A CULTUTURAL HISTORICAL ACTIVITY THEORY EXPLORATION OF

EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS' AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

COORDINATORS' PESPECTIVES ON CONSULTATION

By

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Abstract

Consultation is a key approach used by Educational Psychologists (EPs). However, the breadth of theory of consultation in EP practice has resulted in many definitions, models and approaches across the UK, and research suggests there may be discrepancies in perceptions and understanding of consultation from consultant and consultee perspectives. The present research sought to explore consultation in an Educational Psychology Service within a Local Authority (LA) from the perspective of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) and EPs. Five EPs and five SENCos were interviewed using semi-structured interview schedules based on second-generation Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT). Data from interviews were then analysed using Reflective Thematic Analysis deductively, with CHAT as a framework to structure analysis. Findings suggest that SENCos within the LA understood consultation, and their role within it. Consultation was described by EPs and SENCos as supporting direct outcomes (e.g. interventions) and indirect outcomes (e.g. SENCos feeling reassured). Perception of tools varied across subject perspectives, with EPs valuing their facilitation skills, while SENCos valued EP theory and resource knowledge, as well as the EP's perceived authority. Professional relationships between schools and EPs were described as a key facilitator, as well as organisational rules such as an inclusive ethos, and the efficiency of consultation. The conflicting needs of the adults around the child, misunderstanding of the EP role, and restrictive systems and policy were described as barriers to consultation. Findings can be applied to existing consultation theory and models, to explore how consultation is used by EPs. It furthers understanding of consultation within a LA, including considering how EPs communicate their role and how SENCos perceive consultation. Contradictions within the constructed activity system were explored to offer practice-based recommendations.

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List of abbreviations

Abbreviation	Definition
CHAT	Cultural historical activity theory
COVID-19	Corona virus
DfE	Department for Education
DoH	Department of Health
EHCP	Education, health and care plans
EP	Educational psychologist
EPS	Educational psychology service
IEP	Individualised Educational Plan
LA	Local authority
RTA	Reflexive thematic analysis
RQ	Research question
SEN	Special educational needs
SENCo	Special educational needs coordinator
SENCoP	Special educational needs code of practice
SENDCoP	Special educational needs and disabilities code of practice
TA	Thematic analysis
UK	United Kingdom

Chapter 1: Introduction

Second-generation cultural historical activity theory (CHAT; Engeström, 1987) was used to explore consultation in educational psychology practice from the perspective of Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCos) and educational psychologists (EPs). The research was conducted within a county Local Authority (LA), supported by a large Educational Psychology Service (EPS). Five SENCos and five EPs were interviewed using semi-structured interview schedules based on CHAT. Interviews were transcribed and analysed deductively with Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA), using CHAT to build an understanding of the conceptualisation of consultation, and how it fits within existing theory. Contradictions or tensions which were explored in the constructed activity system were highlighted and used to form the basis of practice-based recommendations.

Personal and professional interest

I began a professional doctorate in educational and child psychology at the University of Birmingham in September 2021. Prior to the course, I worked as a behaviour support tutor in education and community settings. I had no experience working with EPs professionally or personally and had limited understanding of wider education and special educational needs (SEN) systems. The first year of the course was a steep learning curve, as I was taught theory and practice I was previously unaware of, including consultation.

For my second- and third-year professional practice placement, I was in a LA EPS which was trialling a 'new way of working', that encouraged consultative practice (see Chapter 2 for

further details regarding consultation in educational psychology). While EPs were able to practice flexibly as they felt appropriate, consultation was encouraged for efficiency.

I realised that there was a disconnect between the EPS's agenda of promoting consultation, and what schools wanted from EPs, or what they understood EPs could offer to them. Upon further research, I felt that despite being well-explored within the EP profession, the limited research available exploring teaching staff's perception of consultation suggested poor understanding of the EP role. Furthermore, while many EPSs offer consultation, it is not clearly defined in their service offer brochures or websites.

Therefore, as I began to work with my own schools, I explored their understanding of the EP role, their expectations of me, and their understanding and perceptions of consultation. Some of my schools embraced consultation, while others did not appear to value it and instead requested 'full cognitive assessments'. Due to the occasional reluctance to engage in consultation from staff that I encountered, I began to trial different ways of presenting consultative practice and embedding collaborative approaches into my work.

Therefore, as I began to formulate ideas for a research thesis, consultation stood out, and reading further into the literature only reinforced my own experience. My research led to exploration of the broad definitions and conceptualisation of consultation (e.g., Leadbetter, 2006; Wagner, 2000), and the disparity between EPs' perception of consultation and the perceptions from key consultees (O'Farrel & Kinsella, 2018). I was particularly drawn to the work from O'Shea (2019), an EP who had explored how consultation was constructed by EPs within a LA EPS, using CHAT to expand on existing theoretical conceptualisation.

I felt that by furthering this work, and exploring SENCos' perception of consultation as key consultees, I could explore the contradictions I had already encountered and support the EPS

offer. Furthermore, it could benefit my practice, exploring something that I often utilised. I decided to use EP consultation within my placement LA as a case study to explore SENCos' and EPs' constructions of consultation, to understand how perceptions vary, and identify any contradictions that could be resolved.

Research setting

The research was conducted in a county LA EPS in England. The county consisted of large rural areas and historical coal mining economies, with limited (predominantly white) diversity. The LA EPS had three offices, covering three areas within the county. EPs were assigned to one area and had a 'patch' of schools within that geographical area.

The EPS was a traded service, meaning that schools use their budget to 'buy in' time. Each school would agree with their EP on how to use those hours. EPs within the service can practice in their preferred way. Consultation was encouraged as a part of the 'new way of working', but the service offered no guidelines regarding how consultation should be practiced.

Research aims

The research sought to add to the existing knowledge of consultation, which is currently largely focused on features and processes of consultation, by exploring understanding and shared construction of consultation from both the perspective of consultant (EPs) and consultee (SENCos). Additionally, the research could develop practice in a large EPS in England and

support the practical uptake of consultative practice as an evidence-based approach that can support school staff and young people in a timely and effective way.

This research aimed to examine EPs' and SENCos' constructions of consultation, their perceived purpose and role, beliefs about what makes a 'good' consultation and how these have developed over time. Similarities and contradictions within the constructed activity system were examined to support the understanding of perspectives on consultation and the development of recommendations for practice. The research addressed the following questions:

- How do EPs and SENCos conceptualise the purpose of consultation?

- What wider social, cultural, and organisational factors are present for EPs and SENCOs in consultation?

- What contradictions were present within the activity of consultation for EPs and SENCos and how do EPs' and SENCos' views of consultation complement or contradict each other?

Structure of thesis

Subsequent chapters focus on the following:

- Chapter 2 consists of a literature review. The history of educational psychology and the SENCo role are explored. Then, research and theory exploring consultation in educational psychology are discussed.

- Chapter 3 offers an overview of CHAT, how it was developed and its relevance to the present research.

- Chapter 4 details the methods undertaken.

- Chapter 5 outlines thematic findings.

- Chapter 6 discusses applies the findings to existing research and theory.

- Chapter 7 explores the contradictions within the constructed activity system, and implication for practice. Limitations of the research is discussed, as well as implications for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature review

Consultation has been cited as a key role for EPs (Scottish Executive, 2002). However, consultation has not always been common practice, and descriptions and definitions of consultation within the literature have shifted over the decades. The present research used CHAT to explore the activity of consultation in educational psychology practice. CHAT considers activity systems as transforming over time (Engeström, 1999), and therefore can only be understood within the context of their history. Thus, the history of educational psychology and consultation within EP practice is discussed below, alongside the development of the SENCo role as key consultees, and how this has influenced consultative practices in educational psychology. Subsequently, consultation within EP practice is discussed in greater detail, including definitions and models, how consultation is used by EPs in the UK, and consultant and consultee perspectives of consultation.

The history of Educational Psychology in the UK

This section outlines the historical, cultural, and social context of educational psychology, and the paradigm shift within the UK away from EPs as testers of individual differences, towards consultative workers with schools. Figure 2.1 shows a timeline of some key events, including the creation of EP and SENCo roles, and how they have changed over time.

Figure 2.1

Timeline depicting some of the key events in the development of the EP and SENCo roles, and consultative practice.

First Educational Psychologist was appointed, with a role focused on testing individual differences (Leadbetter& Arnold, 2013; MacKay, 2007).

Education Act (1970) deemed education departments responsible for children previously deemed educationally 'subnormal' (Leadbetter & Arnold, 2013).

The Educational Act (1993) introduced the SENCo role, written into the SENCoP (1994). There were no training requirements, and SENCos were appointment from within staff.

The Currie Review (Scottish Executive, 2002) describes consultation as one of the five main roles of EPs.

Wagner (2016) discusses the perception of EPs being inaccessible to teachers.

By 1955, there were 300 child guidance clinics in England focused on assessing children. This reinforced EP role as a tester (Wagner, 2000).

Suggestions of dissatisfaction with the role and the medical model, and EPs seeking alternative ways of working to meet the high workload (Gillham, 1978; Leyland, 1978)
The Warnock Report (1978) first introduced the concept of SEN.

Department for Education and Employment (2000) discussed the growing pressures of statutory work in the EP role and commits to exploring alternative ways to balance the work.

Legislation was introduced for SENCos, who now must be teachers and should complete a Master's Level qualification within 3 years of taking up a SENCo post (Education, England, 2008).

1944   1968   1971   1981   1995   2001   2006   2014

1913   1955   1970   1978   1993   2000   2002   2008   2016

The Education Act (1944) discusses child guidance clinics. EPs were based in these clinics, working in the medical model.

Philips (1971) described the traditional EP role as identification, diagnosis and treatment of children with learning and adjustment difficulties.

Wagner (1995) describes a consultation model of work for EPs.

Farrel (2006) discussed how consultation promotes inclusive practices.

The Educational Act (1981) legislated 'Statements' for children with SEN and EPs were given a statutory role in assessment. Gilham (1999) later described Statements as a 'tragedy' for the EP role.

SENCoP (2001) expressed concerns about underqualified SENCo. The SENCo role was equated to heads of department or heads of year, middle management roles. There is a mention that it 'may find it effective… to be a member of the Senior Management Team.'

The Children and Families Act (2014) linked to the SENCoP (2015) encouraged person-centred approaches, move to EHCPs and collaborative working. The new SENCoP likens SENCos to 'strategic' roles and says they would be most effective as members of Senior Leadership,

Department of Education and Science (1968) described the EP role as 'individual clinical, diagnostic and therapeutic work.'

Note. Blue boxes represent information relevant to EPs, and green represents information relevant to SENCOs. The timeline is not to scale. Abbreviations within the figure in the 'List of abbreviations'.

EPs' initial decades of practice were primarily based on intelligence testing and individual assessment of pupils (Arnold & Leadbetter, 2013), working within child guidance clinics to 'treat' children with emotional and behavioural difficulties (MacKay, 2007). This, alongside the mental testing movement to assess individual differences in children (MacKay, 2007), situated EPs in the medical model of disability, which positions disability to be a deficit within a person (Thomas, 2004), and firmly established EPs as testers (Wagner, 2000). Therefore, the EP role was that of an 'expert', who identified deficits, and advised on treatment (MacKay, 2007).

In 1968, the Summerfield report explored the role of EPs employed in LAs (Department of Education and Science, 1968). Although this report defined the EP role as involving individual, diagnostic, clinical, and therapeutic work, it also mentions that EPs should be 'available for consultation' with school staff. This is the first mention in governmental documentation of EPs having a consultative role to support adults working with children and came shortly before inclusion of children with additional needs became expected practice for schools.

In the 1970s, legislation stated that education departments were now responsible for children previously deemed 'educationally subnormal' (Education Act, 1970), creating demand for support in schools, who were for the first time having to support children with various disabilities. In 1978, Leyland reported an increasing demand for EPs, with burgeoning numbers of referrals. At this time, Gilham (1978) and Leyland (1978) reported a general dissatisfaction among EPs, who were beginning to seek out alternative ways of working. Gillham (1978) collated chapters from multiple EPs discussing frustrations within practice, and the dominance of the medical model, which was beginning to be questioned within the role (Topping, 1978). Thus

began a 'great debate' (Reid, 1976), with some EPs reconceptualising the role of EPs as more systemic, exploring the wider environment around children and young people, with the belief that this may be a more effective application of psychology (e.g. Burden, 1978).

This initiated a shift toward the social model of disability, which considers economic, political, and social barriers that exist for those with disabilities, with discrimination, oppression and exclusion being the disabling feature, as opposed to an individual's deficits (Oliver, 1986). The publication of the Warnock Report (Department of Education and Science, 1978) influenced a shift in the UK policy towards the social model of disability. This was also when the term Special Educational Needs (SEN) was first coined. Consultation could be considered well-placed to promote change in the systems around a child, by focusing on problem-solving with key adults who work in these systems. Therefore, change in policy focus towards the social model of disability likely facilitated consultative work.

Despite this paradigm shift, demands on EPs were further exacerbated when given a statutory role in assessment of children with additional needs (Education Act, 1981). This was later described by Gilham (1999) as a tragedy for the profession of educational psychology and has firmly maintained EPs' role as assessors of individual children until the present day.

Some research suggests that consultation has been a part of school psychologist work since 1925 (French, 1990). In the 1960s, consultation being referred to as a form of service delivery was on the rise (Bergan & Caldwell, 1967; Newman, 1967), and frameworks for consultative practice began to appear in the 1970s (e.g., Alpert, 1976; Bergan, 1977). Bramlett and Murphy (1998) describe this shift as a direct result of dissatisfaction with the medical model and psychometric testing.

Lee and Woods (2017) researched EPSs' service delivery in 'traded' services. Trading gained popularity for EPSs after financial budget cuts in 2010 (Lee & Woods, 2017), and replicates private sector principles, such as purchase-provider financial structures (Sanderson, 2001), where stakeholders buy into services. Now, many EPSs in England have full or partial traded service delivery models (Lee & Woods, 2017). Trading allows schools to directly buy in time from the EPS, as opposed to a 'core' offer, from which money for the EPS would come directly from the LA, and schools would be allocated time from central funding (Lee & Woods, 2017). Increase in trading in EPSs led to concerns regarding whether schools would expect more control of how EP time was used, as they would be directly paying for a service (Lee & Woods, 2017). Lee and Woods (2017) found a decline in the take-up of consultation in 2013-2014, prior to COVID-19, which could suggest that once schools were funding their own access to the EPS and had more control of how that time would be used, they may be less likely to seek out consultation.

However, after COVID-19 and subsequent national lockdowns, Hassard (2022) found an increase in use of consultation, likely due to the need to work online and reduce face-to-face work. It is unknown whether this uptake in consultation was continued after lockdowns ended and face-to-face work resumed. Thus, with educational psychology in England having undergone major changes since the inception of the role, including the move away from individual assessment, and towards traded models and an inclusive focus, consultation is becoming an increasingly important element of EP practice. Additionally, COVID-19 lockdowns and the move to online work may have influenced an uptake of consultation and could make consultation more accessible and efficient due video conferencing technologies. Therefore, now is a pertinent time to explore consultation within English services.

The history of the SENCo role

Since the SENCo role was first introduced in 1993 (Education Act, 1993), SENCos have become EPs' key contacts in schools. The SENCo's role is to support children with SEN in their school (Department for Education [DfE] & Department of Health [DoH], 2015), meaning they are often the individual liaising with and referring to the EPS and therefore the person with whom an EP will consult with. As this research sought to study consultation from the perspective of consultant and consultee, SENCos and their role within schools are important to consider.

Initially, SENCos were appointed from within the existing staff cohort, and did not need additional qualifications or experience. The SEN Code of Practice (SENCoP; Department for Education and Skills, 2001) then expressed concerns about underqualified SENCos, with many being teaching assistants with no protected SENCo time. In the 2001 SENCoP, the SENCo role was described as a middle management role (Department for Education and Skills, 2001).

In 2007, while the SENCo role was still largely unregulated with no requirements for qualifications, Szwed (2007) found that SENCos found it hard to operationalise their role within schools and were working in increasingly complex systems, which could not be generalised beyond an individual experience. Subsequently, in 2008, SENCos were legislated to need to complete a Master's level qualification in SEN (Education, England, 2008). However, five years later, Roberston (2012) found that SENCos described difficulties negotiating policy frameworks, highlighting how even after additional structure and guidance was in place for the role, the subjectivity of policy interpretation and the complexity of the contexts within which SENCos work in created barriers for the role of SENCo.

In the most recent version of the SENCoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), the SENCo role is talked about as a senior management, strategic position. However, there are still no legal requirements

for SENCos to be a part of the Senior Leadership Team, or have protected time for the role. Although policy offers additional guidance regarding qualification of SENCos and suggestion for possible responsibilities (SEND Regulations, 2014), the local interpretation of this varies, which leaves a discrepancy and uncertainty regarding what the SENCo role entails. Prior research has suggested that SENCos often draw from their own identity when in their role, which can shift what the role looks like individual to individual, as well as school to school (Rosen-Webb, 2011).

In 2014, the SENCoP (2015) and Children and Families Act (2014) encouraged person-centred approaches and collaborative working and moved towards Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with SEN, as joined up documents co-constructed by professionals around a child. Consultation lends itself well to this proposal for more collaborative working.

In 2018, the DfE commissioned a SEN school workforce, which included a focus to appoint SENCos and support SENCo development. Research exploring the experience of the SENCo role is more limited than that exploring the EP role, likely to due the 'scientist-practitioner' (e.g. Health & Care Professions Council, 2023, p.50) nature of Educational Psychology.

In addition to the increasing demand on the SEN system in England (DfE, 2023), and the subsequent growing pressures of SENCo role (Dobson & Douglas, 2020), teaching itself is facing ongoing recruitment and retention difficulties, with the latest statistic from Commons Library Research Briefing in 2023 (Maisuria et al., 2023) suggesting that retention has been at an all-time low in the last five years, and Initial Teacher Training targets have consistently not been met in the last three years (DfE, 2023).

Additionally, while the SENCo role in this research refers specifically to SENCos in England, similar roles are present internationally, and difficulty within the role of SENCo (or similar), is not unique to England. For example, equivalent roles in Sweden (Klang et al., 2017), Hong Kong (Poon-McBrayer, 2012) and Ireland (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017) have reported difficulties in the role.

The key principles of consultation are complementary to policy and guidance relevant for the SENCo and EP roles, with a focus on strength based and person-centred practices, and the move towards the social model of disability. As key consultees and change makers within schools, SENCos are important to consider when exploring how consultation is perceived and constructed. However, the increasing pressures from teacher recruitment and retention difficulty (Maisuria et al., 2023), a growing SEN cohort in schools (DfE, 2023), and the ever-evolving role of the SENCo, which can be difficult to generalise due to the complex systems within which they work (Szwed, 2007), need to be considered when exploring SENCo views of consultation as a key consultee.

Definitions of consultation in educational psychology

Although consultation is frequently discussed as a key role in educational psychology, and as an activity which complements the current policy environment in England, it is not always clear what is meant when EPs discuss consultation. This confusion is exacerbated when considering the many ways the term 'consultation' has been adopted by different professionals and in different contexts. This section focusses on unpicking some of the existing definitions of consultation within educational psychology. Table 2.1 provides some examples of definitions of

consultation in educational psychology from the literature. Definitions tend to focus on problem-

solving, indirect service delivery and upskilling the adults around a child.

Table 2.1

Examples of definitions of consultation from existing literature.

Reference	Definition
Wagner (2000, p.11)	'...voluntary collaborative non-supervisory approach established to aid the functioning of a system and its inter-related systems'.
Sheridan (1997, p.121)	'...a structured, indirect form of service-delivery, in which parents and teachers are joined to work together to address the academic, social, or behavioral needs of an individual for whom both parties bear some responsibility'.
Conoley and Conoley (1990)	Consultation is described as a problem-solving relationship between professionals, with a primary purpose of enhancing to consultees' problem-solving capacity. There are similarities to advice-giving and psychotherapy. They describe this as not necessarily focused on giving advice or seeking solutions to problems.
Bramlett and Murphy (1998, p.31)	'...improve teacher's skills in dealing with similar… problems in the future. It is this preventative aspect, along with the indirect focus, that most clearly distinguishes consultation from direct remedial services'.

Leadbetter (2006) explored definitions of consultation across EPSs and literature. They suggest three main ways consultation is defined and used in educational psychology:

1. Consultation as a model of service delivery - a model by which an EPS delivers a service to schools, for example, offering a consultative service. What this looks like in practice can vary.

2. Consultation as a defined task with agreed characteristics - often looks like a 'consultation meeting', with a stakeholder, usually a teacher or SENCo. It seeks to support and empower the consultee and explore solutions that could be used by the consultee. Meetings often include specific agendas, formats, or records, but can also be informal.

3. Consultation as a specific activity or skill – often used for information gathering, sharing or advice giving, involving meeting with others, such as parents or teachers, and flexibly having a conversation.

Despite sharing some common themes, such as working with adults around a child with a problem-solving focus, the wide variety of definitions shows that what consultation is within educational psychology is not clear. When an EP is discussing consultation, they could be referring to a standalone meeting, a skillset, or umbrella term for a way of practising (Leadbetter, 2006). Therefore, further exploration of consultation and its ever-changing conceptualisation is needed.

American research on consultation and school psychology

Much of the literature regarding consultation between psychologists and schools originates from America. There are some key elements of consultation that have been explored, which have been influential within educational psychology practice in the UK; for example, whether consultation is collaborative or cooperative, and how psychologists contribute to the process. Some of these key ideas are summarised below.

An indirect service delivery

Gutkin and Conoley (1990) discuss direct versus indirect service delivery within school psychology in America. They described a sense of 'impotence' from school psychologists due to work focusing on assigning diagnostic labels to children, and their limited capacity to promote positive change (Ysseldyke et al., 1984). These frustrations are reflective of EPs in England at the time. Previously, EPs and school psychologists were focused on direct services, in which referrals were received from teachers, resulting in the EP working with the child. However, Gutkin and Conoley (1990) proposed a shift to indirect service delivery, focused on consulting with adults around a child. They cite this as a necessary service, as school psychologists are reliant on adults around a child acting on their recommendations, and therefore they cannot be treated as a passive part of the process. By taking an indirect service delivery model, referral is still completed by a teacher, but the work is then with them, which can result in the teacher helping the child, rather than the EP having direct involvement with the child. Figure 2.2 represents the difference between these two approaches to service delivery.

Figure 2.2

Visual representation of Gutkin and Conoley's (1990) conceptualisation of direct versus indirect service delivery models.
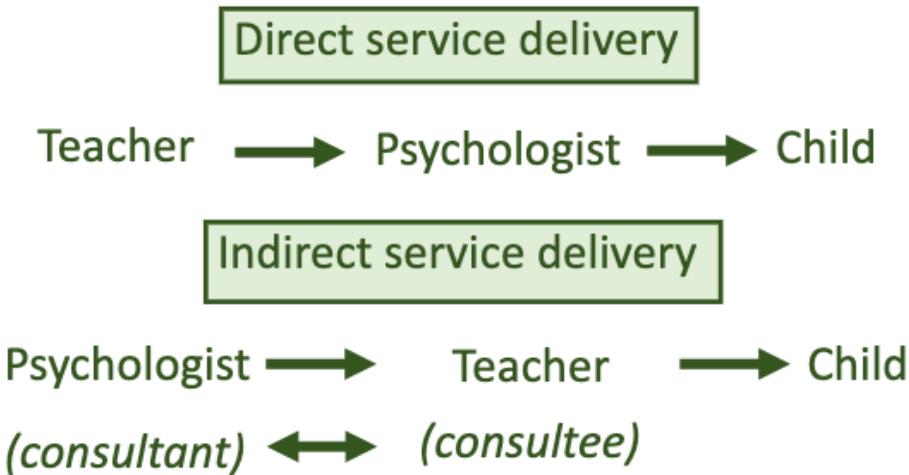
Consultation is therefore considered by Gutkin and Conoley (1990) as an indirect way for psychologists to work with children, which is reflected in the ways EPs practice in the UK, with some EPs using consultation with adults around a child, without ever meeting the child themselves. Instead, the indirect model relies on the consultant working directly with the consultee.

Collaboration or cooperation

Gutkin and Conoley's (1990) assertion that indirect service delivery is dependent on the psychologist's ability to influence the behaviour of a third-party adult resulted in exploration of how truly collaborative consultation can be, leading to the 'collaboration debate' (Erchul, 1999). Erchul's (1987) research in America explored interpersonal power in behavioural consultations,

suggesting that consultation is controlled by the consultant, and therefore consultation cannot be an equal collaboration. Instead of collaborative, Erchul and Chewning (1990) discuss how 'cooperative' is a more appropriate term to describe consultative work, heralding a more directive approach to consultation.

However, Gutkin (1999) went on to discuss collaboration as a key component of consultation, suggesting that collaboration with teachers is necessary for 'buy in.' Gutkin (1999) proposed two dimensions of consultation, as seen in Figure 2.3, which positions one continuum with 'coercive' and 'collaborative' at either end, and another with 'non-directive' and 'directive' at each extreme. This suggests that consultants can occupy differing quadrants at different times within or across consultative work, as opposed to the dichotomy of collaboration and coercion. Leadbetter (2002), applying this model to UK EP practice, suggests that consultants may move through these quadrants without being aware of the shift.

Figure 2.3

Gutkin's (1999) two dimensions of consultation.
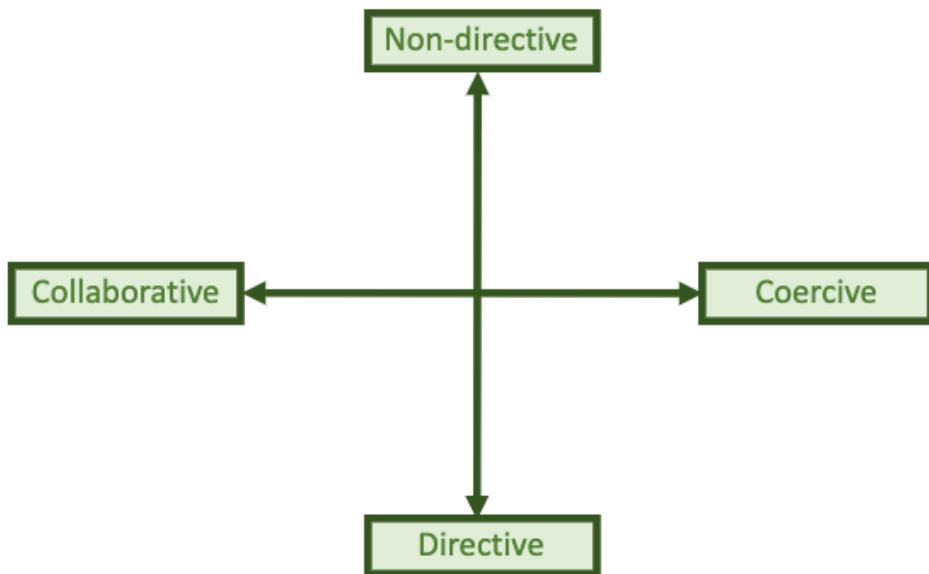
The concept of two continua was later criticised by Erchul (1999), who felt it did not sufficiently consider interpersonal perspectives of the consulting dyad, instead solely considering the consultant. Gutkin (1999) responded to this criticism by expanding his model (see Figure 2.4) to include an additional consultee dimension and the interactions between consultant and consultee.

Figure 2.4

Gutkins's (1999) expanded dimension of consultation.
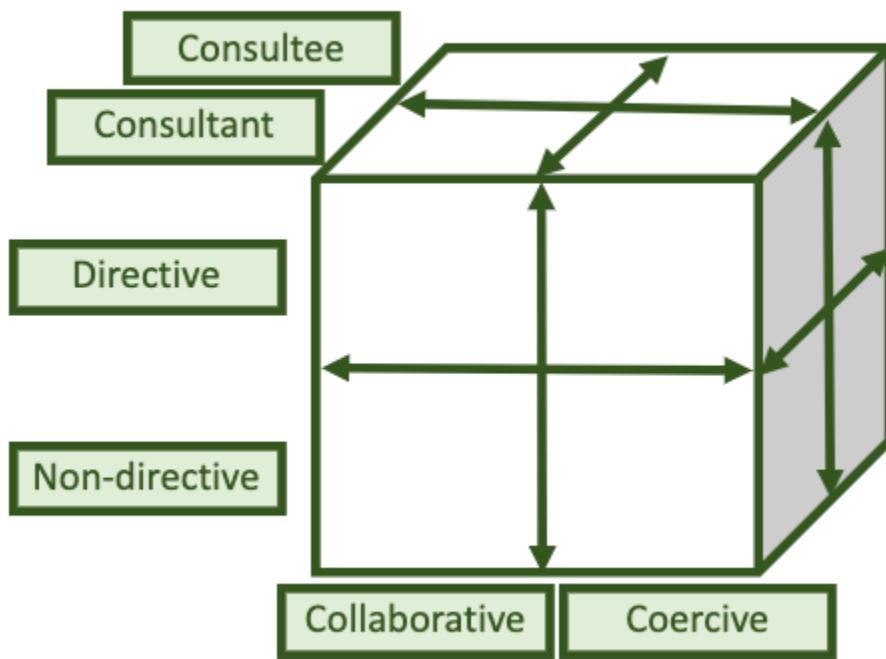
The idea of directive elements of consultation can be seen in recent UK and Irish literature. O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) interviewed teachers, parents, and EPs after participating in consultation, and found that while collaboration was discussed, the teachers involved in the consultations often sought out advice and guidance from the EP. Therefore, the level of collaboration within consultation between psychologists and schools can be debated and is worth considering within the UK context.

Knowledge bases

Another key factor of consultation is the knowledge base that must exist to support problem solving. West and Idol (1987) suggested a conceptual model which proposed two separate knowledge bases (see Figure 2.5). They describe 'knowledge base 1' as the knowledge related to interactions between consultant and consultee, in which the consultant will be using facilitation skills and knowledge of consultation, and 'knowledge base 2', as the knowledge of techniques and theory which can be used to help a child.

Figure 2.5

The knowledge base model of consultation, as described by West and Idol (1987).

Psychologist ⟶ Teacher ⟶ Child
(consultant)   (consultee)   (Client)

Knowledge   Knowledge
base 1   base 2
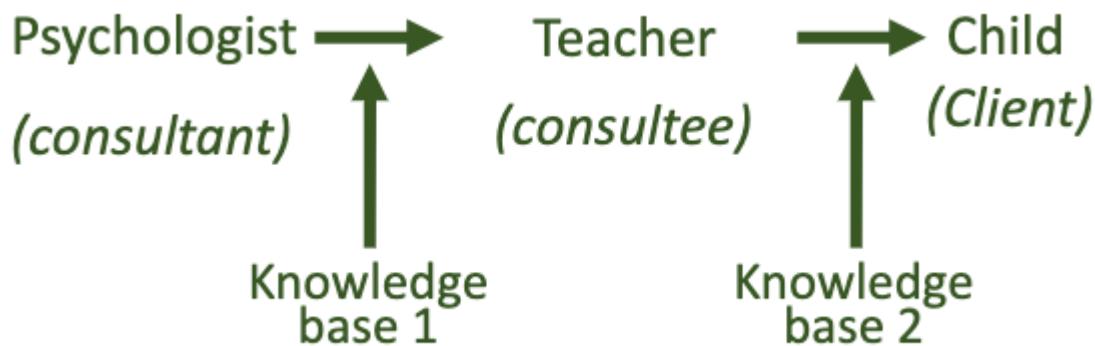
This offers a way to conceptualise the roles that an EP would play in consultation, including facilitator (knowledge base 1) and advice giver (knowledge base 2; West & Idol, 1987). Knowledge base 1 could be considered a collaborative approach, while knowledge base 2 could be considered directive. It offers another way to consider the power dynamic within consultation. However, it may fail to consider the unique contribution of the consultee as well as the consultant.

Models of consultation within educational psychology

There is limited UK-based research exploring what EPs do when 'doing consultation' (Kennedy et al., 2008; Leadbetter, 2006). The research available suggests that, like definitions of consultation, there is a lack of homogeneity regarding EP consultation (Kennedy et al., 2008). Noland and Moreland (2014) stated a need for EPs to be more explicit regarding their consultation knowledge and practice, to help understanding of the topic. Despite the lack of consensus, there appears to be some key elements of consultation used by psychologists working in schools internationally, debated in the literature, as outlined below.

Types of consultation models

Conoley and Conoley (1990) suggest there are three different types of consultation models: behavioural; mental health; and process. Conversely, Larney (2003) suggests there is an additional model, which they refer to as organisational/systems based. These four types of consultation are defined as follows:

1. Behavioural - possibly the most popular consultative approach in UK EPSs (Cording, 2011), stemming from behavioural psychology and outlining a systematic problem-solving paradigm, such as identifying a problem, gathering data, hypothesising, and so on. The approach underpins popular models such as Bergan (1977) and Wagner (1995). It has been criticised for neglecting to consider the nature of relationships within the consultation (Larney, 2003).

2. Mental health - a psychodynamic approach, largely adapted from Caplan's (1970) work. It is not considered a popular consultative approach (Watkins & Hill, 2000), although it

does support the consultee to solve their own problems (Larney, 2003). Key features of Caplan's (1970) mental health consultation are how psychological phenomena and environmental factors explain and change behaviour. Caplan (1970) suggests there is no hierarchy within relationships in consultation.

3. Process - largely from the work of Schein (1999), used primarily in business consultancy. Process consultation seeks to link environmental factors and impact of work environment, with a focus on relationships and changes in attitude, feelings, behaviour and views. This has been cited by Leadbetter (2006) as a useful way to support teachers to improve children's progress and affect change on multiple levels.

4. Organisational/systems - similar to process consultation, organisational consultation is based on organisational and group psychology, aiming to change organisations at the systems level. This is not a popular approach, as it requires training of teachers who participate (Cording, 2011; Gutkin & Curtis, 1999).

These are broad definitions of consultation models present within school and educational psychology. Within the UK, there have been specific models developed by the educational psychology community, some of which are discussed subsequently.

Wagner's (1995; 2000) model of consultation

One of the most prevalently discussed and used models in the UK is that proposed by Wagner (1995; 2000), who posited consultation as a model of service delivery, which cannot be described as a distinct activity that could be offered as a service to schools. Instead, a more comprehensive model of consultation within educational psychology settings would need to consider the complicated social setting EPs work within, and therefore consider systems

psychology. Wagner outlines consultation as a 'conversation that makes a difference' (Wagner, 2000, p.14), underpinned by psychological theory. Personal construct psychology (Kelly, 1955) is used by EPs to explore a person's constructs of situations and self. Symbolic interactionism is used to support an EP to consider how constructs of self, others and behaviour influence social interactions. Systems thinking is used to seek patterns occurring over time, and consider wider contexts, at individual, class and organisational levels. Social constructionism is used to highlight how language constructs reality and meaning. Wagner therefore advocates for avoiding deficit-based language.

Wagner's (1995; 2000) consultation offers a reflective space, which allows the process of consultation to be the key change maker, as opposed to the outcomes. Wagner (2016) highlights how, if the outcomes were the main aim, then the process of consultation would be unnecessary. Therefore, the process of consultation is focused on moving toward interactionist approaches, away from a within-child perspective, to instead facilitate opportunities for change. Wagner used these principles to propose a four-stage model of consultation, which can be moved through flexibly. These stages are summarised in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

Summary of Wagner's (2000) model of consultation.

Stage:	Description:
1. Externalise the problem.	Changing the meaning of the problem to externalise it from the consultee.
2. Getting meta, or taking a helicopter view.	Using questions to explore the situation, including what has been tried, the view of stakeholders and any other relevant factor. This seeks to gain a more holistic understanding of the situation, detached from the consultee.
3. The paradigm shift.	Examining patterns and connections, the consultee should begin to see the problem as interactions between the individual and the environment, instead of as within person, therefore presenting the opportunity for change.
4. Engaging in self-reflexivity.	The consultee recognising their place within patterns of behaviour, and therefore recognising opportunity for change within their own actions.

Multiple EPSs in England adopted Wagner's (1995) model of service delivery (e.g., Dickinson, 2000; Gillies, 2000). Dickinson (2000) suggested that every task within an EP's remit is completed with the EP returning the information to the consultee to pursue solutions, therefore EP work is always interactionist and consultative. Dickinson (2000) emphasises that EPs should never be considered the problem holder, a view which was adopted by an English EPS (Munro,

2000), who chose to adapt their terminology, avoiding the term referral due to the implication that school staff were handing over their problems to the EP.

While Wagner's model offers a flexible framework for practice, within which EPs' work in multiple contexts can be framed, it is faced with criticisms regarding the lack of consideration of outcomes, which Leadbetter (2002) argues could confuse the goals of consultation and may contradict Wagner's (2000) central tenet of transparency to support skill transfer. Additionally, by underpinning the model with certain psychological theories, the principles of the model may conflict with the consultant's and consultee's underlying belief system or varying psychological stances, which Leadbetter (2002) argued could lead to tension and conflict. Furthermore, by positioning the EP as the person who brings and guides the framework, they are taking a dominant role, reducing the consultee role to more 'cooperative' than 'collaborative,' as denoted by Gutkin (1999). This also minimised the EP's knowledge base (Idol & West, 1987), by assuming the EP is facilitating using the underpinning psychological theories of the model.

Leadbetter's (2006) CHAT model of consultation

Leadbetter (2006) used CHAT to consider consultation within its wider cultural, social, and organisational context. They proposed a basic model of consultation within a second-generation CHAT system, which Leadbetter proposed could be used as a framework to analyse processes of EP consultation. See Figure 2.6 for Leadbetter's (2006) proposed activity system for multi-agency consultation.

Figure 2.6

Proposed second-generation CHAT activity system for multi-agency consultation from

Leadbetter (2006).
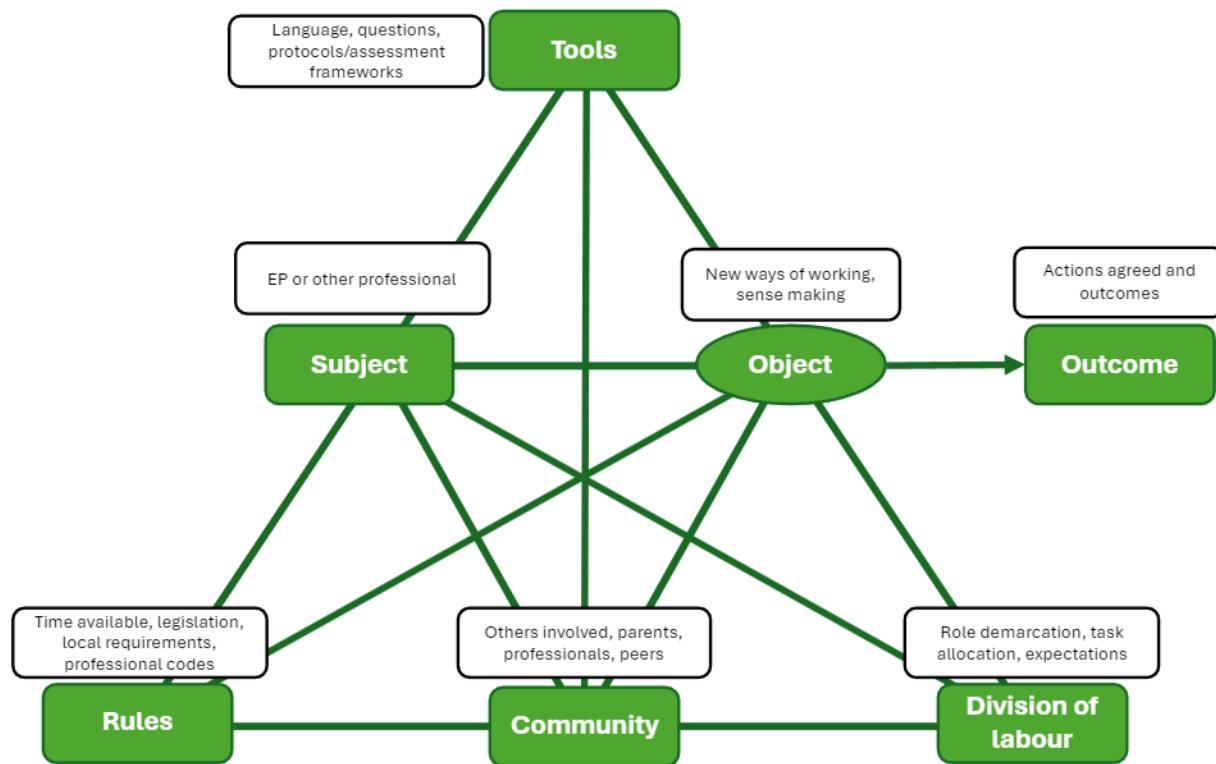
O'Shea (2019) used Leadbetter's (2006) activity system of consultation to explore how

consultation was conceptualised by EPs in a LA in England. CHAT was used to construct

activity systems and explore contradictions within the system. Through this, O'Shea (2019)

aimed to expand on Leadbetter's (2006) exploration of consultation within EP practice, which

suggested a lack of clarity regarding consultation. O'Shea (2019) used results to guide a

functional model of consultation, to make sense of consultation. The activity system constructed

demonstrated how EPs work with SENCos, using their skills, strategies, and knowledge.

SENCos will then filter information through to teachers, sharing their advice, strategies, and ideas, who will then use the information to implement interventions with the child.

O'Shea's (2019) model is reliant on filtering down information and problem solving from EP to SENCo to teacher to pupil. With teachers not directly involved in the consultation, there is a question as to whether they would fully understand the outcomes discussed in consultation and may mean that there would be no 'buy in' (Gutkin, 1999) from the individual implementing support. By only interviewing EPs for this model of consultation, O'Shea (2019) was only able to ascertain the perspective of one link in this chain of support for a child and did not address consultation from the perspective of consultees. Despite this limitation, this research furthered understanding of how EPs were using consultation in English EPSs within the last 5 years. However, in the 5 years since this research was produced, England's education and work systems have shifted due to the rise of online working, increase in traded service deliveries and experiences of lockdowns during COVID-19, which may have changed use of consultation in EP practice.

Consultant and consultee perspectives of consultation

When considering consultation and barriers in uptake of consultative practice, including resistance of schools and poor understanding of what consultation is, it seems important to consider the perspective of consultees as well as consultants. Although there are a variety of models and definitions of consultation which EPs can draw on in practice, there is little that seeks to explore a shared understanding and conceptualisations of the key stakeholders who are involved in consultation with EPs. As this research seeks to explore perceptions of consultation,

this section is focused on a critical discussion of existing literature that discusses perceptions of consultation within educational psychology in the UK and Ireland.

Perceptions of EPs as consultants have been explored more thoroughly in literature than the perceptions of consultees. For example, Leadbetter (2000) researched perceptions of consultation from leaderships roles in EPSs. They found that Principal EPs, while supportive of the use of consultation, did not want to dictate EPs' consultative practices, instead leaving it to EP personal judgement and preference. While this research is decades old, the idea of respecting EPs' own professional judgement as vital to practice is still evident in literature and guidelines today (e.g. Association of Educational Psychologists, 2017). This flexibility may also explain the breadth of models and definitions of consultation seen in the literature (e.g., Larney, 2003; Leadbetter, 2006).

O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) considered perceived effectiveness of consultation in Ireland from school staff and EPs' perspective. They interviewed participants of three consultations, including teachers, parents and EPs. Data were analysed using RTA. They describe three overarching themes of 'Support,' 'Understanding' and 'Valuing Consultation'. Teachers described feeling empowered by consultation, and parents appeared to enjoy the process of consultation. EPs described consultation as an efficient and effective use of their time.

Despite these benefits, O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) found that school staff did not always have a clear understanding of their role in consultation, and some were resistant to the idea of consultation and appeared reliant on cognitive assessments to access resources. While parents and EPs interviewed by O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) appear to construct consultation as a collaborative process, teachers perceived an additional advice-giving element from EPs, and suggest information sharing and training with teachers as important to overcome the gap. They

also suggest that Educational Psychology in Ireland at the time was shifting away from individual assessment, and that consultation was well placed to support this. These contradictory findings, with consultees finding consultation useful and enjoyable, but also possibly not understanding the purpose of consultation, highlights the importance of exploring consultee perception of consultation, and how it is needed to co-construct support.

Similarly, Claridge (2005) considered perceptions of consultation by researching successful and unsuccessful consultation pairings in their thesis research. Claridge (2005) completed five phases of research: a questionnaire completed by EPs; interview with consultants; interviews with consultees; review of findings from interviews, including a focus group and feedback to participants; and recordings and transcription of live consultations, and discussion of transcription with participants. At the questionnaire stage, the most common element of a successful consultation from the 12 EPs surveyed was discussion with SENCos, highlighting they are an important consultee. Claridge (2005) used Grounded Theory to build theory regarding consultation. Although Claridge (2005) had significant participant drop out throughout their phases of research, with only three (out of the original eight) consultants participating in the final phase, the results consider both consultee and consultant perspectives of consultation, and they describe significant differences in consultative practices and conceptualisation, with very little shared understanding between and across consultants and consultees.

Cording (2011) wrote a thesis on perceptions of consultation in Wales. Cording used thematic analysis to analyse interviews with EPs, and found that EP practice was dominated by Wagner's (2000) model of consultation, largely due to its presence in EP training programme curricula. Despite this, Wagner's (2000) model was not perceived as the best way of working (Cording, 2011). Cording (2011) concluded that EPs were unsure of their unique contribution to

consultation processes and did not have a broad knowledge and understanding of consultative practices. While this research extensively explored consultation from both consultant and consultee perspectives, it focused on specific individual consultations, and sought to explore contributing factors to perception of 'successful' consultation. The focus on success may reduce some of the nuances of consultation, and what is considered 'successful' is not clearly defined. Instead, 'success' was decided by participants of consultation with little consensus. For example, at times Cording (2011) discusses how supported consultees felt, and other times related success to generation of interventions. The present research seeks to explore perceptions of consultation as an activity, as opposed to what is perceived as a successful consultation.

Conclusion

Consultation in educational psychology has become increasingly relevant as the EP role and the policy environment has changed in England. The development of the SENCo role further influenced this, with the establishment of a key contact in schools for any SEN-related topics. Research has suggested that use of consultation dropped pre-COVID (Lee & Woods, 2017), before rising during COVID-19 (Hassard, 2022) making it a pertinent time to explore. The variety of definitions and models of consultation in the literature can cause confusion regarding what consultation in EP practice is and can look like, and research has suggested that teaching staff may not understand the EP role and their own role within consultation. Therefore, this research seeks to continue the work of O'Shea (2019) and Leadbetter (2006) to explore consultation using second-generation CHAT, by exploring both consultant and consultee

perspectives, providing greater insight into how schools perceive consultation to contribute to a more in-depth conceptualisation of consultation with an English LA.

Chapter 3: Cultural Historical Activity Theory

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) offers a way to conceptualise an activity in relation to its historical and cultural setting. As the present research sought to explore how consultation is constructed by both consultee and consultant, CHAT is a useful theory on which to frame the research. CHAT's history is influenced by Marxist theory (Johnston & Dornan, 2015), and is inherently tied to work and societal constructs, making it relevant to the present research environment within a LA. The development of CHAT and its application to the present research is subsequently outlined.

CHAT has attracted much-debated assertions regarding its origins, functions, and conceptual underpinning (Leadbetter et al., 2007). To understand CHAT, it is useful to consider it within the context of its history (Daniels, 1996). Early forms of CHAT likely originate from Soviet Psychologists in the 1920s and 1930s. At the time, classic theories such as psychoanalysis and behaviourism were dominant in the literature (Bedny & Meister, 2014; Engeström, 1987). Vygotsky (1978), who is often thought of as the theoretical forefather of CHAT (Holzman, 2006), introduced the concept of mediation as an attempt to understand human activity within its context. In the 1970s, Vygotsky's transcripts were translated to English (Vygotsky, 1978) and have since gained popularity in westernised research (Bakhurst, 2009; Engeström, 1987). CHAT has been critiqued, updated, and developed since its inception, most notably by Engeström (1987), who worked to detail its development through conceptualising the progression of CHAT within three generations, which will henceforth be discussed.

First generation CHAT

First-generation CHAT is based on Vygotsky's original writings in the 1920s, which discussed a 'triangular model of actions', within which all actions towards a goal are mediated by cultural and social artefacts (Engeström & Miettinen, 1999, p.4). Prior to Vygotsky's work, behaviourist principles were dominant in the literature. A behaviourist interpretation of human behaviour outlines a simplistic 'stimulus-response' model, within which human behaviour is the learned response to a presented stimulus (Bakhurst, 2009). Vygotsky (1978), while still focusing on the individual, proposed the principle of mediation to outline how an individual controls their actions through physical or psychological tools. Therefore, human behaviour is mediated by artefacts, which can prompt or influence action, and the way these artefacts are used can reveal thoughts behind the response (Edwards, 2005). Tools that create mediation can include artefacts such as language, symbols, art, and drawings (Vygotsky, 1981). The 'triangular model of actions', visually represented in Figure 3.1, therefore still includes a stimulus-response, but with the addition of mediation (Daniels, 2001; Engeström, 2001).

Figure 3.1

Vygotsky's (1978) first-generation CHAT, adapted from Daniels (2001).
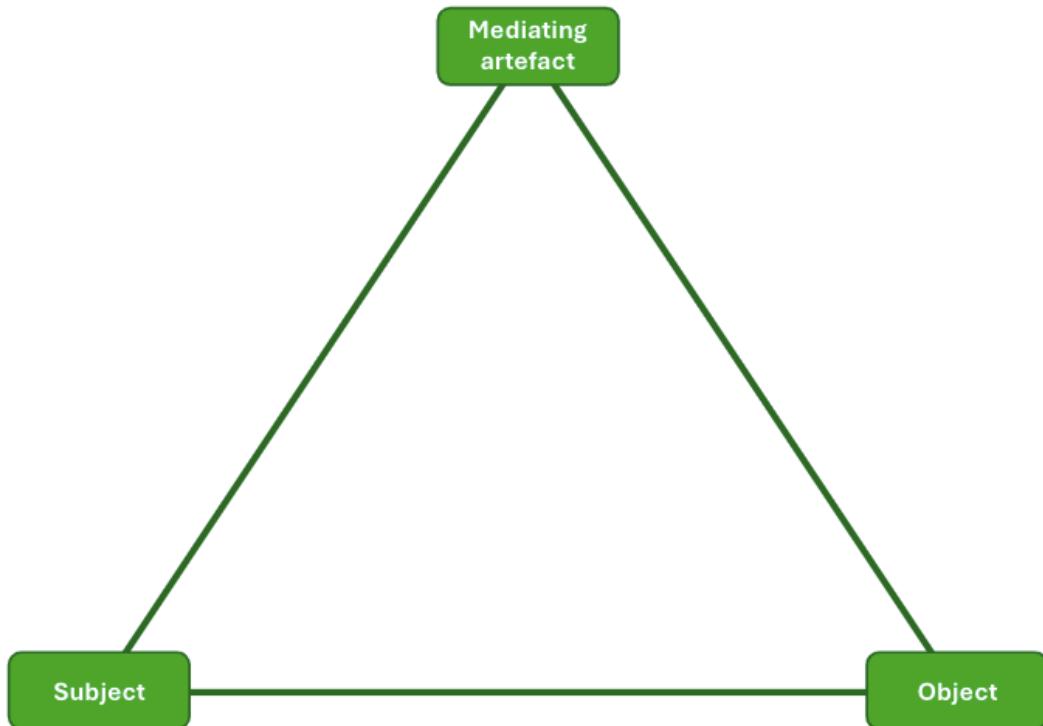
Despite the inclusion of cultural and societal context on activities, first-generation CHAT was criticised as being overly focused on the individual and therefore unable to be applied to activities that involve more than one person (Engeström, 2001). It also did not consider how an individual's own motivations influence their definition of an activity, and how it relates to their action (Leadbetter, 2017). Therefore, the use of first-generation CHAT is limited, and cannot be used for action research or within organisations, which later generations of CHAT became known for.

Second generation CHAT

Second-generation CHAT sought to address the issue of application to groups. Leontiev

(2005) initially differentiated between actions, individual activity and collective activity.

Engeström (1987) expanded on this using Vygotsky's (1978) triangular system, suggesting seven

nodes that encapsulate an activity (see Figure 3.2) and allow for thorough exploration of an

activity within its context:

- Object – the focus of an activity.

- Outcome – the aim of an activity.

- Tools - physical or psychological tools used within an activity.

- Subject - the perspective the activity is being viewed from.

- Rules – the supporting or constraining policies, regulations or unwritten rules within an

  activity.

- Community – groups or individuals involved within an activity.

- Division of labour – how the work is divided between members of the community.

Figure 3.2

Graphic representation of second-generation CHAT (Engeström, 2000).
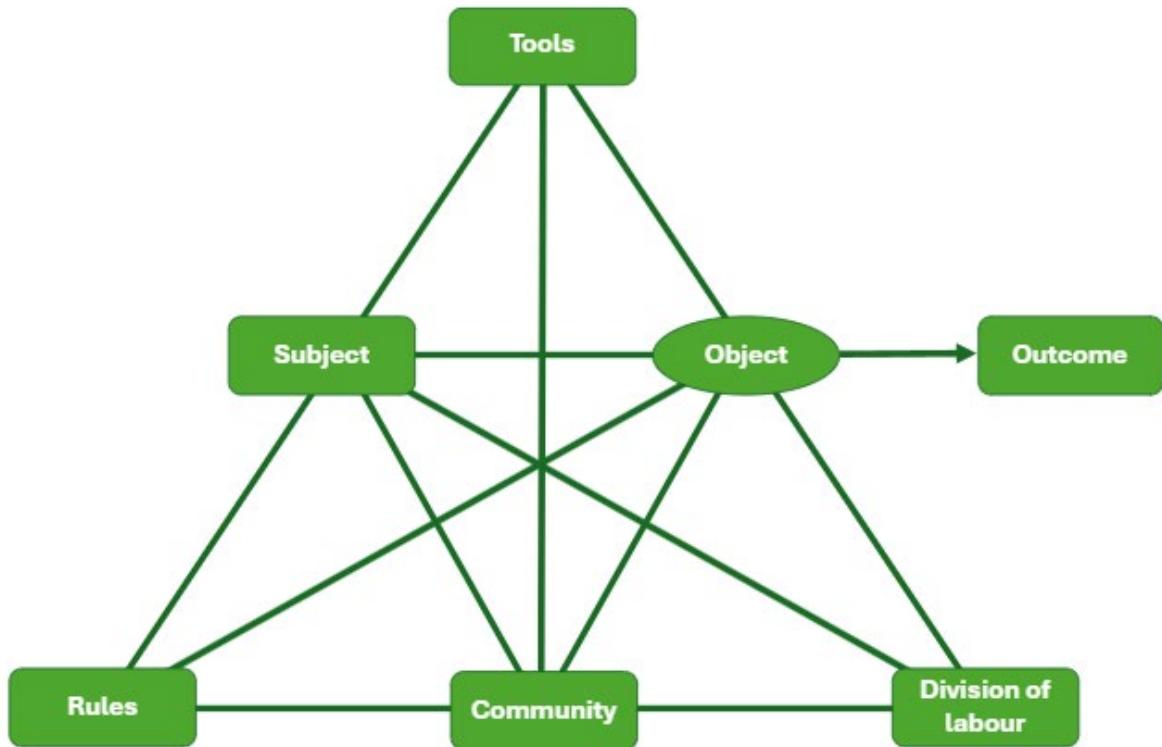
Second-generation CHAT seeks to integrate motivation and emotion, and how they interact with sense of identity within its framework (Roth, 2007). The object node is emphasised as a focal element of the theory, which can be interpreted differently by individuals (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). Roth (2007) considers emotion as vital to action, and therefore important when considering people and group actions within an activity. Each node in second-generation CHAT can be used to explore an activity system from an individual and group perspective. Therefore, second-generation CHAT allows for wider application of the CHAT framework, to groups and organisations as well as the individual.

However, second-generation CHAT was criticised as being insensitive to cultural variations. Griffin and Cole (1984) suggested its gain in popularity internationally was problematic, as CHAT neglects to consider that tools hold cultural value and are not context-free, resulting in possible misinterpretation of the interactions between people and the world. Cole (1988) suggested Soviet theories should combine with westernised traditions to support cross cultural research. Additionally, Daniels (2004) felt that second-generation CHAT does not offer an interpretation of dialogue and interacting activity systems (Daniels, 2004). Therefore, theorists went on to develop a third generation of CHAT to overcome these criticisms.

Third-generation CHAT, historicity and expansive learning

Third-generation CHAT introduces an additional 'third space,' to consider how objects meet to form new meanings within their interactions, initially proposed by Gutierrez et al. (1995). This led to Engeström (2001) adding a way for two or more interacting activity systems to meet in his iteration of third-generation CHAT (see Figure 3.3). For example, within an education setting, one object may be a student's work from a class. The second object could be teaching English. The object of the activity is the interaction of multiple objects, in this example, the individual work, and group teaching. By adding an additional 'third space', third-generation CHAT can allow exploration of multiple interacting activity systems.

Third-generation CHAT allows exploration of individual and organisational development, providing a cultural and historical framework to explore, and potentially improve, human activity (Bourke & McGee, 2012). Therefore, third-generation CHAT can be used to frame qualitative data regarding activities across organisations (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019).

Figure 3.3

Third-generation CHAT (Engeström, 2000).
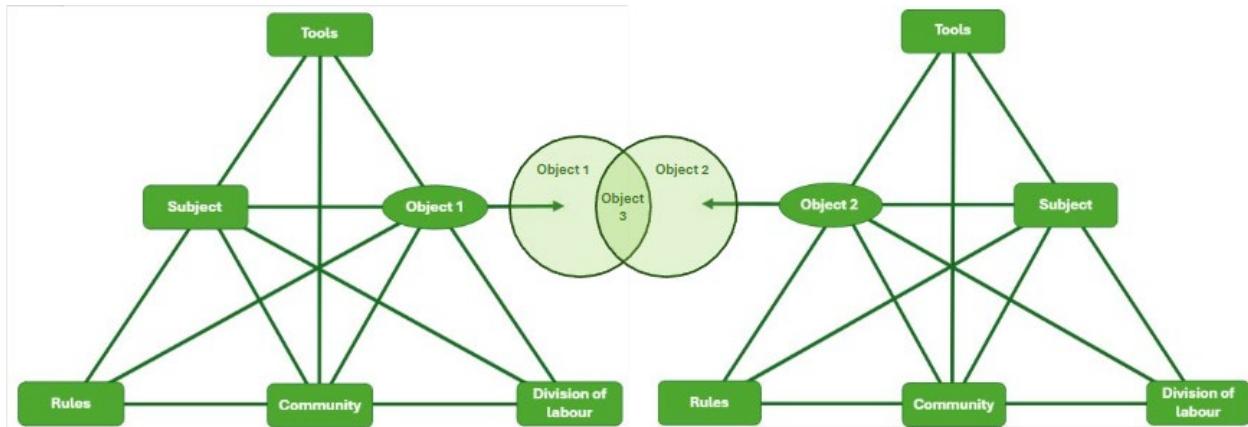
Although CHAT is popular in research and has been applied in many ways (e.g., Capper, 2020; Spinuzzi, 2012), it is still criticised due to its limited applicability. Spinuzzi (2012) found that CHAT can be difficult to use when activities are not clearly defined, or applied to work which may involve multiple interacting activities. Similarly, Wiser and Durst (2019) found when applying CHAT to objects which are new and not yet clearly defined, it may be difficult to evaluate and change systems. Additionally, CHAT has been described as focused too heavily on the activity, without considering the individuals acting within that system (Toomela, 2000). This therefore may limit the use of CHAT in some situations.

Key principles of CHAT

Engeström (2001) outlined five key principles of CHAT:

1. The focus of analysis is a mediated, object-orientated activity system embedded within other systems.

2. There are multiple perspectives across the community from which the activity can be viewed.

3. As activity systems change over time, its history (or historicity; Engeström, 2001) must be considered.

4. Contradictions within the systems need to be explored as a source of change.

5. All activity systems have the possibility for change.

CHAT's use in research

In the context of the present research, CHAT is being considered as a tool to explore an activity within an organisation, with the possibility of organisational change. Despite criticism of CHAT as not being culturally sensitive (Cole, 1988), CHAT has since been used in educational psychology research in the UK (e.g., Leadbetter, 2007; Capper, 2020), and has even been suggested as a framework for practice (Leadbetter, 2017). Furthermore, Colville and Eodanable (2023) explore how CHAT can enhance EP research identity, to develop collaborative research. They suggest that CHAT is well suited to explore the complex nature of EP practice and is complimentary to the socio-cultural and historical influences that impact the role of an EP.

Second- and third- generation CHAT have been established as tools for organisational change. A method of using CHAT to map ongoing activity systems' object, outcome, tools, rules, community and division of labour, and exploring any contradictions within the activity system has been established (Foot, 2014). Contradictions represent accumulated tensions within

an activity system, and can therefore be used as driving force for change, through the

consideration of solutions to address contradictions (Engeström, 2001; Il'enkov,1982).

Contradictions often arise due to the constant change within activity systems, which can cause

tensions or problems within the activity (Kuuti, 1996) and, when explored, can offer up

opportunity for development (Engeström, 2000).

The contradictions explored within CHAT can be on a variety of levels; primary,

secondary, tertiary and quaternary (Engeström, 2001). See Table 3.1 for description of levels of

contradictions.

Table 3.1

Levels of contradictions within CHAT, as detailed by Engeström (2001).

Level of contradiction:	Description (and example):
Primary	Tension within a single node (e.g. differences in the definition of the object)
Secondary	Tension across multiple nodes within one activity system (e.g. a member of the community having their voice stifled by the legislative context).
Tertiary	Tension across a previous activity model's object and new objects (e.g. a new technology is introduced which causes tensions across other areas of the activity system).
Quaternary	Tension between the central activity system, and neighbouring systems (e.g. if the activity is diagnostic dyslexia assessment, but the LA position statement does not support dyslexia diagnosis).

Engeström (2000) discusses the term expansive learning as a way of exploring contradictions. They propose that a new way of working can be modelled by using the concept of mediation and sketching a zone of proximal development, which is potential that can be reached with support (Engeström & Glâveanu, 2012). Tensions within and across activity systems are

considered, and interventions that address contradictions are suggested to improve outcomes (Spinuzzi & Guile, 2019). Previously, CHAT has been used to identity intervention within every node of an activity system, such as developing new tools, adapting rules, or involving new people within the activity.

CHAT has been used in research to explore multiple activities within EP practice, including consultation. For example, Leadbetter (2006) used CHAT to conceptualise future directions for consultation work in EP practice, and O'Shea (2019) used CHAT to explore existing conceptualisations of consultation (see Chapter 2 for further details). Described as a 'new and innovative' (Leadbetter, 2017, p. 254) framework in educational psychology, it has now been used as a descriptive framework, analytic device, and organisational development tool across the profession (Leadbetter, 2017).

Summary

CHAT offers a useful way to frame consultation in the context of the present research. Although facing criticisms regarding application of CHAT to some activities (Spinuzzi, 2012; Toomela, 2000), consultation as an activity within EP practice is well known and developed. Furthermore, the history and context of consultation is important to consider within research, due to the broad range of theoretical and conceptual influences. The present research aims to explore the activity system of consultation, from the subject position of both EPs and SENCos, with consideration of the cultural and historical influences on a LA setting. Consultation is a thoroughly explored topic in the EP profession and is dependent in its context and history. As the present research seeks to explore one activity, within one moment of time, second-generation

CHAT was used as a lens to frame activity within its context and explore contradictions with the

potential for organisational change is suited to the overarching research aims.

Chapter 4: Research Methods

Research aims

The present research aimed to examine consultation from the subject perspective of EPs and SENCos, using second-generation CHAT to frame the activity (see Chapter 3; Engeström, 1987). By viewing consultation from multiple subject perspectives within the community, the research sought to explore in-depth the conceptualisations and understanding of consultation within a LA. This research is exploratory in that it aims to explore a topic that other researchers have not yet studied in-depth. In order to bring clarity and focus to the exploration in the present study, CHAT was used as a framework to structure both data collection and data analysis. This framework is well-suited to explore activities within EP practice (Colville & Eodanable, 2023)..

Through using CHAT and exploring consultation in relation to CHAT nodes, consultation can be considered within the wider interacting systems for both the EP and SENCo, accounting for constraints of the wider organisational and cultural systems. By exploring similarities and contradictions within the systems, key issues within consultation can be better understood within their context. Table 4.1 outlines how each node within CHAT is used to explore an activity system.

Table 4.1

The function of each CHAT node within the activity system of consultation (adapted from

Leadbetter, 2017, and O'Shea, 2019).

Node	Function
Subject	The perspective from which participants (EPs and SENCOs) view consultation as an activity system.
Object	The activity of focus, or what being worked on, in this research, what participants believe the focus of consultation is.
Outcome	What is hoped to be achieved by the activity of consultation.
Community	All participants of an activity system of consultation, who share the same object and are involved in the activity.
Division of labour	The roles among members of the community within consultation, and the division of power and status among these roles.
Tools	The artefacts that mediate consultation as an activity, either concrete (such as a laptop or paperwork) or abstract (such as skills or language).
Rules	The explicit and implicit norms that regulates consultation as an activity system and the actions taken within the activity system.

Research questions

Research question (RQ) 1: How do EPs and SENCos conceptualise the purpose of consultation?

a) What do EPs and SENCos identify as the goals and overall purpose (object and outcome) of their consultation meetings?

b) How do EPs and SENCos conceptualise their role (community and division of labour) within consultation meetings?

c) How do EPs and SENCos facilitate consultation (tools)?

RQ2: What wider social, cultural and organisational factors are present for SENCos and EPs in consultation?

a) What rules do EPs and SENCos identify as constraining their work (rules)?

b) What rules do EPs and SENCos identify as supporting their work (rules)?

RQ3: What contradictions were present within the activity of consultation for EPs and SENCos, and how do EPs' and SENCos' views of consultation complement and contradict each other?

Research approach

Philosophical stance

The philosophical stance of research considers how the RQs posit the formation of knowledge through stating the ontology and epistemology (Thomas, 2017). Ontology concerns

the "form and nature of the social world" (Waring, 2012, p. 16), and epistemology considers the study of how knowledge of the social world is developed and acquired (Thomas, 2017; Waring, 2012). Essentially, ontology considers what is reality, whereas epistemology considers how that reality can be studied. The philosophical stance of the research is outlined in subsequent sections to make clear the assumption underlying the research strategy (Saunders et al., 2019).

Ontology

Within this research, an interpretivist ontological stance was taken. Interpretivism considers reality as constructed individually by personal experience, and therefore individuals can have different interpretations of reality (Waring, 2012). Interpretivism aligns itself well to the underlying ontological assumption of CHAT, which positions activities as dependent on their context and an individual's own experience and interpretation of the activity (Engeström et al., 1999). Research taking an interpretivist stance uses qualitative methods (Newby, 2014), and is well suited to RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2006; see the 'data analysis' section for further details).

Epistemology

The RQs sought to explore how EPs and SENCos construct consultation, through exploring their implicit and explicit knowledge of consultative processes. A social constructionist approach is utilised, by exploring constructions from each individual, acknowledging that there is no single discoverable 'truth', but that individuals and groups construct their own realities (Creswell, 2003). Therefore, constructions of reality are subjective and can only be understood through participants (Creswell, 2003).

By seeking to understand consultation as a subjective human construct, rather than an objective reality (Burr, 2015), this research sought to explore how consultation is socially constructed, using the frame of CHAT to guide the inquiry, in the context of consultative work in a single LA EPS in the UK, from both EP and SENCo perspectives. Social constructionism considers how phenomena have developed over time, and therefore posits that associated events and words carry different meanings across individuals (Burr, 2015). By exploring consultation from both EP and SENCo perspectives, this research sought to explore consultant and consultee's social constructions of consultation within educational psychology practice in England.

As social constructionism posits human phenomena arising from interactions between people in their cultural and social context, to understand human activities, social and cultural influences must be considered, and therefore the social, political and economic realms must be explored beyond the individual (Burr, 2015). Thus, social constructionism is well suited to the overarching aim to explore consultation in educational psychology within its social and cultural context.

Furthermore, the concepts of phenomena being constructed by an individual within their context lends itself well to CHAT. Activity theorists posit that individuals and society are both equally important parts of an interacting system (Daniels, 2001). CHAT's exploration of the interaction between subjects, and their community, allows an analysis of consultation at wider organisational and cultural levels (Daniels, 2001).

Engeström (1999) discussed 'multi-voicedness' within CHAT, outlining activity systems as a community of multiple perspectives and traditions. For example, the subject node focuses on the perspective of the individual participant that is conducting an activity. Therefore, by

exploring EPs as 'subjects' and SENCos as 'subjects', their construction of consultation within the social and cultural context in which they work can be considered. Additionally, the division of labour node (Engeström, 1987) allows the exploration of different subject positions for the participants, within their own context and history. This aspect of CHAT lends itself well to the multiple realities constructed through social interaction outlined in social constructionism (Thomas, 2013).

Research design

Context

In interpretivist research, knowledge is assumed to be situated within relationships between people, known as 'situated knowledge' (Thomas, 2013). As the researcher takes a central role in the discovery of the situated knowledge, Thomas (2013) encourages researchers to acknowledge their subjectivity and disclose their positionality, for readers to have a greater understanding of the researcher and how their positionality may impact the research. Please see Chapter 1 for further details of the context of the research, and researcher's professional and personal interest.

Additionally, a research diary was kept to support reflexivity and maintain awareness of positionality and how this may have impacted the research (Nadin & Cassel, 2006). The diary was used to record insights regarding methodology and theoretical decisions related to the research. Please see Appendix 1 for an extract from the reflective research diary.

Design frame

The design frame of research can be considered the scaffolding of the research (Thomas, 2017; Cohen et al., 2017). The present research has used a case study design to offer a holistic exploration of a single phenomenon (Cohen et al., 2017; Yin, 2009;), which in this instance was consultation from consultee and consultant perspective within a single LA. The research was explorative, seeking to understand the case in the background of its context of the LA, and intrinsic or unique to its own situation (Yin, 2009). Case studies have been defined in many different ways in the literature (Thomas, 2015). Thomas (2015) summarised definitions of case studies through four themes. See Table 4.2 for an overview of how these concepts are considered in the present research.

Table 4.2

Key considerations of case study design, as described by Thomas (2015) and adapted by Capper (2020).

Case study element and definition	Research approach taken
Subject – the type of case that was chosen to be studied.	Local knowledge case, reflective of the researcher's access to a LA EPS.
Purpose – the aim of the case study.	Instrumental and exploratory, aiming to improve understanding of an area of EP practice.
Approach – how the research sought to meet the aim.	Illustrative, aiming to explore the phenomenon of consultation as experienced by consultant and consultee.
Process – the way the case study was approached.	Single snapshot, exploring participants' experiences in a moment of time.

Qualitative research relies on language-based data, as opposed to numerical data (Clarke & Braun, 2013). As a paradigm, qualitative research works on the principle that there are multiple realities based on individual knowledge constructed within a context, and no single

'correct' reality which can be measured (Newby, 2014). This aligns itself with the current research, and the social constructivist epistemology taken.

Qualitative research can be vulnerable to the influence of relationships between researcher and participant, and the direct involvement of researchers leave data collection and analysis open to influence from the researcher's own context (Clarke & Braun, 2013). It is also considered a time-consuming approach to research (Newby, 2014). However, for this research, a qualitative approach supports collection of rich and meaningful data from within a context (Newby, 2014). This contextualisation of the data is important for the research, and the additional reflexivity within the approach allows consideration of the researcher's positionality within that context (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Additionally, the flexibility of the approach allowed for a selection from a wide range of methods to best suit the RQs and aims (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

Summary of research design

The research sought to explore consultation in EP practice from the perspective of both EPs and SENCos, as respective consultants and consultees. Qualitative methods were adopted to gain rich data from participants, framed from a social constructionist lens, positing consultation as a socially constructed phenomenon. EPs and SENCos who participated in educational psychology consultation within single LA were used as a case-study, and will henceforth be referred to as the 'case study'. CHAT was used to frame the research, guiding the interview schedule and data analysis deductively (see subsequent sections), as an approach that is

increasingly being used to frame research in educational psychology, which acknowledges that activities such as consultation are part of wider contexts and activity systems (e.g. Leadbetter, 2007).

Procedure

Ethics

Ethics were comprehensively reviewed in line with the University of Birmingham's ethical review process. The ethics approval letter can be found in Appendix 2. The British Educational Research Association Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research (2018) and the BPS Code of Conduct and Ethics (2018) were considered throughout. Particular considerations included potential conflict of interest, as the researcher works directly with several schools in the LA. If participants' recent experience of consultation was with the person interviewing them, participants may find it more difficult to explore their construct of consultation, and the existing relationship may have impacted the interview. As a result of this, schools which the researcher had directly worked with were excluded from participation.

Participant recruitment

All participants were recruited voluntarily. EPs were recruited via a post in the LA EPS Microsoft Teams channel, which detailed information on the research project and the inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Appendix 3). EPs who were interested in participating could contact

the researcher via email for further information. Those who contacted the researcher were sent an EP information sheet (see Appendix 4) and consent form (see Appendix 5) and offered an opportunity to ask questions. EPs within the service were also approached as 'gatekeepers' for the SENCo participants. Each EP is 'linked' to multiple schools, and their key point of contact is typically the school SENCo. The EPs were asked to email their school SENCos with a message from the researcher (see Appendix 6), including the SENCo participant information sheet (see Appendix 7), consent form (see Appendix 5) and details of how to get in touch with the researcher via email.

Voluntary sampling has some limitations, as it may be influenced by selection bias as participants who self-select may be those with stronger opinions on consultation (Thomas, 2017). To mediate this, EPs and SENCos of various levels of experience were encouraged to volunteer to take part, and the selection criteria allowed anyone who had experienced consultation in the LA in the last year to take part.

Some research exploring consultation in EP practice (e.g. Erchul, 1987) has focused on specific experiences of an instance of consultation and interviewed the 'dyad' consultee and consultant to explore that specific experience. However, as the present research sought to explore constructions of consultation more broadly, as opposed to analysing the effectiveness or outcomes of consultation (e.g. Claridge, 2005), it was decided this was unnecessary.

Participant information

Five EPs and five SENCos were interviewed. All SENCos worked in primary schools.

See Table 4.3 below for participants' demographic information.

Table 4.3

Participant demographic information.

Participant:	Role:	Sex:	Years of experience in current role within the LA:
T1	Primary school SENCo	Female	1 year
T2	Primary school SENCo	Female	11 years
T3	Primary school SENCo and class teacher	Female	4 years
T4	SENCO and Director of primary setting	Male	1.5 years
T5	Primary school SENCo	Female	7 years
EP1	EP	Female	3 years
EP2	EP	Female	7 years
EP3	EP	Female	5 years
EP4	EP	Female	3 years
EP5	EP	Female	5 years

Note. Participants are referred to as either EP (representative of educational psychologists) or T (teaching staff, representative of SENCos).

Data collection timeline

Please see Table 4.4 for a timeline of research activities.

Table 4.4

Timeline of research activity.

Research activity	Date completed
Research idea was proposed to university and placement supervisors.	December 2022
Research proposal presentations at university - university tutors and peers to offer feedback and clarification on research proposal.	January 2023
Application for ethics approval was submitted and confirmed.	February 2023
Recruitment messaged for SENCos sent via EP gatekeepers.	April 2023
Pilot SENCo interview was held with one SENCo.	April 2023
SENCo interviews were held.	August 2023
Recruitment message was posted on whole service Team channel.	July 2023
EP interviews were held.	August 2023
All data were transcribed.	November 2023
Data analysis undertaken.	December 2023

Semi-structured interviews

As social constructionism considers knowledge developing through human interactions such as conversation (Kvale, 1996), interviews were used to explore this topic. Online semi-structured interviews were used to interview participants individually. An interview schedule was used flexibly (Clarke & Braun, 2013). In this research, the interview schedules were based around CHAT nodes, and an activity system was co-constructed for each participant. A drawn-out version of a second-generation CHAT system was used to make notes throughout the interview (see Appendix 8 for an example). At the end of the interview, the system made was shared with participants to check it accurately represented their views.

Structured interviews were not used due to their rigid and static nature (Taylor, 2005), in contrast to semi-structured interviews' flexibility to explore and respond to information raised during data collection (Kallio et al., 2016). This also allows an interviewer to actively engage in the co-construction of meaning, which is well suited to smaller samples and a social constructionist approach (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Semi-structured interviews can be time consuming and reliant on rapport building (Newby, 2014). However, for the purpose of this research, the open-ended questions and flexible approach to an interview schedule allowed the research to capture a range of responses in a natural and free-flowing feeling interview (Gillham, 2005) and clarify any misunderstandings throughout the process (Clark & Braun, 2013).

Interviews were held online to support participant recruitment. The EPS covers a large county, and the research sought to sample the whole service, and not be restricted to a smaller geographical area due to need to travel to interview. Although online interviews have been

criticised for potentially impacting participant engagement and motivation (Chen & Hinton,

1999), it was decided that, as online working is considered normal practice post-COVID-19 (e.g.

Singh et al., 2021), and planning interviews online meant that any unanticipated travel or social

restrictions would not impede data collection, it was an appropriate way to conduct interviews.

Please see Table 4.5 for a summary of advantages and disadvantages of online interviews.

Table 4.5

Summary of advantages and disadvantages of online interviews, adapted from Davies et al.
(2020), Denzin (1989) and Self (2021).

Theme:	Advantage:	Disadvantage:
Participant recruitment	• Online methods can increase likelihood of recruitment the desired sample, possibly due to the reduction of cost and travel.	• The need for technology could cause some participants being unable to take part in interviews.
Participant engagement	• The increased level of anonymity and protection offered by interviewing online may support participants to be more open and honest	• Demand characteristics have been reduced in face-to-face interviews through interviewer's self presentation as relaxed and professional. However, this may be more difficult online and may increase demand characteristics. • When interviewing online via a laptop, participants and research may be subjected to distracting notifications. • Some research suggests that

		responses in online interviews can be shorter and provide less contextual information.
Technology	• Conducting interviews online allows access to transcription and recording via online systems.	• Online interviews require a level of technological ability from participants. • Online interviews require access to technology such as the internet and a laptop. • Technology can fail. For example, a call may freeze or internet may drop.
Communication	• Technology could be assistive in case of communication difficulties, e.g. using text functions.	• Audio can be unclear via video chat, and technology problems can impact clarity of communication.
Interview experience	• Interviews can be conducted from a space in which both the participant and interviewer respectively feel comfortable and familiar with, for example, at home.	• Relational satisfaction may be lower in online interviews.

	• Online interviews can be safer for interviewers, as they are not in a face-to-face situation with someone unknown to them.	
Cost	• Online interviews eliminated travel cost.	• Equipment needed for online interviews may have a cost implication.

See Appendix 9 and 10 for the semi-structured interview schedules for EPs and SENCos, including questions and prompts which were used as necessary. The interview schedules were based on that used by O'Shea (2019) and informed by guidance given by Robson (2002). See Table 4.6 for the interview sequence followed. The interviews were recorded through Microsoft Teams. The researcher also made notes throughout the interview. At the end of the interview, notes taken on the activity system were summarised to check for misinterpretation, to ensure all information the participant felt was relevant was included, and to give participants a chance to add detail to their activity system.

Table 4.6

Interview sequence, as adapted from Robson (2002, p.277) and O'Shea (2019).

Sequence:	How the sequence was applied in the present research:
Introduction	Reason for the research and information from the consent form was reiterated verbally. Understanding of the way the data would be used was checked, and participants were given the chance to ask any other questions before affirming verbal consent. A CHAT image was shared with the participants (see Appendix 9) and used to introduce CHAT to the participant. Each node was introduced in the order outlined on the interview schedule, and it was explained to participants that subsequent interview questions were based on these nodes. Participants were told that the research would make notes on an activity system drawn in front of them, and they would check their interpretation of the participant's construction at the end of the interview.
Warm up	This section focused on the 'subject' node. The participant was asked to share a bit about themselves and their job role, to better understand the perspective they are coming from as the subject of the activity system.
Main body	Questions were asked about the remaining nodes: object; outcome; tools; rules; community; division of labour. The research made notes on a drawn-out activity system throughout.

Cool off	The researcher summarised their notes from the activity system they constructed throughout the interview, and checked their interpretation with the participant. Participants were told they could explain, add or change any of the information. See Appendix 8 for an example of an activity system drawn during interview.
Closure	Participants were thanked, and reminded of the next stages of the research and how their data would be used.

Pilot interview

One teaching staff participant was identified and approached for an initial pilot interview. A SENCo participant was chosen for this in order to gain an understanding of whether teachers would have enough experience of consultation from which to build a sufficient activity system for research. This pilot interview also gave further understanding of which CHAT nodes may need additional explanation and scaffolding during interviews, and to explore the prompts that may be needed to support rich data. After the interview, the participant was asked to feedback on how they found the process, and the researcher engaged in critical reflection. The interview yielded rich and detailed data and, therefore, CHAT felt like an appropriate approach to use with teaching staff as well as EPs. The interview was reviewed, and the interview schedule was deemed appropriate, with some additional prompts for nodes (tools and rules) which needed

further explanation. Because the interview schedule and researcher approach were not changed significantly, it was decided to include the pilot data in the final data set.

Data analysis

Reflexive thematic analysis

RTA has no attachment to philosophical positioning or methods, and therefore can be used with a range of philosophical stances (Braun & Clarke, 2019). In this research, RTA was deductive, or theory driven, seeking explore the data in relation to CHAT nodes. The focus of the research was to share construction of the activity of consultation, not to explore how language impacts construction of consultation. RTA is not rigid or linear process and enables the researcher to flexibly move through the steps to develop codes and revise understanding (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Braun and Clarke (2019) believe high-quality RTA requires researchers to meaningfully engage with the data, to establish creative accounts of the patterns identified.

CHAT's use in research is not clearly defined and does not utilise any specific research methods. Therefore, presentation of findings are subjective (Murphy & Rodriguez-Manzanares, 2008). Due to the subjectivity of CHAT and the use of RTA as a "theoretically flexible method" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, pg. 592) which involves a number of decisions, this section seeks to make the decisions made regarding data analysis explicit for the sake of trustworthiness and transparency.

CHAT seeks to yield a theory of activity (Bakhurt, 2009). In this instance, the research seeks to explore a theory of consultation within EP practice, and does so by constructing an

activity system which included both the subject perspective of the consultee and consultant. Data from participants could be used to describe one activity system from both subject perspectives, of an activity from each single subject perspective. As the research aims were to construct an activity system theory for consultation which incorporated the views of consultant and consultees and to explore contradictions within this, the decision was made to analyse both EPs and SENCo data together, to generate one activity system. By incorporating multiple participants, the present research seeks to develop a rich picture or theory of consultation in educational psychology practice. It was felt that this would allow a greater exploration of contradictions within and across subject perspectives, as themes would discuss both subject perspectives. This approach of combining two subject perspectives for data analysis using CHAT has been used in prior educational psychology research (e.g. Gillen, 2011)

Coding was driven by the RQs and use of CHAT. The focus was on information which was reflective of the seven CHAT nodes. Coding was both semantic (explicit or surface meaning) and latent (attempting to identify underlying meanings, assumptions and ideas; Bryne, 2022). See Table 4.7 for the steps of RTA as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), and specific processes used in the present research. Examples of the coding process can be seen in Appendix 12.

Table 4.7

Description of stages of RTA (Braun and Clarke, 2019) and how they were undertaken in the research.

RTA Stage:	Process undertaken:
1. Transcription	Data were recorded and transcribed by the researcher. Clarke and Braun (2013) suggest that emphasis should be placed on what is said, not how it is said. Therefore, 'non-semantic sounds,' such as pauses and hesitations were not recorded. After transcription, recordings were deleted. A reflexive diary was used throughout this initial phase, to note any common themes, key concepts, or contradictions which may constrain the work of consultation.
2. Reading and familiarisation	All transcripts (from both EP and SENCos) were read through twice to check for transcription errors and develop familiarity with the data. At this point, ideas of initial interest related to CHAT and the seven nodes were noted on transcripts. Any potential contradictions within the system, which may be constraining or preventing consultation from happening or being effective, were also noted.
3. Coding	Data from all interviews (EPs and SENCos) were then re-examined, with both semantic and latent notes made, focussed on data which may answer the RQs under the relevant CHAT nodes. No priority was given to either semantic or latent coding. Coding was done under each CHAT node, and

completed manually by the researcher, using an excel spreadsheet (see Appendix 12). Any contradictions within codes were also noted.

4. Searching for themes (also known as generating initial themes)	Focusing on revisiting the generated codes, the initial codes from all data sets were compared to seek out patterns which could be combined into themes. Initial themes were then noted on paper, and used to refer back to the data in the next step, reviewing themes. Contradictions within the codes were considered throughout. Codes were traced back to their original transcript to identify the subject perspective from which coding originated, and initial themes included consideration of contrasts and similarities within and across subject positions.
5. Reviewing themes	Initial themes were traced back to the data they were taken from, to ensure they accurately reflect the coding and meaning communicated by participants. Where this was not true, the data was readdressed, with the potential to develop new themes, and previously established themes were sometimes combined, or reworded to establish a more accurate story of consultation. Themes aimed to represent participant data, not researcher interpretation.
6. Defining and naming themes	Each theme names was informed by detailed analysis, and subsequent definition of the theme. The final themes were presented in two ways, under the RQ and relevant CHAT node to make clear how the RQs were addressed, as well as in a visual representation of second-generation

CHAT, to show the story being told through codes within the context of

the CHAT frame.

Methods to ensure trustworthiness

As this research is not taking an objectivist stance, Shenton (2004) suggests traditional

ways of considering rigour (using validity, reliability and generalisability) are inappropriate.

Qualitative research is not seeking to be replicable and generalisable; it instead seeks to have an

in-depth exploration of a specific phenomenon. See Table 4.8 for further details regarding how

Shenton's (2004) four criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability

were used to ensure rigour in this research.

Table 4.8

Methods used to ensure trustworthiness, based on Shenton's (2004) strategies.

Method and definition:	Research decisions made related to trustworthiness:
Credibility – in contrast to 'internal validity' in positivist research, 'how congruent are the findings with reality?' (Merriam, 1998)	• RTA, a research method that is well evidence and well established was used to analyse data. • The researcher was familiar with the organisation in which the research was taking place, due to their role within the organisation. • By interviewing both EPs and SENCos, data sources were triangulated. • Participants were all reassured that they could discuss consultation and their experiences honestly, including positives and negatives. This was in an attempt to promote honesty in participants (Shenton, 2004). • All participants had a relationship with the EPS, which Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggests allows trust to be built and a good understanding to be developed of the organisation's (in this case the EPS) systems. • Frequent discussions with the supervising university tutor were held, which, along with a reflective research diary (see

Appendix 1), considered the effectiveness of the methods used (Shenton, 2004).

- Credibility of the research was validated through biographical information provided in earlier sections.

- All data was 'member checked' by participants. At the end of each interview, the researcher's interpretation of the constructed activity system was checked with the participant.

- Research findings were checked against previous research findings to check congruence.

- Recruitment was random, as a message was sent to all EPs in the service, asking for voluntary participants and to pass on information on the study to their school links. However, the voluntary nature of recruitment may result in self-selection bias, with those who chose to take part possibly having an interest in the topic.

Transferability – in contrast to 'external validity' in positivist research. To what extent the findings of the research could be

- The context of the organisation within which the research took place is clearly outlined.

- Inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants is outlined, as well as the number of participants and some demographic details.

transferred to another situation.	• Data collection methods are clearly detailed, as well as the length and number of data collection sessions, and the time period over which data were collected.
Dependability – in contrast to 'reliability' in positivist research. Focusses on ensuring that the research could be replicated, although it would not be expected to get the same results in a different context.	• The research design addresses what was planned and executed in the research, as well as the operational details of data gathering when in the field improves the dependability. • A reflective research diary (see Appendix 1) was completed throughout, to record any small changes in the operational details and the justification of this (Shenton, 2004).
Confirmability – in contrast to objectivity in positivist research. Based on the extent that the researcher discloses their own predispositions (Miles and Huberman, 1994).	• Context and positionality of the research are discussed. • A reflective, reflexive approach was adopted to acknowledge preconceptions and reduce potential bias (Shenton, 2004).

Chapter summary

The research took a qualitative approach, using semi-structured interviews and deductive RTA to build a CHAT overview of consultation from both EP and SENCo perspectives. The research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of consultation within EP practice in a LA from consultee and consultant perspective. Therefore, by taking a case study approach, the rich data gathered was used to gain insight into the conceptualisations and understanding of consultation within the case study.

Chapter 5: Findings

The raw data from interviews with five EPs and five SENCos offered an in-depth description of the activity of consultation, which was analysed using RTA, as described in Chapter 4. Themes were explored under the CHAT nodes outlined by second-generation CHAT, including object, outcome, community, division of labour, rules, and tools. The subject positions were discussed in the method section (Chapter 4), which outlines participants' demographic information.

In this chapter, RQs 1, 2 and 3 are answered. The themes are presented under the relevant CHAT node. Both subject positions (EPs and SENCo) are discussed within the same themes, to highlight similarities and contradictions across the subject positions, and to construct a shared activity system for consultation. Figures 5.1 and 5.2 offer a breakdown of the themes discussed, the related CHAT node and RQ.

While RQs 1 and 2 are answered directly by thematic output, RQ3, which focusses on contradictions across the whole activity system (see Table 3.1 for description of levels of contradictions), is discussed throughout themes. A summary of the contradictions in the data can also be found in Table 5.1. These contradictions, and possible solutions to address the tensions within the activity system are discussed further in Chapter 7.

Figure 5.1

Summary of thematic findings for RQ1, presented under the relevant RQ and CHAT node.
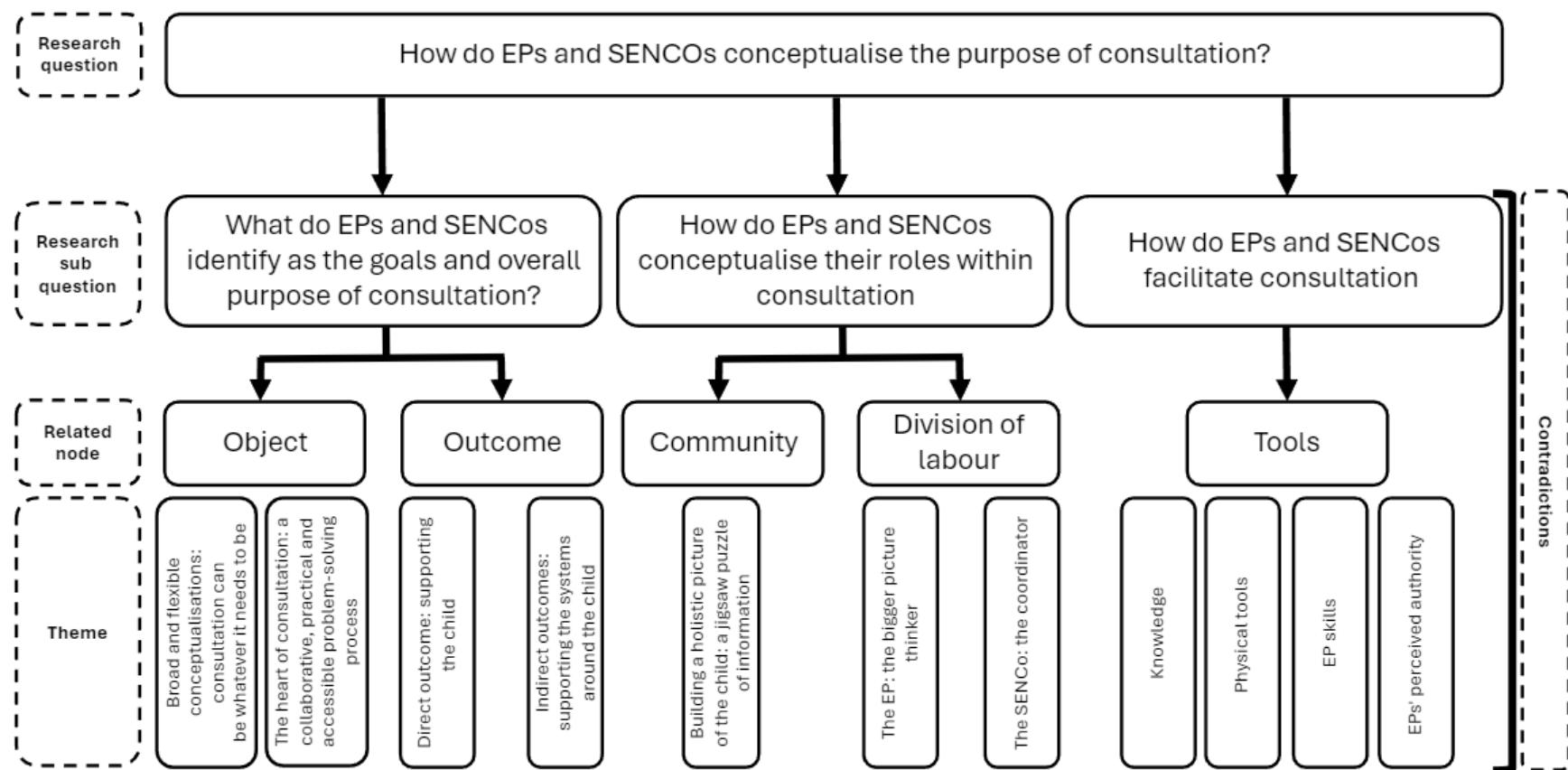
Figure 5.2

Summary of thematic findings for RQ2, presented under the relevant RQ and CHAT node.
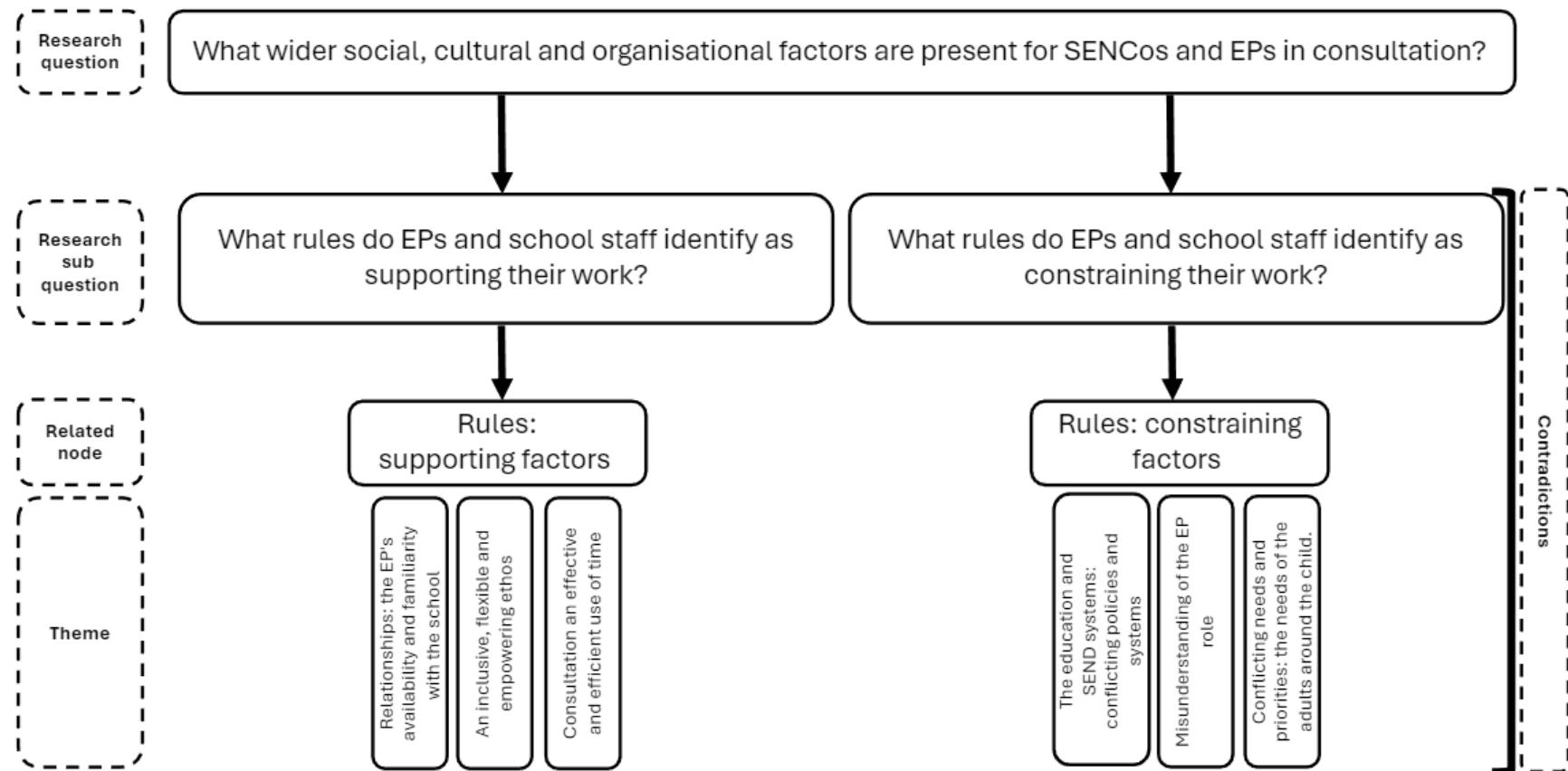
Themes under the 'object' node

Broad and flexible conceptualisations: consultation can be whatever it needs to be

This theme reflects the many ways that the object of consultation was described in the data. Definitions of consultation appeared to exist on a continuum, ranging from consultation as a specific event with a narrow definition, such as a multi-agency meeting, to a broad and flexible understanding, such as consultation being any conversation with an EP, or an ongoing relationship with the EPS. This range highlights a primary contradiction within the 'object' node of the constructed activity system. The quotes below from EP4 and T2 highlight the two opposing ends of the continuum discussed across participants.

"…I don't have this kind of one definition of it and ... it feels very messy in that, but it also feels like. That flexibility, again in terms of it can be what it needs to be in that moment for that context for that person". (EP4)

EP4's 'messy' definition shows a broad and loose conceptualisation of consultation and is indicative of one end of the spectrum of conceptualisations discussed. They frame consultation as a process that can change to meet whatever needs are present in that moment, to make some difference in the circumstances presented.

However, some participants, such as T2, had a much narrower definition of consultation:

"...when I say I'm really struggling can you come in for a chat and then we fill out the PATH [*Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope*] paperwork generally then... we all sit together, you know it may be class teacher, parents and EP and then we talk about you know the child's history, what their strengths are, what we think is working well for them, and anything that we're concerned about". (T2)

T2 described a much narrower process. This participant is specifically referring to an adapted person-centred planning tool, demonstrating that their experience of consultation has been relatively homogeneous and defined as a set task. These respective quotes are representative of the two subject positions, with EPs interviewed likely having a much broader understanding of the theory behind consultation, and therefore tending to have more flexible conceptualisations of consultation as an activity.

However, EPs referred to their understanding of consultation as shifting over time, as they gained experience in practice, suggesting their original conceptualisation may have more closely resembled that of the SENCos interviewed.

"I think that's very much how consultation is taught or how you read about it... I think though over the past three years I've been able to recognize that yeah, absolutely that is, but it doesn't always have to be that way.... The experience of doing the job and being in those situations and realising that, oh that was ..quite a powerful conversation that we just had, but it wasn't an hour and a half problem solving formal consultation. So yeah, I think it has naturally over the past few years through the experiences I've had changed and I've become more comfortable with that I think". (EP4)

This quote highlights how experience in practice can shift perception of consultation, and conceptualisation are likely to become more flexible with experience.

The heart of consultation: a collaborative, practical and accessible problem-solving process

This theme is reflective of the common thread underlying all participants' understanding of consultation, and a key similarity in the 'object' node of the activity system. Every participant discussed how a consultative approach is a collaborative way of working, which was more

accessible and understandable for the stakeholders involved, and holds seeking a way forward at its core.

EP2 highlighted how consultation involves collaborative problem solving:

"…it's a collaborative way to achieve change. It's a very sort of. It opens up the possibility for change. It's a sort of problem-solving relationship between key people, you know, to bring about change". (EP2)

They discussed the need for a problem-solving relationship and emphasised the overarching purpose of consultation to bring about change. They highlight how relationships are at the heart of the process, and how key people who can affect change are involved in the process.

SENCos similarly discussed the main outcome being a plan made in collaboration with key stakeholders:

"…it just gives us the opportunity to be much more collaborative than previous. You know, you'd get a report and you know, that would be really useful. But it's jargon, isn't it, to anybody that's not in that system. So, I can imagine as a parent reading it, you know, it feels all official and like, oh gosh, you know, I've got this and this has got to happen now". (T3)

T3 highlighted the accessibility of consultation compared to assessment-based approaches, exploring how parents may experience receiving a report which they would have had no hand in co-constructing.

EP2 similarly contrasts consultation with assessment, highlighting the time that went into assessments and report writing, and how the effectiveness of that way of working was unclear:

"... so I'm sending a report out to a school. Once I've done that work, I'm putting, you know, actions or recommendations and it's just going out into the school ... and I was thinking is

this working? You know this is taking a lot of my time and … it was starting to feel a bit like a treadmill of report writing.**" -** EP2

Participants describe how consultation differs from assessment to highlight consultation's collaborative nature, making it timelier, more efficient and possibly more effective than a written report based on individual assessment.

Themes under the 'outcome' node

Direct outcomes: supporting the child

This theme relates to the direct, tangible outcomes from consultation, as discussed by both SENCos and EPs. Direct outcomes include next steps and actions agreed in consultation, the plans made, and the write-up of the conversation. These outcomes were focused on the child at the centre of the consultation and included interventions or changes to the school environment. Direct outcomes were discussed by all participants, with every participant discussing next steps or an action plan and a write-up of the consultation.

T4 clearly describes what they believe to be the aim of consultation, and what they expect to finish the process with:

"…a small number of practical solutions that we can put in place …not like a, you know, 30 different things on a generic report, which we are we can't do because we've not heard of them or anything like that… Consultation allows us to talk it through and for them to share those resources and just be a bit more refined and specific about what we're going to do". (T4)

They highlight the expectation that outcomes from consultation should be agreed and understood by those who are expected to action them. They also discuss the practical nature of these outcomes, as being specific and therefore actionable.

EP5 discussed a shared plan, which every stakeholder agrees to:

"…the outcome for me would be…So a plan where we're all on board with it, it's a shared goals. And everyone's collaborated to that plan with the view that that would have a positive impact on the child over time. I guess that's the main outcome". (EP5)

All participants discussed how these goals and plans are shared by the adults around the child in order to best affect change. While focusing on work from the adult, the direct outcomes are around an action plan to create change for the pupil.

Indirect outcomes: supporting the systems around the child

This theme relates to the indirect outcomes described by SENCos and EPs. All participants discussed the systemic changes that can support a child indirectly, including upskilling staff, reassuring adults around a child, offering alternative perspectives and tackling difficult conversations. A common concept that emerged from interviews was that the process of consultation was perceived as more important than the direct output. Consultees were offered the time and space to reflect and problem solve with a solution-focused approach in a safe environment, where their emotions can be held. This is demonstrated by EP5:

"...my work previously felt like my report. Whereas my work now feels like my consultation and the piece of paper that they get at the end is just ... confirming that we had that meeting." (EP5)

EP5 highlighted the differences between consultation and assessment-based approaches. In this case, work previously consisted of writing a report; with consultation, the work is process driven, which in itself supports systemic change. EP5 summarised how they view the outcomes of consultation, beyond the direct recommendations or action plan for intervention.

EP3 concisely summed up what they felt their main outcomes from consultation are; "…we give people hope that things will change things" (EP3). The 'hope' EP3 discussed is not just about the child, but all the adults around the child. While EPs spoke about the change in systems around the child more broadly and focused on containment of the adults around the child, SENCos were more likely to talk about specific ways that consultation has helped them besides supporting interventions for a child. For example, T1 discussed how consultation can support relationships between home and school, and tackling difficult conversations:

"…we were able to use the consultation to kind of approach harder subjects with parents, knowing that the background of the Ed Psych [*Educational Psychologist*] almost gives you a way into that conversation more so than if it was just her teacher or me sitting there saying it. So, we've done it, used it for that, to help like support with parents". (T1)

This highlights a secondary contradiction discussed across multiple nodes (object, outcome, division of labour and tools), representative of tension between the 'expert' and 'facilitator' roles played by the EP. Within the object node, participants highlighted consultation as a collaborative process. However, in the present theme it is the perception of the EP as the expert that T1, T3 and T4 felt lent them the ability to tackle difficult conversations with parents, bridge the gap between school and home, and offer reassurance to the adults around the child. This contradiction is also seen across the division of labour node (within the theme 'the EP: the bigger picture thinker) and the tools node (within the themes 'knowledge' and 'EP's perceived

power'). In subsequent themes, this contradiction will be referred to as 'expert versus facilitator' in reference to the two contradicting roles that EPs play in consultation. Further details and description can be found in Table 5.1.

Themes under the 'community' node

Building a holistic picture of the child: a jigsaw puzzle of information

The members of the community involved in the activity of consultation were described as offering information from different perspectives and different expertise, to support the group to build a holistic and shared understanding of the child or young person. Within this theme, there were no significant contradictions, as both EPs and SENCos described the same community. The people involved in the process of consultation as perceived by participants included the EP, the SENCo, teaching staff who know the child (such as the child's class teacher or teaching assistant), senior leadership in the school who can make changes within school (involved either directly or indirectly), parents or guardians of the child, and any external professionals that may be involved with the child (e.g., speech and language, social services). This is demonstrated by T1:

"…in the actual meeting, class teacher or the TA, we try and make sure there's always somebody that knows the child really well, and then the parents, EP, me". (T1)

Some participants highlighted the importance of parents, along with the EP and SENCo. For example, T2 stated "…definitely parents, I mean that they are the absolute key" (T2).

Although participants discussed how, ideally, they would have other professionals that are familiar with the child in the consultation, this was not always possible. However, T5 described the aim of bring all services around a child together:

"...trying to bring all the services together, they're involved with each young person individually". (T5)

This highlights how consultation in the case study was used for multi-agency work, and how having different perspectives and knowledge bases was valued by both EPs and SENCos.

There was also discussion regarding whether the child played a direct role in consultation, as demonstrated by T4:

"...it depends on the pupil. In terms of how old they are, whether it's appropriate that they're actually part of the meeting or not, or whether we gather their views in a different way, how they communicate". (T4)

Some participants (EP1, EP2, EP3, T1, T4 and T5) felt that although there may be exceptions for older pupils, a child attending a consultation meeting could be inappropriate and potentially harmful for a child to hear adults talking about them, and instead felt that adults should bring the child's voice into the consultation through previous work with them.

Themes under the 'division of labour' node

The educational psychologist: the bigger picture thinker

This theme is focused on the role of the EP within the activity of consultation. The EPs were perceived to be the information gatherers, who would use their knowledge of psychological theory and child development to draw together the jigsaw puzzle pieces of information from the

rest of the community to build a bigger picture of the child. This view was held by both EPs and SENCos.

T5 discussed how they felt EPs bring everyone's views and knowledge together:

"...try and get a big picture of that young person, where they come from, what's their experience …What the concerns are of everyone around the table and what they are hoping to achieve". (T5)

This highlights how the SENCos felt that EPs were the information gatherers, who could sort and prioritise information to create a formulation with the group and add solution-focused direction to the conversation.

However, there was a contradiction within this theme, as EPs perceived their role of 'bigger picture thinker' as facilitating the group, with EP5 describing their role as "…mainly.... as the facilitator of the process" (EP5), which was a view held by all EP participants. However, some SENCos perceived EPs' main contribution as experts offering professional insights or knowledge, as demonstrated by T2:

"…they're obviously offering the professional insight in terms of what could then work". (T2)

This highlights a wider tension across the system, contributing to the 'expert versus facilitator' contradiction. In addition to the contradiction between subject positions, EPs also acknowledged their role as adding professional insight. This directly contradicts EPs who stated that they sought to avoid a power imbalance or minimise perceptions of the EP as an expert. EP5 demonstrated this contradiction:

"…bringing kind of that psychological knowledge. I try not to do it in a real expert way. If that makes sense. And particularly if it's things like attachment and trauma, ... talk around trauma informed. Kind of. Practises ... but in a more discreet way". (EP5)

EP5 described how they are subtly offering 'expert' knowledge. This raises questions regarding whether EPs' attempts to guide conversations and offer knowledge of theory in a subtle way could be considered covert coercion, as opposed to embracing their 'expert' role and being upfront about offering knowledge.

The SENCo: the coordinator

This theme outlines the role of SENCos within the activity of consultation. The SENCo role was generally discussed as being an organiser, or coordinator. They were discussed as making the initial referral to the EPS, setting the time and place for consultation with the EP, inviting all the parties to the meeting, and introducing members of the community.

EP5 discussed their experience of SENCos, as the instigator of the process:

"...my experience of the SENCo has been the one to organise it.... the SENCo has been the one to invite the parent in and organise the space and organise the timings and things". (EP5)

EP5 described how the SENCo is the person who makes the consultation happen and does all the background work to get everyone in the room together. Their role outlined here is about communicating with the key stakeholders to arrange the meeting.

SENCos were often described as EPs' key link to schools, with T3 describing themselves as having a 'middleman' role as often the only person who would know everyone in the room:

"...a bit like a middleman, yeah. because the parents know me and you know, myself and the Ed Psych [*Educational Psychologist*], we know each other, but it's rare that the Ed Psych and

the parents would know each other or the TAs [*Teaching Assistants*] and the Ed Psych, or the TAs and parents". (T3)

T3 outlined how they would introduce the people within the meeting and break the ice between all members of the consultation. They emphasised the importance of having a relationship with the individuals involved in a consultation, and how they are often the person who has a relationship with all stakeholders involved, through their role as the SENCo.

Themes under the 'tools' node

Knowledge

Knowledge was described as a key tool by both SENCos and EPs, with both valuing knowledge of the child in different environments, as well as knowledge of systems, resources and theory. Knowledge was described as a tool for all members of the consultation, with parents and family members likely contributing an in-depth knowledge of the child and their history, teaching staff providing knowledge of the child in a school context, and then the SENCo and EP as having knowledge of systems, resources and interventions.

T2 demonstrated how the knowledge to build an overall view of a child's lived experience in an important tool:

"...everybody who comes into the consultation has got different knowledge of the child in a different environment". (T2)

T2 suggested that consultation may not be as powerful without the different perspectives and knowledge that is brought by the various members of consultation.

T1 outlined how the EP's resource- and theory-based knowledge is a useful tool within consultation:

"[EP]'s bank of strategies always is amazing. She's able to, to on the spot suggest practical resources, books, stories that they might be able to read at home". (T1)

This shows how the EP contributes their professional knowledge to suggest resources and interventions during consultation. This is representative of the secondary contradiction 'expert versus facilitator' (see Table 5.1 for further details).

Physical tools

Physical tools were the same across participants. Physical tools were described as including laptop or paper and pen to make notes, a proforma with a structure to guide the conversation, and a physical space to hold a meeting. Some described tools such as school assessments or data. T5 discussed the data they may bring as a tool for consultation:

"I generally will have lots of Boxall profiles completed to share. ... IEP *[individualised educational plan]* plans, ... provision map, ...any risk assessments and reports.... Just any reports from any agencies that can't come*"*. (T5)

They described paperwork and reports as a physical tool which they can bring to contribute to the overall knowledge base of the child.

T4 talked more about the frameworks or proformas that may be brought into consultation as a tool to guide the conversation:

"...some people like these big pieces of paper ... generally it's been more laptop based so they've just been making a few notes on their laptop as we're going through the discussion". (T4)

The 'big piece of paper' described by T4 refers to an adapted person-centred planning approach, which will outline a certain structure for the conversation to follow and can be used to make notes.

EP skills

EPs were described by participants as bringing skills which help the activity of consultation. These skills were described by EPs as facilitating and interpersonal skills, managing conflict, managing and guiding the conversation, and having a person-centred and solution-focused orientation. This theme was explicitly discussed by EPs. SENCos also discussed skills in a more implicit way, mentioning how difficult conversations were easier with the EP, how they could ask tricky questions, and how they often brought person-centred planning tools to help guide the conversation.

EP3 described the many skills they are utilising when consulting:

"we're juggling a lot of plates ... there's a lot often really difficult relationships and having to read the room .... So there's a lot going on and at the same time you're trying to, really, genuinely listen to what people say in an almost process that in a way that is meaningful to them so that they understand that you've understood, but also that you can use that information to then move forward". (EP3)

They outlined the amount of work going on internally to manage the relationships in the room, while listening actively and processing information into a formulation, and keeping the conversation focused on moving forward with a solution-focused approach. Some of the EPs talked about how these skills have become almost instinctive now, and they can forget the level of skill and the process it took to get them to the point to be able to balance these skills.

SENCos, however, had less explicit knowledge of the underlying skills EPs use, although they did describe how the EPs supported consultation in terms of the results of using these skills. For example, T2 discussed how the EP could move a conversation forward:

"…it's just that it stops it all being a negative, sometime parents come to these meetings and just want to kind of go 'Bleugh,' and teachers will as well sometimes, just want to say 'they can't do this, they can't do that,' and you know talking about what's working well, …you always end up with some positives". (T2)

T2 described how often teachers and parents may focus on negatives or use consultation as a space to vent and focus on difficulties. However, the EPs' solution-focused approach and management of conversation supports exploration of strengths and ways to move forward.

EPs' perceived authority

This theme outlines EPs' perceived authority as a tool that could facilitate engagement from different stakeholders. SENCos implied that, as an external professional with a high-status title (often, 'Doctor'), stakeholders within consultation were more likely to listen and value EPs' views. SENCos discussed that they valued this, as they felt EPs' opinions could hold more weight with others in the consultation and be used to reinforce messages from the school. Contrasting the previous theme 'EP skills', which was discussed explicitly by EPs and implicitly by SENCos, EPs' 'authority' was mentioned explicitly by SENCos, but more subtly by EPs, who were instead more likely to talk about their role as a neutral person, who could offer an alternative perspective to help move a situation forward.

T3 described how messages from the EP are more likely to be listened to by parents:

"…it's more powerful, again, coming from someone in the educational psychologist field rather than us just going well, you know, you need to go and go to GP, go and go and badger them to get on this list". (T3)

T3 compared EPs to medical professionals, who are often considered to be in positions of authority, to be offered respect and trusted at their word. They suggested that talking to an EP can offer more reassurance and containment for parents than a school staff member can, and implied that a parent is more likely to listen and follow an EP's suggestion than they would if that same suggestion came from a member of school staff.

T2 also discussed how, as external agents, EPs were better able to bring up difficult topics with parents:

"…sometimes as school staff it's difficult for us to do that, because some of the questions sometimes I guess can be kind of personal and maybe a little bit awkward for us to address". (T2)

EPs instead were more likely to discuss their facilitation skills, as mentioned in the theme 'EP skills'. However, the way this was discussed did imply a level of authority which allows them to lead the conversation. For example, EP4 discussed how they guide conversations:

"...it's about bringing being the person to bring those, everybody together. To mediate to, to be able to ensure everyone's voice is heard to, you know, impose some structure to be able to make it kind of a meaningful conversation". (EP4)

They discussed 'imposing' a structure on the meeting, and guiding conversations, which implied a level of authority and power over the other participants within consultation, although this authority and power was never explicitly named by EPs in the interviews. This theme is an example of the 'expert versus facilitator' contradiction, highlighting how EPs 'expert' role is

perceived as a tool, despite the contradictory desire for EPs to frame themselves solely as 'facilitators' (see Table 5.1. for further details of this contradiction).

Themes under the 'rules' node, which support the activity of consultation

Relationships: the EP's availability and familiarity with the school

This theme highlights a similarity across the subject perspectives, whereby relationships are a key supporting factor within the activity of consultation. Relationships were often based on familiarity with the school and length of time working with them. This familiarity was likely due to the EPS's patch system, for which EPs are allocated a geographical patch of schools which, where possible, remain the same throughout the EP's time at the service. Additionally, the EPS had guidelines in place which require emails to be replied to within a certain timeframe, making EPs generally easily accessible for schools.

T3 demonstrated how important the EP having a relationship and familiarity with the school is:

"...for the EP to be comfortable in that school because if they were in a school where they don't enjoy the environment, you're not gonna get the best out of the working relationship". (T3)

The familiarity with the school described is due to an ongoing professional relationship, over years of the school having the same EP linked to them. T3 acknowledges how the EP's comfort within the school environment can impact how effective their work is.

EPs often felt that the more familiar they were with an area and a school, the better they were able to suggest consultative work and have it received positively. This is demonstrated by EP4, who stated "...the longer, you are in a school or in an area you start to build relationships."

This was also linked to how accessible the EPs were perceived to be by SENCos, with SENCos discussing their ongoing communications with their link EP, which supported them to change their ways of working, whereas others discussed how previous EPs were difficult to contact and therefore hard to build a relationship with. T5 demonstrated how important the EP being accessible to them was:

"...they can contact them more frequently and you can get together more frequently. It kinda can be more open-ended". (T5)

T5 described how consultation can be an ongoing process with the EP, as they have frequent communications which allows them to continue working together beyond the consultative meeting itself. This accessibility and ease of communication is an important part of that ongoing work.

An inclusive, flexible and empowering ethos

This theme relates to organisation rules. It was discussed by both subject perspectives, with EPs discussing the EPS's ethos, and both SENCos and EPs discussing schools' ethos. If the organisation values inclusion and accessibility, then their rules and policies tend to support consultative practices. Supporting factors from the school included staff autonomy, SENCos

having decision making power, SENCos being part of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT), and SLT and governors valuing the role of EPs.

T5 mentioned SLT and policies focused on inclusion:

"…I think in terms of how inclusive heads [*head teachers*] are, which I think in terms of our trust, it's … an inclusive trust. You've got to be inclusive. You can't not be". (T5)

This outlines how valuing inclusion, and therefore supporting consultative work, has to come from the top of the organisation. T5 described how their head teacher's inclusive ethos supports inclusive practices throughout the school, which therefore supports the activity of consultation.

Similarly, EP3 discussed how schools as a whole need to value the time needed for consultation:

"I think it's very much down to the school ethos. If they feel again they have the autonomy to make little changes and obviously nothing drastic. But just to put certain things in place, I think that's really valuable". (EP3)

This highlights how teaching staff having the autonomy to make changes is important, so that they can act on outcomes from consultation, and feel empowered to generate their own solutions to problems.

Within the EPS, organisational rules which supported the use of consultation included encouragement from SLT, resource sharing across the service and supervision which supported use of consultation. Consultation was also discussed as being supported by the EPS SLT, and fitting with service policies and ethos, as demonstrated by EP4:

"...it's really helped when... it's been encouraged by senior management...it's been really championed and encouraged and promoted". (EP4)

Both EPs and SENCos discussed how the ability to work autonomously, and flexibly, supported their engagement in consultation, and how organisational rules in both schools and the EPS support this.

Consultation as an efficient and effective use of time

This theme relates to how participants described consultation as an effective and efficient use of time, which encouraged them to continue to work in this way. This was seen across both SENCo and EP subject perspectives. Within the traded model, schools buy sessions, and consultation uses less sessions than a more traditional assessment approach. EPs described how they save time by writing less reports, and SENCos talked about how shorter write ups from consultation instead of reports from assessments are easier to read and action.

T4 discussed how dedicating time towards working consultatively makes the most of EP time, and can result in positive change:

"I think it feels like we maximise the time that we've paid for and in order to make a success of it". (T4)

Here, T4 referred to how to best use the time they have bought from the EPS. As schools are purchasing directly, they see the monetary value of EP time, and therefore T4 described how consultation being a time effective approach to working with the EP supported them taking part in consultative work.

For some participants, COVID-19 was a turning point, during which consultation was used due to restrictions on work. Participants described how they realised that working this way could be more efficient, particularly when aided by video conferencing technology. T2 summarises this:

"…it was COVID and it was [*EP*] basically saying that she feels it's a better use of time".

(T4)

This quote highlights both SENCos and EPs realising that consultation can be a more effective and efficient use of time. EP5 also described how consultation "was forced… upon a lot of people" (EP5) during COVID, resulting in EPs having to work in consultative ways. EP5 went on to discuss how using consultation during COVID impacted their work:

"… they [*schools*] have more EP time for their sessions because I don't have to spend as long writing report and I don't have to sit up at night writing long, long reports". (EP5)

EP5 summarises the personal and professional benefits of the efficiency of consultation as a way of working in EP practice, which resulted in them continuing to use consultative practices after COVID-19.

Themes under the 'rules' node, which constrain the activity of consultation

The education and SEND systems: conflicting policies and systems

This theme relates to constraining factors within the education and SEND systems that could make the activity of consultation difficult, or impact effectiveness. All participants described how difficulty with accessing funding, hiring staff members and getting access to resources impacted consultation. T5 talked about school budgets:

"…staffing's been quite an issue, I think. But I think it's getting the right, more complex and high-level need children, and it's getting the right staff and I think school budgets obviously have been ridiculously stretched this year". (T5)

This related more to the effectiveness of consultation, as staff are needed to implement any plan or intervention decided in consultation, representative of a secondary contradiction with the outcome node of the constructed activity system. School budgets allowing the hiring of staff is an issue, but additionally, finding staff members who will work effectively is another concern, with many schools facing issues with recruitment.

Another SENCo discussed how they feel SEN systems in the LA are a 'mess':

" ...SEN in [*LA*] is a mess and I don't mind saying that, quite happily, because of all that going on, we can't get those sessions. So we have to really prioritise then who we think are our absolute 5 neediest children throughout the year". (T2)

This is specifically referring to the limited amount of EP time that can be bought and accessed by the school, despite a high level of need in the school's pupils. As a result, some pupils with SEND will never be the focus of consultative work with the EPS.

Similarly, EPs talked about the increasing demands resulting in difficulties working creatively:

"…It's hard because we're so time pressured and we're so busy and we're so stressed, you know, can say that now when it's summer and I'm a little bit more bit more chilled but … when we're coming up to like December, Christmas time and we're all like you know, if a school goes, can you just, it's very easy to just slip into those ways of doing it". (EP4)

Here, EP4 is talking about how the time demands are so high, they can find it hard to try new ways of working (such as consultation), often resulting in them falling back on what is familiar but perhaps not as effective. All participants discussed increasing job demands and stress levels, which can impact innovative practice, and professionals' capacity to support children.

Misunderstanding of the EP role

This theme described how the role of the EP is misunderstood by both parents and other professionals within the community node of the constructed activity system, which perpetuated unspoken and incorrect 'rules,' such as the EP being a medical professional, a tester, and a gatekeeper for funding and EHCPs. While these rules have been true in the past, now many EPs view themselves as collaborative facilitators, focused on supporting children and the adults who work with them within a social model. This was evidenced by T4, who described a parent who was reluctant to consent to EP involvement due to a misconception of the role:

"…like they don't want the child to be labelled if they don't want the child to be on the register … when families had social care before, like the young person moved up from London, her mum was very anti-, like with everyone... Obviously bless her like in where she came from before, the social worker used to, once turned up at school and took her". (T5)

Here, T5 describes a parent and child reluctant to work with an EP, because they believed that the EP would label the child with a diagnosis and as they have had previous negative experiences with professionals that they associated with EPs and LA staff. Therefore, the title of EP, and the position within the LA, made even starting consultation difficult.

EPs themselves recognise their role may be perceived as similar to a medical role, and that members of the consultation may misunderstand the role of the EP and the purpose of consultation, seeking the EP to provide 'answers':

"…we put pressure on ourselves to know, to have the answers … there's almost like a fear around the consultation". (EP4)

EP4 described a fear among EPs of working consultatively and being faced with questions which they do not know the answers to. They related this 'pressure' as coming from

misconceptions of the role, referring to how "…historically we've worked in a particular way" (EP4), relating to EPs' historic role as a tester working within the medical model.

The view of the EP as a tester was discussed as being reinforced by other professions. For example, EP1 discussed they have had "…pediatricians that say get an EP involved to do a cognitive assessment" (EP1). This shows how commonly held misconceptions regarding the EP role are across other professions. EP1 also later mentions how a "…social worker… thought that we were the ones who kind of wrote and approved the EHCP" (EP1), again reinforcing the role of the EP as that of a gatekeeper to resources and funding.

These misconceptions of the EP role create tension and contradiction between the rules node and community node. The implicit 'rules' that are upheld about the EP role as a tester by members of the community can result in difficulties engaging members of the community in the activity of consultation.

Conflicting needs and priorities: the needs of the adults around a child

This theme reflects the participants' descriptions of families and professionals around a child who are not having their own needs met and are therefore not in the right place to support the child, and enact on agreed actions outlined in the outcome node of the constructed activity system, highlighting a secondary contradiction. This included consideration of increasing job demands for teachers and EPs, and mental health of all consultation meeting members. Parental mental health is discussed, with suggestions that parents' own needs can come to the forefront of a meeting, despite the aim being to focus on the child and their needs.

One SENCo described how a room full of adults with different views and experiences can be a barrier to effective consultation:

"... you've got so many people in the meeting and everyone comes with their own baggage and maybe their own anxieties and their own experience of school, and their own agenda and you're trying to bring it all together ... You're not even talking about that child by the end of it". (T3)

They outlined how these needs can result in the conversation going off topic, or focusing on supporting parents or teachers instead of the child.

T5 discussed the mental health needs of the adults around a child:

"…and I think getting the child to a stage where the where they're ready and regulate to participate in the support that you want to offer them and do with them. And then that's getting parents to a place as well in terms of that". (T5)

T5 is describing how the adults around the child, particularly their parents, do not always have the skills, or are not in the right mindset to help their child. Linking with the quote from T3, not only can the circumstances of the adults around the child impact the conversation within consultation, but it can also impact the likelihood of effective interventions being implemented by adults.

Summary of findings

This section summarises thematic findings from interviews with EPs and SENCos, which used CHAT to construct an activity system for consultation in EP practice, from the perspectives of both EPs and SENCos. The themes from the activity system constructed are summarised in Figure 5.3. Contradictions across the activity system are summarised in Table 5.1. As the present research only constructed one activity system using second-generation CHAT, only primary and

secondary contradictions are discussed. Subsequently, thematic findings are discussed in relation to existing theory in Chapter 6, and contradictions and possible implications on practice are discussed in Chapter 7.

Figure 5.3

Thematic findings from the present research within a second-generation CHAT system
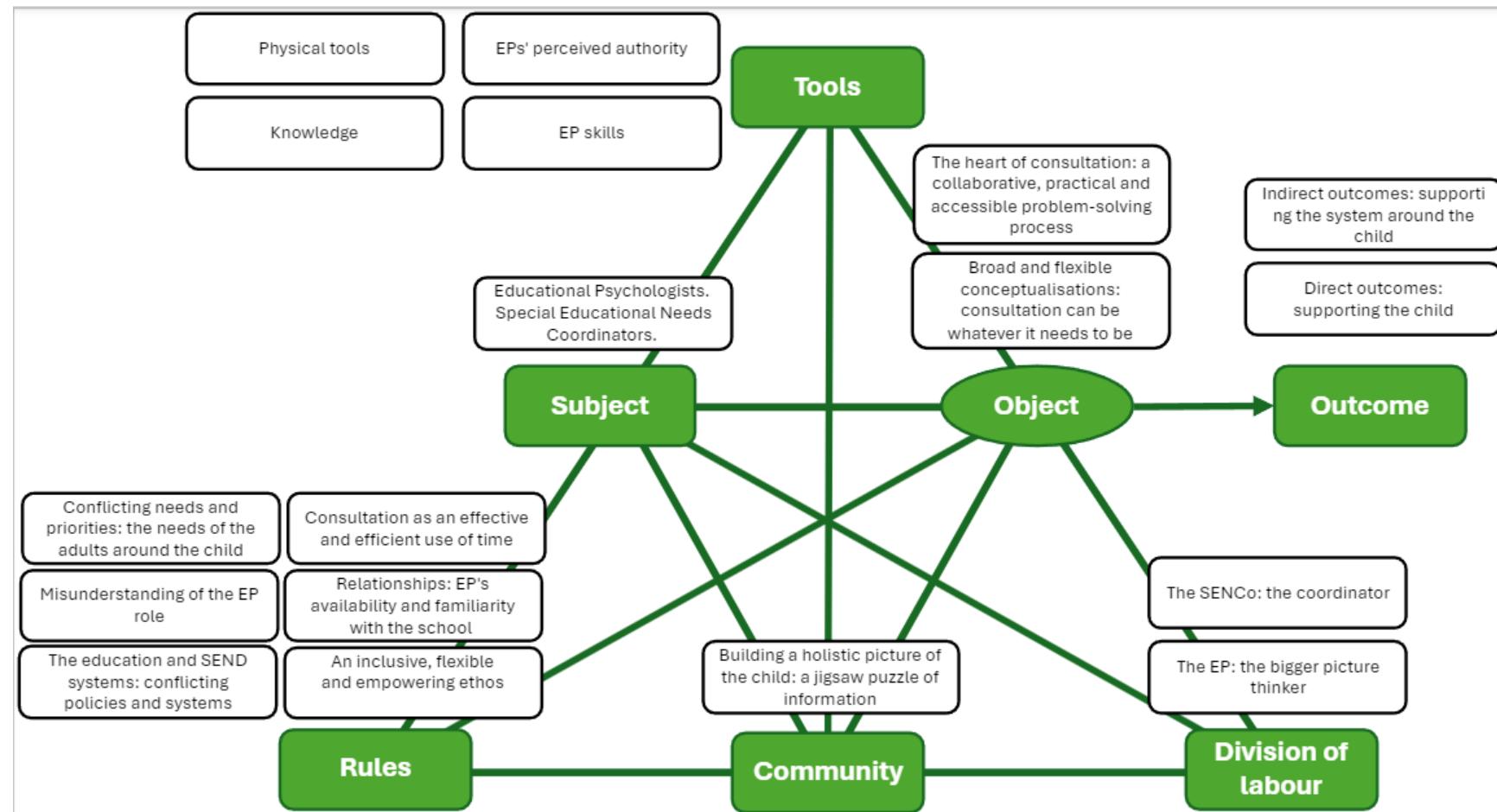
Table 5.1

Summary of contradictions within the constructed CHAT system.

Contradiction label:	Level of contradiction and associated nodes:	Description of contradiction:
Conceptualisations of consultation	Primary contradiction in the object node.	Conceptualisations of consultation appeared to be on a spectrum, ranging from consultation being a fixed activity involving a meeting with an EP using a proforma, and any conversation between an EP and someone else which could help a situation move forward.
Expert versus facilitator	Secondary contradiction between the object, outcome, division of labour and tools nodes.	Contradiction between EPs desire to be in a facilitate role, and avoid perception of an expert. Consultation is described as a 'collaborative' object, but 'indirect outcomes' theme discusses SENCo seeking out reassurance from the EP, which is reliant on perceiving the EP as an expert. SENCos describe the EPs role under the division of labour node as more of an expert, whereas EPs prefer to see themselves as a facilitator in 'the EP: the bigger picture thinker' theme. SENCos value 'EPs' perceived power' as a tool, and EPs expert knowledge is mentioned as a tool under the 'knowledge' theme.

Misunderstanding the EP role	Secondary contradiction between rules and community	Others within the community, including parents and other professionals as described in the theme 'building a holistic picture of the child: a jigsaw puzzle of information' can misunderstand the role of the EP and legislation regarding the EP role, viewing the EP as a gatekeeper to funding, or a medical professional who may diagnose. This causes tension as members of the community can be reluctant to take part in consultation or expect the EP to fulfil an assessment-based role.
Education and SEND systems	Secondary contradiction between rules and outcomes node.	Education and SEND systems, and difficulty accessing resources and funding due to the complexity of the systems can be a barrier to outcomes for consultation. Without having access to funding and additional resources, some outcomes cannot be carried out.
Conflicting needs of the adults around the child	Secondary contradiction between rules and outcomes node.	The needs of the adults around the child who are a part of consultation act as a barrier to agreeing and enacting on consultation outcomes discussed in the theme 'direct outcomes'. For example, if a teacher is overworked and burnt out, they are unlikely to be able to enact agreed actions.

Chapter 6: Discussion

The present research explored consultation from the perspective of EPs as consultants, and SENCos as consultees. Thematic findings have been mapped onto a CHAT system, as seen in Figure 5.3. Findings suggest that consultation within the present case study is perceived as a collaborative, effective and practical way to support children and young people, and the adults around them. Consultation was described as a process involving a meeting with adults around the child to develop an action plan based on shared knowledge. The SENCo was perceived as the coordinator of the work, while the EP was the 'bigger picture' thinker, who facilitated the meeting. Tools used included physical tools such as items for notetaking, EPs' perceived power, EPs skills, and knowledge of the child and theory. The work was supported by good relationships between the EPs and schools, an inclusive and empowering ethos in the organisations involved, and consultation being an effective use of time. The work was constrained by conflicting systems and legislation, misunderstandings of or contrasting views of the role of the EP, and the conflicting needs of the adults around a child.

In this chapter, thematic results are discussed in relation to existing theories and literature. Initially, the activity system is compared to previously constructed activity systems of consultation. This considers how the context and recent history may have impacted the system. Then, specific parts of the activity system are discussed in more depth, including perceptions of consultation, as discussed under the object and outcome nodes, and the role of the EP, as discussed in the division of labour and rules nodes.

CHAT model of consultation

In the first part of this discussion, the CHAT model created in the current research is discussed in relation to findings from prior research that has used CHAT to investigate EP consultation, namely Leadbetter (2006) and O'Shea (2019). The activity system constructed in the present research outlines consultation in EP practice in the case study, from the subject perspectives of SENCos and EPs (see Figure 5.3). Previously, Leadbetter (2006) considered how consultation could be used to facilitate multi-agency work, and O'Shea's (2019) research explored EP subject positions within a LA EPS to construct an activity system. Thus, this section compares the activity system in the present research to the activity systems constructed in previous research and explores implications of this.

Object and outcome nodes

Under the object and outcome nodes in the present research, participants emphasised how consultation was a collaborative and practical approach to sense-making and talked about the aim to support a child and the systems around the child. In the theme 'direct outcomes', EPs and SENCos discussed building a shared understanding of the child and developing an action plan. This theme closely resembled the activity systems constructed in previous research, with Leadbetter's (2006) proposed activity system focused on sense-making and agreeing actions. O'Shea (2019) similarly discussed information seeking, developing a shared understanding, and next steps forward. However, O'Shea (2019) also discussed an uncertainty in outcomes of

consultation, which was not evident in the present research, and themes suggest that action plans were firmly embedded within the activity of consultation.

In the theme 'indirect outcomes', both EPs and SENCos discussed supporting the systems around a child. 'Indirect outcomes' were less evident in Leadbetter's (2006) proposed activity system. However, O'Shea (2019) also found that EPs thought consultation could offer emotional containment and support, supporting the themes found in constructed activity system in the present research. Table 6.1 offers a summary of the object and outcome nodes from the present research, Leadbetter's (2006) proposed activity system, and the system constructed in O'Shea's research (2019).

Table 6.1

Comparison of themes under the object and outcome node across studies.

Related node:	Themes from Present research:	Themes from Leadbetter (2006):	Themes from O'Shea (2019):
Object node	• The heart of consultation: a collaborative, practical, accessible problem-solving process. • Broad and flexible conceptualisations: consultation can be whatever it needs to be.	• New ways of working. • Sense making	• Find out information about the problem. • Develop shared understanding of the problem situation.
Outcome node	• Indirect outcomes. supporting the systems around the child: • Direct outcomes: supporting the child.	• Actions agreed. • Outcomes.	• Plan practical next steps. • Improve the situation for the child. • Provide emotional support and containment. • Uncertainty about outcome.

Community and division of labour nodes

The findings of the present research suggest that every member of the community of consultation was considered to have different pieces of the jigsaw puzzle needed to build a holistic image of the child, as seen the in 'jigsaw puzzle' theme under the community node. The EP's unique role within this is discussed further in the subsequent themes under the division of labour node. The EP is described as the 'bigger picture thinker', who puts together the jigsaw pieces to create a holistic image of the child with the consultees. This view of the EP role was evident across both subject perspectives, suggesting their professional role as the 'bigger picture thinker' was fulfilled. The present research additionally considered the SENCo role, with both subject positions suggesting SENCos had a core role as the person coordinating the meeting and work.

The present research thus suggests that SENCos and EPs have a shared understanding of their roles in consultation. However, in comparison, Leadbetter (2006) discussed concerns regarding how to determine the roles of multiple professionals within a multi-agency consultation, and the unique contribution of the EP. While the present research suggests consultant and consultee roles can be clearly demarcated between EPs and SENCos, this may not be the case when considering the wider community which may be involved in consultation.

Additionally, within the present research, both EPs and SENCos discussed the perception of the EP as an 'expert'. However, EPs also discussed wanting to avoid the 'expert' role, which contradicts the perception of them offering expert knowledge, suggesting some tension in the system. Within O'Shea's (2019) activity system, the EP was discussed as having a gatekeeper role and holding expert knowledge. This suggests that similarly to the present research, an ongoing constraint between 'expert versus facilitator' was present on O'Shea's (2019) research.

Table 6.2 offers a summary of the community and division of labour nodes from the present research, Leadbetter's (2006) proposed activity system, and the system constructed in O'Shea's research (2019).

Table 6.2

Comparison of themes under the community and division of labour node across studies.

Related node:	Themed from Present research:	Themes from Leadbetter (2006):	Themes from O'Shea (2019):
Comm-unity	• Building a holistic image of the child: a jigsaw puzzle of information – including SENCo, EP, child, parents, and other professionals.	• EP • Others involved: parents, professionals, peers.	• EP, SENCos, Teacher, TA, Learning Mentor, External agencies, medical professionals, parents.
Division of labour	• The SENCo: the coordinator • The educational psychologist: the bigger picture thinker.	• Role demarcation • Task allocation • Expectations	• EP role as notetaker, listener, supporter, summariser, clarifier, collaborative decision maker, questioner, sense maker, challenger, holder of expert knowledge,

gatekeeper, spokesperson.

Tools node

Under the tools node of the present research, 'EP skills' and 'knowledge' was discussed. EP's discussed facilitation and interpersonal skills, as well as knowledge of theories such as person-centred and strength-based approaches to guide the conversation. This aligns with Leadbetter's (2006) discussion regarding language and questions are a tool for consultation, and O'Shea's themes which include 'skills and strategies' and 'knowledge'. Similarly, the present research discussed 'physical tools', which included proformas and templated brought by the EP, which aligns with Leadbetter's (2006) suggestion of protocols as a tool.

The present research also considered 'EPs' perceived authority' as a tool which was explicitly discussed by SENCo participants, highlighting a difference between the EP and SENCo subject perspective. Conversely to the idea of EP's perceived power facilitating difficult conversations, in O'Shea's (2019) activity system, EPs discussed power dynamics as a constraining factor under the rules node. Interestingly, in the present research, EPs' perceived power was cited as a tool by SENCos, who felt that the power dynamic could help facilitate conversations and tackle difficult topics. Perception of EP authority as a tool was not explored by Leadbetter (2006) or O'Shea (2019), suggesting this may be as a result of the additional SENCo subject perspective.

Table 6.3

Comparison of the under the tools node across studies.

Related node:	Themed from Present research:	Themes from Leadbetter (2006):	Themes from O'Shea (2019):
Tools	• Physical tools. • EPs' perceived authority. • Knowledge. • EP skills.	• Language. • Questions • Protocols/assessment frameworks	• Skills and strategies. • Knowledge.

Rules node

The present research found that time availability was embedded within the EPS's systems, due to the traded model (see Chapter 2 for further details regarding traded EPSs). Schools were buying time directly out of their budgets and were therefore motivated to make the most of the EP time. Similarly, the rules explored by Leadbetter (2006) closely resemble the present study's themes. Leadbetter (2006) discussed the time available for work, which was described in the 'consultation as an effective and efficient use of time' theme, in which both SENCos and EPs discussed how consultation is a more time-effective way of working for EPs. The themes 'misunderstanding the EP role' and 'the education and SEND systems: conflicting policies and systems,' discussed both SENCo and EP perspectives regarding lack of funding, stretched resources, and perceptions of EPs as gatekeepers for funding. However, participants also discussed individual service policies, senior leadership approaches and overall ethos as rules

that influenced consultation, with an emphasis on a need for inclusive ethos, where staff are

empowered, and senior leadership are supportive. This closely resembles Leadbetter's (2006)

suggested rules of legislation and local requirements. See Table 6.4 for a comparison of these

under the rules node across the present research, and previous research.

Table 6.4

Comparison of themes under the rules node across studies.

Related node:	Themed from Present research:	Themes from Leadbetter (2006):	Themes from O'Shea (2019):
Rules	• Constraints: conflicting needs and priorities, misunderstanding the EP role, the education and SEND systems: conflicting policies and systems. • Supports: consultation as an effective and efficient use of time, relationships: EP's availability and familiarity with the school, an inclusive and empowering ethos.	• Time available, legislation, local requirements, professional codes.	• Constraints: Difficulty gaining access to the "right" person, power dynamics, SEN policy and legislation. • Supports: relationships, attitudes and approaches, EP factors practical factors.

Perceptions of consultation from school staff

Next, perceptions of consultation will be discussed, specifically considering the SENCo subject position, as area which has a less well-established research base, compared to consultant perspective of consultation. Below, implications of the findings of the present research are considered, followed by discussion of these potential implications in relation to the existing research base.

Within the 'division of labour' node of the activity system produced, there were no clear primary contradictions between the subject positions, suggesting that the SENCos interviewed had a clear understanding of their own role, which was cohesive to the EP participants' understanding of the SENCo role. The SENCo role was described as the 'coordinator' role, with both EPs and SENCos describing how SENCos will instigate the process, liaise with the relevant parties and act as a "middleman" (T3) between the individuals involved in the consultation. Thus, the activity system constructed in the present research suggest that SENCos' have an understanding of consultation, and their role within it.

This contradicts findings from O'Farrell and Kinsella's (2018) research in Ireland, which suggested school staff did not have clear understanding of their role. However, O'Farrell and Kinsella (2018) discuss school staff more broadly than the present research. As the present research only interviewed SENCos, who would have had specialist training in SEND and work more frequently with EPs, they are likely to have a greater understanding of EP work and consultation than other school staff.

Additionally, in the present research, SENCos did not discuss seeking out cognitive assessments as an alternative to consultation, and EPs cited that they did not have schools "push" (EP1) them to do a cognitive assessment in addition to, or instead of, a consultation. This may be due to the way consultation was done in the present case study, which could involve some direct

work with the pupil, with one EP commenting that "working with the young people…. feeds into my consultation model" (EP3). Thus, as a flexible approach to consultation was adopted within the LA, with the possibility of direct work, it appears that both SENCo and EP participants did not feel overly reliant on assessment work from the EP. This contradicts previous research, which suggests that some teachers were over-reliant on the perceived importance of cognitive assessments (O'Farrell & Kinsella, 2018), and may suggest that a softer middle-ground, in which more traditional assessment approaches can be incorporated within consultative practices may assuage some consultee-based barriers to moving towards consultative practices.

SENCo's in the present study described positive outcomes, including "reassurance" (T1), "somebody else's perspective," (T1) and an opportunity for the adults around the child to "have their voice heard" (T3). Some described how they "gained an awful lot from being a part of the meeting" (T3). Within the rules node, SENCos discussed how consultation was a good way to "maximize the time we've paid for" (T4) and highlighted how consultation is an effective and efficient way of working with the EPS. This may be indicative of how consultation has been embedded into the EPS post-COVID, and reflective of senior leadership encouraging and celebrating consultative practices, as discussed in the theme 'an inclusive, flexible and empowering ethos', in which EPs discussed how encouragement from their senior leadership supported their use of consultation. Overall, findings from the present study suggest that SENCos valued consultation, despite concerns in the existing literature based which suggests that SENCos and other school staff may not value consultation highly (e.g. Lee & Woods, 2017).

One of the original drivers behind researching consultation in EP practice in the present research was the discrepancy noticed between EPs' and SENCos' perceptions and understanding of consultation in existing research and personal practice. Conclusively, the present research

suggests that SENCos, as key consultees, can have an understanding of consultation and their role within it, and value it as a way of working with the EPS.

Consultation definitions and models

This section focuses on exploring findings from the present research in relation to existing definitions and models of consultation. Below, definitions of consultation are considered in relation to the constructed object and outcome nodes. Subsequently, specific models of consultation are considered in relation to the activity system constructed, to consider how consultation was implemented by EPs.

Definitions of consultation

The range of conceptualisations of consultation in EP practice is reflective of the variety of definitions and models discussed by EP participants. The EPs' 'object' was broader than SENCos. This conceptualisation appears reminiscent of a third definition offered by Leadbetter (2007), with consultation being a skill in an EP's repertoire, used in whatever capacity is needed at the time.

The theme under the 'object' node, 'consultation can be whatever it needs to be', is reminiscent of Wagner's (2000) loose idea of a conversation that makes a difference. However, within this theme EPs discussed contradictions between their current activity system, and previous activity systems for consultation. Previous activity systems described a narrower view of consultation, employing techniques and models taught in training within "an hour and a half

formal problem-solving consultation" (EP4). This shifted with experience gained in the EP role to a more flexible understanding of consultation, to any "powerful conversation" (EP4).

Conversely, the way most SENCos constructed the 'object' and definition of consultation was narrower, closely resembling Leadbetter's (2007) second definition of consultation, as a defined task, with agreed characteristics. This is evident from the very tight descriptions of SENCos' experience of consultation, which tended to be a meeting led by the EP, attended by relevant adults, with a focus on information gathering and creating an action plan. Leadbetter's (2007) first definition of consultation, as a model of service delivery, was not discussed, likely as the EPS involved in the case study did not use consultation as a model of service delivery.

Indirect model

The theme 'supporting the systems around the child' can be considered from a service delivery context. Participants agreed that the overarching aim for consultation is to develop an action plan to support a child. This is representative of indirect service delivery, with the main work from the EP completed with the adults around a child, and making a plan which can then be implemented by key adults, usually staff in the school. However, the nuance of the work completed for consultation in this LA setting is too complicated to be summarised by Gutkin and Conoley's (1990) simplistic model of indirect service delivery. In this context, the EPs still sometimes met with the child to elicit their voice and views to bring to consultation, and within consultation multiple stakeholders have knowledge of the child as well as knowledge of systems from various contexts and backgrounds. Therefore, using CHAT to construct the activity within this LA feels more appropriate to capture the complexity of the work.

Framework for consultation

Participants in the present research did not cite specific frameworks for consultation used in practice. Adapted person-centred planning tools such as Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATHs) and Making Action Plans (MAPs) were mentioned by EPs and SENCos as being used as proformas to structure consultation meetings. However, consultation frameworks can be identified within the themes.

Under the 'community' and 'division of labour' nodes, participants emphasised how each member of a consultation offers information about a child, "like a jigsaw" (EP1), to build a holistic view of a child, and the EP is the person who brings all the information together to build the bigger picture. This idea of everyone contributing to the overall knowledge base collaboratively is reminiscent of Nolan and Moreland's (2014) description of seven discursive strategies used by EPs, found within consultations they analysed. These strategies can all be found within the activity system constructed in the present research. For example, Nolan and Moreland's (2014) strategy of 'summarising and reformulating' is at the core of the theme 'the EP: the bigger picture thinker.' See Table 6.5 for a breakdown of all seven strategies and related quotes from participants evidencing their presence.

Table 6.5

Evidence of Nolan and Moreland's (2014) discursive strategies in the present research.

Discursive strategy from Noland and Moreland (2014):	Relevant themes and quotes relating to discursive strategies:
EP directed collaboration	"Try and get a big picture of that young person where they come from, what their experience, what are they experiencing? What? What the concerns are of everyone around the table and what the hoping to achieve" (T5) "They're the facilitator and they kind of steer the conversation" (T2) "making sure that everybody's got a shared understanding." (EP2)
Demonstrating empathy and deep listening	"active listening" (EP5) "reflecting back" (EP5)
Questioning, wondering and challenging	"to gather as much information as they need" (T5) "EP is very good at you know she knows, she sort of. She's digging for certain bits" (T3)
Focusing and refocusing	"It's about being the person to bring everybody together. To mediate to, to be able to ensure everyone's voice is heard to, you know, impose some structure to be able to make it kind of a meaningful conversation." (EP4)

Summarising and reformulating, pulling threads together	"EP is more or like the formal, this is what I've seen, and this is what it means" (T2)
Suggesting and explaining	"Bringing knowledge when it's appropriate. So often that might be things around, things like, sometimes it's just labelling things that they share" (EP5)
Restating/revising outcomes and offering follow up	"...agreeing some work that's gonna be done in the future. Or it can be the start of a plan that we just implement as a school." (T4)

All of Nolan and Moreland's (2014) strategies were evident in the findings, as seen in Table 6.5. Facilitation skills such as empathy and deep listening were mentioned explicitly by only one EP, and not by any SENCos. One EP participant mentioned that "you just kind of use it without thinking" (EP5) regarding active listening, reflecting back and other interpersonal skills. However, SENCos did mention the 'reassurance' an EP could offer, which suggests that they feel emotionally contained, likely due to these interpersonal facilitation skills.

Gutkin and Curtis (1999) outlined some discrete steps in their ecological consultation model. These stages are less clear within the present activity system, although some key elements can be identified. Gutkin and Curtis's (1999) approach is a behavioural model, and as such emphasises a 'strategy' or practical next steps (Conoley & Conoley, 1990). This was consistent in the participants' perspectives, with participants describing "a small number of practical solutions that we can put in place" (T4) and some highlighting individuals taking

responsibility for these actions: "everyone who was in that meeting has made potentially some

responsibility of actions within the next steps" (T5). This assignation of responsibilities is one of

Gutkin and Curtis's steps (1999). Gutkin and Curtis (1999) also outline an evaluation of the

effectiveness of the action plan as a final step, which is something that participants also

discussed. See Table 6.6 for evidence of Gutkin and Curtis's (1999) problem solving stages in

the present research.

Table 6.6

Evidence of Gutkin and Curtis's (1999) stages of ecological consultation in the present research.

Stages of Gutkin and Curtis's (1999) problem solving structure:	Evidence from activity system:
Define and clarify the problem.	"Try and get a big picture of that young person ... what are they experiencing? ... What the concerns are of everyone around the table" (T5)
Analyse the forces impinging on the problem.	"...the consultation just runs through pregnancy to now, and if there was anything abnormal or anything, you know is their behaviour like at home, or how do they engage with various things at home." (T1)
Brainstorm alternative strategies.	"...chat about things that aren't working and things that do work and how we can apply the things that do work to make life easier for the child." (T2)
Evaluating and choosing among alternative strategies.	"A small number of practical solutions that we can put in place" (T4)
Specify consultant and consultee responsibilities.	"...everyone who was in that meeting has made potentially some responsibility of actions within the next steps." (T5).

Implement chosen strategy.	"...it can be about agreeing some work that's gonna be done in the future." (T4)
Evaluate effectiveness of the action and recycle if necessary.	"...we would review that in our in our data meetings and I'll check that that is going on and I'll check that those the kind of targets that go down to IEPs" (T2)

Wagner's (2000, p14-15) process of assisting change in consultation is perhaps the most difficult model to apply to the constructed activity system in the present research. Wagner outlines four key processes: externalising the problem, getting meta, the paradigm shift, and engaging in self-reflexivity. While externalising the problem and getting meta were apparent, with EPs being described as gathering information, putting it together, formulating, and hypothesising, a paradigm shift and reflexivity is harder to find in the present activity system. SENCos did describe how much they felt they got out of the experience of consultation, which may be indicative of their experience of reflexivity and a paradigm shift over time.

The role of the EP in consultation

This section considers the findings from the present research in relation to existing theory regarding the role of the EP, with particular consideration of perceptions of power, and the construction of the EP as an 'expert'. Throughout the findings, persistent contradictions regarding the EP role were evident, including the perception of the EP as an expert, and

misunderstandings of the EP role. This is likely connected to the history and context of the EP role, and the breadth of approaches that EPs use in their practice with various clients, including schools, the LA and families. Consultation was also discussed by participants as potentially being a multi-agency endeavour, with school staff and other professionals attending. Leadbetter (2007) queried EPs' unique contribution within multi-agency work, and how different terms and ways of working would translate in multi-agency consultation. Thus, this section considers the role of the EP within the constructed activity system, including exploring contradictions found in both EP and SENCo subject positions.

The theme 'misunderstanding the EP role' was cited by participants as a barrier to consultation, with SENCos discussing how the job title 'Educational Psychologist' can act as a barrier for parents, due to misconceptions that an EP will be trying to diagnose them, or tell them something is wrong with their child, and how other professionals' expectations can result in using the EP for access to resources, reinforcing a 'gatekeeper' perception. This understanding, outside of the activity of consultation, impacts across all work EPs do, and can prevent work outside of the traditional 'assessment' based role.

The history of the EP role, with EPs used as testers to determine which children could access schooling and which were educationally 'subnormal', appears to be reminiscent today, despite most EPs' desire to work holistically and systemically, similarly to Gillham's (1978) proposed reconstructions of educational psychology. UK-based research on the EP role highlights this. For example, Ashton and Roberts (2006) discussed how SENCos valued 'traditional' EP roles. In a survey, they found the most valued roles by SENCos were 'Advice giving', 'Statutory assessment work' and 'Individual assessment'. Conversely, 'Working with school staff' and 'Parent/school/EP partnership' were some of the least valued. Whereas in

Ashton and Robert's (2006) research, EPs preferred consultative approaches. This discrepancy was found in the present research, within the theme 'EP's perceived power' under the tools node making it clear that SENCo participants valued the perception of the EP as an expert and someone who holds more power within consultation, as this can support managing relationships and tackling difficult conversations. SENCos felt that difficult messages were better received by parents from the EP, as an outsider with a professional title. They also valued the EP's knowledge of psychological theory, interventions and resources, as seen in the theme 'knowledge', which highlights how SENCos appreciate EPs as advice givers. However, participants also felt that others' perceptions of their role could be a barrier to consultative work.

The need to communicate the EP role more clearly, and to identify its value to areas other than advice giving and individual assessment is something that has been identified repeatedly within UK educational psychology literature, with frequent reviews of the role of the EP being discussed in the last several decades (e.g., Fallon et al., 2010; Patrick et al., 2011; Scottish Executive, 2002). However, some argue that due to the ever-changing political environment (Hill, 2013), the conflicting needs of the multiple 'clients' with which EPs work (MacKay, 2007), the breadth of EP work (Ashton & Roberts, 2006) and overlaps with similarly titled professionals, such as clinical psychologists (Kelly & Gray, 2000), the EP role will constantly be in flux, and therefore hard to define.

Fallon et al. (2010) identified a recurring theme of reconstruction or reformulation of the role of the EP, and suggest this links to low confidence in professional identity and direction. Similarly, Stobie (2002) evidenced that EPs find it difficult to describe their role, and suggested this could be impeding change in EP practice. This was found in the present research with EPs contradicting themselves across themes, suggesting they do not want to take the expert role, but

also feeling as though they should be advice givers in consultation, and leading the process as an 'expert'. SENCo participants also highlighted how much they value the EP as an 'expert' and sought out advice from them. However, EP participants placed greater value on their facilitation and interpersonal skills. This is something that has also been highlighted by prior research, with Kelly and Gray (2000) surveying schools, and finding a disparity between what EPs want to offer, and what schools report they want. This mismatch in expectations and value could be linked to why educational psychology appears to frequently be misconstrued by parents, teachers and other professionals, as EPs themselves do not have a clear construct of their role.

The conflicting perceptions of the role of the EP discussed in the present research also relates to the 'collaboration debate' (Erchul, 1999). Erchul (1987) would argue that the subtle and gentle guidance EP participants discussed means that consultation could not be truly collaborative, as EPs are leading it and therefore are taking an expert role, creating a power imbalance. The dimensions of consultation proposed by Gutkin (1999), which offers a model in which both consultants and consultees can move between collaboration and coercion, and directive and non-directive, was proposed by Leadbetter (2002) as being relevant in consultation, with members shifting on the dimensions throughout. This can be seen in present research, with EPs being identified as moving across all extremes of this continua. SENCos also described themselves as moving along the continua, although this was not always explicit and more difficult to map across all four quadrants. See Figure 6.1 for examples of times EPs and SENCos were described as participating in consultation at differing points on the continua.

Figure 6.1

Quotes from participants mapped on to Gutkin's (1999) dimensions of consultation, from consultee and consultant perspective.
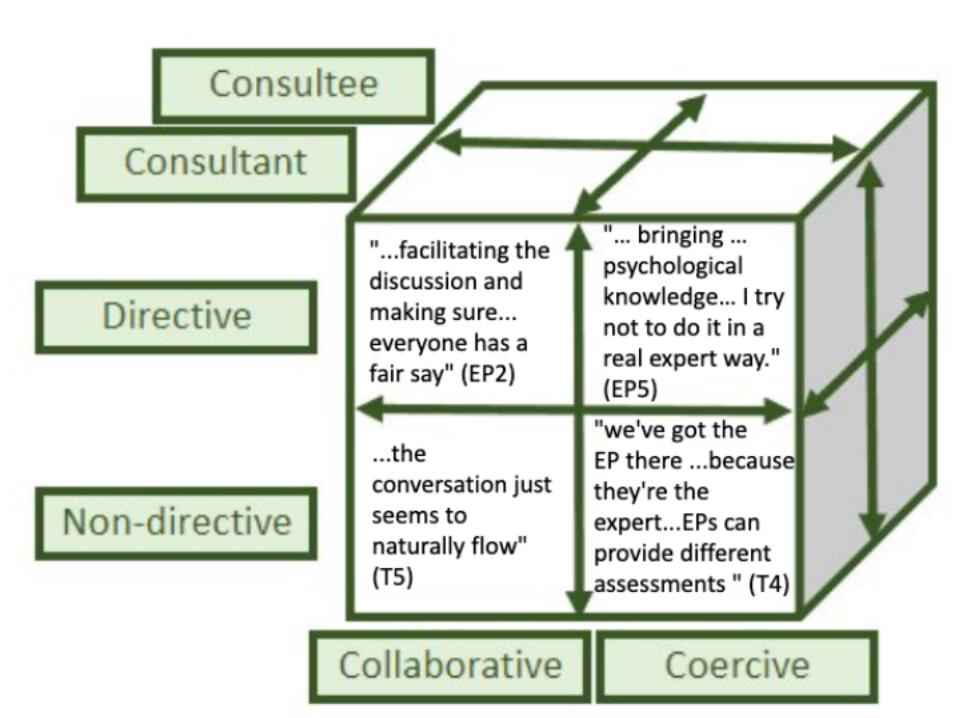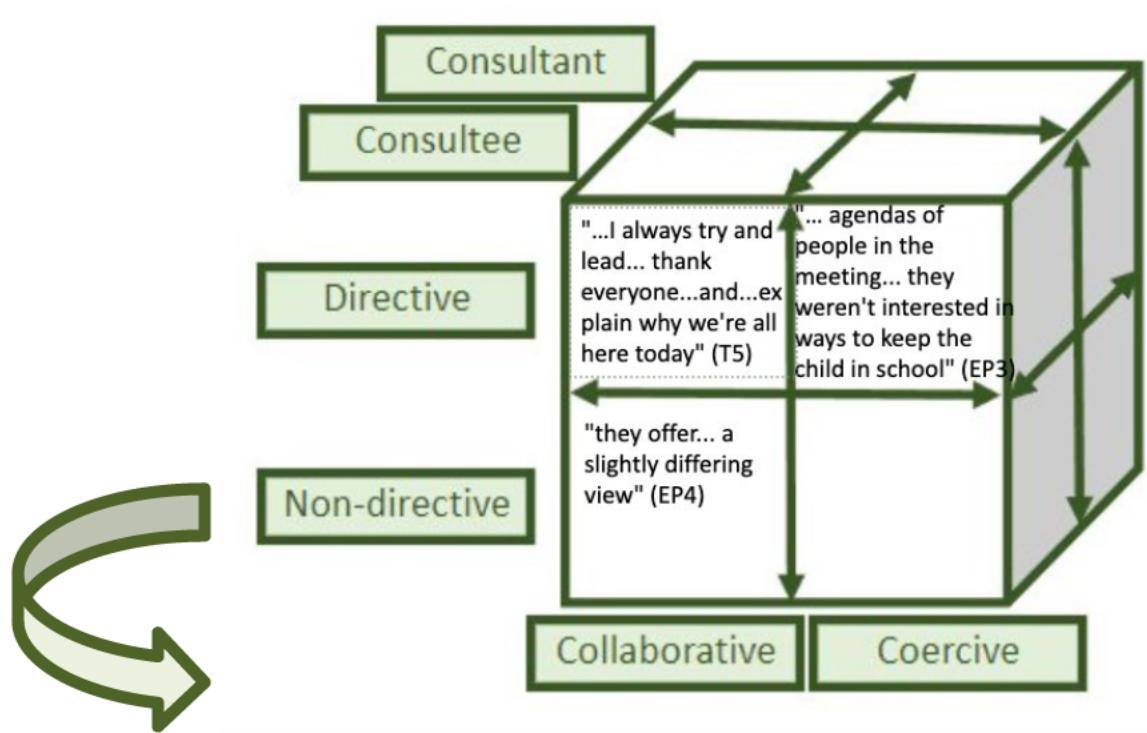
This disparity between EP perception and 'client' perception found in the present research calls into question whether EPs are remiss at communicating their role, or whether their role should be in fulfilling the needs of stakeholders, such as SENCos, who want an 'expert' to offer advice and guidance. Considering Gutkin's (1999) continua of coercive and collaborative, non-directive and directive, it would appear that SENCo participants sought out directive approaches, and EPs may swing between coercive and collaborative throughout consultation. The perceptions of this as continua which EPs can move between (Leadbetter, 2002) appears to be reinforced by the contradictions seen in the present research, with EPs as collaborative, but guiding, and as the non-expert, but offering advice.

Previous research has made suggestions as to how to improve clarity in EP work. In the present research, consultation was often framed as multi-agency work with the adults around a child. Kelly and Gray (2000) highlight the importance of clarity in what EPs offer in the context of multi-agency work. Fallon et al. (2010) proposed that EP work needs to be backed up with clear contextual information and its relationships to the big picture of community, and requires well developed skills in working with others, and mechanisms for evaluating the work. In the context of consultation and the present research, role demarcation is important. By Fallon et al.'s (2010) suggestion, consultation should be clearly communicated within its wider context as supporting the child, school and family. Furthermore, evaluation should always be built into consultation to assess the stakeholders' views on effectiveness and usefulness of consultation. Offering well-developed skills in working with others and utilising their strengths was an important element of the present research, as evidenced by the theme 'the EP as the bigger picture thinker'. SENCos and EPs both perceived the EP role as guiding the conversation and

piecing together the 'jigsaw' of information, with EPs described as subtly guiding the conversation and offering psychological knowledge and skills within consultation.

West and Idol's (1987) model of consultation could offer another way to frame the EP role within consultation, through consideration of the knowledge bases contributed. The theoretical knowledge, which was valued highly by SENCos as seen in the theme 'EP skills', is representative of 'knowledge base 2' and the EPs advice giving role in consultation. Whereas EPs facilitation of the process is representative of 'knowledge base 1' and the interpersonal skills an EP uses. However, West and Idol's (1987) model does not consider multiple consultees, as was discussed in the present research, and nor do they account for the knowledge of the child which consultees contribute to the consultation, which was explored in the theme 'building a holistic image of the child: a jigsaw puzzle of information'.

To reflect the constructed activity system in the present research, West and Idol's (1987) model could be adapted to include a 'knowledge base 3', which is representative of knowledge of the child in different contexts, as seen in Figure 6.2. 'Knowledge base 2' and '3' could be contributed by any member of the consultation and is therefore represented as part of the reciprocal interaction between members of consultation (for example, an EP could add any work completed with the child to 'knowledge base 3', and a SENCo or other professional could add their knowledge of interventions to 'knowledge base 2'). However, 'knowledge base 1' is the unique contribution of the EP, the 'bigger picture thinker' who pieces together the information to build the 'puzzle' image of the child, and is therefore represented as a one-way interaction, from the EP to the members of the consultation. Relevant quotes from the present study evidencing the presence of the knowledge bases are embedded into Figure 6.2, which visually represents the proposed adaption to West and Idol's (1987) model of consultation.

Figure 6.2

Adapted version of West and Idol's (1987) model of consultation, with quotes from the present

research representing knowledge bases.
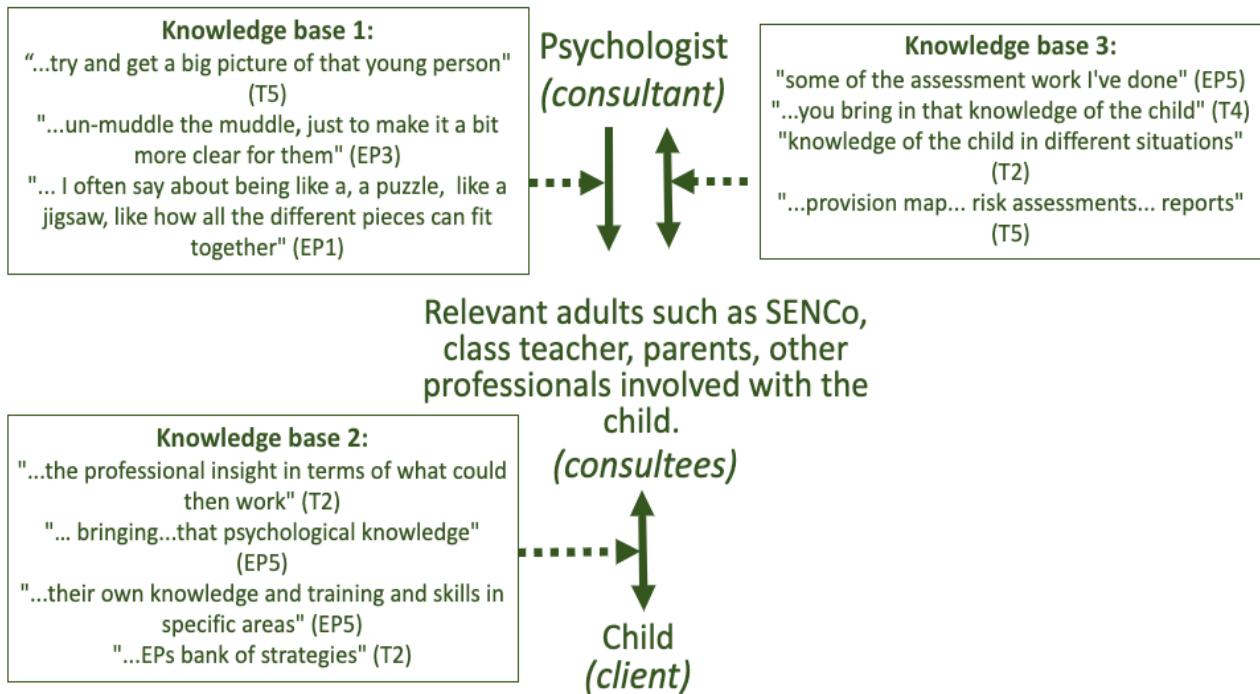
Chapter 7: Implications for practice, based on contradictions

The following chapter considers the application of the findings of the present research to wider educational psychology practice and research. Within CHAT, contradictions within activity systems are described as problems or tensions within or between systems (Kuutii, 1996; see Chapter 3 for further details). Contradictions can be used to generate solutions to alleviate tensions, and therefore can be used to create change within an organisation (Engeström, 2001). In this section, contradictions within the constructed activity system (see Table 5.1 in Chapter 5 for a summary of contradictions) are discussed to highlight tensions within the activity system of consultation in the case study. Existing research is explored in relation to the findings to offer some practical solutions to address contradictions. Finally, the strengths, limitations and implications of the research are discussed.

Contradictions leading to implications for practice

This section considers the contradictions found in the present research and explores some practical solutions that could redress tensions within the system and promote change.

Conceptualisations of consultation

Conceptualisations of consultation was a primary contradiction representing tension within the object node (see Figure 7.1 for graphic representation of the tension within the activity system). There was a contradiction between how consultation was viewed by the subject perspectives, with SENCos considering it a fixed activity involving a meeting, and EPs

constructing consultation as a much broader process which can look different in different circumstances. This is likely due to the many ways the term consultation is used across professions, and the less extensive experience of consultation that SENCos likely have. However, it does raise the question of how clearly consultation within EP practice is communicated to SENCos. As SENCos are generally EPs' key contact in schools, it seems practical to work with them to help them understand how consultation can be used in a variety of ways, depending on the circumstance.

Figure 7.1

Graphic representation of 'conceptualisation of consultation' contradiction
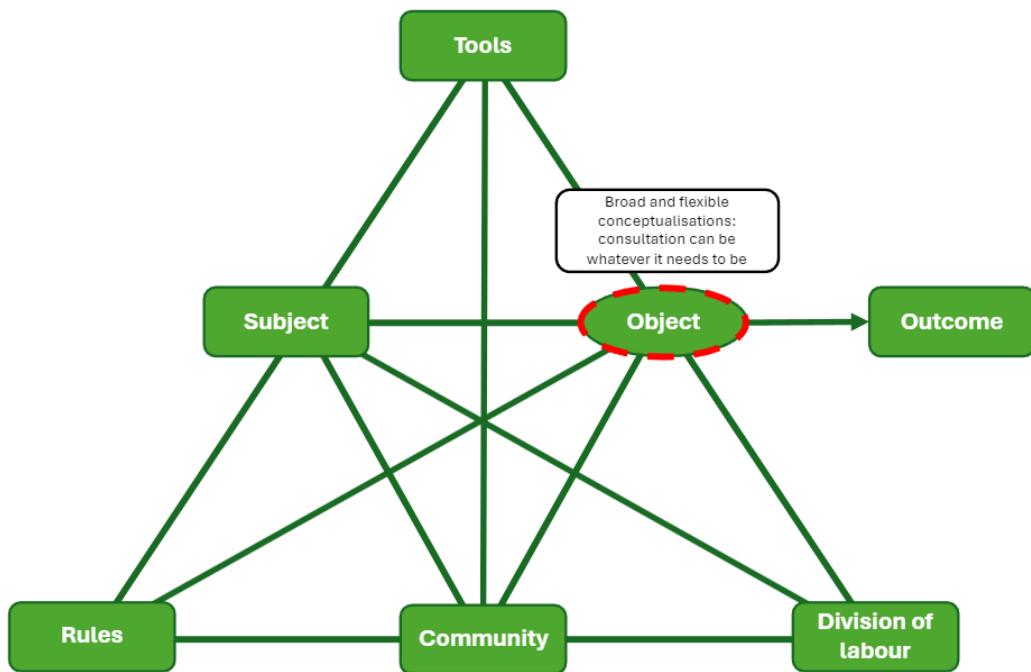
One way which many EPSs communicate their offer is through a service offer brochure. Lee and Woods (2017) analysed service offer brochures of two EPSs and found different emphases on the services offered. When they interviewed participants, they found that although

there was debate regarding whether marketing was needed for the EPS, a brochure helped reframe the EP role for service commissioners. In the EPS involved in the case study for the present research, there was no up-to-date service offer brochure being shared with schools. Lee and Woods' (2017) findings suggest service offer brochures should offer clear packages of time, and evidence of impact. See Appendix 13 for an example of a short, 2-page service offer brochure subsequently created for the EPS, based on The Currie Report's (Scottish Executive, 2002) five core roles of EPs, which can be used to communicate the different service delivery methods available in the EPS, including a clear description of consultation.

Another way Lee and Woods (2017) found EPs communicated an EPS's service offer was through word of mouth, or face-to-face conversations. This could be done through planning and support meetings, which are commonly used in EPSs. Chidley and Stringer (2020) created an Implementation Framework to support planning work with schools. Although their research sought to support EPs' role in training in schools, their focus is on organisational change in schools, and therefore could be applied to other elements of EP work. They used their Implementation Framework after requests for work from schools. Therefore, planning and support meetings, or discussions after requests for individual casework, could focus on exploring what different ways of working, such as consultation, could look like, including elements discussed by Chidley and Stringer (2020), such as developing knowledge and skills, and benefit to the child or young person. This could support SENCos to have a more comprehensive understanding of the aims and potential impact of consultation as opposed to other ways of addressing individual casework, such as assessment.

Expert versus facilitator

Expert versus facilitator is representative of a persistent secondary contradiction across the constructed activity system. This was discussed across the object, outcomes, tools and division of labour nodes. See Figure 7.2 for graphic representation of the tension within the activity system. SENCos often discussed the EP as an expert, valuing the expertise, knowledge and perceived authority they could offer in consultation. However, EPs frequently discussed how consultation allowed them to fulfil a non-expert, facilitator role. They also contradicted themselves, by discussing how they lead consultation, and subtly offer up expert knowledge.

Figure 7.2

Graphic representation of 'expert versus facilitator' contradiction.
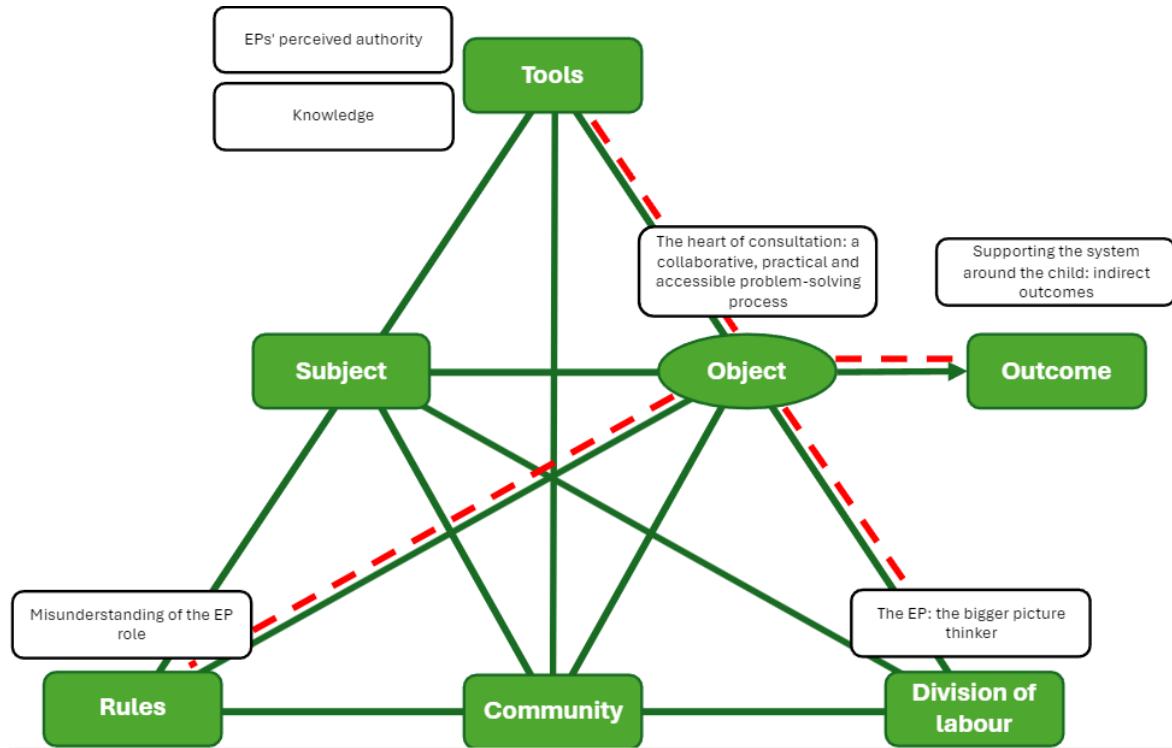
It is unsurprising given the history of the EP role that there are still tensions within consultation practice due to perceptions of the EP role, as EPs try to shed their role as a tester and expert (a perception often maintained by schools). Educational psychology has been reconstructed (Gilham, 1978), and developed in multiple ways since its inception, and EP sense of professional identity, and their unique contribution, is something that has been well explored in literature (e.g. Gaskell & Leadbetter, 2009). Consultation clearly offers a more collaborative approach than assessment-based work, by having consultees as active members, and formulating and discussing hypotheses and action plans with consultees, as opposed to making recommendations within a report. However, the themes from this research raise questions regarding whether EPs should be attempting to address power imbalances, and frame themselves as non-experts, when it appears to be an 'expert' role that SENCos are seeking.

The power dynamic in consultation has been well explored (see the collaboration debate in Chapter 2). There is likely no clear answer to this debate, although thematic findings from the present research suggest that SENCos value EPs' expert knowledge, and therefore EPs may need to be conscious that they should still offer this role where appropriate. There may be ways to support EPs' professional identity. For example, Gaskell and Leadbetter (2009) used CHAT to explore EPs' role in multi-agency working. They found that multi-agency working enhanced professional identity in EPs, and suggested this was due to the need to clarify and develop the skills necessary for the work, which allowed an exploration of strengths and enhanced overall identity (Gaskell and Leadbetter, 2009). Therefore, it could be useful to reinforce roles within consultation at the start of meetings, and outline expectations and unique contributions brought by participants. For example, for the present findings, consultees bring their unique knowledge of the child in different contexts, the schools and their systems, and interventions available, and EPs offer facilitation, frameworks and psychological knowledge. The adapted version of West and Idol (1987) knowledge base model of consultation (see Figure 6.2) proposed in the Discussion chapter could be a useful way to frame this.

Misunderstanding the EP role and educational and SEND systems

This section links together two secondary contradictions, due to their similarities related to the EP role within the context of wider SEND and educational systems. Misunderstanding the EP role refers to a secondary contradiction found between the rules and community nodes, in which EPs were discussed being mistaken for having a gatekeeper role to additional funding or resources, which could result in other members of the community seeking out assessment-based work, or EPs being considered similar to medical professionals, which could make members of

the community reluctant to engage with them. See Figure 7.3 for a visual representation of this contradiction.

Figure 7.3

Graphic representation of 'misunderstanding the EP role' contradiction.
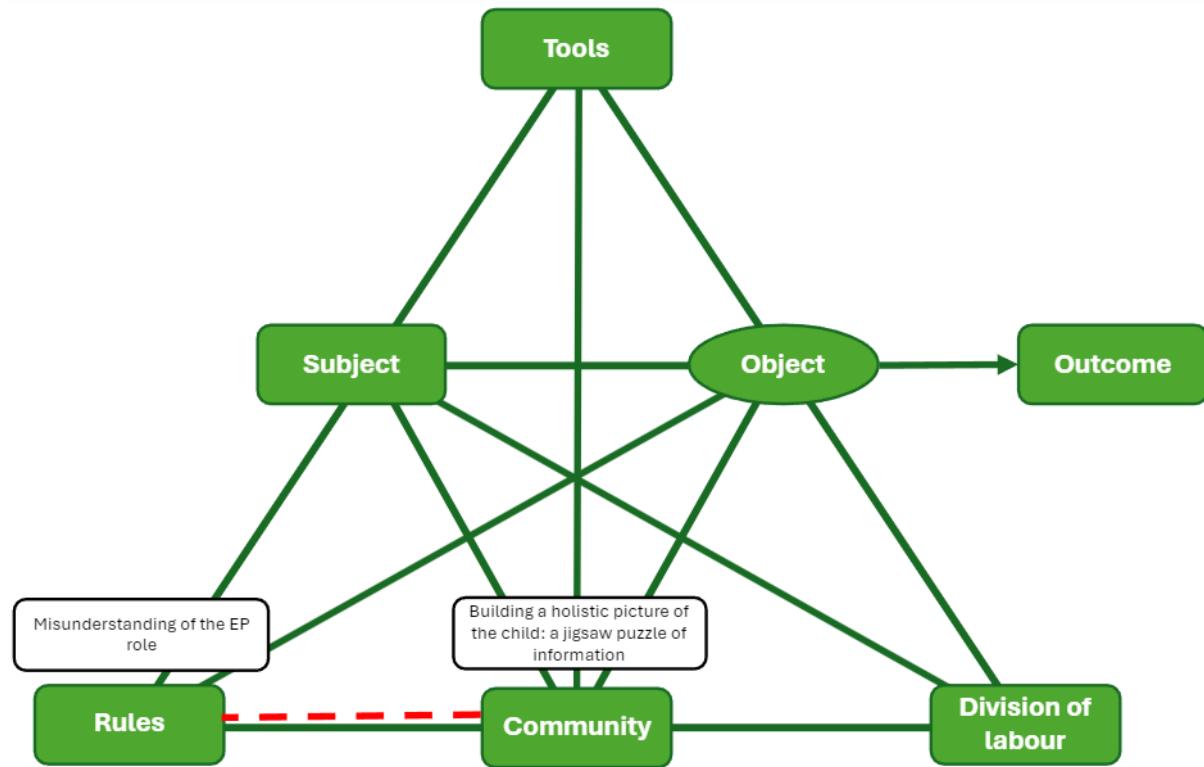
Education and SEND systems were perceived as a barrier to outcomes of consultation, as the systems themselves have contradictory processes which make accessing funding and resources needed to act on planned outcomes from consultation difficult. Figure 7.4 visually represents this contradiction. Participants discussed the perception of some professionals as requiring more formal, assessment-based approaches in order to access funding and therefore implement action plans. For example, it may be agreed that a child needs more support from an

adult in school, which would require additional funding. However, the perceived perception of some professionals is that this funding will not be given unless an EP formally 'assesses' a child.

Figure 7.4

Graphic representation of 'education and SEND systems' contradiction.
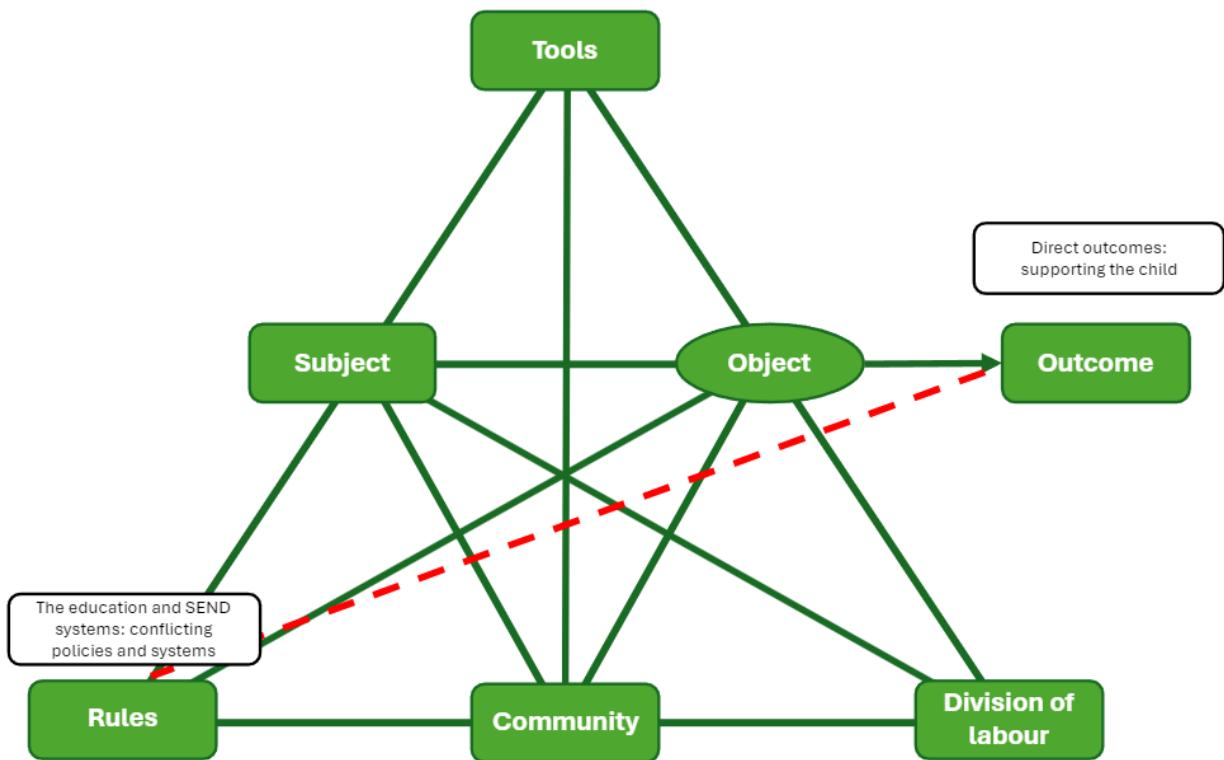
Although this is a commonly held perception (e.g. Vivash & Morgan, 2019), the law does not require work from an EP to access additional funding (DfE & DoH, 2015). However, LA-level policy can suggest otherwise. For example, within the LA involved in the case study, applications for additional funding request an EP report within the last 6 months. This therefore needs to be explored with other professionals within the LA, such as SEND officers, to make

sure that EPs are not perceived as gatekeepers and are not expected to conduct formal assessments outside of their statutory role.

The secondary contradiction between the rules and community nodes highlights misconceptions of the EP role across professionals in education and the LA that can act as a barrier to overall aims of consultation. While the adults around a child may agree to support a child in a certain way, funding paths and resources available locally may prevent this from happening. EPs and SENCos within the present study credited some of this difficulty to a disconnect between LA services; for example, SEND officers, who are involved in EHCP processes, can communicate that they believe an EP report or cognitive assessment is needed to apply for funding. This highlights the need for the EPS to work with other professionals in the LA, particularly SEND officers, to clearly establish the EP role within the LA, and separate the statutory role from work with schools. For example, Capper (2020) used CHAT to explore EPs' and SEND officers' roles in the EHCP process. This was used to reconstruct the EP role in EHCPs in a way that was agreed by both SEND officers and EPs, to ensure that the work done was in line with local and statutory guidelines, and complementary to other professionals' roles in the EHCP process. This research highlights how the EPS should work with other professionals in the LA to make sure their role is understood and complementary.

Conflicting needs of the adults around the child

The section discusses the contradiction of conflicting needs of the adults around the child including professionals and parents, which represents a tension between the rules node and the outcomes node. See Figure 7.5 for a graphic representation of this contradiction. Direct outcomes

for the child within consultation were described of as being impacted by the needs of the adults who are involved in the community. Participants described members of the community of consultation as potentially stressed and overworked and with poor mental health, limiting their ability to enact on any agreed actions. Below, one way to support teacher wellbeing and workload is discussed, as a potential way to overcome this tension within the system.

Figure 7.5

Graphic representation of the 'conflicting needs of the adults around the child' contradiction.
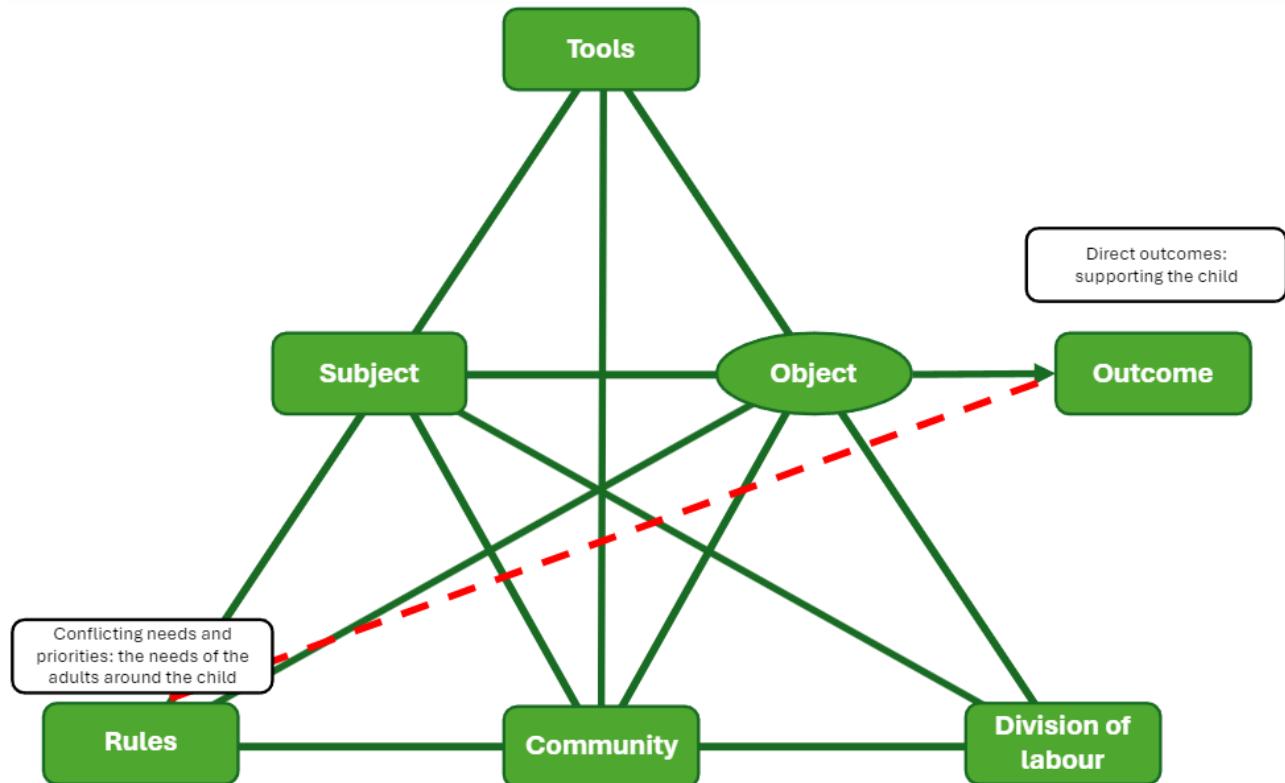
Although this was described by both SENCo and EP subject positions as a barrier to practicing consultation, the tension could be resolved by one of the other themes discussed, 'indirect outcomes: supporting the system around the child'. Within this theme, SENCos

discussed how, as consultees, they felt reassured, being supported to manage difficult conversations and having the time and space to reflect. If this was reflective of all consultees, including other school staff, consultation itself may help resolve the tension.

Two factors which have been suggested to improve teacher resilience and wellbeing are problem-solving and help-seeking (Mansfield et al. 2016). Consultation may be well placed to support both factors. However, while SENCos in the case study likely attended consultation regularly enough to feel the benefit of this, teachers may not. One way to increase teaching staff access to the EP and consultation, could be exploring different ways of practicing consultation, previously not utilised in the LA involved in the case study. Group consultation, which would involve groups of teaching staff attending a consultation, facilitated by an EP, may present the opportunity to discuss and solve problems they are experiencing. This approach offers the opportunity for regular consultation meetings facilitated by the EP in which several teachers have the opportunity to discuss, reflect on and solve problems (e.g. Nugent et al., 2014). Group consultation has previously been found to support learning, emotional containment and belonging for teachers (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021), increasing confidence (Nugent et al., 2014), developing critical problem-solving processes (Bennet & Monsen, 2011), and offering an opportunity for teachers to learn (Hayes & Stringer, 2016).

Implications for personal practice

As the initial concept of the research was based on my personal experiences, and part of the motivation for research was to explore an area of practice I was personally interested in, this section focuses on the implications the present research may have on my own practice. I found

that even as I interviewed participants, I was developing my professional identity, shifting my practice and considering new ways of working.

By exploring consultation in the literature, having in-depth discussions with EPs and SENCos about consultation, as well as researching the history of the EP role, I had the opportunity to reflect on my own values and ethos. The experience reinforced what I felt I was naturally drawn towards, which is empowering parents and teachers, and supporting them to support children and young people. Within consultation, I found an effective and practical way to give the child, and the adults around the child, a voice, and support relationships between school and home.

This has also had a wider impact on my practice, outside of the way I use consultation. By interviewing SENCos, I gained a much deeper insight into their role, and the tensions within it. It has had an influence on how I interact with SENCos, and I now consider how I can offer them a safe space to talk about their workload and try to actively offer containment and reassurance for them where possible.

Hearing from SENCos about their experiences of consultation, and how it could support them just through reassurance and containment, also offered some valuable reflections regarding other ways consultation could be utilised in my practice and in the LA I was on placement in. I have already embedded this into my own practice, by offering SENCos group consultation with other SENCos, so they have a space to problem solve together and support each other.

Limitations and future research

The present research allowed for an in-depth case study of consultation in educational psychology from the perspective of EPs and SENCos within a LA. However, the research is not without its limitations, which should be considered when applying the findings of the research, and to direct future research.

Firstly, the use of CHAT must be considered. CHAT is a complex framework, and the use of CHAT to co-construct an activity system for consultation requires communicating the framework to participants. Although participants were guided through elements of CHAT, the level of understanding of some elements could be called into question, which could make it difficult to truly co-construct with participants. Additionally, tertiary and quaternary levels of contradictions were not discussed in the present research, although participants frequently contrasted consultation to assessment-based work. However, to fully understand any contradictions across these two ways of working in EP practice, third-generation CHAT would be needed to construct neighbouring activity systems. This would be time consuming and was not within the scope of the present research.

Second-generation CHAT has been criticised in the literature for being insensitive to cultural variations (Griffin & Cole, 1984), not allowing for interpretation of interactions and dialogue (Daniels, 2004), and difficult to use for newly emerging activities (Wiser & Durst, 2019). In the context of this research, CHAT has now been established as a research tool in educational psychology in England, and the use of CHAT in the present research mirrors several UK-based studies, therefore negating concerns regarding application to British culture. Additionally, although consultation was changing within the UK and the present case study

context, consultation is a well-established activity in educational psychology and within the EPS involved in the case study.

Furthermore, in the present research, contradictions within the constructed activity system were considered and discussed by the researcher in isolation. Engeström (2016) created Development Work Research (DWR) Change Laboratories as a way to address contradictions collaboratively with the members of the activity community. This would involve a focus group of participants, who would be presented contradictions and could then discuss the tensions and possible solutions together. This would allow for the co-construction of solutions, and would be more likely to result in lasting change within the organisation. However, the time limitations of the present research prevented this from being possible. Future research should consider incorporating DWR Change Laboratories.

Additionally, in the present research, both subject perspectives were analysed together, with the aim to create a co-constructed activity system for consultation within the case study. However, by analysing the data in this way, as opposed to analysing subject perspective separately to create both a SENCo and an EP activity system, some of the nuance of the data may have been lost. For example, themes sought to communicate the narrative of both EP and SENCo perspectives, which may have had the result of minimising each individual subject perspective.

The number of participants and the nature of the research may also be a limitation. Due to the nature of qualitative research, which necessitates a small group of individuals with specific characteristics and experiences (Shenton, 2004), only five EPs and five SENCos were interviewed. However, Clark and Braun (2013) argue that 6-10 participants are enough for data saturation in qualitative research in RTA. Additionally, qualitative research, and research with a

small number of participants, are often critiqued regarding applicability of findings (Shenton, 2004). Stake (1994) argued that each unique individual is representative of a broader group of individuals, in this case study, SENCos and EPs, and therefore, findings have some level of transferability.

Furthermore, participants were interviewed remotely, using video conferencing technology. This may have an impact on features of the research such as increased demand characteristics (Self, 2021), increased distraction (Self, 2021) and development of rapport (Davies et al. 2020). See Table 4.5 for further consideration. Due to the large county in which the research took place, it was decided that online interviews could overcome potential recruitment issues.

The research may also be limited in the type and scope of consultation used by participants. The participants discussed a relatively homogenous experience of consultation. Future research could explore consultation within other LA EPSs, possibly using third-generation CHAT to compare different activity systems across LAs.

Furthermore, the SENCos who participated in the present research all work in primary schools. It is likely that SENCos supporting secondary schools would have a different experience of consultation. The findings from the present study may therefore only be applicable to consultation in primary schools. Further research may seek to explore EP consultation within secondary schools in England.

Although expanding on existing research by including SENCos as participants, the research did not explore the subject perspective of other key consultees, such as parents, children and young people, or other professionals. This was largely due to the scale and time limits on the research.

The research also did not use paired consulting dyads and did not seek to interview participants about a specific experience of consultation. This was due to the focus of the research to explore consultation as a service offer for the EPS, and to explore the ways consultation is used within the case study, and the organisational and overarching tensions within the system, as opposed to focusing on specific instances of consultation.

The recruitment method could also have skewed the results. Self-selection bias means that it is likely that EPs with an interest in the topic of consultation would be more likely to volunteer to participate (Robinson, 2014). Additionally, by using EPs as gatekeepers to recruit SENCos, EPs may have been more likely to send details on to SENCos who have received consultation more positively. This likelihood would have been exacerbated by the inclusion/exclusion criteria, which required participants to have taken part in at least two consultations in the last year, as participants are more likely to enjoy their experience and chose to work that way again. However, the concern was that SENCos without multiple experiences of consultation would not have the level of understanding necessary to support the constructions of an activity system.

Additionally, analysis of data, and consideration of contradictions in the research were completed by the researcher in isolation. This was largely due to the necessary scale of the research and time constraints. However, CHAT, and Engeström's (2016) work to develop CHAT for use in action research (via the aforementioned DWR labs), could have offered alternative ways to construct and address contradictions found within the activity system. While the research and subsequent implications for practice could have been enhanced by this process, the researcher attempted to overcome this potential limitation. Firstly, the activity system constructed within interviews were reflected back to the participants at the end of the interview,

to ensure their views were accurately represented. Secondly, analysis was triangulated with another investigator to make sure codes accurately represented themes.

It is also important to consider the impact of the research being conducted by an 'insider researcher' (Moore, 2012), as someone who was on placement in the LA EPS, and had accepted a role in the EPS upon qualifying post-research. Although participants had never worked directly with the researcher, EP participants were colleagues, and SENCo participants were discussing experiences of consultation that they had with a colleague of the researcher, which may increase demand characteristics, as participants may not want to share information which could get back to colleagues (Mercer, 2007).

The final limitation to consider is the role of the researcher within analysis. Within RTA, the researcher is acknowledged as playing a role in constructing understanding of the knowledge. At the time of the research, I was working within the LA EPS involved in the case study as a trainee EP and had accepted a full-time position in the EPS post-qualification. I was practicing consultation in a similar way to how participants discussed their experience of consultation and felt this way of practising fitted my personal ethos. Therefore, my position was inevitably going to influence the lens from which data was viewed, and interpretations of data would likely be different if completed by other researchers. However, through a reflective research journal and regular supervisions with a university tutor, the potential influence of my own biases were considered throughout the research.

Concluding comments

This research used second-generation CHAT to explore consultation with an LA EPS from both EP and SENCo subject perspectives, as respective consultants and consultees. Developing a CHAT model of consultation from both EP and SENCo subject positions allowed a more in-depth exploration of contradictions between consultant and consultees. The findings have added to the knowledge base on consultation in EP practice and the EP role. The findings describe what participating EPs and SENCos believe the object and outcome of consultation to be, demonstrating the broad conceptualisations of consultation, which is representative of the breadth of definitions of consultation available in the literature. The tools within consultation were also constructed, with a discrepancy regarding how EPs and SENCos perceive the power dynamic within consultation, with SENCos viewing it as a useful tool, and EPs inclined to attempt to reduce power imbalance. Supporting and constraining factors were also explored, allowing consultation to be viewed within the wider social, cultural and organisational factors. Contradictions within the activity system were discussed, and used to consider implications for practice, based on addressing the tensions within the constructed activity system.

Using CHAT to explore experiences of consultation has led to tangible recommendations for how this popular and dynamic element of EP practice can be developed further, to become an established mode of EP service delivery from the perspectives of the service and service-users.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Reflective Research Diary Extracts

"<u>**Aims**</u>**: to capture decision points, what I will change and why, what I could have done differently, and for reflexivity (check biases etc) based on my philosophical stance.**

<u>**September – December 2022**</u>

From development of ideas – report writing or EP work?
- Initial areas of interest was report writing, but struggled to pin this into research topic with clear RQs.
- Brought the idea of report writing as a research topic to a research workshop. The course tutor suggested that it would instead relate to EP work in some way, maybe not just report writing.
- Found a thesis exploring EPs attachment to report writing – I think this was what I was exploring after noticing how some EPs found it hard to write concise reports and not complete cognitive assessments. This still feels too broad and poorly defined though.
- Realized that the reason I was interested in report writing was more about wanting to explore ways EPs work without writing reports, or streamlining report writing.

From development of ideas – consultation?
- My current service is pushing consultation as an efficient way of working – could this be my thesis topic? It would naturally consider report writing, as that is why consultation is being encouraged, to cut down on report writing time.

Researching consultation:
- There is loads of research out there exploring consultation in EP practice – lots on models and theory. Is it too oversaturated to research?
- I found an article by Lee and Woods, which suggested there may have been a decrease in school 'buy in' to consultation pre-COVID. I know that in my service, and in others in England, consultation was one of the most common ways of practicing online during lockdowns, so that will have likely caused a shift in the use of consultation, which won't have been researched yet, as this is the first year post-lockdowns.
…

<u>**April – September 2023**</u>
Recruitment

Pilot interview
- Pilot interview success! The interview was in-depth, and the interview schedule worked well. By summarizing the activity system I had drawn during the interview at

the end, I could see how much of a thorough understanding the SENCo had of consultation, so I have no concerns about future interviews.

- I may need to explain in more depth that I am not expecting major knowledge on consultation, or clear definitions. They appeared to be nervous/worried about a 'right' answer. If I state in the next interview that consultation has so many broad definitions, everyone I asked would have a different answer, would this make it easier to understand?
- The tools and rules nodes felt difficult to explain because they are more abstract concepts. I might need to tweak my interview schedule to include a script about how these are more abstract, explain in a bit more detail with examples, and make sure I offer the space to discuss what they mean if needed.
- I already have so many ideas from just this one interview!! We need a service offer brochure which outlines key roles of the EP to send to schools – this participant directly mentioned this, and it would not be hard to put together.

Interview 2 -

- Trialed making it clear that consultation definitions are broad and vary a lot to help them not feel like they were being tested – this seemed better, they laughed and said they were glad I said that as they were worried about their understanding of it. This made me think about how I was introducing the research, I have been talking through my aims, but maybe I need to make it clearer that is about looking for contradictions, and anything that is not clear or well understood by participants in useful.
- I'm really enjoying the co-constructing element of interviews. I love being able to draw out this activity system as we go and show them how deeply I've listened through summarising it at the end. I find it really rewarding when this participant and the previous participants commented on what a good summary it is – it makes me feel like the decision I made to use CHAT was well grounded, and it offers such a lovely framework to 'hang' consultation on.
- I can already see reoccurring themes just from the 2 interviews so far, the SENCos really value their link EP, and have a good relationships which seems to be founded off mutual respect.
- I found it hard to articulate the last 2 nodes clearly, although they did discuss relevant thinks, maybe I need to refine a script about how these are more abstract and vague?

Interview 3:

- I feel like I am getting much more comfortable with the interviews for this one. I felt like I was using more reflecting and checking my understanding throughout, and able to get the participant to expand and some points more. I also felt like I was working with the to make the constructed system. It felt like it was me making sure I understood their construction, but I probably need to check myself and make sure I am not getting to involved in the construction personally and donating ideas to participants.
- I think this SENCo had the most 'narrow' concept of consultation so far, they really saw it as just this meeting with an EP using a PATH with parents and other relevant adults. However, this showed that they did not need to have a broad understanding to still offer a really in-depth discussion and conceptualisation of consultation.

Appendix 2: Ethics approval letter

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM

Dear James Birchwood ,

RE: Educational Psychologists' and teaching staffs' perspectives on consultation.

Application for Ethical Review: ERN_2023-0588

Thank you for your application for ethical review for the above project, which was reviewed by the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee.

On behalf of the Committee, I confirm that this study now has ethical approval.

Any adverse events occurring during the study should be promptly brought to the Committee's attention by the Principal Investigator and may necessitate further ethical review.

Please ensure that the relevant requirements within the University's Code of Practice for Research and the information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (available at https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Links-and-Resources.aspx) are adhered to.

Please be aware that whilst Health and Safety (H&S) issues may be considered during the ethical review process, you are still required to follow the University's guidance on H&S and to ensure that H&S risk assessments have been carried out as appropriate. For further information about this, please contact your School H&S representative or the University's H&S Unit at healthandsafety@contacts.bham.ac.uk.

Kind regards,

The Co-Chairs of the Humanities and Social Sciences Committee

E-mail: ethics-queries@contacts.bham.ac.uk

Appendix 3: Recruitment message for EPs

THESIS RECRUITMENT

Hi everyone. I am looking to recruit Educational Psychologists for my Thesis with the University of Birmingham. The research is focused on EP and teaching staff perception of consultation, using cultural-historical activity theory. I would be looking to interview you via Teams on this topic. Participants should have been with [*LA*] Educational Psychology Service for at least a year, and have led a consultation meeting at least twice in the last year. If anyone would be interested in taking part, please message me on here or email me, and I can send you the Participant Information Sheet and answer any questions you might have. Thank you!

Appendix 4: EP Information Sheet

<u>Participant Information Sheet</u>

What is the research about?

Consultation is one of the core roles of Educational Psychologist. At [*LA*] Educational Psychology Service, a consultative service delivery approach is being promoted. However, research has largely focused on theoretic underpinning of consultation, and consultation is often not clearly defined by Educational Psychologists and Teaching Staff, and this can result in reluctance to use consultation in practice. This research aims to develop the understanding of how Educational Psychologists and Teaching Staff understand and perceive consultation, and how this may be similar or contradictory. By looking at tensions within the activity of consultative meetings, it is hoped that possible solutions can be explored that may improve consultative practice, and therefore, service delivery.

What will taking part involve?

Participation is voluntary. If you would like to take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in an interview on Teams, which will last between 1 and 1 and half hours. During interviews, you will be asked to talk about time you have led a consultative meeting in the last year. You do not need to bring any physical documents or evidence relating to the consultation, although you can bring document if you feel it would help you remember the meeting. You will be asked to not use any real names if referring to people or places during our interview.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because you have had your role in [LA] Educational Psychology Service for at least a year, and have led 2 consultations in the last year. If you think this does not apply to you, then you will not be able to take part in the research.

What will happen to the data collected during the interview?

The interview will be recorded via Microsoft Teams. Immediately after the interview, the recording and any notes taken will be transferred to a password protected OneDrive. Any other copies will be deleted, or physical notes will be shredded. The interview will then be transcribed, which will also be stored on the password protected OneDrive. Only the researcher will be able to access this data.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the research at any point before and during the interview, with no explanation. You can also withdraw your data with no explanation for up to two weeks after the interview, after which analysis may have begun. Prior to taking part in the research, you will provided with the researcher's name, address, email and phone number, as well as the details of the researcher's supervisor. You can use any of these to inform the research you would like to withdraw from the research.

What will the data collected during the interview be used for?

The findings of the research will be written and published as a doctoral thessis for the aware of Doctorate of Applied Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Birmingham. The

names of participants, the organisation they work in, or the Local Authority they work in will not be named within this work.

Can I get feedback on the findings?

If you would like to be sent a summary of the findings after the research is complete, you can express this on the 'Consent Form' which will be sent to you before taking part in the interview. You will also need to leave an email for the summary to be sent to. This email will not be used for any other proposes after research. All findings will be anonymised.

A summary of the findings will be shared with you and the Educational Psychology Service. All findings will be anonymised.

What if I have questions or require more information?

If you have any questions about the research, or would like to discuss it further, please contact myself or my research supervisor. Details can be found below.

If I would like to take part, what do I do?

If you would like to take part in this research, please send me an email by [insert date]. I will then be able to answer any questions, and send you a consent form for you to complete. Upon completion of the consent form, I will contact you to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview to take place.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Samantha Leece,

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Researcher: REDACTED	Supervisor: REDACTED
Address: REDACTED	Address: REDACTED
Tel: REDACTED	Tel: REDACTED
Email: REDACTED	Email: REDACTED

Appendix 5: Participant Consent Form

<u>Consent form</u>

Title of project: A Cultural-Historical Activity Theory exploration of Educational Psychologists' and Teaching Staff's Perspectives on Consultation.

Researcher: Samantha Leece

This research is part of my doctoral studies at The University of Birmingham.

Purpose of the study:

To explore educational psychologists' and teaching staff's perception of consultation and seek to understand how these perceptions may complement are contradict each other.

Please check the boxes below to confirm that you agree with the below statements:

I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of the research.	
I have read the information sheet and understand the nature of the research.	
I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation or data from the semi-structured interview at any time up to two weeks after my interview, without explanation, by contacting the researcher via phone/email/letter/in person.	
I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have received satisfactory answers to any questions I have asked.	
I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and that I can withdraw my participation or data from the semi-structured interview at any time up to two weeks after my interview, without explanation, by contacting the researcher via phone/email/letter/in person.	
I agree to my semi-structured interview being audio recorded and give my permission for the recording to be used for transcription, analysis and as part of the researcher's doctoral studies at The University of Birmingham.	
I would like to receive a summary of the findings from this research. IF YES, please type your email below (please note, your contact details will be deleted after feedback is sent):	
I agree to take part in this study.	

Appendix 6: SENCo Recruitment Message

Hello,

I am a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist on placement at [*LA*] Educational Psychology Service. As a part of my training, I am completing a thesis on perceptions of Educational Psychology led consultation within [*LA*]. For this, I am looking to interview via Teams teaching staff who have been a part of a consultative meeting led by an Educational Psychologist. This can give you the opportunity to talk about how you feel about these meetings and could result in developing a shared action plan to improve the services offered by the Educational Psychology Service in the future.

If you have been a part of at least two meetings like this in the last year, and would be interested in taking part in the research, please have a look at the Participant Information Sheet attached, and get in touch with me via email at _____ to express an interest and have the chance to ask any questions.

Thank you!

Sammie Leece

Trainee Educational Psychologist, [*LA*] Educational Psychology Service

Appendix 7: SENCo Information Sheet

<u>**Participant Information Sheet**</u>

What is the research about?

Consultation is one of the core roles of Educational Psychologist. At [*LA*] Educational

Psychology Service, a consultative service delivery approach is being promoted. However,

research has largely focused on theoretic underpinning of consultation, and consultation is often

not clearly defined by Educational Psychologists and Teaching Staff, and this can result in

reluctance to use consultation in practice. This research aims to develop the understanding of

how Educational Psychologists and Teaching Staff understand and perceive consultation, and

how this may be similar or contradictory. By looking at tensions within the activity of

consultative meetings, it is hoped that possible solutions can be explored that may improve

consultative practice, and therefore, service delivery.

What will taking part involve?

Participation is voluntary. If you would like to take part in the research, you will be asked to take

part in an interview on Teams, which will last between 1 and 1 and half hours. During

interviews, you will be asked to talk about time you have attended a consultative meeting led by

an Educational Psychologist. You do not need to bring any physical documents or evidence

relating to the consultation, although you can bring documents if you feel it would help you

remember the meeting. You will be asked to not use any real names if referring to people or

places during our interview.

Why have I been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part because you have had your role in a [*LA*] school for at least a year, and have attended 2 consultations in the last year. If you think this does not apply to you, then you will not be able to take part in the research.

What will happen to the data collected during the interview?

The interview will be recorded via Microsoft Teams. Immediately after the interview, the recording and any notes taken will be transferred to a password protected University of Birmingham OneDrive. Any other copies will be deleted, or physical notes will be shredded. The interview will then be transcribed, which will also be stored on the password protected OneDrive. Only the researcher will be able to access this data.

What if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the research at any point before and during the interview, with no explanation. You can also withdraw your data with no explanation for up to two weeks after the interview, after which analysis may have begun. Prior to taking part in the research, you will provided with the researcher's name, address, email and phone number, as well as the details of the researcher's supervisor. You can use any of these to inform the research you would like to withdraw from the research.

What will the data collected during the interview be used for?

The findings of the research will be written and published as a doctoral thesis for the aware of Doctorate of Applied Educational and Child Psychology at The University of Birmingham. The

names of participants, the organisation they work in, or the Local Authority they work in will not be named within this work.

Can I get feedback on the findings?

If you would like to be sent a summary of the findings after the research is complete, you can express this on the 'Consent Form' which will be sent to you before taking part in the interview. You will also need to leave an email for the summary to be sent to. This email will not be used for any other proposes after research. All findings will be anonymised.

A summary of the findings will be shared with you and the Educational Psychology Service. All findings will be anonymised.

What if I have questions or require more information?

If you have any questions about the research, or would like to discuss it further, please contact myself or my research supervisor. Details can be found below.

If I would like to take part, what do I do?

If you would like to take part in this research, please send me an email by [insert date]. I will then be able to answer any questions, and send you a consent form for you to complete. Upon completion of the consent form, I will contact you to arrange a suitable date and time for the interview to take place.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Samantha Leece,

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Researcher: REDACTED	Supervisor: REDACTED
Address: REDACTED	Address: REDACTED
Tel: REDACTED	Tel: REDACTED
Email: REDACTED	Email: REDACTED

Appendix 8: Example of co-constructed activity system drawn in interview with T1
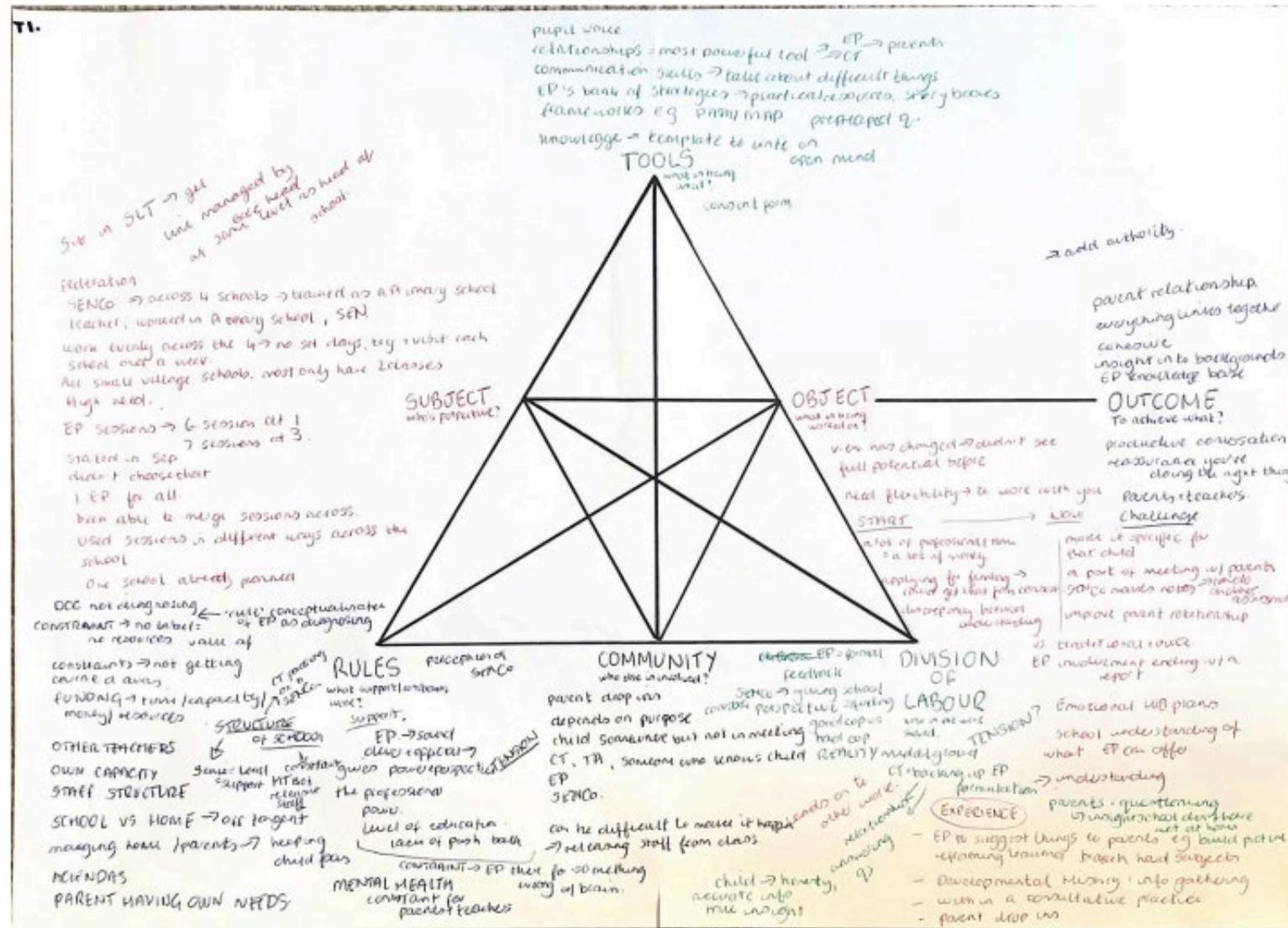
Appendix 9: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for EPs

<u>Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: EPs</u>

Node questions are related to: subject (who's perspective)

What is your current job role and responsibilities?

Prompts: what are the schools you work with like? how often do you lead consultations?

Can you tell me a bit about the service you work with?

Prompts: change in service delivery, size of service, number of schools you work in?

Node questions are related to: object (understanding/definition of consultation)

Make it clear to participants that this is not about testing their knowledge, but about me understanding how they see consultation.

What is your understanding of consultation problem-solving meetings?

Prompts: what do you think the purpose of consultation is, who do you think if involved, what do you think makes a meeting a consultation.

Has your understanding of consultation changed at all throughout your experience of it?

Prompts: ask them to think about a recent consultation they experienced vs earlier ones, ask them to think about their first impression of consultative processes.

Node questions are related to: outcome (what is hope to be achieved)

What do you think are the aims of a consultative meeting?

Prompts: think back to a consultative meeting you have attended – what do you think were the outcomes/goals of the meeting?

Node questions are related to: community (who else is involved)

From your experience of consultation, who is normally involved?

Prompts: think back to a consultation you led – who was there? Why? how are they connected? Is there anyone else involved in the process that was not in attendance?

Node questions are related to: division of labour (who does what, and how is the work shared)

What roles do you think each person in a consultative meeting take?

Prompts: think back to a consultation you attended, what do you think were the role of everyone who attended? If there was anyone involved in the process who was not there, what was their role? How did these roles move the group toward their outcome?

Do you think throughout your experience of consultation, any of the roles have changed?

Node questions are related to: tools (what is used)

Explore WHY these tools are used throughout to think about the properties or behaviours of the artefact.

What things might you bring to a consultation, thinking about both physical things and more abstract things

Prompts: e.g. reports, knowledge.

Would you use anything to guide or support how you play a role in the consultation?

Prompts: frameworks, lists, why you use that specific thing.

Have the tools you use or bring to a consultation changed throughout your experience of consultative meetings?

Thinking of a specific consultation you have been to, is there any physical or abstract tool you think would have supported the meeting?

Node questions are related to: rules (what supports or constrains the work)

How do you think throughout your experience of leading consultation meeting, that EPs role has changed, and has this influenced you experience of consultation?

Do you think that any changes in education, in terms of policy or funding etc has influenced your experience or perception of consultation?

How does school policy or structures influence how consultation works in your setting?

Are the any rules or structures, formal or informal, that influence how you approach consultative meetings with EPs?

Appendix 10: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule for SENCos

<u>**Semi-Structured Interview Schedule: Teachers**</u>

Node questions are related to: subject (who's perspective)

What is your current job role and responsibilities?

Prompts: do you ever work with children with SEND, how often to you work with EPs

Can you tell me a bit about the school you work in?

Prompts: size of the school, number of pupils with additional needs, number of EPs sessions yearly (large buy-in or small buy-in)

Node questions are related to: object (understanding/definition of consultation)

Make it clear to participants that this is not about testing their knowledge, but about me understanding how they see consultation.

What is your understanding of consultation problem-solving meetings?

Prompts: what do you think the purpose of consultation is, who do you think if involved, what do you think makes a meeting a consultation.

Has your understanding of consultation changed at all throughout your experience of it?

Prompts: ask them to think about the last consultation they experienced vs the first one, ask them to think about their first impression of consultative processes.

Node questions are related to: outcome (what is hope to be achieved)

What do you think are the aims of a consultative meeting?

Prompts: think back to a consultative meeting you have attended – what do you think were the outcomes/goals of the meeting?

Node questions are related to: community (who else is involved)

From your experience of consultation, who is normally involved?

Prompts: think back to a consultation you attended – who was there? Why? how are they connected? Is there anyone else involved in the process that was not in attendance?

Node questions are related to: division of labour (who does what, and how is the work shared)

What roles do you think each person in a consultative meeting take?

Prompts: think back to a consultation you attended, what do you think were the role of everyone attended? If there was anyone involved in the process who was not there, what was their role? How did these roles move the group toward their outcome?

Do you think throughout your experience of consultation, any of the roles have changed?

Node questions are related to: tools (what is used)

Explore WHY these tools are used throughout to think about the properties or behaviours of the artefact.

What things might you bring to a consultation, thinking about both physical things and more abstract things

Prompts: e.g. reports, knowledge.

Would you use anything to guide or support how you play a role in the consultation?

Prompts: frameworks, lists, why you use that specific thing.

Have the tools you use or bring to a consultation changed throughout your experience of consultative meetings?

Thinking of a specific consultation you have been to, is there any physical or abstract tool you think would have supported the meeting?

Node questions are related to: rules (what supports or constrains the work)

Do you think that any changes in education, in terms of policy or funding etc has influenced your experience or perception of consultation?

How does school policy or structures influence how consultation works in your setting?

Are the any rules or structures, formal or informal, that influence how you approach consultative meetings with EPs?

Appendix 11: CHAT image shown to participants
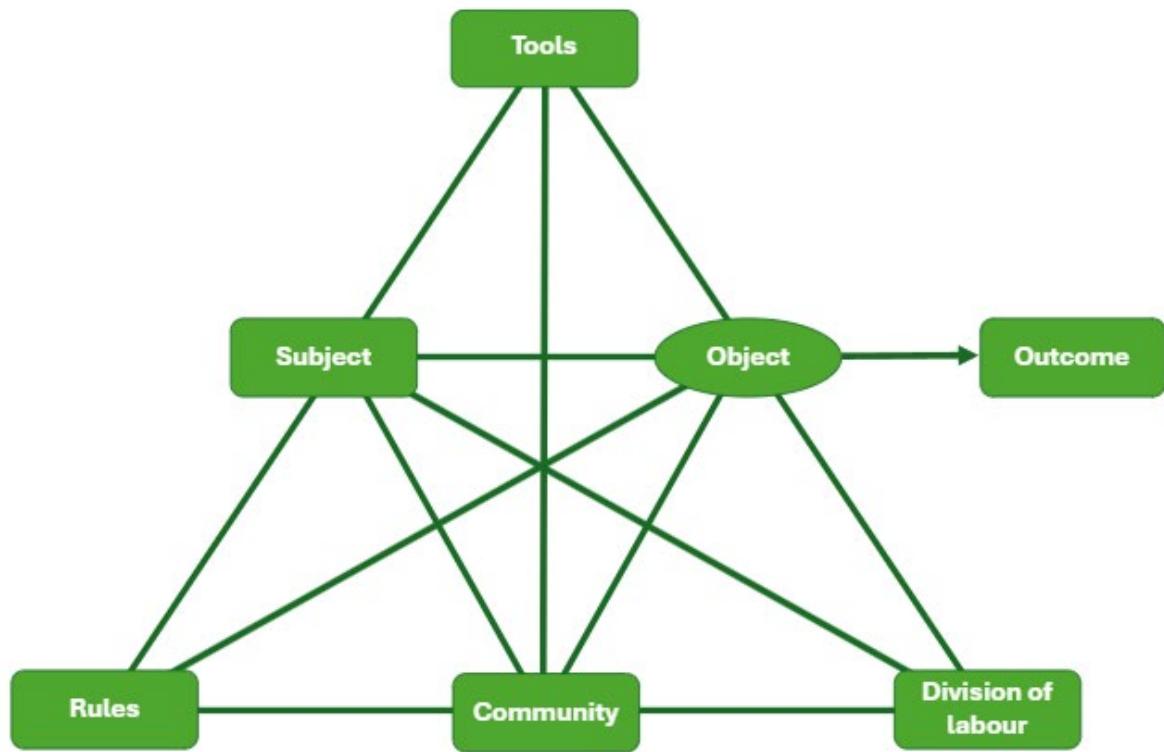
Appendix 12: Screenshots from coding spreadsheet

	Participant	Quote:	Code:	Emerging theme:	Coding
2	T5	I feel the consultation with the LA is more like open and more. You share more in terms of individual details in terms of personal details around the child.	`Consultation within D is open, and involved sharing a lot of details of a child	Difference in LA to other EPSs, more info gathering approach, and an open process.	1
3	T5	That involves more, more family and professionals and more involved in that as well,	Involved families and professionals	Process	1
4	T5	The LA one that says more open and more shared right from the start in terms of what people being involved within that space and within that room where when needed.	Consultation in D in open and honest	Process? And difference to other county. They talk more about processed for their defintion e.g. face to face, professionals and families are invovled etc.	1
5	T5	we sometimes do things virtually, but generally where possible it's face to face, whereas the trust ones are always virtual.	In D, consutlation is more likely to be face-to-face.	Process	1
6	T5	you kind of have your planning meeting obviously at the start of the year and it kinda generally follows the pattern of what you what you planned over then I know the odd thing will come up for about a year ... I think with the LA one you feel like like, for example, if I've got, if I have any queries or anything with EP for the LA, I'll just e-mail over in just say can I just ask you a quick question about so it can be different, it can be like consultant we can have like just back and forth emails as well	In D, consulation feels more like an ongoing process, including conversations/emails/info sharing before and after the actual meeting.	Process and LA specific	1

Emerging themes ☑	Final Themes: ☑	
1. Consultation as a wider ongoing process, which involved ongoing contact and support from EPs.	1. Consultation as a broad term - can be viewed rigidly or flexibly	
2. Consulation within D as different to other counties - more open and involding a hybrid appraoch of working directly with children	2. Consultation as a collabortaive, practical and accessibly problem solving approach	
3. Consultation as involving a multi-agency meeting		
4. Consultation as more useful andpractical than other ways f working, focussed on practicalities and day-to-day support of a child		
5. Talking to an EP to seek out resolutions		

Appendix 13: Service offer brochure

Educational Psychology Services

Consultation

Consultations are problem-solving meetings with key stakeholder, such as teacher, teaching assistants, parents, or other professionals. Consulation has the following advantages:
- Promotes shared understanding of the sitaution.
- Supports co-constuction of solutions.
- Can be an efficient use of time and use as little as half a session, depending on the expectations.
- Can be used to guide future work.
- Consultation records can be used as evidence for furture referals.

Consultation can look like:
- Group consultation with multiple professionals to support problem solving.
- Parent or staff drop-in sessions, where issues are brought to be discussed.
- Meeting with all stakeholders to discuss one pupil.
- Meetings with SENDCo/SLT to problem solve broader issues.

Assessment

Assessment involves in-depth data gathering relevant to a pupil. An assessment would use 2 sessions. A report would be written detailing work done, findings, and recommendations. Assessment has the following advantages:
- In-depth reports including psychological formulation and recommendations.
- Can involve cognitive and dynamic assessment for further breakdown of a pupil's needs.
- Can be used for the basis of an EHC Needs Assessment.

Assessment can look like:
- Information gathering from key adults around a child.
- In-depth assessment work with child, including observations and standardised assessment.
- Pupil voice work.

Intervention

Intervention can be at an individual, small group, whole class or whole school level. Interventions can be therapeutic, behavioural, solution-focussed, among others. Intervention has the following advantages:

- Can promote systemic change in classes.
- Can support individual pupils with complex needs.

Supporting with intervention can look like:

- Supervising staff to deliver intervention e.g. ELSAs in delivering therapeutic support.
- 1:1 therapeutic intervention with pupils.
- Whole-class solution focussed inteventions (e.g. WOWW).

Training and professional development

Professional development can be supported through supervsion or bespoke training packages specific to your school's need. Training and professional development can have the following advantages:

- Training can be delivered to whole staff teams.
- Follow up work can review learning or support setting up interventions.
- Supervision can be offered to school staff to support development of knowledge, confidence and competence.

Training packages can look like:

- Twilight sessions or inset days.
- Topics such as Precision Teaching, Emotion Coaching, Developmental Traumam, Domestic Abuse, Language in the Classroom, Supporting Executive Functioning Skills.
- Regular staff supervision.

Research and strategic development

Systemic work involved working with the school sytems around children. This could include working with policies, behaviour systems, enhances resource bases, or any other system within a school or community. Systemic work can have the following advantages:

- Making bigger changes that can impact more people positively.
- Helping stuck systems becoming 'unstuck.'
- Research can evidence and develop effective practice.

Systemic work can look like:

- Development of policy.
- Supporting staff to implement whole school approaches.
- Exploring and developing approaches in enhanced resouce bases.
- Conducting research to support effective practices.