

Reflections of Academic and Professional Practice

Section 1

Personal Development Plan

This Personal Development Plan will consider Doran's (1981) SMART model to ensure objectives are meaningful and effective.
Specific Measurable Attainable Realistic Time Bound (Ogbeiwi, 2017).

Objectives	Success Criteria	Actions	Implementation
Critical reflection/thinking – Develop skills in engaging with and exploring a range of research, information, perspectives, assumptions to gain a deeper understanding of concepts, theories,	Success and progress will be recognised and monitored through formal and informal feedback from my academic and personal tutors through engagement with my academic studies.	Undertaking research into methods of improving and developing this skill to gain a better insight into the skills needed to perform at a higher level. Observing and learning from more experienced mentors, colleagues and peers. Undertake the training modules on UWTSD's library InfoSkills page to augment my current skills https://www.uwtسد.ac.uk/library/infoskills/	There will be opportunities to implement any new skills or improved confidence as part of my assessments for each element of academic study. I will be able to use these skills to enhance

models and practice to support me with positioning (Cottrell, 2023)	Assignment marks will also reflect levels of success and areas of improvement through summative feedback. Opportunities for this will be regular and structured because of the effective design of the assessment aspect of the programme. Feedback from and discussion with peers will support me to identify success throughout my continual engagement with synchronous and asynchronous lectures	Contact the UWTSD library InfoSkills team for a more specific, 1:1 support session on critical reflection and critical thinking. Reading key and critical texts regularly	and improve my current teaching approaches and lecture content. On-going February 2024 I will have completed the training modules and had a 1:1 session with the InfoSkills team. Aim to read academic material every day.
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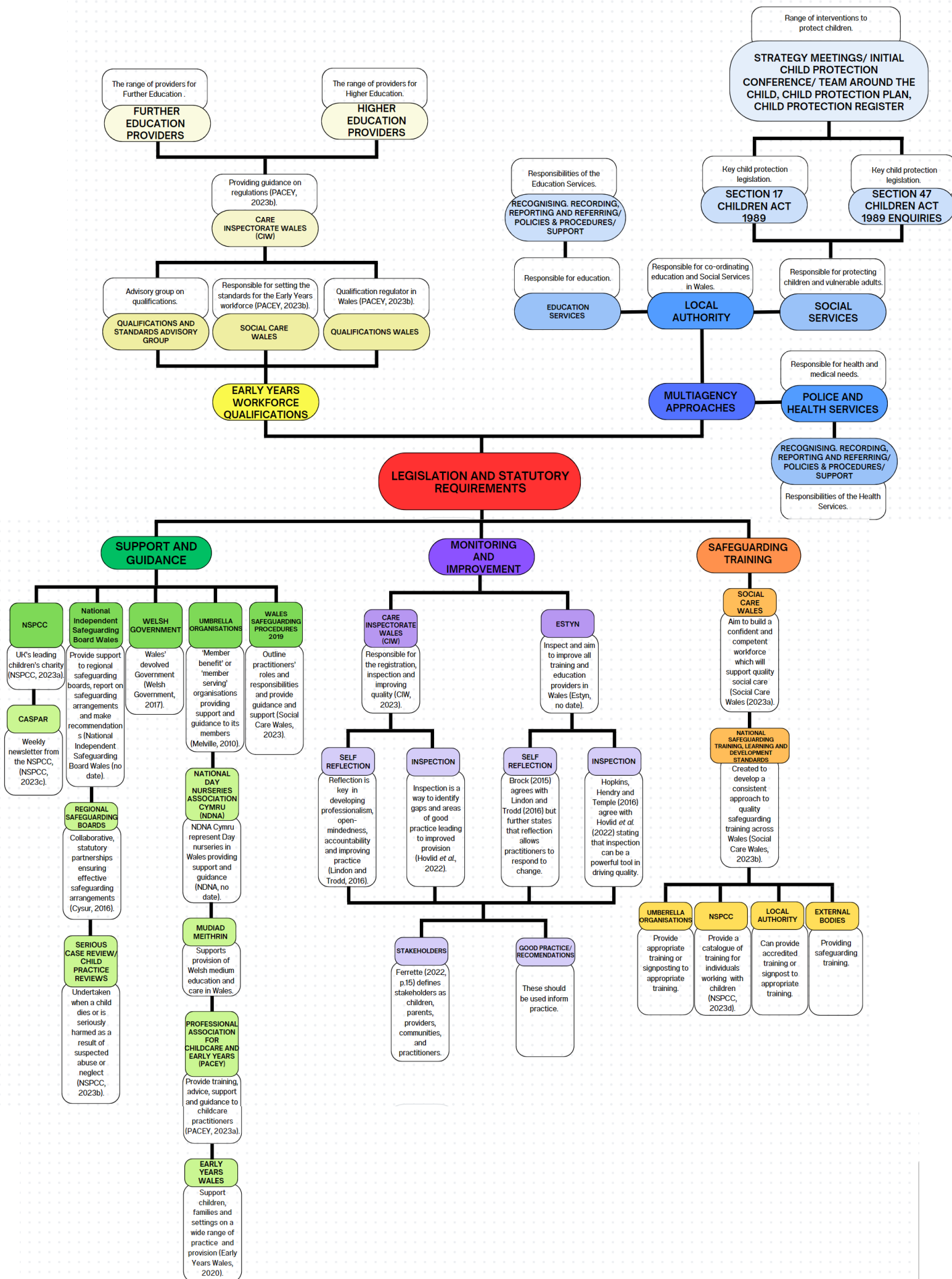
	and with peer interactions.		
Conversation Analysis skills – Develop my skills in Conversation Analysis (CA), with the aim of becoming proficient enough to use the skills as part of current research. Flinkfeldt <i>et al.</i> (2022) define CA as the analysis of participants' practices in minute detail by the examination of recorded episodes of naturally occurring social interactions.	Successful results in identifying patterns within recorded research footage Feedback from research team Feedback from Amanda Bateman, CA expert.	Undertaking group training and practice sessions with other members of the research team. Undertaking 1:1 sessions with Amanda Bateman, shadowing to learn. On Amanda Batemans referral, attend CA meetings and seminars organised by members of the Centre for Research in Culture and Communication (CRCC) at Loughborough University https://www.lboro.ac.uk/research/crcc/events/crcc-seminar-series/ Attend training events and the one-day CA day held by CCRC.	Spring 2024 on Carmarthen Campus Summer/Autumn 2024 When available Dec 2024 Using my skills to analyse recorded research footage and record results to feedback.

			Undertake independent research in CA to deepen knowledge and understanding.
Growth mindset – Develop an improved growth mindset in order to expand my intellectual ability, which will support me to be an improved critical thinker and willing to embrace and take on challenges (Yeager and Dweck, 2020).	Appreciating, validating, and accepting new concepts and theories within my own positioning. Using new ideas and concepts in my academic and professional work	Recognize when I may be using a fixed mindset. Embrace challenge and change. Seek constructive feedback from peers. Surround myself where possible with like-minded people	Using my growth mindset to embrace new thinking in my academic and professional work. Use the constructive feedback to change though processes. On-going

			After every professional/ academic engagement
Develop as a researcher – develop skills to support research informed practice and make beneficial changes to practice (Kvernbekk, 2017).	Through formal and informal feedback Publishing academic work Being invited to contribute to research projects. Undertaking my own research projects	Using the 'Research Development Framework' (RDF) to support me to explore personal and professional knowledge, skills, attributes and values to work collaboratively and make an impact in the field of research (Vitae, 2024). Immerse myself in research opportunities. Develop contemporary techniques. Develop most up to date software to support researching skills	Use and practice skills throughout my professional and academic work. On-going

Section 2

FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE EFFECTIVE SAFEGUARDING PRACTICE IN EARLY YEARS SETTINGS IN WALES



Section 3

Analysis of Concept

This analysis sets out to explore the complex relationship between the multiple layers and strands of the concept map (Section 2). The topic chosen for the concept map is 'factors that influence effective safeguarding practice in Early Years settings in Wales'. Safeguarding is a vast topic (Education Scotland, 2021) with a range of contributing factors (HM Inspectorate of Probation, 2023), all of which are influenced by specific legislation and statutory regulations. The concept map focuses on five strands; early years workforce qualifications, multi-agency approaches, support and guidance, monitoring and improvement and safeguarding training. All of these factors contribute to effective approaches to safeguarding in practice. The concept map, however, is not exhaustive. This analysis will have a particular focus on 'legislation and statutory requirements' and the 'safeguarding training' strands of the map.

Department of Education (2023) and National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC, 2023e) state that it is the responsibility of settings, governing bodies and proprietors to ensure compliance with all legislative duties placed upon them with regards to safeguarding and protection.

UK and Welsh Government policy drives safeguarding approaches for children in Early Years settings in Wales. Welsh Government (2020) outline the need for settings to consider not only education and care but also a pastoral approach to ensuring children's well-being. Furthermore, the *Social Service and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014* place a duty on all care services in Wales to safeguard and protect children. Care and Education settings are also governed by the principles of the *Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015*, which place a responsibility on public bodies to improve opportunities for future generations. The *Childrens Commissioner for Wales Act (2001)* highlights the Commissioner's role in safeguarding children and supporting and promoting children's welfare and rights. *The Children Act (1989)* places a duty on local authorities to investigate concerns over individual's welfare. *The Children Act (2004)* highlights the importance of collaborative approaches to safeguarding to protect vulnerable individuals. Wales upholds its commitment to the rights outlined in the United Nations Convention on

the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and to promoting knowledge of said rights to children in Wales through the *Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011*. This demonstrates Wales responsibility to improve life for all of its citizens (Welsh Government, no date).

Welsh Government (2019), through the *Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016*, recently undertook consultation to assess the level of safeguarding training in Wales. This conforms to their aim of reviewing and improving services in Wales.

Safeguarding and protecting vulnerable individuals is a complex problem; this is, in part, due to the diversity and number of issues that individuals at risk face (Gillen and Canavan, 2023). Furthermore, Canavan *et al.* (2022) elaborate further that it is a political and societal dilemma to be tackled at the highest level.

According to Devaney and Spratt (2009), Gordon-Smith (2014) and Welbourne (2019), tackling child abuse, neglect and safeguarding is a 'wicked problem'. The concept of 'wicked problems', first coined by Rittel and Webber (1973), is a consideration of the challenges in solving complex and multifaceted problems (Head, 2022). 'Wicked problems' are challenging to solve; by definition the resolution of these problems require all possible solutions to be clearly be understood from both the perspective of the individuals trying to solve them and those the problems affect. Conceivable knowledge of all possible solutions is necessary to begin to understand the 'wicked problem' (Rittel and Webber, 1973). Furthermore Head (2022, p. 21-36) comments that contemporary social problems are far too complex to solve because of inconsistencies in stakeholders understanding, discrepancies over possible solutions and opposing values and principles that guide the search for solutions. However, White *et al.* (2015) state that safeguarding is rarely seen as a 'wicked problem' at policy level. Therefore, attempts to reduce safeguarding incidents by provision of effective safeguarding training may be futile if policy makers fail to consider the scale and breadth of the problem (Sherwood-Johnson and Mackay, 2020). Key stakeholders such as Social Care Wales, umbrella organisations, settings and families are much better placed to advise policymakers on the nature of current challenges (Sherwood-Johnson and Mackay, 2020). Addressing safeguarding as a 'wicked problem' will require collaborative solutions from these multiple stakeholders

because of its complex and interconnected nature. It involves navigating a range of perspectives, considering ethical implications and adapting strategies to suit ever evolving circumstances.

Foucault 1982 stated that “power is something exercised, put into action, in relationships” (Barnes, no date, para 6). There is a power dynamic evident in the current approach to safeguarding which can be seen in the hierarchical nature of the concept map, this links to Foucault’s ideas on power.

The power dynamic is such that the policy makers exercise the greatest power (Illustrated by superior ranking on the concept map). The power dissipates as it permeates through the subsequent ‘lower ‘ ranking levels. The influence and power of those lower ranking stakeholders is suppressed primarily by those stakeholders conforming to ensure that the prescribed norms and policies are followed.

Complying with legislation through training as a means of maintaining order and a consistent approach to preventing abuse aligns with Foucault’s ideas on disciplinary power. Ceven, Korumaz and Ömür (2021) highlight Foucault’s ideas on disciplinary power, defining it as power that is exercised by surveillance, discrimination, classification, control, position, whether that is actual or perceived, it has the same result. Haugaard (2022) discussing Foucault’s argues that there is a temptation to consider authority as belonging to those in high-ranking roles. However, everyday authority, that possessed by lower ranking groups, also have the ability to influence hierarchies and systems (Haugaard, 2022).

In considering policy design and implementation that influences the development of safeguarding training, Imperial (2021) describes two contrasting views; ‘top-down’ as being more of an administrative process without taking due consideration of stakeholder perspectives and ‘bottom up’ approaches which allow individual organisations to specifically adapt and tailor approaches dependent on their own contextual policy requirements. Wales currently operates a ‘top down’ approach to safeguarding in Early Years settings, as outlined in the concept map; initiatives/instructions are directed or disseminated in an authoritative manner from a strategic government level to the practice level (Keast, 2011). However, Purtle *et al.* argue that for ‘evidence-informed policy making’ to work, knowledge transfer and dissemination of information should be reciprocal in the policy making process.

De Corte *et al.* (2018) and Karakostas and Zizzo (2016) state that policy makers exercise their power and generate policies to meet the safeguarding needs of individuals and subsequently expect those at practice level to implement those policies. This approach outlines government's intent to implement their often restrictive and standardised approach and demonstrate that they are content with the top-down expectation whereby professionals and practitioners are expected to conform (Almog-Bar, Weiss-Gal and Gal, 2015). This could lead to resistance from those lower ranked stakeholders. This form of resistance could be seen as 'reversed power' where individuals try to create opportunities to exert their own autonomy (Ceven, Korumaz, and Ömür, 2021).

By employing a 'top - down' approach to policy design, there is a risk that the focus may shift from the necessary child-centred approach (Munro, 2012) to one that is increasingly organisational or bureaucratic. According to Rogowski (2015), approaches to safeguarding training are more concerned with compliance with statutory and legislative requirements to enforce accountability rather than focusing on children's needs and how to meet them. De Smedt and Borch (2022) believe that excluding or failing to consult those stakeholders who should co-construct policy can lead to conflict and resentment in the implementation of those policies. Furthermore, Cejudo and Trein (2022) believe that the 'bottom up' approach is a continuous process of policymaking and that stakeholders should not merely be the recipients of directives but rather contributors who can realise a vision. Candel and Biesbroek (2016) agree stating that implementing policy is not a linear or hierarchical process but a multidimensional and complex one. Policy should refocus its methods, concentrating on developing relationships between stakeholders and give practitioners the freedom to utilise their professional judgement and skill (Featherstone *et al.*, 2017).

An effective safeguarding culture is considered, recognised, integrated and reflected upon by all stakeholders and is accepted as a fundamental role of all involved (Owusu-Sekyere, Rhind and Hills, 2022). In reality, this could be achieved by utilising the co-construction of policies with **all** within this strand of the concept map. However, Greere (2022) argues that without meeting compliance and statutory measures first, it can be challenging to assure the ongoing quality of the approach.

The collaboration of stakeholders within the training strand of the concept map could increase compliance and participation and subsequently reduce safeguarding incidents.

Section 4

The need to move from a compliance-led model of safeguarding and child protection to a contextual model – A case study.

As a lecturer in the field of early years and lead for safeguarding on the early years programmes on which I teach, my own qualifications, professional development and experiences in practice have influenced my interest in the field of safeguarding and protecting children. Specifically, my interest lies with moving from a compliance-led model to a contextual model with regards to approaching safeguarding and child protection. It is this topic that will be explored in this paper.

In recent years, due to the repeated failures identified in historic serious case reviews and child safeguarding practice reviews (Garstang *et al.* 2021; Masson and Parton, 2020) the need for a different approach to safeguarding children has become apparent (Jones, no date). The aim of this case study is to generate an in-depth and multi-faceted understanding of the complex, real world social issue of safeguarding approaches in the context of early years practice (Yin, 2009; Crowe *et al.*, 2011; Creswell, 2014; Priya 2021).

A compliance-led model (or synonymously termed regulatory-led model) focuses on meeting the minimum legal requirements (One Education, 2023). In the context of safeguarding and child protection, this may not adequately meet the needs of the individuals that those legal requirements set out to protect (Ainsworth and Hansen, 2011, P164). Ainsworth and Hansen (2011, p 164) state that a contextual or child-centred model aims to ensure an holistic approach to safeguarding and protecting children and families from harm. Moreover, East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership (2023) claim that this approach could address a broader range of safeguarding concerns. For example, these could include mental health and substance misuse (Buivydaite *et al.* 2022); these key facets are not currently covered in statutory safeguarding training. One argument for moving away from a compliance led model is to ensure a comprehensive and broad approach to safeguarding and child protection. According to Menzies and Stoker (2015) and Noble, Gray and Johnston (2016), in addition to complying with the statutory

requirements, induction into the culture of the organisation or setting and understanding of policies and procedures, additional training which is specific to the needs of its service users and the nature of the locality is essential to support practitioners in carrying out their role effectively. Furthermore, Barran and Lowe (2023) believe that a contextual approach to safeguarding will empower practitioners to develop a more comprehensive and effective approach to children's safety and protection needs. This is supported further by Munro (2012) and Sword (2020) who state that the range of contexts a setting and indeed families and children, might face, could be vast, but whatever these may be, a targeted and focused approach will promote effective and specific protection of children and families.

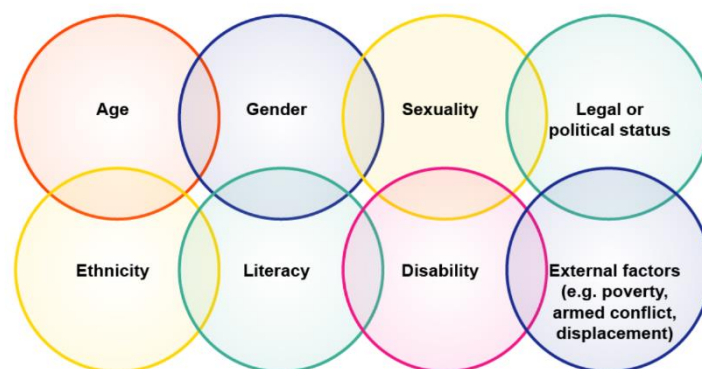
According to Menzies and Grace (2022) and the Department for Children, Schools and families (2020), in order to ensure children attain the best possible outcomes, the early years sector requires a workforce consisting of individuals who are trained to the highest possible level. This will allow practitioners to make decisions based on current best practice and be confident in their own professional judgement, prioritising children's rights as well as their well-being and safety needs. A contextualised model could improve prevention and prioritise early intervention rather than taking a reactive approach to incidents. This is supported by High-Speed Training (2023) who state that by taking a more proactive stance towards safeguarding and embedding this ethos at the centre of approaches, the occurrence of harm could potentially be reduced, therefore providing more comprehensive support for children's safety, protection and well-being. Furthermore, Department for Education (2023) add, that for approaches to be effective, needs and requirements specific to the setting should be considered and ways of monitoring and evaluating efficacy should be in place.

A compliance led approach to safeguarding may not provide practitioners with the skills needed to effectively manage safeguarding and child protection concerns. Hapuarachchi (2023) agrees with this, stating that current approaches to safeguarding and child protection could result in gaps in skills, knowledge and understanding. A contextual approach to safeguarding can foster a more effective and collaborative attitude amongst professionals involved in the lives of early years children and young people (Buivydaite *et al.*, 2022). Improved communication and

collaboration can lead to more effective identification, reporting, recording and responses, something that has been highlighted as a failure in many historical safeguarding cases (The Times Educational Supplement, 2017). Rogowski (2015) agrees with this, stating that the Laming reports (2003 and 2009), commissioned after the deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly respectively, highlighted significant failings in agencies working together effectively. The unfortunate and avoidable deaths of Victoria Climbié and Peter Connelly, led to the commissioning of the green paper 'Every Child Matters' and subsequently the Children Act 2004. The aim of this Act was to improve and instil a systematic and inclusive approach to safeguarding and protecting children, avoiding children slipping through the net (Rogowski, 2015). However, according to Hill (2021) children are still falling through that safeguarding net.

Chambers, Cantrell and Booth (2021) state that the principal approach to promoting safeguarding is through appropriate training. Furthermore Wash *et al.* (2022) support this by highlighting an urgency to improve the capabilities of practitioners to respond more effectively to safeguarding and protection concerns. Moreover, Lewis *et al.* (2017) support this by highlighting the need to fill gaps in practitioner's skills and knowledge. They undertook a pilot of training practitioners in domestic violence and abuse (DVA) a topic which is not currently covered in statutory safeguarding training. Results from this study demonstrated that it positively impacted individual's skills and knowledge and improved their ability to support families. This demonstrates how a contextual approach, going above and beyond those statutory requirements could positively impact children's outcomes. Despite the evidence that highlights the importance of effective safeguarding training to promote children achieving positive outcomes, there is an argument from some that the evidence is unclear as to whether or not mandatory training is more effective than no training. A study by Walsh *et al.* (2022) concluded that there was little empirical evidence to suggest that mandatory safeguarding training is no more effective than no safeguarding training at all. However, despite this being a study spanning 11 countries and more than 1000 participants, they concluded that further research was necessary. A contextual approach to safeguarding ensures that children's well-being and rights are at the centre of the process. By considering each child as individual and each child's lived experience, any approaches to safeguarding should be more effective.

This is supported by Dickens *et al.* (2023) who, in a study researching messages for practice as identified from historic serious case reviews, highlight not knowing children well enough and failure to understand their lived experiences as recurring failures. This links to the concept of intersectionality. Crenshaw (2018, cited in Steinmetz, 2020, p.2) who coined the term intersectionality in 1989, stated that intersectionality was a way to observe how an individual can experience different types of inequalities, possibly numerous at one time, and how this can impact their experiences. Moreover, according to Crenshaw (1991) the way that a child interacts and experiences the world will not be influenced by just one aspect of their identity, it is more complicated and multifaceted than this. Similarly, Bauer *et al.* (2021) defines intersectionality as a theoretical framework that explores how an individual's life experiences are shaped by social factors such as poverty or race, often shaping the way injustices or discriminations are experienced. Open University (2023) highlight how this can help us consider intersectionality with regards to safeguarding, stating that intersectionality is not simply the differences between identities but also differences within them.



(Source: Open University, 2023)

This is an important consideration when protecting children because intersecting identities of discrimination and disadvantage can result in an increase of vulnerability to harm or abuse (Open University, 2023). In agreement is the Department of Children, Schools and Families (2020) who state that children in today's society are at risk of suffering from a wider range of challenges and suffering from a greater range of vulnerabilities.

Additionally, contextual and integrated approaches to safeguarding can involve the wider early years community, including parents and carers in the safeguarding process. This can lead to a culture of shared responsibility for safeguarding and protecting children. This is supported by Buivydaite *et al.* (2022) who, in a study, highlighted how a new integrated approach to providing support for children and families where safeguarding concerns were present, improved outcomes for children thus reducing costs for the local authority. Adopting an integrated approach to safeguarding and protection could act as a precursor to a more contextual type of support scheme. By considering involving the wider community, this could be seen as an ecological systems approach, like that of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model, which conceptualises a child's development as a set of reciprocal and interactive relationships between the developing child and those supportive systems surrounding the child (Anthony, 2022; Özdoğru, 2011). It could also offer an ecological perspective on the issue of safeguarding and protection, and consequently offer an insight into both the individual and the contextual systems and the relational links between them (Eriksson, Ghazinour and Hammarström, 2018). In conclusion, moving from a compliance-led approach to safeguarding and protection to a more contextual approach in the early years could play a pivotal role in creating a safer, more child-centred environment that addresses a broader range of concerns and focuses on proactive prevention and improved protection.

Section 5

Reflective account on gaps in safeguarding knowledge and understanding.

This reflective account outlines a situation I experienced as a nursery manager in an Early Years Setting in an affluent area. Gibb's (1988) reflective cycle will be used to explore the topic as it provides an effective framework to investigate the experience and critically examine distinct stages of an event to enrich learning experiences (University of Edinburgh, 2023).

A child attending the setting had been showing signs of neglect. Department of Education (2023) defines neglect as "the persistent failure to meet a child's basic physical and/or psychological needs, likely to result in the serious impairment of the child's health or development". Hecker *et al.* (2019) and Cohen *et al.* (2017) describe physical neglect using indicators such as failure to provide suitable clothing, food or medical attention and define emotional neglect as the failure to provide loving interactions or caring for a child's emotional welfare. The National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (2023f) add two further categories of neglect; educational neglect, a failure to ensure a child receives an adequate education and medical neglect, a failure to meet or provide for healthcare needs.

The child in question had been observed coming into nursery dressed inappropriately for the weather, hungry (having not had breakfast) and had attended sessions with inappropriate food in their lunch box (in the form of an adult 'meal deal' from a supermarket) on several occasions. In addition, the child frequently appeared nervous around adults and was often the last child left at the end of the session because of persistent lateness on the part of the parents. All concerns and incidents had been recorded, following the settings policies and procedures, and incidents were being closely recorded and monitored. Shaikh and Ali Malik (2021) and Early Years Alliance (no date) state that having and following robust policies and procedures with regards to recording and monitoring incidents effectively will support practitioners undertaking the safeguarding process.

This reflective account was triggered when I overheard members of staff discussing this child and making statements such as “this is obviously not neglect because the parents are both ‘working good jobs’ and they have a nice house.” Another staff member agreed and claimed that because the family were “rich and nice to staff at pick up and drop off; it can’t be a case of neglect.”

This was the point where I employed Schön’s ‘reflection in action’; where I immediately considered the situation (Schön, 1992). Scott (2019) highlights Schön’s theory on how reflective practitioners can address deficits in practice. This situation caused me significant concern. Firstly, the attitudes of the staff highlighted that despite having received the statutory training they failed to truly understand the nature of neglect and were generalising that neglect only happened where poverty was a factor or where non-traditional family values were apparent. I felt frustrated that the staff were unaware that they were demonstrating professional bias and had made judgements based on superficial appearances. I also felt it was clear there were obvious gaps in their knowledge on the issue of affluent neglect.

Horwath and Tarr (2015) highlight the importance of care being taken on the approach of professionals constructing a child’s experience. Horwath and Tarr’s (2015) work predominantly refer to professionals not assuming that children are subjects of neglect based on the appearance of their circumstances. In this case, the converse is true; these professionals incorrectly presumed that this child is not the subject of neglect, based solely on their socially constructed pre-formed judgement. I was also surprised at the lack of consideration and compassion for this child’s possible lived experience. Wilson *et al.* (2020) believe that for children to experience effective safeguarding, their lived experiences must be better understood and given due consideration. Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Safeguarding Partnership Board (2023) agree, suggesting that practitioners should put themselves in the child’s position to gain a better understanding of that lived experience. I also felt frustrated that the staff, who had both attended statutory safeguarding training, were unaware that or unwilling to consider that neglect is possible in affluent families. However, after these initial feelings, I felt empowered to ensure that these issues were addressed.

This incident led me to reflect that something was 'missing' in the contemporary training and support for early years staff in clearly identifying and recognising the nature of neglect and the robust development of safeguarding approaches.

This situation brought several issues to the fore in my role as setting manager.

Firstly, and on a positive note, the staff members clearly had some awareness of signs and symptoms of neglect as they themselves had recorded some of the incidents/ concerns with the child. Bernard and Greenwood (2019a) point out, where neglect is suspected, practitioners tend to look out for indicators such as poor hygiene, malnourishment, poor living conditions and other environmental factors as signs of neglect. The fact that these practitioners had identified inappropriate food and clothing demonstrated some knowledge and understanding. However, there was a lack of understanding of how their own professional judgement can significantly impact the way in which these concerns are identified and resolved. Their lack of awareness of affluent neglect was an obvious knowledge gap and highlighted a deficit in the educational/ training process. Inadequate training of practitioners can lead to failures in following statutory processes which are specifically designed to protect both children and themselves (Webb, Maddocks and Bongilli, 2002). These issues needed addressing to ensure that the setting continued to offer a child centred approach to its care.

Bernard and Greenwood (2019a) define affluence as wealth connected to income and social standing. Merton Safeguarding Children Partnership (2023) and The Safeguarding Company (2021) define affluent neglect as children experiencing neglect despite living in families deemed to be wealthy. According to Merton Safeguarding Children partnership (2023) children from 'well off' families are not sheltered or exempt from harm or neglect despite people's perceptions of circumstances.

It is important to consider that neglect is the most prevalent type of child abuse in the UK (Bernard and Greenwood, 2019a) and Wales (Sharley, 2020) and as such all staff should be vigilant. Neglect can sometimes be difficult to identify (Laajasalo *et al.*, 2023; Shaikh and Ali Malik, 2021; Maguire and Naughton, 2016). According to Hecker *et al.* (2019) neglect is a continuum, and identifying the difference between failure to provide and neglect can prove challenging. Affluent neglect can be even

more challenging to identify because individuals may not present showing signs which are more often attributed to neglect such as malnourishment or poor hygiene (Bernard and Greenwood, 2019a and The Safeguarding Company, 2021).

On the matter of professional bias, Bernard and Greenwood (2019b) highlight findings from two serious case reviews which suggest that professional biases based on class had negatively affected safeguarding processes. Bias is often entrenched in generalised or stereotypical viewpoints (Breese *et al.*, 2023), however Nadal (2011) argues that individuals may not always be aware of their biases, that these can be unconscious and present in subtle ways. LaBrenz *et al.* (2023) agree, stating that biases that affect or influence decision making, attitudes or the way an individual carries out their role because of an unconscious association is known as implicit bias. The Safeguarding Company (2021) state that this kind of bias can be a barrier to identifying safeguarding concerns.

The staff in question were not inexperienced and had worked at the setting for over two years. It was my impression that some staff had become complacent; living in an affluent area implied safeguarding concerns were uncommon within the nursery. Despite the lack of evidence from research, practitioners must understand that neglect and abuse happens in all social classes. Bernard and Greenwood (2019a) highlight that there is limited research on affluent neglect; they highlight that the majority of research is typically undertaken on families from low socio-economic backgrounds rather than those from affluent families. They go onto underline that affluent families are less scrutinised than families who are socially deprived and this could account for lack of evidence. Furthermore, Bernard, Greenwood and Henry (2023) believe that affluent parents can use their social standing, power, and wealth as a way of avoiding statutory investigation.

Race and Frost (2022) highlight that a child-centred approach to safeguarding and provision should be a professional commitment. I wanted to remind all staff of our values as early years practitioners including key values such as compassion, kindness, responsiveness and respectfulness (The British Association for Early Childhood Education, 2011). Professional Curiosity should be a key value in early years (Dickens *et al.* 2023). Phillips *et al.* (2022) define professional curiosity as the ability to investigate, explore and understand what might be happening for a family

rather than making assumptions. Professional curiosity is key to an effective approach to safeguarding, and as such is something that practitioners should possess (Manchester Safeguarding Partnership, 2022). Lack of professional curiosity was highlighted as a failing in the case of Victoria Climbié (Laming, 2003).

After the event, I used Kolb's 1984 theory of experiential learning, which plays a particularly useful role in learning from real-world problems (Long and Gummelt, 2019). I sadly concluded that the issues highlighted arguably contributed to the possibility of the setting not meeting the needs of the child in question and failing to meet the settings vision.

In order to address the obvious gaps in knowledge and understanding, I decided that all existing staff, despite all being up to date with minimum statutory safeguarding training, would benefit from an update to safeguarding training. In addition, a higher academic level was required; I decided that all staff would undertake the level 3 safeguarding qualification (Nuco Training, 2022). Any new staff, as well as undertaking the All-Wales Induction Framework workbooks (Social Care Wales, 2023c) will also undertake the level 3 qualification. Regular team meetings and continuing professional development sessions will continue but with an emphasis on considering professional bias, recapping the settings ethos and early years values with the inclusion of role-based scenarios to aid understanding.

Specific personal learning that came from this was event was to avoid assuming that statutory training will provide all of the required knowledge and understanding. Another personal learning point for me was that professional bias can significantly influence practitioners' behaviour, perceptions and practice.

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