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How to Be an Assistant Educational Psychologist: A Constructivist grounded theory study of how individuals experience work as Assistant Educational Psychologists in England.

**Natalie Neal**

**210103292**

**Supervised by Dr Scott Johnson**

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**School of Education, University of Sheffield**

## Abstract

This study aimed to create a new theoretical understanding of how Assistant Educational Psychologists (Asst. EPs) experience their work through the initial research question: *What are the experiences of Assistant Educational Psychologists currently working in Educational Psychology Services in England?*

Prior research on the Asst. EP role has focused on their activities and value, so the methodology for the current study needed to be exploratory, inductive, and have the potential to create a new theoretical understanding of how Asst. EPs experience work. Using Constructivist grounded theory methodology allowed for Asst. EPs' experiences to be explored in their richness to create a substantive Grounded Theory.

Ten participants were recruited from in-person and online Asst. EP networks. Participants who were employed in England in a role that met the Association of Educational Psychologists' definition of an "Assistant Educational Psychologist" for at least two academic terms were selected to take part. Data were produced through semi-structured interviews and focus groups.

A constant comparative analysis was employed in which codes and categories were compared as they were constructed and revised to determine their relevance to the developing substantive theory. A substantive Grounded Theory of how Asst. EPs experience a lack of meaning in their roles and subsequently create meanings of Asst. EP and EP work was produced, informed by existential philosophical themes.

Implications are suggested for how services can support meaning-making and enable Asst. EP to develop meaningfulness in their work. Guidance using these suggestions was created to share with those who support Asst. EPs.

## Dedication and thanks

Firstly, to my participants. Thank you for sharing your experiences with me, your perseverance and dedication to your work is inspiring.

Thank you to Scott Johnson, my thesis supervisor. I have truly valued your support and enthusiasm throughout my research journey. My journey would not have been the same without your knowledge and philosophical musings.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### 1.1 Background context

The demand for services that support children and young people (CYP) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in England has grown exponentially over the past 12 years. Since 2012, there has been a 91% national increase in statutory assessments for Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and an estimated 10% of CYP in England will have EHCPs by 2024, four times the amount of CYP with EHCPs in 2017 (Marsh, 2023).

Additionally, a national decrease in school funding of 3% per pupil since 2010 (Sibieta, 2022) and a 21% reduction in funding to local authority (LA) budgets since 2012 (Atkins & Hoddinott, 2023) has placed LA SEND systems and educational settings under significant financial strain. Consequently, many educational settings are struggling to provide the SEND provision CYP need within the constraints of their setting's resources, leading to mainstream education becoming less accessible for CYP with SEND (Stanbridge, 2024). The impact of this is seen in the 250% increase in SEND first-tier tribunal appeals since 2015 (Marsh, 2023), showing how the pressures felt in the current system negatively affect families of CYP who feel they have to fight for support for their children. Overall, the current systems to support CYP with SEND in England appear unsustainable.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) play a key role in SEND systems by supporting CYP with SEND through consultation, assessment, intervention, research, and training (Farrell et al., 2006). Historically, the educational psychology profession has struggled with its professional identity, constantly constructing and reconstructing EP work in relation to the changing socio-political context and associated policies for supporting CYP with SEND (Fallon et al., 2010). EPs now work across every level of the SEND system with individual families and CYP,



educational settings, LAs, and national development of education and inclusion practices. Owing to their unique position across these different levels, Marsh (2014, 2023) argues EPs are ideally placed to support LAs in meeting the increased demands for SEND services. However, with the current pressure on SEND services, EPs are experiencing significantly increased workloads, completing statutory assessments as part of the Education Health and Care Needs Assessment process (Atfield et al., 2023). Consequently, many EPs are moving away from LA practice in favour of better working conditions; Atfield et al. (2023) reported that 35% of LA Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) have seen reductions in staff numbers since 2019. Combined with 88% of LA EPSs reporting recruitment difficulties (Atfield et al., 2023), EPSs are experiencing significant capacity issues in meeting the current demands of the SEND system.

Since the 1990s, public service managers and policymakers have addressed workforce shortages by supplementing the work of qualified practitioners with assistant roles (Bach, 2002; Bach et al., 2007). As the number and variety of assistant roles have increased, research has explored the conceptualisation of these roles and the experiences of the people employed in them, particularly Teaching Assistants (e.g., Kerry (2005)), Social Work Assistants (e.g., Kessler et al. (2006)), and Health Care Assistants (e.g., Kessler et al. (2013)). However, there is a dearth of research exploring the experiences of those employed as Assistant Educational Psychologists (Asst. EPs) in the educational psychology profession. The Asst. EP position developed in the late 1990s as a role for psychology graduates to 'assist the work of an Educational Psychologist/Educational Psychology Services and to gain relevant experience before applying for a place on a recognised Doctorate EP training course' (Association for Educational Psychologists [AEP], 2022, What is an AsEP?, para 1). Current guidelines suggest LAs who employ Asst. EPs should provide experiences relevant to

doctoral training and employ Asst. EPs for no longer than 4 years to ensure they enter training as soon as possible (AEP, 2022). These experiences should be tailored to the Asst. EP's prior experiences and competence as it is recognised they are unqualified and so should not undertake the full scope of activities completed by EPs (The Soulbury Committee, 2019). In the absence of detailed workforce data on Asst. EPs, information available from Harland et al. (2022) suggests inequalities exist in this role as the majority of Asst. EPs identified as white women, were aged 25-34 years old, and had no disabilities.

The nature of the Asst. EP role has changed considerably over time. These changes have been associated with legislation that has affected the nature of the EP role and, in turn, affected the role of Asst. EPs (Farrell et al., 2006; Monsen et al., 2009). For example, the promotion of cluster-based work in the Every Child Matters agenda (Department for Education and Skills, 2003) led to some EPSs recruiting Asst. EPs for additional capacity to support this service delivery model (Monsen et al., 2009). More recently, increased statutory duties in the 2014 SEND reforms outlined in the Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) have led to an increased demand for EPs (Atfield et al., 2023; Lyonette et al., 2019). As a result, EPSs have recruited Asst. EPs with the aim of supporting them to gain places on doctoral EP training courses and return once qualified (Atfield et al., 2023; Lyonette et al., 2019). Additionally, changes in the professional training required to become an EP may have affected the nature of the Asst. EP role. In 2006, the training route shifted from a one-year Masters course to a three-year applied Doctorate qualification (Monsen et al., 2009). Subsequently, entry requirements for training courses changed, so applicants no longer needed two years teaching experience prior to application (Monsen et al., 2009). Since then, Asst. EPs have been shown to have a variety of experiences prior to their employment,

including social work, teaching, youth work, and research assistants (Collyer, 2012; Monsen et al., 2009). Contracts of employment for Asst. EPs also reflect the temporary nature of the role, with many contracts lasting 12 months or less (Collyer, 2012).

## 1.2 Coming to know the focus of my research: Meaning and work

Park (2017) described meaning as 'the central issue of human existence' (p.15). Human beings are constantly trying to make sense of the world. In this search for meaning, we construct our understanding of our world, and then use this understanding to direct our actions and further meaning-making (Guevara & Ord, 1996). Going to work is the most common human experience, so work plays a key role in how we understand the world and our place in it (Gini, 2000). If an individual's experience of work is constantly changing, this creates uncertainty and has a significant impact on how those working within the profession create meaning of their world. When individuals encounter change and uncertainty, their current understandings of the world and their lives can collapse in an "existential crisis" of feelings of extreme anxiety (Priya, 2010). As a result, individuals are left questioning their meaning of self in relation to the world, wondering **who am I and why am I here?** However, this existential anxiety can be accompanied by existential hope, as Marcel (as cited in Gosetti-Ferencei, 2020) argued that individuals who are experiencing uncertainty recognise that their life is not pre-determined and can feel joy at the freedom of possibility their Being in the world offers.

The gods had condemned Sisyphus to ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor

(Camus, 1955, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, para. 1)

With meaning comes purpose, which helps humans better understand their relationship with the world around them (Park, 2017). When individuals experience purpose at work, their work becomes meaningful and valuable. Experiencing meaningful work can have several positive effects, both in terms of work-related outcomes and personal well-being. Meaningful work has been reported to be positively related to levels of work engagement and general personal well-being (Steger, 2017; van Wingerden & van der Stoep, 2017), whereas meaningfulness has been reported to be negatively related to employee burnout and work-related stress and fatigue (Garrick et al., 2014; van Wingerden & van der Stoep, 2017). Therefore, being able to construct positive meanings of work as important and purposeful appears to be important for an individual's quality of life.

In the ever-changing context of educational psychology and the role of Asst. EPs, their meanings of work may need to be continually reconstructed as their current understandings become obsolete. Therefore, are individuals working in EPSs able to experience meaningfulness at work if their understanding of their work, selves at work, and others in the world of work lacks stability? These questions about meaning and work came to form the basis of this thesis.

### 1.3 Focus of study: Asst. EPs' experiences of meaning-making

This thesis is a qualitative exploration of individuals' experiences of working in an Asst. EP role using Constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology. In line with a GT approach, I created a broad initial research question to explore in Phase One of the study:

What are the experiences of Assistant Educational Psychologists currently working in Educational Psychology Services in England?

In formulating this research question, I sought to remain open to what Asst. EPs wanted to talk about in relation to their experiences, with the hope of identifying directions for the study that were important and meaningful for them.

For the second phase of the study, I constructed two specific research questions from the two areas I felt were of importance to participants from their experiences they shared in Phase One:

How do Assistant Educational Psychologists experience a lack of work meaning?

How do Assistant Educational Psychologists resolve a lack of work meaning?

## 1.4 Personal perspectives and reflexivity

### 1.4.1 Positionality

Most discussions around the researcher's positionality in qualitative research focus on an insider-outsider dichotomy (Bukamal, 2022). However, this view of positionality has been criticised for its assumption of a hard distinction between subject and object (realist ontology) and that researchers can adopt only one position in their research (Bukamal, 2022; Gelir, 2021). In contrast, Herr and Anderson (2005) argued researchers can adopt multiple positionalities during their research along an insider-outsider continuum based on how their intersectionality of personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, race, experience, etc.) compare to the characteristics of their participants and the setting within they are carrying out the research.

When considering my positionalities in relation to my research, I needed to ensure they were consistent with the ontological and epistemological assumptions I adopted for my research. My research used a constructionist approach to how knowledge is formed,

assuming knowledge is situated within relational processes. From this perspective, I believe I was inherently present within my research, playing an integral role in the co-construction of knowledge throughout the study. I also acknowledge my experience of being an Asst. EP for 2 years prior to doctoral training continues to influence my current beliefs, understandings, and actions despite no longer being a member of the group participating in my study. However, regardless of how I viewed my position, it was also important to consider how participants in the study might view my position in relation to them and what this meant when viewing my research process as a co-construction of knowledge.

**Reflexive journal excerpt (03.02.23)**

Do I share my experience of being an Asst. EP with participants? If I share my experience of being an Asst. EP, I need to consider whether participants will feel I have more credibility as I have been an Asst. EP. Will they feel I will "get" their experience beyond what they say in their interviews? Will they feel I will be more "sympathetic" to their experiences and therefore reveal more negative aspects of their experience compared to if they were talking to someone who hadn't experienced being in the same role? Will they feel I am one of "them"? However, if I assume ontologically that the knowledge in my study is co-constructed, does this matter? I can't stop my experience affecting how data is constructed, so I will just need to consider how being open and honest affected my research.

#### 1.4.2 Reflexivity in the current study

Gemignani (2017) described traditional reflexive processes as 'exploring the ways in which researchers and their subjectivities affect what is and can be designed, gathered, interpreted, analyzed, and reported in an investigation' (p. 1). These traditional reflexive processes of identifying personal assumptions, preconceptions, social positions, and histories have been used to limit their influence on research in an attempt to increase objectivity (Gemignani, 2017). However, Gemignani (2017) argued using reflexive processes

in this way is based on realist ontological views of Being and existence that assume values and ideas can exist separately from the research process. Therefore, I considered how to use reflexive processes in a way that was consistent with the existential and constructionist approaches to knowledge construction adopted in my research. I felt the approach to reflexivity I wanted to take in my research was better described in the quote below by Berger (2015):

It means turning of the researcher lens back onto oneself to recognize and take responsibility for one's own situatedness within the research and the effect that it may have on the setting and people being studied, questions being asked, data being collected, and its interpretation. As such, the idea of reflexivity challenges the view of knowledge production as independent of the researcher producing it and of knowledge as objective

(p. 220)

From the outset, I recognised my beliefs and values would shape my research and the knowledge produced. As these are based on my experience, I acknowledged the knowledge I construed during my two-year employment as an Asst. EP before doctoral training would therefore be present in my chosen philosophical, methodological, and theoretical approaches to researching Asst. EPs' experiences and the co-construction of knowledge throughout my research. Thus, I decided to begin my research journey by considering how I would describe my experience of working as an Asst. EP to reflect on my positions and how they may influence my research. This is shown in the reflective account in Section 1.4.3. Taking into account Finlay's (2002) and Gerstl-Pepin and Patrizio's (2009) caveats that producing a reflexive account in this way would only provide a partial and tentative insight

into my positionings and that I would need to continue to document my perspectives throughout my research, I chose to keep a reflexive journal of my positions throughout my research journey. Excerpts from this are included in reflexive boxes throughout this thesis as an opportunity for readers to better understand my research journey and how my positions may have influenced the research.

#### 1.4.3 Reflexive account: Personal experience of being an Asst. EP

I became employed as an Asst. EP following eight years of teaching. This major life change was accompanied by a loss of my sense of belonging and identity – did I belong within the EPS within which I was working? I felt uncertain about the role as it was a temporary role with the expectation that I would apply for professional training as soon as possible. This experience was uncomfortable as my future was unknown. My response to this feeling of discomfort was that my professional identity felt threatened; I believed I had to recreate my identity from my position as an experienced teacher where I felt competent in my role to an 'assistant' role where my responsibilities were unknown to me. I quickly realised I did not fully understand what EPs did and, in a way, I became "consciously incompetent" (Broadwell, 1969) in relation to the knowledge and skills I held. I felt I had to "unlearn" old systems of working I felt comfortable with and "relearn" a new way of working with CYP. With this came a sense of vulnerability, I moved from being a helper to needing help. I feel I benefitted from working in an EPS that had reflected on how Asst. EPs worked and the support they were given. I was encouraged to create a professional development plan that reflected my prior experiences, interests, and support I felt I needed to increase my competence as an Asst. EP. During my first five months, I experienced a wide range of activities supporting EPs with casework, including gathering pupil views, shadowing EP



consultations, carrying out observations, and conducting research with CYP. Through supervision, I learned to think critically about the psychological theory underpinning the approaches I applied in my work and develop my reflexivity. As I grew in confidence, I felt I had developed some feeling of "conscious competence" in my application of psychology to the activities I was undertaking. As I developed competence in exploring the psychology underpinning the techniques I was applying when working with CYP, their families, and school staff, I began to sense a shift in my professional identity and began questioning whether this was what it was like to be an EP. I recall what I consider to have been a "light-bulb moment" when shadowing an EP using a solution-focused approach in consultation. By listening for areas of strength to build on and using Snyder's (2002) Hope Theory to promote the young person's agency to follow pathways towards their desired goals, I felt a shift in my way of thinking about how to approach problem-saturated narratives surrounding the CYP I worked with. This experience led me to think more explicitly about the psychology I was applying and the appropriateness of theories for my work, which I had not done in my previous teaching role.

During my two years in the role, I became aware of the differences in how Asst. EPs were working and the activities they completed through regional network meetings. For example, some Asst. EPs were employed by EPSs to undertake a specific role, such as developing and delivering training, and did not work alongside EPs in their casework, and others completed statutory assessments independently despite not being qualified to do so. This made me feel uncomfortable as I felt a sense of injustice in how Asst. EPs were treated differently across the EPSs. I believe the support I received from my EPS effectively developed my skills and professional identity in preparation for doctoral training, whereas the activities of some Asst. EPs may not prepare them for this.

#### 1.4.4 Insights from my reflective account

I noticed three main perspectives in my reflexive account that I recognise influenced my chosen research area, methodology, and interpretation of data. These are outlined below.

1. Asst. EPs may have experienced feelings of uncertainty and incompetence when they began working in their roles.
2. Asst. EPs may construct new professional identities while employed in their roles.
3. Some activities may better prepare Asst. EPs for doctoral training than others.

I revisit these perspectives and how they may have influenced my research in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 2: Literature review

In this chapter, I outline my approach to reviewing the literature in the context of using GT methodology and discuss the literature relevant to the substantive Grounded Theory developed throughout the study.

### 2.1 The role of the literature review in grounded theory research

The timing of reviewing the literature when using GT methodology has been heavily debated (Evans, 2013; Glaser, 1978; Holton & Walsh, 2017; A. O'Connor et al., 2018).

O'Connor et al. (2018) argued one of the main factors influencing this debate is the concept of *theoretical sensitivity*, defined by Glaser (1978) as the extent to which the researcher can detect essential concepts in the data that are relevant to their emerging theory. Glaser (1978) suggested researchers should enter the GT process without preconceptions because GT methodology is intended as an inductive method; preconceptions may lead the researcher to force their data into categories that may be inappropriate. Therefore, Glaser (1978) recommended that reviewing existing literature should be delayed so researchers can generate conceptual categories that are purely grounded in the data. As such, Classic grounded theorists who align with Glaser's method often complete coding of their data before starting their literature review to ensure their theory is integrated into, but not influenced by, the existing literature (A. O'Connor et al., 2018).

On the other hand, Charmaz (2014) argued researchers are likely to choose research topics of interest and, in turn, hold knowledge and perspectives about these areas before beginning their research. She proposed that Glaser's (1978) assumption that researchers can enter the research process without preconceptions is naïve and unrealistic (Charmaz, 2014). Instead, she suggested that researchers reflect on their prior knowledge, rather than

pretend it does not exist, to develop an awareness of how this may affect their research (Charmaz, 2014).

In contrast to Classic GT, Constructivist grounded theorists are encouraged to review the literature before data production to develop a critical and reflective stance on previous research in their substantive area of interest (Charmaz, 2014). In addition to supporting the development of a unique theory (Charmaz, 2014), this enables the creation of an *informed Grounded Theory* (Thornberg, 2012) that reflects the relationship between categories developed by the researcher and existing research. Indeed, Glaser (1978) acknowledged that for researchers to develop theoretical sensitivity, they must be familiar with theoretical codes and concepts so they can recognise data that may be relevant to their theory formulation. This can be achieved by exploring wider literature to establish familiarity with a range of general concepts and theoretical perspectives that will support the researcher's ability to construct categories relevant to their substantive area (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978).

## 2.2 Approach to reviewing the literature

My engagement with the existing literature was informed by the concepts I developed through the inductive processes of GT methodology employed in the study. I aimed to develop an informed argument for the contribution of my research to existing knowledge based on the most significant literature related to the concepts in my developing theory. I also considered the context of my research when reviewing the literature to ensure my approach aligned with the constructionist assumptions of knowledge adopted in this study. I constructed a literature review that is qualitative and included literature that was selected based on its relevance to and influence on the developing knowledge about Asst. EPs'

experiences throughout the study. This allowed me to assess and critique literature across fields and disciplines to analyse the development of the conceptualisation of assistant roles across historical and cultural contexts. Consistent with GT methodology (Glaser, 1998; Holton & Walsh, 2017), the literature became part of the study as it was compared to the data constructed in the study to inform theoretical coding of my initial codes, influenced the direction of the focus of the second phase of my research, and became interwoven into the substantive theory created.

### 2.2.1 Search strategy

In line with Constructivist GT methodology, I reviewed existing literature throughout the research process (see Appendix 2). To enhance my theoretical sensitivity and support the originality of my substantive Grounded Theory, I conducted a preliminary review before data construction of literature related to the broad research topic of Asst. EPs, including reasons for their employment and their working practices. At this stage, I decided to include all research that focused on the role of Assistant Psychologists employed in an EPS, using any research methodology, and conducted at any time in the UK. As I constructed the tentative conceptual categories of "Lacking Meaning of Work" and "Creating Meaning of Work" following Phase One and throughout Phase Two of the study, I decided to review research that focused on meaning-making in any work context, including assistant roles, to explore their relevance to these developing concepts and further sensitise my conceptual categories to the broader context of meaning-making at work.

I sought literature from online databases (StarPlus and Scopus) and Google Scholar using the key terms "assistant" AND "psychologist" AND "educational" in the preliminary review, and added "work" OR "career" OR "job" AND "meaning" OR "sensemaking" when searching for

literature following Phase One and throughout Phase Two. I used snowballing to search for literature related to those sources already selected, for example, references of selected papers and online tools to explore related papers (elicit (<https://elicit.org>) and connected papers (<https://www.connectedpapers.com>)).

## 2.3 Meaning of work

Pratt and Ashforth (2003) defined the meaning of work as the product of cognitive sensemaking processes through which individuals interpret their experiences of work.

Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) proposed this combines an individual's perceptions of Job Meaning (characteristics of the tasks and activities they do at work and their interpreted value of these), Role Meaning (characteristics of their position in the organisation and their interpreted value of these), and Self Meaning at Work (characteristics individuals attribute to themselves at work and their interpreted value of these) to form a mental model of Work Meaning.

### 2.3.1 Conditions for meaning-making at work

Meaning-making at work commonly occurs in situations of perceived environmental uncertainty and ambiguity (Duncan, 1972; Weick, 1995). Environmental uncertainty occurs in situations where there is a perceived lack of Work Meaning due to the absence of information; that is, the individual is unaware of Work Meanings that have already been created (Daft & Lengel, 1986). Conversely, environmental ambiguity arises when many diverse interpretations and meanings of work exist, resulting in a lack of clarity or consistency in how individuals experience their environments (March, 1994; McCaskey, 1982). Environmental ambiguity can be caused by poorly defined organisational goals and

vague role boundaries and responsibilities, leading to individuals using their different value orientations to guide their behaviour (McCaskey, 1982).

Meaning-making may occur in response to environmental uncertainty and ambiguity for a number of reasons. Uncertainty and ambiguity are often viewed as negative states that individuals should aim to resolve quickly (Beghetto, 2022). For example, Kahn et al. (1964) found persistent ambiguity of one's role reduces an individual's emotional well-being, which they argued may motivate individuals to create Work Meaning to avoid this feeling.

Although both environmental ambiguity and environmental uncertainty result in confusion for individuals, Daft and Lengel (1986) assert they need to be resolved in different ways: individuals who experience environmental uncertainty need to experience more environmental cues to make sense of their work, whereas individuals with environmental ambiguity need to experience a greater variety of cues and engage in debate with others to create a clear Work Meaning. However, attempting to avoid or quickly resolve uncertainty can restrict creative thinking and the generation of new thoughts, beliefs, and actions (Beghetto, 2018, 2022). Therefore, engaging with environmental uncertainty and ambiguity may stimulate meaning-making as it encourages individuals to explore new possibilities about ways to think and act in situations characterised by uncertainty and ambiguity (Beghetto, 2022).

### 2.3.2 How individuals create Work Meaning

The literature on the meaning of work covers a broad interdisciplinary research field, including psychology, sociology, economics, philosophy, business, and organisational studies. However, there is a general consensus that the meaning of work is constructed rather than given (Rosso et al., 2010; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

The sensemaking process through which meaning is created involves interaction between an individual and their environment, with the individual actively constructing meaning by doing work and interacting with others who shape the meaning of the work while it is being done (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Weick, 1977, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Despite agreement that Work Meaning is constructed, there is continuing debate about whether factors within an individual or factors external to the individual in the work environment have a greater influence on the creation of Work Meanings (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003).

#### 2.3.2.1 Self-based explanations

Scholars who have focused on internal meaning-making theorise that individuals create work meaning in relation to their construct of self (Ashforth, 2001; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003); to be able to answer the question "Why am I here?", an individual must first answer the question "Who am I?" in relation to their work contexts (Guevara & Ord, 1996; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Most researchers who have explored self-based explanations of meaning of work draw on Rosenberg's (1979) view of self-concept, which conceptualises the self as 'the totality of a [person's] thoughts and feelings that have reference to [themselves] as an object' (p. 7). An individual's perception of self may influence meaning-making in the following ways:

- *Personal values*: Nord et al. (1990) defined values in a work context as 'the end states people desire and feel they ought to be able to realize through working' (p. 21). Gandal et al. (2005) reported individuals choose jobs that are congruent with their values and thus influence their decision-making at work. Locke and Taylor (1991) reported values



are also reinforced through the experience of working in a role. This suggests values act reciprocally in the construction of Work Meaning.

- *Self-efficacy*: When individuals believe they have autonomy and the ability to manage their own experience of work, they are more likely to construe positive Work Meanings that view work as purposeful (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002).
- *Self-worth*: Rosso et al. (2010) suggested individuals are motivated to create meanings of work that enable them to experience positive feelings when performing their role.
- *Spirituality*: Hill and Pargament (2003) defined spirituality as 'a process through which people seek to discover, hold on to, and, when necessary, transform whatever they hold sacred in their lives' (p. 65). Research suggests individuals who view themselves as spiritual create Work Meanings that emphasise spiritual behaviours such as caring and service to others compared to their non-spiritual colleagues (Curlin et al., 2007; Grant et al., 2004; Scott, 2002; Wuthnow, 2004). This suggests that when individuals view spirituality as an important aspect of their self, they are likely to interpret their experience of work through a spiritual lens and develop Work Meanings that are more meaningful to them.

Rosso et al. (2010) asserted individuals are motivated to construct Work Meanings that align with their views of self. When there is congruence between an individual's perception of their behaviour at work and their self-concept, their Work Meaning is said to be "authentic" (Ryan et al., 1995; Shamir, 1991). Although researchers generally agree authenticity is a key mechanism involved in meaning-making at work (Baumeister & Vohs, 2002; Deci & Ryan, 2012; Rosso et al., 2010; Sheldon & Elliot, 1999), it is unclear from the existing literature **how** this mechanism works in meaning-making processes.

### 2.3.2.2 Sociocultural construction perspectives

Sense may be in the eye of the beholder, but beholders vote and the majority rules  
(Weick, 1995, p. 6)

Weick (1969, 1977, 1995) challenged self-based explanations of sensemaking for their assumption that Work Meanings are constructed separately to the individual's environment. He argued for a sociocultural construction perspective on meaning-making, where Work Meaning is viewed as a social construct created through interaction with others in a social and cultural context (Weick, 1969, 1995). This results in the construction of intersubjective Work Meanings, whereby an individual's self-concept merges into a 'level of social reality' (Wiley, 1988, p. 254) as a construct of "we". From this perspective, Work Meaning is considered bound to the cultural and social contexts within which it is constructed as it is determined by environmental cues and how they are interpreted by most workers in that environment at that time (Weick, 1995). For example, others influence meaning-making by directing an individual's attention to cues they perceive to be pertinent, in line with the shared beliefs, values, and unwritten rules of the organisational culture, and congruent with socially accepted meanings of work (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978).

Work relationships also influence meaning-making as they provide experiences that inform an individual's meaning of self at work and how they are connected to the organisation in which they work (Guevara & Ord, 1996). One way this may occur is through social identification and comparison (Rosso et al., 2010). Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) suggests individuals categorise themselves into social groups in intergroup contexts, such as work organisations. Individuals compare themselves to others in their organisation in terms of similarity. This results in identification with, and a sense of belonging to, the social groups they consider like themselves ("ingroups"). These social identification and

comparison processes influence meaning-making as individuals are more likely to see the Work Meanings constructed by individuals in their ingroups as relevant to their understanding and use these to inform their meaning-making process (Festinger, 1954). In the work context, this means individuals are more likely to construct Work Meanings that align with those held by individuals like them (e.g., fellow employees) rather than those held by individuals perceived as dissimilar (e.g., managers). This social comparison is more likely to occur when job components are ambiguous or uncertain; therefore, individuals are motivated to seek and accept the Work Meanings held by similar others to help them make sense of their experiences through the process of informational social influence (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955).

One criticism of the research on the role of social identification and comparison is it does not account for power dynamics in work relationships. Power is constructed through the interaction and distribution of resources in a particular context (Campbell et al., 1994; Kindon et al., 2007). Power dynamics in work relationships and their impact on an individual's ability to work autonomously may affect their potential to construct meaning; work relationships that promote a worker's autonomy appear to facilitate Work Meaning construction compared to those that restrict autonomy (Berdicchia & Masino, 2019; Berg et al., 2010; Petrou et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). For example, Berdicchia and Masino (2019) reported individuals who experienced pressure to act in line with their supervisor's interests through the perceived legitimacy of their authority were less able to create meaningful work constructs than individuals who experienced supervision that promoted collaborative decision-making, where the supervisor showed respect for the individual's ideas. This suggests the distribution of power in social interactions at work may have a significant impact on individuals' meaning-making.

### 2.3.2.3 An integrated approach

To consolidate internal and external meaning-making perspectives, Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) developed an interpersonal sensemaking model of Work Meaning. This approach views Work Meaning as the product of both internal meaning-making of the self at work and external meaning-making of the job and role. It builds on the works of Weick (1995) and Salancik and Pfeffer (1978) by placing interpersonal acts at the centre of meaning-making and considering how the interpretation of these acts alters Work Meanings. It proposes individuals interpret whether their understanding of interpersonal acts affirms or disaffirms their understanding of themselves (Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). Peeters and Czapinski (1990) showed disaffirming cues have a greater influence on meaning-making processes, potentially because these violate expectations derived from the mental meaning frameworks already constructed by individuals. Wrzesniewski et al. (2003) also added the concept of "motive work" to their view of interpersonal meaning-making, whereby individuals assess the perceived intention behind the acts of others and what this means for their understanding of self. They proposed that if an individual attributes another's action to a negative belief the other holds about them (a disaffirming cue), they are more likely to interpret this action in relation to their self-concept, and thus influence their meaning-making. For example, if an individual is given a menial task to complete and attributes this to their supervisor believing they are incompetent, then their sensemaking may result in a devalued sense of self at work. Consequently, the meanings of role and work constructed through the interpretation of interpersonal acts in relation to understanding of self form the individual's Work Meaning.

### 2.3.3 Critique of the work meaning literature

Most research on the meaning of work is based on a cognitive paradigm, with meaning-making viewed as a cognitive process that occurs at the individual level. This may be criticised for reducing the concept of Work Meaning to a cognitive framework that, once formed, exists within individuals and is separate from the context within which it was created. Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) offered an alternative view, arguing for Work Meaning to be perceived as a way of Being using an existential ontological perspective. Drawing on Heidegger's (1967) concept of "Dasein" (which translates to "there-being" encompassing the self and the world within the same concept), Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) developed a view of Work Meaning as a fundamentally human way of Being in the world of work that enables individuals to understand their work, selves, and others. By engaging in work, individuals create specific self-understanding, work-understanding, understanding of others, and understanding of work tools that are integrated into an existential meaning of work. Thus, the meaning construed by an individual simultaneously represents what they **do** and **are** (Sandberg & Pinnington, 2009). This may better represent the complexity of meaning-making processes than cognitive approaches that reduce them to psychological processes at the individual level.

Additionally, research on the meaning of work has often conflated Work Meaning with the *meaningfulness* of work, despite these being two distinct concepts (Rosso et al., 2010).

**Meaningfulness** refers to the outcome of an individual's evaluation of the purpose and value of their work (Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). This is evident in Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) conceptualisation of Work Meaning, which encompasses both "content" as the product of sensemaking processes (*meaning*), and "evaluation" as the appraisal of a meaning's value

(*meaningfulness*). Pratt and Ashforth (2003) argued meaning and meaningfulness are separate concepts because they are not created through the same sensemaking process. Instead, evaluating meaningfulness is viewed as a deeper sub-process within sensemaking, whereby individuals continuously assess the value and significance of the Work Meanings they create in relation to their sense of belonging, connectedness, and self-worth (Guevara & Ord, 1996; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Meaning- and meaningfulness-making processes also serve different functions for individuals: meaning-making processes are used when individuals need to make sense of their experiences at work, whereas meaningfulness processes are used when individuals need to appraise their Work Meanings in terms of their worth and value (Guevara & Ord, 1996; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). Therefore, it is difficult to distinguish *how* meaning-making and meaningfulness-making processes occur in the construction of Work Meanings. Indeed, Rosso et al. (2010) strongly encouraged further research to understand the processes by which meaning is created separately from meaningfulness.

#### 2.4 Assistant roles in public services

Assistant roles were created to mitigate recruitment and retention difficulties in British public services and have continued to increase across the public sector workforce since the 1990s, including healthcare, social work, and education (Bach, 2002; Bach et al., 2007). Kessler et al.'s (2006) research with Social Work Assistants (SWAs) suggests the use of assistants in social work developed to manage staff shortages by using the assistant role to "grow their own" social workers and using assistants to work non-statutory cases, thus freeing up social workers to work statutory cases.

Consequently, the intended purpose of these roles, as a way to enhance workforce capacity, has influenced the experiences of individuals who work in these roles and those with whom they work (Bach et al., 2007). Bach et al.'s (2007) case studies of Teaching Assistants (TAs) and SWAs highlight how individuals who are employed in assistant roles construct Work Meaning differently depending on how degraded or empowered they feel in their role. For example, assistants may feel a degraded meaning of self at work if they perceive their work to be inferior to that of qualified practitioners in terms of pay and career prospects. On the other hand, qualified practitioners may develop a degraded meaning of self at work if they feel the assistant role threatens their professional status. Bach et al. (2007) reported TAs' and SWAs' levels of job satisfaction were mediated by the Work Meanings they had constructed in relation to those with whom they worked. TAs' levels of job satisfaction were lower than those of SWAs as they were more likely to view their role as 'cheap labour' (p. 1279) and felt exploited in their role compared to SWAs who construed their role as an opportunity to progress into a career in social work. Despite these differences, both SWAs and TAs reported high levels of empowerment in terms of agency in their role. This was related to the perceived permeability of the boundaries between qualified practitioners and assistants; when SWAs and TAs adopted some of the activities carried out by social workers and teachers, they felt their work was more valuable and developed positive Work Meanings. Interestingly, this permeability also led to qualified practitioners creating more positive Work Meanings; the overlap in role meanings led to professionals feeling they were better able to focus on other aspects of their roles, as they could delegate more routine tasks to assistants. Qualified practitioners also reported feeling empowered by the presence of assistants in terms of the value they felt they could add to their practice.

This study suggests the expansion of assistant roles in public services leads to feelings of empowerment and the creation of positive Work Meanings for both assistants and those with whom they work. However, it is important to recognise that it also highlights differences in empowerment and the ability to create positive Work Meanings depending on individuals' perceptions of career progression, worth in terms of salary, and overlap with the role of qualified practitioners.

From this research on assistant roles in the education and social work sectors, it is unclear **how** these Work Meanings and Meanings of Self are constructed in relation to work contexts. This seems to be particularly problematic as the conclusions drawn appear to be based on meaning-making through social interactions between qualified practitioners and assistants. Therefore, further research may be beneficial to better understand the individual, relational, and socio-cultural mechanisms in meaning-making processes at work.

## 2.5 The work of Asst. EPs

Existing research on the meaning of Asst. EP work addresses four main areas of inquiry, with most focusing on reasons for employment, what Asst. EPs do, and how they are supported, and some exploring the impact of Asst. EPs on the effectiveness of service delivery.

In support of Bach et al. (2007), most service managers reported Asst. EPs are employed to increase service capacity due to shortages in qualified EPs (Atfield et al., 2023; Collyer, 2012; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019), with 88% of LA Principal EPs (PEPs) reporting difficulties recruiting qualified practitioners (Atfield et al., 2023). To fulfil this purpose, Asst. EPs are reported to engage in a wide range of activities, including non-statutory casework (Harland et al., 2022; Monsen et al., 2009), delivering interventions (Collyer, 2012; Harland et al., 2022; Lyons, 2000; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019), training school staff (Harland et al.,



2022; Monsen et al., 2009), project work at school and service levels (Harland et al., 2022; Monsen et al., 2009; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019), and research (Collyer, 2012; Monsen et al., 2009). This shows the wide scope of Asst. EP work across EPSs in the UK.

However, Asst. EPs appear to perform different activities depending on the service in which they are employed. This may be because the purpose of "filling the gap" caused by workforce shortages is so broad that EPSs have interpreted **how** to do this in different ways. For example, Collyer (2012) and Monsen et al. (2009) reported research was the main activity performed by Asst. EPs, whereas Lyons (2000) reported Asst. EPs were not involved in research as this was viewed as part of a qualified EP's role. This was further demonstrated in a large-scale survey of Asst. EPs conducted by Harland et al. (2022) that reported Asst. EPs across England had little involvement in research. This suggests the work of Asst. EPs is largely determined by the context in which they work. Indeed, Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019) concluded the activities carried out by Asst. EPs working in the two LA EPSs studied were determined by the perceived needs of EPs in their services and the school communities with whom they worked. Monsen et al. (2009) also hypothesised the differences between Asst. EP work in LA EPSs may have been due to how Asst. EPs were allocated work. For example, Asst. EPs in one EPS were allocated work at the school cluster level, whereas Asst. EPs in another EPS were given a time allocation for individual schools. Consequently, the activities Asst. EPs engaged in varied depending on the needs of the settings. This may explain the differences observed in the activities Asst. EPs carry out, as they are based on how EPs respond to the changing needs of their work settings, thus affecting the activities they assign to Asst. EPs. This suggests the meaning of Asst. EP work is

highly dependent on the local sociocultural and historic context within which it is conducted, as it varies so much between locations.

There is also variation in the quality and quantity of induction and supervision given to Asst. EPs (Collyer, 2012; Monsen et al., 2009). Collyer (2012) reported that 81% of Asst. EPs in their study received some form of induction, varying from general induction to the LA (41% of those who received an induction) to induction specific to the Asst. EP role (24%).

Research in other services shows how EPSs developed a specific induction for their Asst. EPs, with a focus on increasing Asst. EPs' knowledge of tools they could use and relevant policies for practice (Counsell & Court, 2000; Lyons, 1999). Additionally, Monsen et al. (2009) and Collyer (2012) reported the quantity of supervision differed depending on job title and supervisor workload. Differences in the focus and format of supervision were also found, depending on the supervisor's understanding of supervision. Despite these differences, managers and Asst. EPs viewed supervision as crucial to their work and development (Monsen et al., 2009). This is supported by Davies (2007), who reflected that supervision supported her development as a reflective practitioner by prompting her to consider the psychology she applied in her work. This research suggests ambiguity exists regarding how to support Asst. EPs, in addition to the ambiguity of the activities carried out by Asst. EPs.

Another factor influencing the work of Asst. EPs is how others perceive their competence to carry out activities. The AEP (2022) guidelines for the employment of Asst. EPs state the full range of EP duties should not be carried out by unqualified individuals working as Asst. EPs. Consequently, the activities undertaken by Asst. EPs have been shown to be largely determined by EPs' beliefs about the level of competence required to carry out each activity and their perceived competence of the Asst. EPs (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). For

example, Collyer's (2012) study showed EPs viewed shadowing as the most appropriate activity for Asst. EPs, whereas complex casework and offering advice to school staff were identified as beyond the competence of Asst. EPs. Competence as perceived by others may also affect an Asst. EP's level of autonomy and responsibility. For example, Harland et al. (2022) reported 53% of Asst. EPs had full responsibility for casework that they carried out under EP supervision, whereas 40% had no individual responsibility and only supported EPs with casework. This appears to introduce a power dynamic between EPs and Asst. EPs, whereby EPs are attributed power to decide the competence needed to carry out EP-related activities, the competence of Asst. EPs, and the appropriateness of activities based on this comparison. In turn, the perception of their competence by others shapes the work Asst. EPs do and the range of their experience, impacting their sense of agency and autonomy.

As a result of these differences in Asst. EP work, there appears to exist a high level of uncertainty and ambiguity in the Asst. EP role. This is supported by Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019), who reported the lack of clarity in the remit of Asst. EP work resulted in feelings of uncertainty for those employed in the role and others working in the service. For example, service managers reported difficulties explaining the role of Asst. EPs to EPs, which resulted in EPs avoiding working with Asst. EPs due to not knowing what their work involved. Consequently, the ambiguity and uncertainty of the meaning of Asst. EP work has potential negative effects on both Asst. EPs, in terms of opportunities offered to them, and the qualified EPs with whom they work. Creating assistant roles requires distinguishing between a profession's core and non-core activities (Bach et al., 2007). However, the existing research suggests a lack of clarity regarding the extent to which Asst. EP work overlaps with that of qualified EPs (Collyer, 2012; Harland et al., 2022; Monsen et al., 2009;

Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). This potentially threatens the professional identity of EPs within the context of a profession that has struggled with the search for identity and role since the early twentieth century when the first EP was employed (Ashton & Roberts, 2006; R. J. Cameron, 2006; Fallon et al., 2010; Norwich, 2000; Squires & Farrell, 2007). For example, senior managers in Collyer's (2012) research reported concerns about recruiting Asst. EPs to conduct research and deliver interventions as they did not want EPs to feel these activities were not part of their role. As a result of this threat to their professional identity, some EPSs may be reluctant to employ Asst. EPs when a lack of clarity over their role continues to exist (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019).

Additionally, Monsen et al. (2009) suggested the uncertainty and ambiguity of Asst. EP work may confuse those who work with EPSs, because the distinction between the roles of Asst. EPs and qualified EPs is not always understood. Despite this, schools generally view the work carried out by Asst. EPs positively. For example, Lyons (1999) reported that 76% of schools found observations by Asst. EPs and consultations with the SENCO to be helpful or very helpful. The school staff in Monsen et al.'s (2009) study also felt the Asst. EP role allowed them to have more regular and sustained support from the EPS. Schools valued direct work with CYP, staff training, school-based research and evaluation, and staff supervision.

Despite their different ways of working, Asst. EPs employed in different EPSs viewed their work positively and consistently reported their roles effectively prepared them for doctoral training (Counsell & Court, 2000; Davies, 2007; Monsen et al., 2009; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). Counsell and Court (2000) reflected that being used as additional service capacity for casework enabled them to develop a detailed and realistic understanding of

what the EP role entails. In addition, these activities supported their ability to apply psychology in their practice and understand the issues and dilemmas that EPs face in their work. This is further supported by Davies (2007) and the Asst. EPs in Monsen et al. (2009), Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019), and Harland et al. (2022), who also emphasised the role supported their skills in applying psychology and deepened their understanding of what EPs do. However, it is unclear **why** individuals in these studies reported the Asst. EP role effectively prepared them for doctoral training. This may say more about their experience of their training course or their experience as a Trainee EP (TEP) and how consistent this was with their experience as an Asst. EP, rather than **how** the Asst. EP role prepared them for training.

### 2.5.1 Critique of Asst. EP research

It is important to consider the research on Asst. EP work within its sociocultural and historical contexts. For example, the research conducted in Essex EPS by Counsell and Court (2000) and Lyons (1999, 2000) occurred before the changes in the requirements for EP doctoral training when Asst. EPs were required to have a teaching qualification and at least two years of teaching experience. Monsen et al.'s (2009) study took place as changes to training routes were taking place, so presented data from two cohorts of Asst. EPs with different background experiences. Therefore, it is difficult to draw conclusions from comparing studies because the research took place at times when legislation and training routes differed. Consequently, some of the research may be outdated and no longer relevant to the experiences of individuals who are currently employed as Asst. EPs. Additionally, much of the research has studied Asst. EP work within the local context of EPSs. As the role appears to vary significantly between services, this makes it difficult to draw conclusions about the nature of Asst. EP work in a national context.

## 2.6 Summary

From the existing literature on Asst. EP work, there appears to be a high level of ambiguity and uncertainty in the meaning of Asst. EP work, which may have both positive and negative effects on Asst. EPs and those with whom they work. The existing research positions Asst. EPs as passive recipients of work meaning because their work is largely determined by others, including the needs of the service, schools, and the understanding of Asst. EP work by qualified practitioners. This contrasts with the existing literature on how meaning of work is created, which views meaning-making at work as an active interpersonal process between the self, others, and the sociocultural historic context within which the work is conducted. Therefore, there is a need to explore how Asst. EPs experience working in their roles, given this conflict in the current understanding of how their Work Meaning may be created.

## Chapter 3: Methodology

Research methodology is the theoretical guidelines that inform the investigation of a research problem (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The methodology I chose for my research was related to my understanding of being in the world (ontology) and my beliefs about how knowledge is obtained or created (epistemology). In this chapter, I outline the theories and frameworks that have influenced my understanding and how these have informed my choice of methods.

### 3.1 Ontology and epistemology

Ontology and epistemology are philosophical concepts related to reality, truth, knowledge, and theory (Howell, 2013). Specifically, ontology considers the nature of existence in the world (i.e., the extent to which an object's reality could exist independently of human thought), whereas epistemology concerns the acquisition of knowledge (i.e., whether knowledge pre-exists in the world and how humans gain it) (Howell, 2013). An individual's ontological and epistemological positionings influence all aspects of their research, including, but not limited to, their choice of research framework, decision-making about data gathering and analysis methods, their relationship with participants, positioning of reflexivity in the study, and the way data analysis is presented (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

#### 3.1.1 Philosophical positioning in my research

##### 3.1.1.1 Constructionism

When contemplating my philosophical positioning, I reflected that my understanding of Asst. EP work was likely constructed through my interactions with others during my work as an Asst. EP and the wider social context, such as the LA and the local and national meanings of Asst. EP and EP roles at that time. I believed this may be similar to other Asst. EPs, as

research by Collyer (2012), Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019), and Harland et al. (2022) suggest Asst. EP roles differ across services because of the needs of the services and local communities in which they work. Therefore, I decided to initially adopt a social constructionist position in my research because I felt its interpretive approach was an appropriate fit for my positionality in its emphasis on 'the subjective interrelationship between the researcher and participant and the co-construction of meaning' (Mills et al., 2006, p. 26). Social constructionists adopt a relativist position that questions the idea of objective truth (Weinberg, 2008), with meanings seen as constructed through interaction with the world (Crotty, 1998). Social constructionism emphasises the social nature of knowledge construction; knowledge is mutually created by individuals in a cultural and historical context (Burr, 2015). Consequently, multiple social realities could be constructed as knowledge is temporally and contextually situated. Society imposes on us a 'system of significant symbols' (Crotty, 1998, p. 54) that acts as a lens through which we view phenomena. This system includes the use of language to structure our experience of the world and communicate this to others (Burr, 2015). Therefore, knowledge may be viewed as a product of the co-construction between individual interpretations, language and cultural symbols, and social interactions. In turn, social constructionists recognise data produced through research represent a shared construction of knowledge between the researcher and participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, a key aim of social constructionist research is to gain an interpretive understanding of the meanings constructed by individuals during the research process (Guba & Lincoln, 2005).

While I considered my experience of being an Asst. EP to be socially constructed, and this may also be the case for other Asst. EPs, I needed to ensure my research captured others' understandings of their experiences. Therefore, although social constructionists argue a



researcher's values and experiences are an inevitable part of their research process and outcome, it is also important for them to be acknowledged by the researcher and made explicit for their audience to understand how they are part of the research (Mills et al., 2006). Considering this, I attempted to be transparent and open about my experiences, values, and influence throughout my research by completing reflexive activities throughout the research process.

As I analysed my data throughout the study, my interpretation included power in relational processes when participants described their experiences. For example, power imbalances in relationships (*'even though I can say how I feel about it, it's still them who are gonna sign it off and then you know they can just make whatever they change they want'* (appendix 11, lines 227-229) and the influence of dominant discourses about Asst. EP and EP work (*'some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation''* (appendix 11, lines 327-328)). Therefore, I shifted my positioning to critical constructionism during Phase Two of the study. Similar to social constructionism, critical constructionism assumes knowledge is co-constructed through social interactions within local cultural and historic contexts. However, critical constructionism emphasises the role of historical-cultural discourses within relational processes, assuming power dynamics in the current historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts are repeated in local constructions of knowledge (Heiner, 2016; Hosking, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005). Therefore, societal inequalities can influence knowledge construction at a local level. For example, meanings that are viewed as more acceptable, correct, or congruent with current local realities will be repeated in co-construction processes more than those seen as unacceptable, incorrect, or incongruent with the current construction of reality in the local

context (Gergen, 1995; Hosking, 1995). As a result, societal inequalities are perpetuated through knowledge construction processes.

### 3.1.1.2 Existentialism

Existentialism refers to a school of philosophical thinking concerned with the nature of human existence, which originates from Kierkegaard's (1956) focus on individual "Being" and has since been elaborated by many who are considered existentialists, such as Heidegger (1967), Sartre (1956, 1963, 1970), and Beauvoir (1983). As such, existentialism comprises so many different perspectives that it is argued to be 'more a frame of reference than a fixed idea' (Karl & Hamalian, 1974, p. 13). Despite differences in individual perspectives, existentialists share the common concern of making sense of an individual's life experiences (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) and agree on several universal "givens" of human existence (Strasser & Strasser, 2022). A core assumption of existentialism is that "existence precedes essence": 'Man first of all exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world - and defines himself afterwards' (Sartre, 1970, p. 28). In this sense, individuals are brought into existence in an inherently meaningless world and its meaning must be created by the individual throughout their life. This existential "given" of uncertainty is seen to be a 'paradoxical human tension' (Strasser & Strasser, 2022, p. 46), whereby individuals seek predictability and certainty in a world that is fundamentally unpredictable and uncertain. Sartre (1956) suggested that individuals are "condemned to be free" - while we have the freedom to choose the meaning of our life, these choices are necessary and we are responsible for the choices we make. Consequently, this freedom can lead to feelings of discomfort, an experience termed "existential anxiety" (Strasser & Strasser, 2022). In response to these feelings, some people may reject their freedom to choose and believe

they are not really in control of their decisions, a way of “Being” Sartre (1956) refers to as “Bad Faith”. However, Marcel (as cited in Gosetti-Ferencei, 2020) argues that it is only through experiencing uncertainty that we can feel hope in the freedom to create a meaning for our life where we do not know all the answers with certainty. Living and acting in this hopeful way encourages exploration of possibilities, experimentation, and joy that has the potential to increase feelings of hope by creating meanings that are useful to us, that help us to make sense of our experiences, and relieve our discomfort with a meaningless life. Sartre (1956) argued we must be true to ourselves and our values (“authenticity”) to live a meaningful life. He believed if we conform to the expectations of others and social norms, our lives would not be meaningful.

I decided to adopt an existentialist position in my research because of my reflections during the coding process in Phase One (Figure 1). I felt the existential assumption of “existence precedes essence” fit with the problem I believed participants were trying to resolve, as captured in the interview data during Phase One of the study. Therefore, I felt it was appropriate to integrate existential assumptions into my research during the theoretical coding level of analysis because I felt it helped me make sense of the codes developed through initial and focused coding.

Update 21/07/23

### ***Seeking a Valued Way of Working***

Reflecting on terminology I'm using, what does a valued way of working mean? Is valued the same as meaningful? Something purposeful? Or something that aligns with their values? Is my way of understanding meaning grounded in what participants are saying?

I've listened back to all the interviews and felt 'seeking/finding meaning/values/purpose' accounted for the majority of the data the participants and I have co-constructed. The problem my participants seem to be trying to resolve is what is the purpose of being an Asst. EPs. But I wasn't sure what I meant by meaning/values/purpose as it was slightly different for each participant, I needed a definition that accounted for the variations.

When I have briefly searched for literature on seeking meaning/value/purpose, it comes up with existentialism – when individuals are faced with uncertainty, they realise life is meaningless and they need to create their own meaning of life. This seems to fit with the quotes I have coded as "feeling uncertain", (e.g., *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be'* (8, 6-7)) and what participants are talking about that I have coded as "seeking a valued way of working" so far (e.g., *'I'm trying to think about what kind of EP I want to be I suppose ultimately'* (8, 218-219) and *'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this'* (8, 81)).

It might be that Asst. EPs *need to create meaning* when working in the role because the role is inherently lacks meaning. This seems to be represented in the quotes I have initially coded as "Feeling responsible/accountable" (e.g., *'it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do'* (8, 15-16)).

This would fit with previous literature that suggests the work Asst. EPs do is different depending on the service they are in. So, it's not that there is a meaning of their work to *find* (assumes meaning of the role exists out there as a separate entity to the individual), but that they *actively create* their own meaning that is meaningful to them. I need to go back through my transcripts and check this idea against my data.

Figure 1. Excerpt from Memo 2 showing the rationale for applying existential themes

Importantly, the philosophical frameworks and theories I used to guide my research are congruent as both existentialists and constructionists share the common ontological assumption that knowledge is intersubjective and co-created with others. Relatedness is one of the foundations of existential thinking, drawing on Heidegger's (1967) descriptions of existence as "Being-in-the-world" and "Being-with-others" (from the German "Dasein" or

"there-being"), showing how individuals and the world are not separate entities as they are interrelated and co-dependent. As we share the world with others, realities are co-constructed in relation to others through relational connectedness. Additionally, Sartre (1956) argues individuals are in a constant state of "Being" in interrelationship with others, so the meanings they create are co-created and intersubjective. Therefore, all human interactions through which knowledge is co-constructed are based on this existential "given" of relatedness.

### 3.2 A qualitative research approach

I decided to adopt a qualitative research paradigm as a framework for decision-making in my research. Qualitative research focuses on capturing an aspect of the social or psychological world and analysing it for its meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I felt this was appropriate for my chosen area of research because I was interested in understanding the experiences of Asst. EPs. As previous research on the role of Asst. EPs emphasise the contextual nature of the role (e.g., Harland et al. (2022) and Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019)), I felt a qualitative approach was most appropriate for my research as it appreciates the importance of context in its assumptions that the data produced by participants is subjective based on how the participants are located within a specific context (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This also aligns with my beliefs about the nature of reality and how knowledge is created, as the focus on meanings constructed in a social context is congruent with constructionism and existentialism.

#### 3.2.1 Approaches to grounded theory

GT methodology involves 'the systematic generating of theory from data, that itself is systematically obtained' (Glaser, 1978, p. 2), to explain how the main issue identified by

individuals within a substantive area of interest is 'processed, managed or resolved' (Holton & Walsh, 2017, p. 30). GT methodology was originally developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and has evolved into numerous variations, including Classic GT (Glaser, 1978, 1992, 1998), Straussian GT (Corbin & Strauss, 2007; Strauss, 1987; Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and Constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2014). These approaches to GT share many key procedures despite their differences in research design (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007), as outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1.** *Procedures shared by iterations of grounded theory (Hood, 2007; O'Reilly et al., 2012; Urquhart, 2013; Wiener, 2007).*

Key process	Description
<b>Constant Comparative Analysis</b>	As part of the coding process, the researcher focuses on similarities and differences among emerging categories (Willig, 2013). Differences identified within a category may be used to identify subcategories. Through this process, categories are constantly built up and broken down again to recognise the complexity of the data (Willig, 2013).
<b>Simultaneous data collection, coding, and memo writing</b>	An iterative process of data collection and analysis (Holton & Walsh, 2017) whereby coding and memo-writing occur as data are collected and categories developed through the analysis inform further data collection (Willig, 2013).
<b>Theoretical Sampling</b>	Further data are collected to elaborate or challenge initial codes and categories (Willig, 2013).
<b>Theoretical Saturation</b>	Data collection and analysis continue until no new categories or variations for these categories emerge, as it is believed the existing categories and subcategories capture most of the data (Willig, 2013).

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**Theoretical Sensitivity**

Data is analysed at a continuing higher level of abstraction throughout the process, so the categories become analytic rather than descriptive of the data (Willig, 2013).

Classic GT was developed as a challenge to the dominant positivist approach to research at the time that privileged hypothetico-deductive research processes (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

Classic GT emphasises induction in the research process to develop theory from empirical data. Glaser (1978) challenged researchers to set aside their preconceived ideas about their area of research and allow for a "main concern" to emerge from the data. Through conceptual coding of the data, the researcher works flexibly and creatively to explain the processes in substantive areas of interest (Holton & Walsh, 2017).

By contrast, Straussian GT approaches research in a more interpretivist manner, with Strauss (1987) suggesting the researcher's experience and knowledge should be acknowledged in the research process. As a result, a Grounded Theory developed through the Straussian GT methodology is more descriptive than one developed using Classic GT methodology (Holton & Walsh, 2017). Straussian GT also employs a more structured approach to coding than Classic GT, encouraging the use of coding paradigms (Holton & Walsh, 2017). However, Glaser (1992) criticised the use of coding paradigms, arguing these risk the researcher forcing data into categories that are not grounded in the data.

Constructivist GT maintains the inductive and open-ended approach of Classic GT and further develops the interpretivist approach of Straussian GT (Charmaz, 2014).

Constructivist GT is rooted in relativism and assumes data are not discovered, as proposed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), but are constructed by the researcher and participants

through the research process (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, the analysis and subsequent Grounded Theory are a construction of the world being studied, not an explanation of a true reality. In line with this ontological positioning, Constructivist GT removes the assumption that the researcher is neutral, instead emphasising the need for the researcher to act reflexively throughout the research process to acknowledge and address how their preconceptions have affected the resulting data, analysis, and theory (Charmaz, 2014).

### 3.2.2 Rationale for using grounded theory methodology in this research

I chose GT methodology for this research because of its inductive nature. As the limited research that exists on the Asst. EP role has largely focused on the activities they do and the value of this for the wider EP profession (e.g., Collyer (2012), Harland et al. (2022), Lyons (2000), Monsen et al. (2009), and Woodley-Hume and Woods (2019)), the methodology for the current study needed to be exploratory, inductive, and with the potential to create a new theoretical understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences. I felt GT methodology would allow for Asst. EPs' experiences to be explored in their richness to create a greater understanding of the complexity of the role.

The use of GT methodology would also allow me to create a theoretical understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences by creating a substantive Grounded Theory from my analysis.

Charmaz (2014) defined a substantive theory as 'a theoretical interpretation or explanation of a delimited problem in a particular area (p.344)'. I believe this will further the current literature on Asst. EPs as a new theoretical understanding of their lived experiences and social world.

The GT method also allows for greater focus on what is important and relevant to participants and encourages researchers to follow up on this; Charmaz (1996) claimed 'the



purpose of Grounded Theory is to develop a theoretical analysis of the data that fits the data and has relevance to the area of study (p. 48)'. GT methodology ensures relevance, as Glaser (2005) claimed it is appropriate for research that aims to explore how individuals attempt to resolve a problem they are experiencing. Most previous research on the Asst. EP role has focused on problems that others felt needed to be resolved, such as why EP services employ Asst. EPs (Collyer, 2012; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019), how Asst. EPs should be supported (Collyer, 2012; Lyons, 2000), and what activities are carried out by Asst. EPs (Collyer, 2012; Harland et al., 2022; Monsen et al., 2009; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). Therefore, GT methodology would allow me to meet my aim to explore problems that are meaningful to Asst. EPs and construct understandings that are relevant to Asst. EPs by ensuring my analysis was grounded in the data.

O'Connor et al. (2018) explained a challenge for researchers who are new to using GT methodology is the polarised positions authors often present between different types of GT. Therefore, Bryant and Charmaz (2007) encouraged researchers to develop familiarity with all major forms of GT so they can fully understand how to adapt the methodology appropriately for their research. During this familiarisation process, researchers should focus on the ontological and epistemological assumptions underpinning each form of GT methodology and reflect on how they fit their views of reality and knowledge creation (Fernandez, 2012). Therefore, I dedicated time at the beginning of the research process to learning about the different forms of GT to ensure a good fit with the worldview I brought to my research. Both Classic and Straussian GT hold positivist underpinnings, assuming there is an objective, external reality from which data is collected and theory emerges (Charmaz, 2000). Thus, I was drawn towards Constructivist GT as it presented a methodology that was consistent with my assumptions of the relativism of multiple social realities and that reality

is co-constructed through the research process by the researcher and participants. In Constructivist GT, the theory that is produced from the research is not viewed as an objective representation of reality, but a theoretical understanding that accounts for and makes sense of what had been produced in the research context. Constructivist GT also aligned with my aim of constructing understandings relevant to Asst. EPs, as it aims for 'interpretive understanding rather than testability of results' (M. K. O'Connor et al., 2008, p. 30). I also felt the openness and reflexivity in the research process encouraged by the Constructivist GT methodology were important because it enabled me to scrutinise how the values, beliefs, and understandings I hold from my prior experience working as an Asst. EP influenced the research process.

***Reflexive journal excerpt (29.09.23)***

As I've constructed my conceptual categories of "lacking meaning of work" and "creating meanings of work" in Phase One of my study, I've noticed these represent inductive meaning-making in Asst. EPs that mirrors the inductive meaning-making process I am using in the GT methodology. I mentioned this to my research tutor in supervision, and we wondered if my experience of being an Asst. EP influenced my decision to adopt an inductive approach to my research, as I experienced inductive meaning-making in my Asst. EP role.

### 3.3 Methods

As a novice GT researcher, I used a range of materials and resources to support my research process, including Charmaz's (2014) key text outlining how to conduct Constructivist GT research, reflections by grounded theorists on their research processes (e.g., Duffy et al. (2004) and Roderick (2009)), and social media networks with other researchers using GT methodology to share advice and reflections (e.g., Twitter/X). I followed the GT methodology throughout my study in a flexible manner as encouraged by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This process consisted of two phases (Figure 2). Appendix 2 presents the estimated

and actual timeframes for each stage of the research process.

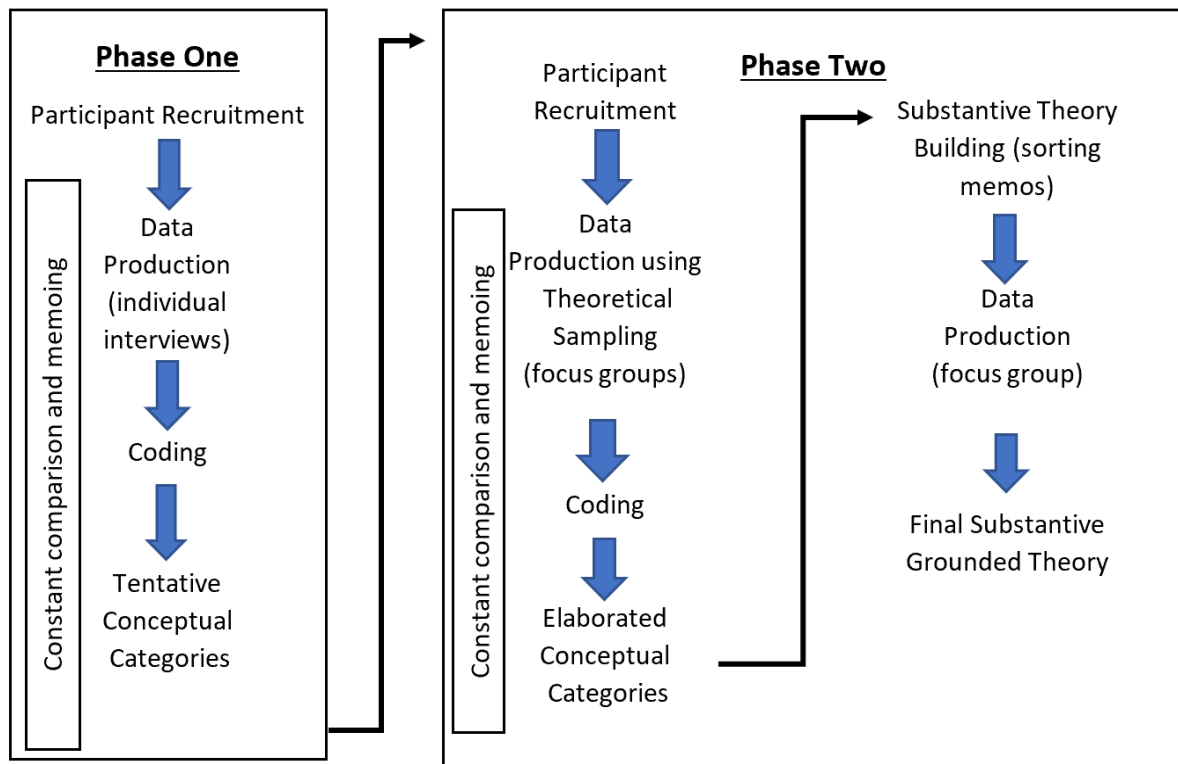


Figure 2. Visual representation of how grounded theory methodology was applied in the study (adapted from van Veggel, 2022)

### 3.3.1 Participants

Traditionally, the recruitment of participants is discussed in terms of sampling from a target population. This is associated with the post-positivist research assumptions of bias and generalisability in terms of how statistically representative participants are of the whole target population (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Green & Thorogood, 2009; Salmons, 2016). Therefore, I decided not to use the terms “sample” and “sampling” in this thesis because the study aimed to construct a deeper theoretical understanding of participants’ experiences rather than seek generalisation based on statistical probability.

I recruited 10 participants to take part in the study, with 5 of these taking part in the first phase and 7 taking part in Phase Two (Figure 3). I recruited participants from the population of Asst. EPs currently working in EPSs situated in England. I recruited participants in Phase

One from a regional support network for Asst. EPs and participants in Phase Two from those who had already taken part in Phase 1 (I asked participants at the end of their interviews in Phase One if they would like to take part in Phase Two of the research) and Asst. EP networking groups on the social media platforms Twitter/X and Facebook. I asked individuals to contact me via my university email address if they wanted to participate in my research exploring the experiences of Asst. EPs.

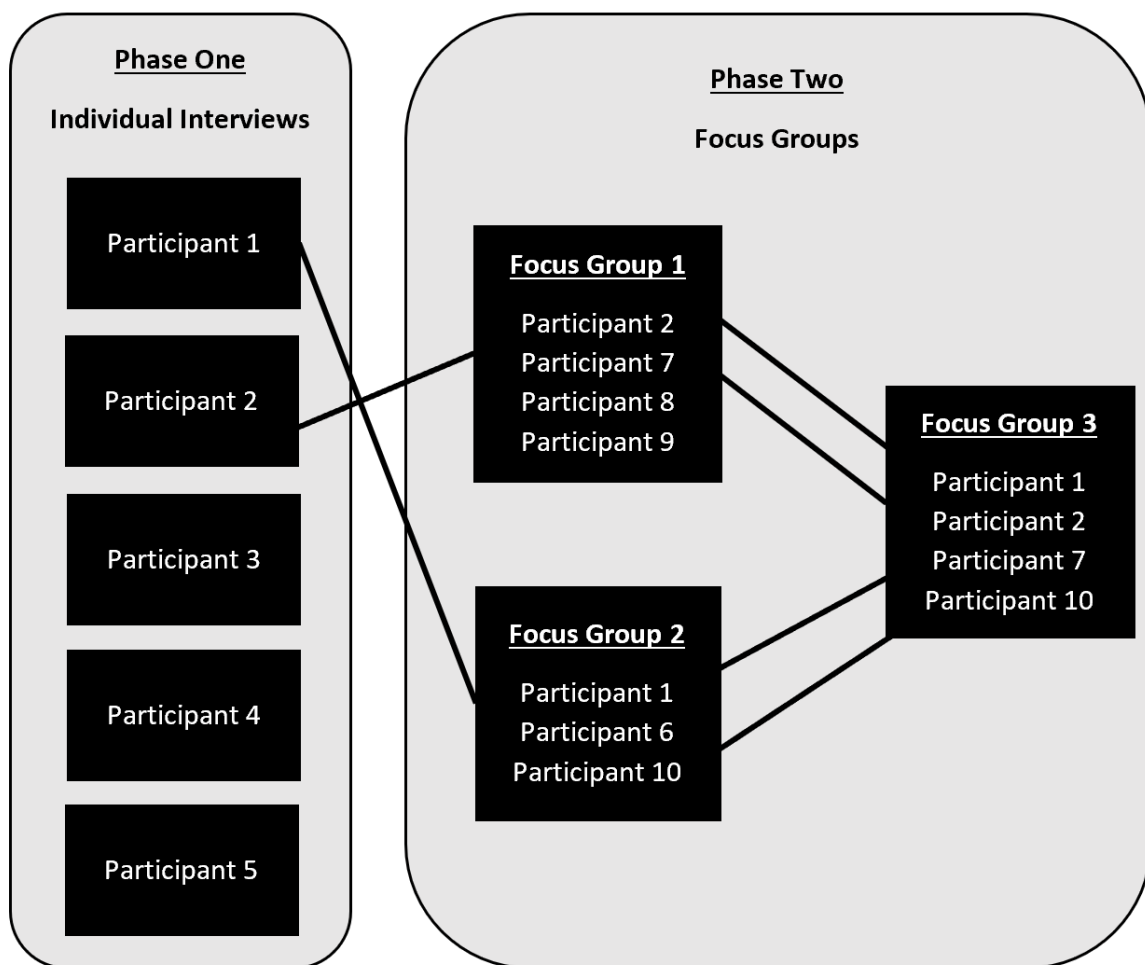


Figure 3. Visual representation of how participants took part in each phase of the study

For each phase of the study, participants were selected who met the following inclusion criteria on a "first-come, first-served" basis:

- a. I selected participants who were employed in a role that met the AEP's (2022) definition of "Assistant Educational Psychologist" regardless of their job title, due to the variation in job titles that exists for individuals employed in these roles (Collyer, 2012).
- b. I selected participants who were employed in EPSs located in England. This is because the AEP's (2022) definition of the Asst. EP role is based on the presumption that the individual in post is gaining experience for doctoral EP training. As EP training routes differ outside England, I decided only to select individuals who were employed in EPSs in England as their experiences may have differed from those of Asst. EPs in other countries.
- c. To ensure participants could talk about their experiences in detail, I selected participants who had been employed as an Asst. EP for at least two academic terms, as I considered participants to be relatively well-established in their role at this point.

I also considered the potential influence of organisational culture on my participants' experiences when determining my recruitment strategy. Individuals who experience work in the same environment may behave in similar ways because they are influenced by the same activities, tools, espoused values, and underlying assumptions of the organisation (Schein, 1985). Therefore, the organisational culture of the EPS within which an Asst. EP works may influence them to experience work in a way that is specific to that organisation and create similarities in experiences between Asst. EPs who work in the same EPS. Therefore, I decided to select participants who were employed in different EPSs, as this heterogeneity of experience would allow me to capture context-related social processes in the Asst. EP experience (Timonen et al., 2018) and increase the potential transferability of my research. The participants who took part in the study worked in ten different EPSs across England.

### 3.3.2 Data construction

The data construction process followed the strategy of constant comparative analysis in Phases One and Two of the study. Constant comparative analysis is an iterative process of data construction (Glaser, 1965, 1998), whereby codes and categories are compared as they are constructed and revised based on their relevance to the developing substantive Grounded Theory. Memo-writing is an integral part of constant comparative analysis, as it enables the researcher to critically reflect on their interpretation of the data and opens new directions for data construction as codes are compared, elaborated, and scrutinised (Charmaz, 2014). I wrote memos recording my thoughts about recurring and significant codes throughout the analysis (Appendices 13 and 25). The product of the constant comparative analysis was a substantive Grounded Theory at the end of Phase Two.

I shared that I had been employed as an Asst. EP prior to doctoral training with participants at the beginning of each interview and focus group. I decided to do this to support openness and transparency in my relationship with participants. However, I also acknowledged that this influenced the data constructed in the study, as it shifted me towards an "insider" position in relation to my participants during the data construction process. As a result, the information produced during the data construction process not only represents the participants' individual experiences, but also their response to their perception of me as the researcher, the context of the research, and their relationship with me. Nevertheless, I felt it was important to share my positionality with my participants in an attempt to establish rapport, increase my credibility in terms of experience of the role, and reduce any perceptions of hierarchical power in the researcher-participant relationship.

### 3.3.2.1 Phase One

Participants' descriptions of their experiences were elicited through individual semi-structured intensive interviews. I felt intensive interviews were an appropriate method to explore my initial research question because they enable in-depth exploration of a participant's experience by using an open-ended question at the beginning of the interview to allow for a range of responses and discourses, while also giving the researcher flexibility to elicit further meaning from the participants' descriptions using focused questions (Charmaz, 2014). The interviews followed a semi-structured question guide (Appendix 5) developed using Charmaz's (2014) guidance for conducting intensive interviews, which suggests participants' views and experiences should be elicited using open-ended, broad, and non-judgmental questions at the start of a GT study. I decided to begin the interviews with a "grand tour question" (Simmons, 2010) and ask follow-up questions to elicit participants' implicit meanings of the language they used and the events they described (Charmaz, 2014). I made field notes during the interviews on my key ideas and reflections to guide the direction of my follow-up questioning and support my understanding of how meanings were co-constructed with participants (Appendix 6). The reflexive nature of these fieldnotes allowed me to see how my personal characteristics and context compared to the personal characteristics of my participants and the settings within which they worked. Thus, I was able to develop an awareness of how this influenced my positionality in relation to my participants and decision-making during data-construction. For example, I shared my position as an ex-teacher with 3 participants, which influenced my follow-up questioning during their interviews, as shown in the excerpt below.

***Reflexive journal excerpt (08.05.2023)***

**Reflections on interview with Participant 2**

I'm surprised at how similar [their] experience is to my own, particularly how they felt about supervision. I recognised [their] feelings of not knowing what to expect from supervision and linking back to their experience of teaching, an experience that I feel is similar to mine. I can see how this influenced my questioning in the interview, as I chose to ask for further information about [their] experiences in supervision, perhaps because I believe that supervision played an integral part in my experience.

The interviews were conducted online because of the varied locations of the participants and were recorded using Google Meet, a video communication service produced by Google.

The audio data were transcribed by hand immediately after each interview (allowing 24 hours for participants to withdraw their data) and interpreted following the processes of initial, focused, and theoretical coding outlined by Charmaz (2014).

The coding process began with initial coding (Appendix 12), which involved 'engaging with and defining the data' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 343). Initial codes form the first link between the data produced through the inquiry and the developing substantive theory (Charmaz, 2014).

Through initial coding, I defined what was happening in the data by naming actions, thoughts, and feelings using verbs and adverbs and began to interpret what this might mean. I chose to code the interview data line-by-line, as Charmaz (2014) asserted this method of coding encourages researchers to immerse themselves in the data, actively break down their data, and view their data from different perspectives. I analysed each interview using line-by-line coding immediately after transcription so I could compare my initial codes between the interviews. This allowed me to determine the initial codes to pursue through focused coding (see Figure 4).



I then began focused coding by scrutinising and comparing the initial codes I had constructed to determine their conceptual value for the developing substantive theory. I tested the analytic strength of each code (i.e., how well they accounted for what was happening in the data) by comparing them to the data across all interviews. Through this process, I decided which codes should not be pursued further and merged some codes (see Figure 4 and memos in Appendix 13 for details of this process).

After focused coding, I used theoretical coding to help me further understand my codes and how they may link together, and decide which codes to raise to tentative conceptual categories. I began the second part of my literature review at this point in the research process, as I could use my focused codes to direct my search strategy to ensure the literature was relevant to my developing theory and use extant theory and frameworks to inform the elaboration and integration of my categories. By doing this, I was able to use existential assumptions and the meaning of work literature to elevate my focused codes to a theoretical level and develop theoretical relationships between my conceptual categories (see memos in Appendix 13 for further details). From this process, I raised the "Feeling uncertain" code to a tentative conceptual category of "Lacking Meaning of Work" and raised the "Autonomy and agency", "Seeking a valued way of working", and "Interpersonal meaning-making" codes, merging them into the tentative conceptual category of "Creating Meaning of Work" (see Figure 4).

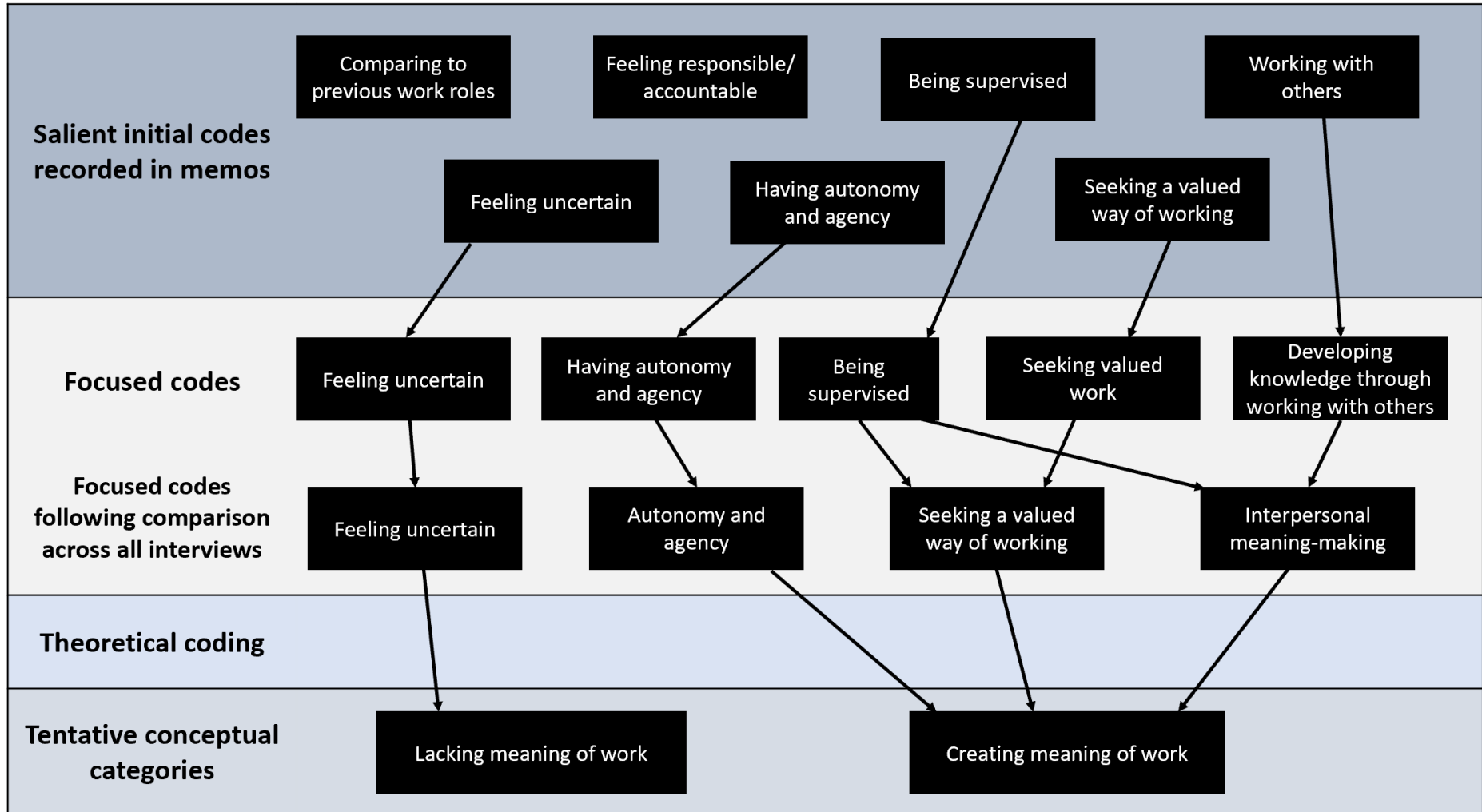


Figure 4: Process map showing development of tentative conceptual categories from initial codes

### 3.3.2.2 Phase Two

I decided to produce further data using focus groups to elaborate my tentative conceptual categories of “Lacking Meaning of Work” and “Creating Meaning of Work”. I determined focus groups to be an appropriate method to achieve this, as participants could discuss different perspectives on the shared experience of being an Asst. EP, thus facilitating elaboration and exception-finding for the categories. The question guide for the focus groups was developed using the concept of theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967), where questions were constructed to elicit data that would further elaborate the categories. These were piloted with a TEP colleague who had previously been an Asst. EP. See Appendix 13 for how the question guide was developed from Memos 1 and 2, and Appendix 17 for the question guide itself. I wrote field notes during the focus groups, as in the interviews (Appendix 18). The focus groups took place online and were recorded using Google Meet. The audio data were transcribed by hand and coded using focused coding based on the two tentative conceptual categories (Appendix 21). New information gained through the coding process and a review of the extant literature were incorporated into the two memos for these conceptual categories (see Appendix 25). After conducting two focus groups, I believed I had achieved theoretical saturation of my two conceptual categories because analysis yielded no new codes or variations of codes. Therefore, I felt my two conceptual categories captured most of the data and no further data needed to be produced.

Finally, I began to build my substantive theory. The outcome of GT research is usually a substantive theoretical statement of ‘a set of concepts that are related to one another in a cohesive way [that should] account adequately for all the data collected’ (Sbaraini et al.,

2011, p. 7). I used diagramming ('creating visual representations of categories and their relationships' (Charmaz, 2014, p. 218)) to systematically sort the memos of my conceptual categories into a model that accounted for most of my data (Appendix 22). I shared this model with a focus group of four participants who had taken part in previous focus groups to gather their views on its resonance (Appendix 23). I compared their comments to the rest of the data produced during Phases One and Two and used those that helped to further the resonance of my categories to create the final substantive Grounded Theory, which is discussed in Chapter 4.

## 3.4 Research ethics

### 3.4.1 Ethical approval

Ethical approval was granted by the University of Sheffield's Ethics Panel in April 2023 (Appendix 1) prior to participant recruitment and data production.

### 3.4.2 Ethical considerations

I told the participants the full aims and rationale on my information sheet to obtain their informed consent. I shared that I was employed as an Asst. EP before training with the participants to support openness and transparency in the research process and researcher-participant relationships. I explained the participants' right to withdraw from the study at the beginning and end of their interview and/or focus group, including a withdrawal period of 24 hours after the interview/focus group due to the concurrent data construction process. I also asked participants if they wanted to take part in further phases of the study but made it clear they may not be selected. Participants were signposted to helplines (such as Mind) if they felt anything discussed during their interview or focus groups had impacted their well-being. Due to the nature of the focus group method, I explained to participants

they may recognise others in their group and had the right to withdraw if they did not feel comfortable participating with them. I also created a "group compact" with participants at the beginning of each focus group where everyone agreed to keep the identities of other participants and discussion confidential. Participants had the option of having their cameras on during the interviews/focus groups, but I made it clear only audio would be transcribed. I explained I would remove identifiable details from the data to minimise the risk of identification. See the information sheets and consent forms for each phase of the study in Appendices 3, 4, 15, and 16 for further details.

## Chapter 4: Results

This chapter presents a substantive theoretical framework developed using constant comparative analysis and informed by existentialist assumptions about human existence. In line with Constructivist GT methodology (Charmaz, 2014), the analysis of my data was also informed by existing theoretical frameworks on meaning-making at work. This is because it is assumed from a constructionist perspective that the knowledge produced during the study was influenced by discourses that already exist in the social, cultural, and historic context within which the co-construction of the data took place (Heiner, 2016; Hosking, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005). Therefore, the resulting framework represents my interpretation of the data produced during the study that is both grounded in participants' experiences and informed by the existing literature on the creation of meaning at work (Berdicchia & Masino, 2019; Daft & Lengel, 1986; Duncan, 1972; Guevara & Ord, 1996; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003; Rosso et al., 2010; Salancik & Pfeffer, 1978; Weick, 1969, 1977, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003; Wrzesniewski & Dutton, 2001). However, in contrast to the existing literature on meaning-making at work that views meaning as a product of cognitive processes bound within individuals, I adopted an existential position on existence and meaning (Heidegger, 1967; Kierkegaard, 1956; Sartre, 1956) and a critical constructionist approach (Heiner, 2016; Hosking, 2011; Kincheloe, 2005) to how meaning is created. When interpreting my data, I felt these positions facilitated a better understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences by placing greater emphasis on how Being in the world as an Asst. EP is experienced, and how meaning is constructed through relational processes within a local social, cultural, and historic context. I felt it was only through these philosophical lenses that the complexity of Asst. EPs' experiences could be understood. As recommended by Charmaz (2014), the theory is

described in the present tense, as the processes are viewed as ongoing in the experiences of Asst. EPs.

#### 4.1 Substantive Grounded Theory

I constructed the model shown in Figure 5 to represent how Asst. EPs experience a lack of Work Meaning when working in the role and how they attempt to resolve this by creating Work Meanings. In keeping with existentialism, I define "Work Meaning" as a way of Being that incorporates an individual's understanding of themselves at work, their work environment, and their relationship with their work environment. This stance reflects Sandberg and Pinnington's (2009) perspective of Work Meaning as a human way of Being in the world of work: understandings of one's work, self, and others are created through active engagement in work. I also emphasise the contexts in which Asst. EPs experience meaning-making in my analysis, as previous literature argues that to understand meaning-making processes, the contexts in which they occur must also be understood (Guevara & Ord, 1996; Weick, 1969, 1977, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). This is consistent with the constructionist position adopted in the study, as Work Meanings are co-constructed through interactions with others in a local historic, social, and cultural context (Weick, 1969, 1995; Wrzesniewski et al., 2003), and the existential position of "Being-in-the-world" (Heidegger, 1967).

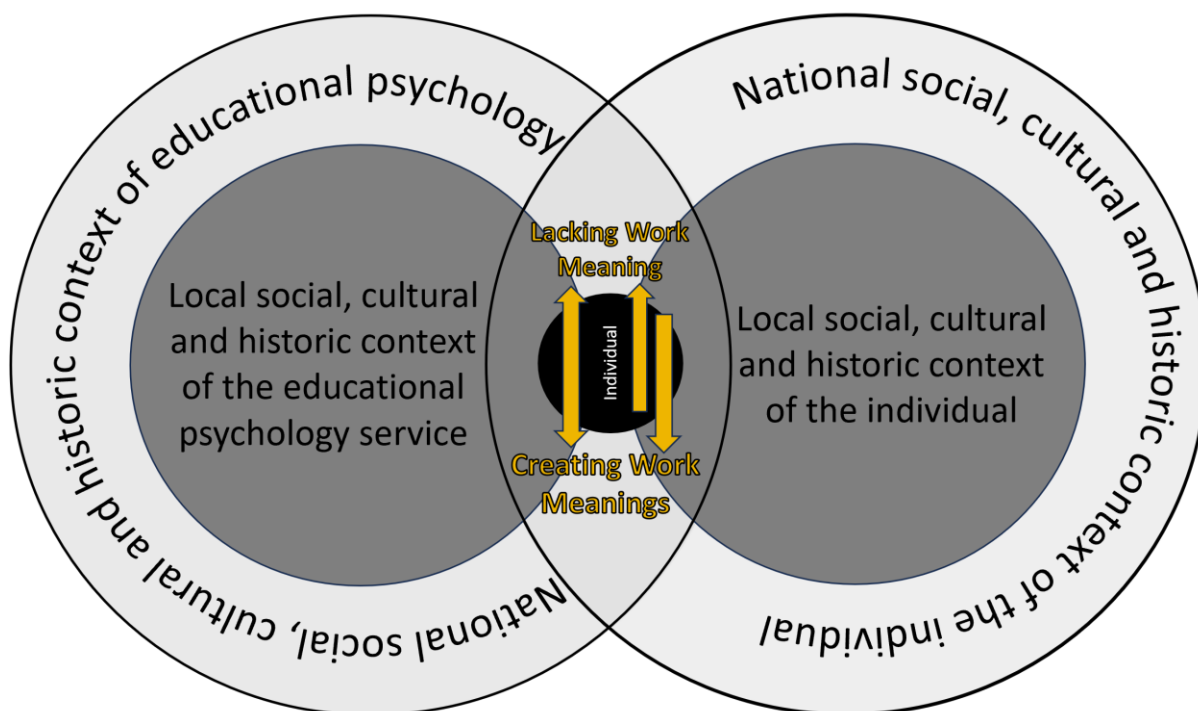


Figure 5: An existentially informed substantive Grounded Theory of how Asst. EPs experience lacking and creating Work Meanings

Asst. EPs begin to experience a lack of meaning of work and self at work when they enter the new work context of educational psychology. This is represented by the nested circles on the left side of Figure 5. In this context, Asst. EPs experience the current varied discourses about Asst. EP and EP work. Motivated by the uncertainty created by this sense of lack of Work Meaning, Asst. EPs start seeking opportunities to create Work Meanings through interactions with others. As shown in the centre of the model, the developing Work Meanings are co-constructed and situated within the relational processes with others. Consequently, they are intersubjective and bound to this temporary context. When creating Work Meanings, Asst. EPs draw on understandings from their local personal context, as shown in the nested circles on the right side of Figure 5, and their local work context, represented by the nested circles on the left side of Figure 5. Several features of the Asst. EPs' local personal contexts appear to influence their meaning-making, including previous



meanings of work, their personal values, and personal characteristics such as gender and cultural positions that may influence how power is distributed in meaning-making interactions, and thus shape explorations of Work Meanings. Work Meanings currently negotiated by others in the local work context also appear to influence Asst. EPs' meaning-making. Asst. EPs' experiences in these local contexts are influenced by the wider context of educational psychology and current cultural discourses on the meanings of Asst. EP and EP work and the current national and local policies on how CYP with SEND are supported. It is important to recognise lacking Work Meaning and meaning-making are not always experienced in chronological order, as shown by the process arrows in the centre of the diagram. Asst. EPs can experience lacking Work Meaning to some extent at the same time as creating meanings or cyclically, where Asst. EPs create Work Meanings but experience a lack of meaning again when the local context changes, so they need to create new Work Meanings.

I explain how the two processes of "Lacking Work Meaning" and "Creating Work Meanings" at the centre of this theoretical framework occur within Asst. EPs' experiences below, using supporting quotations from participants that are referenced using the appendix number and lines of the transcript within which they can be located. Further details of how these developed throughout the constant-comparative analysis are shown in Memos 1 and 2 (Appendices 13 and 25).

## 4.2 Lacking Work Meaning

The Asst. EPs experience a lack of meaning in relation to how to Be in their new world of work; they feel they do not know what their work involves, who they are in this work

context, and how they sit in relation to those with whom they work. This is seen particularly when they first start working in the role:

**Participant 7:** *'oh I'm here I'm here now like now what...Okay I'm an assistant'...'now I don't know what to do' (19, 713-717)*

The Asst. EPs expected to experience this lack of meaning, with Participant 3 explaining they *'didn't realise the role existed... so I really didn't know what it would entail' (9, 4).*

The Asst. EPs experience discomfort in this experience of Being with a lack of Work Meaning. Participant 2 commented the lack of direction and purpose in their work was *'scary' (19, 19)*, and Participant 8 blamed themselves for not knowing what to do in their role: *'I had a lot of guilt... 'am I doing enough how am I developing through this'' (19, 34-35).*

As a result of this sudden realisation that they lack Work Meaning, the Asst EPs experience a sense of meaninglessness in their world of work:

**Participant 7:** *you're like in this no man's land of who am I and what's my professional role here (24, 434-435)*

Despite these negative feelings, the Asst. EPs accept their experience and feel hopeful and motivated to create new Work Meanings through Being an Asst. EP. For example, Participant 8 explained that *'trying to put yourself out your comfort zone and look for opportunities has helped me learn' (19, 39-40).*

As the Asst. EPs experience the world of work in their roles, they create an understanding that their lack of Work Meaning is because the meanings of Asst. EP and EP work need to be constructed in relation to context-specific discourses. Therefore, the Asst. EPs' Work Meanings are lacking until they experience Being in the world as an Asst. EP, as they are not constructed in relation to the context in which they occur. As a result, the Asst. EPs feel their

Work Meanings are likely to continue to lack meaning to some extent because the local and national work context of educational psychology is continuously changing:

**Participant 3:** *I think with this role it's...forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress...I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

Within this experience of lacking Work Meaning described above, Asst. EPs experience a lack of meaning in three key areas of Work Meaning, which are detailed below.

#### 4.2.1 Lacking Asst. EP Work Meaning

The Asst. EPs first recognise they do not know how to Be Asst. EPs at the beginning of their time working in the role. For example, Participant 9 commented '*when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I [was] just going in very blind*' (19, 9-10). This lack of Work Meaning specifically in relation to the Asst. EP role particularly affects their experience of carrying out activities associated with the role for the first time. For example, Participant 2 spoke about how their lack of Work Meaning affected their perception of taking part in supervision: '*I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say'' (8, 96-97).*

The Asst. EPs observe variation in how Asst. EPs work across services, which increases the ambiguity of Asst. EP Work Meaning as it differs depending on the local context. This means the Asst. EPs experience uncertainty about how to work in the local context of their EPS:

**Participant 10:** *it's so varied amongst authorities what assistants do and I think maybe that's part of the problem about knowing what the role is that it is so different it's not just a set role (20, 360-362)*

The Asst. EPs also feel they experience work differently in comparison to other Asst. EPs because of the knowledge of themselves they have developed in relation to their local and wider social, cultural, and historical contexts. As a result, Asst. EPs experience diversity and ambiguity of Asst. EP Work Meanings within the same local context:

**Participant 4:** *if you spoke to my colleagues their experiences are very different to mine and that can be down to...your line manager or opportunities or...personal traits as to whether you feel...happy to approach people or to sometimes be a nag to really get those opportunities (10, 375-378)*

The lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning experienced by the Asst. EPs is exacerbated by others (e.g., EPs, service managers) who also experience a lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning and therefore lack an understanding of how to work with them. The Asst. EPs observe this appears to be related to the length of time the service has had the Asst. EP role:

**Participant 7:** *the role wasn't really developed they employed seven new assistants they had this new model that they was trying to...use and nobody knew how to use us (19, 53-55)*

Conversely, in services where the Asst. EP role has existed for a longer period, others are developing a greater understanding of Asst. EP work. For example, Participant 9 commented *'in like the two three years that I've been an assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more'* (19, 92-93). This suggests the local social and historic context of the service affects how others experience the meaning of Asst. EP work.

Additionally, the Asst. EPs experience differences in how others construe the meaning of Asst. EP work within the same service:

**Participant 7:** *you've got such a variety because I've worked for some EPs who really know the role and the meaning of the role and I think have used assistants really well and then I don't know if it's...cos they're newly qualified or not I think people who are more newly qualified who haven't been assistants previously struggle with knowing the meaning of like 'what do I do with you' (24, 113-117)*

The Asst. EPs develop an understanding that the differences in Work Meanings created by others result from the context in which these meanings were created. They also believe these Work Meanings are temporary as they are likely to change when the local context, including the EP with whom they are working, changes. For example, Participant 2 considered how the high turnover rate of Asst. EPs frequently changed the local context of their service, so others needed to create new Work Meanings in relation to the personal characteristics of the new Asst. EPs:

**Participant 2:** *the EPs have got better at knowing what assistants do over the last year and a bit but when a whole new raft of people come in could they start them off from scratch probably not (24, 60-62)*

Therefore, Asst. EPs feel there will be ongoing uncertainty in Asst. EP Work Meanings as the local contexts of both the service and the individuals working in the service are continuously changing. This may be linked to the assumptions of others working in the service based on inequalities in knowledge, with qualified EPs believing Asst. EPs lack the skills and knowledge to carry out activities when they first start working in their roles:

**Participant 3:** *there came a period of... 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do'...so I think maybe there was not awareness (9, 382-384)*

#### 4.2.2 Lacking EP Work Meaning

The Asst. EPs go into the role to develop their knowledge and understanding of EP work, suggesting they have limited EP Work Meaning particularly when they begin working in their role. For example, Participant 10 described not knowing how EPs work within education systems: *'I struggled with knowing just how like school systems worked'* (20, 11-12).

Conversely, some Asst. EPs feel they have some understanding of EP work based on their previous experiences:

**Participant 2:** *I think because of my experience when I was a teacher working with ed psychs it was very much coming in to do assessments and...one-to-ones and things which ultimately was probably mostly for statutory assessment and so I think probably I had...a little bit of a skewed view of what EPs do (8, 260-264)*

However, as shown in Participant 2's comment above, this meaning of EP work that an Asst. EP has initially constructed can be threatened when compared to the meaning of EP work that has been constructed in the local context of the EPS in which they begin working. The Asst. EPs attribute this to differences in the local social, cultural, and historical context of the EPS:

**Participant 1:** *But is that not reflective of the kind of work y'know I think because you do have to be so fluid it does really depend on all the situations that are going on that services do have to adapt and change to meet the need so yeah I think it maybe is difficult to kind of pinpoint this to 'this is how it needs to be' when it needs to be quite flexible...*

**Participant 7:** *That's true and the communities that you're serving depending on which Local Authority the needs within that community are going to be different like*

*you say it's not just on an individual level but just as the society of that community...Like it's gonna vary so much isn't it (24, 104-112)*

The Asst. EPs also develop an understanding that this ambiguity of EP Work Meaning can occur both between and within EPSs:

***Participant 6:*** *some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work (20, 371-373)*

***Participant 5:*** *there's quite a bit of variation in how people do reports...some of them are very like minimalistic with their wording some of them really like to have a narrative (11, 122-126)*

When the Asst. EPs have created an understanding of EP Work prior to employment as an Asst. EP that then aligns with the local context of the EPS they begin working in, they experience less ambiguity in EP Work Meaning. Conversely, when the Asst. EPs experience incongruence between the EP Work Meanings they have created prior to employment and their actual experiences of EP work in the local service context this creates more ambiguity in EP Work Meaning:

***Participant 7:*** *from my old service we were doing all statutory work and the role of the assistant was literally just to support with the statutory work whereas the service I'm in now like we don't have anything to do with the statutory work...if I'd have only ever experienced one and it was just like I went in and when I was like 'whoa is this all they do like doing statutory working and reports' it kind of put me off in that moment like I don't want to do that but now seeing that actually there's more to the role than that (24, 214-220)*

This highlights that uncertainty of EP Work Meaning is related to the local contexts within which the Asst. EPs work. The Asst. EPs feel a sense of discomfort in relation to this experience as they initially understand this uncertainty in relation to their understanding of themselves, by attributing it to them not understanding EP work. However, through further experiences of Being with EPs, the Asst. EPs create a new understanding that this ambiguity of EP work is part of EP Work Meaning:

***Participant 10:** I think it is a challenge when people do things differently and to start with it does make you think 'oh I'm not doing it right' but then...you realise that it's different ways that people work (20, 456-458)*

Therefore, similar to their understanding of the Asst. EP role, the Asst. EPs create an understanding that EP Work lacks meaning until this Work Meaning is constructed in relation to the specific context within which the EP's work takes place.

#### 4.2.3 Conflicting meanings of self at work

The Asst. EPs' understandings of themselves at work are challenged when working in the role, particularly when they first start working as Asst. EPs. They expect to feel this conflict in their understanding of themselves at work, as they believe their self-concept has been constructed in relation to their experiences of work:

***Participant 1:** I've been a SENCO and a primary school teacher for fifteen years so in a way having that experience is also a change in like your identity a change in your working style so for me it was kind of knowing that I will be changing roles and knowing that you need to adapt in that way (24, 249-252)*

The Asst. EPs need to experience Being in the role to construct new meanings of self at work, which they find difficult and effortful. For example, Participant 2 described how they



tried to adapt their existing meaning of self at work to their new role as an Asst. EP, resulting in their work identity being in conflict:

*I was a SENCO before...and...probably for the first six months I was kind of like this weird little hybrid....so the way I tried to adapt into the role was my perspective of being in a school and that was useful but then that's probably not the way I work now so yeah I guess it's using the identity that you had and adapting it to the role that you're doing but it's really hard (24, 258-265)*

The Asst. EPs experience anxiety in relation to this conflict in their meaning of self at work. For example, Participant 9 explained how the sudden change in role led to feelings of overwhelm and loss of confidence in themselves and their abilities:

*I feel like you almost get this position and then all of your past experience goes out the window and you think 'I'm not capable I don't know anything I can't do this' and you actually forget how did you get here in the first place how did you get this job and what skills do I already have (19, 48-51)*

This loss of confidence in themselves is also affected by the local context of the service within which they work; the Asst. EPs' meanings of themselves at work are understood in relation to others in their environment. Therefore, through these relational processes, the Asst. EPs compare themselves to others and experience anxiety if they perceive themselves to be inferior in comparison to their colleagues:

**Participant 7:** *...you're in a team and who are the other people in that team well they're the educational psychologists so why do you feel incapable or why do you feel you lack knowledge well it's because the only person to compare yourself to (laughs)*

*or that you're working with so often are people who are more educated who are more knowledgeable...*

**Participant 2:** *...you're sitting with very competent very skilled very experienced people and yes you're trying to learn from them but at the same time you want to do what they're doing so it's a hard...mantle to live up to (24, 229-246)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs draw on the cultural discourse of imposter syndrome in an attempt to make sense of this experience:

**Participant 4:** *there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna know yeah is someone gonna know more than me'...it's a tricky one (10, 192-194)*

These feelings of low confidence in themselves and their abilities appear to be reduced as individuals spend more time Being an Asst. EP. For example, Participant 3 explained '*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and...now with the experience...I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased'* (9, 126-129).

### 4.3 Creating Work Meanings

When the Asst. EPs experience a lack of Work Meanings, they experience a sense of freedom to create new Work Meanings. The Asst. EPs' Work Meanings are co-constructed through interactions with others and the context of the organisation in which they are working. They are created at different rates for Asst. EPs, for instance, Participant 7 explained '*after ten months...I still feel like 'who am I what is my role''* (24, 456-457).

With the freedom to create Work Meanings comes a sense of responsibility over how they will create meaning and the meanings they choose to make. For example, Participant 2 described how '*it's kind of been up to the assistants...to look at other things that they can*

do' (8, 15-16). In response to this freedom and sense of responsibility, the Asst. EPs actively construct Work Meanings by seeking experiences they perceive will help them understand Asst. EP and EP work. This is initially done pragmatically by asking questions, looking at what past Asst. EPs have done, and shadowing EPs:

**Participant 2:** *I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain... panels and things to pick up casework...to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff...then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and...go along with them (8, 16-19)*

The freedom to construct meaning is appreciated by the Asst. EPs, as they feel they can choose the activities they experience, and in turn, greater their understanding of work. However, the Asst. EPs also experience discomfort because this freedom and responsibility to create meaning present an existential paradox of seeking certainty in their uncertain world of work:

**Participant 2:** *It is a really hard one...you wanna do work with EPs you want them to tell you what's going on and...why they've done stuff...but at the same time you then need your own space after that to go away and work out 'would I do it that way would I have done it differently' (24, 401-407)*

Additionally, the Asst. EPs experience pressure to create Work Meanings. They draw on the current discourse about the function of Asst. EPs roles as temporary positions that will help individuals get on to EP doctoral training courses to make sense of this pressure:

**Participant 7:** *you're on a time pressure not just to understand but...you're just constricted to this time that you need to learn everything and to be honest I also feel*

*then a lot of stress and pressure by being in this role to knowing I feel pressure that I then need to be on the doctorate (24, 628-631)*

Therefore, not only are Asst. EPs trying to create an understanding of their current way of Being, they are also creating a sense of **Becoming**, in terms of how they want to work as an EP in the future. This has a substantial impact on the emotional well-being of the Asst. EPs, as meaning-making in this context is exhausting:

**Participant 8:** *I feel exhausted all the time...after a day at work and it's so much more mentally cos...I think your brain is just constantly going everyday 'what can I do how could I get this opportunity how does this apply to being an EP' (19, 700-703)*

Adding to this feeling of exhaustion is the experience of simultaneously creating two Work Meanings: how to Be an Asst. EP and the meaning of EP work. The Asst. EPs feel they are creating separate meanings of Asst. EP and EP work, as Participant 8 commented they '*know there's obviously a big difference between what an assistant can do and an EP' (19, 222-223)*. The Asst. EPs also draw on the current discourse of the Asst. EP role being a precursor to doctoral training to make sense of their experience, as Participant 2 described in their understanding of Asst. EP work:

*I think part of the assistant role is just gaining experience and knowledge and being okay with it not necessarily coming to anything other than you going 'that's not for me' or 'that is for me' because that's then the assistant role is all about building you up for the doctorate and to develop as an EP so I feel like it's just those starting steps for you to go 'these are all the things you've allowed me to do and that's brilliant but then this is probably where I'm gonna put myself at some point' (19, 310-315)*

This shows how the Asst. EPs create two Work Meanings with which they want to identify - an understanding of their Asst. EP role as a separate way of Being compared to an idealised way of Being they expect to experience when they become an EP. They need to try and make some sense of both to be able to hold their current identity and know what they are aiming for.

Through Being in the role, the Asst. EPs also create new meanings of themselves at work in terms of their beliefs about their knowledge, skills, and values:

**Participant 3:** *way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and...now with the experience...I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent (9, 126-131)*

This process of constructing understandings of themselves at work is affected by the local context. For example, the Asst. EPs who have more opportunities to reflect on their understanding of the role in relation to their self-concept experience a greater ability to create a meaning of self at work compared to those who have fewer opportunities:

**Participant 8:** *I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills (19, 111-112)*

**Participant 9:** *I feel like the only time I really got to think about myself like that and...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 126-128)*

**Participant 7:** *I spent nine months in one council which the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices...I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months (19, 132-135)*

Ultimately, the Asst. EPs believe the Work Meanings they are creating through their experience of Being an Asst. EP will always be different from the Work Meanings being created by other Asst. EPs. They make sense of this in terms of the different discourses about Asst. EP and EP work they experience in the local work contexts in which they are constructing these meanings. This occurs both between different EPSs and within an EPS when working with different EPs in the same service who work in different ways:

**Participant 7:** *I've been in two different services I was in one first for nine months and this one now for two months so short but...both have been completely different what's been expected of me has been completely different so there's never gonna be this overarching document where this is what assistants do so...[Participant 2] you might create one for your service now for the assistants coming into your service but that will only be relevant to your service (24, 82-88)*

**Participant 7:** *how are we ever gonna understand the role because...you're adapting that role to every EP that you work with so how are you gonna understand the role but then for me now I've moved to a new council with a whole other set of EPs so now I've got to understand the role again (19, 383-386)*

The Asst. EPs also believe the Work Meanings they create are partial and likely to change as they experience the different contexts of doctoral training and work as a qualified EP:

**Participant 7:** *will you ever feel like you really know the role or feel really capable because you haven't done the three year doctorate to do it I don't know (19, 78-79)*

Thus, the Work Meanings constructed by the Asst. EPs are seen as temporary, fluid, and context-bound. This reflects the idea of meaning-making at work as futile and hopeless labour described by Camus (1955), as the Asst. EPs will need to continuously reconstruct their Work Meanings.

Despite their belief that their Work Meanings will change, they believe their experiences of lacking meaning and meaning-making in the Asst. EP role are beneficial in themselves and will enable them to work more effectively as EPs in the future:

**Participant 2:** *I think that's something that I wanna try and hold on to when hopefully at some point I'm an EP to actually remember when I was an assistant and...how I felt and the uncertainty that often felt in situations and bring that to...consultation and things and be able to reflect and go y'know 'I'm not the expert' I never feel like I'm going to be the expert and to just actually go in with a very open mind to everything because I think as an assistant that's what you have to do (19, 581-586)*

There are four key processes through which Asst. EPs create Work Meanings, which I explain in each subsection below.

#### 4.3.1 Using past meanings of work and self

**Participant 7:** *you just go from one professional identity to another...I don't think we want to keep reflecting on who we were or like looking at the past experiences but...because there's not that transition you literally have no other choice...you're still in that mindset almost you're like in this no man's land of who am I and what's my professional role here so you start sharing information that probably is your past role but you just got no other kind of thing to go off (24, 431-436)*

The Asst. EPs draw on the understandings of work and themselves at work they created in previous work contexts to make sense of their current experience. As illustrated in Participant 7's comment above, this is a pragmatic approach adopted out of necessity to manage the feelings of uncertainty that come from experiencing a lack of meaning about the Asst. EP role and conflicting meanings of self at work. Consequently, the Asst. EPs use previous Work Meanings to help them make sense of their new role. This process interacts with their experience of lacking Work Meaning - their meaning of self at work becomes conflicted as they have no clear meaning to transition into. Consequently, Asst. EPs find it difficult to create a new meaning of self at work until they experience Being in the world of educational psychology work as an Asst. EP:

***Participant 9:** I was a TA before so I just felt like a TA that'd been thrown into this role without really any training or anything extra to bring as like an assistant compared to a TA (19, 15-16)*

This affects how the Asst. EPs experience their work as they use previous Work Meanings to inform how to Be in their new role. For example, Participant 2 explained how the understanding of supervision they had created in their previous work role influenced their experience of supervision as an Asst. EP:

*when I started the job having never had supervision before I kind of went into it with this 'is someone judging me...is someone keeping notes on whether I'm doing good supervision'...and I really struggled with it initially I think especially...cos I came from a school background and...any kind of supervision in a school is usually someone judging you...so it took me a while to get over that (19, 445-449)*



This shows the Asst. EPs create initial Work Meanings tentatively using previous Work Meanings. However, this can add to uncertainty about the meaning of work when there is incongruence between these previous Work Meanings and their experience of Asst. EP work. Consequently, the Asst. EPs are motivated to create new Work Meanings that fit the current context to reduce these feelings of discomfort from conflicts in their Work Meanings. As Participant 2's statement above shows, this process of creating new Work Meanings and letting go of old Work Meanings is uncomfortable and effortful.

Previous Work Meanings are also used in the active construction of new meanings. For instance, Participant 4 explained how they reflected on their current Work Meanings and used these to inform what experiences they needed to develop new Work Meanings by '*plugging in the gaps in our existing knowledge*' (10, 12-13). Additionally, others encourage the Asst. EPs to draw on their previous Work Meanings to inform how to Be an Asst. EP:

**Participant 10:** *...I worked in an Autistic residential school and [South-Western County] are doing a project for delivering training to mainstream schools so I didn't identify myself but my PEP said to me 'I know you've got experience with autism would to join the project' so it was sort of her knowing my past experiences that I was then able to bring to that and I thought 'yeah actually I can do that' that gave me confidence in knowing what I was doing so I could then use my past experiences which then made me feel confident in that position*

**Participant 2:** *Yeah I had something similar because I'd worked with young people who'd been at school for quite a significant amount of time to transport them back in so then when [North Eastern Local Authority] started an emotionally-based school non-attendance project it was like 'would you like to be part of that'...to me that was*

*something very tangible to then go 'I've got experience in this area' so yeah it was something for me to go 'I probably feel like I can contribute amongst all the other uncertainties going on' (24, 477-491)*

This also shows how using previous Work Meanings can make the Asst. EPs feel more confident in their abilities, as it reduces some of the uncertainty around the meaning of Asst. EP work by highlighting the similarities between their previous Work Meanings and new Work Meanings.

The way the Asst. EPs use past meanings of work and self to create Work Meanings changes over time. As the Asst. EPs develop a Work Meaning of the Asst. EP role and become more confident in their abilities, they rely less on previous Work Meanings to inform their work:

**Participant 2:** *when you...start the only thing you've got is your past experiences to then...try and make sense of the role at the same time so you initially always draw on the things you've done before in the experiences that you've had and the values that gives you because that's the very tangible thing when you're going 'don't know what I'm doing here I don't know what we're supposed to do' that's all you've got as a starting point...so we'll start probably with the more familiar and then branched out as we became more confident (24, 461-468)*

They also begin to use their past Work Meanings to create Work Meanings that are meaningful to them, that is, how they want to Be an Asst. EP:

**Participant 3:** *I make a point of going into the staffroom...in between...break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then...people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of...this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves'*

*because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

This shows how using past Work Meanings serves different functions during the time the Asst. EPs spend in their role. They initially use past Work Meanings in an attempt to reduce the discomfort of uncertainty when they experience a lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning, however, as they create an Asst. EP Work Meaning, they begin to draw on past Work Meanings to create a meaningful way of Being at work.

#### 4.3.2 Interacting Work Meanings

As discussed above, the Asst. EPs co-construct Work Meanings through interactions with others. Consequently, meaning-making involves an interaction between the Work Meanings others have already construed and the Work Meanings the Asst. EPs are developing. As highlighted in Section 4.1, others have varied understandings of Asst. EP and EP work. The meanings others have construed of Asst. EP work and their confidence in these understandings affect how they interact with the Asst. EPs:

**Participant 7:** *I've worked for some EPs who really know the role and the meaning of the role and I think have used assistants really well and then I don't know if...it's cos they're newly qualified or not I think people who are more newly qualified who haven't been assistants previously struggle with knowing the meaning of like 'what do I do with you' and sometimes they'll either completely avoid...using you at all or working with you...or...use you maybe in the wrong way but I think you've got the other end of the spectrum where you've got people who have been very experienced and qualified a very long time ago who almost use you as "an assistant" (air quotes) like the typical assistant where they're just ordering you to do things (24, 113-122)*

This shows the different Work Meanings of others can have positive or negative effects on an Asst. EP's ability to create Work Meanings, as the experiences through which they make meanings are influenced by others' understanding of Asst. EP work. For instance, when others understand Asst. EP work as having a specific and narrow role within the organisation, then the Asst. EPs feel their ability to create Work Meanings is restricted:

**Participant 5:** *it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

Conversely, the Asst. EPs feel experiencing a variety of Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings facilitates their meaning-making, as this broadens their understanding of the roles by exposing them to different Work Meanings they could choose to create:

**Participant 9:** *I was very much sort of previously 'this is the way that assistants have to work because this is the way that my EP that I work with likes it' and then to experience what I would say is probably the total opposite it was like 'oh it's so much freer than this' (19, 247-249)*

Although the Asst. EPs feel more positive about their ability to create meaning in this context, it also means they must constantly adapt their meanings to that of the EP they are currently interacting with, which makes them feel mentally exhausted:

**Participant 8:** *it's interesting isn't it like how...mentally tiring it can be when you're working with lots...of different EPs and you're trying to almost put a lot of different hats on to EPs... it's quite a difficult thing to do...I think from my experience it really depends what EP I'm working with I have some EPs I'm like 'you lead on writing it I'll*

*do the last spell checks and stuff' but they'll go with how I want to do it whereas other ones it's 'oh we need to change the language to this we need to fit it into these headings' and so it...can be...quite overwhelming at times...and a lot to think about especially if you're writing the four different reports and they're all very different (19, 358-366)*

Despite this, the Asst. EPs appreciate experiencing a variety of Work Meanings in their interactions with others, as this helps them create a deeper understanding of EP work and begin developing a meaningful way of Being an Asst. EP:

***Participant 8:*** *what's really helped me make sense of my role as an assistant is going out with lots of different EPs...and...we have a few trainees within our service and...doing some work with them and seeing...the...type of approaches that I want to use (19, 223-225)*

Opportunities to interact with other Asst. EPs who also experience a lack of Work Meaning and meaning-making are viewed as particularly important for several reasons. First, they support containment of the emotional impact of meaning-making:

***Participant 8:*** *something that's really helped me is connecting with other assistants through networks...or...the team that you have if you have more than one assistant and that's really helped...share feelings and that is normal...and that it is a real process of...development (19, 43-46)*

Secondly, interactions with other Asst. EPs help the Asst. EPs to broaden their understanding of Asst. EP work based on the experiences of others in different local contexts:

**Participant 9:** *it opened my eyes to how different everyone's role is and I definitely felt like I was one of those people that was just doing the same thing all the time but having that knowledge I was then able to go back to my service and be like 'look what all these other assistants are doing use us in this way we don't just have to do the same thing all the time' so that has completely changed my experience and my role (19, 211-215)*

#### 4.3.3 Distributing power in meaning-making interactions

**Participant 2:** *in the assistant role you go in knowing that you're not the person who knows as much y'know you always know that that EP knows a great deal more than you probably in most situations (19, 573-575)*

The Asst. EPs' abilities to construct Work Meanings through interactions with others are influenced by how power is distributed in these relational processes. The Asst. EPs may disempower themselves in relation to qualified EPs, as shown in Participant 2's comment above, thus reducing their responsibility for creating Work Meanings and accepting the Work Meanings given to them by others. Additionally, EPs may take more responsibility for meaning-making in interactions with the Asst. EPs as they are perceived to have greater experience and knowledge of EP work. Consequently, EPs are empowered in comparison to the Asst. EP in meaning-making interactions and try to give Work Meanings to the Asst. EPs directly:

**Participant 1:** *it was...more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have'...'why did you choose that that approach' (7, 72-74)*

This disempowerment in relation to qualified EPs hinders the Asst. EPs' abilities to create meaningful Work Meanings, as it reduces their responsibility to actively create meanings of their work:

**Participant 7:** *I just kept being 'yes' whatever the EP would ask 'yes' I wouldn't reflect I'd just do what I was told (19, 145-146)*

This results in the Asst. EPs creating Work Meanings passively as they understand work in the same way as the EP without understanding the reason why the EP has created that Work Meaning. Consequently, this can lead the Asst. EPs to experience working in "Bad Faith" in line with Sartre's (1956) definition. For example, Participant 5 described how the meaning of EP work given to them by qualified EPs had led to them working in a way that was incongruent with the Work Meaning they wanted to create and thus uncomfortable for them: *'at the moment we do parent carer meetings mostly virtual (sighs)...although it's not meant to be like that' (11, 76-83).*

However, when the Asst. EPs are empowered to take responsibility in these meaning-making interactions, they can actively reflect on the Work Meanings they are constructing. This is most clearly shown in the collaborative interactions the Asst. EPs have with their supervisors during formal supervision where power is distributed equally:

**Participant 1:** *I think when it was the...collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen...that method...or the...different stance that you've chosen'...it isn't...the expert model (7, 79-82)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs experience the supervisory relationship as a safe space for the explicit meaning-making of Asst. EP and EP work because of their shared responsibility for

meaning-making. It also supports the containment of negative feelings created by the meaning-making process itself:

**Participant 9:** *at the start for me [supervision] was absolutely massive and figuring out 'what should I do how should I do it what shouldn't I do'... it was just that safe space to ask even if it's a stupid question 'should I know this should I do this' all sorts of stuff like that so for me I don't think I could have done my job for the first six months without supervision (19, 420-426)*

#### 4.3.4 Creating meaningful Work Meanings

**Participant 2:** *I don't know how much I learned about myself last year other than the bits of the job that I love and the bits of the job that I could probably push to one side a little bit but now I'm kind of using that to go actually 'what kind of EP do I wanna be which bits of the role are really important to me which theories really hold with my own personal values' (19, 165-169)*

Once the Asst. EPs have construed understandings of Asst. EP and EP work and themselves at work, they can begin to create meaningful Work Meanings about how they want to Be an Asst. EP now and an EP in the future. As shown in Participant 2's comment above, the process of creating meaningful Work Meanings is motivated by the desire for "authenticity" (i.e., congruence between their Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings and their beliefs, interests, and values) and are therefore created based on what individuals deem to be important in their lives. The Asst. EPs draw on values they have developed through their personal experiences of Being in the world. They believe these values are intrinsic to their self-concept, for example, Participant 7 commented their '*values have been there right from the beginning as a person they're not something...you can teach people*' (19, 615-617). The Asst.



EPs also draw on their previous Work Meanings and the values encompassed in these to inform this meaningfulness-making process:

**Participant 8:** *I worked in a secondary school for...SEMH needs and a lot of those children experienced quite very hard starts to their lives and a big thing I sort of use in my work...is compassion...that's something that...I try to bring a lot into my work*  
(19, 489-492)

The Asst. EPs also develop their values in relation to others they interact with while working as an Asst. EP, for example, Participant 8 explained how *'one of my values has come with working with another EP who loves collaborating'* (19, 501-502).

Values appear to influence the creation of meaningful Work Meanings reciprocally. The Asst. EPs seek opportunities for meaning-making they perceive align with their values and, in turn, their values are reinforced by others and used to further inform their meaning of EP work:

**Participant 8:** *one thing that I've really noticed is what sort of EPs I'm drawn to in my work and who I really sort of get my...shining golden moments from and I've...come to notice it is...the skills and the values of the EPs and how it's quite similar to me and that surely helped me develop...the EP I want to become* (19, 114-117)

Simultaneously, the Asst. EPs experience the Work Meanings of others that are informed by their values, which can lead to the Asst. EPs shifting their values to align with their work context:

**Participant 7:** *you can't help but bring those values that you already had with you although I would say...they have changed...so a lot of my work was...in social care...on a family one-to-one level with this family working intensely...having that*

*relational approach and...as I started to think from the EP like a...more systemic level maybe so like that's okay supporting like that intervention for that one child but how can we work more systemically with that school or support the staff to support those children so you're kind of having a greater impact on more children (19, 527-535)*

The Asst. EPs' abilities to create and act in accordance with meaningful Work Meanings are associated with how power is distributed in their interactions with others. When the Asst. EPs experience interactions in which they are disempowered and given Work Meanings directly, their ability to construct meaningful Work Meanings is hindered:

**Participant 9:** *we do a lot of...work that just contributes to statutory assessment so a lot of it is just assessment report assessment report...I feel like the only time I really got to think about...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 124-128)*

They also feel restricted in their ability to act with authenticity in ways that align with their meaningful Work Meanings:

**Participant 9:** *you can figure out...what you like and what you might wanna do in the future but at the end of the day you...are always working under someone else and you will always have to do it in the way that they want you to (19, 327-329)*

This can generate an existential challenge for the Asst. EPs if the Work Meanings given to them conflict with their values and threaten their authentic way of Being at work:

**Participant 9:** *it is uncomfortable because obviously some things I do and don't agree with...so it is a bit of a conflict of...what my values are and what their values are it's also difficult as well because when I'm working under different EPs I find...the work*

*that I'm doing is totally different or even the way that I'm writing a report is totally different and at one point I've been writing reports in like three or four completely different styles cos it's to each person's preference which then obviously makes the role a little bit harder cos you're having to change things all the time and do different things so yeah there is a lot of that second guessing is 'okay this is the way that I would wanna do it this is the way that this person would wanna do it and this person' and then I do find that...I feel like I have to go with what the EP wants because at the end of the day they're supervising it it's their case (19, 341-351)*

On the other hand, when the Asst. EPs are empowered in their role, this can facilitate the co-construction of meaningful Work Meanings. For example, the Asst. EPs can create meaningful Work Meanings in interactions where they are encouraged to question their perspectives and make choices about how they want to work:

**Participant 2:** *she...just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what...do you want to get out of this' (8, 80-81)*

The Asst. EPs appreciate formal supervision for this reason, as this is where they are most likely to experience this type of meaning-making interaction:

**Participant 8:** *I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills...talking through why you've done something that way what you could have done differently...so it is a real position where I feel you can grow you have that space to be able to do that (19, 111-121)*

It is important to highlight that not all participants in the study experience this process of meaningfulness-making in their role because they do not yet feel they have created Work Meanings or they feel hindered in their abilities to create meaningful Work Meanings due to

the meaning-making interactions they experience. Despite this, being able to work in a way that aligns with their values and create Work Meanings that allow them to experience "authenticity" is important to all of the Asst. EPs. This is considered in relation to the values encompassed in the Work Meanings of the local service context:

***Participant 10:** if my values didn't align with the service I wonder if I would not be as happy I've worked in jobs before where decisions were being made and I fundamentally disagreed with them and how uncomfortable that made me feel (20, 713-715)*

Therefore, the Asst. EPs feel it is important to create meaningful Work Meanings as these facilitate their well-being and a positive view of their work.

## Chapter 5: Discussion

In this chapter, I consider how the substantive theoretical framework developed from my analysis relates to my research questions:

How do Assistant Educational Psychologists experience a lack of work meaning?

How do Assistant Educational Psychologists resolve a lack of work meaning?

I begin by discussing how the substantive Grounded Theory sits in relation to existing research and theoretical frameworks about the meaning of work and the work of Asst. EPs. Within this, I consider the significance and original contribution of the substantive Grounded Theory to this body of literature. I then consider the dissemination of the research and its implications for those working in educational psychology and the organisations with which they work. I reflect on my experience of the research and how it will affect my practice. Finally, I evaluate this research in terms of its quality and limitations and suggest directions for future research.

### 5.1 Discussion of substantive Grounded Theory

The main aim of this research was to explore the experiences of Asst. EPs currently working in EPSs using Constructivist GT methodology. Therefore, I began my research by asking participants about their experiences of being an Asst. EP. By remaining grounded in the data produced using constant comparative analysis, I noticed much of the information co-constructed through interviews with the participants was related to their experiences of not knowing how to be an Asst. EP and how they responded to this. Through theoretical sampling of further data, I developed a theoretical understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences

that explains how Asst. EPs experience a lack of meaning in their work and seek to resolve this through meaning-making processes.

The substantive Grounded Theory constructed in this research offers a novel way of understanding meaning-making at work from an existentialist perspective of Work Meaning informed by Sandberg and Pinnington's (2009) view of Work Meanings, as a way of Being encompassing understandings of work, selves, and others in the world of work. This provides an alternative perspective to the conceptualisation of Work Meaning as a product of cognitive sensemaking processes developed by Pratt and Ashforth (2003) and develops the existing body of research that approaches meaning-making from a cognitive perspective. Through this existentialist lens, we can better understand why Asst. EPs seek to construct Work Meanings, not just to apply for doctoral training, but also to reduce feelings of "existential anxiety" when seeking certainty in response to the uncertainty of Work Meaning.

Through analysis of the data co-constructed with participants in the current study, experiencing a lack of Work Meaning appeared to be an important part of Asst. EPs' experiences. The substantive Grounded Theory explains how Asst. EPs experience a lack of both Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings, which supports existing research that identifies how a wide variation in Asst. EP work creates ambiguity and uncertainty in the role for both Asst. EPs and those with whom they work (Collyer, 2012; Harland et al., 2022; Lyons, 2000; Monsen et al., 2009; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). This is also reflected in the only national guidelines to support understanding of Asst. EP Work, which may also have contributed to how qualified EPs understand the Asst. EP role:

AsEP can be used in a variety of ways to complete a variety of duties, with appropriate supervision and support. The nature of those duties will depend upon the requirements of the service and the strengths and previous qualifications/experience of the AsEP (AEP, 2022, What is an AsEP?, para 2)

The substantive Grounded Theory developed in this study links existing knowledge from Asst. EP research with the wider meaning of work literature and data co-constructed with participants to explain how this ambiguity and uncertainty affects Asst. EPs' experiences. In line with Duncan (1972) and Weick (1995), Asst. EPs' lack of Work Meaning may be explained by the sudden awareness of uncertainty and ambiguity around the Asst. EP and EP roles in the local context of their EPS. From this experience, they develop the understanding that Asst. EP and EP work inherently lack meaning, which is consistent with an existential approach to Being.

Asst. EPs also appear to experience conflicting meanings of self when working as an Asst. EP. Although this is not directly discussed in the existing literature, it is consistent with Sandberg and Pinnington's (2009) and Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) conceptualisation of Work Meaning as encompassing the understanding of self in a work context. It may therefore be theorised that individuals experience a lack of meaning in relation to their Self Meaning at the same time as experiencing a lack of meaning about Asst. EP and EP work, given the intertwined nature of these. Asst. EPs initially make sense of this lack of Work Meaning in terms of personal competence and ability by drawing on imposter syndrome discourse, i.e., "I lack competence and others are more competent than me". However, through their experience of Being an Asst. EP, they create an understanding that this lack of

Work Meaning is a feature of EP and Asst. EP work because of the highly context-dependent and co-constructed nature of these roles. Thus, adopting an approach to meaning-making underpinned by critical constructionist and existentialist ontological assumptions enables a deeper understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences, in terms of how they respond to the existential "given" of meaninglessness in an uncertain world, instead of viewing their experience from a developmental perspective of gaining competence or knowledge of EP work.

In line with Kahn et al. (1964), the resulting substantive Grounded Theory explains Asst. EPs show motivation to create Work Meanings due to the discomfort felt in response to uncertainty and ambiguity. This is consistent with the existing literature that suggests meaning-making occurs in such work contexts (Duncan, 1972; Weick, 1995). However, the results also show Asst. EPs feel hopeful and motivated to create Work Meanings. This experience may be unique to the Asst. EP role due to prevailing discourse about the purpose of the role. For example, the current AEP (2022) definition implies the role will help individuals gain the experience needed to secure a place on a doctoral EP training course. However, this definition also appears to add to existential anxiety as it conceptualises experience as a "thing to be gained". Consequently, Asst. EPs may experience a paradox of wanting experience to be given to them to increase their feelings of certainty. However, they also strive to take responsibility for meaning-making by actively seeking experiences that will help them to create Work Meanings.

To resolve their lack of Work Meaning, Asst. EPs create Work Meanings through interactions with others in a unique social, cultural, and historic context. These Work Meanings represent a combined understanding of Asst. EP and EP work (activities and tasks), their role



as an Asst. EP (their position in relation to qualified EPs), and their self at work (personal values and meaningful work). This best aligns with Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) integrated approach to Work Meaning and its construction through the interpretation of interpersonal acts in relation to how the individual currently understands themselves. Additionally, the substantive theory builds on Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) approach by considering the influence of the wider context of the educational psychology profession, the context of the EPS within which they are employed, and the Asst. EP's personal context on meaning-making processes.

The distribution of power in meaning-making interactions is an important mechanism that influences the creation of Work Meanings. In the current study, the Asst. EPs' meaning-making processes were facilitated when they were empowered in collaborative meaning-making interactions but hindered when EPs gave them Work Meanings directly. This presents a tension in the meaning-making processes Asst. EPs experience - receiving no guidance and receiving guidance that is too prescriptive are both problematic for meaning-making as both can reduce authenticity. This is consistent with Berdicchia and Masino's (2019) finding that individual meaning-making is influenced by the level of autonomy the individual has to create Work Meanings. How Asst. EPs experience power dynamics in meaning-making interactions may be related to the current pressures on EPSs. For example, existing research suggests the main reason for employing Asst. EPs is to increase service capacity (Atfield et al., 2023; Collyer, 2012; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). The implication of this is that services require Asst. EPs to work with as much autonomy as possible as soon as possible. This may also be influenced by the discourse that the purpose of the Asst. EP role is to gain experience and knowledge. Both of these reasons for employment perpetuate

power imbalances in meaning-making interactions, as EPs are positioned over Asst. EPs for having more experience and knowledge of EP work compared with Asst. EPs. Consequently, EPs may feel pressured to give Work Meanings directly to Asst. EPs to achieve these two objectives. However, this leads to frustration if the Work Meanings given to Asst. EPs conflict with their values and beliefs about meaningful ways of working and disempowers the Asst. EPs, hindering their ability to actively create meaningful Work Meanings, in line with Baumeister and Vohs (2002). It also assumes knowledge and experience are separate entities that can be given, yet this contradicts the understanding of Work Meanings developed through this research as being co-constructed through and bound to relational processes.

Finally, the substantive Grounded Theory developed in this study shows how meaning and meaningfulness are created through distinct sensemaking processes in Asst. EPs' experiences. Previous research into the creation of Work Meanings conflates the meaningfulness and meaning of work (Rosso et al., 2010); thus, the current study offers insight into how these two concepts develop through meaning-making processes. As discussed in Chapter 4, Asst. EPs must experience Being in the world of work before they can begin to make sense of their experiences through meaning-making interactions with others. Once Asst. EPs have begun to create Work Meanings, they are then able to start evaluating these Work Meanings in relation to their personal values, interests, and beliefs. Therefore, the results of this study suggest meaningfulness may be a subsidiary process within meaning-making, with meaningfulness-making being contingent on the initial meaning-making process. This aligns with the self-based explanations of meaning-making that suggest values (a feature of meaningfulness and authenticity) influence how individuals

create Work Meanings (e.g., Gandal et al. (2005) and Locke and Taylor (1991)).

Subsequently, they begin to form meaningful Work Meanings that align with their values and allow them to experience authenticity at work. This is consistent with research by Baumeister and Vohs (2002), Deci and Ryan (2012), Rosso et al. (2010), and Sheldon and Elliot (1999) that suggest authenticity is an important part of meaning-making and furthers understanding of how this mechanism is involved in Asst. EPs' creation of Work Meanings.

## 5.2 Implications for practice

One implication of this study is it offers insight into how Asst. EPs can create Work Meanings that are meaningful and purposeful to them. As illustrated in Chapter 4, taking responsibility for meaning-making plays a key role in Asst. EPs' abilities to create Work Meanings.

Therefore, it is important Asst. EPs embrace responsibility in their work by seeking a wide variety of experiences with different members of their EPS and engaging reflexively in debate about the Work Meanings they are co-constructing through these experiences. As shown in Figure 5, the substantive Grounded Theory shows the process of constructing Work Meanings is influenced by the local and wider contexts in which the individual works. Therefore, Asst. EPs may also benefit from experiencing Work Meanings outside of the local context of their EPS, for example, by taking part in regional EP special interest groups and networking groups for Asst. EPs. Engaging in debate about the meanings of Asst. EP and EP work in these forums would provide a broader context on which to construct Work Meanings. This may also support their emotional well-being when working in the role, as other Asst. EPs offer containment through the feeling of not being "alone" in their experience of Being an Asst. EP.

A second implication concerns how those working in EPSs, including senior managers, PEPs, Senior EPs, and EPs, may effectively support Asst. EPs. The substantive Grounded Theory may raise awareness of the "existential anxiety" associated with the uncertainty of Asst. EP work and help others to develop an understanding that the role presents a complex experience for Asst. EPs, who must sit with very little knowledge of who they are and who they are aiming to be. Consequently, this may help those who support Asst. EPs understand why individuals may find their work difficult, not because they lack competence, but because they are struggling with the experience of lacking Work Meaning and how to resolve this.

The results may also help others develop an understanding of factors that might be helpful or unhelpful for meaning-making in this context. For example, the results of the current study align with those of Daft and Lengel (1986), suggesting ambiguity and uncertainty need to be resolved by engaging in more work experiences that provide a variety of meanings and discussing these with others. Therefore, it may not be beneficial for services to try to reduce uncertainty by giving meaning directly (for example, designating specific activities to Asst. EPs), as this may restrict Asst. EPs' meaning-making and ability to create meaningfulness in their work. Instead, services could work creatively to adapt the role to each Asst. EP's personal context and focus on providing support in a way that develops Asst. EPs' skills to navigate uncertainty in a way that facilitates meaning-making. I have developed guidance to support this (Appendix 26), which I have shared with the service where I am currently on placement.

Additionally, those who support Asst. EPs through formal supervision may further support them by adopting an existential approach to supervision. Existential supervision is widely

used within clinical supervision for trainee clinical psychologists and psychiatrists in the NHS (Tantam & Kumar, 2009). It emphasises a collaborative process of co-reflection through the supervisory relationship, with the aim of co-constructing an understanding of the supervisee's worldview and how they make sense of their way of Being (van Deurzen, 2009). This approach has been shown to effectively support the supervisee's understanding of themselves, others, and supervision itself (Vaštakè et al., 2021). By creating a supervisory alliance where supervisees are positioned as *Being-with-other* in an inter-subjective meaning-making relationship, supervisors develop greater responsiveness to their supervisees' ways of Being and help them develop empathy and reflexivity (Silva & Sousa, 2022; Vaštakè et al., 2021). An example of how existential supervision might be used in formal supervision with Asst. EPs is outlined in the guidance document in Appendix 26.

A final implication for wider educational psychology practice and organisations that champion Asst. EPs (e.g., the AEP and British Psychological Society's Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP)) is to consider national guidance on the work of Asst. EPs. Current discourse on the Asst. EP role and how it fits with current systems for supporting CYP with SEND focuses on meeting needs by increasing the short-term and long-term capacity of EPSs to continue working in the same way. It is also based on the assumption that the role meets the needs of Asst. EPs in terms of gaining experience for EP doctoral training. This positions "experience" as an entity that exists external to individuals that can be quantified (i.e., someone can have more or less experience) and implies there is an amount of experience individuals need to be "ready for" doctoral training. As shown by the results of this study, this discourse appears to place significant pressure on individuals working as Asst. EPs to create meaning as quickly as possible to achieve these two purposes.

This may also result in their experiences being restricted to only those perceived by others to be helpful for EP doctoral training. This has implications for those leading university EP doctoral training courses, as the experiences of those joining these courses have led to them creating a meaning of EP work bound to the context within which it developed.

Consequently, if the experiences offered to the Asst. EPs were restricted, their restricted Work Meaning then needs to be challenged and broadened through EP doctoral training.

Ultimately, the existing discourse needs to be challenged in wider educational psychology practices to ensure Asst. EPs' experiences are meaningful and purposeful for both their meaning-making needs and the needs of the services within which they are employed.

Based on the results of this research, I believe national guidance may benefit Asst. EPs by shifting away from focusing on EP doctoral training as the "end goal" of Asst. EP work, to guidance that focuses on widening the individual's worldview and expectations of EP work. I also believe the concept of experience needs to be reframed in the definition of the role by moving away from a developmental understanding of experience (i.e., experience is an entity that changes with time spent working as an Asst. EP) towards a definition that positions experiencing relatedness with the world at the centre (i.e., to experience Being in the world of EP work). This would open the role to a range of possibilities and may allow Asst. EPs to build on their unique characteristics to create meaningful Work Meanings.

Existing research shows experiencing meaningful work is important for engagement in work, personal well-being, and reduced work-related stress (Garrick et al., 2014; Steger, 2017; van Wingerden & van der Stoep, 2017). Therefore, it is important for Asst. EP guidance to place creating meaningful Work Meanings at the centre of Asst. EP work, as this may benefit both

individuals working as Asst. EPs and the wider EP profession as Asst. EPs can support SEND systems in a meaningful way.

Furthermore, the short-term and transitory nature of the Asst. EP role might undermine meaning-making processes because creating an understanding of Asst. EP work is not seen as the "end goal". This is perpetuated by the current definition of the role's purpose and temporary employment contracts. Instead, the focus is constantly on Becoming an EP, rather than what it means to Be-in-the-world as an Asst. EP. Consequently, meaning-making may be undermined due to the pressure felt by both Asst. EPs and others to create EP Work Meanings as quickly as possible. This focus on Becoming may also hinder the creation of meaningful Work Meanings, as these appear to develop after Asst. EPs have constructed Work Meanings for the Asst. EP and EP roles. Therefore, considering the results of the current study, it may be beneficial for Asst. EPs to be employed permanently so they have the potential to create meaningful Work Meanings because this is viewed to be important for their well-being. I acknowledge this may create tension for EPs, as there are concerns services may use Asst. EPs as a cheaper substitute for qualified EPs (AEP, 2022; Collyer, 2012; Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019). However, if the focus of Asst. EP work shifts to creating a Work Meaning that is unique and meaningful to individuals, then their work could complement rather than replace the work of EPs.

### 5.3 Dissemination of research

The dissemination of the current research follows Harmsworth et al.'s (2001) guidance for disseminating for understanding and for action. In the context of the current study, dissemination for understanding refers to developing understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences and dissemination for action concerns influencing changes in educational

psychology practice. I presented my research to my placement EPS on a service CPD day and at the DECP TEP conference in January 2024. I also intend to explore publishing my research in academic journals aimed at EPs currently practising in the UK. To support dissemination for action, I plan to explore the possibility of connecting with local AEP representatives and PEPs working in other EPSs to consider how the research may influence policy and practice in their services.

#### 5.4 Reflection on the research process

From the beginning of my research journey, I was highly motivated to study the topic of Asst. EPs to support further understanding of their experiences, and I am pleased I was able to explore this in my research. This motivation developed throughout my time as an Asst. EP and was reinforced through hearing the diverse experiences of others. Although the choice of using GT methodology challenged me at times, I enjoyed the possibilities and creativity it allowed in my research by remaining open to the diversity of experiences and following the data constructed with my participants. I believe this enabled the construction of an understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences that may not have been achieved through alternative methodologies as it is grounded in the data and informed by existing theoretical frameworks. Consequently, I feel the resulting theoretical framework resonates with those who have experienced being an Asst. EP and increases the usefulness of this research. By adopting a Constructivist GT approach, I was able to remain true to my experience of being an Asst. EP while critically reflecting on how this influenced my research process. As a result, I have learned a great deal about my meanings of work and self while conducting my research.



One aspect of the research process I found challenging was the complexity and, at times, contradictory nature of GT methodology. Although I dedicated approximately five months at the beginning of my research journey reading and developing an understanding of GT methodology, I felt I only began to understand some of the concepts and processes by *doing* the research methodology. For example, it was only when I began constructing the questions for my focus groups in Phase Two, approximately halfway through my research, that I began to understand what theoretical sampling actually involved. On the other hand, I found the process of memo-writing incredibly helpful for organising my thoughts and critically reflecting on how I was interpreting the data. Despite beginning these straight away after my first interview, it took me a while to fully understand the impact memo-writing had on my understanding of my data, and I am glad I persevered with these throughout the research process.

#### 5.4.1 How my positionality affected my research and how the research has affected my positionality

It cannot be ignored that I am part of my research; my interpretations of the data and language used to communicate these are influenced by the knowledge I have construed of what it means to be an Asst. EP. Having been in educational psychology for five years as an assistant and now as a trainee, my experience and knowledge have been constructed within the context of national and local discourses on SEND and educational psychology, similar to my participants. Although my "insider-outsider" position fluctuated depending on the extent to which I shared personal characteristics with my participants during data-construction, my positionality undoubtedly influenced how I co-constructed knowledge with my participants in terms of how I decided to ask follow-up questions during the interviews and focus groups. Additionally, I felt that sharing the experience of Being an Asst. EP with all

of my participants significantly influenced all parts of my research process, including my decision-making during data-construction and analysis. For example, the terminology I chose during coding and the relationships I decided to form between categories during theory building were influenced by my "insider" knowledge of Being an Asst. EP. Therefore, I recognise that my final substantive theory represents socially constructed knowledge about the Asst. EP role that is inherently based on the intersectionality of characteristics within the researcher-participant relationships. Consequently, although I tried to stay grounded in my data and avoid shaping it into something it was not through the use of constant memoing and reflexive journalling, I ultimately decided what I felt was my participants' "main concern" through my interpretation and what I explored further in Phase Two of the study. I recognise this was influenced by my positionality as an ex-Asst. EP and that researchers who had not had the experience of being an Asst. EP may have identified different main concerns of the participants, subsequently leading to a different analysis and substantive Grounded Theory.

Before starting my research, I created a reflexive account of my personal experience of being an Asst. EP (Section 1.4.3). This represents an understanding of Asst. EP work in relation to my self-concept, which I felt was constructed from knowledge about Asst. EP work from both being an Asst. EP and my experience since becoming a TEP. Consequently, my reflection was a temporary construction of my knowledge of being an Asst. EP bound to the context at the time of embarking on my research journey. My understanding of my experience as an Asst. EP has since been influenced by the research process through the co-construction of what it means to Be an Asst. EP with other assistants and the application of an existential philosophical framework to understand the experience.

The first way I made sense of my experience as an Asst. EP was feeling uncertain and incompetent when starting in the role. This perspective is represented in the substantive Grounded Theory created in the current study, as it is present throughout the data co-constructed with the participants. However, my understanding of my experience of uncertainty in the role has shifted from temporary uncertainty to an understanding that uncertainty was always present in my experience and I developed the skills to navigate this.

This shift in perspective was influenced by the existential position I adopted during the research process in response to the data that had been produced with my participants.

Secondly, I believed I constructed a new identity when employed as an Asst. EP. I now understand why I felt this way through discussion with the participants in the current study and the existing literature about the meaning of self at work. For example, I now recognise my reflective account begins by drawing on my previous meaning of self at work as a teacher, which was also seen in my participants' descriptions of their experiences.

Therefore, creating meaning of self at work forms a core component of the resulting substantive theory.

Finally, I felt some work activities may better prepare Asst. EPs for doctoral training than others, based on my comparison of my experience with that of other Asst. EPs I connected with through Asst. EP networking groups. However, my understanding of how activities influence meaning-making has shifted significantly because of my research. I now believe it is how meanings of activities are created through social interactions that has the greatest impact on meaning-making, rather than the activities themselves. Consequently, I now reflect on how the interactions I had with others during my time as an Asst. EP facilitated my

meaning-making, resulting in the positive experience I had of the activities I carried out in the role.

I also now understand how other elements of my experience as an Asst. EP may have influenced my knowledge of Asst. EP work. For example, I neglected to consider the role of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns in my experience, which I now feel affected my meaning-making as I did not have many incidental interactions with others in the service when working remotely online. Therefore, this research has significantly affected my understanding of my positions in relation to my research. My positioning was fluid throughout the research, as my previous experience both informed and was informed by the data constructed during the study.

#### 5.4.2 How my research has affected my practice

Adopting an existential approach to meaning-making in this research has profoundly affected my understanding of human existence and how the existential "givens" of Being affect individuals' experiences with the world. It has developed my understanding of why and how individuals experience uncertainty and meaninglessness and the effects this can have on them. My new awareness has changed how I view the world and interpret the actions of others. I now approach my day-to-day practice as a TEP when working with CYP, families, and practitioners who support them from an existentially informed position, where I recognise uncertainty as a common experience. Consequently, I feel better able to support them in creating meanings that may facilitate change. For example, I now understand giving an understanding of why the situation may be happening directly may not be effective, as it disempowers individuals to create new meanings. This has shaped the way I engage in

interactions with others by using strategies that promote collaborative debate about different possible meanings and how these relate to our personal values and experiences.

This research has also affected how I work with Asst. EPs on placement. It has been useful in helping me understand how they may experience working in the role and how I can support them effectively. I hope this is an area I can continue to develop in my working relationships with Asst. EPs in the future.

## 5.5 Evaluation of the current study

### 5.5.1 Quality of the research

The quality of the research was considered throughout the process using the six criteria below, designed by Roller and Lavrakas (2015) and Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) to evaluate the quality of qualitative and GT research.

#### 5.5.1.1 Credibility

Roller and Lavrakas (2015) describe credibility as the extent to which the data produced through research is complete and accurate. In GT research, credibility is established by constructing sufficient relevant data so that questions can be asked to produce insight into the area of inquiry and a thorough analysis of data involving ongoing systemic comparisons (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). I believe I achieved credibility in this way by using constant comparative analysis to interpret my interview data and producing further data through focus groups to interrogate this interpretation through the production of additional data relevant to developing conceptual categories.

Specific to Constructivist GT, credibility also involves strong reflexivity throughout the research process (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). Charmaz (2017) argued researchers must acquire *methodological self-consciousness* to establish credibility, which involves making

their biases explicit and examining how these may have affected their decision-making in their research. I attempted to achieve methodological self-consciousness in my research process by engaging in reflexive exercises to help me make sense of my research journey. The positioning statement included in Chapter 1 of this thesis aims to provide readers with an open and honest reflection on my beliefs and experiences related to the experiences of Asst. EPs that influenced my research. I also elaborated a reflexive journal throughout my research journey. Through this practice, I questioned my positionality during decision-making throughout the study and interrogated my beliefs to gain insight into how they influenced my research. I have included excerpts from my reflexive journal throughout this thesis to show examples of how my positionings influenced my research.

#### 5.5.1.2 Analysability

Analysability refers to the extent to which the analysis creates a full and accurate understanding of the constructed data (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). To support analysability, I have included full anonymised transcripts of my interviews and focus groups (Appendices 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, and 24), samples of field notes (Appendices 6 and 18), sections from coded transcripts (Appendices 12, 14, and 21), and full memos developed throughout the data construction and analysis process (Appendices 13 and 25) for readers to see how I developed conceptual categories from my data.

#### 5.5.1.3 Transparency

The transparency of a study is determined by how it is reported and disseminated (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). Transparency is achieved by researchers describing and demonstrating their research design, fieldwork, and analysis procedures in detail in their research write-up (Roller & Lavrakas, 2015). With transparency, readers can assess the transferability of the

research. In this research, this concerns how the substantive Grounded Theory may be applied to other contexts beyond those studied directly (Asst. EPs working in EPSs in England).

I believe this written thesis provides a detailed explanation of my research design and analysis procedures, including the justification of key decision points. To support transparency, I have included figures and fieldnote samples to support understanding of my fieldwork processes. I have also included full anonymised transcripts to support the transparency of the methods used and my presence within them. Furthermore, examples of coding processes (Appendices 12 and 21) and full memos (Appendices 13 and 25) are included to support the transparency of the analysis procedures used in the study.

#### 5.5.1.4 Originality

The outcome of the research process (e.g., a substantive Grounded Theory) may achieve originality if it provides new insights or a different conceptualisation of a problem compared to previous literature (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). When comparing my research to the existing literature, my research takes a novel methodological approach as it is the first study to explore Asst. EPs' experiences using GT methodology. The substantive Grounded Theory produced also offers new insights into how Asst. EPs experience a lack of Work Meaning and meaning-making when working in their role. Additionally, this research offers a different approach to meaning-making compared to most of the existing literature on the creation of meaning at work, as it considers meaning-making processes from an existential perspective rather than a cognitive approach. Consequently, I believe my research may have achieved originality.

### 5.5.1.5 Resonance

The theoretical framework constructed by the researcher should represent and provide insight into participants' experiences (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). By using GT methodology, I was able to focus on understanding the problem of "Lacking Work Meaning" from the perspective of those experiencing it. Adopting an inductive approach allowed participants to guide the direction of the research, and the core conceptual categories of "Lacking Work Meaning" and "Creating Work Meanings" produced from the research are grounded in the stories told by the participants. Although the analysis involved the reconstruction of participants' stories, I was able to ensure this reconstruction fits the data it represents by exploring the resonance of my substantive theory with the participants during focus group 3, before finalising the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 4. Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) also argued researchers must use their data construction methods flexibly to pursue the main concern of participants to establish resonance, for example, through the use of theoretical sampling. In this way, I established resonance in my research by applying theoretical sampling to my questioning in Phase Two to elicit data relevant to the participants. For example, once I realised my question in the first phase may have limited the participants' descriptions of their experiences of being Asst. EPs, I developed questions about mechanisms situated outside the work context, such as personal values, which may influence meaning-making to pursue this possibility.

### 5.5.1.6 Usefulness

Charmaz and Thornberg (2021) argue the product of the inquiry (in this case, the substantive Grounded Theory) should make sense of the participants' experiences in a way that is comprehensible for those who do not share this experience. This should create new



avenues for research and provide a basis for clear policy and practical applications (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021).

Using GT methodology allowed for analysis of Asst. EPs' experiences to be elevated to a theoretical level of understanding. Instead of just describing how Asst. EPs experience the role, applying the theoretical lens of existentialism allowed the development of an understanding of why Asst. EPs experience work in this way that is comprehensible to those who have not had this experience. Consequently, this may increase the usefulness of the research, as others develop their understanding of Asst. EPs' experiences and why the implications of the research may be necessary. Additionally, I believe my research was useful for participants, as they commented at the end of each focus group that the process provided an opportunity for them to reflect on their experiences and gain insights from other Asst. EPs that they could apply to their work and support their future applications for doctoral training.

### 5.5.2 Generalisability

Smith (2018) argued researchers should consider alternative generalisabilities to statistical probability generalisability that is typically associated with post-positivist research when conducting qualitative research (Collingridge & Gantt, 2008; Green & Thorogood, 2009).

Therefore, I decided to consider the transferability (Tracy, 2010) and analytical generalisability (Chenail, 2010; J. Lewis et al., 2014; Polit & Beck, 2010) of my research.

Tracy (2010) defined transferability as the extent to which research produced in one context can be applied in other contexts. By explaining my research journey in detail, I hope readers will be able to consider whether the substantive Grounded Theory developed in this study can explain their experiences. From my experience presenting my research at the DECP

conference to TEPs and other Asst. EPs, their feedback on the resonance they felt when hearing the substantive theory of Asst. EPs' experiences of meaning-making led me to believe the research may be transferable to other contexts.

Additionally, analytic generalisation is achieved when other researchers can use the resulting theory to make sense of their data (J. Lewis et al., 2014). I consider whether my substantive Grounded Theory may be generalisable to research in other contexts and populations beyond Asst. EPs working in EPSs in England. By detailing my methodological and analytic processes, I hope future researchers will be able to explore whether the experiences of lacking and creating Work Meanings explained in the substantive theory are seen in similar populations, such as TEPs or newly qualified EPs.

### 5.5.3 Limitations

The open nature of GT methodology may be considered a limitation of the research, as it meant having to analyse a large amount of data and subsequently narrow this down to a "main concern" felt by all participants. As a result, rich data on the experiences of Asst. EPs may have been lost through the constant comparative analysis to identify a "main concern". Indeed, Charmaz (2014) cautioned GT researchers about focusing on participants' "main concern", questioning whose main concern is being focused on. She argued studying individuals who are experiencing the problem shifts scrutiny away from the individuals and systems that may be creating the problem. Therefore "giving voice" to participants' "main concern" using GT methodology may perpetuate existing inequalities created by the social and historical context of the problem.

Using focus groups in Phase Two of the research may have also influenced how participants responded to questions about their experiences. For example, the participants may have

been influenced by the other Asst. EPs in the group, thereby affecting the information they shared during data production. Some participants may have felt others had more experience than them and thus felt less confident sharing their experiences with the group for fear of looking less competent than others. Conversely, the presence of other Asst. EPs may have made participants feel their experiences were "validated" if shared by others in the group and so describe their experiences in greater detail than they initially felt comfortable sharing. Despite these concerns, feedback from participants following their interviews and focus groups was positive and they enjoyed being part of the experience. Holding the interviews and focus groups online may also have limitations. Although this could not be avoided because the participants were located in different areas across England, it may have influenced how they took part in the research. For example, potential participants may not have had access to online meeting software or feel confident in using this software to be able to take part in the research. Therefore, my research may represent the experiences of those who were able to access the online component of the methodology. Additionally, the virtual aspect may have affected their participation in the interviews and focus groups, as I was uncertain about the context in which they were situated whilst taking part in the discussions. For example, participants may have had others around them or they may have been completing other tasks while taking part in the interview or focus group of which I was unaware. Consequently, I was unable to consider how the context within which the participants took part in the research may have influenced their responses during data production.

Limiting the selection criteria for participants to those currently practising in England may have resulted in a theoretical understanding based only on the context of educational

psychology and discourse on Asst. EPs in England. The Asst. EP role also exists in other countries, including Wales, Scotland, and Ireland, but it may be influenced by the differing contexts of educational psychology and doctoral training in these countries. Therefore, the experiences of these Asst. EPs may be different and including them in the research may have resulted in the development of a different theoretical understanding based on the identification of a different "main concern".

Finally, the participants who took part in the research may not be representative of certain populations, including those with protected characteristics, such as ethnicity, neurodivergence, disability, sexuality, etc. Individuals from these populations who are working in the EP profession report specific experiences that are likely to shape their Work Meanings. For example, Wright (2020) describes how she experienced differences in her work meaning-making processes during her doctoral training due to her "Blackness" (p.2), leading to estrangement and isolation when constructing an EP Work Meaning. This suggests that intersectionality of personal characteristics may influence workplace cultures, resulting in structural/systemic inequalities that shape explorations of work meaning and influence the distribution of power in meaning-making interactions and interpersonal acts. Therefore, if individuals with different characteristics were included in the study, they may have added further details that were missed from the final substantive theory, such as values based on religious, cultural, or political positionalities that my participants did not consider. Further research may wish to focus on Asst. EPs with different characteristics to those in the current study to explore how intersectionality may influence their experiences as Asst. EPs.

## 5.6 Directions for future research

I believe it would be useful to explore the content of the Work Meanings that Asst. EPs create through the meaning-making processes discussed in this study. It would be interesting to see if there are preferred ways of being an Asst. EP that individuals create and why these are more meaningful for them than other Work Meanings. This could potentially inform a framework for meaningful Asst. EP work that would benefit Asst. EPs and the wider educational psychology profession. This may be best approached using participatory research to design the research process in collaboration with Asst. EPs themselves to create relevant and meaningful understandings of what they want to experience in their work.

Additionally, the substantive Grounded Theory developed in this study shows Asst. EPs believe the Work Meanings they create while working in the role are temporary and will change in the future when their work context changes. Therefore, it may be helpful to explore how Asst. EPs' Work Meanings change when they leave the role; for example, when they go on to doctoral EP training and whether the meaning-making processes explained in the substantive Grounded Theory are similar or dissimilar to those that take place in the doctoral EP training context. This may be useful for leaders of doctoral training courses as it could inform support for TEPs during the course.

## 5.7 Conclusions

This research aimed to explore the experiences of Asst. EPs who are currently practising in England. In the current national and local contexts of increasing pressure on services that support CYP with SEND, Asst. EPs are employed to supplement the work of qualified EPs as a result of workforce shortages. Existing research on Asst. EPs highlight the ambiguity and uncertainty of Asst. EP work as a result of existing discourses in the wider educational

psychology profession and systems for supporting CYP with SEND. By approaching the data constructed in this study from an existential perspective, it may be understood how this work context is experienced by Asst. EPs as meaningless, in relation to their understanding of Asst. EP work, EP work, and their self at work. Consequently, Asst. EPs are motivated to actively construct Work Meanings to resolve this lack of Work Meaning. The theoretical framework developed as a result of this research emphasises the importance of relatedness in meaning-making and provides insight into the facilitators and barriers to meaning-making that may occur in meaning-making interactions. From this research, it may be understood that uncertainty of Work Meaning is always present in the experiences of Asst. EPs and this opens up possibilities for Asst. EPs to create Work Meanings that allow them to work with authenticity.

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# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Ethical approval letter



Downloaded: 28/04/2023  
Approved: 27/04/2023

Natalie Neal  
Registration number: 210103292  
School of Education  
Programme: Doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology

Dear Natalie

**PROJECT TITLE:** A grounded theory study into Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences of their role  
**APPLICATION:** Reference Number 052001

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 27/04/2023 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 052001 (form submission date: 16/04/2023); (expected project end date: 31/07/2024).
- Participant information sheet 1119851 version 1 (03/04/2023).
- Participant information sheet 1120206 version 1 (16/04/2023).
- Participant consent form 1119853 version 1 (03/04/2023).
- Participant consent form 1119854 version 1 (03/04/2023).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu  
Ethics Administrator  
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/research-services/ethics-integrity/policy>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: [https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly\\_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf](https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf)
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

## Appendix 2: Estimated and actual timeframes for the study

<b>Action</b>		<b>Estimated Timeframes</b>	<b>Actual Timeframe</b>
Literature review part 1		July – November 2022	July – November 2022
Submission for ethical approval		April – May 2023	April 2023 - approval gained 27th April 2023
Recruitment of participants		June 2023	Phase 1 April - May 2023
			Phase 2 May – August 2023
Data Construction	Phase 1  Data production through interviews, initial and focused coding, and generation of tentative conceptual categories	July – December 2023	May - July 2023
	Phase 2  Theoretical sampling, data production through focus groups, focused coding, elaboration of conceptual categories, and substantive theory development		September 2023 – November 2023
Literature review part 2		January-March 2024	July - December 2023
Writing up and editing in preparation for submission		April -May 2024	October - May 2024

## Appendix 3: Participant information sheet for Phase One of the study

### **A grounded theory study into Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences of their role.**

#### **Participant Information Sheet 27.04.2023**

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

#### **1. Background to the project**

The Assistant Educational Psychologist role currently exists as a temporary position for psychology graduates, with the general aim of gaining experience while assisting the work of qualified Educational Psychologists to progress on to an Educational Psychology doctoral training course. Recent research has shown inconsistencies in the role and function of Assistant Educational Psychologists across Educational Psychology Services and has suggested further research into the experiences of Assistant Educational Psychologists is needed.

#### **2. What is the project's purpose?**

For this project, I am interested in exploring the experiences of individuals who are currently employed as Assistant Educational Psychologists. From this, I aim to create a substantive Grounded Theory (a theoretical model) that makes sense of Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences.

#### **3. Why have I been asked if I would like to take part?**

You have been approached to take part in this study as you:

- are currently employed in an Educational Psychology Service in England,
- assist the work of an Educational Psychologist/Educational Psychology Services and are gaining relevant experience prior to applying for a place on a recognised Doctorate Educational Psychology training course,
- have been employed in this role for at least two academic terms.

#### **4. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You have the right

to withdraw after your interview takes place without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. The nature of this study means that it will be important to be able to analyse your data as soon as possible after your interview takes place. This means that if you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact Natalie Neal ([email address redacted for confidentiality]) within 24 hours after your interview. Please note that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

### **5. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?**

You will take part in a one-to-one interview with Natalie Neal for no longer than one hour. You will be asked to talk about your actions, thoughts, and feelings relating to your experience of working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist. I may prompt you with some questions that follow up on what you say (e.g., how did that make you feel?, how did that make you think?), but there will be opportunities to include any information that you would like to share. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

The interviews will take place online using Google Meet software which is secure through the university. The audio of the interview will be recorded through the Google Meet software. You may choose whether to have your camera on during the interview as this will also be recorded through the Google Meet software if you choose to have this on, however the video recorded will not be analysed for the study. The recording will be immediately saved to the university secure Google drive using participant codes to keep the information anonymous.

After your interview, I will transcribe the audio from the recording, anonymising all identifying details meaning it is very unlikely for you to be identified within the research. The recording of your interview will be deleted once the project is complete. I will analyse the transcript by developing codes to name actions, thoughts, or feelings in the data. These codes will be compared to codes developed from other participants' interviews and will be used to develop questions for the second phase of the study.

The second phase of the study will involve participants taking part in focus groups to gather additional insights into the categories that have been developed following coding from the first phase of the study. This will support the development of a substantive Grounded Theory that provides an understanding of Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences of working in the role. I will ask you at the end of your interview if you are interested in taking part in the second phase of the study. You may or may not be selected to take part in the second phase of the study even if you express an interest, as participants will be selected to take part based on the outcomes of the initial analysis of the interviews. If you

are selected then I will provide you with a second information sheet and consent form to complete to take part.

## **6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I am hopeful that taking part in this study will be an enjoyable experience, however sometimes discussing your experiences and practice can raise uncomfortable feelings. You are able to take breaks at any point during the interview and can withdraw from the research at any point up until 24 hours after your interview has taken place. You may find the virtual aspect of the interviews tiring or cause eye strain. To minimise this, comfort breaks can be taken wherever needed. There is the small possibility that others who know you well may be able to recognise you from what you say in the research. To minimise this risk, identifiable details from your interview transcript will be removed and you do not have to say anything that you feel may be identifiable during your interview. You may also ask for your data to be withdrawn from the research up until 24 hours after your interview has taken place.

If you feel you need further emotional support after discussing your experiences, you may find the following helplines and websites helpful:

### **Samaritans**

Samaritans provides free confidential non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing a difficult time or want to talk about anything that is upsetting them.

Call 116 123 (24-hours).

<https://www.samaritans.org>

### **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

CALM provides free confidential support for anyone who is struggling.

Call 0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight every day).

<https://www.thecalmzone.net>

### **Shout**

Shout offers a free confidential text service providing emotional support.

Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 (24-hours).

<https://giveusashout.org/>

## **7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will allow you to reflect on your experience working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist and use this to plan the future direction of your work. It is hoped that the project may help to shape future processes and practices in Educational Psychology Services.

### **8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team (Natalie Neal and Dr Scott Johnson). You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Where safeguarding concerns are raised, confidentiality may need to be broken and information passed onto the appropriate persons i.e., university project supervisor (Dr Scott Johnson).

### **9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?**

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

### **10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?**

You will have a code assigned to you once informed consent is gained. This code will be used throughout the project and in any future publications. Your personal details will only be accessed by myself and my university project supervisor (Dr Scott Johnson). Audio (and optional video) of the interview will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using your participant code to keep the information anonymous. The recording will be deleted immediately following completion of the research project. This anonymised transcript will be included in my final published thesis and parts may be used in other publications, such as blogs, conference presentations, and lectures.

### **11. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. The recording of your interview will be transcribed so that all identifying details are anonymised meaning it will not be possible for you to be identified within the research. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

### **12. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is being organised by the University of Sheffield, no external funding has been received.

### **13. Who is the Data Controller?**

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

### **14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education. Ethics approval reference number 052001.

### **15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?**

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research please speak to a member of the research team (contact details below). If you wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr Scott Johnson ([email address redacted for confidentiality]) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of School [Professor Rebecca Lawthom; [email address redacted for confidentiality]]. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>. If you wish to make a report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact [Dr Scott Johnson; [email address redacted for confidentiality]] and/or the University's Chair of Ethics (Dr Anna Weighall; [email address redacted for confidentiality]). If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of School [Professor Rebecca Lawthom; [email address redacted for confidentiality]] and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; [email address redacted for confidentiality]).

### **16. Contact for further information**

#### **Researcher:**

Natalie Neal

Trainee Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

**University Project Supervisor:**

Dr Scott Johnson

Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthom

Head of School

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

School of Education, The University of Sheffield Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if you decide to participate, a signed consent form to keep.

**Thank you for your reading this information sheet. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of the research team.**



## Appendix 4: Participant consent form for Phase One of the study

### Participant Consent Form

<i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i>	Yes	No
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project participant information sheet dated 27.04.2023 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being interviewed individually via Google Meet video call.		
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview audio recordings will be made. I agree to being audio recorded and for anonymised transcripts of these audio recordings to be used in the research.		
I agree that whilst I am participating in the interview video recordings will be made. I agree to being video recorded and for these anonymised video recordings to be used in the research. <i>(optional)</i>		
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until <u>24 hours</u> after my interview; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I give permission for the recording(s) of my interview to be saved in a secure Google Drive managed by the University of Sheffield. I understand that this will be destroyed after it has been transcribed anonymously.		
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		
I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		

Name of participant [printed]      Signature                      Date

Name of researcher [printed]      Signature                      Date

**Project contact details for further information:**

**Researcher:**

Natalie Neal

Trainee Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

**University Project Supervisor:**

Dr Scott Johnson

Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

*If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint please contact:*

Professor Rebecca Lawthom

Head of School

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

School of Education, The University of Sheffield, Western Bank, Sheffield, S10 2TN

## Appendix 5: Interview guide for interviews in Phase One

*Ethical considerations - go through consent form and ask if they have any questions.*

*Explain how to signal if they would like to take a break/leave the session.*

**Opening question:** I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an assistant educational psychologist, please could you talk about it?

### *Prompts*

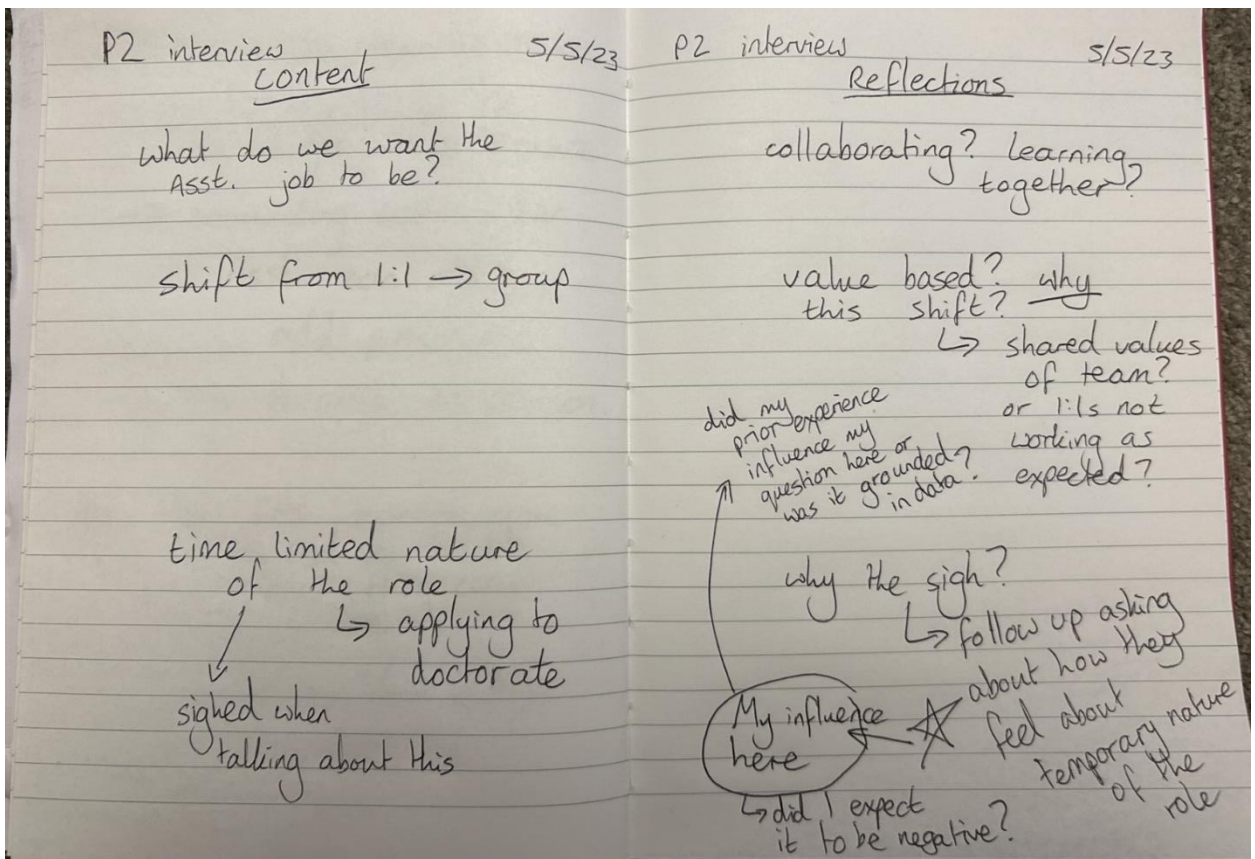
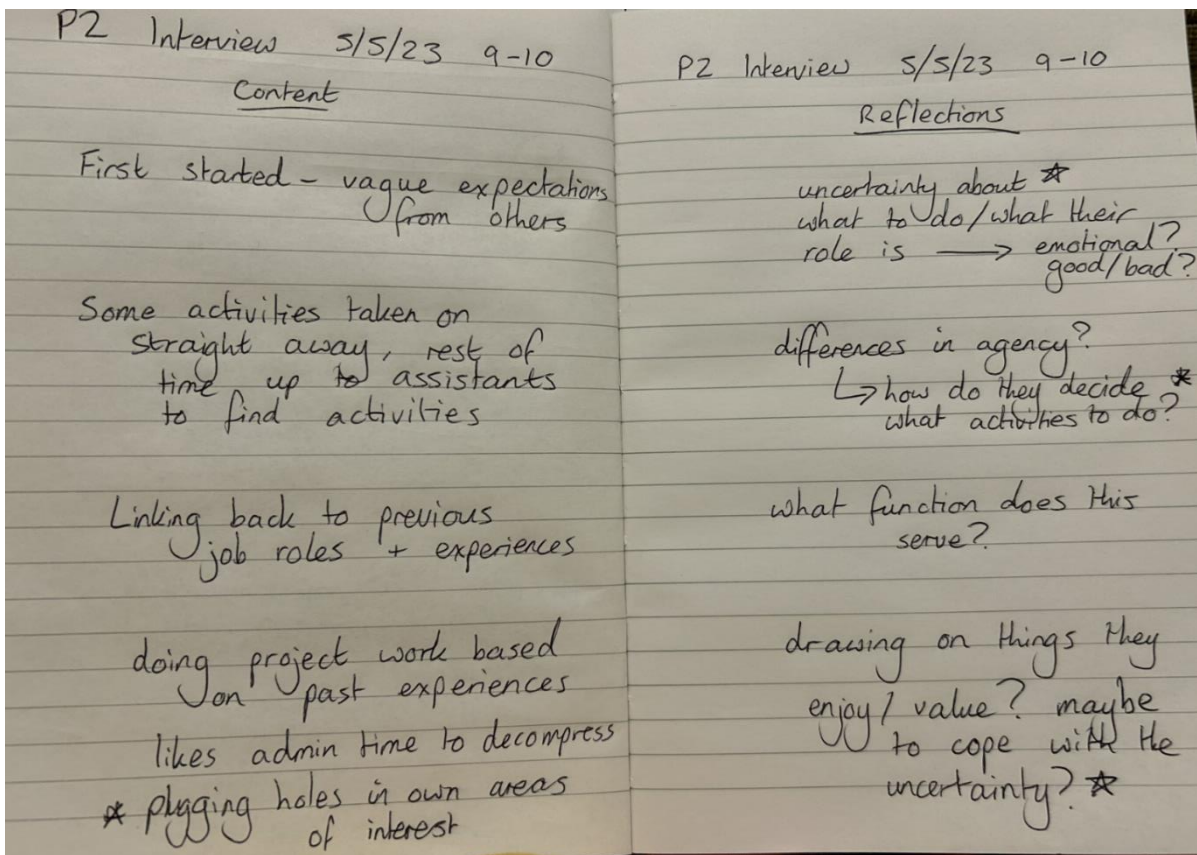
- As you look back on your time as an assistant, are there any other events that stand out in your mind?
- Could you describe a typical day for you when you are... Now tell me about a typical day when you are... (probe for different times and contrasting constructs)
- What was xxx like?
- Could you tell me how you go about..., what do you do?
- If you can recall, what were you thinking when...?
- How did the experience affect you?
- Could you tell me about your feelings when...?
- What thoughts stood out or are memorable?
- What does that mean to you?
- Could you tell me what xxx means to you now?
- How would you compare xxx to xxx?

### *Ending questions*

- Is there something that you might not have thought about before that occurred to you during this interview?
- Is there anything else you think I should know to understand your experience/xxx better?
- Have you shared all that is significant with reference to your experience?
- Is there anything you would like to ask me?

**End with:** Thank you for the opportunity to talk with you about your experience and get to know you better. Would you be interested in taking part in the second phase of the research?

Appendix 6: Sample of fieldnotes written during the interviews



## Appendix 7: Participant one's interview transcript

1 **Natalie:** Okay so I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an assistant educational  
2 psychologist erm please could you talk about it

3 **Participant 1:** So erm having been an assistant for a local authority erm from September to  
4 January so it's just about a year and three months and then now moving to being an  
5 assistant for a private company I've found it very interesting to see the difference between  
6 working for a local authority and working kind of on a kind of more business focused really I  
7 would say I think that's been the main difference that obviously working for a local authority  
8 you still are accountable and still want to do the right thing for the children but I think  
9 there's a a very different way of doing the work from erm between the two experiences that  
10 I've got

11 **Natalie:** Hmm could you maybe describe a time that stands out when you were an assistant  
12 at a local authority

13 **Participant 1:** Er I think from being at the local authority it was having that feeling that you  
14 were supported by a qualified EP and it was kind of the collaboration around the next like  
15 the next task to do which kind of gave you more options and experiences whereas working  
16 now within the kind of business model of doing it it's the these schools are mine I have ten  
17 schools and then regardless of what tasks come up they are mine to do so it's it's kind of  
18 very different experience in that it depends on the school and situation as to the the er  
19 different experiences as opposed to before if that didn't come across that experience before  
20 you could kind of have that opportunity but yeah I suppose at the minute I haven't had that  
21 currently

22 **Natalie:** Hmm and what's that like for you that difference in experience

23 **Participant 1:** I'm pleased to see the difference because it's it's nice to see erm I'm pleased  
24 I've had that experience of being in the local authority first to build on before going because  
25 I think that would have been a very big jump for me personally to have gone straight from  
26 teaching to the assistant role having that that these are your schools and this is your  
27 obviously you are still overseen by an EP but it's just very much yeah I've felt that it was 'this

28 is your role let's let's go with it' kinda thing erm until you get to supervision and then you  
29 talk about things but I felt it was yeah a lot more more opportunity for the support within  
30 the local authority er than currently but maybe that's because of my experience as well that  
31 it's the kind of drawing on that I've had that experience but then yeah maybe that was the  
32 difference that I'm er experiencing

33 **Natalie:** Hmm erm could you describe er one of the days that you've had working in your  
34 role over the last few weeks

35 **Participant 1:** So over the last few weeks it's just been trying to make sure that I'm meeting  
36 the direct contact hours because obviously schools are quieter so they're kind of winding  
37 down themselves but I've still got my weekly direct contact hours to fulfil so that's kind of a  
38 very different approach as well and obviously being this time this side of the academic year  
39 it's making sure everything's booked in so I've found that this week has been very much  
40 prioritising getting my next terms hours booked in to make sure I'm gonna meet that weekly  
41 quota erm so yeah that that's what I'd say at the moment has been my priority

42 **Natalie:** And how do you go about doing that

43 **Participant 1:** Pestering the SENCOs (laughs) and I know they're very busy but it's just  
44 making sure that as soon as I've got them a date's set in the diary so we've at least made  
45 that opportunity and then if it does cancel you know erm you've only got one to chase up  
46 rather than them all so yeah it's very much diary management is a really important aspect at  
47 the minute

48 **Natalie:** Hmm and could you tell me about a day that stood out for you when you were  
49 working in a local authority service

50 **Participant 1:** Erm so I think for me the day would be working with the different EPs erm  
51 and that yeah just that kinda the different styles but also that opportunity to kind reflect  
52 and think 'I like how they've done that that way and they've done that that way' so yeah I  
53 think there's a lot more opportunity to shadow within the erm local authority than there has  
54 been currently but like I say I think that might be because of my experience as well

55 **Natalie:** Hmm could you tell me a bit more about that

56 **Participant 1:** So erm I think it was there was a morning when working for one EP would be  
57 kind of supporting alongside them but then for another EP it'd be very much 'off you go this  
58 is your opportunity to deliver what we've discussed' kinda thing so I think for me it's kind of  
59 looking at the different approaches you could use and different styles erm that different EPs  
60 have which I think is good as well

61 **Natalie:** Hmm and how did that experience affect you seeing the different ways of working

62 **Participant 1:** Er I think it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and  
63 you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if if it  
64 wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that  
65 opportunity to challenge I suppose...

66 **Natalie:** Hm mm

67 **Participant 1:** ...And kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done erm  
68 yeah and then yeah it's just kind of so I would say there were some EPs who were very  
69 collaborative you had that opportunity to have that discussion but it was a lot of reflective  
70 discussion...

71 **Natalie:** Hm mm

72 **Participant 1:** ...Whereas there were some that were kind of challenging but it was kind of  
73 more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could  
74 have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing erm so yeah I think  
75 either way it's still reflective but it's it's still yeah it just kind of looking at who it's benefitting  
76 really

77 **Natalie:** Hmm could you tell me about how you felt when you had those discussions in the  
78 two different ways

79 **Participant 1:** Uh uh so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the  
80 challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen  
81 or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' or maybe if it was that I was stuck then I  
82 kind of felt that it isn't kind of the expert model because it is that opportunity to take each  
83 situation as a you know a a brand new situation as it should be whereas I think it was

84 difficult if that was then challenged in a kind of fixed model because it kind of went against  
85 what I would like it to be because you know working on my values is I'd like it to be person-  
86 centred but then if it's a kind of fixed model then it can't be person-centred because it's  
87 yeah it's not having that opportunity to focus on the individual

88 **Natalie:** Hmm that's really interesting erm could you tell me a bit more about what being  
89 person-centred means to you

90 **Participant 1:** So I would say when there were situations that needed a bit more you know  
91 maybe if a child was already struggling in the setting and if I'd have gone in with a very 'I've  
92 come in to do this and I've come in to do this' that would've added more pressure for that  
93 child so I think if you can be reflective in the moment and think 'right you know I have got  
94 my bag of tools games and things like that but that doesn't mean to say that I'm gonna use  
95 them all' it's just making sure that it's having that time to think 'right this is the situation I'm  
96 in at the moment this child isn't happy' so you know if they say that I'm they're not happy to  
97 continue obviously that's not ethical but obviously it's then having that opportunity to think  
98 'how are we going to gain their best views and be there for the right reason' erm yeah so  
99 sorry I've forgotten what you actually asked me (laughs)

100 **Natalie:** No that's fine so I guess you've kinda told me about what person-centred means  
101 and how it linked to the more I want to say the more flexible way of working...

102 **Participant 1:** Hmm

103 **Natalie:** Um how do you feel like your ability to erm carry out your work in that way has  
104 changed during your time as an assistant

105 **Participant 1:** I think it has in that I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you  
106 know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the  
107 pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that  
108 this I'm sending enough information' but then I think the more you do see actually to  
109 benefit this young person and the situation that they're in you know it's kind of it is being  
110 more 'what is happening in this current situation' to really draw out the information that  
111 you need to gain...



112 **Natalie:** Hmm

113 **Participant 1:** ...And it think it's confidence yeah

114 **Natalie:** And I wonder if you can think about what's happened to be able to feel more  
115 confident now and be able I mean you said that you can now recognise when something  
116 isn't working for that young person...

117 **Participant 1:** Hmm

118 **Natalie:** ...Can you maybe think about what's happened to get you to that point

119 **Participant 1:** I think it's definitely through discussion with the EPs and erm discussion with  
120 other assistants who've been in that situation and kind of drawing on that experience as  
121 well I think you know sometimes it might be that there's a particular question or a particular  
122 situation that has er not helped that situation but I think it's it's really key to draw on  
123 everybody's experiences to think 'actually I know in this situation last time it helped when'  
124 you know I said 'ok I'm going to come back again if you would like me to' and actually make  
125 sure that I erm followed through what I wanted to so the particular boy that I've got in mind  
126 erm was really keen to make sure I did return but he was he wanted to know more about  
127 my role and he was very fixated on that I was from the local authority and I think obviously  
128 his experience of er multi agency staff are very much 'aw somebody else is coming  
129 somebody else is coming' so I think for him it was key to draw on that experience of 'you've  
130 said you're gonna do it you've followed it through' and I think obviously with relationships  
131 erm and attachments and things it's been key to kind of make sure that he he knew that I  
132 meant what I said

133 **Natalie:** Hmm erm and I wondered if there's any times that come to mind when you feel  
134 you've not necessarily been able to work in that way

135 **Participant 1:** Erm I think at the beginning when I first started I would have spoken about  
136 what I plan to do and then probably would have done too many of what I was going to do  
137 because I wanted to kind of show that I'd carried everything out that we talked about but  
138 now obviously now I realise that that wasn't benefiting the child that was just to make help  
139 me make sure that I'd given the best information for the people then obviously now I'm

140 thinking about it it wasn't really you know if there was too much information it's probably  
141 too much for that young person to go through

142 **Natalie:** Hmm that's really interesting you kind of picked up on maybe how that experience  
143 was slightly different when you were maybe doing things for another educational  
144 psychologist...

145 **Participant 1:** Hmm

146 **Natalie:** ...Rather than working in line with what you felt you wanted to do in that situation

147 **Participant 1:** Yeah

148 **Natalie:** I wondered if you had any thoughts on that I was just me putting that out there

149 **Participant 1:** No no erm I think again that was when we had the opportunity to talk  
150 through the report and talk through the findings and things and then when we actually  
151 looked and I was like 'yeah they've done this and they've done this and they've done this'  
152 and I'd think 'yeah that is a lot' because you know erm that was a virtual one as well erm so  
153 that might have made another difference in you can't really see if they're tired and you can't  
154 really so you know it was all those different dynamics initially whereas in school there are  
155 different cues that you can pick up on can't you when when you're working with them but  
156 yeah I'd say it was like during that discussion time when it was talking through the report  
157 and things that you start to think 'yeah I maybe did too much' yeah (laughs)

158 **Natalie:** Hmm thank you erm and what's it like now How would you approach your work  
159 now

160 **Participant 1:** So again I so at the moment we follow a kind of system in that we make sure  
161 we talk to the parents we make sure we talk to the teacher we make sure we talk to the  
162 young person or you know if that's the situation on a particular case work...

163 **Natalie:** Hmm

164 **Participant 1:** ...But It's always started from the planning meetings but I think it's time it's  
165 having that time again to think 'this is the situation what could be the best tools to bring  
166 erm for the kind of the primary need and what is the purpose of what is it we want to gain

167 from the meeting' erm but again it's I would say I have a range of tools to make sure that I'm  
168 giving the child more options and more opportunities than I probably did at the beginning  
169 erm and then yeah it's kind of looking at what it's keeping in mind 'what is the priority what  
170 is it that we want to gain' but obviously trying to make sure that it's still bringing everybody  
171 you know putting the young person centre er central to it all erm so yeah we are giving  
172 them that opportunity to show where their strengths are their areas for development are to  
173 build from that

174 **Natalie:** I wonder if you could maybe talk me through your thinking process when you go  
175 about deciding how you're going to approach that piece of work I know you said that erm  
176 you kind of decide together what's the best way to approach that situation could you tell  
177 me about some of your thoughts that stand out when you're doing that

178 **Participant 1:** So I think again that would be drawing from if you can have a rough  
179 experience of like a different another person in the similar situation and then erm kind of  
180 looking at if it was maybe an SEMH or a cognition and learning kind of looking at how could  
181 we unpick this further and what would be the best method erm to kind of gain that  
182 information er and obviously again drawing from maybe the parent's perspective or the  
183 teacher's perspective because they know already what has been trialled there's no point  
184 repeating things that have already been repeated if another service has been in so it's again  
185 kind of drawing on the full picture for that individual as well

186 **Natalie:** Hmm I want to know more about that can you think of a time where you've  
187 recognised that you've had a similar experience and then you've used that to inform your  
188 decision making

189 **Participant 1:** Erm so I think for things like if it is that the child doesn't want to attend school  
190 or erm maybe isn't happy once they're at school then it could be thinking 'right well there's  
191 the blob tree that we could explore kind of how they associate with being in school how it  
192 makes them feel' and then you know the sorting characteristics of 'let's look at how they  
193 have that self-image' so again it's more like the resources as to how can I erm unpick what's  
194 going on for that young person so again it will be drawing on last time it was really helpful  
195 that that child worked best having picture cards but then I remember actually having it on

196 the computer worked for a different child so again it's it's looking at the tools that could be  
197 used to explore it but obviously also having a range of resources as well cos some children  
198 prefer to draw it some people erm prefer to you know have the visual er the cards to  
199 actually physically sort and things like that so again it's just kind of giving the options but  
200 seeing how they want to do it I think sometimes having that autonomy kind of helps that  
201 relationship building as well

202 **Natalie:** What does relationship building mean to you

203 **Participant 1:** So I think it's because for me it is we're very much rightly or wrongly stepping  
204 into the school and coming out of the school erm I think it would be key to kind of develop  
205 that trusting relationship in that they feel they can share information that they want to  
206 share erm so I that's why I think choice is really important to help with that trusting element  
207 and obviously if they don't feel or if they've had enough then it is also making sure that they  
208 understand that they don't have to continue with things if they don't want to it's just  
209 obviously giving them that opportunity to understand obviously why I'm there and what's  
210 the plan you know what it is that we aim to do for them to feel that there's the purpose of  
211 us being in that situation

212 **Natalie:** Hmm can you think of a time where you've felt you had done that in a session  
213 where you felt like you'd really built that trusting relationship and how you did that

214 **Participant 1:** So I think typically I go in and observe first so then you will kind of they'll see  
215 that you're there but not necessarily know why you're there and then give that opportunity  
216 that you'll always get the more confident ones that will come over and go 'oh what're you  
217 doing what's your name' and things like that so I think then if they are more reserved they'll  
218 kind of see that all their peers and obviously the staff know that you're there and that helps  
219 to see 'yeah I've seen that lady in school already' so it's not just a straight away take them  
220 out of class and come away with this stranger it kind of helps them to see you know the  
221 teachers allowed them to be in the class so obviously hopefully I should be okay to work  
222 with them on a you know erm on a one to one level so I think that again especially there's  
223 one particular person that we've just had a meeting this morning and when I said to the  
224 mum so he likes to erm feel the tags on clothing and he puts his hands up like your top and

225 feels your tag so I said 'as soon as we sat in the room he came and like tried to take the tag  
226 out of my top that I was wearing' so I said to mum about that and she was like 'oh he  
227 doesn't do that to people unless he trusts them' so I was going 'well I think it's because he's  
228 already seen that I've been in school and I tried to get something else to kind of replace my  
229 tag so I got like a vis vest that was on the side to see if I could take his hand from up my top  
230 and give him something else' and she's like 'he just seeks that kind of adult interaction' but  
231 it the fact that he did that to me even though I was a stranger erm she said, 'oh yeah he'll  
232 either like you or not like you but the fact that he did that already' I said 'I think it's because  
233 it already seen that I've been in school' so that yeah that's just what came to mind (laughs)

234 **Natalie:** Yeah and how did that feel

235 **Participant 1:** Erm well nice that obviously he felt that he could do that already but then  
236 equally thinking 'erm I don't know if I should be allowing this' that's why I thought I'd best  
237 get something else to kind of replace it but obviously that's something that he does seek  
238 that from all the staff I'd seen him he'd already done that with another adult in the lesson so  
239 that's why I was thinking like 'what else could I use to kind of give him' but I think it's the  
240 warmth as well as just the silk as well so yeah that's when I tried to hold his hand and I said  
241 'oh would you like to see I think this is gonna be the same on here' to kind of distract  
242 (laughs) but yeah I think like I say and that the fact that mum recognised that that was a  
243 positive already from only being in that half an hour beforehand

244 **Natalie:** Hmm thank you erm so I just wondered if there's erm anything else that you feel  
245 that we've not spoken about yet that would help me to understand your experience as an  
246 assistant any better

247 **Participant 1:** Erm so there's one thing I think as an assistant is very much I feel when you  
248 go in to schools and they automatically introduce you and say 'oh this is the EP' and I'll go  
249 'no I'm the assistant you know I'm being supported by the' and it's kind of making sure  
250 people are familiar with your role because you know I wouldn't want people to assume that  
251 I am a qualified EP when I'm not so that's something that I always do feel erm is important  
252 to clarify...

253 **Natalie:** Hmm

254 **Participant 1:** ...And then explain obviously that my work is supervised and erm  
255 countersigned by an EP erm yeah

256 **Natalie:** Could you tell me why that's important for you

257 **Participant 1:** Erm obviously there's the legality side of it as well as the erm the difference in  
258 the role but I think I think it changes it does change people's expectations because erm  
259 when you say and explain that 'currently I'm an assistant that's being supported myself'  
260 then it I think they they do kind of understand a bit longer a bit more that it will take a bit  
261 longer to be able to get back to them because I'm just checking things and things like that so  
262 erm I haven't personally found it to change the relationship in that kind of...

263 **Natalie:** Hmm

264 **Participant 1:** ...The roles situation but I do know of others that feel that as soon as they're  
265 being referred to as an assistant they don't feel as erm respected in a way but I haven't  
266 personally found that

267 **Natalie:** That's really interesting thank you erm do you feel like that's everything that you  
268 feel is significant about being an assistant erm do you feel like you've shared everything that  
269 you'd like to share

270 **Participant 1:** Yes I think I have erm yeah I mean I think my expectation was that I would be  
271 an assistant get on the course become an EP there we go and obviously the reality is  
272 different (laughs)

273 **Natalie:** How has it been different

274 **Participant 1:** You know just that the whole cycle of so before I became an assistant EP I  
275 was a teacher and did get the interview then became an assistant had the interview still an  
276 assistant had the interview and I just yeah I didn't really erm fully appreciate just how long  
277 the process is (laughs)

278 **Natalie:** That's interesting what's that process been like for you kind of erm applying and  
279 then continuing to apply

280 **Participant 1:** Yeah I just think you are constantly on the cycle at some stage or other so  
281 whether you've once you've made that decision that this is what you would like to pursue  
282 then you're either waiting for your feedback cos you've had your interview or you're ready  
283 to apply again and you you know at one point or another you are on that cycle of what stage  
284 am I at the moment so I do think it takes a lot of dedication to pursue it more than I thought  
285 I would have done

286 **Natalie:** How does it feel kind of knowing that now compared to when you first started

287 **Participant 1:** Erm I think if someone would have told me then it might have put me off but  
288 now I really do value the role even now that I'm doing the role and know I'll have this extra  
289 year hopefully erm to learn from it I do still value that experience and opportunity because I  
290 think in hindsight if I had gone straight from being a teacher into the EP I think it would have  
291 been a big expectation personally to have fully understood the expectations and the actual  
292 role of being becoming an EP

293 **Natalie:** Hmm so do you feel like the assistant role has been beneficial in that way

294 **Participant 1:** Definitely yeah I do and even like the experience of working for the like local  
295 authority with the statutory work and obviously now working for a private company in the  
296 more erm traded way yeah

297 **Natalie:** Hmm how do you feel that that experience might affect you when you go on to do  
298 the training

299 **Participant 1:** Erm I'd say it's drawing on the range of experiences now because erm  
300 obviously either way there are pressures and expectations but it's nice to see it from the  
301 different angles that obviously for the statutory side of things that was supporting the feed  
302 feeding into the local authority making sure that we are being available to work with all the  
303 different children that schools need whereas now because it's the traded model it's making  
304 sure that it's value for money and making sure that you know that kind of different avenue  
305 of making sure still it's the quality and it's the young person but I think you're assessed in a  
306 very different way now you know 'has the school signed up again next year and have we still  
307 met all the hours that we need to do' so the it's a different kind of pressure now

308 **Natalie:** And how do you feel about those different types of pressure

309 **Participant 1:** Erm I think that's what kind of helps me with the workload because it I think  
310 otherwise I'd be sat there thinking about it for such a long time I think I just need to get on  
311 and do it now whereas yeah it's making sure it just keeps keeps everything ticking over  
312 because you know that you've got to meet and fulfil erm people's expectations

313 **Natalie:** Oh that's been really interesting to know could you tell me a little bit about the  
314 different expectations that you've experienced

315 **Participant 1:** Erm so yeah I think as a local authority it's still making sure the I suppose it's  
316 always keeping in mind like everything that we are reporting and everything we're doing is  
317 like that an official document and everything like that so those kind of expectations in that  
318 respect and then obviously the expectations now are that I'm representing that whole  
319 company but obviously it's still making sure that it's in a doesn't change obviously the  
320 professionalism and yeah I suppose it's it's down to like the professional expectations that  
321 this is the role we're doing and this is what we're doing why we're doing it and how it can  
322 benefit everybody

323 **Natalie:** Do you feel like your knowledge of the professional expectations has changed  
324 during your time as an assistant

325 **Participant 1:** Yeah I think I understand more now than I did initially definitely erm but I  
326 think it's also the er I suppose that's again when it comes to the supervision and your  
327 challenge if you are being challenged as to 'how come you've done it in this way' and 'how  
328 come you've done it in that way' that my snapshot of a situation is obviously what's gonna  
329 be written and recorded for this young person erm for a long time so yeah it's always having  
330 that in mind you know that what is recorded for this snapshot yeah yeah sorry (laughs)

331 **Natalie:** That's fine erm I noticed you kind of mentioned about supervision I wondered if  
332 you could tell me a little bit about your experiences of that

333 **Participant 1:** So erm obviously within the local authority it was like a paired supervision  
334 which I benefited from in that you learn from other people in their situation and and have  
335 that opportunity to take an outsider perspective and think 'oh that was interesting that you



336 did it that way on that situation' I think how come you know that's when you can kind of see  
337 as to a different perspective but because this is a smaller team it's just a one-to-one  
338 supervision now so erm it's making sure that I'm more prepared on my you know to fill the  
339 time that you've got so I would say before I wouldn't have dedicated as much time to have  
340 thought about how I could fill the full supervision previously whereas this it's making sure  
341 there's always things to bring and but I think it's again it's having that opportunity to take  
342 the outsider perspective which is obviously difficult when it's one to one and then we do  
343 have group supervision once a half term er and again it's nice to hear from like the even  
344 most experienced EPs when they bring something I think 'oh that's nice that even they're  
345 you know needing the support with things and like the advice and things like that' so yeah I  
346 think it's drawing on lots of erm experiences from lots of people obviously we had the group  
347 supervision as well with the local authority erm and individual too actually didn't we yeah so  
348 I'd say there wasn't as much there isn't as much opportunity now because it's the smaller  
349 business as there was with the local authority yeah

350 **Natalie:** Hmm thank you erm so I guess as we come towards the end is there anything that  
351 you would like to ask me at this point

352 **Participant 1:** No I don't think I just hope I've answered them

353 **Natalie:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk to you about your experiences and  
354 just get to know them a little bit better and yeah it's been really interesting

## Appendix 8: Participant two's interview transcript

1 **Natalie:** Okay so erm so as we've just talked about I'm interested in what it's like to be  
2 working as an assistant educational psychologist so please could you talk about it for me  
3 please

4 **Participant 2:** Yeah erm I started here in September of last year erm and obviously me aim  
5 is to get on the thesis eventually but I opted not to this year just for kind of family reasons  
6 but think when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be erm and quite  
7 vague it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be  
8 they'd only had assistants for the previous year...

9 **Natalie:** Hmm

10 **Participant 2:** ...And I think part of that had been spent trying to work out what they were  
11 gonna do and and how the role was gonna look so there was some things that I took on  
12 straight away which was kind of some training and some whole class interventions so staff  
13 training and...

14 **Natalie:** Hmm

15 **Participant 2:** ...Whole class interventions and then it's kind of been up to the assistants in  
16 some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to  
17 certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do  
18 one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then  
19 other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them and if they've had anything  
20 for me to do then that's been great it's not always been the case erm and then because of  
21 the last job I did I worked with young people who didn't attend school erm the local  
22 authority started as it happened when I started another EP started and that's kinda what  
23 she'd focused on into her her last post as well so being involved in kind of setting up er a  
24 system for emotion based school non-attendance or I know a lot of people call it emotion  
25 based school avoidance we like to be different so but (laughs) erm but we've done a lot of  
26 training on that which has been nice because it was a familiar thing erm that I've then got  
27 to continue with and and do slightly different here and then I've done a lot of training as  
28 well I think I've been quite fortunate that they let me go on training courses and let me

29 kind of develop my knowledge in areas that I didn't really have much experience in so I'm  
30 doing some training in situational mutism at the moment erm and solution circles erm and  
31 then I'm about to start a project erm working with international new arrivals which will be  
32 really exciting erm and then some of the things I do are like I suppose more adminy kind of  
33 stuff I don't mind that actually (laughs) it's quite nice is like a decompression erm but I love  
34 spreadsheets cos in a past life I was a data analyst so like I do a lot of stuff around  
35 evaluation so anytime someone evaluates a piece of training or you know some kinda  
36 course or even just a bit a work they've done with a school erm I'm kinda involved in doing  
37 the evaluations for that erm which is really nice actually cos it's nice to see what's been  
38 happening across the whole service cos there's some people who I don't get to spend a lot  
39 of time with it all erm so it's nice to kind of see what they do from that side of things and it  
40 also gives me a clue of who else I need to go and see and kind of plug holes in my own  
41 areas of interest so erm yeah I've already got plans for for September (laughs) as to what  
42 I'm gonna who I'm gonna try and get alongside just so I get that breadth of experience but I  
43 think here in particular as a as a local authority th-they're quite keen on giving us a kind of  
44 a broad erm experience so we've got we use the the Currie matrix within our supervisions  
45 to kind of make sure that we're hitting things in every aspect of the role that when we do  
46 eventually want to go for the for the PhD then we can that actually we've done a bit of  
47 everything so I feel like by the time I apply next year actually no it's this year by the time I  
48 apply later this year I kind of feel like I'll have had experiences of a lot of different things  
49 and I think I'm actually they've given us this (inaudible)

50 **Natalie:** Thank you for sharing that erm so I just wondered like as you look back on your  
51 time since September working as an assistant if there's any other events that stand out for  
52 you in your mind

53 **Participant 2:** Erm I think probably the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the  
54 team was quite scary and I think it's it was on emotionally based school non-attendance  
55 which like I said was my kind of previous role before this one but it's quite (inaudible)  
56 standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to  
57 them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a  
58 slight imposter syndrome type sense during that...

59 **Natalie:** Hmm

60 **Participant 2:** ...But it was it was good because I think one of the things I've discovered  
61 about working here is how much collaboration there is and how much people seem to  
62 learn from each other erm because I think supervision's been quite a big one for me as well  
63 it's it's stood out as something that I'd not really experienced before erm and actually you  
64 know I can go with a problem and I know I've gone once with a problem and and burst out  
65 in tears in front of my in front of my supervisor and actually I guess that's fine you know  
66 she was like 'you talk I'll listen and we work through things' and she didn't give me any  
67 answers but she she helped me to work out what to do next and I think really cos I was a  
68 well job before last one was teaching and I think if I'd sat down in a room with my head  
69 teacher and burst into tears (laughs) I can't imagine that it would have gone very well so I  
70 think the kind of supportive nature of what we do here has been really uh I don't even  
71 know what word to say but it's just been really amazing I think just the the kind of  
72 community that we've got in our team that I can go into a room and cry with someone in it  
73 and it's all right so (laughs) it was certainly interesting the first time I cried in front of her  
74 I've done it since but I don't feel bad about doing it now so (laughs)

75 **Natalie:** Aw that's really interesting how do you feel that experience of supervision's  
76 affected you as an assistant

77 **Participant 2:** I think when I first went into it because I didn't I didn't know what to expect  
78 and I think I think I went on my first one with like a list of twenty things and I almost  
79 thought I needed to prove what I was doing or that I was thinking about things and actually  
80 she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now  
81 what what do you want to get out of this' and we kind of sat down together and made a a  
82 list of things that we kinda agreed that would happen during supervision and er to chat  
83 openly and to go away thinking positively about the next week and that's always is what  
84 we're quite conscious of like go not necessarily with a solution but with a new focus or a a  
85 bit of a change of perspective and yeah I think in teaching the expectation is always that  
86 you you doing and you know things move on very quickly and if you've got a problem you  
87 fix it and it wasn't that and yeah she doesn't often go 'oh well I think you should do this'  
88 she'd very cleverly lead me to something else or ask me to think of other ways that I might

89 approach it and I think that the strategy that she uses is is something that I would wanna  
90 apply when I'm like qualified and even even in September cos th-there's four of us four  
91 assistants and the other three are on the course for next year so I'm gonna have new  
92 assistants with me and even just their approach when I'm working with them I think is it's  
93 something that I'm quite conscious about so yeah I think the collaboration of supervision is  
94 a very new thing with me, but it's I kinda love it and...

95 **Natalie:** Hmm

96 **Participant 2:** ...I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is  
97 supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me' and  
98 yeah it's not that at all so you know it's very open and sometimes it's general chat  
99 sometimes it's a specific problem...

100 **Natalie:** Hmm

101 **Participant 2:** ...And I don't ever have to worry about what I go to her with so I've yeah I've  
102 loved it I think I wouldn't have said that first time around

103 **Natalie:** I wonder if you could tell me a little bit more about what it's like when you go  
104 with a particular problem and then what it's like when you just go for a general chat

105 **Participant 2:** Yeah when I when I go with a specific problem it's usually that she'll just ask  
106 me to to talk and she usually just gives me space and she'll not say anything and just ask  
107 me to kind of give her as much detail as I can and I find normally that when we do that she  
108 looks at me in a certain way to kind of say 'tell me a bit more about that or tell me a bit  
109 more about that' and then when we do it she'll kind of then just prompt me with little  
110 thoughts or additional questions and she'll say well you know if I've tried something she'll  
111 say 'well why d'ya think that hasn't worked' and it's very much about my thought process  
112 and...

113 **Natalie:** Hmm

114 **Participant 2:** ...Kind of verbalising it and so she she draws out with me what I realized has  
115 happened or hasn't happened and then it's almost like problem solving so trying to come  
116 round to different ways of approaching something but I think cos it's not judgemental and I

117 think because the way she asks the questions is very much just trying to prompt me to  
118 think about different ways to do stuff and I mean there's some times that I genuinely am  
119 stuck so sometimes she'll ask me to go away and she'll give me something to read or she  
120 might point me in the direction of someone else in the team that may know something  
121 about it cos I think because she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's  
122 not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work  
123 it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she  
124 doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because  
125 you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to  
126 me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and  
127 then signposting me if if we haven't worked something out and then when it comes to the  
128 general chats it's (laughs) sometimes just things are I just spill my guts as to what happened  
129 over a week because some weeks well at the minute things are really really busy I don't  
130 know whether it's the run-up to exams or or what but a lot of schools seem to have shoved  
131 in a lot of stuff and I blame the bank holidays as well because yeah (laughs) I think that's  
132 having an effect probably teacher strike days as well cos I've had to move things around cos  
133 of that but erm yeah when we have general chat it's er a reflection on the week things  
134 things that have gone well things that maybe haven't gone well she'll share kind of similarly  
135 from her side of things so it's not just me talking all the time sometimes I don't want to talk  
136 very much when I go in and I think she knows that I think she knows I'm just in a bit of a er  
137 but then usually when we have the general chats and it starts off quite slow they're usually  
138 the ones that run over time quite a bit so we do an hour at a time but yeah (laughs) it'll  
139 sometimes go quite over cos suddenly we'll discover something that's happened or there'll  
140 be a story about some teacher or some kid who's done something weird so yeah but I think  
141 the chats so as you know you don't just get time to chat for you know you've got the space  
142 and time to do it and that's quite different to just go 'I haven't got a problem but we're just  
143 gonna talk' and we just talk so yeah it's quite nice to have that space just to know in my  
144 calendar that I'm either just gonna relax or reflect or try and sort something out in my head  
145 that's bugging me

146 **Natalie:** Thank you I think you've mentioned a few times the word kind of reflecting and I  
147 wondered if you could tell me a little bit more about what that means to you

148 **Participant 2:** I think I spend a lot more time doing it in this job than I have in any other job  
149 I think in teaching I had to be very reactive all the time because I was a SENCO and people  
150 would come to me with problems and go you know 'how do I fix this' or 'how do I sort this  
151 problem with this child' and I always felt like I needed to have answers straight away and I  
152 mean that's fine because you knew the kids inside out yeah I'm not an expert in anything  
153 and actually to then go 'well, I don't know much about that so I'm gonna spend some time  
154 reading up about it or...

155 **Natalie:** Hmm

156 **Participant 2:** ...I have a session with a young person and I write up my notes and I just  
157 spend some time going 'well, what could have gone differently what went well what could I  
158 have changed what do I need to think about for next time' and and it is sometimes it's  
159 giving yourself that bit of space to to work through what what's happened and what's been  
160 done and it's it's really positive because it means that I'm I'm not jumping from one thing  
161 to another I do a training session with staff and I give myself some time to think about  
162 anything I should have said anything I could change and it doesn't necessarily have to be  
163 that I wr-write lots down or you know change a PowerPoint that I've got or something but  
164 it's about spending that bit of time to just go over things in my own head and kind of sort it  
165 out and I think then it helps me then go on to the next thing that I'm doing when I've just  
166 given myself that little bit of space I mean trouble is I don't always get that space cos I  
167 sometimes jump from one thing to the next but if I can even just the car journey from one  
168 school to the next I can spend a bit of time thinking about it and thinking about what I did  
169 and how I would change it and anything else that I might need to do and I think that then  
170 works really well because then it means that I can plan future steps in a in a more  
171 constructive way so I'm not just going 'oh well I did that and I'll do it again' but actually  
172 thinking 'this is what worked' then any feedback that I've got and I think that's making me  
173 better at this job because I'm actually spending the time to to think about what I'm doing  
174 and not just being the reactive person that I was when I was a teacher erm cos you do just  
175 jump from one situation to the other and actually you know I'm I'm (laughs) still really busy  
176 but actually I try and slot in that bit of time to maybe to talk to someone about it it might  
177 be just by myself erm but I think then it's it's fed a lot more into the amount of reading that

178 I do because if I do something then I want to be able to do it better or I wanna to know  
179 more about it and it's that sense like I said before of not claiming to be an expert in  
180 anything and knowing that I'm not but trying to do the best job that I can

181 **Natalie:** You said that you make er feel like the reflecting and taking that time and space  
182 makes it feel like you are doing a better job

183 **Participant 2:** Yeah

184 **Natalie:** Would you tell me a little bit more about that

185 **Participant 2:** Yeah I think it's that thing when you start a new job you always feel like  
186 you're a bit rubbish in everything and you've got to learn everything from scratch and some  
187 of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot  
188 about learning from the bottom up you know so I've got people that I can talk to research  
189 that I can look at it's really handy that we've got trainees here because then they give me  
190 articles that they can access from their uni accounts erm (laughs) cos I can't get half of that  
191 stuff at the minute erm but yeah it's it's for me it's about thinking about how I want this  
192 role to look for me I think we were given some time at the start to think about what we  
193 wanted the assistant job to be it wasn't a really formal you know 'you're gonna do this this  
194 and this' and yes there's certain things that we have to do but there's a lot of space for us  
195 to have a bit of creativity and to think about things that we wanna be involved with and  
196 areas of interest and that's nice for me to be able to say I don't know a lot about this so I  
197 wanna do this and and people really are open to us coming along and and like either  
198 supporting or just observing and then it just gives me a space to go 'right well I still need to  
199 know more about this I still have a lot to learn' and it's quite nice at the minute because  
200 because I'm staying next year people are going 'oh would you like to come and see this' so  
201 I'm getting a kind of head start on September and then (laughs) I'm building a reading list  
202 for the summer which will be good as well erm (laughs) yeah I I think one of the first things  
203 I was told in this job was that 'you'll probably spend a lot of time thinking more so than  
204 you've done in any other job that you will sometimes find that that's what you need to do'  
205 and I think I came in with it well I need to be busy all the time and I think I am busy all the  
206 time just sometimes it's a different kind of busy so it's a reflective busy rather than a doing



207 busy and it's quite nice to know there's different kinds of busy you can be but that (laughs)  
208 you're always doing something and even sometimes it's just finding a podcast that links  
209 with something I'm interested in and listening to that when I'm in the car or on the bus and  
210 you know giving myself that bit of headspace to just suppose almost immerse myself in it  
211 cos I feel like my I did a masters and that was kind of lost cos it was during Covid and  
212 everything was online erm and I didn't really get that opportunity to spend time with other  
213 people and you know read an article and talk about and actually the assistants build that  
214 time in as well so you know every couple of weeks we pick something to read and sit and  
215 chat about and reflect about how it might affect our practice and it's nice to hear other  
216 people's perspectives on that and rather just have your voice and I think that's a lot of what  
217 when I'm working with the other EPs is that I get to hear their voice and their perspective  
218 and then think about how that matches with mine or differs from mine so that almost I'm  
219 trying to think about what kind of EP I want to be I suppose ultimately because I don't want  
220 to be a carbon copy of someone else but I wanna use what I learn from other people to  
221 kind of build that perspective

222 **Natalie:** That sounds really interesting you've talked a little bit about kind of how there's  
223 this maybe sense of learning with others and you've used the word like collaboration quite  
224 a lot in when you've been talking erm I wondered if you could maybe think of some other  
225 times that collaboration seems to have stood out for you in your work

226 **Participant 2:** I think a lot a lot of the training that we do with staff is about collaboration  
227 there's rarely a time I'll go and do something myself erm you know last week one of our  
228 EPs was gonna to do some solution circle training and she couldn't do it so it ended up that  
229 me one of the other assistants and one of our trainees we kind of all said that we would do  
230 it together erm all having seen her do it once (laughs) and and so we got to spend quite a  
231 bit of time together thinking about how we wanted that delivery to look erm how we were  
232 going to divide up what we were doing and even things like, you know who's gonna get the  
233 pens and the notepads and stuff and you know the fact that we could put that time in to go  
234 well let's let's think about how we want this to be because it's not just one person's  
235 training it's it's everyone's training and it it went really well cos I think all of us thought  
236 'well not one of us is qualified to do this' (laughs) erm but actually we took bits of what

237 each of us know and the strengths of each of us and worked out how we could best utilise  
238 that within the training and and it went really well thankfully erm (laughs) yeah I read all  
239 the evaluations that night and it was it was really positive again it gave us things to think  
240 about so then the next day we had a meeting in to kind of think about the next time we  
241 deliver it and what we would do differently and how we would change it and again it it was  
242 that you know we we are we're all in a place where we wanna learn we're all in a place  
243 where we know we're not the experts of things but we wanna do well we wanna support  
244 staff we want to support young people and so we worked out how to do that the best that  
245 we could so and it's it's really nice and I mean even when I go and do even when you're in  
246 the staff training and you're working alongside staff thinking about how they can support  
247 the young people they work with in the best way you know you've gotta listen to them  
248 you've gotta think about what they know they're the experts with the young people they  
249 work with and how you can facilitate them feeling more empowered to do their job so and  
250 I think that's probably why the training that we did went well because actually it was all  
251 around those staff feeling like their voices were important and I think since was that they  
252 didn't always feel like that so yeah it worked really well because we all worked together as  
253 a team to deliver that training but actually we all worked with the staff that we were with  
254 to help them feel like it was worthwhile for them

255 **Natalie:** That's great thank you I know that you mentioned at the beginning you kinda had  
256 that time to think about what you wanted the assistant job to be erm and I wondered if  
257 you look back on that now if you've got any thoughts about that

258 **Participant 2:** Yeah I think (laughs) I think when I first started I mean when we first started  
259 there was a lot of like that you know you've gotta do all the mandatory training and and  
260 stuff and I spent a lot of time initially just with other EPs and I think because of my  
261 experience when I was a teacher working with ed psychs it was very much coming in to do  
262 assessments and you know one-to-ones and things which ultimately was probably mostly  
263 for statutory assessment and so I think probably I had quite a I don't know in some ways  
264 probably a little bit of a skewed view of what EPs do so I think initially my thoughts were  
265 around 'right how can I get involved with cases how could I spend time one to one with  
266 young people' and I think that's initially what I thought I was gonna do a lot of the time and

267 obviously that didn't pan out cos of the demand for statutory assessment meant a lot of  
268 the well most of the traded work that our service do has kind of been shut down for this  
269 year erm and so it's just a lot of statutory and then some core work but actually it's then  
270 been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't  
271 work one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' and I  
272 think that was a big flip for me so you know my perspective that I'd come in and do loadsa  
273 one to ones with young people and that's what I originally tried to build my time around so  
274 the kind of panels that I put myself on was around one-to-one work erm and then I tried to  
275 attach myself to the EP who was going in to schools and then actually I still love that bit I  
276 mean I do some like whole class interventions erm which I think probably my favourite part  
277 of the job and I do some one to ones with young people but actually I'm really enjoying  
278 spending time with staff erm either as a group a larger or a smaller group but kind of  
279 problem solving around young people erm it's not something that I did a lot of before and  
280 actually it's it's giving staff the tools and confidence sometimes to know what they can do  
281 for young people what they're already doing that works and then what else they can do  
282 differently and I think for me that was quite a big shift of what I thought I would enjoy  
283 doing (laughs) compared to what I have ended up doing more of so I mean the variety of  
284 my job's massive definitely love how varied it is and I know I'm quite fortunate I think some  
285 of the some of the EPs feel like their drowning in statutory assessments erm and I know I  
286 get to do the funner bits of the job sometimes erm but actually visits it's being in schools  
287 I'm loving going in to different schools seeing how different schools work thinking about  
288 things I can do that'll support staff and sometimes that's not even been going in and  
289 working with them directly so one of the things I've started doing is building padlets for  
290 schools so on different topics so we've got ones on because I do zones of regulation  
291 training so I've done one on that erm done one on emotion based school not attendance  
292 I've done one on autism am building one for schools working with young people who are  
293 international new arrivals and schools are kind of telling me what they need help and  
294 support with and I'm trying to find research that's helpful tools and resources that are  
295 helpful and thinking about how even if EPs can't be in schools all the time how I can give  
296 schools things to start them off like to start conversations or you know things that will be  
297 useful for them in the interim while they haven't got anyone there so that I really liked

298 because it's a it's been like my own little pet project but actually it's working really well  
299 currently that staff feel that they've got something something tangible that they can kind  
300 of grasp onto cos a lot of staff go 'well I just wanna I just want resources or a want tools'  
301 and so if I can give them some starting points and that's quite helpful

302 **Natalie:** Thank you I wondered if you can recall what you were thinking when you first had  
303 that shift, you kind of mentioned, there was like this flip in thinking between working one  
304 to one er or directly with young people to working with staff erm can you recall that

305 **Participant 2:** Yeah I think to me it was when when I was doing some of the training for  
306 emotionally based school non-attendance because the the EP that I've been working on  
307 that with erm we kind of devised some sheets that teachers could use and when we did a  
308 session with a with a staff team who had three young people who were struggling with  
309 attendance and kind of sitting with them and having those conversations and it wasn't  
310 about just one of the young people it was about as a school what they could do what could  
311 change for them how they could make small changes that might impact not just these  
312 three students but actually the wider school community and I think It was definitely  
313 something around that because in my last job I was working with you know young people  
314 just that one young person and I would talk to their family and I would talk to school and  
315 then it was trying to work around how to support them back in and then I would get  
316 multiple referrals from the same school and you'd go well actually there's clearly a wider  
317 issue if you've got all these young people struggling with the same issue but that was never  
318 within my remit to kind of look on a whole school level whereas here actually doing that  
319 and doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could  
320 affect a lot more young people and it's not that I'm saying that one-to-one work isn't  
321 important but actually a lot of quite simple adaptations at schools can make can make a  
322 massive difference to a wider cohort and I think that yeah, that was definitely part of the  
323 shift because I saw that whereas in my last job it was impact on one young person at a time  
324 this means that actually you can support schools to make sometimes just very minor  
325 adaptations but by recognising what the barriers for young people are and giving them the  
326 time to (laughs) as I've said a lot of reflect and and think about what's going on for them  
327 and the young people that they work with and thinking about how actually can we

328 implement change in a way that's constructive and not just for changes sake cos I think  
329 some some schools feel less empowered when they're part of a big trust who just tell them  
330 they've gotta do stuff and actually going for our school for our community what is it that  
331 we need and what is it that we can do and I've seen some I've just seen some brilliant  
332 conversations with schools where actually they've felt that they've come away from a  
333 meeting going 'right we've got steps we've got ideas of what we can do to support these  
334 young people and their families and to make change' and I feel like if you you feel like you  
335 can support school to make those kind of changes then you tend to see there's a much  
336 broader change rather than just a change for one young person

337 **Natalie:** Could you tell me a little bit more about your feelings when you saw that  
338 happening

339 **Participant 2:** I mean there's an element of pride (laughs) when you feel like you've  
340 supported staff to to make that that change or a commitment to change even sometimes  
341 but I think it's a sense of it's a sense of community I think when you work for a local  
342 authority obviously you trying to work across a large number of schools but when you  
343 make a connection with that school and they feel like you understand what's going on for  
344 them and you're not just in and out doing something really quickly there's that sense that  
345 you're all trying to achieve the same goal that it's not just you coming in and delivering a  
346 bit of training and then you disappear and it's all left to them it's that they feel that actually  
347 you know you understood and I think my feelings from that is actually that you feel when  
348 you've done that with staff that you're doing your job well and I think there's a almost a  
349 comfort in knowing that you know the things that I've learned the reading that I've done  
350 that actually it's all culminated in supporting somebody else so feeling helpful feeling useful  
351 is what I feel like being an assistant is about so you know I can be helpful to one of the  
352 team when they need a spreadsheet making or they need er prettyfication is something  
353 that they say I do quite a lot of cos I like things to look pretty erm (laughs) but you know  
354 doing a small job like that being in a school doing something helping a young person to feel  
355 heard it's it's all that sense that actually my trip into psychology and my commitment to  
356 this job can make that difference for other people

357 **Natalie:** Thank you so much for sharing erm so I guess we'll come in towards the end so I  
358 just wondered if there was anything that you might have thought about during our chat  
359 together erm that hadn't maybe occurred to you before or if there's anything else you feel  
360 like you'd like to share or ask me

361 **Participant 2:** Erm I think just I probably haven't spoken enough about the other assistants  
362 that I work with because we all have different I s'pose we've all got different areas of  
363 interest and we've all got different kind of niche little areas that we're all more interested  
364 in but I think actually the team that we've got has been great erm I know when they hired  
365 us because there was one of the assistants she was already here last year cos she didn't  
366 apply for the doctorate think she only started in the October so it's like she would have  
367 been in the job a month having to apply so she'd been doing it nearly a year and then they  
368 hired three new assistants and I think the four of us together we spend a lot of time  
369 together some weeks and then some weeks we never see each other but actually we  
370 always check in with each other every week we always see if there's something that one of  
371 us has got going on that anyone needs help with erm or if we've got something interesting  
372 going on we'll ask if someone wants to come with us erm we're really good if someone's  
373 stuck and can't do something then someone else'll find a way to pick it up erm but I think  
374 that's been really important for me to have them sometimes as a sounding block  
375 sometimes to rant to sometimes to find out what they're doing in case there's something I  
376 hadn't considered that I wanted to look into or find out more about erm cos one one of the  
377 others in particular is very good at like I dunno searching other people's calendars is I feel  
378 like what they do (laughs) to see what else is going on and going 'ooh I'll ask them if I can  
379 join them for that' erm I haven't got time to filter through two people's calendars (laughs)  
380 but yeah and then people'll pick their jobs or other things to do and and it's quite nice just  
381 to see the variety of what's going on there's there's certain areas that one of the assistants  
382 she does things with the virtual school which isn't something I've got to do this year but  
383 I've already asked when she's off doing the doctorate if I can help that because you know  
384 she shared some of the things that she's done and and yeah my experiences in that area  
385 are quite limited so you know I've learned a lot from them as well even though the level of  
386 psychology and some of their backgrounds is massive some less so but actually because  
387 we're all trying to do the same job and we've all got I suppose the ultimate same end goal

388 you know we're all trying to learn as much as we can in what feels like quite a short space  
389 of time so that I don't know that I would have done as well in the job if I hadn't had them  
390 because I feel like probably they've been there some days pushed me I think when my  
391 motivation's been quite low I think they've probably pushed me to go 'no we'll find  
392 something else to do do this' or you know 'take a bit of time to think about that' erm  
393 because I don't think w-we probably are slightly competitive with each other I think  
394 probably just I think that's our characters rather than the job erm but I think they've been a  
395 good push for me to kind of push myself a bit further I'm not a very I'm not a very pushy  
396 person and I'm I haven't always been great at going 'can I join you for that' or 'can I help  
397 you with that' erm and they've probably encouraged me to do that more purely because I  
398 don't want them to get all the really interesting stuff sometimes but yeah that's I'm not  
399 sure without them that the job would have been quite the same and yeah I'm gonna miss  
400 (laughs) I'm gonna miss them all next year I don't know what I'm gonna get in terms of new  
401 assistants working with me next year so that's a slight I'm sure it'll be fine but I think we've  
402 got a really nice group this year so but I guess that's the other part of the job that you know  
403 it's time dependent so it's kinda like seeing (sighs) seeing what the new year'll bring with  
404 with new people and then having my own panic about applying so

405 **Natalie:** Hmm and what's that like...

406 **Participant 2:** The

407 **Natalie:** ...Kind of the knowing that there's that kind of time dependent nature of the role

408 **Participant 2:** It'll probably feel worse when I'm applying next year because this the post  
409 here was fixed term for two years erm obviously the first assistant she was at her two years  
410 or would have been if she hadn't got on this year but the other two it was their first year so  
411 they applied and got it erm and that was great for them I'll probably feel slightly more  
412 pressurised I suppose when it comes to applying knowing that this is supposed to be the  
413 end point erm and I guess if I don't get on I'll be pleading with them to extend my contract  
414 (laughs) I mean (inaudible) job so it's not it's not like I'll be going 'oh I'm done with this' and  
415 hopefully they'll be all right with keeping us erm but I think with me because I taugth for  
416 such a long time and then kind of gave myself the push because I wanted to do this and

417 kind of didn't I don't I think I had enough faith in myself at the time and I think probably if  
418 I'd thought about applying the year I don't think I would have felt ready because I'd only  
419 been in the job a couple of months...

420 **Natalie:** Hmm

421 **Participant 2:** ...But I would hope that I think I feel ready to apply for next year I know  
422 there's still I know I've still got loads to learn but I know I'm not going to go into the the  
423 doctorate like a shiny like already fully formed EP (laughs) cos the people that I've spoken  
424 to said 'no, they'll make you question everything within the first couple months of being  
425 there' so that sounds like a joy erm but it is funny coming into a job knowing that there's a  
426 an end point but I suppose as as Ed Psych services they want they want to recruit people  
427 who will make good EPs and might join them in the future and I mean the year three we've  
428 got here at the minute she's she's coming back as a fully qualified in September erm so you  
429 know it's it's nice to think about things like that and cos yeah I love the team that I'm with  
430 so if I got to come back to them one day that would be really nice so and the the two of the  
431 assistants who are gonna be like at [University] err they're already planning like how they  
432 can get back over to this local authority for like placements and things so it's nice nice that  
433 they're that keen to be competitive with each other

434 **Natalie:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you about your experiences  
435 and getting to know you better this morning erm I guess is there anything that you'd like to  
436 ask me at this point as we come to the end

437 **Participant 2:** I don't think so I'm kinda can't believe that I've spoken for that long



## Appendix 9: Participant three's interview transcript

1 **Natalie:** So I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an assistant educational  
2 psychologist please could you tell me about it

3 **Participant 3:** Yeah erm it was something that I was unfamiliar with until around this time  
4 last year erm I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail  
5 I thought you know a bit like teaching where you hit the ground running and you would  
6 have to sorta need to get on board with whatever projects there were or sort of like what  
7 you said about you know statutory assessments and writing up reports erm and actually it  
8 was it was very very much the opposite it was in the beginning anyway erm it was about you  
9 know erm taking our time making sure we felt comfortable that we felt confident um sort of  
10 given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us there  
11 was no pressure to get started you know it was very much I guess based around our  
12 competency that you know 'you don't have to do anything that you don't feel comfortable  
13 or competent in and we'd rather that if you were to do it that you know you're going to do it  
14 right and that you feel that you're doing it right' erm so it doesn't it hasn't been a pressured  
15 role I have to say compared to my previous which was teaching ermm the role itself I guess  
16 with the clue in the title of being an assistant EP kind of now that I'm nine months in I do  
17 feel it is it is very much like the assistant to the EP so you know we will do some of the  
18 projects that they're running they've initiated and we've continued ermm we do support in  
19 terms of psychometrics or observations erm and again that's all through encouragement  
20 and you know if you feel capable there's it's not an expectation or pressure erm and then  
21 obviously there's been opportunities and erm forms of sort of CPD and things from the  
22 other EPs in the team and there's been definitely like lots of opportunities for in terms of  
23 shadowing and things so for me yeah it does seem very much the assistant to the EPs but  
24 the role itself does have some things that are specific to it erm particularly here in  
25 [Educational Psychology Service] at least you know erm we do run interventions that are  
26 solely run by the assistant EPs because they've already been established so we're just doing  
27 the maintenance sort of model of it and then we liaise with the the EPs then just to make  
28 sure that you know work's being carried out and we're serving on the same par and the  
29 same track and things like that

30 **Natalie:** That's great thank you you said the there's an element of kind of doing things  
31 where you feel comfortable and competent could you describe maybe some times when  
32 you've been an assistant and you felt comfortable and competent

33 **Participant 3:** Yeah erm I guess if we kinda talk about the training that we've been tasked  
34 with erm we initially started out by shadowing one another so kind of going with the bit of  
35 support because we had an assistant EP she was already here previous to us starting erm  
36 and so it was going with her sort of sort of getting an idea of expectations so you know that  
37 we weren't going in blind and weren't having to be expected to do it independently straight  
38 away so it was quite nice then to get sort of build up that competency erm and kind of  
39 comfort erm and then I find that since I've been delivering it by myself you know the  
40 competency's then built it's being sort of built upon erm each time and again they they  
41 don't run all the time so it's kind of like you have a block and then it'll be another half term  
42 another term another block and another term and another block so the opportunities  
43 actually haven't been you know as plentiful in terms of you know like some of the training  
44 that we offer erm so it's kind of you know having to recognise yourself that you feel  
45 competent and that you know maybe if we do need a bit a support with something or we  
46 feel like need to see something again it's just about having sort of like that conversation  
47 whether it be with the peer erm one of the other assistant EPs or erm or with the with an EP  
48 themselves whether it's the one that we're working with or it's our supervisor which is one  
49 of the senior EPs

50 **Natalie:** You said that you maybe recognise in yourself that developing competence what  
51 kind of stands out to you as feeling competent

52 **Participant 3:** Erm I think it kinda relates back to teaching it's just that with my background  
53 being teaching you know when something flows you know whenever you're secure in it you  
54 know that you're running it quite well and and so like I relate that to sorta psychometrics  
55 you know we had training with the EPs they showed us how to do a WISC and we went  
56 through the process and we we practiced with each other and then delivering that  
57 administering that with a young person was completely different you know they're fidgeting  
58 they wanna move they wanna get up they wanna explore sometimes they don't want to  
59 give you anything and in the structure as well the psychometrics is you know it's quite black

60 and white and trying to have sort of like that confidence as well that you know 'right okay I  
61 know how this goes I know how it's meant to be' and trying to then sort of erm comforting  
62 the young person and things that like that's something that that training didn't cover erm  
63 and it wasn't something I ever thought about until I was delivering it so now that I've  
64 delivered a couple of psychometrics I can now see that I am more competent I am more  
65 confident erm and then I guess the experience of working with a young person you kind of  
66 then know as well how like they react and behave and so I can kind of kind of foresee it  
67 some of the things like that

68 **Natalie:** Hmm I wonder if you can think back to maybe the first time you did a psychometric  
69 and the last time...

70 **Participant 3:** Yeah (laughs)

71 **Natalie:** ...How would you compare those

72 **Participant 3:** Yeah the first time was you know it felt unprepared underprepared you know  
73 just that transition between each of the subtests you know the first time and in the young  
74 person particularly the young person I was with you know she liked to explore and in the  
75 room we were in was a music room because that's all the space we could we were provided  
76 with and and so trying to manage you know her attention and staying on task but then also  
77 trying to get the next task ready and then kind of trying to remember like all the what's the  
78 constraints here what's the you know what's the time constraint what's the instruction how  
79 does it have to be phrased you know what responses am I looking for that I can score it as  
80 I'm going because obviously that'll inform whenever we terminate it and then you know  
81 trying to end each subtest doesn't always finish after the three sometimes it's four and you  
82 know it was all a bit like that seemed disjointed obviously to the young person they they  
83 don't know like that's their first interaction and stuff so I have that on my side but I know  
84 with myself I was like 'oh I didn't like that' so now what I do is I look through the  
85 psychometric so my last psychometric I looked at the order I looked how they were going to  
86 go I could then try to foresee sort of like stalling in between in preparation and then how I  
87 keep the young person engaged and then sort of being aware of the subtest sort of  
88 requirements so whether it was you know I'm looking for these particular responses or how

89 many negatives until you know I can then stop that test erm and even just my language  
90 around sort of you know trying to praise but then also show that we're only looking for  
91 correct answers that you know it's it's sort of like any response is acceptable and trying to  
92 then keep sort of the young person's buy in and that's that's definitely something that I've  
93 got to like I'll go through I'll highlight each one particularly if it's a test I'm unfamiliar with  
94 like the WIAT I think or the WPPSI sorry I've only done the WPPSI once but I knew from the  
95 experience of the previous psychometrics what to look out for like look for the  
96 requirements how many questions where do I start for their age you know what way do I go  
97 back then and things like that so yeah no it definitely flows even though it's a new test and  
98 it's something I've never administered the experience of delivering it informs the next one

99 **Natalie:** Lovely thank you I wonder if you could tell me a little bit about how those  
100 experiences you've just spoken about have affected you as an assistant educational  
101 psychologist

102 **Participant 3:** I think they've prepared me particularly with the you know the aspiration of  
103 getting onto the course I think then those experiences sort of add to that so whenever  
104 comes a time I am gonna be on the course I feel like I'll have that head start and I'll not be  
105 that fresh faced and I'll have that level of competency sort of whenever I'm on the course  
106 which I think is is going to do me good stead obviously the experience with the  
107 psychometrics and the different psychometrics and going through the process of you know  
108 analysing the results and trying to interpret them erm that in itself you know is a great  
109 benefit

110 **Natalie:** Hmm and could you tell me a little bit about how to sorry to just keep mentioning  
111 the word like competence and I really want to dig into that so you said how you feel that  
112 that's giving you a bit more competence in preparation for the course could you tell me a bit  
113 more about that

114 **Participant 3:** Yeah I suppose erm the word competence comes from the the erm code of  
115 ethics you know that there is that competence around being an EP and and sort of maintain  
116 that level of competence that the thing that you're doing you know comes from a source of  
117 benefit and that you're confident in then what you deliver and what you then you know sort

118 of what you're trying to achieve and I think that's why I keep mentioning it because to me  
119 it's a core sort of a core word a core value I think as an EP that and especially assistant EP  
120 just starting is that I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm  
121 doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the  
122 competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP erm so yeah hopefully that  
123 answers it (laughs)

124 **Natalie:** Yeah that's okay do you think competency means the same to you now as it did  
125 when you started as an assistant

126 **Participant 3:** Yeah because I guess the way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent  
127 I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience...

128 **Natalie:** Hmm

129 **Participant 3:** ...I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I  
130 wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become  
131 even more competent sort of thing

132 **Natalie:** Yeah oh that's great could you tell me about a time that stands out for you when  
133 you look back at your time as an assistant

134 **Participant 3:** Around competency or just sort of like anytime

135 **Natalie:** It's up to you anytime we can do a random one and then you can do one that looks  
136 to competence it's up to you

137 **Participant 3:** (laughs) Erm I'm trying to think of like anything that's like you know stood out  
138 like there's a moment erm I suppose it again it comes back to psychometric but I think the  
139 reason it comes back to that is because with the experience of psychometric I got to see it  
140 sort of like going in having the psychometric analysing the psychometric sort of interpreting  
141 it then meeting with the teachers with the class because it wasn't a form of you know a  
142 statutory assessment it was just more of a 'these are a group of children in our school' and  
143 this the deputy manager then was able to sort of allow us time to have sort of like case  
144 study sort of thing so we have experience of delivering psychometric going through the  
145 whole process and delivering that information back to schools erm I think I guess that one

146 stands out because that was my first experience going into a school repeatedly building a  
147 relationship with the staff building a relationship with the young person erm and then  
148 obviously sort of going through a process of evaluating administering analysing delivering  
149 feedback and then the evaluation as well I think that I guess I can think of one particular  
150 instant where it was with one school whereas I feel sometimes that with being the assistant  
151 and stuff and even with just delivering training they're snapshots it's like in one school and  
152 out and then maybe assisting you know one of the EPs and whatever they're delivering or  
153 going to shadow or whatever way it may be but again in the one school and then out you  
154 don't have I guess the same experiences maybe what an EP would have where they would  
155 have a patch and then they go into the school repeatedly and then you know you they  
156 become familiar with you erm I've not quite had that you know and and that that one school  
157 was it that that one school was a full experience where staff were aware reception were  
158 aware you know they know who you are young people that you've interacted with recognise  
159 you and if you're in you know just that kind of sort of like you know I guess a sense of  
160 belonging (laughs)

161 **Natalie:** And how does that feel being able to build those relationships and have that sense  
162 of belonging

163 **Participant 3:** Yeah like so much better it it makes just your transition just that arrival in the  
164 school getting through the door like the chat and stuff and not having the formality around  
165 like 'oh who're you here to see' and they're guarded because they don't know you and sort  
166 of like that safeguarding element you know like 'can you sign in who're you here to see' you  
167 know that kind of like child protection and and and rightly so but then you see that shift of  
168 kinda like 'aah we know him we know you sign in yep you know where you're going now'  
169 'oh yeah yeah' like 'okay' and then you know erm I've been in there a few times now and I  
170 we always again like I have I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort  
171 of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are  
172 aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does  
173 that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort  
174 of good relations erm but no it definitely and it makes it easier as well you know whenever  
175 you kinda need something a bit more like 'oh look can I come back tomorrow for that' like

176 'yeah yeah call anytime' or like 'it's not quite ready you know is that okay you know can we  
177 do like next week and stuff' and they're like 'yeah' and I definitely think it it allows then sort  
178 of I dunno then things to progress in a way I dunno you can have sort of I dunno like you  
179 you're able to have better conversations in a way you know because you have sort of like a  
180 that relationship or that history whether it be short or long

181 **Natalie:** And can you tell me how you go about doing the standalone kind of snapshot  
182 pieces of work you were talking about

183 **Participant 3:** Yeah so erm usually it'll be sort of erm if I think around supporting the the EP  
184 it'll usually sort of centre around something they're doing or delivering and it kinda takes  
185 two ways we can either erm shadow because we look at the calendars and we we do that  
186 ourselves it's very much like 'ooh I've not seen that before I wanna go see that' erm the  
187 other side of it then is also erm them coming to us for support so while they need the  
188 assistance to I dunno create a flyer for something or support in person or erm they think it's  
189 important and they think it's a benefit you know like coming to coming to an event like a  
190 snapshot like a one-off erm and then so usually we'll have a meeting about it just to kinda so  
191 we have an awareness you know location setup purpose you know why are they asking for  
192 this what is it they're hoping to get from it erm and we do like we we do get asked like  
193 feedback in terms of you know if you wanna look over this you want to change anything if  
194 you want to join in if you wanna have an input yeah erm you know we recently well not  
195 recently but since about January we've been erm helping one of the Senior EPs deliver  
196 mental health lead training and so we have a meeting before each each session erm and we  
197 sorta look at the slides and design things think do we need to change anything and and I do  
198 feel like you know our opinions are you know taken on board and are valued and in that  
199 sense it's not just always like not this idea of being spoken to or being told it's very much  
200 like what are your ideas you know and and then there is that sort of erm that relationship I  
201 guess there and the sense that we can take someone's resource and just be like oh like you  
202 know I still got the content but I think it would look better like this and sort of erm I know  
203 we call it sort of like making things pretty (laughs) but I guess because we have time that we  
204 can do it but they appreciate that as well like they're not precious and stuff and I think it is  
205 like it is a lovely team here I have to say at [Educational Psychology Service] with the EPs

206 **Natalie:** Hmm sounds lovely (coughs) could you tell me about a time when you shadowed  
207 an educational psychologist

208 **Participant 3:** Yeah erm it's been a couple of times that we've shadowed in terms of you  
209 know erm one of the Senior EPs they delivered trauma training to a school and we just  
210 participated in the sense that we were part of the the training session we weren't delivering  
211 it was kind of just getting experience of like this is what it is that they're after this is my take  
212 this is how I deliver the training and then we're just kind of there just I guess in a way just to  
213 experience it as well erm but then another time I've been on an experience where I've  
214 shadowed well the same Senior EP actually and feedback was encouraged or like this  
215 conversation this dialogue kind of in front of everyone it wasn't just 'I'm standing at the  
216 front and I'm delivering' in you know kind of like a teacher kind of thing erm there was that  
217 engagement and I think it may be just depended on the sort of topic content and if there  
218 was that sort of opportunity for it I don't think necessarily think that each of the shadowing  
219 opportunities are you know set out like 'oh this one you sit and watch but then this one I  
220 need you to engage' or it's not like that it's it's a bit more fluid I guess but I I guess that the  
221 EP calls it then in that sense of how they how they want you to participate

222 **Natalie:** Hmm if you can recall what were you thinking when you were shadowing and  
223 watching that training

224 **Participant 3:** Yeah I was so one thing was looking at delivery erm I think that's just a  
225 teacher in me it's just like how is it delivered is it delivered in very much like 'this is me  
226 you're gonna listen' or you know are they engaged I look at the what they're presenting and  
227 then I think my mind is always going around sort of like how could it be better or you know  
228 erm what would I do differently kinda think if it were me erm and then yeah cos that was  
229 one of the things that I had whenever I actually shadowed one of the assistant EPs erm so  
230 one of the training programs we deliver I was watching her deliver it it was actually I felt  
231 really bad for her cos there were three of us watching her and it but my mind was very  
232 much 'okay here's the positives here's things I would change' but that's was more for me  
233 and I think that's that's just something quite like personal to me I I always look at things and  
234 think 'oh I like that' but then 'how could I make it or how could I do it' and like put my own  
235 sort of style on to it erm and yeah like and then also as well I kind of look at sort of like how



236 they engage sort of with you know the schools because obviously I'm conscious that you  
237 wanna have that good rapport whether you're only in for one you know and you want to  
238 kind of make it you know in at least some sort of interest or or you know like erm enjoyable  
239 (laughs) so I think if you're going to sit there for forty five minutes erm but again that could  
240 just be the teacher in me you know you always conscious of like someone sitting on the  
241 carpet for you know an allotted like the time and stuff so

242 **Natalie:** Mmm you keep talking about how kind of your experience as a teacher has maybe  
243 affected your role as an assistant I wonder if there's any other times where you can think  
244 that that might have happened where you've thought back to your previous experience

245 **Participant 3:** Yeah I think because we're in schools so much you I'm always touching on  
246 that experience rather like this week it's SATs week so I know what schools are going  
247 through I know what teachers are going through so I'll be conscious of that in terms of my  
248 emails or if I'm looking for something or needing something erm and then yeah I think as  
249 well like in terms of delivery and things and just trying to always put yourself in the position  
250 of the person that you're speaking to whether that's a young person or you know adults and  
251 things erm and yeah definitely think like that's informed sort of like my delivery especially  
252 whenever it comes to my sessions that I'm I'm taking the lead

253 **Natalie:** Hmm and how do you feel your role now compares to your role when you were a  
254 teacher

255 **Participant 3:** Oh so different (laughs) erm I think as a teacher if we come back to  
256 competency that was there I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a  
257 work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if  
258 it's just like acronyms or forms or you know it's kind of like that trainee teaching kind of like  
259 year again of having to get to grips with the new system and a new process erm cos that's  
260 the thing as well like things here move much slower but I get I get why like you know you've  
261 got time constraints with the people you're dealing with but you know also you got  
262 expectations like you know I I think I went out three times to see a young person for an  
263 observation and they weren't in each time and it's just how it goes and so that just makes  
264 that process even longer whereas with teaching it's kind of like need that done today or

265 tomorrow or by Monday or you know you're you're sort of erm time frames I feel are much  
266 tighter as here it's quite open

267 **Natalie:** And what's that feel like for you

268 **Participant 3:** At the beginning (laughs) not so nice erm I think because again I had time  
269 more time than an EP so I kinda felt like if we're talking about something on Monday I could  
270 have it done by Friday but then I realize that that's me putting that expectation on other  
271 people and I had to kinda learn not to do that that you know yes I might have time until  
272 Friday but other people won't and I think that's something I've had to sort of adapt to with  
273 this role because things don't move as fast as maybe I could or would like erm so yeah  
274 patience

275 **Natalie:** And I guess maybe just could you maybe describe a typical day in your role maybe

276 **Participant 3:** Yeah like erm I think of today you know this morning we had peer supervision  
277 we're kind of going through each take turns on who you know does the minutes and things  
278 in the agenda so that was me erm and afterwards we met with our deputy manager we're  
279 just kind of talking over things about like evaluation processes and how they're gonna go  
280 and then I came back cos we're two different sites so I came back to this site I was then  
281 going through the calendar because I had to set up my supervisions with my supervisor so I  
282 was doing all that and then I'm and then today like just this afternoon I've been working on  
283 a poster around adverse childhood experiences erm but like Monday is going to be just  
284 advice writing you know it varies a lot you know some days you can be in a zone where  
285 you're reading you know just for pleasure or whatever it is that you wanna look at other  
286 days it could be you could be spending a day making a PowerPoint for something or  
287 rejigging a PowerPoint erm another day could be you know meeting with an EP to go over  
288 the analysis like the WPPSI you know and kind of going over your interpretation of it  
289 another day could be like tomorrow I'm gonna be making a video for zones of regulation so  
290 it's that kind of like it it moves around quite a lot like not I wouldn't say not I wouldn't say  
291 every day is the same

292 **Natalie:** How does that variability feel

293 **Participant 3:** It feels great yeah and one thing that I've learned to enjoy about this job is  
294 the autonomy it's kind of like the calendar's mine so I've decided Monday and Tuesday I'm  
295 going to take for advice writing I've blocked it out but the same time I'm working with the  
296 EPs on the afternoon and Tuesday afternoon one around erm sorta ACES in care home erm  
297 children's homes and then the other one is EBSNA EBSNA training erm so again like two  
298 different sort of two different EPs two different sort of training but erm having that  
299 involvement is it's great

300 **Natalie:** Hmm that's really interesting and you mentioned about supervision a couple of  
301 times could you tell me a bit more about that

302 **Participant 3:** Yes so we have supervision with the senior EP that we've been allocated erm  
303 that happens every two weeks and then we have supervision peer supervision with each  
304 other every week that's just the kinda keep on top of things sort of upcoming dates or  
305 anything that you know has kind of come up or we're kind of not sure about and and  
306 they've changed as well like our peer supervisions used to just be kind of like keeping on top  
307 of jobs but now that we're kinda keeping on top of it and then there's little lulls sort of like  
308 in between half terms where maybe like everything's coming to an end and we're waiting  
309 for the next one to begin we then start to look around sort of like article reading so we  
310 introduced that we're beginning to I think it was we each read an article and delivered to  
311 each other to kind of keep each other informed but then we changed that we all read the  
312 same article now and we sorta reflect and critique that erm and I think it's it was just  
313 something that think for me I thought was a good way of just kind of keeping the  
314 psychological theory cos I noticed it was something that you know you do kind of tend well  
315 for me I tend to lack because a bit like teaching you're there you do the job you've got the  
316 training you forget the psychology behind it and it's just trying to keep up to date with that I  
317 thought would be useful for us erm particularly with wanting to progress to the course erm  
318 but that was kind of a good way but then supervision itself is is great erm it's almost a bit  
319 like this you kind of have a natural conversation and you kind of discussing like anything  
320 that's on your like I always discuss about what I've got upcoming but then if there's anything  
321 particularly like I need help with so like if I'm doing the WPPSI and it's maybe with another  
322 EP they're gonna do analysis with me but then I maybe use my supervising time erm to kind

323 of just go through my analysis like how have I interpreted have I got it you know so then  
324 whenever I go to the EP I'm looking competent (laughs)

325 **Natalie:** And how does it feel when you do supervision

326 **Participant 3:** Yeah it's nice erm the supervision with my senior is much different because I  
327 guess the way he sees it is that's me talking that's like my time I do that whereas peer  
328 supervision's more about all of us we're all kind of like going through the minutes just kind  
329 of like having a conversation with each other erm and then we allocate the time to that so it  
330 it's maybe it's only structured around minutes kinda thing erm it is nice to kind of like we  
331 always make a point of coming back every week and kind of touching base and stuff because  
332 like that's the other thing as well we each have different interests and like I would say  
333 probably different strengths erm so that then sort of like informs the type of work we do so  
334 you know one of the assistants she's done quite a lot of the psychometrics so I would say  
335 her experience of that's really good checking with them when it comes to interpretation and  
336 one of the other assistants erm he's quite just like 'I wanna be interested in everything' so  
337 he'll go and kind of get involved with different many different different things whereas I'm  
338 very much like I wanna look at this one go and do it a few times make sure I get it before I  
339 look at everything else because I never want to overstretch and then one of our other  
340 assistants I think she's kind of the same actually she kind of likes to kind of dabble a bit in  
341 everything but there is more of a niche there I think she's had much more traction on  
342 different projects and stuff on that longevity kind of there based on her background so yeah  
343 it's it's nice that we're we kinda come together even though we're in the same service we're  
344 talking about how we're each doing something different and how it's contributing to our  
345 experiences and things it's quite it's nice to hear and share

346 **Natalie:** It sounds like there's that kind of working together like learning from each other  
347 kind of thing

348 **Participant 3:** Yeah absolutely yeah yeah particularly the assistant who was here I guess the  
349 year before she knew a lot more in terms of the process or sort of like what something  
350 would entail or even just silly things like oh you know 'd'ya know who it is that works with  
351 that or like deals with this particular intervention or delivers it really well' because she had

352 the year ahead of us she could then use that as like signposting it's quite nice erm but yeah  
353 no I think that was the idea around the article reading as well was that we were the aim was  
354 to learn from each other a bit more and yeah

355 **Natalie:** Erm so I guess is there anything that you've maybe thought of or that's come to  
356 mind as we've been talking that didn't occur to you before the interview

357 **Participant 3:** No not really just that I keep using the word competent (laughs) and...

358 **Natalie:** (laughs) I'm sorry I pointed that out

359 **Participant 3:** ...Now I'm really conscious that I've like kept using it erm but no I I guess  
360 maybe sort of based on your questions and stuff I've been quite reflective just within this  
361 period of time and I guess I'm becoming more aware that as we talk that I've actually  
362 covered quite a lot in the last nine months but even of that of the last nine months I'd say  
363 it's probably just been the last six you know the first few months was getting set up and like  
364 that's like shadowing and kind of like article reading and getting training and things whereas  
365 now I feel to the point where you know I can go to schools I can do an observation you know  
366 I can do a psychometric I can meet parents erm I haven't met with a parent yet sorry meet  
367 with the class teacher and kind of go through what it is I'm thinking or whatever like that  
368 yeah

369 **Natalie:** Hmm I wonder what you feel about that kind of difference between those first  
370 three months where you were doing those things and now where you're saying that you can  
371 go and do these other things like what's happened

372 **Participant 3:** Yeah I guess it just sort of like opportunities experience erm sort of that  
373 encouragement from the EP the senior EP you know I think back to the beginning I was  
374 shadowing him quite a lot cos he was my sort of like my EP point of reference or go to and  
375 but now since then I've tagged along with different EPs and I've kind of like and now EPs  
376 even come to us to kind of like 'ah I need you to do this' or 'I need you to I think you'd be  
377 really interested in that' or erm and I think also as well like we're becoming more familiar  
378 with the team I mean like I think here now I come in every day I'm in the office ninety  
379 percent of the time whereas a lot of EPs are on visits or work from home and then some do  
380 certain days so you know I think also as well them seeing you and having conversations in

381 the office and stuff I think that's helped you know they're like 'oh yeah like oh yeah  
382 [Participant 3] can do that' because I think as well there came a period of sort of like all  
383 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what  
384 they can do' erm and so I think maybe there was not awareness but by now we're fully all  
385 been developing shadowing different EPs and and now like I say they come to us which is  
386 really nice erm with different things

387 **Natalie:** Hmm thank you erm and is there anything else you think I should know to help me  
388 understand you experience a bit better

389 **Participant 3:** Erm I think it's it see the thing is like I guess yeah I guess like personal to me  
390 and then like the service and stuff is that the biggest thing I guess they did for us was they  
391 give us time you know there wasn't the expectation that you're going to do x y and z by this  
392 date and there wasn't any pressure to kinda like 'you have to be doing this by this date' it  
393 was just kind of like 'look take the time read shadow you know ask questions' that kinda  
394 thing and and I think in the beginning like that time frame thing I was talking about you  
395 know where things happen quite fast I think that's where I learned to kind of like okay things  
396 don't happen as quickly and you know having to sort of adapt to that but also be realistic  
397 and and yeah I think it's just I don't know I feel like the service of sort of instilled that in us  
398 and given us a good grounding erm a good foundation and then particularly then in  
399 preparation of going for the for the for the course

400 **Natalie:** How does that feel going for the course

401 **Participant 3:** Yeah I'm excited erm I I think you know this experience has been great  
402 because it let me see that yes it's a job it's a profession I wanna get in to without having to  
403 just go straight into a doctorate spend three years and then realise actually I don't like this  
404 because there's no other experience that you would get you know other than my teaching  
405 and and that's what I've liked and yeah that was a thing like this experience was it was a test  
406 it was a one to two year fixed term contract you know the worst I'll lose is two years you  
407 know if I if I don't get on the course and things and then that'll like affirm it for me that yes  
408 that's what I'm that's this is what I want and I guess that's that's what this has done this job

409 **Natalie:** Hmm I wonder if you can maybe think about how you know that

410 **Participant 3:** (laughs) I feel like I've always known it erm in the sense that like this is  
411 something I've always wanted to do since my undergrad and that was nine years ago so  
412 that's daunting erm but yeah it was something that I always kept in the back of my mind but  
413 I I went into teaching because I guess my supervisor at the time said that I needed a backup  
414 and all my stuff all my volunteering all of my modules were all around developmental  
415 psychology and child development and working in schools and things they got there so it  
416 kinda made sense that was logical erm but I think this job has just kind of reaffirmed it  
417 because now I know what the expectation is I know the reality there's only so much you can  
418 read or hear from a podcast or reading an article and things like that erm yeah I can see  
419 then so and even just like you know we have the Assistant EP network that you obviously  
420 we got you from thank you for reconnecting and that's been great because then I hear what  
421 other services are doing and I feel very fortunate to be in this one I don't know what my  
422 experience would have been if I was in another where it was maybe less core or more  
423 statutory I don't know if I would have enjoyed it as much because that's the thing like with  
424 being in this job and seeing how the EPs work I feel like we're very lucky because we get to  
425 focus mostly on core there's an expectation that we do like one statutory and then we have  
426 to keep at least one erm whereas like I know the EPs here are doing more than that a week  
427 you know and and whereas I have the freedom kind of like 'oh I'm gonna work on a poster'  
428 or 'I'm gonna like sit in a one and a half hour like webinar' you know that kind of thing like I  
429 feel like they don't get that and I guess I have to appreciate the fact that I do for now

430 **Natalie:** So I guess we've talked for forty minutes so it's been lovely speaking with you is  
431 there is there anything you'd like to ask me as we come to the end of the interview

432 **Participant 3:** No no um yeah I'm just I'll be interested to see how things go with your with  
433 your dissertation and stuff which I guess'll be next year

## Appendix 10: Participant four's interview transcript

1 **Natalie:** So as we've just discussed I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an  
2 assistant educational psychologist er please could you talk to me about it

3 **Participant 4:** Erm so I started as an assistant in October erm I had erm well there's four of  
4 us in total in the service erm and we two of us started in October two started in September  
5 I'd previously worked erm with the service erm as a practitioner on the SEMH team erm so I  
6 had sort of some past sort of knowledge about the team and the service and the county  
7 council erm and various things like that erm I've found it's very self-driven erm a lot of the  
8 work that we've done erm and we've helped to kind of inform erm the future kind of  
9 assistant erm program within our service erm so we were given erm a kind of er er an idea  
10 of how our week could look erm and that was given a day for oh no a day and a half for  
11 research and development tasks erm a day for statutory work erm two days for personal  
12 sort of professional development so that was mainly plugging in the gaps in our existing  
13 knowledge erm so for instance some of us haven't done erm sort of much going high school  
14 work or going to a high school or early years work or particular things that we've found  
15 along the journey that we want to develop in ourselves erm and we were given erm I think it  
16 was half a day erm sort of initially for interview prep erm and sort of time to prepare for like  
17 personal statements and things like that erm and we'd also had mock interviews erm set up  
18 by colleagues and that we were really supported to get on to the doctorate so that was kind  
19 of the main aim of the service erm was to get us all on the course erm and if we didn't get  
20 on the course look at feedback and potential of how that could be developed erm and I  
21 guess also sort of helping with retention and you know kind of shaping us into EPs that  
22 would fit into the service if we wanted to to come back but also looking at their kind of  
23 recruitment program erm and sort of this perspective of keeping us on in the future and  
24 having us back as trainees as well erm personally I feel that I've kind of enjoyed being able  
25 to be sort of self-driven and look at the areas that I need to sort of work on and develop on  
26 and I've used sort of time to be able to go into different provision and different schools  
27 different settings and develop my knowledge there erm shadow EPs erm and some of our  
28 specialist teachers as well who do a lot of the cognition and learning erm assessments the  
29 main kind of aim was to get us to do erm some statutory work but there hasn't been as



30 much of that for us to do so we have done some sort of chronologies looking at past reports  
31 on a child and sort of the background and pulling that together for colleagues erm we've  
32 done some sort of pupil voice work and some observations erm what else oh research wise  
33 we're we're working on a research project at the moment erm but due to sort of getting  
34 ethics approval and governance we've kind of helped in the kind of the initial stages that will  
35 then be passed on to future assistants to then carry on that piece of research erm and I've  
36 been involved in a erm a project with a specialist school looking at post sixteen options and  
37 er providing a parent pack erm because there was sort of you know a need there to support  
38 the parents sort of navigating all the information that was already available and having it in  
39 sort of one accessible erm document

40 **Natalie:** Great thank you erm I wondered if you could describe in a bit more detail for me  
41 erm kind of a typical day when you set aside time to do the erm research and development  
42 that you were talking about

43 **Participant 4:** Erm I think the thing is there isn't really a typical day (laughs) I I think it does  
44 vary a lot erm and I know even my experience compared to my colleagues erm has varied  
45 erm so I've sort of taken quite a big lead in er sort of the ethics erm document that we were  
46 sort of putting together for the governance erm so I was sort of doing quite a bit of research  
47 erm around well like the literature kind of review and another colleague of mine had found  
48 some information as well so it was sort of sharing that information erm and we would have I  
49 think they were sort of once a fortnight meetings erm where we were supported by erm a  
50 senior colleague erm and two EP colleagues where we'd talk through the research and sort  
51 of where we were up to erm sort of have any questions answered erm and development  
52 has really varied it's been sort of the the post sixteen pack that I was doing but there's also  
53 been some other service development erm sort of tasks that we've been involved in so a  
54 couple of my colleagues were involved in looking at sort of statutory erm and how we can  
55 kind of improve things erm in terms of like time scales erm and how we can kind of make it  
56 even more person centred and effective erm and we've also been involved in sort of  
57 development groups erm so our service you pick a development group every year erm that  
58 you're sort of involved in and mine has been erm looking at outcomes erm of the work that  
59 we do with young people and how we can erm sort of find about how effective our work's

60 been sort of you know how the how children and parents feel about that erm my sort of  
61 typical day I try to do eight till four doesn't often work that way cos if you're erm the county  
62 that I'm in the schools are very sort of spread out so erm you can be traveling to a school  
63 that's like an hour and a half away or further erm sort of mainly working from home  
64 although we do have a base that we can kind of go into erm but I find working from home  
65 sort of works for me erm and often they'll be meetings that kind of go on longer than the  
66 (laughs) the end of the day as well so you have to kind of I think that's a key thing being  
67 flexible and not being sort of too rigid and thinking you're gonna work eight or four or nine  
68 to five because there might be parents you have to contact out of hours or erm you know  
69 colleagues that you need to catch up with once they've come back from schools and things  
70 like that

71 **Natalie:** Hmm erm I wonder if you could recall are there any thoughts that stand out for you  
72 about the work you've done in the kind of outcomes development group that you were  
73 talking about

74 **Participant 4:** I think erm it's sort of keeping in your mind what you're doing the work for  
75 keeping that child kind of central to the process and kind of not getting stuck in the kind of  
76 you know churning out reports or the you know churning out erm work but really sort of  
77 taking time to reflect on 'why am I doing this work what's what's it gonna add' to sorta write  
78 the outcomes for the child but also sort of like the story and everything that's kind of been  
79 gathered around the child erm and sort of making sure everyone's voices are sort of heard  
80 and acknowledged erm not sort of in particular actually no sorry ignore that (laughs)

81 **Natalie:** That's okay yeah erm and how do you feel being involved in that work has affected  
82 you

83 **Participant 4:** Erm I think it's made me sort of be mindful of sort of the audiences when  
84 you're writing sort of advice erm and really sort of considering who might be reading the  
85 work and sort of how it might impact them erm so I've sort of done some proofreading for  
86 EP colleagues erm and sometimes I've kind of reflected back to them erm that for instance if  
87 one of the parents haven't been involved but there's been quite a strong narrative from the  
88 other parent you know how that other person might feel reading that and whether things

89 can be worded maybe a bit more sensitively erm and yeah it's kind of yeah it's made me  
90 think of keeping in mind kind of you know why are we doing this what what is it adding is  
91 there sort of need for doing it are you are you doing it to kind of fit the school's narrative of  
92 they want this assessment or ticking a box or something like that or is it actually having  
93 something meaningful you know for that child is it gonna make a difference is it gonna add  
94 something to I don't know if you read all the reports is their voice missing or is there there's  
95 something that you can kind of add to it so I think sort of helping me develop into sort of the  
96 EP I want to be to make sure I'm keeping that child at the centre and not doing assessments  
97 just because but actually what what is the purpose why are we doing it

98 **Natalie:** Erm and I wondered if there's any events that stand out for you in terms of you  
99 were talking about the professional development time that you've had erm could you tell  
100 me about a time that stands out for you from that

101 **Participant 4:** Erm so this week I've been into erm an alternative provision and I found that  
102 really sort of erm well a lovely experience cos it was a forest school kind of erm provision so  
103 it was lovely to go and spend the morning and find out how they work erm and and also this  
104 week I went to another sort of specialist school where a lot of the children had been sort of  
105 permanently excluded or fixed term excluded erm from their sort of mainstream settings  
106 erm and it kind of stood out to me how the importance of relationships erm both settings  
107 erm the sort of specialist school talked a lot about using erm PACE the importance of  
108 relationships erm the three Rs sort of things like that which really resonated with me erm  
109 and then actually this morning erm we had peer supervision with my other assistant  
110 colleagues erm where one of erm the team brought a case erm where the child the high  
111 school child was feeling like he wasn't being heard or listened to in the setting erm and how  
112 in that time that he spent with them how he really felt valued and he wanted to know when  
113 they were coming back and just felt really sort of happy and able to kind of be himself and  
114 and be heard and have his say and we were then able to reflect on that importance of  
115 relationships and how you know sometimes in mainstream schools with classes of thirty  
116 thirty-one those kind of relationships can't always happen there's not always time for them  
117 but how important they can be in sort of changing the story for those young people erm like  
118 the young people at this sort of specialist school that I went to erm how some of their sort

119 of stories of how they'd been behaving at their sort of mainstream setting and then how  
120 different they were in sort of presentation in that kind of smaller classrooms with really sort  
121 of attuned relationships with the adults and sort of feeling heard and having sort of like  
122 therapy opportunities and things like that how yeah the difference it can make and it kind of  
123 made everything kind of seem worthwhile sort of the work that we do trying to make sure  
124 we can pull out sort of those opportunities erm and and sort of help people to see actually  
125 this child actually just wants someone to talk to or wants that time to be heard by an adult  
126 and kind of and sometimes just giving schools permission to have that time when they're  
127 sort of rushing around trying to fit everything in curriculum wise that actually you know  
128 taking time to get to know this child build that kind of key person relationship might actually  
129 change the kind of narrative around that child

130 **Natalie:** Hmm how do you approach a case where you feel it would be beneficial to change  
131 the story around the child

132 **Participant 4:** Er probably with imposter syndrome (laughs) to start with erm sort of in this  
133 role erm so I've I've taken a lot of things to supervision erm my supervisor's absolutely  
134 fantastic and very experienced erm we also as a service have erm sort of peer supervision  
135 within the teams so we have groups erm where we follow sort of a particular model and  
136 that's made up of groups of erm assistants trainees erm main grade EPs senior staff as well  
137 erm and someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of  
138 some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be  
139 going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and  
140 sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful erm I think just mainly gathering  
141 all the information as well so it's making sure that we speak to erm schools and parents and  
142 the child and kind of triangulate that information so in my current role in my past role I was  
143 doing that sort of quite a lot erm and sort of producing reports erm but as an assistant erm I  
144 haven't done that quite so much I've done sort of you know bits of information that have  
145 fed into a bigger picture erm so for instance maybe doing the observation or doing the pupil  
146 voice and then feeding back to an EP and then we've been able to sort of have discussions  
147 about erm what we're each thinking or if I've shadowed an EP erm there's often been times  
148 afterwards where we can talk about erm what we both thought and sort of share ideas and I

149 think that's been really appreciated erm by me so as a learning point and I think there's  
150 been times erm I think shadowing also varies so sometimes you're with an EP where they  
151 more kind of want you to sit in the background and just literally shadow and watch erm and  
152 then sometimes you have the chance to sort of discuss afterwards erm other EPs kind of like  
153 you to get involved and like you to sort of ask questions and erm play more sort of an active  
154 role in the work as well erm and I found it really useful where possible trying to see things  
155 through from start to finish so if I'm even if I'm shadowing try and get the referral so I can  
156 look at the referral and look on our sort of systems at any past reports on the child then  
157 kind of whatever my involvement is with the visit or the assessment or the pupil voice erm  
158 and then also asking the EP if I can see the report at the end so I can kind of see everything  
159 and how it's kind of pulled together and you know maybe then what kind of difference and  
160 outcomes it's kind of had whether you know things have been taking on board by school or  
161 whether it's informed different provision erm and things like that really

162 **Natalie:** Hmm you mentioned the term imposter syndrome I kind of just wanted to get your  
163 understanding of what that means for you and how you've experienced that in your role

164 **Participant 4:** Yeah I think I'm somebody who isn't particularly confident anyway erm sort of  
165 personally and that's something I know erm I applied for the assistant post three times erm  
166 so before working for the service I applied erm and sort of didn't get through to I I don't  
167 think I made it through sort of the paper sift the second time erm I got through to interview  
168 and kind of the nerves got the better of me in the interview erm and then I applied for the  
169 third time erm and I'd really I almost kind of didn't apply but I also kind of wanted I think  
170 one of one of the feedback comments was that I didn't know much about the role of an EP  
171 which wasn't the case I think it was mainly maybe I didn't get it across in that sort of  
172 particular interview so the next time I went with the kind of attitude of 'I'm gonna show you  
173 what I know' erm and somewhere some confidence kind of came out and I managed to kind  
174 of do that and I think it helped erm that I'd done sort of like a webinar earlier in the week  
175 that had gone well and I'd listened to it back and sounded different to how I did in my head  
176 but erm yeah I think with imposter syndrome I've sort of found a lot of EPs have said that  
177 they also experience it still so it does seem to be something in the in the profession that  
178 doesn't go away but I think also kind of sits with that it's okay not to know things and it's

179 okay to be able to go away and look things up and consider things and not necessarily have  
180 the answers in that moment which sometimes I find schools kind of want that answer  
181 straight away but actually erm people have said to me it's really good to to kind of consider  
182 things and say 'right I'll go away I'll find the information and I'll come back to you' erm I've  
183 been involved in delivering well sort of co-delivering some training erm and I was sort of  
184 feeling very much like 'do I know more than the people in the room' erm and I think  
185 sometimes age comes into it when there's you know teachers that have been doing the job  
186 or head teachers or SENCOs that have been doing the job for years and then you're going in  
187 and you're sort of giving them pointers can feel a bit daunting erm and and with the training  
188 that was co-delivered erm it was also interesting to speak to the EPs who have done it loads  
189 of times before and still they were feeling that sort of same you know the nerves and the  
190 imposter syndrome and but also kind of you don't have to be the expert in the room and  
191 kind of you know like recognising that parents are the expert in their own child erm and  
192 that's sort of that's helped but I think still there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna  
193 know yeah is someone gonna know more than me or is it gonna' I don't know (laughs) it's a  
194 tricky one

195 **Natalie:** Yeah hmm I know you mentioned about maybe differences in the shadowing  
196 opportunities I wondered if you could tell me about a time where you've shadowed and  
197 you've kind of sat back and watched and then had the discussion afterwards

198 **Participant 4:** Yeah erm I found and I don't know if this is relevant or or not relevant it has  
199 tended to be with more erm of the kind of established EPs or people who have been in the  
200 role longer or erm where I think that they maybe I don't know whether it's that they don't  
201 almost don't remember their sort of being an assistant or being a trainee and needing to  
202 kind of find your feet in the room or whether it's that they've got like an established pattern  
203 of how how they do things and how they kind of see their sort of plan for the session going  
204 erm it has been really interesting erm and in all of the shadowing opportunities finding  
205 things like how the EPs or the senior teachers oh sorry specialist teachers how they  
206 introduce themselves to the child and how they introduce the tasks erm and I've sort of  
207 found sort of sitting back that you can kind of do that and then think 'oh actually I would  
208 take that piece on board I quite liked how you did that' or 'actually I would have like you

209 know erm maybe not done a psychometric erm sort of test there I would have maybe done  
210 like the ideal school or something like that' and it's been sort of interesting to reflect on that  
211 personally afterwards erm but also sort of having a conversation with the EP and kind of  
212 exploring you know their thought processes around erm why they did certain things erm  
213 with the people where they sort of encourage more active participation I found that a little  
214 bit more comfortable in the sense not I think I'm very aware that they are obviously you  
215 know there as the sort of more senior person in the room and er not to kind of interrupt or  
216 disrupt sort of the flow but it's helped with the child erm so you're not kind of the strange  
217 person sorta sat mute in the corner of the room but actually you you have a voice and  
218 you're there for a reason and you kind of you're approachable to the child as well and it's  
219 been sort of helpful in those times to be able to sort of erm you know bounce things off  
220 each other or maybe notice things that the other person hasn't noticed erm or sort of ask a  
221 question that maybe someone hadn't thought about erm so I've probably found those times  
222 more more valuable to probably the child and and myself not sure about the EP erm they've  
223 always sort of reflected that it's been useful to sort of have another pair of eyes and  
224 someone else working with them erm yeah

225 **Natalie:** Thank you erm I wondered if you had any times you could tell me about where you  
226 felt that you had found that kind of way of working valuable so you said that you found  
227 sometimes it's more valuable for you and the young person do you have any examples of  
228 where you felt that

229 **Participant 4:** Erm so there's one particular time would be when sort of my interests were  
230 more like in line with the child so in this particular inci-incident it was football so erm I was  
231 able to sort of build rapport with the child about football whereas erm the EP sort of didn't  
232 necessarily have that that sort of connection erm or sometimes erm if it if I've been with a  
233 erm male EP and the child sort of felt more happy sort of talking to a female erm I'm trying  
234 to think there was another er sort of times with rapport as well sort of like when you've  
235 been able to sort of play games and you're all involved and it doesn't feel sort of quite so  
236 much as erm like two people almost sort of like interviewing each other all that sort of sort  
237 of dynamics it's been more of a kind of group conversation erm because there's been the

238 three of us kind of involved in it rather than just like the EP and the child erm there's  
239 probably other examples but I can't (laughs) sort of think of them off the top of my head

240 **Natalie:** That's fine thank you erm and at the beginning you mentioned that you had a bit of  
241 time to focus on your application for the course could you tell me a bit more about what  
242 that looked like

243 **Participant 4:** Yes so erm it it was kind of quite a quick turnaround for me starting in  
244 October and then erm the applications happened to be in November erm but we had  
245 opportunities for um a senior in the team to kind of proofread erm our personal statements  
246 erm which was really valuable erm I also called on other people that I knew other colleagues  
247 um from past roles and from Twitter erm I'd met a couple of people that had said that they  
248 would give me feedback erm so that was really valuable erm so we had time to sort of you  
249 know perfect and hone our personal statements erm we sort of had time that if it didn't  
250 happen for me due to when I started but if open days sort of happened during sort of um  
251 like working days we were able to sort of leave work early to travel erm to the open days  
252 erm we had sort of mock interview days where um a senior EP and a couple of EP colleagues  
253 really tried to make it feel like a um like an actual interview day erm which was really for me  
254 that was probably the most valuable thing erm in terms of getting onto the course erm so  
255 we had a group task we then had a written task based on the group task we had individual  
256 interviews erm I believe there was something yeah it was just those three things over the  
257 course of a day erm and then we did like a follow-up mock interview where they didn't feel  
258 like we needed to do um the written task again but we did a group task erm and we also had  
259 like a one to one interview as well and they really sort of gave us pointers of erm trying to  
260 unpick the questions especially sort of it was like a two-parter question making sure you'd  
261 answered all the parts of the questions and more sort of techniques of like answering and  
262 making sure you've given that example and you've backed it up with like the theory and  
263 really sort of made sure we'd sort of worked on those skills so that we could kind of apply  
264 them to whatever questions we were asked erm and throughout um we've sort of had line  
265 manager supervision which has been a good time to sort of take any questions or debrief on  
266 erm doctorate interviews and things like that as well and reading lots of time for reading at  
267 the start which was really useful erm something we reflected back on to the service is that it



268 would have been helpful to have more time at the start actually shadowing an EP or going  
269 out into a school erm because that would have given us more to draw sort of in that early  
270 sort of period where um there were sort of a couple of my colleagues they hadn't been out  
271 into a school since sort of like the time they started to the interview erm I'd sort of been  
272 able to go into erm sort of an autism um resource base and sort of do interventions with a  
273 child that I could then draw upon but there was a couple of questions we sort of prepared  
274 for that were around 'what have you done in this at this current role sort of working with  
275 children' erm and so for some people they hadn't had that sort of experience but we did a  
276 um almost like a PATH looking at what we'd have quite liked at different stages erm in our  
277 sort of AP year what what that in an ideal sort of situation would have looked like at each  
278 point and what would have benefited us to hopefully then feed into benefit sort of future  
279 assistants

280 **Natalie:** Erm you've mentioned supervision a couple of times could you tell me about erm  
281 what supervision looks like for you please

282 **Participant 4:** Yep erm so sort of right at the start we had sort of a supervision contract  
283 where we discussed erm sort of how often we would meet whether it would be fixed days  
284 or whether it be flexible erm we opted for flexible due to sort of you know erm sort of my  
285 shadowing and my sort of diary but also my erm supervisor is very very busy so trying to  
286 sort of find a set time a week was not sort of possible erm it's usually sort of about an hour  
287 and a half erm where we sort of my supervisor will sort of check in on sort of wellbeing  
288 things and how I'm sort of I am personally erm any sort of work concerns any sort of cases  
289 that I want to discuss or um anything really where I want a little bit more input from her or  
290 where I want to sort of bounce ideas erm off her or sometimes I'll ask how she would sort of  
291 approach a a situation or a case erm and I feel like I've got a really good relationship with my  
292 supervisor which means that I feel like I could be completely honest erm and open with her  
293 and that I know that she'd be sort of keep things confidential and where if she needed to  
294 escalate things she'd escalate them but sort of in a sensitive erm way erm and that's I just  
295 really think that that's been sort of invaluable that's been fortnightly sort of regularly  
296 throughout um mainly on teams a couple of times we've met in person but sort of outside  
297 of supervision I could call her or message her erm and be able to sort of catch up in that

298 respect erm weekly we have assistant EP peer supervision where sometimes we've met up  
299 in person over a coffee erm sort of most of the time sort of via Teams and we've just sort of  
300 had a general sort of chat and sort of checking with each other wellbeing wise erm we've  
301 been able to sort of share experiences around sort of interviews erm and sort of bounce  
302 ideas off each other sort of talk about cases erm sort of share opportunities so for instance  
303 if I'd booked up to go to a specialist provision and they were happy for someone else to  
304 come along sort of sharing opportunities in that way erm and in our I think they're half  
305 termly um EP meetings sometimes we'll have that peer supervision but I mentioned before  
306 erm where we go through sort of a certain model erm I won't say it (laughs) just in case it  
307 sort of what is an identifying erm factor but we have a model that we go through erm and  
308 where someone will be like the case presenter someone will be the moderator keeping us  
309 to time we'll all get opportunities to ask questions to sort of clarify things then the erm  
310 person who brought the case will kind of step out of the circle we'll all kind of have a discuss  
311 about things then we'll sort of feedback erm and then the person who brought the case has  
312 a sort of chance to summarise at the end and talk about their thinking and where they might  
313 go from that so there sort of several different sort of supervision um sort of opportunities  
314 that we use and and they really have been yeah a godsend at times (laughs) especially  
315 interview times when things are stressful and you think 'did I answer that correctly or did I  
316 you know is there something I should have done differently' erm a particular example I had  
317 a group task where it really didn't go to plan and there was one person who dominated the  
318 whole kind of conversation er talked over people didn't give anyone really chance to to say  
319 much at all and I was able then to reflect back in supervision of you know if that was a I  
320 don't know a parent or a teacher or someone in consultation how to sort of handle that and  
321 whether I sort of did things the right way and whether to sort of stop that person or  
322 whether to let them speak and then reflect and sort of speak to them separately afterwards  
323 and those kind of things

324 **Natalie:** How do you feel having those different types of supervision has affected you

325 **Participant 4:** Erm I think it's helped me to sort of be reflective on my practice and erm sort  
326 of a particular thing with sort of my line manager supervision er there were times where I  
327 was supposed to go out with EPs erm and then it was deemed that maybe it wasn't suitable

328 because the child might not respond well to two adults being there or um I don't know  
329 opportunities fell through or the child wasn't at school or something like that and it was able  
330 to sort of offer me a different perspective on why that might have happened and rather  
331 than sort of sealing it sort of seeing it as a failed erm sort of visit actually thinking 'what  
332 what about this child's story so far might have kind of played a part in that' and I don't know  
333 so for instance if attendance is an issue for the child and then the child's not there when you  
334 go that's kind of adding to that that picture or erm if the child isn't sort of if it's not deemed  
335 suitable for two new adults have they sort of had past bad experience of adults or trusting  
336 adults or is there sort of SEMH erm kind of needs there so it's helped me to kind of see the  
337 bigger picture erm and things like erm working in a school erm where I was kind of getting  
338 some resistance from some of the staff rather than necessarily being so focused on that  
339 particular child looking wider at kind of what might be going on for that staff member is  
340 there I don't know anxieties around their own role are they feeling that their erm sort of  
341 competencies or professionalism is kind of under threat and therefore the reason they are  
342 behaving in this way is because of their own kind of things going on erm so kind of yeah  
343 having that someone else's perspective but also being encouraged to see a bigger picture  
344 erm I have to admit I think I've only presented once and moderated once in the sort of the  
345 the bigger team sort of supervision and again that's around sort of that imposter syndrome  
346 and erm you know is a question gonna be silly or erm if I present something is it something  
347 that I should already know and how might some other colleagues respond um even though  
348 it has been you know everyone's responded kindly and respectfully and everything to other  
349 people's erm sort of cases that they've brought erm but yeah I think it's all that kind of doing  
350 things for the first time and the nerves that kind of go with that as well

351 **Natalie:** Do you feel like that feeling of imposter syndrome has changed at all during your  
352 time as an assistant

353 **Participant 4:** I feel I think I'm trusting my instincts a bit more erm I think that that sort of  
354 helped when I've gone out with EPs or I've kind of read the referral and kind of thought  
355 about maybe how I would approach that or what I think is kind of missing and then they've  
356 the EPs have maybe said the same things that I was thinking erm that's sort of helped me to  
357 think 'actually yes I do I do (laughs) know something I do know you know have that

358 knowledge there that I can tap into' erm yeah I think I think slowly and I think getting on the  
359 course as well um which was my first time of applying and I really I didn't think it was gonna  
360 happen and I was on two reserve I had three interviews and I was on two reserve lists and  
361 my other colleagues so there's four of us the other three all got confirmed places erm and  
362 so that did sort of put that sort of self doubt in there um but I then came off the reserve to  
363 actually get a place in the university that I really want to go to so that made me sort of feel  
364 'actually no I've done something (laughs) right and I've done okay in the interviews to kind  
365 of get there and I should trust kind of what I know and and what I can do' and positive  
366 feedback has really helped from parents and schools and things like that as well

367 **Natalie:** So I just wondered as we're coming towards the end if there's anything else erm  
368 you think I should know to understand your experience as an assistant better

369 **Participant 4:** Erm I think sort of we talked at the start about sort of the other research  
370 that's out there and how it really differs erm from service to service about sort of the role of  
371 the assistant erm and sort of from interview days of speaking to other assistants some of  
372 the things that they'd sort of been involved in erm that maybe opportunities that we hadn't  
373 had erm and how we've kind of been able to feed that into hopefully the program sort of  
374 going forward for assistants but also that it can vary even within a service so um for instance  
375 if you spoke to my colleagues their experiences are very different to mine and that can be  
376 down to you know your line manager or opportunities or you know sort of personal traits as  
377 to whether you feel sort of happy to approach people or to sometimes be a nag to really get  
378 those opportunities if um so some EPs are very used to kind of their way of working and that  
379 they kind of might just book something up and and not because that is a kind of habit of you  
380 know the process they go through and actually you need to sometimes look at their diary  
381 and think 'actually can I come along with that' and having the confidence to say to  
382 somebody you know not wait for them to approach you but to approach them so I think  
383 yeah even within services there can be a real sort of difference of opportunities and erm  
384 even supervision with that we've all sort of compared notes and some colleagues haven't  
385 had sort of supervision since they've got on the course erm or if they're I don't know being  
386 supervised by a more senior EP or a part time EP or something like that that can really sort  
387 of change experiences as well

388 **Natalie:** Is there any way in particular you feel it might change an experience

389 **Participant 4:** I think sometimes the availability of the person erm so for instance if if you've  
390 got a more senior EP or you've got somebody that is part time sort of you haven't got that  
391 erm quite as kind of quick response to emails or you know the flexibility around 'actually I  
392 really need to discuss this case sort of as soon as possible' erm also it can sort of differ if  
393 kind of the other so the role of your supervisor if your supervisor's kind of on the ground in  
394 schools they can have you along to things that they're doing whereas if your sort of  
395 supervisor has other sort of erm commitments or specialisms sometimes that can change  
396 erm sort of what you're able to go along to or sort of what opportunities are out there

397 **Natalie:** Thank you erm and do you feel that you shared all that is significant with reference  
398 to your experience

399 **Participant 4:** I think so I think it was really hard to get on the role but I really do think it's  
400 been really sort of valuable in you know insight into what EPs do and what EP services do  
401 and I really would yeah recommend it to people but equally it's not the kind of be all and  
402 end all of getting on the doctorate and becoming an EP and I think that's really important  
403 cos I think sometimes if you maybe go for an assistant role and you get that knock back you  
404 might then think you're not gonna get on the doctorate or sometimes people think if  
405 they've got that assistant role then they're definitely gonna get on the doctorate and that's  
406 not always the case either erm but I think it is a good opportunity to sort of hone those skills  
407 and and get a bit more of an insight and even into sort of seeing whether that is the job for  
408 you and whether it is something that you want to to pursue as well but for me the main  
409 thing that I've really valued about being an assistant is the people that I've worked with so  
410 we've got quite a a wide team of different sort of specialisms not just EPs but erm other  
411 specialisms as well and being able to sort of tap into other people's knowledge and  
412 everyone's really sort of happy to share experiences and knowledge and information and  
413 resources and the same with Twitter as well which has also been sort of invaluable erm yeah  
414 that's really helped as well I think that's really key and I think overall there's people  
415 prepared to learn from new people coming in and that's the message they sort of say within  
416 our service that you've newly qualified EPs or TEPs bringing something else to the service  
417 you're kind of doing that research and we really want to learn from it and that's something

418 that you don't get in all roles and so that's been really lovely actually thinking I might be a  
419 new person but there's something they want to learn from me or something I can  
420 contribute which I think is really quite nice but then you have got some people that maybe  
421 who've done it a long time and get stuck in their their ways of doing things and maybe less  
422 flexible

423 **Natalie:** Thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you about your experience and  
424 get into know you better erm I'll stop the recording now

## Appendix 11: Participant five's interview transcript

1 **Natalie:** So I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an assistant educational  
2 psychologist please could you talk about your experience

3 **Participant 5:** Gosh um yeah so I started about a year and maybe two months ago or  
4 something like that and um I've come from like a social care background so it's quite  
5 different um it's very interesting but I think in in our service there's a very heavy focus on  
6 EHCNAs just because of like a huge backlog um and in my role I focus on early years which is  
7 really helpful in the sense that you can have a certain area to focus on and to learn more  
8 about and to feel more confident with but at the same time, you don't really get so much of  
9 a chance to explore like other ages and and you know cos that's a completely different way  
10 of doing the assessment and a report um for example with like teenagers and um because  
11 it's so busy with report writing there's not so much chance for shadowing either sometimes  
12 there's the odd thing of it is just yeah it's a bit of a when we started people were saying 'aw I  
13 just feel like I'm on a treadmill' we were like 'really' and now we're like 'yep (laughs) yeah I  
14 get that' so um yeah it is interesting and it's nice they've been really really welcoming and  
15 really helpful in terms of initial shadowing and sharing kind of their their practice and we've  
16 got some really good I think that's just my team though because there's several teams in my  
17 local authority where we do um journal club every two weeks or so so we've got like a  
18 normal team meeting and peer supervision and then we've got um like business type um  
19 meeting and then we've got the um the er journal club which is really nice because it gives  
20 you a chance to have more in-depth discussions with your colleagues about a certain topic  
21 and because we're not really office based so you don't really get to have those types of  
22 conversations very much and I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them  
23 like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions erm yeah  
24 gosh erm and I think initially the report writing was a bit like and the referral paperwork I  
25 was like 'oh my gosh' there's sometimes like ninety pages or a hundred pages and I thought  
26 'how am I going to digest all that information and then do an observation an assessment  
27 and then write a report as well' erm but I guess they've kind of started to streamline the  
28 process a little bit but I do find there's still quite a bit of repeated information erm so you  
29 just got to be really switched on (laughs) erm picking that out so it's it's a bit less

30 intimidating now because I know there's gonna be quite a lot of duplicate information in  
31 there erm yeah does that I don't know if that's it I'm sorry I've tried to touch on most things  
32 I think yeah

33 **Natalie:** Yeah erm you mentioned about that your focus is around the early years could you  
34 describe a typical day when you're working an early years case for me

35 **Participant 5:** Yeah erm most of the children I see attend two settings so they attend the  
36 specialist district specialist centre and they attend like a a mainstream nursery erm so yeah  
37 we do initially just look at the paperwork and we do like a draft or skeleton report  
38 depending on how old the request is and if I know that the child has changed already quite a  
39 lot then I might not include so much information yet erm but with the early years like our  
40 area's prioritising early years so that children have a plan when they start school so most of  
41 the time we can hit the deadline or you know it's not too far off so it's not like you know six  
42 months (laughs) down the line kind of thing erm which is quite helpful cos I initially had a  
43 few of those and then the paperwork is just completely irrelevant and is really hard to  
44 prepare yeah erm and to have a good idea of how yeah what kind of questions asks other  
45 than you know check everything (laughs) type thing erm so yeah I would do that I would just  
46 prepare like a draft skeleton report and then I tend to write questions I kind of do it in the  
47 report format I do like speech and language communication area and then I try to organise  
48 it cos then it's easier to type up after and I write some like prompts of things that I want to  
49 just double check or I often want a bit more information cos there's often quite broad  
50 statements in them in the referral paperwork like 'oh there they have an interest in  
51 numbers they're amazing with numbers' and it's like 'okay well (laughs) what does that  
52 mean you know can you tell me what that looks like and what they do and how they  
53 play' because often it's like 'aw repetitive play' you know there's a big range within that um  
54 so then I normally go in for about an hour and a half or so in each setting probably erm  
55 although if it's really complex need I probably do two hours um just in case there's  
56 something because you don't always see such a range of things within an hour and a half for  
57 those children um yeah so I would try and do like an observation as naturally as possible  
58 (laughs) erm which we're expected for the children who are not really aware that you're  
59 there and I always say you know 'just do what you normally would cos I would like to see



60 them as they would normally be' rather than you know I do think it's nice to do something  
61 with them if they're at that kind of level and they can communicate um fairly clearly or you  
62 know using PECs or something like that erm but I'm a bit I shy away from too much  
63 assessment type interaction things especially in early years because I feel there's not really  
64 true representation of what they would be like normally cos sometimes they can do  
65 something with me but they don't normally do it with adults and it could be because I'm  
66 encouraging them to do it and they normally don't have that but sometimes it's just  
67 something that doesn't normally happen even when they try so it's yeah (laughs) um and  
68 with early years because most of the child I see are non-verbal I would then also chat with  
69 the key worker while I'm there I try and get some uninterrupted observation time as well so  
70 that it's not completely mixed all the time because I like to have a broad range and and I  
71 always ask if I can to see like structured and unstructured times to get a bit of an idea erm  
72 and sometimes it's a bit tricky cos some settings are like 'oh I'll do this now cos then you can  
73 see how bad they get' (laughs) it's like 'ooh you don't have to you know (laughs) please  
74 don't do that I can I can take your word for it' sometimes it's helpful to see how they  
75 respond but I'm always you know I don't want them to push a child into feeling completely  
76 uncomfortable erm so then yeah we do that have a chat with the key worker and at the  
77 moment we do parent carer meetings mostly virtual (sighs) erm just because it saves time  
78 and because as an assistant you work with an EP so then you can't do that on your own and  
79 the logistics of that are quite tricky sometimes (laughs) erm but if their parents are if like  
80 English is a second language or something like that or we think there might be a learning  
81 need with parents then we try and do face to face do always check and yeah if there's a  
82 preference um but if possible you know it's a bit easier online although it's not meant to be  
83 like that erm and then mostly with the online ones without the nursery erm because I speak  
84 with the nursery beforehand so it's not like the person centred meetings (sighs) really erm  
85 like with all the professionals but sometimes I feel like that works better especially if there's  
86 a very different view between parents and nursery cos then the meeting kind of get caught  
87 up in that rather than talking about what the child is gonna need and how they present or  
88 yeah it can just be a bit um tricky so sometimes it's helpful to have that separate sometimes  
89 it's not erm yeah so we do that virtually usually I would write it up erm write up the erm  
90 observations first and then send it to the EP before we have that the parent meeting so they

91 have a bit of a an updated idea erm but I have one EP who likes to come along who likes to  
92 do the um parent meetings in person and then she would come along for like the end of my  
93 observation erm which in one sense it feels a bit like 'aw all like don't you trust me' (laughs)  
94 but in another sense is quite helpful because then they've actually seen the child and then  
95 when I talk to them about the child or you know if we're having a bit of a formulation type  
96 conversation then it feels a bit better that they've actually seen them erm although they  
97 might not see as much as I've seen during that like an hour and a half it's still a bit more  
98 helpful I think cos otherwise it's completely on you which is okay but it's sometimes hard to  
99 explain nuances I guess just through paperwork erm yeah and then once we've had the  
100 parent carer um meeting I would write that up and then incorporate any goals or like any  
101 outcomes that they would want erm depending erm I might rephrase them a bit cos  
102 sometimes it's a bit especially with children who have a diagnosis of autism they're like 'oh  
103 we just want them to be normal (laughs) we want them to have 10 friends' and you're just  
104 like 'well you know we might give them the opportunity to get the skills and the opportunity  
105 to make friends but if they don't want to then' you know it's not not necessarily about 'they  
106 have to have one friend by the end of (laughs) reception year' although a lot of parents do  
107 want that um but I try and rephrase it a little bit and then I will well depending on how  
108 much time I have before the parent meeting I might already do some of the outcomes and  
109 provision erm but if I already know that parents have quite a different view I might leave  
110 that until after so I don't have to rewrite (laughs) too much of it erm cos if it was something  
111 that was really straightforward I might just add a bit or change slight bits but some of them I  
112 think if it's very different it can be quite yeah tricky to to rewrite or you know put in every  
113 sentence 'at school they present like this oh at nursery they present like this however at  
114 home (laughs) they present differently' although the focus is obviously on on nursery  
115 because it's more similar to what they might be like at school erm but if they're completely  
116 different at home then I do like to include a bit of that information just to show that that  
117 might also show at school especially cos it's quite a big transition erm yeah so then I would  
118 type up everything and then I'd write the psychological perspective I basically write the  
119 whole report um which is quite nice actually quite like to do the psychological perspective  
120 part and then it gets sent to the EP and depending on the EP we would either have a bit  
121 more of a discussion around it or it's just like email and then they'll just write back any

122 questions or if they want to put something a bit differently erm yeah there's quite a bit of  
123 variation in how people do reports so that's I find that quite tricky cos if I work with one EP  
124 for like four children you get really used to how they like certain things or how they like  
125 things to be phrased and some of them are very like minimalistic with their wording some of  
126 them really like to have a narrative erm so it's tricky to like have lots of different children  
127 with lots of different EPs um I can remember some of the the changes but some of them  
128 you know it's yeah it's hard to (laughs) keep changing around and they're always like 'oh you  
129 should find your own er report writing style' but obviously they still have to sign it and agree  
130 with it so yeah (laughs) fair enough that they want to make make some changes um yeah  
131 and that's it then usually um although recently I've been hearing back a bit more about  
132 when the plan does go through er sometimes about consults with schools erm and that can  
133 be a bit tricky in parent carer meetings which they have a really set idea on the type of  
134 provision and if I don't think that's going to I mean it's not my role to say where they should  
135 go but if I think that's not you know when it goes to panel sometimes it's very likely that  
136 that's not going to happen erm although parent's views do come first so they can pursue it if  
137 they (laughs) they really want to it's more I think um I had one where I mean I really felt like  
138 specialist provision would probably be the best place for them because they were  
139 developmentally sort of around six months really cognitively and behaviorally um and I just  
140 thought 'goodness I don't know how a mainstream classroom is going to support that' um  
141 also in terms of safety cos there was a lot of mouthing and eating um and it was constant  
142 (laughs) you know it's not like the odd thing um yeah but parents really wanted mainstream  
143 but and because they want mainstream and that's that easier option that will probably go  
144 for mainstream um but then I I sometimes find that bit hard cos we we don't say like 'aw  
145 that's inappropriate' but we do sometimes suggest like to have a look at other (laughs)  
146 types of provision but then I sometimes think like it is the report is meant to be for the child  
147 and like in the best interest of the child erm and that's sometimes tricky in a conflict I guess  
148 (laughs) erm yeah where you feel like how much should you talk about that um because not  
149 really our role but sometimes I feel like if that's really not the right kind of place for a child  
150 it's it's not nice if they're gonna have to go through that whole process of trying here trying  
151 there and then eventually end up somewhere where they are supported um although I  
152 guess the mainstream can still say that they can't make need um but even if that happens at

153 that point I think the specialist school places were already full so it was like 'oh' (laughs)  
154 yeah it's really tricky I think sometimes and you have the other way around as well but that  
155 doesn't often go through because there's so many you know there's only so many places  
156 and not enough yeah for the children who need it or for the parents who want it (laughs)  
157 yeah

158 **Natalie:** Thank you that's really interesting about what you were saying about how you do  
159 your work erm I noticed that you said that sometimes erm it's quite tricky working with  
160 different educational psychologists I wonder if you could tell me a bit more about working  
161 with educational psychologists in your role

162 **Participant 5:** Yeah erm yeah so some of them I think from the start they're a bit more  
163 involved (laughs) erm in terms of even before we see the child or before we meet with  
164 parents already having a conversation about how the child is presenting what we might  
165 want to find out a bit more about and erm and some EPs are really hands off like I will just  
166 send them the invitations (laughs) for the meeting and that's it and then we barely even talk  
167 after the parent meeting erm but with some of them and sometimes yeah I don't know I  
168 sometimes like that but sometimes especially if it's like a more complex child, or more  
169 complex background then it's nice to have that conversation afterwards a bit more or even  
170 throughout when they do make their adjustments erm because it just feels like you're  
171 gonna make better sense of the child erm cos I have one the one who likes to come along  
172 for the end of the observation she then often afterwards we have a real discussion about  
173 how the child presents and like a formulation about why they present differently here or  
174 why they might not be able to do something or in a different setting um and that's really  
175 quite helpful cos then you feel a bit more confident that you're along the right tracks I guess  
176 um cos if you're left to make your own formulation I do like it but like with the complex ones  
177 it's a bit yeah it's nice to have that support I guess and to yeah to explore that together and  
178 also in the observation when she comes along at the end I'm always like sometimes she asks  
179 a few more questions and a lot of the time I have already got answers to most of them but  
180 there's a way that they often ask questions that like 'aw (laughs) I need to practice that' you  
181 know like the curious questioning erm and also helping I guess the setting find things out for  
182 themselves which I try and do but I feel like gosh that's really something (laughs) I would like

183 to learn a bit more like when when I go on to the course erm and like also more of a  
184 formulation question with the staff erm it it kind of depends on the setting whether they're  
185 open to that or not cos sometimes I try and they're like 'oh gosh I have no idea' you know  
186 (laughs) or they haven't really thought about yet about that yet um but when they have and  
187 I don't ask and then she comes along like 'oh gosh I would have missed that if she hadn't  
188 joined' erm so it's a nice kind of CPD opportunity as well I think to just see that a bit more  
189 often cos after the initial shadowing it was just like 'off you go (laughs) on your own' all the  
190 time and I feel like we are like making progress in the way we write and probably the way  
191 we talk as well but I think we could get we could learn more if we did a bit more together  
192 with the EPs...

193 **Natalie:** Hmm

194 **Participant 5:** ...And some of them have like a different way of focusing on the psychological  
195 perspective particularly erm around autism or whether there's a diagnosis or not erm or  
196 whether they're in the process of having an assessment er cos I I'm more of a fan of focusing  
197 on the presenting need cos it can look very different for a different children with the same  
198 diagnosis so I obviously it's in the report somewhere that they have autism if they have a  
199 diagnosis or that they're in the process on the pathway erm but in the psychological  
200 perspective I prefer to just focus on how they present but then one of them is really hot on  
201 like 'you have to include (laughs) if they have a diagnosis' um but then I just think you know  
202 a lot of the children we see are really young and they are often on the pathway and they're  
203 still the same child whether they have that diagnosis yet or not yet like it could be that a  
204 child's gonna be seeing the week after and then they receive a diagnosis and then it just  
205 feels weird to me that that would be a completely different report or like a different  
206 psychological perspective erm yeah so I prefer to focus on just the presenting need but then  
207 they're really hot on saying 'oh they have autism which means all of this is because of their  
208 autism because of their autism this because of their autism that' erm and I find that quite  
209 hard but obviously they are the main grade EPs (laughs) so it's their like final word I guess  
210 erm yeah but I find that quite tricky erm although most of the other EPs they're they're  
211 quite happy with the way I do it I guess um cos it is still in in the report as normally we  
212 normally put it at the top in like the context um so people should read it and then there's a

213 whole discussion around what's the purpose of the report which I very much feel it's not  
214 just to get the funding it's also to help maybe the setting and parents make sense of how  
215 their child presents in different ways and where it comes from um although they might not  
216 read it but I like to think that they might (laughs) erm yeah and I think that was the  
217 argument of the EP who is like 'include the autism diagnosis in that section because for  
218 panel people might only read that bit' and I thought 'they might but that's is that my  
219 responsibility to write it in a way as if they're not gonna to actually read the whole report' I  
220 don't know (laughs) a bit like hmm yeah and some of them say 'oh it's mainly just for panel  
221 to get funding and then that's it' um which I guess in some situations it might be like some  
222 parents just don't read because they get a whole pack you know, at the end (laughs) it's  
223 quite a lot to to take in I guess yeah does that makes sense

224 **Natalie:** Hmm yeah thank you erm I just want to dig a little bit around you'd mentioned how  
225 like 'they're the main grade EP so their like final word goes' and I wondered what that  
226 understanding of main grade EP compared to your role means to you

227 **Participant 5:** I think hmm it's just when when they like to put things slightly differently or  
228 like the autism bit in them in the psychological perspective even though I can say how I feel  
229 about it it's still them who are gonna sign it off and then you know they can just make  
230 whatever they change they want erm I think because I'm fairly independent with it I  
231 normally feel quite confident even though sometimes I think 'should I be (laughs) writing a  
232 whole report as an assistant is that the right thing' erm and 'is it ok that I normally only see  
233 the child and then the EP just sees my observations and the paperwork and then speaks  
234 with the parents' um it seems like quite a big responsibility because they sign it off and  
235 they're then ultimately responsible it's like 'ok (laughs) I'm fine with it' but sometimes I  
236 wonder if that's yeah the most optimal thing but I think at the moment because of the  
237 backlog they're in a position of 'we just want good reports we don't want amazing reports  
238 that you spend forever on because we just need to get them in' Like parents don't want the  
239 best work you've ever done in five months time they want something that's good enough  
240 that's gonna get that child support right now (laughs) um so I can see the argument for like  
241 you know it would take a lot more time like what's the point of assistants if if they're just  
242 gonna be only alongside EPs then it just feels like then you've just got a shadowing role

243 (laughs) you know then it's not a very useful for us as a service I guess um but that yeah I  
244 don't know if it would be helpful to have more or just every once in a while like have an EP  
245 come along um and some of my colleagues actually work just with one EP or maybe two and  
246 so they really get into the groove with things I guess um which is a bit more difficult cos I  
247 work with erm probably one probably like five or six different ones um and I have asked  
248 them to like put them together as much as possible so that it's not like one with this one  
249 and that one and yeah

250 **Natalie:** Hmm that's great thank you erm I wondered if you could tell me a bit more about  
251 how your experience of working with these different EPs writing the reports has affected  
252 erm you in your role

253 **Participant 5:** Um I think with some EPs like actually all of them are really friendly (laughs)  
254 you know they're really supportive um but they all have their different kind of attitudes and  
255 we have we had a funny situation although this might identify me erm...[identifying details  
256 removed]...and when I work with her I feel so much more I guess valued cos I I think she  
257 knows cos she's done our role I think she really knows what it feels like and it feels a lot  
258 more collaborative she's the one who comes along for like part of the observation um  
259 although initially I was like 'oh does that mean I'm not like good enough to do it on my own'  
260 but actually doing it I was like 'actually that's really nice' and then you can have better  
261 conversations erm especially around formulation um and with some EPs I think some of the  
262 ones are a bit more old school maybe erm (laughs) which I find if it difficult sometimes um  
263 because they have more like rigid ideas and a bit more I don't know a bit less open to  
264 discussion maybe so if I then share my viewpoint they'll be like 'ok but this' you know it's  
265 not like 'oh tell me more like oh I can see where you're coming from' it's just like 'yeah  
266 that's that's what you like but not not me kind of thing' erm yeah trying to think what else  
267 er yeah so sometimes with people like that I feel a bit like 'am I doing the right thing  
268 (laughs)' erm and then because they also don't come along it's then it's really hard not that I  
269 want to challenge them but if they then come back cos sometimes they've then changed  
270 something in the report without asking me and then I read it and I think 'oh no no gosh no  
271 that's not (laughs)' you know they've reworded something cos they've understood it in a  
272 certain way and then it's not actually what I meant or it's not accurate for what the child

273 presents um so yeah that can be a bit tricky erm yeah and I guess like not having those  
274 conversations makes that more difficult and then I have to really like check the report to see  
275 what they might have changed so and I like to put lots of comments on it where I think that  
276 the EP might want to change it or if it's not maybe completely clear I'll just write loads of  
277 notes and say '(laughs) by the way this is what I meant so if you have a better way of putting  
278 it then please feel free' or you know I thought I normally include all the things I think I could  
279 include and then it gives them an opportunity to look at all of it and then decide what might  
280 not be as relevant rather than me already doing that and then they don't have the full  
281 information erm yeah and some of them write really straight to the point in like more like I  
282 mean we do use bullet points but some of them it's really short um and I think it might be  
283 quicker to write (laughs) and quicker to read but I don't often feel like it gives like a true  
284 picture of the young person erm cos I like to put like examples from my observation or from  
285 when I've spoken with the key worker when they've given me an example cos I feel like it  
286 puts it a bit more in context erm cos I've had a few where I read the paperwork and I had a  
287 there was quite a lot of paperwork I had quite a good idea of the young person but then  
288 when I saw them I was like 'oh gosh I really did not get this from the paperwork' I'm always  
289 like I really want to try and avoid that (laughs) happening with my report but that's quite  
290 quite tricky erm yeah especially when there's like more complex needs if you want to still  
291 write nicely about them and about their strengths but then you put things in the strength  
292 boxes that for most children you would put in the needs boxes um yeah I find that quite  
293 hard to make sure that people who are reading it like at panel understand the level of need  
294 without making it sound yeah I don't know not nice or (laughs) yeah it's quite tricky cos  
295 there's some of the same kind of words that I would probably use but then yeah it it means  
296 something different for different children so then I'm like 'how can you differentiate  
297 between those' so then there's one EP who was like 'oh I just put' erm she puts significant  
298 (laughs) everywhere for like more complex needs erm or if it's like a bit like 'aw they need a  
299 significantly higher level of support than most children would' erm yeah and I think  
300 especially with those children it would have been nice to have the EP join cos that we don't  
301 see them so much and then I really felt like 'oh oh my gosh I don't know what to do (laughs)  
302 like how what questions do I ask' cos there's two that had really high needs like the the  
303 highest level of engagement for one of them was just like opening and closing their eyes and



304 maybe like tensing some of their muscles but it was not it didn't seem completely like  
305 controlled it was more like a reflex kind of thing erm yeah and then I was just like 'gosh' you  
306 know I tried to read a few reports that people sent me but it's still yeah something quite  
307 unusual for me at least cos I I come from a social care background so I have worked with  
308 children with um additional needs but it's normally maybe children who attend like a  
309 resource base or something like that maybe the odd one who's in a a special school but not  
310 that kind of level of need erm so I think like some training or something like that or  
311 shadowing would have been nice without (laughs) or just doing that jointly

312 **Natalie:** Thank you erm you've mentioned a few times as we've been talking about feeling  
313 that responsibility like a level of responsibility in your role erm I wondered if you could tell  
314 me a bit more about what responsibility means to you

315 **Participant 5:** Erm I think I just want to make sure that I really represent the child with their  
316 strengths and their needs and then help people make sense of it um especially if there's  
317 some maybe practice that I feel uncomfortable with (laughs) you know sometimes the way  
318 people talk about certain children or behaviours you just think 'oh goodness me that's not  
319 (laughs) not a helpful way to to talk about them' um which then affects their practice which  
320 then affects the child and then yeah erm so I feel like a responsibility to help write it in a  
321 way that people can make better sense of it and have a better understanding erm so that  
322 hopefully they can be better with the child in one way (laughs) or another which sometimes  
323 is really tricky um I mean most settings are quite good but there's been a few where you  
324 think 'gosh' they just assume that a child is behaving in certain ways because they just fancy  
325 being difficult (laughs) erm and they don't understand why they you know like lash out  
326 throw things and yeah then I feel like a really big responsibility to try and write that in a  
327 report but also in the appointment but then it's it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like  
328 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation'  
329 but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help  
330 them maybe rethink things' but that's also tricky cos some people are really open to  
331 questions erm but some people feel really like self-conscious I think so so in some settings if  
332 I ask em 'aw what do you think how do you think they might be feeling' or 'where do you  
333 think this comes from' then they're like 'oh gosh I I don't know I've never thought about

334 that' and then you can really like see them like physically move backwards and they just feel  
335 like they don't know things and then the rest of the observation seems a bit like tense um I  
336 guess cos you have that like power dynamic sometimes cos then people think 'oh  
337 educational psychology (laughs) oh they know everything' um and yeah which is tricky but  
338 then sometimes they're really open to it and it's nice then to have those conversations cos  
339 then if they don't even if they don't know they then are open to have a conversation about  
340 'aw I wonder if this might be the case' and I think 'oh yeah actually because of this that  
341 might be' or 'no cos we've we've had another situation' but I sometimes also have the other  
342 opposite where they're just completely bombarding me with 'oh what else should we do  
343 how should we do this do I do this right' (laughs) um yeah it's quite tricky so yeah in that  
344 sense I feel like a responsibility to do the right thing in order to help the child as much as  
345 possible but yeah it's tricky because of the relationships I guess especially if you don't really  
346 know them very well um but I also have one setting who really feel like they do everything  
347 right and they feel like they (sighs) know everything but they have some practices which  
348 maybe slightly outdated (laughs) erm but that it's really tricky because they feel like they  
349 know it and they sometimes feel like they should tell me what I need to put in the plan so  
350 then there's not really that kind of relationship where you would then have a conversation  
351 about the things that you disagree with (laughs) I mean I do ask some questions about it and  
352 they always have answers but I don't always feel like I can then challenge em on those  
353 things just very gently (laughs) erm yeah that's that's a bit tricky sometimes

354 **Natalie:** Hmm I wondered if you had any ideas about why you might feel you're not able to  
355 challenge in that way

356 **Participant 5:** Well cos if it's one where I go back regularly I want to (laughs) it's hard to  
357 balance like having a good relationship and challenging but also I have tried to challenge  
358 them before and they've just come back with like 'oh no that doesn't work like no it doesn't  
359 work that way we do it this way because this and this' and it's yeah it's not really it's a really  
360 hard to have that discussion and it's probably my questioning skills are not brilliant cos if  
361 you ask different questions normally get more out of it um yeah that just makes it really  
362 tricky and they also really see you it feels like they really see us as like we just take whatever  
363 they say as like gospel so yeah although I've had some better conversations recently there

364 but it's still very much like 'well this is the way we operate' and there are sometimes a bit  
365 more aware that they operate in a certain way but then there's still not like they don't seem  
366 to be very open minded into thinking about other possible ways um yeah especially when  
367 it's like erm some settings have like a lot of empathy towards the child and like when they're  
368 upset they like comfort them but then there's some where they're especially with  
369 behaviours or like emotional outbursts they're just like 'ur stop enough' and it's sometimes I  
370 just think if this child's distressed and continues to be distressed they just need a cuddle you  
371 know they just need reassurance like telling them to stop is not (laughs) it's not gonna work  
372 they're just getting more and more upset and then it's also really tricky because you're there  
373 as a visitor and you're a stranger to the child so then I feel like I should be comforting them  
374 but then if I do that then have I overstepped the boundary there and then they will probably  
375 be like 'oh' and if the child's not used to me and not used to that then that's also not helpful  
376 so then I'm always a bit like 'gosh do I just watch this in agony (laughs) or do I do something  
377 else or do I suggest something' um yeah that's quite tricky cos I have been asking like 'aw do  
378 they do they approach you for like comfort and stuff' and they're always like 'no no they  
379 don't do that' hmm I wonder why (laughs) um but hopefully it helps them think about that  
380 as an option um every time yeah

381 **Natalie:** Thank you erm so I guess as we're coming towards the end do you feel like there's  
382 anything else you think I should know to understand your experience as an assistant better

383 **Participant 5:** Um gosh no I think cos it's just about the experience that's yeah that's  
384 probably the only other thing is like but that's not really to do with being an assistant it's  
385 just to do with after covid like we're not as a team in the office so then you don't have the  
386 same relationships with the EPs I think because most of it's virtual we do meet for like team  
387 meetings but you know that's like once or twice a month and then everybody is there so you  
388 don't have people there regularly that you could that's why I don't really go to the office  
389 very much (laughs) cos I feel like there's no point if other people are not gonna be there but  
390 then that does make it more difficult even with other assistants because yeah you don't  
391 have that chat or like when you come in from an an appointment or something they don't  
392 go like 'hey how'd it go' type thing and then you build that relationship and it's easier to  
393 then have more difficult conversations or if you disagree it's easier to yeah talk about that

394 **Natalie:** Yeah how do you feel that has affected your experience

395 **Participant 5:** I think for a really long time I just felt like 'oh I'll just do whatever they say'  
396 and then I didn't really feel like I was able to say anything else like if I had a different  
397 opinion to be really really sensitive about it um and also in terms of like asking questions I  
398 just felt like 'oh if I do that then I'll be the annoying one who continuously (laughs) like  
399 emailing or messaging on teams' or something like that um whereas if you had that more of  
400 a relationship then it's a bit easier erm yeah and I'm also really bad with names so initially I  
401 was like 'um (laughs) what are people's names' yeah I think that just made it a longer  
402 process to like integrate into the team and feel a bit more confident in talking to them  
403 (laughs) and being a bit more honest about how I feel

404 **Natalie:** Yeah how do you feel that has changed do you feel it's changed since you started

405 **Participant 5:** Erm yeah I guess I've seen them a bit more um we do have like meetings with  
406 the whole service as well and yeah cos I've seen them more often even though it's still  
407 maybe at team meetings you then you work with some of them a bit more than others so it  
408 becomes a bit easier but I still feel a bit like comparing to previous jobs I would just yeah  
409 much talk to people much quicker much easier even just to double check something but it  
410 feels like such a task when it's virtual cos obviously you you know you have to go down the  
411 list 'aw who's online are they busy' you know 'when are they back' especially because we  
412 have quite a few part time people as well um it's then really difficult whereas if you're in the  
413 office with a team in a team area then you would just see people there and ask whoever is  
414 there maybe (laughs) erm yeah so I think yeah that's still like maybe part of I could feel  
415 more confident I think if that had been different

416 **Natalie:** Hmm thank you erm so thank you so much for the opportunity to talk with you  
417 about your experience and get to know you better erm I'll stop the recording now

Appendix 12: Sample of initial coding (Line-by-line coding)

Participant Two – Narrative Data (Lines 1 to 49)	Initial Codes
<p><b>Natalie:</b> Okay so erm so as we've just talked about I'm interested in what it's like to be working as an assistant educational psychologist so please could you talk about it for me please</p>	
<p><b>Participant 2:</b> Yeah erm I started here in September of last year erm and obviously me aim is to get on the thesis eventually but I opted not to this year just for kind of family reasons but think when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be erm and quite vague it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be they'd only had assistants for the previous year...</p>	<p>Starting the role</p> <p>Considering temporary nature of the role</p> <p>Prioritising</p> <p>Feeling uncertain</p> <p>Not-knowing expectations of the role</p> <p>Recognising newness of the role in context</p>
<p><b>Natalie:</b> Hmm</p>	

<p><b>Participant 2:</b> ...And I think part of that had been spent trying to work out what they were gonna do and and how the role was gonna look so there was some things that I took on straight away which was kind of some training and some whole class interventions so staff training and...</p>	<p>Others designing the meaning of the role</p> <p>Being thrown straight in</p>
<p><b>Natalie:</b> Hmm</p>	
<p><b>Participant 2:</b> ...Whole class interventions and then it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them and if they've had anything for me to do then that's been great it's not always been the case erm and then because of the last</p>	<p>Having responsibility to find activities</p> <p>Choosing activities Working with EPs</p> <p>Joining panels</p> <p>Doing casework</p> <p>Doing consultations</p> <p>Taking initiative Shadowing EPs</p> <p>Uncertainty of work</p>

<p>job I did I worked with young people who didn't attend school</p> <p>erm the local authority started as it happened when I started</p> <p>another EP started and that's kinda what she'd focused on</p> <p>into her her last post as well so being involved in kind of</p> <p>setting up er a system for emotion based school non-</p> <p>attendance or I know a lot of people call it emotion based</p> <p>school avoidance we like to be different so but (laughs) erm</p> <p>but we've done a lot of training on that which has been nice</p> <p>because it was a familiar thing erm that I've then got to</p> <p>continue with and and do slightly different here and then I've</p> <p>done a lot of training as well I think I've been quite fortunate</p> <p>that they let me go on training courses and let me kind of</p> <p>develop my knowledge in areas that I didn't really have much</p> <p>experience in so I'm doing some training in situational mutism</p> <p>at the moment erm and solution circles erm and then I'm</p>	<p>Using knowledge from previous work role</p> <p>Working together</p> <p>Having ownership/agency</p> <p>Use of 'we' - identifying with organisation?</p> <p>Delivering training</p> <p>Valuing using prior knowledge</p> <p>Adapting practice</p> <p>Delivering training Feeling grateful</p> <p>Having agency?</p> <p>Developing knowledge</p>
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<p>about to start a project erm working with international new arrivals which will be really exciting erm and then some of the things I do are like I suppose more adminy kind of stuff I don't mind that actually (laughs) it's quite nice is like a decompression erm but I love spreadsheets cos in a past life I was a data analyst so like I do a lot of stuff around evaluation so anytime someone evaluates a piece of training or you know some kinda course or even just a bit a work they've done with a school erm I'm kinda involved in doing the evaluations for that erm which is really nice actually cos it's nice to see what's been happening across the whole service cos there's some people who I don't get to spend a lot of time with it all erm so it's nice to kind of see what they do from that side of things and it also gives me a clue of who else I need to go and see and kind of plug holes in my own areas of</p>	<p>Project work</p> <p>Admin work</p> <p>Containing emotions</p> <p>Comparing to previous job</p> <p>Using knowledge/skills from previous work role</p> <p>Gaining a varied perspective of EP work - valuing this</p> <p>Seeing alternative perspectives</p> <p>Seeking valued work</p>
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Appendix 13: Memos written during Phase One of the study (please note supporting quotations are referenced using the transcript's appendix number followed by line number)

## MEMO 1

Version One - 12/05/23

### *Feeling Uncertain*

Participant Two expresses uncertainty about the nature of their role, not knowing how to be an Asst. EP: *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be'* (8, 6-7). They appear to believe this is because the Asst. EP role was relatively new in the service: *'they'd only had assistants for the previous year'* (8, 8), so it had not yet been established what their role in the service would be. This may suggest that their uncertainty of their role was linked with the service also being unsure about how to use Asst. EPs.

They also feel uncertain about certain activities involved in the role, such as what supervision was going to be like – *'I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me'* (8, 96-97). I wonder if previous experiences of supervision have influenced their thinking here when they say *'how's she gonna judge me'* – maybe using old understandings of supervision to try to understand what supervision is in this role?

They also seem to feel unsure in themselves in terms of their confidence in their ability to do some of the activities of their role:

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that* (8, 53-58)

Both instances of uncertainty appear to occur at the beginning of their time working in the role or the first time they had to play an active role in an activity. They appear to expect this uncertainty:

*Yeah I think it's that thing when you start a new job you always feel like you're a bit rubbish in everything and you've got to learn everything from scratch and some of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up* (8, 185-188)

I wonder if this uncertainty eventually goes away as they settle into the role?

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Version two - 18/06/23

## ***Feeling Uncertain***

Participants express uncertainty about the nature of their role not knowing how to be an Asst. EP: *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be'* (8, 6-7).

They appear to believe they feel uncertain for several reasons:

1. The Asst. EP role was relatively new in the service: *'they'd only had assistants for the previous year'* (8, 8), so it had not yet been established what their role in the service would be.
2. They had little previous knowledge of what to expect from the role: *'I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail'* (9, 4)
3. Others in the service were unsure about how to use Asst. EPs: *'there came a period of sort of like all 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do' erm and so I think maybe there was not awareness'* (9, 382-384)

They also feel uncertain about certain activities involved in the role, such as what supervision was going to be like – *'I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me''* (8, 96-97). I wonder if previous experiences of supervision have influenced their thinking here when they say 'how's she gonna judge me' – maybe using old understandings of supervision to try to understand what supervision is in this role?

They also seem to feel unsure in themselves in terms of their confidence in their ability to do some of the activities of their role:

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that* (8, 53-58)

*Yeah the first time was you know it felt unprepared underprepared* (9, 72)

Confidence in their abilities is seen as important to participants and influences their perception of how well they will be an EP:

*I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP* (9, 120-122)

They appear to expect this uncertainty:

*Yeah I think it's that thing when you start a new job you always feel like you're a bit rubbish in everything and you've got to learn everything from scratch and some of*

*the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up (8, 185-188)*

Both instances of uncertainty appear to occur at the beginning of their time working in the role or the first time they had to play an active role in an activity. Confidence in themselves appears to increase as they spend time in the role:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience... I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent sort of thing (9, 126-131)*

Although, Participant Three appears to feel this uncertainty in themselves will continue even when they are more established in their role:

*I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

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**Version three - 02/06/23**

### ***Feeling Uncertain***

Participants express uncertainty about the nature of their role not knowing how to be an Asst. EP: *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be' (8, 6-7).*

They appear to believe they feel uncertain for several reasons:

1. The Asst. EP role was relatively new in the service: *'they'd only had assistants for the previous year' (8, 8)*, so it had not yet been established what their role in the service would be.
2. They had little previous knowledge of what to expect from the role: *'I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail' (9, 4)*
3. Others in the service were unsure about how to use Asst. EPs: *'there came a period of sort of like all 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do' erm and so I think maybe there was not awareness' (9, 382-384)*

They also feel uncertain about certain activities involved in the role, such as what supervision was going to be like – *'I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me'' (8, 96-97).* I wonder if previous experiences of supervision have influenced their thinking

here when they say 'how's she gonna judge me' – maybe using old understandings of supervision to try to understand what supervision is in this role?

They also seem to feel unsure in themselves in terms of their confidence in their ability to do some of the activities of their role:

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that (8, 53-58)*

*Yeah the first time was you know it felt unprepared underprepared (9, 72)*

Confidence in their abilities is seen as important to participants and influences their perception of how well they will be an EP:

*I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP (9, 120-122)*

They appear to expect this uncertainty:

*Yeah I think it's that thing when you start a new job you always feel like you're a bit rubbish in everything and you've got to learn everything from scratch and some of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up (8, 185-188)*

Both instances of uncertainty appear to occur at the beginning of their time working in the role or the first time they had to play an active role in an activity. Confidence in themselves appears to increase as they spend time in the role:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience... I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent sort of thing (9, 126-131)*

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

Although, Participant Three appears to feel this uncertainty in themselves will continue even when they are more established in their role:

*I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

I'm wondering if there's also an element of uncertainty around how long they will be in the role, depending on when they get accepted on to a training course?

*I think I have erm yeah I mean I think my expectation was that I would be an assistant get on the course become an EP there we go and obviously the reality is different (laughs)...(7, 271-272)*

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#### **Version four - 16/06/23**

##### ***Feeling Uncertain***

Possible exception to the category? Participant Five says they feel more confident (maybe due to the level of independence they are given in their role?) but their thinking still displays uncertainty of their role:

*I think because I'm fairly independent with it I normally feel quite confident even though sometimes I think 'should I be (laughs) writing a whole report as an assistant is that the right thing' erm and 'is it ok that I normally only see the child and then the EP just sees my observations and the paperwork and then speaks with the parents' um it seems like quite a big responsibility (11, 230-234)*

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#### **Version five - 13/07/23**

##### ***Feeling Uncertain***

Participant Four also experiences uncertainty about the nature of the Asst. EP role: '*there isn't really a typical day (laughs) I think it does vary a lot erm and I know even my experience compared to my colleagues erm has varied*' (10, 43-44). They feel this may be because '*it really differs erm from service to service about sort of the role of the assistant*' (10, 370-371).

They also feel uncertainty in themselves, in terms of their confidence in their abilities, like other participants:

*there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna know yeah is someone gonna know more than me or is it gonna' I don't know (laughs) it's a tricky one (10, 192-193)*

*again that's around sort of that imposter syndrome and erm you know is a question gonna be silly or erm if I present something is it something that I should already know and how might some other colleagues respond (10, 345-347)*

However this has changed over time: *'I feel I think I'm trusting my instincts a bit more'* (10, 353).

They also spoke about uncertainty over how long they will be in the role, depending on when they get accepted on to a training course, like Participant 1:

*sometimes people think if they've got that assistant role then they're definitely gonna get on the doctorate and that's not always the case (10, 404-406)*

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**Version six - 28/07/23**

### ***Feeling Uncertain*** ***Theoretical Code: Lacking Meaning of Work***

Applying the existentialist theme of "existence precedes essence", participants may be feeling uncertain because the work role lacks meaning for them when they first start working as Asst. EPs. I have chosen to define "Meaning of Work" by drawing on existentialist and meaning of work literature as:

A way of Being based on an individual's understanding of themselves at work, their work environment, and their relationship with their work environment

Individuals may experience a lack of meaning of work because they have not yet had time to construct their essence (meaning of work) within the social context they encounter by "Being" in the role: *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be'* (8, 6-7).

This uncertainty may be because there are several ways in which Asst. EP work lacks meaning for both themselves and others:

1. The Asst. EP role was relatively new in the service: *'they'd only had assistants for the previous year'* (8, 8), so it had not yet been established what their role in the service would be.
2. They had little previous knowledge of what to expect from the role: *'I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail'* (9, 4)
3. Others in the service were unsure about how to use Asst. EPs: *'there came a period of sort of like all 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do' erm and so I think maybe there was not awareness'* (9, 382-384)
4. There is variation in how Asst. EPs carry out the role across and within services:

*it really differs erm from service to service about sort of the role of the assistant' (10, 370-371).*

*if you spoke to my colleagues their experiences are very different to mine and that can be down to you know your line manager or opportunities or you know sort of personal traits as to whether you feel sort of happy to approach people or to sometimes be a nag to really get those opportunities (10, 375-378)*

They also feel uncertain about how they 'should' carry out certain activities involved in the role:

- Supervision – *'I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me' ' (8, 96-97). I wonder if previous experiences of supervision have influenced their thinking here when they say 'how's she gonna judge me' – maybe using old understandings of supervision to try to understand what supervision is in this role?*
- Casework - *'I think because I'm fairly independent with it I normally feel quite confident even though sometimes I think 'should I be (laughs) writing a whole report as an assistant is that the right thing' erm and 'is it ok that I normally only see the child and then the EP just sees my observations and the paperwork and then speaks with the parents' um it seems like quite a big responsibility' (11, 230-234)*

They also seem to feel unsure in themselves in terms of their confidence in their ability to do some of the activities of their role:

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that (8, 53-58)*

*Yeah the first time was you know it felt unprepared underprepared (9, 72)*

*there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna know yeah is someone gonna know more than me or is it gonna' I don't know (laughs) it's a tricky one (10, 192-193)*

*again that's around sort of that imposter syndrome and erm you know is a question gonna be silly or erm if I present something is it something that I should already know and how might some other colleagues respond (10, 345-347)*

Confidence in their abilities is seen as important to participants and influences their perception of how well they will be an EP:

*I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP (9, 120-122)*



They appear to expect this uncertainty:

*Yeah I think it's that thing when you start a new job you always feel like you're a bit rubbish in everything and you've got to learn everything from scratch and some of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up (8, 185-188)*

Both instances of uncertainty appear to occur at the beginning of their time working in the role or the first time they had to play an active role in an activity. Confidence in themselves appears to increase as they spend time in the role:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience... I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent sort of thing (9, 126-131)*

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

*I feel I think I'm trusting my instincts a bit more (10, 353)*

Although, Participant Three appears to feel this uncertainty in themselves will continue even when they are more established in their role:

*I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

There also appears to be an element of uncertainty around how long they will be in the role, depending on when they get accepted on to a training course:

*I think I have erm yeah I mean I think my expectation was that I would be an assistant get on the course become an EP there we go and obviously the reality is different (laughs) (7, 270-272)*

*sometimes people think if they've got that assistant role then they're definitely gonna get on the doctorate and that's not always the case (10, 404-406)*

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**Update 04.09.23**

***Tentative Conceptual Category: Lacking Meaning of Work***

I've decided to take this forward as a tentative conceptual category for elaboration in Phase 2 because it helps to make sense of my "Creating Meaning of Work" category. I feel this lack of meaning is the "main concern" or problem that participants are trying to resolve - "what am I and what am I supposed to be doing?"

I have therefore created the following research question to further explore this tentative conceptual category through focus groups in Phase 2:

*How do Assistant Educational Psychologists experience a lack of work meaning?*

**Summary of this memo to share with participants as context for the questions:**

**1. Lacking meaning of work**

Participants in the first phase of the study talked about not knowing how to be an Assistant Educational Psychologist (EP), particularly when they first started working in the role, and whether they were knowledgeable enough in themselves.

**Questions and rationale for these (in italics):**

1. How do you feel your knowledge of how to be an Assistant EP has changed since you started working in the role? - *I would like to find out more about how meaning of work changes with time spent working in the role and whether this is affected by how long they think they might be working as Asst. EPs.*
2. Do you feel your knowledge of your self has been challenged when working in the role? - *I would like to find out more about whether participants did feel uncertainty in themselves, how this happens when working as an Asst. EP, and if this changes over time in the role.*
3. How has this affected you? Probe for positives and negatives - *I would like to know more about how lack of meaning of work and self in the role makes participants feel as Sartre (1956) claims uncertainty results in negative feelings of discomfort and anxiety that individuals need to resolve. This will construct more data about other processes that participants may feel are involved in uncertainty, such as emotional or cognitive processes.*

## MEMO 2

Version one - 26.05.23

### Seeking a Valued Way of Working

Participants appears to seek the purpose of their work, seeking work that seeking work that aligns with their values and ensuring their work is meaningful and valuable:

*kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done...kind of looking at who it's benefitting really (7, 67-76))*

*thinking about things I can do that'll support staff (8, 287-288)*

*doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could affect a lot more young people (8, 319-320)*

Participant Two describes a key change moment in their experience where the move away from seeking what they initially perceived EPs thought was valuable/meaningful work to aligning with the perceived shared values of the service, thus changing their actions by seeking different activities that align with these values:

*actually it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one to one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' and I think that was a big flip for me so you know my perspective that I'd come in and do loads a one to ones with young people...but actually I'm really enjoying spending time with staff erm either as a group a larger or a smaller group but kind of problem solving around young people erm it's not something that I did a lot of before and actually it's it's giving staff the tools and confidence sometimes to know what they can do for young people (8, 269-281)*

Supervision seems to be involved in Participants' experiences of working in a valued way as they differentiate between different types of support they have received from EPs.

Supervision can either be facilitative or hindering. Participants One and Two describe supervision as being facilitative of their ability to work in a valued way when they are encouraged to reflect on their reasoning and the purpose of their work:

*so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' (7, 79-81)*

*she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what what do you want to get out of this' (8, 80-81)*

However, Participant One also speaks about their experience of receiving supervision in a 'fixed way', which they appear to feel is less beneficial for them being able to work in a valued way:

*there were some that were kind of challenging but it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

This aligns with how other participants have described their experiences of supervision in Memo 4, showing there may be some overlap between these two concepts.

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**Version two - 23.06.23**

### **Seeking a Valued Way of Working**

Participants appear to seek purpose in their role, seeking activities that align with their values and ensuring their work is meaningful and valuable for both themselves and others:

*kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done...kind of looking at who it's benefitting really (7, 67-76))*

*thinking about things I can do that'll support staff (8, 287-288)*

*doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could affect a lot more young people (8, 319-320)*

*the report is meant to be for the child and like in the best interest of the child (11, 146-147)*

*what's the purpose of the report which I feel it's not just to get the funding it's also to help maybe the setting and parents make sense of how their child presents in different ways and where it comes from (11, 213-215)*

*I just want to make sure that I really represent the child with their strengths and their needs and then help people make sense of it um especially if there's some maybe practice that I feel uncomfortable with (11, 315-317)*

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

*it's sort of keeping in your mind what you're doing the work for keeping that child kind of central to the process...really sort of taking time to reflect on 'why am I doing this work what's what's it gonna add' (10, 74-77)*

Participant Two describes a key change moment in their experience where the move away from seeking what they initially perceived EPs thought was meaningful work to aligning with the perceived shared values of the service, thus changing their actions by seeking different activities that align with these values:

*actually it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one to one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' and I think that was a big flip for me so you know my perspective that I'd come in and do loadsa one to ones with young people...but actually I'm really enjoying spending time with staff erm either as a group a larger or a smaller group but kind of problem solving around young people erm it's not something that I did a lot of before and actually it's it's giving staff the tools and confidence sometimes to know what they can do for young people (8, 269-281)*

Some participants appear to feel restricted in their ability to work in a way that aligns with their values, particularly when they speak about times where others have decided how they will carry out the activities:

*it kind of went against what I would like it to be because you know working on my values is I'd like it to be person-centred (7, 84-86)*

*at the moment we do parent carer meetings mostly virtual (sighs)...although it's not meant to be like that (11, 76-83)*

Supervision seems to be involved in participants' experiences of working in a valued way as they differentiate between different types of support they have received from EPs; supervision can either be facilitative or hindering.

Participants describe supervision as helpful for them being able to work in a valued way when they are encouraged to reflect on their reasoning and the purpose of their work:

*so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' (7, 79-81)*

*she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this' (8, 80-81)*

However, some participants speak about being directed by EPs who are supervising their work which means they cannot work in line with their values:

*working on my values is I'd like it to be person-centred but then if it's a kind of fixed model then it can't be person-centred because it's yeah it's not having that opportunity to focus on the individual (7, 85-87)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

I need to see further how this code overlaps with "Being Supervised" to check if they are conceptually different codes or are related.

Update 21/07/23

### ***Seeking a Valued Way of Working***

Reflecting on terminology I'm using, what does a valued way of working mean? Is valued the same as meaningful? Something purposeful? Or something that aligns with their values? Is my way of understanding meaning grounded in what participants are saying?

I've listened back to all the interviews and felt 'seeking/finding meaning/values/purpose' accounted for the majority of the data the participants and I have co-constructed. The problem my participants seem to be trying to resolve is what is the purpose of being an Asst. EPs. But I wasn't sure what I meant by meaning/values/purpose as it was slightly different for each participant, I needed a definition that accounted for the variations.

When I have briefly searched for literature on seeking meaning/value/purpose, it comes up with existentialism – when individuals are faced with uncertainty, they realise life is meaningless and they need to create their own meaning of life. This seems to fit with the quotes I have coded as "feeling uncertain", (e.g., *'when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be'* (8, 6-7)) and what participants are talking about that I have coded as "seeking a valued way of working" so far (e.g., *'I'm trying to think about what kind of EP I want to be I suppose ultimately'* (8, 218-219) and *'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this'* (8, 81)).

It might be that Asst. EPs *need to create meaning* when working in the role because the role is inherently lacks meaning. This seems to be represented in the quotes I have initially coded as "Feeling responsible/accountable" (e.g., *'it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do'* (8, 15-16)).

This would fit with previous literature that suggests the work Asst. EPs do is different depending on the service they are in. So, it's not that there is a meaning of their work to *find* (assumes meaning of the role exists out there as a separate entity to the individual), but that they *actively create* their own meaning that is meaningful to them. I need to go back through my transcripts and check this idea against my data.

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Version three - 04.09.23

### **~~*Seeking a Valued Way of Working*~~**

#### ***Theoretical Code: Creating Meaning of Work***

Sartre (1956) believes that with a lack of meaning caused by uncertainty (link to "Feeling Uncertain/Lack of Meaning of Work tentative conceptual category) comes a sense of freedom and autonomy to create meaning. Participants refer to how they actively made choices for themselves that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 15-19)*

*we look at the calendars and we we do that ourselves it's very much like 'ooh I've not seen that before I wanna go see that (9, 185-186)*

*plugging in the gaps in our existing knowledge erm so for instance some of us haven't done erm sort of much going high school work or going to a high school or early years work or particular things that we've found along the journey that we want to develop in ourselves (10, 12-15)*

However, in line with Satre's (1956) assumption, participants also feel a sense of responsibility to create this meaning themselves:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do (8, 15-16)*

*we're all trying to learn as much as we can in what feels like quite a short space of time (8, 388-389)*

In response to this freedom and sense of responsibility, participants appear to actively seek and construct the meaning of their role, seeking meaning through activities that they perceive will help them to understand how to be an Asst. EP:

*I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 16-19)*

*I feel that I've kind of enjoyed being able to be sort of self-driven and look at the areas that I need to sort of work on and develop on... I've used sort of time to be able to go into different provision and different schools different settings and develop my knowledge there (10, 24-27)*

Once Asst. EPs have created an understanding of how to be an Asst. EP, they begin to think about how they **want to be** an Asst. EP and/or EP in the future:

*I'm trying to think about what kind of EP I want to be I suppose ultimately (8, 218-219)*

*for me it's about thinking about how I want this role to look for me (8, 191-192)*

*there's a lot of space for us to have a bit of creativity and to think about things that we wanna be involved with and areas of interest (8, 194-196)*

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

This process of creating a preferred meaning of the role is related to the values the Asst. EP espouses. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) distinguish between meaning of work and meaningfulness of work, with the former representing the output of a sensemaking process through which an individual interprets what their work means and the former representing the amount of significance of their work (usually positive in terms of desirability or value). Sheldon and Elliot (1999) assert that work becomes meaningful when there is congruence between the meaning of work that the individual has created and their interests and values. This is known as *authenticity* because the individual's work meaning enables them work in a way that is consistent with their beliefs and values (Ryan et al., 1995; Shamir, 1991).

Participants appear to draw on their values to create authenticity in their role:

*kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done...kind of looking at who it's benefitting really (7, 67-76)*

Values they draw on:

- Person-centred:

*helping me develop into sort of the EP I want to be to make sure I'm keeping that child at the centre and not doing the assessments just because but actually what what is the purpose why are we doing it (10, 95-97)*

*the report is meant to be for the child and like in the best interest of the child (11, 146-147)*

*it's sort of keeping in your mind what you're doing the work for keeping that child kind of central to the process...really sort of taking time to reflect on 'why am I doing this work what's what's it gonna add' (10, 74-77)*

*what's the purpose of the report which I feel it's not just to get the funding it's also to help maybe the setting and parents make sense of how their child presents in different ways and where it comes from (11, 213-215)*

*I just want to make sure that I really represent the child with their strengths and their needs and then help people make sense of it um especially if there's some maybe practice that I feel uncomfortable with (11, 315-317)*

- Relational:

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that*



*and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

- Systemic:

*thinking about things I can do that'll support staff (8, 287-288)*

*doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful than it could affect a lot more young people (8, 319-320)*

### **Mechanisms through which meaning is created:**

#### **1. Interpersonal Meaning-making:**

All participants view themselves *in relation to* others, thus they frame their descriptions of their experiences in relation to their interactions with others and the meanings construed through these interactions. They speak about how they learn from others and shape their understanding of their role through collaborative discussions:

*one of the things I've discovered about working here is how much collaboration there is and how much people seem to learn from each other (8, 60-62)*

*it's nice to hear other people's perspectives on that and rather than just have your voice and I think that's a lot of what when I'm working with the other EPs is that I get to hear their voice and their perspective and then think about how that matches with mine or differs from mine (8, 215-218)*

*we are we're all in a place where we want to learn we're all in a place where we know we're not the experts of things but we want to do well we want to support staff we want to support young people and so we worked out how to do that the best that we could (8, 242-245)*

*we kinda come together even though we're in the same service we're talking about how we're each doing something different and how it's contributing to our experiences and things it's quite nice to hear and share (9, 343-345)*

*there were some EPs who were very collaborative you had that opportunity to have that discussion but it was a lot of reflective discussion (7, 68-70)*

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

*someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sort of something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 137-140)*

*if I've shadowed an EP erm there's often been times afterwards where we can talk about erm what we both thought and sort of share ideas and I think that's been really appreciated erm by me so as a learning point (10, 147-140)*

*it's been sort of helpful in those times to be able to sort of erm you know bounce things off each other or maybe notice things that the other person hasn't noticed erm or sort of ask a question that maybe someone hadn't thought about (10, 218-221)*

Participants use the concept of "we" to demonstrate how they have created knowledge together with others:

*it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' (8, 269-271)*

*for our school for our community what is it that we need and what is it that we can do (8, 330-331)*

*we were given some time at the start to think about what we wanted the assistant job to be (8, 192-193)*

*'how are we going to gain their best views and be there for the right reason' (7, 98)*

*it's keeping in mind 'what is the priority what is it that we want to gain' (7, 169-170)*

*how could we unpick this further and what would be the best method erm to kind of gain that information er and obviously again drawing from maybe the parent's perspective or the teacher's perspective (7, 180-183)*

*when we started people were saying 'aw I just feel like I'm on a treadmill' we were like 'really' and now we're like 'yep (laughs) yeah I get that' (11, 12-14)*

*keeping in mind kind of you know why are we doing this (10, 89-90)*

### **1.1. Supervision**

Supervision seems to act as a mechanism of interpersonal meaning-making through which individuals explicitly create meaning of their work and themselves. They differentiate between different formats of supervision: one-to-one, peer, and group supervision, and how different types of supervision they have received from EPs can be facilitative or hindering for meaning-making.

Supervision helps Asst. EPs to manage their uncertainty of self:

***Natalie:** Hmm how do you approach a case where you feel it would be beneficial to change the story around the child*

**Participant 4:** *Er probably with imposter syndrome (laughs) to start with erm sort of in this role erm so I've I've taken a lot of things to supervision (10, 130-133)*

Peer and group supervision are seen as particularly facilitative for meaning-making as they enable Asst. EPs to consider different perspectives on the meaning of the role and integrate the experiences of others into the meanings they are creating:

*you learn from other people in their situation and and have that opportunity to take an outsider perspective and think 'oh that was interesting that you did it that way on that situation' I think how come you know that's when you can kind of see as to a different perspective (7, 334-337)*

*we each have different interests and like I would say probably different strengths erm so that then sort of like informs the type of work we do so you know one of the assistants she's done quite a lot of the psychometrics so I would say her experience of that's really good checking with them when it comes to interpretation (9, 332-335)*

*we have groups erm where we follow sort of a particular model and that's made up of groups of erm assistants trainees erm main grade EPs senior staff as well erm and someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 135-140)*

*we have assistant EP peer supervision where sometimes we've met up in person over a coffee erm sort of most of the time sort of via Teams and we've just sort of had a general sort of chat and sort of checking with each other wellbeing wise erm we've been able to sort of share experiences around sort of interviews erm and sort of bounce ideas off each other sort of talk about cases erm sort of share opportunities so for instance if I'd booked up to go to a specialist provision and they were happy for someone else to come along sort of sharing opportunities in that way (10, 298-304)*

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

One-to-one supervision can be facilitative of meaning-making if it is non-hierarchical and collaborative in nature. It also supports the emotional labour of meaning-making by offering alternative perspectives for the Asst. EP to consider with no pressure to adopt these alternative meanings:

*she was like 'you talk I'll listen and we work through things' and she didn't give me any answers but she she helped me to work out what to do next (8, 66-67)*

*she doesn't often go 'oh well I think you should do this' she'd very cleverly lead me to something else or ask me to think of other ways that I might approach it (8, 87-89)*

*so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' (7, 79-81)*

*when I work with her I feel so much more I guess valued cos I think she knows cos she's done our role I think she really knows what it feels like and it feels a lot more collaborative (11, 256-258)*

*it was able to sort of offer me a different perspective on why that might have happened and rather than sort of sealing it sort of seeing it as a failed erm sort of visit actually thinking 'what what about this child's story so far might have kind of played a part in that'... so it's helped me to kind of see the bigger picture (10, 329-337)*

However, supervision can hinder meaning-making if it involves the supervisor giving direction about how the Asst. EP should act in their role rather than collaborative:

*there were some that were kind of challenging but it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' or maybe if it was that I was stuck then I kind of felt that it isn't kind of the expert model... whereas I think it was difficult if that was then challenged in a kind of fixed model because it kind of went against what I would like it to be because you know working on my values is I'd like it to be person-centred but then if it's a kind of fixed model then it can't be person-centred because it's yeah it's not having that opportunity to focus on the individual (7, 79-87)*

*in the psychological perspective I prefer to just focus on how they present but then one of them [EPs] is really hot on like 'you have to include (laughs) if they have a diagnosis' um but then I just think you know a lot of the children we see are really young and they are often on the pathway and they're still the same child whether they have that diagnosis yet or not yet like it could be that a child's gonna be seeing the week after and then they receive a diagnosis and then it just feels weird to me that that would be a completely different report or like a different psychological perspective (11, 199-206)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

## **2. Autonomy and Agency as a Mediator of Meaning-making Processes**

Having autonomy and agency appears to be dependent on others and how they view the Asst. EP role, e.g., whether they think Asst. EPs should have autonomy - think about power in relationships. This aligns with Participant Three, One, and Five's descriptions of their experience that suggest having autonomy is dependent on the context of the service they are working in:

*sort of given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us (9, 9-10)*

*we follow a kind of system in that we make sure we talk to the parents we make sure we talk to the teacher we make sure we talk to the young person (9, 160-162)*

*as an assistant you work with an EP so then you can't do that on your own (11, 78)*

*I guess also sort of helping with retention and you know kind of shaping us into EPs that would fit into the service if we wanted to to come back (11, 20-22)*

Participants' descriptions suggest autonomy and agency is promoted through supervision if they were encouraged by their supervisor to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves:

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

*other EPs kind of like you to get involved and like you to sort of ask questions and erm play more sort of an active role in the work (10, 152-154)*

However, participants have also experienced supervision that reduces their autonomy and agency:

*it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if if it wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that opportunity to challenge I suppose (7, 62-65)*

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*sometimes you're with an EP where they more kind of want you to sit in the background and just literally shadow and watch (10, 199-203)*

Participant Four identified that this style of supervision *'tended to be with more erm of the kind of established EPs or people who have been in the role longer or erm where I think that they maybe I don't know whether it's that they don't almost don't remember their sort of being an assistant or being a trainee and needing to kind of find your feet in the room or whether it's that they've got like an established pattern of how how they do things and how they kind of see their sort of plan for the session going'* (10, 199-203).

Despite this, Participant Four feels they were still able to create meaning through these experiences:

*how they introduce themselves to the child and how they introduce the tasks erm and I've sort of found sort of sitting back that you can kind of do that and then think 'oh actually I would take that piece on board I quite liked how you did that' or 'actually I would have like you know erm maybe not done a psychometric erm sort of test there I would have maybe done like the ideal school or something like that' and it's been sort of interesting to reflect on that personally afterwards* (10, 205-211)

But felt their understanding was improved by *'having a conversation with the EP and kind of exploring you know their thought processes around erm why they did certain things erm with the people where they sort of encourage more active participation'* (10, 211-214).

Participant Five's interview suggests a tension between autonomy and agency and needing support from EPs:

*after the initial shadowing it was just like 'off you go (laughs) on your own' all the time and I feel like we are like making progress in the way we write and probably the way we talk as well but I think we could get we could learn more if we did a bit more together with the EPs* (11, 189-192)

*what's the point of assistants if if they're just gonna be only alongside EPs then it just feels like then you've just got a shadowing role (laughs) you know then it's not a very useful for us as a service I guess um but that yeah I don't know if it would be helpful to have more or just every once in a while like have an EP come along* (11, 241-245)

*if you're left to make your own formulation I do like it but like with the complex ones it's a bit yeah it's nice to have that support I guess and to yeah to explore that together* (11, 176-177)

Participant One feels their ability to work with autonomy and agency has increased with experience and confidence:

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information'* (7, 105-108)

*I think at the beginning when I first started I would have spoken about what I plan to do and then probably would have done too many of what I was going to do because I*

*wanted to kind of show that I'd carried everything out that we talked about but now obviously now I realise that that wasn't benefiting the child (7, 135-138)*

Based on these comments by Participants Five and One, I wonder if autonomy and agency are mediated by supervision that encourages Asst. EPs to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves. Autonomy and agency appear to be valued by Asst. EPs but can only be achieved if supported first by other EPs. This may explain why I'm using the same quotes in this Memo as in the "Being Supervised" code so I need to pursue more the relationship between autonomy and agency and supervision.

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**Update 10.09.23**

### ***Tentative Conceptual Category: Creating Meaning of Work***

I've decided to take this code forward as a tentative conceptual category for elaboration in Phase 2 because it helps to make sense of my "Lacking Meaning of Work" category. I feel "Creating Meaning of Work" is how participants try to resolve this lack of meaning - "how do I work out what I am and what am I supposed to be doing?", reflected in the definition I have chosen for Work Meaning informed by Sandberg and Pinnington (2009) (see memo 1 version 6):

**Work Meaning = A way of Being based on an individual's understanding of themselves at work, their work environment, and their relationship with their work environment**

I have therefore constructed the following second research question to explore this tentative conceptual category further with focus groups in phase 2:

*How do Assistant Educational Psychologists resolve a lack of work meaning?*

**Summary of this memo to share with participants as context for the questions:**

#### **2. Creating meaning of work**

Participants in the first phase spoke about how they actively tried to make sense of how to be an Assistant EP, e.g., through the activities they did such as shadowing, the influence of others such as working together on cases with EPs and supervision, and drawing on their values and the values of the service.

**Questions and rationale for these (in italics):**

4. What have you done to try to make sense of how to be an Assistant EP? - *I want to know more about how Asst. EPs try to create meaning and the role agency and autonomy plays in this.*
5. How have different ways of working with EPs affected your understanding of how to be an Assistant EP? - *I want to know more about the mechanism of interpersonal meaning-making and how this is involved in creation of meaning of work in the Asst. EP role. I particularly focused on different ways of working as participants in the First*

*Phase discussed how some ways of working were more facilitative of meaning-making, e.g., when they promoted autonomy and agency.*

6. What role has supervision had in how you made sense of how to be an Assistant EP?  
*- I want to gather further data about supervision as a specific type of interpersonal meaning-making.*
7. How have different values, e.g., person-centred, systemic working, affected your understanding of how to be an Assistant EP? Where do you think these values come from?  
*- I realised that I have assumed these values come from either the Asst. EPs themselves or the EP service they work in, because the three values they have discussed in previous interviews align with those I believe are espoused by many in the EP profession. I can see this in the use of the language I have used to describe these values, e.g., person-centred, relational, and that this is based on the values I have experienced when working with others as both an Asst. EP and now as a TEP. I need to check this assumption by seeking participants views about how they would describe their values and where they feel these values come from. I also reflected on how the wording of the opening question in the interviews may have limited participants' descriptions to what they perceive to be the work system so I wanted to explore whether they felt any values crossed the boundary of this system into other areas of their lives.*



## MEMO 3

Version one - 06/06/23

### *Feeling responsible/accountable*

Participant One talks about feeling a level of responsibility and accountability in their role. This is more prominent when they speak about their role in the traded/private service as they feel an expectation that *'this is your role let's go with it'* (7, 26-27). This appears to be related to them feeling they have to meet certain expectations: *'these schools are mine I have ten schools and then regardless of what tasks come up they are mine to do'* (7, 16-17). I wonder how they feel about this perceived accountability and whether it is something they value in their role or not.

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Version two - 01/07/23

### *Feeling responsible/accountable*

Participants One and Five talk about feeling a level of responsibility and accountability in their role that is expected of them from their services:

*'this is your role let's go with it'* (7, 26-27)

*these schools are mine I have ten schools and then regardless of what tasks come up they are mine to do* (7, 16-17)

*it's completely on you which is okay but it's sometimes hard* (11, 98-99)

From Participant Five's comment, it appears that they feel a tension in holding this responsibility; they are happy to be responsible for their work but find it difficult to meet the accountability to the EP they work with

This suggests there may be different levels of responsibility experienced by Asst. EPs. For example, responsibility to the school staff and children they work with. Indeed, this is shown in participant Five's comment: *'I feel like a responsibility to help write it in a way that people can make better sense of it and have a better understanding'* (11, 319-320).

Participant Five also questions their responsibility, particularly in relation to their role compared to the responsibility held by the EPs they work with:

*sometimes I think 'should I be (laughs) writing a whole report as an assistant is that the right thing' erm and 'is it ok that I normally only see the child and then the EP*

just sees my observations and the paperwork and then speaks with the parents' um it seems like quite a big responsibility because they sign it off and they're then ultimately responsible it's like 'ok (laughs) I'm fine with it' but sometimes I wonder if that's yeah the most optimal thing (11, 230-233)

even though I can say how I feel about it, it's still them who are gonna sign it off and then you know they can just make whatever they change they want (11, 227-229)

This feels different to the other data coded using the initial code of "feeling responsible/accountable". I wonder if this is more linked to how they understand their role compared to EPs and how their understanding of their role in the service.

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#### **Update 18/07/23**

I've only used this code in two of the five interviews so I've decided not to pursue this code as it does not seem to help me to make sense of how assistants are experiencing the role.

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#### **Update 04/09/23**

After reviewing literature on existentialist themes and meaning-making at work, I feel responsibility may be a factor involved in meaning-making, although in a different manner to that described in this memo, in that individuals feel they have a responsibility to create meaning when faced with a lack of meaning of work:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do (8, 15-16)*

I need to go back to my transcripts and see if responsibility to create meaning fits with my data better than how I initially coded responsibility.

## MEMO 4

Version one - 10.05.23

### *Being supervised*

Participant Two talks about supervision as a new experience and not knowing what to expect (links to uncertainty code):

*I think supervision's been quite a big one for me as well it's it's stood out as something that I'd not really experienced before (8, 62-63)*

*when I first went into it because I didn't I didn't know what to expect (8, 77)*

*I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say how's she gonna judge me' (8, 96-97)*

This last quote shows that they try to understand what supervision might involve from their experience of being supervised in a previous job role, e.g., by saying 'how's she going to judge me' infers that they experienced judgement in supervision in their previous work roles. They describe attempting to manage this by preparing based on their prior understanding of what supervision would be like: *'I went on my first one with like a list of twenty things and I almost thought I needed to prove what I was doing or that I was thinking about things' (8, 78-79).*

They describe their initial expectation of supervision being challenged by their supervisor: *'she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this'' (8, 80-81).* By doing this, participant two begins to create a new understanding of what supervision involves:

- What supervision sessions look like: *'it's very open and sometimes it's general chat sometimes it's a specific problem' (8, 98-99).*
- A focus on what they perceive to be important and their motivations: *'she was like 'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this'' (8, 80-81).*
- Contracting together: *'we kind of sat down together and made a a list of things that we kinda agreed that would happen during supervision' (8, 81-82).*
- Feeling listened to: *'she'll just ask me to to talk and she usually just gives me space and she'll not say anything and just ask me to kind of give her as much detail as I can' (8, 105-107).*
- Working through things together (compared to previous job role):

*she was like 'you talk I'll listen and we work through things' and she didn't give me any answers but she she helped me to work out what to do next (8, 66-67)*

*she doesn't often go 'oh well I think you should do this' she'd very cleverly lead me to something else or ask me to think of other ways that I might approach it (8, 87-89)*

*she looks at me in a certain way to kind of say 'tell me a bit more about that or tell me a bit more about that' and then when we do it she'll kind of then just prompt me with little thoughts or additional questions and she'll say well you know if I've tried something she'll say 'well why d'ya think that hasn't worked' and it's very much about my thought process (8, 107-111)*

*I think in teaching the expectation is always that you you doing and you know things move on very quickly and if you've got a problem you fix it and it wasn't that (8, 85-87)*

- Leaving with a new focus or changed perspective:

*to go away thinking positively about the next week and that's always is what we're quite conscious of like go not necessarily with a solution but with a new focus or a a bit of a change of perspective (8, 83-85)*

*she she draws out with me what I realized has happened or hasn't happened and then it's almost like problem solving so trying to come round to different ways of approaching something but I think cos it's not judgmental and I think because the way she asks the questions is very much just trying to prompt me to think about different ways to do stuff (8, 115-118)*

- Non-hierarchical (compared to previous experiences of supervision):

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me if if we haven't worked something out (8, 121-127)*

*I was a well job before last one was teaching and I think if I'd sat down in a room with my head teacher and burst into tears (laughs) I can't imagine that it would have gone very well so I think the kind of supportive nature of what we do here has been really uh I don't even know what word to say but it's just been really amazing (8, 67-71)*

They express a change in feelings towards supervision over time: *'I've loved it I think I wouldn't have said that first time around'* (8, 101-102). I wonder what happened to create this change?

## ***Being supervised***

In addition to Participant Two's description of their experience of one-to-one supervision, Participant Three talks about different forms of supervision they experienced, with each having slightly different functions:

**One-to-one supervision** is viewed as a space to focus on their personal development: '*supervision with my senior is much different because I guess the way he sees it is that's me talking that's like my time*' (9, 326-327). Their understanding of one-to-one supervision is to help them to make sense of the activities they are doing:

*I always discuss about what I've got upcoming but then if there's anything particularly like I need help with so like if I'm doing the WPPSI and it's maybe with another EP they're gonna do analysis with me but then I maybe use my supervising time erm to kind of just go through my analysis like how have I interpreted have I got it you know so then whenever I go to the EP I'm looking competent (laughs) (9, 320-324)*

This is congruent with Participant two's experience of one-to-one supervision.

**Peer supervision** is viewed as a space for collaborative development '*peer supervision's more about all of us*' (9, 327-328). They created a space where they can learn together: '*we all read the same article now and we sorta reflect and critique that*' (9, 311-312), and use everyone's strengths to help each other:

*we each have different interests and like I would say probably different strengths erm so that then sort of like informs the type of work we do so you know one of the assistants she's done quite a lot of the psychometrics so I would say her experience of that's really good checking with them when it comes to interpretation (9, 332-335)*

Participant Three seems to value this opportunity for collaboration:

*it's nice that we're we kinda come together even though we're in the same service we're talking about how we're each doing something different and how it's contributing to our experiences and things it's quite it's nice to hear and share (9, 343-345)*

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**Version three - 10.06.23**

## ***Being Supervised***

Supervision seems to play an important part in participants' experiences of their role. They differentiate between different formats of supervision: one-to-one, peer, and group supervision, and how different types of supervision they have received from EPs can be facilitative or hindering for their development.

Peer and group supervision are seen as particularly facilitative for development as they enable Asst. EPs to consider different perspectives and learn from the experiences of others:

*you learn from other people in their situation and and have that opportunity to take an outsider perspective and think 'oh that was interesting that you did it that way on that situation' I think how come you know that's when you can kind of see as to a different perspective (7, 334-337)*

*we each have different interests and like I would say probably different strengths erm so that then sort of like informs the type of work we do so you know one of the assistants she's done quite a lot of the psychometrics so I would say her experience of that's really good checking with them when it comes to interpretation (9, 332-335)*

One-to-one supervision can be facilitative if it is non-hierarchical and collaborative in nature:

*she was like 'you talk I'll listen and we work through things' and she didn't give me any answers but she she helped me to work out what to do next (8, 66-67)*

*she doesn't often go 'oh well I think you should do this' she'd very cleverly lead me to something else or ask me to think of other ways that I might approach it (8, 87-89)*

*so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' (7, 79-81)*

However, supervision is viewed as hindering if it involves the supervisor giving direction about how the Asst. EP should act in their role rather than collaborative:

*there were some that were kind of challenging but it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' or maybe if it was that I was stuck then I kind of felt that it isn't kind of the expert model... whereas I think it was difficult if that was then challenged in a kind of fixed model because it kind of went against what I would like it to be because you know working on my values is I'd like it to be person-centred but then if it's a kind of fixed model then it can't be person-centred because it's yeah it's not having that opportunity to focus on the individual (7, 79-87)*

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Version four - 14.07.23

## **Being Supervised**

Participants Four and Five also value the collaborative nature of group supervision for seeing different perspectives and sharing experiences:

*we have groups erm where we follow sort of a particular model and that's made up of groups of erm assistants trainees erm main grade EPs senior staff as well erm and someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 135-140)*

*we have assistant EP peer supervision where sometimes we've met up in person over a coffee erm sort of most of the time sort of via Teams and we've just sort of had a general sort of chat and sort of checking with each other wellbeing wise erm we've been able to sort of share experiences around sort of interviews erm and sort of bounce ideas off each other sort of talk about cases erm sort of share opportunities so for instance if I'd booked up to go to a specialist provision and they were happy for someone else to come along sort of sharing opportunities in that way (10, 298-304)*

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

Participant Four adds that one-to-one supervision is helpful for supporting the emotional labour of the role, by offering containment and different perspectives on things:

*we've sort of had line manager supervision which has been a good time to sort of take any questions or debrief on erm doctorate interviews (10, 264-266)*

*it was able to sort of offer me a different perspective on why that might have happened and rather than sort of sealing it sort of seeing it as a failed erm sort of visit actually thinking 'what what about this child's story so far might have kind of played a part in that'... so it's helped me to kind of see the bigger picture (10, 329-337)*

Participant Five has also experienced one-to-one supervision that has both facilitated and hindered their development:

*in the psychological perspective I prefer to just focus on how they present but then one of them [EPs] is really hot on like 'you have to include (laughs) if they have a diagnosis' um but then I just think you know a lot of the children we see are really young and they are often on the pathway and they're still the same child whether they have that diagnosis yet or not yet like it could be that a child's gonna be seeing the week after and then they receive a diagnosis and then it just feels weird to me that that would be a completely different report or like a different psychological perspective (11, 199-206)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I*

*feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things'*  
(11, 327-330)

Compared to:

*when I work with her I feel so much more I guess valued cos I think she knows cos she's done our role I think she really knows what it feels like and it feels a lot more collaborative* (11, 256-258)

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**Update - 04.09.23**

***Theoretical Code: Supervision as a mechanism through which meaning is created (part of interpersonal meaning-making)***

Through theoretical coding, I have decided to integrate this code into the tentative conceptual category of "Creating Meaning of Work" as I feel it is part of interpersonal meaning making through which meaning of work is created. **See Memo 2 Version 3 section 1.1 for integration.**



## MEMO 5

Version one - 08.05.23

### ***Comparing to Previous Work Roles***

Throughout their interview, Participant Two compares their experience as an Asst. EP to their previous job/role. They do this in several different contexts:

Using their previous knowledge and skills to help them to complete activities:

*the last job I did I worked with young people who didn't attend school...as it happened when I started another EP started and that's kinda what she'd focused on into her her last post as well so being involved in kind of setting up er a system for emotion based school non attendance (8, 21-24)*

Contrasting between their experiences in their previous job and as an Asst. EP:

*I was a well job before last one was teaching and I think if I'd sat down in a room with my head teacher and burst into tears (laughs) I can't imagine that it would have gone very well so I think the kind of supportive nature of what we do here has been really uh I don't even know what word to say but it's just been really amazing (8, 67-71)*

*yeah I think in teaching the expectation is always that you you doing and you know things move on very quickly and if you've got a problem you fix it and it [supervision] wasn't that (8, 85-87)*

*I think in teaching I had to be very reactive all the time because I was a SENCO and people would come to me with problems and go you know 'how do I fix this' or 'how do I sort this problem with this child' and I always felt like I needed to have answers straight away... and actually to then go 'well, I don't know much about that so I'm gonna spend some time reading up about it or... spend some time going 'well, what could have gone differently what went well what could I have changed what do I need to think about for next time' and and it is sometimes it's giving yourself that bit of space to to work through what what's happened and what's been done and it's it's really positive because it means that I'm I'm not jumping from one thing to another (8, 149-161)*

*in my last job I was working with you know young people just that one young person and I would talk to their family and I would talk to school and then it was trying to work around how to support them back in and then I would get multiple referrals from the same school and you'd go well actually there's clearly a wider issue if you've got all these young people struggling with the same issue but that was never within my remit to kind of look on a whole school level whereas here actually doing that and doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could affect a lot more young people (8, 313-320)*

*in my last job it was impact on one young person at a time this means that actually you can support schools to make sometimes just very minor adaptations but by recognising what the barriers for young people are and giving them the time to (laughs) as I've said a lot of reflect and and think about what's going on for them and the young people that they work with and thinking about how actually can we implement change in a way that's constructive and not just for changes sake (8, 323-328)*

Considering how their experience in their previous role shaped their expectations of EP work:

*I think because of my experience when I was a teacher working with ed psychs it was very much coming in to do assessments and you know one to ones and things which ultimately was probably mostly first statutory assessment and so I think probably I had quite a I don't know in some ways probably a little bit of a skewed view of what EPs do (8, 260-264)*

Drawing on their knowledge in their previous role to ease negative feelings:

*I think probably the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary and I think it's it was on emotionally based school non attendance which like I said was my kind of previous role before this one but it's quite (inaudible) standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you (8, 53-56)*

What is the function of this comparison? Are they using these comparisons to manage uncertainty around being an Asst. EP (link to Memo 1) or show how much they value their experiences as an Asst. EP?

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**Version two - 19.05.23**

### ***Comparing to Previous Work Roles***

Participant Three also makes comparisons between their experiences in their previous role as a teacher and now in their role as an Asst. EP.

Some comparisons fit with Participant's Two considerations of how their experiences shaped their expectations of what the Asst. EP role would involve:

*I thought you know a bit like teaching where you hit the ground running and you would have to sorta need to get on board with whatever projects there were or sort of like what you said about you know statutory assessments and writing up reports erm and actually it was it was very very much the opposite...it hasn't been a pressured role I have to say compared to my previous which was teaching (9, 5-15)*

In addition, they describe how they used their skills from their previous role to evaluate their new experiences:

**Natalie:** *Hmm if you can recall what were you thinking when you were shadowing and watching that training*

**Participant 3:** *Yeah I was so one thing was looking at delivery erm I think that's just a teacher in me it's just like how is it delivered is it delivered in very much like 'this is me you're gonna listen' or you know are they engaged I look at the what they're presenting and then I think my mind is always going around sort of like how could it be better or you know erm what would I do differently (9, 222-228)*

Participant Three also uses their knowledge of themselves from their previous role to help them understand themselves in the Asst. EP role:

**Natalie:** *You said that you maybe recognise in yourself that developing competence what kind of stands out to you as feeling competent*

**Participant 3:** *Erm I think it kinda relates back to teaching it's just that with my background being teaching you know when something flows you know whenever you're secure in it you know that you're running it quite well and and so like I relate that to sorta psychometrics (9, 50-54)*

They also using their past experiences to inform how they want to work as an Asst. EP:

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

These additional examples from Participant Three are making me lean more towards the idea that these comparisons are being used by participants to show how they tried to make sense of their role as an Asst. EP.

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**Version three - 02.06.23**

### ***Comparing to Previous Work Roles***

Participant Five compares their ability to discuss their work with others between their Asst. EP role and previous roles:

*comparing to previous jobs I would just yeah much talk to people much quicker much easier even just to double check something but it feels like such a a task when it's virtual (11, 408-410)*

This doesn't seem to fit my interpretation of the comparisons Participants Two and Three made in their interviews. I wonder what function this comparison serves?

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**Update 04.09.23**

This code has only occurred in three interviews and its occurrence is inconsistent in terms of its interpreted function. I'm not going to ask a direct question about it in my focus groups for this reason. However, I still have a gut feeling that the way I have interpreted it as part of developing understanding of the role might be of significance and Charmaz (2014) says to reflect on why you have this gut feeling. I'm going to see if this way of using the comparison comes up again from participants in my focus groups and see if I can make more sense of it then.

## MEMO 6

Version one - 12.05.23

### *Having Autonomy and Agency*

Participant Two refers to how they promoted their own development by making choices that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 15-19)*

This agency is promoted through supervision, whereby Participant Two is encouraged by their supervisor to work things out and make decisions for themselves:

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

Participant Two values the agency and autonomy of the role as it has allowed them to develop the role into what they wanted it to be, which was one of their aims for the role:

*for me it's about thinking about how I want this role to look for me (8, 191-192)*

*there's a lot of space for us to have a bit of creativity and to think about things that we wanna be involved with and areas of interest (8, 194-196)*

Maybe autonomy and agency are linked to ability to seek valued work (see Memo 1).

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Version two - 17.05.23

### *Having autonomy/agency*

Participants refer to how they promoted their own development by making choices that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be*

*part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 15-19)*

*we look at the calendars and we we do that ourselves it's very much like 'ooh I've not seen that before I wanna go see that (9, 185-186)*

Participants' descriptions suggest agency is promoted through supervision, whereby they were encouraged by their supervisor to work things out and make decisions for themselves:

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

This seems to link with the "Being Supervised" code - maybe they are related?

Participants value the agency and autonomy of the role as it has allowed them to develop the role into what they wanted it to be, which was an aim of theirs for the role:

*for me it's about thinking about how I want this role to look for me (8, 191-192)*

*there's a lot of space for us to have a bit of creativity and to think about things that we wanna be involved with and areas of interest (8, 194-196)*

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

*one thing that I've learned to enjoy about this job is the autonomy it's kind of like the calendar's mine so I've decided Monday and Tuesday I'm going to take for advice writing I've blocked it out but the same time I'm working with the EPs on the afternoon (9, 293-296)*

Maybe autonomy and agency are linked to ability to seek valued work (see Memo 1).

Participant Three feels they were 'given' autonomy by senior members of the service:

*sort of given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us (9, 9-10)*

So maybe autonomy and agency are dependent others and how they view the Asst. EP role, e.g., whether they think Asst. EPs should have autonomy and agency- think about power in relationships.

### ***Having autonomy/agency***

Participants refer to how they promoted their own development by making choices that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

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However, Participant One has also experienced supervision that reduces their autonomy and agency:

*it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if if it wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that opportunity to challenge I suppose (7, 62-65)*

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

I've realised I'm using the same quotes here as in the "Being Supervised" code so I need to think about the relationship between autonomy/agency and supervision.

Participants value the agency and autonomy of the role as it has allowed them to develop the role into what they wanted it to be, which was an aim of theirs for the role:

*for me it's about thinking about how I want this role to look for me (8, 191-192)*

*there's a lot of space for us to have a bit of creativity and to think about things that we wanna be involved with and areas of interest (8, 194-196)*

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

*one thing that I've learned to enjoy about this job is the autonomy it's kind of like the calendar's mine so I've decided Monday and Tuesday I'm going to take for advice writing I've blocked it out but the same time I'm working with the EPs on the afternoon (9, 293-296)*

Maybe autonomy and agency are linked to ability to seek valued work (see Memo 1).

Participant Three feels they were 'given' autonomy by senior members of the service:

*sort of given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us (9, 9-10)*

So maybe autonomy and agency are dependent others and how they view the Asst. EP role, e.g., whether they think Asst. EPs should have autonomy and agency- think about power in relationships.

This aligns with Participant One's description of their experience that suggest having autonomy and agency are dependent on the context of the service they are working in - they feel unable to make decisions about the direction of their work in their current role because they have to follow a certain way of working: '*we follow a kind of system in that we make sure we talk to the parents we make sure we talk to the teacher we make sure we talk to the young person*' (9, 160-162), whereas in another service they had more autonomy to seek opportunities they felt would be beneficial for their development.

Participant One feels their ability to work with agency has increased with experience and confidence:

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

*I think at the beginning when I first started I would have spoken about what I plan to do and then probably would have done too many of what I was going to do because I wanted to kind of show that I'd carried everything out that we talked about but now obviously now I realise that that wasn't benefiting the child (7, 135-138)*



## Update 10.06.23

I've realised as I've been comparing my codes across the interviews that I've used the terms "autonomy" and "agency" interchangeably. I needed to check my assumptions behind my choice to use these terms and how I was applying them, so I've researched the two terms to see if they are conceptually different and make sure I am using them in a way that fits the data:

In Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1991, 2012) autonomy refers to an individual's **ability to make choices for themselves**. Specifically, autonomy is related to choosing actions that the individual values or believes are important. Agency is defined as an individual's **perceived control over the choices they make** (Gallagher, 2000; Lewis, M., 1990). Agency means that individuals have a sense of ownership over their actions, thoughts, and feelings.

I felt that the overlap between the two concepts was significant and when I compared the data I had coded using "autonomy" to those I had coded using "agency" I felt the data fit both concepts, e.g.,

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

This quote could fit both autonomy because it refers to the supervisor encouraging them to make choices for themselves, and agency because the Asst. EP appears to believe they have control over their decisions by positioning the supervisor in a "non-expert" role.

Therefore, instead of separating the codes into two different concepts, I have chosen to keep them as one code.

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## Version four - 16.06.23

### ~~**Having autonomy/agency**~~

### **Autonomy and Agency**

Having autonomy and agency appears to be dependent on others and how they view the Asst. EP role, e.g., whether they think Asst. EPs should have autonomy - think about power in relationships. This aligns with Participant Three, One, and Five's descriptions of their experience that suggest having autonomy is dependent on the context of the service they are working in:

*sort of given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us (9, 9-10)*

*we follow a kind of system in that we make sure we talk to the parents we make sure we talk to the teacher we make sure we talk to the young person (9, 160-162)*

*as an assistant you work with an EP so then you can't do that on your own (11, 78)*

*I guess also sort of helping with retention and you know kind of shaping us into EPs that would fit into the service if we wanted to to come back (11, 20-22)*

Participants' descriptions suggest autonomy and agency is promoted through supervision if they were encouraged by their supervisor to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves:

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

*other EPs kind of like you to get involved and like you to sort of ask questions and erm play more sort of an active role in the work (10, 152-154)*

However, participants have also experienced supervision that reduces their autonomy and agency:

*it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if if it wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that opportunity to challenge I suppose (7, 62-65)*

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*sometimes you're with an EP where they more kind of want you to sit in the background and just literally shadow and watch (10, 150-151)*

Participant Four identified that this style of supervision 'tended to be with more erm of the kind of established EPs or people who have been in the role longer or erm where I think that they maybe I don't know whether it's that they don't almost don't remember their sort of being an assistant or being a trainee and needing to kind of find your feet in the room or whether it's that they've got like an established pattern of how how they do things and how they kind of see their sort of plan for the session going' (10, 199-203)

Despite this, Participant Four feels they were still able to develop understanding through these experiences:

*how they introduce themselves to the child and how they introduce the tasks erm and I've sort of found sort of sitting back that you can kind of do that and then think 'oh actually I would take that piece on board I quite liked how you did that' or 'actually I would have like you know erm maybe not done a psychometric erm sort of test there I would have maybe done like the ideal school or something like that' and it's been sort of interesting to reflect on that personally afterwards (10, 205-211)*

But felt their understanding was improved by *'having a conversation with the EP and kind of exploring you know their thought processes around erm why they did certain things erm with the people where they sort of encourage more active participation'* (10, 211-214).

Participant Five's interview suggests a tension between autonomy and agency and needing support from EPs:

*after the initial shadowing it was just like 'off you go (laughs) on your own' all the time and I feel like we are like making progress in the way we write and probably the way we talk as well but I think we could get we could learn more if we did a bit more together with the EPs (11, 189-192)*

*what's the point of assistants if if they're just gonna be only alongside EPs then it just feels like then you've just got a shadowing role (laughs) you know then it's not a very useful for us as a service I guess um but that yeah I don't know if it would be helpful to have more or just every once in a while like have an EP come along (11, 241-245)*

*if you're left to make your own formulation I do like it but like with the complex ones it's a bit yeah it's nice to have that support I guess and to yeah to explore that together (11, 176-177)*

Participant One feels their ability to work with autonomy and agency has increased with experience and confidence:

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

*I think at the beginning when I first started I would have spoken about what I plan to do and then probably would have done too many of what I was going to do because I wanted to kind of show that I'd carried everything out that we talked about but now obviously now I realise that that wasn't benefiting the child (7, 135-138)*

Based on these comments by Participants Five and One, I wonder if autonomy and agency are mediated by supervision that encourages Asst. EPs to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves. Autonomy and agency appear to be valued by Asst. EPs but can only be achieved if supported first by other EPs. This may explain why I'm

using the same quotes in this Memo as in the "Being Supervised" code so I need to pursue more the relationship between autonomy and agency and supervision.

---

**Update - 21.07.23**

### ***~~Autonomy and Agency~~***

#### ***Theoretical Code: Autonomy and Agency in Meaning-Making***

Taking an existential perspective, individuals are free to assess different meanings of work they experience and make choices about the meanings of work they want to create for themselves (Rosso et al., 2010). This suggests that individuals inevitably have agency and autonomy in their lives. However, some participants felt they had limited agency and autonomy based on their interactions with others. I wonder if this links to the concept of "Bad Faith" (Sartre, 1956). Therefore, I feel that agency and autonomy may play a role in "Creating Meaning of Work" so I have merged it into Memo 2. **See Memo 2 Version 3 Section 2 for integration**

## MEMO 7

Version one - 09.05.23

### ***Working with others***

Participant Two refers to many events working together with others to deliver psychological services to school, also learning from others, and others learning from them:

*one of the things I've discovered about working here is how much collaboration there is and how much people seem to learn from each other (8, 60-62)*

How does this code relate to that of "Being Supervised"? Are they conceptually different?

It's not just 'working with' others, there seems to be something else happening in their interaction with others but not sure what it is yet. For example, Participant Two switches between "I" and "we" throughout their interview, what are the unconscious processes underlying this shift between individual and collective pronouns? Do they view themselves as part of a group who are trying to achieve a shared goal, e.g., working together to design, deliver training.

---

Update 15.05.23

I wonder if there is something about the Asst. EP role being constructed through these interactions? Do they use "we" as they feel it is not the role of the Asst. EP to be the expert and should work collaboratively with others?

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Version two - 06.06.23

### **~~*Working with others*~~**

#### ***Developing knowledge through working with others***

All participants frame their descriptions of their experiences in relation to working with others. They speak about how they learn from others and shape their understanding of their role through collaborative discussions:

*one of the things I've discovered about working here is how much collaboration there is and how much people seem to learn from each other (8, 60-62)*

*it's nice to hear other people's perspectives on that and rather just have your voice and I think that's a lot of what when I'm working with the other EPs is that I get to hear their voice and their perspective and then think about how that matches with mine or differs from mine (8, 215-218)*

*we are we're all in a place where we wanna learn we're all in a place where we know we're not the experts of things but we wanna do well we wanna support staff we*

*want to support young people and so we worked out how to do that the best that we could (8, 242-245)*

*we kinda come together even though we're in the same service we're talking about how we're each doing something different and how it's contributing to our experiences and things it's quite it's nice to hear and share (9, 343-345)*

*there were some EPs who were very collaborative you had that opportunity to have that discussion but it was a lot of reflective discussion (7, 68-78)*

Participants use the term "we" to demonstrate how they have created knowledge together with others:

*it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' (8, 269-271)*

*for our school for our community what is it that we need and what is it that we can do (8, 330-331)*

*we were given some time at the start to think about what we wanted the assistant job to be (P2 interview, lines 192-193)*

*'how are we going to gain their best views and be there for the right reason' (7, 98)*

*it's keeping in mind 'what is the priority what is it that we want to gain' (7, 69-170)*

*how could we unpick this further and what would be the best method erm to kind of gain that information er and obviously again drawing from maybe the parent's perspective or the teacher's perspective (7, 180-183)*

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### **Version three - 19.07.23**

#### ***Developing knowledge through working with others***

Additional examples of using "we" to show knowledge is created together with others:

*when we started people were saying 'aw I just feel like I'm on a treadmill' we were like 'really' and now we're like 'yep (laughs) yeah I get that' (11, 12-14)*

*keeping in mind kind of you know why are we doing this (10, 89-90)*

Additional examples of developing knowledge through collaborative working with others:

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

*someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 137-140)*

*if I've shadowed an EP erm there's often been times afterwards where we can talk about erm what we both thought and sort of share ideas and I think that's been really appreciated erm by me so as a learning point (10, 147-149)*

*it's been sort of helpful in those times to be able to sort of erm you know bounce things off each other or maybe notice things that the other person hasn't noticed erm or sort of ask a question that maybe someone hadn't thought about (10, 218-221)*

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**Version four - 21.07.23**

**~~Developing knowledge through working with others~~**

***Theoretical Code: Interpersonal Meaning-making (a process within "Creating Meaning of Work")***

I feel this code speaks to the co-constructed nature of knowledge, and really backs up my choice of using constructionism as my underpinning epistemology. Through theoretical coding, I have decided to integrate this code into the tentative conceptual category of "Creating Meaning of Work" as it is consistent with previous literature that suggests meaning of work is created through interpersonal sensemaking (e.g., Wrzesniewski et al., 2003). **See Memo 2 Version 3 Section 1 for integration.**

Appendix 14: Sample of focused coding using the initial code "Seeking Valued Work"

Participant Two – Narrative Data (Lines 269 – 283)	Initial Codes	<i>Focused Coding</i>
<p>so it's just a lot of statutory and then some core work</p> <p>but actually it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' and I think that was a big flip for me so you know my perspective that I'd come in and do loadsa one to ones with young people and that's what I originally tried to build my time around so the kind of panels that I put myself on was around one to one work erm and then I tried to attach myself to the EP who was going in to schools and then actually I still love that bit I mean I do some like whole class interventions erm which I think probably my favourite part of the job and I do some one to ones</p>	<p>Identifying with the service</p> <p>Seeking valued work</p> <p>Sharing values</p> <p>Planning systemic change</p> <p>Initially seeking direct one to one work</p> <p>Finding value</p> <p>Working directly with children</p>	<p><i>Seeking valued work</i></p> <p><i>Creating valued work with others</i></p> <p><i>Seeking valued work</i></p> <p><i>Drawing on values - systemic working</i></p> <p><i>Changing perspective of valued work</i></p> <p><i>Seeking work that was initially valued</i></p>



<p>with young people but actually I'm really enjoying spending time with staff erm either as a group a larger or a smaller group but kind of problem solving around young people erm it's not something that I did a lot of before and actually it's it's giving staff the tools and confidence sometimes to know what they can do for young people what they're already doing that works and then what else they can do differently and I think for me that was quite a big shift of what I thought I would enjoy doing (laughs) compared to what I have ended up doing more of</p>	<p>Working with staff</p> <p>Problem solving with staff</p> <p>Promoting confidence of staff</p> <p>Supporting staff to change</p> <p>Empowering staff</p> <p>Shifting perspective of role</p>	<p><i>Finding new valued work</i></p> <p><i>Working in a valued way</i></p> <p><i>Changing perspective of valued work</i></p>
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**A grounded theory study into Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences of their role.**

**Participant Information Sheet 27.04.2023**

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

**1. Background to the project**

The Assistant Educational Psychologist role currently exists as a temporary position for psychology graduates, with the general aim of gaining experience while assisting the work of qualified Educational Psychologists to progress on to an Educational Psychology doctoral training course. Recent research has shown inconsistencies in the role and function of Assistant Educational Psychologists across Educational Psychology Services and has suggested further research into the experiences of Assistant Educational Psychologists is needed.

**2. What is the project's purpose?**

For this project, I am interested in exploring the experiences of individuals who are currently employed as Assistant Educational Psychologists. From this, I aim to create a substantive Grounded Theory (a theoretical model) that makes sense of Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences.

**3. Why have I been asked if I would like to take part?**

You have been approached to take part in this study as you:

- are currently employed in an Educational Psychology Service in England,
- assist the work of an Educational Psychologist/Educational Psychology Services and are gaining relevant experience prior to applying for a place on a recognised Doctorate Educational Psychology training course,
- have been employed in this role for at least two academic terms.

This is the second phase of a two-part study. In the first phase, participants were interviewed about their actions, thoughts, and feelings relating to their experience of working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist. You have been asked if you would like to

help further what has already been discussed in the first phase of the study by giving you the opportunity to agree, disagree, discuss, add thoughts etc. to what has already been said.

#### **4. Do I have to take part?**

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you do decide to take part you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a consent form. You have the right to withdraw after your focus group takes place without any negative consequences. You do not have to give a reason. The nature of this study means that it will be important to be able to analyse your data as soon as possible after your focus group takes place. This means that if you wish to withdraw from the research, please contact Natalie Neal ([email address redacted for confidentiality]) within 24 hours after your focus group. Please note that by choosing to participate in this research, this will not create a legally binding agreement, nor is it intended to create an employment relationship between you and the University of Sheffield.

#### **5. What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?**

You will take part in a focus group with approximately 4-6 other Assistant Educational Psychologists. This will be facilitated by Natalie Neal and last for about one and a half hours. You will be asked to talk about your thoughts and feelings relating to what participants said in the first phase of the interview. I will ask some questions that follow up on what they have said (e.g., A category developed from participants' responses in the first phase of the study was ....., what do you think/feel about this?). There will also be opportunities to include any information that you would like to share. You do not need to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

The focus group will take place online using Google Meet software which is secure through the university. You may also be invited to further focus groups if you would like to take part in these. The audio of the focus group will be recorded through the Google Meet software. You may choose whether to have your camera on during the focus group as this will also be recorded through the Google Meet software if you choose to have this on, however the video recorded will not be analysed for the study. The recording will be immediately saved to the university secure Google drive using participant codes to keep the information anonymous.

After your focus group, I will transcribe the audio from the recording, anonymising all identifying details meaning it is very unlikely for you to be identified within the research. The recording of your focus group will be deleted once the project is complete. I will analyse the transcript by comparing it to codes developed from the first phase of the study. This will

support the development of a substantive Grounded Theory that provides an understanding of Assistant Educational Psychologists' experiences of working in the role.

## **6. What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?**

I am hopeful that taking part in this study will be an enjoyable experience, however sometimes discussing your experiences and practice can raise uncomfortable feelings. You are able to take breaks at any point during the interview and can withdraw from the research at any point up until 24 hours after your interview has taken place. You may find the virtual aspect of the focus group tiring or cause eye strain. To minimise this, comfort breaks can be taken wherever needed. You may recognise someone in your focus group. If this happens and you do not feel comfortable participating with them, I will offer you the option to move to a different focus group, do an individual interview, or you can withdraw from the study with no negative consequences. At the beginning of focus groups, I will discuss the confidentiality of the group and create a 'group compact' where everyone agrees not to disclose information shared or talk about the focus group outside of the group. There is the small possibility that others who know you well may be able to recognise you from what you say in the research. To minimise this risk, identifiable details from your interview transcript will be removed and you do not have to say anything that you feel may be identifiable during your interview. You may also ask for your data to be withdrawn from the research up until 24 hours after your interview has taken place.

If you feel you need further emotional support after discussing your experiences, you may find the following helplines and websites helpful:

### **Samaritans**

Samaritans provides free confidential non-judgemental emotional support 24 hours a day for people who are experiencing a difficult time or want to talk about anything that is upsetting them.

Call 116 123 (24-hours).

<https://www.samaritans.org>

### **Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM)**

CALM provides free confidential support for anyone who is struggling.

Call 0800 58 58 58 (5pm–midnight every day).

<https://www.thecalmzone.net>

### **Shout**

Shout offers a free confidential text service providing emotional support.

Text 'SHOUT' to 85258 (24-hours).

<https://giveusashout.org/>

### **7. What are the possible benefits of taking part?**

Whilst there are no immediate benefits for those people participating in the project, it is hoped that this work will allow you to reflect on your experience working as an Assistant Educational Psychologist and use this to plan the future direction of your work. It is hoped that the project may help to shape future processes and practices in Educational Psychology Services.

### **8. Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?**

All the information that is collected about you during the course of the research will be kept strictly confidential and will only be accessible to members of the research team (Natalie Neal and Dr Scott Johnson). You will not be able to be identified in any reports or publications. Where safeguarding concerns are raised, confidentiality may need to be broken and information passed onto the appropriate persons i.e., university project supervisor (Dr Scott Johnson).

### **9. What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?**

According to data protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis I am applying in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). Further information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

### **10. What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?**

You will have a code assigned to you once informed consent is gained. This code will be used throughout the project and in any future publications. Your personal details will only be accessed by myself and my university project supervisor (Dr Scott Johnson). Audio (and optional video) of the focus group will be recorded through Google Meet and the recording will be immediately saved to the university secure google drive using your participant code to keep the information anonymous. The recording will be deleted immediately following completion of the research project. This anonymised transcript will be included in my final

published thesis and parts may be used in other publications, such as blogs, conference presentations, and lectures.

#### **11. Will I be recorded, and how will the recorded media be used?**

The audio recordings of your activities made during this research will be used only for analysis. The recording of your focus group will be transcribed so that all identifying details are anonymised meaning it will not be possible for you to be identified within the research. No other use will be made of them without your written permission, and no one outside the project will be allowed access to the original recordings.

#### **12. Who is organising and funding the research?**

This research is being organised by the University of Sheffield, no external funding has been received.

#### **13. Who is the Data Controller?**

The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly.

#### **14. Who has ethically reviewed the project?**

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure, as administered by the School of Education. Ethics approval reference number 052001.

#### **15. What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research or report a concern or incident?**

If you are dissatisfied with any aspect of the research please speak to a member of the research team (contact details below). If you wish to make a complaint, please contact Dr Scott Johnson ([email address redacted for confidentiality]) in the first instance. If you feel your complaint has not been handled in a satisfactory way you can contact the Head of School [Professor Rebecca Lawthom; [email address redacted for confidentiality]]. If the complaint relates to how your personal data has been handled, you can find information about how to raise a complaint in the University's Privacy Notice:

<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>. If you wish to make a

report of a concern or incident relating to potential exploitation, abuse or harm resulting from your involvement in this project, please contact the project's Designated Safeguarding Contact [Dr Scott Johnson; [email address redacted for confidentiality]] and/or the University's Chair of Ethics (Dr Anna Weighall; [email address redacted for confidentiality]). If the concern or incident relates to the Designated Safeguarding Contact, or if you feel a report you have made to this Contact has not been handled in a satisfactory way, please contact the Head of School [Professor Rebecca Lawthom; [email address redacted for confidentiality]] and/or the University's Research Ethics & Integrity Manager (Lindsay Unwin; [email address redacted for confidentiality]).

## **16. Contact for further information**

### **Researcher:**

Natalie Neal

Trainee Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

### **University Project Supervisor:**

Dr Scott Johnson

Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint please contact:

Professor Rebecca Lawthom

Head of School

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

School of Education, The University of Sheffield Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN

You will be given a copy of this information sheet and, if you decide to participate, a signed consent form to keep.

**Thank you for your reading this information sheet. If you have any further questions, please speak to a member of the research team.**

Appendix 16: Participant consent form for Phase Two of the study

**Participant Consent Form**

<b><i>Please tick the appropriate boxes</i></b>	<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Taking Part in the Project</b>		
I have read and understood the project participant information sheet dated 27.04.2023 or the project has been fully explained to me. (If you will answer No to this question please do not proceed with this consent form until you are fully aware of what your participation in the project will mean.)		
I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the project.		
I agree to take part in the project. I understand that taking part in the project will include being part of a focus group with 4-6 other people via Google Meet video call.		
I agree that whilst I am participating in the focus group audio recordings will be made. I agree to being audio recorded and for anonymised transcripts of these audio recordings to be used in the research.		
I agree that whilst I am participating in the focus group video recordings will be made. I agree to being video recorded and for these anonymised video recordings to be used in the research. <i>(optional)</i>		
I understand that by choosing to participate as a volunteer in this research, this does not create a legally binding agreement nor is it intended to create an employment relationship with the University of Sheffield.		
I understand that my taking part is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the study at any time up until <u>24 hours</u> after my focus group; I do not have to give any reasons for why I no longer want to take part and there will be no adverse consequences if I choose to withdraw.		
<b>How my information will be used during and after the project</b>		
I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, address and email address etc. will not be revealed to people outside the project.		
I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers will have access to this data only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I understand and agree that other authorised researchers may use my data in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs, only if they agree to preserve the confidentiality of the information as requested in this form.		
I give permission for the recording(s) of my focus group to be saved in a secure Google Drive managed by the University of Sheffield. I understand that this will be destroyed after it has been transcribed anonymously.		
<b>So that the information you provide can be used legally by the researchers</b>		



I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield.		
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Name of participant [printed]    Signature    Date

Name of Researcher [printed]    Signature    Date

**Project contact details for further information:**

**Researcher:**

Natalie Neal

Trainee Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

**University Project Supervisor:**

Dr Scott Johnson

Educational Psychologist

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

*If you would like to speak to someone outside of the research team in the event of a complaint please contact:*

Professor Rebecca Lawthom

Head of School

[email address redacted for confidentiality]

School of Education, The University of Sheffield Western Bank Sheffield S10 2TN

## Appendix 17: Question guide for focus groups one and two in Phase Two of the study

### Set up:

- The discussion should take approximately one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes, but may go on a little longer. One hour and thirty minutes has been allocated for the session in total, allowing for time for any questions at the end.
- During the discussion, I will ask questions relating to topics that assistant EPs talked about in the first phase of my research. I'm seeking your thoughts, feelings, and opinions about these topics. You are welcome, but are not required, to share any information or talk about personal experiences. You do not need to answer any questions if they make you feel uncomfortable.
- You can leave the focus group at any point and do not need to explain why. If you do leave, I will contact you afterwards by email to set up a debrief.
- For confidentiality reasons, please do not discuss what happens in this group outside of the group using identifying details. It is ok to talk very generally about taking part in the group but please do not identify individuals who took part or specific comments they made.

### Ground rules:

- Mobile phones switched off or on silent.
- Please try not to talk over each other, as this makes transcription of the group almost impossible, and I want to hear your viewpoints. Please use the hand up function if needed.
- There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to disagree with each other and offer alternative viewpoints but please do this in a respectful manner.
- If you need a break or to go to the toilet, etc. at any point, just turn your mic and camera off and come back when ready.
- I may interrupt the group if these ground rules are not being followed.

### Introductions:

- Please introduce yourself with your name and how long you have been working as an Assistant EP.

### Question Guide:

#### **1. *Lacking meaning of work***

Participants in the first phase of the study talked about not knowing how to be an Assistant Educational Psychologist (EP), particularly when they first started working in the role, and whether they were knowledgeable enough in themselves.

1. How do you feel your knowledge of how to be an Assistant EP has changed since you started working in the role?
2. Do you feel your knowledge of your self has been challenged when working in the role?
3. How has this affected you? Probe for positives and negatives.

## **2. Creating meaning of work**

Participants in the first phase spoke about how they actively tried to make sense of how to be an Assistant EP, e.g., through the activities they did such as shadowing, the influence of others such as working together on cases with EPs and supervision, and drawing on their values and the values of the service.

4. What have you done to try to make sense of how to be an Assistant EP?
5. How have different ways of working with EPs affected your understanding of how to be an Assistant EP?
6. What role has supervision had in how you made sense of how to be an Assistant EP?
7. How have different values, e.g., person-centred, systemic working, affected your understanding of how to be an Assistant EP? Where do you think these values come from?

If someone asks for clarification or doesn't know how to answer the question give examples from participants in the first phase (look at memos) – *remember to write up reflections on how I was an active participant and influenced the data by doing this.*

Appendix 18: Sample of fieldnotes written during focus groups

<p>Focus Group 1 (P2, 7, 8, 9) 13/9/23  <u>Content</u></p> <p>(2/3) → (gave e.g.s from previous participants to clarify question - may have influenced p's descriptions)</p> <p>Supervision important</p> <p>Temporary contract.</p> <p>→ affects process of meaning making</p>	<p>FG1 (2/7/8/9) 13/9/23  <u>Reflection</u></p> <p>→ p's did talk about exceptions and other things like supervision so don't feel this directed or limited their responses.</p> <p>→ explicit processes of meaning making in discussions w/ supervisor          ↳ interpersonal meaning making also develops meaning of self not just role.</p> <p>→ temporary nature of role doesn't give time for extended meaning making          ↳ focus on meaning of work first (most useful for doctorate app?) then meaning of self</p>
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<p>FG1 (2, 7, 8, 9)  <u>content</u></p> <p>see how different EPs can work</p> <p>freedom + choice given by others          ↳ others don't teach what the role is</p> <p>Some Assts feel they have autonomy + others don't</p> <p>Always have to work in the way the supervising EP works = uncomfortable</p>	<p>FG1 (2, 7, 8, 9)  <u>reflections</u></p> <p>→ Meaning making dependent on activities they do which EPs have control over based on their meaning of EP work</p> <p>→ power in relationships?</p> <p>→ p's without autonomy don't think they have created meaning of Asst role/self but do have meaning of EP role (as inferred through their descriptions)</p> <p>→ ask more about this</p>
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## Appendix 19: Focus group one transcript

1 **Natalie:** Erm so I'll start just by talking through the first category that I've created from erm  
2 the interviews with the assistants before the summer so the first category I've created is  
3 that seems to be this lack of meaning in the role and that work doesn't have any meaning  
4 erm so they talked about not knowing how to be an assistant EP erm particularly when they  
5 first started working in the role and they also wondered whether they were kind of  
6 knowledgeable enough in themselves to be doing the role erm so the first question I  
7 wondered if you'd like to just have a chat about is and how do you feel your knowledge of  
8 how to be an assistant EP has changed since you first started working in the role

9 **Participant 9:** I definitely feel like the same like when I first started I felt like I didn't know  
10 what I was doing and I just going in very blind and I think especially starting during covid the  
11 opportunities for shadowing weren't really there now I feel like it's been a lot of on the job  
12 learning and just sort of muddling through it and it definitely took me I would say over a  
13 year to start feeling confident in what I was doing but at the start definitely I felt like  
14 imposter syndrome I think was definitely the word like didn't think I kind of knew what I was  
15 doing I felt like I I was a TA before so I just felt like a TA that'd been thrown into this role  
16 without really any training or anything extra to bring as like an assistant compared to a TA

17 **Participant 2:** I I would definitely agree with that I think when I look back when I started I  
18 was very reliant on everybody else to kind of tell me what to do or what I should be doing  
19 erm I had a lot of time to do reading and things and and that was great but scary at the  
20 same time because it's almost like no one's directing you to go 'you need to do this' or 'you  
21 need to do that' erm but we had our like first team day yesterday and there was a lot of  
22 times where people were going 'aww [Participant 2] did this with me [Participant 2] came  
23 along with this she would participate in that' and the new assistants actually said 'wow you  
24 did a lot last year' and I'm like 'I did but at the start of the year I didn't know what I was  
25 doing' and I guess it was me finding my feet and other people knowing that they could ask  
26 me to join them with things I suppose me being confident enough to ask if I could come  
27 along to things but it is one of those jobs I think where you learn through seeing and then by  
28 doing but you've gotta have the confidence to (laughs) to ask and to just shove yourself into

29 things cos I don't think if you could just sit there and read and sit behind the screen and do  
30 very little so I think it's really down to the individual to push themselves forward

31 **Participant 8:** Definitely yeah I think yeah I sort of agree with a lot that's been said there and  
32 I think you're right what you said there [Participant 2] is it's what I struggled with when I  
33 first started as an assistant was I went from a really quick paced job in a school erm so I was  
34 sort of a year lead and to just 'oh just do some CPD just do some reading' and I had a lot of  
35 guilt through that like 'am I doing enough how am I developing through this' erm so at the  
36 start I'd say I probably wasn't stimulated enough erm and also my local authority were quite  
37 new to assistants I think I was only the second round so they hadn't really developed how to  
38 use assistants I'd probably say they were quite confident in what was appropriate for us and  
39 what wasn't erm but I think definitely trying to put yourself out your comfort zone and look  
40 for opportunities has helped me learn and of course it's such a huge area all the different  
41 areas of special education needs and trying to develop confidence in that and imposter  
42 syndrome's definitely (laughs) something that creeps up most days erm but I think for me it  
43 something that's really helped me is connecting with other assistants through networks erm  
44 or y'know the team that you have if you have more than one assistant and that's really  
45 helped sort of share feelings and that is normal erm and that it is a real process of sort of  
46 development and I think that's what can be so hard when these positions are temporary and  
47 you're applying to a doctorate and it's like 'am I ready am I not ready' erm yeah

48 **Participant 7:** Yeah I agree with you all everything you've said erm I feel like you almost get  
49 this position and then all of your past experience goes out the window and you think 'I'm  
50 not capable I don't know anything I can't do this' and you actually forget how did you get  
51 here in the first place how did you get this job and what skills do I already have erm and  
52 having the two different councils to kind of compare erm I think the first council I worked  
53 with was what [Participant 8] was saying that the role wasn't really developed they  
54 employed seven new assistants they had this new model that they was trying to erm use  
55 and nobody knew how to use us (laughs) so it's almost like the strategy wasn't in place but  
56 they just employed seven assistants but then the EPs didn't really know like how to use us  
57 whereas the new council that I've been in it's only two weeks yet it's very clear there's lots  
58 of policies handbooks what the assistant role is what's expected of us erm so that kind of  
59 makes it easier one good thing I think though the other council that because they employed

60 seven of us we had a really clear induction erm where we like explicitly was shown what are  
61 pupil views how do we carry out an observation as an assistant erm so that was really  
62 helpful erm there was something else I was gonna say can't remember now gone out my  
63 head I was like trying to think as you were all talking (laughs) but I can't remember

64 **Participant 9:** There was something I thought of just as [Participant 8] was talking about  
65 having to sort of push yourself into it and get those new experiences and something that I  
66 thought is it's really hard to sort of see where the line is between 'I need to push myself and  
67 I need to do this' and that line where 'actually I'm not experienced enough to do this and I  
68 need to go back and talk to someone else' and sometimes because you do wanna prove  
69 yourself you perhaps I can think there's definitely been situations where I should have gone  
70 'actually I don't know that I need to go and y'know talk to my supervisor' or whatever but  
71 you have a go and you try and muddle through when actually when I look back that  
72 probably wasn't the best thing to do at the time

73 **Participant 7:** Yeah that reminds me that so it's like all other roles say you're a TA you've  
74 trained to probably be a TA you've done if you're a teacher you've probably trained to be a  
75 teacher so you know your role you've prepared you've trained whereas this is a role that  
76 yeah you've done a degree in psychology and you've got experience working in different  
77 roles but you haven't really trained for this role so you go in and I think even I mean I've not  
78 done it as long as you guys but will you ever feel like you really know the role or feel really  
79 capable because you haven't done the three year doctorate to do it I don't know that that's  
80 just my feeling around it I think

81 **Participant 2:** I think you're right and I think part of it comes from the confidence of the EPs  
82 that we work with so a couple of the EPs that I worked with a lot last year had experience of  
83 using assistants in their previous local authorities and then came here and with them I think  
84 they knew what they could ask me to do what I felt I could manage how much time they  
85 needed to give me in terms of support whereas other EPs hadn't used assistants well they  
86 were still quite new to our local authority as well and so I've got some people this year  
87 who've gone 'ooh actually I think I might be able to use you with something' whereas they  
88 didn't know that last year or they didn't realise what we could do and I think that probably  
89 then marked some of the experiences we had because some people felt like 'yes I can use I

90 know how to use you' as well as us going 'could I try and help you with that' (laughs) so I  
91 think it's been both ways

92 **Participant 9:** I feel like just from talking to other people even in like the two three years  
93 that I've been an assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more and it is  
94 more clearly defined like when I first started there was so many people in a similar position  
95 like 'there's seven of us no one knows what to do with us we don't know what to do with us'  
96 whereas now I feel like even though it has been a short period of time people are  
97 understanding it a little bit more and even like the new assistants that we've had the  
98 induction is so much more in depth and the training before you start and I feel like that's  
99 quite similar across the board with a lot of places

100 **Natalie:** Thank you everyone erm so I think we've kind of touched on the second question a  
101 little bit but I thought I'd just get some more ideas so the second question is do you feel that  
102 your knowledge of your self has been challenged when working in the role and how has that  
103 affected you

104 **Participant 7:** What do you mean by knowledge of yourself like your capabilities your skills  
105 all of those things

106 **Natalie:** Yeah so like kind of drawing on what previous participants have said around your  
107 competence your confidence your capability to do the role

108 **Participant 7:** Yeah

109 **Participant 8:** I think for me this is something that has developed a lot through my two years  
110 within my local authorities the EP service I work for they're very very big on supervision erm  
111 so I get a lot (laughs) of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values  
112 what are my skills and I'm very lucky that I've worked with an EP who does coaching erm  
113 and mentoring so sort of had experience of coaching pulling out values erm through that  
114 but I think for me one thing that I've really noticed is what sort of EPs I'm drawn to in my  
115 work and who I really sort of get my sort of shining golden moments from and I've sort of  
116 come to notice it is the sort of the skills and the values of the EPs and how it's quite similar  
117 to me and that surely helped me develop sort of the person the EP I want to become erm  
118 but I do think within the assistant role from my experience we get a lot of time of self-



119 reflection supervision talking through why you've done something that way what you could  
120 have done differently and compared to being in a school you don't get that time so it is a  
121 real position where I feel you can grow you have that space to be able to do that

122 **Participant 9:** I feel like my experience is quite different to that and erm maybe it's because  
123 I work in a private service so obviously it is different in some ways from local authority but  
124 we do a lot of like work that just contributes to statutory assessment so a lot of it is just  
125 assessment report assessment report and it's quite easy to get dragged down in like the day  
126 to day of it and I feel like the only time I really got to think about myself like that and y'know  
127 what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the  
128 first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' because I think  
129 otherwise yeah you just get stuck in that cycle for me anyway but obviously it is so different  
130 depending on where you are

131 **Participant 7:** Yeah my my experience I only have two weeks experience of being in this  
132 council to the last council is that it's completely different so I spent nine months in one  
133 council which the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices and do a collaborative  
134 joint assessment meetings and things so like you were saying it was very statutory heavy  
135 and I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months and I probably had two  
136 three supervisions in that nine months I started this job two weeks ago I've already had one  
137 supervision and I've got every supervision booked in every week (laughs) like going forward  
138 I've already had like we have to do a reflective journal every week so I've already started  
139 filling that out and starting to think in that reflective way of what happened and what could  
140 be better what could be different what went well and what didn't and I think just having  
141 even that even two weeks in a new service has shown me like you're saying [Participant 9]  
142 how different it can be within the service or whoever it is that your employed by erm so that  
143 is interesting because I feel like in this role now I probably will develop those skills and have  
144 more confidence and be able to know like my abilities and know what skills I can bring  
145 whereas before I think I just kept being 'yes' whatever the EP would ask 'yes' I wouldn't  
146 reflect I'd just do what I was told and so that's kind of exciting to think of what's to come  
147 with the reflection and development erm but kind of like worrying in a way that the  
148 experience is so different and because it's kind of a new role why is there not more of like a  
149 standardised way of being like 'assistants need this much supervision' or 'they need this

150 kind of induction' because I imagine I don't know cos I'm not an EP but with their three year  
151 doctorate and then that they probably have statutory things that they have to do and  
152 whereas I don't know if we do but yeah that is interesting

153 **Participant 2:** I'm quite amazed that you didn't really have supervision because I've like  
154 [Participant 8] I have fortnightly like supervision with the deputy head of our department  
155 and we have weekly peers supervision and then I have monthly group supervision so it's  
156 three very different experiences that I have but my attitude because I didn't really wanna  
157 apply for the doctorate in the first year I just wanted to do the job and I think probably I did  
158 spend a lot of last year just doing and probably not as much reflection as I maybe should  
159 have done erm but then my attitude going into my second year has been very much that I  
160 wanna take the time to reflect so I'm doing a PATH with my supervisor erm and then we've  
161 kind of planned in other things as we go along so that I can do more reflecting and  
162 journaling erm to kind of make sure that I'm making the most of all the opportunities that  
163 I've got whereas last year I think I did just throw myself into it and just go 'hit me with  
164 whatever you've got' and y'know 'I'll do anything' (laughs) like within reason obviously but I  
165 did just kind of want to see as much and do as much as I could so I don't know how much I  
166 learned about myself last year other than the bits of the job that I love and the bits of the  
167 job that I could probably push to one side a little bit but now I'm kind of using that to go  
168 actually 'what kind of EP do I wanna be which bits of the role are really important to me  
169 which theories really hold with my own personal values' so I think this year is is that year for  
170 me and I don't think I regret the way I did last year but the people who I was assistants with  
171 last year who are on the course I think they probably were doing more of that reflection  
172 across the year than I did erm which is probably why I didn't even contemplate that I was  
173 ready for the course (laughs) cos I didn't wanna be I didn't think I was erm so yeah I'm  
174 probably learning more about myself now erm but that's kinda developed over time

175 **Participant 9:** I do think you need for me I was exactly the same I needed that first year just  
176 to find my feet feel confident know what I was doing and then you can sort of grow on your  
177 skills and what the way that you want to take it and reflect on it like that but I've never been  
178 on a temporary contract but just going back to what someone said before I think feel like  
179 that's a bit of an issue with that a lot of assistants are on temporary contracts and just from  
180 the outside I feel like you wouldn't potentially have that time to find your feet and then sort

181 of develop yourself in that way if you've sort of I know a lot of them get extended but if  
182 you're conscious of 'ooh I've only got this job for a year two years' I feel like some people do  
183 need that time to find their feet and then start that like reflection process

184 **Natalie:** Thank you that was really interesting erm so the second category participants in the  
185 first phase of the study spoke about how they actively tried to make sense of how to be an  
186 assistant EP so for example through the activities they did such as going in shadowing  
187 people and they also talked about the influence of others on how they made sense of being  
188 an assistant such as working together on cases with other EPs and through supervision  
189 which we've touched on a little bit and then another part of that was around drawing on  
190 their values and what the values of the service they were working in as well so it's a bit  
191 multifaceted and I just wanted to ask some questions about these different parts of it so  
192 the first question is what have you done to try to make sense of how to be an assistant EP

193 **Participant 2:** I think for me the assistant network meetings were really really helpful with  
194 that erm coming in as an assistant and the first one I think was just a couple of months in to  
195 the job and actually listening to other people about what they do within their local  
196 authorities and actually the experiences of everyone being really different I think that it  
197 reassured me in some ways because as a group of four assistants in our local authority all of  
198 our experiences became quite different quite quickly because of the EPs that we were  
199 generally working with and actually hear from other people that there was people just doing  
200 statutory there's people just doing interventions in school and there was a whole range of  
201 things going on and I think that made me go this this is a really varied role so I shouldn't be  
202 expecting just er one thing or one experience it's about the breadth of what you've got and I  
203 think certainly when there was some people going saying 'we're just doing this one thing'  
204 that made me then go 'well I'm not gonna do just one thing I'm gonna experience as much  
205 as I can erm and then learn from everyone' and I think from talking to other assistants  
206 outside of your own local authority it's just a really useful thing to do to learn what people  
207 are doing what other people's experiences are like because ultimately you may be on the  
208 same course as them in a couple of years time so y'know it's good to have a breadth of  
209 knowledge just not from your little local authority

210 **Participant 9:** I would completely agree with that the assistant network meetings are so  
211 helpful and I was exactly the same it opened my eyes to how different everyone's role is and  
212 I definitely felt like I was one of those people that was just doing the same thing all the time  
213 but having that knowledge I was then able to go back to my service and be like 'look what all  
214 these other assistants are doing use us in this way we don't just have to do the same thing  
215 all the time' so that has completely changed my experience and my role

216 **Participant 8:** I think for me one thing that's really helped me makes sense of sort of the  
217 assistant EP role again I'll echo the networks have been absolutely brilliant I find Twitter  
218 really helpful erm sort of 'ooh this looks like an exciting idea this is how we could be used'  
219 because within my service we do get quite a lot of autonomy on like project work and I can  
220 become very stuck sometimes thinking 'what's appropriate y'know what's not appropriate'  
221 so I find sort of collaborating with other assistants really helpful and through that and I think  
222 as well I know there's obviously a big difference between what an assistant can do and an  
223 EP but what's really helped me make sense of my role as an assistant is going out with lots  
224 of different EPs erm and even we have a few trainees within our service and sort of doing  
225 some work with them and seeing sort of the the type of approaches that I want to use erm  
226 and so on erm but yeah I definitely echo the networks helped me understand that role erm  
227 and to our community has been a big support as well sort of makes sense of what sort of  
228 things we can do

229 **Participant 7:** Yeah I agree with you all erm the network meetings I'd not even heard of that  
230 until starting this new job so that sounds really interesting erm so I definitely want to attend  
231 that erm so what have I done so far to make sense I think probably like you've said that just  
232 asking lots of questions (laughs) so assistants that were already there at the old council  
233 some had been there for like three years so I've just asked lots and lots of questions and get  
234 lots of examples and erm even asking the EPs like 'what was your journey to becoming an EP  
235 and what have you previously done' and some had been assistants some hadn't erm just  
236 trying to make sense of the role through that really erm but definitely using like previous  
237 examples of work they've done so if it was a research project they'd done or a piece of work  
238 they'd carried out or an intervention that they'd developed like the more you're looking at  
239 all of these things you kinda think 'oh I can do that then like that is like something I could do  
240 or I couldn't do or' yeah so I agree with you all

241 **Natalie:** Fab thank you erm how have the different ways you've worked with educational  
242 psychologists affected your understanding of how to be an assistant EP?

243 **Participant 9:** Erm so erm ours is quite a small service so I've only really worked with two  
244 educational psychologists and one of them is like sort of my direct line manager so I worked  
245 under her a lot to start with erm and then just as I've been like trying to expand my  
246 experiences I started to work with the other one and I think it showed me how different EPs  
247 can work erm I was very much sort of previously 'this is the way that assistants have to work  
248 because this is the way that my EP that I work with likes it' and then to experience what I  
249 would say is probably the total opposite it was like 'oh it's so much freer than this' and it's  
250 y'know you don't have to just do the same things all the time and it's yeah just a lot freer  
251 than I probably thought for the first year and a bit that I worked there

252 **Participant 8:** I think for me it's actually given me more confidence in how I approach things  
253 because I was quite similar [Participant 9] I sort of thought 'oh you know very professional  
254 keeping to a certain way of working' but I've recently been doing a lot of work with quite a  
255 newly qualified EP and y'know the way that she'll write reports is quite similar to me just  
256 chucking everything down and it's giving me that confidence that actually working with a lot  
257 of different EPs in in different sort of erm y'know their different stages of where they are at  
258 in the work I've worked for some very experienced EPs that have been EPs for a long time  
259 and then quite newly qualified and it has helped me actually give me more confidence as  
260 much as it sounds quite a strange thing and actually I can sorta carve out my own approach  
261 as an assistant I think there can be quite a lot of pressure if you're joining a local authority to  
262 sort of y'know adhere to how they do things but y'know there is a lot of power in almost  
263 you carving out how you want to be an assistant and maybe if you want to work more  
264 dynamically or use standardised or if there's a bit of psychology you sort of prefer to use  
265 through consultation erm so yeah it's me sort of pick my tools a little bit what I want to use  
266 and that's come from just working with a lot of different EPs in the service...

267 **Participant 7:** Is that...

268 **Participant 2:** ...Yeah

269 **Participant 7:** ...Your understanding of the role of the assistant not understanding the role of  
270 the EP is that the question Natalie

271 **Natalie:** Yeah and I guess in a way it sounds like from what you've been saying that it can  
272 merge and it's not quite as separate as you've said working with other EPs seems to also  
273 influence your understanding of what it means to be an EP so I'm interested in what you  
274 think about how it affects your understanding of your role at the moment as an assistant,  
275 but also maybe whether you think this is different to your understanding of the EP role,  
276 anything you think really

277 **Participant 7:** Yeah cos I think for me like I don't know if it's helped me understand the role  
278 of an assistant because maybe cos I haven't like had the same experiences where I've had  
279 any autonomy I feel like I've very much just been like 'yes I'll do that' and whether it's cos  
280 I've heavily done statutory erm but as far as like understanding the EP role and what will be  
281 expected on the statutory side it's helped me to understand that and because of I've  
282 supported it's quite a large council service so there was a lot of EPs and I've supported a lot  
283 of different people like you were saying [Participant 8] from like newly qualified to very  
284 experienced and to see the provision that they put in place and the outcomes they produce  
285 and then how they gather that information erm and then it's made me to start think 'how  
286 would I want to do that or what would I like to use or how would I even like the writing  
287 styles' like you're saying when you're doing a report erm so I think I've benefited in that way  
288 cos if we ever do become a qualified EP I guess that's going to be a big part of the role then  
289 erm so yeah it's helped me understand that but as far as understand my role now as an  
290 assistant maybe that will come now I'm in this new council with the reflection and having  
291 more autonomy but so far probably it's erm not helped me that much really

292 **Participant 2:** I I think even though it's a very different experience I'm I'm a bit with you  
293 [Participant 7] I'm not entirely sure that it's taught me more about what the assistant role is  
294 it's more just the opportunities that have come out of it so working with different EPs seeing  
295 the way they work but then equally them going 'what would you like to do as part of this  
296 piece of work so would you like to do some cognitive assessments would you like to write  
297 part of the report do you wanna do some individualised work with the young person' and I  
298 think it's it's all those different things but that's kind of what you make the assistant role

299 rather than teaching you what it is and I think that's when I think what what [Participant 8]  
300 said it's probably more helping me think about what kind of EP I wanna be at the end of it so  
301 when I work with certainly EPs who I think have a very similar style to me and who look at  
302 my reports and go 'aw you're wordy just like me...

303 (general laughter)

304 **Participant 2:** ...You like to write a narrative that's fine' and then I work with someone else  
305 who goes 'no just facts keep it facts and that's fine' and it is it's just different people and the  
306 different ways they like to do things but it challenges me to go along with someone who  
307 hates cognitive assessments and loves dynamic assessment and that's not something that I  
308 know a great deal about I'm learning more but don't know much about but it's alright to go  
309 along and go 'I'm learning from you I'm not sure that's the way I wanna work but actually it's  
310 still those experiences' and I think part of the assistant role is just gaining experience and  
311 knowledge and being okay with it not necessarily coming to anything other than you going  
312 'that's not for me' or 'that is for me' because that's then the assistant role is all about  
313 building you up for the doctorate and to develop as an EP so I feel like it's just those starting  
314 steps for you to go 'these are all the things you've allowed me to do and that's brilliant but  
315 then this is probably where I'm gonna put myself at some point'

316 **Participant 7:** Yeah I think like you were saying it it's you're not really understanding the  
317 role because I don't think well some councils but for me you don't really have that  
318 autonomy to although I'm taking these experiences and thinking 'I like that I would want to  
319 work like that' I don't have the choice to actually make that decision now cos I like you work  
320 with some EPs who do not touch a standardised assessment they they don't want to use  
321 them they don't agree with them it's all dynamic assessment and that's and I could think  
322 'yeah I really want to be that EP I never want to carry out a standardised assessment' but  
323 that's not for me to make that decision now or maybe it is in some authorities maybe but I  
324 don't know I don't feel like you can really carve your way into the role because really you  
325 don't have that autonomy at the end of the day cos you're following supervision from them  
326 I don't know

327 **Participant 9:** Yeah I agree you can figure out like what you like and what you might wanna  
328 do in the future but at the end of the day you you are always working under someone else  
329 and you will always have to do it in the way that they want you to

330 **Participant 8:** One thing that sort of helped I suppose carve out our assistant roles a little bit  
331 as we have a group of EPs that sort of oversee us like a assistant EP working team and that's  
332 sort of (laughs) changed every year we've had them because I think we are working out  
333 what maybe works well what doesn't work well erm but yeah I thought I'd just mention that  
334 we sort of have a team of EPs that do sort of oversee assistants and sort of plan out stuff for  
335 us

336 **Natalie:** I just wanted to come back about what you're talking about in terms of autonomy  
337 and whether you feel that's been helpful or not helpful or kind of something else in your  
338 role so [Participant 9] said that they kind of feel like they've got to do it in the way that the  
339 supervising EP has kind of said they make the final decision like how does that feel in the  
340 role?

341 **Participant 9:** Erm it is uncomfortable because obviously some things I do and don't agree  
342 with erm so it is a bit of a conflict of like what my values are and what their values are it's  
343 also difficult as well because when I'm working under different EPS I find that I'm having this  
344 the work that I'm doing is totally different or even the way that I'm writing a report is totally  
345 different and at one point I've been writing reports in like three or four completely different  
346 styles cos it's to each person's preference which then obviously makes the role a little bit  
347 harder cos you're having to change things all the time and do different things so yeah there  
348 is a lot of that second guessing is 'okay this is the way that I would wanna do it this is the  
349 way that this person would wanna do it and this person' and then I do find that I feel like I  
350 tend to well I feel like I have to go with what the EP wants because at the end of the day  
351 they're supervising it it's their case erm but yeah

352 **Participant 7:** And I always think that I'd like the confidence like I don't really want the  
353 autonomy (laughs) in some way because I'm not the qualified EP so I kind of I'm liking to see  
354 the different styles even if it might not align with my values or how I would think I'd do at  
355 the end of the day I haven't done that doctorate I am not the EP so in a way giving me that  
356 full autonomy would be scary maybe I don't know (laughs)



357 **Participant 2:** Yeah

358 **Participant 8:** I think as well it it's interesting isn't it like how actually quite mentally tiring it  
359 can be when you're working with lots (laughs) of different EPs and you're trying to almost  
360 put a lot of different hats on to EPs and I I don't think sometimes we give ourselves enough  
361 sort of y'know it's quite a difficult thing to do and erm I think from my experience it really  
362 depends what EP I'm working with I have some EPs I'm like 'you lead on writing it I'll do the  
363 last spell checks and stuff' but they'll go with how I want to do it whereas other ones it's 'oh  
364 we need to change the language to this we need to fit it into these headings' and so it it is  
365 can be quite erm quite overwhelming at times erm and a lot to think about especially if  
366 you're writing the four different reports and they're all very different

367 **Participant 2:** Yeah I think I was just thinking along those same lines cos I think sometimes  
368 when you go into like I've done meetings with different EPs and the way they approach  
369 them is so different and I think that's just y'know it's the same when you work with young  
370 people you think about the context of that young person their age and everything else  
371 before you go into that situation and I kind of feel like dealing with EPs is a little bit the  
372 same you think about the EP that you're working with the things you know about them and  
373 you probably adapt yourself to to them which then I suppose is not massively different to  
374 how you have to adapt yourself to a parent meeting a school meeting a meeting with a  
375 young person so yeah I think I (laughs) just kind of deal with different EPs as it comes but  
376 yeah it can be quite mentally taxing I think to to have to change what you do or the way that  
377 you might work to suit them but I think a bit like [Participant 7] I like at the end of the day  
378 sometimes that it's them who has the final say on something so y'know yes you might go  
379 'ugh I wish they'd just agree to that' but ultimately it stops with them so it's quite nice  
380 sometimes to be able to give a little bit of that back and go 'done exactly what you said and  
381 now it's yours to take forward'

382 **Participant 7:** I think you've just like hit the nail on the head there saying with the fact  
383 understanding the role well how are we ever gonna understand the role because like you're  
384 saying you're adapting that role to every EP that you work with so how are you gonna  
385 understand the role but then for me now I've moved to a new council with a whole other  
386 set of EPs so now I've got to understand the role again whereas if you're a teacher you're

387 probably a teacher in whatever school you know your role you're a teacher you've got the  
388 curriculum y'know whereas like you've just said you are adapting that role to every EP that  
389 you're gonna support so are we ever really gonna completely understand that role if it's so  
390 varied for each EP for each service I don't know

391 **Participant 9:** Erm something I do like sorry if this has been mentioned I just had to answer  
392 the door erm I think it totally depends on like the relationship that you've got with the EP as  
393 well I find with so many EPs I've worked with they'll have their style and I'll have mine and  
394 we can have a conversation about 'well this is what I think and this is why' and some of  
395 them are really receptive to that and y'know they're open to sort of the challenge of  
396 someone saying 'well I think it might be best to do in a different way' some EPs just like it  
397 their way and that's how it has to be but I think I do think having that relationship with an  
398 EP where you can have that conversation is really nice as well and sort of shape it in that  
399 way like rather than it just being 'I'll do what you said because I have to'

400 **Participant 7:** That sounds better doing it that way if it could be a standard thing that would  
401 be great (laughs)

402 **Natalie:** So do you feel that helps the way you understand both your role at the moment  
403 and how you would be an EP in the future if you worked in that way where you can kind of  
404 collaborate and share that understanding rather than the EP just saying 'this is how I want  
405 you to do it just go and get on with it'

406 **Participant 7:** Yeah

407 **Participant 9:** Yeah cos I think that gives you more understanding of why you're doing what  
408 you're doing as well it's not just blindly following orders it's even if you're having that  
409 conversation if you're having to sort of back up your point and say 'this is why I think this is  
410 the right thing to do' you're understanding it a lot more than 'yeah just do it'

411 **Natalie:** Thank you so the next question is about supervision and so I wondered if you could  
412 tell me about the role that supervision has had in how you've made sense of how to be an  
413 assistant EP

414 **Participant 7:** For me I've already mentioned I've had very little supervision erm generally as  
415 a team really supportive like unofficial supervision great like I can ask anything and that  
416 whole psychological safety erm I've had within that team erm I feel confident to ask things  
417 but as like formal supervision goes I've had very little so I don't know how much input I can  
418 have on that kind of answer

419 **Participant 9:** For me we have formal supervision erm between like half an hour and an  
420 hour for a week erm at the start for me that was absolutely massive and figuring out 'what  
421 should I do how should I do it what shouldn't I do' erm again I think quite specific to the  
422 situation just because it was covid and I was working on my own a lot it was sort of the only  
423 interaction that I had with an EP for maybe the first six months that I was an assistant so  
424 although the team were really supportive as well it was just that safe space to ask even if it's  
425 a stupid question 'should I know this should I do this' all sorts of stuff like that so for me I  
426 don't think I could have done my job for the first six months without supervision

427 **Participant 8:** I um yeah so I get supervision once a week with my supervisor and then a  
428 peer supervision once a week with two other assistants now we have group it's almost  
429 about every five to six weeks so I think supervision for me um it's really helped sort of  
430 develop the EP I am again we talk through a lot of sort of casework I'm involved with what  
431 might I do differently what am I needing to change but I think for me and [Participant 7] I  
432 think you touched on it it's that safety it's a huge safety net for me supervision and I think as  
433 well it's it's really one thing that I sort of struggled with this time it's more group dynamics  
434 with other assistants and that it's really helped me actually keep that lid on what I want to  
435 do sometimes talking through things so it's really developed my I'd say what's the word I'm  
436 looking for like people skills really like how to sort of deal with challenging situations and  
437 working y'know when I'm working alongside parents and stuff so that's actually helped to  
438 develop quite a lot of skills and and coping mechanisms really when I'm having quite  
439 challenging times at work erm but as well I think in terms of group supervision we explore  
440 like it can be a lot of different things like psychological theory or we'll explore research  
441 methods or consultation so it's really helped link the psychology theory with the practical  
442 stuff which I find really difficult sometimes so it's really helped sort of make those links for  
443 me I'd say

444 **Participant 2:** I think cos obviously I I get three different types of supervision as well and I  
445 think when I started the job having never had supervision before I kind of went into it with  
446 this 'is someone judging me (laughs) is someone keeping notes on whether I'm doing good  
447 supervision' erm and I really struggled with it initially I think especially from a school cos I  
448 came from a school background and kind of any kind of supervision in a school is usually  
449 someone judging you and how good a lesson is so it took me a while to get over that and  
450 actually my supervisions all became very different so some of them tended to be very  
451 problem solving based so when I had issues helping me work through them no one ever  
452 gave me answers which (laughs) it would have been the simple solution but actually getting  
453 me to search for my own process of going through something and that's really useful cos  
454 that's something now that I just generally tend to do myself cos the supervisor that had last  
455 year who did a lot of that with me I don't have her this year erm and so actually now I can  
456 see that I'm practically applying that in situations rather than just going 'er stuck need to  
457 wait a week until I talk to her' erm my peer ones is very much kind of we reflect on what  
458 we're doing erm the experiences we've got sharing things that are going on which again is  
459 just nice because sometimes we see each other loads and sometimes we're all very separate  
460 so I kind of like that as a checking in one erm and then our group ones kind of cover  
461 everything so we do we'll review a paper we'll talk about theory erm any research that  
462 someone's picked up on and I like those because again it's all different elements of being an  
463 EP or an assistant it's it's kind of reflection it's y'know how you apply something to the work  
464 that you're doing erm whether something reflects your own views or values and again it's all  
465 that building up the kind of EP you wanna be erm and I guess when I've started this year  
466 with new assistants and we did our first peer supervision I was a bit like 'how do I want this  
467 to go for them' so we spent a lot of time actually just talking about what they wanted to get  
468 out of it rather than me going in and making it something so I think helping them to feel like  
469 they had autonomy within that situation as well rather than just me dictating something I  
470 think hopefully is making a difference to them as well cos I'm I'm conscious of the  
471 experience that they are stepping into

472 **Participant 9:** Can I just echo what erm [Participant 8] said about erm how supervision for  
473 me it's been like the most important well one of the most important things of supervision is  
474 linking the job and what you're actually doing to the theory and I think supervision is

475 massive for that erm because obviously I think you just get stuck in the routine but it's about  
476 actually using the psychology and I think that's one of the best things for me that I got out of  
477 supervision

478 **Natalie:** Thank you erm so on to the last question the last question is thinking about values  
479 so how have different values so some of the ones that participants mentioned in the first  
480 part of the study were being person centred or valuing systemic working erm so how have  
481 different values affected your understanding of how to be an assistant EP and where do you  
482 think those values have come from?

483 **Participant 9:** Erm I think very similar to what we said before I do think a lot of your values  
484 come from the EPs that you work with and you sort of pick and choose which ones you align  
485 with but it's quite difficult to sort of develop those values and think about them until you've  
486 seen them or talked about them so obviously that is from the EPs

487 **Participant 8:** I think for me quite a lot a my values it took me a while to realise maybe what  
488 they were (laughs) and sometimes they changed a little bit but I think a lot of mine are deep  
489 rooted from my experience before a was a assistant so I worked in a secondary school for  
490 erm sort of SEMH needs and a lot of those children experienced quite very hard starts to  
491 their lives and a big thing I sort of use in my work is a big thing I'm looking on is compassion  
492 and erm that's something that really that I try to bring a lot into my work erm and actually  
493 I've realised it dunno how to really word this but it really helps sometimes when I'm feeling  
494 a little bit maybe overwhelmed by going into something as an assistant so a started doing a  
495 lot of more problem solving sessions with staff and some of them are quite difficult cases  
496 and I've really tried to use my value of compassion to sort of 'I understand how you're  
497 feeling' to try and build those relationships with staff because I don't have my own allocated  
498 schools I just dip in and out and I can find it quite difficult to build relationships sometimes  
499 when I am in and out so that value really helps me as an assistant just that creating a really  
500 warm space and really empathising with them and stuff erm but yeah I'll agree with  
501 [Participant 9] I think another one of my values has come with working with another EP who  
502 loves collaborating and put me out my comfort zone at first but actually it's showed me the  
503 power of collaborating and a lot of stuff I've been involved in wouldn't have probably  
504 happened if I didn't reach out to that person on Twitter or we'd done a piece of work

505 together erm so that those two things have really helped me sort of form my role I'd say  
506 erm yeah

507 **Participant 2:** For me it's come from a few different places I think a lot of it's come from my  
508 past experience so I worked in in schools for a long time and actually a big chunk of it is the  
509 reason why I left education cos I was I went into management and hated being hated not  
510 working with young people basically and being stuck in meetings and actually it was about  
511 the kind of change I wanted to make for young people or support schools to to make the  
512 right decisions for young people and then through this last year I think a lot of the work that  
513 I've done with different EPs has helped to shape that as well and then I'm probably not as  
514 good with Twitter as [Participant 8] is but I do like reading people's reflections on there and  
515 then podcasts have been quite a really useful one as well erm Agents of Hope podcast is one  
516 that I love listening to because you don't only get a sense of why people became EPs but  
517 also through the work that they've done and what values like hold most meaning to them  
518 but I think obviously with the root of Agents of Hope is just hope and I think that's a really  
519 big one for me it's going into every situation with the hope that if something's wrong or  
520 something needs improving that actually we will eventually get there and I think I always try  
521 to maintain that y'know even if it's a really small change hopefully that small change will  
522 snowball over time or that someone'll reflect on something that you said and it'll make a  
523 difference in their daily practice so that's really held true to me in the last year and I think  
524 when I've started doing my PATH kind of thinking about what's really important to me and  
525 then thinking about how I'm gonna reflect that in in what I accomplish over the next year

526 **Participant 7:** I agree with you that I think the values come from lots of different places not  
527 just from the experience as an assistant but you can't help but bring those values that you  
528 already had with you although I would say erm they have changed like as I've worked in  
529 services and erm the understanding like how they've affected my understanding of the role I  
530 guess before I'd think a lot more so a lot of my work was like in social care like on a family  
531 one-to-one level with this family working intensely erm in lots of like deprived areas like  
532 kind of having that relational approach and I think as I started to think from the EP like a  
533 kind of more systemic level maybe so like that's okay supporting like that intervention for  
534 that one child but how can we work more systemically with that school or support the staff  
535 to support those children so you're kind of having a greater impact on more children rather

536 than just I don't know that's how I think it's changed erm probably through being in like a  
537 service with the EP cos like you say you're not in one school you're in lots of schools and you  
538 can't like divide yourself up and give all of your time so it's kind of like thinking more  
539 systemically how can we help that school to help those individuals because me intrinsically  
540 just want to build that relationship with that child and like get to know that family and really  
541 like dig deep but you just can't really do that as much and actually I think that's been a bit of  
542 a challenge for me within this role and thinking of the EP role like that I miss is it's more like  
543 quick isn't it quick in quick out and I miss like really getting to know that family and those  
544 children and like building those relationships erm yeah I find that bit tricky (laughs)

545 **Participant 8:** Yeah no I agree with you I think it is difficult because a lot of the time you're  
546 just that little piece of the puzzle and I think one thing for me as well that I sort of it sort of  
547 helps lower my imposter syndrome a bit is just having that curiosity that's something that I  
548 always hold on to like 'okay so what's happening here' and I think sometimes you try to  
549 bring that value through the work that you do and I think that's what's so powerful about  
550 the work we do is we can create that space to sort of apply curiosity y'know 'what is this  
551 behaviour communicating' thinking outside the box a bit erm and I think that's I really enjoy  
552 those opportunities I get sort of apply those values that I really really like working towards  
553 but yeah it's it's a totally different way of working from school and stuff like that

554 **Participant 7:** Yeah and I think what you said about like compassion and like for me similar  
555 with like the social care side of thing and thinking of kind of making it accessible to those  
556 families because it's very like daunting 'oh the EP educational psychologist is coming' or 'the  
557 assistant' I think it's daunting so just being even in those short snapshots of time like making  
558 yourself approachable talking them on like hmm just it's kind of got this thing like this  
559 academic like kind of feel to it but kind of keeping those values still I'm gonna just be me  
560 from [county] with my accent like making those relationships still with families with children  
561 erm and I think like keeping that value don't all of a sudden think 'well now I'm educated to  
562 this so I'm going to go in and be' y'know because that is just putting barriers isn't it so I think  
563 keeping that value and making it accessible to all and I think I really like feel passionate  
564 about that because I don't really like the private schools I don't like the classes and I think  
565 everything should be accessible regardless of your background your postcode things like

566 that so yeah keeping those values within the role like you say you can still do it it's just keep  
567 reminding yourself that that's I don't know why you're doing it

568 **Participant 8:** I think my values really are a reflection of how I want to sometimes be treated  
569 as well I think I really respond well to somebody being compassionate and warm and kind to  
570 me and people getting me on board 'd'ya wanna join in this' erm and yeah I think it is really  
571 how how I like to be treated and then I like to sort of use that in my work

572 **Participant 7:** Yeah definitely

573 **Participant 2:** But I think I think it fits as well because in the assistant role you go in knowing  
574 that you're not the person who knows as much y'know you always know that that EP knows  
575 a great deal more than you probably in most situations and so I think there is a humility to  
576 the assistant role that actually translates really well when we work with families and schools  
577 because maybe they don't see that we're the big scary EP we're something that's kind of a  
578 bridge between normal people and EPs...

579 (general laughter)

580 **Participant 2:** ...erm yeah and so I feel like there is something in our role that actually does  
581 make us slightly more accessible to people and I think that's something that I wanna try and  
582 hold on to when hopefully at some point I'm an EP to actually remember when I was an  
583 assistant and and how I felt and the uncertainty that often felt in situations and bring that to  
584 kind of consultation and things and be able to reflect and go y'know 'I'm not the expert' I  
585 never feel like I'm going to be the expert and to just actually go in with a very open mind to  
586 everything because I think as an assistant that's what you have to do y'know we've talked  
587 about the adaptations to all the different people in situations and so you do have this kind  
588 of level of 'I don't know everything and I'm just gonna embrace it' and I think that's probably  
589 one of the strengths of being an assistant before you get to be an EP because actually  
590 you've you've gone through that and you've not just gone university doctorate hello fully  
591 formed EP

592 (general laughter)



593 **Natalie:** I think that was really interesting about I was kind of wondering whether people  
594 who hold certain values are drawn to this role cos it sounds like everyone has held similar  
595 values either in previous roles or something that was really important to them erm  
596 personally erm and then that's affected your decision to become an assistant what d'ya  
597 think

598 **Participant 2:** I think for me yes because I did my masters kind of during when I was  
599 teaching because I I kind of felt like this is where I wanted to go and I'd spent some time  
600 with some EPs who'd said 'have the confidence to think that you can do it' but when I  
601 finished my masters I in no way felt like I was ready to apply for the doctorate and so to me  
602 applying to be an assistant was the ideal way to get experience and knowledge and  
603 understanding of the job before I felt ready to apply and like I said even in my first year I I  
604 wasn't convinced that I would be ready and I always thought I would do the first year and  
605 then apply in my second so I think well from my experience it's people who wanna know  
606 more about the job who want to learn more and maybe make themselves feel more  
607 prepared

608 **Participant 7:** I think [Participant 8] like was saying about you you're treating them like that  
609 because you hold that you want to be treated that way and it's like we can't speak for  
610 everybody else only people here but for me I know that this isn't something I've just  
611 developed as a professional I remember being a tiny child at school always standing up for  
612 what was right always making sure people were included because I wanted to feel like that I  
613 was always slightly strange like I wanted people to just accept me y'know and like that stays  
614 with you and you have that value and yes it's progressed into like my career and I've always  
615 worked with children and now going into the EP world but I think yeah those values have  
616 been there right from the beginning as a person they're not something that I don't think you  
617 can teach people actually I think you've either got and when you go into school you kind of  
618 see this like naturally we'd do it with children or we'll do it with staff if you hold that value  
619 where you want to make people feel included and feel comfortable and like I think you've  
620 had that from the beginning as a person really (laughs)

621 **Participant 8:** Yeah

622 **Participant 9:** I do think erm you sort of have to have those values to get you through to  
623 being an EP like it's not a quick training process like probably the quickest you could do it in  
624 is maybe like seven or eight years so I think if you don't have those values it wouldn't feel  
625 worth it to go through degree masters experience doctorate so yeah I think the profession is  
626 full of people who have those values cos you have to be to get into it

627 **Participant 8:** Yeah I think it's like a passion isn't it...

628 **Participant 7:** Yeah

629 **Participant 8:** ...It's I know what I'm like I'll get this like really strong feeling like I want  
630 y'know I want to advocate for this child and this family and even even staff like I'm working  
631 with staff and making their voice heard as well it is it's to me it's not a job it's part of my life  
632 (laughs) y'know it's something that I think about all day every day sometimes too much and  
633 it is it's part of your personality (laughs) almost I feel I really notice my values at work and  
634 what I believe in comes through sort of like family issues friendship issues and stuff like that

635 **Participant 2:** And I think a lot of those core values that we have is probably why we got the  
636 assistant roles because probably when they're interviewing us that's what they're looking  
637 for they're looking for the people who have the passion and the compassion and y'know  
638 determination to make a difference and that's probably why then we all sit here and go 'we  
639 really wanna be EPs' cos they get that sense from us when they hire us

640 **Participant 8:** Absolutely

641 **Participant 2:** I hope so

642 (General laughter)

643 **Participant 9:** I think so definitely cos like they're not hiring for an EP they're not hiring for  
644 someone who knows everything I think at an assistant level they are just looking for the  
645 values and the like potential to then learn everything but that's all you can have at that  
646 stage I think just the passion to want to do it

647 **Natalie:** Thank you erm and then the last thing I just wanted to pick up on was how you  
648 were kind of talking about erm like listening and seeing the values that other educational

649 psychologists or other members of the service you've worked with have and I kind of  
650 wondered where you think their values have come from

651 **Participant 7:** I think it's intrinsic I think when you talk to people there's nobody who  
652 studied psychology who works in psychology who hasn't got a story...

653 (general laughter)

654 **Participant 7:**...Like everybody has a story (laughs) so whatever that may be whether that  
655 have like needs themselves whether they've been through trauma whatever it may be we all  
656 have a story and I think like the more relationships you build with EPs and the more you  
657 open up with each other you start to learn everybody's story y'know that nurture nature  
658 thing there's a reason we are the way we are and I think yeah I think it's intrinsic within  
659 yeah

660 **Participant 9:** I agree I think it's intrinsic but then I also think as well especially with more  
661 experienced EPS I feel like they've had time to really sort of hone if that's the right word  
662 their values and then to completely work in that way because sort of like we said before  
663 they've got that autonomy so the way they work is completely based on their values and  
664 although I definitely do think they're intrinsic they probably develop over time as well with  
665 like what they see in their work and the experiences that they've had erm like the EPs that I  
666 work with now I feel like they're so solid in 'this is me this is what I believe and this is what I  
667 do like to support that' and I feel like sort of that confidence can only really come from  
668 doing it for a long time

669 **Participant 8:** Yeah I think one thing I really notice the group a EPs I work with have very  
670 strong set of values and a lot of it y'know comes from their story as well a few who I've  
671 worked with it it makes up who they are but one when when I really notice how strong they  
672 feel about their values is as many local authorities we've got huge waiting lists and we still  
673 have our service level agreement to school but y'know it's like we need to try and get  
674 through this and it just does not align with a lot of the EP's values and you can see them  
675 getting very upset about the way sometimes they're having to work and that shows how  
676 how deep rooted those values are within them erm and it's quite inspiring actually when  
677 you see them talk about y'know the way they want to work and stuff

678 **Participant 2:** Yeah I think I love it it tends to be our team meetings where you see it the  
679 most erm where where there is something that the council said we need to be doing or not  
680 doing and it's at that point where it's almost like a call to arms...

681 **Participant 8:** Yeah

682 **Participant 2:** ...With I think all of the EPs I think y'know there was a core set of values that  
683 all of them have they reflect them differently in the way they work but they're all still there  
684 and there is this very motivation to stay true to themselves to stay true to the role and the  
685 work that they want to do and suddenly when some piece of legislation or someone from  
686 up high says 'no you have to do it this way' you do see the struggle within them and actually  
687 that's them holding on to what's really important to them and I think that's really important  
688 for us to see because y'know to know that there are certain challenges that even they face  
689 when they're very experienced erm but they still hold true to who they are and have the  
690 confidence to be louder about it than we necessarily are so I think yeah as [Participant 9]  
691 said it's that confidence within them that we maybe don't have but the the knowledge that  
692 you can stay true to your values is really important I think for assistants to see or to be fair  
693 anyone who wants to be an EP

694 **Participant 8:** Definitely

695 **Natalie:** So that's all the questions but I just kind of wanted to open it up if any of you have  
696 any questions or any reflections on the discussion that we've had

697 **Participant 8:** I think it was really powerful and I think I've spoke to a lot of assistants and I  
698 think we see the slight similarities but then the differences as well and I think Natalie you  
699 really you really encompassed it well there we are actively moulding our role and I don't  
700 know about any of you but I feel exhausted all the time (laughs) after a day at work and it's  
701 so much more mentally cos sometimes I'm just working all day but I'm like but I think your  
702 brain is just constantly going everyday 'what can I do how could I get this opportunity how  
703 does this apply to being an EP' and I think that's a really really powerful way of putting it but  
704 no I've really enjoyed it it's been great listening to everyone's stories

705 **Participant 7:** Yeah and I think you have to remember the reason you're an assistant is to  
706 become an EP so it's like we're at the step like before the training you're kind of already pre-  
707 training...

708 **Participant 8:** Yeah (laughs)

709 **Participant 7:** ...So like you're not just doing the job you're thinking like 'how can I reflect on  
710 this what can I learn from this how can I develop from this' and then thinking of your  
711 application for the next step like it is a bit exhausting and almost I feel like I got to the  
712 assistant role after like working so hard doing the degree masters experience and then it's  
713 like 'oh I'm here I'm here now like now what...

714 (general laughter)

715 **Participant 7:** ...Okay I'm an assistant' and that kind of like imposter syndrome like 'oh my  
716 God what am I doing here' (laughs) like I dunno there has been moments of that like once  
717 you get there kind of thinking 'now I don't know what to do' (laughs) but yeah

718 **Participant 9:** I think you're so right it's not like a lot of other jobs in a way where a lot of  
719 other jobs you get the job and it's amazing and that's like job done whereas this is like okay  
720 'step one done on to the next thing'...

721 **Participant 7:** Yeah (laughs)

722 **Participant 9:** ...But just to echo what [Participant 8] said as well I feel like every single time I  
723 talk to other assistants it's so interesting just to get ideas of how everyone else's service  
724 works and what you do and I learn so many new things every time so yeah thank you  
725 (laughs)

726 **Participant 2:** Yeah it is good for stealing ideas...

727 (general laughter)

728 **Participant 2:** ...As well when you chat to other assistants so (laughs) I think the network  
729 meetings I always go away with something to think about or look at erm but it is you're right  
730 the mental challenge of this job you come out of doing something with an EP and you  
731 almost need a debrief after doing it and a chat and a reflection and then you go on to the

732 next thing which is quite different and I think some of the EPs that I work with at the  
733 moment there's a lot of statutory going on so when they get to do something that's not  
734 statutory they're like all guns in and then I probably dip more across different things and  
735 then actually it's so many different things that you're doing the mental challenge of that is  
736 really big

737 **Participant 7:** Especially when they're all new like when you're kind of experienced you've  
738 got this you've already done it once you've got experience whereas we're quite like things  
739 can be the first time you've ever done it and it's constant 'first first first' all the time

740 **Participant 8:** But I think as well it is the sort of journey of becoming an Educational  
741 Psychologist is y'know unless you're in it you don't really understand it and actually I think  
742 that in itself can be quite exhausting (laughs) when you have to re-explain to people 'I'm not  
743 an EP no I'm an assistant I still need to get on the doctorate to do' and actually it's just great  
744 to come together with like-minded people and just share some of the real highs cos there's  
745 so many of them and the lows as well and that can be really powerful but yeah I mean I  
746 absolutely love being an assistant erm I think I'm probably gonna miss it when one day I am  
747 fully qualified (laughs) hopefully

748 **Participant 7:** I think it is inspiring but also daunting like once you start talking to other  
749 assistants you think (laughs) like in your head 'I've been working really hard I've got all this  
750 experience' and like then you like become an assistant 'ooh everybody's been working really  
751 hard' (laughs) like I don't know it's kind of daunting almost then like 'oh my God what can I  
752 bring because everybody's got so much' yeah

753 **Participant 8:** Yeah totally

754 **Natalie:** Thank you everyone I'm gonna stop the recording now

## Appendix 20: Focus group two transcript

1 **Natalie:** Okay so what I'm going to start with is just talking through the first category that  
2 I've created from the participants what we spoke about in the first phase of the study so the  
3 first category at the moment I've called kind of lacking meaning of work erm so participants  
4 spoke about not knowing how to be an assistant educational psychologist particularly when  
5 they first started working in the role and they also wondered whether they were  
6 knowledgeable enough in themselves to do the work that they were doing in the role as  
7 well so the first question I wondered if you could discuss for me is how do you feel your  
8 knowledge of how to be an assistant EP has changed since you started working in your role

9 **Participant 10:** Sorry I'm just writing the question down (laughs)

10 **Natalie:** Don't worry if you want me to repeat anything just ask it's ok

11 **Participant 10:** I'm happy to start if I think for me I struggled with knowing just how like  
12 school systems worked and I felt like there was a lot of sort of unspoken stuff (laughs) like  
13 stuff about term times and about um the way that schools run um we are a two tier system  
14 predominantly but we do have a few schools that are in a three tier system and I wasn't a  
15 teacher beforehand so coming in with the psychology background but not the teaching  
16 background I have found that difficult like I was researching term dates all the time um cos I  
17 just didn't really know the school that I worked in before had their own systems like we had  
18 three week holidays rather than six weeks summer holidays so I found that an adjustment I  
19 would say my knowledge of psychology I felt quite comfortable with I I was worried that so  
20 I'd been at my previous job for for ten years in different roles but I thought that maybe I  
21 could only do that job but actually there was stuff that when I started people were talking  
22 about that 'ah okay I can transfer this knowledge' so I would say for me it was more about  
23 the lack of school understanding rather than like psychology understanding

24 **Participant 1:** Interestingly I was just thinking I was the opposite because of my teacher  
25 background...

26 **Participant 10:** Hmm

27 **Participant 1:** ...It's like the making sure that you're being explicit with the psychology  
28 because you know you do what you do but I think it's just that kind of routine this is why we

29 do it how we do it but sometimes it's underpinning the but that's why we do it that way and  
30 not this way so I think it's interesting that with your psychology experience versus my  
31 teaching experience yeah we'd be good together [Participant 10] (laughs)

32 **Participant 10:** Yeah (laughs)

33 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think similarly to [Participant 1] although I wasn't a teacher (clears  
34 throat) excuse me I think coming from a school working in a school I was aware of that  
35 school kind of system especially the mainstream system um but I think in terms of how my  
36 knowledge of the assistant EP role has developed over time it's kind of gaining information  
37 about services and services kind of external services to school how they work and thinking  
38 about how the systems around the child are interacting and our place and what we bring as  
39 assistant EPs to that um I didn't really have too much knowledge of the assistant EP role but  
40 I knew I'd done quite a lot of research during my undergrad and um this was the aim so  
41 when I was a learning mentor I was kind of thinking about what I might be doing as an as an  
42 assistant EP and then further down the line as an EP but I didn't have too much contact with  
43 EPs at all when I was a learning mentor I think I met an EP once to just kind of ask us some  
44 questions about the job role so I think with my role as an assistant where I work I don't think  
45 I realised how varied it would be erm and I think it's been really helpful to be involved at the  
46 different levels so one on working one on one with children working with their schools their  
47 families and then at a more systemic level so yeah I think it's about kind of developing that  
48 knowledge and that that value of of what we bring erm and our kind of place in in helping  
49 children and young people and their families and schools erm yeah that's what I'll say for  
50 that one I think

51 **Participant 10:** I would agree with what you said about the systems around the child...

52 **Participant 6:** Hmm

53 **Participant 10:** ...I'm still learning about that I would say I don't really know who to contact  
54 when erm and yeah where we sit within that um and something I've also struggled with is  
55 specialist teachers I don't know when it falls to a specialist teacher and when it falls to us I  
56 find their roles very similar sometimes and as much as I can understand that the EPs will



57 bring the psychology sort of knowledge the actual practical things that they do seem quite  
58 similar erm...

59 **Participant 6:** Hmm

60 **Participant 10:** ...So yeah that is something that I'm still getting my head around I would say  
61 that knowledge of systems and people yeah

62 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think it's...

63 **Participant 1:** Hmm sorry...

64 **Participant 6:** ...No it's ok keep going [Participant 1] (laughs)

65 **Participant 1:** ...It was just to say how different the schools are in the different Local  
66 Authorities so I'm working across three different Local Authorities now and they're so varied  
67 that you have to remind yourself 'right this is what this way of working is versus this way'  
68 erm so it yeah just kind of working like you say with the systems but they're just so varied

69 **Participant 6:** Yeah I feel like there's so many services and and I still y'know sometimes in  
70 consultations I'll if they're kind of multi-disciplinary team consultations I'll hear of a name of  
71 a service and I'm sort of noting it down because I've never heard of it and then I speak to  
72 the EP after and I say 'have you heard of this service' and they're going 'no (laughs) I've  
73 never heard of it' there's so many different erm I guess pockets and sources of support that  
74 that's out there I think sometimes for me it's felt a bit daunting kind of knowing that there's  
75 lots to suggest to schools and families but also knowing that I'm not aware of all of them  
76 and I don't know what all of them do and yeah I guess it's just so much out there it can feel a  
77 bit daunting erm but yeah it must be challenging kind of working across the three different  
78 ones and remembering how each work cos I think from what I've heard Local Authorities do  
79 all work differently erm yeah

80 **Natalie:** That's great thank you erm so the second part of this kind of this lacking meaning is  
81 around knowledge of self so in the first phase of the study participants talked about kind of  
82 not having confidence in themselves feeling that they didn't have the competence to be  
83 able to carry out activities that they felt an assistant EP would be doing erm yeah so it was

84 more around kind of their capability and confidence with that so I wondered do you feel  
85 your knowledge of your self has been challenged when working in the role

86 **Participant 1:** Shall I go first so erm for me I found it really helpful with the I think because I  
87 started during covid erm so it was remote learning so initially it was that working on your  
88 own being a teacher when you're in a school around lots of people the biggest thing for me  
89 was y'know having to get that self-motivation to complete work and y'know set boundaries  
90 as well I think that was something I had to really learn because it was making sure you  
91 weren't distracted because the dishwasher's just beeped or something just that kind of erm  
92 yeah there's nobody else that you can go 'ooh how have you found this situation' and then  
93 having to wait for supervision or just having the informal little check-ins cos sometimes  
94 especially at the beginning I'd be thinking 'ooh what if I'm the only one that feels like this  
95 and it's a silly question' and y'know those kind of little self-doubt that I think that's  
96 something I've really learned about the role that actually it can be quite lonely sometimes  
97 that you like I haven't really if you just doing the admin side of things it can be a while  
98 before you do get to check in with erm work colleagues and things so yeah I think and  
99 especially at the beginning that was something that I really did find erm surprising

100 **Participant 10:** Do you want to go [Participant 6]

101 **Participant 6:** Okay thank um I was just gonna say yeah I think that's really interesting to  
102 hear my experience was quite opposite because I started this role after Covid and I started  
103 with the team of six assistants we all started at the same time so having them was so  
104 valuable to um yeah just check in with them and kind of seek advice as well as supervision  
105 but I think for me and my kind of own self-reflections and thinking about imposter  
106 syndrome and things like that on the one hand I was really grateful when I started this role  
107 because um I had about a six week long induction so I had training and lots of shadowing  
108 but as a learning mentor the first day I started I was in a classroom so that was kind of no  
109 training or anything obviously safeguarding things like that but there was no training on how  
110 to do the job it was very much kind of learning on the job so on the one hand when I started  
111 as an assistant EP it was really refreshing to get that training and have that shadowing but  
112 then on the other hand I guess I think I did feel a bit yeah it's kind of imposter syndrome and  
113 knowing that I haven't got a really large amount of experience erm I was only a learning

114 mentor for a year and prior to getting this job I did some voluntary stuff at uni but um I  
115 think yeah for me it was kind of yeah on the one hand it was positive because I had training  
116 and I had the opportunity to shadow with lots of opportunity to reflect in supervision but  
117 then also I did feel that imposter syndrome and I still feel it now I think it's good to always  
118 feel imposter syndrome it shows you're growing but um and learning but that's yeah my  
119 personal kind of experience I would say yeah

120 **Participant 10:** I agree I don't think imposter syndrome ever goes (laughs) like you said it is a  
121 good thing we should keep stretching ourselves and feeling a bit out of our comfort zone  
122 um my induction was about two weeks I'd say um but I still now don't feel pressured I feel  
123 very protected as an assistant if I said to my supervisor 'I'm not comfortable doing that or I  
124 don't wanna do that' I feel like she would have my back and sort of support me so I would  
125 say confident like some of the first things that I did was going and observing early years and  
126 there was that element of 'ooh do I know what I'm doing' but actually it's just an  
127 observation so like I was okay with it and I think that that did give me confidence to be like  
128 'yeah you can do this' um I dunno know it is tricky because like I said I had been doing the  
129 role before but it was very different I worked with the same kids all the time we were on  
130 site as therapists so they were just always there so I got to know them so well and now in  
131 the role sort of y'know you see them once you don't ever see them again I think that can be  
132 tricky because you have to say everything you wanna say and do everything in an hour and a  
133 half or however long you've got with them rather than being able to build up that  
134 relationship with them um I've found that tricky but I think that's because of my background  
135 not because of the role I think and I knew I was signing up for that but it was a big change  
136 but maybe someone who hadn't had my prior experience wouldn't find that an issue or  
137 yeah don't know but I would say my confidence has grown I would notice even the other  
138 day so we had an um EP meeting and I spoke like and I was happy to just sort of put my  
139 hand up and also question things as well we were talking about um how to say no to schools  
140 if they ask you to do work that you just don't have capacity to do and I was like 'how does  
141 that go down' whereas and I was thinking back to um my first one which was at Christmas  
142 last year I didn't speak I was so nervous so I definitely think my confidence around my  
143 colleagues has grown which goes a long way to helping I think you then feel confident in the  
144 job

145 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think getting involved with different things as well as shadowing...

146 **Participant 10:** Hmm

147 **Participant 6:** ...It's kind of having that opportunity to take the lead on things as well it really  
148 helps you to grow and I think sometimes it is a bit of having to push yourself out of your  
149 comfort zone maybe erm and I think it's good that we are able to well I know from my  
150 experience I'm able to reflect in supervision and peer supervision and it's not kind of I do  
151 something and then I'm kind of left in the dark thinking 'oh my gosh how did that go what  
152 could I have done better what were the positives' erm so I think that's yeah that eases the  
153 the um how it can feel daunting sometimes I think takes the pressure off a bit but erm yeah  
154 I agree with you it's sometimes even just speaking in a consultation or in a meeting erm  
155 because I think with the role of the EP and the assistant EP it's learning about how to  
156 actively listen and I think sometimes it's okay if you're just taking everything in and learning  
157 and listening um but I think it's striking that balance isn't it between kind of doing that but  
158 then also trying to get involved and push yourself out of that comfort zone so that you're  
159 growing and learning and then reflecting on that as well

160 **Participant 10:** Yeah erm you said you had six other assistants or five other you were the  
161 sixth so there's two of us one of them the other one has just gotten on to the doctorate this  
162 year so um there's two more joining me in October and I think like you said it's really  
163 important to have another assistant because then you can share that feeling as well you're  
164 not the only one thinking 'I'm the unqualified one like I don't know what I'm doing here'  
165 actually being able to share that experience with someone else I think is really helpful have  
166 you got anyone [Participant 1]

167 **Participant 1:** I'm the only one in this area but then there was one in [North-Eastern LA]...

168 **Participant 10:** Okay

169 **Participant 1:** ...She's now got on to the doctorate so there's one more in [North-Western  
170 City] area so and we've made an effort to make sure that we do have regular contact and  
171 then we've invited the trainees this year as well to be part of that because I just think we  
172 can learn so much from each other and just having the 'it's okay to not feel okay' kind of like  
173 you...

174 **Participant 10:** Yeah

175 **Participant 1:** ...Say sometimes you do push yourself out of your comfort zone then  
176 afterwards think 'gosh I would never have done that last week last year...

177 **Participant 10:** Hmm

178 **Participant 1:** ...Even' and sometimes just having that reflection diary just like look at how  
179 far you came look at how you felt when you was in that situation this is what you're doing in  
180 the day to day sometimes y'know it's nice to just see how far you have come

181 **Participant 10:** Yeah definitely

182 **Participant 6:** Yeah absolutely

183 **Natalie:** I think you've already kind of answered my next question but maybe if anyone had  
184 any other reflections on how this not-knowing and how it has changed has affected you

185 **Participant 1:** Shall I go first again

186 **Participant 6:** Yeah go on

187 **Participant 1:** I do think it has helped my confidence and just kind of meeting people that I  
188 haven't met before and kind of that introduction just the small talk y'know I'm the one that  
189 will go and say things now whereas before I used to wait for somebody else so yeah I do I  
190 would say that in the day to day it's just yeah you get used to the kind of yeah the nuances  
191 with meeting somebody for the first time because yeah like you say you do meet children  
192 that you haven't necessarily worked with or get to know other than that the teachers said  
193 this is what the situation is so yeah it's kind of just building up that relationship in a short  
194 space of time

195 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think it links to those kind of a rapport building skills erm yeah I think  
196 it's comes down to classic y'know practice makes perfect and I think the more you do it the  
197 more confident you get at it erm yeah and I think the way it's affected me as a person I think  
198 my development as an assistant from coming from a school and then to this point it's  
199 changed my mindset my perspective how I view behaviour in work and outside of work I'm  
200 kind of trying to (laughs) not completely bring work into my y'know personal life but I think

201 in this line of work I think it does naturally affect you erm y'know it's psychology it's  
202 everywhere it's all around us all the time I think it's hard to just kind of shut that off I don't  
203 really think it's that possible um when we're doing what we do erm so it's been really  
204 interesting coming from a school and kind of school culture and how schools operate in  
205 terms of erm working with children and young people and erm I guess building those  
206 hypotheses about what's going on for a child and young person and then experiencing that  
207 from the perspective of an EP erm and our value as psychologists erm and kind of helping to  
208 y'know reframe things and adding that psychological kind of holistic perspective I think  
209 that's been so interesting erm when I reflect on that and thinking about that switch in  
210 mindset erm and how it must be for people who have been teachers for years or y'know  
211 assistant headteachers or headteachers and it must be quite a shift in perspective and  
212 mindset but I think at the same time it is so useful from whatever background you're from  
213 but I guess being able to empathise with erm people who work in schools but then just  
214 bringing so [Participant 10] like yourself who was an assistant clinical psychologist it must be  
215 so interesting thinking about that shift for you from that job to this job and maybe a change  
216 in perspective and how you apply psychology now from an educational point of view erm  
217 yeah that's something that's really kind of stood out to me I think as I've been doing this job

218 **Participant 10:** I think I was quite lucky my supervisor from when I was a clinical assistant  
219 was very holistic anyway...

220 **Participant 6:** Yeah

221 **Participant 10:** ...So for me I didn't really find that much of a change um he was very much  
222 about sort of systemic work and let's work with the staff because that's how you help the  
223 children so for me I wouldn't say that was a huge change but um it's interesting I was gonna  
224 say that we're mainly focusing on school but we don't we are very much we have to involve  
225 the parents because there's no nothing's gonna change just doing it within school so I  
226 haven't really found it that much of a difference to be honest...

227 **Participant 6:** Hmm

228 **Participant 10:** ...Um but maybe I was just lucky that my supervisor was that way inclined...

229 (all laugh)

230 **Participant 10:** ...To be fair I have worked with other people that were quite different so  
231 maybe I was just lucky um one of the things as well that I was thinking when you said about  
232 confidence in sort of meeting new people I really struggle with driving places that I don't  
233 know and I always ask what the parking's like want the postcode I want to know what I'm  
234 getting like when I get there what it's gonna look like and for me that's been really tricky  
235 y'know working at the same place for the last ten years I knew the route I went the same  
236 route every day turned up went to my office knew where I was going erm and actually  
237 having to go into a school introduce myself say who I am every time you meet someone um  
238 I found that quite difficult but it's also been really nice when I've been like I've gone back to  
239 the school and they remember me I went to a preschool the other day and they were like'  
240 oh yeah like it's you' and I was 'oh ok' like it was nice and familiar um which I guess as an EP  
241 so in [South-Eastern LA] I don't know if it's the same for everywhere but each school has a  
242 link EP so you have your like patch of schools so I guess ideally you would get to know them  
243 and you do build up a relationship with them so I can see that that would that would suit me  
244 and that would make me feel more confident because you only have to do that introduction  
245 a handful of times and then you are part of that culture as well so yeah I think erm maybe at  
246 the moment because I don't have that it can seem like I'm constantly going to new places  
247 yeah I think it um it feels nice (laughs) I know that's a bit of a silly word but it feels good I  
248 would say to feel more confident and to I've definitely noticed a shift in myself recently and  
249 I think as well because the assistant that I was working with got on I felt very much like 'I've  
250 been left behind' but actually now we've started this year again I feel like 'no I've got this'  
251 like I've now got longer in this job so actually my confidence can grow more and I can be  
252 even more established at knowing what I'm doing so I've tried to make it like 'you've got this  
253 year and you get to go you just get to keep learning and go back over stuff that you've  
254 learned' so yeah I think it's good (laughs)

255 **Participant 1:** No I would echo that too [Participant 10] just with like you've seen other  
256 people get on but then when you read things again you're like 'ooh I thought I understood it  
257 then...

258 **Participant 10:** Yes

259 **Participant 1:** ...But actually it makes so much more sense now' that yeah I think we need to  
260 build in the experience you've got something to hook it on to but then yeah it it makes  
261 much more sense yeah definitely but I was just gonna say as well sometimes it's those tricky  
262 relationships when you are meeting people for the first time you kind of do have that 'ooh I  
263 feel like this person seems very serious in their job' but actually you just know everyone's  
264 just got the different ways of showing their passions and it's just kind of like all the different  
265 dynamics of different people that you meet erm yeah it just kind of makes me reflect and  
266 just think yeah not to jump in with my assumption but it's just yeah like you say you do  
267 apply psychology and erm just understand everyone has different ways of showing their  
268 different passions

269 **Participant 10:** I think one of the things as well just about confidence like people quite often  
270 they'll misread my emails or whatever and they'll introduce me as an Ed Psych and to start  
271 with I'd be like 'oh I'm an assistant' like and I felt a bit like shy about saying it whereas now  
272 I'm like 'I'm an assistant and that is okay' (laughs) it's a job within its own yeah like thing and  
273 yeah I used to be like 'ooh no no you can't call me that like I'm not that' whereas now I'm  
274 like 'just to let you know I'm an assistant' but I think that has changed as well I feel more  
275 confident saying my title

276 **Participant 1:** Mmhm Yeah

277 **Participant 6:** I think one thing as as well when I first started I was quite surprised at EPs  
278 really valuing my viewpoint on things and it'd be a few weeks in and my supervisor would  
279 say y'know 'what do you think about this how did you think that went' and I'd be sort of  
280 thinking of 'oh er really like you want to know what I think' (laughs) erm but so yeah it's  
281 been really nice to kind of feel like my perspective and my viewpoint and my ideas are really  
282 valued erm I think it's good it kind of helps that with that team working and sharing best  
283 practice and sharing knowledge erm but yeah being valued and feeling like I'm valued has  
284 really helped I think with my confidence and knowing that the EPs value me and the other  
285 assistants erm to support them and as well as our ideas has been really nice

286 **Participant 10:** Like I said before like I feel very protected as an EP er yeah as an assistant  
287 erm but also like you said that they do want your opinion and they do care about what you  
288 say and I think all of the EPs I've worked with are so lovely and they want to help it's not like



289 I'm not treated as 'you're the assistant' there's very much that boundaries and they're very  
290 aware of my role and they protect me but there's never like 'well you can't do that cos  
291 you're an assistant' so I think they have helped me to feel confident as well that like I feel  
292 very much part of the team

293 **Participant 6:** Yeah

294 **Natalie:** That's been really interesting thank you erm so the next category is probably the  
295 bigger one erm so as I said it kind of seems like it starts where participants had started in  
296 the role didn't really know what they were supposed to be doing who they were in that  
297 role so then it was the main process was to then create their own meaning of their work  
298 and so in the first phase the participants spoke about how they actively tried to make sense  
299 of how to be an assistant EP so they did this through activities like shadowing EPs and they  
300 also talked about the influence that others had so when they were working together on  
301 cases with other EPs and also through supervision how that affected their understanding of  
302 their role another kind of mechanism involved was their values so they talked about how  
303 they drew on their values and also the values of the service to help them make sense of how  
304 they would be in an assistant EP does that make sense erm so I'm gonna ask a few questions  
305 about each of those areas but if you do want me to repeat any of that that's also fine erm so  
306 the first question is about how you have tried to make sense of how to be an assistant so  
307 what have you done to try and make sense of how to be an assistant EP?

308 **Participant 10:** It's quite a good question actually

309 **Participant 6:** Yeah um

310 **Participant 10:** I think shadowing is huge for me and I've recently asked again so I think  
311 there was a lot of emphasis on it within my erm my induction period and then I would say it  
312 sort of wasn't as present but recently I've said like 'I'm here for this year what can I do how  
313 can I improve what else can I do' so I sent a load of emails asking to shadow different things  
314 and I felt like as well I was allowed to shadow those things so I shadowed a panel yesterday  
315 whereas before I felt a bit like 'ooh that's I can't do like that that's too big for me to be at'  
316 whereas actually everyone's been really open and said 'yeah you can shadow whatever you  
317 want' um so I definitely would say that yeah the shadowing has help me make sense of the

318 role I do find it tricky because I don't know like we're not like "mini EPs" (air quotes) like it is  
319 its own role within itself but there is also that training element that if you are wanting to go  
320 towards the doctorate then you then you are learning how to be an EP I feel like it's the first  
321 step I don't that's tricky I'm not making much sense sorry

322 **Participant 6:** Yeah it is it's a tricky question isn't it the kind of actually thinking about erm  
323 what what we've done I definitely agree about the shadowing absolutely erm yeah I think I  
324 definitely do a lot of shadowing and still do I think over time it kind of evolved into more  
325 getting involved in erm cases so maybe collecting pupil views or parent views erm with the  
326 assessment as part of a case erm and I think that's asking EPs to shadow things or get  
327 involved with things and then they were able to say 'yes that's fine' or 'that's kind of maybe  
328 not within your remit' or y'know 'you need training to do this' erm and I think for me as well  
329 it was just trying to seek out experience within the five more kind of tenets of erm EP work  
330 so kind of trying to get something from each each of those areas but at first I thought 'oh  
331 there's no way I can deliver training I'm not I'm not trained to deliver training' but then quite  
332 early on I was asked can I deliver training so I was a bit like 'okay I can do this then'  
333 (laughs)...

334 **Participant 10:** Mmm

335 **Participant 6:** ... And I I think because our role could be so varied it's always a thing when  
336 someone I don't know asks what I do and I'm like 'er I don't know how to explain this  
337 (laughs) in a way that makes sense cos it's so varied' and erm yeah but I say yeah definitely  
338 shadowing and asking EPs and just seeking out opportunities to see if I'm able to get  
339 involved with something I think are the main things that I've done

340 **Participant 1:** Yeah I would echo that too erm and I think for me it was the difference  
341 between moving from the local authority to the private in that like I have eleven schools  
342 that are my schools now and then I obviously get erm everything gets I discuss it through  
343 supervision and then everything that I send to the schools I send to an EP who then just  
344 checks over and makes sure sometimes y'know helps you to reflect why have you decided  
345 that route erm but this year they've decided that there's going to more observations so  
346 observing me doing the the role which actually would have scared me last year but this year  
347 I was like 'no no I welcome it' I really do just want to make sure that if somebody says why

348 have you chosen that it will make me stop and think this is the decision that I've made just  
349 to make sure that erm y'know it's not a case of being right or wrong but just to kind of erm  
350 it's that reasoning cos I think sometimes like I say when you're a teacher you do think you're  
351 thinking on your feet all the time erm whereas now it's having that time to just start really  
352 reflect and like you say look at other different areas and just consider is everything being  
353 addressed and then putting myself forward to deliver the training because that really did  
354 again at the beginning of the role think 'why would I want to do this' erm but now I really  
355 enjoy I love putting the training together because I learn so much from putting it all  
356 together through all the research so when I'm delivering it I have got that confidence to  
357 deliver it erm so yeah I would just say you're just constantly pushing yourself to do the job  
358 as best as you can but yeah learning all the time and that's what I really look forward to  
359 yeah but I enjoy about the job

360 **Participant 10:** That's so interesting that you've got your own schools like it seems like it's so  
361 varied amongst authorities what assistants do and I think maybe that's part of the problem  
362 about knowing what the role is that it is so different it's not just a set role yeah and even  
363 when [Participant 6] you were saying like about some of the stuff that you've done um I feel  
364 like I've definitely had a focus on the early years so because they don't have EPs assigned to  
365 them the assistants have been involved in the early years erm and it's one of the things that  
366 I've said I want to do this year is actually be more involved with the older students cos I feel  
367 like I'm sort of only getting knowledge in that area so yeah it just doesn't seem like there is a  
368 set job description as such or not necessarily job description it's the same but the roles that  
369 are within that seem so varied

370 **Participant 6:** Yeah definitely I think yeah it just depends on local authorities and then what  
371 they offer and I think some local authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused  
372 and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might  
373 be mostly SLA work so that obviously impacts our roles and what we can be involved  
374 involved in but erm yeah I definitely agree with that it makes it hard to kind of pinpoint erm  
375 our role because they're different erm for different local authorities yeah I definitely agree  
376 with that

377 **Natalie:** All three of you have kind of touched on that there's other assistants erm that  
378 you've been able to work alongside or speak to I wondered if they'd had any influence on  
379 how you've made sense of your role together

380 **Participant 1:** I'd say it's helped confidence wise to kind of see how everyone else has felt  
381 throughout the job and y'know so everyone's got their own little some people enjoy the  
382 training elements some people enjoy the y'know the more in school work some people so  
383 it's just nice to y'know really draw on everyone's kind of natural characteristics erm but yeah  
384 to kind of see that we're all on this journey and all've got different starting points and I think  
385 it's helped me to realise yeah that we're not born knowing everything and even within this  
386 role we can't know everything and that's fine too so yeah yeah I think that's really helped  
387 me

388 **Participant 10:** I think for me I was lucky the assistant I work with are very similar-minded  
389 and we were very much if something needed doing you do it and that we both struggle with  
390 that and it was nice to have her to reflect on cos I thought that was me being a bit  
391 unreasonable maybe but we had quite a few conversations about saying how slow the  
392 projects were running and it was something that really troubled us um but then actually we  
393 were like okay the reason that we're able to get so much done is because we're new here  
394 we don't have as much as responsibility and actually understanding over time how stretched  
395 the EPs are that's the reason that maybe projects are falling behind because of all the  
396 statutory work that they've been doing um so yeah it was nice to be able to share that with  
397 someone as much as it was frustrating to know that it wasn't just you feeling that but also to  
398 be able to reflect with someone to say okay this is why it's happening and actually we don't  
399 have the power to change it and so yeah I would definitely say it helps make sense of the  
400 role

401 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think for me and working for [South-Eastern County] obviously [South-  
402 Eastern County]'s huge and we're all quite as spread out so being able to have kind of  
403 protected time for peer erm supervision was really valuable not only to get an idea of what  
404 each of us are doing in our different areas because our work was so varied I kind of hear  
405 what one of my colleagues is doing up in the North I think 'oh my gosh that sounds so  
406 interesting I want to see if I can try and do something similar down in the East' erm but also

407 for that kind of discussion and as she was you were saying [Participant 10] erm kind of  
408 reflecting on situations and tricky situations as well erm and yeah finding solutions to things  
409 so at one point we were all working on the same project erm all very different kind of  
410 situations and schools and students we were working with so it was yeah really valuable  
411 having a team of us and erm yeah just being able to bounce ideas off learn from each other  
412 and considering everyone's unique experiences and backgrounds and where they were  
413 before becoming assistant EPs erm and that social aspect as well and I think that's really  
414 important erm I think in our service a lot of the work can be remote as I said cos we're so  
415 spread out it was really nice to have those times to just catch up with each other and check  
416 in to help our wellbeing as well as y'know...

417 **Participant 10:** Mmm

418 **Participant 6:** ...Work that we're doing I think

419 **Participant 10:** I think erm I've felt like a team within a team type thing as well so it's like the  
420 wider EP team and then so we're locality work so within [South-Western County] we've got  
421 the six localities so I'm part of like the [South-Western Area] team so like [South-Western  
422 Towns] erm I feel like I've got that team and then I also felt like I had the assistant team  
423 although there's only two of us I felt like I belonged as part of that as well so there's  
424 definitely value in that I'd say

425 **Natalie:** Thank you and so the next question is around working with others and so I  
426 wondered if you could have a chat about how have different ways of working with different  
427 EPs affected your understanding of your role

428 **Participant 1:** I'd personally say that's been my challenge because different EPs have their  
429 own kind of viewpoints and values and ways of doing things erm so even local authority and  
430 private erm working so if I've had to get a piece of work erm obviously countersigned and  
431 things there was one EP that wanted it a specific way but then the next kind of similar kind  
432 of scenario would be sent to somebody else who would then have a completely different  
433 idea so then sometimes you're thinking 'hang on a minute how can it be so varied when it's  
434 very similar y'know kind of situations' I think sometimes it is just understanding that there  
435 are different viewpoints and we are gonna look at it from a different angle so I would say

436 that that was something that I initially was thinking 'oh I'm wrong' and it wasn't a case of  
437 being wrong it was just obviously understanding where I've started from and where I came  
438 from with that perspective

439 **Participant 6:** I think EPs they all yeah as you say they all have their different ways of  
440 working their different perspective their different specialisms I think if you were to give a  
441 case to five EPs they'd probably all give y'know different hypotheses or could come up with  
442 different hypotheses based that their viewpoints and their experiences erm but yeah I think  
443 for me it's been really interesting working with different EPs and seeing how different EPs  
444 work especially I think working with maybe more experienced EPs and then EPs who are  
445 more newly qualified that's been really interesting as well and it's kind of helped me think  
446 about erm the sort of EP I might like to be erm I'm kind of yeah taking on board certain  
447 elements of practice that I like erm even down to things like some EPs prefer using dynamic  
448 assessments over standardised and that's really interesting so I think it's nice to know that  
449 you do have that autonomy to kind of be the practitioner that you want to be and that feels  
450 authentic to you and that's something that can continue to develop erm as as you kind of  
451 move through your career erm but yeah I think it's been helpful for me to kind of if I'm  
452 doing a piece of work for an EP and with an EP just checking how they like things done and if  
453 I'm working with a new EP or an EP I haven't worked with before again checking how they  
454 like something doing erm cos yeah I think they can all be different but yeah I think it's been  
455 so interesting yeah

456 **Participant 10:** I completely agree with everything (laughs) that you've said I think it is a  
457 challenge when people do things differently and to start with it does make you think 'oh I'm  
458 not doing it right' but then like you said you realise that it's different ways that people work  
459 erm so I wrote erm an early years assessment and erm alongside the Senior and she'd put  
460 this bit at the bottom like 'we wish like X all the best and hope like their family' whatever  
461 and I thought that was nice so I put that on the bottom of my next report send it to  
462 someone else and she was like 'this isn't appropriate' I was like 'interesting' (laughs)...

463 **Participant 6:** Mmhm yeah

464 **Participant 10:** ...So how much of it is erm personal preference and style over EP-ness  
465 (laughs) like...

466 **Participant 6:** Yeah

467 **Participant 10:** ...Yeah but I think like you said it's taking bits from different people it's so  
468 valuable to work with different people be able to take elements of them and be who you  
469 want to be within that and I think like you said we're on our journey and we will establish  
470 who we want to be as EPs and knowing that is available but as an assistant it can be tricky

471 **Participant 6:** Mmm yeah

472 **Natalie:** How does that feel having to kind of adapt the way that your understanding of your  
473 role depending on the EP that you are working with

474 **Participant 1:** I personally think it's just knowing 'okay I know this is who it is so I know I  
475 expect that I'm gonna get this email back to say duh duh duh duh duh duh' and then yeah  
476 and then we have had discussions erm there's another assistant who I work with and we  
477 had the discussion to say 'at what point shall we challenge this and say actually erm no this  
478 is why I've said what I've said' but then nine times out of ten we do end up saying 'yeah okay  
479 that's fine' cos like I say sometimes 'well you are the EP' overall they are the one who it  
480 comes down to it's their school it's kind of their overall decision but no sometimes it is just  
481 kind of at what point should it be 'actually I'd like to really stick with what I've decided to  
482 how to word something or' yeah

483 **Participant 10:** I don't know I don't think I can't remember your question sorry how does it  
484 change your role knowing your...

485 **Natalie:** So it was just wondering how you felt like having to adapt to the different ways of  
486 working

487 **Participant 10:** Yeah it's like you said [Participant 1] just you do it for whoever you're  
488 working with and you just get to know that and know how they work and try and tailor it to  
489 them but I think I would now feel more confident but only now so nearly a year into it being  
490 able to challenge where to start with I do think it's very much 'I'm wrong' basically and like  
491 'what you're saying is it has to go' but also I think that that comes with relationship building  
492 as well so once the person you feel better able to question because it's not as much

493 challenging it's just saying 'ah okay the reason I've done this is this or I was thinking about it  
494 from this point of view' actually having a discussion around it whereas to start with...

495 **Participant 1:** Mmm

496 **Participant 10:** ...I wouldn't dare yeah...

497 **Participant 1:** Yeah

498 **Participant 10:** ...I think it's about relationships and knowing that you're not going to offend  
499 someone and that you can have an open chat with them about it

500 **Participant 6:** Yeah I agree with the relationship aspect of it and I think as you said it's not  
501 necessarily challenging but questioning and y'know being curious and offering that  
502 perspective and I think more often than not EPs are open to that and really value that...

503 **Participant 10:** Yeah

504 **Participant 6:** ...But as you say if I was working with an EP I've not worked with before and  
505 maybe they do something or write something in a report that is different to what I've seen I  
506 probably wouldn't question that (laughs) because I just wouldn't feel comfortable but yeah  
507 as you said I think once those relationships have been built then I'd feel more confident  
508 doing something like that and erm but yeah I think in terms of adapting to that kind of  
509 difference in how EPs work I think it's helped with those kind of flexibility skills and yeah as I  
510 was saying I guess it's been useful to work with EPs with different styles to kind of see how I  
511 might take that on board erm as an EP yeah

512 **Natalie:** That's very interesting thank you [Participant 1] I'm aware you're gonna have to go  
513 in a minute so don't worry about just dropping out

514 **Participant 1:** Thank you I'll go now thank you very much

515 **Participant 10:** Bye nice to meet you

516 **Participant 6:** Bye [Participant 1]

517 **Participant 1:** Nice to meet you



518 **Natalie:** Erm so the next question is around supervision so I wondered about your thoughts  
519 on the role that supervision has had in how you've made sense of how to be an assistant EP

520 **Participant 6:** I would say supervision has been so so valuable for me erm having that  
521 protected time every week erm with an EP so I had two supervisors last year I think just  
522 being able to ask any and every question erm I just don't think I would be able to do the job  
523 without it basically it's been so useful in my development and yeah understanding my role  
524 and what's within my remit and what's maybe a bit beyond the bounds of my  
525 responsibilities and checking those things in a space that's confidential erm y'know and safe  
526 and with EPs who fortunately I've really built good relationships with erm this year I'm not  
527 actually receiving kind of one-on-one supervision erm cos we've got new assistants and  
528 we've got TEPs as well in the service and that obviously with the HCPC Guidelines you have  
529 to have supervision as a TEP whereas for assistants I think it's just guidance I don't think we  
530 have to have it so anyway I digress I'm not receiving that as much this year but I'm really  
531 really grateful that I did receive supervision in my first year of the job I think yeah it's just  
532 been invaluable for my learning as well as developing that understanding of my role and my  
533 responsibilities I think yeah

534 **Participant 10:** Yeah I agree I think supervision's absolutely key that's interesting I didn't  
535 know about the guide it just being guidance not sort of rules for assistants I thought we had  
536 to have weekly as well but um so we've been doing it so I've had weekly one-to-one  
537 supervision and then like the next week would be peer supervision and it so I was  
538 supervised by someone and the other assistant was supervised by someone else and then  
539 we've taken it in turns each week so I have had supervision from someone else as well  
540 which has been it's interesting like you said about the relationships I feel like I've definitely  
541 built a relationship with my supervisor I think she's absolutely amazing and she recently got  
542 Senior and there was talk of her not being my supervisor anymore and I was like 'um if  
543 there's any chance like can I keep you' and the way it's worked out we have and I was so  
544 glad um I think I automatically like as soon as I started felt like I could say what I wanted  
545 around her but now even more so like we've established that relationship between us and  
546 what we are and um yeah I've felt like I could ask anything and it would be okay um I think  
547 for like building confidence building understanding of the role as well and sort of thinking  
548 'okay what are you doing in supervision like how are you supervising me so like how I can

549 take this forward' um so like learning from her skills within supervision as well has been  
550 useful and um there was something else you said about nope can't remember (laughs)

551 **Participant 6:** (laughs) I can't remember what I said either yeah I agree like learning from  
552 your supervisor and how they supervise yeah I definitely agree with that it's really helpful I  
553 guess it's similar to working with EPs and and picking out things that you'd like to maybe  
554 what do when you're qualified it's similar I think and I think 'oh yeah if I'm a supervisor I'd  
555 love to be like that' (laughs)

556 **Participant 10:** Yeah I have been one before erm like obviously not in this role in a previous  
557 role and I was very much like I took all their problems on so any I'd come out of there  
558 supervision with loads of actions for myself cos I wanted to solve their problems and I think  
559 in my previous role as well but very much in this role that consultation of learning that  
560 actually you leave the problem with the person and it's about solving it together and maybe  
561 we won't get a solution but actually even talking about it is useful and I think taking that  
562 forward is definitely something that I've learned within this role

563 **Participant 6:** That's so interesting it must be yeah that's so interesting that you've had the  
564 experience of being supervisor in a different setting and being supervisee (laughs)

565 **Participant 10:** Yeah

566 **Participant 6:** Yeah really cool

567 **Natalie:** Thank you and then the last question and so this one's about values so I said  
568 previously that the participants kind of drew on their own values and the values of the  
569 service to understand how to be an assistant EP so I wondered what your thoughts were  
570 about how different values have affected your understanding of how to be an assistant EP  
571 so some of the values that previous assistants we talked about were kind of being person-  
572 centred being systemic in their work and where you feel these values come from I know  
573 that's a big question so if you want me to say anything again that's fine

574 **Participant 10:** Okay I'm happy to go so I did a lot of work on this before I applied last year  
575 so um I've and even more so this year I feel like I understand even more now so I would say I  
576 actually don't know the values of the service if I'm honest (laughs) I wouldn't be able to

577 answer that question but for myself my values are connected and hope and I think that  
578 really like feeds through in everything and I try and like for me I have to feel connected to  
579 what I'm doing as in I have to feel some passion about it and I have to have some sort of  
580 connection to what I'm doing but also the people that I'm doing it for or with or y'know like I  
581 have to feel connected to that group of people or the individual and I think hope as well that  
582 I think it's from the Hunger Games but I don't...

583 (both laugh)

584 **Participant 10:** ...don't quote me but I think there's this thing that says 'the only thing  
585 stronger than fear is hope' and I feel like that is so true the only reason we do anything is  
586 because there's a hope that so it will get there or something will be better or something will  
587 change and I think that really sums up for me like why we do what we do even if you sit in a  
588 meeting with someone why are we here because we hope that something will happen from  
589 it whether that be our child starts attending school again or we I don't know they eat a  
590 carrot anything like there's I think hope for me is really underpinning sort of everything that  
591 I do and yeah being connected if I don't believe in something I'm not gonna to do it like I  
592 don't I'm not invested...

593 **Participant 6:** Mmm

594 **Participant 10:** ...That's me personally but um (laughs) I don't know about the values of the  
595 service I think I can definitely feel we are like when you were talking about dynamic  
596 assessment earlier I feel like we're very much that so we are like person centred sort of  
597 more dynamic approach assessment-wise um so I can pick values up maybe from the service  
598 but I wouldn't say that I knew what they were

599 **Participant 6:** I definitely agree with you about connectedness and hope I feel like if we  
600 leave a family or a school with hope maybe not solution that's not always the case y'know  
601 we don't have magic wands but that hope can y'know (laughs) not to sound cliché or  
602 whatever but y'know ignite ignite change and there's one thing about us being agents of  
603 change that's definitely a value that I think we hold in our service yeah I would say so erm as  
604 well connectedness yeah I agree with that I think it's really interesting what you're saying  
605 about having feeling um you have to feel connected to what you're doing and the people

606 you're working with and I think that links in with kind of relationships and being  
607 compassionate and always kind of being curious about what's going on and remaining  
608 empathetic I think that's a big one for me personally um yeah and I think those relationships  
609 being compassionate I think in terms of the service oh gosh testing my memory I think being  
610 brave is definitely one of them so that kind of links back to what we were saying about  
611 challenging cos I think in our service it's kind of being brave to oh how do I describe it it's  
612 kind of erm challenging like gently challenging but it's something like that anyway (laughs)  
613 erm and I think you mentioned it as well earlier but only the other day in a conference our  
614 service was saying about being able to say no to things...

615 **Participant 10:** Mmhm

616 **Participant 6:** ...Capacity is erm sorta too much so that was kind of linking to the brave value  
617 erm what are some of the others I should know these but I don't (laughs)

618 **Participant 10:** Well I don't (laughs) I don't know mine

619 **Participant 6:** I need to refresh my memory um I think compassion is one of them  
620 competent no that's a skill yeah I know compassion is one of them brave erm but yeah as  
621 you were saying Natalie I think those kind of person-centred systemic values are really key  
622 erm yeah it's it's definitely something I need to spend some time reflecting on and picking  
623 out the key values I think we use them all the time from wherever they kind of come from  
624 personal experiences or um previous roles but I think it's actually labelling them and saying  
625 this is what one of my values is and this is how I kind of implement that in my work um yeah  
626 I think sharing that might be one of our service ones kind of sharing knowledge sharing best  
627 practice um and that links to our I guess being working as a team and if someone asks you a  
628 question no question is a silly question basically and for people to feel comfortable to do  
629 that erm and yeah I think as I said remaining curious with whomever I'm interacting with  
630 children families schools services erm and kindness I think I think being kind and empathetic  
631 can go a long way as well sometimes I think schools and families and children and young  
632 people they just need a listening ear a kind listening ear erm and they want to I think being  
633 heard feeling validated feeling represented and a sense of belonging...

634 **Participant 10:** Mmhm

635 **Participant 6:** ...I think for us if we can try and facilitate that and implement that sense of  
636 belonging think about how we can develop that for young people and children and their  
637 families yeah went off on a bit of a tangent there (laughs)

638 **Participant 10:** No I agree when you said about belonging I feel like for me that's I weighed  
639 that up between like belonging and connected but I think that I can encompass the  
640 belonging with the connected as to feel connected with people like I quite often I've been  
641 saying in reports there's this whole thing about like needing friendships whereas I think it's  
642 more important to have relationships like you don't if a child doesn't feel that they belong  
643 to something then actually that's more of a problem for me rather than having a  
644 friendship...

645 **Participant 6:** Mmm

646 **Participant 10:** ...Actually I think yeah that's huge sense of belonging is massive and you said  
647 about sharing I like that as well that idea of like sharing knowledge is really important I used  
648 to work with a music therapist and she said the day that she stops being curious and  
649 wanting to find out more she'll hang her coat up because like you you can never know  
650 everything and you never should think that you know everything so actually yeah that  
651 sharing knowledge with each other is so important

652 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think having that growth mindset

653 **Participant 10:** Yeah

654 **Participant 6:** And just came to my mind but like probably the biggest one (laughs) inclusion  
655 erm that being it's not only a value but I think yeah inclusion in kind of every way inclusion  
656 and equality and diversity and that links to a lot of other values I think like belonging feeling  
657 included young people feeling included erm and that's something that I think yeah we all  
658 have a role to play along with things like social justice erm yeah it's kind of I feel like you  
659 think of one and then that links in with another yeah

660 **Participant 10:** Yeah it is hard to pin it down to two or how many ever but I had a  
661 conversation the other day with erm someone and then she was saying that a lot of like  
662 things that annoy you can link back to your values because that's the core as to why so I was

663 saying I find it really frustrating when people don't just do their work like don't do their job  
664 it baffles me like 'what're you doing just get on and do it' and she's like 'okay where do you  
665 think that comes from' and I would say for me efficiency is quite important so if someone's  
666 not being efficient and I have quite high standards of myself as well...

667 **Participant 6:** Yeah

668 **Participant 10:** ...And there was a headteacher that was at my school a few years ago and  
669 she was doing an appraisal for me and some of the feedback she said was like 'you get  
670 frustrated with people because you're standards are up here you cannot expect everyone to  
671 be up there as well some people's higher standard is here just because it doesn't match  
672 yours doesn't mean they're not trying their best' and actually that's coming from frustration  
673 within me and I thought that was quite a helpful way of looking at it actually the reason that  
674 you're getting annoyed is probably because it doesn't sit right with something inside you

675 **Participant 6:** Yeah definitely that really resonates because I did some kind of cognitive  
676 behavioural approaches training for an intervention we ran and that was one of the first  
677 things I said they shared a quote I think was Carl Rogers said um 'everything that annoys you  
678 tells you something about yourself'...

679 **Participant 10:** Yes

680 **Participant 6:** ...and I was like yes that's so true it's so true you can always I think it's really  
681 good that we're in this role because we're constantly checking ourselves I feel like and um  
682 something's annoyed us it's kind of good to take a step I think 'well hang on what does that  
683 say about me...

684 **Participant 10:** Yeah

685 **Participant 6:** ...Is there something I can do is there anything I need to change about myself  
686 or about what I'm doing' erm but yeah and as I guess it's that kind of managing our  
687 expectations of people I suppose cos yeah you're right you're not everyone's gonna have  
688 the same efficiency and standards as you might but I think it's recognising that which is the  
689 key thing...

690 **Participant 10:** Yeah definitely

691 **Participant 6:** So linking to values I guess I don't know if it's a value or more skill I don't  
692 know but being self-reflective and being reflexive as well as a practitioner and thinking  
693 about how your own experiences and personality might influence the people you're working  
694 with erm yeah (laughs)

695 **Natalie:** That's really interesting how you share the same values and I was thinking like do  
696 you feel like people who have similar values are drawn to this role of like an assistant EP and  
697 an EP and then that becomes the organisational values rather than it being the  
698 organisational values which you then take on board as an individual

699 **Participant 6:** I think I mean I don't know off the top of my head the values of my service  
700 erm so I think those personal values for me I feel come first or kind of evident in my practice  
701 and my work more naturally because I'm not consciously thinking 'ok what are my service's  
702 values that's how I need to be' I think it's more my personal values which slotted in with the  
703 values of the service I think

704 **Participant 10:** Yeah there's so many things I want to say now I've forgotten them all...  
705 (both laugh)

706 **Participant 10:** ...Um there's obviously a core something that makes people want to be EPs I  
707 would say there must be a shared something that leads people down that path but working  
708 with different EPs or well I haven't actually worked with all of the EPs but there's definitely  
709 different personalities within the service that are some are quite outspoken whereas others  
710 are softer in their approach so I would say that you can see differences within personalities  
711 but there must be a core something that is pulling people towards the job definitely and I  
712 think as well it's I was just thinking when you said about sort of your values within the  
713 service if my values didn't align with the service I wonder if I would not be as happy I've  
714 worked in jobs before where decisions were being made and I fundamentally disagreed with  
715 them and how uncomfortable that made me feel erm one of the TEPs at my job now she did  
716 her thesis in um well actually no I don't know what she did it in but one of the themes that  
717 came out was about compassion fatigue and actually the point of that is not when someone  
718 isn't doing what they want to do is when they can't do what they want to do so then they  
719 become y'know frustrated because they can't be the person that they want to be and I think

720 that if I was experiencing would I want to stay I would like to say not like I wouldn't stay  
721 somewhere that I didn't agree with their values so yeah there must be something within  
722 [South-Western County] that is me

723 **Participant 6:** Yeah I think that's so true it does make me think about y'know when I do  
724 placement with other Local Authorities y'know I hope that my values align with theirs and I  
725 do remember being asked in my interview for this role how my values how I can evidence  
726 the service's values and how they fit with my personal values so I think as much as I'm  
727 looking for working for a service whose values align with mine they're all so looking for  
728 people whose values align the best erm but yeah that's really interesting about the  
729 compassion fatigue I can imagine and like you were saying about that experience of  
730 fundamentally disagreeing with how things were being done yeah must be so  
731 uncomfortable...

732 **Participant 10:** Yeah

733 **Participant 6:** ...And it must make you feel a bit powerless in a way I suppose so yeah I think  
734 it's important that they do align to an extent

735 **Participant 10:** Yeah definitely because it made me think do I even want not this job as in  
736 the previous job if I'm not agreeing with what's going on and it made me question the whole  
737 setup of care and I was thinking 'do I even want to be part of this system anymore' erm so it  
738 goes deeper than just like that the values of the service it made me question everything  
739 within like that um but I definitely feel like I this is different I can feel that this role is  
740 different and everyone is working for the best interest of the children and their families I do  
741 think that even schools are stretched...

742 **Participant 6:** Yeah

743 **Participant 10:** ...Like they are stretched and even when they're not doing what you want  
744 them to do it's because they're literally surviving and maybe it doesn't align with their  
745 values maybe they're not agreeing with what they're doing but they are just in a situation  
746 where they are surviving erm but underneath that I do think that we are fighting for the  
747 same thing and I do feel part of that and I feel I can see that within [South-Western County]



748 **Participant 6:** Yeah definitely I agree it's um about all fighting for the same thing and I guess  
749 it's y'know for the role of this assistant and the EPs it's showing the schools that we  
750 empathise and I guess working with them and listening to them and not just expecting them  
751 to implement x y and z when they physically can't but yeah its yeah we could go on all day  
752 about those kind of discussions but it just shows how values influence all aspects of your  
753 work I suppose

754 **Natalie:** So that's the end of the questions that I had so I just wondered if you had any  
755 questions or reflections on what we've talked about and if you had any questions yeah it's  
756 up to you whatever you want to share

757 **Participant 10:** I've really enjoyed being part of it and it feels nice to be able to be a part of it  
758 and again it feels like I'm heading the right direction I feel useful and I feel like I've got  
759 something to add which is really nice so thank you for letting us me be a part of it

760 **Participant 6:** Yeah thank you I think it's good to hear what other people are doing other  
761 parts of the EP world and reflecting on those things and as you said [Participant 10] feeling  
762 like we're useful and we're going in the right direction

Appendix 21: Sample of focused coding of focus group data using the concepts from the conceptual category "Lacking Meaning of Work"

Focus Group One - Narrative Data (Lines 9-48)	Focused Coding
<p><b>P9:</b> I definitely feel like the same like when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I just going in very blind and I think especially starting during covid the opportunities for shadowing weren't really there now I feel like it's been a lot of on the job learning and just sort of muddling through it and it definitely took me I would say over a year to start feeling confident in what I was doing but at the start definitely I felt like imposter syndrome I think was definitely the word like didn't think I kind of knew what I was doing I felt like I I was a TA before so I just felt like a TA that'd been thrown into this role without really any training or anything extra to bring as like an assistant compared to a TA</p>	<p>Lacking meaning of work Not knowing how to do the role</p> <p>Lacking a new meaning of self at work</p>

<p><b>P2:</b> I I would definitely agree with that I think when I look back</p> <p>when I started I was very reliant on everybody else to kind of tell me what to do or what I should be doing erm I had a lot of time to do reading and things and and that was great but scary at the same time because it's almost like no one's directing you to go 'you need to do this' or 'you need to do that' erm but we had our like first team day yesterday and there was a lot of times where people were going 'aww [Participant 2] did this with me [Participant 2] came along with this she would participate in that' and the new assistants actually said 'wow you did a lot last year' and I'm like 'I did but at the start of the year I didn't know what I was doing' and I guess it was me finding my feet and other people knowing that they could ask me to join them with things I suppose me being confident enough to ask if I could come along to things but it is one of those jobs I think where you learn</p>	<p>Feeling reliant on others due to uncertainty</p> <p>Feeling scared due to uncertainty</p> <p>Feeling free to make choices due to uncertainty</p> <p>Lack of meaning when they started the role</p>
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through seeing and then by doing but you've gotta have the confidence to (laughs) to ask and to just shove yourself into things cos I don't think if you could just sit there and read and sit behind the screen and do very little so I think it's really down to the individual to push themselves forward

**Participant 8:** Definitely yeah I think yeah I sort of agree with a lot that's been said there and I think you're right what you said there [Participant 2] is it's what I struggled with when I first started as an assistant was I went from a really quick paced job in a school erm so I was sort of a year lead and to just 'oh just do some CPD just do some reading' and I had a lot of guilt through that like 'am I doing enough how am I developing through this' erm so at the start I'd say I probably wasn't stimulated enough erm and also my local authority were quite new to assistants I think I was only the second round so they hadn't really developed how to use

Feeling guilty due to uncertainty

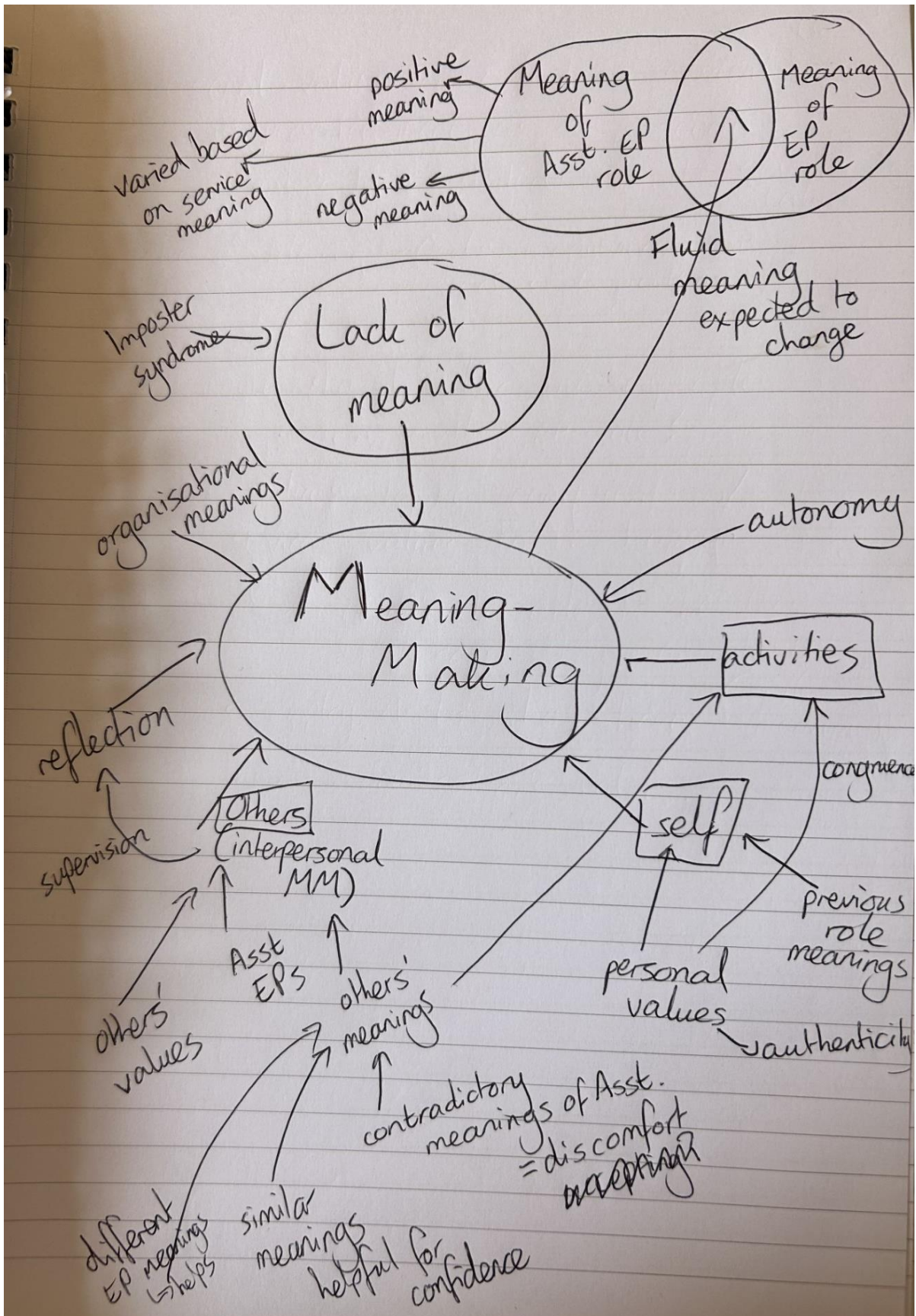
Others not-knowing the meaning of Asst. EP work

assistants I'd probably say they were quite confident in what was appropriate for us and what wasn't erm but I think definitely trying to put yourself out your comfort zone and look for opportunities has helped me learn and of course it's such a huge area all the different areas of special education needs and trying to develop confidence in that and imposter syndrome's definitely (laughs) something that creeps up most days erm but I think for me it something that's really helped me is connecting with other assistants through networks erm or y'know the team that you have if you have more than one assistant and that's really helped sort of share feelings and that is normal erm and that it is a real process of sort of development and I think that's what can be so hard when these positions are temporary and you're applying to a doctorate and it's like 'am I ready am I not ready' erm yeah

Lacking self-confidence

Uncertainty about length of role

Appendix 22: Example of diagramming



## Appendix 23: Question guide for focus group three in Phase Two of the study

***[I sent this question guide to participants one week before the focus group to allow time for them to read and consider the model]***

This final focus group is going to be different to the others because I have now analysed the data from the first two focus groups and compared these to the data from the interviews in the first phase of the study and related literature. From this comparison, I have created a model of how Assistant Educational Psychologists experience a lack of meaning of work and create meaning of work, which is described below for you to look at if you have a chance before the session.

What I am hoping to do in this session is to go through the model together as a group and give you the opportunity to agree, disagree, discuss, add thoughts etc. If possible, illustrating your views with an example from your own experience would be really helpful.

*Set up:*

- *The discussion should take approximately one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes, but may go on a little longer. One hour and thirty minutes has been allocated for the session in total, allowing for time for any questions at the end.*
- *During the discussion, I will ask questions relating to the model I sent through last week (check all participants have received the email and ask them to open the model to look at throughout the session). I'm seeking your thoughts, feelings, and opinions about this model. You are welcome, but are not required, to share any information or talk about personal experiences. You do not need to answer any questions if they make you feel uncomfortable.*
- *You can leave the focus group at any point and do not need to explain why. If you do leave, I will contact you afterwards by email to set up a debrief.*
- *For confidentiality reasons, please do not discuss what happens in this group outside of the group using identifying details. It is ok to talk very generally about taking part in the group but please do not identify individuals who took part or specific comments they made.*

*Ground rules:*

- *Mobile phones switched off or on silent.*
- *Please try not to talk over each other, as this makes transcription of the group almost impossible, and I want to hear your viewpoints. Please use the hand up function if needed.*
- *There are no right or wrong answers. Feel free to disagree with each other and offer alternative viewpoints but please do this in a respectful manner.*

- *If you need a break or to go to the toilet, etc. at any point, just turn your mic and camera off and come back when ready.*
- *I may interrupt the group if these ground rules are not being followed.*

*Introductions:*

- *Please introduce yourself with your name and how long you have been working as an Assistant EP.*

**Questions:**

1. Looking at the 3 parts of the model one at a time (Lacking Meaning of Work, Creating Work Meanings, and Work Meaning Constructs), are there any questions or things that you would like me to clarify/explain?
2. Which points do you agree with? Have you got any examples to illustrate?
3. Are there any points that you feel are wrong, where you disagree with the model? Why? Can you illustrate with examples from your own practice?



## A Substantive Grounded Theory of How Assistant Educational Psychologists (Asst. EPs) Experience and Create Meanings of Work

### Lacking Meaning of Work

The Asst. EP role is seen as an opportunity to create an understanding of what EPs do, therefore uncertainty around how to be Asst. EPs and EPs is expected. There appears to be feeling of hopefulness and motivation to create these meanings through being an Asst. EP.

763

764

765

#### **Not-knowing Meaning of Asst. EP Work.**

766

Individuals do not know how to be Asst. EPs when they start working in the role. Others in the service also have little understanding of Asst. EP work and how they are meant to work with them.

767

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#### **Not-knowing or Meaning of EP Work being challenged.**

771

Assistant EPs either don't know much about the work of EPs or their expectation of EP work was different to what they experienced when they started working in their role.

#### **Uncertainty about themselves**

Individuals experience feelings of low competence and confidence in their abilities when working as Asst. EPs. They try to make sense of this challenge to their self by drawing on the cultural discourse of imposter syndrome.

## Creating Work Meanings

When faced with the uncertainty of work meanings, individuals experience a sense of freedom to create meaning, which is expected and appreciated. There is also a feeling of responsibility to create this meaning as individuals see this as the purpose of the job. They have to be doing the role before creating the meaning of the role. Individuals actively create two meanings of work simultaneously - that of being an Asst. EP and the meaning of EP work - which is mentally and emotionally exhausting. Individuals seek meaning in pragmatic ways, through shadowing EPs, asking questions, looking at what past Asst. EPs have done, etc. Individuals also create meaning of their self at work, which is affected by opportunities to reflect on themselves in the role. Once Asst. EPs have created meanings of work, they begin to create personalised meanings of how they would want to be Asst. EPs and EPs.

### **Interpersonal meaning-making**

#### **- Other's meanings of Asst. EP and EP work:**

Meaning of Asst. EP and EP work is socially constructed through interactions with others and the context of the organisation they are working in. The meanings others had construed of Asst. EP and EP work and their confidence in this construct affects the opportunities others offer to Asst. EPs, in turn affecting the experiences Asst. EPs have to create meaning from. Experiencing different meanings of Asst. EP and EP work broadened the Asst. EP's meanings of work, but meant constantly adapting their meanings to those held by others.

#### **- Supervision**

Formal supervision is seen as a safe space for explicit meaning-making of Asst. EP and EP work. It also supports containment of negative feelings created by the meaning-making process itself.

#### **- Power in interpersonal meaning-making**

Collaborative meaning-making is more facilitative of meaning making than being told what to do. Following directions from others reduces autonomy and agency and thus limits reflection and ability to create meaning.

### **Agency and autonomy in meaning-making**

When Asst. EPs have autonomy and agency they find it easier to create meaning of their work as an Asst. EP and future EP. When they have less autonomy and agency, they can still create meaning of EP work but not how they want the meaning of their EP work to be - they passively do what other EPs think the meaning of Asst. EP and EP work is.

### **Values**

Values from past experiences, other EP's values, and personal values inform the meaning Asst. EPs make for their personalised way of working, enabling them to create work meanings that are consistent with their values.

### **Comparing to past work and self meanings**

Individuals draw on past constructs of work and themselves at work to make sense of their work as Asst. EPs.

## Work Meaning Constructs

Individuals express that the meanings of work they have created will change or are not the final meaning they will create. The meaning of EP work they have created is expected to change as they further experience doctoral training and work as a qualified EP. Thus, meaning constructs are seen as temporary, fluid, and based on context.

## Appendix 24: Focus group three transcript

1 **Natalie:** So what I'm going to do is I'm going to go through the three different colours in the  
2 model one at a time erm and ask you after each one If you've got any questions or anything  
3 that you'd like me to clarify or explain on each of those does that is that is okay

4 **Participant 10:** Yeah

5 (all nod)

6 **Natalie:** Erm so at the moment it's called 'a substantive grounded theory of how assistant  
7 educational psychologists experience and create meanings of work' so it's substantive  
8 because that means that it's just based on the assistants' experiences that I've interviewed  
9 and been in the focus groups I'm not trying to generalise it to all assistants erm so the first  
10 category I've come up with is kind of when assistants first start the role there's this lack of  
11 meaning of work erm and that's quite a positive thing so it's seen as an opportunity to  
12 create an understanding of what educational psychologists do and because of that you  
13 expect there to be this kind of level uncertainty when you first start the job erm but like I  
14 said it seems quite positive like there's this hopefulness and motivation to really make sense  
15 of what is happening for educational psychologists so within this what I found quite  
16 interesting is that there seems to be two meanings that assistants are not sure about when  
17 they first start so the first one is not knowing how to be an assistant educational  
18 psychologist so some participants spoke about they didn't even know that the role existed  
19 before they started erm and they didn't really know what to do but what they also found is  
20 that other people in the service didn't really know what assistant educational psychologists  
21 should be doing as well so then they didn't know how to work with them erm the other part  
22 which is quite interesting is that going into the role there seems to be this uncertainty  
23 around what educational psychologists do so it's either assistants didn't really know much  
24 about what educational psychologists do or they came across educational psychologists  
25 doing something that they didn't expect them to do so an example of that was erm so one  
26 participant spoke about how they thought that educational psychologists did a lot of one-to-  
27 one work with children and young people but then when they were working in the role they  
28 realised that actually there was a lot more systemic work going on so their understanding of  
29 the role was challenged erm and then alongside this is kind of this threat to their

30 understanding of themselves so individuals alongside this feel like erm they don't have the  
31 competence to do the job they lack confidence in their abilities erm and one term that came  
32 up quite a lot in both the interviews and the focus groups was the term "imposter  
33 syndrome" and I've tried to understand that by like that seems to be a term that's floating  
34 around kind of in society and assistants were kind of using that term to help them  
35 understand why they were feeling that way erm has anybody got any questions or anything  
36 they'd like me to clarify about the lacking meaning of work category

37 (everyone shakes their heads)

38 **Natalie:** Okay that's really good I'm glad makes sense erm okay what I'll probably do then  
39 we'll probably go through one erm do you want to do the points that you agree with or feel  
40 are wrong or do you want to go through all three first and then go back I don't mind

41 **Participant 7:** I think do it as like in the chunks otherwise I'll forget...

42 **Natalie:** Yeah

43 **Participant 7:** ...Probably when we go

44 **Natalie:** Is that okay with everyone

45 **Participant 10:** Yeah

46 (all nod)

47 **Natalie:** Yeah okay so which points in this first category erm do you agree with and if you've  
48 got any erm specific examples that you'd like to share to illustrate those that would be great  
49 as well

50 **Participant 2:** I was just going to say cos I had my appraisal on Wednesday which then felt  
51 particularly relevant for this cos I had a really long chat with my well the deputy in the  
52 department and he was saying about how well the challenge that they've set me for this  
53 year is to try and put things in place for future assistants because it's such a short shelf life  
54 of a job and usually well when I started last year there were four of us and three of them  
55 went on the course and just left me so there was a continuity this year but obviously for  
56 next year it might be that all three of us get on and then there's nothing left so if there was

57 new people they would have to start from scratch so they've set that as a challenge for me  
58 to think about how I can put things in place to make sure that there's a level of or less level  
59 of uncertainty for new people and I suppose that was the thing that I was thinking about as  
60 well because he said the EPs have got better at knowing what assistants do over the last  
61 year and a bit but when a whole new raft of people come in could they start them off from  
62 scratch probably not so even though the EPs know what we do now or have a better  
63 understanding they couldn't train people to do the assistant job so it's almost you need  
64 assistants to train assistants but at the same time you want assistants to be on the course  
65 and not be there (laughs) so this weird kind of thing where he was like 'you could record a  
66 weekly video and tell them what they do and how they're feeling' and I was like 'I don't  
67 think I'm gonna go there' but I suppose it was that starting point for me I was thinking  
68 actually what would it be really useful for me to know and what can I help them with and  
69 I'm slightly stuck I'm but sure I'll work it out in time (laughs)

70 **Participant 1:** See I would say I'm kind of in that boat as I had some very helpful experienced  
71 assistants when I was in the role and I read through the guidance and things like that and  
72 was saying 'yeah yeah I think I understand yeah yeah I get it' but then reading that when I  
73 stayed for the next academic year reading it all again I was like 'ooh that makes so much  
74 more sense' so I think having that kind of termly check-in as to what do you think about the  
75 role now because when I first started it I was thinking 'yeah I've got an idea' and then you're  
76 like 'oh actually' I think it's when you've got things to hook the experience on to so as much  
77 as like you can put as much as you can to prepare but I think it's nice that this role does have  
78 its autonomy that you do end up taking that experience just as experience comes along and  
79 then that really does shape kind of I suppose your values as well as you do start to see oh  
80 this is what's quite y'know this is what's happening in schools and for children at the  
81 moment

82 **Participant 7:** I don't know about you [Participant 1] because I've been in two different  
83 services I was in one first for nine months and this one now for two months so short but it's  
84 also like there's never gonna be like a document of like assistant because both have been  
85 completely different what's been expected of me has been completely different so there's  
86 never gonna be this overarching document where this is what assistants do so like  
87 [Participant 2] you might create one for your service now for the assistants coming into your

88 service but that will only be relevant to your service so it's really difficult because like you  
89 say the service I'm in now has guidelines and there's policies but they're not relevant to the  
90 way my previous service worked so I kinda I don't know if it's like we need to develop a  
91 more clear understanding of the role across services or do we not need to do that and it's  
92 just whatever the service wants to use us for I don't know but I do think it would be more  
93 useful maybe to have more consistency across the board

94 **Participant 1:** Yeah

95 **Participant 10:** Yeah I would agree with that I mean I've only worked in one service but from  
96 speaking with other assistants the variety of work is so different it does depend which  
97 authority you're in or wherever you're working um but I think that it's sort of the same for  
98 EPs to some extent because y'know some LAs are only statutory not that they want to be  
99 but just because of the situation that they're in um so I don't think there is standardisation  
100 at all but is that just the role um (laughs) I don't know but yeah I know what you mean  
101 about assistants I do think that like different ones that I've spoken to I'm like 'oh I don't do  
102 stuff like that' and like I think they do use us for whatever they want to

103 **Participant 7:** Yeah

104 **Participant 1:** But is that not reflective of the kind of work y'know I think because you do  
105 have to be so fluid it does really depend on all the situations that are going on that services  
106 do have to adapt and change to meet the need so yeah I think it maybe is difficult to kind of  
107 pinpoint this to 'this is how it needs to be' when it needs to be quite flexible so yeah

108 **Participant 7:** That's true and the communities that you're serving depending on which local  
109 authority the needs within that community are going to be different like you say it's not just  
110 on an individual level but just as the society of that community...

111 **Participant 10:** Yeah

112 **Participant 7:** ...Like it's gonna vary so much isn't it I made a note about the first point erm  
113 that I agreed with it but then you've got such a variety because I've worked for some EPs  
114 who really know the role and the meaning of the role and I think have used assistants really  
115 well and then I don't know if it's when if it's cos they're newly qualified or not I think people

116 who are more newly qualified who haven't been assistants previously struggle with knowing  
117 the meaning of like 'what do I do with you' and sometimes they'll either completely avoid  
118 then just using you at all or working with you (laughs) or erm obviously use you maybe in  
119 the wrong way but I think you've got the other end of the spectrum where you've got  
120 people who have been very experienced and qualified a very long time ago who almost use  
121 you as "an assistant" (air quotes) like the typical assistant where they're just ordering you to  
122 do things erm and I feel in those situations that's when you have very little autonomy erm  
123 over your work and it's like there's no questions being asked it's just you do what you're told  
124 kind of thing so I think you've got both ends of the spectrum there whether that's me just  
125 generalising but it's just something I felt I've experienced personally but I don't know about  
126 others

127 **Participant 2:** We definitely have that in our service there are some people who just still  
128 don't even use the assistants and they're really reluctant to bring us in whereas other  
129 people have gone 'ooh you can do this you can do that you can do whatever you want' but  
130 equally I've been pushed this year (laughs) the art of not saying yes is what they described it  
131 as for me but basically to accept that there's sometimes that I can say 'can I just come along  
132 and watch that and observe it' and use it as a learning experience and I think sometimes we  
133 forget that actually we are there to learn and ultimately to get on the course so we should  
134 just take some learning opportunities as well whereas sometimes I think I'm so entrenched  
135 in (laughs) all the work I'm doing I forget that sometimes so that's definitely something I've  
136 got to try more with this year but maybe I'll try and do that with the people who actively  
137 avoid having me along with them

138 (general laughter)

139 **Participant 1:** Yeah I'd say that's where I'm at currently I've completely snowed myself  
140 under with work to the point that I'm like 'I don't know what I'm doing and I don't know if  
141 this what if this is manageable' but then when I brought it to supervision they were like 'I  
142 can't believe that's how many hours you've put in' because I think I don't know I just kind of  
143 got railroaded into 'I need to do this I do I need to do this' and then it like you say we are  
144 learning and we need to get that experience but again I think it's because how I am working  
145 now is so different to how I was working previously like fifteen of the schools are mine so to



146 speak and then it's just that I have supervision around how I'm managing that so again I'm  
147 just finding at the minute I think having an idea of how I was in the previous role and having  
148 an idea of how different this is is another kind of conflict in itself so when I think I'm  
149 managing it and then I think 'actually no no this is too much'

150 **Participant 7:** Is that between erm working for a locality and private is that what you mean

151 **Participant 1:** Yes...

152 **Participant 7:** Yeah

153 **Participant 1:** ...Yeah local authority and then being in the private practice with it and a lot  
154 of it's coming from the schools so it's having that y'know challenging the schools when  
155 you're just like obviously we have to provide the service and whatever but yeah I'm finding  
156 this really tricky at the minute

157 **Participant 7:** Yeah

158 **Participant 10:** That's so interesting like we don't I don't have any schools at all I'm not  
159 linked to anyone erm and I feel like my experience is quite different from everyone saying I  
160 shadow all the time I do a lot of shadowing and um I feel like I dunno I have quite a good  
161 balance and I feel confident and if I said to my supervisor 'I don't want to do that I'm  
162 struggling' like I really don't think she'd say 'you need to do it' she'd go 'don't do it' and I  
163 think my PEP would as well I feel quite lucky (laughs)

164 **Participant 2:** I think mine's change this year because the two other assistants we've got this  
165 year are brand new and I think initially a lot of work has just come straight at me because  
166 they're still trying to figure out what they're doing and I remember that level of uncertainty  
167 from last year but certainly it has meant that a lot of it's just come straight at me which is  
168 probably then when I reflected on the fact that I wasn't having the learning experiences that  
169 I did have last year so yeah maybe that comes with the having less uncertainty means  
170 you've got more stuff to do

171 **Natalie:** That's great so I've made a note and of erm changing it slightly so it's not that  
172 others don't have an understanding it's just that some EPs have more understanding than  
173 others and that might be linked to their possibly having been assistants themselves so then

174 they've learned that meaning erm or it might be that they've had lots of experience working  
175 with assistants in the past so therefore that's affected it would that make more sense in that  
176 way

177 (everyone nods)

178 **Natalie:** Yep is there any other points that you disagree with or think are wrong in the first  
179 part of the model

180 **Participant 10:** I was just reading

181 **Participant 7:** I was just reading it

182 **Natalie:** Yep everyone just have a few more minutes yeah

183 **Participant 1:** Er do you think the 'how they are meant to work' should be in (air quotes)  
184 inverted commas as in who says it's how they are meant to work y'know is that kind of  
185 somebody's idea of how they're meant to work or is it the kind of expectation y'know where  
186 does that come from

187 **Natalie:** Hmm yeah that's a good idea what would you change it to

188 **Participant 1:** Just maybe putting it in the (air quotes) inverted commas where it could be  
189 where it's that interpretation just to kind of allude to that idea yeah

190 **Natalie:** Yeah

191 **Participant 10:** It's hard because obviously you said this is lots of different people's opinions  
192 and it shouldn't just be one person's but when I read that second box...

193 **Natalie:** Mm hm

194 **Participant 10:** ...That's not true for me I knew what EPs did and I erm yeah I don't know but  
195 I don't know how you capture that because obviously you're trying you're saying this is the  
196 words of people that you have interviewed erm...

197 **Natalie:** Mm hm

198 **Participant 7:** Why do you think you did know?

199 **Participant 10:** I spoke with an EP erm before I interviewed and I felt like I'd done a lot of  
200 reading about it and that was the reason that so I was deciding whether to do Clinical or  
201 erm Ed Psych and I guess I'd done a lot of research around it and actually felt that I wanted  
202 to do Ed Psych because of the systemic work so yeah I don't know but I don't know how you  
203 capture that because I understand the category that it's under like I said

204 **Natalie:** I think it's fine that there's exceptions in there cos then that just adds more erm it  
205 makes it a richer explanation so that erm in some cases if people have known for a long time  
206 or that they're like weighing up the option of different types of psychology then I can add in  
207 if you've kind of done this preparation work then maybe it's not challenged as much or it  
208 could be service specific cos like we've said there's lots of different variety...

209 **Participant 10:** Yeah

210 **Natalie:** ...It might be I dunno know what do people think if maybe you'd gone into a  
211 different service like [Participant 7]'s or [Participant 1]'s or [Participant 2]'s then maybe that  
212 would have been a different experience

213 **Participant 7:** I was just thinking that Natalie like if like [Participant 10] had gone in another  
214 like service maybe wouldn't have been as much of what she expected erm just from my old  
215 service we were doing all statutory work and the role of the assistant was literally just to  
216 support with the statutory work whereas the service I'm in now like we don't have anything  
217 to do with the statutory work so it's like the conflicting y'know if I'd have only ever  
218 experienced one and it was just like I went in and when I was like 'whoa is this all they do  
219 like doing statutory working and reports' it kind of put me off in that moment like I don't  
220 want to do that but now seeing that actually there's more to the role than that I don't know  
221 I think that's true what you're saying Natalie that it probably does depend on then obviously  
222 there's the general role as well but maybe it would have influenced I don't know

223 **Participant 10:** Yeah I think that's very valid yeah

224 **Natalie:** Are there any other points that people thought of when they read through that first  
225 bit

226 **Participant 7:** I was just thinking about the last bit the uncertainty about themselves erm I'm  
227 thinking of like why so why do we have those feelings of like low competence and  
228 confidence in their abilities not just is it a new role and maybe we've not done it before but  
229 actually you're in a team and who are the other people in that team well they're the  
230 educational psychologists so why do you feel incapable or why do you feel you lack  
231 knowledge well it's because the only person to compare yourself to (laughs) or that you're  
232 working with so often are people who are more educated who are more knowledgeable and  
233 I'm just thinking past teams that I've been in you've got such a variety of levels of knowledge  
234 and experience and whereas this is very much you've got EPs and you've got assistants erm  
235 and I think that probably is part of why you may feel that kind of incapability because you're  
236 like 'whoa' you're like in awe of how amazing they are (laughs) and then you're like 'I don't  
237 know any of that' but yeah maybe

238 **Participant 2:** I think it's hard to keep that perspective sometimes y'know when you're  
239 working alongside them every day you forget that they've got that three years on you at the  
240 very least where they've intensely studied and worked and everything else and yeah cos I  
241 think the first time I wrote like an advice on my own and they all helpfully sent me ones to  
242 show me like as a suggestion 'these are things you can include' and to be fair I think I read  
243 them and when 'my God I'm never gonna write like that' because it was my first one but it's  
244 that reality of you're sitting with very competent very skilled very experienced people and  
245 yes you're trying to learn from them but at the same time you want to do what they're  
246 doing so it's a hard like mantle to live up to

247 **Participant 10:** I think...

248 **Participant 1:** I think it's also sorry sorry [Participant 10] do you want to go I was just  
249 thinking as well that I've been a SENCO and a primary school teacher for fifteen years so in a  
250 way having that experience is also a change in like your identity a change in your working  
251 style so for me it was kind of knowing that I will be changing roles and knowing that you  
252 need to adapt in that way so y'know you need to build up that experience of working with  
253 children and young people then doing the masters so in some way you are changing yourself  
254 anyway as part of the role erm so I think that's something that it's really made me think  
255 about just kind of my own path of how I've got here (laughs)

256 **Participant 10:** All I was gonna say is I agree with what [Participant 2] said I think that you  
257 summed it up really well

258 **Participant 2:** I think I like what [Participant 1] said there just cos I was a SENCO before as  
259 well and like again in my appraisal on Wednesday he said probably for the first six months I  
260 was kind of like this weird little hybrid of er well he called me a super SENCO which wasn't  
261 quite right but it was just the perspective around being in three different local authorities as  
262 a SENCO and so the way I tried to adapt into the role was my perspective of being in a  
263 school and that was useful but then that's probably not the way I work now so yeah I guess  
264 it's using the identity that you had and adapting it to the role that you're doing but it's really  
265 hard

266 **Participant 7:** I think on the next page there's a thing isn't the Natalie about comparing to  
267 past working self because I feel like I've written a note down about exactly what you're  
268 saying that you're literally go from one professional identity to another one overnight with  
269 no transition so you've not got the doctorate to like transition into this new person like  
270 three years of learning and experience we literally go from being like one professional  
271 identity to starting a new job and there's literally not that transition point you just then  
272 need to be this new person and this new identity and I just find that tricky but sorry I've  
273 gone on to the next thing now

274 **Natalie:** No it's fine erm is everyone okay if I move on to the next one's the biggie so this will  
275 probably take a bit of time erm so the biggest process that came out of what people were  
276 speaking about was how assistants are creating lots of different meanings when they're  
277 doing their role erm so the first the box at the top is kind of a summary and then the boxes  
278 underneath are different kind of mechanisms involved in this meaning-making and so I'm  
279 just kind of going to summarise the first bit so the uncertainty is expected and alongside  
280 that the individuals kind of experience this sudden massive freedom to kind of make sense  
281 of what's happening erm and that assistants really appreciated having that time and space  
282 to make meaning in the role but there's also this sense of responsibility to create meaning  
283 because they see that's the point of the job is to try to understand what the role of an EP is  
284 erm the thing that kind of I felt was happening was that assistants were having to do the job  
285 before they could then make sense of what the role was erm and assistants are really active

286 in their creation of two different meanings at the same time so you're creating this meaning  
287 of how do I be an assistant Educational Psychologist how do I do my current job but also  
288 how would I do an Educational Psychologist role er what does that mean and that is really  
289 exhausting like it's really emotionally draining erm so at first assistants seem to be quite  
290 practical in the way they go about making these meanings so they do lots of shadowing  
291 asking questions looking at what past assistants have done in the role but once they've got  
292 that understanding and they've had that time to reflect on those things then assistants start  
293 to think well what do I want this role to look like for me and they start to create this more  
294 personalised meaning of how do I want to be working as an assistant how would I want to  
295 work as an educational psychologist in the future erm has anyone got any questions about  
296 that little bit at the moment

297 (everyone shakes their heads)

298 **Natalie:** Okay erm so the biggest thing that seems to be underpinning this is meaning-  
299 making through those interactions with others erm so one thing that I felt came through  
300 quite significantly was this socially constructed understanding of what the roles are and it's  
301 affected by the meanings that other assistants have and the meanings that other  
302 educational psychologists have and also the context of the service that you're working in so  
303 all of those things are affecting how assistants are making sense of their role erm so for  
304 example if educational psychologists in the service think that assistants should only be doing  
305 statutory work then they will only offer them statutory work so then the meaning the  
306 assistants create is based solely on their experience of statutory work does that make sense  
307 whereas if you're offered um a broader variety of activities to do then your meaning that  
308 you're creating will be more varied and you'll um kind of be able to pick up 'oh I liked that'  
309 so then you can create a more personalised meaning rather than a really restricted meaning  
310 erm but that's really hard cos you're constantly adapting to what different educational  
311 psychologists understand as what your role is erm has anyone got any questions about that  
312 bit

313 (everyone shakes their heads)

314 **Natalie:** Erm supervision is really so participants spoke about supervision as a safe space to  
315 make meaning of their work they can go and ask lots of questions about 'ooh is this actually

316 what I'm supposed to be doing is this what I want to be doing' erm and it also supports that  
317 containment of this really exhausting meaning-making process erm and then the other thing  
318 that came through in interpersonal meaning making is power so if educational psychologists  
319 kind of used their power in their role as erm like they're the one who is qualified and they  
320 just told the assistants what to do then that reduced the amount of meaning that the  
321 assistants took from it whereas if the educational psychologist was more collaborative  
322 saying 'how would you like to do this erm what do you want to do in this role what do you  
323 want to get out of it' then that helped them to make the meaning a bit better than just  
324 being told what to do has anyone got any questions about that part of the model

325 (everyone shakes their heads)

326 **Natalie:** Okay erm another big thing that's come out is agency and autonomy so assistants  
327 found it a lot easier to create meanings when they had agency and autonomy in their role  
328 erm so for example if they were able to erm make decisions about how they did a piece of  
329 work which was supported by educational psychologists but if they could choose how they  
330 wanted to do things that helped them erm when they had less autonomy in agency they  
331 could still kind of create an understanding of the work but less how they wanted to do it so  
332 for example if they were told 'you're going to go and gather this pupil's views and I want you  
333 to use this specific tool' then they would think 'oh okay educational psychologists gather  
334 pupils' views and they can use this tool' but if they've not understood why the educational  
335 psychologist told them to use that tool then they're not able to go 'oh yeah I understand  
336 why and I probably would do that again in the future' or 'no I disagree with that I won't do  
337 that again in the future' so that's more kind of passive in their meaning making they're not  
338 actively thinking 'why would I do that in my role' has anyone got any questions about that  
339 bit

340 (everyone shakes their heads)

341 **Natalie:** Okay erm values came out erm a lot of the meanings that people created was  
342 based on values er so these values came from past experiences of work roles erm the values  
343 that they saw other educational psychologists have and also kind of those personal values  
344 so kind of thinking from I think one participant said that from being a child they were really  
345 inclusive...

346 **Participant 7:** That was me (laughs)

347 **Natalie:** ...Erm was that you [Participant 7] (laughs) so that was brought into the role and  
348 that helped them to decide how they wanted to work in this role and it helped them to be  
349 more consistent with their values when they were working in the role as well does that bit  
350 make sense does anyone have any questions

351 **Participant 10:** Can we just go back to the one above I'm just trying to get my head around it

352 **Natalie:** Yes of course

353 **Participant 10:** I feel like we've said above like not knowing what to do...

354 **Natalie:** Mmhmm

355 **Participant 10:** ...Kind of seeking input on how to do the job but then it's saying that we  
356 want to do it on our own

357 **Natalie:** Mmm

358 **Participant 10:** Which I get (laughs) it is that complicated but I'm just not sure how that they  
359 seem a bit contradictory

360 **Natalie:** Yeah

361 **Participant 10:** But they are (laughs) it is complex isn't it

362 **Natalie:** Yeah do you think that I'm trying to think how so I'm wondering if maybe the  
363 agency and autonomy comes a little bit later so once you've started to understand a little bit  
364 more about what the role is then you can start to be more autonomous and making  
365 decisions

366 **Participant 10:** Yes because I think to start with you want to be told what to do because you  
367 don't know...

368 **Natalie:** Yeah



369 **Participant 10:** ...What you're doing so you want someone to say 'go and do this' and be told  
370 how to do it but yeah I think you're right and then later on once you've gathered all of those  
371 tools you then decide what you want to do

372 **Natalie:** Yeah what do other people think

373 **Participant 2:** Yeah I would agree with that

374 **Participant 7:** I kind of agree but then I feel like they're so interrelated like you want to be  
375 given the autonomy but you don't if you don't know what you're doing but this is...

376 **Natalie:** Mmm

377 **Participant 7:** ...Where I think it doesn't just come down to being given the autonomy I think  
378 it's being given debriefs and reflection and what are your thoughts on using that tool and  
379 exploring what you might use if you was to like for me I think the most helpful thing is not  
380 just being given the autonomy erm it's actually then afterwards having that debrief having  
381 that reflection 'well why did you make that decision' or 'what do you think' or asking even if  
382 I have not made any decisions I've been asked 'what would you have done in that situation'  
383 and it's getting me to start having those thought processes even before being given the  
384 autonomy and I know this is not helpful Natalie (laughs)...

385 **Natalie:** No it's fine

386 **Participant 7:** ...But it's kind of like everything is so interrelated isn't it like what you're  
387 saying it's kind of contradictory but erm yeah I think naturally obviously we don't know what  
388 we're doing so we don't have the autonomy but I think and it goes back to kind of that  
389 imposter syndrome we're trying to balance that out we're trying to get rid of that feeling so  
390 you're like wanting to push to like be autonomous and know what you're doing but yeah I'm  
391 not sure I don't think that's very helpful is it sorry (laughs)

392 **Natalie:** No it's fine I think because this came to me cos I was thinking it came out of if  
393 you're told what to do right at the very beginning but that thing you're asked to do goes  
394 against for example like a really deeply held personal value that can be really difficult to kind  
395 of manage erm and participants found that really difficult because they already kind of had  
396 this understanding of how they wanted to work based on that value but then if an EP was

397 asking them to go against that value erm that kind of made them find it more difficult to  
398 create a meaning of their role that they were happy with so I think you're right it's like a fine  
399 balance like you want to have some more autonomy but at the same time be supported to  
400 make those decisions through that supervision maybe

401 **Participant 2:** It is a really hard one and I feel like I'm a bit with [Participant 7] I think it's kind  
402 of elements of both but it is it's that freedom to explore in amongst everything else that's  
403 going on so you wanna do work with EPs you want them to tell you what's going on and  
404 y'know why they've done stuff and like [Participant 7] said those debriefs are really  
405 important because they help construct meaning from what the EPs are doing but at the  
406 same time you then need your own space after that to go away and work out 'would I do it  
407 that way would I have done it differently' and you won't necessarily have those  
408 conversations with the EP because you try to learn why they did it rather than would you do  
409 it and I suppose it's like you wanna watch you want to understand why and then you want  
410 to think about would you or would you not and that's a lot of headspace

411 **Participant 7:** I've valued when EPs have done that though like I know what you're saying  
412 [Participant 2] about going away but then I've worked with some EPs who literally asked me  
413 like even if I'm just shadowing 'what would you do do you think you would' I think it was  
414 something about giving them an EHCP like just asking me to start thinking about those  
415 questions of like and I was like 'ooh I don't know don't ask me (laughs) I don't know  
416 anything' but actually it's really useful to have those moments of kind of challenge a way  
417 being put in those uncomfortable positions but it does actually develop you as a Aspiring EP  
418 I guess

419 **Participant 10:** Yeah I agree I've had that question 'do you think this child should have an  
420 EHCP' and I'm like 'ahhhh' it is good though cos that is the mindset that y'know hopefully if  
421 we when when we get on and those types of things we'll need to know about so it's good to  
422 start thinking about them early but it is daunting (laughs)

423 **Natalie:** Yeah so then the last little bit is just about erm like we were saying before so to  
424 help kind of make sense of erm their new sense of self cos we said previously there's this  
425 uncertainty around themselves in terms of competence and confidence individuals seem to  
426 kind of draw on their past understandings of work and themselves in a work role to make

427 sense of how they should be doing their current role as an assistant erm well it sounds like  
428 that kind of is a process that's quite short and then maybe changes as you become more  
429 confident in the meanings that you're creating

430 **Participant 7:** This I think is what I was talking about before of there's no transition point  
431 you just go from one professional identity to another literally I've just made a note of like  
432 'well there's no other choice' I don't think we want to keep reflecting on who we were or  
433 like looking at the past experiences but like I say because there's not that transition you  
434 literally have no other choice but you're still in that mindset almost you're like in this no  
435 man's land of who am I and what's my professional role here so you start sharing  
436 information that probably is your past role but you just got no other kind of thing to go off  
437 so I don't know if it's because we want to do that there's no choice but to do that

438 **Participant 1:** I think that's where it's nice to kind of have your little diary to look back at like  
439 when I look back at September when I first started my role and thinking 'aahhh I don't want  
440 to have to go to a meeting and be that person' and then you just end up doing that and  
441 y'know just kind of like you say you evolve into that kind of identity but I don't know at what  
442 point you think 'yes this is what I am now' I don't know when that suddenly light bulb  
443 moment happens but yeah y'know you do evolve into it I suppose

444 **Participant 7:** Do you feel like that now [Participant 1] like do you feel content with your  
445 role and like that's your identity

446 **Participant 1:** I think erm (laughs) if I hadn't this week has been so stressful I've completely  
447 overdone it but I suppose because they're my schools and I know the SENCOs and I know  
448 the staff I have to stop everybody and say 'no I'm not the EP I am the assistant EP' because  
449 then they'll go 'oh the EP's here' 'nuh uh no I'm the assistant EP that is here to support' erm  
450 so I suppose yeah it's just you just end up doing it on a because you get in it's kind of the  
451 routine isn't it so yes I suppose sometimes it is just having time to think 'I remember feeling  
452 that before and actually now I'm doing this' y'know you show your badge people recognise  
453 who you are and you go to your little room where you normally work and just kind of that's  
454 what's happening at the moment

455 **Participant 7:** I'm wondering if that's because you have got your own schools because  
456 certainly after ten months not that long but I don't feel like secure in this professional  
457 identity I still feel like 'who am I what is my role' so I'm wondering for you if it's because you  
458 do have kind of your own schools I don't know or when does that happen maybe just  
459 individual experiences I don't know

460 **Participant 2:** I think for me one of the things that it comes from is when you're with other  
461 assistants I think because when you all start the only thing you've got is your past  
462 experiences to then all try and make sense of the role at the same time so you initially  
463 always draw on the things you've done before in the experiences that you've had and the  
464 values that gives you because that's the very tangible thing when you're going 'don't know  
465 what I'm doing here I don't know what we're supposed to do' that's all you've got as a  
466 starting point and probably the way we initially divvied up work was through the lens of  
467 'well that fits more with your past experiences so maybe start with that' so we'll start  
468 probably with the more familiar and then branched out as we became more confident

469 **Participant 1:** Yeah and that's what I miss now because there's only me and another  
470 assistant everybody else is an EP or a TEP and there's no chance now to like collaborate  
471 together so we're trying to make time erm just to meet weekly just to have the check-in as  
472 to 'aahh what are you doing' I do miss having a network of um other assistants just to kind  
473 of see what everybody's experience looks like now

474 **Natalie:** Okay so I know that's a really massive kind of concept and I've tried to break it  
475 down into different parts erm are there any parts of that that you specifically agree with  
476 and have any examples that you'd like to add to any of those

477 **Participant 10:** I guess the last one so I worked in an autistic residential school and [South-  
478 Western County] are doing a project for delivering training to mainstream schools so I didn't  
479 identify myself but my PEP said to me 'I know you've got experience with autism would to  
480 join the project' so it was sort of her knowing my past experiences that I was then able to  
481 bring to that and I thought 'yeah actually I can do that' that gave me confidence in knowing  
482 what I was doing so I could then use my past experiences which then made me feel  
483 confident in that position

484 **Participant 2:** Yeah I had something similar because I'd worked with young people who'd  
485 been at school for quite a significant amount of time to transport them back in so then  
486 when [North Eastern LA] started an emotionally-based school non-attendance project it was  
487 like 'would you like to be part of that' and none of the other assistants wanted to (laughs) or  
488 necessarily I think we were all y'know feet going like the duck erm so you couldn't see us all  
489 madly scrambling but to me that was something very tangible to then go 'I've got  
490 experience in this area' so yeah it was something for me to go 'I probably feel like I can  
491 contribute amongst all the other uncertainties going on' but then this year the other  
492 assistants wanna do it as well and I'm like 'that's fine' but at the time it was my little thing  
493 that I had

494 **Natalie:** That's a really good point so I've kind of added in that it's not just something that  
495 individuals are doing it's also supported by others knowing your strengths and your past  
496 experiences to help you kind of use that at first in the role yep is there any other comments  
497 or things that people would like to add to this category

498 **Participant 1:** I don't know if it is relevant but I just think when I was working with a group  
499 of other assistants sometimes it is that kind of comparison of 'oh you've already done a  
500 school on your own you've already done this and you've already done that' and I do think all  
501 the time you are pushing yourself out of your comfort zone but equally you are comparing  
502 against even y'know other assistants other EPs and I think sometimes that's where kind of  
503 you can lose yourself a little bit when you do start to compare cos y'know it's only natural  
504 that you think ooh is it gonna be as good as what somebody else could do' so y'know I just  
505 think all the time you are pushing yourself it's just recognising that part of the role is being  
506 uncomfortable a lot of the time when you just think 'gosh can I do that right I've done it I've  
507 done it now' (laughs) so yeah

508 **Participant 7:** I definitely agree with that comparing like thinking 'they're doing that and I've  
509 not done that yet' but I think if they give yourself space like we all have our own levels of  
510 what we feel comfortable with don't be but it's hard not to compare

511 **Participant 1:** Yeah

512 **Participant 7:** I was a bit unsure Natalie about the value section...

513 **Natalie:** Yeah

514 **Participant 7:** ...So because I know it says at the end 'enabling them to create work  
515 meanings that are consistent with their values'

516 **Natalie:** Mm hm

517 **Participant 7:** I don't know if I've just misunderstood it but I kind of feel that often maybe  
518 you're not doing things they're not always consistent with your values because you're  
519 having to do things I don't know if this is a good example but like I say in the past service I  
520 worked for having the assistant to do pupil views observation gather all the information and  
521 then we'd do like a collaborative joint assessment meeting with the professionals parents  
522 everybody to bring the statutory advice together erm for me my value would go against that  
523 because I feel the EP who is signing it off as part of their statutory role should have met that  
524 young person and been part of that y'know actually meeting them before they're writing an  
525 entire statutory piece of work so I don't know if that's I've read it wrong but I feel like I'm  
526 not always doing things it's not always enabling me to do work consistent with my values  
527 does that make sense or have I understood it wrong

528 **Natalie:** Yeah no that does make sense and I think it's about that erm I think in my head it  
529 kind of came along with that agency so it's only when you start to have that agency and  
530 autonomy to go 'oh okay I've got a piece of work now how would I like to do this piece of  
531 work how would that fit with my values' that then you're able to create that meaning of  
532 work that aligns with that a bit better whereas if you've not got that autonomy and agency...

533 **Participant 7:** Yeah

534 **Natalie:** ...And you're just being told what to do then you're not able to work in line with  
535 your values as much because there's kind of that you're not able to challenge back and go  
536 'oh well that doesn't sit right with me' and if the EP goes 'well I don't care like I'm the one  
537 who's kind of telling you to do it' then that means that you can't work in that way that's  
538 consistent with the values that you hold does that make sense

539 **Participant 7:** Yeah it does

540 **Natalie:** So maybe I need to make it clearer that agency and autonomy and values are kind  
541 of more interlinked

542 **Participant 2:** I think you do as you move through you've got more capacity to be reflective  
543 on whether or not things fit with your values I still don't know even at this point whether or  
544 not if I was asked to do something whether or not I feel confident enough to go 'actually  
545 that doesn't align with my personal views at all' because I suppose there's always elements  
546 of the role where you have to accept that things don't align but it's having the confidence to  
547 know in the future that actually when you were an EP you would push back...

548 **Participant 7:** Yeah

549 **Participant 2:** ...So maybe giving you a better construct of what your values are when you  
550 become an EP but knowing that actually you can't always get that in the assistant role

551 **Participant 7:** And I always think 'well they must know better (laughs) because they're the  
552 EP at the end of the day' so yeah I definitely wouldn't have the confidence like you say to  
553 kind of challenge that

554 **Natalie:** I wonder if it also links with that power aspect we were talking about so there's that  
555 element of power the EP holds responsibility for this piece of work then maybe assistants do  
556 feel less able to challenge and say 'oh that just go against my values' because at the end of  
557 the day they're the ones who are responsible for it

558 **Participant 1:** I do think it's the time element though having that time to discuss 'this is why  
559 I chose to put I don't know a particular word or a particular action that you did' and you've  
560 got that time to say 'this came from having that discussion with the parents that explained  
561 this' because sometimes I have had where they've said 'oh I don't think you should use that  
562 terminology' but then I was saying 'actually this was like the quote that the parent' y'know  
563 it's kind of making it really personalised but then having that chance to explain but again I  
564 think it's down to that erm just that time to have that reflection and just say 'actually this is  
565 why' y'know and even if it is actually next time maybe I do see why that isn't appropriate  
566 but it's just learning from that as well so I do think it comes from time and reflection

567 **Natalie:** Yeah are there any other comments like bits that you think need tweaking that and  
568 you feel the wrong or you disagree in that section

569 **Participant 2:** I think there was just one thing one other thing that came to me is just when  
570 we were talking before about obviously there's some EPs who are really good at using  
571 assistants and others that aren't I suppose from my point of view because I know there's still  
572 a chunk of EPs who have never used assistants actually it means that we're missing a  
573 richness to the role because we're only with certain people and I think actually I don't know  
574 whether that comes because they don't have the confidence to use us or it could be twenty  
575 million other things but actually that limits our experience because we've only got the  
576 certain pool of EPs who are happy to work with us or want to work with us that actually I  
577 probably still don't have a full sense of my service even after a year because there are  
578 people that I've never worked with and the other assistants I've never worked with

579 **Participant 7:** I think sometimes some of the EPs also view it as more work for them  
580 because if they have to then do this debrief and reflection and check in or y'know brief you  
581 before that's more work for them maybe in the short term because then once they build  
582 your confidence you're going to be more capable but maybe they just think 'I haven't got  
583 time for that' I don't know and I think some have been honest who I've worked with have  
584 said that

585 **Natalie:** Sorry I'm just writing it all down while I remember it all (laughs) so the last bit is it's  
586 kind of tiny because I feel like it's important but it's not the biggest part of what's come out  
587 of the research but I've been able to talk slightly upon what I think assistants are like the  
588 outcome of this meaning-making maybe what their meanings are once they've go through  
589 this process and I kind of summarised it as basically assistants feel that the meanings that  
590 they have been able to create are not the final versions of what they think the educational  
591 psychologist role will be because they expect it to change once they go through training  
592 that'll change the meaning of the educational psychologist role and it'll also change again  
593 when they then go into a maybe a different service as a qualified educational psychologist  
594 so I think they kind of accepted that they're going through this process of meaning-making  
595 but that's gonna continue for a very long time in this role and it's just the nature of the role



596 that the meanings you create are really temporary and fluid and based on whatever your  
597 context is at that point in time has anyone got any questions about that

598 **Participant 10:** No I think yeah I think that that's good

599 **Natalie:** Yeah yeah do we agree with that is there anything that you think is wrong or needs  
600 to change in that section

601 **Participant 7:** No I just wrote agreed exclamation mark

602 (everyone laughs)

603 **Natalie:** Yeah I think it's a really interesting one cos I was kind of wondering whether it kind  
604 of prepares us in a way to do the educational psychologist job because as assistants you  
605 have that experience of 'oh I've had to make sense of what's going on for myself' and then  
606 when you become an EP you have to try and make sense of what's going on for this child or  
607 what's going on for this member of staff and I wonder if that is kind of reflected in the  
608 processes that you go through I don't know It was just a wondering that I had and if anyone  
609 had any thoughts on that (laughs)

610 **Participant 7:** Well definitely it's the whole problem solving isn't it we're trying to solve this  
611 role which then like you say is a skill that we'll definitely going to need moving forward  
612 when we do become hopefully EPs

613 **Participant 2:** I guess it's that thing though in a way cos where you say it's temporary  
614 because you ultimately know the role is temporary y'know everyone has a ours is a two-year  
615 contract but the other local authorities around here just have a one-year contract so it's like  
616 you know that it's a very small chunk of time that actually you've got to learn and  
617 understand and grow but you know that you can't possibly do every bit of growing and  
618 understanding that you can in that time because it's the preparation for the doctorate so  
619 there's an intensity to it to learn as much as you can but actually you can't go in at thinking  
620 that you're going to know everything by the time you leave because well everyone that I've  
621 talked to who started the doctorate just go 'y'know my brain's just exploding' and it's like it  
622 gives you a starting point but you know it's by no means it's not your end goal so it's never  
623 gonna be the final outcome

624 **Natalie:** Hmm I wonder if I need to capture that a little bit more in the model the impact of  
625 the role being temporary

626 (everyone nods)

627 **Participant 7:** Yeah and I think that adds to what you mentioned earlier about being like  
628 exhausted and emotional because you're on a time pressure not just to understand but you  
629 know that it's like you're just constricted to this time that you need to learn everything and  
630 to be honest I also feel then a lot of stress and pressure by being in this role to knowing I  
631 feel pressure that I then need to be on the doctorate like one because you're in it and  
632 everyone is asking 'oh have you applied how's your application oh did you get an interview'  
633 'no' well 'did you do the interview' 'yeah' 'how did it go' 'oh I didn't get on' or like if you  
634 were just still doing your teaching role or whatever it is before like no one's asking you  
635 nobody cares because nobody's in that world (laughs) whereas once you're in the world  
636 there's this massive amount of pressure being an assistant that's gonna progress on you're  
637 on the conveyor belt that's what I always say and I can't get off and it's just going yeah...

638 **Participant 1:** Yeah I say that the wheel

639 **Participant 7:** ...Which is good but also scary

640 **Participant 10:** Yeah I definitely agree with that I think there's so much pressure people  
641 think I think when people don't understand the role as well they'll say to you like 'oh so  
642 you're gonna be qualified soon' thinking that this is the training bit and it's like 'no you don't  
643 get it that's not how it works' and I think there is that pressure isn't there of only having so  
644 mine was a year contract and it has been extended because I didn't get on but there was a  
645 chance of like not getting on and not having a job at the end of it and then you're like 'well  
646 what am I gonna do' and now I'm even more worried because I'm thinking 'if I don't get on  
647 this time are they gonna extend it again like how many times are they gonna keep extending  
648 this for me until they turn around and say well this obviously isn't for you' so that there is a  
649 huge amount of pressure and like you said everyone's asking you it's coming from a place of  
650 love and care but it really puts the pressure on

651 **Participant 7:** And I feel embarrassed almost like I will like if I don't get an interview 'well  
652 why you're an assistant' like this more pressure in that sense that you should but I don't  
653 know

654 **Participant 10:** Yeah I agree

655 **Participant 1:** So this is like this will be my fourth time of doing it and I have got to that point  
656 you just think 'can I put myself through this anymore' at what point is it need to tell me  
657 actually go and find something else because it is emotionally draining and well there's  
658 already so many commitments that I feel that I have put into this role already I mean I was  
659 doing a one hour commute there one hour commute back where I was before erm now  
660 things are on the doorstep but like I say now I've got the big workload I'm a single parent  
661 and it's all those kind of getting on to the doctorate itself is going to be a massive money  
662 erm y'know the pressure there's so many pressures that I feel I'm ready to have this I'm  
663 ready to do the commitment but it's just kind of not really appreciated the big commitments  
664 that we do do erm yeah so it's tough

665 **Participant 7:** Yeah it's all those things that add to that exhaustion and emotional...

666 **Participant 1:** Yeah

667 **Participant 7:** ...You know like what you mentioned at the beginning Natalie I think there's  
668 so much more to just understanding the role that is going on with being part of that role and  
669 the emotions with it yeah

670 **Natalie:** Yeah I hope that comes through the model because I think a lot of the past research  
671 is very much like what do assistants do rather than how do they emotionally feel doing  
672 those things because I feel like that's a massive part that's missing and it's been really  
673 interesting to hear that from people who are currently working in the role erm so I guess  
674 just to summarise erm I'm going to add in some bits about erm educational psychologists  
675 starting to get a better understanding but maybe that's because they've been assistants  
676 before or if they've had more experience working with assistants erm I'm going to put  
677 something about how it's very context dependent so even if stuff was put in place to try to  
678 reduce the uncertainty it might not work because there's that difference between different  
679 services erm yeah I'm gonna add in about others knowing your past experiences does help

680 with that meaning making because it's not just something that assistants do off their own  
681 back it's also kind of involved in that interpersonal thing I'm going to make it a little more  
682 clear how agency and autonomy link with supervision and erm also kind of having that  
683 freedom to explore and having responsibility erm I'm going to add in how important it is to  
684 have time to reflect and discuss with educational psychologists the assistants are working  
685 with and also make it a little bit more detailed around why that meaning is temporary  
686 because of the temporary nature of the role and how that pressure because of the  
687 temporariness of the role kind of makes all the other processes feel really intense erm does  
688 that make sense

689 (everyone nods)

690 **Natalie:** Okay is there anything that you feel that I've blatantly obviously missed in the  
691 theory that I've come up with at the moment

692 **Participant 1:** My only thing I was just thinking and yeah just like y'know the Twitter and  
693 technology and that opportunity to connect with us but sometimes that is another pressure  
694 as in comparing...

695 **Natalie:** Yes

696 **Participant 1:** ...Because you are seeing what other services are doing but y'know  
697 sometimes er does that mean that's the better way of doing it or does that mean so  
698 sometimes it's just again I suppose it's that understanding that there are other assistant  
699 roles but also that it is so different and how that looks so yeah just kind of again that  
700 assumption that an assistant working here and an assistant working here is so varied

701 **Natalie:** Yeah that's worth knowing cos at the moment I kind of put that it was a positive  
702 thing networking with other assistants...

703 **Participant 1:** Yeah

704 **Natalie:** ...Because then it broadens the meaning but actually it's worth knowing that that  
705 also adds to that pressure cos of the comparison that we spoke about thank you

706 **Participant 7:** This is probably not relevant at all but I was talking to the Principal the other  
707 day in supervision and we were talking about erm kind of like the EPs you work with and  
708 your confidence and kind of how they behave will depend on whether you feel the  
709 confidence to do things independently or ask those questions and I was going through all of  
710 this and then she was like 'yes so what is that in psychology and learning' and I was like 'oh  
711 yeah the Zone of Proximal Development and the whole Vygotsky thing' like actually the EPs  
712 you need to use that with us like scaffold us build up our confidence give us that little steps  
713 to build and I was like yeah that's so true so for like them as an EP maybe it is useful because  
714 they're using those skills in a professional sense with colleagues as well as I don't know  
715 because some EPs from my experience I've not experienced that and actually y'know that  
716 feeling of being thrown under the bus almost like y'know not given that safe zone that  
717 psychological safety not being given those scaffolded steps yeah which is not part of your  
718 research is it cos it's not about what they're doing but it's just like a thought that I just  
719 thought I'd share because it's very relevant

720 **Natalie:** I think it is because it comes into that interpersonal meaning making and I think  
721 that's the biggest part of the theory that I've created is how the meanings like the meanings  
722 that are being created are not just dependent on you it's also dependent on how the other  
723 educational psychologists in the service are working what their understanding of how they  
724 work with assistants is and then also like that wider context so you've got Twitter as well  
725 and you've got all this social media you've got the assistant's networks so you can draw on  
726 those understandings it's very big I think the way that the different meanings of people all  
727 interrelate and then you're just one person trying to make sense of all these different  
728 meanings yeah well thank you so much I wondered if you had any reflections on actually  
729 taking part in the research if you wanted to share those it's up to you

730 **Participant 1:** I think it's nice to have that reflection space and to just kind of hear  
731 everybody's experiences but also it is that kind of personal having time to see your personal  
732 journey to where you are now erm yeah I think it's been really beneficial for me personally

733 **Participant 7:** Yeah it's forced that reflection hasn't it on the role but then you're part of  
734 playing that role on a personal level as well yeah

735 **Participant 10:** I think it's been really helpful to meet other people and know that everyone  
736 has the same or not the same because we've all said it's different but as in sharing our  
737 experiences and knowing that you're not alone I think it's really helpful because sometimes  
738 you can think 'oh God it's a me problem I'm struggling with the role' and actually knowing  
739 that everyone feels like that and we all go through that I think is really nice to be able to  
740 share space and know that you're not alone

741 **Participant 2:** Yeah because for me I think a lot of this came from curiosity y'know you do  
742 the AEP networks and you go 'well everyone's doing something really different' and then  
743 the panic starting to kick in as well about the application for the doctorate and it's nice to  
744 know everyone in the room's going 'urrhh' as well so there's massive differences but there's  
745 shared experiences which it's really nice to understand other people

Appendix 25: Memos for the two conceptual categories of "Lacking Meaning of Work" and "Creating Work Meaning" elaborated during Phase Two of the study

## MEMO 1

Version seven - 27/09/23

### ***Conceptual Category: Lacking Meaning of Work***

When exploring existentialism and existential themes, I found further research by Ronkainen et al. (2019) about boundary situations. Boundary situations are highlighted in existentialism as conditions that may trigger meaning-making (Ronkainen et al., 2019). Ronkainen et al. (2019) define boundary situations as those where an individual's identity does not fit with their new experience, thus causing existential anxiety, and leading to significant change in the individual's way of Being. Cohen (2003) argued that changing careers presents a boundary situation because it creates existential anxiety as individuals are confronted with the existential themes of freedom, responsibility, meaninglessness, and authenticity in relation to their self in the world of work.

This seems to link with what the Asst. EPs are saying in the focus groups and interviews, as they appear to experience a lack of meaning of work, particularly when they first enter their new work context as an Asst. EP, and are confronted with meaninglessness of work:

*'oh I'm here I'm here now like now what...Okay I'm an assistant'...'now I don't know what to do' (19, 713-717)*

It may be that they experience this lack of meaning of work because they have not yet had time to construct their essence (meaning of work) within the social context they encounter by "Being" in the role:

*when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be (8, 6-7)*

*when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I just going in very blind (19, 9-10)*

*unless you're in it you don't really understand it (19, 741)*

The Asst. EP role is seen as an opportunity to create an understanding of what EPs do, therefore this lack of Asst. EP and EP meaning is expected:

*some of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up (8, 186-188)*

*I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail (9, 4)*

However, this responsibility and freedom associated with this lack of meaning is uncomfortable for the Asst. EPs, with Participant 2 explaining that the freedom was 'scary' (19, 19), and Participant 8 blamed themselves for not knowing what to do in their role: '*I had a lot of guilt... 'am I doing enough how am I developing through this''* (19, 34-35).

Despite these negative feelings, there appears to be feeling of hopefulness and motivation to create new meanings of work through being an Asst. EP. For example, Participant 8 explained that '*trying to put yourself out your comfort zone and look for opportunities has helped me learn'* (19, 39-40).

There also appears to be an element of uncertainty around how long they will be in the role, depending on when they get accepted on to a training course:

*I think I have erm yeah I mean I think my expectation was that I would be an assistant get on the course become an EP there we go and obviously the reality is different (laughs) (7, 270-272)*

*sometimes people think if they've got that assistant role then they're definitely gonna get on the doctorate and that's not always the case (10, 404-406)*

Asst. EPs seem to experience a lack of meaning in three parts of Work Meaning:

### **1. Not-knowing the Meaning of Asst. EP Work**

Asst. EPs do not know how to Be Asst. EPs at the beginning of their time working in the role:

*when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I [was] just going in very blind (19, 9-10)*

This may be as a result of **environmental uncertainty** (Daft & Lengel, 1986) where there is an absence of information about what Asst. EPs do. This lack of meaning in relation to Asst. EP work particularly affects their experience of carrying out activities associated with the role for the first time. For example, Participant 2 spoke about how their lack of Work Meaning affected their perception of taking part in supervision: '*I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say''* (8, 96-97).

The Asst. EPs notice that there are different ways in which Asst. EPs work across services. This creates the conditions for meaning-making as it increases the **ambiguity** (informed by McCaskey's (1982) definition of environmental ambiguity) of Asst. EP Work Meaning as it differs depending on the local context. This means the Asst. EPs experience a lack of understanding about how to work in the local context of their EPS:

*it's so varied amongst authorities what assistants do and I think maybe that's part of the problem about knowing what the role is that it is so different it's not just a set role (20, 360-362)*



*it really differs erm from service to service about sort of the role of the assistant (10, 370-371)*

*I think yeah it just depends on Local Authorities and then what they offer and I think some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work so that obviously impacts our roles and what we can be involved involved in but erm yeah I definitely agree with that it makes it hard to kind of pinpoint erm our role because they're different erm for different Local Authorities yeah I definitely agree with that (20, 370-376)*

The Asst. EPs also feel they experience work differently in comparison to other Asst. EPs because of the knowledge of themselves they have developed in relation to their environment. As a result, Asst. EPs experience diversity and ambiguity of Asst. EP Work Meanings within the same local context:

*if you spoke to my colleagues their experiences are very different to mine and that can be down to...your line manager or opportunities or...personal traits as to whether you feel...happy to approach people or to sometimes be a nag to really get those opportunities (10, 375-378)*

Others who Asst. EPs work with also appear to have little understanding of Asst. EP work and how they are meant to work with them. This appears to be related to the length of time the service has had the Asst. EP role: *the role wasn't really developed they employed seven new assistants they had this new model that they was trying to...use and nobody knew how to use us' (19, 53-55)*. Conversely, in services where the Asst. EP role has existed for a longer period, others are developing a greater understanding of Asst. EP work. For example, Participant 9 commented that *'in like the two three years that I've been an assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more' (19, 92-93)*.

Asst. EPs feel there will be ongoing uncertainty about the meaning of Asst. EP work as the local contexts of both the service and the individuals working in the service are continuously changing. This may be linked to the assumptions of others working in the service based on inequalities in knowledge, with qualified EPs believing Asst. EPs lack the skills and knowledge to carry out activities when they first start working in their roles:

*there came a period of... 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do'...so I think maybe there was not awareness (9, 382-384)*

## **2. Not-knowing or Meaning of EP Work being challenged.**

The Asst. EPs go into the role to develop their knowledge and understanding of EP work, suggesting that they don't know much about the work of EPs, particularly when they begin working in their role. For example, Participant 10 described not-knowing how EPs work

within education systems: *'I struggled with knowing just how like school systems worked'* (20, 11-12). Some Asst. EPs feel that they have some understanding of EP work based on their previous experiences:

*I think because of my experience when I was a teacher working with ed psychs it was very much coming in to do assessments and...one-to-ones and things which ultimately was probably mostly for statutory assessment and so I think probably I had...a little bit of a skewed view of what EPs do (8, 260-264)*

However, as shown in Participant 2's comment above, this meaning of EP work they initially constructed was challenged when compared to the meaning of EP work in the local context of the EPS they begin working in.

The Asst. EPs develop understanding that differences in EP Work Meaning can occur both between and within EPSs:

*some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work (20, 371-373)*

*there's quite a bit of variation in how people do reports...some of them are very like minimalistic with their wording some of them really like to have a narrative (11, 122-126)*

*I'm working across three different Local Authorities now and they're so varied (20, 66)*

*I think EPs they all yeah as you say they all have their different ways of working their different perspective their different specialisms I think if you were to give a case to five EPs they'd probably all give y'know different hypotheses or could come up with different hypotheses based that their viewpoints and their experiences (20, 439-442)*

And so the Asst. EPs develop an understanding that this **ambiguity** is part of the meaning of EP work and not a lack of their competence in understanding the meaning of EP work: *I think it is a challenge when people do things differently and to start with it does make you think 'oh I'm not doing it right' but then...you realise that it's different ways that people work (20, 456-458).*

Therefore, it appears that the Asst. EPs come to understand that EP work lacks meaning until the meaning of the role is constructed in relation to the local context.

### **3. Uncertainty about themselves**

Individuals experience a lack of understanding about themselves when they move into the new world of Asst. EP work.

*I feel like you almost get this position and then all of your past experience goes out the window and you think 'I'm not capable I don't know anything I can't do this' and you actually forget how did you get here in the first place how did you get this job and what skills do I already have (19, 48-51)*

*especially at the beginning I'd be thinking 'ooh what if I'm the only one that feels like this and it's a silly question' and y'know those kind of little self-doubt (20, 94-95)*

They try to make sense of this by drawing on the cultural discourse of imposter syndrome: *there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna know yeah is someone gonna know more than me'...it's a tricky one (10, 192-194)*

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that (8, 53-58)*

*again that's around sort of that imposter syndrome and erm you know is a question gonna be silly or erm if I present something is it something that I should already know and how might some other colleagues respond (10, 345-347)*

Confidence in themselves appears to increase as they spend time in the role:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience... I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent sort of thing (9, 126-131)*

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

Although, Participant Three appears to feel this uncertainty in themselves will continue even when they are more established in their role:

*I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

And for Participant 10, this is seen as a good thing:

*I don't think imposter syndrome ever goes (laughs) like you said it is a good thing we should keep stretching ourselves and feeling a bit out of our comfort zone (20, 120-121)*

Confidence in their abilities is seen as important to participants and influences their perception of how well they will be an EP:

*I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP (9, 120-122)*

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**Version eight - 30/11/23**

### ***Conceptual Category: Lacking Work Meaning***

I've decided to amend the wording slightly so that it is clearer what the Asst. EPs are lacking as "meaning of work" might be conflated with "meaningfulness", like Rosso et al. (2010) argue in their review of the meaning of work literature.

Therefore, I've chosen to call this category "Lacking Work Meaning" to link it explicitly to the definition I have decided to use informed by existentialist themes and Sandberg and Pinnington (2009):

**Work Meaning = A way of Being based on an individual's understanding of themselves at work, their work environment, and their relationship with their work environment**

The Asst. EPs experience a lack of Work Meaning, particularly when they first enter their new work context as an Asst. EP:

*'oh I'm here I'm here now like now what...Okay I'm an assistant'...'now I don't know what to do' (19, 713-717)*

It may be that they experience this lack of meaning of work because they have not yet had time to construct their essence (meaning of work) within the social context they encounter by "Being" in the role:

*when I first started I wasn't quite sure what the job was gonna be...it was quite vague I think in terms of what the expectations on us were gonna be (8, 6-7)*

*when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I just going in very blind (19, 9-10)*

*unless you're in it you don't really understand it (19, 741)*

The Asst. EP role is seen as an opportunity to create an understanding of what EPs do, therefore this lack of Asst. EP and EP meaning is expected:

*some of the things that I do here I've never done before or would expect to do erm so it is a lot about learning from the bottom up (8, 186-188)*

*I didn't realise the role existed erm so I really didn't know what it would entail (9, 4)*

However, this responsibility and freedom associated with this lack of meaning is uncomfortable for the Asst. EPs, with Participant 2 explaining that the freedom was 'scary' (19, 19), and Participant 8 blamed themselves for not knowing what to do in their role: '*I had a lot of guilt... 'am I doing enough how am I developing through this''* (19, 34-35). As a result of this sudden realisation that they lack Work Meaning, the Asst EPs experience a sense of meaninglessness in their world of work: *you're like in this no man's land of who am I and what's my professional role here* (24, 434-435).

Despite these negative feelings, there appears to be feeling of hopefulness and motivation to create new meanings of work through being an Asst. EP. For example, Participant 8 explained that '*trying to put yourself out your comfort zone and look for opportunities has helped me learn*' (19, 39-40).

As the Asst. EPs experience the world of work in their roles, they create an understanding that their lack of Work Meaning is because the meanings of Asst. EP and EP work need to be constructed in relation to context-specific discourses:

*I've been in two different services I was in one first for nine months and this one now for two months so short but...both have been completely different what's been expected of me has been completely different so there's never gonna be this overarching document where this is what assistants do so...[Participant 2] you might create one for your service now for the assistants coming into your service but that will only be relevant to your service* (24, 82-88)

*how are we ever gonna understand the role because...you're adapting that role to every EP that you work with so how are you gonna understand the role but then for me now I've moved to a new council with a whole other set of EPs so now I've got to understand the role again* (19, 383-386)

Therefore, the Asst. EPs' Work Meanings are limited until they experience Being in the world as an Asst. EP, as they are not constructed in relation to the context in which they occur. As a result, the Asst. EPs feel their Work Meanings are likely to continue to lack meaning to some extent because the local and national work context of educational psychology is continuously changing:

*I think with this role it's...forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress...I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms* (9, 256-258)

This appears to be exacerbated by an element of uncertainty around how long they will be in the role, depending on when they get accepted on to a training course:

*I think I have erm yeah I mean I think my expectation was that I would be an assistant get on the course become an EP there we go and obviously the reality is different (laughs) (7, 270-272)*

*sometimes people think if they've got that assistant role then they're definitely gonna get on the doctorate and that's not always the case (10, 404-406)*

Therefore, this reflects the sense that their meaning-making is hopeless and futile (like Camus described) as they are doing it but will need to start again from scratch in the future.

Within this experience of lacking Work Meaning described above, Asst. EPs experience a lack of meaning in three key areas of Work Meaning, which are detailed below.

### ~~1. Not knowing the Meaning of Asst. EP Work~~

#### 1. Lacking Work Meaning specifically in relation to Being an Asst. EP

Again, I've decided to change the wording of this category so it is more in line with the definition of Work Meaning I am using, as I feel from participants' descriptions of their experiences that they encompass more than just 'not-knowing'. It's more existential than just about knowledge, as shown in the quotes below.

The Asst. EPs first recognise they do not know how to Be Asst. EPs at the beginning of their time working in the role. For example, Participant 9 commented '*when I first started I felt like I didn't know what I was doing and I [was] just going in very blind*' (19, 9-10). This lack of Work Meaning in relation to the Asst. EP role may be as a result of **environmental uncertainty** (Daft & Lengel, 1986) where there is an absence of information about what Asst. EPs do. This particularly affects their experience of carrying out activities associated with the role for the first time. For example, Participant 2 spoke about how their lack of Work Meaning affected their perception of taking part in supervision: '*I think I did probably spend the first couple of weeks going 'what is supervision what's she gonna do what's she gonna say''* (8, 96-97).

The Asst. EPs notice that there are different ways in which Asst. EPs work across services. This creates the conditions for meaning-making as it increases the **ambiguity** (informed by McCaskey's (1982) definition of environmental ambiguity) of Asst. EP Work Meaning as it differs depending on the local context. This means the Asst. EPs experience uncertainty about how to work in the local context of their EPS:

*it's so varied amongst authorities what assistants do and I think maybe that's part of the problem about knowing what the role is that it is so different it's not just a set role (20, 360-362)*

*it really differs erm from service to service about sort of the role of the assistant (10, 370-371)*

*I think yeah it just depends on Local Authorities and then what they offer and I think some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work so that obviously impacts our roles and what we can be involved in but erm yeah I definitely agree with that it makes it hard to kind of pinpoint erm our role because they're different erm for different Local Authorities yeah I definitely agree with that (20, 370-376)*

The Asst. EPs also feel they experience work differently in comparison to other Asst. EPs because of the knowledge of themselves they have developed in relation to their local and wider social, cultural, and historical contexts. As a result, Asst. EPs experience diversity and ambiguity of Asst. EP Work Meanings within the same local context:

*if you spoke to my colleagues their experiences are very different to mine and that can be down to...your line manager or opportunities or...personal traits as to whether you feel...happy to approach people or to sometimes be a nag to really get those opportunities (10, 375-378)*

The lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning experienced by the Asst. EPs is exacerbated by others (e.g., EPs, service managers) who also experience a lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning and therefore lack an understanding of how to work with them. This appears to be related to the length of time the service has had the Asst. EP role:

*the role wasn't really developed they employed seven new assistants they had this new model that they was trying to...use and nobody knew how to use us (19, 53-55)*

Conversely, in services where the Asst. EP role has existed for a longer period, others are developing a greater understanding of Asst. EP work. For example, Participant 9 commented 'in like the two three years that I've been an assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more' (19, 92-93).

Additionally, the Asst. EPs experience differences in how others construe the meaning of Asst. EP work within the same service:

*you've got such a variety because I've worked for some EPs who really know the role and the meaning of the role and I think have used assistants really well and then I don't know if it's...cos they're newly qualified or not I think people who are more newly qualified who haven't been assistants previously struggle with knowing the meaning of like 'what do I do with you' (24, 113-117)*

The Asst. EPs develop an understanding that the differences in Work Meanings created by others result from the context in which these meanings were created.

They also believe these Work Meanings are temporary and there will be ongoing uncertainty about the meaning of Asst. EP work as the local contexts of both the service and the individuals working in the service are continuously changing. This may be linked to the assumptions of others working in the service based on inequalities in knowledge, with

qualified EPs believing Asst. EPs lack the skills and knowledge to carry out activities when they first start working in their roles:

*there came a period of... 'they're AEPs but they're new so we don't know what we can ask them we don't know what they can do'...so I think maybe there was not awareness (9, 382-384)*

*the EPs have got better at knowing what assistants do over the last year and a bit but when a whole new raft of people come in could they start them off from scratch probably not (24, 60-62)*

## ~~2. Not knowing or Meaning of EP Work being challenged~~

### 2. Lacking Work Meaning specifically in relation to EP work

Again, I've decided to change the wording of this category so it is more in line with the definition of Work Meaning I am using, as I feel from participants' descriptions of their experiences that they encompass more than just 'not-knowing'. It's more existential than just about knowledge, as shown in the quotes below.

The Asst. EPs go into the role to develop their knowledge and understanding of EP work, suggesting they lack EP Work Meaning particularly when they begin working in their role. For example, Participant 10 described not-knowing how EPs work within education systems: *'I struggled with knowing just how like school systems worked'* (20, 11-12). Conversely, some Asst. EPs feel they have some understanding of EP work based on their previous experiences:

*I think because of my experience when I was a teacher working with ed psychs it was very much coming in to do assessments and...one-to-ones and things which ultimately was probably mostly for statutory assessment and so I think probably I had...a little bit of a skewed view of what EPs do (8, 260-264)*

However, as shown in Participant 2's comment above, this meaning of EP work that an Asst. EP has initially constructed can be threatened when compared to the meaning of EP work that has been constructed in the local context of the EPS they begin working. The Asst. EPs attribute this to differences in the local social, cultural, and historical context of the EPS:

**Participant 1:** *But is that not reflective of the kind of work y'know I think because you do have to be so fluid it does really depend on all the situations that are going on that services do have to adapt and change to meet the need so yeah I think it maybe is difficult to kind of pinpoint this to 'this is how it needs to be' when it needs to be quite flexible...*

**Participant 7:** *That's true and the communities that you're serving depending on which Local Authority the needs within that community are going to be different like you say it's not just on an individual level but just as the society of that community...Like it's gonna vary so much isn't it (24, 104-112)*



The Asst. EPs also develop understanding that this ambiguity of EP Work Meaning can occur both between and within EPSs:

*some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work (20, 371-373)*

*there's quite a bit of variation in how people do reports...some of them are very like minimalistic with their wording some of them really like to have a narrative (11, 122-126)*

*I'm working across three different Local Authorities now and they're so varied (20, 66)*

*I think EPs they all yeah as you say they all have their different ways of working their different perspective their different specialisms I think if you were to give a case to five EPs they'd probably all give y'know different hypotheses or could come up with different hypotheses based that their viewpoints and their experiences (20, 439-442)*

When the Asst. EPs have created an understanding of EP Work prior to employment as an Asst. EP that then aligns with the local context of the EPS they begin working in, they experience less ambiguity in EP Work Meaning. Conversely, when the Asst. EPs experience incongruence between the EP Work Meanings they have created prior to employment and their actual experiences of EP work in the local service context this creates more ambiguity in EP Work Meaning:

*from my old service we were doing all statutory work and the role of the assistant was literally just to support with the statutory work whereas the service I'm in now like we don't have anything to do with the statutory work...if I'd have only ever experienced one and it was just like I went in and when I was like 'whoa is this all they do like doing statutory working and reports' it kind of put me off in that moment like I don't want to do that but now seeing that actually there's more to the role than that (24, 214-220)*

The Asst. EPs feel a sense of discomfort in relation to this experience as they initially understand this uncertainty in relation to their understanding of themselves, by attributing it to them not understanding EP work. However, through further experiences of Being with EPs, the Asst. EPs create a new understanding that this ambiguity of EP work is part of EP Work Meaning:

*I think it is a challenge when people do things differently and to start with it does make you think 'oh I'm not doing it right' but then...you realise that it's different ways that people work (20, 456-458)*

Therefore, it appears that the Asst. EPs come to understand that EP work lacks meaning until the meaning of the role is constructed in relation to the local context.

### ~~3. Uncertainty about themselves~~

### 3. Conflicting meanings of self at work

From participants' feedback in focus group 3 and comparing this to the coded transcripts, I felt that I needed to make it clearer that this concept is not just about a feeling of uncertainty, but that this uncertainty comes from individuals' Self Meanings at Work (informed by Wrzesniewski et al.'s (2003) conceptualisation of Work Meaning) being in conflict when they enter a new world of work. For example, Participant 2's quote about having to adapt their existing meaning of self at work specifically spoke to me as an example of experiencing an existential boundary situation (Ronkainen et al., 2019).

The Asst. EPs' understandings of themselves at work are challenged when working in the role, particularly when they first start working in their new world of work as Asst. EPs:

*I feel like you almost get this position and then all of your past experience goes out the window and you think 'I'm not capable I don't know anything I can't do this' and you actually forget how did you get here in the first place how did you get this job and what skills do I already have (19, 48-51)*

*especially at the beginning I'd be thinking 'ooh what if I'm the only one that feels like this and it's a silly question' and y'know those kind of little self-doubt (20, 94-95)*

They expect to feel this conflict in their understanding of themselves at work, as they believe their self-concept has been constructed in relation to their experiences of work:

*I've been a SENCO and a primary school teacher for fifteen years so in a way having that experience is also a change in like your identity a change in your working style so for me it was kind of knowing that I will be changing roles and knowing that you need to adapt in that way (24, 249-252)*

The Asst. EPs need to experience Being in the role to construct new meanings of self at work, which they find difficult and effortful. For example, Participant 2 described how they tried to adapt their existing meaning of self at work to their new role as an Asst. EP, resulting in their work identity being in conflict:

*I was a SENCO before...and...probably for the first six months I was kind of like this weird little hybrid....so the way I tried to adapt into the role was my perspective of being in a school and that was useful but then that's probably not the way I work now so yeah I guess it's using the identity that you had and adapting it to the role that you're doing but it's really hard (24, 258-265)*

The Asst. EPs experience anxiety in relation to this conflict in their meaning of self at work. For example, Participant 9 explained how the sudden change in role led to feelings of overwhelm and loss of confidence in themselves and their abilities:

*I feel like you almost get this position and then all of your past experience goes out the window and you think 'I'm not capable I don't know anything I can't do this' and you actually forget how did you get here in the first place how did you get this job and what skills do I already have (19, 48-51)*

This loss of confidence in themselves is also affected by the local context of the service within which they work; the Asst. EPs' meanings of themselves at work are understood in relation to others in their environment. Therefore, through these relational processes, the Asst. EPs compare themselves to others and experience anxiety if they perceive themselves to be inferior in comparison to their colleagues:

**Participant 7:** *...you're in a team and who are the other people in that team well they're the educational psychologists so why do you feel incapable or why do you feel you lack knowledge well it's because the only person to compare yourself to (laughs) or that you're working with so often are people who are more educated who are more knowledgeable...*

**Participant 2:** *...you're sitting with very competent very skilled very experienced people and yes you're trying to learn from them but at the same time you want to do what they're doing so it's a hard...mantle to live up to (24, 229-246)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs draw on the cultural discourse of imposter syndrome in an attempt to make sense of this experience:

*there is that imposter syndrome of 'am I gonna know yeah is someone gonna know more than me'...it's a tricky one (10, 192-194)*

*the first time I had to deliver training to the rest of the team was quite scary...standing in a room of people who are much more qualified than you and like talking to them about things that you probably feel like they know more about so probably had a slight imposter syndrome type sense during that (8, 53-58)*

*again that's around sort of that imposter syndrome and erm you know is a question gonna be silly or erm if I present something is it something that I should already know and how might some other colleagues respond (10, 345-347)*

These feelings of low confidence in themselves and their abilities appear to be reduced as individuals spend more time Being an Asst. EP. For example, Participant 3 explained 'way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and and now with the experience...I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased' (9, 126-129).

Although, Participant Three appears to feel this uncertainty in themselves will continue even when they are more established in their role:

*I think with this role it's it's it's forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress erm so like I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

And for Participant 10, this is seen as a good thing:

*I don't think imposter syndrome ever goes (laughs) like you said it is a good thing we should keep stretching ourselves and feeling a bit out of our comfort zone (20, 120-121)*

Confidence in their abilities is seen as important to participants and influences their perception of how well they will be an EP:

*I do wanna be confident that I wanna make sure that everything I'm doing is adding to the next value the next experience which I then will drive the competency in terms of becoming fully fledged you know EP (9, 120-122)*

## MEMO 2

Version seven - Update 27/09/23

### ~~Theoretical Code: Creating Meaning of Work~~

### **Conceptual Category: Creating Work Meanings**

Sartre (1956) believes that when individuals are faced with a lack of Work Meaning caused by uncertainty (link to Lack of Meaning of Work category), they experience a sense of freedom to create meaning. Participants refer to how they actively made choices for themselves that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 15-19)*

*we look at the calendars and we we do that ourselves it's very much like 'ooh I've not seen that before I wanna go see that (9, 185-186)*

*plugging in the gaps in our existing knowledge erm so for instance some of us haven't done erm sort of much going high school work or going to a high school or early years work or particular things that we've found along the journey that we want to develop in ourselves (10, 12-15)*

However, in line with Satre's (1956) assumption, participants also feel a sense of responsibility to create this meaning as individuals see this as the purpose of the job.

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do (8, 15-16)*

*we're all trying to learn as much as we can in what feels like quite a short space of time (8, 388-389)*

In response to this freedom and sense of responsibility, participants appear to actively seek and construct the meaning of their role. They create new Work Meaning in pragmatic ways (e.g., shadowing EPs, asking questions, looking at what past Asst. EPs have done, etc.), seeking meaning through activities that they perceive will help them to understand how to be an Asst. EP:

*I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 16-19)*

*I feel that I've kind of enjoyed being able to be sort of self-driven and look at the areas that I need to sort of work on and develop on... I've used sort of time to be able to go into different provision and different schools different settings and develop my knowledge there (10, 24-27)*

This reflects the existential theme of "existence before essence" as it appears participants have to experience Being in the role before creating Work Meaning for the Asst. EP role.

Individuals actively create two Work Meanings simultaneously - that of Being an Asst. EP now and what it means to Be an EP. The Asst. EPs feel they are creating separate meanings of Asst. EP and EP work:

*'know there's obviously a big difference between what an assistant can do and an EP' (19, 222-223)*

*I do find it tricky because I don't know like we're not like "mini EPs" (air quotes) like it is its own role within itself but there is also that training element that if you are wanting to go towards the doctorate then you then you are learning how to be an EP I feel like it's the first step (20, 318-321)*

So not only meaning-making about their roles but also the EP role. It might be that EPs are also doing this (as they also lack meaning of the Asst EP role as shown in Memo 1), but they have more power over an Asst. EP's role than the Asst. EPs themselves (e.g., the activities undertaken by Asst. EPs are largely determined by EPs' beliefs about the level of competence required to carry out activities and their perceived competence of the Asst. EPs (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019)).

The Asst. EPs also draw on the current discourse of the Asst. EP role being a precursor to doctoral training to make sense of their experience, as Participant 2 described in their understanding of Asst. EP work:

*I think part of the assistant role is just gaining experience and knowledge and being okay with it not necessarily coming to anything other than you going 'that's not for me' or 'that is for me' because that's then the assistant role is all about building you up for the doctorate and to develop as an EP so I feel like it's just those starting steps for you to go 'these are all the things you've allowed me to do and that's brilliant but then this is probably where I'm gonna put myself at some point' (19, 310-315)*

This shows how the Asst. EPs are creating two Work Meanings they want to identify with: an understanding of their Asst. EP role as a separate way of Being that they are experiencing now (their current position in the world of work), compared to an idealised way of Being they expect to experience when they become an EP. They need to try and make some sense of both to be able to hold their current identity and know what they are aiming for.

Through Being in the role, the Asst. EPs also create new meanings of themselves at work in terms of their beliefs about their knowledge, skills, and values:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and...now with the experience...I've been given with the role I definitely think the*

*competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent (9, 126-131)*

This process of constructing understandings of themselves at work is affected by the local context. For example, the Asst. EPs who have more opportunities to reflect on their understanding of the role in relation to their self-concept experience a greater ability to create a meaning of self at work compared to those who have fewer opportunities:

*I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills (19, 111-112)*

*I feel like the only time I really got to think about myself like that and...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 126-128)*

*I spent nine months in one council which the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices...I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months (19, 132-135)*

This process of meaning-making is mentally and emotionally exhausting for participants: *I feel exhausted all the time...after a day at work and it's so much more mentally cos...I think your brain is just constantly going everyday 'what can I do how could I get this opportunity how does this apply to being an EP' (19, 700-703)*

Individuals express that the meanings of work they have created will change or are not the final meaning they will create. The meaning of EP work they have created is expected to change as they further experience doctoral training and work as a qualified EP.

The Asst. EPs feel that they will need to continuously create Work Meaning in the future as the context of their work changes:

*I think with this role it's...forever sort of I think it's like a work in progress...I still feel like I'm finding my feet with different things even if it's just like acronyms or forms (9, 256-258)*

Thus, meaning constructs are seen as temporary, fluid, and based on context.

### **Mechanisms through which meaning is created:**

#### **1. Interpersonal Meaning-making:**

All participants view themselves *in relation to* others, thus they frame their descriptions of their experiences in relation to their interactions with others, the context of the organisation they are working in, and the meanings construed through these interactions. They speak about how they learn from others and shape their understanding of their role through collaborative discussions:

*one of the things I've discovered about working here is how much collaboration there is and how much people seem to learn from each other (8, 60-62)*

*it's nice to hear other people's perspectives on that and rather just have your voice and I think that's a lot of what when I'm working with the other EPs is that I get to hear their voice and their perspective and then think about how that matches with mine or differs from mine (8, 215-218)*

*we are we're all in a place where we wanna learn we're all in a place where we know we're not the experts of things but we wanna do well we wanna support staff we want to support young people and so we worked out how to do that the best that we could (8, 242-245)*

*we kinda come together even though we're in the same service we're talking about how we're each doing something different and how it's contributing to our experiences and things it's quite it's nice to hear and share (9, 343-345)*

*there were some EPs who were very collaborative you had that opportunity to have that discussion but it was a lot of reflective discussion (7, 68-70)*

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

*someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 137-140)*

*if I've shadowed an EP erm there's often been times afterwards where we can talk about erm what we both thought and sort of share ideas and I think that's been really appreciated erm by me so as a learning point (10, 147-140)*

*it's been sort of helpful in those times to be able to sort of erm you know bounce things off each other or maybe notice things that the other person hasn't noticed erm or sort of ask a question that maybe someone hadn't thought about (10, 218-221)*

Participants use the concept of "we" to demonstrate how they have created Work Meanings together with others:

*it's then been 'how can we look at making a difference to young people through staff if we can't work one with young people' you know 'how can we support kinda systemic change' (8, 269-271)*

*for our school for our community what is it that we need and what is it that we can do (8, 330-331)*

*we were given some time at the start to think about what we wanted the assistant job to be (8, 192-193)*



*'how are we going to gain their best views and be there for the right reason' (7, 98)*

*it's keeping in mind 'what is the priority what is it that we want to gain' (7, 169-170)*

*how could we unpick this further and what would be the best method erm to kind of gain that information er and obviously again drawing from maybe the parent's perspective or the teacher's perspective (7, 180-183)*

*when we started people were saying 'aw I just feel like I'm on a treadmill' we were like 'really' and now we're like 'yep (laughs) yeah I get that' (11, 12-14)*

*keeping in mind kind of you know why are we doing this (10, 89-90)*

### **1.1. Other's meanings of Asst. EP and EP work:**

Asst. EPs co-construct Work Meanings through interactions with others. Consequently, meaning-making involves an interaction between the Work Meanings others have already construed of Asst. EP work and the Work Meanings the Asst. EPs are developing. This can vary between services:

*it just depends on Local Authorities and then what they offer and I think some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work so that obviously impacts our roles and what we can be involved involved in but erm yeah I definitely agree with that it makes it hard to kind of pinpoint erm our role because they're different erm for different Local Authorities yeah I definitely agree with that (20, 370-376)*

The meanings others had construed of Asst. EP and their confidence in this affects the opportunities others offer to Asst. EPs, in turn affecting the experiences Asst. EPs have to create meaning from:

*I think part of it comes from the confidence of the EPs that we work with so a couple of the EPs that I worked with a lot last year had experience of using Assistants in their previous local authorities and then came here and with them I think they knew what they could ask me to do what I felt I could manage how much time they needed to give me in terms of support whereas other EPs hadn't used Assistants well they were still quite new to our Local Authority as well and so I've got some people this year who've gone 'ooh actually I think I might be able to use you with something' whereas they didn't know that last year or they didn't realise what we could do and I think that probably then marked some of the experiences we had because some people felt like 'yes I can use I know how to use you' as well as us going 'could I try and help you with that' (laughs) so I think it's been both ways (19, 81-91)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

However, there is acknowledgement that EPs' confidence and understanding of Asst. EP work is changing the longer they experience working with Asst. EPs:

*even in like the two three years that I've been an Assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more and it is more clearly defined like when I first started there was so many people in a similar position like 'there's seven of us no one knows what to do with us we don't know what to do with us' whereas now I feel like even though it has been a short period of time people are understanding it a little bit more (19, 92-97)*

Experiencing different meanings of Asst. EP and EP work broadened the Asst. EP's meanings of work:

*I was very much sort of previously 'this is the way that assistants have to work because this is the way that my EP that I work with likes it' and then to experience what I would say is probably the total opposite it was like 'oh it's so much freer than this' (19, 247-249)*

But this meant constantly adapting their meanings to those held by others, which is mentally exhausting:

*it's interesting isn't it like how...mentally tiring it can be when you're working with lots...of different EPs and you're trying to almost put a lot of different hats on to EPs... it's quite a difficult thing to do...I think from my experience it really depends what EP I'm working with I have some EPs I'm like 'you lead on writing it I'll do the last spell checks and stuff' but they'll go with how I want to do it whereas other ones it's 'oh we need to change the language to this we need to fit it into these headings' and so it...can be...quite overwhelming at times...and a lot to think about especially if you're writing the four different reports and they're all very different (19, 358-366)*

Despite this, the Asst. EPs appreciate experiencing a variety of Work Meanings in their interactions with others, as this helps them create a deeper understanding of EP work and begin developing a meaningful way of Being an Asst. EP:

*what's really helped me make sense of my role as an assistant is going out with lots of different EPs...and...we have a few trainees within our service and...doing some work with them and seeing...the...type of approaches that I want to use (19, 223-225)*

*it's been useful to work with EPs with different styles to kind of see how I might take that on board erm as an EP yeah (20, 510-511)*

Opportunities to interact with other Asst. EPs who also experience a lack of Work Meaning and meaning-making are viewed as particularly important for several reasons. First, they support containment of the emotional impact of meaning-making:

*something that's really helped me is connecting with other assistants through networks...or...the team that you have if you have more than one assistant and that's really helped...share feelings and that is normal...and that it is a real process of...development (19, 43-46)*

Secondly, interactions with other Asst. EPs help the Asst. EPs to broaden their understanding of Asst. EP work based on the experiences of others in different local contexts:

*it opened my eyes to how different everyone's role is and I definitely felt like I was one of those people that was just doing the same thing all the time but having that knowledge I was then able to go back to my service and be like 'look what all these other assistants are doing use us in this way we don't just have to do the same thing all the time' so that has completely changed my experience and my role (19, 211-215)*

## **1.2. Supervision**

Supervision seems to act as a mechanism of interpersonal meaning-making - individuals seen formal supervision as a safe space where they can explicitly create meanings of Asst. EP work, EP work, and themselves:

*I'm able to reflect in supervision and peer supervision and it's not kind of I do something and then I'm kind of left in the dark thinking 'oh my gosh how did that go what could I have done better what were the positives'...that eases the the um how it can feel daunting sometimes I think takes the pressure off a bit (20, 150-153)*

They differentiate between different formats of supervision: one-to-one, peer, and group supervision, and how different types of supervision they have received from EPs can be facilitative or hindering for meaning-making. Peer and group supervision are seen as particularly facilitative for meaning-making as they enable Asst. EPs to consider different perspectives on the meaning of the role and integrate the experiences of others into the meanings they are creating:

*you learn from other people in their situation and and have that opportunity to take an outsider perspective and think 'oh that was interesting that you did it that way on that situation' I think how come you know that's when you can kind of see as to a different perspective (7, 334-337)*

*we each have different interests and like I would say probably different strengths erm so that then sort of like informs the type of work we do so you know one of the assistants she's done quite a lot of the psychometrics so I would say her experience of that's really good checking with them when it comes to interpretation (9, 332-335)*

*we have groups erm where we follow sort of a particular model and that's made up of groups of erm assistants trainees erm main grade EPs senior staff as well erm and someone might bring a particular case and we kind of you know unpick sort of some questions we might have sort of that curiosity of 'I wonder if kind of this might be going on' or 'have you thought about sorta something there' and kind of feed feedback and sort of give suggestions there so that's been really useful (10, 135-140)*

*we have assistant EP peer supervision where sometimes we've met up in person over a coffee erm sort of most of the time sort of via Teams and we've just sort of had a general sort of chat and sort of checking with each other wellbeing wise erm we've been able to sort of share experiences around sort of interviews erm and sort of bounce ideas off each other sort of talk about cases erm sort of share opportunities so for instance if I'd booked up to go to a specialist provision and they were happy for someone else to come along sort of sharing opportunities in that way (10, 298-304)*

*I feel like we get quite a lot out of it even just listening to them like even if we didn't contribute it's just really interesting hearing the discussions (11, 22-23)*

One-to-one supervision can be facilitative of meaning-making if it is non-hierarchical and collaborative in nature. It also supports the emotional labour of meaning-making by offering alternative perspectives for the Asst. EP to consider with no pressure to adopt these alternative meanings:

*she was like 'you talk I'll listen and we work through things' and she didn't give me any answers but she she helped me to work out what to do next (8, 66-67)*

*she doesn't often go 'oh well I think you should do this' she'd very cleverly lead me to something else or ask me to think of other ways that I might approach it (8, 87-89)*

*so I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' (7, 79-81)*

*when I work with her I feel so much more I guess valued cos I I think she knows cos she's done our role I think she really knows what it feels like and it feels a lot more collaborative (11, 256-258)*

*it was able to sort of offer me a different perspective on why that might have happened and rather than sort of sealing it sort of seeing it as a failed erm sort of visit actually thinking 'what what about this child's story so far might have kind of played a part in that'... so it's helped me to kind of see the bigger picture (10, 329-337)*

Supervision also helps Asst. EPs to manage their uncertainty of self and create new meanings of self at work:

*I get a lot (laughs) of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills (19, 111-112)*

### **1.3. Power in interpersonal meaning-making**

Asst. EPs experience differences in power in their relationships with EPs and others they work with, which can be challenging for them when trying to carve out Work Meaning for their Asst. EP role:

*'at what point shall we challenge this and say actually erm no this is why I've said what I've said' but then nine times out of ten we do end up saying 'yeah okay that's fine' cos like I say sometimes 'well you are the EP' overall they are the one who it comes down to it's their school it's kind of their overall decision but no sometimes it is just kind of at what point should it be 'actually I'd like to really stick with what I've decided to how to word something' (20, 477-482)*

Collaborative meaning-making is more facilitative of meaning making than being told what to do. Following directions from others reduces autonomy and agency and thus limits reflection and ability to create meaning:

*there were some that were kind of challenging but it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen' or maybe if it was that I was stuck then I kind of felt that it isn't kind of the expert model... whereas I think it was difficult if that was then challenged in a kind of fixed model because it kind of went against what I would like it to be because you know working on my values is I'd like it to be person-centred but then if it's a kind of fixed model then it can't be person-centred because it's yeah it's not having that opportunity to focus on the individual (7, 79-87)*

*in the psychological perspective I prefer to just focus on how they present but then one of them [EPs] is really hot on like 'you have to include (laughs) if they have a diagnosis' um but then I just think you know a lot of the children we see are really young and they are often on the pathway and they're still the same child whether they have that diagnosis yet or not yet like it could be that a child's gonna be seeing the week after and then they receive a diagnosis and then it just feels weird to me that that would be a completely different report or like a different psychological perspective (11, 199-206)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

Where Asst. EPs can experience interactions with others who they perceive to have the same level of power of them, this facilitates meaning-making about the Asst. EP role and supports the discomfort experienced with lacking Work Meaning. This is particularly seen in relationships with other Asst. EPs:

*I think like you said it's really important to have another Assistant because then you can share that feeling as well you're not the only one thinking 'I'm the unqualified one like I don't know what I'm doing here' (20, 162-164)*

*the Assistant network meetings were really really helpful...listening to other people about what they do within their local authorities and actually the experiences of everyone being really different I think that it reassured me in some ways... actually hear from other people that there was people just doing statutory there's people just doing interventions in school and there was a whole range of things going on and I think that made me go this this is a really varied role so I shouldn't be expecting just er one thing or one experience it's about the breadth of what you've got and I think certainly when there was some people going saying 'we're just doing this one thing' that made me then go 'well I'm not gonna do just one thing I'm gonna experience as much as I can erm and then learn from everyone' and I think from talking to other Assistants outside of your own Local Authority it's just a really useful thing to do to learn what people are doing what other people's experiences (19, 193-207)*

## **2. Agency and autonomy in meaning-making**

When Asst. EPs have autonomy and agency they find it easier to create meaning of their work as an Asst. EP and future EP. When they have less autonomy and agency, they can still create meaning of EP work but not how they want the meaning of their EP work to be - they passively do what other EPs think the meaning of Asst. EP and EP work is.

Having autonomy and agency appears to be dependent on others and how they view the Asst. EP role, e.g., whether they think Asst. EPs should have autonomy - [think about power in relationships](#).

This aligns with Participant Three, One, and Five's descriptions of their experience that suggest having autonomy is dependent on the context of the service they are working in:

*sort of given the autonomy then to kind of you know look at things that were of interest to us (9, 9-10)*

*we follow a kind of system in that we make sure we talk to the parents we make sure we talk to the teacher we make sure we talk to the young person (9, 160-162)*

*as an assistant you work with an EP so then you can't do that on your own (11, 78)*

*I guess also sort of helping with retention and you know kind of shaping us into EPs that would fit into the service if we wanted to to come back (11, 20-22)*

Participants' descriptions suggest autonomy and agency is promoted through supervision if they were encouraged by their supervisor to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves:

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

*other EPs kind of like you to get involved and like you to sort of ask questions and erm play more sort of an active role in the work (10, 152-154)*

However, participants have also experienced supervision that reduces their autonomy and agency:

*it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if if it wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that opportunity to challenge I suppose (7, 62-65)*

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*sometimes you're with an EP where they more kind of want you to sit in the background and just literally shadow and watch (10, 199-203)*

*I just kept being 'yes' whatever the EP would ask 'yes' I wouldn't reflect I'd just do what I was told (19, 145-146)*

Participant Four identified that this style of supervision 'tended to be with more erm of the kind of established EPs or people who have been in the role longer or erm where I think that they maybe I don't know whether it's that they don't almost don't remember their sort of being an assistant or being a trainee and needing to kind of find your feet in the room or whether it's that they've got like an established pattern of how how they do things and how they kind of see their sort of plan for the session going' (10, 199-203).

Despite this, Participant Four feels they were still able to create meaning through these experiences:

*how they introduce themselves to the child and how they introduce the tasks erm and I've sort of found sort of sitting back that you can kind of do that and then think 'oh actually I would take that piece on board I quite liked how you did that' or*

*'actually I would have like you know erm maybe not done a psychometric erm sort of test there I would have maybe done like the ideal school or something like that' and it's been sort of interesting to reflect on that personally afterwards (10, 205-211)*

But felt their understanding was improved by *'having a conversation with the EP and kind of exploring you know their thought processes around erm why they did certain things erm with the people where they sort of encourage more active participation' (10, 211-214).*

Participant Five's interview suggests a tension between autonomy and agency and needing support from EPs:

*after the initial shadowing it was just like 'off you go (laughs) on your own' all the time and I feel like we are like making progress in the way we write and probably the way we talk as well but I think we could get we could learn more if we did a bit more together with the EPs (11, 189-192)*

*what's the point of assistants if if they're just gonna be only alongside EPs then it just feels like then you've just got a shadowing role (laughs) you know then it's not a very useful for us as a service I guess um but that yeah I don't know if it would be helpful to have more or just every once in a while like have an EP come along (11, 241-245)*

*if you're left to make your own formulation I do like it but like with the complex ones it's a bit yeah it's nice to have that support I guess and to yeah to explore that together (11, 176-177)*

Participant One feels their ability to work with autonomy and agency has increased with experience and confidence:

*I do feel more confident now to think 'this situation you know isn't right and this isn't working' whereas initially I think I was kind of I put the pressure on myself to think 'I need to get the paperwork done' or 'I need to make sure that this I'm sending enough information' (7, 105-108)*

*I think at the beginning when I first started I would have spoken about what I plan to do and then probably would have done too many of what I was going to do because I wanted to kind of show that I'd carried everything out that we talked about but now obviously now I realise that that wasn't benefiting the child (7, 135-138)*

Based on these comments by Participants Five and One, I wonder if autonomy and agency are mediated by supervision that encourages Asst. EPs to take ownership of their problem-solving and make decisions for themselves. Autonomy and agency appear to be valued by Asst. EPs but can only be achieved if supported first by other EPs. **This may explain why there's so much overlap between how I have coded autonomy and agency, power in relationships, and supervision - maybe it's about how power is distributed in interactions and how this impacts how autonomous the Asst. EPs can act, and supervision is an example of a more collaborative type of interaction where autonomy is promoted.**



### 3. Values

This process of creating a preferred meaning of the role is related to the values the Asst. EP espouses. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) distinguish between meaning of work and meaningfulness of work, with the former representing the output of a sensemaking process through which an individual interprets what their work means and the former representing the amount of significance of their work (usually positive in terms of desirability or value). Sheldon and Elliot (1999) assert that work becomes meaningful when there is congruence between the meaning of work that the individual has created and their interests and values. This is known as *authenticity* because the individual's work meaning enables them work in a way that is consistent with their beliefs and values (Ryan et al., 1995; Shamir, 1991).

McCaskey (1982) suggested that individuals are forced to use their values to guide their behaviour when they encounter situations where there are high levels of environmental ambiguity. This seems to be shown in the Asst. EP's experiences, where they draw on values from past experiences, other EP's values, and personal values to inform the meaning Asst. EPs. This enables them to create meaningful work meanings that are consistent with their values. Participants appear to draw on their values to create authenticity in their role:

*kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done...kind of looking at who it's benefitting really (7, 67-76)*

Once the Asst. EPs have construed understandings of Asst. EP and EP work and themselves at work, they can begin to create personalised, meaningful Work Meanings about how they want to Be an Asst. EP and an EP in the future:

*I needed that first year just to find my feet feel confident know what I was doing and then you can sort of grow on your skills and what the way that you want to take it (19, 175-177)*

The process of creating meaningful Work Meanings is motivated by the desire for "authenticity" (i.e., congruence between their Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings and their beliefs, interests, and values) and are therefore created based on what individuals deem to be important in their lives:

*I don't know how much I learned about myself last year other than the bits of the job that I love and the bits of the job that I could probably push to one side a little bit but now I'm kind of using that to go actually 'what kind of EP do I wanna be which bits of the role are really important to me which theories really hold with my own personal values' (19, 165-169)*

This shows how individuals also create meaning of their self at work, which is affected by opportunities to reflect on themselves and their relation to their work whilst working in the Asst. EP role.

The Asst. EPs draw on values they have developed through their experiences of Being in the world. These include:

- Person-centred values:

*helping me develop into sort of the EP I want to be to make sure I'm keeping that child at the centre and not doing the assessments just because but actually what what is the purpose why are we doing it (10, 95-97)*

*the report is meant to be for the child and like in the best interest of the child (11, 146-147)*

*it's sort of keeping in your mind what you're doing the work for keeping that child kind of central to the process...really sort of taking time to reflect on 'why am I doing this work what's what's it gonna add' (10, 74-77)*

*what's the purpose of the report which I feel it's not just to get the funding it's also to help maybe the setting and parents make sense of how their child presents in different ways and where it comes from (11, 213-215)*

*I just want to make sure that I really represent the child with their strengths and their needs and then help people make sense of it um especially if there's some maybe practice that I feel uncomfortable with (11, 315-317)*

- Relational values:

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

- Systemic values:

*thinking about things I can do that'll support staff (8, 287-288)*

*doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could affect a lot more young people (8, 319-320)*

They believe these values are intrinsic to their self-concept, for example, Participant 7 commented that their '*values have been there right from the beginning as a person they're not something that I don't think you can teach people (19, 615-617)*'. The Asst. EPs also draw on their previous Work Meanings and the values encompassed in these to inform this meaningfulness-making process:

*I worked in a secondary school for...SEMH needs and a lot of those children experienced quite very hard starts to their lives and a big thing I sort of use in my work...is compassion and erm that's something that really that I try to bring a lot into my work (19, 489-492)*

The Asst. EPs also develop their values in relation to others they interact with while working as an Asst. EP, for example, Participant 8 explained how '*one of my values has come with working with another EP who loves collaborating (19, 501-502)*'.

Values appear to influence the creation of meaningful Work Meanings in a reciprocal way. The Asst. EPs seek opportunities for meaning-making that they perceive align with their values and, in turn, their values are reinforced by others and used to further inform their meaning of EP work:

*one thing that I've really noticed is what sort of EPs I'm drawn to in my work and who I really sort of get my sort of shining golden moments from and I've sort of come to notice it is the sort of the skills and the values of the EPs and how it's quite similar to me and that surely helped me develop sort of the person the EP I want to become (19, 114-117)*

Simultaneously, the Asst. EPs experience the Work Meanings of others that are informed by their values, which can lead to the Asst. EPs shifting their own values to align with their work context:

*you can't help but bring those values that you already had with you although I would say...they have changed...so a lot of my work was like in social care like on a family one-to-one level with this family working intensely erm in lots of like deprived areas like kind of having that relational approach and I think as I started to think from the EP like a kind of more systemic level maybe so like that's okay supporting like that intervention for that one child but how can we work more systemically with that school or support the staff to support those children so you're kind of having a greater impact on more children (19, 527-535)*

The Asst. EPs' abilities to create and act in accordance with meaningful Work Meanings is associated with how much autonomy and agency they have in their interactions with others. When the Asst. EPs experience interactions in which they are disempowered and given Work Meanings directly, their ability to construct meaningful Work Meanings is hindered:

*we do a lot of like work that just contributes to statutory assessment so a lot of it is just assessment report assessment report...I feel like the only time I really got to think about...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 124-128)*

*the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices and do a collaborative joint assessment meetings and things so like you were saying it was very statutory heavy and I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months (19, 133-135)*

They also feel restricted in their ability to act in ways that align with their meaningful Work Meanings:

*you can figure out...what you like and what you might wanna do in the future but at the end of the day you...are always working under someone else and you will always have to do it in the way that they want you to (19, 327-329)*

This can cause feelings of discomfort for the Asst. EPs if the Work Meanings given to them conflict with their values:

*it is uncomfortable because obviously some things I do and don't agree with erm so it is a bit of a conflict of like what my values are and what their values are it's also difficult as well because when I'm working under different EPs I find...the work that I'm doing is totally different or even the way that I'm writing a report is totally different and at one point I've been writing reports in like three or four completely different styles cos it's to each person's preference which then obviously makes the role a little bit harder cos you're having to change things all the time and do different things so yeah there is a lot of that second guessing is 'okay this is the way that I would wanna do it this is the way that this person would wanna do it and this person' and then I do find that I feel like I tend to well I feel like I have to go with what the EP wants because at the end of the day they're supervising it it's their case (19, 341-351)*

On the other hand, when the Asst. EPs have greater agency and autonomy in their role, this can facilitate the co-construction of meaningful Work Meanings. For example, the Asst. EPs can create meaningful Work Meanings in interactions where they are encouraged to question their perspectives and make choices about how they want to work:

*she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this' (8, 80-81)*

The Asst. EPs appreciate formal supervision for this reason, as this is where they are most likely to experience this type of meaning-making interaction:

**Participant 8:** *I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills...talking through why you've done something that way what you could have done differently...so it is a real position where I feel you can grow you have that space to be able to do that (19, 111-121)*

*Note - I need to check how this overlaps with my "supervision" sub-category*

Not all participants experience this process of meaningfulness-making in their role because they do not yet feel they have created Work Meanings or they feel hindered in their abilities to create meaningful Work Meanings due to the meaning-making interactions they experience. They feel this is an issue for those employed on temporary contracts as they may not have enough time to create meaningful Work Meanings:

*a lot of Assistants are on temporary contracts and just from the outside I feel like you wouldn't potentially have that time to find your feet and then sort of develop yourself in that way...if you're conscious of 'ooh I've only got this job for a year two years' I feel like some people do need that time to find their feet and then start that like reflection process (19, 179-183)*

Despite this, being able to work in a way that aligns with their values and create Work Meanings that allow them to experience "authenticity" is important to all of the Asst. EPs.

This is considered in relation to the values encompassed in the Work Meanings of the local service context:

*if my values didn't align with the service I wonder if I would not be as happy I've worked in jobs before where decisions were being made and I fundamentally disagreed with them and how uncomfortable that made me feel (20, 713-715)*

Therefore, the Asst. EPs feel it important to create meaningful Work Meanings as these facilitate their personal well-being and a positive view of their work.

#### **4. Comparing to past work and self meanings**

I noticed more examples of participants comparing to their previous Work Meanings in focus groups one and two, so have decided to bring back what was a code previously in phase 1, to be a sub-process in meaning-making, whereby individuals draw on past meanings of work and themselves at work to make sense of their work as Asst. EPs.

Participants draw on the understandings of work and themselves at work they created in previous work contexts to make sense of their current experience. This process interacts with their experience of lacking Work Meaning - their meaning of self at work becomes conflicted as they have no clear meaning to transition into. Consequently, Asst. EPs find it difficult to create a new meaning of self at work until they experience Being in the world of educational psychology work as an Asst. EP:

*I was a TA before so I just felt like a TA that'd been thrown into this role without really any training or anything extra to bring as like an assistant compared to a TA (19, 15-16)*

This affects how the Asst. EPs experience their work as they use previous Work Meanings to inform how to Be in their new role:

*the last job I did I worked with young people who didn't attend school...as it happened when I started another EP started and that's kinda what she'd focused on into her her last post as well so being involved in kind of setting up er a system for emotion based school non attendance (8, 21-24)*

*when I started the job having never had supervision before I kind of went into it with this 'is someone judging me...is someone keeping notes on whether I'm doing good supervision'...and I really struggled with it initially I think especially...cos I came from a school background and...any kind of supervision in a school is usually someone judging you...so it took me a while to get over that (19, 445-449)*

*Note - this quote makes sense when compared to their previous interview - I was a well job before last one was teaching and I think if I'd sat down in a room with my head teacher and burst into tears (laughs) I can't imagine that it would have gone*

*very well so I think the kind of supportive nature of what we do here has been really uh I don't even know what word to say but it's just been really amazing (8, 67-71)*

This shows the Asst. EPs create initial Work Meanings tentatively using previous Work Meanings. However, this can add to uncertainty about the meaning of work when there is incongruence between these previous Work Meanings and their experience of Asst. EP work:

*I thought you know a bit like teaching where you hit the ground running and you would have to sorta need to get on board with whatever projects there were or sort of like what you said about you know statutory assessments and writing up reports erm and actually it was it was very very much the opposite...it hasn't been a pressured role I have to say compared to my previous which was teaching (9, 5-15)*

*I worked with the same kids all the time we were on site as therapists so they were just always there so I got to know them so well and now in the role sort of y'know you see them once you don't ever see them again I think that can be tricky because you have to say everything you wanna say and do everything in an hour and a half or however long you've got with them rather than being able to build up that relationship with them um I've found that tricky but I think that's because of my background (20, 129-134)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs are motivated to create new Work Meanings that fit the current context to reduce these feelings of discomfort from conflicts in their Work Meanings.

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### **Update 30/10/23**

During focus group 3, we discussed how there seems to be a paradox between working with autonomy and agency and lacking Work Meaning (i.e., how to Be an Asst. EP). Participants wondered how they are supposed to make decisions about how to carry out activities if they do not know what choices they have.

This seems to reflect the puzzle I've been trying to make sense of, of how supervision, interpersonal meaning-making, power, and autonomy and agency all fit together. Maybe it agency and autonomy are supported through specific types of interpersonal meaning-making, like those shown in supervision where power is distributed equally.

Looking back at my coding process and memos about agency and autonomy, I noticed that I originally started with the term autonomy because I felt this fit the experience of Asst. EPs' abilities to make choices about the way they worked and have control over the choices they made. This was mediated by interactions they had with EPs/supervisors, where collaborative and non-hierarchical meaning-making interactions facilitated meaning-making, whereas directive and inflexible styles hindered meaning-making.

This is reflected in the research by Bach et al. (2007) that I found when exploring research about assistants. They found individuals who are employed in assistant roles construct Work Meaning differently depending on how degraded or empowered they feel in their role. It may be that collaborate and non-hierarchical relational processes empower Asst. EPs (thus promoting their ability to work with agency and autonomy), whereas directive and inflexible relational processes disempower/degrade Asst. EPs (thus reducing their ability to work with agency and autonomy).

Thus, it may be **how** power is distributed in meaning-making interactions that leads to Asst. EPs feeling they have agency and autonomy, with supervision being an example of a relational process. Looking back at my memos and coded transcripts from both phases, I feel this conceptualisation of what is happening in Asst. EPs' experiences fits better.

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**Version eight - Update 15/12/23**

### ***Conceptual Category: Creating Work Meanings***

When the Asst. EPs experience lack of Work Meaning, they experience a sense of freedom to create new Work Meanings. The Asst. EPs' Work Meanings are co-constructed through interactions with others and the context of the organisation in which they are working. They are created at different rates for Asst. EPs:

*after ten months not that long but I don't feel like secure in this professional identity I still feel like 'who am I what is my role' (24, 456-457)*

Participants refer to how they actively made choices for themselves that they felt would greater their understanding of their role, e.g., by seeking opportunities with others by shadowing, joint working, etc:

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do so I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 15-19)*

*we look at the calendars and we we do that ourselves it's very much like 'ooh I've not seen that before I wanna go see that (9, 185-186)*

*plugging in the gaps in our existing knowledge erm so for instance some of us haven't done erm sort of much going high school work or going to a high school or early years work or particular things that we've found along the journey that we want to develop in ourselves (10, 12-15)*

However, in line with Satre's (1956) assumption, participants also feel a sense of responsibility to create this meaning as individuals see this as the purpose of the job.

*it's kind of been up to the assistants in some ways to look at other things that they can do (8, 15-16)*

*we're all trying to learn as much as we can in what feels like quite a short space of time (8, 388-389)*

In response to this freedom and sense of responsibility, participants appear to actively seek and construct the meaning of their role. They create new Work Meaning in pragmatic ways (e.g., shadowing EPs, asking questions, looking at what past Asst. EPs have done, etc.), seeking meaning through activities that they perceive will help them to understand how to be an Asst. EP:

*I've kind of attached myself to certain EPs got myself on to certain erm panels and things to pick up casework erm to do one to ones with young people to be part of consultations with staff erm and yeah then other EPs I've just asked to shadow and and go along with them (8, 16-19)*

*I feel that I've kind of enjoyed being able to be sort of self-driven and look at the areas that I need to sort of work on and develop on... I've used sort of time to be able to go into different provision and different schools different settings and develop my knowledge there (10, 24-27)*

This reflects the existential theme of "existence before essence" as it appears participants have to experience Being in the role before creating Work Meaning for the Asst. EP role.

The freedom to construct meaning is appreciated by the Asst. EPs, as they feel they can choose the activities they experience, and in turn, greater their understanding of work. However, the Asst. EPs also experience discomfort because this freedom and responsibility to create meaning present an existential paradox of seeking certainty in their uncertain world of work:

*It is a really hard one...you wanna do work with EPs you want them to tell you what's going on and...why they've done stuff...but at the same time you then need your own space after that to go away and work out 'would I do it that way would I have done it differently' (24, 401-407)*

Additionally, the Asst. EPs experience pressure to create Work Meanings. They draw on the current discourse about the function of Asst. EPs roles as temporary positions that will help individuals get on to EP doctoral training courses to make sense of this pressure:

*you're on a time pressure not just to understand but...you're just constricted to this time that you need to learn everything and to be honest I also feel then a lot of stress and pressure by being in this role to knowing I feel pressure that I then need to be on the doctorate (24, 628-631)*

This has a substantial impact on the emotional well-being of the Asst. EPs, as meaning-making in this context is exhausting:



*I feel exhausted all the time...after a day at work and it's so much more mentally cos...I think your brain is just constantly going everyday 'what can I do how could I get this opportunity how does this apply to being an EP' (19, 700-703)*

Individuals actively create two Work Meanings simultaneously - that of Being an Asst. EP now and what it means to Be an EP. The Asst. EPs feel they are creating separate meanings of Asst. EP and EP work:

*'know there's obviously a big difference between what an assistant can do and an EP' (19, 222-223)*

*I do find it tricky because I don't know like we're not like "mini EPs" (air quotes) like it is its own role within itself but there is also that training element that if you are wanting to go towards the doctorate then you then you are learning how to be an EP I feel like it's the first step (20, 318-321)*

So not only meaning-making about their roles but also the EP role. It might be that EPs are also doing this (as they also lack meaning of the Asst EP role as shown in Memo 1), but they have more power over an Asst. EP's role than the Asst. EPs themselves (e.g., the activities undertaken by Asst. EPs are largely determined by EPs' beliefs about the level of competence required to carry out activities and their perceived competence of the Asst. EPs (Woodley-Hume & Woods, 2019)).

The Asst. EPs also draw on the current discourse of the Asst. EP role being a precursor to doctoral training to make sense of their experience, as Participant 2 described in their understanding of Asst. EP work:

*I think part of the assistant role is just gaining experience and knowledge and being okay with it not necessarily coming to anything other than you going 'that's not for me' or 'that is for me' because that's then the assistant role is all about building you up for the doctorate and to develop as an EP so I feel like it's just those starting steps for you to go 'these are all the things you've allowed me to do and that's brilliant but then this is probably where I'm gonna put myself at some point' (19, 310-315)*

This shows how the Asst. EPs are creating two Work Meanings they want to identify with: an understanding of their Asst. EP role as a separate way of Being that they are experiencing now (their current position in the world of work), compared to an idealised way of Being they expect to experience when they become an EP. They need to try and make some sense of both to be able to hold their current identity and know what they are aiming for.

Through Being in the role, the Asst. EPs also create new meanings of themselves at work in terms of their beliefs about their knowledge, skills, and values:

*way in the beginning I wouldn't have felt competent I'd be very incompetent and...now with the experience...I've been given with the role I definitely think the competency's increased I wouldn't say that obviously like I'm amazing at it but I feel with each experience I become even more competent (9, 126-131)*

This process of constructing understandings of themselves at work is affected by the local context. For example, the Asst. EPs who have more opportunities to reflect on their understanding of the role in relation to their self-concept experience a greater ability to create a meaning of self at work compared to those who have fewer opportunities:

*I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills (19, 111-112)*

*I feel like the only time I really got to think about myself like that and...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 126-128)*

*I spent nine months in one council which the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices...I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months (19, 132-135)*

The Asst. EPs believe the Work Meanings they are creating through their experience of Being an Asst. EP will always be different from the Work Meanings being created by other Asst. EPs. They make sense of this in terms of the different discourses about Asst. EP and EP work they experience in the local work contexts in which they are constructing these meanings. This occurs both between different EPSs and within an EPS, when working with different EPs in the same service who work in different ways:

*I've been in two different services I was in one first for nine months and this one now for two months so short but...both have been completely different what's been expected of me has been completely different so there's never gonna be this overarching document where this is what assistants do so...[Participant 2] you might create one for your service now for the assistants coming into your service but that will only be relevant to your service (24, 82-88)*

*how are we ever gonna understand the role because...you're adapting that role to every EP that you work with so how are you gonna understand the role but then for me now I've moved to a new council with a whole other set of EPs so now I've got to understand the role again (19, 383-386)*

The Asst. EPs also believe the Work Meanings they create are partial and likely to change as they experience the different contexts of doctoral training and work as a qualified EP: *'will you ever feel like you really know the role or feel really capable because you haven't done the three year doctorate to do it I don't know'* (19, 78-79). Thus, the Work Meanings Asst. EPs create are seen as temporary, fluid, and bound to the interpersonal context within which they are constructed.

Note - I need to make sure I make it explicit that lacking Work Meaning and Creating work meanings are not a linear process. I have realised that the way I presented the draft theory

to focus group 3 that it seemed like Work Meanings were constructs that were created through a linear process of lack of meaning → create Work Meaning constructs. However, when I've engaged with meaning-making literature, this feels more like the cognitive approach to understanding how Work Meaning is made, which doesn't fit with my existential and constructionist approach. From these positionings, lacking Work Meaning and creating Work Meanings are processes located *within* an individual's relationship with the world of work. Thus, the Work Meanings they create are also located within this context, rather than cognitive constructs within the individual.

### **Key processes within the creation of Work Meanings:**

#### **~~1. Interpersonal Meaning-making:~~**

Removed this as a mechanism through which meaning is created, as from a critical constructionist and existential perspective, the construction of meaning occurs *within* relational processes and cannot be separated - doesn't need to be a separate category but will need to explain this when introducing the theoretical framework.

#### **~~1.1. Other's meanings of Asst. EP and EP work:~~**

#### **~~1.2. Supervision~~**

I've decided to remove supervision as a separate process through which meaning is made, as participants' descriptions of supervision spoke more to the relational process within supervision and the way power was distributed in interactions with their supervisor in the supervisor-supervisee relationship. Therefore, I have merged this sub-category into the sub-categories of "Interacting Work Meanings" and "Distributing power in meaning-making interactions" where these processes are shown in the supervisory relational process.

### **1. Interacting Work Meanings**

Asst. EPs co-construct Work Meanings through interactions with others. Consequently, meaning-making involves an interaction between the Work Meanings others have already construed of Asst. EP work and the Work Meanings the Asst. EPs are developing. This can vary between services:

*it just depends on Local Authorities and then what they offer and I think some Local Authorities might be mostly statutory assessment focused and less kind of preventative whereas others might be mostly preventative or some might be mostly SLA work so that obviously impacts our roles and what we can be involved in but erm yeah I definitely agree with that it makes it hard to kind of pinpoint erm our role because they're different erm for different Local Authorities yeah I definitely agree with that (20, 370-376)*

The meanings others have construed of Asst. EP work and their confidence in these understandings affect how they interact with the Asst. EPs:

*I think part of it comes from the confidence of the EPs that we work with so a couple of the EPs that I worked with a lot last year had experience of using Assistants in their previous local authorities and then came here and with them I think they knew what they could ask me to do what I felt I could manage how much time they needed to give me in terms of support whereas other EPs hadn't used Assistants well they were still quite new to our Local Authority as well and so I've got some people this year who've gone 'ooh actually I think I might be able to use you with something' whereas they didn't know that last year or they didn't realise what we could do and I think that probably then marked some of the experiences we had because some people felt like 'yes I can use I know how to use you' as well as us going 'could I try and help you with that' (laughs) so I think it's been both ways (19, 81-91)*

*I've worked for some EPs who really know the role and the meaning of the role and I think have used assistants really well and then I don't know if...it's cos they're newly qualified or not I think people who are more newly qualified who haven't been assistants previously struggle with knowing the meaning of like 'what do I do with you' and sometimes they'll either completely avoid...using you at all or working with you...or...use you maybe in the wrong way but I think you've got the other end of the spectrum where you've got people who have been very experienced and qualified a very long time ago who almost use you as "an assistant" (air quotes) like the typical assistant where they're just ordering you to do things (24, 113-122)*

This shows the different Work Meanings of others can have positive or negative effects on an Asst. EP's ability to create Work Meanings, as the experiences through which they make meanings are influenced by others' understanding of Asst. EP work. For instance, when others understand Asst. EP work as having a specific and narrow role within the organisation, then the Asst. EPs feel their ability to create Work Meanings is restricted:

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

Conversely, the Asst. EPs feel experiencing a variety of Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings facilitates their meaning-making, as this broadens their understanding of the roles by exposing them to different Work Meanings they could choose to create:

*I was very much sort of previously 'this is the way that assistants have to work because this is the way that my EP that I work with likes it' and then to experience what I would say is probably the total opposite it was like 'oh it's so much freer than this' (19, 247-249)*

However, there is acknowledgement that EPs' confidence and understanding of Asst. EP work is changing the longer they experience working with Asst. EPs:

*even in like the two three years that I've been an Assistant I feel like people are understanding the role a bit more and it is more clearly defined like when I first started there was so many people in a similar position like 'there's seven of us no one knows what to do with us we don't know what to do with us' whereas now I feel like even though it has been a short period of time people are understanding it a little bit more (19, 92-97)*

But this meant constantly adapting their meanings to those held by others, which is mentally exhausting:

*it's interesting isn't it like how...mentally tiring it can be when you're working with lots...of different EPs and you're trying to almost put a lot of different hats on to EPs... it's quite a difficult thing to do...I think from my experience it really depends what EP I'm working with I have some EPs I'm like 'you lead on writing it I'll do the last spell checks and stuff' but they'll go with how I want to do it whereas other ones it's 'oh we need to change the language to this we need to fit it into these headings' and so it...can be...quite overwhelming at times...and a lot to think about especially if you're writing the four different reports and they're all very different (19, 358-366)*

Despite this, the Asst. EPs appreciate experiencing a variety of Work Meanings in their interactions with others, as this helps them create a deeper understanding of EP work and begin developing a meaningful way of Being an Asst. EP:

*what's really helped me make sense of my role as an assistant is going out with lots of different EPs...and...we have a few trainees within our service and...doing some work with them and seeing...the...type of approaches that I want to use (19, 223-225)*

*it's been useful to work with EPs with different styles to kind of see how I might take that on board erm as an EP yeah (20, 510-511)*

Opportunities to interact with other Asst. EPs who also experience a lack of Work Meaning and meaning-making are viewed as particularly important for several reasons. First, they support containment of the emotional impact of meaning-making:

*something that's really helped me is connecting with other assistants through networks...or...the team that you have if you have more than one assistant and that's really helped...share feelings and that is normal...and that it is a real process of...development (19, 43-46)*

Secondly, interactions with other Asst. EPs help the Asst. EPs to broaden their understanding of Asst. EP work based on the experiences of others in different local contexts:

*it opened my eyes to how different everyone's role is and I definitely felt like I was one of those people that was just doing the same thing all the time but having that knowledge I was then able to go back to my service and be like 'look what all these other assistants are doing use us in this way we don't just have to do the same thing all the time' so that has completely changed my experience and my role (19, 211-215)*

### **1.3. Power in interpersonal meaning-making**

### **2. Agency and autonomy in meaning-making**

As shown in the update dated 30/10/23, I have decided to merge my "power in interpersonal meaning-making" and "agency and autonomy in meaning-making" categories. These are now one subcategory shown below:

### **2. Distributing power in meaning-making interactions**

Asst. EPs experience differences in power in their relationships with EPs and others they work with, which can be challenging for them when trying to carve out Work Meaning for their Asst. EP role:

*'at what point shall we challenge this and say actually erm no this is why I've said what I've said' but then nine times out of ten we do end up saying 'yeah okay that's fine' cos like I say sometimes 'well you are the EP' overall they are the one who it comes down to it's their school it's kind of their overall decision but no sometimes it is just kind of at what point should it be 'actually I'd like to really stick with what I've decided to how to word something' (20, 477-482)*

The Asst. EP's ability to construct Work Meanings through interactions with others is influenced by how power is distributed in these relational processes. The Asst. EPs may disempower themselves in relation to qualified EPs:

*in the assistant role you go in knowing that you're not the person who knows as much y'know you always know that that EP knows a great deal more than you probably in most situations (19, 573-575)*

As shown in Participant 2's comment above, this reduces their responsibility for creating Work Meanings and they are more likely to passively accept the Work Meanings given to them by others. Additionally, EPs may take more responsibility for meaning-making in interactions with the Asst. EPs as they are perceived to have greater experience and knowledge of EP work. Consequently, EPs are empowered in comparison to the Asst. EP in meaning-making interactions and try to give Work Meanings to the Asst. EPs directly:

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have'... 'why did you choose that that approach' (7, 72-74)*

*in the psychological perspective I prefer to just focus on how they present but then one of them [EPs] is really hot on like 'you have to include (laughs) if they have a*

*diagnosis' um but then I just think you know a lot of the children we see are really young and they are often on the pathway and they're still the same child whether they have that diagnosis yet or not yet like it could be that a child's gonna be seeing the week after and then they receive a diagnosis and then it just feels weird to me that that would be a completely different report or like a different psychological perspective (11, 199-206)*

*it's really tricky cos then some EPs are like 'well your purpose there is just for the report like your purpose is not to have a consultation' but then you're like 'yeah but I feel like I should do something or say something to help them maybe rethink things' (11, 327-330)*

This disempowerment in relation to qualified EPs hinders the Asst. EPs' abilities to create meaningful Work Meanings, as it reduces their responsibility to actively create meanings of their work:

*it was tricky sometimes if yeah if it was kind of a bit too guided and you kind of was like 'I'd like to have a go and get that experience' and then obviously if it wasn't quite how they would have envisioned it that was quite tricky to kind of have that opportunity to challenge I suppose (7, 62-65)*

*it was kind of more of a fixed way of 'this is the way that it's done' rather than 'let's explore what could have' you know 'why did you choose that that approach' kinda thing (7, 72-74)*

*sometimes you're with an EP where they more kind of want you to sit in the background and just literally shadow and watch (10, 199-203)*

*I just kept being 'yes' whatever the EP would ask 'yes' I wouldn't reflect I'd just do what I was told (19, 145-146)*

This results in the Asst. EPs creating Work Meanings passively as they understand work in the same way as the EP without understanding the reason why the EP has created that Work Meaning. Consequently, this can lead the Asst. EPs to experience working in "Bad Faith" in line with Sartre's (1956) definition. For example Participant 5 described how the meaning of EP work given to them by qualified EPs led to them working in a way that was incongruent with the Work Meaning they wanted to create and thus uncomfortable for them: *'at the moment we do parent carer meetings mostly virtual (sighs)...although it's not meant to be like that' (11, 76-83)*. Participant Four identified that this style of supervision *'tended to be with more erm of the kind of established EPs or people who have been in the role longer or erm where I think that they maybe I don't know whether it's that they don't almost don't remember their sort of being an assistant or being a trainee and needing to kind of find your feet in the room or whether it's that they've got like an established pattern of how how they do things and how they kind of see their sort of plan for the session going' (10, 199-203)*.

However, when the Asst. EPs are empowered to take responsibility in these meaning-making interactions, they are able to actively reflect on the Work Meanings they are constructing. This is most clearly shown in the collaborative interactions the Asst. EPs have with their supervisors during formal supervision where power is distributed equally:

*I think when it was the kind of collaborative discussion and the challenges to 'how come you've chosen to maybe choose that method that you've chosen or the kind of different stance that you've chosen'...it isn't kind of the expert model (7, 79-82)*

*she never goes in saying that she's the expert in things so she's not claiming that she'll give me all the answers to something or that she'll be able to work it out for me it's very much about that she'll point me in the direction of something if if she doesn't think that she can help and I think that's a level of comfort that I like because you're not going in with someone going 'I know everything so' you know 'you will listen to me' or 'I'll tell you what to do' it's very much about helping me see the different paths and then signposting me (8, 121-127)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs experience the supervisory relationship as a safe space for the explicit meaning-making of Asst. EP and EP work because of their shared responsibility for meaning-making. It also supports the containment of negative feelings created by the meaning-making process itself:

**Participant 9:** *at the start for me [supervision] was absolutely massive and figuring out 'what should I do how should I do it what shouldn't I do'... it was just that safe space to ask even if it's a stupid question 'should I know this should I do this' all sorts of stuff like that so for me I don't think I could have done my job for the first six months without supervision (19, 420-426)*

### **3-Values**

#### **3. Creating meaningful Work Meanings**

This process of creating a preferred meaning of the role is related to the values the Asst. EP espouses. Pratt and Ashforth (2003) distinguish between meaning of work and meaningfulness of work, with the former representing the output of a sensemaking process through which an individual interprets what their work means and the former representing the amount of significance of their work (usually positive in terms of desirability or value). Sheldon and Elliot (1999) assert that work becomes meaningful when there is congruence between the meaning of work that the individual has created and their interests and values. This is known as *authenticity* because the individual's work meaning enables them work in a way that is consistent with their beliefs and values (Ryan et al., 1995; Shamir, 1991).

McCaskey (1982) suggested that individuals are forced to use their values to guide their behaviour when they encounter situations where there are high levels of environmental ambiguity. This seems to be shown in the Asst. EP's experiences, where they draw on values from past experiences, other EP's values, and personal values to inform the meaning Asst.



EPs. This enables them to create meaningful work meanings that are consistent with their values. Participants appear to draw on their values to create authenticity in their role:

*kind of explore erm my reasonings behind what I would've done...kind of looking at who it's benefitting really (7, 67-76)*

Once the Asst. EPs have construed understandings of Asst. EP and EP work and themselves at work, they can begin to create personalised, meaningful Work Meanings about how they want to Be an Asst. EP and an EP in the future:

*I needed that first year just to find my feet feel confident know what I was doing and then you can sort of grow on your skills and what the way that you want to take it (19, 175-177)*

The process of creating meaningful Work Meanings is motivated by the desire for "authenticity" (i.e., congruence between their Asst. EP and EP Work Meanings and their beliefs, interests, and values) and are therefore created based on what individuals deem to be important in their lives:

*I don't know how much I learned about myself last year other than the bits of the job that I love and the bits of the job that I could probably push to one side a little bit but now I'm kind of using that to go actually 'what kind of EP do I wanna be which bits of the role are really important to me which theories really hold with my own personal values' (19, 165-169)*

This shows how individuals also create meaning of their self at work, which is affected by opportunities to reflect on themselves and their relation to their work whilst working in the Asst. EP role.

The Asst. EPs draw on values they have developed through their experiences of Being in the world. These include:

- Person-centred values:

*helping me develop into sort of the EP I want to be to make sure I'm keeping that child at the centre and not doing the assessments just because but actually what what is the purpose why are we doing it (10, 95-97)*

*the report is meant to be for the child and like in the best interest of the child (11, 146-147)*

*it's sort of keeping in your mind what you're doing the work for keeping that child kind of central to the process...really sort of taking time to reflect on 'why am I doing this work what's what's it gonna add' (10, 74-77)*

*what's the purpose of the report which I feel it's not just to get the funding it's also to help maybe the setting and parents make sense of how their child presents in different ways and where it comes from (11, 213-215)*

*I just want to make sure that I really represent the child with their strengths and their needs and then help people make sense of it um especially if there's some maybe practice that I feel uncomfortable with (11, 315-317)*

- Relational values:

*I make a point of going into the staffroom sort of in between sort of like you know break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then like people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of like this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

- Systemic values:

*thinking about things I can do that'll support staff (8, 287-288)*

*doing a formulation sheet with the staff team felt a lot more powerful that it could affect a lot more young people (8, 319-320)*

They believe these values are intrinsic to their self-concept, for example, Participant 7 commented that their '*values have been there right from the beginning as a person they're not something that I don't think you can teach people (19, 615-617)*'. The Asst. EPs also draw on their previous Work Meanings and the values encompassed in these to inform this meaningfulness-making process:

*I worked in a secondary school for...SEMH needs and a lot of those children experienced quite very hard starts to their lives and a big thing I sort of use in my work...is compassion and erm that's something that really that I try to bring a lot into my work (19, 489-492)*

The Asst. EPs also develop their values in relation to others they interact with while working as an Asst. EP, for example, Participant 8 explained how '*one of my values has come with working with another EP who loves collaborating (19, 501-502)*'.

Values appear to influence the creation of meaningful Work Meanings in a reciprocal way. The Asst. EPs seek opportunities for meaning-making that they perceive align with their values and, in turn, their values are reinforced by others and used to further inform their meaning of EP work:

*one thing that I've really noticed is what sort of EPs I'm drawn to in my work and who I really sort of get my sort of shining golden moments from and I've sort of come to notice it is the sort of the skills and the values of the EPs and how it's quite similar to me and that surely helped me develop sort of the person the EP I want to become (19, 114-117)*

Simultaneously, the Asst. EPs experience the Work Meanings of others that are informed by their values, which can lead to the Asst. EPs shifting their own values to align with their work context:

*you can't help but bring those values that you already had with you although I would say...they have changed...so a lot of my work was like in social care like on a family one-to-one level with this family working intensely erm in lots of like deprived areas like kind of having that relational approach and I think as I started to think from the EP like a kind of more systemic level maybe so like that's okay supporting like that intervention for that one child but how can we work more systemically with that school or support the staff to support those children so you're kind of having a greater impact on more children (19, 527-535)*

The Asst. EPs' abilities to create and act in accordance with meaningful Work Meanings is associated with how much autonomy and agency they have in their interactions with others. When the Asst. EPs experience interactions in which they are disempowered and given Work Meanings directly, their ability to construct meaningful Work Meanings is hindered:

*we do a lot of like work that just contributes to statutory assessment so a lot of it is just assessment report assessment report...I feel like the only time I really got to think about...what my values are and my skills was the application process for the doctorate that was the first time I really started to think about 'what am I doing why am I doing it' (19, 124-128)*

*the model was to use us towards the EHCP advices and do a collaborative joint assessment meetings and things so like you were saying it was very statutory heavy and I don't think I did one piece of reflection the whole nine months (19, 133-135)*

They also feel restricted in their ability to act in ways that align with their meaningful Work Meanings:

*you can figure out...what you like and what you might wanna do in the future but at the end of the day you...are always working under someone else and you will always have to do it in the way that they want you to (19, 327-329)*

This can cause feelings of discomfort for the Asst. EPs if the Work Meanings given to them conflict with their values:

*it is uncomfortable because obviously some things I do and don't agree with erm so it is a bit of a conflict of like what my values are and what their values are it's also difficult as well because when I'm working under different EPs I find...the work that I'm doing is totally different or even the way that I'm writing a report is totally different and at one point I've been writing reports in like three or four completely different styles cos it's to each person's preference which then obviously makes the role a little bit harder cos you're having to change things all the time and do different things so yeah there is a lot of that second guessing is 'okay this is the way that I would wanna do it this is the way that this person would wanna do it and this person' and then I do find that I feel like I tend to well I feel like I have to go with what the EP wants because at the end of the day they're supervising it it's their case (19, 341-351)*

On the other hand, when the Asst. EPs have greater agency and autonomy in their role, this can facilitate the co-construction of meaningful Work Meanings. For example, the Asst. EPs can create meaningful Work Meanings in interactions where they are encouraged to question their perspectives and make choices about how they want to work:

*she kind of just stopped me and she was like 'what's really important to you right now what do you want to get out of this' (8, 80-81)*

The Asst. EPs appreciate formal supervision for this reason, as this is where they are most likely to experience this type of meaning-making interaction:

*I get a lot...of supervision and that's really helped me develop what are my values what are my skills...talking through why you've done something that way what you could have done differently...so it is a real position where I feel you can grow you have that space to be able to do that (19, 111-121)*

Not all participants experience this process of meaningfulness-making in their role because they do not yet feel they have created Work Meanings or they feel hindered in their abilities to create meaningful Work Meanings due to the meaning-making interactions they experience. They feel this is an issue for those employed on temporary contracts as they may not have enough time to create meaningful Work Meanings:

*a lot of Assistants are on temporary contracts and just from the outside I feel like you wouldn't potentially have that time to find your feet and then sort of develop yourself in that way...if you're conscious of 'ooh I've only got this job for a year two years' I feel like some people do need that time to find their feet and then start that like reflection process (19, 179-183)*

Despite this, being able to work in a way that aligns with their values and create Work Meanings that allow them to experience "authenticity" is important to all of the Asst. EPs. This is considered in relation to the values encompassed in the Work Meanings of the local service context:

*if my values didn't align with the service I wonder if I would not be as happy I've worked in jobs before where decisions were being made and I fundamentally disagreed with them and how uncomfortable that made me feel (20, 713-715)*

Therefore, the Asst. EPs feel it important to create meaningful Work Meanings as these facilitate their personal well-being and a positive view of their work.

#### **4. Comparing to past work and self meanings**

##### **4. Using past meanings of work and self**

Participants draw on the understandings of work and themselves at work they created in previous work contexts to make sense of their current experience. This is a pragmatic approach adopted out of necessity to manage the feelings of uncertainty that come from

experiencing a lack of meaning in relation to the Asst. EP role and conflicting meanings of self at work:

*you just go from one professional identity to another...I don't think we want to keep reflecting on who we were or like looking at the past experiences but...because there's not that transition you literally have no other choice...you're still in that mindset almost you're like in this no man's land of who am I and what's my professional role here so you start sharing information that probably is your past role but you just got no other kind of thing to go off (24, 431-436)*

Consequently, Asst. EPs find it difficult to create a new meaning of self at work until they experience Being in the world of educational psychology work as an Asst. EP:

*I was a TA before so I just felt like a TA that'd been thrown into this role without really any training or anything extra to bring as like an assistant compared to a TA (19, 15-16)*

This affects how the Asst. EPs experience their work as they use previous Work Meanings to inform how to Be in their new role:

*the last job I did I worked with young people who didn't attend school...as it happened when I started another EP started and that's kinda what she'd focused on into her her last post as well so being involved in kind of setting up er a system for emotion based school non attendance (8, 21-24)*

*when I started the job having never had supervision before I kind of went into it with this 'is someone judging me...is someone keeping notes on whether I'm doing good supervision'...and I really struggled with it initially I think especially...cos I came from a school background and...any kind of supervision in a school is usually someone judging you...so it took me a while to get over that (19, 445-449)*

*Note - this quote makes sense when compared to their previous interview - I was a well job before last one was teaching and I think if I'd sat down in a room with my head teacher and burst into tears (laughs) I can't imagine that it would have gone very well so I think the kind of supportive nature of what we do here has been really uh I don't even know what word to say but it's just been really amazing (8, 67-71)*

This shows the Asst. EPs create initial Work Meanings tentatively using previous Work Meanings. However, this can add to uncertainty about the meaning of work when there is incongruence between these previous Work Meanings and their experience of Asst. EP work:

*I thought you know a bit like teaching where you hit the ground running and you would have to sorta need to get on board with whatever projects there were or sort of like what you said about you know statutory assessments and writing up reports*

*erm and actually it was it was very very much the opposite...it hasn't been a pressured role I have to say compared to my previous which was teaching (9, 5-15)*

*I worked with the same kids all the time we were on site as therapists so they were just always there so I got to know them so well and now in the role sort of y'know you see them once you don't ever see them again I think that can be tricky because you have to say everything you wanna say and do everything in an hour and a half or however long you've got with them rather than being able to build up that relationship with them um I've found that tricky but I think that's because of my background (20, 129-134)*

Consequently, the Asst. EPs are motivated to create new Work Meanings that fit the current context to reduce these feelings of discomfort from conflicts in their Work Meanings.

Previous Work Meanings are also used in the active construction of new meanings. For instance, Participant 4 explained how they reflected on their current Work Meanings and used these to inform what experiences they needed to develop new Work Meanings by '*plugging in the gaps in our existing knowledge*' (10, 12-13). Additionally, others encourage the Asst. EPs to draw on their previous Work Meanings to inform how to Be an Asst. EP:

*...I worked in an Autistic residential school and [South-Western County] are doing a project for delivering training to mainstream schools so I didn't identify myself but my PEP said to me 'I know you've got experience with autism would to join the project' so it was sort of her knowing my past experiences that I was then able to bring to that and I thought 'yeah actually I can do that' that gave me confidence in knowing what I was doing so I could then use my past experiences which then made me feel confident in that position*

*Yeah I had something similar because I'd worked with young people who'd been at school for quite a significant amount of time to transport them back in so then when [North Eastern Local Authority] started an emotionally-based school non-attendance project it was like 'would you like to be part of that'...to me that was something very tangible to then go 'I've got experience in this area' so yeah it was something for me to go 'I probably feel like I can contribute amongst all the other uncertainties going on' (24, 477-491)*

This also shows how using previous Work Meanings can make the Asst. EPs feel more confident in their abilities, as it reduces some of the uncertainty around the meaning of Asst. EP work by highlighting the similarities between their previous Work Meanings and new Work Meanings.

The way the Asst. EPs use past meanings of work and self to create Work Meanings changes over time. As the Asst. EPs develop Work Meaning of the Asst. EP role and become more confident in their abilities, they rely less on previous Work Meanings to inform their work:

*when you...start the only thing you've got is your past experiences to then...try and make sense of the role at the same time so you initially always draw on the things*

*you've done before in the experiences that you've had and the values that gives you because that's the very tangible thing when you're going 'don't know what I'm doing here I don't know what we're supposed to do' that's all you've got as a starting point...so we'll start probably with the more familiar and then branched out as we became more confident (24, 461-468)*

They also begin to use their past Work Meanings to create Work Meanings that are meaningful to them, that is, how they want to Be an Asst. EP:

*I make a point of going into the staffroom...in between...break time lunchtime at least one of them just so then...people are aware that you're there and it's not just sort of...this thing like 'oh he just comes and does that and leaves' because as a teacher I've seen that and I think that doesn't really foster sort of good relations (9, 170-174)*

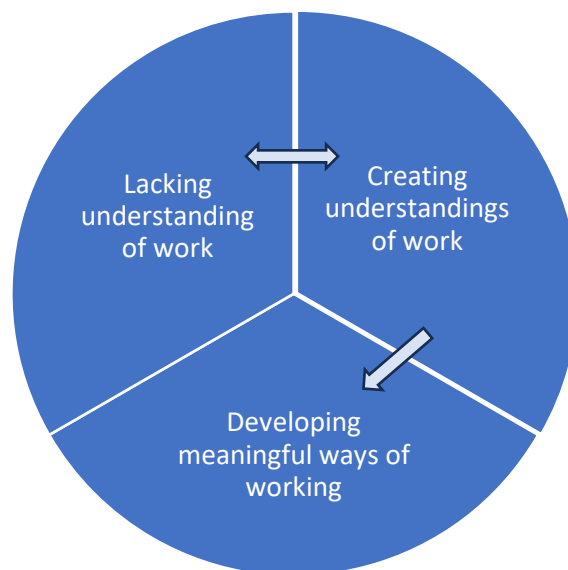
This shows how using past Work Meanings serves different functions during the time the Asst. EPs spend in their role. They initially use past Work Meanings in an attempt to reduce the discomfort of uncertainty when they experience a lack of Asst. EP Work Meaning, however, as they create an Asst. EP Work Meaning, they begin to draw on past Work Meanings to create a meaningful way of Being at work.

## Appendix 26: Guidance for working with Assistant Educational Psychologists (Asst. EPs)

This guidance is based on the view that **all members** of the EP service support Asst. EPs through **supervising their work, modelling reflective practice, and encouraging them to engage in discussion about the work of EPs and Asst. EPs.**

Support for Asst. EPs is based on their understanding of their work, their understanding of EP work, and their developing understanding of themselves in relation to their work. Asst. EPs may experience 'existential anxiety' about their work when they feel uncertainty about the meaning of their work and what it means to be an EP.

To support this, it is important that Asst. EPs are encouraged and supported to **take responsibility** for creating understanding of their work and that of EPs through as **wide a variety of activities with different members of the service and other SEN practitioners** as possible. This support for Asst. EPs is based on a **differentiated level of supervision** for activities and experiences that complements their level of understanding:



### Lacking understanding of work:

#### What might this look like?

- This is most likely to be experienced by Asst. EPs when they first start working in the role. However, it is important to remember that **Asst. EPs can experience a lack of understanding to different extents throughout their time as Asst. EPs, especially if the context of their work changes.**
- The Asst. EP may express feelings of uncertainty about what they 'should' be doing.



- The Asst. EP may feel they have lost their sense of identity at work. They are likely to compare back to their previous understandings of work.

#### **What should support look like?**

- It is important for Asst. EPs to experience a wide range of ways of working at this stage. This is most likely to be through **shadowing** members of the EP service.
- The EP briefs the Asst. EP, explaining the case, their rationale for involvement, and options considered when planning their involvement to the Asst. EP. This includes explicit modelling of problem-solving linked to their values, strengths, and interests. The EP encourages the Asst. EP to ask questions to clarify and extend their understanding of the case.
- During the activity, the Asst. EP observes and reflects on how the EP's approach links with their personal strengths, values, and interests.
- The EP and Asst. EP debrief following the activity. The EP shares their reflections and their developing formulation and explain how they created this. They encourage the Asst. EP to share their reflections and engaging in debate to consider the meaning of EP work.

### **Creating understandings of work**

#### **What might this look like?**

- The Asst. EP may begin to seek experiences they feel are 'missing' from their current understanding of work.
- The Asst. EP may compare ways of working they have observed or experienced. They may report feelings of confusion or frustration about the different ways of working.

#### **What should support look like?**

- It is important for Asst. EPs to continue to experience a wide range of ways of working at this stage but begin to take more responsibility for creating meaning during the activities. Therefore, this stage may best be supported through **joint working** with an EP or other suitably qualified member of the service.
- The EP briefs the Asst. EP by explaining the case. The EP and Asst. EP then plan the activity together, with the EP using questioning to support joint problem-solving linked to their values, strengths, and interests. Roles for carrying out the activity are agreed together with an explicit focus on the Asst. EP's strengths interests, and skills.
- During the activity, the Asst. EP takes part in the activity in a defined role as agreed during planning. The EP supports the Asst. EP to adapt to the situation as appropriate.

- The EP and Asst. EP debrief following the activity. They share their reflections and formulate together about the case. This includes engaging in debate to consider the meaning of EP work.

## Developing meaningful ways of working

### What might this look like?

- The Asst. EP may begin to seek experiences they feel are meaningful to them.
- The Asst. EP may report feelings of frustration about ways of working that do not align with their personal values/interests/theoretical positioning.

### What should support look like?

- At this stage, it is important for Asst. EPs to take responsibility for actively creating understandings of work that are meaningful to them. They should continue to be offered a wide range of experiences but the Asst. EP should be supported to consider how they want to be involved in these in a way that is meaningful to them. The Asst. EPs should be supported to take part in activities **independently**.
- The EP briefs the Asst. EP by explaining the case. The EP encourages the Asst. EP to consider how they want to approach their involvement in the case, including prompts to question how their options link to their values, positioning, strengths, skills, and assumptions about EP and Asst. EP work.
- The Asst. EP carries out the activity and may adapt to the situation as they deem appropriate.
- The EP and Asst. EP debrief following the activity. The Asst. EP shares their reflections and developing formulation. This includes engaging in debate to consider how the Asst. EP's experience of the activity links to their view of meaningful work.

## Additional recommendations for formal supervision of Asst. EPs

It is important for formal supervisors to understand that formal supervision is viewed as a safe space for meaning-making by Asst. EPs. By adopting an approach to supervision that is based on existentialist thinking, supervision can complement the existential understanding of Asst. EPs experiences developed in the substantive Grounded Theory of how Asst. EPs experience and create Work Meanings.

Strasser (2009) developed the Wheel of Supervision as a cross-theoretical framework that can be applied to supervision that encompasses the existential 'givens' of how individuals experience Being in the world. She argues that supervisors must shift their thinking from using supervision strictly for developing and/or evaluating the individual towards a focus on their personal expectations of themselves and their work. From this perspective, supervisors

can come closer to experiencing the worldview of the Asst. EP within the existential 'givens' and support the expansion of their worldview through exploration of relationships with self and others. To do this, supervisors must first focus on developing psychological safety in their relationship with the Asst. EP so they feel supported by the supervisor. Only when Asst. EPs feel empowered and that they can trust the supervisor can the supervisor begin to challenge and ask more thought-provoking questions that facilitate meaning-making.

I recommend reading Strasser's description of how the framework may be used in supervision if you are interested in using this approach to supervise Asst. EPs:

Strasser, A. (2009). Givens of supervision: A cross-theoretical framework. In E. Van Deurzen & S. Young (Eds.), *Existential perspectives on supervision* (pp. 172–184). Palgrave Macmillan.