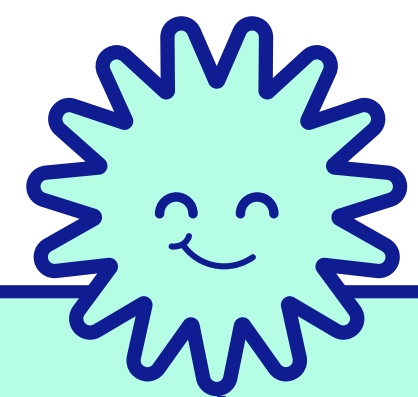


PERCEPTIONS OF THE ROLE OF THE EP IN SUPPORTING SECONDARY AGED, CARE EXPERIENCED, YOUNG PEOPLE



This study uses qualitative methods to explore the perceived role of the EP in supporting care experienced secondary school aged young people within the authority. This is from an education perspective across the three systemic levels of the individual, school and local authority.



Research Questions

1. What do EPs perceive their role to be in the support of secondary school aged care experienced young people in the local authority?
2. Is there a consistent view between other education practitioners and EPs of the EP role?
3. What are the perceived barriers to EPs supporting care experienced young people from an educational local authority perspective?

Aims

- To gain a greater understanding of the perceived role of the EP in supporting care experienced secondary age young people within one local authority.
- To highlight the perceived barriers of EPs supporting care experienced secondary aged young people.
- To inform future local authority policy regarding the support of care experienced young people in local authority secondary schools

Abstract

The recent Independent care review highlighted education as a key factor supporting care experienced children's overall health and wellbeing. Several of recommendations focused on increasing understanding of the needs and experiences of care experienced young people (Independent Care Review, 2020). As Educational psychologists (EPs) are well placed to support meeting the needs of care experienced young people in education (McParlin, 1996), it is of vital importance to gain a deep understanding of the perceived EP role in supporting these young people to provide context for effective future policy and guidance. The study contributes to the little research on the topic of the EP role in supporting care experienced young people in the secondary context by gathering the views of educational professionals in one Scottish local authority. Three focus groups were conducted and the data analysed using thematic analysis. Activity theory was also utilised as an analytical tool to draw out tensions in the data and between data sets. Key findings included a need for a shared holistic working practice to support essential partnership working when planning for CECYP needs. Activity theory was also argued to be a useful tool in framing inter-agency working in education. These findings has implications for both individual EP practice and systemic local authority processes.

Context

In July 2019 there were over 14, 000 CECYP in Scotland with Glasgow City having responsibility for a large number (Scottish Government, 2020). Evidence consistently reports that CECYP have lower educational attainment outcomes than their peers (O'Higgins et al., 2017). These include lower attainment, leaving school earlier and less likelihood of moving on to positive destinations post school (Scottish Government, 2019a). Even CECYP enrolled at university or college have statically lower rates of completing their courses than other students (Scottish Funding Council, 2019). The EP is a relevant support for CECYP given that are over represented in the additional support needs population (O'Higgins et al., 2017), are much more likely to be excluded from education (Scottish Government, 2018), and less likely to achieve the curriculum level relevant to their age (Scottish Government, 2019a).

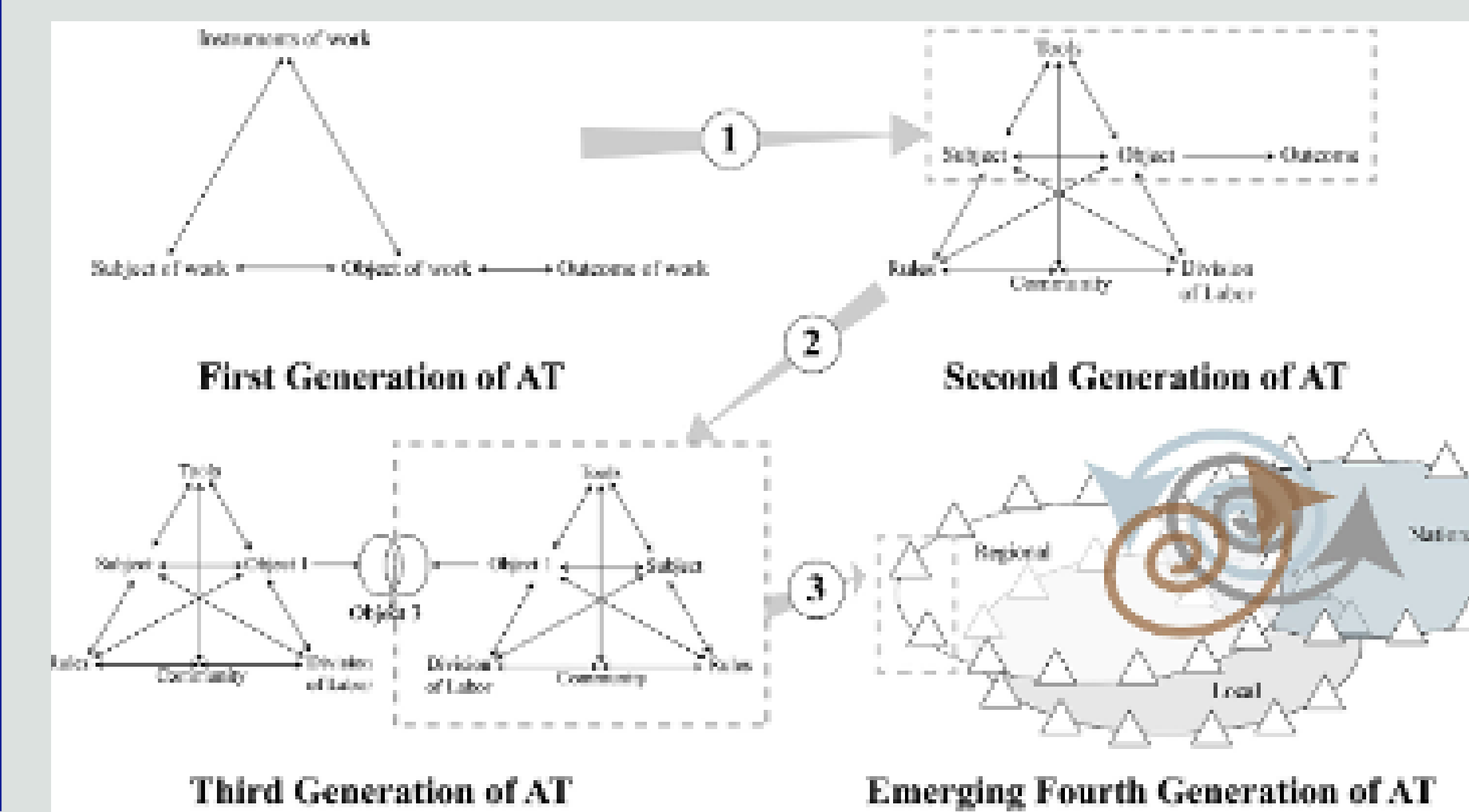
Despite the recognition of this gap in attainment in the 1990s, and the introduction of numerous funding, policy and legislation to support CECYP achieving in education, this disparity in attainment still remains (Who Cares Scotland, 2020). There is therefore a rationale for the current study in exploring the EP role in relation to supporting and improving educational outcomes for CECYP.

Methodology

This is an exploratory study to gain insight in to the EP role in supporting care experienced secondary aged young people within the local authority. This will allow a deeper understanding of the barriers facing EPs in providing this kind of support and inform the generation of hypotheses for further research into this area. This research is informed by an interpretive paradigm which looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social phenomena. The relativist ontological stance of this project acknowledges the presence of multiple socially constructed realities and the researcher will employ a constructivist epistemological approach to the methods and data gathering process.

Methods:

- Focus group with EPs from the psychological service
- Focus group with EPs with recent knowledge and experience of supporting CECYP
- Focus group with other educational professionals with knowledge and experience in supporting CECYP



Literature

There is little published research exploring EPs' work with, or related to children in care, and none conducted in the Scottish secondary context. McParlin's 1996 paper argued that EPs are well situated through their expertise to intervene and support CECYP. Similarly, Bradbury (2006) found that EPs saw themselves as using their skills and expertise to make a contribution to supporting CECYP but there was little consensus among EPs surrounding the exact nature of their distinctive contribution. A study by Norwich et al conducted in 2010 is the most recent large scale empirical study involving EPs that examines the role in supporting CECYP. Over 100 EPs from five diverse local authorities in England answered a survey regarding the nature of their work with CECYP (Norwich, 2010). Similarly to this study, Senior EPs and EPs with a specialist knowledge in supporting CECYP are included. However those with a specialism made up only 34% of the participants (Norwich, 2010).

There is also limited research regarding teachers' perceptions of the role of the EP in supporting CECYP. Research has also shown that mutual understanding of roles between teachers and educational psychologists has a significant positive impact on the nature of any work carried out (Farrell et al., 2005, 2006).

Recommendations from the literature suggest recognising the benefits and expertise of those with specialist knowledge of CECYP within psychological services, and implied a need for further research with this group. A similar study of this scale has also not been conducted in Scotland further emphasising the need for research in this area.

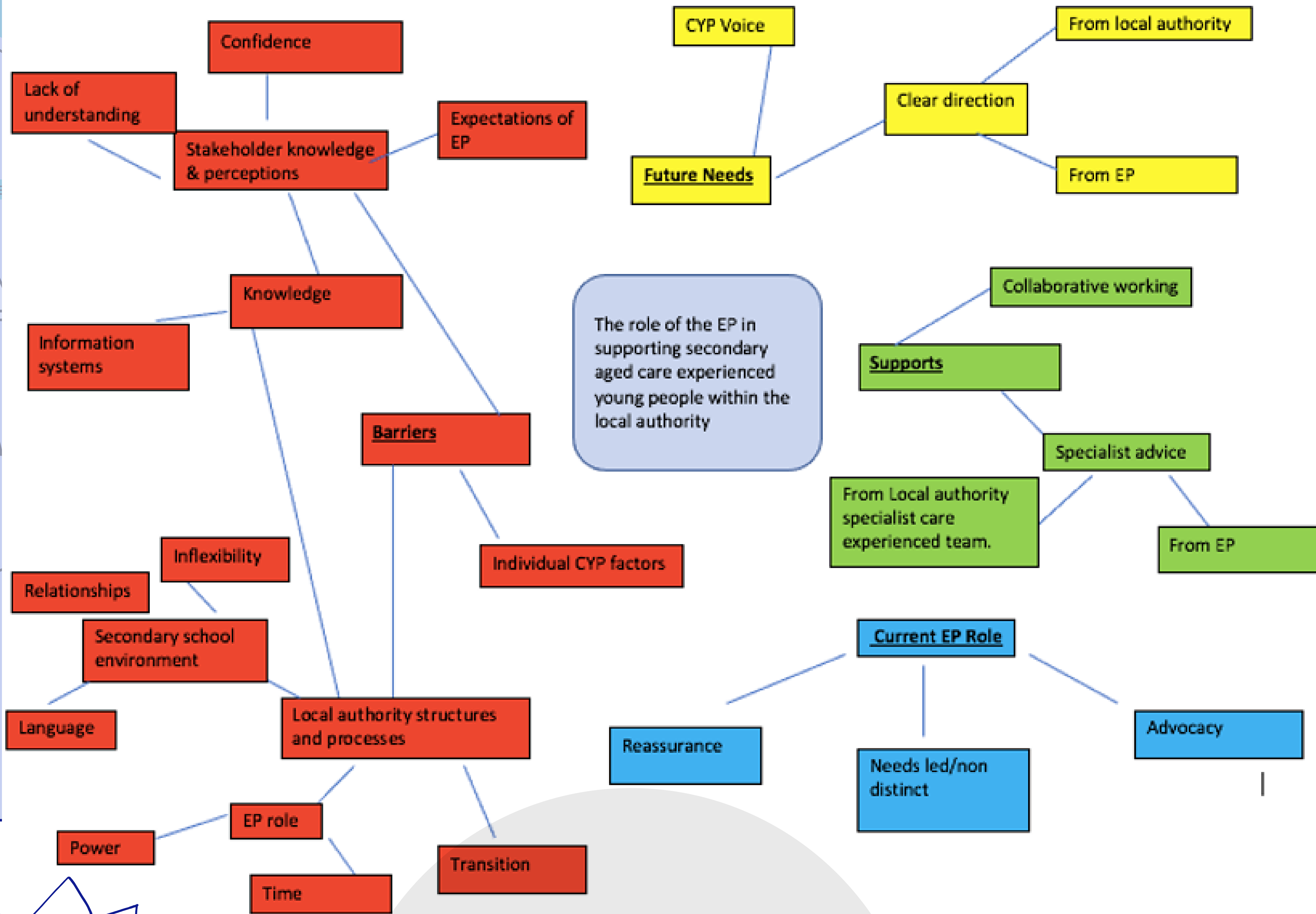
Theoretical Perspective

Cultural-Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) (Engestrom, 2005), provides an increasingly popular analytical tool that is useful for examining the experiences of professionals who are part of complex social systems (Edwards, 2010; Lemonie et al., 2021). These included the educational psychologists and other educational professionals involved in this project. The theory originated from Vygotsky's work (1978), placing mediation at the centre theories surrounding learning acquisition, and draws form a range of disciplines, including psychology, sociology and communication studies (Leadbetter, 2017). The development of Activity Theory has been conceptualised into three generations with the recent emergence of a fourth generation

Results

Thematic Analysis

Four primary themes emerged from the data; the current EP role, future needs, and both the barriers and supports relating to supporting CECYP in education.



Results

Activity Theory Analysis

Object
 Effective pastoral team
 Understanding of CYP needs and how these can be met in the community
 Presumption of mainstream
 Multi-agency working
 CYP at centre of planning
 Inclusion/child friendly approaches

Whole Activity System

Resources / Tools
 LA support and multi-agency meetings
 LAAC reviews
 The EP
 Third sector services/ community resources
 Care Experience specialist team
 Terminology
 School pastoral team
 Trauma informed practice, nurture & attachment
 Online information system
 Training
 Partnership working
 Specialist provision

Community
 School community
 Education professionals
 The CYP
 Team around the child
 Home and family
 Local authority context

Division of labour
 EP support through multi-agency meeting
 EP supports in consultation meetings
 EP support with training needs & policy
 Schools review LAAC population
 School gatekeeping EP involvement
 EP Support with critical incident
 EP signposts resources
 EPs developing shared understanding of CYP needs & wider context, connecting concepts with policy.
 EP supporting schools to know who their CE CYP are.
 Schools gathering CYP voice

Rules
National policy and priorities
 - Exclusion policy
 - Confidentiality
 - Inclusion of pupil voice
 - 'The Promise'
School policies
 Language describing care experienced YP
 Staged intervention
 Local Authority structures & Expectations
 ASPEP agreement
 Social work LAAC reviews and processes
 HMIE inspections

Tensions

Collaboration vs Stakeholder shared understanding
 Collaborative working is viewed an essential resource but there is a lack shared understanding of need among stakeholders

Policy vs Practice
 Policy is viewed as a resource and also a rule by stakeholders but is not always being implemented in practice to support care experienced young people

Relationships vs Systems
 Relationships are viewed as central to supporting care experienced young people but these may be difficult to foster at times in local authority structures.

Staff needs vs Pupil needs
 The needs of staff, such as agency, time access to resources, knowledge is impacting on the needs of the children and young people, such as being included in meetings and their voice being heard.

What do EPs perceive their role to be in the support of secondary school aged CECYP in the local authority?

- This study generated three core themes central to the current EP role; **reassurance, advocacy and needs led**. These support previous research focusing on the EP role in supporting CECYP (Brewin & Statham, 2011; Greig et al., 2014; McClung & Gayle, 2010).
- Both providing reassurance and support to schools, and advocating for CECYP voices, were highlighted as key to supporting the embodying of the 'The Promise' policy document in education, and emphasised as a continuing key role for EPs. Advocacy in particular was highlighted as particularly important due to CECYP's voices being marginalised in the process of supporting them, this also reflects recent policy findings (Independent Care Review, 2020).
- There was a strong consensus that care experienced young people were not viewed as a single homogenous group by professionals supporting them, and subsequently that the EP role in supporting them was similar to other young people and was led primarily by need. This approach has been shown to be important in the literature (McClung & Gayle, 2010), and also to be preferred by CECYP as it improved their wellbeing by fostering a sense of belonging and fitting in.
- This study also highlighted that EPs have a role in supporting schools to make links between theory and practice, such as attachment theory, nurture and trauma informed practice.

Is there a consistent view between other education practitioners and EPs of the EP role?

Commonality	EP Focus Group	EP Care Experienced Focus Group	Other Professionals Focus Group
Stakeholders have a similar perception of the role of the EP	Not a specific role for EP EP has consultation role EP signposts resources EPs developing shared understanding of CYP needs & wider context in partnership working. Connecting concepts with policy etc. EPs have a development remit Delivering training	EP signposting resources LAAC meetings EPs providing reassurance EPs act as advocate for YP & their voice	Not a specific EP role in supporting CECYP. EPs support through multi-agency meeting if CECYP was brought. Delivering training Providing a different perspective Providing support

"The expectation for our role is, I think the word psychology. People misinterpret a lot and are thinking we're going to come in and do a psychological assessment and fix them and when we don't offer that it's like well, what's the point."

- This study highlighted that there was a consistent view of the EP among the participants. However the wider discussion indicated that other stakeholders hold different perceptions regarding the role of the EP in the process of supporting a young person.

What are the perceived barriers to EPs supporting CECYP?

Tensions between Activity Systems

Tension	EP Focus Group	EP Care Experienced Focus Group	Other Professionals Focus Group
Discrepancies regarding perceptions of key barriers to supporting care experienced young people (environmental vs individual factors)	School environment and structure as a barrier to supporting CECYP Role of the EP in local authority structures Stakeholder perceptions, knowledge and understanding of CECYP	Transition into local authority schools as a barrier to supporting CECYP Stakeholders perceptions, knowledge and understanding of CECYP	Past of individual CECYP young people a barrier to relationship building Multiple moves of individual CYP and families viewed as a barrier to understanding them Increased risk taking and poor mental health viewed as barriers to support. Home situation of individual CECYP and engagement also viewed as barrier
Time and pressure impacts ability to support care experienced young people	Service delivery model does not allow time for EPs to give in depth support for schools when implementing approaches EP role within education Expectations of EP role from other professionals	EP role within education	Not enough time in school to read documents in depth School politics Competing pressures EPs do not work directly with individual young people anymore
Impact of policy and approaches to support care experienced young people	Need for EPs to support schools in applying approaches Schools not aware of trauma informed practice Deconstruction of approached and principles needed in schools to enable effective support of CECYP	Need for EPs to promote presumption of mainstream Need for EPs to support schools to view behaviour as communication Schools not filling cooperate parenting role in transition context There is a stigma towards CECYP	Trauma informed practice has been really useful Most helpful CPD from specialist care experienced Excellent nurture provision in school New behaviour policy informed by nurture principles CYP should be involved in meetings

- Stakeholder knowledge and perceptions
- (Individual CYP factors)
- Local Authority Structures and Processes

Next steps for EPs in supporting secondary aged, care experienced, young people within the local authority?

- This study emphasises the importance of the continuation of advocating for CECYP, offering support to schools to better understand the needs and common challenges of CECYP, and also supporting the implementation of 'The Promise' in education through providing a clear vision for schools.
- The continuation of the development of a more flexible and attuned secondary environment through relevant systemic approaches supporting development of caring, holistic practice towards CECYP. It is worth noting that this study highlighted systemic barriers to the implementation of these approaches and which may limit the scope of the EP role in supporting these.
- A tension emerged through analysis between the awareness of policy among stakeholders and its practical application. This could be attributed in part to the lack of stakeholder understanding of CECYP need that has been previously explored, or to a lack of confidence among school staff which also emerged through the data. Some participants also suggested that training delivery and its subsequent impact is dependant on EP time and flexibility in the service delivery model to provide intense support.

This tension supports recent findings regarding practitioner confidence in applying trauma informed practice as part of 'The Promise' (The Independent Care Review, 2020). This approach has been highlighted as key to the future of supporting care experienced young people (The Independent Care Review, 2020), and has implications for the role of the EP in dissemination knowledge on this topic.

- In line with previous literature (Farrell et al., 2005, 2006; Thomson 2007; Walker, 2012), this study highlighted the importance of effective collaboration in supporting CECYP and also indicated that further collaboration with other agencies, such as social work may be necessary to fulfil 'The Promise' effectively. The Independent Care Review (2020) was also shown to have emphasised partnership working as key to the future of supporting CECYP. This suggests that these findings should inform future EP practice moving forward.

Activity theory as a framework to support inter-agency collaboration in education

The concept of relational agency in CHAT provides a useful tool to examine key elements of partnership working in more depth. These include the 'object-motive' of individual practitioners, that is how the object of the activity is interpreted and responded to, determines participants' values and purposes of the dominant practice used in their activities (Edwards, 2010; Leont'ev, 1978;). For successful collaborative working, it is essential to recognise the object-motive of other agencies, and why they are engaging in the activity to enhance interpretation and enrich responses (Edwards, 2010; Nardi, 2005). Relational agency provides a framework for creating a joint understanding between agencies and a rationale for practitioners working to align the object of activity, or case, with the object motive among different agencies looking to improve outcomes for CECYP.

The building of a common knowledge between collaborating partners is crucial to relational agency working effectively to support CECYP without the need for lengthy translation of knowledge or resources for the other practitioners involved (Edwards, 2010). 'The Promise' has also identified that shared understanding is core to effectively for inter-agency working to support CECYP (The Independent Care Review, 2020). Common knowledge, in this case, the needs of care experienced young people, acts as a meditational tool to the interpretations of and responses to the case that have been contributed by stakeholders to support joint conclusions (Edwards, 2010). The child's trajectory is itself mediated and interpreted by the different professionals (Edwards, 2010), for instance the social worker may have a safety focus, and the clinical psychologist mental health. Activity theory highlights that stakeholders work in parallel to view a whole child in a complex world (Edwards, 2010). Relational agency therefore, acts as a shared strength between professionals as they draw on their own specialisms to work on complex cases, or common objects of activity (Edwards, 2010). The building of a common knowledge, such as an understanding of CECYP needs, is key to this process.

The importance not only of relational agency in professionalism, but also professional agency, in the current inter-agency context is highlighted by Edwards (2010). It is argued that professionals are required to exhibit increasing personal responsibility when engaging in partnership work (Friedland & Boden, 1994). EPs, as part of their partnership work, frequently practice on the perimeters of several establishments and are part of multi-agency teams that cross organisational boundaries. As such, strong professional agency is essential for working collaboratively and flexibly (Edwards 2010). Activity Theory provides a useful lens through which to support and examine the development of both professional and relational agency in future research and EP Practice.