

**Implementing problem solving, circle, and consultation groups in schools: an  
exploratory process evaluation**

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## **Abstract**

There are high personal and professional costs associated with poor wellbeing for school staff. Consultation, circle, and problem-solving groups (PSGs) have been found to increase teachers' capacity to respond to challenges through group sharing of strategies and knowledge. PSGs contribute a sense of confidence, belonging and emotional containment for participants.

Paper one outlines a configurative systematic literature review which synthesises existing research on PSGs in education settings. This paper seeks to make explicit the theoretical underpinnings for the reported successes of PSGs and underscores the acceptability, usefulness and feasibility of these groups as forms of peer support.

Paper two reports on how PSGs were put into practice in schools by teachers who had been trained to facilitate these groups. The study was an exploratory process evaluation which considered implementation factors important for introducing and maintaining PSGs in schools. Focus groups were conducted with the teacher - facilitators over an academic year to discuss the implementation process. Data were co-analysed with the participants (teacher- facilitators).

Paper one identified group structure, environment, preparation and planning were related to psycho-social processes which led to the reported positive impacts of PSGs. Paper two outlines how issues of leadership, teacher understanding of PSGs, commitment of facilitators and time influenced implementation. These implementation factors were found to change over time.

Findings from Paper one and Paper two provide both a rationale and practical guidance for implementing PSGs in schools. Dissemination at the research site and beyond is discussed in Paper three. The role of Educational Psychologists in supporting PSGs in education settings is also discussed.

### **Declaration**

I declare that no portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or institute of learning.



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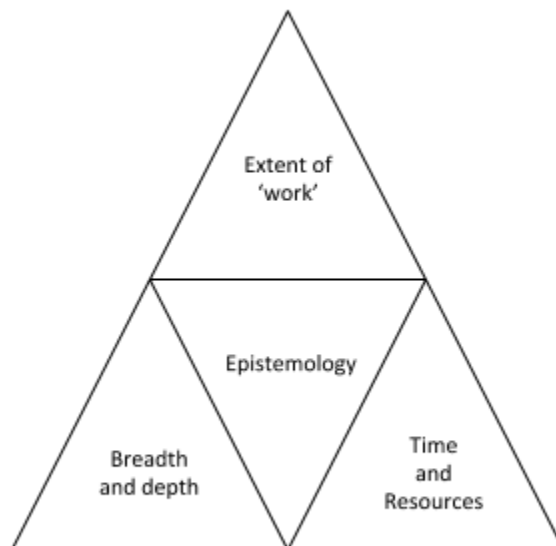
I am immensely thankful to all the teachers who participated in this research, trusted me, gave up their precious time and *stayed after school* to do this work with me; without you this thesis would not have been possible.

## Thesis Introduction

Research projects do not exist in a vacuum. Acknowledging this, Gough and Thomas (2017) point out they are “commissioned and conducted by people at specific points in time with particular needs, priorities and ways of understanding the issue they address and belong within the historic development of what is known about an issue”. They outline “values...priorities...ideological and theoretical perspectives” shape the questions which are asked and the extent of the work (Gough & Thomas, 2017, p.45). Beliefs about knowledge, how it is used and generated (epistemology) together with the purposes of the research, its breadth and depth, as well as time and resources available shape the research project (Figure 1).

**Figure 1**

*Differences in extent, project detail and epistemology from Gough & Thomas (2017)*



In this section, the background of the researcher and the research commission is outlined. Next, construction of thesis ‘work’ and chosen research methods are described. Last, epistemology is discussed in relation to the project.

## **Researcher background**

The author of this paper was previously a science teacher in a secondary school. She trained to teach on a competitive, fast track practice-based PGCE course and holds vested interest in teacher- wellbeing research.

## **The research commissioning**

The research project described in this thesis was commissioned by an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) seeking to establish group problem solving approaches in local schools. At the time of commissioning the research, the EPS were involved in a wider Local Authority project promoting community resilience. Offering problem solving groups (PSGs) for school staff had been identified as one way of supporting teachers' wellbeing and resilience: and consequently, pupil's resilience. This is in an understanding of resilience as a relational quality in the school environment (Gu, 2014).

At an initial meeting to discuss the research project the commissioning team comprising the head of the EPS and Educational Psychologists (EPs) outlined a vision in which PSGs were self-sustaining interventions being run by trained teacher-facilitators in schools with support of the EPS. The EPS had already begun PSG related activities, and had a plan for future activities (see Table 1 below). Italicised text within the table shows the EPS planned implementation activities that were undertaken parallel to the research process.

**Table 1***Existing PSG related activities at EPS and further plans*

| <b>Activities prior to research commission</b>   |
|--|
| Consultations were conducted with schools to understand their current practices in relation to the resilient schools projects  |
| Schools with need for additional activities to support teacher- wellbeing were co-identified by EPs and school leaders   |
| EPs pitched the PSG experience to school staff via a brief presentation  |
| 16 volunteer staff from 5 schools participated in 6 sessions of EP facilitated PSGs<br>These sessions did not come out of their allocated EP 'time' and so were 'free' and additional to other EP activities in the school   |
| Staff who had attended the sessions were offered the opportunity to train as PSG facilitators in a 2-day course<br>Training included theory around the use of PSG approaches and a practice element in which teachers took turns facilitating sessions               |
| <i>Newly trained teacher-facilitators were to advertise PSGs to their colleagues and set up groups</i><br><i>Resources for this were to be provided by the EPS and included leaflets and information sheets for staff (examples are shown in appendices A and B)</i> |
| <i>Post-training visit to schools to ensure the PSG fidelity was maintained and support for teacher facilitators to launch PSGs to wider staff</i>   |
| <i>Term 1 group supervision for teacher-facilitators to be provided by an EP to support them in their role as implementers in their schools</i>  |
| <i>Term 2 group supervision for teacher-facilitators as above</i>  |
| <i>Term 3 group supervision for teacher-facilitators as above</i>  |

### **Constructing the work: research aims and methods**

The initial suggestion from commissioners was that the research project might explore how effective the PSGs would be in their local authority schools. In discussion with the primary researcher, and their academic supervisor it was identified the commissioners' priorities and aims were to:

- Provide support for newly trained teacher-facilitators in their role as implementers of PSGs in schools
- To understand the views of staff involved in PSGs
- Understand how the EPS would be best placed to support implementation of PSGs across the local authority
- Understand how groups could become embedded, maintained and self-sustaining over time

Implementation Science is concerned with how evidence-based practices, interventions and policies are adopted and has primarily been employed in health research (Bauer et al., 2015). To meet commissioners' needs, the researcher and academic supervisor proposed the research would employ an implementation science approach as detailed below.

#### ***Paper 1***

First, to establish the evidence-base for PSG, a systematic literature review addressing the underlying theory and current findings was proposed. The aim of the literature review was to integrate existing data and generate new understandings of how and why school staff benefit from participating in PSGs. Framework synthesis which has previously been employed in health literature to integrate large amounts of qualitative data was identified as an appropriate method (Carroll, Booth & Cooper, 2011; Dixon-Woods, 2011). This method can accommodate a wide range of study types including research which prioritises people's perceptions. Framework synthesis goes beyond the limits of qualitative studies which individually are criticised for being context dependent, and therefore not generalisable. Within this method (context specific) local theory from individual studies can be pooled together to contribute to a general theory (Finfgeld-Connett & Johnson, 2013; Levinsson & Prøitz, 2017). This general

theory provides a context for guiding new research and interpreting new primary findings. It also allows insights to be generalised beyond a specific research context. The literature presented in Paper 1 and addresses the following research questions:

- I. What group processes and psycho-social effects are associated with taking part in (or occur) in a PSG?
- II. What is the impact on participants of the groups and what wider effects are observed in their practice?
- III. How does context relate to PSG activities and outcomes?
- IV. What theories for the change that happens within and outside the group are provided by existing studies of PSGs?

These contribute to answering the over-arching question: how and why do school staff benefit from participating in PSGs, and what wider impacts are observed?

## *Paper 2*

Next, to provide teacher-facilitators support to put the intervention in place, focus groups were proposed. These focus groups would be provided in addition to termly EPS support for teacher-facilitators in their role as implementers. The aims of the focus groups would be to explore factors which helped implementation, identify barriers and support teacher-facilitators to plan and carry out PSGs. This is in line with Plan, Do, Study, Act improvement cycles in the Active Implementation Frameworks (AIFs) (Active Implementation Research Network, 2020). These improvement cycles acknowledge the context for intervention is always in flux and that it is key to identify and solve problems quickly so interventions can be scaled with fidelity.

Improvement cycles are just one of the five AIFs. Blanchard et al., (2017) further explain:

The AIFs outline suggested mechanisms and strategies to use when attempting to put into practice any innovation of known dimensions and take into account the “formula for success.” The “formula for success” proposes that desired...outcomes are a result of multiplying an effective innovation (what needs to be done), effective implementation (how it will be done and by whom), and enabling contexts (where it will thrive). (p. 922-923)

In these proposed focus groups, the primary researcher would discuss with teacher-facilitators what would be done, how and by whom, to support PSGs being put in place. This collaborative practice is commonly understood in participatory and action research (Kemmis, 2006). To expand on the collaborative nature of the improvement cycle, data were to be co-analysed with teacher-facilitators. This would provide teacher-facilitators a way of summing up the key points of their discussions and focus their thinking on next steps. The participatory data analysis, based on thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) was trialed in a pilot study prior to this research project. Thus Paper 2 presents a process evaluation of the PSG implementation addressing the question: what contextual and process factors are important for implementing PSGs in the local authority's schools? These proposals were agreed by commissioners.



### **Ontology, Epistemology and Axiology**

Ontology is the philosophical discussion on the nature of existence, reality and what *is* (Hofweber, 2018). Epistemology is concerned with how knowledge is understood. It explores beliefs about what can be known; how it can be generated or acquired (Cohen, Manion & Morrison 2017). Axiology refers to value theory - it is concerned with ethical judgements about what is good, and how good it is, traditionally considering if objects of value are subjective (psychological states) or objective states of the world (Schroeder, 2016).

The current research sits within a critical - realist philosophical position which holds assumptions about both ontology and epistemology. Critical realism acknowledges the existence of an independent reality, one which cannot fully be known, but is understood through (subjective) perception, constructions (for example, language) and theory (Cohen et al., 2017). In critical realism there are three modes of understanding: the empirical, the actual and the real domains. The empirical domain refers to aspects of reality which can be experienced and observed. Roberts (2014) explains quantitative researchers often work in this domain. The actual domain has underlying structures which exist but may not be experienced or observed and so reality is not always accessible (Cohen et al., 2017; Roberts, 2014). The real domain refers to the underlying structures which cause phenomena, these are unobservable, and instead are inferred to explain causality. Roberts (2014) suggests qualitative research can be understood in the real domain because causal mechanisms are examined in the social world and through social structures. This relates to how individuals experience, interpret and construct the world, for example using language. The critical - realist stance in the research therefore accounts for the individual and context specific experiences. This stance also accepts constructivist notions about the co-construction of shared realities and the evolving nature of truth. It is therefore aligned with participatory approaches to developing knowledge employed in Paper 2. Since critical realists believe knowledge is fallible and can be misleading, it was also appropriate in this approach to undertake iterative processes with multiple participants, holding different views, as in the PDSA cycles.

Building on critical realism, is realist review. This is “an approach to synthesizing quantitative, qualitative, or mixed methods research, based on a realist logic of enquiry. It

answers questions of the general format ‘what worked, for whom and in what circumstances, how and why?’ (Jagosh et al., 2014, p.134). Realist review synthesis questions consider the context, mechanisms and outcomes of data. Here, researchers inductively generate hypotheses (configure), test (aggregate) and refine them in the literature synthesis. Such analysis was not within the scope of the current work (Paper 1). This point demonstrates, however, the appropriateness of the critical- realist stance for configurative synthesis as Paper 1 considers context, mechanism and outcomes, albeit more broadly due to limited resources.

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**Paper 1: How and why do school staff benefit from problem solving, circle, and consultation groups? A framework synthesis of existing research.**

**Abstract**

The current review explored literature describing problem solving, circle and consultation groups in schools (PSGs). It sought to understand the underlying mechanisms which contribute to the reported success of these groups.

Web and database searches were conducted between August 2018 and October 2019 to identify studies reporting on the use of problem solving, circle and group consultation approaches in schools. Fourteen studies met the inclusion criteria and were analysed using a framework synthesis methodology.

Key themes contributing to positive outcomes associated with these groups were identified. Environment, preparation and planning, and group structure enabled subsequent psycho-social processes in the group; examples being a sense of safety, learning, emotional containment, and belonging. Group participation was related to wider positive impacts in the classroom and school environment. The intervention was deemed to be socially valid by participants.

This paper contributes to the understanding of group approaches to problem solving in education. It discusses benefits for staff, pupils and education settings. The paper further offers a description of an ideal set-up for such groups to support staff working in schools.

*Keywords: Collaborative Problem-Solving Groups, Group Process Consultation, Staff Sharing Scheme, Solution Circle, Circle of Adults, Solution Focused Reflecting Teams, Supervision Groups*

## Introduction

In the current educational context where teaching staff are widely reported to be overwhelmed and schools under-funded (Coughlan, 2019; Tapper, 2018; Weale, 2019), it is useful to explore relatively simple and inexpensive supportive interventions which can address some concerns of teaching staff. Problem solving groups are one way of supporting teachers practically and emotionally in schools.

### **What are problem solving groups?**

Broadly, consultation in educational psychology aims to define problems, build a shared understanding, and equip stakeholders with strategies in understanding, reframing and solving perceived problems (Monsen, Graham, Frederickson & Cameron, 1998). In the UK, educational psychologists (EPs), among others, have supported schools to carry out structured forms of peer support drawing on group consultation approaches since the late 1980s with mention of teacher support groups as early as the 1970s (Bennett & Monsen, 2011; Winicki, 1972).

Solution Circles, Circles of Adults, Reflecting Teams, Group Process Consultation, and Staff Sharing Schemes are examples of collaborative groups which have been introduced to schools to help staff manage work related problems by providing a clear process for exploring the presented problem (see Appendix C). These groups allow members to share knowledge, experience and skills and increase staff's capacity and confidence as problem solvers (Babinski & Rogers, 1998). These group approaches in schools are referred to here as problem solving groups (PSGs).

### ***Problem solving groups vs group supervision***

Supervision can be defined as having three functions: normative/ managerial, supportive/restorative, and formative/ educative (Beddoe, 2010). Normativity refers to developing an understanding of the job role and frameworks for practice and is associated with monitoring and management processes. Restorative functions of supervision acknowledge the emotional toll of the job role on the supervisee, and formative functions are concerned with the supervisee's learning and development (Beddoe, 2010).

Within the literature, there is acknowledgement that PSGs can mirror some functions of supervision. However, there is variation in how the overlap between PSGs and supervision is conceptualised (and a distinction between the two is drawn). Rae, Cowell and Field (2017) acknowledge whilst there may be some wellbeing benefit to attending PSGs, since these groups are concerned with problem solving, they are defined as being primarily educative. Rae and colleagues contrast this definition of PSGs with a model of supervision which promotes restorative reflection and analysis of supervisee's emotional responses rather than educative or managerial aspects. They consider problem solving to be a by-product of the primarily restorative process of supervision. Essentially, they view supervision as a process for addressing emotional aspects and PSGs as being concerned with formative aspects. Other literature emphasises the restorative function of PSG groups and puts them forward as an (indirect) means of managing teacher wellbeing (Annan & Moore, 2012).

One explanation for the different emphasis in definitions is that 'supervision' is conceptualised differently across professions, and in practice could fall (and shift) on a 'normative-formative-restorative' scale (Beddoe, 2010; Sturt & Rowe, 2018). Equally, PSGs could also differ in their position on this scale of functions. In some academic papers, no distinction is made between the two terms with 'group supervision' used interchangeably with 'problem solving groups' (Chevreau, 2018; Bartle & Trevis, 2015). In this paper, PSGs are defined as groups which provide a clear facilitated structure for group discussion with a primary aim of supporting problem solving, and which are independent of any formal monitoring and management process.

### **Research questions**

Whilst there is growing evidence for the use of PSGs in schools, it is important to develop an evidence base for PSGs that goes further than describing them and their impacts, to one that also explores how they work. This paper sought to bring together existing research on PSGs to develop a comprehensive theoretical model for these groups by answering the following questions:

- I. What group processes and psycho-social effects are associated with taking part in (or occur) in a PSG?

- II. What is the impact on participants of the groups and what wider effects are observed in their practice?
- III. How does context relate to PSG activities and outcomes?
- IV. What theories for the change that happens within and outside the group are provided by existing studies of PSGs?

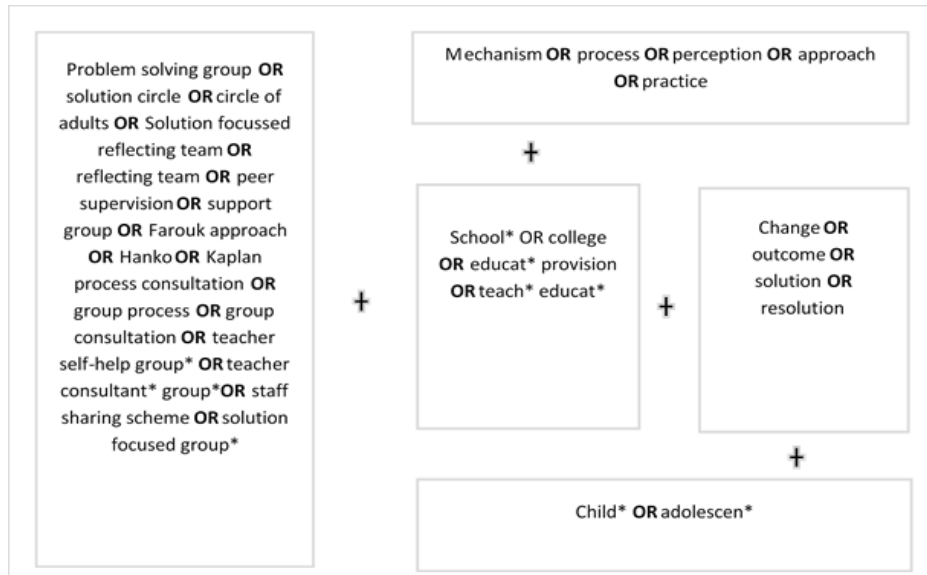
These contributed to answering the over-arching question: how and why do school staff benefit from participating in PSGs, and what wider impacts are observed?

**Systematic search**

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta Analyses (PRISMA) approach (Moher et al., 2009) was employed to identify studies which were included in the review. Between August 2018 and October 2019, the databases PsychInfo, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC), PubMed, Social Sciences and the British Index of Education (BRI) were searched systematically using the search terms in Figure 2:

**Figure 2**

*Illustration of search terms*



Search terms and references were harvested from retrieved papers and snowballed into further searches to ensure all relevant literature had been identified. Google Scholar was also



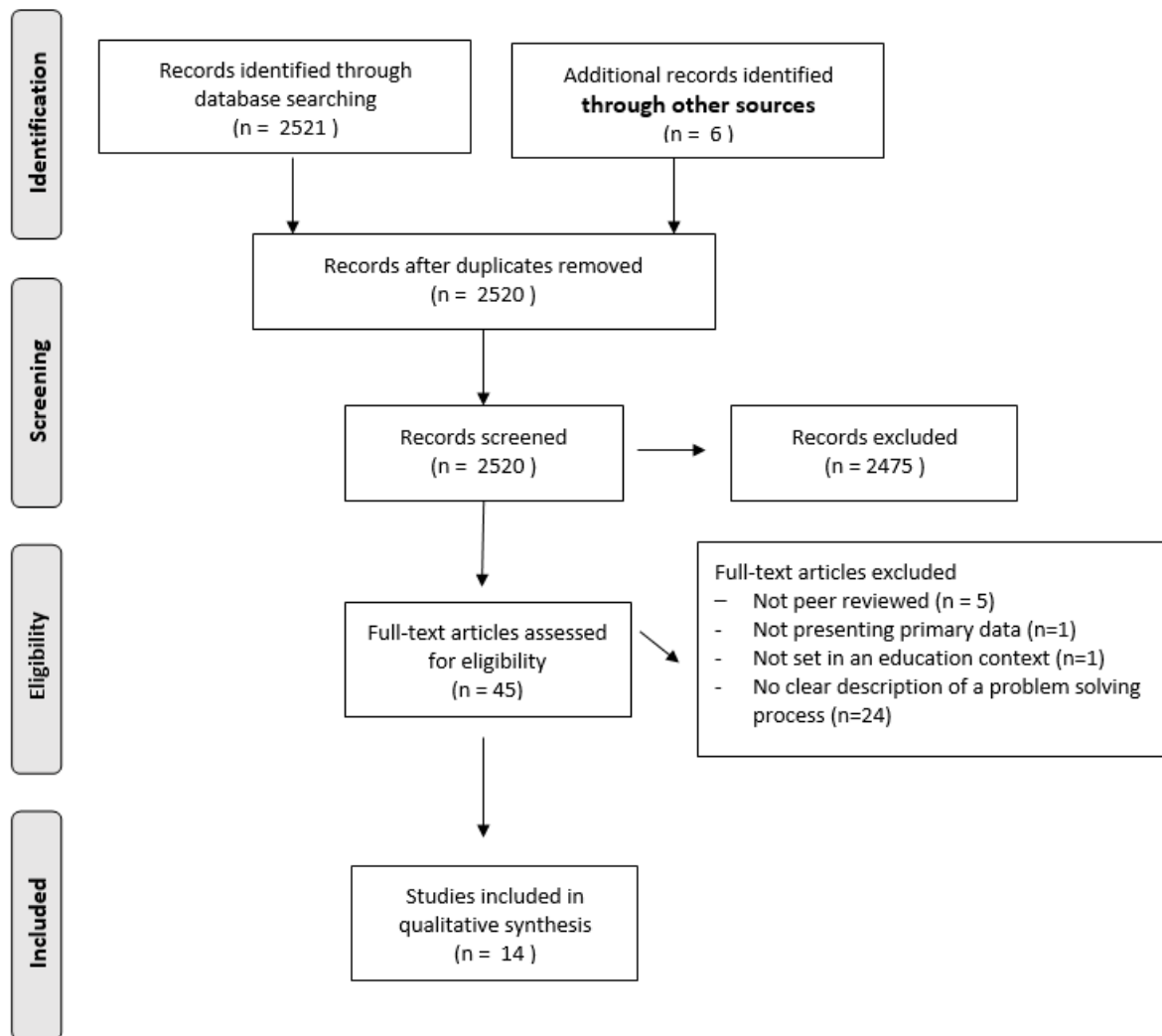
employed to supplement the search. The initial search yielded 2527 papers of which 2482 were excluded after removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts for relevance (Figure 2). The remaining 45 articles were screened utilising the following predefined inclusion criteria:

- I. Studies producing and reporting primary data
- II. Studies describing a clear problem-solving group structure as well as denoting a facilitator role (EP or trainee EP, another external professional or (trained) school-based person)
- III. Studies carried out in education contexts with teachers and teaching support staff
- IV. Papers written in English.
- V. Papers published in a peer-reviewed journal between 1990 and 2020

See Figure 3 below for the PRISMA flow diagram showing identification and screening processes.

**Figure 3**

*PRISMA flow diagram*



### **Summary of included studies**

Since this is an explanatory and configurative review of literature seeking to generate new understandings, papers were not quality assessed. Levinsson and Prøitz (2017) outline that quality assessment of papers for review fits within positivist approaches which may seek to aggregate and test empirical findings. Here, rather than quality assessment of each individual study, inclusion is concerned with the contribution each paper can make in answering the research questions. The 14 studies were included in the analysis where from the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, USA & Canada. Papers included had a range of designs, methodologies, and different foci as well as facilitator configurations. Table 2 below outlines the features of the included papers.

**Table 2***Characteristics of included studies*

| <b>Author (s) &amp; Location</b>                     | <b>Type of PSG</b>   | <b>Aims of study or Aims of PSG</b>   | <b>Study Methods or Activities</b>  | <b>Facilitator type</b>   | <b>Participants &amp; Setting</b>                   | <b>Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period</b>                               | <b>Findings</b>  |
|--|--|---|---|---|---|---|--|
| Annan & Moore (2012)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i>    | Staff Sharing Scheme                                       | Explore PSGs to address aspects of teacher wellbeing<br><br>Explore PSGs as a tool for problem solving around behavioural emotional and social difficulties | Contextual evaluation of using mixed methods and development of revised staff sharing scheme model  | Educational Psychologist, initially then elected school leader who had been trained to facilitate the group | Teachers and school support staff                   | Report based on data from 7 PSGs  | Staff valued PSG<br><br>Staff reported less concern around problem situation<br><br>Valued as a means of addressing teacher wellbeing  |
| Babinski & Rogers (1998)<br><br><i>United States</i> | Based on Caplan & Caplan (1993) group process consultation | Explore PSGs as a support for newly qualified teachers  | Bi-weekly consultation groups conducted for 8 months<br><br>Views of staff sought post-intervention | School psychologist, Counsellor or outside consultant   | 5 New teachers working in different primary schools | Teachers met every two weeks over an academic year totalling 12 sessions over an 8-month period | Groups reported to provide emotional, social and practical support<br><br>Staff developed their teacher identity through participation |

| Author (s) & Location                               | Type of PSG  | Aims of study or Aims of PSG   | Study Methods or Activities   | Facilitator type             | Participants & Setting   | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period   | Findings   |
|---|--|--|---|------------------------------|--|--|--|
| Bartle & Trevis (2015)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i> | Solution Circles<br><br>Process Consultation<br><br>Reflecting Teams<br><br>Balint Model | To explore key workers' perceptions of group supervision formats and perceived impact of these | 9-month project exploring the use of different group supervision models fortnightly<br><br>Focus group evaluations                    | Two Educational Psychologist | Key workers (non – teaching staff) in a specialist education setting for pupils with social, emotional and mental health needs | Sessions were delivered every two weeks over one academic year   | Improved problem-solving skills<br><br>Improved communication between staff<br><br>Increased self-awareness in role  |
| Bozic & Carter (2002)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i>  | Group consultation approach developed by Hanko (1999)                                    | Explore participants' perception of PSGs, and need for external facilitator                    | Consultation groups run in several schools over a school term<br><br>Mixed method<br>Questionnaires to gather data post -intervention | Educational Psychologist     | Teachers<br><br>Teaching Assistants  | Group one met on five occasions in Spring term 2000<br><br>Group 2 met four times Summer term 2000<br><br>Group 3 met four times over Spring and Summer terms 2000 | Teachers thought more deeply about individual children, had new strategies and indicated they would act on these<br><br>Responses indicated preference for external consultant |

| Author (s) & Location                                 | Type of PSG                      | Aims of study or Aims of PSG   | Study Methods or Activities  | Facilitator type  | Participants & Setting  | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period | Findings   |
|---|----------------------------------|--|--|---|---|--|--|
|   |                                  |  |  |   |   | Group 4 met six times in Spring term 2001                  |  |
| Brown & Henderson (2012)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i> | Solution Circles                 | Explore PSGs to support pupils with dyslexia and as a tool to promote inclusion for pupils with a range of needs in mainstream schools | Evaluation of staff experiences of PSG via verbal feedback and post session questionnaire        | Trainee Educational Psychologist                            | Teachers in a primary and secondary school                        | Report on two sessions                                     | Participants had a positive view of the process<br><br>Potential for further use recognised    |
| Davison and Duffy (2017)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i> | Group process consultation model | Examine impact of PSGs to help staff manage challenging behaviour in a nurture group   | Mixed method<br><br>Pre and post intervention measures including focus groups and questionnaires | Educational Psychologist and group member as co-facilitator | Teachers and teaching assistants running nurture groups in school | Two PSG clusters met monthly over a six-month period       | Reduction in level of staff concerns<br><br>Increase in teacher confidence and self – efficacy |

| Author (s) & Location                               | Type of PSG                                       | Aims of study or Aims of PSG  | Study Methods or Activities  | Facilitator type  | Participants & Setting  | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period                                | Findings  |
|---|---|---|--|---|---|---|---|
| Evans (2005)<br><i>United Kingdom</i>               | Group consultation approach based on Hanko (1999) | Exploring PSGs as a model of service delivery in rural area   | Used post-session evaluation forms and Educational Psychologist observations to record participant perceptions | 2 Educational Psychologists or one co-facilitating with another professional (not school based) | Teachers from rural schools meeting in central locations  | Report on 21 PSG sessions conducted over 3 half-terms, representing 3 consultation cycles | Seen as a professional development opportunity<br><br>enabled action planning   |
| Grahamslaw & Henson (2015)<br><i>United Kingdom</i> | Solution Circle<br><br>Circle of Adults           | To understand perceived efficacy from participants and their reflections on the key features of the interventions | Conducted several one - off PSGs<br><br>Employed Post- session questionnaires                                  | Educational Psychologist  | Teachers<br><br>Emotional Literacy Support Assistants<br><br>Special Education Needs Coordinators | Report on 10 Solutions Circles and 4 CoAs   | Circle of Adults led to greater understanding of problem situations<br><br>Solution Circles generated more strategies |

| Author (s) & Location                         | Type of PSG   | Aims of study or Aims of PSG   | Study Methods or Activities  | Facilitator type                            | Participants & Setting   | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period                  | Findings   |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|---|--|
| Hayes & Stringer (2016)<br><br><i>Ireland</i> | Farouk's process consultation group approach (2004) | To explore feasibility of PSGs in the locality   | Evaluation of consultation groups over one academic year using pre- and post-quantitative and qualitative measures | Educational Psychologist                    | Primary school teachers  | Monthly sessions over one academic year with 10 PSGs scheduled in 3 schools | Protected time for learning in PSG led to enhanced problem-solving skills and development of behaviour management strategies   |
| Jones, Monsen, and Franey (2013)              | Staff Sharing Scheme                                | Investigated perceived usefulness of groups to manage challenging behaviour as well as teacher perceptions and causal attributions | Case Study of the implementation using mixed methods to gather data  | School staff (trained to facilitate groups) | Teachers, Special Education Needs Coordinator, Head Teachers and Assistant Headteacher | 1 formal session reported six weeks after staff had been trained on the PSG | Seen to be a useful model for peer support and reflection especially for individuals struggling with pupil behaviour<br><br>Reluctance to share with unknown staff members |
|   |   |  |  |   |  |   |  |



| Author (s) & Location  | Type of PSG  | Aims of study or Aims of PSG   | Study Methods or Activities  | Facilitator type  | Participants & Setting                                     | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period | Findings   |
|--|--|--|--|---|--|--|--|
| Massé, Couture, Levesque, & Bégin, (2013)<br><br><i>Canada</i> | Based on Caplan (2004) group process consultation                                  | Integrating pupils with behavioural difficulties into secondary school over 5- 6 consultations | Quasi - experiment<br><br>Small group problem-solving alongside individual consultations compared with individual consultation only<br><br>Employed pre-post intervention measures | Resource teacher<br><br>Psychologist<br><br>Behaviour management specialist | Teachers in a High School                                  | 5 PSGs over one academic year                              | Shifted perception of children who were seen as having behavioural difficulties<br><br>Group consultation valued and seen as a form of emotional support |
| Nugent et al., (2014)<br><br><i>Ireland</i>                    | Informed by process consultation, problem-solving and solution-oriented approaches | Explore use of consultation as a model for service delivery in rural areas                     | Longitudinal study over 2 years<br><br>evaluated using quantitative and qualitative methods  | Educational Psychologist  | Teachers in school clusters or individual (larger) schools | Report on 91 PSG records over a two-year period            | Found to be an effective model of service delivery for Educational Psychology service in rural area<br><br>High satisfaction ratings from teachers       |

| Author (s) & Location   | Type of PSG                                       | Aims of study or Aims of PSG  | Study Methods or Activities   | Facilitator type                 | Participants & Setting                                    | Frequency of meetings or Number of groups in a Time Period   | Findings   |
|---|---|---|---|----------------------------------|---|--|--|
| Stringer, Stow, Hibbert, Powell, & Louw (1992)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i> | Group consultation approach based on Hanco (1999) | Study aimed to develop and evaluate a training course for teachers to become PSG facilitators | Used pre and post training questionnaire for teachers and follow up questionnaire after PSGs had been in place for a period of 9 months | Trained teacher -facilitators    | Teachers in nursery, primary, specialist and high schools | 9 months post facilitator training, seven groups had met 6 – 12 times, one group had met for 3 sessions and a previously established group met 30 times over 2 years | Reduced feelings of isolation<br><br>Provided practical psychological support  |
| Turner and Gulliford (2020)<br><br><i>United Kingdom</i>                    | Circle of Adults                                  | Explore role of Circle of Adults for staff who work with Looked After Children                | Mixed methods study, using quasi- experimental design   | Trainee Educational Psychologist | Teaching and support staff in secondary schools           | Report of four CoA sessions  | Staff reported:<br><br>Greater self- efficacy<br><br>Greater empathy and understanding of pupil discussed<br><br>They valued group support |

## Method of analysis

This paper presents a configurative systematic literature review, employing framework synthesis as a tool to understand qualitative data. Simply, this method summarises and distils data about PSGs in the literature (Thomas, O’Mara-Eves, Harden, & Newman, 2017).

Framework synthesis can answer diagnostic questions, examining what contributes to a particular phenomenon: “how and why do school staff benefit from participating in PSGs, and what wider impacts are observed?” The synthesis can also answer contextual questions, for example the type of experiences teachers who take part in PSGs report (Booth & Carroll, 2015; Carroll, Booth & Cooper, 2013).

### *Developing the evaluative framework - extracting and synthesising data*

The five stages of framework synthesis outlined by Thomas et al., (2017) were followed:

- I. Familiarisation
- II. Identifying an (initial) framework
- III. Indexing
- IV. Charting
- V. Mapping and interpretation

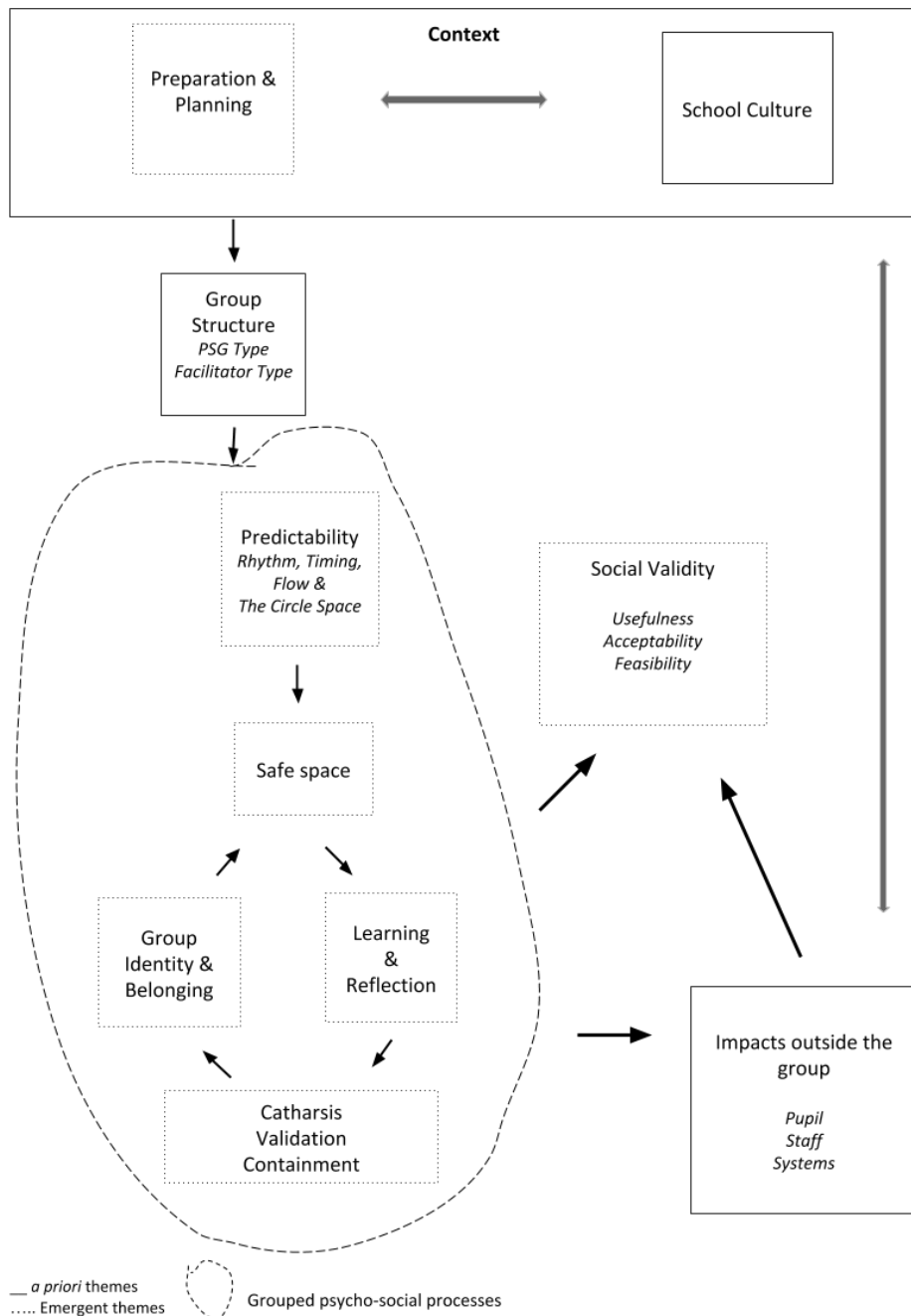
An ‘a priori’ or initial conceptual framework based on knowledge and experience of the topic area was first employed. This was a table consisting of themes (as headings) used to organise both extraction and combination of data thought to contribute to observed PSG effects. The framework was continually modified in response to codes identified in the literature until an emergent framework was formed. That is, the table headings were expanded, collapsed or amended as papers were considered iteratively in the framework until it fully represented and organised the findings across all included studies (Appendix D). Emergent themes were identified and discussed by the researcher and their academic supervisor who reflexively challenged one another to reach consensus on themes.

## Findings and Discussion

The analysis of included papers captured new themes and relationships within the data. The emergent framework represented a modification of the initial framework (Dixon-Woods, 2011; Thomas et al., 2017). A priori themes are shown in solid lines and the themes which emerged from the synthesis are shown in dotted lines (Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Model of themes underlying and contributing to successful PSGs*



Since this is a configurative synthesis seeking to combine and explain PSG processes across the literature, findings are presented together with discussion in relation to the research questions below.

**What group processes and psycho-social effects are associated with taking part in (or occur) in a PSG?**

***Group structure, predictability and the safe space***

The structured format of PSGs shapes participants' experience the group. Across a number of studies participants reported they appreciated the group structure, commenting on how the clear format and phases of the PSG contributed positively to their experience (Brown & Henderson, 2012; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014).

The shared focus and purpose, with the 'circle' seating arrangement symbolises and emphasises non-hierarchical ethos of PSGs (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). This ethos is highlighted in reminders of the ground rules prior to PSG sessions (Appendix C). Overall, group structure was found to contribute to: a space where everyone could speak honestly, an atmosphere of trust where all opinions were valued and equally weighted, a space for rich discussion, identifying common experiences, and sharing feedback (Annan & Moore; Bartle & Trevis; Grahamslaw & Henderson; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014). Altogether these features and the protected time available for PSGs led to the groups being deemed safe by participants (Annan et al., 2013; Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Bozic & Carter, 2002; Brown & Henderson, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014).

***How the facilitator maintains rhythm, timing and flow***

The clear, sometimes time allocated, steps of a PSG lend the groups a sense of predictability, with the phases and pacing of discussion contributing to a rhythm in proceedings. The facilitator role is key in maintaining this rhythm and flow. Task functions are related to safeguarding the structured phases of the PSG. These include: "initiating, information-seeking and giving, opinion-seeking and giving, clarifying, elaborating, summarising and consensus-testing...modelling." Maintenance functions, involve the facilitator "harmonising, encouraging

and compromising, standard setting and testing, diagnosing and gate-keeping” (Hayes and Stringer, 2016, p. 148). The “structured dialogue” in PSGs is analogous to interaction between consultant and consultee (Hayes & Stringer, 2016, p. 147). Therefore, the facilitator’s level of skill and expertise would seem to be a key factor in running a PSG. This is acknowledged in facilitator role being typically undertaken by a psychologist who will have extended training in consultation or by *training* school staff as facilitators.

### ***Facilitator type***

In the literature, external facilitators were valued for their role in sustaining the group meetings (Bozic & Carter, 2002), contributing advice (Nugent et al., 2014) having a non-evaluative role, fostering group culture, addressing inter-personal aspects within the group, as well as maintaining the structure and form of meetings (Annan & Moore, 2012; Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). Babinski & Rogers (1998) note teachers felt an external facilitator was essential in maintaining confidentiality because they did not have a managerial role. However, in Brown & Henderson’s (2012) study a headteacher at the school co-facilitated a PSG alongside a Trainee EP. Participants’ views of the headteacher as facilitator were not discussed in the study. The headteacher’s role is evaluative and directive by design. For these reasons, Stringer et al., (1992) actively discourage headteacher participation in PSGs. In other studies, headteachers (Evans, 2005) and senior staff (Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Nugent et al., 2014) have been participants in groups, though not facilitators of them.

Stringer et al., (1992) developed a training course to equip teachers with facilitation skills. Teacher-facilitators were found to enable positive experiences of the PSG similar to those in PSGs which had been facilitated by a psychologist. Similarly, Jones et al., (2013) trained teachers to facilitate PSGs. However, only one formal PSG group was conducted as staff were reluctant to discuss problems with peers they did not know well. The training provided in each of these studies differed with Jones et al., (2013) focusing on the skills involved in problem analysis, for example defining issues, while Stringer et al., (1992) had a broader focus which included the skills of establishing and facilitating a consultation group and built in experiences of the PSG process.

### ***Different PSG formats***

Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) outlined the shared features of different PSGs by reviewing previous studies, and comparing Solution Circles (SCs) with Circle of Adults (CoA). They identified some differences in participant perceptions of SCs and CoA. They noted CoA led to deeper reflection and understanding of the problem situation whilst SCs generated more strategies. They suggested this difference may have been due to different lengths of the interventions with Circle of Adults running for 90 mins, and Solution Circle for 20 -30 minutes.

In Bartle & Trevis' (2015) study, one group of participants had an opportunity to participate in different PSG formats and were found to value different structures for different purposes:

Preference appeared to be related to the outcome that the presenter wished to gain from the discussion. For example, in some instances key workers wished to engage in outcome orientated discussions, however, in other sessions key workers used a model which encouraged more reflective discussion. (p. 87)

### ***Learning and reflection in the group***

School staff who attend PSGs acknowledge the groups as a forum for learning. In these groups, participants identify, share strategies and make action plans together (Evans, 2005; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). A number of studies reported teachers becoming more self-aware in their role, developing in their problems solving skills and having better understanding of pupils who were experienced as problematic (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Bartle & Trevis, 2015, Massé et al., 2013). Participants arrived at this greater understanding by reflecting more deeply on their work with individual children and taking more time to analyse problem situations in the PSG and afterwards in day to day practice (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Massé et al., 2013). Incidental and generalised learning was reported with participants taking on board information even when they were not presenting a problem (Evans, 2005) and also applying strategies in other contexts (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). "Double loop learning" is described where through helping others to solve problems, participants grew in confidence and in their view of themselves as capable

problem solvers (Annan & Moore, 2012, p.91; Massé et al., 2013). These findings are grounded in the group being perceived to be a safe space which permits this reflection and learning (Grahamslaw & Henson 2015; Davison & Duffy, 2017).

### ***Catharsis, validation and containment***

Emotional support, encouragement, trust, being listened to, having efforts acknowledged, as well as feeling safe, appreciated, and empowered are reported as valued features arising from PSGs (Annan & Moore, 2012; Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Brown & Henderson, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Massé et al., 2013). Further benefits of attending the PSG were in reduced feelings of isolation (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Massé et al., 2013; Stringer et al., 1992), in feeling less stressed (Bozic & Carter, 2002), having increased sense of self-efficacy and being more confident (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Massé et al., (2013) reported teachers intervening more pro-actively and feeling more efficient after PSG participation. Staff were also found to be less concerned about the problem situation after PSG discussions (Annan & Moore, 2012; Davison & Duffy, 2017). Altogether studies indicate three processes; validation, catharsis and containment in the groups mediate some of these positive reports shared by participants. That is, PSG members can provide validation for challenges the problem-holder has experienced and emotions associated with this (Babinski & Rogers, 1998). In some instances, the problem-holder experienced emotional release (catharsis) and felt reassured, supported and comforted by others in the group, experiencing containment (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Jones et al., 2013; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). This emotional support again, is predicated on the group being perceived as a safe, open and non-judgmental space (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015).



## **What is the impact on participants of the groups and what effects are observed in their practice?**

### ***Group Identity and Belonging***

Babinski & Rogers (1998) emphasised regular attendance for teachers to maintain the group composition noting a shared identity helped to maintain the group as a safe space. As shown above, PSG participants found value in being able to help one another (Hayes & Stringer 2016; Jones et al., 2013; Massé et al., 2013). Opportunities for discussing similar or shared problems were a means of forming community for staff (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Stringer et al., 1992) and relationship building (Davison & Duffy, 2017). Participants in the Massé et. al, (2013) study also reported they valued being part of a team. In their study Nugent et al., (2014) note some group clusters stopped meeting when EP facilitators moved out of the region or were absent due to sickness. They also noted a concern around viable group sizes. Hayes & Stringer, (2016) attempted to manage this difficulty by ensuring each school cluster in their study had core members who would always attend the PSG. These studies point to the composition (participant and facilitators) being important for maintaining the group. By extension, it would seem regular group attendance and a shared group identity might also be a contributing factor to the maintenance of the intervention.

### ***Impacts outside the group***

There is a tacit acknowledgement across studies that there is a no direct causal relationship between PSG participation and pupil outcomes. Instead, where studies seek to understand impacts, they do so by inviting participants to share their views on what has changed for them, and what they might change. Researchers more often reported intended and planned behaviour (Bozic & Carter 2002; Evans, 2005; Grahamslaw & Henson 2015; Stringer et al., 1992), rather than discussing actual changes in behaviour (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014).

### ***Impact for pupils***

Hayes and Stringer (2016) suggest pupils in the school gain from teachers' improved behaviour management skills when these are generalised outside the PSG context. Turner and Gulliford

(2020) found that teachers were more empathetic after PSG interventions. The benefit for pupils here, would have been in feeling understood or having other unspoken needs met by the teacher. This is supported by Massé et al., (2013) who report children at the centre of problem situations were calmer, more collaborative, and less confrontational after teachers took part in PSGs and applied strategies they had gained from these sessions. Others refer to unspecified positive impacts on pupils whom staff were previously concerned about (Annan & Moore, 2012; Nugent et al., 2014).

### ***Impact for staff***

Some studies investigated if teachers' causal attributions i.e. how they explain pupil's behaviour change as a result of attending PSGs. It is thought, when teachers recognise that their choices and behaviour can impact pupil behaviour, they have a greater sense of efficacy and are more likely to address the behaviour positively (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Massé et al., 2013). Jones et al (2013), gave teachers a vignette describing 'challenging behaviour' and asked them to complete a Likert questionnaire selecting how much certain factors explained the pupil's behaviour. They found that after PSG training participants identified more teacher- related factors as contributing to pupil behaviour compared to a pre-test measure. In another study exploring causal attributions, authors reported, "participant's generic attribution remains stable, resistant to formal group processes" (Turner and Gulliford, 2020, p. 43). The authors here, acknowledge their methods may not have been appropriately sensitive.

### ***Systemic Impacts***

PSG processes can lead to a "ripple" effect "whereby the impact of the group is experienced beyond the discussions that take place within the circle" (Grahamslaw and Henson, 2015, p. 122). Supporting evidence for this comes from Massé et al., (2013) who reported improvements in classroom climate after the PSG sessions. Additionally, PSGs enhanced communication within staff teams and staff found it easier to discuss problem situations (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Jones et al., 2013). Impact was also observed in one setting where senior leaders changed the staffing structure after participating in a PSG (Annan & Moore, 2012). Here, the PSG also reduced workload for the school's Special Educational Needs Coordinator; as

part of the schools' statutory process for meeting special education needs, schools are required to collate evidence of pupil progress – this was achieved from PSG records. In some groups, participants were able to note recurring issues or patterns in the perceived problem situation and target these for systematic intervention (Brown & Henderson, 2012). Notably, Evans (2005) report after PSG discussions there was shared working across school systems which included: borrowing and lending resources, observing interventions in practice at others' schools and buying resources recommended by peers in the PSG.

### **How does context relate to PSG activities and outcomes?**

#### ***School culture***

School culture describes shared norms, beliefs, values and assumptions around the purposes and ways of working in an organisation. Hanko (1999) and Farouk (2004) observe school culture affects whether PSGs are held, how and what participants contribute, and internal group dynamics. Researchers observed competing school priorities sometimes led to PSGs being cancelled (Davison & Duffy, 2017). In some cases, schools commissioned fewer sessions and had difficulty ensuring the same participants could consistently attend group, prioritising other agendas (Annan & Moore 2012). On the other hand, some headteachers ensured PSGs took precedence over other school meetings, perhaps indicating this was a valued intervention (Stringer et al., 1992).

Sometimes, teachers of a pupil being discussed were not present at a PSG (Nugent et al., 2014). One reason for this might be due to staff availability. However, this may also point to values around who is suitable or capable of discussing needs. Stringer et al., (1992) allude to power dynamics around this issue. They specifically discourage senior staff from presenting problems on behalf of teachers or directing teachers to discuss specific problems situations. A related issue is the notion of power hierarchies in the school. In some schools, senior leaders felt PSGs might be divisive influence- a vehicle for activism which might challenge established ways of working. After being invited to participate in a group, senior leaders were reassured and subsequently more supportive of the intervention (Stringer et. al., 1992). There is a risk that when PSGs are not well understood or supported by senior staff, they are less likely to be

maintained and teachers are less likely be able to implement particular strategies. Conversely in schools where leadership engage positively with PSGs, there is more scope for systemic change (Annan & Moore, 2012). It is therefore important that environments support the implementation of the PSGs (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Bartle & Trevis, 2015). However, there is need to balance the support and involvement of school leaders with staff's access to the PSG as a non-evaluative and safe space. Careful consideration is therefore needed for composing and facilitating groups as dominant participants were noted to reduce the perceived success of the PSG (Hayes & Stringer, 2016).

### ***Preparation and planning***

Prior to introducing PSGs to schools, some planning and preparation activities were outlined. Researchers undertook needs analyses (Brown & Henderson, 2012), established existing school practices (Annan & Moore, 2012), consulted with other EPs at regional level to establish working groups (Nugent et al., 2014), and approached headteachers in schools to propose the intervention (Hayes & Stringer, 2016). Another preparation activity was developing posters, resources packs, and training for school staff involved in the PSG (Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014). Some researchers provided financial resources by covering the costs for supply teachers to enable teachers to take part in PSG activities or attend PSG training (Evans, 2005; Massé et al., 2013).

The context in which PSGs were implemented, and the purposes of introducing such groups, as well as the length and frequency of intervention varied across included studies. PSGs were implemented to target a range of issues such as: meeting additional learning needs or concerns around pupil behaviour (Brown & Henderson, 2012); supporting newly qualified teachers (Babinski & Rogers, 1998) or staff involved in running nurture groups (Davison & Duffy, 2017).

In some instances PSGs formed a small part of other wider interventions (Annan & Moore, 2012; Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Evans, 2005; Stringer et al., 1992; Massé et al., 2013; Nugent et al., 2014), whilst in other instances they were part of a standalone research (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Brown & Henderson, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Jones et al., 2013). The length of PSG sessions could vary from 20 mins (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015)

to 2.5 hours (Evans, 2005). When PSGs were part of a wider project of activities, they were conducted over extended periods of time up to 2 years (Nugent et al., 2014). In longer-term studies, authors noted the importance of agreed times and spaces being available for the groups. In one study participants felt they could make more of time by preparing cases for discussion beforehand (Bartle & Trevis, 2015). Other researchers noted a lack of preparation, lateness and found presentation rotas were seen as too prescriptive (Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Stringer et al., 1992). Another difference across the literature was the frequency of PSGs with some occurring termly (Hayes & Stringer, 2016), each half term (Evans, 2005) and others as often as five times within one term (Bozic & Carter, 2002). All these issues were related to planning and preparation.

**What theories for the change that happens within and outside the group are provided by existing studies of PSGs?**

Bartle and Trevis, (2015) suggest it is social constructionism in problem solving groups (PSGs) that leads to new knowledge and understanding needed for successful problem solving. They propose it is through coming together as a group that staff are able to explore their own constructs and also explore the problem situation through others' lens. Babinski and Rogers, (1998, p. 131) echo this view stating "a sense of community" helps teachers "make meaning from their new complex roles". They also suggest story-telling is a means by which teachers share, explore, and develop their knowledge constructs. This is aligned with Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) who view social narrative theory alongside constructionism as explanations for participants' experiences in PSGs.

Psychodynamic theory is offered to explain participants' reactions and responses to the PSG space. In PSGs, this refers to participants reflecting on the situation, interrogating their own and others' emotional responses; making the unconscious conscious and exploring how present patterns of behaviour may relate a pupil's previous experiences or indeed, how participants own experiences relate to their responses in a given situation (Grahamslaw and Henson, 2015; Turner & Gulliford, 2020).

To account for participants' intentions to act and changes in their behaviour after PSGs, several studies point to cognitive theories, citing Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behaviour to bridge

strategies discussed in the group and teacher's actions outside the group. (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). Other cognitive aspects such as self-efficacy and causal attributions are implicated in this (Davison & Duffy, 2017; Turner & Gulliford, 2020).

Another theory to explain participants' satisfaction with PSGs is social validity. Social validity refers to the perceived value of the intervention and is key to a programme being put in place successfully (Ashworth et al., 2018). Key features of social validity are to do with perceived acceptability and usefulness. The *process* to achieve intended outcomes must be *acceptable* to participants and these outcomes should also be desired by participants (*deemed useful*). Much of the current research on PSGs has explored aspects of feasibility (Evans, 2005; Nugent et al., 2014), usefulness (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Davison & Duffy, 2017) and acceptability (Grahamslaw & Henson 2015; Bartle & Trevis). From the staff point of view, attending PSGs training was made feasible when the EPS provided supply teachers (Evans, 2005) and resources to guide the process (Masse et al., 2013). In terms of usefulness, studies show PSGs can help newly qualified teachers develop their identity as professionals (Babinski & Rogers, 1998) and support non-teaching staff delivering additional support to pupils (Davison & Duffy, 2017). The acceptability of the intervention seems to be closely linked with the notion of safety. Discussing problems can be associated with vulnerability. In one study participants indicated initial wariness to discuss problems but experienced the "relief of sharing" and came to value the "honesty and openness" of the group (Bartle & Trevis, 2016, p.83). However, in Jones et al. (2013) only one formal PSG group was conducted as staff were reluctant to discuss problems with peers they did not know well. One reason may have been the safety of PSGs was not well established and so the process was not acceptable despite extensive training on the problem-solving structure. Still, participants reported ad hoc use of the principles they had learnt in training with familiar peers suggesting they could see the usefulness of the intervention.

## **Summary Discussion**

The study sought to explore how and why school staff benefit from participating in PSGs, and the observed wider impacts of the intervention. A synthesis of the literature identified the structured nature of PSGs; their predictability, creates a safe space for learning and reflection. The safe space is an acceptable forum for exploring problem situations and allows participants a cathartic, validating and containing experience. These shared experiences over time are hypothesised to create a sense of belonging which in turn reinforces the perception of the group as a safe space and its utility for addressing problem situations. This sense of safety is reported even in one- off PSG interventions (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015).

Participants benefited practically and emotionally from PSGs and found them to be a valid use of time and resources. These groups were also found to have wider impacts in the school environment. When pupils were better understood, their needs were better met by staff. Further, increased self-efficacy in teachers correlated with warmer classroom climates (Massé et al., 2013). Staff worked more collaboratively outside the groups when they had attended PSGs. Planning and preparation had a direct influence on the PSG structure for example, the group format employed, and the training facilitators and participants received. School culture also shaped the PSG. It determined the time and space made available, perhaps indicating the value of PSGs in relation to other school priorities. School culture may also moderate the extent to which strategies discussed in PSGs are put in place. For example, in some instances, senior staff members made wider changes to school systems after PSG discussions (Annan & Moore, 2012).

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A possible critique of a qualitative framework synthesis might be that the method relies on researcher interpretation of what themes are observed and how they are categorised.

Researchers' professional biases will have an influence on what is deemed worthy to investigate, with whom the investigation is carried out, as well as how the topic is researched, analysed and reported. Reflexivity, accountability and transparency are proposed to address these issues (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009). It is acknowledged different researchers might have interpreted the literature in different ways.

### **Implications for practice and research**

Previous studies have evaluated counselling and targeted support for teachers experiencing poor emotional and mental health (Gold et al., 2010). However, there has been less focus on preventative support for school staff in the research literature (Naghieh et al., 2015). One clear way to maintain staff wellbeing is to create safe reflective spaces for peer support. The synthesis of data into a model suggests the intervention is highly acceptable, deemed useful and successful under the following circumstances:

- Teachers have opportunities to learn about the purpose of the intervention prior to participating
- There is flexibility in the PSG format or type of group to suit staff needs
- Staff feel they have ownership of the process
- There is a protected time and space for PSGs
- A regular group of teachers participate in the PSG
- There is support from senior leaders
- The PSGs are part of a wider wellbeing initiative or involve collaboration of other bodies (schools, Educational Psychology Services).

Future research could explore the implementation of PSGs in school settings and the factors important for maintaining their use. Additionally, the model provides a context for guiding new research and interpreting new primary findings. Since the model explains how PSGs cause an effect, researchers can target identified aspects. For example, they might explore the fundamental qualities of a successful teacher-facilitator and the key factors in facilitating a safe space. Future studies might also investigate the support needs of trained teacher-facilitators to address the issue of maintaining the intervention in schools.



## **Conclusion**

This paper brought together existing research on PSGs in schools and offers a model explaining the factors which underly their perceived success. Staff are positive about the PSG process, finding it acceptable, useful and a socially valid intervention. Environment, preparation and planning, and the group structure enable the group to be experienced as a safe space. Within the safe space, participants reflect, learn, feel emotionally supported and in some cases develop a sense of belonging with peers. These psycho-social processes enable teachers to change their perception of, and approach to problem situations which leads to positive change outside the group.

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## **Paper 2: Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: an exploratory process evaluation**

### **Abstract**

This exploratory process evaluation considers how problem-solving groups (PSGs) were put into practice in two schools within one local authority (LA) in North West England. The PSGs were led by and run for teachers. The processes and activities of implementation across the two schools were considered across four focus groups over the course of an academic year. Data were co-analysed with participants and key themes found to influence implementation were around the role of a trusted champion, communicating the purposes of PSGs, support for facilitators and issues of time. Findings are examined in relation to the Active Implementation Frameworks and implications of these are discussed.

*Keywords: Collaborative Problem Solving Groups, Solution Circles, Reflecting Teams, Teacher Wellbeing, Participatory Data Analysis, Active Implementation Frameworks, Peer Support*

## **Introduction**

It is widely recognised that teaching is a demanding profession. Time pressure, student behaviour and organisational expectations are cited as stressors (OFSTED, 2019). Stress has negative impacts on teachers' quality of life, personal relationships and can lead to long-term absenteeism (and presenteeism) due to poor physical and mental health (Weare, 2015). This negatively impacts on teachers' effectiveness and engagement with students (Flook, Goldberg, Pinger, Bonus, & Davidson, 2013). Arguably, whilst children and young people's mental wellbeing is prioritised in schools, less focus has been paid to school staff. In a study soliciting staff views of children's health and wellbeing, teachers reported they felt they had a role to support young people but that their own wellbeing was neglected (Kidger, Gunnell, Biddle, Campbell, & Donovan, 2009). Even where a 'whole school approach' to wellbeing is implemented and some intervention is directed to teaching staff, students' academic and social outcomes often remains the primary concern (Humphrey, Barlow, & Lendrum, 2017). Further, when staff experience poor mental health themselves, supporting young people's wellbeing may prompt an awareness of their own needs and exacerbate feelings of not coping (Lang, Marlow, Goodman, Meltzer, & Ford, 2013).

### **Problem solving groups**

Problem solving groups have been found to positively affect teacher wellbeing (Muchenje & Kelly, in preparation). In these groups, participants meet in a quiet, designated space and sit together - usually in a circle. The group follows a structure which typically involves the following stages:

- I. Presentation of the problem by one participant
- II. Affirmation - group members acknowledge problem holder's efforts etc.
- III. Clarification - questions asked to enable problem holder and group members to analyse the problem
- IV. Planning or action - group share ideas and suggestions and formulates a plan
- V. Optionally - feedback at a later time

Groups may record their discussions via a designated scribe, write suggestions individually or may draw a diagram during the session which the problem-holder keeps.



## **Rationale**

Current literature provides evidence for the social validity; perceived usefulness and acceptability of PSGs across a range of settings and participant groups including newly qualified teachers and staff in specialist settings for children with social and emotional needs (Muchenje & Kelly, in preparation). However, there is currently limited understanding of the contextual factors and activities which are important for PSG implementation. Implementation can be understood and practiced using a range of theoretical frameworks and is described as:

a set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions...implementation processes are purposeful and are described in sufficient detail such that independent observers can detect the presence and strength of the 'specific set of activities' related to implementation. In addition, the activity or program being implemented is described in sufficient detail so that independent observers can detect its presence and strength. When thinking about implementation the observer must be aware of two sets of activities (intervention-level activity and implementation-level activity) and two sets of outcomes (intervention outcomes and implementation outcomes). (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, Friedman & Wallace, 2005, p. 5)

Blamey and Mackenzie (2007) add,

for many .... interventions, context is not simply an interesting backdrop but is instead explicitly targeted for change... context, therefore, must be considered as part of the evaluation and can be key to uncovering the circumstances in which, and the reasons why a particular intervention works. (p. 441)

## **Research Question**

To aid practitioners who may seek to address teacher wellbeing via PSGs, this study documented the implementation of one such intervention asking: "what contextual and process factors are important for implementing PSGs in the local authority's schools?"

## **Methodology**

### **Local context**

This project was commissioned by an Educational Psychology Service (EPS) in the North West of England as part of a wider Local Authority (LA) project to support emotional and mental wellbeing in schools and in the community. The EPS introduced PSGs to local schools offering a 6-week series of educational psychologist facilitated PSGs. The EPS's long-term goals were to implement and embed the PSGs in schools with the hope that over time they would become self-sustaining. Staff in five schools who had attended PSGs subsequently took up the opportunity to train as PSG facilitators in a two-day session led by the EPS. Training sessions included opportunities to learn about PSGs and guided experience in facilitating these. The EPS committed to supporting trained teacher-facilitators to implement PSGS in their respective schools by providing 90-minute support sessions for teacher-facilitators termly. Participants for the current study were recruited with support from the EPS from this pool of teacher-facilitators.

### ***School contexts***

Secondary schools in the town perform below the national average, with 26.6% of pupils achieving Grade 5 and above in English and Maths, compared to 43.3% of children nationally. A more recent measure, Progress 8 scores secondary school pupils in the LA as -0.64 compared to the national average of -0.02. 92% of the LA's pupils stay in education or continue studying compared to the 94% country average. For primary schools 62% of pupils in the LA meet the expected standard of progress, a rate which lies below the national average of 64% (Compare School Performance Service, 2018).

The two schools which took part in the study were members of a multi-academy trust.

#### *School A- Primary school*

The primary school was rated 'Good' by OFSTED in May 2017. It performed well above both local and national averages for pupil progress in Reading, Writing and Maths in 2018. 81% of pupils met the expected standard of attainment for their age compared to 64% and 62% in England, and the LA respectively.

#### *School B - Secondary school*

The secondary school was awarded an OFSTED status of 'Good' in March 2017 with student attainments overall falling within 1% of national averages.

### **Participants**

The teacher - facilitators in this study had a dual role as they were also the *implementers* working to establish PSGs in their school contexts. At the primary school, the facilitator- implementers of the PSG were three main grade, early career teachers with 3 – 7 years' teaching experience. In the secondary school, the facilitator- implementers of the PSG were four members of staff. One was an Assistant Headteacher, two were experienced teachers with approximately 20 years' experience, one of whom was a Union Representative. Another teacher had been on the staff team for 8 years. Informed consent for research activities was gained (Appendix E).

### **Data gathering and analysis**

Participants' reflections on implementation of the PSGs were gathered via four focus groups over the academic year. Data generated in the focus groups were co-analysed in partnership with the teacher-facilitators immediately after each focus group to identify themes and patterns in the discussion which informed the next steps for the teacher-facilitators (Appendix F for initial focus group schedule).

### ***Co-analysis of data***

Historically, there has been a separation of the researcher and the researched in social sciences. There has also been differential status between expert knowledge and experiential knowledge (Byrne, Canavan, & Millar, 2009) with the criticism that the processes of research (its methods and ethics) are subject to politics, power and hierarchies (Daly, 2000; McIntyre & Lykes, 1998). Further, it has been argued that researchers themselves cannot truly be neutral or objective, and that they introduce bias to their work as they are influenced by their own socio-cultural and professional contexts (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). One response to this criticism is the notion of reflexivity; interrogation of the researcher's privileged position, as well as their personal and professional biases in relation to the processes and outputs of their research. However, it is not always clear how this reflexivity is operationalised, and reflexive practice is not always reported in research (Mauthner & Doucet, 2003). Social science researchers particularly those working with children, people with disabilities and people in poverty have advocated for participatory research practices, forgoing the separation of expert and the researched, and giving voice and sharing power with participants. One aim of participatory research is to produce more meaningful, impactful and relevant data by using and amplifying the experiential knowledge of participants (Byrne et al., 2009). Participatory methods are a relevant tool for understanding qualitative data, particularly when research is concerned with participants' experiences and were chosen here as an appropriate means of data analysis as the research aimed to document the *live process* of implementation rather than evaluating the activities retrospectively. The present study is collaborative rather than being truly participatory since the focus, purposes and methods of the study were devised by the commissioning EPS with the researcher. Nevertheless, there was an opportunity to amplify the voice of the teacher-facilitators and acknowledge their contributions as co-researchers in the analysis of data.

In the context of thematic analysis, a participatory analysis involves the researcher co-identifying themes with participants. In this study, co-analysis of focus group data was achieved through explicit and reflective questioning based on Braun & Clarke's (2006) methodology for thematic analysis (See Table 3 below).

**Table 3***Participatory data analysis adaptation*

| Braun & Clarke's Methodology             | Participatory adaptation  |
|--|---|
| 1) Familiarising yourself with the data. | "Take some time to reflect on our discussions today"  |
| 2) Generating initial codes.             | "In our discussions what key phrases words or ideas do you feel recurred or where significant?" "Write these on a post-it note and stick them on the flipchart paper"   |
| 3) Searching for themes.                 | "Have a look at the post-it notes others have written and place yours/ move them around so similar phrases, words and ideas are close to each other"<br>"How might we sum up these recurring key ideas?" "How could we group them into themes?" |
| 4) Reviewing themes.                     | "Is there anything we might change about how we've grouped these ideas and post-its?" <i>and/ or</i> " Let's rank the themes in order of importance"  |
| 5) Refining themes                       | "Is there anything else to be added that has not come up?" "Is there anything missing from our discussions?"<br>"Feel free to annotate or label this on the map"  |
| 6) Writing Report                        | Researcher to write report and share with participants for review.  |

Participants' reflections on 'post-it' notes function as 'codes' which were grouped and labelled into sub-themes, themes and thematic maps by teacher- facilitators. Additionally, participants annotated the thematic maps with linking statements. This inductive analysis with co-researchers was employed to guide implementation across the academic year.

### **Findings**

This section will first provide an outline of PSG related activities during the study period (Table 4), followed by presentation of the themes identified through co-analysis of focus group data. Reporting the findings chronologically supports an examination of the intervention over time (Fixsen et al., 2005). Next, Co - analysed data are presented in thematic maps (Figures 5 – 8). Phrasing, spelling and punctuation and symbols have not been changed - only identifying features have been removed (See Appendix G for photographs showing the co-analysis and Appendix H for co-analysis data in table form).

**Table 4***PSG related activities over time*

| Focus Groups   | PSG related activities in Primary School prior to focus group               | PSG related activities in Secondary School prior to focus group   | Agreed Actions/ Planned outcomes  |
|----------------|---|---|---|
| 1. Autumn Term | Preparation for implementing PSGs   | Preparation for implementing PSGs   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Teacher- facilitators chose a new name ‘Solution Sharing’ instead of ‘Supervision’</li> <li>● Facilitators considered an ‘open session’ for school staff to offer them the experience of participating in a PSG</li> <li>● Facilitators discussed ‘spoof scenarios’ for the open session               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Researcher volunteered to provide these</li> </ul> </li> </ul> |
| 2.Spring Term  | Preparation for implementing PSGs<br><br>Staff unable to attend focus group | Session introducing PSGs to wider school conducted<br>Demonstrative/ practice / ‘taster’ PSG completed<br>2 Formal PSGs with 7 and 8 teachers new to the school and NQTs (incorporated as part of induction) in each respective group conducted (on the same date)<br><br>PSG members shared positive feedback as part of | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Facilitators voted on logos in session</li> </ul>  |

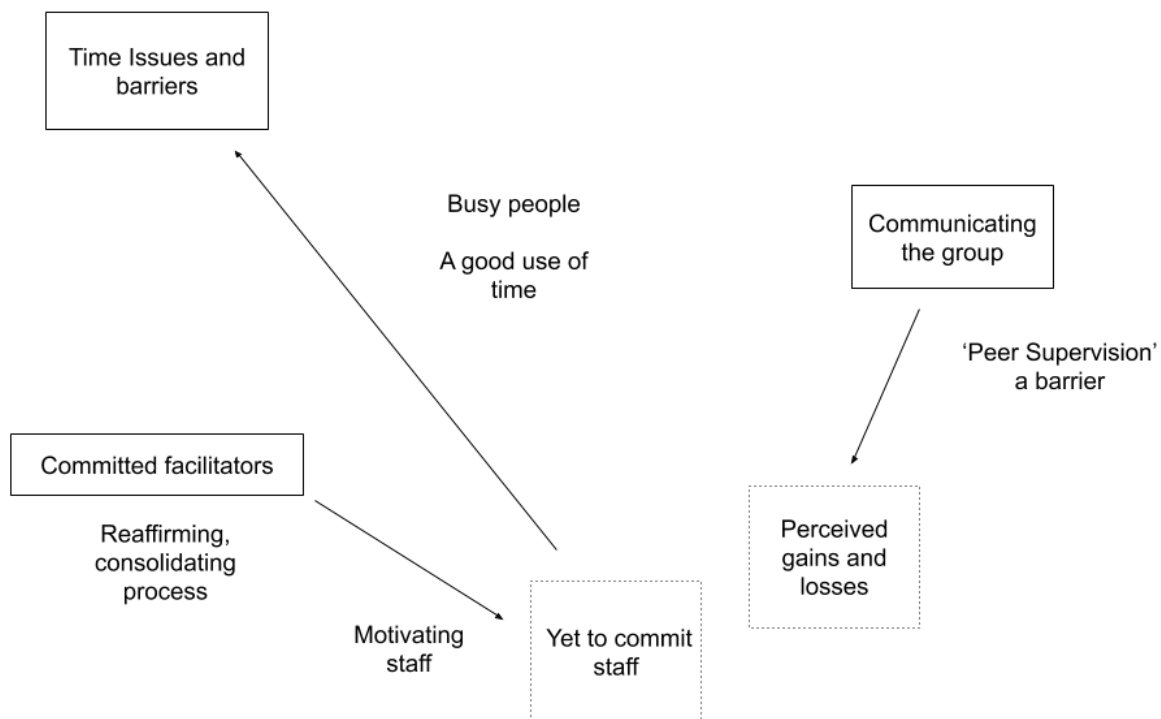
|               |   |  |   |
|---------------|---|--|---|
|               |   | <p>the induction survey</p> <p>Logos designed</p>  |   |
| 3.Spring Term | <p>3 Staff pitched the PSG model to another school in LA with EPS</p> | <p>Second PSG groups took place</p> <p>PSG members had been discussing the group with other members of staff</p> <p>EPS renamed and rebranded PSG training documentation</p> <p>EPS presented project progress at a conference for EPs</p>   | <p>Action: Invite an assistant headteacher with influence to drop by a session in secondary school with aim of PSGs being more widely adopted</p> |
| 4.Summer Term | <p>Staff unable to attend focus group</p>                             | <p>Staff who had attended PSGs were sharing about the group with colleagues</p> <p>Staff from the induction group had requested additional opportunities for PSGs</p> <p>Staff who had experienced the PSGs had spoken positively about it in a whole school CPD meeting</p> <p>A member of staff with leadership role who had included PSGs as part of the induction was leaving their role</p> <p>Reviewed and reflected on previous focus groups</p> <p>Considered how implementation factors had changed over time</p> | <p>Continued discussions on who might take on the 'trusted champion role'</p>   |



## Focus group 1

Figure 5

*Thematic Map, Focus Group 1*



Co-analysis of the first focus group data indicated a relationship between the themes 'Communicating the group' and 'perceived gains and losses'. During analysis teacher - facilitators (also referred to as co-researchers) identified potential PSG members had to try the experience before they could recognise potential gains of joining the group. Facilitators' commitment to PSGs was linked to the idea that facilitators needed to continually reaffirm and consolidate their own knowledge of the PSG process. This need was fulfilled both by EPS support sessions for teacher-facilitators and by attending the research focus groups. One co-researcher, (Participant 1) commented "It's two kinds of commitment as well isn't it, because it's commitment from us, we are committed, and there is the, are the staff who are yet to commit, who aren't as motivated as us, does that make sense?" Co-researchers noted that as

facilitators they had a role in 'motivating staff' to engage with the PSG model. Further bi-directional links were identified between 'time pressures/ barriers' and 'yet to commit staff'.

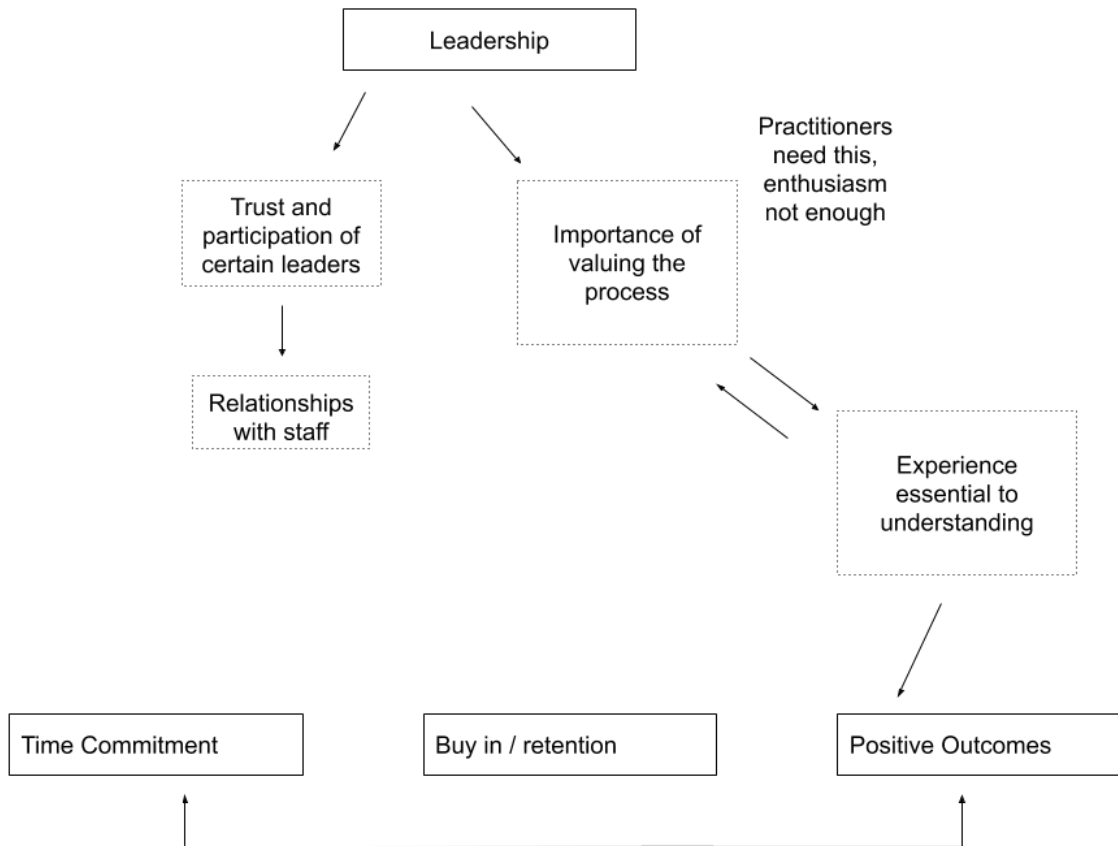
Well I think your time pressure is linked to your commitment, because people given how busy people are, sometimes they don't want to go up and find out about something, if they feel like they might then have to commit and it's going to take up their time, do you know what I mean, they might step--, not even come and find out about it because the thought that it's going to eat into their time (Participant 2).

In the analysis, 'Word of mouth' was noted as a potential strategy for communicating the potential gains of the PSG to other staff in the school.

## Focus group 2

Figure 6

Thematic Map, Focus Group 2



Here, several interconnected links between themes were identified. 'Trust and participation of certain leaders', leaders' 'relationships with staff', leaders 'valuing (the PSG) process' were closely related. Group analysis showed that experience of the PSG process is essential to understanding and valuing it. Participants identified it would be helpful to create opportunity for leaders to experience the process. One comment was:

...Like I say, certain members of SLT I'd be more than happy to have that, and I think I can also see certain members of SLT sharing problems to allow that process to happen, you know...so how that senior leader's relationship with staff has developed over the time they've been here, and so certain relationships have developed in certain ways and

other relationships have developed in a more kind of open way, you have that ability to talk to certain members of staff and not others I guess. But I guess NAMED LEADER can't be everything to everyone can THEY? (Participant 2).

Another consideration for involving leaders was around the limits of confidentiality with Participant 2 commenting:

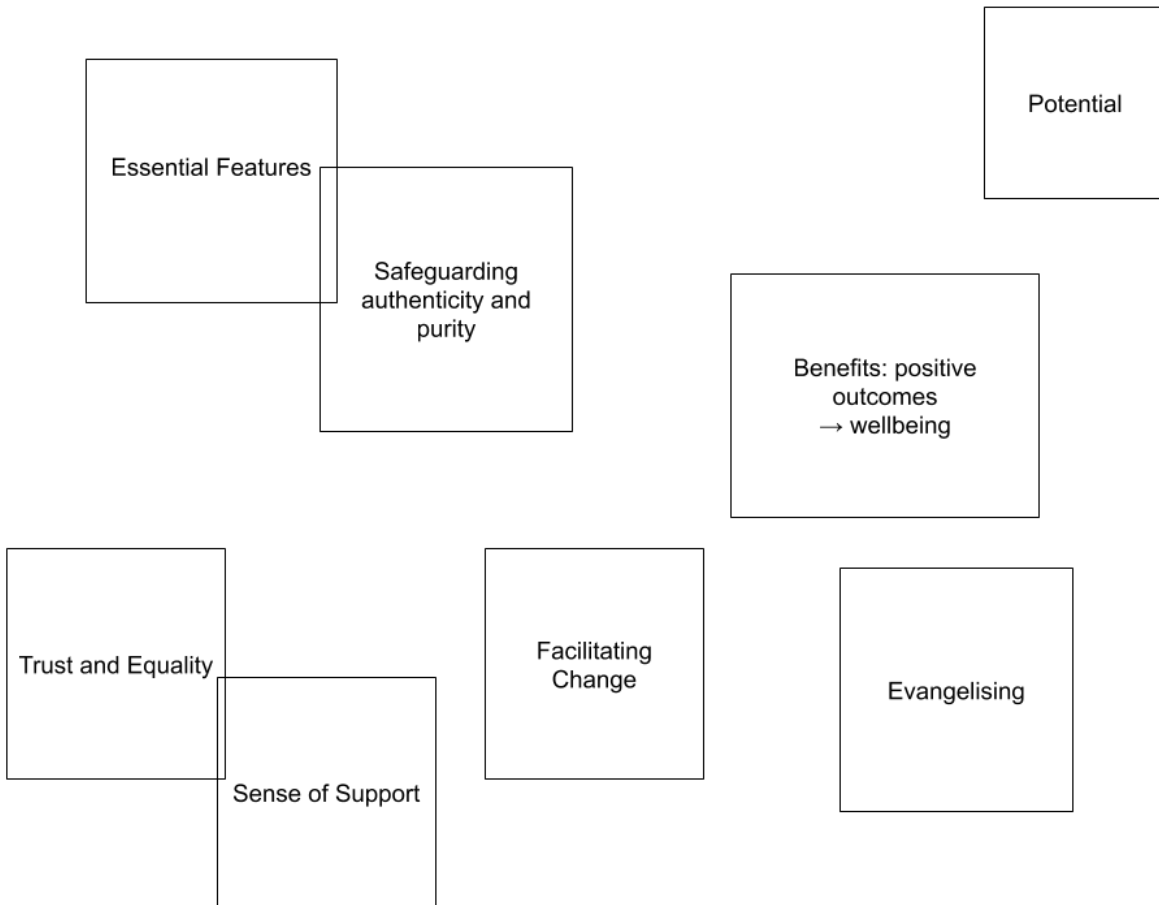
...in something where you agree to confidentiality, you shouldn't have to have those concerns should you? Because if somebody as an adult, as a school leader, agreed to take part in something and agreed confidentiality and that was broken, that's massive.

This concern was framed around the possibility discussions in the PSG could be taken out of the group and fed into formal monitoring or management processes. It was also established that though there was a 'time commitment' in establishing the PSGs time could be gained when positive impacts of the group were realised.

### Focus group 3

Figure 7

*Thematic Map, Focus Group 3*



At time-point 3, co-analysis of data identified 7 broad themes. Here, proximity of ‘essential features’ with ‘safeguarding authenticity and purity’ show teacher- facilitators viewed these as closely related ideas. Similarly, there was close proximity between the themes ‘trust and equality’ with a ‘sense of support’. Reflecting on the relationship between these themes one participant commented:

I think it has a massive value to an institution, to leaders who are having – or whoever is trying to find the solution to a problem. Like NAME has said, it does give you – the process is the solution. But I think it’s realising that value, because then people – people then feel

valued. You know like we said, they leave calmer. I actually think they don't necessarily leave calmer. I think they leave feeling valued (Participant 1).

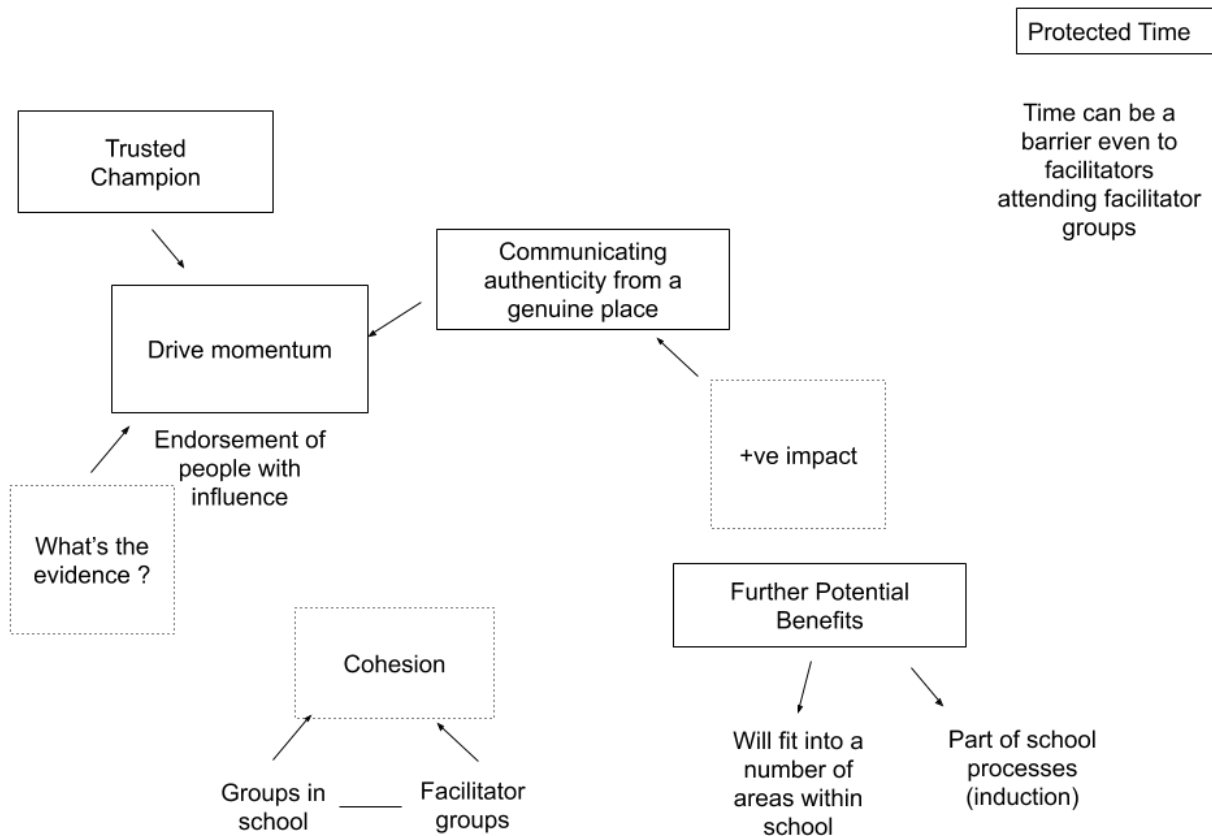
Notably the term 'evangelising' was used to describe a theme instead of marketing or selling with one participant proposing:

...To me it dovetails entirely with our [school's] faith ethos and the whole idea of people being empowered to find their own solutions, all that sort of thing. That's in line with [faith] teaching entirely. At its base, it's the welfare of staff being everyone's concern rather than leaders or something that's imposed on us or whatever. I wonder if that's a selling point for the people to whom we need to sell it, you know (Participant 4).

## Focus group 4

Figure 8

Thematic Map, Focus Group 4



In the final focus group, co-researchers reflected on the PSG related events throughout the year and reviewed thematic maps produced in previous teacher-facilitator focus groups.

Summarising key activities for implementation co-researchers noted the following as driving momentum for PSG implementation: the positive impacts from attending the group, authentic communication of these benefits, and having an 'evidence base' for the PSGs (both experiential and research based) as well as having a 'trusted champion'. Co-researchers commented that the loss of their own trusted champion who had left their role was a threat to the continuation of the PSGs commenting:

I mean, it's kind of reiterated the frustrations you have for me in schools, so it's not something that I've learnt but it's reminded me of the frustrations of, you know, when

you get these initiatives that are forced upon you that you don't feel are useful and positive, that the frustration knowing that there's something useful and positive that is there and is not being utilised, you know. I don't think it's something I've learnt particularly about myself or anything, you know, but that's come to the fore (Participant 4).

Staff recognised that there was an important bi-directional link between hosting the PSG 'groups in schools' and taking part in the 'facilitator groups'. This link was thought to bring about a sense of 'cohesion' and meaningfulness across these activities and also contributed to driving momentum and maintaining PSG practice in schools.

Concluding on the future of the PSGs a Participant 4 reflected:

I mean... we value it and we can see the benefits of it and we're able to see...how the school would benefit by doing this, I guess there would be a frustration if it just – I mean, I suppose bottom line is I don't think the head[teacher] has the foggiest idea what's going on now in this room..., but that hasn't mattered, but it does matter if it's not going to... It'll fizzle out, I suppose, and just be something we look back on as it was a good idea a few years ago and a thing we tried. The school's full of things like that, and this deserves better, I think.

## **Discussion**

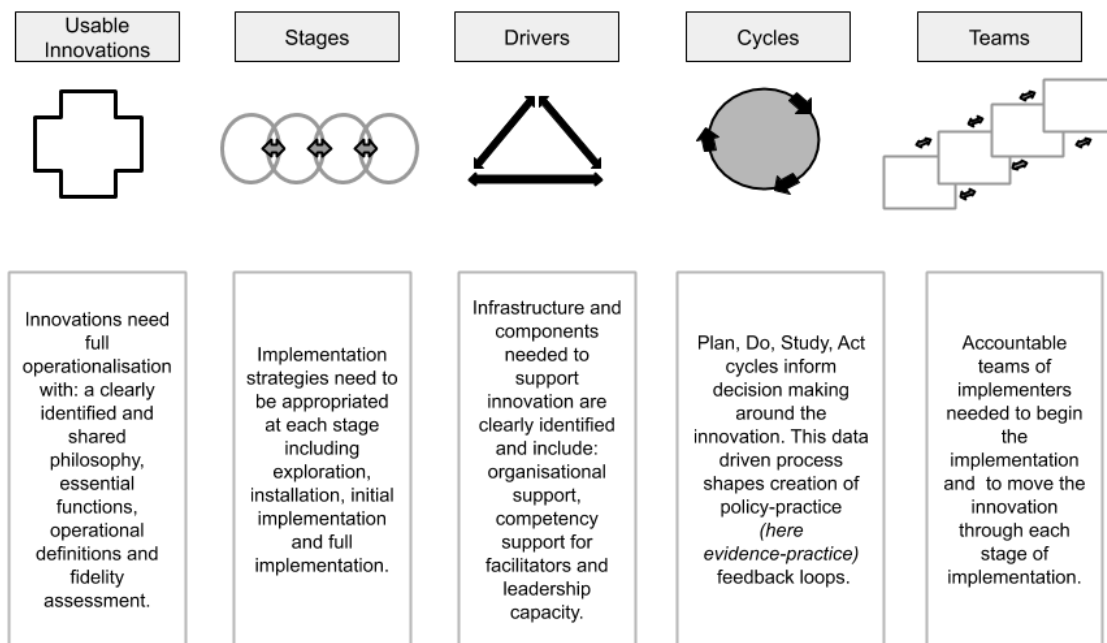
This project aimed to document and evaluate the process of implementing PSGs with teacher-facilitators in a town in North-West England. There is evidence for social validity; the acceptability, usefulness and helpfulness of PSGs for school staff. This research was an opportunity to explore and identify key activities for implementation in schools. This section will discuss the findings in relation to the research question: "What contextual and process factors are important for implementing PSGs in the town?" Two levels of implementation – EPS and school level, are discussed.



The Active Implementation Frameworks (AIFs) are used to structure the discussion of findings. In the AIFs, components to be considered in implementation include; Usable Innovations, Stages, Drivers, Cycles and Teams (Figure 9). In this model components overlap, are non-linear and co-dependent - this is emphasised in the work of Pollastri, Wang, Youn, Ablon, and Marques (2020) (Figure 10). The AIF has recently been used to support interventions with children, young people and their families (Albers, Mildon, Lyon, & Shlonsky, 2017; Pollastri et al. 2020).

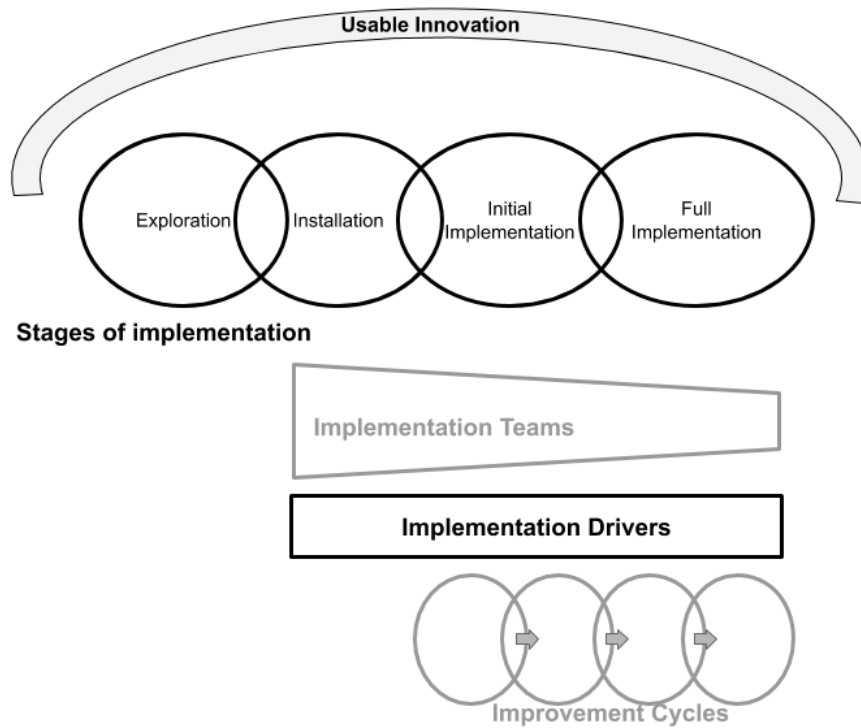
**Figure 9**

*Active Implementation Framework adapted from Blanchard, Livet, Ward, Sorge, Sorensen and McClurg with permission (2017).*



**Figure 10**

*“The overlapping structure of active implementation frameworks” adapted from Pollastri et al., with permission (2020).*



### **Usable Innovations**

A systematic review of PSGs indicates they are widely deemed to be feasible and useful Muchenje & Kelly (in preparation). In the current study, participants recognised the value of the intervention discussing the importance of maintaining authenticity and purity of the process in Focus Group 3. Teacher-facilitators expressed a concern that the purpose of the PSG should remain as intended - fulfilling the essential functions of being supportive and being a place of trust and equality rather than a tool fulfilling management purposes or one for monitoring. Co-researchers recognised the PSGs as a tool for facilitating change and emphasised the potential application of PSGs across a number of areas in their school, for example becoming a tool to problem solve in curriculum groups or as part of continual professional development activities. Co-researchers identified that PSGs contributed to staffs’ sense of wellbeing and this effect

could be greater if the PSGs were used more widely in the school. Opportunities to meet in the teacher-facilitator focus groups and EPS support sessions were recognised as important to maintain the 'purity' of the PSG process and thus fulfilled the function of fidelity assessment.

### **Stages**

The exploration stage includes assessing the 'fit' of an intervention in context. At EPS level, PSGs had been identified as suitable means to deliver support to teachers in schools and were initially named 'peer supervision groups'. At the school level of implementation, co-researchers expressed a wariness around the term 'supervision' as in school contexts this can often denote a form of monitoring. Instead, teacher-facilitators, with assistance from the EPS re-branded the groups as 'Solution Sharing'. Further, one teacher-facilitator who had a role in induction processes for the school was able to include the PSG as a feature of induction for new staff. This highlights that though external agencies may present an intervention having 'assessed fit', a level of flexibility is important for school implementers as they will also conduct a 'fit' analysis with intimate knowledge of their unique context

In terms of installation, at EPS implementation level, practitioner readiness was ensured by providing the initial 6 weeks experience of PSGs and the two-day training period. Within the school, installation revolved around an examination of implementation drivers in the research focus groups which are described below.

### **Drivers**

Initially, themes identified were tied to practical considerations such as time issues and how the group could be communicated to staff (Focus Group 1). At this early stage co-researchers recognised the importance of reaffirming and consolidating their knowledge of the process (by attending EPS support and research focus groups) whilst preparing to conduct the PSGs. Once the groups had been experienced and school staff had begun to share their positive views with others, concerns turned to the importance of school leaders valuing and understanding the process- having experience of it themselves - so they could continue to protect time for the intervention. The nature of leadership involvement was discussed at length with trust being a core consideration. Experiencing and sharing the philosophy of the PSGs was seen as a way to mitigate the PSGs being potentially enforced as a new (top-down) initiative. Co-researchers

emphasised the importance of teachers experiencing and valuing the PSG process and that it ought not to be an imposition on staff from school leadership - but rather an invitation from trusted colleagues. Still, staff recognised that the support of leadership was key to expand PSG practice more widely. Indeed, Pollastri et al., (2020) indicate there is value in organisational leadership experiencing and understanding the benefit of the intervention in the initial implementation phase.

Co-researchers named one of their teacher-facilitator peers as a trusted champion who motivated and energised the group to put in place the PSGs. This individual was trusted to prioritise the best interests of teachers in implementing PSGs, rather than holding other competing school agendas. They recognised a trusted champion did not necessarily have to be a school leader - but an individual with influence - ideally one who could ensure protected time was available for PSGs to be implemented. In the final focus group, co-researcher re-stated the values of attending both EPS support and research groups as they lent a sense of purpose to the PSG activities in school.

In summary, the drivers in the initial implementation were:

- Experiential evidence of the benefits associated with PSG participation
- External research evidence - generating this and learning from it simultaneously
- The trusted champion
- Endorsement of people in school with influence - leaders and non-leaders
- Continued support for teacher facilitators from EPS
- Protected time for the group
- Communicating the group from a place of authenticity to school staff

### **Cycles and Teams**

At school level, cycles of Plan, Do, Study, Act synchronous with practice of Assess, Plan Do, Review in the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), were completed in the research focus- group over the course of the academic year and also in support meetings provided to co-researchers by the EPS. Here the group of teacher-facilitators, the Educational Psychologist and the primary researcher formed the implementation team. One

idea not fully captured by the AIF model is the developmental impact on teacher-facilitators in their role as implementers. Initially focus group discussions identified practical barriers to implementation. Over time, the themes reflected value-based considerations; how teacher-facilitator values as well as PSG values fit with school priorities, and the impact of school cultures generally on wellbeing of both staff and students. Kennedy (2014) highlights that such transformative professional learning requires sustained collaboration involving; teacher engagement, interaction and experimentation with the innovation; actively adapting this with their experience, practice, and local context (Boylan & Demack, 2018).

### **Implications for practice**

#### ***The role for school leaders***

Problem solving groups are a vehicle for emotional support, and professional development. One concern in education presently is the intense level of scrutiny teachers face to meet internal and external performance evaluations. This scrutiny in itself is a stressor (National Foundation for Education Research, 2019; OFSTED, 2019). Therefore, it would be counter-productive if PSGs were used as tools for managing or evaluating teacher performance. This sentiment is emphasised by teacher-facilitators who took part in PSGs in discussing the role of school leaders in the process.

Indeed, Acton and Glasgow (2015) have argued the current neoliberal context privileges competition, accountability, performativity and management and that this is in opposition to notions of collegiality, emotional expression and understanding, professional development, and wellness respectively. In a neoliberal framework PSGs potentially become a vehicle for the former rather than the latter. Therefore, a systemic shift in thinking would seem helpful from individualising problems i.e. 'coping with stress' to creating school culture which prioritises wellness and enriches teaching staff. School leadership are best placed to protect time and physical space for PSG interventions without imposing expectations and outputs for the process (Acton & Glasgow, 2015).

### *The role of educational psychologists*

Educational Psychologist can inform PSG interventions in schools as follows:

- I. Introducing PSGs - delivering training on their evidence base
- II. Identifying fit - exploring the place and purpose for such groups in the particular school context through consultation with staff over time to identify areas of need. PSGs could cater for pastoral teams where there are significant social needs in a school or supporting newly qualified teachers, or teaching assistant groups. They could also be a framework for subject teachers adopting a new curriculum or a leadership team reflecting on behaviour policy etc.
- III. Training teachers to facilitate PSGs using an appropriate model of professional learning
- IV. Offering support for teacher- facilitators as they develop their skills
  - A. Perhaps identifying and approaching teachers who may have the qualities of a 'Trusted Champion'
- V. Contracting and negotiating PSGs as part of the educational psychology service's model of delivery in settings - creating a protected time for these

Within the EPS, where PSGs are being implemented across a several schools, there is a need to identify a trusted champion, and an accountable team actively completing PDSA cycles.

#### **Limitations**

The success of focus groups interviews relies on the skill of the facilitator. Additionally, a focus group is an interaction, where the facilitator and participants have varying stakes, interests and footing - problems which are not always acknowledged in the use of qualitative interviews (Potter & Hepburn, 2005). In addition, the form of participatory data analysis employed in the present study is novel and potential pitfalls lay in the interactive nature of the analysis process. However, interactive knowledge building is widely practiced in forms of collaborative action research (Kemmis, 2006). Further, the primary researcher shared all intents and purposes of the analysis with participants employing consultative and relational skills from her professional practice as a Trainee Educational Psychologist to ensure the process was understood. Indeed, teacher-facilitators were increasingly confident and led the analysis process after the second

focus group with little intervention for the researcher. Finally, participatory analysis fits well with iterative feedback processes of PDSA promoted in the AIF providing a scaffold for deeper reflection which in turn shaped a clear view forward with regard to future actions (Blanchard et al., 2017; Pollastri et al., 2020).

### **Conclusion**

This paper evidences that PSGs when led by trained teacher-facilitators and supported externally can be implemented in schools and potentially become self-sustaining. Key aspects supporting implementation were that PSGs should be understood by staff as a genuine, no strings attached offer which seeks to support, develop and value them as individuals. PSGs create a safe space for reflection and professional development building a sense of collegiality in staff. The paper further introduces Active Implementation Frameworks as a potential tool for understanding and supporting implementation in school contexts.

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## **Paper 3: Dissemination of research**

### **Introduction**

This paper discusses the dissemination of research findings outlined in Paper 1 and 2. First, notions of evidence-based practice (EBP) and practice-based evidence (PBE) are briefly outlined. This is followed by an outline of the effective dissemination of research. Next, the main body of the paper turns to a discussion on the professional and research implications at the research sites. The final section outlines the wider dissemination strategies and how their impact might be appraised.

#### **Evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence**

Evidence based practice (EBP) is widely understood to mean the application of research to practice (O’Hare, 2015). One definition for EBP is that it is “the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of patient characteristics, culture and preferences” (American Psychological Society, 2005, para 1). The expectation for practitioner psychologists including educational psychologists (EPs) to be informed by, apply and evaluate evidence in their practice is outlined in the Health and Care Professions Council, (2015) standards of proficiency. This evidence may draw from a broad range of psychological theory (Fox, 2011). However, there has been some criticism around the feasibility and appropriateness of EPB (when construed purely as the application of research) in educational psychologist’s work. “The need for practitioners to have the skills to critically appraise relevant studies, to keep up to date with the burgeoning volume of published research, to conduct meta-analyses and to receive training in effective techniques” has been pointed out as an inhibiting factor for EPs seeking to apply research directly to their practice (Dunsmuir et al., 2009, p.54).

Further criticisms are concerned with the nature of evidence which might be applied to EP practice. There are hierarchies in research with randomised control trials (RCTs) deemed the highest form of evidence to inform interventions (Dawson, Yeomans, & Brown, 2018; Fox, 2011). However, RCTs can neglect context which is key in EP models of working where the individual’s presentation is understood to be shaped by within person factors in interaction

with context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Burns, Warmbold-Brann, & Zaslofsky, 2015). Morrison (2001, p. 74) argues “the RCT actively builds out and excludes key elements of context, as that could ‘contaminate’ the experiment, yet it could be these very factors that are important.” Building on these arguments, Fox (2011) proposes practice-based evidence (PBE) referring to practitioners being “actively involved in different types of research to justify professional practice” and developing their expertise from their experiences (Fox, 2011, p. 327). More recent definitions have extended ideas around EBP, suggesting that as well as research, evidence can include “practitioner experience and judgement, information from the context which practitioners work in and the perspectives of those people who might be affected by any decision” and that this strengthens the evidence base from which EPs operate (O’Hare, 2015, p.5).

### **Effective dissemination of research**

Historically, researchers producing knowledge (the evidence base) have left it to practitioners and policy makers to interpret knowledge and apply it to practice (Metz et al., 2015). There is now an increased emphasis within academia to publicise developments in knowledge and this has correlated with a rise in research on how to disseminate knowledge (Wilson et al., 2010). Providing a definition for dissemination Wilson and colleagues describe it as:

The planned process that involves consideration of target audiences and the settings in which research findings are to be received and, where appropriate, communicating and interacting with wider...audiences in ways that will facilitate research uptake in decision-making processes and practice. (p.2)

Dissemination serves different purposes and can utilise a range of methods including publications, conferences and internet transmission (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2020; Harrison & McNeece 2001). Some issues which arise in dissemination can include: establishing channels of communication or connections between researchers and practitioners, clearly communicating information so it is understood (Dubé & Lapane, 2014), and communicating to encourage the adoption of effective interventions (Kanouse et al., 1995). These issues correspond with notions of awareness, understanding and action in dissemination as outlined by Harmsworth and

Turpin (2000). They highlight that planning for dissemination, its objectives as well as how and with whom knowledge is to be shared is essential (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000).

The research described in Papers 1 and 2 was commissioned by a local authority educational psychology service (EPS) and as such clear goals for dissemination with the EPS were agreed as part of the commissioning process. These were in terms of the audience (commissioning EPS) what level of dissemination was hoped for (increased knowledge to inform action) and how the research would be shared (presentation to EPS and journal publication). The Implementation Science approaches employed in this project (Papers 2) developed out of a need to close the research - practice gap by seeking understandings which would enable, support and maintain interventions being put in place (Blanchard et al., 2017). These aspects of dissemination and wider strategies are discussed below.

### **Professional and research implications from Paper 1 and Paper 2**

The overarching aims of the research were to understand how the EPS would be best placed to support implementation of PSGs across schools in the local authority and develop practices to ensure groups could become embedded, maintained and self-sustaining over time. To develop commissioner's knowledge around PSGs Paper 1 used framework synthesis to integrate existing data and generate new understandings of how and why school staff benefit from participating in PSGs. Paper 2 employed focus groups to explore contextual and process factors which are important for implementing PSGs and inform teacher-facilitators' implementation strategies.

### **Research Sites**

There are two research sites described in Paper 2. The first site is at the EPS level with educational psychologists (EPs) who were seeking to establish PSGs in local authority schools. The second research site is at the schools level with teacher-facilitators who had been trained to run PSGs and were putting these in practice with their colleagues within their education settings. This section discusses organisation and professional impacts at the EPS and schools. Findings from Paper 1 and focus group data from Paper 2 are referred to in describing implications of the research at schools level. At the EPS level, questionnaire data collected

after feedback to commissioners is presented to explore their views on implications of the commissioned research.

### *Schools*

Of the two schools involved in PSG implementation, the secondary school was able to conduct several PSGs in the academic year they were involved in the research project. Teacher - facilitators at the secondary school shared that staff who had attended PSGs valued the process.

Well I would say just this morning one of the things that showed our success was one of our new qualified teachers stopped me on the stairs to say, "When's our next session, when are we doing that again?" because she said it was really--, "I wish we could do more of it," so I think that's a success straight off, that we've done one round with them, they've taken part in one and it was like, "When's the next one, because it's after Christmas, it's coming up soon isn't it?" (Participant 1, Focus Group 2)

This enthusiasm for PSGs echoes findings outlined in depth in Paper 1 around the acceptability of the intervention. Whilst the primary school at the time data collection ended had not yet had PSG sessions, they remained involved in implementation activities. Primary school staff continued to engage with the research process by attending focus groups and also supported the EPS by pitching PSGs to other schools in the local area. This indicates they felt the PSGs were of value and could be useful to staff in other education settings. Again, this is in line with findings discussed in Paper 1 around the perceived utility of PSGs.

### *Dissemination through participation*

Another set of implications for staff is to do with professional learning and development that occurred through participation in the research project. Participatory research approaches employed in contracting the research project with the EPS and in the process of research (Paper 2) lend themselves well to dissemination since knowledge is constructed with participants (Jagosh et al., 2012). At the school level, there was continual dissemination as knowledge was co-created in the focus groups and acted upon in iterative Plan Do Study Act cycles (Pollastri et al., 2020). An example of professional learning in Paper 2 was the increasing abstraction of

themes in the focus group discussions concerned with implementing the PSGs. This indicated new ways of thinking about implementation from concrete – conceptual.

Percy, (2005) identified that through the research partnership, stakeholders (in Paper 2, teacher- facilitators) are empowered and that this reinforces their engagement in the process. An explanation for this is that experiential learning with autonomy, which is collaborative and occurs over time leads to transformational learning (Kennedy, 2014) and this in turn empowers participants (Percy, 2005). Therefore, it is suggested the act of co-creating research also serves as dissemination in action with lasting impact. Echoing this, Jagosh et al., (2012) report further benefits participatory of research in relation to dissemination. Namely, participatory research leads to: increased professional capacity, improvements in the quality of outputs and outcomes over time, and can increase the sustainability of project aims beyond funded time frames - enduring gaps in external funding. Participatory approaches extend dissemination activities by empowering participants and lead system changes and other unanticipated and beneficial activities Jagosh et al., (2012).

### ***Educational Psychology Service***

Once the research project (Paper 2) had been written up, the primary researcher met with the EPS commissioners to provide oral feedback to the EPS staff team in the form of a presentation. The primary researcher maintaining the participatory principles, asked EPS staff their views on the potential implications of the research for their service. EPS staff briefly discussed this with the primary researcher and agreed to share their views via a brief questionnaire (Appendix I and J for informed consent procedures and a copy of the questionnaire, respectively). Four responses were returned and analysed via content analysis.



Content analysis is a technique employed to organise and interpret qualitative data. There is no single method for this, and the flexibility of the technique has been welcomed by researchers (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). Here, a form of directed approach to content analysis was employed.

The goal of this approach is to:

Validate or extend conceptually a theoretical framework or theory. Existing theory or research can help focus the research question. It can provide predictions about the variables of interest or about the relationship among variables, thus helping to determine the initial coding scheme or relationships between codes (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005, p.1281).

The questionnaire comprised three open ended questions to explore participants' views on the possible implications of the research project in relation to the EPS, the schools they worked in and their professional practice, respectively. In this instance, the 'theory' was that these would be three areas where implications might be observed. Data were coded deductively. In content analysis, when responses do not fit in the pre-decided category, a new category is made to accommodate these (Hsieh and Shannon, 2005). Participants' responses in this form of content analysis can therefore offer "supporting and non-supporting evidence for a theory" (Hsieh & Shannon, 2015, p. 1282). This type of analysis looks at surface structure and remains close to the words in the text not seeking to interpret the data but rather to describe it (Bengtsson, 2016). Analysis of questionnaire responses is shown in Table 5 below.

**Table 5**

**Analysis of questionnaire response using content analysis**

| Question  | Categories   | Example responses   |
|---|--|---|
| <p><b>What might be the implications of this research for the educational psychology service?</b></p> | <p>Develop the EPS implementation team and explore further implementation activities</p> | <p>In principle this is something the EPS should develop</p> <p>Need for EPS ‘champion’ figure – to sustain and nurture the initiative</p> <p>Need to train the whole EPS team in [PSG] model and facilitator training</p> <p>Linking with advisory teacher team re: implementation in schools</p> <p>EPS could <i>raise the understanding</i> of teachers...comprehensively capture teachers’ perspectives and clearly identify teachers’ ZPD [in relation to understanding purposes of PSG and their processes] to substantially improve EPS delivery</p> |
|   | <p>Extended opportunities for PSG use</p>  | <p>The model might be discussed with training leads in local school trusts towards trained teacher teams rolling it forward</p> <p>Exploring the potential for other uses</p> <p>SEND services in addition to teachers in school</p> <p>Possibility of facilitating cross-school groups</p> <p>Possibility of groups for specific school practitioners: NQTs, TAs, Head Teachers</p> <p>A version of the model is already in place for SENDCo Cluster groups – need to refresh</p> <p>To use to support colleagues in LA [Local Authority]</p>              |

|  |   |   |
|--|---|---|
| <b>What might be the implications of this research for the educational psychology service? (continued)</b> |   | Possibility of some EPS team members using the model as a peer supervision structure  |
|  | PSGs as a form of service delivery                      | Find a way to envisage how the programme will fit into offer and systems next year<br>Embed it as a way of using school core time or traded time if appropriate for work at systems level.  |
|  | Other potential uses of implementation framework        | Possibility of using the implementation theoretical models for other initiatives  |
| <b>What could be the implications of this research for your schools if PSGs are introduced?</b>            | Possible improvements to inclusion practices in schools | Model offers potential for schools to ‘problem-solve’ ways forward with additional children [contributing to reducing demand on support services]<br><br>Massive! Improved teacher well-being, inclusive practice and culture of the school   |
|  | Empowers teachers                                       | Approach is empowering for teachers once institutional barriers are raised  |
|  | Continued implementation                                | Existing facilitators could take the lead in renewing and advertising   |
|  | Potential threats                                       | Schools loaded with other “viable” interventions and OFSTED....any activity not directly trajectory to academic performance would have much less chance of securing <i>commitment</i> on an ongoing (rather than ad hoc programme)<br><br>Schools would feel pressure in (a) providing the time (b) securing the commitment (c) sharing practices especially where school policies are less sympathetic |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  | Competitive relationship-dynamics, SLT styles and agendas  |
| <b>What might be the implications (change or difference) for your practice in light of this PSG research?</b> | Incorporating implementation theory into systemic work | [Use] the background theory of implementing school system changes for other projects<br><br>This is a method I already espouse and I would be very keen to promote it [in schools and the EPS] |

An implication drawing from findings of Paper 1 was a broader understanding of the PSG intervention and its potential use in supporting other groups of staff connected to the EPS such as Special Education Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) or headteacher groups. A second implication, drawing from the methodological approaches in Paper 2 was the usefulness of the Active Implementation Frameworks (AIFs) to understand implementation of PSGs and the potential to use this framework for putting in place other EPS projects. The utility of AIFs is encapsulated in Pollastri et al., (2020, p. 2) who describe in their study “frameworks were used to understand implementation successes, what implementation changes were made to standardize implementation, and how using the AIFs helped to identify and overcome barriers to implementation”. It seemed EPS staff noted the potential applying these frameworks would have in other service projects.

### **Strategy for promoting and evaluating the dissemination and evaluating impact beyond research sites**

The dissemination activities for promoting findings from Papers 1 and 2 beyond the research sites (schools and EPS) is detailed below. Further, dissemination of novel methods and approaches is discussed. Specifically, activities to publicise the participatory thematic analysis developed in this project will be outlined. Strategies to promote AIFs as a highly relevant tool to inform educational psychologists' practice are also shared.

### **Promoting findings**

#### ***Journal Articles***

Findings from Paper 1 provide a model offering an explanation for the perceived utility and acceptability of the PSG intervention. The model is useful practically as a tool to inform potential PSG participants on the nature of the process. The *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* journal was identified as an appropriate place for Paper 1 since the primary readership are school professionals with an interest in wellbeing who might see the value of PSGs in their education settings. One particular group of the readership who might benefit from an awareness of PSGs are teachers in non-mainstream and specialist provisions for children and young people with emotionally based difficulties. Staff in these contexts may be particularly in

need of opportunities for reflection and emotional support (Rae, Cowell & Field, 2017; Willis & Baines, 2018). Refer to Appendix K for the journal's scope submission guidelines.

Paper 2 identifies key themes found to influence implementation. This information is useful to any potential implementers of PSGs. Paper 2 will therefore be submitted to *Educational Psychological in Practice* for publication, a journal published by the Association of Educational Psychologists. This is an appropriate place to share insights on PSG implementation since it is widely read by practicing psychologists and education researchers nationally and internationally (see Appendix L for the journal's aims, scope and submission guidelines). Researchers and practitioner psychologists are well placed to form implementation teams to promote the practice of PSGs. Indeed, educational psychologists are typically involved in processes for identifying need, contracting with schools and putting interventions in place in schools with several PSG studies discussed in Paper 1 being carried out by EPs as researchers or trainee EPs working with researchers (Evans, 2005; Hayes & Stringer, 2016; Turner & Gulliford, 2020). The impact of dissemination would be gauged by metrics such as citations, a traditional measure of research impact (Xu, 2018).

### ***Conferences***

The researcher will present a poster detailing finding from Paper 1 and Paper 2 at the International School Psychology Association conference in 2021 to share insights from the research with a wider international audience. This is another way of engaging with academics and practitioner psychologists who are well placed to raise awareness of, and potentially implement PSGs in schools where they work.

### ***Social Media***

*Social media* describes “websites that use collaborative virtual applications that enable the creation, exchange, and broadcasting of online user generated content” and includes platforms such as Twitter, Youtube, Facebook etc. (Pham, 2014, p. 768). Academics, including psychologists in training use social media to share information, advertise for participants, learn from peers, and disseminate their research to academic peers and members of the public alike (Allen et al., 2018; Campbell et al., 2016). Perry, (2017) suggests building an online profile and

strong social networks is beneficial as it makes a researchers' work more discoverable to the public and enables direct engagement with individuals with an interest in the research. To develop a professional social network, the researcher has created a Twitter account and interacted with relevant posts of the topic of wellbeing in schools, supervision in education and shared content or re-tweeted content related to these topics. Impact on Twitter is measured in engagements, that is, the number of likes, retweets or times the tweet has been viewed. These are examples of *altmetrics* and have been compared to traditional metrics of influence in academia- the main being number of citations (Haustein et al., 2015). Traditional metrics such as citations are correlated with academic eminence, and indicate influence in the academic sphere since journal articles are typically read by other researchers. Haustein et al., (2015) compared the properties of journal articles including article length and the number of collaborators to explore how these correlated with social media metrics (altmetrics) and citations. They found papers in social sciences compared to other fields of research were more likely to appear in social media and suggested these are because they address people's concerns. This would be relevant for Paper 1 in particular where aspects teacher wellbeing are discussed. Haustein and colleagues also found documents with shorter titles and shorter documents correlated positively with social media counts. However, shorter documents correlated negatively with the number of citations. Their results indicate "the factors driving social media and citations are different. Therefore, social media metrics cannot actually be seen as alternatives to citations; at most, they may function as complements to other type of indicators" (Haustein et al., 2018, p.1). This research suggests social media likely has social drivers and impacts whilst citations remain a measure of scholarly impact and academic eminence. Though the evidence for altmetrics is in the early stages, the public nature of social media, particularly Twitter makes information highly discoverable and accessible to lay audiences, raising awareness of research. This therefore seems a potentially impactful tool for raising awareness on the need to prioritise teacher wellbeing , and PSGs as a vehicle for this (Allen et al., 2018; Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000).

A key strategy from this research is therefore to tweet short lay summaries of findings in Paper 1 with a link to the published article or full thesis. This would allow both members of the public

and academics to access the research. The aim of dissemination via tweeting is awareness with the potential for increased knowledge and understanding if the audience were to access the full paper or thesis via the link. To balance the potential and risk around the use of social media, the researcher has been guided by professional ethical codes (British Psychological Society Ethics Committee, 2012).

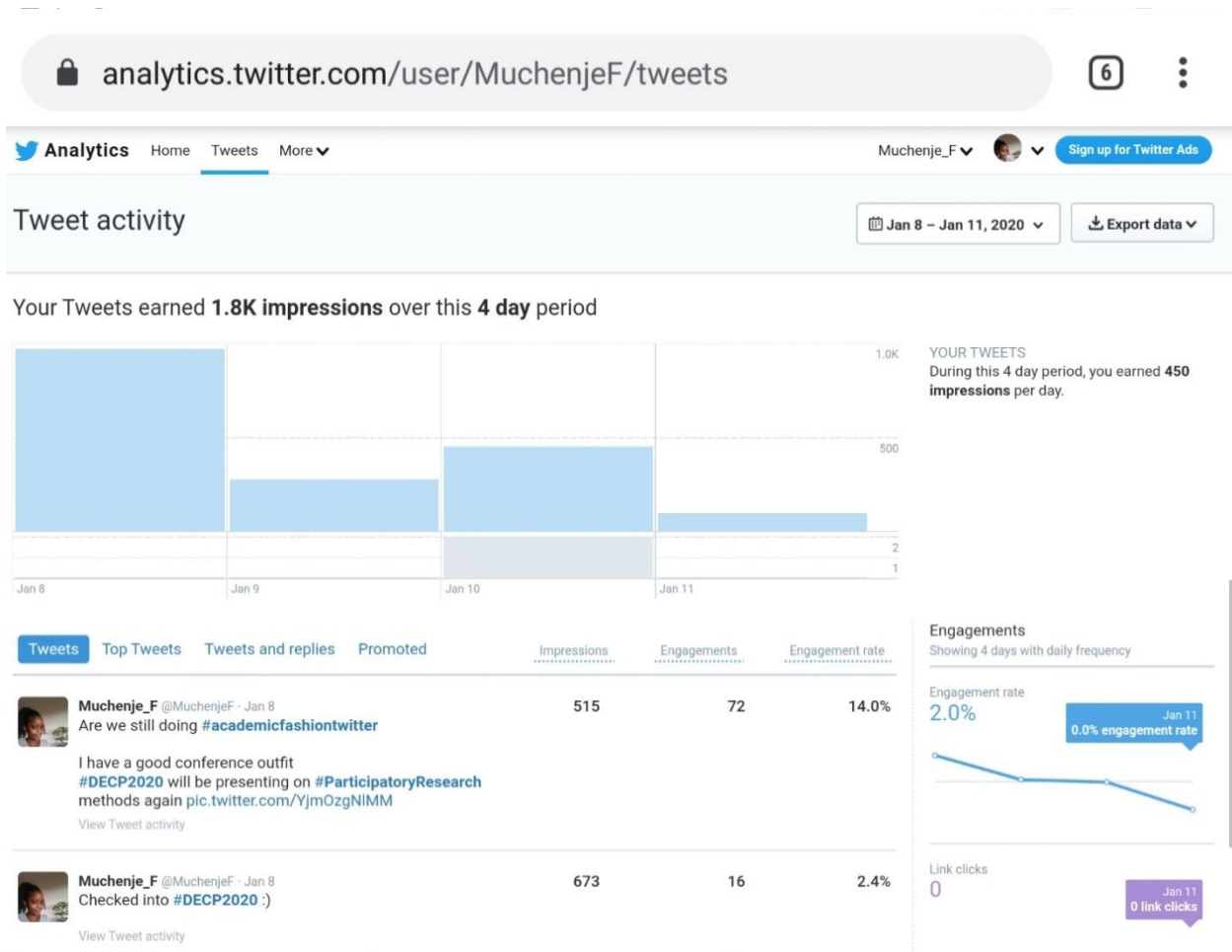
### **Promoting novel methods**

To explore the acceptability of the novel participatory analysis method adapted from Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis presented in Paper 2, the author presented on the topic at the Methods@Manchester conference 2019; a conference for researchers which aims to promote and advance innovations in methodological approaches. Attendees at this conference were students and academic staff from universities in the region. This was an opportunity for informal peer review of the novel participatory analysis approach. The author also presented the participatory analysis approach to educational psychologists in training at the Division of Educational and Child Psychologist conference (DECP TEP) who are well placed to use the approach in developing their doctoral research projects (See Appendix M for conference presentation slides). Reception from researchers and psychologists in training has been positive and is a first step towards interrogating, refining and promoting this participatory analysis as a viable and appropriate research tool. Of note and related to issues of social media dissemination, Allen et al., (2018) reports Twitter has been used at academic conferences and found to promote engagement and extend discussion on topics, themes and ideas presented reaching virtual attendees (researchers and non-researchers alike). For example, when the researcher tweeted to promote the participatory thematic analysis talk and the wider DECP conference, there was substantial engagement with the tweet lasting several days after the conference (Figure 11).



**Figure 11**

*Twitter analytics for researcher's content in 3-day period after DECP conference*



*Note.* Engagements indicate interactions on tweet including hashtags, username, retweets, replies, follow and likes. Impressions refer to the number of times the tweet is seen.

Xu, (2018) cautions against “empty buzz” and highlights “it is more meaningful to understand who has used a research product, how and why it is used, what effect it has had, rather than simply knowing how many people have viewed, downloaded, or mentioned it on Twitter” (2018, p.6) She points to the importance of an “‘interpretive lens’ to understand the motivations behind the social media acts”. However, as a form of dissemination as awareness raising, this use of social media would have seemed to be effective (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000).

### **Concluding Remarks**

This paper has discussed evidence-based practice and practice-based evidence in relation to developing the use of problem-solving groups in schools. Active implementation frameworks and participatory approaches have been discussed as highly relevant in the dissemination of new knowledge as it is co-created at the site of intervention; these can be considered as vehicles of both EBP and PBE. Furthermore, plans for disseminating the processes and outputs of the research formally to academic peers and teachers via journal publication of papers and conference attendance were outlined. The potential for social media as a tool for dissemination to a public audience was also outlined. It is hoped academics and practitioner psychologists in education will find the research processes and outputs useful in shaping PSGs and establishing their practice in schools. This project aspires to communicate the benefit of PSGs for staff and become a resource for implementing and maintaining PSG interventions in schools.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: EPS Resource - Leaflet for headteachers Solution Sharing

Peer Problem-Solving in Schools.



#### What Is Solution Sharing?

Solution Sharing involves small groups of staff meeting together on a regular basis to share and resolve professional problems. Such processes are often referred to as 'peer supervision' but this has the potential for colleagues to misconstrue such meetings in terms of line management, perhaps fearing that it will be a judgemental experience. In fact, Solution Sharing uses a carefully designed conversational structure which has been associated with staff feeling supported & cared for and with coming away with a whole set of strategies which can be applied to issues of teaching and learning in the classroom.

The Solution Sharing process is initially led by an EP for around half-a term. Whilst this is a full peer supervision process, it is also a training programme. By being a participant, staff learn the nature and the feel of collaborative peer problem-solving and progressively pick up the associated discussion skills. If particular staff are sufficiently enthused, they can then join a two-day training course designed to equip them to run groups of their own.

The focus of Solution Sharing is currently on teachers but we are exploring the feasibility of TA groups.

A full description of the process is available as a parallel document: *Solution Sharing – Teacher & Facilitator Guide*.

#### What is Involved?

The Solution Sharing process is facilitated by the Educational Psychology Service and is currently free of charge. The whole process involves:

- Introductory presentation to teachers;
- Formation of self-selecting Solution Sharing group (typically 6 -8 in number);
- Half-term block of weekly sessions (usually scheduled for after school) facilitated by an EP;
- Optional Facilitator training (2 days) to enable this work to continue to flourish using in-house facilitators.

#### What Could I Expect?

Experience of supervision processes of this kind over time have been associated with:

- Increases in professional skills & knowledge;
- Elements of support and restoration as colleagues feel supported with difficult issues;

- An enhanced sense of professional validation & competency;
- A rich fund of problem solutions with the capacity to address real problems of teaching and learning.

Comments from XXXXX teachers include:

*I believe in the process and the structure it provides.*

*The advice I was given really helped me to solve the issue I presented. It has had a huge, positive impact with the relationship I have with the child. I feel far more confident.*

*Gave me the confidence to deal with the issue head-on. The process gave me a range of strategies to use - I had so many that I did not end up using them all. It was also reassuring to know that other staff knew about my situation in a safe way. It made me feel like I wasn't gossiping but dealing with the issue.*

*We are absolutely loving these sessions. We find them powerful, massively helpful and enthralling and we all agree on this.*

*The experience was hugely positive, and completely unlike anything I have previously experienced in a school setting. The process was non-judgemental and the suggestions were all welcome, as was the opportunity to share an issue and explore it from a range of perspectives. I look forward with interest to further sessions and seeing how we develop as a group.*

### **What Do I Need to Do Next?**

If you are interested in taking this process forward in school, please talk with to your school EP or contact XXXXX Specialist Senior Educational Psychologist by email or on XXXXXXXX



## Appendix B: EPS Resource - Setting up and running the group



### Facilitator Session Guide

#### Things to Consider when Establishing the Group

- How will the initial and subsequent meetings of the group be notified/reminder?
- Is there a view that certain members of staff should be encouraged to attend? How will this be managed? Are there concerns about the implications of certain members of staff joining?
- Clarify whether or not your school policy will require discussion with parents about the intention to raise their child in the group.
- When will the group meet? How frequently?
- How many sessions are planned?
- How will issues of competing events be managed?
- Will there be a regular meeting room?
- Will the room be suitable – uncluttered, welcoming, warm, quiet, comfortable, neutral?
- Refreshments?
- Can the room be set-up in advance?
- How will interruptions be managed?
- 

#### The First Meeting

- Arrange beforehand for a group member to bring a particular classroom issue – this should be a real concern but the member of staff should be aware of the practice nature of the first meeting and that the process may not be smooth, given that the group is getting to grips with the process. Thus, this first case might be a ‘starter’ situation, probably not as complex as issues that may be subsequently raised in the group.
- Welcome the group – check everyone knows each other. Ensure the session starts and finishes on time.
- Give out participant guide notes. Note:
  - The specific model and structure of the meeting and its helpfulness in achieving positive outcomes – run through stages.
  - The central importance of keeping to the phases of the process, observing the rules around who speaks and using facilitative questioning.
- Run through questioning types using the participant guidance notes.
- Give out the ‘Understandings’ document and ensure everyone understands the fundamental points. Use this document as the starting point for discussing the importance of feeling safe and boundaried and the need for an agreed set of ground rules. Develop the ground rules collaboratively but include confidentiality and freedom to pass in particular sections.

- Proceed with the initial case, stopping to explain and elaborate if necessary and using the guidance structure below

### Facilitating the Regular Meeting

1. Welcome the group – ensure session starts and finishes on time.
2. Reminder of purpose of group and re-visit ground rules (usually via a published version of the list from the first meeting) . Clarification of Facilitator role.
3. Invite feedback from previous discussions. Should be brief and facilitator ensures that group do not re-embark on the consultative process.
4. You may have set up a system for identifying time needed in advance. If not, seek expressions of interest at this point:

Something like: *Is there anyone who would be willing to share a concern with the group in this session?* If there is competition for time, the facilitator invites volunteers to negotiate, noting opportunities in the future. One criterion that may apply is whether there is a need for immediate help. Go for one presentation per session initially. The Facilitator should check the problem is appropriate for the group (i.e. professional, focus on children, working with colleagues/parents; the topic should be an area over which the consultee has some responsibility/control).

5. Work through meeting phases, ensuring that the rules and timings apply (see next page).
6. Look for opportunities to model questioning styles.

| Phase      | Who speaks<br>Who listens   | Facilitator Activity  |
|------------|---|---|
| Preparing  | Each presenter mentally prepares in advance and is clear about what they hope to gain from the meeting when they take their turn.   |   |
| Presenting | The presenter describes the child or situation they would like some help with – a brief résumé of the issues and what they would like to get from the members.<br><br>The members listen. | Check topic is suitable for a school-based SFRT<br>Make brief notes and feed back the key points at the end of the description.<br>Ensure consultee’s desired outcome is clear. |

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| Clarifying                                     | <p>The members take turns to ask open questions to clarify the situation and the presenter responds.</p> <p>.</p>          | <p>Facilitate the movement of questions around the group, noting the freedom to pass.</p> <p>Look for opportunities to model particular question styles, particularly WH, Preferred Future and Exception types.</p> <p>Check that any lines of questioning/contributions are congruent with the SFRT model and philosophy</p> <p>Summarise the main issues, any positives and what the presenter wants to gain from the members.</p>  |
| Affirmation & Reflecting (Solution Generation) | <p>The members speak in order and can pass.</p> <p>The presenter listens and only speaks briefly to thank the members.</p> | <p>Facilitate the systematic movement of affirmations and solutions around the group, noting the freedom to pass.</p> <p>Model offering tentative suggestions &amp; building further possibilities on another group member's suggestion.</p> <p>Ensure that there is little or no dialogue between group members and presenter – the aim is to generate multiple ideas and perspectives.</p> <p>Summarise the solutions presented once the process has come to a natural end or time is up.</p> <p>Check that all participants are comfortable with the range of potential solutions offered e.g. <i>Reflecting on the list of suggestions, are there any further thoughts on ensuring these are as helpful as they can be?</i></p> |
| Process Reflection                             | The presenter comments.  |   |
| Closing  |  | Thank the presenter and members and close the session or move on to another member's problem.   |

**Appendix C: Table of problem-solving group variants**

Please note: descriptions are copied directly from text within research papers. Only formatting is altered in presenting them here (i.e. placing lists in bullet points were appropriate). Supplementary description of steps where it is embedded with them is removed. Whilst some PSGs may have the same name they contain adaptations within individual studies and thus may be presented more than once.

| <b><i>Study</i></b>                       | <b><i>Type problem solving group described</i></b>   |
|---|--|
| <b>Annan &amp; Moore (2012, p. 98-99)</b> | <p><b>Staff Sharing scheme</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Case Presentation (10 minutes): The person presenting the case (the Consultee) speaks uninterrupted about a particular issue.</li> <li>2. Group Questioning (10 minutes): The other members of the group are able to ask the following in order to elicit further detail on the presenting issue:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Clarifying questions – Who? What? Where? When? How often?</li> <li>● Reflecting questions – What was different? etc</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. Theories and strategies (10 minutes): Each person writes down a theory and associated strategies aimed at addressing the issue which are then shared with the group. This</li> <li>4. Action Planning (10 minutes): The person presenting selects strategies that seem useful and time is spent devising an action plan, which includes consideration of the consequences of particular strategies and the exploration of the practicalities of given options.</li> <li>5. Feedback (10 minutes): In the following session there is time at the beginning for feedback on how things have progressed and a re-rating of the level of concern.</li> <li>6. Meta-evaluation (10 minutes): At the end of each session the group reflects on the process itself, acknowledges positive features of the approach, any improvement suggestions, and fine-tunes the process where appropriate.</li> </ol> |

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>Babinski &amp; Rogers (1998, p.289)</b></p>  | <p>(a) Teachers take turns presenting an issue of concern<br/> (b) the group participates in helping the teacher define and refine the problem,<br/> (c) the group helps the teacher generate possible solutions, and<br/> (d) the group assists the teacher in developing a plan of action.</p> <p>At future meetings the teachers were expected to provide follow-up reports on the implementation of the plan, which allowed for further exploration and collaborative assistance from the group members.</p>   |
| <p><b>Bartle &amp; Trevis (2015, p. 81-82)</b></p> | <p><b>Solution circle</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The problem presenter outlining the problem.</li> <li>2. The team offering solutions.</li> <li>3. The problem presenter leading discussion about potential solutions.</li> <li>4. First steps being identified and agreed.</li> </ol> <p>Throughout the process one of the facilitators captures the key aspects of the discussion using text, diagrams and illustrations. This acts as a visual aid for participants throughout the process.</p> <p><b>A process consultation approach</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description and clarification phase.</li> <li>2. Reflection phase.</li> <li>3. Personal theory generating phase.</li> <li>4. Strategy generating phase.</li> </ol> <p><b>The reflecting team</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A consultant beginning consultation with a consultee.</li> <li>2. At a mid-point, a reflective team discuss their ideas about what they have heard (as the consultant and consultee listen).</li> <li>3. The consultant and consultee continue the consultation (incorporating their responses to the points raised by the reflective team).</li> </ol> |

|   |   |
|---|---|
|   | <p><b>Balint groups</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The problem presenter outlining their concern.</li> <li>2. Group members asking clarifying questions.</li> <li>3. The problem presenter sitting away from the group and listening to the group discussion.</li> <li>4. 4The problem presenter re-joining the group and sharing their thoughts about points of interest.</li> </ol>  |
| <p><b>Bozic &amp; Carter (2002, p. 193)</b></p> | <p><b>Cite Group consultation approach developed by Hanko (1999)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Welcome. (Ground rules are agreed at the start of a sequence of sessions. Typically these include agreements on confidentiality and the maintenance of respect and empathy for other group members.)</li> <li>2. Review of previous cases or issues ± what has happened since we last met?</li> <li>3. Prioritisation of concerns. The facilitator EP invites participants to offer a case or issue that can be discussed in today's session. Often teachers will bring a concern about a particular pupil, but sometimes the issue may be a group of pupils, a class, or a systemic feature of the school. A brief resume of each potential case or issue is made (1 minute each) and one is selected. This is done democratically, sometimes a concern may be held in reserve for a future session.</li> <li>4. The participant whose concern has been selected becomes the `problem-holder' or consultee. This person outlines the issue in slightly more detail.</li> <li>5. Communication check: The facilitator EP asks a group member to re-state the problem and checks with the problem-holder that this is an accurate description.</li> <li>6. Exploration: The group asks questions to elaborate the concern (20±30 minutes). The facilitator EP guides this as necessary, most frequently ensuring that group members do not rush into wanting to provide solutions and advice. Sometimes the EP can develop certain features of the exploration process. For instance demonstrating how to ask certain forms of solution-focused question or how paraphrasing can help to clarify meaning. Much insight into a problem can be gained from the</li> </ol> |

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>exploration phase alone.</p> <p>7. Ways forward. During this phase the group discuss possible ways forward (20±30 minutes). However, it is still possible to ask questions and elicit further information if this is necessary. The facilitator EP encourages participants to frame suggestions for action as possibilities that can be rejected, rather than advice that should be followed.</p> <p>8. Process Review. Led by the facilitator each participant is invited to comment on today's session, significant ideas, concerns and so on. This often stimulates reflection on general issues and learning that participants have experienced in the session.</p>  |
| <p><b>Brown &amp; Henderson (2012, p.180, 189)</b></p> | <p>Solution Circles citing approach developed by Forrest &amp; Pearpoint, (1996)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Step 1: Welcoming the group (one minute)</li> <li>● Step 2: Presenting problem (six minutes)</li> <li>● Step 3: Asking for clarification (four minutes)</li> <li>● Step 4: Generating solutions (six minutes)</li> <li>● Step 5: Dialogue (six minutes)</li> <li>● Step 6: First steps (one minute)</li> </ul> <p>Roles for participants within a SC session include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Problem presenter (who discusses a problem they have with an individual pupil, group of pupils, class, wider school issue)</li> <li>● Process facilitator (manager, time keeper)</li> <li>● Note taker/recorder (who records the discussion on flip chart paper as the discussion takes place)</li> <li>● Brainstorm team</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>Davison &amp; Duffy (2017, p. 289- 290)</b></p>  | <p>The Farouk system of group process consultation operates four distinctive but complementary phases. At phase 1 the referring teacher presents the issue to the group without interruption.</p> <p>Following this, in phase 2, the group members are encouraged to ask a range of questions to provide a detailed, systemic picture of the problem.</p> <p>In phase 3, theories on the factors contributing to the issue presented are gathered.</p>  |

|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>Finally, during phase 4, suggestions for interventions or strategies are given.</p> <p>Post-consultation the referring teacher reflects on the group's recommendations and the most appropriate strategies are selected to be trialed over the coming weeks. The referring teacher is asked to provide a brief update at the next consultation session on the outcome of the intervention.</p>  |
| <p><b>Evans (2005, p.136)</b></p>                       | <p>Each session always began with a reminder of the ground rules including a reminder of the typical process or problem-solving model that might be followed:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Decide what you want to get from the session.</li> <li>● Explore the problem.</li> <li>● Set targets.</li> <li>● Agree interventions.</li> <li>● Confirm action.</li> </ul> <p>Teachers were given guidance on the sorts of questions to pose in preparing for a consultation.</p>  |
| <p><b>Grahamslaw &amp; Henson (2015, p.113-114)</b></p> | <p><b>Cite Solution Circle described in Ree's (2009)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The problem presenter outlines the problem.</li> <li>2. A member of the group summarises the problem.</li> <li>3. The brainstorm team asks questions around the problem.</li> <li>4. The problem presenter is asked what the positives are in this particular situation.</li> <li>5. The problem presenter is asked if there is a particular area of the problem that they wish to focus on.</li> <li>6. The brainstorm team generates as many strategies/solutions as possible to the problem.</li> <li>7. problem.</li> <li>8. The problem presenter summarises what they have gained and what might be their next step.</li> </ol> <p><b>Cite Circle of Adults described in Wilson and Newton (2006)</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Agreeing ground rules</li> <li>2. Presenting the problem</li> </ol> |



|  |  |
|--|--|
|  | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Exploring relationship factors, considering organisational factors, hypothesising about the child's voice</li> <li>4. Synthesis of key points (by the graphic facilitator), generating hypotheses about the situation,</li> <li>5. Generating strategies linked to those hypotheses and</li> <li>6. Agreeing first steps or actions that can be completed within an agreed timescale.</li> <li>7. A "coach" or "mentor" is allocated to support the problem owner to put these actions into place.</li> <li>8. The process concludes with a "round of words" in which all participants can comment on the process that has taken place.</li> <li>9. The "process facilitator" uses their expertise in group facilitation skills to guide the group through these stages but rarely contributes to the discussion themselves.</li> <li>10. The "graphic facilitator" creates a visual summary of the process and discussion, usually on a large poster which is retained by the group.</li> </ol> |
| <p><b>Hayes &amp; Stringer (2016, p. 151)</b></p>    | <p>Farouk's (2004) approach cited.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Description and clarification phase 5 minutes</li> <li>2. Reflection phase 10–15 minutes</li> <li>3. Personal theory generating phase 10 minutes</li> <li>4. Strategy generating phase 10 minutes</li> </ol>  |
| <p><b>Jones, Monsen and Franey (2013, p.260)</b></p> | <p><b>Cite Hanko (1999) and the "Problem Analysis" framework (Monsen &amp; Fredrickson, 2008; Monsen &amp; Woolfson, 2012).</b></p> <p>Teacher initially presents a "problem", or dilemma they are trying to manage, which is then expanded upon and explored by staff within the group, before possible solutions are generated, discussed and critiqued. Finally, the presenting teacher or "problem owner" chooses those ideas from the discussion they feel they can commit to and develops an "Action Plan" (with support from the group).</p>  |

**Massé et al. (2013, p. 332)**

**Cite group problem-solving process developed by Caplan & Caplan as an influence (1993).**

- (1) A teacher (the presenter) presents his or her problem to the group.
- (2) After the presenter has described the problem to be solved, the consultant and the group members work together to help the presenter gain a clearer conception of the problem and generate alternative explanations by asking questions and pushing for clarification and further refinement of the definition of the problem, in order to complete a functional assessment of the situation.
- (3) The consultant then encourages other members of the group to formulate hypotheses about the source of the problem, by putting emphasis on functional assessment and their expertise (experience and theoretical knowledge).
- (4) Once the problem is defined, the group members brainstorm possible solutions or initial plans of action for the problem at hand.
- (5) From these, the presenter selects which of the propositions he is willing to apply and feels could help to solve the problem.
- (6) With the help of the group members, the presenter then formulates an action plan that will be implemented before the next meeting.
- (7) The consultant offers support for its implementation

Nugent et al. (2014, p. 260)

|                                  | Person with Concern                                     | Group  | Time Needed |
|----------------------------------|---|--|-------------|
| Step 1<br>The description        | Outline concerns<br>Say what you want from session      | Listen and reflect<br>Do not comment/<br>ask questions yet           | 6 mins      |
| Step 2<br>The reflection         | Listen and reflect                                      | Ask questions, clarify, encourage, reflect                           | 6 mins      |
| Step 3<br>The key concern        | Summarise main priorities                               | Listen and reflect   | 1-2 mins    |
| Step 4<br>The brainstorm         | Listen and reflect                                      | Generate creative, supportive, positive solutions. Share experiences | 6 mins      |
| Step 5<br>The preferred solution | Select preferred solutions and ask for clarity/ support | Listen, reflect and clarify  | 2-4 mins    |
| Step 6<br>The first steps        | Tell us what first step you will take, (within 3 days)  | Listen, reflect and encourage  | 2-4 mins    |

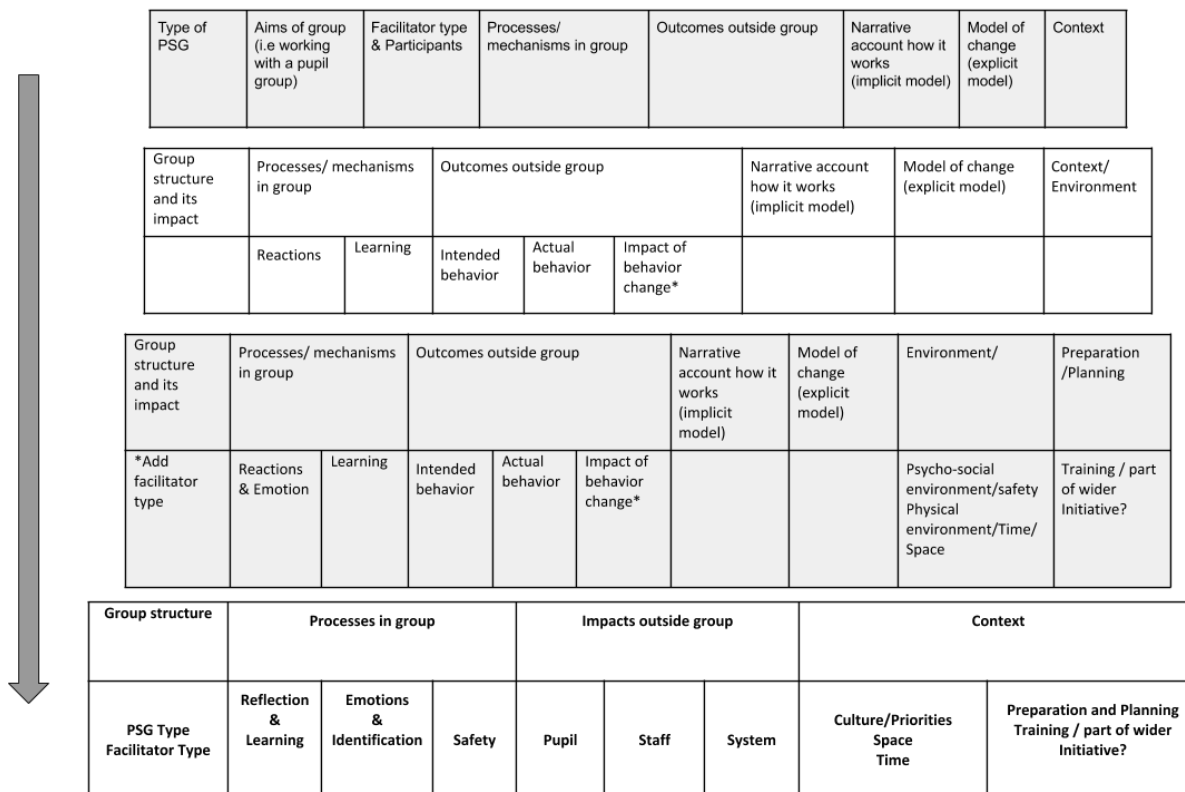
Stringer et al., (1992, p. 91)

We have emphasised the single case approach described by Hanco (op cit). After a welcome and a reminder about ground rules, groups begin by the members stating what they aim to give to the session (eg to practise different kinds of questions, to attend carefully so as to be able to give helpful summaries, to give feedback about the progress of a concern previously shared), and to get from the session (eg help with a concern, feedback from the group about a particular aspect of their contribution).

There is a brief outline of the concern and then the group asks questions to elaborate the concern. The facilitator guides this as necessary, most frequently ensuring that group members

|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>do not rush immediately into wanting to provide solutions and advice.</p> <p>The process aims to utilise the inter-personal skills of consultation and draws on the other elements of theory and practice that have influenced us. It uses frequent references to the consultee to check that the group is understanding the concern, is giving the consultee appropriate help, and to clarify those aspects of the concern that the consultee can take responsibility for doing something about.</p> <p>As the 'content' part of the session nears its end, the consultee is asked to summarise for the group where they have got to, and what they consider they are able to go and do next.</p> <p>At least the last 15 minutes of the session are kept for a process review - led by the co-facilitator, who has usually remained a silent, but active observer for the duration of the session.</p> |
| <p><b>Turner &amp; Gulliford (2020, p. 33)</b></p> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Agreement of GROUND RULES for the session</li> <li>2) PRESENTATION OF PROBLEM</li> <li>3) EXPLORATION OF RELATIONSHIPS</li> <li>4) Consideration of ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS</li> <li>5) Listen to the CHILD'S VOICE</li> <li>6) SYNTHESIS</li> <li>7) Generation of HYPOTHESES</li> <li>8) Generation of STRATEGIES</li> <li>9) Agreement of FIRST STEPS</li> <li>0) 'Round of Words'</li> </ol>   |

## Appendix D: Phases of framework development



## Appendix E: Participant information sheet and consent form for main study

The University  
of Manchester

MANCHESTER  
1824

### Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: an exploratory process evaluation

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

#### ***Who will conduct the research?***

Fungisai Muchenje, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, University of Manchester, EP, at Educational Psychology Service

#### ***Title of the Research***

Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: an exploratory process  
evaluation

***What is the aim of the research?***

The aim of the research is to document and understand the process of putting peer support groups or problem solving groups (PSGs) into practice has been for your school. We are keen to hear your views. Taking part in the research may be helpful for your school to reflect where you are with PSGs and what your next steps might be.

***Why have I been chosen?***

Your school is one of many in the Local Authority taking part in PSGs. We are interested in schools who are putting PSGs into practice. Specifically, we are keen to hear from facilitators of the PSGs

***What would I be asked to do if I took part?***

You would be asked to take part in three, termly focus groups with PSG facilitators from other schools. This focus groups would occur at a time where you typically meet to discuss PSGs / supervision for facilitators. You would also be asked to administer a questionnaire to PSG members once a term.

***What happens to the data collected?***

After each focus group, you with the researcher and the group would summarise key themes of your PSGs experience so far. This would be useful for your planning around PSGs in the next term. The data in its raw or aggregated form may form part of the trainee

psychologist's research project and maybe published. All the data including your personal and school details would be anonymised (such that you are not identifiable) and stored on the University of Manchester's encrypted drive.

***Will I receive any feedback?***

Participant feedback can be arranged by phone, email or text.

***What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?***

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation. Should you choose to withdraw from the study, we would remove your data. However, once data has been anonymised this may not be possible.

***What is the duration of the research?***

The research will take approximately 2 hours for each focus group attended.

***Where will the research be conducted?***

The interview will be conducted at a place which is convenient and preferable for you: at a local school, or EPS offices.

***Will the outcomes of the research be published?***

The findings of this research will contribute to the Trainee's research product to fulfill the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme at University of Manchester. The data may be used to inform future research or maybe published in a psychology journal.



### ***Who has reviewed the research project?***

The project has been reviewed by XXXXX, Tutor on Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology, University of Manchester.

### ***What if I want to make a complaint?***

#### ***Minor complaints***

If you have a minor complaint you may contact the researchers in the first instance.

XXXXXX (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester.

Email: XXXXXX@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

#### ***Formal Complaints***

If you would like to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you should contact the Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing:

XXXXXXXX@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning XXXXXXXXX.

### ***What Do I Do Now?***

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact:

XXXXXXXXX, Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester.

Email: XXXXXXXXX@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: dissemination and impact

This project has been approved by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee [UREC XXXXXXXX].

CONSENT FORM

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below

Please initial box

|  |  |
|--|--|
| I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. |  |
| I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis            |  |
| I understand that the focus group will be audio-recorded.  |  |
| I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.  |  |
| I agree that any data collected may be used as part of the researcher’s doctoral thesis and may be published in the future.  |  |

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

## **Appendix F: Initial focus group schedule**

1 The focus group aims to explore, understand the processes of implementation of PSGs in your schools.

### Preamble

1. Check that the participants have received the information sheet and consent form and understands the project and his/her role in it.

Ask: Have you any questions about the project?

### Ethics:

Remind Participants:

- The discussion will take 60 –90 minutes.
- You do not have to answer any questions that you are not comfortable with
- You can stop at any time, no explanation needed
- If any question doesn't make sense, ask for an explanation

Ask: Is it alright to record the focus group? The transcript will only be seen by those working on the project. I will send you a copy too if you wish.

Ask: Have you any questions before we start?

Ask: Is it OK for me to start recording now?

### Questions

(Warm up)

Participants may discuss in pairs then feedback to the group, also introducing themselves and their role....

1. Why has the school decided to implement PSGs?
2. What was done in school to develop social and emotional skills before you started doing EFS?

Do you still do this?

(Main)

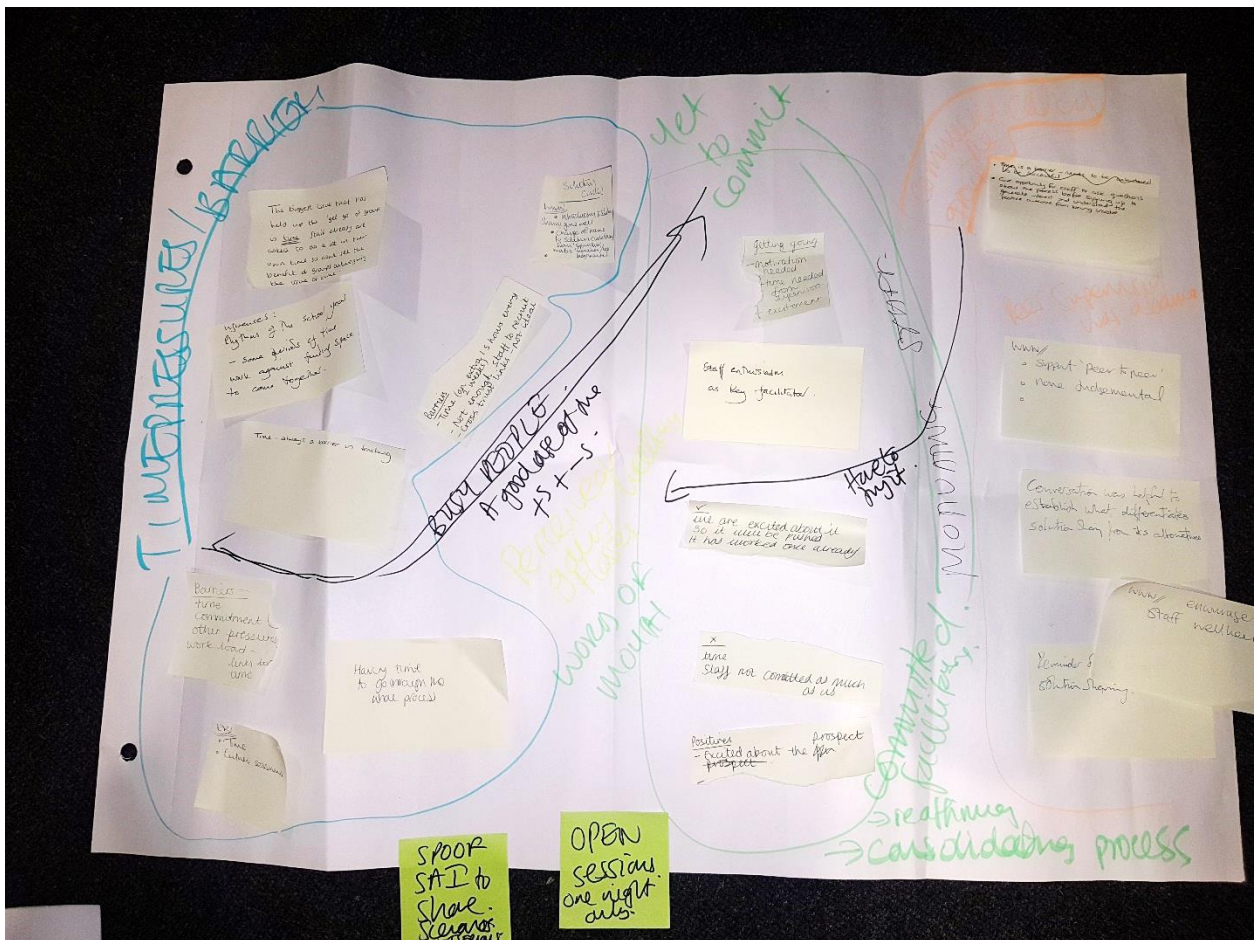
3. What kind of things would you tell someone who has not yet started PSGs but would like to?
4. What do you feel have been facilitators to implementing the PSGs?
5. What do you feel have been barriers to implementing the PSGs?

What have you learnt?

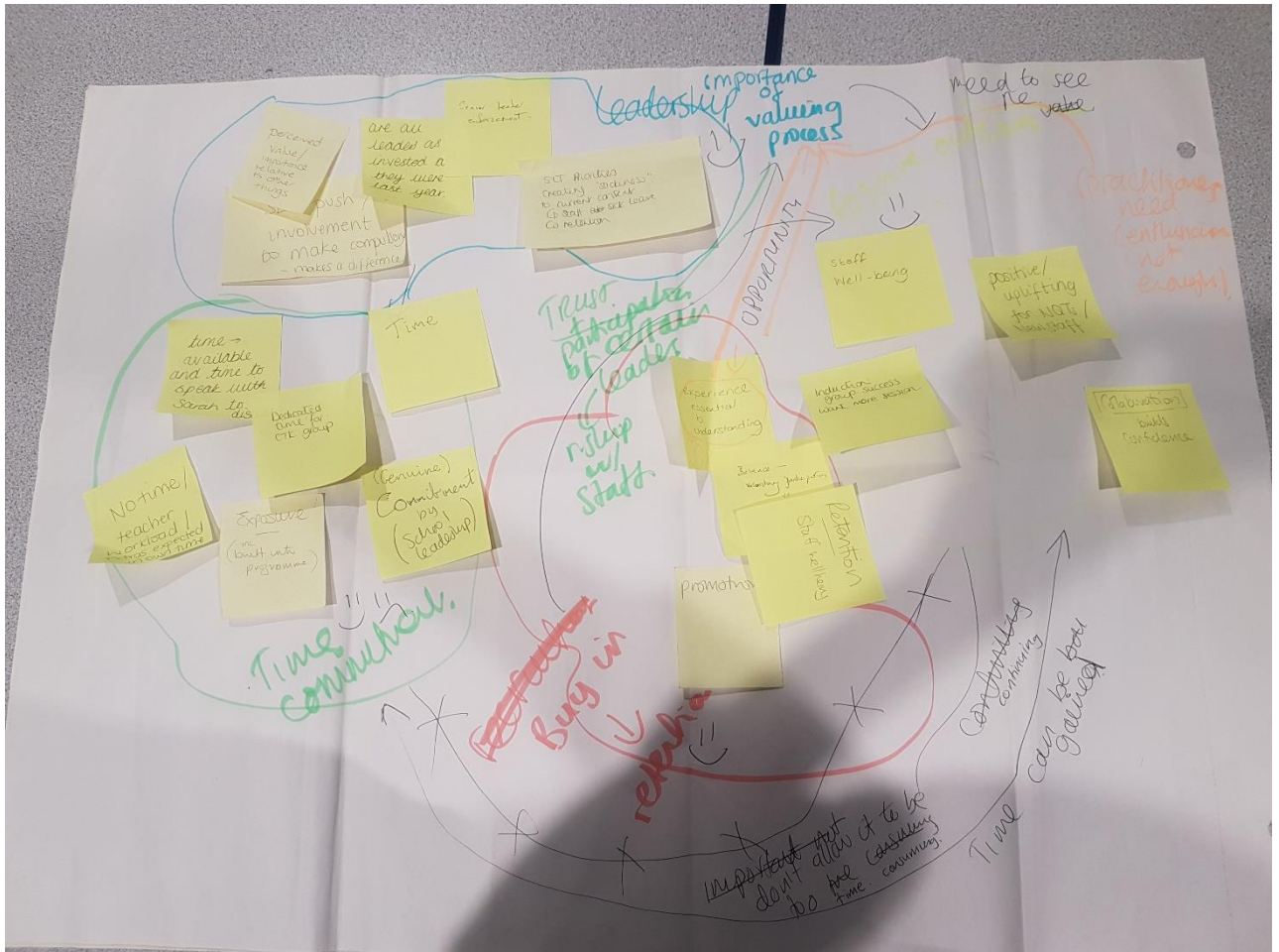
6. What impact has implementing in PSGs had on you, your pupils and school?
7. What might next term look like? What will you be doing?

# Appendix G: Pictures showing co-analysis of data

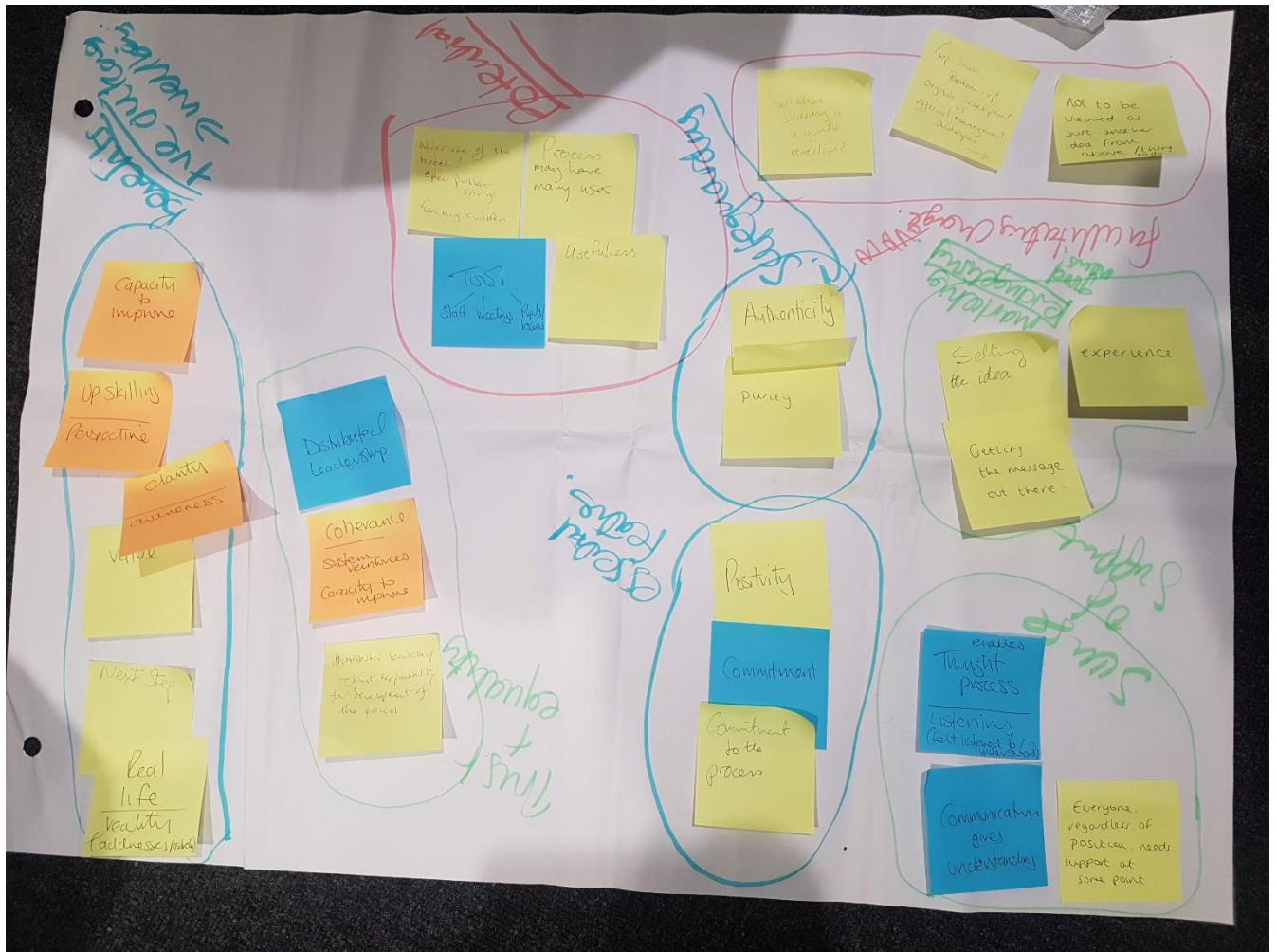
## Focus Group 1



Focus Group 2

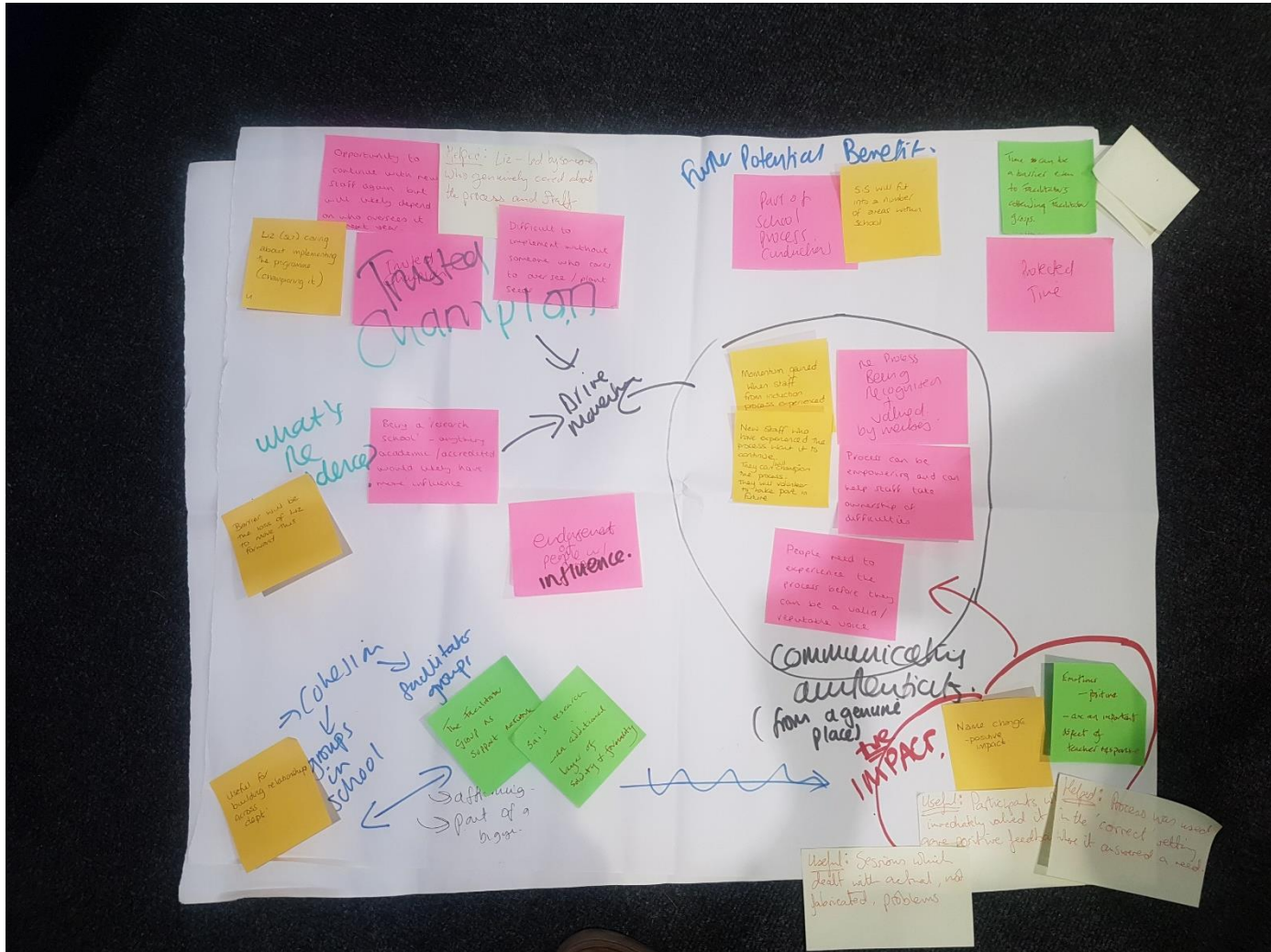


Focus Group 3





Focus group 4



**Appendix H: Co-analysis themes in table form**

Please note: Sticky notes are analogous to quotes in a typical thematic analysis

**Focus Group 1**

| Theme  | Sub-theme/ Annotations                                 | Illustrative ' <u>post-it</u> ' from co-analysis  |
|--|--|---|
| <p><b>Time issues and barriers</b></p><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><br><p><b>Time issues and barriers (continued)</b></p> | <p>Busy people</p> <p>A good use of time +s and -s</p> | <p>The biggest issue that has held up the 'get go' of groups is <u>time</u>. Staff already are asked to do a lot in their own time so don't see the benefit of groups outweighing the issue of time</p> |
|  |  | <p>Influences: rhythms of the school year - some periods of time work against finding time to come together</p>   |
|  |  | <p>Time - always a barrier in teaching</p>  |
|  |  | <p>Barriers - time commitment, other pressures work load - links to time</p>  |
|  |  | <p>Having time to go through the process</p>  |
|  |  | <p>Even better if - time, further sessions</p>  |
|  |  | <p>Barriers - time, an extra 1.5 hours every two weeks</p>  |



|                                   |   |  |
|-----------------------------------|---|--|
| <b>Committed facilitators</b>     | Reaffirming, consolidating process          | We are excited about it so it will be pushed<br>It has worked once already |
|                                   |   | Time - staff not committed as much as us (facilitators)                    |
|                                   |   | Positive - excited about the prospect                                      |
| <b>Perceived gains and losses</b> | Have to try it                              | Barriers - time commitment, other pressures work load - links to time      |
|                                   | Busy people<br>A good use of time +s and -s | Having time to go through the process                                      |
|                                   | Word of mouth                               | Even better if (EBI) - time , further sessions                             |

Focus Group 2

| Theme                  | Sub-theme/ Annotations   | Illustrative 'post-it' from co-analysis   |
|------------------------|--|---|
| Leadership             | Experience essential to understanding  | Senior Leadership Team (SLT) push/ involvement to make compulsory - makes a difference  |
|                        | Experience essential to understanding ←<br>Opportunity → Leadership importance of valuing process →<br>Practitioners need, experience not enough | Are all leaders as invested as they were last year (?)  |
|                        |  | Perceived value/ importance relative to other things  |
|                        | Trust and participation of certain leaders →<br>relationship with staff  | Senior leader endorsement   |
| Leadership (continued) |  | SLT priorities<br>Creating 'stickiness' to current context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff sick leave</li> <li>● retentions</li> </ul> |
| Positive Outcomes      |  | Staff wellbeing   |
|                        |  | Positive/ uplifting for NQTs/ new staff   |
|                        |  | Collaboration - builds confidence   |
| Buy in / retention     | Trust and participation of certain leaders →<br>relationship with staff  | Promotion   |
|                        |  | <u>Retention</u><br>Staff wellbeing   |
|                        |  | Balance - voluntary participation vs XXXXXX   |
|                        |  | Induction group success - want more session(s)  |

|                        |   |  |   |
|------------------------|---|--|---|
| <b>Time Commitment</b> | Time can be gained                      | No time/ teacher workload/ extras expected in own time |   |
|                        | Don't allow it to be too time consuming | Exposure - (including built into programme)            |   |
|                        |   |  | Time → available and time to speak with NAMED SENIOR STAFF to discuss |
|                        |   |  | Dedicated time for Primary School group                               |
|                        |   |  | Time  |
|                        |   |  | (Genuine) Commitment by (school leadership)                           |
|                        |   |  |   |

Focus Group 3

| Theme                                | Sub-theme/ Annotations | Illustrative ' <u>post-it</u> ' from co-analysis                           |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Essential features                   |                        | Positivity   |
|                                      |                        | Commitment to the process  |
|                                      |                        | Commitment   |
| Safeguarding authenticity and purity |                        | Authenticity   |
|                                      |                        | Purity   |
| Facilitating Change                  |                        | Solution sharing is a gentle rebellion?                                    |
|                                      |                        | Not to be viewed as just another idea from above/ thing to do              |
|                                      |                        | Top-down bottom-up organic development vs official management strategies → |
| Sense of support                     |                        | Enables thought process / Listening (felt listened to/understood)          |
|                                      |                        | Communication gives understanding  |
|                                      |                        | Everyone regardless of position, needs support at some point               |
| Evangelising (good news)             |                        | Selling the idea   |
|                                      |                        | Experience   |
|                                      |                        | Getting the message out there  |
| Potential                            |                        | Process may have many users  |

|   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
|   |  | Tool: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Staff</li> <li>● Meetings</li> <li>● Pupils/ lessons</li> </ul> |
| <b>Trust &amp; equality</b>                           |  | Distributed leadership   |
|   |  | <u>Coherence</u><br>System reinforces<br>Capacity to improve   |
|   |  | Distributed leadership - joint responsibility for development of the process                                   |
| <b>Benefits<br/>Positive outcomes →<br/>wellbeing</b> |  | Capacity to improve  |
|   |  | <u>Upskilling</u><br>Perspective   |
|   |  | <u>Clarity</u><br>Awareness  |
|   |  | Value  |
|   |  | Next step  |
|   |  | <u>Real life</u><br>Reality (addresses positively)   |



Focus Group 4

| Theme                              | Sub-theme/ Annotations                  | Illustrative ' <u>post-it</u> ' from co-analysis  |
|------------------------------------|---|---|
| <p><b>Trusted Champion</b></p>     |   | <p>Opportunity to continue with new staff again, but likely depends on who oversees it next year</p>                      |
|                                    |   | <p>Difficult to implement without someone who cares to oversee / plant seeds</p>  |
|                                    |   | <p>Helped: NAME - Led by someone who genuinely cared about the process and staff</p>                                      |
|                                    |   | <p>Trusted champion</p>   |
| <p><b>What's the evidence?</b></p> |   | <p>Being a 'research school' - anything academic/ accredited would likely have more influence</p>                         |
|                                    |   | <p>Barrier would be loss of NAME to move this forward</p>   |
|                                    |   | <p>Endorsement of people with influence</p>   |
| <p><b>Cohesion</b></p>             | <p>Groups in school</p>                 | <p>Useful for building relationships across departments</p>   |
|                                    | <p>Facilitator groups</p>               | <p>The facilitator group as a support network<br/><br/>Sai's research - an additional layer of solidity and formality</p> |
|                                    | <p>Affirming part of a bigger whole</p> |   |

|  |  |   |
|--|--|---|
| <b>Positive Impact</b>                                   |  | Name change positive  |
|  |  | Emotions - positive are an important aspect of teacher response   |
|  |  | Helpful - process was used in the 'correct' setting where it answered a need  |
|  |  | Useful - participants who immediately valued it and gave positive feedback  |
|  |  | Useful - sessions which dealt with actual, not fabricated problems  |
| <b>Communicating authenticity (from a genuine place)</b> |  | The process being recognised and valued by members  |
|  |  | People need to experience the process before they can be a valid/ reputable voice   |
|  |  | Process can be empowering and can help staff take ownership of difficulties   |
|  |  | Momentum gained when staff from induction experienced the process   |
|  |  | New staff who have experienced the process want it to continue. They can/ will champion the process. They will volunteer to take part in future |
| <b>Further potential benefit</b>                         |  | Part of school process (inductions)   |
|  |  | S.S will fit into a number of areas within school   |
| <b>Protected Time</b>                                    |  | Time can be a barrier even to facilitators attending facilitator groups   |



## **Participant information Sheet**

### Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: dissemination and impact

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Take time to decide whether you wish to take part. Thank you for reading this.

#### ***Who will conduct the research?***

Fungisai Muchenje, Trainee Educational Psychologist, Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, University of Manchester, EP, at Educational Psychology Service

#### ***Title of the Research***

Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: an exploratory process evaluation

#### ***What is the aim of the research?***

The aim of the research is to document and understand the implications for putting problem solving groups into practice within your Educational Psychology Service.

#### ***Why have I been chosen?***

Your Educational Psychology Service is introducing PSGs to schools in your Local Authority.

#### ***What would I be asked to do if I took part?***

You would be asked to complete a short questionnaire sharing your views.

***What happens to the data collected?***

The data in its raw or aggregated form may form part of the trainee psychologist's research project and maybe published. All the data including your personal and EPS details would be anonymised (such that you are not identifiable) and stored on the University of Manchester's encrypted drive.

***Will I receive any feedback?***

Participant feedback can be arranged by phone, email or text.

***What happens if I do not want to take part or if I change my mind?***

You are free to withdraw from the study at any time without providing an explanation.

Should you choose to withdraw from the study, we would remove your data. However, once data has been anonymised this may not be possible.

***What is the duration of the research?***

The questionnaire will take approximately 15mins to complete.

***Where will the research be conducted?***

The questionnaire will be completed at a team meeting.

***Will the outcomes of the research be published?***

The findings of this research will contribute to the Trainee's research product to fulfill the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology programme at University of Manchester. The data may be used to inform future research or maybe published in a psychology journal.

***Who has reviewed the research project?***

The project has been reviewed by Dr. Catherine Kelly , Tutor on Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology, University of Manchester.

***What if I want to make a complaint?***

***Minor complaints***

If you have a minor complaint you may contact the researchers in the first instance.

XXXXXX (Trainee Educational Psychologist)

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester.

Email: fungisai.muchenje@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

***Formal Complaints***

If you would like to make a formal complaint about the conduct of the research you should contact the Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: Research.Complaints@manchester.ac.uk, or by telephoning XXXXXXXXXX.

***What Do I Do Now?***

If you have any queries about the study or if you are interested in taking part then please contact:

XXXXXX, Trainee Educational Psychologist

School of Environment, Education and Development, Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, University of Manchester. Email: XXXXXX@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

**Consent form and ethical approval**

Implementing peer led problem solving groups in schools: dissemination and impact

This project has been approved by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee [UREC reference number].

**CONSENT FORM**

If you are happy to participate please complete and sign the consent form below:

|  |                    |
|--|--------------------|
| I confirm that I have read the attached information sheet on the above project and have had the opportunity to consider the information and ask questions and had these answered satisfactorily. | Please initial box |
| I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw without giving a reason and without detriment, prior to the commencement of data analysis            | Please initial box |
| I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.  | Please initial box |
| I agree that any data collected may be used as part of the researcher’s doctoral thesis and may be published in the future.  | Please initial box |

I agree to take part in the above project

Name of participant

Date

Signature

Name of person taking consent

Date

Signature

**Appendix J: Questionnaire – impact of research at project site**  
**Questionnaire: Impact of research at project site**

**EPS level**

What might be the implications of this research are for the educational psychology service?

**School Level**

What could be the implications of this research for your schools if PSGs are introduced?

**EP practitioner level**

What might be the implications (change or difference) for your practice in light of this PSG research?

## **Appendix K: Aims, scope and guidelines for journal submission of Paper 1**

### *Aims and scope*

The central intention of *Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties* (EBDs) is to contribute to readers' understanding of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties, and also their knowledge of appropriate ways of preventing and responding to EBDs, in terms of intervention and policy.

The journal aims to cater for a wide audience, in response to the diverse nature of the professionals who work with and for children with EBDs.

This audience includes:

- Teachers in mainstream, non-mainstream and special schools/facilities.
- Social workers in residential and field settings.
- Professionals concerned with EBDs in medical and psychiatric settings.
- Educational and clinical psychologists, counsellors and psychotherapists.
- Those concerned with the training and support of workers in the above groups, such as teacher and social work trainers, consultants and advisers.
- Researchers and academics concerned with the needs and interests of the above groups.
- Professionals from the above groups engaged in in-service training as part of their professional development, including those pursuing award bearing courses.

Members of the Social, Emotional & Behavioural Difficulties Association (SEBDA) receive the journal as a benefit of membership, see the SEBDA website [www.sebda.org](http://www.sebda.org) to learn of other benefits of membership.

### *Preparing Your Paper*

#### *Structure*

Your paper should be compiled in the following order: title page; abstract; keywords; main text introduction, materials and methods, results, discussion; acknowledgments; declaration of interest statement; references; appendices (as appropriate); table(s) with caption(s) (on individual pages); figures; figure captions (as a list).

#### *Word Limits*

Please include a word count for your paper.

A typical paper for this journal should be no more than 8000 words, inclusive of tables, references, figure captions, footnotes, endnotes.

#### *Style Guidelines*



Please refer to these quick style guidelines when preparing your paper, rather than any published articles or a sample copy.

Please use British (-ise) spelling style consistently throughout your manuscript.

Please use single quotation marks, except where 'a quotation is "within" a quotation'. Please note that long quotations should be indented without quotation marks.

### *Formatting and Templates*

Papers may be submitted in Word or LaTeX formats. Figures should be saved separately from the text. To assist you in preparing your paper, we provide formatting template(s).

Word templates are available for this journal. Please save the template to your hard drive, ready for use.

A LaTeX template is available for this journal. Please save the LaTeX template to your hard drive and open it, ready for use, by clicking on the icon in Windows Explorer.

If you are not able to use the template via the links (or if you have any other template queries) please contact us here.

### *References*

Please use this reference guide when preparing your paper.

An EndNote output style is also available to assist you.

### *Taylor & Francis Editing Services*

To help you improve your manuscript and prepare it for submission, Taylor & Francis provides a range of editing services. Choose from options such as English Language Editing, which will ensure that your article is free of spelling and grammar errors, Translation, and Artwork Preparation. For more information, including pricing, visit this website.

### *Checklist: What to Include*

*Author details.* All authors of a manuscript should include their full name and affiliation on the cover page of the manuscript. Where available, please also include ORCIDiDs and social media handles (Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn). One author will need to be identified as the corresponding author, with their email address normally displayed in the article PDF (depending on the journal) and the online article. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted. Read more on authorship.

Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.

*Graphical abstract* (optional). This is an image to give readers a clear idea of the content of your article. It should be a maximum width of 525 pixels. If your image is narrower than 525 pixels, please place it on a white background 525 pixels wide to ensure the dimensions are

maintained. Save the graphical abstract as a .jpg, .png, or .tiff. Please do not embed it in the manuscript file but save it as a separate file, labelled GraphicalAbstract1.

You can opt to include a *video abstract* with your article. Find out how these can help your work reach a wider audience, and what to think about when filming.

Between 4 and 5 *keywords*. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

*Funding details*. Please supply all details required by your funding and grant-awarding bodies as follows:

*For single agency grants*

This work was supported by the [Funding Agency] under Grant [number xxxx].

*For multiple agency grants*

This work was supported by the [Funding Agency #1] under Grant [number xxxx]; [Funding Agency #2] under Grant [number xxxx]; and [Funding Agency #3] under Grant [number xxxx].

*Disclosure statement*. This is to acknowledge any financial interest or benefit that has arisen from the direct applications of your research. Further guidance on what is a conflict of interest and how to disclose it.

*Geolocation information*. Submitting a geolocation information section, as a separate paragraph before your acknowledgements, means we can index your paper's study area accurately in JournalMap's geographic literature database and make your article more discoverable to others. More information.

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*Figures*. Figures should be high quality (1200 dpi for line art, 600 dpi for grayscale and 300 dpi for colour, at the correct size). Figures should be supplied in one of our preferred file formats: EPS, PS, JPEG, TIFF, or Microsoft Word (DOC or DOCX) files are acceptable for figures that have been drawn in Word. For information relating to other file types, please consult our Submission of electronic artwork document.

*Tables*. Tables should present new information rather than duplicating what is in the text. Readers should be able to interpret the table without reference to the text. Please supply editable files.

*Equations*. If you are submitting your manuscript as a Word document, please ensure that equations are editable. More information about mathematical symbols and equations.

*Units*. Please use SI units (non-italicized).

## **Appendix L: Aims, scope and guidelines for journal submission of Paper 2**

### *Aims and scope*

The defining feature of *Educational Psychology in Practice* is that it aims to publish peer refereed articles representing theory, research and practice which is of relevance to practising educational psychologists working primarily in UK contexts. In its focus on applied psychology it occupies an important complementary position to those journals which emphasise the experimental work of academic psychologists. Whilst the majority of articles submitted to the journal are written by practising psychologists in the UK, submissions are welcomed from outside the profession and from outside the UK.

The journal particularly recognises that relevant applied psychological theory and practice frequently crosses cultural and state boundaries and consequently the journal promotes an interdisciplinary and international approach, reflected in articles which report major pieces of research, debate issues, detail project evaluations, note research, and describe aspects of professional practice. Content also includes book and software reviews and brief resource updates. *Educational Psychology in Practice* is the major publication of the Association for Educational Psychologists, the professional association and trade union for over 3000 educational psychologists in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

*Educational Psychology in Practice* accepts the following types of article:

- Research or Review Article
- Brief Report
- Research Note
- Practice Article
- Article Reflecting on Practice

### *Peer Review*

Taylor & Francis is committed to peer-review integrity and upholding the highest standards of review. Once your paper has been assessed for suitability by the editor, it will then be double blind peer reviewed by independent, anonymous expert referees. Find out more about what to expect during peer review and read our guidance on publishing ethics.

### *Preparing Your Paper*

#### *Research or Review Article*

- Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
- Should be between 2000 and 6000 words.
- Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.

- Between 5 and 6 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

#### *Brief Report*

- Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
- Should be between 1500 and 2000 words.
- Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.
- Between 5 and 6 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

#### *Research Note*

- Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
- Should be between 800 and 1000 words.
- Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.
- Between 5 and 6 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

#### *Practice Article*

- Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
- Should be between 1500 and 2000 words.
- Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.
- Between 5 and 6 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

#### *Article Reflecting on Practice*

- Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
- Should be between 1500 and 2000 words.
- Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.
- Between 5 and 6 **keywords**. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

#### *Style Guidelines*

Please refer to these quick style guidelines when preparing your paper, rather than any published articles or a sample copy.

Please use British (-ise) spelling style consistently throughout your manuscript.

Please use double quotation marks, except where “a quotation is ‘within’ a quotation”.

Please note that long quotations should be indented without quotation marks.

### *Formatting and Templates*

Papers may be submitted in Word or LaTeX formats. Figures should be saved separately from the text. To assist you in preparing your paper, we provide formatting template(s).

Word templates are available for this journal. Please save the template to your hard drive, ready for use.

A LaTeX template is available for this journal. Please save the LaTeX template to your hard drive and open it, ready for use, by clicking on the icon in Windows Explorer.

If you are not able to use the template via the links (or if you have any other template queries) please contact us [here](#).

### *References*

Please use this reference guide when preparing your paper.

An EndNote output style is also available to assist you.

### *Checklist: What to Include*

**Author details.** All authors of a manuscript should include their full name and affiliation on the cover page of the manuscript. Where available, please also include ORCIDiDs and social media handles (Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn). One author will need to be identified as the corresponding author, with their email address normally displayed in the article PDF (depending on the journal) and the online article. Authors' affiliations are the affiliations where the research was conducted. If any of the named co-authors moves affiliation during the peer-review process, the new affiliation can be given as a footnote. Please note that no changes to affiliation can be made after your paper is accepted. Read more on authorship.

You can opt to include a **video abstract** with your article. Find out how these can help your work reach a wider audience, and what to think about when filming.

**Funding details.** Please supply all details required by your funding and grant-awarding bodies as follows:

#### *For single agency grants*

This work was supported by the [Funding Agency] under Grant [number xxxx].

#### *For multiple agency grants*

This work was supported by the [Funding Agency #1] under Grant [number xxxx]; [Funding Agency #2] under Grant [number xxxx]; and [Funding Agency #3] under Grant [number xxxx].

*Disclosure statement.* This is to acknowledge any financial interest or benefit that has arisen from the direct applications of your research. Further guidance on what is a conflict of interest and how to disclose it.

*Data availability statement.* If there is a data set associated with the paper, please provide information about where the data supporting the results or analyses presented in the paper can be found. Where applicable, this should include the hyperlink, DOI or other persistent identifier associated with the data set(s). Templates are also available to support authors.

*Data deposition.* If you choose to share or make the data underlying the study open, please deposit your data in a recognized data repository prior to or at the time of submission. You will be asked to provide the DOI, pre-reserved DOI, or other persistent identifier for the data set.

*Geolocation information.* Submitting a geolocation information section, as a separate paragraph before your acknowledgements, means we can index your paper's study area accurately in JournalMap's geographic literature database and make your article more discoverable to others. More information.

*Supplemental online material.* Supplemental material can be a video, dataset, fileset, sound file or anything which supports (and is pertinent to) your paper. We publish supplemental material online via Figshare. Find out more about supplemental material and how to submit it with your article.

*Figures.* Figures should be high quality (1200 dpi for line art, 600 dpi for grayscale and 300 dpi for colour, at the correct size). Figures should be supplied in one of our preferred file formats: EPS, PS, JPEG, GIF, or Microsoft Word (DOC or DOCX). For information relating to other file types, please consult our Submission of electronic artwork document.

*Tables.* Tables should present new information rather than duplicating what is in the text. Readers should be able to interpret the table without reference to the text. Please supply editable files.

*Equations.* If you are submitting your manuscript as a Word document, please ensure that equations are editable. More information about mathematical symbols and equations.

*Units.* Please use SI units (non-italicized).

#### *Using Third-Party Material in your Paper*

You must obtain the necessary permission to reuse third-party material in your article. The use of short extracts of text and some other types of material is usually permitted, on a limited basis, for the purposes of criticism and review without securing formal permission. If you wish to include any material in your paper for which you do not hold copyright, and which is not covered by this informal agreement, you will need to obtain written permission from the copyright owner prior to submission. More information on requesting permission to reproduce work(s) under copyright.

## Appendix M: Conference Presentation Slides

### Slide 1



### Slide 2

Co-analysing data with participants: a creative development and application of thematic analysis.

### Slide 3

## What is Thematic Analysis?

### Braun & Clarke (2006, 2019)

- Thematic analysis (TA) is a tool within many methods (Boyatzis, 1998)
- Braun & Clarke posited it's a method in its' own right (2006)
  - Described two camps in qualitative methods
    - TA is tied to epistemology and theory e.g Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
    - TA is a method **independent of theory and epistemology** - can be applied across these boundaries
      - **2019 B&C reflected they hold this view**
        - Compatible with both positivist (there are existing truths) and constructionist (truths evolve and are co-constructed) views
- In 2006 & 2019 restate the importance of **reflexivity** in TA
- **Acknowledge decisions, and acknowledge these as decisions**
- **Stressed importance of clear positioning of researcher within analysis**

## Slide 4

## Who are we ? And the work towards a participatory adaptation to TA...

BSc Psychology  
MSc Development,  
Disorders, Clinical  
Practice

- Quantitative methods
- Neuroscience focus
- Positivist
- Deductive approach to analysis -
- More likely to look at Semantics - word level to



BA  
MA, DEdPsych

- Qualitative methods
- Participatory approaches
- Constructionism
- Champions inductive approaches to analysis
- Fan on IPA
- More likely to delve into latent meanings



## Slide 5

## Commissioned Study



### Implementation of an intervention in schools

- Objective & shared realities in schools
- Context is everything in implementation
- Analysis had to be inductive
- Remained influence by idea of the co-constructed evolving truth shared by participants - based on their experiences
- Participation



**Slide 6**

Who won?

|   |   |   |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Positivist<br/>Deductive</p>  | <p>Contextualist Analysis<br/>Realist<br/>Inductive<br/>Participatory Analysis<br/>Semantic---- Latent Themes</p> | <p>Constructionist Analysis<br/>Inductive</p>  |
|---|---|---|

**Slide 7**

**I win.**

| Braun & Clarke's Methodology             | Participatory adaptation   |
|--|--|
| 1) Familiarising yourself with the data. | "Take some time to reflect on our discussions today"   |
| 2) Generating initial codes.             | "In our discussions what key phrases words or ideas do you feel recurred or where significant?"                                |
| 3) Searching for themes.                 | "How might we sum up these recurring key ideas?" "How could we group them into themes?"  |
| 4) Reviewing themes.                     | "Is there anything we might change about how we've grouped these ideas?" and/or "Let's rank the themes in order of importance" |
| 5) Refining themes                       | "Is there anything else to be added that has not come up?" "What would we call these themes?"                                  |
| 6) Writing Report                        | Researcher to write report and share with participants.  |

**Slide 8**

**Is your supervisor here right now??**


Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants?

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst maintaining objectivity?



**Slide 9**

Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants????

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst using thematic analysis????

**Slide 10**

Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants????

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst using thematic analysis????

**Slide 11**

**Argument 1: egalitarianism in research**

- Expert vs experiential knowledge
- Power politics hierarchies
- Objectivity
- Reflexivity



(Byrne, Canavan, & Millar, 2009; McIntyre & Lykes, 1998; Mauthner & Doucet, 2003 )

**Slide 12**

## Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants????

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst using thematic analysis????

### Slide 13

## Argument 2 : Close analysis

- Generating data and proximity
- Temporal proximity
- Feedback



(Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2007 ;Birt et al., 2016).



### Slide 14

## Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants????

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst using thematic analysis????

**Slide 15**

**Bergold and Thomas 2012 - Participatory Research Methods: A Methodological Approach in Motion**

- Formality (power imbalance) & dissent
- Political footballs
- Intervention fatigue
- Amplifying voice

**Slide 16**

Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you just do that?!

How did you arrive at that / What's the reasoning or logic?

Is that really legitimate?

Is that even allowed????

How is that possible??

**Slide 17**

**Nind et al 2011 - Participatory Analysis; a step too far?**

- Artificial separation of data collection and analysis - not needed
- Control, boundaries
- In study context FG discussions informed next stage of implementation

**Slide 18**

Is your supervisor here right now??

Can you co-analyse data with participants?!

How did you arrive at co-analysis/ What's the reasoning or logic?

Is it really legitimate to co-analyse data thematically with participants?

Is that even allowed - thematic co-analysis of data with participants????

How is that possible - co-analysing data with participants whilst using thematic analysis????

**Slide 19**

**BACK UP:** Jackson 2008 - A Participatory Group Process to Analyze Qualitative Data

- Provides three accounts of co-analysing data with participants
  - "A five-part analysis process is described including preparation of the data, grouping and coding, consolidation, making sense of the data, and producing a report. This group analysis process took place over 2 full days with facilitation by an academic researcher. Details about the techniques used for each step are described"

**Slide 20**


**A worked example**

Supervisor and supervisee relationship....

Think : 30 secs

Pair : 1 minute


Share : 5 minutes.



**Slide 21**

### Thematic analysis adaptation

| Braun & Clarke's Methodology             | Participatory adaptation  |
|--|---|
| 1) Familiarising yourself with the data. | "Take some time to reflect on our discussions today"  |
| 2) Generating initial codes.             | "In our discussions what key phrases words or ideas do you feel recurred or where significant?"                                       |
| 3) Searching for themes.                 | "How might we sum up these recurring key ideas?" "How could we group them into themes?"   |
| 4) Reviewing themes.                     | "Is there anything we might change about how we've grouped these ideas?" <i>and/or</i> "Let's rank the themes in order of importance" |
| 5) Refining themes                       | "Is there anything else to be added that has not come up?" "What would we call these themes?"   |
| 6) Writing Report                        | Researcher to write report and share with participants.   |



**Slide 22**

### To Sum...

Can you co-analyse data with participants?! **YES**  
 How did you arrive at that / What's the reasoning or logic?

This participatory approach to thematic analysis:

- o Sees TA as a flexible tool that can be applied across a number of theoretical boundaries
  - In this instance it sits in a realist view of truth, knowledge and understanding
- o Goes beyond double hermeneutic in IPA (interpretation<sup>2</sup>) and seeks to amplify participant voice
  - We're just doing things differently
- o Offers a close analysis of data - proximity & temporal


How is that possible?? **By adapting existing guides e.g Braun & Clarke**

Is that really legitimate? **Others have been doing so..**

Is that even allowed???? **You esteemed colleagues and peer reviewers will have the final say..**

**Slide 23**

Clever questions...?



fungisai.muchenje@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

@Muchenje F