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**The value of Level 3 qualifications in Early Childhood Education
and Care as preparation for professional practice: an exploration
of students' and tutors'
perspectives**

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Abstract

This study explores the experiences and perceptions of students and tutors, focusing on the value of Level 3 qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC), as preparation for professional practice post-qualification. Historical changes to ECEC policy, qualifications and training over the past two centuries provides context for the literature review, examining the current expectations of the Level 3 Early Years Educator qualifications, and the communities of practice that emerge.

Through an online self-completion questionnaire with twenty students who had undertaken Level 3 ECEC qualifications, and email interviews with four tutors delivering such qualifications, data was collected between March 2021 and January 2022. Thematic analysis produced initial findings including demographic trends, and common experiences focusing on support, supervision, and the development of skills and knowledge. Using Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75), further analysis of the findings revealed a number of ways in which the Level 3 qualifications prepare students for practice in the ECEC sector. What emerged from this study was the importance of having a knowledgeable, experienced and supportive tutor, mentor or supervisor, to provide opportunities for novice students to become competent practitioners. Seen as the enabling value within the framework, these individuals provide the foundations for student success within the qualifications, and more importantly, in preparation for professional practice.

Although the use of a small sample means that this data may not be generalisable, this study reflects on the wider implications of developing appropriate training opportunities and qualifications within ECEC, and the need to consider the role of the expert tutor in providing students with opportunities to develop knowledge and skills that will prepare them for practice.

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Glossary of Acronyms and Terms

A-Levels	Advanced level qualification, studied at Post-16. Equivalent to International Baccalaureate
ACCH	Associated Council of Children's Homes
ANTC	Association of Nursery Training Colleges
BAECE	British Association for Early Childhood Education
BERA	British Educational Research Association
BTEC	Business and Technology Education Council, now known as Pearson
CACHE	Council for Awards in Care, Health and Education
CCR	Child Care Reserve
CNTC	Chiltern Nursery and Training College
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CREC	Centre for Research in Early Childhood
CWDC	Children's Workforce Development Council
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DES	Department of Education and Science
DfE	Department for Education
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ECERS-E	Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Extension
ECM	Every Child Matters
EPPE	Effective Provision of PreSchool Education
EYE	Early Years Educator: a Level 3 qualification deemed to be 'full and relevant' from 2014
EYFS	The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) statutory guidance
EYPS	Early Years Professional Status
EYTS	Early Years Teacher Status
FE	Further Education
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education

GLH	Guided Learning Hours
HE	Higher Education
IATE	Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education
ITERS-R	Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale®, Revised
LEA	Local Education Authorities
Level 3	Qualification studied in post 16 education - equivalent to A levels and International Baccalaureate
NCFE	Northern Council for Further Education: awarding organisation for CACHE
NCSR	National Centre for Social Research
NCTL	National College for Teaching and Leadership
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NNEB	National Nursery Examination Board
NSA	Nursery School Association
NSCN	National Society of Children's Nurseries
NSDN	National Society of Day Nurseries
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
O-Levels	Ordinary level qualifications, subject based qualifications replaced by GCSEs
OECD	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
Ofqual	Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, formerly the Office for Standards in Education.
PVI	Private, Voluntary and Independent childcare providers
QCA	Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
REPEY	Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years
RSI	Royal Sanitary Institute
T-Level	Technical qualifications, equivalent to A levels and International Baccalaureate, introduced from 2020
TQT	Total Qualification Time
VET	Vocational education and training

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis focuses on the experiences of students and tutors, exploring the value of Level 3 qualifications in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) as preparation for professional practice. Through an exploration of the Level 3 qualification as a social learning experience, and the consideration of the development of, and engagement with, communities of practice led by tutors, the Level 3 ECEC qualifications are analysed in regard to the value they may hold for those undertaking such qualifications. This thesis reviews the historical context of the ECEC sector in order to show the development of knowledge and qualifications, alongside the shifting policy context that underpins the ECEC sector. This is supported by the investigation of the importance of the tutor within the learning experiences, as considered by both students and tutors, to prepare students for entering the workforce within the ECEC sector.

This study contributes to perceptions of qualifications within the ECEC sector, at a time when such qualifications are subject to scrutiny, with the introduction of T-Level qualifications (IATE, 2021) as well as a government-initiated review of existing qualifications (NCFE, 2022). It was therefore timely to explore how these qualifications are perceived by those who engage with them, and how effective the qualifications are deemed to be, in preparing students for professional practice post-qualification. Through investigating the educational policy, practice and perceptions of ECEC as a distinct sector within education, this thesis captures the experiences of a small number of individuals who have undertaken Level 3 ECEC qualifications, as well as those responsible for the delivery of such qualifications, reviewing the value of pre-service training within the context of ECEC, and providing a unique opportunity to explore the perspectives of the tutors as to how they provide for this pre-service training.

Whilst the term is somewhat dated, and subject to various preferences of nomenclature for those within the ECEC workforce, throughout this study, those working in practice within any ECEC setting are referred to as 'practitioners' rather than 'educators', to avoid confusion with the latest qualification name 'Early Years Educator'.

1.2 Personal interest and Rationale

My interest in this topic stems from a number of experiences in my own professional life within the ECEC sector. As a student undertaking a Level 3 ECEC qualification, I was separated from other students based on GCSE results, with one group undertaking a BTEC Level 3 Diploma in Early Years, and another group undertaking a CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Childcare and Education. Despite the differences, both groups were fortunate to be exposed to a range of knowledgeable tutors, each experienced in different aspects that related to the topics studied during the qualification. As a student undertaking work experience placements, I further encountered a number of competent and expert staff who mentored and guided my professional development, as well as a few that taught me more about what *not* to do. Upon joining the workforce as a 'qualified' member of staff, I was initially struck by the difference in my own knowledge and preparation for practice, and those who had undertaken different qualifications, delivered and assessed in a variety of ways. Further on in my career as a tutor in a Further Education (FE) college, I was again struck by the differences in delivery of learning opportunities, and the lack of value held for ECEC as a distinct subject and field of knowledge, and thus in need of experienced and knowledgeable tutors. An increasing propensity to merge Health & Social Care with ECEC, and to not acknowledge the difference between the two distinct knowledge bases further spurred my interest, leading me to initially propose this thesis to investigate the importance of subject expertise in post-compulsory teaching of Early Years and Childhood Studies.

When initially researching tutors' subject expertise however, it appeared that there was quite a considerable gap in the available literature and subject knowledge. An additional consideration that the impact of individual tutors could not be evidenced against a wider context of other influences necessitated refocusing the research. My decision to refocus led to the aims of this study, exploring not only the importance of tutors having sufficient knowledge and expertise to be able to support the development of knowledge and expertise in others, but also considering what the experience of the qualification itself contributed to students' development of knowledge and skills in preparation for professional practice. This revised focus led me to explore qualifications within the ECEC sector, considering where qualifications had emerged from, and how they had evolved into the current specifications. This exploration of historical literature led to a wider consideration of the historical and political context that necessitated these developments and changes, developing my understanding of the issues that have affected the ECEC sector since its inception. Through engagement with these historical and political contexts, an understanding of the dominant discourses affecting the ECEC sector emerged, highlighting how discourses of structure, knowledge, and power have shaped the ECEC sector, and the current approach to qualifications and expectations of professionalism within the ECEC workforce.

1.3 Research Questions

From revising the focus of the research to consider the Level 3 qualification in itself, the aim of the study focused on Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75), exploring the value of qualifications as a vehicle for professionalisation, transforming novice students into competent practitioners. This included consideration of how, where, and with whom learning occurs, and how these learning experiences prepare students for professional practice post-qualification. Consideration of the most appropriate methods for exploring this topic, along with

consideration of the desired participants directed the research further, which led to the development of three key questions that guided the study:

- How does a Level 3 ECEC qualification prepare students for professional practice?
- What do the experiences of a Level 3 qualification contribute to professional practice in the ECEC workforce?
- How do tutors provide opportunities for professional learning on Level 3 ECEC qualifications?

1.4 Overview of Chapters

Chapter 2: Historical Context provides an overview of the formation of the ECEC sector as a distinct part of the wider field of education. Exploration of developments from the inception of ECEC specific provision in the early 19th Century, through the most recent changes of government policy and iterations of Level 3 ECEC qualifications provide a foundation of knowledge that serves to underpin the knowledge explored within this thesis.

Chapter 3: Literature Review encompasses an overview of the available literature that examines current training expectations for the ECEC workforce. This chapter reviews expectations of professionalisation for the ECEC workforce, and an overview of specific qualifications introduced by the current government, as well as the consideration of tutor expertise in delivering and assessing such qualifications.

Chapter 4: Methodology explains the methodological decisions made in planning and conducting this research, including considerations of ethical practice in recruiting and listening to participants, as well as explaining the processes undertaken in analysing the findings from the data collected.

Chapter 5: Findings sets out the initial findings of the research, using thematic analysis, which provided an insight into key themes arising from the data. Findings were explored

both horizontally, question by question, and vertically, participant by participant. Initially discussed by method, before triangulating the data sets to explore commonalities and divergences, this chapter provides an overview of the findings before the application of a theoretical framework to explore the value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications as preparation for professional practice.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion applied Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a) to the findings presented in Chapter 5, reframing the findings within each cycle of the framework. This permitted a detailed discussion of each element of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, in an attempt to determine the value of the qualifications as preparation for professional practice. Through analysis of the findings in relation to literature explored in Chapters 2 and 3, this chapter provides answers to each of the three research questions, as well as a further consideration of the importance of enabling individuals that support the development of knowledge and skills in preparation for professional practice.

Chapter 7: Conclusion draws the study together, considering the context and implications of the study. Through reflection on the key findings in relation to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a), this final chapter establishes the contribution of this thesis to the knowledge base within the field of ECEC, and identifies potential ways in which issues raised within this study can be addressed.

Chapter 2: Historical Context

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this research was to examine the experiences of practitioners engaged in professional practice, regarding their perceptions of the value of training and professional learning within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector. In considering the process of professional learning within ECEC, it was pertinent to initially explore the development of qualifications and training within the ECEC sector, considering the expectations of tutors, courses, and career opportunities within the sector as it has developed. These expectations have been, in some part, guided and informed by policy, yet from exploration of the development of training and education within the sector, it is evident that a number of developments have been led by individuals and organisations, rather than policy governance. These individuals, whose contributions to the sector have been recorded, have become known as pioneers (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014, p.20).

This chapter sets out the historical context of the development of professional training within ECEC, which more recently, has become known as the professionalisation agenda (Elwick *et al.*, 2018, p.514). As Calder (1999, p.53) argued, to grasp the numerous disparities of 'level, length, rigour and complexity of the different courses and qualifications' available, as well as 'the lack of training required of the ECEC workforce, one needs to try to understand the history of provision in the UK.' This chapter therefore sought to explore these historical issues in order to provide a clear context to understand the current situation and expectations for training and qualifications for the ECEC workforce.

2.2 Professionalisation Agenda

Various policies have guided the provision and progression of the ECEC sector since the end of the 20th Century, which Moss (2014, p.346) described as 'patchy, fragmented and mono-purpose'. Whilst these policy agendas may be patchy, having changed almost annually over the past few decades (Nutbrown and Clough, 2014, p.17), consistent themes of accountability, performativity and quality have been firmly established through these fragmented policies (Miller *et al.*, 2012, p.3). The main element of these policies that situate the focus of this study, is the wavering consideration of the importance of qualifications and the relationship that has with raising quality. Cottle and Alexander (2012, p.637) noted that quality is 'rarely, if ever, defined,' which only serves to exacerbate the inconsistencies of the implementation and interpretation of the policy agendas. Nonetheless, this chapter considers a wide range of policies that focus on workforce reform, with qualifications recognised as a key driver for raising quality (Osgood, 2009, p.733; Sylva *et al.*, 2011; Josephidou *et al.*, 2021).

The past two decades have been confusing in regards to expectations for the ECEC workforce to hold qualifications, with shifting policy priorities. For example, New Labour's introduction of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) led to various attempts to define a framework for ECEC workforce qualifications (Department for Education and Skills, 2003a, p.2) and the introduction of graduate expectations (HM Treasury, 2004, p.45). Subsequently, from 2010, the Coalition government commissioned a review (Nutbrown, 2012a) in order to improve qualifications within the workforce (Department for Education, 2013, p.6). The current Conservative government's approach appears to abandon graduate level investment (Zahawi, 2018) in order to focus on FE level training, with the introduction of T-Level qualifications (Gov.uk, 2018a) to replace existing Level 3 vocational qualifications (Crown, 2019). To fully understand the complexity of these changes, it is important to review the shifting historical and political context that

has shaped and influenced the development of ECEC as a sector, and thus, provided the basis for the current qualification expectations.

2.3 Historical Overview of Policy & Political Context

2.3.1 1800-1899:

Throughout the 19th Century, deliberations of the educational and care needs of children led to considerable changes, with recorded attitudes towards children shifting from needing them to be minded, to wanting them to be cared for and educated. This subsequently led to the identification of a need for training for those who were to work with the youngest children, influenced by the 'principles that its individual founders thought were important' (Mistry and Sood, 2020, p.132).

Table 2.1 1800-1899

Date	Event	Impact on ECEC in UK
1816	Owen's Infant School opens in Scotland	First educational setting that focused on the educational needs of younger children. Inspired others, particularly in London.
1817	Borough Road School	First teacher training institution established to prepare teachers to educate young children.
1818	Model Infant Schools established in London	Introduced appropriate pedagogical approaches for the education of young children
1837	Home and Colonial Infant Society	Established teacher training provision for Infant School teachers.
1854	Government agenda to recruit and train infant school teachers	Demand for Infant Teachers exceeded the supply of trained staff
1892	Charlotte Mason's House of Education	Trained those who worked with young children outside of schools
1892	Friedrich Froebel's Educational Institute	Trained those who worked in kindergartens
1892	Emily Ward's Norland Institute	Trained those who worked with children within the family home or orphanages

1899	Board of Education established	Overseeing educational provision in England
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The qualities and requirements of the ECEC workforce first came to political attention following the introduction of the formal Infant school in 1816, by Robert Owen in New Lanark (Robert Owen Museum, 2008a), which saw teachers recruited for their ‘good temper, patience, and a strong love of children’ (Bradburn, 1966, p.59). Bradburn (*ibid.*) identified how the ethos of kind and practical instruction inspired others, such as James Buchanan, the first infant schoolmaster at New Lanark, and a mentee of Owen, who in turn, inspired Samuel Wilderspin. Similarly, McCann (1966, p.188) documented how Whig MP Henry Brougham requested Owen’s support with developing the Infant school movement in Westminster, which led to Buchanan, previously an illiterate weaver (Robert Owen Museum, 2008b) before his role as the Infant schoolmaster in New Lanark, establishing his own take on a model infant school (Turner, 1970, p.153). Buchanan’s influence further led to Wilderspin, previously an accountant (McCann, 1966, p.191), being employed as schoolmaster in the newly established second model infant school in Spitalfields from 1820 (McCann, 1966, p.192). Turner (1970, p.156) further discussed how both schoolmasters, despite having received no training for the role of teaching young children, were influenced by personal religious ideals, social reform, and Pestalozzian ideologies of education, as well as a desire to educate and train Infant teachers (Whitbread, 1972, p.11) in their mission for the London Infant School Society.

Whilst records of these events are not focused on the training and preparation of these future educators, the works of Turner (1970), McCann (1966) and Bradburn (1966), present an insight as to the possible impact the work of these individuals may have had on the ECEC sector, and the acknowledgement that working with young children required certain characteristics and possible ideals. As Lawson and Silver (1973, p.246)

acknowledged, Owen's influence is inarguable in promoting consideration of the education and care of the youngest children in society, which is suggested to be 'one of the outstanding educational phenomena of the nineteenth century' (*ibid.*). Similarly, Stephens (1998, p.10) acknowledged that the impact of the initiation of Infant schools was highly significant in its 'initial pioneering of progressive pedagogical methods associated with Wilderspin, Stow, Pestalozzi and Froebel', which Brown (1986, p.111) asserted continues to influence practice centuries later. Nonetheless, there appear to be no records that consider the importance of how such individuals developed and shared these pedagogical methods with others at this time.

The importance of educating the teachers in preparation for working in Infant schools appears to have arisen from widespread derision of those who were already minding and educating the youngest, and often poorest children in society, such as Ragged Schools (Schupf, 1972, p.162; Franklin, 2020, p.645). The most commonly documented form of provision were the Dame schools, existing in their thousands in the nineteenth century (McCann, 1966, p.189; Leinster-Mackay, 1976, p.37), which provided a service for parents of young children. Some Dame schools were recorded as focusing more on simply minding the children (Grigg, 2005, p.245) and others on educational instruction, including the letters of the alphabet (McCann, 1966, p.197). Consequently, it appears that consistency was entirely lacking, and the view of these provisions was predominantly unfavourable (Gardner, 1984, p.7). However, whilst Dame schools were derided for their lack of appropriately educated teachers (Lawson and Silver, 1973, p.280; Leinster-Mackay, 1976, p.37), and in some instances, inappropriate practises (Acland, 1908, p.18), Leinster-Mackay (1976, p.38), Higginson (1974, p.166) and Browne (1990, p.6) also defended the institutions. Both Leinster-Mackay (1976) and Higginson (1974) cited a variety of well-known artistic and literary figures from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who had been instructed at Dame schools, as evidence of the propensity of

various social classes to send their children to Dame schools for their first educational experiences, rather than these settings being the sole provision of the care and education of poor children, as is suggested (Bartley, 1871 in Hadow, 1933 p.16). Brown (1986, p.116) further suggested that Dame schools were preferred by the working classes, with Infant schools seen as being 'imposed on them in competition with their own working class neighbourhood dame school'. Similarly, Browne (1990, p.5) also discussed the propensity of 'Writers, politicians and educationists of the time' to ignore the existence of 'alternative forms of early childhood educational facilities', leading to a dearth of records of them. These issues reveal a history of the dichotomy of care versus education that is still in effect today: the propensity to overlook the ECEC sector as simply a provision of care, rather than the foundation of learning experiences, and the dominant discourse of those working with children as lacking in knowledge (Sims-Schouten and Stittrich-Lyons, 2014, p.51) and training (Pascal, 1996, p.37; Mail Online, 2012).

The training needs of teachers working with the youngest children were frequently discussed by notable names such as Owen and Wilderspin, as well as Joseph Lancaster, following his establishment of what is recorded as the earliest teacher training institution at the site of the Borough Road School (Nutbrown *et al.*, 2008, p.9; Brunel University Archives, 2012; Brunel University Archives, 2013). Opened in 1817, it established career prospects for those working in Elementary and Infant schools. Political reports of the time carefully acknowledged that 'No uneducated or undisciplined mind can supply the incessant care, the watchful diligence, the unwearied patience necessary to manage small children' (Mayo, 1837, *in* Hadow, 1933, p.10). This recognition may have spurred an awareness of the need for specialist training to be widely offered to those who would work with Infants in school-based provision. However, Brown (1986, p.117) discussed how 'the lack of central government direction combined with confused and often conflicting objectives' hampered the effectiveness of the Infant school and teacher training

movement. Whilst this may have prevented much in the way of change at this time for England, McCann (1966, p.199) discussed how Wilderspin's teaching methods had inspired David Stow to set up his own Infant school in Scotland (Turner, 1970, p.158). This was followed in 1837 by 'the first teacher training institution in Britain' (Cruickshank, 1966, p.209). In conflict with this record, Gillard (2018) indicated that Stow's training college in fact opened in 1824 when discussing the rapid establishment of teacher training colleges in the first half of the 19th Century. Further conflicting with these records, Cruickshank (1966, p.205) appears to overlook the contradiction of how Stow's training college followed that of Lancaster, when deriding the speed in which Lancaster's teacher-training churned out apprentices. Whilst Stow was accredited with the teacher training of hundreds of Infant school teachers (Turner, 1970, p.159), Turner (1970, p.161) further reported that the Home and Colonial Infant School Society were responsible for educating more Infant school teachers than any other training college at the time.

Under the influence of Charles and Elizabeth Mayo, the Home and Colonial Infant School Society inspired other teacher training colleges (Brown, 1986, p.125), adopting Pestalozzian and Froebelian principles, with initial courses lasting only 15 weeks (Whitbread, 1972, p.22). This soon extended to 24 weeks (Brown, 1986, p.130), and also accepted teachers already in posts in nearby schools 'to seek formal training to improve their own methods' (Brown, 1986, p.128). It was during this phase in the establishment and development of teacher training which saw an unexpected shift in candidates from primarily male, to predominantly female trainee teachers (Turner, 1970, p.161), which continues to represent an overwhelming majority of staff in ECEC and pre-compulsory education (Cooke and Lawton, 2008, p.12; Bonetti, 2018, p.11). It is interesting to note that in 1854, a Whig and Peelite Coalition government set out to increase recruitment of Infant teachers (Newcastle Report, 1861 in Hadow, 1933 p.18), with the incentive of the Queen's scholarship in 1857, in a bid to persuade the public 'that infant teachers in fact

needed more, rather than less, ability than other teachers' (*ibid.*). However, there were clear discrepancies in pay structures between teachers and infant teachers, particularly females, who it is recorded, were on average paid only half of what a man would receive in the same post (Turner, 1970, p.162). Brown (1986, p.131) reiterated this, reflecting on how 'the rather moderate salaries offered to qualified teachers further discouraged the entry of more educated young ladies into a teaching career.' The issue of pay, like the gender imbalance, and care versus education contrariety, continues to affect the ECEC workforce today (Pascal *et al.*, 2020), with Stonehouse's prevailing image of practitioners as 'Nice ladies who love children' (1989, p.61) echoed by Dockett's recent acknowledgement that ECEC 'remains a highly feminised profession' (2019, p.739).

Whilst teacher training colleges were established for those destined to work within schools, towards the end of the 19th Century, more contemporary accounts (Nutbrown *et al.*, 2008; Baldock, 2011; Wright, 2013), indicate that it was primarily left to individuals and those we now refer to as 'pioneers' (Nutbrown, 2018) to establish the means to educate and train those who worked with the youngest children. One such pioneer was Charlotte Mason, who had studied at the Home and Colonial College herself (Spencer, 2010, p.111). Mason's training school, known initially as '*the House of Education*', was established in 1892 to train those who wished to work with young children (Coombs, 2015, p.2), building on known theories and pedagogical approaches from Europe such as Pestalozzi's and Froebel's (Spencer, 2010, p.112). Increasing interest in European philosophies and the escalating ease of international travel led to the introduction of Kindergartens in England, operating under a Froebelian perspective, which often had the distinct advantage of trained and educated staff with a shared ethos. Whilst the Kindergarten movement was not to last within the United Kingdom, Wollons (2000, p.59) argued that 'the kindergarten's greatest impact was upon the discourse of early education and the theories supplied during training to the teachers of young children'.

The Froebel Society campaigned for the ‘proper training of kindergarten teachers’ (Nutbrown *et al.*, 2008, p.10; National Froebel Foundation, 2007), which led to the establishment of the Froebel Educational Institute in 1892 (University of Roehampton, 2018), enabling further Froebel Institutes and kindergartens just three years later to be staffed by former students, passing on their knowledge and shared ethos (*ibid.*). This method of utilising knowledgeable and experienced students as tutors ensured that future students maintained the desired Froebelian approach. In the same year, Emily Ward, also inspired by Froebel, established the Norland Institute (Norland, 2018) providing education and training for students from the age of 18 on 18-month courses. Once again, a division is evident, as this training was differentiated for those who were to become nannies who would work with the children of the upper and upper middle classes, and for children’s nurses, who would work with ‘the orphaned, destitute and needy children of the lower classes’ (Wright, 2013, l.243).

As the end of the 19th Century brought about a level of change in understanding what was required when working with children, these pioneers and educational institutions set out to provide appropriate training and qualifications for those who were to provide the education and care of young children across the country. This establishment of what can be viewed as the foundation of professional ECEC training in England, foreshadows a number of issues that continue to constrain the development of the ECEC sector today, including gender and class demographics, pay, status, as well as a lack of intervention, clarity and direction from the government. This ‘hands off’ approach allowed the sector to fend for themselves in the establishment of appropriate training institutions, rather than seeking to establish a single, standardised approach. Furthermore, the role and voice of the tutor in these training provisions are noticeably absent, indicating the lack of consideration for those filling these roles, or the pedagogical approaches they may have employed.

2.3.2 1900-1930's:

The first part of the 20th Century saw further training provisions for those working with preschool aged children established by pioneers, and the State response to the strains placed upon the sector to provide childcare during the employment shifts caused by the First World War.

Table 2.2 1900-1930's

Date	Event	Impact on ECEC in UK
1901	Princess Christian Nursery Training College	Provided training for those over the age of 20 to work with young children
1906	National Society of Day Nurseries (NSDN)	Established to oversee training for 'Nursery Nurses'
1908	Acland Report	Proposed training of specialists to work with young children.
1918	Education Act	Forcible closure of Kindergartens to make way for nursery provision
1920	NSDN Nursery Nurses' Diploma	Established to standardise the training provision for those working with young children.
1923	Nursery School Association established	Working both with children and families, and lobbied the Government to improve conditions for children living in poverty through Nursery Schools.
1925	Association of Nursery Training Colleges (ANTC)	Established to standardise the training provision within colleges.
1932	ANTC and RSI examination established	Designed to raise standards of training and make nursery nursing a recognised profession.
1933	Hadow Report	Recommended modern ways of teaching young children, the employment of classroom helpers in infant schools, and the widespread provision of nursery education.

The 20th Century heralded a number of changes for education and the ECEC workforce, with the establishment of the Board of Education in 1899 (National Archives, n.d.a) and developments in Nursery education across the country. These developments appear to

have exacerbated the existing divide between provision viewed as education: offered in Infant and Elementary schools, and the establishment of Nursery schools and provision offered through Private, Voluntary or Independent (PVI) services that offered more in the way of care (Acland, 1908, p.19). Whilst this divide was challenged by Raymont (1937, p.273) questioning the 'assumption that a nursery school is a place in which a child is taken care of, but learns nothing', the newly established Board of Education held the opinion that children under the age of five should be at home, in the care of their mothers, noting an exception for those whose 'home conditions are bad' (Board of Education, 1905, p..ii). This further exacerbated the difference in systems and provision between those from more and less advantaged backgrounds. Bell (2011, p.51) regarded the kindergarten movement that had been established in the 19th Century as focusing predominantly on these disadvantaged children, with a focus on the physical wellbeing of children and the development of a healthy environment where this was not provided in the home. This movement, and the effort to provide such an environment, led to a consideration of the right kind of person to work in such an institution, with the previously held assumption that 'a nice motherly, patient young girl would be able to 'mind' young ones quite successfully' (Bell, 2011, p.53), challenged by the acknowledgement that 'the care of those young children presents difficulties at least equal to those which arise in teaching the older ones' (Acland, 1908, p.22), yet tempered by the suggestion 'that more importance should be attached to fitness for this particular work than to mere academical qualifications' (Acland, 1908, p.23).

As the divide in practice grew, training and qualifications for these disparate roles were similarly segregated. 1901 saw the launch of the Princess Christian Nursery Training College (Wright, 2013, l.265), accepting only mature students from the age of 20, however, the duration of training was half that of Norland, at just 9-months (*ibid.* l.272). Princess Christian also presided over the establishment of the National Society of Day

Nurseries (NSDN) in 1906 which soon became the authority in expectations for the training of children's 'nursery nurses' for the first half of the 20th Century, with a training duration of two-years (Mess, 1998, p.111). These training expectations at this time appear to further compound the care and education divide, as for Infant school teachers the Board of Education accepted that 'Probably the best person to have the management of the Nursery school will be a well-educated teacher who has been trained on Froebelian principles in the widest sense of the term' (Acland, 1908, p.23). Yet in contrast, augmenting this divide, the Board of Education decreed that 'a highly-educated lady would not be sent to take charge of a day nursery' (Acland, 1908, p.109). The Acland report further recommended that Nursery schools be established for the proper education of children aged three to five, and that day nurseries should only be provided 'wherever there are slums and in factory towns, and not anywhere else' (Acland, 1908, p.108), further exacerbating the divide between the perceived provision of education and care for young children, particularly for the most disadvantaged children.

In addition to the Princess Christian Training College, further private nursery training colleges, including the McMillan Open-Air Nursery which opened in 1914, became popular, providing opportunities to train whilst working within the sector. Whilst information regarding those who delivered these qualifications is minimal, evidence suggests these training colleges established a community of practice approach, utilising apprenticeship style training which encouraged experienced staff to train new students, continuing the 'educare' (Jarvis, 2013, p.8) ethos of the Open-Air Nursery, much like the Froebel Institute had done twenty years previous. Likewise, training colleges for Nursery teachers were established in Nursery schools (Lillian de Lissa, 2010, p.4) through the newly established Nursery School Association (NSA), continuing the segregation of those who were seen to care for children, and those who were seen to educate them. This issue perpetuates a

century later, with long-standing societal and political influences that continue to entrench the division between education and care provision and training expectations.

State interest in childcare and nursery provision was directly affected by the First World War, with day nurseries opening rapidly through necessity (Mess, 1998, p.110; Lillian de Lissa, 2010, p.5). The focus was on both private and state settings to provide these spaces, with settings receiving grants to care for children of munitions workers (Wright, 2013, I.329). This paved the way for the Education Act of 1918, which proposed the forcible closure of Kindergartens to make way for nursery provision (Wollons, 2000, p.80). This increase in the availability of nursery provision had a detrimental effect on the number of qualified staff per setting (*ibid.*), with provisions increasing to encompass 174 day nurseries in England by 1919 (Baldock, 2011, p.36). This rapid expansion of settings without similar expansion of training provision, then resulted in Local Education Authorities (LEA's) being instructed to 'encourage persons in their [nursery schools'] employment to obtain, if they do not already possess, qualifications for work in elementary and other schools and, departments for young children' (Board of Education, 1918). Wright (2013, I.336) discussed how this instruction, alongside the low levels of appropriately trained staff then led to the NSDN pioneering a training programme for 14-18 year old 'probationers', enabling young girls to work in nurseries whilst learning both the practical skills and theoretical knowledge required. This apprentice-style training was further developed with the introduction of the NSDN Nursery Nurses' Diploma from 1920, eventually becoming known as the NSCN Diploma (*ibid.*).

Attempts at standardisation of training provision were evident in 1925, with the formation of the Association of Nursery Training Colleges (ANTC) (Baldock, 2011, p.37), which was designed to encourage consistency between the 11 private colleges who originally held membership (Wright, 2013, I.387). The formation of this Association eventually culminated in one regulated examination for all students in 1932, accredited by the Royal Sanitary

Institute (RSI); the Nursery School Association (NSA); the National Society of Children's Nurseries (NSCN); the ANTC; and the Associated Council of Children's Homes (Mess, 1998, p.111). This attempted standardisation was lauded by the Board of Education:

'We have throughout visualised the period of education from the age of two or three to that of seven as a continuous whole and we look forward to a training course which will equip teachers to meet the progressive needs of children between those ages' (Hadow, 1933, p.152).

Nonetheless, this attempt at standardisation, and the inclusive vision of these separate organisations did little to diminish the discrepancies and divisions already established within the sector. During this time, pioneers of ECEC continued to develop independent training provisions: with Dr Susan Isaacs opening the Chelsea Open Air Nursery in 1928 (BAECE, 2017); Margaret McMillan opening the Rachel McMillan Training College for Children in 1930 (Jarvis, 2013, p.8); and Chiltern College opening in 1931 (CNTC, 2018), all of which are still open in some form today, maintaining their ethos and setting their own standards for the quality of training and ECEC provision. Potentially, this continued independent element of the ECEC training provision demonstrated perceived deficiencies in the uniform and standardised training promoted by the Board of Education, possibly driven by the strong values held by these pioneers, and their continued influence in the field. Regardless, the attempt to standardise a single training route with the backing of the Board of Education was unsuccessful at this time, continuing to present the sector as Moss (2014, p.346) described as 'patchy, [and] fragmented', despite the attempts at standardisation and progression.

As previously discussed, the lack of coherent approach and policy over the 19th Century and into the 20th Century resulted in the long-standing division of education and care in training provisions. The inconsistent focus on practical and child-centred ways of educating and caring led to a clear discrepancy in the education of teachers that is still seen in the 21st Century. The introduction of the NSDN qualifications and focus on 'childcare' was at odds with government reports of the time, such as the Acland report

(1908) or Hadow report (1933), both of which advocated for specialised training for teachers of younger children. Yet, despite this understanding of the difference in working with Primary and Infant aged children, the qualifications for teachers remained a priority, with political acceptance of the need for higher education and standardised expectations. Lawson and Silver (1973, p.334) reflected that this focus was designed to reduce the influence of denominational organisations, and as Armytage (1951, p.214) discussed, a move that firmly established university based training, rather than apprenticeship style practical learning for those who wished to work in schools. These changes led to further differentiation between education and care, when Infant schools began to be established within Elementary schools, becoming known as Primary Schools, and the pedagogical values of the Kindergarten system being included in teacher training (Hadow, 1933, p.25). Yet for those working with the youngest children, there was no such political intention to determine best practice in relation to training or pedagogical approaches, and similarly, there was to be no oversight as to the role and requirements of those delivering such training, and thus, continued the lack of professional status, or required standard of training or provision for those working with young children outside of the compulsory school system.

2.3.3 1940-1990's:

The latter part of the 20th Century saw some expansion in the provision of training and qualifications, however, this failed to provide a standardised approach to preparing practitioners for work within ECEC. The influence of the Second World War was considerable in establishing qualification routes, however, attempts to establish consistent expectations for such qualifications were not followed through with policy or national strategies.

Table 2.3 1940-1990's

Date	Event	Impact on ECEC in England
1941	Higher Education Child Care Reserve (CCR) courses for women over the age of 18	Introduced a "higher education" qualification in early years
1942	Junior course for girls aged 16-18 with a duration of 3 weeks, and a senior course lasting four weeks for students aged 18-19 or over 31 years of age	Expanded available qualifications and provided opportunities for mature students
1943	Nursery Nursing Examination Committee established	Attempted standardisation of qualifications
1960's	PreSchool Playgroups Association	Introduced a variety of qualification pathways for a diverse range of students to enter the workforce
1967	NSA and NSCN become the BAECE	Further attempted to standardise training and qualification expectations
1985	BTEC established	Introduced vocational focused certificate and diploma courses for childcare workers
1989	Rumbold Report	Review of existing qualifications and the ECEC workforce
1991	NVQs introduced	Attempted to standardise the qualifications pathways - more apprenticeship format
1996	Nursery Voucher scheme	Increased attendance in nurseries led to increased demand for staff

Political priorities in the first half of the Twentieth Century in England were dominated by economic and workforce challenges resulting from two world wars. This led to the Beveridge Report (Socialist Health Association, 1942) attempting to make changes to education provision, and the Education Act (1944), instructing Local Education Authorities to 'plan for the needs of pupils under five' (Lowe, 1988, p.21): a directive which many Authorities chose not to comply with (Abbott *et al.*, 2013). The incumbent Minister of Education, George Tomlinson, was responsible for introducing an 'Emergency Training Scheme' which resulted in the addition of '35,000 additional teachers who qualified after

just one year's training' (Abbott *et al.*, 2013, p.7). These teachers however, were only destined to work in schools, as provision for schools, including Nursery schools were within the remit of the Department of Education and Science, whereas Local Authority nurseries, private day nurseries, and childminders were guided by the regulations and training provided by the Ministry of Health. In regards to caring for children in homes and nurseries, a distinctly different provision than that offered by schools for the 'education' of the under fives, it was prescribed by the Nurseries and ChildMinders Regulation Act (1948) that the Local Health Authority would be responsible for the maintenance of registers of these settings. This responsibility included the inspection of settings to ensure 'that the premises shall be adequately staffed, both as respects the number and as respects the qualifications or experience of the persons employed thereat, and adequately equipped' (*ibid.*, p.2). Yet no clear expectations for qualifications or experience required for those working in such settings can be determined from this time period.

Despite there being 174 day nurseries recorded in England in 1919 (Baldock, 2011, p.36), by 1938, this appeared to have reduced to just 104 (Elliston, 2018). However, there were also a further 118 Nursery schools, and an estimated 170,000 children aged 3-5 attending Elementary schools, making it difficult to estimate the true number of children accessing pre-school provisions and care settings. From 1940, the government appeared to pay closer attention to the needs of this type of care, with the Ministry of Health working under the instructions of the Minister for Labour to provide day nurseries to support the employment needs of married women (*ibid.*)

The increased demand for nursery provision led to a further shortage of qualified nursery staff during the Second World War, with Nursery schools, day nurseries, residential nurseries and nursery centres all receiving funding from the state to subsidise the costs of providing care for young children (Wright, 2013, l.440). The emergency establishment of Nursery Centres from 1940 provided 335 Nurseries with over 10,000 spaces for children

aged 2 -5 to attend a setting by the close of 1941 (League of Nations, 1943, p.26). This expansion was linked to enabling women to fill labour shortages as a result of the war. To counter this shortage, in 1941 the Board of Education sought to work with LEA's to provide higher education (HE) Child Care Reserve (CCR) courses for women over the age of 18 (Wright, 2013, I.600.). This course was subsequently adapted in 1942 to provide a junior course for girls aged 16-18 with a duration of three weeks, and a senior course lasting four weeks for students aged 18-19 or over 31 years of age (*ibid.*), enabling these students to hold a senior post within a setting as 'wardens'. Unsurprisingly for the duration of the course, this training 'did not entitle them to any professional status as teachers' (Wright, 2013, I.621), which again, demonstrated a lack of foresight on behalf of the Board of Education. The lack of a long-term plan to provide parity of status and career progression for those in senior roles of caring for children, as opposed to teaching them, remains an issue that continues to challenge the sector to this day (Osgood *et al.*, 2017a; Pascal *et al.*, 2020).

Despite the war, progress in standardised qualification development continued, with the establishment of the Association of Baby and Child Welfare Diploma in 1942, delivered by the Children's Society (Wakeling, 2015). This continued in 1943 with the establishment of the Nursery Nursing Examination Committee, representing the NSCN, ANTC and RSI alongside the Board of Education and Ministry of Health in a bid to establish 'the standards of qualification that would be desirable and possible' (Wright, 2013, I.652) for the ECEC workforce. In little under 3 years, the National Nursery Examination Board (NNEB) was developed, with the aim of ensuring uniformity in the training available for staff of day nurseries (*ibid.*) leading in the 1950's to the expansion of FE establishments administering the course through LEA's. Nutbrown (2012b, p.26), Lawson (2015, p.6), and Osgood *et al.* (2017a, p.40) are not alone in considering the NNEB qualification to be the 'gold standard' of training within ECEC, as training was both theoretical and practical,

equipping practitioners to prepare for their roles within nursery settings. At the Princess Christian Nursery Training College, students training for the NNEB or RSI Nursery Nurse Examination undertook training for a total of 18 months, learning a range of skills such as milk preparation, needlework and cookery, alongside the development of knowledge regarding premature infants and the physical and mental development of the child (Stanford, 2013). In addition to this, students undertook a six month placement in a Nursery School, working daily with children aged 2-5 under the close supervision of a qualified Nursery School Teacher (*ibid.*). This was then supplemented by an additional month working in a maternity hospital, supervised by trained staff. The importance of having appropriately qualified staff to supervise trainees in placement is evident, with an additional focus on the examiners who were required to assess the NNEB examinations, and senior staff in nurseries, including wardens trained through CCR courses, to train students in practical skills. Although it appears that staff delivering the theoretical training were either education or health trained (Wright, 2013, l.1527), there is a lack of literature that may allude to the standards expected of tutors to be able to satisfactorily deliver these qualifications.

Whilst the NNEB was establishing a standardised approach to training, the 1960s saw the advent of the PreSchool Playgroups Association (PPA), set up in response to a lack of availability of nursery provision across the country (Preschool Learning Alliance, 2017). What initially started as a group of parents quickly became a government-funded charity (*ibid.*), who also ran courses for mothers to develop careers in ECEC (Department of Education and Science, 1989; Nutbrown, 2012b). This initiative enabled those who did not meet the criteria to study for the NNEB to achieve qualifications and become part of the ECEC workforce over the subsequent decades. Whilst laudable in providing opportunities for a career in ECEC to a wider range of potential students (Nutbrown, 2012b, p.15), the provision of these training courses led to further devolution of expectations, expressed as

standards to be achieved by students for the care provision element of ECEC from the 1970's, which Nutbrown discussed in her Review of Early Education and Childcare Qualifications: Interim Report (2012b, p.17),

The training for those working in education also underwent transformation in the 1970's, following the publication of the James Committee Report *Teacher Education and Training* (1972), which meant that teacher-training colleges were forced to close or become absorbed in FE colleges, polytechnics and HE institutions as, similarly to the ECEC sector, the range of courses provided were deemed to lack consistency and coherence. It was also noted that 'Students often found it difficult to understand educational theory because they had no practical experience in which to locate it' (James Committee Report, 1972, p.68). The Committee believed that only with experience could teachers properly experience any benefit (James Committee Report, 1972, p.68), thus teacher training evolved to include practical requirements. Unfortunately, this was not applied equally to training provision within the ECEC sector, exacerbating the division of education and care even further.

The 1970's brought about social changes, and thus, also saw some attempts to address divisions and inequalities, with the Equal Pay Act (1970), the NNEB award being given parity with the more academic O-Levels in 1972 (Crown, 2018), and almost 30 years after the first cohort, allowing men to sit the NNEB examination in 1974 (*ibid.*). Further attempts were made to encourage people into the ECEC workforce via the newly established Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC), offering certificate and diploma training courses for childcare workers from 1985. This was soon followed by the establishment of the National Council for Vocational Qualifications in 1987 (NCVQ Working Party and COT, 1989; Crown, 2018) to oversee and attempt to regulate the education of those undertaking vocational qualifications, enabling students to meet a standardised level of occupational competence, expressed as standards to be achieved.

This increased government focus eventually led to a nationwide review of ECEC provision, scrutinising the way in which children under five were cared for, as well as the variety of qualifications held by the workforce. The subsequent Rumbold Report (Department of Education and Science, 1989, p.19) went on to echo the Hadow Report (1933) by stating '*We believe that what is now needed is a determined effort to bring greater clarity and coherence across the field of courses and qualifications for workers with under fives*'. This placed clear expectations on the newly introduced National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) to provide nationally agreed standards for childcare qualifications, in a bid to replace not only the non-accredited courses available, but also the established and accredited NNEB and BTEC qualifications (*ibid.*). Despite this expectation, the NVQ framework added to, rather than replaced the existing qualifications and over the next two decades, this situation was complicated further, with the NNEB becoming the Council for Awards in Children's Care, Health and Education (CACHE) in 1994 (Wright, 2013, l.4337), and the number of available training courses increasing from approximately 40 (DES, 1989, p.19) to over 445 (Nutbrown, 2012b, p.17).

The Rumbold Report (DES, 1989) additionally drew attention to the lack of status and pay afforded to the ECEC workforce in comparison to teachers, echoing enjoiners from over a century before, recommending that 'the training of prospective teachers of under fives should have as its specialism the early years as a whole' (*ibid.*, p.21). The Rumbold Report (*ibid.*) did little to bridge the divide between the perceived care and education provisions, and so the disadvantages of those training for positions in PVI settings rather than school settings were compounded by a lack of progressive training opportunities post-qualification, despite the introduction of degree level programmes, drawing together research and focusing on 'the development, care, education, health, well-being and upbringing of babies and young children in a social, pedagogical and policy context' (QAA, 2019, p.4). Rumbold (DES, 1989, p.23) provided no recommendations as to how the

difficulty of ensuring and providing further training opportunities could be addressed if NNEB and BTEC courses continued to be competency-based, or in the case of PPA training qualifications, certified through attendance, rather than assessments, raising concerns that 'the standing of these courses is relatively low, and progression to higher education or to training or job opportunities at a professional level is severely restricted' (DES, 1989, p.22). This complexity was hoped to be addressed by the introduction of the NVQ's, 'to strengthen training standards and provide a transferable qualification for students.' (*ibid.*). However, this attempt to establish a consistent qualification to develop the academic skills required for progression and achieving courses such as qualified teacher status, which was seen to be 'primarily knowledge-based' (*ibid.*, p.24), further prolonged the divide between education and care beyond the initial qualifications.

Whilst the initiation of Early Childhood Studies degrees was laudable, the desired clarity and coherence for the early years workforce to develop through higher qualifications did not manifest through policy, being overshadowed by an interest in the evident focus on quality, which served to steer the agenda for the development of the ECEC workforce in the direction of accountability. This agenda subsequently intensified the overtly neoliberal agendas that sought to quantify and marketise ECEC provision, putting the responsibility for quality in the hands of the early years workforce, rather than the government. This broadly neoliberal agenda sought to quantify, datafy and marketise the provision of ECEC, following the ideologies of the Thatcher administration, whereby consecutive Secretaries of State for Education, Keith Joseph (1981-1986) and Kenneth Baker (1986-1989), were the driving force behind the introduction of the free market within educational provision (Abbott *et al.*, 2013, p.82), placing the PVI sector 'in competition with the state-maintained sector' (Faulkner and Coates, 2013, p.248). This drive to build a marketised provision, enhancing competition and accountability without the government having to take direct responsibility for the provision, inevitably positioned existing provision within a deficit

model, using measures such as Ofsted, introduced in 1992, to produce evidence through means of inspection reports to support the notion that 'quality' has not yet been achieved.

As Calder (1999, p.47) explored, there were two distinct approaches to qualifications for those wishing to work within the sector: 'a relatively low level vocational qualification ... for work with young children; or ... professional level graduate qualification ... required only for teachers in state nursery schools or classes'. This complex and divisive development of training provision has resulted in the expectation that those working in ECEC hold lesser qualifications than those working in what are now called Primary or Infant or even Nursery schools. This underscored the pervasive and damaging attitude that is still prevalent towards ECEC, in that staff in the PVI sector are not required or always adequately prepared to undertake degree level training in order to work with young children. Yet those who work within the maintained sector with children of the same ages, or teach children aged four and above are expected to hold different qualifications, resulting in a 'confused and inequitable landscape' of qualifications (Osgood *et al.*, 2017a, p.95).

In reviewing literature that reflects upon the initiatives and policy changes over the past two centuries, it is evident that whilst the inclination to establish a consistent and appropriate training process for those wishing to work with young children has been evident, the implementation of this has remained impracticable. Considerations including the pervasive and disparaging perceptions of the workforce, the lack of direction that political interventions have provided, and the inconsistencies of the various approaches taken until this time, have all combined to prevent progression and development of a minimum threshold of standards as an expectation of the ECEC workforce.

2.3.4 1997-2010: ECEC under New Labour

The change of political leadership from 1997 forged a new pathway in the consideration and focus on qualifications within ECEC and provision of services for children and families. Considerable political intention heralded a number of changes for the workforce, and kickstarted a reform to the qualifications landscape.

Table 2.4 1997-2010

Date	Change	Impact on ECEC in England
1998	National Childcare Strategy	Proposed updated provision of childcare and staffing
1999	SureStart launched	Introduced new provisions and new career opportunities e.g family support worker. No new qualifications introduced.
2000	Care Standards Act	Introduced new requirements for staff qualifications
2003	Every Child Matters agenda	Green paper, proposed changes for organisations providing services for children and families
2004	Initial EPPE findings	Identified links between higher levels of quality provision, and staff qualifications
2004	HM Treasury	Introduced graduate leadership plans for the workforce
2005	CWDC	Review of full and relevant qualifications
2006	EY Professional Status	Introduced a senior status for those with higher qualifications to lead practice in settings
2006	Childcare Act	Established the legal requirements of early years provision
2008	Introduction of the EYFS Statutory Guidance	Set out a legal requirement for 50% of a setting's workforce to be qualified to Level 2, with a manager holding a Level 3 qualification.

The inequalities of the dichotomous care and education elements of the ECEC sector are pervasive (Moss, 2014, p.352), having two centuries of firmly established differences of status, pay and training expectations that the policy agenda of successive governments has yet to address or overcome. This is clear from the records acknowledging that 'pay

and training in this country are worst in respect of the ages nought to three, five and eight – probably the most sensitive period in a child’s development’ (Hansard, 18 Oct 2001; Col. 310WH). Despite a documented understanding of the need for appropriate training and qualifications, mentioned in a raft of educational initiatives, reports, and policy measures dating back over these two centuries, it was only with the election of a New Labour government in 1997 that training and qualifications once again became a focal point of the policy agenda. This election also heralded a multitude of policy reforms that included the National Childcare Strategy (DES, 1998) and the initiation of projects such as SureStart (Glass, 1999); as well as curriculum overhaul and large-scale government-funded research projects including Researching Effective Pedagogy in the Early Years (REPEY) (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002); and Effective Provision of PreSchool Education (EPPE) (Sylva *et al.*, 2004), all of which have been influential in the ECEC sector for the past two decades.

The REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002) and EPPE (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) projects identified a clear connection between highly qualified staff and high quality service for children and families (Roberts-Holmes, 2013). This connection was not apparent when the *National Standards for Under 8’s Daycare and Childminding guidance* (Department for Education and Skills, 2003b) set out expectations that childminders were to have ‘the appropriate experience, skills and ability to look after children’ (*ibid.*, p.10) and have completed a Local Authority approved training course within six months of commencing caring for children (*ibid.*). In a slight improvement to this meagre expectation, the *National Standards for Under 8’s Daycare and Childminding guidance* (DfES, 2003c), established that managers of daycare settings should hold an appropriate Level 3 qualification, and that all staff should ‘have the appropriate experience, skills and ability to do their jobs’ (*ibid.*, p.10). Neither of these guidance documents (DfES, 2003b; 2003c) explicitly explained what would be ‘appropriate’ for these roles, failing to establish a suitable framework for the

training and qualifications of the ECEC workforce as suggested by the Rumbold Report (DES, 1989). Similarly, the role of the tutor in providing appropriate training was overlooked, with the Rumbold Report acknowledging that 'While the NNEB specifies the course content it does not prescribe the teaching approach' (*ibid.*, p.22), suggesting that this 'could also lead to insufficient attention to consistency and standardisation' (*ibid.*).

The introduction of New Labour's *Curriculum Guidance for Foundation Stage* (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, 2000) replaced the Conservative government's *Desirable Outcomes for Children's Learning* (School Curriculum Assessment Authority, 1996), setting out clear expectations for 'high quality care and education' (QCA, 2000, p.12) for the 6,246 day nurseries in operation at the time (The Daycare Trust, 1997) in order to receive government funding (Calder, 1999, p.54). However, both curricula initiatives (SCAA, 1996; QCA, 2000) made little mention of the expectations of the practitioners delivering the curriculum framework, and as Young-Ihm (2002) noted, both of these curriculum guidance documents were excessively goal-oriented for young children. Nevertheless, this outcome-focused guidance, in conjunction with the Care Standards Act (2000) and the Education Act (2002) established a strong accountability agenda for ECEC provision (Neaum, 2016a), introducing the Early Years Profile (QCA, 2003) to assess children against predetermined outcomes at the end of the Foundation Stage in order to measure the effectiveness of provision in the ECEC sector.

Contrastingly, the introduction of Every Child Matters (ECM) in 2003 (DfES, 2003d) was reported to be ideologically different from the performance model assumed in previous publications, which relied on measuring scales such as Early Childhood Environment Rating Scale - Extension (ECERS-E) (Sylva *et al.*, 2003) and Infant/Toddler Environment Rating Scale®, Revised (ITERS-R) (Harms *et al.*, 2003) in order to further define quality in ECEC provision (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2013; Pugh and Duffy, 2014). Nonetheless, Hoyle (2008) argued that the ECM agenda did focus entirely on outcomes, through an extensive

reimagining and refining of children's entitlements which were designed to effectively delegate responsibility and accountability to local authorities, 'whilst continuing to display an inability or unwillingness to acknowledge, or develop effective national solutions for, the structural and systemic problems from which negative outcomes can emerge for children and young people.' (*ibid.*). Likewise, Reid (2005, p.14) considered that this delegation introduced 'Performance targets, action plans, funding streams, financial accountability and performance indicators' for local authorities and agencies, which it was suggested was simply another way of attempting to raise quality within the sector, and reforming the ECEC workforce, 'making work with children an attractive, high status career supported by a more skilled and flexible workforce' (*ibid.*).

Quality was further focused upon with publications such as '*The Choice for parents, the best start for children: a ten year strategy for childcare*' (DfES, 2004), encouraging parents to believe that early education was the best choice for their children. This served to mask the intentions of other policies, encouraging parents to return to employment, and to work longer hours, which Baldock *et al.* (2013, p.23) considered, discussing New Labour's early progress in reducing welfare dependency through the provision of childcare and preschool education. Similarly, Lea (2014, p.19) discussed how these agendas promulgated the notion that mothers have 'a *duty* to work', which also promoted the mother's duty to 'ensure their children benefit from the provisions' (*ibid.*) that were available. As suggested by Lewis (2011), this was a shrewd way of marketing government agendas of early intervention, tackling poverty and unemployment, as well as encouraging uptake of early education as a way of ensuring 'school readiness', in order to continue to attempt to measure the effectiveness of ECEC provision. What was not evident in this era of policy change and social mobility approaches (DfES, 2004) was how the training of the workforce would prepare practitioners for taking on these roles and responsibilities.

The findings of the EPPE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) were pivotal in considering the role of staff qualifications in improving ECEC provision. It was from this era, and in particular, the findings of the EPPE study, that established a firm link in the government's policy making decisions: that the quality of provision could be determined by the qualifications of the workforce. The EPPE study initially reported speculative links between higher levels of quality provision, and staff qualifications (Sylva *et al.*, 2004, p.28), where the higher qualified staff were more likely to hold a management position and could influence other practitioners. These findings, whilst similar to REPEY findings (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002, p.96), were cautious, citing multiple issues that may have had an impact upon the findings of the longitudinal study. Further considerations included the ever-present disparity between skills and qualifications of practitioners in maintained and PVI settings (Department for Children, Schools and Families, 2007, p.85), with findings indicating that the strongest intellectual and social outcomes for children arose from settings with a higher proportion of trained teachers (Sylva and Pugh, 2005, p.14). As the EPPE (Sylva *et al.*, 2004) findings indicated that 'Settings that have staff with higher qualifications have higher quality scores and their children make more progress' (Sylva and Pugh, 2005, p.15), links were made within policy to the socioeconomic importance of high quality ECEC provision (HM Treasury, 2004). This then led the New Labour government to recommend upskilling ECEC to a graduate-led profession (DCSF, 2008a, p.5), whereby *'working with pre-school children should have as much status as a profession as teaching children in schools'* (HM Treasury, 2004, p.5). This was an ambitious aim, with funding provided to support staff to develop at Level 3 and achieve Early Years Foundation Degrees and the newly introduced Early Years Professional Status (EYPS) (DfES, 2006, p.2), in order to meet policy aims for a graduate to lead practice in each setting by 2015 (DCSF, 2007, p.10; DCSF, 2008b, p.8). Whilst this higher level qualification ambition was laudable, the desired clarity and coherence for the ECEC workforce did not manifest

through policy, being overshadowed by the focus on quality, which served to steer the agenda for the development of the ECEC workforce in the direction of accountability. This agenda subsequently intensified the overtly neoliberal agendas that sought to quantify and marketise ECEC provision, echoing the ECM agenda and further delegating the responsibility for quality to the ECEC workforce, rather than the government (Hoyle, 2008; Rogers *et al.*, 2020, p.807).

Lloyd and Hallet (2010, p.79) discussed how the inception of the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) in 2005, and the subsequent reformation of the qualifications framework, set out plans to overhaul the qualifications for the ECEC workforce from 2009. The CWDC's intention was for the ECEC workforce to be qualified to Level 3 as a minimum (CWDC, 2012, p.8), building on existing aims of requiring all staff to be qualified at Level 3 (DCSF, 2008b, p.35), which then resulted in the introduction of CWDC's Early Years and Playwork Database of Qualifications. This move received mixed responses from within the ECEC sector (Faux, 2008; Lawson, 2015) as it failed to accept some qualifications as 'full and relevant', resulting in a number of existing ECEC staff, predominantly in the PVI sector, being required to undertake further training in order to continue with existing jobs or move to new positions. Similarly, Cooke and Lawton (2008, p.7) also called for Level 3 to become the minimum qualification for those working with children, citing 'the compelling evidence linking higher qualifications to early years quality and outcomes for children' (*ibid.*). However, whilst successive government policy documents (DCSF, 2007; 2008a; 2008b) did acknowledge that 'getting the best out of Early Years provision depends on the quality of the workforce' (DCSF, 2007, p.85), and that there would be substantial amounts of funding for qualifications (*ibid.*), the requirements set out in the *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (DCSF, 2008c) did not provide a mandate for all staff to hold a full and relevant Level 3 qualification. This appears to have been a pivotal moment when the New Labour

government could have made a lasting impact on practice and provision, making the Level 3 qualification the minimum expectation for the ECEC workforce. Furthermore, this missed opportunity exacerbated the difference in requirements for those working across the ECEC sector, with the Department for Children, Schools and Families acknowledging that 'there remains a skills and qualifications gap between the workforce in the maintained sector and that in PVI settings and childminders' (2007, p.86).

Similarly, whilst the intention was for every setting to have a graduate practitioner to lead practice and raise quality, the lack of enforcement through the newly introduced EYFS guidance (DCSF, 2008c) meant that in reality, the ECEC workforce remained 'the most poorly qualified, lowest paid and least valued of all professions in the UK' (TUC and Daycare Trust 2006, p.2). Moreover, this policy insight paper, aptly titled '*Raising the bar*' (*ibid.*) was echoed by Leseman (2009), who cautioned that qualifications alone are unlikely to have a dramatic impact upon the quality of the staff and provision. Leseman (*ibid.*) concluded that initiatives to improve quality through qualifications were likely to be unsuccessful without ensuring parity with similar qualifications to teachers, and also improving recognition, pay, and conditions for the workforce, points that were further echoed by Faulkner and Coates (2013, p.253). Despite the New Labour government allocating an unprecedented amount of funding (Bradbury, 2014; Moss, 2014; Neaum, 2016a) for the development of ECEC provision during their 13 year office, a legal requirement for all staff working in ECEC settings to hold a minimum level of qualification was not established. Similarly, a consistent, standardised approach to training and qualifications as planned with the introduction of NVQ's was overlooked, thereby continuing the divisive and inconsistent approach to the standards expected of the ECEC workforce and intensifying the care and education divide.

2.3.5 2010-2022:

Following a further change of political leadership, a number of existing policy initiatives were discontinued, and whilst the focus on qualifications and quality of provision remained, investment and policy initiatives were significantly reduced.

Table 2.5 2010-2022

Date	Change	Impact on ECEC in England
2011	Tickell Review	Called for Level 3 to become the minimum level qualification
2012	Nutbrown Review	19 Recommendations for the ECEC workforce
2013	More Great Childcare	Committed to action regarding 5 of the 19 recommendations of the Nutbrown Review
2014	New EYFS statutory framework	No change to expectations of ECEC qualifications. Introduced English and maths GCSE requirements, which impacted recruitment
2014	Early Years Educator launched	New 'full and relevant' qualifications launched, as Early Years Educator qualifications, delivered at Level 3 from September.
2014	Early Years Teacher Status	EYPS replaced with EYTS in response to the Nutbrown Review, but did not provide QTS
2016	Sainsbury Review	Review of FE qualifications led to proposals for overhaul of vocational qualifications
2017	New EYFS statutory framework	No change to expectations of ECEC staff qualifications.
2017	Early Years Workforce Review	Committed to raising quality in ECEC, including through staff qualifications, but focuses on Level 2 EYE qualification.
2020	T-Levels Launched	New qualification piloted for Education and Childcare in September.
2021	New EYFS statutory framework	No change to expectations of ECEC staff qualifications.

Following the 2010 change of political governance from New Labour to a Coalition of Conservative and Liberal Democrat parties, policy recommendations from Tickell (2011, p.43) and Nutbrown (2012a, p.34) echoed that of the CWDC (2012, p.8), with suggestions

that the government committed to ensuring ECEC staff held a minimum of a Level 3 qualification, and that graduate pedagogical leadership should be considered essential to raise quality in the PVI sector. However, Lewis and West (2016, p.8) noted that the first ECEC focused document published by the new Coalition government stated that 'employers have primary responsibility for the quality and effectiveness of their staff' (DoH and DfE, 2011, p.64), which Lewis and West (2016, p.8) considered to be 'a position in harmony with the 'hands-off' approach to regulation' that the Coalition government espoused. This was firmly established with the swift archival of previous policies and agendas, including *Every Child Matters* (DfES, 2003b). Roberts-Holmes and Bradbury (2016) further discussed the direction of policy changes that emerged from the Coalition government, echoing Moss (2014, p.353) and Neaum (2016b, p.243) in considering that the dominant discourse at this time was economic value (Allen, 2011), and the prominence of outcomes such as school readiness (Ang, 2014, p.191), rather than an extension of previous New Labour ideologies such as professionalising the workforce. The report on ECEC workforce qualifications commissioned by the government (Nutbrown, 2012a) was thus largely disregarded by policy makers (Forrester and Garrett, 2016).

Calder (2015) contemplated that the terms and concepts used in the emerging Coalition policies, such as 'austerity', 'targeting' and a redefined 'early intervention', were simply tools used to justify the reduction in funding and reversal of aspirations, such as the suggested professionalisation of the workforce, whilst the pedagogy of performance was strengthened. Similarly, Brogaard Clausen (2015) and Wild *et al.* (2015) also considered the Coalition government's policy for ECEC to be an attempt to shift the focus from that of quality, in both professionalism and childcare, to that which positions the child as an educational and economic investment. This ideology provided a basis for the Coalition government's main ECEC policy, *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013), which whilst appearing to agree with Nutbrown's (2012a) recommendations, stating that 'that the

workforce ... should be well-qualified, well respected and well-led' (DfE, 2013, p.27), went on to propose that higher rates of qualifications and numbers of qualified staff could then be used to justify higher staff: child ratios (*ibid.*, p.31), further positioning ECEC within an economic investment ideology. Whilst this proposal was soundly rejected by the workforce (Hansard, 11 June 2013: col. 231; Morton, 2013), a further update to the EYFS statutory framework (DfE, 2014a) made negligible changes to the qualification expectations of the workforce, demonstrating a further missed opportunity on behalf of the Coalition government to influence the professionalisation of the sector through qualifications and training.

The changes made during the tenure of the Coalition government included addressing one of Nutbrown's (2012a, p.71) recommendations, to ensure that qualifications met the 'full and relevant' expectations. Reflecting on this, the Coalition government's Department for Education worked with the newly established Teaching Agency to consult the workforce in 2013 (Gaunt, 2013; Teaching Agency, 2013), seeking opinions on the 'new, tougher 'full and relevant' criteria' (Teaching Agency, 2013, 2.3) that would form the new Level 3 Early Years Educator qualifications from September 2014. The responses formed the criteria set by the National College for Teaching and Leadership and the Department for Education (2013) for the qualifications to be deemed 'full and relevant'. At this point, the criteria for a qualification to be deemed 'full and relevant' was updated, from the original criteria:

1. Demonstrate depth and level of learning appropriate to specified outcomes of full early years, childcare or playwork qualifications.
2. Demonstrate it has valid, reliable assessment and awarding procedures
3. Include an element of assessed performance evidence

(DfE, 2012, p.1)

Changing to:

'require candidates to demonstrate an in-depth understanding of early years education and care, including that they can:

1. Support and promote children's early education and development
2. Plan and provide effective care, teaching and learning that enables children to progress and prepares them for school
3. Make accurate and productive use of assessment
4. Develop effective and informed practice
5. Safeguard and promote the health, safety and welfare of children
6. Work in partnership with the key person, colleagues, parents and/or carers or other professionals

(NCTL and DfE, 2013, p.3)

This change provided a greater depth and clarity to the expectations of courses, however, additional elements such as requiring 'Assessment by an individual who is professionally competent and knowledgeable' (DfE, 2012, p.2) were removed from the updated criteria, prompting questions regarding the efficacy of the assessment of the qualifications. Once again, despite the tutors being acknowledged, there appears to be no further consideration of the role, competency, or importance of tutors within policy frameworks. Nutbrown had recommended (2012a, p.72) that 'Tutors should be qualified to a higher level than the course they are Teaching' and that 'All tutors should have regular continuing professional development and contact with early years settings' (*ibid.*). However, this element of the criteria was further overlooked in the process of allowing awarding bodies to design their own qualifications that would meet the 'full and relevant' criteria. This freedom then led to the establishment of a variety of courses, all approved to be 'full and relevant', but maintaining differing approaches and focuses, such as the CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Early Years Education and Care (Early Years Educator) which established a taught route for students aged 16+, as well as a work-based equivalent qualification for

students aged 19+, both lasting two years (Faux, 2013). This subsequently increased to 10 different courses, all accredited by CACHE as 'full and relevant' (CACHE, 2018), offering students a variety of courses to suit different pedagogical approaches and training needs. The final list of 25 courses deemed to be 'full and relevant' (DfE, 2014b) at Level 3, provided some clarity as to which qualifications would be accepted when recruiting suitable staff to work within ECEC provision, yet a list of existing courses agreed to be 'full and relevant' at the time, also added another 56 possible Level 3 courses to this variety (DfE, 2014c). This array of possible courses, whilst reducing the number considerably from Nutbrown's findings (2012b, p.17; DfE, 2013, p.6), did little to provide a consistent and uniform approach to ensuring that all practitioners met the same standards in preparation for working as a professional practitioner within the ECEC workforce.

At the same time as the introduction of the EYE qualifications, the Coalition government caused further tensions for the qualifications of the ECEC workforce, by using the updated '*Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage: Setting the standards for learning, development and care for children from birth to five*' (DfE, 2014a) to introduce the need for qualified staff to hold a GCSE in maths and English at grade C or above. Whilst it was not an unfavourable idea to introduce this requirement in order to ensure the qualifications and skills of the ECEC workforce were sufficient, as indicated by Voice (2014), the way in which this policy was introduced and enforced was insufficient in supporting the development of the workforce. Additionally, this policy shift presented further problems, requiring this level of qualifications of potential students, who perhaps held the assumption that working within the ECEC sector required little in the way of qualifications, as indicated by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Maths and Numeracy (2014, p.1). Furthermore, it drew public attention to the lack of English and maths qualifications held by the existing workforce, as highlighted in *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013, p.6), inciting sensationalist headlines, such as the Mail Online (2012), who claimed

'Nursery staff have worse qualifications than people who look after animals', citing that 'For too long early years work has been perceived as an alternative to hairdressing and a suitable route for those who fail in school'.

The impression of the workforce as 'lacking' (Osgood, 2009, p.736), and the sudden decision to introduce these GCSE entry criteria for students and new staff resulted in a recruitment crisis (Gaunt, 2016; DfE, 2017a, p.16), which was not addressed until the Conservative government acted in 2017 (Gaunt, 2017), permitting practical alternative qualifications, known as 'Functional Skills' to be deemed an acceptable alternative to GCSE's (DfE, 2017b, p.4). This further demonstrated a missed, or perhaps misused opportunity by the Conservative government, that could have made provisions for a slow and well-managed introduction to the increased GCSE requirements, using policy as a means to improve the skills and perceptions of the workforce. Constrastingly, it appears that the government policy (DfE, 2014a) was instead used to make a pronouncement that had a negative impact on the ECEC sector. This was then simply recanted (DfE, 2017b, p.4), without having another strategy in place to ensure the development of the skills of the ECEC workforce, all of which served to reinforce the public perception of a female dominated, low skilled and low paid sector (Chalke, 2013, p.215).

In 2015, the new Conservative government initiated an Independent Panel on Technical Education (DfE, 2016, p.2) to review the technical education provision in England. The findings, published in the Sainsbury Review (DfE, 2016) discussed the difficulties of providing clear career guidance to young adults, where there were over 13,000 courses available to choose from (DfE, 2016, p.6), and importantly, decreed that 'industry experts must lay down the knowledge and skills, and methods of assessment, for each qualification' (DfE, 2016, p.6). This led to plans for the further refinement of qualifications available for the ECEC workforce, causing concerns in regards to further qualifications being added to the existing suite of courses available.

On March 3rd 2017, Caroline Dinenage, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Women, Equalities and Early Years, launched the latest policy paper regarding the early years workforce for the Conservative government's Department for Education. Aptly titled the '*Early Years Workforce Strategy*' (DfE, 2017c), this document built upon prior consultations, reviews, strategies and previous policy documents to establish proposals for the sustainability and future development of the ECEC workforce. Although the Strategy (DfE, 2017c) led the reader to consider the qualifications and training expectations of the ECEC workforce, the discourse within the document once again intertwined the concepts of qualifications and quality (Miller *et al.*, 2012; Mathers and Smees, 2014; Osgood *et al.*, 2017b; Elwick *et al.*, 2018). The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017c) was unambiguous in expressing that 'the evidence is clear that a high quality workforce has a significant impact on the quality of provision and outcomes for children' (*ibid.*, p.9). However, in the same year, an updated EYFS statutory framework (DfE, 2017d) made no discernible changes to the expectation that 'early years providers must employ at least one member of staff with a relevant level 3 childcare qualification and at least 50% of other staff working with children must hold a level 2 childcare qualification' (DfE, 2017c, p.10). It can then be posited from this, that whilst the qualification expectations for the workforce remain so low, then existing perceptions of the workforce as low quality would continue to be the hegemonic view, resulting in a continuation of the perception that the early years workforce is 'lacking' (Osgood, 2009, p.736) and 'inadequate' (Payler and Locke, 2013, p.127). This lack of foresight or inclination in legislating expectations for all staff to hold qualifications then risks settings decreasing rather than increasing in quality, as was expected when graduate leadership was originally proposed.

Encapsulating the withdrawal of policy commitment to professionalisation through graduate level qualifications, Nutbrown's (2012a, p.8) recommendation that 'early years

specialist route to QTS should build on, and eventually replace, current routes to EYPS' was also not committed to or implemented effectively by the Coalition government of the time. The governmental response to this recommendation was to introduce a new graduate level qualification, the Early Years Teacher Status (EYTS), which, it was agreed at the time, would be equal to qualified teacher status (QTS), and that the existing EYPS would be the equivalent of this new status (DfE, 2013 p.27). Yet, Nutbrown's (2012a) recommendation for the establishment of an early years specialism QTS was ostensibly disregarded, with the new EYTS qualification failing to address the lack of parity with QTS held by primary school teachers (Kay *et al.*, 2021, p.181). This served to further exacerbate the divide between those working with young children in schools, and those in PVI settings.

This lack of policy focus and consistency has coincided with overall workforce qualification levels dropping from 87% of staff holding a minimum of Level 3 in 2013 (Brind *et al.*, 2014, p.143), to 79% in 2016 (Panayiotou *et al.*, 2017, p.6) and a further decrease in day nurseries to 66% in 2018, and 52% in 2019 (NDNA, 2019, p.6). However, this is in direct contrast to data showing an increase of qualified staff across the entire sector to 81% reported in 2018 (Marshall *et al.*, 2018, p.9) which may indicate that a large proportion of qualified staff across the sector are not working within the PVI sector, possibly exacerbating the divide between 'care' and 'education' settings further. The NDNA (2019, p.7) posited that these surveys excluded staff on apprenticeships, which may also indicate that a high number of new, inexperienced staff make up a large proportion of those counted as qualified within settings. As yet, there is no substantial data that indicates the current EYE qualification is having a positive impact on qualification figures, as 25% of staff across the sector held this new qualification at Level 3 in 2018 (Marshall *et al.*, 2018, p.9), a large increase from 10% in 2017 (Panayiotou *et al.*, 2017, p.6). However, these figures, combined with the data shown from the NDNA findings (2019, p.11) indicate

retention of staff to be the reason that the number of qualified staff is decreasing rather than increasing. As the first qualified EYE's would have only completed their qualifications in summer 2016, the rapid turnover of staff in ECEC, as suggested by Cooke and Lawton (2008, p.18) and Christie & Co (2019, p.35) is indicative of a sector at the edge of a crisis (Ferguson, 2019). Furthermore, this crisis is unlikely to be resolved by a policy focus on qualifications alone, particularly in the context of the tumultuous political scene at the end of this decade.

In 2018, the Government announced its intentions to introduce T-levels (Department for Education, 2018a), citing a need for coherent training and qualifications across the country, with parity to A-levels, a long-standing qualification at FE level. The introduction of the T-levels indicated that Early Years Education and Childcare would be a specialism within a generic 'Education' course (HM Government, 2019). The T-level qualification was to be piloted from September 2020, with further uptake planned for September 2021, and indication that the Government would then begin to withdraw funding from the existing qualifications (Gov.uk, 2019a) to make the T-Level qualification the sole training route into the ECEC workforce. The new qualification, titled 'Level 3 Technical Qualification in Education and Childcare' being awarded by NCFE CACHE (Gov.uk, 2019b; IATE, 2021), is proposed to be the sole qualification moving forwards. This change in qualification represents a further opportunity for the prospect of a single, standardised qualification for all students who wish to enter a career working within Education, with the possibility of specialising in one of the following areas:

- early years education and childcare
- assisting teaching
- supporting and mentoring students in further and higher education

It could be presumed that this single, standardised qualification route to working in both Education and Childcare may present a solution to the long-entrenched division between

education and care. However, as this new course was to be piloted from September 2020, and not rolled out in full across the country until 2023, it is beyond the remit of this research to examine this in any detail.

2.4 Summary

From examining the historical context of the ECEC workforce, and the 'short-lived, disconnected and under-resourced policy changes' (Bonetti, 2020, p.6) that have been introduced over the past two centuries, it is evident that the current issues regarding the status, pay, value and demographics of the workforce are the result of a long-standing disregard for the importance of ensuring that the ECEC workforce is appropriately trained and qualified. Whilst there have been acknowledgements of the required characteristics, training needs, and policy deficiencies for the ECEC workforce spanning these two centuries, the lack of commitment and investment in addressing these issues at a national policy level demonstrates the value afforded to the care and education of the youngest members of society. Instead, the sector is routinely reduced to the economic value of providing childcare to support employment figures, and the workforce is thus reduced to the hegemonic view of being unskilled, low-paid and under-valued (Bonetti, 2020), echoing views of Dame schools of the 18th and 19th Centuries (Lawson and Silver, 1973, p.280; Leinster-Mackay, 1976, p.37; Gardner, 1984, p.7). Furthermore, the development of the ECEC sector, from inception to current expectations, has consistently overlooked the important role of the ECEC tutor, who bears the responsibility for delivering and assessing the qualifications in order to prepare the workforce for professional practice. There have been indications of acknowledgement of the role of the tutor within the literature reviewed, but there remains no clear understanding or consideration of the role tutors play in the communities of practice as acknowledged by policy. This further serves to reinforce assumptions that have persevered over the past two centuries, that suggest that working with children requires little skill or knowledge, perhaps suggesting that those tutors also

require little skill or knowledge in order to be able to impart their skills, knowledge and experience to novice members of the ECEC workforce, through communities of practice.

From considering the multitude of government agendas, the work of the pioneers of the sector, and the continuing work of researchers, academics and practitioners, it is apparent that these disparate efforts have been held back by a 'raft of conflicting policy measures' (Bowen, cited in Gibbons, 2020) as well as a lack of intention to support the workforce in developing to better suit the needs of the children. From this it can be assumed that unless there is considerable political focus, and a 'long-term vision to build a qualified and skilled early years workforce' (Bonetti, 2020), then it is unlikely that these issues can be ameliorated effectively. This historical context effectively situates the current qualification and training expectations for the ECEC workforce, which is explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of existing literature that examines the current ECEC training expectations, through analysis of existing knowledge, drawing on a wide range of sources to establish what is already known on this topic, in order to define a clear starting point for my own research. Through the examination of current perceptions of professional learning in ECEC, focusing in particular on Vocational Education and Training (VET) in Further Education (FE), the qualification and training experiences of those engaged in practice, learning and teaching at level 3 are critically examined.

Through consideration of the role of the tutor in the qualification and training experiences, the social dimensions of learning within communities of practice are explored, providing a foundation of knowledge on which this research is situated. Newby (2014, p.214) presents the purpose of a literature review to be manifold, situating the research within its desired context, and vitally, demonstrating that the intended research has aims and objectives that have not been previously considered or conducted. Furthermore, Wellington *et al.* (2005, p.81) suggested that the literature review should therefore convince the reader that the study 'needs to be done at this moment in time to move knowledge in the field forward'.

Therefore, this chapter set out to situate the research within the context of existing literature on the current expectations of qualifications and training within the ECEC sector.

The aim of this research was to examine the experiences of practitioners who have engaged in professional practice and learning within the ECEC sector, whilst also exploring the role and importance of the tutors in planning for and providing these social learning experiences. In light of the introduction of changes to FE qualifications, which will be explored within this chapter, this research seemed both timely and appropriate to explore how the process of professional learning could be better understood within the

ECEC sector. In considering the process of professional learning, it was vital to explore the development of qualifications within the ECEC sector in the previous chapter, and the expected development of relevant knowledge and skills; the process of acquiring qualifications within this chapter. These entwined elements required careful consideration of their importance in preparing students to undertake the role of a qualified professional practitioner. The Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC, 2019) suggested that qualifications alone do not 'equip the workforce with the necessary knowledge and skills to provide high-quality early education and care'. In considering this view, it is important to question: what strengths do these qualifications have in preparing practitioners for practice, what might the qualifications and training experiences be lacking, and how could this be identified and addressed? This research therefore set out to explore these questions, critiquing expectations of social learning, through the development of appropriate communities of practice, designed to enable professional learning in preparation for professional practice.

3.2 Current Qualification Context

Having reviewed the development of qualifications and training expectations within the ECEC sector, this brings the situation to the current day, where the expectation remains that the manager of the setting must hold a Level 3 qualification, and 50% of the staff in the setting should hold a Level 2 qualification (DfE, 2021a, p.28). This continues to permit other staff to work towards qualifications whilst still being counted in staff: child ratios, or in some cases, to work without a qualification at all, which currently reflects more than a quarter of the nursery workforce (NDNA, 2019, p.6). Interestingly, Ofsted Early Years Inspection data (Gov.uk, 2018b) demonstrates that 'it is clear that settings with higher proportions of staff qualified to level 3 or above are more likely to have been judged good or outstanding at their most recent inspection' (Bradbury, 2018). Whilst this may only be one measure of the sector and the impact of qualifications, it nonetheless raises further

questions as to why expectations of qualifications remain so low. The current qualification expectations (DfE, 2021a, p.28) continue to impact the PVI sector more than the maintained sector (Gambaro, 2017, p.323), with issues of parity, funding, pay and conditions as dichotomous as they were when the TUC and Daycare Trust proclaimed the ECEC workforce to be 'the most poorly qualified, lowest paid and least valued of all professions in the UK' (2006, p.2). Over a decade later, this is echoed by Aynsley-Green, who considers that the workforce, whilst passionate and hardworking, continues to suffer from 'poor pay, a lack of status and a lack of recognition for the job they do' (Ferguson, 2019).

The current qualifications at FE level within ECEC are awarded at Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3, enabling students to progress from lower levels should they initially lack the required GCSE's to start straight at Level 3 (DfE, 2019a). Since September 2014, all qualifications delivered at Level 3 needed to meet the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria to allow qualifying students the ability to be counted in adult: child ratios in settings, known as being 'full and relevant' (NCTL and DfE, 2013). With a number of awarding bodies, including well known providers such as City and Guilds (2019); Pearson Edexcel (2019); and CACHE (2018), there exists a broad range of qualifications offered at Level 3 that the Department for Education decrees to be 'full and relevant' in order for practitioners to count in ratios (DfE, 2014b). An interesting consideration is the varied expectations of practice and taught hours required for completion of each of these qualifications. As identified by the OECD (2011, p.2), 'it is not the qualification per se that has an impact on child outcomes but the ability of better qualified staff members to create a high-quality pedagogic environment that makes the difference'. However, with the qualifications ranging from 250 to 1,080 Guided Learning Hours (GLH) and from 505 to 2,385 hours Total Qualification Time (TQT) (Table 3.1), evidently there are discrepancies in the training

expectations that allow students to become qualified practitioners, and thus, equipped to be able to deliver this 'high-quality pedagogic environment' (OECD, 2011, p.2).

As previous policy documents and reports (DES, 1998; DfES, 2004; Tickell, 2011; Nutbrown, 2012a; DfE, 2013, DfE, 2017c) indicated a desire to create a well qualified ECEC workforce, in order to raise the quality of provision, it is therefore intriguing that this both identifies the existing workforce as lacking, and implies that improving qualifications is the solution. Yet, despite qualifications being repeatedly identified as a solution, there has been no successful policy agenda that has attempted to regulate the ECEC sector with a view to improving standards and expectations through professional training and qualifications. It has further been identified (Bonetti, 2020 p.12) that the last successful attempt to raise the quality of the workforce through qualifications was the Graduate Leadership Fund, which was terminated in 2011. Hence, the idea of a well qualified, professional ECEC workforce remains rhetoric rather than reality, with little action in respect to following through what the various policy documents have recommended. It is possible however, that proposed changes to vocational qualifications, with the introduction of T-Levels (DfE, 2018b; IATE, 2021) may provide one possible solution to this long-standing issue.

In considering the changes made within and for the sector in relation to qualifications and quality agendas, Gambaro (2017, p.323) summarises one of the key issues that attenuates the impact of any policy reform for ECEC, in that 'One of the problems was the lack of a well-recognised training system relevant to ECEC'. Further explanation that 'A sector characterised by small workplaces and generally low pay did not have the capacity to establish a comprehensive educational infrastructure' (Gambaro, 2017, p.323) draws attention to a key issue that may prevent a successful initiative from addressing this issue, in that the ECEC sector is broad and disparate, with considerable variations in provision, including that of government funding. This lack of standardised training system and lack of

consistent and collaborative capacity within the sector itself, without clear and meaningful political attention, is likely to inhibit progression of any kind when attempting to revise qualifications and ensure a minimum level of training for the ECEC workforce.

Subsequently, whilst there have been attempts to address the variability of ECEC qualifications offered over the past twenty years, the current expectations and availability of qualifications and training still does not offer a consistent route into practice for all practitioners, or set out a minimum threshold of expectations for tutors, leading to potential discrepancies and differences in how practitioners are prepared for professional practice.

3.3 Current qualification expectations

Qualifications available to those wishing to train for work within the ECEC workforce are organised on the existing Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) levels of study (Gov.uk, 2021), with students being able to enter into qualifications at varying levels, dependent on prior learning and achievements, such as GCSE results (DfE, 2019a). Level 1 qualifications are not mentioned at all by the DfE (2017d; 2021a) in the Statutory Framework for the Early Years Foundation Stage, which sets out expectations for staff qualifications to work in ratio within settings.

Staff to child ratios are used within the ECEC sector to determine how many staff are required to safely care for children aged 0-5, primarily across the PVI sector (DfE, 2017d; 2021a). However, this is inconsistent across wider ECEC provisions, as it is not applied equally to childminders, school nurseries and reception classes, or out-of-school provision (DfE, 2017d; 2021a) despite the children being the same ages. Previous proposals of relaxing the ratios stemmed from the publication of *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013) and were swiftly decried by the ECEC sector (Hansard, 11 June 2013: col. 231; Morton, 2013). As previously mentioned, academics such as Brogaard Clausen (2015) and Wild *et al.* (2015) considered this to be an overt attempt to situate ECEC within the economic

investment ideologies that the government espoused. This has not changed since this time, as the current approach to this is summarised in Speight *et al.*'s NCSR report (2020, p.9), surmising that 'staff to child ratios are key to minimising costs and improving financial sustainability of early years settings as businesses'. There is no consideration here of ratios being devised to ensure appropriate levels of care for the children in these settings, although Speight *et al.*'s findings (2020, p.13) did indicate that 'children would have benefitted from more generous ratios, however, that approach was not financially viable for the setting'. This focus on the economical value of the provisions and financial viability of having sufficient staff to meet the children's needs appears to be at odds with the latest EYFS Statutory Framework's assertion that 'Every child deserves the best possible start in life and the support that enables them to fulfil their potential' (DfE, 2021a, p.5). In this latest version of the EYFS Statutory Framework (DfE, 2021a, p.29), there are no changes made to the ratio requirements for staff to hold various levels of qualifications. The existing standard is maintained, whereby the manager of the setting must hold an approved Level 3 qualification, one member of staff with each age group must hold an approved Level 3 qualification, and at least half of all other staff must hold a Level 2 qualification. Ceeda (2017) suggest that staffing PVI settings in accordance with minimum EYFS ratio requirements (DfE, 2017d; 2021a) may save these settings up to 15% on delivery costs, which is undoubtedly an attractive offer when positioned with funding shortages other policies have induced for the ECEC sector. Following this economic agenda, further attempts to relax adult: child ratios are currently being considered, despite clear opposition from the sector (Gaunt, 2022) and from parents (Morton, 2022).

Level 2 qualifications were revised from September 2019, with new 'full and relevant' criteria (DfE, 2018c, p.3) being enforced to standardise 'the minimum requirements for high quality level 2 early years practitioner qualifications'. To ensure this level of consistency, the DfE (2018c, p.5) determined that the programmes of study accredited at

this level would ensure that students would 'demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding in the following areas:

1. Knowledge of child development
2. Safeguarding
3. Health and safety
4. Wellbeing
5. Communication
6. Support the planning of and deliver activities, purposeful play opportunities and educational programmes
7. Support children with special educational needs and disabilities
8. Own role and development
9. Working with others – parents, colleagues, other professionals

Those achieving this level of qualification are then permitted to make up approximately 50% of the workforce within an ECEC setting, as set out with the EYFS Statutory Framework (DfE, 2017d; 2021a). The DfE (2019b) had approved 10 courses that appear to meet these standards, although one such course was identified as having a 'knowledge only pathway' (*ibid.*). This prevents practitioners from being able to use this qualification to be counted in ratio in practice, thus continuing the possible confusion over the value of qualifications being deemed 'full and relevant'.

This study focuses on the Level 3 qualifications, which were revised from September 2014 to meet the Early Years Educator (EYE) criteria, as set out by the National College for Teaching and Leadership (NCTL) and the DfE (2013). As explored in Chapter Two, the criteria for students to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding and practical competencies were revised, expanding upon previous criteria, and setting out a minimum threshold of content for approved qualifications. Similar to the Level 2 qualification, a list of

approved courses is held by the DfE for settings and students to check whether courses are deemed 'full and relevant' in order to count in ratio at Level 3 (DfE, 2014b). Once again, a caveat is placed upon some courses, where a 'knowledge only pathway' does not meet the criteria for these students to be counted in ratios in practice. Similarly, there are discrepancies in programme titles which may confuse, as for certain awarding bodies, only programmes with '(Early Years Educator)' after the title are approved to count in ratios (DfE, 2014b).

There are currently 27 courses approved as 'full and relevant' at Level 3 (DfE, 2014b), all meeting the Early Years Educator criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013) for those completing these qualifications to be counted within adult: child ratios in ECEC settings. Of these courses, there are stark differences between the expectations of students, as shown in Table 3.1 below, for courses with a publicly available specification. In reviewing the publically available course specifications and identifying key features of each, it can be assumed that whilst these courses may all meet the EYE criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013) in regards to content, students choosing particular courses may be advantaged or disadvantaged by the requirements of the course in comparison with students on other courses. Not only are some courses undertaken in less than a quarter of the time as others, but as shown in Table 3.1 below, a number of the courses do not specify the required time students should spend in work placements, or the ages of the children that they should gain experience working with. Similarly, these courses do not indicate clear or consistent expectations for tutors who are required to deliver these qualifications.

Table 3.1 - Specified requirements of Level 3 Qualifications deemed ‘full and relevant’

<i>Awarding body & Course Title</i>	<i>Total Qualification Time (TQT)</i>	<i>Guided Learning Hours (GLH)</i>	<i>Practical experience required</i>	<i>Additional Requirements</i>
1- BIIAB Level 3 Diploma in Children’s Learning and Development (Early Years Educator)	640	331	No details provided	Assessment decisions for competence based learning outcomes must be made in a real work environment by an occupationally competent assessor. Assessment decisions for knowledge based learning outcomes must be made by an occupationally knowledgeable assessor.
2- City & Guilds Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Practitioner (Early Years Educator)	640	356	No details provided	16+ Assessors must be ‘occupationally competent’ and ‘occupationally knowledgeable’
3- Focus Awards Level 3 Diploma for the Children’s Workforce (Early Years Educator)	620	367	No details provided	16+ Assessors have competency in the subjects relevant to the units that they wish to assess
4- FutureQuals Level 3 Diploma In Early Years Education And Childcare (Early Years Educator)	650	495	No details provided	16+ Assessment decisions for competence based learning outcomes must be made in a real work environment by an occupationally competent assessor.
5- Innovate Awarding IAO Level 3 Diploma in Early Learning and Childcare (Early Years Educator)	670	310	No details provided	16+ ‘Assessment decisions for knowledge based learning outcomes must be made by an occupationally knowledgeable assessor.’
6- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma for the Early Years Workforce (Early Years Educator)	610	486	350 hours, aged 0-5	16+ ‘During placement, learners will need support from a professional within the Real Work Environment.’ Assessors must be ‘occupationally competent’ and ‘occupationally knowledgeable’
7- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Holistic Baby and Child Care (Early Years)	660	280	100 hours, ideally in a Steiner Waldorf setting or a setting which is working out of a Steiner	18+ Assessors will need to be both occupationally knowledgeable and qualified to make assessment decisions.

Educator)			/ Pikler inspired ethos.	Tutor Assessors must have a level 4 (or above) qualification in a Steiner Waldorf or Pikler early years related subject area, and / or have equivalent work experience in a Steiner / Pikler early years setting. They must also have undergone appropriate training for delivering and assessing this qualification.
8- NCFE CACHE Level 3 Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy – Birth to Seven (Early Years Educator)	900	250	400 hours Professional Placement in an approved Montessori early years setting is required.	18+ Academic Tutor Assessors must have a qualification in Montessori pedagogy (Montessori Centre International Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy or equivalent) and a BA (Hons) Degree with a minimum of two years post qualifying teaching experience in a Montessori setting (MEAB accredited setting preferable). They must also have undergone appropriate training for delivering and assessing this qualification (Montessori Centre International's Montessori Trainer's Certificate or equivalent). Placement Tutor Assessors must have a qualification in Montessori pedagogy (Montessori Centre International Diploma in Montessori Pedagogy or equivalent) with minimum three years post-qualifying teaching experience in a Montessori setting (MEAB accredited setting preferable) and appropriate assessor training. In addition Placement Tutor Assessors must have experience of working at a supervisory level in a Montessori setting
9- Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development	2385	1080	800 hours supervised, assessed work placement with 0-1, 1-3, 3-5 and 5-8 year olds in 4 different settings, and work with a child with additional needs	16+ 'an appropriately qualified and experienced tutor to deliver the unit, and support/assess the learners' Successful completion of the BTEC National Diploma in Children's Care, Learning and Development confers Qualified Practitioner Status (for the 0-8 age group) to learners.
10- Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Extended Certificate in Children's Play, Learning and Development	505	360	50 hours. At least one setting, with children from birth to seven years 11 months	16+ Staff involved in the assessment process must have relevant expertise and/or occupational experience.
11- Pearson BTEC Level 3 National Diploma in Children's Play, Learning and Development (Early Years Educator)	1625	720	750 hours. Minimum of two different settings. Minimum of 100 hours in each of the following age ranges: • From birth to one year 11	16+ Staff involved in the assessment process must have relevant expertise and/or occupational experience.

			months • From two years to four years 11 months • Five years to seven years 11 months	
12- Pearson Edexcel Level 3 Diploma in Children's Learning and Development (Early Years Educator) NVQ/Competence-based qualification	640	331	Most learners will work towards their qualification in the workplace or in settings that replicate the working environment as specified in the assessment requirements/ strategy for the sector.	16+ Assessment decisions for competence based learning outcomes must be made in a real work environment by an occupationally competent assessor. Assessment decisions for knowledge based learning outcomes must be made by an occupationally knowledgeable assessor.
13- Skillsfirst Level 3 Diploma for the Children & Young People's Workforce (Early Years Educator)	613	402	No details provided	'Assessors can only assess in their acknowledged area of occupational competence.' Tutors 'must have occupational expertise relevant to the units they are teaching, be occupationally knowledgeable in the areas for which they are teaching/delivering training'
14- TQUK Level 3 Diploma for the Children's Workforce (Early Years Educator)	620	367	350 hours of work experience. Learners who have no previous experience of working with children are recommended to spend at least 400 hours in a real work environment. Age range 0-5	16+ Tutors/trainers who deliver a TQUK qualification must possess a teaching qualification appropriate for the level of qualification they are delivering. Assessors who assess a TQUK qualification must possess an assessing qualification appropriate for the level of qualification they are delivering.

One key similarity in all of the courses reviewed is the criteria for those assessing the competence of the students to be occupationally competent and knowledgeable. Yet beyond a list of accredited qualifications in Assessing, only two courses specify the type of professional vocational qualification and occupational experience these staff are required to have. The EYE Criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013) specifies a number of topics that students need to gain a sufficient understanding of, including:

Table 3.2 - Level 3 EYE Criteria: Topics to be covered	
1	Children's development patterns
2	A range of underpinning theories and philosophical approaches to how children learn and develop
3	Attachment
4	The importance of promoting diversity, equality and inclusion, equality of opportunity and anti-discriminatory practice
5	The development of early literacy and mathematics, including synthetic phonics
6	Transitions and significant events
7	Early education curriculum requirements
8	How to plan and lead activities to promote development
9	Modelling and promoting positive behaviours
10	Identifying and meeting additional needs
11	How to assess, carry out and record observations
12	How to track children's progress and development
13	Know the legal requirements and guidance on health and safety, security, confidentiality of information, safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children, including how to respond to accidents and emergencies
14	Carry out risk assessment and risk management
15	Work in partnership with colleagues, professionals and parents
16	Professional development

Of these, the courses explored in Table 3.1 meet these criteria, but each have different numbers of units to be covered by students, along with differing expectations of the time

students should spend learning this content. These differences in time allocated to each topic, or where a number of topics are combined, presents a range of differences for the students on each of these courses, and potentially impacts the level of knowledge students would achieve through the qualification.

Following the refinement of the Level 3 qualifications available to the ECEC sector in 2014, it is interesting to note the differences between the courses available, and the lack of guidance available for prospective students to be able to compare qualifications and determine which course may prepare them more effectively for a professional role in the ECEC workforce. All of the courses in Table 3.1 meet the EYE criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013), yet prospective students may be more influenced by the title, length, cost, or accessibility of a qualification. Prospective students may not consider the difference that this training may have on their ability to perform their role, or the impact this training may have for children and families, which has been established through numerous studies such as REPEY (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002, p.96), EPPE (Sylva *et al.*, 2004, p.28) and reiterated in Manning *et al.*'s systematic review of 48 studies (2017, p.56), as well as Pascal *et al.*'s workforce review (2020, p.6). It is therefore important to consider the literature regarding this professional development and how qualifications may act as a vehicle for this development, to consider how practitioners may become professionals within an ECEC context.

3.4 Professional development through qualifications

Guevara (2020, p.439) explores how 'professionalism in ECE is not defined a priori, but rather in situ within a professional community'. This article aptly describes how 'teacher educators have to make their practical wisdom visible and explicit' (*ibid.*), in order to be able to pass on their knowledge to the students. In reviewing training programmes offered by college-based Level 3 providers, it is my experience that through studying within a

cohort, a community of practice develops between the tutors and the students. A community of practice, according to Wenger (1998, p.4) is the active participation within social groups, resulting in the construction of knowledge, identity and meaning within the group. This type of knowledge development can be classified as situated knowledge, which Lave and Wenger (1991) suggested includes language, culture and experience, which are situated within a context that is understood by those within the social group. It is important to comprehend, within this research, how this shared repertoire of knowledge supports the development of communities of practice, and thus, the development of student practitioners' understanding of their own professional identity and development.

There is a substantial raft of literature exploring conceptions of professionalism within ECEC over the past few decades (Bergen, 1992; Oberheumer, 2005; Dalli, 2008; Harwood *et al.*, 2013; Campbell-Barr, 2018), yet since 2018, this focus appears to have dwindled in academic literature. In relation to professionalism developed through FE level qualifications, there appears to be no absolute consensus on what a professional is, at what point a practitioner becomes a professional, or how a qualification may be a vehicle for this transformation to take place. Havnes (2018, p.658) reflects on these competing priorities and ideologies, exploring how policy, research, and practice intersect to develop professionalism within ECEC. Brock (2015, p.51) considers the importance of 'a triumvirate of As - to be accountable, to be articulate and to advocate', explaining how these skills are vital for any practitioner working in ECEC, regardless of the setting, job title, qualification or professional role. Vincent and Braun's study (2011) explores perceptions of both FE students and tutors in relation to the development of professionalism through ECEC qualifications. Drawing on Colley *et al.*'s (2003, p.487) notion of 'vocational habitus', it is proposed that professional development is rooted in practice, but also centred in knowledge and expertise as well as elements of performance that focus on identity and representation. These professional values are cultivated

throughout the qualification, presented to students through their experiences not only with tutors and work placements, but through course text-books, which have been suggested to encourage students to develop 'highly gendered characteristics, stripped of any dangerous or negative inferences' (Vincent and Braun, 2011, p.782). Thus indicating that there is some pressure for students to 'conform to idealised versions of the consistently 'smiley', patient and calm practitioner' (*ibid.*) in an attempt to become a professional. Wenger's suggestions (1998, p.83) explore a similar issue, in relation to a community of practice in how 'the ways of doing things' are produced and adopted within the community, eventually becoming part of that community's practices and identities. Similarly, Webber's approach (2016, p.60) furthers this concept, exploring how novices are likely to follow the rules and obey the expectations within the community of practice, thus cultivating these perceptions of a professional with ECEC.

Drawing on Abott and Meerabeau (1990); Evetts (2003); and Urban (2008); Vincent and Braun's article (2011, p.774) problematises the construction of 'professionalism' within ECEC, contemplating that the expertise of the sector is multi-disciplinary, and so cannot be singularly attributed to just those working in ECEC. Vincent and Braun (*ibid.*) also consider how the pervasive misconception 'that women have the ability to care by virtue of their gender' (Vincent and Braun, 2011, p.775) inhibits perceptions of those carrying out such roles as being professional. In considering the New Labour Government's attempts to professionalise the ECEC workforce, as discussed in Chapter 2, Vincent and Braun (*ibid.*) suggest that these political efforts were 'rooted in a contemporary context of accountability and performativity', rather than the 'autonomy, discretion, status and self-regulation' that other professional occupations benefit from. This reiterates Urban's consideration (2008, p.139), that 'practitioners are increasingly being told *what to do*, what works and what counts'. When considering these attitudes as part of the dominant culture

within ECEC as explored by Skattebol *et al.* (2016, p.121), it is interesting to consider how this may be established and enforced during pre-service training.

It is accepted that social and experiential learning experiences provide a sound base from which to develop and transform knowledge (Baker *et al.*, 2002; Girvan *et al.*, 2016).

Wenger (1998, p.5) depicts how the communities of practice social learning theory situates learning within four interconnected components: learning as experience; learning as doing; learning as belonging; and learning as becoming. Likewise, Eteläpelto and Collin (2006, p.237) suggested that learning and developing practical expertise can be understood by exploring how participation in communities of practice results in the construction of identities. Eteläpelto and Collin also draw on Wenger (1998) to explain that 'participation and engagement in social practices are the processes by which we learn and so become who we are' (Eteläpelto and Collin, 2006, p.237). This provides a foundation for this study, in the presumption that engaging in a professional training programme to become an ECEC practitioner, directly involves these student practitioners in various communities of practice. These social learning experiences then influence and shape the practitioner they will become, dependent on the knowledge, skills and experiences brought to the social group by its participants.

In regards to the knowledge shared and developed throughout the qualification, Fredricks *et al.* (2004, p.60) discussed three dimensions of student engagement, citing a need for behavioural engagement through participation; emotional engagement through interest and interactions within the learning environment; and cognitive engagement, developed through willingness to apply theory to practise in order to master relevant skills. Reeve and Tseng (2011, p.258) take this further, discussing the need for agentic engagement, whereby students actively contribute to the knowledge shared, which further supports Wenger's supposition that learning is an interconnected process that occurs within a social space (1998, p.5). Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.17) go on to

discuss this in greater depth, exploring how learners generate social learning spaces through 'their ability to do something to affect their world in a way they care about'. Additionally, they explain that where learning is either perfunctory, meaningless to the individuals, or compliance based, it 'will not give rise to a social learning space' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.19). It is this key element of social learning, and engagement in the processes of learning that this study sought to explore, considering the value of the Level 3 qualification and the social learning that occurs.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.3) refer to learning as 'creating value', whereby mutual engagement in social learning spaces leads to the potential to 'make a difference'. In regards to professionals within a workforce, value creation could be construed as 'adding to one's repertoire of capabilities' (*ibid.*, p.43), and for students, this may be as simple as 'making sense of a difficult concept' (*ibid.*, p.44). Contrastingly to previously explored neoliberal agendas influencing the ECEC sector, value creation is not concerned with the creation of marketable products, economic success, or measurable outcomes. Instead, value can be seen in dialogic interactions that do not produce new ideas or ways of thinking. It can also be seen in ideas or new ways of thinking that have not yet been put into practise, or made a difference to practise. In this way, value creation is not something that the Level 3 qualifications will produce as a measurable, definable outcome, but instead, each element of the Level 3 qualification can be explored using the lens of the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75) to explore the potential for the Level 3 qualifications to make a difference to those who are engaged in these learning experiences, and to the wider ECEC workforce.

Within this study, it was assumed that social learning whilst undertaking a Level 3 qualification would reflect Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020a, p.48) suggestions that value creation is aligned with social learning through 'practice, community and identity'. Practice, where value is created through the actions taken by

individuals; community, where what is valued is negotiated in relation to others; and identity, where the identification and recognition of value generates a sense of becoming and an identity for the individuals involved. It is important to consider then, where these social learning spaces may occur, and how students undertaking Level 3 qualifications may be supported both in a formal learning environment like a classroom, but also in a practical context through undertaking work placement experiences in preparation for joining the workforce.

Much of the literature that reviews qualifications within ECEC focuses on undergraduate level training, which makes it difficult to explore expectations of Level 3 qualifications with FE. Eraut (1994, p.65) cautions that 'practical knowledge is expressed only in practice and learned only through experience with practice', making it difficult to fully explore these qualifications through formal learning environments alone. However, Alexander's (2001) study on such qualifications suggests that these ECEC training courses are competence-based, providing a foundation of knowledge that centres on child development and learning, with approximately 40% of the course being practice-based. Furthermore, Alexander (2001, p.3) revealed that the participants in her study reported that their college based learning and work was often 'irrelevant and out of touch with the practice they saw in the workplace'. Similarly, Smedley and Hoskins (2022, p.224) reiterated this, citing participant claims that 'Everything I learned on my course, when I got to work in practice I never used'. These findings are not surprising, as Eraut (1994, p.33) and Tynjälä (2008, p.131) both assert that what is learned in the formal education environment, such as the FE college, is not used, or needs to be re-learnt in practice to suit the expectations of real-world settings. Likewise, Strohmer and Mischo (2016, p.45) identified that 'theoretical knowledge acquired during education as well as the application of professional expertise seem to 'fade out' the longer the teacher education is left behind', which raises questions as to the efficacy of the classroom based learning that

occurs during these qualifications. Alexander's study (2001, p.7) explores this in greater depth, considering whether the student's learning and development of knowledge was merely superficial, picking up enough knowledge to pass assignments, and considering the act of learning to simply be 'a task that they had to get right in order to fulfil the course requirements' (*ibid.*), without truly developing an understanding of the content of the knowledge they have covered, or engaging fully in the variety of teaching methods employed by the tutors. It is important here then, to consider Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's consideration of social learning spaces (2020a, p.32) rather than just communities of practice, as they consider the propensity for tensions to arise between what participants of these learning spaces find useful (*ibid.*, p.51) as well as the agency of the learners within the social learning space (*ibid.*, p.57). Cordingley *et al.* (2012, p.8) reflect this in their assertion that high quality professional learning develops agency through 'empowering practitioners to take risks and try new teaching practices. It also helps tutors focus on a curriculum driven by the needs of their students rather than a curriculum of 'coverage'.

It could therefore be posited that an experienced and highly qualified tutor would be more likely to enable the development of an enriching community of practice for students, providing a social learning space in which practical and theoretical knowledge can be discussed collaboratively in order to 'share with students our understanding of a subject we have mastered' (McDaniel, 2010, p.291). This however, presents the possibility that without the theoretical and practical knowledge to draw upon, a tutor may not be as capable of developing an enriching community of practice for students to develop their own knowledge, as other tutors who have this knowledge to draw upon. This is explored by Soini *et al.* (2015, p.642) who discussed the importance of the reciprocal nature of learning within a community, between both new and established members, perpetuating and developing the community through the constant induction of new members. Wenger

et al. (2002, p.43) further explained that within the community of practice, established members act as experts, having the power to contribute to the knowledge of the community, which as a tutor, would be expected from the role.

The role of the tutor is key to consider here, as by acknowledging that learning is social, and occurs within communities of practice, there needs to be an existing range of knowledge, skills and experiences for others to learn from. In this sense, tutors play a pivotal role in the communities of practice, and therefore, the experiences of tutors are important to consider when exploring the opportunities for learning that occur during the qualifications and training process. The Professional Standards for Teachers and Trainers (Education and Training Foundation, 2022) clarify that 'subject knowledge, teaching expertise,' as well as the ability to 'Share and update knowledge of effective practice with colleagues, networks and/or research communities to support improvement' are key to the role of the FE tutor. However, expectations for tutors to have specific subject knowledge and teaching expertise are not clearly defined, and within ECEC, are not supported by clearly defined expectations within course specifications, EYFS Statutory guidance (2021a) or by the Department for Education (2017d). This oversight of the importance of the tutor again reflects the lack of consideration for the learning experiences of the learners, and for the value of the tutor community.

Whilst many learning theories and examples within the available literature focus on the learners themselves (Alexander, 2000, p.3; Smedley and Hoskins, 2022, p.224), unfortunately, the perspective of the tutor is not well documented within the literature, and whilst literature regarding communities of practice explore the need for expert members such as tutors to guide and teach novice members such as students (Wenger *et al.*, 2015), the tutor community is not effectively considered in great depth. This community of tutors is potentially the underpinning element that brings communities of practice together, and where the knowledge, skills and experiences this community provide remains

unexplored, the value of this community and their collective expertise cannot be effectively appreciated for what they can provide to learners.

In considering the effectiveness of establishing communities of practice in order to build upon and further develop the situated knowledge of a community of ECEC practitioners (Lave and Wenger, 1991; Wenger *et al.*, 2015), Kotzee (2014, p.161) contends that 'within the field of professional education, the concept of expertise plays a central role', discussing the distinction between experts and non-experts. Kotzee (*ibid.*) further considered whether 'reference needs to be made to what the expert *can actually do* in practical terms that other people cannot' (Kotzee, 2014, p.175). In regards to communities of practice, this may further exclude participants who do not have the shared identity or similar background expertise as others. This may then detract from the goal of educating students, as tutors need to be confident in their knowledge in order to pass this knowledge on to students, and to engage with these students in reciprocal learning processes. Wenger *et al.* (2015) also refer to this when considering the establishment of trust between students and tutors, developing identities and developing learning. However, Maguire (1995, p.120) contemplated how the 'problem is exacerbated by the complexity of teaching, by it not being an explicit body of knowledge like an academic subject but rather a practical expertise not easily accessible to explicit formulation'. This can lead to situations as Hedges and Cooper (2018, p.372) explore, where there are established expectations of professional knowledge for primary and secondary teachers, yet not for ECEC practitioners, perhaps contributing to inconsistencies in what is taught. This potentially detracts from the professionalisation of those within this community of practice, affecting their identity and ability to establish themselves as a professional, as whilst these tutors may hold knowledge and expertise in relation to their specific field (Boyd and Harris, 2010) of ECEC, this is not always recognised as professional by the wider community of

practise within post-compulsory education, or within professions that engage with the ECEC workforce, such as social work and teaching.

A further consideration in examining the discrepancies between training routes and qualifications in developing expertise is the expectation that those delivering the training would not only be suitably experienced in ECEC, but also appropriately qualified to do so. Despite the agenda that has permeated policy direction and attempts to professionalise the ECEC workforce (Neaum, 2016a, p.29), there has been little in the way of definitive, measurable policy goals. Successive policy initiatives have inferred links between qualifications of the workforce and quality of ECEC provision (Osgood *et al.*, 2017b), an assertion that is effectively compromised by the concerns of whether training may or may not adequately prepare practitioners to fulfil their roles appropriately (DfE, 2017c, p.23). Discrepancies and varied perceptions of training and qualifications required to work with young children are not unfamiliar, having also been noted from the 19th Century (McCann, 1966, p.189; Leinster-Mackay, 1976, p.37), and 20th Century (Hadow, 1933, p.152; DES, 1989, p.26; Wright, 2013). However, despite the recommendations made by Nutbrown (2012a, p.40) that 'Tutors should be qualified to a higher level than the course they are Teaching', the subsequent policy directions set out in *More Great Childcare* (DfE, 2013, p.42) did not dedicate much attention to this issue. Instead, the policy (*ibid.*) indicated this would be 'accepted in principle', with the clarification that the 'DfE will work across Government (i.e. with BIS) to help Further Education and other post-16 providers to promote good practice in this area' (*ibid.*).

The requirements for a minimum threshold of sector related knowledge and experience for tutors delivering ECEC qualifications continues to be poorly defined, which is evident from the qualifications explored in Table 3.1, as well as in policy, leading to the acknowledgement that 'If tutors are not able to maintain up to date knowledge and sector experience it can directly influence the learning experience of students and result in them

not being fully able, despite their training, to excel in their job.’ (DfE, 2017c, p.23). Despite this concern, the Department for Education has not publicly demonstrated any commitment to rectifying this situation to date, and upon querying this directly (DfE, 2017e), it was made clear that

‘So as not to exclude individuals, it was highlighted that early years tutors should have relevant and current practical knowledge of the early years sector, in order to understand the realities of working in an early years setting. It would be for establishments such as Awarding Organisations and training institutions, to ensure training providers and colleges are running courses by tutors who are appropriately qualified.’

This then places the responsibility for ensuring tutor expertise and qualifications on individual training providers, with no remit for oversight or regulation from the DfE, once again indicating a missed opportunity to ensure consistency or quality of the training provided.

Paniagua and Istance (2018, p.34) argued that ‘the quality of an education system cannot exceed the quality of its teachers’, echoing Nutbrown’s (2012a, p.6) assertion that ‘Tutors of early years courses are hugely influential in shaping the early years workforce and so they too need to be high quality professionals’. It is apparent that those tutors who are responsible for delivering the Level 3 qualifications should be expected to play an integral role in contributing to the development of professional knowledge, through communities of practice in order to support student’s progression to competent practitioners. Yet, this is an area that policy has consistently overlooked. When reflecting upon this in relation to a community of practice, it is evident that there will be inconsistencies in training experiences across the country. Where tutors are ECEC experts, it can be presumed that they will be more likely to establish a community of practice whereby novices are supported to learn and to develop a professional identity that reflects this level of expertise within the sector. Likewise, where tutors may lack relevant experience and qualifications themselves, they may be less likely to take the role of the expert, which can result in

inconsistent experiences for students. Panigua and Istance's assertion that 'innovation in teaching should be understood as a process in which teachers reflect on their own practices' (2018, p.16) is also relevant to consider here, as these reflections should ideally focus on the tutor's teaching practices, as well as their understanding and experiences of practice within the sector. This would support the tutor in sharing their knowledge and expertise within the learning community. Conceptualising this knowledgeability, Wenger *et al.* (2015, p.108) further explore landscapes of practice, suggesting that whilst the classroom is a space for learning, it is not the *only* space for students to engage in learning and to demonstrate understanding.

3.5 Practice Based Learning

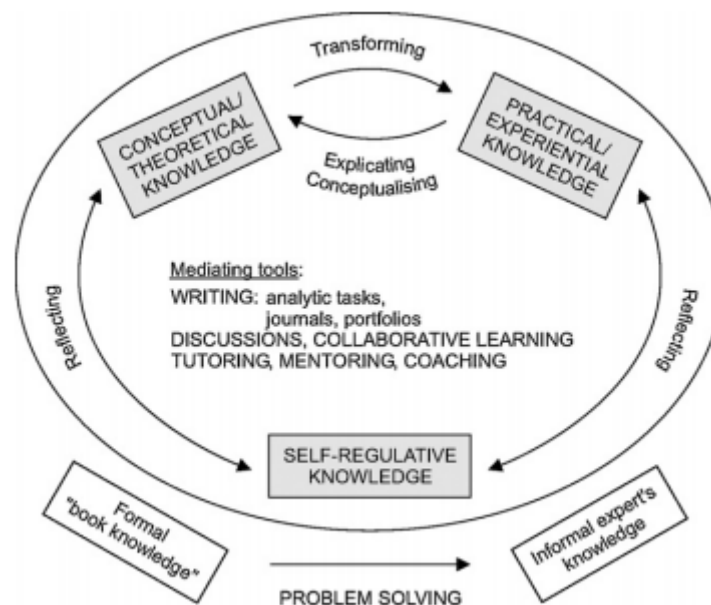
A further consideration regarding the equity of the communities of practice students inhabit is the role of the practice experience during the qualification. For ECEC qualifications to meet the EYE 'full and relevant' guidelines (NCTL and DfE, 2013), there is an expectation that the qualification includes an appropriate amount of assessed practice. This allows the student to demonstrate certain competencies and therefore be permitted to work unaccompanied, known as a 'licence to practice'. Whilst this is an intangible licence, not having been established as anything beyond a phrase used to determine the DfE approval of the qualification, it is vital that these qualifications carry the 'licence to practice' in order for students to find employment post qualification. This requirement for a practical application and assessment of training is not a recent development, with Hadow (1933, p.153) suggesting that 'such work as hers will demand wide and thorough theoretical knowledge and also the ability to apply this knowledge in actual experience with particular children.' More recently, Mathers and Smees (2014, p.41) and Pascal *et al.* (2020, p.28) also reflect that training is most effective in conjunction with practice, affirming the importance of this practice being an integral part of the Level 3 qualification. Similarly, Campbell-Barr (2018, p.78) considered that 'the good ECEC worker is one who

has the *right* practices at the *right* time to achieve the *right* outcomes', evidencing the importance of being able to put knowledge into practice effectively. Colley *et al.* (2003, p.475) also reflected on Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of learning through participation, considering that 'immersion in the social, cultural and emotional aspects of work' are important elements in the preparation for vocational roles, emphasising that 'learning for specific occupations occurs in the workplace itself' (Colley *et al.*, 2003, p.474). It is therefore vital to consider the workplace experiences when considering the EYE qualification as preparation for being a professional, as the students will experience both formal learning of theoretical knowledge within the FE environment, and informal learning of practical knowledge within the workplace environment. Similarly to Alexander (2001), Tynjälä (2008, p.133) suggests that there is an inconsistency between the knowledge that is learnt in a classroom environment, and what is needed in the work environment. Drawing on the works of Sfard (1998) and Paavola *et al.* (2004), Tynjälä (2008, p.131) explores how three metaphors for learning can be used to examine and justify how students learn, firstly exploring 'learning as a process of knowledge acquisition', and secondly, emphasising 'that learning takes place by participating in the practices of social communities', before concluding that through social learning and participation, it is expected that new practices will emerge. Similarly, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.68) reflect how value is created through this participation and engagement. Through the provision of practical experience within the ECEC qualifications, students have the opportunity to put theory into practice, moving from the first stage of knowledge acquisition to being able to participate in practice. This reiterates Lave and Wenger's (1991, p.86) claim that novices would become part of the community of practice, developing various competencies under the guidance and support of more competent practitioners, which Tynjälä (2008, p.140) asserts is essential in transforming tacit knowledge into explicit knowledge. Using the diagram below (Figure 3.1) to explore

'Integrative components of the development of vocational and professional expertise', Tynjälä (2008, p.145) discusses how self-regulative knowledge is necessary for students to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge.

Tynjälä (2008, p.145) explains how the activities undertaken during the qualification, such as discussions and assignments enable students 'to develop their self-regulatory knowledge in a context provided by the knowledge and problem domain of their future profession'. This then supports students in developing their ability to apply theoretical knowledge to practical experiences, and thus respond appropriately to situations, as considered by Campbell-Barr (2018, p.78) and Nutbrown (2021, p.240). This is represented at the bottom of Figure 3.1, whereby students take their theoretical knowledge and apply it via problem-solving tasks, thus demonstrating their competence and development in becoming an expert.

Figure 3.1 - Development of professional expertise (Tynjälä, 2008, p.145)



In applying this to a Level 3 EYE qualification, it suggests that each element of the qualification: the theoretical content and knowledge that is shared; the practical

experiences undertaken; the learning and assessment opportunities provided by tutors and awarding bodies; and the opportunities to reflect on these components are all vital to the process of becoming a professional practitioner.

In reflecting on the components that make up the Level 3 EYE qualification, Tynjälä (2008, p.148) proposes that one of the most important factors to address is the communication between the tutors in the formal learning environment and the workplace mentors that support the students in their placements. Echoing Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020a, p.48) consideration that value is created through communities and negotiation with others, Tynjälä's model (2008, p.145) reflects how such interactions with others may result in new ideas, new practices, and new knowledge to take from, and into practice, transforming novice students into experienced practitioners, as well as updating tutor's knowledge of current practice.

By having a shared understanding of the aims, ways of supporting and assessing the learning, it is suggested that the expected curriculum would therefore be more 'congruent with up-to-date occupational and professional requirements' (Tynjälä, 2008, p.149). This suggestion may be effective in alleviating some of the disconnect between theoretical and practical knowledge, as discussed by Alexander (2001) and Eraut (2004). Potentially, this suggestion could also begin to ameliorate some of the inconsistencies that may arise from the differing levels of knowledge and experiences held by tutors delivering ECEC qualifications. Collaboration between FE tutors and professionals in practice may provide opportunities for students to not only engage in problem solving tasks in order to apply theoretical knowledge to practical contexts, but through feedback from tutors and workplace mentors, students would have opportunities to reflect on their practice, developing themselves as professionals within communities of practice that encompass multiple experts, rather than learning and developing knowledge and skills within separate communities of practice.

The EYE criteria sets out 6 requirements (NCTL and DfE, 2013), that focus not on academic skills, but on the ability to link theoretical knowledge to practical situations, which as previously discussed, Tynjälä (2008, p.145) suggests is the key to developing students as novices into expert professionals. Brock (2015, p.23) suggests that 'Knowledge is drawn from a breadth of experiences gained through education, training and practice'. Through engagement in formal and theoretical learning, and opportunities in practical placements to demonstrate these six competencies (NCTL and DfE, 2013), it could be argued that the Level 3 EYE qualifications are seen to provide students with the opportunities to develop the required level of professionalism expected of those working within ECEC, yet Perkins (2017, p.40) cautions that 'the knowledge, skills and attributes required of ECEC practitioners cannot, and should not, be expected of students working towards Level 3'. With this consideration, it is then worth considering how the Level 3 qualification can be used, and potentially further developed to be the vehicle through which professionalisation occurs, ensuring that those who achieve the qualification are fully equipped to join the workforce and contribute to the provision of care and education within the sector once qualified, without placing too many expectations on the students to achieve a level of professionalism that is either performative, or currently out of their reach.

In reviewing the range of literature available, and in particular, focusing on communities and landscapes of practice, it appears that while the Level 3 qualifications have the potential to be considered as vehicles for transforming students into professionals, this is not a consistent, or even reliable method of professionalising the workforce, due to the complexities and inconsistencies arising from the range of qualifications and the lack of consistency and policy governance. In applying the principles of Wenger's (1998; 2002) communities of practice and situated learning (Wenger-Traynor *et al.*, 2015) these theories of learning provide not only a method of exploring the learning that occurs during

such a vocational training course, but also a framework for analysing experiences of prior learning, and the potential values of professional learning, which were further utilised in this study. Hall and Wall's (2019, p.5) consideration of Billet's (2011) three broad purposes of practice-based learning, and the three dimensions of practice-based learning also echo the dissonance between education and practice-based experiences (Billet, 2011, p.18). These were further explored in this study, considering how the learning experiences are organised, augmented, and serve as 'the means by which individuals come to engage' (Hall and Wall, 2019, p.5). In order to interrogate the Level 3 qualification as a vehicle for professional learning, these considerations mean that it was important to consider not only the formal learning that takes place during the qualification, as set out in the programme specifications, but also to consider the importance of work placement experiences and what they add to the qualifications in order to prepare students to become professional practitioners.

In order to determine the effectiveness of the Level 3 qualification and a vehicle for transforming students into professional practitioners, and to understand the value created by engaging with such qualifications and training, it was therefore important to also consider how the variation of the available qualifications within the ECEC sector have resulted in variations in practice and knowledge. As discussed in Chapter 2, when the NNEB qualifications were introduced, effort was made to ensure that student's experiences on the course were consistent (Wright, 2013, 1.652), and that students were closely supervised by trained and qualified staff. Further intentions for increased standardisation have been evident in the introduction of NVQ qualifications (NCVQ Working Party and COT, 1989), the revision of expectations for Level 3 EYE qualifications (NCTL and DfE, 2013) and now potentially with incoming T-Level qualifications (IATE, 2021). Nonetheless, with the rapid increase in the number of qualifications available to potential students over the past century, and the variations in expectations, standardised

expectations for training during Level 3 qualifications are impracticable. It is therefore important to consider the desire for standardisation as effectively a call for an established threshold of minimum standards to be achieved, open to further development for tailored delivery by tutors, FE providers and awarding bodies.

Whilst not explicitly explored within the available literature, it is presumed that establishing a threshold of minimum expectations for the qualifications would also include an expectation for tutors to meet a minimum threshold of knowledge and skills. The diverse experiences tutors bring to their teaching reflect 'that the FE workforce is fractured and diversified as a result of the varied vocational cultures its teachers originate from' (Salisbury *et al.*, 2009, p.427), yet these diverse vocations and subsequent knowledge and experiences are key to providing students with a wider range of knowledge and skills that can be applied to their own practice. The Professional Standards for FE tutors sets out that tutors should 'Develop and update knowledge of your subject specialism, taking account of new practices, research and/ or industry requirements' (Education and Training Foundation, 2022). This is sufficiently broad to recognise that the expertise of the ECEC sector is multidisciplinary (Vincent and Braun, 2011, p.774), without mandating for a particular level or type of qualification to be held. A minimum threshold for delivering and assessing qualifications should not be assumed to imply a need for uniformity, but rather to ensure that all tutors have sufficient knowledge and expertise of some relevance. Thus, where some tutors may be more or less knowledgeable in particular fields than others, there are others within the tutor community that can contribute alongside, ensuring that the community of practice provides effective opportunities for learning for all members, through the contributions of multiple members, rather than the didactic approach of a single expert transmitting their knowledge to an audience. This collaborative approach within a shared community of practice then supports both the tutors and students to develop their knowledge and skills through multiple means, including engagement with a

range of tutors, 'other practitioners, the material world, children, academic writing, policy and the ECEC environment' (Fairchild, 2017, p.297), whilst also acknowledging the role of the workplace, acknowledging that 'knowledge is increasingly produced in the context of practice itself – in the workplace, in industry, in the professions' (Salisbury *et al.*, 2009, p.423).

Wenger-Traynor and Wenger-Traynor (2020a, p.85) suggest that their potential value creation cycle means that learners may benefit from stories of others' experiences, which are beneficial in supporting students to take memorable information into their own contexts, and to trigger the imagination as to what is possible in these separate contexts. An effective community of practice, consisting of multiple tutors, students, and ECEC workplace settings and practitioners can then be assumed to be pivotal in ensuring that qualifications are successful in providing opportunities for students to develop into future professional practitioners. It must be recognised however, that whilst introducing a minimum threshold of content and expectations of the qualifications, and of the knowledge and skills held by the community of tutors, there are other, prevailing factors that continue to impact on the portrayal of the ECEC workforce, and the potential value of the qualifications.

3.6 Dominant Discourses

In considering the concept of professionalisation in relation to the ECEC workforce, it is important to reflect on the dominant discourses that pervade public perceptions of the workforce. Issues of pay, gender, status, and class intertwine in the raft of literature exploring the ECEC sector, its purpose and its workforce. As previously discussed, dominant perceptions of the ECEC workforce present the notion that the role of the early years educator is essentially that of 'a glorified babysitter' (Mills, 2021, p.1), depicting 'a female, working class, poorly paid workforce, which has a relatively low level of

qualifications' (Vincent and Braun, 2013, p.752). Considered 'an attractive occupation to many working-class girls' (Colley, 2006, p.20), working with the very youngest children is seen 'to be classed, gendered and depicted as unskilled and lacking' (Mills, 2021, p.6), with 'skills and knowledge regularly and enduringly attributed to a natural mothering instinct' (Ailwood, 2008, p.162). Vincent and Braun (2013, p.757) present these stereotypically feminine qualities as a form of cultural capital, which are privileged in such caring roles when demonstrated by women, yet often equated to homosexuality when presented by men. Depictions of those within the workforce as highly feminised and emotional serve to reinforce notions 'that these emotions occur naturally in women and are best practised by them' (*ibid.*). This serves to deter men from the sector, perpetuating the perceptions that working with young children is 'women's work' (Moss, 2006, p.34).

Additional to concepts of gender and mothering, Chang-Kredl *et al.* (2021, p.103) analysed media representations of early years educators, discussing the propensity for those depicted to be portrayed as either 'maternal', 'eccentric' or 'sexy' educators, and acknowledging the effects of this belittling and undervaluing of the ECEC workforce. Likewise, Mills (2021, p.3) identified that typical ECEC workers are 'depicted as 'maternal': feminine without being too sexual, white, in their 30's/40's, respectable, softly spoken, caring, quiet and complicit'. These perceptions reinforce the dominant discourses of dispositions within the ECEC workforce, whereby 'being maternal, kind and loving, has created the role of what it means to be an early years practitioner' (McGillivray, 2008, p.250). McDowall-Clark and Baylis (2012, p.231) discuss how this is particularly difficult for those working with under-threes, where practitioners are 'viewed as caregivers rather than educators', furthering the maternal discourse of practitioners as substitutes for mothers, rather than professionals with acquired knowledge and skills. Similar perceptions of the ECEC workforce as 'docile' (Johns, 2017, p.5), or 'nice girls' (Colley, 2006, p.17) appear to add to the dominant narrative of patriarchal discourses that work to legitimise

the low status and pay afforded to the workforce (Roberts-Holmes and Brownhill, 2011, p.120), perpetuating the cycle further.

Furthermore, Colley's exploration of the training of 'nursery nurses' presents the impression that those undertaking Level 3 qualifications in FE colleges are often those who failed to achieve the qualifications for teaching or nursing, and so 'became obliged to lower their ambitions' (Colley, 2006, p.19). This perception that those who decide to work with young children do so due to lacking in intelligence or suitability for other more 'academic' or professional roles, serves to further undermine the ECEC sector, consistently devaluing the ECEC workforce and denigrating the skills and knowledge required to care for and educate young children. These perceptions of the ECEC workforce differ very little from perceptions of dame schools in the 19th Century, where it was presumed that those who undertook such roles did so as their 'only qualification for this kind of employment seems to be their unfitness for every other' (Manchester Statistical Society, 1834, p.7). These long-standing perceptions differ considerably from Cameron's (2005, p.3) unfulfilled expectation that

'By 2020 the vision is for the main early years worker to be working within a completely integrated care and education framework. She, and increasingly he, should be educated to a level that is equivalent to or exceeds the best in other European countries'.

In the inaugural edition of *Nursery World* (1925) it was declared that 'looking after children is recognised as an art, if not a science' (Baldock, 2011, p.36), establishing a clear need for those undertaking roles within the ECEC workforce to receive relevant training and qualifications. Similarly, Papatheodorou and Moyles (2009, p.78) suggested that if we wish to educate the child we must educate the adult. However, dominant discourses of derision for those within the ECEC workforce continue to overlook the complexity of the knowledge and skills needed to work with young children, exacerbating conceptual divisions between

the provisions and expectations for education and care (Dahlberg *et al.*, 2013; Moss, 2016). Contrastingly, Ingleby's (2018) discussion of the ECEC workforce suggests that expectations of practitioners are unrealistically high. Expectations that 'educators ought to go to 'infinity and beyond' so that they become 'super teachers'.' (Ingleby, 2018, p.23) add to the confusing narrative, presenting the ECEC workforce as unskilled and incapable, yet placing unrealistic expectations on practitioners to raise the quality of ECEC settings and the attainment of the children attending them.

Dominating the literature regarding the ECEC sector, the concept of 'quality' is pervasive. Campbell-Barr (2017, p.46) suggests a post-structuralist view, that 'there are no certainties as to the features of quality and quality can mean many things to many people'. Reflecting the dominant discourses espoused within policy and media, Urban (2008, p.138) proposed that 'too often the language of "quality" is employed to legitimise the proliferating maze of regulations in early childhood education and care, and to undermine instead of support professional autonomy'. Similarly, Osgood (2006, p.191) suggested a level of performativity in regards to policy and regulations 'wherein practitioners feel compelled to cynically comply'. This lack of visible autonomy and agency further exacerbates the dominant discourse that the ECEC workforce is lacking in quality, continuing the narrative presented. Manning *et al.* (2017, p.7) reported a significant correlation between qualifications and the provision of high quality care. The Early Years Workforce Strategy (DfE, 2017c) also highlighted this, yet stated an intention 'to narrow the quality gap between settings in disadvantaged and more affluent areas' (*ibid.*, p.17). This then appears to be a dismissal of the importance of raising quality through professionalising the entire workforce, in favour of responding to inequalities in society (Lloyd and Hallet, 2010, p.77), in what Robertson and Hill (2014, p.169) term 'social-democratic reform'.

Combined with perceptions of the ECEC workforce and their perceived dispositions, it would be logical to suggest that dominant discourses surrounding quality are not controlled by those within the workforce, but by policy agendas and media portrayals. Mills (2021, p.1) highlights the discrepancies in the dominant government and media discourse, identifying how the New Labour government situated the ECEC workforce as the tools by which poverty, social inequality and disadvantage could be reduced, whilst simultaneously depicting them 'as an inadequate and lacking sector in need of 'professionalising' to increase 'quality' of provision' (*ibid.*). Similarly, during the Covid-19 pandemic, the ECEC workforce were identified as 'key workers', and therefore essential to the effective running of the country. Yet concomitantly, they were treated as 'expendable' 'with no PPE, testing or vaccinations' (Mills, 2021, p.7). This lack of status is clearly not just an issue affecting the sector with the UK, with the European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (2021, p.30) identifying similar situations in a number of European countries.

It is evident then, through brief exploration of the dominant discourses enacted upon the ECEC sector, that ambitions to develop 'a more competent, more flexible workforce, with improved career pathways and better progression opportunities, delivering better outcomes for, and reducing the inequalities amongst, children and young people' (DfES, 2003a, p.1) have not been achieved. Similarly, ambitions for practitioners to be 'respected and valued as professionals' (DCSF, 2008b, p.6), are unlikely to reach fruition without clear policy agendas and a concerted effort to re-envision the ECEC workforce, affording status and value to the role of the ECEC practitioner.

3.7 Summary

To conclude, there have been a myriad of changes within the ECEC sector over the past two centuries, both in regards to policy and practice, however, it appears that these have

been inconsistent, and often circular in their approach. Through Chapter 2's examination of the literature that maps these innovations and recantations, it is evident that what is needed to move the ECEC workforce forwards, is a singular, coherent policy strategy, that will be afforded the financial, political and practical support required to be implemented over a considerable time-frame, having the opportunity to make a long-lasting difference. The perceptions of the ECEC workforce have been in place for a considerable length of time, however, with the current context influenced by the Covid-19 pandemic, it has become more widely acknowledged that the ECEC workforce forms the very backbone of the economy, providing quality provision of both care and education for children, and enabling parents, particularly mothers, to participate in the workforce. This then reiterates the 'need to value those who work with babies and young children' (Biden and HRH The Duchess of Cambridge, 2021) if there is hope of those who work with the youngest in society of being perceived as professional.

It is perhaps then, quite timely to consider this research as an opportunity to reflect on experiences of undertaking a level 3 qualification, using Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's values framework (2020a, p.75) to consider how the experiences of those currently employed in the ECEC workforce reflect the literature explored here. Similarly, the identified lack of documentation or discussion regarding the importance of the tutor community within the literature provides an opportunity to explore this further, using this study to seek the voice of the tutor to provide a more balanced understanding of the value of the qualifications, and the role of the tutor in the qualification experiences provided. Through engaging in reflection with qualified practitioners and FE tutors within ECEC, this study explores the resonance and dissonance of the policy frameworks and literature, through methods explored in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Research Questions

- How does a Level 3 ECEC qualification prepare students for professional practice?
- What do the experiences of a Level 3 qualification contribute to professional practice in the ECEC workforce?
- How do tutors provide opportunities for professional learning on Level 3 ECEC qualifications?

4.2 Introduction

The aim of this research was originally to investigate the learning experiences of those involved in Level 3 ECEC qualifications, engaging with students, tutors and practitioners who support learners in practice placements. However, due to various limitations during the Covid-19 pandemic, this aim was reenvisioned, narrowing the focus to explore the Level 3 qualification as a vehicle for professionalism, with a view to developing a clearer understanding of how professional learning occurs and prepares students for the workforce, considering the views of those who had previously undertaken Level 3 ECEC qualifications, as well as focusing on the voices of the tutors, as those responsible for delivering and assessing these qualifications. The revised aim of this research was therefore to explore the experiences of those engaged in professional learning and pre-service training at Level 3 to develop a deeper understanding of how such qualifications could be better understood as a method of professionalising the ECEC workforce.

This chapter sets out the methodological approach taken for this research, encompassing all elements of the planning and collection of primary data through to the analysis phase of the study. The methodological decisions provided a basis for which the determined research questions were to be answered, and from this, developing knowledge of the

experiences of undertaking and delivering a Level 3 qualification in ECEC, and how this knowledge could be used to support future students in their transition into becoming professional practitioners.

In determining a suitable methodological approach for this research, there were a variety of elements to consider. Newby (2014, p.36) explored how 'moral, political, economic and cultural perspectives' shape how the world is viewed by individuals, and thus, further shape the values a researcher holds when determining what tools and sources can be used to gather data. Consequently, an overarching aim was to ensure that all research conducted was ethical, as approved by the University of Sheffield, and that any actions I took were carefully considered to eliminate or minimise the risk of causing any type of harm to any participant of the study, as defined by the British Psychological Society Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2014) the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018) and the Economic and Social Research Council's Framework of Research Ethics (ESRC, 2015). This chapter provides the context for these issues, in order to confirm the processes of determining this research to be an ethical and viable study.

4.3 Approach

My own positionality in relation to the research has inevitably shaped and influenced the choices that I made, irrespective of attempts to remain objective as discussed by Denscombe (2017, p.8) and Wellington *et al.* (2005, p.102). In acknowledging this, it is important to explain my own subjectivities and to acknowledge my own ontological and epistemological assumptions in order to conduct this research using a suitable methodological approach, that enabled the participants involved to share their experiences of undertaking and supporting professional learning through Level 3 ECEC courses.

This research stems from my own experiences and interests in my role as a programme lead for Early Years and Childhood Studies, delivering ECEC qualifications at both HE and FE level. I had previously observed an increasing propensity for FE Colleges to merge Early Years departments with Health and Social Care departments, and similarly, to amalgamate the delivery of some courses, or use one tutor as an 'expert' in both fields, which led me to question the knowledge and understanding of these two distinct sectors within these institutions, and the experiences of those studying and supporting learning at this level. As a tutor involved in planning, delivery and assessment of Level 3 ECEC qualifications, I had also witnessed the propensity of some tutors to deliver content, with no consideration of students' absorption or understanding of the information. Yet other tutors were more likely to captivate and actively engage students in learning, relating knowledge to practice to ensure understanding. These differences were stark, and tutors' approaches were often mirrored by the students' efforts, leading me to question the differences between students who were seemingly enrolled on a standardised programme, but were not being taught in the same way across the programme.

My own experiences within the sector also gave rise to concerns that a significant portion of the ECEC workforce were unqualified, with this seemingly being sanctioned by the Department for Education, who only require half of the staff within a group ECEC setting to have a Level 2 qualification, and the manager to hold a Level 3 qualification (DfE, 2017d, p.21), with other staff simply needing to be 'competent and responsible' (DfE, 2017d, p.23). In planning this study, it was vital that my curiosity around these issues was embraced with minimal bias, exploring the opinions of others in relevant positions, rather than solely examining my own experiences. Newby (2014, p.43) discussed how critical theorists are driven to research based on their own concerns and goals, in order to 'expose the need for change'. This depicts my approach, in that my interests and concerns led me to believe that a change of approach, reinforced through national policy,

would be beneficial in order to strive towards consistency in professional learning and delivery of qualifications across Level 3 ECEC courses, as well as raising expectations of staff qualifications within the ECEC workforce.

Echoing Kingdon (2019, p.113), whilst this research was undoubtedly concerned with 'social, political, cultural, economic and gendered values and experiences', it assumed an interpretivist paradigm, defined by Denscombe (2017, p.8) as 'concerned with developing insights into people's beliefs and their lived experiences', rather than that of critical theory, defined by Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009, p.144) as 'an emancipatory interest in knowledge'. Smythe and Murray (2005, p.182) assert that epistemological considerations are intricately entwined with ethical considerations, and thus determining appropriate research methods that depict the participants' 'multiple interpretations of reality' (Smythe and Murray, 2005, p.183) is vital. However, Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2009, p.40) cautioned against coupling ontology and epistemology, in an attempt to separate 'that which exists with the knowledge we have about it', as this can confuse what reality is, with socially constructed conceptions of it. In contrast, this research accepts Mertens' (2007, p.216) statement that 'there are multiple realities that are socially constructed', and therefore, adopts Newby's (2014, p.36) stance that ontology and epistemology should be linked, as the way in which the reality of the world is viewed and accepted must dictate the methods used, questions asked, and evidence accepted for determining the research findings. Accepting this stance also required consideration of the power dynamics between the participants and myself as a researcher, both being influenced by and subjected to institutional and national policy frameworks that guide the research process. Smythe and Murray (2005, p.182) examined this power dynamic, discussing that participants are undeniably the experts in their own experiences, but nonetheless, researchers often have 'theoretical knowledge and access to literature that can frame the participant's experience within a much larger context' (*ibid.*). In this situation, the concept

of multiple, socially constructed realities dictates that choosing the most appropriate approach for the research must ensure that all participants are valued and heard equally, which Hall and Wall (2019, p.154) suggested 'means that the diversity of the population can start to be captured'. Additionally, Ryan and Grieshaber (2005, p.38) discussed making discourses visible in order to examine them critically, which Maclure presented as the ability 'to pose questions and mobilise issues that are hidden or taken for granted' (2006, p.224). By critically examining the literature in previous chapters, the hegemonic discourses and their enactment in ECEC, this could be used to identify 'whose voices are overlooked by particular theories and practices' (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005, p.37), and therefore inform this research to explore the experiences of those who may not traditionally been heard when reviewing and revising qualifications. For this research, it was important that the voices of those engaged with Level 3 qualifications were heard, and accepted to represent the diversity of those who had experienced these qualifications first-hand. To this effect, it was important to consider how best to provide the platform for these voices to be heard in a way that reflected the multiple realities of their varied experiences.

Mayoh and Onwuegbuzie (2014, p.4) and Onwuegbuzie and Frels (2016, p.4) discussed the propensity for researchers to adopt a mixed methods research approach with a phenomenological focus, which Walker and Solvason (2014, p.69) defined as 'studying the perspectives of others and listening to their voices and using their experience to enlighten and inform'. Additionally, Pring's (2015, p.120) advice that 'one must see things from the point of view of the participants' meant that this research needed to allow the voices of the participants to be heard in their own words, rather than through a lens that may distort the experiences, such as through the interpretation of observations. This led to an awareness that whilst the participants would share their own expectations and experiences, in order to fully comprehend the subjective meanings through which multiple

realities can be interpreted, it was important to adhere to an appropriate methodological approach that would not inadvertently discredit the experiences of any of the participants. Thus, whilst participants may have expressed themselves differently from one another, which may reflect an awareness, or lack of awareness of the context of their experiences, the research needed to consistently recognise that participants 'may be working within a context of social and historical forces, which is beyond their comprehension' (Pring, 2015, p.122). This recognition resonated with my desired methodological approach, assuming a constructivist ontology in order to examine the multiple realities of expectations held by participants, as well as the experiences that shaped them within the context of their learning. This assemblage of information would then be used to construct an understanding of the professional learning that occurs during Level 3 qualifications, in an attempt to understand 'what actually exists, rather than what exists in an ideal situation' (Newby, 2014, p.45) from the perspectives of these participants.

Cohen *et al.*'s (2000, p.38) explanation of the importance of sensitive listening, in order to understand phenomena through the lived experiences of those experiencing the phenomena, led to the decision to assume elements of a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, as defined by Kafle (2013, p.186) as 'focused on subjective experience of individuals and groups ... an attempt to unveil the world as experienced by the subject through their life world stories.' In reflecting on the importance of situated learning through communities of practice (Wenger, 1998), as discussed in the literature review, it was vital that the data collected honestly reflected the knowledge shared by the participants from these communities. Thus, in engaging with elements of a phenomenological philosophy, it was imperative to select appropriate participants.

However, whilst it was originally planned to conduct this research within FE institutions, to engage with students and tutors directly within a small community of practice, the

Covid-19 pandemic resulted in rethinking this approach, ensuring that the safety of potential participants was prioritised. To mitigate the restrictions on face to face data collection, the focus of the research was redefined to make it possible to collect data using online methods, and to encompass a wider, and more diverse range of potential participants. To this end, O'Leary's interpretation of a triangulation approach (2021, p.177) was adopted, using two different data collection processes independently of one another, with the aim of integrating the findings to explore commonalities and divergences of the findings. These strategies aimed to give the findings more authenticity, drawing from a larger collective of voices, valuing the shared elements of practice across a landscape of ECEC practice, rather than an isolated community of practice.

4.4 Participants

Mukherji and Albon (2018, p.30) suggested that selecting a purposive sample is useful in determining who would be best suited to gathering the required data. O'Leary (2021, p.223) also discussed how non-random sampling can effectively and credibly represent populations, with chosen participants being key informants with expert knowledge. Similarly, as discussed by Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.219), this type of sampling gives access to participants with the required expertise or experience, which is echoed by Kumar's (2019, p.307) suggestion that purposive sampling seeks those who 'are best positioned to provide ... the information needed'. Therefore, whilst it was no longer appropriate to recruit participants from a single community of practice, it was still necessary to seek participants who would be able to understand and engage in a reflection of their experiences, whilst maintaining an awareness of how to avoid possible issues such as unwitting bias (O'Leary, 2021, p.222). In this study, it was determined that as the research aimed to examine experiences and knowledge of those who had experience engaging with relevant Level 3 professional learning qualifications in ECEC, it would be best

directed at those currently working in the ECEC sector, who were most likely to have experience with this type of professional learning, and could reflect on these experiences.

The first group of participants would be the larger group, recruited through the use of social media, through a link shared via an Early Years specific social media group. This was important in order to limit the possibility that participants outside of the target demographic would attempt to be 'helpful' and try to complete the questionnaire. Whilst there was a possibility that this link may have been shared more widely than within this specific group, it was anticipated that the wording and focus of the questions would further limit the possibility of non-target responses, as any responses that indicated that the participant did not have experience with training or qualifications at L3 were set to direct respondents to either the next section, or the end of the questionnaire.

The second group of participants would be a small group of tutors, using a non-random volunteering sampling approach (O'Leary, 2021, p.223). These participants were selected for ease of access through a local network, chosen for their experience in planning, delivering and assessing students on Level 3 ECEC qualifications. These participants were part of a larger group of potential participants, and those who agreed to participate were involved in online interviews, conducted to ensure that participants could respond at a time when they were 'not too busy' (Grønmo, 2020, p.197).

Whilst Mukherji and Albon (2018, p.30) warned that purposive sampling can be viewed as subjective, other methods of sampling as discussed by Opie and Brown (2019, p.164) would not suffice for this study, as the target participants would need to be selected based on their expertise on the topic (Newby, 2014, p.257).

As the research was changed from face to face to online data collection methods, this ameliorated a number of potential issues that may have arisen from this study, including a

number of potential ethical dilemmas that may have arisen during each stage of the originally planned study (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p.114). As participants would be recruited via social media, Grønmo (2020, p.60) advocated the use of appropriate *netiquette* in addressing ethical responsibilities when communicating with participants solely through online means, including giving potential participants all relevant information about the study. Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.146) similarly discussed the importance of transparency when conducting internet research, advocating for a 'step-by-step staged process', whereby participants are given sufficient information to decide whether they wish to consent to participate, and then gradually given more information in further sections, preventing participants from being overwhelmed with too much information at first, or from simply skipping over it and giving consent that is not fully 'informed'. This was taken into consideration in planning the research, along with relevant ethical guidelines, to ensure that all potential participants understood their right to opt-in, and subsequently to withdraw from the research at any point during their participation, as advised by the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2018, p.18). The participants were recruited only from those that provided informed consent. Those that declined to give this consent were thanked for their interest and instructed to close the browser, ensuring that no participant who did not give their consent could inadvertently participate. Each participant who gave consent, was then invited to participate in the research by completing an online questionnaire, focusing on their experiences of engaging with Level 3 qualifications in ECEC, with further clarification given in sections to guide and inform the participant, with final informed consent given at the end of the questionnaire, agreeing to submit their responses (Appendix 1).

For all participants, it was made explicit that at any point during their participation in the research, they would be able to withdraw without giving a reason, as articulated by BERA (2018, p.18). As advocated by UK Research and Innovation (2018, p.3) for ethical

purposes, no personal data would be gathered from the questionnaires, and so, once completed and submitted, there would be no way to withdraw an individual's data from the research.

In contrast to this, the participants that agreed to participate in the online interviews were invited through networks and provided with an Information Sheet (Appendix 2) in order to understand the expectations of the study. Using Flick's (2021, p.107) definition of convenience sampling, choosing participants who were ready and willing to help out, participants then made contact via email to agree to participate in the study, and were sent a unique link to an online consent form (Appendix 3). Once informed consent had been provided, each participant was assigned a pseudonym, and once the interview commenced they were reminded that they could withdraw their data for a further three weeks post-completion of their participation. This was also made clear at the end of the interview once final agreement to participate was obtained.

4.5 Methods

In determining appropriate research methods for data collection, through a solely online approach, it was imperative that the methods were accessible for the participants, as well as for myself as the researcher. Through careful consideration, it was determined that there would be a single questionnaire, structured into several sections, and a series of short, semi-structured interviews also conducted online.

4.5.1 Questionnaires

Self-completion questionnaires are a common method of data collection that permits the recording of data from a large number of participants, without time-consuming face to face interaction (Denscombe, 2017, p.184). Self-completion was expected to be the most successful method, as the capability and motivation of the target participants had been predetermined to be sufficient in this regard (Roberts-Holmes, 2018, p.145). The

participants of this method were all provided with sufficient information to choose whether or not to participate through an explanatory paragraph that preceded the questionnaire (Appendix 1), as well as a closing statement that reiterated their choices and right to withdraw, as advised by Roberts-Holmes (2018, p.148), and so the completion and submission of the questionnaire was taken as autonomous and voluntary informed consent (Punch and Oancea, 2014, p.65).

As the largest tool for data collection in this study, and a method where it was not possible to discuss the answers with participants, it was necessary to plan the questionnaire carefully. Whilst the original aim had been to conduct separate questionnaires for each group of participants, amalgamating these into a single cohesive questionnaire took considerable effort. The final questionnaire needed to be planned carefully to ensure that appropriate data could be collected from all participants, irrespective of the type of Level 3 course they had experienced. The participants were presumed to be geographically diverse as a result of being disseminated online (Kumar, 2019, p.191), and also diverse in regards to their ages and experiences, and so the information provided needed to be clear and concise, in an attempt to ensure consistency of understanding, and not take up too much of the participant's time.

There were many pros and cons to consider when choosing to use questionnaires, and this was further complicated by using online questionnaires. Savin-Baden and Tombs (2017, p.107) identified potential issues depending on the platform and device used to complete online questionnaires, considering whether potential distractions from push notifications may affect responses and completion. Fox *et al.* (2003, p.177) considered that the high level of anonymity afforded by online questionnaires may be beneficial in reducing social desirability responses, which made the decision to choose this mode of data collection advantageous for this study. Reflecting upon the research of Becker (1976,

p.756), it is possible that 'the less readily a person can be paired with his responses, the less biasing should take place', reinforcing the importance of participants being able to respond anonymously throughout this study, and the possibility that further data collection methods may produce responses that could reflect a social desirability bias. Further to this, it was accepted (Denscombe, 2009, p.281; Van Mol, 2017, p.317) that online questionnaires have practical, ethical and methodological advantages such as: cost; time; ease of completion; and efficiency. In addition, Denscombe (2009, p.282) and Diaz de Rada and Domínguez (2015, p.339) suggested that question non-response rates are lower for online questionnaires than paper-based, although Denscombe (2009, p.282) questioned whether this may be attributed to a higher non-completion rate. Furthermore, Cohen *et al.* (2018, p.344) discussed low response rates in regard to all types of questionnaires, explaining the importance of considering the length and design in mitigating this issue. This led to refining the information given at the start of the questionnaire, ensuring that the participants would be likely to understand exactly what was expected of them, and what would happen to their data, without being too repetitive or verbose. This was also a consideration for each of the questions within the questionnaire, which was addressed through careful piloting and feedback. To ensure the design of the questionnaire was optimal, considerations such as layout, and question type were reviewed, as advised by Zeglovits and Schwarzer (2016, p.194). Punch and Oancea (2014, p.299) also suggested that it is important to consider the questions asked, advocating a framework to divide the types of questions asked, in order to collect not only relevant quantitative demographic data, but to strategically progress through the questions, grouping similar items as the participants progress towards the completion of the questionnaire, which was also advocated by Wellington (2015, p.195). Likewise, Diaz de Rada and Domínguez (2015, p.344) warned that participants completing online questionnaires may scan the questions, rather than reading them intently. It was therefore

important to include a range of question types to ensure that participants did not grow weary of repetitious questions, checking boxes or end up choosing the same point on a repeating scale. This led to the design of predominantly open-ended questions, seeking individual responses in the participants' own words, rather than a selection of predetermined responses for the participant to choose from (Kumar, 2019, p.229). Whilst these open-ended questions would take more time to respond to, Zeglovits and Schwarzer's (2016, p.193) findings suggested that participants would likely be 'willing to give substantive answers to sensitive questions in self-administered surveys', which was helpful in determining that these questions would be answered thoughtfully, and would therefore be an appropriate initial method of data collection for this research.

Mukherji and Albon (2018, p.261) postulated that questionnaires are ideal for collecting data regarding participants' experiences, and provided logical guidance for considering the design of such a questionnaire. As previously discussed, the construction of the questionnaire required consideration of what would be an appropriate length and format, as well as the type and wording of each question to elicit appropriate responses. To start with, the questionnaire began with demographic questions, before progressing to more open-ended and attitudinal questions. This was further revised to group questions into topics, to ensure continuity and focus for each participant to understand what was expected of them in regards to the responses provided, which Kumar (2019, p.237) suggests is helpful in sustaining the interest of participants. Once the questionnaire had been drafted, it was then piloted with an appropriate audience in order to determine its reliability in collecting relevant data (Wellington, 2015, p.196). The pilot revealed some issues with repetition, which were resolved through adaptation and amalgamation of questions, and also with some participants with differing experiences not being able to answer some questions. This was useful in encouraging reflection on the range of Level 3 qualification routes, and adapting questions and possible responses to suit these more

effectively. A final critique of the questionnaire was the length of each section, which led to the separation of certain topics into further sections, making the questionnaire less intimidating to participants, and easier to complete. The pilot study was also useful in reducing the overall the length of the survey and ensuring that responses provided would be useful in achieving the original aim of 'studying the perspectives of others and listening to their voices and using their experience to enlighten and inform' (Walker and Solvason, 2014, p.69).

Following amendments made after the pilot study, the questionnaire was finalised and was made available online through social media channels for a period of eight weeks, giving sufficient time for busy participants to complete if they wished to. During this time, participants were able to submit responses at their leisure, and could contact me via email to ask questions. It was made clear at the end of the questionnaire that by submitting the questionnaire, all data would be anonymous, and therefore irretrievable. After the eight weeks had passed, the questionnaire was set to no longer accept responses, preventing any additional responses from being added to the data whilst analysis was underway. This allowed me to apply an appropriate analysis framework as advocated by Punch and Oancea (2014, p.326), in order to examine the findings carefully and thus, to reflect the voices of the participants as Walker and Solvason (2014, p.69) recommended.

It was also possible that responses may indicate that the participant was not from the desired sample group, and so it was considered that such responses could be filtered out upon data analysis, and possibly analysed separately to the responses from the target participants. Upon gathering the data, it was clear from the responses that all participants had undertaken qualifications within ECEC, so this was not necessary.

Responses to the questionnaire came in steadily over seven weeks, with no responses in the final week. Whilst no participants emailed with any questions during this time, due to

the online self-completion approach utilised, there was no way of knowing how many potential participants viewed or started the questionnaire without completing it.

4.5.2 Interviews

Following the questionnaires, the second, smaller group of participants were contacted with the opportunity to opt in to participate in the interviews. Whilst these interviews were originally planned to take place within the college environment for the students and tutors, adaptations to online data collection also impacted upon the process of conducting the interviews. The interview process was adapted to be conducted online, and virtual face to face interviews were initially considered, however, it was clear from discussions with this participant group that workloads had dramatically increased during the pandemic, and so email interviews were determined to be a more suitable method. Flick (2021, p.293) considered email interviews to be a suitable replacement for face to face meetings during the Covid-19 pandemic, and similarly Newby (2014, p.367) suggested that it is important to ensure every participant is equally advantaged, diminishing potential power imbalances that may be held by the researcher, or by some participants within a group, and so, all participants were invited to participate in the interviews with an explanation of what their participation would entail, enabling them to make an informed decision to participate.

Savin-Baden and Tombs (2017, p.161) proposed that email interviews are advantageous as they require little in the way of specialist technical knowledge, and can be completed at any time, which ameliorates scheduling or connectivity issues that may arise from other, synchronous online interview techniques. A further benefit for this study was that email interviews allowed participants time to think and craft responses, which 'allows longer responses and reflection' (*ibid.*). James (2016, p.154) regarded this to be a benefit to busy participants, considering that the asynchronicity of the method allowed participants 'flexibility to construct narratives at a pace which suited them, unlike the constrained time

and space they might have experienced in a face-to-face or telephonic interview'. James (2017, p.7) further expounded on this, reflecting on how participants are afforded agency to think and reflect on their experiences, enabling them to contribute to research in their own time, therefore reducing power held by the researcher in the research process. Furthermore, James (2016, p.154) reflected on this shifted power dynamic, exploring how academic participants felt empowered to make decisions to ignore emails for periods of time, giving them time and space to think and reflect on the questions asked, or as Illingworth (2006, p.5) suggested, 'a space to reflect and a space *not* to talk'.

To achieve this level of reflection from each interview response, the interview questions were planned to be semi-structured, making use of open-ended questions, which Denscombe (2017, p.204) proposes allows the researcher to support the participants to speak freely and elaborate on specific points of interest. Similar to Smythe and Murray (2005, p.182), Perkins (2019, p.161) notion of 'inversion of expertise' encouraged positioning the participants as the experts, and so the interviews sought to provide a space for participants to 'tell their stories, to detail their experiences, and to dwell upon those aspects that they wish to convey to their listener' (Richards, 2019, p.175). Richards (*ibid.*) further suggested that this type of research design is beneficial in diminishing the power differential between the researcher and the participants, wherein the participants' knowledge and experience are affirmed through the responsive nature of the methodological design.

The creation of the interview questions also required careful planning in ensuring that questions were open and answerable, and would yield sufficient responses in order to provide an insight into the experiences of the participants. Through four consecutive iterations, questions were refined, reorganised and reduced, resulting in ten set questions (Appendix 4), with twelve additional sub-questions or variations to be asked depending on

the responses received. Once drafted, the interviews were also piloted, which resulted in some amendments to the sub-questions, in order to facilitate clearer understanding or to reflect possible answers to previous questions. As the interviews were also to be semi-structured, it was also possible then to further adapt any questions where necessary to better respond to a previous answer provided.

During the interview sessions, participants who had read the relevant Information Sheet (Appendix 2), understood the method and process of the interviews, and given their consent to participate, were contacted to initiate the interviews. James' (2017; 2016) experience was helpful in noting how the planned duration of data collection can be prolonged through participant non-responses, and similarly, Meho's (2006, p.1286) research into similar research conducted via email interview indicated that the longer it took to collect the data, the greater the risk of participant drop out and frustrations. With this in mind, participants were given a one week window to respond to each question, with clear information provided that a prompt would be sent at the end of the week period asking if the participant wished to respond to a different question, or to discontinue their participation. Throughout the data collection, one participant became non-responsive, resulting in this participant no longer being included in the study. In seeking a third participant to replace this one, two more participants were recruited, bringing the total number of interviews to four.

All of the interviews were conducted online, giving opportunities for the participants to take the time to express themselves (Denscombe, 2017, p.203) in a way that a face to face or informal interview may not have provided (Mukherji and Albon, 2018, p.243). Newby (2014, p.155) suggested that this kind of primary data provides valuable insights into what the participant says and does, as well as how they represent themselves, which can be interpreted to indicate their attitudes, values and priorities. Whilst information was shared

about the underpinning rationale, I remained aware of my own position throughout the data collection process, ensuring that my own influence was mitigated to prevent leading participants, or influencing responses through potential social desirability bias (Holbrook *et al.*, 2003). Thus, consideration of how I could reassure participants of the importance of being honest, was vital to ensure that participants did not feel that they would be judged for the responses and data they provided, as Walker and Solvason (2014, p.10) suggested. Additionally, participants were reminded, in writing, of their right to decide to withdraw from the research process at any time, and that they had the right to choose not to respond to any questions they did not feel comfortable answering (Hinchcliffe and Gavin, 2008, p.96). This encouraged participants to feel that their responses would be afforded a clearly determined level of anonymity, in consideration of Becker's (1976, p.756) previously mentioned suggestion that 'the less readily a person can be paired with his responses, the less biasing should take place'. Coe *et al.* (2017, p.61) further discussed the importance of privacy and anonymity for participants, as the analysis and potential publication of information from interview transcripts may inadvertently reveal the identity of the participant. Accordingly, strategies for maintaining anonymity were used, including the use of pseudonyms for all interview participants and settings mentioned, as well as obfuscating geographic details as appropriate for each setting, to avoid any setting or participant being identifiable within the final data.

Each interviewee responded in their own time, and in their own words, which removed the need to transcribe and double check with participants what they had said. Whilst there are a number of strengths and weaknesses of this approach, Meho (2006, p.1289) considered linguistic methods such as the use of capital letters, abbreviations and emoticons to add a richness to the data, to make up for the lack of non-verbal cues that may assist with transcription. Furthermore, Roberts-Holmes (2018, p.168) pointed out that written notes would undoubtedly not provide this level of accuracy. Mukherji and Albon (2018, p.252)

concluded, highlighting the difficulty of concentrating on note-taking whilst interviewing, which is unnecessary with this technique, making this a clear benefit to the email interview approach.

Following the interview process, each participant was sent a final email thanking them for their participation, and asking for confirmation that they were still happy for their responses to be included in the final study. Participants were also reminded that they had the right to withdraw their participation at any point for a further three weeks after that date, before all anonymised data was analysed and reported.

4.6 Reflection on ethics

Throughout the study, careful planning and ethical research practices ensured that all potential ethical issues were addressed effectively, mitigating the potential for negative effects for any participant at any point. It is the responsibility of the researcher to ensure that research processes are ethically sound, a process that includes ongoing reflectivity, reflexivity and negotiation. During the planning of the study, I considered the potential of any ethical issues, and the possible implications of each element of the study, gaining approval to conduct the study (Appendix 5). The first issue that required consideration was gaining informed consent from participants.

Informed consent was explored through five components: Disclosure of information; Understanding; Capacity; Voluntariness; and Assent (Penn State, 2016; Tait and Geisser, 2017, p.6), all of which are interdependent and necessary to ensure an ethical approach to research. The first component guides researchers in respecting the autonomy of individuals involved in research, as the Association of Research Ethics Committees (2013, p.5) state that 'The participant must normally be as aware as possible of what the research is for and be free to take part in it without coercion or penalty for not taking part'. To ensure that all participants are 'as aware as possible' (*ibid.*), I provided detailed

information to enable them to choose for themselves whether they wished to participate in the research. This component of informed consent is intertwined with the other four components: participants must have the capacity to understand the information given, and they must not be coerced or misled during the provision of information into making a decision. Participants must also be able to comprehend the requirements and potential consequences of being a participant, before they can provide their informed assent. Upon initial contact, all potential participants were provided with adequate information (Appendix 1; Appendix 2) in order to understand the purpose and remit of the research, including the potential for the research findings to be published. This enabled all participants to read through the information at their own pace, and to understand how to contact me should they have any questions. This opportunity for potential participants to ask questions ensured that they fully understood what was being asked of them, and were able to use this understanding to make an informed decision regarding participation, which is the second component of informed consent.

The third component, capacity, was ensured through the selection of potential participants from what Denscombe (2017, p.35) refers to as a non-probability exploratory sample, as participants were selected for their expertise and experience with the research topic. By seeking participants who had completed a level 3 qualification, or taught at this level, it was presumed likely that many would have achieved the GCSE grade 4 or C, or equivalent, in English language, in an effort to ensure that all potential participants had the capacity to read and understand the information provided (Appendix 1; Appendix 2), and to make contact should they wish to seek clarification on any issue. The length of a standard Level 3 course also ensured that participants were all over the age of sixteen, the age at which some participants may have commenced their qualification, and most likely would be over the age of eighteen, and so had the capacity to provide informed consent. However, it was acknowledged that some participants may still be seventeen,

and therefore were not legally adults, which needed further ethical considerations. Scott (2013, p.66) suggested that participants aged 16-18 years-old, the demographic of many students who could have partaken in this study, have the capacity to understand and provide informed consent in the same manner as legal adults, despite not being recognised as such. Lundy (2007, p.935) also suggested that for those who are not deemed legally mature, the right to express their view is not dependent upon their capacity to express a mature view; 'it is dependent only on their ability to form a view, mature or not'. Consistent with hermeneutic inquiry, all participants were deemed capable of discussing their experiences, irrespective of their age.

The fourth component of ethical research, voluntariness, ensures all participants should have the right to choose for themselves whether or not to participate in any research activity. To ensure that no participant felt coerced into participation, a window of two weeks was provided between the initial contact and seeking informed consent to commence the interview methods of data collection. This window allowed participants time to consider the research and the possible implications that may have arisen from their participation, without feeling that they were being rushed into making a decision. The final component was participants giving their assent to take part in the research. This took the form of a Consent form (Appendix 3) for those participating in interviews, and a clear section at the start of the questionnaire seeking consent, along with a final reminder of their rights to edit responses or withdraw entirely before submission of the questionnaire. A further element of seeking informed consent was to consider the potential for perceived and actual power dynamics, as voluntariness 'may be compromised by the perception of adults as authority figures' (Frost *et al.*, 2016, p.166). Through possible perceptions of others, including the researcher, to be more or less superior or 'correct' than others, this may have impacted participants' beliefs and willingness to participate in the research. To mitigate this, the Information Sheet (Appendix 2) encouraged participants to see themselves as experts in

their own experiences, as discussed by Perkins (2019, p.161), encouraging honest reflection and sharing of experiences.

For all participants in this research, a further ethical issue to consider was the risk of inconvenience when taking up their time. To mitigate this issue, the data collection was conducted asynchronously online, enabling all participants to respond at a time that suited them. The use of online questionnaires and email interviews also enabled participants to be able to walk away from the research and return at a later date, thus giving them more control over their time and ability to respond.

An additional ethical consideration was the potential to cause undue stress or harm to any participant. Participants were informed and frequently reminded of their right to withdraw from the research should they feel that the process was at all detrimental to themselves. To ensure the comfort of the participants, questions asked did not focus on academic success, as this was not the focus of the study, and may have caused discomfort or anxiety for some participants. The questions asked focused on the experiences of the individual, and none of the questions were deemed likely to elicit concern in regards to providing a 'right answer'.

It was made clear to all participants through the information (Appendix 1; Appendix 2) provided prior to completion of the questionnaire and reiterated during the interview process, that the research would be anonymous as the questions asked did not require any participant to name themselves or identify any other individual at any time, mitigating the potential that participants would discuss others who may be identifiable from the data collected. Whilst it was possible that participants would be known to one another, the participation of any individual or setting would not be disclosed at any point, with pseudonyms used in place of any names or geographical locations. Also, as acknowledged by BERA (2018, p.21) it may be impossible to prevent participants

discussing their participation with other people, however, it was not anticipated that the questions asked would yield any particularly sensitive data, or that such discussions would be detrimental to the welfare of the participants, as participants may naturally discuss their experiences of the pre-service qualification with others outside of the research. In regards to this potential issue, the study was designed so that each participant, and participant group would participate in the research process separately from one another as advocated by O’Leary’s triangulation approach (2021, p.177).

Whilst there may be some benefit for each of the interview participants in the opportunity to reflect on the experiences and potentially improve their practice, it was deemed unnecessary to reward the participants for their engagement with the research, as this may have encouraged participation of those who were uncomfortable with the research process. The design of the research was shared with all participants from the initial contact, and it was made explicit that participants would not be compensated in any way, however, it was hoped that the findings of the research would be beneficial for all participants in regards to developing a greater understanding of their experiences in supporting the development of professional knowledge for their future as a tutor.

A final consideration was the storage of data collected from both methods. As explained on the Questionnaire (Appendix 1), Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and in the online consent forms (Appendix 3), an anonymised data set from each method was stored securely in a password protected cloud-based storage account provided by the University of Sheffield. In addition to this, all emails related to the email interviews were archived in this secure storage location, with any personal details such as names and email addresses redacted and the original emails deleted.

4.7 Data Analysis

The analysis of the data collected involved two distinct processes, firstly reviewing the data immediately following the collection, and conducting an initial analysis of each question and response. This analysis took place initially following the completion of the data collection method, with each of the responses being considered question by question. The data collected was input into Quirkos (2021), with each participant being provided an anonymous identifier, using numbers for each participant group.

Questionnaire responses were identified as Q1-Q20, and Interview responses as I1-I4. This system enabled all responses to maintain anonymity and to ensure consistency in analysis.

Figure 4.1: Coding



Initial analysis involved simply reading through the participant responses to each section, identifying responses that either responded to certain questions such as demographic data, or had similar responses to other participants. Adding 'bubbles' labelled with clear themes for these responses allowed Quirkos to highlight sections of each transcript in predetermined colours, linking all responses within each theme. These themes could then be coded to subthemes, for example, responses regarding questionnaire participant's current levels of qualification were all coded together, resulting in 42 comments highlighted from the 20 questionnaire participants. Following this, additional codes for subthemes were added to separate the 20 participants into the varying levels of qualifications held, from Level 3 up to Level 8, as shown in Figure 4.1.

Using Quirkos enabled an initial analysis in relation to each topic covered in the questionnaires, adopting a thematic approach as advocated by Braun and Clarke (2022, p.76), through focusing on the whole data set, and exploring shared meaning through the identification of themes within the findings (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.77). Using Quirkos software for this initial analysis was beneficial in both managing the data sets, as well as establishing a process for coding and thematically organising the data, as advised by Coe *et al.* (2021, p.292). An example of a transcript coded through Quirkos is provided in Appendix 6.

Following this initial analysis, a more detailed analysis process was conducted, examining responses from both data sets, discussing 'commonalities and divergences in the experience of the same phenomenon' (O'Leary, 2021, p.58). These similarities and polarities were then considered in relation to the literature previously reviewed, analysing each key theme in relation to the research question. This approach then led to the second stage of the analysis, coding the data and analysing the findings in relation to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020a, p.75) value creation framework, considering the value of the Level 3 qualification in preparing students to become competent professional practitioners within the ECEC workforce when qualified.

Nowell *et al.* (2017) drew on Braun and Clarke (2006, p.87) to highlight how thematic analysis can be beneficial, enabling researchers to examine perspectives of multiple participants, and further reflected on the work of Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.289) to explore the concept of trustworthiness in relation to findings and analysis of data. To affirm trustworthiness within this study, particularly within the initial stages of organising and analysing the data, the six phases of thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p.87; Nowell *et al.*, 2017, p.4) were followed: firstly, familiarising myself with the data collected, and postulating on potential themes, which strengthened my understanding of the data

collected. The second phase, generating initial codes, allowed for identification of a number of themes within the two data sets, as well as providing the opportunity to reflect on the way the data was viewed, initially exploring data horizontally, question by question, before exploring the data vertically, participant by participant. This allowed for a deeper understanding of the responses to each of the questions asked, and with the use of Quirkos, allowed progression into the third stage of the analysis: searching for themes. Through using Quirkos software, coding responses from each individual participant enabled the identification of prevalent themes, building on some of the themes expected from the first phase of analysis, but also identifying new and emerging themes, particularly from the interview data, such as the prevalence of discussion-led learning. The fourth phase as described by Braun and Clarke (2006, p.91) and Nowell *et al.* (2017, p.4) was the most detailed, as by reviewing the themes, it not only required a considerable understanding of the themes, but also a clear and detailed understanding of how these themes had emerged from the data sets, and how they fitted within the data as a way of answering the established research questions. Through this revision and refining of themes, phase 5: defining and naming themes was achieved. The sixth phase, producing the report, then required a clear structure, providing a framework for the discussion of what findings had emerged from the data sets.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020a, p.75) value creation framework was used to structure the reflection of the themes discussed within Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, drawing these through the study in relation to the themes that emerged from the findings. This then provided the structure for conducting an interpretative analysis of the findings of this study, considering the three key research questions:

- How does a Level 3 ECEC qualification prepare students for professional practice?

- What do the experiences of a Level 3 qualification contribute to professional practice in the ECEC workforce?
- How do tutors provide opportunities for professional learning on Level 3 ECEC qualifications?

4.8 Summary

Through the process of designing and refining the methods selected for conducting this research study, there were a number of changes made in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. Original plans to conduct a case-study investigation into the experiences of those undertaking or supporting the delivery of a Level 3 EYE qualification within a single college-based provider were adapted, with plans made instead to engage with current and former practitioners who had experienced undertaking a Level 3 EYE qualification, as well as current tutors who deliver a range of Level 3 ECEC qualifications. This meant that the findings of this study revealed more than anticipated, and allowed for a broader view of the range of Level 3 qualifications than originally planned. Similarly, plans for focus groups and face to face interviews were replaced with email interviews, respecting the time and workload of volunteer participants, and giving a more diverse perspective of those delivering Level 3 EYE qualifications in four different settings across the country, rather in just one college-based setting. Overall however, these changes were beneficial to this study, and enabled the selected methods to gather meaningful data in order to investigate the experiences of practitioners engaged in professional practice regarding their training and professional learning within the Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) sector, and to listen to the previously overlooked voices of the tutors responsible for the delivery and assessment of such qualifications.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter sets out the findings from first the questionnaire, and then the interviews, before reviewing and summarising the findings from both data sets. Various approaches to analysing the data were undertaken, utilising an inductive, experiential approach to thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2022, p.10), seeking to ‘theorise the socio-cultural contexts, and structural conditions, that enable the individual accounts that are provided’ (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.85). Initially this was achieved through examining participants’ responses within the context of the qualifications, and as advocated by Byrne (2021), acknowledging recurrent themes as important, but placing greater importance on meaning drawn from the responses. This process then provided the means to analyse the data further through the lens of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner’s value creation framework (2020a, p.75) throughout Chapter 6 in order to explore the value of the Level 3 ECEC qualification in preparing students to become competent professional practitioners when qualified. The following chapter compares the findings to the existing literature and uses this initial analysis to explore potential ways in which these findings could determine effective approaches to training and qualifications of the ECEC workforce in preparation for professional practice.

5.2 Questionnaire data

As discussed in the previous chapter, the first method utilised to gather data was an online, self-completion questionnaire. Participants recorded consent (Appendix 1) before being permitted to answer any of the questions, and then proceeded through five sections, each focused on a different aspect of their experience, or on them as an individual. Participants were then given a final opportunity to reflect on and agree to their participation before submitting their responses. The final questionnaire (Appendix 1) was

responded to by 20 participants over the course of its 8 week availability, with no responses recorded in the final week. Each respondent was then allocated a pseudonym of Q1 to Q20 in order to maintain a unique identifier.

In using an online, self-completion questionnaire, there was no way to determine the number of participants who engaged with the research but did not complete and submit the questionnaire. To enable a more detailed and accurate analysis of the data collected from the questionnaire, the first stage of data analysis relied on a simple approach to open coding, reviewing the responses to each question one by one. What became evident from this initial analysis was the need to review the data within the context of the demographics of each participant. This review was significant, providing greater context to the responses, due to the wide range of existing and prior qualifications within ECEC, as well as the diverse pathways that these participants have followed in their careers. Without considering this context, it is possible that some of the nuances of the participants' responses may have gone unnoticed, and that analysis of some responses, particularly from those who had completed older qualifications, may have been viewed differently if compared to current standards and expectations.

5.2.1 Demographic of Participants

Participants who responded to the questionnaire were predominantly female, with only 1 male participant. This was not unanticipated, aligning with the demographics of the sector, with only 3% (Weinstein, 2020) of the sector reporting as male. Those who responded ranged across all age ranges from 16-20 to 60-65, as well as those who had trained in the 1980s, to those who were training in the 2020s. This provided an interesting contrast to be able to compare those who had recently completed qualifications, and those who had completed them a number of decades ago, potentially when requirements differed, and certainly before the existence of any curriculum or qualification expectations. What was

clear from the range of responses was the complexity of the qualifications available for students preparing for working in the ECEC sector. There were a wide range of job titles reported, as shown in Tables 4.1, 4.2, and 4.3, which also reflects the range of nomenclature and career paths, some of which are the same but called different things, or similar but viewed differently, which only adds to the discrepancies within the ECEC sector, and within the qualifications themselves.

5.2.2 Qualifications undertaken

Of the responses to the questionnaire, 8 participants had completed an NVQ qualification, 10 had completed a BTEC qualification, and 2 participants had completed a more recent EYE qualification. The duration of each qualification varied, with 5/8 NVQ courses lasting less than one year, in comparison with the BTEC and EYE courses that lasted 18 months to 2 years. One BTEC student reported completing the course in less than one year, and one BTEC student reported taking longer than 2 years to complete, as shown in Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3.

Table 5.1 NVQ participants

Participant #	Duration of study	Decade of study	Current Qualification level	Current Job Title
Q1	18m → 2y	1990s	3	Early Years Practitioner
Q2	< 6m	2010s	7	No longer in ECEC workforce
Q7	6m → 1y	2000s	6	No longer in ECEC workforce
Q9	6m → 1y	1990s	5	Early Years Lecturer
Q10	6m → 1y	2000s	7	Teacher
Q11	18m → 2y	2000s	6	Educarer
Q12	18m → 2y	2020s	6	Early Years Practitioner
Q16	6m → 1y	2000s	5	Manager

Table 5.2 BTEC Participants

Participant #	Duration of study	Decade of study	Current Qualification level	Current Job Title
Q3	18m → 2y	1980s	7	Retired
Q4	18m → 2y	1990s	8	Early Years Lecturer
Q5	18m → 2y	2000s	7	Early Years Teacher
Q6	18m → 2y	2010s	6	Other
Q8	18m → 2y	2010s	7	No longer in ECEC workforce
Q13	18m → 2y	2010s	6	Teaching Assistant
Q14	6m → 1y	2010s	3	Student
Q17	18m → 2y	2000s	3	Other
Q18	> 2y	2000s	6	Early Years Practitioner
Q19	18m → 2y	2000s	7	Early Years Lecturer

Table 5.3 EYE Participants

Participant #	Duration of study	Decade of study	Current Qualification level	Current Job Title
Q15	18m → 2y	2010s	4	Early Years Educator
Q20	18m → 2y	2010s	5	Student

It was interesting to note that there were no discernible differences between the qualifications taken, and the likelihood of those participants having continued to degree level qualifications. Additionally, there were no clear trends between the time period the qualification was undertaken, and an increased likelihood of having achieved a degree level qualification, nor were there any obvious indicators of any particular qualification being significantly less likely to lead to access into higher education. Whilst this may be a reflection on the type of participants who were willing to participate in the study, and not

generalisable to a wider population of Level 3 qualified practitioners, it was surprising to note that completion of a NVQ course did not prevent these participants from progression to undergraduate and postgraduate degree level qualifications within the sector, which has previously been suggested (Hannaford, 2001; Kingston, 2007). It was also of note that of the 20 participants, only 9 could be presumed to still work directly with children in the ECEC workforce, as others had either retired, left the sector, or were currently working as lecturers, echoing the concerns of the NDNA (2019, p.11) and Christie & Co (2019, p.35), as discussed in Chapter 3 regarding sustaining levels of qualified staff in the ECEC workforce.

5.2.3 Initial Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2022, p.230) discuss how thematic analysis relies on the analysis of themes, which seek to 'effectively capture the diversity of responses' (*ibid.*), representing 'patterns of shared meaning, underpinned by a central organising concept' (*ibid.*). As participants were asked to reflect on their own experiences of undertaking their qualification, it was also important to consider the wider context of the participant demographics, and that quotations included within the analysis of the responses given were representative of this small sample of practitioners, but only potentially illustrative of a wider group of practitioners within the sector. Initial open coding that had been used when first attempting to analyse the data had resulted in the identification of 14 themes, each coded with a unique colour to highlight the responses. These codes served to highlight the differences in the responses, not only in the types of qualifications, but in the experiences individuals had, which may be a reflection on the type of qualifications offered at the time. In reviewing and analysing the responses to each of the questions, themes emerged within each of the sections of the questionnaire. When focusing on the content of the qualifications studied, commonalities emerged appreciating knowledge of theory, with

one participant stating that *“The theory side of the course allowed me to understand the causation of some of the situations I was faced with. Due to this context I was aware and prepared in handling the situation in the best way possible.”* (Q20), and an overall appreciation for practical knowledge and experiences emerging from the data set.

Knowledge and skills in observing and planning for children’s development was also frequently cited as beneficial, although one participant did comment *“I found the Observations and activity plans did not link in to how they are actually done in a setting”* (Q13), with other participants explaining that *“activity planning and observations didn’t really match at all, and I learnt that some qualified staff in the placement settings had never even heard of theorists.”* (Q19). These responses reflect the findings of Alexander (2001), Eraut (2004), and Tynjälä (2008) in suggesting that what is learned through the academic activities undertaken during the qualification, does not reflect what is required or observed in practice, requiring newly qualified practitioners to re-learn these skills and adapt to the expectations of practice within individual settings.

To explore this theme more effectively involved taking the data that had previously been reviewed horizontally question by question, and then reviewing it vertically participant by participant. To aid with this analysis, the software Quirkos was utilised, inputting the responses from each individual participant with a clear identifier, labelling the questionnaire participants Q1 through to Q20. This analysis enabled a clearer view of each of the participants and the contexts in which they may have studied, as shown in Tables 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.4. Braun and Clarke (2022, p.230) further identified the concept of a ‘bucket theme’, where everything that is said about a topic gets grouped together, essentially becoming the theme. This effectively reflects the initial use of Quirkos in identifying every response that was linked to a topic, in order to be able to further identify and code responses within these themes. From the initial 14 themes that were identified, analysis through Quirkos provided a visual representation of the data, and the number of

themes identified increased to 35, with the most common themes represented as the largest of the bubbles, as shown in Figure 5.1. When reviewing these themes, it was then straightforward to identify where more prevalent themes could be used to draw together sub themes. The resulting analysis identified the following key themes emerging from the first round of analysis:

- Practical Experience - mentioned 62 times
- Support/Supervision/Mentoring - mentioned 57 times
- Tutor skills/attributes - mentioned 52 times
- Professional skills/knowledge - mentioned 48 times.

Closer analysis of these four themes was undertaken, in relation to the research questions, and the contexts in which the participants studied. A second round of analysis identified a further 9 themes within the data, which were used to provide a deeper level of analysis in relation to demographic and qualification details.

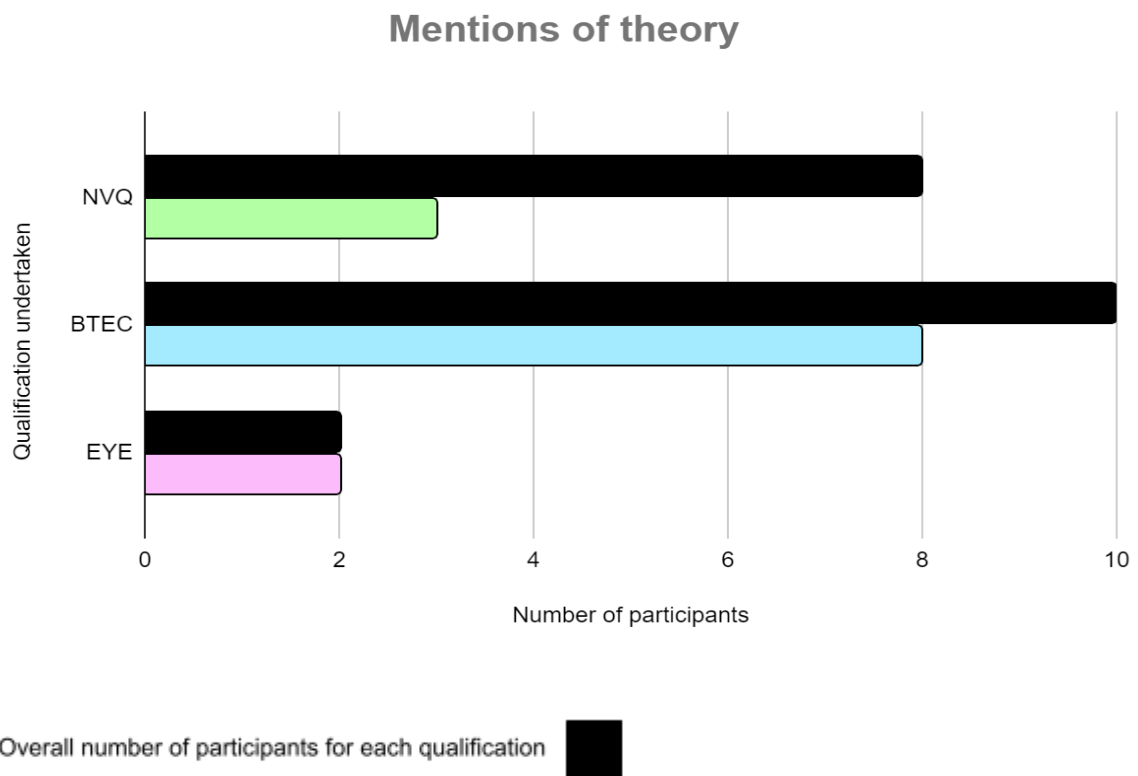
Figure 5.1 - Initial Coding in Quirkos



Quirkos proved invaluable for collating and analysing the data at this level, as coding from the first round of the analysis was easily visible, allowing for additional coding and grouping based on a deeper analysis of the responses. By linking smaller themes to larger, overarching themes, a more nuanced view of the findings was easily visible and accessible for analysis. Being able to see the themes grow and sort by each bubble was also useful, providing the means to create visual representations of the data.

Visualising the data also permitted identification of responses that were more prevalent within some qualifications, such as mentions of theory, shown in Figure 5.2, comparing the number of participants mentioning theory and theoretical knowledge within their responses, in comparison to the number of participants who undertook that qualification.

Figure 5.2 - Courses covering theory



In considering these responses, it can be presumed that BTEC and EYE qualifications were more likely to have provided students with opportunities to learn about relevant

theory than NVQ qualifications. Furthermore, this level of analysis identified the range of subjects studied within each qualification, and the variety that arose, particularly when considering the differences in the expectations of each qualification, and the time that qualification was undertaken. This helped to give some indication of the breadth of topics covered by each qualification, and of the baseline of knowledge students may have once they are newly qualified. Table 5.4 shows the range of qualifications and the number of topics studied by each participant, along with the decade in which they undertook the qualification.

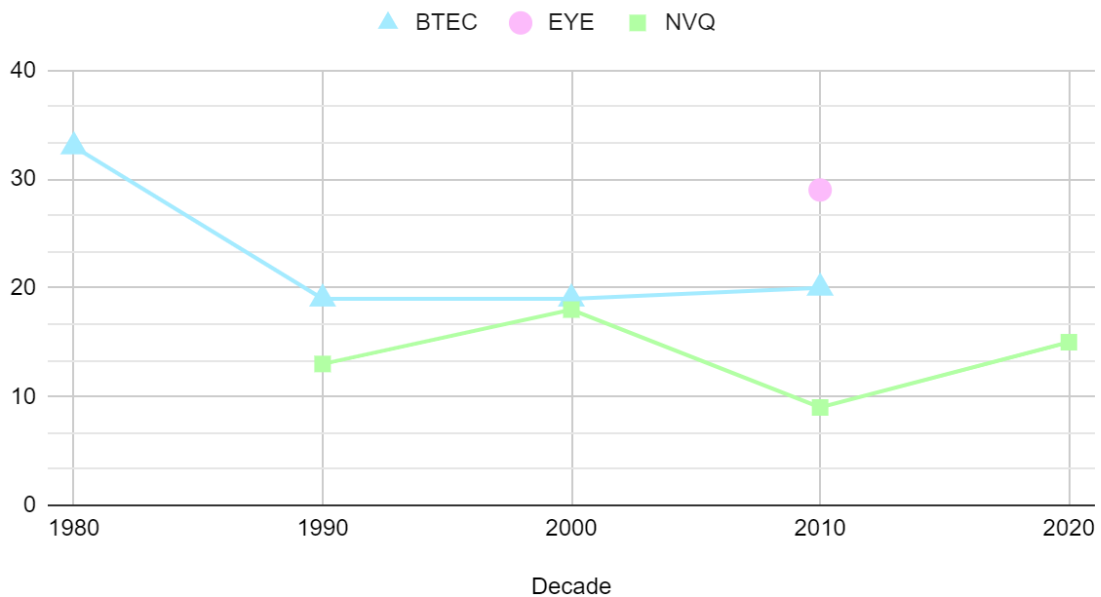
Table 5.4 Number of Topics Studied

NVQ	Date	BTEC	Date	EYE	Date
Q1=17	1990s	Q3=33	1980s	Q15=26	2010s
Q2=9	2010s	Q4=19	1990s	Q20=31	2010s
Q7=30	2000s	Q5=19	2000s		
Q9=9	1990s	Q6=17	2010s		
Q10=26	2000s	Q8=17	2010s		
Q11=10	2000s	Q13=19	2010s		
Q12=15	2020s	Q14=26	2010s		
Q16=6	2000s	Q17=20	2000s		
		Q18=13	2000s		
		Q19=23	2000s		
Mean = 15		Mean = 21		Mean = 29	
Range = 24		Range = 20		Range = 5	

While the majority of the courses covered a range of topics, there were no identifiable trends for the type of qualification, or for the time periods in which the qualifications were undertaken, as seen in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3 - Topics studied by decade

Average number of topics studied by decade



This may be a result of asking participants to choose the topics covered to the best of their recollection, from a list of topics collated from programme specifications. With the EYE qualification being introduced in 2014, trends are hard to currently discern. With the number of topics selected ranging from 6 to 33, there would undoubtedly be a considerable difference in the knowledge held by these practitioners once qualified, further adding to the discrepancies noted within the sector and the confusion over which qualifications are deemed 'full and relevant' as identified by Nutbrown (2012b, p.17). It is worth considering however, that as there is a considerably smaller range of responses from the EYE qualifications post 2014, that perhaps this is currently being addressed through delivery of current qualifications, and further research in this area may indicate a change in trends.

When mapping these qualifications and the topics covered to the current EYE 'full and relevant' criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013, p.3), discrepancies were evident, where none of the topics deemed as necessary were covered by 100% of the participants during their

training. This could be attributed to the lack of criteria and standards when some of the qualifications were completed. However, it was concerning that a pivotal topic such as Safeguarding and/or Child Protection was not covered during two participants' qualifications, when they were completed in the last two decades. These topics have been a priority within the sector for a considerable length of time, with initiatives such as the *Every Child Matters* agenda (DfES, 2003d) placing emphasis on practitioners supporting children to 'Stay safe'. Similarly, of the 20 participants, just 14 reported learning about First Aid, despite First Aid training being an expectation within the workforce as cited in the *National Standards for Under 8's Daycare and Childminding: Full day care* (DfES, 2003c, p.19). Of the 6 participants who did not cover First Aid training during their qualification, 5 of these completed an NVQ, which could indicate that work-based training routes may rely more on settings providing training for students, than in providing these within the qualifications.

Table 5.5 shows the number of participants who recall studying topics that map directly to the current EYE criteria (NCTL and DFE, 2013; DfE, 2018c, p.5) for qualifications to be deemed 'full and relevant'. In reviewing these responses, it was evident that there are a range of different approaches taken by qualifications in delivering and assessing the knowledge that may be required when preparing students for professional practice, and the breadth of knowledge gained through these qualifications will undoubtedly vary, depending on the qualification undertaken. These responses also raise further questions as to what knowledge can be expected as a foundation from which to start learning in practice once qualified, and whether these qualifications should be subject to further scrutiny to consider what knowledge is covered before practitioners qualify.

Table 5.5 - topics studied in relation to EYE criteria

EYE Criteria:	Identified by number of responses	% of responses
1. Knowledge of child development	05 - no theorists 15 - + theorists	25% 75%
2. Safeguarding	18	90%
3. Health and safety	16	80%
4. Wellbeing	08	40%
5. Communication	14	70%
6. Support the planning of and deliver activities, purposeful play opportunities and educational programmes	13 - planning activities 17 - play 08 - assessment of learning 12 - EY curricula 11 - literacy/numeracy	65% 85% 40% 60% 55%
7. Support children with special educational needs and disabilities	13 - SEND/Additional needs 14 - Equality, diversity & inclusion	65% 70%
8. Own role and development	11	55%
9. Working with others – parents, colleagues, other professionals	05 - with families 14 - with children 11 - with parents as partners 06 - with professionals	25% 70% 55% 30%

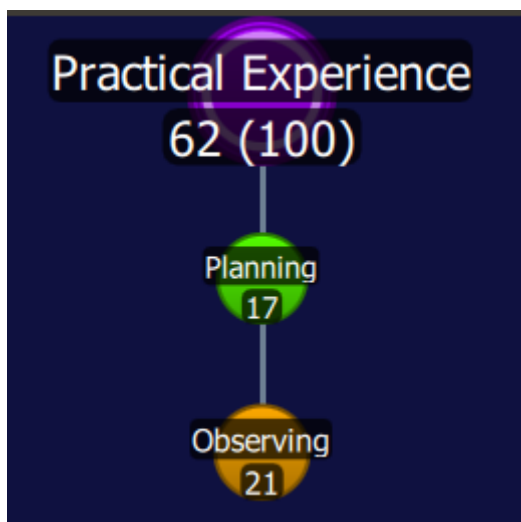
5.2.4 Key Themes

After focusing on the qualifications studied, analysis turned to the content of the responses to seek meaningful data regarding the participants' experiences of undertaking their Level 3 qualification. This second level of analysis also enabled a deeper exploration of the four key themes, focusing on:

1. Practical experience (Figure 5.4)
2. Support and Supervision (Figure 5.5)
3. Skills and attributes of tutors (Figure 5.6)
4. Professional knowledge (Figure 5.7)

The first theme, as shown in Figure 5.4, was Practical experience, which each of the 20 participants reflected on in some way within their responses.

Figure 5.4



Of the 62 responses identified, a considerable number of comments focused on the practical experiences they had had, and the benefits of this. 17 of 20 participants commented positively regarding the practical experiences they had whilst studying for the Level 3 qualification. A number of comments were made regarding the positive impact and experiences of being 'on placement', and the opportunities to put "*what I had learnt in the classroom into practice*" (Q8), as well as how "*going on placements helps the students prepare for what working in Early Years is actually like*" (Q13). One particular response seemed to sum up what others had indicated, explaining how "*Placements were vital to the course not because it was a requirement but to allow you to put theory into practice safely. You have the opportunity to be a novice and make mistakes so long as you learn from them.*" (Q5).

The responses regarding placements and practical experiences all shared a belief in the importance of these opportunities for students to gain hands-on experience, to understand what the job entailed and to develop knowledge, skills and confidence whilst working

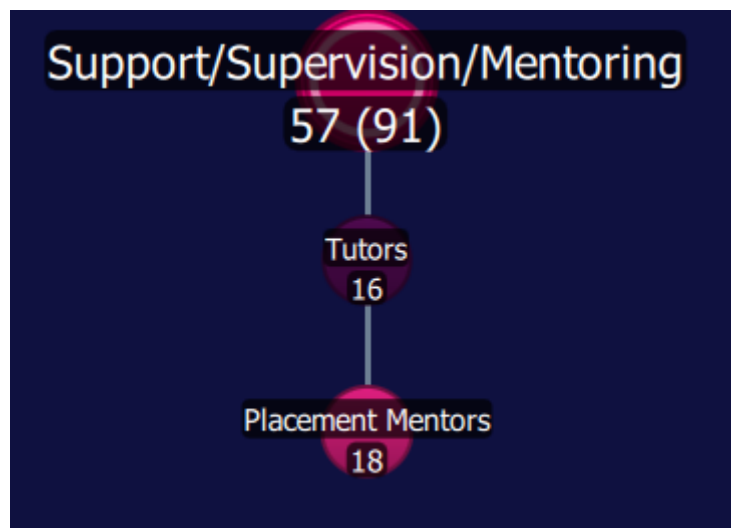
within the safe confines of 'being a student'. Some responses also made clear links between what had been learnt in the classroom, and the development of their practical skills, explaining that "*Through supporting my activities and ideas I was able become confident in my choices. I adapted my practice so I could incorporate all of the best practices I had seen and incorporate those into mine; to give the children the best version of me.*" (Q20). This participant demonstrated reflection and identification of good practice to develop practical skills, but also reflected elements of Vincent and Braun's (2011, p.782) notions of conformity, taking on the characteristics of professionals around them, and Webber's (2016, p.60) consideration of how professionalism is adopted and cultivated through matching behaviours to the expectations that are observed in practice.

Most comments were predominantly positive, with one participant citing that "*it was the most valuable part*" of the qualification (Q17). Other responses reflected on less favourable elements of these practical experiences, such as "*the energy and enthusiasm needed to do a 10 hour shift from 7am*" (Q19); and "*Being exposed to every bodily fluid known- children poo, wee, sneeze, bleed, spit/dribble, vomit. It's important to not be squeamish and be prepared to clean it up.*" (Q5). One response noted the tendency of some settings to expect students "*to sit outside the classroom and complete admin work.*" (Q6). These responses highlight the importance of these practical opportunities being realistic, to provide clarity for students about what the practical work entails once qualified and employed. In addition, placements also needed to be supportive and appropriate in the expectations placed on the students, particularly in regard to the tasks undertaken. It is vital then, that practical experience "*has to be the 'right' experience*" (Q10) to support the student to learn and develop, as advocated by Eteläpelto and Collin (2006, p.237) in that the experiences gained shape the practitioner they will become.

The second theme, Support and supervision (Figure 5.5), was established from a wealth of responses, some focusing on being visited or supported in practice, assessing

competency and providing supportive feedback, and others focussed on the support provided by staff within the setting.

Figure 5.5

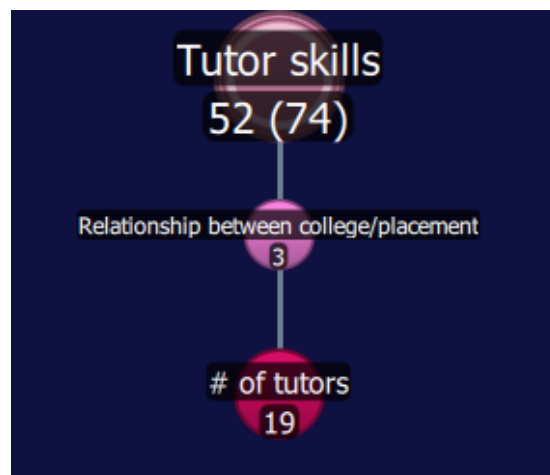


What emerged from this data set was the importance of having this range of support whilst working toward the qualification, with responses reflecting on how important it was *“to be placed with a teacher/ nursery practitioner who is interested in the students progress on the course.”* (Q3), and how *“In most cases, the staff in settings were invaluable in supporting you to learn on the job, guiding and mentoring, and knowing when to step back, or when to intervene.”* (Q19). This support appeared to be one of the most important parts of the qualification process. When reviewing the questionnaire responses to a question on what makes a ‘good’ placement experience, 17 of the 20 responses made reference to the staff that supported them whilst in the setting. These responses predominantly focused on how being made to feel welcome, being encouraged and allowed to get involved, and feeling supported were key to having an effective learning experience as a student. These responses also indicated a level of awareness and reflection on the importance of others within the context of the qualification, and the idea that becoming a professional practitioner does not happen independently. Instead it relies on practitioners in the community of practice to induct novices, and for experts to share

their knowledge, as discussed in Chapter 3. Thus social learning spaces (McDaniel, 2010, p.291; Soini *et al.*, 2015, p.642), and expertise (Wenger *et al.*, 2002, p.43; Kotzee, 2014, p.161) play a key role in the development of knowledge within communities of practice, particularly for the new members of that community.

Similarly, within the third theme of the Skills and attributes of tutors (Figure 5.6), participants' responses considered the support expected and given from staff within the college environment, supporting students to achieve the qualifications and become professional practitioners.

Figure 5.6



Participants reflected on “*some great memories of fun activities in and outside of the classroom, and of tutors who were invested in us as future practitioners.*” (Q19) and how “*Having tutors who have field experience is a bonus- they’ve been there, done that.*” (Q5).

Table 5.6 shows the number of tutors participants reported having engaged with throughout the duration of their course. From this data, patterns emerged with average numbers of tutors per type of qualification differing quite considerably. Participants who had studied an NVQ qualification were likely to have had just one tutor, with one participant standing out within this group, reporting as having had 7 tutors. Compared to

this group, those who had undertaken EYE qualifications had more than 4 tutors, and those who had completed BTEC qualifications engaged with more than 7 tutors.

Table 5.6 - Number of tutors engaged with

Number of tutors reported	Number of responses	% of responses
1	6	30
2	3	15
4	1	5
6	3	15
6-8	3	15
8-9	1	5
multiple/lots	3	15

This trend potentially indicates further discrepancies within the qualifications that may impact the breadth of knowledge a student holds when newly qualified, as suggested by Urban (2008, p.139) where 'being told *what to do*, what works and what counts' is likely to have a direct influence on the students behaviours, which as Wenger (1998, p.83) suggested, then becomes part of that community's practises and identities. If students only have one tutor to influence them, they are presumably more likely to reflect and adapt to the professional expectations of that person, whereas if students are exposed to a range of tutors, they will have the opportunity to observe and learn from a range of professional behaviours.

The professional skills, attributes and behaviours expected and observed of tutors were also interesting to note, with participants appreciating tutors who were "*willing to answer questions*" (Q1), as well as having "*Knowledge of early years, experience of the job*" (Q9). Both personal and practical skills were appreciated, with participants respecting tutors who had "*An ability to see and understand good practice. The ability to support an*

individual to improve by helping them to see where the development needs to take place.” (Q10), as well as those who had *“Contacts with different agencies or settings so that they can arrange talks with people in the field.”* (Q5). In considering how useful these attributes were in preparing them for professional practice, one participant reflected that

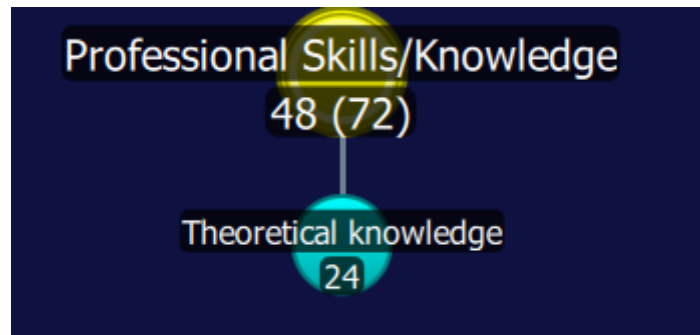
“Their own experiences helped me to understand what to do in scenarios at placement and without that knowledge I wouldn’t have been able to help. They have also helped me to become more confident which helped me to interact with parents and staff members. When they came to observe me within my setting they picked up on points that I could work on which helped me to become a more professional individual.” (Q15).

This is not to say that all participants reflected positively on their engagement with tutors whilst working towards qualifications. Whilst some participants felt that *“Tutors were really supportive and had a wealth of experience in different areas.”* (Q5), others reported that *“there were some tutors who did not engage the students well to set them off with a good start to their professional careers”* (Q6) or simply that *“My tutor was not very good.”* (Q7). A common response noted was that *“I had multiple tutors with differing knowledge and expertise in Early Years”* (Q14), with 60% of all participants identifying this, indicating that there may not have been much consistency of knowledge and experience amongst tutors, as experienced by students over a span of five decades. If students do not feel that tutors are experienced, knowledgeable, or supportive, there is potential for learning opportunities and the development of knowledge to be negatively impacted. Additionally, one participant considered whether the way that tutors engaged with students impacted their experience, sharing that

“most of the tutors were quite ‘old’ and sensible, they wanted us to respect that and be professional, especially representing them on placement. I’m not sure that was the most effective approach for some tutors who treated us like children, as we respected them less than tutors who explained why they were doing what they were doing and how it would help us as professional practitioners.” (Q16).

The final theme, Professional knowledge (Figure 5.7), was something that all participants commented on, with 11 of 20 participants making similar comments regarding the knowledge they gained from their qualification, and 16 participants commenting on the importance of specific knowledge when in practice.

Figure 5.7



A number of participants also focused on specific areas of knowledge, including knowledge of safeguarding being vital and how

“Safeguarding was a very important topic to learn as I feel although I was a student, when attending placement I still had a duty of care to notice for anything that may be wrong as well as reporting it to the correct member of staff. I found it particularly beneficial as prior to learning about this topic I was unaware of how subtle safeguarding issues can be as well as how they can be disguised so well.” (Q20).

Knowledge was also cited by 16 of 20 participants as being a key part of the qualification as well as an expectation of being a professional, with consideration of how the qualifications provided opportunities for knowledge to be developed and how assignments *“help me to consolidate the knowledge I had learnt in both placement and the classroom.”* (Q15) and *“help to bring the subject all together to seal your knowledge”* (Q18).

A number of comments considered the discrepancies between knowledge and practice, particularly between what was learnt in the classroom and what was experienced in

placement. As previously highlighted in relation to observations and planning, participant responses indicated that *“Placement presented challenges on the go that wouldn’t be talked about within learning experiences”* (Q2), with one participant stating that *“it just was nowhere near the same as how it is actually done so I felt you had got the practice but for no reason as you have to do it in a completely different way in the settings.”* (Q13).

Another explained that *“sometimes what you observe contradicts what the textbook says as every child is completely different.”* (Q20). Whilst these discrepancies may echo the research conducted by Alexander (2001), Eraut (2004), and Tynjälä (2008), the participants’ comments also draw attention to the purpose of the qualifications as a vehicle to prepare students to be qualified practitioners, and how these qualifications may require further consideration of the types of knowledge and methods of practice taught to students.

From considering the range of qualifications undertaken, and the responses given to the questionnaire, findings within this data set suggest that qualifications, whilst a good starting point for professional ECEC practitioners, are not sufficient on their own to prepare for employment within the sector. In response to a question asking participants what level of qualification they felt was sufficient to be deemed a professional practitioner who is ‘counted in ratio’, there were a range of responses, with 16 of 20 participants expecting a minimum of Level 3. Some provided additional qualifiers, such as

“I don’t think any course should be less than 15-18 months, or allow students to just work in a single setting like the apprenticeships do. That student may never see good practice, and I know from experience that apprenticeship assessors rarely have the knowledge of the subject that is needed to properly train practitioners. Instead the students just work through booklets and pass written assignments with a couple of lines copied from a textbook.” (Q19).

Another participant commented *“I have a real concern about solely work-based qualifications especially when they are in the same place or operated by the employer”*

(Q4). These concerns regarding apprenticeship-style training were not unique, with other participants' comments suggesting that "*Current qualifications seem to lack rigour. Also there seems to be too much compressed into L3.*" and that "*I would be worried that someone stopped learning after level 3 as I don't think it was in-depth enough.*" (Q2).

Furthermore, some responses considered whether the qualification was even necessary, explaining that "*Someone who is not qualified may not have the qualifications however have a wealth of experience and work very well with children. It's about an individual's interactions with the children being the most important factor*" (Q11). Moreover, it was also important to note that some practitioners reported that they could not rely on qualifications as a marker of knowledge or competency when recruiting staff, as "*students do not understand or come in at the level they expect after obtaining level 3 they say they are often below level 3 and they have to retrain them so it devalues the qualification.*" (Q12).

This comment questions the concept of having qualifications such as the EYE which affords a 'licence to practice', if the qualification is not guaranteed to have given the newly qualified practitioner a strong foundation of knowledge in order to be deemed competent in practice. This problem can be summarised by a further response, suggesting that as a student "*you don't know what you don't know, so it's only a foundation of learning that needs to be built on in practice and through cpd.*" (Q19). Furthermore, this participant also reflected that "*the L3 is a good foundation, but not sufficient for being an expert. It's hard to pinpoint what is lacking, as it's not something that could possibly be added, it's more that practitioners need extensive experience and that can't be added on in a 2yr course.*" (Q19). This is an important point to consider within this study: the Level 3 qualification may be the goal students set out to achieve, but this should be seen as the starting point for a student's learning journey, not the end goal.

In reviewing and analysing the responses to the questionnaire in this second round of analysis, it was evident that the participants' experiences of undertaking Level 3

qualifications varied greatly, and that the four themes may be common threads of experience, but within these themes, responses differed considerably. It was interesting to revisit these initial points of analysis in regards to the data collected from the interviews.

5.3 Interview data

As set out in Chapter 4, interviews were adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic to take place online, respecting the busy work lives of the participants. Four participants volunteered to be interviewed, and having had time to read the Information Sheet (Appendix 2) and consider their participation, each of these participants completed an online consent form (Appendix 3), using a unique link. This strategy enabled all participants to remain anonymous, being given identifiers of I1 to I4 from the start of their participation. Each interview was conducted slightly differently, with the first interview conducted over 6 weeks, and the second conducted over 4 weeks, with questions asked consecutively enabling a more dialogic flow to the interview. The questions asked were determined by prior responses and adapted to suit the flow of the interview process. For the third and fourth interviews, the participants requested all of the questions together to consider and provide responses in their own time, with responses being given all as a continuous dialogue, rather than in sequential dialogue.

5.3.1 Demographic of Participants

Demographic questions were not asked in the same way as in the Questionnaires, however, 3 of the 4 participants identified as female, and all were experienced in working within the ECEC sector, as well as within an FE college to deliver Level 3 approved qualifications. The four participants were also geographically diverse, located in different counties across England, with additional diversity provided by the qualifications delivered, with BTEC, CACHE and the new T-Level qualifications being delivered by these tutors.

All participants provided information as to how long they had been delivering the qualifications at Level 3, with the responses shown below in Table 5.7. As all participants had a number of years experience, this meant that responses were well informed by practice and experience in the role. This, alongside Silverman’s (2020, p.93) suggestion that online interviews satisfy criteria for reliability due to participants transcribing for themselves, provided a sound basis to conclude that findings from these interviews were both valid and reliable, and could be presumed to represent a sample of the ECEC tutor workforce.

Table 5.7 Tutor experience

Participant	Length of time delivering Level 3 qualifications
I1	7 years
I2	4 years
I3	10 years
I4	2 years

5.3.2 Key Themes

In the same way that the Questionnaire data was analysed, data collected from the interviews was also input to Quirkos, with initial analysis reflecting three main themes:

- Practical vs Academic focus
- Reflection on links to practice
- Discussion led learning

Each of the four interviewees mentioned a shift within the qualification when focusing on academic versus practical skills and knowledge within the Level 3 qualification. This shift was interesting because whilst one participant felt that the Level 3 course had “*moved from an academic course to a more practical based course.*” (I3), another suggested that

the course they delivered “*seems to be less and less focus on the practical side, and just getting them through and out the other side.*” (I1). This participant elaborated that “*There has been a significant shift from engaging in developing students' professional identity and understanding the complexity of working in an EY setting to just get them to achieve.*” (I1). In contrast, another participant reflected on having “*made some changes to the units delivered within our campus, to meet industry needs and to provide students with knowledge and skills for what we feel are the most important units for the local sector*” (I2). These two responses reflect contradicting experiences, with one participant indicating that they had the capacity to make decisions about the programme, whereas another participant reflected on decisions being imposed by a leadership team. This difference is likely to influence the way in which the qualification is perceived by the tutors delivering it. Those with experience in the ECEC sector were expected to be more likely to try to “*instil professionalism and the expectations required for practice and future employment*” (I3) within their taught practises, whereas those without this understanding of the sector may instead be “*focused on attainment and therefore do not value the importance of the creative aspects of the curriculum to support students to develop as a person and develop personal qualities needed to be an EY professional.*” (I1).

Additional to this consideration of the focus on both academic and practical skills, was the propensity for early years and health and social care (HSC) programmes to be merged, or be delivered by staff specialising in HSC rather than early years. Responses from these participants considered the importance of tutors having relevant experiences to draw upon, and how other tutors without a background in ECEC relied on their knowledge of being a parent in order to engage with students. Interviewees reflected on the impact this had on students, with leadership teams having “*appointed HSC staff to oversee placements and this has resulted in a dilution of being able to fully support students to understand what placement is really like*” (I1). They also identified how mixed messages

for students resulted in frustration, where *“we’re told how HSC’s the way for, you know, child care.”*, which then resulted in frustration for tutors, *“because I didn’t come into this job to do health and social care.”* (I4).

As expected for the time that the interviews were conducted, the Covid-19 pandemic and resultant national lockdowns were also mentioned as having impacted the balance between practical and academic knowledge and skills, with participants discussing how placement hours were reduced, and simulated activities introduced to compensate for this. It was also interesting to note that participants further reflected on their own experience and links to practice to offset lost opportunities, including reducing the required placement hours, and replacing these with simulated experiences to develop observation skills, and even sharing personal experiences and photographs. As one participant reflected, *“they found my links to practice and stories as well as the photos of activities were useful because they had not been into placement and this allowed them to imagine what it was like.”* (I1). This adaptation further suggests a clear benefit to tutors having had these experiences to be able to draw on, which participants considered within their responses, highlighting *“I have spent many years in the industry working with different age groups and in different settings, and wherever possible relate theory to practice.”* (I2), suggesting that *“Being able to link to practice provides meaningful experiences for students.”* (I3). Another respondent reflected how *“being able to provide students with stories about practice and your experiences helps them to see a realistic picture of the role and understand the complexity of being a teacher, carer, supporting children when many people do not perceive EYs to be a professional profession.”* (I1).

It was clear from the responses that this adaptation was particularly important over the past two years, where students have been unable to access or experience all of the opportunities that may have been available to them pre-pandemic. By being able to draw on personal knowledge and experiences, participants acknowledged that

"I have been able to share my experiences of working in an early years setting and planning relevant activities to children and keep it relevant for students. Especially last academic year my experience has been fundamental in providing students with an idea of the breadth of activities u could do with children." (I1).

Similarly, another participant reflected

"I was employed because of my industry experience. And I think that's really important when you are teaching these industrial skills, be it child care, or social care assistant, hairdresser, you know, I think it's really important that you've got someone that's been there done that, that can preach what they've practised." (I4).

In contrast to these benefits of being able to link classroom experience to practice, some comments suggested that having prior practice knowledge and experience and linking this to teaching was not consistent amongst all tutors within the FE college, considering that *"it has become apparent that how units are linked to practice can vary based on who is teaching"* (I1). The lack of consistency can impact on students, as *"some tutors have recycled their powerpoints and lesson content without adapting to ensure it's current and related to current policy and practice - this then results in students confused as to what they are using in practice"* (I1). These points regarding knowledge and experience reflect discussions within the literature regarding expertise (Kotzee, 2014, p.161) being salient in the teaching process, and the reciprocal nature of learning from others with greater expertise (Soini *et al.*, 2015, p.642) in order to participate and contribute within communities of practice (Wenger *et al.*, 2002, p.43). Similar to these points, participants also reflected on the benefits of students being able to share their experiences with one another, which was discussed by other participants in relation to the third theme:

Discussion led learning.

All of the participants commented on discussions as an effective method for delivery of information and reflection on experiences, discussing how *"We often encourage discussion throughout lessons making links to knowledge and experience gained in*

placement and discuss how they feel their own practice has developed" (12), and how *"Students are encouraged within the classroom to discuss their experiences and link to practice."* (13). The benefits were also considered, with responses highlighting how discussion-led learning can *"support students to feel confident to discuss and share ideas."* and how *"students develop more empathy and support for each other"* (11). It was also suggested that enabling opportunities for discussion and engagement with students on different level training courses was also beneficial, as this *"gave students on a lower level confidence to strive for something they may not have thought to do"* (11). This teaching approach was also cited as beneficial in developing supportive relationships between students and tutors, *"building a bond with students where they feel comfortable to come and seek support and guidance both academically and also professionally"* (11) as well as *"finding out about the students and how they operate and work, just through that conversation, that openness, and that open dialogue"* (14)

In reflecting on this final theme within the interview data, there were a number of commonalities between the questionnaire data and the interview data, including this consideration of the professional relationship between students and staff in colleges and practice-based settings. To summarise this second level of analysis of the two data sets, both were reviewed in comparison to one another, noting similarities and discrepancies.

5.4 Comparison of data sets

Reviewing the data collected from both the questionnaires and the interviews revealed a number of commonalities and discrepancies, with the most prevalent similarities being the links between practice and the classroom, and the importance of the support received whilst training. When reflecting on the findings from both data sets in relation to the links between placement-based learning and the classroom-based learning, it was evident that this played a significant role in preparing students for practice. In the questionnaire, 14 of

the 20 respondents focused on these links, reflecting how *“The theoretical understanding enabled me to apply knowledge in practical situations and to develop a strong practical skill set”* (Q19), as well as how academic reflections *“enabled me to consider my own strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the observed practice that was being used to evidence my competency”* (Q6). Similarly, all 4 interviewees reflected on how they *“encourage discussion throughout lessons making links to knowledge and experience gained in placement and discuss how they feel their own practice has developed”* (I2), along with the importance of *“making the academic classroom a safe space”* (I4) to be able to share experiences, and developing *“that community practice trying to share ideas and share that good practice”* (I4).

Similarly, the questionnaire participants all mentioned the support they had received, and how this support was beneficial to ensure a positive placement experience. Those experiences echoed what the interviewees reflected on when considering the support they gave the students, and how they worked in collaboration to support students to progress through the qualification, *“building a bond with students where they feel comfortable to come and seek support and guidance both academically and also professionally”* (I1), and in collaboration with others, where *“Increased support is provided in collaboration with setting for practical competency and academic support for assignments”* (I3).

When it came to identifying disparities between the two data sets, some questions were only asked of one participant group, which meant that responses were not identified in both data sets. However, through mapping the responses from both methods of data collection in Quirkos, similar themes and responses were easily identified to aid comparison, with very few responses that contradicted one another entirely.

5.5 Summary of findings

Through exploring and analysing each data set individually, and then in conjunction, it was apparent that the data collected from both the questionnaires and the interviews provided a varied range of experiences from those who had undertaken Level 3 qualifications and those who had supported the delivery of Level 3 qualifications in FE colleges across England. As these qualifications had been studied over a considerable time period, and in different ways, delivered through different awarding bodies, it was reassuring to observe so many commonalities. At the same time, it was fairly disheartening to observe how little had changed in over four decades, and the lack of consistency in the varied approaches that students experienced.

This chapter sets out these findings, as well as the initial analysis of the data collected. In order to extract further meaning from these data sets, analysis then returned to the literature, reviewing the findings of this study in comparison with the findings and research of others. In the next chapter, these findings are analysed and discussed in greater depth.

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75) was then applied, analysing the findings through the lens of this framework. The value creation framework (*ibid.*) provided an opportunity to analyse the data sets in greater depth. The aim was to examine the potential value creation, as determined by the responses of the participants, exploring the potential of the Level 3 qualification to align with the values of those working within the ECEC sector. This analysis was then used to discuss the potential value of the Level 3 qualification as a vehicle for preparing students to become competent professional practitioners when qualified. The following chapter discusses this analysis in greater detail.

Chapter 6: Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter critically discusses the findings reviewed in the previous chapter, considering the data collected from both the questionnaires and interviews in relation to the literature explored in *Chapter 2: Historical Context* and *Chapter 3: Literature Review*. Through initial thematic analysis, Chapter 5 explored the findings in regards to key themes arising from the data. These findings were then reflected on, using the historical, political, and practical focused literature as a lens to view and analyse the findings in relation to the Level 3 qualifications and training, as experienced by the participants. To frame this chapter, the data was discussed sequentially in relation to Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75), considering the ways in which the Level 3 qualifications prepare students for practice in the ECEC sector, and how the experiences of the participants provide answers to the research questions:

- How does a Level 3 ECEC qualification prepare students for professional practice?
- What do the experiences of a Level 3 qualification contribute to professional practice in the ECEC workforce?
- How do tutors provide opportunities for professional learning on Level 3 ECEC qualifications?

6.2 The Analysis Framework

Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75) provides the lens through which the data collected in this study can be viewed, and made sense of, in relation to the value the Level 3 qualification has in preparing students to join the ECEC workforce as qualified and competent professional practitioners. Wenger-Trayner *et al.* (2019, p.323) explored the concept of social learning, explaining how the practices of individuals are learning opportunities for others, and how learning interactions can

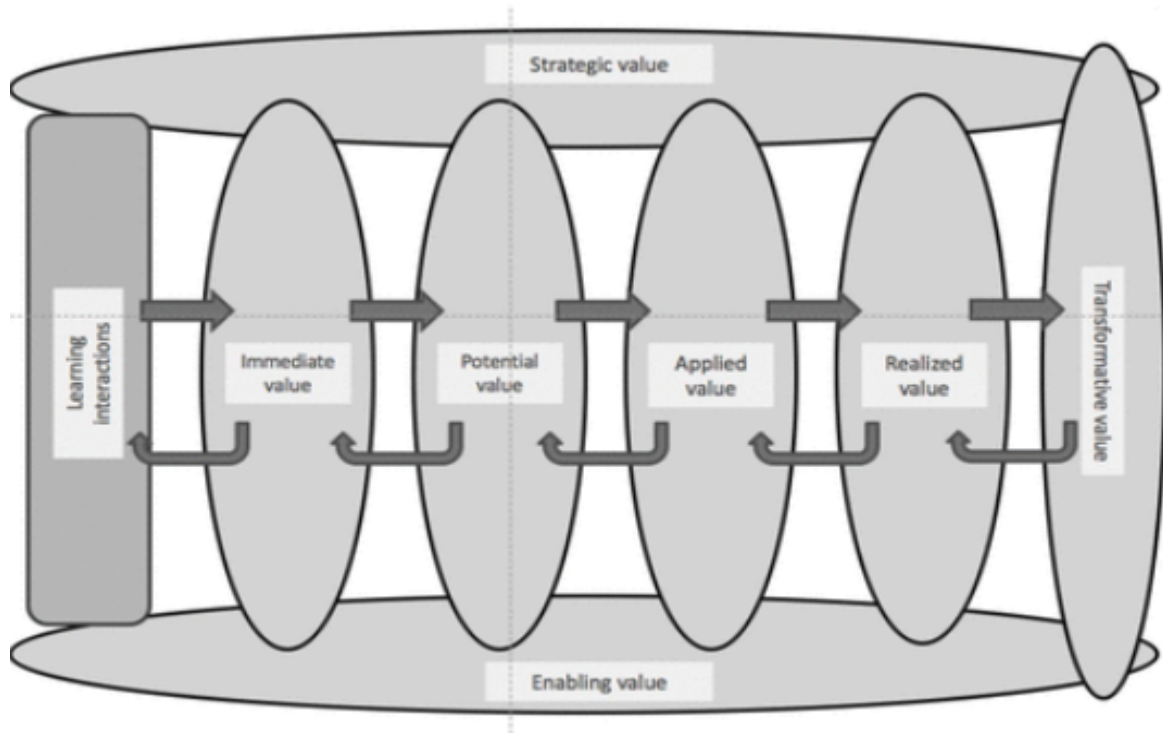
influence changes in practice. What is key within the theoretical framework for this study is the final element, where 'Learning comes full circle when they feed back these effects into their communities.' (*ibid.*). For a qualification to carry value that is positive and enabling for individuals, those that undertake the qualification should be able to reflect on the value of their qualification and identify where elements of the qualification were valuable, and to be able to articulate that value for themselves as individuals. For the qualification to be deemed valuable to the ECEC workforce, I would suggest that the qualification also needs to reflect Wenger-Trayner *et al.*'s (2019, p.323) suggestion that the valuable elements of the qualification would be opportunities for others to learn from, and therefore, influential for a wider audience than just the individual undertaking the qualification. Within the ECEC sector, this is vital, as Cottle and Alexander (2014, p.639) explain that those who are employed as qualified staff are expected to be working directly with children and families, and to be able to provide 'high quality' care and educational provision as appropriate to a wide range of communities and settings. Qualifications therefore need to prepare individuals not just for practice in regards to working with children and families, but also for working in collaboration with others, developing the necessary skills to support others to learn.

As shown below in Figure 6.1, eight value creation cycles 'contribute to participants' ability to make a difference' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.73), where 'social learning is theorised as loops that carry value creation across cycles and back.'

(Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2019, p.324). In this context, 'making a difference' is defined as the potential for newly qualified practitioners to develop sufficient knowledge and skills to competently practise as a professional within the ECEC sector. This means having the ability to enter the workforce with the potential to progress from being a novice, towards becoming an expert, and contributing to communities of learning. Firstly through learning from others, and eventually through what Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a,

p.75) consider to be an intricate and iterative process, progressing towards being the qualified staff within settings whom students observe and look up to as expert examples of good practice.

Figure 6.1 Value creation cycles in the framework (Wenger-Trayner *et al.*, 2019, p.324)



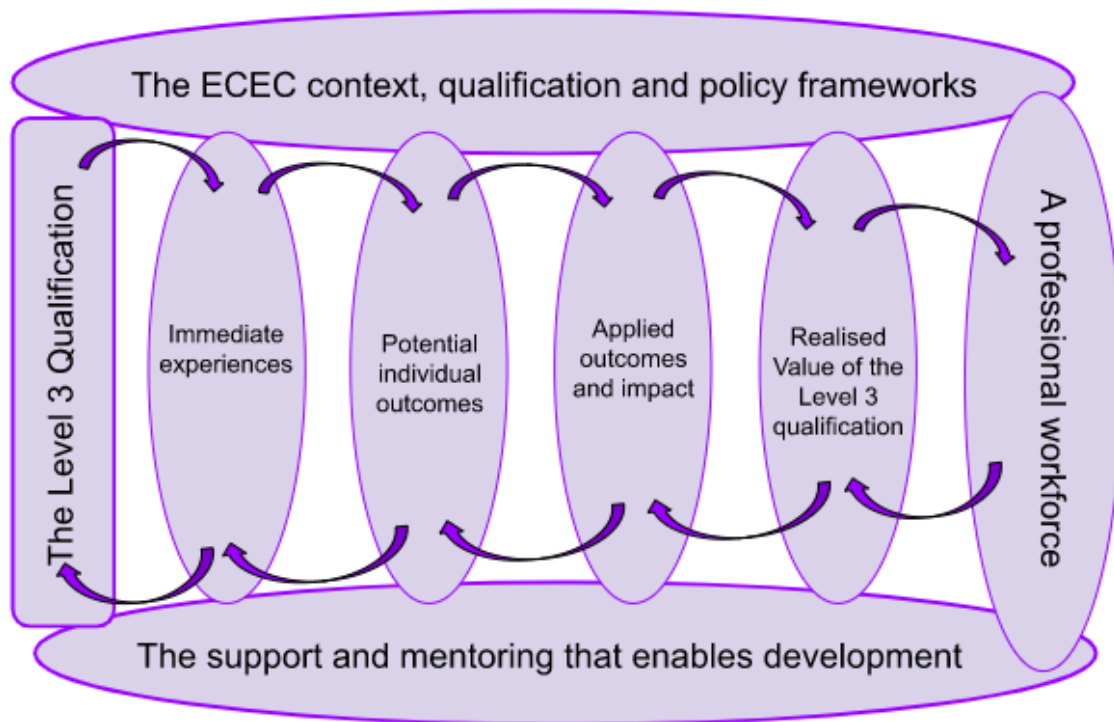
To analyse the data collected through this lens of this framework firstly required an understanding of the framework, and an idea of how it could be used to represent the potential value of the ECEC Level 3 qualifications. To begin with, the uppermost *Strategic value* can be understood to represent the stakeholders, context, and policy frameworks that act to provide a 'top down' approach that influences all aspects of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications. Beneath this, the *Learning Interactions* orient the *Strategic values*, providing the expected value of the opportunities for the Level 3 ECEC qualifications to be interacted with and understood by those undertaking, delivering, assessing and supporting engagement with the qualification. The *Immediate value* then provides the space for this

engagement to take place, and reflects initially on immediate experiences of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications. By taking this a step further and exploring the *Potential value*, the framework provides a lens to examine the benefits acquired through the learning opportunities provided on the Level 3 ECEC qualifications. Taking the exploration of the value of the qualification an additional step further, the *Applied value* then seeks to examine these skills, experiences and interactions in relation to ‘what you do with it’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75). This then leads into the *Realised value*, analysing the Level 3 ECEC qualifications beyond the level of the individual, considering the value of the qualifications for institutions, organisations and the reputation of the qualifications within the sector. The final value in the mid-section then seeks to analyse the *Transformative value* of the Level 3 EYE qualification, considering the wider impact of the qualification, the potential and broader ranging impact for the workforce, and what this implies for the ECEC sector. What is most relevant in regards to the findings of the study explored in Chapter 5 is the underlying value that ‘makes it all possible’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75), which is the *Enabling value*. In the context of this study, this is understood to be the human element of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications: the tutors that support students to succeed, and the workplace mentors that guide students to observe and understand effective practice within the ECEC settings.

This understanding of each cycle then led to adapting the visual representation of the framework to suit the context of this study, as shown below in Figure 6.2. This reinterpretation of the values framework then afforded a way of analysing the data collected from both the questionnaires and the interviews, using this theoretical framework to analyse the experiences of situated learning in the professional development of ECEC practitioners. This provided a structure through which to consider the value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, and the potential for the qualification to be the vehicle through which professionalisation occurs. This analysis then considers whether those who achieve the

qualifications are adequately prepared to join the ECEC workforce and to not only contribute to the provision of care and education within the sector once qualified, but also to contribute to the communities of practice, moving from novice to expert.

Fig. 6.2: Value creation within Level 3 ECEC qualifications



6.2.1 Strategic Value - The ECEC context, qualification and policy frameworks

The overarching cycle of the *Strategic value* of the Level 3 qualification in this context was taken to be the structures and requirements imposed by the existing policy and qualifications frameworks, that situate the learning on the qualification into a ‘bigger picture of what matters to whom’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.106). In this way, the strategic value of the qualification provides an understanding of not only the external expectations enforced through the qualification, in regards to established outcomes for the qualifications to meet, and aspirations of what the qualifications will

enable, but also 'the processes by which participants adopt, renegotiate or resist external expectations' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.107).

Chapter 2 set out the historical events that influenced changes within the ECEC sector, including the introduction of various policy agendas, and the establishment of various qualifications for the ECEC workforce. Throughout that chapter, a dominant discourse of divisive approaches is evident, establishing a poorly paid, and poorly valued, predominantly female workforce for those working with the youngest and often most vulnerable children. This then contrasts quite starkly in comparison with those who follow a standardised qualification and training route to become recognised as a member of the compulsory education teaching workforce. Whilst recent policy agendas have declared intentions to reform the ECEC workforce, Osgood (2021, p.172) observed that 'None of the reforms during this period meaningfully addressed structural issues associated with the sector such as poor pay, unfavourable working conditions, and a continued lack of parity with school teachers'. Instead, the historical context explored in Chapter 2 sets the scene for the continued division of care and education, through a fragmented and inconsistent approach that provides the context for the most recent iteration of the expectations of the ECEC sector in regards to training and qualifications, and the lack of affordance as to the importance of the tutors delivering the training and qualifications.

Chapter 3 established the current context of the ECEC sector in respect of expectations for qualifications and training. As explored in Chapters 2 and 3, policy development and enactment within the ECEC sector has been subject to continuous critique, and 'persistently framed by a rhetoric of 'raising quality' ... which provides justification for a constant need for workforce reform' (Osgood, 2019, p.199). This policy context acts to control the requirements and expectations of the sector, including the qualifications offered to meet the expected standards for the EYE qualifications to be deemed 'full and relevant' (NCTL and DfE, 2013, p.3). By establishing these requirements, all qualifications deemed

'full and relevant' need to 'meet the national requirements set by Ofqual for valid, reliable assessment and awarding procedures' (NCTL and DfE, 2013, p.3), which were explored in Chapter 3.3. Table 3.1 set out the specifications for 'reliable assessment' in the form of statements of expectation from fourteen different courses deemed 'full and relevant' on the DfE list of approved Level 3 EYE qualifications (DfE, 2014b). Each of these qualification specifications sets out an expectation for assessors to be occupationally competent, knowledgeable, qualified or experienced. However, only two of these fourteen courses provide further detail as to what qualifications or experience are required. This lack of clarity then appears to act as a barrier, preventing the consistent delivery of a coherent approach for all courses, failing to set a consistent and clear standard for those responsible for assessment of the course. This aspect is further discussed in 6.2.8 in regards to the ability of these assessors to support and mentor students appropriately.

Similarly, Table 3.1 also depicted the expected Total Qualification Time (TQT) for each course, highlighting the discrepancies within the expectations for how long a student should spend on the qualification, which range from 505 to 2,385 hours. Further differences were identified in relation to practice expectations, with many courses failing to identify exactly how long students should spend in practice whilst training, and other courses identifying a range of hours between 50 and 800 for students to spend in practice. Additionally, there were differences in Guided Learning Hours (GLH) for how long should be spent covering each topic within the course, which range from 250 to 1,080 hours.

Within this study, in response to the questionnaire (Appendix 1), there were a number of points raised that indicated the brevity of their training and the impact this may have on practice, stating that "*My course was 6 months long. I don't think this was enough to cover all essential aspects and meant some areas/topics were not covered in depth that they should have been*" (Q2), as well as how the course "*did not cover the full age range and so I finished without a thorough understanding and capability.*" (Q10). These concerns

echo the concerns raised almost a decade ago by Nutbrown's consultations (2012b, p.24), questioning how such brief training courses can provide sufficient time to develop the knowledge and level of understanding expected of practitioner who may be in charge of leading an ECEC setting and therefore, in a position to be influencing and leading the practice of others. This is key when considering that little has changed since Nutbrown's review (2012b), with qualifications failing to establish a minimum threshold of expectations of the length of time spent in practice, yet participants in this study clearly indicated the value of these opportunities to spend time in practice working alongside qualified practitioners.

A response to an interview question also highlighted competing priorities for time within the qualification, suggesting that

“the college is focused on students that have not attained english and maths ... having to juggle the level 3 qualification, placement and english and maths which results in students missing some sessions as maths and english are perceived as being more important” (I1).

This may suggest that whilst students are timetabled to complete a set number of hours on the qualification, they may not get the full amount of time focused on the EYE qualifications if they are also having to meet the expectations to achieve Level 2 qualifications in English and maths (Department for Education, 2017d, p.6; 2021a, p.28) within this time. Further pressures on time for tutors provide additional considerations of how time becomes a key factor in the qualification framework, and perhaps, is not fully considered in respect of what students need to gain from the qualification, but instead considers what needs to be evidenced as part of the qualification, with tutors explaining that

“staff have become more pressed for time and getting the desired outcome, staff are having to deliver to the outcomes in order to complete units. But also do not

have the time to adequately plan innovative lessons to help students fully appreciate their role” (I1).

Tutors also reflected on how difficult it could be for college training providers to *“find a course that fit the amount of guided learning hours that students need to be in college”* (I4). This further suggests that time to develop skills and reflect on practice as discussed by Nutbrown (2012a, p.22), is less of a priority than tutors being able to find the time to fit in the delivery of the courses to meet external expectations. There was also further discussion of how external expectations for evidence were influential on teaching strategies, with time being prioritised on a weekly basis to *“ticking off the standards, have they have they got X, Y and Zed, have they got enough evidence, have they been strong enough and sort of doing things like nappy changing and bottle feeding?”* (I4). This approach seems to indicate that the Strategic value of the qualification and what is understood of the external expectations are a dominating force within the training and qualifications for the ECEC workforce, dictating what is covered, and what is prioritised, perhaps at the expense of the students’ needs. In consideration of the Level 3 qualification as a way of providing appropriate knowledge and skills prior to joining the ECEC workforce, this then suggests that the range of qualifications available, and differences in workloads and expectations of time taken, may in fact serve to dilute rather than strengthen the quality of training provision across the ECEC sector.

Additionally, a point of discussion that arose from the findings in Chapter 5 is that of the 20 responses to the questionnaire (Appendix 1), only 18 participants undertook a course that included a unit of study on safeguarding and/or child protection. Similarly, just 14 of the 20 participants undertook a course that included First Aid training, despite this being a key expectation in practice (DfE, 2021a, p.27). The only subject studied by 100% of participants during their Level 3 qualification was child development, although there were

also discrepancies cited there, with 25% of questionnaire participants having studied child development without learning about relevant theory or theorists. These differences in the experiences of the 20 participants indicate a further lack of coherence evident in the qualifications studied. This echoes the trends discussed in Chapter 2, in that despite various calls for standardisation and initiatives attempting to ensure uniformity of training, from the ANTC in 1932 (Mess, 1998, p.111), the NNEB in 1946 (Wright, 2013, 1.652), to NVQs in 1987 (Department of Education and Science, 1989, p.19) and the EYE in 2014 (NCTL and DfE, 2013), none of the policy agendas or political shifts have made concerted efforts into providing a consistent approach to training routes into the ECEC workforce. Furthermore, none of the policy agendas published since the inception of the Board of Education in 1899, have provided a definitive minimum threshold of expectations for qualifications. Nutbrown's report (2012a, p.17) indicated a desire from the ECEC workforce not to move towards a single, uniform training route, but for the Government to 'ensure that courses are more demanding and robust, and reduce the proliferation in their number.' (2012a, p.25). However, this lack of consistency or standardisation appears to undermine the value of the qualifications offered. This was further commented on by questionnaire participants, who suggested that "*Current qualifications seem to lack rigour*" and that "*I would be worried that someone stopped learning after level 3 as I don't think it was in-depth enough*" (Q2). This demonstrably echoes Nutbrown's summation of the sector having 'A lack of trust amongst employers as to which qualifications properly equip potential staff to work effectively' (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.17).

Consequently, without a clear strategy for a standardised approach to preparation for professional practice, it appears that the strategic value of the qualification is in question, with the lack of consistency, and therefore, a lack of trust providing further opportunity for policy to divide and deride the ECEC workforce, rather than provide a unified and cohesive approach to preparing the workforce for practice. These problems highlight the

systemic challenges and gaps in providing a unified and cohesive approach to preparing the workforce for practice. Whilst uniformity is not a desired outcome, it appears that cohesion and consistency of the policy and training expectations for the ECEC workforce would be more effective in providing the strategic value than the current expectations.

A further point of analysis for the Strategic value of the qualification draws together Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020a, p.107) consideration of how individuals may 'adopt, renegotiate or resist external expectations', with the findings from this study. In reviewing the data gathered, there is evidence of the propensity of tutors who were interviewed to have adapted their teaching of the qualification to suit student or sector needs, with tutors explaining how

"I have made some changes to the units delivered within our campus, to meet industry needs and to provide students with knowledge and skills for what we feel are the most important units for the local sector" (I2)

However, there was little evidence that tutors felt in a position to resist external expectations of the qualification. One participant openly discussed how they went out of their way to provide opportunities for students to gather the evidence needed for the qualification, perhaps renegotiating expectations of placements by "*phoning around friends, family who had babies and saying 'right we've got a couple of students, I need this'" (I4)* in order to "*secure some babies so the students could pass because otherwise they'd fail" (I4)*. Similarly, another interviewee explained how tutors would "*complete a progress tracker each term or when appropriate so we can monitor whether students are on track" (I2)* and potentially make referrals to provide additional support for those who were not meeting the expectations of the course. This determination to support students' success was not discussed in as much detail by other participants, even when it was evident that the course did not provide what it used to. This was discussed by one participant who reflected on a case where a student was unable to get a place at

university because the specification of the course had changed, leaving the student ineligible to continue studying their chosen career path at that time. One participant also reflected on how the change of assessment expectations on the qualification appeared to have a detrimental effect on achievement, as *“when the exams came into the BTEC level three, we were still getting high grades, but a lot of the students weren’t getting those triple distinction stars, they were getting like two Ds and a Distinction star or something like that”* (14). Yet participants did not mention any consideration of how this impact could be ameliorated through any kind of adaptation to delivery or potential resistance to external expectations.

Overall, in regards to the Strategic value of the Level 3 EYE qualification, it can be surmised that whilst policy frameworks have been implemented in various ways in numerous attempts to standardise the qualification and training expectations, there are still too many variables to control within the wide range of qualifications currently deemed ‘full and relevant’. In analysing the value of the Level 3 EYE qualification as a vehicle for transforming students into professionals within the ECEC workforce, the policy context is inconsistent, and at times incoherent in its attempts to reform and professionalise the workforce. Additionally, whilst tutors delivering courses may have some ability to make adaptations in the way that they engage and comply with expectations of the qualifications, they are not in a position to openly resist the top down approach enforced by various policy and qualification frameworks. Chapters 2 and 3 provide a context for this overarching value of the qualification, but in relation to the findings explored in Chapter 5, it can be assumed that this overarching value simply provides a basis for the continuous devaluing of the ECEC workforce, reinforced by the lack of, and changes to policy direction, and the overwhelmingly dominant perspective of the ECEC workforce as unskilled as identified by Cooke and Lawton (2008, p.27).

6.2.2 The Level 3 Qualification

At the start of the main cycles of analysis within Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75; Fig. 6.1), is the cycle of *Orienting Value*, which in this study is the expectations and landscape of the Level 3 qualification itself. This cycle provides the framework to examine the findings explored in Chapter 5 in relation to the broader landscape and expectations of Level 3 qualifications undertaken and delivered. This includes the variety of qualifications, and the expectations of these qualifications from the perspective of both students and tutors. Nutbrown (2021, p.240) avers that 'A qualification should stand as evidence of what early childhood educators know and can do', which is key to understanding this cycle within the framework, exploring the discrepancies between expectations and standards set to define competence when performing in practice, and the wider knowledge base within the field of ECEC. If the qualification can be understood to carry value based on the expectations of what that qualification will provide, then it is more likely that the value of the qualification can be perceived as a proxy for the value of the individuals who hold such qualifications.

Reflecting on the current landscape of the Level 3 qualifications, there are a variety of ECEC qualifications undertaken, and a multitude of training opportunities available to those within the ECEC workforce, or seeking to join the workforce. The demographics of these individuals within the ECEC workforce have been influenced by various developments within the workforce, as well as iterations of policy as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. Furthermore, the previously discussed Strategic value appears to enforce an entrenched perspective of those 'working with children' as predominantly young, female, and poorly educated (Stonehouse, 1989, p.61; Calder, 1999, p.47; Osgood, 2009, p.736; Dockett, 2019, p.739). There were therefore a number of similarities within the data collected, as well as within the demographic of the respondents that both reflected and challenged these assumptions. In response to both the questionnaire

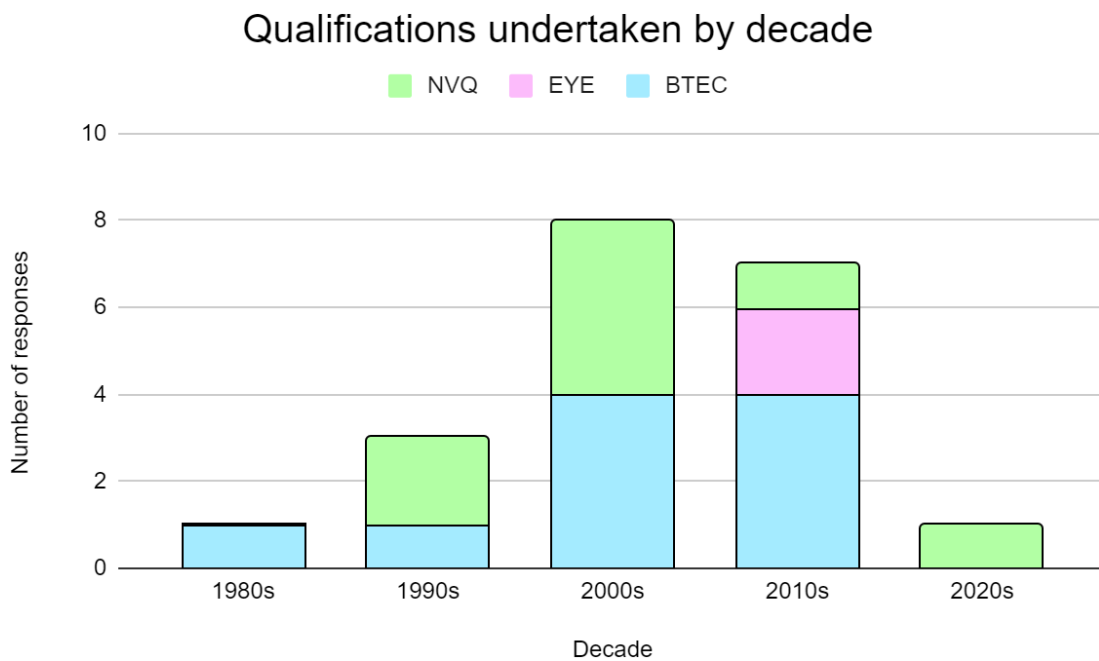
(Appendix 1) and the interviews (Appendix 4), participants self-reported their identified gender, with just 2 of 24 participants identifying as male, echoing trends identified within the workforce by Turner (1970, p.161) back in the 1850's. This also reflects the current persistent imbalance within the sector where 97% of group-based and school-based practitioners, and 99% of childminders are female (DfE, 2021b, p.12), highlighting the continuous trend of a predominantly female workforce within the ECEC sector. Whilst it was not asked within this study, it may have been beneficial to have also explored a wider range of diversity within the participants, as evidence suggests that ethnicity and disability are also underrepresented within the demographics of the ECEC workforce (Early Childhood Forum, 2008, p.4; Nutbrown, 2012a, p.48; Pascal *et al.*, 2020, p.18; DfE, 2021b, p.12).

In regards to expectations of the Level 3 qualification within this value cycle, the data gathered in regards to demographics shows that despite intentions for workforce development strategies 'to attract a diverse workforce' (Early Childhood Forum, 2008, p.5), more recent data indicates that the lack of diversity within the workforce remains an ongoing issue that no policy agenda has yet effectively addressed. Recent announcements of a reduction in the number of available qualifications (Gov.uk, 2022) from 2024 have been poorly received by the FE sector, suggesting that the withdrawal of options would 'limit the horizons of those from the most deprived and marginalised backgrounds' (NASUWT, 2022). If qualification changes may in fact reduce the diversity of the workforce as suggested, I would recommend that any future policy direction for the ECEC workforce, and in particular, future changes to qualification expectations, consider the importance of attracting a far more diverse pool of individuals who are able to better reflect the characteristics of the children, families and communities they engage with.

As shown in Figure 6.3, the majority of the participants undertook their Level 3 qualifications within the last two decades, with trends identifying age discrepancies shown

in Figure 6.4, reflecting the relative newness of the EYE qualification, and a propensity for NVQ qualifications to have been undertaken by more mature students. The qualifications undertaken by the Questionnaire participants (Tables 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3) reflect the introduction of various qualifications as discussed in Chapter 2, with BTEC courses introduced in 1985, NVQ courses introduced in 1987, and the EYE courses introduced in 2014.

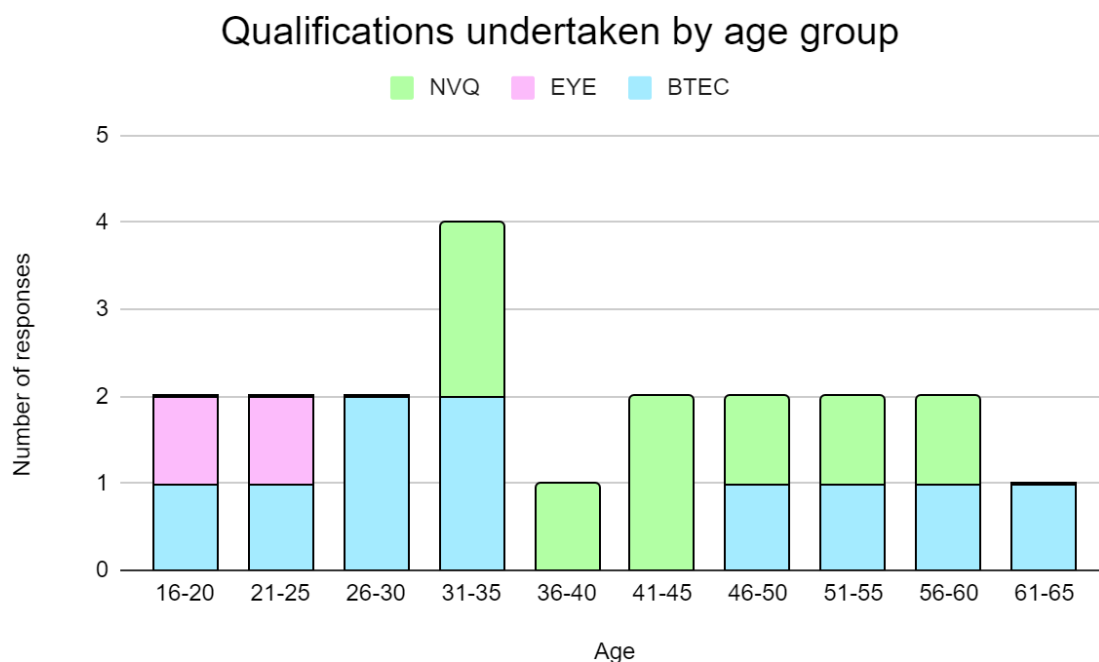
Figure 6.3: Courses undertaken by decade



It was interesting to note that no participant reported undertaking an NNEB course, despite this being one of the longest-standing and highly rated training courses available within the ECEC sector (Lawson, 2015, p.6; Osgood *et al.*, 2017a, p.40). As this data was collected in 2021, it is presumed that EYE qualifications would be increasingly prevalent within the workforce in the first half of the 2020's, reflecting the growth from 10% of the workforce in 2017 (Panayiotou *et al.*, 2017, p.6), to 38% in 2021 (DfE, 2021b, p.13). It is also likely that future trends in the latter half of the 2020's will follow the existing trend of qualification changes, presuming that from 2022, and increasing more rapidly from 2025,

Level 3 qualified practitioners may also have completed the new T-Level Technical Qualification in Education and Childcare (IATE, 2021). With the announcement of closures to courses that ‘overlap’ with these T-Levels (Gov.uk, 2022), it can be presumed that the number of available qualifications will gradually decrease. This decrease suggests that the potential for a workforce trained through a standardised qualification approach is a possibility presented by the current policy agendas. However, this is not likely to impact the current range of qualifications held within the workforce, which indicates that discrepancies in training, knowledge, and skills are likely to persist for a considerable time yet.

Figure 6.4: Qualifications undertaken by age group



Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.114) suggest that there are two elements of the *Orienting value* worth exploring in detail: the external and the internal. While the internal orienting value focuses on the participant biographies and boundaries, as explored through the demographics of the participants, the external orienting value is perceived to be the ways in which participants have engaged with the wider field of

knowledge within ECEC. This includes expectations of those delivering the qualifications to keep up to date with the latest research, practice and pedagogy (Education and Training Foundation, 2022), including engaging with guest speakers and networking to share practice and expertise and to provide additional perspectives for their students. For those undertaking the qualification, the expectation is that there will be engagement with the wider field of study, perhaps through reading and research, as well as through engagement with various CPD opportunities. In relation to the questionnaire responses, all 20 participants had engaged in some form of CPD following their Level 3 qualification, including the participant who had completed her qualification in the 2020's (Table 6.1).

Table 6.1 CPD and Further Training identified

CPD courses and Further Training identified	Questionnaire Participants	Percentage of participants
BA (Hons) Early Childhood Studies / Education	Q2, Q4, Q5, Q7, Q8, Q10, Q11, Q16, Q18, Q19, Q20	55%
Safeguarding	Q1, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q12, Q18	35%
First Aid	Q1, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q8, Q15	30%
MA Early Education / Social Work	Q2, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q8, Q19	30%
Foundation Degree	Q5, Q11, Q16, Q19	20%
SEN / SENCO Training	Q10, Q13, Q16, Q20	20%
Prevent	Q4, Q6, Q8	15%
PGCE Primary Education / 3-7	Q2, Q5, Q10	15%
Play	Q12, Q19	10%
Phonics	Q14, Q18	10%
Food Hygiene / Food for Life	Q1, Q18	10%

From the 20 participants who responded to the questionnaire, there were 40 different CPD and further training courses identified. Table 6.1 shows the prevalence of the further training, listing the 11 CPD and further training courses undertaken by more than 2 participants, highlighting just how inconsistent opportunities for CPD may be where courses are not standard expectations of the workforce.

As shown in Figure 6.5, CPD and further training undertaken varied quite widely, which presents the assumption that opportunities for further engagement with external audiences and contexts may have been directly influenced by availability, and therefore dictated by policy, particularly in regards to cost (Nutbrown, 2012a, p.52) and accessibility as identified by Pascal *et al.* (2020, p.27). Ingleby's (2018, p.23) findings that 'CPD was considered an unwelcome distraction from everyday work with the children' were important to consider here, in that no responses indicated that further training and CPD were viewed this way. In contrast to Ingleby (*ibid.*), one participant declared that "*CPD and training should never stop!*" (Q10).

This range of responses to CPD and further courses undertaken suggests that all participants, regardless of their current role, age or engagement with the ECEC workforce had engaged with the external orienting values of the qualification. However, whilst the range of courses identifies the opportunities that exist to engage with the broader landscape in which the Level 3 qualification is situated, it also serves to highlight how few practitioners may be able to access training. The Social Mobility Commission (2020, p.13) identified that access to CPD opportunities were inadequate, citing not only financial and time constraints, but also potential that 'some managers are reluctant to train their staff because they fear that they will become more competitive and leave their setting for a better job' (*ibid.*).

Figure 6.5 - CPD and Further Training identified



Only 35% of the questionnaire participants identified having completed a Safeguarding course post-completion of their Level 3 training, a necessary course for all individuals working with children, and yet the same number of participants identified having undertaken safeguarding as a Level 7 Masters degree or PGCE. Whilst not part of the Level 3 qualification itself, the range of CPD undertaken serves to illustrate the competences of the ECEC workforce in continuing to learn and develop sector specific skills and knowledge, which further demonstrates the external orienting values of the qualifications in not only preparing students to become professional practitioners, but also in preparing individuals to continue learning, developing their knowledge of the wider field of ECEC, as well as honing sector specific skills.

Interestingly, despite derision of ECEC training courses and consideration of poor academic and career progression, the findings from the questionnaire, as discussed in

Chapter 5, present a challenge to the perception that NVQ courses were unlikely to prepare students for progression into higher education (Hannaford, 2001; Kingston, 2007). Of the 20 participants, 8 had undertaken an NVQ, and of those, all but one had continued to pursue higher education qualifications within the ECEC sector. Across the sector, the DfE (2021b, p.13) reported that 11% of staff in group-based settings, 32% of school-based staff and just 9% of childminders were qualified to Level 6. In comparison with current data on the ECEC workforce, 17 of 20, or 85% of the Questionnaire participants reported having undertaken a higher education level qualification within an ECEC related field, with 13 of 20, or 65% qualified to Level 6 or above, potentially reflecting the 13% rise noted by Bonetti (2020, p.13) attributed to the success of the Graduate Leader Fund. Whilst these findings may simply reflect the type of participant who was willing to engage with this study, it also raises considerations of the destinations of the many students who undertake Level 3 qualifications each academic year. It could therefore be considered that whilst the Level 3 qualification may hold value that can be built upon through CPD opportunities, those completing these qualifications may continue to develop skills and knowledge, but not remain in the ECEC workforce to pass these on to new students and practitioners.

Low pay has long been a concerning factor for the ECEC workforce (Cooke and Lawton, 2008, p.6), with Bonetti (2019, p.36) and the Early Years Workforce Commission (2021, p.6) identifying a worrying number of the ECEC workforce not being able to remain working in the ECEC sector due to financial insecurity. What was evident in the data gathered from the Questionnaire was the propensity for staff with higher qualifications to move out of the ECEC sector (15%, n=3), to become teachers and thus not work with younger children (10%, n=2), or to no longer be working directly with children, in roles such as early years lecturers (15%, n=3), which serves to reduce the number of expert, and degree level practitioners within the workforce. This appears to undermine the value of the qualification, providing skills and knowledge to practitioners who are subsequently

forced into untenable financial positions and eventually make the decision to leave the ECEC sector in favour of better paying positions in retail, schools or local authority roles, as identified in Christie & Co's report on workforce trends (2019, p.36).

As discussed in Chapter 2, findings from the EPPE study (Sylva *et al.*, 2004, p.28; Sylva and Pugh, 2005, p.15) and the REPEY project (Siraj-Blatchford *et al.*, 2002, p.96) made links between higher quality and better outcomes for children in correlation to qualification levels of staff within the setting. Whilst this link was acknowledged somewhat through various policy agendas (HM Treasury 2004, p.5; DfES, 2006, p.2; DCSF, 2008a, p.5), the intention to establish a minimum expectation of a Level 3 qualification (DCSF, 2008b, p.35; CWDC, 2012, p.8) was never realised. This suggests that whilst acknowledgement of the importance of qualifications was forthcoming, with the EYFS framework declaring that 'The daily experience of children in early years settings and the overall quality of provision depends on all practitioners having appropriate qualifications, training, skills, knowledge, and a clear understanding of their roles and responsibilities.' (DfE, 2021a, p.26), a clear political intention to address these issues through the Level 3 qualification is unlikely to be realised. Similarly, in regards to CPD, wider trends identified a drop in accessing job-related training (Bonetti, 2019, p.33), thus it appears unlikely that funding and availability will be prioritised, resulting in the external orienting value of the qualification not being actualised to its full potential. With current policy agendas doing little to address the pay, training and status disparity between those who work to provide care and education for the youngest children, and those who 'teach', there is little evidence in the findings to suggest that the external orienting value of the qualification is actually beneficial to the ECEC workforce if staff are forced out of the sector to take better paid jobs.

6.2.3 Immediate Experiences

Within the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75), the *Immediate Value* of the Level 3 qualification can be determined by participation, interaction and engagement with the qualifications, and the experiences participants had when either studying or supporting students. For the participants of this study, immediate value can be drawn from comments made in response to questions asked, reflecting on participants' perceptions of their participation and engagement in learning opportunities. Some questionnaire participants reflected fondly on their experiences: "*I have some great memories of fun activities in and outside of the classroom*" (Q19). In regards to interactions with these qualifications, findings from the questionnaire indicated a general level of satisfaction with the courses studied, citing benefits that ranged from personal attributes such as confidence (Q7), to practical skills such as learning how to observe children (Q18), and understanding how theory and research informs practice (Q4).

It was evident from answers to the questionnaire that professionalism was a key consideration within the ECEC qualifications and workforce, with responses citing elements of their studies that they felt promoted characteristics of professionalism and professional behaviours. These included "*positive behaviour in placement*" (Q6), "*representing yourself well in placement*" (Q19) and "*Demonstrating practice that is accepted as 'best'*" (Q10), which all reflect a level of performativity in the workplace (Vincent and Braun, 2011, p.775). These perspectives also reiterated Eteläpelto and Collin's (2006, p.237) suggestion that developing practical expertise relies on constructing new identities, and Colley *et al.*'s view of vocational habitus (2003). In contrast to these perspectives, one particularly thought-provoking expectation of students on the Level 3 courses was discussed by two interviewees, both with an expectation that the qualification would provide students with opportunities for "*being silly*" (11), advising students "*don't be afraid to be silly in front of in front of the other people ... be as as wacky and zany as you*

can, because you'll love it, and the children will love it as well." (14). These comments contrast with the literature examined in Chapter 3, including Colley *et al.*'s (2003) consideration of professionalism being rooted in performance, which was echoed by Vincent and Braun's suggestion (2011, p.782) that students are pressured to conform to expectations of being calm and smiley, and Webber's (2016, p.60) reflection of students obeying perceived expectations of behaviour in order to cultivate a professional identity. This contrast suggests that whilst literature presents the notion that ECEC professionals are expected to behave in certain ways, 'conforming to a narrow version of professionalism' (Osgood, 2021, p.175), in practice, there is scope for a wider interpretation of what it means to be an ECEC professional. Therefore, there may be opportunities to further determine how the Level 3 qualification can provide a platform to develop this broader professional identity, and to challenge existing perceptions of professional behaviours exhibited within the role.

In relation to the Level 3 qualification's Immediate value, Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.80) considered how learners may benefit in this cycle through nine different forms, including the identification and a sense of inclusion of themselves in relation to others around them. Furthermore, they considered the importance of 'exposure to other contexts and ways of seeing and approaching the difference you care to make' (*ibid.*, p.81), and more importantly in this study, 'newcomers witnessing and engaging with the rich experience of old-timers, or conversely old-timers engaging with the fresh perspectives of newcomers' (*ibid.*, p.82). These points reflect the literature explored in Chapter 3, such as Reeve and Tseng's article (2011, p.258), which discussed how students can actively contribute to learning experiences and the development of knowledge, and Wenger's (1998, p.5) consideration of learning resulting in a sense of belonging. Responses from the questionnaire clearly reflected these findings, with a number of participants suggesting that being treated as part of the team was key to

providing valuable learning experiences in placement settings. One participant also suggested that

“A good placement allows you to feel welcomed as a student rather than being a visitor who attends a few days a week as well as parents and children being aware of who you are and why you are there. ... Although you are not a staff member they should encourage you to learn and do things out of your comfort zone in order for you to grow; with necessary supervision” (Q20)

Similarly, responses from the interviews represented this, with consideration of social learning activities students enjoyed participating in, such as *“creating display boards, open events, cooking, decorating the Early years floor for significant events and children in need activities” (I1); “practical teaching activities in the classroom too, just to support those learners whose preferred learning style is kinaesthetic” (I2); and having “a local nursery come in once a week to our setting because we had a model classroom” (I4).* These comments all reflect the kinds of opportunities which provide students undertaking Level 3 qualifications with additional experiences to be able to develop a student's independence and confidence in trying new activities, as recommended by Cordingley et al. (2012, p.8). These kinds of opportunities provide sufficient value for newly qualified practitioners to be able to reflect on their training, *“So when they go to their placements, or will go to university, they can say ‘Oh, I remember when I did that’, or, ‘Oh, I understand” (I4).*

Conversely, other experiences were not as well received, with interviewees reflecting *“I used to say no makeup. I said you're not there to meet a husband, you're there to do a job. And they used to hate me for saying that!” (I4).* Similarly, questionnaire participants reflected less fondly on aspects deemed to be tedious, such as *“The endless observations” (Q18); “Spending hours completing activity plans!!” (Q6); and questioning whether their efforts were worthwhile: “I provided an extensive portfolio and could have produced less and still passed” (Q2).* These reflections on experiences demonstrate

similarities with Alexander's findings (2001, p.7), considering some learning experiences to simply be 'a task that they had to get right in order to fulfil the course requirements' (*ibid.*). Nonetheless, the responses also present an opposing argument, where despite students suggesting "*I'm never going to do this in my actual capacity*" (I4), tutors were able to counter this by explaining that "*you gotta do it because it's just a skill you have to learn because you may go into a setting that will want detailed planning*" (I4), and providing opportunities for students to understand the importance of working

"with a mentor to implement the planning and assessment cycle and observe children throughout the year, to enable students to reflect on how they have found the process and how they have found using observations that are used within the setting they are working" (I1).

The Immediate value applied to assignments completed throughout the qualification varied, with acknowledgment that some tasks were simply "*copying from a supplied book, so I wouldn't say I used much thinking*" (Q2). However, twelve of the questionnaire participants felt that all parts of the course had benefited them in some way, with some participants considering "*Actually observing children and planning for their next steps helped put the theory into context and allowed you to apply it.*" (Q5). Assignment tasks were generally viewed positively, with participants reflecting how "*My assignments help me to consolidate the knowledge I had learnt in both placement and the classroom. The feedback of the assignment showed me where I needed to improve and highlighted my strengths in that topic too.*" (Q15). One participant made links between the importance of the assignments in relation to the rest of the course, including the practical elements, reflecting that

"The written elements were important for reflection on my own personal development and understanding of my role and the development of the children I was working with. These reflective elements enabled me to consider my own strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the observed practice that was being used to evidence my competency" (Q10).

These links between assignment tasks and placement were key for a number of participants, with some responses indicating that “*Practical experience enabled me to get a job from one of my placements straight after qualifying. The theoretical understanding enabled me to apply knowledge in practical situations and to develop a strong practical skill set*” (Q19) as well as being “*able to gain knowledge to improve my practice and develop my career*” (Q7). This preparation for the workplace is a key part of the Level 3 qualification, and so provides assurance that the immediate value of the qualification can be determined through these experiences and opportunities, despite suggestions from Alexander (2001, p.3) that college based assignments were ‘irrelevant and out of touch with the practice they saw in the workplace’. By ensuring that students undertaking the qualification are adequately prepared with experiences that provide appropriate knowledge and skills for working within the sector, this leads the students into the next cycle of the value creation framework, considering the potential value of undertaking the qualification for these individuals.

6.2.4 Potential Individual Outcomes

The next cycle in the framework, which is both reliant on, and influenced by the previous cycles, is the *Potential Value*. Throughout this cycle, analysis of the findings explored responses from participants in relation to the skills acquired, the tools and documents mentioned, the social connections made, new views of learning and knowledge, as well as various means of inspiration that may influence the practitioners these students may become. These responses all indicate the qualifications undertaken to have provided some way to ‘take away something that goes beyond their direct experience’, providing the ‘potential to make a difference’ (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.84).

In response to the questionnaire asking participants about the elements of the course that have benefitted them the most when in the workplace, it was interesting that six participants noted the importance of theoretical knowledge, and “*Understanding how*

theory and research informs practice" (Q6), with eight participants also claiming knowledge of child development and understanding children was key to being successful in the workplace. Furthermore, all but one of the responses from students who had not encountered any theory in their Level 3 qualification mentioned the importance of their courses in relation to developing knowledge on child development, raising questions as to their level of knowledge and understanding of development without knowledge of developmental theories. Additionally, six participants reported benefitting from learning about planning and implementing activities, and five participants reported benefitting from undertaking observations, despite other responses indicating that these types of tasks were required for "*no reason as you have to do it in a completely different way in the settings*" (Q13).

This cycle of the value creation framework considers the importance of resources and accessible information in order to make a difference (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.85). The most commonly cited resource beyond the activity plans and observations, was the curriculum framework, referred to simply as 'the EYFS'. Within the ECEC workforce, references to 'the EYFS' may refer to the *Statutory framework for the early years foundation stage* (DfE, 2021a), which provides expectations for settings and practitioners, or the non-statutory guidance known also as '*Development Matters*' (Moylett and Stewart, 2012) that guided expectations for children's development at the time of conducting this study. In response to the Questionnaire (Appendix 1), the EYFS curriculum guidance was referred to nine times by six participants, with acknowledgement of the importance of knowing and understanding 'the EYFS' in relation to observing and planning for children's learning and development. This practical knowledge was identified as being key to practice post-qualification, acknowledging that "*These are all transferable skills within a variety of Early Years settings.*" (Q15), supporting Nutbrown's (2021, p.240) suggestion that 'qualifications are not so much the means by

which educators should know *what to do* in some formulaic way but rather, *how to think* about the situations they face'. These perspectives suggest some level of similarity, but also contradict the findings of Strohmer and Mischo (2016, p.45) and Tynjälä (2008), who considered that what was learnt in the college environment would need to be re-learnt in the 'real world' post-qualification. The value evident here, as discussed by the questionnaire participants, is that whilst some skills would need to be adapted and fine-tuned in practice post-qualification, what had been learnt during the qualification provided a foundation of knowledge and skills that could be built upon. In this instance, participants were able to reflect on their knowledge of policy frameworks such as 'the EYFS', and to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the importance of these guidance documents, not only for their immediate practice, but also for their ability to apply their knowledge of statutory requirements to situations that may arise in a variety of practical situations.

A further element of this cycle within the value creation framework was the importance 'of others' experiences' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.85). Reflecting on how placements had benefited them, questionnaire participants identified how "*teamwork, leadership and communication*" (Q14) were key elements of these experiences that they were able to take with them into their own careers, and that "*Having tutors who have field experience is a bonus- they've been there, done that.*" (Q5). As identified in Chapter 3, McDaniel (2010, p.291), Soini *et al.* (2015, p.642) and Wenger *et al.* (2002, p.43) all considered the importance of social and reciprocal learning, establishing communities of practice where both novice and expert members of the community contribute to the development of knowledge and skills. This was likewise echoed in the interview responses, with tutors identifying the importance of them having industry experience, and being able to encourage students "*to share examples of their practice and settings in group discussions*" (I2), and "*to discuss their experiences and link to practice*" (I3). These

opportunities to hear stories of others' experiences, including tutors' own experiences "*has worked well in terms of building a bond with students where they feel comfortable to come and seek support and guidance both academically and also professionally*" (I1). This reiterates Wenger *et al.*'s (2015) assertion of the importance of these experiences in building trust between students and tutors in order to facilitate effective learning opportunities within the communities of practice. This type of opportunity for students to learn from one another, as well as from the experiences of their tutors, was further discussed in relation to the potential value of the qualification. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.84) claim that 'Approval of what you are doing from others in the field can increase your confidence' which is vital in supporting student practitioners to develop the necessary self-confidence in their own practice and skills. This was reflected well in one interview, with the tutor explaining the impact of observing students in practice and then

"having that debrief with them, they actually took it quite well as like that constructive criticism, constructive feedback ... and then when I went to see them again, I saw that those missed opportunities became things they knew, they saw it and acted upon it." (I4).

These opportunities to impress upon students the importance of some issues through informal learning opportunities and discussions that developed the students' knowledge and skills, including their resilience, were also praised, including advising students "*don't take everything as a criticism on your practice, just take it on the chin. You know, they've said it for a reason.*" (I4).

Through these discussions and responses, it is evident that learning is occurring in both landscapes and communities of practice, demonstrating the importance of these experiences as both planned and purposeful within the context of the Level 3 qualification. Accepting that these curriculum guidance documents and professional relationships may be subject to change, with continuous changes and updates to frameworks, students

moving into practice, and practitioners moving out of the ECEC sector, the Potential value of the Level 3 qualification as preparation for practice may be questioned. Nevertheless, students appear to have the potential to use their experiences and knowledge, and to continue to develop and hone professional knowledge and skills in collaboration with other practitioners when in practice. Their responses suggest the potential of these learning opportunities is positive, as ways of providing both tangible and intangible outputs that students can carry with them into their careers. The findings support the assertion that the Level 3 qualifications, despite their variations, are beneficial in preparing students for professional practice post-qualification.

6.2.5 Applied Outcomes and Impact

The fifth cycle, moving deeper into the value creation framework, was the *Applied Value*. In analysing the findings in relation to the applied value of the qualifications for these participants, exploration of comments made reflected on the implementation of advice; innovation in practice; reuse of products; use of social connections; and new learning approaches. Whilst some of these responses also reflect the potential value, this cycle focuses on how the potential value becomes actualised in practice. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.89) consider how the Applied value can either 'act as a landing ground for potential value' or can be seen to follow on from more formal learning, representing opportunities for inventiveness, adaptation, reflection and reflexivity in practice environments, rather than formal learning environments. In this way, they assert that 'the applied cycle will create value whether it works or not' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.93), as 'all the details, challenges, and creativity associated with doing something in practice are a trove of useful insights that enrich - and thus become an integral part of - whatever is learned.' (*ibid.*)

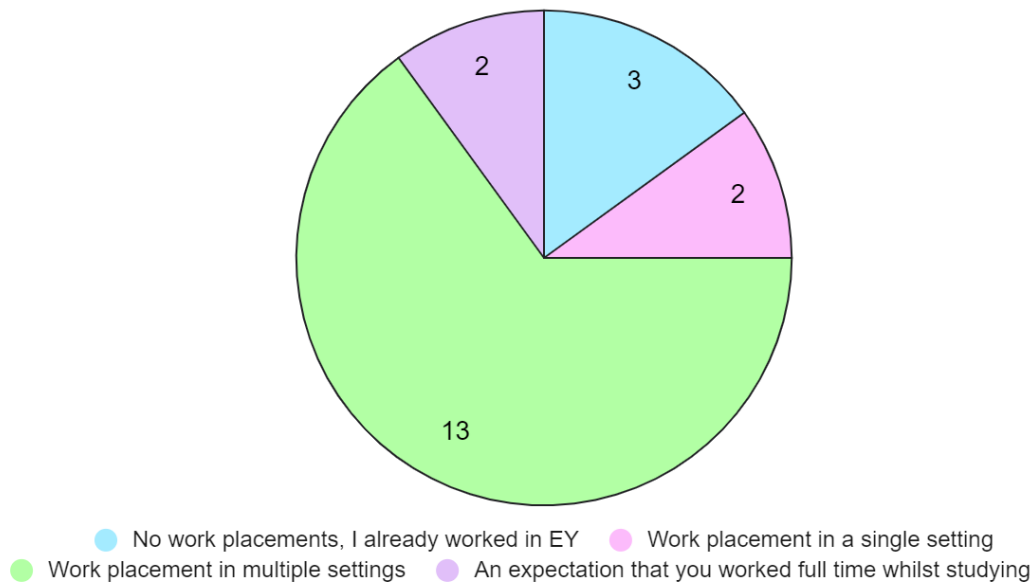
In considering how the experiences of Level 3 qualifications are put into practice in the workplace environment, the importance of placement experiences is apparent within the

findings, as discussed in Chapter 3. Guevara's (2020, p.439) consideration of the importance of learners developing professional knowledge through placement experiences is key. Alexander (2001, p.3) discussed how 40% of the qualification was practice based, although, one response from an interviewee reflected that there used to be *"almost a 40, 60 split (40 practical)"*, however, this had changed, *"since we have had a new HoS with minimal EY knowledge and staff that haven't got up to date knowledge of EY there seems to be less and less focus on the practical side and just get them through and out the other side. So possibly 20% practical and the rest academic learning."* (I1). Contradicting this perception of the course moving to a more academic focus, a different interviewee reflected that *"Over the last 10 years the Level 3 Qualification has moved from an academic course to a more practical based course"* (I3). These contradictions highlight the differences that individual courses and FE providers may implement, suggesting wider differentiation for how students engage with practice experiences as preparation for professional practice.

Questionnaire responses from 17 of the 20 participants indicated that placements within settings were part of their course, with the remaining 3 participants identifying the expectation that they were employed within an early years setting whilst undertaking their Level 3 qualification. Figure 6.6 identifies the placement expectations as recalled by these participants, with seven participants having worked or completed placements in just one setting for the duration of their course, compared to 13 participants who undertook placements in multiple settings. Again, these data suggest further differentiation in practical experiences, providing students with varying levels of experience with children of different age ranges, or in settings of different kinds.

Figure 6.6 - Placement expectations

Placement expectations of Level 3 courses undertaken



While these differences reflect the disparity of expectations across Level 3 qualifications deemed ‘full and relevant’ as set out in Table 3.1, they also identify differences in the ways in which the qualifications may have prepared these individuals for professional practice. Nonetheless, participants who had no work placements at all did not appear to be disadvantaged in their subsequent careers and further study. Of the three participants who did not undertake a placement but worked instead, all completed an NVQ qualification, and went on to further study. Two of the three went on to complete Foundation degree qualifications in Early Years, with one having become an Early Years Lecturer and another a Manager of an ECEC setting. The third student reported completing a BA (Hons) in Early Childhood Studies, however this participant further reported having left the ECEC sector entirely. The remaining four participants who identified having worked or undertaken placements in a single setting throughout their training had also undertaken an NVQ qualification, with the exception of one participant who had undertaken a BTEC qualification in the 1980’s, potentially indicating a change in placement expectations for

this qualification over time. Of these four participants, two reported having completed Masters degrees, with a third participant having completed a BA (Hons) in Education, and the fourth participant remaining at Level 3. Similarly to the participants who had not undertaken any placement experiences during their Level 3 qualification, two of these participants were no longer working in the ECEC sector, with one having retired and another leaving the sector entirely. As previously discussed in 6.2.2, only nine of the 20 questionnaire participants identified their current job role as working in the early years, reflecting the wider retention trends identified across the sector (Christie & Co, 2019, p.35) where 1 in 6 practitioners cannot afford to work in the sector for longer than a year (Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021, p.6).

In comparison, the thirteen participants who reported having undertaken placements in multiple settings agreed that their experiences in practice and placement settings were beneficial in preparing them for professional roles within the ECEC workforce, demonstrating the applied value of the qualification in being able to utilise what had been learnt. Whilst the level of agreement varied, with some participants stating that their placement experiences were *“Invaluable. The reality was different to my expectations it helped me decide where I wanted to work”* (Q4) and others suggesting that *“I personally feel that for my current role, I required more experience in a range of different types of settings”* (Q6). It was evident that many of these participants valued *“Knowing what to expect for each age to find out what age you enjoy working with”* (Q14), as well as how the variety of placements *“enabled me to understand my practice and the places in which I would like to work and which best suit me”* (Q20).

Considering these responses in relation to the Applied value of the Level 3 qualification, it can be assumed that the opportunity to experience a range of settings provides students with insight into how professionals conduct themselves in a range of professional roles, allowing students to take this knowledge with them into their careers, applying what they

know in a variety of situations they may encounter. Campbell-Barr (2018, p.81) suggests that 'individuals adjust their behaviours as they learn to become the 'right' person for the job', echoing Colley *et al.*'s view that vocational learning occurs in the workplace (2003, p.474). These views reflect an acknowledged level of development through experiential learning, highlighting the importance of the practical expectations of the programme. As discussed in Chapter 2, from the NSDN Nursery Nurses' Diploma, to the so called 'gold standard' NNEB, and the RSI Nursery Nurse Examination, all of the training courses in the early 20th Century espoused the importance of students undertaking extensive placements in both nursery schools and hospitals, and being able to demonstrate practical skills, including milk preparation, needlework and cookery (Stanford, 2013; Wright, 2013).

Through undertaking placements and developing the required practical skills, students would presumably be better prepared to apply their knowledge and skills within the workforce post-qualification. However, this is not as simple to discern from the Questionnaire responses, with only three of these thirteen participants reporting current roles as practitioners. Table 6.2 shows the range of jobs undertaken by these 13 participants at the time of the study, showing the diversity of the roles Level 3 students progress into, presumably using the experiences and knowledge gained through the qualification to progress to different careers or further study opportunities.

Table 6.2 - Job titles

Current Role	Number of participants
Early Years Practitioner/Educator	3
Lecturer	2
Student	2
Teacher	2
Social Worker	1

Teaching Assistant	1
Other	1
No longer working in the Early Years workforce	1

An additional point of analysis within this cycle of the value creation framework was the propensity for participants to have reflected positively on working collaboratively, reiterating Lave and Wenger's (1991) assertion that learning takes place through social, cultural and participatory practices (Farnsworth *et al.*, 2016, p.140). 50% (n=10) of questionnaire participants cited how their qualification and placement experience enabled them to develop skills in teamwork, interaction with colleagues, parents and external agencies, considering how *"The supportive placements taught me a lot of new skills which I carried forward"* (Q8), and how *"It helped me to grasp the basics and to improve on them as I worked"* (Q15). Musgrave and Stobbs' acknowledgement that 'working in an early years setting is as much about working with adults as it is with children' (2015, p.70) is key to acknowledge here, along with a reflection from an interviewee, explaining how *"I also set up experiential experiences where they have to work in partnership. Resolve conflict as these are skills that they will need"* [sic] (I1). There were also additional reflections on the types of activities and planned learning opportunities for students to engage in to develop these skills:

"students engage in a range of challenges to prompt them to support each other and do challenges that are possibly out of their comfort zones. It is evident to see when we have done this activity compared to the years we have not as students develop more empathy and support for each other" (I1)

"to have those opportunities to talk and spend the whole lesson just talking and thinking about how we communicate, those different sort of cues in certain verbal/nonverbal ways" (I4)

Participants undertaking the Level 3 qualifications and placement experiences in ECEC settings are required to be able to communicate effectively with colleagues, preparing them for professional practice where they will be required to communicate effectively with a wider audience of parents, carers, external agencies and professionals, as well as with the children and colleagues they work with. This ability to utilise skills gained in relation to working with others, and in reflecting on formal learning and then adapting behaviours and skills in work environments is key in demonstrating the applied value of the Level 3 qualification as an effective vehicle for preparing students for professional practice.

Similarly to the questionnaire participants, interview participants reflected on a number of opportunities for students to put knowledge into practice, and to learn from their experiences to be able to apply their knowledge and skills to new situations. Participants cited the importance of tutors having the knowledge and skills to facilitate this, explaining how *“Staff with EY experience understand the importance of providing students with practical and transferable skills”* (I1). By facilitating opportunities to apply learning, tutors were able to discuss the importance of students being able to reflect on their experiences, making links between classroom discussions and practice based experiences. As discussed in Chapter 3, the development of professionalism is rooted in practice, drawing on knowledge and expertise as well performance and representation as a process of ‘becoming’ (Colley *et al.*, 2003, p.489). These opportunities to work collaboratively, to share knowledge and experiences, and thus to develop their own expertise and professional practice are pivotal in applying these experiences to this cycle the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75), highlighting the benefits of the level 3 qualification as a vehicle for this type of professional development. As one participant explained, the qualification provided a safe space to develop, as: *“You have the opportunity to be a novice and make mistakes so long as you learn from them”* (Q5).

Interview participants gave examples of how regular structured opportunities for reflection supported this type of learning, citing how *“Students used to write a reflection, like a diary reflection and how it was and what they've learned from it”* (I4). This enabled students to develop a level of awareness that may not have been possible in the moment, giving an example of how students can *“kind of go through that process of okay, I see why couldn't do that. I couldn't do that food tasting. Because there's, you know, three children that've got allergies to something”* (I4). Similarly, other tutors considered how the units delivered on the Level 3 qualification support these opportunities, explaining that *“There is a reflective unit embedded within the course and students are encouraged to keep a reflective journal from their practical experience”* (I3), and

“We have a unit on reflective practice, where we teach students to use a range of reflective theories, from this they are encouraged to fill out their SWOT (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats) this helps them to set targets on areas for improvement in their own knowledge and practice within different areas of the Early Years Educator. This is a working document and students are encouraged to review this on a regular basis to monitor their own progress and set new targets where appropriate” (I2)

These considerations of reflective practise were not as evident within the Questionnaire responses, with only seven participants discussing the importance of reflection, and how *“Being reflective is a crucial skill”* (Q5), explaining the importance of

“reflection on my own personal development and understanding of my role and the development of the children I was working with. These reflective elements enabled me to consider my own strengths and weaknesses in comparison to the observed practice that was being used to evidence my competency” (Q10)

Nevertheless, it is evident that the Level 3 qualifications provide opportunities for reflection through mandatory units of study, and that tutors see the value in these opportunities, supporting students to develop vital skills as reflective practitioners. Chapter 3 discussed Tynjälä's (2008, p.145) consideration of the importance of these opportunities for

discussion and reflection, explaining how self-regulative knowledge is vital for students to be able to integrate theoretical and practical knowledge, in order to be able to apply theoretical knowledge to practical experiences. Similarly, Campbell-Barr's (2018, p.81) exploration of how those training to, or working in ECEC 'use prior experiences ... to inform subsequent ones' helps to shed light on the importance of this cycle within the value framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75). If those who have undertaken the Level 3 qualification are supported to develop the transferable skills and knowledge required to be successful when working within the ECEC workforce, then as previously identified, this cycle demonstrates how the potential value of the qualification becomes the applied value: taking what has been learnt in formal learning environments, and providing opportunities to put this into practice in practical environments, reflecting on successes and adapting practice to suit specific contexts as necessary.

6.2.6 Realised Value of the Level 3 Qualification

The sixth cycle of the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75) was the *Realised Value*, reflecting on the ability to make a difference. Similarly to the previous cycle, Brock's consideration that 'Knowledge shared promotes understanding and a desire to use the knowledge to make a difference' (2015, p.28), is key in acknowledging that what is learnt can be reflected on, and used in subsequent experiences. This enables the level 3 qualification to have broader impact than just on an individuals' knowledge or skills. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.94) consider that 'Learning is not complete until it makes a difference', but go on to explain that "Value created at one cycle is translated into value at the next. It is in this flow that learning makes a difference." (*ibid.*, p.127). By drawing on the value of the previous cycles, it becomes evident that the partnerships and collaborations previously explored, as well as the opportunities for practice and reflection, provide a space for not only individuals, but for the settings these individuals go on to practise within, to develop new

ideas, and to change their practices, thus 'making a difference' within the ECEC workforce.

The Level 3 qualification in this cycle then becomes a key part of the cycle of communities of practice. Novice learners begin their qualifications, developing a foundation of knowledge which is built upon through work placement experiences. Fairchild (2017, p.298) considered how such communities of practice 'enforce a circle', with students positioned as novices until they have developed sufficient experience to move towards becoming an expert. Practitioners already in the workforce form a key part of these communities of practice, ranging between novices and experts, but continuously imparting knowledge and skills, as well as picking up new knowledge and skills themselves. This drives the continuation of these circles in communities of practice, recognising that members will both join and leave the communities of practice, with opportunities to move from being novices towards being experts within cycles and circles.

Within this cycle, it is important then to acknowledge that learning within these communities may be 'difficult to perceive, either because it is long term or because the effects of learning are diffuse or complex' (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p. 97). The realised value of the Level 3 qualification can then be perceived as the continuous process of learning and practice that occurs in relation to other individuals, other spaces, and the potential to develop other ways of working. Whilst not always easily discernible, adaptations to practice often evolve from encounters in social learning spaces. As discussed in Chapter 3, Eraut (1994, p.11) suggested 'that the initial period during which novice professionals develop their proficiency in the general professional role continues well beyond their initial qualification', thus presenting the realised value as an ongoing loop that extends far beyond the length of the Level 3 qualification.

The specific learning experiences reflected on by participants were not the 'end product' of the qualification however, but were a vital part of the journey that enabled the realised value to become apparent. Whilst two questionnaire participants perceived that their Level 3 qualification made no difference to their current approach to early years practice, others reflected on the difference their qualification made to not only their early years practice, but their personal skills, citing how *"I used the knowledge gained within my qualification to review my own practice and develop new policies within the setting in which I worked, it also gave me confidence to develop my career further and manage a nursery"* (Q7).

Similarly, other participants who no longer worked in ECEC settings, but instead had moved into teaching these FE qualifications themselves, reflected how

"When I started working at a sixth form college to teach child care level 2 and 3, I very much used more knowledge of my level 3 experience than my undergraduate degree or teacher training. EY has evolved more since I qualified and it's important that I keep up to date with these changes and evolutions" (Q5)

and

"I think my L3 qualification had a huge impact on my current practice, not only do I respect the young learners that I teach, but I have the knowledge of what they are experiencing, and can empathise. I can reflect on this as the start of my journey, and know that without the solid foundation this course provided, I would not be where I am now" (Q19)

A further reflection from an interviewee was also important to consider, when analysing the realised value of the qualification, and the potential for students to go on to 'make a difference' through further study and career progression.

"BTEC students are being allowed to go and study medicine, at university, which is fantastic, that's absolutely brilliant. That is such a powerful way that shows not just the UK but the world that industry practice is vital, and worth more than sitting in the classroom" (I4)

Despite apprenticeship style learning being rooted in historical learning practices (Tynjälä, 2008, p.143), and ECEC vocational qualifications having been introduced many decades ago, there are long-standing perceptions of vocational, or technical qualifications being inferior to academic qualifications, despite being delivered and assessed at the same level (Gov.uk, 2021). This response challenges the perception of vocational qualifications as not holding parity with academic qualifications. This challenge presents opportunities to deconstruct some of the discourses that are prevalent within ECEC, as previously discussed in Chapter 3. Osgood's (2006, p.194) consideration of how such discourses of derision could be challenged suggests 'a viable alternative construction of professionalism, which encapsulates and maintains an ethic of care and, at the same time, is infused with pride, confidence and self-belief'. 22 questionnaire responses from 10 participants cited confidence as a key result of the Level 3 qualification, with one participant suggesting that "*Being on the course I certainly changed- I became so extrovert and confident because I realised I was actually good at something and my grades were a reflection of that*" (Q5). Similarly, a further response within an interview considered the tutor's interest and desire for "*actually preparing the student to be an independent practitioner, and somebody who's actually confident enough to practice rather than to conform with what they think practice should be.*" (14). Therefore, it could be presumed that a Level 3 qualification could provide novice practitioners with not only the confidence to practice, as suggested by these responses, but also the potential to develop this pride and self-belief through practice. Such attributes can then be carried into future experiences, thus reiterating the realised value of the Level 3 qualification as a starting point for a career in ECEC.

6.2.7 A Professional Workforce

The penultimate cycle within the value creation framework is the *Transformative Value*. Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.119) review two dimensions of

transformative value: Internal and External. Whilst Internal transformative values may be reactive and disruptive for participants within social learning spaces (*ibid.*), External transformative values affect not only participants, but the wider landscape of the ECEC sector. In this cycle, analysis was centred on the concept of the potential of each student to view themselves as a professional, to be seen and valued by others as a professional, and to negotiate conforming to existing values or challenging and incorporating their own values into their perceptions of a professional within the ECEC sector.

As explored in Chapter 2, there have been a multitude of policy agendas over the past two centuries that have attempted to construct a perception of those who care for and educate the youngest children in society. Chapter 3 further explored how the development of two dichotomous roles, caring and educating, have become entrenched within the ECEC sector. The term 'educating' often brings to mind professionals known as 'teachers', in direct contrast to the term 'care', which is presented 'as unskilled women's work' (Powell and Gooch, 2016, p.101). The Early Years Workforce Commission (2021, p.22) therefore recommended a shift away from the use of the word 'childcare', rationalising the impact this label has on devaluing the ECEC workforce.

In response to the questionnaire (Appendix 1), participants were asked to consider what the word 'professional' meant to them, with a range of responses shown below in Figure 6.7. The use of the word 'experience' by seven participants, and consideration of 'knowledge' from eight participants supports suggestions from Manning *et al.* (2017, p.21) that qualifications and ECEC specific training are vital for the development of practitioner's knowledge and their ability to adopt developmentally appropriate practices. However, Urban *et al.*'s (2012, p.515) consideration of the development of knowledge and skills acquired through training highlights the problematic assumptions that can accompany the concept of professional competence.

As Tickell (2011, p.43) discussed over a decade ago, whilst practitioners may hold relevant qualifications, there was concern that ‘the current training courses are not universally of the quality needed to prepare people to work in the early years or to support professional development.’. Similarly, this was echoed by Nutbrown’s review of the early education and childcare qualifications, which concluded that ‘Some current qualifications lack rigour and depth, and quality is not consistent.’ (2012a, p.5). This lack of consistency suggests that whilst experience and knowledge are highly valued, and perceived as professional attributes, these are not guaranteed outcomes from undertaking a Level 3 qualification.

Figure 6.7. ‘What does the word professional mean to you?’



It was interesting to note that a further six participants equated professionalism with training through qualifications, suggesting that a professional is “*Someone who has a higher level qualification alongside high quality experience and practice*” (Q16). Although

discussed almost two decades ago, with the New Labour Government's ten year strategy for childcare (HM Treasury, 2004, p.5) declaring that '*working with pre-school children should have as much status as a profession as teaching children in schools*', attempts to raise qualification levels were short lived. Owen and Haynes (2010, p.202) reflected on this agenda in regard to higher level qualifications, where those qualified to Early Years Professional (EYP) status were to be employed in every Children's Centre by 2010, and in every day care setting by 2015. However, EYPs were 'not recognized by the maintained sector as a QTS equivalent' (*ibid.*) and therefore, the perception of those working with the youngest children continued to lack the 'status as a profession'. Further policy agendas such as the replacement of EYP with Early Years Teacher (EYT) status, also failed to address 'differentials in pay, career progression and professional status' (Pascal *et al.*, 2020, p.6) compared with QTS, furthering the disparity in the perception of those who educate the youngest children and those who 'teach'.

Commitment to implementing a minimum expectation for practitioners to hold a Level 3 qualification was similarly discussed a number of years and policy agendas ago. Intentions of requiring all staff to hold such qualifications (DCSF, 2008b, p.35) were echoed by Tickell (2011, p.43) and Nutbrown's (2012a, p.34) recommendations, the CWDC (2012, p.8), and further research (Mathers *et al.* 2014, p.6; Osgood *et al.*, 2017a, p.100). Nonetheless, subsequent policy agendas appear to have abandoned this intention, reiterating that it is the responsibility of the PVI settings to recruit the required staff (Kulakiewicz *et al.*, 2022, p.15), and that investment 'to build a stronger, more expert workforce' would focus on Covid-19 recovery, 'particularly those in the most disadvantaged areas' (*ibid.*).

Within this study, responses relating to qualifications held have previously been discussed, yet perceptions of the workforce as professionals are still divided. In considering the internal transformative value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, one

response reiterated a number of points previously explored within the literature regarding the identity of practitioners as professionals, stating that

“It’s an identity of self. In my early EY days, I was a professional because I went into a profession where you were making a difference and we’re important to someone either your colleagues, the children or the parents. In my EY lead role, I am no different to the young 19 year old “nursery nurse” I once was. The only difference is time and experience” (Q5)

This ability to apply the label of ‘professional’ to themselves reiterates the value of the Level 3 qualification as a vehicle to prepare students for the workforce. As previously discussed in regard to the Immediate value of the qualification, questionnaire participants reflected on a number of professional attributes and behaviours, ranging from *“How you present yourself/dress code” (Q5)* to *“Being respectful and confidential, to leave your problems at the door when you enter a setting” (Q15)*. Of the 20 responses to the questionnaire, when questioned about ‘which characteristics of being a ‘Professional’ do you think your level 3 course focused on?’, only 1 participant felt that their Level 3 qualification did not focus on any aspects of being professional. Interestingly, this was one of the participants who had reported completing her qualification in less than a year, and not undertaken any placements, perhaps reflecting a lack of opportunities to learn and experience professional behaviours. This participant’s experience affirms concerns raised by Tickell (2011, p.43) and Nutbrown (2012a, p.6) that the quality of training in preparation for the workforce has been inconsistent, as noted by the Social Mobility Commission (2020, p.6) who reported that ‘the entry-level qualifications held by junior staff entering the sector were often inadequate preparation for the job.’.

Furthermore, within the interviews, there were discussions reflecting on how tutors provided opportunities to develop the professional attributes of students in preparation for the workforce. It was considered that *“Through the delivery of the qualification, lecturers*

instil professionalism and the expectations required for practice and future employment”

(13). Further reflections on the qualifications discussed

“that professionalism, making sure that you're preparing them for a world of work as well I think that's really important with BTEC, it actually does prepare them ... we used to do things like CVS and mock interviews with them as well, because I'm sort of writing application forms, all part and parcel of trying to build that professionalism” (14).

However, there were also considerations of how *“Due to the age and experience of the Level 3 students, the confidence to question knowledge and practice needs to be developed”* (13). It may therefore be surmised that whilst Level 3 ECEC qualifications may provide a starting point for practitioners to begin to see themselves as professionals within the sector, there are inconsistencies within the qualifications that have impeded this.

There are also further points to reflect on, including the demographics of the workforce, and whether it is appropriate to expect newly qualified practitioners, positioned as novices when first joining the workforce, to perceive themselves as professionals. These practitioners are predominantly young women, surrounded by the dominant discourses that belittle their skills and knowledge, reducing their practice and expertise to that of ‘a glorified babysitter’ (Mills, 2021, p.1). If these practitioners are to be supported to view themselves as professionals, then this needs to coincide with a shift in the perceptions of the workforce.

In respect of the external transformative value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, it is very difficult to identify how those who have undertaken such qualifications can, as individuals, influence the ways in which they are seen and valued by others as a professional. Osgood (2019, p.199) ‘argued that professional identities are generated from the ways in which human subjects (nursery workers) are positioned and self-position within discourses.’ It is these dominant discourses that prevail here. The lack of status and recognition as professionals exacerbates the low pay and poor working conditions for the ECEC sector,

thus reinforcing the poor reputation of the sector, and preventing positive change. In regards to the data collected, analysis of responses considered the ability to negotiate conforming to existing values or challenging and incorporating their own values into their perceptions of a professional within the ECEC sector. From the responses to the questionnaire, it was clear that all participants considered their attributes and behaviours to be what made them professional within their roles. One participant was hesitant to apply the concept of 'professionalism' to the role held by Level 3 practitioners, suggesting that "*With a degree yes but not at basic level 3 as alot of 19 year old lack empathy experience understanding of families and application of transferring knowledge to your children*" (Q12). This serves to further support the notion that at Level 3, and particularly when young or newly qualified, practitioners are not perceived as being 'professionals'.

This then reflects a lack of value creation here, in the external transformative value cycle of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework (2020a, p.75). Whilst Level 3 qualifications may provide opportunities for some individuals to feel as though they are professionals, and may support the practices and behaviours that participants reported to be professional attributes, practitioners lack the ability to dictate or influence widespread and dominating perceptions of the ECEC sector. The policy agendas introduced and influenced by the ideologies and priorities of successive governments have resulted in a powerful discourse of derision, which has only been exacerbated throughout the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic in recent years. Continued lack of funding and inconsistent pay structures lead to workforce retention issues (Social Mobility Commission, 2020, p.5; Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021, p.6). Pascal *et al.* (2020, p.34) highlight that 'higher qualifications will not be effective if salaries and conditions are not sufficiently attractive to draw high quality candidates into the profession of early education and care', effectively summarising that the low status and pay conditions continue to work against the perception of those within the ECEC sector as

being professional. Moreover, continued lack of policy direction and ongoing attempts to reform the workforce continue to compound these dominant perceptions of the ECEC workforce as 'lacking' (Osgood, 2009, p.736) and 'inadequate' (Payler and Locke, 2013, p.127). Mills (2021 p.9) asserts that 'The government must recognise and acknowledge the power, oppression and structural injustices they impose upon the sector, give early years workers a voice and work alongside them to co-construct a new narrative for positive change'. Whilst the Social Mobility Commission acknowledges that 'it will take a monumental effort to change the perception of an entire Sector' (2020, p.4), what occurs within communities of practice and landscapes of learning is insufficient to shift firmly entrenched perceptions of those who work with young children. It is therefore concluded that whilst the Level 3 ECEC qualification holds value in its potential to provide knowledge and skills through training and practice experiences, these are insufficient in providing transformative value. When positioned against the backdrop of dominant discourses and literature suggesting the initial training of practitioners is too inconsistent to be relied upon as a measure of quality. It is evident then that the Level 3 qualifications, and the disparate voices of individuals within a fragmented sector, are unable to compete against the wider rhetoric that positions the ECEC sector as 'deficient' (Osgood, 2021, p.178).

6.2.8 The Support And Mentoring That Enables Development

The final cycle of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework (2020a, p.75) to be explored within this study was the *Enabling value*. As the underpinning element of the entire framework, this cycle is key in understanding how and why the Level 3 ECEC qualifications create value in the way they have for the participants in this study. Within this cycle, analysis was focused on the people who mentor, supervise, support and share their own values to enable the transformation of the students into novice professional practitioners.

In considering how the dominant discourses situate ECEC practitioners within previous cycles of the value creation framework, it is important to note that for some, their entry into ECEC is a result of this perception of the role as 'unskilled'. Nutbrown (2012b, p.9) identified the prevalence of the 'hair or care' stereotype, and the propensity of students with poor academic records to be guided towards ECEC. Similarly, Vincent and Braun (2010, p.206) noted how many ECEC students in their study had 'left school having been labelled either as inadequate, or adequate but no more'. As noted by the Social Mobility Commission (2020, p.53), there remains 'a tendency of school career advisers and teachers to 'push' less academic students into the sector'. This tendency lends further credence to dominant discourses that undermine the transformative value of the Level 3 qualifications. This cycle of the framework however, presents an opportunity for these students to be seen differently, to be given opportunities to 'turn oneself around' (Vincent and Braun, 2010, p.206). Vincent and Braun's discussion further noted how these students 'worked hard to leave behind apparently immature, inadequate student identities, replacing them with sensible and successful learner identities, albeit ones which in many cases were heavily dependent on support from the college tutors to keep them on track' (2010, p.209). This is a particularly salient point to consider, providing opportunities to explore questionnaire and interview responses that reflect upon the role of tutors and mentors in supporting these students to develop a more professional identity, and to see themselves as professionals.

Participants within the questionnaire focused on the enabling value throughout their responses, some in overtly positive responses, and others more dismissive in their consideration of the role of others in supporting them to achieve. This does not necessarily affirm Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's view of the enabling value in that 'the more successful it is, the less visible it tends to be' (2020a, p.100). Within this study, all of the 20 questionnaire participants engaged with at least 1 tutor, with Table 5.6

in Chapter 5 identifying an average of 4 tutors per participant. Comments made reflected how tutors “*were positive and motivating. Highlighting strengths*” (Q2), and how “*If they didn’t know they would help to find out*” (Q5). Additional comments reflected on positive experiences that supported practical development:

“Their own experiences helped me to understand what to do in scenarios at placement and without that knowledge I wouldn’t have been able to help. They have also helped me to become more confident which helped me to interact with parents and staff members. When they came to observe me within my setting they picked up on points that I could work on which helped me to become a more professional individual” (Q15).

One particular participant also reflected how

“They were two of the most supportive people I have met, they had confidence in my abilities and never seemed phased by anything. They could offer advice and support but also knew how much to give and how much to let you work through on your own so you had ownership of your learning and development” (Q10) [sic]

This positive reflection on the support received from tutors effectively demonstrates the enabling value of these tutors for individuals undertaking the Level 3 ECEC qualifications. Similarly, responses from the interviews also discussed the benefits of being able to share knowledge and experience, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic:

“my experience has been fundamental in providing students with an idea of the breadth of activities u could do with children. I was very fortunate to have been in a position to share photos of activities I had done with my own child to the group. The feedback was that they found my links to practice and stories as well as the photos of activities were useful because they had not been into placement and this allowed them to imagine what it was like” (I1) [sic]

Whilst some positive reflections focused on clearly defined skills or practical knowledge, others focused on how the support had provided them with other, more personal benefits, such as “*I believe they gave me the confidence to work in Early Years settings*” (Q3).

In contrast to this, three participants felt that their tutors did not help to prepare them to become a professional in the early years. Interestingly, all three of these students completed an NVQ, and only had 1 tutor throughout their time studying. There were also two further participants who had completed a BTEC qualification when in their late twenties, who felt that their tutors did not impact their practice too much, either because they were a mature student, or that their tutors were able to provide them with knowledge, but not the practical skills needed to excel in practice. In considering this kind of support as an enabling value, it is therefore important to consider how tutors can support students both academically and practically. Further exploration of the support provided by tutors (Figure 6.8) showed that whilst 15% (n=3) of participants felt that their tutors were better at supporting academic skills, 45% (n=9) of participants felt that they were supported both practically and academically by tutors throughout their Level 3 qualifications.

Figure 6.8. Tutor support



It was also interesting to consider the 6 responses that identified that the support provided depended on the tutor asked. When asked to consider this within the questionnaire, Table 6.3 identifies student perceptions of their tutors' knowledge and expertise in regards to the support offered throughout their qualifications. Of those who were supported by more than one tutor throughout their qualification, it was interesting to note that the majority of these participants (12 of 14) felt that the knowledge and expertise of their tutors varied.

Table 6.3 - Tutor expertise

Response	Number of responses	% of responses
Yes, I had multiple tutors with differing knowledge and expertise in Early Years	12	60
N/A, I only had one tutor	6	30
No, I had multiple tutors with very similar knowledge and expertise in Early Years	2	10

Tutors also agreed with this level of variation, reflecting on the impact of this for students:

“I feel that staff level of knowledge of EY as well as HoS can shape and direct how students are prepared for their future role as an EY professional and also staff maintaining current practice and training impacts on the student experience and transferring this skills to their future roles” (I1)

As discussed in Chapter 3, the *Early Years Workforce Strategy* noted that ‘If tutors are not able to maintain up to date knowledge and sector experience it can directly influence the learning experience of students and result in them not being fully able, despite their training, to excel in their job.’ (DfE, 2017c, p.23). This consideration is vital in understanding the importance of the enabling value of the qualifications in this cycle. If tutors are able to reflect and share current and appropriate knowledge with the students they teach, then it can be presumed likely that these students will be adequately supported to learn, and to develop a professional identity through their knowledge and experiences. This reflects the responses from a large majority of participants within the questionnaire. However, there are also other voices within these responses that indicate

that their experiences were not similar, and the support they did or did not receive was not sufficient or appropriate to prepare them for the ECEC workforce, for example: “*I had a college tutor who came out to see how I was doing however they were quite unreliable which made me look bad when I told staff I had a tutor visiting*” (Q5). Further consideration of the approaches taken by tutors to support students also highlighted some less favourable reflections, including a consideration that “*Inconsistencies in staffing can hugely impact learning*” (Q8).

It is evident from both the literature and these findings that the current training programmes and qualifications offered for the ECEC workforce vary greatly. As previously identified in Table 3.1, there is a lack of clarity regarding the expectations for tutors delivering those qualifications to have the appropriate subject expertise to be deemed occupationally competent or knowledgeable, echoing Kotzee’s concerns over what these tutors can do that others cannot (2014, p.175). The discourse surrounding the professionalisation of the ECEC workforce appears to overlook the importance of those responsible for training the future workforce, despite attempts. In contrast to Lave and Wenger’s (1991, p.86) views of novices and experts, Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1986) posited that there are three clear levels of expertise: novice, competent and expert. Kinchin *et al.* (2008, p.317) also draw upon Dreyfus and Dreyfus’ model (1986) in their assertion that a critical purpose of formal education is to prepare students for their future professional lives, which includes preparing them to transition from novice to competent, with potential to progress further to expert. Elvira *et al.* (2017, p.188) further considered the work of Tynjälä (1999; 2008) in considering the nuances between individuals’ identity as subject specialists rather than educators, which is further echoed by Brandes and Ginnis (1997) and Spenceley (2011). In consideration of the need for these tutors to be positioned as experts within the communities of practice, further analysis of the attributes questionnaire

As previously discussed in Chapter 3, McDaniel (2010, p.291) explored the need for tutors to develop these professional relationships and work collaboratively with their students, imparting knowledge, wisdom and experience in order to ‘share with students our understanding of a subject we have mastered’. This was echoed within a further interview, reflecting that *“Being able to link to practice provides meaningful experiences for students”* (I3). This collaboration of new and established members as a shared community of practice is important to develop a learning environment that actively promotes participation of all within the community, in order to facilitate a ‘reciprocal collaborative learning process’ (Soini *et al.*, 2015, p.642) that will benefit all.

Although tutors were mostly frequently cited as sources of support by questionnaire participants, they were not the only sources of support reflected on. A number of participants also reflected positively on the support they received from workplace mentors, considering their experiences in settings:

“A good supervisor who looked at what I needed. Encouraged me and gave me lots of real experiences” (Q4)

“I was given a placement supervisor who would check in with me as well as ask the staff I worked with. I got to know different staff in each placement so I knew who to go to” (Q5)

“The teacher in the nursery and other staff, and my tutor at college were all extremely supportive and showed that they had confidence in my abilities” (Q10)

Also discussed in Chapter 3, Elvira *et al.*'s (2017) consideration of Tynjälä (1999) and Heiberg Engel (2008) emphasises the role of placement in developing knowledge, as ‘this type of unarticulated knowledge is seldom taught in educational settings, but is usually gained through practical experience’ (Elvira *et al.*, 2017, p.190). Responses from the questionnaire reflect this, considering how other individuals may be more influential and supportive than tutors when undertaking a qualification. Within this study, not only were participants able to draw upon the expertise of tutors, but through practice experiences

and placements, there were also workplace mentors and colleagues who provided support and guidance, for example, *“I gained support from my Placement Officer who would observe me at regular intervals during placement in order to check my progress. I also had support from my other teachers at college and the staff members at my placement”* (Q20).

An additional question within the questionnaire attempted to explore where, and from whom, students had sought support throughout their studies. As shown below in Table 6.4, participants sought support from a range of individuals and groups, both in the formal learning environment, and within placement and work settings. Interestingly, two participants reported not seeking support from other people. One of these participants had completed an NVQ with just one tutor, and reflected that *“My tutor was not very good”* (Q7). However, the other participant also reflected that they preferred to ask others in their qualification cohort group, and within placement settings for support, potentially nullifying this response.

Table 6.4 - Support from others

Response	Number of responses	% of responses
I preferred to ask my tutor for support	7	35
I preferred to ask my group for support	3	15
I asked lots of people for support	9	45
I did not need to seek support	2	10
I preferred to ask other people working in Early Years for support	5	25
I preferred to seek support from elsewhere	1	5

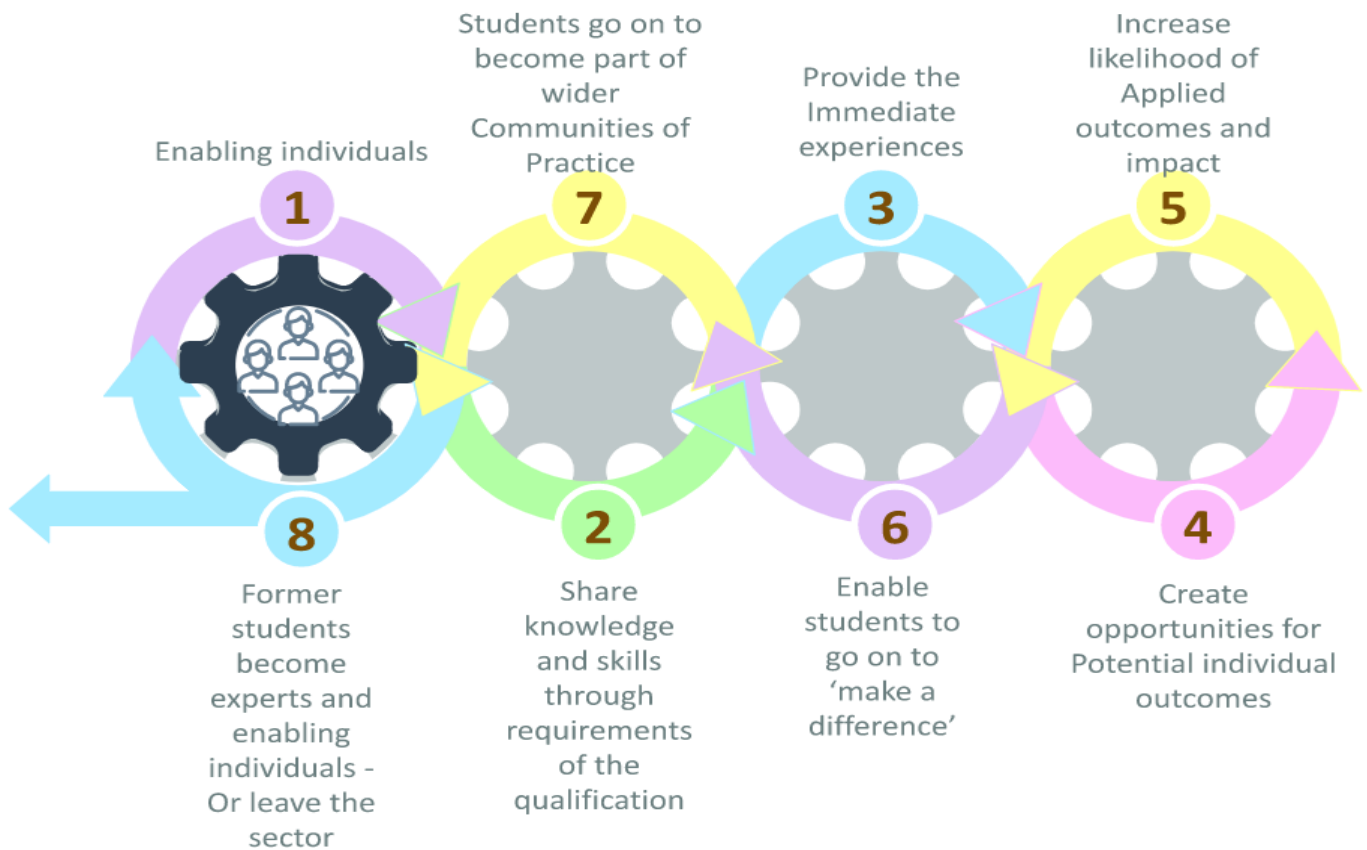
Like the responses to the questionnaires, there were also similar responses from interviewees, including a reflection on encouraging peer support, rather than just tutor support, as *“I definitely believe that, we aren;t the be all and end all, and we don't know everything and it is good to speak to others, learn from others”* (I4) [sic].

These responses all identify the importance of having people around, not only to learn from, within the circles and cycles of communities of practice, but also to seek guidance and support from, at various stages of their studies. In this way, students as novices are explicitly learning from more competent and expert others. These experiences assist their development of knowledge and skills, both academically and practically, providing the enabling value that gives the opportunities for these students to be seen and valued as professionals within the ECEC workforce when qualified. I would suggest that the enabling value, the support from tutors and setting mentors, is essentially the linchpin of the qualification process. Without this support, it is less likely that individuals undertaking qualifications, such as the questionnaire participants, would have developed the self-confidence or the knowledge and practical skills in the way that they have. Findings from this study suggest that this support serves to boost self-confidence and self-efficacy, challenging stereotypes that individuals may have encountered and instead, promoting an identity of themselves as ‘brilliant, capable, strong and clever’ (David, 2004, p.27).

Similarly, the sharing of knowledge and expertise, both theoretical and practical; welcoming these students as novices into the communities of practice; and therefore enabling all of the previous cycles in the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a, p.75) to occur. In visually representing this, I suggest that this value is essentially the gear that generates progression within cyclical communities of practice. As shown below in Figure 6.10, the enabling individuals are responsible for inducting new members into the existing communities of practice that exist within the remit

of the Level 3 qualifications, both in the formal learning environment, and within practice-based environments.

Figure 6.10 - The importance of the enabling individuals



This process provides novice students with immediate experiences where they are able to learn from competent and expert individuals, creating potential for these students as novices to learn, and to engage with individuals, environments and resources. These experiences and opportunities increase the likelihood that these novices will be able to develop sufficient knowledge and skills through the Level 3 qualification in order to join the workforce and put their knowledge and skills into practice. In joining the ECEC workforce, these novices have the potential to become competent practitioners, and to continue to develop their knowledge and skills through CPD and engagement with new communities

of practice. Practitioners may then be in a position to become enabling individuals for others, supporting novice students through placement experiences and mentoring in the workplace. However, there is also the possibility that through lack of progression opportunities, or as previously discussed, lack of pay, status and benefits, these individuals leave the ECEC workforce.

6.3 Key Findings

Reflecting on the findings as discussed in Chapter 5 and analysed through Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75), the key findings of this study relate to not only the value of the Level 3 qualification, but the value of those who enable the qualification to be delivered and assessed, both in formal learning environments and within practice based settings. As the literature and findings that have been discussed have highlighted, there is a clear need for a cohesive and consistent policy strategy to develop the ECEC workforce. What is not expressed with as much clarity, is the need for careful consideration in regard to the skills and knowledge of the tutors delivering the qualifications, and those who support students in practice.

As this chapter has explored, the value creation cycle presents a wealth of opportunities to explore different facets of the Level 3 qualification in relation to the value the qualification may have for individuals, and for the ECEC workforce as a whole. It is evident however, that the strategic values that dictate the context of the Level 3 qualifications are complex. This complexity impacts in various ways upon each element of the qualification in its delivery and assessment. Situating the qualifications within the wider ECEC context, these complexities continue to impact individuals within the sector, dictating a number of elements of the role of professionals within the ECEC workforce. Therefore, it can be suggested that without the enabling value of the individuals who tutor, mentor and support

learning within complex communities of practice, the Level 3 qualifications may not provide the value that they have the potential to.

It may thus be posited that similar to the former reliance on individuals who became known as pioneers in the early years of the ECEC workforce development, as explored in Chapter 2, the current approach to the development of the ECEC workforce is to rely on new 'pioneers' to carry the burden of inducting new members into the workforce. Through communities of practice established in formal learning environments and in ECEC settings, individuals take on responsibility for supporting new practitioners, and developing new practices. However, their roles and responsibilities are largely determined by current policy frameworks, and constricted by the dominant discourse that positions the ECEC sector as in need of constant reform.

6.4 Summary

This chapter utilised Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75), considering the ways in which the Level 3 ECEC qualifications prepare students for practice in the sector, and how the experiences of the participants provide answers to the three research questions.

The first research question sought to explore how the Level 3 ECEC qualification prepares students for professional practice. It can be surmised from the findings of this study, that the existing and previous ECEC qualifications have been inconsistent in their approach to preparing students for practice. Nonetheless, many of the qualifications studied provided students with knowledge of a range of topics relevant to the sector, as well as opportunities to experience working within the sector and to develop appropriate practical skills.

The second research question considered what the experiences of a Level 3 qualification contribute to professional practice in the ECEC workforce. From the findings of this study, I suggest that whilst experiences both in the classroom and in practice environments are necessary, the Level 3 ECEC qualifications are secondary to the individuals who support the development of professional practice. These enabling individuals create opportunities through various formal and practical learning experiences for students and novice practitioners to develop their professional practice safely.

The third and final question reviewed how tutors provided opportunities for professional learning on Level 3 ECEC qualifications. In considering the responses to this study, it was evident that tutors valued opportunities to engage with students, developing knowledge through dialogic learning and reflection on practice. Whilst learning opportunities varied across the qualifications, consistent themes of sharing knowledge, identifying good practice, and supporting students to develop confidence emerged from the data. It is therefore more appropriate to reflect that for this research question, it is not only tutors who provide opportunities for professional learning. Within cyclical communities of practice, those positioned as competent and expert are continuously providing opportunities for novices to learn from, supporting Wenger-Trayner *et al.*'s assertion that 'Learning comes full circle when they feed back these effects into their communities.' (2019, p.323).

Chapter 7: Conclusion

7.1 Introduction

This final chapter provided an opportunity to draw together the study and subsequent findings in order to consider the implications of this knowledge within the current context of Early Childhood Education and Care as a sector with specialist knowledge and expertise. Through discussions of the key findings, this chapter reviews the findings within the context, implications, contributions and limitations of this study. Following this, reflections on the study lead to consideration of how these implications and limitations may be addressed by future research and policy change.

7.2 Thesis summary

This study set out to explore the experiences of students undertaking Level 3 ECEC qualifications. Through seeking to explore the qualifications from both the perspective of the students undertaking them, and tutors delivering and assessing them, it was hoped that this study would provide insight into the ways in which new practitioners are prepared for what is termed 'professional practice' through a Level 3 qualification. This was subsequently amended during the pandemic, expanding the focus to explore the development of qualifications within the ECEC sector, and the experiences of those who had undertaken or delivered them to determine the value of the qualification as preparation for professional practice. This study also provided an opportunity to include the voice of the tutors within the ECEC sector, as this community has been consistently overlooked within the literature and policy focus.

Chapter 2 explored the historical context of the ECEC sector, reviewing the contributions of pioneers. From the inception of specialist provision for the care and education of young children; the introduction of specialist knowledge through Pestalozzian and Froebellian perspectives; and the eventual introduction of qualifications for those within the ECEC

workforce; these individuals known as pioneers established the foundations of the ECEC sector through their independent acts and intentions. Following the work of these pioneers, policy guidance established expectations for both settings and practitioners, introducing guidelines and expectations for qualifications. Chapters 2 and 3 reflect these developments through to the latest change of government and subsequent policy guidance. This foundation of knowledge provided a context for the current expectations for Level 3 ECEC qualifications and perceptions of the workforce, as presented in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3 also reviewed relevant literature to explore various elements of social learning, in relation to communities of practice and considering notions of expertise, and the collaborative and communal possibilities for learning. Furthermore, considerations of professionalism and value allowed an opportunity to review the dominant discourses that impact upon and influence the ECEC sector, which in turn, impact and influence the possible value of the Level 3 qualifications. These chapters highlighted the lack of consideration for the voice of the tutor, providing an opportunity for this research to contribute a unique perspective in considering the role and importance of tutors, and listening to tutors to better understand their experiences of delivering and assessing qualifications, and more importantly, in supporting students to progress into practice post qualification.

Opportunities for face to face research through a case study approach were restricted by the national lockdowns and safety responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. This necessitated a shift of methods, resulting in an online approach to engaging with individuals who had undertaken Level 3 ECEC qualifications over the past four decades, and with tutors responsible for the delivery and assessment of current qualifications, as set out in Chapter 4. This change of approach enabled a broader perspective of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, considering a number of elements of the content of the Level 3 qualifications undertaken, and providing an opportunity to compare the types of

qualifications and ways in which the qualifications may have prepared students for professional practice once qualified. These findings were thematically analysed (Braun and Clarke, 2022) and discussed in Chapter 5, drawing out key findings for each participant group. This then led to a review of the perceived value of the qualifications through the lens of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a) in Chapter 6.

7.3 Key Findings and Implications

Through an online, self-completion questionnaire (Appendix 1), 20 participants revealed they had undertaken three different types of Level 3 ECEC qualifications: BTEC qualifications from 1980s to 2010s, NVQ apprenticeship style qualifications from 1990s to 2020s, and the most recent Early Years Educator (EYE) qualifications in 2010s. With participants having completed qualifications across a span of more than four decades, there were some anticipated discrepancies in experiences. However, the majority of responses reflected similar perspectives in regards to experiences of learning, undertaking work placements, and engaging with tutors. Similarly, through four online interviews with tutors (Appendix 4), it was found that despite delivering qualifications through different awarding bodies, and in different regions of England, there were a number of similar responses regarding the ways in which they engaged with students in order to prepare them for professional practice.

As discussed in Chapter 1, my initial interest that inspired this study was the lack of clarity regarding the expectations for tutors delivering relevant ECEC qualifications. As a tutor working in an FE institution myself at that time, it was evident that qualification delivery and assessment decisions reflected a lack of value for, and understanding of, the sector. This was further compounded by a lack of interest in how those who deliver and assess qualifications could impact upon the success of the students undertaking them. At the time

of commencing this study, very little available literature focused in-depth on the pivotal role of the FE ECEC tutor, and their ability to share and develop knowledge with students.

Whilst considerations of the knowledge and experience of tutors exist within the literature (Maguire, 1995, p.120; McDaniel, 2010, p.291; Nutbrown, 2012a, p.6; Jarvis, 2013, p.8), there remains very little exposition of the importance and the role of ECEC tutors in the qualification process, or acknowledgement of this in national policy. This study therefore provides an original contribution to the field of knowledge within the sector, in hearing the perspectives of a small number of these tutors, and in considering the importance of the tutor as the enabling value within the qualification experience.

Through exploring historical accounts of the development of ECEC as a distinct sector, it is clear that as a sector, ECEC has persistently been overlooked as a priority in national policy, resulting in a sector on the edge of crisis (Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021, p.5). Whilst there was a significant shift in policy focus, accompanied by substantial investment in the skills and quality of the ECEC sector during the terms of New Labour governance, this was effectively dismantled under the subsequent Coalition government, in favour of supporting 'childcare' as a means to support parents back into employment. Positioned within politically inclined economic and academic discourses, the notion of ECEC as a foundation for children's learning and development appears to be largely disregarded in recent national policy from the Conservative government. Educational justifications for ECEC have shifted considerably over the past century, with current expectations for practitioners and settings to shoulder the burden of raising children's outcomes, and addressing the impact of poverty, social stratification, and economic disadvantage. Expectations that ECEC settings would receive funding to provide provisions for disadvantaged children and somehow make a positive difference to these children's outcomes dismisses the importance of the workforce shouldering these expectations, and additionally, disregards the policies that enforce these disadvantages.

These high expectations for the ECEC workforce serve to reinforce perceptions of the workforce as lacking, and may, alongside previously discussed issues of low pay, status and value, also be responsible for the rapid turnover of staff within settings, and potentially the low recruitment of students to ECEC training courses. If the ECEC workforce is to practice in such problematic contexts, then it would be appropriate to ensure that all potential entrants to the workforce were appropriately prepared with sector specific knowledge and skills, and that the value of the sector is re-examined in light of these expectations.

Qualifications are designed to provide students with both knowledge and skills relevant to their chosen career path and field of study. The importance of the learning and assessment opportunities provided by tutors and awarding bodies, and the opportunities to reflect on these components are all vital to the process of becoming a professional practitioner. Tynjälä's (2008, p.140) reflection on the importance of these opportunities is key to return to here. If students as novices can be welcomed into existing communities of practice, they can be supported through these communities and experiences. Likewise, if they have the opportunity to reflect and regulate their knowledge and skills through guidance and support from more experienced and knowledgeable others, they are likely to develop the skills and knowledge required to do the job expected of them as professional practitioners. This then supports the progression of the student from being a novice, to becoming competent, as suggested by Lave and Wenger (1991, p.86). This suggests that the ECEC workforce would benefit from training and qualifications delivered by those who have the skills, knowledge and experience to be deemed an expert.

Analysing the findings of this study through Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75) provided an opportunity to separate various elements of the qualification, examining the existing systems, structures, and processes expected of the qualifications, in conjunction with the participant's reflections on their experiences of

undertaking and delivering such qualifications. By breaking down the findings into the eight value creation cycles (Figures 6.1; 6.2), there were a number of key findings explored within each cycle that enabled a greater understanding of the ways in which students were prepared for professional practice through a Level 3 ECEC qualification.

The strategic value was the overarching cycle, in which the literature explored in Chapters 2 and 3 provided context through previous iterations of policy and guidance that structure the ECEC sector. Within this cycle, findings indicated that whilst the number of qualifications available at Level 3 were reduced following Nutbrown's review (2012a), the qualifications that were deemed to be 'full and relevant' still vary widely. Within these qualifications the content, duration and expectations of students, tutors and assessors differ quite considerably. This has had the effect of prolonging the issues identified by Nutbrown, such as a lack of trust in the qualifications preparing students for practice (2012a, p.17). Whilst uniformity is not desirable, consistency of expectations would be beneficial to ensure that all students undertaking such qualifications could be expected to have similar knowledge and skills once qualified. This may aid the workforce in presenting a coherent identity as professionals who have all completed a standardised training programme in preparation for practice. However, as highlighted in Chapters 2 and 3, this is unlikely without a coherent and consistent approach from national policy. Without clear governance, including ownership and long-term accountability for any potential reformation of the qualifications within the ECEC sector, the current approach to deriding the workforce and viewing practitioners as being consistently in need of reformation is likely to continue. In view of the findings of this study, I would therefore conclude that the strategic value of the Level 3 qualifications hinders the ECEC sector, providing opportunities for scrutiny and derision, rather than placing confidence in the qualifications to adequately prepare students to fulfil the expectations of their roles within the workforce once qualified.

The second phase of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation cycle (2020a) was the orienting value, which focused on the demographics of the sector in correlation to the participants of the study. Literature discussed in Chapters 2 and 3 provided a basis for the findings in Chapters 5 and 6, highlighting the lack of diversity within the ECEC sector. A dominant view of the ECEC workforce as predominantly young, white, and poorly qualified females reinforces stereotypes of working class girls encouraged into career paths of 'hair or care' (Nutbrown, 2012b, p.9). As with the strategic value, the ECEC workforce appears to be inhibited by a lack of coherent and strategic policy direction to address these issues. Recent news regarding the cancellation of ECEC qualifications deemed to be too similar to the new T-Level qualifications (Gov.uk, 2022) were suggested to be detrimental to the ECEC sector, potentially reducing rather than increasing the diversity of the students entering the workforce. Once again, this presents inconsistencies with previous policy ambitions, and situates the workforce as lacking in regards to diversity. Subsequently, this may impact on the ability of the workforce to appropriately reflect the communities and families with which they work. Interestingly, the findings of this study presented a challenge to the perception of the ECEC workforce as poorly qualified, reviewing the propensity of participants to have undertaken both undergraduate and postgraduate qualifications. Whilst this may be indicative of these participants, rather than the entire ECEC sector, this does highlight the inaccuracies in the way that the ECEC workforce is assumed to reflect the stereotypes of them as 'unskilled' highlighted by Mills (2021, p.6), with low levels of qualifications, as identified by Vincent and Braun (2013, p.752). Despite this, the orienting value of the Level 3 qualification is unclear to those outside of the ECEC sector. The qualifications available do enable students to progress to further study, and to continue to develop their skills and knowledge through CPD. What is lacking from this cycle of the framework is a clear understanding how this value can be

more widely observed, and whether this could have the potential to change the ways in which the ECEC workforce is perceived.

The third cycle reflected the immediate value of the Level 3 qualifications, reviewing participants' reflections on their experiences whilst undertaking the Level 3 qualifications. This cycle garnered a number of responses regarding participants' engagement in various learning opportunities, and their ability to observe, mimic and develop professional behaviours. As indicated in the literature, it was anticipated that participants would reflect on such changes to their behaviours and identities, reflecting the findings of Colley *et al.*, (2003, p.487), Eteläpelto and Collin (2006, p.237), and Vincent and Braun (2011, p.782), where students 'represented' themselves, and 'demonstrated best practice', essentially conforming to expected ways of performing. Nonetheless, responses from participants also reflected a need to perform in different ways, standing out and 'being silly' rather than conforming to expectations of calmness, challenging Osgood's (2021, p.175) view that these performed behaviours represented a restricted interpretation of professionalism. This cycle provided an insight into the importance of practical experiences being embedded into the Level 3 qualifications, giving students opportunities to learn in practice and from practice. Such opportunities to make links between the theory and literature around developing knowledge and skills, and then having the opportunity to put this into practice and learn 'on the job' is essential. These findings reflect the findings of the James Committee Report (1972, p.68) and more recently, Tynjälä's assertion (2008, p.149) that formal learning environments and workplace environments are equally as important for learning if there is to be clear understanding of both theoretical and practical knowledge, giving students the skills and confidence needed to know what to do and how to respond to situations faced post-qualification. This ultimately reflects Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's (2020b) suggestions that 'real practice' extends beyond what is learnt from formal training, and so the multiple settings in which a student has the opportunity to

engage, form a landscape of practice within which students are able to develop knowledge, skills and identities that can be used in professional practice. Thus, the opportunities to experience placement opportunities within multiple settings within a Level 3 qualification are essential if students are to be adequately prepared to face the challenges presented by professional practice post-qualification. It is this consideration that must be prioritised during further reviews of qualifications (NCFE, 2022), ensuring that all Level 3 ECEC qualifications deemed to be 'full and relevant' mandate that students should access a range of settings, working with a full range of age-groups in order to achieve a 'licence to practice'.

The next cycle of this framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a) reflected the potential value of the qualification, in using the knowledge and skills gained through the immediate experiences, and applying them to further experiences. This cycle positions the Level 3 ECEC qualifications as being effective when students are able to demonstrate that they can take knowledge and skills developed during the qualification and apply them to practice. Nonetheless, responses from the questionnaire challenged this, reflecting the findings of Alexander (2001, p.7), and Smedley and Hoskins (2022, p.224), in suggesting that what is learnt during the qualification may be superficial, inappropriate, or inadequate compared to the knowledge and skills required post-qualification. Similarly, a lack of trust in the Level 3 qualifications being adequate preparation for practice echoed concerns identified by Nutbrown (2012a, p.17) that qualifications were inconsistent in their potential value. Whilst responses reflected awareness of appropriate types of professional behaviours, knowledge of statutory requirements and curriculum guidance, I conclude that the interactions with others within this cycle appeared to be more important than the ability to use transitory documents and resources in a constantly changing policy landscape. A key finding from this cycle was the importance of professional relationships, collaborative practices, and thus, the development of communities of practice within defined landscapes

of practice. The benefits of learning from 'more knowledgeable others' were evident within the findings, providing examples of situations where experiences and expertise were shared, and confidence was developed, demonstrating the potential for professional networks and relationships to arise from these learning opportunities. This again reiterates the importance of tutors and mentors having up to date knowledge and sector specific experiences to draw upon if they are to be positioned as the competent and expert individuals within these communities of practice.

Moving further through the value creation cycle, the applied value explored the ways in which participants' reported adapting and using the potential knowledge developing during their qualification when in practice. This section of the findings revealed a lack of consistency in opportunities to observe and learn from expert practitioners in the workplace, and tutors within the formal learning environments. It could be presumed that this is attributable to the lack of consistency in the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, where some participants completed qualifications with work placements in a range of ECEC settings, working with children of different ages, and yet other participants had never worked with children under two years of age, or had only experienced practice in a single setting. This lack of opportunity to observe variations in practice may impact on a student's ability to engage in appropriate professional practice themselves, inhibiting their ability to demonstrate occupational competence in unfamiliar contexts post-qualification. This lack of consistency in qualifications and abilities further feeds into the dominant discourses affecting the ECEC workforce, positioning practitioners as 'unskilled' (Cooke and Lawton, 2008, p.27; Nutbrown, 2012b, p.9; Powell and Gooch, 2016, p.101) and therefore poorly valued (Bonetti, 2020; Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021). Once again, this situates the Level 3 qualifications as in need of revision to ensure consistency and a coherent approach to providing skills and knowledge that can be applied post-qualification. If future qualifications could reflect the importance of varied placement

experiences, and thus, mandate for a consistent approach to ensuring these opportunities, then it can be assumed that students would be better equipped for post-qualification practice through being able to observe and work with a variety of competent and expert staff, to learn from them, reflect on their experiences, and to be inducted into these communities of practice as well as the social learning spaces established within the formal learning environments. Thus, these social learning experiences influence and shape the practitioner they will become, dependent on the opportunities for developing knowledge and skills through such experiences.

These opportunities for practical experiences and reflection link into the next cycle of the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a), the realised value, whereby findings reflected the participants' ability to make a difference. By being able to practice skills and develop knowledge safely within the remit of 'being a student', participants reported being able to use the knowledge gained through the Level 3 qualifications both in practice in ECEC settings, and as applied to new career paths including FE tutors of similar ECEC qualifications. These findings reflect a number of previously explored sources, including Kotzee's (2014, p.161) suggestion that the concept of expertise is pivotal in determining the realised value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications, and how expert knowledge and skills can be applied in further contexts beyond the initial qualification. Likewise, Campbell-Barr's (2018, p.78) consideration that 'good practitioners will have the *right* practices at the *right* time to achieve the *right* outcomes' reiterates this, as does Nutbrown's (2021, p.240) suggestion that the Level 3 ECEC qualification should be able to stand as proxy for the qualification, providing evidence of the expertise held by qualified practitioners. This cycle quite clearly reflects the views of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020a, p.48) in considering that the ability to make a difference does not require grand changes, or measurable outcomes. Instead, skills and knowledge are developed through shared experiences, and are able to be taken forwards into new

contexts, and shared with others beyond the initial community of practice, thus contributing to future learning.

The transformative value of the Level 3 ECEC qualification was the penultimate cycle to be explored, presenting findings that demonstrated that the knowledge, skills and experiences as discussed above do not necessarily equate to becoming a 'professional' Overall, findings from this study indicate variations in the Level 3 ECEC qualifications that lead to inconsistencies in knowledge and skills, preventing practitioners from being perceived as appropriately skilled or knowledgeable. Compounding this is the wider context, including the hegemonic view of those within the sector as unskilled (Bonetti, 2020; Mills, 2021), the historical and entrenched divisions of training, pay, status and career progression (Pascal *et al.*, 2020, p.6), and the complex web of socio-political issues that situate ECEC as an economic investment (Speight *et al.*, 2020, p.13), or a sector in constant need of reform (Osgood, 2009; Josephidou *et al.*, 2021). It can therefore be concluded that for this study, whilst participants were able to articulate their own understandings of professionalism, the lack of strategic policy direction and enactment for the ECEC sector, as well as the ongoing inconsistencies within the training and qualifications available, precludes the ECEC workforce from being perceived and valued as professionals. This is not necessarily a part of the qualification, but is controlled by the wider context that the Level 3 ECEC qualifications are situated within, resulting in a workforce that is consistently demeaned. In order to affect transformative change, changes to national policy are needed, including a revised expectation for practitioners counted in ratio to be adequately qualified as advocated by Cooke and Lawton (2008, p.7). As explained by Owen and Haynes (2010, p.204), 'The most obvious indication that there is a problem with the vision for an integrated and highly qualified workforce is the fact that no steps have been taken to resolve the situation' Unfortunately, this is not something that the ECEC workforce can control as the current context is controlled by a

heavy 'top down' approach, evidenced within the strategic value, with funding issues that prevent settings hiring or retaining more qualified staff (Christie & Co, 2019; NDNA, 2019; Social Mobility Commission, 2020; Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021), and policy dictated to settings, with compliance enforced through measures such as Ofsted inspections. The current ECEC sector is too disparate and from reviewing the available literature, too overworked and underpaid (Christie & Co, 2019; Early Years Workforce Commission, 2021) to enact a bottom up approach to making changes that suit the needs of the ECEC workforce. In this way, the ECEC sector continues to rely on those seen to be pioneers to make changes, and to provide the guidance and support for new members of the workforce.

This expectation that those deemed to be competent or expert will induct novice members into the workforce, guiding them through qualifications and practical experiences summarises the findings of the last cycle of the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a), the enabling value. This cycle underpins the key findings of this study, in that pioneering individuals and organisations were responsible for the establishment of the ECEC sector, as well as the establishment of qualifications for the ECEC sector. Similarly, it appears to be left to individual training providers, tutors, and settings to ensure that new members of the ECEC workforce are welcomed into the sector, and provided with appropriate knowledge and skills to ensure that the work undertaken supports children, families and communities. From the findings of this study, it can be posited that the experiences of students undertaking qualifications, and practitioners engaged in professional practice are influenced by their experiences when undertaking training and qualifications. Thus, these experiences are likely to have been influenced quite considerably by the type of support received, and the knowledge and experience of those in these enabling and supportive roles. If tutors are both knowledgeable and experienced, then it can be presumed that both the theoretical content

and knowledge that is shared will support the student to develop their own skills, knowledge and understanding. Similarly, in regard to the practical experiences undertaken through the qualifications, if those who support novice students in practice are deemed to be competent, or possibly expert practitioners, it can be assumed that novice students would be likely to learn from them, developing appropriate skills and knowledge from these experiences. It is this underlying message that resonates throughout this study, reiterating the importance of having support from more knowledgeable others, in order to develop oneself. This support, offered by tutors and placement mentors, provides the necessary guidance that directs new practitioners in understanding how to behave, how to act, and possibly even how to think. These impressions can help to mould novice ECEC practitioners into becoming competent practitioners themselves, thus continuing the cycle when they are then in a position to make a difference to the learning of others, as they were once supported.

7.4 My Contributions to Knowledge

As has been previously identified, this research provides an original perspective in that it provides a focus on the tutors, who have been marginalised within the available literature and policy guidance. The role, and importance of the tutor is evident in the findings of this study, and through engaging with tutors and considering their voice. Providing a platform to be recognised, and an opportunity for tutors' voices to be heard meets the aims discussed in the methodology to identify those whose voices were traditionally overlooked (Ryan and Grieshaber, 2005, p.37), and therefore enabled an original exploration of the experiences of tutors in considering ECEC training and qualifications. This perspective has enabled a deeper understanding of the contributions of tutors to the learning experiences provided during qualifications, and adds knowledge to the field that is not currently evident within the body of available literature.

This thesis utilised Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's value creation framework (2020a, p.75) adapted to suit the context of ECEC (Figure 6.2). As applied to the findings of this study, whilst other literature explored in Chapters 2 and 3 discusses aspects and provision of ECEC qualifications, both at FE and HE level, this study is also original in seeking to explore the value that the Level 3 ECEC qualifications provide as preparation for professional practice. This study contributes a unique perspective, consolidating knowledge through exploration of the historical context and development of the ECEC sector in order to better understand the contemporary knowledge within the field of ECEC. Reviewed against a background context that demonstrates a consistently undervalued workforce, and widespread derision for the knowledge and skills of the sector, this study provides a theoretical contribution to knowledge in the field, highlighting not only the value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications as preparation of professional practice, but also, through exploration of the experiences, knowledge, and skills gained during a qualification, an underexplored area has been exposed, presenting the importance of knowledgeable, skilled and supportive individuals within the communities of practice that develop. Without the contributions of these individuals, it is unlikely that the Level 3 qualifications would hold the same value in preparing students for professional practice post-qualification, as this study has found.

7.5 Reflections

Through situating the current context of the ECEC sector within the historical timeline, it is easy to suggest that nothing has changed in the past two hundred years. Those working with young children are still derided for their presumed lack of intelligence and capability, as they were two centuries ago. In this time, other professions have become firmly established, with clear structures for training, pay and career progression, whereas the ECEC sector has long been overlooked and disregarded. Political agendas have sought to

marketise and quantify the provision of care and education, yet there has been scant long-term commitment to change and progression for the benefit of the workforce, or the children and families they work with. Nonetheless, the ECEC sector has not stagnated. The contributions of pioneers, researchers, and determined individuals have provided a rich and complex history, providing the foundations for understanding the intricacies of caring for and educating young children, and the ways in which knowledge can enhance practice, as taught on Level 3 ECEC qualifications. Moreover, the work of individuals in the provision of not just care and education for children, but also the mentoring and support of students seeking to join the workforce provides an interesting insight into the sector, and a different perspective of how experiences during qualifications can prepare individuals for professional practice post-qualification.

Throughout this study, it has been vital to continue to reflect on the aims of the research, reflecting on the three key questions I set out to answer. Whilst the study evolved due to Covid-19 safety limitations in 2020, the questions asked of questionnaire participants worked effectively to gather sufficient data to answer these research questions and to explore Level 3 ECEC qualifications, reviewing the value of the qualifications as preparation for professional practice. Similarly, whilst email interviews were a data collection tool that I had not utilised before, I was able to engage effectively with an appropriate number of participants to gather sufficient data regarding their experiences, and present this in their own words, enabling the voices of the tutors to be clearly heard within the findings of this study.

It was anticipated that Covid-19 adaptations may have changed the focus of the study, however, it is now evident that through the initial methodological plan to conduct a case study exploration of the delivery and engagement with a Level 3 qualification in a single setting, findings may have been entirely different. Through exploring the range of qualifications undertaken across more than four decades, with participants spanning a

wide range of ages and careers, the value of Level 3 ECEC qualifications and enabling individuals has been identifiable through the participants responses in a way that may not have been captured in just a single FE setting with a more homogeneous group of participants. Nonetheless, this is a small scale study, with participants who volunteered to participate in the research. Whilst not necessarily a limiting factor of this study, it would be interesting to research a much larger, and more diverse population of ECEC practitioners in order to compare the perceptions of the value of the Level 3 ECEC qualifications.

My own experiences are also important to reflect on at this point. The original design for this study sought to conduct an in-depth case study of a specific group of students, their tutors, and the placement mentors that supported them in the workplace. It was hoped that listening to these voices, and triangulating findings from each of the participant groups would provide a better understanding of the experiences students had whilst undertaking qualifications, and thus reveal the value of the qualifications in preparing students to be professionals. Nonetheless, this study did provide an opportunity for the voices of both students who had undertaken Level 3 qualifications, and tutors who were responsible for delivering such qualifications, to be heard, and appreciated for their perspectives.

Upon reflection, a key strength of this study was the data collected, as whilst the number of participants was not as high as was hoped, the responses were all in the participants' own words. This provided greater insight into their experiences and perceptions, and allowed a deeper understanding of the importance of tutors and more knowledgeable others in supporting learning experiences. Likewise, the experience of engaging in a webinar hosted by Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner (2020b) was pivotal in giving a clearer direction for the analysis of the findings. Through understanding the value creation framework (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner, 2020a) this study was able to explore multiple facets of the Level 3 ECEC qualification and social learning experiences that would not have been possible when utilising a different theoretical or analytical framework.

Furthermore, the opportunity to articulate thoughts and draw out meaning was considerably enhanced through engagement with a critical friend during the analysis phase, enabling a deeper understanding of the data collected, and opportunities to step back and look at the bigger picture of what this study had found. This then fed into the understanding of Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner's framework, allowing for distinction to be made between cycles, but also to identify where cycles overlapped and fed back and forth into one another.

Conversely, a number of weaknesses were identified throughout the study, including the omission of the voices of the placement mentors when the methods were revised during the pandemic. This would have provided additional perspectives within the findings of this study, and potentially drawn attention to not only the importance of the tutors being competent or expert in their subject, but also the importance of mentors working within settings to be knowledgeable and experienced themselves. Furthermore, this study may have benefited from a wider group of participants, as the findings from the questionnaire may have given greater insight had participants undertaken a wider range of qualifications. Similarly, the voice of the tutors was represented by just four participants. Whilst these four interviewees taught on a range of Level 3 qualifications and in diverse geographical locations, it is presumed that a more diverse group of tutors would also provide diversity in their responses, and therefore provide greater clarity as to the role and the importance of the tutor as the enabling value of the Level 3 qualification. Overall, the study manages to illuminate key findings in respect of the importance of the tutor, and provide an opportunity for the voices of tutors to be heard, yet it is important that future research considers these muted voices in greater depth moving forwards.

7.6 Where do we go from here?

My belief is that what is needed for the sector, is the establishment of a minimum threshold of expectations for both pre-service training and staffing, including a minimum of Level 3 qualification for all staff within the ECEC workforce. Existing qualifications within the sector are too disparate, which has enculturated the pervasive perceptions of derision, and encouraged inconsistencies and business approaches to qualifications. There are currently more than 16 Awarding Organisations responsible for 76 different ECEC qualifications (DfE, 2022), some meeting the EYE criteria (NCTL and DfE, 2013), and others not sufficient to count in ratio. Whilst NCFE (2022) reviewed Level 3 ECEC qualifications for publication in Autumn 2022, it is my hope that this review identifies the lack of trust held in the sector as a result of inappropriate and insufficient qualifications. More realistically, it is my expectation that this review will be used to justify the closure of existing courses that compete with the new T-Level qualification, which as previously identified, may affect the range and diversity of applicants to the sector in future years. If these closures come about, there will be a risk of stifling the development of training and qualifications by eradicating competition and furthering a lack of trust in the Level 3 ECEC qualifications as appropriate preparation for professional practice.

A further recommendation would be for the incumbent government to develop a clear and coherent policy strategy to overhaul the ECEC sector, encompassing training, qualifications, pay, status and career progression, along with long-term funding and plans that extend beyond political party terms. Whilst unlikely, it may be the most effective way of recognising the contributions of enabling individuals within the sector, and retaining knowledgeable and expert practitioners within the workforce. Without such political intervention, the ECEC sector continues to edge closer to an irreversible crisis of retention and recruitment that has a considerable impact on the families of England. Failure to

intervene may mean that the current ECEC workforce continues to leave the sector in search of financially viable alternate career paths. Without a clear vision for the future of the sector, the ECEC workforce continues to be subsumed by the dominant discourses enacted upon it, and the failure of policy to address the structural inequities within the field. These policy failures remain a major contradiction in light of the expansion of places for children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old, and the expectations that preschool education will ameliorate the effects of poverty and disadvantage on children and families.

In regard to further research, from the findings of this study, it would be beneficial to consider how the findings from the government initiated review of qualifications fit within the context provided from annual ECEC workforce surveys. From there, I would suggest that further research explores the potential for change within the workforce, for families and communities, and most importantly, for children's outcomes, if the ECEC sector were to professionalise themselves with a minimum qualification expectation, achieved through robust and consistent qualifications that provide opportunities to learn through practice as well as in formal learning environments.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questionnaire

Experiences of Level 3 Early Childhood Education and Care qualifications

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to agree to take part, it is important that you read this section carefully to ensure that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This research is being conducted for the purpose of completing a thesis for the Doctorate of Education at the University of Sheffield. This research will not be funded by any organisation. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please email lstafford1@sheffield.ac.uk with any questions.

Why am I being asked to take part?

The purpose of this research is to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences of those who have undertaken an early years qualification at level 3. Level 3 is the expected standard for qualified staff in the early childhood education sector, and this research sets out to explore how the qualification helps to prepare students for practice once they are qualified. This survey is seeking responses from any individual who has experienced a level 3 training qualification related to working with children in the early years.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research, it is entirely voluntary. You will be asked to tick the consent box below to indicate you are happy to take part, before proceeding to answer any questions. All information you provide will be anonymised and kept strictly confidential. Any comments made that reflect on an identifiable person or place will be anonymised to prevent identification.

Should you decide that you do wish to take part, you may also change your mind and withdraw from participating in the research by not submitting this questionnaire and simply closing the web browser.

If you have completed the questionnaire, you should understand that all the submitted responses are anonymised at source and it will not be possible to identify or withdraw your responses once you have completed the survey.

What will participation involve?

You will be asked to complete this online survey about your experiences of undertaking an early years qualification at level 3. Overall, it should take approximately 15-20 minutes to complete. You will not be asked for any personal information, and will not be required to give any further time to this research.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no major risks or disadvantages to taking part in this research, as it is anticipated that all participants will be sharing experiences and expectations of their level 3 training course and that there will be some shared experiences amongst participants.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Your decision to participate in this research will be entirely confidential as no personal data will be collected at any time. You are free to discuss your participation in the research, however, the researcher will not collect or be able to disclose any details about your participation at any time.

All information collected from the questionnaire will be anonymised at source, as the survey will not collect any personal data, such as email addresses, and so no participant or location will be identifiable in any reports or publications.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

As this survey will not collect your personal data, there are no implications for GDPR. According to Data Protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis that applies in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. Further information regarding the use of your data can be found in the University's Privacy Notice should you wish to know more (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>).

All data collected will be stored immediately and securely in password protected cloud based storage for the duration of the research project. This data may be pseudonymised shortly after the data collection has concluded for ease of analysis and presentation of findings. Pseudonymised data will be stored securely for the duration of the research project, and all data included in the final report will be presented in a way that prevents identification of any person or location. Under the supervision of the Dissertation Supervisor, all data will be analysed solely by the researcher. The data collected will be used for the researcher's Doctoral thesis (EdD) and may be included in future academic publications.

Who has ethically reviewed the project?

This project has been ethically approved via the University of Sheffield's Ethics Review Procedure as administered by the School of Education.

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

It is not expected that this survey will pose any risk to participants. However, if you have any queries or complaints please contact me at lstafford1@sheffield.ac.uk or my supervisor Professor Elizabeth Wood can be contacted at e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk.

Many thanks for taking the time to read this information and complete this survey.

***Required**

1. I confirm that I have read and understood the information above, and that I consent to taking part in this research. *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No *Skip to section 8 (Thank you!)*

For the purpose of this study, 'Early Years' is used in place of a range of terms, including Early Childhood, Childcare and Education, etc.

2. Have you undertaken a training course to achieve a Level 3 qualification in Early Years? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No *Skip to section 8 (Thank you!)*

About
you...

This section is designed to gather information about you that may have influenced the possible responses to future questions. All responses are completely anonymous, but will help to understand the types of courses and training opportunities you may have had.

3. 1) What gender do you identify as? *

4. 2) What is your current age? *

Mark only one oval.

16 - 20

21 - 25

26 - 30

31 - 35

36 - 40

41 - 45

46 - 50

51 - 55

56 - 60

61 - 65

66 - 70

71 - 75

76+

5. 3) Which label do you feel best suits your current role? *

Mark only one oval.

- Student
- Early Years Practitioner
- Early Years Educator
- Early Years Teacher
- Educarer
- Nursery Nurse
- Teaching Assistant
- Teacher
- Childminder
- Nanny
- Room Leader
- Deputy Manager
- Manager
- Early Years Tutor
- Early Years Lecturer
- Early Years Assessor
- Retired
- No longer working in the Early Years workforce
- Other

6. 4) In which decade did you undertake your Level 3 Early Years qualification?

Mark only one oval.

- 1950's
- 1960's
- 1970's
- 1980's
- 1990's
- 2000's
- 2010's
- Currently working towards this qualification

Your Early
Years
qualifications

Having studied for an Early Years qualification at Level 3, this section asks you to reflect on that training.

7. 1) Please indicate which Level 3 course you studied (e.g. BTEC National Diploma in Early Years, NNEB Diploma in Nursery Nursing, NVQ in Playwork) to the best of your recollection. *
-

8. 2) How long did your Level 3 course last? *

Mark only one oval.

- Less than 6 months
- Between 6 months to 1 year
- Between 1 year to 18 months
- Between 18 months to 2 years
- More than 2 years

9. 3) What elements of your course have benefitted you most in practice when working in the Early Years? *

10. 4) Were there any parts of your course that you believe did not benefit you? What were they and why do you think this? *

11. 5) How do you think your assignments contributed to your learning? *

12. 6) To the best of your recollection, which topics did your course cover? (tick all that apply) *

Tick all that apply.

- Additional Needs / Special Educational Needs
- Assessment of learning
- Attachment
- Behaviour management
- Child Development, no focus on theorists
- Child Development, with a focus on theorists
- Child Protection and/or Safeguarding
- Children's Dietary needs / Nutrition
- Children's Health
- Children's Personal Care
- Children's Rights
- Children's Wellbeing
- Communication skills
- Equality, Diversity or Inclusion
- Ethics or Values of Care
- Early Years Curriculum
- First Aid
- Health and Safety
- Literacy skills
- Numeracy skills
- Observation techniques
- Planning activities for learning
- Play
- Professional Development
- Psychology
- Recording, reporting and sharing information
- Reflective Practice
- Research
- Safe environments for children
- Sociology
- Supporting Transitions
- Working with Children
- Working with Families
- Working in Partnership with Parents
- Working in Partnership with Professionals

13. 7) Were there any topics that you feel were more important than others? Which ones? Why do you think this? *

14. 8) Were there any topics that you feel were less important than others? Which ones? Why do you think this? *

15. 9) Overall, how well do you think your Level 3 qualification prepared you for working in the Early Years? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Not at all well	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Very well

16. 10) Based on your experiences, what do you think makes a 'good' course in preparing students for a career in Early Years? *

17. 11) Do you have any particular memories of your course that you would like to share?

18. 12) What does the word 'Professional' mean to you? *

19. 13) What characteristics of being a 'Professional' do you think your level 3 course focused on? *

20. 14) Did you complete your qualification before working in Early Years, or whilst *
working in Early Years?

Mark only one oval.

- I studied prior to working in Early Years
- I studied prior to working in Early Years, but did placements throughout the course
- I studied whilst working in Early Years
- I worked in Early Years for a while before studying whilst working
- I worked in Early Years for a while, then took a break to study

21. 15) Did your Level 3 qualification have: *

Mark only one oval.

- No work placements. I already worked in the Early Years *Skip to question 30*
- No expectation of practice based experience *Skip to question 30*
- Work Placement in a single setting
- Work Placements in multiple settings
- An expectation that you worked part time whilst studying
- An expectation that you worked fulltime whilst studying
- Other: _____

Your
Practice
Experiences

This section asks you to recall your practical experiences in the Early Years whilst undertaking your Level 3 course.

22. 1) Do you feel that your experiences in practice/placement were beneficial in preparing you for working in Early Years practice? Please explain your answer *

23. 2) How would you rate your placement experiences? *

Mark only one oval.

	1	2	3	4	5	
Difficult, not very useful or demotivating	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Enjoyable, inspirational or very useful

24. 3) Based on your experiences, what do you think makes a 'good' placement experience? *

25. 4) Based on your experiences, what do you think makes a 'bad' placement experience? *

26. 5) What knowledge and skills did you learn in your placement that you did not learn elsewhere on your Level 3 course? *

27. 6) What kind of support did you have, and from whom, when attending a practice based placement? *

28. 7) How do you think that the support you received in practice/placement prepared you for working in the Early Years? *

29. 8) How effectively do you feel that your placement experience reflected what you learnt 'in the classroom'? *

Your
tutors

This section focuses on your recollection of those who delivered and assessed your Level 3 Early Years qualification. The term 'tutors' is used to encompass all staff engaged in teaching/delivery of information and knowledge, supporting academic learning and assessing your knowledge and skills.

30. 1) How many tutors did you engage with throughout your course? *

31. 2) What skills do you think a 'good' Early Years tutor should have? *

32. 3) Did the level of knowledge and expertise of your tutors differ? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes, I had multiple tutors with differing knowledge and expertise in Early Years
- No, I had multiple tutors with very similar knowledge and expertise in Early Years
- N/A, I only had one tutor

33. 4) To what extent do you feel that your tutor's level of knowledge and expertise * impacted on the likelihood of you approaching them for support?

Mark only one oval.

1 2 3 4 5

Not at all, it was their job to support me Very much so, I needed the support of an expert

34. 5) What skills do you think your tutors were best at supporting? *

Mark only one oval.

- Mostly Academic skills
- Mostly Practical skills
- Both
- Neither
- It depends on the tutor

35. 6) Which do you feel is a more accurate representation of your learning experience? (tick all that apply) *

Tick all that apply.

- I preferred to ask my tutor for support
- I preferred to ask my group for support
- I preferred to ask other people working in Early Years for support
- I preferred to seek support from elsewhere
- I did not need to seek support
- I asked lots of people for support

36. 7) How do you think your tutors prepared you to be a professional in the Early Years? *

**Post
Qualification
and Practice**

This final section asks you to reflect on how your Level 3 training experiences may have impacted your practice, any additional qualifications you may have undertaken, and any final thoughts you may have on the experience of undertaking a Level 3 qualification and working in Early Years

37. 1) Do you feel your Level 3 qualification enabled you to find a desirable job or opportunity for further study in Early Years or relevant fields? *

Mark only one oval.

- Yes
- No

38. 2) When working in the Early Years, how do you think the term 'Professional' applies to your role? *

39. 3) What impact do you feel your Level 3 qualification had on your current approach to Early Years practice? *

40. 4) What CPD/training courses have you engaged with since completing your Level 3? *

41. 5) What do you believe are the strengths of Level 3 qualifications in preparing practitioners for working in the Early Years? *

42. 6) Do you believe Level 3 qualifications are lacking anything in particular? If so, *
what would you add?

43. 7) Have you studied beyond Level 3 in a field related to Early Years? *

Mark only one oval.

Yes

No

44. 8) What is your highest completed qualification level? *

Mark only one oval.

Level 3

Level 4 (HNC, NVQ)

Level 5 (HND, NVQ, Foundation degree)

Level 6 (BA/BSc or Honours degree, QTS)

Level 7 (PGCE, PGDE, Masters degree)

Level 8 (Doctorate)

45. 9) When working in the Early Years, what do you think should be the minimum
qualification level to be counted in ratios?

46. 10) Do you have any additional comments you wish to make about Level 3 Early Years qualifications and training courses?

Thank
you!

Please click submit when you are happy with your answers.

Once submitted, your responses will not be identifiable, and therefore cannot be withdrawn from the study. If you are happy with this, please click the 'submit' button below. To edit any of your responses, please use the 'back' button. To withdraw from participation, please close the browser.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to participate in this research.

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Appendix 2: Interview Information Sheet

Participant Information Sheet

Research Project Title: Experiences and expectations of professional learning in Early Childhood Education at level 3

You are being invited to take part in a research project. Before you decide whether or not to agree to take part, it is important that you read this sheet carefully to ensure that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve.

Please take the time to read through this information sheet and feel free to ask any questions you may have. If there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information, please ask via email. You may discuss this with others if you wish.

Please take your time to consider your involvement carefully before deciding whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the project's purpose?

The purpose of this research is to gain a clearer understanding of the experiences that people have when supporting students on an early years educator qualification at level 3. Level 3 is the expected standard for qualified staff in the early childhood education sector, and this research sets out to explore how the qualification helps to prepare students for practice once they are qualified. The research is designed to explore a snapshot in time, and so participation will take place over the 2021/2022 academic year.

This research will take the form of a thesis, to be submitted for a Doctorate of Education to the University of Sheffield.

Why have I been chosen?

You have been chosen to participate in this study as you have experience delivering on an early years educator qualification at level 3. The research seeks to recruit a small number of students, tutors and practitioners within the early years sector to share their experiences.

Do I have to take part?

You do not have to take part in this research, it is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part, you may want to read this information sheet and keep it or dispose of it. There will be no negative consequences should you not wish to participate. Whether you choose to participate or not, no one else will know as only the researcher will have this information, and it will not be shared with anyone else.

Should you decide that you do wish to take part, you may also change your mind and withdraw from participating in any further research at any time: either by not submitting responses to questions, or emailing the address above if you plan to or have participated

in an interview and wish to withdraw. You do not need to give a reason, you are free to decide for yourself at any point during your participation in the research, and there will be no negative consequences for your decisions.

If you wish to withdraw your data from the research following an interview, there will be a period over after the interview where this will be possible. From 3 weeks post interview, all data will have been anonymised during the analysis process, and will no longer be able to be withdrawn from the research.

If you do take part in the research, you will be asked to keep this information sheet so that you can refer to it should you have any questions. You will also be asked to complete a consent form before taking part in any research to ensure that you are freely agreeing to participate.

What will happen to me if I take part? What do I have to do?

Should you wish to take part in the research, your involvement will last no more than a few weeks.

If you have agreed to participate, you will be asked to participate via an online interview to share some of your experiences. This can take the form of a virtual meeting, recorded via Zoom, or through email interactions to suit your availability.

Should you wish to take part in an interview to share your experiences in more detail, you will be contacted using the email address given to arrange this at a convenient time and method. You will then be asked to give your consent at the start of the interview to participate in the interview process, and for the information shared in the interview to be anonymised and used in the final thesis. It is expected that the interview process will be a relaxed process, which should take place at times that suit you as a busy participant, whereby you will be asked to respond to various questions about your experiences of delivering qualifications and supporting students, and your expectations of the level 3 early years educator qualification. You will also have the opportunity to ask your own questions or provide additional comments during this time.

After the interview, you will be sent a transcription of the recorded conversation for you to read. Should you wish to make any amendments or clarifications, you will have an opportunity to do so at this time. Should you decide to withdraw from the research, you will also have the right to request that this data is not included in the final research up until 3 weeks after your participation has ended.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no major risks or disadvantages to taking part in this research, as it is anticipated that all participants will be sharing experiences and expectations of the early years educator course and that there will be some shared experiences amongst participants. All participants will be either assigned a participant group, e.g. 'Tutors', or a pseudonym in the analysis of the data, and so no participant or location will be identifiable. For tutors, there should be no negative repercussions from participating. Your involvement in the research will not be shared with others. Any comments made that reflect on an identifiable person or place will be anonymised to prevent identification.

For practitioners, there should be no negative repercussions from participating. Your involvement in the research will not be shared with others. Any comments made that reflect on an identifiable person or place will be anonymised to prevent identification.

The main disadvantage to your participation may be the inconvenience of finding time to participate, which it is anticipated that email interviews will take up less of your time, and provide you with time to consider your responses before committing to sending.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

Whilst there are no immediate benefits to taking part in the research, it is hoped that there will be benefits for all participants in being able to reflect on experiences and expectations, and use that reflection to inform their future practice or study. It is also hoped that from the findings, recommendations can be made that will support students, tutors and practitioners in getting the most out of the experience of studying/delivering/supporting students on the early years educator at level 3 in the future.

Will my taking part in this project be kept confidential?

Your decision to participate in this research will be kept confidential. You are free to discuss your participation in the research, however, the researcher will not disclose any details about your participation at any time.

All information collected from the interviews will be kept confidential, and all participants will be referred to by their participant group, e.g. 'Tutors', or a pseudonym in the analysis of the data, and so no participant or location will be identifiable in any reports or publications.

Should any participant disclose any information that would present a risk to any person, location or public safety, the researcher will be obliged to report this to the relevant authorities.

What is the legal basis for processing my personal data?

In order to collect and use your personal information as part of this research project, we must have a basis in law to do so. The basis that is used is that the research is 'a task in the public interest', though full details on the legal basis for collecting and using data are available at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection>.

Whilst this research will ensure that all personal data will be pseudonymised during analysis, some personal data may be required in order to communicate with participants. According to Data Protection legislation, I am required to inform you that the legal basis that applies in order to process your personal data is that 'processing is necessary for the performance of a task carried out in the public interest' (Article 6(1)(e)). The University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study. This means that the University is responsible for looking after your information and using it properly. Further information regarding the use of your information can be found in the University's Privacy Notice should you wish to know more (<https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>).

As a participant in the research, your right of access can be exercised in accordance with UK Data Protection Law. You also have other rights including rights of correction, erasure and objection that will be upheld throughout the study. Should you have any concerns regarding these issues, you may wish to contact myself as the researcher, or my supervisor, using the contact details provided at the end of this sheet.

What will happen to the data collected, and the results of the research project?

All data collected will be stored immediately and securely in password protected cloud based storage for the duration of the research project. This data may include personal details, and so, will be pseudonymised shortly after the data collected has concluded.

Pseudonymised data will be stored securely for the duration of the research project, and all data included in the final report will be presented in a way that prevents identification of any person or location. This pseudonymisation will also apply should the research findings be presented at conferences and written up in journals. Should the data collected be used for additional or subsequent research, additional pseudonyms will be used to prevent deduction of identification. Due to the nature of this research it is possible that other researchers may find the data collected to be useful in answering future research questions. You will be asked for your explicit consent for your data to be shared in this way, and are under no obligation to agree to this.

There will only be one researcher throughout the study, and no other persons will be authorised to access your data at any time.

Once the final report has been approved, an anonymised dataset will be stored for potential future research use, and all personal data stored in the cloud based storage will be destroyed.

Who is organising and funding the research?

This research is being conducted for the purpose of completing a thesis for the Doctorate of Education at the University of Sheffield. This research will not be funded by any organisation.

What if something goes wrong and I wish to complain about the research?

Should you feel that you wish to complain about any aspect of the research, it is requested that you contact myself as the researcher, or my supervisor to address this situation, using the contact details provided on this sheet.

Should your complaint be an issue that can be addressed directly, you will receive a response and possible action from this within two working weeks of raising the issue. Should your complaint be in regards to a serious adverse event, it may be necessary to take additional time to investigate the issue further, and you will be kept informed as necessary throughout this process.

Should you feel that your complaint has not been handled to your satisfaction, you may wish to contact the Head of Department, who will then escalate the complaint through the appropriate channels.

Should the complaint relate to how your personal data has been handled, information about complaints, and how to raise a complaint can be found in the University's Privacy Notice: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection/privacy/general>.

Contact for further information

Should you wish to contact the researcher at any time, to ask questions, request further information, withdraw from the research or to raise a complaint, please email Louise Stafford at lstafford1@sheffield.ac.uk

Should you wish contact the Supervisor of this project, Professor Elizabeth Wood, Head of School for the School of Education at the University of Sheffield can be contacted at e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk

Finally ...

Thank you for reading this. Please keep this copy of the information sheet, as you may need to refer to it should you choose to participate in the research. You will be asked to provide your consent to participate prior to completing the questionnaire, and again should you also choose to participate in an interview. Remember, this consent can be withdrawn by you at any point, you are under no obligation to participate in this research.

Thank you.

Appendix 3: Interview Consent Form

Consent form

Research Project Title: Experiences and expectations of professional learning in Early Childhood Education at level 3

Please read through the Information sheet provided, and select either Yes or No for each statement below:

*Required

1. I have read and understood the Information Sheet provided, and have had the opportunity to ask questions *

Tick all that apply.

Yes

No

2. I understand that in order to collect and use my personal information as part of this research project, there must be a basis in law to do so. The basis is that the research is 'a task in the public interest', and that full details on the legal basis for collecting and using data are available at <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/govern/data-protection> *

Tick all that apply.

Yes

No

3. I understand that the University of Sheffield will act as the Data Controller for this study and will be responsible for looking after my information and using it properly *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

4. I have read and understood how the data I provide will be used *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

5. I have read and understood what is required of me as a participant *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

6. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time, without giving reason. *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

7. I confirm that I have consented to participate in this research at this time *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

8. I agree to the interview being audio recorded *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

9. I understand my personal details such as name, phone number, and email address etc. will not be revealed to any other person *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

10. I agree to the use of anonymised quotes in publications *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

11. I understand and agree that my words may be quoted in publications, reports, web pages, and other research outputs. I understand that I will not be named in these outputs unless I specifically request this. *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

12. I agree that an anonymised data set, gathered for this study may be stored in a specialist data repository relevant to this subject area for future research outputs *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

13. I agree to assign the copyright I hold in any materials generated as part of this project to The University of Sheffield. *

Tick all that apply.

- Yes
 No

14. I give my consent to participate on: *

Example: 7 January 2019

This content is neither created nor endorsed by Google.

Google Forms

Appendix 4: Interview Questions

- 1) How long have you been delivering Level 3 courses?
 - a) And what changes have you noticed over the years? / Have you identified any changes to the courses since that time?
 - b) And what is your opinion of the content of the current Level 3 EYE qualification you deliver?
- 2) How do you think the course and your teaching prepares students for professional practice and employment, particularly considering their ability to develop independence as professional practitioners, and to question knowledge and practice, or conform to expectations?
- 3) How would you describe the balance between practical and academic learning on the course?
 - a) Are there any skills that you think CANNOT be taught in the classroom, or can ONLY be taught in the classroom?
 - b) How have you supported students to develop practical skills?
 - c) Have you encountered situations where students have experienced discrepancies between what they learn in the classroom and what they see in practice?
- 4) What opportunities do you provide for students to reflect on practice within the classroom?
 - a) How do you encourage students to be reflective?
 - b) How often do you reflect with the students about their progress?
- 5) How do you make links between theoretical and practical knowledge to support student's understanding of their role as a future professional practitioner?

- 6) What strategies do you use to support students to develop professional skills and attributes?
 - a) What kind of attributes and skills do you think your student's view as being 'professional'?
- 7) How do you see your role in facilitating student's engagement in their own professional learning?
- 8) How do you feel your knowledge and experiences of Early Years influence and contribute to your teaching?
- 9) In a community of practice, learning is collaborative, supporting the development of knowledge and skills, where novices are supported to learn from and with experts, how do you see this reflected in your classroom experiences?
- 10) Throughout the qualification, students complete assignments and attend placements. Do you as a tutor have opportunities to communicate with other tutors, placement assessors and mentors to discuss student's progress?
 - a) Are you aware of any actions you or others may take if you have doubts regarding a student's practical or academic competency?

If you have any questions, comments or additional information, please feel free to note this here.

Appendix 5: Ethical Approval Forms



Application 024707

Section A: Applicant details
Date application started: Fri 8 February 2019 at 12:00
First name: Louise
Last name: Stafford
Email: lstafford1@sheffield.ac.uk
Programme name: EdD Early Childhood Education
Module name: Thesis Last updated: 05/09/2019
Department: School of Education
Applying as: Postgraduate research
Research project title: Experiences and expectations of professional learning in Early Childhood Education at level 3
Has your research project undergone academic review, in accordance with the appropriate process? Yes
Similar applications: - not entered -

Section B: Basic information				
Supervisor				
<table><thead><tr><th>Name</th><th>Email</th></tr></thead><tbody><tr><td>Elizabeth Wood</td><td>e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk</td></tr></tbody></table>	Name	Email	Elizabeth Wood	e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk
Name	Email			
Elizabeth Wood	e.a.wood@sheffield.ac.uk			

Proposed project duration

Start date (of data collection):
Fri 1 November 2019

Anticipated end date (of project)
Sat 1 August 2020

3: Project code (where applicable)

Project code
- *not entered* -

Suitability

Takes place outside UK?
No

Involves NHS?
No

Human-interventional study?
No

ESRC funded?
No

Likely to lead to publication in a peer-reviewed journal?
Yes

Led by another UK institution?
No

Involves human tissue?
No

Clinical trial?
No

Social care research?
No

Involves adults who lack the capacity to consent?
No

Involves research on groups that are on the Home Office list of 'Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations'
No

Indicators of risk

Involves potentially vulnerable participants?
No

Involves potentially highly sensitive topics?
No

Section C: Summary of research

1. Aims & Objectives

This research aims to investigate the current expectations and experiences of students and tutors in regards to the professional learning that occurs during level 3 Early Years Educator qualifications. Whilst acknowledging the discourse regarding the quality of early childhood education and its workforce, this research focuses on the pre-service training required to become a 'professional' practitioner in the sector. This will be achieved through exploration of the policies and relevant research that underpins the qualification, as well as engagement with students, tutors and workplace settings that support students in achieving their qualifications. This engagement seeks to explore shared expectations, experiences of developing knowledge and skills, and the preparation for employment provided by pre-service qualifications.

2. Methodology

The research has been planned to involve three groups of participants:

Students enrolled on a level 3 Early Years Educator qualification

Tutors involved in delivering and assessing the level 3 Early Years Educator qualification

Professionals who support the students in the workplace to develop the necessary practical skills to achieve the Early Years Educator qualification.

Gatekeeper consent will be sought from an institute of Further Education to engage with staff and students, and workplace settings will be chosen from the surrounding locale to ensure consistency.

Each group will be provided with relevant information regarding their potential participation, and informed consent will

be recorded confidentially, assigning pseudonyms to each setting and participant.

Participation will involve each group of participants being invited to complete an online questionnaire designed to explore their perceived roles, experiences and expectations regarding the professional learning that occurs during the Early Years Educator qualification. Clear consent to participate in the research will be sought before participants are able to answer any questions. There will also be contact details for participants to communicate with the researcher should they have any questions or concerns. Should a participant change their mind during their participation, the responses already completed will not be collected if the participant exits the online questionnaire prior to completion and submission.

The questionnaire will be tailored to each participant group, and all similarly structured into separate sections, focusing on: the participant themselves; the Early Years Educator qualification; the work experience placements; and finally perceptions of the role of tutors and practitioners in facilitating the professional learning.

Participants will have the option to also participate in a follow-up semi-structured interview, designed to elicit further detail in regards to experiences and expectations of the professional learning that occurs during the level 3 qualification in preparation for employment in the sector. The interviews will take place in small participant groups where play based creative resources discussed in Holmes (2019 in Brown and Perkins, 2019, p.97) will be used to engage participants in discussion and reflection, with prompting questions drawn from themes arising in the data collected from questionnaires. These interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed using NVivo, and additional notes will be made by the researcher to enhance accuracy and clarity.

Responses to both questionnaires and interviews will then be analysed using NVivo. All data collected will be coded in relation to themes arising from the literature reviewed and from the data itself. This will then be used to analyse the data from each participant group, attempting to determine what experiences may impact on professional learning, and how the participants perceive pre-service qualifications to prepare students to become professional practitioners.

3. Personal Safety

Have you completed your departmental risk assessment procedures, if appropriate?

Not applicable

Raises personal safety issues?

No

Research will take place online in the first instance, and then interviews will be conducted at the FE institution to ensure the safety of students and staff, with myself as a visitor to the setting. For interviews with practitioners, I will attend the Early Years setting at a mutually convenient time.

In both settings, I expect to be signed in to the building following existing health and safety procedures, and to show my DBS clearance as a standard procedure.

Section D: About the participants

1. Potential Participants

Initially, staff and student participants will be determined through approaching FE institutions to gain gatekeeper approval in conducting the research within their setting. Using a case study approach, it is vital that the participant groups are all involved in the same pre-service qualification offered through a single college. Students will only be recruited from those studying the level 3 Early Years Educator qualification, and similarly, teaching staff will be restricted to those who deliver or assess this qualification. This will then determine a geographical location where early years settings will be approached and informed consent sought to conduct research with relevant staff from each setting who support students in their professional placements.

The number of participants will depend entirely on the size of the college programme, which will not be determined until gatekeeper approval is determined. However, it is anticipated that each group of participants will number no more than 15, with fewer participants choosing to participate in interviews than with the questionnaires.

2. Recruiting Potential Participants

Potential teaching staff and student participants will be identified during an initial face to face information sessions held at the agreed FE institution. I will provide all potential students and staff with appropriate information regarding the research and to answer any questions that may arise either face to face during the session, or via email following the session. Similarly, I will write to local early years settings to recruit a number of participants, including a full information sheet to ensure that all participants are provided with the means for making an informed decision regarding their participation, ensuring that all potential participants are able to contact me via email should they have further questions. The information sheets provided will be tailored to each group of participants, detailing the purpose of the research and possible benefits to the participants, the involvement and time requested from them, what will happen to their information when the data is being collected as well as following this time, and ensuring that all participants are fully

informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any time. Following this, potential participants will be given adequate time to read and ask questions regarding their participation. I will wait two weeks before contacting potential participants to gain consent for participation in the research.

2.1. Advertising methods

Will the study be advertised using the volunteer lists for staff or students maintained by CiCS? No

- not entered -

3. Consent

Will informed consent be obtained from the participants? (i.e. the proposed process) Yes

All participants will be provided with an Information Sheet detailing the purpose of the research and possible benefits to the participants, the involvement and time requested from them, what will happen to their information when the data is being collected as well as following this time, and ensuring that all participants are fully informed of their right to withdraw from participation at any time during the collection of data. I will allow two weeks for participants to read and ask questions regarding their participation, before seeking initial consent from each participant. The initial method of data collection is an online questionnaire, will include an initial consent section, to be completed prior to any questions being answered. This is to ensure participants are reminded of the information sheet and their right to withdraw from the research before opting in to the research. As the questionnaire will make use of Google Forms, all consent will be recorded securely on the Google Drive provided by the University alongside the responses given for each participant. Should a participant not provide consent, then they will not be permitted to continue to the question section of the form. This initial method of an online questionnaire will then attempt to recruit a small number of participants to take part in interviews, asking for an email address to be provided to allow communication in planning the interview. The data collected, including any email addresses provided will be stored securely on the Google Drive provided by the University. The second method of data collection is interviews. All participants who opt to participate in interviews will be given an additional copy of the Information Sheet prior to arranging the interview at a mutually agreeable time. At the start of the interview, consent will be sought from all participants prior to collecting any data. This will be recorded via AppSheet, designed to be utilised on mobile devices via the Google Forms application for safe and secure electronic storage of consent forms on the Google Drive provided by the University. Should a participant decide that they no longer wish to consent to participate at this time, the interview will not take place. The interviews will follow a semi-structured convention, utilising play-based creative resources to engage participants in discussion and reflection, with questions used as prompts where necessary. Questions will also be derived from any themes arising from the data collected via online questionnaires, seeking to explore any themes in greater depth where relevant. Should any participant feel that they wish to withdraw their consent during the interview process, they will be permitted to leave, and all responses ascribed to their pseudonym will be removed from the data set.

As all participants will be qualified in English to the standards expected of their roles, holding a GCSE grade C/4 or above, or functional skills equivalent, it is anticipated that all participants will be capable of reading and understanding the information provided and therefore, to give informed consent should they wish to participate in the research.

4. Payment

Will financial/in kind payments be offered to participants? No

5. Potential Harm to Participants

What is the potential for physical and/or psychological harm/distress to the participants?

For all participants in this research, there will be the risk of inconvenience when taking up their time. For staff and students, this may involve taking up time after scheduled sessions. For practitioners, this may involve inconvenience of finding a suitable time when they are not required to be included in adult:child ratios.

It is not anticipated that any questions or aspect of the research will cause undue stress or harm to any participant. Participants will also be reminded of their right to withdraw from the research should they feel that the process is detrimental to themselves. Questions asked will not focus on academic success, and will not ask any participant to name or identify any other individual. It will be made clear through the information sheet and during the interview process that the research is a case-study, exploring the perceptions of three different groups of participants who are involved with the same pre-service qualification. Whilst this does mean that participants in each group may be known to one another, the participation of any individual or setting will not be disclosed. In regards to potential power differentials, it is expected that each group of participants will participate in the research processes separately from one another, and that those who may be uncomfortable participating in a small group interview will not put themselves forward for this. As acknowledged by BERA (2018, p.21) it may be impossible to prevent participants discussing their participation with one another, however, it is not anticipated that the questions asked will yield any particularly sensitive data, or that such discussions would be detrimental to the welfare of the participants, as participants may naturally discuss their experiences of the pre-service qualification with peers outside of the research.

It is not likely that any participant will experience any physical harm during the research process. All play-based

resources used in the interview process will be resources suitable for young children, and will pose no risk to participants.

It is hoped that the findings of the research will be beneficial for all participants in regards to developing a greater understanding of their experiences in supporting or developing professional knowledge for their future as a practitioner or as a tutor.

Should any situation arise where a participant reveals additional information that requires immediate action, this will take precedence of data collection, and safeguarding procedures of the setting will be followed as advised by BERA (2018, p.25).

How will this be managed to ensure appropriate protection and well-being of the participants?

In regards to the inconvenience caused by the time taken to participate in the research, it is anticipated that online completion of the questionnaire should minimise disruption, and allow participants to complete quickly and without having to go out of their way to return the completed questionnaire. For interviews, it is anticipated that this will take place at a mutually convenient time, when the participant would already be in that location to save time and prevent unnecessary expenditure on travel.

Should any participant indicate verbally or nonverbally that they are uncomfortable during the interview process, they will be reminded of their right to withdraw from participation at any time.

Should any participant perceive that their participation is in any way detrimental to their wellbeing, they will be advised, as in the information sheet, to withdraw their participation. Students may have concerns that their participation or responses may be linked in some way to assessment, grading or success on the course, and will be reassured that this is not possible, as no other person will have access to the responses collected from the questionnaires or interviews, and none of the questions asked will focus on assessment, grading or success on the course. The researcher is not seeking information regarding these issues, and will intervene where necessary should the interview veer towards these topics. Similarly, participants may be concerned that other participants may give responses that may identify them in some way. This will be managed through the removal and redaction of any identifying names or places, and the use of pseudonyms in the analysis and presentation of the data collected.

Following the interviews, a supportive debrief will be offered, reminding all participants of what will happen with the data collected, their right to withdraw and right to confidentiality. This will also be an opportunity for participants to discuss any queries or concerns they may have, and for the researcher to alleviate any anxieties regarding their participation and engagement with the research. Participants may also contact the researcher via email after this time with any further issues.

In regards to any concerns that may arise from the data collected, it may be appropriate to discuss this confidentially with my supervisor, and potentially with the designated safeguarding officer or gatekeeper of the setting as advised by BERA (2018, p.25) in order to ensure the wellbeing of the participants, as well as those they work or study with. As explained in the information sheet for participants, and advised by the University (https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.165641!/file/SREGP-Children-Young-People.pdf), should any participant disclose any information that would present a risk to any person, location or public safety, the researcher will be obliged to breach confidentiality in order to report this to the relevant authorities.

Section E: About the data

1. Data Processing

Will you be processing (i.e. collecting, recording, storing, or otherwise using) personal data as part of this project? (Personal data is any information relating to an identified or identifiable living person).

Yes

Which organisation(s) will act as Data Controller?

University of Sheffield only

2. Legal basis for processing of personal data

If, following discussion with the UREC, you wish to use an alternative legal basis, please provide details of the legal basis, and the reasons for applying it, below:

- *not entered* -

Will you be processing (i.e. collecting, recording, storing, or otherwise using) 'Special Category' personal data?

No

3. Data Confidentiality

What measures will be put in place to ensure confidentiality of personal data, where appropriate?

In regards to data collected through questionnaires, these will be completed electronically, and automatically stored securely in a folder on the Google Drive provided by the University. Any identifying information provided through responses, such as names of settings, will be pseudonymised during coding and analysis.

For the planned interviews, participants will be requested to provide additional consent using an App, derived from the Google Forms consent form used for the questionnaires. This will also be automatically saved securely in a folder on the Google Drive provided by the University. As data will be stored automatically once consent is given, timestamps will be used to identify participants, and therefore, no names will be recorded. The interviews will be audio recorded for transcribing and analysis purposes, and the audio files uploaded to the secure Google drive, linked to the consent forms via the timestamp. These files will then be formatted from the Dictaphone once a copy has been securely saved. Participants will be allocated a pseudonym for themselves and for their workplace setting, that correlates to the timestamp of the interview. This will permit confidential analysis of data using NVivo.

All pseudonyms will be used throughout the coding and analysis process, to ensure that the data that is published and disseminated is consistent in the confidentiality provided to all participants and settings involved in the research. This consistency will then permit continued confidentiality should the data be further disseminated.

4. Data Storage and Security

In general terms, who will have access to the data generated at each stage of the research, and in what form

Consent forms, questionnaire responses and audio recordings of interviews will be stored securely and confidentially using Google Drive. NVivo will be used to transcribe the audio files, which will then be saved to the Google Drive for security purposes. All NVivo files will be securely stored on the Google Drive.

All data stored will make use of pseudonyms rather than real identities of people and places in order to maintain confidentiality throughout the research and dissemination.

I will be the only person to have direct access to the data stored on the Google Drive. Where necessary, pseudonymised data may be made available to my supervisor. There will be no additional researchers, or services provided by external agencies that would require access to data collected.

What steps will be taken to ensure the security of data processed during the project, including any identifiable personal data, other than those already described earlier in this form?

All data will be stored securely on the Google Drive provided by the University. All data will be pseudonymised when transcribed from interview, using timestamps from the consent form to identify the interview and ensure consistency of pseudonyms. No paper copies of interview notes or consent will be made at any point. Through using the Google suite, all data will be electronically stored. Data will not be saved to local drives or portable devices to eliminate risk of data being stored incorrectly, lost or corrupted.

Will all identifiable personal data be destroyed once the project has ended?

Yes

Please outline when this will take place (this should take into account regulatory and funder requirements).

Access to the University Google Drive will be lost following the awarding of the doctorate, and so all data will be deleted from the cloud storage prior to this date.

Section F: Supporting documentation

Information & Consent

Participant information sheets relevant to project?

Yes

[Document 1057697 \(Version 2\)](#)

[All versions](#)

Consent forms relevant to project?

Yes

[Document 1057698 \(Version 2\)](#)

[All versions](#)

Additional Documentation

External Documentation

- not entered -

Section G: Declaration

Signed by:

Louise Stafford

Date signed:

Fri 23 August 2019 at 16:37

Official notes

- not entered -



Downloaded: 29/07/2022
Approved: 05/09/2019

Louise Stafford
Registration number: 160137215
School of Education
Programme: EdD Early Childhood Education

Dear Louise

PROJECT TITLE: Experiences and expectations of professional learning in Early Childhood Education at level 3
APPLICATION: Reference Number 024707

On behalf of the University ethics reviewers who reviewed your project, I am pleased to inform you that on 05/09/2019 the above-named project was **approved** on ethics grounds, on the basis that you will adhere to the following documentation that you submitted for ethics review:

- University research ethics application form 024707 (form submission date: 23/08/2019); (expected project end date: 01/08/2020).
- Participant information sheet 1057697 version 2 (23/08/2019).
- Participant consent form 1057698 version 2 (23/08/2019).

If during the course of the project you need to [deviate significantly from the above-approved documentation](#) please inform me since written approval will be required.

Your responsibilities in delivering this research project are set out at the end of this letter.

Yours sincerely

ED6ETH Edu
Ethics Administrator
School of Education

Please note the following responsibilities of the researcher in delivering the research project:

- The project must abide by the University's Research Ethics Policy: <https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/rs/ethicsandintegrity/ethicspolicy/approval-procedure>
- The project must abide by the University's Good Research & Innovation Practices Policy: https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/polopoly_fs/1.6710661/file/GRIPPpolicy.pdf
- The researcher must inform their supervisor (in the case of a student) or Ethics Administrator (in the case of a member of staff) of any significant changes to the project or the approved documentation.
- The researcher must comply with the requirements of the law and relevant guidelines relating to security and confidentiality of personal data.
- The researcher is responsible for effectively managing the data collected both during and after the end of the project in line with best practice, and any relevant legislative, regulatory or contractual requirements.

Appendix 6: Quirkos Transcription Coding

Codes:

Gender 20 Self labelled	Tutor skills 52 (74) (no description)	Professional Development 38 (no description)
Age 20 (no description)	Relationship between college/...	Academic Achievement 3 (no description)
Job 19 (no description)	# of tutors 19 (no description)	Interpersonal skills 10 (no description)
Qualification 20 (119) (no description)	CPD 19 (no description)	Support/Supervision/Mentoring ... (no description)
Date studied 19 (no description)	Current Q Level 22 (42) (no description)	Tutors 16 (no description)
Time to study 22 (no description)	3 3 (no description)	Placement Mentors 18 (no description)
Benefitted most in practice 24 (no description)	4 1 (no description)	Placements 22 (no description)
Benefitted least in practice 14 (no description)	5 3 (no description)	Link between practice and classr... (no description)
NVQ 8 (no description)	6 6 (no description)	Practical Experience 62 (100) (no description)
BTEC 10 (no description)	7 6 (no description)	Planning 17 (no description)
EYE 2 (no description)	8 1 (no description)	Observing 21 (no description)
Assignments contribute to learni... (no description)	Comments 25 (no description)	Leadership/Management 5 (no description)
Professional Skills/Knowledge 4... (no description)	Professionals 24 (no description)	Poor Experiences 23 (no description)
Theoretical knowledge 24 (no description)	Q required 20 (no description)	Negatives/Areas to Develop 21 (no description)
Reflection 11 (no description)	(untitled) 0 (no description)	Positives 37 (no description)
		Topics studied 22 (no description)
		Study / Work 21 (no description)

Q5 Interview 1 13 Interview Questions (1)

Male

31 - 35

Early Years Teacher

2000's

BTEC National Diploma in Early Years

Between 18 months to 2 years

"Observation, planning and assessment How health can impact on a child's education Human growth and development Placement and professional practice Special educational needs Play"

Design and Technology. At the time I remember thinking this wasn't an essential unit to learn about. Over time I've changed my view slightly- more for the importance of knowing about toys and the appropriateness of them for learning.

There were a variety of methods- mainly lengthy written essays but mixed with practical aspects which made the experience and learning journey purposeful. Actually observing children and planning for their next steps helped put the theory into context and allowed you to apply it. Creating booklets and informative posters helped shape my understanding of the assessment criteria practically.

Additional Needs / Special Educational Needs, Attachment, Child Development, with a focus on theorists, Child Protection and/or Safeguarding, Children's Health, Children's Personal Care, Children's Rights, Communication skills, Equality, Diversity or Inclusion, First Aid, Health and Safety, Literacy skills, Numeracy skills, Observation techniques, Planning activities for learning, Play, Professional Development, Research, Safe environments for children

"Observation, planning and assessing I think is always an important one. Knowing developmental milestones I believe is crucial to knowing where to go next and how to do it.

Play and learning through play is vital. Knowing the benefits of play and how to plan purposefully for play. Many of the above listed topics are important in their own way and I've viewed them as we do children- holistically. Knowing how to observe will affect how to plan and assess but being able to talk to parents will aid the planning with children's interests at the heart of it."

Again looking at the topics holistically, there are so many important aspects of each that build the character of an EY practitioner. At college, you develop your theory, at placement you put it into practice but it's not until you are employed that you can fully immerse and embrace the challenges and successes of each topic.

5

Q5 Interview 1 13 Interview Questions (1)

5

"-It's ok to make mistakes. You're learning but learn from those. Being reflective is a crucial skill
 -Every moment counts when you work with children. Blink at that second has gone. -Keep to deadlines for assignments -Having tutors who have field experience is a bonus- they've been there, done that. -Being exposed to every bodily fluid known- children poo, wee, sneeze, bleed, spit/dribble, vomit. It's important to not be squeamish and be prepared to clean it up. -Theories of development develops your understanding of children's behaviour and motivations for why they do what they do. -Play and it's relevance. Learn how to play. Know what play is so you can then facilitate children's thinking, knowledge and understanding. -EYFS curriculum -Safeguarding. It keeps changing but young budding EY practitioners need to know what to do so a child's life isn't lost. -Placement to practice skills learnt in the classroom."

I loved my 2 years at college. The placements, the friends I made, the difference I made to children's lives and knowing I wanted to be an EY expert. The tutors were amazing and you knew they had worked in the field. I remember a display task that the whole class had to do. That was great for team work building and I think I may have the photos somewhere. I remember the first day of college and we had to do a fashion show in the sports hall. We had to do some other induction tasks too like a coat of arms phrase that would get me through the next 2 years. Being on the course I certainly changed- I became so extrovert and confident because I realised I was actually good at something and my grades were a reflection of that.

It's an identity of self. In my early EY days, I was a professional because I went into a profession where you were making a difference and we're important to someone either your colleagues, the children or the parents. In my EY lead role, I am no different to the young 19 year old "nursery nurse" I once was. The only difference is time and experience.

"Communication- different ways to talk to different people (parents/children/staff) How you present yourself/ dress code Attitude towards the profession- it's a calling. It's not an easy job. You have to be doing it because you want to, not because there was nothing else to do
 Maintaining confidentiality Developing confidence Relating theory to practice Asking for help/ advice"

I studied prior to working in Early Years, but did placements throughout the course

Work Placements in multiple settings

YES!! Placements were vital to the course not be use it was a requirement but to allow you to put theory into practice safely. You have the opportunity to be a novice and make mistakes so long as you learn from them. I certainly did a couple of times (most times I was a model student). Had I not had placements, I don't think I would have lasted as long in private day care (I stayed 5 years before moving to school) it prepares you to the awe, wonder and the not so pretty stuff (like bodily fluids). Placements allow to develop that perception of your professional identity and who you want to be when you ultimately qualify.

Q5 Interview 1 I3 Interview Questions (1)

identity and who you want to be when you ultimately qualify.

5

"Supportive supervisors. I do think supervisors should have 'training' prior to taking on students. Friendly staff who are happy to help and who are approachable. Opportunities to showcase yourself e.g. trips, displays, in-house CPD. Mucking in and immersing yourself into the team, being willing to help out with every aspect of the job."

"Although I feel lucky in my placements, I would say the opposite of the above would make it a bad experience. Unsupportive supervisors. Unfriendly staff. Always being used as a cleaner/cook/not being with the children (that's what you're there for- to be with the children)"

Nappy changing, singing, reading stories, laminating, photocopying, setting up activities, making formula bottles, reporting accidents and safeguarding incidences, speaking to parents

"I was given a placement supervisor who would check in with me as well as ask the staff I worked with. I got to know different staff in each placement so I knew who to go to. I had a college tutor who came out to see how I was doing however they were quite unreliable which made me look bad when I told staff I had a tutor visiting."

I remember in my 2nd placement of my first year, I was offered a job as soon as I qualified. I was humbled that I could show strangers I had what it took to be an EY practitioner. The feedback I received from all of my reports were always positive and gave me useful points for development. All of this helped to shape my understanding of early years and certainly prepared me for the big wide world of working in EY once I qualified.

I definitely think what I learnt in the classroom, I was able to apply in the workplace and I had many lightbulb moments of "ah ha I learnt that in class, I've now seen what it looks like in practice" I value both the classroom and placement go hand in hand in EY courses.

About 8/9

"Experience of working in the field and working in different EY age groups. An area of expertise that they are passionate about. A sound understanding of the EYFS and how to observe, assess and plan for children's development. Good communication. Be willing to look 'silly' so students can feel comfortable to do the same. Contacts with different agencies or settings so that they can arrange talks with people in the field."

Yes, I had multiple tutors with differing knowledge and expertise in Early Years

5

Both

Q5 Interview 1 13 Interview Questions (1)

I preferred to ask my tutor for support, I preferred to ask my group for support

Links between placement and classroom really helped to prepare for the world of work. Tutors were really supportive and had a wealth of experience in different areas. If they didn't know they would help to find out.

Yes

I am the one who organises a department of 7. I am the go to person for anything related to the running of the EYFS department at school. I am a senior manager and therefore have a lot of responsibility to make sure assessment data is accurate, everyone is doing their job, parents are happy and has someone to go to if they have questions.

"When I started working at a sixth form college to teach child care level 2 and 3, I very much used more knowledge of my level 3 experience than my undergraduate degree or teacher training. EY has evolved more since I qualified and it's important that I keep up to date with these changes and evolutions."

When I first qualified, I would have annual safeguarding training, health conditions (asthma and epipen), behaviour management, First Aid. After 2 years I knew I wanted to continue my learning journey so I completed a Foundation Degree/ BAHons in Early Childhood Studies (with a 1st class), I completed my EYPS (Early Years Professional Status) and qualified as a primary teacher. Recently I completed a PGCert in Early Years leadership and am currently studying for my MA in Education.

"Level 3 gives you a taster of different aspects of working in EY. Having a variety of units/topics/modules let's you develop your interests and eventual expertise e.g. Special Educational Needs. Placements are definitely a strength as you can develop your skills."

I do think it should be mandatory to have a topic/unit on SEND and mental health as these are on an increase. Play and learning outdoors is also one that needs to be taught as children have different development needs outdoors than indoors. How to plan for different age groups of the EYFS. ICT and how to use it to enhance learning but also how to be sensible and not the over reliance. Dough disco/ finger gym, alternate communication e.g. Makaton or British Sign Language.

Yes

Level 7 (PGCE, PGDE, Masters degree)

Level 3 qualified not training/apprenticeship