

A unique kind of pressure: Successful collaboration between Educational Psychologists and
School Staff in settings for learners with Severe, or Profound and Multiple Learning
Difficulties: A Grounded Theory study

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Abstract

Background: In 2018, Public Health England reported a rise in the number of children and young people identified as having Profound Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD) or Severe Learning Difficulties (SLD), increasing by 16% and 17% respectively from 2010. Educational settings have reported that they are supporting pupils with increasingly complex learning needs and that this requires them to develop multi-agency approaches for the complexity of pupils they are teaching. Despite this, how educational psychologists (EP) and staff in SLD/PMLD settings successfully work together remains unexplored in the literature.

Aims: This research aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between EPs and staff within settings for learners with PMLD and SLD, and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this.

Methods: This study utilised a qualitative approach by conducting four dyadic interviews with an EP and a member of staff from SLD and/or PMLD settings. Constructivist Grounded Theory methodology was used to inform both data gathering and analysis approaches to co-construct an understanding of successful collaboration.

Findings: The research identifies seven theoretical categories which contribute to a model of successful collaboration between EPs and staff in SLD/PMLD settings: a foundation consisting of an understanding regarding boundaries, task alignment, and negotiation of flexibility between the EP- and staff member; the development of trust; equalised relational dynamics within the helping relationship; EP developing an understanding of the setting with regards to its unique context; emotional support and containment; inputs which provide resources and influence their work; and outputs which impact the surrounding context through feedback loops within the wider environment..

The research reports a conceptual framework with a core theoretical basis within open system theory, with the addition of integrating both psychodynamic and organisational lenses to offer understanding regarding how the EP-staff pairs view and facilitate successful joint working in SLD/PMLD settings.

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Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Term
EP	Educational Psychologist
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
CGT	Constructivist Grounded Theory
CYP	Children and young people
DfE	Department of Education
DfH	Department of Health
DfH&SC	Department of Health and Social Care
EHC	Educational Health Care
EHCP	Educational Health Care Plans
EPS	Educational Psychology Services
GT	Grounded Theory
IPA	Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
LA	local authority
NAPEP	London National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists UK
NAPEP	National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists UK
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OT	Occupational Therapists
PCP	Person-centred Planning
PCRs	person-centred planning reviews
PEP	Principal Educational Psychologist

PHE	Public Health England
PMLD	profound and multiple learning difficulties
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
SALTs	Speech and Language Therapists
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SENCos	Special Educational Needs Coordinators
SLCN	Speech, language and communication needs
SLD	severe learning difficulties
SLD/PMLD	SLD and/or PMLD
SLT	Senior Leadership Teams
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UK	United Kingdom

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

In 2018, Public Health England reported the number of pupils identified as having severe learning difficulties (SLD) or profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) increasing by 16% and 17% respectively when compared to 2010 (Public Health England, 2020). Government publications state that part of an Educational Psychologists (EPs) role is to support children with needs that are described as severe and complex (Kelly & Gray, 2000), a definition which is also further evidenced by literature from within the profession (Farrell et al., 2006) and a recent EP workforce report (Atfield et al., 2023). Despite this, there is a reported lack of research investigating what form of support EPs should offer to children with complex or severe needs (Davies & Soni, 2025), and how EPs and staff in setting which support these learners successfully work together to support the pupils as, according to (Hampton et al., 2019), these settings are one of the most challenging environments for an EP to use their psychological knowledge to foster positive outcomes for children and young people (CYP) due to the diversity and complexity of the needs, aetiology, and backgrounds of the pupils within these settings. Therefore, my research aims to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate successful collaborative practice between EPs and staff within SLD and/or PMLD settings through investigating how the two professionals jointly describe successful interprofessional collaborative working.

This chapter will introduce the key concepts relevant to this research, including offering an understanding of key terms relevant to this research. This chapter will also detail the background social and political context of special educational needs (SEN) in the UK and my reflections on reflexivity, positionality, and my role as the author of this research. This chapter will conclude with a statement regarding the aims for this research.

Key Concepts and Definitions

Key terms have been used within this research to describe groups of learners based on their needs, educational setting, and even the nature of the interaction between the two professions which are the focus of this research. These terms need to be defined to enable a shared understanding between both EPs and SLD and/or PMLD setting staff so that this research can be interpreted and applied to develop practice in both professions (Bellamy et al., 2010). I will start by discussing definitions related to severe or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD and/or PMLD) due to these being the foundation of this research. The terms “setting staff” and “educational setting” will also be explored due to their significance within this research. Finally, the term “collaboration” will be defined to offer a lens to understanding the interactions between EPs and SLD and/or PMLD setting staff in relation to the work they have jointly conducted.

Severe or Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties

Neither the terms SLD nor PMLD are clinical diagnoses but are instead considered descriptions of groupings of learning disabilities (Mencap, n.d.). Further, MacKay (2009) states that the diversity within these definitions of disabilities adds difficulty when attempting to explicitly define and classify these terms. However, MacKay (2009) also states that the definitions of SLD and PMLD commonly contain two important features; difficulties in cognitive processes, and difficulties in adaptive functions (Hampton et al., 2019; MacKay, 2009). The term “difficulties” within both SLD and PMLD is commonly used within the UK, however the UK is almost alone in not using the term disability, leading to much published research using these two differing terms interchangeably (Imray et al., 2023). I will be using “difficulties” as I am conducting this research within the UK.

The definitions of SLD and PMLD used within this paper are taken from existing research. These definitions are deficit focused, which contradicts my personal strengths focused beliefs, however I chose these definitions to ensure they would be recognisable and able to be interpreted and applied within the research field, therefore enabling this research to be most useful. The broader term of “complex learning difficulties and disabilities” was considered (Carpenter et al., 2015) as I felt it to be more positive due to its lack of words referring to intensity (severe or profound). However, as this term describes those who have two or more co-occurring disabilities it can include a broad spectrum of CYP beyond learners with SLD and PMLD. As the purpose of this research is to understand how EPs collaborate with staff who work with SLD and PMLD learners I felt it was necessary to use more specific descriptive terms.

Further, Winter’s (2017) thesis paper exploring the contributions of EPs to special school which cater for learners with PMLD acted as a springboard for my own research, which is why the initial focus was on staff who worked within PMLD settings. However, confining my research to solely EP collaboration with staff in PMLD settings caused me some concern due to Winter’s (2017) acknowledgement of the overlap between PMLD and SLD settings and that many settings which categorised the primary need of their students as SLD also were provisions for learners with PMLD. Finally, in my personal experience the terms SLD and PMLD are not commonly used within settings to differentiate learners and, as found by Winter (2017), it can be difficult to separate the EP’s work within a setting based purely on a pupil’s needs.

I chose to use definitions for SLD and PMLD from two prominent education researchers who work within the field, both of whom have lectured on the area and previously taught pupils with SLD or PMLD (Imray, n.d.; Routledge, n.d.). Within the UK education system, SLD and PMLD describe two distinct groups of CYP based on the learning

characteristics that they exhibit (Colley, 2020a; Imray & Colley, 2017). It is acknowledged that there is overlap between the characteristics of both groups, and thus they are sometimes combined as one group (denoted as SLD/PMLD) within research (Colley, 2020b). According to Mencap (n.d.), people with SLD or PMLD can be distinguished relative to those with moderate learning difficulties by the fact they will require more support with communication, personal care, and mobility. However, although their commonality is outlined above, SLD and PMLD are two distinct groupings which should not be considered homogenous and therefore a description for each of the labels and a comparison between them can be found within Appendix A, with a summary of this table found in the paragraph below.

Both CYP with SLD and PMLD are described as having communication difficulties (Colley, 2020a; Imray & Colley, 2017). CYP with SLD experience a broad range of communication difficulties, for example most pupils with SLD are able to hold simple conversations though some may use signs and symbols to support their communication (Colley 2020b; DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015). In comparison, CYP with PMLD are often described as being pre or non-verbal and therefore may not communicate in methods which are commonly considered typical (Colley, 2020a). Both groups are recognised as having cognitive difficulties which impact their learning. CYP with SLD may learn within the upper P scale¹, whereas CYP with PMLD are likely to remain in the earlier P-scale range (Colley 2020b; DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015). Further, some individuals with PMLD are also described as having attendant physical disabilities or additional complex medical conditions (Colley, 2020a).

¹ Performance attainment targets (P scales) are performance descriptors for pupils aged 5-16 with special educational needs (SEN) who are working below the standard of the national curriculum tests and assessments (Department for Education, 2017, p. 3)

Educational Settings for Pupils with SLD and/or PMLD Definition

An educational setting for pupils with SLD and/or PMLD will have specialist provisions which support students who have the difficulties described in Appendix A. Government statistics report 73% of PMLD settings in London also cater for pupils with SLD, however some provisions do not support both groups simultaneously (DfE, n.d.). Thus, and/or² allows the consideration of provisions which support the education of either or both groups of CYP.

The description of SLD/PMLD settings in this research is intentionally open to best capture the diversity of settings which educate CYP with SLD/PMLD, as described hereafter. Firstly, the variance of mainstream versus specialist settings is evidenced by the Department of Public Health England (PHE) (2020) report which highlights that, although most pupils with SLD/PMLD were reported to be educated within special schools, 15% of pupils with SLD and 12% of pupils with PMLD were taught in mainstream schools. Further, from 2025 statistics, there were a reported 449 mainstream schools in England with special provisions known as SEN units (DfE, 2025). These units are separate classes for pupils with SEN (DfE, 2025), evidencing that mainstream schools are working to become accommodating for CYP with SEN, with SLD/PMLD students falling within this umbrella. Secondly, some schools or settings cater for specific ages of CYP, such as nurseries and colleges. Finally, there are myriad funding structures for educational settings. These include local authority (LA) maintained settings, settings which are independent of the LA, and finally, non-maintained settings which are also independent of the LA and operating on a charitable non-profit basis (DfE & Department of Health, 2015).

² When considering the definition of settings which cater for CYP with SLD and/or PMLD, the “and/or” is shortened to “/” from here on

To be able to best understand how EPs work collaboratively within the above environments, I felt it was critical to keep the definition of SLD/PMLD settings as open as possible, including mainstream settings with specialist provisions as well as dedicated settings, to best consider the variety of settings and stage of education they offer to CYP with SLD/PMLD.

Collaboration Definition

According to the Cambridge dictionary, collaboration is a noun which encapsulates a situation where there are at least two people working together to achieve or create a shared outcome (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). However, when one considers the definition of collaboration from the viewpoint of research into professionals from differing disciplines working together, there is less clarity. In a recent scoping review conducted by researchers in Australia which aimed to compare and clarify definitions of collaboration relating to Early Childhood Education and Care, the authors found that different studies used different definitions for collaboration interchangeably, meaning the understanding of the level of collaboration offered within these studies becomes ambiguous (Sun et al., 2024).

When considering research from the United Kingdom (UK), Birch et al. (2023) used the term “interprofessional collaboration” to consider joint working between EPs and Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs), and used the World Health Organization’s definition of interprofessional collaboration which is “collaborative practice happens when multiple health workers from different professional backgrounds work together with patients, families, carers and communities to deliver the highest quality of care” (World Health Organization 2010, p.7). Birch et al. (2023) then went on to further define interprofessional collaboration as referring to collaboration between professionals within a single agency (such as health or educational organisations), and the working together of professionals from different agencies.

This research uses the term interprofessional collaboration based upon the definition offered by Birch et al. (2023) which is outlined above. I chose to use Birch et al.'s (2023) definition of interprofessional collaboration as their paper is a recently published, peer-reviewed journal article. In addition, as Birch et al. (2023) specifically examined collaboration between EPs and another type of professional who frequently work within the education sector, I felt that using the same definition would allow the findings from this research to be compared with those of Birch's (2023) study. This would enable consideration of both potentially more general aspects of interprofessional collaboration and the more specific mechanics of collaboration when working with staff in SLD/PMLD settings.

Background and Context

Socio-Political Context

Since 2024 there has been a reported increase of 5.6% in learners with special educational needs in England (DfE, 2025). Similarly, in 2018 Public Health England reported a rise in the number of pupils with SLD/PMLD in schools nationally (PHE, 2020). This increase in SLD/PMLD population could be linked to medical and social advances, particularly in neo-natal care (Carpenter et al., 2015; Colley, 2020a; Imray et al., 2023). Pupils with SLD/PMLD are commonly acknowledged as having some of the most complex needs and therefore most are reported to attend specialist settings (Colley, 2020b; Imray et al., 2023; PHE, 2020). They are also identified to be at increased risk of experiencing financial difficulties such as poverty; statistics from 2018 found CYP with SLD/PMLD had double the rates of free school meal eligibility when compared to their peers (PHE, 2020). Further, those with SLD/PMLD are reported to be at an increased risk of both physical and mental health problems (Colley, 2020b; Goward et al., 2005; O'Brien, 2016) and to experience vulnerability at higher rates (Colley, 2020b; Shakespeare, 2014). Supporting this, national statistics from 2015 found that 3.7% of children with SLD and 4.3% of children with

PMLD on school rolls in 2015/16 were considered a Looked After Child, meaning that the LA becomes responsible for the child's welfare and placement (PHE, 2020).

Despite the evident level of need for this population of pupils outlined above, the literature suggests that these learners have been largely excluded from SEN educational policy due to the national focus on a single curriculum centred on academic achievement and linear progression (Colley, 2020b; Carpenter et al., 2015; Imray et al., 2023).

National Legislation

The Education Act (1996) legislates parents as responsible for ensuring that their child engages in full time education tailored to their age and any SEN they have (Education Act 1996). Supporting this, both the Equality Act (2010) and the Children and Families Act (2014) work in conjunction to remove barriers to learning which would discriminate against children with SEND (Children and Families Act, 2014; Equality Act, 2010). The Department for Education and Department of Health (2015) emphasises supporting CYP with SEN for independent living and preparing for an adulthood which includes employment, however Colley (2020b) argues that as CYP with SLD/PMLD are not likely to live independently nor be employed, the current guidance is unlikely to support them.

Further, the UK National Curriculum is guided by what neurotypical ten to eleven-year-olds are expected to have attained by the end of primary education and the linear learning up to this point. If this cannot be attained by an individual because of their disability, then for them the National Curriculum can be considered to be without purpose (Imray & Hinchcliffe, 2014). This is especially relevant to learners with SLD/PMLD who are defined by an expectation to not progress beyond the first stage of the curriculum (Davies & Soni, 2025; Gale & Gibbs, 2009), should it be accessible for them at all (Colley, 2020b; DfE, 2016). The engagement model (DfE, 2020) and pre-key stage 1 and 2 standards (Standards

and Testing Agency, 2022, 2024) were introduced to support the assessment of those working below the National Curriculum Level 1, however these are targeted towards assessment and school accountability, and offer limited guidance for setting staff on how best to support pupils' development. Finally, support for CYP with SLD/PMLD was also curtailed by the cancellation of the requirement for additional training when working with these learners in 1989 (Imray et al., 2023), and the scarcity of training courses available nationally (Rees, 2017). These points suggest that, though there is legislation to support CYP with SEN it does not comprehensively define the support to be offered to those with the most need. Nevertheless, these learners must be placed within the education system by their parents, be supported by the staff within the settings, and interact with the wider educational support systems.

Educational Psychology Services Support for CYP with SLD/PMLD

Educational Psychology Services (EPS) are instructed to support CYP of all descriptions of SEND from the ages of 0-25 years old (Atfield et al., 2023). Since the introduction of the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DfH, 2015), the role of the EP has been extended to providing psychological knowledge and advice as part of the statutory Educational Health Care (EHC) needs assessment process, and an increasing proportion of EPS time has been allocated towards the increasing demand for Educational Health Care Plans (EHCP) (Atfield et al., 2023). For the vast majority of cases, there must already be an EHCP completed to enable a CYP with SLD/PMLD to access the specialist settings and provisions within them (Atfield et al., 2023), and it can be inferred from this that specialist provisions are therefore less likely to interact with EPs as they are less likely to need statutory support given that ECHPs are predominately already in place.

Supporting this claim of limited EP presence; in a survey completed by 207 EPs, 60.4% responded that they were not currently working with a setting which catered for

learners with PMLD, and 31.9% responded that they had never been linked to this type of setting (Winter & Bunn, 2019). Winter and Bunn (2019) also found that EPs themselves reported that they lacked confidence when working with these settings, indicating that there are additional barriers to EPs working with CYP attending these settings even when opportunities to do so arise. Potentially supporting this finding, research exploring how EPs work with such settings appears to be limited. A recent scoping review recovered only seven papers of EPs working with SLD/PMLD special schools (Davies & Soni, 2025), and there appears to be no published literature of EPs supporting SEN units for SLD/PMLD students in mainstream provisions.

Further, the recent SEND Reform consultation (2026) proposes a shift in EP practice through the introduction of the ‘Experts at Hand’ model, which proposes a multi-agency team, including EPs, model to provide support to educational settings (DfE & Department of Health and Social Care, 2026, p.57). Although the focus of the model appears to be primarily aimed at mainstream schools, there is also clear message that special schools should be connected to wider systems (DfE & DfH&SC, 2026, p.8) suggesting that the Experts at Hand model should extend to specialist settings.

Background and Context Summary

The numbers of CYP with SLD/PMLD is increasing yet support for them is not being defined at a legislative level. Teaching staff are being directed to educate these learners yet there is no applicable guidance on assessment nor on best practice to support them, alongside limited access to specialist training for supporting their education. Currently, it can be inferred that EPSs are limited in their support for SLD/PMLD settings as an increasing proportion of their time is taken by EHC assessments, which SLD/PMLD settings typically have less need for these than mainstream schools. EPs are also reported to not feel confident when working with settings which cater for PMLD, despite the role of the EP being defined

by legislation to support CYP and all educational settings. Finally, the SEND Reform consultation has suggested the potential to better support specialist settings through increased community links and multi-agency working, indicating a pressing need for EPs to work collaboratively within these spaces.

Reflexivity and Positionality in Relation to the Research Topic

One of the key purposes of this research is to support my training at the Tavistock Education and Training (formerly Tavistock & Portman NHS Trust) on the Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology. Beyond this purpose, my motivation to research this topic stems from my previous roles working as a setting staff member within two specialist settings which support SLD CYP in two different LAs. Therefore, this research, my training, and my personal experience before becoming a trainee EP (TEP) are intertwined and will influence my meaning making throughout this research.

Practitioner Research

Within this research I am striving to understand a phenomenon (in this case, a collaborative working relationship between two different professionals) which I do not have experience of myself as I am yet to work with SLD/PMLD settings as a TEP. Therefore, this research is not intended to be a self-study (Coghlan, 2014). Further, even though I am myself a TEP, this research is not intended to be a self-study of the field of Educational Psychology nor the LA in which I am located because neither the organisation of Educational Psychology nor my LA has requested this research to be conducted. Therefore, it can be understood that I am approaching this research as if I were external to it (Coghlan, 2014).

However, to describe myself as an outsider to the organisation is untrue as I am a TEP and therefore am studying within the field of Educational Psychology. According to Alvesson (2003), when a researcher relies on familiarity with the organisation as a starting point for the

study, the research is considered “self-ethnography” and consequently the author must understand their relationship to the research and to the subjectivity they hold (Coghlan, 2014, Quadrant 1). Therefore, the ontological and epistemological positions of this research will have to acknowledge that I will be part of the knowledge constructed within this study because of my proximity to its focus.

Motivations for Research

I was surprised at the lack of contact I had with EPs whilst working within specialist settings for CYP with SLD, especially since during this time I also completed my MSc Psychology and observed that psychological thinking influenced by this education positively informed my practice with the learners in these settings. Over the course of my training on the EP doctorate, I became increasingly aware of the prominence and understanding of the EP role when supporting mainstream settings, as well as the limited opportunities to work with specialist settings I would have as a qualified EP. Further, through conversations with colleagues I became aware that there is a lack of clarity felt by EPs regarding the role and impact they could have working with learners with SLD/PMLD, and that the view held by some EPs is that the staff within these settings are seen as the experts on supporting the development of CYP with SLD/PMLD. This represents a tension for me as I have experience being the staff member in this scenario and am therefore aware that being denoted as an expert was not how I perceived myself at the time. Further, throughout my doctoral training I have reflected and continue to reflect on how I would now be able to better support the pupils with SLD I worked with. A specific example of this is that, when working as a class teacher for autistic pupils who were all pre-verbal and required high levels of adult support to communicate, I would have appreciated a more in-depth understanding regarding the impact of cognitive load on capacity to learn, especially when considering some of the pupils in the class were accessing the augmentative communication tools in a second language.

I am aware that my closeness to and opinions regarding the research topic means that I will need to reflect carefully on my subjectivity. However, I believe my prior experience in these settings enables me to see the benefits of increased collaboration between these professional spheres and, despite holding positions on both sides of the collaborative relationship being explored within this research, I have not myself experienced working with the opposing professional. Therefore, I am able to bring a genuine curiosity to the research, whilst also being close enough to have concerns regarding the current situation and to hope I can support change.

I must acknowledge that I will also be a part of the meaning making and knowledge constructed from this research. Therefore, this research is grounded in a relativist ontological position and a social constructionist epistemology as both align with the view that individuals hold their own understanding of reality, while also acknowledging that shared understanding can be created through interactions (Losantos et al., 2016; Robson, 2016). Further, this research employs a constructivist grounded theory (CGT) methodological approach. This approach acknowledges that the researcher's subjectivity actively influences the data, while also enabling the generation of a theoretical model to understand the topic being researched. This will be discussed in greater depth in the Methodology chapter.

Research Aims and Objectives

This research aims to explore successful interprofessional collaborative working between EPs and staff within settings for learners with SLD/PMLD. It seeks to identify and explain the factors that facilitate such collaboration through the development of a theoretical model to inform Educational Psychology practice.

To achieve this, I aim:

- To review existing literature to offer an understanding with regards to role of the EP in supporting learners with SLD/PMLD, and how literature described successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and other professionals
- To explore how EPs and setting staff describe successful interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings
- To construct an understanding of the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings
- To consider the implications of findings considering the reviewed literature, and offer concepts for EP practice and future research in this area

Chapter 2 – Scoping Reviews

Chapter Overview

This chapter is a two-part scoping review of existing research regarding EP practice when supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD, and existing research into successful collaboration between EPs and other professionals. The aim of these scoping reviews is to identify and describe the gap within current research with regards to EP collaborative working with staff in SLD/PMLD settings.

Approach to Reviewing the Literature

Differently to typical grounded theory (GT) methodology, where it is argued that reviewing the literature should be postponed to after the research had completed the data analysis, CGT enables me to conduct reviews of the literature first (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2025) to allow me to avoid retreading previously found ideas without realising, and to acknowledge my familiarity with relevant literature through my TEP practice (Bulmer, 1984; Dey, 1999; Layder, 1998; Charmaz, 2025; Thornberg, 2012).

Further, this paper employs a social constructionist epistemology where knowledge is understood to not exist within its own right but instead is believed to be constructed by individuals through their interactions with one another and interpretations of these interactions (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Through this epistemological lens, I as the researcher am embedded within a historical, ideological, and socio-cultural context, so it can be understood that the findings of this paper will be constructed within the context of my interactions with the participants and the data. Thus, my prior understanding of the topic is unable to be separated from the findings. Scoping reviews were therefore conducted to gain an overview of literature regarding the EPs role working to support CYP with SLD/PMLD

and working collaboratively with other professionals to justify and support direction of the current study.

First scoping review: Role of the EP in Supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD

Scoping Review Methods

Both scoping reviews are guided and structured by Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) methodological framework. There are six stages to this framework, however the final stage is optional, so I am choosing to follow only the first five stages of the model. The presentation of the scoping review follows the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA- ScR) Checklist (Tricco et al., 2018) to provide transparency.

A critical appraisal tool has not been used for either review. This is because the purpose of a scoping review is to map the breath of research around a particular topic to enhance understanding of the field of enquiry and implications of future research, not to provide recommendations for practice or policy and thus that level of critical analysis is not required (Pollock et al., 2024). Instead, I critique the relevance of each paper to the review question. I will also judge the relevance of the papers to my research question by considering whether the paper explicitly mentions the role of the EP in supporting individuals with SLD/PMLD, and whether the paper provides empirical evidence of EP practice in supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD. Papers which explicitly mention the role of the EP and provide empirical data will be considered most relevant to the review question and those which state the role of the EP but do not provide empirical evidence will be considered least relevant as they are only exploring a possible role.

Stage 1: Identifying the Review Question

Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework states that some aspects of the research question must be clearly defined before interrogating the existing literature, although the research question itself can be broad in nature to invite a wide scope.

Davies and Soni (2025) completed a scoping study which focused on current and potential areas of EP practice in special schools within the UK. I wanted to explore EP practice specifically with specialist settings for pupils with SLD/PMLD. An assessment of Davies and Soni's (2025) scoping review identified that there were twelve papers used in the study, of which only seven were relevant to my targeted populations. This small population of research specific to students with SLD/PMLD indicates that there is merit in completing my own scoping review and provides justification for the review to be made broader to consider more generally how the literature describes EPs supporting CYP with PMLD and SLD (Davies & Soni, 2025).

Scoping review question: What does the literature reveal about Educational Psychology practice in supporting individuals with SLD/PMLD?

Stage 2: Identifying Relevant Studies

Decisions were made around inclusion and exclusion criteria, whilst also holding in mind the research question, and considering what is feasible when considering time and resource constraints (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Therefore, the literature was selected through the parameters found in Table 1.

Search Strategy. Relevant databases in the fields of education and psychology were searched; APA PsycINFO, PEP Archive, Education Source, and ERIC. These databases were selected so I could consider literature relevant to EPs working with CYP with PMLD and SLD across both the teaching and EP professions. Searches were conducted on 20th April

2025, 12th August 2025, and checked again on 31st March 2026. Search terms can be found in Table 2.

Table 1

Search terms for role of the EP in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD

Key Term	Search Terms
Educational Psychologist	Educational psychologist*
SLD/PMLD	Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilit* OR Profound and Multiple Difficult* OR "PMLD" OR "SLD" OR "Severe Learning Difficult*" OR "Severe Learning Disabilit*"
UK and Ireland	United Kingdom OR England OR Ireland OR Scotland OR Wales OR UK

Table 2

Criteria for literature exploring the role of the EP in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD

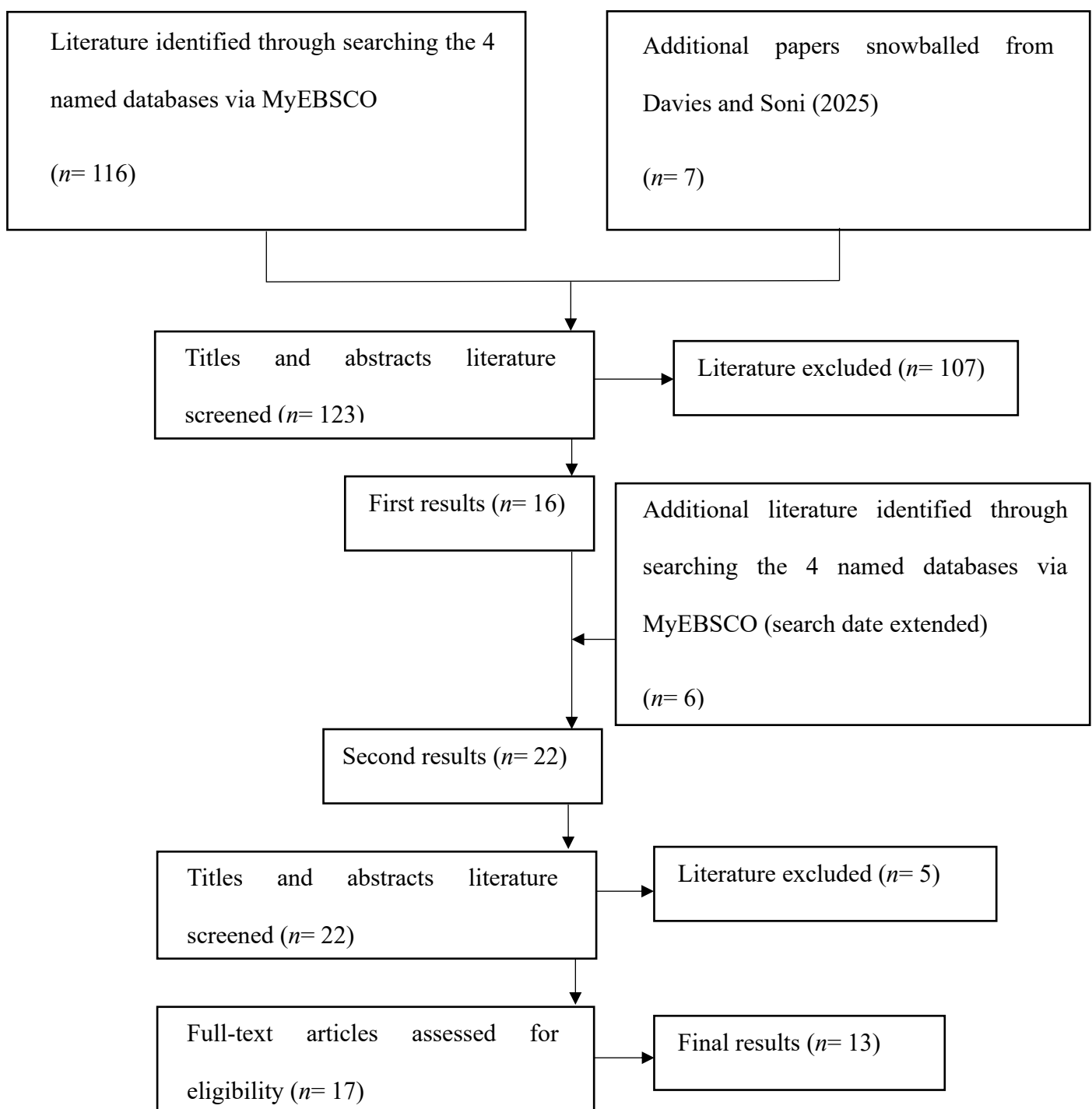
Study Feature	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Type of publication	Peer-reviewed publications and unpublished doctoral theses	Opinion pieces, blogs, newsletters, policy and guidance documents.	I wanted to capture a breadth of literature given the limited number of empirical studies in the field, as evidenced by Davies and Soni's (2025) scoping review.
Country of study	Any countries within the UK or the Republic of Ireland	Papers from any countries outside the UK or the Republic of Ireland	The EP role in the UK differs to most countries outside the UK. However, the EP role in the Republic of Ireland similarly adopts a consultative model (DfE and Youth, 2020) and the SEND system also offers specialist settings (Knight et al., 2024).
Date of study	Published from January 2014	Published before 2014	Search started in January 2014 to include Crombie et al. (2014), snowballed from Davies and Soni's (2025). Papers were not sought earlier than this date due to the significant changes to legislation in 2014, which have impacted education.
Subject/ focus/ participants	Included the terms PMLD or SLD, and Educational Psychologist.	Did not include the terms either PMLD or SLD, and Educational Psychologist.	The purpose of this scoping review is to develop an understanding of EP practice in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD.

Stage 3: Study Selection

I screened the resultant papers by their title and abstract. All papers which met the inclusion criteria were then read to ensure their relevance to the review question (see figure 1).

Figure 1

Selection of sources of evidence for role of the EP in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD



Stage 4: Charting the Data

I used a charting approach to apply a common framework, which consisted of mapping the data in “data charting form” to extract and analyse both process and outcome data for each of the studies (Arksey and O’Malley, 2005, p.9). Please see Appendix B for the completed chart. In total 13 papers were selected based on their relevance to the question.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results

In alignment with Arksey and O’Malley’s (2005) framework, the findings of the scoping review are presented in two ways; through table mapping (Appendix B) and through employing a framework synthesis approach. The thirteen papers identified for the scoping review were read in full before using a framework synthesis approach illustrated by Pope (2000). Framework synthesis was chosen to assess the literature as my exposure to the role of the EP and SLD/PMLD environments disallows me from approaching the literature with complete naivety. Therefore, use of the framework allows me to maintain transparency with regards to how the data is collected into themes.

In terms of the structure of the framework used; after reading the papers in full, I synthesised the papers into three levels of EP involvement which were based on the work completed by EPs: the individual child or young person level, the group level (such as, a team of school staff, class group or family), or the organisational level (such as, the school, or the local authority) (Fallon et al., 2010). This framework aligns with that used by Davies and Soni (2025) and can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3

Table of themes for understanding the role of the EP in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD

Level of EP involvement	Theme
Individual Level	Eliciting pupil voice
	Facilitating assessment and intervention
	Working within multi-agency teams
Group Level	Training staff
	Facilitating reflection in staff
	Supporting families
Organisational Level	Impacting education
	Conducting action research

Individual Level

Eliciting Pupil Voice. Five of the reviewed articles highlighted a role for EPs in eliciting pupil voice of pupils with SLD/PMLD to support person-centred planning (Atkinson et al., 2015; Bason, 2020; Farmer & Stringer, 2023) and to advocate for their views (Hill et al., 2016; Loveday, 2014). This is not surprising given that the SEND Code of Practice (2015) mandates that that LAs must consider the views of CYP with regards to setting next steps, and that LAs must consult with CYP as much as possible throughout the process (DfE & DfH, 2015, para. 8.9-8.16).

Loveday's (2014) research aimed to gather information through unstructured interviews with headteachers from four special schools regarding issues they experience in relation to their learners with PMLD and to analyse this information with regards to implications for EP practice. Several key issues attributed to the parents of students with PMLD were found, such as how parental expectations of their child can lead to them losing sight of the child within their disability. Loveday (2014) went on to suggest that the EP has a

role in advocating for the child within discussions with both parents and schools, specifically through providing opportunities for a broader perspective of the child by supporting the adults to consider the child's inner identity, their learning, and their interests. However, it is important to highlight that the author did not provide details of how an EP might conduct this work, therefore it is difficult to assess whether an EP would be successful in this role.

Atkinson et al.'s (2015) research on developing the TEP curriculum to better support people with SEN aged 16-25 suggests that EPs are well placed to take up the role of eliciting their views as part of person-centred planning reviews (PCRs) as they already have within their expertise the capacity to apply psychological understanding. Similarly, Farmer and Stringer (2023) aimed to explore the individual subjective viewpoints which contribute to understanding the views of CYP with PMLD within a PCR process. They reported that adults have a key role to provide opportunities for the CYP to develop both communication and cognitive skills to better express their view. Farmer and Stringer (2023) modelled the role an EP can have in supporting the adults around a pupil to have collaborative discussions regarding their differing understanding of the pupil's views by formulating data capture of the individual (such as pictures or video) into a presentation which was shared in the PCR, enabling the adults who know the CYP best to discuss their interpretations of the pupil's reactions, emotions, and preferences to bring their views into the process.

Similarly to Farmer and Stringer (2023), Bason (2020) also argued that the EPs can have an instrumental role in facilitating PCRs. The aim of the study was to determine whether the PCR resulted in more individually relevant transition plans that outlined future outcomes for young people, and whether there was planning for how future aspirations may be achieved. Although Bason (2020) observed that the young person typically participates in the PCR, they also noted that participation was considered poor for those CYP who had limited communication, which may be more applicable to those with SLD/PMLD. Bason (2020)

went on to offer critique of the process, identifying that, due to the young people with SLD/PMLD having limited communication, there were doubts that the views elicited during the PCR process were representative of the CYP's views, further highlighting the challenges for accurately capturing pupils with SLD/PMLDs' views. Contradicting this, Hill et al. (2016) used a participatory study to understand the experiences of CYP who were being educated in residential special schools. They found that pupils with a range of learning and communication needs were able to contribute to participatory research when data-gathering methods were adapted and they are supported by adults. In accordance with Farmer and Stringer (2023), Hill et al.'s (2016) paper demonstrates the role of the EP when working to gain insight from pupils with SLD/PMLD can take the form of developing accessible and appropriate assessing materials or through direct observation methods. It should be noted however that there were just three pupils with SLD/PMLD within Hill et al.'s (2016) study, reducing the opportunity to generalise from their study.

Facilitating Assessment and Intervention. As previously discussed, Atkinson et al. (2015) investigated the TEP curriculum with an aim to further enhance their capacity to support young people with SEN. They developed a framework for TEPs which explicitly identifies PMLD and complex learning difficulties and disabilities as groups which the TEPs would be supporting in the future, with assessment being an area identified as in need of further development. Thus, Atkinson et al. (2015) argues that the EP has a role in selecting and using psychological assessment methods for CYP with SLD/PMLD. Further, Winter and Bunn (2019) explored EPs' views on their current and ideal roles working with CYP with PMLD and the perceived opportunities and barriers to practice. They found that of the 207 EP's they surveyed, 83.1% reported to have completed statutory work with a PMLD setting. Similarly, 80.7% of EPs responded to having currently or previously worked at the individual level, and 61.8% reported involvement in consultations (Winter & Bunn, 2019). Their

findings echoed Atkinson et al. (2015) in that many of the EPs surveyed by Winter and Bunn (2019) identified useful psychologically based skills and knowledge they held which could be utilised in individual work. This expertise included knowledge around development, detailed functional assessments, and finally experience of capturing pupil views.

One of the least reported forms of work from the EPs surveyed by Winter and Bunn (2019) was delivering interventions, however completing intervention work was rated by 58.5% of EPs as one of their ideal contributions to these settings. It is important to note that Winter and Bunn (2019) do not specify who the interventions are with, and as the only interventions identified within their paper were Video Interaction Guidance (VIG) and Video Enhance Reflective Practice (VERP), it appears that rather than interventions where the EP works directly with the CYP, the interventions reported by EPs are used to support the adults around the individual.

Thompson & Atkinson (2022) conducted in-depth analysis of the perspectives of staff within a special setting for pupils with SLD/PMLD to explore how they promote mental health and wellbeing for post-16 students. Through this, Thompson and Atkinson (2022) aimed to identify supportive factors for the pupils, and additionally factors which facilitated and hindered effective delivery of these supportive strategies. They reported that there is a role for the EP when supporting the mental health of CYP with SLD/PMLD at an individual level by using a framework of strategies, such as the Human Givens Institute of emotional needs framework (Griffin & Tyrrell, 2003), for both identifying needs and guidance for more targeted support. However, the evidence for this finding came from Attwood and Atkinson's (2020) research, which found that applying the Human Givens intervention (Griffin & Tyrrell, 2003) improved the emotional health of one young person described as having a diagnosis of autism and learning difficulties, though not explicitly identified as having SLD. Therefore, while Thompson and Atkinson's (2022) and Attwood and Atkinson's (2020)

studies present a case example of an EP providing support to a pupil with complex learning difficulties, this approach may not be accessible to all pupils with SLD. This example further supports the emerging theme from the literature of a focus on the EPs working with the adults around the CYP rather than directly working with pupils with SLD/PMLD.

Working Within Multi-Agency Teams. Of the 207 EPs surveyed by Winter & Bunn (2019), 55.6% reported that contribution within multi-agency meetings was part of their current or previous involvement with a PMLD setting, though an understanding of the scope and purpose of this work was not offered. Winter and Bunn (2019) also highlight that joint casework with other professionals was identified by the surveyed EPs as an ideal way of working with these settings. Finally, the participants specified that there is a role for EPs within multi-agency working when it comes to supporting educational transitions for young people.

One key point of transition within a pupil with an EHCP's educational journey is the PCR, which is typically a multi-agency review and is used to assess the direction the pupil will progress toward adulthood. As previously described, Bason's (2020) multiple case study assessed the PCR process. They reported that the quality of outcomes from the PCR varied based on the professionals present and the knowledge they could contribute, and that the PCR was particularly reliant upon which professional role took up the mantle of facilitator. It was noted that the PCR helped to bring external agencies together to determine post-secondary destinations, however the tasks were not always completed as they were not followed up on systematically. Bason (2020) puts forward that EPs are well-positioned to facilitate PCR meetings based upon their experience in using person-centred planning within their practice however, as previously identified, they do not provide any evaluation of how successful an EP would be in this role.

Group Level

Training Staff. Winter and Bunn's (2019) survey reported that EPs have a role in providing professional practice training to staff in PMLD settings with 42.0% of EPs sharing that they had contributed in this way. The authors argue that training is an effective way for EPs to share their knowledge and hypothesise that EPs could support pupils with PMLD further by delivering training to foster inclusion of CYP with PMLD in mainstream settings. Further, Thompson and Atkinson's (2022) study references EPs upskilling educational staff so that they can in turn support students to be proactive in supporting their own mental health. Finally, Geiger et al.'s (2015) action research study aimed to develop a systemic methodology for providing support for post-16 learners with complex needs in one London LA. They provide an example of a request made to the EPs to deliver additional staff training regarding good practice informed by research.

Facilitating Reflection in Staff. Winter and Bunn (2019) found that VIG and VERP has been utilised by EPs to support staff reflecting within PMLD settings. The authors argue that EPs promoting reflection skills should be considered important due to the unique needs of these settings and the emotional effect of the work on staff but are unable to offer an assessment of the effectiveness of EPs in doing so.

Similarly, Hampton et al. (2019) aimed to explore the use of VERP alongside the Engagement Model (DfE, 2020) for setting staff to understand how the two models together benefit both students and staff at a school for children with complex needs, all of which were described as physical and learning disabilities with many of the pupils having little verbal communication. The role of the EP within this study was to train the staff participants on the process and to facilitate the 16-week VERP intervention. Interviews found that the intervention's highlighting of good practice had a powerful beneficial impact on the participants and their pupils. Further, the reflective aspect of the process was identified as

having a substantial impact on improving relationships between staff and students through identifying and supporting attuned interactions. The study recommended EPs using strong evidence-based psychology when supporting staff in setting for pupils with complex needs to ensure maximum benefit for children within the setting (Hampton et al., 2019).

Although not using specifically VERP, Crombie et al. (2014) also worked alongside SLD/PMLD setting staff to capture their often-unconscious professional practice. Their aim was to offer an understanding of what constitutes professional competence in the setting and identify methods to acknowledge this as part of staff training, ultimately to rebalance the over-reliance on specialist professional knowledge. The role of the EP in this research was to support the setting staff in highlighting the professional capacities which enhance staff-pupil relationships. By observing the staff, the EP was able to identify these attuned behaviours which were then fed-back through consultation. An analysis of how effectively the EP functioned within this role was not offered by the paper, however, Crombie et al., (2014) identified that the relationship-based strategies utilised by setting staff were not consciously accessed or able to be modified unless through consultative reflective practice, highlighting the importance of the process facilitated by the EP in this research.

Supervision was another model identified as being utilised by EPs to support staff with reflection. Winter and Bunn (2019) reported within their data that 57.5% of the EPs relayed that their ideal contribution to settings which support PMLD pupils is being a supporting figure to the setting staff due to the understanding that there is a large emotional impact when working in these settings. Their research suggested that the EPs could fulfil this role through coaching staff, facilitating staff supervision, delivering supervision training sessions, and running peer supervision and reflective groups (Winter & Bunn, 2019). However, despite this, when reporting on current or previous work with PMLD settings, staff supervision was rated as the lowest occurring task at only 14.5%. It is important to note that

Winter and Bunn's (2019) paper highlights only the EPs perspective, and although there has been previous research suggesting the emotional impact of the work on staff (Nind & Grace, 2024) it is possible that the surveyed EPs could be assuming that staff in these settings would appreciate an EP providing supervisory support. Interestingly, Thompson and Atkinson's (2022) found that the setting staff in their study were able to access supervision from an EP if they had significant pastoral responsibilities and that staff also reported that they were able to attend EP-led drop-ins as a space to problem-solve, explore alternative strategies, and reframe thinking. However, only one member of staff was accessing the supervision, and it is unclear from the study whether staff were actively using the drop-in provision (Thompson & Atkinson, 2022).

Supporting Families. Literature also shows that EPs have a role in supporting the families around CYP with PMLD. Winter and Bunn (2019) found that 72.9% of the surveyed EPs reported that one of their preferred roles with PMLD settings would be to work with parents in the settings, and that only 42% of EPs reported to be doing so at the time of the survey. Further, engaging with parents was highlighted as a key theme within the research's qualitative feedback with EPs suggesting that they could achieve this through organising parent drop-ins, facilitating joint consultations with parents and staff, delivering training for parents, and using approaches such as VIG for both assessment and intervention (Winter & Bunn, 2019). Employing a holistic approach to working with the families was also considered possible by the EPs, an example of this being working with the whole family unit around those with PMLD to support with the emotional context of living with someone with PMLD.

Evidence of the EP having a role in directly supporting parents was reported by Loveday (2014) who suggested that EPs can utilise psychological expertise to inform and educate family members around the child with regards to the child's disability, thereby allowing them to see beyond the medical diagnosis. Loveday (2014) also proposed that EPs

can use psychological theories of bereavement support with parents of pupils with life-limiting illnesses, and impart findings in neuroscience and the educational implications of their child's needs. Loveday (2014) suggests that EPs using a strengths-based approach when giving their advice may result in moving staff away from a deficit model of the child and widening their understanding of how CYP with PMLD learn.

Warner (2015) conducted a pre and post measures assessment of a post-diagnostic support model for parents of pupils with SLD/PMLD to help them increase their knowledge regarding their child's diagnosis, and to provide a space for them to reflect upon the diagnosis' impact on themselves. Warner (2015) reported that two of the three sets of parents involved in the study reported to have found the sessions with the EP beneficial in allowing them to consider their own feelings and providing understanding about their child's disability. In addition, teachers identified changes in parents' understanding of their child's needs. Warner (2015) argued that through post-diagnostic support such as this, an EP can support parents and the relationship between parents and teachers, observing that EPs are well placed to hold this role as they are trained to deliver such sessions and have access to models of support, such as Critical Incident frameworks, to discuss with families about their possible grief that the child they had was not the child that they thought that they would have.

Beyond the methods of directly supporting families around CYP with SLD/PMLD discussed above, PCR were identified as an opportunity for the EP to provide such support through enabling the sharing of information between the home and school contexts. Bason (2020) reported that the PCR is an opportunity for parents to voice their opinions and for professionals to transfer information with the parents themselves. Farmer and Stringer (2023) agree with this and further found that PCR meetings allow for alternative interpretations to be shared which helped with decision making. The EP facilitated these meetings, and it can

therefore be inferred that the EP supports the parents with understanding their child within these meetings.

Organisational Level

Impacting Education. Rees (2017) conducted a literature review exploring the influence of prominent models of disability on the categorisation of pupils with SLD/PMLD. They found that both the medical and social models of disability have the most influence on policy and individual practice in educational settings (Rees, 2017). The medical model of disability emphasises impairments and locates these within the child. The social model of disability suggests that the relation of reduced function of the individual and the experience of disability is influenced by wider systems around the individual including cultural, social, and environmental factors. With this in mind, Rees (2017) argues that the EP role could extend to supporting educational professionals' understanding of disabilities associated with learners with SLD/PMLD through training. This would support with an understanding of the often-non-linear development of these pupils, and that this could in turn influence attainment monitoring. The paper illustrates an example where the implementation of a curriculum and assessment framework to support pupils with SLD/PMLD was facilitated by the EPS and Inclusion service in one LA. This example is then explored further by Rees et al. (2017) who aimed to evaluate the implementation and impact of the framework. They reported that the framework provided educational settings with information about how CYP with differing levels of cognitive difficulty learn alongside guidance on teaching approaches and assessments. Their evaluation of this framework reported a positive impact on teaching pedagogy and professional mindset, including increasing confidence, enhanced beliefs in capability, and a greater willingness to trial new approaches (Rees et al., 2017).

Winter and Bunn (2019) highlighted that part of the EP role is to support PMLD settings at the systemic level by supporting the curriculum taught within these settings.

Further, they propose that EPs could have a role in supporting CYP with PMLD within mainstream settings by supporting the development of a dedicated curriculum. However, this paper does not provide empirical evidence to suggest this would be an effective application of the EP role within both PMLD and mainstream settings. Similarly, Bason (2020) proposed that EPs could contribute to supporting young people with SEND with post-16 transitions through the development of curricula targeting young people's skills underpinned by self-determination theory. However, Bason (2020) also does not provide any evidence of the implementation of this within practice.

Conducting Action Research. Action research (Cohen et al., 2000; Hampton et al., 2019) is described as a process enabling EPs to collect practice-based evidence (Fox, 2011; Hampton et al., 2019) to support both their own and their peers' practice (Crotty, 2009; Hampton et al., 2019). A strength of this approach is that it allows for improvement to be achieved simultaneously with the research activity (Dick, 2002; Geiger et al., 2015; Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000).

Hampton et al. (2019) conducted action research exploring how students and staff within a setting for pupils with complex needs, including SLD/PMLD, benefitted from an intervention, and to identify adaptations to maximise its effectiveness. They demonstrated the impact of the intervention through evidence-based findings, as well as identifying further aspects of the intervention for development. Hampton et al. (2019) suggested that EPs may have a role in conducting research within SLD/PMLD settings to develop evidence-based best practice within these contexts.

Geiger et al. (2015) conducted action research aiming to use evidence-based approaches to develop a systemic methodology for providing support for post-16 learners with complex needs across one London LA. Geiger et al. (2015) found that key stakeholders,

which included the senior EP in the team, professionals from the LA itself, and senior professionals from two specialist provisions, worked collaboratively through the action research model to co-construct priorities and assign actions. The senior EP chaired the meetings between the key stakeholders throughout the study, which suggests that the role of the EP can be to drive systemic-level change when leading in a consultancy-style relationship to facilitate collaborative working. However, despite identifying changes to the provisions which could in turn support pupils, Geiger et al. (2015) does not assess the impact of the work on the experience of the pupils. In addition, although the findings suggest the stakeholders from the educational settings were positive about the work, the feedback is presented through the reports of the author, which further increases the difficulty of understanding whether the project led to positive outcomes for the learners themselves.

Summary

In summary, the papers reviewed above indicate that the role of the EP when supporting learners with SLD/PMLD primarily takes the form of interacting with the adults around the pupil rather than direct support with the pupil themselves. This can be seen at different levels, such as the individual where the EP is reported to be working with setting staff and parents to elicit pupil views (Atkinson et al., 2015; Bason, 2020; Farmer & Stringer, 2023; Loveday, 2014); the group level through upskilling both setting staff (Crombie et al., 2014; Hampton et al., 2019; Thompson & Atkinson, 2022; Winter & Bunn, 2019) and parents (Loveday, 2014; Warner, 2015; Winter & Bunn, 2019); and at an organisational level through influence of the education systems, pedagogy and curriculum (Bason, 2020; Rees, 2017; Rees et al., 2017; Winter & Bunn, 2019), as well as utilising research skills to gather evidence-based practice that supports CYP with SLD/PMLD at the whole school and LA levels (Geiger et al., 2015; Hampton et al., 2019).

Critique. Winter and Bunn's (2019) study plays a significant role in this review, being referenced in six of the eight themes discussed above. Despite containing input from a sample of 207 EPs, a key limitation to their study is the survey design which restricts interpretation regarding the nature of EP work within PMLD settings. For example, whilst 80.7% reported individual level work with CYP, the survey was unable to offer detailed insight into what this work involved.

Of the six studies which provided empirical evidence of the role of the EP in SLD/PMLD settings (Geiger et al., 2015; Hampton et al., 2019; Rees et al., 2017; Thompson & Atkinson, 2022; Warner, 2015; Winter & Bunn, 2019), five had limited sample sizes. This restricts the extent to which conclusions can be generalised about the EP role in supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD.

Further, three papers modelled aspects of the EP role in supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD through research activities (Crombie et al., 2014; Farmer & Stringer, 2023; Hill et al., 2016) but did not explicitly suggest that these aspects of their roles are routinely picked up by EPs outside of the research setting. A further example of this is that, although five papers proposed that EPs have a role in eliciting pupil voice, only two papers provided empirical evidence of EPs capturing pupil voice (Farmer & Stringer, 2023; Hill et al., 2016). In the other three studies, this role was theorised to be applicable to the EP due to the skillset they have (Atkinson et al., 2015; Bason, 2020; Loveday, 2014). Additionally, neither Farmer and Stringer (2023) nor Hill et al. (2016) explicitly evaluated the effectiveness of the EP in this role but rather modelled the potential of a professional to undertake this work, making it unclear whether the authors intended this to be an EP specific responsibility.

Implications of the Review for the Current Study. Despite the above literature review highlighting the importance of EPs working with setting staff to support CYP with

SLD/PMLD, only four of the papers contained data from setting staff which could be considered directly relevant to the EP role (Geiger et al., 2015; Hampton et al., 2019; Thompson & Atkinson, 2022; Warner, 2015). Consequently, the review skews towards EPs' perspective of their own role. Further, although the word "collaborative" was used to describe the work completed through multi-agency teams, there was little assessment of how successful this collaboration between EPs and other professionals within the SLD/PMLD context was.

A short assessment of facilitators and barriers to successful EP work with settings which support learners with PMLD can be found in Winter & Bunn's (2019) study, where they asked whether the EPs had a good relationship with the settings they worked with and to identify three barriers to working with them. They were not able to offer an in-depth assessment of factors which could influence the success of interprofessional collaborative working involving EPs within the SLD/PMLD context due to the nature of their study. In addition, Winter's (2007) thesis paper also elicited views from specialist provision staff using the same questions again as a survey, and so also encountered the aforementioned constraints.

What is missing from the literature assessed above is analytical descriptions of collaborative practice (e.g. what characterised it). Therefore, I will conduct a further scoping review which investigates successful interprofessional collaborative working involving EPs.

Second Scoping Review: Interprofessional Collaboration

The aim of this second scoping review is to understand how successful collaboration is described between EPs and other professionals. Please see Table 4 for the inclusion and exclusion criteria used to identify the literature to be reviewed – in total 9, papers met the inclusion criteria for this review. I will judge the included papers' relevance to my review question by considering whether the paper directly addresses the research question, whether

the paper focuses on the working relationship between EPs and other professionals, whether the features of collaboration discussed within the paper are relevant to collaborative practice in general or are specifically to interprofessional work. Finally, papers which describe features of interprofessional collaboration within specialist settings will be considered most relevant.

Scoping Review Methods

This second review was also guided by Arksey and O'Malley's methodological framework for conducting a scoping review (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). The scoping study is presented following the PRISMA Extension for Scoping Reviews (PRISMA- ScR) Checklist (Tricco et al., 2018) to offer transparency to this review of the literature (see Figure 2)..

Stage 1: Identifying the review question

Scoping Review Question: How does the literature describe successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and other professionals?

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies

Decisions were made around inclusion and exclusion criteria, whilst also holding in mind the research question, and considering what is feasible when considering time and resource constraints (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005). Therefore, the literature was selected through the parameters found in Table 4.

Search Strategy. Relevant databases in the fields of education and psychology were searched; APA Psycinfo, PEP Archive, Education Source, and ERIC. These databases were selected so I could consider literature relevant to EPs working with other professionals. The search was conducted on 20th April 2025 and checked again 11th August 2025. Inclusion criteria can be found in Table 5.

Table 4*Search terms for interprofessional collaboration*

Key Term	Search Terms
Educational Psychologist	"Educational psychologist*"
Collaborative	"Joint work*" OR collabor* OR "interprofessional" OR "working together" OR "inter-professional" OR "joined up" OR "multi-agency" OR "working collaboratively"
UK and Ireland	"United Kingdom OR England OR Ireland OR Scotland OR Wales OR UK"

Table 5

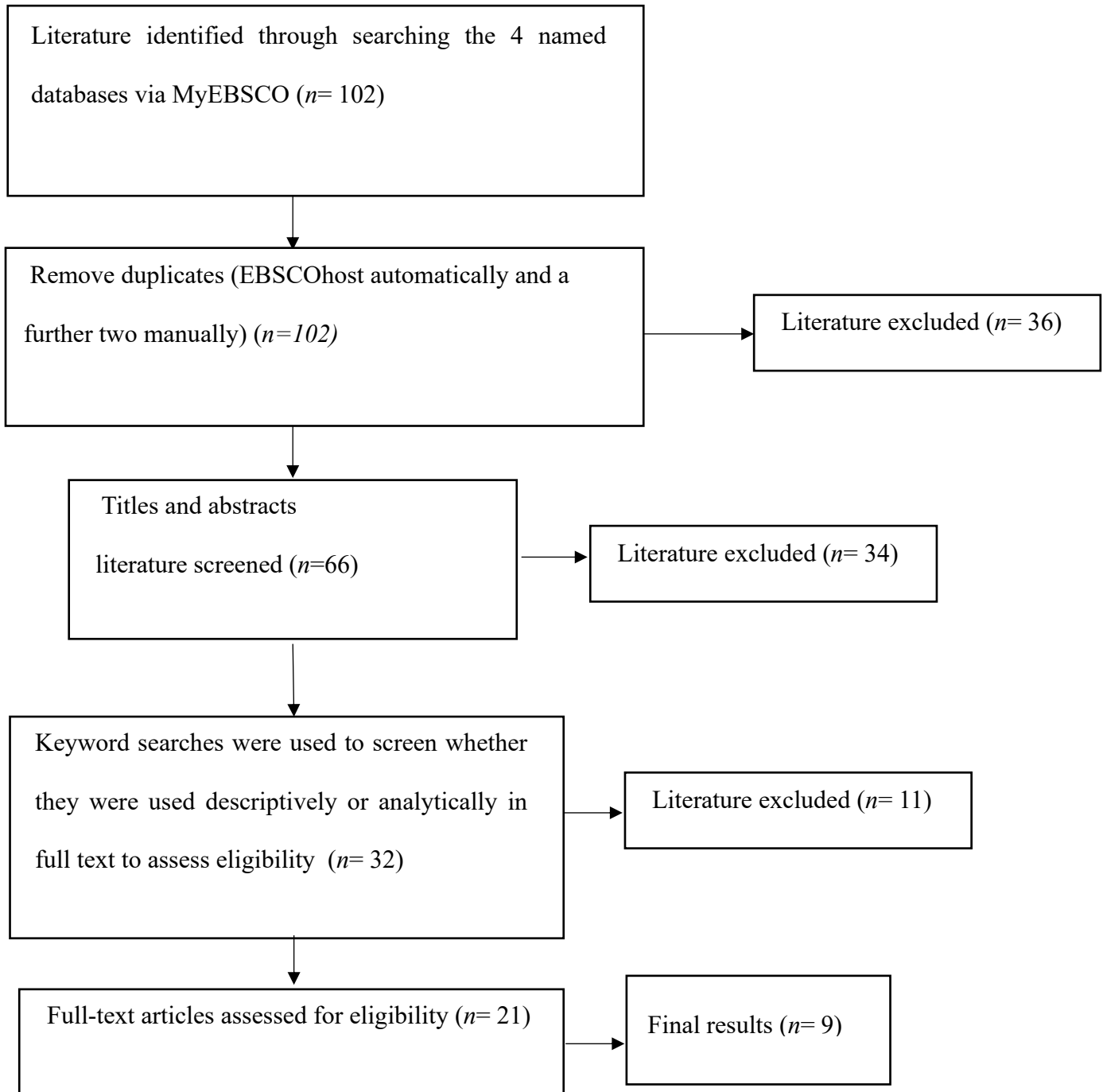
Inclusion and exclusion criteria for interprofessional collaboration

Study Feature	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Type of publication	Peered review journals	Literature that is not a journal or peer reviewed	To include literature that is considered rigorous and trustworthy for professional practice.
Country of study	Any countries within the UK or the Republic of Ireland	Research from any other countries	The role of an EP differs in countries outside the UK. However, there are many similarities in practice with the Republic of Ireland (see Table 2).
Date of study	Published from Sept 2014	Dated before 2014	The SEND Code of practice came into effect in Sept 2014 and had a significant impact on how professionals work to support pupils with SEND.
Subject/ focus/ participants	Papers include an analytical description of collaborative practice within the findings (e.g. what characterised it and involved at least one form of interprofessional collaboration with an EP.	If the paper did not describe how an Educational Psychologist engaged in joint work with the other professional.	The purpose of this scoping review of the literature is to develop an understanding of successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and other professionals

Stage 3: Study Selection

Figure 2

Selection of sources of evidence for interprofessional collaboration



Stage 4: Charting the Data

I used a charting approach to apply a common framework to extract and analyse both process and outcome data for each of the primary studies (Arksey and O'Malley, 2005) (please see Appendix C). In total nine papers met the criteria and seven of these studies directly explore joint working between EPs and other professionals, with the remaining two indirectly relevant to the question.

Stage 5: Collating, Summarising and Reporting the Results

In alignment with Arksey and O'Malley's (2005) framework, the findings of the scoping review are presented by table mapping (Appendix C) and by grouping the literature according to thematic synthesis.

I was guided by Thomas and Harden's (2008) method of thematic synthesis. The methodology was adapted for the purposes of this review to align with the practical time constraints of the current research. Rather than conducting line-by-line coding across full result sections, segment-by-segment coding was applied to analytical descriptions identified within the findings or results sections of eligible papers. The analytical descriptions of collaboration were gathered as direct quotes from the results section of the papers by searching the key terms (found within Table 4) in each of the nine selected papers. The quotes were then put in a table (see Appendix D).

I then applied the remaining steps detailed by Thomas and Harden (2008), first completing segment-by-segment coding of the quotes identified within the table to devise initial codes, before then comparing these initial codes to develop eleven descriptive themes (Appendix D). The descriptive themes were then analysed through the lens of the research question to generate four analytical codes (See Table 6).

Table 6*Table of analytical codes for scoping review*

Analytical Codes
Sharing Understanding
Interaction and Communication Processes
Capacity Building
Relational Qualities

Sharing Understanding

Two papers found that a shared understanding between the EP and the other professional was an important aspect of successful interprofessional collaborative practice. These papers provide assessments of EPs constructing a shared understanding within two differing power dynamics; a one up one down power dynamic, and an equalised power dynamic. With regards to the one up one down relationship, Nicholas and Feeney's (2015) paper aimed to illustrate the key facets and impact of weekly consultations between EPs and keyworkers within two family intervention projects in one LA, with the EP coming into the situation as the external helper. They reported that EPs were raising up keyworkers by offering recognition that they are experts within their own context. However, during the consultation meetings the EPs were also providing an opportunity to view situations from a fresh perspective and supporting keyworkers with the application of psychology to a situation.

The power dynamic within the interprofessional team assessed by Sedgwick and Stothard's (2019) study was two professionals both coming into a situation to help, thereby equalising their power dynamic. Their study aimed to explore the EP's self-reported practices

when working jointly with SALTs. They found that good joint practice between EPs and SALTs would occur in situations where the individuals could share their respective knowledge and appreciate one another's professional perspective, and when working with an aim to discuss and debate ideas to ultimately arrive together at a shared understanding. Further, Sedgewick and Stothard's (2019) study highlighted benefits from such ways of working in that the outcomes would be co-constructed, therefore reducing the bias from individuals, and that resultant supportive strategies would be borne from multiple professional perspectives allowing for more complete support of the pupil. The paper also found that EPs reported wanting more challenge from others when working within interprofessional groups, which Sedgewick and Stothard (2019) hypothesised could take the form of questioning and examination of the EP's thinking process.

Interaction and Communication Processes

Birch et al.'s (2023) study explored the views of both EPs and SALTs from across the UK with the aim of understanding the facilitators and barriers to interprofessional collaboration between the two professions. They found that communication was the second most frequently mentioned facilitator for interprofessional collaboration, with 47% of EP responses and 45% of SALT responses acknowledging it as such. Both professional groups also reported that communication could be a barrier to joint working when not perceived to be working well. This illustrates that good communication is a key facilitator for successful collaboration for these professionals, although it is also important to acknowledge that Birch et al. (2023) do not identify what each professional would define as "good" communication within the context of interprofessional working.

Both Boorman et al.'s (2025) and Warwick's (2023) studies provide examples of what can be inferred as good communication, and they both discuss how tools could be used to support collaborative interprofessional working. Boorman et al.'s (2025) research aimed to

understand the experience of EPs and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) when using Person-centred Planning (PCP) in annual review meetings within one LA in England. Their participants reported that communication was supported in the annual review meetings by graphic recording, providing the attendees with a visual representation of what was being discussed. They found that this approach supported all attendees to have a voice within the review meeting which further supported the collaborative aspect of the meeting. It should be clarified that the PCP meetings occur with a pupil's parents in addition to the professionals, and it is unclear if using a graphic approach was more helpful for the purpose of collaborating with parents rather than with the other professional.

Warwick's (2023) research explored the views of EPs and social workers regarding the role of the EP when working in multi-agency teams to support children who have experienced care in Wales. They found that the EP used specific communication tools, such as genograms, to structure and promote collaborative practice within the team. These tools were aimed at allowing the team to explicitly structure processes to work more cohesively. Warwick (2023) also reported that the communication tools enabled structured dialogue between professionals, which in turn supported the development of team self-efficacy and team member independence in developing solutions, which fostered positive change for service users. This suggests that an aspect of effective collaborative practice which the EP supports when working in an interprofessional context is structuring communication. Warwick (2023) does not provide in-depth assessment of which tools were used by the EPs which limits the understanding of which of them best supported interprofessional working.

Warwick's (2023) study further reported that EPs have a distinct role within multi-disciplinary teams as they can act as a bridge between social workers and families. It was specifically noted that the EP plays a role in attempting to repair the relationships between these parties as well as working to get the families to align their understanding of the child

with the professional team. One possible explanation for this is that EPs are best positioned to communicate with the child and the family at both an educational and home context, though explicit mention of how this is achieved was not detailed within the study. This aspect of the EP role within an interprofessional team was also seen within Boorman et al.'s (2025) research, where the EP acting as the bridge between home and school is one of the aims of using PCP approaches within annual reviews to meaningfully include the CYP and their family's voices.

Finally, Holland and Fitzgerald's (2023) research aimed to explore the experiences of collaboration between National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologists, SENCOs, and Senior Leadership Teams (SLT) in Irish post-primary schools to identify the barriers and facilitators to successful collaborative working. They found that open communication between professionals was a quality needed for trustful relationships and that it should be intentionally co-constructed to support collaboration. Communication was further linked to being able to present a united team to the family, providing opportunity for the construction of a shared understanding between school and home. The NEPS psychologist's role in this was to support the building and maintaining relationships between schools and parents.

Capacity Building

Five papers referenced capacity building within their descriptions of successful interprofessional collaboration involving EPs. Capacity building in this sense can be understood as the EP supporting the other professional so that they are in turn able to support more CYPs.

Capacity Building – Interprofessional Learning. One method of capacity building most frequently identified within the papers was through interprofessional learning. Two

papers refer to direct training or upskilling delivered by the EP to other professionals (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Warwick, 2023), whereas Norwich et al. (2018) suggests a facilitative approach to support professional learning.

Warwick's (2023) study investigating the role of the EP in supporting care-experienced children found that all EPs reported providing direct training to the other professionals within their multi-disciplinary team. This finding was also supported by the views offered by social workers, who described an aspect of the EP role as supporting the upskilling of team members. The EPs felt that the benefits of upskilling other professionals within their team were twofold; it allowed for other professionals to understand psychological thinking relevant to the situation and it provided insight into education systems for social workers. A third aspect to the upskilling was also identified which was to focus on encouraging other professionals to utilise skills they had previously been trained in. This suggests that the purpose of upskilling extends beyond delivering training directly to also encompass the development of other professionals' confidence to use skills independently.

Holland & Fitzgerald (2023) detailed the support NEPS psychologists can offer within systemic interprofessional working and identified that direct supervision of their team members was a key contribution they could offer. One example illustrated how facilitating targeted Continuing Professional Development supported systemic change within a school. This further supports that development of other professionals' skills allows them to be used in applications independently of EPs.

Norwich et al.'s (2018) study is distinct from the others in this section as they evaluated how EPs work with teachers in Lesson Study teams, which are a collaborative method of explicit professional development, to inform the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties. This approach involved the EP working with the adults around the pupils to

coach them to think in different ways. This way of working was compared by the EP research participants to direct intervention, with participants noting that this more indirect method allowed them to collaborate more with the setting staff. The benefit was also highlighted by the teachers in the study who reported that they viewed the Lesson Study teams as providing opportunity for in-depth exploration of individual pupils' learning, improved understanding of the learning process, and changes to practice. However, this data came from the teachers' evaluating the Lesson Study teams in general rather than specifically how the EP collaborated in the teams, therefore their perceived positive impact of the Lesson Study way of working may be due to factors other than the collaboration with the EP.

Capacity building – Interprofessional Supervision. In addition to training, interprofessional supervision was described within reports of successful collaboration between EPs and other professionals when EPs are identified as supporting professionals to build capacity. According to the guidance from the Division of Educational and Child Psychology, supervision within EP practice is “a psychological process that enables a focus on personal and professional development and that offers a confidential and reflective space” for the individual to consider their work and their responses to it (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010, p.7). The most common approach for supervision is often on an individual basis, however supervision can also be provided by a supervisor to a group, or at a peer-to-peer level within a group (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

Evaluation of an EP-led interprofessional supervision model was discussed by Wedlock and Turner (2017), Rae et al. (2017), and Warwick (2023) with three professionals respectively: Family Support Key Workers, setting staff within a school for pupils with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and social workers. Rae et al.'s (2017) research aimed to explore setting staff's understanding and experiences of supervision when working with pupils with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties, as well as the EP's role in

supporting staff wellbeing. In contrast, Wedlock and Turner (2017) explored Family Support Workers' lived experiences of interprofessional supervision with EPs over an extended period. All three identified that the supervisory space created by the EP was a reflective opportunity, with Wedlock and Turner (2017) further containing descriptions of it as trusting and non-judgemental. The outcome of supervision within all three studies was that it provides an opportunity for the supervisee to off-load and process difficult emotions they had encountered through work. This suggests that collaborative working between EPs and other professionals can involve the EP supporting assessing and making sense of emotions, which in turn then supports the professional to increase the capacity they have for their role. It should be noted that Rae et al.'s (2017) sample contained participants who expressed that they had no direct experience of supervision with an EP and that the paper's reports on EP-led supervision came from the responses of one individual only, meaning that the findings from their study cannot be considered generalisable.

Within Holland and Fitzgerald's (2023) study, a single EP described their role when working with setting staff at an organisational or managerial level (SENCOs and SLT) as providing a space where these professionals can slow down, reflect and think. Although this is not a direct report of interprofessional supervision, the space which had been created between the EP is a close resemblance of a supervisory space. The EP highlighted that providing an opportunity for reflection was significant when working interprofessionally because often the work involves interacting with professionals who are stressed, and the space provided by the EP allows for some degree of calmness. This was supported within the study by a member of SLT, who also described the role of the EP as shaping and influencing school communities at the systemic decision-making level. Further, the EP described their role as providing a safe space for teachers who are experiencing high levels of stress, indicating that the EP has a role in providing emotional support to the school community in

order to develop their capacity so that they are better able to support their students, and that this emotional support appears to be both at a teacher and a managerial level.

Capacity building – Shared Responsibility and Workload. Sedgwick and Stothard (2019) explored the perceptions and knowledge of EPs with regards to supporting pupils with SLCN. They found that one EP participant described the historically better organisational joint working between EPs and other professionals supporting the CYP as sharing workloads, and the participant noted that the cooperative nature of the work provided an opportunity to avoid duplication of work tasks and achieve collective responsibility. Therefore, Sedwick and Stothard (2019) suggest that sharing workload and responsibility is a key aspect of successful interprofessional collaborative practice within this context, however, it is key to note that this point was made by an EP who was looking back to previous working formats rather than an observation of current practice, and therefore is unable to identify what would support this way of working in current day.

Relational Qualities

The most prominent code to emerge from the reviewed papers was identification of qualities that the professionals exhibited which strengthened their working relationship, known from here on as relational qualities, which was expressed in seven papers in total. The quality of relationship between professionals was highlighted as an important component of effective joint working. For example, Sedgwick & Stothard (2019) and Birch et al. (2023) reported that when EPs work with SALTs, a facilitator to successful collaborative working was that the professionals understood each other's roles. Birch et al. (2023) also reported that relationships between professionals could be a barrier to successful interprofessional collaboration though the reasons why were not stated in their study. Similarly, Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) also highlighted the relationship between professionals as being essential when considering EPs working with both SLT and SENCOs in Ireland, and that a strong

professional relationship between the individuals fostered through their working together in turn supported the success of their collaborative working.

Trust was a relational quality raised in three papers. Wedlock & Turner's (2017) paper on supervision found that, when considering interprofessional EP-led supervision with Family Support Key Workers, consistency of personnel supported the development of trust within the professional relationship. In addition, they found mutual understanding of the goal of joint working between professionals to be important to successful collaboration. Alongside trust, other relational qualities identified within the papers were openness and honesty, valuing each other's expertise, similarity of values between professionals, and the provision of a non-judgemental space (Birch et al., 2023; Norwich et al., 2018).

Birch et al. (2023) found that a contributing factor to sharing information between EPs and SALTs which allowed them to work together effectively was the structural and physical aspects of the working environment. Working environment was rated the highest facilitator for collaborative working by both the EP (47%) and the SALT (45%) participants in their study. Further, working environment as a facilitator to successful collaboration was linked to the indication that the working environment represented the organisational arrangement between the professionals, suggesting that sharing a working environment when collaborating was an important factor in supporting successful interprofessional collaborative practice, potentially because organising time to work in the same space demonstrates a commitment to the relationship.

Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) found that placing a value on the EP's time prompted change in school systems due to a sense that this time is both a limited and flexible resource. However, this also results in there being pressure placed on the setting staff member by the involvement of the EP, most notably in relation to the need to gather quality information to

inform assessments and therefore increasing the effectiveness of the EPs time. Mutual respect and valuing of each other's contributions were also identified as factors supporting successful collaborative practice within interprofessional contexts by the study.

Warwick's (2023) study reported that social workers described EPs they had worked with as being flexible and able to adjust their roles in response to ongoing changes. This was reported to support joint working as the EP was then able to support at different organisational levels. Within this paper, the EP's ability to adapt to the nature of interaction with the social worker team and respond accordingly to their needs was identified as an element of successful interprofessional working.

Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) reported that EPs should show motivation, care, and respect when working with school staff. They reported that the EP has a role in providing security for an education setting as a whole and that creating a safe space for staff goes beyond relationships with individuals as a school is a multi-layered organisation, and that there should be the opportunity for mutual reliance within the school and between the school and the EP. Therefore, the EP providing a sense of safety for the school and being known as dependable by the staff were identified as features of successful interprofessional collaboration.

The EP actively not taking up an expert role within the relationship was raised by three of the papers as a component of successful interprofessional joint working (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Nicholas & Feeney, 2015; Norwich et al., 2018). Nicholas and Feeney (2015) reported that their key worker participants valued information which was shared in an accessible way to them by the EP. The key workers also reported that they appreciated the EP allowing them to take the lead within certain aspects of the joint working. In these scenarios, the EP was supporting and scaffolding the working by asking questions to guide thinking and

adding their knowledge of psychological factors when it supported the collaborative work. The authors shared that this wilful abdication of the expert role by the EP may support the key workers to feel empowered, and that acknowledgement from the EP that the key workers are experts in their own situation allowed for a more equal professional relationship which in turn increased collaboration.

Displaying a commitment to joint working was also raised within the literature as a feature for successful joint working in interprofessional contexts (Birch et al., 2023). However, Birch et al. (2023) reported that, although commitment to working together was highlighted as a facilitator for interprofessional collaboration for 18% of the EPs and SALTs surveyed in their research, it was also identified to be a barrier when these commitments were lacking.

Further, Birch et al. (2023) reported that commitment to joint working was also found to be relevant when considering organisational factors rather than between individual practitioners. For example, commitment to joint working by the management team within educational settings was highlighted to impact the possibility of funding for joint working between professionals (Birch et al., 2023). Similarly, Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) reported that the SLT within schools hold a key role in resolving conflicting priorities by hiring collaboratively minded staff into key positions and using whole-school ethos to drive change rather than expecting it to come from an individual level.

Summary

In summary, the papers reviewed within this scoping review suggest that features of successful collaborative interprofessional practice includes good communication (Birch et al., 2023), which can be intentionally co-constructed between the professionals (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023), or structured through tools which support visual representations (Boorman

et al., 2025; Warwick, 2023); shared workload and responsibility (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2019); and relational qualities such as openness, honesty, trust, shared values, a non-judgemental approach (Wedlock & Turner, 2017; Birch et al., 2023; Norwich et al., 2018), displaying a commitment to joint working and sharing working environments (Birch et al., 2023).

This review further suggests that when professional role differences are present, successful collaboration includes addressing power dynamics and supporting shared psychological understanding (Nicholas & Feeney, 2015), mutual respect of professional knowledge within helper-helper dynamics (Sedgewick & Stothard, 2019); communication between stakeholders within which the EP acts as a bridge (Warwick, 2023); and a strong focus on capacity-building through interprofessional learning, supervision, and reflective spaces (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Norwich et al., 2018; Rae et al., 2017; Warwick, 2023; Wedlock & Turner, 2017). Additional relational features included clarity of professional roles, EP adaptability, providing safety to the system and avoiding the adoption of an expert-dominant role (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Warwick, 2023).

Critique. Only one paper explicitly investigated “interprofessional collaboration” between EPs and another profession (Birch et al., 2023). Two of the nine studies within this review did not directly explore the working relationship between EPs and another profession, meaning that relevant data were indirectly gathered from examples provided within these studies. Among the seven studies that directly explored the working relationship between EPs and another profession, five employed qualitative methodologies offering depth but limiting generalisability due to small sample sizes. This review suggests that while common features of interprofessional collaborative practice exists their application is context specific, such as whether a one up one down or equalised power dynamic was underpinning the relationship.

Only one paper within this scoping review directly explored the working relationship between EPs and school staff from a specialist setting, and this paper was not explicitly exploring interprofessional collaboration rather interprofessional supervision, and there was only one participant within the study who had experienced EP facilitated supervision (Rae et al., 2017).

Given that both context specific and non-specific collaborative features were identified, it should be noted that although this research is focusing on interprofessional collaboration, features of collaboration which are not specific to the interprofessional relationship are likely to be explored also. However, I believe that these will be relevant to understanding successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff regardless of their specificity.

Chapter Summary

It should be noted that none of the papers throughout either scoping review identified the other professional within the EPs collaborative relationship as working with CYP with SLD/PMLD. When considered in combination with the summary of the first scoping review, that is, that the role of the EP when supporting learners with SLD/PMLD primarily takes the form of interacting with the adults around the child, it can be understood that the collaborative relationship between the EP and the staff within SLD/PMLD settings is of vital importance to EPs looking to support the CYP in these settings. Therefore, I can identify the question my research is aiming to answer: How do EPs and setting staff describe successful interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings? And derived from above; what are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

Chapter 3 – Methodology

Research Purpose and Aims

This research aims to explore successful collaborative interprofessional working between EPs and staff within settings for learners with Severe or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD). It aims to address the following two research questions:

1. How do EPs and setting staff describe successful collaborative interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings?
2. What are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

The aims of this study are both exploratory and explanatory. This research is driven by curiosity to explore the collectively constructed views on successful interprofessional working from the perspective of EPs and staff in SLD/PMLD settings (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants, or SENCos), as this appears to have not been explored within research before. Through this exploration, I also aim to identify contextual components and mechanisms which play a role in creating the interpretation of successful collaborative working between these professionals, with the intention that these factors can inform future EP practice with SLD/PMLD settings.

It should be noted that the purpose of the study was adjusted to support recruitment efforts. The original scope was to explore successful interprofessional working between EPs and setting staff working in only PMLD settings. The adaption to including SLD settings expanded the reach of the research and the reasoning for this is detailed in the Recruitment section below.

Ontology and Epistemology

Relativism

This study is grounded in a relativist ontological perspective. An understanding of relativism presented by Burr and Dick (2017) states that although there is no single definitive truth and that there are multiple experiences of any event, person, or object, there may be dominantly accepted perspectives that are influenced by politics and power. This suggests that there can be meaning systems that are used to understand the world and events within it shared between individuals which are both culturally and historically specific. This research aligns closely with Burr and Dick's (2017) description of relativism, meaning that I accept that there could be some shared understanding regarding successful joint working between EPs and SLD/PMLD staff, however this should be derived from context specific interpretations and recurring features of meaning-making with those in these contexts and roles.

Social Constructionism

This study is congruent with a social constructionist epistemological view whereby knowledge can be understood through the interactions between people, and the cultural, social and historical context of a specific moment in time (Gergen, 1973; Losantos et al., 2016). This stance acknowledges that individuals will have their own subjective understanding and experience of reality and that this will influence a shared understanding which is constructed from the exchange of individuals' perspectives. This view underpins this study, as it enables the EP and setting staff participants to co-create a shared understanding of successful interprofessional working whilst also recognising that the researcher is not objective to this process and is in fact taking an active role in the interpretation of this research (Losantos et al., 2016). Burr and Dick (2017) noted that as the researcher is also part

of the social world, the interpretation of the participants' co-created reality is impacted by the researcher's subjective interpretive construction. Therefore, this research will be the distinct result of the exchange of perspectives between the participants, and the participants and myself (Losantos et al., 2016).

Research Methodology: Constructivist Grounded Theory

Glaser and Strauss (1967) first developed the methodological approach of Grounded Theory (GT) which encourages researchers to be objective in their approach by constructing hypotheses and concepts from their data before engaging with theories and literature which may be relevant to the field of research (Charmaz, 2014). In addition, Glaser and Strauss (1967) advised researchers to use the GT approach to investigate under-researched areas of study due to there being less pre-existing literature to impact the direction of the study (Charmaz, 2014).

GT was chosen as the methodological approach for my research as it enables the exploration whilst also specifies a framework to construct knowledge regarding an area of study and to generate a theoretical model to offer understanding of it (Charmaz, 2014). In Chapter 2, I identified a gap in literature regarding how EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff describe successful interprofessional collaborative working, indicating that my research must be exploratory. Similarly, also previously discussed, there is literature to suggest that there is a lack of confidence within EPs when working with SLD/PMLD settings, therefore a focus on successful working was thought to best support future practice and so this study also seeks to understand and explain how successful interprofessional collaboration happens through investigating the mechanisms which are described as facilitating it. Both Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith et al., 2021) and Reflexive Thematic Analysis (RTA) (Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2023) were considered when selecting my research methodology, as both these approaches allow participants' perspectives to be captured with

flexibility. However, GT was preferred over IPA as this research is concerned with understanding the factors that influence how EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff collaborate successfully (Willig, 2013). GT was also preferred over RTA as the framework supports the construction of theoretical concepts from the data being presented, whereas RTA produces knowledge in the form of themes (Willig, 2013).

Since the initial introduction of GT, other versions of the approach have been developed. One example of this is the Constructivist Grounded Theory (CGT) presented by Charmaz (2014), which moves the approach away from the objective paradigm presented by Glaser and Strauss (1967) to the position that the researcher cannot be objective and acknowledges that findings are co-constructed between the participants and the researcher (Charmaz, 2025). This therefore means that the researcher actively collaborates in the data collection, analysis, and thus the inductively generated theory (Charmaz, 2025). This position is compatible with this study's social constructionist epistemological lens due to Charmaz's (2014) acknowledgment that the researcher's subjectivity is not distinct from the social world and is especially relevant due to my previous experiences of being a setting staff member in SLD/PMLD settings and my current position of TEP.

The understanding that the role of the researcher is not fully objective accounts for why researcher reflexivity is fundamental to CGT. Charmaz (2017) notes that researchers using CGT should engage with methodological self-consciousness; a process to aid the researcher to integrate aspects of their identity, their worldview, the meanings they construct, and an examination of their positions of power within the study (Charmaz, 2017). Through undertaking this reflexive process, I have challenged how I perceive the study's aims, the data gathered, and even myself within the research (Charmaz, 2017).

Research design

Rationale for Joint Interviews

Joint interviews taking place between an EP and a member of setting staff who had worked together was selected for this research as this aligns to the social constructionist epistemological stance of the study. Joint interviews allow participants to react to and draw upon responses from the other, as well as negotiate ideas or in other words “co-construct” meaning together (Morgan et al., 2013). In the context of a CGT study, the joint interview method is considered a strength as it enables the participants to co-construct the findings together within the context of their relationship. This is more in accordance with CGT than when interviewing individually as the interviewer would be required to interpret the individual’s meaning without having the contextual experience which is required to properly understand it. I also felt that joint interviews would provide stronger empowerment for the participants as the interviewer (me) would have less control over the direction of the interview. An example of this can be observed in interview 2 where, when asked what supports successful collaboration, the EP mentioned that at the SLD/PMLD setting staff are given time to meet with her. From this, the setting staff member further clarifies that this is because of the setting’s values, that staffing can be very difficult for the setting but because the EP’s views coincide with the setting’s ethos for supporting the pupil’s wellbeing, the setting ensures that there is cover available for the staff member to meet with the EP. This then appears to lead the EP to reconsidering her original response and to go on to recognise the role of the setting’s values within the relationship. I was also hopeful that the joint interviews and sharing of perspectives within them could strengthen the pair’s collaborative practice through sharing and understanding each other’s professional view., the previous example is also an example of this sharing and challenging in order to develop understanding within the relationship without this process being defined by a critique of their work together. Finally, in the context of a CGT study, the joint interview method is considered a strength as it enables the participants to co-construct the findings together within the context of their relationship. This is more in accordance than when interviewing individually as the interviewer would be required to interpret the individual’s meaning without having the contextual experience which is required to properly understand it.

Ethical Considerations

To prioritise respect for the rights and dignity of the participants within this research, careful consideration was given to ethical practice (BPS, 2021). This section outlines how ethical considerations were taken in relation to informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, as well as more research design specific ethical issues, such as the potential impact on existing working relationships. All of which were considered within ethical approval which I received from the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Research Ethics Committee on 20th March 2025 (please see Appendix E).

Informed Consent. To support informed consent, an information sheet and consent form was shared with each participant as part of the invitation to take part (BPS, 2021) and can be found in Appendix F and G. Both participants were offered the opportunity to question any aspects of the study to ensure they were able to provide informed consent (BPS, 2021). All consent forms were gathered prior to the interviews. Alongside this, each of the participant's managers were asked to check the information sheet and sign their colleague's consent form to ensure that they also understood the terms of the research. This was so both professionals had a clear understanding of the limitations to confidentiality, anonymity, and the impact regarding where the information could be shared. At the start of each interview, I went through the aims of the research, the boundaries of confidentiality, the right of participants to withdraw, how the data will be managed, and how I will know and act should either of the participants become distressed. In addition, each participant was offered another opportunity to read the information sheet and to ask questions before commencing the interview.

Confidentiality and Anonymity. All data was stored confidentially on a password protected laptop and consistent with the Data Protection Act (2018) and the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Information Governance, Data Protection and Confidentiality Policy

(2025), all interviews were anonymised. Participant conversation occasionally used identifiable names, either of each other, me, or of the setting. Confidentiality was protected by anonymising any reference to these, using identifiers such as “EP1”, and “Name of place” in their place. Within the transcripts, each speaker is represented by either S1 (speaker 1 – interviewer), STAFF MEMBER (interview number) (setting staff member) or EP (interview number) (EP).

All participants were informed regarding the limitations of confidentiality, such as the nature of the interview being joint and therefore relying on each other’s commitment to confidentiality, the small sample-size, and my responsibility to share information should any safeguarding, illegal, or professional misconduct issues emerge. All three considerations regarding the limitations of confidentiality were noted both on the information sheets and the consent forms (Appendix F and G). In addition, this information was reiterated as part of the introduction to the interview, so that participants were clear not only of the risks to themselves due to the limitations of confidentiality, but also that any concerns regarding safeguarding or practice raised during the interview would need to be acted upon following the appropriate procedures. No safeguarding concerns were raised in any of the interviews.

Potential Negative Impact on Working Relationship. All participants were informed via the information sheet (Appendix F) of the risk that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations between the two professionals, which could in turn impact their working relationship after the interview. This was perceived as a risk because, although the participants may previously have had the opportunity to review shared work, this would have occurred within the context of an existing professional working relationship, and it is unlikely that such a review would take place within an interview setting. However, given that the purpose of this study was to identify successful working it was hoped that the conversations between the two professionals would naturally be positive.

Potential Distress. Due to the emotional demands of working with pupils with SLD/PMLD, there was a risk that participants may become distressed in the interview and this was raised on the information sheet. In addition, at the start of each interview I asked the participants how it would be possible to identify if either of them became distressed so that remedial steps could be taken and I also created a distress protocol so that there was a clear stepped process to follow should the need arise (Appendix H). In addition, there were opportunities offered for both participants to debrief together or individually following the interview, and all information sheets provided signposting to resources to support mental health and wellbeing.

Benefit to participants. In addition to the perceived risks associated with this study, there were also anticipated benefits for the participants. For example, given that this study is exploring how the participants construct successful joint working, the interview questions were designed to ask the pair to consider past successes (Weick and Saleebey, 1995). Therefore, the interviews provide an opportunity for the participants to engage in reflective dialogue to explore shared strengths and accomplishments. The literature suggests that reflecting on existing strengths encourages building these into future practice (Gregersen & Mercer, 2022). Therefore, the interview could strengthen the working relationship as each individual in a pair could understand what has been successful from the other's lens, and this knowledge could support their future work together.

Recruitment

Recruitment approach

This study contains joint interviews with EPs and staff working in SLD/PMLD settings, requiring participants to be recruited in pairs. For EPs to be considered for interviewing they were required to be HCPC-registered and had worked in a SLD/PMLD

setting within the academic year. This means that private, locum, and LA EPs were all eligible.

The recruitment strategy was updated from the initial plan which originally entailed a purposive sample of London-based EPs and setting staff working in PMLD settings. I chose to initially focus on London boroughs with an aim to interview participants with similar local contextual characteristics to aid the identification of definitions for successful interprofessional working which were shared across interview pairings. In line with the CGT methodology, I hoped to recruit four to six EP and staff pairings for interview, with the prediction that by six pairs the data would have reached saturation.

The initial recruitment process involved me contacting my network of TEPs and staff from the educational psychology doctoral course at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and sharing the research via the EPNET³ mailing list. Additionally, I asked two Principal Educational Psychologists (PEPs) within my network to share details of the study via the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists UK (NAPEP)⁴ group and within their LA (see the email in Appendix M). A snowballing technique was planned to be utilised to recruit the setting staff members from their matching EP (see evidence of recruitment methods in Appendix I).

The inclusion criteria for the setting staff member were that they work within a SLD/PMLD setting and that they had completed work directly with the EP in that setting within the last year. The term setting staff was intentionally open to include any professional

³ EPNET is mailing list for Educational Psychologist and other education professional (Langford, 2020)

⁴ A voluntary peer support group of the most senior and qualified and HCPC registered educational psychologists (NAPEP, n.d.). These senior EPs must actively manage a team of EPs which are part of the main service which the local authority relies on.

supporting learners with PMLD in an educational setting for pupils with PMLD. There was no inclusion criteria for what constitutes successful collaborative working as I wanted the descriptions to be based on how the setting staff-EP pairs defined it themselves.

Within the initial recruitment phase two EPs exhibited interest and were also happy to engage in a joint interview with a setting staff member. A further EP did get in touch; however, they shared that they would only be happy to take part if the setting staff member did not have to join as the EP felt that the staff member's workload was currently too high to participate. Declinations to participate were received and reasoning why was given from several sources, such as from one PEP who explained that their EPS did not currently work with any of the special schools in their area as they did not buy into their traded offer. I contacted those who did not respond to the initial recruitment drive after 2 weeks.

Recruitment Challenges

Two months after initialising recruitment I did not have any interviews confirmed and a low interest in the study. Feedback from those who had declined highlighted three main challenges; the limitation of recruiting within London when I was on placement outside of London, recruiting pairs through EPs only, and finally utilising the descriptive term PMLD.

As a result, I decided to expand recruitment to areas outside of London. This expansion plan was included within my original ethics application. The change in inclusion criteria was shared through the same recruitment channels used in the initial process identified above. This change resulted in four additional EPs expressing interest and contacting their partnering setting staff members for recruitment.

Despite expanding the geographical reach, an additional challenge identified was that I relied on EPs as the initial point of contact. Although interest from EPs increased, obtaining confirmed agreement from setting staff members remained difficult. Feedback from one

setting staff member highlighted that staff members may wish to ask questions directly before expressing interest in participation. This suggested that the current method of snowballing setting staff member recruitment through the EP could represent a barrier, as although there were opportunities to ask questions in pre-interview meetings, some setting staff members could prefer to ask these questions before confirming interest to their EP partner.

The final hurdle was expressed both by EPs and a member of setting staff around the term PMLD. Two EPs who expressed an interest so far also shared that the settings where they had worked educated both students with SLD and PMLD, and that they could not necessarily say that their work had directly supported the learners with PMLD. Further, one setting staff member was not certain if the pupils they supported would be described as having PMLD or SLD. I can understand this as, in my own experience, the terms as SLD and PMLD are not commonly used in schools as they are descriptors rather than diagnoses.

Therefore, I decided to amend my ethics application (Appendix J) and to adjust both the research purpose and recruitment strategy to overcome the barriers above. I changed the purpose by expanding the area of research to include severe or multiple and profound learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD) in the hope that EPs and setting staff would feel more confident about whether they met the criteria to take part. In addition, I also changed the recruitment strategy to enable me to approach schools directly to further remove communication barriers. Following the updated ethical approval, I communicated the updated recruitment poster, information sheets and consent forms (see Appendix K) through the original channels. In addition, I directly emailed 57 special settings in London which cater for learners with SLD/PMLD (see Appendix L). I identified these settings through EduBase2 on the Department for Education website (DfE, n.d.).

This further recruitment drive secured four EP-setting staff interviews. Three of the pairs had been recruited through EP networks from the LA where I was on placement and educational institution contacts, and one pair were recruited from directly contacting schools. A further six EPs were in contact with their respective setting staff partner regarding the interview, however none of these were able to recruit setting staff pairs.

Participants

In total the research included four pairings for interview, all from the South-East of England. The EP participants' experience ranged from three to twenty-four years. All participating setting staff members had worked in their current roles for a minimum of two years and had prior experience of roles in education (see Table 7)

Ethnicity, role and experience data was collected from the participants after the interview if they were happy to share. This was to support me to reflect on positionality and on potential power dynamics within the interviews (Charmaz, 2025). Charmaz (2025) notes how relative differences may play out in an interview, as powerful people may take charge. For example, a participant may dominate the conversation if they have more experience in their position, a point which is especially important when considering dyadic interviews. Therefore, experience, role and ethnicity data was used to support my reflective practice throughout the research and to consider how identity differences or similarities may have influenced the interaction between participants.

Table 7*Table of Participant characteristics*

	Roles	Setting	First started working together	Number of times worked together	Last worked together	Length of time in role	Time working in SLD/PMLD settings	Previous experience working with the other professional
STAFF MEMBER 1	Lead Teacher	Specialist nursery	6 years ago	Approximately 25 visits per year	Day before interview	6 years (current role)	6 years	Yes (but only through child observations)
EP 1	EP (Link EP)		6 years ago	Approximately 25 visits per year	Day before interview	20 years	Whole career on and off	Yes
STAFF MEMBER 2	Qualified Teacher	Specialist secondary school for pupils with complex profound to severe learning difficulties	24/25 academic year	3 times	Spring Term (last term)	6 years (2 years qualified role)	7 years	No
EP 2	EP (Link EP)		24/25 academic year	3 times	Spring Term (last term)	3 years	3 years	Yes
STAFF MEMBER 3	Assistant Head and Co-ordinator of provision for students with SLD and additional complex needs	Specialist secondary School which caters for pupils with SLD and PMLD.	3 years ago	Approximately 9 times per year	Ongoing	7 years (current role)	Over 22 years	Yes
EP 3	Senior EP Joint Link EP)		3 years ago	Approximately 9 times per year	Ongoing	24 years (as an EP)	24 years	Yes
STAFF MEMBER 4	A Curriculum Pathway Lead for learners with PMLD and developing independence (SLD)	All-through specialist provision for pupils with sensory and medical needs.	Indirectly approximately two years ago	A couple of times directly	At least a term ago	2 years (current role)	3 years	Yes
EP 4	Private EP (Employed by Trust)		Indirectly approximately two years ago	A couple of times directly	At least a term ago	2 years (current private role)	2 years as EP 15 years previously	Yes

Data Collection

Semi-Structured Dyadic Interviews

This study uses dyadic interviews to answer open-ended questions which are posed to the participant pair at the same time (Szulc & King, 2022) (see Appendix M). This interview structure compliments the Social Constructionist epistemological view of constructing meaning through social interactions, as it enables participants the opportunity to co-create ideas that may not be produced if interviewed individually (Morgan et al., 2013). I felt that this approach was especially important as findings from previous research had indicated differences in opinions between EPs and professionals in PMLD settings with regards to the role of the EP in these settings (Winter, 2017). Further, there was a lack of direct input from SLD/PMLD professionals found within the scoping review on EP practice in supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD. Finally, given the prominence within this paper's scoping review of the importance of relational factors for successful interprofessional working with EPs and other professionals, dyadic interviewing would provide scope to consider relational interactions (such as nodding or smiling at one another) which present during the interviews.

To also remain consistent to CGT guidance, the interviews within this study include characteristics of intensive interviewing (Charmaz, 2014). Intensive interviewing enables the collection of detailed data whilst also allowing understanding of social systems that influence the lives of the participants. Characteristics of this include confirming participants have first-hand experience of the area being researched and examining this experience in-depth by asking open-ended questions and seeking elaboration on any unexpected topics that developed through the discussion (Charmaz, 2014). To achieve this, a semi-structured interview plan based on answering the two research questions is used in all interviews.

I used my experience of consultation skills to construct and sequence the questions in a way intended to build rapport and therefore started with asking for concrete examples of interprofessional working, before asking the participants to describe their relationship and the mechanics which they felt supported their collaborative relationship. However, within each interview there was freedom to adapt the schedule to follow up on the individual accounts shared by the participants. Furthermore, the interview schedule itself adapted between interviews as I followed up on interesting and unexpected lines of enquiry identified in earlier interviews (Charmaz, 2014) (see Appendix N).

Interview Procedure

Two of the four interviews were conducted in-person in a room in the educational establishment where the setting staff participant works. In-person interviews were pursued to enable the opportunity for non-verbal cues between the participants to be captured. The rationale for including non-verbal communication alongside verbal communication was that non-verbal behaviour has been shown to complement understanding of verbal communication (Bull, 2002; Denham & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Duncan, 1969; Mehrabian, 1981, 2009; Morris, 1977). Furthermore, drawing on my training and experience in both consultation skills and VIG training, non-verbal interaction is understood to be a key component of constructed communication between individuals (Pilnick & James, 2013). I considered it important to capture non-verbal data as this could provide additional insight into the mechanisms underlying collaborative practise and enhance the richness of the verbal data. These face-to-face interviews were video recorded using the equipment built into my laptop and then stored in a protected location on the same laptop. Video recording was chosen to support pairing of non-verbal cues with spoken language.

In-person interviews were the intended process for all the interviews; however, feedback received during recruitment from potential participants highlighted the difficulties

of aligning busy schedules to meet in-person. Therefore, ethical approval was sought to conduct interviews online was obtained (Appendix J) and two of the interviews occurred within this space. These interviews were audio recorded only as I anticipated there to be less non-verbal interactions due to the nature of engaging virtually and that these could therefore be noted by me during the interview, meaning video recording was unnecessary. The audio files from these interviews were also securely stored on my laptop.

Data Transcription

All interviews were transcribed using MaxQDA, a software commonly used in qualitative research and particularly for GT studies due to its ability to support with the line-by-line coding to categorise, review, and monitor data. The software adheres to strict GDPR-compliant guidelines (VERBI GmbH, 2025), and its usage was approved prior to the research. Interviews were transcribed by MaxQDA within four weeks of taking place and I manually reviewed the transcripts to anonymise each interview and to ensure accuracy with regards to the linguistic variation of participants (Bailey, 2008). This also provided an opportunity to include visual interactions at the appropriate positions within the interview. After completing the transcription process, both audio and video recordings of the interviews were deleted.

Researcher Positionality: Participants and Interpretative Lens

I am a White British woman who is currently training to become an EP, and I have previously worked as a staff member within settings for pupils with SLD. Through aspects of my identity and experience I bring perspectives and potential biases to this study; I shared similarities in understanding and experience with setting staff members due to my previous roles. Conversely, I hold knowledge of EP practice that may not be fully understood by setting staff participants. These dual professional identities and experiences present a risk of

unintentional alignment with one participant over another, creating potential power imbalances within the research.

Additionally, based on identity data shared by participants, I had greater similarity in terms of race, ethnicity, and language with the EP participants than the setting staff participants which may have introduced further power dynamics influenced by systemic factors. For this reason, it was important for me to critically reflect on my role in the construction of the data by self-evaluating how my biases, beliefs, and lived experiences could be impacting the construction of the data (Berger, 2013). To support this, I remained mindful of intersecting identities within the context of the triad (participant pair and myself) during both the interview and data analysis. This included avoiding the use of professional terminology not shared within the pair and adopting a stance of curiosity around meaning, rather than making assumptions based on my own experience. Approaches to understand this influence and defend against alignment with one participant over another can be read in the section on Reflexivity in this chapter.

Data analysis

Constant comparison method

Within the GT method, constant comparison is a process used to generate increasingly abstract concepts through the inductive analysis involving the comparison of data across all stages of analysis (Charmaz, 2025). This involves identifying similarities and differences of processes, actions, or beliefs within and across interviews (Charmaz, 2025). In line with Charmaz's (2025) guidance, interview segments were first compared within individual interviews and then across interviews with ongoing attention for similarities and differences in the data. Charmaz (2025) also emphasises the importance of acknowledging that the researcher's interpretations are shaped in part by their own experiences, rather than treating

preconceptions as objective truths and imposing them on the data, they are understood as one perceptive amongst many. To remain open to new insights, I focused on how participants made sense of their experiences and recorded reflections for myself known as memos (please see the section on Memo-Writing below), which were then explored and tested through the comparative process.

Memo-Writing

Memo-writing is an essential aspect of GT due to its role in allowing the grouping of data and codes early in the analytical process (Charmaz, 2025). I used memos to question hypothetical connections between initial codes which came to light through analysis of interviews one, two, and three. These memos were then used to guide focus during the analysis of interview four. Similarly, I used memos to note how the initial codes in interview four compared and interacted with the codes from previous interviews, and what further questions this guided me to ask of the data (Charmaz, 2025) (please see Appendix O for memo extracts).

Initial Codes

True to the CGT methodology, I started by assessing the interviews segment-by-segment to form initial codes (Charmaz, 2025). I ensured the initial codes remained close to the original data by identifying and utilising the language expressed by the participants themselves (Charmaz, 2025) (please see Appendix P for a coding sample).

I intended to complete initial coding for the first two interviews and then compare the datasets. However, the initial coding of interviews one and two could not be completed before interviews three and four due to time constraints. Therefore, I reviewed the incomplete initial codes and transcripts for interviews one and two carefully and discussed them in research supervision prior to interviews three and four taking place. Through reflection with

my research supervisor, I identified two discoveries in interviews one and two and was able to add additional questions to interviews three and four to provide an opportunity to learn more regarding these concepts (Charmaz, 2025). An example of this was around understanding how a family's context finds its way into the collaborative work, and whether the family context being brought into the work was a feature of their successful collaborative working. Interview one only briefly touched upon the EP facilitating understanding between the setting and home contexts, whereas the EP facilitating the relationship between school and home was seen as a critical factor within interview two. This difference spurred me to be curious as to whether the data from interview two was an exception to general collaborative relationship linked to contextual facets within their pairing. Through adding further questions to the interview schedule for interviews three and four I was able to understand more regarding the role of the familial context within the EP and setting staff relationship (see Appendix P for updated interview transcript).

Once the four interviews had taken place, I then completed initial codes for interviews one, two, and three before moving to focused coding.

Focused Codes

The next stage of analysis involves comparing the initial codes across interviews one to three to identify data which appeared most frequently, or that which was felt to hold significance when considering the research questions (Charmaz, 2025). These groupings of initial codes are termed as focused codes. Analysis of interview four takes place after focused codes had been created, with the initial codes within interview four being compared back to the initial codes that had already been identified from previous interviews following the process of constant comparison (Charmaz, 2025).

Through the constant comparison process and the use of a research journal to guide the analysis process, new codes became evident within the data which in turn allowed for reconsideration of the significance of previous codes, and even to reconsider how they had been coded. For example, multi-agency working was identified within the analysis interview four despite this way of working being discussed in two of the previous interviews. This and other examples subsequently lead to a re-analysis of interviews one to three to allow for different conceptualisation of the initial codes considering those from interview four, and then to consequently change the focused coding to reflect these changes.

I discussed my completed focused codes in research supervision, highlighting my concern that key codes had been lost within the proposed focused codes due to the grouping of the data (see Appendix Q). This prompted me to regroup initial codes to create new focused codes. To achieve this, the codes were printed out and manually arrayed on the floor to provide a literal higher perspective of the data, and to ask questions of it and to allow for flexible grouping. This process prompted me to alter a selection of the focused codes to offer better understanding of the findings.

Theoretical Sampling

Theoretical sampling is a unique feature of GT when compared to other qualitative methodologies (Charmaz, 2025). Theoretical sampling is the process of continuing to gather data, either through additional data gathering or through re-examination and re-categorisation of the existent data to create theoretical categories until no new theoretical concepts are uncovered (Charmaz, 2025). Theoretical categories, also known as theoretical codes, act as analytic tools which support the exploration of potential relationships between focused codes which develop during the data analysis stage of research. They draw on theoretical and analytic perspectives that the researcher brings to the process and from outside of the dataset,

such as exploring other papers and theories relevant to the field of research (Thornberg & Charmaz, 2013).

I began tentatively considering two theoretical categories after focus coding interviews one, two, and three, recorded through the process of memo-writing discussed above. These theoretical categories were then referred to after focused coding had been completed on interview four. For example, one of the theoretical categories which had been tentatively identified was around the EP providing the setting staff with containment (Bion, 1962). It was essential to be sure that it was this specific pattern of relating which was being described in the data and additionally I must be aware that, as I am a student of the Tavistock Education and Learning, I must not be imposing theory which I would likely have a bias towards due to its prominence within the institution. I tested my tentative theoretical categories through abductive reasoning, and through giving precedence to other potential explanations when reviewing interview four's codes before re-examining these alongside the other data with the containment theoretical interpretation in mind. This step resulted in my initial theoretical categories.

After discussing the initial theoretical categories with my research supervisor, I again re-examined the four interviews with these in mind. This, alongside member-checking (which involved me sharing the most prominent focused codes with the participants and inviting them to comment on whether and to what extent these codes were felt to be important for their collaborative relationship and whether any focused codes surprised them or that they disagreed with) supported me in understanding the nuances of the data and to reach theoretical saturation. Theoretical saturation refers to the moment when no new dimension to that category appears (Charmaz, 2025; Glaser, 2001). Please see Appendix R for the member-checking email.

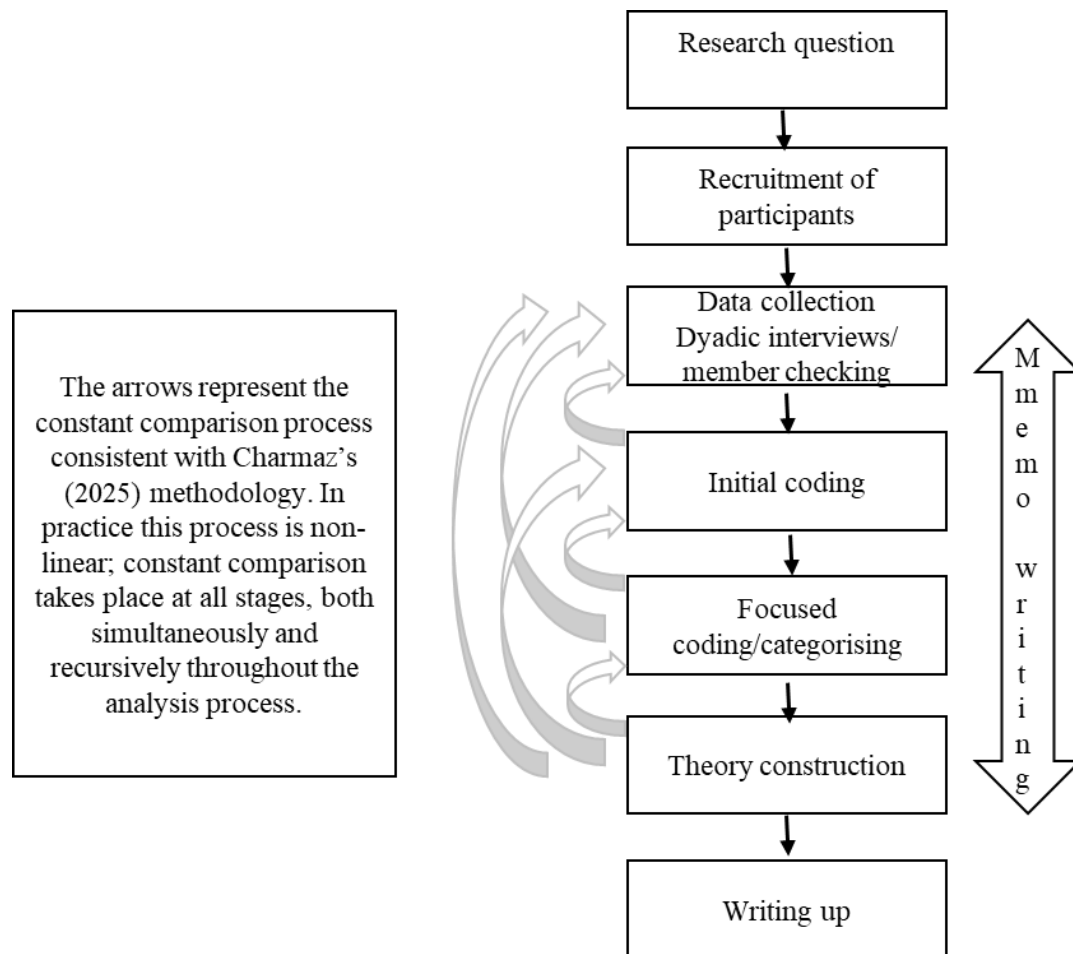
Theoretical Model

The theoretical model is used to explain how I conceptualise key theories grounded in my data which offer understanding on how EPs and SLD/PMLD staff co-construct descriptions of successful collaboration. In alignment with the social constructionist epistemology, theories within my research assume that there are multiple realities and multiple interpretations of these realities. Therefore, theories understood through a social constructionist lens do not attempt to explain reality, but rather the theories describe commonalities in perspectives, positions, and experiences (Charmaz, 2025) (see Appendix S).

I utilised theoretical sensitivity within my theoretical model by considering the reason I have taken certain stances through reflecting on my professional practice, the reviewed literature and my positionality, and considering the data from alternative perspectives to avoid forcing theories onto the data (Charmaz, 2025). For example, I am aware that I picked up on discussions about whether the EP takes up an expert role, as there is a discourse about this within EP practice. However, within both interviews one and two discussions around expertise came up without me asking and across all four interviews both the setting staff members and the EPs discussed it, so I warranted that it was not me forcing it into the data. In total the data analysis process, from initial coding to producing a theoretical model, took seven months from June 2025 through to February 2026. See Figure 3 for a diagram of the CGT process.

Figure 3

Constructivist grounded theory process⁵:



Reflexivity

Reflexivity is the process of engaging in continual critical self-evaluation of my positionality, whilst also actively and explicitly recognising that this position may impact both the research process and outcome (Bradbury-Jones, 2007; Guillemin and Gillam, 2004; Pillow, 2003; Stronach et al., 2007). As I am a TEP researching within the Educational Psychology field, it is evident that my positionality has had an influence on study, giving

⁵ Adapted from Charmaz (2025).

evidence to why Charmaz (2025) notes that the researcher must be reflexive about what they bring to the research.

I maintained self-evaluating throughout the research through maintaining a reflective journal and by considering Charmaz's (2025) questions for revealing preconceptions to attend more closely to the data. Reflexivity was particularly critical during the focused coding stage as this was when the data analysis becomes more interpretive. I found research supervision an important space to articulate my connections between data and codes, further supporting this process.

I also reflected on aspects of my identity and on the known aspects of identity of the participants to allow an understanding of aspects of sameness and difference so that when reading through the transcripts I could reflect on whether dynamics were influencing the data, and if so how. To prompt this aspect of reflection, I used Burnham's (2018) social GGRRAAACCEEESSS model in my reflective diary (please see appendix T).

Issues of Validity, Reliability and Trustworthiness

Research which espouses quantitative methodologies attempts to measure relationships between factors that can be understood to be independent of their context. In contrast, qualitative research aims to explore how processes are influenced by their context, including the context of the researcher (Yardley, 2017). Therefore, this difference in assumptions about the nature of knowledge and how it is obtained calls for different approaches to showing the value and validity of research (Yardley, 2017).

Yardley (2000,2008) argues that qualitative research can demonstrate the quality of the study through four key areas: sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence; and impact and importance. My research employs a CGT methodological approach which explicitly rejects the objectivist GT view by acknowledging subjectivities

throughout the data, including my role within the construction of the data (Charmaz, 2025). Therefore, Yardley's (2000,2008) approach to evaluating the quality of the research was felt to be most aligned with this study. Three of Yardley's (2000,2008) key areas have been considered in this section of the paper (sensitivity to context; commitment and rigor; transparency and coherence), and impact and importance will be reflected on when critiquing this research in the Discussion chapter.

Sensitivity to Context

Sensitivity to context refers to the research demonstrating awareness of the context of the data and analysis (Yardley, 2017). This can be evidencing an understanding of the participants' perspectives and their setting, sociocultural, and linguistic traits, and how these may impact both what is said within the interviews and how this is then understood by me. Sensitivity to context was considered throughout this research by examining the context of the data gathered from the participants, my influence, and the relevant literature in the co-construction of the data. This is discussed in more detail above in Reflexivity section.

Commitment and Rigor

Commitment and rigour can be understood as evidence of in-depth engagement in the topic, showing knowledge of the chosen methods, and conducting a thorough, in-depth analysis (Yardley, 2017). I demonstrate understanding of the CGT method through the criteria for GT studies illustrated by Charmaz (2025); credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Usefulness will be critiqued in my Discussion section. Credibility was considered through the in-depth engagement with the literature within both scoping reviews and the implementation of data gathering and analysis cycles illustrated by Charmaz (2025). Originality was considered by remaining grounded in the data, so that the categories represent the participants' views detailed within this study and the data refines and extends current

practice as it is an under researched area (Charmaz, 2025). Resonance was considered by seeking to understand contextual factors so that the reader can take into account those factors when attempting to understand the relevance of the research to themselves.

Resonance was also contemplated by seeking clarity on findings through member-checking with the participants. Member-checking was completed by sharing the focused codes and informal descriptions of their contextual dimensions through pen portraits (Association for Qualitative Research, n.d.) with the participants so they can confirm or deny that the focused codes represented their views on collaborative working, in addition to gathering additional information to support the categories (Charmaz, 2025). Three of the eight participants responded.

Transparency and Coherence

Transparency refers to the reader being able to understand clearly how the interpretation was developed from the data (Yardley, 2017). I maintained transparency by capturing in detail the steps taken within this research so the reader can see how this resulted in the presented theoretical model. Methodological decisions have been explained when introduced, and data collection and analysis steps are detailed earlier in this chapter. Furthermore, I have engaged in continual reflexivity throughout the study as outlined earlier also.

Summary of Quality of the Study

In summary, this study has drawn upon Yardley's (2000, 2008) approach to evaluate the qualitative quality of the research, detailing how this research has considered three of the four principles: Sensitivity to Context, Commitment and Rigor, and Transparency and Coherence. Further, I have used the criteria outlined by Charmaz (2025) for evaluating GT quality (credibility, originality, resonance) to assure the methodological standards of a GT

study. By utilising both criteria alongside, one another, I have considered how this qualitative research can demonstrate the quality of the study.

Chapter 4 – Findings

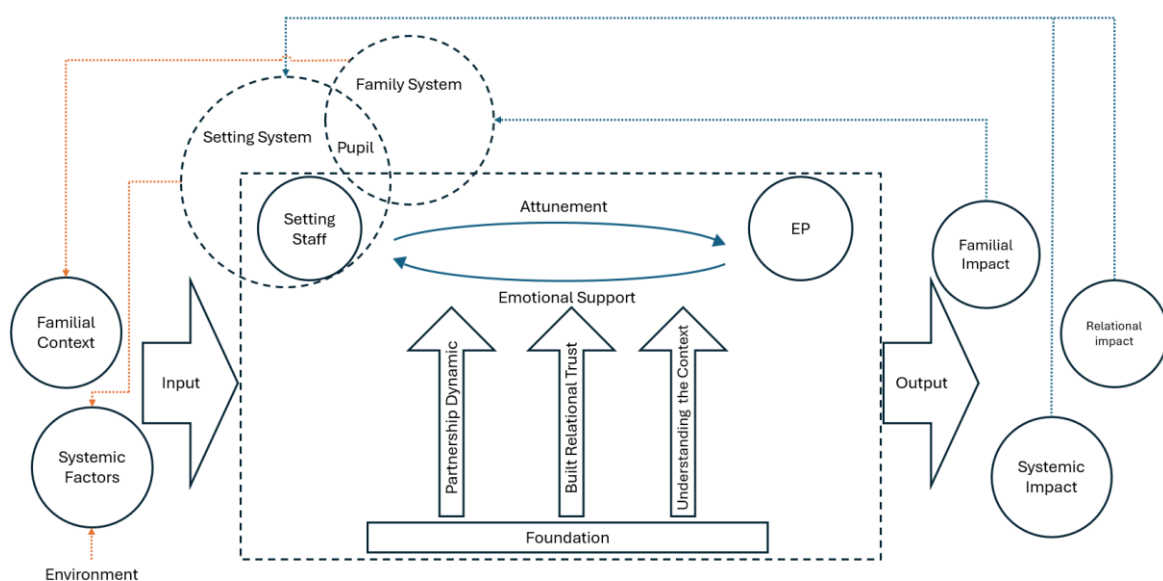
Chapter Overview

In this chapter I will present the overarching theoretical model which supports successful collaboration between EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff members (Figure 4). The theoretical codes which underpin the theoretical model have been constructed to answer both research questions, and I will provide a description of each theoretical code containing the focused codes beneath them. In the Discussions chapter, I will illustrate how the theoretical codes and the theoretical model answers both the research questions:

1. How do EPs and setting staff describe successful interprofessional collaboration in SLD/PMLD settings?
2. What are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

Figure 4

Theoretical model for successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and setting staff in SLD/PMLD settings



Core Theoretical Underpinnings

The core theoretical basis for the theoretical model is open system theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950a, 1950b), in that, when working together, the SLD/PMLD setting staff member and the EP form an open system which can only exist if it also experiences constant exchange with the environment around it. This is represented by the perforated border surrounding their relationship which can be considered their system's boundary. The pair form a subsystem within the educational setting's system, within which all subsystems can act independently of each other yet are interrelated with one another (Brunner & Long, 2021). The linkages circling from the outputs of the staff member/EP system back to the inputs represent that the pair's environmental influence is circular rather than simply impacting in one direction.

Although this model takes a predominately systemic approach, another important aspect of the relationship which has been identified from the data and is presented within this research is understanding the relational aspects of the helping relationship, and the emotional experience underneath the interactions between the EP and SLD/PMLD setting staff member. Therefore, I have been led by the data to include psychodynamic informed thinking to support understanding of the relationship.

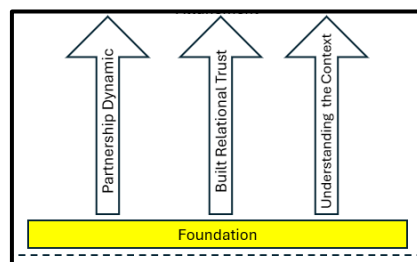
Although psychodynamic thinking is distinct from open systems theory, I argue that they are complementary within this research. This is due to the fact that open systems theory is used by psychologists to understand the workings of human systems, whereas psychoanalytic psychology can be used to better illuminate the intangible relational interactions between individuals within these systems, as well as the feelings or emotions which underpin these interactions, which I feel can further support the understanding of the system that the EP and the setting staff member create (Osbourne, 1994/2018). For the complete model see Figure 4.

I am now going to explore each of the theoretical codes by briefly introducing the theoretical code and focused code, before offering detail via exploration of the initial codes which fall within them. Only the most pertinent initial codes and those that represent exceptions falling under each focused code are discussed within this chapter – some are located within Appendix U. The details of where each initial code can be found is tabulated in Appendix U. As a general lookahead, I will be starting with a focus on the theoretical codes which relate to the dynamic between the EP-setting staff member, before turning to focus on the external factors which interact with their system. Interview quotes have been edited for clarity and conciseness. Interview data is identified via transcript position references in the form of

([interview number], Pos.[paragraph number])

Additionally, non-verbal interaction between the participants is captured by parentheses and placed within the transcript text at relevant points.

Foundation



This first theoretical code represents the foundation of the relationship between the EP and SLD/PMLD setting staff member, as it represents how the EP crosses the permeable boundaries of the setting system to form a subsystem with the staff member.

Focused Code 1 – Organisational Flexibility

Single Staff Member Facilitates Contact with EP. Across all four interviews the participants described there being a main point of contact within the setting staff team for the

EP. In all the interviews, this point of contact was in a senior role within their setting. EP 4 explains why it is helpful to have a single main contact within the setting:

I think having link people in each setting is super important. Um, so we know who we're connecting with and it's not sort of here, there and everywhere. So to have clear lines of communication with each setting is really helpful. (4, Pos.59)

The main contact was described as “hinging” (1, Pos.117) together the EP to different aspects of the setting by passing on information on behalf of the EP (3, Pos.35), putting the relevant members of staff in contact with the EP and facilitating that working relationship (2, Pos.122).

Ongoing, Clear Communication is Key to Collaboration. All the interviews described “ongoing communication” between the EP and their main setting contact (1, Pos.155). At a basic level, this was described as copying in the setting main contact to all correspondence between the EP and the setting as a way of overseeing the link (2, Pos.122). However, it was also described as a way of the setting staff member keeping the EP informed on the context of the setting:

or to have a bit of time with ... [the] head teacher, to hear a bit more about context (4, Pos.53)

This is particularly important when the context impacts the collaborative work. For example, EP 3 discusses “understanding the additional complexities that special settings have to cope and manage with” (3, Pos.34) and STAFF MEMBER 3 explains how these additional complexities can impact whether the setting is able to get the necessary paperwork completed for the EP. As an example on a logistical level, this communicative approach can therefore take the form of letting the EP know that the date of the session will have to move (3,

Pos.32). STAFF MEMBER 3 shared that she is appreciative that she can do this, and that EP 3 responds to these changing priorities quickly:

[EP 3] will come back to us and she will say we have this day, that day and that day.

So the response is ... very quick and very clear. (3, Pos. 32)

Flexibility Between EP and Main Setting Contact to Navigate Challenges. Within all interviews there were descriptions of the pairs being bidirectionally flexible to support collaboration within the relationship and to adapt to changes. As described by EP 1:

It's the organic kind of, being able to adjust to changes as and when they emerge in relation to the setting and the needs of the setting and the staffing (1, Pos.236)

Examples of the setting system being flexible to accommodate the EP included providing cover for specific staff to ensure the EP can work with the staff members most relevant to the pupil. This provision of flexibility from the setting is especially critical given that staffing within these settings can be challenging, and knowledge of individual pupil needs is required to cover classrooms safely (2, Pos.112; 4, Pos.63). In addition, there were two examples of the setting adapting to working with EP team members other than their designated EP to allow for increased capacity on the EP-side:

I can't always be the only, like, I can't take all of the traded SLA and deliver all of it to [name of school] because ... I've got a couple of other things I have to do. So it's just that ... having to share it with another EP, and sometimes that works, sometimes that doesn't work (3, Pos.116)

Despite EP 3 describing this arrangement as not always being successful, STAFF MEMBER 3 demonstrates a commitment to being flexible within their arrangement:

We're quite happy how it is working now. Um even if we have two EPs and all that, um, [EP 3] will support that EP ... and we have to also support that person (3, Pos.128)

Review-Based Learning and Evolution of Work Over Time. Three of the participant pairs described their joint working as adapting (4, Pos.82) or evolving over time (1, Pos.254; 3, Pos.79). This was described to be taking different forms, for example through professional conversations as they go along (1, Pos.252) or within a set process as outlined by EP 3:

Yeah, it's just we've got a kind of system for making a contract together that's very collaborative that we revisit and tweak and review ... as we go along (3, Pos.133)

Although is part of a standard process implemented by her EPS (3, Pos. 97-98), EP 3 describes the key element is having a strong relationship with the setting staff member so that she can be honest with the EP when reviewing their work:

So we've got a trusted ... relationship that ... you can ... tell me what's not working and what we need to do differently ... or where we need to shift our priorities (3, Pos.97-98)

A more structured approach to work review was described by EP 4 in the form of an impact report:

And at the end of every year we make an impact report. And that's where we really go into quite a lot of detail about what's worked, what hasn't worked (4, Pos.82)

Additionally, similarly to EP 3, EP 4 shares that, especially given the context of specialist settings being so different to mainstream schools, she relies on that honest feedback from the settings about what they need:

But of course, we're very, very much relying on on yourself, [Staff Member 4], and other members of staff to say, hey, have you thought about adapting ELSA or, you know, have you thought about this? ... So some of what you're saying isn't relevant or could be relevant in a slightly different way (4, Pos.53)

There can be alterations to EP practice following honest feedback from the setting staff member, as illustrated by STAFF MEMBER 1 who recounts adaptations regarding sharing changes in terminology (1, Pos.256) and changes in the structured process of work for each pupil (1, Pos.280).

Focused Code 2 – Coordination Through Consistent Framework

Meeting and Constructing a Plan Ahead Together. Across all the interviews, it was evident that the EPs and the setting contact met in advance of work commencing to plan the EP's work with the setting. As EP 4 highlights:

we sit ... and we think about what [are] their priorities for the coming year (4, Pos.69)

Often these meetings were described as “planning meetings” (2, Pos.128; 3, Pos.97) and enabled work to be prioritised against “the school improvement plan” (3, Pos.96). In addition, the planning sessions enabled the EP to understand the nature of the work within the setting as described in by EP 2:

whether it's cases or whether it's more kind of systemic work ... then that kind of gets decided (2, Pos.128)

In interview 1 the EP and setting staff member referenced coordinating together:

Then we coordinate early on in the academic year around the number of children that are likely to go forward for a plan. And then we organise things like the observations and all the joint assessment meetings and interviews with parents (1, Pos.27)

Consistent Framework for Approach to Working. All of the interviews referenced having a “framework” (1, Pos.199; 3, Pos.35) to the way the EP works with the setting. As described by STAFF MEMBER 2:

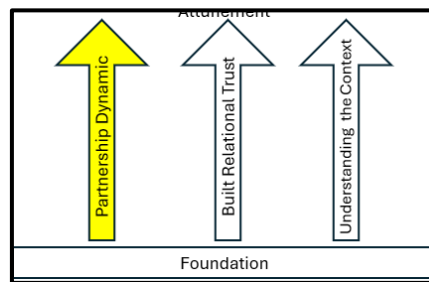
So our deputy head, who kind of is leads with kind of EPs and behaviour and stuff, made a referral to her ... then we arrange for a time she came in, observed the student, and then we had ... a meeting afterwards. So that's kind of the setup. And that's normally the setup that will happen throughout the whole school (2, Pos.38)

Structure seemed to help the pairings initiate work despite each piece of work being different (1, Pos.199). An example of this can be found from STAFF MEMBER 1, who stated that having a structured pattern to working allowed them to experience work which “never feels like going through motions” (1, Pos.199). This is significant given the work context for this setting staff-EP pairing was regarding statutory work for the EHC needs assessment, and therefore all cases would have had a similar process and goal. She also described the work as “very fluid” (1, Pos.199), indicating that the structured approach to working together supports the setting staff and EP’s ability to work together on a practical level.

The pairing within interview 3 described having a structured approach as able to “help” them to work together (3, Pos.96). This approach was described to enable clarity on how staff could access the EP or their knowledge. For example, STAFF MEMBER 3, describes:

Following ... the forms or the tools that the educational psychologist has ... offered us ... is helping that link to be successful because we're following a framework structure (3, Pos.96)

Pillar 1 – Partnership Dynamic



The second theoretical code represents the first of three pillars which support the relational aspects of the helping relationship.

Focused Code 3 – Depth of Knowledge: Role of the Setting Staff

EP Valuing Different Perspectives. Across all the interviews the EP participants acknowledged that hearing different narratives and different perspectives enabled a richer picture of the CYP. For example, EP 1 discusses how she has a process of joint assessment meetings with professionals in the setting who know the pupil well in addition to the child’s parents and collating that evidence together to provide highly detailed view of the child (1, Pos.80). The EP’s role within this work is therefore bringing together and “valuing different perspectives” (2, Pos.112). EP 4 further evidenced this:

And actually ... I think those sessions have been really powerful because then you're hearing different narratives, different perspectives. You're ... hopefully finding a place where there's alignment (4, Pos.41-42)

Settings Staff’s Wealth of Knowledge Helps. It is evident from the EPs’ language within the interviews that they respect the setting staff as “the expert of that child or young person and expert of their own self-in-role” (4, Pos.46) and that they have “expertise” (3, Pos.79). It is further identified that, if the EP could not draw on this expertise through the interprofessional work then the result would “be nowhere near as impactful” (3, Pos.79). Although the EP not taking up an expert role within consultation and collaborative working is

not unheard of, the findings of this research suggest a greater need for abdicating the expert role within SLD/PMLD settings, as described by EP 2:

I mean, I don't like to ever really be in like an expert role, but I definitely feel like here, most of the time I'm coming in and the staff who work here know much more about the kids and the profile of the kids than I would. So I think that helps it to become so much more collaborative (2, Pos.81)

The data suggests that this is because the setting staff are with the children on a daily basis and so will know them at a much deeper level (1, Pos.108). This is important when considering how best to support a child with SLD/PMLD as highlighted by EP 1, who acknowledges that in statutory work they typically write provisions which they know have worked previously, which sits in juxtaposition to how they describe working with SLD/PMLD settings:

So you could write a whole list of strategies that can [be] effectively irrelevant. So it's ... having somebody really knows the child and what works and what doesn't work. And the one that always comes back to me, example wise, is the difference in the types of non-verbal or the, you know, the augmentative communication systems, because ... I would probably always go for one that I know ... Whereas when you've got somebody who's actually working with the child saying, well, no, that doesn't work ... What we need is this (Interview 1, Pos. 109)

Focused Code 4 – Breadth of Knowledge: Role of the EP

EP and Setting Staff Share the Expert Role. Participants across the interviews linked success in their interprofessional working to the fact that each member is bringing their “unique expertise” to the table (2, Pos.81), or rather, as illustrated by EP 4:

no person in the room is an expert whilst everyone in the room [is] ... an expert of their own ... experience with the children and young people (4, Pos.46)

What is identified as unique within the SLD/PMLD setting staff and EP collaborative relationship is that the EP brings a breadth of knowledge regarding CYP (1, Pos.325) and psychological understanding (3, Pos.35) to the discussion, whereas the setting staff bring the depth of knowledge of the CYP (1, Pos.325) being discussed, which allows the work to be more collaborative in nature (2, Pos.81). The EP therefore “comes alongside” (3, Pos.79) when working with the setting staff, and share different facets of their expertise (3, Pos.79). Coming alongside in this sense can be defined as working with the setting staff rather than directing setting staff. As stated by EP 4, this also requires both professionals to come in:

... to that space with ... open hearts and open minds, rather than it being ... I'm coming to you as an expert in something (4, Pos.46)

Fresh Pair of Eyes. Within this idea that no one person in the relationship is “the expert” (4, Pos.46), further data from the interviews suggests that the EP has a role within the collaborative work which involves approaching the situation with naivety and inquisitiveness, allowing for a “fresh pair of eyes” (2, Pos.56) to support the setting staff. This took the role of questioning to provide setting staff with an opportunity to check out (1, Pos.85) and moderate what they are seeing with the child (1, Pos.91). The data suggests that an EP is well positioned to offer this because ultimately the EP is from outside of the setting system and therefore does not know the child, and so is able to provide a fresh perspective (2, Pos.85). This allows them to come from place of “not exactly of naivety, but of genuinely not knowing and being curious about” the situation (4, Pos.41).

In addition to the distance allowing inquisitiveness and naivety, the data also suggests that the EP is well positioned to offer a fresh perspective because of their knowledge, as illustrated by STAFF MEMBER 1:

what's important ... is that whilst it might be lots of eyes, it's not all sorts of eyes" (1, Pos.135)

This suggests that the EP is recognised as a professional whose input will “value the student” and “value the class team” (2, Pos.109) and therefore implying worth the setting staff making time for conversation with them.

EP Role Needing to Work Alongside Other Professionals (CAMHS and OT). In addition to working alongside SLD/PMLD setting staff, data from three interviews also highlighted that EPs often need to work with other agencies such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and occupational therapists (OTs) when working with CYP with SLD/PMLD. An example of this, can be found within interview 2 where the EP describes consulting with an OT who had previously supported the pupil. Although this is not unique to pupils in SLD/PMLD settings, the EP highlights that it is unusual to have such easy access to the OT:

EP2: ...from my perspective, that doesn't happen a lot, particularly in ... mainstream settings where the OT is ... flying in and out ... here because there are professionals who are

STAFF MEMBER 2: On site [*S2 nods*]

EP2: Based here on site ... you're able to just pull someone and go, oh, can you come and chat about this people for ten minutes? And it makes such a difference (2, Pos.43-45)

There are often multiple agencies involved with CYP with SLD/PMLD because they have complex needs, as illustrated by STAFF MEMBER 3:

the impact that the educational psychologist has had has been enormous ... together with all the other provisions that we have, such as CAMHS, the OT ... we have ... students in the provision ... they have very complex needs and ... those complex needs can impact their ... mental health, wellbeing, you know, regulation (3, Pos.88)

When supporting pupils in SLD/PMLD settings, the EP aims to be part of a “holistic approach” (3, Pos.83) where different professional lenses should be considered, such as an educational perspective, social emotional perspective, and a sensory perspective (2, Pos.40). EP 4 discusses how initially she was brought into the trust as they were trying to develop their own “in-house multidisciplinary team” (4, Pos.105) and though it is currently “in its infancy” (4, Pos.107), she describes how she anticipates this role will involve multi-agency working:

And in terms of collaborative working, that would be incredibly important to be able to maybe sit around the table with yourself [Staff Member 4] ... with the speech language service, with the physiotherapist, with whoever else is involved with that child or young person and really have these discussions and really think about ... the support (4, Pos.105)

Focused Code 5 – Joint Working in SLD/PMLD Settings is a Dynamic Process

Working Together Through Professional Dialogue and Openness. Across all of the interviews, EPs and setting staff identified examples and benefits of open “professional dialogue” (1, Pos.91) by “collaboratively sitting together” (4, Pos.46), “exploring, wondering” and “figuring things out” (4, Pos.46). It can be seen that each professional is bringing their own expertise to the table and considering different aspects of the collaborative

work together (3, Pos 81-82), even though it is “all through questioning” (1, Pos.96). For example, EP 2 explains:

So I think that helps it to become so much more collaborative because ... when we were having our discussion ... it was just me kind of thinking outside the box ... but you telling me things that you knew about the pupil, and that was why that wouldn't work (2, Pos.81)

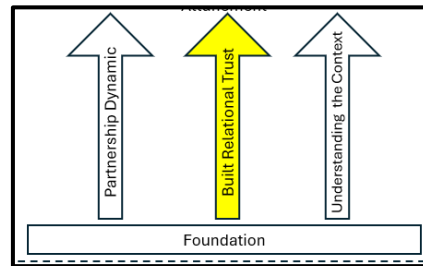
Evidence of Non-Dynamic Process as a Problem. Supporting the point above, an outlier code relevant to one interview only due to its specific context provides an example of the EP not contributing professional dialogue to the joint working. In interview 1, STAFF MEMBER 1 explains that they have worked with different EPs previously. In a specific example, she explains that although the previous EP listened to the views of the parents and the setting, they did not bring their own view to the discussion and STAFF MEMBER 1 felt that this was a problem:

In some circumstances we've had where an EP, they, they are a typist doing a combination of the parent view, the setting view and not really bringing their view (1, Pos.254)

Further, STAFF MEMBER 1 shared that when working with an EP other than EP 1, she felt as though there was not a shared view of the child (1, Pos.280). A shared understanding of the child would be facilitated through successful collaborative working and specifically the process of the different professionals bringing their perspectives to the table, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

But to have, you know, somebody else coming with their professional expertise and their specialism to kind of bounce that off and say, oh, you know, we're seeing the same thing (1, Pos.79)

Pillar 2 – Build Relational Trust



This code represents the second pillar which supports the relational aspects of the helping relationship.

Focused Code 6 – Trust, Respect, and Shared Values Underpinning Relationship

Shared Professional Values as Foundation to Enabling Collaboration. This code describes how three of the interview pairings spoke about how sharing values regarding the work they are doing together is an important aspect of their relationship (1, Pos. 221) and “a shared ethos” (2, Pos.147). For example, STAFF MEMBER 1:

STAFF MEMBER 1: ...I think that's what makes it work, because I think we've got a very agreed, shared value and view about the nature of the work. And I think that's implicit with all of everything that we do. You know, I think that.

EP 1: Yeah. [EP 1 nods] (1, Pos. 153-154)

A defining value shared across all the settings interviewed for this study observed both implicitly and explicitly was that they want “best possible outcome” (2, Pos.169) and impact (3, Pos. 81-82) for their pupils. As illustrated in interview 1:

STAFF MEMBER 1: But I think essentially it's because... the child is at the centre of it, and that's absolute.

EP 1: Yes we are child-centred.

STAFF MEMBER 1: That is absolutely key to what we do. And, you know, it can be very easy to sort of, oh, you know, just get through ticking the boxes. And I don't think that whilst we've still got to manage the workload, which is enormous... I think that we manage to cover the workload because we've refined so many of these systems and because we're both working equally hard for the same process (1, Pos. 268-270)

Evidence within these codes suggests that it is important for the EP to understand, align with, and contribute to the setting's ethos. STAFF MEMBER 2 shares that they would probably ask to work with a different EP if they felt their current collaborative partner was not in alignment with the setting's ethos because it is considered critical to the setting's view on supporting their pupils:

EP 2: I suppose now that we've spoken about it, I think it is maybe more about the ethos of the school. [*Both face each other*]

STAFF MEMBER 2: [*Both nod*] Yeah, I think it's. like you said, it's positive because I think we would find it difficult to work with an EP who might come back with a suggestion of ... maybe like a recommendation would be like, ABA ... we don't do that, we wouldn't touch into that. So it's just literally a waste of our time ... because there could be other EPs who don't necessarily agree ... with, like our approach to behaviour and certain things (2, Pos.144-145)

Although values were not mentioned in interview 4, interestingly both EP 4 and STAFF MEMBER 4 responded to the member-checking email and they both reported focused code Trust, Respect and Shared Values as the most important theme for their collaborative relationship, further evidencing the importance of shared values within the relationship.

Trusted Partnership because of History. This code demonstrates that the history of their relationship and observing the impact of their work over time has led to trust between professionals, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

if you really trust the person that you're making those with, because that's based on history, that's based on something, you know, more broad (1, Pos.248)

Trust within the relationship can be increased through observations of the impact the EP can have on the setting system, evidenced by STAFF MEMBER 3's descriptions of the EP having had a strong influence and consequently asking each year to work with her again because she trusts that she will continue to have "a big impact" (3, Pos.92). This was also identified by STAFF MEMBER 4 when she referred to the fact that the setting had already "gained a lot from them [EP] being part of the Trust" (4, Pos.21). Further, STAFF MEMBER 4 actively supported her staff to make time to see the EP and shared firsthand testimony with them when signposting them towards working with the EP, indicating that she trusts the EP and their work (4, Pos.31).

Stable Link Relationships Preferred by Both Professionals. In interviews 1, 2, and 3, the EPs were linked to the setting through their role within the LA. Within these interviews, the link EP model was described as being "easier" (1, Pos.279) for collaborative working because "it's just nice to come in and let people know who you are" (2, Pos.123) and that the EP is able to have a more complete understanding of the setting (2, Pos.126). This is further evidenced by EP 2:

then you feel like you have to start from scratch every time. Like in terms of explaining ... the ethos of the school and that you're very like child led and your play based (2, Pos.125)

Preserving the personnel within the link relationship was felt to be so important in interview 3 that the pair had agreed to spread out their visits in order to prioritise this, as explained by EP 3:

So, um, in order to keep this staffing, the link relationship with [name of school]'s as stable as possible, it's meant that we've kind of maybe done a bit less, but we've prioritised stability, if that makes sense. So spread things over two years rather than one year. (3, Pos.26)

Familiarity Between EP and Wider Setting Staff Team Helping Working

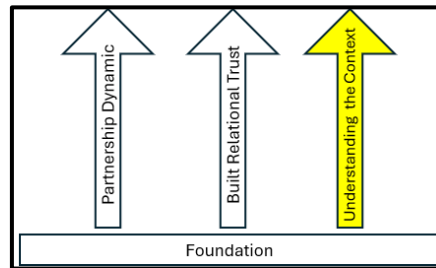
Relationship. Within all of the interviews, the EP and setting staff member detailed how the EP being known to the wider team within the setting “supports” (1, Pos.72) successful joint working. This is described as key by STAFF MEMBER 3, who highlights that if the wider setting team know the EP then they will also be aware of the work the EP is doing within the school:

so ... that is a key element because ... if they know you, they know what you're doing in the classes ... So it is important ... building that relationship (3, Pos.54)

Similarly, EP 4 also describes the importance of developing relationships with the wider setting team as evidenced by her discussing the importance of building these relationships, particularly within the SLD/PMLD settings, to better understand the setting's context:

“You know, as much as we can, [we] spend time in the setting, you know, not to have the work discussion groups online, we always have those in person. We always have them at [name of setting] ... try and go a bit earlier and pop into the class here or there (4, Pos.53)

Pillar 3 – EP Understanding the Context of the Setting



This theoretical code is the third and final pillar which supports the relational aspects of the helping relationship. It represents the importance of the EP taking the time to have contextual understanding of the setting for both the pupils and the staff and bringing that to their role within the partnership.

Focused Code 7 – Understanding the Need for a Tailored Approach

EP Understanding that Working with SLD/PMLD Settings comes with Additional Complexities. EP participants within three of the interviews described how working with SLD/PMLD settings comes with “widely different” demands (4, Pos.48) and complexities. EP 3 shared:

Yeah. And I think there's something about the EP understanding the additional complexities that special settings have to cope and manage with ... And I'm not sure how good we are at training up EPs with that in mind. And maybe it's something, maybe to think a little bit about the unique kind of pressures and demands on special settings and then therefore what kind of relationship they need with their link educational psychologist. (3, Pos.34)

Some of these unique demands stem from the fact that the setting’s main priority is literally the wellbeing of the students (2, Pos.109), and that setting must “have the... capacity to respond to student’s needs” (3, Pos.112). As discussed, when defining the term SLD/PMLD, the CYP grouped within these labels require a higher level of assistance than

other individuals with disabilities. Further, when considering explicitly PMLD, some will have complex medical conditions and may be wheelchair users. What can be understood from this is that the setting must have the capacity to rapidly respond to something specific, such as a crisis, a safeguarding situation (3, Pos.112) or “critical incident” (4, Pos.29), and that these situations may arise with more regularity in SLD/PMLD settings than mainstream settings due to the nature of pupils’ needs. EP 4 provides an assessment of this from a PMLD perspective:

but that context is so supportive for future conversations where we're really understanding the amount of risk, actually, that you guys are holding. A member of staff telling us, you know, if she gets the ... oxygen saturation slightly wrong ... then this this is a medical emergency ... and of course, people have received training and they're not nurses and doctors ... Yeah, I mean, in terms of context, if we can't hold that in our head with all the conversations that we're having, then we're really missing something about what it is to work that work in the context that you're in. (4, Pos.49)

STAFF MEMBER 3 shared that to collaborate effectively there is need for the EP to be understanding of how the demands placed upon setting staff can so rapidly change:

There is always something that we can shift the focus to. So we are quite busy ... And then the educational psychologist comes and she understands the way we work ... that's the reason why we work well. (3, Pos.114)

The child-led focus of setting staff can also work in an EP’s favour. EP 2 speaks to the flexibility in staff presence in SLD/PMLD settings, and explains how this can allow for collaborative approach across multiple professionals:

in the in the classroom I'll always chat to people who are there, whether that's a class teacher or... the support staff... I think we had... the assistant head was in the room. I

was there. The positive behaviour support person was there ... the class teacher from last year was there and it was just like, oh, let's just have... a 15 minute discussion ... it just seems like that's something that would be kind of the norm here, whereas it certainly is not that way in mainstream (2, Pos.114)

Although she describes this way of working as “super helpful”, she outlines that this approach to “valuing differing perspectives” and “commitment” to joint working is not her experience in other settings where it can take more the form of “this is your one person you speak to, and that's your lot.” (2, Pos.112).

A Specific Tailored Approach is Important when Needs are Profound. Across all the interviews the participants specified that an aspect of the collaborative relationship was the EP’s understanding of the individual needs of pupils with SLD/PMLD, and how they require more tailored and often “bespoke” educational support (2, Pos.151). As described by EP 1:

EP 1: When you've got children who have very severe learning difficulties ... that very personalised or very sort of specific tailored approach is even more important when the needs are really quite profound. And particularly when they involve a high level of medical care and, and adult supervision and attention. [*STAFF MEMBER 1 nods*] (1, Pos.112)

STAFF MEMBER 4 explains the complexities working with CYP with SLD/PMLD further by explaining:

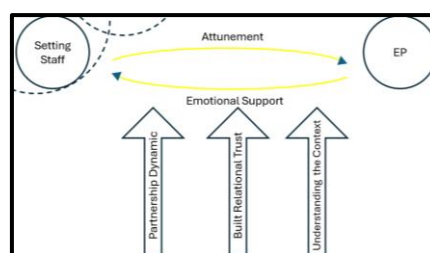
Somebody who's going through puberty, we all know what that looks like ... and then what it may look like for somebody with ASD it's very different. But then what's that like for somebody who's non-speaking, only communicates with their eyes or through

body movements. And how do we manage that and how can we support that to, you know, go through this huge stage, this milestone stage of their life? (4, Pos.103)

These points illustrate why the EP needs to offer more bespoke options rather than simply advising the intervention that an EP would “probably always go for” (1, Pos.109). This is described as different from their experience of working with mainstream settings where they felt that each recommendation does not have to be so bespoke to meet the needs of the child:

EP 2: But like a lot of the time, my work and like mainstream settings, if I'm doing like early years work, for example, I'm not specifically writing every single recommendation because there is so similar in the mainstream schools need the kind of basic level. Whereas when I write a report for [setting's name]'s, I know that I'm going to I'm going to sit down and I'm going to be really like, I'm going to need to make it bespoke because it has to be something different. You have to think about what's already being done. [*Both laugh and face each other*] (2, Pos. 151-152)

Feedback Loop Arrows: Attunement and Emotional Support



This theoretical code represents the pattern of relating between the EP and the setting staff member, and the feelings underpinning these interactions.

Focused Code 8 – Attuned Interactions

This code describes how there is evidence of attuned interactions between the EP and setting staff member in all four interviews. This primarily took the form of nodding in

agreement (4, Pos.71; 3, Pos.82; 2, Pos.27, 57, 60, 88, 121, 124; 1, Pos. 100, 112, 117, 154, 158) and mirrored interactions such as smiles (4, Pos.87; 3, Pos.39; 1, Pos.210), and shared laughter (4, Pos.26; 3, Pos.91; 2, Pos.151; 1, Pos.178). Interestingly, all instances of laughter within the interviews seemed to be linked to aspects of the partnership which could be considered challenging, such as attempting to identify dates they had worked together during a busy period (4, Pos.26; 1, Pos.178), whilst discussing requesting to work with the same EP despite busy schedules (3, Pos.91), and when acknowledging that a facilitated group became like a therapy session (2, Pos.151).

Further, there was evidence in this code of the pair being attuned in other ways, exemplified by instances such as utilising the same phrases of words (1, Pos.203-4; 3, Pos.73-6) inviting each other to answer (3, Pos.48, 75; 2, Pos.108, 162; 1, Pos.50, 72, 77, 91), and checking in with the other person (4, Pos.118; 3, Pos. 23, 24, 31, 58, 60, 73; 2, Pos. 57, 59, 1, Pos. 44, 52, 74, 194) which took the form of directing questions to one another (2, Pos.22, 27) such as “isn’t there? [*face each other*]” (1, Pos. 194) and “haven’t we?” (3, Pos.24) or comments such as “[STAFF MEMBER 2 *faces EP 2*] The name was familiar to you” (2, Pos. 66).

Focused Code 9 – EP Providing a Space for Emotional Support

EP Offering Supervisory Space, Officially or Unofficially, for Setting Staff. Three interviews referenced that the EP provides a space for setting staff where supervisory support can be offered. This was described as the EP taking on this supervisory role either individually or within a group setting, and either officially or unofficially, and that each of the three staff members in the pairings had experienced supervision on an individual basis from the EP within their collaborative relationship. Each of these three setting staff seem to highly value a supervisory space, particularly one with an external person. One of the reasons why an external person is able to provide this supervisory space is that they are perceived as not

currently carrying the same challenges or anxieties that the setting staff are, as detailed by
STAFF MEMBER 1:

Yeah. There is a lot to hold ... And when you're holding that with your team here and we're with them all the time, there's nowhere else. You know, I can't take that to my team because I'm also holding them as well (1, Pos.207)

The setting staff in both interviews 2 and 4 noted that speaking to someone external helps them to talk more openly regarding how their work impacts them beyond their role within the setting:

EP 2: like having a meeting with an external person who's not linked to the school. I got the impression that then you could also talk a little bit about like, more openly about the impact on you.

STAFF MEMBER 2: [Both face each other, STAFF MEMBER 2 nods]: Yeah. Yeah, yeah for sure.

EP 2: Like as a teacher, as a professional, as a human. Um, whereas it's quite difficult when, as you say, the other staff members are all kind of caught up in it. (2, Pos.89-90)

STAFF MEMBER 4 provides a further example of supervisory space provided by the EP, and goes on to relate this to successful joint working:

understanding that we're in a safe space to talk, to, discuss professionally, but without judgement as well. Um, I think that makes really successful joint work (4, Pos.48)

Setting Staff Detailing Challenges of Working in the Setting and EP Offering an Opportunity to Verbalise Them. Within three of the interviews, it was demonstrated that the EP and setting staff member's relationship was considered strong enough for setting staff to

share the challenges of their work without fear of judgement, and the EP validating these challenges they are experiencing in return. This was evident through the language used between the EP and the setting staff member to describe the setting staff's members work such as "It is draining. You know ... there is a lot to hold" (1, Pos.207), "it does drain you a lot" (2, Pos.85), "When we said people cry here that is that's real" (1, Pos.206), and "burnt out" (2, Pos.85; 4, Pos.80).

EP 4 also provided examples of this occurring in an unstructured manner with other setting staff members:

It's often sort of a hand on the door knob sort of moment where just as our time is coming to the end ... Okay, let's take a few extra minutes here (4, Pos.80)

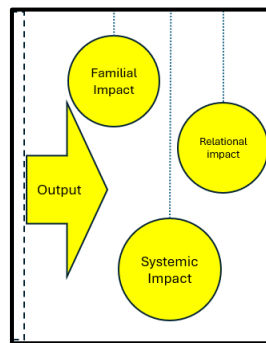
In interview 2, the EP suggests that being external to the setting system enables them to genuinely validate the feelings of setting staff members:

And maybe, like, it's not as shocking to them anymore because they've seen it day in and day out. Whereas actually sometimes it's nice to have someone come in and be like, oh God, that is awful. Yeah, that's really tough. (2, Pos.89-91)

EP offering reassurance through validation of thinking. Beyond providing emotional support through a supervisory space, the setting staff in three of the interviews described how the EP provided emotional support by providing reassurance through validation of thinking or prompting reassessment through questioning. As described by STAFF MEMBER 1, the EP is able to provide "an element of moderation around what we're seeing" (1, Pos.91) and in her particular context that was helpful as she describes herself as feeling vulnerable as she felt that:

[There is] a lot of onus on you to make these ... big judgements and these children are tiny ... They're very, very young. And so for me it's really, really valuable that it is a combined ... working time.” (1, Pos.129)

Relational Output



This theoretical code represents the fact that outcomes are produced through the EP-setting staff member open system into the environment which surrounds it.

Focused Code 10 – Systemic Impact of EP in SLD/PMLD Settings

EP Impact on the System and Practices. In all four interviews there was descriptions of the interprofessional working relationship with the EP having an impact on the setting’s system, all of which describe the work as having “benefited not just the teacher but class teams as well” (3, Pos.40).

In the case of interview 2, the EP’s support led the setting to reconsider their approach to accommodating requests from families, which was described by STAFF MEMBER 2 as not supporting the relationship between home and the school in the particular case they described (2, Pos.95).

Similarly, interviews 3 and 4 offered examples of interprofessional links with the EP leading to changes across the setting system. For example, STAFF MEMBER 3 shared that they were aware of a form used by the EP which is intended to be completed with families

prior to engaging with the EP, and how they now use this form before working with families alongside other external professionals:

So it's a really lovely form that [Name of EP] introduced to us ... then we ... use that approach with not just with educational psychologist ... now we are using it with CAMHS as well ... and I do the consultations with parents using the same approach (3, Pos.40)

Focused Code 11 – Positive Impact of Joint Working on Family

EP Helps Understanding Between Home and Setting. This code represents how the EP had a positive influence in facilitating understanding between both family and educational contexts during joint working, as described in two interviews. From EP 3:

I'm joining a process where they're already working together just to facilitate that a little bit more (3, Pos.49)

The above constructive situation is opposed to the situation described by EP 2:

...there was somewhat of a strained relationship with the family (2, Pos.57)

However, the outcome of both situations is the same in that the EP is seeking to improve the link between the two contexts around the pupil.

STAFF MEMBER 2 felt that the EP's involvement allowed the setting and family to progress through "slowly breaking barriers" (2, Pos.57). EP 2 commented on how she perceived her role in facilitating that process:

It's like having someone neutral come in and just almost report things as they are (2, Pos.59)

EP Involvement Leads to Positive Outcome for the Family. Within all four interviews there were descriptions of how the joint work between the EP and the setting staff

member led to an improved outcome for the CYP, or a positive impact upon the parents/carers.

EP 4 makes an important argument that support for the staff has a positive impact on pupils, as through this work the EP is supporting the pupils indirectly:

we seem to be able to sort of reach a wider group of students if we are supporting the teachers supporting the students (4, Pos.69)

Interviews 2 and 3 provided examples where the EP had engaged in direct work with pupils and how in both cases this supported them directly. As illustrated by STAFF

MEMBER 3:

So the impact has been great because some of the students ... that are or were in ... those sessions, they were not able to open up or to speak (3, Pos.63)

Focused Code 12 – Relational Impact

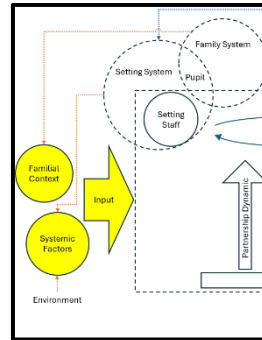
EP is Part of the Broader School Team. Within three of the interviews there was evidence of the EP's relationship with the setting becoming so trusting that they are considered a part of the setting's wider team. This was explicitly shown through data such as the setting staff referring to EP as "part of our broader team" (1, Pos.81) and "she's [EP] part of us" (3, Pos.73), despite the EP only being formally linked to the setting through their role within the LA EPS. The positive relationship between the EP and the setting team is demonstrated through actions and support the EP has implemented, described by STAFF

MEMBER 4:

they've done some really great training... about trauma and support... being able to identify things and also put in place to support our students through... trauma as well... I've been able to reach out to [EP 4] (4, Pos.19)

This evidences beneficial integration between the EP as an external practitioner and the pre-established school system enabling further positive outcome.

Relational Input



This theoretical code represents the inputs which provide the EP-setting staff member open system with information and energy from the environment.

Focused Code 13 – Systemic Influences on Joint Working

Difficulty Getting buy in for the EP Work from Setting Staff for PMLD Students when Compared to SLD Students. This code describes an exception within the data and is only found in interview 4. STAFF MEMBER 4 raised that she had noticed that a low amount of “buy in” (4, Pos.71) to the EP supervisory drop-in space from the staff working with PMLD students relative to those working with SLD students:

So we're working with the harder to reach students, and I don't know whether it's ... because of the students more complex needs ... but actually they could really do with some, you know, the educational psychologist's input (4, Pos.71)

Building on from the above, EP 4 feels that the staff of pupils with SLD/PMLD would benefit from emotional support from the EP. In the cases where a staff member does attend a drop-in session, the conversation is initially focused on support for a student rather than emotional support for the staff member themselves.

And there's a kind of a list of students, you know, we really want to help with these students. And perhaps a felt sense of, oh, is it a bit selfish to come and just spend this whole time talking about myself? And actually we're saying, no, this is where the real impact on the students will be had. (4, Pos.80-81)

Systemic Organisation Dictating Nature of Relationship. This code represents that there was an acknowledgement within three of the interviews that the EPS organisation had a large impact on the nature of the working relationship. All three interviews noted that the EP had a “link” role to the setting (1, Pos.279;2, Pos.9; 3, Pos.26) meaning that they are the person “allocated” to the setting by the LA (2, Pos.139).

Even when there is a link model within the EPS, this does not necessarily mean that the EP currently linked to that setting will remain as the linked practitioner as described by EP 2:

I think if there was a big issue or something like they would take ... my perspective into consideration, but I suppose ... they could pull the school from me and give it to someone else. And I suppose that's ... just an element of like not being in control (2, Pos.167)

Another systemic impact from the EPS on the collaborative relationship between setting staff and the EP is linked to the EPS being understaffed, therefore affecting their ability to deliver their traded offer and how this has meant that the EP has had to “deliver the visits over a period of two years” (3, POS.24) with the focus of keeping the link relationship as stable as possible.

However, it is important to note that although EP 4 was working with their paired setting privately, there are still restrictions based on how they are brought in which determines the nature of the relationship. EP 4 explains that the Trust buys a set number of

days of the EP's time, which impacts the amount of time she has in each of the settings within the Trust:

Quite a lot of time, although it's quite a big Trust. So it has specialist settings and mainstream settings across [name of place] and [name of place]. And so actually the amount of time each setting gets is not ... very much unfortunately (Interview 4, Pos. 16)

Resource Scarcity Dictating what is Possible. All the pairs of participants raised time as a barrier to their joint working, and in particular how this impacted the direct work that the EP could complete with the setting. For example, in interview 1, EP 1 shared that time was a challenge due to “the sheer volume of ... children coming through now” (1, Pos.283) when referring to the number of CYP coming through the EHC needs assessment process. Consequently, she shared that due to this she is unable to complete the whole assessment process on her own:

because of the sheer volume of work now, I can't do all the observations. It's impossible ... I haven't got a picture of the child in my head, whereas when I've been here and seen them (1, Pos.271)

In harmony with this notion that the EP having more time would allow opportunities from more conversation in the settings, EP 4 explains how limited time in a setting is a barrier, particularly a specialist setting as the more time spent there the more opportunity there is to understand the setting context:

I think it is a barrier in terms of I think, [Staff Member 4], you and I might have crossed paths more often if we had more time in setting ... we'd ... be able to spend more time in class and also know more about contexts (4, Pos.82)

Money was also presented as a barrier by three of the pairs, as this was directly linked to the restricted time from the EP. This was represented as a current barrier for the pairing in interview 2, who were only able to access the “core time” (2, Pos.157), and interview 4, who have a set amount of paid EP time across the Trust (4, Pos.16). STAFF MEMBER 3 raised money as a potential future barrier as “all schools are kind of struggling now and the budget is tricky” (3, Pos.100).

Focused Code 14 – Familial Context Within Joint Working

EP Bringing the Context of Home to Support Child. This code represents how in three of the four interviews, the EP integrates understanding gained from pupil’s home context with the understanding of the pupil’s educational context to obtain a “wider picture” (1, Pos.84). This is able to provide further understanding of “other situations that might be impacting on the on the child's development” (1, Pos.88) or behaviour. This is illustrated by EP 2 when discussing concerns around a pupil’s swearing:

Yeah, because the child was swearing quite a lot in school and I'd asked about it. I think I just asked in a very open way, like, oh, do you have any ideas about where that would come from? And I think mum was just like, oh yeah, like it's because we had a family argument. I accidentally said x, y, z and he's picked them. He picked it up. We massively overreacted (2, Pos.69)

Ultimately, this example is a microcosm of the EP providing a link between the family and educational contexts. EP 3 explains this further:

And it's all about ... really thinking about the fit between home and school for the child and the child making that journey and how we can make that journey ... closer together? ... so they have less, you know, challenges in terms of navigating home and school (3, Pos.49)

School Wants More Input from the Family into the Work. Interestingly, interview 4 was the only example where the EP did not work directly with the families through the course of the collaborative work with the setting staff member. STAFF MEMBER 4 expressed that this was difficult to because of how difficult it is to obtain the parents “buying in” but how it is critical because “their buying in is equally, if not more important as well as what's going on with their student and how to support them or their child.” (4, Pos.84). This is why STAFF MEMBER 4 goes on to say that this collaboration would be in her ideal world:

SETTING STAFF 4: The collaboration between school, home and the student. And that would be just perfect world wouldn't it?

EP 4: Yeah [*everyone smiled*]

SETTING STAFF 4: Yeah [*STAFF MEMBER 4 laughed*]

EP 4: My chest was all buzzy when you say that [STAFF MEMBER 4]. I'm like yeah, yeah. (..) [*STAFF MEMBER 4 and EP 4 smile and laugh*] (Interview 4, Pos. 84-88)

Member Checking

The most prominent focused codes were shared with the participants and they were invited to comment on whether and to what extent these codes were felt to be important for their collaborative relationship, and whether any focused codes surprised them or that they disagreed with. See Table 8 for the findings from this exercise.

Table 8

Additional findings: Responses gathered from member checking

Focused code	Description	Responder
Importance of a specific tailored approach with PMLD/SLD settings	PMLD/SLD settings operate under different ways to address the unique challenges their pupils face, approaches not typically seen in mainstream settings. Working with and understanding pupils with PMLD/SLD requires a more tailored approach, often bespoke educational support. These factors need to be considered within the overall picture of the work completed by the EP, and so the EP must understand the complexities of the settings which support these children and young people.	SETTING STAFF 4
EP embedded in the team	The EP is embedded within the school team and identified as such to both parents and the staff at the setting. This is identified as beneficial to the joint working.	
EP providing a space for emotional support	Setting staff taking the opportunity offered by the EP to share experiences & reexamine situations related to the challenges of their role.	EP 1 SETTING STAFF 4
Joint working in PMLD/SLD settings is a dynamic process	Joint working between EPs and school staff in PMLD/SLD setting is a dynamic conversation, with open discussion regarding cases. Different expertise is sought to help build formulations and ways of working, and proposed interventions are further developed with input from setting staff.	EP 1
Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship	Both professionals demonstrate that a commonality of values and respect of each other's time supports their work together. Time spent working together also allows for a trusting relationship.	EP 1 SETTING STAFF 4 EP 4

Note. Accompanying qualitative feedback can be found in Appendix V

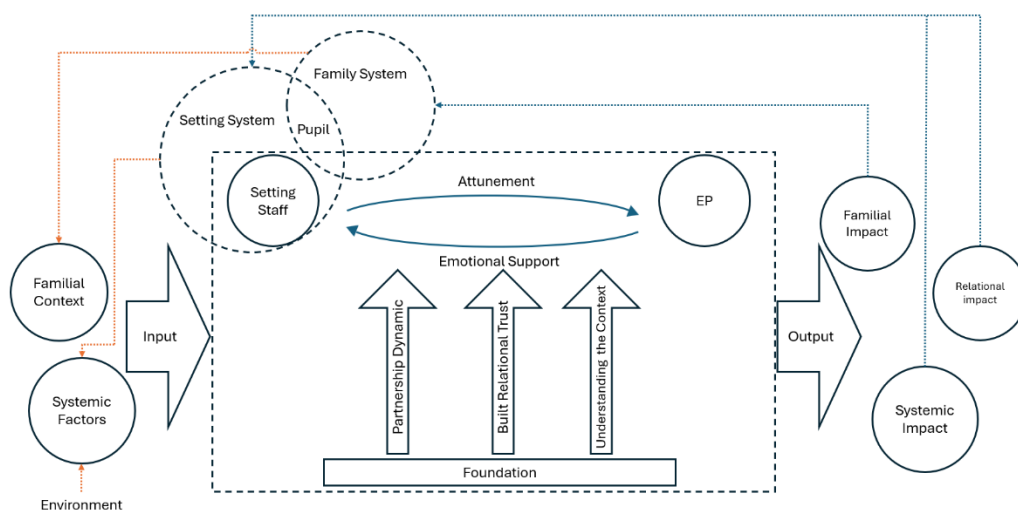
Chapter 5 – Discussion

The findings of this study indicate seven theoretical categories which contribute to building theoretical model of successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and setting staff in SLD/PMLD settings.

In this chapter, I will discuss each theoretical category and illustrate its theoretical links to the constructed conceptual framework. I will demonstrate how the findings answer both research questions whilst also comparing the findings to relevant literature before outlining the limitations of the study and finally highlighting how these findings can be used to support professional practice. As a prelude – this integrated theoretical framework has a core basis within open system theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950a, 1950b), with the addition of amalgamating both psychodynamic and organisational lenses to understand how the EP-setting staff pairs view and facilitate successful interprofessional collaborative working in SLD/PMLD settings.

Figure 4

Theoretical model for successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and setting staff in SLD/PMLD settings



Discussion of Theoretical Categories Links to GT and Research

Foundation

The first theoretical code represents the foundation of the relationship between the EP and SLD/PMLD setting staff member. This theoretical code relates to how the EP crosses the permeable boundaries of the setting system to form a subsystem with a single staff member who facilitates the contact with the EP. This relationship maintains ongoing, clear communication by, for example, ensuring the main setting contact is copied into all correspondence. Further, the use of review-based learning is found to be a vehicle which enables the pair to develop a structured framework for working together and to create flexibility within their working to navigate challenges. Flexibility is identified within this data as the process of reworking dates and times for visits, reviewing and agreeing on tasks which align to the setting's values and improvement plan, and aligning authority such as taking ownership of the tasks each are responsible for, but understanding that all these aspects of joint working are adaptable to the pressures from outside of the sub-system.

According to open systems theory (von Bertalanffy, 1950a, 1950b), systems encounter difficulties functioning when a lack of alignment regarding task, role, or boundaries occurs (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). This could explain why the interviewed pairings expressed the importance of consistent frameworks as well as opportunities for bidirectional alignment to update one another on tasks, priorities, upcoming challenges. The goal is to ultimately navigate these issues, allowing the interprofessional system to flexibly adapt to changes in the system external to them (Dowling, 1994/2018). The tendency for an EP to support psychological safety by co-creating understanding around boundary, tasks, and authority within a helping relationship has been theorised through Kennedy and Lee's (2021) Relational Model of Consultation. While this model was developed in a different context, its underpinning assumption that a shared understanding of boundary, tasks, and authority

supports predictability and psychological safety is also identifiable within the patterns observed by the setting staff in this research who reported that a structured approach allowed for clarity on how they work with the EP.

Additionally, the data within this research suggests that the creation of boundaries through a consistent framework also enables a space for creativity and “uniqueness” (1, Pos.222) within the joint approach, suggesting that the boundaries of the relationship are not so fixed that they restrict capacity for growth (Kennedy & Lee, 2021). Therefore, information and feedback continue to be exchanged within the relationship, allowing opportunities for re-examination and re-establishment of the framework again. This ability to review and adapt was found to be significant when considering successful collaboration between EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff due to the additional contextual complexities that these settings must cope and manage with which influence the EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff subsystem. These findings align with Atfield et al.’s (2023) report on EPS which found that EPs working in special schools within the UK were reported to engage more frequently in planning meetings than with mainstream settings.

Being able to work within and react to the complexities outlined above demonstrates consistency, capability, and commitment from the two members within the EP-setting staff member relationship, and that these qualities are sought by and demonstrated to one another which then in turn allows the pair’s relationship to build and develop. Therefore, this organisational flexibility and coordination acts as the foundation for the relationship being researched within this study.

Pillar 1 – Partnership Dynamic

The second theoretical code represents the first of three pillars which supports the relational aspect of the helping relationship. This code describes how the setting staff member

was found to bring the depth of knowledge regarding the pupils to the relationship, whilst the EP brings breadth of knowledge including psychological approaches, other agency involvement, and naivety and inquisitiveness which allows for a fresh perspective on the work. The final aspect to the partnership dynamic theoretical code is that interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings is an inherently iterative collaborative process, whereby the two professionals repeatedly work together to identify and align on which approach is best to use, and where different narratives can be included to support a rich picture of the child.

An important finding of this research is that the EP does not have to be an expert in supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD as the setting staff member brings that expertise to the joint working. This challenges the narrative within literature that EPs having a lack of knowledge and experience working with pupils with SLD/PMLD is a barrier to working with settings (Winter & Bunn, 2019). Although most of the EPs in my research did have extensive experience, this is not what the data suggests their unique contribution was. In addition, one EP only had three years' experience and all with one SLD/PMLD setting, which could be considered limited, illustrating that extensive knowledge of SLD/PMLD education is not a requirement to start working with these settings.

It can be argued that this research describes approaches which can be considered general practice advice for EPs, including using frameworks (Winter & Bunn, 2019), using consultation to gather the views of multiple stakeholders (Atfield et al., 2023), sharing professional and psychological knowledge (Nicholas & Feeney, 2015; Warwick, 2023), co-constructing outcomes to scaffold the work (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2019), using questioning to guide thinking (Nicholas & Feeney, 2015), and finally working within a multi-agency group around CYP (Atfield et al., 2023). Despite this there were differences identified by the EPs within this research when considering working in SLD/PMLD settings with regards to working alongside other professionals. Whereas the literature illustrated examples of the EPs

working within multi-agency teams to support transitions (Bason, 2020; Winter & Bunn, 2019), this research reports that other professionals could be closely linked to the settings (such as CAMHs), or working within the setting (such as OTs) and so the EP is able to engage in quick and ongoing collaboration with these professionals to support the pupils in the SLD/PMLD setting. This is different from mainstream settings due to the higher level of involvement from professionals within SLD/PMLD settings, which therefore increases the opportunity for contact between the EP and these other agencies, as well as increasing the necessity and expectation for collaborative working to more holistically support CYP with SLD/PMLD.

The concept of not taking up the expert role within consultation is also a commonly accepted aspect of collaborative working (Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023; Norwich et al. 2018; Nicholas & Feeney, 2015). Osborne (1994/2018) argues that the process of consultation is sympathetic to a systemic approach as the aim of consultation within systemic understandings is to consider differing perspectives with an aim to shift perceptions rather than simply the consultant offering an expert opinion which may turn out to be incorrect. Within this lens, the search for a solution is superseded by good collaborative outcomes. The data within this study suggests this is especially pertinent when EPs work with SLD/PMLD settings due to the bespoke nature of the settings and the previously discussed depth of knowledge that the setting staff hold about the pupils, both individually and as a group. For example, in interview 2 the setting staff member and the EP described discussing the application of interventions and how best to adapt them to better support pupils moving forward (2, Pos.52-53, 56). This was described as occurring within a consultation, and the interview pair described that this discussion was able to mitigate against the EP suggesting interventions which had already been tried and had not worked as hoped, improving both the collaborative nature and efficiency of this interprofessional work.

Finally, we can see that the values which underpin the dynamics of the consultative relationship illustrated within the interview data are best described by the relationship-centred work of Schein (2009). The opening power positions of the collaborative relationship between EP and setting staff member are a one-up, one-down, with the roles being helper and the one asking for help respectively. Schein (2009) argues that the overarching goal of consultation is to equalise the power dynamics of the relationship which is recommended to be achieved through the consultant avoiding the traps of their initial power position and empowering the consultee. Similarly, Schein (2009) identifies that the consultee will know which solutions would work best within the culture of their organisation, which echoes the previously discussed aspect found within this research of the SLD/PMLD staff member bringing the depth of knowledge regarding their pupils and setting culture. It can be observed that, due to the complexity and unique nature of the work within the SLD/PMLD settings, where the data suggests a “specific tailored approach” (1, Pos. 112) the EP is required to empower the setting staff member rather than becoming an outside expert.

The risks of the inverse of the EP occupying the expert role must also be considered. It can be observed within the interview data that the setting staff member offers a great deal of knowledge regarding the pupils, and it can also be understood that whilst the EP must remain curious, they should not fall into the trap of assuming that the setting staff have exactly identified the issues and solutions (Schein, 2009). This was made evident in interview 1 in which it was identified that an EP who had previously worked with the setting did not engage in the professional dialogue through questioning the staff member’s observations, and that this was described as problematic (1, Pos. 280). Aligning with this, Winter (2017) also found that a setting catering for PMLD described their relationship with an EP as poor due to the EP showing little interest in their students and instead depending on the setting staff member’s opinion.

Pillar 2 – Build Relational Trust

The third theoretical code represents the second of the three pillars which supports the relational aspects of the helping relationship. This code describes how consistency of EP within the interprofessional working team was highlighted to support successful collaboration between the professionals. Consistency here refers to stable link relationships between the EPS and SLD/PMLD setting, which was the working structure across all four interviews. This structure means that all four EPs work directly with their respective setting; three of them as one of the allocated schools within their LA EPS model, and one as a private EP linked to the multi-academy trust of the setting.

This research found that the consistency inherent within the link relationship working model was idealised as it enables the EP to develop relationships with the wider setting staff and for the EP to be considered part of the setting's broader team by both parents of pupils in the setting and the whole setting community. These findings align with a recent research report on EP services which found that EPs working in specialist settings in the UK were often reported to be linked to a particular setting (Atfield et al., 2023). Atfield et al. (2023) also found the link model was identified by both setting staff and EPs to support efficiency when working together, reportedly due to the model enabling EPs to obtain a detailed understanding of the setting's context, a finding also reported within this research, as well as the aforementioned ability to develop deeper and more trusting relationships (Atfield et al., 2023).

According to Schein (2009), trust within a relationship relates to the idea of an individual within a relationship being able to safely claim value for themselves through what they reveal about their thoughts, feelings, or intentions, and that in return the other individual will provide recognition and acceptance, and will not take advantage of what has been shared. Further, he suggests that trust is continually mutually tested within the relationship until at

least one individual feels that if they reveal any more, they will be misunderstood or not accepted (Schein, 2009). Through this lens, successful collaboration between the setting staff member and the EP can be perceived as the time spent working together providing opportunities for the pair to reveal more of themselves through this cyclic dynamic, and the information revealed being respected (Schein, 2009). This concept of a circular exchange as mutually affecting the relationship between the EP and setting staff member is sensitive to a systemic lens as it aligns with the systemic concept of a feedback loop (Dowling, 1994/2018). These reflections regarding the link model by Atfield et al. (2023) were not gathered specifically from professionals working in SLD/PMLD settings, however, the criticality of the link model to developing trust was also found in my research, suggesting that it is relevant to SLD/PMLD settings.

The quality of relationship between professionals was highlighted as key to successful interprofessional working by this research. Winter and Bunn (2019) identified factors which support positive relationships between EPs and specialist settings, including the duration of the relationship between the EP and the setting, the frequency of engagement between the EP and the setting, how the impact and value of the EP's work was understood, and a shared understanding between the two professional spheres. Time is therefore a significant aspect of the relationships between setting staff and EPs, which supports Holland and Fitzgerald's (2023) finding that when working with settings, EPs should be aware that it takes time to develop the trust which facilitates successful collaboration. My research aligns with both Winter and Bunn (2019) and Holland and Fitzgerald (2023) in identifying that trustful relationships built over time are an important aspect of an EP's role when working with setting staff but also identifies that the EP needs to develop relationships with staff beyond their primary contact at the setting.

This research found that the EP and setting staff member pairs having shared professional values also supported the development of trust within their working relationship. All the settings in this research identified themselves as being child-centred, and the complexities of their pupils' needs led to distinct whole-setting cultures structured toward how to best support them individually. These approaches were identified as being critical to the setting's identity, and it is therefore also critical for the EP to understand, support, and exhibit these values, evidenced through the appreciation shared by the setting staff when this is displayed by the EP.

Rees (2017) argues that this diversion of cultural identity is where SLD/PMLD settings and mainstream are most different to one another. Policy in the UK supports a social model of disability which focuses more on environmental barriers and reduces understanding of individual disabilities, however, the literature suggests that for pupils with SLD/PMLD, differentiation in pedagogical practice based on the non-linearity of their development is beneficial for these learners (Rees, 2017) therefore indicating that an understanding of an individual's disabilities is necessary for these learners to develop. The findings within this research evidence this further by demonstrating how the child-led learning within specialist settings and the variation in educational practice that this results in needs to be comprehensively understood by the EP to build a successful collaborative relationship.

Pillar 3 – EP Understanding the Context of the Setting

This theoretical code is the third and final pillar which supports the relational aspects of the helping relationship. This code represents the importance of the EP taking the time to obtain a contextual understanding of the setting for both the pupils and the staff and bringing that understanding to their role within the partnership. This was due to the observance that working within these settings comes with additional complexities, such as understanding

whole-school cultures, and that the need for a specific tailored approach was mandatory for supporting the setting's pupils.

The concept that learners with SLD/PMLD require specialist learning support is not new. According to Mencap (n.d.) people with SLD or PMLD will require more care and support with their mobility, personal care, and communication when compared to those with other forms of disabilities. Aligning with this is the fact that a large proportion of these pupils are reported to attend specialist settings, which often have highly differentiated resources and equipment to support their complex educational needs (Rayner et al., 2005; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Furthermore, Imray et al. (2024) describe that it is impossible for any National Curriculum to fulfil the education needs of children, young people and adults with PMLD or SLD. Instead, they argue that these pupils require a pupil-centred curriculum which is flexible enough to suit each individual learner, and one which is created with a holistic aim so that learning is not compartmentalised and is directly motivating to the individual learner (Imray et al., 2023). The findings within this research emphasises how “vastly different” (4, Pos.48) the experiences of the staff within SLD/PMLD settings are when compared to mainstream settings, and therefore why it is critical for an EP supporting SLD/PMLD settings to understand the context of the setting so that they are able to work successfully with setting staff to best support the pupils.

Morgan (1986) reports that a system's culture can be understood as a shared understanding amongst individuals within the system. These shared understandings are embedded within the system and maintained through feedback loops between individuals within the system, influencing behaviours and views (Morgan, 2006). For example, the data from this research suggests that there is a similar culture across all the settings regarding a “child led” (2, Pos.125) approach which is often described as the ethos of the setting and can therefore be considered as the characteristic spirit of its culture (Dowling, 1994/2018). This

belief in being child centred can explain some of the behaviours described by individuals within the systems, an example of which can be found in interview 3 where the setting staff member described shifting whole setting priorities around to meet the needs of their pupils (3, Pos. 112).

This adaptive approach which focuses on the needs of the pupils is identified as divergent from mainstream culture in interviews 2 and 3, and so we can therefore see that if an EP does not themselves appreciate the context and challenges of the setting they are working with, they run the risk of not truly understanding the needs of that setting and therefore failing to display the characteristics required by the setting staff to build a collaborative relationship.

Feedback Loop Arrows: Attunement and Emotional Support

This theoretical code represents the pattern of relational interaction between the EP and setting staff pairings, and the feelings underpinning these interactions. The findings suggest that the EP providing a space for emotional support, typically through offering a supervisory space both officially or unofficially, facilitates opportunities for the pairing to reflect, offer perspectives on each other's concerns, provide a space for setting staff to share the challenges of their work environment, and the EP offering reassurance through validation of the staff member's thinking. This emotional relating is evidenced through attuned interactions between the pair which were observed during the interview.

The pattern identified within this research of the EP providing emotional support when working interprofessionally is consistent with the literature (Wedlock & Turner, 2017; Rae et al., 2017; Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023). Further, there is an identified significant emotional pressure for those who work with CYP with SLD/PMLD (Black & Halsted, 2021; Nind & Grace, 2024). For example, research examining the mental health and wellbeing of

teaching staff working in SLD/PMLD settings found abnormal and borderline abnormal anxiety scores across the sample, emphasising the need for emotional support for staff in these settings due to the inherent emotional challenges associated with their work (Black & Halsted, 2021). These emotional pressures were also evident in this research's findings through the setting staff's descriptions of their work with emotive language. Therefore, it is concordant with literature that within this research there was evidence of the EPs providing emotional support to the setting staff through facilitation of a reflective space and using psychological process to support them (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010; DfE, 2011; Winter & Bunn, 2019). This research suggests that relational support was offered by the EP both at an official level through supervisory spaces such as solution circles or staff drop-ins, and unofficially through conversation.

The EP having a role in supporting reflective practice with staff in SLD/PMLD settings was also identified in the literature (Crombie et al., 2014; Hampton et al., 2019; Winter & Bunn, 2019). However, EPs facilitating official supervision was only identified within two of the papers (Hampton et al., 2019; Winter & Bunn, 2019). Interestingly both papers reported a low rate of supervision facilitation in these settings. However, the findings within this research suggest that EP-led supervisory spaces are in fact being utilised by setting staff members, however they are seldom identified as supervision. The reasons why these spaces are not officially denoted as supervision are unidentified in this research. I feel that a contributing factor can be found in interview 4 where EP 4 highlights that staff accessing her sessions primarily come to discuss pupils, before the conversation turns to self-in-role discussion or emotional support.

Psychoanalytical theory suggests that emotional support can be provided through attuned interactions. Winnicott (1967, 1971) described mirroring within the parent-child relationship as the parent's face providing the infant with a picture of their own feelings by

reflecting the baby's facial expression and therefore transferring their emotion into a visible form for the infant. Through the parent identifying with the baby in this way, it is felt that they are providing the infant with the implicit message that they are also feeling as the baby is feeling (Wright, 2009) and thereby providing emotional support. Within the interviews there was evidence of mirrored interactions between the EP and setting staff member such as mutual nodding or smiling, indicating that the pair were reassuring one another that they were in alignment.

The interviews also contain data which indicates evidence of attunement within the relationship. According to Stern (1985), attunement can be understood as a parent's responses to their infant which are intended to support the child to develop their understanding of their emotions and foster a sense of connection and understanding between them (Wright, 2009). Attunement is a lens which allows further understanding of the relational dynamics between the EP and the setting staff member, whereby the EP and setting staff member demonstrate an understanding and consideration of one another's viewpoints. All the interviewees displayed evidence of awareness of one another at both a verbal and implicit level, for example, through selective mimicry of conversational movement as outlined above, utilising the same phrases of words, and inviting each other to answer.

Both mirroring and attunement are suggested to provide the infant with a continuing sense of connection to their parent even when there is separation within the relationship, whilst also strengthening the child's developing sense of self (Wright, 2009). The data from this research suggests that within the interviews, each of the pairing took up the role of the parent to each other at times which demonstrates a bidirectional pattern of relating and supporting within their relationship.

It should be noted that it was discussed by the pairs within the interviews that the EP taking up a role of reassuring and validating feelings and thinking within the collaborative relationship was appreciated by the setting staff member. This represents a reported shift in the dynamic from the bidirectional relating and attunement displayed in the interviews. It can be hypothesised that the EP takes up a more reassuring role for the setting staff member when in the setting system. This may be because the EP-setting staff subsystem is constructed to perform a task (Brunning & Long, 2021), and when in the setting their task is based around that system. The data suggests that communicating with a person external to their setting system they perceive themselves as existing within enables the setting staff member to honestly discuss the impacts of the work. This dynamic is then altered during the interview itself, with the setting staff member taking up a more reassuring role relative to that which is described in the working relationship as the pair's subsystem is now existing within the EP's perceived system suggesting that the EP themselves is feeling that their work is under assessment by the interviewer. Further, the purpose of the interview is to investigate how the pair jointly describe their work together, therefore the shift from the reported one-way (EP to staff member) reassurance to bidirectional reassurance evident in the interviews themselves illustrates that the pair do not occupy a helper-helped relational dynamic in the interviews. This observation suggests that; under working conditions which can be considered typical, the EP will be offering more attunement, reassurance, and validation to the setting staff member than the setting staff member will be offering back to the EP.

Building upon the patterns of relating identified above, Bion's (1962) theory of containment illustrates that a parent provides containment when they are empathically attuned to their child's need, taking in the parts that the child split from themselves during times of overwhelming emotion and responding in a way which releases back these uncomfortable emotions so the child can make sense of them - supporting and allowing the

child to soothe (Lanman, 1998; Kenneally, 2021). In this description, Bion (1962) refers to the parent as taking up the role of the container and the child's emotions being contained (Kenneally, 2021). In the collaborative relationship being investigated within this research, the setting staff member has the role of container for their pupils, and the EP is acting as the container for the setting staff member (Kenneally, 2021). An example of containment can be found within Interview 2 where STAFF MEMBER 2 sought support from the EP with feelings of being burnt out. This can be identified as potentially a sign of disowning any feeling of competency and projecting that into others within that moment. The EP was able to contain and repackage the emotions of the setting staff member, leaving her feeling more reassured regarding her practice. This supports the finding that the EP-setting staff member dynamic can take the form of container-contained; where the EP acts as a container who is able to receive, tolerate, and consider a difficult situation and return it in way in which the setting staff member can process it more easily (Bartle, 2021). However, usage in the interviews of terms such as "seeing a different point of view" (4, Pos.37) and "moderation of what we are seeing" (1, Pos.91) suggest that the EP may not always hold back their own observations or thinking, which is not helping the setting staff member to process and understand their emotion into a more digestible form themselves. It should be noted that throughout the interviews the EPs spoke to using questioning as their main tool to understand and explore, and setting staff spoke to EPs facilitating reflection suggesting that even in situations where the EP gave their own thoughts, it was presented as a space for emotional reassurance through containment rather than just an expert sharing their views.

Relational Output

This theoretical code describes the outcomes of the relationship between the EP and the setting staff member and how they impact upon the wider setting system. Specifically,

this theoretical code addresses those outputs which have positive impacts on the setting's systems and practices, in addition to positive impacts on the pupils and their families.

The findings within this research align with the recent reflections of the EP role from Atfield et al. (2023). They reported that EPs within their sample commonly conveyed a preference for working at an organisational level rather than an individual level (Atfield et al., 2023). This is echoed by the findings within this research which reported that all four of the EPs interviewed conveyed that they supported CYP through supporting the adults around the pupil, which is also in alignment with the literature reviewed earlier in this paper regarding the EP's role in supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD (Geiger et al., 2015; Hampton et al., 2019; Rees, 2017; Winter & Bunn, 2019; Thompson & Atkinson, 2022). In three of the interviews, it was identified that supporting the adults around the child took the form of building capacity through development of the setting staff's knowledge and understanding through the use of models such as conventional training, EP led drop-in sessions, and prompting reflection on systemic approaches.

Another key indicator of successful interprofessional working observed within this research was the impact on the child and their family context. This finding is consistent with the literature's view that an aspect of the EP's role when working with pupils with SLD/PMLD is to support the families' understanding of their child's needs and how to best support them throughout their life (Loveday, 2014; Warner, 2015; Winter & Bunn, 2019). This research reports that one of the avenues the EP can achieve this is through facilitating conversation between home and setting and bringing the family voice into conversations with educational professionals. It is acknowledged that part of an EP's role is to take a relational approach to working with both schools and families to foster positive change due to EP's ability to mediate between the two contexts from independent and neutral position (Atkinson et al., 2015). According to Dowling (1994/2018), the role that the EP holds within

educational systems is particularly important as they can bridge between a CYP's family and education systems. These are two of the most influential systems around a CYP, therefore to best support CYP there needs to be open communication and relationship between them.

According to Loveday (2014), there is even greater significance of bringing together the context of home and school when considering pupils with PMLD due to additional challenges regarding parental engagement with the school setting. The reasons for this are linked to lack of direct contact between families and the setting, as typically the pupils travel to and from school via transport provided by the LA, and some parents of children who have a life limiting condition are not perceived to prioritise school, further lowering levels of engagement. Both Bason (2020) and Farmer and Stringer (2023) found that during EP facilitated discussions between home and school, EPs were able to engage the adults within both family and educational contexts to discuss interpretations of the pupil's reactions, emotions, and preferences to bring the pupil's views into the decision-making process. This is highlighted to be critical for pupils with PMLD as they are typically not using a formal communication system and therefore rely on the adults who know them best to interpret their meaning and speak on their behalf. Similarly, pupils with SLD are also identified as having communication difficulties (Imray and Colley, 2017), so it can be observed that there would also be some barriers to capturing their views directly, as reported by Hill et al. (2016). It can be argued that, in the previously discussed considerations of communication challenges experienced by learners with PMLD and SLD, there is even more of a significance of the need for effective communication and understanding between the home and school settings.

Relational Input

This theoretical code describes the inputs which provide the EP-setting staff member system with information from the environment around it. The environment around the relationship is made up of various other systems which seek to exert influence on the EP-

setting staff member sub-system due to their tasks, such as the LA or EPS, or the family context of the CYP. The data also highlighted the relationship was further impacted by broader societal challenges regarding time and money which change the nature of the EP-setting staff member pair working relationship (Brunning & Long, 2021).

Within the literature, time scarcity was highlighted as a barrier to working with SLD/PMLD settings (Hill et al., 2016; Winter & Bunn, 2019) and for successful collaborative working (Birch et al., 2023). This was also seen within this research, identified through how much EP time is made available to the setting, a scarcity of which then impacts both continuity of personnel in the interprofessional work as well as provision of the opportunity for the pair to review and reflect upon work.

The EPS model was found to both enable and constrain the success of joint working. Similarly to the LA influence, this can be considered in terms of how much time the setting staff members were afforded to access joint working and the continuity of personnel in the relationship. For example, for three of the pairs, the LA EPS model meant that the EP was linked to the setting, and they identified this as facilitator to their successful joint working. However, the potential pitfalls of this way of working were highlighted by the pairing in interview 1 who reported that as the model was changing, they were no longer going to be linked, ultimately disrupting their joint working.

Although only named within one interview within this research, a disparity was identified in the level of engagement with the EP between staff for PMLD learners when compared to staff for SLD learners. This is an interesting finding, especially when considered alongside the fact that feedback to this research's initial recruitment drive suggested that EPs who were working with PMLD settings were not directly supporting pupils with PMLD but instead were supporting the settings' pupils with other descriptions of disabilities. Further

supporting this, of the three setting staff members within this research who directly support PMLD pupils, one described that the work with the EP as part of the statutory assessment process, one was a teacher of a class of pupils with SLD at the time of working with the EP, and finally the last staff member had worked with the EP in a more systemic way and was also the participant who highlighted the aforementioned engagement disparity. This interviewee was able to add more detail to the perceived barrier by describing that there was also difficulty to increase staff engagement in the supervisory drop in spaces, despite the belief that the wider staff team would benefit from participation, suggesting that there could be a further barrier regarding the PMLD staff not prioritising themselves, which is in alignment with literature reporting that teachers experience guilt when prioritising themselves (Farouk, 2012; NASBTT, 2024).

A further potential reason for the lower levels of engagement in EP services from PMLD supporting staff can be seen when considering the findings of Winter's (2017) study which found that setting staff reported that they observe EPs to have a lack of knowledge and skills to help PMLD learners. The finding within this research, although only identified once within the data set, appears to align with the findings within Winter's (2017) thesis.

Finally, systems theory illustrates that a child cannot be understood without considering their context. By this, I refer to the endlessly evolving and changing relationships and connections surrounding the child, both influencing the child and being influenced by the child (Brunning & Long, 2021). The data within this theoretical code highlighted the importance of bringing together two influential systems around a child (their family and school) to best support the child, and the role the EP plays in facilitating communication and relationship between these two systems (Dowling, 1994/2018).

Aligning with the Atfield et al.'s (2023) report, some interviewees in this research believed that EPs produced higher quality work because they had a deeper understanding of the context of the school or family. This suggests that an increased understanding of these two contextual aspects is helpful for the quality of the EP-setting staff member collaborative working as it supports a more shared understanding between the adults around the CYP. An increased shared understanding and improved communication between these three parties is important for all CYP and all schools seen by an EP, however it should be considered especially useful in SLD/PMLD settings given the potential decreased direct communication between the educational setting and home due to transport needs (Loveday, 2014), and the pupils themselves having communication difficulties (Farmer & Stringer, 2023). In support of this, in the one interview in which the EP did not currently directly engage with families of the setting, the setting staff member opined that direct engagement between the EP and families of pupils would be helpful as she felt these parents need further support. This prior contact can be achieved through differing contexts such as meeting families through EP-led sessions, or through work with other educational settings.

Formulating a Response to the Research Questions

1. How do EPs and setting staff describe successful interprofessional collaboration in SLD/PMLD settings?

Open systems theory is the main psychological understanding used to understand the successful interprofessional relationship described within this research. However, open systems theory alone is unable to support the full understanding of the emotional processes and relational stances when considering how EPs and SLD/PMLD staff members describe successful collaboration. A further understanding which can be applied to support this research's model is a psychodynamic approach. Osbourne (1994/2018) argues that the psychodynamic approach is compatible with a systemic view because whilst psychodynamic

theory allows the understanding of a relationship, inclusion of open systems theory allows real world factors outside of the relationship to be considered within that understanding (Osbourne, 1994/2018).

From a psychodynamic perspective, successful collaboration between EPs and SLD/PMLD staff members involves balancing the unconscious power dynamic within the relationship so that neither individual is considered the expert but both bring their expertise to the work; it is building a trusting relationship between the individuals over time through each revealing parts of themselves, having that part accepted by the other, and progressively showing more beyond; and in terms of acts of each person in the relationship – it is attuned interactions, mirroring, and containment which all are structured to support emotional processing within a stressful environment such as a specialist setting.

Open systems theory is also applied to capture the fundamental definitions of the EP-staff member sub-system such as boundaries of role, task, and authority. Beyond the factors contained within the EP-staff member sub-system itself are factors external to them, such as the organisational structures of the school, LA, and EPS; the family contexts around the CYP the pairing support together; and the inputs to and outputs from the pair's collaborative relationship. All these external factors are critical to the success of the EP-staff member sub-system as they provide energy and information into the sub-system which is required for the relationship to be successful, as well as being in receipt of the outputs from their sub-system which therefore gives their interprofessional work purpose. See Appendix W for an overview of the codes in relation to the first research question.

2. What are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

The findings of this research suggest two main facilitators which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings which are consistency within the relationship, an understanding of the context and its values, and the EP divesting themselves of the expert role in favour of iterative collaborative working.

The relationship dynamic of the EP having a single member of staff who can be considered the main point of contact and acts as the conduit into the setting system was identified as a strong facilitator for successful EP practice in all four interviews. This link enables the EP to cross the permeable boundary of the setting's system and work within a subsystem with various setting staff members, and consistency of personnel in this link relationship allows for the development of a consistent framework for working, which further supports the wider setting system to access the EP. A consistent link relationship also enables the EP to build trust within the relationship through the impact of their work, and through the EP demonstrating understanding and respect of the setting's culture, evidencing that they share its' values.

The EP sharing the setting's values was also highlighted as important within all four interviews. It should be noted that a significant finding within this research was how differently to mainstream settings SLD/PMLD settings operate, that this is typically a child-centred approach, and that the level and complexity of needs of their pupils places different demands upon them. For there to be successful joint working, the EP must understand the setting's values and pressures, and reflect their understanding back to the setting in the form of additional flexibility or bespoke approaches to support their pupils.

Finally, it should be recognised by EPs looking to work with these settings that their contribution will be one of a group of experts around the pupil, all working together to give the best support to that pupil. The EP does not need in-depth or specialist knowledge

regarding pupils with SLD/PMLD because the setting staff bring this expertise to the working dynamic, however the EP can have confidence in what they can offer which is detailed psychological knowledge regarding development, consultation and reflective practice skills, and empowering the other experts in the team.

Consideration of Findings in the Context of a GT Study

It should be noted that I study Educational Psychology at the Tavistock Education and Training, therefore my psychological understandings naturally lean toward the systemic and psychodynamic approaches. These perspectives underpin many of the modules I access, so I will have a natural bias to working with these theories. However, Glaser and Strauss (1967) warn of dangers when conducting a GT study in topics familiar to them, and researchers forcing their data to match pre-existing theoretical frameworks. To counter this, it was essential that I demonstrated theoretical agnosticism (Henwood & Pidgeon, 2003), a critical stance toward pre-existing theories and findings; theoretical pluralism, whereby I considered and compared different pre-existing theories within this critical lens; and theoretical playfulness, where I challenged myself to consider new possibilities of theorising (Thornberg, 2012). Examples of some of these considerations can be seen Appendix X.

Limitations

Methodological Limitations

Due to both recruitment and scheduling difficulties, I was unable to organise interviews between participant pairs far enough apart to fully engage in asking increasingly tailored questions in the later interviews to investigate fresh theoretical interpretations and therefore fully engage in abductive reasoning. Abductive reasoning is a key feature of a GT study as it enables the researcher to test hypothesis to a point at which they achieve a plausible theoretical understanding of an unexpected finding (Charmaz, 2025). However, I

was able to ask tailored questions in interviews three and four, based on my initial reads through. Further, I was able to engage in abductive reasoning through re-examining all four interviews multiple times, and through inviting the participants to view and comment on the most prominent focused codes through member-checking.

An additional limitation relates to the recruitment process and the professional roles held by each of the participants within the paired interviews. The setting staff members for three of the four participants pairs were recruited through a snowball sampling approach via the participating EP. The verbal feedback I gathered from these EPs was that they were hoping to recruit the member of setting staff who was their main contact or work commissioner, often a senior member of staff, as this would be the most consistent member of staff that they interact with. However, this was not always possible due to availability of these senior setting staff members. Consequently, the snowballing recruitment method may have impacted which professional roles and the experience they held within the setting were represented within the collaborative relationships being discussed. Further, it can be observed that those setting staff members who had experienced good collaborative working with the EP could also be more willing to share their experiences of joint working with the EP, therefore potentially inflicting a bias to the sample although this is also welcomed as the purpose of the study is to explore successful collaboration. This is evidenced in interview 4, in which the setting staff member shared that she chose to take part as she felt the EP had positively impacted the Trust in addition to having an example of working directly with the EP which she considered successful collaboration. This is also observed in interview 2's pairing within which the recruitment of the EP was achieved through snowballing from the setting. A class teacher participated in the interview who felt she had an example of good collaborative work with an EP to share.

Similarly, as the setting staff participants represented different roles with different levels of responsibility within their systems, they were able to offer a views from a variety of interview pairing power dynamics. For example, in interview 2 the pair focus on an example of case work for an individual pupil, whereas in interview 3 the pair spoke to influencing a new process which has supported systemic change. Beyond being different lived experiences, this differentiation in discussion topic could also be influenced by differences in professional status resulting in a power imbalance within the interview pairing itself, further influencing what participants felt comfortable to discuss. For example, a member of a senior leadership team could be more comfortable discussing the systemic impact of the EP-staff collaborative relationship compared to a class teacher due to their role within the setting system. This within pairing power imbalance also has the potential to be present within the interview triad of me as the interviewer, the setting staff member, and the EP, as in this example the class teacher would be speaking to two EPs. An example of instances where this potential imbalance could present as an issue could be when language is used which could be commonly understood by the EPs, but may not as easily understood by the setting staff member such as discussion regarding details of the traded offer of the EPS. It is possible that a member of the leadership team would have more knowledge regarding the role of the EP and the setting's relationship with the EPS. and would therefore be able to more fully understand the terminology used within this discussion. It should be noted that I purposefully attempted to counteract this from occurring during the interviews by using language and terminology which I intended to be understood easily by both participants, regardless of familiarity with the discussion topic.

Though, as outlined above, the diversity of setting staff member roles can be observed as a limitation (imbalance of power dynamics within the interview triad, imbalance of responsibility between the setting staff member relative to other members of staff within their

setting, and imbalances in experiences feeding into topics discussed within the interviews) it can also be seen that the diversity of roles held by the setting professionals is a strength of the study. I was able to identify recurring patterns within the data across all interviews with regards to how successful interprofessional working was described and the mechanisms which supported it, suggesting that this theoretical model is applicable to the variety of setting member seniority which the EP could find themselves working with.

Data Collection

A risk of interviewing participants together in pairings can be the possibility of participants censoring their responses in the other's presence as each will exert influence on how they present themselves and may want to present themselves in a certain light to the both the interviewer and their partner (Lowton, 2018). A further risk is that one interviewee dominates the interview due to role, personality, or other differences (Arksey, 1996; Szulc & King, 2022), for example, through speaking more or dismissing the other interviewee (Kvalsvik & Øgaard, 2021). It is important to note that accounts of the pairs interviewed individually will likely differ to the accounts they construct together (Lowton, 2018; Taylor & de Vocht, 2011), however, this appears to be the first dyadic approach to gathering the views of both EPs and SLD/PMLD setting staff, and it has allowed me to offer understanding on how the two professionals describe successful collaboration from two simultaneous perspectives to create one joint description. This approach helped me to better understand where there were similarities between each pairing's ideas and how they constructed meaning when their ideas diverged, a process that would have been lost if interviewed individually.

Further, in terms of not dominating the space, it was evident within all four interviews that the participants made a conscious effort to include one another in the conversation and engage in turn-taking when answering. In interview four, it was evident that both the EP and setting staff member had more experience to draw upon from working with other setting staff

and another EP respectively. Despite being curious regarding the extent of their other relationships, I was cautious to remain true to this research's questions through focusing on the pairing's joint work and how they describe successful collaboration based on it and so focused the interview upon the pair's relationship.

A further limitation of this study is the fact that the setting staff member's role was less specific than the EP role. Initially, the setting staff member role was defined as the setting member who commissioned the work with the EP. However, I decided to use an intentionally open term to open the research up to any other position which supports learners with SLD/PMLD. This is because I wanted to be open to differences in organisational structures and did not want to create additional barriers to recruitment. It is possible that there could be differences to the findings if I focused on one specific role with SLD/PMLD settings. That said, after the initial introduction through the main commissioner the participants who did not hold this main contact role still described the dynamic, which was represented in the model, including agreeing a time. This suggests that the variety within the setting staff interviewed for this research has enabled a rich view of EP work in SLD/PMLD settings.

Another limitation is related to my choice to include non—verbal data. Firstly, it is important to note that this involved me noticing and interpreting interactions. However, this aligns with my CGT methodology which is interested in the construction of meaning making between people, and non-verbal gestures contribute to this construction. In addition, CGT acknowledges the role of the researcher in interpreting the data and thus also contributing to the construction of meaning making. I had ethical approval to gather this form of data and consent from all participants to film the interview for these purposes. However, due to moving online for interviews three and four, I noticed a reduction in non-verbal communication captured alongside verbal communication. In addition, I made a poorly informed choice to only audio record the final two interviews (despite having consent to

video record) and manually record interactions which also impacted this data. Interestingly though, as identified in the Findings chapter, there was still clear evidence of non-verbal communication in these interviews such as mirrored and attuned interactions.

Quality and Trustworthiness

As previously discussed, Yardley's (2000, 2008) approach to evaluating the quality of the research was felt to be most aligned with this study. Two of Yardley's (2000, 2008) key areas are critiqued in relation to this study's quality and trustworthiness. These areas are impact and importance, and commitment and rigor.

A method used to seek clarity on findings and therefore increase the paper's trustworthiness was through member checking with the participants, where all of the participants were invited to review and comment on the most prominent focused codes to understand if the codes resonated with them. Only three of the eight participants responded, meaning it was difficult to confirm whether all participants felt the codes reflected their realities (Charmaz, 2025). However, as the codes represent the construction of data rather than a direct reflection of their views, member checking could be arguably less critical in a CGT study (Charmaz, 2025) when compared to other qualitative methodologies.

I have strived to ensure commitment and rigour through evidencing knowledge of my chosen method (Yardley, 2017). The critical assessment for GT studies as illustrated by Charmaz (2025) includes credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness. Usefulness according to Charmaz (2025) refers to the practical application of the findings of the research. Similarly, this criterion closely aligns with Yardley's (2000) criteria of impact and importance, which states that any piece of research must be judged by its impact and utility.

The usefulness, impact, and importance of this research can be difficult to assess at this moment in time. However, I plan to disseminate the findings of this research so that it

can be both be useful and impactful. The findings within this study challenge the narrative from previous literature that EPs need specialist knowledge to work with SLD/PMLD settings. This alone demonstrates the research's importance as it evokes a new understanding of EP practice. Further, as this topic is an under researched area, the impact of my research could be through influencing others to continue researching within this field.

Implications for the Researcher & Professional Practice

Researcher

Through completing this research and consideration of its findings, I have become increasingly secure in the knowledge that the training I have received will equip me with the skills required to work in interprofessional collaboration with staff within SLD/PMLD settings. I feel empowered to reach out to these settings and to advocate for EP support, to build collaborative relationships, and ultimately to support pupils with SLD/PMLD. This represents a development of my beliefs which I held at the start of this research, which is that additional skills and different approaches to practice would be needed when supporting SLD/PMLD settings. A more detailed account of the impact upon myself of this research can be found in Appendix Y and Z, including descriptions of ethical dilemmas which I navigated which also supported my development as a practitioner-researcher.

Initial EP Training

This research's core implication for EP practice is the identification that EPs already have the knowledge and skills to collaborate with SLD/PMLD setting staff, and that specialist positions within EPSs for working with SLD/PMLD settings are not necessary. What is needed to support EPs working with these settings is for them to be given the time to build trusting relationships with the staff, to understand the setting's context, and to know their

contribution is not about depth of knowledge but the ability to work in partnership, facilitate thinking, and to provide emotional support.

However, given that there is a relatively low amount of research which explores EPs supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD, and both Winter and Bunn (2019) and myself have identified a reported lack of confidence from EPs with supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD, it can be understood why there exists a narrative that EPs require specialist training for supporting CYP in these settings. To counter this, I suggest that TEPs would benefit from explicit learning regarding how their existent skills and knowledge can be used to support pupils in SLD/PMLD settings.

EP Practice

It is widely accepted within EP practice that during consultation the EP should renounce the expert role and instead work collaboratively, through developing a shared understanding of the problem and engaging in joint exploration with relevant stakeholders (Wagner, 2000; Royle & Atkinson, 2025). However, in a 2025 scoping review of UK EPS' consultation policies, Royle and Atkinson (2025) identified inconsistencies between various LAs, and that some policy documents indicated that follow up work should be conducted by the EP. This suggests that EPs in these LAs will provide actions and solutions, therefore taking up the organisational and expert role within the process (Royle & Atkinson, 2025). This is itself consistent with research which reports that service users desired the EP to take up this role in collaborative work (Kennedy et al., 2008; Larney, 2003; Wagner, 2000; Royle & Atkinson, 2025). O' Farrell and Kinsella (2018) found this to be especially true for the teachers in their study who also viewed consultation as a process where they would receive advice from the EP, and this should be especially pertinent in light of the reports that teachers feel they are not adequately prepared to support pupils with SEN (Forlin, 2010; Kinsella et al., 2014; Ware et al., 2011; O' Farrell & Kinsella, 2018).

These aspects together may explain why there is evidence of EPs finding themselves taking more directive roles within consultations despite wanting to be collaborative themselves (Jones & Atkinson, 2021; Newman et al., 2014; Royle & Atkinson, 2025). The findings within this research represent a diversion from that external signal to be directive, as it is not possible for the EP to have the same depth of knowledge of the pupil as the setting staff do and the setting staff are aware of this. This may also be true in mainstream settings, however this paper also found that due to the complexity of the pupil's needs, the support for children with SLD/PMLD leads to more tailored and specific provisions for the individual pupil.

To summarise, there are indications of EPs being positioned into the expert role within collaborative relationships by those they work with. This is not seen to occur when EPs work with SLD/PMLD settings due to the increased depth of knowledge which the setting staff have regarding the pupils they work with. The EP cannot be considered the expert when working with these settings and therefore it is imperative that they not take up the expert role in their practice with SLD/PMLD settings.

EP Service Level

The concept of being flexible and adaptive is recognised as a key successful aspect of the EPs' contribution to schools (Atfield et al., 2023). Specifically, Atfield et al. (2023) found that EPs and staff in educational settings described that it is critical that EPs had the autonomy to work creatively and flexibly to deliver targeted support, a finding which is echoed by this research. Although in theory flexibility is acknowledged as important for EP practice with schools, this research found that the demonstration of flexibility over time is critical from both the EP and the SLD/PMLD staff member in order to build a successful collaborative relationship. However, in practice, time is a limited resource for both the EP (Atfield et al. 2023) and SLD/PMLD settings. Therefore, when it comes to working with

these settings there would be a need for the EP to deliver them committed time that goes beyond standard practice, and that EPs working with SLD/PMLD settings have to be willing to mirror the adaptability and flexibility which the settings demonstrate to their pupils. This means that the offer from EPSs towards SLD/PMLD settings must allow for EPs working with these settings to hold some flexibility within their work.

With regards to time spent developing collaborative relationships – similarly to Winter and Bunn (2019), this paper highlights the significance of the context for the staff in SLD/PMLD settings is so different from mainstream. It is critical that the EP takes the time to understand the unique demands of these settings at both a staff and pupil level, through which the EP can learn the setting's culture and can in turn demonstrate shared values, which supports the development of trust. Similarly, it is acknowledged that consistency of personnel within the relationship between EPS and the setting is critical to the building of a trusting relationship over time, which is why consistent link working models should be considered for these settings.

Impact and Dissemination

According to UK Research and Innovation (2025), research impact refers to the influence, change or advantage imparted by the research to the real world beyond its impact on academia. Addressing this generally, I hope that the construction of the theoretical model found within my research will support the development of future EP practice with CYP with SLD/PMLD. Supporting this, I have been asked whether my findings can be used to support the TEP training regarding supporting pupils with SLD/PMLD at the Tavistock Education and Training. It is my hope that my research has the potential to be both academically and educationally impactful, in that it helps advance the academic ideas of EP practice and also can be utilised practically by future TEPs (University College Dublin, 2025).

Further, to support the dissemination of the findings, I plan to create two 7-minute briefings, one tailored for each professional. A 7-minute briefing is a technique used to share learning which is currently employed by several LAs within the UK (Lambeth Safeguarding Children Partnership, n.d; Lancashire Safeguarding partnership, n.d.). I have chosen to disseminate my research in this format due to the well understood busyness of both professional groups, and I personally am mindful of overwhelming professionals. Although they will only contain an overview of the findings, the briefings will signpost towards the full thesis available via the Essex Depository should anyone wish to know more information. I hope that the briefings will act as a catalyst to foster discussion and reflection on practice and systems within both professions.

Finally, the PEP of my EPS shared that there is an opportunity for me to share my research with the wider EP team. I believe this will have real world impact as the service operates a core offer model which has recently been made accessible for all specialist settings, therefore there are multiple EPs within the service who could be working interprofessionally with staff in SLD/PMLD settings. Some of these EPs will be working with these settings for the first time. I hope that my research can support their practice during this transition.

Future Research

One interview pairing within this research highlighted that there was less engagement with the EP wellbeing drop-in sessions from PMLD-focused staff when compared to SLD-focused staff. Therefore, I suggest that further research can be conducted to consider the additional barriers which could be faced by EPs when looking to provide emotional and/or professional support to PMLD-focused staff, and what can be done to overcome these barriers. Within the same vein, a further area for future research is whether the use of the SLD/PMLD labels within specialist settings creates stigmatisation (Lauchlan et al., 2017) and

therefore presents a social disadvantage for pupils with PMLD to accessing EP support, both in terms of the EP working directly with these pupils and for setting staff supporting these students in seeking EP support.

Regarding the diversity of setting staff member roles within this paper, I find it interesting that a relatively less senior member of staff, such as a class teacher, was able to be interviewed alongside the EP, rather than the main commissioner within the setting who is often a member of the senior leadership, and wonder if this could be interpreted as an indicator of the level of trust that the setting has in the EP. I also feel the inverse is true and that the interviews in which the main commissioner is participating indicates an increased level of integration between the EP and the setting, and therefore an increased level of trust. This is supported by the examples of successful collaborative work given within the interviews in which the main commissioner was participating. In these two interviews (interviews 1 and 3) the discussions described more systemic examples, suggesting that the EP was embedded into the setting. It is not possible for me to confirm this pattern due the limited sample size and because it was not explicitly discussed within the interviews, however it remains an open question which future research could illuminate.

Conclusion

The research proposes a conceptual theoretical model with a core theoretical basis within open system theory, with the addition of integrating psychodynamic thinking to how the EP-setting staff pairs view successful joint working in SLD/PMLD settings, and the facilitators for this. Due to the CGT methodology, this research was never designed to represent a universal understanding, but instead to be considered as a starting point where readers can consider contextual factors when attempting to understand the relevance of the research to themselves.

While the research provides insights into an under researched area of EP practise, it is key to acknowledge limitations have been identified around the ability to engage in abductive reasoning through new interviews and through data collection, both in terms of conducting dyadic interviews and gathering non-verbal data. Despite these drawbacks, the research provides a foundation for challenging a narrative around the requirement for specialist skills and training for EPs to engage in successful interprofessional collaboration with staff in SLD/PMLD settings. Instead, this research advocates for a shift in narrative through initial training and also a shift in approach so that time and consistency is prioritised within EP practice with these settings.

References

ai acknowledgement: I acknowledge the use of Claude (Anthropic, <https://claude.ai>) in this thesis, specifically and limited to proofreading a portion of the references listed below ensure adherence to APA 7 format.

Example prompt: Is this reference correct for APA 7 format? [reference to be checked]

However, references were also manually checked by myself and manually edited where necessary.

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**Appendix A:
Definition Comparison**

Table A1: Comparison of Key Definitions of SLD and PMLD

Area of need	SLD (Imray & Colley, 2017, p. 38) According to Imray and Colley (2017), SLD refers to a spectrum which includes learners who are consistently working at or below the starting stages of England's National Curriculum. This means that all those who can be described with SLD will, to differing degrees, have:	PMLD (Colley, 2020a, p.40) Those who are denoted as having PMLD are described to display the following characteristics to varying degrees, though not necessarily presenting all characteristics at one time:	Comparisons between SLD/PMLD
Communication	Communication difficulties	They will probably be pre or non-verbal, or in other words, may not communicate in what we may call "typical" ways. More recently the term "post verbal" is sometimes heard as this emphasises the fact that non-typical but equally valid ways of communicating may have been developed by the person such as gesture, body language, eye pointing, behaviour, limited use of symbols, or very simple language. Their direct communication may largely be for needs and wants only.	The difference between pupils with SLD and PMLD in relation to communication skills can be understood in that pupils with SLD can experience a broader range of communication difficulties. This means "some pupils may use sign and symbols, but most will be able to hold simple conversations" (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020b, p. 722). Whereas pupils with PMLD will "probably be pre or non-verbal". However, there is not necessarily a clear distinction between the two groups. As Imray et al. (2023) illustrate, within the SLD spectrum there are learners who "have no developed formal communication system, will generally be non-verbal and may be regarded as being non-linguistic communicators. That is, they will not use language as their main means of communication, even though some may have a number of words, signs and/or perhaps understand and be able to use a limited number of concrete and iconic

			symbols but will communicate primarily through expressions of behaviour” (p.9). Therefore, both groups are recognised needing some level of support with communication skills (Imray & Colley, 2017; Colley, 2020b; Imray et al., 2023, MENCAP n.d.)
Cognition and Learning	Difficulties in concentration and attention Difficulties with understanding abstract concepts Difficulties with both short term and long-term memory Difficulties with sequential memory Difficulties with working memory Inefficient and slow information processing speed Limited general knowledge Poorly developed strategies for thinking and learning Difficulties with generalisation and problem solving	They may have a limited understanding of cause and effect and/or object permanence. They may have some difficulty following instructions and may have behaviours which challenge the people around them or can be said to be socially unacceptable in some contexts.	Both pupils with SLD and PMLD are described as having significant cognitive difficulties (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020b, p. 722). However, some pupils with SLD may learn “within the upper P scale³ range (P4–P8) for much of their school careers (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020b, p. 722). In contrast, pupils with PMLD are likely to remain in the earlier P-scale range (P1–P4) throughout their school careers (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020b, p. 722). This difference can be seen in the differing ranges of cognitive skills described within Imray and Colley’s (2017) definition for SLD and Colley’s 2020 definition for PMLD. This further suggests that both groups of learners require support in all areas of their learning (DfE 2012 Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020b, p. 722).

Sensory and Physical		Some – though by no means all – may have attendant physical impairments and possibly co-occurring mental health issues. Some will have complex medical conditions and may be wheelchair users. They will require a high level of adult support throughout their lives and are unlikely to achieve “independence” in its traditional sense of autonomous living and employment.	In addition to having “very severe learning difficulties”, pupils with PMLD are also identified as having “other significant difficulties such as physical disabilities, sensory impairments or severe medical conditions” (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020, p. 722). This therefore means that pupils with PMLD “require a high level of adult support, both for their learning needs and for their personal care” (DfE, 2012; Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020, p. 722). However, it should also be noted that, although to lesser degree than pupils with PMLD, learners with SLD are also recognised as potentially having “difficulties in mobility and coordination, communication and perception, and the acquisition of self-help skills” (DfE 2012 Lacey & Scull 2015; Colley 2020, p. 722).
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Appendix B:
Completed Charting Form for the Role of the Educational Psychologist in Supporting CYP with SLD/PMLD

Population data was extracted to consider the relevance of each study's sample to the focus of the scoping review. The aims were recorded to determine whether the paper would provide empirical data relevant to the review question. The methodologies were captured to understand the scope of each study. Outcome measures were identified to understand whether the focus of the paper was directly relevant to the review question. Finally, important results were extracted with reference to the review question to support synthesis.

Author(s), year of publication, study location	Study populations	Aims of the study	Methodology	Outcome measures	Important results
Atkinson et al., 2015 England and Wales	EPs with “expertise in working with 16-25 year olds” (<i>n</i> = 24)	To develop a comprehensive and evidence-based framework to access professional skills, competence and performance in educational psychology for working with 16- 25 year olds	Delphi technique of 2 rounds of questionnaire data, 1 round consultative meeting with a purpose sample.	70% level of consensus	The competency framework devised suggests the EP needs skills and knowledge in assessment for pupils (PMLD) and complex learning difficulties and disabilities (CLDD). EPs have a role in eliciting the views of young people with SLD/PMLD. Other aspects of the framework may have been applicable to CYP with SLD/PMLD however due to the breadth of focus of the framework, I have included the findings that were explicitly described for SLD/PMLD learners.
Bason, 2020 England	Year 12-3 pupil case studies (<i>n</i> = 6)	To determine whether the person-centred reviews (PCRs) led to more	Multi-case study Thematic analysis of observations, questionnaires for the professionals and parent interviews.	Thematic network that provides insight on whether the PCR led to more	EP can be instrumental in facilitating PCRs to support the develop of an action plan with pupils. This approach can be used by the EP to support setting goals and could even

	Pupils with PMLD ($n = 2$) Pupils with SLD ($n = 2$) Professionals (Connexions; physiotherapist; social workers; college learning advisor; occupational therapist; case manager; LA SEN Officer) Parents One special school	specific transition plans that identified future outcomes for young people, and whether the PCR addressed how future aspirations may be achieved.		specific transition plans, gains, barriers and challenges.	support transition planning with young people. EPs have role in multi-agency teams EPs may also have a role in contributing to new service design and course curricula to foster young people linked to self-determination.
Crombie et al., 2014 England	A special school Pupils with SLD/PMLD and CLDD School staff	To identify unconscious professional practices in an outstanding special school and to develop a	A case study design. Staff team discussions were used to identify professional values, the EP conducted a narrative review of observations, Staff created vignettes from their observations which were categorised, parents' observations and views were gathered through	Development of a model to support future practice and development in the school	Th EP has a role in facilitating staff reflection to support their practice.

	Parents EP within the study	framework of these practices.	consultation, staff took part in consultation to interpret findings using psychological theory, finally an explanatory framework was developed.		
Farmer & Stringer, 2023 England	Pupils aged 4-11 with PMLD (n=3) Mother of each pupil (n=3) Two professions per pupil	To explore the individual subjective viewpoints that contribute to understanding the views of a child with PMLD within a PCR process.	Multiple case study design. Data from eight individual interviews, non-participatory observations and focus group discussion was gathered and analysed utilising social constructivist grounded theory approaches.	Demonstration of how collaborative adult interpretation of the pupil's communication enables person-centred planning for learners with PMLD.	Models the EP facilitating PCP approach to gather pupil voice. EP has a role in supporting parents through facilitating PCR meetings which allow for alternative interpretations to be shared which helped with decision making.
Geiger et al., 2015 England	Young people with complex needs (including SLD & PMLD) LA Managers, senior leaders from special schools, FE college staff, Educational psychologist, trainee EPs	Action research study which aimed to develop a systemic methodology for providing support for post-16 learners with complex needs in one London LA.	Participatory action research. Data gathered through document review, observations, interviews, and population data analysis.	Development of evidence-based good practice guidance for 16+ provision	EPs have a role in providing staff in PMLD settings with professional practice training as the EP is asked to provide staff with further training on good practice. Demonstrated the EP role can be to support systemic-level change within a LA when working in a consultancy-style relationship to facilitate collaborative working and to support necessary change.

Hampton et al., 2019 England	A special school Pupils aged between 3-16 years with severe and complex needs Teachers (n=2) Teaching Assistants (n=10)	To explore how staff and students benefit from the use of VERP alongside the Engagement Model for setting staff in a school for children with complex needs, all of which were described as physical and learning disabilities, with many of them having little verbal communication.	Action research design. Educational Psychologist led training and supervision over 16 weeks. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews using hierarchical focusing and analysed thematically.	Staff-reported improvements in reflective practice and professional confidence.	EP to have a role in facilitating reflection in staff by training them on the VERP process and facilitating the VERP intervention. A role of the EP is to conduct action research to investigate the impact of an intervention and to identify adaptations that would need to be made to support the intervention.
Hill et al., 2016 England	Residential special schools CYP with a wide range of needs and disabilities aged between 8-19 years (n=83) Pupil with SLD (n=1)	To understand the experiences of children and young people who were being educated in residential special schools.	Participatory action research. Data gathered from observational approaches, participatory activities, and adapted communication frameworks	Developing and modelling methods for capturing pupil voice.	Demonstrates the role of the EP includes gaining insight from pupils with SLD/PMLD through developing accessible and appropriate assessing materials can be directly elicited.

	Pupil with PMLD (<i>n</i> =2) School staff				
Loveday, 2014 England	Headteachers from four special schools which support pupils with PMLD	To gather information from four special schools about key issues their settings experience in relation to their learners with PMLD, to analyse the information to consider the implications for EP practice	Scoping exercise. Data gathered from unstructured interviews and analysed using thematic analysis.	Identification of key themes affecting the specialist settings and the development of practice-based implication for EP roles in supporting pupils with PMLD.	EP has a role in advocating for the child within discussions with both parents and schools. EP have a role in directly supporting parents to inform and educate adults around the child with regards to the child's disability.
Rees, 2017	Conceptually on children with SLD/PMLD	To explore the influence of prominent models of disability on the categorisation of pupils SLD/PMLD and to articulate a practice-relevant conceptual framework to inform how children with	Conceptual paper which critically examines models of disability, through a review of literature and proposes a theoretical framework.	The development of practice-relevant conceptual framework to inform how children with SLD/PMLD are supported educationally.	EP role could include supporting educational professionals with teaching pedagogy through training on the disabilities associated with SLD/PMLD learners.

		SLD/PMLD are supported educationally.			
Rees et al., 2017 Scotland	Additional Support Needs establishments (<i>n</i>=7) Pupils' early years to secondary school age with SLD/PMLD Senior leaders (<i>n</i>=6) Staff members (<i>n</i>=24)	To evaluate the implementation and impact of the curriculum and assessment framework for pupils with SLD/PMLD.	Mixed methods practice-based evaluation. Data gathered from pre- and post- audit of curricular practice from senior leaders, questionnaires from staff members and semi-structured interviews with 8 staff members. Data analysed with a mixed quantitative and qualitative analysis.	Improved staff confidence and practice with clearer individualised target setting.	EPs have a role in developing a framework providing education settings with guidance on teaching approaches and assessments and impacting on teaching pedagogy.
Thompson & Atkinson, 2022 England	One special school sixth form Pupils aged between 16-19 years with SLD/PMLD Tutors	To explore the perspectives of staff within specialist sixth form of how they promote mental health and wellbeing for post-16 students, including	Single case study. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews, and follow up focus groups and analysed with reflective thematic analysis with inductive and deductive coding	Identification of whole school practices supporting post-16 mental health and wellbeing, informed by the Human Givens emotional needs framework.	There is a role for the EP when supporting the mental health of CYP with SLD/PMLD at an individual level. EP's have a role in upskilling staff with knowledge and skills so they can then support students how to be proactive in assisting their own mental health.

	(n=2) EP (n=1) Senior leader (n=1)	identifying barriers and facilitators to provision.			EP has a role in facilitating reflection in staff working through supervision and drop-ins.
Warner, 2015 England	One special school Children with SLD/PMLD between the ages of 4-9 years (n=3) Parents (n=5) Teachers (n=2) EP facilitating intervention (n=1)	To conducted and evaluate post-diagnostic support for parents of pupils with PMLD or SLD, using an established model of post-diagnosis work offered within the LA, to help parents increase their knowledge regarding their child's diagnosis, and to provide a space for them to reflect on the impact of the diagnosis upon themselves.	Practice-based qualitative evaluation. Data evaluating the intervention gathered from qualitative parent and teacher feedback and pre/post rating data.	Improved parental understanding of diagnosis and enhanced school-parent communication.	EP has a role in supporting parents by facilitating post-diagnosis work.
Winter & Bunn, 2019 England	207 Educational Psychologists	To explored EP's views on their current and ideal roles working with	Mixed methods survey. Data gathered from the online survey and analysed through descriptive statistics and qualitative content analysis.	Identification of current and ideal EP roles in settings that	EPs have a role individual work, statutory assessments and consultations. EPs have a role in delivering interventions.

	(including TEPs)	children and young people with PMLD, and perceived opportunities and barriers to practice.		cater for learners with PMLD at a national level.	EPs have a role in contributing to multi-agency meetings. Ideally EPs will work engage in joint casework with other professionals. EPs have a role for EPs within multi-agency working when it comes to supporting educational transitions for young people. EPs have a role in providing staff in PMLD settings with professional practice training. EPs use of Video Interactive Guidance (VIG) and Video Enhanced Reflective Practice (VERP) to support PMLD settings. EPs have a role in staff supervision. EPs have a role working with parents. EPs could have a role in supporting the curriculum.
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Appendix C:
Completed Charting Form for Interprofessional Collaboration

Population data was extracted to consider the relevance of each study's sample to the focus of the scoping review. The aims were recorded to determine whether the paper would provide direct exploration of joint working between an EP and another professional. The methodologies were captured to understand the scope and nature of each study. Outcome measures were identified to understand whether the focus of the paper was directly relevant to the review question. Finally, important results were extracted with reference to the review question to support synthesis. In total nine papers were assessed.

Author(s), year of publication, study location	Study populations	Aims of the study	Methodology	Outcome measures	Important results
Birch et al., 2023 UK	SALTs (<i>n</i> = 182) EPs (<i>n</i> = 125)	To gather the views of both EPs and SALTs from across the UK with the aim of understanding the facilitators and barriers to interprofessional collaboration between the two professions.	Online survey with both quantitative and qualitative questions and analysed through content analysis.	Identified reported facilitators and barriers to collaboration.	Successful interprofessional collaboration is characterised by good communication, shared understanding of professional roles, supportive aspects of the working environment, and commitment to joint working.
Boorman et al., 2025 England	Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) (<i>n</i> = 2)	To understand the experience of EPs and SENCOs when using Person-centred	Qualitative case study approach. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews and	Reported experiences of PCP annual reviews including child participation,	Successful collaborative practice is characterised by the use of visual representations to support shared understanding, facilitation of communication between stakeholders, an objective stance, and the sharing of multiple perspectives.

	EPs (<i>n</i> = 5)	Planning (PCP) in annual review meetings within one LA in England.	analysed through reflexive thematic analysis.	communication, child-centred practices, facilitation, roles and relationships, and implementations of challenges and benefits.	
Holland & Fitzgerald, 2023 Republic of Ireland	Post-primary schools (<i>n</i> = 6) SENCos (<i>n</i> = 3) Senior leaders (<i>n</i> = 3) National Educational Psychological Service psychologists (NEPS) (<i>n</i> = 3) Online survey (completed)	To explore the experiences of collaboration between NEPSs, SENCos, and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and identify the barriers and facilitators of collaboration across the continuum of support.	A sequential explanatory mixed methods design. Phase 1 was an online cross-sectional survey to inform interview design. This paper presents Phase 2 where data was gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA).	Themes relating to collaboration between the three professionals including systems for communication, interpersonal relationships, understanding of the context, and practical considerations.	Successful collaborative practice is characterised by open, co-constructed communication, valuing practitioner's contributions, the creation of a safe space for both individuals and the wider system, and mutual respect where each professional's contributions are valued. It also involves mutual reliance, avoidance of the EP taking up the expert role, and the engagement of staff who have a collaborative mindset.

	by SENCos; Senior leaders; NEPs) (<i>n</i> = 278)				
Nicholas & Feeney, 2015	Key workers from family intervention projects (<i>n</i> = 2) EP facilitating consultation	To explore and define the nature and impact of weekly consultations (Complex Case Discussions (CCDs)), with key-workers from two family intervention projects which were facilitated by EPs within one LA.	Qualitative study. Data gathered through semi- structured interviews and analysed through inductive thematic analysis.	Impact of CCDs on the key workers from two family intervention projects in the form of themes.	Successful interprofessional collaborative practice is characterised by the EP actively not taking up an expert role within the relationship, raising up the other professional by offering recognition that they are experts of their own context, sharing their respective professional knowledge and appreciating one another's professional perspective.
Norwich et al., 2018 England	A primary school, a secondary school and a special school	To evaluate how EPs join teachers in 'Lesson Study' (LS) teams, a collaborative form of	Mixed methods case study methodology. Data gathered from Lesson Study Cycles through	Inter- professional collaboration processes, EP contribution to LS, identifying mechanisms	Successful interprofessional collaboration is characterised by building capacity through interprofessional learning, including coaching and facilitating thinking. It also involves the development of trust, the creation of a non- judgemental space, and avoidance of the EP being cast in the expert position.

	One team per school. Team members: Class teachers (<i>n</i>= 2) SENCo (<i>n</i>= 1) EP (<i>n</i>= 1)	professional development to inform the teaching of pupils with learning difficulties	interviews and questionnaires, with qualitative data analysed using thematic analysis.	underlying outcomes, and positive and negative context factors.	
Rae et al., 2017 England	Special schools catering for pupils social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) (<i>n</i>= 2) Teachers (<i>n</i>= 8)	To explore how teachers of pupils with social, emotional and behaviour difficulties understood and experienced supervision, and the EP's role in providing supervision.	Qualitative exploratory study. Data gathered through semi-structured interviews and analysed through conventional content analysis adopting a constructivist paradigm.	An understanding of teacher's experiences and understanding of supervision, and their perceptions of the EP role in providing supervision.	Interprofessional collaborative practice is characterised by a focus on building capacity through supervision, which involves reflective thinking and an opportunity to make sense of difficult emotions.
Sedgwick & Stothard, 2019 England	EPs (<i>n</i> = 8)	To explore the EP's perceptions, knowledge and practices	Qualitative interview design. Data gathered from semi-structured	An understanding of EP's views and reported practices in	Successful interprofessional collaboration is characterised by supported capacity building through shared responsibility of workload, enabled by sharing their respective professional knowledge and appreciating one another's professional perspective.

		regarding speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), including working with Speech and Language Therapists (SALTs)	interviews and analysed with thematic analysis.	relation to SLCN, including facilitators and barriers to effective joint working.	Clear understanding each other's roles supported this collaborative practice. EPs reported wanting opportunities for greater challenge from other professionals when working interprofessionally.
Warwick, 2023 Wales	Social workers (n= 5) EPs (n= 5)	To explore the views of EPs and social workers regarding the role of the EP when working in multi-agency teams to support children who have experienced care in Wales.	Qualitative study. Data gathered through online semi-structured interviews and analysed through reflective thematic analysis followed by Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) analysis.	An understanding of the EP's role in multi-agency teams, professional relationships, and factors that support effective multi-agency working.	Successful interprofessional collaboration is characterised by building capacity through interprofessional learning, including upskilling to develop skills and confidence. It also involves flexibility and ability to adjust their roles in response to ongoing changes. Effective collaborative practice is supported by tools which enable structured dialogue between professionals.

Wedlock & Turner, 2017 England	Family Support Workers (FSWs) (n= 7)	To enhance insight of FSWs' lived experience of inter-professional supervision with EPs over an extended period.	Qualitative phenomenological study; semi-structured interviews analysed through IPA.	In-depth understanding of FSWs' experiences of EP-led supervision.	Successful interprofessional collaborative practice is characterised by supervision that creates a trusting and non-judgemental space. It also supported by the development of trust between professionals and a shared goal.
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Appendix D: Samples of Thematic Synthesis From the Second Scoping Review

- **Figure D1: Example of Initial Coding and Descriptive Theme Development within Thematic Synthesis**
- **Figure D2: Example of the Initial Code “supervisory space” under the descriptive code and “capacity building”**

Figure D1: Example of Initial Coding and Descriptive Theme Development within Thematic Synthesis

Authors	Quotes	How does the literature describe successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and other professionals?	Initial codes	Descriptive themes
Rae et al.,	Based on these findings, the authors propose approaches that utilise group supervision as well as individual supervision, the latter based on the principles of nurture and narrative practice highlighting a role for the EP in both approaches."	Group-supervision could be useful in special educational settings	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	Well they contribute in the fact that it is confidential and you can just let everything out and then I suppose they like (name of EP) just took it all on board and then she was able to kind of you know that just made me feel better anyway.	Inter-professional supervision led by the EP allows a space for staff to offload	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	I knew it wasn't going to go back anywhere. She tried to find ways that she could help me, make me feel better sort of thing and that's useful but not in a kind of a forced way that you might feel from like management or something like that	EP tried to find ways to help	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	. It was more just ideas and suggestions rather than, 'I think you should do this or that'. I know she's not going to come and check" up on me or anything. (Jill)	EP suggesting solutions rather than forcing ideas	Supervisory space	Capacity building
Nicolas & Feeney	Both participants spoke about "working together and sharing knowledge"(Participant 1). This is valued particularly when "you just get stuck (Participant 2), and because each person involved in the CCD has a different specialisation and background. Participants value the fact that the EPs work with	Working together by bringing their own specialism Taking each other's lead	Power dynamics / expert role Power dynamics / expert role	Relational Commitment Relational Commitment
	Honesty. Collaboration, not only between key-workers and EPs in CCDs, but with the families, is important. Honesty is vital in relationships with families, and is something that other workers may struggle with if they feel unable to communicate openly.	Honesty is key to collaborative relationships Communicating openly is key to collaboration	Relational Relational	Relational Commitment Relational Commitment
	EPs do not behave like "experts", and it seems to be recognised that key-workers are the experts in their own circumstances. This is similar to the approach taken in process consultation (Kaplan, 1979; Schein, 1987, 1990) and may enable workers to feel empowered in the problemsolving process. It is therefore apparent that the psychologists are valued more than	Collaborative working involves balancing expert role EPs are enabling situation to be understood differently	Power dynamics / expert role Empowering	Relational Commitment Capacity building

Figure D2: Example of the Initial Code “supervisory space” under the descriptive code and “capacity building”

Authors	Quotes	How does the literature describe successful interprofessional collaboration between EPs and other professionals?	Initial codes	Descriptive themes
Wedlock & Turner	the supervisory relationship offers an intimate connection with an EP who is able to provide a trusting space where they can reveal their true selves.	EPs providing a safe space for staff (supervision)	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	It can tolerate a catharsis and offers a protective holding presence that is gradually established through a joint endeavour.	offers a protective holding presence	Supervisory space	Capacity building
Rae et al.,	Teachers wanted objective, solution-focused and confidential support and opportunities to reflect; offload and feel contained.	School staff want solution-focused supervision to feel contained	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	Based on these findings, the authors propose approaches that utilise group supervision as well as individual supervision, the latter based on the principles of nurture and narrative practice highlighting a role for the EP in both approaches."	Group-supervision could be useful in special educational settings	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	Well they contribute in the fact that it is confidential and you can just let everything out and then I suppose they like (name of EP) just took it all on board and then she was able to kind of you know that just made me feel better anyway.	Inter-professional supervision led by the EP allows a space for staff to offload	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	I knew it wasn't going to go back anywhere. She tried to find ways that she could help me, make me feel better sort of thing and that's useful but not in a kind of a forced way that you might feel from like management or something like that	EP tried to find ways to help	Supervisory space	Capacity building
	. It was more just ideas and suggestions rather than, 'I think you should do this or that'. I know she's not going to come and check" up on me or anything. (Jill)	EP suggesting solutions rather than forcing ideas	Supervisory space	Capacity building
				Capacity building

Appendix E: Ethical Approval Letter

The Tavistock and Portman 

NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Samantha Martin

By Email

20 March 2025

Dear Samantha,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: *'A co-created understanding of successful interprofessional collaboration between Educational Psychologists and school staff in PMLD settings'*

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including modifications to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC for review.

Failure to obtain prior approval for such changes may result in academic and/or research misconduct.

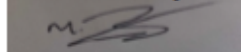
If you have any further questions or require any clarification, please do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn



Academic Governance and Quality Officer

T: 020 938 2699

E: academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix F: Original Information Sheets

- *Original Information Sheet for EPs*
- *Original Information Sheet for Setting Staff*

Original Information Sheet for EPs

Research Project Information Sheet for EPs

A co-created understanding of successful collaborative interprofessional working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in PMLD settings

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research.

Researchers:

*Samantha Martin - Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) studying for a Doctorate in Child,
Community and Educational Psychology - sm23027@essex.ac.uk*

Dr Kate Farmer – Senior Lecturer and Research Supervisor - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

This information sheet is designed to share detail of the study so you can design whether to take part or not.

What is the aim of the research?

This research aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between EPs and school staff within settings for learners with profound and multiple learning disabilities (PMLD) and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this. This will be from the perspective of EPs and school staff in these settings (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants, or SENCos who work directly with learners with PMLD). The researcher hopes to develop a theory or model based on the findings to inform Educational Psychology practice.
under PMLD as defined above.

PMLD refers to profound and multiple learning disabilities, however sometimes the word disabilities can be used in the place of difficulties. PMLD is not a clinical diagnosis but a description. For this research I will be using the definition from Supporting People with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities: Core and Essential Service Standards:

Children and adults with PMLD have more than one disability, the most significant of which is a profound intellectual disability. These individuals all have great difficulty communicating, often requiring those who know them well to interpret their responses and intent. They frequently have other, additional, disabling conditions which may include for example:

- physical disabilities – that limit them in undertaking everyday tasks and often restrict mobility; risk to body shape
- sensory impairments
- sensory processing difficulties
- complex health needs, (e.g. epilepsy, respiratory problems, dysphagia and eating and drinking problems)
- ‘coping behaviours’ (to their communication or other difficulties for example) which may present as challenging
- mental health difficulties. (Doukas et al., 2017, p.12)

PMLD settings will include any specialist provision which caters for students whose needs can be classified under PMLD as defined above.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for qualified EPs (HCPC registered) who are currently working with staff in a PMLD setting, or who have worked with staff in a PMLD setting in the last academic year. Private, locum, and EPs that work for local authorities will be welcome to take part in this research. To participate, an EP and the member of school staff from the PMLD setting who worked directly with the EP must be willing to take part in a joint interview to discuss successful collaborative working between EPs and school staff within PMLD settings. All participants who jointly volunteer after reading this sheet and completing the consent form will be given the opportunity to take part. All participants will be offered the opportunity to discuss the research and the information sheet prior to consenting.

Please let me know if you have local policies or arrangements for research in your organisation.

What will it involve?

The EP and school staff pair will be asked to take part in a joint interview for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask open-ended questions related to the topic to generate a dialogue.

During the analysis, I will offer the opportunity for you to see the themes generated which will contribute towards the theory/model created and seek your comments. This will be a chance for you to feedback on the themes, in case you feel any of your points were not captured.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

- Add the voices of both teaching staff and EPs to inform others of success EP practice in these settings.
- Engage in reflective dialogue to explore shared strengths and accomplishments, and to share examples of what you felt was successful joint interprofessional working, with an aim to strengthen your working relationship.
- Contribute to an under-researched area of EP practice, which could help develop and inform EP practice within PMLD settings and ultimately benefit learners with PMLD. Current research suggests there is a lack of confidence from EPs working with these settings.

What are the potential risks of taking part?

- There is a possibility that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations regarding your work together which could have an impact on your relationship and future work. However, given that the drive of the research is to focus on strengths, it is hoped that the conversation can be constructive in a positive way.
- Although it is not expected, due to the potential emotional experience of working with children and young people, there is a chance that participants could become upset during the conversation. If this situation should occur the researcher would encourage the participant to speak with their line manager or supervisor directly after the interview.
- Given the nature of joint interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, grounded theory involves a data-driven sample size, which may be small and could impact confidentiality.

and anonymity, as a smaller sample size lends itself to increased difficulty in maintaining anonymity.

Confidentiality of the Data

Interviews will be video recorded on a password protected laptop and securely stored. Interviews will be transcribed no more than 4-weeks after the interview and the video will be deleted. All transcripts will be anonymised including all names of schools, organisations and participant. The anonymised interview transcripts will be stored and handled for approx. 6-10 years in line with the Trust Data Protection Policy.

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/>

Interview content will remain confidential subject to legal limitations. If any concerns or risks are identified, safeguarding or appropriate professionals will be notified.

Location

The researcher would like the interviews to take place at the PMLD setting and in a private space where, as much as possible, conversations cannot be overheard. The researcher will arrange this with each EP–school staff pair.

Disclaimer

All participants can decide to withdraw from the study any time up to when the data has been anonymised, which will be within four weeks of the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the research, you may do so without needing to provide a reason and without any negative consequences for yourself, for the school, or any organisation.

Debriefing

Opportunities for joint and individual debriefing at the end of the interview.

If you have any concerns related to this research, you can contact the researcher, Samantha Martin, or Head of Academic Registry academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you wish to seek support after the interview, I recommend speaking with your supervisor or line manager.

Additionally, there is the following resource:

NHS Every Mind Matters

This resource supports anyone with their mental health and wellbeing by promoting a range of self-care actions.

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Original Information Sheet for Setting Staff

Research Project Information Sheet for School Staff

A co-created understanding of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in settings for learners with Severe, or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research.

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) studying for a Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer – Senior Lecturer and Research Supervisor - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

This information sheet is designed to share detail of the study so you can design whether to take part or not.

What is the aim of the research?

This research aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between school staff within settings for learners with Severe or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD) and educational psychologists, and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this. This will be from the perspective of schools’ staff in these settings (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants or SENCos who work directly with learners with SLD/PMLD) and the Educational Psychologist they have worked with. The researcher hopes to develop a theory or model based on the findings to inform Educational Psychology practice.

SLD, and PMLD are not clinical diagnoses, but descriptors used to categorise people based on their learning needs.

SLD refers to Severe Learning Difficulties which is a spectrum which includes those learners who are consistently and over time working academically at or below the starting levels National Curriculum.

All those with SLD will have, to a greater or lesser degree:

Communication difficulties.

Difficulties in concentration and attention.

Difficulties with understanding abstract concepts.

Difficulties with both short term and long-term memory.

Difficulties with sequential memory.

Difficulties with working memory.

Inefficient and slow information-processing speed.

Limited general knowledge.

Poorly developed strategies for thinking and learning.

Difficulties with generalisation and problem solving.

(Imray and Colley, 2017, p. 38)

According to Colley (2020) Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties refers to learners who have the following needs:

- They will probably be pre- or non-verbal or in other words may not communicate in what we may call 'typical' ways. More recently the term 'post verbal' is sometimes heard as this emphasises the fact that non typical but equally valid ways of communicating may have been developed by the person. This may include gesture, body language, eye pointing, behaviour, limited use of symbols, or very simple language.
- Their direct communication may largely be for needs and wants only.
- They may have a limited understanding of cause and effect and/or object permanence.
- They may have some difficulty following instructions and may have behaviours which challenge the people around them or can be said to be socially unacceptable in some contexts.
- Some – though by no means all – may have attendant physical impairments and possibly co-occurring mental health issues.
- Some will have complex medical conditions and may be wheelchair users.
- They will require a high level of adult support throughout their lives and are unlikely to achieve 'independence' in its traditional sense of autonomous living, and employment.

A setting for pupils with SLD and/or PMLD will include specialist provision which caters for students who have the needs described above.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for a school staff member from a SLD and/or PMLD setting to take part in an interview with a qualified Educational Psychologist who has worked with them in their setting to take part in a joint interview to discuss successful collaborative working between school staff within settings for learners with severe, or profound and multiple learning disabilities (SLD/PMLD) and educational psychologists. All participants who volunteer jointly after reading this sheet and completing the consent form will be given the opportunity to take part. All participants will be offered the opportunity to discuss the research and the information sheet prior to consenting.

Please let me know if you have local policies or arrangements for research in your organisation.

What will it involve?

The School staff – Educational Psychologist pair will be asked to take part in a joint interview for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask open-ended questions related to the topic to generate a dialogue.

During the analysis, I will offer the opportunity for you to see the themes generated which will contribute towards the theory/model created and seek your comments. This will be a chance for you to feedback on the themes and an opportunity for you to clarify any of your points which you feel were not captured accurately.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

- Add the voices of both school staff and Educational Psychologists to inform others of successful Educational Psychology practice in these settings.
- Engage in reflective dialogue to explore shared strengths and accomplishments, and examples of successful joint interprofessional working to strengthen your working relationship.

- Contribute to an under-researched area of Educational Psychology practice which could help develop and inform Educational Psychology practice within SLD and/or PMLD settings and ultimately benefit learners with SLD & PMLD.

What are the potential risks of taking part?

- There is a possibility that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations regarding your work together which could have an impact on your relationship and future work. However, given that the drive of the research is to focus on strengths, it is hoped that the conversation can be constructive.
- Although it is not expected, due to the potential emotional experience of working with children and young people, there is a chance that participants could become upset during the conversation. If this situation should occur the researcher would encourage the participant to speak with their line manager or supervisor directly after the interview.
- Given the nature of joint interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, grounded theory involves a data-driven sample size, which may be small and could impact confidentiality and anonymity, as a smaller sample size lends itself to increased difficulty in maintaining anonymity.

Confidentiality of the Data

Interviews will be video, and audio recorded on a password protected laptop and securely stored. Interviews will be transcribed no more than 4-weeks after the interview and the video and audio will be deleted. All transcripts will be anonymised including all names of schools, organisations and participant. The anonymised interview transcripts will be stored and handled for approx. 6-10 years in line with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data

Protection Policy.

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/>

Interview content will remain confidential subject to legal limitations. If any concerns or risks are identified, safeguarding or appropriate professionals will be notified.

Location

The researcher would like the interviews to take place at the school setting and in a private space where, as much as possible, conversations cannot be overheard. The researcher will arrange this with each School staff – Educational Psychologist pair.

Disclaimer

All participants can decide to withdraw from the study any time up to when the data has been anonymised, which will be within four weeks of the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the research you may do so without needing to provide a reason and without any negative consequences for yourself, for the school, or any organisation.

Debriefing

Opportunities for joint and individual debriefing at the end of the interview.

If you have any concerns related to this research, you can contact the researcher, Samantha Martin, or Head of Academic Registry academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you wish to seek support after the interview, I recommend speaking with your supervisor or line manager. Additionally, there are the following resources:

Education Support

This is a charity which provides 24/7 emotional support for teachers and education staff through a helpline. You can call at 08000 562 561

NHS Every Mind Matters

This resource supports anyone with their mental health and wellbeing by promoting a range of self-care actions.

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Appendix G: Original Consent Forms

- *Original Consent Form for EPs*
- *Original Consent Form for Setting Staff*

Original Consent Form for EPs

Consent Form for EPs



*A co-created understanding of successful collaborative interprofessional working between
Educational Psychologists and school staff in SLD and/or PMLD settings*

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer (supervisor) - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

*This research is being conducted as part of the researcher's Professional Doctorate in Child,
Community and Educational Psychology.*

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

	EP's initials here:	If part of LA, PEP's initials here:
I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.		
I understand what the research is about and could ask questions.		
I understand that I will be interviewed alongside a school staff colleague and engage in a discussion about our work together and that interview will be video recorded and then transcribed anonymously.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have up to four weeks after the interview to tell the researcher if I would like to withdraw and to have my information removed. I can withdraw without any consequences to myself and without having to give a reason.		
I have received a link to the Tavistock and Portmen NHS Trust Data Protection Policy.		
I understand that the researcher will ensure my data is confidential unless risk of harm is identified.		
I agree to keep the information shared by my school staff colleague in the interview confidential.		
I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality due to being interviewed with another person.		
I understand that the sample-size for this research is not predetermined, therefore there could be a small number of participants and that a small sample size could impact the levels of confidentiality and anonymity. This is because a small sample size could suggest that the collaborative work that you are doing is less common.		

I understand that the findings of this study may be presented at conferences and in academic journals.		
I understand that if any safeguarding, illegal or professional misconduct issues emerge, that the researcher will have a duty to share this information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead of that school.		
I understand that by discussing interprofessional working with my colleague in an interview could have implications for our future work. I understand that is not with the researcher's control.		
I consent to taking part in this research.		
I consent for this research to take place in the local authority and with an EP from the Local Authority (LA).		

Please turn over

Local
Authority:.....

Date:.....

Educational Psychologist (EP)
(taking part in the interview)

Name: (BLOCK Capitals).....

Signature:

Principle Educational Psychologist (PEP)

Name: (BLOCK
Capitals).....

Signature:
.....

Original Consent Form for Setting Staff

Consent form for School Staff



A co-created understanding of successful collaborative interprofessional working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in PMLD settings

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

This research is being conducted as part of the researcher's Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

	School staff member taking part in interview	Headteacher
I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.		
I understand what the research is about and could ask questions.		
I understand that I will be interviewed alongside an EP colleague and engage in a discussion about our work together, and the that interview will be video recorded and then transcribed anonymously.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have up to four weeks after the interview to tell the researcher if I would like to withdraw and to have my information removed. I can withdraw without any consequences to myself and without having to give a reason.		
I have received a link to the Tavistock and Portmen NHS Trust Data Protection Policy.		
I understand that the researcher will ensure my data is confidential unless risk of harm is identified.		
I agree to keep the information shared by my EP colleague in the interview confidential.		
I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality due to being interviewed with another person.		
I understand that the sample-size for this research is not predetermined, therefore there could be a small number of participants and that a small sample size could impact the levels of confidentiality and anonymity. This is because a small sample size could suggest that the collaborative work that you are doing is less common.		
I understand that the findings of this study may be presented at conferences and in academic journals.		

I understand that if any safeguarding, illegal or professional misconduct issues emerge, that the researcher will have a duty to share this information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead of that school.		
I understand that by discussing interprofessional working with my colleague in an interview could have implications for our future work. I understand that is not with the researcher's control.		
I agree to have the joint interview take place with a member of school staff within the school, in a private space.		
I consent to taking part in this research.		

Please turn over

School:.....

Date:.....

School Staff Member
(taking part in the interview)

Headteacher

Name: (BLOCK Capitals).....

Name: (BLOCK
Capitals).....

Signature:

Signature:
.....

Name of Role:

Appendix H:
Distress Protocol from Section 14 of Original Application for Ethical Approval

14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)

Given the emotional nature of working with children and young people, particularly in PMLD settings, participants may become distressed during the interview. Before starting, I will ask each participant how to identify if they are distressed. Distress may appear as upset or withdrawal. In such cases, a distress protocol will be followed.:

1. Ask the participant about how they are feeling and listen empathically.
2. Give them time to recuperate.
3. Check to see if they are happy to continue with the interview.
4. If they decide to end the interview, ask the participant the name of their line manager or supervisor and suggest that they speak with them directly after the interview.
5. Provide the participant with either an individual or a joint debrief (see appendices A & C), which has some signposting to support resources.
6. Report the incident to research supervisor.

I will not provide any support or advice myself

In the event of any concern for pupil welfare from the interview I would follow the school's safeguarding procedure to report any concerns. I will ensure I familiarize myself with the DSLs of each school before the interview. I follow safeguarding procedures as part of my role as a trainee EP every time I go into school and so I am familiar with the protocols.

Joint interviews on interprofessional working might lead to uncomfortable discussions. Preventative actions include:

- Outline on both information sheets the purpose of the research and that the interviews will take place jointly.
- Using a strengths-based approach by focusing on what they feel has been successful.
- Discuss potential next steps at the end of the interview to encourage a focus on moving forward positively.
- Opportunities for joint and individual debriefing at the end of the interview (please see appendices A & C).

Appendix I:
Evidence of recruitment methods

- *Recruitment: Email to support my research poster and information sheet with additional information.*
- *Recruitment: Original Recruitment Poster*
- *Recruitment: EPNET*
- *Recruitment: Email to PEPs*

Recruitment: Email to support my research poster and information sheet with additional information.

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well!

I am currently recruiting participants for my research regarding a co-constructed understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings. Would you be happy to share the details below with any EPs that you know who work in London? Thank you in advance!

Please see details below:

Hello,

In case we have not met before my name is Sam Martin and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am looking for participants to take part in research for my thesis.

My research is regarding a co-constructed understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings. PMLD refers to Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and a PMLD setting describes any special school which supports learners with PMLD. For more information and a more complete definition of PMLD please refer to the information sheet attached.

I am looking for EP and School Staff pairs who are based in London to complete a joint interview regarding their collaborative working. Please see the research poster and information sheet attached for more information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Also, please feel free to pass on to any of your EP colleagues who work with PMLD settings that you feel might be interested.

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,

Recruitment: Original Recruitment Poster



Educational Psychologists and School Staff from PMLD Settings Needed for Research

We want to hear about your experiences of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists (EPs) and school staff in settings for learners with profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Participation involves one 60-minute, in-person joint interview. Each interview will be with an EP and a member of school staff who have worked together in a PMLD setting. 'School staff' refers to any professional working in a PMLD setting.

All HCPC registered EPs who are currently working or have recently worked in PMLD settings are invited to participate.



Who are we?

I am a Year 2 trainee EP at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, and I am supervised by a Senior Lecturer.

By participating you will contribute to helping develop a shared understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings, developing practice and enhancing future support for learners with PMLD.



For more information, please contact Sam Martin at sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Recruitment: EPNET

Hello, my name is Sam Martin and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am looking for participants to take part in research for my doctoral thesis.

My research is regarding a co-constructed understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings. PMLD refers to Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and a PMLD setting describes any special school that supports learners with PMLD. I am looking to recruit **any HCPC registered EPs working in London** only at this time, thank you.

For more information, please see contact me directly via email (sm23027@essex.ac.uk)

Recruitment: Email to PEPs

Hello,

I hope this email finds you well!

I am currently recruiting participants for my research regarding a co-constructed understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings. Would you be happy to share the details below of my research with London NAPEP group and your team? Thank you in advance!

Please see details below:

Hello,

In case we have not met before my name is Sam Martin and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust. I am looking for participants to take part in research for my thesis.

My research is regarding a co-constructed understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in PMLD settings. PMLD refers to Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities and a PMLD setting describes any special school which support learners with PMLD (for more information please refer to the information sheet attached).

I am looking for EP and School Staff pairs (based in London) to complete a joint interview about their collaborative working. Please see the research poster and information sheet attached for more information.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask. Please feel free to pass on to any EP colleagues (who work privately or for a local authority) with a PMLD setting that you feel might be interested.

Thank you for your time.

**Appendix J:
Ethics Amendment Form**



Notification of Amendment to Approved Ethics Application

To apply for an amendment to an existing study please complete the form, attach all appendices (track changes where appropriate) and send application including all appendices to academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk – ensuring that your supervisor is copied into the email.

1. Details of Researcher/Principal Investigator and Supervisor

Student name	Samantha Martin
Doctoral Programme	M4 - Child, Community and Educational Psychology Professional Doctorate
Supervisor(s)	Dr Kate Farmer

2. Details of Research Project

Project Title:	A co-created understanding of successful interprofessional collaboration between Educational Psychologists and school staff in PMLD settings
Original Date of Approval:	20 th March 2025
Date Project Commenced (if applicable):	8 th April 2025

3. Details of Amendments

(Please delete as appropriate)

Does the amendment involve changes to information supplied in the original ethical application to TREC? <i>(If yes, please detail the changes in Section 4 below)</i>	Yes	No	
	Please see Section 4		
Does the information involve changes to the consent form, information sheet or other supporting materials for the study? <i>(If yes, please ensure all amended materials are appended to this application)</i>	Yes	No	
	Please see amended materials below		
If your project has the approval/consent of external/commissioning organisations 'external organisations', please confirm that they have been consulted/consent to the changes	Yes	No	NA
			NA

4. Summary of Amendments - Please state clearly and simply the proposed changes to your project (methods of data gathering, changes to design etc)

Please explain the reason for the change(s) and their implications for the study.

If the amendment substantially changes the research design, methodology, data gathering or may otherwise affect the value of the study, please indicate if additional and appropriate critique has been obtained.

I would like to make the following amendments:

- A. Adjustment to recruitment process: Approaching schools directly to recruit participants
- B. Change of terminology from PMLD to severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD)
- C. Approaching private EPs directly through ACHIPPP
- D. The option to conduct interviews online as a contingency plan
- E. The use of MAXQDA to transcribe interviews

H) Approaching schools directly to recruit participants

I would like to change my recruitment method so that I can approach schools directly about my research rather than purely recruiting through an EP. My initial school contact revealed several questions that highlighted how schools may need specific information before providing informed consent. While my ethics approval includes offering pre-consent meetings and staff information sheets, I now believe direct contact would better enable schools to ask questions and receive full study information before expressing interest to the EP. Thus, further supporting their ability to give truly informed consent.

This is my proposed approach:

I plan to contact Special schools in England which cater for learners with PMLD and SLD through the EduBase2 on the Department for Education website ([Get Information about Schools - GOV.UK](#)). From I have been able retrieve a list of special schools across the UK and I have been able to filter the schools based on the area of learning needs that they cater. The head teachers' names are provided on the website; therefore I plan to contact the head teacher of each of the special schools via their school email address. I plan to email them with the email included in Appendix A, in addition to attaching a copy of the poster and information sheet for the school and an EP.

H) Change of terminology to those with severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties

I would like to change the term “profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD)” and expand it to “severe or multiple and profound learning disabilities (SLD/PMLD). This is because from my recruitment so far, I have heard that EPs who work with special schools that cater for learners with PMLD only support learners with SLD. This is interesting

because from my experience working as a teacher in special schools, I understand that terms such as SLD and PMLD are not commonly used in schools as they are descriptors rather than diagnoses. Therefore, it can be difficult to categorise learners under these two descriptors. By changing the term, I believe it will help EPs and school staff feel more comfortable knowing whether they meet the criteria to take part. In addition, as I am interested in how EPs collaborate with school staff in special schools to support children with the most complex needs, a clear distinction regarding which pupils the two professionals work together to support this could be an interesting factor to understand as a supporting mechanism for interprofessional working.

According to Mencap (n.d.), there are different types of learning disabilities (mild, moderate, severe or profound). Those with a severe learning disability (SLD) or profound and multiple learning disability (PMLD), will need more care and support than those in the other categories. Unlike those with moderate learning disabilities, learners with SLD or PMLD will need more support in areas such as mobility, personal care and communication. Therefore, it is equally relevant to consider how EPs work collaboratively with school staff for learners with SLD, as they will also require high levels of support from school staff.

To support this adjustment, I have updated the following materials:

Consent form for School Staff

- Consent form for EPs
- Information sheet for school staff
- Information sheet for EPs
- Research poster
- Email to PEPs
- General email to contacts through to my network of trainee EPs and staff from the M4 course at Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust and my network through the Educational Psychology Service I am on placement

H) Approaching private EPs directly through ACHIPPP

I would like to change another aspect of my recruitment so that I contact private EPs directly through the Association of Child Psychologists in Private Practice (AchiPPP). This is a publicly accessible website, and I plan to sift through and individually email those who identify as an EP using the email address listed for their contact. I have included an example of the email in the appendices. The reason I would like to contact private EPs directly is that at present the only method I have to recruit private EPs is via EPNET and I would like to try not privilege EPs who work for a local authority.

H) The option to conduct interviews online as a contingency plan

In-person interviews are my preferred method as I can identify some of the non-verbal interactions. However, it has been brought to my attention that a barrier to taking part in my study has been finding a suitable time in busy diaries to meet in person for an interview. Therefore, I would like to include a contingency plan whereby I can conduct interviews online if there is no way for a participant pair to take part in person. For these interviews, I plan to only record the audio as I am not sure the specifics of recording video

via Teams. I plan to make written notes of any non-verbal interactions as there will be fewer to capture due to the nature of the methodology. Audio will be recorded using the audio recorder on a laptop. All audio recordings will be stored securely and will only be used for transcriptions. All audio recordings will be transcribed within 4-weeks after the interview.

H) The use of MAXQDA to transcribe interviews

Under my current approval I have permission to transcribe the interviews manually. I would like to change that step so that I can use software to help me to transcribe.

I will record the audio using the sound recorder app on a laptop which saves recordings in a subfolder called “Sound Recordings” within the “Documents” folder (C:\Users\Owner\Documents\Sound Recordings). I will then immediately move the recording to a password protected folder location on the same laptop. Within 4-weeks after the interview, I will upload the audio to MAXQDA. MAXQDA follows strict GDPR-compliant data protection policies. Audio files are deleted immediately after transcription. The transcripts are automatically deleted once I download them (but no longer than 7 days). I will download them immediately and anonymised them. Then the audio and original transcript will be deleted.

(<https://help.maxqda.com/en/support/solutions/articles/80001135587-is-my-data-safe-when-using-maxqda-transcription->)

H) Additional Information

Applicants may indicate any specific ethical issues relating to the proposed changes, on which the opinion of TREC is sought.

H) List of enclosed documents

<i>Document</i>	<i>Date</i>
Email to schools	23/05/25
Email to EPs	23/05/25
Updated recruitment poster	23/05/25
Updated information sheet for school staff	23/05/25
Updated information sheet for EPs	23/05/25
Updated consent form	23/05/25

H) Declaration

- I confirm that the information in this form is accurate to the best of my knowledge and I take full responsibility for the details herein.
- It is my belief that it would be practical for the proposed amendment to be implemented.
- I have discussed the changes with my supervisor(s) and I can confirm that they are in agreement with my changes and have approved my changes (please copy your supervisor into the email request)

Signature of Student:

Print name: Samantha

Martin _____

Date of submission: 23.05.25 _____

Please return this form as directed by your supervisor or course lead to
academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

You **must** ensure any changes are also approved by the ethical approval body before you start work

Appendix K: Amended Recruitment Documents

- *Amended recruitment poster*
- *Amended Information Sheet for EPs*
- *Amended Information Sheet for Setting Staff*
- *Amended Consent form for EPs*
- *Amended Consent form for Setting Staff*

Amended Recruitment Poster



Educational Psychologists and School Staff from Special Schools Needed for Research

We want to hear about your experiences of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists (EPs) and school staff in settings for learners with severe, or profound and multiple learning disabilities.

Participation involves one 60-minute, in-person joint interview. Each interview will be with an EP and a member of school staff who have worked together in a SLD and/ or PMLD setting. 'School staff' refers to any professional working in a SLD and/ or PMLD setting.

All HCPC registered EPs who are currently working or have recently worked in PMLD settings are invited to participate.



Who are we?

I am a Year 2 trainee EP at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, and I am supervised by a Senior Lecturer.

By participating you will contribute to helping develop a shared understanding of successful interprofessional working between EPs and school staff in special schools, developing practice and enhancing future support for learners with SLD and PMLD.



For more information, please contact Sam Martin at sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Amended Information Sheet for EPs

A co-created understanding of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in settings for learners with Severe, or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research.

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) studying for a Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer – Senior Lecturer and Research Supervisor - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

This information sheet is designed to share detail of the study so you can design whether to take part or not.

What is the aim of the research?

This research aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between EPs and school staff within settings for learners with Severe or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD) and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this. This will be from the perspective of EPs and school staff in these settings (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants, or SENCos who work directly with learners with SLD/PMLD). The researcher hopes to develop a theory or model based on the findings to inform Educational Psychology practice.

SLD, and PMLD are not clinical diagnoses, but descriptors used to categorise people based on their learning needs.

SLD refers to Severe Learning Difficulties which is a spectrum which includes those learners who are consistently and over time working academically at or below the starting levels National Curriculum.

All those with SLD will have, to a greater or lesser degree:
Communication difficulties.

Difficulties in concentration and attention.

Difficulties with understanding abstract concepts.

Difficulties with both short term and long-term memory.

Difficulties with sequential memory.

Difficulties with working memory.

Inefficient and slow information-processing speed.

Limited general knowledge.

Poorly developed strategies for thinking and learning.

Difficulties with generalisation and problem solving.

(Imray and Colley, 2017, p. 38)

According to Colley (2020) Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties refers to learners who have the following needs:

- They will probably be pre- or non-verbal or in other words may not communicate in what we may call ‘typical’ ways. More recently the term ‘post verbal’ is sometimes heard as this emphasises the fact that non typical but equally valid ways of communicating may have been developed by the person.

This may include gesture, body language, eye pointing, behaviour, limited use of symbols, or very simple language.

- Their direct communication may largely be for needs and wants only.
- They may have a limited understanding of cause and effect and/or object permanence.
- They may have some difficulty following instructions and may have behaviours which challenge the people around them or can be said to be socially unacceptable in some contexts.
- Some – though by no means all – may have attendant physical impairments and possibly co-occurring mental health issues.
- Some will have complex medical conditions and may be wheelchair users.
- They will require a high level of adult support throughout their lives and are unlikely to achieve ‘independence’ in its traditional sense of autonomous living, and employment.

A setting for pupils with SLD and/or PMLD will include specialist provision which caters for students who have the needs described above.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for qualified EPs (HCPC registered) who are currently working with staff in a SLD and/or PMLD settings, or who have worked with staff in a SLD and/or PMLD setting in the last academic year. Private, locum, and EPs that work for local authorities will be welcome to take part in this research. To participate, an EP and the member of school staff from the PMLD setting who worked directly with the EP must be willing to take part in a joint interview to discuss successful collaborative working between EPs and school staff within SLD and/or PMLD settings. All participants who jointly volunteer after reading this sheet and completing the consent form will be given the opportunity to take part. All participants will be offered the opportunity to discuss the research and the information sheet prior to consenting.

Please let me know if you have local policies or arrangements for research in your organisation.

What will it involve?

The EP and school staff pair will be asked to take part in a joint interview for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask open-ended questions related to the topic to generate a dialogue.

During the analysis, I will offer the opportunity for you to see the themes generated which will contribute towards the theory/model created and seek your comments. This will be a chance for you to feedback on the themes, in case you feel any of your points were not captured.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

- Add the voices of both teaching staff and EPs to inform others of success EP practice in these settings.
- Engage in reflective dialogue to explore shared strengths and accomplishments, and to share examples of what you felt was successful joint interprofessional working, with an aim to strengthen your working relationship.

- Contribute to an under-researched area of EP practice, which could help develop and inform EP practice within SLD and/or PMLD settings and ultimately benefit learners with SLD & PMLD. Current research suggests there is a lack of confidence from EPs working with these settings.

What are the potential risks of taking part?

- There is a possibility that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations regarding your work together which could have an impact on your relationship and future work. However, given that the drive of the research is to focus on strengths, it is hoped that the conversation can be constructive in a positive way.
- Although it is not expected, due to the potential emotional experience of working with children and young people, there is a chance that participants could become upset during the conversation. If this situation should occur the researcher would encourage the participant to speak with their line manager or supervisor directly after the interview.
- Given the nature of joint interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, grounded theory involves a data-driven sample size, which may be small and could impact confidentiality and anonymity, as a smaller sample size lends itself to increased difficulty in maintaining anonymity.

Confidentiality of the Data

Interviews will be video, and audio recorded on a password protected laptop and securely stored. Interviews will be transcribed no more than 4-weeks after the interview and the audio and video will be deleted. All transcripts will be anonymised including all names of schools, organisations and participant. The anonymised interview transcripts will be stored and handled for approx. 6-10 years in line with the Trust Data Protection Policy.

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/>

Interview content will remain confidential subject to legal limitations. If any concerns or risks are identified, safeguarding or appropriate professionals will be notified.

Location

The researcher would like the interviews to take place at the school setting and in a private space where, as much as possible, conversations cannot be overheard. The researcher will arrange this with each EP–school staff pair.

Disclaimer

All participants can decide to withdraw from the study any time up to when the data has been anonymised, which will be within four weeks of the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the research, you may do so without needing to provide a reason and without any negative consequences for yourself, for the school, or any organisation.

Debriefing

Opportunities for joint and individual debriefing at the end of the interview.

If you have any concerns related to this research, you can contact the researcher, Samantha Martin, or Head of Academic Registry academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you wish to seek support after the interview, I recommend speaking with your supervisor or line manager.

Additionally, there is the following resource:

NHS Every Mind Matters

This resource supports anyone with their mental health and wellbeing by promoting a range of self-care actions.

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Amended Information Sheet for Setting Staff

Research Project Information Sheet for School Staff

A co-created understanding of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in settings for learners with Severe, or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties

The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust has given ethical approval to carry out this research.

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - Trainee Educational Psychologist (EP) studying for a Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer – Senior Lecturer and Research Supervisor - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

This information sheet is designed to share detail of the study so you can design whether to take part or not.

What is the aim of the research?

This research aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between school staff within settings for learners with Severe or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties (SLD/PMLD) and educational psychologists, and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this. This will be from the perspective of schools’ staff in these settings (e.g. teachers, teaching assistants or SENCos who work directly with learners with SLD/PMLD) and the Educational Psychologist they have worked with. The researcher hopes to develop a theory or model based on the findings to inform Educational Psychology practice.

SLD, and PMLD are not clinical diagnoses, but descriptors used to categorise people based on their learning needs.

SLD refers to Severe Learning Difficulties which is a spectrum which includes those learners who are consistently and over time working academically at or below the starting levels National Curriculum.

All those with SLD will have, to a greater or lesser degree:

Communication difficulties.

Difficulties in concentration and attention.

Difficulties with understanding abstract concepts.

Difficulties with both short term and long-term memory.

Difficulties with sequential memory.

Difficulties with working memory.

Inefficient and slow information-processing speed.

Limited general knowledge.

Poorly developed strategies for thinking and learning.

Difficulties with generalisation and problem solving.

(Imray and Colley, 2017, p. 38)

According to Colley (2020) Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties refers to learners who have the following needs:

- They will probably be pre- or non-verbal or in other words may not communicate in what we may call 'typical' ways. More recently the term 'post verbal' is sometimes heard as this emphasises the fact that non typical but equally valid ways of communicating may have been developed by the person. This may include gesture, body language, eye pointing, behaviour, limited use of symbols, or very simple language.
- Their direct communication may largely be for needs and wants only.
- They may have a limited understanding of cause and effect and/or object permanence.
- They may have some difficulty following instructions and may have behaviours which challenge the people around them or can be said to be socially unacceptable in some contexts.
- Some – though by no means all – may have attendant physical impairments and possibly co-occurring mental health issues.
- Some will have complex medical conditions and may be wheelchair users.
- They will require a high level of adult support throughout their lives and are unlikely to achieve 'independence' in its traditional sense of autonomous living, and employment.

A setting for pupils with SLD and/or PMLD will include specialist provision which caters for students who have the needs described above.

Who can take part in this research?

I am looking for a school staff member from a SLD and/or PMLD setting to take part in an interview with a qualified Educational Psychologist who has worked with them in their setting to take part in a joint interview to discuss successful collaborative working between school staff within settings for learners with severe, or profound and multiple learning disabilities (SLD/PMLD) and educational psychologists. All participants who volunteer jointly after reading this sheet and completing the consent form will be given the opportunity to take part. All participants will be offered the opportunity to discuss the research and the information sheet prior to consenting.

Please let me know if you have local policies or arrangements for research in your organisation.

What will it involve?

The School staff – Educational Psychologist pair will be asked to take part in a joint interview for approximately one hour. The researcher will ask open-ended questions related to the topic to generate a dialogue.

During the analysis, I will offer the opportunity for you to see the themes generated which will contribute towards the theory/model created and seek your comments. This will be a chance for you to feedback on the themes and an opportunity for you to clarify any of your points which you feel were not captured accurately.

What are the potential benefits of taking part?

- Add the voices of both school staff and Educational Psychologists to inform others of successful Educational Psychology practice in these settings.

- Engage in reflective dialogue to explore shared strengths and accomplishments, and examples of successful joint interprofessional working to strengthen your working relationship.
- Contribute to an under-researched area of Educational Psychology practice which could help develop and inform Educational Psychology practice within SLD and/or PMLD settings and ultimately benefit learners with SLD & PMLD.

What are the potential risks of taking part?

- There is a possibility that taking part in the research could lead to uncomfortable conversations regarding your work together which could have an impact on your relationship and future work. However, given that the drive of the research is to focus on strengths, it is hoped that the conversation can be constructive.
- Although it is not expected, due to the potential emotional experience of working with children and young people, there is a chance that participants could become upset during the conversation. If this situation should occur the researcher would encourage the participant to speak with their line manager or supervisor directly after the interview.
- Given the nature of joint interviews, confidentiality cannot be assured. However, participants will be asked to maintain confidentiality. Additionally, grounded theory involves a data-driven sample size, which may be small and could impact confidentiality and anonymity, as a smaller sample size lends itself to increased difficulty in maintaining anonymity.

Confidentiality of the Data

Interviews will be video and audio recorded on a password protected laptop and securely stored. Interviews will be transcribed no more than 4-weeks after the interview and the audio and video will be deleted. All transcripts will be anonymised including all names of schools, organisations and participant. The anonymised interview transcripts will be stored and handled for approx. 6-10 years in line with the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust Data Protection Policy.

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/your-information-and-privacy/privacy-policy/>

Interview content will remain confidential subject to legal limitations. If any concerns or risks are identified, safeguarding or appropriate professionals will be notified.

Location

The researcher would like the interviews to take place at the school setting and in a private space where, as much as possible, conversations cannot be overheard. The researcher will arrange this with each School staff – Educational Psychologist pair.

Disclaimer

All participants can decide to withdraw from the study any time up to when the data has been anonymised, which will be within four weeks of the interview. Should you choose to withdraw from the research you may do so without needing to provide a reason and without any negative consequences for yourself, for the school, or any organisation.

Debriefing

Opportunities for joint and individual debriefing at the end of the interview.
If you have any concerns related to this research, you can contact the researcher, Samantha Martin, or Head of Academic Registry academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk

If you wish to seek support after the interview, I recommend speaking with your supervisor or line manager. Additionally, there are the following resources:

Education Support

This is a charity which provides 24/7 emotional support for teachers and education staff through a helpline. You can call at 08000 562 561

NHS Every Mind Matters

This resource supports anyone with their mental health and wellbeing by promoting a range of self-care actions.

www.nhs.uk/every-mind-matters/

Amended Consent Form for EPs
Consent Form for EPs



A co-created understanding of successful collaborative interprofessional working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in PMLD settings

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer (supervisor) - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

This research is being conducted as part of the researcher's Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

	EP's initials here:	If part of LA, PEP's initials here:
I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.		
I understand what the research is about and could ask questions.		
I understand that I will be interviewed alongside a school staff colleague and engage in a discussion about our work together and that interview will be video, and audio recorded and then transcribed. Transcripts will be immediately anonymised. Video and audio recordings will be deleted as soon as transcribed		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have up to four weeks after the interview to tell the researcher if I would like to withdraw and to have my information removed. I can withdraw without any consequences to myself and without having to give a reason.		
I have received a link to the Tavistock and Portmen NHS Trust Data Protection Policy.		
I understand that the researcher will ensure my data is confidential unless risk of harm is identified.		
I agree to keep the information shared by my school staff colleague in the interview confidential.		
I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality due to being interviewed with another person.		
I understand that the sample-size for this research is not predetermined, therefore there could be a small number of participants and that a small sample size could impact the levels of confidentiality and anonymity. This is because a small sample size could suggest that the collaborative work that you are doing is less common.		
I understand that the findings of this study may be presented at conferences and in academic journals.		
I understand that if any safeguarding, illegal or professional misconduct issues emerge, that the researcher will have a duty to share this information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead of that school.		

I understand that by discussing interprofessional working with my colleague in an interview could have implications for our future work. I understand that is not with the researcher's control.		
I consent to taking part in this research.		
I consent for this research to take place in the local authority and with an EP from the Local Authority (LA).		

Please turn over

Local Authority:.....	
Date:.....	
Educational Psychologist (EP) (taking part in the interview)	Principle Educational Psychologist (PEP)
Name: (BLOCK Capitals).....	Name: (BLOCK Capitals)..... ...
Signature:	Signature:

Amended Consent Form for Setting Staff
Consent form for School Staff



A co-created understanding of successful collaborative interprofessional working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in SLD and/or PMLD settings

Researchers:

Samantha Martin - sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Dr Kate Farmer - KFarmer@Tavi-Port.nhs.uk

This research is being conducted as part of the researcher's Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology.

Please initial the statements below if you agree with them:

	School staff member taking part in interview	Headteacher
I have read and understood the information sheet and have had the chance to ask questions.		
I understand what the research is about and could ask questions.		
I understand that I will be interviewed alongside a school staff colleague and engage in a discussion about our work together and that interview will be video, and audio recorded and then transcribed. Transcripts will be immediately anonymised. Video and audio recordings will be deleted as soon as transcribed.		
I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I have up to four weeks after the interview to tell the researcher if I would like to withdraw and to have my information removed. I can withdraw without any consequences to myself and without having to give a reason.		
I have received a link to the Tavistock and Portmen NHS Trust Data Protection Policy.		
I understand that the researcher will ensure my data is confidential unless risk of harm is identified.		
I agree to keep the information shared by my EP colleague in the interview confidential.		
I understand that there are limitations to confidentiality due to being interviewed with another person.		
I understand that the sample-size for this research is not predetermined, therefore there could be a small number of participants and that a small sample size could impact the levels of confidentiality and anonymity. This is because a		

small sample size could suggest that the collaborative work that you are doing is less common.		
I understand that the findings of this study may be presented at conferences and in academic journals.		
I understand that if any safeguarding, illegal or professional misconduct issues emerge, that the researcher will have a duty to share this information with the Designated Safeguarding Lead of that school.		
I understand that by discussing interprofessional working with my colleague in an interview could have implications for our future work. I understand that is not with the researcher's control.		
I agree to have the joint interview take place with a member of school staff within the school, in a private space.		
I consent to taking part in this research.		

Please turn over

School:..... Date:.....	
School Staff Member (taking part in the interview) Name: (BLOCK Capitals)..... Signature:..... Name of Role:	Headteacher Name: (BLOCK Capitals)..... ... Signature:.....

Appendix L:
Email to the SLD/PMLD settings

Email sent directly to special schools who cater for learners with PMLD, or SLD

Dear (name of head teacher),

I am a Year 2 Trainee Educational Psychologist at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust, and I am conducting research which aims to explore ‘successful’ collaborative working between EPs and school staff within settings for learners with severe, or profound and multiple learning difficulties (SLD/PMLD) and to identify and explain the factors that can facilitate this. This will be from the perspective of any member school staff in these settings who work directly with learners with SLD and/or PMLD and a EP. The researcher hopes to develop a theory or model based on the findings to inform Educational Psychology practice.

My research is being supervised by Dr Kate Farmer and has met all the Trust’s requirements for conducting it (including ethical approval).

Participation involves one 60-minutes, in person joint interview. Each interview will be with a member of school staff and an EP who have worked together in a setting for learners with SLD and/or PMLD.

I would be grateful if you could share information about this study with your staff. If anyone would like to take part, please can you ask them to share the study with the Educational Psychologist that they work with. If anyone would like to take part or has any questions please do not hesitate to contact me via sm23027@essex.ac.uk

Thank you for your time.

Kind regards,
Samantha Martin
Trainee Educational Psychologist
Tavistock and Portman NHS Trust

Appendix M:
Initial interview Guide

Theme 1: How do EPs and school staff describe successful interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings?

- a. Tell me about your working relationship? How do you work together?
- b. Can you provide an example of successful joint working?
- c. Why was the EP involved? What did you want to see change?
- d. What happened? What kind of work was done?
- e. What does successful joint working look like?
- f. Could you tell me more about this?
- g. Can you describe your relationship? What is it like?

Theme 2: Derived from above; what are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

- h. What supports the successful collaborative working between EPs and school staff in SLD/PMLD settings?
- i. What was most helpful?
- j. Can you think of any barriers that exist to collaborative working between EPs and school staff in SLD/PMLD settings? If so, can you tell me about them?
- k. What else outside your relationship impacts the way that you both work?

Appendix N: Amended Interview Guide

Theme 1: How do EPs and school staff describe successful interprofessional working in SLD/PMLD settings?

- l. Tell me about your working relationship? How do you work together?
- m. Can you provide an example of successful joint working?
- n. Why was the EP involved? What did you want to see change?
- o. What happened? What kind of work was done?
- p. What does successful joint working look like?
- q. Could you tell me more about this?
- r. Can you describe your relationship? What is it like?
- r1. When you both think about working together, how do you see each of you contributing to the work?

Theme 2: Derived from above; what are the factors and mechanisms which contribute to successful EP practice in SLD/PMLD settings?

- s. What supports the successful collaborative working between EPs and school staff in SLD/PMLD settings?
- t. Thinking about your experience, what felt most helpful in supporting that work?
- t1. How does a family's context find its way into the work you do together?
- u. Can you think of any barriers that exist to collaborative working between EPs and school staff in SLD/PMLD settings? If so, can you tell me about them?
- u1. Something that has come up in conversations with others is the sense that resources can feel stretched. If you were to imagine things being more open and fluid, what do you think that might look like in how you work together?
- v. What else outside your relationship which impacts the way that you both work?

Appendix O: Examples of memos taken from research journal

Memo – dated 11.07.25 from initial codes process

There seems to be a code around a preference for a stable link within the relationship between the setting and the EP evidenced in both interviews [1 and 2]. Why is there this preference? Interview 1 seems to suggest the way they worked together had developed through this link, and as time is a barrier. Interview 2 touches upon logistical challenges of having the EP come in and also suggests the importance of understanding the way the setting works.

Memo- dated 13.09.25 -memo focus coding interviews 1,2 & 3

I was struck by how the school staff member described compromising how they use the EP time to prioritise the link relationship. From interviews 2 and 3, there is a sense of the EP being “part of the team”. Does this mean the link relationship plays a part in the EP being part of their wider team? What does it mean to be considered part of the wider team? All three interviews spoke about the EP knowing other staff [not just the main link) - important.

Memo-dated 30.10.25

Noticed that, in interview 4, the EP had not worked a lot with the school staff member, and yet the school staff member felt the EP had a big impact on the school and herself. Beyond just a stable link- actually embedded in the team.

Memo- dated 19.12.26 Focus coding in ideas

Embedded in the team- I am not sure about this, as all have mentioned the EP being external, and that being external is important for the emotional support.

Memo- dated 21.12.26 theoretical coding ideas

I was struck by the word used by school staff member 4, “testimony”, when describing recommending her team to the EP. EP embedded in the team? NEED TO THINK ABOUT IT - systemic? Does this link to BART- psychological safety created through consistency?

Memo-dated 14.02.26

EP is part of the broader team- I think this is to do with trust and opportunities to build trust. Trust is needed to be considered part of the team, and trust comes from time and consistency.

Appendix P: Sample of initial codes

The screenshot displays the MAXQDA (24.11.1) software interface. The top menu bar includes options like Home, Import, Codes, Memos, Variables, Analysis, Mixed Methods, Visual Tools, Reports, and MAXDictio. Below the menu is a toolbar with icons for New Project, Open Project, Reset, Logbook, Teamwork, Merge Projects, Save Project As, Save Anonymized Project As, Project from Activated Documents, External Files, Archive, Data, and What is AI Assist?.

The main window shows "Interview 3 (150 Paragraphs)" with a search bar and a filter dropdown set to "EP and main setting contact to navigate challenges". The transcript is displayed in a list format with line numbers and time stamps. The text is color-coded to represent different initial codes. On the left side, a list of codes is visible, including:

- Stable link relationships preferred by both professional team
- Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigate
- Working together through professional dialogue and co
- Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navig
- Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigate
- Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration
- Checking in with the other
- Review-based learning and evolution of work overtime
- Review-based learning and evolution of work overtime
- Checking in with the other
- Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigate
- Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigat
- Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration

The transcript text includes the following segments:

26 [0 05 55 6] S3: So, um, in order to keep this staffing, the link relationship with [name of school]'s as stable as possible, it's meant that we've kind of maybe done a bit less, but we've prioritised stability, if that makes sense. So spread things over two years rather than one year. Um.

27 [0 06 16 4] S2: And that's one of the reasons why the collaboration works really well, because sometimes we discourse, um, we find ourselves that we are quite busy and then, um, we have to maybe or we have another we have to prioritise something else. So, um, it's, um, really kind of. We feel quite lucky because it's not. Um, as we go, we can be a little bit more flexible. Um, so it has helped us as a school.

28 [0 06 57 3] S1: Yeah. Really heard that word flexible there as you try and arrange things around each other. And just so I got a clear picture, what does that look like as someone looking in, if you, um, carry some of those dates over or move them around, what might that look like?

29 [0 07 19 2] S3: A good question. Um, well, we we stay in communication with one another, [name of school staff member], don't we?

30 [0 07 28 5] S2: We do a review as well. We do review helps a lot. So if some of the priorities have changed, um, then, um, then we focus on. So that's, that's quite good. So we stay that lack of feedback loops which is really good. And then we go back and review and look at new, um, I guess focus on targets. Yes. That's right.

31 [0 07 54 9] S3: Yeah. And it's kind of collaborative, isn't it? Kind of. Yeah. How we structure the visits. And you know what? How you decide to prioritise. We kind of think a little bit together about that don't we as well.

32 [0 08 12 8] S2: And yes. And what we... can... what I've learned from this um, link with you guys is that it's like we have like a streamlined process of... So it's not that we have to kind of wait and wait or miss a visit. No, we are quite proactive and say it's not going to work that day. Can we look at other

Appendix Q: Illustration of the Coding and Re-coding Process Focused Codes

- *Figure Q1: Example of initial focussed codes*
- *Figure Q2: Questions prompting re-organisation*
- *Figure Q3: An example of a re-configured focused code*
- *Table Q1: Table of Final Focused Codes*

Figure Q1: Example of initial focussed codes

1	Top level	Second level
2		Including the voice of the parent and and the child
3		School staff want best outcome for pupil
4		EP Involvement Leads to Positive Outcome for the Family
5	Child and parent-centred holistic approach	EP work as Concerns about a single student
6		EP Presented to Parents as Part of the school Team
7		EP and school work on a with a holistic approach
8		EP working alongside the other provisions (CAMHS and OT)
9		Acknowledges Shift in Practice and Language Through Collaboration
10	Collaborative Process to Constructing	The EP Valuing And Bringing Together Different Perspectives
11		Working Together Through Professional Dialogue and Openness
12		EP Not Inputting Professional Perspective Identified As A Problem
13		Meeting and constructing a plan ahead together
14	Coordination through consistent framework and communication	Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration
15		Consistent framework for approach to working
16		Consistent framework fosters shared ownership of the work and direct responsibility within the professional organisations
17		EP Facilitating opportunities for staff to offer different perspectives and increase understanding
18	Emotional support and acknowledgement during joint working	Speaking to EP provides opportunity for and helps staff to discuss self-in-role
19		School Staff Detailing challenges of working in the setting and EP offering a relationship to verbalise them
20		School staff detailing challenges of their working environment
21		EP and School staff share the expert role
22	EP brings the wealth and school staff brings the depth	EP brings psychological approaches to the setting
23		EP works with those who know child best
24		Setting staff 's wealth of knowledge helps
25	EP Reflecting Back as an External Person	Fresh Pair Of Eyes
26		EP offering clarity through validation or challenging of ideas
27	Evolving partnership and flexibility throughout relationship	Mutual flexibility between EP and main school contact to navigate changes challenges
28		Review-based learning and evolution of work overtime
29	Importance of a Specific Tailored Approach with PMLD/SLD settings	Difficulty getting buy in for the EP work from school staff for PMLD students when compared to SLD students
30		EP and school staff aligning on interventions to use
31		A specific tailored approach is important when needs are really quite profound
32	Prioritising Stability and EP embedded within	Stable link relationships preferred by both professional teams
33		Familiarity between EP and wider school staff team helping working relationship
34		EP is part of broader school team
35	Recognition of similar values, trust, and respect acting as foundation for relationship	Setting culture enabling the collaborative relationship
36		Shared professional values as foundation to enabling collaboration
37		Trusted partnership because of history
38		Respectful approach to roles, relationship and time
39	School staff as the EP's gateway to the system	School staff make independent judgments to decide on if they need EP input
40		Single staff member facilitates contact with EP
41	School staff Completing Assessment Preparation and Coordination	Staffing is a challenge in specialist settings and so time has to be protected made to work with EP
42		School staff facilitating EP involvement for best possible outcome
43	School Staff Development and team implementation	EP engages in single case work or more systemic work
44		EP impact on the system and practices
45		EP supporting staff development and team implementation
46	School-home Relationship Facilitation by EP	recognised difference with family
47		School had new relationship with parent
48		EP helps understanding between home and school
49		LA changing function of setting affecting relationship
50	Systemic authority and constraints	Systemic organisation dictating nature of relationship
51		Resource scarcity dictating what is possible
52		Businessness and shifting focus due to the capacity to respond to the students needs

Figure Q2: Questions prompting re-organisation

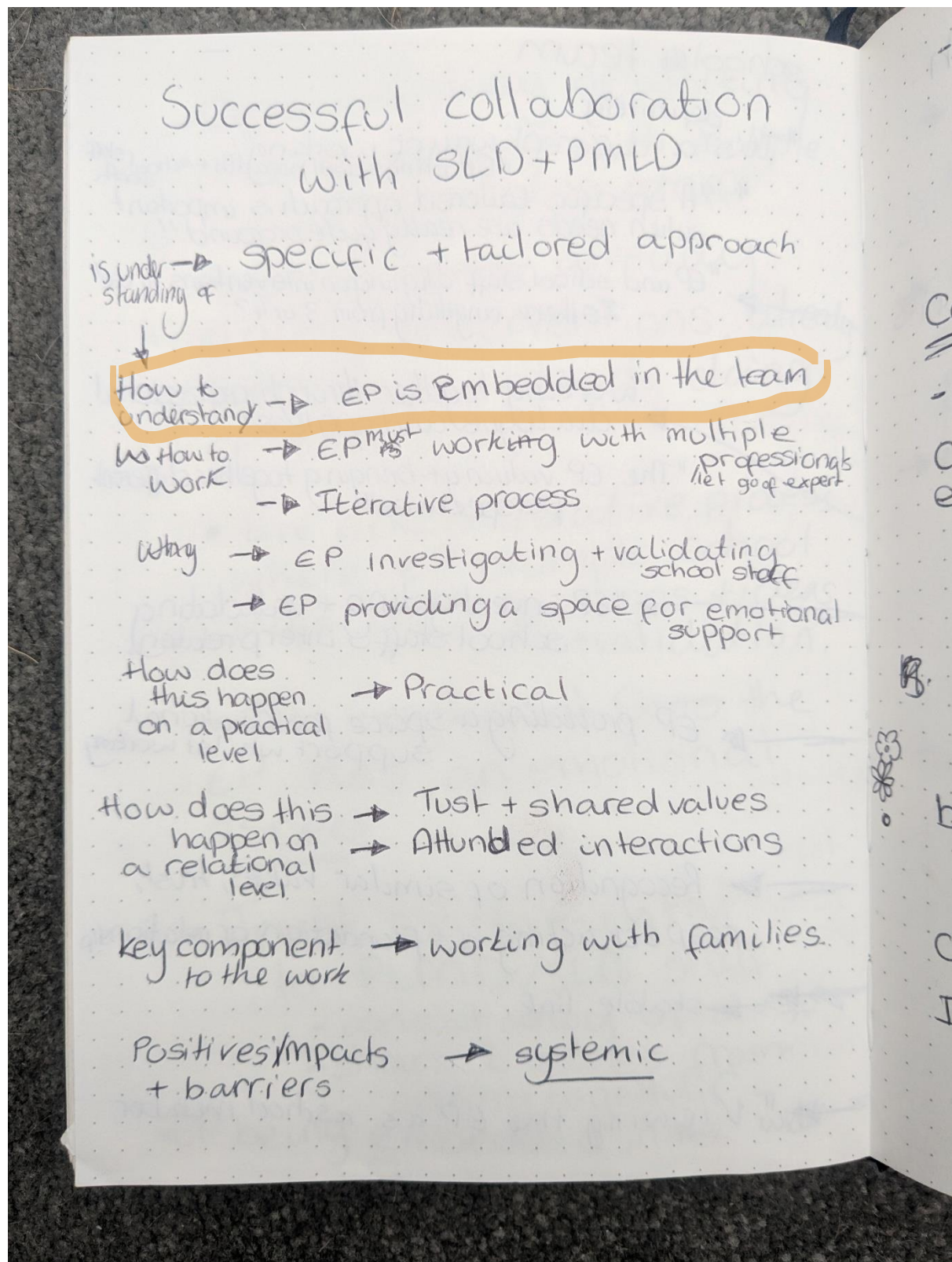


Figure Q3: An example of a re-configured focused code

EP embedded in the team The EP is embedded within the school team, and identified as such to both parents and the staff at the setting. This is identified as beneficial to the joint working	Stable link relationships preferred by both professionals	"Whereas now I'm the link EP that's, you know, it's much easier than for you. If you need any advice, you need something that's going to come that way. You know, it's one person."	"So? And rather than having a role and just almost, then you feel like you have to start from scratch every time. Like in terms of explaining the spins, like the ethos of the school and that you're very like child led and your play based." S2: A lot of your background work is done in a canteen, and you're just assessing. She's just assessing like what is in front of her or that case load."	So, um, in order to keep this staffing, the link relationship with [name of school] is as stable as possible, it's meant that we've kind of maybe done a bit less, but we've prioritised stability, if that makes sense. So spread things over two years rather than one year.	Direct descriptions of the link EP model being helpful for collaborative working, and the EP and school staff prioritising stability
	Familiarity between EP and wider school staff team helping working relationship	I know the team prior to [name of school] because I worked with them at [name of previous nursery]. Yeah. Um, and, um, and then when they moved over here as well. So I think that supports as well, doesn't it? S2: Yeah. S3: We work in a certain way that, you know, when I come in, I want to see the books."	"So I suppose like in, in general, having a link EP is nice because you can it's just nice to come in and let people know who you are. S2: 100% [S2 nods]"	"Um, um, so that is come that is a key element because if they don't know, they see you in school, but they don't really know you. Um, that probably will not. Um, I mean, so if they know you, they know what you're doing in the classes. Uh, So it is important that, uh, building that relationship, not just working with the classes across the school in the."	EP and School staff detailing how EP being known to the wider school allows them to be accessible to and embedded in the school team
	EP is part of broader school team	"You know [name of EP] feels part of our broader team as do [name of EP]s other colleagues as well, which is great."		"So we introduced the the EP and we sometimes she does training, parents get to know the EP. So she's very she's she's involved. She's she's part of us."	Evidence of the EP being seen as part of the school's wider team, and direct references to this
	EP Presented to Parents as Part of the school Team	"It helps with that situation because we know the family so well. And sometimes the assessment can be challenging because you know, you are looking on, you know, there is a what can your child not do. There can be hard can't they. And that sort of, um, looking into the fact that we do have some of the mainstream settings. It's the first time, only time they've ever gone through that process. It can be quite hard to find it. So it's really great. It is a real team of all supporting each other and		"One of the um, professionals that will be supporting our students would be the educational psychologist."	Descriptions of how the EP is incorporated into the wider school team, and presented as such to parents. Consistency of processes within the provision

Table Q1: Table of Final Focused Codes

		Interview 4	Interview 3	Interview 2	Interview 1
✓	Theoretical code 1 - Foundation				
✓	Coordination through consistent framework				
	Meeting and constructing a plan ahead together	•	•	•	•
	Consistent framework for approach to working	•	•	•	•
	Consistent framework fosters shared ownership of the work a	•	•		
✓	Organisational flexibility				
	Single staff member facilitates contact with EP	•	•	•	•
	Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration		•	•	•
	Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigate ch		•		•
	Review-based learning and evolution of work overtime	•	•		•
✓	Theoretical code 2 - Partnership Dynamic				
✓	Joint working in PMLD/SLD settings is a dynmaic process				
	EP and school staff aligning on interventions to use			•	•
	Working together through professional dialogue and openne	•	•	•	•
	Evidence of non-dynamic process as a problem				•
✓	Breadth of knowledge: Role of the EP				
	EP and setting staff share the expert role	•			•
	EP brings psychological approaches to the setting	•	•	•	
	Fresh pair of eyes	•		•	•
	EP role needing to work alongside the other professionals (CA	•	•	•	
✓	Depth of Knowledge: Role of the School Staff				
	EP valuing different perspectives	•	•	•	•
	EP works with those who know child best	•	•	•	
	Settings staff's wealth of knowledge helps	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 3 - Built relational trust				
✓	Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship				
	Shared values as foundation to enabling collaboration		•	•	•
	Trusted partnership because of history	•	•		•
	Stable link relationships preferred by both professional teams		•	•	•
	Familiarity between EP and wider school staff team helping w	•	•		•
	Respectful approach to roles, relationship and time		•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 4 - Understanding the context of the setting				
✓	Understanding the need for a tailored approach				
	EP understanding that working with SLD/PMLD settings come	•	•		
	A specific tailored approach is important when needs are pro	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 5 - Attunement and emotional support				
✓	Attuned Interactions Within Interview				
	Nodding whilst agreeing	•	•	•	•
	Checking in with the other	•	•	•	•
	Inviting the other to answer		•	•	
	Mirrored interactions - smiling, nodding, laughter	•	•	•	•
	face the other to acknowledge positives			•	•
✓	EP providing a space for emotional support				
	EP offering supervisory space, officially or unofficially, for sett	•		•	•
	EP facilitating opportunities for staff to offer perspectives on	•		•	
	Setting staff detailing challenges of working in the setting and	•		•	•
	Setting staff detailing challenges of their working environmen	•		•	
	EP offering reassurance through validation of thinking	•		•	•

✓	•	Theoretical code 6 - Relational Output					
✓	•	Relational impact					
	•	EP is part of broader school team		•	•		•
	•	EP presented to parents as part of the setting team			•		•
✓	•	Systemic impact of EP in SLD/PMLD settings					
	•	EP impact on the system and practices		•	•	•	
	•	EP supporting staff development and team implementation		•	•	•	
✓	•	Positive impact of joint working on family					
	•	EP helps understanding between home and school (+)		•	•	•	
	•	EP involvement leads to positive outcome for the family		•	•	•	•
✓	•	Theoretical code 7 - Relational input					
✓	•	Systemic influences on joint working					
	•	Difficulty getting buy in for EP work from school staff for PML		•			
	•	Systemic organisation dictating nature of relationship			•	•	•
	•	Setting culture enabling the collaborative relationship		•	•	•	
	•	Consistency of staffing is a challenge in specialist settings		•		•	
	•	Resource scarcity dictating what is possible		•	•	•	•
✓	•	Familial context within joint working					
	•	Prior family context proves helpful			•	•	•
	•	School wants more input from the family into the work		•			
	•	EP bringing the context of home to support child			•	•	•

Appendix R: Template for member-checking with participants

I hope you're both well. I just wanted to follow up with you both after our interview in June/July regarding my research, *a co-created understanding of successful collaborative working between Educational Psychologists and school staff in settings for learners with Severe, or Multiple and Profound Learning Difficulties*. I appreciate it's been a few months, but you may remember I mentioned the opportunity to see the themes I've generated and offer feedback.

This is a completely optional part of the process, so please don't worry if you don't have time. If you would like to participate, the feedback simply involves replying to this email once.

Thank you again for your time and support with my thesis.

Please see below the details regarding your context and five key focused codes. These are not all the codes, but five prominent ones that emerged from the data. If I've captured anything incorrectly, please don't hesitate to let me know by **Monday 15th December**.

Contextual information:

	School staff	EP
Roles at the time of the interview (including role for the setting e.g. link EP)		
When you first started working together		
How many times you had worked together at the time of the interview		
When you had last worked together at the time of the interview		
How long you had been in your role for at the time of the interview at the time		
How long you had worked with PMLD and/ SLD settings at the time of the interview		
Whether you had experience working with the other type of professional before working with each other?		
Ethnicity (if shared)		

Focused codes:

Code	Description
Importance of a specific tailored approach with PMLD/SLD settings	PMLD/SLD settings operate under different ways to address the unique challenges their pupils face, approaches not typically seen in mainstream settings. Working with and understanding pupils with PMLD/SLD requires a more tailored approach, often

	bespoke educational support. These factors need to be considered within the overall picture of the work completed by the EP, and so the EP must understand the complexities of the settings which support these children and young people.
EP embedded in the team	The EP is embedded within the school team and identified as such to both parents and the staff at the setting. This is identified as beneficial to the joint working.
EP providing a space for emotional support	Setting staff taking the opportunity offered by the EP to share experiences & reexamine situations related to the challenges of their role.
Joint working in PMLD/SLD settings is a dynamic process	Joint working between EPs and school staff in PMLD/SLD setting is a dynamic conversation, with open discussion regarding cases. Different expertise is sought to help build formulations and ways of working, and proposed interventions are further developed with input from setting staff.
Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship	Both professionals demonstrate that a commonality of values and respect of each other's time supports their work together. Time spent working together also allows for a trusting relationship.

- **Please can you pick out the top 3 focus codes/themes you feel are most important for your collaborative relationship?**
- **Note any focus codes/ themes that surprised you or that you disagree with**
- **Finally, if you have any additional comments, please feel free to share them, though as mentioned, there is no pressure to. Thank you again**

Thank you again so much for time and help. If you have any questions please feel free to ask.

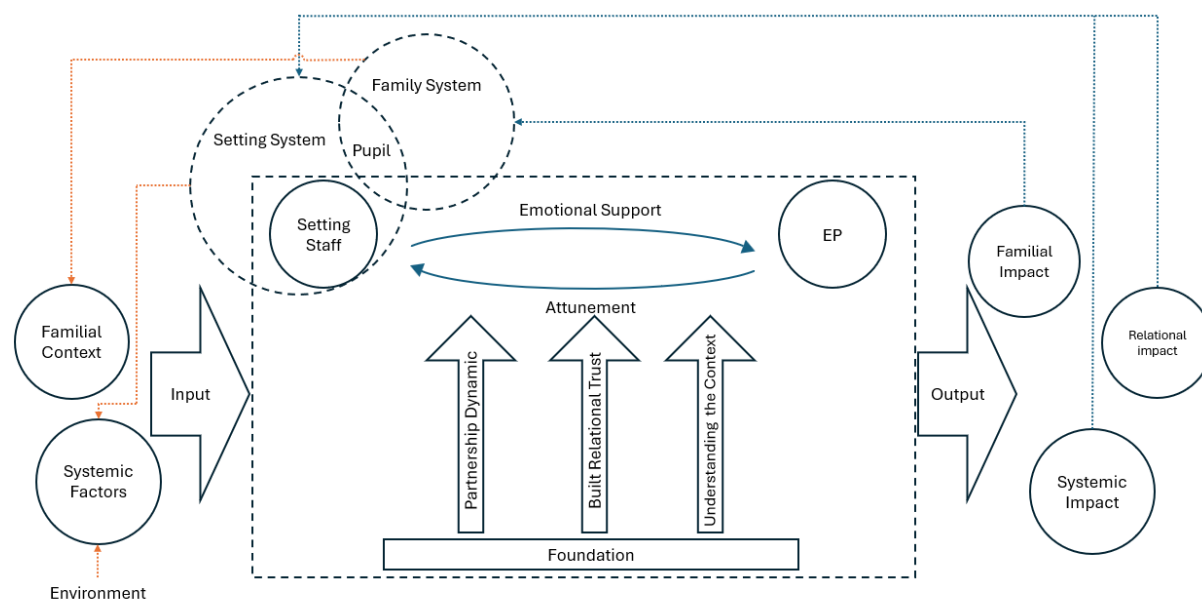
Appendix S

Development of Theoretical Categories and Model Construction

- **Table S1: Table of final theoretical codes applied to final focused codes Figure S1: Final theoretical Model**
- **Figure S2: Example of theoretical sorting**
- **Figure S3: Early version of the developing model**

Table S1: Table of final theoretical codes applied to final focused codes

		Interview 4	Interview 3	Interview 2	Interview 1
✓	Theoretical code 1 - Foundation				
>	Coordination through consistent fra	•	•	•	•
>	Organisational flexibility	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 2 - Partnership Dyam				
>	Joint working in PMLD/SLD settings	•	•	•	•
>	Breadth of knowledge: Role of the E	•	•	•	•
>	Depth of Knowledge: Role of the Sc	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 3 - Built relational tru				
>	Trust, respect, and shared values un	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 4 - Understanding th				
>	Understanding the need for a tailor	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 5 - Attunement and e				
>	Attuned Interactions Within Intervie	•	•	•	•
>	EP providing a space for emotional	•		•	•
✓	Theoretical code 6 - Relational Output				
>	Relational impact	•	•		•
>	Systemic impact of EP in SLD/PMLD	•	•	•	
>	Positive impact of joint working on	•	•	•	•
✓	Theoretical code 7 - Relational input				
>	Systemic influences on joint working	•	•	•	•
>	Familial context within joint working	•	•	•	•

Figure S1: Final theoretical Model**Figure S2: Example of theoretical sorting**

Appendix T:
Example from reflexive journal and typed up for readability

30.07.25

Reflecting on interview 4, I felt myself aligning more with the school staff member, as I felt for them given that they had not worked with the EP many times before. The EP, who I felt was trying to support me and my data gathering, was sharing more examples beyond those relating to their direct working relationship. I was mindful of the school staff member feeling included in the interview and was conscious not to prioritise the EP's voice. Because of this, I kept bringing the discussion back to both of them. This was also so that it (the interview) aligned with CGT - life experiences as data. Although I do not necessarily think anything was lost, as this research did not focus on the role of the EP, I did feel bad after the interview. This has made me reflect on the limitations of my research and whether it should have involved the EP and the commissioner instead. However, they were really rich ideas in the interview, and the P had initially tried to recruit the main commissioner. This raises the question of whether busy schedules might have been another barrier to recruitment. Either way, I'm pleased with the interview, while also remaining mindful of how it may have felt for the EP in the moment when I brought the discussion back to the work they had complete together.

Appendix U:
Additional evidence from Findings chapter

- *Table U1: Location of initials codes and additional evidence*
- *Additional evidence from Findings chapter*

Theoretical code	Focused code	Initial code	Location
Foundation	Organisational flexibility	Single staff member facilitates contact with EP	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		Flexibility between EP and main setting contact to navigate challenges	Findings Chapter
		Review-based learning and evolution of work overtime	Findings Chapter
	Coordination through consistent framework	Meeting and constructing a plan ahead together	Findings Chapter
		Consistent framework for approach to working	Findings Chapter
		Consistent framework fosters shared ownership of the work and direct responsibility within the professional organisations	Appendix U
Pillar 1 – Partnership Dynamic	Depth of knowledge: Role of the setting staff	EP Valuing Different Perspectives	Findings Chapter
		EP works with those who know child best	Appendix U
		Settings staff's wealth of knowledge helps	Findings Chapter
	Breadth of knowledge: Role of the EP	EP and setting staff share the expert role	Findings Chapter
		EP brings psychological approaches to the setting	Appendix U
		Fresh pair of eyes	Findings Chapter
		EP role needing to work alongside other professionals (CAMHS and OT)	Findings Chapter
	Joint working in SLD/PMLD settings is a dynamic process	EP and setting staff aligning on interventions to use	Appendix U
		Working together through professional dialogue and openness	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		Evidence of non-dynamic process as a problem	Additional evidence in Appendix U
Pillar 2 – Build relational trust	Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship	Shared professional values as foundation to enabling collaboration	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		Trusted partnership because of history	Additional evidence in Appendix U

		Respectful approach to roles, relationship, and time	Appendix U
		Stable link relationships preferred by both professionals	Findings Chapter
		Familiarity between EP and wider setting staff team helping working relationship	Additional evidence in Appendix U
Pillar 3 – EP understanding the context of the setting	Understanding the need for a tailored approach	EP understanding that working with SLD/PMLD settings comes with additional complexities	Findings Chapter
		A specific tailored approach is important when needs are profound	Findings Chapter
Feedback loop arrows: Attunement and emotional support	Attuned interactions		Findings Chapter
	EP providing a space for emotional support	EP offering supervisory space, officially or unofficially, for setting staff	Findings Chapter
		EP facilitating opportunities for staff to offer perspectives on others' concerns	Appendix U
		Setting staff detailing challenges of working in the setting and EP offering an opportunity to verbalise them	Findings Chapter
		Setting staff detailing challenges of their working environment	Appendix U
		EP offering reassurance through validation of thinking	Additional evidence in Appendix U
Relational Output	Systemic impact of EP in SLD/PMLD settings	EP impact on the system and practices	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		EP supporting staff development and team implementation	Appendix U
	Positive impact of joint working on family	EP helps understanding between home and setting	Findings Chapter
		EP involvement leads to positive outcome for the family	Findings Chapter
	Relational impact	EP is part of the broader school team	Findings Chapter
		EP presented to parents as part of the setting team	Appendix U
Relational input	Systemic influences on joint working	Difficulty getting buy in for the EP work from setting staff for PMLD students when compared to SLD students	Additional evidence in Appendix U
		Systemic organisation dictating nature of relationship	Findings Chapter
		Setting culture enabling the collaborative relationship	Appendix U
		Consistency of staffing is a challenge in specialist settings	Appendix U
		Resource scarcity dictating what is possible	Findings Chapter

	Familial context within joint working	EP bringing the context of home to support child	Findings Chapter
		Prior family context proves helpful	Appendix U
		School wants more input from the family into the work	Additional evidence in Appendix U

Additional evidence from Findings chapter

Theoretical 1, Focused Code 1 – Organisational flexibility

Single staff member facilitates contact with EP

Across all four interviews the participants described there being a main point of contact within the setting staff team for the EP. In all the interviews, this point of contact was in a senior role within their setting. EP 4 explains why it is helpful to have a single main contact within the setting:

I think having link people in each setting is super important. Um, so we know who we're connecting with and it's not sort of here, there and everywhere. So to have clear lines of communication with each setting is really helpful. (4, Pos.59)

The main contact was described as “hinging” (1, Pos.117) together the EP to different aspects of the setting by passing on information on behalf of the EP (3, Pos.35), putting the relevant members of staff in contact with the EP and facilitating that working relationship (2, Pos.122).

This contact role is likened to acting as a “conduit” into the school community and is further described as “helpful” and a method of providing “clear lines of communication” between the setting and the EP (4, Pos.59).

In addition, the setting staff member and EP pairing in interviews 2 and 3 were described as coordinating together in the academic year to plan (2, Pos.128; 3, Pos.54). These meetings enable the EP-setting staff pair to consider the “priorities for the coming year” (4, Pos.69) in light of the setting’s values and improvement plan (3, Pos.54), and from that whether more individual case or systemic work should be planned (2, Pos.128). This planning takes a different approach for the pair in interview 1, as the nature of their work is already predetermined by the EHC needs assessment process. However, this means that the pair’s planning for the year revolves around the number of children who are likely to go forward for an assessment, anticipation of when they would be put forward, and ultimately with an aim to pencil in slots of time throughout the year for the assessments to take place (1, Pos. 27).

Theoretical 1, Focused Code 1 – Organisational flexibility

Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration

All the interviews described “ongoing communication” between the EP and their main setting contact (1, Pos.155). At a basic level, this was described as copying in the setting main contact to all correspondence between the EP and the setting as a way of overseeing the link (2, Pos.122). However, it was also described as a way of the setting staff member keeping the EP informed on the context of the setting:

or to have a bit of time with ... [the] head teacher, to hear a bit more about context (4, Pos.53)

This is particularly important when the context impacts the collaborative work. For example, EP 3 discusses “understanding the additional complexities that special settings have to cope and manage with” (3, Pos.34) and STAFF MEMBER 3 explains how these additional complexities can impact whether the setting is able to get the necessary paperwork completed for the EP. As an example on a logistical level, this communicative approach can therefore take the form of letting the EP know that the date of the session will have to move (3,

Pos.32). STAFF MEMBER 3 shared that she is appreciative that she can do this, and that EP 3 responds to these changing priorities quickly:

[EP 3] will come back to us and she will say we have this day, that day and that day. So the response is ... very quick and very clear. (3, Pos. 32)

Similarly, in interview 1, STAFF MEMBER 1 also refers to the ongoing communication as supporting the EP to understand the setting context to better support the practical aspects and flexibility of the working relationship:

I think it's the flexibility that we bring with it, isn't it, as well? ... we never know if it's going to change. Some plans come in quicker than others ... Sometimes families ... change their mind. (1, Pos.153)

Theoretical 1, Focused Code 1 – Organisational flexibility

Ongoing, clear communication is key to collaboration

Within all interviews there were descriptions of the pairs being bidirectionally flexible to support collaboration within the relationship and to adapt to changes. As described by EP 1:

It's the organic kind of, being able to adjust to changes as and when they emerge in relation to the setting and the needs of the setting and the staffing (1, Pos.236)

Examples of the setting system being flexible to accommodate the EP included providing cover for specific staff to ensure the EP can work with the staff members most relevant to the pupil. This provision of flexibility from the setting is especially critical given that staffing within these settings can be challenging, and knowledge of individual pupil needs is required to cover classrooms safely (2, Pos.112; 4, Pos.63). In addition, there were two examples of the setting adapting to working with EP team members other than their designated EP to allow for increased capacity on the EP-side:

I can't always be the only, like, I can't take all of the traded SLA and deliver all of it to [name of school] because ... I've got a couple of other things I have to do. So it's just that ... having to share it with another EP, and sometimes that works, sometimes that doesn't work (3, Pos.116)

Despite EP 3 describing this arrangement as not always being fully successful, STAFF MEMBER 3 demonstrates a commitment to being flexible within their arrangement:

We're quite happy how it is working now. Um, even if we have two EPs and all that, um, [EP 3] will support that EP ... and we have to also support that person (3, Pos.128)

Similarly, STAFF MEMBER 1 also references a transition period to support Assistant Educational Psychologists (AEPs) to support EP 1 with the observations for assessments:

So there's been a transition period with that, where [EP 1] has supported their [AEPs] professional development ... where we've done that in partnership (1, Pos.81)

In addition, there was evidence within the interviews of the EPs being flexible to respond to the specific needs of the setting at that time, as described by STAFF MEMBER 3:

and then ... we have to prioritise something else ... We feel quite lucky ... we can be a little bit more flexible ... so it has helped us as a school. (3, Pos.27)

In a slightly different light, EP 4 discusses that the need for adaptability can vary between settings:

And we've noticed that in [name of a location] the work discussion groups are very well attended. They're very vibrant. People seem to go away very positive, lots of ideas. And for some reason the [name of a location] and the [name of a location] seems to have dwindled a bit. So then of course, we have to be wondering about that. Um, but also adapting (4, Pos.82)

Theoretical 1, Focused Code 2 – Coordination through consistent framework

Consistent framework fosters shared ownership of the work and direct responsibility within the professional organisations

All the interviews described how the structured approach to working also “fosters shared responsibility” (3, Pos.35) within the collaborative relationship to support joint working. For example, both interviews 1 and 3 detail how the understanding of a shared framework involved understanding how the EP works (1, Pos.230), and from that how they “can get outcomes for the students” (3, Pos.35). This also enabled them to involve other setting staff in their processes, as highlighted by STAFF MEMBER 3:

And then I passed that information to others and then ... all are involved. So it's like ... ownership of responsibility ... So it works. (3, Pos.35)

Further, STAFF MEMBER 1, describes how her team work together to ensure that they are also getting the most from their work with the EP:

we discuss that in the morning ... we make the most of the opportunity for an observation by ensuring in our team meeting “Okay. Ed Psychs coming in today to see this child. What do we need to ensure happens to facilitate that rich observation?” (1, Pos.101)

STAFF MEMBER 1 and STAFF MEMBER 3 also highlight that having a consistent framework helps them to support pupils’ families to work with the EP:

[name of EP]'s spoken to them on the phone, but I will have also already said, you know, we're going through these processes ... You know, I kind of go through the four areas strengths, barriers, what can they do? What can't they do? (1, Pos.174)

Finally, interview 4 notes how structure supports the setting to trust the EP and the setting staff pairing with responsibility within the process. In EP 4's example, she describes that the setting has a key member of staff overseeing the process of their work discussion groups:

The idea is they've already had a conversation with that link person, and then they then take back some of what they've discussed with us to that link person, so that there's always an overview ... so things don't get lost (4, Pos.59-60)

Theoretical 2, Focused Code 3 – Depth of knowledge: Role of the setting staff

EP works with those who know child best

The data in this code demonstrates how the EP utilised the expertise of the setting staff members who “know the child best” (2, Pos.39; 3, Pos.73) in order to support the CYP in each of the collaborative relationships between the EP and setting staff member.

The adults who are described as knowing the pupil well can be many different professionals within the setting system, including the class teacher (2, Pos.39), an OT (2, Pos.39), class team members (3, Pos.73; 4, Pos.46), and learning mentors (3, Pos.73), to name a few examples.

Theoretical 2, Focused Code 4 – Breadth of knowledge: Role of the EP

EP brings psychological approaches to the setting

The data for this code demonstrates that an aspect of the EP’s contribution as part of that breadth of knowledge is bringing psychological understanding (4, Pos.46), knowledge, and tools (3, Pos.63) into the discussion. Evidence of this could be observed with the EPs considering aspects of the family context and how this might be impacting on the child’s development (1, Pos. 88), providing training to support parents to understand how trauma, sensory differences and also mental health issues could be impacting their children, and strategies to support their children and themselves (3, Pos.50).

EPs also implement psychological tools into their assessments. Examples of this can be using a functional behaviour assessment model to support the understanding of trigger points (2, Pos.50), introducing setting staff to interventions such as the Tree of Life to help strengthen practice within the setting (3, Pos.58), and training setting staff to be able to implement these interventions without EP support (3, Pos.60).

Theoretical 2, Focused Code 5 – Joint working in SLD/PMLD settings is a dynamic process

Working together through professional dialogue and openness

Across all of the interviews, EPs and setting staff identified examples and benefits of open “professional dialogue” (1, Pos.91) by “collaboratively sitting together” (4, Pos.46), “exploring, wondering” and “figuring things out” (4, Pos.46). It can be seen that each professional is bringing their own expertise to the table and considering different aspects of the collaborative work together (3, Pos 81-82), even though it is “all through questioning” (1, Pos.96). For example, EP 2 explains:

So I think that helps it to become so much more collaborative because ... when we were having our discussion ... it was just me kind of thinking outside the box ... but you telling me things that you knew about the pupil, and that was why that wouldn't work (2, Pos.81)

This open dialogue is considered a method of “triangulating a moderated process” (1, Pos.91) by involving a fresh perspective (2, Pos.85) to best support the pupils. Demonstrating this, STAFF MEMBER 3 shared:

STAFF MEMBER 3: But I think we're all [bringing] ... unique expertise to the table. And if we have an idea, [EP] will ask me what about this? And I will say, yeah, what about that? And then we will learn. But it's all based on students' needs and how we can have an impact here.

EP 3: Yeah. [EP3 nods] (Interview 3, Pos.81-2)

Theoretical 2, Focused Code 5 – Joint working in SLD/PMLD settings is a dynamic process

Evidence of non-dynamic process as a problem

Supporting the point above, an outlier code relevant to one interview only due to its specific context provides an example of the EP not contributing professional dialogue to the joint working. In interview 1, STAFF MEMBER 1 explains that they have worked with different EPs previously. In a specific example, she explains that although the previous EP listened to the views of the parents and the setting, they did not bring their own view to discussion and STAFF MEMBER 1 felt that this was a problem:

In some circumstances we've had where an EP, they, they are a typist doing a combination of the parent view, the setting view and not really bringing their view (1, Pos.254)

Further, STAFF MEMBER 1 shared that when working with an EP other than EP 1, she felt as though there was not a shared view of the child (1, Pos.280). A shared understanding of the child would be facilitated through successful collaborative working and specifically the process of the different professionals bringing their perspectives to the table, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

But to have, you know, somebody else coming with their professional expertise and their specialism to kind of bounce that off and say, oh, you know, we're seeing the same thing (1, Pos.79)

The EP goes on to explain that shared understanding is facilitated through asking lots of questions to structure that conversation (1, Pos.96). This suggests that the staff member is reflecting that the previous EP did not question their thinking enough through the process, suggesting that they do not want the EP to allow the staff member to determine the nature of the need themselves but to be genuinely curious and to “moderate the process” (1, Pos.91).

Theoretical 2, Focused Code 5 – Joint working in SLD/PMLD settings is a dynamic process

EP and setting staff aligning on interventions to use

Participants from three interviews identified how the application of intervention is iterative in the sense that the EP will discuss with the setting staff which intervention they would like to apply. It was further highlighted in two interviews that this was because the settings are already using interventions and strategies to support the pupils, as explained by EP 2:

Again, I would say it differs a lot from my work in more mainstream settings where you go in and you know, they've never heard of intensive interaction and stuff. So then it's it does feel a lot more like you're giving brand new suggestions and ideas. But I always find, here that you're basically already doing most of the stuff. (2, Pos.56)

This can be considered related to the idea that a:

very sort of specific tailored approach is even more important when the needs are really quite profound (1, Pos.112)

The participants relayed how they would work together to delve deeper into the application of intervention and consider tweaking aspects of provisions to better support the pupil moving forward (2, Pos.52-53; 2, Pos.56). In addition to being able to collaborate with the setting staff and engage in that dialogue, this level of adaptation of intervention requires the EP to know the students and setting well enough to be able introduce those ideas in the first place (3, Pos.58-60), but also that the setting staff share their understanding of the student to help adapt provisions to the individualised needs of each CYP and the context of their settings.

An example of this was given by STAFF MEMBER 2 with the description given including an OT who has facilitated sensory interventions with a pupil in the consultation. This meant they were:

able to offer her [EP] kind of extra information and ruled out stuff that maybe she [EP] would have said to try, which we already had and hadn't worked (2, Pos.40).

In addition, EP 4 highlighted that not all interventions are initially accessible or supportive of the needs of pupils with SLD/PMLD, particularly those with PMLD, and therefore adaption of the intervention is worthwhile:

we offered ELSA out and I think it was yourself [name of staff member] that said, have you thought about adapting ELSA for a PMLD setting? And [other EP] and I were like, wow, let's talk more about that. (4, Pos.49)

Theoretical 3, Focused Code 6 – Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship

Shared professional values as foundation to enabling collaboration

This code describes how three of the interview pairings spoke about how sharing values regarding the work they are doing together is an important aspect of their relationship (1, Pos. 221) and “a shared ethos” (2, Pos.147). For example, STAFF MEMBER 1:

STAFF MEMBER 1: ...I think that's what makes it work, because I think we've got a very agreed, shared value and view about the nature of the work. And I think that's implicit with all of everything that we do. You know, I think that.

EP 1: Yeah. [EP 3 *nods*] (1, Pos. 153-154)

A defining value shared across all the settings interviewed for this study observed both implicitly and explicitly was that they are “child-centred” (1, Pos.269) and that the work is about wanting the “best possible outcome” (2, Pos.169) for their pupils. As illustrated by STAFF MEMBER 3:

STAFF MEMBER 3: ...it's all based on students' needs and how we can have an impact here

EP 3: Yeah. [S3 *nods*] (Interview 3, Pos. 81-82)

Evidence within these codes suggests that it is important for the EP to understand, align with, and contribute to the setting's ethos, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

and then [EP] and her team come along with a very human approach to that child. And they join that ethos that we've got with the families all the time. And I think that's that feels really shared, that feels like a really shared sort of ethos to me (1, Pos.199)

In fact, STAFF MEMBER 2 shares that they would probably ask to work with a different EP if they felt their current collaborative partner was not in alignment with the setting's ethos because it is considered critical to the setting's view on supporting their pupils:

EP 2: I suppose now that we've spoken about it, I think it is maybe more about the ethos of the school. [*Both face each other*]

STAFF MEMBER 2: [*Both nod*] Yeah, I think it's. like you said, it's positive because I think we would find it difficult to work with an EP who might come back with a suggestion of ... maybe like a recommendation would be like, ABA ... we don't do that, we wouldn't touch into that. So it's just literally a waste of our time ... because there could be other EPs who don't necessarily agree ... with, like our approach to behaviour and certain things (2, Pos.144-145)

Building upon the previous quote, whilst it is evident that there is a shared sense of identity across the SLD/PMLD settings involved in this research, it is also evident that each have their own culture, values, and identity with regards to their values and how they support the CYP which are critical to their context.

we have reduced physical intervention to actually zero ... We don't believe in physical intervention. Um, we believe that we need to provide ... as much ... provision as possible to support students ... to get to that stage that they can regulate, and then they can notice and then they can engage (3, Pos.88)

The definition of the above value as a belief illustrates that it is fundamental to how the setting system sees itself. It is also therefore critical for the EP to align, reflect, and contribute to this ethos.

Further evidence of value alignment between the pair and therefore the wider setting system can be found from EP 1:

And values. I think that that sits quite comfortably with me is the idea that, you know, they're aligned ... So I think there is that alignment of, of values and ... of goals. (1, Pos.221)

Although values were not mentioned in interview 4, interestingly both EP 4 and STAFF MEMBER 4 responded to the member-checking email and they both reported focused code Trust, Respect and Shared Values as the most important theme for their collaborative relationship, further evidencing the importance of building trust within the relationship.

Theoretical 3, Focused Code 6 – Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning

Trusted partnership because of history

This code demonstrates that the history of their relationship and observing the impact of their work overtime has led to trust between professionals, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

if you really trust the person that you're making those with, because that's based on history, that's based on something, you know, more broad (1, Pos.248)

Trust within the relationship can be increased through observations of the impact the EP can have on the setting system, evidenced by STAFF MEMBER 3's descriptions of the EP having had a strong influence and consequently asking each year to work with her again because she trusts that she will continue to have "a big impact" (3, Pos.92). This was also identified by STAFF MEMBER 4 when she referred to the fact that the setting had already "gained a lot from them [EP] being part of the Trust" (4, Pos.21). Further, STAFF MEMBER 4 actively supported her staff to make time to see the EP and shared firsthand testimony with them when signposting them towards working with the EP, indicating that she trusts the EP and their work (4, Pos.31).

Within this code detailing how a long-term relationship is beneficial to building trust between the EP and SLD/PMLD staff there is an element that the EP has gained an understanding of how the setting works from working with them over time (3, Pos.100). STAFF MEMBER 2 describes that the time required for an EP to understand their setting represents a barrier to working, and that it is more beneficial to work with someone with an understanding of the setting already:

A lot of your background work is done in a sense, and ... She's just assessing like what is in front of her or that case load. (2, Pos.126)

Theoretical 3, Focused Code 6 – Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship

Respectful approach to roles, relationship, and time

Participants across the interviews from both professionals described a shared "respectful" approach to the joint working relationship (1, Pos.189,196), especially with regards to time pressures from outside the working relationship. This was demonstrated by all of the EPs towards the setting staff members through their evident appreciation of the setting staff member prioritising time for them to meet and plan (3, Pos.97), for sharing challenges that they experience in their role (4, Pos.32), and considering the impact of their way of working on the setting staff member, such as the length of the report and the time take to read it (2, Pos.170).

Theoretical 3, Focused Code 6 – Trust, respect, and shared values underpinning relationship

Familiarity between EP and wider setting staff team helping working relationship

Within all of the interviews, the EP and setting staff member detailed how the EP being known to the wider team within the setting "supports" (1, Pos.72) successful joint working. This is described as key by STAFF MEMBER 3, who highlights that if the wider setting team know the EP then they will also be aware of the work the EP is doing within the school:

so ... that is a key element because ... if they know you, they know what you're doing in the classes ... So it is important ... building that relationship (3, Pos.54)

In order to better support development of relationships between the EP and the wider setting team, STAFF MEMBER 3 describes arranging with the EP to have "a meeting with the staff in the morning to introduce herself" (3, Pos.54).

Similarly, EP 4 also describes the importance of developing relationships with the wider setting team as evidenced by her discussing the importance of building these relationships, particularly within the SLD/PMLD settings, to better understand the setting's context:

“You know, as much as we can, [we] spend time in the setting, you know, not to have the work discussion groups online, we always have those in person. We always have them at [name of setting] ... try and go a bit earlier and pop into the class here or there (4, Pos.53)

Theoretical 5, Focused Code 9 – EP providing a space for emotional support

EP offering reassurance through validation of thinking

Beyond providing emotional support through a supervisory space, the setting staff in three of the interviews described how the EP provided emotional support by providing reassurance through validation of thinking or prompting reassessment through questioning. As described by STAFF MEMBER 1, the EP is able to provide “an element of moderation around what we're seeing” (1, Pos.91) and in her particular context that was helpful as she describes herself as feeling vulnerable as she felt that:

[There is] a lot of onus on you to make these ... big judgements and these children are tiny ... They're very, very young. And so for me it's really, really valuable that it is a combined ... working time.” (1, Pos.129)

Further, STAFF MEMBERS 2 and 4, shared the value they find in “getting reassurance” (2, Pos.2 & 4, Pos.38) and being “encouraged” that the way they are considering a situation is correct (4, Pos.37), as well as the EP facilitating thinking through questioning:

And somebody either given, um, it's like being devil's advocate and showing a different kind of point of view (4, Pos.37)

Theoretical 5, Focused Code 9 – EP providing a space for emotional support

EP facilitating opportunities for staff to offer perspectives on others' concerns

Two of the interviews described how the EP created a space for setting staff to share their experiences and offer different perspectives on challenges that other setting staff members are experiencing. For example, STAFF MEMBER 2 described how the EP facilitated a solution circles sessions with the teachers in the setting:

the whole task was I need someone to be like the problem person. They have a problem. And then everyone ... collaboratively works together (2, Pos.95)

She further describes how this session became therapeutic in nature:

And it literally, I think it just turned into like a group therapy session in that meeting. [*Both face each other and laugh*] (2, Pos. 94-95)

Similarly, EP 4 described her work of facilitating spaces which provide setting staff opportunities to arrive at a shared understanding:

[If] we can't quite find a way where we can be ... unanimous or on the same page. So then we've said, okay, let's have an open group, then why not all sit together? So

everyone working around that particular child, everyone within that class team and think and feel about that (4, Pos.41)

Theoretical 5, Focused Code 9 – EP providing a space for emotional support

Setting staff detailing challenges of their working environment

Both interviews 2 and 4 noted how the EP providing a supporting and validating space also enables capacity building within the setting system so that the path through adversity is not as reliant on an individual, and this was expressed at different levels. For example, from a class teacher's perspective when referencing the benefit of having an opportunity to converse with the EP:

I think it was for me it was good because it was it just got to a point of, I've literally tried every single thing (2, Pos.85)

And from STAFF MEMBER 4, from a management team member's perspective:

I don't know, even in my role as a curriculum pathway leader, I don't have all the answers here ... I can signpost to you, to somebody who also might not have all the answers, but actually they ... are skilled in this area. They might be able to support in a way of thinking or a way of looking at something differently. And yeah, I think that's where it's had the most impact is knowing actually as a leader ... [I] don't [have to] carry this on my own ... so yeah, that's what's been really beneficial and really effective. (4, Pos.40)

Theoretical 6, Focused Code 10 – Systemic impact of EP in SLD/PMLD settings

EP impact on the system and practices

In all four interviews there was descriptions of the interprofessional working relationship with the EP having an impact on the setting's system, all of which describe the work as having "benefited not just the teacher but class teams as well" (3, Pos.40). Examples of this included the EP supporting the setting staff with the understanding of individual pupils, as described by STAFF MEMBER 1:

if we didn't have the specialist ... observation of somebody like [EP 1] ... it can also leave you ... quite vulnerable.... it's so much more rich if we can all work and all do that all together (1, Pos.129-132)

In the case of interview 2, the EP's support led the setting to reconsider their approach to accommodating requests from families, which was described by STAFF MEMBER 2 as not supporting the relationship between home and the school in the particular case they described (2, Pos.95). The EP's input supported a reflection within the setting of the benefits of boundaries for families:

STAFF MEMBER 2: but I think when I heard it from you [EP] and it's like management even ... okay, maybe we do need to change our ways, not for everyone because a lot of parents appreciate it a lot. But for some, less is more. some, less is more.

EP 2: Yeah [*Both nod*] (2, Pos. 95-96)

Similarly, interviews 3 and 4 offered examples of interprofessional links with the EP leading to changes across the setting system. For example, STAFF MEMBER 3 shared that they were aware of a form used by the EP which is intended to be completed with families prior to engaging with the EP, and how they now use this form before working with families alongside other external professionals:

So it's a really lovely form that [Name of EP] introduced to us ... then we ... use that approach with not just with educational psychologist ... now we are using it with CAMHS as well ... and I do the consultations with parents using the same approach (3, Pos.40)

Theoretical 6, Focused Code 10 – Systemic impact of EP in SLD/PMLD settings

EP supporting staff development and team implementation

This code describes how it was noted that part of the purpose of the joint working between the EP and the setting staff member was to upskill staff within the setting. This was evidenced by descriptions of the EP delivering training for staff members in interviews 2, 3, and 4 (2, Pos.27-28; 3, Pos.56-58; 4, Pos.19).

Theoretical 6, Focused Code 12 – Relational impact

EP presented to parents as part of the setting team

Further, interviews 1 and 3 provided descriptions of how the EP is incorporated into the wider setting team through their presentation to and involvement with the setting's parent community, further supporting the idea that the EP is embedded within the provision and the wider setting team. For example, STAFF MEMBER 1 includes the EP when describing the team "all supporting each other and leaning on each other" (1, Pos.117) when referring to working with parents as part of their child's EHC needs assessment. STAFF MEMBER 3 described sharing what the EP does within the parents' newsletter "so it's not like, an unknown thing anymore" (3, Pos.54). She further details how the EP is presented to and works with parents of the setting:

sometimes she does training [and] parents get to know the EP. So she's very... involved (3, Pos.73).

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 13 – Systemic influences on joint working

Setting culture enabling the collaborative relationship

This code represents how all the pairs of participants note the importance that the SLD/PMLD setting is open to input from the EP for successful collaborative working (1, Pos.248), whether that is based upon new suggestions regarding practice (1, Pos.248; 2, Pos.49), or a new process which is important for the EP, as described by EP 3:

[Staff Member 3] has written for all the staff in the school, this is how EP's work with us, and she's got a kind of guide for staff ... and she's actually used something that some schools see as an incredibly bureaucratic and annoying process, which is our request form for consent. She's actually embraced that amazingly well and uses that as actually an intervention (3, Pos.36)

When considering openness of setting, three of the interviews described this as being driven by a “child-centred” approach (1, pos.269), with a core belief of being “interested in the children and trying to understand them” (3, Pos.84) and the role the EP plays in supporting with this, as described by STAFF MEMBER 2:

the ethos of the school and like the values of the school and like our main priority is literally the wellbeing of the student. And obviously you kind of slot into that significantly (2, Pos.109)

This value is being demonstrated by the commitment from the setting to give their staff “the time and space” to be able to meet with the EP (2, Pos.106), despite that pulling on resources within the setting (2, Pos.109) and requiring cover from other staff (4, Pos.63).

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 13 – Systemic influences on joint working

Difficulty getting buy in for the EP work from setting staff for PMLD students when compared to SLD students

This code describes an exception within the data and is only found in interview 4. STAFF MEMBER 4 raised that she had noticed that a low amount of “buy in” (4, Pos.71) to the EP supervisory drop-in space from the staff working with PMLD students relative to those working with SLD students:

So we're working with the harder to reach students, and I don't know whether it's ... because of the students more complex needs ... but actually they could really do with some, you know, the educational psychologist's input (4, Pos.71)

Although not clear of the reason, she felt this could be needing to prioritise the physical and medical needs of the pupils over attending the sessions:

It's not seen as a it's not the first point of call ... I don't know if I'm articulating this well, but it's because their medical needs, their pastoral needs, their physio needs just come way above this (4, Pos.71)

It should be noted that the EP provided a space where supervisory support can be offered in all interviews. However, lower attendance of PMLD staff relative to SLD staff was not raised by any other participant pairs. That it was raised in interview 4 could be due to STAFF MEMBER 4's role where she is within the middle-management team overseeing both the SLD and PMLD staffing and so is positioned to observe any differences between the two bodies of staff.

Building on from the above, EP 4 feels that the staff of pupils with SLD/PMLD would benefit from emotional support from the EP. In the cases where a staff member does attend a drop-in session, the conversation is initially focused on support for a student rather than emotional support for the staff member themselves.

And there's a kind of a list of students, you know, we really want to help with these students. And perhaps a felt sense of, oh, is it a bit selfish to come and just spend this whole time talking about myself? And actually we're saying, no, this is where the real impact on the students will be had. (4, Pos.80-81)

Through the above examples we can understand that SLD/PMLD setting staff primarily utilise time with an EP to discuss support for students rather than support for themselves.

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 13 – Systemic influences on joint working

Consistency of staffing is a challenge in specialist settings

Staffing difficulties were explicitly explored in two of the interviews, with STAFF MEMBER 4 highlighting that:

it can be quite difficult because staffing is a real difficulty, a real barrier, especially in special needs schools ... you find that ... half the staff generally ... within special schools are agency. Then you've probably got half that permanent ... so all that has an impact. (4, Pos.63)

Similarly, STAFF MEMBER 2 also discussed that staffing in her setting can be difficult (2, Pos.109) and how the setting will always make time for work with the EP due to the value they place upon the EP's opinion. However, she did describe finding the time to work with the EP as a barrier (2, Pos.169) due to staffing:

I think it just ... Probably a lot of the time is just finding the time to do it, and it's just like ... staffing is tight because in a sense, I think when you came in and observed the student, as much as I was conducting somewhat of a lesson, my focus isn't really at that moment with the other students. It's mainly with him because I know he's being focussed on by someone and you just want the best possible outcome for him ... But yeah, it's just the time, just making sure the class is safe and all of that. (2, Pos.169)

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 13 – Systemic influences on joint working

Systemic organisation dictating nature of relationship

This code represents that there was an acknowledgement within three of the interviews that the EPS organisation had a large impact on the nature of the working relationship. All three interviews noted that the EP had a “link” role to the setting (1, Pos.279; 2, Pos.9; 3, Pos.26) meaning that they are the person “allocated” to the setting by the LA (2, Pos.139).

This was highlighted by EP 1 who shared that not all EPS have a link EP model, ultimately impacting the working relationship of the two participants in interview 1:

whereas how it was before was it made it more difficult because you didn't have that kind of link relationship ... Whereas now I'm the link EP that's, you know, it's much easier ... And going forward it probably will be [changed] so that the shift in the system that's going to affect how we work, because ... any EP could come in. (1, Pos.279)

Further, even when there is a link model within the EPS, this does not necessarily mean that the EP currently linked to that setting will remain as the linked practitioner as described by EP 2:

I think if there was a big issue or something like they would take ... my perspective into consideration, but I suppose ... they could pull the school from me and give it to someone else. And I suppose that's ... just an element of like not being in control (2, Pos.167)

Another systemic impact from the EPS on the collaborative relationship between setting staff and the EP is linked to the EPS being understaffed, therefore affecting their ability to deliver their traded offer and how this has meant that the EP has had to “deliver the visits over a period of two years” (3, POS.24) with the focus of keeping the link relationship as stable as possible.

Further, the EPS also determines the model of working, whether that is “traded” where the settings buy in the EP’s time (3, Pos.24) or “partly traded” (2, Pos.11) whether there is a freely accessible service as part of an offer which is allocated to settings, such as in interview 2 where the EP works with the setting purely through the core allocation.

However, it is important to note that although EP 4 was working with their paired setting privately, there are still restrictions based on how they are brought in which determines the nature of the relationship. EP 4 explains that the Trust buys a set number of days of the EP’s time, which impacts the amount of time she has in each of the settings within the Trust:

Quite a lot of time, although it's quite a big Trust. So it has specialist settings and mainstream settings across [name of place] and [name of place]. And so actually the amount of time each setting gets is not ... very much unfortunately (Interview 4, Pos. 16)

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 13 – Systemic influences on joint working Resource scarcity dictating what is possible

All the pairs of participants raised time as a barrier to their joint working, and in particular how this impacted the direct work that the EP could complete with the setting. For example, in interview 1, EP 1 shared that time was a challenge due to “the sheer volume of ... children coming through now” (1, Pos.283) when referring to the number of CYP coming through the EHC needs assessment process. Consequently, she shared that due to this she is unable to complete the whole assessment process on her own:

because of the sheer volume of work now, I can't do all the observations. It's impossible ... I haven't got a picture of the child in my head, whereas when I've been here and seen them (1, Pos.271)

Similarly, EP 3 shares that she has limited in time within her role, which has also meant that she shares the work with a colleague:

I suppose it's just my time as well. Like, um, because I have other responsibilities ... to the service ... I can't always be the only, like, I can't take all of the traded SLA and deliver all of it to [Name of school] (3, Pos.116)

EP 2 discusses that due to the limited time she has with the setting, she is unable to follow up with individual staff members (2, Pos.160). Aligning with this, although STAFF MEMBER 3 explained that EP 3 does manage to get an update from staff and talk about what is working well, she caveats it with “when we have time” (Interview 3, Pos. 73-75) suggesting that this is not always possible.

In harmony with this notion that the EP having more time would allow opportunities from more conversation in the settings, EP 4 explains how limited time in a setting is a barrier, particularly a specialist setting as the more time spent there the more opportunity there is to understand the setting context:

I think it is a barrier in terms of I think, [Staff Member 4], you and I might have crossed paths more often if we had more time in setting ... we'd ... be able to spend more time in class and also know more about contexts (4, Pos.82)

Money was also presented as a barrier by three of the pairs, as this was directly linked to the restricted time from the EP. This was represented as a current barrier for the pairing in interview 2, who were only able to access the “core time” (2, Pos.157), and interview 4, who

have a set amount of paid EP time across the Trust (4, Pos.16). STAFF MEMBER 3 raised money as a potential future barrier as “all schools are kind of struggling now and the budget is tricky” (3, Pos.100).

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 14 – Familial context within joint working

Prior family context proves helpful

Three interviews also identified consistency in EP engagement with the family as a benefit in being able to integrate an understanding of the family context into the collaborative work. For example, EP 3 speaks about appreciating meeting parents through training she has delivered at the school as well as through direct work with their children:

I've been quite lucky ... some of the parents I've worked with on an individual ... basis as well as through the workshops. So it's nice to meet them in different contexts (3, Pos.53)

Both the of EPs in interviews 1 and 2 shared it helped having worked with a child's sibling previously, whether that is within a different setting as described by EP 2 (2, Pos.63), or the same setting as is the case with EP 1:

EP 1: when you've had another child and it's been a sibling and then you've said, do you remember so-and-so? ... And then you get that wider picture as well...

SETTING STAFF 1: Yeah. [*They face each other*] (1, Pos.84-85)

Further, STAFF MEMBER 2 and STAFF MEMBER 3 described episodes they had experienced of the parents being able “to get to know the EP” and be “familiar” (2, Pos.47) as being “helpful” (2, Pos.52).

Theoretical 7, Focused Code 14 – Familial context within joint working

School wants more input from the family into the work

Interestingly, interview 4 was the only example where the EP did not work directly with the families through the course of the collaborative work with the setting staff member. This was due to limited resources making this a challenge:

[That's] another challenge being spread across the Trust in mainstream and special, and the special [settings] within the Trust ... being quite diverse ... it's a big question, how do we understand context of [each] and reach the families? (4, Pos.57)

STAFF MEMBER 4 described how, in an ideal world in which time was not a factor, the relationship between school and home would take the form of:

collaboration with not just the class teacher and the student and the school, but I think that's where you will see the parent involved (4, Pos.84)

She also expressed that this was difficult to reach because of how difficult it is to obtain the parents “buying in” but how it is critical because “their buying in is equally, if not more important as well as what's going on with their student and how to support them or their child.” (4, Pos.84). This is why STAFF MEMBER 4 goes on to say that this collaboration would be in her ideal world:

SETTING STAFF 4: The collaboration between school, home and the student. And that would be just perfect world wouldn't it?

EP 4: Yeah [*everyone smiled*]

SETTING STAFF 4: Yeah [*STAFF MEMBER 4 laughed*]

EP 4: My chest was all buzzy when you say that [STAFF MEMBER 4]. I'm like yeah, yeah. (..) [*STAFF MEMBER 4 and EP 4 smile and laugh*] (Interview 4, Pos. 84-88)

Appendix V:
Template for member-checking with participants

Qualitative feedback from Member Checking

“It feels to me that you have captured the key aspects fantastically! The trust, respect and shared values really stand out to me as being so vital and necessary in underpinning everything else.”

“It was a valuable process to go through with [STAFF MEMBER] and to make explicit what worked well. Sady, the reorganisation of Special Nurseries and EY support means we are no longer working in this way.”

Appendix W:
Theoretical codes in relation to research question 1

Eight theoretical codes were constructed from the analysis of the interviews.

Theoretical code	Prevalence	Description
Theoretical code 1: Foundation	131 codes	This code represents that a feature of successful collaboration was agreement regarding boundaries, authority, role, and task. This agreement creates predictability which supports the theoretical pillars underpinning the collaborative relationship (partnership dynamic; built relational trust; understanding the context of the setting) to develop.
Theoretical code 2: Partnership dynamic	174 codes	This code represents that a feature of successful collaboration was identified as the EP avoiding taking up an expert dominate role. Instead, there is respect for the fact that the setting staff bring the depth of knowledge, whilst the EP brings a breadth of knowledge. Successful interprofessional collaboration can therefore be achieved through dynamic engagement with joint professional perspectives.
Theoretical code 3: Built relational trust	78 codes	This code represents that a feature of successful collaboration was identified as trust within the relationship which has been built over time through consistency, and the demonstration of respect and shared values.
Theoretical code 4: Understanding the context of the setting	35 codes	This code represents that a feature of successful collaboration was identified as the EP understanding the context of the setting. This includes specific, tailored approaches for students, as well as the more general additional responsibilities and complexities experienced by staff in the setting.
Theoretical code 5: Attunement and emotional support	180 codes	This code represents how a feature of successful collaboration is described as the EP providing emotional support the setting staff member. This can be enacted through the three pillars (partnership dynamic; built relational trust; understanding the context of the setting). However, it is also important to highlight that participants model attunement within the interviews, suggesting mutual emotional support within the relationship.
Theoretical code 6: Relational output	114 codes	This code represents how successful interprofessional collaboration was described through the outputs of the relationship and how these positively impacted the families, the wider setting, and the role of the EP. This includes the EP being positioned as external to the setting and yet seen as part of the broader team within the setting.
Theoretical code 7: Relational input	115 codes	This code represents how the EP-setting staff member pair do not exist in a vacuum and that they must take in information from the environment around their system. These inputs can be facilitating their interprofessional collaboration or, at times, create barriers to their working.

Appendix X: **Examples of alternative theories considered to understand the findings**

Open systems theory and psychoanalytical theory are both key components which constitute systems psychodynamics. However, the systems psychodynamics lens is a process which considers both the covert behaviour and psychological nature within systems (Lawlor & Sher, 2021). Although the theory developed within this paper integrates both open systems theory and psychoanalytic theory it does not take up a systems psychodynamics perspective as the purpose of this research is to understand how the SLD/PMLD setting staff member and the EP construct successful joint working between them, rather than offering a comprehensive understanding of the pair's behaviour at both a conscious and unconscious level (Lawlor & Sher, 2021). Therefore, rather than using emotions as data, I have been led by the participants words and interactions and tentatively used psychoanalytical theory support understanding of their views (Sher & Lawlor, 2022) rather than explicitly analysing and reporting on my perceptions of them.

Further, I also considered Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological theory (Weisner, 2008; Tong & An, 2024) as it provides a framework to allow for conceptualisation of the environment around a child, and how the relationships and interactions between the different aspects of the environment and the child's biological characteristics may affect a child's development (Shelton, 2019; Tong & An, 2024). This theory is relevant to the findings within this study through its emphasis on supporting the learners with SLD/PMLD through working with the different components of their ecosystem, particularly the microsystems of the setting and the child's family, and the interactions between the two. However, as previously identified, the focus of this study is to understand successful collaboration between two components within the environment of the child rather than focusing on the development of a learner with SLD/PMLD. Therefore, Bronfenbrenner's theory is not helpful for understanding the patterns of relating found within this research.

Appendix Y:
Positionality: How the process has impacted me

I was able to approach this research from a unique position – I am an EP who has not yet worked with SLD/PMLD settings, and during my time as a staff member in SLD/PMLD settings I did not interact with an EP, meaning that I could approach this subject with a deep interest and yet practical naivety. Additionally, through conversations with my EP colleagues I was aware that some EPs do not feel confident working with SLD/PMLD pupils, typically because there is a presumption that specialist training, knowledge, or experience is necessary, and consequently many EPs did not seek to support these settings. I therefore approached this research with a preconceived notion that this was true and that the EP-staff member pairings I would interview would reveal how the EP practice would be required to change to enable successful interprofessional collaboration. This is a position I no longer hold as the opposite of my assumption is instead what was revealed; that EPs already have the skills to complete successful interprofessional work with and in support of these settings, and that their knowledge can be of huge help to the CYP within the settings primarily through supporting the adults around them.

Appendix Z: Ethical Dilemmas

I feel it is important to highlight how I navigated ethical dilemmas which I experienced throughout this research to inform future research within this field and to support my own development as a practitioner-researcher. Firstly, a primary method for recruiting was for me to share details of the study with my contact network. However, this led to an uncomfortable tension when trying to recruit as I was aware of the workload of those in my network and was therefore mindful of my need to recruit participants whilst also not increasing the burden on them. This was again true when snowballing setting staff participants through EPs, as some EPs expressed an interest in taking part in the research and then were unable to recruit a setting staff member. As detailed in the Methodology chapter, to counteract this dilemma somewhat, when expanding the scope of the research I also broadened my recruitment strategy to rely less on the EP to recruit their paired staff member.

Further, I deliberated over whether to gather identity data from participants. Initially, I had planned to use the Social Graces as a visual tool to ask participants if there was any aspect of their identities which they would like to share, with the intention that this would enable me to learn some of the invisible aspects of their identities and reflect upon the impact of these on the dynamics within the triad. However, through discussion with my research supervisor, we both felt that this could create an uncomfortable experience for the participants as the act of asking for this information can add a layer of unintentional pressure to give information which could be considered private. Ultimately, I chose to ask participants whether they required any adjustments for the interview process before the interview and for ethnicity data at the end of the interview after providing a clear message that it was not a requirement to provide this if they did not want to. This data was only gathered to allow me to reflect upon potential power dynamics within the interview through my analysis process and within research supervision. I contemplated whether to report on the ethnicity data within the research, however considering that most of the participants' role descriptions being are relatively specific to their setting and the need to protect anonymity, I chose not to include the data within this study.