a family?**

TA of the data from question 3 gave the following results, which, after coding, were grouped under 2 main positive themes (each code heading is illustrated by examples of direct quotes from the responses, given below in italics).

**Confidentiality (5)**

> *...confidentiality... (Participant 3)*

**Code of conduct (4)**

> *...all psychologists have to adhere to certain codes of conduct... (Participant 11)*

**Question 4 (a): Are you aware of the British Psychological Society (BPS)?**

- *Yes = 8*
- *No = 5*

**Question 4 (b): Are you aware of the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct?**

- *Yes = 5*
- *No = 8*

**Question 5 (a): Are you aware of the Health Professions Council (HPC)?**

- *Yes = 3*
- *No = 10*

**Question 5 (b): Are you aware of the HPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics?**

- *Yes = 1*
- *No = 12*

**Question 6: If you answered yes to question 4 or 5 please list as many points from one or both of these codes as you can in the boxes below.**

This question was in the main part left blank. The two responses given were as follows.

> *...professional body that all psychologists are governed by or a member of... Underpins standards and ethics...The BPS advises government and drives psychology forward...Undertakes evidence based research... (Participant 11)*

> *...respect, competence, responsibility, integrity... (Participant 7)*

**Question 7: In addition to the information you have already given, what else do you think an EP could contribute to a MATSF?**

TA of the data from question 7 gave the following results, which, after coding, were grouped under 3 main positive themes (each code heading is illustrated by examples of direct quotes from the responses, given below in italics).

**Training (12)**

> **...**dissemination of knowledge/skills through workshops/training... (Participant 12)*

**Advice and support (10)**

> *...ideas for suitable interventions for children with additional needs and ideas for using suitable ways to explain information to families as a whole... (Participant 1)*

**Prioritise the children in MATSF (5)**

*...prioritise the children within the families we work with in order for us to work more efficiently with families, as this will support us to put strategies in place in the home... (Participant 13)*

## 3.7. Discussion

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher will examine, in the following section, if the findings discussed in the literature review resonate with the perceptions voiced by the MATSF team members. It is acknowledged by the researcher that consideration should be given to the subjective judgement applied in creating the categories and the coding used to interpret the team members' responses.

### 3.7.1. How do the team members construct the role of an EP?

Several participants expressed the perception that an EP's role in a MATSF was as an assessor of individual needs and a definer of resources (Frederickson & Miller, 2008). The results support Cunningham and Lauchlan's (2010) proposal that social workers and kinship carers want assessment and help to address additional support needs from EPs. It is, however, important to note that there was a small minority of participants who suggested that the EP could work at levels beyond the individual child and with more able children.

In summary, the findings from this question suggest that the majority of participants' constructions of the role of an EP within a MATSF contrast with Shannon and Posada's (2007) analysis of themes for future development, whereby EPs wanted to increase the priority of their early years work, have greater involvement in organisational level work and are dissatisfied with the emphasis on individual, statutory work. The results do not support Alexander and Sked's (2010) finding that the role of the EP had been critical in the effective running of the meetings. The team members sampled in the current study did not construct this to be a function that an EP could contribute to a MATSF.

At a more general level, there was widespread agreement that EPs are not appropriate professionals to be drawn on for counselling or therapeutic interventions (e.g., brief solution-focused therapy) in the MATSF. These perceptions support Norwich et al.'s (2010) findings that EPs do not have enough time for intervention and therapy work. The results do not support Pugh's (2010) findings and suggest EPSs must re-emphasise core therapeutic functions to see a revival in the provision of psychological therapy by EPs.

### 3.7.2. How do the team members construct the methods, tools and techniques underpinning an EP's practice?

The methods, tools and techniques cited the most often by participants were 'assessment' and 'advice and support', with one team member expressing doubts regarding the EPS' consultation initiative and 'new' way of working. This viewpoint is in contrast to recent literature (Kelly, Woolfson & Boyle, 2008) which is calling, once again, for EPs to reconstruct educational psychology (Gillham, 1978) and to move away from referral systems, psychometric assessment and reactive rather than preventative work. This is an interesting point for the educational psychology profession to consider, with consultation becoming recognised as one of the main models of service delivery within EPS' (Wagner, 2008).

Norwich et al.'s (2010) paper provides several possible explanations for the current findings. For example, they found that the tensions between social care and educational expectations, clarity about roles and knowledge about what EPs can do can all affect how team members construct the methods, tools and techniques underpinning an EP's practice.

Some other possible explanations suggested by the researcher for why team members value assessment over consultation are listed below.

- That the consultation process appears simple and this can be deceptive (Wagner, 2000).

- Where there has been no culture or tradition of whole team problem-solving, team members may simply not be accustomed to having any input into decision-making and there may be a lack of confidence in engaging in discussion. At its worst, there may be a culture of fear of participation and team member opposition to being involved. For instance, team members may feel concerned that involvement will jeopardise their job security or career prospects if they are seen to challenge other professionals' views in consultation fora.

- It is possible that team members may feel cynical about becoming involved in consultative exercises where, for example, they have previously been involved in, or have observed, consultative arrangements that were either not meaningful or had no visible impact. This may have resulted in a situation of 'low trust'.

- The history of relations between services may have a pervasive effect on the opportunities for introducing new consultative arrangements in a workplace. This may manifest in employee behaviours and perceptions of other professions.

It is suggested that, based on the findings of this study, mutual trust (Alexander & Sked, 2010) and complementary practices (Anning et al., 2006) may both be a precondition for effective consultation between an EPS and a MATSF in many circumstances. Equally it is a feature of the employment relationship that is most likely to emerge where the parties have worked through difficult issues together, using joint consultative processes. This may especially be the case where there has been no tradition of employee involvement, or where the employment relations climate has been adversarial (Norwich et al., 2010).

### 3.7.3. How do the team members construct the ethical guidelines governing an EP's practice?

The results of this study provide evidence that, apart from in the area of 'confidentiality', time may not have been spent on 'learning each other's "language" and cultures, codes of practice and legislative imperatives' (Fallon et al., 2010, p. 13). The EPS's value base does not appear to be explicit and shared.

It should also be borne in mind that, during the semi-structured interviews, team members stressed the importance, from the outset, of establishing the scope of the EP role, or its 'terms of reference', with regard to which matters can and cannot be discussed. Team members felt that EPs needed to strike a balance between giving information that was meaningful and not jeopardising confidentiality. One solution suggested by the researcher may involve, at the stage of developing a MATSF, EPs spelling out the type and degree of

confidential information they will share with other team members, and EPs developing protocols for ensuring that team members maintain confidentiality.

### 3.7.4. How do these constructions contribute to current practice in this area and what are the implications for future practice for EPs in multi-agency teams?

The participants indicated, via their responses, what changes they would expect to see in the EP role if their views were listened to. The research has highlighted that the majority of participants constructed that EPs need to spend more time "capacity-building" (Farrell et al., 2006, p.7) so that team members are fully equipped to fulfil their roles and responsibilities in the MATSF. The themes 'training' and 'advice and support' make it clear that working with team members to develop knowledge of special educational needs, facilitation and communication skills is perceived to be an important part of the role of an EP in a MATSF. These results support Cunningham and Lauchlan's (2010) findings.

### 3.7.5. Limitations of the research.

It is acknowledged that the limitations of this type of small-scale study are that the findings cannot be generalised to all MATSF because: (1) participant numbers are small; and (2) the data received from team members will be qualitative and relate primarily to their perceptions of working in one team.

Furthermore, specifically in this research, it might have been helpful to find out about the extent of participants' previous contact with EPs. This would be helpful because it would provide context about the depth of their knowledge of EP working.

### 3.7.6. Directions for future research.

Future research in this area might explore the role of an EP in a MATSF as a consultant and transmitter of skills (e.g., psychological therapies training) and facilitator of communication and collaboration.

### 3.7.7. Implications for EP practice.

The discussion so far has focused on practical considerations (creating appropriate processes and structures), good practice in information sharing and consultation and on the behavioural aspects (the necessity of team members' commitment to the MATSF objectives). Strategies for pinpointing such problems and resolving them are discussed in the following section.

### 3.8. Conclusion.

The current study sought to improve understanding of how the role of an EP is perceived by other team members in a MATSF. Questionnaires were distributed to all team members in one MATSF (N=19) and thirteen were returned. Ten follow-up interviews were then carried out to explore further the arising themes.

The results supported much of the literature relating to this issue. For example, once again it would appear that historical precedent means that it is difficult for EPS' to set up 'new' structures and processes in MATSF, and difficult for EPs to implement them. The research also revealed that, despite a shift to more harmonious dealings, residual workplace cultures may cause team managers to believe that their team members should continue to relate to EPs in a certain way.

A second point raised by the research is how and what information is conveyed to the MATSF by the EPS can be issues of some complexity. There are several aspects to this. First, where confidential information is discussed, the EP must decide how much of this information may be disclosed to the MATSF. The results of the current study suggest that problems may occur where EPs are consulted over sensitive information, for example, relating to individual children. Therefore it is important that information-sharing protocols, procedures and behavioural standards are established (and ideally, set down in writing) at an early stage to ensure the smooth running of the system.

It is, however, recognised by the researcher that no two workplaces are the same, and the challenges of informing and consulting team members are wide-ranging, necessitating a sensitive, tailored and, at times multi-layered, response. It is clearly not possible to devise 'template' information sharing and consultation arrangements which can be replicated across all MATSF. Rather, this report has attempted to capture a series of overarching principles which provide a point of entry for securing meaningful, effective and lasting arrangements.

In light of the findings of this research project, there would appear to be considerable scope for expansion of the role an EP plays in a MATSF. However, it must be emphasised that these comments only give a snapshot of some professionals' viewpoints on educational psychology at a given moment in time. Furthermore, it may also be the case that what team members choose to say in explaining educational psychology to others may not fully reflect their own understanding. Another point worth considering when reading this paper is that there is, "an almost infinite pool from which constructs appear from one occasion of inquiry to another" (Hyman, 2008, p. 286). Thus, the challenges to effective MAW arrangements are wider than those discussed so far.

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**Appendices**

**Appendix A: Inclusion/exclusion criteria for systematic literature review.**

| Inclusion Criteria | Exclusion Criteria |
|---|---|
| • Published in a peer reviewed journal. | • Dissertations, books, non-peer reviewed journal articles. |
| • Written/transcribed in English. | • Not written/transcribed in English. |
| • Studies conducted during or after 2000. | • Studies conducted before 2000. |
| • Reference specifically to educational psychology or educational psychologists in the title or abstract. | • No reference made to educational psychology or educational psychologists in the title or abstract. |
| • Include the words multi-agency/ multi-disciplinary/multi-professional in the title and/or abstract. | • Do not include the words multi-agency/ multi-disciplinary /multi-professional in the title and/or abstract. |

**Appendix B: Criteria for evaluating weight of evidence.**

Below are Gough's (2007) criteria that were used to evaluate the weight of the evidence for selected studies. Each study was rated as being of high, medium to high, medium, medium to low, or low in terms of weight of evidence for each area.

**The weight of evidence is based on:**

**A.** The extent to which the study was adequately described; whether it had clear aims; whether it was clear about how its sample had been chosen; and the appropriateness of the sample design for the research focus. The adequacy and suitability of the data collection and analysis methods for the study focus were also considered.

**B.** The appropriateness of the research design and analysis in relation to the review question.

**C.** The relevance of the study topic focus in answering the review question was judged based on how well the data collected helped to answer the question.

An overall weighting was calculated taking into account A, B and C.

**Appendix C: Weight of evidence (Gough, 2007).**

| Number | Study | Weight of Evidence A (methodological quality) | Weight of Evidence B (methodological relevance) | Weight of Evidence C (topic relevance) | Weight of Evidence D (Overall Weight of Evidence) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Norwich, B., Richards, A., & Nash, T. (2010). Educational psychologists and children in care. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 26*(4), 375-390. | Medium to High | High | High | High |
| 2 | Cunningham, L., & Lauchlan, F. (2010). Pre-school children in kinship care: are we doing enough as EPs? *Educational and Child Psychology, 27*(4), 73-90. | Medium to High | High | High | High |
| 3 | German, M., Wolfendale, S., & McLoughlin, L. (2000). The role of educational psychologists in child protection: an exploratory study. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 15*(4), 263-271. | Medium to High | High | High | High |
| 4 | Robinson, M., & Dunsmuir, S. (2010). Multi-professional assessment and intervention of children with special educational needs in their early years: the contribution of educational psychology. *Educational and Child Psychology,* 27(4), 10-21. | Medium | High | High | High |
| 5 | Ryrie, N. (2006). Working with a youth offending team: personal perspectives on challenges and opportunities for the practice of educational psychology. *Educational and Child Psychology, 23*(2), 6-14. | Medium to Low | Medium to Low | Medium to High | Medium |
| 6 | Alexander, S., & Sked, H. (2010). The development of solution focused multi-agency meetings in a psychological service. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 26*(3), 239-249. | Medium to Low | Medium to High | Medium to High | Medium |
| 7 | Leadbetter, J. (2006). Investigating and conceptualising the notion of consultation to facilitate multi-agency work. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 22*(1), 19-31. | Medium to Low | Low | Medium to High | Medium |
| 8 | Maddern, L., Franey, J., McLaughlin, V., & Cox, S. (2004). An evaluation of the impact of an interagency intervention programme to promote social skills in primary school children. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 20*(2), 135-155. | Medium | Medium | Medium to High | Medium |
| 9 | Gaskell, S., & Leadbetter, J. (2009). Educational psychologists and multi-agency working: exploring professional identity. *Educational Psychology in Practice, 25*(2), 97-111. | Medium to Low | Low | Medium | Medium |

**Appendix D: Ethical considerations.**

**Informed consent**

A gatekeeper letter (see Appendix J), outlining the main aims and objectives of the researcher was sent to the Service Manager in order to gain permission to conduct the research.

Once the Service Manager approved the research and gave consent for team members to be approached, all professionals working for the MATSF who wished to participate were included in the sample.

Prior to the questionnaires being handed out, at a MATSF team day, participants were provided with information verbally about the purpose of the research study, to help them to decide whether or not they wished to participate.

Participants were informed as to the purpose of the information gathered, the duration of storage, and the conditions of use (e.g., that their data would be securely stored and destroyed after two years).

Participants were told that participation in the study was entirely voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study up until their questionnaires had been returned to the researcher and their semi-structured interviews transcribed and anonymised.

Participants were told to leave blank any questions that they felt uncomfortable about answering.

**Anonymity**

The data collected via the questionnaires were submitted anonymously. Participants were told that everything reported in the questionnaires were anonymous and that they may withdraw from the study up until their questionnaires had been returned to the researcher.

The data collected via semi-structured interviews were anonymised after each interview was transcribed.

Participants were told that all semi-structured interviews would be anonymised and that they could withdraw from the study up until transcription. After this, nobody would be able to trace information back to individual participants.

Participants were informed that they could ask for the information that they provided in the semi-structured interviews to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until their data had been anonymised.

Participants were told that the results of the project might be published but their anonymity would be preserved.

**Confidentiality**

The participants were told that the information provided during the semi-structured interviews would be held confidentially, such that only the researcher could trace this information back to them individually. Participants were informed that, after the interviews had been transcribed and anonymised, it would not be possible for the transcriptions to be traced back to individual participants by anyone.

Participants were told that any information that would make it possible to identify them as individuals, or the team under study, would not be included in the final report or thesis.

**Protection of participants**

The researcher ensured no distress was caused to participants during the study. Any queries were clarified. Participants were given a debrief sheet (see Appendix I), following their questionnaire completion and semi-structured interview, together with contact details of the researcher, the research supervisor and the Cardiff School of Ethics Committee, if they wished to discuss any concerns.

**Appendix E: Informed consent form (questionnaire).**

The role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF)

Consent Form

 I understand that my participation in this project will involve completing a questionnaire and will require approximately 30 minutes of my time.

I understand that the research objectives of the study are the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.
- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  ➢ the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  ➢ the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the team.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study up until my questionnaire has been returned to Naomi Erasmus at which point it will not be traceable back to me.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time or discuss my concerns with Naomi Erasmus (Trainee Educational Psychologist) or John Gameson (Professional Director, DEdPsy Programme, Cardiff University).

I understand that the information provided by me will be held anonymously, so that it is impossible to trace this information back to me individually. I understand that access to the questionnaires will be restricted to the researcher. I understand that the questionnaires will be stored in a secure area (e.g., locked filing cabinet) and destroyed after two years. I understand that any information that would make it possible to identify me or any other participant will never be included in the final report/thesis.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study to be conducted by Naomi Erasmus (Trainee Educational Psychologist) who will be supervised by John Gameson (Professional Director, DEdPsy Programme, Cardiff University).

Signed: _____ Date: _____

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at GroveNR1@Cardiff.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and interest.

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

John Gameson                           Simon Griffey
Professional Director                  Research Director &
DEdPsy Programme                       Professional Tutor

Cardiff University                     Cardiff University
Tower Building                         Tower Building
Park Place                             Park Place
Cardiff                                Cardiff
CF10 3AT                               CF10 3AT

Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 75474            Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 70366
Email: GamesonJ@Cardiff.ac.uk          Email:  GriffeySJ@Cardiff.ac.uk

**Appendix F: Informed consent form (semi-structured interview).**

<u>The role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF)</u>

<u>Consent Form</u>

I understand that my participation in this project will involve taking part in a short semi-structured interview and will require approximately 30 minutes of my time.

I understand that the research objectives of the study are the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.
- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  - the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  - the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the **team**.

I understand that participation in this study is entirely voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study up until the point my interview has been transcribed (anonymised) at which point it will not be traceable back to me.

I understand that I am free to ask any questions at any time or discuss my concerns with Naomi Erasmus (Trainee Educational Psychologist) or John Gameson (Professional Director, DEdPsy Programme, Cardiff University).

I understand that the data collected via semi-structured interviews will be held confidentially and then anonymised (given a code) after each interview is transcribed and after this point no-one will be able to trace information back to me individually.

I understand that the interviews will be taped (audio) and access to the tapes will be restricted to the researcher. I understand that the tapes will be stored in a secure area (e.g., locked filing cabinet) and the tapes will be destroyed after they have been transcribed. I understand that if my words are quoted then a code will be used to ensure that they cannot be identified in any way. I understand that any information that would make it possible to identify me or any other participant will never be included in the final report/thesis.

I also understand that at the end of the study I will be provided with additional information and feedback about the purpose of the study.

I, _____(NAME) consent to participate in the study to be conducted by Naomi Erasmus (Trainee Educational Psychologist) who will be supervised by John Gameson (Professional Director, DEdPsy Programme, Cardiff University).

Signed: _____    Date: _____

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at GroveNR1@Cardiff.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and interest.

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

| John Gameson | Simon Griffey |
|---|---|
| Professional Director | Research Director & |
| DEdPsy Programme | Professional Tutor |
| | |
| Cardiff University | Cardiff University |
| Tower Building | Tower Building |
| Park Place | Park Place |
| Cardiff | Cardiff |
| CF10 3AT | CF10 3AT |
| Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 75474 | Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 70366 |
| Email: GamesonJ@Cardiff.ac.uk | Email: GriffeySJ@Cardiff.ac.uk |

**Appendix G: Questionnaire.**

<u>The role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF)</u>

Firstly, thank you very much for agreeing to answer some questions for me. I am trying to find out a little more about other team members' perceptions of the role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families and his/her ways of working (e.g., methods/tools/techniques used and ethical guidelines governing practice). I can only do this with your co-operation – so thank you for your time.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the **team**.

This questionnaire consists of 7 separate questions. It should take you approximately 30 minutes to complete. Please answer the following questions as openly and as honestly as you can. If there are any questions you are unable to answer then please leave them blank. Your replies will be treated in complete confidence and at no time will any opinions be passed on, or retained by us, in a way that could be traceable to you. Anonymity will be maintained as you are requested not to provide your name on the questionnaire. Furthermore, any information that would make it possible to identify you or any other participant will never be included in the final report/thesis.

Once you have completed the questionnaire please return it to Naomi Erasmus. Please be aware that, by returning your questionnaire you are consenting to participate in the current study.

**Part 1:  Educational psychology**

1.   (a) What is educational psychology?

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(b) What does an educational psychologist do?

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2. What methods/tools/techniques do you perceive an educational psychologist uses, in working with families?

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**Part 2: Ethics**

*Professional ethics refers to the ethos, rules and principles underpinning professional practice. In joining a professional body and assuming a professional title, a practitioner expressly agrees to be bound by the rules of that profession. Professional codes of ethics set down many general rules about how practitioners are expected to behave. This is an important aspect of professional self-regulation because it means there is a recognised standard against which professional practice can be measured, and an explicit statement about the level of commitment and behaviour the public is entitled to expect.*

3. What ethical principles do you think guide an educational psychologist when he/she is working with a family?

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4. (a) Are you aware of the British Psychological Society (BPS)?

   **Yes / No** (Please circle)

   (b) Are you aware of the BPS Code of Ethics and Conduct?

   **Yes / No** (Please circle)

5. (a) Are you aware of the Health Professions Council (HPC)?

   **Yes / No** (Please circle)

(b) Are you aware of the HPC Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics?

**Yes / No** (Please circle)

6. If you answered 'yes' to questions 4 or 5 please list as many points from one or both of these codes as you can in the boxes below.

(Please just provide the main points that you are aware of. There is no need to refer to the codes to complete this section).

| BPS | HPC |
|-----|-----|
|     |     |

## Part 3: Future Directions

**7.** In addition to the information you have already given, what else do you think an educational psychologist could contribute to a multi-agency team supporting families?

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*Thank you for your time.*

*Your participation is greatly appreciated.*

**Appendix H: Semi-structured interview schedule.**

The role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF)

Firstly, thank you very much for agreeing to answer some questions for me. I am trying to find out a little more about other team members' perceptions of the role of an educational psychologist in a MATSF and his/her ways of working (e.g., methods/tools/techniques used and ethical guidelines governing practice). I can only do this with your co-operation – so thank you for your time. Your replies will be treated in complete confidence and at no time will any opinions be passed on, or kept by us, in a way that is traceable to you. Furthermore, any information that would make it possible to identify you or any other participant will never be included in the final report/thesis.

The semi-structured interview today will consist of 6 separate question areas and should take approximately 30 minutes to complete. Please answer the questions as openly and as honestly as you can. If there are any questions you are unable to answer then please leave them blank.

Your participation in this research project is entirely voluntary and you can withdraw from the study, without giving a reason, up until your interview has been transcribed. After that it will not be possible to withdraw as the transcription will have been anonymised. You are free to ask questions at any time.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the **team**.

| Overarching Themes | Questions | Possible Probes (follow up questions) |
|---|---|---|
| 1. It is the study of how people (children) learn in educational settings such as schools, colleges and universities.<br>2. It focuses on identifying | Some of the themes that arose from question (1a) on the questionnaire *'What is educational psychology?'* were ......<br>Can you tell me a bit more about these themes? Do you agree or disagree? | Some say...do you agree?<br>Could you say more about...?<br>Can you tell me a bit more about ...? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| appropriate support to assist certain groups of children experiencing problems, difficulties or disabilities.<br>3. Specific educational needs are examined. | | |
| 1. Assessments of children.<br>2. They offer advice and support to both schools and parents. They help put strategies in place in order to meet children's needs.<br>3. They facilitate courses/training for teachers and parents and anyone involved with the education of children.<br>4. They work with other agencies who provide services to children.<br>5. They help children who are experiencing problem within an educational setting with the aim of enhancing their learning.<br>6. They look at the whole child. For example, promote children's psychological, social, emotional and behavioural development. | Some of the themes that arose from question (1b) on the questionnaire *'What does an educational psychologist do?'* were ...... Can you tell me a bit more about these themes? Do you agree or disagree? | Some say…do you agree? Could you say more about…? Can you tell me a bit more about …? |
| 1. Assess academic achievement.<br>2. They observe children within the classroom setting and possibly at home. | Some of the themes that arose from question (2) on the questionnaire *'What methods, tools and techniques do you perceive an educational psychologist* | Some say…do you agree? Could you say more about…? Can you tell me a bit more about …? |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 3. They provide interventions.<br>4. They offer support through Brief Solution Focused Therapy and understanding different psychological theories/models.<br>5. They work directly with families.<br>6. They provide counselling. | *to use, to move families forward? (i.e., are examples of current educational psychology practice in relation to families?)'*<br>were ......<br>Can you tell me a bit more about these themes? Do you agree or disagree? | |
| 1. Confidentiality<br>2. Their code of conduct. | Some of the themes that arose from question (3) on the questionnaire *'What ethical principles do you think guide an educational psychologist when he/she is working with a family?'*<br>were ......<br>Can you tell me a bit more about these themes? Do you agree or disagree? | Some say…do you agree?<br>Could you say more about…?<br>Can you tell me a bit more about ...? |
| 1. Provide information through training.<br>2. Offer advice and support.<br>3. Prioritise the children within the families we work with. | Some of the themes that arose from question (7) on the *questionnaire 'In addition to the information you have already given, what else do you think an educational psychologist could contribute to a multi-agency team supporting families? (i.e., what else might you expect/like an educational psychologist to do?)'*<br>were ......<br>Can you tell me a bit more about these themes? Do you agree or disagree? | Some say…do you agree?<br>Could you say more about…?<br>Can you tell me a bit more about ...? |

*Is there anything else you would like to add?*

*Thank you for your time and help.*

**Appendix I: Debrief sheet.**

The role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF)

Debrief

(To be retained by the participant)

Thank you for taking part in this research project. The research objectives of the study were the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.
- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  ➤ the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  ➤ the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the team.

This research is considered to be important because clarity about the educational's psychologists role may help in ensuring effective service delivery. We hope that the findings from this research will be of benefit to ******** Educational Psychology Service and MATSF in ********.

If you have any further questions about this study, please contact me at GroveNR1@Cardiff.ac.uk. Thank you for your time and interest.

Naomi Erasmus (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

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

| | |
|---|---|
| John Gameson | Simon Griffey |
| Professional Director | Research Director & |
| DEdPsy Programme | Professional Tutor |
| Cardiff University | Cardiff University |
| Tower Building | Tower Building |
| Park Place | Park Place |
| Cardiff | Cardiff |
| CF10 3AT | CF10 3AT |
| Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 75474 | Phone: +44 (0) 29 208 70366 |
| Email: GamesonJ@Cardiff.ac.uk | Email: GriffeySJ@Cardiff.ac.uk |

**Appendix J: Gatekeeper letter.**

Address to be inserted

Dear ****************,

I am a postgraduate student in the School of Psychology, Cardiff University. As part of my degree I am carrying out a research project on the role of an educational psychologist in a multi-agency team supporting families (MATSF).

The research objectives of the study are the following.

- To explore what other team members' constructions of the role of an EP are.
- To examine in more detail other team members' constructions of:

  - the methods, tools and techniques underpinning the professional practice of an EP; and
  - the ethical guidelines governing the professional practice of an EP.

- To use the findings to inform future educational psychology service delivery in the MATSF and other multi-agency contexts.

Please note that this research relates to an educational psychologist's role in general and not to the two educational psychologists in the team. It will not be possible to identify any team members when the research is reported.

I am writing to enquire whether you would be willing for your team to participate in this research project. In order to research these objectives all team members (apart from the educational psychologists on the team) will be asked to complete a questionnaire, which it is anticipated will take 30 minutes to complete.

The questionnaire will contain both open and closed items related to the role of an educational psychologist and his/her ways of working (e.g., the methods/tools/techniques

underpinning professional practice and the ethical guidelines governing professional practice).

Following thematic analysis of the individual questionnaires by the researcher, up to ten team members selected randomly will be asked to take part in a semi-structured interview on an individual basis. The rationale for these semi-structured interviews is to create an opportunity for the themes that emerged from the individual questionnaires to be investigated further, as well as to include other relevant commentary.

The data collected via the questionnaire will be submitted anonymously. The data collected via semi-structured interviews will be held confidentially and then anonymised after each interview is transcribed and after this point no-one will be able to trace information back to individual participants.  The information provided by participants will be retained for up to two years when it will be deleted/destroyed. Participants will be informed that they can ask for the information that they provide in the semi-structured interviews to be deleted/destroyed at any time up until the data has been anonymised.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please contact me if you have any questions or require further information.

Regards,

**Naomi Erasmus**
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

Phone:  +44 (0) 29 208 75393
Email: GroveNR1@Cardiff.ac.uk

**John Gameson**
Professional Director, DEdPsy Programme

Cardiff University
Tower Building
Park Place
Cardiff
CF10 3AT

Phone: +44 (0) 29  208 75474
Email: GamesonJ@Cardiff.ac.uk

**Appendix K: Method of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).**

The researcher's thematic analysis was based on the six phases listed below.

1. Becoming familiar with the data
2. Generating initial codes
3. Searching for themes
4. Reviewing themes
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Producing the report

**Appendix L: Research activity timeline.**

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| **September-October 2011** |
| Initial meetings with Research Supervisor, Principal Educational Psychologist and key personnel in Local Authority to identify areas of interest and potential research. Researcher spoke to MATSF team leader about potential research. |
| **November-December 2011** |
| Review of relevant literature and consolidation of research objectives in collaboration with Principal Educational Psychologist and Research Supervisor. |
| **January 2012** |
| Development of research proposal and specification of research methods (including development of information sheets, consent protocols and data collection) and submission of research proposal to Cardiff University Ethics Committee. |
| **March 2012** |
| Ethical committee approval of the research. Pilot questionnaires and interviews were conducted with two professionals in another multi-agency team. The gatekeeper letter (see Appendix J), outlining the main aims and objectives of the research was sent to the MATSF service manager to obtain consent to approach team members. |
| **April 2012** (Data gathering) |
| The researcher presented the research proposal to team members at their service day. Consent forms and questionnaires were given to nineteen MATSF team members. Thirteen questionnaires and consent forms were returned. |
| **May-June 2012** |
| Thematic analysis of the questionnaire responses began conforming to phases set out by Braun & Clarke (2006), see Appendix K. |
| **July 2012** (Data gathering) |
| The researcher held individual, semi-structured interviews with a random sample of consenting MATSF team members (N=10). The purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to explore the themes emerging from the questionnaires further. |
| **July 2012** |
| All semi-structured interviews were transcribed one-by-one. |
| **August 2012** |
| Thematic analysis of the semi-structured interview responses began conforming to phases set out by Braun & Clarke (2006), see Appendix K. |
| **September 2012-April 2013** |
| Continued refinement of data analysis and write up of research. |