

# ***Working in Partnership with Schools***

*(A description of EP work using the Consultation framework)*

## **Contents:**

- *What are the skills of the EP?*
- *What does the EP do?*
- *How is the work organised?*
- *What might the work involve?*
- *What is the consultation approach?*
- *Consultation - what is the aim?*
- *What happens before a Consultation?*
- *What happens in a consultation?*
- *How are parents involved in consultations?*
- *What else does consultation offer?*

## **What are the skills of the EP?**

The skills of the EP are in providing a framework for problem solving in the general area of the psychology of schooling. The aim is to work collaboratively with the school to raise pupils' attainment and promote inclusion.

## **What does the EP do?**

The EP visits the school regularly to work with teachers on:

- # consultation and assessment over individuals who cause concern
- # consultation and assessment over groups or classes who cause concern
- # consultation and assessment over organisational issues which cause concern

These three levels are inter-related and lead to more effective work and a wider coverage.

## **How is the work organised?**

All of this work is carried out according to the needs and priorities of the school through collaborative work with teachers, with the school deciding on the priorities. Consultation takes place with the person "most concerned" - i.e. the person with the role and responsibility for the overall view of the pupil - in secondary schools, the form tutor or Head of Year; in primary schools, the class teacher. This partnership illustrates the view that the EP cannot be an effective agent of change in relation to school based concerns when s/he works alone. But s/he can be an effective role partner with skills and expertise to share in supporting teachers as agents of change within the school.

## **What might the work involve?**

Within the consultation approach the work is about assessment and intervention. This always begins with the person most concerned and could involve a range of different activities, for example:

- # an individual assessment interview with a pupil
- # diagnostic thinking about a pupil/group's behaviour
- # analysing a pupil/group's learning, learning styles, strategies and approach to learning
- # analysing classroom processes
- # analysing organisational effects on pupil behaviour
- # supporting teachers in tutoring and/or counselling individuals/groups or in running groups to develop pupils' social skills
- # joint school-family work
- # supporting pastoral developments (not as a separate entity but as closely linked to the curriculum)
- # Inset and workshops in relevant areas for teams of teachers
- # action research and school projects appropriate to the issues raised.

These are some of the possible tasks of the EP, in partnership with teachers in mainstream schools, and in other support and advisory services, when this is appropriate. Other role partners are social services and health service colleagues.

## **What is the consultation approach?**

Consultation is an approach to the work with the school. Consultations are offered to schools as part of regular school visits and take place with teachers over individual pupils who cause concern, or over groups or classes who cause concern, or over organisational issues. Consultation takes place with either individual teachers or groups of teachers and leads to a range of levels of interventions. These interventions may focus on individual pupils, or groups, or may lead to whole-school approaches or project work (see above).

## **Consultation - what is the aim?**

The aims of consultation in school, whether at the individual, group or organisational level is the same; that is, to help in finding solutions to school-based problems. Consultation in school most frequently focuses on individual pupils and is usually preceded by a classroom observation.

The aim is to make sense of a pupil's difficulties in the classroom context and to work out appropriate intervention strategies in that context in a collaborative fashion with the teacher concerned, and subsequently with the parents (when the consultation is at the individual level).

The same aim would pertain in relation to consultations over groups of pupils. With organisational issues the aim is to explore those issues so that progress can be made in the most effective way possible.

Examples of organisational work are:

- # developing a whole-school behaviour policy
- # reducing bullying
- # developing aspects of PSE
- # developing inclusive classrooms

## **What happens before a Consultation?**

Before a consultation takes place over an individual pupil the teacher will have already involved parent(s)/carer(s) in discussing the concerns and so will have some idea about how the family view those concerns. Parental permission for the EP to be involved will also have been sought. For consultations over groups, classes or for organisational issues parental permission is not usually needed.

## **What happens in a consultation?**

In a consultation the EP works with the teacher “most concerned” (in a professional sense - e.g. class teacher or form tutor/HoY) to explore various aspects of the school and classroom context which may be having an effect. The teacher, therefore, contributes her/his knowledge, understanding, perceptions and views to the consultation.

For example, in a case of an individual level consultation over a pupil with learning difficulties, some of the areas for exploration in the first consultation with the teacher might be the history of the pupil’s education and educational opportunity, the current attainments, achievements and learning style of the pupil, the pupil’s organisational and study skills, the curriculum offering and the teaching styles, the help the pupil has received in the past and currently, the view the pupil seems to have of self as a learner and the belief s/he appears to hold about her/his abilities and learning skills, the reputation the pupil has in the class group and the expectations other pupils appear to have of the pupil.

In the case of a pupil whose behaviour causes disruptive effects a similar approach is taken, geared to features of the classroom situation which relate to the behaviour which causes concern, e.g. the involvement of other pupils. The aim is to build up a picture which is more informative and from which more useful strategies can be developed.

This frequently involves the teacher in on-going classroom based investigations between consultations. At the end of a consultation conclusions are drawn about the possible meaning of a pupil’s behaviour and strategies which have been worked on during the consultation are agreed on.

## **How are parents involved in consultations?**

The follow-up consultation usually takes place on the next school visit and at this point in time the strategies are reviewed and evaluated and modified accordingly. At this stage the parents/carers are involved in a joint school-family consultation. The aim of this is to engage them in the strategies the teacher is trying out, to involve them in home-based support strategies, and to explore the family dimension of the pupil's difficulties in school (when this is appropriate).

Consultation follow-ups will continue until the piece of work has been completed.

## **What else does consultation offer?**

Consultation is also a form of staff development as well as a way of addressing teacher concerns. It is aimed at helping teachers develop a range of explanations and understandings about pupil behaviours in class. These explanations and understandings go beyond dispositional or circumstantial explanations (such as intelligence or background) which, taken on their own, restrict the range of strategies available to the teacher. It helps the teacher work out appropriate classroom-based intervention strategies, to review and evaluate them, and to engage appropriately and productively with the family over these.