

**Early years safeguarding and child protection in  
practice: An enquiry into the experiences of newly  
qualified practitioners.**

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For Paul.

This is as much yours as mine.

## **Abstract**

Much has been written about challenges facing early years practitioners in a time of rapid policy implementation affecting the children's workforce, and the introduction of graduate professional accreditation (NCTL, 2013) for those tasked with leading quality developments in the early years sector. Tensions have emerged across the children's workforce particularly in the fields of health and social care, concerning the implications for safeguarding and child protection (Munro, 2011; Lumsden, 2012). Whilst research illuminates workforce challenges, as policy is imposed on professional practice, little is known about the actual experiences of safeguarding and child protection from the perspectives of those practitioners with Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) who are new to the sector. This small-scale research project sought to examine the safeguarding and child protection experiences of 'change of career' Graduate Entry (GE) EYTS trainees in their first year of employment in an early years setting.

The study took an empirical phenomenological approach (Schütz, 1962) to reveal the lived experiences of Early Years Teachers (EYTs) in the context of their settings. It revealed that notions of safeguarding and child protection were conceptualised as interrelated but different elements of practice that affected confidence as EYTs experienced situations over time. This was related to emotions that inhabited and affected behaviours as EYTs experienced tensions between statutory policy, procedural requirements, partnership working and what they considered to be appropriate practice for working with young children. The conclusions suggested the need for further policy developments in safeguarding and child protection in the early years sector, so that EYTs might not be compromised in their practice. New ways of educating GE EYTs in safeguarding and child protection were identified to better enable contextualisation of their learning and to develop personal and emotional agency in order for them to confidently navigate this complex aspect of professional practice.

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## **Statement of Objectives**

This research enquiry arose from a number of education practice issues relating to safeguarding and child protection that I encountered when working as Director of Studies for Early Years courses in a Higher Education (HE) establishment. The first of these concerned the political shift to professionalise the early years workforce (Osgood, 2006b). The nature of statutory intervention presented itself through imposed workforce reforms including revised statutory early years curriculums, revised early years safeguarding and child protection requirements and a revised early years accredited professional status award for graduates in the sector working in diverse early years settings. The issues culminated in an encounter with a postgraduate trainee who expressed concerns relating to her experiences in practice during such a tumultuous period of reform. Her suggestion that safeguarding and child protection practice in early years was not effective, because legislation was generating uncertainty, was deeply concerning. I considered it important that if children might be at risk as a result of imposed reform in early years, then I needed to investigate these anecdotally reported experiences in order to more fully appreciate what was happening.

This research project is therefore contextually situated within the political and educational discourses surrounding the emerging professionalisation and safeguarding and child protection practices for graduate leaders in early years. Using empirical phenomenology as a tool to guide the methodology (Schütz, 1962) the enquiry analyses the ways in which practitioners, awarded Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS) following a one-year ‘change of career’ graduate entry course at one HE establishment, report their experiences of safeguarding and child protection. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews conducted at the beginning of their first year in employment and towards the end, informs the findings.

The intention of this research study is to generate new knowledge that richly captures and evaluates the complexity of early years safeguarding and child protection experiences for those practitioners new to the field. It is with ‘curiosity’ (Thomas, 2007) that the ‘life-world’ (Schütz, 1932) experiences of EYTs are investigated. The key questions explored are: How are graduates undertaking a one year ‘change of career’ pathway to EYTS (located in one HE institution), educated in safeguarding and child protection? What are the experiences of EYTs within safeguarding and child protection practice over a period of one year in first employment? How might emerging themes arising from the lived experiences of EYTs

contribute to the enhancement of university education programmes in early years safeguarding and child protection?

In attempting to answer these questions, the intention is for the research project 'to have direct applied relevance to professional practice' (Punch, 2009, p. 41). It is anticipated that findings might provide some enlightenment concerning the real world experiences of early years safeguarding and child protection practice. The EYTs contextualised experiences may illuminate the complexities and dimensions of working within a period of rapid reform and how this impacts on the safeguarding and child protection aspects of professional practice within their unique settings. The findings might indicate future developments for teaching and learning in early years safeguarding and child protection prior to and during employment as EYTs.



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## Glossary

CPO	Child Protection Officer
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families in England
DfE	Department for Education
DfEE	Department for Education and Employment
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DHSS	Department for Health and Social Security
DSL	Designated Safeguarding Lead
EdD	Doctor of Education
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYITT	Early Years Initial Teacher Training
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
EYTs	Early Years Teachers
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
GE	Graduate Entry
HE	Higher Education
ITT	Initial Teacher Training
LA	Local Authority
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NSPCC	National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent
QTS	Qualified Teacher Status
SCR	Serious Case Review
UNCRC	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

# Chapter 1 Rationale

## 1.1 Introduction

It was the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) that recognised the importance of the professional doctorate for educational practitioners, supporting them to develop individual practice and contribute to professional knowledge (Burgess, Sieminski and Arthur, 2006). This resonated with my personal position as an educationalist and it was through professional experience and personal interest in the social and political constructs of early years (as a phase of education), and safeguarding and child protection (as a right of all children), that this research project was born.

The focus of the research project draws together these two key interests: *safeguarding and child protection* in the context of *early years practice*. The field of early years encompasses (amongst others) childminders working alone, full day care settings, playgroups, pre-schools, schools and multi-dimensional children's centres. The variation of provision is complex in terms of organisation, encompassing privately owned, voluntary, independent and government maintained settings. However, each registered provider works under the same statutory legislation, namely the *Early Years Foundation Stage* (DfE, 2017a), which includes specific safeguarding and child protection requirements. My interest in developing this research project stems from having initial curiosity into how the complexities of safeguarding and child protection legislation and guidance are interpreted in practice within localised and diverse early years provision, and how this might inform my knowledge of professionally contextualised issues.

As a teacher and lecturer in primary and early years education for more than 30 years, I have gained knowledge of safeguarding and child protection and experienced some of the complexities relating to rapid legislative change. In frontline practice I have had involvement with children deemed *at risk* or *in need* (DfE, 2015) and have experienced the increase in engagement with professionals across education phases and from different agencies in response to legislation (Laming, 2003). I have been aware of emerging tensions in safeguarding and child protection practice that have included ambiguity in roles and responsibilities, both within and between the different professions and agencies that work with children and their families. It was as a result of these issues that I wanted to explore how

safeguarding and child protection legislation, policies and guidance influenced practice specifically within diverse early years contexts.

In my role as teacher educator in early years, I became drawn to a group of trainees who had chosen to undertake the one-year, graduate entry course to gain EYTS. It was during training that their anecdotal discussions concerning professional practice in assessed placements raised several issues in respect of safeguarding and child protection. These included the requirement for them to demonstrate how they ‘understood’ safeguarding and child protection policies and practices, but also how they ‘contributed to multi-agency team working’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 5). I became interested in their deliberations in terms of the complexity of their EYTS role and how they might make sense of requirements in practice, as they may previously have had very little experience of working with young children and their families. My personal interests and experiences in this area of professional practice were overtly present in my initial musings and progressively focused my attention towards the need for an empirical enquiry. I recognised my perspectives of safeguarding and child protection had been shaped and influenced through many years as an early years practitioner and teacher educator. I considered that my interest to investigate practice experience was because of a series of situations and encounters with children, families, practitioners and students over time. These had generated questions, problems and matters of concern that I had sought to explore as I navigated the complexities of safeguarding and child protection perceived as a professional responsibility in early years (NCTL, 2013).

In the role of a professionally focussed researcher, I have awareness that influencing alignments and associations with early years safeguarding and child protection in professional practice may have resulted in assumptions and preconceptions affecting how I might approach the research and interpret data. However, I have attempted to mitigate this by adopting a reflective and reflexive approach throughout this research project, advocated by Mason (2002) and discussed further in chapter three: revealing how and why decisions have been made in the design of the research and in the data analysis. Ultimately I have made my narrative a central thread of this enquiry: seeking to gain knowledge and contextual understandings in order to inform my own professional practice. I wanted to examine how the EYTS graduates from one HE institution experienced safeguarding and child protection in practice as employed practitioners new to the sector. I considered that by investigating their experiences I might be able to make sense of their contextual understandings and share the

findings, potentially influencing the content of safeguarding and child protection aspects of their training at the HE establishment where I am employed. The following section (1.2) provides some analysis of the EYTS course and why this group of trainees was of particular interest in terms of this research project.

## **1.2 Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS)**

It was stated by the government that the introduction of EYTS (DfE, 2014, 2017b) refined competency standards that had previously led to the award of Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (DfES, 2007), and introduced admission requirements in line with existing Initial Teacher Training (ITT) programmes (traditionally developed for those wishing to work with statutory school aged children). Trainees undertaking Early Years Initial Teacher Training (EYITT) select optional pathways to gain EYTS accreditation according to their circumstances and qualifications. The pathways include a full time three-year undergraduate course (leading to a BA (Hons) and EYTS), a one-year employment-based course (for graduates with a related degree, experience and employment in early years), and a one-year full time course (for those with an unrelated degree and no, or very limited, experience of working with young children). Regardless of pathway taken, all lead to the professionally accredited EYTS award.

The EYITT Graduate Entry (GE) pathway towards this status is targeted at attracting ‘change of career’ graduates into the early years (birth to five) sector (DfES, 2013). The HE institution where I am employed is an accredited provider of EYTS and has offered the GE pathway. During their course, trainees on the GE pathway anecdotally began to raise concerns about understandings of their role whilst engaged in practice experience. These specifically concerned assumptions of their knowledge, skills and experience in safeguarding and child protection that were made by staff, employers and parents/carers: often requiring those on the GE pathway to take a lead role in the setting, or those new to gaining EYTS to take on Child Protection Officer (CPO) or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) duties at the start of their first employment. EYT trainees anecdotally discussed how challenging the area of safeguarding and child protection was and how often they were thought to be highly skilled both in knowledge of the field and in managing their setting’s policies and procedures. They often informally requested additional and on-going support into employment from their HE tutors.

It was unclear to me why there appeared heightened levels of anxiety expressed by EYT trainees relating specifically to the safeguarding and child protection aspects of professional practice, particularly from graduates on the GE course. Initially this raised concern as to whether their training was appropriate. However, similar one-year, ITT courses, such as the PGCE Early Years leading to Qualified Teacher Status (QTS), did not appear to generate the same levels of concern from trainees. I began to consider the possibility of anxieties being contextualised in practice: perhaps related to the rapid political reform in early years towards more accountability, and whether safeguarding and child protection aspects of professional practice might be perceived in terms of ‘getting it right’ or ‘getting it wrong’. However, there was no knowing whether this was the case. I was not able to find research specifically relating to understanding safeguarding and child protection practice from the perspectives of EYTs in context.

Research by Tarr, Whittle, Wilson and Hall (2013) alluded to challenges of knowing how best to prepare students for safeguarding and child protection in statutory education through HE courses. However, there was limited research concerning the actual experiences and interpretations of EYTs in the birth to five sector of education. This highlighted the need for an investigation into EYT’s interpretations of their training and practice in safeguarding and child protection. The framework for this research project began to take shape. The following section (1.3) defines the key terms of safeguarding and child protection for the purposes of this enquiry and explains how the framing of the project became further refined.

### **1.3 Safeguarding and child protection in early years initial teacher training**

*Safeguarding* and *child protection* are terms that are used widely across the children’s workforce. They encapsulate a breadth and depth of complexity involving policies, procedures and practices. Whilst practitioners may allude to safeguarding and protecting children, the ways in which policy influences practice varies widely within and across professions (Hood *et al.*, 2017). As safeguarding and child protection are politically and socially determined, they change over time (Trodd and Chivers, 2011). They are immersed in historical, contextual, moral and ethical sensitivities. Whilst safeguarding and child protection training is a statutory requirement for all practitioners working with children, what is deemed important to include is therefore influenced by temporal political and social constructs. It is of the moment. Therefore, safeguarding and child protection can really only be defined as a complex phenomenon in a constant state of change.

Although well-defined parameters may be elusive, some framing of the terms might be considered from legislation and guidance concerning practice across all professions in the children's workforce. The Children Act 1989 in particular was significant in reforming existing laws that had previously affected the care and protection of children and their families/carers. Detailed in its principles, the Act advanced the rights of children by ensuring their welfare was safeguarded, promoted and paramount in any decisions that affected them. Section 17 related to safeguarding and provided a definition for children considered *in need* as being a child 'unlikely to achieve or maintain, or to have the opportunity of achieving or maintaining, a reasonable standard of health without the provision of services by a local authority' or 'likely to be significantly impaired, or further impaired, without provision for him of such services' or 'disabled' (Children Act 1989, Part 3, Section 17, no page). It presented a duty to promote the welfare of children and provided the framework for a more preventative approach in professional practice. It outlined the means by which children might be safeguarded through offered services that might be voluntarily received. Section 47 related to state intervention in order to protect a child if they were considered to be 'suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm' (Children Act 1989, Part 5, Section 47, no page), defining harm as impairment or ill-treatment impacting upon health and/or development. Amendments in subsequent legislation have since been made, but the Children Act 1989 remains significant in influencing understandings of safeguarding and child protection and related practices.

The government document *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (DfE, 2015, p. 5) uses the language of prevention and states that,

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as: protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes.

The *Early Years Foundation Stage* (2017) outlines the requirements of safeguarding and child protection for all registered providers of early years. Section three of this document covers safeguarding and welfare including: ensuring the suitability of adults who have contact with children, promoting good health, managing behaviour and maintaining records, policies and procedures for safeguarding and protecting children (DfE, 2017a, p. 16). The participants of my research project practice within the EYFS (2017) and their interpretations

of safeguarding and child protection would likely be influenced by this document. The presented directives and guidance suggest simplicity of interpretation: if this is followed all will be well. However, in the EYFS (2017) under the subsection 'Child Protection' some of the complexities begin to emerge as practitioners are challenged with the following:

3.4. Providers must be alert to any issues of concern in the child's life at home or elsewhere. Providers must have and implement a policy, and procedures, to safeguard children. These should be in line with the guidance and procedures of the relevant Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB). The safeguarding policy and procedures must include an explanation of the action to be taken when there are safeguarding concerns about a child and in the event of an allegation being made against a member of staff, and cover the use of mobile phones and cameras in the setting. (DfE, 2017a, p. 16)

Section 3.4 presents a number of interrelated but quite separate elements that requires reflection. I consider the first sentence alludes to the notion of providers being all knowing, both inside and outside of the professional setting. The subsequent sentences are both illusive and prescriptive: illusive in the sense that policies and procedures are left to interpretation, but prescriptive in some aspects that have to be included for example, an allegation against a member of staff and the use of mobile phones and cameras. In terms of this research project, I began to explore whether my interpretations and reflections may be indicative of challenges facing practitioners, resulting in emerging tensions within the field. I considered the need for greater understanding of safeguarding and child protection from practitioners new to employment as EYTs, who may be interpreting and implementing legislation and related guidance within their settings.

The EYITT GE trainees typically have little or no previous experience of working with children before undertaking an intensive one-year course with assessed placements in early years settings. An encounter with one of these trainees 'resonated with my growing concern as to whether the EYTS safeguarding and child protection training sufficiently supported them for this complex and challenging area of practice.

"You'll be pleased to know I've just heard I got the job as Deputy Manager at my placement nursery, the last one. They want me to be the Child Protection Officer as well. I know I've had all the training but I need you to help me understand it...they'll be looking to me to know..." (March 2013, GE EYITT Student), (Maisey, 2014, p. 3).

The trainee's comment suggested that it was not enough to have knowledge (to know) but recognised the significance of understanding in context (to know how). With eighteen weeks assessed placement in an early years setting this trainee was successful in gaining the



professional accreditation (EYTS) and in securing the post of Deputy Manager and Child Protection Officer (CPO) in a registered setting. The trainee's comment was fundamental in drawing together the final framing for this research project. The statement raised issues in terms of approaches to learning about safeguarding and child protection but also highlighted practice concerns in terms of role expectations. The award of EYTS requires trainees to demonstrate competence in eight professional standards and is awarded to those who are expected to lead in practice (NCTL, 2013, p. 2). Standard 7 relates specifically to safeguarding and child protection: the inference being that the award of EYTS affirms leadership in this aspect of practice. I reflected upon whether employers might be positioning EYTs in roles to lead on safeguarding and child protection, as illustrated by the example on page 16, and whether some children might be considered at risk if training might not be enabling EYTs to demonstrate the capabilities to lead effectively in this aspect of practice.

Further anecdotal concerns raised by GE EYTS trainees suggested there may be other emerging tensions within early years safeguarding and child protection, but that these had not been explored or examined from their position within the sector: as someone awarded EYTS but new to the profession and professional practice. Tensions appeared to concern the publicised role profile of an EYT. 'Early Years Teachers make the education and care of babies and children their first concern. They are accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct. Early Years Teacher Status is awarded to graduates who are leading education and care ...' (NCTL, 2013, p. 2). The use of 'highest possible standards' and 'leading education and care' may imply enhanced competences in practice, without acknowledgement of the pathway of training undertaken: that the award of EYTS is indicative of professional expertise. The notion of expertise is discussed in chapter two but it is important to note that this particular group of trainees expressed different understandings of their role and expectations of expertise, as concerns in their safeguarding and child protection practice. This influenced my decision to examine the GE EYTs experiences in particular. I wanted to investigate what it was like for EYTs new to the sector in terms of their experiences of safeguarding and child protection. The following section (1.4) summarises and draws together the key contextual and influencing factors that I considered to be the final crucial elements underpinning the need for this research project and that led to the resulting aims and research questions.

#### **1.4 Temporality and the legislative context for the research project**

Early years has experienced rapid policy reform within its own field and as part of the wider children's workforce since 1997. It was the *National Childcare Strategy* (DfEE, 1998), introduced by the Labour Government, that saw the beginnings of change towards a more integrated, cohesive approach to legislation, policy and guidance concerning the care and education of children (0-14 years). The strategy outlined ambitions to ensure parents/carers had choice in high quality, affordable and locally accessible childcare provision. Policy reforms continued, with the Childcare Act 2006 exclusively focussing on early years and childcare, attempting to address the need for services to take a more integrated and holistic approach to provision, particularly involving social care, health and education. Social issues, including children's welfare, safeguarding and child protection, resulted in a reorganisation of children's services across England. Reform, affecting the wider children's workforce, continues (Children Act 2004; Childcare Act 2006; Children and Families Act 2014, Children and Social Work Act 2017).

Specifically within early years, developments in curriculum guidance and statutory curriculum legislation (DfEE, 1998; DfES, 2000; DfES, 2008; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2014; DfE, 2017a), and qualifications required by practitioners (Nutbrown, 2012; Truss, 2013; DfE, 2013; DfE, 2017b) were the means of change. The Childcare Act 2006 was pivotal in introducing the statutory EYFS (2008) bringing together previous frameworks relating to care and learning, introducing new inspection systems and outlining a new training and qualifications framework. The introduction of the Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) as the first graduate leader professional status in the sector reflected the political ideology of the time; that a highly qualified workforce, influenced by research (discussed in chapter 2) would contribute to improved outcomes for young children and reduce inequalities in local areas (Childcare Act 2006). The effect of these reforms in early years resulted in discourses relating to professional identity, accountability and performativity. These issues have been widely debated in the sector (Moyle, 2001; Osgood, 2006a, 2006b; Moss, 2008; Whalley and Allen, 2011; Miller and Hevey, 2012; Nutbrown, 2012; Lumsden, 2013) but essentially the resulting impact has seen early years reconceptualised as a phase of the education profession. This context is significant for the research project and a more in-depth analysis is included in the following chapter. However, it is acknowledged that the social and political context remains changeable, as legislation continues to be reformed. The discussions and

findings of this research project are therefore framed within the political context of the moment and temporal.

Within this context professional competency standards (originally introduced as EYPS) have been further refined. Those with EYTS have a competency standard specific to safeguarding (see section 1.3) and must contribute to multi-agency team working in order to safeguard and protect children (DfE, 2013; DfE, 2017b). The EYTS is the only professional accreditation within the education profession that has this specific emphasis. It appears influenced by highly publicised Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) of child abuse and child deaths, where ineffectual communication between professionals has been highlighted as a concern (Laming, 2009). In the social care context Ayre (2001), Kirton (2009) and Munro (2005, 2011) have cautioned that policy reform in reaction to individual cases, may have led to practices not commensurate with effective safeguarding and child protection. Certainly the directive to include mobile phone and camera use within early years policy (DfE, 2017a) was a response to the findings of the Plymouth Local Safeguarding Children's Board SCR on Nursery Z (2010). Trainees on the EYTS course have anecdotally reported challenges when using mobile phones in practice: resorting to negotiations of where and how this might be possible. Aware of these emerging tensions I was involved as a co-researcher in a government commissioned research study into why lessons learnt from SCRs may not have been embedded into frontline practice (DfE, 2014). Findings from that research indicated practitioners across the children's workforce (health, social care and education) experienced challenges in safeguarding and child protection, including issues with training, communication and ambiguity in processes when trying to implement policies and procedures (Rawlings *et al.*, 2014). This built on previous research by Anning *et al.*, (2010) who cautioned that some practitioners may not be acting appropriately to safeguard children despite organisations having clear policy guidance and procedures in place. However, discourses examining these tensions are situated predominantly within the health and social care fields. In education and in particular early years, there is very limited research into practitioners' experiences of safeguarding and child protection and yet annual statistics report that 23.6% of children in England who are under five years of age are deemed 'in need' and are receiving services (DfE, 2016). Whilst the population of children data and children 'in need' data has remained relatively stable since 2010, as reported by the DfE in their annual 'Children in need census', in contrast, the same census data indicates that the number of children starting a Child Protection Plan is steadily increasing year on year (DfE, 2016). Data

reported by Bilson *et al.*, (2016) evidences that one in five children are referred to Children's Social Care before they reach the age of five and one in nineteen are formally investigated. Data from the DfE (2016) and Bilson *et al.* (2016) indicates problematic conditions within early years. If, as other professions suggest, implementing regulatory frameworks in safeguarding and child protection is challenging, I considered it necessary to examine whether similar complexities are experienced in early years. I decided that undertaking this research project with EYTs would enable the opportunity to locate and appreciate whether, what and how tensions may manifest and/or be experienced in practice.

This research project intends to explore the experiences of GE graduates at the beginning of their careers. As they may have very limited experience of working with children, the enquiry examines the meanings and interpretations that they attach to knowledge and experience of safeguarding and child protection through situations in practice. The research project takes place over one year so the data gathered only provides 'snapshots' of individuals' interpretations in the moment: they are contextualised and temporal. However, the findings arising from analysis and reflection may enable me to construct meanings to inform awareness and potential understandings of EYT's experiences. In turn, these may illuminate possibilities for enhancing initial teacher education in the area of safeguarding and child protection. There may be many influencing factors that might affect individual participants involved in this research project and therefore it is important to note that I am not suggesting there is a direct causal link between training undertaken prior to employment and effective safeguarding and child protection in practice. I am suggesting that by exploring the EYT's interpretations of their realities I might better appreciate the complexities of safeguarding and child protection practice that will contribute to the body of knowledge about this aspect of professional practice.

I have acknowledged that the context of this research project is complex and is situated within a time of rapid policy reform. Indeed, as this project has come to completion further updated statutory guidance documents have been published (*Working together to safeguard children*, DfE, 2018; *Keeping children safe in education*, DfE, 2018). Whilst acknowledging the temporality of any findings from this enquiry, it is intended they will be of interest to those engaged in the safeguarding and child protection education of trainees prior to employment in early years and to those employed or working in the sector.

### **1.5 Aim of the research project**

The aim of this research project is therefore to investigate the safeguarding and child protection experiences of GE graduates over their first year of employment in early years having undertaken and gained the professionally accredited EYTS award in one urban HE institution. The investigation seeks to examine influences that may be informing, enlightening and/or shaping safeguarding and child protection practices of EYTs in their setting contexts. Under consideration is my knowledge and understanding, the graduates' interpretations of practice experience and potential implications for safeguarding and child protection education training. The questions are interlinked in order to frame the enquiry as a journey from the participants' recall of training through to experiences during their first year of employment. There are three questions that focus the research project:

- How are early years graduates, located in one HE institution, educated in safeguarding and child protection?
- What are their experiences of safeguarding and child protection practices over a period of one year in first employment?
- How might emerging themes arising from the lived experiences of the graduates contribute to the enhancement of university education programmes in early years safeguarding and child protection?

It is the intention that this research will enable me to more fully appreciate matters influencing the participants' experiences in safeguarding and child protection within their early years practice contexts. It is anticipated that any interpretive meanings arising from this research might enlighten my knowledge of the participants' lived experiences within this area of practice. Subsequently, they may inform the enhancement and development of future teaching and learning experiences within the HE institution where I am employed and be of interest to practitioners, employers and others working in the early years field. The research project will contribute to wider professional understandings of safeguarding and child protection in early years as reported from frontline EYTs.

### **1.6 Research project design**

This research project has been designed to illuminate ways in which practice in safeguarding and child protection is experienced. It is set out to enable a detailed analysis of safeguarding and child protection matters that arise in the participants' first year of employment. Their

situations are located in their unique 'life-world experiences' (Husserl, 1970) and that 'experience' is 'anything of which a person may be conscious' (Priest, 2017, p. 1). The participants share their being in the world (Heidegger, 1962) of safeguarding and child protection practice in early years and how their understandings and meanings have derived.

As the researcher I approach this area of research with some knowledge and experience in the field of practice and therefore am aware of existing sensitivities, presuppositions and assumptions. However, I want to better understand the phenomenon of safeguarding and child protection in early years from the EYTs position (Finlay, 2012). My role is to be alert to my prejudices and to be critically self-aware and reflective (Schön, 1983), whilst existing within the 'essence of the phenomena' (Sloan and Bowe, 2014): to identify and draw meaning from the phenomena of safeguarding and child protection practice from the disclosures of EYTs. Therefore, the methodology that I have chosen for this study is influenced by phenomenology, first articulated by Kant (1764) and subsequently developed by Husserl (1859-1938), Heidegger (1889-1976), Shütz (1899-1959), van Manen (1990), Smith (1996) and others, but providing the assertion that 'there is an attachment in time and space to both culture and history, which provides understandings of beliefs and contexts, forming perspectives that colour and shed light on a phenomenon of interest' (Miles *et al.*, 2013, p. 410). I am attempting to investigate experiences of safeguarding and child protection within early years practice as it is lived over time (van Manen, 1990).

The project has been conceived to enable the exploration of the research aims and initial questions. Therefore, the design has focussed on the opportunity to learn from the experiences of the participants in early years safeguarding and child protection practice. The study involves a particular group of participants who have undertaken a 'change of career' professionally accredited one-year GE course to gain EYTS. The sample has been restricted to a whole cohort of ten participants from one HE institution who successfully achieved EYTS and secured employment in the early years sector. Data has been collected from semi-structured interviews conducted twice: at the beginning and towards the end of each participant's first year of employment. The analysis used a phenomenological approach (Hycner, 1985) as a tool to aid interpretations of data that were linked to the research aims and questions. This enabled a focus on the experiences of participants to illuminate critical reflection and analysis.

The organisation of the research project is in chapters. Following the introduction and rationale (chapter one), chapter two provides a literature review which explores the historical emergence of early years as a profession and the dominant discourses that have influenced the practice of EYTs over time. It begins with an examination of the contextual situation in which the EYTs practice and concludes with an exploration of tensions that are emerging surrounding the notions of care and emotional engagement as a professional expectation in early years, and the interface between these notions and the need to safeguard and protect children as part of statutory welfare requirements.

Chapter three provides explanation of the methodology used in the research project. It explores the interpretive approach and how empirical phenomenology informed the design of the project and provided a frame for analysis. It also provides explanation around decisions taken concerning ethical procedures and the complexities of gathering data from practicing EYTs. Chapter four organises the findings of the data analysis into sections and subsections that relate to the emerging 'journey' of the participants from their recall of admission to training and through their first year of employment. Distinction is made between the first and second interviews that illustrates how responses were affected over time. The themes that emerged from the analysis are discussed and linked to the literature review (chapter two). The discussions attempt to make sense of the ways that EYTs report experiencing safeguarding and child protection in their practice contexts. The final chapter five offers conclusions based on the data analysis findings and discussions. It presents notions for policy and practice consideration including future research possibilities.

## **Chapter 2 The Literature Review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This research project is situated in the field of early years and seeks to explore EYTs' experiences of safeguarding and child protection within this context. In this chapter I critically examine literature that informs the analysis of data gathered from EYTs in practice. Discussions are situated within the framework of government policy and procedures that have affected early years practice in England. These are purported to have influenced a more technician approach to early years professionalism that has consequences for the ways in which aspects of practice might be perceived, interpreted and enacted by EYTs (Moss, 2010). It is my intention to examine some of the influences surrounding the professionalisation of the sector in order to explore potential implications for safeguarding and child protection practices.

The complexity of the early years field and the intricacies of early years safeguarding and child protection has required extensive exploration of related literature. The chapter begins with an examination of discourse concerning the rapidly imposed governance of the sector and the emergence of early years as a phase within the education profession. It explores tensions that have arisen as early years practitioners experience a shift of emphasis from a health to an educative focus in practice. The literature reviewed then examines whether interpretations of safeguarding and child protection policy may be influencing procedures in settings and affecting roles (as disclosed by EYTS trainees anecdotally). As part of this discussion the historical discourse of the female gendered workforce is explored, where tensions reportedly exist between professional competences and other attributes: specifically, that EYTs might be expected to care for and protect children as part of assumed maternal qualities. Within this discussion I critically examine the notion of care and how this relates to policy and/or personal agency, concerning practitioners' moral and ethical values. The caring role is explored to appreciate whether those new to early years might engage in practices with emotional investment that may influence behaviours, particularly in safeguarding and child protection. Focussing specifically on this complex area of practice I examine definitions of safeguarding and child protection and explore the legislative requirement that EYTs contribute to work with other agencies (NCTL, 2013). Finally, I critically examine the discourse concerning partnership working with parents: where there are statutory requirements for practitioners to demonstrate effective relationships with parents, and



tensions that might emerge when practitioners have concerns about a child. Each of the discourses explored relate to the context in which the participants of my research project are situated. They provide some conceptualisation of factors that may be influencing EYTs as they make sense of, and report their lived experiences of safeguarding and child protection. The review of literature provides me with a broad critical overview of related research to inform the data analysis. The chapter starts with critical discussion relating to the early years legislative context in which participants experienced training and first employment in the sector.

## **2.2 The legislative context in early years**

This section presents the legislative context of early years and the emergence of the field as part of the education profession. It explores how successive and amended statutory frameworks of the EYFS (DfES, 2008; DfE, 2012; DfE, 2017a) and competency standards, introduced as EYTS (2013, 2017b), have contributed to a changing landscape of accountability in safeguarding and child protection. Research by Moss (2008, 2010, 2014), Osgood (2006a, 2006b, 2009, 2010), McGillivray (2008, 2011), Simpson (2010) and Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2013, 2016) is critically examined to illuminate whether ‘change of career’ EYTs are entering practice that requires them to have skills of technical know-how (Schön, 1983; Winch, 2015) and other attributes such as ‘passion’ (Moyles, 2001) to manage safeguarding and child protection effectively. Examination of related literature draws on works by Eraut (2002, 2004a, 2004b) who examines the generation of knowledge through experience; Oakeshott (1989) who identifies the need for professionals/teachers to have two components of knowledge, information and judgment; and Frowe (2005) who advocates professional trust as ‘an essential component of what it means to be a professional’ (Frowe, 2005, p. 38) and which affects judgments in practice. This section presents a critical review of literature exploring the theoretical framework that EYTs enter employment in uncertain and changing legislative contexts but with understandings that as the professional/teacher they are competent and confident to undertake effective practice in safeguarding and child protection. This section is subdivided to focus the critical explorations of literature as described above. The first subsection (2.2.1) examines the emergence of EYTs as professionals in early years. It explores reported tensions within role ambiguity and how this might affect safeguarding and child protection practice.

### 2.2.1 The professional/teacher in early years

Historically, the field of early years has 'featured divides between early childhood education, childcare for the children of employed parents and childcare delivered as part of child welfare services' (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010, p. 77). These divides have been exacerbated by differences in legislation and services offered for children from birth to three years of age and those aged between three and five years (Lloyd, 2015). The early years workforce has been reflective of this divide with the socially constructed position that those working with babies and toddlers care for them and are therefore considered to be in low status, low qualified roles (Mooney *et al.*, 2001). This has been perceived to be in contrast to the role of early years teachers working with three to five year olds in maintained nursery and reception classes who are required to have degree level qualifications, considered reflective of the knowledge and skills needed to educate young children (McGillivray, 2008; Miller, 2008; Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). It was not until the Childcare Act 2006 that early years care and early years education were 'formally integrated' (Chalke, 2013, p. 212). There was a shift from early years provision considered within a childcare framework (health and social care) to one with pedagogical focus within education.

The EYFS (DfES, 2008) emerged as a phase of the education continuum with an emphasis on graduate professionals leading practice (as in other parts of the education profession) (Osgood, 2006a, 2006b). The politically driven shift from care to education generated tensions in terms of the identity of practitioners working across diverse early years provision and the purpose of their role as education professionals (Lumsden, 2010, 2012; Mathers *et al.*, 2011; Hadfield *et al.*, 2012). Historically, having professional status suggests restricted access to exclusive knowledge, an agreed set of principles and accredited practice (Oakeshott, 1989; Downie, 1990; Lloyd and Hallet, 2010). In this respect exclusive knowledge might be explained as qualifications gained through assessed courses. Accredited practice might be considered the standards/competences that have to be successfully demonstrated by those entering their profession and that frame the role in practice: or as Lumsden (2010, p. 175) cautions 'state interventions' that can result in what Schön (1983) refers to as the 'technical rationality' of practitioners.

In the context of my research project the graduate 'change of career' GE course leading to EYTS has a set of eight Teachers' Standards (Early Years) (NCTL, 2013) that require trainees to demonstrate that are assessed as met or not met. Standard 7 specifically relates to

safeguarding and child protection and requires trainees to:

7. Safeguard and promote the welfare of children, and provide a safe learning environment.

7.1 Know and act upon the legal requirements and guidance on health and safety, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the child.

7.2 Establish and sustain a safe environment and employ practices that promote children's health and safety.

7.3 Know and understand child protection policies and procedures, recognise when a child is in danger or at risk of abuse, and know how to act to protect them. (NCTL, 2013, p. 4)

The trainee is perceived to be competent to undertake the role of an EYT once they have demonstrated the standards in assessed practice and through the presentation of documentary evidence: they have met the competences to be regarded as having professional accreditation to practice as the teacher in early years (NCTL, 2013). There is an assumption they have attained competences to address the safeguarding and child protection aspects of their professional role effectively. However, some research cautions that the implications of regarding the EYT as the 'technician' within practice, is concerning (Moss, 2010; Urban, 2012). Exploring the notion of 'technician' in early years Moss (2010, p. 10) suggests, 'the task of the educator as technician is to apply prescribed human technologies of proven effectiveness ('what works') to produce predetermined outcomes.' Moss (2010) highlights tensions of state governance affecting understandings of the professional/teacher role within early years and the notion of professional autonomy that he argues is needed for practitioners to meet the demands of working in uncertain situations. He alludes to the diversity of provision, the complexities of work and the many roles practitioners undertake that have been identified by Hevey (2010) as multifaceted and different within and between settings. As the term early years is used broadly to mean any registered provision for children from birth to five years of age, defining standardised competences such as those suggested in the Teachers' Standards (Early Years) infers agreement across this diverse sector that certain and particular knowledge enables someone to practice effectively regardless of the provision context.

Competency standards may have been founded upon research that has suggested good quality early years provision impacts positively upon children's long term life chances (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Hadfield *et al.*, 2012) and that certain ways of practicing, if demonstrated effectively by professionals, may ensure this quality. This notion has been widely debated and highly criticized in the early years professionalism discourse (Hevey, 2010; Osgood, 2006a, 2009, 2010; Moss, 2010). Arguments are presented that caution against following a technician

approach that may affect practitioners' abilities to enact practice effectively because the nature of their work is unpredictable. Urban states, 'too often the language of "quality" is employed to legitimize the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education and care, and to undermine instead of support professional autonomy' (Urban, 2008, p. 138). Urban (2008) cautions that rapidly imposed legislation accompanying the professionalisation of the early years sector suggests erosion of personal agency against requirements to act in particular ways.

Discourse in the field of social care during the same period indicates similar concerns, as the reconfiguration of services for families and children illuminates tensions in terms of roles specifically concerning safeguarding and child protection (Munro, 2011; Parton, 2012, 2014). Parton's (2014) research in the context of Social Work, suggests a significant shift in government policy that concerns safeguarding and child protection and as a result 'the role of the state ... has become more authoritarian and much more willing to intervene in certain families with the full weight of the law behind it' (Parton, 2014, p. 2052). He suggests policy developments following highly publicized cases of child abuse has focused attention on failings within the child protection system rather than on the wider welfare debate. Parton (2014, p. 2054) cautions that the government response has been to impose further regulation rather than attend to the 'range of social harms which cause maltreatment to children.' In the early years context Powell and Uppal (2012, p. 10) also note that whilst 'policies relating to safeguarding and child protection are relatively new phenomena,' government initiatives such as *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003) have followed intense media attention on SCRs. The government's policy response to improve services in safeguarding and child protection has resulted in measures for more professional accountability (Laming, 2003). Professionals are to prevent and protect children from harm and be accountable when failings happen.

The emerging accountability measures across social work and education coincided with the introduction of the first professional standards within early years for practitioners with a degree qualification (DfE, 2007). The expectation was that they would lead and support change in order to raise the quality of early years practice. Originally, the successful demonstration of competences led to the award of EYPS. This status enabled practitioners to lead practice in the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sectors but not in maintained settings and schools (despite overlap in the age group 3-5 years). Practice in the 3-5 year age group in maintained settings (mostly schools) remained with those who achieved Qualified

Teacher Status (QTS). EYTS replaced EYPS in September 2014 and entrance requirements to the training courses aligned with those applying for QTS (DfE, 2013). This change in standards documentation and the introduction of the word ‘teacher’ into the status title is reflective of the shift to educative emphasis within early years practice. As Roberts-Holmes (2013, p. 340) highlights, ‘the policy changes represented a trend away from a childcare discourse towards a pedagogical discourse’.

The emphasis both in the EYTS (2013) standards and the EYFS (2017) curriculum is on practitioners to evidence progress in young children’s development and to be accountable for measurable attainment in their learning (DfE, 2017). This accountability reform was particularly prolific between 2008 and 2016 when education policy in England increased the production of ‘compliance data’ in early years (Selwyn, Henderson and Chao, 2015) through statutory assessment. The increased regulation of assessment and monitoring generated discourses surrounding the governance of EYTs and the challenges of assuming consistency of practice across the sector. As Moss (2014, p. 66) states, ‘complexity and messiness, diversity and context, the social and the cultural must and can be controlled, reduced and tamed, spurred on by the belief that there must be one right answer for every question,’ in which there is ‘one calculable rate of return on any investment.’ Moss (2014) cautions that measurable data might be presented to demonstrate effectiveness of learning, for which EYTs and other practitioners would be held accountable. He suggests a parallel purpose to the increased demand for data: not only to monitor children but a way of measuring the performance of practitioners. In support of this notion, Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016, p. 600), ‘noted the ways in which the surveillance and performative culture of accountability both affirms, legitimates and seduces through discourses of quality while increasingly regulat[es] and govern[s] the early years.’ The developing accountability culture within the professionalisation of the early years sector suggests measurability: a definitive outcome. It suggests that there are methods that can be followed for optimum results.

Research by Hevey (2010, p. 69) charts the significance of accountability reform in early years from the Children Act 1989 and highlights the paradigm shift from a view of early years based in care (health) to one of promoting young children’s learning (education) through centralised regulation. Hevey (2010) cautions regardless of policy reform ‘the principles of the Children Act 1989 that were concerned with children’s rights, parents’ responsibilities, listening to children and inter-agency co-operation’ (Hevey, 2010, p. 69)

remain apparent. She argues, ‘the dominant discourse of quality and standards is strongly contested and that regulation and inspection alone cannot guarantee quality’ (Hevey, 2010, p. 77). Hevey (2010) identifies the emergence of strongly regulated accountability measures in early years and her recommendations to address this include the development of a graduate workforce. She does not elaborate why she considers this significant and it appears paradoxically within her argument as practitioners gaining EYTS undergo regulated and measurable processes. Moss (2010) suggests promoting a graduate led workforce might signify a welcome shift in the way society views practitioners working with babies and young children. Others raise concern that a professional status based on graduate qualifications is problematic in terms of society’s expectations (Urban, 2008; Osgood 2009): that a practitioner holding the qualification provides certainty or ‘trust’ (Frowe, 2005) that they enact professional duties in all areas and contexts effectively.

In early years there is research that shows positive correlation between practitioners who hold higher qualifications and enhanced quality of provision (Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Fukkink and Lont, 2007; Sammons *et al.*, 2013). This research initially encouraged an increase in the number of practitioners holding higher levels of qualification but without remuneration or increased employment benefits (Nutbrown, 2013). Subsequent tensions emerged between practitioners who held different professional accreditation: EYPS, EYTS and/or QTS Early Years (Osgood, 2009; Simpson, 2010). These concern on-going differences that exist between qualifications, contract terms, adult/child ratios and inspections, depending upon the location of employment either in the PVI or maintained sectors. Vincent and Braun (2009) state, despite the EYFS (2017) being the statutory curriculum underpinning all practice for early years practitioners, ‘the pay and conditions (and hence their professionalism) continues to represent the historic split between care and education’ (p. 349). Moss (2014) cautions, the continued development of different legislation regarding curriculum and qualifications that relate to either the PVI or maintained sectors, contributes to the growing divide. As a result Moss (2014) suggests practitioners across early years are faced with uncertainty in their roles. Simpson’s (2010) research indicates that the interface between colleagues holding different qualifications is particularly problematic.

The experiences of EYPs in the study demonstrate there may be some way to go before EYPS is regarded as having parity of esteem with qualified teacher status (QTS) across early years settings. This appears to be a negative by-product of setting up EYPS without addressing the issue of the continuing split early years workforce. (Simpson, 2010, p. 14)

The indication is that the introduction of EYTS exacerbates this ‘split’ and intensifies the discourse about understandings of the role for those that hold a professional status. The EYTS (DfE, 2014, 2017) course offered to practitioners working (or who want to work) in the PVI sector differs in design to that of the QTS Early Years course required by those who want to work in maintained early years settings. Essentially there are competing professional statuses, with different competency standards in the same phase of education that is governed by one statutory curriculum, the EYFS (2017). The differences are not clearly articulated by the governing body (NCTL, 2015; DfE, 2017a) and tensions and ambiguity concerning roles remain. *The Early Years Workforce Strategy* (2017) suggests the DfE are re-examining this debate: reviewing the comparability and employment of those holding different statuses. However, research critically examined in this subsection suggests that ‘change of career’ EYT graduates entering the early years profession do so in an unstable inter-sectorial context.

The introduction of EYTS may have contributed to the professionalism discourses concerning the ‘split’ in early years as EYTs demonstrate professional competency standards that are different to other professional statuses within the same sector. There is implication for these differences to be misinterpreted: the EYT is the teacher but not qualified to work as the teacher in government maintained early years settings. By implication the EYT is different but (like those with QTS) they are accountable for monitoring children’s progress and in keeping them safe from harm (EYFS, 2017). There is a need to better understand how EYTs work within their role and in particular how this affects their practice. There is a need to examine the interpretations of EYTs who are new to the sector and whether matters concerning role ambiguity are identified as significant to them in their deliberations about safeguarding and child protection practice. From the context of tensions emerging between EYTS and QTS the following section 2.2.2 goes on to explore other legislation that is influencing understandings of practice in early years, illuminating some of the potential challenges facing EYTs as they enter the profession with particular reference to safeguarding and child protection.

### **2.2.2 Perceptions of the Early Years Teacher role in practice**

The notion of accountability in early years, introduced in section 2.2.1, has been widely discussed in the sector (Osgood, 2010, 2012; Jones *et al.*, 2014; Moss, 2014; Urban, 2015; Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury, 2016). There is concern that statutory regulation and an increase in requests for data in early years has seen the demise of personal agency under a top

down ‘regulatory gaze’ (Osgood, 2010). Moss (2013) cautions that the accountability culture has potentially disempowered early years professionals/teachers and limits their opportunities to demonstrate professional discretion based on values and understandings of practice. Basford and Bath (2014, p. 120) suggest accountability emphasis makes it ‘difficult to recognize children as individual and potentially idiosyncratic learners’: that the datafication of early years affects practitioners’ abilities to observe children with open rather than outcome focussed minds (Daniels, 2012). This discourse has potential implications for safeguarding and child protection if the suggestion is that practitioners consider their role as one that focuses mainly on curriculum observations related to education assessment outcomes and progress. There is indication that EYTs may be influenced by measurable attainment practices in learning rather than the more rounded nature of a child’s development (and factors that may affect this). Related research (Osgood, 2010; Simpson, 2010, Hadfield *et al.*, 2012) provides some indication of how early years practitioners perceive their roles and responsibilities although findings are holistic and relate to practices in general. There is very limited research that explores how accountability regulation has impacted upon an EYT’s autonomy within practice and in particular whether the sense of personal agency specifically enables them to manage safeguarding and child protection practices effectively. However, undertaking a critical review of related literature has supported my understanding of the contextualisation of practices and tensions in terms of expectations that EYTs might face as they enter the profession.

Simpson (2010) examined practitioners’ perceptions of their role in early years and his findings indicate,

the pervasive nature of official discourse connected to regulatory frameworks was visible in the narratives of interviewees but it became clear that it was not determining in shaping what interviewees thought their professionalism is about. Indeed, interviewee’s themselves felt its influence should not be over-exaggerated and was more benign than some theorists suggest with official discourse being open to interpretation. (Simpson, 2010, p. 7)

This suggests perceptions of the professional/teacher role in early years are not wholly being driven and shaped *from above* through imposed legislation (Osgood, 2006b, 2010; Evetts, 2011). However, the participants in Simpson’s (2010) research are employed practitioners and experienced in early years practice. Interpretations of their role are articulated through a reflective model situated within the employment organisation and developed over time (Simpson, 2010). Their knowledge is contextualised. In my research project the attention is



focussed on new ‘change of career’ graduates into the early years workforce. The perceptions, experiences and understandings of their role as EYTs are likely to be different to those in Simpson’s (2010) research. Their knowledge is not initially contextualised in professional practice. It is based upon knowledge of other people’s experiences, conveyed through their EYTS training.

The ‘change of career’ graduates may already have some conceptualisation of what being a professional/teacher means based on personal experiences of education (Brock, 2012). They enter employment with the title of EYTS but with only eighteen weeks of training in practice. The tension is that a practitioner being awarded the professional status indicates a level of *expertise* either for the individual or within the setting that they are employed (Early *et al.*, 2007; Brock, 2012). The assumption of expertise relates to all aspects of their role, including safeguarding and child protection. Eraut (2002, 2004) explores notions of expertise, professional knowledge and competence as a process of experience. He discusses the implications of certain behaviours that become more efficient as knowledge is refined through experiences in practice. Eraut (2002, p. 44) suggests exposure to professional experience over time enables the reduction of possible ways of thinking that leads to ‘intuitive reliance’ on certain ways of working. He suggests experience enables a ‘process of generalization’ in professional practice as practitioners learn to handle situations more ‘quickly and efficiently’ drawing upon knowledge gained through personal experience or from the reported experiences of others.

Whilst training in safeguarding and child protection is a statutory requirement for those undertaking EYTS (DfE, 2017b), the course of action subsequently taken in the work setting is considered their professional response: influenced by personally exclusive knowledge, understandings and experience. The tension is whether responses are indeed indicative of effective professional practice. It is possible that some behaviours exhibited by EYTs may differ from expected professional responses. As Frowe (2005, p. 49) cautions, some may ‘observe and copy certain strategies but lack the experience that enables their judgment to become sufficiently attuned to the particular circumstances.’ Frowe (2005) suggests professional trust might describe how society perceives the legal and moral credibility of teachers and judgments they make in practice. In the context of my research, EYTs are trusted to manage professional practice situations such as those found within safeguarding and child protection. These practices require knowledge but with a depth of understanding

about contextual situations that might be gained through experience (Eraut, 2002). The assumption is that the award of EYTS may suggest expertise, and EYT's responses will ensure trust in the profession is maintained (Frowe, 2005). Literature that I have critically explored may suggest otherwise. EYT's may not be able to rely on expert knowledge gained through the professional experience process, as their practices are limited. Instead the EYT's may draw on expertise gained through other life experiences.

Eraut (2004, p. 251) explains that experience is 'accumulated learning from a series of episodes' and the notion of intuition may be derived from the 'aggregated memories of the perceptions of many previous episodes': that experience is an instinct of knowing what is or is not an appropriate course of action. Eraut (2004, p. 253) cautions, 'because the aggregation process has not been under our conscious control, there is a danger that our selection and interpretation of information from these episodes [is] biased'. The EYT's may lack experience in professional practice but they may have accumulated knowledge of safeguarding and child protection through the training course and other means. This may not be contextualized within professional practice, but within personal histories. The EYT's may not be aware of intuitive understandings influencing their practice. As Eraut (2004) explains,

Intuitive understanding signifies some familiarity with most or all aspects of the situation, but cannot be described as procedural knowledge if it does not lead to rapid decisions. This could be either because no sensible options readily come to mind or because the level of risk suggests that the original understanding should be checked before taking any further action. Often this intuitive understanding is not fully recognized until somebody, deliberating between two or more options, expresses a strong preference for one particular option, because they suddenly feel that it fits the situation much better than the alternatives. (Eraut, 2004, p. 253)

Within the context of early years safeguarding and child protection the notion of intuition as described by Eraut (2004) may influence EYT's' practices. It is unlikely they will have 'some familiarity with aspects of the situation' (ibid) within the professional context but they may draw on intuition as learned through personal histories to make judgments in practice.

Oakeshott (1989) suggests professionals/teachers exercise judgment when they have the ability to reflect upon information (impersonal facts), understand meaning, recognise possible strategies and make decisions in unique situations. Oakeshott (1989) states impersonal facts can be taught and learned, but cautions that judgments can only be acquired through immersion in professional practice experiences. He suggests judgments are mostly founded upon personal histories: that whilst experienced professionals may make different judgments based upon the same information, experience enables them to identify the most appropriate

strategies to undertake within the professional context. The inference is that inexperienced professionals such as the EYTs in this research project, will be expected to make appropriate judgments in safeguarding and child protection, but may lack the professional experience to do so.

Eraut (2004) and Schmidt and Boshuizen (1993) examine the notion of expertise in professional practice and suggest it is the ability to use knowledge for efficient and effective purposes. If expert knowledge comes from aggregated and conscious memories of collective episodes as suggested by Eraut (2004), when immersed in practice (Oakshott, 1989), then there may be possibility that the rarity of some safeguarding and/or child protection incidences might result in a lack of expertise around this aspect of professional practice. As discussed in section 2.2.1, there may be understanding that EYTs are the professional/teacher with assumed experience and a level of expertise to enable them to respond to incidences in safeguarding and child protection appropriately. The literature reviewed in this section indicates this might not always be the case. Actions may differ if knowledge is defined by information held but not contextualized within professional experience. With very limited involvement in practice EYTs who have undertaken the 'change of career' course may be drawing on experiences from other aspects of their lives in order to make sense of any safeguarding and child protection situations they encounter. A longitudinal study of EYPS by Hadfield *et al.*, (2012) found that professionals that followed a change of career pathway became identified as 'novice practitioners'. The term 'novice' indicating that whilst these practitioners were regarded in the same light as their more experienced EYPs because of their status award, they were identified as inexperienced in practice and in need of support from a more experienced practitioner in order to understand their role. This issue raises another tension that concerns the role of a more experienced practitioner that suggests there is 'expertise' in each setting.

This research project seeks to explore whether EYTs reveal some of the issues discussed above including ambiguity in roles, different understandings of professional competences and judgment and whether, as Simpson (2010) found, they exercise personal agency within the changing legislative context. Eraut (2004) suggests that as learning through experience happens, 'there is a triangular relationship between challenge, support and confidence' (Eraut, 2004, p. 269): that professionals report increased levels of confidence when successfully meeting challenges as long as they feel supported in their settings. In the

following section (2.2.3) this notion is explored further and related legislation and literature is reviewed to critically examine whether supporting mechanisms are in place for EYTs at the start of their careers.

### **2.2.3 Early Years Teachers and supporting mechanisms within early years settings**

Early years trainees successfully completing QTS (Early Years) enter the profession and are required to undertake an additional induction year as Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) with the promise of a ‘personalised programme of development, support and professional dialogue...’ (DfE, 2018, p. 6). Trainees successfully completing the EYTS course enter the profession without this requirement. Whilst there may be debate concerning the purpose of an induction year there is a sense of transition for those with QTS into an established body of professional practice: the indication that support and opportunities for working with more experienced teachers is provided. For practitioners with EYTS there is no such indication. In practice the EYT may be the only practitioner holding a graduate status in their setting and may be isolated from peers. EYTs entering the early years workforce are reliant on mechanisms to support their practice that have been established within their individual employment settings and/or organisations.

Statutory requirements in the EYFS (DfE, 2017a) specify the need for supervisory support meetings to regularly take place for all early years employees who have contact with children and families. Supervisory meetings are explained as the forum for practitioners in early years to receive support and opportunities for development. It is stated under section 3.22 of the EYFS (2017) that ‘supervision should provide opportunities for staff to: discuss any issues - particularly concerning children’s development or well-being, including child protection concerns; identify solutions to address issues as they arise; and receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness’ (DfE, 2017a, p. 21). The indication is there should be a forum for EYTs to receive effective support through the implementation of supervision in practice: considered by some to be essential for effective safeguarding and child protection (Munro, 2011). A number of research articles have been written about supervision in education (Hawkins and Shohet, 2006; Richmond, 2009) but few of these relate specifically to addressing safeguarding and child protection issues and there are some indications that supervision in early years is not yet ‘an established strategy’ within practice (McMahon and Percival in Reid and Burton, 2013, p. 181). There are also assumptions that supervisory

meetings enable practitioners to reflect on practice with a more knowing other (Reid and Burton, 2013). In some early years settings this might be problematic. Typically early years practitioners with varied qualifications and experience may be asked to supervise EYTs who might be expected 'to know' (as disclosed by the GE graduate in section 1.3). The research reviewed in this section indicates EYTs may be entering employment with support mechanisms that are locally determined and which may be particularly problematic for lone workers and small early years providers.

In the context of this research study, understanding support available for EYTs is meaningful. As mentioned in subsection 2.2.2, Eraut (2004) noted a relationship between work challenges, support within the workplace and the level of confidence articulated by professionals. Whilst keen to point out his findings are not generalizable Eraut (2004) notes in particular that confidence expressed by novice professionals could be adversely affected if their work demanded coping response mechanisms, rather than reflective responses to challenges that arise in practice. He cautions professionals are more efficient in practice where they have considerable experience, but 'if there is neither a challenge nor sufficient support to encourage a person to seek out or respond to a challenge, then confidence declines and with it the motivation to learn' (Eraut, 2004, p. 269). Eraut's (2004) work provides a critical perspective to support the analysis of data generated by this research project through an exploration of what support mechanisms the EYTs might draw on when disclosing their experiences in safeguarding and child protection practice. He draws attention to the notions of reflective responses as opposed to coping responses when dealing with challenge and the articulation of a causal effect on confidence.

Schön (1983) examines some of the complexities related to the need for teachers/professionals to be both reflective and reflexive in order to respond effectively to the uniqueness of professional practice. He suggests having technical know-how may not enable teachers to enact appropriate interventions: that know-how does not address the intricacies of diverse and dynamic social and political contexts. This is particularly relevant for safeguarding and child protection practices that are unpredictable and complex by nature. Schön (1983) suggests that to navigate what he terms the 'swampy lowlands' where 'the 'indeterminate zones' of everyday practice' relate to 'the problems of greatest human concern' (Schön, 1987, pp. 3-6), requires 'artful' competence: the ability of the teacher to be reflective and reflexive in order to adapt to multi-faceted and changeable situations.

The discourse concerning reflection and reflexivity in professional practice continues to be contested although many consider them essential to enable effective enactment of the role (Dunn, Harrison and Coombe, 2008; Urban, 2008; Bolton, 2014). In the context of early years the EYTS standards outline the expectation that EYTs should have both reflective and reflexive capabilities (NCTL, 2013): to be able to examine and evaluate professional practice within their employment organisation as well as to examine and evaluate the organisation itself (Kuisma and Sandberg, 2008). EYTs should be able to consider whether they are, ‘*doing things right* as well as *doing the right things*’ (Peeters and Vandebroek in Miller and Cable, 2011, p. 10). The tension is whether EYTs consider they have appropriate knowledge, experience and support that enables an environment for reflection and reflexivity in the context of safeguarding and child protection: whether EYTs have reflective as opposed to coping responses (Eraut, 2004).

The EYTs are faced with making, ‘the education and care of babies and children their first concern... [being] accountable for achieving the highest possible standards in their professional practice and conduct... leading education and care... [and being] self-critical’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 2). As an overview of the expected role EYTs undertake, this reference enables the opportunity to illuminate key issues examined so far. The critical review of literature in this section has revealed it is likely EYTs may enter the profession with a focus on educative elements of practice (with increased requests for data on attainment and progress), with changing perceptions of accountability (as legislation continues to be reformed) and with varied support mechanisms in place to help them manage the complexities of the professional role. Some research suggests the balance of these challenges, and support to manage them, may result in impact upon confidence (Eraut, 2004). In safeguarding and child protection this might be particularly relevant as EYTs new to the profession may be considered novices with limited experience and might be isolated within practice. However, research reviewed suggests the presence of reflective skills and experience gained in other aspects of their lives may provide EYTs with the ability to make sense of situations as they arise in professional contexts (Schön, 1983; Bolton, 2014).

In the following section I critically examine literature that concerns the responsibilities of EYTs to care for as well as educate children as the political shift moves early years from a health to an education emphasis. I explore whether this transition is affecting how

practitioners ensure children are cared for and protected and whether this is perceived as a ‘taken for granted’ aspect of professional practice as the workforce remains predominantly female (Taggart, 2011). I examine whether the maternal discourse suggests practitioners have ‘inherent need’ to protect children, emerging from gendered emotional engagement (Noddings, 2003). The notions of care and education are critically explored to reveal some of the complexities and how they might be present in the EYTs reporting of safeguarding and child protection experiences.

### **2.3 The Early Years Teacher and notions of care and emotion in education**

As legislation shifts public perception of early years from a health to an education focus, new discourses are emerging. Some of these concern the impact of professionalisation on the sector (as discussed in section 2.2). Others illuminate particular demands of ensuring that children remain cared for whilst being educated (Moss, 2010). This tension concerns whether the shift in policy direction influences perceptions of care within the professional/teacher role and how this affects safeguarding and welfare practices. In this section the notion of care is examined within the changing educational context of early years. Discussions explore how care relates to the emotional engagement of practitioners (Hargreaves, 2000). Works by Tronto, (1993), Taggart (2011), Page (2011), Harwood *et al.*, (2013), Elfer (2013) and Nguyen (2016) are critically explored to illuminate potential understandings of how EYTs may be expected to care and how this relates to practices of safeguarding and protecting children. Finally, research by Hochschild (1983), Lumsden (2012) and Smith *et al.*, (2013) is examined to illuminate historical influences and emerging ways of multi-agency working that might influence perceptions of the caring role within the early years safeguarding and child protection context. This critical review supports the analysis of findings where EYTs might allude to emotions affecting behaviours in practice. The section begins with an examination of the notion of care within early years.

For babies and young children, research overwhelmingly endorses that secure relationships are beneficial in terms of their sense of self and for their attainments and achievements as they grow and develop (Maslow, 1943; Bowlby, 1969; Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Ainsworth, 1989). To optimise development and learning children need to be cared for and feel safe in that care. However, the notion of care within education is complex. Care as a concept has been widely discussed both within health and social care (Smith, 2012) and in the field of education (Demetrulias, 1994; Hare, 1993). In early years there are those that have discussed

care within the welfare agenda of legislation (Nutbrown and Clough, 2013). Others have debated the need for care to be associated with a set of attributes that EYTs should demonstrate as part of their professional role (Moss, 2010; Lumsden, 2013; Miller and Dalli, 2014). In early years it is challenging to consider care as a separate entity to education as the two are so inextricably linked, however, they are referred to separately in the EYFS (2017). 'The framework covers the education and care of all children in early years provision' (DfE, 2017a, p. 6). In this statement the need to care and the need to educate indicate a separation of concepts and distinctness in requirements: care as provision for undisclosed needs related and yet isolated from learning. This implies difference in practice. However, the message is clear: practitioners are expected to care.

In the health sector the discourse of care has been widely contested (Smith, 2012). In social work 'care' is seen by some to affect the relationship between client and social worker but is still seen as an elusive concept (Dybicz, 2012). The debate across public service professions illustrates the challenge of defining care. Watson and Smith (2002, p. 455) acknowledge, 'caring is understood as a value-laden relation of infinite responsibility to self and others.' They suggest caring is unique to the individuals involved: that there is difference in care depending upon the carer and the recipient of that care. Smith (1999) suggests 'care' has different meanings depending upon the context in which it is being conceptualised: that it is a theoretical perspective that defines the uniqueness of what care means to individuals. For EYTs new to the profession, this may be problematic. Paradoxically there is tension between a clearly defined set of statutory practice expectations (teachers will care) and an elusive, contextually and personally influenced notion of what it means to care in professional practice (how to care). One teacher might choose to care through demonstrable practices that differ to another's. Some care practices might be considered contentious in a professional context such as teachers hugging children. The EYFS (2017) presents uncertainty. Within the context of professional practice, EYTs interpretations and demonstrations of care may be in conflict with other professionals.

The EYFS (2017) outlines curriculum requirements for children from birth until statutory school age, and contains several sections that refer to children being 'in the care' of providers whilst receiving 'education'.



Early years providers must guide the development of children's capabilities with a view to ensuring that children in their care complete the EYFS ready to benefit fully from the opportunities ahead of them. (DfE, 2017a, p. 7)

There is a sense that care in this context is overarching. The child is situated within an environment of care to enable learning. The assumption is that care is facilitated. It is not explicit but implicit within the learning environment: a pre-condition to expedite learning that is necessary but not wholly sufficient. The statutory assigned key person is to 'ensure that every child's learning and care is tailored to meet their individual needs' (DfE, 2017a, p. 10). By implication care may be located within a defined adult task-oriented outcome: the key person demonstrates a set of actions that have been custom-made for each child. As Tronto (1993, p. 176) states, caring is about 'meeting the needs of the particular other or preserving the relationship of care that exists.' It is argued this might be called the 'act of caring' or 'caring for' the child: addressing their needs through the 'act of labour' (Held, 2006, p. 56). Hochschild (1983) argues care practice is separate from caring and uses the term 'emotional labour' to describe the taught rather than intuitive care that practitioners might demonstrate. She suggests skills required for caring can be learnt and demonstrated by 'deep acting', involving the suppression of personal feelings. Hochschild's (1983) notion that care can be learnt indicates personal preferences demonstrated within professional work may be less influential in determining practice. Her acknowledgement of the need to demonstrate practice commensurate with care suggests the concept is one with defined outcomes: that care can be determined through action.

Hochschild (1983) recognises that 'deep acting' care may also require a sense of emotional engagement involving deep empathetic sensitivities, recognising individual preferences and an overwhelming need to resume normality. There is a sense that instinctive, intuitive response might be described as 'caring about'. Research by Tronto (1993) and Held (2006) suggests this involves concern and sensitivity to another: an investment in their wellbeing that acts as motivation to initiate actions. Nguyen (2016, p. 288) argues, 'to care about another involves having the emotional and intellectual awareness and sensitivity to recognize a need exists which requires attention.' In the context of early years safeguarding and child protection, discussion of these notions illuminates some of the complexities EYT's might experience. Within the EYFS (2017) 'care' is not defined, explained or discussed. Therefore the notion of care is open to interpretation and by implication founded upon individual conceptualisation. It may be considered highly subjective in context: embedded in cultural

difference and individual values and beliefs. Care in this respect indicates a highly differential context where personal inclinations may influence professional practice. If care is related to ‘emotional and intellectual awareness’ of practitioners (Nguyen, 2016, p. 288) then some examination of related research may support the analysis of data where EYTs may allude to emotions during practices of safeguarding and child protection.

Hargreaves (2000) conducted research into the emotions of teachers and found that the younger the child, the higher the level of emotional intensity they expressed. ‘Elementary teachers, especially, claim not only to have affection for students but, in some cases, even to love them’ (Hargreaves, 2000, p. 817). In his research, Elfer (2007) explores how practitioners manage emotions in the context of their practice. He describes this in terms of professional conduct in order to carry out expected behaviours. He suggests for emotions to be managed effectively practitioners need to feel valued themselves and require opportunities to talk about their feelings (see subsection 2.2.3). O’Connor (2008, p. 119) suggests ‘emotions are the means through which teachers personally interpret the demands placed upon them’: that emotions are an integral part of practice and practitioners need to experience emotions in order to respond effectively in different contexts.

As mentioned in subsection 2.2.1, discourse concerning the professional role in early years has been considered by some as an extension of the maternal role (Stonehouse, 1989) and the predominantly female workforce as reinforcing the notion of ‘feminine capital’ (Huppertz, 2009): that employment advantage can be gained by capitalising on characteristics associated with moral obligation, such as caring for and protecting children. Penn (2000) surmises those entering early years commonly build on interactions historically perceived as the maternal role. This notion may indicate a tension for EYTs entering the profession. Characteristics such as caring are not traditionally explored as part of training although expected in practice (DfE, 2017b). Research may indicate the notion of caring in early years is founded upon historical maternal beginnings but as Noddings (1997, p. 678) suggests, this may be considered advantageous in professional practice as, ‘developing people with a strong capacity for care is a major objective of responsible education.’ EYTs in my research project may refer to care in relation to the maternal discourse and this may indicate whether those new to the field hold these prevailing views.

Taggart's (2011) research examines notions of care and emotional labour within the early years context. He argues early years should be recognised as 'a 'caring profession' like others such as nursing or social work, defined by a moral purpose' (Taggart, 2011, p. 85). He acknowledges differences between competences of professional practice and the need for moral and ethical care in order to meet the demands of social justice. Taggart (2011) cautions, EYTs working with young children do so in an environment requiring emotional engagement within an unpredictable social and political context. He suggests caring for children forms part of assumed moral characteristics of teachers within personal pedagogy. This sense of moral and ethical care is captured by Moyles (2001, p. 83) who states 'to be an early years practitioner carries the expectation that you will like all of the children all of the time and respond to them as unique individuals: in this way, operating from the emotions is positively expected by society.'

The obligation to invest in emotional engagement supports the argument that EYTs might locate their practice within a highly personalised and emotional context. Page (2011) suggests the term 'professional love' might best describe relational pedagogy between practitioners and very young children. She argues emotional attachment experienced by practitioners is not unlike a sense of deepened care. Her research indicates that mothers looking to place their children in nurseries want practitioners to 'love' their children. However, Page (2011) acknowledges that the mothers in her research use interchangeable terms to describe what she calls 'professional love'. Words and phrases such as 'care', 'extended professional relationship', 'compassion' and 'understanding the needs' of the child are used to describe mothers' expectations of practitioners. Page's (2011) work suggests there are social expectations of moral principles within early years practice that relate to features and behaviours of individual practitioners beyond those stated in statutory legislation. As Carr (2005, p. 261) suggests, 'the key point is that those who lack certain fundamental qualities of ordinary moral human character and association – of temperance, courage, honesty, fairness (justice), wisdom (good practical judgment) – are unlikely to be effective teachers.'

Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) suggest the essence of a caring professional in early years might be described in terms of a 'presence'. They suggest presence is, 'a state of alert awareness, receptivity and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environment, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step' (Rodgers and Raider-Roth,

2006, p. 265). This suggests interactions with children are intimately associated with an individual's morality. McDowall Clark and Murray (2012) promote the 'moral purpose' of early years practice and argue, 'passionate care for furthering the well-being of children is an ethically active professional orientation, not a domestic concept of care' (McDowall Clark and Murray, 2012, p. 31). The emerging argument suggests demonstrations of care in a professional context may be founded upon personal moral obligations.

The literature explored in this section overwhelmingly suggests practitioners working with very young children experience a level of emotional engagement that differs in intensity to practitioners working with older age groups. Whether this is due, in part, to the historical emergence of early years from a largely maternal position, remains a topic of debate. However, there seems little argument to counter the suggestion that those working in early years are expected to demonstrate qualities such as caring that are commensurate with keeping children safe and protecting them from harm. In Section 3 of the EYFS 'Safeguarding and welfare requirements' (DfE, 2017a, p. 21) this notion of protection is referenced, indicating that care in this context is related to legal responsibility.

Providers must notify local child protection agencies of any serious accident or injury to, or the death of, any child while in their care, and must act on any advice from those agencies. (DfE, 2017a, p. 28)

Legislation requires that practitioners must provide care. In the context of safeguarding and child protection there is consensus that all those employed within the children's workforce take responsibility for a child's care, health and wellbeing above all else (Munroe, 2011; DfE, 2017a). However, there is tension as to whether this care is provided as *caring for*, *caring about* and/or both (Tronto, 1993). The literature reviewed in this section so far suggests that legislation indicates practitioners *care for* children and research indicates practitioners *care about* children. My research project provides the opportunity to examine EYT's disclosures of emotional engagement and how emotions might be revealed and/or described in the context of safeguarding and child protection practices: alluding to notions of caring for and/or caring about the children with whom they work.

Examining discourses related to early years arising predominantly from the reconceptualization of early years as part of the education profession, have illuminated several key considerations that will inform the analysis of my findings in this research project. These include potential role ambiguities and accountability changes arising from

legislative reform, and expectations of practice related to qualifications (as discussed in subsections 2.2.1, 2.2.2 and 2.2.3). They also include tensions arising in terms of the transition of early years from a care to an education focus, and potential influences on changing emphasis within practice: that care may be perceived as part of the wellbeing requirements without acknowledgement of personal engagement or part of an assumed moral obligation founded in the maternal discourse. The literature that has been critically examined suggests current changes in professional qualifications may raise expectations of practice that are presumptuous: that EYTs have knowledge, skills, experience and attributes to manage safeguarding and child protection practices effectively. It is in the context of safeguarding and child protection that there is a need to also critically examine the notion of multi-agency working: the legislative requirement for professionals in the children's workforce to work effectively together to safeguard and protect children (DfE, 2015). In the following section (2.4) this notion is explored in the context of early years legislation that affects policies and procedures in practice.

#### **2.4 Early Years Teachers and multi-agency working in safeguarding and child protection**

Waring and Currie (2009) suggest it is the language of a profession that can become the instrument by which certain ways of working are adhered to: that practitioners adopt a professional identity through their working practices. As already explored in sections 2.2 and 2.3, there are discourses that relate specifically to working practices in early years that are affected by a number of factors. Those examined include EYTs having specialized knowledge and also attributes and characteristics that enable them to demonstrate behaviours conducive to appropriate professional conduct in different contexts. The inference here is that specialized knowledge and attributes are discipline specific (early years): they are situated within a profession and locally demonstrated in practice (in settings). However, in safeguarding and child protection this is problematic. Legislation and guidance is interpreted across children's services. It is the responsibility of professionals to ensure that practice specific requirements meet compliance categories within their own professions. For EYTs there is challenge of understanding safeguarding and child protection within the context of the legal jurisdiction of their professional domain (early years). As discussed in section 1.3 definitions and practices in safeguarding and child protection differ within and between professions. The discourse related to multi-agency working is therefore relevant to the context of this research project. The investigation enables an exploration of how EYTs assign

meanings to their experiences of safeguarding and child protection and how they work with others.

The *Working together to safeguard children* (DfE, 2015) guidance document outlines differences between safeguarding and child protection. The definition stated relates to safeguarding as an aspect of children's welfare: ensuring actions are taken to avoid children becoming at risk of harm and considered to be the responsibility of everyone in contact with them. Child protection relates to actions taken when a child has been identified at risk of harm: where specialised intervention is implemented to protect the child. Other documentation specific to education such as *Keeping children safe in education* (2015) focuses on safeguarding aspects of practice and states,

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is defined for the purposes of this guidance as: protecting children from maltreatment; preventing impairment of children's health or development; ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children to have the best outcomes. Where a child is suffering significant harm, or is likely to do so, action should be taken to protect that child. (DfE, 2015, no page)

Practitioners have long understood that maltreatment of young children has far reaching implications into adulthood (Finkelhor, 2008; McKee and Dillenburger, 2010). Legislation determines that all education practitioners are therefore trained to recognize signs of abuse. There is some research in primary education to suggest teachers are aware of safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures (Baginsky, 2008; McGarry and Buckley, 2013). Registered early years settings are required to have policies that specifically define safeguarding and child protection and state processes and procedures to be undertaken at local level (Ofsted, 2015; DfE, 2017a). The challenge for EYTs is not only to know what safeguarding and child protection means, but to more fully appreciate the inference arising from definitions that imply a certainty of being able to protect children, prevent abuse, ensure safety and enable potential. It is this certainty that is explicitly outlined in legislation (DfE, 2017a) and, by implication, understood by society to be the responsibility of the professional/teacher. However the notion of professional is generalized within safeguarding and child protection legislation. It does not recognize difference within separate professions. 'Change of career' graduates with EYTS enter early years as the professional with endorsement from the DfE (2013) and face societal and political expectations within the complexities of safeguarding and child protection policy which are not fixed but dependent

upon constant change (Walsh *et al.*, 2010). There is tension that all professionals regardless of discipline should have agreed understandings of safeguarding and child protection but this is not the case (Munro, 2011).

EYTs are awarded their professional status when they have demonstrated competency standards. Included in these is a statement requiring EYTs to ‘Understand the importance of and contribute to multi-agency team working’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 5). Whilst rather problematic it is essential that the phrase, ‘multi-agency team working’ is highlighted in terms of positioning this research within education as opposed to a health or social care context. Research specifically examining the context of multi-agency team working in the context of safeguarding and child protection practice in early years is very limited. Therefore, related works in education have been critically explored to enable some understanding of potential complexities facing EYTs as they undertake training and begin their careers.

Baginsky’s (2007) four-year research study examined how teachers and social workers (in England) work together and found many teachers unclear about their role in child protection. He reports failings to recognise or report situations where children might be deemed at risk or suffering harm. He notes some teachers consider their responsibilities fulfilled once they make a referral to children’s social care. Baginsky (2007) concludes ambiguity exists between what is meant by working with other agencies and between respective roles and responsibilities. Subsequent research by Baginsky, Driscoll and Manthorpe (2015) explores changes to professional guidance for practitioners in safeguarding and child protection and found that rather than providing clarification, ‘Greater dependence on professional judgment is emphasised, requiring professional expertise and confidence in responding to safeguarding concerns’ (Baginsky, Driscoll and Manthorpe, 2015, p. 256). In section 2.2, literature examined suggests EYTs are entering the profession encountering uncertainties in role as a result of rapid legislative reform. In addition the notion of knowledge gained through experience (Eraut, 2004) and the relationship between experience and confidence has been critically explored. Baginsky, Driscoll and Manthorpe’s (2015) findings are therefore concerning as the requirement to work with other professionals from different agencies might exacerbate some of the challenges EYTs may already be facing. As Dyson, Farrell, Kerr and Mearns (2008) caution, reform of welfare services raises concern over the potential for practitioners to,

move beyond existing working practices and procedural arrangements in order to engage in the sorts of evolutionary and negotiated approach to role definition [which] may result in considerable role ambiguity, interprofessional tension and the temptation to work beyond professional competence. (Dyson, Farrell, Kerr and Mearns, 2008, p. 3)

They highlight emerging tensions between professionals working across disciplines: the suggestion that practice might be compromised. Research by Anning *et al.*, (2006) also found the traditional position of having training in safeguarding and child protection undertaken within separate disciplines, results in misunderstandings across professions: exacerbating challenges with agency specific policies and practices. This in turn may contribute to a sense of uncertainty when EYTs are ‘faced with complex situations that require cooperation and collaboration’ (Trodd and Chivers, 2011, p. 43).

Lumsden’s (2012) research examines the perceived roles of practitioners holding the predecessor to EYTS: namely EYPS. Her findings note the emergence of a ‘new professional space’ at the intersection between health, education and social care. Lumsden (2012) suggests legislative reform and the requirement to work with other agencies, as specified in the Children Act 2004, raises concern over roles and responsibilities. She suggests that to work effectively with other agencies requires particular and different knowledge, skills and attributes than those developed through discipline specific training courses. Lumsden (2012) suggests that those with a professional status in early years presents an opportunity to recognise them as advocates for young children as they lead on working with others to ensure quality outcomes.

Research reviewed in this section suggests overarching safeguarding and child protection legislation and guidance in terms of multi-agency practice may affect EYTs in terms of understanding their role and responsibilities. EYTs will be working within environments of political and social reform generating uncertainty. In the following section I critically explore a related tension of EYTs working with parents when faced with the challenge of identifying a child deemed in need or at risk. I examine the legislative position of required ‘partnership working’ (DfE, 2017a) and how this relates to the notion of relationships between professionals/teachers and parents/carers during challenging situations.



## **2.5 Early Years Teachers working with parents/carers in safeguarding and child protection**

The statutory EYFS (2017) makes clear it ‘seeks to provide: **partnership working** between practitioners and with parents and/or carers’ (DfE, 2017a, p. 5) and in its overarching principles states, ‘children learn and develop well in **enabling environments**, in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between practitioners and/or parents/carers’ (DfE, 2017a, p. 7). In the context of these two statements the notion of partnership is complex. ‘Seeks to provide partnership working’ and ‘enabling environments’ (ibid) suggests the practitioner is the facilitator of ‘partnership’: by implication that ‘partnership’ is organised. The implicit suggestion is that early years practitioners enable partnership and lead the initiation of ventures. The EYT must, ‘4.3 Promote a love of learning and stimulate children’s intellectual curiosity in partnership with parents and/or carers’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 3) and ‘5.5 Know when a child is in need of additional support and how this can be accessed, working in partnership with parents and/or carers and other professionals’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 4). EYTs are tasked with the promotion of learning and in knowing when intervention is required, suggesting they have a specific role in developing and initiating partnership with parents/carers. In the context of early years legislation and professional status competences, the notion of partnership paradoxically indicates the need for EYTs to lead, although by way of definition the notion of partnership might be construed as an equal investment of interest, connection and cooperation between practitioners and parents/carers. Research into ‘partnership working’ in an education context indicates it is a widely debated and contested notion (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Knopf and Swick, 2007).

Cottle and Alexander (2014) explain that the origins of ‘partnership working’ within education are located in historical and political discourses. Their research indicates early years practitioners may hold prevailing views of parents/carers ‘as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ depending on their visibility within the setting and the way they support what happens there’ (Cottle and Alexander, 2014, p. 639): and as service users positioned to drive the political quality and accountability agenda (discussed in section 2.2). Cottle and Alexander (2014) caution that this view of parents influences relationships as early years practitioners wrestle with challenges of forming positive working partnerships where there might be sensitivities to diverse family cultures and contradictory policy discourses. Blackmore and Hutchison’s (2010) research in schools notes teachers have ambivalent relationships with parents/carers in response to partnership legislation: that policy presents an oversimplification of how

partnerships are formed and how complex issues of class and culture affects relationships between teachers and parents/carers that need to be developed in order to enact partnership working.

Rodd (2006) suggests partnership is a concept that needs to be founded upon positive relationships between practitioners and parents and proposes principles that she suggests can form effective partnership working. These include practitioners and parents having mutual respect for the expertise they hold and contributions they make to the partnership, with shared and collaborative responsibility for the children involved. In this conceptualisation Rodd (2006) indicates partnership is mutually constructed and the relationship is equal. However, McGrath (2007) suggests practitioners are unaware of the influence they have on parents/carers and concluded in her research that ‘true partnership’ cannot be realised in practice. Ward (2013, p. 30) also cautions, ‘the relationship between early years practitioners and parents/carers is shaped by the life experiences and backgrounds of both and is therefore characterised by great variety. As a consequence, professionals need to be very flexible in their approach to parents and use a range of different methods and strategies.’

The indication is that partnership working and how this is founded through the development of relationships, is highly complex. In early years Brooker (2010) cautions relationships necessary for the establishment of partnership working can be challenging. She identifies, ‘These important relationships are not necessarily easy to establish, and when differences of opinion develop they can cause distress for both parents and practitioners, which may in turn have an impact on the child on whom the relationship is focussed’ (Brooker, 2010, p. 182). Brooker (2010, p. 194) suggests relationships between practitioners and parents in early years practice are ‘fraught with opportunities for misunderstanding.’

Hohmann (2007) introduces the concept of a ‘triangle of care’ founded upon her research with childminders that recognises the interconnectedness of relationships between practitioners and parents/carers. Hohmann’s (2007) findings note relationships are affected by differences in expectations between practitioners and parents/carers and it is these expectations that can create positive trusting relationships or can generate tensions and disagreements. She suggests expectations are founded upon imbued and entrenched cultural values and beliefs that are individual and personal. Lang *et al.*, (2015) attempt to make sense of the challenges of relationships between teachers and parents in early years by introducing

the term ‘cocaring’ building on Feinburg’s (2002) conceptual framework of ‘coparenting’. Their research suggests relationships are influenced by how communication is perceived and how tensions can emerge when actions by the practitioners or parents are either endorsed and encouraged, or criticised and undermined.

The nature of relationships within partnership working reveals some of the complexities facing EYTs as they enter the profession. The literature that has been critically reviewed strongly suggests ‘partnership working’ is highly complex and contentious. The discourses reveal challenges of working in partnership where the participants (practitioners and parents/carers) may have different constructs of childhood and parenthood (Cottle and Alexander, 2014). Whilst legislation refers to ‘partnership working’ there is no further explanation or clarification of what this might mean in practice and how this relates to relationships formed between practitioners and parents/carers. In safeguarding and child protection, practice typically involves working in partnerships that may well be formed with the parents/carers but also with other professionals. In the context of my research project the EYTs might refer to these partnerships and to relationships they may have formed to enable partnership activities to be enacted. An awareness of these discourses will support the analysis of the EYTs descriptions of their safeguarding and child protection experiences.

## **2.6 Summary**

The literature, legislation and research reviewed in this chapter provides a contextual frame around some of the potential influences that EYTs might experience in safeguarding and child protection practice. Key areas examined relate to the possibility of influences emerging from the reconceptualization of early years as a profession, revealing issues between and within roles and responsibilities as legislative reform imposes greater accountability in practice. The identity of early years as part of the education profession illuminates some of the tensions between ‘caring for’ and ‘caring about’ children as practitioners experience changes to statutory welfare requirements that incorporate safeguarding and child protection. There are suggestions of emerging concerns from legislative directives and guidance to work effectively with other agencies and in partnership with parents. The literature reviewed has revealed related but not specific research that explores these notions from the perspective of ‘change of career’ EYTs.

In the following chapter I outline how the research project was planned and implemented to capture the EYTs experiences. The structure of the project is explained and includes the ethical considerations undertaken, the limitations of the enquiry and some of the challenges faced as data was gathered from EYTs in their first year of employment. The chapter also explains how data was analysed, and how themes emerged, to provide some meanings that EYTs attributed to the phenomena of safeguarding and child protection in practice.

## **Chapter 3 Methodology**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This research project arose from my curiosity to examine why GE EYTs were anecdotally expressing anxieties concerning the safeguarding and child protection aspects of their professional practice. The literature reviewed for chapter two suggests potential issues might be related to the professionalisation of the sector and the positioning of child ‘care’ perceived by some as part of the welfare requirements that incorporate safeguarding and child protection directives (EYFS, 2017). Whilst there is related research that explores some of these matters there is very little focussed specifically on the aspect of safeguarding and child professional practice from the perspectives of EYTs new to the sector, so I wanted to know what it was like for them.

The focus for the research project was concerned with a particular group of participants who gained EYTS through a one-year course designed to attract graduates from other fields into the early years workforce. These fields may not have been related to early years, so it is recognised these participants are likely to have both personal and professional backgrounds that are diverse and multi-dimensional. At the start of the enquiry they would all be in new employment roles and situated in varied and diverse settings in terms of ethos and organisation. The complexity of conducting a research project with new staff, in new roles, in new settings and in a new field of work, is so multi-faceted that the research approach, design and the implementation needed to be sensitive to the personal and professional intricacies involved.

The notion of the research being embedded in experience and my involvement in interpreting findings led to an exploration of qualitative and interpretive research methodologies. Section 3.2 includes a brief explanation of how these methodologies influenced my exploration into empirical phenomenology to support the framing of the research design. This is followed by discussion of the research project as it was intended (3.3-3.8), including design of the project, use of a preliminary study, selection of research participants, data-gathering and storage methods, ethical processes undertaken, and how data was analyzed. At each stage a rationale is provided to enable clarification of why decisions, choices and actions have been taken. Where appropriate, issues concerning reliability and validity have been synthesized within discussions.

### **3.2 Rationale for empirical phenomenology**

‘Novice researchers are often overwhelmed by the plethora of research methodologies, making the selection of an appropriate research design for a particular study difficult’ (Groenewald, 2004, p. 42). At the start of this research project this was not the most encouraging assertion to come across and my initial reading of literature on the matter certainly appeared to add some gravitas to Groenewald’s statement. However, after studying educational research methodology through the EdD programme it became apparent I needed to let the enquiry focus suggest the research design and the tools for analysis: to carefully consider what it was I wanted to find out and what I needed to do to address the research questions (Hycner, 1999).

I focused on the need to examine the safeguarding and child protection experiences of EYTs and explored empirical research. ‘Empiricism is a philosophical term to describe the epistemological theory that regards experience as the foundation or source of knowledge’ (Punch, 2009, p. 2). Empirical research enables knowledge to be derived from actual experience rather than from theory, but acknowledges that the links between theory and experience are symbiotic: that one can inform the other. As Gray asserts, ‘Both the empirical and theoretical literature can be used to identify gaps in knowledge’ (2018, p. 176). My intention was to gather primary data from the EYTs experiences and consider related literature in the field of early years safeguarding and child protection. However, I recognized that, as the researcher, I was already embroiled in the issue. I considered having experience in the field and knowledge of early years safeguarding and child protection, I could not be detached from my own theoretical presuppositions (Hammersley, 2000). As Walliman suggests, ‘Being human ourselves, we cannot take an impartial view of others, and we cannot establish ‘facts’ as fixed eternal truths. We can only aim for interpretation and understanding of the social world’ (Walliman, 2006, p. 14). This ‘social world’ was the starting point for an exploration into phenomenology.

Phenomenology is a term used to encompass a philosophical movement and a range of research approaches that can be traced to Kant (1764), but Husserl (1859-1938) is considered the founder of phenomenology as it is referred to from the twentieth century (when published in English). His philosophical methodology was based on scientific methods for finding and guaranteeing ‘essential structures of consciousness’ (Priest, 2017): that knowledge was derived from experience. He contested that information about the material world could not be

considered reliable and that people could only be certain about how things appear whilst in ‘consciousness’.

Heidegger (1889-1976) moved away from this philosophical stance towards an existential and interpretive position (Finlay, 2009). Heidegger introduced the concept of ‘dasein’ or ‘there-being’: the notion that the observer cannot remove themselves from the processes of ‘essence identification’ but that they exist within the phenomenon (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Finlay (2009) asserts that according to Heidegger’s position, phenomenology is the study of the nature and meanings of phenomena: the emphasis is on the way things appear through conscious experience (not just consciousness of the phenomenon). People come to know their worlds through their experiences in relation to other entities that also exist in that world. As Miles *et al.*, (2013, p. 411) explain, ‘People’s actions can only be understood when placed within a social construct; thus the ‘taken for granted’ meanings and routines of everyday life can be unraveled and illuminated’.

Schütz (1899 - 1956) furthered the idea of conscious experience and suggested ‘the human world comprises various provinces of meaning’ (Vandenberg, 1997, p. 7). He considered perspectives of phenomena in the life-world were rooted in the unique life history of every person. He suggested ‘stocks of knowledge’ and ‘stores of experience’ are the means by which ‘individuals make sense of their life-worlds’ (Wagner, 1970, p. 13). Schütz (1932) suggests the observer in the experience assigns meanings. These meanings have both motivation (there is a need to know why an action has taken place), and they are value based (culturally and socially situated). According to van Manen (2001) it is this phenomenological frame that provides a useful pedagogical context for lived experience research: to question the way a person experiences their life-world. In relation to my research project the attraction of this approach situates the experiences of EYTs at the center of in-depth explorations into the phenomenon of safeguarding and child protection: an approach that has the potential to illuminate the phenomenon as experienced by education practitioners. However, the quality of this illumination requires careful attention.

One of the challenges of phenomenology is the reluctance to prescribe methods that might be helpful in the design of the research project and in the data analysis (Holloway, 1997). This is attributed to the possible imposition of a rigid technique or process affecting the ‘integrity of the phenomenon’ (Hycner, 1985, p. 144). Much is written about the difficulties of capturing

phenomenological understandings and insights. As van Manen states, ‘The term *phenomenology* occurs in a confusing abundance and range of qualitative studies and publications’ and he cautions against ‘constructivist approaches to phenomenology where meaning is (pre-) determined, constructed, or attributed to a phenomenon or event by the subject (van Manen, 2017, p. 775). He advocates freedom to be attentive to the enigma of experiences revealing ‘fathomless depths, rich details, startling disturbances, and luring charms’ (van Manen, 2017, p. 779). However, Lester (1999, p. 1) states, ‘Adding an interpretative dimension to phenomenological research enabling it to be used as the basis for practical theory, allows it to inform, support or challenge policy and action.’ This notion was appealing in terms of my research project. I had already identified that the intended participants’ were employed within professional practice and the phenomenon under consideration was situated within that practice. The interpretative dimension would provide the frame from which pedagogical meanings might emerge (van Manen, 2001).

The diverse and extensive interpretive challenge meant an awareness that the design and methods used in this research project would be influenced by, and represent my own thinking about the ‘social reality’ being studied (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). I bring to the research assumptions about how the world is socially constructed in early years safeguarding and child protection and this frames my methods. This aligns with empirical phenomenology that ‘is characterised by the way the researcher approaches the field’ (Aspers, 2009, p. 7). Empirical phenomenology is concerned with how ‘philosophical and theoretical insights of phenomenology can be used in empirical research’ (Aspers, 2009, p. 1). It builds on assumptions that the social world is socially constructed, there is a central role of theory in research and that it is ‘the actors’ perspectives that are central to the analysis’ (Aspers, 2009, p. 1). This resonated with my positioning within the framing of the research project and this is discussed in the following paragraphs.

All research undertakings begin with a focus, a problem or an interest (Creswell, 1994) and in this case the issue was *not knowing* what safeguarding and child protection matters were being experienced by EYTs as they began to report challenges in practice. As the researcher, my epistemological position, or as Walliman (2011) defines, my ‘theory of knowledge’, was that any information about this issue was held within their everyday practice experiences. I decided that if this phenomenon was to be investigated then I would need to engage in dialogue with EYTs but recognising their subjective meanings play a crucial role in their



social actions: that each would interpret safeguarding and child protection practice experiences, dependent upon their unique personal and professional situations. Indeed Schütz (1966, p. 5) argues the researcher *should* ‘start with the life-world where the person acts’ within these ‘taken-for-granted attitudes’. Likewise, van Manen (1979, p. 520) asserts, research into the life-world is an approach that enables ‘an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning of naturally occurring phenomena in the social world’. Schütz (1932) suggests in the study of the social world, the starting point is examining the lived experiences of the people who are ‘looking at the world from within the natural attitude’ (Schütz, 1932, pp. 97-98). He illuminates the importance of constructing meaning and explains,

The thought objects constructed by the social scientist, in order to grasp this social reality, have to be founded upon the thought objects constructed by the common-sense thinking of men, living their daily life within their social world. Thus, the constructs of the social sciences are, so-to- speak, constructs of the second degree, that is, constructs of the constructs made by the actors on the social scene. (Schütz, 1962, p. 59)

Schütz clarifies that the participants in my research project will have constructed meanings about the safeguarding and child protection aspects of their professional practice in early years. As the researcher I will be constructing my own meanings from their accounts, disclosures and considerations of this phenomenon. Schütz acknowledges the researcher and participants might be more likely to construct meaning if they are aware of ‘each other’s provinces of meaning’ (Schütz, 1962, p. 220): that common signs and language in face-to-face interactions can facilitate understanding. I consider that reality and experience are socially constructed and interpreted and represent different ‘truths’ from the perspectives of those involved. In this respect I reasoned my ‘provinces of meaning’ might be considered what Connelly (2015) terms an ‘asset’ in the interpretation of reported experiences from different perspectives: that I might be able to make meaning from experiences reported by the EYTs as someone who uses similar language and has worked in similar environments, whilst also being alert to my assumptions, conjectures and beliefs.

I acknowledged that through the process of the research project I might inhabit multiple roles and identities such as lecturer, researcher and/or practitioner. There is literature that suggests the role undertaken by the researcher during the interview impacts upon the responses of the participants (Berger, 2015). My approach was to adopt the position of one who knows about the phenomenon (safeguarding and child protection) but not how this is experienced in

practice unique to GE graduates. This was articulated to the participants prior to each interview (appendix, A, p. 163) as an attempt to generate respectful rapport as education professionals. I wanted the participants to help me understand their experiences and as Schütz states, understandings might be realized if ‘one understands what the other means’ (Schütz, 1932, p. 20).

Schütz (1932) argues that in the social world each person constructs different perspectives that are due to their unique biographies and relational experiences. The inference is that the EYTs may reveal difference in their experiences of the phenomenon. The intention of this research is not to provide generalisations or to find one truth, but to analyse and reveal meanings that belong to the EYTs and that might lead to some understanding of the phenomenon being explored (Swanick and Barlow, 1994). As Aspers states, ‘We must not simply deliver descriptions of states of mind: social science must understand why and how things happen, and this must refer to the way people understand and relate to these phenomena’ (2009, p. 4). It is my intention in this research project to reveal interpretations and meanings attributed to safeguarding and child protection within the realities of early years practice. It is concerned with understanding the phenomenon of early years safeguarding and child protection from the reporting of the EYTs involved.

EYTs are employed in diverse settings and in varied roles. Their reality is their interpretation of their world and, ‘what in any given situation is formulated, communicated and understood is only a fraction of what could be noticed. Not everything present in a situation is relevant to the person’s involved in it’ (Wagner, 1970, p. 14). Schütz (1962) concedes that the individual’s life-world is selective and is also pre-structured by the other actors in the world through social construction of what is considered to be normal in that moment. He suggests the life-world is ‘prodded and guided by instructions, exhortations, and interpretations offered by others’ (ibid). In my research project this might mean practices in safeguarding and child protection that are influenced by stakeholders inside and outside of the setting such as colleagues, parents, children and other professionals: the adoption of some practices that shape their reporting of experiences. This suggests participants may share views of their life-world that could provide some ‘unity of outlook’ (ibid): some similarities. Alternatively, that the phenomenon might be in a constant state of change, as it is reliant on the social interactions and interpretations as they take place and therefore reveal differences unique to the EYTs. As the researcher I need to be aware of these complexities, however, as Schütz

(1962) advocates, I can explore their life-worlds, recognising that they are in the moment and personal. It is by examining the very uniqueness of their experiences that insights into what it is like to experience safeguarding and child protection might be revealed. It is intended that from these insights new knowledge may be generated that will inform my understanding and be of interest to others in early years or related fields.

Starting from the original aim of this project and related research questions I have identified an interpretive approach to the methodology, known as empirical phenomenology, as the means to frame this research project. The appeal of this methodology relates to examining a phenomenon that is temporal and uniquely located within the individual's experience of professional practice. However, as a novice researcher I have to understand the complexities of planning the project, gathering and analysing data and reporting findings from this position. In the follow section (3.3) I provide some explanation of how I drew on key texts to inform the research design.

### **3.3 Research design**

Empirical phenomenology is embedded in social reality that is 'an account of a series of interactions with the social world in a form which plausibly alerts us to the possibility of a new order not previously seen – a theoretical account', (Gherardi and Turner, 2002, p. 91). This may be a motivational and exciting prospect but one that is difficult to execute. For inexperienced researchers the first steps in planning a research project can be some of the most challenging as they bring together complex theoretical and conceptual ideologies. To help me navigate through meanings and understandings of design and methods in empirical phenomenology I explored the works of Aspens (2004, 2009) and Hycner (1985).

The design of the project was influenced by Aspens (2004) who suggests using a seven-step process to orientate an empirical phenomenological approach: defining the research question, conducting a preliminary study, choosing theories as schemes of reference, studying first-order constructs, generating second-order constructs, checking for unintended effects and relating the evidence to the empirical field of study. Whilst not entirely prescriptive I used this approach to provide shape to the research design. The following subsections (3.3.1 to 3.3.4) provide brief explanations of the domains of the design relating to the planning and implementation of the research, with reference to Aspens (2004) where appropriate. These

include how the research questions were defined, sampling, conducting the preliminary enquiry and the interview process.

In section 3.4, discussions show how I used Hycner's (1985) work on a staged approach to analysing data to provide me with guidance as I sought to generate meaning from the information gathered from the EYTs. Whilst Hycner cautions against the use of a prescriptive list, his staged process is 'presented as an attempt to sensitize the researcher to a number of issues that need to be addressed in analysing interview data' (Hycner, 1985, p. 280). Hycner's suggested process was drawn upon but not rigidly followed. Subsections 3.4.2 to 3.4.4 provide explanations of how the original semi-structured interviews were captured on recordings and transcribed followed by the process of analysis drawing on Schütz's (1962) notions of first-order and second-order constructs. The process enabled a very detailed and in-depth analysis and supported my awareness of potential issues. The process of analysis is illuminated with examples captured within the chapter and within appendices B to F (pages 165 to 171), so that the generation of meaning might be made transparent.

### **3.3.1 Defining the research questions**

'The researcher with a sociological imagination uses his or her own life experiences as topics of inquiry.' (Denzin, 2002, p. 350). In defining the aim of this research enquiry, this was certainly the case. As outlined in Chapter 1 the research questions arose from an encounter with a 'change of career' graduate asking me for support in safeguarding and child protection as they entered early years employment, having secured the post of CPO in the setting. The actual quote is captured on page 16 but what particularly resonated with me were the words, 'looking to me to know'. Reflecting upon this statement revealed that I did not 'know' either. I was not the EYT new to employment and new to the field of early years. This revealed to me a problematic issue in terms of my professional knowledge. I could not begin 'to know' the complexities of their safeguarding and child protection experiences. This led to a motivation to explore and uncover how the problematic issue might be 'organised, perceived, constructed, and given meaning' (Denzin, 2002, p. 350). I was curious to find out why issues were arising as discussed in chapter one: how safeguarding and child protection training was perceived by the EYTs, what safeguarding and child protection experiences the EYTs encountered in practice and what insights might enable new ways of thinking about this phenomenon. I wanted to know what it was like to experience safeguarding and child protection aspects of practice in an early years context.

As the essence of the research began to take shape I used Mason's (2002, p. 4) notion of 'active reflexivity' to focus my thinking. Mason (2002) advocates using active reflexivity throughout the research process in order to engage, respond and resolve issues as they emerge. She explains, 'Reflexivity in this sense means thinking critically about what you are doing and why, confronting and often challenging your own assumptions, and recognising the extent to which your thoughts, actions and decisions shape how you research and what you see' (Mason, 2002, p. 5). Drawing on Mason's (2002) active reflexivity, I was aware that my approach to this research project was from the position of an education professional, with practitioner experience in early years, primary and HE and with interest in the EYTs as educators. I recognised that the research project would be influenced, shaped and affected by personal and professional histories: viewing, responding and acting through the lens of an educator (Brookfield, 2017) to assign meanings. My life-world would be present (Schütz, 1966) and as such Berger (2015, p. 220) suggests the need for 'internal dialogue and critical self-evaluation of researcher's positionality as well as active acknowledgement and explicit recognition that this position may affect the research process and outcome.' In chapter one I make transparent the process of the progressive focussing of issues that influenced the framing of this research project and in section 3.2, I revealed some of the complexities of undertaking multiple roles as the professional practitioner/teacher researcher during the interview process (page 57). In terms of deciding the research questions, I used Mason's (2002) questions of strategy to engage in active reflexivity, which included exploring my ontological and epistemological positions and critical reflections about the purpose of the research. It was through the process of these considerations that my research questions were formed.

- How are early years graduates, located in one higher education institution, educated in safeguarding and child protection?
- What are their experiences of safeguarding and child protection practices over a period of one year in first employment?
- How might emerging themes arising from the lived experiences of the graduates' contribute to the enhancement of university education programmes in early years safeguarding and child protection?

Defining questions early in the research project enabled the study to be focussed and indicative of the area and location of professional practice to be examined. The challenges I encountered related to ensuring that the questions would inform the design but would not restrict potential outcomes: that arguments could be constructed in attempts to address the questions in the course of the research project. I decided the variation of ‘how’ and ‘what’ questions should enable the problematisation and exploration of issues (Mason, 2002, p. 20). However, I was also aware the questions might be refined as the research project evolved. The questions were specific to a particular group of students on a particular training programme and so sampling was part of the process of active reflexivity when exploring the initial essence of the project.

### **3.3.2 Sampling**

The research concentrates its focus on a specific group of people who have chosen to undertake a ‘change of career’ graduate course to the award of EYTS located in one HE organisation. The notion of purposive sampling was therefore applied to ‘reflect the purposes and questions guiding the study’ (Punch, 2009, p. 162). The criteria for selection to take part in the project were specific. This is known as ‘criterion sampling’ that involves, ‘all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance’ (Patton, 2002, p. 238). In this case there was a need for participants to have trained at the same time at the specified HE organisation and have entered employment in a registered early years setting directly following the successful completion of their course, achieving the award of EYTS. The sample was therefore time bound as the research project could only be started with participants between the completion of their training programme and the start of their employment: typically a window of two months between July and September. Undertaking a preliminary study in the year 2014-2015 indicated that the response rate to the invitation to participate in the research project might be low (see subsection 3.3.3). However, it was anticipated that adjustments made following the preliminary study should mitigate against some of the reasons given for lack of previous engagement. The decision was taken to invite all former students at the HE organisation who had achieved EYTS and started employment in an early years setting in 2015, to take part in the research that would commence data gathering in October 2015 and complete in July 2016.

The cohort on the EYTS GE course for ‘change of career’ graduates at the HE institution that could be the participant sample for the research project consisted of ten. All were provided

with information about the research project in June 2015 on successful completion of their course and with the award of EYTS. This information included an expression of interest form for them to provide contact details should they be willing to participate in the research project. All ten students expressed an interest in taking part subject to gaining employment in an early years setting. The EYTs were subsequently contacted in September 2015 to determine eligibility to become participants.

The following table shows the participant sample at the start of the research project schedule (October 2015). To protect the participants' anonymity (and the identity and location of their employment setting) only identification codes and general descriptions have been included.

***Table 1 Research Project Participants and Locations of Employment***

<b>Allocated Code for Participant</b>	<b>Nature of Early Years Setting</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>
P1020	Urban Nursery	Early Years Teacher
P1100	Urban School	Early Years Teacher
P1217	Urban Full Day Care	Early Years Teacher
P1318	Urban Full Day Care	Early Years Teacher
P1419	Rural School	Early Years Teacher
P1521	Urban School	Nursery Teacher
P1622	Rural Nursery	Early Years Teacher
P1723	---	Not employed in Early Years
P1824	No response to contact	Unknown
P1925	---	Not employed in Early Years

Seven of the potential ten participants that were contacted in October 2015 successfully met the selection criteria to take part in the research project and arrangements were made to gain ethical consent and agree interview dates.

One of the limitations of this purposive sample is that it may be considered unrepresentative of the total population of 'change of career' EYTs. This is somewhat mitigated by employment details that show participants located across a wide geographical area (urban and rural) and employed in a diverse range of early years settings. However, I consider that the specific group sample 'does not pretend to represent the wider population' (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000, p.103) but might reveal 'rich understandings' (Newby, 2010, p. 251) of the phenomenon from their localised and unique positions. The sample is considered to be large enough to provide access to enough data to address the research questions (De Chesnay and Botteriff, 2015). In empirical phenomenology guidance suggests the sample size is

normally between three and ten in order to provide detailed and nuanced data on discussions concerning the phenomenon (Creswell, 2013).

### 3.3.3 Conducting a preliminary study

The process of research is one that involves knowledge and judgment. As a novice researcher it is essential to include a preliminary study in the research design (Walliman, 2011, p. 191). The preliminary study enables a small-scale rehearsal or ‘dummy run’ (Robson, 2011, p. 405) of the proposed project including ethical consent procedures, interview arrangements, active interviewing, recording, transcribing and analysing. The intention is to ensure that sources of confusion might be addressed prior to the research project or as Robson explains, ‘a small-scale version of the real thing, a try-out of what you propose so its feasibility can be checked (Robson, 2002, p. 185). However it is acknowledged that undertaking a preliminary study may not necessarily eradicate all issues that might occur in the actual project.

The first cohort of GE EYTs was invited to take part in the preliminary study in the academic year 2014-2015. Data to locate the potential participants was obtained from the course destination information held by the institution where I am employed. Ethical approval of the proposal by the HE’s Faculty Research Education Committee (FREC), which adheres to British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) guidelines, enabled me to proceed to contact the EYTs via email. From a cohort of thirteen students there were seven affirming responses but only two confirmed that they would be happy to take part. The other responses indicated work pressures (being new to their setting) as inhibiting or preventing involvement. Therefore the preliminary study involved interviews with two participants with the same criterion sample profile as those who would subsequently engage with the actual enquiry: the participants were EYTs new to the field of employment having undertaken the EYTS ‘change of career’ pathway to the professional status at the same time and at the same HE institution.

***Table 2 Preliminary Study Participants and Locations of Employment***

<b>Preliminary Study</b>		
<b>Participant Code</b>	<b>Early Years Setting</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>
PP1	Full Day Care	Early Years Teacher
PP2	Sessional Pre-School	Early Years Teacher

Conducting the preliminary study was valuable in enabling reflective and reflexive action (Mason, 2002). The schedule of the EYTS course meant the actual cohort that might be



willing to take part in the research project would not be in a position to do so until the following academic year (2015-2016). The poor response rate to the invitations for the preliminary study was a cause for concern. Learning from this situation it was considered information about the research project should be given to the students whilst they were still attending the institution, but after they had successfully completed the course, to minimise any conflicts of interest: that the EYTs would perceive taking part in the research would influence their assessments on the programme. However the timing would ensure the EYTs would already have information about the research project prior to employment in a new setting and would be able to discuss this with their Manager/Head Teacher. The students would then be sent ethical consent documentation to take part in the research project once confirmation of their employment was received. It was also decided that employers would be approached via an information letter once the consent of the participants had been received. The letter would outline the purpose of the research project and request whether interviews might take place on employment premises should the participant indicate this as a preference. Learning from the preliminary study enabled changes in the process of information giving and the timeliness of communication in the lead up to the project commencing.

The preliminary study also enabled me to practice the process of organising and conducting interviews. There were issues of disturbance during the interview held at the setting, as the EYT was essentially perceived first and foremost as the professional in practice (Israel and Hay, 2006). The interruption by a child and parent happened despite arrangements for the interview to take place after the EYTs hours of work in a room away from the main classroom. Consequently, there were issues to resolve in terms of ensuring a suitable environment was secured for each of the interviews held for the actual project. The value of learning from this involved the need to have clarity of expectations regarding a suitable location for the interview: that the nature, space and/or organisation of the setting might not always be conducive to uninterrupted conversations and this needed to be clarified with the participants and their employers prior to arrangements being confirmed.

The semi-structured interview questions appeared to elicit the information required that related to my research questions, however the analysis of data caused some challenges. These concerned the organisation of information as I tried to make sense of the data. I was initially overwhelmed with the amount collected and recognised that I needed to 'find effective ways of organising and managing materials that are likely to be unstructured, multifarious and

eclectic, so that [I] could assemble them, have them at [my] fingertips and move easily among and through them in ways that would enable [me] to draw insights and make interpretations (Mason, 2002, p. 187). I also noted that my initial musings were not reflective of the breadth and depth of practices revealed by the EYTs. Specific areas of my own interest influenced my interpretations. This was discussed with supervisors and adjustments made to the data analysis process as a result. I returned to empirical phenomenology that framed the approach to my project and from further exploration chose to use Hycner's (1985) staged approach to structure the analysis (discussed further in section 3.4). This enabled me to be more alert to potential issues and remain conscious of my own positioning within the data analysis process.

### **3.3.4 Interviewing**

Empirical phenomenological research requires researchers to study the life-world experiences of those involved in a phenomenon and therefore I considered that dialogue with participants would be the most fruitful method to elicit disclosures in the form of face-to-face interviews. As Punch (2009, p. 144) states an interview 'is a very good way of accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions of situations and constructions of reality. It is also one of the most powerful ways we have of understanding others'. The first semi-structured interviews with the seven consenting EYTs were conducted in October/November 2015. In May/June 2016 I conducted 'follow-up' second interviews with five of the consenting EYTs. In the period between interviews, one participant withdrew from the research project citing work pressures, and a second participant left early years employment and was not contactable. In total 12 interviews were completed. Each interview lasted approximately an hour. The interviews were all transcribed (see subsection 3.4.1).

Whilst there are many different ways of conducting an interview, I adopted the 'semi-structured' approach to enable what Burgess calls 'conversations with purpose' (1984, p. 102). Semi-structured interviews enable the opportunity to open up the subject matter and for the researcher to explore different lines of enquiry. As Newby (2010, p. 338) explains, 'The flexibility of interviews and their ability to expose issues creates an understanding of processes, events and emotions, all of which make them particularly suitable in qualitative research.' Whilst I provided some framing questions for the semi-structured interviews (appendix A, p. 163) I ensured that I was prepared to enable the flexibility required to delve deeper into the interviewees' revelations.

### *First Interviews*

I intended to draw on my personal experience of interviewing in a wide range of situations, to empower the participants to guide the conversations. I wanted to adopt a relatively informal approach to encourage dialogue that would offer open and rich insights into early years safeguarding and child protection practice. Whilst having some framing questions for the first interviews that were related to my research questions, I wanted the interviews to reveal the uniqueness of each participant's situated experience: to enable the flexibility suggested by Newby (2010) so that the participants might feel able to share what was important to them. I needed to ensure what Punch (2009, p. 149) refers to as 'sensitive interviewing': to be able to 'follow up their specific responses along lines which are peculiarly relevant to them and their context, and which [I] could not have anticipated in advance, in a highly organic way' (Mason, 2002, p. 64). The semi-structured questions that were prepared in advance were therefore not regarded as sequential or essential. As the participants became animated in dialogue the interview became led by what they assigned as significant to them (Walliman, 2011).

It was my intention to explore the 'life-world' experiences of the EYTs. I wanted to examine in detail their thoughts, feelings and responses around matters concerning safeguarding and child protection as teachers new to employment in the sector. As such I recognised that in interviews requiring in-depth explorations 'the interviewer needs not only to be skilled but, just as importantly, they must be knowledgeable about the issue' (Newby, 2010, p. 343). This involves 'cognitive and affective intelligence related to feeling' (Riessman, 2002, p. 221), requiring 'in action' reflection and reflexivity (Schön, 1983) to manage complex communications about a complex issue. As a novice researcher this was challenging but I also perceived this might be considered a strength of my research. I do have knowledge and experience in the field of enquiry and I am experienced in conducting interviews. I wanted to generate an ethos of trusted conversation within the interview. Whilst I intended not to pass judgment or opinions, I wanted to show knowledge and empathy for matters disclosed. I conducted the interviews demonstrating understanding and respect as issues were discussed. The following excerpt illuminates how a participant recognises my knowledge and experience in the field and seeks reassurance. My response acknowledges respect for her knowledge but also how I infer a course of action rather than pass judgment on her disclosures:

P10: ... and so in my first placement there's no way I would have wanted to work in that environment because I just didn't like the way the teacher spoke to the children. I would, I certainly wouldn't have wanted, you know, my children to be there – umm... but is that a cas- ? You know is that a safeguarding concern?

PI: Well as you say, you know, it's if those patterns of behaviour ... isn't it? ...

P10: Yeah ...

### ***Second Interviews***

The second interviews were conducted with the same 'sensitive approach' (Punch, 2009) but the questions and discussions were more unique to the individual from the outset. This was influenced partly by my opening questions and partly by the approach to the interview taken by the participants. Some of my opening questions during the second interviews were influenced following the data analysis process based on Hycner's (1985) staged approach (discussed in section 3.4). I also adopted a reflexive action approach, as advocated by Mason (2002), and noted my initial responses and reflective comments. Whilst I had carefully constructed the first interview questions to address the research questions, the analysis revealed I had not considered how the participants might have responded.

There were sections of the first interview transcripts that raised some ambiguity: indicating multiple meanings. For example, in the first interview P15 was asked whether she had undertaken any safeguarding or child protection training prior to the EYTS course. P15 replied, 'No training no, I think it was just one of those things you just know about.' (P15: 43). P15 had revealed she had a degree in a related field suggesting the possibility of some engagement with safeguarding. I was not sure whether her firm denial might have been related to her understanding of what she thought I had intended when I asked her about 'safeguarding and child protection training': perhaps she considered this a separately attended course or regular training within employment. I wanted to be clear whether her assertions were her intended meaning. Therefore, in the second interview I used an opening question to gain some clarity but also as a way of starting the dialogue, using our previous conversation as a way of further contextualising the focus of the interview and in creating a 'sensitive' and personalised environment for discussion: indicating to the participant that I was interested in her experiences, as shown in the excerpt below:

PI: I didn't ask the question at the time...did you cover safeguarding and child protection in that degree?

P1521: It didn't really cover... well it did cover child protection...it's so long ago I can't remember that far back (laughs) umm...

Whilst I had questions to start the second interviews based on some elements of clarification from the first interviews, I did not intend to follow them should the participant respond in such a way as to reveal what was important to them. The primary purpose of the second interview was to enable participants to disclose what experiences had occurred in the intervening months, to reveal what was important to them and for me to engage in respectful discussion. I had given careful thought as to how I would start the dialogue in the second interviews (by talking about the first interview and sharing some elements of clarification). I had not given a similar level of reflective attention to the potential responses of the participants. I had not anticipated that their approach would lead the interview from early on in the process, as some of the participants began to talk about their experiences almost immediately following the introduction and ethical statement (appendix A, p. 160). In these cases I followed the lead of the participants, as it was my understanding that this was the way in which EYTs would reveal experiences and assign meanings to matters of importance to them.

### **3.4 Data analysis**

Gherardi and Turner (2002) suggest that data analysis in qualitative research is complex and diverse.

Without structure, perception is chaotic and any account of the world must typify. One of the most difficult tasks in qualitative social science research is deciding just what kind or level of typification is used in the appraising of field notes and interview transcripts in order to allow material to release its sociological meanings. (Gherardi and Turner, 2002, p. 92)

As a consequence there are many different ways in which the analysis of qualitative data might be undertaken. When faced with different approaches as a novice researcher, it can be confusing to locate a method of analysis that best captures the richness and complexity of the phenomenon being explored. However, Punch (2009, p. 171) suggests 'there is no single right way to do qualitative data analysis - no single methodological framework. Much depends on the purposes of the research, and it is important that the proposed method of analysis is carefully considered in planning the research.' Starting from an empirical phenomenological approach (following learning from the preliminary study), ensured I considered the analysis from this position. I drew on the work of Hycner (1985) to support

the development of a transparent, systematic and rigorous method (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Hycner (1985) proposes a staged process of data analysis in order to clarify how essences of meaning about a phenomenon can be reached. I chose to use this process as a guide for the analysis so that it might be made transparent and the interpretations of meanings open to checks for appropriateness. The importance of this was to ensure rigor in terms of ‘validity’: a term often ‘avoided by proponents of flexible, qualitative design’ (Robson, 2002, p. 170). However, my definition of ‘validity’ in the context of this research aligns with that proposed by Robson (2002, p. 170) who sees validity as a form of ‘credibility or trustworthiness’ in the way in which interpretations have been formulated. As Mason explains,

validity of interpretation in any form of qualitative research is contingent upon the ‘end product’ including a demonstration of how that interpretation was reached. This means that you should be able to, and be prepared to, trace the route by which you came to your interpretation... The basic principle here is that you are never taking it as self-evident that a particular interpretation can be made of your data but instead that you are continually and assiduously charting and justifying the steps through which your interpretations were made. (Mason, 2002, p. 150)

The following subsections provide an explanation of the data analysis process as advocated by Hycner (1985) and how the process I chose to undertake linked to the design of the research project that was influenced by Schütz (1932) and Aspers (2004).

### **3.4.1 Transcribing, protecting and validating the data**

The data collected for this research project lay in the transcriptions of the recorded interviews. In the preliminary study I had the interviews transcribed for me. However, following that analysis I decided for the actual research project I would transcribe the interviews myself. This enabled me to decide on the format and capturing of pauses, emphasis and hesitations. However, transcriptions cannot capture all non-verbal cues that can be as important to meaning as verbal. A pause in a transcription may have very different meanings. As Reissman (2002, p. 226) explains, ‘Different transcription conventions lead to and support different interpretations and ideological positions, and they ultimately create different worlds. Meaning is constituted in very different ways with alternative transcriptions of the same stretch of talk.’ Completing the transcriptions personally meant that I was able to identify and employ my own *cues* to indicate nuances such as a series of three dots to indicate a pause, as shown in the excerpt below:

PI: And how did you feel about that?

P16: A bit surprised... just a bit confused... umm... what if I didn't know what I was doing? What if I had absolutely no idea? You know...what then? And staff would have to come to me and ...and give me and ask me questions and stuff and if I didn't know anything then that would just be a complete disaster really ...umm... ..

Having conducted the transcribing of the interviews I listened intently and repeatedly to hours of recordings to get as Hycner (1985) terms 'a sense of the whole' which I recorded as personally written reflective narratives for each interview (appendix B, p. 162). Whilst challenging, this enabled me to immerse myself in the dialogue and this subsequently contributed to my understandings.

Whilst the transcriptions enabled typed recordings of the data, the original recordings have been accessed frequently. The recordings were uploaded and the transcriptions saved on a password-protected computer. I am the only person who has access to this data, which has been securely stored as stated in ethical practice (section 3.6).

### **3.4.2 Studying first-order constructs (and bracketing)**

Capturing the phenomenon is through dialogue with the participants in the research project. Their 'first-order constructs' (Schütz, 1932) are the personal narratives about the phenomenon that they construct and present in the moment (interview). The participants report incidents, events, situations (present and historical) that relate to early years safeguarding and child protection. Their personal stories or 'first-order constructs' are captured electronically (on a digital voice recorder) and transcribed, therefore obtaining recorded data. Studying the first-order constructs requires investigating this data by examining what people mean when they use certain words, how these relate to each other and how they are situated within the frames of reference (Aspers, 2004). However, this is not a case of interpreting the phenomena in terms of existing theoretical meanings. 'Bracketing' (Husserl, 1962, p. 86) is essential. This involves confronting the empirical data with openness to whatever meanings emerge, and interpreting them as an informed researcher, revealing essential recurring features. As Aspers (2004, p. 7) states,

In the research process, the student cannot just let her theory guide her into the details of the empirical field; the empirical material, so to speak, must be given the chance to 'kick back'. This means that the empirical evidence may reformulate the theory, alter it, or add dimensions to it. She must, therefore, bracket the theories while being in the field.

The notion of 'bracketing' is complex. A desire to generate new meanings can result in data

becoming misleading and for unintended consequences to occur (Aspers, 2004). As Newby (2010, p. 462) cautions, a researcher should ‘always view results with scepticism’. It is quite possible the researcher may only see what they want to see and attach meanings that have purpose for their own ends. The participants in the research may also cause unintended consequences from the life-world they reveal, as they may not be consciously aware of differences between their interests and the researcher’s. The capturing of meaning to unintended consequences can be located in the first-order constructs and given meaning in second-order constructs (see subsection 3.3.4). Aspers (2004, p. 8) suggests ‘the researcher may be able to present a picture of the actors’ life-world that connects their meaningful actions with both intended and unintended consequences.’ Hycner (1985) advocates the use of ‘bracketing’ so that the researcher remains alert to their position and I utilised this approach to examine both intended and unintended consequences from the semi-structured interviews. The following excerpt illustrates how I became alert to my own unintended consequences during one of the first interviews.

*Bracketing - First Interview excerpt with P14.*

‘I was very aware during this interview that I experienced a sense of judgment early on when P14 outlined how the children in her setting could not be victims of abuse as they lived in an affluent area and were children of celebrities. I wondered whether a training focus on ‘neglect’ as an aspect of safeguarding and child protection might have influenced her perceptions. I recognized that I was making a mental note to explore this further as she was talking and this was reflected in some of my follow-up questions, which were poor and did not further the aspect under discussion. I was aware that I didn’t want to appear judgmental when she was talking about how difficult she thought it might be to challenge ‘rich parents’ should the setting have a concern. I found that I became acutely aware not to make her feel that she was ‘at fault’ and to enable her to continue to talk freely... This demonstrated to me that I hold strong opinions about how professionals should respond to any concerns about a child regardless of their social standing. I need to be aware of my position when analysing the data.’

This excerpt is representative of alertness to my position that might have unintentionally influenced the way I approached the analysis of data. There may have been temptation to assign meanings without critical engagement and reflection (Mason, 2002). In this particular example the analysis subsequently illuminated tensions that emerged in the hierarchical organisation within which P14 was employed: that her initial choice of language to convey meaning (to which I assigned judgment) was not representative of the point she was trying to make. It was not until the process of analysis that I was able to ‘bracket’ my presuppositions and engage in the process of interpretation in a reflexive sense. As Mason (2018) asserts,



‘that you tried your best to read your data from alternative interpretive perspectives’ (Mason, 2018, p. 240). As Hycner (1985, p. 2) suggests, bracketing means the researcher should ‘as much as possible suspend their meanings and interpretations by entering the world of the participant’. ‘It means using the matrices of that person's world-view in order to understand the meaning of what that person is saying, rather than what the researcher expects that person to say’ (Hycner, 1985, p. 3). Appendix C (p. 163) provides two examples of how I used Hycner’s (1985) notion of bracketing to ensure that I showed awareness of how previous knowledge and experience might influence interpretations.

### **3.4.3 Generating second-order constructs**

First-order constructs are related to second-order constructs as researchers strive for understanding and explanation of the phenomenon as experienced by the participants. Second-order constructs are founded upon first-order constructs (see the quotation by Schütz on page 57). In relation to my research project Schütz (1962) provides some clarity concerning how meanings may be realised. The EYTs interpret their experiences of safeguarding and child protection. They give meaning to their experiences (first-order constructs) that are captured in the recordings and related transcripts. In the analysis and interpretation of the first-order constructs, second-order constructs are developed: connecting the life-world with the theoretical world to generate new meanings (or theories) of the phenomenon (Schütz, 1962).

In the generation of second order constructs I used the notion of ‘delineating units of general meaning’ involving a ‘rigorous process of reviewing every word and phrase to elicit participant’s unique meaning irrespective of the research questions’, advocated by Hycner (1985, p. 282). Each phrase was considered and captured in a margin located on the right hand side of each transcript. This was followed by ‘delineating units of meaning relevant to the research questions’ (Hycner, 1985, p. 284) where general meanings relevant to the foci of the project were highlighted in green. A short excerpt as an example of this process is shown in appendix D (p. 164).

At all times the original recordings were accessed to enable the nuances of tone and emphasis to inform the construction of meanings. After eliminating redundant meanings (those without relevance to the research focus) I began the process of clustering units within each transcript that appeared to have commonalities: looking for themes emerging from the units presented.

This involved reading and re-reading the transcripts and locating unities of outlook and unique differences, as advocated by Schütz (1962). Appendix D (p. 164) provides a short excerpt as an example of how I captured this process.

Once this was completed for all transcripts ‘general and unique themes’ were collated into a table for the first and second interviews (appendix E, p. 166). From these, general themes emerged that provided meanings attributed by the EYTs to the phenomenon of safeguarding and child protection in early years practice (appendix F, p. 168). These were captured and discussed as thematic narratives in the findings (presented in chapter 4) as explained in the following subsection, 3.4.4.

#### **3.4.4 Relating the evidence to the empirical field of study**

The final part of the data analysis process explores how the phenomenon is contextualised within current theoretical frameworks within the field of enquiry. The analysis of the data may affirm, amplify, moderate or question the theoretical studies that shape the field of practice. It is at this point that links with theory are made explicit. In other words existing theory, some of which is critically explored in the literature review (chapter two), is related to the empirical data revealing that which synthesises or provides comparison, as well as illuminating unexpected and new ways of thinking.

We are engaged in the generation of theory not primarily as a predictor of variables, but as a pattern, which we will recognise when it recurs (Reason and Rowan, 1981). If the theoretical pattern is sufficiently recognisable, useful and sensitively constructed, and if our segment of the world is not too unrepresentative of aspects of that pattern, it may well turn out to be recognisable, appealing and useful to others as well. (Gherardi and Turner, 2002, p. 93)

The notion of ‘theoretical pattern’ provides a useful frame for the discussion of findings. In my research project theories concerning safeguarding and child protection in early years draw on previously formulated ideas. These will have been critiqued and modified over time. They may well be considered as related to the field of study rather than directly addressing the specific focus. However, theoretical patterns provide an awareness of paradigmatic ways of perceiving the phenomenon. They are drawn on to support the development of existing ideas or to provide the basis on which to refute them. They enable contributions to the existing field of knowledge (Coffey and Atkinson, 1996).

Empirical phenomenology can be summarized as relating to phenomenon that can be observed in practice, the use of theory related to the empirical research field and the checking of unintended consequences through the process of data analysis. The nature of empirical phenomenology is iterative and therefore provides the opportunity to uncover and reveal new insights into a phenomenon. However, the approach acknowledges that the researcher coherently and consistently uses existing theory to provide contextualised meanings. Success from the data analysis process is whether or not the units of relevant meaning can be authenticated against the participants' reported experiences and whether the summary provides a succinct sense of the phenomenon that can be 'kept in mind by a wide readership' (Fischer, 2002, p. 293).

In my research project the analysis that was employed enabled a detailed and transparent process to illustrate how meanings were constructed and how these could be authenticated with the original recordings of the participants. However the process of data collection and data analysis were not without difficulties and challenges. The following section (3.5) illuminates an awareness of limitations and discusses how some of these were addressed.

### **3.5 Limitations of the research project**

One of the greatest challenges in an interpretative research project is appreciating that, 'all knowledge of cultural reality, as may be seen, is always knowledge from particular points of view' (Weber, 1949, p. 81). In this research project the 'points of view' were gathered from EYTs in different roles and in different settings. Their life-world constructions of meaning were understood to be conceptually and contextually dynamic. 'Meaning is fluid and contextual, not fixed and universal. All we have is talk and texts that represent reality partially, selectively and imperfectly' (Reissman, 2002, p. 228). Therefore a limitation of this research is its usefulness in terms of generalizations. Findings are local and specific in terms of who and what is investigated. However, claims for the generalizability of findings from this research project have not been made. Instead it has been maintained that insights into the uniqueness of the EYTs experiences may inform my understanding of factors affecting their experiences and be of interest to others in the field.

In empirical phenomenology one of the limitations is the nature of interpretations made during the analysis of gathered information. Schütz (1962) cautions that the researcher brings to the analysis their own unique life-worlds that affect the ways in which they interpret the

observations and experiences of others. Other researchers may well listen to and read the original transcriptions of my research project and identify how they might have constructed different meanings. However, it has been acknowledged that this research is temporal and personal to the participants (section 1.2). The data was captured in the political and social constructs of the moment. Whilst the design of the project and the process of analysis might be replicated, the outcomes would be unlikely to produce precisely the same conceptualisations. The participants and the phenomenon under investigation are all fluid. They are affected by constructs of knowledge in time: that any meanings derived from the EYTs experiences are a depiction of their historical situation.

Despite these limitations the design of the project has been made explicit. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) suggest if ‘components of a study – including units of analysis, concepts generated, populated characteristics, and settings – are sufficiently well described and defined that other researchers can use the results of the study as a basis for comparison’ (Goetz and LeCompte, 1984, p. 228), then the research project might be used as the basis to examine the phenomenon further: to use the findings as a ‘working hypothesis’ (Cronbach, 1982) for further research. This was stated as the intention from the outset of my research project and recommendations in the final chapters indicate where further investigations might be employed.

### **3.6 Ethical considerations**

‘Empirical research in education inevitably carries ethical issues, because it involves collecting data from people’ (Punch, 2009, p. 49). In this research the ‘people’ were EYTs discussing their experiences of safeguarding and child protection in professional practice. The subject matter might be considered sensitive by some and carries with it professional statutory controls. One of the challenges, in terms of ethical practice, was ‘minimising harm’ to participants talking about safeguarding and child protection (Israel and Hay, 2006), but also upholding children’s rights should disclosures reveal children deemed at risk of harm (DfE, 2016). Considerable discussion and examination of ethical practices were undertaken prior to the research being submitted for ethical approval. It was agreed that in this research project any stated abuse of children would be reported to the ‘appropriate authority’ (Robson, 2002, p. 71): in this case the designated CPO/DSL (or person of authority) in the setting. Participants would be informed of this prior to each meeting for written or verbal consent. My ethical responsibility was also to the participants talking about safeguarding and child

protection matters in professional practice. It was decided that I would terminate any interview should the subject under discussion become distressing for the participant (Israel and Hay, 2006).

Ethical issues in qualitative research involves ‘values of honesty and frankness and personal integrity... [and] ethical responsibilities to the subjects of research, such as consent, confidentiality and courtesy’ (Walliman, 2011, p. 240). It is essential that ethical matters be considered at every stage of a research enquiry. This research project is underpinned by the British Education Research Association (BERA) (2011) guidance and the ethical guidelines for Kingston University (2012). An ethical statement for this research proposal was submitted to Kingston University’s Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education Ethics Committee prior to commencement. As Bell (2008, p. 46) states, ‘Ethics committees pay an important part in ensuring that no badly designed or harmful research is permitted’. The ethical considerations received approval from the committee following communication and information details that would be provided to the participants and their employers.

At all stages of the research the participants were informed of the purpose, the commitment required and their right to withdraw at any time (prior to publication). The participants were provided with information that detailed the proposed arrangements for the interview process, how their anonymity could be assured and how any data gathered would be stored and destroyed. As suggested by O’Leary (2004) the participants’ consent was sought throughout including before the research started and before each interview ensuring continued endorsement of their willing participation. A sample of the script prompts used for informed consent provided to each participant can be found in appendix A (p. 160).

Prior to the commencement of the research project I was aware that the EYTs were familiar with me, as I had taught them on part of the EYITT course. I was mindful of issues relating to potential influence that might arise: that participants may tell me what they think I want to hear. However, this concern was somewhat mitigated by the fact that I had not taught the professional practice expectations within safeguarding and child protection and so participants were unaware of my interest in this area of work. Also the interviews were conducted several months after my contact with the EYTs had ceased so there was no conflict of interest in terms of an immediacy of lecturer/student relationship as the participants had all successfully completed the course and were no longer students of the university. However,

acknowledgement that my 'status and role might put me in a dominant position that affects the free action of the participants in the research' (Walliman, 2011, p. 249), needed to be made transparent.

The data gathered and stored during the research project followed strict protocols for ensuring anonymity and confidentiality. Only I knew the participants' names and their places of employment. In the subsequent sharing and reporting of the research project, the participants were given codes and their settings described in general terms. The participants were always referred to by their codes. For the first interviews these were P10, P11, P12, P13, P14, P15, P16. The second interview coding depicted the first interview codes followed by the second interview codes as recorded on the digital voice recorder. These were P1020, P1217, P1318, P1419 and P1521. This enabled ease of access to the original recordings and denoted not only the defining code of the participant but clarified if direct quotations were taken from the first or second interviews. As the process of the data analysis was undertaken any transcripts shared with supervisors were made anonymous in advance. In the writing of the findings and related discussion it was decided to retain the coding to ensure accuracy was not compromised by inserting pseudonyms and having to constantly distinguish between the first and second interviews, when discussing commonalities and/or differences. The following chapter seeks to present how the data gathered from the EYTs was interpreted with discussions relating to theoretical underpinnings.

## **Chapter 4 Findings and Discussions**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This research project set out to examine the safeguarding and child protection experiences of ‘change of career’ graduates who undertook EYTS training and entered employment in early years. The research questions were designed to explore why participants had chosen the EYTS course, how they had been educated in safeguarding and child protection, what experiences they had over one year in employment and whether these might provide some insights for enhancements to training. This chapter reports findings from the analysis of data (described in chapter three) and is organised into five sections that follow this introduction (4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6). The sections have been presented to broadly relate to the research questions. The first two sections (4.2 and 4.3) explore the participants’ recall of their reasons for applying to become EYTs, their previous knowledge and experience of safeguarding and child protection, and their perceptions of safeguarding and child protection as they gain the professional status. Section 4.4 analyses the participants’ articulations of safeguarding and child protection experiences over their first year in employment. It explores their knowledge of policies and procedures and how they are interpreted in local practice. Section 4.5 examines partnerships and relationships between parents and practitioners: exploring tensions, behaviours and emotions expressed by participants as they experienced situations of safeguarding and child protection. The final section (4.6) presents the participants’ recommendations to improve EYTS training that might enhance knowledge and understanding of safeguarding and child protection in an early years practice context for ‘change of career’ graduates entering employment with limited experience of working with children.

### **4.2 Pre-qualifying knowledge, skills, experience and training in safeguarding and child protection**

The first semi-structured interview questions were specifically intended to elicit responses focussed around why participants chose to become EYTs, and their knowledge and experience of safeguarding and child protection both before and during initial engagement with the EYTS programme. The following subsections 4.2.1 and 4.2.2 present the themes that emerged from the analysis of responses to these questions.

#### *4.2.1 Reasons for becoming an Early Years Teacher*

When asked why they had chosen to undertake the EYTS course each participant identified personal reasons and revealed influences that had affected their decisions. Two participants declared their choice was influenced by previous experiences of employment where they were working directly with children. P13 stated she ‘was temping in day nurseries’ and ‘really loved it’ and that was why she chose to become an EYT (P13: 5). P14 declared she was working for a company and had decided to change career because she had ‘taught before back in [her] country and [she] enjoyed being with children’ (P14: 2-4). P13 and P14 declared ‘love’ and ‘enjoyment’ from previously working with young children suggesting this personal fulfilment influenced their decision to start the EYTS course.

For P10 and P16 the decision to change career appeared located within a process of decision-making with the outcome that the EYTS course might be beneficial for them. As P10 stated, ‘The interest in working with children more generally was a sort of process of working through the types of things that I liked and the types of things that I enjoyed, and whittling out some of the things I didn’t like’ (P10: 22). P16 reflected upon her previous job,

‘I think it was because I didn’t have enough passion for that role, I wasn’t very excited about it, ... I just didn’t have job satisfaction so that’s why I thought... what do I actually want to do with my life, what do I enjoy, what do I feel like is not a job and so working with children, I feel like that is something that I love and that’s my passion and that is what I want to do.’ (P16: 4-6)

P10 and P16 individually stated they had very limited experience of working with children prior to applying for the EYTS course. Their declarations appeared influenced by experiences with children in other contexts. In the course of the interview P10 disclosed she had her own children and P16 mentioned being with children of family members and friends. They both referred to the need for ‘enjoyment’ and there was indication that employment working with young children would provide fulfilment in this respect. P16 also referred to ‘love’, ‘passion’ and ‘job satisfaction’ as influencing her choice. P16 spoke of her intentions (‘what I want to do’) but used emotive assertions in the present tense to justify her reasons (‘that is something that I love and that’s my passion’) indicating a self-surety of rationale. There was a sense from both participants that the EYTS role would provide fulfilment in terms of their emotive aspirations to ‘enjoy’ their work.

Whilst P11 and P15 had no previous experience of working with children, within an employment context, they also made assertive declarations of why they had chosen to



undertake the EYTS course using language that incorporated emotions within their rationales. P11 asserted she ‘had a massive passion for working with children’ (P11: 1). P15 stated ‘I knew I didn’t want to teach older children ... because the younger children are a bit more, they’ve got lots of imagination, they’re really fun to play with and they kind of make you be, feel younger’ (P15: 23-24). The details of their previous experiences with young children were not known, although they both subsequently mentioned having family members with children. Their use of phrases such as ‘passion’ and ‘fun to play with’ indicated their previous experiences of being with children had been enjoyable.

Whilst most participants referred to positive emotions in language used to explain their reasons for starting the EYTS course, P12 stated her decision was made following three months of employment in an unrelated field when she ‘was not sure what she wanted to do’ and when her plans to work as a teaching assistant and ‘do a PGCE did not really get anywhere’ (P12: 9). P12 ‘started thinking back to teaching’ whilst in other employment and having received an email with information about the EYTS course, she was prompted to apply (P12: 10). P12 did not make reference to previous experience of working with children as influencing the reasons for her change of career decision. Her responses did suggest she was conflicted in her employment (‘not sure what she wanted to do’) and she was influenced by an opportunity to enter the teaching profession from a direct communication.

Whilst the analysis of data suggested the emphasis on reasons for starting the EYTS course were different for each participant, there was indication that each participant sought personal gain from undertaking the course and that these might relate to fulfilment in terms of feelings and/or emotions. With the exception of P12, the participant responses as to why they chose to undertake the EYTS course predominantly resided within emotional intent. There were no references to career aspirations or ambitions of promotion within the sector as being reasons for entering the profession.

This finding might be signified in the discourse of early years professionalism. Research conducted by McGillivray (2008) into historical discourse surrounding the emergence of early years as part of the education profession, found that ‘constructs of what it means to be an early years practitioner may influence career choices made by those becoming an early years practitioner’ as ‘individuals consider themselves to possess the desired qualities or they aspire to possess such qualities’ (McGillivray, 2008, pp. 250-251). McGillivray (2008)

cautions that the ‘desired qualities’ of an early years practitioner have been constructed from historical and social influences. She states that the prevailing gendered and stereotypical ‘desirable qualities’ from the 1940’s to 1970’s that include ‘being maternal, being a mother, a liking for children, having good sense, being kind and loving, being warm and sensitive’ (McGillivray, 2008, p. 250) are different to the discourses emerging from the 1980’s to the 2000’s where there is a shift towards ‘career possibilities into management and leadership’. The participant responses in my research study suggest their reasons may be influenced by the historical discourse of early years as gendered and stereotypical, but may also suggest influence from the political discourse of professionalism in early years (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2009; Dalli, 2008; Moss, 2010; Chalke, 2013) where ‘the personal vocabulary of hope, passion and love becomes enlisted in the cause of community and social justice’ (Taggart, 2011, p. 86). Most of the participants used words such as ‘enjoyment’ and ‘love’ to describe their reasons for applying to become an EYT: terminology that has been widely discussed in the early years context as tensions emerge in the debate concerning professional competences and professional attributes to work effectively with young children and their families (Osgood, 2009; Taggart, 2011; Moss, 2010; Page, 2011).

The word ‘passion’ was mentioned by P11 and P16 that appeared to reveal a depth of intense emotional ambition for undertaking the EYTS course: a fervent expression of purpose associated with personal venture. With the exception of P12 the participants declared emotive intent and alluded to emotive fulfilment as influencing their decisions. As discussed in chapter two, Hargreaves (2000) suggests that practitioners working with young children demonstrate a heightened sense of emotional engagement within practice. However, Hargreaves’ (2000) research suggests this emotional engagement is developed once practitioners are working *with* children: that it is the routine encounters with children that enables the development of personal satisfaction over time. My research indicates this emotional engagement is present *before* the practitioners are working in a professional context with children. Their declarations may be founded upon previous encounters and/or relationships with children as they are cited within reasons for joining the profession.

Research that examines perspectives of professionalism has found that those working in early years express enduring and intrinsic emotive reasons for working with young children (Moyles, 2001; Osgood, 2010). Both Moyles (2001) and Osgood (2010) propose recognition of emotional engagement, expressed in words like passion, as a requirement for practitioners

due to the 'affective nature' of the work. Clark (2012, p. 346) found early childhood practitioners in New Zealand described passion as an 'agentic, generous and powerful' notion that expressed the 'sense of loving [their] work' and 'making a difference for children, and for their families.' The notion of passion described as a vehement and intense enthusiasm for their work, demonstrated as commitment in practice (Day, 2004). Murray (2013, p. 535) found 'passionate commitment' for working with young children was repeatedly expressed by candidates at the beginning of their EYPS course (the predecessor to EYTS), 'indicating that it acts as a foundation and a sustaining force through the early process of professional identity'.

Whilst research in early years identifies the existence of strong emotional engagement for those working with children, it does not address the practitioners' anticipated expectations of emotional fulfilment and the relationship with experiences in practice. The findings in my research project show that participants indicate a sense of foresight: an assumption that working with children will be personally fulfilling. This may suggest they have emotional expectations that working with children will bring them personal reward: an inductive mode of thought based on previous observations and encounters. The participants, regardless of whether they had limited experience of being with or working with children, express this sense of expectation. The anticipation that working with children will enhance their wellbeing and make them feel differently and positively about themselves: a desirable state. Whilst some research examines the emotional wellbeing of teachers within the early years context (Elfer, 2013; Jennings, 2014; Yarrow, 2015) this is predominantly concerned with those already immersed in practice. My research findings suggest 'change of career' graduates may be entering the EYTS training programme with expectations of personal wellbeing and emotional fulfilment.

In the context of safeguarding and child protection, professional practice can be emotionally demanding (Munro, 2008). The potential issue is that emotional expectations may not be compatible with emotions experienced. There are indications of a potential tension between emotional expectations of practice and emotional fulfilment in practice. There is some educational research that explores more generally what Mahmood (2013) calls the 'reality shock' of early years teachers entering employment and the sense of initial optimism that is 'modified by the realities they face when practising the actual profession' (Mahmood, 2013, p. 154). Mahmood's (2013) research within a New Zealand context, explores experiences of

early years teachers entering the profession after a three-year undergraduate course. His findings indicate tensions between expectations of practice and experiences of practice once in employment. However, his research is focussed on general practices within early years. Further research is needed to examine how practitioners engage with specific aspects of practice that may involve difficult emotional situations such as those experienced in safeguarding and child protection, and which may conversely challenge their initial expectations and passionate declarations of intent. It is important for me as a teacher educator, to seek further understanding of EYT's reasons for entering the profession: to examine personal expectations of fulfilment, recognising how this might affect them when faced with potentially upsetting contexts.

#### *4.2.2 Safeguarding and child protection training prior to starting the EYTS course and employment*

The initial questions posed during the semi-structured interviews included those that were intended to enable safeguarding and child protection to be brought into focus but also to examine whether participants had undertaken previous training in this aspect of practice before engaging in the EYTS course. Two participants recalled training prior to starting the EYTS programme and identified the sources of their knowledge. P12 reported she had 'volunteered for a short time at a club, a weekend club for children with disabilities, and they put [her] on a safeguarding training session, so [she] learnt a lot about it there' (P12: 12). P13 recalled her degree programme that covered aspects of safeguarding and child protection that made her 'feel like [she] had quite a bit of knowledge before [she] started' the EYTS course (P13: 13). Both P12 and P13 identified sources of previous knowledge although they did not disclose whether this was significant in helping them to understand safeguarding and child protection within the context of early years. They both expressed judgment of knowing about safeguarding and child protection ('a lot', 'a bit'). Their responses did not offer indication of how they reached this assertion and whether this was related to subsequent training on the EYTS course: how much they knew and whether their EYTS training was repetitive of that already known. This finding is significant in the context of research undertaken by Rawlings *et al.*, (2014) that suggests training in safeguarding and child protection should be personalised to the individual and relevant in terms of respecting previous knowledge, understanding, experience and role.

The other participants recalled being less aware of safeguarding and child protection as a specific element of professional practice until they started the EYTS course. They mentioned having awareness of safeguarding and child protection influenced by media or from communications with family members. P15 stated she knew ‘what not to do which she learnt as she grew up’ (P15: 19). P16 reported,

‘I didn’t have absolutely any kind of experience. I would know obviously reading the news and stuff that situations happen, what kind of things you could possibly look out for in terms of what happens to children, things like that, what you need to report, but the procedures to do that and kind of specific things, I had no idea of, not really.’  
(P16: 19-20)

P15 and P16 acknowledged a general consciousness of safeguarding and child protection and recognised their knowledge was influenced by means other than formal training.

There was a sense that through safeguarding and child protection training on the EYTS course, some of the participants came to an awareness of the professional requirements to ensure safeguarding and child protection knowledge was enacted in practice. P15 stated that before the course she ‘didn’t really know what to look for’ but became ‘a bit more conscious of it having studied it’ (P15: 32-33). P10 and P11 articulated their growing awareness of safeguarding and child protection was experienced as a sense of ‘responsibility’: a duty associated with their professional role, a competence of knowing with accountability. P11 revealed she ‘knew what to look out for’ but had not realised ‘how much of the control [she] had in terms of responsibility’ (P11: 17-19). P10 declared, ‘I hadn’t really thought very much about safeguarding before, but what it made me aware of is the responsibility: I think in terms of the training, is the great weight of responsibility that you have when you are caring for somebody else’s children’ (P10: 84-85). P10 and P11 specifically recalled this sense of responsibility, although other participants suggested that safeguarding and child protection was revealed as an important part of their professional practice as they studied the Teachers’ Standards (Early Years) (NCTL, 2013).

As a requirement of the EYTS course participants would have had to provide documentary or observed evidence of having met the competency requirements of Standard 7 that specifically addresses having knowledge and demonstrating understanding of legislation and guidance relating to safeguarding and child protection (NCTL, 2013, p. 4). As P15 recalled,

‘As a Teaching Standard, Standard 7 was all about child protection and safeguarding so it was applying the knowledge that we got from the university to practice and I

think having it in the Standards also made me actually think about it a bit more.’ (P15: 30-31)

The focus of training for Teaching Standard 7 in safeguarding and child protection in the EYTS course was recalled by each participant and provided some insights into how this influenced practice in placements and employment. P15 explained how she ‘learned all about safeguarding and child protection and while [she was] at placement, to apply that’ (P15: 29). P11 recalled how training covered the indicators of abuse and the EYT’s ‘role within safeguarding’. She specifically mentioned how training made her ‘more aware in what to look out for’ and what she ‘could potentially deal with’ (P11: 23-26). P10 recalled ‘thinking about the case reviews, looking at real life circumstances and thinking about the processes of what went wrong’ (P10: 73-74). P13 gave an example of how ‘knowledge that was gained from the course and becoming an EYT ... definitely helped [her] to behave appropriately in a [child protection] situation’ (P13: 121) that she experienced in practice.

The disclosures indicate some of the participants (P12, P13, P15, P16) had awareness of safeguarding and child protection prior to starting the EYT course that had been influenced by media, family and/or previous experiences of working with children. There was a sense of these participants recognising how personal experiences had informed their knowledge on entry to the programme. Subsequent training on the EYTS course had enabled the other participants to reveal their growing awareness of this aspect of early years practice. Manning-Morton (2006) suggests personal awareness is an important attribute for early years practitioners as it enables them to meet the constantly changing demands of working with young children. It was this sense of awareness about their knowledge, influences and subsequent learning that was reported by all participants. The knowledge they gained on the course implied certain responsibilities towards children: that safeguarding and child protection was previously known of, but not embraced in personal premise. The participants acknowledged having had awareness of the terms but revealed they did not know what their personal involvement might have been. As P15 reported, ‘if a child was abused she wouldn’t have known what to look for but she became a bit more conscious of it having studied it...’ and ‘...thought she was more wary about safeguarding and child protection following training’ (P15: 33-34). Without exception the participants expressed an increased state of consciousness in terms of acknowledging legislative requirements to protect children from harm, although there was little evidence to indicate when or how this developed in their training. P10 and P11 referred to this awareness as responsibility. There was the suggestion

that this responsibility was a professional duty that they were accountable for, but also illusive as a concept in practice: that safeguarding and child protection might be construed as knowledge that needed to be enacted in different early years contexts, so that practitioners might be assessed in their ability to demonstrate ‘know how’, as required by the Teachers’ Standards (Early Years) (NCTL, 2013). Winch (2016) examines the notion of ‘know-how’ in professional practice and cautions,

when awarding a professional qualification we offer a guarantee that the candidate has the know-how to practise the occupation. This implies that the individual concerned is *able* to practise the occupation. On some accounts of know-how it is not necessarily the case that the attribution of know-how entails the attribution of the corresponding ability. (Winch, 2016, p. 555)

Winch’s (2016) research is important in understanding tensions between expectations of practitioners gaining EYTS and starting out in early years practice, with safeguarding and child protection accountabilities as part of statutory requirements. This is further discussed in section 4.5.3 however, the participants report undergoing a transition towards a realisation of professional accountability. The analysis suggests participants enter the training course with some knowledge of safeguarding and child protection but with varied and diverse understandings. The development of alertness towards professional responsibility and accountability is illuminated in their responses. Teacher educators should examine whether training is supportive through the process of this transition to ‘corresponding ability’ (Winch, 2016). The following section presents how participants described their own abilities and intentions to keep children safe within the constructs of their local setting policy and procedures, and how their knowledge of safeguarding and child protection manifested in practice.

### **4.3 Personal and professional assertions to keep children safe in practice**

The second section of questions from the semi-structured interviews centred on participants’ roles in their settings and their experiences of safeguarding and child protection situations. The settings in terms of geographical location and demographics were very different, as were their size and organisation. However, there were many similarities in terms of the participants’ responses to questions relating to their knowledge and enactment of local safeguarding policies and practices in their settings. The following subsections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 present findings that suggest practitioners assert a personal agency to protect children and have knowledge of how safeguarding and child protection policy should be applied in practice to meet the requirements of sector legislation. In subsection 4.3.3 findings are

presented that suggest as participants change employment roles, their perception of safeguarding and child protection knowledge changes and their associated accountabilities are affected.

#### *4.3.1 Personal assertions to keep children safe*

During the first interviews all respondents gave personal assertions that they had to keep children safe. P10, P11 and P13 stated they felt ‘responsible for children’ and needed to make sure ‘children were safe’ (P10: 87-88; P11: 116; P13: 14). P12 thought she had a ‘moral obligation’ because the children were ‘so innocent and vulnerable in the way that they may not know that something was happening to them’ (P12: 95). Likewise P16 felt she was in a ‘position of responsibility and children were the most vulnerable people so it was really down to adults to stop situations happening’ (P16: 27). P15 stated, ‘the sense of protecting children came from knowing children were young and had innocence which meant they wouldn’t understand what was going on and couldn’t really express how they felt’ but ‘the majority of adults would want to protect children and make sure they were ok’ (P15: 65-67). The strongest assertions came from P14 and P16 who stated,

‘As an Early Years Teacher I’m just like, ok, I’m not just in this for the certificate. If I need to save a child’s life then I need to save a child’s life, because that is what I have been trained to do.’ (P14: 68)

‘I feel like I have a duty, I like to protect, I’m very into standing up for things that are right for people, I’m into justice, I care about that strongly in my own personal life. I feel like when something is wrong or when something happens to someone that is morally wrong then I feel like...I get very angry with that and I can never just not say anything. I have to say something if I feel someone is being mistreated in any way, in a really bad way.’ (P16: 110-111)

The overriding sense was one of personal agency that has been defined within social cognitive theory as individuals who perceive themselves as ‘producers of experiences and shapers of events’ (Bandura, 2000, p. 75): ‘to intentionally make things happen by one’s actions’ (Bandura, 2001, p.2). Participants presented personal and intimate dimensions to the safeguarding and child protection aspect of their practice. Nouns such as injustice, duty, protection and morality were used to describe intentions. Children were referred to as innocent and vulnerable. Adults were referred to as the protectors.

In the wider discourse of early years professionalism Taggart (2011, p. 86) argues for ‘moral seriousness’ and acknowledgment of care for children as a sustainable ‘social principle’. The



participants' responses allude to 'moral seriousness' in their assertions to care for, safeguard and protect young children. However, their construct of children as vulnerable (or weak) is in contrast to reconceptualization theories that have challenged this traditional view in early years to one where young children are considered as active agents (Dahlberg, Moss and Pence, 2006; Papatheodorou and Moyles, 2009): where adults are encouraged to empower children and respect them as part of a reciprocal relationship rather than adopting a pervasively dominant role (the adult always knows what is best for the child). In the context of safeguarding and child protection the tension is that EYTs might apply their own meanings of how childhood should be viewed without taking into consideration the constructs of the individual: the cultural and unique contexts of the children with whom they work. Examples were disclosed in the interviews where this tension was revealed. P10 refers to her professional practice being based on constructs of her own childhood, her experiences within a particular religious community (P10: 36-38) and how she parented her own children (P10: 174). P14 declares how safeguarding differs in England to practices she was familiar with in the country where she grew up and trained as a teacher (P14: 16-18).

In the second interviews P10, P13, P14 and P15 presented explanations that revealed emotive feelings they held about their practice. Since P13 had been working with the children she had not quite realized how much she 'cared' about them and how 'strongly emotionally' she felt for them and it had made her 'really think about safeguarding and child protection' (P1318: 117). P14 asserted she 'still protected the interests of the child, listened to the child to see how best to support them and gave them the best care and protection she could' (P1419: 79), whilst P15 affirmed that 'knowing the children on a really personal level helped her intuition' when considering potential concerns (P1521: 32). P10 outlined the link between her emotional attachment to the children and an increased sense of responsibility towards them.

'You do feel very keenly for the children that you have, that you're responsible for. And so, if I felt that there was an issue where they were at risk and that risk was being presented from home, I would feel keenly for them. I hope that I would conduct myself appropriately and professionally but I would...because they are just little people, they're very vulnerable and so I do take their care seriously. I know that their parents do as well. Do you know what I mean? They really matter. They really matter and so I do want to protect them and keep them safe. And if I felt that there was risk then I would feel that personally and keenly.' (P1018: 79-80)

P10 uses emotive expressions to articulate the depth of feeling she has for the children with whom she works. She emphasises how they 'matter' to her and how 'keenly' she feels for them. She uses intensive personal declarations but with a professional reference in terms of

conducting herself ‘appropriately’. This suggests awareness that there is difference in terms of feelings expressed within a professional context. Whilst similar terms might be used to describe feelings in personal and professional contexts there is indication that these might have different meanings (see discussions in chapter two concerning ‘Professional Love’, Page, 2011). Further research is needed to explore whether language used to express feelings in the context of professional early years safeguarding and child protection has different meanings to when they are expressed within other contexts, such as between family members in the home.

Each participant expressed awareness that they had deeply rooted emotive feelings towards children. Rodgers and Raider-Roth (2006) describe this as ‘presence’: ‘a state of alert awareness, receptivity, and connectedness to the mental, emotional and physical workings of both the individual and the group in the context of their learning environment, and the ability to respond with a considered and compassionate best next step’ (2006, p. 265). For some contemporary researchers this emotional alertness or ‘presence’ is considered an essential attribute for practitioners to work effectively with young children and their parents/carers (Noddings, 2002; Osgood, 2006b, 2010; Taggart, 2011; Page, 2011). Particularly in early years safeguarding and child protection Reid and Burton (2013) acknowledge, ‘The personal element in child protection and safeguarding is important since it is not merely a matter of cognitive ability; it also involves feelings and skills’ (Reid and Burton, 2013, p. 49).

The analysis presented in this subsection indicates practitioners working with very young children profess a *passion* (Moyle, 2001) for their work with children and demonstrate *presence* (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006) in their personal assertions. However, the analysis suggests initial declarations of intent made early in their career might be located within the EYTs positive emotional ideal of practice: that EYTs are aspiring to possess qualities and adopt ways of working congruent with what is suggested describes an effective early years practitioner (McGillivray, 2008). This relates to the discussions concerning the EYTs initial expectations of emotional fulfilment (discussed in subsection 4.2.1). There is the sense this emotional intensity is innately satisfying but in practice it can also generate feelings of anxiety, fear and frustration when practice situations are challenging and emotionally demanding (Mahmood, 2013). In the following subsection this notion of emotional engagement is further explored as participants reveal tensions in responses to questions

relating to their knowledge of safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures in their settings.

#### *4.3.2 Knowledge of safeguarding and child protection policy and procedures in the setting*

The EYFS (2017) specifies minimum welfare requirements for safeguarding and child protection in early years. Each setting has to ensure it is compliant with statutory requirements and this is articulated and implemented through their policies and procedures (DfE, 2017, p.16). Questions were asked during the semi-structured interviews related to knowledge participants' drew on to help them with safeguarding and child protection issues in practice. The responses illuminated the significance of setting policies. All participants stated they used policies to inform their practice. The introduction to policies in different settings showed similarities in the practice of self-regulation. All but one participant in the *first interviews* stated they were given policies to read without further opportunity to discuss or clarify the contents. P10 was 'given the policies to read over the holidays' and then asked during induction 'whether she had read them' (P10: 102). P11 was 'asked to read the policies and sign them but did not go through them with anybody' and thought 'the process was not very good' (P11: 31, 125). P12 was 'given the policies to read when she started employment but because they were so lengthy it took a few months for her to get through them all, although she was asked to read the child protection one first' (P12: 40-41). P14 was 'given the safeguarding policy to read by herself' (P14: 31). P15 stated that reading her placement policy and what signs to look out for helped her a lot (P15: 75). Only P16 stated the manager let her look at the policies and was 'quite helpful' as she sat down with P16 'to make sure she was following everything and asked her if she had any questions' (P16: 37-38).

The participants attributed importance to policies in the sense of providing them with knowledge of statutory legislation and knowing how they should act given a concern about a child. Each participant was able to describe their setting policies in terms of reporting procedures involving the Child Protection Officer (CPO) or Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). The participants articulated that within their settings there was a line of accountability. Responses suggested this existed in order to safeguard and protect the participants themselves from further involvement in the concern. P10 stated if a concern came her way she 'would be cautious and seek some support from the safeguarding lead' and she knew the 'chain of command was fairly clear' (P10: 111, 115). P11 stated she 'knew how

to deal with a case but as soon as she had told the safeguarding officer it was taken off her' (P11: 37). P14 reported, 'according to the setting policy it was the CPO that dealt with issues and all she needed to do was get as much information as possible as the CPO would then take it up from there' (P14: 49-50). This line of accountability was accepted as being for the participants' benefit. The participants reported a significant other in the setting would have greater knowledge and experience to manage any escalating issues concerning safeguarding and child protection: that following the reporting of a concern their involvement was no longer required. This is in contrast to the participants' expressions of intense personal and emotional engagement with safeguarding and child protection and their innate sense of responsibility discussed in sections 4.2.1 and 4.3.1.

In the *second interviews* the participants similarly discussed their role as being one of following the setting policy and reporting a concern to the CPO/DSL. In their disclosures, the policy remained a crucial document.

'It protects us because it tells us how to behave in a certain situation. It tells us who we can contact. It tells us who at the nursery we can talk to. Also it gives phone numbers, so all that kind of thing. It's really useful and I think that's how we then use that to make sure we're influencing our practice and keep using it correctly.' (P1318: 46)

However, participants reported that, unlike other policies governing early years practice, the safeguarding and child protection policy contained material that was important for everyday practice, and material required for the escalation of serious concerns that was rarely accessed. The scope of the policy included daily risk assessments to the involvement of other professionals located around children perceived to be in need or at risk. The participants suggested some elements of safeguarding and child protection were not routinely known or experienced or practiced. It was only through regular reminders that they remained aware some situations might arise, albeit rarely.

'I took time out myself to just make sure I did really know that policy just in case something did happen then this is what I need to do. And then when other staff have started I've had to induct them in as well. So the more I say the things they need to do, the more it gets, it kind of stays in my brain.' (P1217: 34)

In the *second interviews* the participants affirmed they still saw the CPO/DSL role as someone who would take on a concern that they might initiate. When reflecting upon a case P14 stated, 'it was the CPO who had the authority to decide whether it should be taken further or ended', so P14 thought it was a 'good thing that they were in charge' and she saw

her new role as the class teacher to 'report a concern and give evidence as she did not have the authority to call the police directly without informing an officer, someone on top to know about it as that was the policy; that she could not just pick up the phone and call or raise an alarm as it was a process' (P1419: 76). P14 asserted, 'whilst the CPO might have more knowledge and experience they passed the concern on, so it was just a hierarchy' (P1419: 74-75). The indication was the line of accountability extended beyond the setting. P15 affirmed that 'should a child disclose that their mother had caused deliberate bruising she wouldn't say anything to the mother but she'd give it to the safeguarding officer to see what they suggested because they might have had an incident that she didn't know about that had been reported, like an older sibling where it had happened and was already on file' (P1521: 115). In this example the CPO was also seen as someone in authority who had an overview of the family as well as an individual child.

The participant responses indicate they consider their setting policies concerning safeguarding and child protection as key to guiding practice. Without exception the participants identify their setting's safeguarding and child protection policies as central to knowing procedures (what to do) and who to contact when concerns arise. There is acknowledgement of processes and procedures involving a more knowing other and a handing over of responsibility to someone with more experience.

There is very limited research in early years that specifically examines how safeguarding and child policies are interpreted in localised practices and procedures. Research concerning early years policy tends to be more generic around curriculum and pedagogical concerns but does acknowledge tensions arising between policies and practices within the discourse of professionalisation (Osgood, 2006a, 2006b, 2010; Moss, 2010). Therefore in order to support the analysis of the EYTs disclosures I have drawn on research from the social care field. This suggests that overly prescriptive policies and procedures and an over reliance on them, is not conducive to effective practice in safeguarding and child protection (Munro, 2011).

In my research project the EYTs reported using their setting's policies as documents to guide practice. There appeared universal acceptance that the content of their setting's safeguarding and child protection policies met overarching regulatory compliance with government documentation such as the EYFS (2017), *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (2015) and *Safeguarding Children in Education* (2016). In this respect EYTs may be indicating a

reliance on setting's policies and procedures to help them navigate safeguarding and child protection aspects of professional practice. Their understandings of lines of accountability (a more knowing other to raise concerns with) may be indicative of their *presence* (Rodgers and Raider-Roth, 2006): alert to their knowledge and aware of their limitations. This is significant in the professionalism discourse that presents EYTs as 'the only professional in England that has [a safeguarding and child protection] focus for 0-5 explicitly built into their standards' (Lumsden, 2018, p. 132). As Lumsden (2018, p. 150) cautions 'they should be ideally placed to lead on child protection... however their role in settings is still emerging.'

Baginsky, Driscoll and Manthorpe, (2015, p.356) suggest 'Greater dependence on professional judgment is emphasised, requiring professional expertise and confidence in responding to safeguarding concerns'. In the participant responses there is indication of confidence in safeguarding practice: that preventative steps taken frequently and practised regularly indicates assuredness in the wellbeing of children. P12 affirmed she was confident in her [safeguarding] ability (P12: 55) and P10 stated, 'The stuff that sticks is the stuff that's practiced' (P10: 185). The EYTs appear to gain knowledge to become competent in what they encounter and action frequently: that which is a 'continuous process' within their professional context (Urban *et al.*, 2011, p. 21). In comparison, some of the EYTs suggest rare engagement with child protection incidents generates a lack of confidence and a need to rely on the setting's policy to give direction. P11 discloses that she 'has just qualified and feels added extra pressure that maybe she should know more. She is just not confident because she hasn't dealt with a case before' (P11: 99-100). P15 states she 'was worried that she'd not had an actual incident' (P15: 116).

Eraut (2004) explains that discrete experiences (implied by the EYTs as child protection incidents),

become meaningful when they are accorded attention and reflected upon. The 'act of attention' brings experiences, which would otherwise simply be lived through, into the area of conscious thought, where treatment may vary from actual comprehending to merely noting or hardly noticing. Such attention may be given on a number of occasions, each conferring a different meaning on the experience according to the meaning-context of the moment. (Eraut, 2004b, p. 251)

Without experience of child protection incidents P11 and P15 articulate their feelings drawn from other forms of knowledge that appear to generate a sense of foreboding, such as 'not confident' and 'worried'. P15 affirmed that she thought 'the sense of protecting children had

a lot to do with the media and thought when she'd heard stories it shocked her quite badly especially as she was working with children' (P15: 62). Eraut's (2004b) work suggests that the experience, attention and reflection of a child protection incident, will enable the EYTs to accord meaning in context.

The implications of these findings are important in relation to the third research question concerning EYTS training. Teacher educators need to be aware that whilst statutory early years policy (EYFS, 2017) refers to safeguarding and child protection as interrelated dimensions of practice, the EYTs in this project indicate their experiences suggest difference: that safeguarding practices that are planned and routinely experienced increases confidence in practice, but child protection situations that are unplanned generate feelings of unease, a lack of confidence and the need to locate guidance from documentation or a more knowing other. The following section explores this notion in greater depth as participants recount examples of how their setting's policies and procedures affect their behaviours in practice.

#### *4.3.3 Application of policies and procedures in the setting*

All participants cited specific examples from practice that illustrated the application of their setting safeguarding and child protection policies in practice. Mostly these outlined reporting a concern about a child to the CPO/DSL. The participants expressed how they utilised setting policies to ensure they followed the right procedures. P11 stated she drew on what she read from the policy to keep children safe (P11: 34) and P12 affirmed she thought the policy provided a helpful framework (P12: 91). If P14 had a concern she would 'go into the policy and complete an accident form and the manager would be aware' (P14: 46) and P13 would want to make sure she did not make any mistakes, did everything properly 'by the book' and did 'everything right' (P13: 67).

During the *first interviews* there was a sense that policies provided the 'how to', the instructions and the process. The participants suggested they relied on policies to help them make correct decisions regarding practice and what procedures to undertake. There was indication that safeguarding and child protection practices were located within the setting context only. Participants were hesitant when making references to wider implications outside the setting. P12 in particular stated her responsibilities finished at the end of the day when she went home, although she showed hesitation as she was talking during the interview.

She identified in the moment that as she had to keep everything confidential, ‘perhaps her responsibilities never ended’ (P12: 57).

The *second interview* responses showed that participants still referred to policies as outlining procedures to follow but they also illuminated a more sceptical questioning of their effectiveness. P10 stated she ‘felt there was so much to learn, as just because she was taught about it, it did not mean it was the same as doing it in practice and whilst she might remember things, they were pieces of things and it was only through doing things a few times that she felt more assurance’ (P1020: 85, 87). Likewise P13 recognised that having a policy was not indicative of its influence on practice, as illustrated by the excerpt below.

P1318: I think the policies they are... they’re good, they know what they’re doing, they know what they’re supposed to do but if you’re not familiar with them you’re not going to be able to do what you need to be doing. So I think as long as there’s sort of procedures in place to make sure that you’re actually reading the policies, and knowing them then, yes, they are effective’ (P1318: 20-22).

Again, as in section 4.3.2 there is indication from participants that safeguarding and child protection policies have purpose in outlining procedures, but that the complexity of content means some aspects might be challenging to remember without regular engagement: that knowledge of policies is different to knowing how to apply those policies in different practice situations. Winch (2016a) in his work exploring the concept of ‘know-how’ in professional practice states, ‘know-how involves being able to carry out the relevant action in appropriate circumstances’ (Winch, 2016a, p. 56). Winch (2016b) cautions,

professional know-how is very often highly complex and can require: the application of knowledge to practice, situational awareness, higher-order forms of know-how beyond skill, [...] responsiveness to complexity and unpredictability and, at the same time, the ability to be consistent in giving performances of high quality, themselves subject to complex and sophisticated forms of evaluation. (Winch, 2016b, p. 555)

The participants’ responses in the second interviews suggest that experience over time had affected their interpretation of how the setting’s policies were applied in practice. Some responses were hesitant and revealed that policies might not always be effective in the highly unpredictable area of safeguarding and child protection. As suggested by Winch (2016b) the participants’ responses indicated that knowing the process outlined in the setting’s safeguarding and child protection policy might not always be conducive to managing the complexities of a concern within different contexts.

Understanding this perspective is important for teacher educators as participants revealed



tensions as they gained experience: that policies not regularly attended to were less likely to influence practice, and knowing a policy might not always be effective for every practice context. There is research that explores the ‘knowledge-practice gap’ in general teacher education (Anderson and Herr, 1999; Cochran-Smith, 2005) and there is related research that examines the shift in contextualising teacher education within a more practice-based approach providing ‘novice teachers with experiences’ so that they can encounter potential scenarios in their learning (Berry and Loughran, 2002, p. 15). In general, Peercy and Troyan (2016) and Winch (2016b) caution that having knowledge *about* something does not always prepare a teacher to *enact*. Whilst helpful in supporting the analysis, the research base that investigates the influence of local policy interpretations on safeguarding and child protection practices specifically in the early years context, is less fully formed and further research is recommended in this area. The next section further examines tensions between policy and practice as reported by the participants. It suggests policies might be considered purposeful as guidance for EYTs when starting employment in professional practice but illustrates that interpretations can change within different employment contexts.

#### 4.3.4 *The effect of changes to employment*

Four participants mentioned changes to their employment and roles during their first year in the early years sector. In each case the participants referred to having ‘more responsibility’ resulting in this affecting perceptions of safeguarding and child protection policies and/or practices. P12, P13 and P16 were appointed as CPO/DSLs within four months of their new appointments and P14 moved from being a room leader in a day care setting to a class teacher in a primary school. Both P12 and P13 reported that EYTS was significant in them securing the CPO/DSL role as the setting manager had the status. P13 thought this probably helped the manager think she was ‘mature, sensible, with knowledge and theory...’ (P1318: 12). P13 affirmed that as one of three CPO/DSLs in her setting she was confident in taking on the CPO/DSL role, as illustrated in the interview excerpt below.

P13: If it was me on my own I’d probably be a bit more worried. I think because I know I’m supported it doesn’t make me feel so worried about it. I’m actually feeling quite good about doing it. I’m not too bothered. I think I know enough now to sort of put me in good stead to be able to do it. And the fact that there’s three of us makes it easier on things that I don’t have to make decisions on my own. It means I can always seek advice and support if I need it. So... If I didn’t have that I don’t think I’d be quite so ready to take on that position. (P1318: 65-68)

Similarly P12 stated ‘having another deputy manager was just a bit of reassurance really but if it was a safeguarding issue then they’d probably take it straight to the manager anyway’

(P1217: 42). She asserted having EYTS may have suggested to others in her setting that in terms of safeguarding and child protection, she may have had ‘more knowledge’ so she had possibly been given ‘a little bit more responsibility’ (P1217: 8). P16 stated ‘luckily she hadn’t had any issues in the nursery to that moment but it [being the CPO for her floor in the setting] was a big responsibility and an additional thing to take on as well as being the teacher’ (P16: 57). There appeared to be suggestion that the CPO/DSL role was seen as separate to their role as teacher: an additional responsibility with accountability consequences.

Legislation (EYFS, 2017) requires every early years setting to have a named staff member for safeguarding and child protection. There is indication from some participants in my research project, that the identification of a unique role may influence understandings of safeguarding and child protection accountability within different setting contexts: that having someone identified may relinquish accountability from some practitioners (see P12 above). Tensions with accountability might also be influenced by the organisation of the setting. As P10 identified, ‘as there were only five teachers and two assistants at the setting the roles such as Fire Officer, First Aid and Child Protection had to be handed out and everybody had to be something to fill all the different roles’ (P1020: 76). Further research would be beneficial in exploring tensions between named roles and perceptions of involvement in safeguarding and child protection practices.

The participants reported that in their new roles (as CPOs/DSLs) they located the setting’s policies to ensure they followed correct procedures for safeguarding and child protection. They appeared focussed on the practicalities of process: needing to follow procedures in order to do things correctly. There was an overriding sense that policies and procedures indicated a right or wrong way of doing things. P16 stated ‘when she started work she went through the safeguarding policy’ so that she knew who to report ‘any issues to’ (P16: 50).

P13 reported,

‘the policy was like the bible or safety net, so if they got stuck on anything they would check the policy to make sure they were doing things right, ...because if they knew how to behave in a situation then they were safeguarded as practitioners and children were safeguarded because of their behaviour’ (P1318: 47-48).

Some of the participants disclosed that unlike safeguarding, the child protection aspects of the policy were not regularly visited or explored in respect of daily operations and so familiarity with requirements might be questionable. This seemed to reveal some anxieties as

participants began to talk about their accountability and identified the need for support from others in their settings. P12 stated she ‘was quite lucky that she hadn’t had to deal with any sort of child protection issue’ (P1217: 21). P13 stated she ‘was accountable to Ofsted as if she did anything wrong then a parent could go to Ofsted and request a check on the setting and ... that was a big accountability’. She also thought she was ‘accountable to the children themselves because anything that she did wrong impacted on them’ (P1318: 111-112). P14 disclosed ‘if she’d done the wrong thing or had done well, the head teacher would let her know and either he, or the deputy manager, would provide support’ (P1419: 72).

The notion of accountability in terms of involvement with a child protection incident is relevant to question two of my research. There was indication that accountability generated concern, that there was a strict way of conducting practice: that accountability indicated a measure of the EYT’s performance (Osgood, 2006a). The participants used the word ‘wrong’ to repeatedly explain their anxieties should they deviate from known procedures written in setting policies. Kilderry (2014, p. 245) noted teachers in early years ‘are accountable for ensuring that practice meets policy expectations and regulation’ and it was this sense of ensuring certainty in policy implementation that relates to participants’ references to their confidence in practice. The EYTs suggest regular experience of safeguarding practices over time generates a sense of confidence whereas infrequent engagement with situations of child protection generates a sense of anxiety (also noted in section 4.3.2). Exploring notions of experience and time I considered the work of Schütz (1976) who explains the ‘life-world’ of individuals in terms of a continuous flow of experiences over time that is affected, and changed, by interpretations unique to each: and Eraut (2004) who examines the notion of experience and points out, ‘Part of the problem is that when we refer to ‘an experience’ we are probably thinking about a single episode or incident, but when we talk about what we have learned from ‘experience in general’ we are probably referring to our accumulated learning from a series of episodes’ (Eraut, 2004, p. 251).

The analysis of the participants’ responses suggests there is tension with interpretations of the interconnectivity between safeguarding and child protection in early years practice. ‘Accumulated learning’ from ‘episodes’ of safeguarding appear to be distinguishable from learning gained from ‘single episodes’ of child protection as reported over time. In the following section (4.4) this tension is further explored as the analysis reveals uncertainties within safeguarding and child protection policy and the EYT’s practice.

#### **4.4 Uncertainties within safeguarding and child protection policy and practice**

In the first interviews the semi-structured questions associated with pre-training and EYTS learning in safeguarding and child protection elicited responses concerning emotional intent. The participants articulated personal and emotional agency in reasons to keep children safe. They specifically highlighted setting policy and procedures that supported them in managing safeguarding and child protection in professional practice, including deferring concerns to the CPO/DSL (sections 4.2 and 4.3). They also reported worries of accountability. The next section of interview questions provided the opportunity to talk generally about their role in the setting and their safeguarding and child protection experiences. It was through this dialogue that participants illuminated a number of tensions. The following subsections examine the tensions revealed which include uncertainties in definitions of safeguarding and child protection, concerns with information sharing about children involved in cases, knowing when to report a concern and how the application of some policies may cause harm to themselves or children. The participants revealed a strong sense of emotional investment as they disclosed feelings about their involvement in early years safeguarding and child protection practice.

##### *4.4.1 Uncertainties in definitions of safeguarding and child protection*

In the first and second interviews the participants declared uncertainty in their understanding of the terms safeguarding and child protection. In the *first interviews* P15 stated she thought the ‘whole of child protection and safeguarding came under safeguarding’ and that initially confused her because she had ‘understood more what child protection was, and then got confused with what safeguarding was, and was still confused with the difference’ (P15: 73). Likewise, P11 did not ‘see safeguarding and child protection as distinct but interlinked’. She ‘did not know whether they were separate or not, as they came separately in a child protection policy and a safeguarding policy, but were mostly the same’ (P11: 117-120). From what P14 understood she thought ‘safeguarding and child protection was about abuse, health and safety, ensuring that she looked out for a child as an individual, and observed signs that might be a big issue at the end if further investigated’ (P14: 21).

In the *second interviews* P10 stated that ‘a safeguarding policy could give some parameters for understanding because even the word ‘safeguarding’ could just be a term’ and she thought that she could ‘lose the sense of what safeguarding meant as opposed to child protection or risk assessment, so fleshing out what they might mean would identify what the terms were’

(P1020: 69-70). P13 stated ‘a lot of people didn’t quite understand how wide a subject like safeguarding was because when people said the word safeguarding they thought child protection and didn’t think of the wider picture’ (P1318: 4). P15 stated she had ‘always got confused between safeguarding and child protection’ (P1521: 51).

The responses indicate assumptions of different forms of knowledge concerning the notions of safeguarding and child protection. The terms are often used together indicating a separateness of meaning but an interconnectedness of application. In the EYFS (2017) the terms are used interchangeably although there are no working definitions provided within the document. The Safeguarding and Welfare requirements are set out in Section 3 of the EYFS (2017) and within this there is a subsection for Child Protection. In this subsection references are made to safeguarding (DfE, 2017a, p.16). The terms are layered and transposable within the same section of document potentially causing confusion, as revealed by the EYTs.

This ambiguity in the use of terminology has been widely discussed in the field of social work (Parton, 2011, 2014). Parton (2011) identifies that reform of social services and accompanying policy since the 1970’s have identified subtle yet significant shifts between emphasis on safeguarding (prevention and wellbeing) and emphasis on child protection (abuse). Parton (2011, p. 857) explains how ‘Effective measures to safeguard children were seen as those that also promoted their welfare, and should not be seen in isolation from the wider range of support and services provided to meet the needs of all children and families.’ Parton (2011) explains how there was development of a tiered system of universal and specialist services following the broadening of prevention and protection definitions. However, he cautions in a later work that, ‘The scandal-driven politics of child protection have encouraged a narrow view of what is at stake in policy making and in the process the ‘failures’ of child protection are seen to result from problems in the design and operation of child protection systems and the decisions of certain professionals, particularly social workers’ (Parton, 2014, p. 2053). The challenges associated with the ambiguous use of terminology and shifting practice emphasis between safeguarding and child protection in the social care field (Parton, 2011, 2014) appears reflected in the early years sector. This may indicate why participants reported concerns in understanding the difference but interrelatedness of safeguarding and child protection. This was also discussed in subsections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3 where participants indicated confidence in safeguarding (prevention) regularly practiced, and lack of confidence in child protection practices in which they rarely engaged.

Practitioners in post for a year reported uncertainty in meanings, suggesting that experience does not always clarify practices that have implied distinctness and yet are presented as interrelated. The participants' responses indicate they are alert to the limitations of their understanding and show *presence* in identifying the need for further knowledge. These findings have particular relevance for the third research question that explores how knowledge gained from this research project may inform EYTS training. The EYTs responses suggest the terms safeguarding and child protection may be used in legislative documentation but their meanings are open to interpretation, potentially creating misunderstandings within and between early years establishments. In the following subsection 4.4.2 the suggestion of ambiguity and confusion is further explored as the participants shared experiences of what they were and were not allowed to know, in terms of children deemed at risk or in need within their settings.

#### *4.4.2 Participants' awareness of children involved in safeguarding and child protection concerns*

The participants reported that one of the challenges was being made aware of children perceived as at risk or in need. There appeared some confusion as to who was informed in the setting. Some participants expressed concern about their own involvement or how they found out that children in their setting might be involved in a suspected or on-going case.

During the *first interviews* P10 stated she had not been involved in a safeguarding or child protection case but she had also 'not been made aware of any particular areas of concern about the children in her class' (P10: 108). P11 disclosed that in her setting no one knew which children were on the safeguarding list 'except the safeguarding officer, the headmistress and probably the class teacher', although she thought 'everyone should know within a phase' because it was 'better for that child's safety' (P11: 66-67). P12 had been made aware of an incident but 'was not told the full story, just what had happened and that she did not need to worry about it' but was 'advised what to do if the parents spoke to her' (P12: 75-76). P13 did not think 'the setting had any children that she would have expected to have child protection and safeguarding issues with' but she had then been involved in a case because the manager attended a child protection meeting and P13 had to 'get all the documentation out for the child and explain how the child had been' (P13: 139, 41).

These participants reported differences of opinion about who needed to know about a child involved in an actual or potential safeguarding or child protection issue. Most articulated only relevant persons needed to be informed although there were two participants who suggested all staff engaged with the child should know about a case as they might hold significant information or observe particular behaviours in the child. Not knowing about a child either in need or at risk appeared to cause the participants some concern as they might hold vital information that would be of relevance. Dependent upon the size and organisation of the setting they expressed that a number of practitioners might be in contact with the child in any one day. Behaviours of children might be considered typical or atypical with knowledge of the contextual background of the child and their family.

The *second interviews* revealed little difference in responses and the same tensions remained. P12 affirmed she reported a concern early in practice but because she ‘was new it was dealt with without her’ (P1217: 5). P14 stated it was only after a serious incident involving the police that she got to know the family of one of her key children ‘had been having issues and Social Services had been involved with the mother’s neglect of the child’. She stated things reported from home would go straight to the school without anyone knowing what was going on, which she thought ‘was just really sad’ (P1419: 51-52).

The responses indicated practices concerning disclosures of children deemed in need or at risk were causing concern. There was suggestion that whilst practitioners were essentially responsible for the children in their class, information about them was within a restricted context: that not all information about a child and family was shared with those who worked regularly with them. Participants suggested information should be shared appropriately but their disclosures indicated that different settings have different practices and, in the example given by P14, this did not include informing the Key Person that the child had a Child Protection Plan. Practice appeared to relate to information about the child and family only being shared with those in senior positions regardless of whether they had regular contact with the child or not (for example the Head Teacher, Manager or CPO/DSL). This practice appears in contrast to guidance provided by the Department for Education (2015) that actively promotes the sharing of information with frontline practitioners who have responsibility for working directly with children. Outlining the principles of information sharing within safeguarding services it states, ‘Practitioners should use their judgment when making decisions on what information to share and when and should follow organisation

procedures or consult with their manager if in doubt. The most important consideration is whether sharing information is likely to safeguard and protect a child' (DfE, 2015, p. 8). The inference is that responsibility to share information lies with frontline practitioners who report to senior managers within the setting or organisation. The participants reported it is their senior managers that hold information on children deemed in need or at risk and for reasons unknown (in the context of this research project) the frontline staff may be uninformed of these children. The suggestion is that without information concerning children in need or at risk, EYTs may potentially misinterpret or ignore children's behaviours and disclosures that might be significant in context, although ultimately held accountable for their welfare, as stated in the a (DfE, 2017a, p. 16). This tension has potential practice implications. EYTs may well hold vital information on the children as 'they are experts in the day to day understanding of young children' (Doyle, 2014, p. 240) but their reported concerns relate to whether changes in a child's behaviour is important in the context of safeguarding and/or child protection. Further research is needed to explore whether this is an issue in the wider early years sector. Some additional investigations into what and how information sharing is conducted within settings would enable further analysis of the potential impact and whether this is in the interests of safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children (DfE, 2015). The following section introduces a related tension as participants identified indecisions in knowing when to report a concern about children.

#### *4.4.3 Knowing when to take action*

In the previous section the data analysis indicated participants' concerns about having knowledge of children deemed at risk or in need with whom they had regular contact. Directly linked to this were disclosures of tensions concerning when actions should be taken, and issues escalated to other staff and/or the CPO/DSL. The participants indicated moments of indecision before they felt confident to report a concern. These appeared located within personal premise, as each participant considered different practices and behaviours were appropriate with young children (discussed in subsection 4.3.1). Practitioners revealed they were unsure whether knowledge they might have about a child might be of concern (or otherwise) when considered in context with other knowledge.

P10 stated she only knew what was 'normal' or when 'something was slightly up with her own children' and relied on this to help her to make decisions about the children in her class (P10: 133). She gave an example of how she had witnessed a teacher shouting at children



making them 'feel diminished'. P10 asked me in the course of the interview whether this should have been seen as a safeguarding issue had this behaviour pattern continued (P10: 143-145). P11 shared she 'should know what to do if something was to arise' (P11: 53) but she would have to 'talk to someone about it', to 'see what their advice was' so that she would have 'support to come to a conclusion rather than a decision based on her own thoughts' (P11: 78-82). P12 disclosed that faced with an issue the first thing she would do was 'ask another staff member whether she should go and tell the safeguarding officer' (P12: 65).

The responses in the *first interviews* suggest participants were aware of what they should do if a concern arose in practice as stated in their setting policies, but there were moments of indecision concerning the thresholds for action: a checking of significance in relation to their personal position. The participants either sought the opinion of others (not the CPO/DSL) or considered raising the concern based upon personal judgment.

In the *second interviews* these moments of indecision were still evident. However, experiences of safeguarding and child protection cases in the intervening months showed some participants had become consciously aware of these moments and had established some strategies to support themselves. P13 affirmed the case she was involved with had influenced the threshold for when she would take action, as it had been about a child she 'had not had concerns about at all' (P1318: 42). P13 explained as a result she then 'reported and recorded everything' as she 'would much rather be safe than sorry' (P1318: 43). P14 disclosed there were potential examples of safeguarding and child protection in practice that might just be the result of a combination of events such as 'a child coming to school without breakfast as they were late waking up' and were not necessarily neglected. P14 stated she had begun to speak to parents about such incidences (P1419: 88). Likewise P15 disclosed she always talked to parents if a child's 'behaviour was something which was inconsistent or out of the ordinary' as there was 'always something behind it' (P1521: 37). The example given below illustrates how P15 used the strategy of talking to another member of staff and then relating the issue to her own childhood experiences to inform her judgment about whether to action concerns.

P15: So if we do have a problem I usually talk to my EYFS coordinator about it and ask her opinion and if she thinks that it should go further then it will go further. I would then talk to the SENCO or the safeguarding officer so anything. There's nothing really. One of the other children doesn't like it when they have to go back home with their dad and always cries. But then again it's hard. It's just one of those things. I remember when I was young I only wanted my mum to collect me and no

one else so I'd get upset. So is it that she just wanted her mummy or is there something else to it and things like that. I mean I write it down of course' (P1521: 48-49).

The challenges of when to take action were acknowledged by P12 as she recalled a wider strategy to support all staff in the setting. She appeared to suggest confidence was a key indicator for initiating action and this might be gained from seeking the support of others.

'I think maybe if a member of staff sees something that they're not sure about or doesn't sit well with them they should, instead of just ignoring it, just feel confident enough to even just ask another member of staff, 'hey, what do you think of this? It doesn't look right to me', and then maybe that second opinion can confirm something and then that child can be protected in the way that the policy states' (P1217: 56).

Moments of indecision before enacting a concern were attributed to not being sure about either the meaning of a child's behaviours and/or the participant's confidence to make a decision without the affirmation of another. There is very limited research in education that might provide some understanding of these findings in the context of early years safeguarding and child protection, so I have drawn on work from the field of social work to inform my interpretations. A review by Munro (2011) identified that frontline social work practitioners developed an overreliance on safeguarding and child protection procedure at the expense of professional judgment, due to changes in services causing uncertainty in practice, and a developing culture of fear exacerbated by high profile cases of child abuse. Parton (2014, p. 2051) also noted that the impact of service reform increased levels of anxiety for social workers. The EYTs expressed safeguarding and child protection policies were regarded as key documents in providing information on procedures but this may well have been linked to their relatively early stage employment (as discussed in subsections 4.3.2 and 4.3.3) rather than overreliance as identified by Munro (2011). There were disclosures of anxiety expressed by EYTs and this is further discussed in subsection 4.4.4. However it is difficult to determine whether moments of indecision to action concerns, evidenced in my research project, were affected by similar influences identified by Munro (2011) and Parton (2014). Further research is needed to examine more closely the significance of external factors affecting actions in practice.

Munro's (2011) and Parton's (2014) findings do resonate with research in early years that has examined the effects of reconceptualising early years as a phase of education (discussed in the literature review) and the resulting ambiguities of roles and the impact of accountability (Osgood, 2010; Moss, 2010; Chalke, 2013; Lumsden, 2012). The EYTs in my research

project expressed confidence in knowing the procedure (subsection 4.3.2) but acknowledged limitations in knowing how to act in uncertain situations (subsection 4.3.3). Some EYTs provided examples of over reporting (P13) and potential avoidance (P14) following involvement in practice situations. The moments of indecision they reported before taking action may well be situated in a personal awareness of limitations in terms of knowledge and/or experience (presence). The engagement of another member of staff to affirm their actions may be indicative of the novice seeking expert advice about structural ambiguities in practice or uncertainties in procedure. The following section explores the participants' disclosures that suggest some of their indecisions might also be attributed to tensions between policy and practice that they experienced over time.

#### *4.4.4 Tensions between policies and their application in professional practice potentially causing personal risk and/or harm to the EYTs and children*

The relationship between setting safeguarding and child protection policies and their local application was one of the key issues participants shared as being very tenuous in practice. The examples given suggested some policy applications might potentially cause risk and/or harm to practitioners and children within settings. Participants stated policies were developed to protect themselves and children, but identified that difference in interpretations caused tensions between procedures and guiding principles of early years: where tensions existed between local policy directives that appeared in conflict with what was generally considered effective practice when working with very young children.

In the *first interviews* some tensions had already arisen in the participants' experiences. P10 reported concern for 'over zealous policies' (P10: 151). She cited the setting's mobile phone policy under safeguarding and understood that this had arisen from statutory requirements to protect children from being photographed. However P10 stated when staff took children outside the setting the policy was applied to the 'nth degree' and they were not allowed a mobile phone to call for help should they need to, as the setting did not 'want to come a cropper with Ofsted by being caught out'. P10 wondered 'whether carrying out the policy was putting children at risk' in these situations (P10: 154-158). P10 gave other examples where she thought she 'might get into trouble with her setting for doing things she personally did not think were a risk to anybody' but that she did 'in the moment' such as helping children to 'have an outside wee' when they were away from the setting on park land. P10 stated her concern that 'policies might make her at risk' of accusations concerning

inappropriate behaviour (P10: 167-170). P11 stated concerns associated with not having had any safeguarding training at the setting. She outlined her 'anxiety' and 'worry' related to not knowing what was expected of her in terms of specific setting procedures. Despite repeated requests for training and support she had not received anything and she 'did not feel confident' (P11: 33, 55, 74, 138). P12 expressed similar concerns, as she had not had a 'chance to talk with anyone about what was in the policy' (P12: 47). P12 stated that her anxieties centred on being wrongly accused. She stated if she knew 'the job was being done correctly then her anxiety would be reduced'. P12 thought 'someone wrongly accused could lose their job and never be able to work with children again, which would be awful, especially if they had not done anything wrong', so she thought it would 'probably make people a lot more careful about what they did and think harder about how they were doing something' (P12: 86-89). P12's perception appeared centred on her not being confident in her knowledge of the setting policy and related procedures, and therefore the concern that she might make a mistake. The suggestion was this might result in moments of indecision if she was more careful and thought harder about how she would do something. Similarly P16 was given the CPO/DSL role with assumptions of knowledge and experience based on the professional status leaving her feeling a lack of support. P16 recalled being appointed the CPO/DSL when she started at the setting without being informed and having found out from a notice board announcement. P16 thought she had been given the role because she was a graduate although she 'hadn't been asked if she had confidence, if she knew what she was doing and there was no interview' (P16: 58). P16 had not received training for the role but was briefly told if she had any concerns she should 'write them down, log it and pass it on to the manager' (P16: 59). P13 recalled being involved in a child protection case and described what had happened. She recounted being asked for setting documentation on the child and staff being 'worried' they had 'missed some signs that something was happening at home' (P13: 54-55). P13 stated staff 'were all pretty nervous thinking they were going to be the ones getting into trouble'. Being interviewed by a Social Worker made P13 feel like 'staff were all being judged as if they had done something wrong' (P13: 56-60). The resulting impact was one of uncertainty in procedures that differed from 'typical' practice. As P13 recounted,

'We were initially told to write down anything, anything at all, any accident he had even if there were no marks on the child just to make sure we had everything documented. And then we were told; actually don't do that because you're going to scare the parents because they are going to have so many things to sign. We don't want them to think we are judging them. So it was a bit of mixed messages at first. Afterwards I think nobody was really quite sure what to do' (P13: 76-77).

P15 also reported a tension between policy and practice. This concerned the notion of 'touch'. P15 stated that 'touch made people nervous and the media didn't help' but thought 'whilst there were a few incidents that were serious, the policy outcomes affected those that understood the needs of young children' (P15: 45-47). P15 stated if a child needed a 'bit of a cuddle' then she 'personally didn't think that there was anything wrong with that'. P15 stated 'policies had been put in place for the protection of children but at the same time it was about looking at the needs of children and this was difficult' (P15: 48-49). P15 asserted that whilst she understood policies, 'as long as there was someone else in the room like her teaching assistant and a child was crying, then she would pick them up and put them on her lap, because having someone present would save her back' (P15: 50). P15 gave other practice examples where she experienced a sense of uncertainty between policy and actual practice that made her 'worry'. However P15 stated that the 'fear of being accused did not override her responsibilities to the children' (P15: 112).

The *first interview* responses revealed that the application of some policy requirements resulted in conflict with early years practices, where participants saw themselves at risk in terms of being accused of wrongdoing, however unintentional. Some of the EYTs experiences suggested that application of the setting's safeguarding and child protection policies did not always appear to be in the interests of young children.

In the *second interviews* this notion appeared compounded by more examples that further illustrated these tensions. P10 reported that having been in practice for a year she was aware she was 'responsible for other people's children but there were things in every day that she didn't assume were a particular risk in general practice' such as 'sort of throwing a couple of the children in her class onto the beanbag and tickling them because they were just having a lovely time and she was very familiar with them' (P1020: 12-13). However P10 recalled details of an incident that involved the assumed practice of parents leaving their younger children unattended on the street when they entered the setting to pick up siblings from her class. In the incident P10 closed the setting door when a parent and child were still inside and a younger sibling (not attending the setting) was left outside. P10 was made to feel accountable that she had not supervised the safety of the child outside when she was told to apologise to the parent. Parents were contacted to remind them of the policy not to leave siblings on the street, but practice continued as before. P10 stated she would 'want a blanket ban on any child being left on the open street but that wasn't how it was, as the setting was

not gated although she couldn't be responsible for watching left children when she was at the door' (P1020: 56). P15 also stated concern for a policy stating that staff had to refrain from cuddling children and provided an example of an incident where the Head asked P15 to remove a child from her lap and place them on a chair (as stated in the setting policy), which had 'upset' P15 and was 'unfair' as the child needed comforting in order to separate from the parent (P1521: 58-59). P15 stated she understood why, but thought it was 'all a bit silly' and affirmed she had 'confidence to respond to what she thought was the right way for working with children even if guidance in the setting stated another way' (P1521: 60-64).

The responses indicated participants were aware of policy directives but that these sometimes conflicted with what they considered to be effective early years practice. The uncertainty appeared to add to participants' concerns. They subsequently developed strategies such as having someone in the room, or making sure issues were recorded that seemed to have been generated to safeguard themselves if challenged. This relates to the work of Lipsky (1980) whose research with 'public service workers who interact with citizens in the course of their jobs, and who have substantial discretion in the execution of their work' (Lipsky, 1980, p. 3), suggests that the views and actions of frontline workers aptly convey whether policy is effective or not. Lipsky (1980) refers to frontline workers as 'street-level bureaucrats' and argues that some decisions and 'the devices they invent to cope with uncertainties and work pressures, effectively become the public policies they carry out' (Lipsky, 1980, p. xii). The participants in my research project indicated their setting safeguarding and child protection policies may have been developed for all children to capture all eventualities, but these sometimes conflicted with the needs of individual children at different ages or stages of development and in different situations. The participants gave specific examples of how they acted with 'discretion in the execution of their work' (Lipsky, 1980) citing strategies to circumnavigate some of the tensions they experienced. Lipsky's (1980) research is helpful in the analysis of findings as the suggestion is that EYTs actions may be indicative of effective professionally skilled behaviours: their abilities to make discretionary judgments that indicates they are not bound by 'strict accountability' as suggested in section 4.4.4. The EYTs behaviours may also suggest there are ineffectual policies and procedures that need further investigation and attention: that intentions to capture learning from SCRs and the policy reform that follows, might not be appropriate for practices that are considered essential when working with young children (such as appropriate physical contact when a child seeks reassurance).

During the EYTS programme trainees are introduced to principles underpinning effective practice in early years that are founded upon historical and contemporary research (Piaget, 1936; Bowlby, 1969; Vygotsky, 1978; Sylva *et al.*, 2004; Bruce, 2015). Essentially the GE graduates explore how early years practice is located in a child-centred conceptual framework. Tensions reported by the participants in my research project appear to relate to where these practices are in conflict with their setting's policy: where overarching processes eclipse the needs of the individual child as perceived by the participants. The EYTs recognise tensions between policy, procedures and practice. They make decisions based upon knowledge and experience to make sense of what they articulate as being appropriate for the child whilst being mindful of, but not dictated by, policy. The work of Lipsky (1980) challenges practitioners 'to question the rules, real or self-imposed, and constraints within which [they] work [their] own behaviours in that environment' (Rowe, 2012, p. 12). The findings in my research project suggest the EYTs question their setting's safeguarding and child protection policies and procedures in relation to effective early years practice. They exercise discretionary practices that Urban *et al.*, (2011) argue is essential for working in uncertain circumstances.

Although it is important to have a 'body of knowledge' and 'practice', practitioners and teams also need reflective competences as they work in highly complex, unpredictable and diverse contexts. (Urban *et al.*, 2011, p. 21)

Further research is needed to examine whether some of the challenges the EYTs reported in my research, is indicative of the wider workforce involved in safeguarding and child protection practices in the early years context: whether policies are generating fear for practitioners regarding non-compliant disciplinary procedures and/or whether the application of policies for *all* children in the setting might potentially have adverse consequences. Whilst acknowledging that participants may be exercising some discretion within their professional role the following subsection 4.4.5, examines their declarations of how this is influenced by their personality traits and feelings about safeguarding and child protection in general.

#### *4.4.5 Personality traits and feelings about safeguarding and child protection*

When discussing safeguarding and child protection practices the participants' referred to concerns relating specifically to their personality traits as well as feelings about their professional responsibilities. There was a general sense that the ability of participants to successfully manage a safeguarding and child protection situation might be reliant upon their

personal characteristics and temperament. For those participants who had not been involved in a safeguarding or child protection situation, these amounted to concerns in anticipation of an incident. Some participants had experienced involvement in a child protection situation and they identified how it had affected them personally and professionally. The participants used language associated with the emotions when describing their experiences and outlined the impact upon their wellbeing.

In the *first interviews* dialogue revealed intentions to adhere to statutory legislation to raise a concern, but uncertainties as to whether the participants had the personal attributes to accomplish this in practice. P10 shared her concern that if she suspected another adult of wrongdoing she would ‘hope that the needs of the child would be paramount’ and she ‘would behave appropriately’ (P10: 135) but was concerned she ‘wouldn’t be assertive enough to challenge behaviour’ (P10: 146). P11 declared she would ‘probably panic a little bit if something was to happen to a child in her class’ and she would be ‘a bit anxious’ (P11: 49-50). P11 explained she had anxiety because she should ‘know what to do but she was not confident’ (P11: 93). Likewise P12 declared ‘anxiety if anything were to happen’ and ‘wanted reassurance’ (P12: 63, 66). The participants who had experienced a situation early in their employment directly related their experiences to personal and emotional impact. P13 explained that confidence was needed to speak out against anybody (P13: 124). She reported her experience of a child protection situation had made her ‘much more cynical’ in practice and had ‘made her nervous’ because she wanted to ‘make less mistakes’ should something like that happen again (P13: 64, 66). P16 shared her feelings about an incident.

P16: I was definitely scared because you know having to kind of deal with something like that is kind of shocking and scary and the thoughts in your mind are like, this is not good at all. You know I felt more scared for [-----], kind of that’s it really, just kind of ... a bit of panic as well, kind of worried really (P16: 78).

P16 explained how the incident had ‘affected her personally’ and revealed she ‘couldn’t forget about it’ and ‘it made her feel more responsible for the children’ than she was before, as if she ‘wanted to take particular care of them’. P16 affirmed she felt ‘more personally involved with those particular children and wanted to make sure they were looked after’ as she had ‘a care for them, a natural care, that came out when she thought they were vulnerable’ (P16: 96-99). Likewise P15 also recognised she was ‘quite an emotional person so that if a child was crying she felt their pain,’ (P15: 64, 70). The participants’ suggested they experienced deeply felt emotional responses.



In the *second interviews* this sense of personal impact was affirmed through several more examples from experience. There was a general sense of participants recognising that involvement in incidents affected them significantly and in some cases changed their behaviours. P10 experienced an incident (described in subsection 4.4.4) where she was made to apologise even though she was not at fault (P1020: 49). P10 stated it ‘felt like staff weren’t brilliantly protected in that they were vulnerable’ and she ‘hadn’t slept that night, she felt really guilty and she talked with the team about how she might resolve it’. As a result of the incident P10 changed her behaviours and was ‘more careful’ but she ‘didn’t think this was a great thing’ as responsibility lay with the parent (P1020, 46, 55, 96). P12 stated her anxieties about incidences continued as she had ‘heard all the stories in the media’ but hoped she ‘would know what to do and would just get on with it’ (P1217: 33). P13 stated she could have had ‘all the knowledge in the world but when it actually happened she felt helpless and it really changed how she saw things.’ P13 stated she subsequently ‘questioned anything as a result and thought it was the uncertainty in the whole safeguarding topic that made everyone have different levels of confidence in it’ (P1318: 58, 81). P13 revealed the emotional impact the incident had on her.

‘With things like safeguarding and child protection it is a very emotive subject and I think when you are involved in it, it becomes so much more real and so much more personal, emotional wise as well as practical and professionally. And I think, as much as you try, it’s hard to switch that off because that’s a child. I think that’s why it’s so emotional because it’s a child and you know that child is, in a sense, helpless and it’s up to us to make things better. And it’s hard to switch off your emotions towards that even though you know as a professional that’s something you’re going to have to work towards.’ (P1318: 92-95).

The significant personal impact was also reported by P14 following her involvement in an incident where she escalated a concern about a child to the CPO/DSL which resulted in the parents refusing to talk to her regarding anything to do with their child (P1419: 32). The consequences of P14’s experience was her assertion that whilst she would report a concern again she would ‘do it anonymously’ as she had ‘learnt not to confront or face parents because to them she had done something wrong to their family’, and she ‘wouldn’t want to be tagged or disassociated again so she would just listen and take it further anonymously to protect herself’ (P1419: 82). The impact of the incident on P14 left her feeling victimised by the parents and also alienated from staff who avoided showing association with her whilst the situation was occurring. Likewise P15 reported that an incident that she had been involved with had ‘scared’ her although ‘she hadn’t done anything wrong’ (P1521: 103).

The participants who had experienced child protection situations appeared to have heightened awareness of personal emotional impact. There were several examples where participants described how they had been deeply affected and subsequently these increased personal concerns and anxieties, such as P12 who stated that barriers to her wanting to intervene were ‘not knowing what the reaction might be from the other person’ (P12: 61). There was an overriding sense that participants felt they were placed in a vulnerable position themselves. They reported fears of getting things wrong, being the victims of unfair allegations and experiencing adverse behaviours from others. They expressed that experiences generated further uncertainty around their future involvement in situations. The participants declared intentions to continue raising concerns about children in practice, but there was indication this would involve some consideration of impact upon themselves: to what extent they might suffer harm either emotionally or physically. The participants’ responses indicated potential hesitations of instigating child protection procedures in practice as they shared concerns about the need to protect themselves as well as the child. In the citation on page 112, P13 suggests her emotional engagement should be something other than personal to help her manage responses: that being a professional somehow indicates a need to ‘switch off’ emotions in order to cope with the personal impact experienced. In examining research to inform my interpretation of this finding I was able to draw on the discourse relating to the emotional engagement of practitioners in respect of their general work in early years (as discussed in chapter two). I have also explored this notion within the wider field of professional disciplines.

Munro (2008) has explored the impact of emotions in safeguarding and child protection within the social work context. She has argued that emotions should be recognised as irreducible but necessary alongside analytic reasoning in order for decisions by practitioners to be effective. She states, ‘Recent work in psychology and neurophysiology has revealed a more fundamental and a more positive role for emotion: that it is essential for effective judgment and decision making’ (Munro, 2008, p. 13). She has also highlighted the heightened emotional effects experienced by practitioners engaged with this area of work. Most significantly, in terms of my research findings, she identified that support mechanisms for practitioners can mitigate against feelings that might result in practitioners demonstrating behaviours in practice, such as cynicism (as reported by P13). ‘A system that seeks to ignore emotions is in danger of leaving them to have an unknown, possibly harmful impact on the

work, and is also neglecting a rich source of data to help us understand what is going on' (Munro, 2008, p. 14). The examples from practice reported by the EYTs hinted at the possibility that some of them had experienced 'harmful impact'.

At present there is little research into systems that are in place to support the emotional dimensions of safeguarding and child protection practices in early years. P10 affirmed that 'a supervision meeting would have helped her' but 'there wasn't supervision at the setting' (P1020: 9). Supervision is the statutory system in place as part of the welfare requirements in the (2017), which states that,

Supervision should provide opportunities for staff to:

- discuss any issues - particularly concerning children's development or well-being;
- identify solutions to address issues as they arise; and
- receive coaching to improve their personal effectiveness. (DfE, 2017a, p. 21)

Soni (2018, p. 4) proposes that in early years the 'description of supervision adds a focus on safeguarding and prioritizes it as it is the first bullet point,' in the welfare requirements (shown above). However, the conclusion of her research identifies that the term is defined in different ways for different purposes and this causes confusion in the sector. The participants in my research project report that their emotional experiences are not well supported in practice. Further research is needed to examine whether supervision is effectively supporting practitioners in safeguarding and child protection aspects of practice but there are some implications in terms of my third research question. EYTS educators might examine how the safeguarding and child protection aspects of the course explores what Munro (2008, p. 12) calls 'emotions and reasoning': recognizing that the safety of children arouses emotional responses in practitioners that are beneficial in determining the best course of action, but that can leave a lasting impact upon them, both in desirable and undesirable ways.

One of the key areas that participants referred to as generating particular concern in terms of experiencing emotional turmoil was in their involvement with the parents/carers during an incident. The following section presents the findings concerning responses of participants to situations that involved working directly with parents of children at the centre of safeguarding and child protection situations.

## 4.5 Parent partnership working

‘Parent Partnership’ is a term used widely in early years education to describe practices established between parents/carers and practitioners for the benefit of children’s learning and development. The EYFS (DfE, 2017a, p. 6) states it is essential ‘there is a strong partnership between practitioners and parents and/or carers’. The interpretation of partnership as a conceptual term is located in the development of practices within individual early years settings and organizations. The notion of partnership suggests a relationship between partners: a sense of mutual cooperation. In the EYTS Standards trainees must demonstrate their ability to ‘forge positive professional relationships and work with parents and/or carers in the best interests of babies and children’ (NCTL, 2013, p. 2), in order to achieve the professional status. The research questions relating to safeguarding and/or child protection incidents that the participants had been involved in revealed a number of tensions relating to parents: how relationships within partnership working influences practitioners’ responses to concerns about children in their settings. These findings are presented and discussed in the following subsections (4.5.1, 4.5.2 and 4.5.3).

### 4.5.1 Working in partnership with parents/carers

Participant responses recognised the statutory expectation they must work in partnership with parents and P13 recalled that on the EYTS course she ‘was told parent partnership was really important and it was crucial to create good bonds with the parents’ (P13: 158). However, the participants revealed how these expectations caused significant tensions when working with safeguarding and child protection situations.

The first of these suggested parents were influential in affecting how initial decisions to enact a concern were reached. In the *first interviews* P14 stated if she reported a concern to the manager she would ‘have to be very specific and need to have enough evidence to show it could be abuse’ as ‘it would be very difficult for the manager to challenge parents’ and ‘quite difficult to do something about it because of the social status of the people in that environment’ (P14: 57-58, 62). P16 affirmed she was worried because she had ‘heard through gossip that there had been situations in the nursery where parents got offended if they were accused of hurting their child and then they would obviously take them out of the nursery and things like that’ (P16: 90). P15 openly shared her concerns that she was ‘fearful of parents’ as they could ‘make unfair allegations from something that a child might say to them’ that could be misconstrued (P15: 109-110).

In the *second interviews* the participants' further experiences seemed to have affirmed that parents were influential and affected the way participants responded to initial concerns about children. P13 stated 'the partnership was dependent on the parents as some held the keys to the relationship and she had to follow their lead and other parents would let her take the lead and be in charge of the relationship' but she was essentially 'held to account by the parents' (P1318: 52, 110). This sense of accountability was also evident in the interview held with P10 who recalled a safeguarding incident in the setting and from her experience affirmed the 'balance of power rested with the parents' as they 'had an attitude that they paid and were provided with a service and she was their staff' (P1020: 60-61). P10 openly declared if she had an issue 'she wouldn't feel like she could challenge too much as it would feel quite uncomfortable' and 'it didn't feel like it was part of the way the setting did things' (P1020: 65).

The findings suggested practitioners considered the position of parents as a significant influence when considering a potential safeguarding concern about a child in the setting. Parents were perceived to be a leading force as the setting might be reliant upon the financial security of children attending the setting. The settings' reputation rested with the perceptions, interpretations and judgments of parents that could be made public. When talking about her anxieties in safeguarding and child protection P11 revealed the extent to which the setting considered the influence of parents.

P11: They know they want everything to be perfect and in every single meeting they're like, everything is based on the parents, you can't say this because the parents will think this.' (P11: 55)

When P14 referred a child to the CPO/DSL she revealed how the parents then controlled the situation through the way in which they chose to communicate. The mother asserted she had the 'right to treat her child the way she wanted' (P1419: 27) and then both parents refused to speak to P14 on any account. When P14 asked for support from the CPO/DSL she was told she should 'just let it be' (P1419: 35). P14 stated the situation 'made her feel horrible' (P1419: 29) and she revealed how she had tried different strategies to engage in dialogue with the parents but at each attempt they ignored her. P14 experienced fear when the mother demonstrated aggression towards her. As P14 recounted,

'...because that day when the mum came back to me, she just saw me in the corridor and she burst at me. I was frightened you know and it's one parent. You know people have got different levels of tolerance and anger so I'm getting those with experience

saying, 'Oh they got busted outside after work' and all that. So some people will take it further. 'Ok you've done this to us so we'll do this back to you.' (P1419: 83-84)

P16 recalled how 'anxious she felt when talking to the parent' because she 'didn't want to say something that would really offend the mother and cause it to escalate to an Ofsted or someone coming to check things out' at the setting (P16: 84). Similarly P15 gave a detailed explanation of when a child had innocently kissed her on the leg and, whilst she had told him not to, the next day he asked her whether she had 'remembered him kissing her'. P15 was 'concerned that if he'd said that to his mother it could be interpreted in a very wrong way' (P1521: 104). The following day the child's mother asked if she could 'talk to P15 immediately' and whilst P15 had 'not done anything wrong', she had a 'sense of fear' and stated it was 'horrible' and she had 'started to cry because her mind just went to the worse'. The mother wanted to talk about something unrelated and the incident was described as 'nothing' but P15 was 'worried she could have been misunderstood because she'd heard about things like that as everyone talked about it and it was in the news' (P15: 105-109).

This fear reported by participants featured strongly in their accounts of practice with parents. They associated safeguarding and child protection practices with a sense of foreboding with adverse undertones in terms of impact upon themselves. The parents' interpretations of practice and their judgment of participants were revealed as highly influential and potentially harmful to them and/or the setting. P13 stated how damaging interpretations of their practice by parents could be.

'I mean, you know it only takes one person to say something to somebody else and then that's it, your reputation keeps spreading so it could be problematic to the reputation of the whole nursery if you don't do something particularly correctly. Or even if you do, some people may even judge the fact that something's happened even if they don't really know the inside and the outside, it's just 'that nursery, you know they have safeguarding issues' and it wouldn't even have to do with us. It might just be a child at the setting but people are very judgemental without knowing a lot of details, I think. So it could influence people's ideas about the setting itself.' (P1318: 31-33)

The experiences of participants suggested parents' reactions and responses influenced the ways in which they considered safeguarding and child protection issues. It was suggested there needed to be certainty relating to a potential situation before the EYTs would report concerns because of the potential impact upon the setting's reputation, their finances (should a dissatisfied family leave) and the practitioners' emotions.

Research concerning parent-practitioner partnerships in early years predominantly explores the benefits of cooperative and collaborative working that is seen as crucial for enabling optimum effectiveness in young children's learning and development (Elfer, Goldschmied and Selleck, 2003; Melhuish *et al.*, 2008; Brunton and Thornton, 2010). Mac Naughton and Hughes (2011) propose that partnership in early years should involve respect for knowledge that the parents/carers and the practitioners hold on the child. Parent-practitioner partnership from this perspective indicates an equality of involvement. However, the notion of parent-partnership is not clearly defined and international studies within early years from Finland and Iceland have indicated tensions between the involvement of parents/carers for the purposes of disclosing information about their children, and their actual involvement in influencing the pedagogical practices of settings: that partnership is not perceived as equal by either the practitioners or parents/carers (Alasuutari, 2010; Einarsdottir and Jónsdóttir, 2017). Research in the context of early years in England examines how parents might feel marginalised in the practitioner-parent partnership if the perception is that control about what and how the child is educated rests with the professional knowledge of the practitioner (Mac Naughton, 2005; Mac Naughton and Hughes, 2011). If partnership assumes cooperation between parents and practitioners on equal terms then there are inevitable tensions when challenging situations arise particularly in safeguarding and child protection.

The EYTs reported tensions in partnership working with parents/carers when revealing examples of practice where safeguarding and child protection policies of the setting were intentionally or unintentionally contravened. P10 recalled that at 'pick up times' it was her 'responsibility to watch the setting door, to make sure that the children in her care were not leaving without their parents' but it 'was not her responsibility to watch the children that parents left outside' (P1020: 36). Despite letters to parents explaining they were leaving children at their own risk, parents continued to expect P10 to watch siblings left outside when they entered the nursery. P10 affirmed whilst 'the policy put responsibility on the parents, the parents chose to disregard it, which put her in an uncomfortable position' (P1020: 68). In another example, P15 revealed a tension between expectations to regularly report learning and development of children to parents and the methods by which this was achieved. Some parents had requested their children should not be included in setting photographs, but with the introduction of online interactive learning journals, P15 was concerned these children might be captured in video footage in the background of other children's journals (P1521: 46-47). P15 expressed that the situation could lead to allegations of wrongdoing and

contravention of the setting's policy, leaving P15 to manage the dilemma whilst maintaining effective partnership working with the parent/carers.

The partnership between parents/carers, children and practitioners may be challenged and potentially changed by differences in opinion and/or changes in circumstances (as reported by P13, P14 and P15). EYTs reported complexities and challenges in parent-partnership. Further research would be beneficial to support understandings of the impact of parent-practitioner partnership working within the English early years safeguarding and child protection context. Embedded within the participants' reporting of parents/carers influencing their enactments was the notion of personal investment in relationships. Participants reported their relationships with parents might be perceived as personal and that had implications for practice, particularly in relation to safeguarding and child protection. The following section explores this finding further.

#### *4.5.2 Relationships with parents/carers*

One of the most complex aspects causing tension was the nature of the participants' relationships with parents and their children. The EYTS (2017) requires 'partnership' with parents but it appeared there were different interpretations about how the development of relationships might be framed within this notion. In the *first interviews* P13 stated how 'it was nice to talk to parents' and how much she 'enjoyed talking to parents' but that she 'hadn't realized how much of an emotional connection she would build with the parents of the children in her room' (P13: 159). P13 recalled how she ended up having 'quite normal chats with parents about her social life' but how the relationship 'made it awkward when something did happen and she took it personally' (P13: 163, 165). P16 stated if children were crying 'sometimes the parents looked to her for reassurance and she felt really responsible for them' (P16: 31). P15 shared an example of how her relationship with the mother of a child influenced her decision about a child in her setting who complained of being hungry.

'One child kept telling me he didn't have breakfast in the morning but after knowing his mum, after speaking to his mum a lot I didn't think that would be the case.' (P15: 117)

In the *second interviews* the participants affirmed they had regular contact with parents but there was suggestion that the nature of their relationships with the children had developed to the point where they considered themselves as the 'parent'. P12 stated she 'loved the children, they were so sweet' and she felt as 'most of them went to the setting full time' they



‘saw her more than they saw their own parents’ so she ‘should act like that at work’ (P1217: 54, 55). P15 said she ‘sometimes felt like a mum of the children because they were so young, looked up to her and so she had that responsibility’ (P1521: 42).

The nature of relationships between the participants and the parents appeared to become particularly significant when they had to address a concern. P13 affirmed the child protection incident she had been involved in had ‘definitely affected her relationships with other parents as she would not judge or jump to conclusions because she thought they were initially lovely’ (P13: 170). Although P13 reported she still had ‘emotional connection and bond with them, she thought it would be easier to disconnect from them if something happened’. She declared ‘the incident had built up more of a boundary with parents so whereas she would have had quite personal chats with the parents she now kept her guard up a bit more’ (P13: 173, 176).

The participants appeared conflicted in the relationships they held with parents as part of partnership working. There was a sense that effective relationships, as advocated by the EYFS (2017), enabled practitioners to really know the child, to learn from parents about their children’s interests and personalities, likes and dislikes. This would support the practitioner in knowing when observed behaviours were typical for children or not, indicating whether there was need for concern. However, to elicit such information suggests parents have confidence in the practitioner and some sense of certainty in how their information might be used or shared within and beyond that partnership. The partnership suggests the need for a trusting relationship to be built between parents and practitioners.

It appeared EYT’s had not initially considered the nature of their relationships with parents (e.g. how much personal information should be shared) and subsequently how they might be personally affected during and following a safeguarding or child protection situation. For those who had experienced an incident there were declarations this had affected their relationships with parents more generally and would possibly affect their future involvement in suspected cases. This was illustrated in P14’s situation when she revealed that the direct confrontation she experienced from the mother of a child she referred to the CPO/DSL, resulted in a breakdown in the relationship. She reported that this left her feeling fearful for her own safety and affected the way in which she would report a concern in the future.

Hohmann's (2007) research into relationships between childminders and parents presents the existence of a relational 'triangle of care' between parents, children and practitioners that could be described as having multi-faceted complexities. Research by Brooker (2010) identifies that it is the complexities within this 'triangle of care' that can result in relationships that are 'not necessarily easy to establish, and when differences of opinion develop they can cause distress for both parents and practitioner, which may in turn have an impact on the child on whom the relationship is focused' (Brooker, 2010, p. 183). Hohmann (2007, p.33) suggests, 'a combination of expectations from parents and practitioners regarding everyday practice can either be the basis of a trusting relationship between the adults involved in this caring triangle, or a breeding-ground for tension'. Hohmann (2007) identifies that challenges arise when expectations are not mutually understood and are related to individual differences in culture, values, beliefs and roles. This suggests EYTs should be aware that expectations from parents and themselves might not be founded upon mutual understandings but on assumptions located in personal interpretations. The EYTs enter the profession with their own constructs of childhood and parenting that may differ to that of the parents/carers with whom they will work.

Cottle and Alexander's (2014) research explores the value of partnership and their findings suggest relationships between parents and practitioners are,

understood and enacted in very different ways [inferring] that these differences are rooted in practitioners' constructions of parents and that these in turn are influenced by practitioners' personal and professional histories (Goodson 2003), their perceptions of the purposes and priorities of their setting and the national policy context. (Cottle and Alexander, 2014, p. 638)

It appears the complexities of relationships within partnership working are founded within multiple discourses. Brooker (2010, p. 194) suggests that between parents/carers and practitioners, 'personal and professional roles and identities need to be negotiated.' Whilst research provides some illumination of the complexities of relationships between parents and practitioners, further research is needed to investigate how relationships are developed within the remit of potential conflict: avoiding disagreements within the 'triangle of care' (Hohmann, 2007). My research findings indicate when conflict arises in a safeguarding or child protection context it not only changes the relationship between those directly involved but also the nature of relationships between practitioners and other parents/carers. In terms of the third research question this finding is important. Teacher educators should support EYTs in understanding the nature and purpose of parent-practitioner relationships and how they can

impact effectively on children's learning and development but also how the foundations of relationships are formed. There is potential for conflict and EYTs need to be aware of how to work effectively with parents when there are challenging situations to face. In the following section the complexities of partnership working are further discussed as participants report differences in terms of expectations of their roles as EYTs.

#### *4.5.3 Expectations of the EYTS role by parents/carers, employers and practitioners*

In previous sections (4.5.1 and 4.5.2) participant responses indicated challenges in terms of how relationships are affected within partnership working with parents/carers. It was revealed this might concern the personally held constructs of parenthood influenced by practitioners' personal histories. During the semi-structured interviews the participants also revealed experiences that were concerned with the possible constructs that parents/carers, employers, practitioners and other professionals might have about the role of the EYT. Tensions appeared to be largely concerned with the interpretation of EYTS and expectations that this status ensured specialist knowledge and skills.

In the *first interviews* the participants recalled examples of where there were assumptions and expectations of their knowledge, skills and experience to deal with safeguarding and child protection cases. As an EYT, P11 confirmed she felt 'pressure and responsibility' as 'others might think that she should know more' (P11: 85). P11 stated the 'safeguarding officer might have thought she could deal with a safeguarding concern because she was highly qualified' although she was 'new' to practice (P11: 91). Likewise P13 revealed she got 'asked quite a few questions on policies because of her qualification' (P13: 108). P16 affirmed this view stating 'as the only pre-school teacher in the nursery, nobody had a clue about what her role was or what it meant other than it was at level 6' and there were 'definitely expectations on her although she had not worked in a nursery before' and had only '18 weeks placement experience with children' (P16: 45, 47,48). P16 had been 'surprised and confused to be given the CPO role' and had 'questioned whether she would know what she was doing and what would happen if she had no idea, as staff would go to her and ask questions and if she didn't know anything then it could be a complete disaster' (P16: 55-56).

The expectations of participants with EYTS appeared located within an assumption of knowledge and practice experience. However, participants recognised that whilst they might

have some knowledge they might not have had any experience in managing a safeguarding and/or child protection situation in professional practice.

The *second interviews* affirmed there were still assumptions about the EYT role. P13 stated ‘having the Early Years Teacher Status indicated to others certain assumptions about her experience and knowledge because everyone asked her things, as they did to the other EYT and the manager’, and ‘staff were quite shocked’ when she told them it was her ‘first job after qualifying’ (P1318: 72-73). P13 stated parental expectations of her role was ‘probably influenced by the way society viewed safeguarding and child protection’, which ‘had changed’. She reported how society looked ‘to practitioners to know these things did happen and they needed to be on top of it’. P13 cautioned ‘a lot of people who were not involved in the sector would just think practitioners shouldn’t make mistakes because they shouldn’t and it just didn’t work like that’. She stated ‘whilst hindsight could sometimes be positive, most of the time it was pretty negative because what happened couldn’t be changed’ and every situation ‘would not involve the same people or the same context’ (P1318: 97- 102). P14 asserted ‘it was best to do the right thing at the right time than to be at fault and to be blamed at some point’ (P1419: 86).

The participants perceived that their EYT status suggested to others assumptions about their competencies to manage safeguarding and child protection situations effectively: that EYTs would not make mistakes. This indicates an expected level of competence and ability conducive to a practitioner with knowledge in practice over time: the expert (Eraut, 2004). The tensions reported by participants suggested they might have some knowledge but very limited practice with which to contextualise learning, resulting in anxieties that they might not always *get it right*.

Drawing on research located in early years practice Hohmann (2007) suggests it is confusion arising from the reconceptualization of early years from care to the education sector that has led to ambiguities within expectations. There is a plethora of research that explores emerging issues, such as professional identity, ambiguity in roles and status (as discussed in chapter two) but Hohmann (2007, p. 35) specifically cautions that tensions have been created between parent-practitioner relationships, ‘generating unease regarding boundaries between parental responsibility and the right to make decisions on behalf of the child and practitioners’ expertise and knowledge giving the right to make decisions about how care and

education should be practised'. Hohmann's (2007) research is helpful in focusing attention on the impact of reconceptualization in respect of the relational and emotional impression on practitioners. As a solution to relational tensions she suggests, 'The potential for conflict to threaten arrangements could be reduced if details of care and claims about rights to make decisions were clarified before the start of service arrangements, and if parents and practitioners could recognize that these negotiations form an important part of their relationship' (Hohmann, 2007, p. 44). Clarification of service arrangements might be achieved in terms of how the EYFS (2017) wellbeing requirements (that include safeguarding) might be planned for by the EYT in the setting. However this suggests certainty within practice: the sense that relationships between parents/carers and practitioners might remain defined within the context of changing practices in early years. My research findings indicate that it is the uncertainties that are present within safeguarding and child protection situations that generate tensions in relationships. Relationships change according to the unique and contextual situations that are experienced. Eraut (2004, p. 255) recognizes that 'relationships play a critical role in workplace learning, and that the emotional dimension of professional work is much more significant than normally recognized.' He identifies that relationships are complex and founded upon the ability to work effectively with others but Eraut's research has largely been focused on the child/adult relationship or the colleague/colleague relationship. The intricacies of relationships between parents and practitioners in early years are an area in need of further research.

In the final section of the semi-structured interviews the participants were asked to reveal whether they had recommendations of their own that might influence training for EYTS students in the future specifically in the safeguarding and child protection aspects of their work. Their responses and related discussions are presented below.

#### **4.6 Early Years Teachers' Recommendations for Future Training**

In both the *first and second interviews* the participants referred to safeguarding and child protection training as being essential in providing them with knowledge to meet demands as they arose in practice. However, those participants that had been involved in a case recalled how the experience was not what they expected. P13 stated 'training, knowledge and information could not really prepare for safeguarding when it actually happened' (P13: 180). Her comments related to the unexpected personal and emotional responses she experienced during the situation as discussed in subsection 4.4.5. However P13 and the other participants

did suggest training they thought would have been helpful although these were locally positioned as participants reflected upon their personal needs. The suggestions included knowledge of ‘indicators’ (in terms of what a practitioner might look for that could suggest a child was in need or at risk), the use of ‘real’ scenarios and more regular training for EYTs that would enable them to address some of the specific concerns relating to practice from their unique positions. The following subsections (4.6.1, 4.6.2, 4.6.3) explore each of these areas further.

#### *4.6.1 Indicators of potential safeguarding and child protection concerns*

Related to participants’ concerns about thresholds for taking action (subsection 4.4.3) there was a declared need for further knowledge of the types of behaviours that might be demonstrated by children experiencing a safeguarding or child protection issue. This was apparent in both the *first and second interviews*. P10 ‘would like to know what might be considered a normal range of behaviours in a child’ and have ‘some signposting of what types of behaviours might manifest in situations where children were experiencing a safeguarding concern’, although she acknowledged ‘in a training context this would be tricky because children were all very different’ (P10: 128, 131,132). P12 also reported this as a need as she thought ‘everyone was quite clued up on what to do if they had a concern but the other aspect of how to recognise it wasn’t really published that much’ (P12: 104). The focus of EYTS training centred on legislative requirements of professional practice but participants suggested that exploring what *behaviours* might be observed in practice would help them to identify a child in need or at risk. The notion of behaviours was also applied to those of parents/carers, as P13 thought ‘some training about not judging people by how they look (nice and innocent) because they might not be, would be helpful’ (P13: 181).

Eraut’s research (2004, 2010a, 2010b, 2011) has examined informal learning in the workplace alongside formal learning from more traditional methods in adult education. Eraut (2004) defines informal learning as learning from others as well as learning from personal experiences. Whilst his work is not specifically located in education (but in healthcare) his findings have informed my interpretation of the participants’ accounts. Eraut (2004, p. 248) argues that working practices are ‘normally complex and typically involve the simultaneous use of several different types of knowledge and skills, which have to be learned more holistically.’ He cautions that experiences, and memory of those experiences, affect the knowledge used in the immediate situation, ‘sometimes irrespective of its quality’ (ibid). This

is relevant to my third research question. The participants' suggest having more traditional instruction on selected aspects of knowledge that has been shown to have little relevance if not encountered regularly in practice. Isolated formal learning (such as that proposed) may not be effective if attention is not focused and learning is not captured in memory or as Sternberg *et al.* (2000) suggest, the learning is not contextualized. The participants were not aware of their additional learning needs until they had experiences of safeguarding and child protection situations in practice. Their suggestions were situated within their context and personal. This point is further explored in the following section as the participants recommended the use of more practice-based learning scenarios that they reported would help them better understand knowledge in context.

#### *4.6.2 Scenario training*

The most referred to aspect to enhance training was the use of 'real-life scenarios' or being present at 'real cases'. P10 stated, 'potentially interacting with some scenarios would be helpful training as a way of learning' but to 'practice in a real situation with a real child would be beneficial' (P10: 182-183). P11 concurred and suggested that whilst 'training with a scenario would increase knowledge', having 'a case study re-enacted would enable her to put herself into the situation and to learn about how she would react'. She thought it would be most 'helpful if she were to be let in on a case to go through the standard procedures with the safeguarding officer' (P11: 102, 105-108). Following experience of a safeguarding issue P13 stated 'training should highlight that actually it was important practitioners didn't make a mistake as whilst they were all human, when a situation actually happened and was real, there was much more at stake' than experienced through 'pretend cases or fake scenarios' (P13: 78-80). However, P10 recognised that as trainees 'scenarios actually put flesh on the bones of what someone would do in a circumstance and that's as close as it could get to the real thing' (P10: 113).

Reporting on previous research that examined informal learning in different workplaces, Eraut (2011) found that participants learned more in practice than in formal learning situations and he concluded,

given favourable conditions, learning in the workplace can be enhanced by improving opportunities for productive engagement in a wide range of work processes. Moreover, working alongside a colleague for a while enables someone to learn by asking questions and receiving feedback about shared activities and events as and when they happen. It also allows the learner to see how a colleague reads situations, monitors them and takes decisions. (Eraut, 2011, p. 9)

The challenge in terms of Eraut's (2011) suggestion is to ensure the 'favourable conditions.' It is unclear how this might be interpreted when it has been widely discussed in the sector that the reconceptualization of early years has generated tensions in practice (discussed in chapter two). Eraut (2011) suggests 'working alongside a colleague' but with the diversity of early years provision and the structural organisation of some settings, this might be challenging. In my research project the participants revealed they sought the support of colleagues in the setting when faced with potential safeguarding or child protection concerns about a child (see subsections 4.4.2 and 4.4.3), but there was only implicit reference to working alongside colleagues in this area of practice (P12 and P13 in relation to their appointment as CPO/DSL of their setting).

The issue revealed by participants (i.e. the need for 'real-life' learning) is relevant to my third research question. As an ITE educator consideration needs to be given to how trainees are introduced to situations relating to actual safeguarding and child protection concerns. The use of SCRs to illustrate 'real-life' cases may expose the trainees to extreme outcomes and not be reflective of incidental learning from less serious but more regularly encountered scenarios in practice. It must be questioned whether this form of training further endorses the element of fear and anxiety that the participants associated with this area of practice. Further research is needed to examine different training approaches in safeguarding and child protection and the implications for practice.

#### *4.6.3 Specific and on-going training for EYTs*

The participants alluded to the unique nature of their entry into the early years sector of education. Each participant disclosed a lack of confidence in their abilities to manage a child protection situation and they revealed feeling the pressure of expectations from employers and parents concerning the role of the 'teacher'. P10 thought 'the word 'teacher' defined the role as she was responsible for the children in her class' and 'parents had expectations like she had of her own child's class teacher at the primary school' (P1020: 3, 8). However, the participants had very little experience of working with children and therefore requested specific training that would better support their particular situation. P11 thought it would be 'good to have training specifically for former trainees as they were all in the same situation' and 'as newly qualified teachers they could probably link experiences and talk' (P11: 111-112).



One of the challenges reported by the participants was the notion that safeguarding and child protection was both part of their everyday practice and involved related procedures to escalate a serious incident that might be rarely experienced. It was this aspect of practice that seemed to raise most concerns. The suggestion was made that the participants should have more regular and 'on-going training' (P11: 109) such as P16's 'refresher courses' that 'would help to keep safeguarding and child protection in her mind the whole time so as not to forget all the information that is important to know off the top of her head' (P16: 113).

One of the reoccurring themes was the notion of support in a setting and participants suggested this was essential in giving them confidence to address some of the more challenging situations they faced. P16 thought 'a forum, a proper one to one, should be done every time with the manager or someone senior just to talk about the situation because it was hard hitting when she had to go through it and see things like that', and she 'would have liked to have talked about how she felt because the [research] interview was the first time she'd actually talked about it and she thought it would have been useful for her to have been able to do that before' (P16: 114, 109). Likewise P10 affirmed 'a supervision meeting would have helped her as there wasn't supervision at the setting although she'd had a probation review before the incident and a governor was looking into supervision' (P1020: 9). It appeared the participants were asking for support in terms of talking through their experiences as they had been deeply affected.

In summary the participants suggested some enhancements to training that included the use of real cases and scenarios. However the overarching need appeared to be located once the participants were in employment. The request was for focussed and regular training specifically for EYTs, including de-briefing sessions each time there was involvement in a safeguarding and/or child protection case. Eraut's (2011) research into work-based learning found,

support and feedback were critically important for confidence, learning, retention and commitment, especially during their first few months when they were best provided by the person on the spot. In the longer term, more normative feedback on progress and meeting organizational expectations also became important. Equally important for developing confidence after the first few months was the right level of challenge. (Eraut, 2011, p. 9)

Unlike other students who have attained QTS in early years, those with EYTS do not have a Newly Qualified Teacher (NQT) year with specific requirements around individualised mentoring and support (NCTL, 2017). EYTS graduates may be well supported within individual settings (as reported by some of the participants) but this is locally determined and would appear to be inconsistent. There is indication that newly qualified, change of career graduates with EYTS would welcome the on-going support and feedback suggested by Eraut (2011). The notion of training specific to their needs supports the findings of Rawlings *et al.*, (DfE, 2014) who identified that regardless of discipline, frontline and managerial practitioners involved in safeguarding requested that training was less generic and more focussed on their specific positions and responsibilities within practice.

The responses of the participants presented in sections 4.2 to 4.6 reveal some of the complexities they associate with the phenomenon of safeguarding and child protection within early years practice. They identify this area of work as a multi-faceted domain, citing examples to illuminate some of the issues, matters and tensions they experienced over the period of their first year in employment. The sections and subsections present findings that are both unique to individuals and generic illustrating some 'unity of outlook' Schütz (1962). These include the notion that safeguarding and child protection is emotional: that the engagement of emotions is fundamental in influencing their practice. The participants revealed experiencing changes in emotions as they tussled with the complexities of implementing policy. They disclosed some of the challenges relating to their sense of accountability to children, to parents and to the profession: knowing they are accountable for safeguarding and protecting children but handing over responsibility to someone else to enact concerns. They made known their feelings such as their sense of confidence in safeguarding but lack of confidence in child protection that suggested a separateness but interconnectedness of terminology used to describe practice. They declared personal uncertainties within practice and revealed the generation of strategies within practice to help them to secure satisfaction in terms of their own sense of what is effective practice for young children. In the last chapter of this research project I draw together final summaries that address the general themes that have been explored and that seek to address the research questions initially posed.

## **Chapter 5 Conclusions**

### **5.1 Introduction**

Using empirical phenomenology as an approach to inform the structure of this small-scale research project and the analysis of data, this enquiry has sought to reveal understandings about what it is like for change of career EYTs to experience safeguarding and child protection in early years. This final chapter draws together the key findings related to the research questions, which set out to investigate how GE EYT graduates from one HE institution were educated in safeguarding and child protection; what their experiences of safeguarding and child protection practices were over a period of one year in first employment; and how emerging themes arising from their lived experiences might contribute to enhancements of university education programmes in early years safeguarding and child protection.

The semi-structured interview questions were organised in such a way that they supported participants to reveal their life-worlds as a journey over time. The EYTs indicated learning they considered relevant to practice that provided some framing to address question one of this research project. They revealed experiences of safeguarding and child protection from their position as teacher in the context of early years practice that illuminated the presence of strong feelings and affected behaviours as they wrestled with tensions involving policy and practice over time (question two). Finally their disclosures provided reflective and reflexive challenge to my understanding of contextualised practice and my approaches to educating GE EYTs in safeguarding and child protection (question three).

In the following sections I seek to reveal my final conclusions and to signpost new knowledge and new ways of working that will contribute to the growing discourse around this complex area of professional practice. In section 5.2, I discuss implications of current policy implementation in practice (as revealed by the EYTs) and outline the need for policy development and new ways of thinking about policy in diverse contexts. Section 5.3 specifically focuses on implications for training in safeguarding and child protection for GE EYTS trainees, and proposes the need for a review of content and a change in approach. The final section 5.4 outlines the implications for post EYTS learning, identifying the need for specific and targeted support as EYTs are positioned to lead safeguarding and child protection practice in early years settings.

## 5.2 Policy Development

Legislation, policies and related guidance referred to across the children's workforce and specifically in early years use the key terms 'safeguarding' and 'child protection' regularly and often interchangeably. The findings of this research project indicate that whilst the widespread use of these terms suggests some commonality of understanding, the EYTs reported otherwise. All participants reported confusion in understanding the notions of safeguarding and child protection. Each revealed difference in their confidence between experiences of safeguarding and those of child protection. They interpreted these feelings as seeing these aspects of practice as separate but interconnected. Experience they gained in regular safeguarding practices over time provided EYTs with *increased confidence* in their ability to prevent children from becoming in need or at risk within the setting context. In some disclosures the EYTs reported practicing with a sense of surety: P10 and P12 explicitly declaring confidence in safeguarding (page 94). In contrast, irregular attention to child protection situations (potential or actual) generated a *decrease in confidence* and some participants expressed fear related to this aspect of practice. The respondents that had experienced a child protection incident described how it had affected them emotionally and made them more aware of the personal implications of their involvement. There was indication they became alert to the uniqueness and complexities involved that generated uncertainties in practice, explicitly articulated by P13 (page 109).

The participants' reports of increasing confidence in safeguarding practice between the first and second interviews is related to the work of Eraut (2002, p. 44) who states that practitioners equate experience with learning from a series of practice episodes over time through a 'process of generalization' until practice becomes intuitive. They contextualise their learning. The single episodes of child protection suggest learning cannot be contextualised in the same way: that infrequent involvement and alertness to complexities may cause demise in confidence over time that is multifaceted. This is concerning and a potentially serious practice issue. As a result of involvement in child protection cases some participants revealed behaviours demonstrating overly prescribed attention to, or avoidance of, practice concerns. This has been identified and discussed within the social care and multi-agency context that suggests where ambiguity exists, behaviours are not always conducive to effective practice (Anning *et al.*, 2010; Baginsky, Driscoll and Manthorpe, 2015).

My research signifies that conceptualisations of safeguarding and child protection in early years *are ambiguous* and resultant practice *is uncertain*. This has important implications for policy development. Legislation, policy and related guidance at national and local levels should ensure clarity and consistency in the use of general terms. Professionals should be clear about the principles and purpose of safeguarding and child protection for all children. However, whilst a holistic approach to policy development may be purposeful in attempting to determine common and general understandings across the children's workforce, it might also unintentionally cause ambiguity as practitioners try to make sense of statutory requirements in unique and diverse local settings with unique and diverse needs. Policy and related guidance should reflect the uniqueness and contributions of different professions for common purpose: to safeguard and protect children. EYTs should be able to identify with the articulation of key terms in policies within their legal jurisdiction, rather than trying to reconcile and resolve challenges: becoming fearful of 'doing the wrong thing' in practice when policy may inadvertently confuse. Policy makers need to be alert to these tensions and ensure that EYTs see themselves reflected in the language of safeguarding and child protection legislation, policy and guidance.

EYTs are required to demonstrate competences that indicate certainties of the safeguarding and child protection process (NCTL, 2013, p. 4) in order to uphold trust in the profession (Frowe, 2004). In their disclosures all participants recalled procedural knowledge that required them to report a concern. Without exception, they described their locally implemented policies and procedures. They reported strict protocols of conducting safeguarding and child protection practice in their settings: the requirement to adhere to stated procedures to ensure effective outcomes. However, examples of practice indicated there were some tensions experienced between the EYTs personal assertions to protect children and their understandings of procedure and accountability. Several participants revealed that once they reported concerns to an identified other in their settings, accountability was taken from them: a satisfactory position as articulated by P14 (page 93). All acknowledged procedure to report a concern and expressed their responsibility to 'hand over' accountability. There was suggestion that a hierarchy of accountability existed for the purpose of protecting the practitioner as well as the child. This is a paradox within safeguarding and child protection practice. There is inference that rigid application of procedure might have promoted dependency on specific individuals within early years settings (such as the named CPO/DSL) or on certain ways of doing things (as stated in setting

policy documents). The processes and procedures may be exacerbating the notion that practitioners may remove themselves from the immediacy of a concern. This has serious implications for policy and practice.

This research has revealed the extent to which participants may perceive their ongoing accountabilities to children. Policy makers need to be critically aware of these tensions and should encourage a review of how the DSL role is referred to in policy documentation and related guidance. The articulation of the DSL role needs careful consideration in terms of purpose and in the context in which the role is situated. Attention should be given to potential misunderstandings as accountability for children in safeguarding and child protection extends beyond the moment of reporting. There is no ‘hand over’ to the DSL that belies the EYT’s ongoing responsibilities for the welfare of the children with whom they work. Policy should articulate the understanding that a professional/teacher’s involvement, and their potential to contribute to contextual safeguarding and child protection matters, is ongoing.

EYTs are considered leaders of high quality practice that includes specific duties related to safeguarding and child protection (DfE, 2013). As participants gained experience of working within practice policies over time, they reported tensions of accountability because their situations were uniquely complex. Participants reported encountering difficulties between their setting’s safeguarding and child protection policies and pedagogical practices deemed appropriate for young children. Participants presented several examples of how they acted in practice that might have been perceived in contravention of a setting’s policy. Some participants disclosed how they generated strategies to help them manage the pedagogical and/or pragmatic tensions that arose. They explained how they wrestled with the possibility of getting into trouble although they expressed confidence in their personal agency: that systems and processes did not limit their enactment (page 110).

The EYTs revealed that imposed policy and procedures did not define their professional practice or how they deemed themselves as professionals. Some disclosed professional practice examples that illuminated how they made sense of paradox, modified relationships and managed dilemmas that were not reconcilable. In doing so the EYTs demonstrated they moved beyond procedural knowledge: that they were not bound by technical compliance. As Schön (1983) might argue, the EYTs demonstrated reflexivity: ‘their emotions intimately connected to their reflective selves’ (O’Connor, 2008, p. 119) and where

their ‘emotions and professional philosophies are viewed as the means by which they individually navigate, interpret and occasionally resist the official ethos’ (O’Connor, 2008, p. 118). The participants established meanings in the moment: employing themselves and their resources to make sense of complexity.

This finding provides greater awareness of how a knowledgeable professional in early years safeguarding and child protection might be perceived and contributes to the wider professionalism discourse. The EYTs revealed knowledge beyond technical understandings of safeguarding and child protection. EYTs might be considered neither prescribed nor directed in the fulfilment of their safeguarding and child protection duties: that through dealing with complex issues and situations the EYTs established meanings for themselves that they employed in practice. However, reflecting upon Lipsky’s (1980) work, the tensions reported by EYTs suggests that safeguarding and child protection policy may not be enabling effective practice, but generating the conditions of complexity. EYTs reported navigating conflicts created by policy that were intended to provide assurances in safeguarding and protecting young children. The implication for policy development is *reconciliation*: that policy should reflect contextual and sector needs. Safeguarding and child protection policy in early years should better reflect the age/stage of children in terms of their social, personal, emotional, physical and cognitive development and needs. EYTs should not be compromised in navigating policy that does not reflect effective early years pedagogical practice. Children’s needs should not be compromised by the imposition of policy and procedure but rather reflect professional knowledge and understandings of effective education and care in the context of early years.

### **5.3 Professional Preparation for GE EYTs in Safeguarding and Child Protection**

Emotion as a concept has been researched within the wider early years professionalism discourse following the reconceptualisation of the field as discussed in chapter two. Debates have focused on tensions arising from imposed competencies related to professional courses such as the EYTS, and the tacit nature of emotional aspects of practice that are deemed essential for professional practice but not clearly defined (Taggart, 2011). The EYFS (DfE, 2017a) and Teacher’s Standards’ (Early Years) (DfE, 2013) do not acknowledge the role that emotions play in safeguarding and child protection. In my research the participants revealed repeatedly that behaviours and practices were strongly influenced by their emotions: that safeguarding and child protection work is emotional.

The EYTs reported emotional awareness from application to training and, with the exception of P12, declared this to be present in their decisions to become EYTs. They considered that working with children would be emotionally fulfilling and provide personal reward that would endorse their positive presuppositions: expressed by P16 as contributing to social justice and by P14 as saving a child's life (page 88). In subsequent experiences of practice all participants reported engagement with keenly felt sensitivities: assertions that they 'cared about' the children with whom they worked (Tronto, 1993). Their disclosures of passion and love for children generated the conditions by which they felt able to intuitively sense when a child was potentially in need or at risk: intuition as a form of knowledge that is highly valued in safeguarding and child protection in the social care field (Munro, 2011). It suggests sensitivities and insights that enable the subtleties of children's behaviours to be contextualized. It indicates abilities to sense changes in conduct, deportment and/or demeanor (Reid and Burton, 2013). It makes possible the interactions and interventions that may safeguard or prevent a child from being at risk of harm. This finding signifies how feelings and emotions *inhabit* this critical aspect of early years work.

The participants' sensitivities to their feelings and emotions were not confined to comment and disclosures concerning children. They all revealed heightened awareness of their own emotions in different situations that affected their behaviours. Some reported experiencing challenging safeguarding and child protection situations that invoked strong and sometimes undesirable emotions, such as fear and anxiety. This was in conflict with their initial assertions that practice would positively endorse personal fulfillment. Within this context participants revealed their practice was not only influenced by emotions but also by personal premise, such as their constructs of childhood, experiences of parenthood and moral positioning. All participants disclosed having some knowledge of safeguarding and child protection at the outset of the course and recognised this was informed by many factors, including culture, family and the media. As they gained experience in the workplace P10, P13, P14 and P15 in particular revealed personal histories related to emotions that influenced their practice. They provided insights into their personal lives, such as relationships with family members, which they drew on in order to make sense of practices they demonstrated, and judgments they made. They gave examples where their emotions were challenged and sometimes changed over time. They expressed deeply felt personal involvement. This finding indicates a uniqueness of emotional experience in safeguarding and child protection practice



that is *profoundly personal*. Their 'life-world' (Schütz, 1932) experiences suggest feelings are personal and intimate, and inherent within this area of practice. Whilst Hargreaves (2001, p. 1059) suggests teachers should have 'genuine emotional understanding' towards others, my research shows they also have genuine emotional understanding of themselves: in some instances the emotions experienced having lasting effects that influenced subsequent behaviours.

The findings of this research project contribute to the wider professionalism discourse and should be of interest to EYTS educators. There is need to recognize the complexity and essentiality of emotions in the field of early years safeguarding and child protection and need to consider how emotions might be explored in training to convey their significance in the interpersonal relationships that EYTs encounter. The findings suggest EYTs should study emotions and emotion work as part of their preparation: to understand how their emotions influence the ways in which they may practice in safeguarding and child protection. EYTs need to examine how emotions are tacit in professional practice and yet crucial in recognizing and making judgments about children potentially in need or at risk of harm.

As discussed in chapter two, the shift in early years from a care to an educative focus resulted in a number of emerging discourses in the field, including accountability. This notion featured strongly in participants' disclosures (discussed in section 5.2). It was through training EYTs reported alertness to accountability in safeguarding and child protection. Accountability in the early years professionalism discourse relates to externally imposed directives and prescribed ways of working. In the EYFS (2017) some requirements of safeguarding and child protection are related to outcomes and recommendations from SCRs that have attracted wide media attention and in some cases, apportioned blame to individuals and/or organizations: the focus on what went wrong implying a right way of practicing. P10 in particular articulated that it was through the study of SCRs that the 'great weight of responsibility' was revealed (page 85) and P15 became 'more wary' after training (page 86). The suggestion was that cases explored in EYTS training illuminated the failings of professionals: the inference that EYTs as novices in professional practice might not 'get it right' if experienced professionals can 'get it wrong'. The participants revealed expressions of anxiety related to the notion of being accountable and to the possibility of being accused of wrongdoing: of being answerable for their actions. Whilst all participants declared passionate intent to safeguard and protect children, (section 4.3) they articulated a fear of being held to

account: the sense that in their justifications of practice they might be criticized or receive punishment. This was articulated by P12 as being wrongly accused and potentially losing her job (page 108). This indicates a view that accountability in early years safeguarding and child protection is a personal endeavour: that EYTs might be made vulnerable in this area of practice and therefore exposed to challenge.

This finding should not be considered as an isolated aspect of practice but discussed further within the wider professionalism discourse and more closely examined within the accountability and ‘regulatory gaze’ context (Osgood, 2006). However, it should also be explored in the context of EYTS training in safeguarding and child protection. Further research needs to examine the extent to which exposure to highly publicized cases with individuals held to account and failings exposed, contributes to perceptions that involvement results in personal upset: whether recognition that cases are complex and unique suggests that child protection is an aspect of practice to be feared and avoided.

Teacher educators in this field need to consider the relevance of exposing trainee teachers to extreme case scenarios. GE EYTs in training have little experience of working with children and may not be in a position to be able to contextualize their learning (Eraut, 2004; Sternberg *et al.*, 2000). Isolated learning from the scrutiny of serious, diverse and complex cases may contribute to the generation of anxieties as reported by some of the participants in my research. Consideration might otherwise be given to learning from less serious case recommendations and how they relate to practice more frequently encountered in settings: where EYTs might actively engage in safeguarding activities and feel confident in doing so.

A key factor influencing participants’ behaviours in safeguarding and child protection was disclosed as their relationships with children and their parents/carers. Most participants reported that their connectedness to parents and children helped them to realize potential concerns. However, this connectedness made any challenging safeguarding and child protection situations emotionally very demanding. This tension was revealed in over half of the first interviews and in all of the second interviews. The participants disclosed tensions in the way relationships were founded upon the principles of partnership (EYFS, 2017) but situated within personal constructs. The EYTs attributed challenges they experienced with parents/carers as being related to the nature of their personal relationships. Some participants gave examples that signified a level of personal intensity in the relationship, articulated by

P13 as sharing social information. The EYT's experiences suggest an innate need to maintain positive relationships in the face of adverse conditions: an emotional turmoil associated with rationalising their involvement. Some disclosures indicated risk at upsetting the preferred status quo of mutually beneficial relationships. P14 in particular attributed the practices of safeguarding and child protection as disturbing the relationships formed with parents/carers: a negative perception to the notion of relationships promoted as essential for effective early years practice (as discussed in chapter 2). The consideration about whether potentially upsetting parents was worth the resulting distress.

This finding contributes to the discourse of partnership in early years practice. Research discussed in chapter 2 endorses the benefits of strong partnerships built on relationships developed between practitioners and parents/carers. There is little to enable informed comment on contexts where conflict may be inevitable. EYTs have disclosed more of the uncomfortable: that the potential for conflict with parents/carers may affect their behaviours in safeguarding and child protection, both positively and negatively. GE EYTS teacher educators need to consider exploring the notions of partnerships and relationships with trainees: to acknowledge and examine the benefits and potential challenges that might be present both within safeguarding and child protection and in other aspects of professional practice. Where conflict might be present but where EYTs act so as not to compromise professional practice.

#### **5.4 GE EYTs and Ongoing Professional Development**

Some participants recalled that to know about safeguarding and child protection was not enough to prepare them for practice in this field of work (Winch, 2010b). As participants encountered situations they revealed episodes of indecision. These episodes were articulated as opportunities to consider their emotions, ways of acting and to seek advice and reassurance: to make sense of their interpretations of safeguarding and/or child protection situations, as they were experienced. These episodes were evident as participants worked through the potential consequences of their actions. The problematic of this should be very carefully considered in the context of early years safeguarding and child protection practice and in terms of the ongoing support provided to EYTs as they start employment as professionals in the sector.

The participants revealed that their safeguarding and child protection practices were affected by both internal and external factors. During episodes of indecision these factors were present and influential. They included financial, reputational, personal and emotional implications that were present as the EYTs negotiated possible actions. The complexities of their role, relationships, parental influence and legislation contributed to the maelstrom of activity that appeared considered, as articulated by P13 (page 118). Far from being perceived as non-constructive in this challenging area of work, these episodes of indecision might be perceived as opportunities to examine courses of action. They suggest caution and tentativeness whilst possibilities are explored, discussed and debated. The EYTs shared some of the strategies they used whilst experiencing these episodes, particularly concerning child protection situations, such as seeking the assurance of a more experienced professional or locating guidance documentation. Perhaps more uncomfortable was the notion that part of the indecision related to personal impact: that the practitioner may be influenced by profoundly personal histories with the understanding that their involvement may bring them emotional harm. The dilemma is whether reporting a concern is considered worth the emotional turmoil they might experience, as shown in the example given by P14 after she was frightened by confrontation with a parent (page 118).

There is a sense that safeguarding and child protection in early years that is bound by legislation, policies and procedures, should enable some certainty of practice. My research has revealed that this may not always be the case. The very notion of indecision indicates that early years safeguarding and child protection practices are beset with uncertainty. It could be argued that episodes of indecision are inevitable so that influences and issues may be debated, argued, disputed and contested, until the practitioner is confident to act. This finding contributes to the construct of professional knowledge in early years safeguarding and child protection practice as discussed in chapter two. It builds on Simpson's (2010, p. 7) research (undertaken with experienced early years practitioners), and suggests that the 'official discourse' must be 'open to interpretation' to acknowledge the uniqueness of every child, situation and practitioner embroiled in the concern (discussed in section 5.2). Indecision is present when practitioners are faced with emotive, complex and uncertain contexts.

My research has illuminated that indecisions intertwined with emotions are part of safeguarding and child protection practice. Teacher educators and employers need to be alert to this state: that personal and emotional turmoil is likely to be experienced in safeguarding

and child protection and requires conscious presence from which strategies might be employed to make sense of situations. When encountering a safeguarding and/or child protection concern EYTs need to recognise the potential for an immediacy of conflict: what I would describe as the *aperture of uncertainty*, where factors such as emotion, reputation, relationships and financial implications that might affect action are present and influential. By conscious alertness to this state EYTs may be afforded agency: where they seek appropriate support to acknowledge and work through the influencing factors in order to act professionally. Educators and employers working with GE EYTs new to employment need to reveal and discuss the uncomfortable: to enable EYTs to understand that uncertainty is present and emotions are evident but that these can be managed. EYTs should have ongoing opportunities to examine safeguarding and child protection situations and encounters that they experience, not only through supervision, but within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998): exploring their unique position as leaders in this area of complex practice.

This research study has offered insights into the ways in which EYTs new to the sector experience safeguarding and child protection as part of their professional practice. Findings have revealed that emotions inhabit practice. The complexity of emotions is central to the phenomenon of safeguarding and child protection in early years. EYTs reported feelings of passion and love towards children before and during training and employment. They also expressed worry, fear and anxiety as they encountered different contexts and situations. They disclosed managing their emotions in different ways, developing strategies to cope (Lipsky, 1980). The EYTs expressed confidence for safeguarding practices regularly attended to, and lack of confidence in child protection situations perceived as uncertain and complex. The practitioners revealed that under pressures to adhere to policy, procedures and expectations they had awareness of their presence: alert to their own limitations. They considered what would and would not be appropriate practice in the different and complex contexts they encountered. The practitioners made sense of practice drawing on personal histories. There is opportunity to learn from the GE EYTs experiences, to further develop early years policy and procedures and to generate ongoing safeguarding and child protection training specific to the needs of their role and unique contexts.

As a final reflective comment, I have carefully considered the findings of this research project and the impact on my own understandings of training GE EYTs in safeguarding and child protection (research question three). I have begun to critically reflect upon the

university training programmes in safeguarding and child protection for which I am responsible in my HE institution. I have started to implement change: exploring how EYT trainees might be supported in examining the uniqueness and uncertainties of this area of work and how their emotions might inhabit and therefore, affect practice. I have begun to explore how EYTs might be encouraged to discuss episodes of indecision and examine factors that might influence their thinking and behaviours (perceived as positive and negative). I have started to examine how to facilitate generic learning from less serious local cases and how these might inform or enhance safeguarding practices in settings: something over which EYTs might have some influence and with which they regularly engage. Finally I have explored how EYT trainees might be supported in exploring their ongoing responsibilities to the child and/or family following the reporting of a concern and how they might consider ways to work with others through times of uncertainty: having alertness to the *aperture of uncertainty* and identifying strategies for implementation.

The disclosures of EYTs in this research study have provided the foundations for change in the way GE EYTs are educated in safeguarding and child protection in my institution and will be of interest to others working in this field. HE EYTS teacher educators need to have awareness that learning about safeguarding and child protection should be contextualised. Rather than exacerbating the emotion of fear associated with this aspect of practice, teacher educators need to consider the message and materials used for learning. GE EYTs new to the early years sector should be supported in understanding and developing their reflective responses as opposed to coping responses (Eraut, 2004) that are deemed essential in navigating such a complex and uncertain area of professional practice with confidence.

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## Appendices

**Appendix A** - Semi-structured interview questions and script prompts to ensure ethical practice was adhered to during the interviews.

**Early years safeguarding and child protection in practice: An enquiry into the experiences of newly qualified practitioners.**

### **Aims of Research:**

- How are early years graduates, located in one higher education institution, educated in safeguarding and child protection?
- What are their experiences of safeguarding and child protection practices over a period of one year in first employment?
- How might emerging themes arising from the lived experiences of the graduates' contribute to the enhancement of university education programmes in early years safeguarding and child protection?

### **Ethical reminder:**

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Please can I remind you that:

- The interview will be about one hour long and will be recorded
- All personal details will be held strictly confidential (unless S&CP disclosures are made where a child might be deemed at risk of harm)
- You are free to withdraw at any time
- Any questions?

### **Interview:**

*The purpose of this interview is to find out about your experiences of safeguarding and child protection in practice. As graduates new to employment in the early years sector I want to try and understand what your experiences are and have been since you started your job. I am looking to learn from you what it is you draw on to help you work effectively in safeguarding and child protection. I am also interested to find out what your thoughts are of the university training you undertook through the EYTS programme. The following questions are really a just guide to help us focus the conversation;*

#### **Previous Role:**

- Can you tell me why you chose to undertake the Early Years Teacher Status? Explore previous role
- Before you did the EYTS did you have any knowledge of safeguarding and child protection? What was this?

#### **Current Role:**



- What is your current role in early years?
- When did you start this job?
- What has been your involvement of S and CP since you started your job in early years?
- What do you draw on to help you with Safeguarding and CP issues in practice?
- What other knowledge or skills do you think you draw on to help you with practice

***KU Involvement through EYTS Training***

- I am interested to find out how you felt the KU EYTS training prepared you for practice in Safeguarding and Child Protection. Can you tell me?
- Can you tell me about what you learned?
- Did you think this was helpful for professional practice?
- What do you think could be improved?

***Other factors influencing professional practice in safeguarding and child protection***

- Are there any other factors that you think influences professional practice in safeguarding and child protection?
- What do you think the impact of these is for you?

**Thank you for taking part in this study. I will make sure that you get a copy of the final report if you are interested.**

**Appendix B** – Two examples of ‘Sense of the Whole’ (first interview, P16; second interview, P15) from the data analysis process.

### **Data Analysis P16 First Interview**

#### **Sense of the Whole**

P16 started the interview talking about her previous work in ■■■. She mentioned her change of career had been due to the need for enjoyment in her job. She appeared to have decided that experiences with family and in particular her cousins, had been the catalyst to explore alternative work with children.

Later in the interview she very much emphasized her belief in the ‘rights’ of individuals. She explained that she had a particular interest in the area of safeguarding and child protection and also that a child’s voice should be represented. P16 stated that she thought children were vulnerable.

She mentioned ‘duty of care’ and her ‘moral duty’ to protect children. She claimed that she had a heightened sense of connection with the children she thought most vulnerable, i.e. the ones who had been involved in the two cases she shared in the interview. P16 suggested that this was because she now considered those children as ‘more’ vulnerable.

P16 considered her training in safeguarding and child protection had been ‘hard hitting’. She used this phrase on more than one occasion. It was unclear whether this was related to the training materials used or on her personal responses at the time.

### **Data Analysis P15 Second Interview**

#### **Sense of the Whole**

P1521 talked intensively about individual children and how she had worked with them. She gave examples of how she supported children and there was a sense of P1521 being very tactile with the children. She mentioned several times the need to cuddle children and demonstrated how this was done in the setting. She mentioned the unfairness when she was made to feel uncomfortable when a child had been placed on her lap by a parent and the Head had asked her to move the child to the chair next to her. There was a strong sense that P1521 felt there was a need for children to have appropriate physical contact but she also highlighted a couple of times that she always had another adult in the room to ‘cover her back’. P1521 suggested that there was a tension between the application of a no touch policy and the need of children to have physical contact.

P1521 gave a number of examples in practice where she had experienced some fear. She used the word ‘scared’ to describe what she thought might have been a parent misunderstanding the meaning of their child who might have stated that he had kissed P1521. There was a sense that P1521 was aware that practice might be challenged and she appeared very uncomfortable that what she considered appropriate physical contact could be misconstrued.

P1521 mentioned people talking about safeguarding and child protection and the influence of the media. She thought this had affected her understanding and caused some anxiety.

**Appendix C** – Two examples of ‘bracketing’ my own presuppositions from the data analysis process as advocated by Hycner (1985).

### **First Interview with P10**

P10 confidently expresses her role as the teacher and alludes to running sessions with a group of eight children. I found I questioned what she meant by a ‘teacher’ is as my own experience in this assigned role was with large classes of over thirty children in a full time capacity. *I clearly have preconceived ideas about what a ‘teacher’ is and what a ‘teacher’ does based on a set of personal experiences. I had not previously given thought to a definition.*

P10 outlines her motivation to becoming an Early Years Teacher as based on a set of pros and cons relating to her own family’s interests and her preferences for enjoyment in work. This was a conscious decision about what would ‘suit’ as opposed to a ‘vocational’ calling as she expresses it. *This challenged an assumption of mine that teachers are generally motivated to work with children for moral reasons i.e. want to make a difference to the lives of young children or want to have some effect for the better.* This might have an effect on the way safeguarding and child protection practice is articulated: from a moral or pragmatic standpoint. *I need to be aware of my prejudice here.*

P10 spends time talking about her experiences as a [REDACTED], working in the [REDACTED]. There is an assumption that this means that she is a ‘good’ person. There is a sense of ‘goodness’ about people who do charitable works. P10 mentions liking ‘kindly’ people and gives an example of practice that she did not like in a setting (where teachers shouted at children). I found that I was ‘approving’ of this assertion and can be heard acknowledging positively. *I clearly have a sense that teachers should be ‘kindly’ and need to be aware that my interest might be captured by what I think is an important attribute rather than what the participants are actually saying.*

The questions I asked were at times leading the responses. I mentioned ‘what gives concern’ on a number of occasions thereby implicitly suggesting the area is of ‘concern’. *I clearly consider the area of safeguarding and child protection as a concern and this was evident in the language I used in the interview.*

## **Data Analysis**

### **‘Bracketing’ my own presuppositions as the researcher.**

#### **Second Interview with P1318**

P1318 engaged very quickly in the focus around safeguarding and child protection. I was able to follow the questions that had arisen from the first interview and she remained focused in her dialogue.

I was aware that I became engrossed in her dialogue and began to engage in conversation at one point as she articulated her position in terms of safeguarding being a complex area of practice.

I found myself very interested in her summations and in the clarity of her exposition. I think that I was beginning to engage in the debate rather than listening and I had to stop myself from leading the questions at one point. I was disappointed that on a few occasions I anticipated her response as she paused and I’m not sure she would have used the words that she did if I had not interrupted. *I will need to be aware of where these incidences occurred and not use them in the analysis.*

**Appendix D** – A short excerpt from ‘Delineating Units of General Meaning’ and ‘Delineating Units of Meaning Relevant to the Research Questions’ (highlighted in P14’s transcription), from the data analysis process.

Transcript Excerpt P14	Units of General Meaning
<p>P14: Ok, when doing the early years I think we did safeguarding as a topic on its own. We did child protection as well<sup>20</sup>. And from what I’ve understood it’s about abuse. It’s about health and safety. It’s about ensuring...ensuring that you look out for that child as an individual and you observe signs...that might later...a big issue at the end if you further investigate<sup>21</sup>. So it could be an abuse. It could be umm malnutrition, which sits under abuse. It could be lateness which is under abuse. It could be...it depends...safeguarding is really broad<sup>22</sup>...so...</p> <p>PI: So, tell me about your job now. What are you doing now?</p> <p>P14: Now...I’m a pre-school teacher now. I’m a pre-school teacher now. I’m still a room leader so there are two room leaders in the room now so.... My own focus is mainly teaching the children<sup>23</sup>. All I do is teach all the seven areas of early years. Playfully, yeah. Engage the children playfully. Make relationships with the parents<sup>24</sup> and umm...</p> <p>PI: What age are you working with at the moment?</p> <p>P14: Pre-school which is 3-5, yeah.</p> <p>PI: Is that one room with a 3 to 5 split?</p> <p>P14: Yeah one room<sup>25</sup>.</p> <p>PI: Across the age group or...</p> <p>P14: Just altogether, yeah.</p> <p>PI: And how many have you got?</p> <p>P14: Ok, the room can take 30 children but at the moment from what I’ve started most of them they’ve moved up to big school. So we have about 15 now<sup>26</sup>. So it’s not a lot now. So hopefully it’s going to expand because they had about 25 but most of them moved up to big school so...from now we are just getting new ones from nursery room coming down to pre-school.</p>	<p><sup>20</sup> P14 stated that she did safeguarding and child protection as a topic on the early years course.</p> <p><sup>21</sup> From what P14 understood she thought safeguarding and child protection was about abuse, health and safety, ensuring that she looked out for a child as an individual, and observed signs that might be a big issue at the end if she further investigated.</p> <p><sup>22</sup> P14 thought it could be abuse; malnutrition (which she thought sat under abuse), lateness or it could depend, as safeguarding was really broad.</p> <p><sup>23</sup> P14 stated she was now a pre-school teacher and still a room leader whose focus was mainly teaching the children.</p> <p><sup>24</sup> P14 reported that her role was to teach all seven areas of early years, engaging the children playfully and making relationships with the parents.</p> <p><sup>25</sup> P14 worked with 3-5 year olds in one room.</p> <p><sup>26</sup> The room can take 30 children but P14 had about 15 and was hoping this would expand.</p>

PI: Are you the only graduate in the setting?

P14: Umm, no, I think somebody did the early year, err early years umm early prof, early years professional. Yes it was and somebody did umm BA in education<sup>27</sup>.

PI: So have you found umm when you started work, what was your induction into your new job like?... did you have to look at policies?

P14: Yeah, yeah, err, I did look. I was given the policies to look in<sup>28</sup> (laughs) and I was defin flippin', flippin' flippin' the policy and umm getting to know which were not new. Because you know the placement experience you know we obviously every setting has got their own way of umm setting their policy<sup>29</sup>. But at the end of the day we still have to go with the Standards statutory requirements really. So I did go through the policy<sup>30</sup> and umm...

PI: Did they have a policy on safeguarding?

P14: Yes they do...

PI: And how...did they go through it with you?

P14: I was given to it to read by myself<sup>31</sup>.

PI: And have you had a chance to talk about anything in the policy with anyone?

P14: No in all fairness because once you get into that system it's just (clicks fingers three times) you are there on your toes, you are there on your toes, you are there on your toes<sup>32</sup>. But it is umm, you just make sure you're safeguarding<sup>33</sup>.

Everything is in practice. For instance we have the health and safety requirement folder that's got all requirements that we need to miss, open and closing, room temperature, risk assessment and loads and loads of policies<sup>34</sup>. I just need to ensure everything is in place and you're ticking the boxes for all<sup>35</sup>. And we got a manual operation folder, head count, registration, temperature, sleep chart, accident/incident form, ...umm staff signing in and out which is compulsory...yeah and umm...

<sup>27</sup> P14 affirmed that there were two other graduates in the setting; one who had done the Early Years Professional Status and one who had done a BA in Education.

<sup>28</sup> P14 was given policies to look in.

<sup>29</sup> P14 stated that from her placement experience she knew that every setting had their own policies.

<sup>30</sup> P14 stated that at the end of the day she had to go with statutory requirements so she did go through the policy.

<sup>31</sup> P14 was given the safeguarding policy to read by herself.

<sup>32</sup> P14 affirmed that she hadn't talked about anything in the policy as once she was in the system she was there on her toes.

<sup>33</sup> P14 just makes sure that she is safeguarding.

<sup>34</sup> P14 stated that everything is in practice, for instance the health and safety requirement folder that has got all requirements that she needs such as opening and closing, room temperature, risk assessment and loads and loads of policies.

<sup>35</sup> P14 reported that she just needed to ensure everything was in place and she has ticked the boxes for all.

**Appendix E** – An excerpt from ‘Eliminating Redundancies and Identifying Clusters of Relevant Meaning’ from the data analysis process (first interview P10).

### **Redundancies**

<sup>1</sup> A class teacher

<sup>4</sup> P10’s day is 8 until 02.15

<sup>6</sup> Eight children

<sup>11</sup> There was an EYPS in the setting

<sup>13</sup> P10 hadn’t spoken to her about her experiences

### **Clusters of Relevant Meaning**

#### ***A. Personal Motivations for Becoming an Early Years Teacher***

##### ***A1 Personal Fulfilment***

<sup>23</sup> P10 liked the company of people, structure and routine

<sup>24</sup> P10 liked children

<sup>25</sup> P10 enjoyed being with them

<sup>26</sup> P10 felt fulfilled by teaching

<sup>27</sup> P10 felt fulfilled when involved in educational things

<sup>55</sup> Such an immersion into an experience meant the children were absolutely gripped

<sup>56</sup> It was fun.

<sup>57</sup> P10 wanted to do more of that sort of thing.

<sup>58</sup> The experience was key in thinking that that was good.

<sup>67</sup> Received lots of positive feedback

##### ***A2 Reasoned Choice***

<sup>18</sup> Motivation to choose EYTS was not having an interest in working with children over five.

<sup>19</sup> P10 didn’t see any reason to do QTS with an early years focus

<sup>20</sup> P10 not interested in teaching children of six and seven

<sup>21</sup> General interest in working with children was a sort of process of the types of things she liked and enjoyed

<sup>22</sup> Whittling out some things she didn’t like

<sup>28</sup> P10 didn’t like being on her own

<sup>29</sup> P10 didn’t like working from home

<sup>30</sup> P10 didn’t like being away from her own children in the holidays

<sup>61</sup> P10 wanted to do something as part of a team

<sup>62</sup> P10 wanted to plan and learn together

<sup>64</sup> It wasn’t vocational

<sup>65</sup> It was a conscious decision to move into early years teaching

<sup>68</sup> P10 is good with kids. She does fine with kids.

<sup>177</sup> P10 knows and feels confident that she is not a risk to children.

<sup>178</sup> P10 treats the children the same way as she would her own.

##### ***A3 Recognizing Previous Experience and Skills***

<sup>35</sup> P10 had different experiences of working with children before

<sup>36</sup> She had her own children

<sup>38</sup> P10 taught at children’s church for five, six, seven years

<sup>39</sup> P10 did an interactive telling of the nativity story for local schools

<sup>52</sup> P10 called the narrated experience extraordinary.

<sup>53</sup> P10 thought this was just brilliant.

<sup>54</sup> The children were learning.

<sup>59</sup> P10 organized other events

<sup>60</sup> Mostly on her own

## ***B. Safeguarding and Child Protection Training prior to Employment***

### ***B1 Pre-qualifying Training in Safeguarding and Child Protection***

<sup>72</sup> P10 recalled two sessions on safeguarding and child protection.

<sup>73</sup> P10 noted that what stood out was thinking about the case reviews.

<sup>74</sup> P10 looked at real life circumstances and the processes of what went wrong from the Baby P and the photograph led Plymouth Review.

<sup>75</sup> P10 noted that what stood out was looking at real life things and the series of factors that came together for those cases.

<sup>76</sup> P10 noted that what stood out was no joined up thinking and people not working together.

<sup>85</sup> Training made P10 aware of the great weight of responsibility that she has caring for somebody else's children.

<sup>179</sup> P10 did run through some scenarios in training.

### ***B2 Previous Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection***

<sup>77</sup> P10 hadn't necessarily thought greatly about safeguarding before training.

<sup>78</sup> P10 knew she had to be CRB checked or she wasn't supposed to be in a room with a group of children.

<sup>80</sup> P10 hadn't been in a position before where she felt she was in a vulnerable position with any children, where she thought they could be unsafe.

<sup>81</sup> P10 had known an ex-offender was working in the kitchen, wasn't allowed to be left alone with children when the playgroup was on.

### ***B3 Pre-qualifying Responsibilities for Safeguarding and Child Protection***

<sup>82</sup> P10 was aware but it wasn't her own personal risk.

<sup>83</sup> P10 aware of risk factor but wasn't her responsibility.

<sup>84</sup> P10 hadn't thought much about safeguarding before.

## ***C. Personal and Professional Assertions to Keep Children Safe***

### ***C1 Personal Assertions to Keep Children Safe***

<sup>86</sup> P10 describes herself as a fairly cautious person.

<sup>87</sup> P10 knows she is responsible for children.

<sup>88</sup> P10 trusts that she is not a risk to children and so gets on with it.

<sup>89</sup> P10 is conscious of toileting children.

<sup>90</sup> Children have accidents and P10 can be in a position where she is in the loo with eight children on her own.

<sup>91</sup> When a child has wet themselves P10 calls for help to get a change of clothes.

<sup>92</sup> P10 works out how to get them changed in an appropriate way that is not embarrassing for them in front of the other children.

<sup>93</sup> She has to do it responsibly and in a way that shields the child.

<sup>94</sup> She is not nervous in that instance.

<sup>95</sup> She is not a risk but just trying to do it in an appropriate and dignified way for the child.

**Appendix F – ‘Clustering Units of Relevant Meaning’ from the second interviews leading to emerging General Themes.**

GENERAL THEMES	Second Interview Participants				
	P1020	P1217	P1318	P1419	P1521
	<b>CLUSTERS OF RELEVANT MEANING</b>				
<i>Emotive Reasons for Becoming an Early Years Teacher</i>					<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal Fulfilment</i></li> </ul>
<i>Safeguarding and Child Protection Training prior to EYTS Course</i>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Pre-qualifying Training in Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> <li>• <i>Previous Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Previous Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Previous Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> <li>• <i>Pre-qualifying Responsibilities for Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Previous Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection</i></li> </ul>
<i>Personal and Professional Assertions to Keep Children Safe (Emotive Intent)</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Application of Policies and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Application of Policies and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal Assertions to Keep Children Safe</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Application of Policies and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Changes in Employment</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal Assertions to Keep Children Safe</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Application of Policies and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Changes in Employment</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Personal Assertions to Keep Children Safe</i></li> <li>• <i>Knowledge of Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> <li>• <i>Application of Policies and Procedures in the Setting</i></li> </ul>
<i>Uncertainties within Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Practice affecting confidence</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Awareness of Children Involved in Safeguarding and Child Protection Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Awareness of Personal Attributes if Faced with Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Tensions between Policies and their Application in Professional Practice Potentially causing Personal Risk</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Awareness of Children Involved in Safeguarding and Child Protection Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Identifying Thresholds to take Action</i></li> <li>• <i>Awareness of Personal Attributes if Faced with Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Tensions between Policies and their Application in Professional Practice Potentially causing Personal Risk</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Recording</i></li> <li>• <i>Identifying Thresholds to take Action</i></li> <li>• <i>Awareness of Personal Attributes if Faced with Concerns</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Awareness of Children Involved in Safeguarding and Child Protection Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Identifying Thresholds to take Action</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Identifying Thresholds to take Action</i></li> <li>• <i>Awareness of Personal Attributes if Faced with Concerns</i></li> <li>• <i>Tensions between Policies and their Application in Professional Practice Potentially causing Personal Risk</i></li> </ul>



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Uncertainties in Definitions</i></li> <li>• <i>Declared Impact upon the Self</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Uncertainties in Definitions</i></li> <li>• <i>Declared Impact upon the Self</i></li> <li>• <i>Expectations</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Uncertainties in Definitions</i></li> <li>• <i>Declared Impact upon the Self</i></li> <li>• <i>Expectations</i></li> <li>• <i>Working with other Professionals</i></li> <li>• <i>Support</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Working with other Professionals</i></li> <li>• <i>Cultural Differences</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Uncertainties in Definitions</i></li> <li>• <i>Declared Impact upon the Self</i></li> <li>• <i>Support</i></li> </ul>
<b>Recommendations for Future Training</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Scenario Training</i></li> <li>• <i>Indicators of safeguarding and child protection issues</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Specific and On-going Training for EYTs</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Real situations and how they were dealt with</i></li> </ul>		
<b>Parent/Practitioner Relationship (Emotive Involvement)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tensions in blurred Boundaries of Responsibility between Practitioners and Parents</i></li> <li>• <i>Fear of Litigation</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrated Behaviours from Parents and Staff following and incident in Practice</i></li> <li>• <i>Emotional Engagement and Judgments</i></li> <li>• <i>Power Differential between the Parents and the Setting</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tensions in blurred Boundaries of Responsibility between Practitioners and Parents</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrated Behaviours from Parents and Staff following and incident in Practice</i></li> <li>• <i>Emotional Engagement and Judgments</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tensions in blurred Boundaries of Responsibility between Practitioners and Parents</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrated Behaviours from Parents and Staff following and incident in Practice</i></li> <li>• <i>Emotional Engagement and Judgments</i></li> <li>• <i>Power Differential between the Parents and the Setting</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tensions in blurred Boundaries of Responsibility between Practitioners and Parents</i></li> <li>• <i>Fear of Litigation</i></li> <li>• <i>Demonstrated Behaviours from Parents and Staff following and incident in Practice</i></li> <li>• <i>Emotional Engagement and Judgments</i></li> <li>• <i>Power Differential between the Parents and the Setting</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Tensions in blurred Boundaries of Responsibility between Practitioners and Parents</i></li> <li>• <i>Fear of Litigation</i></li> <li>• <i>Emotional Engagement and Judgments</i></li> <li>• <i>Power Differential between the Parents and the Setting</i></li> </ul>

### Emerging General Themes from Clusters

- Emotive Reasons for Becoming an Early Years Teacher
- Safeguarding and Child Protection Knowledge/Training differs prior to EYTS Course
- Personal and Professional Assertions to Keep Children Safe (Emotional Intent)
- Uncertainties within Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and Practice (tensions between policy and effective EYs practice) affecting confidence
- Recommendations for Future Training (EYTS and Role Specific)
- Influence of Parent/Practitioner Partnerships/Relationships (Emotional involvement)