EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY WORK IN CHILDREN'S

CENTRES: A REALISTIC EVALUATION OF GROUP

SUPERVISION WITH FAMILY SUPPORT WORKERS

By

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers (FSWs) based in Children's Centres, suggests key mechanisms and context features for consideration when implementing group supervision and highlights future directions for research. Literature on the role Educational Psychologists hold in Children's Centres is reviewed and a role utilising community, critical and organisational psychology principles is suggested.

The present study uses a Realistic Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) framework to explore the mechanisms, context and outcomes of group supervision. Key mechanisms within FSWs were: confidence, openness to ideas, experience of the job and supervision, prioritisation of group supervision and relationships with colleagues. Key mechanisms within group supervision were: the professional contract, group working agreement, supervisor role, size and composition of the group. Key features of the context were management support and group dynamics.

The present study discusses outcomes of group supervision in light of the literature, finding positive outcomes outweigh the number and frequency of negative outcomes, supporting previous literature and raising additional outcomes. The outcomes were coded into educative, supportive and managerial functions (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006). The educative outcomes were: learning from others, sharing experiences and problems, gaining ideas, strategies and new perspectives. The supportive outcomes were: reduced isolation, raised confidence, reassurance, supporting team relationships and individuals. The managerial outcomes were group supervision supported FSWs in delivering better outcomes for children and families.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

BPS   British Psychological Society
CCST   Children's Centre Support Teachers
CWDC   Children's Workforce Development Council
DECP   Division of Educational and Child Psychologists
DfES   Department for Education and Skills
EP   Educational Psychologist
EPPE   Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project
EPS   Educational Psychology Service
EYCS   Early Years Childcare Service
EYFS   Early Years Foundation Stage
EYP   Early Years Professional
EYPS   Early Years Professional Status
FSW   Family Support Worker
GSF   General Supervision Framework
PEP   Principal Educational Psychologist
QTS   Qualified Teacher Status
SEN   Special Educational Needs
SENCo   Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SLD   Severe Learning Difficulties
SOA   Super Output Areas
SSLP   Sue Start Local programmes
TAT   Teacher Assistance Team
TST   Teacher Support Team

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1   INTRODUCTION

This present study has been undertaken in order to explore and evaluate a potential role for Educational Psychologists (EPs) within Children's Centres. The literature discusses the changes to both Early Years provision and policy. These changes include the development of Children's Centres as a central part of the Government strategy to narrow the gap between the most disadvantaged young children and the rest of the population. Whilst many EPs and Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) recognise the importance of Children's Centres as shown in the review of the functions and contributions of EPs (DfES, 2006b), there is little written within the literature on the roles for EPs and the models that could be used for practice in these contexts.

I have always worked in the arena of Early Years – first as a teacher, then as an advisor supporting Early Years provision – and early intervention is an area that has always interested me. After becoming an EP, I took on the specialism of Early Years and have since become the Senior EP for Early Years within the local authority. I soon realised that there were many professionals in the field of Early Years, and Children's Centres that had little or no understanding of the role of the EP. My experiences illustrated that those which did have an understanding immediately associated the EP role with work done for children with high levels of Special Educational Needs (SEN). The emergence of Children's Centres alongside my new role as Senior EP for Early Years offered an opportunity to create a different role for EPs: that of supporting, developing and empowering the workforce. This was a shift

in emphasis from taking on individual work of a statutory SEN nature alongside professionals who had a distinct understanding of the EP role. In addition, it meant creating an ideas menu of the possible contributions EPs could make to support professionals within the Early Years Children's Workforce who had no idea of the role of the EP.

Within this menu the concept of group supervision quickly became a popular choice for a range of professionals. Initially, this was offered to the Early Years professionals that EPs in my local authority traditionally had worked with and were within the SEN field, such as Portage home visitors and Area SENCos. However, the emergence of Children's Centres provided a range of new Early Years posts such as Children's Centre Support Teachers (CCSTs) and Family Support Workers (FSWs) to work with. Whilst the approach is popular, I felt it was important to understand why this model of group supervision worked with these professionals, and what the specific outcomes were.

This led to the present study on the use of group supervision with FSWs working in Children's Centres. It was important to go beyond a simple isolated evaluation of the outcomes of the group supervision for the participants and their managers who commissioned the use of group supervision. A consideration of those aspects of the intervention of group supervision that made it work, alongside a consideration of the groups of professionals that might find this useful was deemed valuable. Therefore, Realistic Evaluation within a single case study was selected as a methodological framework as it allowed evaluation of the intervention in terms of examination of the context, mechanisms and outcomes. Realistic Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) has the following as the central question:

"What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4)

Realistic Evaluation seeks to develop programme theories in order to understand social programmes, how and why they work, and the mechanisms that produce the outcomes in the context, rather than focusing on evaluating the outcomes alone. It is intended this would then provide some guidance when using the intervention of group supervision with other groups of workers in a range of contexts.

The present study was undertaken in a geographically large local authority. The local authority contains a mix of urban and rural areas, with 60% of the total population (approximately 553,000 people) living in urban areas. Whilst the local authority is generally prosperous, 47 out of 361 Super Output Areas (SOAs) are amongst the 30% most deprived in England. SOAs are small, stable areas that are uniform in size and are the building blocks of neighbourhoods or wards, and are used by the Office of National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. The 47 SOAs are not restricted to urban areas and are geographically small areas in which deprivation is highly concentrated, and it is here that the 25 Children's Centres are located. Early Years provision includes approximately 300 private or voluntary Early Years settings, 540 childminders, one nursery school and 53 nursery units. There are 179 first/primary schools, 22 middle schools, 29 secondary schools, ten special schools and nine pupil referral units (OfSTED, 2008).

It is intended that the present study will suggest a model for EPs to work with Children's Centres, other related new sectors such as Extended Schools, and the wider Children's Workforce. This study will build upon the current body of research on supervision and group supervision, examining the key mechanisms within group

supervision, the aspects of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision and the outcomes for those who participate in or commission the use of group supervision. It is intended that this will generate some transferable knowledge that will enable group supervision to be implemented in other settings.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1   Introduction to the literature review

The present study aims to evaluate the impact of using group supervision with Family Support Workers linked to Children's Centres. Group supervision is explored as a model for EP's work within Children's Centres. The review of literature begins by considering the legislative context in England for Early Years education and care, including a brief historical overview of the changes in Early Years policy and practice, in order to fully understand the Government agenda for changes to the workforce under the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) and the development of Children's Centres. This is followed by a review of the role that EPs have held in the Early Years sector, challenges to EPs working in Children's Centres and the potential role EPs could have within them. This incorporates an examination of the moves within Educational Psychology towards a community psychology orientation, alongside critical psychology and the possible utilisation of organisational psychology principles. Definitions and models of supervision and group supervision are discussed and evaluated alongside considerations of why group supervision is a useful tool for EPs to use in their work with Children's Centres.

2.1.1   Early intervention

Aslin's (1981) models of environmental influence offer a useful conceptual framework to consider early intervention. It would be considered to be an attunement model where the early intervention is aimed to lead to permanent gain or enduringly higher levels of performance. In comparison, Montgomery (2003), takes a social

constructionist approach and sees early intervention occurring in three ways, dependent on the discourse held about children:

- rescuing children – based on a discourse of children where they are seen as passive, weak, powerless, vulnerable and as victims. Examples include charitable aid programmes that collect money for children;

- fulfilling children's potential – based on a discourse where children are seen as "human capital ... (and) an investment that will bring rewards in the future" (p.206). Examples include Head Start, Sure Start programmes and Children's Centres; and

- children's rights - based on a discourse where children are seen as social actors and competent participants in their own lives and play an active role in the design and implementation of intervention. Examples include programmes such as children's councils in schools.

These types of early intervention can overlap and have elements of more than one discourse, but have developed over time with historical approaches using a rescuing theme, and with a current shift to the 'children's rights' approach in Europe.

The shared idea between these conceptual frameworks of early intervention is enhanced performance by children in later years. Therefore, when linked to disadvantage, early intervention is intended to compensate for early disadvantage and enhance performance compared with the predicted performance without it. Specifically, whilst Children's Centres can be seen to fall squarely within the 'fulfilling children's potential' discourse, there are elements of the 'children's rights' discourse in how Children's Centres services are to be consulted upon and evaluated.

2.2   Developments in the Early Years policy

The national picture of support services to Early Years providers has changed dramatically since Labour won the general election in 1997. They brought rapid changes to Early Years services. The Government considered the growth of childcare services as important in order to release parents for work and training and to provide children with a good start to education (DfEE, 1998a). In 1999, the Government initiated Sure Start as part of its drive to tackle child poverty and social exclusion. The aims of Sure Start were to improve the health and wellbeing of families and young children under five – particularly those who are disadvantaged – so that children were more likely to flourish on entry to school. The Government was attempting to create an environment where there was universal, high quality childcare available, alongside diversity and choice for parents (Baldock, 2001).

The government's National Childcare Strategy in 1998 (DfEE, 1998a) had four key strands:

- Co-ordination of Early Years services at a local level through establishment of Early Years Development and Childcare Partnerships (EYDCPs).

- Provision of funding assistance for parents/carers and the providers of Early Years services. Parents were helped with the cost of childcare through the Nursery Education Grant (NEG) and the Working Families Tax Credit. Providers were helped with new developments through a range of schemes, including New Opportunities Fund (NOF), Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) programme and European Social fund (ESF).

- Investment in training, development and support to Early Years providers, through establishment of a National Early Years Training Organisation in 1999,

revision of the Desirable Learning Outcomes and the introduction of the Foundation Stage (QCA/DfEE, 2000) curriculum. Providers with children receiving Nursery Education Grant (NEG) were given support from Area Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCos), Early Years teachers, development workers and advisers.

▪ Improvement in the regulation of Early Years services with a comprehensive set of standards: the National Daycare Standards (DfES, 2003), developed by The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) and the Social Services Inspectorate. The Early Years Directorate within the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) took responsibility for regulation, registration, inspection and enforcement.

The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare built upon this "…strong foundation of service and support for parents…" (HM Treasury, 2004, p.3) created by the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998a). It aimed to give parents greater choice through more flexible working conditions, a wider range of childcare that suited local community needs in terms of affordability and flexibility, and continued to assure all childcare is of a high quality in order to ensure every child achieves the best start in life.

The Ten Year Strategy for Childcare (HM Treasury, 2004) views the development of the workforce as fundamental to improving the quality of Early Years provision. Therefore, it focuses on developing the qualifications and career structure of practitioners working within Early Years provision particularly in the private, voluntary and independent sectors. The change in children's services outlined in

Every Child Matters: Change for Children (HM Treasury, 2003) also provided the context for the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a), which aimed to develop the workforce in order to improve outcomes for children. The Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) utilises findings from the Effective Provision of Pre-school Education Project (EPPE) (Sylva et al, 2003) as the evidence for this shift in policy. The EPPE summary (Sylva et al, 2003) highlights the significance of the relationship between the quality of the setting and improved outcomes for children. In turn, the quality of the setting is shown to be linked to:

- the qualification level of staff;
- having trained teachers alongside less qualified staff; and
- staff having skills in interacting with children, supporting children in conflict resolution, supporting parents and also having a good understanding of curriculum, child development and learning.

Building on this evidence, the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) has shifted its emphasis from external support – as in the National Childcare Strategy (DfEE, 1998a) – to improving the skills of the workforce within childcare directly, by improving the qualification level and continuing professional development. The targets are to have an Early Years Professional (EYP) in all Children's Centres by 2010, and in all full daycare settings by 2015. The Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) is considered to be equivalent in level to qualified teacher status (QTS). The Children's Workforce Strategy states that "…development and retention of the workforce…" (p.24, DfES, 2005a) is a challenge specifically within the Early Years workforce. The Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)/ Skills for Care (2007) identified supervision as:

"…having a crucial role to play in the development, retention and motivation of the workforce." (p.3)

This quote reinforces the potential use of supervision as a useful tool for EPs and others to use with the Children's Workforce in Children's Centres and other Early Years provision.

The Childcare Act (England and Wales Statutes, 2006) is the first Act to be exclusively concerned with Early Years and childcare. It took forward some of the key commitments from the Ten Year Childcare Strategy, reforming and simplifying Early Years regulation and inspection arrangements, providing a new integrated education and care quality framework for pre-school children and an Ofsted Childcare Register. The Childcare Act initiated the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) (DfES, 2007) which was implemented from September 2008. The EYFS is the new regulatory and quality framework for the provision of care and education for children between birth and five, the end of the child's Reception year. All Early Years providers are required to use the EYFS to ensure that, whatever setting parents choose, they can be confident that their child will receive a quality experience that supports their development and learning.

2.2.1 Children's Centres

The Childcare Act (2006) required an integration of early childhood services to maximise access and benefits to families, and the primary method for doing this is Children's Centres. The Sure Start Children's Centre Practice Guidance (DfES, 2006a) states that:

> "(Children's) centres will be the key mechanism for improving outcomes for young children, reducing inequalities in outcomes between the most disadvantaged and the rest and bringing an end to child poverty." (p.4)

Children's Centres are hubs where children under five years old and their families can receive seamless integrated services and information. Until 2006, the first phase of Children's Centres were located where need was greatest, so local authorities focused on children living in the 20% most disadvantaged wards in the country or in pockets of disadvantage outside these wards where similarly high levels of need existed. Between 2006 and 2008, local authorities developed the next phase of Children's Centres in the 30% most disadvantaged Super Output Areas (SOAs) and then moved into less disadvantaged areas. SOAs are small stable areas that are uniform in size and are the building blocks of neighbourhoods or wards, and are used by the Office of National Statistics for the collection and publication of small area statistics. Each Children's Centre offers a core menu of services as described below but is encouraged to consult with the local community to develop the services needed by the local community. This results in all Children's Centres being unique in physical environment, ways of working, the structure of workforce within and the way in which services are offered.

Children's Centres in the 20% most disadvantaged SOAs offer the following:

- good quality early learning combined with full day care provision for children;

- good quality teacher input to lead the development of learning within the centre;

- child and family health services, including ante-natal services;

- parental outreach;

- family support services;

- a base for a childminder network;

- support for children and parents with special needs; and

- effective links with Jobcentre Plus to support parents/carers who wish to consider training or employment.

In the more advantaged areas, local authorities have greater flexibility in the services they provide to meet local need, but all Children's Centres have to provide a minimum range of services including:

- appropriate support and outreach services to parents/carers and children who have been identified as in need of them;

- information and advice to parents/carers on local childcare, looking after babies and young children, local Early Years provision (childcare and early learning) and education services for three and four year olds;

- support to childminders;

- drop-in sessions and other activities for children and carers at the centre; and

- links to Jobcentre Plus services.

By 2006, Children's Centres were potentially reaching over 650,000 pre-school children living in the most disadvantaged SOAs in the country. This reach target refers to the number of children who might potentially use health or family support services provided by the individual centre. By 2008, Children's Centre services were reaching all children under five and their families in the most disadvantaged areas, as well as many families outside these areas, with 2,500 Children's Centres in total. The Government has pledged to have a Children's Centre in every community and aims to have 3,500 Children's Centres by 2010 (Sure Start, 2009).

This legislative context illustrates that promotion of quality in Early Years provision, Children's Centres and the development of the Children's Workforce are at the heart of current Government policy. The shift in emphasis in the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) towards developing a more highly qualified and empowered workforce, is illustrated by the following quote:

> "… new recruits and existing workers …(being) able to develop their skills and progress their careers within the sector…" (p.25)

Therefore EPs need be aware of and embrace models that empower, develop and support retention of the workforce. They need to move away from giving expert advice, as illustrated by the "hero-innovator" (Georgiades & Phillimore, 1975), "information-giver" (Egan, 1997) or "visiting expert" (Bender, 1976). I will argue that EPs need to develop alternative, community psychology-based strategies for organisational change that develop and empower the workforce within Early Years provision and Children's Centres. The following section examines the role of EPs within the Children's Workforce, in terms of the type of work they currently undertake in Early Years, and could consider undertaking in the future.

2.3 The role of EPs in Early Years

The review of the EP role (DfEE, 2000) established Early Years work as one of three core functions of EP Services. However, the recent review of Educational Psychologists (DfES, 2006b) does not mention this and highlights the role of EPs in the Special Educational Needs (SEN) field. Stringer, Powell & Burton (2006a) state that EPs are:

> "…bracketed with special educational needs co-ordinators in schools and with the production of statements of special educational needs." (p.59)

They note this perception is repeated in the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a). In terms of work within Early Years provision, this view is supported by the fact that 73% of nurseries which responded to the DfES review (2006b) were able to provide an example of EP work that illustrates their distinctive function in relation to individual children within SEN. Whilst this was a small sample of 53 nurseries, it demonstrates the focus on both SEN and individual work that can occur in Early Years. Although the DfES review (2006b) adds that EPs do work within multi-agency teams in Early Years through Child Development teams, Sure Start, Portage and Early Support Teams, detail is not offered on how frequently EPs play a part in these teams and the roles EPs play within them.

Shannon & Posada (2007) examined current models of service delivery in Early Years. They found that individual-based casework was the primary area of EP work in Early Years, with 59% of EPs spending over half their Early Years time engaged in individual work, compared with 31% spending the majority of their Early Years time engaged in organisational level work. However, the most frequent type of EP involvement in organisational level work was working with practitioners to develop individual education plans (IEPs). These results highlight that individual work is given a greater degree of priority that organisational work. These contrasts with Shannon & Posada's analysis of themes for future development whereby EPs want to increase the priority of their Early Years work, have greater involvement in organisational level work and are dissatisfied with emphasis on individual, statutory work.

The emphasis on SEN in educational psychology work in the Early Years is also evident in Dennis's (2003, 2004) articles. Dennis (2003) calls the growth of the Early Years provision a "golden opportunity" for EP Services to work with the private, voluntary and independent sectors of Early Years provision and proposes a broader model of service delivery by EPs in Early Years work, but the focus in her articles remains on supporting Early Years practitioners in their work with children with SEN. Dennis (2003) recognises the likelihood of Early Years practitioners envisaging a traditional role for EPs based on assessment and individual intervention and (Dennis, 2004) that EPs could end up replicating the statutory assessment role undertaken in schools. Dennis (2003) advocates the creation of senior specialist EP for Early Years, and Shannon & Posada (2007) identified that many services had created this role.

Shannon & Posada (2007) highlight that the major themes for change in reviews of the role of EPs has been to move away from statutory assessment and individual work towards a greater emphasis on consultancy, problem solving and organisational work (DfEE, 2000: DfES, 2006a). Whilst Dennis (2003) highlights an opportunity to go beyond the assessment and intervention role towards consultation and training about SEN related issues, I would argue there is a greater opportunity than that for EPs within Early Years work and Children's Centres. Wolfendale & Robinson (2001) suggest that whilst the EP contribution may be at an individual level, EPs also have a role at an organisational level. Indeed, they consider that EPs can provide training and interventions that promote child development and learning and can provide support for all Early Years children. It is this suggestion that I think can be developed further, in that EPs can seek to go beyond the traditional SEN role to an

organisational role to support and develop the Early Years children's workforce. Indeed, Shannon & Posada (2007) note that this is important for all EPs – not just the senior specialist EP – to be involved in organisational and development work.

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

Curran, Gersch & Wolfendale (2003) describe the work of EPs at three levels:

- the individual – e.g. assessment and intervention with a child;
- the organisation – e.g. providing in-service training to the staff of a school; and
- the system – e.g. developing additional provision with a local authority.

The projects described by Warner & Pote (2004) and Laffan & Synmoie (2004) are at an individual family level using the Curran, Gersch & Wolfendale's (2003) service delivery model rather than at the level of the system. Whilst there are examples of Early Years work by EP Services at the organisation or system levels within Wolfendale & Robinson (2001) work, there are limited examples beyond this.

Davis et al (2008) note there is little research detailing the roles EPs take within Early Years in Sure Start local programmes (SSLPs). A review of the literature

found there is little written about the role of EPs in Children's Centres and this may be due to the recent emergence of Children's Centres. Indeed, although Imich (2004) describes a range of work undertaken by EPs in Sure Start projects in Essex – developing speech and language programmes, supporting transitions, developing training and attendance at drop-ins – he calls for further work of this type to be written up. It is encouraging that he adds that he sees a future role for EPs in contributing to local evaluations, in a similar way to Laffan & Synmoie (2004).

As an EP currently holding a specialism in Early Years, I find a significant amount of specialist time is spent on SEN-related activities, such as attending multidisciplinary pre-school panel meetings and undertaking statutory work at an individual level. However, whilst on secondment for one day a week, undertaking evaluative research for the Early Years Childcare Service (EYCS), I have been able undertake the evaluative, strategic role suggested by Imich (2004) and evident in the setting and local authority level in Curran, Gersch & Wolfendale's (2003) service delivery model.

This section illustrates – both within the literature and at a personal level – the nature of the role that EPs have tended to take in Early Years work. It highlights the focus on work within the SEN field at an individual level, whilst acknowledging that there are opportunities to work in an alternative way as suggested or described in the literature. This focus on SEN work at the individual level is one of the challenges faced by EPs in developing different roles in Children's Centres and the following section will further explore the challenges facing EPs when developing models for work in Children's Centres. However, the opportunities presented by the emergence

of Children's Centres as a new area of work are exciting and have potential for all EPs.

2.3.1 Challenges facing EPs working in Children's Centres

The following section considers the literature underpinning the four main challenges facing EPs in their role, but I will argue that these have particular relevance to work in Children's Centres:

- The SEN – individual level of work that EPs are associated with;

- The lack of recognition of the role of EP in key Government documents;

- Confusion about the EP role; and

- Lack of clarity about the potential EP role.

The first challenge to EPs working with Children's Centres has been exemplified by the preceding discussion about the type of work undertaken by EPs in Early Years settings. It has been suggested that there tends to be an emphasis on individual work with children with SEN. Although as discussed previously, alternative ways of working within Early Years exist in the practice of some EPs (Warner & Pote, 2004, Laffan & Synmoie, 2004) there is limited detail available on the full scope, nature or effectiveness of this work. This indicates the need for EPs to write up work beyond the individual, SEN focus in Early Years, in order to contribute to a base of evidence-informed practice and to move towards work at a setting and organisational level as in Curran, Gersch & Wolfendale's (2003) service delivery model.

A second challenge is the lack of recognition of the contribution EPs could make to Sure Start programmes and Children's Centres. This is evident in the British Psychological Society's (BPS) (2007a) description of EP's role which places an emphasis on the schools, as demonstrated by the use of the words 'teacher' and 'education' in the following quote:

> "Educational psychologists tackle the problems encountered by young people in education, which may involve learning difficulties and social or emotional problems. They carry out a wide range of tasks with the aim of enhancing children's learning and enabling teachers to become more aware of the social factors affecting teaching and learning. Reports may be written about children for allocation of special educational places…." (p.1)

Whilst this does not discount the potential role of EPs in Children's Centres, it does highlight the focus on SEN and schools.

However, the DfES (2005b) states that EPs are seen as providing:

> "…assessment, consultation, advice and training to Early Years settings, schools, families and the Local Education Authority." (p.1)

Whilst this list of potential clients includes Early Years provision unlike the BPS definition, it illustrates a third challenge faced by EPs in developing a role in Children's Centres. This is that EPs face difficulties in being clear about who is the client within their work. MacKay (2002) found all of those listed in the above quote can be considered clients for EPs, within the same piece of work, but may have conflicts in what they want from EPs, resulting in confusion about the EP role and contribution.

A fourth challenge is the lack of recognition of the role of EPs in key Government documents. Imich (2004) notes that EPs are only mentioned three times in the Green Paper, Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003). In addition, the DfES

(2006b) review of the EP role stated that a significant number of stakeholders believe – and, indeed, about half of the EPs surveyed, indicated – that an alternative provider may have been able to carry out the work of an EP. The point made by Imich (2004) taken alongside   the DfES (2006b) review of the EP role illustrates the danger of the EP role becoming peripheral in the Government agenda. In addition, the Sure Start Children's Centres Practice Guidance (DfES, 2006a) makes no direct mention of EPs. This contrasts with the review of EPs (DfES, 2006b) which stated that 57% of Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) report that EPs are involved in Children's Centres, and 69% of PEPs felt EPs should be involved. This indicates that whilst EP Services (EPSs) feel they have a role to play in Children's Centres, this is not recognised in the DfES guidance available to Children's Centres and therefore is highly unlikely to be recognised by Children's Centres managers and staff. Consequently, Imich (2004) strongly advocates EPSs highlighting their actual and possible contributions to Sure Start programmes. Similarly, the DfES (2006a) stated EPs should be clear about the distinctive nature of their work.

Nevertheless, this fourth challenge has to be considered alongside difficulties in understanding what EPs do. Stobie (2002) found EPs themselves find it difficult to describe their role and there is much diversity in what EPs do. Ashton & Roberts (2006) discuss the need to find the distinctive contribution made by EPs, suggesting this would reduce individual EP's anxiety, support EPSs in being clearer about their role in multi-agency integrated teams (DfEE, 2000), and help EPs be clearer to stakeholders who may want to commission EP Services (MacKay, 2002).

From a personal perspective I have found that professionals who work in Early Years and with Children's Centres either view educational psychology as closely linked to SEN and statutory assessment of special educational needs, or are unsure of what EPs do and therefore could offer. Therefore, it would seem appropriate to apply the following comment by Ashton & Roberts (2006) to EPs in relation to those managing and working in Children's Centres:

> "The challenge now is to make EPs' distinctive contribution clear to schools, families and other professionals, but also to be perceived as valuable by them." (p.121)

The British Psychological Society (BPS) National Occupational Standards describe the particular skills, knowledge and understanding of applied psychologists. The BPS presents six "key generic roles" which could be useful in identifying with stakeholders the distinctive contribution that EPs make in aiming to improve outcomes for children (BPS, 2007b):

- Develop, implement and maintain personal and professional standards and ethical practice.

- Apply psychological and related methods, concepts, models, theories and knowledge derived from reproducible research findings.

- Research and develop new and existing psychological methods, concepts, models, theories and instruments in psychology.

- Communicate psychological knowledge, principles, methods, needs and policy requirements.

- Develop and train the application of psychological skills, knowledge, practices and procedures.

- Manage the provision of psychological systems, services and resources.

Whilst it has been discussed previously that professionals and parents may have an individual, SEN view of how EPs work, or have a limited understanding of the EP role, these six key generic roles could form the basis of explaining the potential role for EPs in Children's Centres. However, it is important to consider Wolfendale's (2006) analysis of EPS literature for parents and resulting recommendations. She recommended that EPSs review their documentation for parents and the public to ensure that all core information is contained in the documentation, and that it is written in clear, accessible and jargon-free language. Stringer et al (2006a) also highlight the importance of EPs being clear about the contribution of psychology within educational psychology. These recommendations would aid EPs in their work in Children's Centres, as it would enhance access for the community and also help professionals working within Early Years to understand the EP role and engage more effectively with EPs.

To summarise, a review of the literature demonstrates there are a number of challenges that face EPs in developing a role in Children's Centres. These include fixed views or, alternatively, confusion on the role of the EP; lack of recognition of a potential role for EPs in Children's Centres in descriptions of EP's work and within the Sure Start Children's Centre Practice guidance (DfES, 2006a); and a lack of clarity and information about what it is that EPs can offer to Children's Centres. Whilst considering the roles EPs could take in Children's Centres beyond the individual assessment and SEN role, I will argue that community and organisational psychology offers a potential answer to these challenges, offering a framework for developing a model for EPs to utilise in Children's Centres that will develop and empower sections of the Children's Workforce.

2.3.2 The **contribution of community and organisational psychology to the EP role in Children's Centres**

The DfES (2006b) review noted that the changing nature of Children's Services is likely to lead to EPSs becoming more community focused. Whilst this is not a direct link to community psychology, some EPSs have found that community psychology has much to offer in supporting the transition to a community focus with a reduced emphasis on school work (Stringer et al, 2006). Indeed, MacKay's (2007) fundamental argument is that educational psychology should be established as a true community psychology in order to continue and develop the profession. The following section argues that EPs could develop models of work in Children's Centres utilising community psychology and organisational psychology principles.

In order to analyse whether community psychology can support EPs in taking a different approach to work in Early Years and Children's Centres, it is vital to understand the principles within it. Orford (1992) describes community psychology as understanding people in their social worlds, and how this understanding has to be used to improve people's wellbeing. Therefore, community psychology aims towards a more equitable distribution of resources, emphasising the right for all to live in peace and freedom, to have fair treatment, self-determination and social justice. Therefore it is not objective, but has strong core values about the duties within community psychology to enable others and to look after the world and the people in it (Kagan, 2004).

The principles of community psychology (Kagan, 2004, Orford, 1992) can be explained as shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Explanations of the principles of community psychology

Principle	Explanation
Ecological approach	Individuals should be considered in terms of the historical, environmental and situational context in which they exist
Systems perspective	Community psychologists need to analyse at different levels to understand multiple causes of problems
Diversity and power	Community psychology encourages diversity and seeks to enable others
Prevention and social action	Community psychologists focus empowerment and wider social change alongside prevention of problems
Evaluation	Community psychology uses research methods that reflect the complexity of the relationship between the individual and their social context including action research
Community based	Practice should be located within or as close as possible to the relevant social context and utilises the psychological expertise in the community
Proactive approach	Community psychology seeks out the issues that are affecting the community
Interdisciplinary work	Community psychology is about sharing psychology with others and recognising the artificial boundaries that exist between different professional groups

Mackay (2007) views community psychology as an opportunity to work differently and to move beyond the:

> "…boundaries of special educational needs and the servicing of bureaucratic educational functions" (p.7)

However, EPs have to be aware of and understand the underpinning value system and aims of community psychology in order to consider whether these are compatible with current ways of working. Stringer et al (2006) – whilst writing about the compatibility of educational psychology and community psychology – acknowledge the central role of community psychology values but overlook the overtly political stance of community psychology, focusing on the type of work undertaken and how it fits with the Every Child Matters (HM Treasury 2003) Outcomes framework. Whilst

community psychology on the surface leads to a non-expert role and collaborative work that EPs are familiar with, much of community psychology work goes beyond the boundaries of traditional psychology due to its strong political stance. Therefore, if EPs are to embrace community psychology, they will support and develop other workers in Children's Services, as in the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a), and will have to move away from a 'visiting expert' (Bender, 1976) model. Simultaneously, EPs still need to be mindful of the need to show the distinctive contribution of educational psychology (DfES, 2006a) generally, as well as within Early Years (Imich, 2004). Therefore, rather than taking on community psychology as a whole, EP Services can utilise what is useful and transform them into new models and adopt a community psychology orientation. This orientation rather than wholesale adoption of a community psychology model would lead to developing and empowering the Children's Workforce whilst simultaneously being clear about the distinctive psychological element that they bring to the work. The next paragraph examines EP Services that have developed this orientation to their work.

Stringer et al (2006) report on the adoption of a community psychology orientation within their EP Service and suggest that EP Services should view themselves as beyond a service to schools and schools' definitions of their communities, and instead as a service for the community as a whole. In Hampshire this has been done by creating community teams of EPs, whilst maintaining a named EP for each school. In the case of Early Years work, it would seem appropriate to have a similar approach and have a named EP for each Children's Centre, with annual planning meetings. This would allow EPs to gain access to Children's Centres and be

seen as and become part of the team that supports the children and families who attend the Children's Centre.

In comparison, other EP Services (Davis and Cahill, 2006) have adopted community psychology alongside critical psychology. Critical psychology (Prilleltensky & Fox, 1997) attempts to apply psychology more progressively to promote social change and emphasises the need to both recognise power differences between social classes and groups and how these impact upon people. Prilleltensky & Fox (1997) argue that mainstream psychology overlooks this aspect and seeks to maintain things as they are, supporting institutional injustice, and therefore avoids the resulting social, moral and political implications.

 Community and critical psychology can appear similar but Prilleltensky & Nelson (1997) argue that community psychology is ameliorative and does not challenge the legitimacy of existing conditions, whereas critical psychology aims to transform oppressing institutions and alter unjust systems. They call for community psychology to move social justice to the foreground of its principles. Davis & Cahill (2006) have done this in that they utilise community and critical psychology together, promoting the view that psychology can be applied in the community whilst maintaining a critical view. This stance has led to community psychology becoming even more political, moving away from value-free ways of working, which is more likely to conflict with the role of working as a Local Authority officer.

This does not mean it is an impossible approach to consider, but one that may be difficult to pursue at an individual level and will need a clear direction and steer

from the EPS and has many implications for working within the wider team of Children's Services. It seems appropriate to adopt those aspects from community and critical psychology which enable work in the community whilst being reflexive about power differences and not seeking to maintain unjust systems. This is particularly appropriate to developing models of EP work within Children's Centres, which are a community based intervention by the Government that seeks to overtly reduce the gap between the most disadvantaged children and the rest as part of the Every Child Matters (HM Treasury, 2003) Outcomes framework.

In comparison with the recent shift to community psychology, Georgiades & Phillimore (1975) represent an organisational psychology approach that is over thirty years old. However, their guidelines for supporting organisational change have much relevance and overlap with the values of community psychology, especially in relation to the systems perspective. Georgiades & Phillimore (1975) highlight the following aspects of change practice:

- a move from treatment role to that of organisational change agent;

- working with the forces of the organisation that support change rather than resist, in order to develop a critical mass for change;

- allowing longer timescales for change;

- working with those who have freedom and autonomy to carry out change;

- involving managers in the change appropriately, not necessarily directly; and

- offering ongoing support and development to staff.

If this is compared with Table 1 (Explanations of the principles of community psychology) there are some parallels. However, the aspects of change practice focus on change within the organisation rather than community development. For example,

both organisational change aspects and community psychology principles recognise the importance of working at different levels of the organisation.

Fullan (2001, 2003, 2006) has developed Georgiades & Phillimore's (1975) ideas further in relation to considering how to sustain organisational change in educational settings. The themes are similar, but Fullan (2003) adds that it is important to build success by creating, celebrating and sharing successes of all sizes. Fullan's and Georgiades & Phillimore's models on how to create and sustain organisational change are valuable in considering the EP role in Children's Centres as a new area of working, and to go beyond the individual SEN role and instead work at an organisational level as in Curran, Gersch & Wolfendale's (2003) service delivery model.

Therefore, if these concepts from organisational and community psychology are considered alongside the Children's Workforce strategy (DfES, 2005a) and applied to developing an EP role in Children's Centres, it highlights the need to shift away from the external advice role and treatment role to an organisation change role. The purpose of the present study is to investigate an organisational role for EPs in Children's Centres through development of the Children's Workforce. Organisational and community psychology principles indicate the need to offer Children's Centres managers a range of options that demonstrate clearly what EPs can distinctively offer Children's Centres at an organisational level. In turn, Children's Centres managers need time to consider, discuss and select the option that is the most appropriate. The work, considered in the present study, was developed after offering Children's Centres managers a range of services to choose from, including individual drop-in

consultation sessions, training, support on parent programmes and the use of group supervision. The managers of the four Children's Centres selected group supervision with Family Support Workers as the piece of work they would like the EP to undertake in the Children's Centres. Therefore, the target group was identified by the manager, not the researcher.

I have argued that utilising a community psychology orientation alongside organisational psychology principles is a useful framework for EPs to consider in the development of their role in Children's Centres. The focus of the present study is a model for EPs working in Children's Centre using a group supervision approach with Family Support Workers. This type of approach has been described in the literature as being used with Portage teams and Area Special Needs Co-ordinators (SENCos) by an EP in Hampshire by Stringer et al (2006). As an EP with an Early Years specialism, it is an approach I use in my local authority with similar groups of workers. However, it seemed to have relevance to groups beyond this, and to be located within both the community psychology orientation, organisational psychology principles and the direction of the Children's Workforce Strategy (DfES, 2005a) as detailed previously. This resulted in consideration of the research question:

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

The following section examines the definitions of supervision, models of supervision, and the impact and outcomes of supervision, before looking more specifically at group supervision.

2.4   Supervision

2.4.1   Definitions of supervision

Scaife (2001) notes that supervision is used within educational, clinical, counselling and health psychology; mental health; social work; psychotherapy; psychiatry, nursing; art, speech and language and occupational therapies. She suggests that although there are many definitions of supervision, no single term can fully capture the meaning as it is used differently in different countries, and within different traditions. She also notes that her own definition overlaps with what other authors may define as consultation. Scaife (2001) defines supervision as:

> "…what happens when people who work in the helping professions make a formal arrangement to think with one another or others about their work with a view to providing the best possible service to clients and enhancing their own personal and professional development." (p.4)

> Hawkins & Shohet (2006) define supervision as:

> "a quintessential interpersonal interaction with the general goal that one person, the supervisor, meets with another, the supervisee, in an effort to make the latter more effective in helping people." (p.225)

There are similarities between the two definitions in that both focus on supervision as a tool to support those who work within the helping professions. In addition, both are broad definitions thereby demonstrating the breadth of the practice of supervision and that there are many different models and approaches incorporated within the term.

Scaife (2001) proposes that since it is difficult to define supervision, it is useful to identify a number of common features which characterise supervision in order to be able to differentiate it from conversations. These are:

- The purposes of supervision are to secure the welfare of the clients, and to enhance the services offered to clients by their therapists. In doing so the

supervisory focus may be almost exclusively on the needs and experiences of the supervisee.

- Supervisory relationships should either preclude the simultaneous existence of other-role relationships between participants (friendships, managerial relationships), or, where dual relationships pertain, this should be acknowledged and the implications addressed.

- Supervision is characterised by an agreement or contract (with varying degrees of formality) which specifies the purposes, aims, methods, terms, frequency, and location of the supervision.

- It should not be an aim of supervision for the personal development needs of the supervisor to be met by the supervisee, but supervision is appropriately addressed to the personal and professional development of the supervisee.

- Supervision can serve formative, restorative and normative functions (as discussed in the following section).   (p.5)

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) (2005) defines supervision as:

> "....the reflexive exploration and development of helping practice, in a supportive yet challenging context, involving individuals in the role(s) of supervisee and supervisor." (p.1)

This definition has similarities to the definitions given by Scaife (2001) and Hawkins & Shohet (2006) shown previously. However, the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) (2002) takes its definition of supervision a step further, as supervision is stated to be essential. Supervision is defined as:

> "….the opportunity to explore and learn from the practical, experiential and theoretical elements of professional practice and is an *essential* component of the psychologist's continuing development." (p.19)

Therefore, in the DECP view, supervision is considered more than an entitlement for all EPs, but an essential part of continuing development. Indeed, the onus is placed on the EP him/herself to ensure potentially controversial issues or those with uncertain ethical connotations are presented for supervision.

Although Hawkins & Shohet (2006) do not comment on the necessity of supervision, they highlight the value of supervision and the importance of it becoming a regular and integral part of working life:

> "We believe that, if the value and experience of good supervision are realised from the beginning of one's professional career, then the 'habit' of receiving good supervision will become an integral part of the work life and the continuing development of the worker." (p.3)

However, within educational psychology, Nolan (1999) notes that the focus tends to be on the use of supervision at the early stages of an EP's career as a trainee or when newly qualified, rather than reflection on supervision as a tool within practice or the outcomes of supervision. Carrington (2004) demonstrates this point in the following quote:

> "Supervision represents a key step along the path towards becoming a professional….." (p.32)

Sayeed & Lunt (1992) reported that whilst 91% of EPs and 71% of PEPs stated EPSs had designated members to provide support for newly qualified EPs also demonstrating a focus on supervision in the early stages of an EP's career. Similarly, Webster, Hingley & Franey (2000) highlight that although supervision is stated to be essential by the DECP (2002), and there are examples of good induction and supervision practices for some newly appointed EPs, there is a lack of consistency across and within services with great variation in the amount and type of supervision being given. Interestingly, they also note that non-existent, infrequent and fragmented

supervision in EPSs served to reduce confidence, self-esteem and commitment to the job, thereby highlighting an outcome from a lack of supervision. Whilst Nolan (1999) concludes that the provision of supervision for maingrade EPs appears to be improving, she suggests there was more needed in order to ensure quality supervision is available to all EPs on a regular basis.

In comparison, the definition offered by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) / Skills for Care (2007) is that supervision is:

> "… an accountable process which supports, assures and develops the knowledge skills and values of an individual, group or team. The purpose is to improve the quality of their work to achieve agreed objectives and outcomes." (p.5)

Whilst this definition, like the DECP definition, indicates the potential value of supervision, in contrast it emphasises the accountability element of supervision. However, the inclusion of accountability within supervision is not agreed within all definitions and approaches to supervision, and this is discussed further in the following section on the outcomes of supervision.

In contrast to the emphasis of the necessity of supervision in the DECP definition, supervision is not widely used in education and can be greeted with suspicion. Whilst Steel (2001) recommends it for teachers working with young people with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in order to alleviate stress, she states:

> "Supervision is a concept that is widely accepted and valued in the social service and nursing sectors, and evidence suggests that the educational field could benefit from adopting it." (p.96)

This suggests that supervision is not well utilised in education. However, there are exceptions, such as:

- Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) in the area of special educational needs (Norwich & Daniels, 1997);

- Staff consultation groups used in schools in Newcastle (Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell & Louw, 1992);

- Solution circles (Pearpoint & Forrest, 2002); and

- Circles of adults for working with children with emotional and behavioural needs (Wilson & Newton, 2006).

These exceptions will be examined further when discussing different models of group supervision.

In the Early Years sector and Children's Centres my personal experience is that supervision is more likely to be used if the Early Years workers have come from a social work or Family Support background. Supervision is less likely to be utilised for those from an education or daycare background, such as those in Foundation Stage classes/units in schools or in the private, voluntary or independent sectors. Elfer & Dearnley (2007) state it can be difficult for nursery staff – particularly from the private, voluntary and independent sector – to access any continuing professional development, whilst Hopkins (1988) emphasises the importance of staff having a regular and consistent place for training discussions. This contradiction highlights the difficulties in establishing supervision groups for workers in Early Years provision. It is important to be aware of the issue of differing structures and models in the different sectors when one considers the development of Children's Centres, which draw together many different disciplines, including daycare, health, social work and education, but also recognise the potential for disciplines to learn from one another and utilise a wider range of models and approaches such as group supervision.

Davis et al (2008) highlight supervision as an area of activity that is used by some EPs in Early Years work but could be put to greater use in Children's Centres. They suggest that this is particularly relevant as it demonstrates the contribution EPs can makes to the development of other professionals. Davis et al (2008) suggest that the evaluation evidence of those who have used supervision as a way of supporting other professionals indicates that this has been a successful way to develop their skills, confidence and knowledge.

2.4.2   Functions of supervision

Hawkins and Shohet (2006); Kadushin (1976); and Proctor (2000) suggest there are three main functions or roles in supervision shown below and summarised in the following table taken from Hawkins & Shohet (2006):

- Educative/formative – developing the skills, understanding and abilities of the supervisee, through reflection on and exploration of the supervisees' work,

- Supportive/restorative – responding to the supervisees' emotional response and reaction to their work and this helps reduce the stress and the incidence of 'burn out',

- Managerial/normative – the quality control aspect of the supervision, which plays a role for line managers but also ensures that the work is appropriate and maintains ethical standards.

Table 2: The three main functions of supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, p.58)

Hawkins	Proctor	Kadushin
Developmental	Formative	Educational
Resourcing	Restorative	Supportive
Qualitative	Normative	Managerial

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) note supervision can move from one function to another within the process, and the functions are not separate but combine and overlap. Within group supervision the three functions can be observed. However, the managerial function is not linked to a manager role but, instead, members of the group act as the verification that the work discussed is ethical by bringing actions and thoughts to the surface. The three functions link closely to the outcomes of supervision, and different approaches to supervision emphasise different functions.

Interestingly, Scaife (2001) acknowledges that informal and formal conversations undertaken for other purposes may also have similar outcomes to those designated for supervision and, indeed, that supervision does not have to be "overly special" to achieve its aims and purposes. She identifies one of the most significant factors in creating optimum supervision as:

> "…the interest that the supervisor has in supervision and in the supervisee. When this is the case, all else is likely to follow." (p.5)

In a similar vein, Proctor & Inskipp (2001) define the outcome of supervision:

> "By good supervision we mean supervision which is satisfying to the participants and to the supervisors and therefore enables the most effective work with clients – the heart of the matter." (p.99)

Therefore all these views reflect that the functions of supervision must be experienced by the participants of the supervision process and their clients. Indeed, when reviewing the literature on supervision, much of it focuses on explaining models and functions of supervision and how to undertake supervision effectively, with limited examples of evaluations of supervision. This has relevance to the present study where the outcomes of the supervision are reported by the participants themselves from open questions rather than selecting from a fixed list of outcomes.

Whilst there is broad agreement on the three functions of supervision, there is variance in the importance accorded to these functions. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise the supportive function of supervision in the helping professions by accentuating the importance that emotions being recognised in a safe setting are acknowledged, accepted, reflected upon and learned from. Similarly, Steel (2001) suggests that effective supervision allows adults to be psychologically held, listened to and encouraged, and to act as an emotional container for the supervisee.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) also link reduction of stress in the helping professions directly to the use of supervision, through discussion on how supervision is essential for professional helpers as an antidote to stress. They define stress as:

> "A state of fatigue, ill health and often depression caused by distressing, strenuous and emotionally overwhelming pursuits. Typically the individual is out of balance between what is given out and what is restorative and recreational for themselves." (p.225)

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) use the analogy of 'pit-head time' which the British miners of the 1920s fought for – the right to wash off grime from the pit in work time. The analogy is that supervision is the equivalent time for professionals to wash off their distress from working at the coal-face of other's people's distress and pain. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) state that it is essential for professionals to have this time to become aware of how the people they work with affect them and how they are reacting to it. They state that if these emotional needs are not attended, it soon leads to less effective workers, who either over-identify with the clients or defend against being affected by them. Over time, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) state that this leads to worker stress and burn-out. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) cite Pines et al (1981) to define burn-out as:

"The result of constant or repeated emotional pressure associated with an intense involvement with people over long periods of time. Such intense involvement is particularly prevalent in health, education and social service occupations, where professionals have a 'calling' to take care of other people's psychological, social and physical problems. Burnout is the painful realisation that they no longer can help people in need, that they have nothing left in them to give." (p.28)

In comparison, other authors such as Hanko (1999); Scaife & Scaife (2001); and Greenaway (2003) emphasise the problem solving or educative aspect of the process of supervision. Greenaway (2003) asserts that the main purpose of supervision is to assist learning, when examining three models of supervisory practice. Similarly, Scaife & Scaife (2001) reflect a similar focus on the educative function as demonstrated by the following quote:

'Whatever else is accepted as a purpose and aim of supervision, the development of the supervisee's knowledge, understanding and skills is almost invariably a central component" (p.15)

Indeed, Hanko (1999) chooses not to use the term 'supervision' and instead uses terms such as 'collaborative problem solving', highlighting the educative function.

Within literature written from educational psychology, Carrington (2004) notes that the literature on supervision share an assumption that supervision is beneficial to professional learning and development of the supervisee, thereby showing a focus on the educative outcome of supervision. Webster et al (2002), in their research on the transition between training to becoming an independent practitioner, consider the experiences of induction of 53 EPs. They draw upon Schon (1987, 1991) and his emphasis on the coaching of learning through systematic, reflective, evidence-based practice. Both Carrington and Webster et al, in a similar

way to Hanko (1999) and Scaife & Scaife (2001), highlight the educative function as the dominant function of supervision.

Within educational psychology and the DECP and CWDC/Skills for Life definitions of supervision, the managerial function of supervision is considered vital. However, the CWDC/Skills for Life and the DECP operate from different perspectives, as in the CWDC/Skills for Life definition where line management is seen as an interrelated aspect of supervision with clear links to performance management; whereas in the DECP definition, supervision is viewed as providing the forum whereby the individual psychologist's professional work and judgement is open to inspection by his/her professional peers. However, Nolan (1999) supports the position of the CWDC/Skills for Life of supervision and appraisal from an EP's perspective. She argues that when supervision and appraisal are closely aligned, this alliance would support the continuance of supervision as a professional practice within educational psychology, as it would meet the rising need for accountability in local authorities. In comparison, Steel (2001) reflects that whilst compulsory managerial supervision led by managers is the model favoured within social services and health, this is not an appropriate model to import into education. She states that a managerial model of supervision can lead to fears from the supervisee that they need to appear competent in front of their manager and therefore may compromise genuine acknowledgement of feelings and the supportive function of supervision. Others such as Jennings (1996) and Pomerantz (1993) support Steel's view. Jennings (1996) suggests supervisees need reassurance that supervision is a separate process from appraisal, and Pomerantz (1993) argues that EPs feel if supervision is separate from

appraisal it is more highly valued and allows a more open, honest climate in supervision.

In summary, whilst there is broad agreement on the three functions of supervision – educative, supportive and managerial – there is variety within the literature as to which function is emphasised. Within literature from educational psychology there is recognition of all three functions but much of the research focuses on the provision and quality of supervision (Nolan, 1999; Pomerantz 1993), supervision for trainees (Lunt, 1993) or newly qualified EPs (Lunt & Sayeed, 1995; Webster et al, 2000) with fewer articles considering the outcomes of supervision. The three functions of supervision are used as a framework for considering the nature of the outcomes of supervision in the present study.

2.4.3   The developmental approach to supervision

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) examine supervision styles, and suggest this is likely to be affected by the style of one's practitioner work. They emphasise that the supervisees and the supervisor need to share enough of a common language and belief system to be able to work and learn together. This has particular relevance when considering the use of supervision groups for Children's Centres workers where workers may have differing professional backgrounds and therefore differing terminology and belief systems.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) take a developmental approach to supervision. This has four stages showing how supervisees can develop in their approach to supervision (see Table 3 below). In addition, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) differentiate between

vertical and horizontal supervision. Vertical supervision occurs where a more experienced supervisor works with a less experienced supervisee. In horizontal supervision the supervisor and supervisee are on the same level, and this is what is encouraged within group supervision.

Table 3: Stages of development in supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, p.74)

Level	Centre of supervisees focus	Role of supervisee	Where is the concern of the supervisee located
Level 1	Self-centred	Novice	Can I make it in this work?
Level 2	Client-centred	Journeyman	Can I help this client make it?
Level 3	Process-centred	Independent craftsman	How are we relating together?
Level 4	Process-in-context-centred	Master craftsman	How do processes interpenetrate?

This has relevance to the present study where differing levels of expertise and experience of supervision may be anticipated in many groups of workers, in that some supervisees will be at novice level and others are at a further stage of development. Consequently, vertical supervision and horizontal supervision can occur simultaneously.

2.5 Group supervision

2.5.1 Definitions of group supervision

Scaife (2001) notes that some definitions of supervision emphasise a one-to-one supervisory relationship, and recognises this to be the most frequent form of supervision. However, she offers the following as a definition of group supervision:

> "…group supervision can offer a rich tapestry for learning and development with a range of possible formats and leadership roles."
> (p.4)

Similarly, Proctor & Inskipp (2001) state that their aim in promoting group supervision stems from viewing it as:

> "…an aid to seeing practice in a diversity of ways – offering a tower with many windows." (p.99)

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) simply define group supervision as:

> "…(what) happens within a group with a supervisor present." (p.225)

They clearly demarcate it from team supervision which is supervision of a whole team working together, or peer supervision where peers supervise each other in a reciprocal way.

Proctor (2000) elects not to offer a single definition of group supervision but instead discusses what it can offer and includes:

- An opportunity for practitioners to mix and open up their work to each other
- Scrutiny of practice
- Increased accountability
- Shared learning
- A variety of learning
- Skills and awareness in groups and systems
- Resources within the group for the work of supervision
- Harnessing differences in the group
- Economics

These will be discussed further within the section on the outcomes of group supervision.

2.5.2   Theoretical frameworks for group supervision

This section examines two main theoretical frameworks for group supervision: Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) Russian Dolls framework and Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) concentric rings framework. The two frameworks are compared with one another, and similarities and differences are drawn out.

Proctor & Inskipp (2001) use Russian Dolls as a framework for the interdependence of the various agreements that are needed between supervisors and supervisees if there is to be a group working alliance. This is represented as follows:

1. the largest Russian Doll contains the professional contract

2. the second Russian Doll contains the group working agreement

3. the third contains the session agenda

4. the fourth represents the uncontracted space where the supervisor balances the needs of the group members and the tasks to be supervised

5. the fifth Russian Doll contains the mini-contract for a particular piece of supervision that is brought to the group

The professional   Group working   Session   Uncontracted   Mini
contract   agreement   agenda   space   contract
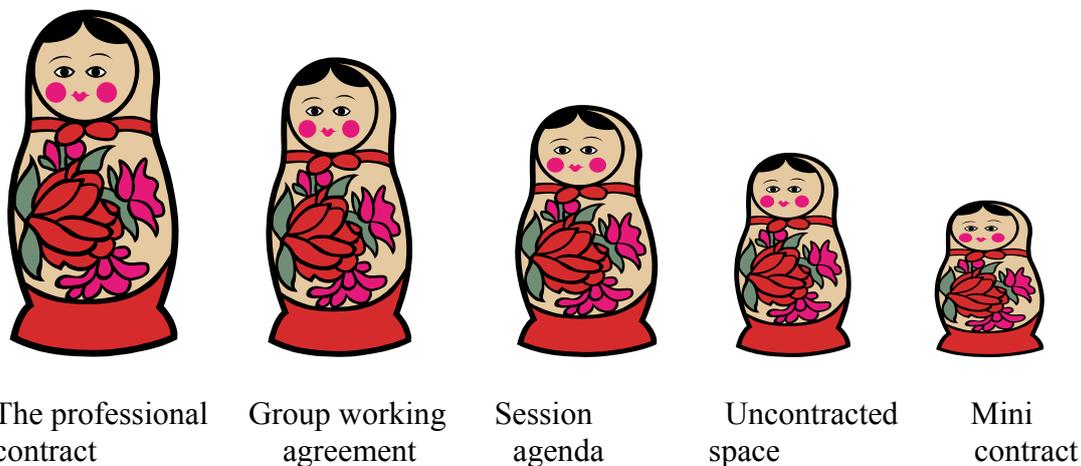
Diagram 1: Russian Dolls representing the agreements and alliances within group supervision (Proctor & Inskipp, 2001, p.106)

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) have a similar framework containing four concentric rings to represent the supervision processes in group supervision. However, their model is taken from the perspective of the group supervisor. Hawkins & Shohet view the central inner ring as the core skills of reflective supervision that are used in supervision one-to-one. However, within a group the group supervisor has to facilitate the responses of the group. This has parallels with Proctor & Inskipp's (2006) third and fourth Russian Dolls of the session agenda and the uncontracted space. The third contextual ring is managing the group dynamics and attending to the developmental stage of the group. This has similarities to the second Russian Doll and the group working agreement in Proctor & Inskipp's model (2001). The outer ring has similarities to the largest Russian Doll, the professional contract in Proctor & Inskipp's model (2001).

Space for
reflective
supervision

Facilitating group
responses

Attending to
group dynamics
and development

Managing group
contract and
organisational
boundaries
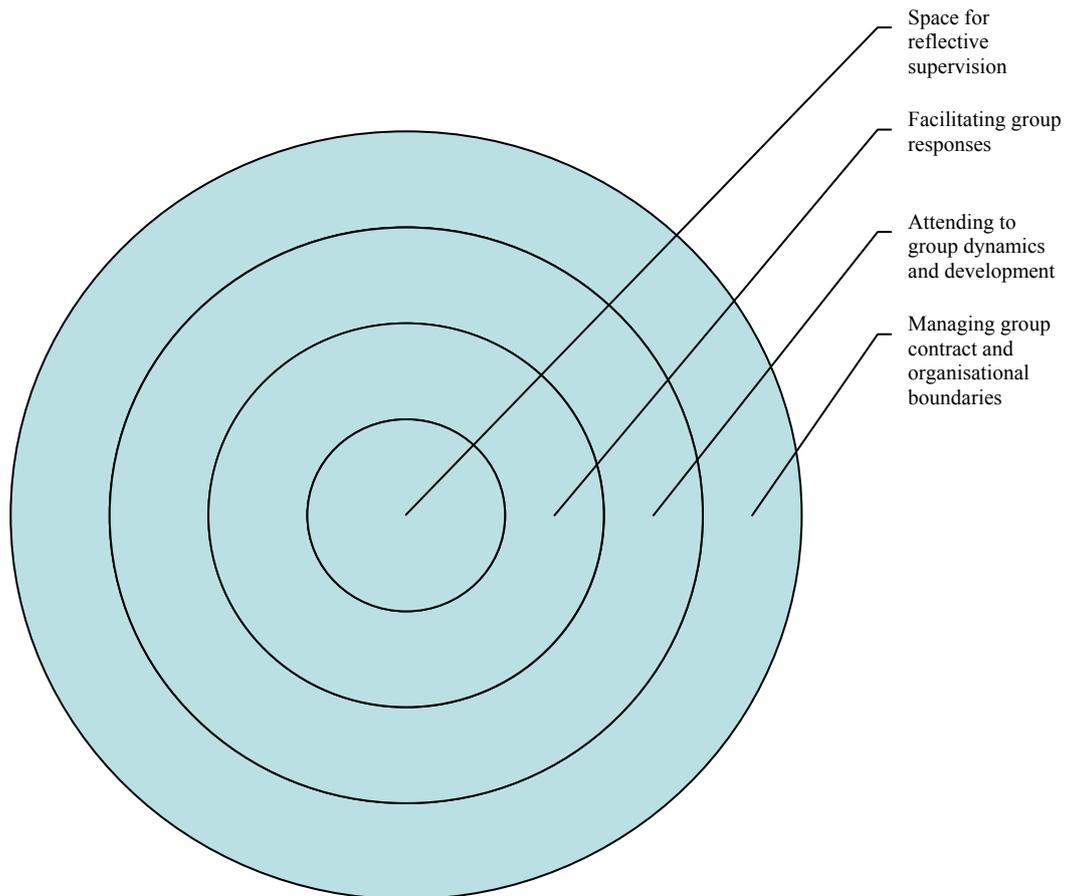
Diagram 2: The concentric rings of group supervision process (Hawkins & Shohet, p155)

The key texts on group supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, Proctor & Inskipp, 2001 and Scaife, 2001) all highlight the professional contract as critical within the process. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) describe the professional contract as containing the following non-negotiable parameters of the group supervision process:

- accountability of supervisor and supervisees;

- the conventions of confidentiality;

- Codes of Ethics and Practice that all are working with; and

▪ supervisor and supervisee rights, responsibilities and communication with managers.

Proctor & Inskipp (2001) use the metaphor of the largest Russian Doll as the professional contract and suggest it should be given in writing prior to the start of the group and needs time to be digested. Similarly, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise the importance of how a group is first contracted and suggest the following questions to guide this stage:

▪ How are the size and membership of the group to be determined?

▪ Who decides if it is an open or closed group?

▪ What messages are given to group members about their membership and expected attendance?

These questions show similarities to Proctor & Inskipp's non-negotiable parameters, as both create the intention of and boundaries to the group. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise that the professional contract is not a rigid set of rules to adhere to, but should be viewed as an important part of contracting the work with the group. Scaife (2001) emphasises that the professional contract underpins the establishment of a good working alliance. Similarly, Norwich & Daniels (1997) emphasised that how schools find out about Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) or are briefed on the TSTs' significance, value and implications was critical in whether schools decided to develop a TST or not. Farouk (2004) emphasises that an essential prerequisite for effective group work is the two-part entry phase where the group supervisor must firstly develop the support of the management team through the professional contract

and then gain commitment of those who may attend the group through the group working agreement.

The group working agreement is represented by the second Russian Doll, and contains the next level of detail needed to allow a working alliance. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest there are four aspects to this. These are:

- the type of group (authoritative, participative, co-operative or peer);

- the working arrangements for the group (duration, frequency);

- the ground rules of the group; and

- the individual responsibility of the participants.

This has similarities to Hawkins & Shohet's second and third concentric circles which examines how the group supervisor facilitates group responses and attends to the group dynamics and development.

The ground rules of the group are an aspect of the group working agreement. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) believe the group rules play an important role in setting up a safe climate for the supervisees to open their work to others, as this can be a process that can cause anxiety and fear. They suggest that the group rules can help prevent destructive group processes, but also encourage risk-taking alongside the need for safety. It is interesting to note that they also view the 'goodwill' of the group as essential to making the group supervision process work and suggest this can be encouraged by a reminder that everyone present shares the same goals and is there help one another. Kearney & Turner (1987) state that the function of ground rules is to:

"…facilitate communication, trust, self-disclosure, to encourage participants to take responsibility for their own learning…." (p.20)

Newton (1995) and Evans (2005) maintain that effective group work requires clear boundaries and this is best achieved through negotiated and agreed ground rules. Similarly, Proctor (2000) asserts that ground rules can support the group in having 'good group manners' within the group supervision sessions and help promote an atmosphere of empathy, respect and authenticity. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest that within a Type 2 or 3 group – as the group within the present study was intended to be – the ground rules should include respecting time, task and other people's opinions, and clarifying what is meant before disagreeing, advising or suggesting. Similarly, Newton (1995) had ground rules to avoid members of the group giving advice to others that may lead them to feel deskilled or disempowered, and therefore suggests statements have to be personally owned. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) promote a useful ground rule is to ensure feedback from group members is owned, balanced and specific.

This section has compared Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) theoretical framework with Hawkins & Shohet (2006) and illustrated the high level of similarity between them. Both emphasise the importance of the initial contracting stage for group supervision, including negotiating the professional contract, group working agreement and ground rules for the group.

2.5.2   The role of group dynamics in group supervision

Group dynamics are an important part within both Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) and Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) frameworks for group supervision. This section considers the following key theories within group dynamics:

- Rioch, Coulter & Weinberger (1976)

- Schutz (1967,1989)

- Adair's (1983) framework for group needs

- Tuckman's (1965) group movement model

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) draw upon the work of Rioch et al (1976) to consider the role of group dynamics in group supervision. Rioch et al discusses the value of considering the issues of competition and authority in the group and recommends the supervisor reflects that they too are subject to the same group pressures as the supervisees. Therefore, Rioch et al encourage supervisors to reflect that they too are competitive, resistant and reluctant to expose their own incompetencies and insecurities, and recommend that supervisors model a willingness to learn from their own imperfections rather than strive for perfection. Schutz (1967, 1989) identifies three areas of individual needs: inclusion needs, power and influence needs, affect needs. These needs are similar to those identified by Rioch et al. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest that Schutz's (1967, 1989) individual needs may arise in sequence, as the group develops over time, and therefore it is helpful to the group supervisor to be aware and prepare for individuals' changing needs.

Both Hawkins & Shohet (2006) and Proctor & Inskipp (2001) recommend that the supervisor is aware of and balances the three needs within Adair's (1983) framework for group needs:

- the tasks presented within the group;

- the individuals in the group; and

- group maintenance activities.

Hawkins & Shohet recommend that issues relating to the dynamics within the group should not be overlooked and left until crisis point. Instead, they advocate regular attendance to the dynamics within the group and suggest using questions to explore those in operation.

Tuckman's group movement model (1965) is highlighted as useful by Proctor & Inskipp (2001). This framework outlines the development the group develops through as a system with five stages to the framework:

- forming – the initial stage where individual inclusion needs are paramount;

- storming – the stage where the power and influence needs may become apparent;

- norming – the stage where the group working agreement is more truly agreed as the power and influence needs settle;

- performing – this is reported to be the optimal stage and it is encouraged to get to this stage as quickly as possible; and

- mourning – this occurs as the group ends and is going through a process of dissolution, and is important to mark if it is at the end of a fixed period such as training.

These key theories were useful for me to reflect upon as the supervisor of the group supervision in the context of the present study.

2.5.4   Types of groups in group supervision

Alongside the group dynamics, Proctor & Inskipp (2001) note that the type of group often influences the other aspects of the group working agreement, and suggest these should be reviewed regularly and that reminders may be needed, dependent on

the consistency of membership of the group. Therefore, this has greater importance if the constitution of the group is changing as in the present study. Proctor (2000) identifies different types of supervision groups as shown:

Table 4: A Typology for Supervision Groups

Type Number	Style	Role of supervisor	Role of supervisees
1	Authoritative Group Supervision	Supervises each supervisee in turn and manages the group	Observers and learners
2	Participative Group Supervision	Responsible for supervising and managing group	Co-supervisees with facilitation and induction by supervisor
3	Co-operative Group Supervision	Group facilitator and supervision monitor	Contracted by supervisor to actively co-supervise
4	Peer Group Supervision	Members take shared responsibility for supervising and being supervised.	

(Proctor, 2000, p.38)

Proctor (2000) states that these types of supervision are not distinct and, instead, may be referred to as points on a continuum, with Type 1 being at one end and Type 4 at the other. Proctor (2000) also indicates that the typology of groups is not hierarchical, and one type may be better suited for one group than another, but that they can be seen in developmental manner. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) explain horizontal supervision can be advantageous within group supervision when group members distrust groups or there may be negative group dynamics. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) draw upon Proctor's typology of supervision groups, and note the importance of using this typology in considering the type of group supervision to be used in group working agreement. Indeed, Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest that the supervisor

should take time within the group working agreement to declare his/her intention for the type of group it is to be, and encourage those participating to consider and negotiate. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) suggest that supervisors should consider the experience and skills of the supervisees to help decide on the appropriate type of group.

Within the present study, my aim as group supervisor was to work with the group within the Type 2 or 3 levels. However, it was recognised that other forms of supervision the FSWs experience or have experienced in the past may have been within Type 1. Therefore, the need to maintain a facilitator rather than an expert role remained uppermost in the sessions. It was also relevant to consider that different participants came into the group at differing levels and therefore there may be supervisees working at different levels within the group.

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) consider their model of group supervision styles (shown below) similar to Proctor's (2000) typology of supervision groups. Hawkins & Shohet's model has four quadrants, each representing a different style of group supervision:

- Quadrant A: Supervisor-led, process focused

- Quadrant B: Supervisor-led, task focused

- Quadrant C: Group-led, task focused

- Quadrant D: Group-led, process focused.

In Quadrant A and B the supervision group is more directively led by the supervisor and therefore is similar to the authoritative group in Table 4. The difference between

Quadrant A and B is that in A the focus is on the group process, whereas in B it is more focused on the content of the cases. In Quadrant C there is a shift towards a participative group where the group moves over to taking more leadership responsibility among the members. In Quadrant D this is similar to the co-operative group in Table 4, as the group is responsible for focusing on its own process.

Diagram 3: Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) model of group supervision styles

Task focused

C   B

Group led   Supervisor led

D   A

Process focused
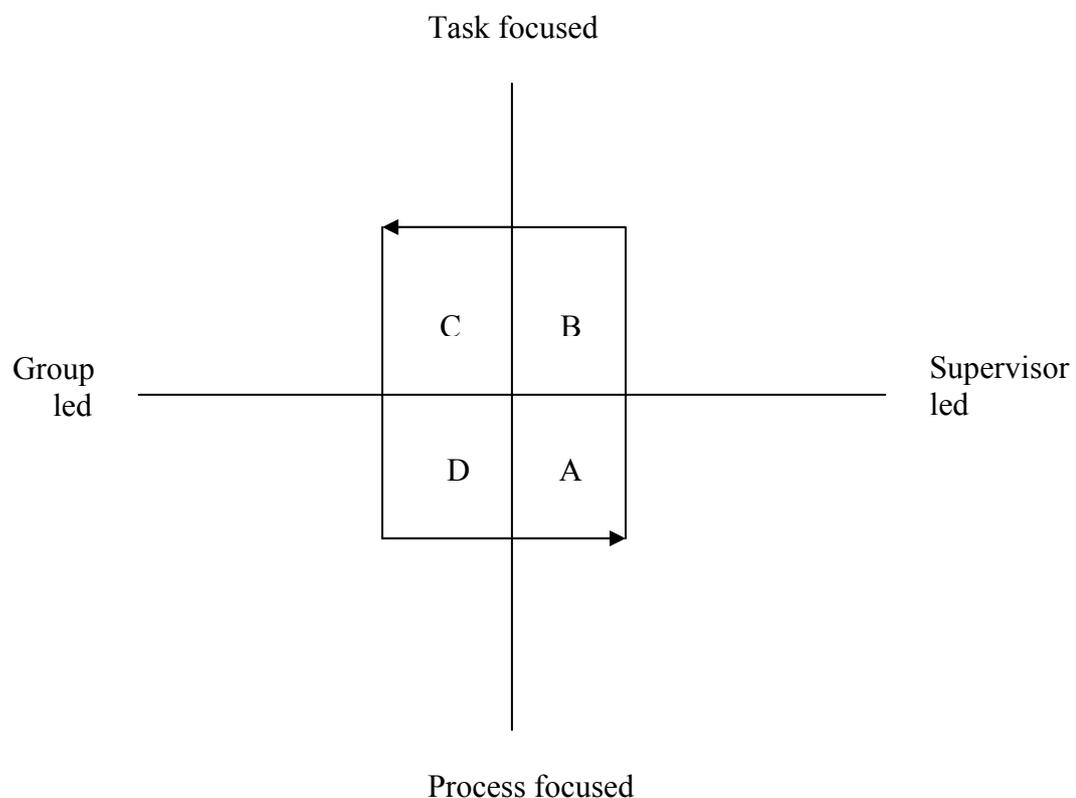
(p.154)

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) suggest that good group supervision moves flexibly through all these areas, depending both on the needs of the group and the stage of development of the group. They suggest groups often begin in Quadrant A, move into Quadrant B as the group settles to the tasks, and then incorporate the

remaining quadrants as the group matures and becomes more self-maintaining. They do note that it is important for the group to be aware of where it is and to avoid being locked into one quadrant's shadow side. The table below illustrates the potential difficulties within each quadrant:

Table 5:   Possible dangers of each quadrant in Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) model of group supervision styles

Quadrant	Possible dangers of being stuck in this style/quadrant
A	Group attends to personal needs of group members and ignores client issues
B	Group supervisors can show off to group members and create dependency in the group members
C	Competitive peer advice giving with group members outdoing each other
D	Over-collusive peer support groups that fail to attend to the task or needs of the clients

Both of these models helped me reflect upon my work within the present study as the newer members often entered in Quadrant A or at Type 1, whereas others who have been in the group longer help support the moves to quadrants C and D and to a more co-operative type of group.

2.5.5   Models of group supervision

There are a number of models used to describe supervision in groups. Indeed, the models – group supervision, solution circles, teacher support teams, group consultation, collaborative problem-solving, circles of adults and peer/team supervision – have been used in many areas of life within education and beyond. Table 6 gives an overview of these models, with brief definitions of each and the orientation each has emerged from. There is a range of orientations within this including the psychodynamic, problem-solving, non-directive, solution-focused and

consultation. However, the common idea amongst all is that groups can change and support individuals in their work. These models will be drawn upon to help illustrate the reasons for choosing the term 'group supervision' to describe the intervention used in this research.

Table 6: Models of supervision in groups, authors, definitions and orientations

Model	Authors	Definition by author(s)	Orientation
Solution circles	Pearpoint & Forrest (2002)	These are process tools in which a group of people can quickly generate ideas for solutions for a specific problem…with a facilitator who agrees to work with (the) circle and a graphics recorder (p.1)	Solution-focused orientation, used with a range of groups including education
Circles of adults	Wilson & Newton (2006)	This is a problem solving process that …take(s) an in-depth look at meeting the emotional needs that commonly underlie challenging behaviour in schools. The approach is co-facilitated and is designed to enable the participation of teacher teams to reach a deeper understanding of a young person and to evolve a set of hypotheses and emerging strategies that better accommodate unmet emotional and learning needs (p.4)	This builds upon Hanko's psychodynamic orientation in collaborative problem solving and solution-focused orientation in Pearpoint & Forrest's solution circles. It is used within schools
Collaborative problem solving	Hanko (1999)	This is a process of non-directively guided sharing of experience between fellow professionals of equal but distinct expertise (p.45)	Psychodynamic and mental health consultation orientation and has been used in schools
Issue-focused model for mental health group consultation	Cohen & Osterweil (1986)	This model emphasises educational preventative measures and is designed to satisfy consultee needs and reduce anxiety and defensiveness (p.243)	Issue-focused builds upon Caplan's consultation model
Staff consultation groups	Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell & Louw (1992)	These are school based staff support groups using consultation to facilitate the process of problem-solving (p.87)	Built upon Hanko's psychodynamic and consultation orientation and used in schools

Model	Authors	Definition by author(s)	Orientation
Teacher Support Teams	Norwich & Daniels (1997)	These are a system of team support of peers for individual class teachers experiencing teaching difficulties in relation to special educational needs (p.5)	Builds upon Hanko's psychodynamic orientation and is used in schools
Teacher Assistance Teams	Chalfant & Pysh ((1986)	These are a school-based problem-solving unit used to assist teachers in generating intervention strategies	A teacher-oriented consultation approach used to complement general and special educational programmes in USA
Peer/team supervision	Hawkins & Shohet (2006)	Team supervision is similar to group supervision but the team has an inter-related work life with a high level of shared activity and joint responsibility outside the group. (p.162-3) Peer supervision is similar to group supervision but has no group leader (p.165)	Psychodynamic orientation, used initially in therapeutic and counselling fields but has broadened to a range of groups
Group supervision	Proctor (2000)	Group supervision offers practitioners from differing traditions the opportunity to mix and open their work to each other with a facilitator to support the process (p.20)	Counselling and therapeutic orientation and has been used in a range of groups; mainly therapeutic or counselling background

As shown in Table 6, the main author within group supervision approaches in education is Hanko (1989a, 1990, 1999) who has written extensively about the use of a collaborative problem-solving approach with teachers in schools. Hanko (1999) explains her use of the term 'consultation' because she is keen to show that this is not a process where the facilitator acts as:

> "…..*sole* expert who provides others with solutions….Instead he acts as a non-directive facilitating fellow professional skilled in the art of sharing his experience and expertise in a process of joint exploration of a problem." (p.9)

She builds upon the work of Caplan (1970) who uses group consultation for professionals in social work, and the work of Balint (1956) within the medical profession. She also utilises ideas of 'work group' (Bion, 1961) where the group works together to explore an agreed issue and remains neutral on issues such as leadership as far as possible. More recently, Hanko (1999) has widened her approach, stating that a collaborative problem-solving approach for staff development can benefit all children rather than focusing on the special needs of some children. She chooses to emphasise the word collaborative rather than consultation within her definition in 1999, although she does discuss consultation within the book and earlier works do refer to the concepts of consultation in their title (Hanko, 1986, Hanko, 1987, Hanko, 1989b). Hanko's choice of the term 'collaborative problem solving' may illustrate her recognition that collaborative problem-solving is a more accessible term within education, and was also a term utilised by the DfEE (1998b).

In contrast, Stringer et al (1992) use the term 'staff consultation groups' to describe the work of Newcastle EPS in LEA schools, working with groups of teachers from within a school, or drawing teachers together from a range of schools. Stringer et al (1992) deliberately use the word 'consultation' to describe the process they use, due to the influence of Hanko (1990) within education, Caplan (1970) within mental health and Andersen (1984) and Tomm (1987) from family consultation. Indeed, Hanko acted as a consultant to Newcastle EPS and with staff at three schools within the LEA. Within the Newcastle group consultation approach the EP acts as a facilitator and also works in a non-prescriptive style. In a similar approach to Hanko, Stringer et al (1992) support the absence of head teachers from the group as a key mechanism within their staff consultation groups. Stringer et al (1992) developed the

group consultation approach further as they trained staff in how to establish and facilitate a staff consultation group independently of the EP facilitator and set up a Facilitator Support Group.

Cohen & Osterweil (1986) draw upon Caplan's (1972, 1977) work on group mental health consultation and use the term 'group consultation' in a similar way to Stringer et al to describe their work with teachers. However, they utilise an issue focus rather than a case orientation, with the issues being explored by the group members to gain a better understanding of the children in their class. Similarly, Gupta (1985) had a focus issue for each session drawn from a list suggested by the participants of the support group for head teachers.

Norwich & Daniels (1997) developed Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) based on Hanko's ideas. These were established to help teachers working with children with Special Educational Needs (SEN). Norwich & Daniels (1997) describe their model as more similar to that of Stringer et al (1992) than Hanko's, as it is a school-based collaborative teacher group. They describe their distinguishing feature as:

> "….their focus (is) on teacher and teaching concerns, with individual teachers participating on a voluntary basis and there being an analysis of particular teaching concerns with a quick response and follow-up." (p.4)

Norwich & Daniels (1997) also draw upon the use of Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989) as used in the United States of America. This approach was raised as an alternative to respond to issues raised in the U.S. Department of Education Task Force (Will, 1986) about over-referral rates to special education programmes, misclassification of students, rising costs and the need to

maximise opportunities for all students. Both the TSTs and TATs are groups of three teachers representing different levels or disciplines, who assist teachers who refer to the team. This could be viewed to sit within the team supervision approaches (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) rather than group supervision, but are worthy of inclusion as both use supervision/ consultation approaches within a group format.

Newton (1992) describes 'Circles of Adults' as a tool to support secondary teachers working with pupils with emotional and behavioural needs. He acknowledges the influence of Stringer et al (1992), Hawkins & Shohet (1989) and the Circles of Friends approach (Pearpoint, Forrest and Snow (1992)). This Circles of Adults approach has been further developed by Wilson & Newton (2006) to include graphic facilitation to help reach a deeper understanding of a child's challenging behaviour and to develop new strategies. It is linked to the Solution Circles approach advocated by Pearpoint & Forrest (2002).

Hawkins and Shohet (2006) differentiate between group and team supervision and use the term 'team' when the supervisees deal with the same group of clients. The Family Support Workers do not work individually with the same clients although there may be overlaps within support for families through Parent Groups. Therefore, it is inappropriate to call this 'team supervision' and the term 'group supervision' was selected.

I have chosen to use the term 'group supervision' within the present study as I am utilising models of supervision from Hawkins and Shohet (2006) and Proctor (2000). Whilst all members of the group in the present study could participate, they

were operating at differing stages of development (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006) with some choosing to remain silent. This meant the term 'collaboration' seemed less appropriate for the present study. I was keen to move away from using 'solutions' to describe the process, due to the importance of the supportive function of supervision and the discussion of emotional responses to issues, and to prevent emphasis on the managerial or educative solutions to issues. Similarly, the idea of 'problem-solving' was not an appropriate description of the process as the process was not only there for problems, but for exploring any issues participants wished to bring and also for sharing successes.

Therefore, the term 'group supervision' was selected for the present study, because whilst I agree with Hanko's (1999) definition of consultation, I believe there can be a tendency for participants to conceptualise consultants within the expert model (Bender, 1976). In comparison, supervision as defined by the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) (2002) is seen as an opportunity to explore and learn from the elements of professional practice and therefore can be a joint exercise where all group members are of equal status. As with any term used, the decision on the name of the group may vary in practice, and must be based on the preferences of the participants of the group. Group supervision was appropriate in this context, as it combines the concepts of group work and supervision. It is the name this group of Family Support Workers chose to use, and is a short, usable term that is likely to be understood by others within Family Support who may join the group. The following section will utilise these models to consider the different reported outcomes of what could be termed collectively 'group supervision'.

2.5.6   The role of the supervisor

Proctor & Inskipp (2001) describe the skills of the supervisor as including an ability to actively lead; maintain reflective space for the supervisees, allowing them to engage in their own and other's learning; to have clarity of role; be prepared, receptive and reflective; to know their own preferences within leadership of groups; and be able to use of frameworks on group development. However, Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) model of group supervision (Diagram 2) illustrates the four processes that exist within group supervision that have to be managed by the supervisor. These are to:

- allow and encourage reflective supervision, as occurs in individual supervision;

- facilitate the responses of the group members and link those back to the focus issue raised;

- manage the group dynamics, and respond to the developmental stage and needs of the group process; and

- ensure the supervision occurs within an appropriate contract and boundaries.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise the need for supervisors to set a safe climate for supervisees to open their work to others. They note that supervision is a process that always contains some anxiety and fear for the supervisees, as their work or they themselves as people may be perceived as flawed. Consequently, Hawkins & Shohet encourage supervisors to share their own anxieties, insecurities and concerns that they don't know the answers in order to alleviate these feelings, rather than being placed in the expert or manager role. This resonates with the literature on the need to empower the Children's Workforce, and for EPs to move away from giving expert advice, as illustrated by the "hero-innovator" (Georgiades & Phillimore, 1975),

"information-giver" (Egan, 1997) or "visiting expert" (Bender, 1976). Proctor & Inskipp (2001) strengthen Hawkins & Shohet's approach, and view anxiety to be part of the group process, and encourage supervisors to be aware of both group processes and the group dynamic, deeming this to be in the group supervisor's sphere of activity. Conversely, Gersch & Rawkins (1987) suggest that teachers' anxiety decreased with regular attendance at the teacher support group and a supportive approach by group members, therefore not viewing reduction of potential anxiety as within the supervisor's role. The concept of establishing a safe climate for sharing can be positioned alongside two of the principles of community psychology (Kagan, 2004; Orford, 1992): community psychology encourages diversity, and seeks to enable others and share psychology with others. This demonstrates how community psychology can offer an orientation to the potential EP role in Children's Centres, supporting and developing the Children's Workforce.

Evans (2005) examined the safe climate within the evaluation by questioning the extent to which participants felt able to contribute their skills and experience to the concerns of colleagues within group consultation. This was given the lowest ratings in comparison with the other questions and was highly variable, suggesting a number of participants felt uncertain of their own skills and experience, and were less confident of their contribution to the process. Evans reports this to be particularly evident in the first sessions, but reduces over time as feelings of empowerment are fostered by the supervisor in the participants as they attend more sessions. Evans promotes supervisors carefully monitoring feelings of empowerment in participants and encourages supervisors to utilise ways of validating and celebrating effective work practices in order to raise confidence. Whilst this does highlight that confidence in

participants can be variable, it places the promotion of confidence of participants as a role for the supervisor.

Within the present study I was the facilitator of the group and utilised literature on the role of the supervisor, particularly in relation to the professional contract, group working agreement and ground rules in reflecting upon the role I took. The group supervision was intended to be within Type 2 and 3 of Proctor's (2000) typology of groups – the participative and co-operative types of groups – and therefore this needed reinforcement as there were times where the members of the group seemed to desire an expert approach.

2.5.7 Who should be the group supervisor?

The literature offers a range of suggestions as to who should take the place of the group supervisor. Within education contexts it is often a role taken by EPs individually (Guishard, 2000; Hanko, 1987; Bozic & Carter; 2002, Gupta, 1985; Farouk, 2004) or in pairs (Evans, 2005) or alongside another professional such as Learning Support Teachers (Tempest et al, 1987). Hanko (1999) suggests EPs as group supervisors, but adds there are other professionals such as clinical psychologists and systems consultants who could carry out this role. Hanko's reasons for suggesting that EPs are particularly well placed to undertake this role are that they have direct access to all levels of the system within the school and school services. This can be positioned alongside the principles of community psychology, whereby the community psychologist needs to analyse at different levels to understand multiple causes of problems (systems perspective principle within community psychology as shown in Table 1). Gersch & Rawkins (1987) also state that the EP is well placed:

> "…by dint of his or her knowledge of behavioural methods, group dynamics and assessment techniques, in addition to being a relative 'outsider' to the group has a unique contribution to make to such a group." (p.81)

This quote emphasises both the potential skills and qualities of the EP within their external role to the school as an organisational change agent described by Georgiades & Phillimore (1975). Steel (2001) also suggests an external supervisor can be a good choice for supervision within the education field, as an external supervisor can avoid the politics of the staffroom and offer greater objectivity, whereas members of the staff team may collude with other members of the team. This literature has pertinence to the present study where I was an external supervisor to the group, but also could be used by EPs to show their distinctive contribution to Children's Centres, as few have access to clinical psychologists or systems analysts.

Bozic & Carter (2002) questioned the participants of the consultation groups about the need for an external consultant and state that their research adds weight to the notion that setting up consultation groups as a self-sustaining feature of a school requires ongoing support and is more than guiding staff through being participants in groups. They found that 90% of teachers questioned felt that the establishment of a consultation group required the aid of an external consultant, although 30% of teachers were confident to sustain the group without the EP once it had run for a number of sessions.

Nevertheless, there have also been successful supervision groups or support teams run by teachers or other school-based staff including Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) (Norwich & Daniels, 1997), Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant &

Pysh, 1989), Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995) and Staff Consultation Groups (Stringer et al, 1992). Newton (1995) explained his reason for not developing an external supervisor role as part of "giving away psychology" (p.12) and reflected this had helped this type of approach become embedded in school culture. Stringer et al (1992) reported great variance in the length of time sustained by staff consultation groups. Key factors were that facilitators needed to be enthusiastic, skilful and well respected by their peers; in addition facilitators needed the initial training course and follow up sessions. Norwich & Daniels (1997) reported that all the schools with TSTs had at least one support visit per term by the project staff and one four-way meeting with other schools in their phase. However, the impact of these support visits and meetings is not discussed in the article. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) also did not have facilitators in the TATs but emphasise the need for a support system for the TATs either in the form of a district-wide co-ordinator, ongoing meetings or newsletters. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) stress that it is not the specific form of support that is critical for the continuation of the TATs, but rather its existence and availability. Stringer et al (1992) developed a facilitator support group that met regularly after the training and reported that attendance at the support groups had been good.

Interestingly, Cohen & Osterweil (1986) did not consider psychologists automatically able to undertake the consultation role in the issue-based group sessions. They offered experiential training, with trainees becoming participant observers in an active group, then practicing the group consultation skills gained with other trainee group consultants and an experienced group supervisor, for psychologists who had gained experience of individual consultation. Comparably, Hanko (1999) suggests that EPSs and training departments would need to enhance

EPs in their consultative skills in order to prepare them for collaborative problem solving in groups. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest that group supervisors need to take into account the following:

- their own developmental stage as a group leader and supervisor;

- the context of the group in terms of their culture and expectations;

- the developmental stage of the supervisees; and

- their own values and understanding about learning, practice and living (p.121).

In addition, Proctor (2000) states regular attendance at group supervision is essential for those training to work as group supervisors in order to experience the group supervisor role. She encourages group supervisors to have ongoing individual or group mentoring, and suggests the use of supervisor development groups for professional monitoring, development and accountability. Stringer et al (1992) promoted the use of the Service Staff Consultation Group for EPs, in order to practise the approach of group consultation in a safe and supportive way.

In contrast, Davis et al (2008) suggest that the evidence from the involvement of EPs in Sure Start Local Projects (SSLP) illustrates that supervision as a way of supporting other professionals has been successful. Davis et al suggest supervision is an area where EPs should feel confident and knowledgeable and suggest this as an area for development, but do not comment on the use of group supervision. However, whilst EPs may be confident and knowledgeable about supervision as a process, group supervision involves different skills and understanding, and therefore may be widely used but poorly understood (Prieto, 1996). The literature demonstrates there is a need for ongoing training and development for EPs, so they are able to confidently and

knowledgeably begin using models of group supervision to work in Children's Centres and with other parts of the Children's Workforce.

2.5.8 The size of the group

The literature offers ideas on the size of group used in the intervention but the reasons for the choice of size are rarely given. Indeed, the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989) and the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) (Norwich & Daniels, 1997) contained four, but the reasons for this are not explored in either article. Cohen & Osterweil (1986) specify group sizes of three to fifteen, but do not explain the reasons for the size of the group. Gersch & Rawkins (1987) report that the teacher support group was attended by between six to eight people. It is important to note that all staff members were invited and so, potentially, the group could have been much larger. This may indicate that the group self-regulated on size, as the authors indicate that most teachers attended on one occasion or another but no detail is offered on how the group was maintained at an even size. Stringer et al (1992) also reported that groups tended to be between six and twelve, and in their evaluation of what promoted or hindered the establishment of a staff consultation group, size of the group was not mentioned. Wilson & Newton's (2006) guidance on Circles of Adults gives no direction on the size of the group. Whilst this could indicate it is not a significant issue for participants, it could reflect the methodology selected or that teachers are able to confidently participate in a range of different sized groups.

Lunt (1998) states the optimum size of the group for a focus group, rather than a supervision group, but this has relevance to supervision groups. Both focus and supervision groups have an explicit need for discussion and interaction between group

members, and therefore the group needs to be of a size which facilitates discussion and interaction. Lunt (1998) cites Millward (1995) who states that the average size of the group used for focus group research in psychology is nine, with a range of six to twelve.

However, Proctor (2000) suggests a smaller number for group supervision and gives the optimum size of the group as between four and six to allow for intimacy and variety. Conversely, she suggests it is difficult to have an upper size to the group and this depends on how much supervision or reflective space each member of the group is getting individually and what is feasible within the size of the group in the time available. Hanko (1999) suggests groups of up to twelve members to offer maximum benefit of members' range of experience and expertise. She suggests that larger groups are inappropriate as they hinder participants expressing their ideas and that the presenter of a case may end up with more contributions from members than s/he can examine, and that some members may become silent. She also suggests it forces the consultant to the group to take a chairperson role rather than playing a part in the problem solving and facilitation, thereby preventing joint and equal exploration.

In summary, it would appear from the literature that group sizes vary and there is a range of sizes suggested from four to twelve participants. However, Cohen & Osterweil's (1986) proposal that group members are interviewed prior to the group may offer a potential way forward, as within this the optimum size of the group could be discussed, either at this stage or within the professional contract and the group working agreement stages.

2.5.9   Outcomes of group supervision

Some authors such as Hawkins & Shohet (2006) and Proctor (2000) focus on giving guidance on how to set up groups and the rationale for doing so – as do other articles written by EPs (Farouk, 2004; Kearney & Turner, 1987) – rather than examining outcomes. However, the following section reviews articles that undertake evaluation, and consider the outcomes of group supervision and the methodology used within the articles.

Norwich & Daniels (1997) describe their evaluation of the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) as using a "disciplined eclectic" approach (Shulman, 1986) and made systematic use of both quantitative and qualitative methods. Norwich & Daniels (1997) analysed records of the TST meetings and questionnaires completed at the end of the monitoring period by the head teachers, TST members and referring and non-referring teachers. In comparison, Stringer et al (1992), Gupta (1985), Gersch & Rawkins (1986) used questionnaires used to examine the impact of the staff consultation groups. Cohen & Osterweil (1986) evaluated their model of group supervision report by reviewing whether the eight pre-determined needs of the consultees were satisfied. This has similarity to Guishard (2000), and Bozic & Carter (2002) have used Likert-type scale approaches to evaluating their models of group supervision. These chosen methods have implications for the methods and methodological framework selected to examine group supervision in the present study and are further discussed in the methodology chapter.

As discussed previously, different models of group supervision may place emphasis on one of the three functions of supervision which, in turn, has an impact on

the evaluation of the outcomes of the supervision model. Some approaches to group supervision emphasise the solution or educative function, such as Solution Circles (Pearpoint & Forrest 2002), Circles of Adults (Wilson & Newton 2006) and Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989). Wilson & Newton's (2006) aim for Circles of Adults was to enable teaching staff to have a better understanding of the child and to develop strategies to meet difficulties faced. Similarly, Hanko (1999) believes that collaborative problem-solving enables teachers to take a fresh look at an issue and develop their own strategy to improve the situation, thus leading to self-improvement. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) also state that TATs may help teachers to analyse and better understand classroom problems, set intervention goals and create practical solutions. These lie squarely within the educative function in Hawkins & Shohet's model of supervision.

However, the educative function of supervision may contain broader outcomes beyond the development of strategies for the focus child. Stringer et al (1992) reported that some of the main positive effects from participating in a consultation group included sharing expertise and learning. Newton's (1995) evaluation showed that school staff reported developing their skills in working with individual children but also in chairing pupil planning meetings, greater ability to ask questions and reflect on situations where children were presenting with difficulties. Interestingly, Norwich & Daniels (1997) note that many of the strategies or materials suggested were not new and were familiar, but that the TSTs helped teachers access their own teaching competence, as 34% reported an increased ability to distance themselves from a problem and re-examine their activities. Certainly, Proctor (2000) views that the group option within supervision enhances the educative function, as

group members have access to a wider range of practice and, therefore, a wider range of learning opportunities. Proctor (2000) and Hanko (1999) emphasise the value of shared learning, and sharing knowledge and skills as particularly stimulating, and Proctor (2000) suggests that group members' individual learning aims can be shared within the group and regularly reviewed as part of the group supervision process.

The results from Norwich & Daniel's (1997) research also showed outcomes within the supportive function of supervision. They reported the TSTs increased teacher's tolerance of the challenges and the lack of responsiveness from the children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and were therefore more able to actively engage the children with SEN. This was because the TST enabled the teachers to perceive their pupils with SEN as within their teaching capability and responsive to their teaching. The analysis the TST meetings showed that 20% of cases, in which specific notes were made, detailed increased teacher confidence and happiness. Similarly, Newton (1995) reflects that the use of Circle of Adults led to increased teacher tolerance of the children they worked with.

In a similar way, Gersch & Rawkins (1987) emphasise that their evaluation highlighted a highly positive impact on teachers' perceptions about pupil changes, rather than focusing on actual behavioural changes in the individual pupils. The majority of the respondents (88%) reported that the teacher support group at the special school for children with Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD) was helpful and 82% reported it had helped them with their work. Over 70% of respondents stated that the group had helped the development of their knowledge of behavioural treatment and helped them generate new ideas, and approximately 60% stated the group had

extended their knowledge of other treatment methods other than behavioural treatments. These outcomes are within the educative function of supervision. However, Gersch & Rawkins (1987) report additional unanticipated outcomes from the group, as it provided support and social contact for the members of the group. Similarly, Chalfant & Pysh (1989) reported supportive outcomes of the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) despite the focus being on problem solving and devising interventions and educative outcomes. The second highest outcome was the provision of moral support and reinforcement of teachers by the team members (24%), with the first being the effectiveness of group problem solving to generate useful strategies (38%).

Bozic & Carter (2002) also examined both supportive and educative outcomes of consultation groups. The six questions on the effects of participating in a consultation group examined outcomes linked to the educative function of supervision and the supportive function through consideration of impacts in terms of enhanced confidence and reduced job-related stress. Within Bozic & Carter's (2002) research, the three strongest reported effects of the six offered were within the educative function. Ninety-two per cent of teachers reported it made them think more deeply about the way they worked with individual children, 80% reported it had raised awareness of strategies that could be used in the classroom and 64% were trying something new as a result of being in the group. Just over half of those who responded felt participation in the group had made them feel more confident about working with children with SEN, and a similar proportion felt less stressed by things that happen in school. Similarly, Guishard (2000) examined both educative and supportive outcomes and reported that 75% of Further Education tutors involved in the staff consultation

groups felt they had gained knowledge and understanding, and 63% felt they had gained confidence about achieving set goals with their students.

Chalfant & Pysh (1989) also point out that teachers have relatively few opportunities to share their problems and ways to solve them. Newton (1995) reinforces this point:

> "…many individuals working in and with schools find themselves increasingly exposed and vulnerable with little opportunity to engage in reflection upon their own reactions to individual pupils or to think and plan proactively about what might be the best strategy in a given situation. (p.9)

Gupta's (1985) research found head teachers seldom have ready access to groups of their peers and work on their own for the majority of the time. Steel (2001) notes that even the most competent practitioners can start to feel isolated unless support is available, and therefore actively encourages practitioners to ask for help and share problems. Stringer et al (1992) highlight an increased awareness of the occupational stress on teachers and a simultaneous acceptance that teachers can share concerns and look actively for support. Qualitative comments cited by Bozic & Carter (2002) and Stringer et al (1992) report teachers feeling a reduction in isolation and reassured that others experienced similar problems, demonstrating that models of group supervision offer a forum to achieve the outcome of opportunities to share and a reduction in feelings of isolation.

Evans (2005) examined a different outcome in her evaluation of the use of a group consultation approach within the service. In addition to evaluating educative outcomes, Evans also asked how empowering the approach had been to those

involved. It is interesting to note that the responses to this were more variable, with lower ratings given in response to the question on the extent they felt able to contribute skills and experience to the concerns of colleagues. Evans suggests that a number of consultees felt unsure about their own skills and experience, and this was particularly evident in the first group consultation cycle.

Research discusses broader outcomes for the setting beyond individual outcomes for the participants of the group supervision models. Guishard (2000); Wilson & Newton (2006); and Norwich & Daniels (1997) believe their models of group supervision promoted and supported inclusion of a broader range of pupils/students as it empowered the staff to believe that they could teach the students with SEN. Farouk (2004) suggests that the process of using staff consultation groups influenced the school as a whole, as teachers became increasingly used to supporting each other in their work. Therefore, the outcome of group supervision or group consultation can be that it has longer-term effects on the culture of the setting in that staff are more likely to support and reflect with each other out of sessions. Lally & Scaife (1995) term this as 'teacher empowerment' and state this is a particularly important outcome of collaborative approaches, as in their research it was clear:

> "...the value of sharing in open discussion about professional issues had not been articulated or legitimised….and the recognition of the need to legitimise professional concerns through dialogue." (p.325)

Lally & Scaife's work used a range of tools including supervision to explore non-hierarchical contexts for collaborative reflection and peer review, thereby changing the school culture in relation to dialogue about professional issues.

In summary, the literature describes a range of outcomes and these have been influenced by the methodology chosen by the researchers – therefore, it was important to capture key stakeholders' views of the outcomes of the group supervision sessions and not to present a closed list of outcomes. Within the present study I offered a range of options of work I could undertake as an EP at the organisational level of the Children's Centres. However, I did not, at the time, explore why this option of group supervision was selected and chosen for Family Support Workers (FSWs). Therefore, it was important to explore from the FSWs and the Children's Centre managers what they feel the outcomes are from group supervision. Although there are suggested outcomes within the three functions of supervision detailed within the literature, it was important to be open to other possible outcomes, both negative and positive, in the research process. The different potential outcomes are likely to be different for the FSWs, due to the differing nature of their work with children and families, compared with the participants described in the research within the Literature Review, who were teachers within the field of education or professionals from counselling or therapeutic backgrounds. Simultaneously, it was important to incorporate individuality, as each person may have different outcomes from participating in group supervision. Therefore, whilst the outcomes that have been detailed within previous research need consideration, there needed to be openness to alternative, previously unanticipated outcomes, leading to the following research question:

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

2.5.10 Contexts for group supervision

Context is linked to circumstances and Pawson & Tilley (1997) include the spatial location and the social aspects of the context. A number of models of group supervision have been discussed in the previous section, and these have been used in a range of contexts. However, Chalfant & Pysh (1981) highlight the potential use within education:

> "Teachers ordinarily have few forums to share their problems in a professional way and brainstorm solutions with one another. Building level teams provides a forum where teachers, like physicians, can consult with one another, share their expertise, and benefit from one another's experience and areas of speciality." (p.57)

This quote stresses the absence of group approaches for teachers in the US to share their work and problems with each other in a forum, and leads to consideration of other contexts where professional have limited opportunities to share their work with each other.

Within education in the UK, although supervision is relatively rare, EPs have used group supervision within special schools (Gersch & Rawkins, 1987), with head teachers (Gupta, 1985), across different sectors in education (Hanko, 1987), within the further education sector (Guishard, 2000) and with groups of schools (Evans, 2005). Both Farouk (2000) and Newton (1995) used a group supervision approach with teachers working with children with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Stringer et al (1992) describe how the staff who were trained to run a staff consultation group came from all phases and sectors of education: nursery, infant, first, junior, primary, middle and secondary, special schools and also support services.

There are models of group supervision that draw from more than one site, such as Hanko (1987) who worked with teachers from across two or more schools serving the same community and could be described as having the same shared goals of supporting children and families in this community. She suggested this had particular advantages, as colleagues from other schools may have previously taught the focus child or his/her siblings and may be able to add something of the family situation. Evans (2005) also details how Powys EPS worked with groups of two to five schools, as the local authority contained a large number of small rural schools often located some distance between each other. Evans (2005) suggests that this was particularly beneficial for staff in the small, rural schools, as they often worked in isolated situations and developed local partnerships to support each other.

The relationship with managers within group supervision processes can be considered a feature of the context. Norwich & Daniels (1997) did not include head teachers in the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs), and suggested that the TSTs be comprised of SEN co-ordinator, a member of the senior management and a more junior class teacher. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) reported 91% of the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) cited support from the building principal as a key factor contributing to their effectiveness, and that there are three aspects needed within this support:

- making time available for the team to meet regularly;
- showing a positive attitude to the TAT by encouraging use of the team, reinforcing and giving incentives for those who do participate and publicising team effort and success; and

▪ planning how to set up the team through considering the needs, interest and readiness of the staff, the resources needed and how the team will fit alongside other structures in the school.

Similarly, Stringer et al (1992) stress that one of the four main factors that support the establishment of the staff consultation groups was that the group be valued and supported by the head teacher/senior management. Hanko (1999) reinforces this is needed within the entry phase and that it is:

> "…crucial to secure the assistance of the head teacher and senior staff that the aims of such innovative support are congruent with the interests of the school……..Their active support is vital to legitimatise the potential group, to protect… its arrangements against such hazards as simultaneous competing meetings and to allow the growing insights to be put into practice." (p.101)

In this quote Hanko emphasises the critical importance of the managers in supporting the group in practical ways to allow the group to maximise its potential use to the staff. As an inhibiting factor, Norwich & Daniels (1997) reported that if a head teacher was sceptical or hostile to setting up a TST, even if the staff were in favour of establishing a TST, it was unlikely to be successful.

Hanko (1999) advises of the need to discuss with head teachers the importance of their support, but also the potential negative impact of the head teacher's presence in the group and the necessity of confidentiality of the details of the discussions. She proposes this entry phase is negotiated fully before any introductory meetings with participants. The entry phase was also found to be vital by Norwich & Daniels (1997), as very similar to the professional contract described by Proctor & Inskipp (2001), and the early stage contracting before the group starts as described by Hawkins &

Shohet (2006). Farouk (2004) also saw the entry phase in two parts: firstly developing the support of the school management team and secondly gaining the commitment of individual teachers.

There are differences in opinion within the literature as to whether models of group supervision support the attendance or absence of managers. Gersch & Rawkins (1987) reported that the head teacher was invited to the teacher support group but Chalfant & Pysh (1989) suggested principals only participated on the Teacher Assistance Teams when requested. In comparison, Norwich & Daniels (1997) explicitly do not include head teachers in the TSTs, although senior staff in the form of school-based special needs teachers (SENCos) tended to be a part of the TSTs. Hanko (1999) suggests that the presence of a head teacher in a problem-solving group can:

> "…easily inhibit the process of skill enhancement by virtue of his position as assessor of staff competence." (p.101)

Hanko (1999) supports this view by drawing upon Hargreaves' (1972) work that describes how difficult it is for teaching staff to talk freely in meetings with the head teacher present, even when on the best of terms, and there can be a tendency for staff to impersonate what they feel is the head teacher's ideal of a good teacher or become silent in the presence of the head teacher. Stringer et al (1992) support Hanko's view in promoting the absence of head teachers from groups due to their management role in school. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) make no direct comment on managers being present or absent in group supervision, but do encourage that this is made clear in the early stage contracting – the professional contract – before the group starts. Chalfant & Pysh's (1989) approach to this issue may be helpful, as managers could be invited

when supervisees wish for them to participate, and therefore it may be that managers could ask to attend when they wish to bring an issue to the group.

The present study has explored the use of group supervision in a new context unconsidered by the previous research: Children's Centres with Family Support Workers. Therefore, in order to consider whether this is an appropriate context for group supervision, the following research question has been devised:

- What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

It was also important to consider the key features of the participants and how this affected the use of group supervision as an intervention, and the following research question was devised:

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

2.5.11   A comparison of group and individual supervision

Primarily, the advantages and disadvantages of group supervision shown in Table 7 overleaf comes from Hawkins and Shohet (2006), Proctor (2000) and Proctor & Inskipp (2001). Table 7 also incorporates relevant points from Newton (1992), Hanko (1987), Tempest et al (1987), Wilson & Newton (2006), Farouk (2004) and Cohen & Osterweil (1986):

Table 7:   The advantages and disadvantages of group supervision compared with individual supervision

Advantages of group supervision compared with individual supervision	**Disadvantages of group supervision compared with individual supervision**
1. A more economic use of time, money and expertise (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Proctor, 2000) 2. A supportive atmosphere of peers is provided in a group to both share anxieties and realise others are facing similar issues (Hawkins & Shohet; 2006, Hanko, 1987) 3. Supervisees receive reflections, feedback and input from their colleagues as well as the supervisor (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) and therefore have access to a wider range of skill and ability (Proctor, 2000) 4. The group can provide a way for the supervisor to test out their emotional or intuitive response to material presented by checking if group members respond in the same way (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 5. Within a group there is a larger range of life experiences, ages, races, personality types and therefore a greater likelihood of someone in the group being able to empathise with the supervisee or the supervisee's client. (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Proctor, 2000) 6. Action techniques such as role-reversal, re-enactment can be used within groups to develop greater understanding (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Proctor, 2000) 7. Group supervision allows learning to be gained from the supervision taking place in a group, giving opportunities to learn how to run groups and to reflect on the dynamics of groups (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) and supervisees experience this in practice (Proctor, 2000)	1. The impact of group dynamics on the process can be negative and undermine the process of supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 2. There can be less individual time per supervisee in the group compared with individual supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 3. Supervisees may be working at different developmental levels of supervision from each other (Proctor & Inskipp, 2001) 4. Group supervision does not mirror the individual work that the supervisee may be doing, whereas individual supervision would (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 5. The group can become preoccupied with their own group dynamics and lose sight of their clients (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 6. Supervisees may focus on a particular function of supervision leading to conflicting ideas within the group about the function of supervision (Cohen & Osterweil, 1986) 7. Groups can establish very strong norms – e.g. a competitive spirit – that are hard to challenge and can undermine individual supervisees (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) 8. Poor group supervision can create boredom, anxiety and purposelessness which is more damaging than poor individual supervision (Proctor, 2000)

Advantages of group supervision compared with individual supervision	Disadvantages of group supervision compared with individual supervision
8. Supervisees learn how to make their work public and more open to scrutiny and reflection (Proctor, 2000) 9. It can be seen as less threatening and more supportive than individual work (Newton, 1992) 10. Group supervision offers practitioners from a range of traditions the opportunity to mix and open their work to each other (Proctor, 2000) 11. Group supervision allows supervisees to come across a wider range of practice and issues than they would come across individually (Proctor, 2000) 12. Group supervision increases accountability, as supervision can be collusive, but group supervision offers more chance for supervisees to notice and question (Proctor, 2000) 13. Group supervision can offer companionship in what is a 'private practice', showing how others do it (Proctor, 2000) and can be a restorative opportunity in a pressured, potentially lonely working life for supervisees and supervisors (Proctor & Inskipp, 2001) and reduce isolation (Tempest et al, 1987) 14. Group supervision allows an opportunity to practice and receive feedback on communication and feedback skills (Proctor, 2000) 15. Group supervision can harness the forces of competition and comparison in the service of more effective practice (Proctor, 2000) 16. Allows multiple perspectives on an issue that the problem presenter can select from (Wilson & Newton, 2006) 17. Process of group consultation can influence the context as a whole, as staff become increasingly used to supporting each other in their work (Farouk, 2004)	

Whilst Proctor (2000) promotes the use of group supervision, she does suggest it should replace one-to-one supervision, and instead encourages choice of approaches. She suggests that individuals take responsibility for auditing their current needs and designing a supervision package to meet these needs. Steel (2001) suggests that a model of supervision that allows for both individual and group supervision would be the most effective, as it allows those who find it difficult to speak in a group to express their feelings, managers to discuss issues individually that they can't discuss in a group, and for staff to support each other within the group. Whilst Cohen & Osterweil (1986) recognise that group mental health issue-focused consultation is the most economical method for introducing positive mental health programs into the school system, they state it cannot replace individual consultation but would reduce cases for individual consultation to the most complex, urgent ones and develop awareness of previously unidentified or unreferred cases. Indeed, Gersch & Rawkins (1987) also stress that the EP continued to do individual casework whilst running the staff support group, and reported no contradiction in the EP doing both approaches in parallel, viewing them as compatible and mutually supporting.

However, within education contexts participants are less likely to have utilised supervision (Steel, 2001) in any form, so it is difficult to review or compare mixed programmes of individual and group supervision. Much of the literature that has utilised a group supervision approach with professionals in education (Norwich & Daniels, 1997; Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Stringer et al, 1992; Kearney & Turner, 1987; Farouk, 2004) makes no comment on whether staff members are or should also be accessing individual supervision alongside group supervision.

Whilst the literature review detailed a number of advantages and disadvantages of group supervision, it is interesting that Prieto (1996) labels group supervision as widely practiced but poorly understood in terms of what it offers in content and processes. Prieto (1996) acknowledges that it is difficult for researchers to isolate the unique characteristics of group supervision because many trainees who access group supervision also access individual supervision. However, this denotes a positivist approach to research, and a lack of interest in the trainees' subjective experience of the two types of supervision. Therefore, within the present study it was important to explore the key aspects of group supervision that promote or inhibit its use, as this was within a context where participants did access individual supervision on a regular basis. Therefore the following research question was devised:

- What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

2.6 The present study

The model of group supervision used in the research utilises Hawkins and Shohet's (2006) work on supervision and seeks to recognise the three functions of supervision. Therefore, when Family Support Workers bring an issue to the group they are asked to describe what they feel they need from the group, leading to a request for one of the three functions described by Hawkins and Shohet (2006). The Family Support Worker may request:

- advice, skills and knowledge (educative function);
- a discussion around the emotional needs coming from their work (supportive function); and

- check they working correctly and ethically and that it will have the desired affect on the client, child or family (managerial function).

This avoids participants having a function of the supervision donated to them, and feeling pressured to experience a single function of supervision.

There has been an attempt to meet needs from within the group rather than relying on the facilitator as expert role. Therefore, when requests are made for information, this is returned to the group so all members are encouraged to share a piece of work or contribute to the discussion to avoid vertical supervision for the supervisee. Thus the model of supervision utilises Proctor's (2000) approach to group supervision as the group is run as a co-operative form of group supervision (Type 3 in Table 4) where there is a facilitator of the group who monitors the supervision, and the members of the group are encouraged actively to co-supervise dependent on their confidence to do so. However, there is recognition that different participants of the group are at different developmental levels (Table 2) and so there may be participants who choose to remain silent at novice level and others who are more able to participate and co-supervise.

This is also recognised in the group working agreement and the ground rules that participants can remain silent if they choose. The ground rules drew upon the literature – particularly Hawkins & Shohet (2006); Proctor & Inskipp (2001); Proctor (2000); and Newton (1995). The ground rules reinforced the nature of the links with managers and that it was the decision of the supervisee to take things to discuss with their manager, but that as facilitator I maintained confidentiality unless there was a breach of ethical conduct. The ground rules encouraged good group manners (Proctor,

2000) as they encouraged respect for each other, listening to each other and owning one's own statements. The group ended on a positive note utilising ideas from organisational psychology (Fullan, 2003) and each participant was asked to share something positive that has happened to them. This gives those who have been silent a chance to speak, and often leads to Family Support Workers complimenting each other, thereby enhancing the supportive function of the group supervision and helping the session end on a positive note.

The national picture of Early Years policy has changed greatly over the last ten years with an increased focus on developing and empowering the Children's Workforce alongside the development of Children's Centres, thereby integrating services for families in early childhood and narrowing the gap in inequality for children. The role of the EP in Early Years practice has been considered and shown an emphasis on individual, SEN work whilst the DFES (2006a) review has called for EPs to be clear about the distinctive role they can offer to children, families and communities. The move towards a community psychology orientation alongside utilisation of organisational psychology principles has been suggested as the way to develop the EP role in Children's Centres for the coming years. Definitions and models of supervision have been explored, alongside a consideration of the outcomes and advantages of group supervision, in order to understand the theoretical model of supervision utilised in this research. This research seeks to explore a model of EP practice in Children's Centres through the following research questions:

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

- What are the mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What are the aspects of Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

- What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH AIMS, QUESTIONS, METHODOLOGY, METHODS AND STUDY DESIGN

3.1   Introduction to the research aims, questions, methodology, methods and study design

The present study aimed to explore a model for EP practice in Children's Centres that has been developed by the author in her Local Authority. The model developed involves the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers from four Children's Centres. This chapter outlines the research questions, and provides an account of why specific methodological approaches, methodologies and methods were chosen. This will include a consideration of how the study was designed, the threats to objectivity, reliability and validity and the steps taken to control for these threats, as well as ethical considerations and an outline of the data analysis procedures.

3.1.1   Research aim

The present study explores a model of practice that could be used by EPs in developing and empowering sections of the Children's Workforce in Children's Centres and other settings.

3.1.2   Research questions

The key research questions were developed after a full scope of available literature on the developments in Early Years and the Children's Workforce at Government level; the roles taken by EPs in Early Years work and more recently in Children's Centres; the changing orientation of Educational Psychology practice to one of a community psychology orientation and theories and models of supervision

and group supervision. These key questions allow an exploration of the mechanisms, context and outcomes of the group supervision model proposed in the preceding chapter. The research questions are:

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

- What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

- What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

In order to answer these research questions, Realistic Evaluation will be used as the theoretical paradigm, with a single case study approach.

3.2 Selecting the methodological framework for the research

Research carried out in social settings can be informed by different methodological approaches. The normative paradigm advocates a positivist approach to research. Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) explain that a positivist approach assumes that the techniques used in natural and physical sciences can be reapplied to the social world. It is based on empiricism and the testing of hypotheses based on the manipulation of isolated variables or outcomes. However, Cohen et al (2000) report criticisms of this approach for the following reasons: it does not account for how participants experience and represent the world, and overly emphasises the quantification and computation of data, leading to misleading representations of

human life. This approach to research is appropriate when there is an experimental design with pre and post-intervention measures taken which can be compared. However, the present study had a single treatment group that was currently engaged in an intervention; therefore a research design using an experimental approach was not appropriate, as no measure was taken prior to the intervention. There were also difficulties in designing a study where it was unclear what would be measured. In addition, it was important to consider and incorporate the subjective views of the Family Support Workers and the Children's Centres managers, how they experienced the group supervision as an intervention, and what they believed it brought in terms of outcomes, whereas the positivist approach regards human behaviour as passive and determined and overlooks the individual's agency and beliefs.

In comparison, the interpretive paradigm rejects the positivist belief that there are general universal laws that govern human behaviour, and instead utilises individual's subjective views of the social world, and involves naturalistic research methods. However, those that criticise interpretive methodology argue that it does not offer sufficient rigour to the research, and is likely to be descriptive rather than explanatory. Cohen et al (2000) note the interpretive approach can neglect and overlook the impact of the context and within this the power of external forces to shape behaviour and events. Cohen et al (2000) state:

> "Just as positivist theories can be criticised for their macro-sociological persuasion, so interpretive and qualitative can be criticised for their narrowly micro-sociological persuasion." (p.27)

Cohen et al (2000) cite Habermas (1972) as identifying a third approach that goes beyond the positivist and interpretive approach: the critical approach which is premised upon reflective practice. Critical theories go beyond understanding

phenomena and situations but look to question and change them, and therefore have an overtly political stance. The critical approach has similarities to interpretive research in that it tends to be small scale, and involves the researcher actively in the process. However, unlike interpretive research, critical research encourages the use of participant researchers.

Pawson & Tilley (1997) state that Realistic Evaluation offers an alternative to positivist and interpretive approaches as it focuses on contextualised evaluation leading to developments in practice and policy. Although Pawson & Tilley (1997) do not actively place Realistic Evaluation within critical theory and instead place it within realism theory, both incorporate the role of politics and policy makers but to differing degrees. Pawson & Tilley (1997) place the context centrally, and therefore incorporate the role of politics at a micro level, but view policy makers as key stakeholders who form a central part of the research and are considered participants.

Therefore, two methodological frameworks have been selected to help inform the research design:

- Realistic Evaluation; as it is seeking to develop policy and practice; and
- Case study; as it is a contemporary phenomenon in a real-life context.

The following sections will explore further the methodological framework selected for the research: Realistic Evaluation and case study design.

3.2.1   Realistic Evaluation

Tilley (2000) describes Realistic Evaluation as taking an alterative view to the interpretive and positivist approaches, and emphasises the purpose of evaluation

research in developing policy and practice. This leads to a shift away from a positivist focus on deriving universal laws and, instead, movement towards the contextualised question of:

"What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4).

Realistic Evaluation is concerned with understanding causal mechanisms and the conditions under which they are activated to produce specific outcomes. It seeks to develop programme theories in order to understand social programmes, and how and why they work. Programme theories explain how context and mechanisms work together to produce outcomes. Within this research the word 'programme' used by Tilley (2000) has been replaced with the word 'intervention', although the term 'programme theory' is maintained.

Realistic Evaluation has roots in realism and seeks to develop theories to explain the real world, and explores the way mechanisms produce events and the circumstances needed for this. Pawson & Tilley (1997) call for evaluation to be realistic in terms that it has a useful, clear goal, and define realistic as:

"…trying to perfect a particular method of evaluation which will work for a specific class of project in well-circumscribed circumstances." (p.xiv)

Pawson & Tilley (1997) emphasise that, according to Realistic Evaluation:

- interventions are theories leading to the concept of a programme theory;

- interventions are embedded in social systems, so realistic evaluators must consider the different layers of social reality that make up and surround interventions;

- interventions are active, therefore participants' views and interpretations are integral to considering an intervention/programme's outcomes; and

- interventions are part of open systems and can not be isolated or kept constant – therefore universal laws can not be derived.

These key points in understanding the nature of interventions and how they work have important implications for research and evaluation. Pawson & Tilley (1997) recognise the importance of participants in interventions and social programmes, and that they are a critical factor in any intervention in any social context. Therefore, a social programme cannot be explored in isolation but must also examine the role of the people, the outcomes attributed to the programme and the context within which the programme occurs. Pawson & Tilley (1997) use the following basic realist formula, and describe this as the basis for designing realist research:

"mechanism + context = outcome" (p.xv)

Therefore it is important to consider what the contexts (Cs), the mechanisms (Ms) and the outcomes (Os) are, in order to derive a programme theory.

The mechanisms are those parts of an intervention that bring about effects and change, the structures of the social programme. Mechanisms are ways in which the resources available are used to generate outcomes. Pawson & Tilley (1997) state realistic evaluators must understand the action of mechanisms in order to understand why a social programme works. In one of the methodological rules of Realistic Evaluation they state:

"Evaluators need to focus on how the causal mechanisms which generate social and behavioural problems are removed or countered through the alternative causal mechanisms introduced in a social programme." (p.216)

Pawson & Tilley (1997) emphasise that mechanisms are often hidden to the researcher, and whilst the researcher can anticipate mechanisms that may be raised by the participants, there should be a willingness to acknowledge the existence of other, previously unconsidered, mechanisms. Timmins & Miller (2007) highlight that different types of participants may produce different outcomes and, therefore, features of the participants can be considered mechanisms. Thus the intervention, the group supervision approach, may have a different effect on different types of participants. Thus mechanisms incorporate the relevant characteristics of the participants and characteristics of the intervention that lead to the outcomes of the intervention.

The context describes the features of the conditions in which the intervention is introduced that are relevant to the operation of the programme mechanisms. Pawson & Tilley (1997) illustrate that contexts go beyond the spatial location and include the conditions that allow the mechanism to come into operation. Within social contexts, this includes the social rules, norms and values, interpersonal and social relationships. They emphasise that contextual knowledge is crucial in order to ensure that the intervention is well-targeted.

The outcomes-patterns comprise both the intended and the unintended consequences of an intervention, and realism does not depend on a single outcome measure. This allows for a sensitive evaluation of complex interventions and, as such, outcomes need to be defined by the participants of the intervention.

The context mechanism outcome pattern configuration can also be considered the programme theory. This, in effect, explores the configuration of features needed to sustain an intervention.

The preferred methodology chosen to explore and develop a theory for a model of EP work in Children's Centres was Realistic Evaluation. This would develop a programme theory to explain a model of EP work that was used within a particular context, through an examination of the context, mechanisms and outcomes for participants and other stakeholders in the intervention. Therefore, in the context of the present study, it could be said that the following possible mechanisms, contexts and outcomes have been identified by the researcher, although others may not yet be identified and will be uncovered through the research process. In addition, mechanisms, outcomes and contextual factors can individually work as positive or negative factors. Examples of mechanisms, contextual factors and outcomes that could be uncovered by the present study are:

- Mechanisms: Group supervision approach

  Family Support Workers

  Facilitator/EP

  Children's Centres managers

- Context: Children's Centres

  Children's Centres manager's relationships with Family

  Support Workers

  Autonomy of Family Support Workers

- Outcomes: Increased/decreased abilities to cope with workload

  Abilities to deal with children and families

> Increase or decrease in the willingness to learn from one
>
> another
>
> Improved relationship Family Support Workers and EP

- Possible context mechanism outcome pattern configuration or programme theory: Family Support Workers will feel highly supported, able to cope with their case load and more able to share ideas with each other (O) within Children's Centres where the manager supports the autonomy and group learning of the Family Support Workers (C) who have group supervision on a regular basis with a facilitator/EP who can support group supervision approaches (M).

Pawson & Tilley (1997) explain that Realistic Evaluation is not within the positivist paradigm and does not seek universal statements – such as this social programme always led to these outcomes – as this overlooks the issue of context. Alternatively, they state that the goal of evaluation is the "continual betterment of practice" (p.119) through seeking out the "descriptive particulars" (p.119) of an individual programme in order to build and cumulate sets of ideas into an organising framework. Pawson & Tilley (1997) describe this as:

> "…an organising framework which 'abstracts' from a programme a set
> of essential conditions which make sense of one case after another."
> (p.120)

Therefore, whilst Pawson & Tilley (1997) do not use the term 'theory', they state that evaluators must build their evaluation on research from previous evaluations and these previous evaluations must also consider the issue of context and mechanisms, not outcomes alone. Within the present study the information gained from the research

methods can be used to construct a set of descriptive particulars that builds upon previous research in order to lead to continued improvement in and changes to practice by EPs and others using group supervision with a range of workers within the Children's Workforce.

3.2.2   Case study design

Yin (2008) defines a case study as:

"…an empirical inquiry that
- investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth within its real-life context, especially when
- the boundaries between the phenomenon and context are not clearly evident." (p.18)

The emphasis on context is particularly important for the present study, as Children's Centres are a new context for EPs. The present study is seeking to highlight a set of descriptive particulars that can be considered by EPs and others for using group supervision in Children's Centres and other contexts. The present study is an investigation of the use of group supervision with a group of Family Support Workers, which is a contemporary phenomenon and is based in a real-life context – namely Children's Centres.

Yin (2008) adds a second part to the technical definition:

"The case study inquiry
- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points...
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion …
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis." (p.18)

The present study gathers evidence from multiple sources: from interviews with a range of Family Support Workers, and from the Children's Centre managers. The semi-structured realistic interview schedule utilises the programme theories of each interviewee and results analysed in light of the review of literature.

Cohen, Manion & Morrison (2000) suggest a strength of case studies is the emphasis on the effect of the context. This works well alongside Pawson & Tilley's (1997) emphasis on context within Realistic Evaluation. Just as within case studies (Yin, 2008) in Realistic Evaluation it is the boundaries between context and mechanism that are recognised as not always clearly evident.

Case study design allows for a number of different methods to collect data regarding the programme theory. Robson (1993) views this as one of the strengths of case study methodology, since data gathered from one source are compared and triangulated against data from another source. Although the data was gathered using the same method, it came from a range of sources. The sources include a number of Family Support Workers – both those who have participated in group supervision and those who have chosen not to – the Children's Centres managers who selected the use of group supervision for the EP to use in the Children's Centres.

A single case study approach was chosen because it will allow detailed examination of a particular instance: a model of EP work in Children's Centres. As Cohen et al (2000) suggest, it will allow examination of the subtleties and complexities of a single case in its own right, which can then be interpreted and utilised for EPs to consider as a possible model for work in Children's Centres. Cohen

et al (2000) also suggest that the presentation of a case study makes the model more accessible to a wider range of readers. The present study is to be fed back to a wide range of people – EPs, Children Centres managers and workers in Early Years – and therefore needs to be accessible to a broad audience.

It is important to recognise the potential weaknesses of a case study approach. It may be difficult to make general assumptions from the results, and these are not easily open to cross-checking. There may be researcher bias (Nisbet & Watt, 1984). The potential weaknesses are recognised and further discussed in the threats to reliability and validity section alongside taking steps to counterbalance them.

There are different types of case study. This case study considers a group activity and utilises a realistic interview approach, whereby the interview is guided by key questions with a view to understanding the context, mechanism and outcomes of group supervision with Family Support Workers in a Children's Centre. Yin (2008) defines this as holistic case study – the concern is at a single, global level, looking at a single instance rather than multiple examples of the same group approach used by a range of facilitators.

Yin (2008) outlines three kinds of case study design: descriptive, exploratory and explanatory. Descriptive case studies present a detailed of a case; explanatory case studies seek to explain and understand how a phenomenon occurs; whereas an exploratory case study is useful to develop hypotheses for future study and tends to be used at the early stages of research. Yin (2008) explains how to examine the research questions to define whether a case study is descriptive, exploratory or explanatory. He

suggests that where research questions are mainly 'what' questions this would indicate an exploratory design, whereas 'why' questions indicate an explanatory case study. The research questions in the present study are mostly 'what' questions which seek to explore what is happening in this model of EP work in Children's Centres, and therefore the present study is an exploratory case study.

Bassey (1999) terms an exploratory case study a theory-seeking case study, as it is exploring a particular phenomenon in order to lead to 'fuzzy propositions'. The fuzzy proposition can be viewed in Realistic Evaluation terms as a set of descriptive particulars leading to a possible programme theory to help explain how the intervention of group supervision works in the present study's specific context of Family Support Workers and Children's Centres. The fuzzy proposition that will be explored in this research is a model for EP work in a particular context: Children's Centres. In realistic terms it is seeking to explore the programme theory devised by the researcher from seeking the stakeholders' views of how the outcomes, mechanism and context interact. Pawson & Tilley (1997) describe an exploratory case study evaluation as one that formulates and develops a theory, demonstrating that this is an appropriate model to use for the present study.

3.3   Research methods

Yin (2008) emphasises that within case study design there are three principles of data collection which highlight:

- the importance of using multiple sources of evidence rather than types of evidence:

- the need to create a case study database and that the case study report is separate from the data and evidentiary base; and

- the need to maintain a chain of evidence so an external observer can follow the derivation of any evidence from the research questions to ultimate case study conclusions.

Within this research the research method chosen was the realistic interview in order to explore the programme theory. In order to fulfil Yin's recommendations for multiple sources of evidence, data is gained from multiple sources; by conducting interviews with Children's Centre managers and the Family Support Workers (those that attended and those did not attend group supervision). In addition, each interview will be transcribed in full and logged in a case study database. Finally, the research process will be documented in detail, including the piloting and development of the realistic interview schedule.

Cohen et al (2000) define the research interview as:

"…a two-person conversation initiated by the interviewer for the specific purpose of obtaining research-relevant information, and focused (by the researcher) on content specified by research objectives of systematic description, prediction or explanation." (p.269)

A semi-structured realistic interview (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) was selected because the questions follow the hypothesis of the researcher whilst openly explaining to the participant the reasons and the programme theory behind the interview. Scheurich (1997) builds upon Mishler's (1986) critique of conventional, positivist interviewing. Mishler (1986) questions the conventional approach to interviewing as "…the standard anti-linguistic, stimulus-response model…" (p.35-6) and suggests an

alternative postmodernist approach where interviewing is viewed as "…discourse between speakers." (p.35-6). However, Scheurich (1997) concurs with Mishler's concepts of the power imbalance between interviewer and interviewee, and that the interviewer should go beyond empowering the interviewee but also be aware of the interviewee's active role in the interview. This has implications for both research interviewing and how results are reported, and researchers are encouraged to be open about the research and their own position including reasons for the research, funding sources and epistemological orientation. These ideas sit well alongside Pawson and Tilley's (1997) realistic interview, which they view as varying from the traditional interview in that it brings out two hidden functions: the teacher-learner function and the conceptual refinement process. The teacher-learner function implies that the researcher is open to learning about the programme theory from the interviewee and is open about doing this being part of the interview process. The conceptual refinement process refers to the interview process allowing a continual refinement of the programme theory being explored and discussed by the interviewee. This means that interview creates a situation in which the programme theory and conceptual structures under investigation are open to the interviewee in a way that allows the interviewee to make an informed and critical contribution to them. Therefore the interview schedule was semi-structured in a way whereby the researcher is constantly seeking to be open to the interviewee's ideas and theories, and is seeking to understand their views rather than imposing her own. This is reflected in Table 8 (Realistic interview schedule) where the significance for the researcher is shown on the schedule.

Yin (2008) emphasises the importance of wording used in interview questions, so that the interviewer appears naïve about the area of interest and allows the

interviewee to provide a fresh view. This would appear to contradict a realistic interview approach. However, whilst the researcher may have a programme theory in mind, the researcher must remain open to the possibilities of finding new mechanisms, aspects of the context and outcomes. Therefore a semi-structured interview was selected where the type of question was pre-determined but the order in which they are asked could be varied, and further explanations and clarity sought as appropriate from the interviewee (Robson, 2000).

The data that emerge from the realistic interviews with the Family Support Workers – both those who attend group supervision and those who do not attend group supervision – and Children's Centre managers will form the case study database. This will allow triangulation of the data gained.

3.3.1   Interview design

An explanatory passage was written and read out at the interviews to explain the nature of the research project. The wording was carefully chosen to avoid leading or influencing the participants. The interview schedule was piloted with two workers who attend group supervision from a different organisation, Portage, with the same facilitator to check if questions are leading and how the data collection process should take place. This is further discussed in threats to reliability and validity.

The realistic interview framework was designed in order to elicit the features of the context, the mechanisms and the outcomes from each interviewee. The questions were phrased so that the interviewer was open to learning about the programme theory of the interviewee, whilst having a clear link to the research

questions of the present study. Table 8 below shows the interview question, the significance for the evaluator and the link to the research question of the present study.

Table 8: Realistic interview schedule

Interviewer question	Significance for evaluator	Link to research question
I want you to tell me about your ideas around group supervision and the impact it has upon you as a Family Support Worker (FSW)/Children's Centre manager and the people you work with. I am keen to follow your lead in the interview and so we can go through the questions in any order that suits you.	Interviewer is explaining to participant what is wanted from the interview.	Opening explanatory passage.
I am asking you to consider the benefits or costs of group supervision to FSWs. This is not easy to do so it may help to consider examples where it has helped or hindered you as a FSW/Children's Centre manager.	Interviewer is suggesting the discussion of concrete examples as a way of understanding the programme theory.	What are the outcomes of group supervision for FSWs and their managers?
What do you feel is the impact on the families you work with? Can you think of an example of that?	Interviewer is checking if there is an impact on the families.	What are the outcomes of group supervision for FSWs and their managers?
What do you feel is the impact on the children you work with? Can you think of an example of that?	Interviewer is checking if there is an impact on the children in a similar or different way from families.	What are the outcomes of group supervision for FSWs and their managers?

Interviewer question	Significance for evaluator	Link to research question
What is it about group supervision that makes you personally attend the sessions? What do you feel group supervision gives the FSWs?	Interviewer is asking for clarity over the mechanisms in the programme theory.	What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with FSWs in Children's Centres?What mechanisms within FSWs promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?
What about you helps you to attend group supervision?	Interviewer is asking about the context (within person) in the programme theory.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres?
What about stops you from attending group supervision?	Interviewer is seeking clarity over the aspects of the context in the programme theory that may prevent theory from working.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres?
What do you feel group supervision offers in comparison with individual supervision?	Interviewer is asking for clarity over the mechanisms in the programme theory.	What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with FSWs in Children's Centres?
What was your previous experience of supervision?	Interviewer is looking at possible features of the context.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres?

Interviewer question	Significance for evaluator	Link to research question
How have your ideas of supervision changed since attending group supervision?	Interviewer is checking if context changes over time.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres?
Can you think of a time when group supervision has assisted you?	Interviewer is asking for examples to triangulate previous question on the mechanisms within group supervision.	What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with FSWs in Children's Centres?
Why did it assist you on that occasion?	Further understanding of the mechanism of group supervision that makes it work in the context of Children's Centres.	What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with FSWs in Children's Centres?
What is special about FSWs that makes group supervision work or not work for them?	Interviewer is finding out about the key features of the context (FSWs).	What mechanisms within FSWs promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?
What about the structure of your workforce means that group supervision works or doesn't work for you?	Interviewer is finding out about the key features of the context (FSWs).	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres?

Interviewer question	Significance for evaluator	Link to research question
Are there any other types of groups of worker for whom you feel group supervision would be useful?	Interviewer is finding out other examples of groups that may have similar features for whom the model works, checking the key features of the context and of the mechanisms within FSWs.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres? What mechanisms within FSWs promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?
Why?	Prompt for further detail.	
What factors in group supervision or your role help or hinder you from attending?	Interviewer is seeking to find out mechanisms in group supervision or in role, and any features in context to triangulate previous answers.	What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with FSWs in Children's Centres? What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with FSWs in Children's Centres? What mechanisms within FSWs promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?
So, group supervision is …..	Interviewer articulates the emerging CMO configuration explicitly to check for agreement on programme theory.	All research questions are summarised to clarify the points made by the interviewee.

3.4   Data collection and analysis

3.4.1   Data collection

Interviews were conducted with twelve FSWs, one who had attended no group supervision sessions, and four who had attended one group supervision session, with the remaining seven having attended between two and five group supervision sessions. The reasons why the FSWs chose to attend or not to attend the group supervision sessions were unclear at this stage in the study. Therefore it was an important part of the interview schedule to explore possible barriers to attendance and other reasons the FSWs had for electing not to attend. The decision to interview those who hadn't attended was in order to gain multiple views as recommended by Yin (2009) and is also a step taken to control threats to objectivity. In addition this was part of a realistic evaluation approach where the researcher is seeking to understand from the key stakeholders;

"What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4).

In order to fully answer this question, it was important to ask those FSWs who chose to attend but also those who elected not to attend as it was important to understand why they felt it was not useful to them. All twelve FSWs worked within the cluster of four Children's Centres, and were based at one of the four Children's Centre sites. The four Children's Centres were managed by the same management board, and the three managers from the management board were interviewed as key stakeholders who had commissioned the use of group supervision. Table 9 gives a summary of the experience level of each of the Family Support Workers interviewed:

Table 9: The prior experience of the Family Support Workers

Family Support Worker	Length of experience as a FSW in this position	Previous experience	Experience of individual supervision prior to this job	Experience of group supervision prior to this job
1	1 year	Nursery nurse in maternity unit	No	No
2	2 years	Education Access Officer for traveller community	Yes	No
3	3 ½ years	Nursery nurse	Yes	No
4	3 ½ years	Nursery nurse	No	No
5	2 years	Not given	Yes	No
6	> 1 year	Paediatric nurse	No	No
7	3 ½ years	Teaching assistant	No	No
8	> 1 year	Nursery nurse	No	No
9	2 years	Social work assistant	Yes	No
10	> 1 year	FSW at a CC	Yes	No
11	5 years	School	No	No
12	Not given	FSW	Yes	No

3.4.2   Procedure for data collection

The timescale for the data collection for the present study is shown in Table 10:

Table 10: The overall time line for the present study

Action	Time line
Pilot interviews held with 2 Portage home visitors who had attended group supervision sessions	May 2008
Refinement of interview schedule from pilot	June 2008
Interviews held at interviewees convenience	July 2008 – early Aug 2008
Interviews transcribed	September 2008
Interviews coded individually to identify mechanisms, context features and outcomes	October 2008
Interview transcriptions and coded summaries sent to interviewees by email	31.10.08
Interviewees agreed to content of interview, coding of interviews and contents being used	November – December 2008

A threat to objectivity was that the research could not be replicated and therefore a step taken to control was clear documentation of each of the steps taken.

- **Pilot interviews** were conducted with two Portage home visitors in May who had had regularly attended group supervision with the same supervisor for the preceding 18 months. These pilot interviews were held by the researcher for the present study.

- **Amendments to the procedure and content of the interviews following the pilot interviews.** The feedback from these pilot interviews led to changes in the procedure of the interviews and interview schedule. These were implemented to increase the likelihood of participation and participants' confidence. This included the interview schedule being sent in advance of the interview to give participants time for preparation. In addition the participants of the pilot interview strongly recommended that participants be invited to be interviewed individually or in pairs and select the interview venue in order to increase the likelihood of participation, raise confidence and increase the comfort level of the participants. Whilst allowing participants to choose whether they are interviewed in pairs or individually affected the data collected in paired interviews as one participant may lead or influence the other's views shared, steps were taken to control for this threat to reliability through an individual verbal summary for each participants at end of the interview.

- **Consent gained from the FSWs and managers to be interviewed** was gained via email alongside telephone discussion as needed individually.

- **Contact was made with the participants to invite them to be interviewed either individually or in pairs and in a venue of their choice.** The participants responded by email or telephone and selected a venue, either one of the four Children's Centres or the offices of the interviewer. The

participants chose to be interviewed either individually or in pairs, if the latter was selected the participants chose who to be interviewed with. These were collated in a timetable of dates, venues and preference in Table 11 below.

Table 11: The time line and organisation of the realistic interviews

Date of interview	Interviewees	Had attended group supervision (√) or not (x)	Where	Transcript sent alongside summary of mechanisms, context features and outcomes	Agreement given for to the transcript and coding of the interview
18.6.08	5-13 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08
9.7.08	Deputy manager and Senior FSW	x	Children's Centre	31.10.08	21.11.08 22.12.08
11.7.08	0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08
11.7.08	0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	4.11.08
14.7.08	0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	31.10.08
14.7.08	Teenage FSW	x	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08
18.7.08	5-13 and 0-5	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	4.11.08 7.11.08
23.7.08	0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08
28.7.08	5-13 FSW and 0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	2.11.08 11.11.08
1.8.08	Multicultural FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08
4.8.08	0-5 FSW	√	Children's Centre	31.10.08	10.11.08
8.9.08	Cluster manager	x	Children's Centre	31.10.08	3.11.08

- **The interview schedule was sent out with a confirmation of the date, time and venue of the interview** once agreed. This was a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the interview and a maximum of 4 weeks prior to the interview.

- **The majority of the interviews were conducted over a 6 week period.** There were two exceptions to this, with one interview held with a FSW in June as she was due to leave and move to a new position outside Children's Centres. An interview with the cluster manager had to be held in September as the initial recording from July failed. The interviews were recorded onto a handheld Dictaphone and contemporaneous notes were made during the interview in order to feed back to each individual their programme theory at the end of the interview. This allowed participants to reflect on what they had said and add or reinforce or contradict what had been interpreted from the interview as a step taken to control for internal validity.

- **The transcript of the interview along with the coded summary of the context of mechanisms, context features and outcomes of the interview was sent out by email.** All summaries and transcripts were sent on the same date at the end of October. The transcript was sent for participants to comment on and as a step taken to control for accuracy of transcription. A summary of the mechanisms, context features and outcomes in narrative form was also sent as a step taken to control for reliability of the coding of the transcripts to ensure accuracy in interpretation. If participants were interviewed in pairs they both received an identical transcript of the whole interview. In addition to control for threats to reliability from being interviewed in a pair rather than individually each participant's interview was individually coded for their responses and the coded responses were summarised and sent individually by email. The participants were asked to give consent for the interview and summary data to be used in the research and for any amendments that they might wish to make. Two participants did wish to add an additional point and

this was added into their summary of mechanisms and context features. Of these participants one had been interviewed individually and one had been interviewed as part of a pair. Table 11 details when the transcript and summary of the mechanisms, context features and outcomes of the interview was sent by email to participants and the date at which agreement was given to use the results in the study. Sample transcripts alongside the summaries of the interviews and email contact are in Appendix 1 (FSW) and 2 (manager). The time period from the interview to the emailing of the transcript and summary was a maximum period of 20 weeks to ensure that the interview had not been forgotten and to ensure full informed consent was being given by participants.

3.4.1 Data analysis

Data gained from the interviews was coded in order to extract ideas raised by the participants linked to the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes. This allowed an exploration of the differing programme theories held by each of the participants. Each of the participants' programme theories were compared with the other participants' programme theories to seek points of similarity. This created a set of 'descriptive particulars' from the present study that build upon previous literature to develop a set of ideas for EPs and others working in a range of contexts, including Children's Centres, to utilise when using group supervision with workers from the Children's Workforce.

Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend that case studies need to be written up clearly in order to be of use to policy makers. An example of the written summary of one interview in terms of mechanisms, context and outcomes is shown in Appendices

1 and 2. Miles & Huberman (1994) highlight the need for the data to be condensed, ordered and driven by the research questions, and suggest matrices as a useful way of exploring the data, particularly in an exploratory case study. They suggest that it is useful to generate rough formats during the early stages of data collection, but that the researcher needs to anticipate making several iterations to ensure the data display works. Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend that the displayed data needs to be examined with care and conclusions need to be drawn within an analytical text, by noting patterns and themes and building a logical chain of evidence.

The points of the interview where the contexts, mechanisms and outcomes are likely to be discussed are shown on the realistic interview schedule (Table 8). Initially, items were coded from the interview transcript as mechanisms, features of the context and outcomes. Since the interviewer had sought to highlight the interviewee's own programme theory verbally at the end of the interview this could also be used to check the coding at the initial stages. In the next stage, each interviewee was sent a transcript of the interview and a written summary of the mechanisms, features of the context and the outcomes they had identified as a narrative passage (examples in Appendices 1 and 2). This was to follow the teacher-learner cycle of the interview and to help ensure that the interviewer has interpreted the interview in the way the interviewee meant.

Pawson & Tilley (1997) highlight that mechanisms, features of the context and, indeed, outcomes are often hidden to the researcher; therefore whilst the researcher can anticipate what that may be raised by participants, they should also be willing and open to acknowledge the existence of other, previously unconsidered

mechanisms, features of the context and outcomes. It is for this reason that each of the realistic interviews was initially coded for mechanisms, context features and outcomes before being shared as a written summary of the programme theory with the participant. This ensured the coding of the interview accurately reflected the views of the participants, gave an opportunity for each participant to add any other aspects to their interview summary and ensured the researcher was not simply identifying mechanisms that the researcher sought to elicit.

Due the nature of the Realistic Evaluation approach, a conceptually clustered matrix has been selected, as the rows and columns are arranged to bring together items that belong together in order to create conceptual coherence. Miles & Huberman (1994) describe a conceptually clustered matrix as a descriptive display that orders the display by concepts. In the present study the researcher was using items that relate from Realistic Evaluation approaches for coding purposes: the aspects of the context, the mechanisms and the outcomes. Therefore the following conceptually clustered matrix seems the most appropriate choice as shown below:

Matrix 1:   Conceptually clustered matrix for showing frequency of features of context, mechanisms and outcomes for each participant

Interviewees	Aspects of context		Mechanisms		Outcomes	
	+	-	+	-	+	-
Family Support Workers who have attended group supervision (between 0 sessions and 6)						
1						
2						
3						
4						
5						
6						

Interviewees	Aspects of context	Mechanisms	Outcomes			
	+	-	+	-	+	-
8						
9						
10						
11						
12						
Children's Centre manager/deputy/senior FSW						
1						
2						
3						

Patterns were sought both across rows and down the columns. Looking down the columns allows comparison between individuals and groups – such as looking if there are similarities between certain interviewees – and allows comparison of groups of interviewees such as managers and FSWs. In comparison, reading across the rows shows relationships between variables and if the same feature of context or mechanism or outcome was being raised by more than one FSW or manager. This allowed the frequency of different codes within the mechanisms, features of context and outcomes to be calculated.

Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend the following stages are followed in order to draw and verify conclusions from the data that are gathered:

- Noting patterns and themes – these can be patterns between variables or processes, but should be recurring regularities (Guba, 1978):

- Seeing plausibility – Miles & Huberman (1994) recognise the use of intuition and plausibility, but warn that it should not be relied on alone;

- Clustering – this refers to grouping together and conceptualising things that have similar characteristics or patterns into categories;

- Making metaphors – and being aware of the metaphors that are used by participants and considering what they mean;

- Counting – being aware of the number of participants mentioning the same item or idea in order to help see what is there, verify a hypothesis and to keep analytically honest;

- Contrasting and comparing – this can be between cases or variables or processes;

- Partitioning of variables – Miles & Huberman (1994) recommend that variables be considered and partitioned if they are too broad for the research and it allows differences to be shown up more clearly;

- Subsuming particulars into the general – this is linked to clustering but looks for whether items can be subsumed into a more general category;

- Factoring – this is looking for factors that may underlie items or response, thereby helping illustrate how they potentially link together;

- Noting relationships between variables – this can be a direct association, an inverse association, a causal relationship or a mutual relationship but the researcher has to verify ideas about relationships; and

- Finding intervening variables – the intervening variable can help understand the relationship between variables.

Miles & Huberman (1994) suggest these steps allow a logical chain of evidence to be collected and lead to conceptual coherence and theories.

In the present study the following stages were followed to draw conclusions from the data:

Table 12: Stages of data analysis followed in the present study

Stage	Reason
Clustering	The interviews were coded into mechanisms, contexts and outcomes. These were clustered for each interview transcript and then reported back to the interviewee.
Making metaphors	The interview transcripts were summarised and sent back to the interviewee to ensure that metaphors had been correctly interpreted.
Noting relationships between variables	The coded mechanisms, features of the context and the outcomes were coded into positive and negative. Positive coding inferred that a mechanism promoted the use of group supervision, whereas a negative coding inferred an inhibiting of the use of group supervision.
Counting	The number of participants who mentioned the same idea to help see what was reported more frequently.
Clustering	The mechanisms were clustered under those relating to the intervention of group supervision, and those relating to the workers. The features of the context were clustered under those relating to features of the team and features of the profession The outcomes were clustered under three functions: educative, supportive and managerial.
Partitioning of variables/subsuming particulars into the general	Coded items were examined to see if they could be subsumed into one item – e.g. busy diary and work commitments – and variables that were too broad were partitioned into separate items.
Contrasting and comparing	This was achieved through the presentation of the reduced data in charts, in order to compare and contrast different groups (FSWs and managers).

Once the items from the interviews were coded as mechanism, features of the context or outcomes, the items were also coded negative or positive. This primary coding of the interviews was then summarised into charts showing whether the codes occurred in the realistic interview by each the participants, with the highest possible frequency being 15 as this was the total number of participants.

At this stage of the coding the mechanisms were divided into two broad areas: the features of the participants, FSWs; and features of the intervention, group supervision. This supports the concept which Timmins & Miller (2007) highlight: that

different types of participants may produce different outcomes, and consequently features of the participants should also be considered mechanisms alongside the intervention itself. The results of the mechanisms are illustrated in Charts 1 and 2, Tables 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21.

The coding of the features of the context gave two broad areas: at the level of the team and at the level of the profession. The results of the features of the context are illustrated in Charts 3 and 4, Tables 22, 23, 24 and 25. The coding for the outcomes gave three broad areas within the positive outcomes: the educative, supportive and managerial outcomes. The results of the outcomes are illustrated in Charts 5, 6 and 7 and Tables 26, 27 and 28. The negative outcomes were fewer in number and were placed together, and are illustrated in Chart 8 and Table 29.

3.5   Threats to objectivity, validity and reliability and steps taken to control

3.5.1   Objectivity

Objectivity is a difficult issue as it is seen to lie firmly within the positivist tradition of research. However, Robson (1993) suggests that there can be an aim to strive to approach objectivity through:

> "…a commitment to look at contrary evidence (and) a determination
> to aim at maximum replicability of any study." (p.65)

Alongside this, Robson (1993) suggests that there should be attempts to understand what multiple observers or, in this case, participants agree to as a phenomenon, rather than relying on a single subjective view. The threats to objectivity and the steps taken to control these threats are shown in Table 11 below.

Table 13: Threats to objectivity and steps taken to control

Threat to objectivity	Steps taken to control
A commitment to look at contrary evidence	- Realistic interview schedule piloted to check alternative programme theories are allowed to emerge - Realistic interview schedule semi-structured so alternative programme theories can be developed by the participant
Determination to aim at maximum replicability of study	Clear documentation of the steps taken from design of data collection instruments, raw data, coding, analysis of data and conclusions.
Attempts to have multiple observers' views of phenomenon rather than single subjective view	Realistic interviews to be done with a range of FSWs who have attended and not attended the group, alongside interviews for Children's Centres managers

3.5.2   Reliability

Yin (2009) defines reliability as:

"…demonstrating that the operations of a study – such as data collection procedures – can be repeated with the same results." (p.34)

Banister et al (1994) suggest that reliability – in a similar way to objectivity – is not appropriate for single case studies. However, Yin (2009) suggests that the goal of reliability is applicable to case studies as it aims to reduce errors and biases in the case study. Therefore he suggests that reliability is enhanced by good documentation of the processes followed so they could be repeated by another researcher. The threats to reliability and the steps taken to control these threats are shown in Table 12 below.

Table 14: Threats to reliability and steps taken to control

Threats to reliability	Steps taken to control
Reliability and transcripts: Accurate transcription of responses	Interviews conducted face-to-face and to be recorded on digital hand-held recorder, to be transcribed at the earliest opportunity

Threats to reliability	Steps taken to control
Reliability and transcripts: Accurate transcription of responses continued	- Transcripts of interviews shared with participants to comment on and check for accuracy - Full interview recorded and transcribed to avoid selective recording of data
Reliability and interviews: All interviewees to understand the interview schedule in the same way	- The interview schedule was piloted with two participants to ascertain clarity of wording - Prompts for the interview schedule were written in and were used in a standard way to check understanding. However, a structured interview schedule was deemed inappropriate as this allowed more detailed data - A semi-structured realistic interview schedule devised to help maintain the sequence of the functions of the interview
Reliability and interviewer: Good rapport between the interviewer and interviewee	- The function of all of the interviews was explained clearly at the beginning of the interview so interviewees were clear of the reason for the interview - The researcher is known to the FSWs and Children Centre managers as she has met with them on a number of occasions through her role as an EP - The interviews were conducted individually or in pairs, in the preferred context in order to help participants feel comfortable with the process.
Reliability and questions in the interview: Questions in the interview not to be leading	- The questions were piloted with two participants who were part of a different group that accesses group supervision - The questions were carefully phrased with prompts to ensure aspects were covered rather than to direct participant's responses
Reliability and the coding of interview transcripts: Coding of participants' transcripts checked to check it reflected views of participant	- All transcripts coded by same researcher - All coding of transcripts fed back by email to each participant to check accurate interpretation of context, mechanisms and outcomes

3.5.3 Validity

Robson (1993) defines validity as:

"...concerned with whether the findings are 'really' about what they appear to be about." (p.66)

Yin (2008) outlines three types of validity to consider within validity: construct validity, internal validity and external validity. Construct validity refers to whether the correct operational measures have been selected for the concepts being studied. Yin (2008) notes that construct validity is particularly challenging for case study research and that subjective judgements from individuals are used to collect the data.

Table 15: Threats to construct validity and steps taken to control

Threats to construct validity	Steps taken to control
Construct validity: Is the research developing descriptive particulars that exist in practice?	▪ Use of multiple sources of evidence from a number of FSWs and Children's Centre managers, not relying on one single view. They work at different levels within the organisation ▪ Establish a chain of evidence to show where the descriptive particulars has been derived from ▪ Have key participants and peers review the draft case study report

Internal validity relates to whether the intervention has actually caused the outcome. Yin (2009) suggests that internal validity has less relevance to exploratory studies, such as in this research, due to the difficulties of being able to cross-check whether the intervention has caused the outcome. However, Silverman (1993) suggests that issues of internal validity are worth considering because, otherwise, research can become little more than descriptive accounts.

Table 16: Threats to internal validity and steps taken to control

Threats to internal validity	Steps taken to control
A changing population of FSWs who have engaged in the group supervision	▪ All FSWs including those who have chosen not to participate have been interviewed in order to understand the reasons why some engage and some may choose not to. This question is also included on the interview schedule
The culture of the Children's Centres involved is not fully known	▪ Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a range of participants, Children's Centres manager and FSWs to allow multiple perspectives to be gained on the impact of the group supervision approach ▪ The researcher was at all of the preceding group supervision sessions and so was familiar with the culture of those sessions ▪ The researcher has worked alongside some of the FSWs as an EP and has some understanding of the role and culture of the Children's Centres ▪ The researcher has some understanding of Children's Centres through research and work within Children's Centres in other roles
Changes may occur because of the impact of the realistic interview schedule	▪ The interviews were held over a short period of time of six weeks to keep the realistic interview schedule consistent
There was one researcher examining the interview transcripts and framework for analysis	▪ Peers within Educational Psychology Doctorate group support in examining the data gathered for a short period of time
Other aspects have changed in the FSWs' environments other than those forming a direct part of the research	▪ Questions in the semi-structured interview schedule allowed for discussion of a range of factors
The findings may not reflect the participant's views	▪ Ensuring participants have access to transcripts of their interviews ▪ Ensuring participants agree to the coding of their interviews and are happy with the interpretation ▪ Making available and feeding back findings to all participants; FSWs and Children's Centres managers

Yin (2008) defined external validity as whether the findings are generalisable beyond the research. Again, this is particularly challenging for case studies. However, as Yin (2008) emphasises, this is because the focus should be on analytical generalisation where the researcher is:

> "…striving to generalise a particular set of results to some broader theory" (p.36)

Therefore Banister et al (1994) suggest that reflexivity at the personal and professional level as the most appropriate way of gaining external validity in qualitative research. This means the researcher has to reflect upon his/her own bias and create conditions whereby the research can be replicated. Similarly, Pawson & Tilley (1997) encourage researchers to move away from trying to create universal theories but to describe the particulars of a social programme that can be used as the basis of a set of ideas that could be used in an organising framework for future similar social programmes – the descriptive particulars. Therefore it is important that a high level of detail of the context, mechanisms and context are recorded.

Table 17: Threats to external validity and steps taken to control

Threats to external validity	Steps taken to control
The research is biased	▪ The researcher constantly examines for personal bias or assumptions within the interviews by checking analysis and interpretation of transcripts with each interviewee and for biases within the process through discussion with tutor
The research can not be replicated	▪ The researcher keeps a detailed account of the sample, data analysis, procedures and outcomes so this enhances the opportunities for other researchers deciding if the research has applicability elsewhere

Threats to external validity	Steps taken to control
The research is not built upon a theoretical base	▪ The research documents the theoretical bases of Realistic Evaluation explicitly, and draws upon previous research in related fields. This allows further research to understand the methodological framework of the present study and build upon it further

3.6   Ethical issues

The following issues of informed consent and confidentiality were considered in line with the guidance from the British Psychological Society's (2006) Code of Ethics and Conduct; British Psychological Society's (1992) Ethical Principles for Conducting research with Human Participants; and British Educational Research Association (BERA) (2004) Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research.

Table 18:   Ethical issues and steps taken to control

Ethical issue	Steps taken to control
The need for informed consent from all participants	▪ All participants were verbally asked for consent, with a full explanation for the reasons for the research given. ▪ All participants gave written consent for use of their transcript and interpretation of their transcript by email. This included the right to quote from transcripts
The storage of use of digital recording	▪ Digital recording was used in order to accurately record the interview and ensure accurate transcriptions. ▪ The reasons for this were fully explained to all participants, and consent to use it was gained individually on each occasion ▪ The digital files were securely stored and access was not available to anyone except the researcher

Ethical issue	Steps taken to control
The right to withdraw throughout the process	▪ All participants were informed of the right to withdraw at any time. This was given as a verbal reminder at the end of the interview, and twice in written form when the transcript was sent and when the initial coding/interpretation of the interview was sent
Maintaining the anonymity of participants	▪ It was emphasised that anonymity would be preserved within transcripts, and the transcripts were made available for each participant to check for accuracy and to add any further information as needed
No incentives for participation	▪ No incentives were offered for participation and all participants were informed of the right to withdraw or not take part at the beginning of the process and on regular occasions throughout

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS

4.1   Introduction to the results

The results have been displayed in both charts and tables in order to more easily see the key mechanisms, aspects of the context and the outcomes for managers and the Family Support Workers (FSWs) as separate groups. The frequency of codes occurring for the managers (n=3) is shown alongside the frequency of codes occurring for the Family Support Workers (n=12). This allows for the different types of responses to be viewed from managers and FSWs, alongside the total frequency. The results are organised into eight charts as shown below:

Mechanisms

    1. Positive
        Features of group supervision
        Features of the worker

    2. Negative
        Features of group supervision
        Features of the worker

Context

    3. Positive features
        Features of the team
        Features of the profession

    4. Negative features
        Features of the team
        Features of the profession

Outcomes

    Positive
        5. Educative
        6. Supportive
        7. Managerial

    8. Negative
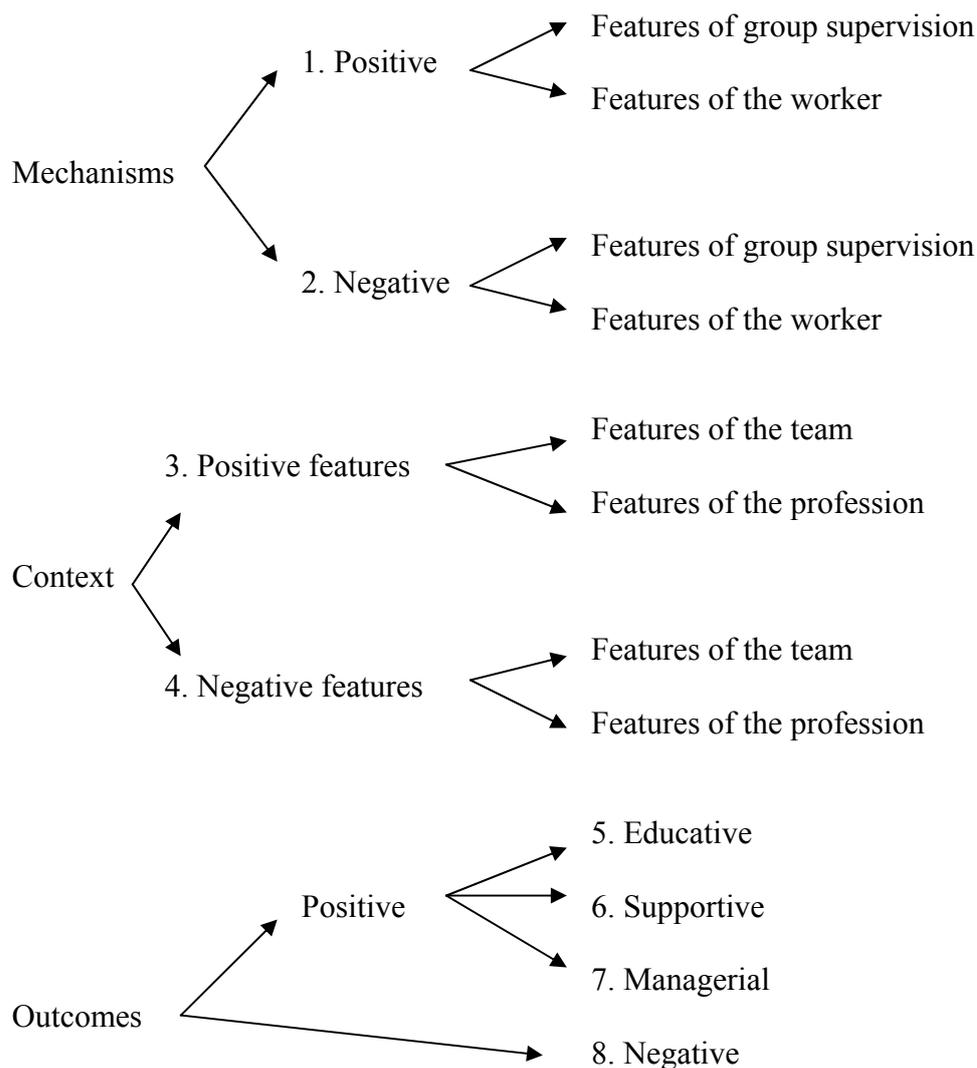
The highest ranking results have also been displayed in 13 tables to clearly illustrate the number and percentages of FSWs and managers who reported each code.

This study has utilised Realistic Evaluation (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) as one part of the methodological framework as discussed in the Methodology chapter. Realistic Evaluation is concerned with understanding causal mechanisms and the conditions context under which they are activated to produce specific outcomes. Pawson & Tilley (1997) state that social programmes cannot be explored in isolation but must also examine the role of the people, the outcomes attributed to the programme and the context within which the programme occurs. Therefore they use the following basic realist formula, and describe this as the basis for designing realist research:

"mechanism + context = outcome" (p.xv)

Thus the results are presented in relation to the context, mechanisms and outcomes reported by the FSWs and managers.

4.2   Results from the mechanisms

The results from the mechanisms intend to answer the following research questions:

- What mechanisms within group supervision promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

The mechanisms are those parts of an intervention that bring about effects and change; the structures of the social programme. Mechanisms are ways in which the resources available are used to generate outcomes. Pawson & Tilley (1997) emphasise that mechanisms are often hidden; and whilst the researcher can suggest mechanisms to participants, there should be a willingness to acknowledge the existence of other, previously unconsidered mechanisms. Timmins & Miller (2007) point out that different types of participants may produce different outcomes. Thus the intervention – the group supervision approach – may have a different effect on different types of participants. Therefore, mechanisms incorporate both the participants and the approach; the relevant characteristics of the participants and characteristics of the intervention. It is for this reason that the mechanisms were divided into two categories:

- Features of the participants – the Family Support Workers
- Features of the intervention – group supervision

The mechanisms have also been coded into two aspects: positive and negative mechanisms. Positive mechanisms relate to those features of the Family Support Workers and the group supervision process that are likely to promote the use of group supervision, whereas negative mechanisms would inhibit use.

4.2.1 Key findings from the positive mechanisms

The findings from the positive mechanisms are illustrated in:

- Chart 1: Chart showing the positive mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews
- Table 19: The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within group supervision reported by FSWs and managers

- ▪ Table 20: The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within workers reported by FSWs

- ▪ Table 21: The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within workers reported by managers

Chart 1, Tables 19, 20 and 21 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- ▪ What mechanisms within group supervision promote its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- ▪ What mechanisms within Family Support Workers promote the use of group supervision with them?

The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within group supervision reported by the FSWs (n=12) and managers (n=3) in their interviews are shown in Table 19 below:

Table 19:   The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within group supervision reported by FSWs and managers

Positive mechanism	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Participants can listen and not speak	9 FSWs (75%)	-	9 (60%)
The management are not present	7 FSWs (58%)	1 manager (33%)	8 (53%)
The relaxed informal approach	7 FSWs (58%)	-	7 (46%)
More than one person's view	7 FSWs (58%)	-	7 (46%)
Facilitation	3 FSWs (25%)	2 managers (67%)	5 (33%)
All have a chance to talk	5 FSWs (42%)	-	5 (33%)
Can bring a range of issues	5 FSWs (42%)	-	5 (33%)
With colleagues who do the same job	5 FSWs (42%)	-	5 (33%)

A range of features of the worker was reported by more than half of the FSWs (n=12) and managers (n=3) to be important as key positive mechanisms that would promote the use of group supervision. The highest ranking mechanisms within workers reported by the FSWs are shown in Table 20 below:

Table 20: The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within workers reported by FSWs

Positive mechanism	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
The openness of the worker to new ideas	10 FSWs (83%)	2 managers (67%)	12 (80%)
How experienced and willing to talk the worker is	9 FSWs (75%)	3 managers (100%)	12 (80%)
Nurturing, caring workers who want to help	9 FSWs (75%)	2 managers (67%)	11 (73%)
How experienced and willing to listen the worker is	9 FSWs (75%)	2 managers (66%)	11 (73%)
The confidence level of the worker	8 FSWs (67%)	3 managers (100%)	11 (73%)
Could organise their own diaries	7 FSWs (58%)	-	7 (47%)
Willing to give group supervision a chance	6 FSWs (50%)	1 manager (33%)	7 (47%)
Keen to learn	6 FSWs (50%)	1 manager (33%)	7 (47%)

The highest ranking mechanisms within the workers reported by the managers (n=3)

are shown in Table 21 below:

Table 21:   The highest-ranked positive mechanisms within workers reported by managers

Positive mechanism	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
How experienced and willing to talk the worker is	3 managers (100%)	9 FSWs (75%)	12 (80%)
The confidence level of the worker	3 managers (100%)	8 FSWs (67%)	11 (73%)
Able to share	3 managers (100%)	4 FSWs (33%)	7 (47%)
The openness of the worker to new ideas	2 managers (67%)	10 FSWs (83%)	12 (80%)
Nurturing, caring workers who want to help	2 managers (67%)	9 FSWs (75%)	11 (73%)
How experienced and willing to listen the worker is	2 managers (66%)	9 FSWs (75%)	11 (73%)
Believe in talking to colleagues	2 managers (67%)	5 FSWs (42%)	7 (47%)
Reflective	2 managers (67%)	4 FSWs (33%)	6 (40%)
Want to show that they are busy	2 managers (67%)	2 FSWs (17%)	4 (27%)

Chart 1:Chart showing the positive mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews
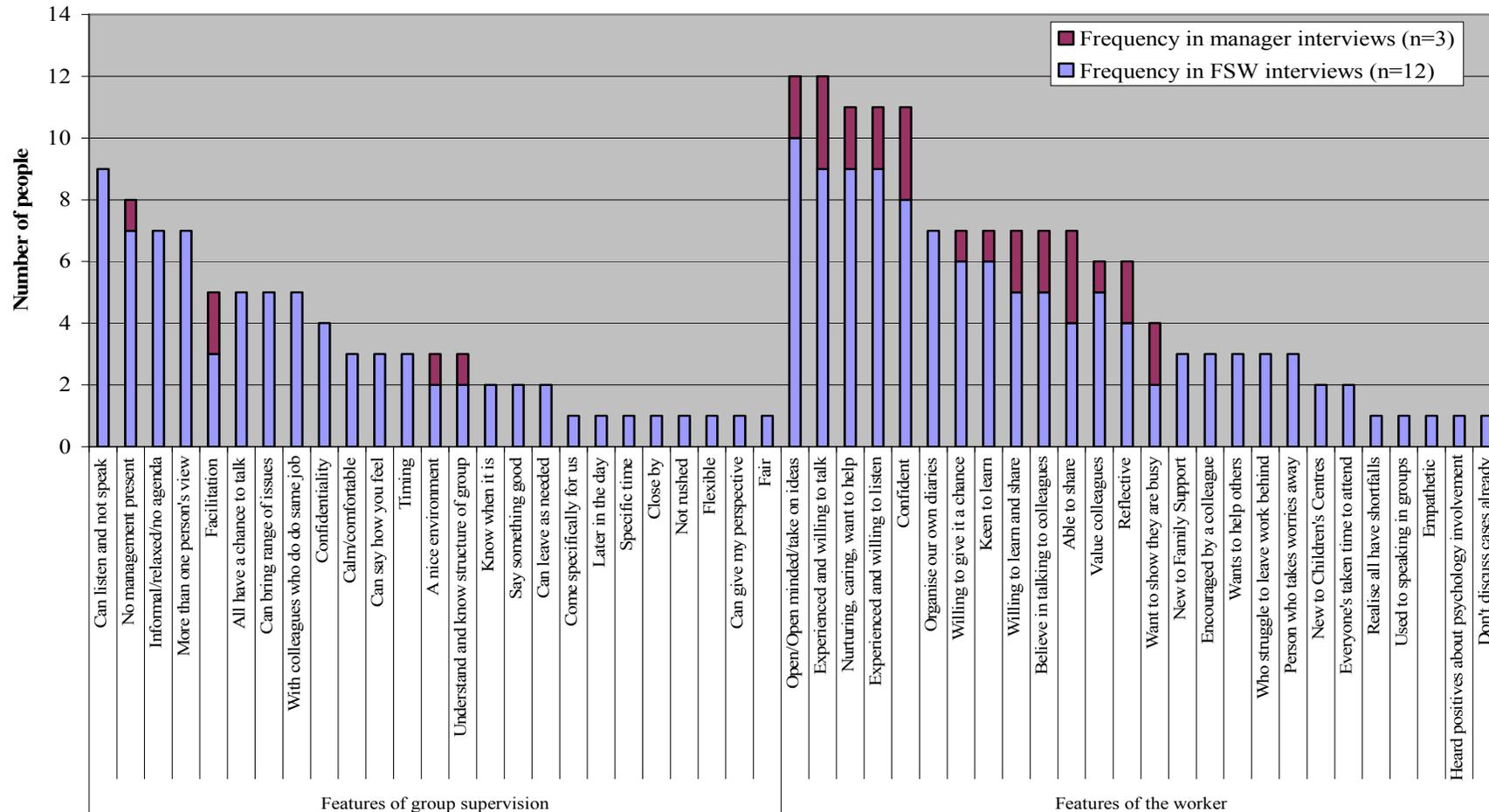
Positive mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

Chart 1, Tables 19, 20 and 21 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- What mechanisms within group supervision promote its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers promote the use of group supervision with them?

Chart 1 shows the positive mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers within the group supervision process alongside those described as within the workers. It is noticeable that most of these positive mechanisms within the group supervision process have been reported by the FSWs rather than the managers. This is likely to be because the FSWs experienced and attended the group supervision sessions, whereas the managers were aware and in support of the sessions but did not attend. Therefore the FSWs made more comments relating to the positive mechanisms of the group supervision, whereas the managers tended to focus on the types of workers who would be more likely to attend.

With regard to similarities there was a clear overlap in responses from both managers and FSWs in the key features that were needed in workers as positive mechanisms. The top-ranked shared features were the openness of the FSW to new ideas, the FSW's experience level and willingness to talk and listen, the caring nature of the FSW and the confidence of the FSW. There was also agreement from managers and FSWs over less frequently reported features such as: workers needed to be willing to give group supervision a chance, were keen to learn, were willing to learn and share, believed in talking to colleagues, have an ability to share, value colleagues, be reflective and have a desire to show that they are busy. In contrast, only FSWs

reported that an ability to organise their own diaries was a key positive mechanism for the workers.

A range of features of the group supervision were viewed as key positive mechanisms of the model. These relate to the running and organisation of the group supervision model and tended to be reported by the FSWs. This is likely to be because the FSWs were participants within the group supervision, whereas the managers commissioned the use of the intervention. The top-ranked features of group supervision were that:

- Participants can listen and not speak

- The management are not present

- The relaxed, informal approach

- More than one person's view

The key features of group supervision reported by two of the three managers, together with three FSWs, was that facilitation was a key feature of the group supervision.

4.2.2   Key findings from the negative mechanisms

The findings relating to the negative mechanisms reported by FSWs and managers are illustrated in:

- Chart 2: Chart showing the negative mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

- Table 22: The highest ranked negative mechanisms within group supervision reported by FSWs and managers

- Table 23: The highest ranked negative mechanisms within workers reported by FSWs and managers

Chart 2, Tables 22 and 23 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- What mechanisms within group supervision inhibit its use with Family Support

  Workers in Children's Centres?

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers inhibit the use of group

  supervision with them?

Table 22:   Table to show highest-ranked negative mechanisms within group
             supervision reported by FSWs and managers

Negative mechanism	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Hours/timing	7 FSWs (58%)	-	7 (47%)
Domination by one participant	4 FSWs (33%)	3 managers (100%)	7 (47%)
Big group	5 FSWs (42%)	1 manager (33%)	6 (40%)
Concerns about what to say	5 FSWs (42%)	-	5 (42%)

A range of features of the worker were also seen as potential negative mechanisms,

that would inhibit use of group supervision, by more than half of the FSWs (n=12)

and managers (n=3). These were:

Table 23:   The highest-ranked negative mechanisms within workers reported by
             FSWs and managers

Negative mechanism	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
How busy the FSW was and their work capacity	9 FSWs (75%)	1 manager (33%)	10 (67%)
Lack of confidence	7 FSWs (58%)	3 managers (100%)	10 (67%)
Being new to the job	3 FSWs (25%)	3 managers (100%)	6 (40%)

Chart 2: Chart showing the negative mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

Negative mechanisms reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews
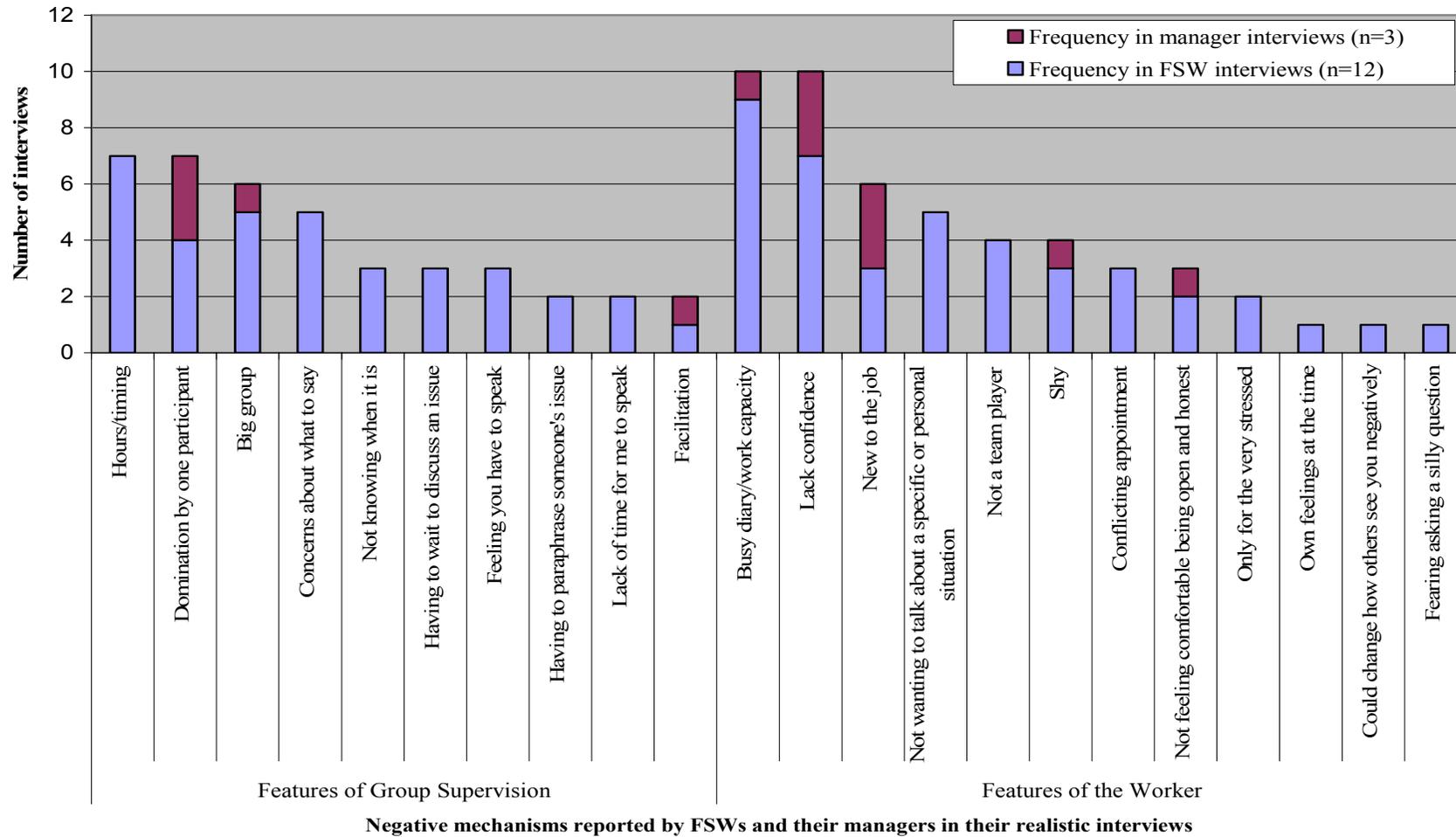
Chart 2, Tables 22 and 23 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- What mechanisms within group supervision inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What mechanisms within Family Support Workers inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

Chart 2 shows the negative mechanisms that exist within group supervision process. These were reported at a lower rate than the positive mechanisms and most of the top-ranked negative mechanisms that inhibited the use of group supervision shared by FSWs and managers.

There were four key negative mechanisms within group supervision raised by five or more of the FSWs and managers as shown in Table 22. The main negative mechanisms related to either time or the confidence of the Family Support Workers: not having time to attend group supervision, and the confidence levels of workers to be part of group supervision. Over half of those interviewed (both FSWs and managers) also mentioned the timing of the sessions as a negative mechanism, alongside concerns that one person may dominate the sessions.

The size of the group being too large was mentioned by just under half of those interviewed, showing a shared concern by both managers and FSWs. However, in comparison, the concerns about knowing what to say and not wanting to discuss a specific or personal situation were raised by FSWs alone, as they were participants in the group supervision process. It is interesting to note that this inhibiting mechanism

can be linked to the positive mechanism that 'participants can listen and not speak' shown on Chart 1.

Similarly, 'being new' was reported as both a negative mechanism and a positive mechanism, with all of the managers and two FSWs viewing this as a negative mechanism. In comparison, being new to Family Support was seen as a positive mechanism for three FSWs, and being new to Children's Centres was seen as a positive mechanism by two FSWs.

4.3   Results from the features of the context

The results from the features of the context intend to answer the following research question:

- What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

The context describes the features of the conditions in which the intervention is introduced that are relevant to the operation of the programme mechanisms. Pawson & Tilley (1997) illustrate this point by stating that contexts go beyond the spatial location, and include the conditions that allow the mechanism to come into operation. Within social contexts, this includes the social rules, norms and values, interpersonal and social relationships.

Therefore the aspects of the context have been divided into two categories:

- features of the team; and
- features of the profession.

As with the mechanisms, the features of the context have been coded into two aspects: positive and negative features of the context. Positive features of the context are positive features of the team and the profession – in this case Family Support – that are likely to promote the use of group supervision; whereas negative features of the context would inhibit the use of group supervision.

4.3.1 Key findings from the positive features of the context

The findings relating to the positive features of the context reported by FSWs and managers are illustrated in:

- Chart 3: Chart showing the positive features of the context reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews
- Table 24: The highest ranked positive features of the team reported by FSWs and managers
- Table 25: The highest ranked positive features of the profession reported by FSWs and managers

Chart 3, Tables 24 and 25 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- What are the features of the context that promote the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

There were two clear features of the team that were seen to promote the use of group supervision, shown in Table 24:

Table 24: The highest ranked positive features of the team reported by FSWs and managers

Positive feature of the team as part of the context	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
The team trusts and supports each other	7 FSWs (58%)	2 managers (67%)	9 (60%)
The managers are pro group supervision	7 FSWs (58%)	2 managers (67%)	9 (60%)

The key features of the profession that were identified by the largest number of FSWs

(n=12) and managers (n=3). These are shown in Table 25 below.

Table 25: The highest ranked positive features of the profession reported by FSWs and managers

Positive feature of the profession as part of the context	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
The intense, challenging, stressful nature of the job	8 FSWs (67%)	3 managers (100%)	11 (73%)
The need to talk and share with colleagues	8 FSWs (67%)	2 managers (67%)	10 (67%)
The job being emotionally demanding	7 FSWs (58%)	2 managers (67%)	9 (60%)
Having a shared goal	8 FSWs (67%)	-	8 (53%)
The varied nature of the role	7 FSWs (58%)	1 manager (33%)	8 (53%)
That lots happens within the role	7 FSWs (58%)	1 manager (33%)	8 (53%)
Work with families	6 FSWs (50%)	2 managers (67%)	8 (53%)
The number of different ways that exist to do the job	6 FSWs (50%)	1 manager (33%)	7 (47%)
Work on own a lot	6 FSWs (50%)	-	6 (40%)

The primary feature of the context of the team reflected in both the negative and positive features of the context related to team dynamics. A positive feature of the context was that the team knew, trusted and supported each other, and the negative feature of the context was where the team don't know each other. A second key feature of the context of the team that was reported by both FSWs and managers was that managers needed to be in favour of and support of group supervision.

The features of the profession that were identified as important positive aspects of the context were that group supervision is needed for professions where the work is intense, challenging and stressful, emotionally demanding and where colleagues need opportunities to talk and share with colleagues, work with families, have variety of work within role, and face high demands.

Chart 3: Chart showing the positive features of context reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

Legend:
- Frequency in manager interviews (n=3)
- Frequency in FSW interviews (n=12)

Y-axis: Number of people

X-axis categories: Trusts & supports each other; Managers pro group supervision; Team exists; Managed by one person; Team not together much; Managers not face to face; Intense, stressful, challenging job; Need to talk/share with colleagues; Emotionally demanding; Have a shared goal; Very varied; Lots happening; Work with families; Different ways to do the job; Work on own a lot; Dealing with big, serious issues; Unpredictable; Work with people/public; Going into homes; Job includes listening; Pressure to fix it; Do group work themselves; Fits organisational values to seek support; Familiar with supervision; Work with children; Time to process again needed; Dealing with people's emotions; Clients have different experiences to workers; Job includes problem solving; Every advice and family is unique; On front line; Fits organisational value - collective effort; New initiative; Vulnerable; Uncertain

Features of the team   Features of the profession

Positive aspects of context reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews

4.3.2   Key findings from the negative features of the context

The findings relating to the positive features of the context reported by FSWs and managers are illustrated in:

- Chart 4: Chart showing the negative features of the context reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

- Table 26: The highest ranked negative features of the team reported by FSWs and managers

- Table 27: The highest ranked negative features of the profession reported by FSWs and managers

Chart 4, Tables 26 and 27 illustrate the responses to the research questions:

- What are the features of the context that inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

Table 26: The highest ranked negative features of the team reported by FSWs and managers

Negative feature of the team as part of the context	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Team dynamics or that the team doesn't know each other	4 FSWs (33%)	2 managers (67%)	6 (40%)
Lack of trust in the group	2 FSWs (17%)	1 manager (33%)	3 (20%)

This can be compared with features of the profession that were identified as inhibiting the use of group supervision as shown in Table 27 below:

Table 27:   The highest ranked negative features of the profession reported by FSWs and managers

Negative feature of the profession as part of the context	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Don't support families	3 FSWs (25%)	-	3 (20%)
Highly structured work	2 FSWs (17%)	-	2 (13%)
Don't go into homes	2 FSWs (17%)	-	2 (13%)
Can select own work	2 FSWs (17%)	-	2 (13%)

Chart 4: Chart showing the negative features of context reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews
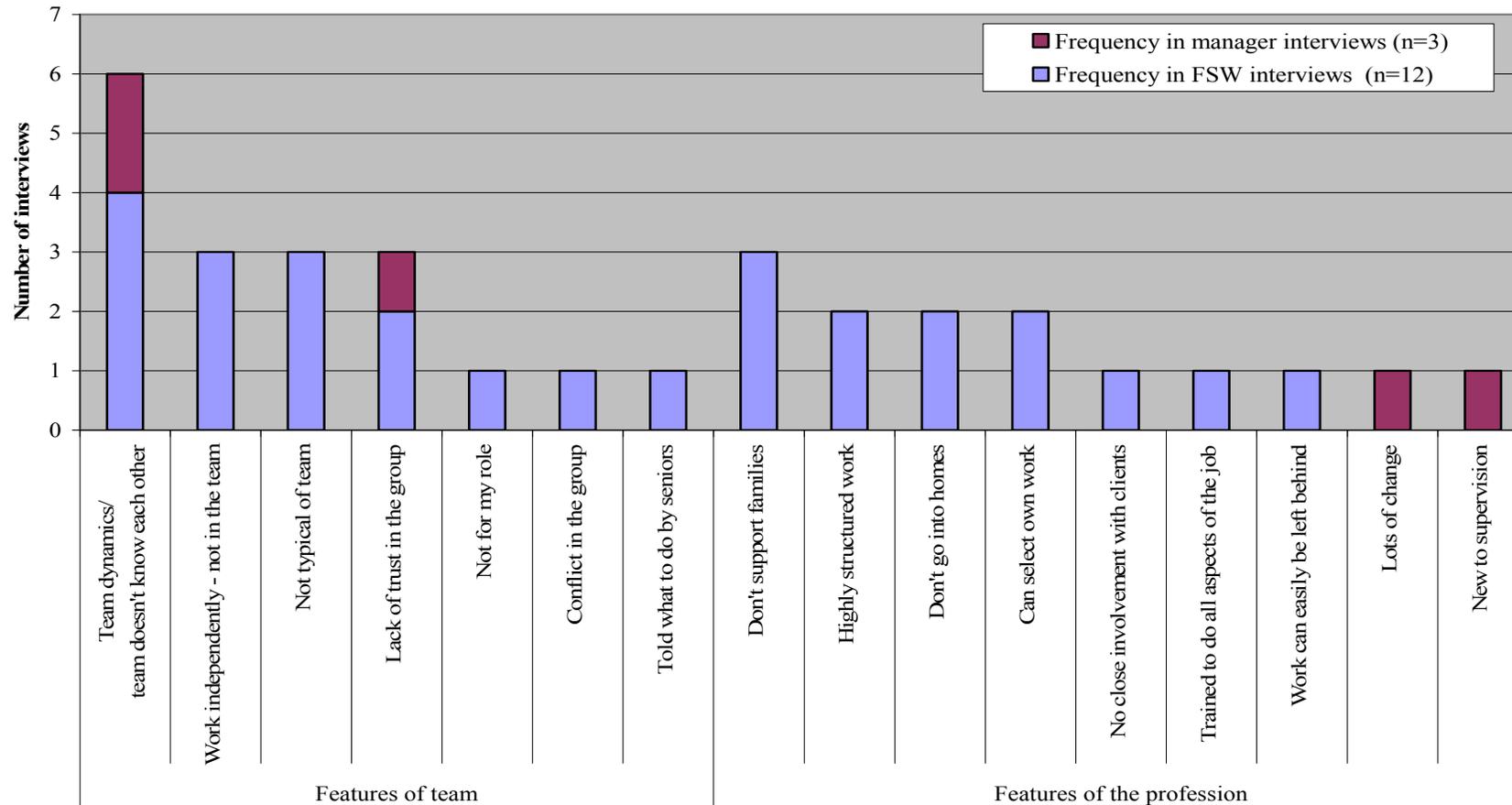
Negative aspects of the context reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews

The primary feature of the team that reflected in both the negative and positive features of the context related to team dynamics. Therefore, a negative feature of the context was the members of the team not knowing each other, whereas a positive feature of the context was that the team knew, trusted and supported each other. This result can be viewed alongside other important features reported in interviews such as the identification of the worker with the group. Therefore, if a worker worked independently of or did not see him/herself as a typical member of the team this was reported as an inhibiting feature of the context.

The features of the profession within the negative aspects of the context included workers who did highly structured work, unrelated to families and homes, and are able to select their own work. These features of the profession were reported as indicators of professions who unlikely to need group supervision.

4.4   Results from the outcomes

The results from the outcomes intend to answer the following research question:

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

The outcomes comprise both the intended and the unintended consequences of an intervention, and realism does not depend on a single outcome measure. This allows for both negative and positive outcomes as they are dependent upon the stakeholders' – in this study, the managers and the Family Support Workers' – views. The positive outcomes were divided into three functions as utilised by Hawkins & Shohet (2006):

- Educative – developing the skills, understanding and abilities of the supervisee through reflection on and exploration of the supervisees' work with their clients

- Supportive – responding to the supervisees' emotional response and reaction to their work, which helps reduce the stress and the incidence of 'burn out'

- Managerial – the quality control aspect of the supervision, which plays a role for line managers but also ensures that the work is appropriate and maintains ethical standards

4.4.1 Key findings from positive educative outcomes

The findings relating to the positive features of the context reported by FSWs and managers are illustrated in:

- Chart 5: Chart showing the positive educative outcomes reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews

- Table 28: The highest-ranked positive educative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers

Chart 5 and Table 28 illustrate the responses to the research question:

- What are the (positive educative) outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

The highest-ranked positive educative outcomes are shown in Table 26 below:

Table 28: The highest ranked positive educative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers

Positive educative outcome	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Learn from others	11 FSWs (92%)	3 managers (100%)	14 (93%)
Get ideas and strategies	10 FSWs (83%)	3 managers (100%)	13 (87%)
Get feedback from others	11 FSWs (92%)	2 managers (67%)	13 (87%)
Sharing experiences	10 FSWs (83%)	2 managers (67%)	12 (80%)
Get tips and advice	10 FSWs (83%)	1 manager (33%)	11 (73%)
Getting other people's perspectives	9 FSWs (75%)	1 manager (33%)	10 (67%)
Sharing problems	7 FSWs (58%)	1 manager (33%)	8 (53%)

There were shared key educative outcomes for FSWs and managers and also some that were reported predominantly by either group as shown below. The key educative outcomes shared by both FSWs and managers were:

- Learn from others

- Get ideas and strategies

- Get feedback from others

- Share experiences

In addition, half or more of the FSWs reported that the following were key educative outcomes:

- Get tips and advice

- Get other people's perspectives

- Share problems

- Get resources

Also, more than half of the managers reported that the following were key educative outcomes:

- Give clarity of thought and perspective

- To understand own reactions

Chart 5: Chart showing the positive educative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews
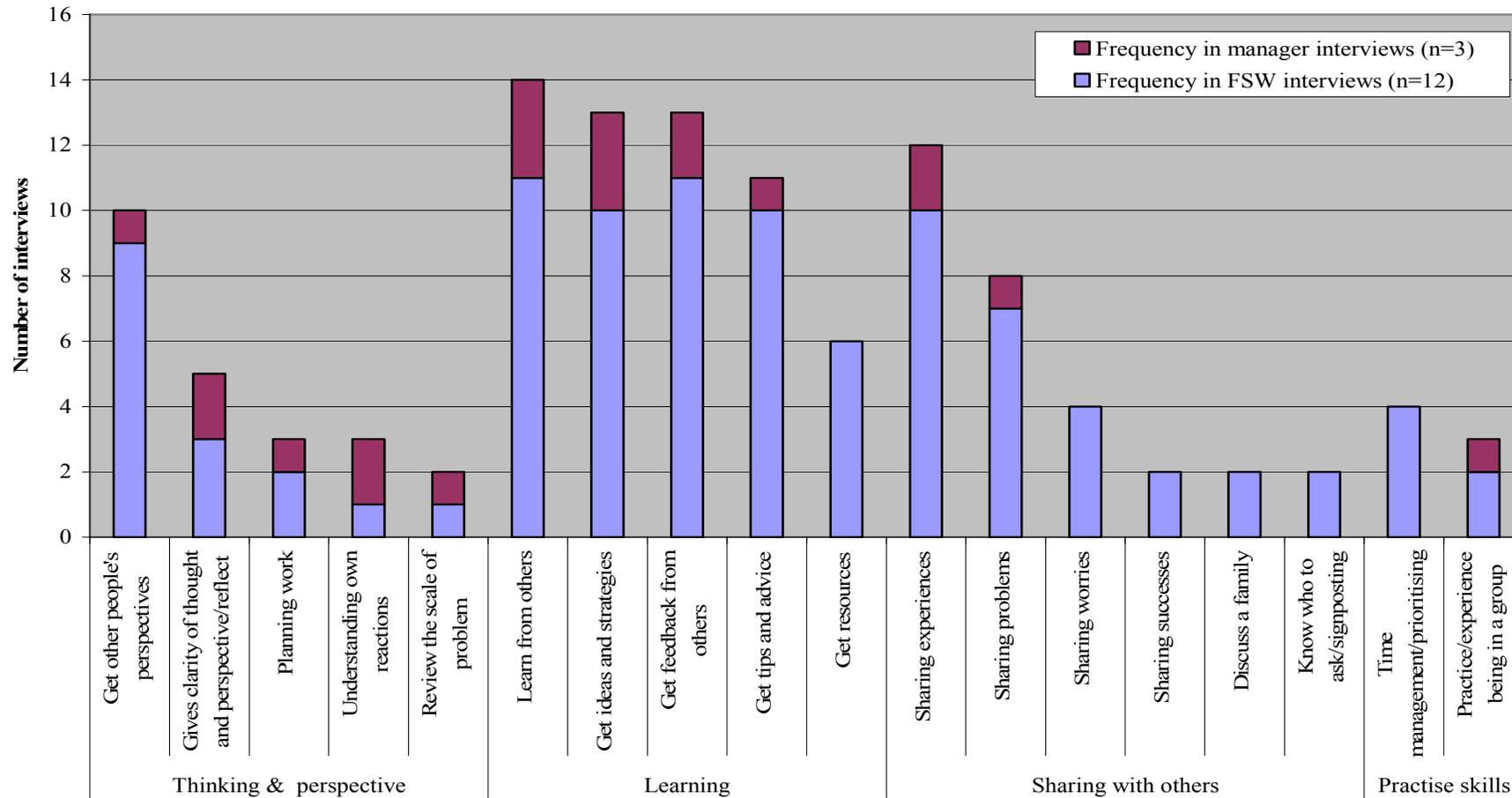
Positive educative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in realistic interviews

4.4.2   Key findings from positive supportive outcomes

The results that illustrating the positive educative outcomes are shown in Chart 6: Chart showing the positive supportive outcomes reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews. Within this chart the results have been broken down into four broad themes:

- Team

- Get emotional support

- Emotional outcome

- Support others

Chart 6 and Table 29 illustrate the responses to the research question:

- What are the (positive supportive) outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

The highest ranked positive supportive outcomes are shown in Table 27 below:

Table 29:   The highest ranked positive supportive outcomes reported by FSWs and managers

Positive supportive outcome	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Builds team relationships	10 FSWs	2 managers	12 (80%)
Creates peer support	9 FSWs	3 managers	12 (80%)
Showing others struggle or feel the same too	10 FSWs	1 manager	11 (73%)
Gets the team together	8 FSWs	2 managers	10 (67%)
Getting back up and reassurance from others	9 FSWs	1 manager	10 (67%)

Positive supportive outcome	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Can say how we are feeling	8 FSWs	1 manager	9 (60%)
Makes me feel part of the team	7 FSWs	1 manager	8 (53%)
Reducing isolation	7 FSWs	1 manager	8 (53%)
Listening to others	8 FSWs	-	8 (53%)
Knowing how others feel	8 FSWs	-	8 (53%)
Offloading	7 FSWs	-	7 (47%)
Helping others	7 FSWs	-	7 (47%)
Gain confidence	7 FSWs	-	7 (47%)
Be open and honest about problems	6 FSWs	1 manager	7 (47%)
Generally feel good or nice	5 FSWs	2 managers	7 (47%)
A chance to speak and express	6 FSWs	-	6 (40%)
Shows we're working to the same aims	6 FSWs	-	6 (40%)
Feel calmer or better	6 FSWs	-	6 (40%)

There were shared key supportive outcomes for FSWs and managers and also some that were reported predominantly by FSWs as shown below. The key supportive outcomes shared by both FSWs and managers were:

- Building team relationships

- Peer support

- Shows others feel the same/struggle too

- Get back up and reassurance from others

- Gets team together

- Can say how we're feeling

- Reduces isolation

- General feeling nice/good

In addition, half or more of the FSWs reported that the following were key supportive outcomes:

- Listening to others

- Knowing how others feel

- Can help others

- Gain confidence

- Offloading

- Feel better/calmer

- A chance to speak or express

- Shows we're working to the same aims

Chart 6: Chart showing positive supportive outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews
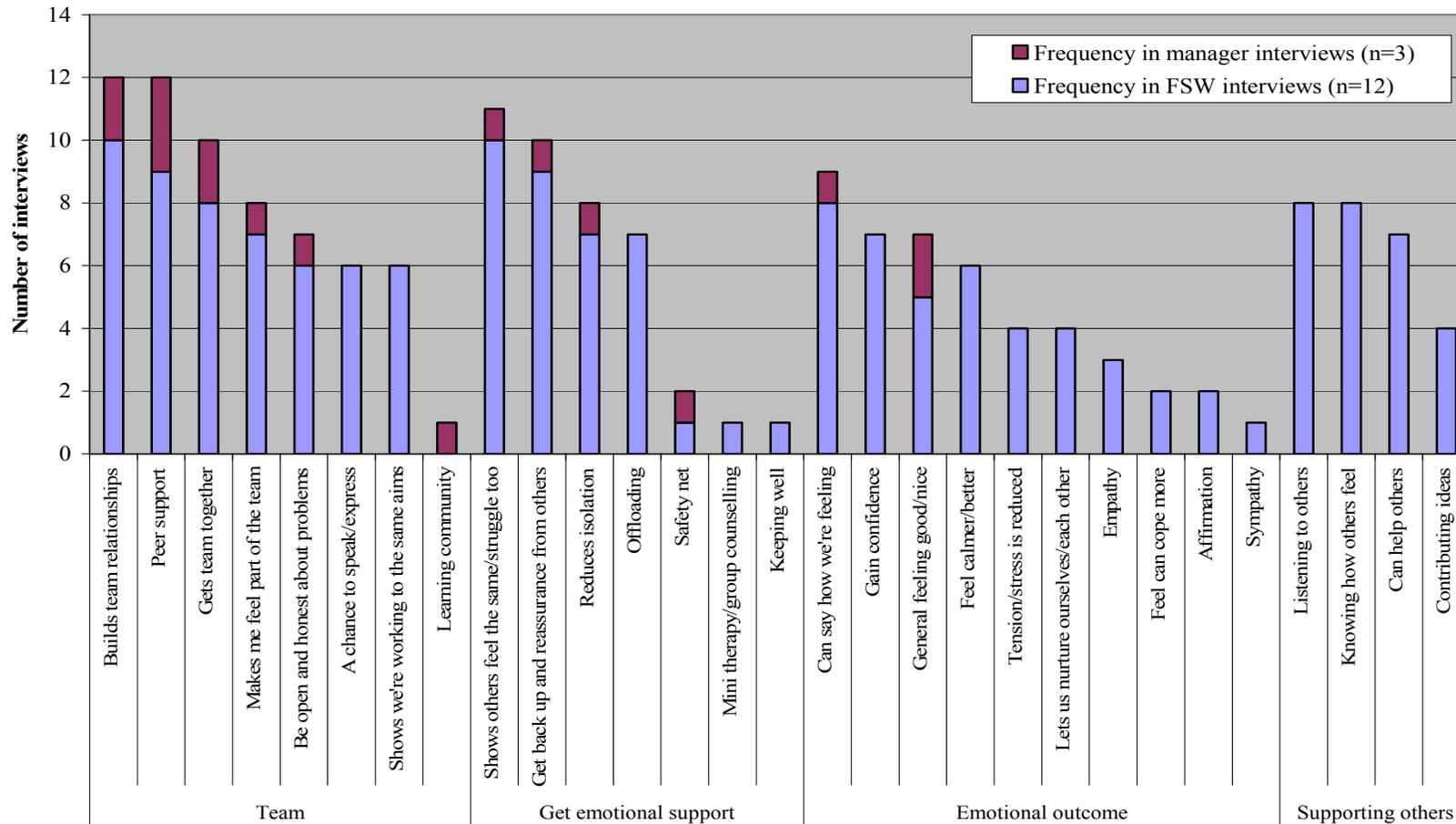
Positive supportive outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews

4.4.3   Key findings from positive managerial outcomes

The results illustrating the positive managerial outcomes are shown in Chart 7: Chart showing the positive managerial outcomes reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews.

Chart 7 and Table 30 illustrate the responses to the research question:

▪   What are the (positive managerial) outcomes of group supervision for Family

Support Workers and their managers?

The highest-ranked positive supportive outcomes are shown in Table 30 below:

Table 30:   The highest-ranked positive managerial outcomes reported by FSWs and managers

Positive managerial outcome	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Better service for families	8 FSWs	3 managers	11 (73%)
Children feel better or benefit	8 FSWs	2 managers	10 (67%)
Allows supervision later	4 FSWs	1 manager	5 (33%)

There were shared key managerial outcomes for FSWs and managers and also some that were reported predominantly by FSWs. The key managerial outcomes shared by both FSWs and managers were:

- Better service for families

- Children feel better or benefit

Chart 7: Chart showing the positive managerial outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in their realistic interviews

Positive managerial outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews
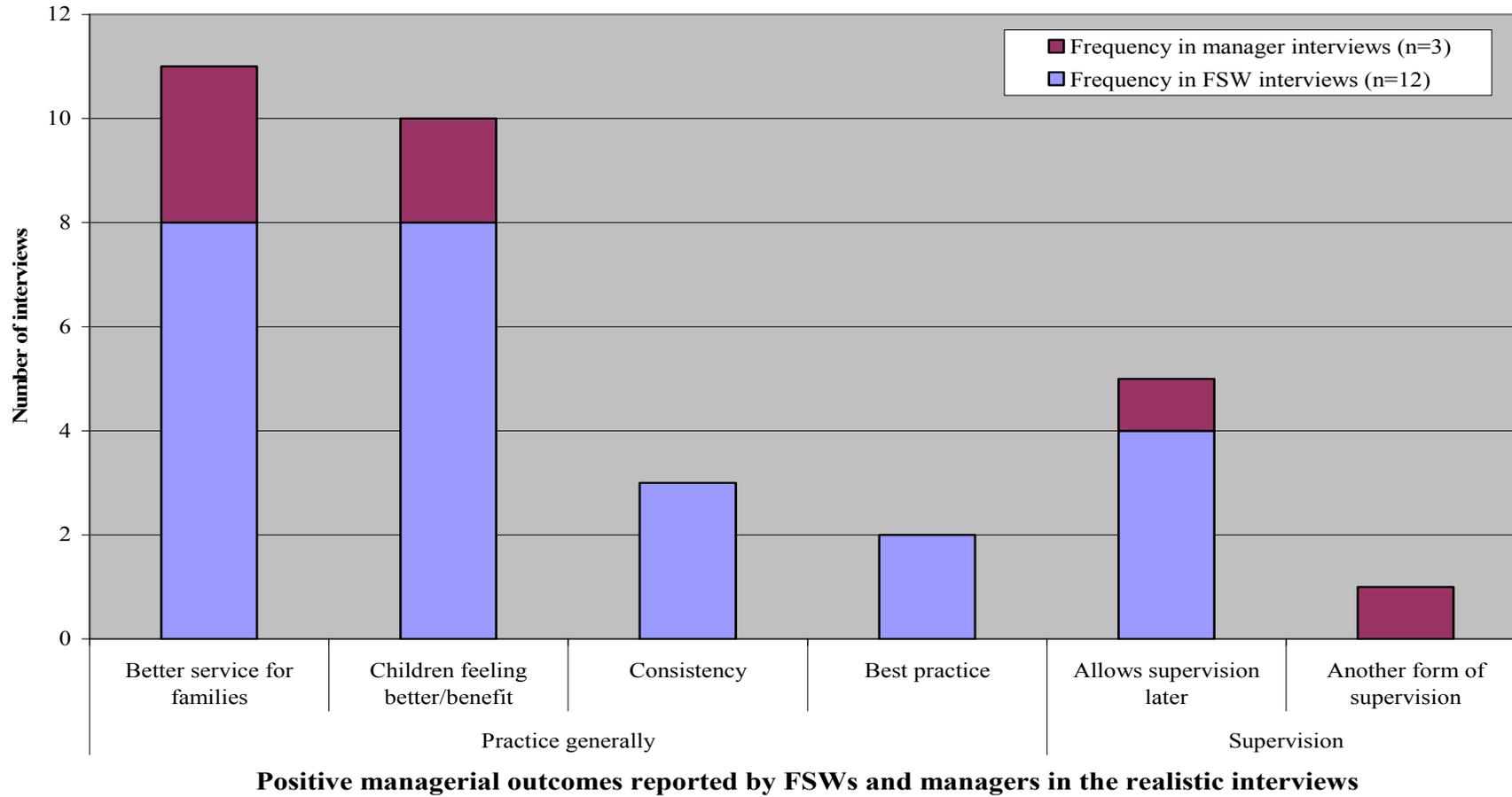
4.4.4 Key findings from negative outcomes

The results illustrating the negative outcomes are shown in Chart 8: Chart showing the negative outcomes reported by FSWs and their managers in their realistic interviews.

Chart 8 and Table 31 illustrate the responses to the research question:

- What are the (negative) outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

The highest ranked negative outcomes are shown in Table 31 below:

Table 31: The highest ranked negative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers

Positive managerial outcome	Number of FSWs (% of FSWs) (n=12)	Number of managers (% of managers) (n=3)	Total number of reports by FSWs and managers (%) (n=15)
Certain people may dominate the group supervision	3 FSWs	3 managers	6 (40%)
Concerns that other staff may think I can't cope	5 FSWs	-	5 (33%)
May feel a bit judged	4 FSWs	1 manager	5 (33%)
Sometimes feel exposed	4 FSWs		4 (27%)
Cost on time	3 FSWs	1 manager	4 (27%)

The negative outcomes of supervision tended to be shared by managers and FSWs, and the main concerns were:

- Certain people could dominate the supervision

- FSWs could be perceived by others as unable to cope, could be judged or feel exposed

Chart 8: Chart showing negative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews

Number of people

■ Frequency in manager interviews (n=3)
□ Frequency in FSW interviews (n=12)

Certain people may dominate supervision
Concerns other staff may think I can't cope
Might feel a bit judged
Sometimes feel quite exposed
Cost on time
Could become a moan
May sit back and not participate
May become personal and can be uncomfortable
May get frustrated
May feel undermined by hearing different practices
Issue raised have to be managed long term
Things being said back to managers

Negative outcomes reported by FSWs and managers in the realistic interviews

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

5.1   Introduction to the discussion

This chapter will consider the results presented in Chapter 4. These findings will be discussed in light of both the research questions and in relation to the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. The research questions are:

- What are the mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers, and their managers?

- What are the mechanisms within Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

- What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

In addition, this chapter will reflect upon the methodological framework selected for the research as described in Chapter 3, and will conclude by considering implications for future areas of research.

5.2   Discussion of the mechanisms that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision

This section discusses the results in relation to the following research questions:

- What are the mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

- What are the mechanisms within Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?

5.2.1   The mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers

Pawson & Tilley (1997) state that mechanisms are essential to consider, in order to understand why a social programme works in a particular context, and use the following basic realistic formula:

"mechanism + context = outcome" (p.xv)

Mechanisms are those parts of an intervention that bring about effects and change. This section (Section 5.2) discusses the mechanisms relating to group supervision, and the following section (Section 5.3) discusses the mechanisms relating to the participants. This section will focus on discussing those mechanisms shown in Charts 1 and 2, and Tables 19 and 23.

These mechanisms within group supervision relate to the running and organisation of the group supervision, and therefore will be discussed within the following sections on:

- the professional contract;

- the group working agreement;

- the role of the supervisor;

- the size of the group; and

- meeting with peers for group supervision.

5.2.1 .1   The professional contract

This section considers the following two highly rated mechanisms reported by FSWs and managers:

- The management are not present

- Confidentiality

The absence of managers was one of the highest-ranked positive mechanisms within the group supervision process, raised by the FSWs and managers. Although not one of the high-ranking mechanism, confidentiality was reported as a positive mechanism by 4 FSWs (33%) and as this links to attendance by mangers will also be discussed in this section, as this also has pertinence to attendance of managers at the group supervision sessions. Both issues are closely linked to the professional contract as described by the largest doll in Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) Russian Dolls metaphor (shown in Chapter 2).

Within the present study, the non-attendance of managers and the lines of communication with managers were discussed within the professional contract. The present study found that 58% of FSWs identified the absence of managers as a key positive feature of the group supervision model, and this was agreed in the professional contract prior to beginning the group supervision. It is interesting to note that two of the managers did not comment positively or negatively on the absence of managers. However, one manager was actively in favour of her absence and saw this as a positive mechanism. This finding would support the views of Hanko (1999) who explicitly did not encourage the presence of managers, but could also resonate with the work of Chalfant & Pysh (1989) who suggest that managers should only attend if invited by the group. Indeed, this compromise could be negotiated from the outset within the professional contract but may help steer an approach that neither excludes the manager nor prevents staff talking freely.

Within the present study, the responsibilities and lines of communication to managers were made clear at the entry contracting stage – in the professional contract – before the group began and re-iterated at the beginning of every group session as recommended by Proctor & Inskipp (2001). Within the group established within the present study, it was agreed verbally in the professional contract that managers would not attend the group supervision sessions and that supervisees were to make their own individual decision about whether they wanted to take issues that they had raised to their managers. However, issues that were discussed within the group were to remain confidential unless the supervisee decided as an outcome of the supervision within the group to take their issue to their manager. The caveat to this ground rule was if gross professional misconduct was revealed and the supervisee refused to take active responsibility to redress, as suggested by Hawkins & Shohet (2006). Hanko (1999) proposes that the confidentiality principle suggests that information discussed in the group is not discussed outside the group unless this is clearly in aid of those concerned to answer the frequently unvoiced question of 'will you tell the boss?' This confidentiality principle allows discretionary discussion between the group members, the manager and professionals involved in the child's welfare and education, but excludes reference to what individual members have said in the group. The present study would support the idea that agreement on confidentiality and lines of communication to managers are important to the participants. Therefore the present study would support literature on the importance of the professional contract ((Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Proctor & Inskipp, 2001; and Scaife, 2001) in the initial stages and, as Proctor & Inskipp (2001) suggest, would benefit from re-visiting on a regular basis.

In summary, the present study found that the professional contract, the entry phase and the initial contracting stages are important to both the participants and those who commission the use of the model – in this case the managers. Therefore the present study reflected the importance of the professional contract as a key mechanism that contributes to the effectiveness of the intervention of group supervision. The present study also raises the importance to the participants of considering whether the presence of managers in sessions is appropriate or not, and if not, how links to managers are maintained. Whilst the literature presents a mixed view on attendance by managers, the present study presents a strong belief from the FSWs that the absence of managers was a positive mechanism promoting the use of group supervision and enhancing the effectiveness of it.

5.2.1.2 The group working agreement

This section considers the following highly rated positive mechanisms reported by FSWs:

- Participants can listen and not speak

- All have chances to talk

- Can bring a range of issues

In addition, this section considers the following negative mechanisms reported by FSWs:

- Hours/timing

- Concerns about what to say

The group working agreement is represented by the second Russian Doll in Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) model (see Diagram 1). Proctor & Inskipp (2001) propose there are four aspects to the group working agreement:

- The type of group (authoritative, participative, co-operative or peer)

- The working arrangements for the group (duration, frequency)

- The ground rules of the group

- The individual responsibility of the participants

The mechanisms reported by the FSWs fall within the four aspects of the group working agreement described by Proctor & Inskipp, so each aspect will be discussed in turn within this section.

The highest ranking mechanism – that participants choose to listen and not to speak – was considered valuable by nine FSWs, showing it to be an important ground rule and one linked to the type of group being used in the present study. The different types of groups and the related roles of supervisors and supervisees are shown in Proctor's (2000) typology of groups in the Literature Review. Proctor & Inskipp (2001) state that the selection of the type of group is dependent on three key factors:

- the composition of the group;

- the participants' degree of ability at working in a group; and

- the supervisor's beliefs about learning, expertise and risk.

Alongside Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) theoretical framework for the type of group being established, Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) stages of development in supervision

described in the Literature Review also had relevance. This contains four stages showing how supervisees can develop in their approach to supervision (see Table 2).

Within the present study, the group of FSWs was composed of a wide range of experience and confidence of working in and running parent groups, and had differing levels of expertise in both working as FSW and having supervision. Alongside this mix of experience, the group had a changing pattern of who was attending, due to issues of short-term contracts, changes in hours and changes in staff. As a result, it was agreed from the outset within the professional contract that whilst the group was aiming to working as a participative or co-operative group (Types 2 and 3), there may be participants at differing individual stages in development in supervision (see Table 2: Stages of development in supervision). In any group supervision session it was likely that some participants would be at novice level and others would be at a further stage of development, and therefore there was a need for ground rules that would allow each supervisee to develop at their own rate. Therefore, within the group working agreement there was an agreed ground rule that participants could choose to speak, and would not be called upon to speak when they did not want to and had the right to pass at any time. This was a familiar concept to the FSWs from their own group work with parents and families.

The group working agreement included the duration and frequency of the group. Hours and timing of the group was raised as a negative mechanism, indicating the importance of agreement when the sessions were and to ensure the sessions were within all the FSW's working hours. It proved difficult to find a time when all were able to attend as the FSWs worked in four different Children's Centres. Stringer et al

(1992) reported a similar finding: that it could be difficult to find a time when all staff from a school who would like to could attend. In addition, Stringer et al found that school staff consultation groups being held in non-directed time, or continuing until late, were both factors that hindered the establishment of staff consultation groups. Norwich & Daniels (1997) had comparable findings with the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs), as two of the schools held their TSTs in school time, and this was cited by staff within these schools as a very important factor in raising the status of the TST and simultaneously demonstrated the management support for the TSTs (a feature of the context that is discussed further in Section 5.4.1 Management support). In the same way, Stringer et al cited head teachers who allocated directed time to groups or stated that the group had precedence over other meetings if it was prearranged time, were factors that supported the establishment of a staff consultation group. This literature alongside the present study exemplifies the importance of maintaining links with and support from the managers throughout the group supervision sessions. In the present study, some of the FSWs had shorter patterns of working days but as group supervisor I was unaware of this until other FSWs brought it to my attention and suggested appropriate timings for the group. This indicates the need for regular review of the working arrangements for the group within the group working agreement to ensure they are meeting all group members' needs with changing working patterns.

In addition, Evans (2005) had a ground rule to encourage participants to take personal responsibility and take their own notes as needed. Evans reported this had two benefits: maximising the facilitator's time and reducing administration, but also helping the participants – in her work, teachers – to retain ownership of the problem and to make their own choices about the ideas and actions they chose to take away

from each session. This was to help the teacher feel an active partner in the process of equal status to the consultant – in this case, the EP – rather than passively receiving advice from others. This again links to Proctor's typology of groups shown in Table 2, with the group supervision in this research intended to be at Type 2 or 3. Therefore the concept of being an active partner of equal status was important and is reflected in the mechanism of 'All have chances to talk' reported by 42% FSWs in the present study. Although this mechanism appears initially to conflict with the mechanism reported by 75% of FSWs that 'Participants can listen and not speak', it reflects that there was agreement within the group that there were different participants at different levels alongside equality of opportunity. Some FSWs remained anxious, with concerns about what to say, which reinforced the need for participants to have the right to pass as they wished as a ground rule. This is shown in the example from the transcript of an interview below:

FSW: I was a bit nervous about what I think so you do need to have a bit of confidence to say something, but the fact you don't have to; it really doesn't matter.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) indicate the value in reviewing these ground rules at the beginning of each session to ensure they continue to fulfill the needs of the group. The participants of the present study also stated that it was important to know the right to pass is reiterated at each group supervision session as shown below:

FSW: I think you make very clear at each one that we come to if we don't feel like, you know, sharing the situation you don't have to; you can just come; and I feel happy and just sit there and I haven't got anything that I want to share at this one.

Interviewer: Does that help you?

FSW: Yes, I think it is very important to let people know there's no pressure…..

This section has illustrated the importance to participants within group supervision of establishing clear ground rules that incorporate the needs and views of those participating, particularly those who may be unfamiliar with the process. The present study supports previous research and theories that highlight the importance of negotiating and agreeing the group working agreement prior to beginning to work with the group and reviewing these arrangements on a regular basis to ensure all the participants' needs are being met on an ongoing basis.

5.2.1.3 The role of the supervisor

This section discusses the role of the supervisor and considers the following positive mechanisms that were reported by the FSWs and managers during their interviews:

- the relaxed, informal approach; and

- facilitation.

Interestingly, whilst facilitation was reported as a positive mechanism by some FSWs, it was also reported as a negative mechanism, demonstrating this works both as a promoting and inhibiting mechanism within group supervision. An additional negative mechanism – domination by one participant – was raised by a number of FSWs, which has clear links to the role of the supervisor in facilitating the group sessions.

Whilst the role of the supervisor is represented within Proctor & Inskipp's (2001) Russian Dolls model (see Diagram 1) within the group working agreement and the professional contract, it is shown more centrally within Hawkins & Shohet's

(2006) model of the group supervision process (see Diagram 2: The concentric rings of group supervision process). Therefore this model will be used to consider the role of the supervisor.

The mechanisms – positive and negative – reported by the FSWs and managers during their interviews can be viewed within the second and third concentric rings of Hawkins & Shohet's model (2006) of the group supervision process. These were:

- the relaxed, informal approach;

- facilitation; and

- domination by one participant.

Hawkins & Shohet's model (2006) highlights the need for supervisors of groups to consider their facilitation of group responses, their attendance to the group dynamics to prevent domination by one participant, and that the approach within the group is negotiated and agreed by the participants and viewed favourably.

The first mechanism – the relaxed and informal approach within group supervision – alludes to the climate within the group and the sessions. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise the need for supervisors to set a 'safe climate' for supervisees to open their work to others and state that supervision is a process that always contains some anxiety and fear for the supervisees, as their work or they themselves as people may be perceived as flawed. The mechanism – the relaxed and informal approach within the present study – indicates that a safe climate had been created and this was considered important by the participants, thereby supporting Hawkins & Shohet's work on group supervision on the value of a safe climate.

The negative mechanism – domination by one person within the group – was reported by FSWs and all managers. It was an anticipated negative mechanism for the managers as they did not attend the group supervision sessions and manager interviews indicated that they all considered domination needed to be considered by the group supervisor to rectify as needed. The following extract from an interview transcript demonstrates this clearly:

Interviewer: OK, lots of benefits there. Any costs to group supervision?

Manager: I guess, and as I say I've not been part of them, you could find if they're not managed correctly that certain people overtake the supervision and other people will sit back and not necessarily partake or get frustrated by that if you've got people in the group like that that potentially need managing.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) place management of responses in the group as the role of the supervisor, in the second concentric circle of their model of the group supervision process. They suggest that the supervisor needs to try and ensure there is an approximately equal amount of sharing and self-disclosure between all group members, avoiding domination by particular supervisees. Whilst this is sound advice, this was more challenging within a mixed group of participants, who had a wide range of experience of supervision and confidence and were at different stages of development in supervision. Therefore, within the present study's group supervision sessions, the ground rule that participants could choose to remain silent was selected. However, potential domination by one participant was a significant issue for me to consider and reflect on within the present study, and I encouraged a balance in feedback and between supervisees in the group.

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) encourage supervisors to reflect upon the climate in the group, working to ensure that the atmosphere in a group remains safe, because it can become unsafe if participants feel unwilling to contribute through possibly overt or covert conflict. For that reason, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) recommend that the supervisor acknowledges the group dynamic and brings it into their awareness. This allows the group dynamic to be attended to and learnt from. However, they also highlight that this should not take over as the major focus of the group but be used as a part of the learning process. This helps to explain why, in the present study, facilitation is seen as a negative and positive mechanism within the group supervision sessions, as it can work to either inhibit or promote group supervision. The responses of the managers, all reporting domination of the group as a negative mechanism and all reporting facilitation as a negative or positive mechanism for the group, shows their heightened awareness of the central role the supervisor plays in the process. Therefore, it was important within the present study to raise these issues when discussing the professional contract at the entry stage, and to re-visit these concerns within regular discussions with managers, and this could be suggested to be an important part of links with managers.

In their discussion of the climate within their group sessions, Cohen & Osterweil (1986) found data indicating that group atmosphere is closely linked with the satisfaction of professional needs. They found that the measure of comfort in the group and the average score of need fulfilment correlate significantly. In turn, they correlated need fulfilment with the consultant's role of helping solve work problems and his/her role as a model for interpersonal relations. Therefore, this indicates the need for the group supervisor to understand the needs of the participants within the group supervision process in order to help the group support these identified needs.

The model of group supervision used within the present study encouraged supervisees to consider the function of their supervision (educative, supportive or managerial) prior to sharing the issue with the group, thereby assisting the supervisee to clarify their needs first and facilitating the group members to support the appropriate need, or inadvertently supporting a different need or perceived need thereby frustrating the supervisee. The high-ranked reporting of the importance of the informal, relaxed atmosphere of the group by 58% of FSWs demonstrates that the atmosphere in the group was important. It can be suggested that the technique of stating the function of the supervision at the outset may have assisted, as it encouraged supervisees to be aware of and share their need with the group and the group to respond accordingly.

The literature offers a range of suggestions as to who should take the place of the group supervisor. Within education contexts, it is often a role taken by EPs either individually (Guishard, 2000; Hanko, 1987; Bozic & Carter, 2002; Gupta, 1985; Farouk, 2004) or in pairs (Evans, 2005) or alongside another professional such as Learning Support Teachers (Tempest et al, 1987). Both Hanko (1999) and Gersch & Rawkins (1987) view the EP as well placed and having the appropriate skills for this work. This literature has pertinence to the present study, where EPs can highlight their distinctive contribution to Children's Centres as few have access to other professionals who hold the same skills.

There are a number of successful supervision groups or support teams run by school staff, such as the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) (Norwich & Daniels, 1997), Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989), Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995), and Staff Consultation Groups (Stringer et al, 1992). However, all of

the projects described in the literature which established group supervision in education without external supervisors involved significant training packages for those who were going to run the groups and ongoing support. Norwich & Daniels (1997) reported that all the schools with TSTs had at least one individual support visit per term by the project staff and one four-way meeting with other schools in their phase. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) emphasise the need for a support system for the TATs and stress that it is not the specific form of support that is critical for the continuation of the TATs, but rather its existence and availability. Hanko (1987) strongly asserts that simply providing mechanical support for teachers – 'packages for teachers' – through short courses is unwise, and that intermittent, systematic post-course consultative support is needed and, again, EPs are ideally placed to act as enabling consultants. However, Cohen & Osterweil (1986) do not consider psychologists automatically able to undertake group consultation and suggest the need for further training and experience within a group. Literature by Hanko (1999), Proctor & Inskipp (2001) and Stringer et al (1992) support this view and would encourage that supervisors access further training and development opportunities.

In summary, whilst the present study has not examined if the role of group supervisor should be undertaken by an EP, it has shown the key role the supervisor plays in the success of group supervision. Although there are examples in the literature of teacher support groups and consultation groups being established without an external consultant, all take considerable training and ongoing support. The literature indicates that the group supervisor, either external or internal to the organisation, needs to have appropriate training. For that reason, if EPs are going to take on the role of group supervisor, their initial training and ongoing continuous

professional development needs to contain not only elements related to supervision and/or consultation but also group supervision. The present study also supports previous research on the importance of the supervisor role in the following areas as shown in Diagram 2: The concentric rings of group supervision process (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006, p155):

- negotiating the initial professional contract appropriately (as discussed in Section 5.2.1 The professional contract)

- facilitating the group responses

- considering and responding to the group dynamic and the development of the group

- creating the safe climate within the group for supervision.

5.2.1.4 The size of the group in group supervision

The following section considers the size of the group, because this was reported as a key negative mechanism by five FSWs (42%) and one manager (33%). Within the present study, the size of the group varied due to the changing pattern of attendance and an increase in the number of FSWs working within the Children's Centre. During the present study it was decided by the group supervisor and the Children's Centres management team to keep the numbers in the group below ten, and a second group has been established.

The literature (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Cohen & Osterweil, 1986; Gersch & Rawkins, 1987; Stringer et al, 1992) reported that group sizes vary. There is a range of sizes suggested from four to twelve participants, with Proctor (2000) suggesting a group size of between four and six to allow intimacy and variety, and Hanko (1999) suggesting up to 12. However, both state clearly that this is dependent on a number of

other factors such as access to other forms of supervision and the time available. The literature does not comment on participants' views of the size of the group. However, group size was a consideration for both FSWs and managers, as demonstrated by the following extract from an interview transcript:

Interviewer: It could be anything about the structure, anything at all?

FSW: I think sometimes, if it's a very large group, I might be less likely to attend.

Interviewer: Yeah, so what would you say is a very large group?

FSW: Well, I think, I don't know, say about five people. If there were five people, around about that number, I would be more likely to attend. I don't want to be fighting to get my point across or feeling like I'm not getting an opportunity to speak. Although the groups I have been to have been quite large and there is always the opportunity to speak, but I think I'd be less inclined to share my specific problem and take a big chunk of time if there was a large group.

Within the present study the group size varied from three to twelve, and in interviews most were unwilling to state a maximum number although six was suggested by two FSWs. However, as the total number of FSWs working at the four Children Centres expanded, and two more Children's Centres joined the cluster of Children's Centres, the number of FSWs who could join the group expanded. Therefore it was agreed with the managers that two sessions should be offered instead of one, in order to reduce the potential size of the group and to also give flexibility in timing in attendance. It is interesting that the FSWs themselves seem to know who is likely to attend each session and seem to work together to self-regulate the size of the group. This number has expanded again more recently and, therefore, it has been agreed to offer a third session as group size was a key mechanism in potentially inhibiting attendance at the group supervision sessions.

5.2.1.5 The composition of the group

This section considers the following positive mechanisms that were reported by the FSWs during their interviews:

- Having more than one person's view

- Meeting with colleagues who do the same job

It is relevant to note that these are factors that were significant to the FSWs and were not reported by managers. Again, this may reflect an experiential view of the group supervision sessions and demonstrate the importance of having opportunities to meet with colleagues. Whilst there are regular team meetings, it is unclear how often the FSWs meet as a team, as they work from four separate sites within the same management structure.

The literature review detailed a number of advantages and disadvantages of group supervision as shown in Section 2.4.2 The outcomes of supervision. The mechanism reported by FSWs that it is important to have more than one person's view, in that supervisees receive reflections, feedback and input from their colleagues as well as the supervisor (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) and therefore have access to a wider range of skill and ability (Proctor, 2000). In terms of the mechanism that group supervision allowed FSWs to meet with colleagues who can do the same job, this relates well to Proctor (2000), who comments that group supervision can offer companionship in what is a private practice, showing how others do it . This is demonstrated in the following extract from an interview:

Interviewer: So what is it about you personally that you think helps you attend sessions?

FSW: I'm open minded and I believe in the value of talking with your colleagues really, in a structured environment, plus there's a part of me that really wants to help my colleagues but also really values their input into my ideas as well. So, sort of like, I'll take on board different ideas but I might not always use them because nobody does use everything. But you know if something can stop you in your tracks and makes you think 'Hold on I hadn't considered that, that might be a good idea' so it's eye opening to me.

Interviewer: So it's the value of talking to your colleagues. And what do you think it is about group supervision that gets you attend? A slightly different question.

FSW: As opposed to one to one?

Interviewer: Hmm. Yes that's another question too but very good, yes.

FSW: I think because you never know who's going to give you an idea or a perspective, do you know what I mean? And everybody's got totally different experiences, so they bring it to the group…

However, Proctor (2000) does state that one of the advantages of group supervision can be in "harnessing difference" (p.23). Therefore, if the groups do not have to be homogenous in nature but can have mixed membership. Norwich & Daniels (1997) had colleagues from different levels within the school in the Teacher Support Teams but all were from the same school. In the present study the FSWs who attended were on differing types of contract (temporary or permanent) and worked with differing age groups (0-5 or 5-13) but the similarity was in the type of work undertaken. This is demonstrated in the following extracts from an interview with a FSW who chose not to attend as she had a specialist area of working with teenage parents:

Interviewer: C sends them to you, so you're aware that it's going on, it's not lack of information, it's lack of time but also your job is something slightly different to the others who attend the group?

FSW: I think it's probably comes down to the fact that I strongly believe that my remit is very different to a Family Support Worker.

Interviewer: Do you think there is a group of workers who it would be useful to meet with?

FSW: Mmm, well, unless it were a group of Teenage Pregnancy Support Workers, I don't want to single myself out too much. I think I could probably sit with Family Support Workers but I couldn't. The difference is, what I couldn't want to because they deal with families, because they are dealing with families with pregnant daughters or dealing domestic violence so there are, but I couldn't relate as strongly…..

In the context of the present study, the FSWs were accessing regular individual supervision with their managers, and some emphasised that group supervision was useful but needed to run alongside individual supervision. One FSW aptly summarised up this view in her response to the summarised transcript by stating:

"Yes it is fine to use. Please could you just amend that I do feel supported by my individual supervisions; I don't get more support from the group supervision, just a different type of support, if that makes sense?" (personal email from FSW 7.11.08)

In addition, some FSWs and a manager also viewed group supervision as useful for prompting issues for individual supervision later, demonstrating that group supervision was viewed as complementary to individual supervision and not a replacement for it. This supports the literature, such as Proctor (2000) who suggests that, where possible, choice for individual and/or group supervision should be encouraged, whilst Steel (2001) suggests a mixed model of both group and individual supervision would would support those who find it difficult to speak in a group and allow more sensitive issues to be discussed which supervisees or supervisors feel uncomfortable discussing in a group, whilst group supervision allows staff to support and learn from each other.

In summary, two key mechanisms within group supervision identified within the present study are to have supervision alongside others at the same level in the team, in order to hear their views, thereby demonstrating a wish for group supervision with peers. These mechanisms could not be achieved within individual supervision as these relate to getting multiple views and opinions from colleagues who share the same job. This does illustrate the possibilities of utilising peer or team supervision. However, the findings within the present study demonstrate the key role the supervisor plays in the success of group supervision as an intervention.

5.2.1.6 Concluding reflections and comments on the mechanisms within group supervision

To conclude this section on the mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use, the key positive mechanisms identified were:

- The professional contract discussions with managers

- The group working agreement with the participants

- The role of the supervisor

- The size of the group

- Meeting with peers

The present study supports the literature in identifying the initial contracting stage of the group supervision as a vital mechanism. It has shown that the negotiation and discussion on how the group will run with managers contributes to the effectiveness of the intervention of group supervision. The professional contract establishes that managers understand the group supervision process, should ensure their support, discuss their potential attendance, the roles of the supervisor and supervisees and issues of confidentiality.

The group working agreement gives participants and the supervisor opportunities to negotiate these issues and, in addition, the intended type and size of the group, the possible ground rules and the working arrangements of the group. The present study supports previous research that highlights the importance of negotiating and agreeing the group working agreement prior to beginning to work with the group, and reviewing these arrangements on a regular basis to ensure all the participants' needs are being met on an ongoing basis.

Whilst the literature presents a mixed view on attendance by managers, the present study also identified absence of managers as a positive mechanism promoting the use of group supervision that was important to the FSWs. Therefore this formed an important part of both the professional contract and the group working agreement.

The present study has shown the key role the supervisor plays in the success of group supervision in negotiating the professional contract, the group working agreement, facilitating group responses, responding to the group dynamic and development and creating a safe climate within the group. The literature indicates that the group supervisor – either external or internal to the organisation – needs to have appropriate training in supervision but also group supervision.

The present study highlighted the importance of considering and consulting with participants on an appropriate size to the group as this can potentially be an inhibiting mechanism. The literature reports a range of sizes, and whilst FSWs and managers within the present study were unwilling to place an exact figure on numbers, it is an

important consideration within the group working agreement and professional contract.

The final key mechanisms discussed were the importance of peers attending the group who do the same job as the other participants. Whilst the literature presents differing views on the importance of homogeneity of the group, it was highlighted as important within the present study that the participants of group supervision did the same job as each other. The FSWs wanted to have supervision alongside others at the same level in the team, in order to hear their views, thereby demonstrating a wish for group supervision with peers. These mechanisms could not be achieved within individual supervision as these relate to getting multiple views and opinions from colleagues who share the same job.

5.2.2 The mechanisms within Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision

The mechanisms of the Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision can be viewed at three levels: features of the individual, features of the team and features of the profession. The features of the team and the features of the profession are discussed within the section examining the context. This section considers the features at an individual worker level, through consideration of the mechanisms elicited from the FSWs and Children's Centre managers. Timmins & Miller (2007) draw upon Pawson & Tilley (1997) and state that people are a critical factor in any intervention in a social context. They highlight that different types of participants may produce different outcomes and, therefore, this aspect should be incorporated within the mechanisms.

The results that reflect the features of FSWs as individuals that make them more or less likely to engage in group supervision are illustrated in the results in Charts 1 and 2, and Tables 20,21 and 23. The results of the present study suggest that the most important mechanisms within the worker, both positive and negative, reported by the FSWs and managers were:

- confidence;

- experience;

- availability of time;

- the team relationships; and

- openness of the worker to new ideas.

5.2.2.1 The confidence level of the Family Support Workers

The results show that both FSWs and managers consider that confidence – either having confidence as a positive mechanism or a lack of confidence as a negative mechanism – play a key role in whether a FSW would make use of and engage with group supervision. The FSWs seemed to emphasise the personal confidence of the FSW, and this is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a FSW:

Interviewer: Do you think there is anything within you that makes you more likely to attend than another person? Are there any personal aspects of yourself that make you a person more likely to engage in group supervision?

FSW: Personally I think I'm a confident person and as long as I know the structure and I've got an idea about what we're talking about then I'll input. If I'm weak on that subject then I'll tend to listen a lot more, if there is information I can offer then I will. That's the way I tend to find it I think.

Interviewer: Yeah, so I suppose, in a way you're saying a more confident person maybe more likely to attend; someone who is shyer would be less likely to attend a group supervision.

FSW: And to become involved, I think. I'm confident enough to become involved in discussion, whereas that quieter, more reserved person may sit back in the background a little bit and take the information in.

In comparison, within the interviews with managers, the managers were clear that the FSW needed confidence to be within the group but also confidence in the process which links back to the previous section on the group working agreement with the participants in the initial contracting stage. This is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with two managers:

Interviewer: Do you have any view as to why some are more likely to attend than others?

Manager 1: I think, I think team dynamics might be one. I think some workers may feel more comfortable in being honest and open than perhaps some others and that might be down again to experience and how long they have been in the team.

Interviewer: Is there anything else?

Manager 2: It's down to that confidence thing; understanding and knowing exactly what the group's about, the purposes of it.

However, when confidence is mentioned in the literature it tends to be viewed as an outcome of supervision rather than as a mechanism that promotes the use of supervision. This is demonstrated by Proctor (2000) who writes that group supervision can be used by each supervisee as:

"…a major forum for the development of the four Cs – Competence, Confidence, Compassion and Creativity." (p.8)

Hawkins & Shohet (2006) similarly consider confidence in supervisees as an outcome, and therefore focus on the role of the supervisor, discussing how the supervisor can reduce anxiety and thereby enhance the confidence of supervisees by creating a safe climate. This is discussed in more depth in Section 5.2.3 on the role of

the supervisor. Farouk (2004) also reported that a supervisor encouraging more passive members of the group within the group work sessions to give their opinions early on, and validating these views, helped participants become more likely to contribute. Both Farouk (2004) and Evans (2005) takes a similar stance to Hawkins & Shohet in focusing on the role of the supervisor in developing the confidence of the participants, rather than supporting Proctor & Inskipp's view that supervisees also need to develop confidence and skills in preparing work for supervision. In comparison, Proctor & Inskipp (2001) imply that the supervisee has to develop skills in order to make best use of supervision, including confidence to present their own work, rather than solely placing this within the realm of the supervisor.

In summary, the confidence level of the individual FSWs was considered relevant by both FSWs and managers in whether FSWs were likely to access group supervision, thereby demonstrating that confidence has a place as a mechanism rather than purely an outcome as the literature tends to suggest. However, the literature places the onus on creating confidence in different aspects of the group supervision process. Hawkins & Shohet (2006), Evans (2005) and Farouk (2004) view that it is the role of the supervisor to enhance the confidence level of participants in group supervision where possible, especially those who are more reticent, whereas Proctor & Inskipp state that supervisees also play in role in developing skills and confidence to make best use of supervision. These positions are not incompatible and both can be utilised, whereby supervisors have an awareness of the need to support supervisees' confidence in group supervision, but also supervisees are encouraged to prepare and maximise the opportunities presented in group supervision. Therefore the present

study's results show confidence is an important mechanism to consider, both during the process as a supervisor but also at the initial contracting stage.

5.2.2.2 The experience of the Family Support Workers

The results from the present study highlight the importance of experience of the FSWs to both the FSWs and their managers, although this is not in relation to the concept of group supervision as may be anticipated, but in relation to their experiences of talking and listening to others. The experience of talking and listening to others comes in a number of ways for the FSWs within this research. The FSWs gained experience of this within their current roles undertaking outreach support to families and through running parent groups. In addition, most of the FSWs had relevant experience of talking and listening to others – either children or adults – in their previous roles as can be seen in Table 12. The range of experience of the FSWs in their current role ranged between less than a year to five years.

Proctor & Inskipp (2001) highlight some of the essential qualities of the supervisees in order to make good use of group supervision. These clearly include communication skills, and this can be seen to relate to the mechanism identified by nine FSWs (75%) in the present study: that the individual needs to be experienced and willing to listen and talk.

However, in addition, experience of group supervision and/or individual supervision may have played a role. The FSWs all received individual supervision from their line manager in their current role, but varied in their understanding or access to supervision prior to joining this role, ranging from the majority having no

prior experience of supervision to one FSW having undertaken a counselling course. This is shown in Table 12.

Being new was reported as both a negative mechanism and a positive mechanism. All three managers and two FSWs reported 'being new' as a negative mechanism and, therefore, inhibiting engaging in group supervision. In comparison, being new to Family Support was seen as a positive mechanism – thereby promoting the use of group supervision – for three FSWs, and being new to Children's Centres was seen as a positive mechanism by two FSWs. It is interesting to see that managers saw being new as an inhibiting factor, whereas some of FSWs themselves were likely to see this as a promoting factor. It may be that the mechanism of experience was influenced by other factors, such as the confidence level of the FSW, or by having peer encouragement to attend, as demonstrated by this quote from an experienced FSW who had not attended group supervision:

FSW: Yes, a member of staff, C, she said to me and C, actually more than anything she said to me, 'Come and talk about the things you're stressed about' … And I think C was just chatting to me and said that why don't you come, you don't come to these meetings…

Hanko (1999) considers the role of experience within the collaborative problem solving groups. She cites Eggleston (1977) in promoting to schools to involve a high number of staff with a range of positions and responsibilities in the school in the collaborative problem solving groups, as this affects the impact of the support system on the institution as a whole. Hanko (1999) suggests that heterogeneous groups have advantages in that less experienced members of staff feel reassured by the experienced members, and the more experienced staff welcome the infectious

strengths of those recently committed to the job, and the reminder of the need for their support. However, despite this guidance, she reports that schools differed greatly in their decision as to whether a group should be open to all staff regardless of status or experience. Proctor (2000) states that an advantage of group supervision is that supervisees receive reflections, feedback and input from their colleagues as well as the supervisor, and therefore have access to a wider range of skill, ability and experience. In addition, both Hawkins & Shohet (2006), and Proctor (2000) suggest that within group supervision there is a larger range of life experiences, ages, races and personality types and, therefore, a greater likelihood of someone in the group being able to empathise with the supervisee or the supervisee's client as detailed in the Literature Review.

In summary, the present study has found that experience of communication is an important mechanism in promoting the use of group supervision. However, experience of communication does not act in isolation, and experience of supervision may also have an impact but was not reported explicitly by the participants within the present study. Individuals varied in their views of how important experience within the profession or being new had been and the literature – in particular Hanko (1999); Hawkins & Shohet (2006); and Proctor (2000) – tends to encourage a mix of experience to maximise the advantages of group supervision.

5.2.2.3 The availability of time to access group supervision for the Family Support Workers

The availability of time was raised as an inhibiting factor for the FSWs and the manager with 'having other appointments or being too busy' reported as a negative mechanism that could prevent attendance at group supervision sessions. Conversely,

having the ability to organise one's own diary was seen as a promoting mechanism by several FSWs. Indeed, it is important to remember that time is a factor in supervision that can prevent supervisees from accessing any supervision, group or individual.

Some of the literature within the review made an assumption that supervision is a necessity to practice and therefore time must be made available, as demonstrated in the Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP) (2002) definition of supervision:

> "….the opportunity to explore and learn from the practical, experiential and theoretical elements of professional practice is an essential component of the psychologist's continuing development." (p.19)

Other authors such as Hawkins & Shohet (2006) state that supervision is very important, thereby implying that time must be made for it. Hawkins & Shohet's (2006) position is helpful when considering the data on access to supervision prior to current position in this research, as shown in Table 12 (Table to show the experience level of the Family Support Workers). Table 12 shows that half of the FSWs who participated in the research had experienced individual supervision prior to their current post, and none had previously experienced group supervision. Therefore it could be suggested that since some of the FSWs had limited experience of supervision, they had not developed within a culture of accessing supervision and could be fearful of it. The following extract from an interview with an FSW illustrates her belief that the FSWs who are willing to access and makes time for group supervision are those who have had experience or understanding of supervision:

FSW: No just that I think it's really nice to have the opportunity and I always encourage all the others to come because not everyone else does, well not everyone else but not everyone sees it as an important part of the job whereas I do.

Interviewer: And why is that? What is your theory about that?

FSW: I think it came from the counselling where they told us, well they read through the benefits of supervision that when you're counselling somebody, obviously, you can't help but take on board and you're being sort of exposed.

Interviewer: Contained?

FSW: Yeah, to that kind of stuff really and that's for your emotional health and mental health that you have to offload because you can't just keep taking on and keep taking on, eventually you'll explode.

Interviewer: So you're talking about the burn out? And it stops stress? Do you think other people don't feel that stress or do you think...?

FSW: Or don't realise, and that it's an outlet, for me it is and I know everyone deals with it differently but I don't, personally don't feel that everyone gets the maximum benefit that they could out of it, but that's a personal view.

Interpreter: That's your own view?

FSW: I think they're a bit scared of it.

Both Chalfant & Pysh (1989) and Newton (1995) note that insufficient time allocated for implementation was a high-ranked concern for many participants. Stringer at al (1992) and Norwich & Daniels (1997) state having protected time to run groups in was a promoting factor for the continuation and establishment of group supervision approaches. The literature indicates time needs consideration as to when group supervision sessions should be held, and the present study has reinforced this view. However, in addition, the present study adds that the issue of time is related to the priority participants place on accessing supervision which reflects both their previous experience and the stance the managers take with regard to the value of

supervision and reflection. Therefore the issue of time relates to the discussion of the professional contract, the group working agreement and the importance of strong links with managers. The importance of managers being in support of the process of group supervision and encouraging staff to attend or view it as a priority is further discussed within the section on management support.

In summary, whilst having sufficient time for supervision is an important consideration, this also relates to how the managers promote supervision and allow the time needed for it, and how the participants feel about the value of supervision. The present study supports that this can be related to previous experiences of supervision as this may influence whether staff perceive supervision as essential and a 'habit' – as termed by Hawkins & Shohet (2006) – or a luxury that is utilised when time is available.

5.2.2.4 The team relationships between the Family Support Workers

The relationships between FSWs are discussed in greater depth when examining the features of the context, namely the team, within the following section on group dynamics. However, the following high-ranked factors were identified as promoting mechanisms at individual worker level by both FSWs and managers as shown in Tables 20 and 21:

- Willing to learn and share

- Believe in talking to colleagues

- Able to share

These mechanisms do have a strong relationship to the relationships within the team, as discussed as part of the context. However, there can be individual variation between workers on these beliefs and attributes. Stringer et al (1992) report a similar finding in the examination of factors aiding a group's establishment stating that:

> "…group members should be 'involved', 'interested' and 'caring'; they need to be 'willing and able to commit themselves to the group." (p.95)

This resonates with Proctor & Inskipp's ideas (2001) of good group manners within the group working agreement referred to earlier, where the participants are aware of how to share. Proctor (2000) encourages group supervisors to remind supervisees of the need for them to have the information, skill, support and challenge (Egan, 1997) to enter creatively and actively into the group working alliance. However, Stringer et al (1992) take this a step further by identifying that it is not merely how able participants are to share but also their willingness to do so. In turn, the present study would add that participants need to be willing and able to share and also believe in the need to do so. This is illustrated in the following extract from a transcript from an interview with a manager:

Interviewer: What type of Family Support Worker do you feel is more likely to access group supervision? You talked about the costs previously?

Manager: I think, perhaps you've got members of the team that are perhaps shyer and are not so comfortable with a big group and in our Centres if you've got very high numbers, if you're not feeling comfortable in that situation, if you're new to the team and I think you've got to be willing and open to learn I think, to recognise that actually people can share good practice and learn from that, you've got to be able to recognise that.

Norwich & Daniels (1997) examined the attitudes of teachers – the non-referring teachers – who did not make use of the Teacher Support Teams (TSTs)

established in their schools. They report that the non-referring teachers had distinct attitudes to the TSTs, and stated that either the TSTs were irrelevant to them or might be used in the future. This does not identify that the non-referring teachers were unwilling to share and talk with others as would be anticipated from the present study. However, in comparison, Chalfant & Pysh (1989) do identify willingness of teachers to engage in Teacher Support Teams (TATs) as a significant factor in accessing the TATs, as it was mentioned by 48% of the teams, and limited teacher support was identified by 61% as a factor in reducing TAT effectiveness. This was characterised by unwillingness to admit that a problem existed; reluctance to share problems with colleagues; resistance to sharing problems with other teachers and preferring to refer to special education personnel. Therefore the present study supports Chalfant & Pysh's findings that FSW willingness to access support is an essential aspect to promote effective use of group supervision.

In summary, the present study would highlight the willingness, ability and belief in sharing with colleagues as important aspects to consider in relation to supervisees. This can be discussed when negotiating the ground rules for the group supervision sessions and is important to discuss at the initial contracting stages; the professional contract and group working agreement of the process of group supervision.

5.2.2.5 The openness of the Family Support Workers

The following high-ranked factors were identified as promoting mechanisms at individual worker level by both FSWs and managers as shown in Tables 20 and 21:

- The openness of the worker to new ideas
- Willing to give group supervision a chance

The feature as to whether supervisees are open to the idea of group supervision is one that has limited discussion within the literature available. As has been seen in Section 5.3, there is limited literature available on why some supervisees are more willing to engage in processes such as group supervision compared with others. However, research by Chalfant & Pysh (1989) reported that if school staff were unreceptive to change and new ideas there was an impact on the accessing of the TATs, but do not offer detail on this. Chalfant & Pysh (1989) recommend that participants have an active role in agreeing to accept or reject the implementation of a programme such as a TAT in the initial contracting stage, as the effectiveness of a school consultation programme is highly dependent on staff support. The present study and Chalfant & Pysh's research indicate that the internal quality of the supervisee of being open to the process is important. This can be linked to the role of the supervisor, particularly in the initial contracting stage, when the supervisor needs to boost supervisees' willingness to give group supervision a chance alongside gaining management support. Alternatively, it can be the role of peers encouraging each other to attend, as illustrated in the following extract from a transcript of an interview with a FSW:

Interviewer: The next question is what about you that makes you more likely to attend as a person, do you think there are any characteristics make a person more likely to engage in group supervision?

FSW: I suppose I feel able to share things with others and I think that when I've spoken to the others that say they might not want to say anything, the thing that stands out, at which point I say you don't have to say anything, but I've always got a lot to say for myself, so I just found that helps but when I have said that to the others that you can just listen and observe it. And there are a lot quieter members of our team who would do that and still find benefits of it. So I think we all, we all, would benefit if we give it a chance but erm...

Interviewer: So you think giving it a chance?

FSW: Yes, I think definitely give it the chance because... I've certainly encouraged the girls to give it a chance because they can't really know what it's about until they see….

5.2.2.6 Concluding reflections and comments on the mechanisms within the Family Support Workers

To conclude this section on the features of Family Support Workers as individual workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision within the context, a number of factors have been discussed:

- the confidence level of the FSW;

- the experience of the FSW;

- the availability of time for the FSW to access group supervision;

- the team relationships with colleagues; and

- the openness of the FSW to new ideas.

Whilst there is limited literature on why some individual workers are more willing to engage in group supervision processes than others and this may be a future area for research, this may reflect the methodological approaches selected for the research. In the present study, Realistic Evaluation not only allowed an exploration of mechanisms, but in using the teacher-learner cycle I needed to continue to be open to new ideas from the participants about what the mechanisms may be. Realistic Evaluation has supported a fuller exploration and description of what makes group supervision work for these FSWs who attended the group supervision sessions in this context.

The present study supports the literature in highlighting the importance of the supervisor in promoting the five factors listed above, particularly in the initial

contracting stage of the group supervision process. The literature and the present study also emphasise the importance of engaging managers in actively supporting the group supervision process and supporting the supervisees to attend by supporting availability of time, encouraging the FSWs to be open and be confident of the process.

5.3 Discussion of the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision

Section 5.3 discusses the results in relation to the following research questions:

What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group

supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?

5.3.1 The features of the context at the level of the team that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers

Realistic Evaluation also emphasises the centrality of the context to any intervention. Pawson & Tilley (1997) state that a social programme cannot be evaluated in isolation from the context; therefore they term the basic realistic formula as the conceptual backbone to Realistic Evaluation:

"mechanism + context = outcome" (p.xv)

The section of the results that considers the context is illustrated in Charts 3 and 4 and Tables 24 and 25. Context describes the features of the conditions in which the intervention is introduced that allow the mechanism to come into operation. There were two principal contexts identified in the realistic interviews:

- features at the team level; and

- features of the profession level.

This section discusses the features at team level.

There were two clear features of the team that were seen to promote the use of group supervision: the team trusts and supports each other, and the managers are in favour of group supervision. The highest-ranked features of the team that would inhibit the use of group supervision were team dynamics, or the team doesn't know each other and lack of trust in the group. Therefore this section will discuss:

- management support; and

- group dynamics.

5.3.1.1 Management support

The relationships with managers has been discussed within the section on the professional contract. Whilst this section discussed the importance of establishing agreement on the participation level of managers, this section considers the critical importance of ensuring that managers are in support of the group supervision process. Within this research, it appears to be a vital element needed in the context to ensure the success of group supervision. This feature of the context can be positioned alongside the absence of managers as a key mechanism within group supervision, thereby demonstrating the importance of managers and the professional contract to the process of group supervision.

As discussed previously, establishing that managers are in support of group supervision occurs in the initial entry phase when the group supervision sessions are being set up through the professional contract. There is much within the literature (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989; Stringer et al, 1992; Hanko, 1999) that highlights the importance of the management support. Hanko (1999) advises of the need to remind managers how vital their support of the group will be at the initial contracting phase

and the importance of the professional contract has been discussed previously. As an inhibiting factor, Norwich & Daniels (1997) reported that if a head teacher was sceptical or hostile to setting up a Teacher Support Team (TST), even if the staff had a majority vote in favour of establishing a TST, the TST was unlikely to be successful.

The present study endorses the findings in the literature which highlight that support by managers is an important feature of the context, and must be negotiated as a mechanism at the entry phase. The importance of management support is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with a FSW:

FSW: I think the managers are supportive.
Interviewer: Do you think that's an important factor?
FSW: Yes, definitely. I'm sure if push came to shove, they'd say that it was probably a necessity if we were getting benefit from it …

And from a manager's perspective:

Manager: I think we definitely try and promote that as an opportunity and it's different from one-to-one supervision, it's different from the reflective group that they run and so I actually think it's a really good time for them to really think about themselves and other people and focusing on the issues they've got because it's a tricky job.

The present study would endorse Farouk (2004), who stated that the initial contracting stage should be viewed as having two parts: the discussion of the professional contract with the managers, and the group working agreement discussion with the group. The discussion with the managers is vital to gain the support of managers. Within my role as both researcher and group supervisor, I have found it important to ask managers to remind the participants of the value of the group supervision sessions on a regular basis to demonstrate continued management support. This is particularly relevant in the context of the present study, where there is a changing pattern of attendance as the team of FSWs grows and changes.

5.3.1.2   Group dynamics

The dynamics of the group was seen as a potentially promoting or inhibiting factor by a majority of the FSWs and managers. Initially all the frameworks described in the literature review – Rioch et al's (1976) work on group dynamics; Adair's (1983) framework for group needs; Schutz's (1967, 1989) framework of individual needs; and Tuckman's group movement model (1965) – appeared beneficial to consider for the group in the present study, but the context plays a key role in determining which frameworks are more relevant. The membership of the group in the present study was changing because the group drew from a fixed group of potential supervisees, but the number and attendance of FSWs varied from session to session. This group was also subject to relatively high levels of change as the contracts tended to be fixed, short-term contracts with a high turnover of staff. The mobility of staff within a year was at approximately 25%. Therefore, whilst all the frameworks can be drawn upon, a developmental approach to group dynamics had to be considered alongside a changing pattern of attendance. Thus Adair's (1983) framework for group needs, Schutz's (1967, 1989) individual needs and Rioch et al's (1976) work on group dynamics have greater relevance than Tuckman's (1965) group movement model, which seems to have more significance for groups of fixed membership. The role that the supervisor plays in managing and attending to the group dynamic is also discussed in the section on the role of the supervisor.

5.3.1.3   Concluding reflections and comments on the features of the context at the level of the team that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers

To conclude this section on support for setting up group supervision the features of the team as part of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group

supervision, this section has considered the two key findings within the present study which are:

- the importance of having management; and

- the importance of the supervisor utilising a range of conceptual frameworks to both understand and support the dynamic of the group and balance the different needs within a group.

The present study's findings support previous literature such as Chalfant & Pysh (1989); Norwich & Daniels (1997); and Stringer et al (1992) on the importance of management support. It also supports ideas offered within key texts (Hanko, 1999; Proctor & Inskipp, 2001; Hawkins & Shohet, 2006) on how to establish and support group supervision through the initial contracting stage and the importance of the professional contract.

5.3.2 The features of the context at the level of the profession that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision

As stated previously, Realistic Evaluation emphasises the centrality of the context to any intervention. The section of the results that considers the context is illustrated in Charts 3 and 4 and Tables 26 and 27. The key features of the profession were identified from the realistic interviews and can be used to identify the type of professions which may benefit from using group supervision as a tool to support their work. These are discussed under the following headings:

- The nature and demands of the work in the profession (including working with families and in the home)

- The need for professionals to talk and share

- The shared goals of the profession

5.3.2.1   The nature and demands of the work in the profession

The key findings were that both FSWs and managers felt that group supervision was appropriate for their profession, as the work is with families and within the home. Indeed, two FSWs saw that an inhibiting feature of a profession for group supervision would be that the workers did not work with families or in the home. Therefore, in considering other professions which could benefit from the use of group supervision, FSWs tended to suggest either that it had relevance to all, or was particularly relevant to a wide range of professions that work with families and children such as teaching, nursing and social work. The following comments illustrate the wide range of application suggested:

Interviewer: Are there any other types of groups of worker for whom you feel group supervision would be useful?

FSW1:   I suppose Home Start?

Interviewer: And why would you do it with Home Start, what about them?

FSW1:   They're also going into families and offering Family Support and I imagine they have their emotional needs.

FSW2:   Health visitors, nurses, anybody really who works with the public.

FSW1:   Creche and nursery staff.

The literature on the differing professional groups that may benefit from supervision discuss a wide range of professional groups. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) entitle their book 'Supervision in the helping professions' and therefore highlight that supervision is needed by all those who work within the helping professions. Similarly, Scaife (2001) also views that supervision is needed by those within the different disciplines of professional helping. In contrast, Proctor (2000) views her book as concentrating on supervision of counsellors and psychotherapists but does

state that the core ideas to have application to other professional group. Therefore the present study would support the literature that supervision has application to a wide range of groups, but is particularly relevant to those who professionally help others.

The emotional demands of the profession were stated by seven FSWs and two managers as a key aspect of the profession that promoted the need for group supervision. This needs to be considered alongside the feature of the profession as intense, challenging and stressful by eight FSWs and all managers. This is the highest-ranked feature of the profession and shows a high level of agreement between the FSWs and managers that the demands and stress engendered by the role of Family Support are critical in promoting the use of group supervision. This is illustrated in the following extract from an interview with two FSWs:

Interviewer: You know if you've had to choose who was going to get group supervision if there was only this much, so we can only give it to this group, why would you give it to Family Support Workers first?

FSW 1:   Just because of the nature of the job they do really, because it's quite stressful.

FSW 2:   You're dealing with people's emotions and everyday lives.

Both Hawkins & Shohet (2006) and Stringer et al (1992) state that a key function of supervision is allowing emotions to be acknowledged, accepted, reflected upon and learnt from. Indeed, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) link reduction of stress in the helping professions directly to the use of supervision. Stringer et al (1992) reported that the staff consultation groups offered support for staff under stress. This is also reflected in the results in Chart 6 showing the positive supportive outcomes reported by FSWS and their managers in the present study.

Gersch & Rawkins (1987) begin their article on the use of a teacher support group in school for children with severe learning difficulties (SLD) by detailing that teaching children with SLD can be stressful, lonely task with limited feedback and slowly achieving results. This resonates with the strong response in the present study from FSWs and their managers that professions with high emotional demands and stress benefit from use of group supervision, and this is an important indicator of a profession with the need for group supervision.

5.3.2.2   The need for professionals to talk and share

The need for group supervision was considered important for those professions where there is a need to talk and share by eight FSWs and two managers. This can be considered alongside other aspects of the profession that were highly rated as positive features of the profession:

- The varied nature of the role

- That lots happens within the role

- The number of different ways exist to do the job

- Work on own a lot

This could also be compared with the inhibiting features of the profession where work is highly structured or can be selected by the worker and therefore inhibits the need for group supervision.

The variety of ways in which to approach the role of FSW and variety within the FSW role were raised in a number of interviews:

FSW: I think the main thing that it gives specifically to Family Support is that not every Family Support Worker works the same, as in any context, but that there are so many different ways you can do Family Support.

FSW: Their work…Our work can….I think you just need to be able to....mmm, I don't know how to put it. It's very varied work. Also many of the people you work with may well have experienced something already that you haven't and, and vice versa so…

Gupta (1985) highlights that it is the variety of the pressures on head teachers that can cause stress and, in a similar way, the variety within the FSW role was considered an important reason to talk and share in the present study.

This feature of variety can be placed alongside the feature of working alone raised by six FSWs. The FSWs conduct the vast majority of their outreach work on their own in client's houses and this, together with the variety of work, seemed to lead to the need to talk and share. In a similar way, teachers can work in relative isolation in their classrooms and, as Chalfant & Pysh (1989) point out, have relatively few opportunities to share their problems and ways to solve them. Indeed, Stringer et al reported a reduction in feelings of isolation as an advantage of participating in the staff support group. This outcome is reflected within the present study as discussed in the section on the supportive positive outcomes. Evans (2005) reported that the most consistent comment made by teachers attending the group consultation sessions was that it allowed quality discussion in ways that had not previously been possible. Gersch & Rawkins (1987) also found that sharing problems with others was considered a primary or secondary function of the teacher support group by 82% of the teachers who participated. Therefore the literature would indicate that whilst group supervision can reduce isolation, this is particularly relevant in professions where there are few opportunities to share and the bulk of the work is conducted

individually as in schools. In the present study there is a similar picture where FSWs work within in their outreach role on their own and therefore have few opportunities to discuss the detail of their work.

The literature illustrates that there is increased recognition of the need to have chances to talk and share in professions such as teaching, or roles such as head teachers. It illustrates that these are professions where work and approaches are varied, and because the work may be conducted in relative isolation from other workers there is therefore an increased need to talk and share. This can be applied to many other professions beyond teaching and education and shows a potential for group supervision to be utilised with other groups of professionals, including FSWs as in the present study.

5.3.2.3   The shared goals of the profession

The feature of having shared goals was an important feature of the profession according to eight FSWs (67%). Whilst having shared goals is not frequently discussed in the literature, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) discuss the difference between team supervision and group supervision, which has application to this feature. They state that a team has an interrelated work life outside of the group. In some ways, this criterion applies to the group within the present study, in that they do have an interrelated work life, but come from four different Children's Centres, and from two different teams (0-5s, 5-13s) within Family Support. Therefore, although they had periods of time where they did not see each other and worked with different personnel, they did work within the same management structure. However, the FSWs who participated in the research felt they had shared broad goals and this was an important aspect that promoted the use of group supervision.

This can be compared with other contexts for group supervision. There are examples of group supervision established within a single physical context, such as Gill & Monsen (1995) staff sharing scheme, Norwich & Daniels (1997) Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) and Chalfant & Pysh (1989) Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) all on single school sites, and Gersch & Rawkins (1987) teacher support group in a school for children with SLD. Stringer et al (1992) also tended to run their staff consultation groups as a self-selecting group from one school, although other types of groups did exist, such as groups for head teachers or for teachers on an MA programme. Whilst Gersch & Rawkins' (1987) teacher support group and Stringer et al's (1992) school-based staff consultation groups came from one physical context as the staff all came from the same school team, it is possible that staff worked in separate areas of the school with different groups of children. This compares with the present study whereby FSWs were drawn from a number of different sites. However, it is important to note the size of the site. One Children's Centre alone would not have had enough FSWs to warrant group supervision session, and therefore there was a need to draw from a number of sites. This has more direct parallels with Evans (2005) and Hanko (1987), who worked across sites, although it is anticipated each school site would have sufficient staff for group supervision whereas the present study's individual Children's Centres did not.

Whilst it could be questioned whether staff from different school sites can have the same goals, it would seem that they have the same broad goals for the children and families, although they work within different schools and structures. The group supervision approach may have led to an understanding of shared goals

between different groups of staff in schools. Within the present study working with

staff from four different Children's Centres, the sharing of goals seems to act as both

a feature of the context but also as an outcome, as it reminded staff that they did share

the same broad goals. This is illustrated in the following extract from an interview

with a FSW:

FSW: …And sometimes just going to that meeting makes you realise we're all there
for a purpose and we're, like I said, all aiming for the same thing…

5.3.2.4 Concluding reflections and comments on the features of the context at the level of the profession that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers

To conclude this section on the features of the profession as part of the context

that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision, the key findings within the

present study are:

- The nature and the demands of the profession, in particular in relation to the

  emotional demands of the work

- The need for professionals to share and talk, as there may be limited

  opportunities to do so due to working practices, location and other factors

- The shared goals of the profession

All three factors are in place and play a key role in promoting the use of group

supervision within the profession of FSWs in this context of four Children's Centres.

Whilst Realistic Evaluation would not say that all these factors are generalisable, but

instead that this forms the basis of a set of descriptive particulars that can be used in

other contexts to consider whether group supervision has application with a particular

professional group in their context. Thus it is possible to generate a description of the

context that that might help in subsequent groups, rather than an attempt to evaluate without acknowledging what the professionals have brought to the context.

5.4 Discussion of the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers

Section 5.4 discusses the results in relation to the following research question: What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?

5.4.1 The positive outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers

Pawson & Tilley (1997) highlight that the outcomes are comprised of both the intended and the unintended consequences of an intervention, as realism does not depend on a single outcome measure. This allows for a sensitive evaluation of complex interventions – such as the use of group supervision – and, as a result, outcomes need to be defined by the participants of the intervention and may vary between them.

This section examines the outcomes defined by the FSWs (n=12) and their managers (n=3) and have been divided into three types of outcomes as defined by Hawkins & Shohet (2006):

- Educative/formative/developmental – developing the skills, understanding and abilities of the supervisee through reflection on and exploration of the supervisees' work with their clients

- Supportive/restorative/resourcing – responding to the supervisees' emotional response and reaction to their work, which helps reduce the stress and the incidence of 'burn out'

- Managerial/normative/qualitative – the quality control aspect of the supervision, which plays a role for line managers but also ensures that the work is appropriate and maintains ethical standards

5.4.1.1 The positive educative outcomes

The section of the results that considers the positive educative outcomes is illustrated in Chart 5 and Table 28. These include:

- Learning from other in terms of ideas, strategies, tips and advice

- Getting feedback from others

- Getting other people's perspectives

- Sharing experiences and problems

Scaife & Scaife (2001) do not evaluate the impact of supervision but state that:

"…the development of the supervisee's knowledge, understanding and skills is invariably a central component." (p.15)

This demonstrates the acceptance within this key text on supervision that learning as a part of the educative or formative function of supervision plays a central role in the supervision process. However, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) suggest that whilst the educative function tends to be the one emphasised in definitions of supervision, this is not the primary function of supervision. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) term the educative function 'developmental', as it focuses on the development of the skills, understanding and capacities of the supervisees, and overlaps frequently with the other functions of supervision. Therefore they place 'receiving information and another's perspective concerning one's work' and 'receiving content and process feedback' as within the developmental function and also the resourcing (managerial)

function. This demonstrates that Hawkins & Shohet do not view the outcomes or functions of supervision hierarchically.

The literature review discussed that different approaches to group supervision may emphasise the educative outcomes of the process. Indeed, many of the approaches within education such as Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) (Norwich & Daniels, 1997); Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) (Chalfant & Pysh, 1989); and Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995) have had educative outcomes as the primary motive for change.

The present study supports the results (Cohen & Osterweil, 1986; Evans, 2005; Guishard, 2000; Bozic & Carter, 2002) from the evaluations of the impact of the consultation groups. However, it is important to note that in all four evaluations, the potential outcomes were defined by the evaluators of the consultation group and were not devised by the participants themselves, and this is a key difference between some of the research in literature and the research within the present study. In comparison, Chalfant & Pysh (1989) used an open-ended survey questionnaire so staff could list the ways the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) had helped them, and these were coded into statements which, in turn, were sorted into major categories, with 38% of respondents placing the effectiveness of group problem solving to generate useful strategies as the highest-ranked positive category. This is a similar methodological approach to the one taken within the present study. Norwich & Daniels (1997) collected their data from questionnaires and interviews with the head teachers, TST members, referring teachers and non-referring teachers. They reported 34% of the referring teachers reported that the TST had enabled them to distance

themselves from a problem and re-examine their activities. Learning from others, getting ideas, strategies, feedback, tips or advice or sharing experiences did not feature in either evaluation. However, it is important to remember that both the TSTs and TATs were not made up of a large group of colleagues but were comprised of groups of three teachers from differing levels within the school who worked with the referring teacher to help support and assist. This has a different approach to the group supervision approach within the present study and therefore could have different positive educative outcomes in terms of learning within the group.

The present study found strong evidence to show that participants in group supervision do achieve the positive educative outcomes anticipated within key texts on supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Proctor, 2000; Proctor & Inskipp, 2001; Hanko, 1999). However, some evaluations of group supervision tend to focus on evaluators anticipating the outcomes of group supervision and participants agreeing or disagreeing with these, whereas the present study, through its use of Realistic Evaluation, used interviews and coding responses to elicit individual participants' own outcomes as used by Chalfant & Pysh (1989) and Norwich & Daniels (1997). The educative outcome that has not been considered previously within the literature reviewed is about how group supervision promotes a consideration of others' perspectives rather than distancing one's own perspective, and this may be a useful area to consider in future research. This is illustrated by the following extracts from interviews with the FSWs:

FSW: I'm open minded and I believe in the value of talking with your colleagues really, in a structured environment, plus there's a part of me that really wants to help my colleagues but also really values their input into my ideas as well. So, sort of like, I'll take on board different ideas but I might not always use them because nobody does use everything. But you know if something can

> stop you in your tracks and makes you think 'Hold on I hadn't considered that that might be a good idea' so it's eye opening to me.

FSW: And also I'm keen to learn, so I'm still very new to this environment if you like, and I've only been doing this particular role for two years and my background is not as such Family Support, so I'm keen to listen to what other ideas that people have got, and experiences, and take all that on board. That's why I'm keen to attend

5.4.1.2 The positive supportive outcomes

This section of the results considers the positive supportive outcomes illustrated in Chart 6 and Table 29. These include:

- Building team relationships and peer support, and demonstrating shared aims

- Gaining reassurance, knowing others struggle or feel the same, reducing isolation

- Listening to and helping others

- Gaining confidence

Whilst Proctor and Inskipp (2001) state that group supervision can be restorative for both the supervisee and the supervisor, they highlight the learning and development potential within group supervision, whereas Hawkins & Shohet (2006) emphasise that the supportive function of supervision is considered vital and state that if these emotional needs are not attended it soon leads to less-effective workers, and overtime leads to worker stress and burn-out.

Evaluations of group supervision have found supportive outcomes to be recognised by participants even when the focus of the group is upon educative needs and outcomes. Gersch & Rawkins (1987) reported that 88% of the respondents found that the teacher support group provided support and social contact for the members of

the group. Interestingly, they place this as a latent function of the group, whereas the manifest function of the group was problem sharing and solving. This has similarities to the findings in the present study on the supportive outcomes related to the team, whereby FSWs showed that they felt the group supervision process had a latent function as a support to team relationships. They reported that they felt this was through enabling the team to be together and giving opportunities to speak that may not exist in other arenas, as illustrated in this extract from an interview with an FSW:

Interviewer: What is it about group supervision that gets you to attend? You personally?

FSW 1: Erm, I think it's just the fact of us all being together as a team and sort of, sort of, offering that, you know, that support really. It's just that, it very much appeals to me, I mean I do like group working in that respect where you're all sharing ideas and things.

FSW 2: I like that the way when you go round you do have that choice that you do say something or if we don't.

FSW 1: I like that because the fact, because there are a lot of group discussions that you go to that a lot of people that don't even speak, and the fact, that gives me more confidence because the fact that everybody gets a chance to speak and talk, it just makes you feel more relaxed because you know everybody is probably feeling a bit the same, a bit anxious, a bit nervous, but everybody gets an opportunity to talk. Because I think that's quite a fair way, there are lots and lots of group things you go to, even team meetings, lots of things isn't there, where not everybody gets the option to talk and I think that's quite important.

The chance to get together as a team also appeared to act as a reminder of the shared goals. This concept of shared goals was in the section on the shared goals of the profession acting as a key feature of the context, and shows this can also be interpreted as an outcome.

Other evaluations – such as Guishard (2000) and Bozic & Carter (2002) – have examined both the supportive and educative outcomes of the group and report

enhanced levels of confidence for the majority of the participants. These findings are supported to a degree by the present study, as raised confidence was stated by seven FSWs (47%) as a positive supportive outcome. The issue of confidence is discussed within the section on the confidence level of FSWs acting as a key mechanism within the FSWs, and this outcome shows that confidence can be viewed both as an outcome and as a mechanism. This issue was raised by an FSW within her interview, showing that she reported that confidence was an outcome that applied to her but may not apply to all:

Interviewer: What is it about group supervision that makes, gets you to attend? Yes, what is it about group supervision that gets you to attend? You personally?

FSW: I think I'm the opposite slightly, there. I like to listen although I do feel that they, the group consultations, have built my confidence up and I do talk more in them.

Qualitative comments within both Bozic & Carter (2002) and Stringer et al (1992) relate to participants feeling a reduction in isolation and feeling reassured that others experienced similar problems. Reduction of isolation is also reported as a potential advantage of group supervision by Proctor & Inskipp (2001), Tempest et al (1987), Hawkins & Shohet (2006) and Hanko (1987). This reflects the same finding in the present study – that knowing others feel the same and a reduction in isolation were key supportive outcomes for a large number of the FSWs. It is interesting to note that these comments are made anecdotally within Bozic & Carter's research, thereby demonstrating the need for open-ended approaches to research in order to fully gain participants' subjective views of the outcomes of group supervision, rather than using Likert scales based on what researchers anticipate being the outcomes of the process.

The fourth area related to supporting others in the group within the supportive outcomes was unanticipated was not evident within literature and not detailed within the advantages of group supervision. It was important for a number of FSWs that they could listen to and help others and know how they feel. This was not noted by any of the three managers as it was not an anticipated outcome to them and is an area of group supervision that has not been fully considered in the literature. However, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) do explore the complex motives for helping and discuss that there is a shadow side to helping, encouraging professionals in the helping professions to see themselves as a vehicle or a channel of help rather than a helper. They discuss the importance of considering motivations to help, the potential desire for power, and whether the helping is to satisfy the helper's own needs, and that these issues should be considered and not denied. Egan (1997) has also written extensively on the role of helping and the challenges for the helping professions. These two areas may be useful sources for future consideration of the positive supportive outcome within group supervision of helping and supporting others in the group.

In summary, the present study supported findings from other research about the range of positive supportive outcomes of group supervision: reduction in isolation, raised confidence and reassurance that others face similar problems and issues. However, the latent outcomes of group supervision, as opposed to the manifest outcomes, would be a useful area to consider for future research. The areas that do not appear to have been given as much consideration as gaining emotional support and supportive outcomes are those of supporting team relationships and supporting others in the group.

5.4.1.3 The positive managerial outcomes

The section of the results that considers the positive managerial outcomes is illustrated in Chart 7 and Table 30. The managerial function of supervision is described as the qualitative aspect of supervision by Hawkins & Shohet (2006), as it plays the role for line managers of ensuring work is ethical and appropriate. However, this is a challenging area, as discussed within the literature, as the definition of supervision by the CWDC/Skills for Life (2007) reflects a belief that line managers conduct supervision and that the process is highly linked to performance management. However, the DECP definition of supervision states that the managerial function of supervision is served not by supervision being conducted by a manager but as the EP opening his/her work and judgements to peers. Indeed, Pomerantz (1993), Jennings (1996) and Steel (2001) strongly favour supervision as more highly valued and working more successfully if it is kept separate from appraisal.

Therefore, within the present study, where supervision was not conducted by a manager, the issue of managerial outcomes was examined through evaluation as to whether group supervision has a positive impact on the children and families. This is because the main function of the FSWs' role is early intervention and to support the families and children within the reach area of their Children's Centre.

The present study was not directly examining the outcomes for children and families, and so instead asked FSWs and managers what they believe the outcomes are for children and families. This is a difficult area to measure. However, most of those who participated in the research – both FSWs and managers – felt that group supervision was of indirect benefit to children and families, whilst recognising the

difficulty in measuring the impact directly. This is demonstrated in the following extract from an interview with a manager:

Interviewer: What do you feel would be the impact – I know you haven't attended – on the families of the Family Support Workers having group supervision?

Manager: I think the impact would be on the Family Support Worker's breadth of knowledge and the ideas they've got. I guess if it's shared properly it should show that a lot of the Family Support Workers face the same things, which should reassure the Family Support Workers that hopefully they can pass onto the parents that they're not alone in this. It should build the confidence of the Family Support Worker, which will be reflected in the work with the family.

Chalfant & Pysh (1989) measured the impact on children of the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) by examination of student performance. In this approach, the teacher devised goals for students with the support of the Teacher Assistance Teams, and then rated the extent to which these have been achieved by students. The data collection methods were complex and based on the teacher's perceptions of progress. However, Chalfant & Pysh (1989) reported data demonstrating that teachers did perceive improvement in most students' performance in their classrooms as a result of assistance from the TAT. This has similarity to Norwich & Daniels' (1997) evaluation of Teacher Support Teams (TSTs) who examined the impact on teacher confidence and therefore their ability to tolerate and actively manage difficult problems. They suggest that there is a need to find ways of monitoring pupil change following change by the referring teacher to the TST. Whilst both these studies have attempted to measure the indirect impact of the support given to teachers, the issue is complex. Whilst Hawkins & Shohet (2006) suggest the need for outcome-based studies showing the effect of supervision on both the supervisee's practice and on their work with the clients, they note the impact of intervening variables and the

difficulty in establishing causal links. However, despite these difficulties, this is an area for consideration for further research and development.

In summary, this section has considered the outcomes for children and families from the use of group supervision from FSWs, as reported by FSWs and their managers. The present study reports that FSWs and managers feel there is a positive impact on the service for children and families and, therefore, it should lead to better outcomes for children and families. However, this is still an area that would benefit from further research.

5.4.2 The negative outcomes of group supervision for the Family Support Workers and their managers

The section of the results that considers the negative outcomes is illustrated in Chart 7 and Table 31. The negative outcomes are lower in number and frequency of occurrence than the positive outcomes. Some of these negative outcomes are closely related to other mechanisms and therefore have been discussed in previous sections. The cost on time is a negative outcome but has also been discussed as a negative mechanism within the section on the group working agreement. Other negative outcomes are also seen to act as mechanisms or features of the context and have been discussed in relation to the role of the supervisor, the place of group dynamics as a feature of the context and the confidence level of FSWs. Whilst these are important negative outcomes to consider and therefore need to be managed through the professional contract and ground rules by the supervisor, it is also relevant to note that the number and frequency of the negative outcomes is less than the positive outcomes. The present study supports findings by Chalfant & Pysh (1989) that 88% of the

statements by teachers relating to the Teacher Assistance Teams (TATs) were positive, compared with 12% of negative statements.

5.4.3 Concluding reflections and comments on the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers

To conclude this section on the outcomes of group supervision, the key findings within the present study are:

- The educative outcomes are similar to those described in the literature in terms of learning from others, sharing experiences and problems, and gaining ideas and strategies, but there was a further area identified regarding gaining other people's perspectives and views.

- The supportive outcomes were similar to those reported in the literature: reduction in isolation, raised confidence and reassurance that others face similar problems and issues. However, further supportive outcomes that have not been given as much consideration are how group supervision supports team relationships, and that an important outcome for many is being able to support others in the group.

- The FSWs and managers report there is a positive impact on the service for children and families and, therefore, should lead to better outcomes for children and families in terms of managerial outcomes. This applies to those FSWs who attended the group supervision.

- The negative outcomes are lower in number and frequency of occurrence than the positive outcomes, and relate to issues of time and confidence. These are important to consider and need to be managed through the initial contracting stage with managers and then participants, through discussion of the

professional contract and the group working agreement, and by the supervisor through consideration of the group dynamics.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSIONS, REFLECTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Introduction to conclusions, reflections and recommendations

This chapter consider the findings of the present study which have been discussed at length in the previous chapter. The methodological framework is considered, in order to suggest implications for colleagues who wish to undertake similar research and also to consider future areas of study. This chapter concludes with final comments about the opportunities for EPs to work with other professionals of the Children's Workforce collaboratively within Children's Centres.

6.2 Conclusions

The present study explored the use of group supervision with FSWs working in a cluster of four Children's Centres. The following section will explore and explain the conclusions of the study in relation to the four research questions that are the basis of this study. These conclusions will be presented alongside the data reported within the results and discussion chapters of the study.

- **What are the mechanisms within group supervision that promote or inhibit its use with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?**

The present study has offered a set of descriptive particulars (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) on the mechanisms within group supervision to be considered when establishing interventions for groups of professionals within the Children's Workforce. The key mechanisms identified within the present study are:

- The professional contract discussions with managers.

The present study raised that agreement on whether managers should be present and how confidentiality will be managed were key issues. These would be discussed

within the managers during the professional contract discussions and also with the FSWs within the group working agreement.

- The group working agreement with the participants

The present study suggested it was important to have ground rules within the group working agreement. These included that participants could elect to listen rather than speak, that everyone should have a chance to speak if they wished, that a range of issues could be discussed and the timing of the sessions.

- The role of the supervisor

This study highlighted the value placed on facilitation with the possible domination by one participant a negative mechanism highlighted by all managers and four FSWs. In addition the relaxed informal approach of the group was a highly ranked positive mechanism of group supervision . The facilitation of the group lies within the role of the supervisor as does the approach taken within the group.

- The size of the group

In the present study participants of the group supervision process and one manager highlighted that a big group was a negative mechanism that may prevent attendance.

- The group is comprised of peers who do the same job

In this study more than half of the FSWs reported that key positive mechanisms were that group supervision presented more than one person's view and was with colleagues who do the same job as them.

These descriptive particulars are presented as mechanisms that should be taken into account and considered by EPs and others who want to conduct group supervision with a group of professionals within a context such as a cluster of Children's Centres. These are not considered to be wholly generalisable but are useful to consider when establishing this type of work.

- **What are the aspects of Family Support Workers that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with them?**

The present study has offered a set of descriptive particulars (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) for facilitators to reflect upon when engaging participants for group supervision. The key mechanisms to consider that have been illuminated by this study are:

- The confidence level of the FSW as this was raised as both a positive mechanism by seven FSWs and a lack of confidence was also seen as an inhibiting factor by seven FSWs and all managers.

- The FSW's experience was raised as a key mechanism in terms of how experienced the FSW was and willing to talk and listen by 9 FSWs and all managers.

- The FSW's availability of time and ability to prioritise group supervision was also seen as a key mechanism. Seven of the FSWs raised the fact that they could organise their own diaries as a positive mechanism, whilst how busy the FSW was and their work capacity was the most highly rated negative mechanism.

- The team relationships with colleagues was highlighted this study particularly by the managers. All managers felt an ability to share and two of the three managers felt it was important that the FSW believed in talking to colleagues.

- The openness of the FSW to new ideas was also highlighted as this was the highest ranked positive mechanism reported by the FSWs. Alongside this six of the FSWs felt the FSW had to be willing to give the group supervision sessions a chance and be keen to learn.

The study has highlighted that it is important to be aware of what the professionals, in this case FSWs, bring to the intervention of group supervision. This includes their confidence level, experience, time available, openness and relationships with their team. Whilst these are not innate qualities of the FSWs, these key mechanisms can be supported by the supervisor, particularly in the initial contracting stage, through careful discussion of the group working agreement, liaison with managers about the professional contract and ongoing discussion within the group sessions. These qualities are also worth considering and reflecting upon when contracting group supervision with other professional groups, as different professional groups may need greater encouragement or support from their management or the supervisor to be confident to engage in group supervision, or may benefit from some team building prior to engaging in the process of group supervision.

- **What are the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision with Family Support Workers in Children's Centres?**

    The present study identified descriptive features of the context that can work to promote or inhibit the use of group supervision. The features of the team in this context were identified as:

    - having and sustaining management support . The factor that managers are in support of the group supervision sessions was identified as a positive feature of this context by seven FSWs and two managers.

    - the dynamic of the group and team. The team trusting and supporting each other was the highest ranked positive feature of the context identified by FSWs and managers. This was taken alongside the highest ranked negative context features being negative team dynamics, a team that doesn't know each

other or where there is a lack of trust in the group. Therefore whilst it may be easier in a context to try and work with teams where the team trust and support each other, the supervisor also has a role in supporting the group members to know, and support and trust each other. This is reflected in previous discussions on the role of the supervisor.

In addition, descriptive particulars of the context in terms of professions likely to access and benefit from group supervision within this study were identified as:

- professions where the work is emotionally demanding and intense. The intense, challenging, stressful nature of the job was identified as the highest ranked context feature of the profession. An additional context feature identified by seven FSWs and two managers was that the job is emotionally demanding.

- professions where professionals need to share and talk. This was the second highest ranked positive feature of the context, and professions where there may be limited opportunities to talk and share was also identified by half the FSWs. In addition half of the FSWs identified that group supervision was needed by professions where the professional works on their own a lot.

- professions where there are shared goals. This was the fourth highest ranked positive feature of the context. Eight FSWs reported that having a shared goal was a positive feature of their context that promoted the use of group supervision.

These descriptive particulars identified in the present study are intended for EPs and others to reflect upon when considering the professional groups that may benefit and

engage in group supervision. However these are not considered to be transferable, universal rules that describe all the professions that will engage. Further research with other professional groups could build upon this and develop a body of evidence of the professions that are likely to benefit from the intervention of group supervision.

- **What are the outcomes of group supervision for Family Support Workers and their managers?**

   The positive outcomes described by FSWs who attended the sessions and their managers outweighed the number and frequency of negative outcomes. The educative outcomes are similar to those described in the literature in terms of learning from others, sharing experiences and problems, and gaining ideas and strategies. Learning from others was identified by all FSWs who attended and all managers as an educative outcome of the group supervision sessions in this study. A further educative outcome identified within this study that has not been identified in the literature reviewed, was that nine FSWs reported gaining other people's perspectives and views as a positive outcome of the group supervision sessions.

   The supportive outcomes were similar to those reported in the literature: reduction in isolation raised by seven FSWs and one manger, raised confidence reported by seven FSWs and reassurance that others face similar problems and issues reported by nine FSWs and one manager. Additional supportive outcomes, beyond those in the literature review, were identified in the present study. These included supporting the development of team relationships as the highest ranked supportive outcome for ten FSWs and two managers. Additionally an outcome of wanting to

listen and help others in the group was reported by more than half of the FSWs who attended the group supervision sessions.

The FSWs and managers reported that there is a positive impact on the service for children and families with eight FSWs reporting they believed group supervision led to a better service for families and this enables children to feel better or benefit.

Therefore the descriptive particulars obtained from the present study give some useful indicators as to the context, mechanisms and outcomes of group supervision with FSWs working in a cluster of Children's Centres. The present study has sought to evaluate group supervision in this context by examining the question posed by Tilley (2000)

"What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4).

This evaluation has sought to go beyond outcomes alone, to also explore the mechanisms within group supervision and within the FSWs and the features of the context that promote or inhibit the use of group supervision. This study concludes that group supervision can be an effective way of supporting FSWs in a cluster of Children's Centres, and identified mechanisms and context features that are likely to hinder or help the success of this intervention. This is not to infer that these factors can be transferred directly to all settings and professional groups, but that it would be of value to consider these factors when establishing group supervision with a group of professionals in another context.

The group supervision intervention that has been researched in the present study continues to grow and thrive since the data collection and analysis. The group became

two groups during the process of the present study, and since then a third group is being created to cope with the increasing number of FSWs based in the cluster of Children's Centres. The managers maintain support of the process and have decided to make the group supervision a part of the regularly timetabled development opportunities for the FSWs. Thus group supervision now forms a part of the annual calendar of events. As other Children's Centres and groups of workers within the Children's Workforce have become aware of the group supervision intervention, the demand for the intervention has increased. This demonstrates an interest in and a commitment to this way of working, and a willingness to use EP time in this manner. I am currently in the process of establishing a number of similar groups across the local authority for a range of other workers, including other FSWs and Children Centre managers. This research has been valuable in working with other EPs in facilitating and establishing these groups and considering what may promote or inhibit the use of group supervision.

6.3   Reflections on the research design

There have been limited evaluations on the use of group supervision, and Prieto (1996) calls for:

> "…researchers to begin building a foundation of knowledge concerning group supervision…" (p.295)

Prieto (1996) states that group supervision is not frequently or rigorously evaluated, but is still widely practiced. Whilst Prieto argues for empirical evaluations of group supervision, and this demonstrates a positivist approach to research which may mean some interpretative evaluations were excluded from the systematic evaluation, it cannot be denied that there are limited examples of evaluation. This study takes a different approach in that it seeks to take a realist perspective, in that rather than

simply evaluating the use of group supervision, it has sought to illuminate a set of descriptive particulars to show what within group supervision makes it work, with particular reference to when used with FSWs working in Children's Centres. These are descriptive particulars that could be reflected upon and considered when establishing whether group supervision can be used, however these descriptive particulars relate to the particular context in which this study was located, as it was seeking to answer:

"What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4).

The literature review demonstrated a wide range of types of group supervision, with different terms, definitions and orientations. Some of these approaches were evaluated, but these evaluations were dominated by the use of questionnaires and Likert-type scales. The questionnaires tended to be based on the evaluator's view of what outcomes group supervision is intended to achieve, and then sought to ask if they had been achieved or not. For example, Guishard (2000) used questions designed to assess the shifts in tutors' perceptions of their students' needs and difficulties and their confidence in meeting these needs. This works from the premise that this is the only or main outcome that tutors gained from the use of staff consultation groups. Whilst this does generate useful data quickly, it does not allow for the participants themselves (in this case, tutors in further education colleges) to explain openly what they understand about the process and how it works for them, as it would be if a Realistic Evaluation framework was used. It was important within the approach to the present study to reflect the subjective views of the participants on the intervention of group supervision, their own roles in the intervention, their context and the outcomes from the intervention going beyond an evaluation of the type previously described.

In comparison, Norwich & Daniels (1997) used interviews alongside the main questionnaire data, and did ask the non-referring teachers as well as the referring teachers what they felt about the Teacher Support Teams. This compares favourably with other evaluations that gather data from those who are participating in the group supervision approach. Norwich & Daniels' approach is useful and one that was utilised within this research, as it is important fully to understand the views of both participants and non-participants.

The present study utilised case study and Realistic Evaluation as the methodological approaches within a participative framework. An advantage of a participative framework was that it allowed the direct involvement of participants in order to offer their views and ideas. Cohen et al (2000) suggest that the direct involvement of participants leads to an increase in their feelings of self-worth and confidence, and improves their disposition toward reflection. In the present study it allowed the FSWs and managers to reflect on the intervention of group supervision and make suggestions to develop the use of the intervention within their Children's Centres. This allowed me, as both researcher and facilitator, to act on the suggestions immediately and adapt the group supervision sessions to best meet the needs of those participating within them.

The use of case study worked well in conjunction with Realistic Evaluation, as both approaches emphasise the importance of context. The potential weaknesses of using a single case study were the difficulty of making general assumptions from the results and the possibility of researcher bias. However, through the summarising of

the realistic interview and the primary coding of the realistic interviews transcripts with the participants this bias was reduced, since the interpretation of interviewees' views was checked to be accurate throughout the process of interviewing and coding. This helped ensure that the interpretation of results fully reflected an interviewee's ideas and thoughts on the mechanisms, context and outcomes, both at the end of the interview and after primary coding.

The key question in Realistic Evaluation is: "What works for whom in what circumstances?" (Tilley, 2000, p.4). This approach to evaluation allowed an alternative view to the interpretive and positivist approaches, with the evaluation focused on developing practice. It realistically evaluated a social programme – group supervision – with the key participants, and reflected upon the outcomes attributed to the programme and the context within which the programme occurred. Realistic Evaluation, through the use of realistic interviews, gave an opportunity for participants to explore and explain their views of the process of group supervision, and why it worked in their context. Similarly, it also gave a tool for FSWs who chose not to participate to explain their reasons why. Finally, it allowed managers to explore the mechanisms that they felt enabled group supervision in the context and the outcomes group supervision would bring for FSWs, families and children. This triangulation of views is considered an advantage of using a case study framework (Robson, 1993) and demonstrates the value of using a case study methodology alongside Realistic Evaluation. As the interviewer, the process of realistic interviewing and then, at the end of the interview, sharing my understanding of each interviewee's mechanisms, context and outcomes, was exhausting. However, it was also exhilarating, as it allowed the teacher-learner function and the conceptual

refinement process (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) to occur and supported me in remaining open to the interviewee's views. The teacher-learner function kept me, as researcher, open to learning about the programme theory from the interviewee. The conceptual refinement process allowed the interviewee continually to refine the programme theory being explored and discussed. Therefore, the realistic interview process encouraged me to be open to the interviewee's ideas and theories, seeking to understand their views rather than imposing my own. This allowed the interviewee to be active and empowered in the process (Scheurich, 1997).

In terms of adaptations and changes, it would have been useful to have been researching group supervision sessions run by another EP, as there was greater likelihood of researcher bias (I was both researcher and group supervisor). In interviewing the FSWs, there was a higher possibility that they would be less critical as they did not want to alienate me as the group supervisor. Although this was a disadvantage, as I was conducting the research I was able to respond instantly to FSWs' suggestions for improvement and development in the next group supervision session, hopefully encouraging them to be honest and critical in their reflections on the process.

In summary, this methodological framework has had a number of benefits, in that it fully engaged participants in the research process, and allowed stakeholders to share all their views. Whilst Pawson & Tilley (1997) explain that Realistic Evaluation is not within the positivist paradigm and does not seek universal statements as in traditional forms of evaluation, social programmes such as these do have outcomes. Alternatively, they state that the goal of evaluation is the "continual betterment of

practice" (p.119) through seeking out the "descriptive particulars" (p.119) of an individual programme in order to build and accumulate sets of ideas into an organising framework. Therefore, whilst this research may not be simply transferred to other contexts, it does offer some descriptive particulars on the mechanisms and features of the context. In addition it highlights the outcomes described by the FSWs who participated, alongside the outcomes managers believe to occur from using group supervision with FSWs in this context. It builds upon the existing body of research to concur with some key findings such as the importance of the initial professional contract, the role of the supervisor, the need for management support amongst others and, in addition, identifies some new outcomes for consideration such as the value of workers supporting each other, gaining other people's views and developing team relationships.

6.4   Future directions for research

A number of future directions for research have been identified within the discussion chapter, as group supervision is an approach that is widely used in a number of professions but is rarely evaluated (Prieto, 1996). There are a number of key authors on group supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2006; Hanko, 1999; Proctor, 2000; Proctor & Inskipp, 2001) and whilst they make use of each other's conceptual frameworks, there is limited discussion on how to evaluate. Hawkins & Shohet (2006) call for outcome-based studies to show the effect of supervision on the practice of the supervisee and their work with their clients. This leaves group supervision as a process with limited literature on evaluation, there being no clear suggestions on how to carry this out.

There is a limited amount written about the role of EPs within Early Years provision and Children's Centres. As discussed in the literature review within the sections on the role of EP in Early Years and challenges faced by EPs working in Children's Centres), there has been a focus for EPS on work with children with SEN at an individual level. There are some limited examples of EPs working in different ways in Sure Start Local programmes (SSLPs) and Children's Centres but, as Davis et al (2008) highlight, there is little research detailing the role of EPs in SSLPs. Whilst the present study has offered a model for working in Children's Centres and SSLPs, there is a need for more research into the role of EPs in Children's Centres and SSLPs. This was demonstrated by Davis et al (2008), as many EPSs responded to the questionnaire on the involvement of EPs in Children's Centres and SSLPs by stating that this is an area of work under negotiation. Therefore Davis et al (2008) call for ongoing research to keep pace with the changing context as Children's Centres continue to develop. The present study is part of this ongoing research, but there is a need for more literature and research in this area to demonstrate ways that EPs can be involved in supporting the work of Children's Centres, otherwise EPs could miss a valuable opportunity to be involved in supporting the Children's Workforce in early intervention.

Consultation groups and group supervision approaches have been used widely by EPs at a number of levels, within schools and within groups of schools, and with other groups of professionals within education. However, there has been a limited number of evaluations of group supervision approaches within education, and there is a need for further research into the impact of group supervision, to consider the outcomes but also the mechanisms within and context of the approach. In conjunction with this, there is a continued need for evaluations of group supervision utilising

research tools that allow both participants and non-participants to give their views on the process and outcomes, as demonstrated by Norwich & Daniels (1997).

It would be of interest, in order to evaluate the impact of the group processes, to compare experiences of individual supervision with group supervision. This would allow comparison of the two processes and allow consideration of whether supervision is diluted or enhanced by participation in a group. Within this it would be useful to consider the impact of group supervision on the group or team, and to consider the value gained from supporting others within the group. This is an area of group supervision that appears to have received little attention from researchers.

This present study has focused on the views of the FSWs and managers, and there is a need to research the resulting impact on families and children as considered by Chalfant & Pysh (1989). This is complex, but one possible way would be to involve the participants themselves as action researchers in evaluating their own impact on children and families, and the mechanisms that have enabled this impact. Indeed, Hawkins & Shohet (2006) suggest using action research approaches to examine supervision as shown in the following quote:

> "Supervision, then, can be understood as a type of action research built into the working life of the practitioner so that each is a researcher as well as a practitioner...Supervisors can thus be considered, not only as researchers, but as teachers of research as they encourage their supervisees to structure ongoing inquiry into their practice. It is a small step from here to more full-blown research in which supervisees and supervisors collaborate in an inquiry which gathers knowledge and experience together to improve the practice of supervision further."
>
> (p.78)

6.5   Concluding reflections

Whilst there are some limitations to the present study, and there are other research questions to consider, the present study has highlighted some descriptive particulars (Pawson & Tilley, 1997) that have enabled me to develop group supervision as an intervention to use with FSWs in Children's Centres. It is anticipated that the identification of key elements of both the context and the mechanisms can also be considered by others, including EPs, seeking to use group supervision or similar interventions with FSWs or other groups within the Children's Workforce.

At a personal level, the present study has given me greater insight into the use and value of group supervision as a means of supporting and developing a key professional group within the Children's Workforce. The use of group supervision led to both educative and supportive outcomes, which are deemed by the FSWs who attend, and their managers to have had a positive impact on the parents, families and children.

As stated previously, there has been a great deal of interest from other professional groups in the area of supervision and group supervision led by EPs. Consequently, this has formed a larger proportion of my work in both Children's Centres and Extended Services to Schools. This interest is in line with the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC)/ Skills for Care (2007) that supervision has:

> "… a crucial role to play in the development, retention and motivation of the workforce." (p.3)

The present study into the use of group supervision with FSWs, facilitated by an EP, in a cluster of Children's Centres, has led to managers within other Children's Centres and Extended Services to Schools being able to both clearly understand and value the distinctive contribution of EPs to the Children's Workforce. This is demonstrated by the increased commissioning of EP time within the Local Authority that has occurred.

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APPENDIX 1

Transcript of interview with FSW alongside summary email and permission for use

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APPENDIX 2

Transcript of interview with manager alongside summary email and permission for use

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