


**Original citation:** Richards, Claire  and Robinson, Catriona (2020) '*I know I am just a student but...': the challenges for educators in supporting students to develop their advocacy skills in protecting children*. *Early Years: An International Research Journal*. ISSN Print: 0957-5146 Online: 1472-4421 (In Press)

**Permanent WRaP URL:** <https://eprints.worc.ac.uk/id/eprint/9320>

### **Copyright and reuse:**

The Worcester Research and Publications (WRaP) makes this work available open access under the following conditions. Copyright © and all moral rights to the version of the paper presented here belong to the individual author(s) and/or other copyright owners. To the extent reasonable and practicable the material made available in WRaP has been checked for eligibility before being made available.

Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge, provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

### **Publisher's statement:**

This is an Accepted Manuscript of an article published by Taylor & Francis in *Early Years: An International Research Journal* on 8 April 2020, available online: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09575146.2020.1749036>

### **A note on versions:**

The version presented here may differ from the published version or, version of record, if you wish to cite this item you are advised to consult the publisher's version. Please see the 'permanent WRaP URL' above for details on accessing the published version and note that access may require a subscription.

**For more information, please contact [wrapteam@worc.ac.uk](mailto:wrapteam@worc.ac.uk)**

**FINAL EDIT – Including Title Page**

**Taylor & Francis Word Template for journal articles**

Early Years: An International Research Journal

***‘I know I am just a student but...’: the challenges for educators in supporting students to develop their advocacy skills in protecting children.***

Claire Mc Loone-Richards\*

*Department for Violence Prevention, Trauma and Criminology, University of Worcester, Worcester, United Kingdom.*

University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, UK. WR6 2AJ

Email: [c.richards@worc.ac.uk](mailto:c.richards@worc.ac.uk)

ORCID ID – 0000-0002-1933-8074

Catriona Robinson

*School of Education, University of Worcester, Worcester, United Kingdom.*

University of Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, UK. WR6 2AJ

Email: [c.robinson@worc.ac.uk](mailto:c.robinson@worc.ac.uk)

**WORD COUNT – 7,186**

## **Abstract**

The paper presents findings from an explorative qualitative study on the experiences of students of early childhood studies and primary initial teacher training programmes in England during professional practice placements. The research examined how students' developing advocacy skills to safeguard and protect children were enabled in response to influential factors in their professional practice environments. The role of the university as the education provider is examined in view of the experiences of academic staff in supporting students in the event of a disclosure about a child protection concern. Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* is considered in relation to the student's position in terms of the challenges and opportunities in developing their confidence and competency in finding their place and voice to advocate for vulnerable children. Given the critical role of Early Childhood Education and Care practitioners (ECECs) and teachers in safeguarding children, this paper argues the need for more robust provision and integration of teaching advocacy within child protection studies for students as developing professionals.

Keywords: early childhood educator; child protection; student; advocacy, *Habitus*, pedagogy.

## **Introduction**

Students of Early Childhood Studies (ECS) and Primary Initial Teacher Education (PITE) undergraduate programmes can quickly develop an appreciation of the complexity of their role beyond their own educational contexts. The realities of their responsibilities for the education and care of children direct that they should acquire significant insight into the child's world, understanding aspects of their home life, familial relationships, their culture, their well-being and happiness (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2011; Mevawalla and Hadley, 2012 and Moody and Darbellay, 2019). The student in transition from a novice practitioner to becoming more expert (Daley, 1999 and O'Connor and Leonard, 2014) should acquire an appreciation of the importance of their role in contributing beyond the education of the child, alongside the establishment of a meaningful relationship as a 'positive attachment' with the child (Allen, 2012; Keddell, 2017; Verissimo et al. 2017). This includes an expectation of their responsibilities in safeguarding and protecting children as there is increasing recognition of the role of pre-schools and schools in safeguarding vulnerable children within the last decade of austerity, where schools are pertinently described as the 'unofficial fourth emergency service' (Adams, 2019).

In view of these issues, the study was conducted within a university in England with final year undergraduate early childhood students (ECS) and trainee teachers, including their undergraduate programme tutors. The concerns related to the emergence of this paper were twofold: firstly, to investigate the confidence levels of students' and staff knowledge of what to do if they were worried about the welfare of a child in an educational setting. It should be noted that the ECS had completed a mandatory child protection module, while the trainee teachers had no dedicated mandatory module but had received varied input on this subject within their programme of study.

The paper secondly intended to explore the significance of child advocacy skills in the professional practice of ECEC practitioners and teachers and the need for greater focus on these skills within education programmes, to ensure more confident and competent advocacy for children's rights and interests and for their protection.

To achieve a better understanding of these points, the aims of this study were to:

- gain perspectives from students and academic tutors where concerns are identified in the context of safeguarding children in professional practice experience;
- have an improved awareness and understanding of what helps in supporting students, beyond the provision of policy and guidance related to safeguarding children;
- understand the experiences and implications for academic tutors and the university in supporting students who raise a concern about issues of safeguarding children in professional placement experience;
- consider any further implications for education programmes in developing student knowledge and advocacy skills for professional practice.

## **Background Literature**

There is no central database or source of information to measure the current extent and nature of child abuse and neglect in the UK. The issue is directly related to the ethical issues and research challenges around asking children about such a highly sensitive topic and the likely consequences for them following a disclosure. One of the most useful data sources is the Crime Survey for England and Wales (ONS, 2019) which highlights that 1 in 5 adults aged between 18 to 74 years experienced abuse before the age of 16 and around half of these adults (52%) also experienced domestic abuse in later life. The experiences of child abuse and neglect before the age of 11 predicts a higher likelihood of poor mental health, including self-harm and suicidal ideation and greater propensity for delinquent behaviours and vulnerability to other forms of abuse outside the family home (Radford et al. 2011; Sidebotham et al. 2016). In terms of the concern about child neglect, research in England identified that neglect was a factor in 60% of

serious case reviews of serious injury or child deaths (Brandon et al. 2013). Manning and Patterson (2005) offer a strong case for the need to ensure that early childhood educators have the essential knowledge and skills to recognise, prevent and intervene in response to the troubling issue of child abuse.

Among the many professional discourses on child protection, the child's rights discourse should be the most prominent, providing the thread of cohesion and connectivity towards ensuring that the child's right to be safe and their well-being are protected (McNamara, 2012). The UK ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (UNICEF, 1989), thereby agreeing to ensure for every child 'such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being' (UNICEF, 1989, article 3.2). The Convention places direct focus on the child and takes into account 'the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her' (ibid.). In England and Wales, the Children Act 1989 detailed the need for collaboration between parents and local authorities, which includes education services, to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. The collaborative relationship between State and family life is characterised by the direct assessment and intervention in matters concerning children's safety and welfare, which is becoming the focus of professional attention in safeguarding and child protection practice. In the last decade, there has been an increasing focus on ECECs practitioners' safeguarding and child protection roles and responsibilities as highlighted in the following statutory guidance; *What to do if you are worried a child is being abused. Advice for practitioners* (HM Government, 2015), *Working Together to Safeguard Children* (HM Government, 2018), *Keeping Children Safe in Education* (DfE, 2018) and *Preventing and Tackling Bullying* (Department for Education, DfE, 2017). There are also salient reminders of the evidence within reported Serious Case Reviews into the contexts of a child's death due to abuse and neglect or having suffered serious harm due to abuse and neglect (Laming, 2003; Laming, 2009; Lock, 2013; Radford, 2010; Sidebotham et al. 2016 & Wonnacott and Watts, 2014). The public attention that such cases have received has perhaps heightened the tensions and anxieties of ECEC practitioners whose increasing prominence in the multi-professional child protection arena, contribute to their concerns about getting a safeguarding concern "wrong" as opposed to "getting it right" (Warner, 2013).

Further to the children's rights discourse, there is recognition that the evolution of children's autonomy and self-determination is aided by supportive and respectful adults who promote their right to be heard and be taken seriously (Alderson, 2016; Lansdown, 1998; Mulhearn Blasco, Falco and Munson, 2006 and Moody and Darbellay, 2019). This perhaps bears some resemblance to student practitioners' experiences during professional placement (in professional settings for example, the nursery or school), where they may feel overlooked, unheard or not

taken seriously due to their novice status or perceptions by other professionals of their incompetence. The point is underlined by O'Connor and Leonard (2014, 1814) who describe the power and cogency of voice-ness [self-advocacy] in social work practice, as students in their study related how their voice was not 'given weight'. In teaching advocacy to students, Page et al. (2004, 39) explain that 'True advocacy entailed nurturing candidates in their development as well as being a gatekeeper by asking candidates to take on responsibility for their own growth'. The authors refer to the gatekeeping role of universities or colleges in teaching advocacy to students as part of their roles and responsibilities for safeguarding children, but there are dilemmas and conflicts for students in professional placement when the theory of children's rights and protection is at odds with what they observe in their practice setting (O'Connor & Leonard, 2014). This point will be examined further in relation to the students' experiences and the responses of their university.

### **Developing Professional Advocacy Skills within Safeguarding and Child Protection Practice**

Professional Advocacy is an essential skill for all practitioners within multi-disciplinary practice working with children and their families. There are many definitions to offer a meaning and understanding of this concept. The pursuit of empowerment, social justice and equality are some of the agreed key components of advocacy in practice (Boylan and Dalrymple, 2011; Fielder, 2000; O'Connor and Kelly, 2005; Shore 1998; Waterston, 2008). Dyson's description (as quoted in Waterson 2009, 25) offers a provocative and sturdy definition, which is applicable to many disciplines and professional contexts:

'Advocacy is many things. It is speaking out, speaking up, speaking for. In its simplest and most profound form, advocacy is giving voice to the questions, "What is wrong here? Couldn't we do better?". ....Some advocacy involves taking serious risks, caring enough about a cause to question authority and even to court personal repercussions.'

Fiedler (2000) elaborates on the concept of *disposition* as reflecting the values, attitudes and ethical behaviours of individuals who advocate for children, he is also mindful of the risks attached to personal and professional advocacy leading to fear of 'getting it wrong' (2000,12) in practice. A potential struggle ensues as 'A complex picture emerges of [the student] finding 'voice' and utilising discretion and power in work' (O'Connor and Leonard 2014, 1808) within the space of their professional placement. Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* may offer a useful lens for examination of the position of students within the social spaces they occupy in their learning

institutions, professional placements and beyond these contexts. Bourdieu's work explains how the *Habitus* is acquired over time but eventually becomes securely deposited within the individual, comprising historical 'mental and corporeal schemata of perception, appreciation and action' (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, 16). The individual incorporates and performs a particular mind-set of beliefs and behaviours based on their understanding of who they are and their place in society. The *Habitus* concept may be of particular relevance to the student's learning experience, illustrating how power and inequalities are experienced within the student's educational or professional space or *Field*. McNay (1999) helpfully describes *Habitus* as a sense of place or "*knowing one's place*" within an institution or community that may be informed and influenced by the individual's knowledge and life experiences, predisposing the individual to act in a certain way. Students may consider themselves "*less worthy*" or feel that it is "*not their place*" to advocate, to question or challenge poor practice in relation to the rights of the child and their welfare. This inner conflict may cause an ambivalence about their own efficacy and self-doubt about their professional judgements and practice in protecting children.

## **Method**

The research was a small-scale exploratory study attempting to gain new insights and understanding and to create further ideas for future research (Robson, 2002). The study conducted in 2014, aimed to examine and understand the experiences of students and academic staff in responding to safeguarding concerns about children and poor professional practice in student practice placements. A questionnaire was designed to include open text box responses to enable an understanding of the usefulness and accessibility of university resources in supporting students and staff in the context of safeguarding children and professional practice. The study comprised a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006) to interpret the qualitative data from the questionnaire surveys and focus group. Ethical approval was received from the University Ethics Committee to progress the study. The researchers considered the possibility of encountering data that raised concerns about the welfare of children or vulnerable adults. This issue was highlighted in the research participant information correspondence, if a direct disclosure within a focus group raised a child protection concern, then this would necessitate the implementation of the university's safeguarding policy and procedures. One limitation identified by the study was that only partial consideration was given to the risk of vicarious or secondary trauma in the context of students' and staff experiences of child abuse and trauma (Acevedo & Hernandez-Wolfe, 2014; Lucas, 2007; Mc Cormack & Katalinic, 2016) and that more explicit signposting to counselling and support agencies should have been offered to the research participants to minimise the risk of any distress.

The two-staged process of the study firstly involved the distribution of a questionnaire in a hard copy format to 221 students and 87 members of staff, this resulted in a return of 14% (n=30) of student questionnaires, 35% of which (n=10) were Early Childhood Studies students (ECS) 65% (n=20) PITE students and 25% (n=18) staff. The questionnaire was posted to staff via the internal mailing system of the institution and returned to the researchers by the same means. No demographic information was recorded about the student participants, but given the demographic makeup at the time, the majority of students were white females between the ages of 18 to 21 years old. The researchers visited student cohorts of the PITE and Early Childhood Studies programmes to introduce and explain the aims of the study and to distribute the questionnaire. The completed student questionnaires were deposited in a specially constructed secure post box in the Students' Union collected by the researchers. All of the research data were analysed manually, the questionnaire data from the student and staff survey were analysed separately by each researcher and the findings and themes were subsequently compared, discussed and agreed.

The second stage comprised a focus group (Beyea and Nicoll, 2000; Morgan and Spanish, 1984), its aim was to facilitate open discussion among students reflecting on their practice experiences (Schön, 1991). The focus group was facilitated by one of the researchers; it was not voice recorded and the intention was to explore the issues identified from the survey. The researcher designed a data table which included the questions and early emerging themes from the survey which were to be investigated further. Immediately after the focus group the researcher developed a narrative from the data notes which was subsequently shared with the students to confirm the data as a fair and accurate representation of their discussion. This phase of the study had a very low uptake of, 3 students and none by staff, thereby limiting a more in-depth analysis of data to understand the emerging themes raised by the questionnaire data and the research study itself. However, the insights yielded from the students' narratives merited recognition in this paper because of the critical insights from each student describing some of the challenges and dilemmas in practice placement. Irrespective of the limited generalisability of the findings to other contexts, these issues potentially have implications for educators and professional settings alike, suggesting a need to provide more support for students and improve their preparation in safeguarding practice for children.

## **Results**

The student and staff questionnaires offered qualitative data and from the thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) the researchers undertook a step-by-step analysis of a process that involved firstly looking for data codes. This stage required careful reading numerous times by the researchers to familiarise themselves with the emerging data narratives. Secondly,



connections were identified across the codes within the data towards developing a sequence of themes emerging from the data. Thirdly, this repeated analysis provided an opportunity to create a list of the prominent and common themes from the data. Finally, three common themes for both students and academic staff were identified. These related firstly to knowledge of safeguarding children procedures, secondly having experience of a safeguarding concern about a child and thirdly, being worried about the outcome for a child. These themes subsequently formed the discussion points for the student focus group.

### **1. Knowledge of Child Protection and Safeguarding Procedures**

The data indicated that 63% (n=18) of students were aware of the university's safeguarding children guidance and work-based practice procedures. There was a lack of awareness regarding the Student Disclosure Form (SDF) with just 20% (n= 6) of students and 50% (n= 9) of staff knowing of its existence within the institute. The SDF was introduced by the institute as a means of providing clearer procedural responses for students and staff in the event of a safeguarding or child protection disclosure, and to provide an audit trail for processing any action or intervention that was taken by the individual student, staff or the university. Similarly, the SDF offered a means of recording experiences of observed poor professional practice which could also lead to a re-assessment of the suitability of the professional setting as a quality provider for student professional placement. While staff data indicated 100% awareness of the university safeguarding policy and procedures to support students in their professional practice placements, the respondents called for improved awareness of policy implications and increased guidance for staff in responding to students' initial safeguarding children concerns.

### **2. Experiences of a safeguarding concern about a child**

The questionnaire data identified a range of experiences of child safeguarding concerns disclosed by the PITE students (n=6). The data suggested that these concerns ranged from the practice placement staff sharing information with the student about a child or the student themselves recognising a safeguarding concern about a child in their classroom. Similarly, the questionnaire data highlighted the nature of concerns raised by university tutors (n=5) where students related their experiences to them about their professional practice experiences within early years' settings and schools. Students (n=4) raised a concern with staff in their professional practice placement and the following commentary from the data offered initial insights into the nature of the concerns about children and how the professional staff responded to the student voicing their concerns. Student 1 (S1) explained how they had concern about the welfare of a

child and their home situation: *“Concerns rose when the child said something to me and I passed my concerns on to staff”*

S2 described the concerns relating to a child’s welfare in their home environment and their poor diet, they added that a *“Home Visit was undertaken.... Outcome of [my] concern was fully supported by setting.”*

S3 related how a high percentage of children in their class were assessed as being *“a child in need”*, while worryingly, S5 conveyed how *“multiple”* children in their class *“were suffering from abuse and neglect”*.

Where students (n=2) did not raise the issue with professional or academic staff, it was because the professional placement staff were already aware and were responding to the safeguarding concern. In S4’s experience, they had been informed that three children in their class were deemed to be a *“cause for concern”* ...*“Every time the children said/did something that showed concern, we wrote it down on school’s child protection form and gave a copy to the Headteacher.”*

Similarly, S6 described their concern about *“a child who appeared neglected”* they added the school’s response was *“They told me they are aware, had similar issues with the child’s older siblings, and “keeping an eye on it”.”*

### **3. Being worried about the outcome**

The academic tutors (n=5) communicated issues relating to inadequate or poor professional practice in safeguarding children. Tutor T3 identified how they had concern about a child identified in a student’s research but the student did not share this concern, the tutor did not describe any follow up on the matter. Tutor 1 explained a scenario where they supported a student in escalating a concern about a child with Ofsted (Office for Standards in Education) due to the apparent lack of response by the staff in the professional setting. T4 described *“an incident where a child had expressed suicidal feelings on entering the classroom”* but the student was told to *“ignore this as it was common for this child to say such things. No feedback or outcome for the child was given/shared with the student.”* These data highlight how the child’s voice and the student’s voice may be simultaneously dismissed or “not taken seriously”. The experience is in contrast to another tutor (T5) who described a less formal approach in addressing poor practice which could have implications for safeguarding children. The student *“complained about poor practice at the setting”* however *“Upon chatting to me she then spoke with her school-based mentor in an informal way.”* This raises questions as to whether an “informal” approach is seen as more desirable as an initial response, due to possible dilemmas and conflicts with professional settings about concerns relating to poor practice.

T2 related how a student “*was unhappy about the way a teacher grabbed a child*” but the student felt nervous about reporting the observation in the school and was reluctant to raise the concern with the tutor’s support and guidance. There was no elaboration offered concerning the next steps taken by the tutor in this case. The data from the survey questionnaire revealed the importance of having an identified person or persons to be a point of contact for consultation and guidance. The data also suggested the tensions that can exist for students in professional settings where their knowledge and prior experiences of good practice are compromised or challenged.

### **Focus Group - Finding voice and being taken seriously**

The student focus group comprised 3 participants from the Early Childhood Studies discipline, all of whom were at the final year of study of their degree and one of the authors. The focus group with Jo, Sandra and Jane (pseudonyms) was facilitated by one of the researchers and the discussion, following the initial analysis of the survey data, revolved around issues of awareness, confidence and support for students in their professional placement experiences and safeguarding children practice. They were asked about how the university could improve students’ awareness and preparation for professional placements and there was a consensus that student handbooks and guidance were not enough, as Jane indicated *‘I forget to look at the handbook as I want to talk to someone first, I don’t automatically think of the guidance.’* A personal contact in the professional setting and links with their academic tutor were the best assurances when there were difficult issues in a professional setting. The safeguarding module on their degree programme was significant in developing their knowledge and confidence, but the students recognised that at times they were working with staff who were less qualified than they were and appeared less knowledgeable about child safeguarding. Sandra described this as a *‘difficult dynamic’*.

The students valued the learning environment of the university and the support from their tutors and peers, Sandra referred to how tutors *‘always had their door open’* and that at times in certain professional settings there may not be the same support and that *‘you are left to get on with it.’* Interestingly, the focus group revealed some insight into the experiences of parental perceptions of the student status. Jo related her frustrations about the general public views of early years practitioners in not being valued as they *‘just play with kids....I hate that phrase!’* She described that some settings did not introduce students properly to parents which seemed to compound the problem of being seen as less competent or trustworthy, and in some instances students were discouraged from talking to parents.

The focus group inquired about the possible barriers to students raising their concerns in a professional setting or with the university. Sandra described her anxieties about working with ‘*unapproachable staff*’ in a setting and said there was a fear of ‘*not being taken seriously*’. Jo described her anxiety in circumstances where she perceived staff in a professional setting as being less knowledgeable or confident in safeguarding practice, ‘*I am absolutely terrified that I missed something....not doing the correct thing.*’ Jo identified that there are still gaps in practice experiences and what the university teaches about good practice in safeguarding children.

### **Conflicts and Conundrums of Professional Identity and Status**

Tarr et al. (2013) state that children in the UK spend an average of 169 days at school each year which highlights the prime positioning of the teacher in the early detection and timely response to a safeguarding concern about a child. Critically, it should be further noted that babies and pre-school children are likely to spend longer daily hours within early childhood settings such as nurseries, pre-schools or in the care of childminders, compared to primary school children. This point is of particular significance in view of the dominant and enduring UK public [mis]perceptions and attitudes towards early childhood educators and carers who are sometimes seen as “babysitters”. This is in addition to the assumptions and biases of other professional disciplines who ascribe inferior professional status to the ECEC practitioners (Chang-Kredl, 2018, Harwood & Tukonic, 2016, Richards, 2009). This issue was evident in Jo’s frustration that she was deemed to “*just play with kids.*” Moyles (2001) suggests that ECEC practitioners have a longstanding history of low self-esteem and concerns about low professional recognition of the value of their expertise and skills in educating and caring for the most vulnerable human beings in our society (Davis & Degotardi, 2015; Harwood et al. 2013, Harwood & Tukonic, 2016). There can be stark differences between the professional experiences of ECEC practitioners and primary school teachers, where the latter enjoy better employment experience in terms of professional status, credibility, salary and career prospects (Vanassche, Kidd & Murray, 2019).

In examining the perceptions and identities of the EC student in contrast to their peer as the trainee teacher, a Bourdieuan lens (1990, 1992) is used to apply the concept of *Habitus* to the professional identity and status of the ECEC practitioner amidst other professional disciplines working with children and families. The student is subsumed within a matrix of institutional realities (or *Fields*); the university campus, the lecture theatre, the school and the nursery, where they observe the inter-play of power over those who are less powerful; the tutor with the

student; the senior practitioner with the student or the teacher with the child. Bourdieu emphasises that the *Habitus* is not a fixed state within the individual and that life experiences can either modify, adjust or reinforce these mindsets and behaviours. Additionally, the experiences of being disempowered or becoming more empowered, can also be altered and influenced within the *Field* (professional setting) which students occupy in their personal and professional contexts and experiences. These complex dynamics can be embodied within how students perceive their position and power in different professional contexts, offering an insight into the dilemmas and anxieties that are produced in the challenging professional scenarios they encounter, as part of their learning experiences about child protection.

The *Habitus* therefore can be interrupted and disrupted by the teaching and learning experiences facilitated by their tutors and their peers, and the more liberated student in transforming the reality of their outmoded habitus, may begin to adopt the attitudes, values and behaviours of advocacy. The students in the focus group described positive experiences of settings where they felt valued and trusted by the practitioners, being recognised as more than “*just a student*”, which helped to build their confidence in developing professional relationships. O’Connor and Leonard (2014, 1815) refer to the experiences of student social workers in practice and how their voices are considered as ‘worthy of being listened to’. The authors reflect how students experience ‘deeply contradictory messages’ (2014,1815) in practice within an interplay of power dynamics and professional hierarchies. This experience is similar to the student narratives of this paper where the respondents report struggling at times, to be heard or to exercise their developing disposition for advocacy by being allowed to contribute to professional advocacy discussions about the welfare of children in their care.

### **The Child’s Rights to Competent and Compassionate Educators and Carers.**

Historically, the issue of recognising and reporting child protection concerns in educational contexts has been a disputed and anxious experience for teachers, (Clarke and Healy, 2006; Crenshaw, Crenshaw and Lichtenberg, 1995; Dinehart and Kenny, 2015; Goldman and Grimbeek, 2008 and McGarry and Buckley, 2013). Despite the availability of procedural guidance for education practitioners (DfE, 2018; HM Government, 2015 and HM Government, 2018) this study highlights some uncertainty around these guidelines and procedures and whether they have been followed correctly in terms of student and academic staff experiences. The children’s rights discourse underlines the critical importance of ensuring that ECS and PITE graduates have the capacity and dispositions required of compassionate, supportive and respectful adults who can advocate for children’s rights across a range of multi-disciplinary and societal contexts (Alderson, 2016; Lansdown, 1998; Mulhearn Blasco, Falco and Munson, 2006

and Moody and Darbellay, 2019). The present study identified some of the students' quandaries within professional placements where their status as a competent novice with a developing disposition for advocacy, is either thwarted or nurtured by the influences of the organisational culture and daily interactions with practitioners. Ruch (2007, 372) notes that 'emotionally informed thinking spaces' are critical for effective child protection practice, ensuring that practitioners who practise collaborative and inclusive communication with students are both professionally and emotionally available to provide support. These experiences are further illustrated by the students in the focus group, as Sandra described being "*talked over*", not trusted to talk with parents or, just giving up in voicing their views or asking a question. The students' experiences oscillated from being in a professional setting that was supportive, inclusive (Helm, 2017) and child's-rights-centred, enabling and augmenting the practitioner voice (Ferguson, 2005 and Goddard and Hunt, 2011) to one where they were overlooked or excluded.

### **Challenges for Students and Academic Staff**

The study's findings begin to offer some important insights to the complex dynamics and interplay for students in their professional relationships in practice and their relationship with their university tutors. This complex triad is mirrored by the experiences of academic staff (tutors) who describe similar thoughts and feelings. The tutors also relate to and identify with what appears as the uncertain territory of child protection procedures or challenging poor professional practice. The parity with the experiences of academic staff is significant, although one step removed from the realities of everyday practice for students in their professional settings. The paper suggests that academic staff may share some of the anxieties experienced by students who are dealing with a concern about a child (Acevedo & Hernandez-Wolfe, 2014; Lucas, 2007; Mc Cormack & Katalinic, 2016).

The findings from the study suggest that there is a need for more training for academic staff and better awareness of signposting for guidance and advice as academic tutors. Crenshaw et al. (1995) assert that where educators are well informed they are more likely to escalate concerns raised by students, and where they perceive themselves to be minimally trained, then they are less likely to report. Crenshaw et al. emphasise the statutory responsibilities of educators where the best interests of the child 'may override such fears' (1995,1105). This study also reveals a variation in responses by academic staff to safeguarding disclosures, ranging from robust reporting to Ofsted (T1), to "*informal*" chats (T5) or an apparent lack of detail on any course of action (T2). This apparent lack of detail may be suggestive of the tensions within professional partnership conundrums, as a university may rely on maintaining professional relationships and partnerships with professional placement providers for students. Universities

may strive to preserve such relationships and may risk overlooking sensitive dilemmas for the benefit of professional programmes of study. Indeed, universities may be reluctant to jeopardise the relationship based on the risk of ambiguous or tentative suspicions raised in student reports. Despite such uncertainties, professional advocacy on the part of students or academic staff does, as noted, incur a degree of personal and professional risk and uncomfortable repercussions (Dyson, cited by Waterson, 2008; Fenech and Lotz, 2018; Fiedler 2000 and O'Connor and Kelly, 2005). Child advocacy is complex and challenging and the purpose of every robust professional programme of study should be to instil values of advocacy, to develop dispositions for advocacy and to promote the behaviours of professional advocacy in all students.

### **Conclusion**

The findings from this study provide some valuable insights into the dilemmas and uncertainties of ECS students and trainee teachers for safeguarding children in professional practice, in addition to how academic staff are drawn into these narratives as their tutors. Although this is a small-scale study and this is a limitation of the paper, it would be beneficial to replicate this study on a larger scale and across a range of academic disciplines offering student practice placements working with children. It would be useful to research further the impact of dedicated child protection modules on teacher training programmes in preparation for teaching practice, as this provision was not available to the PITE cohort of this study, in contrast to the ECS students. The paper suggests that there is a risk education programmes do not adequately prepare students for the realities of professional practice by providing sufficient knowledge about signs of child abuse and neglect and about the rights of children. The paper highlights how the student experience of finding a voice in their professional placement was challenging, apparently due to the impact of their self-doubt or lack of confidence. The paper calls for educators to be more mindful of the impact and influence of the *Habitus* of each student, as they bring their own incorporated histories into the classroom providing potential opportunities for transformations in their learning and future professional practice. In order for this area of study to move beyond the academic context, there is a need to improve the extent to which child protection studies focus on learning and “doing advocacy” with students. This is a challenge for academics, practitioners who provide professional placements and for the students themselves.

## References

- Acevedo, V.E. & Hernandez-Wolfe, P. (2014) Vicarious Resilience: An Exploration of Teachers and Children's Resilience in Highly Challenging Social Contexts. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*. 23 (5): 473-493.  
doi:10.1080/10926771.2014.904468
- Adams, R. 2019. "Schools have become 'fourth emergency service' for poorest families." *The Guardian*, March 15.
- Allen, B. 2012. "The Use and Abuse of Attachment Theory in Clinical Practice With Maltreated Children, Part 1: Diagnosis and Assessment." *Trauma, Violence and Abuse* 12 (1): 3- 12.  
doi:10.1177/1524838010386811.
- Alderson, P. 2016. *The Politics of Childhoods Real and Imagined. Practical application of critical realism and childhood studies*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- Beyea, S.C., and L.H. Nicoll. 2000. "Learn more using focus groups." *Association of Operating Room Nurses Journal* , no. 71: 897-900.
- Boylan, J., and J. Dalrymple. 2011. "Advocacy and Social Justice and Children's Rights." *Practice* 23 (1): 19-30. doi: 10.1080/09503153.2010.563212.
- Bourdieu, P. (1990) *The Logic of Practice*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press.
- Bourdieu, P. & Wacquant, L.J.D. (1992) *An Invitation to Reflexive Sociology*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
- Brandon, M., Bailey, S., Belderson, P. & Larrison, B. (2013) *Neglect and Serious Case Reviews*. Accessed 20 February 2020  
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1053/neglect-serious-case-reviews-report.pdf>
- Braun, V., and V. Clarke. 2006. "Using thematic analysis in psychology." *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3(2): 77-101. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa>
- Chang-Kredl, S. (2018) Challenging public perceptions of childcare teachers through Ciroux's écriture feminine. *Gender and Education*. 30(2): 259-272.  
doi:10.1080/09540253.2016.1203885
- Clarke, M., and J.B. Healy. 2006. "Effectiveness of pre-service child protection training: student teacher attitudes, perceptions and knowledge." *International Journal of Professional Education* 9(1): 46-60.
- Crenshaw, W.B., L.M. Crenshaw, and J.W. Lichtenberg. 1995. "When educators confront child abuse: An analysis of the decision to report." *Child Abuse and Neglect*, no. 19: 1095-1113.
- Daley, B.J. 1999. "Novice to Expert: An Exploration of How Professionals Learn." *Adult Education Quarterly* 49(4): 133-147.



- Davis, B. & Degotardi, S. (2015) Who cares? Infant educators' responses to professional discourse of care. *Early Child Development and Care*. 185(11-12): 1733-1747.  
doi:10.1080/03004430.2015.1028385
- Department for Education. 2017. *Preventing and Tackling Bullying*. Accessed March 5 2019  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/623895/Preventing\\_and\\_tackling\\_bullying\\_advice.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/623895/Preventing_and_tackling_bullying_advice.pdf)
- Department for Education. 2018. *Keeping Children Safe in Education*. Accessed March 5 2019.  
[https://consult.education.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-schools-team/keeping-children-safe-in-education/supporting\\_documents/Keeping%20Children%20Safe%20in%20Education%20Proposed%20Revisions.pdf](https://consult.education.gov.uk/safeguarding-in-schools-team/keeping-children-safe-in-education/supporting_documents/Keeping%20Children%20Safe%20in%20Education%20Proposed%20Revisions.pdf)
- Dinehart, L., and M.C. Kenny. 2015. "Knowledge of Child Abuse and Reporting Practices Among Early Care and Education Providers." *Journal of Research in Childhood Education* 29: 429-443. doi:10/1080/02568543.2015.1073818
- Fenech, M., and M. Lotz. 2018. "Systems advocacy in the professional practice of early childhood teachers: from the antithetical to the ethical." *Early Years. An International Research Journal* 38 (1) :19-34. doi:10.1080/09575146.2016.1209739.
- Ferguson, H. 2005. "Working with Violence, the Emotions and the Psycho-social Dynamics of Child Protection: Reflections on the Victoria Climbié Case." *Social Work Education*, 24(7): 781-795. doi:10.1080/02615470500238702.
- Fiedler, C. R. 2000. *Making a Difference. Advocacy Competencies for Special Education Professionals*. Needham Heights, MA: Pearson Education Company.
- Goddard, C., and S. Hunt. 2011. "The Complexities of Caring for Child Protection Workers: The Contexts of Practice and Supervision." *Journal of Social Work Practice* 24(4): 413-432. doi: 10/1080/02650533.2011.626644.
- Goldman, G., and P. Grimbeek. 2008. "How university student-teachers for primary school learn about Department of Education Policy on child sexual abuse and mandatory reporting: The sources of their professional information." *Higher Education: The Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning* 58(2): 221- 239.
- Harwood, D., Klopper, A., Osanyin, A. & Vanderlee, M.L. (2013) 'It's more than care': early childhood educators' concepts of professionalism. *Early Years*. 33(1): 4-17.
- Harwood, D.& Tukonic, S. (2016) Babysitter or professional? Perceptions of professionalism narrated by Ontario early childhood educators. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*. 8(4):589-600.
- Helm, D. 2017. "Can I Have A Word? Social Worker Interaction and Sense-Making." *Child Abuse Review* 26: 388-398.
- HM Government (1989) *The Children Act*. London: The Stationery Office.

- HM Government. 2015. *What to do if you are worried a child is being abused. Advice for practitioners*. Accessed March 5 2019.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/419604/What\\_to\\_do\\_if\\_you\\_re\\_worried\\_a\\_child\\_is\\_being\\_abused.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419604/What_to_do_if_you_re_worried_a_child_is_being_abused.pdf)
- HM Government. 2018. *Working Together to Safeguard Children*. Accessed March 5 2019.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/779401/Working\\_Together\\_to\\_Safeguard-Children.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/779401/Working_Together_to_Safeguard-Children.pdf)
- Kedell, E. 2017. “Interpreting children’s best interests: Needs, attachment and decision-making.” *Journal of Social Work* 17(3): 324-342. doi:10.1177/1468017316644694.
- Laming, W., 2003. *The Victoria Climbié Inquiry: Report of an Inquiry by Lord Laming*. London: The Stationary Office. Accessed 20 February 2019.  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/273183/5730.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/273183/5730.pdf)
- Laming, W., 2009. *The Protection of Children in England: A Progress Report*. London: The Stationary Office.
- Lansdown, G. 1998. “Practice and Implementation, the rights of disabled children.” *The International Journal of Children’s Rights*. 6:221-227.
- Lock, R., 2013. *Coventry Serious Case Review*. Accessed 20 February 2019. [https://cscb-new.co.uk/downloads/Serious%20Case%20Reviews%20-%20exec.%20summaries/SCR\\_Archive/Coventry%20SCR%20-%20Daniel%20Pelka%20\(2013\).pdf](https://cscb-new.co.uk/downloads/Serious%20Case%20Reviews%20-%20exec.%20summaries/SCR_Archive/Coventry%20SCR%20-%20Daniel%20Pelka%20(2013).pdf)
- Lucas, L.(2008) The Pain of Attachment- “you have to out a little wedge in there”. How Vicarious Trauma Affects Child/Teacher Attachments. *Childhood Education*. 84 (2), 85.
- Manning, M.& Patterson, J. (2005) Early Childhood Educators and Child Abuse Prevention. NAEYC. *Childhood Education*. 81 (4): 250.
- Mevawalla, Z., and F. Hadley. 2012. “The advocacy of educators: Perspectives from early childhood.” *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood* 37(1): 75-80.
- McCormack, L. & Katalinic, N. (2016) Learning to Heal from Those Who Know! The “Lived” Experience of a Peer Support Program for Adult Survivors of Childhood Trauma. *Journal of Aggression, Maltreatment and Trauma*. 25(10): 1021-1042.  
doi: 10.1080/10926771.2016.1223247
- McGarry, K., and H. Buckley. 2013. “Lessons on Child Protection: A Survey of Newly Qualified Primary-Level Teachers in Ireland.” *Child Abuse Review*, no. 22: 80-92. doi: 10.1002/car.2216.
- McNamara, P. (2011) Rights-based narrative research with children and young people conducted over time. *Qualitative Social Work*.12 (2): 135-152.  
doi: 10.177/1473325011428538

- McNay, L. 1999. "Gender, Habitus and the Field. Pierre Bourdieu and the Limits of Reflexivity." *Theory, Culture and Society* 16(1): 95-117.
- Moody, Z., and F. Darbellay. 2019. "Studying Childhood, children and their rights: The challenge of interdisciplinarity." *Childhood* 26 (1): 8-21.  
doi: 10.1177/0907568218798016.
- Morgan, D.L., and M.T. Spanish. 1984. "Focus groups: a new tool for qualitative research." *Qualitative Sociology* , no.7:253-270.
- Moyles, J. (2001) Passion, paradox and professionalism in early years education. *Early Years Journal of International Research & Development*. 21(2): 81-95.
- Mulhearn-Blasco, P., R. A. Falco, and I.J. Munson. 2006. "Project SELF: Preparing Professionals to Facilitate Self-Determination." *Journal of Early Intervention* 29(1):63-79.
- O'Connor., T. and B. Kelly. 2005. "Bridging the Gap: A Study of General Nurses' Perceptions of Patient Advocacy in Ireland." *Nursing Ethics* 12(5): 453-467. doi: 10.1191/0969733005ne814oa.
- O'Connor, L., and K. Leonard. 2014. "Decision Making in Children and Families Social Work: The Practitioner's Voice." *British Journal of Social Work*, no. 44: 1805-1822. doi: 10.1093/bjsw/bet051.
- Office or National Statistics (2019) *Child abuse extent and nature: England and Wales year ending March 2019*. Accessed 20 January 2020  
[ps://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childabuseextentandnatureenglandandwales/](https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/articles/childabuseextentandnatureenglandandwales/)
- Page, M.L., G.L. Rudney, and C.E. Marxen. 2004. "Leading Preservice Teachers to Water...and Helping Them Drink: How Candidate Teachability Affects the Gatekeeping and Advocacy Roles of Teacher Educators." *Teacher Education Quarterly* 30(2): 25-41.
- Radford, J. 2010. Serious Case Review, Case Number 14. Accessed 19 February.  
[http://northumberlandlscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/kyhra\\_ishaq\\_scr.pdf](http://northumberlandlscb.proceduresonline.com/pdfs/kyhra_ishaq_scr.pdf)
- Radford, L., Corral, S., Bradley, C., Fisher, H., Bassett, C., Howat, N. & Collishaw, S. (2011) *Child abuse and neglect in the UK today*. London: NSPCC.
- Robson, C. (2002) *Real World Research*. 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
- Richards, C. (2009) Safeguarding Children: Every Child Matters so Everybody Matters! In, Reed, M. & Canning, N. (eds.) *Reflective Practice in the Early Years*. Xxxxx London: Sage.
- Schön, D.A. 1991. *The Reflective Practitioner: how professionals think in action*. Aldershot: Avebury.
- Ruch, G. (2007) 'Thoughtful' Practice: childcare social work and the role of case discussion. *Child and Family Social Work*, no. 12: 370-379.
- Shore, M.F. 1998. "Beyond Self-Interest. Professional Advocacy and the Integration of Theory, Research, and Practice. *American Psychologist* 53 (4): 474-479.

- Sidebotham, P., M. Brandon., S. Bailey., P. Belderson., J. Dodsworth., J. Garstang., E. Harrison., A. Retzer, and P. Sorensen. 2016. *Pathways to harm, pathways to protection: a triennial analysis of serious case reviews 2011 to 2014*. University of East Anglia and University of Warwick.
- Tarr, J., M. Whittle., J. Wilson, and L. Hall. 2013. "Safeguarding Children and Child Protection Education for UK Trainee Teachers in Higher Education." *Child Abuse Review*, no. 22: 108-115. doi:10.1002/car.2275.
- UNICEF (1989) *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*. Paris: UNICEF.
- Vanassche, E., Kidd, W. & Murray, J. (2019) Articulating, reclaiming and celebrating the professionalism of teacher educators in England. *European Journal of Teacher Education*. 42(4): 478-491. doi: 10.1080/02619768.2019.1628211
- Verrissimo, M., N. Torres., F. Silva., C. Fernandes., B.E. Vaughn, and A.J. Santos. 2017. "Children's Representations of Attachment and Positive Teacher-Child Relationships." *Frontiers in Psychology* 8:2270. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2017.02270
- Waterston, T. 2008. "Teaching and learning about advocacy." *Archives of Disease in Childhood. Education and practice edition*. 94(1): 24-28. doi:10.1136/adc.2008.141762.
- Warner, J. 2013. "Heads must roll?" Emotional Politics, the Press and the Death of Baby P." *British Journal of Social Work* 44: 1637-1653. doi:10.1093/bjsw/bct039.
- Wonnacott, J., and D. Watts. 2014. *Daniel Pelka Review Deeper Analysis and Progress Report on Implementation of Recommendations*. Coventry: Coventry Safeguarding Children Board. Accessed 30 April 2019.
- <https://edemocracy.coventry.gov.uk/documents/s15753/Retrospective%20Deeper%20Analysis%20and%20Progress%20Report.pdf>

