

**WHAT DRIVES US TO GIVE OF OUR BEST? - AN APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
INTO HOW EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS SUPPORT EARLY YEARS
CHILDREN AND THEIR FAMILIES.**

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of
Doctorate in Educational Psychology
In the Faculty of Humanities

2010

**EILEEN OAKES
SCHOOL OF EDUCATION**

Contents	Page
Abstract	9
Declaration	10
Copyright statement	11
List of abbreviations	12
Chapter One – Introduction	15
1.1 Summary	20
Chapter Two – The Educational Psychologist’s Role in Supporting the Changes in Children’s Services	21
2.1 Introduction	21
2.2 The work of EPs in the early years within the context of recent government legislation	22
2.2.1 Every Child Matters: Change for Children, 2003 and beyond	22
2.2.2 Drivers for change in the early years	24
2.2.3 The contribution of EPs to the ECM agenda	26
2.2.4 The role of EPs in the early years	27
2.3 Evidence for the effectiveness of multi-agency working and the role that EPs have in facilitating this process	29
2.3.1 Key findings from research on multi-agency working	29
2.3.2 Psychological perspectives in multi-agency working	32
2.4 Summary	33

Contents	Page
Chapter Three – Appreciative Inquiry	35
3.1 Introduction	35
3.2 Evaluation paradigms and their implications for EPs	35
3.2.1 The empirical/normative paradigm	36
3.2.2 The constructivist/interpretive paradigm	39
3.2.3 Realistic evaluation	41
3.3 LA hubs of effective practice in SEN/LDD	43
3.4 Appreciative Inquiry	44
3.4.1 Core principles and assumptions of AI	45
3.4.2 Appreciative Inquiry Models, Processes, and Methods	47
3.4.3 Applications of Appreciative Inquiry in Local Authority settings	49
3.4.4 Advantages of using appreciative inquiry	50
3.4.5 Disadvantages/limitations of appreciative inquiry	51
3.4.6 Evaluation of appreciative inquiry	54
3.5 Summary	57
Chapter Four – Methodology	59
4.1 Introduction	59
4.2 Summary of procedures used and timeline	60
4.3 Choice of affirmative topic	62
4.4 Selection of participants	63

Contents	Page
4.5 Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - “What is the best of what is?”	65
4.5.1 Appreciative interviews with EPs	66
4.5.2. Appreciative interviews with parents	67
4.6 Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - “What might be?”	68
4.7 Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - “What should be the ideal?”	70
4.8 Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - “How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise?”	72
4.8.1 Tracking the implementation of changes	72
4.8.2 Rediscovery	73
4.9 Data analysis	74
4.10 Ethical considerations	78
4.11 Critique of methodology	79
4.11.1 Researcher positions	79
4.11.2 Power and control	83
4.11.3 Inclusivity	84
4.11.4 The use of interviews as a method of data collection	87
4.11.5 Focus on the positive	89
4.11.6 Using EPs as co-researchers	90
4.11.7 Project chronology	92
4.12 Summary	93

Contents	Page
Chapter Five - Results	95
5.1 Introduction	95
5.2 Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - “What is the best of what is?”	96
5.2.1 Appreciative interviews with early years EPs	96
5.2.2 EP1’s story	97
5.2.3 EP2’s stories	99
5.2.4 EP3’s story	100
5.2.5 Synthesis of themes from EP interviews	102
5.2.6 Appreciative interviews with parents	109
5.2.7 Parent 1’s story	110
5.2.8 Parent 2’s story	111
5.2.9 Parent 4’s story	112
5.2.10 Parent 5’s story	114
5.2.11 Parent 6’s story	115
5.2.12 Parent 7’s story	116
5.2.13 Parent 8’s story	117
5.2.14 Synthesis of themes from parent interviews	118
5.3 Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - “What might be?”	122
5.3.1 Workshop A:	122
5.3.2 General observations	123
5.3.3 Positive stories	123
5.3.4 Provocative proposals	124
5.3.5 Summary of responses on reflection/evaluation sheets	125

Contents	Page
5.4 Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - “What should be the ideal?”	126
5.4.1 Workshop B	126
5.4.2 Prioritisation of provocative proposals	127
5.4.3 Action planning	128
5.4.4 Summary of responses on reflection/evaluation sheets	130
5.5 Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - “How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise”	132
5.5.1 Tracking the implementation of changes	132
5.5.2 Review of progress made during the Summer Term 2009	133
5.5.3. Introduction of meetings for Early Years EPs	135
5.5.4. Summary of Autumn Term Activities	136
5.5.5. Spring Term 2010	137
5.5.6 Rediscovery	137
5.5.7 Collaborative working is prioritised and valued	139
5.5.8 We develop sincere and respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively	141
5.5.9 Communication is at the heart of all care	141
5.5.10 Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start	142
5.5.11 Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family	143
5.5.12 Evidence of how AI has influenced the work of other professionals	144
5.5.13 Changing perceptions of the role of the EP	145
5.5.14 Positive stories	146
5.5.15 Facilitators/barriers	146
5.5.16 Dreams	147
5.5.17 Co-creating the future	148
5.6. Summary	148

Contents	Page
Chapter Six – Discussion	150
6.1 Introduction	150
6.2 Delivering a solution-oriented EP service	151
6.3 What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?	153
6.4 How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?	157
6.4.1 The views expressed by parents/carers	157
6.4.2 Other stakeholders	159
6.5 How can these findings inform current and future EP practice?	162
6.5.1 Best practice in working with parents	162
6.5.2 Transition	164
6.5.3 Earlier and longer involvement	164
6.5.4 Maintaining consistency of service delivery	165
6.5.5 Consultation with stakeholders	167
6.5.6 The role of the senior specialist EP	167
6.6 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working?	170
6.6.1 What worked well?	170
6.6.2 What worked less well?	171
6.6.3 Recommendations for using AI as a research tool	173
6.6.4 Further applications of AI in the Sefton context	176

Contents	Page
6.6 What have I learnt?	177
6.7 What would I do differently?	178
6.8 Concluding remarks...	179
References	180
Appendices	190
Appendix 1: Initial letter to parents/carers	190
Appendix 2: Copy of letter sent to Parent 2 for member checking of transcript	191
Appendix 3: Invitation to SEPPS early years stakeholders	192
Appendix 4: Example of minutes of early years EP meeting	194
Appendix 5: Coded transcript of EP2's interview	197
Appendix 6: Initial analysis of EP2's interview	205
Appendix 7: Combined provocative proposals from EP interviews	207
Appendix 8: Synthesis of themes from EP interviews	215
Appendix 9: Level of involvement of SEPPS team members	218
Appendix 10: Parent 1's story	220
Appendix 11: Summary of positive stories from Workshop A	225
Appendix 12: Links between positive stories and Workshop A provocative proposals	228
Appendix 13: EPs' Prioritisation of provocative proposals	231
Appendix 14: Actions from Workshop B	232
Appendix 15: Handout for Professional Development Session, 16 September 2009	237

52,836 words

**What drives us to give of our best? - An appreciative inquiry into how educational psychologists support early years children and their families.
Eileen Oakes, 2010**

Abstract

The aim of this study was to ensure that the Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service (SEPPS) maintained a high quality service to very young children, their families and settings while responding to the national changes in Children's Services prompted by Every Child Matters (ECM) (DfES, 2003) and changes in team structure and personnel at a local level. The methodology used was based on the appreciative inquiry (AI) 4-D cycle described by Coghlan, Preskill and Catsambas, (2003) and consisted of four phases which were implemented over a period of eighteen months: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.

During the Discovery phase of the project, three educational psychologists (EPs) provided rich narratives illustrating what drives them to work with very young children, families and settings and the contribution that they think EPs make to this area of work. Individual EP's views of their own skills were corroborated by interviews with parents and analysis of all seven parental stories confirmed that the service that they received met the EPs' expectations of best practice.

In Phase Two, (Discovery/Dream) a workshop was held with representatives of the EP team's other early years stakeholders to introduce them to AI and to elicit their perceptions of best practice in partnership working. The findings from the inquiry were then used to inform the work of the team during the period from April 2009 to February 2010 (Design/Destiny). Progress was tracked both formally and informally. At the end of the Destiny phase, the stakeholders involved in Phase Two of the project were interviewed to gather evidence on whether they had been able to apply AI in their own work and whether they had noticed any differences in the early years' work of EPs since attending the initial workshop.

The data collected by the author and other members of the EP team (who acted as co-researchers) included interview transcripts, worksheets, flipcharts, reflection/evaluation sheets and minutes of meetings. Each of these elements was analysed individually and collectively by the author according to the principles of thematic analysis, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001), Carter (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2006).

At the end of the project, some of the stakeholders interviewed reported that the AI workshop had transformed their way of working from a deficit model to a strengths based model. There was also evidence that attendance at the workshop had changed participants' perceptions of the role of the EP, facilitating improved channels of communication and the development of a shared vision. Each member of the early years EP team was mentioned in at least one positive story, indicating that high standards of service delivery were maintained during a period of considerable change. The extent to which AI contributed to this process and the challenges presented by this methodology are also discussed.

Declaration

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 other institute of learning;

Copyright statement

i. The author of this thesis (including any appendices and/or schedules to this thesis) owns certain copyright or related rights in it (the “Copyright”) and s/he has given The University of Manchester certain rights to use such Copyright, including for administrative purposes.

ii. Copies of this thesis, either in full or in extracts and whether in hard or electronic copy, may be made only in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 (as amended) and regulations issued under it or, where appropriate, in accordance with licensing agreements which the University has from time to time. This page must form part of any such copies made.

iii. The ownership of certain Copyright, patents, designs, trade marks and other intellectual property (the “Intellectual Property”) and any reproductions of copyright works in the thesis, for example graphs and tables (“Reproductions”), which may be described in this thesis, may not be owned by the author and may be owned by third parties. Such Intellectual Property and Reproductions cannot and must not be made available for use without the prior written permission of the owner(s) of the relevant Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions.

iv. Further information on the conditions under which disclosure, publication and commercialisation of this thesis, the Copyright and any Intellectual Property and/or Reproductions described in it may take place is available in the University IP Policy (see <http://www.campus.manchester.ac.uk/medialibrary/policies/intellectual-property.pdf>), in any relevant Thesis restriction declarations deposited in the University Library, The University Library’s regulations (see <http://www.manchester.ac.uk/library/aboutus/regulations>) and in The University’s policy on presentation of Theses

List of abbreviations

AHDC: Aiming High for Disabled Children

AI: Appreciative Inquiry

ASD: Autistic Spectrum Disorder

BPS: British Psychological Society

CAF: Common Assessment Framework

CAMHS: Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CC: Children's Centre

CCP: Consultant Community Paediatrician

Ch: Children

CMO: Contexts (Cs), Mechanisms (Ms) and Outcomes (Os)

CORE: Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation

DCATCH: Disabled Children's Access to Childcare

DCSF: Department for Children, Schools and Families

DEA : Disability Equality Advisor

DfEE: Department for Education and Employment

DfES: Department for Education and Science

DS: Down syndrome

DH: Department of Health

ECM: Every Child Matters

EBD: Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties

EO: Eileen Oakes

EP: Educational Psychologist

EPPI-Centre: Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating
Centre

EPNET: Educational Psychologist Network

ES: Early Support

EY: Early Years

F: Families

F/B: Facilitators/barriers

HI: Hearing Impaired

HMP: Her Majesty's Prison

HT: Head Teacher

ICON: Inclusion Consultant

LA: Local Authority

LDD: Learning Difficulties and Disabilities
LGA: Local Government Association
LIW: Learning in and for Interagency Working research project
MBC: Metropolitan Borough Council
MRI: Magnetic Resonance Imaging
NFER: National Foundation for Educational Research
NHS: National Health Service
NSF: National Service Framework
NSMP: Nepal Safer Motherhood Project
OD: Organisational Development
OL: Outcomes-led
Op. cit.: Opus citatum (from the work cited above)
PCP: Personal Construct Psychology
PCT: Primary Care Trust
PDC: Professional development centre
PDR: Professional development review
PEP: Principal Educational Psychologist
Physio: Physiotherapist
PMLD: Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties
PP: Philosophy/principles
PPO: Parent Partnership Officer
PS: Positive Story
P&V: Private and Voluntary
PW: Portage Worker
SAIS: Sefton Advisory and Inclusion Service
SALT: Speech and Language Therapist
SEN: Special Educational Needs
SENCO: Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEPPS: Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service
SLD: Severe Learning Difficulties
SLT: Speech and Language Therapy
SOL: Self-organised Learning
STEPS: Sefton Teaching and Educational Psychology Service
TEP: Trainee Educational Psychologist

UCLAN: University of Central Lancashire

UK: United Kingdom

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

VI: Visually Impaired

WRLHP: Women's Right to Life and Health Project

WT: Working together

WWC: What Works Clearinghouse

Chapter One – Introduction

The aim of this study was to ensure that the Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service (SEPPS) maintained a high quality educational psychology service to very young children, their families and settings while responding to both national and local drivers for change. At a national level, the publication of *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES, 2003) and subsequent government guidance/legislation has meant that the context in which most EPs work has been subject to a period of radical review and change. The principal aim behind this agenda for change has been to ensure that all services for children and young people work in partnership to ensure that every child has the opportunity to achieve the five outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being (DfES, 2003, p. 7). Although *Every Child Matters* makes scant reference to EPs (Baxter and Frederickson, 2005), this was redressed when the DfES commissioned Research Report 792 to identify the distinctive contribution that EPs can make to children's services, both at a uni-professional and multi-professional level (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires, and O'Connor, 2006).

As well as meeting the demands of the national change agenda, SEPPS has also been subject to substantial local changes. In September 2007, SEPPS disaggregated from a larger support service, Sefton Teaching and Educational Psychology Service (STEPS). The STEPS staffing structure included six senior practitioner posts, one of which was the post of senior practitioner for early years. Although these posts were open to both advisory teachers and educational psychologists (EPs), the early years specialism had been held by an EP since STEPS was first established. As SEPPS is a smaller service than STEPS, a different staffing structure was created, based on generic management skills rather than areas of professional specialism. Although a number of the current EPs have experience of early years working, the holder of the post of STEPS senior practitioner for early years left the team to take up a promoted post in another Authority. There was therefore a need to review how SEPPS' work to support very young children, their families and settings could best be co-ordinated and delivered within the context of a new service.

In addition to the drivers for change in services for all children, changes in social policy and improvements in health technology have led to significant developments in the services provided to early years children and their families. Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) see the development of improved access to early education and child care for all as providing EPs with new opportunities to apply their knowledge of child development and research skills in mainstream early years provision. EP services have, however, also had to respond to the consequences of improvements in health technology and other factors which have led to the production of revised policy and guidance in working with very young children with disabilities and their families. Dennis (2003) argues that while all EPs should have a role in the early years, in order to ensure full participation in this increasingly complex arena, EP services should develop a role for a senior specialist.

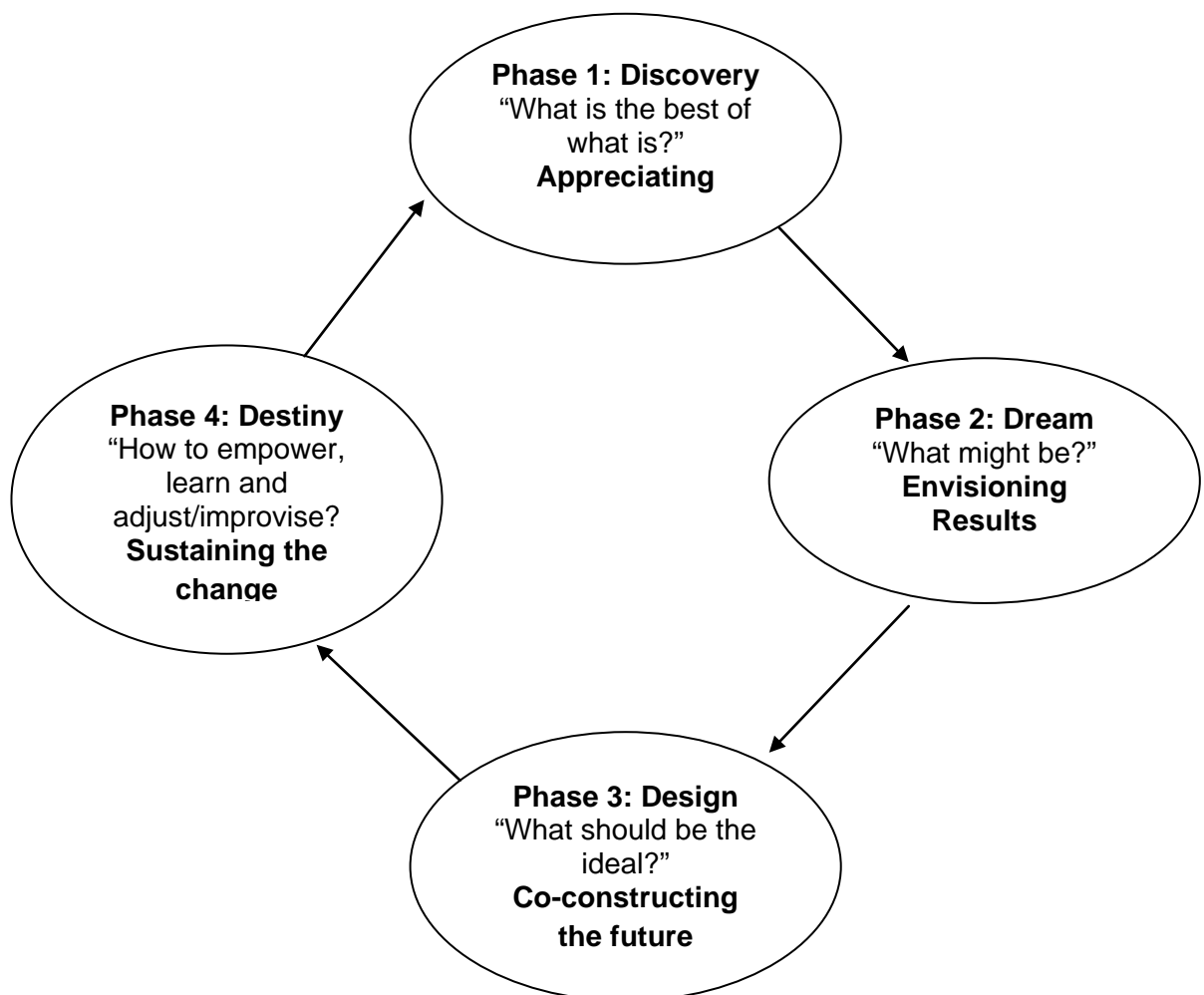
Despite the scope for EPs to contribute to the improvement of early years services, there is only a limited literature on this aspect of EPs' work. The articles available are reviewed in chapter two and this synopsis reveals a tension between the proposed role of the senior specialist EP and the job satisfaction experienced by generic EPs responsible for this area of work. There is evidence to suggest that those EPs with a specialist role have been able to take advantage of some of the opportunities envisaged by Wolfendale and Robinson (2004), representing the EP service at a strategic level on working groups and committees concerned with the development of services for all early years children. At the same time, high levels of dissatisfaction have, however, been reported by generic early years EPs, due to the volume of individual casework experienced, (Dennis, 2003; Shannon and Posada, 2007). Although one of the EPs interviewed in the present study has experience of working at a strategic level, the principal focus of this research was to surface the factors that make generic EPs proud of the skills and knowledge that they contribute to high quality casework. It has also been possible to track the development of a group of generic early years EPs over a year in the absence of a specialist EP for early years.

As noted above, the literature on the role of EPs in supporting very young children, families and settings is not extensive. In their report of a study aimed at providing exploratory research evidence of current models of service delivery and EP attitudes, Shannon and Posada (2007) note that '*in relation to the specific EP role within the early years, there has been a limited examination of current or future role*'. Although there are other papers on the role of EPs in multi-disciplinary contexts, including a special volume of *Educational and Child Psychology* on 'Psychological Perspectives in Multi-Agency Working' (Miller, Gulliford and Stringer, 2006), a systematic search of the literature has failed to identify any new articles on the role of EPs in the early years. One of the aims of the research undertaken in this thesis is therefore to extend the information available on what constitutes good practice in this area of work.

One of the recommendations of Research Report 792 was that all EP service delivery plans should be written in a format which indicates the activities that EPs intend to deliver under each of the five ECM outcomes, (Farrell et al., 2006). The annual SEPPS plan already met this requirement, but there was still a need to identify more clearly how the activities listed contributed towards the outcomes for children. This study has therefore been informed by a review of the literature on approaches and methods which might be used to evaluate the impact of educational psychology services. Although alternative approaches were identified, the methodology of choice was appreciative inquiry (AI) as the philosophy underpinning AI was found to be congruent with the principles and philosophy of the Sefton EP team, as surfaced using the process described by Rees (2008). Examination of the literature on AI also suggests that it is a suitable tool to use in sensitive situations, such as the context described above of a team which was still living through the consequences of re-structuring and a change in management (Keefe and Pesut, 2004; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold, 2001). Furthermore, discussion with EPs from other services through the Educational Psychologist Network mailing list (EPNET) and the National Strategy LA Hubs (DfES, 2007) indicated that EPs in other parts of the country were also considering the use of AI as an evaluation tool (see chapter three, below).

The process of appreciative inquiry (AI) as a means of bringing about organisational change was developed as part of David Cooperrider's doctoral research (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). Appreciative inquiry seeks to surface the factors which have contributed to an organisation's success in the past in order to apply this learning to new situations in the future. Although a full AI cycle is said to consist of four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003), few published studies go beyond the initial stages of the process. This research was planned to include all four phases, going beyond the elicitation of perceptions of best EP practice in the early years to track how this information could inform service delivery over time. The data in this study was therefore collected over a period of eighteen months, following the 4-D cycle shown in figure 1.1, below:

Figure 1.1 Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (adapted from Coghlan et al, 2003)



Whilst many different articles and books on AI have been published in journals and on websites, these mostly relate to organisational change and change management. The potential to use AI as a research tool has only recently been explored, (Carter, 2006; Reed, 2007) and the use of AI as a methodology is therefore one of the claims to originality of this thesis. Using AI as a research tool presents a number of challenges to the researcher. More conventional research projects can be planned in advance to follow a well-established sequence of activities. Although some aspects of an AI study can be planned in advance, the research design needs to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate new ideas generated by participants as the project progresses. It was therefore incumbent on me to keep an accurate log of how and why particular decisions were reached as this research developed. There was also a tension between the need to remain true to the principles of AI, by including other members of the EP team in making decisions about the collection and interpretation of data, while demonstrating the extent to which work of a doctoral standard had been carried out on an individual basis. Chapter four, below, seeks to provide evidence of the rigour with which these challenges were met and to provide a critique of the methodology used.

Central to the ECM agenda is a drive to more effective working between all the professionals employed to provide services to children and young people. Although the literature on multi-professional working is extensive, there are still many questions which remain unanswered. Much of the literature on multi-disciplinary approaches focuses on the perceived barriers to this type of working and the advantages and disadvantages of joint working are frequently given in terms of positive or negative impact on the agencies or individual professionals concerned, rather than in terms of the difference that joint working can make to children and families (Hughes, 2006). For example, when Sloper (2004) reviewed the literature on multi-agency working as part of the evidence gathering to inform the children's National Service Framework, she concluded that there was little evidence on the effectiveness of multi-agency working itself or of different models of such working producing improved outcomes for children and their families.

The above paper by Hughes (2006) is one of eight articles in a special volume of *Educational and Child Psychology* on 'Psychological Perspectives in Multi-Agency Working' (see 2.3.2, below). In their editorial to this journal, Miller, Gulliford and Stringer (2006) note that the authors of all the papers in the volume are EPs and therefore cite this as evidence of the contribution that EPs can make to understanding the processes underpinning effective multi-agency working. By using an appreciative inquiry approach with EPs, parents/carers and a cross-section of other early years stakeholders, this study has been able to demonstrate how a strengths-based approach can facilitate more effective partnership working. (See chapters five and six, below).

1.1 Summary

The research undertaken in this thesis was designed to add to the information available on the contribution that EPs can make to supporting very young children, families and settings, working in partnership with other stakeholders. From the SEPPS perspective, there was a need to explore how to ensure that this work was satisfying for generic EPs and to consider the implications of a team structure without a senior specialist for early years. The collaborative approach favoured by the AI methodology chosen enabled the full EP service to develop a response to these issues over time. Chapter six provides evidence that this study has been able to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?
2. How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?
3. How can this inform EP practice?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working?

Chapter Two – The Educational Psychologist’s Role in Supporting the Changes in Children’s Services

2.1 Introduction

As noted in chapter one, since 2003, the local government context in which most EPs work has been subject to a period of radical change aimed at securing better outcomes for all children and young people. The agenda set by *Every Child Matters* (ECM) (DfES, 2003) and subsequent government guidance/legislation has resulted in a hundred and fifty local change programmes in which it is intended that more integrated front-line delivery, processes, strategy and governance should be informed by an analysis of local priorities. Central to this process is a drive to more effective working between all the professionals employed to provide services to children and young people.

In addition to the drivers for change in services to all children, changes in social policy and improvements in health technology have led to significant developments in the services provided to early years children and their families. Since 1997, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of childcare places provided by private day nurseries, child minders and out of school clubs. The quality control criteria for these settings include the requirement to operate within the special educational needs (SEN) code of practice, which has implications for the delivery of EP services to a broader range of early years providers. Alongside the development of improved access to early education and child care for all, improvements in health technology and other factors have led to the production of revised policy and guidance in working with very young children with disabilities and their families.

This chapter is divided into two interconnected sections. The first reviews the work of EPs in the early years within the context of recent government legislation. The second considers evidence for the effectiveness of multi-agency working and the role that EPs have in facilitating this process. Both of these sections are of equal relevance for this thesis, as best EP practice in supporting early years children and their families needs to be conceptualised in the context of national guidance and effective partnership working with other early years professionals.

This study therefore seeks to add to knowledge of the contribution that EPs can make in both these areas.

2.2 The work of EPs in the early years within the context of recent government legislation

2.2.1 Every Child Matters: Change for Children, 2003 and beyond

The green paper, *Every Child Matters* (ECM), (DfES, 2003) was published in response to the findings of the Laming report into the death of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003). These findings were compared with the results of similar enquiries and it was concluded that the difficulties inherent in joint working were responsible:

‘The common threads which led in each case to a failure to intervene early enough were poor co-ordination; a failure to share information; the absence of anyone with a strong sense of accountability; and frontline workers trying to cope with staff vacancies, poor management and a lack of effective training’ (DfES, 2003, p.5).

The proposals set out in the green paper were aimed at ensuring these failures in the delivery of children’s services were addressed and that every child has the opportunity to achieve the following five outcomes: being healthy, staying safe, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and economic well-being (DfES, 2003, p. 7). The legislative foundation for the reform of children’s services was set out in the Children Act 2004. The provisions of the Act and the framework for its implementation are summarised in *Every Child Matters: Change for Children* (DfES, 2004). This included giving legal force to the five outcomes for children and young people, which were seen as being central to the programmes for change, set within a national framework, to be taken forward in each of a hundred and fifty Local Authority areas.

The Every Child Matters agenda has been further developed by the publication of the *Children’s Plan* in December 2007 (DCSF, 2007). The Plan is a ten year strategy covering all aspects of children’s lives, built on the premise that children spend only one fifth of their childhood at school and that they learn best when their families support and encourage them. By 2020, the Plan aims to improve

educational outcomes for children, improve children's health, reduce offending rates among young people and eradicate child poverty. The strategies for achieving these goals include: strengthening support for families during the early years, setting new goals for school improvement, involving parents in their children's learning, providing more places for children to play safely and helping to make sure that children have interesting and exciting things to do outside of school (DCSF, 2009a). The central theme of this thesis is therefore very topical as it provides information from seven parents/carers of very young children with complex needs on how EPs supported them, in partnership with the other professionals involved.

At a strategic level, the Local Authority change programme is driven by a Children's Trust. Children's Trusts bring together all services for children and young people in an area, underpinned by the Children Act 2004 duty to cooperate in order to focus on improving outcomes for all children and young people. Revised guidance on the duty to cooperate was published in November 2008 (DCSF, 2008).

The essential features of a Children's Trust are:

- a child-centred, outcome-led vision for all children and young people, clearly informed by their views and those of their families
- inter-agency governance, with robust arrangements for inter-agency cooperation
- integrated strategy: joint planning and commissioning, pooled budgets
- integrated processes: effective joint working sustained by a shared language and shared processes
- and integrated front-line delivery organised around the child, young person or family rather than professional boundaries or existing agencies.

(DCSF, 2009b)

This model of whole-system change, the Children's Trust in action, is illustrated by the 'onion' diagram:

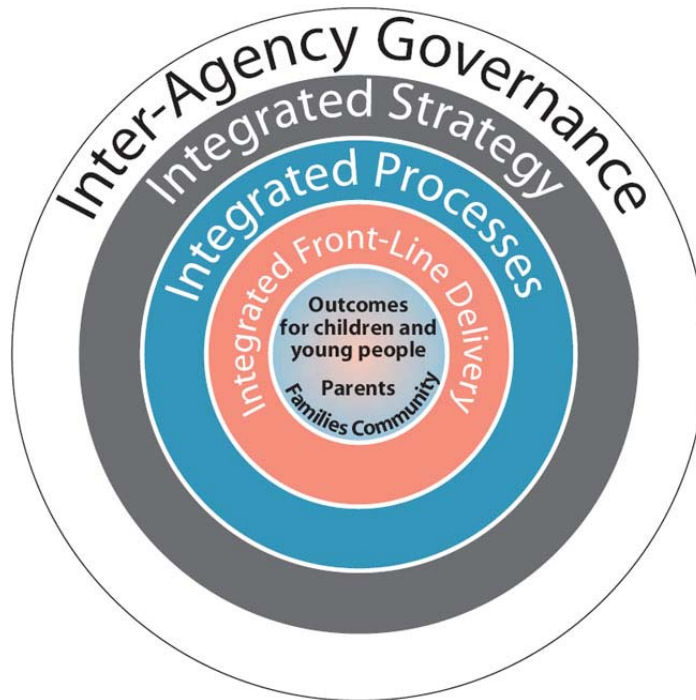


Figure 2.1, The 'Onion' diagram, (DCSF, 2009b)

In addition to eliciting the views of parents/carers on how EPs can best support them, this study seeks to contribute to a better understanding of some of the processes which can facilitate more effective partnership working in a Children's Trust.

2.2.2 Drivers for change in the early years

The social inclusion agenda of the New Labour government of the late 1990s was exemplified by the developing focus on childcare and early years. The expansion of childcare provision, local Sure Start programmes aimed at tackling child poverty and social exclusion within local communities and the designation of forward-looking provision as Early Years Centres of Excellence has ensured that children aged up to eight have moved from the periphery to centre stage (Wolfendale and Robinson, 2004).

Since 1997, some seventy thousand new childcare places have been created across private day nurseries, child minders and out of school clubs. The benefits that these settings are able to offer, in terms of hours of work and being open all year round, mean that an increasing number of parents are opting for non-maintained rather than school-based provision for their preschool children. These private and voluntary settings have to meet a number of quality control criteria

including undergoing inspection by Ofsted. This in itself introduces the requirements for settings to deliver the foundation stage curriculum and to operate within the SEN code of practice (Dennis, 2004).

Alongside the development of improved access to early education and child care for all, there have also been key developments in approaches to working with very young children with disabilities. DfES Research Report 798 (Young, Temple, Davies, Parkinson, Bolton, Milborrow, Hutcheson and Davis, 2006) provides a summary of five key drivers which led to an increased focus on children with disabilities from birth to three, their families and the services supporting them:

1. An increasing number of premature babies are surviving at an ever earlier stage of development.
2. Improvements in health technology have meant that disabilities can be detected at a significantly earlier stage than was previously possible, e.g. neonatal hearing screening has brought the average age of detection of a significant hearing loss down from twenty six months to around two months.
3. There was increasing pressure from the families of children with complex needs for services to be designed round their needs, rather than the needs of the service provider.
4. From a policy point of view, the division of responsibility between health, from birth to two years, and education, for children over two, was seen to be inappropriate in the context of early identification.
5. The changing context of integrated services for all children has provided a framework for multi-agency working for children with disabilities.

(Op. cit. p.2 – 6).

These changes were reflected in two policy guidance documents: *Together from the Start: practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to third birthday) and their families* (DfES/DH, 2003a) and *Developing Early Intervention/Support Services for Deaf Children and their Families* (DfES/DH, 2003b), which together formed the basis of the subsequent implementation of Early Support. Early Support (ES) was funded by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) over a four-year period, from 2002–06, to work with a wide range

of service users and service providers to support development in the following areas:

- initial assessment of need
- coordination/multi-agency support for families
- better information and access for families
- improved professional knowledge and skills
- service review and development
- partnership across agencies and geographical boundaries

It is intended that good practice from the ES programme will inform the core offer of Aiming High for Disabled Children (AHDC). Another strand of AHDC is Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH). Sefton is one of the Authorities in the first wave of pilot projects (Phase 1) which was launched in September 2008 (DCSF/DH, 2009).

2.2.3 The contribution of EPs to the ECM agenda

Baxter and Frederickson (2005) expressed concern at the paucity of references to the contribution of the educational psychology profession in *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003). They suggested that this may be because the profession has become so associated with the management of special educational needs that this makes it difficult for EPs to be viewed as playing a substantial role in the development of universal services for children and young people. They concluded that there was a pressing need for the profession to develop an empirical basis for measuring the contribution that EPs make to the five ECM outcomes. In February 2005, the government announced its intention to commission a 'fundamental review' of the function of EPs, to be carried out within the wider context of children's services as a whole, (DfES, 2005). The role of EP services in England had previously been reviewed in 1999 (DfEE, 2000) but it was recognised that the context in which EPs were working had since changed significantly. The overall aim of the new review was to consider the contribution that EPs can make to meeting the five ECM outcomes for children (DfES, 2003) and the extent to which the profession can make a distinctive contribution working with and alongside other related services.

A team from Manchester University was commissioned to carry out the new review and the findings were presented in DfES Research Report 792 (Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires, and O'Connor, 2006). The contribution of educational psychologists to multi-agency work, including work with early years children, families and settings, was identified as one of the particular foci for the research. Specific examples of the impact of this work in meeting the five ECM outcomes were elicited from the questionnaire, the follow-up interviews and other documentation received by the review team. It was reported that all respondents perceived the multi-agency work in which EPs were involved had a high or very high impact on the ECM outcomes for the children concerned, (op. cit., p. 39). It was, however, noted that many respondents indicated that another provider might have been able to undertake the work with the same level of impact, (op. cit., p. 47). It was proposed that the distinctive contribution that EPs can make to multi-agency work is 'to act as a bridge between school and community'. The EP role is often therefore that of a facilitator, smoothing the way for other services:

'There was evidence that users of EP services draw on the EPs' distinctive knowledge that they have gained through being in this position in the local authority. This knowledge is used to help agencies work together and to 'oil the wheels' of joint working and decision making.' (Op. cit., p. 101).

2.2.4 The role of EPs in the early years

Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) chart the development of the role and influence of EPs working in the early years. They note that EPs working with children in the early years have a well-established role as members of multi-professional teams and, although the primary focus of their work is still with special needs, there are an increasing number of opportunities for them to apply their knowledge of child development and their research skills in mainstream early years provision.

The role for EPs envisaged by Wolfendale and Robinson (2004) echoes that of 'bridging' described above (Farrell et al, 2006):

'Many practitioners, EPs included, have spent long hours pondering the 'unique contribution' they could make to this highly specialised field. Only recently has it become apparent that for the EP the unique role may be that of understanding the working of the various systems and ensuring that they work in a logical, coherent and productive way. The many and diverse

activities associated with educational psychologists working in early years attests to an impressive repertoire of skills and a legitimate claim to a distinctive contribution.' (Op.cit. p. 19)

Dennis (2003) draws on her own practice to provide examples of how EPs can contribute to the early years agenda at an individual, service and systemic level. She argues that while all EPs should have a role in the early years, in order to capitalise on the opportunities available, EP services should develop a role for a senior specialist. It was envisaged that the EP concerned would ensure that the EP service was represented at a strategic level on working groups and committees concerned with the development of services for early years children. Another aspect of the role would be to initiate and maintain an Early Years Service Development Plan. This is one of the topics that will be explored in this study as in the Sefton EP team the role of the senior practitioner for early years work has been subsumed into a more generic leadership structure.

The review of the functions and contribution of educational psychologists in England and Wales described above suggests particular areas of development, across the gamut of EP role and practice, which may have implications for early years EP practice in the future (Farrell et al, 2006). However, in their report of a study aimed at providing exploratory research evidence of current models of service delivery and EP attitudes, Shannon and Posada (2007) note that '*in relation to the specific EP role within the early years, there has been a limited examination of current or future role*'. A systematic search for more recent articles suggests that this is still the case, despite the emerging literature on the contribution that EPs can make more generally to multi-disciplinary working (see 2.3, below).

The main conclusions drawn from the Shannon and Posada (2007) study, using data collected from EPs working in twenty eight Local Authorities, primarily within the North-West of England, were that for EPs working in most of the authorities sampled, the volume and timescales associated with individual casework in the early years are perceived to be barriers to engaging more fully with the ECM agenda with this age group. These pressures are often associated with the need

to complete the statutory assessment process in order for children to access provision. As noted in the introductory chapter, Shannon and Posada's (2007) findings suggest that there may be a difference in the perceptions and experiences of EPs with a specialist early years role compared with those with a generic role, with specialist EPs reporting more opportunities to be involved in multi-agency working, research and projects. This view will be revisited in chapter six.

2.3 Evidence for the effectiveness of multi-agency working and the role that EPs have in facilitating this process

2.3.1 Key findings from research on multi-agency working

The literature on multi-agency working is extensive. The research undertaken in this thesis was informed by the findings from a number of key literature reviews and studies:

- Local Government Association (LGA) Research Report 17: *Multi-agency working: an audit of activity* (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott and Kinder, 2001).
- LGA Research Report 26: *Multi-agency working: a detailed study* (Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott and Kinder, 2002).
- DfES Research Report 412: *Effective Joint Working between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Schools* (Pettitt, 2003).
- *Multi-Agency Working: Literature Review* (Fitzgerald, 2004, cited in DCSF, 2009d).
- *Interagency Collaboration: a review of the literature* (Warmington, Daniels, Edwards, Brown, Leadbetter, Martin and Middleton, 2004).
- *Facilitators and barriers for co-ordinated multi-agency services* (Sloper, 2004).

Four themes of relevance to this research were identified from the literature reviews and studies cited above: evidence of the impact of multi-agency working on children and families, benefits to professionals, barriers to effective multi-disciplinary working and activity theory. Each of these will be examined in more detail below.

Atkinson, Wilkin, Stott and Kinder (2002) identified three broad areas in which multi-agency working had impacted on the target group of children and their families: improved services, direct outcomes for children and families and prevention. Thirteen of the thirty studies surveyed by Atkinson et al (2002) reported an improvement in children's educational attainment and their access to education. Pettitt found it more difficult to identify a link between school-based CAMHS interventions and improved academic achievement, as few of the services studied had evaluated this aspect of their work. There was, however, evidence to suggest that joint working with schools enabled CAMHS staff to provide a service to children whom they would not normally reach as well as the ability to identify children's problems earlier. The children in the case studies were reported to be happier and improvements in their communication skills, peer relationships and behaviour were also noted (Pettitt, 2003). Other studies have, however, been more equivocal in their findings. Sloper (2004) reviewed the literature on multi-agency working as part of the evidence gathering to inform the children's National Service Framework. She concluded that there was little evidence on the effectiveness of multi-agency working itself or of different models of such working producing improved outcomes for children and their families.

The advantages and disadvantages of joint working are frequently given in terms of positive or negative impact on the agencies or individual professionals concerned, rather than in terms of the difference that joint working can make to children and families. Atkinson et al (2002) found that for the agencies involved, the advantages of multi-agency work centred on offering them a broader perspective, a better understanding of the issues, and increased understanding of and improved interactions with other agencies. The individual professionals involved were also reported to find that working with professionals from other backgrounds was rewarding and stimulating. Fitzgerald found that practitioners with backgrounds in single, traditional agencies report high levels of satisfaction with multi-agency working. In particular, they feel liberated from the narrow bureaucratic and cultural constraints of their parent organisation. Where the initial bedding down phase is well-managed, they find the potential for cross-fertilisation between the different agencies stimulating and many value the opportunity to take a more holistic approach to the needs of children (Fitzgerald, 2004).

Much of the literature on multi-disciplinary working focuses on the perceived barriers to this type of working. Atkinson et al (2002) reported that the challenges identified in association with multi-agency working were numerous and reflected the complexities involved when professionals engage in collaborative ventures. It was, however, concluded that the main issues involved centred broadly around the areas of funding and resources, roles and responsibilities, competing priorities, communication, professional and agency cultures and management. Pettitt (2003) notes that most interviewees agreed that joint working was more time consuming, particularly in terms of the time needed for attending meetings and networking – activities which do not necessarily involve direct contact with children and their families. There is therefore a need for more comparative studies to investigate the ways in which outcomes for children can be improved by effective joint working rather than uni-professional working and whether the additional time and resources required can always be justified.

The activity theory approach, central to the *Learning in and for Interagency Working* (LIW) research project (Warmington et al 2004), takes a different view of these 'barriers'. It is argued that it is at the boundaries between activity systems that new learning occurs and that placing too much emphasis on a need for consensual working may restrict the opportunity for professional development. Although the methodology used in the present study is a strengths-based approach, it was still possible for participants to highlight some of the perceived barriers to effective working and to examine these from different professional perspectives. Professional debate was viewed as a feature of healthy relationships between different services, with the questioning approach adopted by new members of the service leading to alternative ways of working (see chapters five and six, below).

Hughes (2006) challenges the evidence on which the assumption that improved multi-agency working will lead to better outcomes for all children is based. He highlights some of the issues around definition and suggests that the development of children's services should focus on a shared language for describing child development and the role of risk and protective factors rather than putting

structures and processes first. He suggests that EPs have the skills to provide answers to some of the questions raised. This study seeks to demonstrate how EPs can use their knowledge of approaches such as appreciative inquiry to help multi-agency teams identify and build on those factors which lead to more effective team functioning.

2.3.2 Psychological perspectives in multi-agency working

The above paper by Hughes (2006) is one of eight articles in a special volume of *Educational and Child Psychology* on 'Psychological Perspectives in Multi-Agency Working'. The papers include comprehensive literature reviews by Watson (2006) and Hymans (2006). They draw on a wide range of psychological theories and explore a number of themes including the psychology of team functioning, the role and contribution of educational, clinical and other professional psychologists within children's services, exploration of aspects and applications of organisational psychology that may be most pertinent within effective children's trusts and the place of psychological research and theory in the training of professionals working in the children's services context. As well as the paper by Hughes (2006), cited above, the papers of particular relevance to this study are those by Leadbetter (2006) and Barclay and Kerr (2006) which are summarised below.

Leadbetter (2006) uses the findings of the *Learning in and for Interagency Working* (LIW) research project described above (Warmington et al, 2004) to illustrate the effects that working in multi-agency teams have on the professional identities of team members. She reiterates the importance of uncovering tensions and contradictions within activity systems in order to focus on new ways of working and uses quotations from workshops to exemplify the emergent themes around professional identity. The development of resilient professionals who have the tenacity and creativity to overcome bureaucratic hurdles to obtain the best service for children and young people was seen as a key factor, along with the level of involvement and control that individuals have in constructing their new roles. In the present study, professional autonomy was also identified as an important factor in EPs being able to give of their best in supporting very young children, their families and settings (see chapters five and six, below).

Barclay and Kerr (2006) demonstrate how systems theory can provide a range of models of collaborative working. Although their study provides evidence of increased joint working within children's mental health services in one Scottish authority, they argue that unless the leaders of the teams involved share a vision about the model of collaboration to which they are working, then the system will remain 'closed'. 'Double loop learning' in which services look at the governing principles that lead to successes and failures in collaborative working is seen as a key process, rather than 'single loop learning' in which only the consequences of actions are considered. The importance of the organisation using feedback from stakeholders and treating parents and professionals as equal partners is also emphasised. The present study was designed to facilitate 'double loop learning' by surfacing the factors that have contributed to successful partnership working in the past and then applying these principles and processes in new situations.

Miller, Gulliford and Stringer (2006) conclude by supporting Hughes' view that the success of multi-agency working must be judged by improved outcomes for children and young people, rather than solely by the levels of collaboration achieved between the professionals involved. The extent to which the present study adds to our knowledge of how psychology can be applied to increase the effectiveness of multi-agency working is discussed in chapter six, below.

2.4 Summary

The *Change for Children* agenda has created the opportunity for all professions providing services to children and young people to re-evaluate their roles and the contribution that they make to improving outcomes for children, young people and their families. Although *Every Child Matters* makes scant reference to EPs, Research Report 792 sought to redress this and the literature on the contribution that EPs can make as applied psychologists in multi-disciplinary contexts is growing. Early years work is one of the areas where EPs have an established multi-disciplinary role. It is therefore paradoxical that little has been written on how professional learning from this area of work can inform the wider agenda. One of the aims of this thesis is to use the perceptions of EPs, parents/carers and other stakeholders to identify and build on good practice in partnership working to support very young children, their families and settings. The study will also reflect

on the development of the Sefton Early Years EP team in the absence of a senior practitioner for early years.

In addition to reviewing the way in which Sefton EPs can continue to deliver a high quality early years service, the methodology chosen for this research has given the EP service the opportunity to pilot an innovative approach to promoting more effective multi-professional working: appreciative inquiry (AI). The next chapter provides a summary of the literature on the history, philosophy, advantages and limitations of AI. The impact that this approach has had on partnership working between Sefton EPs and other early years stakeholders during the course of the project is discussed in chapters five and six.

Chapter Three – Appreciative Inquiry

3.1 Introduction

One of the main ways in which this study evidences its originality is by the methodology used. This chapter describes how an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach was chosen following a review of the literature on evaluation paradigms and their implications for EPs. The decision was also informed by links with EP services in other parts of the country facilitated by the National Strategy SEN team (DfES, 2007).

Although alternative approaches were identified, the philosophy underpinning AI was congruent with the principles and philosophy of the Sefton EP team, as surfaced using the process described by Rees (2008). AI was recommended as a suitable tool to use in sensitive situations, such as the context of a team which was still living through the consequences of re-structuring and a change in management (Keefe and Pesut, 2004; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold, 2001). Discussion with EPs from other services through the Educational Psychologist Network mailing list (EPNET) and the National Strategy LA Hubs (DfES, 2007) also indicated that EPs in other parts of the country were considering the use of AI as an evaluation tool.

AI is well-documented as an organisational development tool, but there is a risk of the approach being seen as a 'management fad', rather than a robust research tool and there have been few published studies evaluating AI (Bushe and Kassam, 2005; Carter, 2006; Reed, 2007; Messerschmidt, 2008). This chapter provides a summary of the literature on the history, philosophy, advantages and limitations of AI and there is further discussion on the use of AI as a research methodology in 4.11(below).

3.2 Evaluation paradigms and their implications for EPs

Paradigms are theories of knowledge which can be differentiated according to ontology (assumptions about the nature of reality), epistemology (assumptions about justifications for knowledge claims) and methodology (assumptions about constructing knowledge) (Kuhn, 1996).

A review of the literature on approaches and methods which might be used to evaluate the impact of EP services highlighted three alternative theories of knowledge underpinning the literature on evaluation methodology:

- The empirical/normative paradigm
- The constructivist/interpretive paradigm
- The realist paradigm

The main differences between these three paradigms are summarised below and examples are provided of how each of the approaches described has been translated into practice within local authority or educational psychology service contexts.

3.2.1 The empirical/normative paradigm

The key premises underpinning this paradigm are described by Giddens (1975):

- The methodological procedures of natural science may be directly applied to the social sciences
- The analyses of social scientists can be formulated in terms parallel to those of natural sciences, i.e. laws or law-like generalisations of the same kind that have been established in relation to natural phenomena.

Christie and Fleischer (2009) regard psychology as being the discipline responsible for introducing the experimental method into social inquiry. They link the experimental method with the post-positivist paradigm. Christie and Fleischer (2009) describe the ontology of post-positivism as the assumption that there is a single reality that can be studied objectively. They observe that post-positivists believe that the objectivity of the inquirer can be ensured by noting and accounting for values and biases. The post-positivist methodology is described as being predominantly quantitative, although not exclusively so. Post-positivists also believe that causation is observable and that over time predictors can be established (op. cit., p. 24).

Over the past few years publicly employed professionals in the social sciences and health have been encouraged to base their practice on the best available research evidence (Department of Health, 1998a, 1998b). Three components in the development of evidence-based practice were described by Fox (2003):

1. That research should provide the evidence on which professional practice is based.
2. That professionals will base, and change, their practice on the best available research evidence.
3. That by keeping accurate outcome measures (known as audit within the National Health Service (NHS)), services can monitor the effects of their interventions.

In this context, '*evidence-based practice*' is located within the empirical paradigm. Fox (2003) reports that within the health world the following hierarchy has been agreed to evaluate the quality of research in programme/treatment effectiveness:

- A systematic review of randomised controlled trials
- At least one randomised controlled trial
- At least one controlled study without randomisation
- At least one other type of quasi-experimental study
- Non-experimental descriptive study, such as comparative study, correlational studies, case-controlled studies
- Evidence from expert committee reports or opinions and/or clinical experience of respected authorities (op. cit., p. 93)

All professionals in the health service, including clinical psychologists, are therefore expected to base their practice on the 'gold standard' of evidence from a systematic review of randomised controlled trials. Typically, studies seek to benchmark interventions using the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-Outcome Measure (CORE), e.g. Gilbert, Barkham, Richards and Cameron (2005). Although there is a similar commitment to evidence-based policy development and approaches in the delivery of education, it has proved more difficult to define what constitutes good quality educational research (DfEE, 1998). There are, however, a number of websites that seek to disseminate the best available research evidence to teachers, schools and policy-makers, e.g. the 'What Works Clearinghouse' (WWC) database (<http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/>) in the USA and the 'Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre' (EPPI-Centre) database (<http://eppi.ioe.ac.uk>) in the UK.

The empirical approach can present both practical and methodological issues to practicing EPs. In their study on solution-focused practice by UK EPs, Stobie, Boyle and Woolfson (2005) note that *'the so-called 'gold-standard' of a large-scale randomised control trial requires considerable external funding and is beyond the scope of Educational Psychology Services.'* (Op. cit, p. 20). The study did, however, provide some solutions to the methodological issues that EPs could encounter in carrying out single subject research. An example of a multiple baseline across participants single –subject experimental design is given to illustrate the use of Percentage Non-overlapping Data (PND) (Scruggs, Mastropieri and Casto, 1987). It is also suggested that Goal Attainment Scaling (GAS), (Kiresuk and Sherman, 1968) may be a suitable approach to be used in the evaluation of solution-focused interventions.

Baxter and Frederickson (2005) have also advocated the use of GAS and provide examples of its use in educational contexts. In their paper reviewing the evidence base of social story interventions, Ali and Frederickson (2006) considered further ways in which the routine use of single-case study designs could add to the evidence base of EP practice. Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyaduri and Monsen (2009) describe a Target Monitoring and Evaluation (TME) system derived from GAS which was developed to evaluate the outcomes of interventions implemented by EPs and assistant EPs in two local authorities. They conclude that the adoption of similar evaluation protocols into routine EP practice would require commitment and resources from both senior management and individual EPs. If this were to be achieved, it would also require a considerable culture shift from the EP profession, as the responses to the EPNET survey described by Stobie et al (2005) provide an indication that many EPs are not evidence-based in their day-to-day practice.

Fox (2003) argues, however, that the fundamental issue in evidence-based practice for EPs concerns the epistemology, or theory of knowledge, that underpins our professional practice — positivism or constructivism. Fox (2003) suggests that the theory of professional practice espoused by most EPs is usually constructional. The methodology of the present study is located within the constructivist paradigm and the initial literature search identified evaluation methods which fit within this paradigm, one of which is considered below.

3.2.2 The constructivist/interpretive paradigm

Social constructionism reflects a belief that there is no one reality or truth; rather, truth is grounded in the multiple and contextually determined realities of individuals' perceptions, dialogues, and shared understandings. Gergen (1999) distinguishes between social construction, where discourse is the primary driver, and social constructivism, where cognitive structures are more important. In reality both of these are part of a continuum of theory where the human constructions of the world, frequently through language and social interactions, are seen as being of primary importance. This has implications for the work of educational psychology, especially in consultation, where language and social interactions become central processes in change.

The ontology of the constructivist paradigm is that there are multiple realities, which are subjective and change according to the 'knower' (Christie and Fleischer, 2009). In the constructivist paradigm, the 'knower' and the 'known' are interrelated, unlike positivist epistemology where they are considered to be independent. Constructivists therefore seek to acknowledge and consider bias rather than to ignore or control it. Qualitative methods are thought to be better suited to investigating the subjective layers of reality. Generalisability is not considered to be as important as local relevance (op. cit., p. 25). Christie and Fleischer (2009) describe social constructivism as a sociological theory of knowledge that considers how social phenomena are not independent of the society in which they exist.

One example of a social constructionist approach to evaluation in use in another EP service is self-organised learning (SOL) (Clarke and Jenner, 2006). Clarke and Jenner (2006) describe how the SOL approach was used as a vehicle for reflecting on the paradigms underpinning the work of one educational psychology service, enabling the service to move from a positivist approach to a constructionist approach to service delivery. Self-review is an important part of the model. It was expected that this change in service paradigm would result in fewer statutory assessments and more proactive consultations occurring. It was reported that: *'Work at a systems level increased significantly around such issues as*

behaviour, approaches to learning, local authority policy and establishing the remit of an early years team.' (Op. cit., p. 195)

Clarke and Jenner (2006) note that in the SOL approach '*The learning coach must suspend his/her own constructs in order to subsume the constructs of the learner and therefore help the learner to develop purposes and strategies that work for them.*' Critics of the naturalistic/interpretative paradigm argue that this focus on the subjective processes by which individuals interpret and define a situation is too narrow and ignores the power of external social structures to shape behaviour and events (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). Fox (2003) also identified a tension between EPs' espoused theory of professional practice (which is generally constructional) and our tendency to 'flip' to a positivist view, falling back on the use of normative data to support an argument, when challenged.

There may therefore be a case for arguing for a more pragmatic approach, based on the methodology which is best matched to the research questions rather than a particular philosophical viewpoint. Schwandt (2009) supports the argument that the credibility of evidence cannot be judged in the abstract and that the debate about whether quantitative or qualitative methods produce more credible evidence is counter-productive. He puts the case for a potential theory of evidence for evaluation that considers the credibility, relevance and probative value of evidence as well as embracing a variety of methods:

'At minimum, an adequate theory of evidence includes analyses of several kinds – the character of evidence, the ethics of evidence, the contexts of the application of evidence, and the nature of rationality and argumentation (including the notion of an evidence "base" for decision making).'

(Op. cit., p. 199)

Christie and Fleischer (2009) put the case for a third paradigm, pragmatism, which sits between post-positivism and constructivism. Pragmatists are said to regard both quantitative and qualitative approaches as legitimate forms of inquiry, depending on the question to be studied. They argue that there can be multiple explanations of reality, but at any one time there is one explanation that makes the most sense. Pragmatists believe that causes can be linked to effects, but that

absolute certainty about causation is impossible. They do not believe that inquiry is value-free, but that their values are important to the inquiry process (op. cit., p. 26).

3.2.3 Realistic evaluation

Drawing on the philosophy of scientific realism and their own research Pawson and Tilley (1997) have articulated a new evaluation paradigm called '*Realistic Evaluation*'. Pawson and Tilley (1997) named their approach '*Realistic Evaluation*' to reflect their view that programmes deal with real problems and that the primary purpose of evaluation is to inform realistic developments in policy making that benefit programme participants and the public. Using examples from their own fields of crime prevention and offender education programmes, Pawson and Tilley (1997) demonstrate how realistic evaluation looks inside the 'black box' and hence generates information that is potentially more useful than the global success or failure of a programme that could be the conclusion from an empirical approach.

The key aim of a realistic evaluation is to develop and test a hypothesis of what might work for whom in what circumstances. In order to do this, the programme concerned is described in terms of contexts (Cs), mechanisms (Ms) and outcomes (Os). (Contexts are the settings where the programmes take place and mechanisms are what people do in order to produce the outcomes). Pawson and Tilley are of the opinion that in order to generate hypotheses, realistic evaluators need to have a thorough understanding of the field in which their evaluation studies are undertaken and to co-construct their hypotheses with stakeholders.

Realistic evaluators are therefore not able to take the neutral stance adopted by empiricist researchers. The role of the realistic researcher is therefore similar to that of the learning coach described in the SOL approach above, where the techniques from personal construct psychology (PCP) are used to surface the purposes behind the strategies to be implemented (Clarke and Jenner, 2006). Pawson and Tilley (1997) are, however, in agreement with Cohen et al (2000) that it is not always possible for the researcher to suspend his/her own constructs when carrying out research that has to be informed by the ethics and power structures underpinning the country's legal framework.

Having generated the necessary hypotheses about CMO configurations, the evaluator has therefore to choose the methods of collecting evidence which are best suited to the task of testing the hypotheses concerned. The aim of this process is to determine what it is about particular contexts that are most effective in triggering the mechanisms that result in the desired programme outcomes. As this relationship becomes better understood, the programme concerned can be adapted to suit local circumstances. Realist evaluations therefore generalise to theories which provide analytical frameworks to interpret similarities and differences between families of programmes.

Using this framework, Timmins and Miller (2007) re-examined two earlier studies from the perspectives of Realistic Evaluation. One (Preece and Timmins, 2004) explored students' views of an inclusion centre newly established in a mainstream school. The other (Miller, 2002) investigated some of the changes occurring when speech and language therapists began to work in mainstream schools. The exercise raised a number of issues:

- In applying the approach to the complex systems of schools and support services, Timmins and Miller (2007) reported that they encountered difficulty in identifying and defining programme relevant contexts, mechanisms and outcomes.
- It was found that Cs, Ms and Os in one aspect of a programme might exchange places in a follow-up or linked programme.
- Building a programme theory from a review of the literature relating to the programme concerned was acknowledged to be a potentially daunting task for practitioners, but it was considered that a programme theory could also be surfaced from talking to practitioners about how they thought a particular programme could or should function.

Nevertheless it was concluded that '*in the work on SLT services described above, we see the beginnings of a framework that could be used by any support service to evaluate its work with schools...*' (Op. cit., p.15). It was also suggested that the use of Realistic Evaluation might also help schools '*to understand how and why*

their efforts to attain particular pupil outcomes work (academic or social) and possibly why they do not...' (Op. cit., p.16).

3.3 LA hubs of effective practice in SEN/LDD

A systematic search of the peer-reviewed literature on evaluation paradigms and their implications for EPs provided only partial information on the approaches actually used in EP services across the country. As Stobie et al (2005) note much EP practice '*remains private and does not contribute to an increase in knowledge which can be shared with fellow professionals.*' (Op. cit., p.18). Their study was, however, able to demonstrate how the use of EPNET could bridge this information gap. There are also other ways in which EPs can share their learning.

In March 2007 Sefton was one of the eighteen Local Authorities which were invited to become regional hubs of effective practice in special educational needs/learning difficulties and disabilities (SEN/LDD) by the Primary and Secondary National Strategies (DfES, 2007). I was a member of the delivery group of Sefton EPs and other LA staff which worked closely with the National Strategies SEN team, colleagues from other authorities and the regional partnerships to address the theme of '*developing support services that are effective in building the capacity of mainstream provision*'.

Through the networking arrangements facilitated by the National Strategy SEN team I was able to discover that AI was one of the evaluation approaches being used by the Nottingham EP team (Small, 2007). At the time, the service had not published any peer-reviewed articles on their work, but I was referred to discussion threads on AI in the EPNET archives and provided with a good introduction to the literature summarised below, including the work of Carter, Corby, Cooper, Cummings, Martin and Hooton (2004).

A summary of the above literature review was presented at the first meeting of the North West regional hub on 27 September 2007. At least seventeen Local Authorities were represented, two of which subsequently requested support in implementing the Timmins and Miller (2007) approach to Realistic Evaluation. EP1 and EP11 were, however, of the opinion that the approach seemed very technical

and Tilley (2010) has since confirmed that the 'Mechanism' part of the model is not always understood by those seeking to implement the approach. The session was also attended by the PEP from Blackburn with Darwen who reported that his team were also considering the use of AI (Crowder, 2007). The decision to use this approach had also been influenced by the study by Carter et al (2004), in which a research team from the University of Central Lancashire (UCLAN) reported the findings of a project designed to identify best practice in multi-agency working in Cumbria and Lancashire.

As the remit of the Sefton LA Hub was to facilitate the sharing of best practice in developing effective support services across the region, the UCLAN research was considered to be relevant to this brief. Professor Carter was therefore invited to present her research at the second meeting of the hub. She accepted the invitation and also provided copies of the supporting literature. The references provided indicated that AI had been recommended as a suitable tool to use in sensitive situations, such as the context of the Sefton EP team which was still living through the consequences of re-structuring and a change in management (Keefe and Pesut, 2004; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold, 2001).

During the Autumn Term 2008, the Sefton EP team spent two days working with loan Rees to develop a model of service delivery which incorporated the principles of solution-oriented working (Rees, 2008). The first stage of this process was to surface the philosophy underpinning the team's work. This was found to be rooted in a strengths-based approach congruent with the principles of AI (see 3.4.1 below).

3.4 Appreciative Inquiry

The process of appreciative inquiry (AI) as a means of bringing about organisational change was developed as part of David Cooperrider's doctoral research (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000). The development of the approach was strongly influenced by Ken Gergen's book, *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge* (1994), and the theory of social constructionism. Cooperrider and others applied the theories of social constructionism and the power of image to organisational change and developed the five core principles for the practice of appreciative inquiry (Cooperrider and Whitney, 2000) (see below). Although many

different articles and books on AI have since been published in journals and on websites, these mostly relate to organisational change and change management. The potential to use AI as a research tool has only recently been explored, (Carter, 2006; Reed, 2007).

As noted in 3.3 above, the philosophy and principles established by the Sefton EP team are located within a constructivist paradigm. It was therefore considered that the use of evaluation methods which were also based on a constructivist approach might be the first step towards creating an evaluation culture within the Sefton EP team. The other advantages of using the AI approach are considered below.

3.4.1 Core principles and assumptions of AI

How language is used is central to appreciative inquiry. Cooperrider and Whitney (2000) have therefore provided dictionary definitions of 'Appreciate' and 'Inquiry' to explain their use of this terminology:

'Ap-pre-ci-ate, v., 1. valuing; the act of recognising the best in people or the world around us; affirming past and present strengths, successes, and potentials; to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, excellence) to living systems 2. to increase in value, e.g. the economy has appreciated in value.

In-quire, v., 1. the act of exploration and discovery. 2. to ask questions; to be open to seeing new potentials and possibilities.'

(Op. cit., 2000, p. 2).

In their summary of the development of AI since 1987, Cooperrider and Whitney list five principles that they consider to be central to AI's theory-base:

1. The Constructionist Principle
2. The Principle of Simultaneity
3. The Poetic Principle
4. The Anticipatory Principle
5. The Positive Principle

(Op. cit., p.14 – 17)

1. **The Constructivist Principle:** This principle suggests that what is known about an organisation and the organisation's actual destiny are interwoven.
2. **The Principle of Simultaneity:** This principle is based on the premise that as reality is an evolving social construction, it is possible through inquiry to influence the reality an organisation creates for itself. Inquiry and change are therefore seen as simultaneous and 'inquiry is intervention.'
3. **The Poetic Principle:** This principle is based on the metaphor that an organisation is like an open book in which the story is being continually co-authored by its members and those who interact with them.
4. **The Anticipatory Principle:** This principle postulates that the discourse that shapes the collective image an organisation has of its future can shape that organisation's current behaviour.
5. **The Positive Principle:** Cooperrider and Whitney state that after 'years of experience with appreciative inquiry'...

'...What we have found is that the more positive the question we ask in our work the more long lasting and successful the change effort.

(Op. cit., p.17).

Based on these principles, eight assumptions form the foundation for appreciative inquiry's processes and methods, (Hammond, 1998, pp. 20–21):

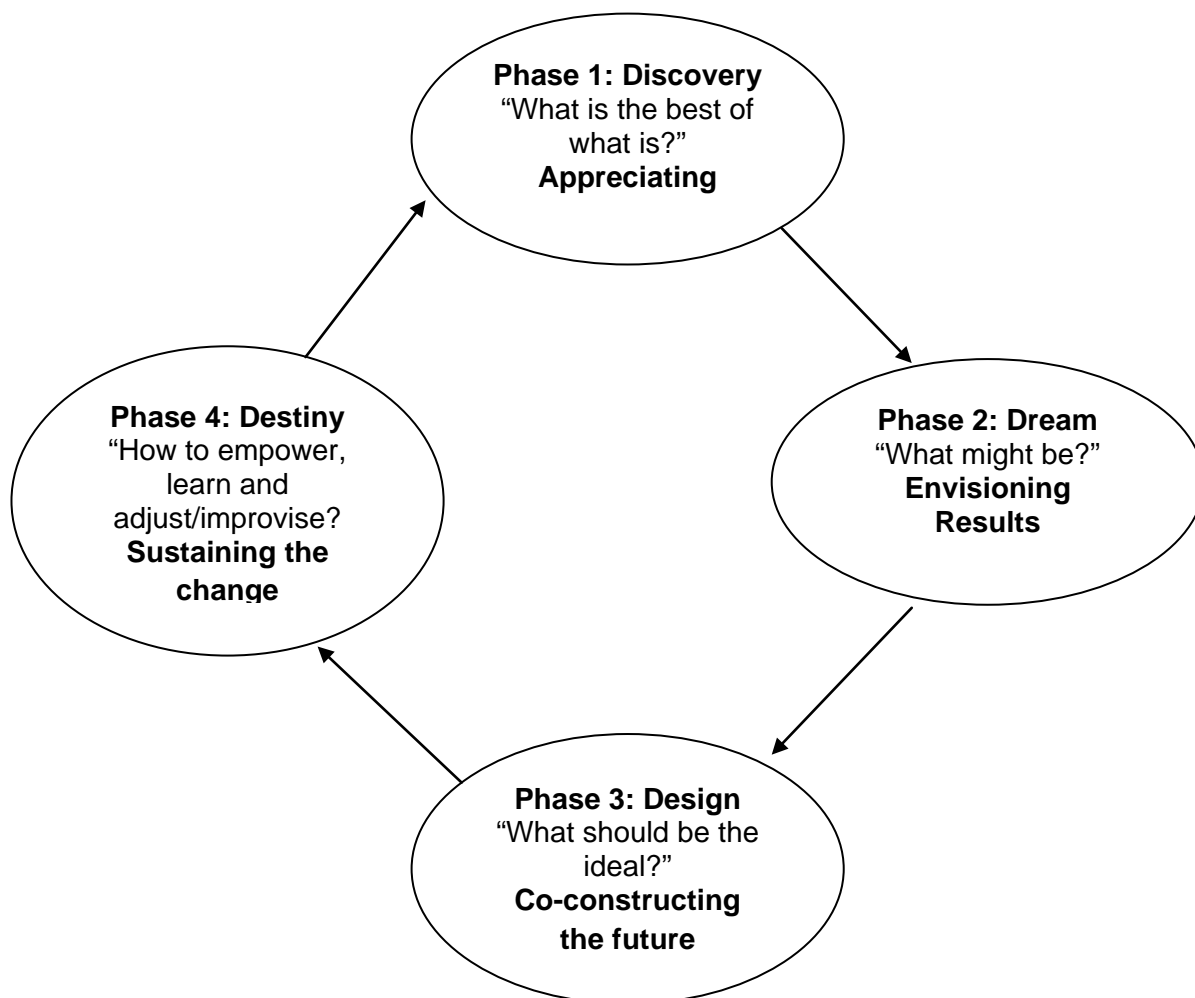
1. In every society, organisation, or group, something works.
2. What we focus on becomes our reality.
3. Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4. The act of asking questions of an organisation or group influences the group in some way.
5. People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).
6. If we carry parts of the past forward, they should be what is best about the past.
7. It is important to value differences.
8. The language we use creates our reality.

3.4.2 Appreciative Inquiry Models, Processes, and Methods

The principles and assumptions listed above inform the philosophy of appreciative inquiry and the ways in which it is conducted. Coghlan et al, (2003) have identified two primary models for conducting appreciative inquiry:

- **The 4-D model**, in which the Ds stand for Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny.
 - **The 4-I model**, in which the Is stand for Initiate, Inquire, Imagine and Innovate
- Of these, the 4-D model is the approach most commonly used for implementing the AI process, (Coghlan et al, 2003; Bushe and Kassam, 2005). This model is summarised in Figure 3.1 below:

Figure 3.1 Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (adapted from Coghlan et al, 2003)



Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - “What is the best of what is?”

The first phase in the model, Discovery, consists of participants interviewing each other and sharing stories about their peak experiences. The following foundational (or generic) questions guide these interviews:

- Describe a high-point experience in your organisation—a time when you were most alive and engaged.
- Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself, your work, and your organisation?
- What are the core factors that give life to your organisation, without which the organisation would cease to exist?
- What three wishes do you have to enhance the health and vitality of your organisation?

Participants share their individual stories in pairs and then with the larger group, and together they identify key topics or themes common to the stories. They then create a customised interview protocol by selecting three to five of the identified topics or themes and writing several appreciative questions for each. Using the new protocol, interviews are conducted with as many organisation members as possible, ideally by the members themselves.

Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - “What might be?”

Participants then begin the Dream phase: based on the information obtained from the interviews, they envision themselves and their organisation functioning at their best. Through various kinds of visualisation and other creative exercises, participants think broadly and holistically about a desirable future.

Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - “What should be the ideal?”

Based on these dreams, in the Design phase participants propose strategies, processes, and systems, make decisions and develop collaborations that will create and support positive change. They develop provocative propositions - statements that are concrete, detailed visions based on what was discovered about past successes.

Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - “How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise?”

In the Destiny phase, participants begin to implement both their overall visions of the Dream phase and the specific provocative propositions of the Design stage. This phase is ongoing as participants continue to implement changes, monitor their progress, and engage in new dialogue and appreciative inquiries.

(Coghlan, Preskill and Catsambas, 2003, p. 10 -11)

3.4.3 Applications of Appreciative Inquiry in Local Authority settings

In addition to reading the references supplied by Small and Carter described in 3.3 (above), I have also carried out three electronic searches:

1. To inform the proposal for this thesis
2. For the first draft of this chapter in August 2009
3. For the final version of this chapter in April 2010.

Although the initial literature search did not highlight AI as one of the evaluation approaches on which EPs had published articles in peer-reviewed journal, a further search has identified an account of a study by Doveston and Keenaghan (2006), which indicates that the Northamptonshire EP service has been using AI since 2002. Doveston and Keenaghan (2006) also provide a useful summary of the applications of AI in educational settings including an article by Cullen and Ramoutar (2003) which describes how AI has been integrated into the practice of EPs in Islington and Camden. The most recent search also identified an article by Onyett (2009) which reviews the literature on how solution focused approaches and appreciative inquiry can be used to improve services for children and families.

AI has also been used in the following contexts relevant to the present study:

- In multi-agency support systems:
 - With the families of children with complex needs, (Carter et al, 2004; Carter, 2006)
 - With older people going home from hospital, (Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne and Wilding, 2002; Reed, 2007)
- In consultations with stakeholders, (Farrell, Douglas and Siltanen, 2003)
- In implementing a professional development system, (Goldberg, 2001)
- In supporting changes of leadership:

- In a college of nursing, (Keefe and Pesut, 2004)
- At Wandsworth prison, (Liebling et al., 2001)
- To inform the midwifery element of the NSF, (Lavender and Chapple, 2004)

The National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) has recently funded and conducted a pilot study of AI to investigate its potential use in educational research (Shuayb, Sharp, Judkins and Hetherington, 2009). The context selected for piloting AI was young people and community cohesion, an area in which local authorities (LAs) in deprived areas had implemented several initiatives in schools to build community cohesion, but where there was considered to be insufficient evaluation of the initiatives concerned and little evidence of eliciting the views of young people. The findings from this and other studies are considered below under the headings:

- Advantages of using appreciative inquiry
- Disadvantages/limitations of appreciative inquiry
- Evaluation of appreciative inquiry

3.4.4 Advantages of using appreciative inquiry

The literature indicates that by focusing on ‘what works’ rather than ‘what’s broken’, the use of AI can be more affirming for participants than more traditional problem-solving research approaches. Elliott (1999) notes that appreciative inquiry

‘is much less threatening and judgmental than many variants of traditional evaluation for it invites the staff—and indeed, in theory, all the stakeholders—to reflect on their best practice rather than to admit their failures and unsolved problems’. (Op. cit., p. 202–203)

Coghlan et al (2003) list a number of contexts and processes where they consider that the AI process has the most potential to contribute to evaluation practice. These include situations where previous attempts at evaluation have been unsuccessful and where there is a history of difficult relationships between the individuals and groups concerned. They also suggest that AI can be used when change needs to be accelerated and when there is a desire to build evaluation capacity by helping others learn from evaluation practice (op. cit., p.19). One of the aims of this study was as the first step towards creating an evaluation culture

within the Sefton EP team, this is therefore one of the situations in which Coghlan et al (2003) would recommend the use of AI.

AI has also been used successfully in some very sensitive situations such as the research in prisons carried out by Liebling, Elliott, and Arnold (2001) described in 3.4.5, below. As noted in the introductory chapter, the context in the present study is sensitive because of the changes in organisation and personnel involved. AI was therefore chosen as a research tool to help members of the EP team re-focus on their strengths and to develop creative thinking about the future development of the service.

3.4.5 Disadvantages/limitations of appreciative inquiry

Fitzgerald, Murrell and Miller (2003) suggest that AI is being hailed as '*a magic bullet that works in all situations.*' It was, however, noted that even Cooperrider and Whitney did not claim that AI was appropriate in all conditions. They were quoted as saying that two of the essential criteria for AI to succeed were full leadership participation and sufficient resources for full implementation (op. cit. p. 7). Other possible limitations of the AI approach include dealing with negatives and research issues. Each of these topics is discussed in more detail below:

Leadership/resource issues

The literature demonstrates that AI can be useful to managers, especially at key transition points in organisational development. (Keefe and Pesut, 2004; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold, 2001). However, one of the main risks in carrying out an appreciative inquiry is that managers may be unwilling or unable to respond to the wishes of the participants. Liebling et al (2001) contrast the success of the approach in Wandsworth Prison, where a new governor gave his full support to the process, with the situation at HMP Manchester, where the same process was used in a different context. Although the same methodology was used and the research brief had been agreed with the Manchester governor in advance, by the time the research team had their first meeting with the staff workgroup, they had received the devastating (and unexpected) news that they were to be market tested.

After an explanation of what the research was likely to entail, the staff were given the option of withdrawing their involvement. Despite the negative context, the staff decided to proceed and the same process of ‘*active flourishing of individuals*’ as had been observed with the Wandsworth team was observed. A presentation, including ‘provocative proposals’ was prepared for the governor, but the energy then went out of the process as the governor was not able to fully engage with the appreciative inquiry until three months after the date for which the original presentation had been scheduled. By then, he had completed the market testing bid and he was able to be very open with staff about the bidding process. This won the group round and the eventual outcome was reported to be very positive for all concerned (op. cit., p. 172-174).

Shuayb et al. (2009) also experienced different levels of engagement from the two head teachers involved with their study which impacted on the extents to which the students’ recommendations could be implemented. They therefore emphasised that:

‘It is worth highlighting that although AI partially serves as an evaluative technique, its main purpose is to introduce and implement change successfully. This takes it beyond the normal responsibility of research, requiring a commitment to implementation on behalf of all participants, especially those in positions of responsibility.’ (Op. cit., p. 14)

Dealing with negatives

It may be considered that the positive nature of the AI process might make it difficult to identify the problems and weaknesses that an organisation needs to address in order to move forward. McNamee (2007) argues that those who see AI as ‘happy talk’ that prohibits any talk of difficulties or problems are posing artificial limits on the organisation’s capacity for change:

‘Can’t there be ways to talk about our difficulties that also give rise to an appreciation of how they challenge us toward generative transformation? AI as one form of social construction in action, sensitises the researcher to the language practices of clients, “subjects”, and participants. This must include a form of “generous listening”, which does not prohibit problem talk, but frames questions that help move problem talk toward appreciation and

possibilities within which new ways of coordinating action can be crafted.'
(Op. cit, p. ix.)

Liebling et al (2001) note that as a mode of inquiry, AI seems to take better care of informants and participants in research, by putting problems into context and allowing a safe space within which to openly discuss strengths, weaknesses and wishes for the future:

'It generates creativity, drawing on memories and imaginations (and emotion—or positive as well as negative affect). It results in a more rounded version of the participants' world, as they recognise and experience it, and makes critical analysis easier to bear and engage with.'
(Op. cit. p.164)

AI was also found to make negative findings more acceptable to participants. The study by Liebling et al (2001) at Wandsworth Prison described above followed a severely critical Inspectorate visit to the prison in October 1999 which left staff at all levels bitter and defensive about the visit, and the feedback they received (op. cit., p.165). Although the study's findings were described in many respects to be as negative as those of the Inspectorate, it was thought that AI methodology opened the door to self-reflection and open discussion about the way forward (op. cit., p. 166).

Liebling et al (2001) report that AI also facilitated reflection on very sensitive topics such as prisoner suicide. The NFER team found that AI was able to provide a new outlook on potentially controversial subjects such as diversity, multiculturalism, communities and cohesion by avoiding the stereotypical responses that a more traditional research approach brings. It was, however, reported that some respondents felt that the positive stance taken had meant that the research had avoided taking responsibility for addressing racism (Shuayb et al., 2009, p. 11). Although this was provided as evidence that AI was not a suitable tool for dealing with this issue, an alternative explanation could be that the interviewers were inexperienced. The study trained pupils in two secondary schools to carry out the inquiry and although the use of young people has many benefits, it may be that they were more inclined to follow up topics that were of particular interest to them

or that they needed more training in reframing negative comments as constructive actions.

Research issues

The NFER research team concluded that AI appeared to be a useful approach when conducting participative research with projects wishing to record the voices of young people. Their findings indicated that AI could provide a new outlook on a particular topic by avoiding stereotypical answers and identifying good practice. They therefore recommended the use of AI for evaluating and developing initiatives in schools and local authorities (Shuayb et al., 2009, p. 14). Appreciative inquiry is still, however, a relatively new research tool and there have as yet been only a few published studies using this method that have been subject to a rigorous peer review process (Reed, 2007). Carter (2006) notes that: *'As with all research, the robustness, credibility and authenticity of the research lies with the rigour with which the researcher approaches and manages the study.'* (Op. cit., p. 52). It is therefore incumbent on me to demonstrate that this study meets these standards. There is a detailed critique of the methodology used in chapter four (see 4.11, below) and there is further reflection on the AI process in chapter six.

3.4.6 Evaluation of appreciative inquiry

Bushe and Kassam (2005) expressed concern that AI was in danger of being seen as a management 'fad' that was becoming an increasingly popular organisational change method with very little research underpinning its effectiveness. A review of the theoretical literature on AI was used to establish criteria against which studies of AI could be judged. The following key principles and practices were identified:

1. Transformational change
 2. Outcome was new knowledge versus simply new processes
 3. Intervention created a generative metaphor
 4. Intervention adhered to the nine principles of AI
 5. Intervention followed the 4-D cycle
 6. Intervention began with collecting stories of the affirmative topic
 7. Intervention focused on figure or on ground
 8. Intervention concluded with implementation or improvisation
- (Op. cit., p. 16)

Kassam then systematically examining every published case study of AI which contained enough information to be assessed against a matrix based on the above criteria. Bushe coded 50% of the studies independently and obtained an agreement rate of 96% (op. cit., p. 170). At the start of the investigation, in 2002, twenty suitable case studies were identified. It was found that although all twenty case-studies began by collecting stories of the positive, followed the 4-D model, and adhered to five principles of AI articulated by Cooperrider and Whitney (2000), only seven (35%) showed transformational outcomes. Highly consistent differences between the transformational cases and the others led the Bushe and Kassam to conclude that two qualities of appreciative inquiry are the key to the approach's potential for organisational transformation:

- '(a) a focus on changing how people think instead of what people do and*
- (b) a focus on supporting self-organising change processes that flow from new ideas.'* (Op. cit., p. 161).

The study by Doveston and Keenaghan (2006) is an excellent example of how an appreciative inquiry can be critically evaluative. In addition to reflecting on their roles as researchers and supplying a range of qualitative and quantitative data, they demonstrate how the criteria from Bushe and Kassam (2005) can be used to provide evidence of the success of a project.

Bushe and Kassam (2005) noted that the processes used to embed and sustain change implemented by organisations using AI were under-researched: *'...of all the AI theory reviewed above, this is the least widespread.'* (Op. cit., p. 169). One exception to this is Messerschmidt's (2008) analysis of the contribution that AI has made as an organisational, transformational and team building tool to two women's health projects in Nepal: the UNICEF Women's Right to Life and Health Project (WRLHP) (Messerschmidt, 2005) and the Nepal Safer Motherhood Project (NSMP) (Thomas, Messerschmidt, Messerschmidt and Bhimsen, 2004). Both projects were successful in reducing Nepal's maternal mortality rate and it was reported that the findings suggested that the training of health care staff and community members in AI was one of several contributory factors (Thomas et al, 2004; Messerschmidt, 2008).

The Women's Right to Life and Health Project had three components:

- An extensive programme of AI training, initially for UNICEF staff , then disseminated to district hospital staff and local level facilitators
- Upgraded medical equipment and facilities
- Technical training.

Messerschmidt (2005) was commissioned to determine the changes in management which could be attributed to AI and to assess the potential sustainability of the approach. The methodology used consisted of a literature review, interviews with key informants, focus group discussions and on-site observations.

It was concluded that although AI appeared to have had an affirmative and transformational impact on individuals in the organisations and communities where it had been introduced, this was difficult to quantify. Project documents were said to provide evidence of AI contributing to increased utilisation of services by women from rural communities, but it was noted that caution was advised on AI stories, which could take on the status of myths or fables, without reliability or validity. As noted in 3.4.5 above, AI was reported to be most successful when supported by strong leadership. It was, however, found that those who had received AI training appeared to be reluctant to pass it on and therefore periodic coaching and refresher inputs were needed by external AI facilitators (Messerschmidt, 2008, p. 461 - 462).

Messerschmidt (2008) reported an intensive literature review had revealed little evidence of AI self-evaluation. It was noted that:

'Too many AI practitioners state outright that evaluating AI is a fruitless venture, since most (if not all) standard evaluation techniques are inconsistent with AI assumptions and contradictory to the transformational change process.' (Op. cit. p.463)

These practical and philosophical issues are explored in a paper by van der Haar and Hosking, (2004) in which they advocate a constructivist approach which they term *'responsive evaluation'* (op. cit., p. 1017). One of the few exceptions found by Messerschmidt (2008) was the study reported by Kotellos, Rockey and

Tahmassebi (2005). This paper claims to be the first to apply an appreciative evaluation methodology to investigate the impact of a full appreciative inquiry process in the context of an organisation and community, (op. cit., p. 16). The underlying philosophy of the study is therefore rooted within the same paradigm as AI.

On the face of it, using AI to evaluate AI may seem to be circular, but the approach used has many parallels with that of self-organised learning described in 3.2.2 (above) in that Kotellos et al (2005) appear to have used AI to surface the original purposes of the organisation and then to evaluate whether the strategies employed and the outcomes obtained were congruent with these purposes. This revealed a tension between giving AI participants permission to 'dream' and the evaluator's need to define clear objectives and document progress towards these objectives. They conclude that:

'AI processes should be among every evaluator's key set of tools. Likewise, evaluation should be part of every AI process, from the beginning. AI offers a powerful organisational tool that encourages individuals and organisations to image themselves at their potential best. Appreciative evaluation can help them know when they have reached those dreams.' (Op. cit., p. 19)

3.5 Summary

This chapter describes how an appreciative inquiry (AI) approach was chosen as the methodology for this study following a review of the literature on the implications of three evaluation paradigms for EP services and discussion with EPs in other parts of the country through EPNET and the National Strategy LA Hubs (DfES, 2007). The history, philosophy, advantages and limitations of AI were considered and it was decided that the approach was suitable for the context of this study for the following reasons:

- EPs in other parts of the country have recommended the use of AI as an evaluation tool
- AI is recommended as a suitable tool to use in sensitive situations, such as the context of a team which was still living through the consequences of restructuring and a change in management (Keefe and Pesut, 2004; Liebling, Elliott and Arnold, 2001)

- The philosophy underpinning AI was congruent with the principles and philosophy of the Sefton EP team, as surfaced using the process described by Rees (2008).

The following chapter provides details on how this appreciative inquiry was conducted and a critique of the methodology used is provided in section 4.11.

Chapter Four – Methodology

4.1 Introduction

As noted in the introductory chapter, this study was designed in order to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?
2. How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?
3. How can this inform EP practice?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working?

The aim was therefore to use the AI methodology described in chapter three as the main vehicle for providing answers to the first three research questions. This is one of the key elements which contribute to the originality of this study. Although a full AI cycle is said to consist of four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design and Destiny (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003), few published studies go beyond the initial stages of the process. This research was therefore planned to include all four phases, going beyond the elicitation of perceptions of best EP practice in the early years to track how this information could inform service delivery over time.

Although the evolution of AI as an approach to organisational development is well-documented (e.g.: <http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/intro/timeline>), the use of AI as a research methodology is still in its infancy, (Reed, 2007). Using AI as a research tool presents a number of challenges to the researcher. More conventional research projects can be planned in advance to follow a well-established sequence of activities:

- 1) A review of the literature reveals gaps in knowledge or anomalies to be resolved.
- 2) Research questions are then generated which define the subsequent stages of the study:
 - a) Sampling
 - b) Data collection

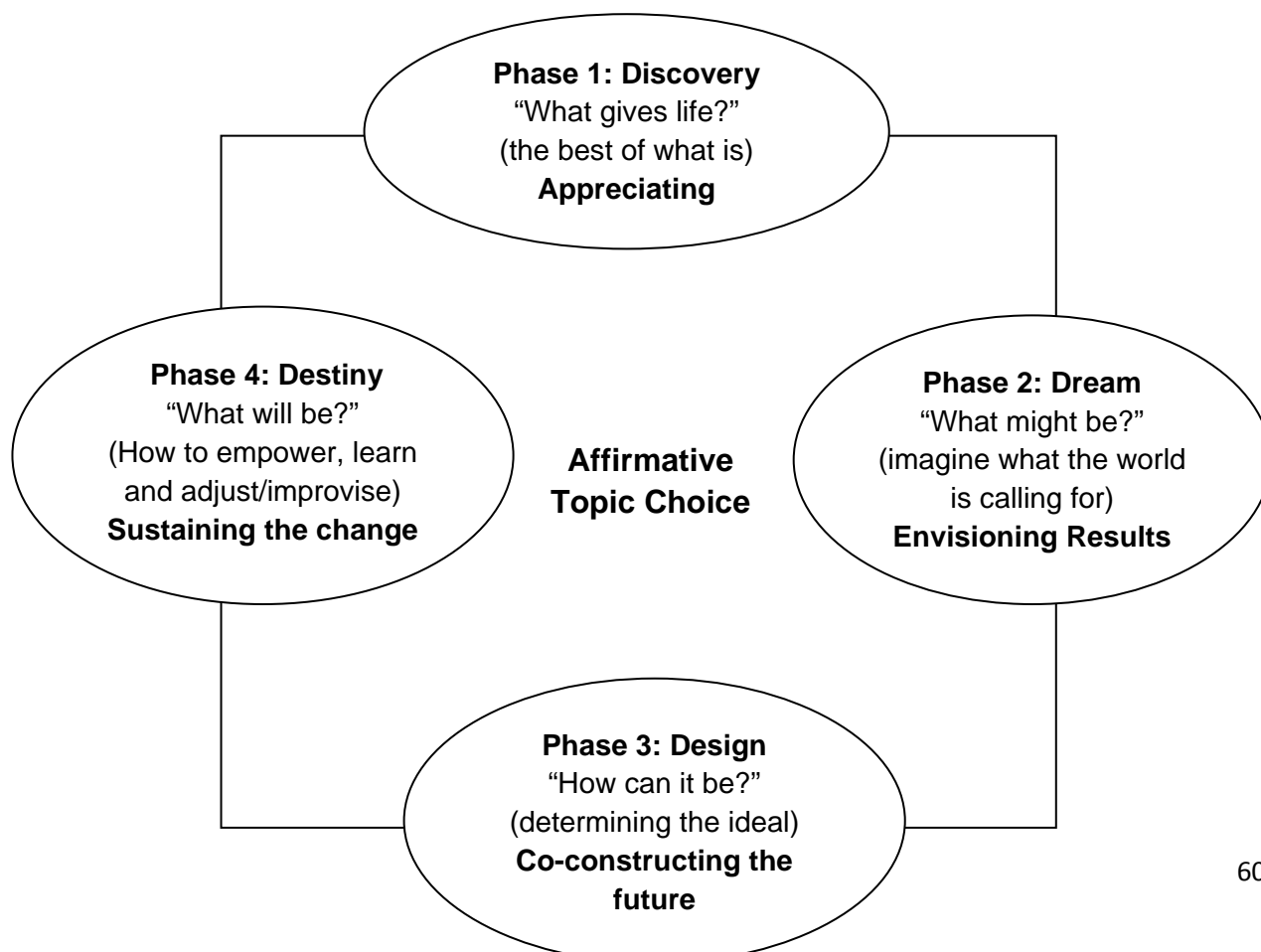
- c) Analysis
- d) Dissemination

Some aspects of an AI study can be planned in advance but the research design needs to be sufficiently flexible to incorporate new ideas generated by participants as the project progresses. It was therefore incumbent on me to keep an accurate log of how and why particular decisions were reached as this research developed. There was also a tension between the need to remain true to the principles of AI, by including other members of the EP team in making decisions about the collection and interpretation of data, while demonstrating the extent to which work of a doctoral standard had been carried out on an individual basis. This chapter seeks to provide evidence of the rigour with which these challenges were met.

4.2 Summary of procedures used and timeline

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the study was developed in four phases, according to the appreciative inquiry 4-D cycle described by Cooperrider et al. (2003):

Figure 4.1 Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle (adapted from Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003).



The research therefore involved four Phases which were implemented according to the following timeline:

Date	Tasks completed
Summer 2008 to end of project	Literature review, research log and write-up
Autumn Term 2008	<p>Phase 1: Discovery</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposed generative questions and process checked with critical friend • Appreciative interviews with the 3 EPs who had had dedicated time for early years work in 2007/08 • 10 families were selected for interview from examination of the case-files on children known to the Portage team and the recommendations of EPs. • Appreciative interviews were held with parents/carers at a venue and time of their choice
Spring Term 2009	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transcription and thematic analysis of interviews to develop 'provocative proposals' for the Phase 2 workshops • Preparation for Phase 2: Dates and venues set for Summer Term workshops and invitations sent to EPs and early years stakeholders
Summer Term 2009	<p>Phase 2: Discovery and Dream</p> <p>Workshop A: 13 early years stakeholders and 9 EPs attended a workshop at which appreciative interviews were held. The stories elicited were used to develop 'provocative proposals' – practical but creative visions of best EP practice in the early years. These were then compared with the 'provocative proposals' elicited in the Phase 1 interviews</p>
Summer Term 2009	<p>Phase 3: Dream and Design</p> <p>Workshop B: Early years EPs shared the findings from Workshop A with the rest of the EP team. A 'visioning' exercise was carried out and all the 'provocative proposals' were ranked and used as the basis for action plans</p>
Summer & Autumn Term 2009, Spring Term 2010	<p>Phase 4: Destiny</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tracking of implementation of action plans using both formal and informal methods • Appreciative interviews with the participants from Workshop A to identify changes noted in EP practice during the project and any influence of any AI in their own work • Final analysis of data and completion of write-up

4.3 Choice of affirmative topic

Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2003) note the importance of choosing an appropriately affirmative topic to form the focus of an appreciative inquiry:

‘Since human systems typically grow in the directions about which they inquire, affirmative topic choices encourage people to select topics they want to see grow and flourish in their organisations. The choice sets the stage for AI through the application of the 4-D Cycle.’ (Op. cit., p. 32).

It was also noted that although the early appreciative inquiries had used an open choice of topic, allowing members of the organisation to be fully involved in the process from the start, other organisations had achieved success with pre-determined topic choices. Here I chose the topic for the investigation, in consultation with the principal educational psychologist.

The background to this study is described in chapter one. In September 2007, the Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service (SEPPS) disaggregated from a larger support service, Sefton Teaching and Educational Psychology Service (STEPS). The STEPS staffing structure included six senior practitioner posts, one of which was the post of senior practitioner (early years). Although these posts were open to both advisory teachers and EPs, the early years’ specialism had been held by an EP since the post was first established. As SEPPS is a smaller service than STEPS, a different staffing structure has been created, based on generic management skills rather than areas of professional specialism. Although a number of the current EPs have experience of early years working, the holder of the post of STEPS senior practitioner (early years) left the team to take up a post in another Authority.

During 2008/09, a number of other changes were made to the team’s early year’s work:

- The number of EPs involved was increased from 3 to 7
- The age range of the children concerned was extended to cover from birth to the end of the Foundation Stage, rather than from birth to entering a maintained nursery or school.

There was therefore a need to review how SEPPS work in the early years could best be co-ordinated and delivered. The context for the proposed research was

sensitive because of the changes in organisation and personnel described above. AI was therefore chosen as a research tool as the literature indicated that this approach could be more affirming for participants than more traditional problem-solving research approaches, (e.g. Elliott, 1999; Coghlan et al, 2003).

As I am a member of the service's current senior management team and I was joint head of the previous service, there was a possibility that choosing the topic in this way could have been perceived as a 'top down' decision, resulting in a power imbalance which would have been contrary to the philosophy underpinning AI. This issue is explored further in 4.11.1 and 4.11.2, below. It should, however, be noted that the findings from Workshop B indicate that the members of the team with most early years experience were pleased that one of their interests was given 'centre-stage', after previously being seen as marginal to the work of the service (see chapter five).

4.4 Selection of participants

Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros (2003) recommend that the participants in an appreciative inquiry should represent a microcosm of the organisation and as diverse a range of viewpoints as possible. The design of this study enabled all members of SEPPS to be involved in at least one Phase of the process. The two Portage workers and the three EPs with the most extensive early years experience, one of whom is also the PEP, were involved from the beginning.

The first Phase of the study included interviews with parents/carers who had been in contact with EPs before their children had attended school. Given the time needed to carry out the interviews and process the data obtained, it was considered that a sample size of around ten would be appropriate. The aim was to identify parents/carers who were likely to be able to recount positive stories of their involvement with the EP concerned.

As the lead EP for early years had recently left the service, the first stage in the selection procedure was to discuss the proposed study with the two Portage workers and to elicit their views on suitable families. The case notes on the children concerned were then examined for evidence of significant EP involvement. Seven families were identified in this way. An e-mail was then sent to

members of the EP team asking for further examples of casework carried out in the previous three years which met the following criteria:

- The child was under 5 at the time of initial EP involvement
- EP involvement included contact with parents who were likely to provide positive stories

A further three children were identified in this way. The details of the families involved are summarised in the table below:

Table 4.1 Characteristics of the target families

Parent	Child's age at time of interview	Child's setting at time of interview	Category of need	Area of Borough	EP
Parent 1	4y10m	Special (SLD)	SLD + VI	North	EP2
Parent 2	5y9m	Mainstream	ASD	Central	EP5
Parent 3	4y4m	Home	PMLD + VI	South	EP11
Parent 4	4y11m	Mainstream	ASD	North	EP2
Parent 5	5y3m	Special (SLD)	PMLD	North	EP3
Parent 6	4y11m	Unit	ASD	South	EP11
Parent 7	3y1m	Special (SLD)	SLD	Central	EP2
Parent 8	3y4m	Home	ASD	Central	EP11
Parent 9	4y9m	Mainstream	DS	South	EP3
Parent 10	3y10m	Special (SLD)	PMLD	South	EP3

Key: ASD = autistic spectrum disorder; DS = Down's syndrome; PMLD = profound and multiple learning difficulties; SLD = severe learning difficulties; VI = visually impaired

In Phase 2, the inquiry was broadened to include other early years stakeholders. Invitations to attend Workshop A were sent by e-mail and letter to all the services to which copies of early years EP reports are routinely circulated. Twenty two participants attended the workshop, representing the following groups:

- 9 EPs (The PEP, all the early years EPs and 1 other EP)
- 3 Early Years Inclusion Consultants (ICONS, formerly known as advisory teachers)
- 2 Portage workers
- 2 representatives from Children's Services management, with a particular focus on extended schools and Children's Centres
- 1 Physiotherapist
- 1 Speech and language therapist
- 1 Community paediatrician

- 1 Head teacher
- 1 Area SENCO
- 1 Parent partnership officer

Workshop B was attended by ten EPs, nine of whom were present at Workshop A, and two trainee EPs. In August 2009, two more trainee EPs joined the service and they were fully included in Phase 4 of the project. A total of thirty one participants were therefore involved in the study.

4.5 Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - “What is the best of what is?”

Coghlan et al (2003) note that *Discovery*, the first phase in the model, consists of participants interviewing each other and sharing stories about their peak experiences. The following foundational (or generic) questions guide these interviews:

- *‘Describe a high-point experience in your organisation—a time when you were most alive and engaged.*
- *‘Without being modest, what is it that you most value about yourself, your work, and your organisation?’*
- *‘What are the core factors that give life to your organisation, without which the organisation would cease to exist?’*
- *‘What three wishes do you have to enhance the health and vitality of your organisation?’*

(Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003, p. 23)

For the purposes of this study, there were three strands to the Discovery Phase:

- Appreciative interviews with three EPs with specific responsibility for early years work
- Appreciative interviews with selected parents who had been in contact with EPs before their children had entered school
- A joint workshop with SEPPS early years stakeholders and all the EPs who now have responsibility for early years work

I carried out the interviews described in 4.5.1 and 4.5.2., using questions based on the above models. In 4.6, the nine EPs who attended Workshop A carried out appreciative interviews with the thirteen early years stakeholders who attended.

4.5.1 Appreciative interviews with EPs

During the Autumn Term 2008, appreciative interviews were carried out with the three EPs who had been provided with dedicated time for early years work during 2007/08. Unfortunately, two of the interviews had to be postponed until the second half of the term, in one case due to bereavement, and in the other case due to injury.

The aim of appreciative interviews is to elicit rich narratives, providing detailed accounts of real life events. This process was facilitated by asking the following questions:

- Describe your best experience of early years work
- What made it possible?
- Describe the special talent/skills/attitude that you bring to early years work that makes a difference to children and their families
- Describe your three concrete wishes for the future of EPs working in the early years

These questions are based on those described by Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, (2003) and fulfill their general principles for crafting AI questions, which include thinking about questions as having two parts:

‘Part A: The question must evoke a real personal experience and narrative story that helps participants to see and draw on their best learning from the past.

Part B: This part of the question allows the interviewer to go beyond the past to envision the best possibility of the future.’ (Op.cit., p. 88)

Permission was given for interviews to be digitally recorded and a maximum time for the interview agreed in advance. One of the benefits of digital recording was that the completed interviews could then be stored under password protection in a secure sector of the Authority’s computer storage.

During the Spring Term 2009, the recordings were encrypted and sent for transcription by an agency that had signed a confidentiality agreement with the

Authority's Children's Services Department. The content of each interview was then examined for themes that could be phrased as 'provocative proposals'. 'Provocative proposals' are affirmatively worded statements that challenge the way things currently work. Liebling et al (2001) describe them as:

'...statements worded in the present, that represented their best vision of the prison, and which were grounded in all of this real experience, but which seemed just out of reach. The statements were 'wishes', but are written as though these wishes have already been achieved.' (Op. cit. p.170)

A suggested list of these statements was attached to each transcript and returned to the EP concerned for member checking and to prompt any new thinking on the points raised.

4.5.2. Appreciative interviews with parents

Ten families were invited to participate in the study following an examination of the case-files on children known to the Portage team and the recommendations of EPs. Permission for involvement was obtained by letter (see Appendix 1). Nine parents agreed to be interviewed in their own homes. Permission was given for interviews to be digitally recorded and a maximum time for the interview agreed in advance. In three cases the child concerned was also present. The parents were asked to tell their child's story with particular reference to the following questions:

- Describe your best experience of receiving support from a Sefton EP
- What difference did this make to you and your child?
- How did this work complement the support you've received from other agencies?

At the end of the story, the parent concerned was asked what advice they would now give to a parent who had recently been asked to consider giving permission for an educational psychologist to become involved with their child. As with the interviews with the three EPs, the recordings were encrypted and sent for transcription by an agency that had signed a confidentiality agreement with the Authority's Children's Services Department. The content of each interview was then examined for themes that could be phrased as 'provocative proposals'.

A suggested list of these statements was attached to each transcript and returned by post to the parent concerned for member checking and to prompt any new thinking on the points raised. The accompanying letter invited comments to be made by phone, e-mail or post. A stamped, addressed envelope was provided and a second copy of the transcript and proposed statements, in case the respondent wished to annotate and return these (see Appendix 2).

4.6 Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - “What might be?”

Following the Discovery Phase, Coghlan et al (2003) describe how participants then begin the Dream Phase: based on the information obtained from the affirmative interviews, they envision themselves and their organisation functioning at their best. Through various kinds of visualisation and other creative exercises, participants think broadly and holistically about a desirable future. (Op. cit. p. 10)

Workshop A:

Invitations to attend Workshop A were sent by e-mail and letter to all the services to which copies of early years EP reports are routinely circulated. These early years stakeholders were provided with a summary of the study and invited to attend a workshop to find out more about appreciative inquiry and the findings from Phase 1. The invitation also noted that during the session, participants would be given the opportunity to provide some examples of good practice in working with EPs and to help describe the ideal SEPPS Early Years Service for the future (see Appendix 3). The details of the participants are summarised in 4.4 (above). The content of the workshop was summarised as a Powerpoint presentation. The session began by setting the research in the context of previous research and developments within the EP team. A summary of the AI process and literature relevant to those working in Local Authority contexts was provided. The procedures followed during the Phase 1 interviews were described, but the results were not discussed until participants had completed the following workshop exercises:

Workshop Exercise One - 5 minutes (completed on an individual basis)

Think of a time when you knew that working together was going well. You were confident and excited that young children and their families were being supported and you felt energised about partnership working. Make brief notes on the following:

- What was happening?
- Who was involved?
- What made this process (or outcome) so successful?
- Why was it successful?
- What was your role?

Workshop Exercise Two (in pairs)

Pair up with one of the EPs or someone from a different setting to yourself and share your stories. (You will be given 10 minutes each).

Decide on your 'quotable quotes' – the highlights of your stories that encapsulate the best of the best.

After 20 minutes, you will be asked to join one or two other pairs to form a group of up to six. In this group, spend 2 minutes each telling the highlights of your partner's story and then look for themes across all the group's stories. As the themes emerge, write them on flipchart paper. Over coffee, each group will then be able to share their themes with the larger group.

Workshop Exercise Three (in groups of four to six).

As a group, choose the theme that encapsulates the best Early Years EP service possible and determine the circumstances that made this possible. What implications do these have for future working? Write down one or more 'provocative proposals' on your flipchart, as if your ideal future is already in place.

'Provocative proposals' are affirmatively worded statements that challenge the way things currently work but they are grounded in what has actually taken place. Your statement(s) should fulfill the following criteria:

1. Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge or innovate?
2. Is it grounded in examples?
3. Is it what we want? Will people defend it or get passionate about it?
4. Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms and in present tense (as if it were already happening)?

All the EPs present were asked to collect the notes made by their partners in exercise one and to add any notes of their own to help them remember the key points of the stories told. They were also asked to take responsibility for bringing the completed flipcharts to Workshop B. At the end of all three exercises, each participant was provided with the provocative proposals generated from the interviews with parents and the three EPs (all of whom were also participants in Workshop A). They were then asked to complete a reflection/evaluation sheet which included the following questions:

- What were the most positive aspects of this morning's workshop?
- How will the session influence your future working with EPs?
- What applications can you see for appreciative inquiry in your area of work?
- Any other comments

4.7 Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - "What should be the ideal?"

In Phase 3, Coghlan et al (2003) describe how the dreams developed in Phase 2 are used as the starting point for the Design Phase. Participants propose strategies, processes, and systems, make decisions and develop collaborations that will create and support positive change (op. cit. p. 11).

Workshop B

All members of the EP team were invited to attend this workshop. The content of the workshop was summarised as a Powerpoint presentation. As with Workshop A, the session began by setting the research in the context of previous research and developments within the EP team. A summary of the AI process and literature relevant to those working in Local Authority contexts was provided. Although this meant that the early years EPs were now very familiar with this content, it was felt to be necessary to set the research in context for other members of the team. The following summary of Workshop A was provided:

Discovery: Participants were asked to think of a time when they knew that working together was going well. A time when they were confident and excited that young children and their families were being supported and they felt energised about partnership working. Stories of best practice were shared in pairs and then in groups. The stories were used to identify the factors which enabled best practice to be delivered.

The EP team was split into the three area teams, each of which had at least two team members who had attended Workshop A. The early years EPs were then asked to share the highlights of the stories elicited from stakeholders during the previous workshop and to give their views on the themes that had emerged from the group work.

The second exercise consisted of the following 'visioning' task:

Imagine you wake up tomorrow and we are providing the ideal early years service.

- What are we doing?
- Who are we working with?
- What are the things that made it happen?
- What makes this dream exciting?

After this exercise, each team member was asked to review the full list of 'provocative proposals' and to use post-it notes to indicate which of the proposals would be their top three priorities. The results were collated and the team was divided into pairs to identify the actions which would be necessary in order for one of their top three proposals to be implemented. The following instructions were provided:

For your chosen provocative proposal:

- Revise, edit or improve the statement based on group discussion
- List all your ideas about specific things that can occur now or in the near future to realise the dream
- Record the key targets/actions/strategies necessary to make this happen, by whom and when
- How can we track that this is happening?

At the end of the session, each participant was asked to complete a reflection/evaluation sheet which included the following questions:

- What were the most positive aspects of this morning's workshop?
- How did you feel?
- What new ideas/learning occurred?

- How will the session influence your future working?
- Any other comments:

4.8 Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - “How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise?”

4.8.1 Tracking the implementation of changes

According to Coghlan et al (2003), in the Destiny Phase, participants begin to implement both their overall visions of the Dream Phase and the specific provocative propositions of the Design stage. This Phase is ongoing as participants continue to implement changes, monitor their progress, and engage in new dialogue and appreciative inquiries (op. cit. p.11).

This was the most challenging aspect of the study, as very little could be planned in advance because the methods of data collection and analysis were dependant on the actions identified by the team members involved in Workshop B. There were also changes in staffing. One of the three EPs interviewed in Phase 1 retired and two other EPs took up posts in another North West Authority. Two more trainee EPs joined the service in August 2009 and were given 'patches' which included early years work. There was therefore a need to review the progress made.

In September 2009, one of the team's professional development sessions was used to revisit the AI process and to share the findings from further analysis of the Phase 1 interviews (see Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3, in chapter Five, below). The team were reminded of the provocative proposals from the April stakeholders' workshop and then split into pairs to consider the following questions:

- What did we achieve last term?
- What do we need to do next?
- How will we know that we've achieved our goals?

Although evidence of individual action was provided and noted, (see chapter five for details), it was decided that more formal tracking procedures were needed. Prior to the project, the PEP introduced a system of monthly meetings at which early years casework requests are allocated to EPs, Portage workers or early years inclusion consultants (ICONS), according to their perceived roles and the

area of the Borough in which the family lives. As these allocation meetings start at 3pm, the early years EPs were therefore invited to meet at 1.30pm on these afternoons to share progress towards the actions identified in Workshop B and to plan new actions. These meetings are minuted and the minutes sent to participants for checking (see Appendix 4).

Where the actions proposed by the early years EPs have implications for the full team, these are discussed and minuted at one of the fortnightly business meetings. During the course of the project, a research journal was also maintained. This contains notes on informal conversations with EPs and other professionals relating to AI and early years work, as well as the more formal records noted above. There were, however, ethical issues as to how much of the information collected in this way could be included in this thesis. These are considered in 4.10, below.

4.8.2 Rediscovery

The original proposal for this thesis included plans for a concluding workshop with the participants of Workshop A to gather evidence of any changes in EP practice that they had noticed during the course of the project. Informal feedback collected after one of the above meetings initiated with the early years EPs indicated that there was a danger that the project was being perceived as 'Eileen's research' rather than a collaborative approach to modelling service delivery on the views of stakeholders. It was therefore decided to involve the group in planning the final phase of the study.

At their January meeting, the early years EP team discussed the pros and cons of interviews, questionnaires and group-based approaches of data collection. It was decided that eliciting views from the Workshop A participants on an individual basis could provide richer data than if they were subject to the pressures for consensus implicit in group-based approaches. One approach to collecting the information required would have been for each of the nine EPs involved in Workshop A to interview their original partners. As noted above, however, two of the EPs concerned had since left the service and some of the other EPs provided reasons as to why their involvement might skew the results. Both of the new

Trainee EPs volunteered to help, on the grounds that the experience would be useful for their own professional development.

During February 2010, twelve of the thirteen stakeholders who attended Workshop A were invited to participate in the final stage of the project. (The headteacher has since retired). I conducted face-to-face appreciative interviews with the two Portage workers and the three early years ICONs. These interviews have been transcribed and analysed in a similar way to the original interviews with EPs and parents. TEPs 3 and 4 invited the remaining seven stakeholders to participate in telephone interviews. They made notes on the replies given and then sent them for member checking before forwarding them to me for thematic analysis.

The questions asked were:

- Has appreciative inquiry had any influence on your work since you attended the workshop on 21st April?
- Have you noticed any differences in joint working with EPs since the workshop?
- Has there been an example of a particularly effective piece of collaborative work that you could describe?
- How do you think EPs' work complements your own role?
- What are your hopes for future working with EPs?

4.9 Data analysis

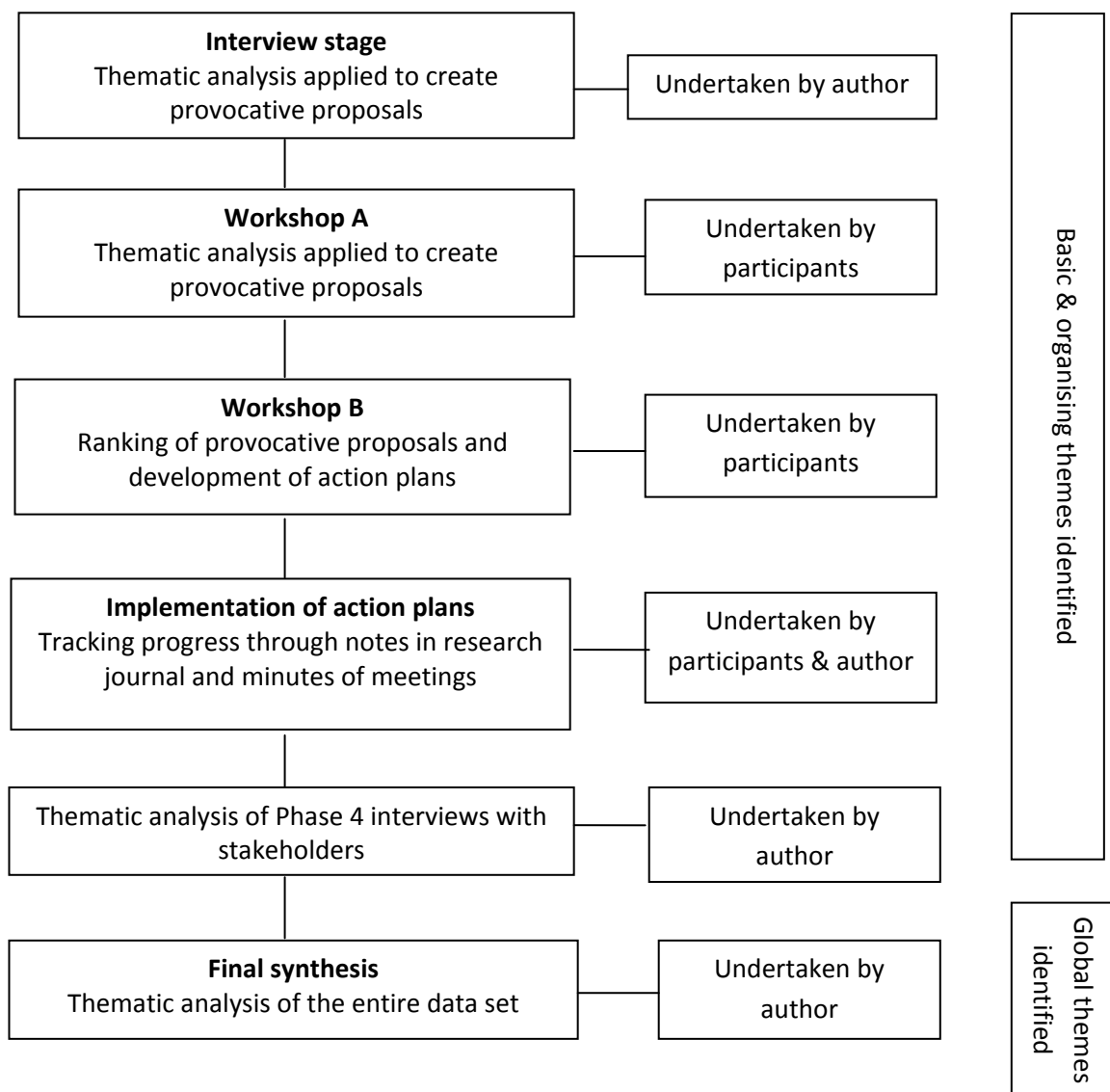
The study has generated a considerable volume of primary source material including:

- Interview transcripts
- Worksheets
- Flipcharts
- Reflection/evaluation sheets
- Minutes of meetings

One of the challenges has therefore been to present this rich, complex data in a form that is accessible to the reader, while remaining faithful to the meanings intended by the participants. Chapter five demonstrates the staged approach by which each of the above elements was transcribed into Word format and then

analysed individually and collectively according to the principles of thematic analysis, as described by Attride-Stirling (2001), Carter (2004) and Braun and Clarke (2006). This was a reflexive, iterative process during which each stage of analysis was checked by re-reading the original materials. The use of the workshop participants as co-researchers meant that this approach had to be applied flexibly, as summarised in Figure 4.2 below.

Figure 4.2: Steps taken in the analysis of data



Step 1: coding the material

The first reading of the material involved highlighting key words and phrases which summarised that element of the text. Transcripts were read through the 'analytical lens' of research questions one to three:

1. What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?
2. How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?
3. How can this inform EP practice?

Particular attention was therefore given to statements which exemplified the positive actions which EPs had undertaken with very young children, families and settings and possible barriers/facilitators to this best practice. These elements were then numbered for ease of future identification. (See appendix 5 for an example of a coded transcript of an appreciative interview with EP2).

Step 2: identifying themes and provocative proposals

Each coded text segment was then re-read and the segments were grouped together according to common themes. The original material was then re-read to ensure that the themes identified provided an accurate summary. In the first phase of the analysis, the basic themes were then synthesised in the form of 'provocative proposals' - affirmatively worded statements that challenge the way things currently work but grounded in what has actually taken place. (See appendix 6 for an example of the initial analysis of EP2's interview).

As the study was based on eliciting positive stories, most of the statements elicited were already worded positively. Where a barrier to the implementation of best practice was identified, this was reframed as if the barrier concerned had been removed.

e.g. EP3 expressed concern that one view of the graduated response to special needs had been to involve EPs later in the process:

'I've not found it satisfactory the way that I've been working as an EP in the last few years.... I think it's awful when things have been decided before the EP comes onto the scene. You know, with a graduated response model, that is one of the pitfalls because things have been decided when you come on the scene. So there's expectations that the EP will come in and just

rubberstamp things, but I don't like that and I think if you're involved at the beginning, then you could circumvent all that, you know, you are the more... can be more influential, you know.'

These views were represented by the 'provocative proposals':

- Educational Psychologists are involved at an early stage
- We work with children and families over time

The accuracy with which these statements summarised the interview concerns was checked by participants as they were each provided with a list of 'provocative proposals', along with a transcript of their interview. In addition to confirming that the 'provocative proposals' provided an accurate summary of their interview, respondents were asked to check whether the statements fulfilled the criteria listed by Hammond (1998):

1. Is it provocative? Does it stretch, challenge or innovate?
2. Is it grounded in examples?
3. Is it what we want? Will people defend it or get passionate about it?
4. Is it stated in affirmative, bold terms and in present tense (as if it were already happening)?

Step 3: synthesising the provocative proposals

Once the provocative proposals had been checked for accuracy by participants, the findings were synthesised further. This was a three stage process. First, the provocative proposals from a group of respondents were collated. (See appendix 7 for an example from the three EP interviews). These statements were then examined for clusters of similar issues, which were identified as middle-order or organising themes. Thematic networks were then generated by identifying the super-ordinate or global themes unifying the organising themes (see appendix 8).

Steps 4, 5 and 6: discussion and interpretation of the thematic networks

The thematic networks generated from the data set were compared for similarities and differences with the themes identified in the literature summarised in chapters two and three and the findings summarised in chapter six.

4.10 Ethical considerations

Jones (1996) provides a list of the rights of research subjects:

- The right to privacy
- The right not to be harmed by research
- The right to refuse to participate

For psychologists working in Britain the professional standards to be maintained in ensuring that these rights are protected are exemplified in the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct, (BPS, 2006).

All participants in this study were provided with details of the purpose of the study and the research methods to be used before being asked to give their agreement to participation. With the exception of the principal educational psychologist, the anonymity of all participants has been ensured by replacing their names by a code linked to their roles, e.g. Parent 1 etc. The AI literature emphasises the importance of involving the manager of the organisation in the process (Fitzgerald, Murrell and Miller, 2003). It was therefore considered to be essential to demonstrate that the PEP had been involved throughout. Permission has therefore been obtained for the views of this participant to be recorded in a manner that means that her anonymity cannot be assured.

All the EPs concerned were treated as co-researchers and particular care was taken to minimise the risk of the study resulting in emotional or psychological harm to them. Where interviews with parents indicated that there was a need for further EP involvement, this was provided within a month of the interview taking place.

The pervasiveness of the methodology used meant that there were particular ethical issues to be considered as to how much information participants agreed could be used in this thesis. Although permission had clearly been given for interviews to be used in full, this was very much an 'insider' study, so information relevant to the development of the project was available through conversations in the office, team business meetings and supervision sessions as well as through processes more clearly identified as research activities. These issues were discussed at a team meeting and boundaries agreed. Individual EPs have also been provided with the opportunity to check all the references to themselves in this account to ensure that I have their full permission to use the material concerned.

4.11 Critique of methodology

Appreciative inquiry is a relatively new research tool and there have as yet been only a few UK studies using this methodology that have been subject to a rigorous peer review process. Carter (2006) notes that: *'As with all research, the robustness, credibility and authenticity of the research lies with the rigour with which the researcher approaches and manages the study.'* (Op. cit., p. 52).

It is therefore incumbent on me to ensure that this study meets these standards. This section will therefore reflect on some of the research issues posed by the methodology chosen. These include:

- Researcher positions
- Power and control
- Inclusivity
- The use of interviews as a method of data collection
- Focus on the positive
- Using EPs as co-researchers
- Project chronology

4.11.1 Researcher positions

In their article discussing the issues of positionality for nurses undertaking fieldwork research, Borbasi, Jackson and Wilkes (2005) describe a situation with many parallels to that of an educational psychologist undertaking research in the Authority in which she is employed: *'As a practice discipline, nursing needs to negotiate a thorny path between methodological purity and practical application, with nurse researchers required to take account of both philosophical and pragmatic concerns.'* This description is very similar to that of the EP taking on the role of 'scientist-practitioner' (Miller, 2007), translating the principles of University-led research into the day-to-day work of EPs with children, schools and families.

Robson (2002) notes that *'it is increasingly common for researchers to carry out a study directly concerned with the setting in which they work'* and he continues by saying:

'There are clear practical advantages to this kind of 'insider' research. You won't have to travel far. Generally you will have an intimate knowledge of the context of the study, both as it is at present and in a historical or developmental perspective. You should know the politics of the institution, not only of the formal hierarchy but also how it 'really works'.... You will know how best to approach people. You should have 'street credibility' as someone who will understand what the job entails, and what its stresses and strains are. In general, you will already have in your head a great deal of information which it takes an outsider a long time to acquire.' (Op. cit., p. 382).

The disadvantages listed included:

- Assuming the role of 'researcher' as well as 'colleague'
- Maintaining objectivity
- Difficulties in interviewing colleagues, especially if they are of higher status
- Being trusted to maintain confidentiality
- The possible effects on working relationships if colleagues have shared personal information
- The consequences of having to live with any mistakes made in the course of the research

(Robson, 2002, p. 382).

In order to balance the advantages of insider research with its disadvantages, Robson (2002) advocates the use of mixed insider-outsider research teams. While this might be the ideal situation with an externally funded project, this study was conducted as part of my doctoral research, in parallel with my work as senior lead EP for the Authority in which the inquiry took place. As such, the quality of the research is, however, subject to external scrutiny from the staff at Manchester University and an external examiner.

Borbasi et al (2005) note that *'the position adopted by a researcher in the field affects every phase of the research process, from the way the research question/problem is initially constructed, designed and conducted to the ways in which reports and publications arising from the study are presented.'* It is therefore important to reflect on how my personal position may have compromised the rigour with which this research was carried out.

As noted above, I am currently employed as a senior lead EP with the EP team which formed the focus of the study. My own personal and professional situation is therefore part of the context in which the research was carried out. I joined what was then a combined teaching and educational psychology team in 2002 to manage the EP team. In March 2003, the head of the service left the Authority to take up a new post. I was then appointed as acting principal educational psychologist (PEP)/joint head of service, in partnership with the manager of the teaching team. I maintained this role until September 2007, when the teaching team became a separate service and moved to a new base.

In December 2003, my husband died very suddenly while I was celebrating Christmas with the EP team. This led me to re-evaluate my personal goals and I subsequently chose not to take up the post of PEP. The post was therefore advertised externally. The successful candidate was an EP for whom I had had line-management responsibility in another North-West Authority, where I was senior EP (early years)/acting PEP. This outcome therefore represented an interesting role-reversal. The new PEP led the team through the re-structuring process described above, during which the three EPs who had senior practitioner posts in the previous structure, including the lead for early years work, left the team to take up posts in a different North-West Authority and an established member of the early years team retired.

All of these factors are likely to impact on how the other members of the team have responded to being asked to participate in this study. Prior to this project, the EP team were given the opportunity to rate my emotional literacy and management skills in three confidential 360° appraisals. The findings from these questionnaires give me some insight into how I am viewed by the EPs who

participated and enable me to predict that they would probably want to shield me from any personal criticism. In this context, AI was a useful approach, as it enabled the EPs interviewed to talk about the past more openly than they might otherwise have done, as demonstrated by this extract from the appreciative interview with EP2:

'Because at the time the person who was the senior practitioner for early years I felt trusted me completely and trusted my professional judgment and allowed me to work in the way that I saw fit really and so I felt confident that somebody else felt confident that I would do it. I mean I am very experienced in early years so I wasn't sort of going off on a frolic, I was using that experience to inform the decisions I took, but that was a huge part of it to be honest the fact that I felt trusted and valued professionally and that somebody thought I could do this work.'

The above extract also illustrates the benefits of insider research, as an outsider may have missed some of the deeper meanings attached to these comments. Further discussion with EP2 suggests that, at the time of the initial interview, she was missing some aspects of working with EP11. There was also the implication that EP2 did not feel that the new PEP was allowing her to have the same level of autonomy. Despite this, EP2 has been the member of the team who has been most engaged with this research, demonstrating her commitment to early years work.

As noted above, the promoted posts within SEPPS are based on generic management skills rather than areas of professional specialism. Three area teams were created, each managed by a senior lead EP and three other EPs were appointed to the role of lead EP, to co-ordinate the team's response to local and national priorities. At the start of this study, there was, however, no one EP acting as the lead for early years work, but four EPs had time for early years work included in their 'patches'. The appointment of a new EP in January 2009 led to the number of EPs working with early years children being increased to seven. This arrangement continued until September 2009 when one of the EPs concerned retired, one left the Borough and another was seconded to lead a parenting project. Two trainee EPs (TEPs) joined the team in September 2008. During the course of the year, they expressed an interest in early years work and

this responsibility was therefore included in their 'patches' for 2009/10. When two new TEPs were appointed in August 2009, it was decided that their 'patches' should also include some time for early years work. By September 2009, there were therefore four EPs and four TEPs working with early years children, families and settings, but without a clear lead.

My 'patch' does not currently include any time for early years work, so although I am an 'insider' in many respects, in terms of the team's role with very young children, families and settings, I could be seen as an 'outsider'. This ambiguity of role created some confusion during Phase Four of the project where I introduced a new set of meetings for early years EPs to track progress towards the actions identified in Phases Two and Three. One of the group made comments to the PEP suggesting that the work of the group was being seen as 'Eileen's research', rather than a collaborative process in which we were responding to the views of stakeholders.

The resignation of one of the lead EPs led to debate within the SEPPS senior management team about whether the vacancy should be advertised as the lead for early years work. No firm conclusion was reached, but it was decided that the team would be told that I was acting as the lead for early years until the appointment was made. Although this has resolved some of the confusion about the status of the meetings for Early Years EPs, my role within the group is still ambiguous as I now have a clear management role in addition to my role as project leader. I have therefore sought to make explicit in which role I am acting when I am speaking about a particular issue.

4.11.2 Power and control

As I am the previous manager of the EP team and still a member of the present SEPPS senior management team, there are clear differences in power between me and other members of the team which could restrict the extent to which they feel comfortable in sharing personal information with me. This is compounded by my previous history of working closely with the new PEP in another Authority. During the project, I have used this power to ensure that AI has had a high profile at the team's professional development and business meetings, as well as introducing the early years meetings described above. I have also been able to

use individual supervision sessions with the EPs in my area team as an opportunity to elicit information on how they have been developing their role in working with very young children, families and settings. There are, however, ethical considerations as to whether the information generated in this context can be reported in this thesis (see 4.10, above).

By exercising my power in this way, I have risked compromising the principles on which AI is based, but I have also sought to provide opportunities for all the EPs and Portage workers to have a voice in how the study has developed. Examples of the inclusiveness of this research are provided below, (see 4.11.3) along with discussion of some of the challenges presented by using other members of the team as co-researchers.

Another way in which power could have impacted on the research was in the planning of Phase Four. At the January meeting of the early years EPs, those present discussed the pros and cons of interviews, questionnaires and group-based approaches to data collection. It was decided that eliciting views from the Workshop A participants on an individual basis could provide richer data than if they were subject to the pressures for consensus implicit in group-based approaches. Despite having been fully involved in the discussion, none of the EPs volunteered to participate in data collection, but both of the new trainee EPs said that they would help, on the grounds that the experience would be useful for their own professional development. As the most junior members of the team, it is possible that the TEPs could have felt 'press-ganged' into this role. Arrangements were therefore made to speak to them outside the group. They still appeared to be genuinely enthusiastic and one of them had come prepared with some suggestions on suitable questions.

4.11.3 Inclusivity

In her book, *'Appreciative Inquiry – Research for Change'*, Reed (2007) explores a number of the issues involved in using AI as a research methodology. One of these issues is the inclusive nature of AI and the implications that this has for sampling:

'Inclusivity is a powerful theme in AI texts that focus on OD. Writers of OD texts that describe the process of AI argue that including as many people as possible in the AI activity can help to facilitate support for the process, so that knowledge, understanding, and participation are not confined to a small, elite group whose conclusions may be rejected by others who have not been involved in the AI work. Invitations to participate should be extended to all key players inside and outside groups and organisations, to include as many views and experiences as possible and to develop strategies that have a widespread resonance and acceptance.' (Op. cit., p. 70)

Reed (2007) puts forward the view that the sampling process within AI is theoretical rather than random, but that there can be tensions between the researcher's view of whom is theoretically important, as opposed to the views of other members of the organisation involved in the inquiry. Inclusivity can also shape the development of the inquiry in other ways, as participants become more or less involved over time and therefore the more active members of the organisation could play a greater role in how change is implemented. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, in this study there was also a tension between the need to remain true to the principles of AI, by including other members of the EP team in making decisions about the collection and interpretation of data, while demonstrating the extent to which work of a doctoral standard had been carried out on an individual basis.

During the course of this study all members of SEPPS have been involved with at least one Phase of the inquiry (see appendix 9). The two Portage workers were involved from the beginning in identifying parents who were likely to be able to provide positive accounts of their involvement with EPs, they participated in Workshop A, worked in partnership with early years EPs throughout the project and were interviewed at the end of Phase Four. In addition to the workshops and meetings for the early years EPs, there were a number of opportunities for the other EPs to maintain their involvement with the research:

- During the Summer Term 2009, EP6 led a professional development session for the full team on multi-agency working

- In September 2009, another professional development session was used to provide a reminder of/introduction to the AI process and to review progress
- Following discussions on best practice in working with parents in the early years group, it was decided that this issue had implications for all our work and the matter was raised at a business meeting with the full team
- In February 2010, EP2 used a professional development session to lead a discussion with the full team on the implications of two examples of her early years casework.

As noted above, the degree to which members of an organisation choose to become involved with an appreciative inquiry can influence the outcome. Appendix 9 shows that EP2 has maintained a high level of participation throughout the project and the findings will therefore be heavily influenced by her particular style of working. Since joining the service in January 2009, EP8 has also had a high level of involvement and her style of working with parents was used as a model of best practice in one of the full team business meetings. Although TEP 1 and 2 were actively involved during the Summer Term 2009, their level of participation has become more sporadic as they have come under pressure to complete their own doctoral research. Despite joining the team after Phases one to three of the project had been completed, TEPs 3 and 4 have demonstrated an interest in AI and they volunteered to assist with the collection of data at the end of Phase Four. What is less clear is why EPs 6 and 7 have taken a less active role than some of their colleagues. One possibility is that they are both lead EPs and they may therefore be prioritising the areas of work for which they have personal responsibility.

The methods used for selecting parents and other early years stakeholders to participate in the research are described in 4.4 above. As this was an appreciative inquiry, the aim was not to obtain a cross-section of representative views, but to use the principles of AI to identify people who could share positive stories of EPs' work. Sampling was therefore theoretical, as described by Reed (2007). Although there was no attempt to select parents by background, the home visits necessary for the interviews suggested that they did represent a reasonable cross-section of the Borough's population. The seven stories provided were about the work of four

different EPs, although three of them were about the work of EP2. The early years stakeholders who attended Workshop A were largely self-selected from the invitations sent out to all the groups with whom Early Years EPs work in partnership. As noted above, both the Portage workers participated, as did the full complement of early years ICONs, who were previously part of the same service as the EPs. The workshop was also attended by representatives of children's centres, school nurseries and the private and voluntary sector. One of the parent partnership officers attended and the PCT was represented by a consultant community paediatrician, a speech and language therapist and a physiotherapist. The main gaps in participation were health visitors, occupational therapists and the Borough's SEN team. The early years EPs are therefore intending to invite representatives of these groups to attend a meeting to discuss their roles and the opportunities available for partnership working.

4.11.4 The use of interviews as a method of data collection

During Phases 1 of this study and for the conclusion to Phase 4, interviews were used as the main means of data collection. Robson (2002) describes the interview as '*a flexible and adaptable way of finding things out*'. He also notes that:

'Observing behaviour is clearly a useful enquiry technique, but asking people directly about what is going on is an obvious short cut in seeking answers to our research questions.' (Op. cit., p. 272)

Yin (2003) lists the strengths of interviews as:

- *'targeted – focuses directly on case study topic*
- *'insightful – provides perceived causal inferences'* (Op. cit., p.86)

Although interviews can be highly informative, this method of data-gathering is not without its disadvantages. Robson (2002) emphasises that interviewing can be time-consuming. It was suggested that the optimum length of an interview should be between half an hour and an hour in length, but that transcription was likely to take ten times the length of the interview. Here travelling time was also a factor in the interviews with parents as they all chose to be interviewed in their own homes. It was, however, possible to schedule the interviews so that families living in similar parts of the Borough could be interviewed on the same day.

Despite the time required, all the interviews were taped and transcribed, as it was decided that this method of recording would provide the most accurate data for

analysis and enabled me to give respondents my full attention. Ideally, I should also have carried out the transcription as the first stage of the analysis of qualitative material is to familiarise yourself with the data (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Due to time constraints, a confidential transcription service was used instead, but I then took care to ensure that each transcript was read and re-read thoroughly during the data analysis phase of the research (see chapter five, below).

Yin (2003) lists the weaknesses of interviews as a source of evidence as:

- *'bias due to poorly constructed questions*
- *response bias*
- *inaccuracies due to poor recall*
- *reflexivity – interviewee gives what interviewer wants to hear'*

(Op. cit. p.86)

The questions used were based on models from the AI literature. This therefore introduced a planned bias towards positive answers, as the underpinning philosophy of AI is to look for examples of best practice. This focus on the positive will be discussed in more detail in 4.11.5, below. As noted above, my role within the team may also have predisposed the EPs interviewed to respond in a particular way. Two of the parents interviewed responded to me as a senior EP rather than a researcher. I therefore dealt with their concerns in this role but I did not include these interviews in the data for this study. The other seven parents interviewed appeared to understand my role as a researcher and responded appropriately. The two Portage workers are noted for their loyalty to EP11, who was their line-manager, but the information that they were asked to provide did not need them to compromise this relationship. Although I do not personally have any time allocated for early years casework, the Early Years ICONs attend planning meetings at the schools for which I am the designated EP to discuss transition issues and this may have influenced their responses.

All the interview transcripts were sent for member checking, which provided respondents with the opportunity to alter their answers without the interviewer being present and to correct any inaccuracies that they had since become aware

of. In Phase 1, participants also had the opportunity to check the first stage of the analysis as they were provided with a list of 'provocative proposals' that had been generated from their interviews. It was possible to triangulate two of the appreciative stories from EP2's interview with the accounts provided by Parents 1 and 4 and Parent 3 corroborated EP3's perception of his skills in putting parents at their ease. At the time of her interview, EP1 was relatively new to the Authority. She therefore chose to talk about an example of her work in a previous Authority which could not be triangulated in the same way. Although the context of this piece of work was known to me, it took place after I had left the Authority concerned.

4.11.5 Focus on the positive

One of the major criticisms in using AI as a research methodology is its focus on the positive. Reed (2007) notes that:

'While a positive focus can be justified in OD as a useful way of encouraging support for change in an organisation, in research, it poses more problems. It can be justified on pragmatic grounds as being an approach that is more likely to encourage participants to provide information and talk about their experiences in a non-threatening atmosphere. This pragmatic concern, however, does not reflect some theoretical concerns that might arise, that is, the idea of a partial account that ignores or neglects negative stories. A focus on the positive, then, can be seen as offering only a limited understanding of a phenomenon.' (Op. cit., p. 75).

Reed argues that this is easier to justify if the study is embedded in the literature on the area under investigation, rather than being seen in isolation. This is a particularly useful argument where the other studies take the more traditional research stance of exploring problems and deficits. AI can then be said to be adding to the knowledge available by asking different questions.

Other studies have demonstrated that it is possible for participants to air their concerns within an appreciative inquiry, but that the positive focus then allows for possible solutions to these issues to be generated. McNamee (2003) notes that:

'As might be expected, my interviews did not omit discussion of departmental or personal problems. Many faculties seemed to view their interviews with me as a chance to air their side of the story. This raises an interesting issue for me as a constructionist using appreciative inquiry as a

method for constructing transformation. Many mistakenly believe that appreciative inquiry prohibits any discussion or talk of problems. In my own experience, prohibiting the very issues that people want to discuss is oppressive and therefore monologic.' (Op.cit., p. 26)

This approach is similar to that of *'keeping one foot in the pain'* advocated in some solution orientated approaches, (Rees, 2008).

AI was chosen as the methodology for this study as the EP team had been through a period of considerable change in structure and staffing. The aim was therefore to provide the remaining members of the team with recognition for the quality of work they had carried out in the past, while engaging them in developing effective ways of working in the future. The study was also informed by the literature on EPs work in the early years which presents some of the potential areas of concern which may not be represented by the positive approach taken in this research, (see chapter two).

4.11.6 Using EPs as co-researchers

The AI literature encourages a collaborative approach to ensure that the maximum engagement between members of the organisation and the process. During Phases 2, 3 and 4, each member of the EP team had a role in the collection and analysis of data. Reed, Pearson, Douglas, Swinburne, and Wilding (2002) note that the use of multiple researchers to analyse data is not as well explored in the literature as is analysis by single researchers. In their study, Reed et al (2002) used participants from thirty seven different organisations with little experience of research protocols, different views and experiences to analyse the data generated from appreciative interviews. The researchers needed an approach to analysis that encompassed the diversity of views and ideas expressed and then enabled the group to reach a consensus about the implications of the data for change. The approach chosen was nominal group technique (Delbecq, Van De Ven and Gustafson, 1975)

Nominal group technique was developed in the 1970s (Delbecq et al. 1975) as a systematic approach of facilitating the generation of ideas from each participant within a group as well as ideas from the group as a whole. It aims to avoid the dominance of individual views and perspectives which can sometimes occur within

other approaches to group discussion. Equally it avoids 'social loafing' which can be seen in some group situations whereby some participants exert less effort in a group compared to if they were asked to contribute as individuals.

In this study, the process by which the early years EPs and their partners had identified the key themes from the affirmative stories elicited in Workshop A was subject to scrutiny by the other members of the EP team during Workshop B. All members of the EP team were involved in the visioning exercise and the provocative proposals were then rated according to the individual's view of how important the statement concerned was in assisting the team to attain their vision of the best service for early years children and their families. This process ensured that each member of the team, irrespective of role or status, was able to ensure that their voice was heard and that a consensus was reached on the priorities for future action.

During Phase Four, the intention was for the project to be developed in partnership with all the TEPs and EPs who had responsibility for delivering an EP service to very young children, their families and settings. The methodology used was therefore similar to that of a co-operative inquiry, as described by Smith (2008):

'The understanding of participants as co-researchers and the focus on solving problems and thus enabling social change makes co-operative inquiry an exciting method for researchers in psychology.'

(Op. cit., p. 211)

Smith (2008) emphasises the need for researchers using this methodology to remind themselves of their understanding of group processes, as well as the nature of the inquiry itself:

'In a science of persons, the quality of inquiry practice lies far less in impersonal methodology, and far more in the emergence of a self-aware, critical community of inquiry nested within a community of practice. So, while co-operative inquiry as method is based on cycles of action and reflection engaging four dimensions of an extended epistemology as described above, co-operative inquiry as human process depends on the development of healthy human interaction in a face-to-face group.'

(Op.cit., p. 215).

In the present context, the early years EPs had not been brought together as a discrete working group on a regular basis before I convened the Phase Four meetings. Discussion with the PEP suggests that this was deliberate as when the casework allocation meetings were first introduced, the early years EPs said that they would not need any management oversight. The PEP was therefore 'taking a back seat' to see how the EPs concerned would develop their role. Even if the group had been meeting on a regular basis and had established a team identity, the changes in personnel meant that the team would have had to re-establish itself in September 2009. By the end of the Autumn Term, informal feedback suggested that at least one member of the group still perceived AI to be 'Eileen's research', rather than a shared endeavour. The January meeting was therefore used as a forum in which all those present contributed to planning the end of Phase Four. It was, however, concluded that this group is still in its infancy and that more work will be needed after this project ends to enable the early years EPs to see themselves as a team and to promote true co-operative working.

4.11.7 Project chronology

Although it is possible to plan some aspects of an AI study in advance, the research design needs to be sufficiently flexible to respond to the new ideas for data collection generated as the project progresses. This means that the pacing of the study can be difficult to predict. Reed (2007) lists a number of factors which could influence the pace of the study:

- The extent to which pre-project learning and debate is required
- Which activities can be scheduled in advance
- The level of organisational support, including where AI fits in with other work demands
- The reaction of the participants to the approach and findings

Here delays in implementation were experienced from the start because two of the three EPs needed for the Phase One interviews were absent from work due to injury and bereavement. Chapter Five will provide evidence of the team's positive response to the Phase Two and Three workshops, but this level of energy and enthusiasm was not self-sustaining at a team level and more conventional

management strategies had to be employed to ensure that that Phase Four could be completed in line with University deadlines. This action may have compromised the principles underpinning appreciative inquiry, but positive outcomes were still reported, (see chapter five).

4.12 Summary

This chapter provides details of how the four phase cycle of an appreciative inquiry was applied in a research project designed to identify and implement best EP practice in early years work. The methodology used enabled all members of SEPPS to participate in the study. EPs were able to compare their perceptions of best practice with the service received by selected parents/carers and other stakeholders' perceptions of the extent to which we work in partnership. The initial findings from the Inquiry were then used to inform the early years work of the team during the period from April 2009 to February 2010. Progress was tracked both formally and informally. At the end of Phase Four, the stakeholders involved in Phase Two of the project were interviewed to gather evidence on whether they had been able to apply AI in their own work and whether they had noticed any differences in the early years work of EPs since attending Workshop A.

The study generated a considerable volume of primary source material including:

- Interview transcripts
- Worksheets
- Flipcharts
- Reflection/evaluation sheets
- Minutes of meetings

Each of these elements was transcribed into Word format and then analysed individually and collectively according to the principles of thematic analysis. The results of this analysis are summarised in the next chapter.

Although AI is well-established as a tool for organisational development, it is still in its infancy as a research methodology. Some of the issues posed for the researcher include:

- Researcher positions
- Power and control

- Inclusivity
- The use of interviews as a method of data collection
- Focus on the positive
- Using EPs as co-researchers
- Project chronology

This chapter has considered each of these issues in turn and the extent to which they are likely to compromise the quality of the research. Further reflection on the advantages and disadvantages of the methodology used is included in chapter six.

Chapter Five - Results

5.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a summary of the findings from each phase of the research, demonstrating the staged approach by which data were collected, analysed and then synthesised.

In the '*Discovery Phase*' (Phase One), the basic themes elicited from the transcripts of each of the interviews with the three EPs and seven parents were initially synthesised in the form of 'provocative proposals'- affirmatively worded statements, rooted in past experience of best practice, that challenge the way things currently work. These statements and other basic themes were then analysed further for organising and global themes. This provided an overview of the EPs' perceptions of what constitutes best EP practice in the early years for comparison with parental experiences of the service that they received.

The findings from the '*Dream Phase*' (Phase Two) include the themes elicited from the appreciative stories of other early years stakeholders, which were summarised in the form of further 'provocative proposals' by participants in Workshop A. In the '*Design Phase*' (Phase Three) the combined set of 'provocative proposals' was ranked by the full EP team and then used to plan actions for Phase Four. At the end of Workshops A and B, participants were asked to complete feedback sheets designed to elicit their first impressions of the AI process. The comments received are also presented in the summary of the results obtained in Phases Two and Three of the research.

Phase Four consisted of collecting data over time on the implementation of the actions identified in Phase Three. During this phase, a research log was maintained consisting of informal and formal data collection processes. The findings from the analysis of these data are presented in section 5.5 of this chapter.

One of the aims of this research was to create an evaluation culture within the EP team. The final stage of the research was therefore planned in collaboration with

the early years EPs. Two of the trainee EPs acted as co-researchers in asking the participants from Workshop A to provide evidence of how AI had impacted on their own work since Workshop A. They were also asked whether they had noticed any differences during the year in the way that they were working in partnership with EPs to support early years children, their families and settings. The changes in working practice identified were then compared with the 'provocative proposals' that had been given the highest rankings by EPs. Perceptions of the extent to which these changes could be attributed to the AI process were elicited and ideas for future practice were also provided.

5.2 Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - "What is the best of what is?"

5.2.1 Appreciative interviews with early years EPs

During the Autumn Term 2008, appreciative interviews were carried out with the three EPs who had been provided with dedicated time for early years work in 2007/08. The aim of the interviews was to elicit rich narratives, providing detailed accounts of real life events. It was intended that these stories would include themes illustrating the perceptions of these EPs on what constitutes best EP practice in the early years.

The questions used to facilitate the process were derived from the AI literature (see chapters three and four):

- Describe your best experience of early years work
- What made it possible?
- Describe the special talent/skills/attitude that you bring to early years work that makes a difference to children and their families
- Describe your three concrete wishes for the future of EPs working in the early years

As noted in 4.5.1, above, the interviews were digitally recorded, encrypted and transcribed into Word format. The content of each interview was then examined for themes that could be phrased as 'provocative proposals'.

'Provocative proposals' are affirmatively worded statements, rooted in past experience of best practice, that challenge the way things currently work. (Appendix 6 provides an example of this process using the transcript from the interview with EP2).

The transcripts and proposed 'provocative proposals' were then returned to the EPs concerned for member-checking. No changes were requested, although EP1 asked to hear a copy of the original digital recording of her interview as the transcript included fifty two inaudible words/phrases. This was probably due to the speed at which EP1 speaks and the background noise during part of the interview when there were children playing outside the window. As the total interview consisted of 4714 words, it was considered that these gaps did not significantly impair the accuracy of the account.

5.2.2 EP1's story

EP1 chose to tell the story of how, in a previous Authority, she had successfully collaborated with the managers of other early years services to introduce a new area-based system for supporting all children, including those with additional needs. Personal philosophy/principles was a strong theme throughout the account. The examples given included being child-centred, supporting inclusion, regarding quality first teaching as a right for all and the need for equity of service provision. Obtaining evidence of the outcomes arising from the strategies implemented was also important to this respondent.

EP1 expressed the view that the contribution that EPs make to this area of work is in terms of the psychology of the individual child, through a knowledge of child development, an understanding of how young children learn best and a belief in assessment over time. EPs were also considered to have an understanding of change, an understanding of the psychology of the adults in the system and an understanding of how Local Authority support systems work.

The importance of EPs being able to recognise and utilise the strengths of the other professionals concerned was emphasised:

‘Within an area the EP would be involved with all the children that came into the system. Not involved in seeing them all, but involved in consulting with the other professionals around them. A lot of that was about supporting the notion that the other professional’s knowledge and strengths around good practice and early years held true for children that are different.’

It was recognised that there may be situations in which it was necessary to challenge the views of other professionals, for example, where exclusive practices were identified, but that promoting the strengths of others was a good starting point in building effective working relationships.

Thematic analysis of the interview resulted in the following provocative proposals:

- Our work is underpinned by key principles
- Children are viewed as children first
- Parents know what they want and are given real choices
- Everyone in the system is looking after the children’s best interests
- Services are organised in areas around all children’s needs being met
- Within an area, the EP is involved with all the children that come into

These statements are intended to summarise EP1’s view of what constitutes excellent EP practice in the early years.

5.2.3 EP2's stories

EP2 chose to talk about three examples of her early years casework. Taken together, these illustrate her confidence in working with children with a wide spectrum of needs. In this interview, the theme of philosophy was less explicit, although EP2's commitment to putting her views of the child's needs at the centre of her work was a strong feature of each of the accounts, as was her commitment to supporting inclusion, where this was the parental preference and support was provided.

EP2 sees herself as having a high level of empathy for parents. Her stories demonstrate this quality as she reflected on the emotions expressed by both parents and the need for the EP's involvement to start at where parents are in their thinking and to be matched to their pace. Interestingly, this interview is one of the few where a father's needs are mentioned. The mother from EP2's first case study was also interviewed (see Parent 1's story, 5.2.10, below and appendix 10). Parent 1's account provides confirmation of the accuracy of EP2's perception of the support that she provided to this family.

EP2's view of the contribution that EPs can make to this area of work included some of the attributes identified by EP1. EPs were thought to bring knowledge of the psychology of child development and an overview of all the system. It was also considered that EPs are good at recognising other people's strengths and pulling them in. EP2's wish for the future was:

'I think I would hope that we would have a system around early years, which was tight and which didn't let children slip through the net but at the same time allowed people a good deal of professional freedom because people are confident about what they do. I think I would be very anxious that we don't lose the psychology from early years work.'

The concept of using a problem-solving, hypothesis testing approach was a common theme in all three interviews with EPs. Two new themes emerged from EP2's account: Facilitators and barriers to effective working in the early years. EP2 was very open about her need for professional autonomy and trust and the pleasure that she gets from working with very young children:

'I absolutely totally and utter adore little children in all shapes and sizes, I love working with them. I feel at ease working with families with very young children, I think I feel that is when I am at, I don't know whether that's when I at my best but it's when I am at my most comfortable.'

The provocative proposals generated from EP2's appreciative interview were:

- We do our best work when we feel trusted and valued professionally
- We keep the child at the centre
- We have empathy for parents but are brave enough to be honest with them
- Joint working helps us to confirm our hypotheses about a child
- Sharing our understanding of a child's development takes time
- We start from where the child and family are at this moment in time

As with EP1's story, it is intended that these statements should provide an accurate summary of EP2's perception of what excellent EP practice in the early years looks like. Following the initial analysis, EP2 was given the opportunity to check the statements against the transcript of her interview. She provided the following written response: "This seems fine. I think I say 'really' a lot!" This suggests that EP2 was in agreement with the above statements. During one of the Phase 3 meetings, EP2 made a comment about how accurate the transcription of her interview had been.

5.2.4 EP3's story

EP3 used the case study of a child with myotonic dystrophy in a private and voluntary nursery to illustrate his view that effective communication and applying psychology to solve problems are the key elements of best EP practice with early years children and their families. As with EP1, the importance of utilising the principles of positive psychology was emphasised.

EP3 also agreed with EP2 that working with very young children could be fascinating:

'I do actually like going in the nurseries, I just get a kick out of it, I get a buzz out of it, I like the... it's so interesting, you know, from a psychologist's point of view, just to watch little children and to interpret what they're saying and what they're doing and understand and try to understand what their

play means, what their language means. And just to... I just find it interesting to see them, you know, at a very early stage of their development.'

EP3 saw his own skills as including the ability to relate and communicate well with parents:

'I think people trust me and I think people tell me a lot. I do, I've noticed that particularly recently, they do. I think they're comfortable, you know, in my company and they will... and they're not frightened of divulging information which they wouldn't give to other people, you know, because they know... well they trust me, you know, with that information.'

This perception was confirmed by Parent 5 (see 5.2.13, below).

EP3's account provided evidence that it is possible for an appreciative interview to highlight negative views as he expressed concern that one view of the graduated response to special needs had been to involve EPs later in the process:

'I've not found it satisfactory the way that I've been working as an EP in the last few years.... I think it's awful when things have been decided before the EP comes onto the scene. You know, with a graduated response model, that is one of the pitfalls because things have been decided when you come on the scene. So there's expectations that the EP will come in and just rubberstamp things, but I don't like that and I think if you're involved at the beginning, then you could circumvent all that, you know, you are the more... can be more influential, you know.'

The AI approach enabled these comments to be reframed in a positive light, as if these barriers to good practice did not exist:

- Educational psychologists are involved at an early stage
- We work with children and families over time

The other provocative proposals generated from EP3's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs have a strong sense of identity
- We use positive psychology to build on strengths
- We represent the child's best interests

- We start with the parent(s)' knowledge of their child
- We recognise parent(s)' pain
- We add to our understanding of children by observing them in different contexts
- We help children to be happy and settled in their current settings
- We bring people together to work collaboratively
- We believe that any child has the right to be supported to attend their local school
- We support children through important transitions

These statements were then combined with the provocative proposals elicited from EP1 and 2's stories and used to inform Workshops A and B (see Phase Two, below).

EP3 expressed the opinion that early years work should be part of the generic role of all EPs as he saw our remit as working with the full age range 0 to 19. By working co-operatively in a 'Team round the child', it was thought that EPs could contribute:

- A knowledge of child development
- A knowledge of psychology
- Communication and facilitation skills
- Consultation and problem-solving skills
- Experience of working with different settings and families
- A broad knowledge of educational provision

5.2.5 Synthesis of themes from EP interviews

What are Sefton EPs passionate about?

The aim of the appreciative interviews with the three EPs was to elicit detailed accounts of examples of their own work of which they were particularly proud. The stories presented provided powerful illustrations of how EPs can make a difference to outcomes for children at a systems level, a family level or an individual child level. It was also possible to identify a group of organising themes which synthesise what is important to these three EPs in their work:

- Philosophy and principles

- Liking a challenge!
- Knowing that we make a difference to children and families
- Professional autonomy
- Enjoying the company of very young children

(See appendix 8 and figure 5.1, below).

EP1's story provides many examples of how she sees her personal philosophy and principles informing her work (see 5.2.2, above). Although EP2 did not use this terminology in her interview, the stories that she told provided rich illustrations of the principles underpinning her work. It was clear that although she puts the needs of the child first, she sees her role as supporting parents to understand what these needs mean in the context of their family. As noted above, EP3 provided examples of how the principles of positive psychology inform his style of working.

All three EPs supported the rights of children to supported inclusion, which EP3 saw as one of the Service principles:

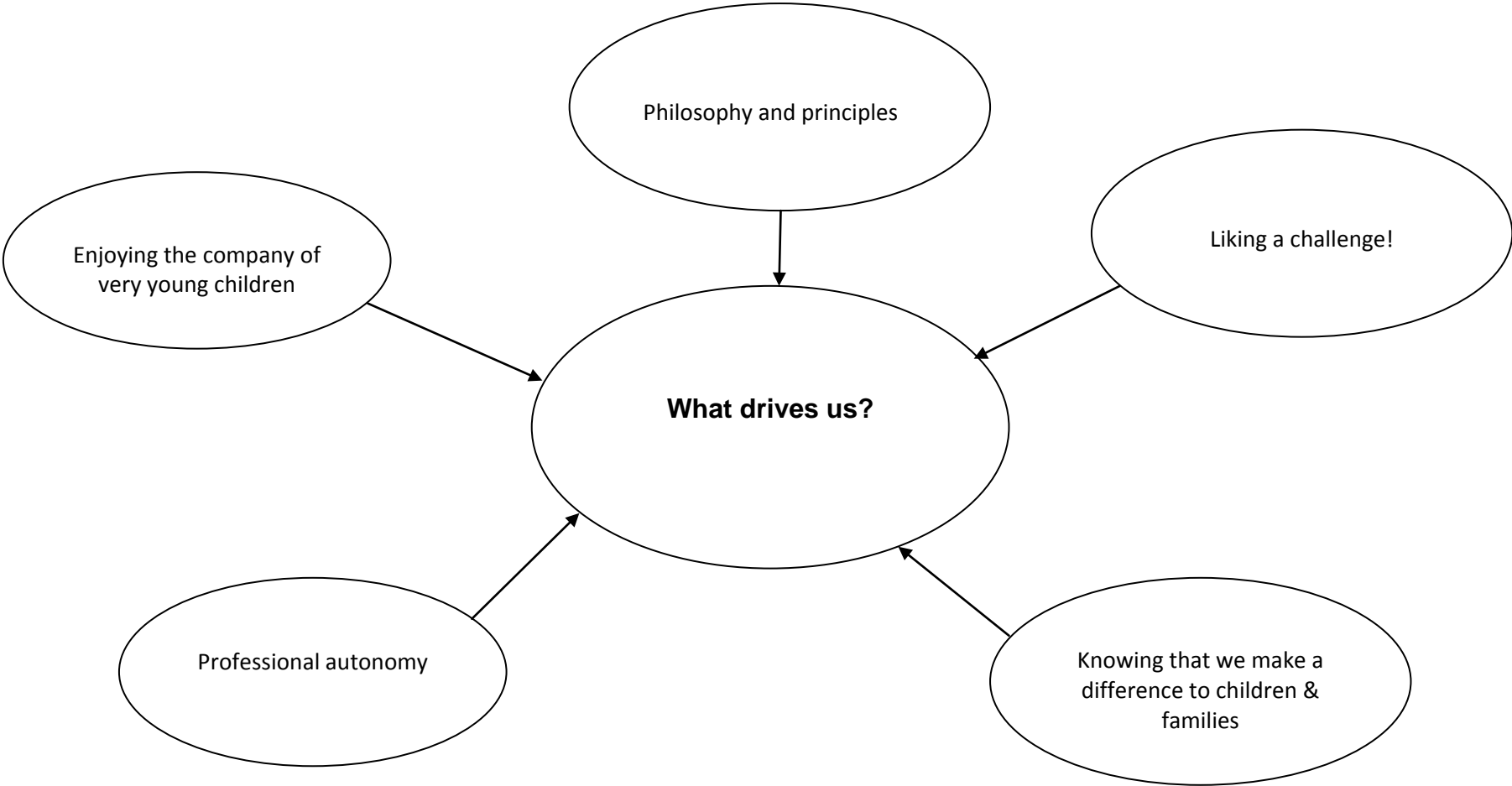
'She just wanted (child's name) treated as a normal child which is absolutely fine, you know, can go along with that, she didn't want her daughter as, you know, any different. And her sole aim was to have (child's name) go to a local primary school. Which, you know is one of our principles, it's still one of my principles, you know, that any child has a right, really should have a right to be supported to go to the local primary school.'

The stories of all three EPs provided of evidence of how they were proud of applying their skills and knowledge as psychologists to overcome potential challenges:

EP1's story was about her role in bringing about whole system change in partnership with others:

'I think quite a massive change and I think that was about everybody getting lined up really, that is was systematic and there was some, not only me but some determined managers who would, that did have a belief that if there is an issue in the operation that we could trace it back to the system that we we're putting in place and do something different and better.'

Figure 5.1: What are Sefton Early Years EPs passionate about?



EP2 summarised her account of Child 1's story by giving her view of how she had contributed to his successful school placement by working through some challenging issues with his mum and dad:

'It never came to that, a provision that they visited in Sefton they loved and the child is now appropriately placed there and I think we managed to save potentially a very contentious situation just by moving slowly with mum and dad but nevertheless being prepared to do the difficult work as well. So that was good, you know to the best of my knowledge he is still well placed.'

EP3 listed the hypotheses that he had generated as possible explanations for the high level of distress shown in the nursery context by the child in his story. He explained how his observations had led him to conclude that the principle factor was separation anxiety and how he had supported key adults in implementing effective strategies to reduce this anxiety. EP3's account provided evidence that he had contributed to positive outcomes for the child concerned that were sustained over time:

'So gradually we saw that crying reduce and (child's name) settled down into the setting. And the other thing we were able to find was a little friend of hers who she was comfortable with. So as well... so that helped in that programme as well, so she came in with (child's name) when she arrived and then they went in together. So it wasn't the trauma, you know, so the child settled down. And then we were able to work on a communication and mobility programme which was a primary need really, had to... I felt that she had to be able to move around the nursery, communicate... start to communicate and then she would be a lot happier in the setting as well.'

'I'd heard from the school, 'cause I rang up, I'd heard that (child's name) had settled in very well, they were very pleased, that she was happy, she was communicating more and things were going well.'

The importance of contributing to positive outcomes for children and families was emphasised in all three accounts. One of the many examples provided by EP1 was in changing perceptions of the meaning of young children's behaviour:

'We used to have, what was called an EBD Panel, a panel for children with behavioural difficulties and previously there had been quite a number of young children, so 4, 5, 6 year olds who would be coming to that panel as having behavioural difficulties and my view being that the developmental needs that weren't understood as I don't think children are born naughty or horrendous and therefore it was about, my view would be children that, well if [inaudible 16.57] behaved perfectly reasonable so and that was reduced to none, there were none of those children coming into that panel.'

As noted above, professional autonomy was particularly important to EP2, who had felt that her skills had been valued in the previous system. While this theme was not explicit in EP1's story, her account illustrated the opportunities that she had been given to work collaboratively at a senior level in another Local Authority. Although EP3's story provided an example of the benefits of working with very young children over time, he expressed the view that the volume of casework and the way in which the graduated response to special needs had been interpreted had eroded his ability to deliver this quality of work on a regular basis. One of the aims of this research is to ensure that the contribution that Sefton EPs make to early years working is understood and valued by our stakeholders. Whether this aim was achieved will be discussed in Phase 4, below.

Although much of the work of EPs is mediated through adults, EPs 2 and 3 were able to use their interviews to illustrate the enjoyment that they gain from working with very young children. EP3 saw this as one of the essential requirements for EPs working with very young children:

'Personally, I don't think I'm particularly gifted working with pre-school children, although I do think, you know, they like me, you know, they're comfortable around me and... and I'll play with them and I enjoy it you see, so... and I think you've got to have... I think you have to have that, I think you've got to... as an EP you've got to want... you've got like them at that age, you know, you've got to find the interest in them and use it.'

What do EPs contribute to Early Years work?

In addition to providing examples of work of which they were proud, each of the three EPs interviewed was asked to list the personal skills and attributes that contributed to the effectiveness of their early years work and their views on the more general contribution that EPs make as a professional group. The themes elicited included:

- A knowledge of child development
- A knowledge of how children learn best
- An understanding of change
- An understanding of the psychology of adults
- Empathy for parents and a recognition of where they're starting from
- An ability to recognise and utilise the strengths of others
- A knowledge of Local Authority systems and processes
- Good communication skills and the ability to put people at their ease

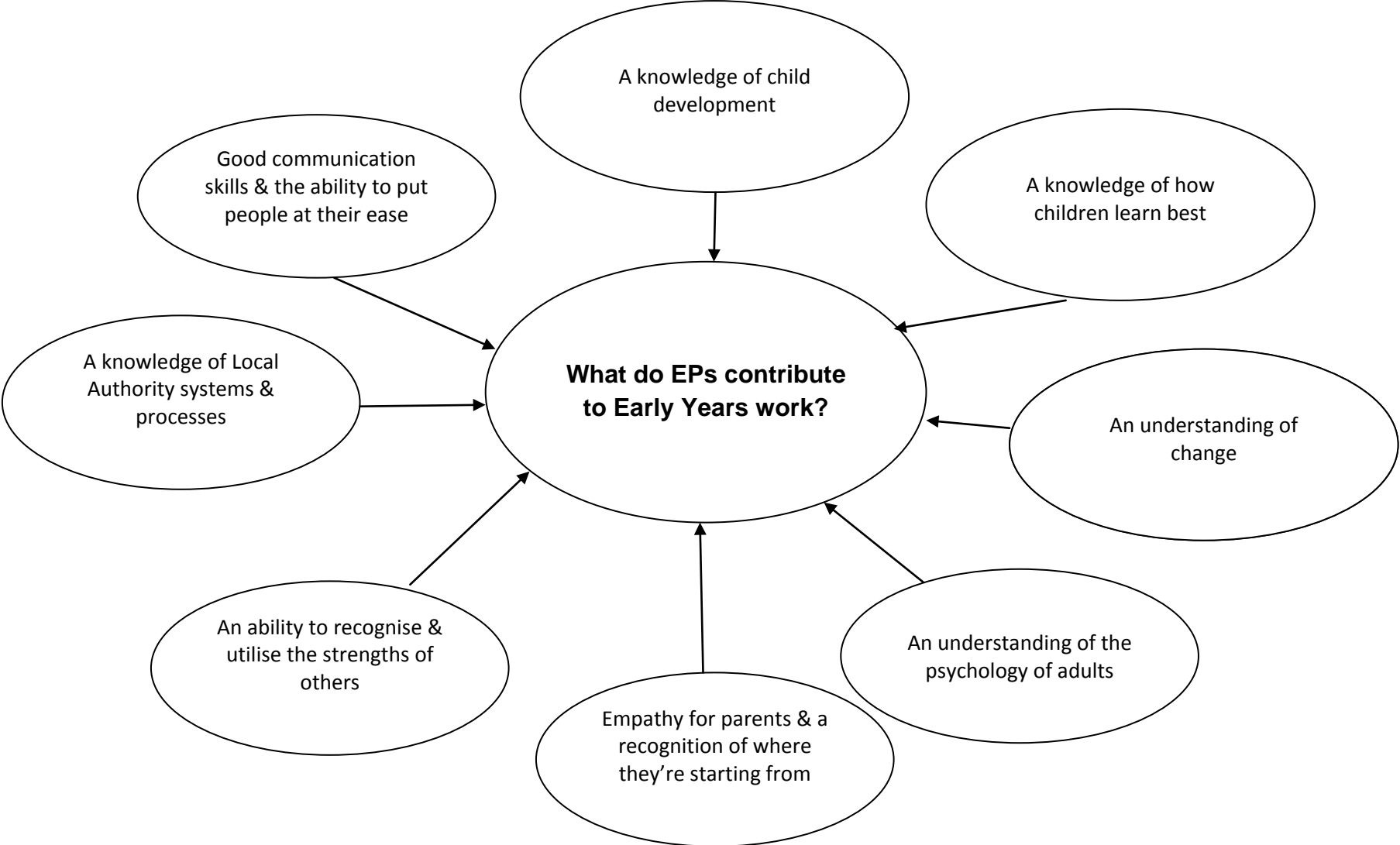
This summary of what EPs think they provide was found to be in good agreement with the perceptions of the service received by the parents interviewed. (See figures 5.2, 5.3 and table 5.1 below).

Facilitators and barriers to best practice

As noted above, there was some overlap in the perceptions of the EPs interviewed of what was important to them in their work and the factors which they thought facilitated best practice. EP1 emphasised the importance of working together with committed leaders, developing agreed protocols and processes and linking funding/support to need and outcomes. EP2 was also positive about the benefits of joint working, citing the example of how she had worked with a physiotherapist to support Child 1. EP3's account demonstrated his commitment to the 'Team round the child' approach to service delivery.

The timing of the EP's involvement was seen as a crucial element in the delivery of best practice. EP3 expressed concern at being brought in at too late a stage to 'rubber stamp' decisions made by other professionals.

Figure 5.2: What do we think we contribute to Early Years work?



EP2 also expressed her views about the dangers of focusing on an educational placement at too early a stage, based on an incomplete understanding of the child's needs. Pressure for statutory assessment was also seen as a potential barrier to effective working, as were the different structures within which early years teams operated.

As noted above, the AI approach enabled potential barriers to be reframed as 'provocative proposals' describing best practice:

- *We do our best work when we feel trusted and valued professionally*
- *Educational Psychologists are involved at an early stage*
- *Sharing our understanding of a child's development takes time*
- *We work with children and families over time*

5.2.6 Appreciative interviews with parents

Ten families were invited to participate in the research following an examination of the case-files on children known to the Portage team and the recommendations of EPs. All the parents who participated in the interviews were mothers and it was interesting that the father's contribution was only mentioned by Parent 1. Nine interviews were held and seven of the parents interviewed were able to provide appreciative accounts of their involvement with Sefton EPs. At the time offered for their interview, the parents of Child 10 were found to be taking him to hospital as he was very poorly. As noted in 4.11.4, above, Parents 3 and 9 reacted to me as a senior EP rather than a researcher. I therefore used these interviews to respond to their current concerns. The information provided was not in the form needed for this study and time constraints did not allow for alternative families to be identified.

For the seven appreciative interviews, the parents were asked to tell their child's story with particular reference to the following questions:

- Describe your best experience of receiving support from a Sefton EP
- What difference did this make to you and your child?
- How did this work complement the support you've received from other agencies?

At the end of the story, the parent concerned was asked what advice they would now give to a parent who had recently been asked to consider giving permission for an educational psychologist to become involved with their child. As with the EP interviews, each of the appreciative interviews with parents was digitally recorded, encrypted and transcribed into Word format. The content of each interview was then examined for themes that could be phrased as 'provocative proposals'. The transcripts and proposed 'provocative proposals' were then returned to the parents concerned for member-checking.

No changes were requested in the proposed provocative proposals. Parent 1 returned a copy of the transcript of her interview with a small number of changes, most of which were grammatical in nature, e.g. 'cause' was altered to 'because'. The changes requested appeared to relate to the informality of conversational speech and how this can look different when viewed in print, rather than changes to the underlying meaning of the points previously made. Parent 2 rang to say that she had now discovered that the telephone conversation with the first EP mentioned in her interview was actually with a health visitor with the same first name. It was, however, still possible to include this interview as part of the research as Parent 2 had met EP5 in person. Parent 4 rang to confirm that the transcript would be anonymised and to emphasise that EP2 was not the only professional who had provided her with helpful support and advice.

5.2.7 Parent 1's story

Appendix 10 provides a more detailed summary of Parent 1's rich account of her journey to find answers about her son's rare genetic condition. In her interview, she described how her experience of working with young people with special educational needs in further education led her to conclude that Child 1 had other needs in addition to his blindness. Prior to the involvement of EP2, Parent 1 had visited a range of local schools, none of which were thought to be able to meet Child 1's needs. Parent 1 describes EP2 as the catalyst who moved her on to finding the answers to her questions about Child 1's development.

Parent 1 confirmed that EP2 had observed Child 1 over time at nursery and at home and that she had worked in partnership with Child 1's physiotherapist to suggest effective strategies for managing his behaviour. EP2 was also said to have provided support for the whole family. Although Parent 1 said that the involvement of the family with EP2 had been positive overall, she would have welcomed clearer information about what to expect from the EP service in the future. This comment was therefore included in the list of provocative proposals as:

- Sefton EPs keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

The other provocative proposals generated from Parent 1's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs support the whole family
- Sefton EPs believe that parents know their child best
- Sefton EPs take parents' concerns seriously
- Sefton EPs are honest and give parents accurate information
- Sefton EPs observe children at home and in nursery
- Sefton EPs provide families with support in managing their child's behaviour
- Sefton EPs work closely with other professionals and contribute to multi-agency meetings

5.2.8 Parent 2's story

In her interview, Parent 2 described her experiences with Child 2, who was given a diagnosis of Asperger's syndrome in 2006. At the time of the interview, Parent 2 thought her first contact with the EP team had been through a telephone conversation with EP4. After reading the transcript of the interview, Parent 2 realised that this conversation had been with a health visitor with the same first name.

Parent 2 felt that the research skills that she had developed as part of her social studies degree had helped her to become better informed about Child 2's needs and how to access the support she needed for him. She described how her attitude towards statements of special needs had changed since having Child 2.

Before moving to Sefton, she had visited schools in another authority for her daughter. At the time her attitude had been:

'I don't want my child to go to school where there's statements.'

Parent 2 had since changed her opinion and, on the advice of a friend, she had requested a statutory assessment of Child 2. EP5 had been asked to provide the psychological advice for Child 2.

Despite having had previous contact with range of other professionals, Parent 2 found the experience emotionally draining:

'I mean I came out feeling absolutely drained but you always do from those sort of things and they're very, I don't know, there was one point during the meeting and I thought I could just burst into tears now because they're talking about your beloved child and you're having to be objective and I always had a feeling you need to be reasonably unemotional about it to achieve what you need to achieve if that makes sense.'

Following the meeting with Parent 2, EP5 had then gone to observe Child 2 in the nursery. Parent 2 felt that it was necessary for the process to be so thorough and she concluded by saying:

'I think on the whole it's been fine. But I suppose I would say that wouldn't I because I got what I obviously needed.'

The provocative proposals generated from Parent 2's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs believe that parents know their child best
- Sefton EPs take time to listen to parents' views
- Sefton EPs observe children in settings which are familiar to them
- Sefton EPs provide reports that describe children accurately

5.2.9 Parent 4's story

Child 4 was another of three children used by EP2 as examples of her best practice. Parent 4 described how when Child 4 had started nursery at the age of two and a half he was still not walking or talking so he was sent for a range of different tests. He was found to have an extreme form of hypermobility and he was also diagnosed with autism.

EP2 was one of the professionals who observed Child 4 in nursery. With hindsight, Parent 4 was impressed with the accuracy with which EP2 described Child 4's needs:

'EP2 went into the nursery and observed him and I must say, I was quite fascinated. She was the first person that kind of picked out his real concerns, his real problems.....She predicted that his learning difficulties were probably more of a problem or would be, than his autism. And at the time I kind of thought I'm not quite sure about that.'

EP2 was again seen as being very honest:

'But again I think she was very honest, she probably said things at the time that I didn't particularly wanted to hear and I disagreed with her. I didn't think that certain schools would be suitable for him but she kind of disagreed with me. And I've got to say she was damned right the whole way along.'

EP2's description of Child 4's needs and the barriers that he was likely to experience was seen as much more specific than the information provided by other professionals:

'I feel what she did different was, how can I say it was different? She convinced me I suppose that what she could see in Child 4...now what's the right words? She was very particular about what she felt would be right for him if you like? What his concerns were going to be and what obstacles he would face in a school setting. And I don't think anybody else actually pinpointed these problems. It was all a bit general and she actually broke it all down and erm...I don't know I can't....she was just very helpful. And very spot on, very spot on in, as I say, she didn't know him at all. But just observing him a few times she really got a really good picture of him.'

As well as providing an accurate description of Child 4's difficulties and the barriers that he was likely to experience, EP2 also identified his strengths. It was this approach that gave Parent 4 the confidence to choose a mainstream school placement for Child 4. EP2 was also seen as approachable and informative:

‘Certainly a nice, relaxed, approachable person. Very helpful and even though I’ve phoned her a few times she was always willing to speak to me and go over the same subject.’

As with Parent 1, though, Parent 4 would have welcomed more information on what to expect from the service after Child 4 started school. As before, this comment was reflected in the provocative proposal:

- Sefton EPs keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

The other provocative proposals generated from Parent 4’s appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs are approachable and helpful
- Sefton EPs talk to parents on the ‘phone
- Sefton EPs believe that parents know their child best
- Sefton EPs take time to listen to parents’ views
- Sefton EPs observe children in settings which are familiar to them
- Sefton EPs describe children accurately in ways that parents can understand

5.2.10 Parent 5’s story

Parent 5 provided confirmation of EP3’s perceptions of his skills with parents, although Child 5 was selected from the list of children provided by the Portage team rather than the example used in EP3’s own interview. As with Parent 1, Parent 5 was very positive about the practical and emotional support provided by Portage worker 1:

‘You can be very alone when you find out your child’s disabled. It’s like when you come out of the hospital with a baby that you think is going to be doing all of the things that you imagine a child usually does. And when you realise they’re not going to you need that extra help. And you know the fact that they come to the house and they have got so many different toys and objects to show the child. And just generally easing you into adapting because parents have got to adapt to the fact that the child.... he is still your child, you still love him to bits but you’ve got to adapt to a different way of life. Not the way you thought it was going to be.’

EP3 was introduced to Parent 5 by Portage worker 1. EP3 was seen as both approachable and knowledgeable. Parent 5 said that he had provided her with in-depth information about Child 5's needs so that she could decide which schools might be suitable. Parent 5 then went to visit a range of schools with Portage worker 1 before finally deciding on one of the specialist schools for children with severe learning difficulties. She said that she had chosen the school on the basis of proximity to her home and the hydrotherapy pool. When asked whether she had made the decision herself, Parent 5 replied:

'Oh yes I mean no one pushes you or says, you've got to send your child to this school. We could have looked at a bigger, wide range of schools if I had wanted to.'

The provocative proposals generated from Parent 5's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs work in partnership with Portage
- Sefton EPs are friendly and approachable
- Sefton EPs reassure parents
- Sefton EPs observe children in settings which are familiar to them
- Sefton EPs provide an in-depth picture of children's needs to help parents plan for the future

5.2.11 Parent 6's story

Parent 6 has two children with an ASD diagnosis who were born two years apart. Both children attended a resourced nursery before transferring to a mainstream school with a resourced class for ASD children. Parent 6 said that one of the members of the family was a primary school teacher in another Authority and that she had suggested that the elder boy should be placed in a mainstream school. Parent 6 had, however, chosen a resourced school for both boys on the recommendation of the other parents that she had met through a speech and language group.

Although Parent 6 could visualise EP11 and remembered her attending some of the meetings about the children, she was unable to differentiate the support that EP11 had provided from that provided by other professionals:

'The whole thing just seems like such a blur to be honest, it sounds awful but I forget what everyone's actually done cos everyone's been very helpful but I know she's been like, she used to hold the meetings and things and be there in the nursery to sort of say how things were going and be there.'

The timing of the interview may have been partially responsible for this response:

'I mean I think it's just, it's been a weekend and it's hard to sort of, you've been up at 4 in the morning for the last 3 days so I'm quite like ugh at the moment, surviving on coffee and getting by.'

The provocative proposals generated from Parent 6's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs work as part of a really helpful team to support the parents of children with complex needs
- Sefton EPs are available on the end of the telephone when you need them
- Sefton EPs ensure that parents get their children's needs met quickly

5.2.12 Parent 7's story

Parent 7 provided confirmation of EP2's perceptions of her skills with parents, although Child 7 was selected from the list of children provided by the Portage team rather than one of the examples used in EP2's own interview. Parent 7 was introduced to EP2 by Portage worker 2. Parent 7 wanted Child 7 to attend a specialist school for children with severe learning difficulties and EP2 was seen as part of the process for obtaining a place at this school.

EP2 was seen as really friendly and the assessment process was much less formal than Parent 7 was expecting. Parent 7 was particularly relieved that she was not expected to write anything:

'I know when people think of psychologists it's like, oh, it's...she's really friendly and it's just basically about the child it's not about you at all, so I think some parents think, oh are they gonna look at me but it's not like that at all it's just really about Child 7, it's not a frightening situation, she just comes, she's really friendly and it's to basically have a look at what the child's like and assessing their needs.'

The provocative proposals generated from Parent 7's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs are really friendly
- Sefton EPs make parents feel comfortable
- Sefton EPs come round to your home
- Sefton EPs observe children in settings which are familiar to them
- Sefton EPs describe children accurately in ways that parents can understand
- Sefton EPs are available on the telephone if parents need to speak to them again

5.2.13 Parent 8's story

Parent 8 described how she had done her own research on the internet because she suspected that Child 8 was autistic. When he was two, she contacted one of the consultant community paediatricians who had been given good reports by other parents. Parent 8 had then been put in contact with the ASD link nurse, who provided her with a lot of papers. Parent 8 thought that she had found the contact details for the EP team in these papers and she was then able to ring EP11.

EP11 came round to the house and Parent 8 said that they 'hit it off straightaway'. Parent 8 had expected that once Child 8 was in the system, she would be put in touch with someone who would co-ordinate things for her, but this did not seem to happen. There did not seem to be one central place where all the information that she needed was available. EP11 was described as 'the fount of all knowledge' because she knew the contacts that were necessary so she helped Parent 8 identify the people she needed to be in touch with at a given stage for Child 8.

Parent 8 said that she was originally thinking about Child 8 going to a mainstream school, possibly the same school as her daughter. She did not feel that EP13 put her under any pressure to let go of the idea of mainstream and she was supported in going to visit all the different sorts of provision that are available. (As she lives in the centre of the Borough, there are a wide range of different types of schools available within reasonable travelling distance).

The provocative proposals generated from Parent 8's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs are a key source of support for parents
- Sefton EPs visit parents at home
- Sefton EPs are available on the telephone
- Sefton EPs focus on the needs of the child
- Sefton EPs support parents in sifting through all the information and finding out what's best for their child
- Sefton EPs provide parents with choices
- Sefton EPs have good contacts with other services and can put parents in touch with the right service at the right time

5.2.14 Synthesis of themes from parent interviews

In addition to analysing each of the transcripts of the parent interviews separately, the seven transcripts were analysed together to enable the basic themes described by the provocative proposals to be grouped into eight organising themes. These were then drawn together under the global theme of 'Supporting parents in understanding their children's needs.' :

- EPs get to know our children in a range of familiar settings
 - EPs provide us with a good picture of our children's needs and also their strengths
 - EPs look at the needs of the whole family
 - EPs can help us manage our children's behaviour
 - EPs have good contacts and can work as part of a team
 - EPs can help us sift through all the information
 - EPs provide us with informed choices
 - EPs are relaxed, friendly and approachable but they are also honest with us
- (See figure 5.3, below).

As noted above, there were many parallels between these themes and the perceptions of the EPs interviewed about the contribution that the profession makes to very young children and their families (see table 5.1, below). Where parents had received support from EP2 or EP3, there was also evidence to substantiate these EPs' perceptions of their own skills.

Figure 5.3: What does our best practice look like to parents?

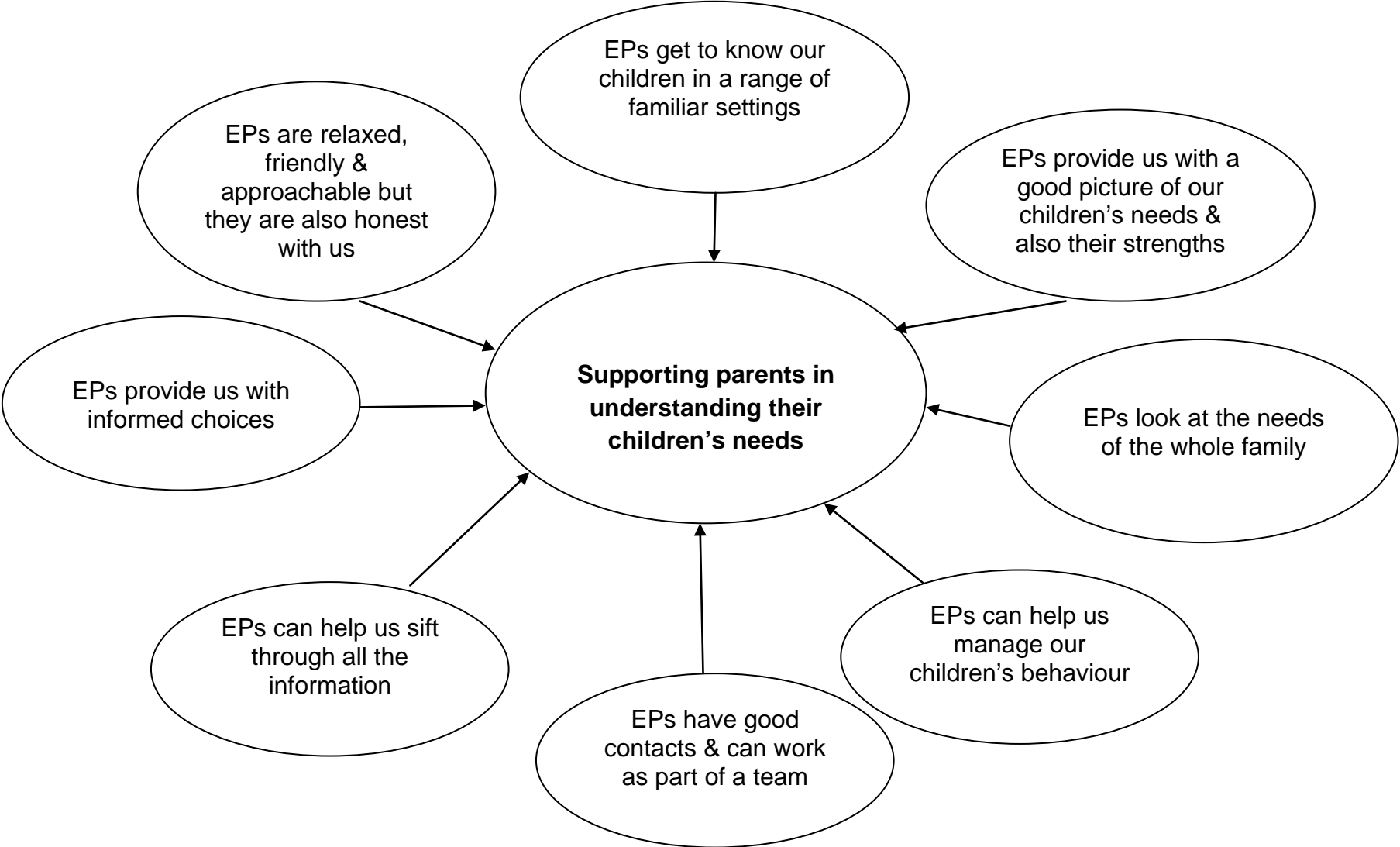


Table 5.1: Comparison of organising themes from EP interviews with organising themes from parent interviews

EPs' perceptions of the contribution made
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A knowledge of child development • A knowledge of how children learn best • An understanding of the psychology of adults • Empathy for parents and a recognition of where they're starting from • An ability to recognise and utilise the strengths of others • A knowledge of Local Authority systems and processes • Good communication skills and the ability to put people at their ease
Parents' perceptions of the service received
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • EPs provide us with a good picture of our children's needs and also their strengths • EPs get to know our children in a range of familiar settings • EPs look at the needs of the whole family • EPs can help us manage our children's behaviour • EPs have good contacts and can work as part of a team • EPs can help us sift through all the information • EPs provide us with informed choices • EPs are relaxed, friendly and approachable but they are also honest with us

In most cases, although the parents interviewed had received support for their children from a range of different professionals, they were able to describe the distinctive contribution made by the EP concerned. The one exception was Parent 6, who has two boys with an ASD diagnosis. Although she could visualise EP11 and knew that she was a member of the team that had supported both boys, Parent 6 was unable to differentiate the nature of the support provided by the EP from the support provided by the rest of the team.

The partnership between the EPs and the Portage team was seen as particularly effective. Parents 1 and 5 were very complimentary about the support provided by Portage worker 1 and Parent 7 described how Portage worker 2 had introduced EP2 to her. With Child 8, Parent 8 first made contact with EP11, who was the Portage supervisor at the time and was able to ensure that Child 8 was given access to the Portage service.

Without being prompted, Parent 1 provided corroboration of EP2's perceptions of the service that she had provided to the family (see 5.2.10 above and appendix 10). Parent 1 confirmed that EP2 had got to know Child 1 over time in a range of different settings and she had worked in partnership with Child 1's physiotherapist to help with management of Child 1's behaviour. EP2's distinctive contribution was thought to be the way in which she had provided support to the whole family.

As noted in 5.2.12, Parent 4 was impressed at the specificity with which EP2 described Child 4's strengths and needs, as opposed to the more general information that has been provided by other professionals:

Parent 4: 'She spoke about the fact that my son had lots of good points, very sociable, loved to copy other children and loved being around other children. Wasn't in a world of his own and she felt that alone...he would learn far better in a mainstream situation rather than in perhaps somewhere where they're more severe than him. '

Parent 8 described EP11 as 'the fount of all knowledge'. Although Parent 8 had the skills to research Child 8's condition on the internet, she found the way in which EP11 helped her to sift through the information and to put it in a local context to be invaluable. Although she was provided with the information that she needed, Parent 8 still felt that she had made her own decision about the choice of school for Child 8 (see 5.2.16, above). Parent 5 also confirmed that EP3 had provided her with the information that she needed to make her own choice of school for Child 5.

Parent 5 confirmed EP3's own perception that he is friendly and approachable. Although EP2 was also seen as approachable, it was noted that her honesty could be challenging at times:

'Thinking back on it, I knew that I could have a conversation with EP2 about, everything, and not just necessarily that she was just there to deal with Child 1 and that was probably what was needed at that time and maybe, by not having perhaps such a close hands on relationship with Child 1 and me and the family, she was in a better position to be able to point out what roads we needed to be going down, what we needed to consider, or what needed to be thrown into the pot perhaps.'

Because it is, you know, although Child 1 is the centre of this we're all going through it as well, you know the whole family and there are times when we need to be able to feel that we need to ask questions and I always felt that I was able to ask EP2, as I said, she was honest and to the point and we didn't always agree on what was said, but I knew I could ask and that was important to me, because we obviously wanted to make the right choice for Child 1 ultimately.'

5.3 Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - "What might be?"

5.3.1 Workshop A:

In Phase 2, the inquiry was broadened to include other early years stakeholders.

Twenty two participants attended Workshop A on 21st April 2009:

9 educational psychologists (EPs)

3 early years inclusion consultants (EYICONS) (formerly known as advisory teachers)

2 Portage workers (PWs)

2 representatives from Children's Services management, with a particular focus on extended schools and children's centres

1 physiotherapist (physio)

1 speech and language therapist (SALT)

1 consultant community paediatrician (CCP)

1 head teacher (HT)

1 area special educational needs coordinator (area SENCO)

1 parent partnership officer (PPO)

The activities carried out in the workshops are described in 4.6 (above). The aim was to elicit further narratives of real life situations where EPs had worked in partnership with other stakeholders to deliver an effective service to early years children, families and settings. These stories were then used as the basis for groups of between four and six participants to identify the common themes and to use these to describe best practice.

The EPs in the groups were given responsibility for collecting worksheets from their partners summarising their stories and for annotating the accounts, if

necessary. Each group was then asked to agree the common themes from the stories and participants used this information to record 'provocative proposals' for future EP working on flip charts. After completing this task, the groups were provided with the full list of provocative proposals generated from the EP and parent interviews for comparison with the statements developed in the workshop. All this material was used as the basis of the next day's workshop with the EP team and then collected for further analysis. At the end of the session, each participant was also asked to complete a written reflection/evaluation sheet giving their initial perceptions of the workshop and the AI process.

5.3.2 General observations

Following the initial presentation introducing AI and the background to the research, the activities planned ensured a high level of participation from all those present. The success of this approach was evident from the level of discussion taking place within the room. As there were five groups in the room, sometimes with more than one participant speaking at a time, I was unable to keep detailed notes of all the conversations taking place. Some of the other EPs could have been used to collect this information, but it was decided that to ask them to collect detailed notes would have put them in the role of observers rather than participants, thus reducing their involvement with the process. An alternative approach would have been to make audio recordings of all the conversations taking place, but it would have been challenging to transcribe and analyse this kind of data in time to make the results available for the next stage of the process. My role was therefore to ensure that participants understood the instructions for each of the activities set, particularly the generation of 'provocative proposals'.

5.3.3 Positive stories

Each of the nine EPs provided a worksheet summarising a positive story of joint working in the early years. The notes from the work sheets are presented in appendix 11, which also indicates how the basic themes emerging from these stories could be coded using the same categories as those used to summarise the themes from the interviews with the EPs (see appendix 6):

- Philosophy/principles (PP)

- Children (Ch)
- Families (F)
- Working together (WT)
- Outcomes-led (OL)
- EP's role (EP)
- Facilitators/barriers (F/B)

Although participants had been briefed in advance that they would be asked for examples of when EPs had worked well with them, the notes provided on two of the stories, PS4 and PS5, do not include EPs in the list of those involved.

5.3.4 Provocative proposals

The flipcharts collected by the EPs at the end of Workshop A listed the following provocative proposals:

- We focus on strengths whilst acknowledging challenges
- We seek always to highlight possibilities
- Communication is at the heart of all care
- Recording the child's journey
- We develop sincere and respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively
- We establish a shared starting point, jointly acknowledge progress and share goals
- Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family
- Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start
- Collaborative working is prioritised and valued
- All practice and procedures develop the strengths, well-being and skills of professionals
- Planning meetings are useful (essential to include E.Y.s children – section for E.Y.s)
- All parts of the jigsaw available to one another. Example: EP referrals to SALT to be copied into Paediatrician

As noted above, it was intended that these statements should summarise the themes that had emerged from group discussions on the positive stories of joint working elicited in the first part of the workshop. Given the way in which these data were collected, it is not possible to provide evidence of the full analytical process. Proposed links between the themes elicited from the notes made on the positive stories and this new set of provocative proposals are shown in appendix 12.

Although EPs 1, 2 and 3 were participants in the workshop, comparison of these statements with those derived from their initial interviews shows much more emphasis on the relationships between the adults involved rather than the earlier focus on putting the child's need first. This focus on the child was, however, still apparent in the positive stories collected by EPs 1 and 2 (see PS8 and PS6 respectively).

5.3.5 Summary of responses on reflection/evaluation sheets

At the end of the morning, participants were asked to provide written feedback on the workshop under the following headings:

- What were the most positive aspects of this morning's workshop?
- How will the session influence your future working with E.P.s?
- What applications can you see for appreciative inquiry in your area of work?
- Any other comments.

The majority of participants noted that sharing their thinking, ideals, vision and/or experience had been the most positive part of the morning for them. This was summarised by EP6 as *'Noticing that there is a strong values-driven consensus within the group focused on meeting the needs of children and families.'* The opportunities that the workshop had provided for networking and celebrating success were also valued. The Area SENCO listed *'Discussion across departments – sharing ideals, looking at areas for development, teasing out the issues'* as one of the positive features for her and the head teacher commented on the workshop's *'Emphasis on positive, not a moaning shop'*.

The other professionals present at the workshop anticipated that they would have improved communication and information sharing with EPs after the session. The

parent partnership officer noted that the session had given her a better understanding of the EP's role in the early years and there were indications that some of the respondents would be inviting EPs to become involved with families at an earlier stage in the future. During Phase 4, respondents confirmed that these aspirations had been met during the course of the year. (See 5.5, below).

The feedback received suggested that respondents had found the positive emphasis of AI to be an interesting approach which they could use to evaluate other aspects of service delivery. Early years ICON3 provided the following response: *'Reflecting on the findings/comments and feelings of others and adjusting and adapting ways of working to improve services.'* The interviews carried out with the early years ICONs during the final phase of the study indicate that the AI approach used in this workshop challenged their thinking and they have since been implementing a strengths-based approach to supporting very young children, families and settings, rather than a deficit model (see 5.5, below).

The other comments received indicated that participants had found the session to be enjoyable and stimulating. EP9 commented that the workshop had been *'a really good quality and productive session.'*

5.4 Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - "What should be the ideal?"

5.4.1 Workshop B

All members of the EP team were invited to attend the second workshop on 22nd April 2009. The activities carried out are described in 4.7 (above). The aim was to use the material generated from the appreciative interviews with parents, EPs and the preceding day's workshop with other early years stakeholders to create an agreed vision of future EP working with early years children, families and settings and to identify the actions needed to achieve this vision.

After a brief introduction to appreciative inquiry and the previous stages of this research, the EP team was split into the three area teams, each of which had at least two team members who had attended Workshop A. The early years EPs were then asked to share the highlights of the positive stories elicited from

stakeholders during the previous workshop and to give their views on the themes that had emerged from the group work. Following this activity, the groups carried out the visioning exercise described in 4.7:

Imagine you wake up tomorrow and we are providing the ideal early years service.

- What are we doing?
- Who are we working with?
- What are the things that made it happen?
- What makes this dream exciting?

The three area teams were then brought back together. The flipcharts with the provocative proposals from the previous day were displayed and each EP was provided with the full list of provocative proposals from the EP and parent interviews. Each team member was asked to review the list of 'provocative proposals' from Workshop A, in the light of their vision for the future, and to use post-it notes to indicate which of the proposals would be their top three priorities. The results were collated and new groups were put together using the ratings provided. Each EP was allocated to a group which would be planning the actions necessary for one of their top three proposals to be implemented.

At the end of the session, each participant was also asked to complete a written reflection/evaluation sheet.

5.4.2 Prioritisation of provocative proposals

Appendix 13 shows the ratings that each of the thirteen EPs gave to the provocative proposals from Workshop A, following their discussions in the three area teams on the positive stories elicited from early years stakeholders and their vision of how early years work should be carried out in the future.

The statements given the highest rankings were:

- We develop sincere and respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively
- Communication is at the heart of all care
- Collaborative working is prioritised and valued
- Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start
- Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family

These statements were therefore used as the basis for planning future actions, with each EP working in a group which was considering one of the statements that they had personally rated in the top three.

5.4.3 Action planning

Each of the new groups was allocated one of the team's top five provocative proposals and asked to carry out the following task:

For your provocative proposal:

- Revise, edit or improve the statement based on group discussion
- List all your ideas about specific things that can occur now or in the near future to realise the dream
- Record the key targets/actions/strategies necessary to make this happen, by whom and when
- How can we track that this is happening?

The outcomes from this task are presented in Appendix 14. The group allocated the task of planning actions to promote the development of sincere and respectful relationships presented their ideas in the form of an action plan, which addressed the first three bullet points, but the other groups only provided lists of actions. None of the groups provided detailed ideas on how the implementation of the actions identified should be tracked.

Although each of the groups had been given different provocative proposals to consider, the outcomes indicate that there had been some overlap in the areas discussed. This could have been because the provocative proposals used did not

represent discrete themes. An alternative explanation is that the members of each group chose to discuss the areas that were most important to them following the earlier activities. The written feedback provided indicated that all of the groups had considered the actions necessary for building effective sincere and respectful relationships with families and professionals. Three of the groups had also spent some time considering the first contact between EPs and families in some detail.

All of the actions listed could be grouped under one of the following headings:

- Developing EP practice
- Building on our relationships with other professionals
- Reviewing how we work with parents

(See appendix 14).

It was recommended that the theme of developing sincere and respectful relationships should be re-visited at one of the team's professional development meetings, along with what was understood by 'good communication'. In addition to sharing examples of best practice through team meetings, it was suggested that more use should be made of peer supervision and co-working. The need for the team to be reminded of the principles of Early Support was also highlighted.

The actions aimed at building sincere and respectful relationships with other professionals included:

- To find out more about good practice in multi-agency working from discussion of published research and visits
- To extend the scope of the research to find out more about best practice for EPs working with private and voluntary settings
- To learn more about work of other professionals/agencies working with EY children, for example by inviting representatives of other professional groups to talk about their work at EP team meetings, with an offer to reciprocate
- To develop joint working with other professionals – projects as well as casework.

The first contact was seen to be crucial in the development of effective relationships with parents/carers. As noted above, this was discussed in detail by three of the groups and the following actions identified:

- The establishment of a service protocol describing best practice in terms of the timing and method of contact
- Ensuring that the service leaflets give parents an accurate picture of what we do in the early years
- To consider whether the leaflets should be freely available to the general public, e.g. in libraries or whether they should be given out by the person referring to the service
- Parents to receive an acknowledgement letter from the PEP within two weeks of receipt of the referral, with a copy to the referrer
- Parents to be offered a choice of where we meet them, including in their own homes
- In the ideal situation, we should first meet the parent with someone they already know

5.4.4 Summary of responses on reflection/evaluation sheets

At the end of the morning, participants were asked to provide written feedback on the workshop under the following headings:

- What were the most positive aspects of this morning's workshop?
- How did you feel?
- What new ideas/learning occurred?
- How will the session influence your future working?
- Any other comments

The majority of the team noted that the emphasis on building on the team's strengths had been the most positive aspect of the workshop for them. This was summarised by EP7:

'Appreciative inquiry enabled me to think about the things that work and stopped me from feeding back complaints of others (even though I thought of them) This made the conversation more focused on the things that we do well and possibility.'

As with the participants in workshop A, the opportunity to share thinking and values with others was appreciated. Specific comments were also made on the importance of focusing on the team's early years work. For example, EP2 provided the response: *'That Early Years has taken Centre Stage with the whole team. AI was a good vehicle.'* Other members of the team valued the focus on action and the setting of concrete goals.

The AI literature often includes comments about the positive emotions elicited by the approach. Although there was a high level of engagement with Workshop A, participants made few comments about their emotional response to the approach on their feedback sheets. Participants in workshop B were therefore given an explicit question about their feelings. The three EPs who have been involved in the research from the beginning all described themselves as positive and optimistic about the future. The current early years EPs who joined the process in workshop A also described themselves as positive and motivated. For example, EP8 made the following comment:

'Motivated to continue to build on the good practice and improve aspects identified in discussions. The time frames for action also enabled me to feel that aspects in the service will develop.'

The responses from the three EPs who had only been involved for workshop B were more mixed, although TEP1 commented that everyone had contributed to the session, EP5 and TEP2 would have preferred more information about the AI process in advance of the workshop, describing themselves as 'playing catch-up'.

EP6 provided very detailed responses to the questions on the feedback sheet. He described his feelings as: *'A bit confused to begin with, but I could see where it was going by the end.'* In reflecting how the session was likely to influence his future working, he responded: *'I'm now familiar with appreciative inquiry and have a better understanding of how the early stages of the process can be translated into observable actions.'* EP6 described the new learning that had occurred in the session as: *'seeing the link between service development and professional practice – i.e. in order to achieve service goals (what people aspire to do) we have to examine professional practice (what they actually do).'*

The new learning identified by other members of the team included:

- learning about their own practice by having to make explicit what they were doing and why for the other EPs in their workshop groups
- learning about the practice of other members of the team
- clarifying the role of the EP
- gaining more insight into the perspectives of other agencies.

EP9 included the comment: *'Lots of possibilities. Most concrete being about encouraging peer working/co-working to increase respect and understanding.'*

EP7 gave the following response to the question about how the session was likely to influence her future working: *'It is good to have an understanding of what appreciative inquiry is and it would be useful to use with CS staff in future if you are in a system that is problem focused as a method of moving things forward without offending, upsetting or implying criticism.'* As noted above, EP6 also made specific mention of AI in his response to this question. Although the other EPs did not mention AI, they expressed the intention to notice more of what works well and to incorporate positive phraseology into future practice.

5.5 Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - "How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise"

5.5.1 Tracking the implementation of changes

This was the most challenging aspect of the study, as very little could be planned in advance because the methods of data collection and analysis were dependent on the actions identified by the team members involved in Workshop B. As noted above, although the April AI workshops were perceived to be challenging and informative, none of the EP groups in Workshop B developed concrete proposals for tracking the implementation of the actions listed. The study could therefore have been strengthened by a further session with the EPs to clarify how progress would be tracked. There was also the assumption that the early years EPs, as a group, would take responsibility for taking the lead in implementing many of the actions listed.

In April 2009, the early years EPs consisted of:

North: EP2, EP8 and EP9

Central: EP 6 and EP10

South: EP3 and EP7

Although the EPs concerned were attending monthly casework allocation sessions on a rota basis within their area teams, there was no established pattern of meetings for the full group of early years EPs and since EP11 had left the service, there was no one within the team who had a clear remit for taking a leading role in our work with very young children. Discussion with the PEP suggests that this was deliberate as when the casework allocation meetings were first introduced, the early years EPs said that they would not need any management oversight. The PEP was therefore 'taking a back seat' to see how the EPs concerned would develop their role.

5.5.2 Review of progress made during the Summer Term 2009

Even if the early years EPs had been meeting on a regular basis and had established a team identity, the following changes in personnel meant that the team would have had to re-establish itself in September 2009:

- EP3 retired at the end of August 2009
- EP10 left to take up a promoted post in another North West Authority
- EP9 had to reduce his early years' casework as he had been asked to lead on a parenting project in partnership with the children's centres.
- TEPs 3 and 4 joined the team in August 2009.

The Early Years team for 2009/10 is therefore:

North: EP2 and EP8

Central: EP6, TEP3 and TEP4

South: EP7, TEP1 and TEP2

These personnel changes provided the opportunity for me to revisit the findings from the Phase One appreciative interviews and to gather information on the implementation of any actions arising out of Phases Two and Three. The EP team has fortnightly professional development sessions led by one of the area teams on a rota basis. The meeting on 16th September 2009 was due to be led by the North team, which I manage. Permission was therefore sought from the other members

of the area team to use the session for a session on AI and early years. The content of the session was summarised on a handout (see Appendix 15).

Following a brief résumé of the AI cycle, Figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 (above) were used to summarise the findings from the appreciative interviews with EPs and parents. The comments from parents regarding their uncertainty about ongoing support from the team were phrased as 'a wish for the future' in the form of the following provocative proposal:

- Sefton E.P.s keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

The team were reminded of the provocative proposals from the April stakeholders' workshop and then split into pairs to consider the following questions:

- What did we achieve last term?
- What do we need to do next?
- How will we know that we've achieved our goals?

The following personal achievements were identified:

Although EP9 no longer has any time allocated for EY casework, he described how he had decided to retain responsibility for EP input to one family with a very young child with complex needs as the family was at an early stage in understanding what the implications of their child's needs were. They were likely to need information to be provided little-by-little over time and EP9 had only just introduced himself to them so he said that he would like to continue working with the family. This provided EP9 with the opportunity to provide further evidence of the practice summarised in figures 5.2 and 5.3 and this account was subsequently confirmed by Portage worker 1 (see 5.5.12, below). EP6 described how he was taking a similar approach with the family of one of the early years children that had been allocated to him. In both cases, these were male members of the team providing support to fathers, a role which was endorsed by the Early Years ICONs (see 5.5.13, below).

EP5 is not one of the early years team, but she reported that she had noticed an improvement at school planning meetings in how information on children entering school was handed over to the EP, ICON and SENCO for the school concerned from the early years team. She described the procedures as 'really tight now'.

EP8 joined the service in January 2009. During Workshop A, she had worked in a group with one of the consultant community paediatricians for the North of the Borough. EP8 said that CCP had since been much more willing to share information about children with whom they were both working. Prior to the workshop, she had not received any phone calls from CCP and they were now talking to each other much more frequently. This was confirmed in TEP3's telephone interview with CCP in February 2010, (see 5.5.11, below).

EP4 is not currently a member of the early years team but she drew on her extensive experience to describe how initial visits to parents/carers had been handled in the past.

EP2 said that she'd noticed that there had been more informal discussions within the team about practice within the early years.

5.5.3. Introduction of meetings for Early Years EPs

Although evidence of individual action was provided and noted, there was still no clear consensus within the team about how future actions should be tracked. I therefore decided that more formal tracking procedures were needed. As noted above, prior to the project starting, the PEP introduced a system of monthly meetings at which early years casework requests are allocated to EPs, Portage workers or early years ICONs according to their perceived roles and the area of the Borough in which the family lives. As there is more than one EP for each area, they attend these meetings on a rota basis. The allocation meetings start at 3.30 pm, all the early years EPs were therefore invited to meet at 1.30pm on these afternoons to share progress towards the actions identified in Workshop B and to plan new actions. These meetings are minuted and the minutes sent to participants for checking (see appendix 4)

5.5.4. Summary of Autumn Term Activities

At the first early years EP team meeting, discussion centred round the three headings listed in 5.4.4.:

- Developing EP practice
- Building on our relationships with other professionals
- Reviewing how we work with parents

The time needed for working effectively with early years children and their families was discussed. It was suggested that each child should be allocated a minimum of two sessions of EP time, but that some families would require more and that there needed to be a system for tracking when a review was needed. Procedures for transition were discussed and it was agreed that what we mean by the phrase 'transfer to school-based systems' needed to be specified in more detail.

It was agreed that there was a continuing need to learn more about the roles of other professionals working with very young children. EP7 and TEP4 were therefore asked to invite a physiotherapist and an occupational therapist to a team meeting to discuss their role and to explore ideas for joint working. EP12 was asked to extend a similar invitation to a health visitor and TEP1 agreed to offer to reciprocate, in partnership with another member of the EP team.

Each of the EPs present shared examples of their existing practice in making the first contact with parents/carers and maintaining contact with them. It was agreed that where we are the first service to work with the family, we should phone the parent/carer and let them know that we have been asked to work with their child. The parent should then be given the opportunity to provide their views first, either in the setting or in their home. Those present had different views about discussing children with parents by telephone. It was agreed that the practices discussed could apply to parents/carers of school age children as well as early years children and that this issue should be raised at a full team meeting.

At the full service business meeting on 25 November 2009, all members of the EP team were given the opportunity to share their practice in involving parents with their work. Most of the team reported that they were in regular contact with parents

by telephone and the general view was that we should treat the parents/carers of the children that we were working with in the same way that we would expect to be treated our selves. The findings from this meeting have been summarised in a best practice document which has been included in the team's induction folder.

5.5.5. Spring Term 2010

The minutes of the January early years EP team meeting are attached as appendix 4. Prior to this meeting, a reminder of the arrangements was sent to all the early years EPs by e-mail and it was suggested that it would be helpful if each member of the group could reflect on the following questions:

- Which aspect of your Early Years work in 2009 are you most proud of?
- Who else would have noticed your contribution to this piece of work?
- What would be the best way of asking them for their views?
- What are you hoping to achieve in your Early Years work in 2010?
- What are your hopes for the SEPPS Early Years team in 2010?

The first part of the meeting therefore consisted of eliciting responses to these questions. Appendix 4 provides a summary of the new positive stories provided and the future actions agreed.

5.5.6 Rediscovery

As noted in 4.8.2, above, the original proposal for this thesis included plans for a concluding workshop with the participants of Workshop A to gather evidence of any changes in EP practice that they had noticed during the course of the project. Informal feedback collected after one of the above meetings initiated with the early years EPs indicated that there was a danger that the project was being perceived as 'Eileen's research' rather than a collaborative approach to modelling service delivery on the views of stakeholders. It was therefore decided to involve the early years EPs in planning the final stage of the study.

At the January meeting described in 5.5.5. (above), the early years EP team discussed the pros and cons of interviews, questionnaires and group-based approaches to data collection. It was decided that eliciting views from the Workshop A participants on an individual basis could provide richer data than if they were subject to the pressures for consensus implicit in group-based

approaches. One approach to collecting the information required would have been for each of the nine EPs involved in Workshop A to interview their original partners. As noted above, however, two of the EPs concerned had since left the service and some of the other EPs provided reasons as to why their involvement might skew the results. Both of the new trainee EPs volunteered to help, on the grounds that the experience would be useful for their own professional development.

During February 2010, twelve of the thirteen stakeholders who attended Workshop A were invited to participate in interviews to evaluate the impact of appreciative inquiry on our partnership working. (The head teacher who attended Workshop A has since retired). I conducted face-to-face appreciative interviews with the two Portage workers and the three early years ICONs, as these are the partners with whom early years EPs work most frequently and were therefore most likely to have noticed any difference in EP practice since April 2009. These interviews were digitally recorded, transcribed and analysed in a similar way to the original interviews with EPs and parents.

TEPs 3 and 4 were given the task of contacting the remaining seven stakeholders to invite them to participate in telephone interviews. TEP3 was able to interview the three health professionals who had attended Workshop A: a speech and language therapist, a physiotherapist and a consultant community paediatrician. She made notes on the replies given and then sent them for member checking before forwarding them to me for thematic analysis. Despite making repeat telephone calls and following them up by e-mails, TEP4 was less successful in making contact with the four stakeholders with a community support role. This was disappointing, as it would have been useful to obtain the perceptions of these partners on EP9's work with parents, but he has since reported similar difficulties in communication with the individuals concerned.

It was proposed that the following questions would be used:

- Has appreciative inquiry had any influence on your work since you attended the workshop on 21st April?
- Have you noticed any differences in joint working with EPs since the workshop?
- Has there been an example of a particularly effective piece of collaborative work that you could describe?
- How do you think EPs' work complements your own role?
- What are your hopes for future working with EPs?

The transcripts provided by TEP3 suggest that she omitted to ask question 1, so no data was provided on whether AI had influenced the work of the health professionals involved in this study, but this was offset by the strength of the response from the early years ICONs (see below). All those interviewed provided responses to questions 2, 3, 4 and 5. The responses provided were compared with the 'provocative proposals' given the highest rankings by EPs in Workshop B:

- We develop sincere and respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively
 - Communication is at the heart of all care
 - Collaborative working is prioritised and valued
 - Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start
 - Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family
- (See appendix 13).

The interview transcripts were also examined for evidence of any facilitators or barriers to effective joint working and any new themes that could inform future working.

5.5.7 Collaborative working is prioritised and valued

As might be expected from the questions used, joint working was the strongest theme in all the transcripts and each of the early years EPs was mentioned by name in at least one positive story. Some of the accounts given also provided corroboration of the examples of work provided by EPs during the service meetings and early years team meetings described above.

In her telephone interview with TEP3, the physiotherapist reported that it was good to share an understanding of the child's needs, meet other professionals face-to-face and to discuss roles. She used one of the examples of joint working described by EP2 in a recent professional development meeting for the EP service as a positive story. This had involved many professionals working together to coordinate intervention/share actions. The physiotherapist's perception was that this was better for the child and the family. She said that working with EPs has helped her to meet targets and agree support with others. This was felt to be particularly important in complex cases and better outcomes had been noted when this has happened.

The early years ICONs described how their anxieties about how the restructuring of the teaching and EP teams might impact on joint working had been unfounded and that there was now more evidence of genuine collaboration between the two teams:

'Well I think we've always been quite good at working as a team, in a team way, I mean I wasn't sure when we separated as two different services if that was going to cause some distance between the way we work but in fact it hasn't has it and I think we're quite good at meeting together informally and more formally at meetings and in reviews and I think we had a good shared approach to meeting needs and working with families really. I feel it's an informal comfortable way that we work together really and I don't think either agency feels threatened by the other and I think we recognise there are different ways that we work and there are different skills that we bring to families and to schools.' (EYICON3).

'Yeah I think there is a lot more joined up work in between the two teams now, even though we've become two separate teams I think we're joining up more...Previously it used to be either one went in or the other went in but now we're looking at, rather than duplicate each other's work we are looking at ways where we can help each other really.' (EYICON1)

Portage worker 1 had also noticed that she was working more closely with EPs, but she was uncertain as to whether this was as a result of the AI workshop or the fact that the Portage team and EPs now shared a base.

5.5.8 We develop sincere and respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively

EYICON2 used an example of collaborative working in a school to illustrate her view that good practice in joint working was not about ascribing a particular role to all EPs or ICONs, but about individuals recognising the strengths and skills of the people with whom they are working in partnership:

“I mean often it seems to be that because of schools and graduated response it can still sometimes feel like jumping through hoops and with the EPs ultimately being the gatekeeper for statement specialist and provision and so on, and I think that in that particular instance in turned, that was completely turned on its head and you’d actually been seen, you’d actually been asked to see a child who you had seen and then subsequently you suggested that I did a maths recovery, which is something that obviously I’m able to do and it completely reverses the process, but it’s about looking at people’s skills in terms of enabling school to best meet the needs of the child and I, I don’t know that’s the one thing I think has been really good.”

Mutual respect and a shared vision of how to work together to improve the life chances of children were therefore seen as key factors in effective joint working and this view was felt to have been endorsed by Workshop A. It was, however, noted that one of the EPs present at the workshop had said that what EPs brought was the psychological perspective, without giving any recognition to what ICONs bring. This view was challenged on the grounds that psychology is not a discrete discipline and EPs are not the only professionals with knowledge of psychology.

5.5.9 Communication is at the heart of all care

Evidence of improved channels of communication with EPs was provided by the consultant community paediatrician interviewed by TEP3. He reported that there had been greater and more frequent information sharing by EPs since Workshop A, in the form of letters and reports. This was felt to be a two-way process, as the paediatricians had also been prompted to share more documentation with EPs.

These findings corroborate the account provided by EP8 in the September EP service meeting of how she had found the paediatrician concerned to be far more accessible since they had been in the same group during Workshop A.

EYICON1 reported that there was now much more evidence of genuine joint working starting much earlier in the process and involving support for staff in settings as well as children:

'It works well because we're communicating a lot more and finding out what's the best piece of work so there's no duplication and in fact I've been on visit today with EP6 as well, so yeah we have quite a lot of shared cases and we're looking at how we can move forward by identifying training needs for a setting and how that's going to work.'

While Portage worker 2 endorsed her colleague's view of the benefits of co-location with the EP team and how this had facilitated communication:

'We do feel part of the team and if we need to ask anything over a child we, we're literally just next door or across the corridor. So that has made a big difference to us.'

5.5.10 Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start

The general perception was that *'there's more time and, you know, people are more available.'* There had also been a change in the timing of EPs' involvement with very young children and their families since Workshop A:

'I think the main thing, one of the other things we took from it, I was in a group with EP10 on the day...but we talked about this, there being a tendency in the past...that the EPs were only called in or referred to when it went to statutory assessment and you know it shouldn't be the case. Especially if you're looking at it from the point of view that you are now, they're not the ones that should come in at the last minute to try and save everything....With that in mind really and having spoken to EP10 when we have our allocation meetings, if there's a child we're working from right from the beginning I say well let's go for it, if we can let's go for a joint allocation and then if both of us aren't needed further down the line that's fine, but

rather than wait until it goes to statutory assessment, oh we need an EP, you know like they're the gatekeeper.' (EYICON1)

This change in the perception of the EP's role has facilitated the ability to match the pace of involvement to the needs of the family. Portage worker 1 provided evidence of this approach and corroborated the account given by EP9 in the September EP service meeting (see 5.5.2, above):

'They needed a really gentle softly, softly approach. Not being ... not feeling like they were being pushed into anything they weren't ready to do yet and we are still taking it very, very slowly and EP9 has been wonderful in that way that he has been very hands off really rather than hands on and just guided them really.'

There was also evidence that individual EPs could respond quickly if necessary. The consultant community paediatrician described a case in which a child was referred to him at a relatively late stage (four years old). He was able to make contact with the named EP to gather information and quickly prioritise this case. He said this was useful because it speeded up the assessment process and it became possible to establish the child's needs prior to school entry.

5.5.11 Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family

As noted above, respondents had noticed that the early years EPs were able to match the pace of their involvement to the needs of the family. As the early years ICONs and the Portage workers are all female, they therefore saw the presence of male EPs in the early years EP team as a distinct advantage for working with fathers:

'I think maybe one of the ones I'm working on with EP6 at the moment, it's very much ongoing but we went in, I think, he came on board slightly after I had but we'd been working jointly and we've identified that there are different, the needs of the child and the context of the setting, but there's also the needs of the family which is quite an unusual family background, it's a single dad and grandparents and the dad has some learning needs. So we decided the focus that EP6 would work maybe more with the family to talk about needs at home and I would work with the setting.' (EYICON1)

'He's been able to talk to the dad much more on a man to man kind of way... Really made a difference with this family much, much more. Dad was much more receptive to this man coming in and saying, well you know we could do this, or we could do that. And you know we need to look at nurseries, we need to, you need to think about this and think about how it's going to affect (child's name) in the future and her needs. And dad was very receptive to it and I think he was more receptive to it coming from EP9 as a man than if EP9 had been one of our women EPs.' (PW1)

5.5.12 Evidence of how AI has influenced the work of other professionals

As noted above, the transcripts of TEP3's telephone interviews with the health professionals who attended Workshop A did not provide any data on whether AI had influenced their own work. Both the Portage workers thought that the session had endorsed their existing approach. There was, however, strong evidence of the impact of the approach on the thinking and working of the early years ICONs:

'It made me re-think how we do work, I have to admit and I think all too often it's that deficit model isn't it...and even when we looked at our referral forms for early years, up until then it had always been about highlighting the child's weaknesses and that worked to, that it did make me open my eyes to how we worked and going into settings on visits, I was using that method a bit more and trying to get them to identify what they've done that was right and how that had worked and why it had worked to move forward.'

(Interviewer: 'And did you find that helpful?')

'Yeah I think it's helpful in, it gives the settings more confidence as well and it empowers them a little bit more. Rather than you going in asking, oh what's gone wrong?' (EYICON1)

Early Years ICON2 had a vision of the future which included further opportunities for identifying and building on best practice:

'I think it could be in the long run, it could be useful that we've had those sessions together and shared those areas of, and I think really more of the things that we know have worked well when we have done joint visits, when we have done joint observations, and we have got multi agency meetings around the child and where that has worked and maybe further evaluation

as to what does work well and focusing on that. Because that was something that I really took away from that workshop, the point about, you know we talk about it in terms of behaviour management of children and don't focus on the negative because that's the thing that will, get worse or will increase or whatever, but to actually think about, well what works and actually, and I think that's quite, I do think that is quite a shift really in thinking, it absolutely makes sense, focus on the positives, what we're doing well, well let's think about doing that more and it's a much, I think it's a much more, kind of like stress less way of thinking about things rather than worrying about things that we're not doing, we can actually build on the strengths it absolutely makes sense to do that.'

5.5.13 Changing perceptions of the role of the EP

During the workshop, EP10 had endorsed the concerns expressed in the interview with EP3 that the role of the EP in the early years was in danger of becoming very narrow. This fitted with EYICON1's perception of the previous system in which the EP came in at the last stage of planning the child's transition to school; often investigating the child's needs separately from the ICON and therefore at risk of duplicating the activities already carried out. The interviews also provided evidence that this style of working was perceived as hierarchical with the EP's view of the child's needs having greater status than the views of the professionals working with children and families during the earlier stages of the process. This perceived difference in status was potentially divisive and could have been a barrier to genuinely collaborative working, whereas the new style of working together was seen as empowering by the EYICONS and the Portage workers.

For the EYICONS and the Portage workers, the role of the EP was seen as taking the lead in situations where a child's behaviour was reported to be causing concern and in a shared approach to children with very complex needs. As noted above, there was also evidence that the gender balance of the EP team could be useful in working with families. Although the physiotherapist was very positive about her recent work with EP2, she did not provide a clear distinction between their roles. The speech and language therapist also saw EPs as having a role in helping to interpret a child's behaviour and in determining whether a child's speech and language difficulties were general or specific by providing information on the

child's non-verbal skills. The paediatrician described how the information that EPs can provide on how a child functions in real world settings can complement observations made in the clinic.

5.5.14 Positive stories

With the exception of EYICON3, all respondents were able to provide at least one positive story to illustrate their perceptions of effective joint working with the early years EPs since Workshop A and EYICON3's response was: *"I feel it's all good, I wouldn't really like to highlight a specific case."*

Each member of the early years EP team was mentioned by name at least once and the examples provided have been used to illustrate the themes described above.

5.5.15 Facilitators/barriers

As with previous interviews, although the general tone was very positive, it was possible for EYICON1 to voice her opinion on some of the limitations of the present EP service. Although she gave examples of effective joint work with TEPs as well as with EPs, EYICON1 had found that it could be difficult arranging joint appointments because of the TEPs' University commitments. She also expressed concern about the risks of a lack of consistency and continuity of service if too many EPs were included in the early years team.

Other respondents, such as EYICON3 and Portage worker 1 had valued the opportunities that the extension of the early years EP team had provided:

'I think we've got good relationships, yeah, I mean I've worked with TEP1 and TEP2 and, you know, just if you're having a cup of tea I'll say, 'Have you ever known this before?' and 'Have you got any information on this particular thing?', 'What would you do about this?', 'Who could I contact?', you know, all the time you're seeking information, be it informally over a cup of tea or, you know, in a more formal context as well. So I think we've learnt a lot from the new staff and personnel.' (EYICON3)

Although the speech and language therapist interviewed by TEP3 was able to provide a positive story of joint work with EP2, she noted that the speech and language therapy team had been understaffed this year and this could have impeded the progress of joint working.

5.5.16 Dreams

Early years ICON1 wanted the two teams to build on the present way of working and she was hoping that EPs would be able to support the early years ICONs in establishing a support network for the staff from early years settings. In an ideal world, however, she would prefer to work as a member of a team dedicated solely to working with very young children, families and settings:

'I mean my ultimate dream really is to have a proper early years team, I've always wanted that. With lots of professionals and possibly located together.'

Other respondents wanted to continue to build on existing good practice:

'Well I think like the allocation system that we have currently, that's something else really I could have talked about before, I think that's worked well were we've sat together and looked at well, what are the needs of this particular child that's been referred? Who has got the skills and is this something we can work on together or should one of us start first and then mull it over between us? That kind of thing. So developing the allocations really I think and having more formal opportunities to reflect on what we've done since the referral, I think, you know, we just give a little brief update don't we at those monthly meetings, you know, review, done this, done that but maybe to reflect a little bit more, well did that work or could we have done something better? So analysing a little bit more together what we've done really.' (EYICON3)

5.5.17 Co-creating the future

The findings from the Phase Four interviews with stakeholders were presented to the Early Years EP team on 8th March 2010 and to the full EP team on 24th March 2010. The early years EPs have agreed the following actions:

- To consider sharing the AI approach and the findings from this study with the school-based ICONs
- To analyse the differences in early years referrals across the three areas of the Borough
- To implement strategies to ensure consistency of EP working across the three area teams
- To review the functioning of some aspects of allocation meetings
- To implement strategies to ensure that parents are supported through the transition process
- To prioritise partnership working with speech and language therapists.

The full EP team has allocated another session in April 2010 to review the purposes of eliciting feedback from service users and other stakeholders and to compare AI with the other approaches available.

5.6. Summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the findings from all four phases of this complex study which has tracked the appreciative inquiry process over a period of eighteen months.

During the first phase of the project, three EPs provided rich narratives illustrating what drives them to work with very young children, families and settings and the contribution that they think EPs make to this area of work. Individual EP's views of their own skills were corroborated by interviews with parents and the themes elicited from all seven parental stories confirm that the service that they received met the EPs' expectations of best practice.

Although the AI approach provided many positive examples of EP working, participants were also able to highlight possible barriers to effective working. For EPs, these included concerns about the timing of their involvement and the

pressures of statutory assessment. For the parents interviewed, these included a lack of clarity over arrangements for EP involvement when children start attending school. The study has provided evidence that these issues have since been addressed.

The feedback sheets from the two workshops on AI held in April 2009 indicate that both EPs and the other early years stakeholders valued the opportunity to share their thinking, ideals, vision and experience of joint working. 'Provocative proposals' describing best practice in EP working with very young children, their families and settings were developed in partnership with stakeholders and then ranked by the full EP team. Action plans to implement the service described were also devised.

The last section of this chapter describes how the implementation of the action plans was tracked from April 2009 to March 2010 using a variety of different methods. During February 2010, the participants from the stakeholders workshop in April 2009 were interviewed to elicit their perceptions of any differences in EP working and the impact that AI had had on their own work. Each of the EPs involved were mentioned by name in at least one positive story and the interviews also provided evidence that the early years EPs had been implementing all five of the provocative proposals seen as the team's highest priorities. AI was found to have had the greatest impact on the thinking of early years ICONs who had since been working to a strengths-based approach, rather than to a deficit model of child development.

Chapter Six – Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the implications of the findings set out in detail in chapter five and the supporting appendices, summarising what has been learnt from this study and how this learning provides an original contribution to knowledge. This is presented through two strands:

- What is it about EP work in the early years that is valued and how can this be extended?
- What has been learnt about the use of AI as a research tool for use in local authority contexts?

This thesis has tracked the development of a group of generic EPs over time in the absence of a senior practitioner. Evidence is presented to demonstrate that an AI approach has been successful in providing answers to the following research questions, as listed in chapters one and four:

1. What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?
2. How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?
3. How can this inform EP practice?

These findings are discussed in the context of the development of the systemic, solution-orientated model of service delivery introduced in parallel with this research. The implications for current and future EP practice are considered through the topics of best practice in working with parents, transition, earlier and longer involvement, maintaining consistency of service delivery, consultation with stakeholders and the role of senior specialist for early years.

This chapter then provides answers to the fourth research question: what are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working, by extending the critique of AI methodology included in chapter five. The successes and challenges that using this approach presented are reviewed and suggestions made as to how AI could support the EP team in responding to the challenges of the new political agenda.

6.2 Delivering a solution-oriented EP service

Drawing on the work of Bill O'Hanlon (O'Hanlon, 2007) and others, Ioan Rees has developed a systemic, solution-oriented model for the delivery of public services based on the following ten principles:

1. If it works, do more of it; if it does not work, do something different
2. A small change in any aspect of a problem can initiate a solution
3. People have the necessary resources to make change possible
4. A focus on future possibilities and solutions enhances change
5. No sign-up, no change
6. Cooperation enhances change
7. The problem is the problem, not the person
8. Possibilities are infinite
9. People have unique solutions to their problems
10. Keep one foot in the pain and one in possibility (Rees, 2008, p. 170 – 172).

As noted in 3.3 (above) during the Autumn Term 2008, the EPs who participated in this thesis also spent two days working through the process of applying the solution-orientated model to the Sefton context. The outcome was summarised in a statement which Rees describes as the team's 'Core Professional Purpose' – the 'service promise' that the Sefton EPs present all committed to fulfil (op. cit, p. 175):

Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service

Promoting a Flourishing Community

Applying psychology collaboratively to promote the development, well-being and life opportunities of children and young people.

In addition to developing a common vision of the core purpose of the EP service, the team agreed a set of service principles, which it was intended would set the standards by which service delivery would be judged (op. cit. p. 176 -177):

SEPPS' Principles

We believe in:

- Integrity
- Possibility
- Fairness
- Inclusion
- Strengths
- Respect

Within this model, Rees describes the role of the manager/leader as 'policing' these principles in systemic practice:

'Systemic managers and leaders deliver the organisational vision by managing principles and systems within that organisation, not people. For the people to consistently perform at their best, the systems that will promote and support such performance need to be in place and understood within the context of the vision and principles.' (Op. cit., p.176)

This thesis demonstrates how AI can be used as a tool to support the managers of EP services in carrying out this role. The findings demonstrate how the work of Sefton early years EPs is informed by solution-orientated principles and the feedback received from early years stakeholders provides evidence that the team are able 'to walk the talk'. The positive stories elicited from parents and other partners indicate that the strengths-based philosophy of the EP service has been systematised and communicated effectively to new members of the team. The collaborative nature of the approach taken has also been empowering for the EPs themselves, particularly EP2 who commented in her annual personal development review (PDR) meeting that she had now got her motivation for early years work back.

As noted in 6.1, the study has also been able to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?

2. How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?
3. How can this inform EP practice?
4. What are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working?

The evidence in support of this claim is set out in the following sections of this chapter.

6.3 What do Sefton EPs perceive to be best practice in their early years work?

Section 5.2 (above) and the supporting appendices summarise the initial findings in respect of this research question. Thematic analysis of the Phase One interviews with EPs 1, 2 and 3 highlighted common themes across the three interviews illustrating both why and how the three EPs in question thought that they had contributed to best practice in their early years work. These findings were synthesised in figures 5.1 and 5.2, which have been reproduced below. Although these figures represent common themes from the three accounts, the context of each of the three narratives was different, indicating that the EPs in question believed that their early years work had made a difference at a whole system level, a family level and to the life of an individual child.

The stories provided by EPs 1, 2 and 3 supplied evidence that they sought to apply solution-orientated principles in their work by identifying and building on the strengths of the child, the family and the other professionals involved. This personal philosophy was most clearly articulated by EP1, who described how she had been able to apply these principles in effecting whole system change for early years children and their families in a previous authority. As EP1 now leads the Sefton EP team, she is therefore in a strong position to ensure that her style of working informs the way in which the service is delivered, including commissioning the input from Ioan Rees. The principles listed above and the stories provided by EPs 2 and 3 indicate that there is strong support within the team for this approach. This study has also provided evidence from parents and other stakeholders that their experience of how the service is delivered in the early years is congruent with the team vision.

Figure 5.1: What are Sefton Early Years EPs passionate about?

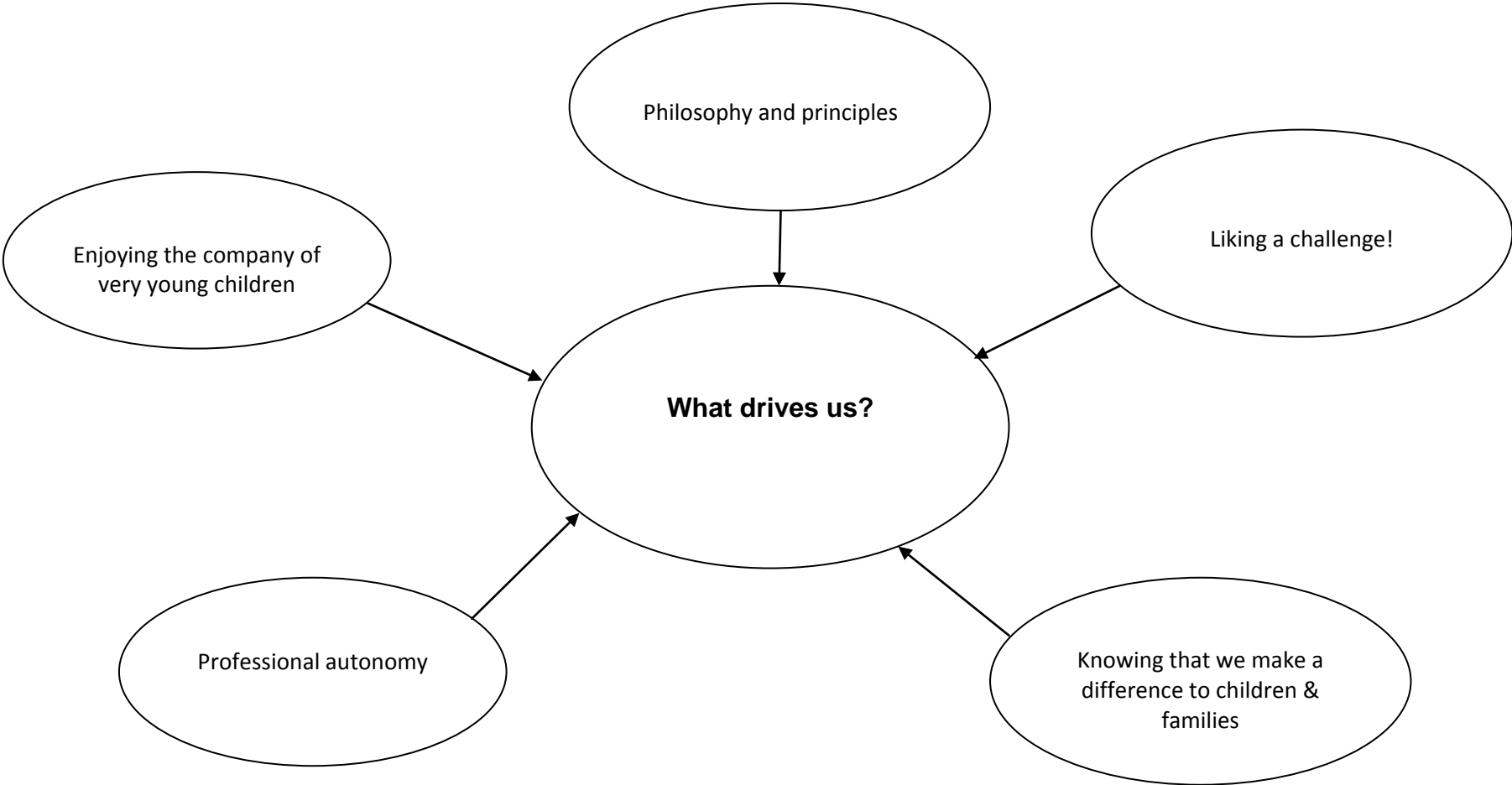
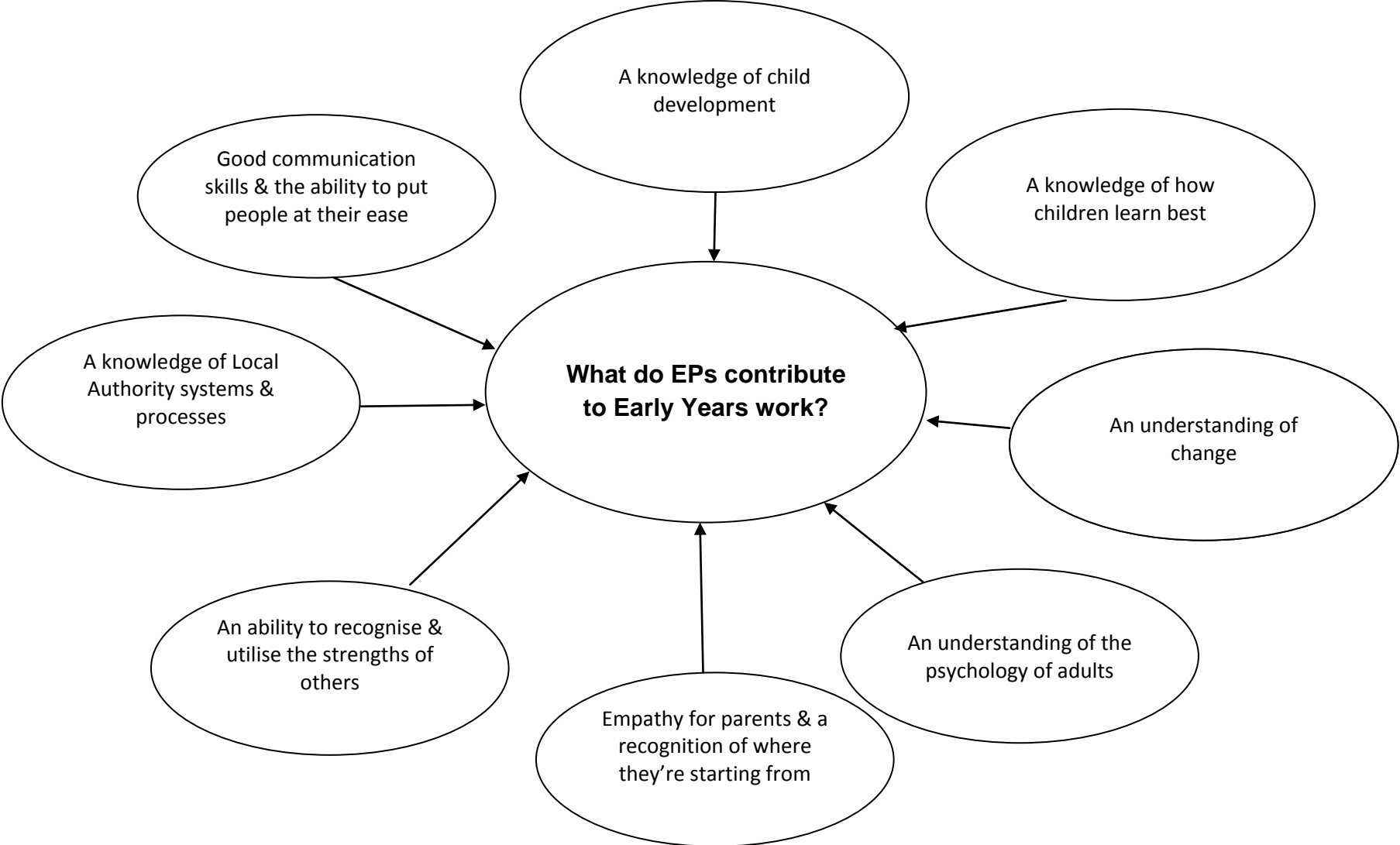


Figure 5.2: What do we think we contribute to Early Years work?



In addition to their knowledge of child development and how children learn best, the EPs interviewed saw themselves as having an understanding of change and the psychology of adults. As well as bringing these skills and knowledge to the 'team around the child', EPs 1, 2 and 3 thought that they also contributed a knowledge of Local Authority systems and processes. On a personal level, they saw themselves as having good communication skills and an ability to put people at their ease. They also considered themselves to have empathy for parents and they sought to recognise and build on the parents' knowledge of their own child. The interviews with parents confirmed that the EPs' perceptions of their personal attributes and the contribution that EPs can make was in good agreement with the service provided (see 6.4.1 below).

Further examples of the ways in which EPs can contribute to the early years agenda are included in the positive stories elicited in subsequent phases of the project (see 5.3.4, 5.5.2, 5.5.6 and 5.5.16 above). As in Phase One, the methodology used enabled EPs' own accounts of best practice to be independently corroborated by stakeholders (see 6.4.2 below).

In addition to providing information on EPs' perception of best practice in their early years work, the Phase One interviews elicited the views of the EPs concerned on facilitators and barriers to best practice (see 5.2.8, above). EP2 emphasised her need to feel that the managers/leaders of the team respected her professional judgement and the sense of personal autonomy that this engendered. The timing of the EP's involvement was also seen as a crucial element in the delivery of best practice. EP3 expressed concern at being brought in at too late a stage to 'rubber stamp' decisions made by other professionals. EP2 also expressed her views about the dangers of focusing on an educational placement at too early a stage, based on an incomplete understanding of the child's needs. This issue will be discussed in more detail in 6.5.3, below.

6.4 How do these perceptions compare with the views of parents/carers and other stakeholders?

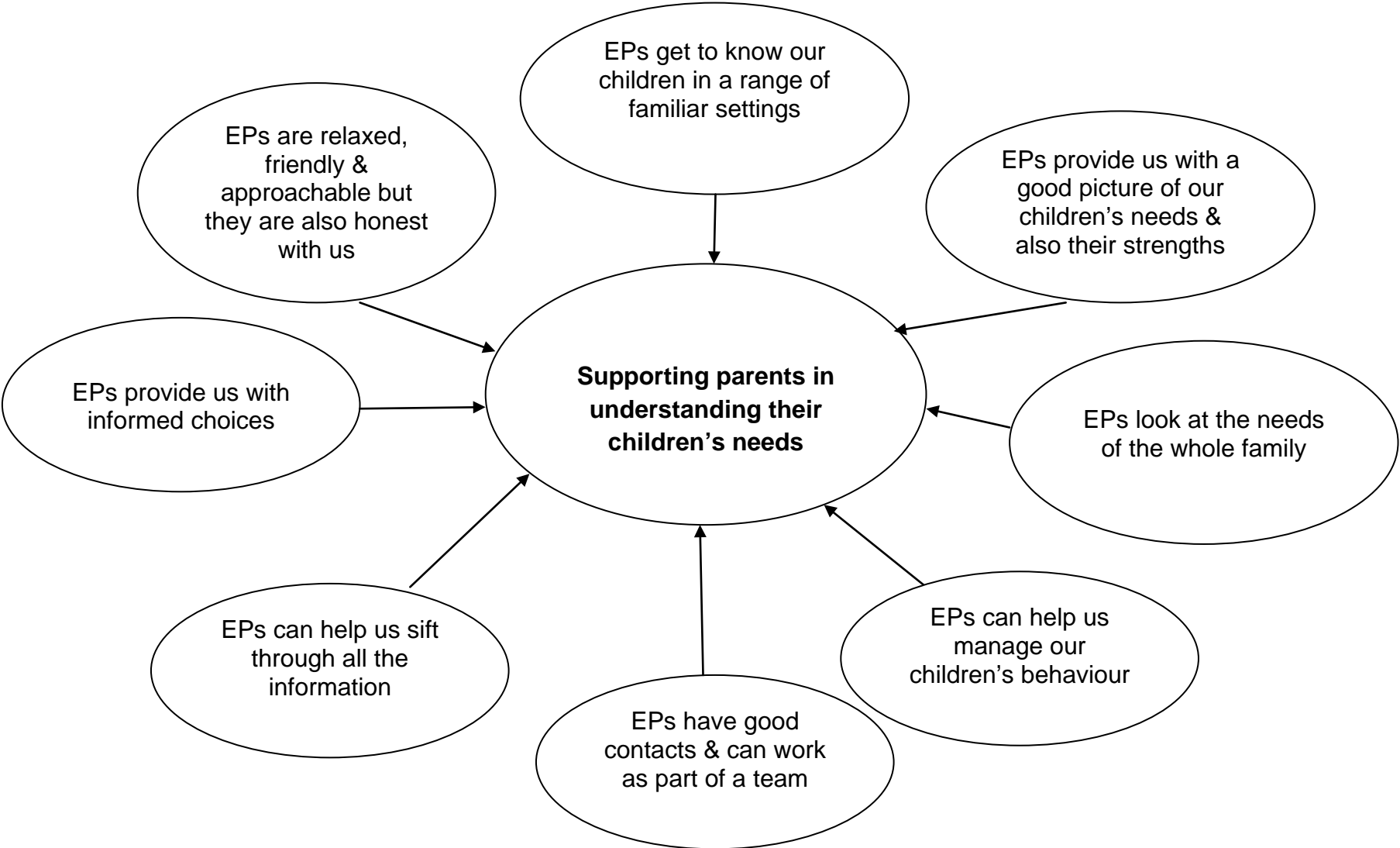
6.4.1 The views expressed by parents/carers

Chapter five demonstrates how the information provided by parents and other stakeholders provided a robust method of triangulating the perceptions of EPs about their individual skills and the contribution of the EP team as a whole to early years work. Section 5.2 includes quotations from the Phase One interviews with parents which corroborate EP2 and EP3's stories. Thematic analysis across all seven interviews also provided powerful, in-depth evidence that the service received by this group of parents reflected the description of best practice provided by the EPs interviewed (see 5.2.17, above).

The ways in which parents said Sefton EPs contributed to their understanding of their children's needs are summarised in figure 5.3 (reproduced below). Six of the parents interviewed were able to be very specific about the role that the EP had played, as distinct from the support for their children provided by other professionals. Although Parent 6 could visualise EP11 and knew that she was a member of the team that had supported both her sons, she was unable to differentiate the nature of the support provided by the EP from the support provided by other professionals., all of which she described as timely and meeting her requirements for her sons.

What parents valued about the work of the Sefton early years EPs was their ability to address the needs of their child in the context of providing emotional support for the whole family. The service provided was not therefore a 'one size fits all' model, but a response tailored to the individual needs of the child and the family's requirements. The EPs concerned were seen as accessible, friendly and approachable, yet knowledgeable about child development and local authority systems and support. Examples were provided of the very precise way in which the EPs had described how a particular child's strengths and needs related to the different types of provision available in the authority, in contrast to the more generic advice received from other professionals.

Figure 5.3: What does our best practice look like to parents?



The team were, however, presented as informative without being prescriptive and the parents concerned confirmed that they had been supported in making their own decisions about the preferred school placement for their child.

The interviews with the seven parents who contributed to this research referred back to the previous system of service delivery in which EPs 2, 3 and 11 were the only EPs in the team to provide psychological advice on the needs of pre-school children, with EP11 allocating requests for early years support to the Portage workers and the advisory teachers (the previous title for the EYICONS), as well as the EPs. When children entered school nurseries, the designated EP for the school was then responsible for responding to requests for any psychological advice required, hence EP5's involvement with child 2.

The parents' narratives indicate that all four EPs involved provided the seven families concerned with an excellent service that was in line with the description of best practice elicited from the interviews with EPs 1, 2 and 3 and the EP team's core professional purpose and principles. One of the challenges to be met by this research was to ensure that this standard of service was maintained by a larger team of EPs, some of whom were not as experienced in this type of work as EPs 1, 2 and 3, and without a senior specialist EP co-ordinating their input. The extent to which this aim was achieved is discussed below.

6.4.2 Other stakeholders

The views of other stakeholders on the contribution that EPs make to early years work were elicited during Workshop A and the Phase Four interviews (see 5.3 and 5.5.8 to 5.5.18, above). Although Workshop A produced nine accounts of successful joint working, the summaries provided did not distinguish clearly between the role of the EP and that of the other professionals involved (see 5.3.4). The group did, however, identify the factors that contributed to effective partnerships, which were summarised in the form of twelve provocative proposals. These were prioritised by the full EP team in Workshop B, with the following statements receiving the highest ranking:

- We develop sincere & respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively

- Communication is at the heart of all care
 - Collaborative working is prioritised and valued
 - Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start
 - Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family
- (See 5.4.2, above).

Comparison of the Workshop A provocative proposals with the list of principles in 6.2 (above) highlights how the AI process promoted solution-oriented thinking across the professional groups represented at the workshop. The full impact of Workshop A on the other professionals involved was, however, not apparent until participants were interviewed at the end of Phase Four (see 5.5.8 to 5.5.18, above). The interviews with the Early Years ICONs indicated that the strengths-based philosophy underpinning AI and solution-orientated working has transformed their thinking (see 5.5.14). Their responses also suggested that there had been discussions about the role of the EP during some of the group activities but that the content of these conversations had not been captured by the data collection methods in use. During her Phase Four interview, EYICON1 said that Workshop A had provided EP10 with the opportunity to voice her concern that the role of the EP in the Early Years was in danger of becoming very narrow. This fitted with EYICON1's perception of the previous system in which the EP came in at the last stage of planning the child's transition to school; often investigating the child's needs separately from the ICON and therefore at risk of duplicating the activities already carried out. EYICON1 therefore felt that the workshop had endorsed a more collaborative style of working, which had paradoxically reduced duplication of roles (see 5.5.9, above).

As reported in 5.5.12, above, the general perception was that '*there's more time and, you know, people are more available*' (EYICON3). The early years ICONs provided evidence of more genuine collaboration between the EP and teaching teams, based on mutual respect and a shared vision of how to work together to improve the life chances of children. They attributed this change in working practice both to the process of the AI workshop and the new way of allocating early years work. This style of working is also further evidence of the systematising

of the EP team's solution-oriented approach to service delivery. The Portage workers, however, highlighted co-location and a change in management style as having had a greater impact on their relationships with the EP team than AI.

Evidence of improved channels of communication with EPs was provided by the consultant community paediatrician interviewed by TEP3. He reported that there had been greater and more frequent information sharing by EPs since Workshop A, in the form of letters and reports. This was felt to be a two-way process, as the paediatricians had also been prompted to share more documentation with EPs. These findings corroborated EP8's own account of how she had found the paediatrician concerned to be far more accessible since they had been in the same group during Workshop A (see 5.5.2 and 5.5.11).

In addition to providing evidence of improved partnership working, the Phase Four interviews also confirmed that early years EPs were seen as matching the pace of their involvement to the needs of the family and the presence of male EPs in the Early Years team as a distinct advantage for working with fathers (see 5.5.13, above). The theme of best practice in working with parents has also been highlighted in EP team discussions throughout the year (see 6.5.1, below).

For the EYICONS and the Portage Workers, the role of the EP was seen as taking the lead in situations where a child's behaviour was reported to be causing concern and in a shared approach to children with very complex needs. As noted above, there was also evidence that the gender balance of the EP team could be useful in working with families. Although the physiotherapist was very positive about her recent work with EP2, she did not provide a clear distinction between their roles. The speech and language therapist also saw EPs as having a role in helping to interpret a child's behaviour and in determining whether a child's speech and language difficulties were general or specific by providing information on the child's non-verbal skills. The paediatrician described how the information that EPs can provide on how a child functions in real world settings can complement observations made in the clinic (see 5.5.15, above).

The predominant theme linking all the above responses on the contribution that EPs make to early years work is how we apply our knowledge of child development. As noted in 6.2 above, this was one of the skills highlighted by the three EPs interviewed in Phase One. Parent 4's account provides a vivid description of the specificity of EP2's description of Child 4's needs (see 5.2.12, above) and EYICON3 described how she values the EP's judgement because she sees EPs as having more structured systems in place for assessing children's development. At no stage was our access to specialist tests mentioned, although this may be implicit in EYICON3's comment.

6.5 How can these findings inform current and future EP practice?

Chapter two sets out the context of this thesis in terms of the literature available on the work of EPs in the early years in the light of government legislation and the evidence for effective multi-disciplinary working. Given that early years work is one of the areas where EPs have an established multi-professional role, it was found to be somewhat paradoxical that little had been written on how professional learning from this area of EP work could inform the wider agenda. This study therefore adds to the knowledge available on what EPs consider to be best practice in early years work and the aspects of this work which are valued by parents and other stakeholders.

Although EPs' very precise knowledge of early child development was one of the skills valued, many of the other themes described above are applicable across the range of EP working and provide evidence of how a solution-oriented model of service delivery can be systematised. The topics discussed in this section include best practice in working with parents, transition, earlier and longer involvement, maintaining consistency of service delivery, consultation with stakeholders and the role of the senior specialist EP. Further discussion on the implications of AI for future and current EP practice is presented in 6.6, below.

6.5.1 Best practice in working with parents

Section 5.5.4, above, provides evidence that the narratives elicited during the *Discovery* phase of the research prompted further discussion within the early years EP team about what constitutes best practice in working with parents. During the Autumn Term 2009, the EPs concerned shared examples of their

existing practice. It was agreed that there were common themes which would constitute best practice in working with parents/carers of children of all ages, not just in the early years. The topic was therefore included on the agenda of the next full service meeting and it was agreed that a summary of the points raised would form the basis of a best practice document to be included in the team's induction folder.

Best EP practice with all parents was conceptualised in terms of how we would want to be treated ourselves. Based on the team principles and those aspects of service delivery valued by the parents interviewed for this thesis, it was agreed that parents should be the first point of contact in gathering information about a child's needs, either by telephone, or in person, depending on their preference. The EP would then provide regular feedback on their involvement according to the method of communication agreed. In the early years, the Portage workers were found to have been very helpful in the way that they prepared parents for what to expect, but even then, Parent 7 was still anxious about what to expect from an 'assessment' and she was relieved that she had not been required to write anything. It was therefore agreed that we would ensure that our involvement would be introduced to parents/carers by a familiar adult who could give them an accurate summary of the solution-oriented service summarised in figure 5.3.

The aim of this approach was to ensure that parents felt 'listened to' from the start and that their expert knowledge of the development of their own child was acknowledged. The importance that parents place on EPs gathering information on the questions to which they want answers and being kept informed was highlighted by Squires, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney and O'Connor (2007) in their analysis of the parental questionnaires distributed as part of the EP review described in 2.2.3 (above). Squires et al also emphasised the need for EPs to be more explicit about the nature and extent of their involvement, as parents were often left expecting the EP to provide continuing direct involvement where this was possibly not likely to happen (*op. cit.*, p.356). This concept of the need to make the 'contract' between the EP and parents/carers explicit links with the ambiguity about transition arrangements highlighted by the parents interviewed for this thesis.

6.5.2 Transition

As noted in 6.4, above, two of the parents interviewed in Phase One of the project said that they would have welcomed clearer information about what to expect from the service in the future. These comments regarding parents' uncertainty about ongoing support from the team were phrased as 'a wish for the future' in the form of the following provocative proposal:

- Sefton E.P.s keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

This theme has been re-visited at regular intervals throughout the year (see 5.5.2, 5.5.4 and 5.5.19). In the past, the three pre-school EPs transferred responsibility for tracking children's progress to the designated EP for the school concerned when the child entered nursery. If there is a need for ongoing involvement from an EP, the early years EPs are now responsible for providing this support during the Foundation Stage and then transferring responsibility to the school EP. Although self reports from the early years EPs suggest that they have ensured that these arrangements have been fully explained to parents/carers during the course of this project, the data collected did not include any means of corroborating this information. This topic will therefore be included in the list of issues on which stakeholders' views are elicited during 2010/11.

6.5.3 Earlier and longer involvement

Prior to the reorganisation of the service, EP11 was responsible for allocating the requests for STEPS input in the early years. It was therefore her decision whether work should be given to a Portage worker, an early years advisory teacher (the equivalent of an early years inclusion consultant) or an EP. It is possible that this process was responsible for the differing perceptions of EP2 and EP3. Whereas EP2 valued the professional autonomy and trust provided by EP11, EP3 expressed concern that he was being involved later in the process. It may also have been a reflection of the culture of the previous organisation. When I first took up my post as deputy head of STEPS, I was told that one of the reasons that STEPS had been established was to avoid duplication of work between the advisory teachers and the EPs. The interviews in this study revealed that neither team had been happy with the situation. EP3 expressed his frustration at being

brought in at the end of the process (see 5.2.4), yet the early years ICONs perceived this to be hierarchical, implying that an EP's skills/knowledge were in some way superior to those of an advisory teacher/ICON (see 5.5.12).

The findings from this research suggest that both groups find the new allocation system meets their personal and professional needs better. The Phase Four interviews with the early years ICONs indicate that they have been working more collaboratively with EPs since Workshop A and that this has facilitated more informed discussion about how the two roles can complement each other (see 5.5.11, above). There was also evidence that EPs were able to match the pace of their input to the needs of the family, in line with the best practice highlighted in Phase One (see 5.5.13) and the solution-orientated principles of the service. There are, however, emerging resource implications with EPs being involved with children earlier and for longer. It is therefore likely that the time allocated for early years work will need to increase next year if we are to maintain this level of service delivery.

6.5.4 Maintaining consistency of service delivery

As noted in 6.4.1 above, one of the challenges to be met by this research was to ensure that early years children and their families continued to receive an EP service that was in line with the description of best practice elicited from the Phase One interviews and the EP team's core professional purpose and principles, despite considerable changes in personnel. Rees (2008) would argue that a systemic solution-oriented manager should carry out this task by setting up systems to ensure that the organisation's vision and principles are kept at the forefront of all aspects of service delivery. Here AI was used as the vehicle for ensuring that all members of the EP team were regularly reminded of the standards for service delivery in the early years and provided with opportunities for self-reflection.

Section 5.5.2 (above) describes how AI was kept alive in the *Destiny* phase of the project. In September 2009, all EPs, including the new early years team, were reminded of the AI process and provided with copies of figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3 giving a summary of best practice in the early years, as described by the EPs and

parents interviewed in Phase One. During the course of the next two terms, the early years EPs were given regular opportunities to report on their own practice, using an AI framework. The less experienced EPs were able to shadow more experienced colleagues and there was also some joint working.

There is evidence to suggest that this approach of managing by a combination of sharing agreed standards of best practice and self-evaluation was flexible enough to meet the needs of both experienced and more junior colleagues. The personal autonomy valued by EP2 does not appear to have been compromised by the need to be accountable to the rest of the team for her practice, as she commented in her annual personal development review (PDR) meeting that she had now got her motivation for early years work back. The trainee EPs were also able to provide examples of their own good practice which were triangulated through the Phase Four interviews.

At the end of Phase Four, it was decided that what was needed was a broad picture of the service delivered across the Borough by the early years EP team rather than more in-depth information about our input to a relatively small number of families. Under the new allocation system, the early years EPs take it in turns within their area teams to attend monthly meetings with the two Portage workers and the early years ICON for their part of the Borough. As well as deciding who should respond to new requests, the group systematically reviews their existing involvement with children and makes decisions about any further action required. This means that between them, the Portage workers and the three early years ICONs now have a good overview of all our early years work. From the Phase Four interviews described in 6.4.1, above, I was therefore able to corroborate the early years EPs' accounts of their own work and obtain an indication as to whether we were maintaining the previous standards of service delivery.

As noted above, from their perspective, the early years ICONs preferred the new system and each of the EPs concerned was mentioned in a positive story by an early years ICON or a Portage worker (see 5.5.16). These findings suggest that the previous standards of service delivery have been maintained by a larger team of EPs, some of whom were not as experienced in this type of work as EPs 1, 2

and 3, and without a senior specialist EP co-ordinating their input. There is, however, a need to confirm this by seeking further feedback from parents/carers. The early years EPs have also decided to take turns to sit in on the allocation meetings for an area other than their own. They then intend to compare observations to ensure that consistency of service is maintained across the Borough.

6.5.5 Consultation with stakeholders

AI has given the EP team a model for consultation with parents/carers and other stakeholders and how this can inform service planning and delivery. By using a combination of interviews and workshops, this study has provided feedback in both depth and breadth about the quality of service provided by the different groups of EPs responsible for our early years work during the eighteen months of the research. The findings from Phase Four were presented to the full EP team at the last service meeting. During 2010/11 one of the other senior EPs will be taking the lead on extending the consultation process to a broader group of service users. Each of the area teams will be asked to discuss the purposes of consulting with young people, parents/carers and other stakeholders. They will then be asked to decide on the strategies that best meet these purposes. It will be interesting to note whether AI is one of the strategies chosen and, if so, on what basis.

6.5.6 The role of the senior specialist EP

In their report on *Increasing Access to Essential Obstetric Care* in Nepal, Thomas et al (2004) consider the role of 'champions'. Champions are described as '*highly dedicated individuals who take the lead for the majority of project activities and initiatives in implementation areas.*' The research team argues that while this model of project delivery has its advantages, it is ultimately unsustainable because if the champion leaves or moves out of the area there is often no one as qualified or as dedicated to take up and continue the action (op. cit., p.114). Similar risks are inherent in an EP team structure which relies too heavily on individual specialists. The focus of the present study on EP work in the early years was determined by the team's senior practitioner for early years leaving the service to take up a promoted post in another authority. This left a considerable gap in the skills and experience within the team, which was even more noticeable when EP3

retired. The only member of the previous early years team left in the service is therefore EP2. While this study provides ample evidence of the skills and enthusiasm that she contributes to this area of work, there was a need to develop a more sustainable model of service delivery.

Although there are risks inherent in a team structure with individual specialists, there are also benefits to service users and the individual concerned. EP1's story provides a detailed account of what she achieved as a senior specialist EP for early years in another Borough. Although she was well aware that the context in Sefton was different, one of her aims would have been to demonstrate to me how she had fulfilled the legacy that I had left her, as I had been appointed to the post in question when it was first established. I therefore have personal experience as a senior EP for early years. Such a post can be satisfying for the individual concerned as, if the conditions are right within the organisation as a whole, it can provide the post-holder with the opportunity to make a significant personal contribution to setting in place systems that can make a difference to the lives of far more children than working at an individual casework level. EP1 provided details of some of the conditions necessary in her interview:

Interviewer: *'So a big change has occurred in a very short period of time really?'*

EP1: *'I think quite a massive change and I think that was about everybody getting lined up really, that is was systematic and there was some, not only me but some determined managers who would, that did have a belief that if there is an issue in the operation that we could trace it back to the system that we we're putting in place and do something different and better.'*

As noted above, EP1 is of the opinion that these conditions are not yet in place within Sefton, but there are emerging opportunities, which will be discussed below.

There is a tension between ensuring that an EP team has the skills and knowledge to respond effectively at a whole system level, while continuing to maintain high standards of service delivery to individual children with complex needs. The responses received from the generic EPs in Shannon and Posada's (2007) study provided evidence that having a senior specialist for early years can be deskilling for the other members of the team. It is unlikely that the demand for individual

casework will decrease while the senior specialist is working to put systems in place and typically this need has to be met by other members of the team. It is also possible that the senior specialist could be adding to these pressures by increasing awareness of the support that can be provided by EPs. As the manager of a team of EPs, I would therefore have been interested in knowing more about how Dennis's (2004) work with private and voluntary providers of early years education and child care impacted on the demand for EP time and how this was met.

Apart from EP1's story, there is little mention elsewhere in this study about the contribution that Sefton EPs can make to early years work at a strategic level, although there are examples throughout this thesis of how EPs can make a difference to the lives of very young children with complex needs and their families at an individual level. I have used this research to explore how AI could empower the early years EPs to review their current practice and plan for the future. Although there are signs that this strategy has been successful (see 5.5.19, above), there is a need to ensure that the team looks at the broader picture as there are emerging opportunities for early years EPs to apply their skills and knowledge at a whole system level:

- There is a new Director of Children, Schools and Families
- SEPPS has been given the lead for the Disabled Children's Access to Childcare (DCATCH) project
- Funding has been provided for a joint project with staff from the Children's Centre to develop a model for supporting parents
- The early years ICONs have invited the EPs to participate in setting up a network of early years practitioners

The reductions in funding proposed by the new government mean that there are also threats to the resourcing of high quality public services. The next section will therefore include a discussion of how AI can prepare the Sefton EP team to respond to these new challenges.

6.6 What are the advantages and disadvantages of using appreciative inquiry (AI) as a research tool in the context of Local Authority working?

The first part of this chapter has demonstrated how AI has proved to be a useful tool for providing evidence that the Sefton EP team has successfully systematised the solution-oriented principles described in 6.2 (above). AI has ensured that the standards of service delivery in the early years have been maintained, despite considerable changes in personnel and that the promise to stakeholders summarised in the team's 'core professional purpose' has been delivered. The next section of this chapter will summarise what has been learnt about using AI as a research tool and put forward some recommendations for those considering the use of AI as a methodology in the future.

6.6.1 What worked well?

Although time-consuming, the *Discovery* phase was very successful. After a brief introduction to the AI process, EPs, parents and other stakeholders were able to provide convincing stories of their own experiences. These findings provide evidence of the importance of the questions asked (Cooperrider, Whitney and Stavros, 2003). By asking colleagues to tell me about a piece of work of which they were particularly proud, I obtained responses which indicated that I had tapped into the core constructs of the individuals concerned in a similar way to the PCP laddering techniques recommended for surfacing the purposes underpinning actions in the SOL approach described above (Clarke and Jenner, 2006). In the same way that Clarke and Jenner (2006) used SOL as a model for understanding the psychology of the EP team that they were working with at the time, AI has provided me with the opportunity to learn more about the psychology of the Sefton EP team, including providing confirmation that the team's solution-oriented principles have been systematised in our practice. AI therefore helps to make the invisible visible so that teams and individuals can identify the personal resources that they have available to enable them to apply this knowledge to new situations. The implications of this finding in the context of the new government agenda for public services are discussed in 6.6.4 (below).

Workshop A was also particularly successful, a good cross section of our early years partners attended and much was achieved for a relatively small investment of personal time. As noted in 5.3.2 (above), although more data could have been collected, the work sheets were sufficiently detailed for the purposes of Workshop B. The interviews with the early years ICONs in Phase Four of the study indicate that the introduction to the strengths-based philosophy of AI was transformational for them (see 5.5.14). Their accounts of the influence of AI on their work provide evidence of the change in thinking considered to be one of the two qualities of appreciative inquiry that are the key to the approach's potential for organisational transformation by Bushe and Kassam (2005). The reluctance of the community based stakeholders to participate in telephone interviews may also provide evidence that workshops are more popular than interviews.

6.6.2 What worked less well?

Although the comments on the feedback sheets from Workshop B were generally positive (see 5.4.5, above), the outcomes from the session did not completely fulfil my expectations, as I did not observe evidence of the self-sustaining transformation promised by so much of the AI literature. This was perhaps because I was too anxious to get to a list of actions that could be implemented and tracked in the next phase of the project and I was overambitious about what could be achieved in one morning. It is therefore possible that the workshop did not fulfil all the criteria for transformation listed by Bushe and Kassam (2005). My perception is that I pushed the team through the stages of the process and I may not have given individuals sufficient time for personal reflection. Although the three area teams were asked to participate in an exercise in which they imagined what our early years work would look like in the future, none of the groups provided me with any kind of record of their visions. This was a lost opportunity, as the information obtained could have provided a more powerful summary of the morning's activities than the list of actions actually produced. By this stage in the process, a total of sixty five provocative proposals had been generated, twenty six from EPs, twenty seven from parents/carers and twelve from workshop A. Those EPs who had not been present at workshop A had to process this information very quickly before being asked to give their ratings to the statements elicited from workshop A and the outcomes from the next activity suggested that there was

more overlap between the themes actually discussed than I had envisaged. I would have been more likely to have achieved my expectations if I had included an intermediate activity in which the team were given the opportunity to distil the key messages from the full list of provocative proposals and to produce a much smaller number of statements which represented discrete themes. Although a list of actions was generated by the end of the morning, these then proved to be difficult to track because I had not asked individuals to give a commitment to taking the work forward.

There are a number of ways in which this Workshop could have been improved:

1. By providing a briefing session on AI in advance, so that all members of the team knew what to expect
2. By ensuring that all team members participated in workshop A
3. By allocating a full day rather than just a morning to the process
4. By being more aware of the learning needs of others rather than being driven by my own needs!

An alternative explanation is that the Sefton EP team are already very familiar with strengths-based approaches and the philosophy of AI would therefore be unlikely to produce the same 'Road to Damascus' effect. As noted in 6.2, prior to Workshop B, the team had spent two days working through the activities described by Rees (2008). The links between this process and AI were verbalised by TEP2 who asked why we were repeating the task.

The Phase One narratives from parents who had experienced a high standard of service delivery provide powerful evidence to convince a Director of Children's Services that EPs can make a difference to some children, families and settings. What these accounts do not reveal is the extent to which this input is needed across the Borough. As the EP review suggests, there are likely to be other contexts where the team around the child, including the family, already has a good understanding of the needs of the child in question and the next step forward without needing to seek further advice from an EP (Farrell et al., 2006). It is likely that the information provided by individual case studies would need to be supplemented by other data, probably of a quantitative nature, in order to make

the case for the optimum number of EPs that an Authority should employ, compared with the need for other professional groups. AI can therefore provide useful information to make the statistics come alive, but the approach is unlikely to be sufficient as the only tool in the evaluation toolkit. Other approaches which answer the questions posed by Realistic Evaluation may also be needed: what works, for whom, in what circumstances? (Pawson and Tilley, 1997).

6.6.3 Recommendations for using AI as a research tool

This thesis demonstrates that what AI is good at is making the invisible visible, such as surfacing the psychology and philosophy underpinning service delivery. For those planning to use AI in their own research, Reed (2007) provides an excellent introduction to some of the issues to be considered. This section provides a summary of what I have learnt from using AI as a research methodology in a small scale, real life context and makes recommendations for each stage of the process for those seeking to carry out similar studies.

Leadership/resource issues: The importance of ensuring full leadership participation and sufficient resources for full implementation in advance of an AI project was emphasised by Cooperrider and Whitney (as quoted in Fitzgerald, Murrell and Miller, 2003, p. 7). This was been confirmed in the studies by Liebling et al (2001) and Shuayb et al (2009) reviewed in chapter three, where the implementation of the changes suggested by the teams involved was hampered by difficulties in ensuring full management engagement. Where this happens, there is a danger that AI will be counterproductive, sapping the energy of the team involved and creating a negative culture. In this thesis, the principal educational psychologist (EP1) was involved from the start and her background as a senior EP for early years in another authority ensured that the topic being investigated was an issue of particular interest to her.

Choice of affirmative topic: The AI literature is divided on whether the choice of affirmative topic should be open or pre-determined (see 4.3, above), but however the topic is chosen, it is emphasised that the main focus of the inquiry should be viewed as an area of work that participants want to see grow and flourish, rather than a problem to be solved. Here I chose the topic of our early years work as the

main focus of this study. The high levels of involvement of SEPPS team members summarised in appendix 9 confirm that this was a suitably affirmative aspect of our work. The findings were sufficiently general to have implications for the full EP team, but the initial focus on early years also meant that the Portage workers were able to play a significant role in the development and implementation of the study.

Using co-researchers: In order to have maximum impact and to remain true to the principle of inclusivity implicit in AI, other members of the EP team were used as co-researchers. For a small scale study, carried out alongside other work, without any additional funding, this has advantages in terms of the resources needed. There were, however, implications for data collection and analysis. In this study, there were gaps in the 'audit trail' which could have been avoided by ensuring that the early years EPs had all been briefed on AI before workshop A and that practical methods for collecting and analysing data had also been agreed in advance.

The group processes involved in carrying out collaborative work mean that progress may be slower than anticipated and Reed (2007) notes the importance of establishing systems for resolving differences of opinion/disagreements. There will also be a need to agree how any negative comments from respondents are reframed in an appreciative form, using a respectful solution-oriented approach of 'keeping one foot in the pain and one foot in the possibility' (Rees, 2008). The early years EP team is still in its infancy as a group and may not therefore have reached the 'storming' phase yet, (Tuckman and Jensen, 1977) but the project design needed to be flexible in order to ensure that consultation was viewed as genuine. This was particularly apparent at the end of Phase Four, where the original thesis proposal had included a concluding workshop with stakeholders, but the design was changed, following discussion with the early years EPs.

Discovery phase: In this study, I carried out the data collection and analysis in the first part of the Discovery phase. This meant that I gained first-hand experience of the quality of service provided to parents/carers, which enhanced my knowledge of the performance of those members of the team for whom I have line-management responsibility. In terms of this thesis, it also helped me to

demonstrate that I had the research skills to carry out work of a doctoral standard. In future studies, I shall, however, consider the benefits of involving other members of the team in interviewing stakeholders to elicit positive stories of their own best practice. The power of this approach was illustrated for me on a personal level by the Phase Four interview with EYICON2. Although this inclusion consultant also works in schools, I was expecting her to provide me with a positive story of working with one of the early years EPs. She chose instead to illustrate her views on collaborative working with an example of my own work. I was really pleased to find out how much it had meant to her when I had recommended that the staff in one of the Borough's MLD classes should draw on her expertise in maths recovery.

Dream phase: In reflecting on the possible weaknesses in this study, my advice to future researchers would be not to rush this phase and to ensure that the team's vision of future working is recorded in a format that can be displayed and revisited at regular intervals. In the absence of a record of the Sefton team's vision for early years working, I found that my summaries of the findings from the Phase One interviews (figures 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) were a useful means of describing the project to new team members and they also had access to the team's previous work on our 'core professional purpose' and team principles.

Design phase: The present research would have been strengthened by ensuring that individual EPs committed themselves to personal actions in this phase of the study, rather than ascribing tasks to the management team or the early years EP team. My advice would therefore be to ensure that all participants are clear about the purpose of this phase and the information required to deliver and track the actions planned.

Destiny phase: The limitations of the Design phase in the present study meant that tracking arrangements were not planned collaboratively and new meetings were introduced for the early years EP team. While this was not ideal, it proved to be effective as these meetings provided the opportunity for each of the EPs involved to provide examples of their own practice which were then triangulated by the interviews with stakeholders at the end of this phase. I would therefore

recommend that other AI researchers consider how they intend to track progress and to feed successes back to the team concerned.

6.6.4 Further applications of AI in the Sefton context

The response of participants to workshop A demonstrates the potential of AI to facilitate improved collaboration between services. The approach could therefore be introduced in other areas of EP partnership working such as targeted youth support. There is also scope for capitalising on the relationships established through the workshop by extending the approach to other members of the teams represented, e.g. all the consultant community paediatricians or all the children's physiotherapists working in the Borough. As noted in 6.6.1 (above), the Phase Four interviews with the early years ICONs indicated that AI had been transformational for them. This suggests that both the EP team and the teaching team would benefit if the findings from this study could be shared with the school based ICONs. The timing of this input would need to be considered carefully, however, as the head of the teaching service has just retired.

The recent change in government and the substantial reductions proposed in the funding of public services present a number of challenges to the Sefton EP team. The team is held in high regard at a corporate level and permission has therefore been given for us to fill all our vacant posts at a time when other services are facing with losing staff. The core staffing budget for SEPPS is not therefore under threat, but the in-year cessation of the Area Based Grant means that funding for one of our posts will cease at the end of 2010. There is therefore a need for EPs to generate income to make up this shortfall. In this context, there are at least two ways in which the use of AI could help us meet these new challenges. One of the possible affirmative topics for a new inquiry would be for the team to work collaboratively to discover the strategies that we have employed to maintain individual and team resilience through the changes that we have experienced in the past. The other focus for a new inquiry would be to surface the aspects of our work where we experience 'flow' – our optimal level of functioning as EPs, (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) to release creative thinking about selling our services effectively. (It may, of course, be possible to sell appreciative inquiry on a consultancy basis to other teams).

6.7 What have I learnt?

Like the colleagues who were kind enough to participate in my interviews, I enjoy completing a challenge! This study has been demanding on many levels, particularly in the thought that I have had to put in to making decisions that reflect the AI philosophy during Phase Four. As noted above, I am not the most patient of people and I have had to learn to give other members of the team time to reflect on how to build on their strengths.

As a manager, I have found the insights that the Discovery phase provides to be invaluable and I shall reflect on how I can apply this knowledge by the questions that I shall be using in the next round of personal development reviews (PDRs) with my team. I now have a much greater understanding of what is important about their work to the EPs who participated in this research, although that knowledge presents me with further challenges, as while there are common themes, there is also a diversity of interests to be embraced and utilised effectively. There are also the competing demands of strategic work versus individual casework to be considered, as discussed in 6.5.6, above.

As an EP, the study has also given me the opportunity to learn how my own behaviour can facilitate partnership working. For her positive story, early years ICON2 gave an example of our joint work in a primary school to illustrate her view that it is not a particular EP or ICON role that makes joint working effective, but mutual respect and a knowledge of the skills that an individual brings to a piece of work. From working with EYICON2 in a previous Authority, I knew that she had been at the forefront of piloting Maths Recovery in the region. I therefore suggested that she should be asked to advise on suitable strategies for one of the boys in the school's moderate learning difficulty (MLD) resource base who was struggling to keep up with the rest of the class in numeracy. Until I asked EYICON2 to provide me with a positive story as part of Phase Four of this project I was unaware how she had valued my actions, as historically, the resourced classes are perceived to be the province of EPs rather than ICONs.

As a parent, I have felt privileged to be able to listen to the experiences of the parents involved in this study. Although they have very busy lives, balancing the schedule of appointments associated with having a child with complex needs against trying to maintain life as a family, they were willing to provide the time needed to sit and tell me their stories. By listening from a different stance from my usual role as an EP, I was able to learn more about the emotions they had experienced and the practicalities that they face.

As anticipated, the strengths based philosophy underpinning AI has been particularly valuable during a time of such change within the team structure, culture and composition. During the past eighteen months, I have been able to use the study as an opportunity to provide the other EPs with frequent opportunities to reflect on their achievements and the range of team members identified in the positive stories collected at the end of the project was particularly helpful. The flexibility of the approach made it easy to include new team members in the study, as can be seen from the support provided by TEPs 3 and 4 in Phase Four (see 5.5.8, above). This may not have been possible with a more traditional research design in which every aspect had been planned in advance.

6.8 What would I do differently?

As noted in chapter one and elsewhere in this thesis, there was a tension between the need to remain true to the principles of AI, by including other members of the EP team in making decisions about the collection and interpretation of data, while demonstrating the extent to which work of a doctoral standard had been carried out on an individual basis. In addition to developing my own knowledge of AI, I have, however, been able to ensure that all members of SEPPS are familiar with the approach. It should therefore be possible for the next inquiry to be more collaborative, starting with a team decision about the topic to be investigated and involving more EPs in the collection and analysis of appreciative stories. One possible application could be as we seek to extend our role in working with communities. A primary school has recently expressed concern about relationship issues between a particular group of parents impacting on their children's behaviour in school. AI could be a suitable vehicle for responding to these

concerns in a sensitive manner and providing opportunities for identifying creative solutions.

6.9 Concluding remarks...

Some of the benefits of AI are not easy to demonstrate. Messerschmidt (2005) describes these as 'super-grease':

'Perhaps the best we can say is this (using a mechanical metaphor that some AI practitioners may eschew): that it is like applying super-grease (AI) to an already functioning set of gears (an organisation). The super-grease does not cause the gears to turn (they were already running, well or poorly, before AI was introduced), but AI appears to improve how well the organisation functions (hospitals, health posts and the like).' (Op.cit., p. 40)

Much of this chapter provides evidence of an early years EP team that is providing a high quality solution-oriented service. It is impossible to turn the clock back and to demonstrate whether the situation would have been different without AI. I have, however, sought to demonstrate how AI has helped keep the team 'on-track' through a period of change and uncertainty. The data collection methods used have enabled me to sample stakeholders' views in both depth and breadth and the information provided indicates that the most valued aspect of our early years work is how we apply our knowledge of child development.

This study has demonstrated that AI can provide rich case studies to illustrate the contribution that EPs make to children's services. The approach is therefore a valuable one to have in the 'evaluation tool kit' for an EP service. It is, however, unlikely to be the only tool necessary in providing a full description of all the ways in which EPs make a difference to the lives of children, families and settings within a borough. There is therefore a need to re-visit some of the other approaches described in chapter three now that the topic of evaluation is higher up the team's agenda. What AI has provided is a model of collaborative working that could be extended to new pieces of work. It is hoped that by continuing to use AI in this way, we will be able to use the resilience and creativity of Sefton EPs to take us successfully through the uncharted territory of the new government agenda for public services.

References

- Ali, S. and Frederickson, N. (2006) Investigating the evidence base of social stories. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22 (4), 355-377
- Atkinson, M., Wilkin, A., Stott, A. and Kinder, K. (2001) *LGA research report 17, Multi-agency working: an audit of activity*. Slough: NFER.
- Atkinson, M., Wilkin, A., Stott, A. and Kinder, K. (2002) *LGA research report 26, Multi-agency working: a detailed study*. Slough: NFER.
- Attride-Stirling, J. (2001) Thematic networks: an analytic tool for qualitative research. *Qualitative Research*, 1, 385–405.
- Audin, K., Mellor-Clark, J., Barkham, M., Margison, F., Mcgrath, G., Lewis, S., Cann, L., Duffy, J. and Parry, G. (2001) Practice research networks for effective psychological therapies. *Journal of Mental Health*, 10 (3), 241–251
- Barclay, G. and Kerr, C. (2006) Collaborative working across children's services: Where are we now? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 35 – 46
- Baxter, J. and Frederickson, N. (2005) Every Child Matters: Can educational psychology contribute to radical reform? *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21(2), 87– 102
- Borbasi S., Jackson D. and Wilkes L. (2005) Fieldwork in nursing research: positionality, practicalities and predicaments. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 51(5), 493–501
- Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006) Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 77 - 101
- British Psychological Society (BPS) (2006) *Code of ethics and conduct*. Leicester: BPS
- Bushe, G.R. and Kassam, A.F. (2005) When Is appreciative inquiry transformational?: A meta-case analysis. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 41 (2), 161 – 181
- Carter, B. (2004) How to do qualitative data analysis. In: Lavender T, Edwards G and Alfirevic Z. *Demystifying Qualitative Research in Pregnancy and Childbirth*, Shropshire: MA Healthcare Ltd.
- Carter, B., Corby, B., Cooper, L., Cummings, J., Martin, L., and Hooton, S. (2004) *Executive Report: Multi-Agency Working Practice Project - Appreciating the Best*. Preston: UCLAN Faculty Of Health
- Carter, B. (2006) One expertise among many - working appreciatively to make miracles instead of finding problems. Using appreciative inquiry as a way of reframing research. *Journal of Research in Nursing*, 11 (1), 48–63

- Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990) cited in Joseph, S. (2008) Positive psychology as a framework for practice. Chapter nine of Kelly, B., Woolfson, L. And Boyle, J. (2008). *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology*. London: Jessica Kingsley
- Christie, C. A. (2006) Appreciative inquiry as a method for evaluation: an interview with Hallie Preskill. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(4), 466 – 474
- Christie, C.A. and Fleischer, D. (2009) Social inquiry paradigms as a frame for the debate on credible evidence. In Donaldson, S. I., Christie, C. A. and Mark, M.M. (2009) *What Counts as Credible Evidence in Applied Research and Evaluation Practice?* London: Sage.
- Clarke, S. and Jenner, S. (2006) The psychology of delivering a psychological service: self-organised learning as a model for consultation. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 22 (3), 185 - 198
- Coghlan, A.T., Preskill, H., and Catsambas, T. (2003) An overview of appreciative inquiry in evaluation. *New Directions For Evaluation*, 100, 5 – 22
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., and Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education: 5th edition*. London: RoutledgeFalmer
- Cooperrider, D. L., and Whitney, D. (2000) A positive revolution in change: appreciative inquiry. In Cooperrider, D.L., Sorensen, P.F., Whitney, D. and T. Yaeger, F. (eds.), *Appreciative Inquiry: Rethinking Human Organization Toward a Positive Theory of Change*. Champaign, Ill.: Stipes Publishing.
- Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D. and Stavros, J.M. (2003) *Appreciative Inquiry Handbook*. Bedford Heights, Ohio: Lakeshore
- Crowder, D. (2007) *Personal communication*. (During first meeting of regional LA hubs of effective practice in SEN/LLD, 27 September 2007).
- Cullen, K. And Ramoutar, L. (2003) Building fresh perceptions of a class: turning 'horrors into lovelies'. *Educational and Child Psychology* , 20 (4), 116 - 130
- Delbecq, A.L., Van De Ven, A. H. and Gustafson, D.H. (1975) *Group Techniques for Program Planning: A Guide to Nominal Group and Delphi Process*. Glenview, Glenview, IL.: Scott, Foresman and Company.
- Dennis, R. (2003) Starting to make a difference: responding to the challenges of recent developments in the early years. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19 (4), 259 – 270
- Dennis. R. (2004) Delivering educational psychology services to non-maintained early years settings: inclusion ABC. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 21(2), 26 – 38

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2007) *The Children's Plan: building brighter futures*. HMSO, Norwich. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/childrensplan/downloads/The_Childrens_Plan.pdf

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2008) *Children's Trusts: Statutory guidance on inter-agency co-operation to improve well-being of children, young people and their families*. HMSO, Norwich. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/resources-and-practice/IG00346/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009a) *About Every Child Matters*. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/about/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009b) *Strategic overview*. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/about/aims/strategicoverview/strategicoverview/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009c) *Multi-agency services: Toolkit for practitioners*. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/multiagencyworking/managerstoolkit/practitionerstoolkit/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009d) *Benefits of multi-agency working*. Retrieved 8 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/strategy/deliveringservices1/multiagencyworking/faqs/benefitsofmultiagencyworking/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) (2009e) *Early Support (ES) programme and the National Portage Association (NPA)*. Retrieved 3 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/sendisability/earlysupportprogramme/earlysupportprogramme/>

Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)/Department of Health (DH) (2009) *Aiming High for Disabled Children: Best practice to common practice*. HMSO, Norwich. Retrieved 3 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/healthandwellbeing/ahdc/AHDC/>

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1998) *Excellence in Research on Schools*. London: The Stationery Office

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2000) *Educational Psychology Services (England): Current Role, Good Practice and Future Directions. Report of the Working Group*. Nottingham: DfEE publications.

Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (2001) *Promoting Children's Mental Health within Early Years and School Settings*. Nottingham: DfEE publications.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2003) *Every Child Matters*. London: The Stationery Office

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Department of Health (DH) (2003a) *Together from the Start: practical guidance for professionals working with disabled children (birth to third birthday) and their families*. HMSO, Norwich. Retrieved 3 August 2009 from <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/everychildmatters/earlyyears/sendisability/earlysupport/earlysupport/>

Department for Education and Skills (DfES)/Department of Health (DH) (2003b) *Developing Early Intervention/Support Services for Deaf Children and their Families*. HMSO, Norwich. Retrieved 3 August 2009 from <http://publications.teachernet.gov.uk/default.aspx?PageFunction=downloadoptions&PageMode=publications&ProductId=LEA/0068/2003&>

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2004) *Every Child Matters: Change for Children*. London: The Stationery Office

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2005) *Every Child Matters: Educational psychology service*. Retrieved 26 August 2005 from www.everychildmatters.gov.uk/ete/psychology.

Department for Education and Skills (DfES) (2007) *Special educational needs newsletter*, 3, Summer 2007. Retrieved 30 September 2007 from www.standards.dfes.gov.uk

Department of Health (1998a) *White Paper. A First Class Service*. London: The Stationery Office

Department of Health (1998b) *Modernising Social Services*. London: The Stationery Office

Donaldson, S. I., Christie, C. A. and Mark, M.M. (2009) *What Counts as Credible Evidence in Applied Research and Evaluation Practice?* London: Sage.

Doveston, M. and Keenaghan, M. (2006) Growing talent for inclusion: using an appreciative inquiry approach into investigating classroom dynamics. *Journal of Research in Special Educational Needs*, 6(3), 153–165

Dunsmuir, S., Brown, E., Iyaduri, S. and Monsen, J. (2009) Evidence-based practice and evaluation: from insight to impact. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 25 (1), 53-70

Elliott, C. (1999) *Locating the energy for change: an introduction to appreciative inquiry*. Winnipeg, Manitoba: International Institute for Sustainable Development,

Farrell, M., Douglas, D. and Siltanen, S. (2003) Exploring and developing a college's community of interest: an appreciative inquiry. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 19(6), 364-371

- Farrell, P., Woods, K., Lewis, S., Rooney, S., Squires, G. and O'Connor, M. (2006) *Research Report RR792: A Review of the Functions and Contribution of Educational Psychologists in England and Wales in light of "Every Child Matters: Change for Children"*. Nottingham: DfES
- Fitzgerald, M. (2004) *Multi-Agency Working: Literature Review*. (Unpublished – cited in DCSF, 2009d, above)
- Fitzgerald, S. P., Murrell, K. L. and Miller, M. G. (2003) Upfront best practice: appreciative inquiry: accentuating the positive. *Business Strategy Review*, 14(1), 5-7
- Fox, M. (2003) Opening Pandora's box: evidence-based practice for educational psychologists. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 19 (2), 91 – 102
- Gergen, K. J. (1994) *Toward Transformation in Social Knowledge*. London: Sage.
- Gergen, K. J. (1999). *An invitation to social construction*. London: Sage.
- Giddens, A. (ed.) (1975) *Positivism and Sociology*. London: Heinemann Educational Books
- Gilbert, N., Barkham, M., Richards, A. and Cameron, I. (2005) The effectiveness of a primary care mental health service delivering brief psychological interventions: a benchmarking study using the CORE system. *Primary Care Mental Health*, 3(4), 241 - 251
- Goldberg, R.A. (2001) Implementing a professional development system through appreciative inquiry. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 22 (2), 56–61
- Hammond, S. A. (1998) *Thin Book on Appreciative Inquiry. (2nd Edition)* Plano, Texas: Thin Book Publishing,
- Hodgson, R., Badu, K., Kati, C. & Parajuli, M., 2003, 'Artistry of the Invisible': Evaluation of 'Foundation for Change' – A Change Management Process, Kathmandu: Nepal Safer Motherhood Project. Retrieved 15 April 2010 from: <http://www.nsmmp.org/pdf/Artistry-of-the-Invisible--Evaluation-of-Foundation-for-Chan.pdf>
- Hughes, M.(2006) Multi-agency teams: why should working together make everything better? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 60 - 71
- Hymans, M. (2006) What needs to be put in place at an operational level to enable an integrated children's service to produce desired outcomes? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 23 - 34
- Jones, R.A. (1996) *Research Methods in the Social and Behavioral Sciences. (2nd Edition)*. Massachusetts: Sinauer

- Keefe, M. R. and Pesut, D. (2004) Appreciative inquiry and leadership transitions. *Journal of Professional Nursing*, 20(2), 103-109
- Kiresuk, T. and Sherman, R. (1968) Goal attainment scaling: a general method for evaluating comprehensive community mental health programs. *Community Mental Health Journal*, 4, 443–53.
- Kotellos, K., Rockey, S. and Tahmassebi, B. (2005) Using appreciative methods to evaluate an appreciative inquiry process: Evergreen Holistic Learning Centre. *AI Practitioner: The International Journal of AI Best Practice*, February 2005, 16 - 19
- Kuhn, T.S. (1996) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions: Third edition*. Chicago: University of Chicago
- Laming (2003) *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming*. London: The Stationery Office
- Lavender, T. and Chapple, J. (2004) An exploration of midwives' views of the current system of maternity care in England. *Midwifery*, 20 (4), 324-334
- Leadbetter, J. (2006) New ways of working and new ways of being: multi-agency working and professional identity. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 47 - 59
- Liebling, A., 1999, Doing research in prison: breaking the silence? *Theoretical Criminology*, 3(2), 147–173
- Liebling, A., Elliott, C., Arnold, H. (2001) Transforming the prison: romantic optimism or appreciative realism? *Criminal Justice*, 1(2), 161–180.
- Lloyd, G., Stead, J. and Kendrick, A. (2001) *Hanging on in there: a study of inter-agency work to prevent school exclusion in three local authorities*. London: National Children's Bureau
- McInnes, B. (2006) Management at a crossroads: the service management challenge of implementing routine evaluation and performance management in psychological therapy and counselling services. *European Journal of Psychotherapy and Counselling*, 8 (2), 163 – 176
- McNamee, S. (2003) Appreciative evaluation within a conflicted educational context. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 100, 23 - 40
- McNamee, S. (2007) Foreword. In Reed, J. (2007) *Appreciative Inquiry*. London: Sage.
- Mellor-Clark, J. and Barkham, M. (1997). Evaluating effectiveness: needs, problems and potential benefits. In I. Horton & V. Varma (Eds.) *The Needs of Counsellors and Psychotherapists*. London: Sage.

Messerschmidt, D., Thomas, D., Messerschmidt, L., and Bhimsen, D. (2004) *Increasing Access to Essential Obstetric Care: A Review of Progress and Process – Executive Summary*. Nepal: Department of Health Services. Retrieved 6 April 2010 from http://www.nsmo.org/publications_reports/documents/IncreasingAccessReviewSummary.pdf

Messerschmidt, D. (2005) *A Qualitative Review of the Impacts of Appreciative Inquiry*. Evaluation report prepared for UNICEF/Nepal. (Copy obtained by e-mail from Dr Messerschmidt)

Messerschmidt, D. (2008) Evaluating appreciative inquiry as an organisational transformation tool: an assessment from Nepal. *Human Organisation*, 67(4), 454 – 468

Miller, A., Gulliford, A. and Stringer, P. (2006) Editorial. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 4 - 6

Miller, A. (2007) *Keynote address to North West EP Network CPD conference, Chorley, December 2007*.

Miller, C. (2002) Learning from each other: practitioners in school-based support for children with language and communication needs. *Support for Learning*, 17 (4), 187–192.

Moore, J. (2005) Recognising and questioning the epistemological basis of educational psychology practice. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 21 (2), 103 – 116

Morton, R. (2004) *EMIE Report No. 76: Writing on the Wall: pioneer development of integrated local authority services for children and families*. Slough: NFER

Mukherjee, S., Beresford, B. and Sloper, P. (1999) *Unlocking Key Working: An Analysis of Keyworker Services for Families with Disabled Children*. Bristol: The Policy Press.

O'Hanlon, B. (2007) *Frequently asked questions about possibility therapy*. <http://www.billohanlon.com/FAQS/questionsaboutpossibilitytherapy/billohanlon.html> (accessed 21/7/10)

Onyett, S. (2009) Working appreciatively to improve services for children and families. *Clinical Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 14 (4), 495 - 507

Patton, M. Q. (2003) Inquiry into appreciative evaluation. *New Directions for Evaluation*, 100, 85 – 98

Pawson, R. and Tilley, N. (1997) *Realistic Evaluation*. London: Sage

Pesut, D.J. (2001) Appreciative inquiry. *Nursing Outlook*, 49, 163

- Pettitt, B. (2003) *Effective Joint Working between Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and Schools. DfES Research Report No. 412.* Nottingham: DfES publications.
- Pinney, A. (2004) *Reducing reliance on statements: An investigation into local authority practice and outcomes.* London: DfES Publications
- Postma, W. (1998) Capacity building: the making of a curry. *Development in Practice*, 8 (1), 54-63.
- Preece, D. and Timmins, P. (2004) Consulting with students: evaluating a mainstream inclusion centre. *Support for Learning*, 19 (1), 24–30.
- Reed, J. (2007) *Appreciative Inquiry.* London: Sage.
- Reed, J., Pearson, P., Douglas, B., Swinburne, S. and Wilding, H. (2002) Going home from hospital - an appreciative inquiry study. *Health and Social Care in the Community*, 10(1), 36-45.
- Rees, I. (2008) A systemic solution-orientated model. In Kelly, B., Woolfson, L. And Boyle, J. (2008). *Frameworks for Practice in Educational Psychology.* London: Jessica Kingsley
- Robson, C. (2002) (2nd Edition) *Real World Research.* Oxford: Blackwell
- Schwandt, T. A. (2009) Towards a practical theory of evidence for evaluation. In Donaldson, S. I., Christie, C. A. and Mark, M.M. (2009) *What Counts as Credible Evidence in Applied Research and Evaluation Practice?* London: Sage.
- Scruggs, T.E, Mastropieri. M.A. and Casto, G. (1987) The quantitative synthesis of single-subject research: methodology and validation. *Remedial and Special Education*, 8 (2), 24–33.
- Shannon, D. and Posada, S. (2007) The educational psychologist in the early years: current practice and future directions. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23 (3), 257-272
- Sharp, S. (2003). Towards more integrated services for children and young people with disabilities in Sheffield. Report to the Children and Young Person's Strategic Partnership Board, Sheffield. (Cited by Hughes, M., 2006, Multi-agency teams: Why should working together make everything better? *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 60 – 71)
- Shuayb, M., Sharp, C., Judkins, M. and Hetherington M. (2009). *Using Appreciative Inquiry in Educational Research: Possibilities and Limitations. Report.* Slough: NFER. Retrieved 6 April 2010 from: <http://www.nfer.ac.uk/nfer/publications/AEN01/AEN01.pdf>
- Sloper, P. (2004). Facilitators and barriers for co-ordinated multi-agency services. *Child: Care, Health and Development*, 30(6), 571–580

- Small, C. (2007) *Personal communication at National Strategy meeting*. (See also EPNET Archives for 7 June 2007)
- Smith, J.A. (2008) *Qualitative Psychology – a Practical Guide to Research Methods (Second Edition)*. London: Sage.
- Squires, G., Farrell, P., Woods, K., Lewis, S., Rooney, S. And O'Connor, M. (2007) Educational psychologists' contribution to the Every Child Matters agenda: the parents' view. *Educational Psychology in Practice*, 23(4), 343-361
- Stobie, I., Boyle, J. and Woolfson, L. (2005) Solution-focused approaches in the practice of UK educational psychologists. *School Psychology International*, 26 (1), 5 - 28
- Sturdy, A. and Grey, C. (2003) Beneath and beyond organizational change management: exploring alternatives . *Organization Articles*, 10(4), 651–662
- Thomas, D., Messerschmidt, L., Messerschmidt, D. And Bhimsen, D. (2004) *Increasing Access to Essential Obstetric Care: A Review of Progress and Process*. Nepal: Department of Health Services. Retrieved 6 April 2010 from http://www.nsmo.org/publications_reports/documents/IncreasingAccessstoEOC-AReviewofProgressandProcess.pdf
- Tilley, N. (2010) *Realist Evaluation of Children's Programmes*. Seminar for Manchester University Doctorate in Educational Psychology, March 2010.
- Timmins, P. and Miller, C. (2007) Making evaluations realistic: the challenge of complexity. *Support for Learning*, 22 (1), 9-16
- Tuckman, B. W. and Jensen, M.A.C. (1977) Stages of small group development revisited. *Group and Organization Studies*, 2(4), 419-27
- van der Haar, D., and Hosking, D.M. (2004) Evaluating appreciative inquiry: a relational constructionist perspective. *Human Relations*, 57(8), 1017-1036
- Warmington, P., Daniels, H., Edwards, A., Brown, S., Leadbetter, J., Martin, D. and Middleton, D. (2004) *Interagency Collaboration: a review of the literature*. Retrieved 1 August 2006 from www.education.bham.ac.uk/research/projects/liw/background/
- Watson, H. (2006) Facilitating effective working in multi-agency co-located teams. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 23 (4), 8 – 22
- Wolfendale, S. and Robinson, M. (2004), The developing role and influence of the educational psychologist working within early years. *Educational and Child Psychology*, 21(2), 16 – 25
- Yballe, L. and O'Connor, D. (2000) Appreciative pedagogy: constructing positive models for learning . *Journal of Management Education*, 24 (4), 474 - 483

Yin, R.K. (2003) (*3^d Edition*) *Case Study Research: Design and Methods*. London: Sage

Young, A., Temple, B., Davies, L., Parkinson, G., Bolton, J., Milborrow, W., Hutcheson, G. and Davis, A. (2006) *Research Report RR798 Early Support: An Evaluation of Phase 3 of Early Support*. Nottingham: DfES

Appendix 1: Initial letter to parents/carers

Children's Services Department
Sefton Educational Psychology & Portage
Service (S E P P S)
Freshfield Primary School Site
Watchyard Lane
Formby
Liverpool L37 3JY

Date:

Please contact: Eileen Oakes
Contact Number: 01704 385902
Fax No: 01704 385901

Dear «Title» «LastName»,

Parental Views on Educational Psychology Involvement

I am hoping to obtain the views of a number of parents who have had contact with Educational Psychologists during the past three years. This is so that the team can learn what parents value most about the service that we provide and we can then build on this good practice in the future.

You may remember «EP» talking to you about «Child»'s development. If you are willing to take part by talking to me about your involvement with «EP», I would like to visit you at home at «Time» on «Interviewdate» . If these arrangements are not convenient, please can you let me know.

Yours sincerely

Eileen Oakes

Senior Lead Educational Psychologist

Appendix 2: Copy of letter sent to Parent 2 for member checking of transcript and provocative proposals

**Children's Services
Sefton Educational Psychology &
Portage Service (SEPPS)**

Ainsdale Hope Centre
Sandringham Road
Ainsdale
SOUTHPORT
PR8 2PJ

Date: 17 February 2009

Please contact:

Telephone: 01704 882038

Fax: 01704 882039

E-mail: eileen.oakes@cs.sefton.gov.uk

Dear Parent 2,

Many thanks for letting me talk to you about Child 2's early years and your experience of the support provided by EP5. I was particularly interested in your thoughts on how the service should be equally accessible to all the parents who need it.

I've attached a transcript of your interview. This may not be wholly accurate as it was typed by a confidential external agency that was not always familiar with some of the language used. Please let me know if you wish to make any changes or if you would now like to add any more information. (The names of the people concerned will be deleted in the final version).

The next stage of the research is to use your story to help us ensure that other parents of young children receive the same quality of service from the Educational Psychology team. I have used the transcript to generate some 'Provocative Proposals' which describe the ideal situation. I now need you to check whether these statements are an accurate summary of the key themes of your story or whether there are any alterations or additions that you would like me to make. I have included a spare copy of the list, on which you can record your views, and a stamped, addressed envelope. Alternatively, you might prefer to ring me or e-mail me at the above address.

Thank you for your continued help and support.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Oakes, Senior Lead Educational Psychologist

Appendix 3: Invitation to SEPPS early years stakeholders

**Children's Services
Sefton Educational Psychology &
Portage Service (SEPPS)**
Ainsdale Hope Centre
Sandringham Road
Ainsdale
SOUTHPORT
PR8 2PJ

Date:
Please contact:
Telephone: 01704 882038
Fax: 01704 882039

Dear «FirstName»,

Workshop for SEPPS Early Years Partners

Formby PDC, 21st April 2009, 9am to 12 noon

This year, we are using an innovative approach called 'Appreciative Inquiry' to review the role of Sefton Educational Psychologists working in the Early Years. We hope that you can join us for a morning workshop at Formby PDC on 21st April 2009 to find out more about what 'Appreciative Inquiry' involves and what we found out during the first phase of the review. During the session, you will also have the opportunity to provide us with some examples of when we have worked well with you and to help us describe the ideal SEPPS Early Years Service for the future. The session is timed to run from 9am to 12 noon.

I have attached a flyer providing further information for you to share with other members of your team.

Yours sincerely,

Eileen Oakes, Senior Lead EP

Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service (SEPPS)

Help us make our best even better!

**Workshop for SEPPS Early Years Partners, Formby PDC, 21st April 2009,
9am to 12 noon**

This year, we are using an innovative approach called 'Appreciative Inquiry' to review the role of Sefton Educational Psychologists working in the Early Years. There are four phases:

- Phase 1: Discovery/Appreciating - "What is the best of what is?"
- Phase 2: Dream/ Envisioning Results - "What might be?"
- Phase 3: Design/ Co-constructing the future - "What should be the ideal?"
- Phase 4: Destiny/ Sustaining the change - "How to empower, learn and adjust/improvise"

During the Discovery phase, some of the parents who have had contact with Educational Psychologists during the past three years agreed to be interviewed. This has enabled us to find out what parents value most about the service that we provide so that we can build on this good practice in the future. The Educational Psychologists who have worked with Early Years children and settings in previous years have also been given the opportunity to reflect on the conditions that have shaped their best work. We are now ready to share these findings with other partners and to begin to plan for the future.

We hope that you can join us for a morning workshop at Formby PDC on 21st April 2009. The session is timed to run from 9am to 12 noon. You will be able to find out more about what 'Appreciative Inquiry' involves and what we found out during the first phase. You will then have the opportunity to provide us with some examples of when we have worked well with you and to help us describe the ideal Early Years service for the future.

Please reply to Eileen Oakes, Senior Lead EP,
Sefton Educational Psychology and Portage Service
Ainsdale Hope Centre
Sandringham Road
Southport
PR8 2PJ

Telephone - 01704 882038
Fax - 01704 882039
eileen.oakes@cs.sefton.gov.uk

Appendix 4 - Minutes of Early Years Meeting, January 12th 2010
Present: EP2, EP8, TEP3, TEP4, EP6, EO

Apologies: EP7, TEP1, TEP2

Prior to the meeting, each of the EYEPs was sent an e-mail asking them to reflect on the following questions:

- Which aspect of your Early Years work in 2009 are you most proud of?
- Who else would have noticed your contribution to this piece of work?
- What would be the best way of asking them for their views?
- What are you hoping to achieve in your Early Years work in 2010?
- What are your hopes for the SEPPS Early Years team in 2010?

EP6 responded by e-mail as he was not expecting to be able to attend the meeting, but he arrived in time to help plan the next steps.

TEP3 had been asked to give an opinion as to whether a 5 year old boy who had been fitted with a cochlear implant approximately a year ago was showing evidence of social communication difficulties. TEP3 had observed the boy in the school playground and then attended a CAF meeting. In between these two sessions, it was reported that one of the other professionals involved had suggested to the boy's parents that he may be showing signs of ASD. At the CAF meeting, however, there was evidence that the boy has started to make progress socially and this had provided TEP3 with the opportunity to suggest that the boy's development should be observed over time, especially as there had not yet been time to see how he would respond to the intervention programmes already in place. TEP3 thought that the boy's parents were more comfortable with this approach and that the speech and language therapist would have noticed her contribution. It was noted that the CAF process had also been helpful.

TEP4 had completed statutory advice on a young girl who had been given an assessment place at a school for children with severe learning difficulties when the family moved into the area from Dundee. Although the girl was not yet able to express her views verbally, TEP4 was proud of the way that she had gathered evidence from both school and home to suggest that she was enjoying being in the school. For example, the girl's father had told TEP4 that she got excited when the school bus arrived, smiling and laughing. TEP4 hoped that the SEN assessment team and the girl's father would notice her contribution.

EP2 was proud of her work with two teenage mothers at one of the Children's Centres. Both of the young women had given birth to children with complex needs and EP2 was therefore exploring the role of the EP with young mothers as well as with children in the early years. EP2 said that she had been able to look at the whole picture. She had carried out some direct 1:1 work, but she had also brought in other professionals such as the Early Years ICON, physiotherapist and speech

therapist for joint work or further individual work, as required. EP2 likened this approach to working in a Child Development Centre.

EP8 chose to share an example of her work supporting a child with the transition to YR in a large primary school. She said that she had been able to respond very quickly to what was perceived by the school to be a crisis situation in which the boy concerned was reported not to be accessing the class, but running round, biting and kicking. EP8 met the boy's parents, who she described as 'disheartened', she then observed the boy's behaviour and worked with the classteacher to set him small targets with frequent reviews involving the headteacher and SENCO. EP8 was pleased at the progress that the boy had made, saying that because his teacher was an NQT, she had been very willing to try a different approach with him. It was also thought that the relatively short time between reviews had been helpful. EP8 thought that her input would be recognised by the boy's parents, his teacher, the SENCO and the headteacher.

Next steps: TEP3 reported that all the TEPs had met with the SAIS early years team to discuss the unique contribution of the EP and some of the tools available to support working with very young children. Her priority for the future was to carry out more joint work with the Early Years ICONs.

TEP4 said that she had continued to keep best practice in contacting parents at the front of her mind and that she had been able to apply this practice with school-based work as well as with the parents/carers of early years children. Where she was not able to meet with parents directly, she was ensuring that she contacted them by phone.

EP8 was intending to use a similar approach to that described by EP2 with a Chinese child at one of the nurseries. Her observations had indicated that the child's needs were more complex than could be explained solely by the child having English as an additional language, but other professionals were felt to be wary of getting involved. EP8 was therefore intending to take responsibility for bringing a team round the child together. She also noted that she was looking for more opportunities to carry out joint work in future.

EP2 offered to use the example of her work at one of the full team professional development sessions to facilitate further understanding of how we use our psychological skills in working with very young children with complex needs and their families. EP2 also expressed the view that there was a need to review the Early Years casework procedures early in the Autumn Term 2010.

EP6 joined the meeting for a discussion of the best methods to elicit the views of stakeholders on the progress made to date. The methods discussed included interviews, questionnaires or a further workshop. It was suggested that the responses given in a group setting would be more convergent and less specific than if people were approached on an individual basis. The approach suggested was to carry out interviews with the SAIS Early Years ICONs and the Portage

workers and to draft a questionnaire for use with other stakeholders. The use of scaling and solution focused questions was also explored. Both TEP3 and TEP4 expressed an interest in helping to gather the data required.

Next meeting: The next meeting will be held at St John Stone between 1.30pm and 3pm on 9th March 2010.

Appendix 5: Transcript of interview with EP2

Speaker	Unit	Dialogue	Issues discussed
I:	1	Thank you for volunteering to take part and as you know what we are looking at is what is it like when we are our best and the idea is then that we can build on that and we can do more of that. So I have spoken as you know to some of the parents that you have put me in touch with and they have got their own very clear ideas as to what we have done for them and that has been helpful so now it's looking at your views. It is looking at it in fairly concrete terms so its trying to visualise a piece of work that you are very proud of that is a good example of what you would construe as our best work. If you talk about a piece of work that fits that sort of description.	
EP2:	2	All right. Do you want names or d'you want to just talk?	
I:	3	You can have names but we can also take them out of the transcript to anonymise it for confidentiality purposes but that might make it more real if you are naming people.	
EP2:	4	That's Fine. There are three particular pieces in mind so I will start with one if you like. This was a case which came to me because of my background in visual impairment and to all intents and purposes at the time it looked like a blind child. When I met the family there was already a history of involvement with professionals which was a little, it was quite hot in the sense that the	<p>EP2 4a – responding to contentious issues raised by others</p> <p>EP2 4b – acknowledging parental anxieties</p> <p>EP2 4c – focus on</p>

	<p>parents were still at the stage of huge anxiety around the future placements really for the child specifically but hidden behind that I felt, my judgement was that there was a misunderstanding or a denial around the true nature of the child's needs really. My view was that here we were looking at a child with profound and multiple disabilities not just a blind child. I worked with colleagues to kind of confirm that hypothesis by just gathering their reviews at well. Colleagues such as sensory, advisory teachers and physios, occupational therapists and the parent's main anxieties were as I say they were focused on the placement but I felt that although we had to deal with that and the acknowledge their concerns that really we needed to bring everything back a little bit to the here and now because the child was only just 2 at the time this [inaudible at 2.58] became involved and do a little bit of work really around what the child's actual needs were, about the sort of support at that moment in time that the family needed, which was different from thinking about the future of educational placement and also start to do a little bit of work really around unpacking the family view of the child's needs. It was a bit painful to be honest for the family and they had I think in all innocence been given advice to request statutory assessment very early, this had been based on the idea of the child being a blind child and needing very specific provision, which may not be available in Sefton and for me it was going down the road that was not the road we needed to go down. To start with we did some direct work though home visits with mum just talking through his needs, talking through strategies, about managing him at home matching that with managing in the nursery, some of the things that were happening but also asking for family to kind of trust us and</p>	<p>educational placement at too early a stage</p> <p>EP2 4d – incomplete understanding of child's needs</p> <p>EP2 4e – hypothesis testing</p> <p>EP2 4f – focus on immediate context</p> <p>EP2 4g – child's current needs</p> <p>EP2 4h – provide the support the family needs when its needed</p> <p>EP2 4g – using the family's view of their child</p> <p>EP2 4h – honesty can be painful</p> <p>EP2 4i – pressure for statutory assessment</p> <p>EP2 4j – home visits</p> <p>EP2 4k – direct work/strategies</p> <p>EP2 4l – building trust</p>
--	---	--

		<p>bear with us really around not rushing to judgement around statutory assessment of school placement and they were very anxious about dropping that but it was, I felt quite strongly that it was the right thing to do, that we needed to put that on the back burner. Very slowly over the visits we were kind of introducing the notion to mum that the needs might not be specific to the child's blindness and I think it was clear to us really that mum did understand that in her heart of hearts and the issue was dad.</p>	
I:	5	So who were us?	
EP2:	6	<p>Myself and the sensory advisory teacher, the key worker at the nursery were the three key people at this moment in time, although I would say that the OT's and physios had the same belief. We proceeded really with me making monitoring visits to the nursery and to the home and putting strategies in place, just reviewing strategies and putting them into place. It led to a bit of joint work which the physio which was really good and really brought about a big spurt of progress based on what we did together and as we were beginning to think that we really needed to broach the subject with dad of having a different view of the child's needs or you know playing around with that view it was kind of taken out of our hands and a specialist at Maudesley Hospital in London did it for us. So that was obviously very traumatic for dad, but what it did do was immediately helped mum and dad to think differently about school placement and they started to visit a range of provision because by this time it was twelve to eighteen months on and we were ready to think really more realistically about statutory assessment. They were still looking at that time out of authority provisions, which you know its not obviously all placed to think about provision but if I was asked in a Court of Law is that</p>	<p>EP2 6a – joint working</p> <p>EP2 6b – acknowledging emotional needs of the family</p> <p>EP2 6c – going at the pace of parents</p> <p>EP2 6d – taking on challenges</p> <p>EP2 6e – diagnosis can be helpful</p> <p>EP2 6f – supporting inclusion</p> <p>EP2 6g – respecting parents views</p> <p>EP2 6h – funding</p> <p>EP2 6i – celebrating success</p> <p>EP2 6j – home visit</p> <p>EP2 6k – knowledge of normal development</p>

	<p>the right place for that child I would have said no if I had to be very honest. It never came to that, a provision that they visited in Sefton they loved and the child is now appropriately placed there and I think we managed to save potentially a very contentious situation just by moving slowly with mum and dad but nevertheless being prepared to do the difficult work as well. So that was good, you know to the best of my knowledge he is still well placed. So that was one. A second one was kind of different really in that the child, it was one of those cases where you walk into the nursery and straight away knew this child was autistic. There was no question there was any other diagnosis that would be appropriate. Mum and dad had already started to think about that themselves. Fairly soon after the diagnosis was made and that was great but the concern was that he was presenting in the nursery and this was really only 12 months prior to school entry that he was presenting in the nursery really with quite marked manifestations of autism. You know very little in the way of communication, etc., but nevertheless we decided to bite the bullet and think about mainstream and mum and dad wanted that as well and with a lot of sort of gritting out teeth he received support from the funding panel. He went into reception and quite honestly within 6 months he was a different child, totally different child and still is. I am still involved with this child, he is year 2 now, doing beautifully you know, lots and lots of support still in place. He will need life long support but he is really responding very well. Then just briefly very quickly another one were I think these things don't happen very often but for me it was an important piece of work and it was a referral that came through from a speech and language therapist were there were just a few questions really around, is there a</p>	<p>EP2 6l – joint working with parent</p> <p>EP2 6m – reassuring the family</p>
--	--	---

		<p>developmental delay, is there some speech issue and he wasn't in a provision at the time, he was due to go in one about 6 weeks after our referral, so we just made a home visit, the speech therapist who referred him, I know very well because she does lots of early years work and lots of stuff together. We went to make the home visit and saw what I thought was a perfectly normal child who was just a bit immature and so I sort of girded my loins and I said that I don't think there is a job for me here. This is a perfectly normal child who is a bit immature, reported mum was perfectly happy with that and Jude was going to follow up the child in the provision, we arranged that, that's what Jude and I and mum arranged between us, fed that back to the speech therapist who was hugely relieved because that had been her gut feeling and she was trying to do a belt and braces job and I think that we perhaps come across children like that more than we acknowledge really. So that felt like a good piece of work you know, there was one family totally reassured and able to get on with their lives you know with a little boy who was just a bit on the immature side really. So those are probably three of the most recent cases that I can think of were it has been hard, certainly in the first two it has been hard work but I think the outcomes have been good.</p>	
I:	7	So thinking about those situations you work more generally, what do you think are your special talents and abilities; you know what do you bring to bear as an individual in this?	
EP2:	8	Me personally or as an EP.	
I:	9	You as an EP.	
EP2:	10	I think that I have huge empathy for parents . You know I don't know whether that, I am sure that I am not the only person in the world with that but I do find it very easy to	EP2 10a – empathy

		<p>have empathy for parents. I find it very easy to summon, or not easy but I find I am able to summon a professional way of working with parents that are difficult to work with and challenging to work with. I feel that is my job to do that and keep the child at the centre, obviously without. I think that I am quite brave in the practice that I do take risks if I believe it is the right thing to do even if it perhaps not, you know always the easy way out. I think I'm sensitive to parents and I absolutely totally and utter adore little children in all shapes and sizes, I love working with them. I feel at ease working with families with very young children, I think I feel that is when I am at, I don't know whether that's when I at my best but its when I am at my most comfortable.</p>	<p>EP2 10b – working effectively with challenging parents</p> <p>EP2 10c – keeping the child at the centre</p> <p>EP2 10c – sensitivity</p> <p>EP2 10d – adoring little children</p>
I:	11	But you get a lot of pleasure from this work as well as feeling confident?	
EP2:	12	I don't ever feel stressed by early years work.	
I:	13	Why?	
EP2:	14	Even when it's really difficult you know child protection cases and things like that, I don't ever feel stressed by early years work and I don't know why that it I just don't. But that's good.	
I:	15	Sorry I have missed a stage out but it may be related to that question that you have just answered. So thinking back to the examples that you gave and the work that you do best, what made it possible for you to do work of that quality in those situations?	
EP2:	16	Because at the time the person who was the senior practitioner for early years I felt trusted me completely and trusted my profession judgement and allowed me to work in the way that I saw fit really and so I	EP2 16a – feeling trusted

		<p>felt confident that somebody else felt confident that I would do it. I mean I am very experienced in early years so I wasn't sort of going off on a frolic, I was using that experience to inform the decisions I took, but that was a huge part of it to be honest the fact that I felt trusted and valued professionally and that somebody thought I could do this work. Obviously experience, you know in the knottiness of some of the uncomfortably detail around some of the cases it is really only experience that has brought me to a stage where I am not stressed by that, so two things really, experience and a line manager who trusted me and allowed me to manage it the way I saw fit.</p>	<p>EP2 16b – confidence in own abilities</p> <p>EP2 16c – experience in dealing with 'knottiness'</p>
I:	17	<p>So putting all that together and thinking that the [inaudible at 13.25] what would be your three wishes for the service if we are going to build on that, the sort of experience that you have just described?</p>	
EP2:	18	<p>I think I would hope that we would have a system around early years, which was tight and which didn't let children slip through the net but at the same time allowed people a good deal of professional freedom because people are confident about what they do. I think I would be very anxious that we don't lose the psychology from early years work. You know with the introduction of curriculum around early years development or have you which I am not hugely comfortable with and which I feel will be short lived in its existence. I do feel that the penny is going to drop not that children's development shouldn't be recorded but that curriculum is not the right way forward really so that the psychology of child development, particularly around the very young children is protected and that we very much take a lead with our colleagues in that area. Those are two things really. I mean off the top of my head I can't</p>	<p>EP2 18a – effective systems for early identification</p> <p>EP2 18b – a high degree of professional autonomy</p> <p>EP2 18c – EPs taking the lead on the psychology of early child development</p>

		think of anything else. If I were to sit down and spend today thinking about it, it would probably be lots.	
I:	19	But like I say you will get the opportunity after this part of the work to think further so if there is anything you want to add you are welcome to do that but its what would make the most difference really isn't it, the way that we function as a team given [inaudible at 15.05] early years.	
EP2:	20	I think you know really acknowledging and developing our role as somebody who does have an overview of all the system. Not that we don't have specific competencies and tools to put into the box but actually one of our great strengths is that we do stand over the whole system, all the different bits and that we are good at recognising other peoples strengths and pulling them in as and when but ultimately somebody has to stand looking over the whole lot and I personally think we are probably best placed to do that so there is something around not losing that, I think which we are in danger of, again partly because of the push on curriculum.	<p>EP2 20a – EPs have an overview of the system</p> <p>EP2 20b – EPs are good at recognising and utilising the strengths of others</p>
I:	21	Right OK.	

END

Appendix 6: Initial analysis of EP2 transcript

Code	Theme	Provocative proposals
EP2 6f – supporting inclusion	Philosophy/ principles	(Links with EP1 = ‘ <i>Our work is underpinned by key principles</i> ’)
EP2 4g – child’s current needs	Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We keep the child at the centre</i>
EP2 4b – acknowledging parental anxieties EP2 4f – focus on immediate context EP2 4g – using the family’s view of their child EP2 4h – provide the support the family needs when its needed EP2 4j – home visits EP2 4l – building trust EP2 6j – home visit EP2 6b – acknowledging emotional needs of the family EP2 6c – going at the pace of parents EP2 6g – respecting parents views EP2 6m – reassuring the family EP2 6l – joint working with parent	Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We start from where the child and family are at this moment in time</i> • <i>We have empathy for parents but are brave enough to be honest with them</i>
EP2 6a – joint working	Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Joint working helps us to confirm our hypotheses about a child</i>
EP2 4k – direct work/strategies EP2 6k – knowledge of normal development EP2 18c – EPs taking the lead on the psychology of early child development EP2 20a – EPs have an overview of the system EP2 20b – EPs are good at recognising and utilising the strengths of others	EPs role	Basic themes carried forward to ‘What do EPs contribute?’

Code	Theme	Provocative proposals
EP2 4e – hypothesis testing EP2 6d – taking on challenges EP2 10a – empathy EP2 10b – working effectively with challenging parents EP2 10c – keeping the child at the centre EP2 10c – sensitivity EP2 10d – adoring little children	Personal skills/ attributes	Basic themes carried forward to ‘What do EPs contribute?’ and ‘What drives us?’
EP2 4a – responding to contentious issues raised by others EP2 4c – focus on educational placement at too early a stage EP2 4d – incomplete understanding of child’s needs EP2 4h – honesty can be painful EP2 4i – pressure for statutory assessment EP2 6e – diagnosis can be helpful EP2 16a – feeling trusted EP2 16b – confidence in own abilities EP2 16c – experience in dealing with ‘knottiness’ EP2 18a – effective systems for early identification EP2 18b – a high degree of professional autonomy	Facilitators/barriers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We do our best work when we feel trusted and valued professionally</i> • <i>Sharing our understanding of a child’s development takes time</i>

Appendix 7: Combined provocative proposals from EP interviews

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
<p>EP1 6a & 6j – based round children’s needs EP1 6i – children are seen as children 1st EP2 4g – child’s current needs EP3 16 – interpretation of child’s distress EP3 18 c & d – importance of seeing the child in context EP3 20d – peer support EP3 26f – representing the interests of the child</p>	<p>Children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children are viewed as children first • Everyone in the system is looking after the children’s best interests • Services are organised in areas around all children’s needs being met We keep the child at the centre • We start from where the child and family are at this moment in time
<p>EP1 6c – parental preference EP1 6d – choice EP2 4b – acknowledging parental anxieties EP2 4h – provide the support the family needs when its needed EP2 4g – using the family’s view of their child EP2 6b – acknowledging emotional needs of the family EP2 6c – going at the pace of parents EP2 6g – respecting parents views EP2 6m – reassuring the family EP2 6l – joint working with parent EP 18e – mum seen as defensive by others EP3 26a – mum critical of other professionals EP3 26b – mum defensive of child EP3 26c – mum wanted mainstream EP3 108a – having child with a disability can be painful for parents</p>	<p>Families</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents know what they want and are given real choices • We start from where the child and family are at this moment in time • We have empathy for parents but are brave enough to be honest with them

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
EP1 6b & 6j – locality/area based EP1 10b - Area provision EP1 6e – services working together effectively EP1 6j – systems organised around child’s needs EP1 10f - Working together	Working together	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Services are working together, utilising each other’s strengths and avoiding overlap to enable early intervention • Joint working helps us to confirm our hypotheses about a child
EP1 6f – utilising strengths EP1 6g – avoiding overlap EP1 6h – early intervention EP1 6k – Philosophy that inclusion & quality are the same EP1 8 – Philosophy of equality of access to services EP1 10d - Supporting additional needs isn’t necessarily a specialist role EP1 10e - Importance of quality first teaching EP1 22a - Belief that everyone is looking after the children’s best interests EP2 6f – supporting inclusion EP3 26d – working to principle that the child has a right to supported inclusion EP3 103c – principles/philosophy of =ve psychology: building on strengths	Philosophy/principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Our work is underpinned by key principles

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
<p>EP1 16a -Took time EP1 18a -Importance of committed leaders EP1 18b - Funding/support linked to need and outcomes EP1 18c -Need for agreed protocols and processes EP1 18d - Based on agreed principles EP1 22b - Building on strengths EP1 22c - Building a relationship EP1 22d - Challenge later EP2 4j – home visits EP2 4k – direct work/strategies EP2 4l – building trust EP2 6a – joint working EP2 6j – home visit EP3 12a – graduated response EP3 12c – direct work with child & family EP3 12d – consultation EP3 20a & b – implementing strategy/programme EP3 22b – multi-agency meeting EP3 26e – transition planning EP3 26j- transition meeting</p>	<p>Processes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing our understanding of a child's development takes time

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
EP1 16b - Evidence that outcomes for children were monitored EP1 16c - Feedback from parents EP1 16d - Impact on specialist provision EP2 6i – celebrating success EP3 20c – success measures EP3 28 – evidence of follow-up EP 30c – making a difference EP 30d – positive outcomes for child & family EP3 38 – evidence of follow up	Outcomes-led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We collect evidence of the outcomes for children and families • If the system's not working, we do something different and better • By working together, we have stopped children arriving in reception without their needs being understood
EP2 4f – focus on immediate context EP2 6e – diagnosis can be helpful EP2 16a – feeling trusted EP2 16b – confidence in own abilities EP2 16c – experience in dealing with 'knottiness' EP3 22a – collaboration EP3 26i – advance planning EP3 40 – timing of EP involvement is important	Facilitators	

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
EP2 4a – responding to contentious issues raised by others EP2 4c – focus on educational placement at too early a stage EP2 4d – incomplete understanding of child’s needs EP2 4h – honesty can be painful EP2 4i – pressure for statutory assessment EP3 12b – EPs coming in later EP3 46a – early years teams operate in different structures EP3 66 – dissatisfaction with previous system EP3 70a – problems with graduated response EP3 70b – EPs used to rubber stamp things EP3 74a – need more EPs EP3 74b – pressure of work	Barriers	
EP1 4a -One piece of the jigsaw EP3 116a – EPs only a small part of the picture	Complexity (is this a barrier?)	
EP1 3b -Time allocation EP1 10a - Time allocation EP2 6h – funding EP3 12e – key worker EP3 26h – need support in place	Resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sharing our understanding of a child’s development takes time

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
<p>EP1 4b -EP influence on other services EP1 10c - E.P.s co-ordinating EP1 10g - Early involvement EP1 10h – Consultation EP1 10i -Strengths-based EP1 14 - Equality of access to services EP1 18e - Strengths-based approaches to psychology EP1 18f –E.P.s know about child development & how children learn best EP1 18g – EPs understand change EP1 18h – EPs understand the psychology of adults EP2 6k – knowledge of normal development EP2 18c – EPs taking the lead on the psychology of early child development EP2 20a – EPs have an overview of the system EP2 20b – EPs are good at recognising and utilising the strengths of others EP3 30b – EPs skills: communication, facilitation, child development, applying psychology EP3 52 – EPs in a good position in the system EP3 54a – signposting EP3 54b – knowledge of psychology, child development, different settings, working with families EP3 76 – should be generic role EP3 80 – need to relate & communicate with parents EP3 96b – the EP’s remit is 0-19 EP3 96c – early years work alone would be too narrow EP3 130a – psychology EP3 130b – knowledge of child development EP3 103d – skills = communication, problem solving, consultation EP3 134a – depth of understanding EP3 134b – need strong sense of identity</p>	<p>EPs role</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within an area, the EP is involved with all the children that come into the system

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
EP1 24 a - Personal knowledge and experience of what works EP1 24b -Hypothesis testing EP2 4e – hypothesis testing EP1 24 c - Assessment over time EP1 24d - Understanding of LA support systems EP1 24e - Knowledge of change management EP1 24f - Matching the approach to the context EP1 24 g -Importance of timing EP2 6d – taking on challenges EP2 10a – empathy EP2 10b – working effectively with challenging parents EP2 10c – keeping the child at the centre EP2 10c – sensitivity EP2 10d – adoring little children EP3 4 – experience EP3 18a & b – problem-solving/hypothesis testing EP3 18f –helping people relax & talk EP3 26g – facilitating meetings EP3 30a – summary of skills used EP3 50 – problem solving EP3 84a – people trust me EP3 84b – people feel comfortable with me EP3 84c – people trust me with information EP3 88 – I like being with young children EP3 96a – I find working with little children is interesting EP3 108b - empathy	Personal skills/ attributes	

Codes	Themes	Provocative proposals
EP1 26 E.P.s have a role in ensuring equity within the system working towards the aspiration that all children can be educated, cared for and play together EP2 18a – effective systems for early identification EP2 18b – a high degree of professional autonomy EP3 46b – EPs should be involved 1 st (ie before teachers) EP3 56a –EPs coordinating Team Around the Child EP3 116b – need TAC EP3 116c – need better communication, protocols, timing	Aspirations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="1688 384 2134 491">• We do our best work when we feel trusted and valued professionally
EP1 4 c- Preparation for interview	Engagement with research	

Appendix 8: Synthesis of themes from EP transcripts

Basic themes/provocative proposals	Organising themes	Global theme
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Our work is underpinned by key principles</i> • <i>We use positive psychology to build on strengths</i> • <i>We believe that any child has the right to be supported to attend their local school</i> 	Philosophy and principles	What drives us?
EP1 24b -Hypothesis testing EP1 24e - Knowledge of change management EP2 4a – responding to contentious issues raised by others EP2 4e – hypothesis testing EP2 6d – taking on challenges EP2 10b – working effectively with challenging parents EP2 16c – experience in dealing with ‘knottiness’ EP3 16 – interpretation of child’s distress EP3 18a & b – problem-solving/hypothesis testing	Liking a challenge!	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We collect evidence of the outcomes for children and families</i> • <i>By working together, we have stopped children arriving in reception without their needs being understood</i> • <i>If the system’s not working, we do something different and better</i> 	Knowing that we make a difference to children & families	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We do our best work when we feel trusted and valued professionally</i> 	Professional autonomy	
EP2 10d – adoring little children EP3 88 – I like being with young children EP3 96a – I find working with little children is interesting	Enjoying the company of very young children	

Basic themes/provocative proposals	Organising themes	Global theme
EP2 6k – knowledge of normal development EP2 18c – EPs taking the lead on the psychology of early child development EP3 54b – knowledge of psychology, child development, different settings, working with families EP3 130b – knowledge of child development	A knowledge of child development	What do EPs contribute to Early Years work?
EP1 18f –E.P.s know about child development & how children learn best	A knowledge of how children learn best	
EP1 18g – EPs understand change EP1 24e - Knowledge of change management	An understanding of change	
EP1 18h – EPs understand the psychology of adults	An understanding of the psychology of adults	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>We start from where the child and family are at this moment in time</i> • <i>We start with the parent(s)' knowledge of their child</i> • <i>We recognise parent(s)' pain We have empathy for parents but are brave enough to be honest with them</i> • <i>Parents know what they want and are given real choices</i> 	Empathy for parents & a recognition of where they're starting from	
EP1 18e - Strengths-based approaches to psychology EP2 20b – EPs are good at recognising and utilising the strengths of others	An ability to recognise & utilise the strengths of others	

Basic themes/provocative proposals	Organising themes	Global theme
EP1 24d - Understanding of LA support systems EP2 20a – EPs have an overview of the system EP3 52 – EPs in a good position in the system EP3 54a – signposting	A knowledge of Local Authority systems & processes	What do EPs contribute to Early Years work? (cont'd)
EP 18f –helping people relax & talk EP3 80 – able to relate & communicate with parents EP3 84a – people trust me EP3 84b – people feel comfortable with me EP3 84c – people trust me with information	Good communication skills & the ability to put people at their ease	

Appendix 9: Level of involvement of SEPPS team members

Title	Early Years role?	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
Portage Worker 1	Throughout	Identified parents	Participated in Workshop A	No involvement	Joint work & interview
Portage Worker 2	Throughout	Identified parents	Participated in Workshop A	No involvement	Joint work & interview
TEP1	From Sept 09	No involvement	No involvement	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload & participated in some AI meetings
TEP2	From Sept 09	No involvement	No involvement	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload & participated in some AI meetings
TEP3	From Sept 09	Before appointment	Before appointment	Before appointment	EY caseload , participated in AI meetings & interviewed some stakeholders
TEP4	From Sept 09	Before appointment	Before appointment	Before appointment	EY caseload , participated in AI meetings & interviewed some stakeholders
EP1	Until Jan 09	Interviewed	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	Agreed process
EP2	Through-out	Interviewed	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload , participated in all AI meetings & shared practice with all EP team
EP3	Until Sept 09	Interviewed	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	Retired in Sept 09

Title	Early Years role?	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4
EP4	No	No involvement	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	Participated in AI meetings for all EPs
EP5	No	Identified parent	No involvement	Participated in Workshop B	Participated in AI meetings for all EPs
EP6	Through-out	No involvement	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload & participated in some AI meetings
EP7	From Jan 09	No involvement	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload & participated in some AI meetings
EP8	From Jan 09	Before appointment	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	EY caseload & participated in all AI meetings
EP9	Jan 09 to Sept 09	No involvement	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	Participated in AI meetings for all EPs
EP10	Jan 09 to Sept 09	No involvement	Participated in Workshop A	Participated in Workshop B	Left the Authority
EP11	Before leaving the Authority	Mentioned in interviews	No involvement	No involvement	No involvement
EP12	No	No involvement	No involvement	No involvement	Participated in AI meetings for all EPs

Appendix 10: Parent 1's story

Parent 1 provided a rich, detailed account of her journey to find answers about her son's rare genetic condition. She described the anticipation in the family before Child 1's birth following three bereavements over the course of two to three years, including the death of her daughter during the previous year. Parent 1 had concerns about her son's lack of reaction to her from birth, but, although he spent his first three weeks in a special care unit, she felt that she was not taken seriously until he was around three months old. Her health visitor then agreed that Child 1 was not responding appropriately and she was able to obtain an early appointment with a Consultant Paediatrician who then referred Child 1 on to a Consultant Ophthalmologist. Parent 1 described her reaction to this response:

'So at that point, I actually felt a huge relief. I thought somebody's actually listening to me here and agreeing and doing something, rather than just patting me on the back and saying, you know I'm sure it'll all be fine.'

Child 1 was found to be experiencing visual difficulties, but the extent and nature of the difficulties was initially unclear. Over the next few months, a range of tests were carried out to establish whether Child 1's sensory difficulties were cortical or visual in nature. Parent 1 was subsequently told that although Child 1 was blind, his brain functions appeared normal on an MRI scan. The delay in his general development was therefore attributed to blindness:

'It was explained to us that children can be very delayed when they're blind but still develop normally, they kind of reach a threshold where they start to catch up. So we set off on this journey, it's the best way I can describe it, where we met a variety of therapists and we had physiotherapy and speech and language and sadly, up until 12 months ago Child 1 was a little boy very locked in his own world and didn't respond to anybody or anything very well and was tactile defensive. Simply didn't want to be touched and didn't want to touch anything, so working with him for me, and anybody else, was incredibly challenging I have to say.'

In addition to the different types of therapy described above, Child 1 also received support from the Portage service. Parent 1 was very positive about how Portage Worker 1 supported her through the physical and emotional challenges of working with Child 1:

'We were fortunate enough to have Portage Worker 1 who came out a great deal, so I have to say was a wonderful lady. She really uplifted me at some points where I was feeling quite deflated and quite demoralised with Child 1.....I was dealing with a little boy that didn't want to be touched, didn't want to play, didn't want to do anything, wasn't sleeping and it really did wear me down at some points, but Portage Worker 1 was fantastic, she came in and persevered with him and played with him.'

Parent 1 described the range of responses she obtained when she tried to find an appropriate nursery for Child 1. She was, however, happy with the nursery from the private and voluntary sector where he was eventually placed, especially as he was provided with one to one support from a member of staff with extensive experience of working with young children with a significant visual loss. Direct payments also enabled Parent 1 to buy in additional hours from Child 1's carer so that he could sleep at her house one night per week.

Parent 1 described how her experience of working with young people with special educational needs in further education led her to conclude that Child 1 had other needs in addition to his blindness. Although the peripatetic teacher for visually impaired children was encouraging Parent 1 to place Child 1 in a mainstream setting, Parent 1 thought that a more specialist placement was needed. Prior to the involvement of EP2, Parent 1 had visited a range of local schools, none of which were thought to be able to meet Child 1's needs.

Parent 1 describes EP2 as the catalyst who moved her on to finding the answers to her questions about Child 1's development:

'At this point we met EP2 and, I think what I liked about EP2 I would have to say, was she was very honest and to the point and I would rather somebody was like that, so I know where I stand and what I'm doing and she quite blatantly said, well it's your choice ultimately what type of education you want, but looking at Child 1 I think he presents other difficulties. I believe that maybe he has learning difficulties

as well. And I was like, well I appreciate that but I need somebody to actually medically give me this diagnosis.'

Parent 1 confirmed that EP2 had observed Child 1 over time at nursery and at home and that she had worked in partnership with Child 1's physiotherapist to suggest effective strategies for managing his behaviour:

'We sort of brought EP2 on board with the therapist, which was fantastic because she actually worked with his physio a couple of times and looked at, how do we work around getting Child 1 to actually do what we want him to do. For his benefit, but without making it, it'd become a battle of wills. We'd fight for an hour to make him do it, he'd fight not to do it and nobody was winning in the situation. So she suggested some behavioural management strategies to put in place with Child 1. That actually did help alleviate the conflict I would say of him not wanting and us wanting him to and that was very beneficial.'

Parent 1 felt that the answers that she needed were not available locally. She described how reading Jordan's biography led her to contact Moorfield Eye Hospital, as Jordan's son has a similar condition to Child 1. Child 1 was offered a place on the hospital's research programme, but there was a delay in an appointment being offered while Parent 1 applied for funding from the PCT. Child 1's father was reported to have been reduced to tears by an insensitive registrar who Parent 1 described as having no people skills. It was, however, confirmed that Child 1 did have learning difficulties in addition to his blindness. The family has since developed a positive relationship with the Professor conducting the research and a subsequent assessment at Great Ormond Street has also confirmed that Child 1 is autistic.

Despite her preconceptions about the type of children who used to attend one of the local schools for children with severe learning difficulties, Parent 1's first reaction to the school concerned was very positive:

'We had reservations, I'll be perfectly honest at this point, but we had been around the school and we got a fantastic vibe off it and the head teacher.'

Parent 1 insisted that Child 1's needs were specified in detail in his statement, but she said that she had been reassured by the way in which the Head teacher had

maintained regular contact with her by telephone until Child 1's support was in place.

Parent 1 was one of the first parents in the Authority to pilot the Early Support approach described in chapter 2. She was very positive about the materials, especially the developmental journal and the multi-agency meetings:

'I had several different organisations, services and therapists, there was never any evaluation of: Is this service working? Is this what people want? Is this meeting the child's needs? It was kind of, well you've got it, so there you go and that's why I think I ended up continuing with the multi-agency cause this was my opportunity to say, well this is working or this isn't working, or I'm struggling here, please give me support or input and that was quite invaluable and I'm quite lucky I suppose, I'm a mum that's not forward in coming backwards and that's why we went down that road and I know there's lot of parents out there that aren't as able and that's quite difficult for them I know.'

Parent 1 confirmed that EP2 had supported the whole family:

'I'd probably say in the context, some of the other therapists that you, are very hands on with Child 1, whereas with EP2 I felt it was, it wasn't just Child 1, it was Child 1 and me. There was, I'm trying to think how to explain it, the therapist that come in are there to work with Child 1 and that's what they're for and that's what Child 1 needs, but there are times when, I as a parent, need support or I need propping up, or challenging, or given different perceptions and that was something I think the educational psychologist did was that, it wasn't just about Child 1, it was about the family as well maybe.'

Although Parent 1 said that the involvement of the family with EP2 had been positive overall, she would have welcomed clearer information about what to expect from the service in the future. This comment was therefore included in the list of provocative proposals as:

- Sefton EPs keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

The other provocative proposals generated from Parent 1's appreciative interview were:

- Sefton EPs support the whole family
- Sefton EPs believe that parents know their child best
- Sefton EPs take parents' concerns seriously
- Sefton EPs are honest and give parents accurate information
- Sefton EPs observe children at home and in nursery
- Sefton EPs provide families with support in managing their child's behaviour
- Sefton EPs work closely with other professionals and contribute to multi-agency meetings

Appendix 11: Summary of positive stories from Workshop A (see below for code to acronyms)

Story no.	Type of child	Setting/context	People involved	Key points	Theme (see below)
PS1	Social communication issues	Home - first visit	Both parents, EP4, EYICON	Real sharing and joint working. Dipping in and out of roles. Focusing on the parents' story Beginning to establish trust and confidence Presenting the human face of the EP Looking at positives	WT WT F F EP PP
PS2	Not specified	Statutory assessment in an early years setting	Parents, EP7, EYICON3 & staff from setting	People were aware of others involvement/views/roles Expertise & involvement of people in the setting People all playing their part Communication smooth Parents happy & fully informed of their options Child's needs met Stress-free, not a battle	WT WT WT WT F Ch OL
PS3	Child with complex needs: CP, cochlear implant, feisty	Transition meeting in resourced nursery	Staff from nursery & receiving school, EP, SALT, EYICON, DEA, HIICON, PW, OT, Physio.	Communication with parents & professionals - "wove it together" Establishing trust & respect for everyone's role Expertise @ EP level Experienced EY practitioners Listening to parents wishes. Tracking families – regular reviews & anticipation of situations Signpost/guide rather than pre-empt decision - "right decision for the right reasons" Links between nursery & mainstream & special schools, including training TAs.	WT WT EP WT F OL F WT

Story no.	Type of child	Setting/context	People involved	Key points	Theme
PS4	Child with complex needs	Not specified, but home implied	Portage, Therapists, Parent, Grandparent (no mention of EP)	Communication between parents/professionals Talking together – answering parents questions Listening to parents concerns – trying to find solutions Parents given all options Looking at different provision – supporting the parents decision Maintaining a positive focus	WT F F F F PP
PS5	Child with complex needs	Reflection on meetings held in the parents' home & occasionally joint treatment sessions	Portage worker, Physio- & parents (no mention of EP)	It was good to see that both professionals were working to the same goals Also good for parents to see that we liaise & communicate with each other Eases bombardment of info to parents Parents happy that agencies are working to same goals & witnessing child achieving small steps towards goals	WT WT F OL
PS6	2 year old girl with language delay & query other delay? (Difficult circumstance for family with children in care etc., looking @ whole child & family not just speech)	Home Visit	EP2 / S</staff from CC & playgroup leader	Regular & clear communication with the professionals All were reasonably clear of their bit in terms of role Everyone doing what they agreed to do, with EP2 co-ordinating tasks, making initial contacts & providing regular feedback to parents Working very much from where the family were at – taking it one step at a time Providing an overview of the child's needs & giving truthful & reasonable outcomes Provide a structured setting to enable the child to develop & progress No one panicked, the mother is now understanding the child's needs & child is making progress	WT WT WT/EP F Ch Ch OL

Story no.	Type of child	Setting/context	People involved	Key points	Theme
PS7	Child with ASD	Home visit (new referral)	EP3, EYICON 3, CCP, SALT and parent	Sharing information Opportunities for discussion (often informal) Planned transition into nursery Informal relationship with family Links with setting Co-ordinated approach	WT WT OL F WT WT
PS8	ASD boy attending CDC in previous Authority	Nursery	EP1	Demonstrating co-ordinated approach Informal, non-threatening Parents are the experts Focus on family life Recognising that children are central Being human Valuing positives	WT F/B F F Ch F/B PP
PS9	Nursery age child seen as struggling in setting	Nursery	Mother, teacher, EP, SALT	Joint working – child seen by SALT & EP together. There was time for joint discussion with all parties involved. We could all support each other to help the parents move on with their understanding of the child's needs	WT WT WT/F

Key:

Educational psychologists = EPs

Early years inclusion consultants (formerly known as advisory teachers) = EYICONs

Portage workers = PWs

Physiotherapist = Physio

Speech and language therapist = SALT

Consultant community paediatrician = CCP

Head teacher = HT

Area special educational needs coordinator = Area SENCO

Parent partnership officer = PPO

Philosophy/principles (PP)

Children (Ch)

Families (F)

Working together (WT)

Outcomes-led (OL)

EP's role (EP)

Facilitators/barriers (F/B)

Appendix 12: Links between positive stories and Workshop A provocative proposals

Codes from positive stories	Themes	Workshop A provocative proposals
Looking at positives (PS1) Maintaining a positive focus (PS4) Valuing positives (PS8)	Philosophy/ principles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We focus on strengths whilst acknowledging challenges • We seek always to highlight possibilities
Child's needs met (PS2) Providing an overview of the child's needs & giving truthful & reasonable outcomes (PS6) Provide a structured setting to enable the child to develop & progress (PS6) Recognising that children are central (PS8)	Children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recording the child's journey
Focusing on the parents' story (PS1) Beginning to establish trust and confidence (PS1) Parents happy & fully informed of their options (PS2) Listening to parents wishes (PS3) Signpost/guide rather than pre-empt decision - "right decision for the right reasons" (PS3) Talking together – answering parents questions (PS4) Listening to parents concerns – trying to find solutions (PS4) Parents given all options (PS4) Looking at different provision – supporting the parents decision (PS4) Eases bombardment of info to parents (PS5) Working very much from where the family were at – taking it one step at a time (PS6) Informal relationship with family (PS7) Parents are the experts (PS8) Focus on family life (PS8)	Families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We develop sincere & respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively • Communication is at the heart of all care • Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family • Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start

Codes from positive stories	Themes	Workshop A provocative proposals
<p>Real sharing and joint working (PS1) Dipping in and out of roles (PS1) People were aware of others involvement/views/roles (PS2) Expertise & involvement of people in the setting (PS2) People all playing their part (PS2) Communication smooth (PS2) Communication with parents & professionals - “wove it together” (PS3) Establishing trust & respect for everyone’s role (PS3) Experienced EY practitioners (PS3) Links between nursery & mainstream & special schools, including training TAs (PS3) Communication between parents/professionals (PS4) It was good to see that both professionals were working to the same goals (PS5) Also good for parents to see that we liaise & communicate with each other (PS5) Regular & clear communication with the professionals All were reasonably clear of their bit in terms of role (PS6) Everyone doing what they agreed to do (PS6) Sharing information (PS7) Opportunities for discussion (often informal) (PS7) Links with setting (PS7) Co-ordinated approach (PS7) Demonstrating co-ordinated approach (PS8) Joint working – child seen by SALT & EP together (PS9) There was time for joint discussion with all parties involved (PS9) We could all support each other to help the parents move on with their understanding of the child’s needs (PS9)</p>	<p>Working together</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative working is prioritised and valued • All practice & procedures develop the strengths, well-being & skills of professionals • Planning meetings are useful (essential to include E.Y.s children – section for E.Y.s) • All parts of the jigsaw available to one another. Example: EP referrals to SALT to be copied into Paediatrician

Codes from positive stories	Themes	Workshop A provocative proposals
Stress-free, not a battle (PS2) Tracking families – regular reviews & anticipation of situations (PS3) Parents happy that agencies are working to same goals & witnessing child achieving small steps towards goals (PS5) No one panicked, the mother is now understanding the child's needs & child is making progress (PS6) Planned transition into nursery (PS7)	Outcomes-led	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We establish a shared starting point, jointly acknowledge progress and share goals
Presenting the human face of the EP (PS1) Expertise @ EP level (PS3) EP2 co-ordinating tasks, making initial contacts & providing regular feedback to parents (PS6)	EP's role	
Informal, non-threatening (PS8) Being human (PS8)	Facilitators/ barriers	

Appendix 13: EPs' Prioritisation of provocative proposals

Proposal	Rated 1st = 3pts	Rated 2nd = 2pts	Rated 3rd = 1pt	Total
We develop sincere & respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively	6x3=18	1x2 =2	1x1=1	21
Communication is at the heart of all care	1x3=3	6x2=12	1x1=1	16
Collaborative working is prioritised and valued	1x3=3	1x2=2	6x1=6	11
Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start	2x3=6	1x2=2	1x1=1	9
Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family	1x3=3	2x2=4	1x1=1	8
We focus on strengths whilst acknowledging challenges	1x3=3	1x2=2	1x1=1	6
We establish a shared starting point, jointly acknowledge progress and share goals	1x3=3		1x1=1	4
Planning meetings are useful (essential to include E.Y.s children – section for E.Y.s)		1x2=2	1x1=1	3
All parts of the jigsaw available to one another. Example: EP referrals to SALT to be copied into Paediatrician				0
Recording the child's journey				0
All practice & procedures develop the strengths, well-being & skills of professionals				0
We seek always to highlight possibilities				0

Appendix 14: Actions from Workshop B

We develop sincere & respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively – EP9 & TEP2 to draft actions

Relationships to be considered within 2 frameworks:			
i) Relationships with other professionals – from health (e.g. therapists, doctors etc), social care (e.g. Children with Disabilities team), Voluntary sector ('support' agencies), Educational settings (nurseries, schools & private & voluntary settings)			
ii) Relationships with parent/carers/families			
Action	By whom?	When?	Desired outcome
Scoping the relationships – i) with professionals ii) with parent/carer/families	EY EPs		Identification/ agreement of what a sincere & respectful relationship looks like
Discussion of “Who’s the client?” within EY work? (family, child, setting? Is it different once child is accessing EY education?)	EY EPs	By 22 nd May 09	
Linked to the above discussion & appreciate inquiry approach, interview EY settings – especially P&V settings to obtain views of EP work	EO	By July (or in line with doctorate)	Obtain wider picture of what is good about EY EP work, in settings who may be unfamiliar with EP work
Learn more about work of other professionals/agencies working with EY children	EPs	Apr-Dec 09	Better understanding of working practice /ethos /challenges facing others and enabling others to understand our work
Develop teamwork with other professionals – through discussion & joint working – projects as well as casework.	EPs		As above. Joint working / tasks to facilitate the development of relationships
Learn from & share good practice of multi-agency working (from within & outside Sefton)	EPs	Apr-Dec 09	Use research / evaluations to develop good multi-agency practice
Develop cross-silo working within Sefton – - joint & shared work planning - (pilot) projects to lead the way	EPs (Sefton MBC / PCT etc!!)	Ongoing	Improved opportunities to work with others outside of the Inclusion division
Peer supervision – develop co-working practices, appreciative enquiry	EY EPs, SAIS, Portage	EY EP meeting before 22.5.09	Develop understanding of working practices, and identification of good working practice

Communication is at the heart of all care – EP7 & EP2 to draft action(s)

Hi Eileen,

EP7 and I were asked to consider the statement; communication is the heart of all our care. We changed the wording slightly to; Good communication is the heart of all our work.

We discussed two possible actions which might fit the time scale.

1. An E.P. Professional Practice Session given over to a debate/discussion/idea sharing forum to consider;

What are good communication skills

Revisit/remind ourselves of what it takes to engage well with parents in difficult circumstances.

Do we think communication in Early Years is different to other age - cohorts.

We think this may be possible during the Summer term and that all E.P.s should be involved but would need a volunteer to facilitate it.

2. An exercise to look at the practicalities of how we work e.g. protocols around how to make initial contact, how we record or structure contact with other professionals.

This could be done in the Autumn Term by the Early Years Team.

Collaborative working is prioritised and valued – EP3 & EP6 to draft action(s)

Dear Eileen,

EP3 and I were asked to consider the following statement

'Collaborative Working is prioritised and valued'

We first broke that down into three areas:

1. Collaboration within the team
2. Collaboration with other professionals
3. Collaboration with families

Two possible actions were discussed:

1. Developing a protocol about agreeing actions with settings and families in order to fully include families in any interventions (this could be carried out by the EP early years team in the autumn term)
2. Discussing the need to balance transparency with caution in communicating views about a child's development to families and other stakeholders (this could be raised in an EP professional practice session).

regards,

EP6

Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start – EP4 & EO to draft actions

- Review the leaflets to ensure that they give parents an accurate picture of what we do in the early years – all EPs with TEP2/TEP1 leading, by the Spring Bank Holiday
- Identify all the people who are likely to distribute the leaflets & settings, e.g. HVs, libraries?, clinics?, Children's Centres, Community Paeds, Portage etc (NB Do we want the leaflets to be freely available or do we want them to be give out by with a personal message?)
- Elicit views alongside content – same people, same time scale
- We need to offer parenst a choice of where we meet them, including in their own homes
- In the ideal situation, we should 1st meet the parent with someone they already know (Would we encourage parents to bring someone with them or would this fuel their anxieties?) (How do we find out parental choice of 1st contact? – ideally by phone?)

Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family – EP8 & EP1 to draft action(s)

Eileen,

Further to your request for our actions, I have recorded our action below:

Group: EP1 and EP8 (prioritise the needs of families)

Action: To send acknowledgement letters to parents (copied to the referrer) when a child is referred to the service (To be completed by EP1 in two weeks)

We also discussed things which are already in place such as promoting informed choice. Other points included:

- having discussions with early years EPs around initial contact with parents
- examining existing systems
- looking at the principles of early support
- regular reviews with families

Regards

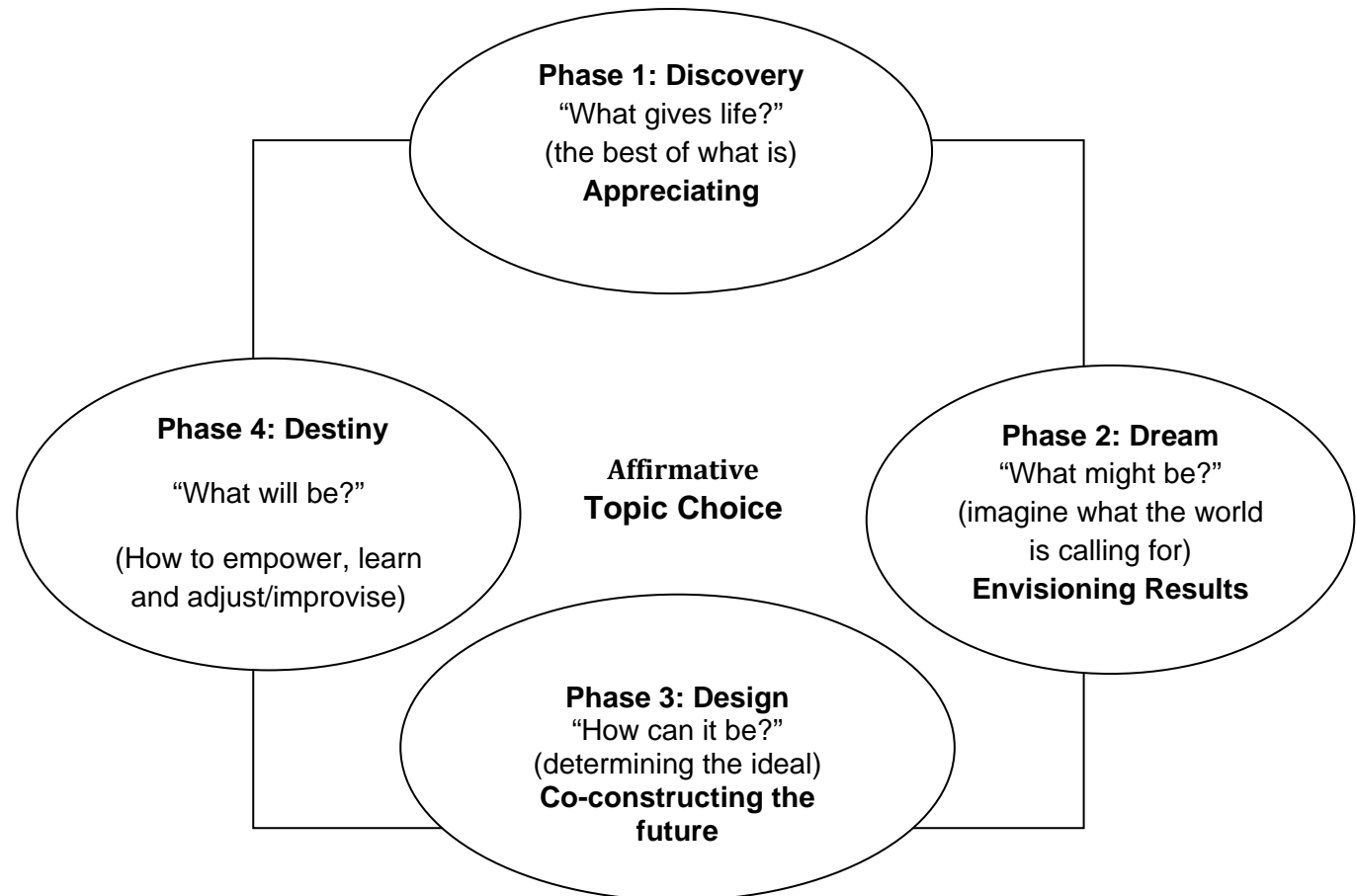
EP8

Appendix 15: Handout for Professional Development Session, 16 September 2009

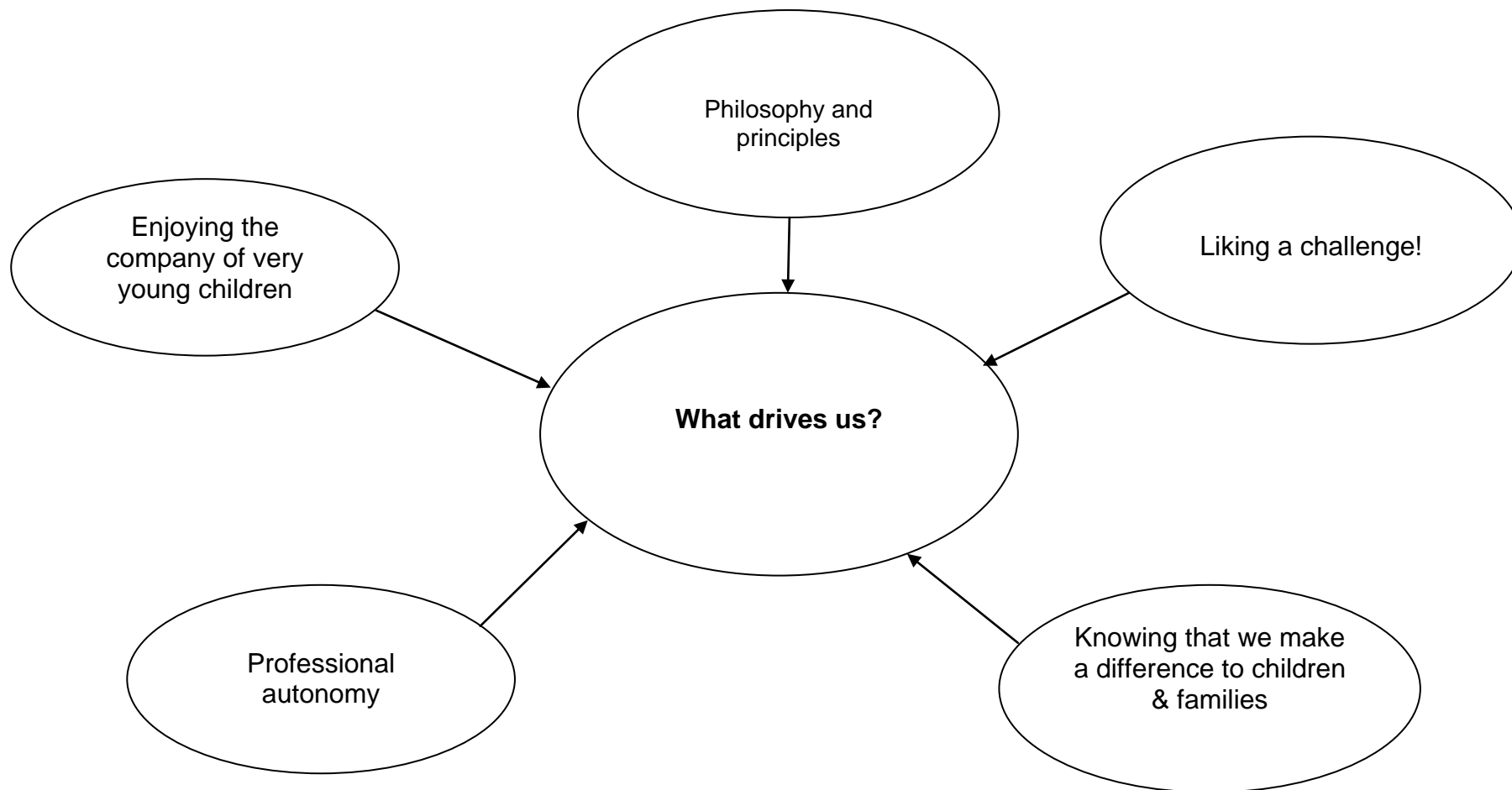
Content:

- The AI cycle re-visited
- What are Sefton Early Years EPs passionate about?
- What do we think we contribute to Early Years work?
- What does our best practice look like to parents?
- A wish for the future....
- Provocative proposals from April workshop
- What did we achieve last term?
- What do we need to do next?
- How will we know that we've achieved our goals?

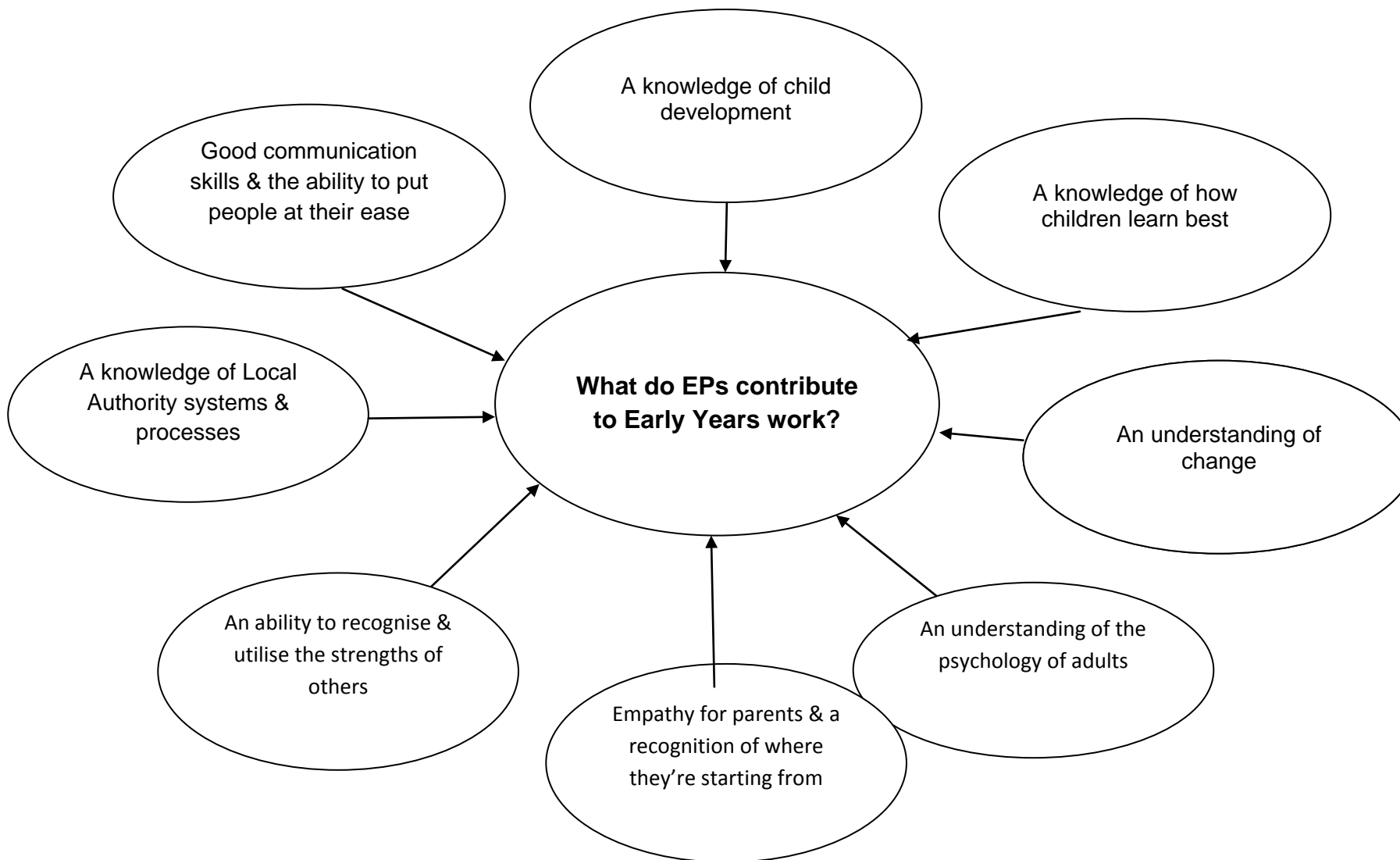
The AI cycle re-visited



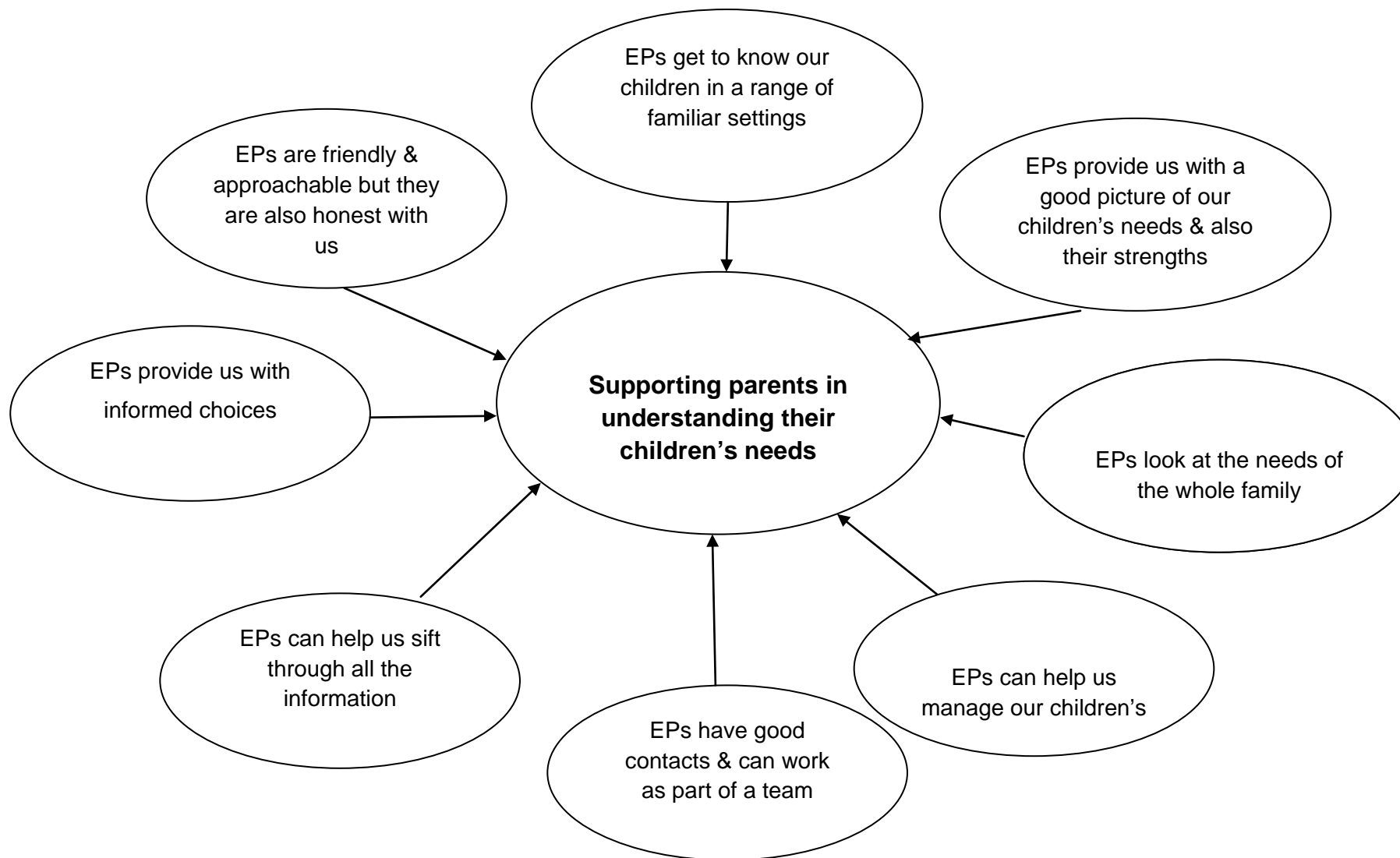
What are Sefton Early Years EPs passionate about?



What do we think we contribute to Early Years work?



What does our best practice look like to parents?



A wish for the future....

- Sefton E.P.s keep parents informed when their work is finished or they transfer responsibility to another member of the team

Provocative proposals from April workshop

- We develop sincere & respectful relationships/Fruitful relationships provide the basis for highlighting possibility and working effectively
- Communication is at the heart of all care
- Time constraints are not a barrier to developing positive relationships with families and professionals from the start
- Whatever we do professionally promotes the well-being of the family Collaborative working is prioritised and valued
- Planning meetings are useful (essential to include E.Y.s children – section for E.Y.s)
- We focus on strengths whilst acknowledging challenges
- We establish a shared starting point, jointly acknowledge progress and share goals
- All parts of the jigsaw available to one another. Example: EP referrals to SALT to be copied into Paediatrician
- Recording the child's journey
- All practice & procedures develop the strengths, well-being & skills of professionals
- We seek all ways to highlight possibilities

What did we achieve last term?

What do we need to do next?

How will we know that we've achieved our goals?