AN EXPLORATION OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS’ USE OF CONTEXTUAL OBSERVATION IN PRACTICE

A thesis submitted to the University of Manchester for the degree of Doctor of Educational and Child Psychology in the faculty of Humanities

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Thesis Abstract

Considering the centrality of contextual observation within educational psychologists’ (EPs’) daily practice, it has been identified within the profession that some level of rigour to the process should be available so that contextual observation meets the professional requirement for evidence-based practice (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC), 2016). It is hoped that this research will promote consistency in EP practice by providing guidelines for best practice that a) help facilitate a professional ‘conversation’ on the basis of some shared understanding, and b) reduce ambiguity and opacity in communicating the skills of contextual observation in practice to new entrants to the profession.

Paper 1 systematically identified papers which report EPs’ use of contextual observation. It used an adapted evaluation checklist to critically evaluate the quality of the reporting of observation, and a bespoke analytic framework of key features of contextual observation with which to analyse the content and process of observation reported. It was found that there are inconsistencies around which details of contextual observation are reported, which makes it difficult for the process of contextual observation to be reliably replicated across EP practice or to be communicated clearly on educational psychologist training programmes. The two approaches used to analyse the studies were combined, creating a revised analytic framework that provides a foundation for further research.

This further research is presented in Paper 2. This empirical study took the analytic framework developed in Paper 1 and used it as an interview schedule to carry out six semi-structured interviews with EPs practising in services across the North West of England. The purpose was to explore in more depth at the practice-level why and how EPs carry out contextual observation. Thematic analysis identified that the EPs had a lot in common in how they carried out contextual observation, with little variance reported between practitioners. The analytic framework was subsequently revised again to reflect the key
findings from the analysis of the EP interviews, and to thereby provide practice-informed initial guidelines for considerations around best practice in contextual observation (initial Contextual Observation Guidelines – COG). A strategy for disseminating the research is presented in Paper 3, including scope for future research commissioning to continue the momentum that this research has started, towards the use and development of the COG across the profession at all levels.
Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.
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http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/about/regulations) and in The University’s policy on Presentation of Theses.
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Finally, thank you to all the EPs who took part in this study and made the research possible.

The Author

The researcher holds a P.G.C.E. in primary education, and worked as a primary school teacher for seven years. She later achieved a British Psychological Society Accredited Masters Degree in Psychology before working for one year as an Assistant Educational Psychologist prior to accepting a place on the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology initial professional training programme at The University of Manchester.
Aims of the research

A preliminary focus group facilitated a group of educational psychologists (EPs) from a single Educational Psychology Service (EPS) to discuss their use of observation in their practice (Farook, 2018, unpublished). One finding was that the participants were very aware that they had particular skills and knowledge that were different to other professionals – “what we have is the application of psychology” (Farook, 2018, p.37, unpublished) yet it served to draw further attention to what Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010) had suggested:

EPs need to emerge from initial professional training being able to articulate a coherent view of their psychological skills set, as well as a clear view of the context within which this can be applied for the benefit of children and young people (p12).

A further finding from that focus group was that the participants had a shared understanding that direct observation in EP practice was most often used because it allows the EP to observe the child or young Person (C/YP) in the context that relates to an aspect of the presenting issues, so informing their psychological assessment. As such, the term contextual observation was proposed at the beginning of the current research, and will henceforth be referred to throughout the thesis.

More recently, Speed (2019) provided evidence of current interest in EPs’ use of contextual observation. Drawing attention to its central place in EP practice, she identified that there is a need to be aware of and consider any potential limitations. However, 13 years following Woods and Farrel (2006), Speed (2019) reported that there is still very little literature relating specifically to the process of observation in EP practice. In order to try and evaluate the process, Speed (2019) referred to both existing guidelines for legal and ethical practice in educational psychology, as well as her own experience as a trainee.
educational psychologist (TEP). She also drew attention to the reliance on experiential learning with regards to the skills and process of observation in the absence of a specific evidence base.

Speed (2019) provided clear rationale for both the timing and the overarching aims of the current research. These were to a) critically evaluate the evidence base for observation in EP practice, using a strategy that would go beyond a traditional search of appropriate electronic databases in order to identify literature relating specifically to observation in educational psychology, and, b) explore, in-depth, why and how practising EPs use this assessment tool in their practice. The overarching aim was to use the evidence identified by the current research to begin to develop a tool that could guide EPs to consider the constructs that may form part of a professional conversation around practice in this area. This would provide, over a decade later, “an overarching approach to [the] process” of contextual observation (Woods & Farrell, 2006, p. 402).

**Research strategy**

Paper 1 is a systematic literature review (SLR). The purpose of this was to systematically identify and critically evaluate research evidence of EPs’ use of contextual observation. An adapted evaluation checklist for observation was used to systematically evaluate the methodological quality of 16 papers identified through a systematic hand-search of peer reviewed journals. As there was no existing central frame of reference as to what should be considered when carrying out contextual observation, the research supervisory team discussed what this might look like. This group made reference to a preliminary focus group study on EP use of observation which had been carried out by the researcher (Farook, 2018, unpublished). Through discussion, a definition of *contextual* observation which makes explicit what this type of observation provides to the EP was proposed, and a bespoke analytic framework of 11 areas for consideration when carrying
out contextual observation was developed. This was used to systematically review the papers and identify whether these areas were reported on in each. Of the 16 papers the systematic evaluation identified 10 papers with low and medium methodological quality with regards to the reporting of observation, however, the researcher decided not to exclude these papers from being reviewed by the bespoke analytic framework. This was because the inclusion of these served to illustrate that the existing evidence base is both limited and undefined, so the researcher did not consider that excluding these papers was justified. The data extraction table (paper 1, Table 1), clearly identifies the rating of the studies so as to make clear which of them also received a rating of ‘high’ quality reporting of observation. As such, the limited pool of evidence identified in the SLR successfully identified that EPs use contextual observation across the range of EP role functions (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010): consultation, assessment, intervention, training and research. It began to communicate how this is done, although with limited clarity due to the fragmented inclusion of details of how contextual observation is carried out. The bespoke analytic framework was enhanced by combining the two approaches used to analyse the studies: the bespoke analytic framework exemplifies practice-informed knowledge and provides a structure for looking at what EPs do in contextual observation, and the adapted evaluative checklist exemplifies academic knowledge and provides a structure for looking at how well EPs do those things. The SLR therefore provides an initial contribution to the evidence base through its findings and through its presentation of ‘the analytic framework’.

Paper 1 identified that the evidence base around contextual observation is limited in its volume, as well its content. Whilst it provided some indication of why and how EPs carry out contextual observation, there was rationale for carrying out further practice-based research with practising EPs to address the following research questions: 1) Why do EPs
carry out contextual observation? And, 2) How do EPs carry out contextual observation in their practice? These research questions were addressed through the empirical research presented in Paper 2.

In Paper 2, the analytic framework developed through the process of the SLR was used as an interview schedule to carry out six semi-structured interviews with EPs practicing across four educational psychology services (EPSs) in the North West. The interviews were analysed using Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clark, 2006) which identified that the EPs had a lot in common in how they carried out contextual observation, with little variance reported between practice, although there was found to be some variance within individual EP practice. The discussion highlights some interesting ethical and philosophical questions around EPs’ decisions to tell or not to tell a C/YP that they are being observed, as well as highlights areas for future research. The researcher used the themes to make some revisions to the analytic framework so that it reflected the practice based evidence of the research, and is presented as initial Contextual Observation Guidelines (COG). It is intended that the COG will be useful to EPs in practice and to TEPs on doctoral training programmes, in order that a robust evidence base can be used to communicate why and how contextual observation is carried out.

Finally, paper 3 reviewed the concepts of evidence-based practice (EBP) and practice based evidence (PBE) within the context of educational psychology, and also considered how research evidence can be effectively disseminated. As dissemination is “a planned process” (Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan & Nazareth, 2010, p.2) it also provided space for the researcher to develop a detailed dissemination strategy. This targets specific audiences through the methods chosen, in order to achieve dissemination for the purposes of awareness, understanding and action (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000). It also describes the
scope that exists for future research commissioning which would continue the momentum of research in this area of EP practice.

**Rationale for engagement**

The researcher first became aware of this research opportunity through The University of Manchester’s research commissioning process. The researcher’s interest was captured by the communication in the original pitching of the commission that very little evidence was available about this area of practice other than to document that it is a frequently used assessment tool. Initial conversations at the university around the scope for this research meant that the researcher considered it an exciting opportunity to use her doctoral research to make a significant contribution to the profession.

**Positioning for data access**

The research was undertaken with six qualified EPs based in four EPSs in the North West of England. The participants were recruited using purposive and convenience sampling, with the researcher using her contacts with Principal EPs in services where she had had contact during the training programme. The participants all volunteered to take part by contacting the researcher after the participant information document had been distributed in their services, and then signing the consent form. As such, the researcher was confident that all of the participants were interested in the topic, and willing to engage thoroughly in the interview process.

**Ethical Issues**

The research followed the standards outlined in Manchester University’s Ethical Practice Policy and Guidance (Appendix 1). The data from transcribed interviews with participants were stored securely on an encrypted data stick, which only the researcher had access to.
Informed consent was given by all of the participants, and their right to withdraw was made explicit (Appendices 2 & 3).

The researcher considered the safety, comfort and privacy of the participants carefully by making arrangements in advance of the interviews. For example, the interviews were all held at the participants’ respective EPSs for their convenience, and the researcher contacted the relevant administrative team in advance to book a room in which to hold the interview.

Evaluation of epistemological, ontological and axiological stances

Ontology is the branch of philosophy that is concerned with reality and the nature of existence. Ontology answers the question “what is the form and nature of reality?” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 108), and there exists a continuum of positions. On the one hand, realists believe there is only one reality, or truth, which exists independently of an individual’s theories or perceptions. On the other hand, relativists believe there is no absolute truth, and accept that there may be multiple accounts and interpretations (Maxwell, 2012).

Epistemology is the branch of philosophy concerned with how an individual understands and makes sense of reality. It is interested in “the very bases of knowledge- its nature and forms, how it can be acquired, and how communicated to other human beings” (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p.7). A continuum of positions exists: Positivism, on the one hand, believes that there is one true reality, and it can be measured using quantitative experimental designs. It is a position that holds that the goal of knowledge is simply to describe the phenomena that we experience, and that science is concerned only with what is observable and measurable. In a positivist view of the world, science was seen as the way to get at truth, to understand the world well enough so that we might predict and control it.
Critics of positivism, for example Chalmers (1982) and Outhwaite (1987), say that this position overlooks the role and effects of perspective. In contrast, relativism is a social and scientific position that discards the objectivity and measurability of positivism and argues instead for a reality as represented through the eyes of the participants (Kelly, 2008).

‘Critical Realism’ is a form of post-positivism, and represents an integration of positivist and relativist positions (Mingers, Mutch & Willcocks, 2013). This is the position with which this research is aligned. As such, the research retains ontological realism, believing that there is a world that exists independently of our perceptions, theories and constructions, reflected through the use of the analytic framework across the research. It also accepts a form of epistemological constructivism and relativism, acknowledging that individuals' understanding of the world is inevitably a construction from their own perspectives and standpoints, reflected through the qualitative, semi-structured interviews and inductive analysis of the data.

In critical realism, relativist epistemology implies that knowledge development focuses on explanation rather than prediction (Mingers et al., 2013); as the social phenomenon is complex, it is impossible to make precise predictions in a given context (Mingers et al., 2013). This description of the critical realist position provides philosophical orientation for the development of the initial COG (Paper 2), and its design.

For example, the prompts are purposely non-directive. This reflects the variance identified through the data analysis, and acknowledges that EPs may have different considerations depending on the individual context of their work, and their individual values and philosophical positions. The analysis was kept close to the data to allow for the participants’ contributions to be valued and accurately captured, identifying both commonalities and variances across the data. It was also found that there were many
aspects to the process of observation that were similar across the data. This acknowledges that there is a shared understanding between EPs and constructs which exist independently of individual perceptions, such as ethics, reliability and validity for example. As EPs may be asked to account for these to demonstrate the integrity of their professional practice, being able to comment on these constructs as part of a professional conversation is important, and is facilitated through the availability of the initial COG. This is also directly related to the researcher’s axiology, the “values and beliefs” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 3) that she holds, and what she considers to be intrinsically worthwhile. The researcher holds a sense of commitment to carry out research that was commissioned through the university in response to a shared understanding amongst practising EPs of the need for research in the area of contextual observation. As such, her belief that there is value in this work for the purpose of the profession has driven a thorough and committed approach.
References


Paper One: A Systematic Review of Research Evidence Reporting Educational Psychologists’ Use of Contextual Observation in Practice

Prepared in accordance with the author guidelines for Educational Psychology in Practice (Appendix 4).
Abstract

Considering the apparent centrality of contextual observation within educational psychologists’ (EPs’) daily practice, it is argued here that some level of rigour should be available through review of relevant research and self-evaluation, so that contextual observation meets the professional requirement for evidence-based practice (Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016). This systematic literature review used an adapted critical evaluation checklist and a bespoke analytic framework for contextual observation created by the researcher and the research project supervisory team, to systemically identify and critically evaluate the research evidence of EPs’ use of contextual observation within practice. Across the studies, there were inconsistencies around which details of contextual observation were reported, which makes it difficult for the process of contextual observation to be reliably replicated across EP practice or to be communicated clearly to new entrants to the profession. The researcher enhanced the bespoke analytic framework by incorporating features of the adapted evaluative checklist to produce an analytic framework for contextual observation which combines academic knowledge with practice-informed knowledge. This potentially provides a contribution to the evidence base for EP use of contextual observation, as well as laying a foundation for building an understanding of its process. Further research can be directed towards the development of guidelines for best practice of contextual observation in order to produce an evidence-based tool for use across the profession.

Keywords: educational psychologists, educational psychology practice, observation, contextual observation, assessment.

Introduction

Contextual observation in educational psychology practice

Reconstructing Educational Psychology (Gillham, 1978) was published as a key text 41 years ago. This ‘landmark’ work drew together contemporary perspectives from leading
practitioners and academics. It marked a paradigm shift for educational psychology, set within a postmodern/social constructionist/phenomenological epistemology that challenged approaches used to assess ‘child difficulties’, and the relevance of psychometric assessment in particular. It moved the focus on to methods which worked with the child’s environment and school systems, using project work and research, to promote an interactionist perspective on child development within school and home ‘systems’.

In the 2000s, evidence-based practice encouraged educational psychologists (EPs) to account for the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness (Frederickson, 2002) of their work. It also further supported the development of systemic models of professional practice and consultation across a wide range of role functions. Fallon, Woods, and Rooney (2010, p. 4) describe the EPs’ role in terms of “utilising psychological skills, knowledge and understanding through the functions of consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training, at organisational, group or individual level across educational, community and care settings, with a variety of role partners”.

From preliminary research (Farook, 2018) and the research project supervisory team’s many years of EP practice, it is known that observation is used to gather information across all of the role functions (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). It is one of a “variety of tools, techniques and approaches” that a psychological assessment should involve (BPS, 2002, p. 26). It was found that observation may be considered as one part in a wider information gathering process set within a framework for practice, placing presented issues or concerns in context. For the purpose of this study, the term contextual observation is used. A definition is offered which positions contextual observation as a rigorous tool for practice:

*Contextual observation is used by EPs as an information gathering method that occurs in vivo or by video capture and may be used across the range of role functions.*
There is, however, a question around how this contextually sensitive work is consistently operationalised and utilised in the absence of any guidelines. Given the centrality of contextual observation within EPs’ daily practice, it is argued that some level of rigour around contextual observation should be available, developed through review of relevant research and self-evaluation, so that contextual observation meets the professional requirement for evidence-based practice (HCPC, 2016).

Professional requirement for evidence-based practice and rationale of the current review

Considering the central position of contextual observation in EP practice, it is surprising that some important aspects of the process around it are not generally known, for example, when and why contextual observation is used, when and why it may be more or less structured, how it is recorded, analysed and utilised. This knowledge gap leaves practitioners, and their professional training programmes, less able to effectively self-evaluate practice in this area, and potentially open to challenge that their practice falls below best practice standards.

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency (SoPs) require EPs to emerge from professional training able to demonstrate a logical and systematic approach to problem solving (HCPC, 2016, SoP 14.12). Broad professional practice frameworks have become embedded within practice, such as the Monsen Problem-Solving Framework (1998), which prompt EPs to gather information using a variety of assessment tools. There is, however, very little research around EPs’ use of specific assessment, or evaluation skills, including contextual observation, to support the teaching, practice and development of such skills in a systematic way. Some 15 years ago, Woods and Farrell (2006) surveyed the range of EP assessment practices and provided a starting point for the development of knowledge around EP assessment. Its
sustained relevance demonstrates the importance of continuing this work within the current context.

Crombie, Sullivan, Walker and Warnock (2014) identify literature relating to unconscious professional practice, which may explain to some extent why there is very little peer-reviewed research about EPs’ use of contextual observation. The paper set out to identify what was unconscious about the practice of professionals working in a school, in order to make the complexity of professional competence more explicit. This is directly transferable to the process of contextual observation. This is because without guidelines to capture the complexity of the process around contextual observation, the transference of skills and knowledge around it relies on processes learnt ‘experientially’, which does not sit easily with the evidence-based practice requirement for ‘accountability’.

Related to this, Ahrenkiel, Schmidt, Nielsen, Sommer and Warring (2013) refer to “unnoticed professional competence” (p. 4) referring to the individual aspects of professional practice which are not considered separately as individually important aspects of a whole process. Within contextual observation, this translates as all of the considerations around its process that individual EPs give attention to, but that are not necessarily recorded. This is because there is an assumption that the process is understood by all those who use it, prompting less urgency in practitioners’ reporting of its details. In the absence of an overarching approach that captures all of these ‘unnoticed’ elements of contextual observation, the effect may be that practice is based on custom and practice of individual psychologists being conveyed through professional conversations or shadowing experiences.

As such, contextual observation as an information gathering tool within a problem solving approach is not currently embedded within an evidence base. This makes it difficult for the process to be defended as consistent and rigorous, or developed and improved, because there is not yet an explicitly agreed standard of best or effective practice from which to work.
The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2017) professional practice guidelines set out that “research provides the evidence base for the practice of psychology” (p.9). They also make specific reference to the “application of systematic observation” (p. 9), providing further rationale for an urgent contribution to the evidence base in this area of practice.

5 Aims of the current review

Discussions between representatives of regional Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) which offer practice placements for trainee EPs, and the respective regional English university provider of EP training, identified a valuable opportunity for research in this area to be commissioned. The aim of the current systematic literature review is to:

- Systematically identify and critically evaluate research evidence of EPs’ use of contextual observation;
- Propose an initial analytic framework for contextual observation;
- Identify implications for further research needed for the development of the analytic framework

Setting these three aims rather than having specific research questions is congruent with the aim of this review, which is to explore the literature relating to EP use of contextual observation in practice. Gough, Thomas and Oliver (2013) say that the aim of a review can influence the approach taken, and as such, this review is broadly configurative and exploratory in nature, with the overarching aim of informing specific research questions for a future piece or elated empirical research. Although the review used the bespoke analytic framework to analyse the papers, it was not wholly aggregative because there was little emphasis on assessing the impact, fidelity or impact of observation, and increased emphasis on exploring how and why observation is carried out.
Method of the review

Literature search strategy and review process

Stage One

The Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher, Liberati, Tetzlaff, Altman, & Prisma Group, 2009) was used to identify and select appropriate papers for the review. Electronic searches of journal titles, abstracts and keywords were undertaken between December 2017 and February 2018. The following databases were systematically searched for relevant studies: Psych Info, Education Resources Information Centre, Google Scholar and the Manchester Online library. The following search terms: observation AND psycholog* AND education* AND practice, were used. This search however produced only seven potentially relevant papers, all of which were cited in peer reviewed journals. When the search was expanded to include full texts, the number of papers returned was too great to manage with limited time and resources, and so an alternative approach was taken.

Stage Two

As the number of papers identified through the database search was too great to manage, it was decided that relevant research would be more reliably identified through a comprehensive hand-search of the most relevant journals. These were selected by consulting a reference group with academic and practitioner educational psychology roles across university and service settings. Reference group members were asked about their preferences for reading and publishing practice-based educational psychology research. This scoping exercise identified six journal titles: Educational Psychology in Practice, British Journal of Educational Psychology, Educational and Child Psychology, Psychology in the Schools, School Psychology International, Pastoral Care in Education. Searching period was a ten year
period covering 2007-2017 initially. This was updated with subsequent searches for new research in 2018 to identify later published research before the completion of this review.

Reading titles and abstracts identified the seven papers produced through the database search in Stage One, as well as nine further papers. The 16 papers identified through Stages One and Two searches were then read to ensure they met the following inclusion criteria.

1. published between 2007-2018 at the time of the search;
2. written in English;
3. focus on the empirical practice of EPs or school psychologists (SPs);
4. make specific reference to the use of observation carried out by an EP or SP;
5. subjected to peer review in an academic journal.

No papers needed to be excluded, as they all met the inclusion criteria.

**Data classification.** Firstly, the papers were subjected to review using methodological quality evaluation criteria which were adapted by the researcher and the research project supervisory team to fit the focus of the review, that being educational psychologists’ use of observation (‘the adapted quality evaluation checklist’, Appendix 5). As most of the identified papers were reporting other assessment methods, as well as observation, it was difficult to make a meaningful evaluation of the quality of the research as a whole. To afford the researchers greater precision relating to the focus, the checklist used an adapted version of Gough’s (2007) Weights of Evidence (WoE) framework, combining WoE B and C with WoE A.

The adapted quality evaluation checklist amalgamated qualitative and quantitative investigation research appraisal criteria from the previously widely used University of Manchester review frameworks for qualitative and quantitative evaluation/investigation research 2017 and 2018 respectively (cf. Bond, Woods, Humphrey, Symes, & Green, 2013; Law & Woods, 2018; Sedgwick & Stothard, 2019). Distinctions were made for quantitative or
1 qualitative-specific criteria, to reflect observation data collected through quantitative or
2 qualitative approaches. Criteria applicable to both quantitative and qualitative observations
3 include: appropriate utilisation of observation within research design; clear use of observation
4 protocols; observation measures have demonstrable
5 credibility/validity/trustworthiness/reliability; well executed data collection using
6 observations. Criteria specific to qualitative observations include: analysis close to the
7 observation data; negative case analysis from observation. Criteria specific to quantitative
8 observations include: appropriate statistical analyses of observation data-descriptive or
9 inferential; multi-level, inter-group, individual and/or time trends identified from observation.
10 This process crafted the single generic observation critical evaluation appraisal checklist with
11 which the 16 studies were examined. Each reporting of observation was able to achieve a
12 score of 0-21 (some criteria carrying two points) regardless of whether the observation was
13 qualitative or quantitative.
14 Each paper was read at least twice, and a 25% sample (four papers) was read and
15 coded by the research project supervisory team, with moderation discussions of each to reach
16 a consensus view on the quality of methodology and to ensure consistent interpretation and
17 application of the quality criteria. This process indicated a high level of post-discussion
18 agreement (average inter-coder agreement of 99%).
19 To compare scores fairly, reports of observation which scored 0-9 points were
20 deemed to be low quality, those which scored 9.5-14 were defined as being medium quality,
21 whilst more than 14 points earned a high-quality judgement. Where the reporting of the
22 observation was identified as low quality, these studies were not excluded from the analysis
23 because the quality of reporting of observation is acknowledged to be an interesting finding in
24 its own right.
Data extraction and synthesis. 16 papers were included in the final review. The researcher read each paper at least twice, and highlighted salient content to populate each category presented in Table 1.

To produce a synthesis of findings across the use of contextual observation, the studies were systematically analysed using the adapted quality evaluation checklist. Following this, the studies were further analysed using a bespoke overarching 11-part framework (‘the bespoke analytic framework’, Appendix 6). The bespoke analytic framework was created in partnership with the research project supervisory team, in response to identifying that there was not a central frame of reference setting out what might be considered as part of best practice contextual observation. The process involved a discussion from a practice point of view, about what an EP would consider at every stage of the contextual observation process, beginning with contracting, then what might be considered during the contextual observation, and then what might be considered following it. The 11 categories reflect these stages, and the prompts within each area were intended to draw out further detail in relation to each of those areas. The prompts are intentionally very open and exploratory, which reflects the exploratory nature of the study. Materials relating to other professions which also use observation, such as teaching, were not drawn upon because the researcher remained determined to ground this research in educational psychology and begin to address the same gap identified by Speed (2019). An explicit mechanism for managing the initial research project supervisory team’s discussion was not used, as its assembly was co-ordinated opportunistically. The group linked directly to the commission of the research, as the EP who pitched the commission was part of that group from the beginning. As momentum of the research began, the group moved through a process from commissioning, to partnership and collaboration. It has been considered that the group could have been constituted more broadly and perhaps externally using a structured approach such as a focus group, and that this may have afforded some
1 benefits. Amongst these, is that collaboration with a range of Principal EPs as well as other
2 initial training institutions may have generated greater breadth and depth of discussion
3 informed by a wider range of experience. Future research could draw on this reflection and
4 use a more structured approach with a wider scope of participants. The contribution that the
5 discussion group made, however, was tested and validated through the development of a
6 useful bespoke analytic framework that fulfilled the initial aim of the research which was to
7 critically evaluate the papers identified through a hand search of the literature.

8 This second phase in the analysis, using the bespoke analytic framework,
9 acknowledges that the studies exemplify the core functions of the EP role, and as such
10 require psychological skills, knowledge and understanding to be explicitly communicated
11 through the use of such a framework. The bespoke analytic framework makes explicit the
12 skills, knowledge and understanding behind the process of observation, as identified by a
13 group of academics and practising EPs.
Table 1

Data Extraction Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Authors and Research Context</th>
<th>Aim of Study</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Participants in Observation</th>
<th>What was the Focus and Why?</th>
<th>How was the Observation Carried Out?</th>
<th>Contribution of the Observation to the Research Aim</th>
<th>Quality Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vivash, Dockrell and Francis, 2018. Northamptonshire UK. Six mainstream primary school KS1 classrooms; Professionals involved with SLCN.</td>
<td>To identify gaps between professional perspectives and practice around how SLCN is supported in schools.</td>
<td>Observation. Questionnaires.</td>
<td>KS1 classroom, staff and children. Classroom environments and interactions. How is SLCN provided for in practice?</td>
<td>Communicating and Supporting Classroom Observation Tool (Dockrell, Bakapoulou, Law, Spencer and Lindsay 2012).</td>
<td>Part Contribution. Provided a sample of how SLCN provision is realised in practice, following professionals’ views around how it should look.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Burt and Stringer, 2018. Hampshire, UK.</td>
<td>To evaluate the effect PACE maths programme has on staff practice and</td>
<td>Observation. Focus Group.</td>
<td>Two teachers. Two Learning Support Assistants. PACE maths sessions. Update and improve the</td>
<td>Direct observation using a schedule designed by first author based on</td>
<td>Part contribution. Observation identified which aspects</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 3 and Year 5 pupils in one mainstream school; PACE maths approach.</td>
<td>children’s participation in learning; to improve effectiveness.</td>
<td>PACE maths programme.</td>
<td>key elements of the programme.</td>
<td>of the programme were being used and how effectively to allow the programme to be adapted for the future.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Regan and Howe, 2017. Telford, UK University of Birmingham.</td>
<td>Six year old boy in a mainstream primary school; Video Self Modelling (VSM) intervention.</td>
<td>To measure impact of VSM in modifying one pupil’s challenging behaviour.</td>
<td>Videoed observations.</td>
<td>One six year old boy.</td>
<td>Identified target behaviours to provide baseline data. Provide material for the VSM intervention and directly observe measurable changes post intervention.</td>
<td>Event-based time sampling; Momentary time sampling.</td>
<td>Whole contribution. Observation alone provided all data for the findings of the study.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraser, 2017. Ellon, UK. A mainstream primary school with embedded</td>
<td>To explore growth mind set principles in a primary school.</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews. Focus groups. Observations in classrooms.</td>
<td>Three class groups of children in morning and afternoon lessons.</td>
<td>Classroom environments, behaviour and approaches to learning. Triangulate data obtained</td>
<td>Narrative style.</td>
<td>Part contribution. Observation contributed to dataset which was thematically</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Growth Mindset Approach</td>
<td>To evaluate Theraplay as an intervention for LAC.</td>
<td>Consultation with staff. Observation. Pre and Post intervention Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire. Interviews</td>
<td>20 Looked After Children. Participants in the classroom. Ascertain level of need to inform allocation to research group. Type of observation not discussed.</td>
<td>Analysed to provide themes pertinent to the research aim.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Francis, Bennion and Humrich, 2017. Leicester, UK. Looked After Children (LAC) from 9 schools, over 8 months.</td>
<td>To generate information about the nature of professional practice in the school.</td>
<td>Observation. Vignettes. Consultations with parents. Staff consultations.</td>
<td>15 children and young people with severe and complex learning difficulties/disabilities and their teaching/support staff.</td>
<td>Part contribution. Classroom observations described as forming one method of initial assessment. No further information provided thereafter.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Crombie, Sullivan, Walker and Warnock, 2014. Blackburn, UK. 3-year research project at a special school.</td>
<td>To generate information about the nature of professional practice in the school.</td>
<td>Observation. Vignettes. Consultations with parents. Staff consultations.</td>
<td>Individual children and staff in classrooms, around school, visits to local area. Behaviour of participants across contexts.</td>
<td>Narrative Observation. Engagement Profiles. Part contribution. Identified examples of good practice and informed the contexts of the vignettes as staff identified examples of this good practice in</td>
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<tr>
<td>Colville, 2013</td>
<td>To gain the views of stakeholders of strengths-based approaches to multi-agency meetings (SBMAs), and the impact of the approach in the Local Authority.</td>
<td>Observation of meetings. Interviews Focus Groups Analysis of documentary data.</td>
<td>Stakeholders of SBMAs in the Local Authority.</td>
<td>SBMAs Inform the researcher in gaining the views of stakeholders.</td>
<td>Type of observation not discussed: 'qualitative data collected' (Colville, 2013).</td>
<td>Part contribution</td>
<td>Whole data set relating to views of stakeholders and impact of SBMAs, including observation data analysed using template analysis.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brown, Powell and Clark, 2012. Aberdeen, UK. Working on What Works (WOWW) approach.</td>
<td>Parental Confidence Rating Scale. End of Pilot Questionnaire.</td>
<td>To improve the behaviour and relationships through collaborative working with school staff and pupils. Target Monitoring and Evaluation form (‘TME’, adapted from Dunsmuir, Brown, Iyadurai, &amp; Monsen, 2009). Observation of participant children. Consultation with staff and pupils.</td>
<td>Class group of 25 children (aged 5-6 years). Participants in the classroom. Stage 1: positive things to feedback to pupils. Stage 2: Goals set by children themselves actively looked for during observation period. To improve classroom behaviour and relationships. ‘An observation schedule’: child’s name noted alongside space for the observation, and space to indicate which target was being met at the time of the observation.</td>
<td>Part contribution. Data from observation fed back to pupils and class teacher, and used to set and scale new targets for each period of observations.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Brown and Kennedy 2011. Surrey, UK.</td>
<td>To support teachers and pupils develop their use of dialogue to involve</td>
<td>Discussion groups. Video recorded interactive</td>
<td>Six teachers and their class group children. Teachers’ whole class teaching. Professional development; Videos coded for ‘talk types’ as identified through discussion</td>
<td>Majority contribution. Videoed classroom interactions</td>
<td>High</td>
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<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Objective</td>
<td>Methodology</td>
<td>Findings</td>
<td>Contribution</td>
<td>Rating</td>
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<td>Swinson, 2010. Area not specified. UK. One 11-18 comprehensive school.</td>
<td>To help revise and improve school’s behaviour policy and practice.</td>
<td>Staff and class meetings (consultations) Questionnaires. Classroom Observations.</td>
<td>Class group children (year 9, aged 13-14yrs) before and after policy improvements in the research school. Pupil behaviour and teacher interactions. Record incidents of disruptive behaviour; positive and negative statements made by teachers; on-task rates.</td>
<td>Observation Schedule devised for the study based on behaviours used by Grey and Sime 1988. Part Contribution Observation provided a comparison of various classroom behaviours before and after new behaviour policy.</td>
<td>Medium</td>
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<tr>
<td>Day, 2010. Essex, UK.</td>
<td>To investigate how a sample of children experience day care in Children’s Centres, what they enjoy, and how experiences can be improved for other children.</td>
<td>Age appropriate pupil voice gathering tools. Interviews. Observation.</td>
<td>Three boys and three girls with age range spanning 20 months to 4 years.</td>
<td>Behaviour and interactions in the nursery environment. Describe what the children were doing and saying; noises, facial expression and body language.</td>
<td>Observation schedule developed for the study.</td>
<td>Part contribution. Observations were coded and contributed to the Mosaic Approach of data collection (Clark &amp; Moss, 2001).</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study</td>
<td>Methodology and Findings</td>
<td>Behaviour Management</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sanders, 2007</td>
<td>To investigate whether children in nurture groups make significant social and emotional gains after attending a group.</td>
<td>Staff and pupil interviews. Pupils attending KS1 nurture group children (aged 4-7yrs) across 3 schools. Nurture group pupils during play and academic tasks. Concentration, engagement and interactions.</td>
<td>Naturalistic observations. Part contribution. Naturalistic observations suggested concentration, engagement and interactions improved.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hampshire, UK</td>
<td>3 schools with nurture groups for KS1, and one comparison school without a nurture group.</td>
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<td>Swinson &amp; Knight, 2007</td>
<td>To investigate patterns of teacher feedback towards pupils designated as having behaviour problems and the rest of the class.</td>
<td>Observation. 24 pupils designated as regularly displaying challenging behaviour (18 boys and six girls in Year 8). Pupil on-task and off-task behaviour; Teacher feedback. Is there a correlation between feedback directed to individuals and individual pupil behaviour?</td>
<td>Observation Schedule (The Pupil Behaviour Schedule, Jolly &amp; McNamara, 1992). Whole contribution. High</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Findings

The 16 studies all exemplify EPs’ use of contextual observation for the overarching purpose of research, although they have been individually identified as having a focus which fits into the other four core functions of the role of the EP (assessment, consultation, intervention and training). All studies were carried out in the UK.

Overview of findings using the adapted quality evaluation checklist

Presented first is an overview of the findings following an analysis of the studies that received a ‘high quality’ rating for their reporting of observation (Table 1). The completed individual adapted quality evaluation checklists for the studies that received a ‘high’ rating for the methodological quality of the reporting of observation were compared across categories to identify which categories were most commonly omitted. This provides an understanding of which details relating to contextual observation are not clearly described by the available literature. The common omissions in the high rated studies were: no, or little, information regarding negative case analysis for qualitative observations (Day, 2010; Regan & Howe, 2017); no, or little, information regarding researcher-participant negotiation of observation and process (Apter et al., 2010; Rait, 2012; Swinson & Knight, 2007); incomprehensiveness of observation documentation (Brown & Kennedy, 2011; Day, 2010; Swinson & Knight, 2007); no, or little, evidence of attention to relevant ethical procedures and issues around observation (Day, 2010; Swinson & Knight, 2007).

Where a study scored 0 or ½ a point, it was considered that there was not sufficient information about that category in the reporting. Where a study scored 1 or 2 points, there was considered to be sufficient information to communicate the part of the process comprehensively.
Overview of findings using the bespoke analytic framework

Presented next is an overview of the findings following analysis of all of the studies in relation to the bespoke analytic framework. All of the studies used the term ‘observation(s)’. Of the studies which used video as a medium through which to observe, one study referred to ‘video observation’ (Rait, 2012). Two studies did not refer to ‘video’ when describing the type of observation (Brown & Kennedy, 2011; Regan & Howe, 2017). Six studies used the term ‘schedule’ (Apter et al., 2010; Burt & Stringer 2018; Day, 2010; Hayes et al., 2007; Regan & Howe, 2017; Swinson, 2010). One referred to a ‘measure’ (Rait, 2012) and one study used the term ‘observation tool’ (Vivash et al. 2018). Three studies used specific terms to describe the type of observation carried out: Sanders et al. (2007) used ‘naturalistic observation’, Crombie et al. (2014) and Fraser (2017) both used ‘narrative observation’.

It was found that the purposes of the observations all fell within the range of practices that underpin the role of the EP, as identified by Fallon, Woods and Rooney (2010): research (Apter, Arnold & Swinson 2010; Day, 2010; Colville, 2013; Crombie, Sullivan, Walker & Warnock 2014; Fraser, 2017; Sanders, 2007; Vivash, Dockrell & Francis 2018), training (Burt & Stringer, 2018; Brown & Kennedy, 2011), intervention (Frances, Bennion & Humrich, 2017; Rait, 2012; Regan & Howe, 2017) and consultation (Hayes, 2007; Swinson, 2010). In relation to the function of -assessment, it was found that observation was used for the purpose of identifying strengths and areas for development prior to training being delivered (Burt and Stringer, 2018), and to identify allocation to intervention groups (Francis, Bennion & Humrich, 2017) both within a research context.

It was also found across the studies that the purpose of observation was to provide contextual evidence about the topic or issue being addressed by the EPs’ involvement. For example, Burt and Stringer (2018) supported a school to evaluate a maths programme, and
used observation to identify which aspects were working or needed developing. Brown and Kennedy (2011, p. 382) described their videoed observations as “observations of interactive behaviour”. Vivash, Dockrell and Francis (2018) used observation to provide in-context information about how SLCN is actually provided for in classroom environments and interactions, rather than relying on questionnaires alone. Table 1 provides further examples across all 16 studies of observation being used for the purpose of generating contextualised information relating to the focus of the EP involvement.

Fraser (2017, p. 650) refers specifically to the purpose of observation in the study, describing it as being “undertaken to triangulate the data through staff interviews and focus groups”. Observation was a part contribution, with other data collection methods also contributing to the data set, in 14 studies.

The studies discussed various elements of the process prior to an observation being carried out. In the bespoke analytic framework contracting describes the phase before consent for the observation has been obtained, and incorporates explaining the purpose of the observation to the participants, and ascertaining their feelings towards it. It was found that Hayes et al. (2007) gained an understanding of the attitude of participants to the research as a whole, which incorporated observation into its methodology. Table 1 demonstrates that the purpose of the observations was clear across the studies, however, how this is communicated to participants and to what extent there is dialogue around how they feel about being observed was not clear in most of the studies (Sanders, 2007; Day, 2010 Rait, 2012; Colville, 2013 Crombie et al.;2014 Francis et al., 2017; Fraser, 2017; Burt and Stringer 2018; Vivash et al. 2018).

In the category of ethics, the studies were considered in relation to whether they reported on obtaining consent, sensitivity and minimising harm when feeding back conclusions drawn when observation had been used. Half of the papers made reference to
obtaining consent for observation, three of these referred to ‘informed consent’ (Apter et al., 2010; Francis et al., 2017; Regan & Howe, 2017). Examples of minimising harm and showing sensitivity to participants include occasions where the participants and the observer have a shared understanding that the process is collaborative (Brown & Kennedy, 2011; Fraser, 2017) and, or, reflective. In other instances, feedback was also balanced providing opportunity to discuss areas for change as well as what was working well, and this approach was well received by the participants (Burt & Stringer, 2018).

The category of tools, in the bespoke analytic framework, considers what the observer uses when observing, such as a specific schedule. Table 1 demonstrates that the use of a schedule was the most commonly used approach to observation, with more than half of the studies citing use of one. Nine studies reported the use of an observation tool (Brown and Kennedy, 2011; Burt & Stringer, 2018; Crombie et al. 2014; Day, 2010; Hayes, 2007; Rait, 2012; Swinson, 2010; Vivash, Dockrell & Francis 2018). Three studies reported the use of a narrative style of observation (Crombie, 2014; Fraser, 2017; Sanders, 2010). Three studies reported the use of video observations (Brown & Kennedy, 2011; Rait, 2012; Regan & Howe, 2017) and two studies did not describe the type of observation used (Colville, 2013; Frances et al., 2017).

The studies were also analysed in relation to their reporting of what the EP(s) did during the time that they were in the immediate setting of the observation. This considered where the EP physically positioned themselves, and whether there was any dialogue between the observer and anyone in the room where the observation took place. The reporting of this aspect of observation was particularly sparse, with very few studies providing relevant description beyond what tools were used. Exceptions to this include Swinson and Knight (2007) who explain that the observer sat at the back of the classroom,
and began the observation when the class had settled, and Fraser (2017) who describe an uninvolved observer role.

The studies were analysed with regards to reporting the contexts in which observations were carried out. This category explores whether observations were carried out in one context, such as one classroom, or across contexts suggesting more than one place for the same purpose. It was found that, in some studies observations were made in different classes, of different pupils, but for the same overall purpose of the use of observation such as observing behaviour or on and off-task working. One study used video to record two observations of the same participant, both in the same classroom. In some studies it was not clear whether multiple sets of observation data were recorded on separate occasions in the same context or in different contexts, this was prevalent in the studies that used video recording and observation for the purpose of observing meetings as art of the research focus (Rait, 2012). There were studies where observations were reported to be carried out across contexts such as at different times of the school day (Brown et al., 2012). It was found that where observation was reported in an early years setting, the length and nature of the observation afforded the observer opportunity to observe the participants across contexts in the setting (Day, 2010). Where the observation was carried out for the purpose of observing with a narrow contextual focus such as a nurture group (Sanders, 2007) or for the purpose of assessing participants for a group or individual intervention-type (Francis et al., 2017) or for the purpose of training (Burt & Stringer, 2018), observation was in a single context relative to its purpose. Crombie et al. (2014) focused on individual children across a range of settings.

The studies were also analysed in relation to their reporting of reliability. It was identified that joint observations were carried out in two studies (Apter et al., 2010; Swinson & Knight, 2007), and four studies reported inter-rater reliability (Apter et al.,
2010; Brown et al., 2012; Rait, 2012; Swinson & Knight, 2007). Two papers referred
directly to using other data in the study to triangulate with the observation data (Brown et
al., 2012; Fraser, 2017). Five of the studies reported multiple observations of the same
group over time although by the same observer (Day, 2017; Crombie et al., 2014; Fraser,
2017; Regan & Howe, 2017; Vivash et al., 2018). How reliability was achieved was not
always clearly reported across the studies.

How the studies reported validity was also considered. Where studies reported
using an observation schedule, the items on the schedule were vis a vis the purpose of the
observation, and linked to the overall aims of the research (Apter et al. 2010; Burt &
Stringer, 2018; Hayes, 2007; Swinson & Knight, 2007; Swinson, 2010; Vivash et al.,
2018). Rait (2012) designed a video coding scale specifically for coding the video recorded
observations, this was also provided as an appendix. Brown et al. (2012) did not use a
schedule, but agreed the target behaviours which would be looked for during the
observation, during a planning meeting. For narrative and naturalistic observations, the
reported findings linked to the purpose of the observation (Fraser, 2017; Sanders, 2007).
Day (2017) reported that the data collection methods, which included observation, had
been piloted.

In relation to actions following an observation analysis focused particularly upon
content and process for feeding back. Feedback was found to be more evident in studies
where there was a narrow focus of the observation such as an individual participant,
specific observable targets, or as part of a directly reflective process to inform points for
development for individual participants. For example, three of the studies which did refer
to feedback were those using video to record the observation. These observed individual
participants, parent-child interaction, and individual teachers’ practice, (Brown &
Kennedy, 2011; Rait, 2012; Regan & Howe, 2017). One study used feedback as part of the
approach to inform training (Burt & Stringer, 2018), and one study provided feedback to pupil participants which was directly related to identified target behaviours which were being looked for during the observation (Brown et al., 2012).

The studies were also analysed as to what equipment was reported to be used during the observations. A description of equipment was not provided by most of the studies. Regan and Howe (2017) identified the video medium as a tablet computer.

**Discussion**

**Summary of findings**

Findings identified inconsistency in how much detail was included in the reporting of observation across the studies, illustrated through the inclusion of studies evaluated as having high, medium and low ratings for the quality of reporting of observation. Without comment from EPs, it cannot be assumed that the elements which were not reported were not practised, however, the absence of some areas of the bespoke analytic framework across the studies which were otherwise evaluated as high quality, renders it potentially difficult for EPs to acquire comprehensive skills, knowledge and understanding about contextual observation.

Six studies received a ‘high’ rating for their reporting of observation following application of the adapted quality evaluation checklist. These six studies all contained elements relating to eight categories of the bespoke analytic framework encompassing considerations of: Terminology (referring to ‘observation’), the purpose of the observation; what happens during the observation, reliability and validity, observation across contexts, and what occurs following an observation. Omitted considerations in relation to the bespoke analytic framework included: contracting, tools used, ethics. Identification of equipment used occurred once.
Findings also identified a continuum of contribution that observation made to data gathering in the studies, illustrated through the inclusion of studies where observation made a whole, part or majority contribution (Table 1). The prevalence of observation making a part contribution reflects triangulation where an EP may draw on other sources of information in addition to observation, to contribute to their psychological formulation (Cohen, Manion and Morisson, 2007). It also reflects what was found in the preliminary study (Farook, 2018, unpublished), and what was discussed within the research project supervisor team, that the use of observation is often one part of a wider problem solving process. There was, however, no reporting of observation being used as part of the individual assessment of a child or young person (C/YP), as might be carried out by an EP using observation as part of a consultation process in every day practice. This also contributes to the potential difficulty for EPs, particularly new entrants to the profession, to acquire comprehensive skills, knowledge and understanding about contextual observation in practice.

Implications for practice and future research

Since the search period for the literature reviewed in the current paper, there has been recent interest in EP use of observation in a professional context. Speed (2019) reported that there is very little literature relating specifically to the process of observation in EP practice. Speed (2019) also identified some of the same aspects of observation worthy of consideration that the current review also found to be unclear in the literature, (broadly and not exhaustive: defining observation within EP practice; ethics; validity and reliability; structured and unstructured tools; individual differences between EP approaches to observation). Furthermore, Speed (2019, p. 1) sets out the importance of knowing more about these things, considering that it is “frequently used”. The current review provides a timely next step by providing a means of addressing these unknowns by bringing them to
the fore through the use and development of the adapted quality evaluation checklist and
the bespoke analytic framework. This review has offered further development of
knowledge in the area of EP use of contextual observation.

A rigorous two-phase process was used to review and analyse a set of research
papers, each of which reported EP use of contextual observation. The two approaches used
were an adapted quality evaluation checklist and a bespoke analytic framework. Each
afforded its own value in its contribution: the adapted quality evaluation checklist captures
the researcher’s systematic evaluation of how clearly elements of contextual observation
are reported across research evidence reporting EPs’ use of contextual observation in
practice, and the bespoke analytic framework reflects a practitioner EP view on what
should be considered in relation to contextual observation. The researcher identified
affordance in combining the two approaches to contribute to an analytic framework (‘the
analytic framework’, Appendix 7), that incorporates academic knowledge with practice-
informed knowledge. In order to achieve this, additional prompts which reflect the
evaluative checklist were incorporated into the analytic framework (Appendix 7).

The analytic framework potentially provides a contribution to the evidence base for
EP use of contextual observation across the five core functions: research, assessment,
consultation, intervention and training, as it identifies key considerations for an EP
carrying out contextual observation, and lays a foundation for building an understanding of
its process.

To develop this into a useful tool for use across the profession, there are
opportunities for further research. It is envisaged that this may take the form of an
empirical study which uses the analytic framework in its current form as an interview
schedule to facilitate individual EPs to evaluate their day-to-day practice of contextual
observation. This would provide practice-informed evidence which could be used to
develop the analytic framework into initial best practice guidelines with application that is
transferable across the five core functions.

It is hoped that the findings from this systematic literature review, and the further
research it has set in motion, will promote consistency in EP practice, and reduce
ambiguity and opacity in communicating the skills of contextual observation. This will
allow EPs to a) emerge from professional training able to apply a logical and systematic
approach to contextual observation as part of a wider problem solving approach, and b)
develop contextual observation as part of a wider evidence-based community of practice
through further research, peer review and refinement.
References


Paper Two: An Exploration of Educational Psychologists’ use of Contextual Observation in Practice

Prepared in accordance with the author guidelines for Educational Psychology in Practice.
Abstract
Contextual observation is central within educational psychologists’ (EPs’) daily practice. In order to meet professional requirements for evidence-based practice, there should be some level of rigour to the process of contextual observation. The systematic literature review (Paper 1) used an adapted quality evaluation checklist and a bespoke analytic framework for contextual observation, created by the researcher and the research project supervisory team. These were used to systematically identify and critically evaluate the research evidence of EPs’ use of contextual observation within practice, and were subsequently combined to create ‘the analytic framework’. The analytic framework was used in the present study as an interview schedule to carry out semi-structured interviews with six EPs in one region of England to provide information about their use of contextual observation in practice. The findings from these interviews identified common practices between the EPs, as well as some variance within practice. These findings were used to enhance and revise the structure of the analytic framework to develop it as a set of initial Contextual Observation Guidelines (COG) for best practice in contextual observation. It is hoped that with further research and opportunities for refinement, the COG will promote consistency in EP contextual observation practice, and reduce ambiguity and opacity in communicating the skills of contextual observation.

Keywords: educational psychologist, educational psychology practice, observation, contextual observation, assessment, guidelines.

Introduction
In 2017, discussions between representatives of regional Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) which offer practice placements for trainee educational psychologists (TEPs), and the University of Manchester, identified a valuable opportunity for research
around EPs’ use of observation in practice. These discussions considered aspirations to teach TEPs the skills of observation more rigorously and consistently, through explicit reference to an evidence base. There was also an aspiration for EPs to have a model to reflect on and review their practice “systematically” (HCPC, 2016, p.12) using an evidence-based point of reference.

Historically, the benefits of having consistent approaches to assessment have been at the heart of frameworks such as Every Child Matters (DCFS, 2004), and the Common Assessment Framework (Children’s Workforce Development Council, 2006). Research on EP assessment (e.g. Bourke & Dharan, 2015; Heick, 2004; Woods & Farrell, 2006;) has tended to focus on what assessment methods EPs use, without providing any explanatory detail of how EPs “operationalise” them (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010). For example, The British Psychological Society (BPS, 2002) sets out ‘A Framework for Psychological Intervention and Assessment’ (Professional Practice Guidelines Division of Educational and Child Psychology, BPS, Appendix 1, 2002). This outlines what a psychological assessment involves, what purpose they serve, the principles underpinning them, and guidance on the reporting of assessment outcomes. Furthermore, the BPS framework (2002) does not provide EPs with a range of assessments from which to choose, or specific criteria to meet when employing the “variety of tools, techniques and approaches” that a psychological assessment should involve (BPS, 2002, p. 26)².

Consequently, there are variations between both individual EPs’ approaches to assessment methods, and more broadly between EPSs (Boyle & Lauchlan, 2009; Heick, 2004; Woods & Farrell, 2006). More recently, the British Psychological Society Professional Practice Guidelines (BPS, 2017) refer specifically to observation as an

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² Notably, in the area of psychological testing, the BPS (2004) has made a case for certified test use through the availability of the Educational Test Users Certificate (ETU).
assessment procedure: “the application of systematic observation and measurement of
behaviour in a range of contexts and settings” (p. 9). It does not set out a framework for
guiding the process of observation, or what ought to be considered. It is hoped that
research in this area will generate an evidence base that will, over time, promote
consistency in EP practice in relation to observation, and reduce ambiguity and opacity in
communicating the skills of observation in practice.

A preliminary focus group in a single EPS (Farook, 2018) facilitated a group of
EPs, TEPs and assistant educational psychologists to discuss their use of observation in
their practice. The participants were very aware that they had particular skills and
knowledge that were different to other professionals: “what we have is the application of
psychology” (Farook, 2018, p. 37) yet it served to draw further attention to what Fallon,
Woods and Rooney (2010) had suggested:

EPs need to emerge from initial professional training being able to articulate a
coherent view of their psychological skills set, as well as a clear view of the context
within which this can be applied for the benefit of children and young people (p.
12).

Following the preliminary study, the researcher and the research project
supervisory team met to discuss and make explicit the skills, knowledge and understanding
behind the process of observation. This discussion identified 11 appraisal categories with
prompts, relevant to professional practice in respect of the use of contextual observation.
These were presented as a bespoke analytic framework (Appendix 6), so called as it was
used to analyse a set of 16 systematically sourced papers that presented EP use of
observation in research and practice (paper 1), following systematic evaluation using an
adapted quality evaluation checklist (Appendix 5).
A principal finding from the preliminary study was that observation is used to contextualise issues identified through EP involvement, and that it is frequently used and valued by service users. The researchers and the research project supervisory team identified a need to use these findings to offer a definition of observation in educational psychology practice that captures its significance for the profession. This definition positions contextual observation as a rigorous tool for practice, and henceforth, the present study will refer to the same term:

*Contextual observation is used by EPs as an information gathering method that occurs in vivo or by video capture and may be used across the range of role functions.*

In a recent review of the literature concerning EPs’ use of observation (paper 1), the researcher systematically searched a range of academic databases and six key educational psychology journal titles, finding 16 papers that reported EPs’ use of contextual observation across a range of professional practice contexts. It was found that the ways in which contextual observation is reported in published papers is often lacking in detail, and does not allow for a comprehensive understanding of the complexity of the process of observation (cf. Speed, 2019). From this, the systematic literature review (paper 1) concluded that notwithstanding an available wealth of practitioner expertise, the scientific evidence base that EP training providers are able to draw upon in order to inform the profession-specific teaching of contextual observation skills to TEPs is fragmented and inadequate.

There has been recent interest in EPs’ use of contextual observation in a professional context. On the basis of her experiences as a TEP, Speed (2019, p.1) evaluates the use of observation within the process of psychological assessments and some of the issues arising, in particular: legal and ethical considerations, validity and reliability,
observation techniques, and the differences between individual EPs’ approaches to
observation. Speed’s (2019) discussion provides an indication that there is a curiosity
within the profession about how others are approaching observation in their practice, and a
desire to marshal some of its variance, offering practice review and reflection in a research
forum, and presenting it in a way that allows for observation to be effectively taught and
evaluated from a starting point of a clear evidence base.

This research developed the analytic framework into useful initial guidelines for
best practice of contextual observation. This was achieved by using the prompts from the
analytic framework as semi-structured interview questions for EPs (Appendix 8). The
interviews facilitated EPs to reflect on their practice in relation to each of the 11 areas of
the analytic framework. Findings provide an illustration of the approaches individual EPs
have to each of the areas. It was the intention to capture variance in practice,
communicating why and how EPs carry out contextual observation, in a way that is
transparent. The present research examines this articulation of specific skills in relation to
EPs’ uses and methods of observation, and aims to answer the following research
questions:

1) Why do EPs carry out contextual observation?
2) How do EPs carry out contextual observation in their practice?

Method

Design and participant recruitment

This study employed an in-depth survey utilising semi-structured interviews
(Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007; Kvale, 2008). Purposive and convenience methods
were used to recruit a sample of six EPs across four EPSs in the North West of England.
To contextualise analysis of data and enhance credibility, the researchers considered the
following participant background factors: participant initial professional training institution, year of initial professional training, number of completed years in practice, current role, EPS region (Table 2).

Table 2

Participant Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EP</th>
<th>Training provider</th>
<th>Professional training</th>
<th>Years in practice</th>
<th>Current role</th>
<th>EPS region</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2005-2006</td>
<td>13 years</td>
<td>Main Grade EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2006-2009</td>
<td>10 years</td>
<td>Main Grade EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>2008-2011</td>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>Senior EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2012-2015</td>
<td>4 years</td>
<td>Main Grade EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>2014-2017</td>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>Main Grade EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>2015-2018</td>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>Main Grade EP</td>
<td>North West</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data gathering methods

Phase one. The analytic framework was utilised as an interview schedule. The researcher piloted this interview schedule with a practising EP. All interviews were face-to-face, transcribed and because no amendments to the interview schedule were required, the data from the pilot interview was included in the final analysis.

Phase two. Following the pilot interview, the researcher then conducted a further five interviews with EPs to complete the dataset. These were also face-to-face, recorded and transcribed, each lasting between 48 minutes and 1 hour and 15 minutes.

Data analysis

Data were analysed using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) model as a broad guide for thematic analysis, undertaken in six stages: reading and familiarisation; coding completion
(Appendices 9a, 9b, 9c, 9d); searching for themes (Appendix 10); reviewing themes (Appendix 11) and producing a provisional thematic map (Appendix 12); defining and naming themes (Figures 1 & 2); report writing. A broadly inductive, data-driven approach was adopted allowing links between semantic themes and the data in order that the themes reflected the views and perspectives of the participants. There was also a deductive layer to the analysis by virtue of the way that the interview questions were structured, which influenced the data gathering and generation of data.

The author used a committed and rigorous approach to handling the data (Yardley, 2000). A process of constant comparative analysis applied in the generation of codes through successive interview transcripts until saturation was achieved (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The codes were then revised to identify repetition or clusters. All codes were grouped under potential themes which were reviewed and organised into two thematic maps, which illustrate the themes in relation to the research questions (Figures 1 & 2). A critique of thematic analysis is that there is the potential for researchers to privilege personal views and to ‘cherry-pick’ data in order to support themes of significance to the researchers. To minimise this, the author ensured that all coded data could be accurately represented by one of the themes.
Findings

Why do EPs Carry Out Contextual Observation?

Figure 1
Thematic map for the themes identified for the first research question

- To gather and triangulate information
- To generate and test hypotheses
- To assess C/YP’s functioning in their environment
- To get a holistic view

RQ 1
Why do EPs carry out contextual observation?

Theme 1: To gather and triangulate information.

All six EPs referred to information gathering. EP1 said that they “tend to position observation within information gathering, which may also include consultation and assessment”. The finding that contextual observation is part of an information gathering process, positions it as connected to the other sources of information, such as the referral information, consultation with school staff and parents/carers, discussion with other professionals involved with the child or young
person (C/YP) and direct work with the C/YP. It was found across the data that EPs carry out contextual observation to gather information about the C/YP’s functioning in their environment in order to be able to triangulate it with information collected before and after the contextual observation. EP5 said “I’ll never just observe a child without having some form of consultation, it’s never just a stand-alone exercise, I always have consultation either before or afterwards”, and “the interactive factors framework is something that I have used quite a bit, often afterwards to put all the information in and triangulate it and pull out the key themes” (EP5).

Using contextual observation as part of individual case work was common for all the EPs. Two EPs said that they also use contextual observation for whole classes or groups. Both EPs said that this is usually commissioned by the school with the purpose of observing class or group dynamics and interactions.

**Theme 2: To generate and test hypotheses.**

It was found that the information gathered during contextual observation helps the EP to identify exceptions to other information gathered during the involvement “it’s always looking for exceptions” (EP2). Identification of exceptions is part of a process of testing hypotheses already generated from prior information, and also generating new ones, as the EP asks ‘why?’ they are seeing something different, and then considering “so why was this different? Let’s figure this out” (EP3). Generating and testing hypotheses is linked to triangulation. EP3 explained:
what the parents and the teachers have provided you with is their overview of how
they feel the child is most of the time and with the exceptions to that, so your
information needs to feed in to see which bits match and which bits don’t and why.

The data collected with regards to contextual observation being used to generate
and test hypotheses, further illuminates the finding that contextual observation is often one
part of a broad information gathering process, and that contextual observations are planned
as an opportunity to generate and test hypotheses “I use the observation as part of [my]
assessment to start testing some of the hypotheses that may have been generated from
either the referral information or the initial consultation” (EP4).

**Theme 3: To assess the C/YP’s functioning in their environment.**

Three EPs referred specifically to ‘assessment’ when talking about
contextual observation, each describing contextual observation ‘as part’ of their
assessment. ‘Assessment’ was also used in the context of “observation towards an
EHC assessment” (EP6). With some EPs using the word ‘assess’, it was found that
all EPs use contextual observation to gather information about how the C/YP is
functioning in their environment. All the EPs gave similar examples of what they
look for when carrying out contextual observation. EP3’s response was reflected
across the data “where do the issues arise? Is it about interaction? Is it about, you
know, particular approaches and how they respond? Is it about environment and
whatever else?”

**Theme 4: To get a holistic view.**

Linking to the theme of assessing the C/YP’s functioning in their
environment and the things that EPs look for, this theme illustrates further that
contextual observation was found to be part of broad process of knowledge building in order to get “an holistic view” and an “overall look” (EP5), and “a helicopter view” (EP6). EP2 said that the reasons EPs take a holistic view is because “we are trained to look at the whole child”. The use of “trained” (EP2) illustrates that the approaches that EPs take in their contextual observations of C/YP are not by chance. EP6 felt that “something that observation gives you that is quite unique…it allows you to see all those extraneous factors around the child”.

EPs reported that they often take a broad view of the C/YP during contextual observation, before carrying out direct work with C/YP at some point afterwards. Direct work was explained to be narrower in its focus “it’s looking at everything that’s happening to this young person, before just doing more direct work, which sort of narrows it down to the child, whereas observation gives you richer information” (EP5).
How do EPs Carry Out Contextual Observation in their Practice?

Figure 2

**Thematic map for the themes and subthemes identified for the second research question**

- **Theme 1: Common practices around contextual observation**
  - Consent
    - All EPs said that they would obtain consent for being involved with a C/YP at the beginning of their involvement. All EPs mentioned parental consent, with one EP talking...
about obtaining consent for involvement directly from a young person if they were Gillick competent (EP4). Three EPs specifically mentioned written consent, with EP2 explaining that on one occasion “I had done the consultation with the parent and then still hadn’t got the actual piece of paper, so I didn’t do the observation because I need that written consent form”. EP6 said that if their involvement was for a statutory assessment, then the consent given for that assessment to go ahead was the consent for the EP to carry out the observation. The findings were not specific around whether the consent form, which is always signed at the beginning of the EP’s involvement, specifically referred to the EP potentially carrying out contextual observation, or whether it referred to a more general description of EP involvement that the parent or young person was agreeing to. Four EPs said that they have an initial consultation with parents and school staff before carrying out a contextual observation as part of non-statutory work, and the data indicates some overlap between consent and contracting in these instances, where contextual observation was discussed and agreed as a potential next step during an initial consultation with parents and school staff.

**Contracting**

The common findings were that all of the EPs contract their contextual observation, and that it involves explaining the purpose of the contextual observation, and making arrangements. All EPs said that they contracted the contextual observation before carrying it out, although there was variation as to with whom. Five EPs said that they would contract the observation during the initial consultation with whoever was present, and these EPs said that this is almost always parents, as well as staff. The findings showed that for these five EPs, contracting involved providing information about the purpose of the contextual observation, as well as making arrangements. EP3 explained clearly that they contract by saying something like:
in order to test this and to understand this, I will need to spend a bit of time seeing a
young person in this context, and make sure that I’ve got at least half an hour to
see them in this context and whatever else. So I’ll try and be quite specific about
what it is that I’m wanting and why.

EP1 said “we’ve already got written consent, but I would usually discuss the reason
why we’re going to go and do this”. One EP drew some level of distinction between
explaining to parents the purpose of the contextual observation, and making the
arrangements, although they did not say they are absolutely separate:

So with parents and carers, I generally explain what I will be doing. I would
describe what the observation would consist of but the main contracting is done with
school. I wouldn’t say that’s contracting as such, I would say that’s more kind of notifying
them about what it would look like, part of my initial contracting with staff is that I then
negotiate when the observation would take place (EP4).

*Settings and contexts*

It was found that one EP had carried out a contextual observation in a post-16
setting. One EP said that they had not carried out any contextual observation in a specialist
setting, although other EPs did not mention these. A finding across the data was that all
EPs carry out contextualised observation in early years, primary and secondary settings as
part of their day-to-day practice. EPs reported that their approach to contextual observation
across settings is very similar, although two EPs said that secondary school contextual
observation can be more difficult. This was explained to be due to the young people often
being more socially aware, as well as the movement between lessons and school staff
impacting on the validity of the contextual observation as how a young person behaves in
one lesson may be affected by factors such as their enjoyment of the subject or their
dynamic with the teacher for example. One EP said that for contextual observation in early
years settings there can be more interaction with the child than perhaps primary or
secondary settings because of children’s natural curiosity and the nature of continuous
provision within such settings.

Across these settings, two EPs said that they always carry out contextual observation
in more than one context, with the classroom and the playground being most popular. EP3
said that they,

usually try to see [the C/YP] across a couple of settings and particularly break
times because a lot of the time, regardless of the kind of hypotheses, you can see things in
unstructured settings that aren’t always present in structured ones.

EP4 also explained that they always observe in a “structured and non-structured
environment”, also citing the classroom and playground as examples of these. Four EPs
said that they thought that observing across contexts is important, although whether they
did so in practice depended on factors such as time “I think if you’ve got the capacity time-
wise to observe in different contexts, it’s really important. You can see the different
interactions coz [sic] certain lessons may be different, certain times of the day” (EP5). EP1
felt that it “depends on the need of the child. If they’ve got social difficulties, then I would
absolutely try and observe them on the playground as well”.

Reliability

A common finding was that EPs are mindful that what they see on one occasion
may not be seen in the same way on a different occasion because of the variety of factors
which could influence the C/YP and the observation setting. A common factor mentioned
across the data was the effect of the presence of the observer. One EP said that they did not
think that the presence of an EP was a unique influence; rather, the presence of anyone
would cause an observer effect. For example, EP5 said “I think any type of involvement with the child is never going to be fully reliable because you’re always having that impact on them”. When talking about reliability, all EPs referred to triangulation “informing a broader perspective which also draws information from other places” (EP3). EP6 explained how they approach reliability in contextual observation:

I try to make them as reliable as I can, through certain things, whatever the age of the child, I’d usually discuss my observation with the teacher and parents after I’d carried it out to check that the behaviours that I’ve seen are maybe typical or…or if they’re not typical sometimes things are flagged that teachers go, ‘Oh yeah, we didn’t think about that, maybe it’s this instead’.

The findings around reliability were found to overlap with those around triangulation, identification of exceptions and generating and testing hypotheses.

Validity

The responses from some EPs around validity presented an interesting consideration for the findings. On the one hand, EP6 said:

Unless it’s making the child upset and deregulated and then you’re not seeing what you want to see, then that is a useful piece of information, that your presence would do that, but it’s not maybe what you’re looking for. You’re maybe looking for something different. So that would make your observation less valid.

However, EP2 felt that whatever is observed, is an accurate snapshot of that moment in time…and it gives you the information about that moment which is…an experience that the child has had, and interactions
that the child has had and usually there are themes from that which feed into
information you’ve already got.

EP2 suggests that all information gathered during contextual observation is valid in
its own right, and triangulating it with information from other sources is vital for
ascertaining how it contributes to the EP’s psychological formulation. Broadly, the
findings indicate that validity and reliability are not mutually exclusive of each other in the
context of contextual observation, and may be directly linked to the wider interaction of
the processes around contextual observation, those being information gathering and
triangulation, identification of exceptions, and generating and testing hypotheses.

**Bias**

All EPs talked about the information that they had from the referral information,
and/or consultation leading to a certain amount of bias. EP1 said that for them, this was
“part of the consultation model” because they use contextual observation to explore the
issues that those people around the C/YP are most concerned about. This was reiterated by
other EPs, however, it was also found that what EPs look for is not always limited to
finding evidence of the presenting issues in consultation; instead they are open to seeing
things which are exceptions. EP4 explained that,

because I’ve been primed with that information I will be looking more in line with
those hypotheses, but because I think we’re trained to be scientist-practitioners, as
much as I’m looking to confirm a hypothesis, I’m also looking to disconfirm it.

In addition to information the EP has been “primed” with (EP4), another EP
explained that there are also wider considerations of bias possibly relating to knowledge
of the Local Authority and processes, the socio-economic status of an area and how these
things impact upon families and the wider school context, and that there “is always a
Four EPs talked about the need to be reflective, which involves having a conscious awareness of the bias they have, and actively looking more broadly during the contextual observation, with a thought process around “I’ve read these things, so this might impact upon how I see this’, is really important” (EP6). The impact of having this reflective thought process was found to be that the EPs actively took a holistic view.

Another finding was that there was an acknowledgment of the importance of their professional training in shaping their response to bias. Three EPs referred specifically to their experiences of EP professional training, and specific teaching around reflective practice. Although three EPs made explicit mention of training, it was a common finding across the data that EPs felt strongly that they needed to have a holistic understanding of the C/YP, through the use of contextual observation alongside other sources of information and provides further evidence that contextual observation is part of a wider process of information gathering.

Note-making and equipment

All EPs said that they write down their notes by hand. Some EPs said that they write long-hand using bullet points or “a brief few words rather than sentences” (EP3). Others write down any key things that are said, verbatim. In addition, some of the EPs create codes for certain behaviours, and use these within long-hand note-making, as part of a structured approach for an antecedent/behaviour/consequence observation (ABC observation, Dyer, 2013) for example. One EP explained that they use codes to represent aspects of a checklist without using a paper copy. Another EP said, however, that if they were using a checklist in a structured observation, they would always have a paper copy.

It was also found that most EPs write their contextual observation notes onto a
blank sheet of paper without any structured headings. Some EPs use their EPS’s blank
headed notepaper.

One EP referred to using video, in the context of Video Interactive Guidance (VIG,
Kennedy, Landor & Todd, 2011), but not as a medium for capturing contextual
observation. Video was not mentioned by any other participants.

Other than a pen and paper, the most common equipment that the EPs reported
using was a clock in the classroom, and/or a timer for structured contextual observation.

Feedback and reporting
Five out of six EPs said that they provide some feedback to the Special Educational
Needs and Disability Coordinator (SENDCo) or class teacher immediately after the
contextual observation. EP6 specifically mentioned feeding back to parents, usually the
same day. EP4 said that they would not feedback following the contextual observation,
but after they had collected any further information they felt they needed. What the EPs
feed-back includes differences between the consultation and what the EP had seen in the
contextual observation, as well as “quite practical” things they felt the teacher could try to
implement or change (EP1). Two EPs said that in addition to verbal feedback, they
specifically reported the contextual observation in written form for the school and parents.

Theme 2: Wider considerations around contextual observation
Timing of contextual observation.
All EPs said that they carry out contextual observation in every piece of work. Four
EPs said that they would carry out contextual observation after having had a consultation.
One EP said that this would be prior to any other direct work with the child. One EP
reported that sometimes they carried out observation prior to consultation with school staff
in order to aid their understanding of context during the consultation, although sometimes
they would carry it out afterwards if this was more practical in terms of arrangements. One
EP said that they were not prescriptive about where in the involvement it occurred, but
they always carried out a contextual observation.

**Ethical considerations**

All of the participants talked about ethical considerations relating to contextual
observation. The first of these is whether to tell, or not tell, the C/YP that they are being
observed. Four EPs said that they do not usually tell the C/YP that they have come to
observe them,

to promote as much objectivity as there can be within the observation given that
say the class teacher is likely to know that you’re there to observe that child… at no
point would I tell the child that I was there to observe them. (EP4)

Times when the C/YP would be informed included if the EP was going to work
directly with the C/YP after the contextual observation. Also, “children who need
advanced warning for any kind of change in their environment are quite often pre-warned
that there’s going to be either someone coming into the classroom” (EP5).

EP3 felt that all C/YP should be told,

if someone is in a position to be able to understand that concept because otherwise
you’ve got a stranger sitting behind you or in the corner of your classroom…other
young people are also probably going to be affected by it too.

One EP explained that if a young person was Gillick competent, then their
permission would always be sought prior to the contextual observation. Age appropriate
child assent to the observation was highlighted, including indirect indications through child
behaviour (e.g. seeming uncomfortable with the EP’s presence) and the increased self-consciousness of many secondary school students.

EPs also talked about where they position themselves in relation to the C/YP, in order to minimise intrusiveness. EPs explained that if another C/YP came to their attention during the contextual observation, they would, notwithstanding safeguarding concerns, inform the SENDCo as they would need parental consent to discuss the other C/YP.

All EPs said that when they first enter the setting, they do not want the C/YP to be pointed out so that they do not feel singled out. EPs 5 and 6 said that they ask a member of school staff to identify the C/YP before entering the classroom. For example, EP5 said “I say, ‘Please don’t point at the child when we get in the room or say, this one’, I ask for just some identifying feature”. EP6 felt that:

observing is real skill because you’ve got to do it without looking as though you’re focusing on one child, ‘cause [sic] you don’t want them to feel singled out, and I think that’s even more important in a secondary setting just because children tend to be quite a lot more socially aware.

Use of frameworks
‘Frameworks’ as described by the EPs were not associated with carrying out a structured observation but rather as being tools for guiding information gathering about a wide range of factors relating to the C/YP. Examples given were materials from dynamic assessment, which prompted EPs to look for how the C/YP responds to teacher input and tasks. Another example was using some of the content of the Cognitive Assessment Profile (CAP, Deutsch & Reynolds, 2010), and another was the Interactive Factors Framework (IFF, Frederickson & Cline, 2002). EP5 referred to the IFF explicitly as a psychological framework that they also used after gathering information across the involvement, to help
them “interpret that information alongside other sources”. The four areas of need within the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (DfE, 2015) were also cited as a framework, most often used in statutory work. Almost all EPs talked about having internalised frameworks such as these so that they are “embedded” (EP5) and “automatic” (EP1), with EP2 also saying “the more you do it, it’s just in your head” (EP2). One EP referred to “mental schema” (EP3). EP2 expressed that,

that’s what being an EP is, isn’t it? You…you slowly gather more and more knowledge as you do the job…and then you don’t realise you’ve got that knowledge anymore and you’re using it without knowing you’re using it.

The findings therefore identified some difference between frameworks used during contextual observation as tools to structure the gathering of the information, and those frameworks used afterwards to interpret that information.

**Structured or naturalistic**

The data identifies that ‘structured’ contextual observations were understood by most of the EPs to be quite narrow in focus, with the EP often having a specific hypothesis, often around a specific difficulty or area of difficulty. EP3 said that,

if I’ve got a particular hypothesis to test, I will usually have some more structured way of looking at that. I’d probably try to think ahead of time about what sort of behaviours I’d be expecting to see and then be able to code them.

EP4’s explanation distinguished clearly between naturalistic and structured observation “I would like to observe the child during structured and unstructured times, that’s more for my purpose of information gathering, but if I was to do a checklist in an observation, I would call that a structured observation”.

Structured contextual observation was also understood to be defined by the use of approaches such as time sampling, event sampling, ABC observation, or a checklist. Some examples of checklists provided were the Conners (3rd ed., Conners, 2008), Childhood Autism Rating Scale (Schopler, Van Bourgondien, Wellman, & Love, 2010), and specific criteria within The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (5th ed., American Psychiatric Association, 2013). It was also found that sometimes an EP may use both a naturalistic and a structured approach during the same contextual observation. EP5 recalled:

I was doing a naturalistic observation and partway through, because I was seeing similar behaviours occur, I wanted to record this in more of a structured way, so I switched to an ABC approach just so I could unpick what had been happening before and afterwards.

This finding establishes that there is a difference between naturalistic and structured approaches in their process and purpose.

**Statutory and non-statutory work**

Four of the EPs identified some differences between contextual observation carried out as part of statutory work, and non-statutory work. The common difference was that EPs have a wider focus during statutory work with four EPs talking about using the SEND Code of Practice as a framework for structuring the information that they gather. EP5 also talked about the difference being that, there’s less negotiation with school around what their hopes would be for the outcome of my involvement, and the purpose, and I’m more directive in saying...

‘I’m coming in to do an observation,’ so we’d negotiate around practical aspects like times.
On the other hand, two EPs did not feel that there was any noticeable difference, because they were still using the contextual observation to gather information in order to work towards identifying the C/YP’s needs.

**Discussion**

The EPs who took part in this study carry out contextual observation in order to gather and triangulate information from other sources, assess the C/YP’s functioning in the observation setting, and generate and test hypotheses. This is done as part of a wider process of involvement to contribute to a professional view of the C/YP. The EPs were found to have a lot in common in how they carried out contextual observation, with very little variance reported between practice. There was found to be some variance within practice. The factors which caused this were those such as whether the contextual observation was part of statutory or non-statutory work, the presenting issues of the involvement which influenced the EPs’ choice of framework guiding their information gathering, the decision to carry out a structured or naturalistic observation, as well as the age and wider understanding of the C/YP’s ecological systems; at the centre of both the common practices, and the variances, were the C/YP, and the EPs’ commitment to work in their best interests.

The findings captured that the EPs use contextual observation as part of the assessment of individual C/YP, with limited reporting of its use for group, or whole class observations, for example. This addresses the identified gap in the literature (paper 1), relating to the limited reporting of EP use of contextual observation in the individual assessment of C/YP.

Reported in the findings was that most EPs do not tell the C/YP that they will be observing them, unless they are Gillick competent, or for a reason pertaining to their social
and emotional circumstances. This presents a contrast between contextual observation and other forms of EP assessment, where a C/YP would be asked explicitly if they would like to work with the EP, and would have opportunity to withdraw consent. The reason given for not telling the C/YP why the EP is in the setting was to promote objectivity by reducing the impact of the observer’s presence, and their influence on behaviours and environments in order to see the C/YP in their most natural context. At the same time, observer effects cannot be separated from considerations of reliability and validity, and there was a little variance in the findings between EPs who felt that whatever was observed was valid, with changes to the C/YP’s behaviours seen as an interesting exception, and those who felt that differences in the C/YP’s behaviour could render the information gathered less valid for the purpose of the assessment. The latter view was less common, and there was particular emphasis from other EPs on not viewing an exception as an example of unreliable or invalid data, but rather as an important piece of information that needed to be considered in light of wider sources. As such, triangulation was viewed as very important by all the EPs, with consideration made of how the information gathered through contextual observation fits with that from other sources, and what it means for formulation in relation to the client C/YP. Speed (2019) cautioned against biased interpretations of contextual observation but this research has found that EPs do not interpret information from contextual observation without reference to other information, which includes talking to setting staff, parents and other professionals involved with the C/YP. This is also guided by training on reflective practice, which supports EPs to be mindful of their own bias and to use triangulation to check their understanding. This process of triangulation was widely reported to be linked to generating and testing hypotheses, illuminating the core reasons why EPs carry out contextual observation.
The findings described a process for how EPs may generate and test their hypotheses using contextual observation. It was generally found that the EPs developed an expectation of what they may see during the contextual observation based on prior consultation, and then consider how the information from contextual observation does or does not fit, and why this may be the case. Most of the EPs reported that they use ‘frameworks’ to guide this information gathering, although these were mostly described as being internalised, having developed from professional practice experience. Notably, Kelly, Woolfson and Boyle (2008) highlight that schemata “evolve with experience” (p. 77) which is reflected in this research where EPs reported that with experience, frameworks become ‘automatic’ (cf. Anderson, Spiro & Anderson, 1978). The same authors refer to the function of schemata within a hypothesis testing process, and explain that schemata provide a means of organising, matching and checking information that is gathered. This perhaps goes some way to explain the previously reported vagueness, or opacity, around how contextual observation is carried out (Speed, 2019). It is acknowledged that further research would be useful to identify specific examples of the frameworks and theories that are internalised by EPs, which would provide even greater insight to how contextual observation is carried out. The EPs’ explicit orienting of contextual observation within a hypothesis testing framework within this research brings contextual observation further into focus through a scientist-practitioner lens (Lane & Corrie, 2006).

This study highlights the breadth and depth of thought that is involved in the process of contextual observation, and demonstrates that EPs are very mindful of associated limitations and approach these with consideration for ethical practice (cf. Speed 2019). The interviews facilitated the participants’ articulation of these issues and did not identify areas of thought that were novel for the participants; instead, it drew attention to
the confidence with which the EPs were able to talk about why and how they carry out contextual observation. In light of this, the analytic framework developed in paper 1, which was used as the interview schedule in this study, has now been revised here to reflect some of the key findings from the analysis of EP interviews, and to thereby provide practice-informed initial guidelines of considerations for best practice of contextual observation: initial Contextual Observation Guidelines (COG). This revision has brought to the fore the key findings about why and how contextual observation is used. It is also noted that some of the revisions are aspects of practice that are naturally less explicit as they are concerned with the thought process of the EP. The guidelines make these processes explicit as well as communicable for training purposes. Appendix 13 provides a summary of some of the more detailed revisions relating to the areas of: Purpose; Ethics; Frameworks; Reliability and Validity.

It is intended that the prompts within the initial COG (Appendix 14) are minimally directive, because the data identified some variance, and it is not the intention to remove autonomy in individual practice. Rather it is the intention of this research to inform EPs through practice-based evidence, and to make more explicit key areas of practice in contextual observation such as consent, assent and contracting, use of frameworks, reliability and validity (Speed, 2019).

In relation to reliability and validity in particular, whilst it wasn’t explicitly referenced in the interview dialogues, the researcher’s reflections on the analysis have led to a wondering about the use of the terms ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’ in relation to qualitative research, and whether there are potential limitations in using these terms for this purpose. For example, in order to meet the criteria for reliability in a quantitative research sense, several hours of observation data on a single C/YP may have to be gathered in order to be able to make claims around the reliability of the data, which is not a practical or
feasible use of EP time. As such, the researcher has considered that ‘trustworthiness’ and ‘usefulness’ could be alternative terms, rather than reliability and validity. Although not explicitly used by the participants, these alternative terms draw on the essence of what the participants said. For example, on the one hand, the importance of considering both how useful the contextual observation data may be to the EP’s evolving understanding of the C/YP. On the other hand, the importance of not carrying out contextual observation as an isolated assessment, but as one part of a wider triangulated process to ensure its trustworthiness through considering how the data fits with other sources both in terms of similarities and exceptions and what that could mean in terms of the EP’s formulation. The researcher proposes that the terms ‘usefulness’ and ‘trustworthiness’ could be offered as alternative terms to ‘reliability’ and ‘validity’, and considered in future related research by way of scoping whether these different constructions may be helpful in conceptualising and offering further guidance around developing useful and defensible practice of contextual observation.

The research reported here is small scale, involving six EP participants. Data analysis achieved a reasonable degree of saturation (cf. Braun & Clarke, 2019), and so the interview schedule was considered to be fit for purpose in facilitating the participants to talk about why and how they carry out contextual observation in their practice.

The interviews were carried out in geographically proximate areas, and three training providers were represented in the small sample. It is acknowledged that there are 13 educational psychology training providers in England, and so it is possible that those that were not included may have given their graduating practitioners a different orientation and skills set than the ones elicited within this study. It is suggested that any further research takes this into consideration during participant sampling.

Findings indicated that there are some areas that could be explored in greater detail
(e.g. examples of frameworks EPs use to guide their information gathering during contextual observation), although the identified gaps were captured as explicit prompts in the initial COG, thus ensuring that those who use it would be guided to think explicitly about those things. It is anticipated that EPSs may volunteer to trial the initial COG in order to identify how it could be further revised and refined, and where there may be any need for further research to clarify ambiguities. This would continue momentum towards the production of a final version of the COG that can be used across EPSs nationally and perhaps beyond, as well as by providers of initial professional training programmes.

Future research could also explore how the initial COG applies to practice of contextual observation when used in systemic work and whether there are additional or different considerations required for contextual observation for these purposes. The systematic literature review (paper 1) identified that contextual observation is used across the range of EP role functions, however, EPs in the present research mostly talked about contextual observation in relation to individual casework practice, with two references to its use with whole classes or groups.

The same systematic literature review also included research which reported EPs’ use of video capture methods in contextual observation. In the present research, one EP said that they are trained in VIG, but have not used video outside of that specific consultative process. It is suggested that future research may also consider whether video capture more generally is used by EPs who did not take part in this research, and in turn how the initial COG aligns with a video approach to contextual observation.
Conclusion

Contextual observation is an assessment tool that is part of everyday practice for many EPs, yet its evaluation and development have been neglected. This study has explored the reasons why and how some EPs carry out contextual observation, providing useful indications of areas that require further exploration. The initial COG provides a framework for further research and development, supporting EPs’ practice of contextual observation to be underpinned by a robust evidence base.
References


Paper Three: The Dissemination of Evidence to Professional Practice
Introduction

This paper will review the concepts of evidence-based practice (EBP) and practice-based evidence (PBE) within the context of educational psychology. It will also consider how research evidence can be effectively disseminated. This will be discussed in relation to research conducted by a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) in the area of educational psychologists’ (EPs’) use of contextual observation in practice. The first paper systematically reviews literature which reports EP use of observation in practice using a bespoke critical evaluation checklist. The second paper is an empirical study exploring EP use of contextual observation in practice which informed the development of a set of initial contextual observation guidelines (COG). The researcher will consider the implications of these papers and provide a strategy for dissemination, and evaluation of impact.

An overview of the concepts of evidence-based practice and practice-based research and related issues

EBP has its origins in the medical sector, where health professionals make treatment decisions with their patients based on clinical expertise, the preferences of the patient, and the best available evidence (Brun, 2013). The two main aims of EBP in healthcare are to promote the quality of care provided, and to lessen the variability of care received by clients in differing locations and service settings (Barkham & Margison, 2007). The definition of evidence-based practice adopted by the Institute of Medicine (Wolfe, 2001), as adapted from Sackett, Rosenberg, Gray, Haynes & Richardson, (1996) is: “the integration of best research evidence with clinical expertise and patient values” (p. 71). In the context of EBP, ‘evidence’ is conceptualised as knowledge generated through empirical research (Bieta, 2010; Brun, 2013). There also exists a research hierarchy, which means that the chosen research design determines the ‘best evidence’, or quality of
the research. The Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN, 2015), cited by Boyle and Kelly (2017, p. 33) developed a hierarchy of evidence (Table 3), with the highest weighting given to systematic reviews, the meta-analysis of randomised control trials (RCTs) and well-designed RCTs. RCTs are considered optimal for maximising internal validity, allowing for causal effect, which facilitates assurance that interventions and treatments are both safe and effective.

**Table 3**

*Hierarchy of Evidence*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of evidence</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;st&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>High quality meta-analysis, systematic reviews of RCTs or RCTs with a very low risk of bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2&lt;sup&gt;nd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Well-constructed meta-analysis, systematic reviews of RCTs with a low risk of bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;rd&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Meta-analysis, systematic reviews or RCTs with high risk of bias.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>High quality systematic reviews of case control or cohort studies with a very low risk of confounding or bias and a high probability that the relationship is causal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Well conducted case control or cohort studies with a high risk of confounding or bias and a significant risk that the relationship is not causal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Case control or cohort studies with a high risk of confounding or bias and a high significant risk that the relationship is not causal.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Non-analytic studies (e.g. case reports, case series).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>Expert opinion.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is agreement that psychological practice needs to be based on evidence (APA, 2006). In the United Kingdom, educational psychologists (EPs) are required to use EBP as this is a professional standard outlined by the Health Care and Professionals Council (HCPC) (2015). There was acknowledgment by the APA that there are several issues with deciding the relative weight to place on different types of research in the context of psychology practice, as well as with the generalizability of findings and transfer of knowledge from RCTs carried out in clinical settings to the complex problems held by clients of psychology practitioners. The Presidential Taskforce on Evidence-Based Practice
(2005) acknowledged these dilemmas and considered that “psychology—as a science and
as a profession—is distinctive in combining scientific commitment with an emphasis on
human relationships and individual differences” (p.8). As such, evidence-based practice in
psychology (EBPP) endorses the use of multiple research designs, and acknowledges the
merits of different types of research. For example, qualitative research can be used to
describe the lived experiences of people, and RCTs are the best approach for drawing
causal inferences about the effects of intervention. In EBPP there is acknowledgement that
the research design should be selected to fit the research question (Greenberg and
“the integration of the best available research with clinical expertise in the context of
patient characteristics, culture, and preferences” (p. 5). This definition helps us to
understand the role of evidence in educational psychology, where a “more functional
approach” is required (Boyle & Kelly, 2017, p. 34) as some designs may be more
appropriate than others for addressing a particular research question, as well as the
affordance of combining methods in mixed-method designs where this is appropriate. This
approach involves using any of the research designs set out in the hierarchy of evidence
(Table 4). This means, for example, that small scale, qualitative studies are recognised as
being particularly useful when trying to understand why and how certain behaviours or
situations occur, and that findings can lead to the development of theory, which could
suggested that the results of RCTs do not usually reflect real-life situations, particularly in
the field of education where variables are less easily controlled, and PBE bestows
acceptability on fitting the research design to the research question and context.

In this way, PBE takes into account different interacting factors, characteristics and
contexts which may influence the efficacy of an intervention (Biesta, 2010). These are
things such as the environment, the setting which the intervention was designed for, and relationships. Furthermore, PBE highlights that the development of interventions, and study of their efficacy, should also involve key stakeholders (Fishman, Penuel, Allen, Cheng & Sabelli, 2013).

An overview of the evidence on the effective dissemination of research and research impact

The HCPC Standards of Proficiency require that EPs are able to support the dissemination of research activities. The inclusion of this requirement alongside supporting the design, implementation, conduct and evaluation of research activities conveys dissemination not as an ‘add-on’ but rather as an integral part of the whole research process: an ‘obligation’ (Keen and Todres, 2007). The conceptualisation of dissemination as a ‘process’ is central to the literature on dissemination. Wilson, Petticrew, Calnan and Nazareth (2010) defined it as a “planned process that involves consideration of target audiences and the settings in which research findings are to be received” (p. 2). Similarly, Freemantle and Watt (1994) say that dissemination is more than simply distributing information acquired through research. Rather, it is a process whereby “target audiences become better informed, make decisions or change behaviour as a result of using the disseminated information” (p. 136).

Freemantle and Watt’s (1994) definition of dissemination also describes the purpose behind the process. Harmsworth and Turpin (2000) provide further detail around purpose, as well as who the audience may be for that purpose. They suggest that there are three purposes for dissemination. The first purpose is dissemination for awareness, and involves disseminating to those audiences that do not require detailed knowledge of the research findings, but who would nevertheless benefit from being aware of them. Creating
awareness may help word of mouth type dissemination and also help build an identity and profile within the community. The second purpose is dissemination for understanding, which involves disseminating to those who will benefit from the research, and requires a deeper comprehension of the research findings. The final purpose is dissemination for action, which results in changes in practice directly as a consequence of using the findings. This is brought about by targeting dissemination towards those who have the power to influence change in their organisation. Harmsworth and Turpin (2000) emphasise that dissemination is conscious and proactive: ‘delivering and receiving’, ‘transfer’, and ‘engagement’. This is congruent with the HCPC’s (2015) positioning of dissemination as part of a process of research ‘activity’.

Harmsworth and Turpin (2000) also discuss methods of dissemination and potential limitations. Methods include: scholarly journals; monographs, books and chapters; professional presentations; newsletters, and the internet. They suggest that journals are generally agreed to be the most important and prestigious avenues for researchers, however, a limitation is that the process of submitting to a journal can be intimidating and long. A further limitation is that in focusing on academic journals alone, dissemination could be limited to a specific group of academics. This links with Harmsworth and Turpin’s (2000) suggestions around purpose and audience, and further prompts need to go beyond these more traditional forms of dissemination that serve academic communities, such as journal publication and conferences, and set out to disseminate research findings to those whom the research specifically concerns (Keen & Todres, 2007), and so maximise the impact of the research findings.

Keen and Todres (2007) reviewed the literature around the dissemination of qualitative research findings specifically, and found that the main features of successful dissemination strategies are: tailoring material to the target audience in regards to the
content, message and medium; paying attention to the source of the message; and, enabling active discussion of the findings. As such, Keen and Todres (2007) say that active dissemination requires the use of “tailored materials that have been transformed beyond the journal article or conference paper” (p.2).

Wilson et al. (2010) carried out a systematic scoping review which identified and described several conceptual frameworks that could be used by researchers to guide dissemination activities. One of these is the Persuasive Communication Matrix (McGuire, 1969, cited by Wilson et al., 2010) which argues that there are five variables that influence how far people can be persuaded to change through the dissemination of research findings: the source of the communication; the message the disseminator wishes to communicate; the channels of communication; the characteristics of the receiver or target audience; and, the setting in which the communication is received. Another conceptual framework is the Diffusion of Innovations Theory (Rogers, 2003, cited in Wilson et al., 2010). This suggests that change takes place over time, and that there is a five-phase ‘innovation-decision process’ which incorporates: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. Also discussed was Social Marketing (Kotler & Zaltman, 1971, cited in Wilson et al., 2010): This framework highlights five factors that focus on formatting evidence-based information so that it is clear and appealing to a defined target audience. All of these frameworks share the common elements of identifying the target audience for dissemination, and persuading them that change via the research findings communicated to them is beneficial.
A summary of the policy, practice and research development implications for the current research

Paper 1

Paper 1 was a systematic literature review which used an adapted quality evaluation checklist (Appendix 5) and a bespoke analytic framework (Appendix 6) for contextual observation created by the researcher and the research project supervisory team, to systematically identify and critically evaluate the research evidence of EPs’ use of contextual observation within practice.

One of the key findings was that across the systematically identified studies, there were inconsistencies around which details of contextual observation were reported, which makes it difficult for the process of contextual observation to be reliably replicated across EP practice or to be communicated clearly to new entrants to the profession.

Analysis of the studies also identified that observation is used across the variety of role functions carried out by EPs: assessment, consultation, research, intervention and training (Fallon, Woods & Rooney, 2010), however, the use of contextual observation in individual casework as might be carried out by an EP in everyday practice, was not reported.

It was also found that observation typically forms only a part contribution to data gathering methods in EP work, with 13 of 16 studies evidencing this was suggested to be reflective of triangulation in practice. Observation was the sole information gathering method only in studies reporting the use of video, or a large scale research project.

The researcher combined the two approaches used to analyse the studies: the bespoke analytic framework exemplifies practice-informed knowledge and provides a
structure for looking at what EPs do in contextual observation, and the adapted quality evaluation checklist exemplifies academic knowledge and provides a structure for looking at how well EPs do those things. This was achieved by inserting some additional prompts which reflected the adapted quality evaluation checklist, into the bespoke analytic framework, creating the analytic framework (Appendix 7).

The systematic literature review (paper 1), and the analytic framework provides the foundation of an evidence base for contextual observation, whilst also providing a starting point for further research which could find out why and how practicing EPs use contextual observation, and use this to develop a set of guidelines that could be used across the profession and on doctorate training programmes.

**Paper 2**

Paper 2 used the analytic framework from paper 1 to develop an interview schedule (Appendix 8) that was used to carry out 6 semi-structured interviews with EPs practising in services across the North West of England.

Thematic analysis of the interviews identified that the EPs who took part in this study carry out contextual observation in order to gather and triangulate information from other sources, assess the C/YP’s functioning in the observation setting, and generate and test hypotheses. This is done as part of a wider process of involvement to contribute to a professional view of the C/YP. This finding reflects the finding in paper 1 that EPs generally do not use contextual observation as a sole source of information.

The finding that the EPs most commonly reported using contextual observation for assessment of individual C/YP addresses the gap in the literature identified by paper 1, relating to the limited reporting of this use of contextual observation in the research evidence base.
The EPs were found to have a lot in common in how they carried out contextual
observation, with very little variance reported between practice, though there was found to
be some variance within practice. The factors which caused this were those such as
whether the contextual observation was part of statutory or non-statutory work, the
presenting issues of the involvement which influenced the EP’s choice of framework
guiding their information gathering, the decision to carry out a structured or naturalistic
observation, as well as the age and wider understanding of the C/YP’s ecological systems.

Highlighted in the discussion was the finding that most EPs do not tell C/YP that
they are being observed, unless they are considered to be Gillick competent. The reason
given for not telling the C/YP why the EP is in the setting was to promote as much
objectivity as there can be by reducing the impact of the observer’s presence, and their
influence on behaviours and environments, in order to see the C/YP in their most natural
context. This was linked to considerations of reliability and validity in contextual
observation, and whether the EPs considered that changes which may have occurred in the
environment as a result of the C/YP knowing they were being observed could render the
information gathered unreliable or invalid. The majority finding was that the EPs did not
feel that changes to behaviour and interaction as a result of informing the C/YP of the EP’s
presences would compromise reliability and validity, yet in their usual practice this group
carried out covert contextual observation. As such, the findings revealed an interesting
debate around the idea of assent in contextual observation, and why and how it differs
from other aspects of EP assessment.

Paper 2 also identified areas for further research. For example, around the
frameworks that EPs use to direct their information gathering during contextual
observations, as these were most often explained to be retrieved from memory. Also, the
participants mostly referred to the use of contextual observation within individual
casework. Paper 1 also included video capture in the final collection of papers, but paper 2 did not provide any further detail relating to contextual observation through video capture. This could also be an area for further exploration.

The analytic framework which was used as the interview schedule in paper 2 was subsequently revised to reflect some of the key findings from the analysis of EP interviews, and to thereby provide practice-informed initial guidelines of considerations for best practice of contextual observation (Contextual Observation Guidelines – COG, Appendix 14).

The initial COG is intended as a useful tool for practice, underpinned by a clear and developing evidence base. There is scope for future research to gather constructive feedback on the initial COG following a period of its use by EPs and TEPs, in order to further refine it.

At the research sites

There are implications for the researcher herself as well as the participating EPs who took part in the study. Conducting the research has provided opportunity for the researcher to reflect on the reasons why she uses observation in her practice, and has identified with the reasons given by the participants as presented in paper 1 (Figure 1), as these have vocalised her own reasons where it may previously have been less easy to articulate. Similarly, the findings around how the EPs in the study carry out contextual observation has broadened the researcher’s thinking and understanding, particularly around reliability and validity, and how she conceptualises these in the context of observation. The researcher has a heightened awareness of how she approaches every aspect of contextual observation, from identifying the C/YP, to her physical position in the setting and gauging the responses of the C/YP to her presence, which previously, on reflection, was automatic.
The research has impacted on the participating EPs in a similar way to how it has impacted on the researcher, illustrated by EP6 who said,

it’s quite useful to have some of these questions because you don’t really address them without… I think you can fall into habits, particularly with observation, because it can be such a naturalistic thing, you can then fall into habits or assumptions without really realising what you’ve done.

Whilst all of the participating EPs engaged fully with the interviews, and similar core findings were identified across the data, it was noted that there was some difference in the amount of content of the responses across the participants. The researcher has considered that this could be due to individual difference between individual EPs, with some being more naturally inclined to talk less and perhaps communicate less detail. There did also appear to be some sort of effect around how recently an EP had trained and the fullness of the content of responses. It was noted that the EPs who trained within the last 10 years provided more depth in their responses, compared with a little less detail from those with 10+ years of experience. These findings can be considered in the context of pattern matching, the continuous process of which leads to recognition and reinforcement of information (Dutton, 1994). Over time, information becomes increasingly internalised and so embedded in the long-term memory. Furthermore, Kelly, Woolfson and Boyle (2008) highlight that schemata “evolve with experience” (p. 77) which is reflected in this research, and considered in the discussion section of paper 2, where EPs reported that with experience, frameworks become ‘automatic’ (cf. Anderson, Spiro & Anderson, 1978). In relation to the current findings, these considerations around pattern matching, and schemata offer an explanation as to why longer qualified participants had reached a level of fluency and competency within their practice rendering the frameworks they draw on, and the processes they go through, more difficult to consciously articulate.
At the organisational level

The researcher intends to share both papers 1 and 2 with EP colleagues at the service where she is currently on placement and will take up a full-time post once qualified. The researcher presented the early stages of the research during a whole-team service day last summer, and it was received with enthusiasm and interest, with many colleagues communicating that they would be very interested to know how others carry out observation, with further interest in the planned development of a set of guidelines for best practice. The researcher is confident that the service will engage with the findings of papers 1 and 2, and would like to invite colleagues to use the initial COG in their practice, before providing feedback in order that appropriate revisions could be made perhaps as part of a future research project. The researcher would particularly like feedback regarding the following:

• the number of ‘considerations’ in the initial COG: are there too many?
• is the order of the initial COG areas functional?
• what do EPs feel the added value to their practice would be?

At the professional level

The implication of the research at the professional level is three-fold. Firstly, the researcher hopes that individual EPs and TEPs will engage with findings from papers 1 and 2 in order to challenge and refresh their thinking around this area of practice, through dissemination by conference presentations, reading of blog posts and publication of the papers in a journal.

Secondly, the researcher intends on interacting face-to-face with EPSs, in order to bring about awareness and understanding, and so maximising the action/impact of the research (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000). This would be achieved through briefings, initially
at the researcher’s practice placement EPS in September 2020, and then hopefully beyond, following networking opportunities achieved through the other dissemination methods which facilitate this, such as conferences. The researcher would like these briefings to engage Principal EPs who are in positions to be able to agree to their services using the initial COG in practice.

Thirdly, the research will have implications for professional training providers as there is opportunity for the initial COG to be used in seminars in which TEPs are taught about contextual observation. This will provide TEPs with practice-based evidence of how colleagues in the profession carry out contextual observation. It will also mean that subsequent qualified EPs will all enter the profession with the same set of guidelines for contextual observation, established on an evidence base. As discussed in paper 2, the initial COG is not intended to be directive, but its implementation from the stage of professional training will ensure that the aspects of contextual observation which have been agreed within the profession are kept at the forefront of EPs’ minds.

**Strategy for promoting and evaluating the dissemination and impact of the current research**

This section sets out the researcher’s planned strategy for promoting and evaluating the dissemination and impact of the current research. The researcher intends on disseminating the findings of both research papers 1 and 2. The process and findings of the SLR (paper 1) were influential in the development of the initial COG, and the empirical research (paper 2) provides practice-based evidence around EPs’ use of contextual observation, and documents the further development of the initial COG in response to this. As such, it is intended that the content of papers 1 and 2 is disseminated in conjunction with the initial COG.
The researcher has adopted Harmsworth and Turpin’s (2000) ten-step
dissemination strategy (Figure 3). The Harmsworth and Turpin document is an interactive
step-by-step workbook to use in developing an effective plan for dissemination of research
findings, and was specifically designed for the field of education research. The strategy
focuses attention on what is to be disseminated, identification of the target populations,
establishment of reasonable timeframes, and venue of dissemination. It is based on the
framework of dissemination purposes which were described above, namely: awareness, understanding and action. This framework was also included in Wilson et al.’s (2010)
systematic scoping review which identified and described several conceptual frameworks
that could be used by researchers to guide dissemination activities.

**Figure 3**

*Harmsworth and Turpin’s (2000) Ten-step Dissemination Strategy*

1. What is dissemination?
2. What do we want to disseminate?
3. Who are our stakeholders and what are we offering them?
4. When do we disseminate?
5. What are the most effective ways of disseminating?
6. Who might help us disseminate?
7. How do we prepare our strategy?
8. How do we turn our strategy into an action plan?
9. How do we cost our dissemination activities?

Harmsworth and Turpin (2000) suggest setting the dissemination strategy out in a coherent document, and they provide template tables with headings which facilitate this.

Table 4 incorporates those headings in order to draw up an action plan for promoting and evaluating the dissemination of her research. For example, the second column identifies the target audiences because key stakeholders or a target audience must be identified before dissemination can occur (Harmsworth & Turpin, 2000; McGuire, 1969). The
researcher has added the first column, ‘what is being disseminated?’ for clarity. Details of the plan and how impact of each dissemination strategy will be measured are discussed in further detail thereafter.
Table 4

Strategy for Disseminating and Evaluating Success of Papers 1 and 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What is being disseminated?</th>
<th>Target Groups</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Method</th>
<th>Costs associated with method</th>
<th>Success Criteria</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The findings of paper 1:</td>
<td>EPs, TEPs, academic community from educational psychology training institutions.</td>
<td>To raise awareness, develop understanding and encourage action to address the evidence base for practice of contextual observation.</td>
<td>Briefing at CPD day at TEP’s practice placement EPS, followed by team discussion. Paper distributed for reading (September 2020).</td>
<td>Preparation time for briefing: slides and hand-outs.</td>
<td>Findings of paper 1 have been communicated local, nationally and internationally.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inconsistencies around which details of contextual observation were reported makes it difficult for the process of contextual observation to be reliably replicated across EP practice or to be communicated clearly to new entrants to the profession.</td>
<td></td>
<td>To disseminate locally, nationally and internationally.</td>
<td>Publication of paper 1 in Educational Psychology in Practice (December, 2020).</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>EPs, TEPs and the academic community from educational psychology training will know about paper 1, and understand the need for this research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextual observation is used across the variety of role functions carried out by EPs (assessment, consultation, research,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation at DECP Annual Conference (January, 2021).</td>
<td>Preparation time; printing of materials; travel costs for researcher.</td>
<td>All stakeholders are engaged with the purpose of the research and</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The findings from paper 2, and the COG:</td>
<td>EPs, TEPs, academic community associated with educational psychology training institutions.</td>
<td>To raise awareness, develop understanding and encourage action to address the evidence base for practice of</td>
<td>Publication of paper 2 in Educational Psychology in Practice (December, 2020).</td>
<td>None.</td>
<td>EPs, TEPs and the academic community from educational psychology training institutions reflect on their own</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPs who took part in the study carry out contextual observation in order to gather and triangulate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation at CPD day at TEP’s</td>
<td>Preparation time of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation at the North West EP CPD Conference.</td>
<td>As above.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Presentation at the International School Psychology Association Conference.</td>
<td>As above.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Posting of a blog about the findings of paper 1 on a website such as edpsy.org.uk</td>
<td>Preparation time and commitment to checking for and responding to comments left by bloggers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information from other sources, assess the C/YP’s functioning in the observation setting, and generate and test hypotheses.</td>
<td>Local, nation-wide and international.</td>
<td>Contextual observation. To stimulate reflection on current practice. To communicate the plan to refine the COG through EP use and feedback. To disseminate locally, nationally and internationally.</td>
<td>Practice placement EPS, followed by team discussion. Paper distributed for reading (September, 2020). Presentation of DECP Annual Conference (January, 2021). Presentation at TEP DECP Annual Conference (January, 2021). Preparation time; printing of materials; travel costs for researcher. As above.</td>
<td>Practice of contextual observation in relation to the findings from paper 2. Conference delegates and the researcher’s colleagues are engaged by the COG, and some have decided to use it in practice. Some stakeholders have offered to provide feedback to the researcher which could be used to inform further refinement in a future research project. The blog post will record the number of ‘views’ and have some</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specific targeted dissemination for trainees regarding how and why EPs use contextual observation, including an introduction to the COG and how it was developed.</td>
<td>TEPs studying on the DECP at Manchester University.</td>
<td>To raise awareness and develop understanding to inform practice.</td>
<td>Co-delivery of contextual observation seminar with academic tutor responsible for the course unit at the University of Manchester. To include the sharing of findings from papers 1 &amp; 2 (September, 2020). Presentation at TEP DECP Annual Conference (January, 2021).</td>
<td>Preparation time; printing of materials; travel costs for researcher.</td>
<td>Preparing to summarise the main findings of papers 1 and 2 and feel confident about using the COG to make informed considerations around carrying out contextual observation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Further discussion of the dissemination strategy

Journal articles

The researcher intends to submit papers 1 and 2 for publication in Educational Psychology in Practice (EPiP). This journal has been chosen because it is widely read by the UK EP profession, especially those practising in the UK, and it may also reach those practising internationally. This group of EPs may not be as accessible via other methods such as conferences, and so any opportunity to reach a wider audience is useful.

Academics associated with initial professional training programmes may also be consumers of the findings of this research, so may be made aware of, and develop an understanding of papers 1 and 2 through reading them in the journal. They may also be in positions of power and able to cascade the dissemination to those at the organisational level of EP training programmes, where there can be action through incorporation into planning of seminars on EP use of contextual observation.

The researcher’s contact details will also be available in the publications, which would allow interested readers to contact her with questions or comments via email or post, so creating opportunity for dialogue.

The researcher acknowledges that it is difficult to evaluate the direct impact that publishing in EPiP would have, although the number of views and citations will be available. There may also be other tangential indications, such as emails from professional readers; invitations to professional conferences and invitations to input to Initial Training of Educational Psychologists (ITEP) programmes. It is felt that it remains an important part of the dissemination strategy as the editors of the journal will choose manuscripts that they feel will be of interest to their readers. Any feedback via the process of submission would also be very useful for gauging the potential of the papers to be received with interest and enthusiasm by the EP community, as well as potential impact.
**Briefings**

The EPS where the researcher has spent her practice placement has showed an interest in the research topic since its early days, and invited the researcher to share her thesis proposal with the service. This sharing of findings was received well, with EPs saying that they were curious to know how colleagues carry out contextual observation, and to have a point of reference. This view was also shared by other TEPs in the service/within training at the same time as the researcher. The researcher has been encouraged to share the findings of papers 1 and 2 with the service at their CPD day in September 2020.

As the researcher will be taking up a post at that EPS once qualified, it is felt that a briefing there would be an ideal opportunity for interaction and discussion between the researcher and EPs and trainees. It is hoped that the principal educational psychologist (PEP) will encourage colleagues to use the COG, and the researcher would be well placed to receive feedback over time. This feedback could contribute to a further piece of research being commissioned which sets out to review and, where necessary make appropriate and responsive revisions to the initial COG.

The proximity of the researcher to the EPs and trainees who may use the initial COG would allow for the impact in that EPS to be judged.

It is possible that the same process could be followed in other EPSs, with the researcher offering a briefing and dialogue which facilitates feedback, received remotely.

**University seminars**

The researcher has been asked to share her thesis and co-deliver a seminar on the doctorate of Educational and Child Psychology Training Programme at Manchester University. The university informed the researcher that a module input on observation is being added to the curriculum for 2020-21, which is an exciting example of action borne from an awareness and understanding of the importance of this research at the
organisational level. The inclusion of contextual observation on the curriculum gives weight to the topic and may provide rationale for TEPs to engage with the findings of papers 1 and 2, and the initial COG. TEPs will be encouraged to take the initial COG with them into their practice placements, which may strengthen its position as a recognised supportive tool for practice, and enable it to be more far-reaching as a result as the locations of trainee practice placements are geographically varied.

The researcher will be able to judge the impact of the seminar through in-the-moment feedback. It would be possible for the researcher to provide TEPs with contact details so that they could communicate to her whether they have found the initial COG useful in practice, so providing the researcher with a method of gauging the research’s impact on a cohort of TEPs.

**Future research commissioning**

The researcher would like to use the facility of research commissioning in ITEP at the University of Manchester or elsewhere to further secure the development of the initial COG. This could take the form of case studies, for example, to further explore some of the areas for future research identified in paper 2. This would also provide further research evidence of the reporting of EP use of contextual observation in practice, which paper 1 found to be limited.

**Conferences**

The researcher intends to present papers 1 and 2 at professional conferences. The number of possible venues allows for the researcher to disseminate locally, at the North West Educational Psychology CPD Conference; nationally, at the British Psychological Society’s Division of Education and Child Psychology’s Annual Conference (for EPs and TEPs), and Association of Educational Psychologists’ Annual Conference; and internationally at the International School Psychology’s (ISPA) Annual Conference. All of
these opportunities would allow for interaction between the researcher and EPs working in
the UK and internationally, through questions and discussion. Holding a workshop at any
of these conferences would provide even greater opportunity for interaction.

The nature of conferences is that delegates can choose which speakers or
workshops they would like to attend, which means that generally speaking those who
attend will have an interest in the topic which increases the likelihood of engagement, and
so the understanding that delegates are more likely to have. The reception of the
presentations will also be an indicator of dissemination success.

Attending conferences is also opportunity for the researcher to network and engage
EPs and perhaps PEPs in individual conversations about using the initial COG in their
services, so disseminating for action. Providing contact details in order that the researcher
is contactable could allow for some evaluation of the impact of attending the conferences.

**Internet**

The researcher intends on utilising the accessibility of internet through a blog post
on a relevant website such as edpsy.org.uk (https://edpsy.org.uk). As well as being an
accessible and familiar medium to some consumers of research, a blog post on a website
such as this is available to all, and so could be viewed by a wide audience through a single
medium. It could also be accessed through an individual ‘searching’ the website for
information specifically about observation, and so may attract people who are interested in
the topic, and keen to increase their awareness as well as their understanding, perhaps with
a view to action. The blog post may also be read almost unintentionally by an individual
browsing the website, and so increase awareness. A blog post would also have the facility
for readers to comment below the post, although this medium may allow for less dialogue
between the reader and the researcher due to restrictions on how much can be written, as
well as the public nature of the communication. A blog post would provide information as
to how many ‘views’ the post has had, although the nature of that figure would be open to
interpretation as it would not be apparent as to how many of those views indicated that a
reader had furthered their understanding, or that it would lead to action. The number of
views would, however, indicate how many people were subsequently aware of the
research.

Summary of Key Impact Indicators of the Research:

Key impact indicators of the research over 12 months:

- The findings of papers 1 and 2, including the initial COG, are considered of interest
to the EP community indicated by publication of papers 1 and 2 in the identified
academic, peer reviewed journal within 12 months;
- The research is considered of interest to EPs, TEPs and ITEP programmes. This
  will be indicated by delegates attending presentations of papers 1 and 2 at local,
  regional and national conferences, and interacting with the researcher through
  questions and discussion both during the conference and via correspondence.
- The initial COG is used in practice by EPs and TEPs, indicated by the researcher’s
  practice placement EPS using the initial COG in the period following the
  September 2020 briefing;
- The initial COG is used by TEPs, indicated by TEPs contacting the researcher to
tell her that they are doing so;
- Papers 1 and 2 have informed the doctorate in educational and child psychology
  training programme at the University of Manchester, indicated by the University
  incorporating the research findings into their seminar planning for the academic
  year 2020-21, and the researcher co-delivering this seminar to TEPs.
References


Appendices

Appendix 1: Ethical Approval

The University of Manchester

Environment, Education and Development School Panel PGR
School for Environment, Education and Development
Humanities Bridgeford Street 1.17
The University of Manchester
Manchester
M13 9PL
Email: PGR.ethics.seedi@manchester.ac.uk

Ref: 2018-5085-6997
03/09/2018

Dear Ms Jennifer Farook, Dr Kathleen Tydesley, Prof Kevin Woods

Study Title: Developing an Executive Framework for EP Observations

Thank you for submitting your low risk ethics application for the project named above which has now been approved by your supervisor and logged with the Ethics Administrator.

If anything untoward happens during your research or any changes take place then please inform your supervisor and/or programme director immediately.

Please accept this email as confirmation that your low risk Ethical Approval application has been approved and you are now able to carry out your research.

Please let us know if you have any additional queries by emailing: PGR.ethics.seedi@manchester.ac.uk

Yours sincerely,

[Signature]
Appendix 2: Participant Information Sheet

You are invited to take part in a study that will become my professional doctorate thesis. The aim of the research is to explore why and how Educational Psychologists (EPs) carry out observation.

Before you decide whether to take part, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please do get in touch with me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information; my contact details are at the end of this document. Thank you for taking the time to read this.

Who will conduct the research?
Jennifer Farook (Trainee Educational Psychologist),
School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED),
Ellen Wilkinson Building,
University of Manchester
Oxford Road,
Manchester,
M13 9PL.

What is the purpose of the research?
The purpose of the research is to explore why and how EPs use observation in their practice. Historically there has been a lot of research into the types of assessment methods used by EPs and observation is known to be used frequently, yet there is little research about the details of this particular assessment method. It is intended that this research will contribute to the evidence base.

Why have I been chosen?
This study intends to find out why and how EPs carry out observation. I am looking for qualified EPs who will kindly volunteer to take part in individual semi-structured interviews to talk in depth about why and how they carry out observations in their day-to-day practice.

What would I be asked to do if I took part?
If you take part, I would like to interview you about your use of observation. The broad areas that I would like us to cover are:

- Definitions of types of observation
- Purpose
- Contracting
- Ethical considerations
I am keen to hear your opinions, learn from your knowledge and experiences, and capture the variety of individual practice. The interview is not designed to make you feel uncomfortable in any way. If however you do feel uncomfortable, the interview can be stopped at any time.

Following all of the individual interviews, I will transcribe and thematically analyse the data. It is the intention to use the findings from the analyses to contribute to a document that may provide some guidance to EPs, including new entrants to the profession.

What happens to the data collected?

The interview and the focus group will be audio recorded, and then transcribed with participants anonymised. The anonymised transcripts will then be thematically analysed. I may discuss the analysis process with my research supervisory team. Anonymous quotes from participants may be used as part of the published outputs from this research.

How is confidentiality maintained?

When the audio recording is transcribed, all participants’ names will be anonymised as will the name of the Educational Psychology Service (EPS) and the Local Authority. Any other references that could lead to identification of individuals will also be taken out. In line with The University of Manchester’s policy, the audio recording will be stored on an encrypted data stick and stored securely. It will be destroyed five years after the completion of the research.

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

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. If you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw up to the 1st June 2020, (the submission date for this research), without giving a reason and without detriment to yourself.

Will I be paid for participating in the research?

You will not be paid for participating in this research.

What is the duration of the research?

The interview will take around 60 minutes, though if on the day you decide that you would prefer to carry out the meeting in two separate parts this can be arranged.
Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will be held at your EPS office, and you will be informed of the exact location in advance. The focus group format will be confirmed based on the majority preference of participants, which can be expressed at the interview stage.

Who has reviewed the research project?

The project has been reviewed by my supervisors at the University of Manchester: Professor Kevin Woods and Dr George Thomas.

What if something goes wrong or you want more information?

Please contact me at the address at the start of this information or by email: jennifer.farook@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk

Alternatively, you can contact:

Professor Kevin Woods
Director of Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology,
School of Environment, Education and Development,
Room A5.16 Ellen Wilkinson Building,
University of Manchester,
Oxford Road,
Manchester M13 9PL
Tel: 0161 275 3509

What if I want to make a complaint?

Minor complaints

If you have a minor complaint, please contact me, or my supervisor, in the first instance.

| Jennifer Farook (Trainee Educational Psychologist), School of Environment, Education and Development (SEED), Ellen Wilkinson Building, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL. E mail: jennifer.farook@postgrad.manchester.ac.uk | Professor Kevin Woods Director of Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology, School of Environment, Education and Development, Room A5.16 Ellen Wilkinson Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester M13 9PL Tel: 0161 275 3509 Kevin.woods@manchester.ac.uk |
Formal Complaints

If you wish to make a formal complaint or if you are not satisfied with the response you have gained from the researchers in the first instance then please contact the Research Governance and Integrity Manager, Research Office, Christie Building, University of Manchester, Oxford Road, Manchester, M13 9PL, by emailing: research.complaints@manchester.ac.uk or by telephoning 0161 275 2674 or 275 2046.

What Do I Do Now? If you have any queries about the study, or if you are interested in taking part, then please contact me via email. Contact details have been given above.

This Project Has Been Approved by the University of Manchester’s Research Ethics Committee, reference: 2018-5085-6997
Appendix 3: Consent Form

If you are happy to take part in the study please complete and sign the consent form below:

Please initial the box

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. I confirm I have read the attached information regarding the project. I have had opportunity to consider the information and ask questions. My questions have been answered satisfactorily.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. I understand that my participation in the study is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my consent at any time without giving a reason and without detriment to my treatment/myself/service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I understand that my data will remain confidential.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I understand that the interview will be audio-recorded.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I agree to the use of anonymous quotes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I agree to take part in the above study.

Name of participant:

Date:

Signature:

Name of researcher:

Date:

Signature:
Appendix 4: Journal Submission Guidelines for Educational psychology in Practice

Disclaimer

Papers 1 and 2 were written for publication in the journal Educational Psychology in Practice. General submission guidelines for this target journal have been followed. For thesis submission, there are some discrepancies between the formats of papers 1 and 2, and those formats which may be submitted for publication. For example, the use of extended left hand margins to adhere to University submission guidelines, and included appendices.

Preparing Your Paper

Research or Review Article

• Should be written with the following elements in the following order:
• Should be between 2000 and 6000 words.
• Should contain an unstructured abstract of 150 words.
• Should contain between 5 and 6 keywords. Read making your article more discoverable, including information on choosing a title and search engine optimization.

Style Guidelines

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

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

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

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

Taylor & Francis quick layout guide

These general article layout guidelines will help you to format your manuscript so that it is ready for you to submit it to a Taylor & Francis journal. Please also follow any specific Instructions for Authors provided by the Editor of the journal, which are available on the journal pages at www.tandfonline.com. Please also see our guidance on putting your article together, defining authorship and anonymizing your article for peer review.

We recommend that you use our templates to prepare your article, but if you prefer not to use templates this guide will help you prepare your article for review.
If your article is accepted for publication, the manuscript will be formatted and typeset in the correct style for the journal.

**Article layout guide**

**Font:** Times New Roman, 12-point, double-line spaced. Use margins of at least 2.5 cm (or 1 inch). Guidance on how to insert special characters, accents and diacritics is available here.

**Title:** Use bold for your article title, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.

**Abstract:** Indicate the abstract paragraph with a heading or by reducing the font size. Check whether the journal requires a structured abstract or graphical abstract by reading the Instructions for Authors. The Instructions for Authors may also give word limits for your abstract. Advice on writing abstracts is available here.

**Keywords:** Please provide keywords to help readers find your article. If the Instructions for Authors do not give a number of keywords to provide, please give five or six. Advice on selecting suitable keywords is available here.

**Headings:** Please indicate the level of the section headings in your article:

1. First-level headings (e.g. Introduction, Conclusion) should be in bold, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.
2. Second-level headings should be in bold italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.
3. Third-level headings should be in italics, with an initial capital letter for any proper nouns.
4. Fourth-level headings should be in bold italics, at the beginning of a paragraph. The text follows immediately after a full stop (full point) or other punctuation mark.
5. Fifth-level headings should be in italics, at the beginning of a paragraph. The text follows immediately after a full stop (full point) or other punctuation mark.

**Tables and figures:** Indicate in the text where the tables and figures should appear, for example by inserting [Table 1 near here]. You should supply the actual tables either at the end of the text or in a separate file and the actual figures as separate files. You can find details of the journal Editor’s preference in the Instructions for Authors or in the guidance on the submission system. Ensure you have permission to use any tables or figures you are reproducing from another source.

Please take notice of the advice on this site about obtaining permission for third party material, preparation of artwork, and tables.
Running heads and received dates are not required when submitting a manuscript for review; they will be added during the production process.

Spelling and punctuation: Each journal will have a preference for spelling and punctuation, which is detailed in the Instructions for Authors. Please ensure whichever spelling and punctuation style you use, you apply consistently.

Format-free submission
An increasing number of Taylor & Francis journals allow format-free submission, which means that, as long as your article is consistent and includes everything necessary for review, you can submit work without needing to worry about formatting your manuscript to meet that journal’s requirements. The ‘Instructions for authors’ for your chosen journal will tell you whether it operates format-free submission.

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

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

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

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

References
Please use this reference guide when preparing your paper.

An EndNote output style is also available to assist you.

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

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

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*Updated 12-05-2020*
Appendix 5: The Adapted Quality Evaluation Checklist

D.Ed.Ch.Psychol. 2017-20
Review framework for qualitative and quantitative/ investigation research with the focus of observation

Author(s):
Title:
Journal Reference:

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<th>Criterion</th>
<th>Score</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>R1</th>
<th>R2</th>
<th>Agree %</th>
<th>Comment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Appropriate utilisation of observation within research design (why)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
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<td>e.g. rationale vis-à-vis aims; links to previous approaches; limitations</td>
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<td>Clear use of observation protocols (what; when)</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td>Observation measures have</td>
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<td>Demonstrable credibility/ validity and trustworthiness/ reliability</td>
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<td>Well executed data collection using observation (how): <em>e.g. by whom; use of multiple observers; calibration of observation; clear details of who</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Analysis close to the observation data (for <em>qualitative</em> observations): <em>e.g. researcher can evaluate fit between categories/ themes and data</em></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>Appropriate statistical analyses of observation data – descriptive or inferential (for <em>quantitative</em> observations): <em>e.g. coherent approach specified; sample size justification</em></td>
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<td>Evidence of explicit reflexivity around observation e.g. impact of researcher; limitations; data validation (e.g. inter-coder validation); researcher philosophy/stance evaluated</td>
<td>2 1 0</td>
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<td>Comprehensiveness of observation documentation e.g. schedules; paper trail for external audit; data management</td>
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<td>Negative case analysis from observation (for qualitative observations) e.g. contrasts/contradictions/outliers within data; categories/themes as dimensional; diversity of perspectives</td>
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<td>Multi-level, inter-group, individual</td>
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| and/ or time trends identified from observation (for *quantitative* observations) | Clarity and coherence of the reporting of observation  
*e.g. clear structure, clear account linked to aims, key points highlighted* | Evidence of researcher-participant negotiation of observation and process  
*e.g. contracting; member checking; empower participants* | Valid and generalisable/transferable conclusions from observation  
*e.g. contextualised findings; implications of findings; limitations* |
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<td></td>
<td>2</td>
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of research; limitations of scope
Evidence of attention to relevant ethical procedures and issues around observation e.g. presentation; sensitivity; minimising harm; feedback

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<th></th>
<th>Max 21</th>
<th>Mean % agree</th>
<th>Mean % agree</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evidence of attention to relevant ethical procedures and issues around observation e.g. presentation; sensitivity; minimising harm; feedback</td>
<td>2 1 0</td>
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</table>

References


Appendix 6: Bespoke Analytic Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Definitions</th>
<th>How would you define observation?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your practice, what do you understand the different types of direct observation to be?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Such as time sampling, event sampling, naturalistic or structured observations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>In your experience do EPs have different names for these types of Observation?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. Purpose</th>
<th>When do you carry out observations?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Are there times when you will always carry out an observation?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Are there times when you would choose not to carry out an observation, why?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Why do you think observation is so important/or not?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- To what extent do you feel that your initial hypothesis influences what type of observation you carry out? E.g. If you know what you may see related to your hypothesis will you use a particular schedule, or perhaps choose to carry out a naturalistic observation without a schedule?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- When you use a schedule, do you always use the same ones for the same referred issues?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Do you carry a selection of schedules with you?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Can you give some examples of how you decide what should be the focus of your observation based on the information you have been given prior?</td>
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<td>Are your observations different depending on whether the purpose is a statutory assessment, or a piece of traded work?</td>
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<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>- <em>How/why not?</em></td>
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Does a setting ever ask you to look for something specific?

- *Is this helpful or an issue for observer bias?*
- *Is this different to looking for something specific based on your hypothesis?*
- *Can an observation ever be completely subjective or neutral?*

How do your observations differ across age ranges?

- *Are your observations different for post 16?*
- *Do you use particular schedules for observations relating to work readiness?*

<table>
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<tr>
<th>3. <strong>Contracting</strong></th>
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<tr>
<td>What do you do before you carry out an observation?</td>
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</table>

Do you contract your role with the class teacher or parent?

- *What does this look like?*
- *Does this look different depending on who has commissioned the work?*
- *Does it look different for a statutory assessment?*
- *When does it take place; e.g. at a planning meeting?*
- *Does the reason for the observation ever change between contracting and carrying it out if there has been a gap in time? Who suggests that this may be the case?*
- *If you have not met the C/YP before, how do you identify who to observe in the classroom?*
4. Ethics

When do you obtain consent to carry out an observation?

Do you tell the C/YP that you are there to observe them?

- Why/why not?
- Are there exceptions?
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see?
- Do you think this affects the reliability of your observation?

5. Tools

Are there times when you will observe naturally, without a schedule?

- At these times, what have you been looking for?
- What psychological frameworks influence what you look for at these times?

Are there times when you will use a schedule?

- Which schedules do you typically use?
- Do you always use the same schedules for the same referral issues?

Do you ever use a combination of naturalistic observation and a schedule during the same observation session?

- What might cause you to change between these approaches?
- Do you use time sampling methods when recording the observation?
- What influences your choice of time sampling method?
- Do you use a coding system, or write down verbatim what you are seeing or hearing?
6. During an observation

Do you speak to the teacher when you enter the classroom?
- Are they always aware of why you are there?
- Do you introduce yourself as an EP?
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see?
- Do you think this affects the reliability of your observation?

Where do you tend to position yourself in the setting?
- Do you move around?
- Do you sit out of vision to the C/YP you are observing?

Do you interact with the C/YP/teacher/TA/parent during the observation?
- Why/why not?

You see another child that catches your attention whilst observing another; what would you do?

7. Reliability

Do you think that both naturalistic observations and those carried out using an observation schedule are always reliable?
- Why/why not?
- What do you do to ensure your observations are reliable?
- Do you ever carry out paired observations with a colleague?
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<tr>
<th>8. Validity</th>
<th>Do you think that your presence in a setting affects validity of the observation?</th>
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<tbody>
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<td></td>
<td>- How do you manage this if it does?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Have you come across any observation schedules which you feel don’t assist you look for what they say they will?</td>
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<tr>
<th>9. Contexts</th>
<th>How important is it to observe across contexts?</th>
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<td></td>
<td>Are there times when you don’t observe a C/YP in more than one context?</td>
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### 10. Following an Observation

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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tr>
<td>Are there any settings where it is more, or less, difficult to carry out an observation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Why/why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Why do you think this is?</td>
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<td>Do you use the same schedule or time sampling method in each of these contexts?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Is it always necessary?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Does this ever significantly change a hypothesis you had during a consultation, or from reading a referral?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How important is it to see the C/YP in context following a consultation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Is it always necessary?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does this ever significantly change a hypothesis you had during a consultation, or from reading a referral?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you always feedback following an observation?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Who is usually in this meeting?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Do you always feedback to Young People following the observation, or wait until following the report and use a medium such as a letter?</td>
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<tr>
<td>What aspects of a feedback conversation following an observation do teachers/parents find helpful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What is not helpful?</td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you feed back more negative aspects of what you observed?</td>
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<td>11. Equipment</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you use a specific pro-forma for a naturalistic observation?</td>
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## Appendix 7: The Analytic Framework

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Questions and Prompts</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Definitions and terminology</td>
<td>How would you define observation?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In your practice, what do you understand different types of observation to be?</td>
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<td>- Such as time sampling, event sampling, naturalistic or structured observations</td>
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<td>In your experience do EPs have different names for these types of observation?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are your observations different depending on whether the purpose is a statutory assessment, or a piece of traded work?</td>
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</table>
1. Observation

- How/why not?

Does a setting ever ask you to look for something specific?
- Is this helpful or an issue for observer bias?
- Is this different to looking for something specific based on your hypothesis?
- Can an observation ever be completely objective?

How do your observations differ across age ranges?
- Are your observations different for post 16?
- Do you use particular schedules for observations relating to work readiness?

3. Contracting

What do you do before you carry out an observation?

Do you contract your role with the class teacher or parent?
- What does this look like?
- Does it look different for a statutory assessment?
- When does it take place; e.g. at a planning meeting?
- Does the reason for the observation ever change between contracting and carrying it out if there has been a gap in time? Who suggests that this may be the case?
- Are there some types/ occasions of observation for which you explicitly negotiate the focus or process of the observation? (from ‘researcher-participant negotiation’ in Evaluative Checklist).
- If you have not met the C/YP before, how do you identify who to observe in the classroom?

4. Ethics

When do you obtain consent to carry out an observation?

Do you tell the C/YP that you are there to observe them?
- Why/why not?
- Are there exceptions?
| 5. Equipment | Is there any equipment that you need for the observations that you carry out?  
- Do you use any other method of recording, e.g. voice recorder/video?  
- Do you use a coding system for what you see, or do you write long hand?  
- Do you write down what you hear verbatim?  
- Do you use a specific pro-forma for naturalistic or structured observations? (*from comprehensiveness of observation documentation* in Evaluative Checklist). |
| 6. Tools | Are there times when you will observe naturalistically, without a schedule?  
- At these times, what have you been looking for?  
- What psychological frameworks influence what you look for at these times?  
Are there times when you will use a schedule?  
- Which schedules do you typically use?  
- Do you always use the same schedules for the same referral issues?  
Do you ever use a combination of naturalistic observation and a schedule during the same observation session?  
- What might cause you to change between these approaches?  
- Do you use time sampling methods when recording the observation?  
- What influences your choice of time sampling method?  
- Do you use a coding system, or write down verbatim what you are seeing or hearing? |
| 7. During an observation | Do you speak to the teacher when you enter the classroom?  
- Are they always aware of why you are there?  
- Do you introduce yourself as an EP?  
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see?  
- Do you think this affects the reliability of your observation? |
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<th>Question</th>
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<td>Where do you tend to position yourself in the setting?</td>
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<td>- Do you sit out of vision to the C/YP you are observing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do you interact with the C/YP/teacher/TA/parent during the observation?</td>
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<td>- Why/why not?</td>
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<td><strong>8. Reliability</strong></td>
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<td>Do you think that both naturalistic observations and those carried out</td>
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<td>using an observation schedule are always reliable?</td>
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<td>- Why/why not?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- What do you do to ensure your observations are reliable?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To support confidence in your interpretation, do you check</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>interpretation of observation with a colleague? (From 'evaluate fit'</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>in Evaluative checklist', e.g. evaluate fit between theme and data)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- In qualitative observations, do you try to include opposites for</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>categories/ descriptors identified (e.g. ‘hits another student’ vs</td>
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<tr>
<td>‘positive physical initiation to another student?) (From ‘negative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>case analysis’ in Evaluative Checklist, e.g. looking for contradictory</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evidence)</td>
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<tr>
<td>- Do you ever carry out paired observations with a colleague from the</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>EPS or from the setting? (From ‘multiple observers’ in Evaluative</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Checklist)</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the information you receive from a referral or a consultation</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>prior to an observation cause any observer bias?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>To what extent do you feel there is a need, or scope, to disprove your</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hypothesis? (From ‘negative case analysis’ in Evaluative Checklist e.g.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>looking for contradictory evidence)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How far do you think professional knowledge and training influences</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>how you carry out contextual observation?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you check with the teacher/parent before the observation whether</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that day is a normal day in terms of timetable/routine?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| 9. Validity | Do you think that your presence in a setting affects validity of the observation?  
- How do you manage this if it does?  
Have you come across any observation schedules which you feel don’t assist you look for what they say they will? |
|---|---|
| 10. Contexts | How important is it to observe across contexts?  
Are there times when you don’t observe a C/YP in more than one context?  
- Why/why not?  
Are there any settings where it is more, or less, difficult to carry out an observation?  
- Why do you think this is?  
Do you use the same schedule or time sampling method in each of these contexts?  
How important is it to see the C/YP in context following a consultation?  
- Is it always necessary?  
- Does this ever significantly change a hypothesis you had during a consultation, or from reading a referral? |
| Following observation | Do you always feedback following an observation?  
- Who is usually in this meeting?  
- Do you always feedback to Young People following the observation, or wait until following the report and use a medium such as a letter? |
What aspects of a feedback conversation following an observation do teachers/parents find helpful?
- What is not helpful?
- Are some ways of feeding back quantitative data more helpful or appropriate, e.g. % occurrences, frequency counts; positive/ negative ratios; inferential/ descriptive analysis justifications (including sample size reference if appropriate); subject comparisons (e.g. class vs. class; target student vs. non-referred student; this sample vs. previous observational data) (From 'multi-level analysis' in the Evaluative Checklist).
- What is the relative importance of comprehensive written and verbal feedback on the observation? (From 'clarity and coherence' in the Evaluative Checklist).

How do you feed back more negative aspects of what you observed?
- How do you address a difference in point of view?

How important is it to triangulate what you have seen?
- How do you do this?

Do you include ‘warrants’ to the observation feedback such as the limitations on reliability or validity or transferability, including the potential impact of the observation/ observer, or missing data (e.g. non-completed part of a standard checklist), or caution in generalising from these observations (e.g. to a different class or teacher; between home, school or community settings)? (From ‘limitations’ and ‘impact of observer’ and ‘missing data’ and ‘limitations of scope’ in the Evaluative Checklist).

Is the feedback usually helpful for generating strategies to support the setting?
Appendix 8: Interview Schedule

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date of Interview</th>
<th>Male/Female</th>
<th>Year of Training</th>
<th>Training provider</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</table>

### Areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Questions and Prompts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>1. Definitions and terminology</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you define observation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your practice, what do you understand different types of observation to be?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Such as time sampling, event sampling, naturalistic or structured observations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In your experience do EPs have different names for these types of observation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>2. Purpose</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>When do you carry out observations?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there times when you will always carry out an observation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Are there times when you would choose not to carry out an observation, why?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- Why do you think observation is so important/or not?
- To what extent do you feel that your initial hypothesis influences what type of observation you carry out? E.g. If you know what you may see related to your hypothesis will you use a particular schedule, or perhaps choose to carry out a naturalistic observation without a schedule?
- When you use a schedule, do you always use the same ones for the same referred issues?
- Do you carry a selection of schedules with you?
- Can you give some examples of how you decide what should be the focus of your observation based on the information you have been given prior?

Are your observations different depending on whether the purpose is a statutory assessment, or a piece of traded work?
- How/why not?

Does a setting ever ask you to look for something specific?
- Is this helpful or an issue for observer bias?
- Is this different to looking for something specific based on your hypothesis?
- Can an observation ever be completely objective?

How do your observations differ across age ranges?
- Are your observations different for post 16?
- Do you use particular schedules for observations relating to work readiness?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3. Contracting</th>
<th>What do you do before you carry out an observation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do you contract your role with the class teacher or parent?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- What does this look like?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does it look different for a statutory assessment?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- When does it take place; e.g. at a planning meeting?
- Does the reason for the observation ever change between contracting and carrying it out if there has been a gap in time? Who suggests that this may be the case?
- Are there some types/occasions of observation for which you explicitly negotiate the focus or process of the observation?
- If you have not met the C/YP before, how do you identify who to observe in the classroom?

4. Ethics

**When do you obtain consent to carry out an observation?**

**Do you tell the C/YP that you are there to observe them?**
- Why/why not?
- Are there exceptions?
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see?
- Do you think this affects the reliability of your observation?

5. Equipment

**Is there any equipment that you need for the observations that you carry out?**
- Do you use any other method of recording, e.g. voice recorder/video?
- Do you use a coding system for what you see, or do you write long hand?
- Do you write down what you hear verbatim?
- Do you use a specific pro-forma for naturalistic or structured observations?

6. Tools

**Are there times when you will observe naturally, without a schedule?**
- At these times, what have you been looking for?
- What psychological frameworks influence what you look for at these times?

**Are there times when you will use a schedule?**
- Which schedules do you typically use?
- Do you always use the same schedules for the same referral issues?
| 7. During an observation | Do you ever use a combination of naturalistic observation and a schedule during the same observation session?  
- What might cause you to change between these approaches?  
- Do you use time sampling methods when recording the observation?  
- What influences your choice of time sampling method?  
- Do you use a coding system, or write down verbatim what you are seeing or hearing?  

Do you speak to the teacher when you enter the classroom?  
- Are they always aware of why you are there?  
- Do you introduce yourself as an EP?  
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see?  
- Do you think this affects the reliability of your observation?  

Where do you tend to position yourself in the setting?  
- Do you move around?  
- Do you sit out of vision to the C/YP you are observing?  

Do you interact with the C/YP/teacher/TA/parent during the observation?  
- Why/why not?  

If you notice another C/YP who you are concerned about, when you are there to observe another, what do you do?  

8. Reliability | Do you think that both naturalistic observations and those carried out using an observation schedule are always reliable?  
- Why/why not?  
- What do you do to ensure your observations are reliable?  
- To support confidence in your interpretation, do you check interpretation of observation with a colleague?  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>- In qualitative observations, do you try to include opposites for categories/ descriptors identified (e.g. ‘hits another student’ vs. ‘positive physical initiation to another student?’)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Do you ever carry out paired observations with a colleague from the EPS or from the setting?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Does the information you receive from a referral or a consultation prior to an observation cause any observer bias?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- To what extent do you feel there is a need, or scope, to disprove your hypothesis?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- How far do you think professional knowledge and training influences how you carry out contextual observation?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Do you check with the teacher/parent before the observation whether that day is a normal day in terms of timetable/routine?

Do you check with teacher/parent as to whether what you have seen is typical for that C/YP?

- If it is not, what are your next steps?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>9. Validity</th>
<th>Do you think that your presence in a setting affects validity of the observation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- How do you manage this if it does?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Have you come across any observation schedules which you feel don’t assist you look for what they say they will?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>10. Contexts</th>
<th>How important is it to observe across contexts?</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Are there times when you don’t observe a C/YP in more than one context?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Why/why not?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Are there any settings where it is more, or less, difficult to carry out an observation?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Following observation</th>
<th>Do you always feedback following an observation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Who is usually in this meeting?</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Do you always feedback to Young People following the observation, or wait until following the report and use a medium such as a letter?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**What aspects of a feedback conversation following an observation do teachers/parents find helpful?**

- What is not helpful?
- Are some ways of feeding back quantitative data more helpful or appropriate, e.g. % occurrences, frequency counts; positive/negative ratios; inferential/descriptive analysis justifications (including sample size reference if appropriate); subject comparisons (e.g. class vs. class; target student vs. non-referred student; this sample vs. previous observational data)
- What is the relative importance of comprehensive written and verbal feedback on the observation?
- How do you feed back more negative aspects of what you observed?
- How do you address a difference in point of view?
- Do you talk about limitations?

**How important is it to triangulate what you have seen?**
| - | How do you do this? |
Appendix 9a: Coding Completion – Example of Transcript Coding

Interviewer: Well, thank you. And it’s a bit about the use of observation, we are looking at it there, but when you carry out observation?

Respondent: Yeah, so... I was having the discussion the other day. I think we’re looking at it more as an exercise and I’ve generally at that point noted. I’ve had a kind of checklist when we were doing a kind of staff... but that’s what I would say. I would like to observe the child before I do any parent and staff consultation? I guess generally. I would want with parents and staff the parental information from their perspective, and then I would do an observation as part of gathering and kind of overview with the child. But, generally, there are... we could have a number of situations where I would observe and that’s down it’s given in a secondary context. Should say the reality is that don’t observe all of the context. It’s around things we ask and that is... I’ve had a kind of checklist where we’re doing things. It’s a good practice to ask questions from that context. It’s an opportunity to think of things from that context. It’s a good practice to ask questions from that context.

Interviewer: OK. And why do you think it’s so important to observe at those times?

Respondent: Why do I think it’s important? Because I think... one of the main roles as a psychologist is to provide an objective view of a child’s functioning within the context that they’re in and... I think gathering information from... even if you’re in one to one situations, it’s important to observe the child in the classroom and the majority of time. I think we’re moving with a lot of staff, certainly in a one to one situation where the child is... it’s important to gather information from parents and parents about what they think the child needs and what they’re doing and... how they could move forwards. That again is from their perspective so... I tend to find it quite useful. I find it important to observe because it’s the first time that you can put the information into the information you’ve gathered from the initial context and the context that the child is... within school. Because generally speaking, they’ll be in class, or they’re in the setting that they’re in. Observation will be easy, usually. You know, day to day. So I think it’s important because at that point you can then take an objective view as to how the child is within a setting, within the provision. You can then both gather information about the child, the child’s role, the child’s interaction with other children, what the child is...
Appendix 9b: Coding Completion - Example of Transcript Coding
## Appendix 9c: Coding Completion – Example of Coding and Exploration of Themes and Sub-themes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Direct quotations from original transcripts</th>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Theme: WHY/ Sub-themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| I see it as a process by which you would observe and **look at** a child in the school setting (T1 p1 L19-20) | • A look  
• See  
• View  
• Watch  
• overall | Definitions (What observation means to EPs) |
| To **look at** things (T2 L13) | | |
| my own definition of observation is...an opportunity to see a young person or a group of young people that I’m working with...or I suppose an adult, engaging in something which is relevant to the kind of problem dimensions that I’m looking for and the things that I’m trying to have an impact on. (T4 p1 L1-4) | | |
| just having an holistic **look** (T3 p1 L10) | | |
| standing back and watching (T5 L16) | | |
| an **overall look** really at what’s happening (T6 p1 L13) | | |
| We have that **helicopter view** don’t we? (EP3) | | |
| and would feed back my observation information alongside other **assessment** information as well (EP1) | | |
| EHC needs **assessment** (EP1) | | |
| you’d probably observe them **interacting** with their keyworker (EP2) | | |
| in our observations we can maybe see those **dynamics** as well between different people, so different children, you know, child to child relationships and also adult to child relationships (EP3) | | |
| looking at those different **teaching dynamics** as well (EP3) | | |
| we’re looking at different **dynamics within the classroom** and I think and different | | |
| | | Part of your assessment (Part of a broad information gathering process within EP involvement)|
| teaching styles that work for that child or don’t work for that child (EP3) |
| So maybe it’s been the teacher previously, now it’s the TA, so that’s something else you’re observing (EP3) |
## Appendix 9d: Coding completion - Example of Codes and Corresponding Quotes

**Before Cutting Up and Manually Searching for Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Codes</strong></th>
<th><strong>Quotes</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What it is</strong></td>
<td>I see it as a process by which you would observe and look at a child in the school setting (T1 p1 L19-20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>my own definition of observation is...an opportunity to see a young person or a group of young people that I’m working with...or I suppose an adult, engaging in something which is relevant to the kind of problem dimensions that I’m looking for and the things that I’m trying to have an impact on. (T4 p1 L1-4)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>just having an holistic look (T3 p1 L10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>an overall look really at what’s happening (T6 p1 L13)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I consider observations to be a form of direct involvement (T6 p4 L42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>we have that...helicopter view don’t we? (T3 p11 L7)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Type of observation</strong></td>
<td>Just call it observation (T3 p1 L16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Just be observation (T3 p1 L18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>naturalistic (T4p1 L10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a timed observation (T4 p1 L12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>observation where you’re looking at several young people but...you know, in a comparative way (T4 p1 L12-13)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>different types of observation, they’d still fall under the main category (T4 p1 L15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>ABC observations looking at antecedents, behaviour, consequences</strong> (T6 p1 L14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>time sampling (T6 p1 L15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>event sampling (T6 p1 L16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I say informal observation (T6 P1 L21)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Interacting with C/YP

what you sometimes find is that they want to come up and show you what they’re doing or something like that and…and I don’t think it’s really fair for me to then sit there stony faced and not respond, but I’ll usually try and say, ‘Oh yeah, that’s really good. You’re doing really well.’ (p16 L35-37)

In terms of asking to do particular things, again, I’d usually would have tried to do that through the initial contracting rather than…kind of in the spur of the moment. (T4 p17 L2-4)

usually I won’t and usually if it is, it will be stuff like [ask TA to read with the C/YP], things that are probably going to be happening anyway p17 L10-11

if the child approaches me, I will switch what I am doing and then I will start to join them in play because I’m not going to push them away so I can get my observation done (T5 p4 L25-26)

I would normally sit…and not interact or do anything for probably about 20 minutes, half an hour, depending on what’s going on, and then I will often then go and start chatting and interacting a bit more for ten minutes or so. (T5 p4 L30-32)

I will always work with the child individually so I…so it’s partly introducing myself, so I’m not unfamiliar next time they see me. They’ve seen me in the classroom…and I’ll go and join their table and have a bit of a help out on that table, so they know me a little bit, (T5 p4 L38-40)

I tend to stay back…and then will go and speak to them towards the end (T5 p7 L33)

if I feel like I’ve got enough information from stepping back in the observation, if I feel like I’ve got what I need…then sometimes I’ll go and join the child and start working with a teacher to kind of say, ‘Oh…I was just wondering…what do you reckon if we…’ (T5 p19 L20-23)

I think naturally in Early Years setting you do have a little bit more interaction, just with the environment as well because you’ve got children coming up to you, you often have the focus child who might approach you too (T6 p4 L9-11)

### Not interacting with C/YP

You would…observe and look at a child T1

Observing and looking at a child T1

Look at things (T2 p1 L14)

watching a child (T3 p1 L11)
I probably will try not to interact T4 p16 L35

In terms of asking to do particular things, again, I’d usually would have tried to do that through the initial contracting rather than...kind of in the spur of the moment. P17 L2-3

my big concern is marking the child out too much...in that classroom environment and there are ways around it, so just approaching other children too... I just prefer to sort of be as unobtrusive as possible...and just to see...the environment in as natural form as it could possibly be. (T6 p8 L42-43 & L45-46)
Appendix 10: Searching for Themes – Example of Process of Grouping Codes and Quotes to Manually Search for Themes
### Appendix 11: Reviewing Themes - Initial Themes Table and Process of Review

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>RQ2</th>
<th>RQ3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why do EPs use observation?</strong></td>
<td><strong>What do EPs do when they use observation in a piece of work?</strong></td>
<td><strong>How do EPs carry out observation?</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reasons for using observation</td>
<td>A shared understanding of considerations around observation</td>
<td>Approaches to observation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Subtheme 1: Theme 1: Part of a broad information gathering process

- **1.** Assessment
- **2.** Observe the CYP in context
- **3.** Test and generate hypotheses
- **4.** Look for exceptions, triangulate data
- **5.** Inform next steps

#### Subtheme 2: Theme 2: Coming to a professional view

- **1.** Give an outsider perspective
- **2.** Science, data and theory driven

#### Subtheme 3: Theme 3: Part of EPs’ assessment of CYP’s functioning in that school’s environment

- **1.** Dynamics between CYP, TA, peers
- **2.** Observe teacher/TA
- **3.** CYP’s responses
- **4.** Environment
- **5.** Specific difficulties (inc. schools direct EPs re...)

#### Subtheme 1 - Theme 1
- Consent
  - Subthemes:
    - **1.** Parent/carer
    - **2.** JACK Competency

#### Subtheme 2 - Theme 2
- Settings for observation: subthemes
  - EYFS
  - Primary
  - Secondary
  - Post 16

#### Subtheme 3 - Theme 3
- Triangulate observation data
  - Subthemes:
    - Gather information before, and/or, after observation
    - Referral info
    - Consultation
    - Staff views
    - Communicate the process to others (common approach; consent and contracting)
    - Other professionals

#### Subtheme 1: Theme 1: Professional autonomy guided by professional training

- Subthemes:
  - When in involvement takes place
  - Understanding of the EP role (in under unique profile/need)
  - How EPs come to their view, science & data driven/scientist practitioners (EP is part of our role and we do it because we are scientist practitioners)
  - Understanding of professional code of conduct/expectation (under ethical considerations)
  - Understanding of legal position re consent of EP
  - Theories informing decisions
  - Reflective practice
  - Some of these relate to planning b

#### Subtheme 2: Theme 2
- Reliability and validity

#### Subtheme 3:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bias:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- link to reflective practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- bias or hypotheses?</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 3</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional context of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Statutory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Non-statutory</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 4:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of observation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subthemes:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Structured observation schedules/frameworks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Naturalistic</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 5:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experience:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- Forms/checklists can be automatic from memory</td>
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</tbody>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subtheme 4</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theme 6:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Direction from school</td>
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Ethical decisions
Subthemes:
- Times when EP won’t observe
- Telling/not telling CYP when EP has parental consent
- Interacting/not interacting with CYP

Subtheme 8:
Theme 13:
Recording of observation data in vivo
Subthemes:
- Style of recording
  - equipment

Subtheme 9:
Theme 12:
Feedback
Appendix 12: Producing a Provisional Thematic Map
### Purpose

Now includes the words ‘information gathering’ and ‘assessment’ to
- reflect key findings from the data around why the EPs carry out contextual observation.

### Ethics

Originally one section, this has been sub-divided to include: On-going consent, assent and contracting and Further ethical considerations.

**On-going consent and assent**
- Analysis identified that whilst EPs have a clear rationale for not telling a C/YP they are being observed, they are always conscious of whether the C/YP being observed is perceived to be assenting to the observer being present. As such, consent does not end with parental or YP’s initial consent, but is an on-going process of monitoring.

**Contracting**
- Reflects the analysis that identified that most EPs have an initial consultation before contextual observation, where they ‘contract’ by explaining the purpose and process of contextual observation to parents and staff, as well as making arrangements.
- With Gillick Competent YP, a conversation would be had with them to ‘contract’ similarly. This would provide opportunity for consent to be withdrawn at this point.
- It was not clear how consent would be ‘informed consent’ if the contextual observation was carried out before a consultation.

Further ethical considerations prompts consideration around
- how an EP identifies the C/YP they have arrived to observe
| Frameworks | Inclusion of a specific section about the use of frameworks provides:  
|            | a) opportunity for EPs to enunciate the specific frameworks and psychological theories they draw on, and  
|            | b) documents the finding that EPs’ information gathering during contextual observation is not random, rather it is guided by professional frameworks and knowledge, which are internalised through experience and use. |
| Reliability and Validity | Three subsections now included:  
|            | Triangulation, Identification of exceptions and Generate and test hypotheses.  
|            | a) Incorporates key findings from the data around conceptualising inconsistencies, and what these mean for the C/YP as part of a wider process of EP involvement.  
|            | b) Also included here is a prompt around bias, which reflects the finding that professional training, specifically in relation to reflective practice, guides EPs’ approach to this. |
## Initial Contextual Observation Guidelines

### Considerations around: PURPOSE
- When do you use contextual observation?
- Are there times when you will always use contextual observation, or not?
- What purpose does contextual observation have in terms of your information gathering and assessment of a C/YP?
- Does a setting ever ask you to look for something specific during contextual observation?
- What influences the way in which you approach contextual observation?

### Considerations around: ETHICS

#### On-going consent, assent and contracting
- At what point do you obtain consent to carry out contextual observation?
- From whom do you obtain consent, considering the age of the C/YP?
- How do you ensure that you are gaining informed consent?
- With whom do you contract contextual observation and what does this look like?
- Are there some types/ occasions of observation for which you explicitly negotiate the focus or process of the observation?
- How far does the process of contracting support informed consent?
- Do you tell the C/YP that you are there to observe them?
  - Why do you tell them, or not tell them and are there exceptions?
  - Do you look for indications of assent from the C/YP?
  - When might you decide to cease contextual observation?

#### Further ethical considerations
- If you have not met the C/YP before, how do you identify them in the classroom/ setting?
- What do you do if another C/YP comes to your attention during contextual observation?

### Considerations around: EQUIPMENT
- What equipment do you have with you for contextual observation?
- Do you write by hand during contextual observation?
- Do you use a specific pro-forma during naturalistic contextual observations?
- Do you use video capture?

**Considerations around: INFORMATION GATHERING**

**Frameworks**

- Which frameworks do you draw upon when carrying out contextual observation?
- Which psychological theories underpin the frameworks you use?

**Structured and naturalistic approaches**

- To what extent do your initial hypotheses influence what type of observation you carry out? eg. If you know what you may see related to your hypothesis, will you use a particular schedule or choose to carry out a naturalistic observation without a schedule?
- When you use a schedule, do you always use the same ones for the same hypotheses?
- When you use a checklist, do you always use the same ones for the same hypotheses?
- Do you use a physical copy of the schedule, either paper or electronic?
- Do you use a coding system, or write down verbatim what you are seeing or hearing?
- Do you ever use a combination of naturalistic observation and a schedule during the same observation session?

**Contextual observation in statutory and non-statutory involvement**

- Does anything about the way you carry out contextual observation differ depending on whether it is for a statutory or non-statutory piece of work?

**Settings and contexts**

- How do your observations differ across age ranges?
- Are your observations different for post 16 young people?
- How important is it to observe across contexts?
- Are there any settings where it is more, or less, difficult to carry out an observation?

**Considerations around: RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY**

- Do you think that both naturalistic and structured contextual observation is always reliable?
- At any point in the process of contextual observation do you do anything particular with reliability in mind?
- In qualitative observations, do you try to include opposites for categories/descriptors identified (e.g. ‘hits another student’ vs. ‘positive physical initiation to another student’)?
- How far do you think Observer Effect has an effect on what you see during contextual observation?
- How far do you think Observer Effect affects the reliability, and or validity, of your observation?
- Do you speak to the teacher when you enter the classroom?
- Do you introduce yourself as an EP?
- Does their awareness of your presence have any effect on what you see; do you think this affects the reliability of your observation?
- Where do you tend to position yourself in the setting?
- Do you interact with the C/YP/ teacher/ TA during contextual observation?
- Do you carry out paired contextual observation?
- To support confidence in your interpretation, do you check interpretation of observation with a colleague?
- To what extent do you feel there is a need, or scope, to disprove your hypothesis?
- How far do you think that information you have gathered prior to contextual observation causes bias? Are aspects of professional training useful in guiding your approach to this?

**Triangulation**

- How do you triangulate information gathered from contextual observation?
- Do you discuss what you have seen with others, including other professionals if appropriate?
- Do you ask whether what you have seen is typical for that C/YP?
- Do you ask before the contextual observation whether that day is a normal day in terms of timetable/routine?

**Identification of exceptions**

- If you identify an exception to other information you have gathered, what does this mean for your thought process and next steps?
- Do you try to include opposites for categories/ descriptors identified in observation schedules?

**Generate and test hypotheses**

- What part does contextual observation play in your process of generating and testing hypotheses?

**Considerations around: FEEDBACK AND REPORTING**

- Do you always provide feedback in person following an observation?
- Who is usually in the feedback meeting?
- What aspects of a feedback conversation following an observation do teachers/parents find helpful?
- How do you feedback any negative aspects of what you observed?
- When is feeding back quantitative data helpful or appropriate, e.g. % occurrences, frequency counts; positive/ negative ratios?
- Is the feedback usually helpful for generating strategies to support the setting?
- How explicit are you in explaining the integration of the data from contextual observation with any other assessment methods?
- Do you include ‘warrants’ to the observation feedback such as the limitations on reliability or validity or transferability, including the potential impact of the observation/ observer, or missing data (e.g. non-completed part of a standard checklist), or caution in generalising from these observations (e.g. to a different class or teacher; between home, school or community settings)?
- What is the relative importance of comprehensive written and verbal feedback on the observation?