A reflexive thematic analysis on SENCOs' experience of Educational Psychologist facilitated peer group supervision.

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Summary

This thesis portfolio consists of three sections: a review of the literature relating to the subject area; an empirical paper; and a reflective chapter. Firstly, the literature review aims to provide an overview and critical analysis of the current research on the impact of supervision and supervision in schools. Secondly, the empirical chapter is a piece of research carried out with Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) working in primary and secondary schools in the East of England to explore their experiences of monthly peer group supervision sessions. Finally, the reflective chapter provides a reflexive account of the researcher's journey through the project. This includes a discussion of the research topic, the research paradigm and methodological decisions, analysis, implications for practice and future research, and dissemination.

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List of Abbreviations

AEP	The Association of Educational Psychologists
BPS	The British Psychological Society
CAMHS	Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service
CBT	Cognitive Behavioural Therapy
CR	Critical Realist / Critical Realism
CYP	Children and Young People
EHC	Education, Health and Care
ELSA	Emotional Literacy Support Assistant
EP	Educational Psychologist / Educational Psychology
EPS	Educational Psychology Service
FG	Focus Group(s)
GSF	General Supervision Framework
IPA	Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis
LA	Local Authority
HCPC	The Health and Care Professions Council
NASEN	National Association for Special Educational Needs
NHS	National Health Service
PGS	Peer group supervision
RTA	Reflexive Thematic Analysis
RQ	Research Question(s)
SATs	Standard Assessment Tests
SEN/SEND	Special Educational Needs / Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
TEP	Trainee Educational Psychologist
UNESCO	The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UEA	University of East Anglia

Chapter One: Literature Review

1.1 Introduction and Overview of the Literature Review

The importance and value that the Government place on education is highlighted by the large financial investments they provide for the training of teachers and school staff. This represents a significant economic expenditure and, presumably, a subsequent objective of this is of high-quality teaching and the attainment of students (Lauchlan, Gibbs & Dunsmuir, 2012). Being a successful educator, however, is not solely dependent on your training. The wellbeing of school staff must also be considered, especially given that research has shown the significant impact on self-efficacy and the interactions with students, of stressed and overwhelmed school staff in comparison to those experiencing a balanced personal and professional life (Greenfield, 2015; Lauchlan, Gibbs & Dunsmuir, 2012; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

The literature provides many conceptualisations of stress and there remains little agreement on a single definition, notably due to the various factors that can affect it and the subjective ways in which it is experienced (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Lewis, 2017; Nelson & Simmons, 2004). This will be explored further in the literature review. In brief bursts, stress can encourage us to focus and prepare for challenging situations. However, if this becomes increasingly frequent or prolonged, it can negatively impact on our quality of life and can lead to further issues (Montgomery & Rupp, 2005; Spilt et al., 2011). Education Support, the only UK charity dedicated to supporting the wellbeing and mental health of educators, conducted their Teacher Wellbeing Index in 2020. This, along with their more recent index (Education, Support, 2023), shows a worrying trend of increased symptoms associated with rising stress levels, such as difficulty concentrating and tearfulness; it also highlights the sustained pressure on senior leaders as they report the highest levels of stress amongst staff (Education Support, 2020).

Education Support (2020) conducted an additional survey in 2020 to investigate stress in the academic year following national lockdown; this highlighted stress levels between July and October rose from 62% to 84%. Sadly, many issues highlighted in the report existed long before COVID-19, as previously published reports demonstrated stress levels rising from 66% in 2017, to 67% in 2018, and 72% in 2019 (Education Support, 2019). Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs), the professionals responsible for coordinating the provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN), are one group of professionals particularly experiencing rising stress, as they are managing increasing workloads and responsibilities (Lewis, 2017). This is not limited to supporting the educational needs of students, but also behaviour, their emotional, social, physical, and medical needs,

and the complexity of working with families. Combined, these create immense pressure and may cause the SENCO distress (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Mackenzie, 2012; Reid & Soan, 2019).

Given the Educational Psychologist's (EP) role is to support schools at an individual, group, and systemic level (British Psychological Society, 2022a), it is pertinent to consider how they can support SENCOs to manage their responsibilities. One approach EPs take to support school staff wellbeing, is through facilitating peer group supervision, to afford staff the opportunity to reflect on practice and the impact this has. For the purposes of this literature review, peer group supervision (PGS) is defined as the regular gathering of individuals with a designated facilitator, to discuss concerns relating to professional work, with the objective of developing understanding and skills, reflect on practice and learn from experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Wilbur et al., 1994).

Narrative reviews, the approach taken in this review, provide an analysis of the current understanding and knowledge on a topic and are typically a vital part of empirical articles and theses (Baumeister & Leary, 1997; Ferrari, 2015). Narrative literature reviews align well with research with a qualitative element (Kysh, 2021) as the review identifies knowledge gaps, highlights potential areas for future research and develops research questions to provide further knowledge to the topic area. This literature review takes a thematic approach and aims to provide an overview and critical analysis of the themes, categories, and concepts in the literature. This will relate to the research topic of SENCO PGS and the potential support it could provide to help them manage stress and develop practice.

1.1.1 Search Process

Doncaster and Thorne (2000) recommended that Doctoral researchers conduct a process of planning and reflection when devising the search criteria for their research to ensure critical reflection. Electronic databases available through the University of East Anglia (UEA) were searched for this narrative literature review, as an initial means of investigating the topics. Databases including ERIC, ScienceDirect, PsycINFO, JSTOR and Google Scholar broadened the literature available. The review included research dated in the last 20 years, to ensure that it examined the most recent literature, however some references from earlier were included due to their significance to the field.

Search terms such as "school supervision" and "peer group supervision" in combination with terms such as "in schools" and "in education", and "and stress", were used to explore the supervision literature. Supervision in schools appears to be under-researched and so additional searches were conducted using the reference lists of relevant articles and

terms identified in the literature, for example, “clinical supervision” and “consultation groups” to identify additional papers. Themes apparent in relevant papers were used to broaden the search, which included individual supervision, group supervision and research using the structured peer group supervision model specifically. It is recognised that the research included in the review may be based on different country’s education systems, which could impact direct comparability.

In addition, terms such as “school staff stress” and “stress in schools” were used to explore the literature on stress. As stress is subjective, research with “stress” in the title, abstract or main body were reviewed. The literature highlighted that SENCOs were experiencing significant stress (Education Support, 2020; Reid & Soan, 2019) and so the researcher searched for papers on supervision with SENCOs in addition to supervision in and outside of education more widely. Stress and retention were issues apparent in the researcher’s placement local authority (LA) and they introduced peer group supervision to address this. As research on supervision in schools is scarce, it is important to note that literature on supervision not including the concept of “stress” was also included in the literature review.

Journals applicable to EP practice, including The British Psychological Society’s (BPS) Educational and Child Psychology journal, The British Journal of Educational Psychology and the Association of Educational Psychologist’s (AEP) Educational Psychology in Practice, were also searched to include the community’s perspectives. Relevant government reports and initiatives, advice and guidance, and unpublished theses contributed to the review, however it is recognised that unpublished theses will not be peer-reviewed. The themes identified in the literature formed the structure of this review.

This literature review is divided into four sections. The first section explored the emotional impact of working in schools to highlight the increasing pressures that school staff face in the current education system. The impact of stress on school staff and school communities, the influences on levels of staff stress and initiatives to support school staff are discussed. Section two outlined the role of the SENCO, including why teachers become SENCOs and the demands and facilitators of the role. The third section reviewed the literature around supervision. This section explored what supervision is, supervision models, the impact on stress of PGS, and the research on supervision in schools. Supervision for SENCOs was explored specifically and the EP role in delivering supervision. The fourth section summarised the literature review. This section outlined the gaps in the literature and directions for future study.

1.2 Exploring Staff Stress Within School Communities

1.2.1 The Impact of Stress on School Staff and School Communities

In their research on supervision and the emotional labour associated with teaching, Hanley (2017) highlights how teaching and working in schools is frequently seen to be a highly emotive role, with school staff often being on the front line with regards to the support of children and young people's holistic needs. As a result, school staff may also expect to experience increasing emotional impacts (Ellis, 2018; Lauchlan, Gibbs and Dunsmuir, 2012; Partridge, 2012), including stress levels.

1.2.1.1 Defining Stress. It is difficult to determine when the concept of stress began (Hutmacher, 2021). However, our understanding of this has evolved over time, it is a term frequently used in everyday life and, arguably, something that we all experience (Franks, Spencer & Vanichkachorn, 2023). Early definitions express stress as interruptions to our physiological and psychological balance (Cannon, 1929) which is typically interrupted because of a stimulus (Selye, 1956). Cannon (1929) and Selye's (1956) definitions were similar in that they both recognised stress as producing a biological response. More recent definitions describe stress as being determined by one's perception of a stimuli's "stressfulness" (Cohen et al., 1983, p. 385), and an outcome of not feeling like one has the suitable and appropriate personal or social resources to respond (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This suggests that two individuals could respond to an identical stimulus in different ways depending on the abilities and resources they feel are available to them to manage that situation. This raises the possibility of one managing their response to a stimulus more effectively than another. One may have greater protective factors such as social connections, a family network, or a community that increases their resilience and buffers the impact that may not be as readily available to others (Magson et al., 2020; Van Harmelen et al., 2017).

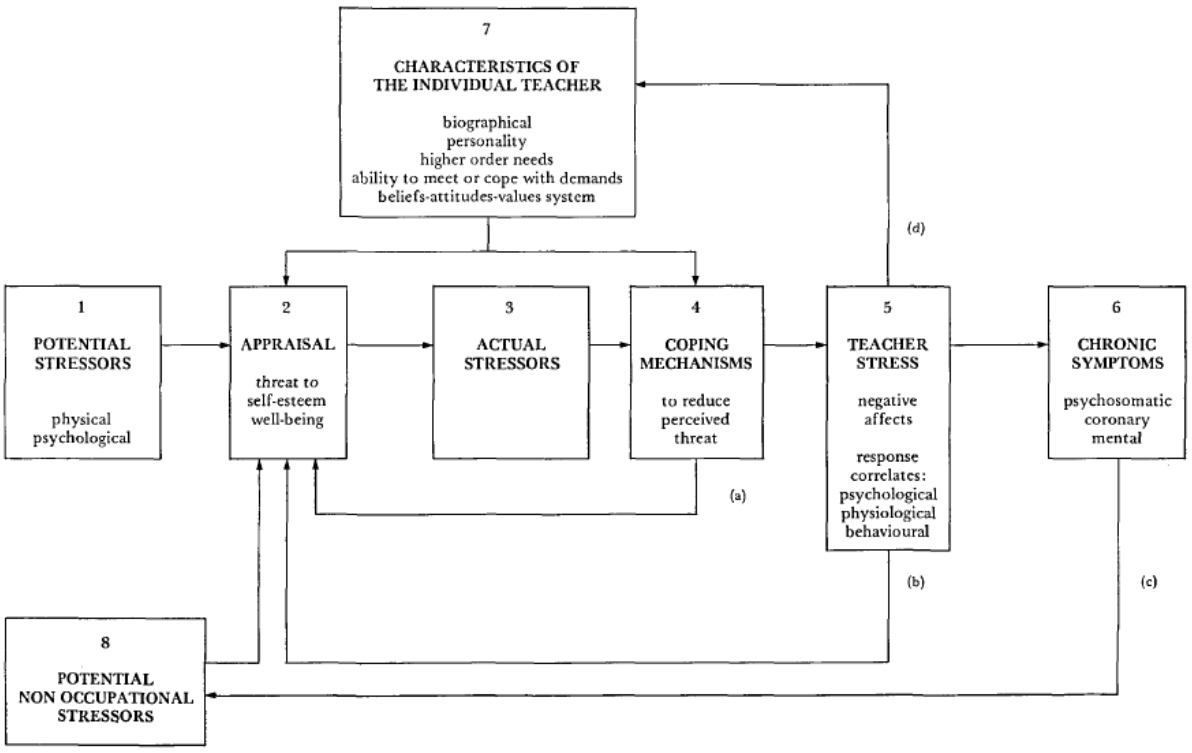
Franks et al. (2023) argued that modern definitions used by researchers typically recognise stress as a process whereby one understands and responds to a stimulus that is perceived as ominous. These events can occur frequently, be short or prolonged, and result in affectual, physiological, behavioural, and cognitive shifts. However, defining stress remains a challenge as stress is typically no longer seen as a simple stimulus or response, and incorporates the recognition of one's appraisal of the situation and our perceived ability to manage this. As more contemporary definitions recognise these aspects, it introduces a subjective element whereby stress can be placed upon a continuously adapting continuum (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Lewis, 2017). The researcher recognises that defining stress is increasingly complex when one considers that it does not always yield a negative outcome. When presented with optimal stress levels, this can

improve an individual's performance and encourage creativity (Avey et al., 2009; Ferguson, 2022).

Within the literature there are different definitions for stress and life events identified as stressful. For example, stress for some refers to actual life conditions that may occur in one's life, such as getting divorced, whilst others may place a greater focus on the reaction or response that is evoked as the stress (Cohen et al, 2019). Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) developed a model of teacher stress, and researchers argue that it is a dominant perspective now used in contemporary research (Ferguson, 2022; McCarthy, 2019). The model (see Figure 1) aims to demonstrate the complexity of stress and the different factors that affect it. Although this model was developed with teachers in mind, Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) argue that it is applicable to other areas and can be widely employed. The model incorporates the objective reality of the challenges faced in education, such as increasing workload, alongside individuals' subjective analyses of such encounters, including their perception of their ability to manage (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; McCarthy, 2019). These difficulties are ones not solely faced by teachers, but other educationalists such as senior leadership teams (SLT) and SENCOs (Curran & Boddison, 2021; Reid & Soan, 2019).

Figure 1

A Model of Teacher Stress



Initially the model recognises probable psychological and physical stressors (Box 1, Figure 1), such as the high expectations expected of educators and completing relevant paperwork and referrals. The appraisal stage of the model (Box 2, Figure 1) is critical as it recognises the subjective experience of stress and the degree to which one experiences that stress. Here the model demonstrates how various factors can affect this, such as the interaction of the stressors, the coping mechanisms one has (Box 4, Figure 1), an individual's characteristics (Box 7, Figure 1), and the impact of non-work-related stressors (Box 8, Figure 1) on the extent to which they feel stressed. The interplay in this model between the various factors that affect one's appraisal of stress highlights that stress is subjective (i.e., one's perception of stress), but also recognises the objective factors at play such as workload.

Due to the model placing the management of stress on individuals, it disregards the causes of stress and how to address these, including issues of a more systemic nature. Instead, the model addresses the outcomes and symptoms of having experienced stress. The model does, however, provide us with a structure that can be utilised when supporting school staff to manage both the subjective and objective challenges they face, and develop skills in evaluating the impact of stressors and ways of dealing with these.

Although many definitions of stress exist, there is limited agreement on a specific classification. The literature highlights that stress can be closely related to other constructs such as burnout, emotional labour, and wellbeing (Beech, 2021). This contributes to the lack of clarity (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Lewis, 2017; Nelson & Simmons, 2004). Epel et al. (2018) maintains that the broad definitions render the construct as limited in use as it currently stands. Kagan (2016) has called for researchers to provide detailed accounts of how stress is conceptualised within their research. The subjective nature of the construct coupled with different methods of measuring stress add complexity when reviewing and comparing studies within the existing literature.

Stress is complex to define and models attempting to define stress often include numerous factors (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). The model of teacher stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978), for example, acknowledges the intertwining factors impacting an individual's appraisal of stress. An example of a factor in their model includes an individual's characteristics. The model also recognises the factors that are prevalent when considering stress in education settings. The current research aligns with the definition that stress is the experience of negative feelings in response to a potential stressor, which may be physical or psychological in nature. If there is a discrepancy between an individual's abilities to manage the potential stressor and the demand made upon them, they may be more susceptible to

experiencing stress (Cohen et al., 1983; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Franks et al., 2023). Kyriacou (2001) argued that stress is often felt because the demands that are placed upon individuals outweigh their ability to meet them. The researcher felt that this definition recognises that there are subjective and objective factors that affect one's response to stress. Other researchers might adopt different orientations and therefore consideration and criticality must be explored to determine which definition to use when discussing stress. One must also remain critical when exploring other studies, including those researching supervision and stress, as although still valid in the field, discussion of stress definitions may differ.

1.2.1.2 The Impact of Stress on Staff Personal and Professional Wellbeing.

Research in schools has shown that stress is closely associated with psychological wellbeing (Sheffield et al., 1994; von der Embse & Mankin, 2021). In 2012, Partridge reported that there was little research into the wellbeing of school staff, however this is increasing. For example, Education Support have reported a pattern over the last five years of increasing stress, anxiety, mental health issues and reports of those considering leaving the profession (Blick, 2019; Education Support, 2018, 2021). Adams et al. (2023) also highlight that 86% of educators felt their work was stressful and this affected their health and wellbeing. The increasing stress and anxiety are owing to numerous factors not limited to rising expectations on staff to manage pupils' holistic development and limited resources to execute their work (Adams et al., 2023). Educators identified wellbeing at work as one of the most important indicators of overall wellbeing (Rath et al., 2010). This suggests that levels of stress impact school staff in numerous ways, personally and professionally.

Ofsted (2019) identified that rising stress levels amongst school staff are increasing the health issues they are experiencing. This includes difficulty with sleep and concentration (Salter-Jones, 2012). School staff reported a lack of work-life balance (Adams et al., 2023; Department for Education, 2019b; Salter-Jones, 2012), not feeling valued and their increasing stress as affecting their motivation. Some discussed feeling a sense of "de-professionalisation" due to the limited autonomy, feeling "done to" rather than "worked with" (Ofsted, 2019, p. 5). School staff subsequently felt their own needs were neglected by themselves and others, with increasing stress often leading to burnout, feeling guilty about prioritising themselves and staff putting on an emotional front (Gearhart et al., 2022; Partridge, 2012). This resulted in poorer occupational and overall wellbeing and increased stress-related absence for many (Ofsted, 2019).

Policymakers have sought to cultivate schemes to support staff (Brady & Wilson, 2020) but low occupational wellbeing continues to be reported and the complexities of

working in schools remain high (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Ellis, 2018). Partridge (2012) and Reid and Soan (2019), on their research on providing school senior manager support via supervision, argued that this is owing to the limited opportunities of staff to reflect on their role and the support available to them.

1.2.1.3 The Impact of Staff Stress on Students. A report by the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS, 2009, p. 35) described school staff as "valued and trusted by many children and young people". Pupils spend a large proportion of their time in school, and it is arguable that staff, therefore, play a significant part in supporting pupils. Staff are often the first individuals that young people will ask for support (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Hattie, 2016; Partridge, 2012; Salter-Jones, 2012).

Healthy staff are vital to support children and young people (CYP) to develop and achieve their potential (Hattie, 2009, 2015; McCallum, 2021; Rubie-Davies, 2014). Hattie (2009) highlighted the importance of school staff on CYPs' success, irrespective of children's social status, circumstance, or location. To effectively support pupils to develop a sense of belonging and thrive, staff must be well (McCallum, 2021; McCallum & Price, 2010, 2016). One study demonstrates that staff who feel well reported higher job satisfaction and commitment (Kern et al., 2014). An increasing body of research demonstrates the need for teacher quality, good attitude, motivation, and effectiveness for systems to perform well, and staff wellbeing is closely connected to staff quality (Mingren & Shinquan, 2018). This suggests the need for schools to employ and retain a high-quality workforce, however stress is a key component affecting their decision to remain in their roles (Ellis, 2018).

Professional wellbeing is important and significantly impacts CYP's attainment and outcomes (Blick, 2019; Roffey, 2012). Staff with good wellbeing and manageable stress correlated with increased pupil academic outcomes. For example, Briner and Dewberry (2007) studied the relationship between staff wellbeing and Standard Assessment Tests (SATs) and found that 8% of the variation in scores were owing to teacher wellbeing. Educators may struggle to successfully support their students if their own needs are not met, and "when teachers become burned out their students' achievement outcomes are likely to suffer because they are more concerned with their personal survival" (Watt & Richardson, 2013, p. 272).

1.2.1.4 The Impact of Staff Stress on School Systems. Whilst educators who report feeling well have a more positive impact on school systems (McCallum, 2021), staff stress levels impact staff retention. Research by Roffey (2012) and Spilt et al. (2011) demonstrates the link between wellbeing and effectiveness; organisations whose staff report greater wellbeing and reduced stress report better organisational outcomes. Meanwhile,

higher levels of stress and lower levels of wellbeing contribute to a greater turnover of qualified professionals (Education Support, 2021; Perryman & Calvert, 2020). Ofsted (2019) identified that workplace relationships typically promote workplace wellbeing. As school staff turnover is increasing, it could be argued that there are reduced opportunities for those working in schools to develop long-term working relationships with their colleagues. These are relationships that could have provided emotional support and therefore may contribute to further increasing levels of stress.

School staff often feel unable to access support from the school system (Ellis, 2018). Research cited several reasons for this, including having too few colleagues available to share concerns with, acknowledging the pressures that all school staff are experiencing, individuals who are struggling not wishing to burden colleagues further with their concerns, and the concept of reflecting on practice not being prioritised within education (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Ellis 2018). This is not a new trend, however, as Partridge (2012) has previously identified that such difficulties are leaving school staff feeling isolated rather than supported by the system. This lack of support is likely to affect the school staff's self-efficacy and feeling isolated may result in them resigning. This lack of retention would, in turn, impact the support available to students' and their academic outcomes (Briner & Dewberry, 2007; McCallum, 2021; Watt & Richardson, 2013).

There is an alarming trend whereby staff feel unable to talk about wellbeing issues at work and some also felt discouraged from doing so (Brady & Wilson, 2020; Culshaw, 2019; Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). This has been exacerbated by a pattern within schools of only discussing concerns, such as stress, when individuals are struggling. Researchers argue that this is when individuals should be having these conversations as they already know when they are well (Culshaw, 2020; Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). Worryingly, this has led to an atmosphere where educators feel there is a lack of support, and they are under surveillance to perform (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). They associate struggling with failing and worry about being seen as a problem (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Department for Education, 2019a). Education Support (2018) identified that 36% of staff surveyed described how talking about their difficulties may be portrayed as an inability to effectively do their job, thus losing credibility. Moreover, 24% believed the support they may receive by disclosing their difficulties would not be helpful, leaving them hesitant to do so (Education Support, 2018). This can impact the school as a system as they increasingly manage the stressors and strains experienced with fewer resources. This potentially risks affecting staff motivation.

Positive relationships impact staff performance (Department for Education, 2019a). France and Billington (2020) reported that school staff recognised the importance of working

relationships and having the opportunity to develop such relationships provided them with a sense of camaraderie and reduced feelings of isolation. This research was based on a small sample of five Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) in one English county and so wider generalisations from the findings cannot be made. Maxwell (2013) acknowledged the need for supportive systems both within and outside of work to determine team spirit and identity. Once established, staff reported increased self-confidence and self-efficacy within their role (Maxwell, 2013). Culshaw and Kurian's (2021) research supported this, noting that individuals experiencing less stress reported greater connectedness and relation with colleagues in complex education systems.

1.2.2 Influences on Levels of Staff Stress

Research highlights an array of factors impacting school staff stress levels (Blick, 2019; Paterson & Grantham, 2016). This includes systemic and practical influences. As schools do not work in isolation from other systems, it is important to consider how wider systems and the ways in which they work implicate schools and the impact of those decisions on staff. In understanding the influences on staff stress in greater detail, we may be able to identify how to reduce these and better support educators.

1.2.2.1 Systemic Influences on Staff Stress. Throughout the last few years, the world has had to adjust to numerous changes. It is important to acknowledge the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on exacerbating school staff stress (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; UNESCO, 2020). In their research on staff perspectives on the return of in-person teaching, Marchant et al. (2021) and Minihan et al. (2022) highlighted that stress amongst staff heightened causing increasing levels of burnout. This was, in part, due to the rapid and substantial changes that were made to the way staff worked, but also due to the undesirable effect of COVID-19 on their physical and mental health (Marchant et al., 2021; Minihan et al., 2022). Although the pandemic has passed, the need for staff mental health to be prioritised remains (Marchant et al., 2021; Minihan et al., 2022). This is not a new need, however. Culshaw and Kurian (2021, p.15) described the pandemic as the "magnifying glass" that emphasised pre-existing concerns relating to rising school staff stress levels, uncovering in greater detail the daily impact that working in schools can have.

Additional research identifies trends of increasing expectations of educators in relation to their responsibility, accountability, and performance levels (Partridge, 2012; Rae et al., 2017; Weare, 2015). Such demands subsequently escalate others' expectations, thus placing great importance on high-quality teaching and support. However, we must recognise that schools not only deliver the curriculum, but they are also increasingly in a position of providing emotional and social support, and staff do not always feel appropriately able to

manage this (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015; Salter-Jones, 2012). Research describes how schools have become used to a result-driven ethos that is determined by league tables, and this has led to a culture of competition and comparison, rather than empathy and partnership (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Mc Keon, 2020; Partridge, 2012). Salter-Jones (2012) highlighted that a change in political focus has resulted in an emphasis on good teaching and attainment as being essential for positive behaviour, moving away from recognising the importance of CYP's emotional wellbeing, regardless of the impact of this on engagement and learning. This highlights the importance of addressing pupils' emotional needs to allow them to progress with their academic attainment (Wang et al., 2019). With support for pupils' emotional needs increasingly being provided by school staff, it is important to recognise that staff may also require support to deliver this care.

1.2.2.2 Practical Influences on Staff Stress. There is a dearth of training for school staff that could support them to manage the difficulties they face (Partridge, 2012; Riley, 2011). Research on the importance of student-teacher relationships and the experience of school staff emotional wellbeing in one secondary school, highlights the limited understanding that professionals have of the relationships between their work and emotions (Partridge, 2012; Riley, 2011). Salter-Jones (2012) emphasised that staff require ongoing training and support to be able to effectively provide for CYP. Without this, staff continue to struggle balancing their own and their students' needs (Ellis, 2018; Rae et al., 2017). It is important to recognise, however, that such research (e.g., Rae et al., 2017) is limited by the schools that formed the sample, as research was typically conducted in one school or type of schools, and staff employed in other schools and provisions may not have shared this view.

Many staff are also ill-equipped in the way of practical resources and support, resulting in barriers to effectively performing their job (Partridge, 2012). It is recognised that work demands are increasing, and this challenges staff (Ellis, 2018; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hanley, 2017). Plentiful research suggests how being ill-equipped can add to an already excessive workload and unrealistic expectations (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Ellis & Wolfe 2019; Gibson et al., 2015; Roffey, 2012). The combination of systemic and practical influences on stress may result in staff feeling increasingly stressed and burnt out.

1.2.3 Initiatives to Support School Staff

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), published a report examining support for teachers and education personnel during times of crisis. They note the importance of supporting educators' "wellbeing, social-emotional competencies, and resilience before, during and after crisis" (UNESCO, 2020, p. 4).

Culshaw and Kurian (2021, p. 2) argue that there is a need to promote more “specialised support” to address staff needs, as instances of stress and anxiety are “significantly higher” compared to professionals in other sectors (Health & Safety Executive, 2022, p. 6). This is more prevalent across England than neighbouring countries, as sickness is linked to difficulties with stress, which resulted in upwards of two million days of staff absence annually (Department for Education, 2018).

Policymakers have attempted to introduce general wellbeing initiatives to target stress levels, such as mindfulness approaches (Brady & Wilson, 2020; Hwang et al., 2017). However, within the literature it remains unclear how to support individuals most effectively, as their struggles continue (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Ellis, 2018). Culshaw and Kurian (2021) highlighted that a proposal that targeted workload, independence, and improved working relationships was most valued, as these were based on prevention and often impacted the school’s ethos. Less successful ideas were those that aimed to address difficulties that staff were already facing rather than addressing the causes (Brady & Wilson, 2020). Culshaw (2019) suggested that more needed to be done systemically for such initiatives to be effective.

The Department for Education (2021) recently published their Education Staff Wellbeing Charter, demonstrating their commitment to supporting staff wellbeing by reducing unnecessary workload, considering the impact of policy change, and through mediums such as peer support and supervision. This is optional guidance to support and address the impact of the real-life problem of declining wellbeing. This initiative recognises the need for shared responsibility between schools, colleges, and the Department for Education to “protect, promote and enhance” staff wellbeing (Department for Education, 2021, p. 4). The Department for Education (2021) recognise that staff are an invaluable resource to schools, and by increasing this value, a more supportive and encouraging atmosphere may be created in schools. Positive, supportive environments have the potential to contribute towards recruitment and retention of good professionals (Hughes et al., 2015; Willis & Baines, 2018).

Supporting school staff remains a complicated undertaking. This was prevalent prior to the pandemic, when the recognition of positive psychology highlighted the need for SLTs and those informing policies to address the emotional difficulties that staff face (Seligman, 2011). This stimulated increased attention on supporting staff (Hwang et al., 2017), but Culshaw and Kurian (2021, p. 4) argue that initiatives, such as mindfulness, run the risk of becoming “tokenistic”. Thus far, such schemes have provided blanket support, whereas Brady and Wilson (2021) argue that measures that address the cause of problems that

specific groups of staff are experiencing in relation to their roles and responsibilities, and those which are embedded in whole school culture, are more effective and well-received. Culshaw and Kurian (2021) questioned if initiatives truly address the pressures different groups of staff are facing in relation to their specific responsibilities. More research is needed to understand the effectiveness of initiatives across different stakeholders (e.g. teachers, SLTs, and SENCOs) and how to address issues such as retention (Brady & Wilson, 2021).

Research indicates that SENCOs are a vital member of the school community and responsible for ensuring that pupils with SEN receive the relevant support (Colum & Mac Ruairc, 2023; Hallett, 2022). National statistics highlight the increasing identification of SEN amongst children during recent years and, therefore, workloads have increased in an unprecedented fashion (Department for Education, 2023; Hutchinson, 2021). In their research into SENCO career plans, Male (1996) found that 80% of participants found their role “stressful” or “very stressful”. More recent research highlights how stress is still present for SENCOs (Lewis, 2017) with 84% of participants reporting the role as “moderately”, “very”, or “extremely” stressful. The increase in workload owing to increased identification of needs potentially adds pressure, and subsequent stress, on the SENCO, which may explain Lewis’ findings. This could suggest that more specific support for groups of staff, such as SENCOs, is needed. The SENCO will be explored further in the following section.

1.3 The Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO)

Within schools, there are a variety of staff who support CYP’s development, including but not limited to teaching and learning support staff. Regarding support for CYP with SEN, the role of the SENCO is particularly important, to ensure needs are met and provisions provided (Dobson et al., 2022). The detail and context from the previous section is therefore especially significant given the important role of the SENCO.

1.3.1 The History of the Role

The Warnock Report (1978) was a prominent milestone for the conceptualisation of education for children with SEN and disabilities as it required (for the first time) schools to develop their policy, practice, and teaching to accommodate all children (Smith & Broomhead, 2019). The 1981 Education Act translated many of the recommendations of the Warnock Report into law. The SENCO role was not formalised until the 1993 Education Act and the Department for Education and Skills’ (1994) Special Educational Needs Code of Practice were introduced. At the time, the SEN Code of Practice (henceforth referred to as “the Code”) clarified that it was not the sole responsibility of the SENCO to teach these children but instead the role was related to providing support to teachers.

The SENCO position has seen numerous transformations regarding role expectations (Curran & Boddison, 2021; Dobson, 2023; Esposito & Carroll, 2019). Reviews of the Code in 2001 and 2015 saw the advancement of the SENCO towards one that collaborated with Headteachers and governing bodies to develop SEN policy and provision. SENCOs are increasingly involved in delivering staff training, and using their knowledge, understanding, and critical skills to support others navigating a complex arena (Dobson, 2023; Smith, 2017). This is supported in Plender's (2019) research, which explored primary SENCOs' experiences, and identified that they often discuss their role in relation to wider contextual shifts, such as taking on more strategic work in schools (i.e., whole school change) and greater involvement in Education, Health, and Care (EHC) needs assessments. This diverges from previous literature, which did not highlight as much of a focus on strategic working (Cole, 2005). The most recent Code outlines eleven key areas of responsibility (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). As well as accountability for the strategic progression of school policy and provision, and an understanding of the Local Offer, SENCOs must: ensure that policies are in operation; support the effective allocation of SEN budgets; take accountability for implementing and coordinating SEN provision; liaise as the first point of contact between families, colleagues and other professionals; ensure that teaching and learning is of a high standard and in line with a graduated approach, and; support senior leaders and schools to meet their responsibilities as stated in the Equality Act 2010.

Although the status of SENCOs as part of SLTs continues to vary (Curran & Boddison, 2021; Layton, 2005; Qureshi, 2014), it is recognised as a significant role within schools, notably in promoting the inclusion of all CYP regardless of need (Curran & Boddison, 2021; Tysoe, 2018). Arguably, working with CYP with SEN reaps many rewards, and SENCOs report enjoying teaching and building rapport with students and other professionals (Department for Education, 2019a; Tysoe, 2018). However, such work continues to be difficult (Smith, 2017; Warnock, 1978).

1.3.2 *Why do Teachers Become SENCOs?*

Research by Dobson (2021) suggests that factors affecting primary and secondary teachers' decisions to embark on a SENCO career are wide ranging, and teachers typically cited several reasons for wanting to do so. These reasons are reportedly similar for primary and secondary schools, despite them working with children and young people at different points of their education and the different ways in which primary and secondary schools operate. Reasons cited often related to their personal and professional circumstances, as well as wider political and cultural reasons.

Dobson (2021) further identified that SENCOs' interest in the role often develops owing to their own experiences. These can be personal and professional, such as their aspiration to emulate colleagues' practice or their experiences of their children's journeys through the SEN system. In Dobson's (2021) analysis, the drivers for wanting to become a SENCO were categorised into what they termed outward-facing factors and inward-facing factors. The outward facing factors incorporated inclusion, which highlighted individuals' keenness to encourage greater equity through actions such as policy change, and high-quality provision, which indicated that SENCOs had ideas for the provision in their school. These factors were considered by SENCOs as more significant than the inwards facing factors, which were educational and professional development, and leadership voice and status. The former identified that many were interested in the role to develop their skills and knowledge whilst the latter highlighted their desire to be listened to by SLTs. Interestingly, Dobson (2021) found that SENCOs who were younger and had spent less time in the role were more motivated by educational and professional development. For these SENCOs, this could look like them developing additional skills to support them in the role or coping mechanisms to reduce stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). Meanwhile, those already considered as part of their school's SLT had a greater desire to increase their leadership voice and status. Having had greater opportunity to develop effective coping mechanisms, these SENCOs may turn their focus to extending their ability to meet increased demands.

A common theme within their data highlighted that SENCOs' yearned for change and greater social equity and integrity in schools, irrespective of their age or breadth of experience (Dobson, 2021). Regardless of the reasons teachers give for wanting to become a SENCO, what remains paramount is the importance of SLTs recognising the motivations and expectations of prospective SENCOs when recruiting, to encourage them to remain in role. It is important to recognise that these are not mutually exclusive to the SENCO role and are likely to also relate to teachers. In addition, policymakers should aim to understand and more clearly define the role to ensure those recruited are a good fit (Dobson, 2021). This could involve exploring SENCOs' characteristics (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978).

1.3.3 The Demands of the Role

Although an important position within the school, numerous aspects can make an already challenging role even more so (Fitzgerald & Radford, 2017; Warnock, 1978). As qualified teachers, SENCOs regularly maintain teaching responsibilities alongside their duties. In their research on primary SENCO's experiences, Plender (2019) found that SENCOs were also often responsible for coordinating subjects and one of their participants talked about juggling several of these responsibilities. Although individual experiences

varied, the complex and intricate nature of their responsibilities demonstrates how the role is further expanding. Researchers identified that SENCOs are not always provided the opportunity to accomplish their responsibilities in the most advantageous way (Lewis, 2017; Smith, 2017; Szwed, 2007). Qureshi (2014) reports that this may be owing to SENCOs' varying experience of working alongside or as part of the SLT. SLT support is a significant provider of SENCOs' efficacy and the impact they are seen to have on colleagues' practice (Qureshi, 2014). Without such support, balancing multiple responsibilities with limited opportunity to address these effectively, may negatively influence stress levels.

During the pandemic, SENCOs often dealt with rising safeguarding concerns (Middleton & Kay, 2021), and were more likely to experience increasingly intense negative emotions in comparison to class teachers with no additional responsibilities (Burton and Goodman, 2011; Dobson & Douglas, 2020; Mackenzie, 2012). In more recent research on the role (Plender, 2019; Tysoe, 2018), SENCOs highlighted the changes in the context of their work, including increased pressures of others' emotional wellbeing. Previously, SENCOs often felt the impact of others' anxieties, projecting such feelings onto themselves (Evans, 2013). This is supported by Plender's (2019) findings, whereby SENCOs found themselves acting as a method of containment for those they were working with, which involved them experiencing their own and others' emotions and returning them in a more manageable and digestible fashion. Managing the impact of this, alongside dealing with increasingly hostile behaviour from CYP who were learning to manage the uncertainties of COVID-19 (Asbury et al., 2021) are believed to have contributed to the intensity. One SENCO in Plender's (2019) research highlighted the importance of having resilience to allow them to manage and manoeuvre their emotions effectively. The research also identified that SENCOs often compare themselves to their counterparts and avoid reflecting on their own feelings. Dobson (2023) highlighted in his paper on the SEN Green Paper that the SENCO population are not at threat of leaving due to retirement, and although many leave to pursue promotions there is still a significant number leaving for other reasons. Consideration is needed for why this is the case, but a possible hypothesis is that stress, burnout, and the interlinked factors described in Kyriacou and Sutcliffe's (1978) model of stress, are contributory factors. Research indicates that SENCOs in training had greater levels of positivity about the role than those who were already trained (Dobson, 2021), suggesting that perceptions of the role differ to reality. Dobson (2021) and Smith (2017) proposed that this may be owing to wider factors such as lack of resources, time and status causing an increased dissatisfaction with the role. More research is needed to understand how to retain SENCOs.

SENCOs reported regularly feeling alone, as they operated at the “edge” of school life (Evans, 2013, p. 300). As a result, they frequently felt disregarded by school leaders as an important member of the SLT (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017). The SENCO role is typically the only role of its kind within a school, and responsibility is often held by one individual. The concentration of these feelings may have made it more difficult to manage as the role is often conducted in isolation from others (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017; Lewis & Ogilvie, 2003). Although the Code (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) states that teachers maintain responsibility for their pupils’ progress, the SENCO is responsible for overseeing SEN provision and is often seen as the one with greatest expertise, regardless of SEN being everyone’s responsibility. The role requires one to conduct activities that are considered very different to others’ responsibilities, such as supporting the allocation of SEN budgets, resulting in SENCOs feeling different to their colleagues (Parker & Bowell, 1998; Lewis, 2017).

SENCOs felt unable to share the difficulties they faced with teaching and leadership colleagues, as competing agendas and differing demands were placed upon them (Lewis, 2017; Sharpe, 2020). Mackenzie (2012) and Burton and Goodman (2011) highlight the frequent discrepancy between SENCOs’ perspectives and those of their colleagues’, due to opposing objectives around inclusion and academic development. This likely adds to the loneliness experienced. It is important to highlight that Lewis’ thesis acknowledges notable difficulties with the practicalities of their research, including the way in which the data was gathered. Their participants completed surveys in the presence of one another, which may have affected participants’ ability to answer accurately. Lewis acknowledges that previous literature has highlighted individuals as less likely to be willing to participate in studies when facing disproportionate levels of occupational stress themselves (McDonald-Fletcher, 2008). In addition, Dobson and Douglas (2020) recognised that their sample was small, and a proportion of the participants were recently trained at the time of data collection which may have impacted stress levels. Furthermore, the interviews conducted in Dobson and Douglas’ (2020) research did not aim to generalise their findings due to the risk of them being misinterpreted and provided only a snapshot that may not have fully encompassed extraneous variables, such as the impact of COVID-19.

SENCOs develop great skill but are seldomly recognised for this in the way of status in schools (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Lewis, 2017; Smith, 2018; Wedell, 2012). Recent theses have researched the implications of SENCO training on perceptions of the role (Smith, 2017) and the SENCO role in implementing SEN legislation (Tysoe, 2018). Whilst Smith (2017) aimed to explore SENCO perspectives regarding their commitments, Tysoe (2018) wished to explore how SEN legislation was being implemented. Tysoe’s (2018)

research suggests that SENCOs often appear to act as more of a middle leader, which causes them to be an in-between for teachers and SLTs**.** Combined, Tysoe (2018) and Smith (2017) highlight that the extent and importance of a SENCOs' responsibilities is a stressful and demanding undertaking and implementing some legislation can prove problematic (Smith, 2017; Tysoe, 2018). As noted earlier, 80% of participating SENCOs describe their role as stressful (Male, 1996) and the lack of recognition of their skill frequently led to them feeling underappreciated (Burton & Goodman, 2011). One should recognise that the compulsory role of the SENCO in maintained schools was still new at the time of Male's research, and it is likely that SENCOs were still adapting to their responsibilities in line with the new Code (Department for Education and Skills, 1994). However, over a decade later stress was still found to be commonplace amongst SENCOs (Mackenzie, 2012) and the SENCO Forum in 2016 identified that 39% of SENCO respondents were considering leaving and 32% had planned to leave (Lewis, 2017). This is supported by further research (Smith, 2017). It is important to note that although Lewis' research contained an unofficial survey, and it was based upon a small sample that is not representative of the whole SENCO workforce, the results cause concern.

A more recent review, undertaken between 2018-2020, suggests that 52% of the SENCO respondents were considering leaving their role within 5 years, quoting workload stress as the probable cause (NASEN, 2020). This reduced to 27% in 2020, which is a promising reduction of 25% (NASEN, 2020) and in line with Curran and Boddison's (2021) report. However, within the review the quantity of SENCOs completing the survey dropped from 200 in 2018 to 52 in 2020, and the reduced percentage may be less representative of the wider population. In addition, the review does not reference other causes that affect SENCOs' decisions to leave the profession, such as the impact of others' attitudes towards inclusion. Middleton and Kay (2021) researched SENCOs' experiences of leading SEN education during COVID-19 and found that they were increasingly supporting colleagues and families with their mental health. As outlined in Kyriacou and Sutcliffe's (1978) model of stress, the interplay between their appraisal of potential and actual stressors, their coping mechanisms, their individual characteristics, alongside any non-occupational stressors can affect how they manage this. Middleton and Kay (2021) argue that the stress experienced, and the subsequent impact of this personally and professionally, suggests the need to further review and revise policies in reference to their positioning within schools and around the emotional support they provide. Following such a move, they suggested it would be advantageous for SENCOs to be supported to reflect on their practice and contemplate how to effectively manage their responsibilities (Middleton & Kay, 2021; Soan, 2017).

1.3.4 Facilitators of the Role

Research has identified several factors that effectively support SENCOs to conduct their role and, when considering Kyriacou and Sutcliffe's (978) model of stress, this has the potential to increase the coping mechanisms upon which individuals can draw to reduce any perceived threat. Research has identified that the development of positive relationships with parents, colleagues and SLT is paramount (Heath, 2017; Plender, 2019). This is supportive of other research that argues that forming relationships is a central tenet of being a SENCO and regarded as a good use of time (Maher & Vickerman, 2018; Tysoe, 2018). This provided them with a support network (Plender, 2019) that was an apparent method of support during the pandemic (Middleton & Kay, 2021). Heath (2017) found that the development of relationships with parents was fostered when there was a shared understanding of the school's approach and of the concerns for the child. It also helped that SENCOs felt they better understood the parents' situation when they had developed a relationship, they could show empathy towards them, and they were able to demonstrate how they could provide support. Heath (2017) argued that this enabled trust between the SENCO and parents, which supported them to acknowledge and contemplate each other's views and come to a shared agreement.

SENCOs highlight that discourse between professionals can support them in conducting their role (Middleton & Kay, 2021). This was felt to be easier when SENCOs were part of SLTs as they felt more valued (Middleton & Kay, 2021; Smith, 2017). The need for discourse between SENCOs and wider colleagues was vital in maintaining supportive and positive professional relations (Bartram, 2018; Middleton & Kay, 2021). The evidence in Heath's (2017) research indicates that the way in which SENCOs communicated, be they formal or informal methods, was indicative of the development of relationships with colleagues and positive communication supported mutual agreements.

SENCOs are an integral element of the school community and more research exploring how to address the stress they experience would be beneficial (Lewis, 2017). Research has shown that it is crucial for practitioners to feel supported and able to manage their role to provide positive outcomes for students (Blick, 2019; Burton & Goodman, 2011; Roffey, 2012). Methods such as supervision or space to reflect on practice could provide this opportunity (Blick, 2019). SENCOs were more likely to share their experiences of the emotional challenges of the role when compared to learning support staff and teachers (Mackenzie, 2012). SENCOs reported receiving substantial support from EPs before and during lockdown, and although continued contact with EPs can prove challenging, external support encouraged them to reflect and process the challenges they faced (Evans, 2013; Middleton & Kay, 2021). Supervision is not a common practice in education, yet such approaches could provide the opportunity to contain feelings and improve performance

(Burton & Goodman, 2011; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Mackenzie, 2012). Burton and Goodman (2011) highlight that SENCOs yearn for resources such as supervision, to deal with daily stressors and they affirm that professionals outside of education who experience challenging roles, including those within counselling professions, typically access such practice. Throughout their training and practice, EPs receive instruction on, and experience various supervision models (HCPC, 2015). As external professionals, EPs understand the importance of partaking in supervision practices and are in an ideal position to facilitate such forums and help schools enhance and reflect upon their professional practices (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

This section has explored in detail the nature and challenges of the SENCO role, and the resources and support required for SENCOs to manage the stress and demands of the role. This followed from a broader analysis of the significance of staff stress in schools in section 1 of this review. The following section will focus in more detail on supervision which has been suggested by McBay et al. (2023) as a particularly important source of support for school staff, including SENCOs. It will initially conceptualise supervision, before exploring various supervision models, the mechanisms that could explain stress reduction, and reviewing research on supervision in schools.

1.4 Supervision

1.4.1 What is Supervision?

Supervision is commonplace in numerous professions, for example health, counselling, and educational psychology (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010) and, for some practitioners, supervision is a requirement undertaken regularly to support various elements of their role. Due to its use across professions, there are numerous conceptualisations, understandings and titles that could refer to the process of supervision, including but not limited to clinical supervision, problem solving groups, process consultation groups, and reflecting teams (Andersen, 1987; Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Other examples include Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996) and Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995). Dunsmuir and Leadbetter (2010) define supervision as a process which allows one to focus on the development of their work in a confidential and reflective space. The main purpose is to improve the service provided to the client group (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, 1987). Hawkins and Shohet (2012) describe supervision as a means of support for helping professions, and a joint effort between supervisor and supervisee to effectively provide for the supervisee's clients. This occurs by providing reflective space to consider the wider systemic impacts affecting the clients' difficulties, improving the quality of supervisee's work, strengthening the client-practitioner relationship,

and improving the supervisee's wider development (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Supervision involves discussing these various elements to aid professional progress, support professionals to manage the emotional impact that their work can induce and ensure the quality of service offered (Carroll, 2007; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010; Lockett, 2001).

Hawkins and Shohet (2007) recognised three central aims and purposes of supervision; these include improving expertise, safeguarding, and nurturing and helping the supervisee. Muchenje and Kelly (2021) similarly describe its three functions, termed normative, formative, and restorative. Normativity in supervision involves increasing one's knowledge of their role and the processes in which they work, for example in relation to how one must conduct their role; restorative refers to recognising and addressing the emotional impact that their work may induce personally and professionally, including the stress and burnout that one may experience; and finally, formative supervision acts in relation to one's skill development, for example in relation to professional development (Beddoe, 2010; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021; Sturt & Rowe, 2018).

Supervision is commonly conducted on a one-to-one basis, with a supervisor and a supervisee, however, can also be conducted within a group setting. Within individual supervision, an interaction discussing aspects of professional practice and/or casework that is proving challenging takes place between the supervisee and their supervisor, who is typically trained to practice in a similar field to the supervisee (Squires, 2010; Willis & Baines, 2018). For example, in relation to Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), therapists may expect to be supervised by a more experienced and knowledgeable CBT practitioner (Squires, 2010). The aim of this is to facilitate a safe space where the supervisee can develop their practice. Carroll (2007) highlights that if discussions are not focussed on professional practice, it is instead considered counselling. PGS is an example of group supervision and is defined by researchers as the regular gathering of a group of individuals with a designated facilitator, to discuss concerns relating to professional work, with the objectives of developing understanding and skills, reflecting on practice, and learning from experience (Bernard & Goodyear, 2014; Wilbur et al., 1994). As with individual supervision, these professionals typically share common ground, such as similar working roles or backgrounds. Research suggests some of the benefits of group supervision includes improved communication and development of camaraderie (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020). There are various group supervision models available for use with groups of professionals, which are explored it the next section.

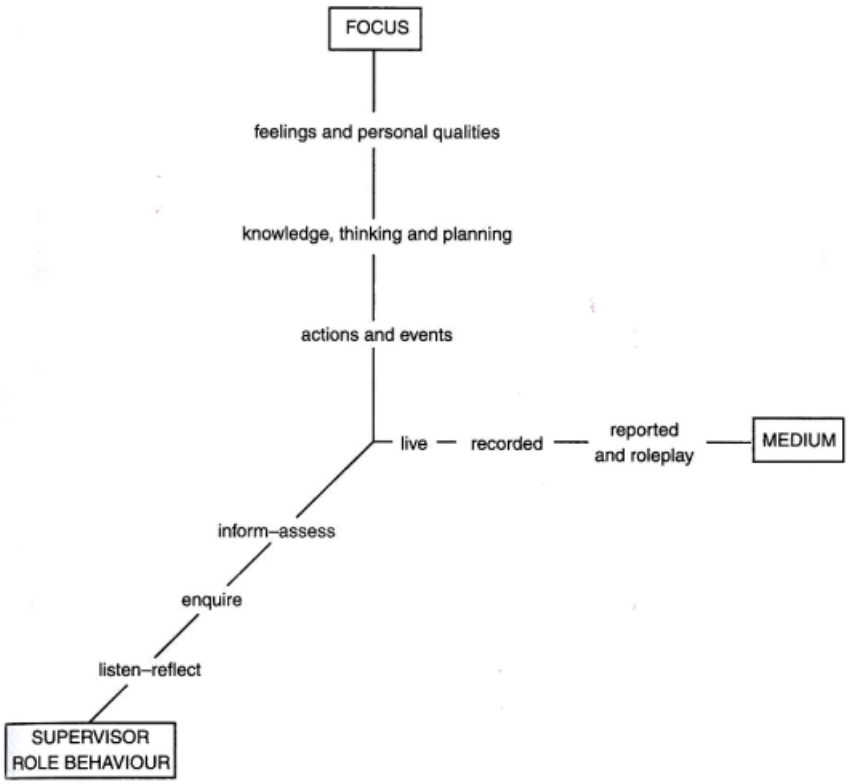
1.4.2 The Similarities and Differences of Group Supervision Models

Supervision models are “a way of conceptualising and applying supervision in a transparent and systematic way in any setting” (Carroll et al., 2020, p. 9). Many models exist to support supervision (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013), which Hawkins and Shohet (2020) argue fit into four categories. These are psychotherapy-based models, process models, second-generation models, and developmental models. A survey into some of the most frequently used models in EP practice identified Scaife’s (2001) and Page and Wosket’s (2001) models (Dunsmuir et al, 2015). Other models include Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996), process consultation approach (Farouk, 2004; Hanko, 1999), structured peer group supervision (Wilbur et al., 1994), reflecting teams (Andersen, 1987), work discussion groups (Jackson & Warman, 2007), and Circle of Adults (Newton, 1995). These models, and research utilising them, will be considered further when exploring the mechanisms to support stress reduction and the research on supervision in schools.

1.4.2.1 The General Supervision Framework (GSF). Scaife’s (2001) framework (Figure 2) concentrates on the processes enabled by the supervisor. This focuses on three dimensions, through which variation can exist. These include the focus of supervision, the medium of supervision, and the supervisor’s behaviour (i.e., the questions asked in sessions). Dunsmuir and Leadbetter (2010) argued that this model suits practitioners’ diverse theoretical leanings as it is not grounded in a specific theory and is a recommended model for use by EPs. A general belief of the GSF is alike to the Discrimination Model (Bernard, 1997), which outlines that supervisors should adapt their responses in line with supervisee needs, which are likely to vary between sessions. Scaife recognises the importance of adult learning theories which highlights the need to respond dynamically to supervisee’s needs in terms of constructivist ideas. In addition, this must be in accord with the life experience of individuals to avoid cognitive dissonance (Piaget, 1972). As this model is not established on one theory, it is applicable to practitioners from different backgrounds. For example, professionals interested in behavioural psychology may wish to focus on actions and events, whilst those interested in cognitive models or psychodynamic theory may wish to focus on exploring knowledge and thinking, or feelings and qualities, respectively. A focus on these could support supervisees to recognise their characteristics that support them to meet or cope with demands. The applicability of different theories ensures that supervisors and supervisees do not consistently focus on one area, thus neglecting others (Callicott, 2011). Bernard (1997) argues the simplicity of the GSF is a weakness, as it risks losing the depth and rich detail based on a hardy theory.

Figure 2

Scaife's (2001, p.75) General Supervision Framework.



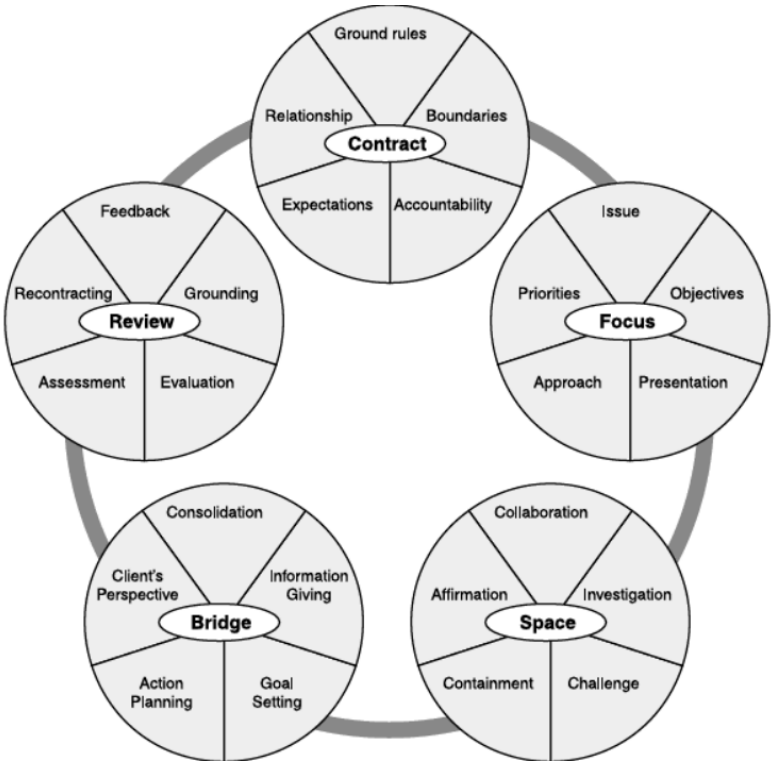
1.4.2.2 The Cyclical Model of Counsellor Supervision. The Cyclical Model of Counsellor Supervision (Page & Wosket, 2001, p. 36) was developed for counselling professions and is based on humanistic, psychodynamic, and cognitive-behavioural principles. Figure 3 demonstrates the five stages that can be further divided into sub-stages (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013) which include the contract, focus, space, bridge, and review. A core assumption of this model is that supervision should offer containment to supervisees rather than focus on educative or therapeutic processes (Callicott, 2011).

Although their sample was small, Callicott and Leadbetter's (2013) research on the factors involved when EPs supervise other professionals involved interviewing six EPs and four professionals. Their analysis identified that interprofessional supervision was positively perceived. This could have been supported through the containment that Wosket and Page (2001) highlighted as being experienced when utilising the Cyclical Model. They suggested that the stages of the process supported increased feelings of safety and security, and the bridging stage supported professionals to put aside the application to practice, which is revisited at a later stage (Wosket & Page, 2001). However, Callicott and Leadbetter (2013) recognised that their participants noted some negative experience at the contracting stage,

some of whom discussed having contrasting understandings of the purpose of supervision which caused tension within the supervisory relationship. Callicott and Leadbetter (2013) also highlight that, whilst the model can be applied flexibly, its path appears fixed which could cause some disruption to the natural flow in sessions.

Figure 3

Page and Wosket's (2001, p.36) Cyclical Model of Counsellor Supervision.



1.4.2.3 Solution Circles. Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996) aim to help professionals to become "unstuck" by calling on the resources of those with the ability to help, something the authors term "community capacity" (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996, p. 1). Solution Circles are formed of five to nine professionals with roles including the problem presenter, process facilitator, note taker and brainstorm team. Wood (2016) argues that Solution Circles were not originally developed as a supervision model, instead as a problem-solving tool and a way of promoting inclusion. In developing the tool, the authors did not specify specific psychological theory, however social constructivism (Gergen, 1985) for example, helps us to understand the influence of social interactions in building understanding and meaning that can subsequently support problem solving processes.

A combination of research explored the use of Solution Circles (Brown & Henderson, 2012: Elliott, 2019; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Whilst Brown and Henderson (2012) focused on introducing Solution Circles in primary and secondary schools to promote

problem-solving using colleagues' skills, Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) studied the views of sixty-two educators having experienced the intervention and ten Solution Circles were facilitated during either ELSA supervision or staff or partnership meetings. Elliott (2019), in their research on the use of Solution Circles in secondary school, interviewed two SENCOs and four Solution Circle facilitators. Brown and Henderson (2012) evaluated this model with nine teachers to explore how it could be used to promote the inclusion of pupils with a wide range of needs in mainstream schools.

Combined, the research highlighted that the process was viewed positively, and it had the potential to support a variety of situations, including inclusion (Brown & Henderson, 2012; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). The model was viewed as a "flexible tool" that provided opportunities to contribute, have these suggestions valued (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015), and to encourage positive and creative approaches to problem solving (Brown & Henderson, 2012, p. 184). Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) highlighted the connection between problem solving and solution-oriented approaches, extending their research to include additional opportunity to clarify and have more in-depth dialogue regarding the problem. Elliott (2019) identified three themes. These related to pupils' experiences, professionals' views on the viability of organising and utilising Solution Circles, and included the process, outcomes, and future hopes. These explored the practicalities in terms of running sessions, the efficacy of the approach and the resources needed to utilise them, and how professionals wished to use them in future. Grahamslaw and Henson's (2015) participants described how the intervention could support additional areas of their practice. An increase in solutions and ideas resulting from Solution Circles, and an increase in staff and pupil motivation was reported (Elliott, 2019; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Elliott (2019) further highlighted how Solution Circles could support educators to develop their confidence and resilience. An increase in confidence was also reported in Grahamslaw and Henson's (2019) study, with participants sharing that they felt their ideas were appropriate and valuable.

1.4.2.4 The Process Consultation Approach. Previous research studying EP-facilitated supervision in schools has explored group consultation which, like supervision, continues to be challenging to define and incorporates a range of models (Nugent et al., 2014). Although various definitions are available, there is tacit agreement in the literature that it is a problem-solving process between two or more individuals where members voluntarily join to discuss an issue that they wish to resolve and develop their skill (Beech, 2021; West & Idol, 1987). Beech (2021) highlighted that it is arguable whether consultation should be considered supervision and Rae et al (2017) argued that its prime purpose is its educative aspect whilst supervision also has a supportive element. The Process

Consultation Approach was originally developed by Schein (1969), and research exploring this approach highlights the role of the supervisor in supporting the supervisees to ponder and create solutions (Rockwood, 1993). This model has since been adapted by Hanko (1995) and Farouk (2004) to include consideration of a school's culture and of group dynamics.

Farouk's (2004) approach draws on Schein's approach for its emphasis on dealing with individual and group dynamics and Hanko's structure and order, whilst also adopting Hanko's focus on the "restoration of objectivity" (Farouk, 2004, p. 210) for the presenter. They argue that this is accomplished through use of psychodynamic principles and interactional systemic thinking. Hanko's view of the group as having a single voice whereby views interact dynamically and changeably is shared by Hawkins and Shohet (1989), who further suggest that if dynamics are not addressed effectively, then this can cause the group to become unhelpful (Farouk, 2004). In addition to the interactional systemic thinking and psychodynamic principles, Farouk (2004) suggested that they also utilise solution focused questioning, such as "what do you think made that lesson easier to manage" (p. 216), to support school staff to become more focused on moving forward and be contextually or systemically oriented (Durrant, 1995; Rhodes & Ajmal, 1995).

Several studies have explored the process consultation approach (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Davison & Duffy, 2017; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). Davison and Duffy (2017) examined the impact of process consultation in supporting teachers and teaching assistants running nurture groups to manage behaviour that challenges, whilst Hayes and Stringer (2016) used interviews, questionnaires, and participants' reflections to evaluate teachers' views of the usefulness of the approach. These highlighted several benefits. Meanwhile, Babinski and Rogers (1998) explored process consultation for early career teachers, facilitated by counsellors and school psychologists. Bartle and Trevis (2015) studied the perceptions of EP-facilitated supervision to educators working in a specialist provision and the impact of this.

Participants across the studies highlighted that having the time for discussion and reflection, and to identify possible solutions was useful (Babinksi & Rogers, 1998; Hayes & Stringer, 2017; Kempsell, 2018). Hayes and Stringer's (2016) study highlighted that individuals appreciated the opportunity to provide and receive support from colleagues. Babinski and Rogers' (1998) and Davison and Duffy's (2017) analyses echoed this, identifying that supervision groups provided social, practical, and emotional support which participants' felt developed their professional identity, and it was vital to be honest when sharing the impact of their practice. An improvement in problem-solving and behaviour

management skills were highlighted which appeared to support individuals beyond the target child (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Hayes & Stringer, 2016).

Increased self-awareness, self-efficacy, and self-confidence in their roles were highlighted as beneficial outcomes of the approach (Bartle & Trevis, 2015; Davison & Duffy, 2017). Davison and Duffy (2017) highlighted the personal effects of the process consultation approach as a substantial benefit. This included the development of relationships, teamwork, group support, and increased communication amongst colleagues (Bartle & Trevis 2015; Davison & Duffy 2017; Hayes & Stringer, 2016). One attendee described her experience as therapeutic whilst other supervisees felt reassured and less stressed (Davison & Duffy, 2017). Hayes and Stringer (2016) recognised that their data could not provide definitive outcomes due to few questionnaires being returned. It is also important to acknowledge that some factors regarding the execution of the groups were identified, including the organisation, willingness of schools and individuals to engage in change, and facilitator effectiveness.

1.4.2.5 The Structured Group Supervision Model. Wilbur et al. (1994) describes a model of structured group supervision involving five steps which was originally developed with trainee counsellors as a method to support the development of counselling skills. The process provides constructive challenge via a circular process which allows the opportunity for all members to hear others' views on their contributions (Scaife, 2008). Researchers argue that it is applicable to issues often discussed during supervision for other professions such as school psychologists, and it is an empirically validated model that has been tested within the field (Bahr et al., 1996). Bernard and Goodyear (1992) suggested that the model was conceptualised in a similar way to other group supervision models (e.g., Holloway & Johnston 1985; Sansbury, 1982). The format of the model is "structured for the active involvement and participation of all group members" (Wilbur et al., 1991, p. 92), highlighting group processes as a significant element of supervisee development (Linton, 2003). For example, the model encompasses supervisors' roles and theoretical leanings as pertinent to personal and skill development (Hart, 1982). Wilbur et al. (1994) identified other significant processes that they called the task process group modality, psycho process modality, and the socio process modality. Respectively these recognised the teaching element and discussion of the case, the internal processes occurring in individuals such as the development of higher-level social skills throughout sessions.

Newman et al. (2023) studied the practicalities of structured peer group supervision during school psychologist training and McKenney et al. (2019) utilised case study methodology to describe structured peer group supervision with graduate students studying

school consultation and the influence on communication and problem-solving skills. Across both studies, numerous aspects were identified as useful, such as receiving feedback, its potential to support future practice, and peer support, which helped supervisees to better plan their time and reflect (McKenney et al., 2019; Newman et al., 2023). Newman et al. (2023) and McKenney et al. (2019) highlighted how the approach developed skills, including but not limited to consultation skills such as paraphrasing, empathic responding, summarising, and asking clarifying questions.

McKenney et al.'s (2019) participants reflected on the benefit of discussing and sharing ideas with peers as this helped them to consider further factors affecting the case discussed and alternative views and solutions to problems that they previously found challenging to address. Additional research by Ingraham et al. (2022), which studied the support novice consultants request and receive, identified the subsequent learning occurring from colleagues, which often identified strengths and helped them to consider wider interacting factors. Across the studies, some challenges and barriers were identified, which included a period of adjusting to the model and there not consistently being an issue for the group to explore (Newman et al., 2023). A lack of content to discuss in sessions was an issue that the participants in McKenney et al.'s (2019) also highlighted. This was exacerbated when the participants felt their concern was not enough of a problem to discuss, they felt it was too straightforward, and when they perceived peers as having more persistent concerns (McKenney et al., 2019).

1.4.2.6 Reflecting Teams. Andersen (1987, p. 415) developed reflecting teams to support families who were "stuck" with a problem, and he described how a team observed a conversation between a family and interviewer. During the process, the interviewer asks the team for their thoughts about what is being discussed in the interview whilst the family are listening. The interviewer then returns to the family to comment on the team's observations. A comparable process was discussed by Shah (2019a) in the professional context of working with general practitioners. The assumption of reflecting teams is that more than one reality of a situation can exist, and the group's task is to share their thoughts regarding alternative realities to the family's overriding narrative (Harrawood et al., 2011).

Shah (2019b) aimed to evaluate reflecting teams as an educational intervention, and they recruited ten general practitioners to their action research. Meanwhile Harris and Crossley (2021) explored client experience of reflecting teams in clinical practice and Hicks et al. (2021) studied the helpfulness of reflections in family therapy to support reflecting teams to be as efficacious as possible. Harris and Crossley (2021) indicated from their analysis that reflecting teams were viewed as unique and while they initially felt strange to

some participants, they were viewed as an effective and useful approach. The effectiveness of the intervention was reiterated in Shah's (2019b) and Hicks et al.'s (2021) studies. Shah (2019b) highlighted that it provided a practical tool and an opportunity to discuss alternative perspectives and have their feelings validated. The participants in Harris and Crossley's (2021) study discussed the usefulness of sharing with others new ideas.

Hicks et al. (2021) found common characteristics of reflecting team members, which included being respectful, collaborative, and non-judgmental and, alongside discussing alternative solutions, this helped group members to settle impasses and foster positive interaction. Harris and Crossley (2021) suggested that this helped individuals to feel understood and safe. However, research also identified that being provided with too much information is less useful and teams were not perceived as positively if rapport was not established between the facilitator and the group. Hicks et al. (2021) identified that groups found certain reflections less helpful than others, and this impacted the change process. For example, they identified metaphors, and others' commenting on their own feelings and experiences as less helpful (Hicks et al., 2021).

1.4.2.7 Work Discussion Groups. Work discussion groups stemmed from Hanko's work and were initially developed for clinical settings such as psychotherapy (Dawson, 2013). Work discussion groups are based on psychodynamic theory and the facilitator's role in work discussion groups is one of reflection on the psychodynamic processes occurring within the group (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). Jackson and Warman (2007) have since endeavoured to implement them within social services and education. The aim of this was to provide the opportunity to share concerns with the support of an external facilitator, which they felt was comparable to "group consultation" (Jackson & Warman, 2007, p. 38). Work discussion groups were introduced to school staff by Jackson (2008) to increase their understanding of the primary cause of behaviours and to highlight the emotional factors related to their work and how their thoughts, feelings and behaviours about a situation can impact on learning.

The focus on the groups' reflection, rather than the identification of solutions makes work discussion groups somewhat different to other models (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). Psychodynamic theories relevant to work discussion groups include projective identification (Klein, 1946), the process by which elements of oneself are separated and attributed to external objects or people (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015), and the concept of containment, where one provides another with the emotional security to support them to manage their own feelings and develop conditions that promote development and engagement (Bion, 1961; Ogden, 2013).

Jackson and Berkeley (2020) studied work discussion groups for Headteachers, whilst Cannon (2019) recruited six members of teaching staff within a Social, Emotional and Mental Health provision to explore how they experienced their participation in work discussion groups. Cannon's (2019) findings indicate that groups offered staff a forum whereby they felt contained. They could join with and relate to colleagues, reflect on issues pertinent to their roles such as those of an organisational nature, and feel empowered. Jackson and Berkeley's (2020) study added to this, highlighting in their analysis that groups provided a confidential and safe medium on a regular basis whereby they could consult about the dilemmas and challenges they faced.

1.4.2.8 Circle of Adults. Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995) is a thorough process of problem solving proposed to help school staff working with pupils with behavioural and emotional difficulties (Wilson & Newton, 2006). Group process facilitation and graphic facilitation are incorporated through the key stages and questions, and this develops the team members' understanding of the cause of challenging behaviour, to identify unmet needs, and to pinpoint strategies to address this (Wilson & Newton, 2006). Like work discussion groups (Jackson & Warman, 2007), the Circle of Adults process supports the team to recognise the link between emotions and behaviour, including staffs' own opinions and experiences that may affect these. Newton's (1995) approach was established on the work of Hanko (1999) and developed from Caplan's (1970) model of group consultation which originally studied professionals supporting children orphaned through war and the impact this seemingly had on them as they appeared to internalise the feelings the children were experiencing. Having learnt about the way in which these feelings were being projected, the professionals were contained, and they were better able to manage their own feelings and subsequently support the children they were working with.

There are numerous studies investigating the use of Circle of Adults (Cosgrove, 2020; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Along with Solution Circles, Grahamslaw and Henson (2015) investigated the views of school staff who had taken part in four Circles of Adults to support the reintegration of pupils back to mainstream schooling. In Turner and Gulliford's (2019) study, Circles of Adults were used with staff supporting children in LA care and they investigated changes in participants' causal attributions, perceived implementation of change and self-efficacy. Meanwhile, Cosgrove's (2020) research investigated teachers' involvement in Circles of Adults, including their experiences and its perceived effectiveness.

Although Turner and Gulliford (2019) found no significant effects on self-efficacy or causal attributions, individuals valued the intervention and perceived increased self-efficacy

and success in executing the discussed actions following. Participants reported an enriched group unity and focus (Turner & Gulliford, 2019) and Wilson and Newton (2006) suggested that this had an impact on children discussed as more effective strategies were utilised. Following the Circle of Adults, research highlights that the way in which educators viewed their student changed and individuals reported having a greater understating of the problem situation (Cosgrove, 2020; Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015). Turner and Gulliford (2019) found similar experiences, with participants' insight and empathy for the student and their situation increasing. Cosgrove (2020) highlighted that the process for their participants supported them to better understand the interaction between the systems in which they worked and the problem, which teachers often felt disempowered by. Following the intervention, they felt more supported and part of a team (Cosgrove, 2020). Whilst awareness of reflection and group processes were reported benefits (Turner & Gulliford, 2019) and participants hoped to continue to utilise Circles of Adults (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015), the perceived worthiness of the intervention those involved in Cosgrove's (2020) study appeared to be undermined when tangible solutions were not identified.

Research has found that 21.4% of EPs did not use a model to support the supervision they provided to others (Dunsmuir et al., 2015). Page and Wosket (2001) suggested that models could both support and restrict a supervisor providing supervision. They argued that models could increase a supervisor's confidence, but potentially also stifle their flexibility and originality. Hanley (2017) argues that having multiple models available allows supervisors to draw upon different approaches and this allows them to remain flexible and use various models in a complimentary way (Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004). The choice of model that a supervisor utilises may be influenced by their theoretical orientation (Kaufman & Schwartz, 2004) or may instead be considered the best fit for the supervisee's background (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

1.4.3 The Impact on Stress of Peer Group Supervision

Supervision is a common practice amongst nursing populations and, subsequently, there is a body of research exploring this (Blomberg et al., 2016; Koivu et al., 2011; Peterson et al., 2008; Saab et al., 2021). Research by Peterson et al. (2008) and Koivu et al. (2011) identified the benefit of PGS on participants' general health. Their results suggested that nursing professionals experience fewer symptoms of burnout, were more able to manage work-related stress, and supervision acted as a buffer against their body's stress response. Further research on supervision in nursing supports the findings that supervision supported a reduction in stress levels and those attending supervision regularly experienced significantly lower stress (Blomberg et al., 2016; Saab et al., 2021). Similar findings were

also evident in research on group supervision with other populations, such as school counsellors (Stuart, 2023) and social workers (Graham & Killick, 2019; Ravalier et al., 2023; Tu et al., 2023). This was particularly pertinent for those whereby job demands are high (Tu et al., 2023) and it supported supervisees to develop their skills to better manage stress (Koivu et al., 2011; Stuart, 2023). Furthermore, social worker participants receiving a combination of peer group and individual supervision, reported decreased negative affect (Tu et al., 2023). For those who did not receive supervision, a relationship was found between a lack of supervision and increased stress (Fineman, 1985).

For professionals working in nursing and healthcare, attending supervision increased capacity to manage stress (Fakalata & St Martin, 2020). This may have been owing to increased levels of resilience (Stacey et al., 2017) or one's increased ability to solve problems, manage change and effectively prioritise (Saab et al., 2021). Participants had a greater understanding of the environmental factors affecting their stress levels and this helped them to recognise that these heightened levels of stress were not necessarily owing to individuals' capabilities (Stacey et al., 2017). This led to increased understanding of the importance and practice of self-care (Stacey et al., 2017). For those working in the Early Years Mental Health workforce, self-care practices were better maintained when compared to workers not receiving supervision (Morelen et al., 2021). This supported them to feel calmer (Saab et al., 2021).

Although these findings are promising and conclusions from the studies suggest that supervision is a valuable and comparatively inexpensive technique to alleviate stress and burnout, act as a buffer against negative affect, and should be utilised to support professionals in a range of settings, there were limitations to these studies (Blomberg et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2008; Morelen et al., 2021; Tu et al., 2023; Tulleners et al., 2023). Often there was a low uptake in such studies (Blomberg et al., 2016; Saab et al., 2021; Stuart, 2023) and for some this was coupled with a high dropout rate (Peterson et al., 2008; Stacey et al., 2017). Furthermore, most participants partaking in the research were female. Although it could be argued that females are typically overrepresented in such professions, the quantity of males within the samples did not represent the male workforce equally (Koivu et al., 2011; Morelen et al., 2021; Saab et al., 2021; Stuart, 2023; Tu et al., 2023). These issues resulted in small samples and a lack of variation in participants' backgrounds therefore making it difficult to compare the findings to other professionals (Saab et al., 2021).

Moreover, techniques to recruit participants typically involved them identifying themselves as interested in the research. This runs the risk of self-selection bias, or volunteer bias, whereby participants nonrandomly differ from the larger population therefore

making the sample unrepresentative. For example, participants may have an interest in the topic at research, be of a higher socioeconomic status or be better educated. This hinders the transferability of the findings to the whole population (Saab et al., 2021). The measures used in the abovementioned studies were often self-reported measures. Participants may have knowingly or unknowingly under- or over-reported certain aspects of their experience (Bomberg et al., 2016; Peterson et al., 2008; Tu et al., 2023) and in one study (Morelen et al., 2021), measures that were newly formed and still being validated were used. This causes issues with the validity of the results. Many of these studies recognised their limitations and highlighted that further research would be required on the impact of supervision (Torppa et al., 2013). Future research would benefit from ensuring they had representative samples and more objective measures, such as those measure stress hormones levels.

1.4.3.1 Explaining Stress Reduction in Peer Group Supervision. Previous research has suggested that supervision may be able to thwart stress and burnout (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020), increase capacity and enhance supervisees' wellbeing (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). In addition, it has been shown to increase self-efficacy, self-awareness (Wheeler & Richards, 2007), and improve staff wellbeing and retention (Carroll et al., 2020). There are various processes that may explain stress reduction within PGS.

1.4.3.1.1 Cognitive Theory and Attribution Theory. Cognitive theory posits that one's thinking, emotional states, and behavioural experiences are all interconnected and influence one another (Beck, 1964; Beck, 1995; Southam-Gerow et al., 2011). Therefore, the way in which one thinks about a situation affects the feelings and behaviours they subsequently experience and engage in, rather than the situation itself. People with depression, for example, tend to hold negative views of themselves and therefore tend to see themselves as low in worth. Meanwhile, attribution theory considers how individuals explain and find causes for situations and the effects of these on their behaviour (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). These can be further broken down into attribution theories and attributional theories. Respectively, these are concerned with the various antecedent conditions to causal attributions and the psychological outcomes of such attributions (Forsterling, 2001; Gulliford & Miller, 2015).

Keinan and Sivan (2001) highlighted that individuals experiencing heightened stress tend to exhibit a greater inclination to form causal attributions, one reason for which being that such individuals are often simultaneously experiencing a reduced sense of control. To explain their feelings and feel more in control, they search for causal reasons as explanations. Further studies suggest that, previously, some researchers may not have fully

recognised how stressed individuals are more likely to make attributions related to their own dispositions, motives, or beliefs, rather than situational factors at play (Kubota et al., 2014).

For some, supervision may support them to better manage their stress, as it provides them the opportunity to explore with others the wider situation. In doing so, fellow supervisees may highlight wider systemic factors that could be contributing to the difficulty experienced, thus lessening the attributions they may relate due to their own characteristics. This may challenge the thoughts they are having about the situation or, in the case of Circles of Adults (Newton, 1995), support them recognise the link between behaviours emotions and how these interplay with staff opinions. According to cognitive theory, this could result in them feeling or behaving differently to the same situation. For example, supervision using the GSF (Scaife, 2001), Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996), and process consultation (Farouk, 2004; Hanko, 1999) all provide the opportunity to reflect on the influence of wider systemic or social interactions on a situation, which may provide an individual who feels stressed due to a child not making the expected progress with the chance to realise that the child is also experiencing upheaval at home which could contribute to them being unable to focus when in school. This way of reframing the situation will affect the way in which the supervisee sees it, helping them to think differently and change their perspectives, which in turn may impact their levels of stress and the way in which they respond to the child. Muchenje (2020) found that supervision provided the chance for participants to reflect on the situation, interrogate their emotional responses, including how these link to their own experiences. Furthermore, McBay et al. (2023) highlighted how the interpersonal connection, challenge and containment supported the supervisee to recognise their thoughts, feelings and attitudes towards the situation which helped them to better understand how they were affected.

1.4.3.1.2 Social Identity Theory. Social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) theorises that individuals obtain part of their self-concept from their membership to social groups. These could relate, for example, to one's social class, family, and interests, and have important implications for our self-esteem. Tajfel and Turner's (1979, 1986) theory suggests that our social identity affects the way we make decisions and individuals move through a series of stages. Initially one goes through social categorisation, whereby their observations support them to realise that groups exist within a society. Next, they go through a process of social identification, whereby self-reflection allows them to consider their identity and the groups to which they belong. Finally, once part of a group, individuals compare this group to other groups. Social identity groups are important as they provide individuals with a sense of belonging, purpose, self-worth, and identity. These, when experienced positively, can support one to feel connected to individuals and that they're not

alone in their experiences, feel like they have shared goals with others, can impact one's self-esteem and support feelings of achievement. They can also help one to better understand where they stand in relation to the wider community. Having shared attributes or goals with others can support this.

Research suggests that social identity can provide a protective factor for group members from the adverse effects of feelings such as stress. (Haslam et al., 2005). It is believed that this is owing to group members being able to receive and benefit from support from others. Their research highlighted a strong positive correlation between social identity and social support and job satisfaction, and a strong negative correlation between stress and social identification (Haslam et al., 2005). Schury et al. (2020) confirmed similar findings, suggesting that social identity also buffers the stress felt when observing others in a stressful situation.

Supervision can provide individuals with a group to which they can develop their social identity and belong, thus validating the feelings they experience. Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996), for example, give attendees a specific role within sessions (i.e. problem presenter, process facilitator, note taker, and brainstorm team), potentially supporting the development of group cohesion and identity. If one has developed a positive social identity to such a group, this could see their stress reducing. Gillman et al. (2023) suggested that those with a greater connection to colleagues also experienced less perceived stress and had a greater social identification with said colleagues, which increased the social support they perceived themselves as receiving. They further found that lower social identification and greater perceived stress linked closely with staff turnover (Gillman et al., 2023). Although supervision could go some way to provide individuals with a group to which they could belong, it is not guaranteed that one will develop this identity. For some, they may not find their feelings are validated in the group, they may feel threatened by their position and as a result, this is not likely to buffer their stress.

1.4.3.1.3 Belongingness Theory. Important to also consider is belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) which puts forward that individuals have an innate desire to form and maintain interpersonal relationships with others. The researchers argued that this is linked to evolution and has clear benefits in relation to survival and reproduction. Driving individuals' need to belong, they argue, is two criteria. Firstly, individuals strive for frequent pleasant interactions with others and, second, these must be within a stable context and be reciprocal, i.e. they each must have concern for the other's welfare. Baumeister and Leary (1995) argue that, if interactions are not reciprocal or consistent, then this risks the contact being unsatisfactory and relatedness not developing. Belongingness is a motivation

deeply rooted in individuals that implicates our thoughts, feelings, and behaviours (Allen et al., 2021; Baumeister & Leary, 1995).

Previous research has recognised the buffering effect that a sense of belonging can have on our physical health, including one's health perceptions and physical symptoms (Hale et al., 2005). Further research found that belongingness was a strong factor in depressive symptoms (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010). In their research on sense of belonging, mental wellbeing, and stress in university students, Skipper and Fay (2023) found that a greater or stronger sense of belonging predicted lower stress and higher mental wellbeing. Madeley (2014) argued that forums such as supervision can provide individuals with opportunities for fulfilling interactions, and when people socialise, they provide one another reciprocal support and advice which can contribute to a sense of belonging and result in lower levels of burnout. Peer supervision, such as that described in Wilbur et al.'s (1994) development of the Structured Group Supervision Model, provides the possibility of a group to which individuals can belong. This model posits that supervisees come together to discuss and problem-solve which increases the available resources. Researchers argue that the model supports the development of a shared responsibility and belonging to a group who have similar interests and experiences (Bahr et al., 1996; Bernard & Goodyear, 1992). This possibly provides them with the means to possibly reduce their stress.

1.4.3.1.4 Containment. Containment describes the process whereby one is responsive to another's concerns and supports them to grow and manage their anxieties by holding them. This is done metaphorically and helps to reduce the anxiety to more tolerable levels (Dawson, 2013). Frosh (2002) argues that it is vital for trust to develop in a non-judgmental environment and for one to own their feelings. Hawkins and Shohet (1989) support the idea that adults' needs must be met for them to effectively support children's needs. If they are not effectively supported and having their own needs met, Dawson (2013) argued that it would be challenging for them to support children. Stockley (2003), when researching Circles of Adults, found that the process enabled the adults to change, and the process was containing as it allowed them to feel held which supported them to subsequently contain the children's needs.

Containment is a fundamental aspect of PGS allowing others to manage feelings, reinstating the ability to think clearly (Douglas, 2007). Wood (2016) argued that the concept of containment (Bion 1985; Ogden, 2013) was prevalent in supervision, as without having our own emotional responses to situations contained, we are unable to grow and learn. Page and Wosket's (2001) Cyclical Model of Counsellor Supervision, for example, is based on cognitive-behavioural principles, but another core assumption of this model is that

supervision should help to contain supervisees. Similarly, the aim of work discussion groups (Jackson & Warman, 2007) was to highlight the emotional factors related to educators' work and the impact of these on learning. They argued that an opportunity to reflect encouraged individuals to be less reactive with students (Jackson & Warman, 2007). Containment could have supported this. Muchenje and Kelly (2021) hypothesised that the combination of feeling contained, having a safe space for reflection and learning, and the structured nature of PGS that was apparent in the studies they reviewed, created a sense of belonging. This sense of belonging reinforced the feeling of a safe space within the group and was more evident when staff attended supervision regularly as they could maintain a shared identity (Babinski & Rogers, 1998). This provided reassurance resulting in decreased feelings of anxiousness, stress, and isolation and increased feelings of calm (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

For many adults working in schools, they have limited opportunity to reflect on their responses to pupils or situations (Jackson, 2019; Newton, 1995). It could be argued that these staff have a lack of containment and may be unable to effectively support their pupils without having their own feelings contained by a supervisor and peer group. Dawson (2013) found that when staff were supported, this helped them to better understand the pupils' feelings and manage these feelings themselves. Within supervision, this could support supervisees to better manage their own feelings (Dawson, 2013). Support, such as supervision groups, are reported to increase wellbeing (Wood, 2016) and therefore it is reasonable to propose that increasing opportunities to contain staff's emotional responses could lead to them more effectively managing their stress and supporting children. It is important to recognise that any supervisor must also have their own feelings adequately contained outside of the group supervision forum to continue to support supervisees (Wood, 2016).

1.4.4 Research on Supervision in Schools

Educators often share similar responsibilities and experience comparable demands to other helping professions, that supervision could address. These demands include supporting others' social and emotional development, mental health and wellbeing, alongside areas that others would more typically associate school professionals with supporting, including academic attainment (Carroll, 2020; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012).

There are similarities in the SENCO role to other helping professions, such as those working in social care, healthcare, and counselling and therefore should have access to supervision (Beech et al., 2023; Reid & Soan, 2019). Professionals, such as social workers are often tasked with identifying individuals in need of help, assessing their situation and

determining goals to work towards, maintaining records, and advocating for those less able to advocate for themselves. Likewise, those working in healthcare often make difficult decisions regarding care plans, which are often impacted by external factors such as budgets (Anessi-Pessina et al., 2020). Meanwhile, counsellors are directly involved in helping others, by addressing the difficulties they face and promoting individual growth and wellbeing. The above helping professionals, alongside others such as CBT therapists, would typically have ready access to resources such as supervision, to ensure they are able to provide the most effective and appropriate service to their clients (Squires, 2010).

SENCOs conduct specific tasks in their everyday role that could be directly compared to those of social workers, counsellors, and healthcare professionals. SENCOs are required to assess CYP's needs, not limited to their academic, social, and emotional needs, ensure that additional services or professionals are involved (for example, Mental Health Support Teams), and complete the relevant referral paperwork (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). They are further tasked with setting targets, overseeing interventions and monitoring progress (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). Like counsellors, SENCOs help others to develop skills and are often a sounding board for their concerns, including those of parents and colleagues. As is the case with healthcare and social care professionals, much of the SENCO role is determined by legislation and policies, one example being the Equality Act 2010.

The literature base highlights that work pressures and expectations of the SENCO role are increasing, however staff are often met with diminishing resources to meet needs at a time when they are needed the most (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012; Lewis 2017; Ofsted, 2019). Balancing these demands whilst ensuring all CYP's needs are met, undoubtedly places a great stress on school staff (Ellis, 2018; Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hanley, 2017). It is important to receive support when working with individuals experiencing depression, anxiety, or sharing traumatic experiences (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). Clients' circumstances are often increasingly challenging and complex, and no amount of initial training will equip a professional to deal with all the issues they may be presented with in their career (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). This is particularly prevalent for SENCOs who, following initial training, hold responsibility for managing SEN and ensuring the appropriate provision is provided for children's evolving, challenging and complex needs. It is not sustainable to conduct such work without ongoing support to manage the difficult and complex emotions that dealing with others' pains and difficulties can induce (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). Supervision provides the opportunity to upskill (Reid & Soan, 2019), reflect on the emotional impact of one's practice (Carroll, 2007), and develop a network of support (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

Regardless of the challenge of working in education, historically, supervision has seldomly been considered for use in schools to promote growth and address the difficulties school staff face (Blick, 2019; Burton & Goodman, 2011; Gibbs & Miller, 2014). As such, supervision in schools is not a widely researched area (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014), but discussions around the use and value of individual and group supervision in education is increasing, particularly in relation to addressing staff emotional wellbeing (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Several more recent EP studies have explored the implementation of EP-facilitated individual and group supervision, including process consultation groups, Circles of Adults, and Solution Circles. These studies, which are largely based on EP-facilitated supervision with a variety of education professionals, has indicated several findings. These findings will be examined here, prior to identifying the strengths and limitations of the research.

In their research, Beech et al. (2023; see also Beech, 2021) recruited twenty-one school staff in a range of roles and settings to study their views of supervision, whilst Turner and Gulliford (2019) conducted their research on the Circle of Adults intervention with staff supporting children looked after in secondary schools. They conducted a quasi-experimental explanatory, sequential, mixed methods study designed to investigate the changes in participant causal attributions, perceived self-efficacy, and success in implementing the actions agreed in the Circle. Their research on four Circle of Adults groups and three comparison groups included a qualitative investigation into participants' views of the Circle process. Meanwhile, Cairns et al. (2023) conducted their small-scale, mixed methods research with twelve Headteachers and eight EPs. Their study offered six one-hour monthly EP-facilitated individual supervision sessions for Headteachers which was evaluated through an end of trial questionnaire and two workshops.

Each study clearly explained their approach, the methodologies were appropriate for meeting the study aims, and clear descriptions of inclusion and exclusion criteria were given for participants (Beech et al., 2023; Cairns et al., 2023; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). For example, Cairns et al. (2023) recruited a combination of male and female primary and secondary Headteachers with a range of experience, and EPs who had relevant experience in delivering supervision and the time to commit to all sessions. There was little attrition in Beech et al.'s (2023) study, and the Headteachers and EPs in Cairns et al.'s (2023) study were paired based on not knowing one another, to avoid possible confusion between dual roles. As these studies were relatively small scale, this meant qualitative responses could be explored in greater depth and Turner and Gulliford (2019) utilised fidelity checks to ensure the Circles they were studying were conducted appropriately.

Participants identified that supervision provided the opportunity to reflect on practice and the impact of experiences (Beech, 2021; Cairns et al. 2023; Nugent et al., 2014; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Whilst Underwood's (2022) research indicated that supervision supported the supervisees to slow down their thinking, other research highlighted that having the opportunity to share, listen, and develop a shared understanding supported a richer discussion and allowed for other perspectives to be highlighted (Turner & Gulliford, 2019; Wood, 2016). Whilst some of Beech's (2021) participants noted benefits such as increased self-awareness, their experiences varied, and others were cautiously optimistic. Studies have highlighted that there were difficulties relating to participants having time available in their working week to attend supervision, whilst others indicated that there was often limited space and funding for such a resource (Beech et al., 2023; Dempsey, 2012; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Turner & Gulliford (2019) further identified that the success of supervision sessions was largely dependent on people attending the sessions. Given that other research has highlighted that having limited time to attend supervision can be a barrier (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014), and may result in some supervisees not attending regularly, this could impact the quality of the experience and impact on others in the group.

Cosgrove (2020) also studied teachers' experiences of Circles of Adults and their perceptions of children at risk of exclusion. Their exploratory research recruited four teachers working with three pupils and used semi-structured interviews with the teachers prior to their involvement in the intervention and additional interviews with two teachers following the intervention. Nugent et al. (2014) researched the group consultation process facilitated by EPs with teachers during termly group supervision sessions. Wood (2016) instead aimed to explore the mechanisms affecting the value of Solution Circles and recruited thirty-one participants (eighteen of whom contributed data) who attended five Solution Circles facilitated by colleagues trained as facilitators. They utilised semi-structured interviews with six facilitators and focus groups with participants during the final meeting, to gather their data. This study was mixed methods and Wood took measures of staff self-efficacy, resilience, and anxiety before and after the intervention.

There are numerous strengths of these studies. Whilst Wood (2016) conducted a pilot study of intervention facilitated in another school to gain feedback and inform the rest of the research, Nugent et al. (2014) ensured they triangulated their data by collecting data from a range of stakeholders. There was generally a good return rate in the studies, particularly in Nugent et al.'s (2014) study, and the researchers demonstrated reflexivity and recognised the underlying assumptions affecting their interpretation of the data (Cosgrove, 2020). To ensure they were gaining an accurate reflection of the participants' views,

Cosgrove (2020) used participant validation checks within the interviews by reflecting to the participants their responses. The participants in their studies indicated that they appreciated and valued the supervision process and structure (Cosgrove, 2020; Nugent et al., 2014, 2014; Muchenje, 2020; Wood, 2016), including the graphic produced in the Circle of Adults (Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Increased empathy and insight into the child's background and difficulties were apparent for some following supervision (Cosgrove, 2020; Muchenje, 2020; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). This appeared to result in more positive talk about the child and their situation reported in Underwood's (2022) research. Research indicates that supervision supported attendees to develop skills (Muchenje, 2020) which could have contributed to the increased self-efficacy, success, and confidence reported (Dempsey, 2012; Madeley, 2014). It is important to note, however, that Wood's (2016) research indicated only a small effect and Turner & Gulliford (2019) found no statistical differences in self-efficacy. Alongside this, there was some disagreement that supervision helped attendees to offload, reduce their stress levels and support wellbeing (Beech, 2021; Beech et al., 2023; Muchenje, 2020).

Meanwhile, Madeley (2014) aimed to study what early years educators and carers would value in supervision and utilised Q methodology to explore the responses of thirty workers to a set of fifty-four statements developed through a focus group with early years staff and the literature available. They utilised factor analysis to identify common viewpoints within the group. Dawson (2013), when studying Circles of Adults, employed interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) when exploring adults' and children's experiences of school and their relationships before and after the intervention. They purposively selected two Year 5 boys with social, emotional, and behavioural difficulties as their main need and four key adults who worked with them to complete a reflective account on their experience. As one adult was unable to complete this, it resulted in a total of 5 participants. Dawson (2014) conducted semi-structured interviews with the children one day after the intervention and again after six weeks to allow for the actions to be implemented. Reflective accounts were completed by the adults six weeks after the Circle.

These studies provided a clear breakdown of the criteria for participating and the stages of the process, including the methodology used. Dawson avoided recruiting from schools in which they worked to avoid any possible bias having already developed rapport with prospective participants, and they used reflective accounts as they felt that interviews would not necessarily allow participants to answer truthfully as the researcher had also been part of the Circle process. Madeley's approach involved the participants in the research process, thus fostering a feeling of being worked with rather than done to. The findings in these studies indicated that the adults felt empowered and in control, whilst the children reported feeling more accepted in school and by the teacher and felt that changes in their

environment made it more stable and consistent. In addition, motivation and enthusiasm were noted as products of attending supervision in these studies, which coincided with other research (Turner & Gulliford, 2019; Wood, 2016).

Group cohesion reportedly strengthened following supervision (Cosgrove, 2020; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). This was supported by a shared focus in sessions. In other research, the development of shared identity, interests, aims, beliefs, and values supported the development of solidarity, a sense of community between the professionals and positive working relationships (Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Collaboration also improved, more so when attendees were working towards a shared understanding (Muchenje, 2020; Underwood, 2022; Wood, 2016). Underwood (2022), in their research on EP facilitation of collaborative joint conversations, indicated that the language used supported this collaboration. In taking a solution focused approach, the EP used their skills to contain and scaffold conversations (Underwood, 2022). The skills of the supervisor reportedly determine the success of the group, suggesting that the facilitator impacts the supervisees' experience (Beech, 2021; Madeley, 2014; Muchenje, 2020). Greater collaboration may have contributed to participants reduced feelings of isolation (Muchenje, 2020).

Supervision is becoming more commonplace for groups working in specialist provisions or as ELSAs. As a result, the research base for these populations is increasing. Both Osborne and Burton (2014) and France and Billington (2020) explored the experiences of ELSAs of EP-facilitated group supervision. Whilst France and Billington (2020) recruited five participants who attended four sessions over one year, Osborne and Burton (2014) recruited a larger sample of 270 ELSAs. A combination of interviews (France & Billington, 2020) and questionnaires (Osborne & Burton, 2014) were utilised to collect qualitative and quantitative data which were subsequently analysed. France and Billington identified six themes in their data whilst Osborne and Burton's data provided insight into quantity and quality of supervision sessions. ELSA appeared to be an established intervention in the areas the studies were conducted, and the researchers were clear about who the participants were and what training they had received. France and Billington (2020) increased rigour in their study by initially coding interview transcripts individually, and then collaboratively to uphold inter-coder reliability. The overarching themes and subthemes were mutually established.

The findings of their research highlighted that ELSAs felt supervision addressed the aims of developing skills and competence, to improve the quality of their work, and to sustain and support the ELSA. Although conducted exclusively with ELSAs, the analyses highlighted

that the opportunity to discuss cases, share ideas, and gain reassurance had personal and professional impacts providing means for a supportive discussion. This subsequently improved the support they offered pupils (Osborne & Burton, 2014). Some ELSAs identified difficulties sharing personal or sensitive issues in group settings and individuals not always feel like support was reciprocated (Osborne & Burton, 2014). This may have been owing to the concern about being judged, the limited time available in group supervision to discuss everyone's cases or feeling like their own issues are less significant (France & Billington, 2020). France and Billington's (2020) research suggest that during group discussions, group members had the opportunity to share information, practical ideas and resources, and consider alternative solutions to a problem. Their analysis highlights that group members found this useful and valued this opportunity. They often discussed their perspectives and problem-solved in a more solution-focussed way. There was a strength found in the relationships formed and communication between ELSAs developed. Mutual support was found in other studies to be particularly useful for newly qualified practitioners in fostering a supportive atmosphere (Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020, Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The giving of advice and sharing of one's own knowledge was reported to provide additional ideas, experience, skills, and resources to individuals who may previously have felt unsure of how to address a concern (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014). Osborne and Burton (2014) finally suggested that group supervision affords the opportunity to incite critical thinking from a greater variety of resources, often providing multiple perspectives on presenting issues. Hawkins and Shohet (2007) previously suggested that group supervision is more cost-effective than individual supervision, owing to the cost and time implications that individual supervision may have on school's increasingly limited budgets. Group supervision allows for more professionals to gain from one supervision session as sharing multiple perspectives and solutions provided learning for the presenter and the group. This may prove particularly valuable for those new-in-post who may still be carving a professional identity in relation to their new responsibilities. However, with school budgets decreasing and supervision not a mandatory practice, SLTs may face the dilemma of prioritising other resources.

To the researcher's knowledge, no studies are available solely investigating individual or PGS conducted with SENCOs. Reid and Soan (2019) conducted their research on clinical supervision for senior leaders which included some SENCOs, having recognised the need for supervision following their personal experience. Their research involved a small sample of four participants attending one-to-one supervision and three participants attending group supervision over six, two-hour sessions. Reid and Soan (2019) clearly outlined the context of their research, including a good description of how they conceptualised clinical

supervision and the supervision model that was used. Prior to commencement, a supervisory contract was outlined. It is unclear if the group supervision was conducted with professionals with similar roles. Supervision was conducted by an experienced counsellor, researcher, or supervisor either in the school or a mutually agreed setting. The researchers utilised questionnaires to evaluate participants experiences at three timepoints during the study. One SENCO highlighted that the requirement for support via supervision is not "recognised, let alone available" (p. 60), regardless of its potential as a "valuable tool" (p. 71). This is irrespective of other research highlighting that, from a group of teachers, assistants, trainees and SENCOs, the SENCOs were most likely to reflect on the emotional impact of their duties (Mackenzie, 2012).

SENCOs and senior leaders highlighted the positive changes and the opportunity to learn from like-minded professionals that supervision afforded them (Reid & Soan, 2019). These positive changes extend to managing stresses and adapting teaching, and participants reported feeling "refreshed and a lot calmer" (Reid & Soan, 2019, p. 69). One professional attending individual supervision commented on being able to see the "big picture", as the containment experienced diminished feelings of overwhelm (Reid & Soan, 2019, p. 67). Findings indicated that supervision allowed supervisees to evaluate, problem-solve and resolve complex issues. Collectively the group realised that it was not their individual capabilities that resulted work being challenging, rather the challenges experienced were related to the demands of the role. They also noted that their judgements felt more considered. The trust between supervisor and supervisee was crucial to ensure that supervision provided a safe and confidential space (Reid & Soan, 2019). The importance of forming an initial relationship within supervision was corroborated in Wedlock's (2016) study on EP-facilitated supervision with Family Support Workers. Creating a better work-life balance and providing for one's own needs before expecting to provide for another's also presented as key themes (Reid & Soan, 2019). Reid and Soan (2019) concluded that their research supported the claim that supervision could help build professional resilience, which supported professionals to remain in their roles. The researchers recognised that, beyond their research, further research would be needed to investigate whether supervision encouraged SENCOs to be more confident and effective leaders, as the underlying aim of supervision in schools is to improve the outcomes for service users (Carroll, 2007; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010; Lockett, 2001).

The researchers in the abovementioned studies indicated that they used a combination of approaches to ensure that their studies were as rigorous and robust as possible, including using fidelity checks and tight descriptions of their approach to justify the limitations of their methodology (Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Whilst others offered reflexivity,

accountability, and transparency (Muchenje, 2020), Cosgrove (2020) planned for her research to recruit participants with no previous connection to the researchers to avoid biases. Other researchers openly acknowledged the limitations that remained in their studies, for example Beech et al. (2023) who identified that their Q-methodology could have been enhanced in numerous ways, not limited to including supplementary statements in their Q-set. Dawson (2013) identified that in repeating their research, they would add rigour by instead utilising semi-structured interviews to gather richer, deeper data.

A common limitation identified in the research base was the use of small samples which can also instigate difficulties with generalising a study's findings (Beech et al., 2023; Cosgrove, 2020; Dawson, 2013; Underwood, 2022). Although some argue that small samples should not always be considered a limitation, for example, Beech et al. (2023) and Underwood (2022) were able to identify increasingly nuanced viewpoints from their participants, in studies involving a qualitative element, a smaller sample reduced the quality and quantity of the data (Cosgrove, 2020). A lack of data also meant that more robust statistical analyses were not possible (Wood, 2016). Researchers discussed the threats to the internal validity of their research and the lack of data resulting in sufficient statistical power to avoid a type II error occurring (Cosgrove, 2020; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). This is also known as a false negative, whereby a researcher accepts the null hypothesis when it is false.

Further limitations to the research include the possible differences in the implementation of the approaches taken in the studies which could be subject to group nuances, as identified by Turner and Gulliford (2019). Many of the studies examined rely on researcher interpretation, which could lead to the possibility of researcher bias (Cosgrove, 2020; Muchenje, 2020). In some studies, the participants volunteered to partake, and others were not actively accessing supervision when interviewed by researchers (Madeley, 2014). It could be argued that the volunteering participants had a possible vested interest in the subject at study and may have hoped that partaking in the study would support them to continue to access supervision (Wood, 2016). Dawson (2013) utilised IPA which relied upon participants to express themselves articulately. They explained that one participant found their responses difficult to communicate which may have led to poorer quality data. Some studies reported issues with the reliability and validity of their measures (Cosgrove, 2020) whilst some relied on self-report measures (Wood, 2016) which increased the possibility of invalid answers being provided. This could happen, for example, if a participant feels unable to respond truthfully.

1.4.5 The EPs' Role in Delivering Supervision

Ensuring that supervision groups are facilitated by an impartial and efficient professional, who may be external to the organisation, is essential and valued by supervisees (Bozic & Carter, 2002; Reid & Soan, 2019). Conyne (1996) emphasises the impact that having a dual relationship as the supervisor and line manager can have on a group, raising ethical concerns. Although heavily involved in schools at the individual, group and systemic levels, EPs are impartial and well-placed to use their skills to provide supervision as a critical friend. It may be harder for a colleague who is also a member of SLT to be impartial if facilitating supervision, due to the potentially competing agendas they hold. If receiving supervision from a colleague in SLT, staff may not feel able to share their concerns openly and honestly, for reasons such as fearing being perceived as failing. One could also argue that the dual role an SLT member has as facilitator, may lead them to having alternative underlying goals (Conyne, 1996). For example, one may have goals based on academic progress whilst the supervisee strives for a feeling of emotional containment. A lack of common goal may produce feelings of discomfort.

EPs support schools on a whole-school, group or individual basis and are well-placed to do so, given their regular work in schools, their experience, training, and theoretical fit (Osborne & Burton, 2014). It could therefore be argued that they are well-placed to provide supervision in schools for several reasons including, but not limited to, their pivotal role in supporting school staff to support their pupils (Osborne & Burton, 2014) and helping staff recognise the power of the support they provide. They undertake substantial training which allows them to develop understanding and skills in areas such as pedagogy and staff training (Callicot & Leadbetter, 2013; Farrell et al., 2006). Therefore, one can expect EPs have good knowledge of supervision systems and models through their own supervision practices. EPs are largely positively perceived (France & Billington, 2020) and are in a unique position to encompass and encourage the use of psychological theory and models in schools (Salter-Jones, 2012). Due to the nature of their role, EPs are familiar with school systems and continue to acquire many skills throughout their experience that can be relied upon to facilitate good supervision.

EPs are impartial and can facilitate reflective discussions around whom or what within the eco-systems may be causing or maintaining a difficulty (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019). EPs as supervisors are non-evaluative and non-managerial which ensures that confidentiality is maintained alongside fostering group dynamics and the structure of supervision sessions (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The skills used within their everyday work, such as rapport-building and being a critical friend, are transferrable to different methods of working. A significant proportion of their work involves consultation, during which EPs demonstrate active listening, solution-focused questioning, and collaboration to empower consultees

(France, 2016; France & Billington, 2020). Coupled with the mediation, facilitation, and understanding of education and mental health that EPs offer lends well to supporting SENCOs using PGS.

EPs facilitating supervision held pertinent qualities, such as compassion and understanding (Osborne & Burton, 2014). Furthermore, EPs who were familiar with supervisees tended also to be familiar with the cases discussed in supervision and therefore already had a good understanding of the supervisees' concerns (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014). EPs can help SENCOs to understand how their own narratives affect and interact with their work, the impact of which could induce stress (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019). EPs are well-positioned to buffer these feelings and reinforce that there are no right or wrong ways of working (France & Billington, 2020).

EPs can promote the use of national and local initiatives targeting support for school staff. For example, they would be well-placed to implement the support described in the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (Department for Education, 2021) or encourage the use of the guidance developed by the Centre for Inclusive Education (Carroll et al., 2020). This could go some way to address the emotional toll that SENCOs experience because of their responsibilities (Evans, 2013). It is important to recognise in the real-world context of EPs' work however, that time and resources are already stretched, and it would take substantial consideration of how EPs would effectively manage the ongoing offer of supervision alongside other commitments (France & Billington, 2019). Regardless, EPs have the responsibility to continue to increase the discussion around the value and benefits of supervision within schools, sharing their knowledge so supervision is better understood (France & Billington, 2020).

1.5 Summary and Recommendations

In section 1, the literature reviewed initially defines stress as a construct. The construct is complex and wide ranging. The literature highlights that working in schools is stressful for staff. It then considered the impact of stress on staff, students, and school systems. This highlighted that working in schools has a variety of adverse impacts not limited to staffs' emotions, stress levels, health, wellbeing, and on students' outcomes. This is unsustainable. The systemic and practical influences on stress were then reviewed. These include the COVID-19 pandemic and increasing expectations, whilst having fewer resources available to name a few. The literature suggests that these factors are increasing, resulting in helplessness, frustration (Partridge, 2012), and overwhelm (Ellis, 2018). Initiatives to support staff were reviewed, research on which suggests that many schemes and initiatives do not address the causes of stress or provide effective support that is appreciated by staff

(Culshaw & Kurian, 2021). The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (Department for Education, 2021) is one example of an initiative introduced to attempt to combat this, and included commitments such as peer support, supervision, and support for professional development. The charter is not mandatory, which risks the support not reaching schools more widely. The limited clear and effective support available to educators suggests that further research would be beneficial to understand how to support school staff and address the cause of the issues they face most effectively.

Section 2 of this review explores the history of the SENCO role, why teachers choose to become SENCOs, and the demands and facilitators of the role. The review highlights the many changes and advancements in the role over the previous decades, including the introduction of the Code of Practice which outlines a SENCO's key responsibilities. Factors identified as reasons that teachers choose to become SENCOs are personal and professional. For example, teachers may train as SENCOs following experiencing their own children going through the SEN system, for purposes of educational and professional development, leadership and status, or due to wider political and cultural reasons (Dobson, 2021). Although the review highlighted that having positive relationships with parents, colleagues and SLT (Heath, 2017; Plender, 2019) alongside effective and efficient discourse between professionals (Middleton & Kay, 2021) support SENCOs to conduct the role, research continues to indicate that being a SENCO is demanding. This is partly due to juggling many responsibilities and the loneliness of the role.

SENCOs are a group of educators increasingly experiencing burnout whilst facing conducting their job with diminishing resources and support. This increases the emotional toll that their responsibilities have, causing a difficulty in recruiting and retaining quality professionals. Although undoubtedly a rewarding role, many SENCOs report feeling isolated (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017) whilst facing increasing pressures and responsibilities. This is not limited to the need to undertake additional training, regularly execute teaching responsibilities, provide containment for others, and manage numerous professional relationships. Stress levels amongst SENCOs remains high and in 2018 52% of SENCOs reported plans to leave the profession (NASEN, 2020). As we have not yet been able to identify effective strategies to support school staff, notably SENCOs, to manage the emotional impact of their work, this risks a group of stressed and vulnerable individuals becoming even more so. This could result in a subsequent effect on their physical and mental health, and retention. Further research on this specific group of professionals to explore factors that induce and maintain stress, and how best to mitigate this is needed. We must consider how best to support SENCOs to support their pupils, whilst providing a better balance of expectations and training to motivate practitioners to remain in the profession.

This could involve exploring, for example, how the peer support, supervision, and professional development previously suggested (Department for Education, 2021), could support this specific group of staff.

Section 3 of this review explored group supervision models, the impact on stress of PGS, theories that may explain the stress reduction in PGS, and research on supervision in schools. There are a variety of group supervision models currently available, not limited to the GSF (Scaife, 2001), Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996), work discussion groups (Jackson & Warman, 2007), and structured peer group supervision (Wilbur et al., 1994). Hawkins and Shohet (2020) suggest that these fit into four categories, including process models, second-generation models, developmental models, and psychotherapy-based models. Supervision in other professions such as nursing has shown a positive impact of supervision on general health (Koivu et al. 2011; Peterson et al., 2008), including a reduction of stress (Blomberg et al., 2016; Saab et al., 2021). This was apparent in other populations including social workers (Tu et al., 2023). A variety of theories could explain the reduction of stress in PGS, including cognitive theory and attribution theory (Beck, 1964, Beck, 1995), social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), and containment (Bion, 1985; Ogden, 2013).

SENCOs do not currently receive supervision, however the literature points to a clear need to manage and contain the work-related emotions they experience (Blick, 2019). Supervision is an especially useful approach, as it provides the opportunity to collaborate with other professionals who can relate and empathise (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020, Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The current research on supervision in schools demonstrates that supervision offers many benefits such as the opportunity to reduce feelings of isolation (Gibbs & Miller, 2014) and increase belonging (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). This could be particularly valuable to SENCOs and may go some way to address the emotional strain and stress they experience (Evans, 2013; Plender, 2019). An analysis of the literature reports the impact of supervision on professionals' wellbeing and their connection to colleagues (Willis & Baines, 2018; Wolsey & Leach, 1997).

Although increasingly being used for certain groups, supervision is seldom utilised in schools (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014) and due to this, limited research is available. This is irrespective of SENCOs experiencing similar demands to helping professionals, who often have ready access to supervision to discuss increasingly complex difficulties. The research available is mainly based on supervision for ELSAs and alternative provision staff (for example Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington 2020, Osborne & Burton 2014). Few studies included SENCOs within their sample and when they

were included, groups were formed of various school professionals (Grahamslaw & Henson, 2015; Jones et al, 2013).

EPs are well-placed to provide the space for reflective discussions (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019) and are viewed positively in schools (France & Billington, 2020). It could be argued that EPs are, therefore, in a position to provide this. The skills developed throughout training and practice are core elements of supervision and these skills allow them to distribute guidance, such as that developed by the Centre for Inclusive Education, to encourage and support senior leaders to establish supervision practices (Carroll et al., 2020). This guidance is freely accessible. EPs can carefully consider the practicalities and barriers of introducing supervision to ensure that it is utilised most advantageously. They are in an ideal position to facilitate supervision and can continue to increase the discussion around its value by sharing their knowledge, so it is better understood and utilised (France & Billington, 2020).

Despite research recognising its benefits and supervision increasingly being recommended in schools to support mental health (Appleby et al., 2006; Willis & Baines, 2018), there is currently no research available that specifically and solely studies the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated peer group supervision. Given that SENCOs are typically the professionals responsible for ensuring that vital SEN provision is supplied (Morewood, 2012; Plender, 2019), it could be argued that they require support via supervision and EPs are well-placed to provide this. This could address the impact of the emotional toll they encounter, their rising stress levels and to ensure quality staff remain in our schools (Evans, 2018; Plender, 2019; Willis & Baines, 2018). It could potentially improve outcomes for children and young people, one of the core functions of supervision (BACP, 1987; Carroll, 2007; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010; Lockett, 2001). There is a need and opportunity for further research to contribute to our understanding of EP-facilitated PGS for SENCOs, the potential role it may have in addressing stress, and the use of PGS as a potentially valuable resource in schools. The results of such research could provide the knowledge that EPs need to better understand how to support and safeguard this important but vulnerable group of school professionals, to help them develop within their roles and remain in the profession. This may go some way to encourage professionals working within education to consider supervision as a method to, in part, address SENCO’s needs.

Chapter Two: Empirical Paper

2.1 Abstract

Historically, supervision is not commonplace in schools regardless of its potential as a valuable tool for other professions, such as therapists and psychologists. Owing to this limited research on supervision in education is available, however the availability of research is increasing for groups such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs). Research highlights the emotional toll working in schools has on educators. This impacts one group of staff specifically. Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) have vast responsibilities and surveys indicate that they are a profession experiencing increasing levels of stress. This is driving them to leave their jobs and experience burnout. This needs to be addressed.

The study explores SENCOs' experiences of Educational Psychologist (EP) facilitated peer group supervision (PGS) and their experience of PGS regarding feelings of stress. This study adds to the limited evidence-base available. One focus group and semi-structured interviews with participants are utilised. Reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2002) is used inductively, from which the researcher develops five themes: supervision requires careful planning, support networks developed from supervision, supervision provided emotional support, supervision had varying impact on stress, and supervision provided the opportunity to learn. The researcher highlights the potential of the EP role. The implications of the research on EP practice are discussed, followed by the study's limitations. Some limitations include the small sample, the inability to generalise the themes identified, and the researcher also recognises that they did not observe the intervention. The need for, and direction of, further research is also discussed.

2.2 Introduction

Supervision is a mechanism available to numerous helping professionals, such as counsellors, to support them to conduct their role in the most advantageous way and to help to manage the emotional toll of their practice (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Research has found that working in schools can be a highly stressful undertaking for a range of educators, yet such opportunities are not routinely available to them (Blick, 2019). The role of the Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) has been found to have similar responsibilities as other helping professionals and are a group of professionals particularly experiencing heightened stress (Plender, 2019; Reid & Soan, 2019). Here we will explore further what supervision is, its role in the helping professions, the impact of working in schools, what stress is, supervision in schools and specifically for SENCOs, and the role of Educational Psychologists (EPs) in supporting this group of professionals. The paper will then go on to present a study exploring SENCOs' experiences of peer group supervision (PGS), including their experiences regarding their feelings of stress. Ten SENCOs working in one local authority in the East of England who were attending PGS were recruited to the study and subsequently interviewed on their experiences. This was analysed and themes developed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These themes are discussed in relation to previous literature and theory. The implications for practice are discussed, prior to the limitations of the study and future research directions, and conclusions. This research will help to inform EP practice and develop a greater understanding of the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated PGS.

2.2.1 What is Supervision?

Numerous definitions of supervision are presented by a range of professional bodies, and descriptions can vary depending on the type of professional group under discussion. Dunsmuir and Leadbetter (2010, p. 7), for example, define supervision as a "psychological process that enables a focus on personal and professional development and that offers a confidential and reflective space" for professionals to "consider their work and responses to it" within a supervisory relationship. Hawkins and Shohet (2000) describe how the supervisor "creates 'a play space' in which the dynamics and pressures of the work can be felt, explored, and understood" (p. 7) and where the supervisor and supervisee collaborate to co-create new ways of working. Whilst there are numerous definitions and the purpose of supervision can differ, there are also common descriptions and purposes. Muchenje and Kelly (2021), for example, highlight that supervision can have a normative, formative, and restorative function, which refer to clarifying responsibilities and ethical issue, reviewing practise and professional relationships, and exploring the feelings that arise from practise,

respectively. Meanwhile, Reid and Soan (2019, p. 59) highlight how supervision provides the chance to discuss and reflect on practice in a “confidential, non-judgemental setting”.

Supervision can be conducted on a one-to-one or peer group basis. PGS typically involves peers collaborating in a reciprocal arrangement that offers mutual benefit and encourages feedback, self-directed learning, and evaluation of practice (Benshoff, 1992). Peer groups do not necessarily need to work in the same team or organisation, and in general peer groups do not have a designated group leader (Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). A variety of supervision models are available to guide supervision sessions, which researchers argue align with four categories, including psychotherapy-based models, process models, second-generation models, and developmental models (Hawkins & Shohet, 2020). Some examples include Solution Circles (Forrest & Pearpoint, 1996), the process consultation approach (Farouk, 2004; Hanko, 1999), and the structured PGS model (Wilbur et al., 1994). These are used in a range of professions, including educational psychology (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010).

2.2.2 Supervision in the Helping Professions

Supervision is a commonplace professional activity in numerous helping professions, including within health, counselling, and educational psychology (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Supervision is a regular requirement for some practitioners and supports different elements of their role. Supervision, for example, is a critical component of practice as an EP and is embedded throughout one’s career, starting during initial training (British Psychological Society [BPS], 2022b; Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Other professionals, such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapists (CBT), may expect to receive supervision by a fellow experienced and knowledgeable CBT practitioner (Squires, 2010).

The functions of supervision in the helping professions include those of a normative, formative, and restorative nature (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Normative supervision involves increasing one’s knowledge and understanding of a role; formative supervision acts in relation to one’s skill development, and restorative refers to recognising and addressing the emotional impact that one’s work may induce both personally and professionally (Beddoe, 2010; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021; Sturt & Rowe, 2018). Ultimately, supervision supports the development of professional competence and ensures one is working within ethical and legal parameters (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010) to guarantee delivery of high-quality services. Research has previously indicated that supervision could support professionals to manage their stress (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; Reid & Soan, 2019). Several theories may explain this effect, including cognitive theory and attribution theory, social identity theory, belongingness theory, and containment (Miller, 1995; Reid & Soan, 2019). Supervision has

the potential to support individuals to recognise the connection between their thoughts, feelings, and actions, support them to develop their sense of identity and connection to a group, and provide a sense of belonging, providing for one's innate desire to have interpersonal relationships (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Furthermore, supervisees may experience a feeling of containment, which allows them to better manage their feelings and reduce anxieties to a more tolerable level (Dawson, 2013; Douglas, 2007). Supervision does not typically extend to those working in education, regardless of it being a potentially valuable tool to manage the strains they experience.

2.2.3 The Impact of Working in Schools

Working in schools is recognised as increasingly challenging and emotive, and schools are required to provide for children and young peoples' (CYP) holistic needs (Hanley, 2017). Culshaw and Kurian (2021, p. 15) argue that these concerns are not new, describing the COVID-19 pandemic as accentuating former issues. This was during a climate whereby school budgets are decreasing, and schools are finding retention and recruitment difficult (Education Support, 2022).

School staff are substantially impacted by numerous influences outside of their control. This includes a combination of increasing accountability (Rae et al., 2017), a results-driven ethos (Burton & Goodman, 2011), a lack of training (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015), practical resources and support (Partridge, 2012), amongst other issues. Staff report progressively experiencing stress and burnout (Adams et al., 2023; Ellis, 2018; Partridge, 2012). Although stress is a subjective experience and various definitions are available, there is consensus that stress typically occurs when one feels too much pressure, and this outweighs one's ability to manage it; this results in anxiety, tension, and discomfort (Fink, 2009; Kyriacou, 2001; National Health Service, 2016).

The Teacher Wellbeing Index (Education Support, 2022) found that 75% of all staff are stressed and 59% were not confident to disclose this to their employers. Furthermore, 78% of staff experienced symptoms of mental ill-health and 28% thought that these symptoms could signify burnout. Worryingly this has led to 59% of the workforce considering leaving the profession and 55% actively seeking other employment. This stress adversely impacts staff effectiveness and organisational outcomes (Roffey, 2012; Spilt et al., 2011) alongside students' success rates (Hattie, 2009, 2015; McCallum, 2021; Rubie-Davies, 2014). Initiatives have been introduced to support school staff, such as mindfulness approaches, however these do not address the cause, offer a blanket approach, and are at risk of becoming "tokenistic" (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021, p. 4). Research is needed to identify how best to support SENCOs to manage their stress.

2.2.4 What is Stress?

Some early definitions in the literature describe stress as interruptions to our physiological and psychological balance induced by a stimulus (Cannon, 1929; Selye, 1956). More recent definitions however focus on symptoms of stress and stress as a process whereby one perceives and responds to a stimulus (Cohen et al., 1983; Franks et al., 2023; National Health Service, 2022). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress as not feeling like one has the appropriate resources to respond to the situation, suggesting that stimuli are not inherently stressful. This indicates that individuals may respond differently to an identical stimulus. This makes it difficult to define stress and, instead, some researchers visualise stress as a continuously adapting continuum (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Lewis, 2017).

Kyriacou and Sutcliffe (1978) provide a model of teacher stress (see Figure 1, Chapter 1), which they argue can be applied to other school professionals and which aims to demonstrate the complexity and interacting factors. The model integrates the objective reality of the challenges faced by educators in their professional and personal lives, beside their subjective analyses of such encounters, including their perception of their ability to manage and their coping mechanisms (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; McCarthy, 2019). The interplay in this model between the various factors that affect one's appraisal of stress highlights that stress is subjective (i.e., one's perception of stress), but also recognises the objective factors at play such as workload.

Stress is complex to define and models attempting to define stress often include numerous factors (Kyriacou, 2001; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). The model of teacher stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978), for example, acknowledges the intertwining factors impacting an individual's appraisal of stress. An example of a factor in their model includes an individual's characteristics. The model also recognises the factors that are prevalent when considering stress in education settings. The current research aligns with the definition that stress is the experience of negative feelings in response to a potential stressor, which may be physical or psychological in nature. If there is a discrepancy between an individual's abilities to manage the potential stressor and the demand made upon them, they may be more susceptible to experiencing stress (Cohen et al., 1983; Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978; Franks et al., 2023). Kyriacou (2001) argued that stress is often felt because the demands that are placed upon individuals outweigh their ability to meet them. The researcher felt that this definition recognises that there are subjective and objective factors that affect one's response to stress. Other researchers might adopt different orientations and therefore consideration and criticality must be explored to determine which definition to use when discussing stress. One

must also remain critical when exploring other studies, including those researching supervision and stress, as although still valid in the field, discussion of stress definitions may differ.

2.2.5 Supervision in schools

Historically, supervision in educational settings has not been readily available (Reid & Soan, 2019). This may, in part, be owing to others' misunderstanding of the function of supervision (Kennedy & Laverick, 2019). As supervision is not commonplace, limited research has been conducted (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014). However, the research-base is growing, especially for certain groups of school staff such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs) and senior leaders. During ELSA supervision, supervisees shared that discussing cases, sharing knowledge and ideas, and gaining reassurance had personal and professional impact. This subsequently improved their skills and the support they offered pupils (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014). Although not termed supervision, Farouk's group discussions shared similar qualities to supervision groups and highlighted the opportunity for "open" and "trusting" conversations (Farouk, 2004, p. 208). Furthermore, increased supervisee confidence, self-efficacy, and self-awareness has been reported following supervision (France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

More recent research includes that by Beech et al. (2023), who recruited school staff in a range of roles to explore their views of supervision, and Turner and Gulliford (2019) who studied the Circle of Adults (Newton, 1995) intervention. Cairns et al. (2023) recruited EPs and Headteachers to their study, which evaluated the outcome of monthly EP-facilitated individual supervision sessions. Across the studies, the participants identified that supervision provided the opportunity to reflect on their practice (Beech et al., 2023; Cairns et al., 2023; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Other benefits were noted, including heightened self-awareness (Beech et al. 2023), having the opportunity to share concerns, develop shared understanding, and understand alternative perspectives (Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Others highlighted some difficulties in their experiences, including time limitations making regular attendance difficult and having limited space and funding in schools for this resource (Beech et al., 2023; Turner & Gulliford, 2019). Time-related difficulties were identified in previous research on ELSA supervision (France & Billington, 2019; Osborne & Burton, 2014), which could impact the quality of supervision if individuals are unable to access this regularly. Turner and Gulliford (2019) identified the success of sessions was dependent on people attending. If more research were conducted, our understanding of the impact of supervision in schools should increase.

Furthermore, staff in special schools and alternative provisions value their concerns being heard, having the opportunity to reflect on their wellbeing, and develop camaraderie with colleagues (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Willis & Baines, 2018). Through the sharing of their emotional experiences, staff felt better able to process the pressures of their job in a contained environment. The potential for supervision to provide a feeling of containment has been highlighted by various researchers (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020, Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Containment involves being responsive of another's concerns and the emotions they are experiencing in a way that allows them to have an increased understanding of the situation (Bion, 1961; Ogden, 2013). This is essential in group supervision if one is to support others to manage their feelings (Douglas, 2007). Muchenje and Kelly (2021) aimed to understand the inherent processes that contribute to successful problem solving, circle and consultation groups in schools. They hypothesised that feeling contained combined with having a safe space to reflect and learn, fostered a sense of belonging**.**

Sense of belonging refers to the development of a sense of identification and association with people, places, and cultures (May, 2013). Maslow (1954) suggested that a sense of belonging was essential for existence and a significant motivator of behaviour. Baumeister and Leary (1995) further suggested that belonging forms the basis for humans to engage in interactions. To maintain belongingness, they argue that humans need frequent pleasant interactions with others and relationships that are long-term and durable. Without one or both, individuals may experience negative consequences. Through supervision, school staff reported developing shared identity, interests, aims, beliefs, and values. This reportedly supported the development of solidarity, a sense of community and belonging, and positive working relationships; this subsequently improved collaboration and communication (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

Hulusi and Maggs (2015, p. 30) highlighted that school staff "are largely alone in not receiving a boundaried space in order to reflect on their professional practice". The Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (Department for Education, 2021) could provide this, and outlines the Department for Education's support and commitment to supporting education staff and emphasises that practices such as peer support and supervision could address concerns. As supervision provides a safe space in which one can process and make sense of the insurmountable emotions and experiences of one's role and responsibilities, it is simultaneously intriguing and concerning that supervision is not a requirement in schools. This is especially so when one considers that staff support children's development beyond the formal curriculum and into areas such as social and emotional development (Salzberger-

Wittenberg et al., 1983). Increased research into groups of school professionals, such as SENCOs, could allow us to understand how supervision could support them to balance their responsibilities.

2.2.6 Supervision for Special Educational Needs Coordinators

Although rewarding, Warnock (1978, p.7) described working with those with special educational needs (SEN) as “challenging and intellectually demanding”. SENCOs are individuals responsible for liaising with multiagency professionals and developing their school’s SEN policy. The SEN Code of Practice (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015) outlines additional responsibilities including coordinating provision and ensuring the school meets its legal requirements in line with the Equality Act 2010.

Effectively conducting the SENCO role is a challenge (Curran & Boddison, 2021) regardless of SENCOs enjoying teaching and seeing CYP succeed (Department for Education, 2019a). This is impacted by wider political, social and health factors. SENCOs are seldom provided with the time or opportunity to conduct their role in the most advantageous way (Lewis, 2017), are more likely than teachers to experience intense negative emotions (Burton & Goodman, 2011; Dobson & Douglas, 2020), and work in isolation from other school staff (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017). SENCOs report being constrained by financial restrictions, and their role being impacted by legislative decisions that do not provide national consistency (Curran & Boddison, 2021). Owing to these issues, many are considering leaving the profession (NASEN, 2020). As their role is highly stressful (Plender, 2019; Tysoe, 2018), it could be argued that supervision could go some way to address the difficulties they face, as it has previously demonstrated benefits for other groups of school staff (e.g., ELSAs). There is currently no research available solely studying group supervision for SENCOs and the research that included SENCOs often formed groups of people with varying roles.

Burton and Goodman (2011) highlight that SENCOs yearn for such resources to deal with daily stressors, and they affirm that professionals outside of education who experience challenging roles, such as counsellors, typically access such practice. Without support, balancing multiple responsibilities with limited opportunity to address these effectively, may adversely affect SENCOs’ stress levels. Carroll et al. (2020) in their report on professional supervision recognised this and subsequently developed guidance for SENCOs and school leaders on the use of supervision.

It has been suggested that SENCOs and senior leadership teams (SLTs) should provide for their own needs before providing for others (Reid & Soan, 2019). Reid and

Soan's (2019) research involved supervising school SLTs. Positive group dynamics between the SLTs in their research supported the development of a collective realisation that it was not individuals' capabilities that resulted in work being challenging. Instead, the challenges they were experiencing were related to the demands of the role. It is important to consider group dynamics and the impact of this on group outcomes. Bion (1961) argued that to be a functioning group, individuals must have common purpose, clear boundaries and be flexible and dynamic in their approach, to ensure that all group members feel valued. This occasionally involves needing to be tolerable of discontentment.

SENCOs are an essential component of a school's community, and a resource that should be appreciated and utilised sensitively. The benefits of supervision would be particularly valuable to SENCOs, which could address some of the emotional strain and stress that they encounter. With the support of an impartial facilitator to aid the process and integrate group narratives, groups can create shared understandings of issues raised. Research is needed to ascertain the impact and benefit of supervision solely for SENCOs. It is crucial SENCOs feel supported and able to manage their responsibilities to provide positive outcomes for students (Blick, 2019; Burton & Goodman, 2011). EPs could support this.

2.2.7 The Role of the Educational Psychologist

EPs develop many skills throughout their training and practice and are well placed to provide supervision to other professionals. Within their everyday work, EPs build rapport, use solution-focused techniques and active listening, and collaborate to empower consultees (France, 2016; France & Billington, 2020). Working within schools at an individual, group, and systemic level is a fundamental aspect of the role and, as such, they are ideally positioned to provide impartial support as critical friends. EPs continue to gain skills throughout their practice. These can be relied upon to develop positive working relationships with SENCOs and facilitate reflective discussions around whom or what within the eco-systems may be causing or maintaining a difficulty (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019).

EPs are largely positively perceived as supervisors (France & Billington, 2020) and are in a unique position to encourage the use of psychological theory and models in schools (Salter-Jones, 2012), their knowledge of education and mental health lending well to support for SENCOs through facilitated PGS. EPs skills allow them to be good facilitators of supervision who already play a pivotal role in supporting SENCOs. Their position as non-evaluative and non-managerial figures ensures that confidentiality is maintained, and group dynamics are promoted during discussions (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

There is a need and opportunity for further research to contribute to how we understand EP-facilitated PGS for SENCOs, the potential role it may have in buffering some of the stress they experience, and the use of PGS as a potentially valuable resource in schools. The results of such research could provide the knowledge and understanding that EPs need to further support the SENCOs they work with. EPs have the responsibility to continue to increase the discussion around the value and benefits of supervision within schools, sharing their knowledge of supervision so it is better understood (France & Billington, 2020). They can promote the use of national and local initiatives targeting support for SENCOs. For example, they would be well-placed to implement the peer support and supervision described in the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (Department for Education, 2021) or encourage the use of the guidance developed for SENCOs and school leaders on the use of professional supervision (Carroll et al., 2020). This could go some way to address the emotional toll that SENCOs experience because of their responsibilities.

2.2.8 Aims and Rationale of Present Study

Given the limited research available on supervision in schools, notably with SENCOs, there are numerous avenues that future research could explore to contribute to the research-base. The present study aims to explore SENCOs' experiences of EP-facilitated peer group supervision. Given that previous research has identified that SENCOs are a group of professionals increasingly experiencing heightened stress, this is an important area of study that requires greater research to develop our understanding, and studies on supervision highlighting that this could support stress levels, the present study also aims to explore SENCOs' experiences of supervision in relation to stress.

It is hoped that the area of study and investigation of the research questions will provide a greater understanding of experiences of PGS. This is with the goal that the research will further support our understanding of peer support and supervision in schools and that concentrating on SENCOs' experiences will build upon previous findings from research conducted on supervision in schools. To achieve this, the following research questions have been developed:

1. What are the experiences of SENCOs of EP facilitated peer group supervision?

    1.1 What are the experiences of SENCOs of EP facilitated peer group supervision regarding feelings of stress?

2.3 Methodology

Establishing appropriate methods is paramount to ensure that data collected for research purposes will answer the questions, aims and objectives (Heck, 2006). Whilst

planning, the researcher must consider the most appropriate methodological framework and data collection methods to allow them to do this (Heck, 2006), whilst remaining reflexive, reasonable, and realistic.

2.3.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position

Ontology is the philosophical study of the nature of existence and what is true or real and causes one to question if there is a reality in the social world, or if it is constructed in the mind (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). Ontology allows us to understand social phenomena or believe that something is real (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017; Scotland, 2012). Once recognised, individuals subsequently conduct analyses to make sense or meaning. Realists, or positivists, believe that one truth exists; this does not change and can be discovered using objective measures. Realists argue this knowledge can be generalised. Instead, a relativist position believes in multiple realities that are dependent on meaning and can evolve dependent on interactions and experiences (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017).

Epistemology is the nature of knowledge and what counts as knowledge in the world (Cooksey & McDonald, 2019). Epistemology concerns the relationship a researcher has with the research, the nature and form of this knowledge, and how it can be obtained and conveyed (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). For example, positivism relies on realism and argues that reality is independent of one's efforts to know and understand it (Burr, 1998). The positivist researcher sees themselves as separate to the participant and they can examine the world without having influence (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Alternatively, constructionists argue that research produces, rather than reveals, evidence (Willig, 1999). A researcher does not harvest data, instead they tell a story that is coherent with existing systems of meaning (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

This research aligns with critical realism (CR). Ontologically realist and epistemologically constructionist, CR recognises that structured reality exists outside of our interpretations and that the knowledge of that reality is approximated in our social and cultural contexts. CR sits between positivism and interpretivism and, like positivism, accepts that there are objective realities. CR is critical of solely relying upon positivist reasoning to understand the world due to individual perceptions and experiences varying. It sees the social world as a mixture of culture, behaviour, language, economy, history, and beliefs, thus making it more complex than what can be measured or studied through positivist formulas (Willig, 1999; Willig, 2013). Maxwell (2012) and Willig (1999) highlight the significant mediating effect of the broader context and personal experience and expectations. Reflexivity is important and this helps to guide empirical investigations by shining light on one's assumptions.

The researcher aligned with the CR approach, recognising that alternate views of reality exist dependent on experiences, and this is only one form of truth. Taking a CR stance in this research acknowledged individuals' experiences as distinct, whilst recognising the systems within which they work (i.e. schools) and the ways in which these are managed (e.g. directives from Department for Education). Related to the varied interpretations of reality is the subjective influence of the researcher as part of the process. Due to its understanding of reality as an existence regardless of how we think we know it, CR affords itself to a range of research methods, depending on the aims and questions identified (Sayer, 2000). A CR stance married well with the current research aims.

2.3.2 Participants

Purposive sampling was adopted as it is a method used to target specific groups within a population (Cohen et al., 2011). Purposive sampling aligned due to the characteristics of the group under study, i.e., participants were SENCOs of primary or secondary schools in the eastern region of England, who had experienced the research topic (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011).

The Educational Psychology Service (EPS) contacted local authority (LA) SENCOs, offering the opportunity to attend monthly, EP-facilitated PGS for one year. These sessions formed part of the EPS' offer and were not designed and organised for research purposes. Having expressed interest, prospective supervisees were invited to an introductory session with the facilitating EP, who was not the researcher, to gain more information on the aim of supervision, the model utilised (discussed below) and to agree a supervision contract. Ethical approval (Appendix A) was granted prior to this session and so the researcher attended this session with the purpose of recruiting prospective participants to their research, which would inquire about their experiences and ask them to reflect on this following the intervention. The researcher offered information about the research and provided an information and consent sheet (Appendix B) for SENCOs to complete and return electronically. SENCOs were aware that they were not obliged to take part in research to access supervision and the researcher's role involved interviewing the SENCOs about their experiences.

A total of ten SENCos working in the LA, who attended PGS at various times, were recruited and given pseudonyms. This involved them being interviewed about their experience after attending the sessions. Annie, Bethany, and Carla attended monthly PGS sessions during the academic year 2021-2022. Charlotte, Sophie, Mia, Jack, Kate, Chloe, and Rebecca attended supervision during the academic year 2022-2023. Further information on participant characteristics is included below in Table 1. Due to changing teaching

responsibilities, Sophie had to cease attending after three sessions, but they committed to being interviewed about their experience of these sessions. All participants were recruited following ethical approval being granted. The facilitating EP, who was also not the researcher, was not included in the sample.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Pseudonym	Academic year during which they attended supervision
Annie	2021-2022
Bethany	2021-2022
Carla	2021-2022
Charlotte	2022-2023
Sophie	2022-2023 (attended 3 sessions)
Mia	2022-2023
Jack	2022-2023
Kate	2022-2023
Chloe	2022-2023
Rebecca	2022-2023

2.3.3 *Supervision Sessions*

The supervision sessions were designed and set up by the EPS, rather than as part of the research project, which instead aimed to explore SENCOs' experiences of PGS having attended the sessions. The research was not intended to evaluate the fidelity or integrity of PGS, rather it aimed to explore SENCOs' experiences, to contribute to our understanding of a topic that has not yet been researched in depth. The supervision sessions took place monthly for the duration of one year and were conducted using Microsoft Teams. The SENCOs who agreed to participate in the research were subsequently interviewed about their experiences having attended the sessions.

The facilitating EP, who was not the researcher, utilised the Structured Peer Group Supervision model (Wilbur et al., 1994), as this is an empirically validated model that has been tested within the field (Bahr et al., 1996). A full cycle lasts approximately one hour and there are three main roles. The presenter offers an issue or concern to discuss, the moderator (i.e., the facilitating EP) keeps time and ensures the process is followed, and the group contribute insights and ideas to the forum. The six phases of the model include a

presentation phase, a request for help, a question period, a discussion period, and a brief pause before the presenter feeds back their response. Finally, the moderator encourages the group to reflect and summarise discussions in one word. For further details of what each stage involves and approximate timings, see Appendix C.

In each of the sessions, the EP and the SENCOs logged onto the meeting link, greeted each other and checked in with how they had been since the previous session. The agenda was then agreed, including who was presenting. The facilitator then explained each of the phases of the model as a reminder. This became briefer over time, as the SENCOs became familiar with the process. The facilitator's role was to support the group to work through the phases of the model and encourage them to reflect on the issues presented. Once the supervisees had adapted to, and become familiar with the structure, the EP facilitating provided little direction other than supporting them to reflect on the issue and informing the group of the time used or remaining for each phase of the model. At the end of the sessions the facilitator checked in to see if there were any other questions or concerns before the group left.

The facilitator devised an agreement in collaboration with the group when they contracted the sessions. They agreed that they would remain on camera when they felt able and comfortable to, and they would mute their microphones whilst others were talking or the presenter presenting. The aim of this was to increase the sound quality and minimise the possibility of noise feedback. When participants had a contribution or question, they either unmuted their microphone to speak or raised a virtual hand to which the facilitator responded.

2.3.4 Data Collection

This research took an exploratory, inductive approach, due to its aim of providing a greater depth of understanding of SENCOs' experiences of PGS. The data collection and analysis therefore aimed to provide insight into the themes and categories relating to SENCOs' experiences of supervision and what this may have meant for their levels of stress. An individual theoretical framework incorporating the previously discussed definitions of PGS and stress were used to discuss the findings in greater detail.

Initially, the researcher planned to conduct three focus groups (FG) consisting of three-to-four SENCOs in each, to gather their views on their experiences. Supervision participants were originally divided into smaller focus groups to ensure they felt comfortable sharing their experiences openly and to allow greater opportunity to provide depth in their discussion. The researcher organised and conducted the FG with the SENCOs who attended supervision during the academic year 2021-2022 (Annie, Bethany, Carla), after

ethical approval had been granted. This took place in the summer term of 2022 on Microsoft Teams and lasted approximately one hour. Only two of the three SENCOs were able to attend due to the third (Carla) attending to a safeguarding concern at the time of the planned FG. Carla was invited to and completed a semi-structured interview in place of the missed FG.

The researcher originally opted for FGs as they had similar collaborative qualities to group supervision and allowed them to utilise the group dynamics that had developed during supervision sessions. This benefit would not have been realised using interviews (Kidd & Parshall, 2000). FGs also afforded data collection to be conducted in a shorter timeframe (Queiros et al., 2017). During the FG, the researcher was aware that they wished to ask further questions regarding the participants' responses, however, was conscious that doing so would interrupt their dialogue. The researcher attempted to address these questions at later points in the FG, however this made the discussion feel disjointed. Having reflected on the quality of the discussion and the data that was produced, the researcher decided to change subsequent FGs to semi-structured interviews to afford asking further questions about their responses, without interrupting the 'flow'. The two SENCOs who attended the FG later attended individual follow-up semi-structured interviews to allow the researcher to clarify their responses.

Following the FG, the researcher adapted the research design from utilising FGs to semi-structured interviews. The seven SENCOs attending supervision during 2022-2023 completed interviews only. Both the FG and semi-structured interview data were included in the analysis. A total of 10 interviews took place following the FG. This included the SENCO unable to attend the FG, two follow-up interviews with the two SENCOs who attended the FG so the researcher could clarify certain responses, and seven interviews with the SENCOs who formed the cohort attending supervision in the 2022-2023 academic year (Charlotte, Sophie, Mia, Jack, Kate, Chloe, Rebecca). Further reflections on this change are included in the reflective account.

2.3.4.1 Online Focus Group. Researchers refer to the benefits of small FGs of between four and seven participants, such as having good internal homogeneity and their ability to facilitate members to share sensitive and personal disclosures in a more effective way than interviews allow (Barbour & Kitzinger, 1999; Greenbaum, 1998; Guest et al., 2017). This could be due to the participants' discussions in FGs being like those between colleagues rather than in interview scenarios whereby the participants would share experiences in a researcher-participant relationship (Coenen et al., 2012).

Due to COVID-19 restrictions at the time of ethical approval, the University of East Anglia (UEA) stipulated that data collection must be conducted solely online. The participants joined the online FG from their school offices. The FG was audio recorded on a Dictaphone and subsequently manually transcribed verbatim. Whilst transcribing, names were replaced with pseudonyms to ensure participants remained anonymous. See Appendix F for samples of transcripts.

2.3.4.2 Online Semi-Structured Interviews. Having considered other qualitative methods of data collection, such as surveys, the researcher converted to utilising semi-structured interviews. These are considered more versatile than FGs as they allow researchers to gain deeper data related to the research questions (Kelly, 2010). Interviews allowed the researcher to ask questions, to which the participants provided an understanding of their experiences (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009). Semi-structured interviews permitted the researcher to ask additional questions relevant to individual comments, affording the opportunity to further explore meaning (Robson, 2002) and produce greater understanding. The researcher reflected on the quality of the data gained from interviews, which appeared to provide more depth than the FG and a balance between enough structure to ensure that the conversation produced quality data, but not so much structure that it became an unnatural and restrictive conversation. This may have hindered the participant from sharing experiences that were particularly pertinent or significant to them.

A schedule identical to the one utilised in the initial FG was used for the interviews (Appendix E). This was designed specifically with the research aims and questions in mind. The schedule included questions loosely based on the research questions and encouraged the participants to reflect on their experience. This afforded them choice in elaborating their responses. The questions were left intentionally wide so not to lead the participants' responses. The nature of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to guide the initial topics and revise and reform the questions depending on the direction of dialogue.

Each participant took part in one interview lasting up to one hour, conducted using Microsoft Teams and audio recorded via Dictaphone. Recordings were manually transcribed verbatim by the researcher and all names were pseudonymised. Prior to starting, participants were reminded that the interview would be recorded, about withdrawal rights, and it was not obligatory to answer all questions. At the end, the researcher asked for permission to contact the participant again, should there be any follow-up questions whilst transcribing. The researcher also offered clarification of where to access additional support if required.

2.3.5 *Data Analysis*

2.3.5.1 Reflexive Thematic Analysis. Reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) is recognised as a methodology that is not tied to one paradigm, nor does it have predefined methodological requirements (Braun & Clarke, 2019). RTA is not atheoretical and the researcher has flexibility to apply various theoretical frameworks. For example, the theoretical assumption that language provides access to others' experiences. In this instance, RTA was applied flexibly, informed by previous research on supervision in schools and gave voice to the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated PGS, whilst considering wider sociocultural factors.

RTA was considered the best fit as it sought to explore the subjective experiences, seek meaning behind these and identify patterns across data in relation to the research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Clarke & Braun 2017). RTA afforded the opportunity to produce an inductively driven analysis whereby the researcher led with the data as the "starting point for engaging with meaning" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 56). RTA allowed for common themes, patterns and meaning which depicted semantic and latent meaning, thus providing descriptive and interpretive accounts of SENCOs' experiences. The researcher recognises that "data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) and their prior knowledge and views will have influenced the themes generated. RTA aligned with the critical realist approach, research foundations and interview methodology, as it affords the opportunity to gain a "contextualised version of realism" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p.169).

Braun and Clarke propose a six-phase approach to RTA. However, this process is recursive, and researchers often move flexibly between phases throughout the process (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The phases include familiarising with the data, coding, and generating initial themes. The researcher then develops and reviews the themes whilst referring to the dataset and considering the narrative developed through the themes and relationships between them. Themes are refined, defined, and named, considering the theme's core concept, before writing these up. The researcher familiarised with the data (Clarke & Braun, 2016), which initially involved manually transcribing the FG and interviews verbatim. After transcribing, the researcher engaged with the data by re-reading the interviews at random. Notes were made of potential patterns and meaning, and reflections noted in a journal.

To code, the researcher printed transcripts and hand-wrote initial codes in the margins whilst highlighting relevant points. One or two interviews were coded with breaks in between due to its enormity. Breaks from coding encouraged the researcher to actively reflect and provided an opportunity to refresh; this often involved the researcher moving to a

different part of her home. Afterall RTA is an active process (Braun, Clarke & Weate, 2016). Semantic and latent codes depicted the explicitly expressed meaning in, and interpretations of, the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022) (see Appendix G for sample of coding process). The researcher found having printed transcripts easier to work from as it allowed her to go back and forth to other interviews and add notes whilst looking at individual interviews. Having coded three or four interviews, the researcher found that the coding became neater and more focused. The second round involved clarifying and refining the codes. The researcher referred to her notes and reflections throughout. The researcher combined each interview's codes in a document which included the data associated with that code. Codes exemplifying similar meaning were combined. Having coded all interviews, these were amalgamated into one master document that included all codes, their definitions, and the associated data extracts.

Codes were gathered into shared patterns of meaning and reviewed against the coded extracts. The researcher began generating initial themes and subthemes by arranging the printed codes and extracts into groups; the researcher continued to review and develop the themes. The process of arranging the clusters on a table and manually moving them around supported the active process of organising and drawing links (Braun et al., 2016). (See Appendix H). Themes were then refined and named. The researcher continually reviewed and reflected on the themes and subthemes and were revised up until they were written. Thematic maps were used throughout the reviewing and developing of themes to visually present the themes and subthemes and illuminate the relationships between them (see Appendix I; Braun et al., 2016).

Initially, seven themes were generated which then melded and reduced to five themes following refinement. Each theme and subtheme were written up into a story that included a definition and how it fitted with the overall project. The research found that five themes represented the central organising concepts with defined boundaries and only slight overlap. The dataset was reviewed against the themes to ensure consistency and the researcher developed a final map to visually demonstrate the themes generated. This was representative of the researcher's conceptualisation of the dataset which she hoped depicted the participants' views.

2.3.5.2 Reflexivity. The researcher remained aware throughout the research of her position as a doctoral student with interest in supporting school staff and her previous research experience, limited to the completion of her master's. The researcher acknowledged that in previous roles she had also experienced clinical supervision, albeit when working for the National Health Service (NHS) rather than education. She remained

reflexive on how her previous experience affected the way she approached the research as a whole and related to participants.

The researcher had not fully realised the complexity of her role within the process prior to starting the project. Other researchers also recognise the subjective practice that researchers bring to research (Hill & Dao, 2021; Pilgrim, 2014), including their own histories, assumptions, values, and politics – "we cannot leave those at the door" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 36). This is not limited to the research topic, but also their approach to analysing and interpreting the data.

Reflexivity of positionality was vital and played a significant role in constructing the project, however also significant were situational and social factors affecting each participant. To log her reflections on the factors that could have affected the participants and the research, the researcher kept a reflective journal updated at regular points throughout. This provided an audit trail that was transparent and described the steps taken; a story of the research project (Braun & Clarke, 2019). Furthermore, this acted as a memoir on which the researcher could critically reflect on the research and the themes developed. This remained a continual process and acted as a diary which included personal thoughts and feelings and developments and changes at different stages.

2.3.6 Ethical Considerations

This research was granted ethical approval by UEA's Ethics Committee (Appendix A). Research was executed in accordance with British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021) Code of Human Research Ethics and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC, 2016) Standards of Conduct, Performance and Ethics. Alongside having respect for participants and acting responsibly as a researcher (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2016), the researcher upheld integrity and awareness of the possible dual role that could occur as trainee and researcher. She remained reflexive on the need to maintain appropriate boundaries (HCPC, 2016) and on how her involvement may influence the outcomes throughout.

The prospective supervision participants initially signed up to attend monthly PGS sessions through the LA EPS. It was during an introductory session to supervision, held by the facilitating EP, that participants were introduced to the research. Prior to engaging in the research process, participants were provided an electronic information sheet (Appendix B) outlining the research and what it would involve. Prospective participants were not obliged to partake and were given the opportunity to reflect on their involvement prior to giving informed consent. It was clear throughout that participants did not need to partake in research to attend supervision.

Consideration was given around the use of semi-structured interviews, notably around confidentiality and privacy. Upon switching from FGs to interviews, the researcher consulted the ethics committee, who confirmed that an amendment to the proposal was not required as the schedule and topics remained the same. The researcher confirmed with participants that all data would be anonymous, and names used in transcripts would be replaced. Information irrelevant to the research was not collected and participants were reminded of withdrawal rights. All data was saved securely in a password protected electronic file, only accessible by the researcher.

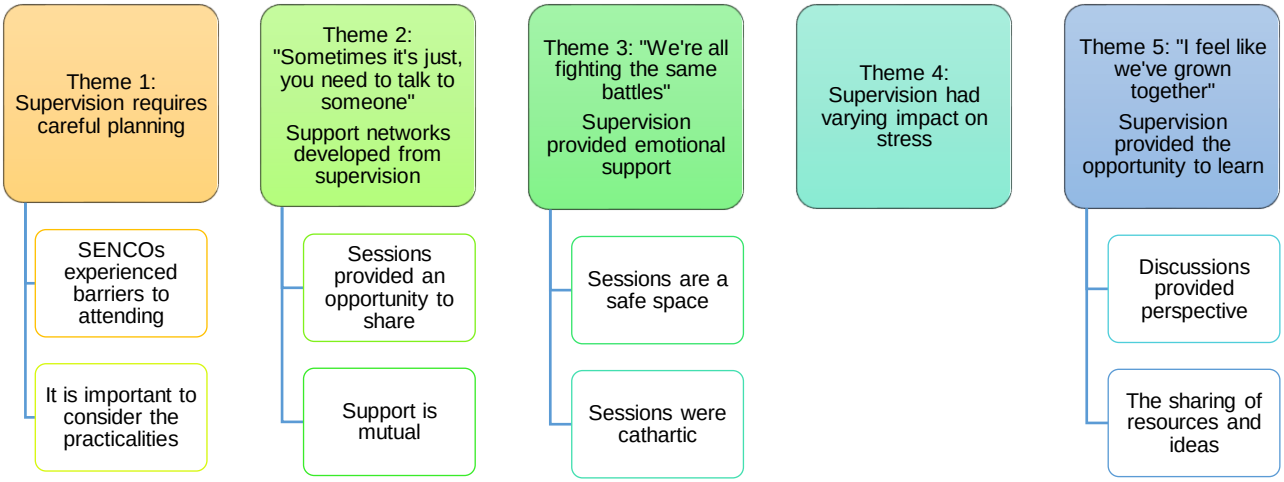
Due to the nature of supervision, sensitive information may be shared that could prove emotive for participants to divulge. The researcher used a collaborative approach in interviews, using active listening skills and reflecting participants' responses to clarify understanding and ensure they felt heard. There was minimal psychological or physical risk to participants, and it was made clear that participants should only share what they felt comfortable sharing. Details of external agencies and charities providing additional support were given, should the research have produced any issues that participants wished to explore further. Participants were able to contact the researcher or her supervisor regarding concerns relating to the research project. The researcher was committed to prioritising the wellbeing of participants and they were supported and encouraged to report concerns, where necessary.

2.4 Analysis and Discussion

This section will present the analysis of the data, which was collected in one FG and semi-structured interviews and analysed using RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis process led to five themes being developed. These are shown within a thematic map in Figure 1. Whilst these have been separated into constituent themes, it is essential to understand that they are also, at times, interconnected. Each of the themes and their sub themes will be defined and discussed in turn, with example extracts taken proportionately across the interviews and FG to illustrate these.

Figure 4

Thematic Map Illustrating Themes and Subthemes



2.4.1 Theme 1: Supervision Requires Careful Planning

The theme ‘Supervision Requires Careful Planning’ reflected the need for the supervision sessions to be carefully planned prior to them commencing, to allow for the finer details of the sessions to be clarified and to recognise the barriers that might hinder the supervisees from attending. Theme 1 comprises of two subthemes: ‘SENCOs experienced barriers to attending’ which reflects the difficulties SENCOs experienced in relation to attending sessions and ‘it is important to consider the practicalities’ which reflects the need to plan supervision sessions carefully in relation to when and where they will take place, what sessions will look like and who will facilitate these. These were included as subthemes, rather than themes, due to their interconnected nature of the impact of barriers on planning and executing sessions.

Subtheme: SENCOs Experienced Barriers to Attending. Most of the SENCOs described how their workload often presented as a barrier to attending supervision sessions and this would require careful thought and planning to allow them to attend as many sessions as possible. However, numerous SENCOs described how unexpected issues would arise last-minute and these things needed to be prioritised. This unavoidably affected their attendance.

> ***Kate**: “It is capacity …competing priorities and a busy school and a busy workload…when you’re responsible for safeguarding as well, that always has to come first.”*

***Charlotte**: "Just it for me because I'm safeguarding as well. I've just had a couple of safeguarding things that have had to trumpet sort of thing".*

***Jack**: "…all the sheer workload…there are moments when other meetings unfortunately will take priority that you can't change"*

The SENCOs appear keen to attend supervision sessions, however their busy workloads threaten to hinder their access to this support. This aligns with previous research that highlights that SENCOs regularly balance multiple responsibilities and are not always provided the opportunity to accomplish these effectively and efficiently (Lewis, 2017; Szwed, 2007). Closely linked to this was the difficulty of the time commitment that came with attending monthly supervision sessions. The SENCOs described balancing the many responsibilities they have as SENCOs, as outlined in the Department for Education and Department of Health's (2015) Code of Practice (the Code), which often included teaching their own classes, and the amount of time this took within their schedule that could have been afforded to supervision.

***Jack**: "lots of us have dual roles…I'm a SENCo three days a week so if they…do a time when I'm teaching, sometimes I can't get out of that"*

***Rebecca**: "normal pressures of time…giving an hour and a half to supervision…whilst it is valuable, sometimes you're like oh God, I've got so much to do. I can't really do that as well"*

Again, the SENCOs were keen to ensure that this was not a barrier that would regularly impact being able to have supervision, and one SENCO (Sophie) described how she had the Headteacher's support to protect the time. The prearranged dates were subsequently put into the school's diary to protect the time for Sophie so that she was able to make the monthly commitment. Time remains a challenge for SENCOs, as previous research identifies that limited time to effectively conduct their responsibilities can cause great stress (Curran & Boddison, 2021; Dobson & Douglas, 2020). Although there were mixed thoughts about the use of online sessions, having sessions online somewhat addressed the barriers of workload and time. The SENCOs highlighted that having sessions online negated the need to spend time travelling to each other's schools, even though meeting face-to-face might have been more "personal" (Carla).

***Charlotte**: "in terms of time constraints, it's probably better online…it's very easy to attend, isn't it?"*

***Chloe**: "…the time that it takes to get there and then to get back to your school…that could potentially be a 2-hour thing instead…[Being online] keeps it quite concise".*

> ***Sophie**: "It works online as well. It makes it possible. I'm not sure having it…face to face, unless it was here all the time, would make it possible".*

Although some SENCOs agreed that it would have been nice to have supervision face-to-face, this meant that further time would need to be allocated. The extra time commitment that in-person sessions would require, further reduces the opportunity to complete other tasks, and this was something SENCOs clearly could not afford. Although less personal for some, having sessions online allowed greater attendance and meant the sessions remained within the allocated time. The worry for some was that in-person sessions would provide the opportunity for social chat before work discussions start and they may have found it easier to interrupt during discussions, thus lengthening the session.

Subtheme: It is Important to Consider the Practicalities. This subtheme describes how it is important to plan supervision carefully and consider what might affect its utility to ensure sessions are as beneficial as possible. SENCOs reflected on the importance and usefulness of having signed a contract that outlined the expectations of the supervisees, supervisor, and the sessions themselves. When sharing their experiences, they referred to the contract that was agreed and signed in the introductory session, as something they had considered important. The signing of this ensured that everyone had a clear understanding of their role and what they could expect from others, including the facilitator.

> ***Sophie**: "Ohh but we've signed that agreement' which I think was important…there's always a pull on your time thinking could be doing something else. But having signed that agreement…I never thought I'm not gonna do it".*

Benefits of having contracted the sessions also extended to the shared development of the group rules. Professional guidance on supervision in schools highlights the importance of having an agreement to ensure clarity and security in sessions (Carroll et al., 2020). This likely improved group dynamics as there was a clarity around shared purpose, goals and standards, and there are clear boundaries in relation to one another. This ensured all members felt valued. Bion (1961) explained that these features are important for a group to develop good spirit.

> ***Jack**: "…you have to treat it with respect…also the very fact that it relies on everybody being there and everybody having a contribution…I resent if I have to miss it"*

> ***Mia**: "…actually by taking that time it's definitely gonna benefit me…I've made sure consciously that I've given myself the time…if you don't, then you're not going to get the most out of it…"*

The SENCOs explained it was important to prioritise their time to attend and to work collaboratively during the sessions. This helped them to gain the most from them. Previous research highlights that working collaboratively was particularly beneficial for newly qualified professionals and it fostered a supportive atmosphere (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The SENCOs suggested that the sessions would not have been as beneficial if they had not prioritised their time. The Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) provides a reason why the SENCOs prioritised their time to attend. The theory posits that the way we behave is related to our attitude towards that behaviour. It describes attitude as the belief that a behaviour will have a positive contribution to life. The theory also suggests that behaviour is determined by perceived behavioural control and subjective norms. These refer to one's belief in how easy or hard it is to engage in a behaviour, and the influences around the individual, including their network and group beliefs.

A positive attitude, favourable social norms and a high level of perceived behavioural control are best predictors for forming a behavioural intention which results in a displayed behaviour (Ajzen, 1991; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975). If SENCOs have this, they may be more inclined to attend. Careful planning permits the SENCOs to problem-solve in advance, any issues that could present as barriers to accessing supervision. Without careful planning, this could risk SENCOs not developing positive attitudes, norms and behavioural control and therefore not engaging in supervision as fully as possible. The nature of group supervision is that there are a group of professionals coming together. This would not have worked if minimal SENCOs attended the sessions. By putting effort into the sessions and by frequently attending, the SENCOs were able to have collaborative discussions, finds solutions to their issues and it have impact on their daily work life. This was consistent with Farouk's (2004) research, which demonstrated that group discussions allowed professionals to problem-solve in a more collaborative way.

Supervisees also discussed the importance of where they were when they joined the online sessions. The SENCOs shared that privacy and confidentiality were important. This was to protect not only themselves, but also the privacy of the CYP they were discussing. Arguably, being in the familiar environment of their own school, rather than the possible unfamiliarity of travelling to others' schools, supported SENCOs to share as they felt more comfortable.

> ***Annie**: "it was about privacy...the one I presented I actually I asked if I could go home for the afternoon...so I could do it from home cos I…don't always feel like I can talk freely because actually it's paper-thin walls…"*

> ***Charlotte**: "I guess if you were in someone else's school…you'd be more nervous about confidentiality and things because you maybe wouldn't know who might overhear or might see you leaving upset…"*

The SENCOs responses suggested an element of feeling vulnerable, particularly if wishing to disclose something that was personal or emotive. The concern appeared to be regarding people outside of the group of SENCOs hearing their difficulties and the fear that this would be shared further or would influence their opinion of them. In previous research, a safe and confidential space was also highlighted as paramount for supervision to develop a trust between supervisor and supervisees (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013; Reid & Soan, 2019). This may be a contributing factor towards, or a consequence of, SENCOs feeling isolated and as though they work at the edge of school life, as highlighted in the literature (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017). There seemed to be little concern regarding sharing with a group of professionals who had the same job, and this may be owing to having discussions with likeminded professionals who could understand the weight of their responsibilities. Although in Sophie's interview, she shared the dilemma she faced in the initial session. She described how one of her pupils' parents was also hoping to attend the sessions due to their SENCO support role within the same school. This made Sophie feel compromised and although they had a good working relationship and she trusted that the discussions would not be shared outside of the forum, she felt this would impact her feeling able to openly share in the sessions and she was keen not to implicate her pupils' confidentiality. This highlights the need to address ethical dilemmas as they arise.

> ***Sophie**: "It's different if a parent is listening…one of my pupil's mother was going to be in the same sessions and I felt…compromised because she would know…the children and…[pupil confidentiality] is something we have to be careful of"*

Whilst planning and contracting the sessions, consideration was given to the model that would be utilised to structure the sessions. This model was shared with the SENCOs in the initial introductory session prior to supervision commencing. Three of the SENCOs had initial reservations about the model, suggesting that it would not allow for a natural flowing conversation, and they were concerned this would make the discussions seem unnatural and awkward.

> ***Annie**: "at the beginning…I was worried it would be too structured and not allow for natural kind of expression…the bit where we're not talking and just listening I found it quite awkward"*

> ***Bethany**: "it just felt a little bit unnatural to start with but the more you went on you could see the purpose of why it was set out like that"*

> ***Rebecca**: "at first, I was a little bit wary…but actually I find the structure actually works quite well"*

Having familiarised with the model following a few sessions, the SENCOs views altered, and instead they explained how the model ensured that everyone knew their role, what to do and when, everyone had equal opportunity to share and no one person was dominating the conversation. Furthermore, it afforded SENCOs the opportunity to talk without being interrupted and allowed the conversation to be productive. This was a two-way process, as there was opportunity to speak and to listen. The potential for group supervision to provide a supportive discussion whilst offering a diverse variety of resources through multiple perspectives has been highlighted in previous research (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

> ***Rebecca**: "that time to talk freely without being interrupted but also that time to kind of sit back and listen…you have that time to step away and think…it structures the way you're thinking."*

> ***Mia**: "I'm somebody that likes structure and organisation so for me having that clear structure and…so knew what my part was"*

> ***Sophie**: "I found it quite soothing the fact that we knew what we were doing when…nobody was taking over…It was all very structured in terms of the topic we were actually answering the questions um that somebody brought."*

It could be argued that the use of the model was therapeutic for some of the SENCOs. For example, the familiar and consistent use of the structure was "soothing" for Sophie. The reassurance that previous research has highlighted as being provided by supervision (Osborne & Burton, 2014; Willis & Baines, 2018) has the possibility of having therapeutic benefits. The consistent use of the model and the routine that the model provided in the sessions, reaffirmed the SENCOs' expectations of the sessions. This provided the stability and security to allow them to feel safe enough to share openly, and following the model ensured that the conversations were productive. Without this, the sessions risked becoming futile. Research outside of education has identified that such frameworks ensure supervision remains focused and structured (Sloan et al., 2000).

> ***Charlotte**: "…It's almost like a non-negotiable structure, isn't it? So if people are straying off, you've got a good way of bringing people back because you say, well, actually at this point…"*

> ***Jack**: "it gives you a very good structure…whoever is bringing it forward is given a certain amount of time to speak and everyone's effectively told to be quiet…[without the structure] it would become more of a chat"*

Annie's response reiterated the "power" of the model, as she explained that she felt that it allowed her to better process the issue being discussed and the conversation was more productive than a conversation without using the model would have provided, as others may just "butt in". This discouraged supervisees from ruminating on the issue, instead focusing on possible solutions. Carroll et al. (2000) identified that supervision models also allow one to conceptualise and apply supervision in a transparent and methodical way.

The final consideration that SENCOs highlighted as important when contemplating the practicalities of supervision was around the facilitator. Kaner (2007, p. 32) argues that the role of the facilitator is to "support everyone to do their best thinking", and to maintain the structure, rhythm, timing, and flow of sessions (Muchenje, 2020; Wood, 2016). The facilitator has numerous roles, including encouraging participation, prompting shared understanding, nurturing inclusive solutions, and promoting shared responsibility. The facilitator ensures that everyone feels heard, makes space for quieter members of the group to participate, and encourages people to overcome the difficulty of not saying what they truly think (Kaner, 2007). This balances the distribution of power in groups (Halton & Soni, 2023). They support the continuation of thinking about problems and help the group to develop a wider perspective and understand others' points of view, helping to foster group culture (Hawkins & Shohet, 1989; Muchenje, 2020). Previous research identifies that facilitators often have skills that incite critical thinking and provide multiple perspectives (Obsorne & Burton, 2014), synthesise numerous narratives, clarify key points and optimise the effectiveness of the group (Hammond & Palmer, 2018; Thomas, 2010). This is done in a non-judgmental manner (France & Billington, 2020). The SENCOs felt that the facilitator was an important member of the group in ensuring that the group remained on task and followed the structure of the sessions.

> ***Kate**: "[EP] will often say ohh, you know we're not at the questions yet and it just makes you reflect and think… you need a facilitator to keep those parameters…cause the structure wouldn't be referred to would it?"*

> ***Charlotte**: "I think [EP's] very, very clear…she runs a tight ship. It's very firm, but it's very clear. And if people do go off the path [EP] brings people back to the model"*

> ***Sophie**: "…EP was very clear that everybody has an input and would go back if someone hadn't"*

The EP was able to do this effectively and efficiently and as Mia mentioned, when people inevitably “went off on a tangent” the EP was able to bring the conversation back. Without this the sessions ran the risk of being unproductive. Facilitators help individuals to actively listen to others’ contributions and support them to understand the value in hearing other views, and at times they deal with difficult dynamics. For example, recognising that disagreements or misunderstandings are inevitable and should be treated respectfully (Anderson & Hayes, 2023; Kaner, 2007; Underwood, 2022). In addition, the facilitator supports the group to identify new ideas that combine everyone’s viewpoints, drawing upon theory and collaborative problem-solving skills to explore other possibilities (Kaner, 2007; Muchenje, 2020; Underwood, 2022). This helps to drive behavioural and cognitive change around issues (Cairns et al., 2023; Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). To support the above, facilitators use skills such as mirroring, reflective listening, creating space for people to participate, validation, empathy, and summarising (Kaner, 2007; Stringer et al., 1992; Wood, 2016). They also identify and acknowledge feelings, raising awareness of them to the group to help them to recognise and access everyone’s feelings. This creates a feeling of safety that helps supervisees to feel challenged but also contained (Beech 2021; Scaife, 2009; Steel, 2001; Wood, 2016). It also conveys warmth, interest, and respect (Stringer et al., 1992). Some of these skills were recognised by the SENCOs as necessary facilitator skills. For example, Bethany described how the facilitator would “paraphrase” participants’ thoughts and put it together in a way that enabled the SENCOs to make sense of their situation. These are skills EPs typically use in other areas of practice, such as consultations (Wagner, 2017). Mia recognised that it was “extremely beneficial” having the EP in the sessions, however she felt that the skills needed to effectively facilitate supervision were not necessarily unique to the EP. Instead, Mia felt that if an individual had skills that enabled them to be a good facilitator, this would be more important than the need for them to be an EP. This included them using solution focused questions.

> ***Mia**: “…they've got the skills and knowledge, but I don't think that's been used for that…they've come up with some solutions…when we're answering those questions dropping those things in…having them there has been extremely beneficial.”*

When referring to previous experience of the same supervision model in a different group supervision scenario, Rebecca shared that her experience was not positive due to the model being used in a way that it was not designed for. Whilst sharing this, Rebecca recognised that the facilitator of those sessions did not have the skill to effectively use the model, and they did not allow for flexibility which resulted in an uncomfortable atmosphere. This further reiterates the importance of the facilitator having good skill, the ability to build rapport and work collaboratively (France, 2016; France & Billington, 2020).

The data suggests that SENCOs are keen to prioritise time for sessions and are proactive in doing so. This may be owing to SENCOs' desire for forums of support such as supervision, and there being little understanding of the need for supervision regardless of its potential as a 'valuable tool' (Reid & Soan, 2019, p.71). Affording the opportunity to consider the practicalities of the sessions meant a plan can be discussed and implemented to avoid the impact of the barriers that would inevitably affect them being able to attend. Although it could be argued that the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1975) supported their behaviour intentions and subsequent behaviours, and they were afforded the opportunity to problem-solve around potential issues, SENCOs inevitably still experienced barriers outside of their control. This aligns with research conducted with other groups of staff, which also identifies that school staff find having enough time to attend supervision and prioritise this is challenging amongst their other responsibilities, which often must take priority (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020). The nature of the SENCO role is a busy one and when carrying dual responsibilities, issues relating to teaching or those of a safeguarding nature, are often unexpected, unavoidable and must be prioritised to ensure the pupils' safety. It would be advantageous to consider a plan should similar issues arise to allow SENCOs to attend as many sessions as possible. This could include appointing an additional deputy safeguarding officer or an alternative staff member to address teaching issues, when required. It is recognised that this would be an ideal option, however realistically staff do not have this additional capacity amongst their other responsibilities.

Contracting supervision is an important aspect of supervision within other professions such as educational psychology (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Carroll et al. (2020) also encourages contracting within their professional guidance on supervision for SENCOs and school leaders. During the initial introductory session these issues were considered, and it appeared to create a shared understanding of the commitment the SENCOs were making. It is pertinent to be mindful of the impact of group dynamics in situations such as PGS and contracting the sessions likely had a positive impact on this, as it provided the opportunity to clarify everyone's responsibilities, expectations, and boundaries. Common purpose and understanding will contribute to group cohesion and provide a safe environment in which the SENCOs feel able to share. This will have contributed towards a shared common purpose that Bion (1961) argues is required to be a functioning group.

Considering the group's facilitator carefully is a notion that previous literature has highlighted (Carroll et al., 2020). Contracting provided the opportunity to recognise the importance of employing an effective facilitator who understands such issues when facilitating sessions. Research suggests that it is more advantageous if the facilitator is impartial to the group, for example Conyne (1996) acknowledges the impact that supervisors

with dual relationships have on the efficacy of supervision. If receiving supervision from a line manager, staff may not feel able to share their concerns openly. This raises ethical concerns and may be owing to fears around being seen as inadequate. One could also argue that the dual role an SLT member has as supervision facilitator, may lead them to having alternative underlying goals.

Within the supervision sessions, SENCOs appeared to see the EP as an impartial member who supported the group to reach their goals. EPs as supervisors are non-evaluative and non-managerial which ensures that confidentiality is maintained alongside fostering group dynamics and the structure of supervision sessions (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The EP as the facilitator steered the SENCOs in this research back to the model when they strayed from the matter. This was consistent with previous findings which identified that the facilitator was one who ensured the group followed processes and synthesised the groups' narratives (Hammond & Palmer, 2018; Thomas, 2010). This encouraged the group to reflect and hopefully empowered the SENCOs. As EPs are already involved in schools, it is argued that they are impartial and well-placed to use their skills to facilitate supervision. In the current research, the EP was able to build rapport with the SENCOs and one SENCO referred to the EP running a "tight ship" that was firm but fair and ensured everyone had the opportunity to share and felt valued. This suggests that the SENCOs respected the EP, which helped the SENCOs tolerate the discontentment that disagreements in sessions could have had (Bion, 1961). An impartial facilitator further limited the opportunity for the group to form exclusive sub-groups, something Bion (1961) described as detrimental to group dynamics.

The skills of the facilitator, as described by the SENCOs in this research, are not necessarily unique to the educational psychologist. There lies the possibility of EPs providing an understanding of PGS and demonstrating the effective skills of a facilitator in initial sessions. This would be prior to allowing other professionals, such as the SENCOs themselves, to facilitate their own supervision. As the SENCOs are unlikely to work in the same schools and have developed working relationships prior to meeting for supervision, it could be argued that they may also present as impartial to other SENCOs' schools. This would need further exploration but could provide an even more cost-effective way of accessing PGS, as in time schools would be able to provide this for themselves.

2.4.2 Theme 2: "Sometimes it's just, you need to talk to someone": Support Networks Developed from Supervision.

SENCOs discussed how the supervision sessions provided them the opportunity to talk to someone and from this they were able to develop a support network. This theme

regularly highlighted the benefits of SENCOs sharing their concerns and issues, not only with others, but with professionals who understood, could empathise, and relate to those concerns and issues having experienced them themselves. This theme comprises of two subthemes: ‘sessions provided an opportunity to share’ and ‘support is mutual’.

Subtheme: Sessions Provided an Opportunity to Share. The theme of having the opportunity to share was common across most interviews. SENCOs shared that it was beneficial being able to stop and discuss some of the finer details of their concerns but also listen to others share their concerns. This was something SENCOs implicitly suggested that they would not have done without supervision.

> ***Chloe**: “It forces you to…really listen…obviously you can ask your questions, but…there were times where…you asked the question and then cause the way they answer it, it changes your opinion.”*

> ***Kate**: “[Supervision] makes you think of the task in hand and…it just makes you think…this is the point we're at. It makes you listen, it makes you…respectfully take it in turns”*

Chloe suggested that the supervision model encourages you to listen, and this allowed the SENCOs to gather further information about the case. In typical conversation, one may try to jump straight into offering solutions without considering the wider factors that may impact the situation and do so in a way that inadvertently interrupts the problem-owner’s processing. Allowing the presenter an uninterrupted space to talk about their problem ensured that the group really listened to what was happening, which allowed them to reflect on the advice or suggestions they gave before giving them. This provided more appropriate and nuanced responses. The SENCOs described how, often, the topics that were brought to the discussion were concerns or issues to which the group could relate.

> ***Carla**: “everybody always gets the same blockages or things that they need to go over so regardless of secondary or primary we actually all have the same relative issues…it's sad that there was lots we could have talked about”*

> ***Annie**: “the support of knowing that there is a group of other people…it gives you…connection…share those frustrations and challenges with someone who would be able to relate”*

> ***Bethany**: “there’s an element there of being able to relate … because they’re doing the same job...and that’s partly what helps you to open up and to feel understood… being in the same boat…”*

Carla acknowledged that SENCOs face many difficulties in their roles that there were numerous topics they could have discussed. These difficulties were often in relation to accessing support for pupils, but also accessing support for themselves. The literature suggests that there is a lack of support for SENCOs. Previous research has highlighted how SENCOs are typically the only role of its kind in a school and often conducted by one individual (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017; Lewis & Ogilvie, 2003). This may add to the unsureness of how to support SENCOs effectively. Some SENCOs do not necessarily know where to go to get support and others feel unable to speak to their colleagues through fear of burdening them further. Facilitating group discussions around topics of concern provided them with this support and a network subsequently developed. As SENCOs were able to relate to one another through their discussions, regardless of whether they worked in a primary or secondary school, this built rapport and meant SENCOs worked collaboratively to identify solutions.

The power of feeling as though one has been heard should not be underestimated. Carla argued that she would not have been able to form such a strong connection to the group if they had not been SENCOs because she recognised their very different needs compared to teaching colleagues. There is an aspect of SENCOs sensing that a network and connection was able to develop due to them having the same roles. This allowed them to feel better understood. Although the SENCOs agreed that they felt like part of their school and they got on well with their teaching colleagues, they lacked feeling understood and this left them feeling isolated and alone.

> ***Jack**: "…they'll [class teams] have those conversations which you're not party of…so to be able to sit there…with fellow professionals to actually have a conversation that you wouldn't normally otherwise…"*

> ***Rebecca**: "I think just knowing that kind of the workload and that SENCO can be quite a lonely job…good to have that opportunity to talk to other SENCOs…that feeling that you're not alone and there are others sharing the same issues"*

Although the SENCOs described having good relationships with their colleagues, this did not appear to be enough for them to feel understood. The isolating feeling that this likely caused SENCOs, alongside feeling disregarded as an important member of SLT, has been recognised in previous research (Evans, 2013; Lewis, 2017). When discussing a historical experience of supervision with other professionals, Bethany described how the gaps in her knowledge of their role, and them not fully understanding the SENCO role, left her feeling unsupported. As the other professionals could not relate to Bethany's concerns, she left supervision sessions not feeling heard or understood. Situations such as these risk leaving

SENCOs feeling unable to share the difficulties they are facing with other colleagues, which has been recognised as a concern in Lewis' (2017) research. Speaking to likeminded professionals, who understood the pressures they were facing, supported the development of cohesion amongst SENCOS. This resulted in a higher quality of discussion whereby SENCOs felt they could share openly without the risk of feeling judged. Annie explained that *"…it never felt like someone was telling you 'why haven't you tried this yet'"*. Theories that could explain these further are included later in this section.

> ***Sophie**: "I could say what I needed to…I didn't feel any inhibition that I was gonna be judged……that was the main benefit cause sometimes it's just [pause] you need to talk to someone say ohh, what about this and…and not feel like you're failing".*
>
> ***Mia**: "I wouldn't say I get upset really in school…but when it was my time to present, it'd been a really tricky day and so I did…it was quite emotional about a particular child…I felt really supported, not judged"*

The SENCOs appeared to feel more comfortable sharing their difficulties or issues with likeminded professionals. Having a shared experience brought SENCOs together as they had a greater understanding of one another's roles and the situations they were discussing. This understanding relates to SENCOs' status in schools, as previous research identifies that SENCOs who were considered part of SLT, also reported an increased ethos of care and this increased the extent to which they felt valued (Middleton & Kay, 2021). There may be a difference in experience between SENCOs who are and are not part of SLT. Those considered a valuable part of SLTs may feel more comfortable than those not part of SLT in sharing their concerns with other professionals.

Subtheme: Support is Mutual. The theme of mutual support between group members was evident when speaking to the SENCOs, who highlighted that this made them feel like part of a team. The support SENCOs felt they gained from supervision sessions worked both ways and the SENCOs described how supervision was not solely about receiving support but also being able to offer other SENCOs support too. This was irrespective of where in their careers SENCOs were.

> ***Jack**: "It's not just about you, it's about the other people that are involved as well…nobody likes letting anybody down, especially SENCOs…"*
>
> ***Kate**: "I think it's a supportive forum…and the support I can offer others as well. It's a two-way thing"*
>
> ***Rebecca**: "…it's still so nice knowing that that sometimes you can support other people as well"*

> ***Carla**: "you all work together as a team working it through…we also looked forward to being with each other…when you're connecting with people you trust you're more upfront"*

These insights fit with belongingness theory which tells us that individuals have an innate desire for interpersonal relationships, and motivation is therefore deeply rooted and affects one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). The frequent, pleasant, and reciprocal interactions echoed in the participants' views are described by Baumeister and Leary (1995) as being essential for relatedness to develop, seemed to be present within the stable context of supervision. In this instance, it appears the caring nature of the group and the ability to both receive and provide support encouraged the development of connection between SENCOs. Although at different points in their careers, the SENCOs had developed the respect to listen to each other's ideas and appreciation was given whether they were new ideas or ones that had previously been tried. The process of receiving and providing support appeared therapeutic for the SENCOs and they were keen not to disappoint or let each other down by not attending. A trust developed amongst them, which helped them to openly discuss their challenges. Being able to form positive relationships with the fellow SENCOs seemed an important aspect to support the SENCOs to develop a sense of belonging and as part of a community, which made them feel "a bit more like a team" (Chloe). This developing sense of belonging allowed them to feel not only connected to other SENCOs, but also to the LA. This has been identified in the context of supervision, as previous researchers highlighted that teamwork supports the development of a sense of community, subsequently fostering good working relationships and improved communication and collaboration (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The sense of belonging developed to the extent that group members felt able to reach out for support outside of the supervision sessions. The SENCOs shared that since starting supervision and developing a network of support, they have relied upon this when they have encountered difficulties in their day-to-day work.

> ***Carla**: "I loved…that I was able to reach out to the group outside of the peer supervision and just say okay I just need, I didn't even know what I needed…at that time I was particularly vulnerable"*

> ***Annie**: "one experience in our group where one person sent us all an email to reach out for that emotional support…I don't know if I should admit this…there was a time I was going to do the same…"*

Carla felt comfortable reaching out to the group via email when she was struggling. Although Annie was keen to ask the group for their support, and intended on sending them

an email, she decided not to as she was mindful that she would potentially interrupt their evening. The act of writing that email and knowing that the support network was there if she did ask for help was enough for Annie to feel relieved without needing to press send. When Bethany described having drafted her letter of resignation due to having similar feelings, she described the group as an entity that would provide her support without necessarily having to be there and that support was enough for her to feel able to continue.

> ***Bethany****: "when someone reached out it just made it feel…I've got this safety net all of the time so it doesn't now just feel like supervision sessions…I know that if I ever felt like that again I know what I can do about it"*
>
> ***Charlotte****: "It's also quite useful if you do then want to contact anybody you know, within the sessions people have said Oh come and visit"*
>
> ***Jack****: "…knowing that you've got an access point to do that…you can just email them or contact them outside of [supervision], you know it's been huge"*

When discussing the composition of the group, some SENCOs were ambivalent about introducing professionals outside of SENCOs to the group. Annie described how the group dynamics remained the same when another SENCO joined halfway through the academic year, which may have been owing to them also being a SENCO. However, when presented with the possibility of other professionals joining the SENCO group, some were wary. Chloe explained that, for her, "it just wouldn't work". Although she recognised that it would provide others with a better understanding of the SENCO role, she found it difficult visualising this being effective. This may have been owing to them having differing responsibilities and roles, and discussions with other professionals who are unlikely to be able to empathise with SENCOs would not be as impactful. Carla described the group as "elite", which she explained meant that were a very small group with very different needs to teachers. Although group supervision has previously identified developing networks as an outcome of supervision (France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021), having likeminded professionals together appeared to have an even greater impact. This may have been owing to them understanding and relating to one another. It could be that some of the SENCOs developed a sense of membership in line with social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986), which is explored further in Theme 4. This theory posits that individuals obtain part of their self-concept from membership to social groups. Tajfel and Turner (1979) proposed that the groups to which people find themselves belonging can provide several benefits, including feelings of connection and unity, purpose, greater self-esteem, and a way in which to understand themselves. This could have provided comfort, in the sense that participants were not alone, experienced group direction and achievement, developed a

positive image of themselves, and were better able to identify their attributes. Bethany explained that previous experience of supervision with other professionals had not been as fruitful as the SENCO sessions, which she felt was due to the lack of understanding that her fellow supervisee had of the demands of the SENCO role specifically. It could have been that she did not feel like she shared social identity with this group. Whilst it is important to ensure that SENCOs uphold open channels of communication with other colleagues too, this highlights the potential importance and advantage of providing supervision specifically for SENCO groups. Previous research highlights the importance of discourse in maintaining supportive and positive relations to ensure the best outcomes for young people (Bartram, 2018; Middleton & Kay, 2021).

It is likely that the social connectedness the SENCOs appeared to experience helped to develop and reinforce a sense of belonging to the group. This, if the case, would have addressed the innate motivational drive to connect, to develop and maintain interpersonal connections to others (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Sense of belonging refers to feeling secure, supported, and included within a group and feeling connected to and accepted within a community. A significant aspect in the development of this and to provide support is communication (Middleton & Kay, 2021). This is fostered by positive group dynamics and provides individuals with both an individual and shared identity. In this instance, having a shared identity explains the SENCOs' comfortableness in allowing another SENCO to join the group halfway through the year; they already had the individual identity as a SENCO, and this allowed them to easily merge into the shared identity without threat to the group. However, when it was suggested that a professional outside of the SENCO role joined the group, for example a teacher, this threatened to disrupt the groups' identity and resulted in ambivalence. Some of the SENCOs shared that they were concerned they would not benefit as highly from mixed groups. Discussing professional issues with colleagues who could share those experiences and relate to your feelings felt somewhat "safe" to the SENCOs and negated the concern that they would feel judged. They felt supported and were able to build trust and connection amongst the group when they had common ground. EPs develop close relationships with SENCOs and may be the key to bringing specific groups together.

2.4.3 Theme 3: "We're fighting the same battles": Supervision Provided Emotional Support.

The theme 'Supervision Provided Emotional Support' incorporates the idea that supervision provided SENCOs with the opportunity to share their emotional concerns, have these acknowledged and understood. These were often concerns that, when discussed, were also shared by other SENCOs. Hearing others having similar difficulties allowed the

SENCOs to feel relieved, reassured and contained. Supervision having provided emotional support was a key theme across most of the interviews. This theme is divided into two subthemes: ‘sessions are a safe space’ and ‘sessions were cathartic’.

***Kate**: “I have found them useful for my own…reassurance…actually we're all on this same path...we’re fighting the same battles, trying to get the same support for our kids [pause] that's the bottom line to know that other people are out there”*

Subtheme: Sessions are a Safe Space. Numerous SENCOs referred to the supervision forum as being a safe space in which they could discuss concerns openly. Mia simply stated that she “felt really safe”, whilst others elaborated on their responses:

> ***Rebecca**: “…having that forum to kind of speak openly and share and support each other…that's probably the biggest impact…sometimes…you can be wary of talking about things in certain forums…[supervision] is a safe space to do that”.*
>
> ***Chloe**: “…you are always vulnerable, even though I don't feel like unsafe because everyone's really nice. I've just felt a bit what vulnerable”.*
>
> ***Bethany**: “I felt that we were all safe enough and we would get the support enough to actually think about what I was feeling inadequate about, which is a hard thing to bring”*

The physical environment in which supervision sessions take place is an important consideration, and the SENCOs acknowledged this when contracting the sessions. Previous research supports this finding, suggesting that the opportunity to attend safe and contained supervision sessions allowed supervisees to reflect more deeply on their practice and experience, knowing there would be no judgement (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). However, it was apparent that the connections formed were also paramount for the sessions to feel safe enough for them to share emotionally. Rebecca explained that it is not always possible to find this safe space in other forums, for example on social media. Although the SENCOs felt “vulnerable” sharing in the sessions this was something they were able to manage having developed trusting relationships with the group. SENCOs alluded to the importance of confidentiality in fostering the safe environment. Some SENCOs referred to the sessions as being a space whereby they could offload and know that what was shared in supervision stayed within sessions. It is important to discuss this during the contracting phase to reassure SENCOs that their discussions remain private. Annie explained how this sense of safety allowed her to “compartmentalise” her job and use supervision as a space to leave the issues that she was carrying around day-to-day. SENCOs currently have limited opportunity to do this even though restorative supervision can address the emotional impact

of one's work (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021) and it has the potential to help them feel more balanced. This can help SENCOs to concentrate on other aspects of their role. The concept of containment is explored further below. Some of the SENCOs explained that having the sessions online, rather than in person, helped promote a feeling of safety.

> ***Bethany****: "…I think maybe [having sessions online] did actually make it easier to start with cos you're just talking to a computer…it took away the pressure"*
>
> ***Charlotte****: "…for some people actually having that distance you can kind of turn your camera off…whereas if you're in a room of people you can't do that, can you? So perhaps people share more online."*
>
> ***Rebecca****: "We've got quite used to doing things online these days…it maybe feels more comfortable…you've got that level of separation…you feel a bit more protected"*

The familiarity of working remotely since the COVID-19 pandemic has remained as normal practice for many, with meetings and consultations with stakeholders regularly taking place online. The familiarity of online working appeared to provide the reassurance and comfort to allow SENCOs to speak freely. Being in the familiar environment of their offices and schools, in comparison to attending others' schools, is likely to have helped: *"I feel like I'm safe in my office actually"* (Annie). As Charlotte described, working online provides one with a level of distance between yourself and others. There is an element here whereby the distance between the SENCOs may have also allowed them to "detach" themselves from their own emotions and as Annie previously described, "compartmentalise". This may not work for everyone, but the "anonymity" of being able to turn your camera off when sharing something emotive online certainly allowed some of the SENCOs in this research to feel more able to share and ask for support.

Subtheme: Sessions were Cathartic. Having developed a connection and fostered a safe space for discussions, the SENCOs were then able to experience the emotional benefits of sharing aspects of their roles that they found difficult. The SENCOs discussed how the process of sharing concerns felt cathartic and liberating. Issues discussed were not always directly related to the SENCOs' feelings, however discussing those issues in supervision provided SENCOs with a feeling of relief.

> ***Annie****: "…you just offload…I left every session feeling…lighter and…more in control…as time went on it became less of a standalone event…and remember that I can feel differently about the job"*

> ***Carla**: "very emotive...it really gave you an outlet and the actual quite scary if that's the correct word to use was that I know my other colleagues have voiced the same thing...it's quite therapeutic"*

The SENCOs felt comfortable speaking about their emotions and feelings with one another and attending supervision provided SENCOs a forum to share this. The SENCOs suggested that there was limited opportunity to do this outside of supervision; this provided them with a monthly "debrief". It is important to recognise that the SENCOs did not necessarily initially feel able to share emotionally, but after they had developed relationships, it was less "embarrassing" to do so. The group cohesion that developed over time and the realisation that it was okay to be emotional and have those feelings, made sharing in future sessions easier. Farouk (2004) also found that educators acted as a resource to the presenter providing support through "open" and "trusting" conversation (p. 208). One SENCO (Chloe) suggested that supervision should not be compulsory but should at least be offered to all SENCOs. There are, however, barriers in implementing this as previous research indicates that supervision is not "recognised, let alone available" (Reid & Soan, 2019, p. 60). Until supervision, the SENCOs had not necessarily recognised the impact that the role was having on them. The weight of their responsibilities was realised upon having the opportunity to discuss how they were feeling about their difficulties with understanding colleagues. For some SENCOs, they felt comfortable speaking about their feelings soon after supervision sessions started, whilst for others they felt that future supervision sessions had the potential to do this. Supervision is a space for reflection that SENCOs would not otherwise receive (Middleton & Kay, 2021; Reid & Soan, 2019).

> ***Rebecca**: "…if we could continue…building those relationships, it could become a forum to discuss…the less practical things and…the stress and all of that kind of thing…it's good that people feel comfortable to…share those really big issues"*

After some of the SENCOs had experienced the benefit of sharing emotionally, they looked forward to meeting for supervision and resented if they had to miss a session. Learning in supervision that other SENCOs were experiencing similar difficulties reassured SENCOs and made them appreciate their current position. This was likely containing for the SENCOs. Although they were experiencing challenges, some realised that they were not in as difficult a position as they initially thought, there were not always evident solutions to the problem, and that this is okay.

> ***Charlotte**: "I think it's good to know that you're not the only school in that situation, and I think that generally, the situation is getting worse for all schools as the finances are getting tighter"*

> ***Chloe**: "…just hearing that other people are having the same level of kind of…self-doubt and…crazy insecurities about whether they're doing it right…hearing other people with a lot more experience...it validates that it is a hard job…"*

Supervision could have provided the SENCOs with a different perspective from which to view the situation (see Theme 5 for further discussion). Cognitive theory is a useful framing here in that it suggests that one's thoughts, feelings and behaviours are interconnected and therefore the way one thinks about a situation can influence people's emotions and actions (Beck, 1964; Beck, 1995; Southam-Gerow et al., 2011). The opportunity to explore situations from different perspectives had the potential to challenge any negative thoughts that a SENCO may have had about a situation, possibly resulting in a reframing of thoughts. Furthermore, attribution theory suggests that individuals seek causes for situations and the impact of these on behaviour (Gulliford & Miller, 2015). Supervision could have provided the chance for SENCOs to reflect on the difficulties they were experiencing and develop their understanding of the possible causes or factors maintaining an issue or concern. Through joint discussion the SENCOs appeared to acknowledge that there were wider factors, outside of their control, that affected the way they felt about their role. Upon recognising such factors, the SENCOs may have developed a greater understanding of what support or intervention they could implement to support progress. For example, Charlotte explained how the cuts in budgets that schools are experiencing are exacerbating the difficulties they encounter. Research highlights further systemic pressures affecting SENCOs, such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021; Minihan et al., 2022), increasing expectations, responsibilities, accountability, and performance (Rae et al., 2017; Weare, 2015), results-driven ethos (Burton & Goodman, 2011), and providing support beyond the national curriculum (Hulusi & Maggs, 2015). If supervision supported SENCOs in this research to reframe their thoughts, or better comprehend the situation, this has the potential to instil greater hopefulness in individuals. This validated for the SENCOs that their role was challenging and normalised their feelings of overwhelm and helplessness.

Although one function of supervision is to better understand one's role (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021), the SENCOs in the study appeared to develop an understanding that their levels of knowledge and familiarity of the job was often irrelevant to helping them with the difficulties they were experiencing. Regardless of whether a SENCO was experienced or new in post, the role remained a challenge. This challenge was recognised by Warnock (1978), and it appeared to impact SENCOs' confidence. It was a comfort to the SENCOs that others were feeling the same. The emotional effect of sharing their concerns and realising that they were not alone was therapeutic and further reinforced their desire to attend sessions. Supervision became unmissable for many, and less of a standalone event

that they attended every month. Instead, supervision turned into a part of their role, and for some it encouraged them to stay in their positions.

> ***Chloe**: "...you do find yourself really wanting to attend, because actually once a month it's nice to have a debrief…with people who are actually SENCOs and impartial to your school"*

> ***Bethany**: "…it's almost like I needed to go, and it wasn't just…something else that we were doing, I think after about the third or fourth session it became very like protected time that I wasn't gonna miss"*

For the SENCOs in this research, supervision acted almost as a reset. By having their emotions and feelings about the difficulties they were experiencing heard and contained in a safe environment, they felt more productive and supported. In their review, Muchenje and Kelly (2021) highlighted how a safe space for reflection and learning and feeling contained go hand in hand. The feeling of containment that the SENCOs appeared to experience allowed them to better comprehend the situations they were in and the feelings this induced (Bion, 1961). The concept of containment (see Bion, 1985; Ogden, 2013) suggests that without support from others to contain one's emotions, growth and learning will not follow. Researchers have argued that containment is a fundamental aspect of group supervision, reinstating in supervisees the ability to think clearly (Douglas, 2007; Wood, 2016). Wood (2016) further argued that containment supported supervisees to manage their emotional responses, and, in turn, this fostered their growth and development. In attending supervision, this could have provided the SENCOs an opportunity to have their feelings contained, subsequently supporting them to process their emotions and better support their pupils. Although it may have caused the SENCOs to feel "vulnerable", the sharing of emotional experiences allowed other school staff to manage the pressures of their job (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; Willis & Baines, 2018). In a study on individual supervision, one professional shared that they were able to see the "big picture", as the containment they experienced diminished feelings of overwhelm (Reid & Soan, 2019, p. 67). Jackson and Warman's (2007) work discussion groups, for example, were based on the containment principles and reportedly supported the increase of staff wellbeing. Wood (2016) hypothesised that by containing staffs' emotions and responses, this could also increase effective working. This containment could also have supported the SENCOs to better manage their stress levels. Containment will be explored further in Theme 4.

Although research highlights that having a safe space in school can be a barrier to attending supervision (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020), it is reassuring that the SENCOs felt that supervision itself provided a sense of safety. A core tenet and aim of

supervision is to provide a safe space in which one can discuss various aspects of practice and Muchenje and Kelly (2021) identified sense of safety, belonging, and containment as key outcomes. These facilitated sessions encouraged supervisees to reflect more deeply and learn from experience (France & Billington, 2020, Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Research highlights the importance of developing trust to ensure supervision remains a safe space (Callicott & Leadbetter, 2013; Reid & Soan, 2019). The trust between the facilitating EP and SENCOs was a key component in this study. The safe environment appeared to allow the SENCOs to develop a sense of belonging, as was the case in previous research (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Muchenje and Kelly (2021) explained that the structured nature of supervision likely helped. This reinforced the feeling of a safe space within the group and was more evident when staff maintained shared group identity (Babinski & Rogers, 1998). This proved beneficial and further reinforced the feeling of a sense of safety within the group. These factors, combined with the opportunity to collaborate with likeminded professionals, are likely to support SENCOs to feel productive and supported and may have gone some way to addressing the stress and emotional overwhelm they experience. The importance of considering SENCOs' identity and who is involved when setting up PGS is crucial to afford SENCOs the optimum benefits.

The emotional support supervision provided appeared to be a surprising benefit for the SENCOs and one which they had not necessarily considered essential until they received it. This understanding is important, given that previous research highlights the limited understanding that professionals have of the relationships between their work and emotions (Partridge, 2012; Riley, 2011). Upon realising this, most of the SENCOs felt it paramount that they continued to receive supervision to process their day-to-day work. As supervision progressed, the SENCOs recognised the importance of giving themselves time for this, allowing themselves to share concerns to experience that cathartic effect. Similarly, previous literature indicated that SENCOs developed a greater understanding of how the impact and weight of their responsibilities affected them professionally and personally. This understanding and support, alongside the argument that staff require ongoing training (Salter-Jones, 2012), would allow SENCOs to better provide for pupils.

It is frustrating that factors outside of their control, such as decreasing budgets, impact SENCOs significantly. Amongst other aspects, the impact of budget cuts on being able to efficiently conduct their roles is recognised in previous research as a factor that affected approximately two thirds of SENCOs, those of whom intended to leave their role within five years (Curran & Boddison, 2021). The strength felt in forming relationships and communicating with a group of like-minded individuals, and the emotional support

experienced having attended supervision, supported SENCOs to recognise the impact, feel contained and go on to provide this containment for others (Jackson, 2008; Partridge, 2012).

2.4.4 Theme 4: Supervision had Varying Impact on Stress.

The theme 'Supervision had Varying Impact on Stress' captured the varying experiences of supervision and stress. Although participants largely described experiencing positive emotional effects from supervision, the experiences SENCOs shared with the researcher were not all similar. The impact of supervision on stress levels fluctuated between SENCOs during and following supervision sessions. Some SENCOs described supervision as having no positive impact on their stress levels and one SENCO identified that she felt hers increased. Other SENCOs felt supervision sessions provided more relief from stress, but the effect of this was short-term. This confirms the conclusions from previous research that identifies stress is experienced subjectively (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Lewis, 2017).

Chloe shared that she experienced benefits having attended supervision, however reduced stress was not one of these. Instead, she felt like her stress increased shortly after sessions due to the realisation that SENCOs more widely are experiencing difficulties with managing their workload and responsibilities. This was regardless of her perception of others' levels of experience in the role. If other SENCOs had not shared similar feelings around being overwhelmed by workload, Chloe may have found the sessions more comforting and gained reassurance from other SENCOs that the situation would improve. This was not the case.

> ***Chloe**: "…after each one, I'd say there's a spike in stress or…feeling negative and despondent...Sometimes when you see that it's no better anywhere else…that can actually make you think oh…the whole system is broken…It's never ending…"*

Chloe appeared concerned by the state of the profession to the extent that she was considering leaving "very, very seriously". This feeling is shared amongst SENCOs in previous research and surveys that identified that stress was increasing, and many were choosing to resign (Education Support, 2020; Reid & Soan, 2019). A survey by Education Support (2021) identified that 54% of staff had considered leaving the profession in the previous two years. This increased to 63% for those in SLT positions. Kate shared that she did not feel like supervision had any effect on her stress, instead it just provided the opportunity to reflect, whilst Annie explained that she hadn't noticed anything different about her stress. However, Annie did acknowledge that she "felt better" afterwards and this provided a feeling of "relief" that helped her to "ease" back into work. For others, supervision provided some relief from stress and provided support they were not otherwise receiving but

this support did not extend to reduced stress over a prolonged period. Supervision appeared to provide short-term support for many of the SENCOs. This is owing to supervision being unable to address the source of SENCOs stress. The SENCOs' workload remains, and supervision cannot address this. Instead, supervision afforded some perspective which enabled them to realise that they were managing their responsibilities well, somewhat addressing the impact of their workload. This perspective allowed them to think more clearly and helped them to prioritise tasks and is explored further in Theme 5.

> ***Carla**: "…stress levels definitely came down sharing, reaching out to each other…"*
>
> ***Bethany**: "once I'd had supervision my stress level had really reduced...and I felt more able to put things into perspective...I don't know…how long that would last for...but it did feel like you'd…released the stress…that little bit afterwards it felt easier..."*
>
> ***Mia**: "I would say there is short term impact when I'm doing it and when I've done it. I wouldn't say long term impact"*

The experience of supervision and stress also varied amongst SENCOs who felt it helped their stress. Carla sounded certain the supervision had positively affected her stress, whilst Bethany's response suggested that this had more of a subtle impact. Mia explained that whilst supervision helped her to manage her stress, this was short-lived, and she was not sure this extended beyond the session and shortly afterwards. One wonders if supervision assisted SENCOs to sit with and be open to the stress, despite their stress. This provided the possibility for Mia to put into perspective the work she needed to complete and may have increased her motivation, however this was not something she experienced as having a longer-term effect.

During her interview, Sophie found it difficult to verbalise how supervision affected her stress levels, suggesting that it was difficult to tell due to factors outside of her control, i.e., the time of the year typically being a stressful time for her. Instead, the reassurance that Sophie felt when she had attended supervision was more notable and impactful. Sophie alluded to the idea that her "to do" list was the main cause of her stress, and this was something that supervision, although helped her to manage, did not address. Supervision was unable to remove anything from her list.

In this research, supervision could have provided the SENCOs with containment, whereby the facilitating EP and fellow supervisees were responsive to the concerns shared. This subsequently could have supported them to manage their stress and worries more effectively by metaphorically holding them. In experiencing containment, this may have

helped them to feel more capable, and result in changes to thinking and behaviour patterns. Such a change was observed in previous research studying Circles of Adults (Stockley, 2003). If this were the case for the participants, this could have supported the development of their sense of belonging, which may have subsequently reinforced the feeling of supervision being a safe space as found in previous research (Babinski & Rogers, 1998; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). Research by McBay et al. (2023) highlighted that the interpersonal connection between supervisees provided a sense of containment, and this helped them to better understand how their own thoughts, feelings and attitudes were connected to the situation.

Cognitive theory and attribution theory (Beck, 1964; Beck, 1995) could further explain why there was some change in some of the SENCOs' perspectives. These theories highlight the connection between one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviours and our inclination to seek causes for situations. During the interviews, some of the SENCOs commented about feeling "stuck" with the problems they presented, and this caused them to feel hopeless. Supervision appeared to provide some of the SENCOS with the opportunity to explore alternative ways of viewing the situation. It supported them to challenge their thoughts and recognise the emotions they were feeling as a result. One SENCO shared that supervision helped her to recognise that it was not her actions that were maintaining the difficulty, rather it was environmental factors relating to the child's living arrangements. The reframing of this situation supported the SENCO to engage in behavioural change and she explained that she made a referral to an outside agency following the session. Challenging her thoughts may have helped reduce the negative emotion she experienced, as she recognised that she could somewhat change the factors maintaining her "stuck" cycle. Both theories help us to understand that change can occur, including through behaviour and thinking, and this impacts our emotions. If the SENCO is better able to see a situation from other viewpoints, and change as a result, this has the potential to increase their feelings of control.

Given that stress is subjective, the experiences of SENCOs of supervision and stress differed. This may be owing to the little agreement on a single definition of stress, but also the various factors that can affect it (Baum & Contrada, 2010; Lewis, 2017; Nelson & Simmons, 2004). Stress is complex, varied, and subjective and one's experience is multifaceted. We must interpret and understand stress carefully as we know that it can be affected by extraneous variables. For example, throughout the school year there are naturally fluctuating levels of workload. Other variables are also likely to impact SENCOs' stress, such as a school expecting or going through an inspection. The model of teacher stress (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978) also highlights non-occupational stressors. For the SENCOs who felt their stress decreased due to attending supervision, it may be that having

the opportunity to share their concerns and difficulties with likeminded professionals went so far in helping with this.

Gibbs and Miller (2014) highlighted the significance of supervision in affording the opportunity for professionals to come together to discuss personal and professional issues related to their practice. This can occur in a workplace that is often isolating (Gibbs & Miller, 2014). The SENCOs highlighted that having the opportunity to receive emotional support in a safe environment allowed them to feel contained. Blick (2019) identified the need for safe, respectful, and supportive school communities for school staff to develop a positive wellbeing. Previous research highlights that the opportunity to attend supervision encouraged supervisees to reflect more deeply on their practice in an open and non-judgemental forum (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The networks that were formed from supervision appeared to go some way in providing the SENCOs with a developing sense of belonging and identity. This may have somewhat buffered the impact of the stress they experienced in their role. This could be explained by social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979, 1986) which theorised that individuals obtain part of their self-concept from membership to social groups. This affects the way in which one makes decisions and can provide a sense of purpose, self-worth, and identity. When experienced positively, this can increase feelings of connection to others and help them to feel like they have shared goals and a sense of achievement. It could have been the case that the social identity and sense of membership to the supervision group that some of the SENCOs appeared to develop, subsequently supported them to manage their stress.

Research has highlighted that social identity can provide group members with a protective factor from the effects of feelings of stress (Haslam et al., 2005; Schury et al., 2020). Furthermore, Gillman et al. (2023) suggested that a greater connection to colleagues can support reduced feelings of perceived stress and increased social identification which increases the social support they perceived themselves as receiving. The SENCOs in this study appeared to develop a connection to the group members. Belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995), as described in Theme 2, could also help to explain why supervision may or may not decrease stress. Similarly to social identity theory, supervision could have supported the SENCOs in this research to development of a sense of belonging, which had the potential to help them to manage their affectual state. This was a strong factor in other research in supporting depressive symptoms (Cockshaw & Shochet, 2010) and physical health (Hale et al., 2005). Supervision, for the participants in this research, appeared to provide a sense of belonging and offered the opportunity for fulfilling interactions and reciprocal support. In Madeley's (2014) research, they found that such forums can contribute to belonging and result in lower levels of burnout.

Supervision provided the network outside of sessions to rely upon. This impact of having a greater perspective and a support network appeared reassuring for the SENCOs and built their self-efficacy. Wellbeing has a significant impact on self-efficacy, and this subsequently affects staffs' relations with pupils (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). For the SENCOs in this research, the thought of having monthly supervision sessions that would provide an "anchor" to look forward to, knowing that they would benefit from attending, helped them to feel somewhat relieved and reassured that there would soon be an opportunity to share. The SENCOs appeared to "look forward" to having the opportunity to release regardless of whether it was their turn to present an issue.

> ***Annie****: "…I did feel like sometimes in the week running up to it I felt a bit of 'oh okay you've got that coming' almost like an anchor I knew that supervision was coming and you know it would be okay".*

2.4.5 Theme 5: "I feel like we've grown together": Supervision Provided the Opportunity to Learn.

The theme 'Supervision Provided the Opportunity to Learn' represents the learning that SENCOs gained from supervision sessions and one another. The quote "I feel like we've grown together" highlights the importance of the group in being able to learn. This theme incorporates the sub-themes 'discussions provided perspective' and 'the sharing of resources and ideas'.

Subtheme: Discussions Provided Perspective. SENCOs often described how supervision sessions provided them with other perspectives on the issues they were presenting. This was relevant regardless of whether it was their own concern they were presenting or another's and referred mainly to the issues and cases being discussed.

> ***Carla****: "…not just being reflective on other people…but being reflective on your own practice and your own mindset…it is very easy to fall into a negative mindset…it enabled us to think further and go that bit deeper"*
>
> ***Charlotte****: "it is a bit of time where you can just have a bit of a step back and a bit of a think and maybe put things in perspective, I think it can make you feel a bit calmer afterwards"*
>
> ***Mia****: "[I've] reflected on things that people have said and perhaps maybe changed the way I've approached things."*

Carla alluded to the idea that it was easy to become overwhelmed by your workload as a SENCO, and that could easily affect how one perceives the role. One argues that this is

not difficult given the vast list of responsibilities outlined in the Code (Department for Education & Department of Health, 2015). The impact of this negative feeling towards the job on one's motivation and desire to conduct it, has significant implications. This is demonstrated in surveys such as the National SENCO Workforce Survey undertaken between 2018-2020, that identified that 52% of the SENCOs were considering leaving their role within 5 years (NASEN, 2020). Having the opportunity to zoom out of a situation, in which SENCOs are emotionally and professionally invested, allowed them to understand the connection between the situation and their feelings, and consider the wider picture. The impact of this for Charlotte, and potentially other SENCOs, was a calming one. The nature of group supervision and involving more than one supervisee, means that more perspectives come together to create an understanding of the circumstance. Discussions draw upon a greater variety of resources and multiple perspectives (Osborne & Burton 2014). This provides learning not only for the presenting SENCO, but also the other group members. Hawkins and Shohet (2007) describe this as a more cost-effective solution than individual supervision. As discussed in themes 3 and 4, cognitive theory and attribution theory (Beck, 1964; Beck, 1995) highlight the interplay between thoughts, feelings, and behaviours, and one's tendency to pursue causes for situations. In this research, it appears some of the SENCOs experienced a change in thinking patterns during and following supervision which may have affected how they felt about the presenting problem or the way they responded. This may have supported them to better understand, for example, how to manage the overwhelm that Carla indicated, or reframe their thinking or consider alternative perspectives having learnt and developed their understanding. This has the potential to support them to think more clearly.

The facilitating EP was a pertinent member of the group who also provided alternative angles on the issues and difficulties raised. Sociocultural learning theory views development as a socially mediated process of acquiring problem-solving skills through collaborative dialogue with knowledgeable others (Vygotsky, 1978). For Vygotsky, social interaction plays a fundamental role in development and meaning. Language has a powerful role in shaping our thoughts. The facilitating EP likely supported this by using scaffolding and solution focused questioning (de Shazer, 1985) that encouraged SENCOs to reflect on the situation, as alluded by Sophie and Mia.

> ***Sophie**: "I've not mentioned [EP] yet but having someone there who was not a SENCO also to put a different slant on things and come up with different strategies and ideas that was also useful."*

> ***Mia**: "…rather than dictating it, as is more sort of, have you thought about? What have you done? What could you do? So, kind of dropping those things in…I think having them there has been extremely beneficial."*

Previous research highlights that a significant part of an EP's work involves using solution-focused techniques and questioning (France, 2016; France & Billington, 2020). The solution focused element of supervision brought by the EP, provided SENCOs with a renewed view on situations. Many of the SENCOs suggested that they wished to attend supervision to gain emotional support. The solution focused approach was powerful and a surprising benefit for those who did not initially expect this. This suggests the SENCOs had not necessarily realised the full potential of supervision until learning that there were other options they could apply to their issue. The solution focused nature of the sessions ensured discussions were provided in a supportive way, meaning that SENCOs were not made to feel inadequate through fear of asking simple questions. Bethany explained "it never felt like someone was telling you "Well I've got it all sussed and this is what you do".

> ***Annie**: "…suddenly there was a fresh way of looking at something and of course there are solutions and there is a different way of looking at this erm and again it keeps coming back to me"*

For Annie the solution focused element was particularly effective and remained with her throughout the academic year. In her interview, she shared how her alternative perspectives on a situation she presented was one she revisited whilst working with the same child. In her day-to-day work, Annie remembered "vivid comments" made during supervision that she "hangs onto" to maintain that perspective. This suggests that she continued to consider how her thoughts and feelings impacted her subsequent behaviours, as described by cognitive theory (Beck, 1995), even after supervision. The reflection and learning points from the session are ones she continues to use in her practice. EPs are typically solution focused practitioners and keen to understand the wider factors affecting a situation. In the reflection phase of the process consultation approach, Farouk (2004) described how it was "useful to model asking solution-focused and systemic questions" (p. 215) to ensure the group do not ruminate on problems or focus on within child factors.

A substantial aspect supporting the SENCOs to develop different viewpoints was the opportunity to reflect on previous and future practice. Mackenzie (2012) found that, of SENCOs, learning support staff and teachers, SENCOs were more likely to share to share their experiences of the emotional challenges of their role. The distance between the SENCO and their concern achieved during reflective discussions encouraged them to pause and consider alternative views. The value of hearing others' viewpoints was immeasurable,

suggesting that attribution theory was relevant for the SENCOs here. This helped them to recognise and explore the root cause of the issue they were seeing, consider what they might do to support the situation and reflect on how others would approach it.

The perspective developed in supervision extended further than the cases discussed and the SENCOs' workload. Whilst reflecting on how much she felt she still needed to achieve, supervision also provided Bethany with the realisation of how much she had already achieved when she was feeling like there were copious amounts still left to do. Bethany shared that discussions with other SENCOs allowed her to see how much of an impact she had made in the short time she had been in her school. This instilled in Bethany, and the wider group, a sense of pride.

> ***Bethany**: "that perspective helped so…I was reminded that actually…what I'd already achieved...and you don't realise how much you've done you just think about how much you've got left to do so it helped to keep it in perspective"*

Learning occurred from the reflections had during sessions. This may have been somewhat owing to cognitive theory and attribution theory (Beck, 1964; Beck, 1995). The learning related to both practical elements of the role and about oneself, which provided personal and professional development. Learning about one's role, skill development and addressing the emotional impact of work are core functions of supervision (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). The learning that took place appeared to be a group process that may not have been so successful if the SENCOs had received individual supervision. Group supervision specifically has been shown to improve communication and camaraderie (Ellis & Wolfe, 2019; France & Billington, 2020), provide a greater variety of resources and multiple perspectives (Obsorne & Burton, 2014), and a chance for likeminded professionals to come together in a workplace that can often be isolating (Gibbs & Miller, 2014).

> ***Annie**: "…like we were all naturally kind of evolving through discussion…it feels like we've grown together and maybe it's part of the role that we will all share the same challenges…it probably strengthened my practice because it helped me understand"*

> ***Jack**: "…you have your own way of thinking…everybody has their own natural leanings. I come out of a background of trying to support dyslexia and autism…It's been a learning experience…focussed time on development."*

Jack referred to his knowledge being extended through conversation. Annie suggested that the common background, understanding and experiences the SENCOs shared supported the learning process. Reflecting-on-action is described by Schon (1984) as the opportunity to experience confusion or puzzlement on an uncertain situation, reflect

on this and the prior understanding and assumptions implicit in one's behaviour. One suspects that Jack sometimes experienced this confusion about situations he was unable to resolve when drawing upon his "natural leanings" towards dyslexia and autism. Through discussions, Jack likely recognised his developing understanding of wider situations outside the lens of his knowledge. The opportunity to share experiences of supervision encouraged SENCOs to reflect further. Bethany and Carla shared the following:

> ***Bethany**: "over the year it's made me feel like a more well-rounded SENCo. I've got better understanding of what other people do and what works and what doesn't, and I think I've changed some of my practice because of some of the ideas".*
>
> ***Carla**: "I'm awful at passing over or delegating"*

It appears that Bethany and Carla developed personally and professionally. Carla realised the difficulty she has in delegating responsibilities and the likely impact this had on her own work-life balance, whilst Bethany felt her developing skills meant she was better-informed and comprehensive in practice. This was consistent with previous finds from research on supervision in education. This research identified that giving and sharing of one's knowledge provided ideas, skills and resources to others who may have previously been unsure of how to address a situation (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; France & Billington, 2020). The idea that SENCOs took something away from each session possibly fostered this feeling.

> ***Annie**: "every week felt like my week every week I left feeling like 'okay I've picked something up today' or 'I've learnt something useful'…I very quickly realised that I got so much out of every single session."*
>
> ***Carla**: "I don't think there was one thing that was brought up that did not have a direct impact…you were learning with every single one of those peer supervisions."*
>
> ***Charlotte**: "it's been really useful in that…most of the things that have come up have been relatable…although you only present one of your own problems, you're almost getting solutions on…several at the same time."*

Attending group supervision provided SENCOs with significant knowledge and learning that individual supervision, due to the limited perspectives being shared, may not be able to offer. This is an important consideration when exploring the use of supervision in education.

Subtheme: The Sharing of Resources and Ideas. In addition to the perspective that supervision provided, the SENCOs also highlighted the benefit of supervision for sharing resources and ideas with one another.

> ***Carla**: "[supervision] enabled me to pick up some of those strategies that were offered to someone else but actually I was able to magpie them for myself…you got ideas and thoughts and shared documents."*

> ***Kate**: "…when somebody else has brought an issue and I thought actually yeah, I could do that. Or I could use that, or I felt like I can support others on some of the calls and perhaps less experienced SENCos."*

The sharing of resources and ideas naturally provided SENCOs with additional learning around areas where they were unfamiliar or had limited knowledge. Regardless of who was presenting, the SENCOs shared the idea that they benefitted from every session and were able to bank ideas and sources, be they practical resources to use immediately or ideas to consider for future use. This was done knowing that the SENCOs were likely going to experience, or had possibly previously experienced, the need to address similar difficulties in their own practice. In their own research on ELSA group supervision, Osborne and Burton (2014) highlighted the opportunity to share ideas and discuss cases was reassuring and impacted ELSAs' professionally and personally, which subsequently improved the support they offered pupils. The sharing of resources and ideas in this research was reciprocal and for most of the SENCOs also extended outside of supervision sessions. One SENCO felt more positive and worthy when she was able to offer other SENCOs, particularly those with less experience, her own resources. Sharing one's own knowledge reportedly provided additional ideas and resources (Ellis & Wolfe 2019; France & Billington, 2020) and the learning, sharing, and adapting of resources that took place (France & Billington, 2020) helped form relationships. This affected change and supported application of learning from their experience (Jackson, 2008; Partridge, 2012). This likely empowered the SENCOs to feel more competent professionally. Mia explained how the network they had developed allowed them to share resources between sessions when they found something they felt a fellow SENCO would benefit from.

> ***Mia**: "…people have then shared things afterwards and said oh I found this for you. I thought this was a really good idea. Do you want this? Yeah, so yes. Sharing resources, sharing ideas and sort of support"*

The support, resources, and ideas that SENCOs shared with one another likely made them feel reassured that there were other options. Even if the SENCOs were unable to share new ideas and resources, it was apparent that hearing others explain that they would

also have tried similar approaches was comforting and validating that they were trying their best.

> ***Sophie**: "I got lots of information from people, lots of ideas…a lot of which we were already putting in place, but it was still useful to hear that we were doing the right thing."*

In education, there is limited opportunity to reflect (Partridge, 2012; Reid & Soan, 2019). This theme highlights the importance of SENCOs having the opportunity to share ideas and resources, reflect on practice and continue their professional development. Our knowledge and understanding of the difficulties that the CYP we work with are continually developing and it is impossible to know everything about every issue that will arise in practice. Without the opportunity to develop, we risk SENCOs stagnating and not being able to offer the best support for their pupils. This should be avoided as the aim of supervision is to improve the quality of one's work to improve the service offered to others (BACP, 1987; Hawkins & Shohet, 2012). Supervision has the potential to provide SENCOs with a valuable opportunity and one that will ultimately improve their practice and the support they provide. The importance of having opportunity to reflect is high, particularly since the COVID-19 pandemic affected many areas of life (The Children's Society, 2020). The core purpose of supervision is the improvement of one's practice for the benefit of the service users (BACP, 1987). However, this development is not possible if SENCOs are denied the chance.

2.5 Implications for Practice

The analyses from this research address the research questions (RQs) identified. Five themes were developed from the reflexive thematic analysis to address RQ1 (What are the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated peer group supervision?) and RQ1.1. (What are the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated peer group supervision regarding feelings of stress?). Four of these themes have further subthemes. The first theme was 'Supervision Requires Careful Planning'. This highlights the need for sessions to be carefully planned to allow for the finer details and barriers to attending supervision to be recognised and addressed. 'Support Networks Developed from Supervision' discussed the opportunity supervision provided to share concerns with likeminded professionals and develop mutual support. The theme 'Supervision Provided Emotional Support' identified how supervision provided a safe space in which SENCOs shared their concerns. 'Supervision had Varying Impact on Stress' acknowledged that supervision affected SENCOs in different ways and to fluctuating extents. Finally, 'Supervision Provided the Opportunity to Learn' identified that SENCOs learnt from the supervision experience by providing perspective and the sharing of resources and ideas. The analysis highlights the importance of utilising supervision to its

fullest to provide the most positive experience, ensuring SENCOs feel related to and understood, and the need for SENCOs to have the opportunity to share and feel contained. This helped them manage the emotional impact of their role and for some supported their stress levels. It could be argued that themes three and five are unsurprising given the main functions of supervision for helping professions are to recognise and address the emotional impact of one's work, increase one's knowledge of their role and develop one's skill (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). This research confirms that supervision is applicable and provides these functions for individuals working in education.

2.5.1 Supervision Requires Careful Planning

The importance of planning supervision carefully was an unexpected theme and one particularly pertinent to the practice of EPs, especially those considering facilitating supervision groups for SENCOs and other groups. EPs must recognise the need to contract PGS to ensure the practicalities of the group and sessions are clarified and there is shared understanding of the commitment. This allows for the finer details to be discussed, including but not limited to the frequency, time and duration of sessions, the location of the sessions, whether sessions will be remote or in person, the supervision model(s) that the group has available, and identify a suitable facilitator. If opting for online sessions, it would be pertinent to consider having an initial in-person session to allow the SENCOs to meet one another in person and to support the development of positive relationships.

The EP should identify an appropriate facilitator due to their understanding of the skills needed to facilitate supervision and their experience of this (Dunsmuir & Leadbetter, 2010). Often this will be themselves, however, as one SENCO identified the skills needed to facilitate supervision are not limited to the EP. Others sharing similar skills, for example more experienced SENCOs, may be able to facilitate this with EP support. Having contracted and established a group, the EP may consider facilitating the first few sessions to demonstrate these skills, before identifying a SENCO(s) to continue this role. This may prove a more cost-effective way to access group supervision in a climate whereby EP services are increasingly offering a traded model.

EPs must consider these factors collaboratively with prospective groups to provide agency and ownership of sessions, and so that barriers to attending supervision can be identified by those likely to experience them. Considering these factors ensures that EPs are utilising group supervision to its fullest to provide the most positive experience. If SENCOs are not part of school's SLT, as is the case for many SENCOs (Curran & Boddison, 2021), EPs must ensure that the Headteacher or SLT member is committed to protecting time and space for the SENCO to attend. Regular attendance ensures that sessions are most

effective. EPs should use documents such as the guidance for SENCOs and school leaders (Carroll et al., 2020) to support others' understanding of supervision as a valuable resource.

2.5.2 Support Networks Developed from Supervision

Theme two was likely as PGS naturally brings together likeminded professionals who often share similar values and beliefs to discuss aspects of their practice. This theme highlighted the importance for SENCOs to develop relationships with colleagues who can understand, relate and empathise with their situation. This was recognised in previous research on groups of ELSAs (France & Billington, 2020; Osborne & Burton, 2014) and has the potential to support SENCOs to manage their stress more effectively as they experience a greater sense of belonging and connection to colleagues.

EPs have an important part to play in this support. EPs regularly work with SENCOs in day-to-day practice and develop attuned relationships. EPs are well-placed to bring these professionals together in groups, to extend SENCOs' networks and the benefits wider networks provide, such as providing the opportunity to talk to colleagues who can relate and truly understand others' predicaments. Through attuned relationships, EPs should be able to identify SENCOs who may be struggling or require additional support. EPs should consider theories on group dynamics when bringing SENCOs together, to ensure that SENCOs share common values and purpose (Bion, 1961). Clear contracting of sessions, which has been previously highlighted by Carroll et al. (2020) in their supervision guidance for SENCOs and school leaders, will go some way to support this. PGS is a practical tool and can be used for groups of SENCOs across schools and EPs are able to introduce and facilitate this. This may extend more widely to other groups of school professionals in the same role, in time.

2.5.3 Supervision Provided Emotional Support

This research identifies that the impact of providing SENCOs with an opportunity to share their emotional concerns and have these acknowledged and understood provided significant support. Research has found that this is also the case for other professionals (Stacey et al., 2017). Hawkins & McMahon (2020) argue that it is not sustainable for one to conduct such significant and challenging work without ongoing support to manage the difficult and complex emotions their work can induce. EPs have a duty to ensure that school staff have a full understanding of the emotional impact of practice, personally and professionally. We also have the responsibility to ensure school staff understand the benefits supervision can provide in managing this. As EPs regularly provide training in schools, this could be delivered by way of training packages that incorporate teaching on containment and group dynamics. EPs understand the power of feeling contained through our own experience of supervision and the feelings of professional competence this can induce. We

should share this benefit with SENCOs, as the strength participants felt in this research allowed them to manage their workload and emotions more effectively. This is particularly pertinent currently, in a climate whereby SENCOs are experiencing increasingly high workloads (Culshaw & Kurian, 2021).

2.5.4 Supervision had Varying Impact on Stress

Theme four provides a new and interesting insight into the varying impact of supervision on stress and its potential in helping some SENCOs feel less stressed. This was not recognised in previous research. Although the impact of supervision varied for SENCOS, they experienced other benefits which supported them to feel more able to conduct their role. Given a large part of EP practice is helping schools to support pupils (Osborne & Burton, 2014), we must help SENCOs to recognise earlier the impact of stress on factors such as retention, learner outcomes, motivation, academic achievement, and attitude towards learning (Gibson & Carroll, 2021). As Gibson and Carroll (2021, p. 5) identify, the rising stress levels are "sufficient to warrant the need for national policy and evidence-informed targeted strategies". At a macro-system level, EPs should become involved in developing local and national initiatives to reduce the impact of stress in schools whilst conducting further research on stress, burnout, anxiety and depression more widely (Gibson & Carroll, 2021).

2.5.5 Supervision Provided the Opportunity to Learn

This theme reinforced the importance of SENCOs accessing continuing professional development. This does not have to be via formal training, although EPs are able to offer teaching on knowledge-gaps. The SENCOs learnt substantially, simply by sharing ideas, resources, and experiences with professionals they would not otherwise have met. EPs understand supervision and can bring SENCOs together. This widens the possibility of sharing good practice occurring elsewhere that otherwise might not have been accessed and is a more cost-effective use of budgets than individual supervision (Hawkins & Shohet, 2007). Upon bringing professionals together, EPs can utilise skills such as solution-focused questioning that are often used in other areas of practice including consultation. This incites deeper reflection, discussion and enhances learning amongst SENCOs.

Outside of education, researchers recognise the impact and importance of the need to receive support when working with individuals experiencing difficulties (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020). This has previously been shown to help professionals to, for example, develop their skills, manage their stress, and increase their problem-solving skills (Blomberg et al. 2016; Koivu et al. 2011; Saab et al., 2021; Stuart, 2023). Clients' circumstances are often increasingly challenging and complex, and no amount of initial training will equip one

for their whole career. SENCOs are comparable to helping professionals in numerous ways, largely experience similar issues, and hold significant responsibility for managing SEN policy and provision in their workplace.

Based on the analysis, it is apparent that SENCOs need support to develop their knowledge and skills, the network around them and to have an emotional outlet. This research demonstrated that experiences of supervision were largely positive for the participants and highlights that it would be useful for EPs to consider providing supervision for SENCOs where feasible. Wider benefits were experienced, which likely helped SENCOs in more ways, such as feeling contained and supported. EPs have extensive understanding of psychological theory and models and use these in their everyday practice. This should now extend to the use of supervision models and sharing an understanding of the impact of one's sense of belonging and social identity on their practice. It should also extend to supporting SENCOs to recognise and understand the emotional impact of their role both personally and professionally.

2.6 Limitations and Future Research Directions

This study contributed to a limited research based around the experiences of SENCOS of EP-facilitated PGS. Researchers potentially conducting future studies on SENCO stress and supervision must remain critical. It is difficult for any researcher to control for extraneous variables that are likely to impact participants' responses. In doing so, one must also remain critical of exploring stress levels and, where applicable, the tools utilised to provide measurements, as stress has been identified as something that is experienced subjectively. It is important to highlight that the Hawthorne Effect (see Diaper, 1990) may have been prevalent within this research. Reflections on this can be found in Chapter 3. Although mostly positive comments were made regarding experiences of supervision, and these subsequently fed into the themes developed, the Hawthorne Effect reminds us that the participants were aware that they would be interviewed on their experiences of supervision, and this may have impacted the way in which they behaved and subsequently experienced sessions. In addition, the positive experiences shared may have been owing to undergoing change, rather than it being due to supervision itself. The researcher did not observe the supervision sessions and therefore was not able to say for definite what happened. Due to the nature of this research, comment on this group of participants' experiences can be made. Conclusions on whether supervision would be a valuable intervention for others cannot be made and comments made must be done so carefully and tentatively.

The researcher had initially hoped to recruit a larger population of SENCOs. To widen the recruitment of SENCOs to such research, it would be beneficial for future research

to be conducted across a wider area than the local authorities involved in this research, and for EPs to come together to do this. By researching a wider geographical area, one has greater access to suitable prospective participants and may identify subtle distinctions and needs across different local authorities. It would be pertinent to explore in more depth the wider impacts of supervision on SENCOs and school staff specifically and the impact of this on their practice.

Wider generalisability is not concurrent with nature of reflexive thematic analysis. Instead, Braun and Clark (2022, p. 143) refer to transferability as being more “qualitatively situated”. This refers to research that is highly contextualised and that allows the reader to judge the extent to which they can safely transfer one paper’s analysis to another setting or circumstance (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This research aimed to retain the context and interpretation of the data, aspects of which are central to RTA. In this research the context matters, as the SENCOs are situated beings in a certain environment. Sandelowski (2004) argues that researchers can potentially generalise qualitative results but not in the same way as quantitative results. The themes developed in this research could potentially be generalised to SENCOs in similar contexts and it may also be possible to generalise to supervision of other groups of school staff conducting similar roles to one another. However, this must be applied with criticality, bearing in mind the SENCOs’ individual characteristics and the setting of the research as factors that shaped the outcome of the research.

RTA is a method that embraces the notion that there is no one correct interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Whilst the researcher attempted to maintain closeness to the SENCOs’ perspectives (Watts, 2014), an alternative researcher with a different ontological position may have connected different themes and conclusions. It is vital to be reflective of oneself as a researcher. It is recognised that the researcher of this study likely brought their own pre-existing values and assumptions and was influenced by their previous experience and knowledge. Although the research took a data-driven, inductive approach, the researcher likely added a deductive element to this during the process of coding and theme development as they were unable to detach themselves entirely from the reality that they are exploring through the research (Pilgrim, 2014).

The researcher argues that this is a strength of RTA, whilst Braun and Clarke themselves debate that the “avoidance of bias is illogical” (2021a, p. 334). A researcher’s interpretation and subjectivity in RTA is an important analytic resource and one that should not be underestimated. The notion that for research to be useful it must also be generalisable is a positivist position, alongside the idea of seeking saturation from data (Braun & Clark, 2021b). Braun and Clarke (2021b) argue that the power of the information

gained from research is more important. CR recognises context and the importance of how individuals develop their understanding of the truth (Braun & Clarke, 2013). For example, SENCOs' overall understanding and narratives around stress and how to manage this is likely influenced by and connected to their school's ethos and the wider education system. Similarly, SENCOs' views of PGS are likely to be influenced by their colleagues' views of supervision.

Whilst this research specifically explored the SENCOs' experience of PGS, it would be advantageous to research EPs' experiences of facilitating this resource. This would help to identify factors not recognised by the SENCOs, relating to the organisation and delivery of sessions. This would help to further inform EPs' practice, especially in relation to considerations needed during the contracting phase. Such research could later explore the possibility of EPs providing PGS, with the eventual aim that they will support the group to facilitate this themselves.

It is discomforting that many SENCOs currently experience high levels of stress and are also considering leaving the profession (Lewis, 2017; NASEN, 2020). Although supervision goes some way to supporting SENCOs, further research would be beneficial exploring how supervision could better address stress specifically. More could also be done to identify how to address the factors causing such levels of stress. For those unable to access supervision, further research on other methods outside of supervision would be beneficial, to identify how else EPs can support SENCOs.

2.7 Conclusion

This research explored the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated PGS in one LA in the East of England. It provides an interesting analysis and begins to address the gaps in the literature by conducting research solely on SENCOs' experiences. The SENCOs in this study appeared to experience benefits from attending PGS and the themes support our understanding of what supervision can offer this group of educators. This includes having a supportive environment and network, through which SENCOs can feel like their emotional experiences are validated and valued. The research highlights that SENCOs appreciated receiving emotional support and it is important for this to be ongoing so that they can manage their responsibilities. The research helps us to understand some of the key aspects requiring consideration if planning and organising supervision groups in schools, such as ensuring that a mutually agreed contract is in place. Furthermore, it highlights that supervision can provide SENCOs with an opportunity to learn and develop their practice. Although not apparent for all participants in this study, for some it helped them to manage their stress. Whilst distinct, these themes and their subthemes are not analytic conclusions

and, at times, are interconnected. These connections are based on the researcher's interpretation and understanding of the SENCOs' experiences. The SENCOs in this research identified some benefits of attending supervision, as shown in the themes developed, which provided SENCOs the opportunity for much needed support to encourage them to remain in their roles.

Chapter Three: Reflective Account

3.1 Introduction

Evidence-based practice is integral to educational psychology (EP) practice and this recognition continues to increase (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021). Given that a significant aspect of EP training in the UK involves research (BPS, 2022b), EPs are in an ideal position to conduct, evaluate, and encourage research (Boyle & Kelly, 2017). The reflective chapter will focus on my own experience of the research journey. Throughout the chapter I will reflect-on-action (Schön, 1984) in a retrospective manner and the decisions taken at various stages of the research process. The chapter will also include critical reflections about how my role as a researcher and practitioner affected the literature review and empirical paper.

Initially, I will present my reflections on my learning journey throughout each stage of the research and consider how my personal and professional skill has developed. Primarily, my thoughts around identifying a research topic, narrowing this down to identify the gaps in the literature and how my previous experience and training influenced this, will be explored. My attention will then focus on reflections on conducting the empirical paper, including the original and revised thesis. This includes my thoughts on the research paradigm, the approach and the methods utilised, and sampling and recruitment of participants, including the limitations of these. Following this, I will turn my reflections to the analysis of the data. The reflective account will then consider the wider implications of my research. Ultimately, reflections will be provided on the future and moving forwards from completion of the research. In this last part, I will provide a brief account of my thinking in relation to the dissemination of my research and possible future research.

3.2 My Research Journey

There have been many highs and lows throughout my journey as a researcher, and I have come out of the other side having learnt more than I ever expected. Many changes, not limited to the data collection and analysis methods, and later amendments following the viva, were made during the research process and this journey has increased my resilience and made me the researcher and EP I am becoming. Although some of the qualities and skills, such as time management and organisation, are ones I felt I had prior to commencing the Doctorate, they have certainly been fine-tuned throughout this research. I regard myself as an organised person, who likes to have a clear plan. Having reflected on this, this often causes me anxiety earlier than some would say necessary, however the stress I would feel closer to a deadline without such a plan, far outweighs this. I recognise that the positive and negative emotions I have experienced because of conducting such a significant project, are

likely to have influenced the outcome of this study (Gilbert, 2001, Hallowell et al., 2005). I now fully understand the importance and benefit of taking a break. There is a balance to be had whilst developing and conducting research and, without this, I could easily have neglected my other needs. This contemplation is one I will take into future practice. I would urge others conducting Doctoral training to also be mindful of this. As I reflected on the importance of looking after myself, I also considered the need to look after the participants who were involved in my research. Owing to this, I paid particular attention to the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). Maintaining integrity (2.2) and responsibility (2.3) was important to me, personally and professionally.

I came into the Doctorate with, what I would consider as, limited research experience. I had completed small research projects during my undergraduate and postgraduate studies, and I had also published my master's dissertation, but I still felt like there was a lot to learn. I initially saw myself as a qualitative researcher, and one who was particularly keen to learn about others' experiences, how this affected them and how it had helped them develop as an individual. I believe this is still the case.

3.3 Identifying the Gaps

When it came to deciding the topic of the research, there were numerous ideas I wanted to study but I kept returning to supervision. I had experienced various types of supervision in my previous role in the National Health Service (NHS) and found the support and reassurance it provided immeasurable. This was something I often found myself reflecting on needing during my work as a teaching assistant but also a resource I was unaware of at the time. It was important for me to remain reflexive on the complexity of my role within the research, as others also recognise the subjective practice that researchers bring to their research (Hill & Dao, 2021; Pilgrim, 2014). This included my own "histories, values, assumptions, perspectives, politics, and mannerisms", aspects I could not separate myself from (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p. 36).

Whilst searching for and reading literature on the topic of supervision, I found it difficult to narrow down my topic due to finding it all interesting. However, I appeared to be pointed in the direction of rising stress levels amongst staff and Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO) retention was certainly a difficulty my placement host were experiencing. Having experienced supervision, I could see how it had the potential to help these stressed school professionals. The literature around supervision in schools was limited, and supervision and stress limited even further. A gap was appearing whereby I could study supervision and stress using mixed methods, hence my original plan for the project. I believed this would add to the literature-base, as the results could be more robust

than qualitative or quantitative research would alone (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009; Thomas, 2013). Niaz (2008) agrees that mixed methods within social science research complements one another. At this point it made sense to measure stress quantitatively, whilst exploring their experiences qualitatively. Further reflections on the quantitative strand of the initial research design are provided in later reflections.

Whilst exploring research for my literature review, I found research that had been conducted in different countries (Muchenje & Kelly, 2021). I initially focused my reading on the emotional toll experienced by school staff, the SENCO role, and their experience of peer group supervision (PGS). As the PGS model that was utilised in this research was based on studies conducted in the United States, it was important not to discount studies from other countries. There is limited research on PGS within schools and the papers available on supervision rarely identify the use of specific models. Owing to this, I decided not to limit myself to studies based solely on the structured peer group supervision model (Wilbur et al., 1994) when looking into group supervision. My reasoning for this was to widen my search criteria as far as possible to critically analyse all papers relevant to the topic. I remain aware that the policies and legislation central to supporting UK schools and the role of the SENCO and the EP in the UK may differ to other countries.

The literature included in the original submission demonstrated that research on supervision was increasing for groups of staff such as Emotional Literacy Support Assistants (ELSAs), but other than a few studies including some SENCOs in their samples (e.g. Reid & Soan, 2019), SENCOs appeared to be missed. I also reflected on how supervision is often mandatory for professionals working in other areas, such as educational psychology. Not only was this missing in education, but managing the emotional impact of working in schools or conducting the SENCO role specifically is also not taught during training (Department for Education, 2014). Developing my research from personal interest, reflections from the limited literature available, and its applicability to EP practice aligned with the 'scientist-practitioner' role the HCPC Standards of Proficiency (HCPC, 2015) advocate for.

Whilst working through the amendments, critically reflecting on definitions of stress, adding literature on the impact of stress in other contexts, the psychological processes that may explain stress reduction, models of stress, and EP-specific studies took most of my time. This was due to me having to go back to the literature and conduct further searches and analyses and spend time carefully writing these into the review. Although an anxiety-provoking undertaking due to worrying about missing something, and one that took significantly longer than I had planned due to working full time, this was somewhat enjoyable. Supervision remains a topic that I feel passionate about and so it was interesting

re-engaging with the literature and especially learning about the more recent papers that were published. I particularly enjoyed exploring the supervision edition of the Educational and Child Psychology journal. Upon re-engaging with the literature, I feel I developed my understanding of the background of some models that I was previously less aware of, e.g. reflecting teams. Having explored additional literature, I am now aware of a greater number of models that I hope I can use in future practise.

Although I think I considered definitions of stress carefully, reflecting on the original thesis not enough of this exploration was included. I believe this resulted in the literature review and empirical paper being unclear on how it was conceptualised, a considerable limitation of the original project. Whilst writing the original thesis, I had neglected the benefit of exploring the psychological processes that could explain stress reduction in supervision. Having reflected further on the literature review and empirical paper, I am frustrated that this was not included as it is a significant part of the project and provides a variety of ways to understand the SENCOs' experiences. This, along with definition of stress, had a later effect on the quality and depth of the thematic analysis, which in parts could have been developed further. Having included these in the revised submission, it was clearer how the analysis could be developed.

3.4 Designing the Research

Owing to the limitations of the quantitative strand of the research, issues with recruitment and research design, and the little value that it added to the overall project, in discussion with my supervisor and the course directors, it was agreed that this would be removed in the revised project to make the study more robust and focussed. These limitations will be discussed further below. The revised version was therefore able to focus on enhancing the qualitative aspect of the study.

3.4.1 Ontological and Epistemological Position

This research project was situated within a critical realist (CR) approach (Bhaskar, 1989), maintaining that behaviours and happenings are owing to the interactions between structures that are not clearly observable but have the power to cause effect (Bhaskar, 1989; Wikgren, 2005). CRs accept that there are objective realities, and agreements about those realities, but they argue that we cannot solely rely upon positivist reasoning to understand the world due to individuals perceiving and experiencing phenomena differently. I embraced the concept of shared truth, which can be understood and realised through others' views and experiences (Kelly, 2017).

Whilst designing my research, I wished to utilise methodology that complemented my approach, which was initially planned as a mixed methods study. Taking a CR approach fitted most comfortably with this methodology and with my own positioning as a researcher. A CR approach allowed me to recognise that as a researcher, I am part of the research process and could subsequently influence others' knowledge and understanding and place my own interpretation on this. Hence, it is important to accept that alternative understandings could have developed from the data in the research. Given the subjectivity of stress and individuals' experiences, taking a CR approach ensured I considered the historic, social, and political context around the SENCo's role, the stress they can experience because of their role and their experience of PGS, to gain a broader and deeper understanding of their truth. Having previously worked in other schools, I understand the fluctuating stress levels occurring throughout the year and could see how this was impacted by wider systemic factors. Taking this approach allowed me to explore how these experiences shaped the truths.

I feel a good summary of my stance is providing an analysis, with the acknowledgement of the role of the context, and an interest in different experiences whilst recognising the influence of the researcher as a subjective individual (Silverman, 2000). An alternative epistemological positioning could have been used as an approach for this research, however they did not fully align with my ontological and epistemological beliefs. Social constructionism, for example, focuses on social interactions as aiding the construction of things (Taylor, 2018). Social constructionism maintains that knowledge and representations are constructed (Taylor, 2018) and whilst I agree with this to a certain degree, I also maintain that objective truths are available in the world. Owing to this, a CR approach was deemed more appropriate for this research than a social constructionist approach.

3.4.2 Methodology and Methods

Since submitting the original project, the approach was changed and significant adaptations made, resulting in the original mixed methods project now solely being a qualitative research study that focussed on exploring SENCOs experiences and understanding these experiences. This change was due, in part, to issues regarding the original research design and recruitment. These issues will be explored further below. When designing the original research, I chose to utilise a mixed methods methodology to allow me to gather quantitative and qualitative data. Although mixed methods offer the "best of both worlds" (Hannen & Woods, 2012, p. 204), Hannen and Woods (2012) suggest this raises the difficulty of integrating data, especially when qualitative and quantitative data appear to

contradict. Although I reflected on this, I believed utilising mixed methods posed more of an advantage, as previous research had largely focused on qualitative methods. Using mixed methods would have permitted me to triangulate both qualitative and quantitative data with previous literature to form a robust and interesting project. Furthermore, Jogulu and Pansiri (2011) suggest that by combining both methods, researchers can avoid overreliance on one or the other. Upon revising the thesis, this now does not include the quantitative strand and is instead a qualitative, exploratory study.

3.4.2.1 The Research Questions. I had intended for the original research questions to incorporate both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the study. In doing so, I tried to orientate research questions 1 (what are the experiences of SENCOs of EP-facilitated peer group supervision?) and 1.1 (what impact, if any, did their experience have on stress levels?) towards the qualitative component, and question 2 (is there a relationship between the perceived stress levels and attending peer group supervision?) towards the quantitative strand. Unfortunately, these questions needed further revision as they were not answerable by the study's design and aims. Due to recruitment difficulties and the researcher not being able to pair baseline and post-intervention stress measures, further statistical analyses on the quantitative data were not possible. Although descriptive statistics were used, these issues meant that the research did not have the data to sufficiently answer the questions centred on the impact and relationship between attending PGS and stress. In mixed methods research, Lall (2021) highlights that questions can be presented as one single overarching question or as two or more separate qualitative and quantitative questions. In retrospect, I could, for example, have considered how I might have incorporated both strands of the research into one overarching research question.

The revised version of this thesis is a qualitative, exploratory study which aimed to investigate research questions that had not yet been investigated in depth. I hope to have provided clarity around the aims and research questions, by adding in the relevant section of the empirical paper that the research hoped to explore perceptions of SENCOs of PGS, to provide a greater understanding of its use in schools. In exploring their perceptions, I asked the SENCOs to comment on their experience of PGS and their experience regarding stress. This research did not aim to reach a final or conclusive solution or result.

In reviewing the research questions to fit the study's aims and design, this moved away from evaluating the supervision and focused towards looking at SENCOs' experiences and understanding of these experiences. Therefore, the comment in the original thesis about 'hoping that the study will provide an evaluation of the use of PGS in one local authority in the East of England' has been removed, as this was no longer an aim of the study due to

focussing solely on the qualitative explorative aspect. The research had the potential to provide the local authority (LA) with information on how their use of PGS was perceived by SENCOs. The original thesis involved an element of evaluation and gaining perceptions on experience. Having removed the quantitative strand and focused on the exploratory, qualitative strand, the evaluative component has been removed. I have also removed research question 2, as it was no longer relevant.

3.4.2.2 The Appropriateness of the Measure. I had originally planned for a group of SENCO participants and a group of control participants (who did not access supervision) to anonymously provide a pre and post stress measurement, with the hope of conducting analyses to evaluate the possible outcome of supervision and stress. Unfortunately, when planning the original research, it became apparent that there was no stress scale designed to measure SENCOs' perceptions of work-related stress and so questionnaire adaptation was deemed necessary. As I was not in a position due to time restraints, to develop and pilot a measure, I opted to utilise the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen et al., 1983). This measure was selected as it recognises and measure's one's appraisal of stress, was validated to be used with adults, and no significant differences were found between genders (Chan & La Greca, 2020; Cohen et al., 1983). This stress measure is widely used (Chan & La Greca, 1983) and has good psychometric properties, including strong internal consistency (α = .84 to .86) and test-retest reliability (*r* = .85 over a 2-day period, *r* = .55 over a 6-week period) (Chan & La Greca, 2020; Cohen et al., 1983). The authors claimed that the measure can also be used in research and in clinical settings as an outcome variable (Chan & La Greca, 2020).

Scale adaptation refers to the changes a researcher may make to a scale (Heggestad et al., 2019; Pillet et al., 2023). There are numerous reasons why a researcher may do this, one aim being to increase the specificity of the measure (Ambuehl & Inauen, 2022; Heggestad et al., 2019). Altering the stem of a questionnaire for research purposes is an example of this and is a common occurrence routinely used to reflect the situational contexts of studies (Pillet et al., 2023). While it is not bad practice, researchers highlight that scale adaptation raises the concern about reliability and validity, and that the scale may no longer measure the construct intended (Heggestad et al., 2019; Pillet et al., 2023). When researchers do this, it is important to conduct additional tests to ensure that the measure holds up given the minor changes made (Heggestad et al., 2019). I recognised this at the time and therefore conducted further testing to determine the Cronbach's alpha or an estimate of reliability. These should have been included in the original thesis. The internal consistency for this sample was as follows: control group baseline (α = .911), supervision

group baseline (α = .752), control group post intervention (α = .944), and supervision group post intervention (α = .940).

During the viva, my anxiety heightened to the extent that I found it difficult to think clearly. I found that the stress that I was experiencing hindered me from processing the information as quickly as I usually do. This caused me to take longer to process and respond to the examiners' questions. I recognised this at the time, and it caused me to feel even more overwhelmed. As a result, I incorrectly explained that I had changed the wording of the items of the stress measure, to reflect the participants answering in relation to their work-related stress, rather than general stress. The wording of the individual items used in this research did not differ from the author's original measure and I recognise that changing the wording of items of a measure threatens its reliability and validity. If items are changed on a measure, then the psychometric properties such as the reliability and validity, and the normative data on which the measure was established, are no longer applicable. I changed the stem of the questionnaire to make the measure population-specific and asked the participants to complete their responses in relation to their work-related stress rather than general stress which could have impacted the reliability and validity as it was not used in the way that the authors designed and tested. The Cronbach's alpha figures conducted on the baseline and post-supervision measures to test reliability fell within the 'acceptable' and 'excellent' ranges.

A key element of the quantitative side of the original study was the reliance on self-reported measures of stress, as was the case with the qualitative data. Hence both sets of data represent the participants' subjective interpretations. Upon reflecting further on the research, perhaps stress, including workplace stress, is too subjective a construct to measure in such small samples and is certainly too sensitive to measure with general stress measures. Due to the data being highly subjective, conclusions and interpretations can only practically be drawn to explain how this group of SENCOs felt pre- and post-supervision.

I was glad that the SENCOs were able to submit their responses anonymously, as I thought this would allow them to feel more comfortable sharing honestly. However, not asking them to provide a pseudonym meant that I was unable to conduct the analyses that I had originally planned as measures could not be paired. It also meant that I was unable to follow up with specific SENCOs when collecting stress measurements. These issues were simultaneously disappointing and frustrating but as the participant group was already small, it is unlikely that the amount of quantitative data would allow me to make comments from further statistical analyses. In hindsight, I should not have included the descriptive statistics within the project due to the minimal value it added and the significant flaws in the

quantitative design of the project. Further reflections on the limitations can be found under the section titled ‘The Threats to Internal Validity’.

If the original research was repeated, greater consideration would be needed when selecting the most suitable measures and alternative instruments to explore the impact of attending supervision. This would strengthen the research project, by making the data analysis more robust and appropriate for the subject at study. This could result in the implications of the research being more widely applicable. If researching stress again, it would be beneficial to find an alternative measure, specifically determining work-related stress, so that this was more valid and reliable. An example of a work-related stress measure includes the Work Stress Screener (Sweetman et al., 2022). This is a 13-item, self-report measure designed to assess the stress experienced in the workplace and the extent to which stress harms work performance or promotes and challenges work performance (Sweetman et al., 2022).

Alternatively, given the potential benefits of supervision shown in research in other populations, instruments measuring wellbeing could have been fruitful and have measured the impact of supervision more widely than stress alone. Examples of measures include the Teacher Subjective Wellbeing Questionnaire (Renshaw, 2020), which looks at teacher efficacy and school connectedness. The authors developed this scale to be used in one of two ways; the scales of teacher efficacy and school connectedness can either be administered individually or combined to provide an overall wellbeing score.

On the other hand, scales such as the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale (Tennant et al., 2007) or the Professional Quality of Life (Stamm, 1995) could have been utilised. The former scale was developed to measure wellbeing in general populations, but it has also been validated for use on project evaluation and programmes which aim to improve wellbeing. This scale has been validated for use in a wide variety of settings, including in the workplace and schools. The latter scale is also a self-report measure which the authors designed to measure work satisfaction, compassion fatigue, and burnout in helping professionals. Utilising wellbeing measures would have allowed the project to explore the wider possible benefits and impact of attending PGS, rather than a stress measure which is limited to measuring stress alone. As alternative measures, such as those mentioned above, have been developed and validated for use in the workplace, it would not have required the stem, nor individual items in the questionnaires, to be amended. This means that the reliability and validity of the measures would not have been affected and would therefore add robustness to the research.

3.4.2.3 The Threats to Internal Validity. When designing and conducting research, one must carefully consider internal validity. This refers to the extent to which one can be confident that the observed results of a study represent the truth and are therefore not the result of methodological errors (Cohen et al., 2018). Several limitations relating to the way in which the study was completed, and the methods employed, were present in this research. Although the research explored supervision and the potential for it to support SENCOs to manage their stress, the revised project does not measure or evaluate the effect of the intervention through quantitative means. The limitations, particularly of the original research, had implications for the internal validity of the research. As a result, the researcher felt it was not sufficiently free of errors and it added little value to the project, hence the quantitative element was removed from the revised study. These limitations are discussed below.

I recognise that self-selection bias (American Psychological Association, 2018a) was apparent in this study. Self-selection bias occurs when one decides who is and is not going to be studied, i.e. when the selection is not random (American Psychological Association, 2018a). These implicate the comparability of the groups. Although the supervision and control groups were all working SENCOs in the original research, they were drawn from different populations as each group worked for different local authorities. In the original research, the supervision and control groups were unlikely to be alike in all respects aside from their exposure to the supervision groups. Ideally, the control group would have been identical to the experimental group and only differed in that they would not receive the intervention. This can be achieved through the random allocation of participants to experimental and control groups. Whilst this does not guarantee that the groups will be alike in all respects, it minimises the chance that they will not be. For practical reasons, I was unable to do this and took advantage of naturally occurring groups (SENCOs who were receiving the supervision and SENCOs who were not). This threatened the internal validity of the analysis as the groups were not comparable upon commencement. This could have been somewhat overcome if I had instead applied random assignment (American Psychological Association, 2018b) to the groups, so that all participants had equal opportunity of being selected to complete either group. This quasi-experimental design is not as strong, as the groups are unlikely to have been equivalent on several variables, including that they were employed by different LAs. In recruiting to the research, I must also consider self-selection bias and acknowledge that the participants were not a random sample but instead were volunteers who had expressed interest in the research. Therefore, it could be argued that they had a vested interest in supervision and / or want it to continue after the research ceased.

When considering internal validity, I also recognise the impact of social interaction amongst participants, and the possible influence of this on the results. SENCOs in the control group understood that they would not access supervision when agreeing to take part and may have become resentful of the supervision group. This could have increased their stress and would mean that the measures of stress were not reflective of their work-related stress. I tried to avoid this by being clear about the aims of the original study but understand that this could have influenced the results.

History and maturation throughout the research are further aspects to consider. History refers to unanticipated events that could change the conditions of the research and influence the results, whilst maturation refers to the passing of time as an influence on the dependent variable or stress levels (Cohen et al., 2018). As was the case in previous studies exploring stress and PGS (Peterson et al., 2008; Stacey et al., 2017; Tu et al., 2023), this research was unable to account for extraneous variables that could have affected the experiences or levels of stress. When measuring stress, one is unable to control for the impact of personal and workplace changes, and other factors such as contextual details, personality differences, and years of experience, all of which could have affected how the SENCOs managed, and subsequently their stress measures. In this study, SENCOs in either group could have learnt additional methods to better manage their work-related stress during the research. Changes in environmental factors could have influenced levels of stress, for example an increase or decrease in staffing, resources, and training, that could help or hinder them in managing their stress.

Cohen et al. (2018, p. 252) define regression as the likelihood of a participant scoring "relatively lower on a post-test" having scored highest on a pre-test, and vice versa. In the original study, participants in the control and supervision groups who scored higher on the baseline may have scored relatively lower on the second measure. Therefore, I was unable to comment on whether the SENCOs stress scores had changed. A greater reduction in stress could have been due to extraneous variables, as discussed above, and the unreliability of measures, which is discussed below. Regression effects could have impacted internal validity if, as a researcher, I mistakenly attributed post-supervision gains or losses to low scoring and high scoring respectively. Whilst planning the research, I had hoped to pair each SENCOs' baseline and second measures. Due to not asking the SENCOs to select a unique identifier to allow me to match pre- and post-stress scores, I could only produce the average scores for the supervision and control groups pre- and post-measure. It was therefore not possible to comment on the stress scores nor the impact this has on the validity of the research, thus creating a significant limitation.

Pre-testing (e.g. of stress) at the start of a study may generate effects other than those owing to the research treatment (Cohen et al., 2018). In completing two measures, the participants in this research may have felt the need to be consistent in their answers in both measures. Likewise, they might have knowingly or unknowingly responded differently to two measures. Behaving differently when one is aware they are being observed, or the Hawthorne Effect (see Diaper, 1990), could have affected the study's validity and therefore limited my ability to comment on the observed outcome being attributable to the supervision group intervention. It is also important to acknowledge that, in this study, a general stress measure was utilised as there was no tool available to specifically measure work-related stress in this population, and so I had to adapt the scale to fit the research. Further reflections on the use of the tool selected to measure stress can be found in Chapter 3 under 3.4.2.2 The Appropriateness of the Measure.

The final consideration possibly implicating a study's internal validity and results is attrition bias. This suggests that, over the course of longer studies, participants may drop out of the research. Attrition in this study was not a concern as the sample remained small throughout and no participants dropped out of the research. I understood the need to consider the possibility of attrition and, due to the nature of stress, it was possible that I could have experienced this.

3.4.2.4 Observing the Intervention. I understood taking a CR approach would allow me to acknowledge the structured reality outside of our interpretation, and that the knowledge of said reality is assessed according to the cultural and social context. As a CR researcher, I also accept my part in forming knowledge and that I can only ever have a partial understanding of this reality and context. I originally decided not to attend the supervision sessions, as I did not want my close involvement to affect the participating SENCOs' behaviour and experience. When considering the process, I was originally concerned that if I had been present in the sessions, the participants may have given reserved responses or not felt able to share particularly negative experiences. If I had been directly involved in each session, I was anxious that participants may have found it markedly difficult to share apprehensions or criticisms of the researcher or the model utilised, as I would have been closely involved with them over several months. I wanted to avoid this so that the analysis of the data was as close to their experience as possible.

In my role as researcher, I did not wish to affect the dynamics of the group by attending. Not attending avoided the possibility of observer bias or the Hawthorne effect. This refers to people behaving differently when they know they are being observed. I did not want the SENCOs to act differently in the sessions, which I felt might have been the case if I

had attended, as they would have known I was there as a researcher. For example, one supervisee might have avoided sharing an opinion that may not have conformed to the group's consensus. Potentially they would want to avoid the possibility of disagreement or misunderstanding and thus portray sessions as successful. A prospective reason may be the possible hope that they might continue supervision after the study finished.

A limitation of not attending sessions was that I was unable to comment in detail on the nature of the sessions compared with the supervision model. I cannot say for definite that sessions ran as intended. Although I can only tentatively comment on the content of supervision and on how each session operated, the participants' experiences of the sessions appeared to be largely positive and beneficial. If I had the opportunity to do the project again, I would carefully consider the potential benefits and limitations of attending sessions. As I was closely involved in the analysis of the qualitative data, my subjective interpretation was unavoidable, and attending sessions could have helped me to further understand SENCOs' experiences.

Studies involving the investigation of an intervention must carefully review the implementation and its measurement. One method involves fidelity checks (Hoffmann et al. 2014). In addition, if repeating the original plan, I could have considered asking the participants, either throughout the process or during the qualitative data gathering process, to comment on how the sessions were run. In summary, I recognise either my presence in the sessions or including the facilitating EP in the reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) process may have added a richness to the interpretation of the data and enhanced the RTA. If repeating the initial research as planned, I would more carefully consider observing each of the sessions to add rigour and confirm my understanding of how the sessions were conducted.

3.4.2.5 Qualitative Data Collection. When designing the research, I initially opted to conduct focus groups (FGs). I was interested to hear the feedback that the two SENCos provided about their experience in the first FG, and it was useful to have prompts to the broad questions that I had devised in the FG schedule. I tried to use the active listening skills I was developing in everyday practice, to ensure that I had fully understood the SENCOs' experiences. Having completed the first FG, I could not help but feel like I needed to conduct follow-up interviews, to gather further information and allow me to ask additional questions to get more in-depth data. I enjoyed conducting the FG, but it was difficult to ask individual SENCOs to elaborate on their answers as their dialogue naturally evolved from the comment that caused me to want to ask for further detail. I reflected in supervision on the prospect of changing to semi-structured interviews, something I found daunting as it was not how I had

envisaged gathering the data. However, having completed a FG I did not feel this provided enough quality data, and so a move to using interviews was necessary.

I was nervous conducting the first few interviews, but with practice this eased. I felt that the natural flow of conversation made the interviews feel more coherent, and I was able to ask follow-up questions without interrupting the flow of the conversation between the SENCos. I reflected on the impact this would have on the quality of my data, allowing me to delve further and explore and thus, confirm my understanding of their experience more easily than FG allowed. This meant the data I collected was richer from the start.

3.4.2.6 Sampling and Recruitment. I was concerned about how difficult recruiting to my research would be. Following my draft research presentation, whereby we presented our research plans, I decided to employ a control group. In the initial stages of reading for my literature review, I was keen to explore supervision with a range of professionals in schools, however due to the research base suggesting that SENCOs were a group particularly in need and my placement host providing supervision to SENCOs, I focused on this group. This limited the individuals I could target for my research and in a LA that is relatively small in comparison to neighbouring authorities. I was worried that I would not be able to recruit a comparable size of SENCOs for supervision and the control group to fully utilise the quantitative data.

3.4.2.7 Deciding on a Control Group. Whilst planning, I considered the possibility of recruiting three participant groups, one of which would be a control group, another who would attend the supervision sessions, and a third who would access an alternative intervention. This could have provided an additional benchmark from which to explore the quantitative data. Whilst recruiting this number of participants did not seem feasible within the limited timeframe of the research, I was more concerned that I would have continued to face the dilemma that one group would still not access the intervention. I was also faced with the barrier of the size of the placement LA. If I were to focus recruitment from this LA, I would have had a limited pool of participants, therefore, the decision not to go ahead with this plan was a pragmatic one.

It would have been pertinent to consider introducing a control task to the control group for the duration of the intervention group attending supervision, to mitigate against the ethical dilemma of the group not accessing the intervention. Empirically tested activities proven to reduce stress, such as more regular exercise (Elliott et al., 2021) or mindfulness (Sarazine et al., 2021), could have been utilised. This would have provided an alternative intervention to compare to. As I was hoping to comment on the control and supervision group stress measures, my concern with taking such an approach was that I would have

manipulated more than the independent variable (i.e. attending supervision sessions). Although this could have been seen as a more ethical approach, as the control group would have received some intervention to support with stress, this would have made it difficult to comment on what might or might not have affected stress levels.

I considered using a waitlist control group, a group of participants who would be assigned to a group who would also access supervision sessions following completion of the study (Kinser & Robins, 2013; Patterson et al., 2016). This would have provided a benchmark, or untreated comparison group, to determine possible impact of supervision. In taking such an approach, I could have isolated the independent variable. A waitlist approach is often seen as a more desirable approach to control groups not accessing the intervention, as it would have allowed the participants later access to supervision (Patterson et al., 2016). Not utilising a waitlist control group raised ethical implications, including of equality. In recruiting a control group who would not access supervision, it may appear that the researcher was giving preferential or biased treatment to one group over the other. Whilst it is important to note that this was a naturally occurring group and I did not take anything away from the participants (it was instead the case that their LA was not trialling the use of supervision groups), not offering them supervision could also be seen as withholding benefits from some participants. This risked leaving a group of individuals known to experience increased work-related stress susceptible to continued stress.

When reflecting in my own supervision, it seemed a more unethical decision to provide supervision to the control group, hence not opting for a waitlist approach. It was not feasible for the facilitating EP to provide supervision, as the SENCOs were employed outside of the LA in which the EP worked. I considered facilitating the sessions myself, however this would not have been possible until the research was completed, at which point I would no longer be employed by the LA providing the sessions. I would have been unable to access my own supervision, which could have resulted in the SENCOs, and myself, being put in a vulnerable position. Especially if, for example, safeguarding concerns or concerns around malpractice were identified. Whilst making this decision, I remained aware of the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021), which reminded me that I should maximise benefit and minimise harm when working with human participants.

In designing the research, I considered the Hawthorne Effect (see Diaper, 1990) and the impact of this on the validity of the results and how well they represented reality. Whilst using a waitlist control group could be considered a more ethical alternative, it has its complications. For example, Cunningham et al. (2013) argued that utilising waitlist groups could result in exaggerated evaluations of the intervention. In suggesting to participants that

they will receive supervision, this potentially stalls them in making their own behaviour change, thus creating a change in the way they act, knowing that they will receive support in the future. Rather than attempting change independently, such as employing their own strategies to manage stress, they wait. This has potential implications on the level of change than a control group not receiving the intervention would demonstrate. Due to the potential bias this creates, researchers should carefully evaluate the threats this poses, and only recruit waitlist control groups if the most appropriate avenue. In not changing their own behaviour as a potential waitlist group, the participants may have experienced a decline (i.e. increased stress levels) whilst awaiting supervision sessions. This could affect the findings, as any intervention that is then offered could appear to be more effective than it might have been if they received support sooner. Previous research utilising waitlist groups has highlighted similar concerns (Faltinsen et al., 2022). If people had acted differently, this could impact the validity of the results as the results may not have represented true findings. For example, the findings could suggest that supervision has a greater effect than it had, as receiving any support could produce improvements.

It is important to recognise that the Hawthorne Effect may have been prevalent in the revised study. Although there some barriers experienced attending supervision, many participants commented positively about their experience of supervision, and these subsequently fed into the themes developed. When considering the limitations of the revised study, I reflected on the possibility that the participants may have had positive experiences due to undergoing change, rather than it being due to supervision itself. Although I made comment on the value of supervision for this group of SENCOs, some may have knowingly or unknowingly commented overly-positively about their experience, for example in the hope supervision may continue following the end of the planned sessions.

Researchers have argued that it can be ethical withholding interventions, on the condition that participants are not put in a position where they are exploited (Resnik, 2009). In recruiting to the control group, I did not wish to deceive participants (BPS, 2021) and was as transparent as possible, ensuring that prospective participants were aware that in signing up to the research they knew that they would not be accessing the intervention. I feel that, in making the decision to not offer the control group supervision, I used my reasoned judgement and fully considered the costs to the participants versus the benefits. It felt a difficult balance to strike and so I consulted more widely with experienced colleagues. In speaking to the Chair of the Ethics Committee, the above decisions were made having regarded all avenues, such as the implications if I were to provide supervision to the control group. It was agreed that I would instead offer a virtual workshop to provide feedback to the control group on the outcomes of the study and an explanation of the model.

3.4.2.8 Recruiting from Neighbouring Authorities. I initially hoped to recruit SENCOs for each of the supervision and control groups from within the placement LA, and once ethical approval was granted the SENCOs were contacted via email. It was not a planned requirement for the SENCOs to work within the same LA, rather it made sense to start here, given that the I had easier access to their contact details. I had initially hoped to recruit 20-25 participants to each of the groups, so that I had a greater amount of quantitative data on which to conduct the planned statistical analyses. Unfortunately, recruitment did not go as intended and I was required to make amendments to the plan to recruit to the control group from outside of the LA. As the placement LA is a traded service, priority was given to SENCOs working in the authority's schools to attend the supervision group, as this is a service that their school had paid for. If more SENCOs from outside of the LA had expressed an interest in the research than hoped for, I could have approached the Principal EP to discuss the possibility of other SENCOs joining the supervision group. However, as their schools had not bought into the service, this could not have been guaranteed.

The purpose of the control group, who would be aware that they were not accessing supervision as part of the research, was to provide a benchmark to compare the results of the supervision group and any potential changes in stress levels at pre- and post-supervision. I had hoped to make reasonable comment on the intervention as an active component that helped with the stress levels that I had planned to measure. I understand that recruiting a control group, even if enough participants and data were available, would not allow me to make final conclusions on the causal relationship between attending supervision and stress without further research. For example, I would not be able to control for, for example, any extraneous variables that could have affected stress levels in any way.

When it became apparent that the uptake was low and far fewer SENCOs expressed interest than envisaged, I had to consider looking more widely than the placement LA in the hope that a sufficient sample were recruited for the control group. The decision to recruit from neighbouring LAs was purely a pragmatic one, due to the limited uptake. In my original thesis, I commented on SENCOs from neighbouring authorities more likely having similar experiences to the SENCOs already recruited. Upon further reflection, this was irrelevant as the SENCO role varies greatly, and is a variable that cannot be controlled for. Even SENCOs in the same LA are likely to have varied experiences. Instead of being controlled for, these nuances could have been incorporated into and commented on in the analysis and discussion.

The University supplies EP training across the East of England and when initial recruitment was difficult, I decided to contact other authorities in the East of England as I was aware that links and contacts may already have been established with the university. A benefit of contacting neighbouring authorities were the already-formed networks. I had hoped by being connected to the University that contact would be returned sooner than, for example, sending out recruitment adverts for the research to LAs more widely (i.e. nationally). I considered if recruitment was wider, or done at a national level, that I would struggle to source direct contact details with SENCOs and may still have not had the uptake hoped for. I considered the possibility of recruiting through other avenues, such as social media, but I did not have the ethical approval to recruit this way and was concerned that amending my ethics application would take considerable time. I found it somewhat reassuring contacting an already-established network during what felt like a short window to recruit.

Although offering the research more widely, i.e. nationally, may have increased my access to prospective participants, recruiting a sample from one LA, I believe, allowed me to identify increasingly nuanced perspectives from the SENCOs. I was able to delve further into the participants' experiences, which I believe helped me to better understand their experiences. Advertising more widely would have given me access to a greater pool of possible participants, and if I were to complete the research again, I could consider sending information about the research nationally. I could also consider including in my ethics application the use of recruitment through methods such as social media. Whilst the groups were comparable in size, they remained small, and I was therefore unable to conduct the original plan. The statistics included in the original quantitative analysis were purely descriptive and no certain conclusions could be drawn. Future research could explore wider recruitment through avenues not used in this study (e.g., through social media). This may allow future studies to conduct further statistical analyses.

3.4.2.9 Participant Demographics. Whilst planning the research, I was keen to only collect the data that was required to answer the research questions and to ensure continued anonymity. This felt the most ethical approach. Not having additional demographic data about the SENCOs could also be considered a limitation. Collecting and collating this demographical data imposed several ethical implications, of which I did not believe were beneficial enough to be appropriate for this research. Future research could consider collecting the participants' demographics to help the researcher to further understand the data and participants' experiences. When we collect data, we make assumptions about it, and this subsequently shapes the way our knowledge is constructed, and analyses made.

I was happy with the qualitative data I initially collected as it evidenced and broadened my understanding of the SENCOs' experiences. If repeating the project, I would collect additional demographics to give the opportunity to make further analyses. Future research could ask participants how long they had worked as a SENCO to help the researcher to comment on possible differences in experiences of stress. Madeley (2014) argued that professionals who had been in their role for longer periods had experienced numerous changes to working arrangements during their career and therefore felt better able to face, and less apprehensive of, additional change. It could be argued that one with a greater level of experience may have had more opportunities to develop effective coping strategies having had the time to practice them or develop stronger connections with colleagues. Those with greater experience may also have a better understanding of the role and its responsibilities. This could have provided them support and possibly subsequently decreased their perceived levels of stress, in comparison to SENCOs with less experience who may not yet have developed and solidified their own strategies.

Future research could determine the size and type of the school (i.e. primary or secondary) in which the SENCO works, to provide additional information about their backgrounds. This may allow prospective researchers to comment further on how SENCOs experience PGS or how this may impact their ability to manage their stress. Curran and Boddison (2021), in their research on the complexity of the role, identified that there was a disparity between primary and secondary SENCOs in relation to multiple roles. They highlighted that 78% of secondary SENCOs reported balancing teaching responsibilities, compared to 48% of primary SENCOs. It could be argued that those with additional teaching responsibilities may find they experience increased stress levels due to balancing multiple roles.

Finally, future research could determine whether SENCO participants were part of their school's senior leadership team (SLT), as this could affect how able they felt to implement change at a higher level. Ekins (2012) highlighted that SENCOs not considered part of SLT can result in them experiencing limited prospects to effect development and change within schools. Given that more primary school SENCOs reported being part of SLT due to their SENCO role, this could be problematic, and potentially stressful, for secondary SENCOs (Curran & Boddison, 2021).

3.4.2.10 The Numbers Recruited. I felt like more participants I could recruit the better, as it would allow me to gather a wider range of views on the experience of peer group supervision. Malterud et al. (2016) encourage researchers to estimate their sample size during the planning of research and acknowledge the importance of the researcher

continually reflecting on this throughout the process. I ensured I continually reflected on this throughout recruitment, notably when fewer SENCOs took up the offer than I hoped. Whilst reflecting, I considered Braun and Clarke's (2021c) argument that researchers can approach sample sizes flexibly and larger sample sizes do not necessarily equate to superior results. Vasileiou et al. (2018) agree, adding that greater sample sizes may provide the researcher with difficulties identifying nuances in data. Braun and Clarke (2021c) assert that it is more important to use the participants' data to develop a clear idea of what a theme encompasses and represents, rather than recruit a certain sized sample. I found this reassuring when I came to my final sample.

With the sample that I had recruited, I then began to think about getting a rich and textured understanding from the data (Sandelowski, 1995). This, along with finding comfort in the sample that I'd recruited, felt like an important milestone in the research process. Although having changed from FGs to semi-structured interviews, I reflected on the fact that having fewer participants meant that I would not be constrained any further by the limited timeframe in which to conduct the research. Instead, this sample would provide enough information power in relation to the specificity of the SENCOs' experiences, given that the experiences of this group have not previously been explored specifically and they held characteristics specific to a certain target group relevant to the aim of this research (Malterud et al., 2016). The participants I recruited provided quality data to undertake the proposed qualitative analyses. Having now conducted and experienced a full cycle of RTA, I believe that if I had employed more participants to fulfil the quantitative requirements, the qualitative data that was subsequently transcribed and analysed would have become overwhelming. This risked the possibility of one failing to identify codes or themes that may have been significant.

I then turned my focus onto ensuring that the analysis of the research provided knowledge to the area. I also focussed on the interview schedule I put together for the research to make sure it provides a good quality interview dialogue that addressed the research aims. I was inexperienced in conducting interviews for research as in my previous studies I have tended to use focus groups or questionnaires to gather data, so I used textbooks to help with this (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

3.5 Analysis

3.5.1 Quantitative Analysis

3.5.1.1 The Original Plan. As a novice researcher, the prospect of analysing the data that I collected for the largest and most significant research project I have conducted was daunting. I hoped to do this justice, identify practical applications, whilst also ensuring

that the analysis methods aligned with my ontological and epistemological position. I originally combined descriptive statistics with RTA to achieve the mixed methods design I was hoping for. The initially-aimed-for product of the quantitative research was to demonstrate the baseline and second measures of stress in both the supervision and control groups. As described above, I had initially planned to conduct further statistical analyses on the data, in the way of mixed design factorial ANOVA. I realised a few weeks prior to sending the second stress measure that I was unable to identify which SENCo had submitted which baseline stress scores, due to them being submitted anonymously. I was annoyed at myself for overseeing this issue and it meant was unable to pair the individuals' two measures to conduct the planned analysis. At the time, it seemed a shame not to use the quantitative data that had been collected and so my supervisor and I discussed using the findings to describe the trends and group averages as an alternative. Hence in the original thesis, the findings present descriptive statistics only.

Should I have been able to pair the SENCOs' baseline and second measures, and the data have met the assumptions, the mixed design factorial ANOVA would have been appropriate given the mix of between-subjects (group: experimental and control) and within-subjects (time: pre- and post) design elements. This would have allowed me to determine if there were statistically significant differences in stress scores between the experimental and control groups, and before and after the supervision groups intervention (as well as if there was a significant interaction between group and time), something the descriptive statistics were unable to show. It would have been interesting and beneficial to be able to make more inferences from the data and identify further possible implications for EP practice as this would have added valuable information to the research base.

3.5.2 Qualitative Analysis

The qualitative data was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) RTA. This was a lengthy and non-linear process, but an ideal method for a novice researcher (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I revisited my learning of RTA through lectures and updated myself on Braun and Clarke's more recent work on RTA and other forms of thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021a, 2021b, 2022). This provided a comparison and ensured that I had selected the most appropriate and fitting style for my research. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was considered as an alternative method of qualitative analysis, however I decided against IPA as this would limit me to understanding and exploring participants' "subjective experience of the world" (Willig, 2013, p. 96) within individual sets of data. Furthermore, IPA is a methodology rather than a method and this meant it did not suitably align with the original mixed methods research. Instead, RTA allowed me to explore

patterned meaning across the dataset, and recognised the subjectivity of the participants' experiences which provided a more focused understanding of the shared reality of the SENCOs. Braun and Clarke (2022) describe RTA as theoretically flexible; RTA appeared to cohere with my project plans, recognised researcher reflexivity and engagement with the data and was also well suited to and allowed me to remain close to the CR position taken.

Although I had hoped to recruit more participants, RTA offered me the opportunity to inductively explore the participants' experiences and identify themes developed from these. Braun and Clarke (2022) argue that data saturation is often advertised as the "gold standard" for ascertaining sample size, however this has issues due to being a positivist stance aligned with generalisability (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 28). Instead, researchers suggest that the concept of information power is more valuable (Braun & Clarke, 2022; Malterud et al., 2016). Upon commencing with the RTA process, I soon began to realise the depth that the data offered. I felt privileged that some felt able to share their raw reflections on the emotional impact of their role and how supervision had provided some with enough support to feel they could remain in the profession. Examples of data transcripts and stages of the analysis process can be found in Appendices F to I.

Whilst familiarising with the data in the early stages of RTA, I was aware that I was hoping to analyse both the semantic and latent meaning of the data, so that my interpretation as a researcher was offered whilst also providing the reader with an understanding of the context. Braun and Clarke (2022) suggest this encourages the researcher to engage with the data and produces more depth to the analysis. If the researcher did not fully engage, the analysis risked providing a surface level depiction. Whilst considering my subjectivity as the researcher, I ensured I consulted Braun and Clarke's (2013) checklist to confirm I was conducting good RTA. This prompted me to consider aspects I may have overseen, such as checking the analysis and data matched and themes were checked against each other and the original data. This was important as I ultimately aimed for the research to be transferable.

The coding process produced lots of codes. This was overwhelming but I was glad that I had made a start. As I progressed throughout the phases and through the initial theme development, I started to find the process more enjoyable as I could see the research taking shape. I factored in numerous breaks during the process to ensure that my approach was thorough and credible. I explored various places to do this and different ways of displaying my data, including electronically, on the kitchen table, and ultimately on a notice board. I found having the data printed and to hand much more effective as I could manually move the data, codes, and initial themes around. This also provided a relief from the screen. I spent

time reducing the codes and relabelling these where they did not seem to fit. This was difficult and I reminded myself that Braun and Clarke had discussed letting go of some of the codes as, in the end, I would not be able to include it all. Discussing my ideas and reflections in supervision guaranteed that I did not lose meaning whilst wading through the array of data I was exploring. Having re-evaluated, reviewed, and refined my five themes, and shared these in supervision, I can see how the RTA approach can ever-evolve. Each time I revisited my analysis, I was seeing things that I had not previously seen, and so I made the decision following supervision that I would start to write this up. I hope that my actions provided the analysis with integrity and that my final analysis reflects the participants' experiences in a way that makes the research transferable.

3.6 Wider Implications

Upon reflection, I perhaps should not have been surprised that the themes somewhat mirror the functions of supervision. It was reassuring that the supervision had delivered what supervision intends to provide. I had not foreseen discussions around online working, and I wonder if the pandemic meant everyone was already familiar and comfortable with working online, hence it had remained. The theme around planning supervision was interesting and pertinent to EP practice. Having facilitated other groups (not research-based), I felt planning supervision would be beneficial to ensure that supervision was as effective, and I had considered all eventualities. It appears this went further in clarifying the expectations for the SENCOs too and must be considered as good practice in future. There exists a gap for a training package for EPs offering Continued Professional Development in relation to delivering supervision, which incorporates previous guidance such as that by Carroll et al. (2020) and the Dunsmuir and Leadbetter (2010). This should also highlight the potential role of other guidance such as Supervision in Education by Lawrence (2020) and the Education Staff Wellbeing Charter (Department for Education, 2021). Given that EPs have a sound understanding of supervision and they receive and deliver supervision within their profession, such a training package could provide them with the opportunity to reflect on how providing supervision to other professionals could further support the SENCOs and education staff they work with.

It is important to consider the wider implications of this research, which potentially extends beyond the scope of the EPs and SENCOs involved, as it may also be relevant to other groups of professionals such as Designated Safeguarding Leads and Senior Leaders to name two. Research from Ferguson (2022) was completed whilst I was conducting my own research, which explored the factors that affect how EPs support primary school teachers with work-related stress. Although our studies have notable key differences, further

research studying the EP's role in supporting SENCOs, and possibly other groups of education staff, with supervision is needed. It would be beneficial for this research to include a focus on EPs' experiences of delivering supervision to such groups to identify any aspects that were overlooked in this research. For example, there may have been subtleties that the SENCOs were unaware of when the EP was planning how to introduce supervision.

As delivering training is an integral part of their role, EPs could further develop a package that they deliver to schools. A package delivered to school staff, where supervision from EPs is available, would raise awareness of the support that supervision and EPs could provide. Ferguson's (2022) research identified that the Department for Education's (2014) outcomes for the initial SENCO training does not mention the role of the Educational Psychologist. This is an evident oversight and one that should be amended, so that SENCOs undergoing their training have a full awareness of what EPs can offer. A training package delivered by EPs would help allay any misconception that school staff have of supervision, notably its difference to line management. Within such packages it would be pertinent to explore and recognise the importance of aspects relating to group dynamics, sense of belonging, and containment in schools amongst other theories explored in this research.

3.7 Proposed Dissemination

The BPS Practice Guidelines (2017, 9.9; HCPC, 2015, 8.9) stipulates that the sharing and dissemination of research is a core competency of EP practice. This dissemination can take several forms, including publication in peer-reviewed journals. Sedgwick and Stothard (2021) highlight that sharing research, ideas and knowledge is vital and contributes to practice-based evidence. I imagined that soon after submitting my thesis I would aim to publish this in a relevant journal, and so I ensured that I gained ethical approval to do so. This involved gaining participants' consent to publish the paper correctly and in line with the BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (2021). The possibility of publishing came sooner than anticipated when I received an email in December prior to submitting my original thesis. This referenced submissions to the BPS Educational and Child Psychology journal for a special edition on supervision. I was immediately excited about the possibility of there being a relevant journal publishing an edition on the topic of my thesis. Although I knew the topic was relevant to EP practice, I found it reassuring that the topic I was studying was important and others were keen to learn more. However, when I learnt that the deadline for submission was March, I knew that I would not have completed my thesis in time to do this too. Due to the journal's expectations of the finished piece, this would mean completing what felt like an additional piece of work. After a short while reflecting on the possibility of

submitting part of my literature review, I begrudgingly put this aside and focused my efforts on completing my thesis, knowing that it was my priority.

I turned to my fellow Trainee Educational Psychologists (TEPs) and we discussed alternative ways of dissemination. During our conversations, I realised that those who would benefit most from my research, i.e., SENCOs and other groups of school staff, along with EPs, would not necessarily be able to access a journal article, unless the journal had open access, or they subscribed to it. To me, publishing was an additional way of disseminating as it was not accessible for all. As outlined in my ethical approval, I will instead focus my efforts on presenting my findings to my placement LA, and developing and sharing an executive summary of the research that is accessible to the SENCOs involved in the research, wider EP services and LAs who helped me to recruit to the study. This will detail the key findings and its implications for PGS practice, to both promote and develop awareness and understanding of how PGS can support SENCOs (Sedgwick & Stothard, 2021). I will also conduct an online workshop for the control group SENCOs, so that they can learn more about how they could utilise PGS in their schools.

As a soon-to-be newly qualified EP, I intend on taking these findings into my practice and developing a workshop and guidance for schools interested in accessing such a resource. I hope this will highlight to schools the benefits of supervision, both personally and professionally. Finally, I aim to present my thesis at upcoming conferences relevant to the EP profession, including the Eastern Region conference and the DECP TEP conference. I hope this will go some way to showcase to other TEPs and EPs the research that is being conducted in the profession and inspires them to consider conducting their own research. I will also explore the possibility of writing blogs, such as TES and EdPsy.org. I hope that these are also more widely accessible to those outside of the EP profession who share similar interests. The approach I intend on taking to disseminate my findings is described by Sedgwick and Stothard (2021, p. 4) as “multi-stranded”. Having a pre-established route to disseminate my research provides me with a clear, initial plan of my next steps.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter has provided a reflective account of my journey through the research process from the development and amendment of the project through to dissemination. I have shared my open and honest reflections on the journey to help the reader understand the decisions made, including the implications for EP practice and the direction future researchers may wish to pursue. I feel this chapter demonstrates my development as a reflective practitioner. Starting this project on the back of the COVID-19 pandemic added additional curveballs to the process, that I feel were managed well. I have fine-tuned my

organisation and time management skills, and I also have a greater understanding of the need to take a break when needed. Prior to training, I had not considered myself a researcher and although I will be taking a break from conducting research whilst I ‘find my feet’ in my day-to-day role as an EP, I hope that I will continue to use the skills learnt in my daily practice and as I continue learning and researching throughout my career. I feel I approached this study with ethical consideration and adherence to professional and research guidance, and I feel the amended and revised study is a sound piece of research. In comparison to the original research, this study includes greater clarity around how stress is conceptualised, further depth regarding previous research and theory relating to the topic, and deeper reflections on the limitations of the research. This was somewhat lacking from the original submission. The study has certainly added to my personal and professional development, and I will continue to ask myself reflective and reflexive questions as I move through my career. I hope that my reflective chapter provides others with an understanding and rationale of the research, and its significance within EP practice.

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Appendix A

Ethical approval

University of East Anglia
Norwich Research Park
Norwich. NR4 7TJ

Email: ethicsapproval@uea.ac.uk
Web: www.uea.ac.uk

Study title: School Staff Supervision: A mixed methods exploration of school staff stress and the potential role of peer group supervision.

Application ID: ETH2122-1060

Dear Kristie,

Your application was considered on 7th April 2022 by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

The decision is: **approved**.

You are therefore able to start your project subject to any other necessary approvals being given.

This approval will expire on **31st August 2023**.

Please note that your project is granted ethics approval only for the length of time identified above. Any extension to a project must obtain ethics approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) before continuing.

It is a requirement of this ethics approval that you should report any adverse events which occur during your project to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) as soon as possible. An adverse event is one which was not anticipated in the research design, and which could potentially cause risk or harm to the participants or the researcher, or which reveals potential risks in the treatment under evaluation. For research involving animals, it may be the unintended death of an animal after trapping or carrying out a procedure.

Any amendments to your submitted project in terms of design, sample, data collection, focus etc. should be notified to the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) in advance to ensure ethical compliance. If the amendments are substantial a new application may be required.

Approval by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee) should not be taken as evidence that your study is compliant with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR) and the Data Protection Act 2018. If you need guidance on how to make your study UK GDPR compliant, please contact the UEA Data Protection Officer (dataprotection@uea.ac.uk).

I would like to wish you every success with your project.

On behalf of the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee)

Yours sincerely,

Victoria Warburton

Appendix B

Information & Consent Sheets for Supervision and Control Groups

Mrs Kristie Sullivan
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Email: K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

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Norwich NR4 7TJ

United Kingdom

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02 April 2022

School Staff Supervision: A mixed methods exploration of school staff stress and the potential role of peer group supervision.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about school staffs' perceived stress levels and their experience of peer group supervision based on the model by Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Hart, Morris and Betz (1994).

Peer group supervision involves meeting regularly with other professionals to discuss concerns relating to work. There is a designated facilitator in the supervision sessions to ensure its smooth running. An Educational Psychologist will facilitate the supervision sessions that will take place. The objective of supervision is to develop understanding and skills, reflect on practice and learn from experience.

This research will run alongside the peer group supervision sessions taking place in the local authority and aims to explore school staffs' experience of supervision and the potential impact it may have on their stress levels. This study will be based on staff employed in schools in the East of England.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a school staff member of a primary or secondary school that has paid into the local authority educational psychology service that the researcher is currently hosted by. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Mrs Kristie Sullivan.

This will take place under the supervision of Mr Ryan Cullen (Ryan.Cullen@uea.ac.uk, 01603 591451).

(3) What will the study involve for me?

Should you choose to take part in the study that runs alongisde peer group supervision sessions, this will involve:

- attending 11 monthly peer group supervision sessions lasting 90-minutes each, taking place via Microsoft Teams during the academic year;
- completing two online and anonymous measures of the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) at two time points during the academic year. This questionnaire involves answering 14 questions relating to the stress you experience in your role, on a Likert scale of 0 ('Never') to 4 ('Very often'); and,
- attending one online 90-minute focus group to discuss your experiences of peer group supervision with fellow supervisees after approximately 8-10 supervision sessions.

In supervision sessions, supervisees will have the opportunity to bring and discuss a concern or dilemma relating to professional practice. These are decided by the supervisee and will be based on topics that supervisees feel comfortable exploring. You will not be expected to discuss concerns that you do not wish to.

The Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) involves answering 14 questions on a Likert scale of 0 to 4 in relation to your experience of stress. You will be asked to answer these in relation to your professional role. An example of a question includes 'in the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with day-to-day problems and annoyances?'

During the focus group you will be asked about your experience of attending peer group supervision. Example questions include 'can you describe you experience of peer group supervision?' and 'what benefits or barriers, if any, did you experience having attended supervision?'. Focus groups that take place due to the study will be audio recorded using a Dictaphone, for purposes of transcribing the data.

An audio/video recording will be taken.

You will have the opportunity to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4)How much of my time will the study take?
By taking part, you agree to attend eleven monthly 90-minute supervision sessions and 1 90-minute focus group. In addition to this, the two measures of the Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) will take approximately 15 minutes each. A total time commitment of approximately 18 ½ hours will be required to complete the Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) questionnaire, supervision sessions and focus group.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part. Likewise, if you have registered interest in attending peer group supervision but do not wish to take part in the study, you are also able to do so. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your

current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by contacting the researcher using the following email address K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk. Please be aware that by withdrawing from the study you are withdrawing any future data that you may have provided, however it will not be possible for previous Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) data or comments made during a focus group to be withdrawn, due to them being anonymous and pseudonymised.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore, we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

If you take part in a focus group, you are free to stop participating at any stage or to refuse to answer any of the questions. However, it will not be possible to withdraw your individual comments from our records once the group has started, as it is a group discussion.

You are able to continue to attend the peer group supervision sessions that are running alongside the study, should you wish.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

During supervision sessions or the focus group, you may choose to discuss topics or experiences of your daily practice that you or others find emotive. It is important to acknowledge that this would be your choice to discuss these and there are no expectations that you would do so.

Other than the time implications of attending monthly peer group supervisions, a focus group and the time taken to complete Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) measures, it is not foreseen that you will occur any other costs or risks by taking part.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

By participating in the study, you will be given regular, protected time to reflect on your practice, potentially proving beneficial to your levels of stress. Participating in supervision will also provide the opportunity to network with other colleagues and share ideas for practice, as previous research suggests (Farouk, 2004; France & Billington, 2020; Muchenje & Kelly, 2021).

The placement host local authority may also benefit from the outcomes of the research, should peer group supervision go so far to address the local authority priorities around staff retention, stress levels and wellbeing. This has the potential to subsequently and indirectly impact pupils in such schools due to greater consistency in staffing.

In relation to the placement host EPS, participation will help contribute to the support offered by the EPS and may provide recommendations for the continued use or future use of peer group supervision.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?

Other than providing consent, at no point during the study will personally identifiable

information be requested. All data provided via the Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) will be anonymous and pseudonyms will be used when transcribing the focus group. This will ensure that any data you provide will not be attributable to yourself or your employer.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law.

During the study, your consent form and raw (Perceived Stress Sscale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) responses, audio records and subsequent transcripts) will be stored on the researcher's university OneDrive in a password protected folder, accessible solely by the researcher. Themes from the anonymised and pseudonymised data may be shared with the researcher's supervisor when discussing the outcomes of the study. No additional third parties will have access to the data. Following successful completion of the study, this data will be removed and permanently deleted from the researcher's OneDrive password-protected folder.

The results of the research may be published in a journal relating to the educational psychology profession following successful completion. The raw data received during the study will not be used for any other purposes than for this study.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Mrs Kristie Sullivan (K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.

Once completed, the researcher will share the overall findings with the Local Authority.

You can tell us that you wish to receive feedback by contacting the researcher via email on K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk , stating that you wish to receive details on the results of the study following its successful completion.

This feedback will be in the form of an executive summary of the research project that will be emailed to yourself, following successful completion of the study.

This feedback will be available to participants upon full completion of the research project.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Mrs Kristie Sullivan

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau (Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk, 01603 591451).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

The data controller is the University of East Anglia.

- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk in the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?

You need to fill in one copy of the consent form and add an electronic or handwritten signature to the researcher to the following email address: K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk. Please keep the letter, information sheet and the second copy of the consent form for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 11th April 2022.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email from the researcher.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (First Copy to Researcher)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may leave the focus group at any time if I do not wish to continue. I also understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my comments once the group has started, as it is a group discussion.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Completing a questionnaire	YES ☐	NO ☐		
Audio-recording	YES ☐	NO ☐		
Reviewing transcripts	YES ☐	NO ☐		

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study? YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

....
.....

Signature **PRINT name**
Date

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM (Second Copy to Participant)

I, ... [PRINT NAME], **am** willing to participate in this research study.

In giving my consent I state that:

- I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be asked to do, and any risks/benefits involved.
- I have read the Participant Information Sheet, which I may keep, for my records, and have been able to discuss my involvement in the study with the researchers if I wished to do so.
- The researchers have answered any questions that I had about the study and I am happy with the answers.
- I understand that being in this study is completely voluntary and I do not have to take part. My decision whether to be in the study will not affect my relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.
- I understand that I may leave the focus group at any time if I do not wish to continue. I also understand that it will not be possible to withdraw my comments once the group has started, as it is a group discussion.
- I understand that the results of this study may be published but that any publications will not contain my name or any identifiable information about me.
- I understand that personal information about me that is collected over the course of this project will be stored securely and will only be used for purposes that I have agreed to. I understand that information about me will only be told to others with my permission, except as required by law.

I consent to:

Completing a questionnaire	YES ☐	NO ☐		
Audio-recording	YES ☐	NO ☐		
Reviewing transcripts	YES ☐	NO ☐		

Would you like to receive feedback about the overall results of this study? YES ☐ NO ☐

If you answered **YES**, please indicate your preferred form of feedback and address:

☐ Postal: _____

_____

☐ Email: _____

....

Signature **PRINT name** **Date**

Mrs Kristie Sullivan
Trainee Educational Psychologist

Email: K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk

Faculty of Social Sciences

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

Norwich Research Park

Norwich NR4 7TJ

United Kingdom

02 April 2022

School Staff Supervision: A mixed methods exploration of school staff stress and the potential role of peer group supervision.

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

(1) What is this study about?

You are invited to take part in a research study about school staffs' perceived stress levels and their experience of peer group supervision based on the model by Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Hart, Morris and Betz (1994).

Peer group supervision involves meeting regularly with other professionals to discuss concerns relating to work. There is a designated facilitator in the supervision sessions to ensure its smooth running. An Educational Psychologist will facilitate the supervision sessions that will take place. The objective of supervision is to develop understanding and skills, reflect on practice and learn from experience.

This research will run alongside the peer group supervision sessions taking place in the local authority and aims to explore school staffs' experience of supervision and the potential impact it may have on their stress levels. This study will be based on staff employed in schools in the East of England.

You have been invited to participate in this study because you are a school staff member of a primary or secondary school, in the geographical area of the researcher's placement host local authority. This Participant Information Sheet tells you about the research study. Knowing what is involved will help you decide if you want to take part in the study. Please read this sheet carefully and ask questions about anything that you don't understand or want to know more about.

Participation in this research study is voluntary. By giving consent to take part in this study you are telling us that you:

- ✓ Understand what you have read.
- ✓ Agree to take part in the research study as outlined below.
- ✓ Agree to the use of your personal information as described.
- ✓ You have received a copy of this Participant Information Sheet to keep.

(2) Who is running the study?

The study is being carried out by the following researcher(s): Mrs Kristie Sullivan.

This will take place under the supervision of Mr Ryan Cullen (Ryan.Cullen@uea.ac.uk, 01603 591451).

(3) What will the study involve for me?

Taking part in this study will involve being part of the control group. The control group will **not** receive peer group supervision. The role of a control group is to provide a comparison to measure the results of the other group. A control group is important as it allows the researcher to confirm that any results are due to attending supervision, rather than other reasons.

As part of the control group, you will be asked to complete two anonymous online measures using the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) at two time points during the academic year. These time points will be approximately 8-10 months apart. Taking part in this study involves answering 14 questions on a Likert scale of 0 ('Never') to 4 ('Very often') in relation to your experience of stress. You will be asked to answer these in relation to your professional role. An example of a question includes 'in the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with day-to-day problems and annoyances?'

Due to the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) results being anonymous, you will not be able to review information generated about you prior to publication.

(4)How much of my time will the study take?
It is expected that each measure takes approximately 15 minutes to complete. Taking part in the research involves spending a total time of approximately 30 minutes on research activities.

(5) Do I have to be in the study? Can I withdraw from the study once I have started?

Being in this study is completely voluntary and you do not have to take part.

Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relationship with the researchers or anyone else at the University of East Anglia now or in the future.

If you decide to take part in the study, you can withdraw your consent up to the point that your data is fully anonymised. You can do this by contacting the researcher using the following email address K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk. Please be aware that by withdrawing from the study you are withdrawing any future data that you may have provided, however it will not be possible for previous Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983)data to be withdrawn, due to scores being anonymous.

(6) What are the consequences if I withdraw from the study?

If you decide to take part in the study and then change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time before you have submitted the questionnaire. Once you have submitted it, your responses cannot be withdrawn because they are anonymous and therefore, we will not be able to tell which one is yours.

(7) Are there any risks or costs associated with being in the study?

Aside from giving up your time, we do not expect that there will be any risks or costs associated with taking part in this study.

(8) Are there any benefits associated with being in the study?

You will benefit from the opportunity to attend a workshop to hear about the outcomes of the research, learn about peer group supervision and the model that was used in the research, that you could subsequently utilise in your own practice. A guidance sheet providing information on using Peer Group Supervision in practice will also be available.

The guidance sheet outlining the supervision model and its use will be available to the wider education workforce following successful completion of the study, to allow for other educational professionals to use this within their practice.

(9) What will happen to information provided by me and data collected during the study?

To take part in the study you will be required to give consent. At no point during the study will personally identifiable information be requested and the numerical data that is provided by completing the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) will be anonymous. As a result, it will not be attributable to yourself or the school you work in, nor possible to identify individual Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) scores.

The information you provide will be stored securely and your identity will be kept strictly confidential, except as required by law.

During the study, your consent form and Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) data will be stored on the researcher's university OneDrive in a password protected folder, accessible solely by the researcher. The anonymous Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) data may be shared with the researcher's supervisor when discussing the outcomes of the study. No additional third parties will have access to the data. Following successful completion of the study, this data will be removed and permanently deleted from the researcher's OneDrive password-protected folder.

The results of the research may be published in a journal relating to the educational psychology profession following successful completion. The raw data received during the study will not be used for any other purposes than for this study.

Your personal data and information will only be used as outlined in this Participant Information Sheet, unless you consent otherwise. Data management will follow the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), and the University of East Anglia's Research Data Management Policy.

(10) What if I would like further information about the study?

When you have read this information, Mrs Kristie Sullivan (K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk) will be available to discuss it with you further and answer any questions you may have.

(11) Will I be told the results of the study?

You have a right to receive feedback about the overall results of this study.

Once completed, the researcher will share the overall findings with the Local Authority.

You can receive feedback from the researcher by identifying that you wish to hear about the results of the study, following its successful completion. You can do so by contacting the researcher via email: K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk.

This feedback will be in the form of a brief virtual workshop. This will include information, guidance and advice on the supervision model used in the research, should you wish to utilise this within your own practice.

This feedback will be provided following successful completion of the study.

(12) What if I have a complaint or any concerns about the study?

If there is a problem, please let me know. You can contact me via the University of East Anglia at the following address:

Mrs Kristie Sullivan

School of Education and Lifelong Learning

University of East Anglia

NORWICH NR4 7TJ

K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk

If you are concerned about the way this study is being conducted or you wish to make a complaint to someone independent from the study, please contact the Head of School of Education and Lifelong Learning, Professor Yann Lebeau (Y.Lebeau@uea.ac.uk, 01603 591451).

(13) How do I know that this study has been approved to take place?

To protect your safety, rights, wellbeing and dignity, all research in the University of East Anglia is reviewed by a Research Ethics Body. This research was approved by the EDU S-REC (School of Education and Lifelong Learning Research Ethics Subcommittee).

(14) What is the general data protection information I need to be informed about?

According to data protection legislation, we are required to inform you that the legal basis for processing your data as listed in Article 6(1) of the UK GDPR is because this allows us to process personal data when it is necessary to perform our public tasks as a University.

In addition to the specific information provided above about why your personal data is required and how it will be used, there is also some general information which needs to be provided for you:

The data controller is the University of East Anglia.

- For further information, you can contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.uk
- You can also find out more about your data protection rights at the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO).
- If you are unhappy with how your personal data has been used, please contact the University's Data Protection Officer at dataprotection@uea.ac.ukin the first instance.

(15) OK, I want to take part – what do I do next?
If you are happy and consent to take part in the study simply email the researcher at K.Sullivan@uea.ac.uk to request the link for the questionnaire.

By submitting your responses you are agreeing to the researcher using the data collected for the purposes described above. Please keep the information sheet for your information.

(16) Further information

This information was last updated on 2nd April 2022.

If there are changes to the information provided, you will be notified by email from the researcher.

Appendix C

Structured Peer Group Supervision Model

Guidelines for Structured Peer Group Supervision

Based on Wilbur, Roberts-Wilbur, Hart, Morris, and Betz (1994)

1. **Presentation phase (10 mins)**
   The presenter provides a summary of the problem / situation / issue causing concern. Only the presenter speaks – the group listen.

2. **Request for Help (5 mins)**
   After giving a summary, the presenter identifies the specific nature what assistance is being requested from the supervision (e.g., I need your help with…)

3. **Question Period (10-15 mins)**
   The supervision group members ask the presenter questions about the information presented in Step 1 and 2. This step allows group members to obtain additional information, clarify any misperceptions concerning the summary information and to construct a group understanding of the situation.

   One at a time, group members ask one question of the presenter. The process is repeated until there are no more questions. *Focus questions on identifying strengths and solutions as well as information (e.g. exception finding / coping questions / rating questions).*

4. **Feedback / Group discussion (10-15 mins)**
   The group members discuss the situation. They respond to all of the information obtained by stating how they would handle the presenter's situation and suggest possible ways forward. The purpose of this phase is for the group to provide suggestions and insights.

   The presenter remains silent but may take notes regarding the comments or suggestions.

   When giving feedback, group members take it in turns to suggest how they would handle the presenter's dilemma. First person is used, e.g., "If this were my school, I would…" The process is repeated until there is no further feedback. *There should be a focus on identifying strengths and ways forward.*

5. **Pause period / Break (5 – 10 minutes)**
   A break to enable the presenter to reflect on the group's feedback, assimilate suggestions and insights and to prepare for the next step.

   The group should not converse with the presenter and should not talk to each other about the issue raised.

6. **Presenter's response (10 mins)**
   The presenter identifies the benefits of the groups' suggestions and insights.

   Group members remain silent and the presenter responds to each group member's feedback. The presenter tells group members which of their statements were helpful and why.

   The presenter identifies one or two actions that they will take following peer supervision.

7. **Discussion / Reflection / Round of words**
   The supervisor may conduct a discussion of the process, summarize, react to feedback offered, process group dynamics, identify benefits of the group.

   The session may finish with a round of words, whereby all participants summarise the session in a single word.

8. **Agree who will be presenter next week**

Reference

Wilbur, M. P., Roberts-Wilbur, J., Hart, G. M., Morris, J. R. & Betz, R. L. (1994). Structured group supervision (SGS): A pilot study. *Counselor Education and Supervision, 33*, 262-279.

Bernard, J. M., & Goodyear, R. K. (1997). *Fundamentals of clinical supervision* (2nd ed.). Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon.

Appendix D

Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983)

Appendix D comprises of the Perceived Stress Scale 14 (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983) as presented by the authors, and screenshots of the scale in Microsoft Forms, as presented to the participants.

PSS-14

INSTRUCTIONS:

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during THE LAST MONTH. In each case, you will be asked to indicate your response by placing an "X" over the circle representing HOW OFTEN you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	○	○	○	○	○
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	○	○	○	○	○
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	○	○	○	○	○
4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with day to day problems and annoyances?	○	○	○	○	○
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life?	○	○	○	○	○
6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	○	○	○	○	○
7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	○	○	○	○	○
8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	○	○	○	○	○
9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	○	○	○	○	○
10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	○	○	○	○	○

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PSS-14

	Never	Almost Never	Sometimes	Fairly Often	Very Often
	0	1	2	3	4
11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	○	○	○	○	○
12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish?	○	○	○	○	○
13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time?	○	○	○	○	○
14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	○	○	○	○	○

Perceived Stress Scale 14 (control group baseline)

(PSS-14; Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein, 1983)

Instructions:

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month.

In each case, you will be asked to indicate your response by identifying **how often** you felt or thought a certain way. **Please respond in relation to your work as a SENCo**, for example, for question 3 you would respond with how nervous or 'stressed' you felt in relation relation to your SENCo work.

Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way, but rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

Please ensure you answer all of the questions.

* Required

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? *

- ◯ Never
- ◯ Almost Never
- ◯ Sometimes
- ◯ Fairly often
- ◯ Very often

2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

4. In the last month, how often have you dealt successfully with day to day problems and annoyances? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

5. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were effectively coping with important changes that were occurring in your life? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

6. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

7. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

8. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

9. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

10. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

11. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control? *

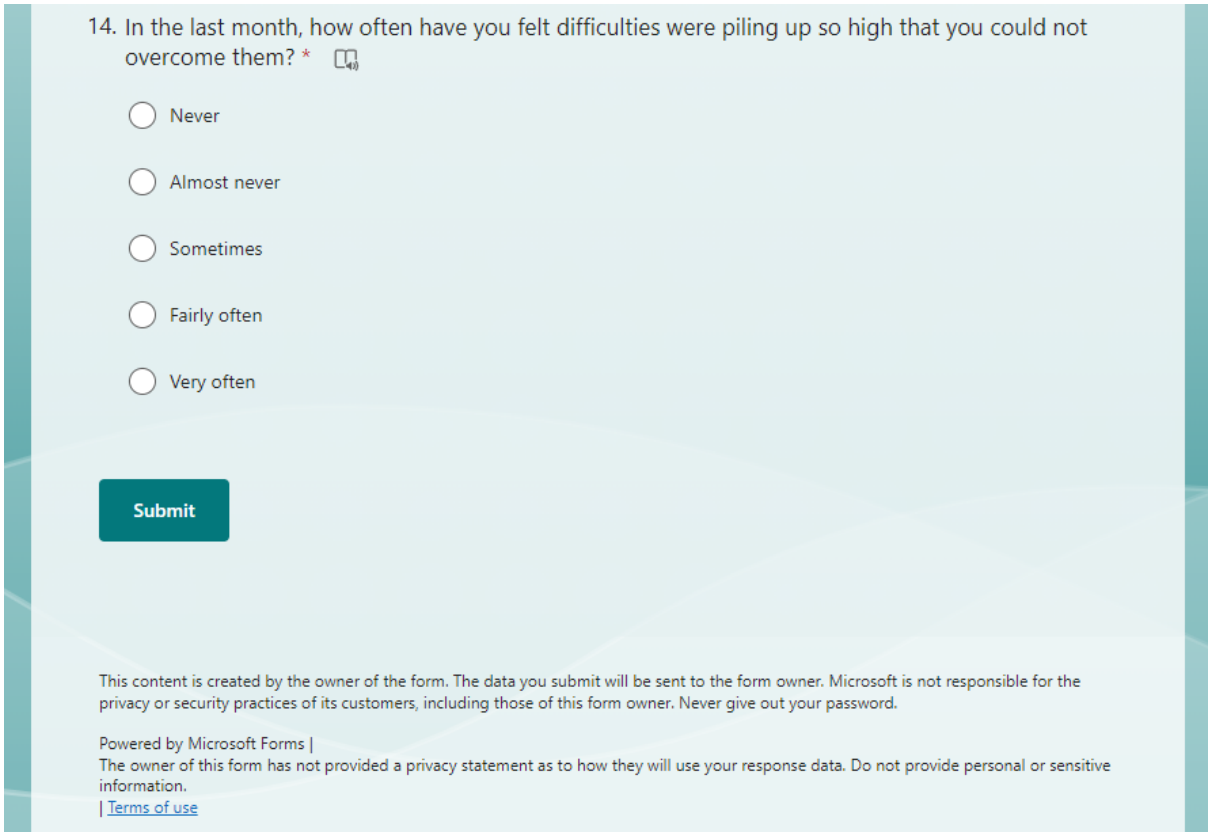
- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

12. In the last month, how often have you found yourself thinking about things that you have to accomplish? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

13. In the last month, how often have you been able to control the way you spend your time? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often



14. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? *

- Never
- Almost never
- Sometimes
- Fairly often
- Very often

Submit

Appendix E

Focus Group and Interview Schedule

1. What made you want to attend peer group supervision?
2. Can you describe your experience of peer group supervision?
3. What benefits, if any, have you experienced having attended supervision?
4. What impact, if any, have your experienced have on stress levels?
5. What is your experience of the supervision model used? (Wilbur)
6. With regards to the remainder of the peer group supervision sessions this year, would you like to continue using this model, or would you prefer to explore a different model?
7. What barriers, if any, have you experienced in attending supervision?
8. Are there any other comments regarding your experience of supervision, that we haven't already explored?

Closing information

a) Do you have any questions?
b) Any information, personal experiences or opinions given in the session will not be shared outside of the interview, other than by myself for the purposes of the research as outlined in the information and consent form.
c) Please seek support from your line manager or school's link EP if any personal or professional issues related to the interview arise that you feel needs discussing further.
d) Should you wish to speak to myself as the researcher or my research supervisor at UEA about anything from the research, you are more than welcome to email either of us using the addresses in the information sheet.
e) Other support is also available through helplines, such as the Education Support Helpline or Samaritans, should they prefer to discuss their experience anonymously.

Appendix F

Sample of Transcripts

Focus Group

healthcare and I know that supervision is something erm that is offered in a more clinical setting erm quite regularly so

Researcher: mmm

Annie: I think I had this idea that what that would be the benefits of it and the opportunity to share and yeah just kind of be able to collaborate with other people would be useful erm so yeah err yeah I was definitely interested straight away wasn't even a 'ooh I'd like to find out more' (chuckle) it was just yes please!

Researcher – yeah, it sounds like you didn't think twice you sort of

Annie – no

Researcher - knew that there was almost a need there and because you were sort of feeling…

Annie – yep

Researcher – sort of lonely at times that you thought it would be something beneficial for you to at least try out, and if…

Annie – yeah definitely and I think I remember someone else said at the time it was offered to SENCos and DSLs and I remember straight away forwarding it to my DSL saying 'ooh this sounds like amazing' erm and yeah I was glad I did because we got an email the next day saying they'd been overwhelmed with responses and actually they weren't| you know, it would be a first come first served and that was it so yeah and I felt very lucky that I'd been on my emails (chuckle)

Researcher – super. Good timing.

Bethany – mmm, I think I felt the same kind of thing and I think I moved to **Local Authority** just before it was 6 months before the erm pandemic so I hadn't really kind of got my head round the whole **Local Authority** different systems of being a SENCo here different paperwork and stuff and then all of a sudden the pandemic hit and you got to speak to nobody you know kind of thing and I think again having been a SENCo somewhere else again it was very lonely and I know that from our PSGs groups and stuff that actually it was sometimes solidarity in numbers and know that sharing of experience erm but I think particularly after the pandemic it was really really you know, like you said I didn't think twice about it I'm very lucky that I must have actually seen that email quite quickly and err reply to it because I don't always with emails (chuckle). Erm so yeah, so I think it was that kind of get to know other people and to find out more about it but also because you know the pandemic had left me feeling a little bit isolated with the new systems in the **Local Authority.**

Researcher – mmm. So there's there's sort of loneliness mentioned with both of you then and it was particularly hard for you **Bethany** because you were sort of unfamiliar with the way that **Local Authority** did their sort of processes and things and having that erm sort of support from likeminded individuals who are doing the job that you're going into doing was something that was reassuring. Okay, brilliant. So you're nodding there, that's super. So what what did you maybe think erm you feel you would have achieved by coming? So you've mentioned sort of a couple of things around sort of erm solidarity in numbers that sort of thing I wonder if either of you could maybe elaborate on, what you feel it would look like having achieved what you wanted to get out of supervision?

Pause

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
want to talk to other SENCos
@mention or reply

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Beneficial to collaborate
@mention or reply

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Lonely, I wanted to speak to other SENCos
@mention or reply

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Collaboration. Strength in numbers
@mention or reply

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Regularly feeling isolated within the role
@mention or reply

Interview 1 – 'Carla'

Carla: yeah erm the teacher supervision was very much it was more around trying to keep a structured hold on discussions in staff meetings and pupil erm feedback meetings etc so that kind of model if you like was used was the same model but it was used in a different way erm and it wasn't used as consistently

Researcher: mmmm

Carla: as we used in the SENCO peer supervision so it didn't have the same impact

Researcher: okay okay and what sort of impact would you say you've experienced from both I guess sort of just to compare

Carla: erm the to compare the teacher the teacher err the teacher erm peer supervision wasn't consistent enough

Researcher: mmm

Carla: whereas we had a very clear plan from the very beginning

Researcher: mhmm

Carla: with the senco peer supervision I also think with teachers there was there was nearly too much information coming at one go it wasn't condensed enough

Researcher: mmm

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Model provided sessions with consistency
@mention or reply

Kristie Sullivan (EDU - Postgraduate Researcher)
Model provided a plan to sessions
@mention or reply

Carla: but with sencos the group is is I'm going to use the word elite, but there are they are a very small group

Researcher: yeah

Carla: erm with very different needs compared to teachers erm and actually our role is often come loggerheads because were often asking for things that are erm perhaps not the easiest to provide in class erm but are as part of our role it's our role to fight for those reasonable adjustments

Researcher: mmm

Carla: about what we consider to be reasonable adjustments but in terms of the peer supervision we er they're hard to compare because one was well run and the other wasn't

Researcher: mmm

Carla: mmm and it so therefore immediately had no comparability because of the actual organisation of it

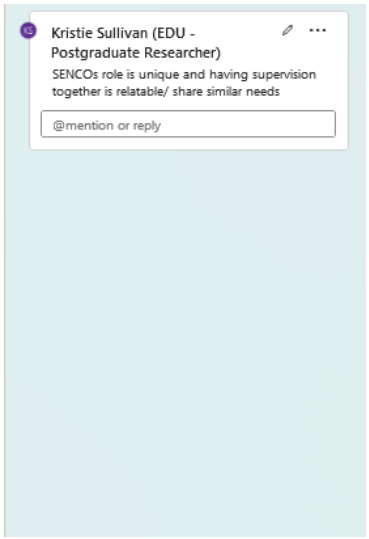
Researcher: mmm

Carla: yeah so it is hard to hard to compare the two

Researcher: mmm mmm fair enough and you mentioned sort of elite do you mean sort of like I guess as sencos you had more of an understanding of each others roles and stresses and experiences that you understand sort of day to day is that

Carla: yeah

Researcher: kind of what you're referring to



Interview 5 – 'Chloe'

Researcher: OK.

Chloe: They still kind of expect me to. It was really a five day job and three days there was no kind of allowance there, whereas in this role... Because the deputy head was the same code she can pick up and she does pick up little bits here and there and I don't feel like... If I leave on a Thursday... A don't feel desperately stressed.

Researcher: Yeah.

Chloe: That on a Monday, you know, on Tuesday when I get back here in something will have been left from the Thursday all those days and that builds up like parent problems and.

Researcher: Yeah.

Chloe: So yeah, things do keep sort ticking over on a Monday to Friday.

Researcher: Okay.

Chloe: Even if it's just an e-mail response from the deputy head to say she'll get back to you next Tuesday, you know? So... That helped my wellbeing a lot because I feel like I am doing... I have actually got time to get the same post stuff done in my last role. I didn't have time because I was teaching and I was covering other people's classes too and arranging all of the cover of the TAs and doing... Other stuff on top of that.

Researcher: Wow, yeah.

Chloe: And then expected to be a SENCo.

Researcher: Yeah.

Chloe: In three days so... I guess wellbeing is about like... Adequate workload, but enough to keep you feeling challenged as well.

Researcher: Yeah.

Chloe: Um... But not too much and sort of... work life balance and... I need to feel productive. I need to see results that I need to see the... Something new that put into place is having an impact.

Researcher: Hmm.

Chloe: Because then... Okay, I've done that. I can park that now and move on. Yeah, and it I what I realised in my last role is what really really impacts my work and my mental wellbeing is frustration. So if I try and put something in place and then I get people say no can't do it because of this or we can't do it because of that. No they can't do it because there's or somebody just decided it would do it or... It can't happen because I've gotta do XYZ first... And then what happens is... About two months later, somebody would come and say Ohh we need this and you'll say I tried this about two months ago and you were behind it, you know.

Researcher: OK.

Chloe: That really, really rrr (laughs) that that was constant, but that was like the four years... is constant, so that... Really, really stressing me out whereas here... We ask somebody to do that. They just do it and say yeah, OK no problem... You know, if you wanna put something in place... The head teacher the SLT will get behind you and we'll sort of give it that rubber stamp and... teachers get on bored and everything just goes easier to organise and easier to

Appendix G

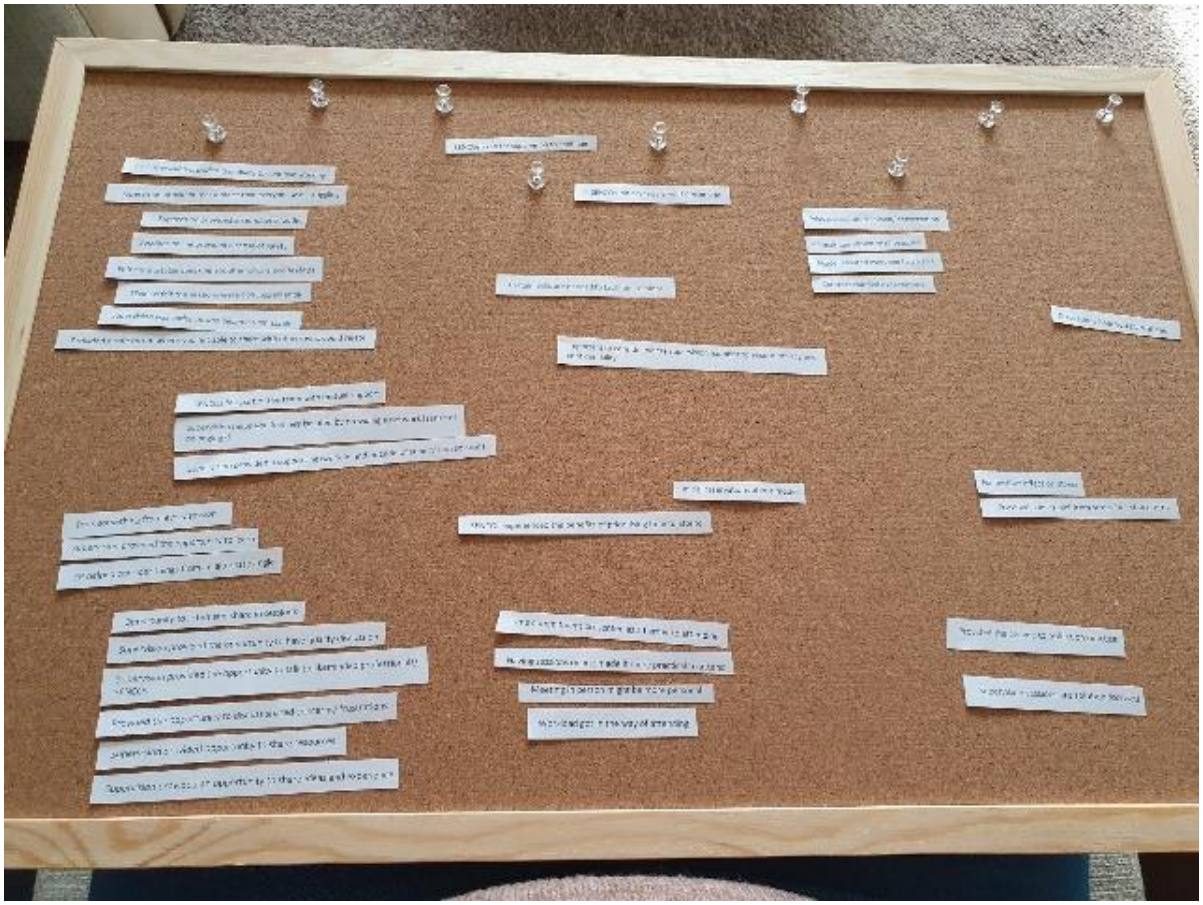
Sample of Coding Process

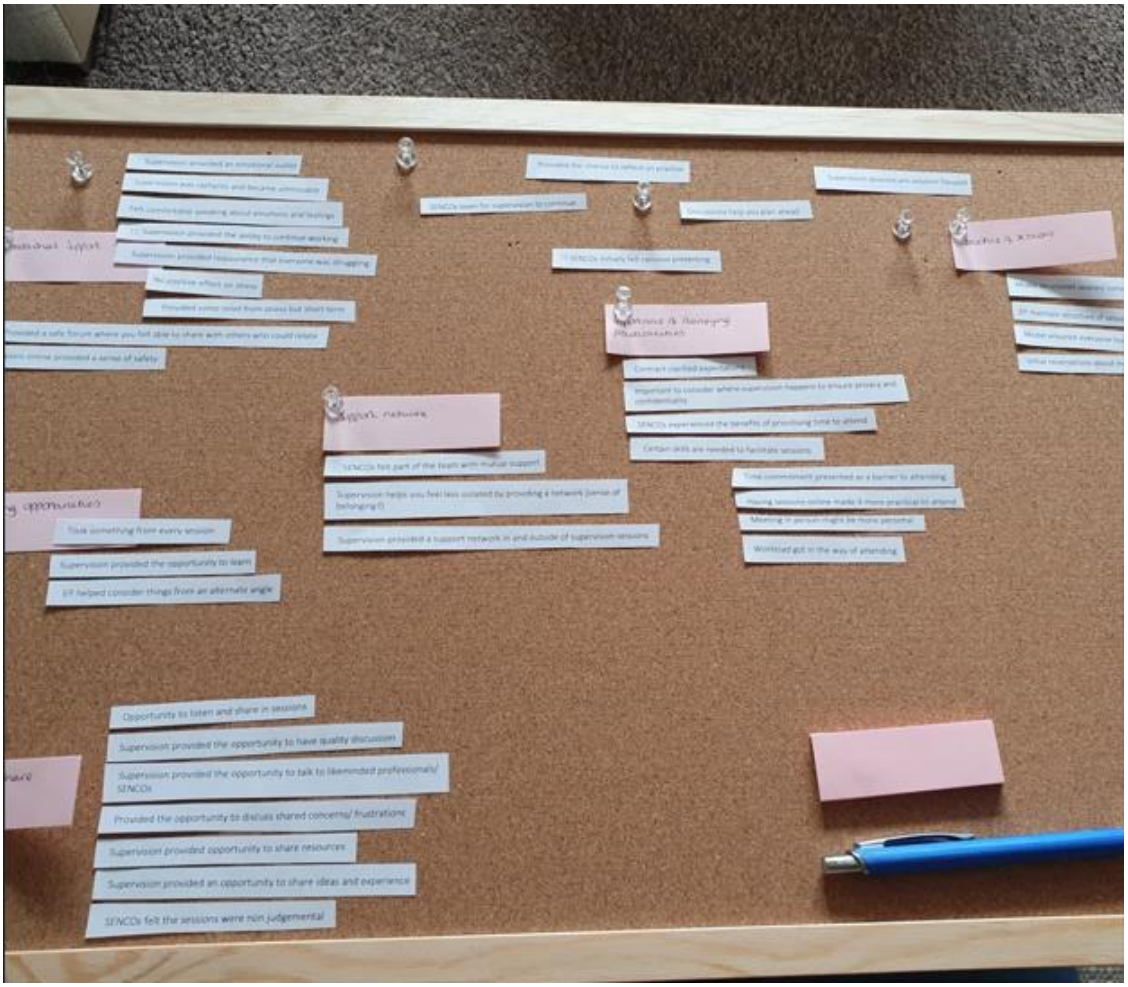
#	Line	Participant	Data item	Code
8	10	Mia	the reason I wanted to attend was because a SENCos role can be quite lonely or feel quite isolated and no one understands the SENCo role apart from a SENCo	felt lonely / alone in role
8	13	Mia	I mean, I wouldn't say I feel lonely because I feel I've got a really good network. But in a school. You you it nobody kind of understands the barriers and understands the role, so it was good experience to be able to share and listen to other people.	wanted to relate to others in same role
8	13	Mia	I mean, I wouldn't say I feel lonely because I feel I've got a really good network. But in a school. You you it nobody kind of understands the barriers and understands the role, so it was good experience to be able to share and listen to other people.	able to share and listen
8	26	Mia	I really like the clear structure I'm somebody that likes structure and organisation. So for me having that clear structure and obviously I'd kind of read everything so knew...How... what my part was so that I understood there were times when we had to be quiet and... That actually the process is really good, but of course people sometimes go off on a tangent because they give the advice before the, which is is natural	sessions have clear structure
8	40	Mia	I'd say that what I have to be really mindful of is making sure that I absolutely give that time. Because I think if you don't, then you're not going to get the most out of it.	mindful of prioritising time for sessions
8	26	Mia	I really like the clear structure I'm somebody that likes structure and organisation. So for me having that clear structure and obviously I'd kind of read everything so knew...How... what my part was so that I understood there were times when we had to be quiet and... That actually the process is really good, but of course people sometimes go off on a tangent because they give the advice before the, which is is natural	model helped me understand my role

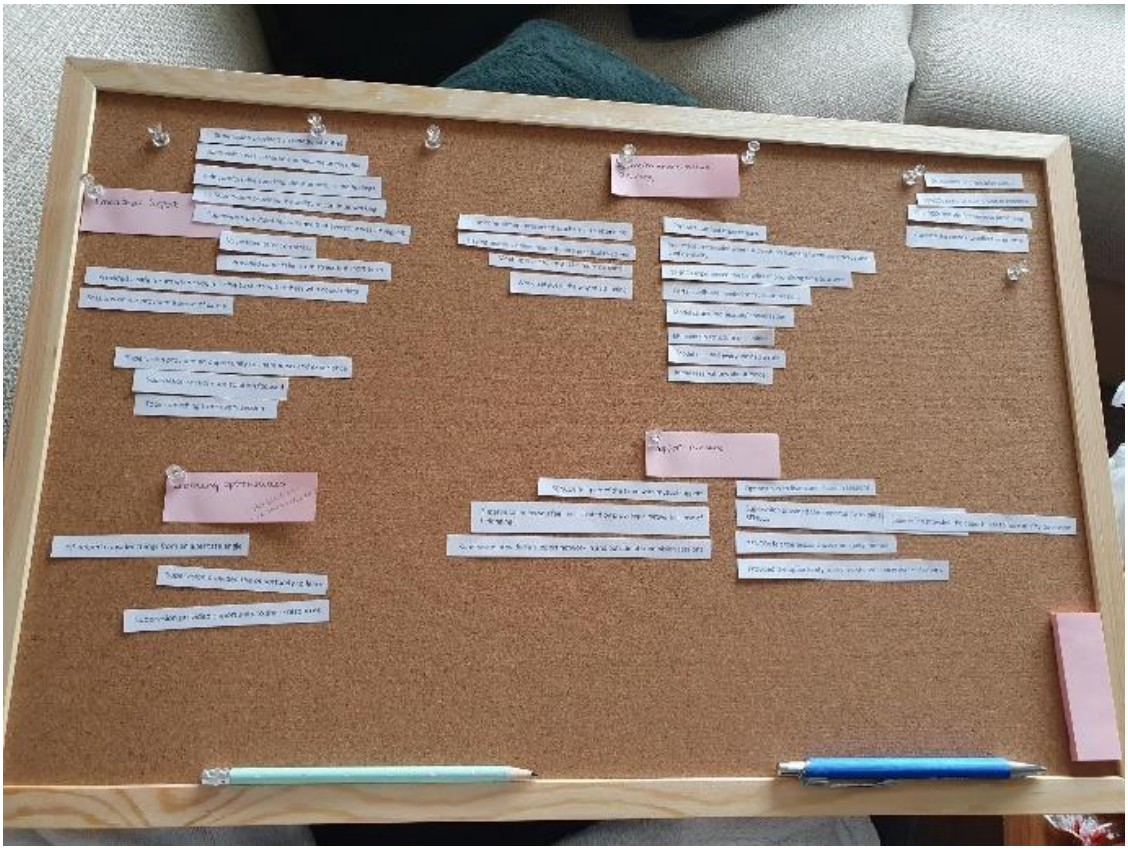
#	Line	Participant	Data item	Code
7	6	Jack	It was a couple of things, really. Um, the the the first one was. I was new in new in the area, new in new and new in post, new in school, new in area	new in post
7	7	Jack	new in area I I started in Easter so of course when that came along. It was the first opportunity I've had to sort of network and and actually get to grips and sort of get to meet other SENCos in in the in the new county. So that was something to start with. However, even if it had come up somewhere else. I would have come along anyway, especially with the name like supervision	wanted to network
7	14	Jack	I would have come along anyway, especially with the name like supervision because it's, you know it's the SENCO. You're normally the only person in the school, especially at primary level and. The only people that really know what's going on in that is other SENCOs is that make sense, so you know it it was (laughs)... Sometimes it does good just to be able to.	only role in school
7	60	Jack	So having the supervision would also mean that I... You know some of the cases, you just want to make sure you're right...	opportunity to share cases to check you're doing it right

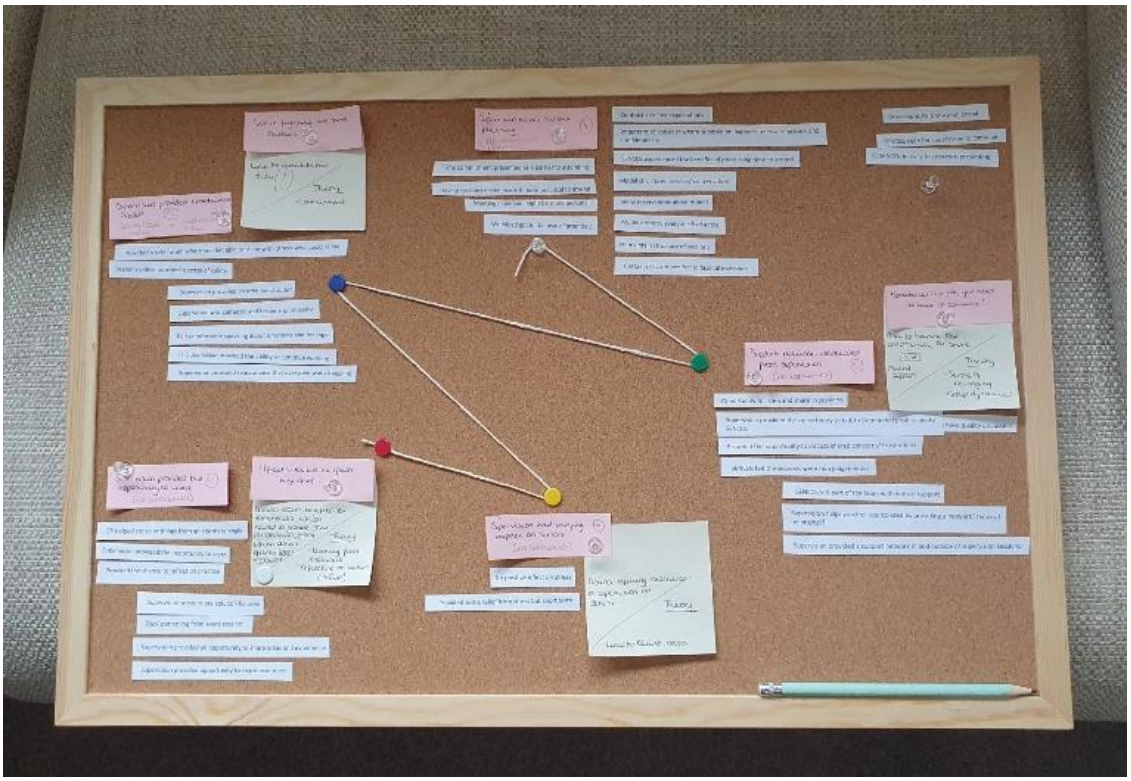
Appendix H

Developing Themes




Opportunity to listen and share in sessions
Supervision provided the opportunity to have quality discussion
Supervision provided the opportunity to talk to likeminded professionals/ SENCOs
Provided the opportunity to discuss shared concerns/ frustrations
Supervision provided opportunity to share resources
Supervision provided an opportunity to share ideas and experience
SENCOs felt the sessions were non judgemental





Appendix I

Thematic Map