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PhD Thesis, James Cook University.**

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A Strengths Approach to Child-Protection Education

Thesis submitted by
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in September, 2012

for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
in the School of Education
James Cook University

DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics. Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (approval number: H2567).



Signature/ Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am indebted to the participants of this project for their generosity and willingness to explore personal and often difficult aspects of their practice. The narratives recorded in this thesis have the additional sensitivity of examining, at times, possible instances of child abuse and teacher reactions to this. I thank the participants for having faith that I would use their information wisely to help others. I am aware of the tremendous trust and responsibility given to myself as researcher in gathering and representing their responses with integrity. The data shared by participants, I view as a strength and a gift that have guided the formulation of this thesis as much as any formal code of ethics or standardised research technique.

Support and advice:

Principal Supervisor: Associate Professor Melissa Vick (James Cook University, School of Education) BA BMus, DipEd, MEd, PhD

Thank you for your thorough interest and extended care in assisting me to develop and learn with this project. I am ever grateful for your expertise and detailed understanding of the personal and professional importance of completing this child-protection research.

Supervisor: Professor Nola Alloway (Pro-Vice-Chancellor, James Cook University, Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences) BEd (Hons) PhD

With gratitude for initiating and continuing to support my teaching and research development in education and for your infectious advocacy for the well-being of young children.

Many thanks to my family, [REDACTED] Your love, understanding and continuous support has enabled me to complete this thesis.

This thesis is dedicated to the many children who have not had the benefits of a protective family or teacher.

ABSTRACT

Teachers face many competing responsibilities and barriers to protect children, which consequently presents many challenges for pre-service teacher preparation. This thesis outlines a research project in teacher education, that explores the use and potential of a strengths approach to enhance the area of child-protection education. The broad context of child protection and the development of a strengths approach were joint catalysts for planning and implementing a strengths-based research project and methodology.

The prevalence and negative effects of child abuse on children's development and teaching practices are well documented, yet there is a conspicuous lack of literature on successful child-protection education strategies. In contrast, the use of a strengths approach in social services yields positive results and this suggests potential for using the approach in education. This thesis explores that potential as a research opportunity examining connections between the strengths approach, teacher preparation and child protection both in literature and practice.

The research project charts teacher-education students' responses to a strengths-based child-protection module that was newly developed for pre-service teachers by the researcher. The author occupied the dual role of teacher and researcher. The thirteen-week module was designed for students to explore issues and perspectives of abuse and safety, learn how to identify their own and children's strengths and formulate teaching strategies for child protection. Responses from the pre-service teachers, during and after the module, were analysed to elucidate meanings, understandings and implications of this practical application of a strengths approach to education.

The research developed and used a strengths approach to methodology. Qualitative data collection techniques of individual interviews, focus groups and electronic research were modified using strengths principles. Modifications were made in order to maximise collaboration and to allow participants to explore, demonstrate and share their own strengths whilst giving responses to key research themes. The data were examined by contextual and thematic analysis. Interpretations were shaped by principles articulated in strengths literature and research in the field of child protection and teacher education.

The research findings confirmed the significant practical and moral demands of child-protection education for pre-service teachers, as identified in child-protection education literature. For many participants the dialogue focussed initially around the issues of child abuse and protection as well as their personal needs and feelings when preparing to be teachers. Participants affirmed the need for practical solutions to protect children and saw existing teacher preparation as a barrier to protection. They appeared to welcome and value the opportunity to vision, and

explore strengths, resources and strategies as they were presented in the teaching module. The strengths approach studied by the participants appears to have contributed to an increased awareness and confidence in child-protection education both during and after the module. Some participants explained that they used an explicit strengths approach during teaching practice, while others reported that they felt they had used specific elements of the approach more implicitly for a broader range of teaching issues.

The participants' reactions to a strengths approach to child-protection education were multi-layered, positive, critical and pragmatic. For some participants, reactions indicated that the approach influenced or complemented their personal and professional philosophy and together with their knowledge of broader education theory, could have wider use than in child protection. Other participants expressed limitations and the need for adaptations in the use of the approach. Overall, the participants' reactions appear to support claims that the strengths approach has potential beyond the social-service sector and may be translated from a largely therapeutic context to an educational one. Most participants found that identifying their own strengths was challenging yet confirming. The difficulty expressed by one participant in examining their strengths prompted further investigation of this element of the strengths approach. Post teaching-practice data revealed that participants used solution-focussed strategies, recognised individual strengths and were confident when discussing and planning for complex ethical issues of child protection.

Unexpected findings from the research emerged, not from the data collected but from determining the research methodology. In attempting to match research subject and method, surprisingly, the strengths approach also emerged as an enhancement to conducting research. As well as prompting the expected rigorous examination of researcher subjectivity and ethics, strengths principles also influenced the choice and appropriateness of data collection and consequently provided a guide to developing new research adaptations. By drawing on the strengths of existing paradigms, theories and methods, especially those that adhered to strengths principles of social justice and empowerment, a strengths research framework was developed. Although influenced by a multi-layered theoretical foundation, the singular strengths framework was designed to elucidate rich meaning and understanding from the data collected. The single framework provided a consistent reference point for determining methods and guiding analysis.

This research indicated that a strengths approach to pre-service child-protection training could provide a positive alternative, or addition, to the single, adjunct child-protection workshop currently offered by most teacher-education courses. The research findings suggest that an extended strengths approach assisted the cohort of pre-service teachers to understand, develop

strategies and connect with child-protection issues in their careers. Additionally, the findings suggest that a solutions-based, strengths approach helps to relieve the reported anxiety felt by teachers in dealing with child-protection issues. Rather unexpectedly, using a collaborative, strengths-based research process also provided an opportunity to develop and use new techniques to work with research participants.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

A STRENGTHS APPROACH TO CHILD-PROTECTION EDUCATION

Thesis Statement

In this thesis, the use of a strengths approach to child-protection education for pre-service teachers is explored. The historical, current and theoretical contexts for teachers' roles in child protection are examined. The development and principles of the strengths approach (originating from social services) are outlined and links to educational theory and practice are identified. The strengths approach module designed to assist a group of pre-service teachers in preparing for child-protection education is described. The research project charts these pre-service teachers' responses to the module (during and after implementation) and uses the key themes of child protection, teacher preparation, and the strengths approach to describe and highlight their key reactions. The interplay of the research findings with the significant practical and moral demands of educating and caring for children is explored. Finally, the literature results, methodology choices and research project findings are analysed using a strengths approach to discover implications that may influence policy and practice in child-protection education. Based on the research project findings, the author contends that the strengths approach assisted the research participants to explore child-protection issues in depth. Participants expressed positive perspectives on their ability and confidence to implement protection strategies after completing the strengths module. Additionally, the project findings suggest that strengths approaches may be of wider utility to teacher-education and research programmes. Strengths approaches may be valuable not only to prepare pre-service teachers to protect children but also for addressing a range of teaching and management issues relating to their practice and teaching philosophies.

Rationale

The author's experiences working previously as a classroom teacher, early-childhood service director, project officer in social services, and (concurrently for ten years) as an early-childhood university lecturer, provided motivation to explore why many teachers appear to lack confidence in implementing child protection into the curriculum. Further research impetus came from the opportunity to potentially enhance pre-service preparation in child protection, which, as the literature reports, pre-service teachers find so challenging. As an educational practitioner, the author had used strengths-based resources when working with vulnerable children in education and social-service settings¹ and found them useful for increasing personal

¹ Education settings - state and Catholic schools in England and Australia; private and community-based early childhood centres in Queensland (Qld), Australia. Social service settings - Qld community centre;

practitioner confidence. The publication of *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005) detailing the Australian development of the approach provided additional impetus to learn how to implement strengths principles in teaching. The possibility of using and evaluating the approach in education and research was intriguing for the author, both as a teacher educator and as a novice researcher. In the area of child protection, pre-service teachers had expressed informally to the author, uncertainty about how to work with children at risk of abuse and anxiety about teaching child protection. The research project presented an opportunity to examine whether other pre-service teachers also felt this and whether the resources and the methods presented by a strengths approach could be of use outside a social-service context.

The Strengths-Approach Framework

This research both studies and uses the Strengths Approach as a theoretical framework. This key component of the research and the links to other relevant theories and approaches are explored in more detail in the discussion of the research framework developed for the thesis (Chapter 3). As a foundation for the research, however, McCashen's (2005) definitional overview is of use here as an introduction. He explains that the Strengths Approach:

- is a philosophy for working with people to bring about change;
- is an approach to people which is primarily dependent upon positive attitudes about people's dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities;
- emphasises people's ability to be their own agents of change by creating conditions that enable them to control and direct the process of change;
- creates conditions that enable people to identify, value and mobilise their strengths, capacities ... and resources as opposed to compensating for perceived deficits;
- acknowledges and addresses power imbalances between people working in human services and those they work with;
- seeks to identify and address social, personal, cultural and structural constraints to people's growth and self-determination; and
- acknowledges and addresses power dynamics, cultures and structures in organizations that are incongruent with socially-just practice. (McCashen, p. v)

The approach encourages identifying resources and using challenges, as they occur, to create resilience and aptitude when working with issues.

A guide for implementing a Strengths Approach is the six key stages for reflection, planning and action:

1. Listening to people's stories ... exploring the core issues;
2. Developing a picture of the future [visioning] and setting goals;
3. Identifying and highlighting strengths and exceptions to problems;
4. Identifying additional resources needed to move towards a picture of the future;

5. Mobilising strengths and resources through a plan of action; and
6. Reviewing and evaluating progress and change. (McCashen, 2005, pp. 47-48)

The first five stages are usually presented in a five-column table format, to guide practitioners applying the Strengths Approach and this is termed, *The Column Approach* (p. 48) as shown in Table 1 (below).

Table 1

The Column Approach

Stories and issues	The picture of the future	Strengths and exceptions	Other resources	Plans and steps
Ask questions that invite people to share their stories and enable them to clarify the issues.	Ask questions that help people explore their aspirations, dreams, interests and goals.	Ask questions that help people explore their strengths and the exceptions to the issues.	Ask questions that help identify resources that might help them reach their goals.	Ask questions that enable people to specify concrete steps towards their goals.
What's happening? How do you feel about this? How long has this been a problem? How is it affecting you and others?	What do you want to be happening instead? What will be different when the issues are addressed?	What strengths do you have that might be helpful? What do you do well? What's happening when the issues aren't around?	Who else might be able to help? What other skills or resources might be useful?	What steps can be taken, given your picture of the future, strengths and resources? Who will do what? When? How? By when?

Note. From *The Strengths Approach* (p. 48), by W. McCashen, 2005, Bendigo: Innovative Resources. Copyright 2005 by the St. Lukes Innovative Resources. Reprinted with permission.

The term *Strengths Approach* can be used both as the name of the method developed by the Australian social-service organisation, St. Lukes (McCashen, 2005) and as a descriptive term for related practices.²

² In this thesis where used in the first sense, capitals are used, in the second sense, lower case.

Justification for Research Focus

There are two principal reasons for undertaking this research. Firstly, occurring locally, nationally and internationally, “maltreatment is a multi-layered, common insult to the developing child and adolescent” (Wekerle, 2011, p. 159) requiring research investment into protection and prevention measures (Fallon, Trocmé, & MacLaurin, 2011; Finkelhor, Turner, Omrod & Hamby, 2009, 2010) with particular regard for promising programs and inter-organisational collaboration (Scott, 2001, 2005). Secondly, “strengths-based development has potential that is just beginning to be realized. There is clearly a need to educate the world about positive psychology in practice and the importance of understanding and focussing on strengths” (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 4). More specifically, literature in education confirms that teachers express anxiety in working with abuse issues and have minimal preparation in child protection compared to other curriculum areas (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; McCallum, 2000, 2001; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Whiteside, 2001). This research provides an opportunity to explore the use of a strengths approach in the discipline of education to assist in preparing teachers to protect children. Justification for focussing child protection and strengths research on teacher preparation is encapsulated in work by Walsh and Farrell (2008). Walsh and Farrell (2008) argue, “child abuse and neglect are serious social problems that make extraordinary demands on teachers’ knowledge and professionalism. Yet the field of education has been slow to develop a discipline-specific knowledge base about child abuse and neglect for teachers and teacher-education programmes and there is a paucity empirical research into teachers’ knowledge in relation to child abuse and neglect” (p. 585).

Previous Research

Child abuse is occurring worldwide (International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect [ISPCAN], 2004, 2010). Abuse damages the physical, emotional, sexual and social well-being of children in our Australian communities (Australian Institute of Health & Welfare [AIHW], 2011). Child abuse is happening locally and daily despite the concern and efforts of a wide range of adults including, parents, police, welfare workers, politicians and educators (Crime & Misconduct Commission, 2004; Queensland Government, Department of Communities [DOCS], 2004, 2011). Many adults who are involved with children have reported the effects of abuse and articulate an urgent need to prevent and stop abuse. More formally, numerous reports and investigations state the confirmed, wide and complex scope of child abuse in our society (National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse & Neglect [NAPCAN], 2010, 2011; Werkle, 2011). International, national and state-wide statistics provide evidence of thousands of reported and substantiated child-abuse cases (AIHW, 2011, IPSCAN; 2004, 2010). While researchers may debate definitions of what constitutes child abuse (Feerick, Knutson, Trickett & Flanzer, 2006; Price-Robertson & Bromfield, 2011) and

debate the under or over-reporting of child abuse, the notion that children are abused and that this is ethically wrong is not in question (ACT For Kids [ACT], 2009).

International and national audits of child-protection programs and research reveal that many studies focus on the short and long-term effects of abuse (in all categories) on children and families (Cashmore & Ainsworth, 2004; Higgins, Adams, Bromfield, Richardson, & Aldana, 2005; IPSCAN, 2004, 2010). Fewer studies, however, provide detailed descriptions and formal research evaluations of prevention or intervention programs (Higgins et al., 2005; McIntosh & Phillips, 2002; Scott, 2005; Scott & O’Neil, 2003; Wise, da Silva, Webster & Sanson, 2005). Bearing in mind the capacity of teachers to assist in child protection, conspicuous in their scarcity are the formal research examinations of successful child-protection initiatives in teacher education (Arnold, 2006; McCallum, 2003; Walsh, Farrell, Bridgestock & Schweitzer, 2006; Walsh, Farrell, Schweitzer & Bridgestock, 2005). Over a decade ago, Watts and Laskey (1997) proclaimed an urgent call to restructure and enhance child-protection training. Research suggests, however, that little change has occurred in over a decade for the provision of child-protection preparation (Laskey, 2004, 2005; see also Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005). A number of studies detail teachers’ fears of false allegations and litigation against them (Kalichman, 1999; McCallum, 2002; McCallum & Johnson, 1998; McWilliam & Jones, 2005; Mellor & Sachs, 2004; Sachs & Mellor, 2005) and complement other studies that reveal teachers’ hesitation with the teaching of prevention topics, particularly sexual abuse (McCallum, 2000, 2001; Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Whiteside, 2001). The joint call from these researchers for increased training and support for teachers remains a compelling reason to look for strategies to enhance child-protection education.

References to strengths approaches within human and social-services literature have increased over the last decade (Beilharz, 2002; Glickin, 2004; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Saleebey, 1996, 2005, 2009; Seligman, Reivich, Jaycox & Gillham, 1995). Specific strengths-based approaches to child-protection practice in social work are led in Australia by the St. Lukes organisation based in Victoria (McCashen, 2005). St. Lukes “provides over 60 types of services ranging from family counselling, out-of-home and respite care, youth housing, psychiatric disability programs and gambler’s help and financial counselling” (St. Lukes Anglicare, 2010). Significant anecdotes of success using strengths approaches (Beilharz, 2002; Scott & O’Neil, 2003) are accompanied by calls for more formal research in this area. Hodges and Clifton (2004) note that strengths approaches have a potential for application in a far wider range of fields than social services alone.

Contemporary Research Context

In 2004, the Crime and Misconduct Commission released the report *Protecting Children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care* (Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2004). A

subsequent blueprint (Queensland Government, DOCS, 2004) presented a plan of action for implementing 110 recommendations from the report which revolutionised the Queensland child-protection system and is a large part of the contemporary context for this research in Queensland. The inquiry detailed miscommunication between helping professions such as, social workers, doctors, teachers, childcare workers and police, as a barrier to preventing abuse. The report called for tighter working practices and more research. Following the criticisms within the report relating to poor handling of child-abuse cases, the then Queensland Department of Families was closed. The report made 110 statements for a total overhaul in Queensland of the child-protection system and the large consultation process provided a unanimous call across departments and organisations for collaboration. Specific recommendations were made for education. The report called for an unprecedented and coordinated “whole-of-government approach to child protection” (Crime and Misconduct Commission, 2004, p. 242) and identified the Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training (DET) (2011a) as an agency with child-protection responsibilities. Adding to this context, recent studies underline the continuing enormity of abuse and alert the community to the prevalence of abuse (AIHW, 2011; ISPCAN, 2004, 2010; Krug, Dahlberg, Mercy, Zwi & Lozano, 2002; Pinheiro, 2006).

The 2007 publication, *Professionals Protecting Children: Child protection and Teacher Education in Australia* is particularly important for this research (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007). Professor Marie Brennan (then Secretary, Australian Council of Deans of Education) noted in the foreword that it provides a “benchmark study of coverage of child protection issues in teacher-education programs in Australia” (2007, Foreword). The study found “most coverage of issues to do with abuse, neglect, vulnerable children and those in care was conducted in training for mandatory child protection, of only a few hours in any program” (Foreword). Brennan (2007) emphasises:

Given the research on the widespread consequences for life chances and educational futures, and the widespread numbers of children so affected, we need to do better... school staff are the most common source of notification that result in final investigations. Our role as educators, especially of pre-service teachers, is thus crucial. Our programs need a stronger focus and further research on appropriate teaching, support for staff and on children’s lives in order to be more effective ... I commend the study to teacher educators around the country for immediate consideration and action. (Foreword)

Scale and Organisation of the Research Project

This thesis discusses the design, conduct and findings of a research project that explored the use of a Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005) for child-protection education. The project involved a cohort of 19 mainly third-year pre-service teachers (referred to interchangeably as pre-service teachers, students or participants) completing a four year Bachelor of Education degree as internal students at the same Queensland university. All were enrolled in a third-year

core curriculum subject within the degree exploring early-childhood care and education services. The curriculum subject, as the site of the research, lasted a full university semester comprising of 13 weeks for which the researcher was also the subject lecturer. The child-protection module was integrated throughout the subject (along with other content) and covered cumulatively, themes of the Strengths Approach and child protection. Students enrolled in the subject were invited to participate in the research. After an independent senior colleague had explained the purpose of the research, the proposed research methods and the time commitments that participation in the research might involve, all students agreed to participate.

Methodology

The qualitative research sought to determine whether the Strengths Approach might enhance teacher preparation for child protection. The methodology was based on a strengths theoretical framework, which influenced the development of a strengths approach to the research. A sample group of pre-service teachers was chosen purposefully as being likely to be able to explore the key themes of child protection, teacher preparation and the strengths approach. An integrated strengths-based child-protection module was developed and implemented for the research. Data, including responses to the module, were generated from recorded, face to face individual interviews, focus groups, electronic discussion board entries and emails. The participant responses were analysed to evaluate the potential of enhancing their preparation to protect children. The research highlights the participants' responses using thematic and contextual analysis. Responses were evaluated both against the literature reviewed and uniquely, against the strengths-based Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). Findings were also examined for broader implications that may suggest enhancements to teacher education, child protection, strengths research, and practice.

There were three distinct phases of the research data collection: during the teaching module; after teaching practice; and twelve months later. A qualitative and multi-method research format was used. This format evoked triangulated, in-depth responses from the group rather than statistically representative results that might be generalised (Patton, 2002, p. 48).

The research used methods compatible with time, financial and accessibility dimensions for all involved. A major factor was the participants' existing study loads. Methods allowed the participants to use existing and familiar modes of communication, such as university electronic discussion boards and student email. The methods of interviews, focus groups and email responses were adapted to align closely with the Strengths Approach. New techniques thus emerged and developed throughout the research to form the strengths-based interview *Open View*, strengths-based focus group *Open Focus Group* and strengths-based email response *EView* (Fenton, 2008a, 2008b).

Researcher Role

As a teacher educator and researcher, the author was a significant stakeholder in the research along with the participants. The research examined a way of preparing teachers for working with children and teaching protective strategies and arose directly from the perspective of the researcher as an employed teacher educator with previous child protection experience (Mac Naughton, Rolfe, & Siraj-Blatchford, 2001, p. 6). When presenting the research project to participants it was necessary to acknowledge the insider knowledge, subjectivity and particular standpoint of the author (Burns, 2000; Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2008). Some of the challenges and opportunities of such a connected researcher role are examined in the methodology chapter of the thesis (Chapter 3), particularly in relation to traditional research and strengths principles that question the influence of researcher power on project findings.

Thesis Outline

The second thesis chapter, *Literature: A Research Strength*, explores the key terms of *child abuse*, *child protection*, *teacher preparation* and *strengths approach*. The chapter reviews findings from literature searches related to each search term and particularly the intersections of terms. The review informed the project regarding the current context of child-protection education and preparation, particularly in respect to early-childhood education and teacher education and explores research in the intersections of these areas. It explores the extent of child abuse at international, Australian and Queensland levels and provided a contextual grounding for the research project. Additionally, the literature offered an important precursor to understanding the development of the child-protection module and the research methodology. The literature revealed complex debates on the multiple definitions of abuse applied in research studies and added to concerns with the widespread amount of abuse recorded by researchers. The literature confirms that many teachers experience a lack of confidence, express fear when dealing with child-protection issues and seek practical strategies to help improve their practice. Chapter 2 also notes the resource of statistical data and quantitative research in the literature as well as qualitative research conducted in child protection and early-childhood education. Research that confirms the importance of the early years in children's long term well-being is examined in the review and understandings from longitudinal research that emphasises the benefits of quality early-childhood care and education and intervention strategies is included. The theoretical underpinnings of the Strengths Approach from cross-sector theories of social work, psychology and education are explored and the Australian version of the Strengths Approach is outlined (McCashen, 2005, pp. 9-17). The possibility of repositioning the Strengths Approach in an education context is investigated and links to resiliency research (McGrath & Noble, 2003; Noble & McGrath, 2007) are pursued. The review concludes by

expressing the need to move beyond the charting of occurrences of abuse to search for meanings and solutions for improving child safety and preparing teachers to protect children.

The third chapter, *Methodology: A Strengths Approach*, introduces and examines the construction of a Strengths Approach research framework designed for this project. The chapter describes applying a Strengths Approach to the conduct of qualitative research as well as outlining the organisation and methods used in the research project. Section one demonstrates how strengths approaches influenced both the *subject* and the *conduct* of the research. Literature findings helped to formulate the child protection-teaching module and the underlying framework of the project in relation to traditional theoretical positions. The project used strengths from the literature review and incorporated recommendations and significant findings made by researchers into the research project design. Methodological research precedents from the work of strengths perspective pioneers (Clifton, Hollingsworth, & Hall, 1952; Saleebey, 2009; Seligman et al., 1995), other paradigms and theories (Patton, 2002) were evaluated for their ability to align with a strengths theoretical framework. Unexpectedly, the challenge of applying a strengths theoretical framework to research also contributed to the overall research findings.

The implications of developing a strengths-based theoretical research framework and using strengths-based research techniques are also discussed in this chapter. Section two of Chapter 3, identifies the specific considerations and techniques for recording and analysing the participants' child-protection preparation responses. Data were collected from participants, once during and twice after the implementation of the integrated strengths-based child-protection module. The demographics, roles and terminology decisions related to the participants in the research are described in order to situate the reader in the research context. The complexities of the dual role of teacher/researcher, insider knowledge, methods of data collection, storage and analysis are outlined as well as challenges of ethical considerations and tensions between traditional research techniques and strengths approaches. In this section, the reasons for using the strengths-based research techniques of the *Open View* interview method, *Open Focus Group* focus group method, and *EView* email response method developed for this project are articulated (Fenton, 2008a, 2008b). The development and details of the child-protection module are also explained to provide readers with an understanding of the context and site of the research from which to view the following analysis and findings chapters.

Chapter 4 presents thematic analysis, discussion and findings relating to the use and potential of the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005) to enhance child-protection education with the group of pre-service teachers who were involved in both the subject and the research. In the chapter, *Drawing Threads Together*, findings from the three phases of data collection are drawn together using thematic analysis around the research terms of child abuse and child protection. Chapter 4 explores the fusion of socially constructed knowledge (Patton, 2002) on

child abuse and protection which emerged from the research experience as a whole. Chapter 4 presents the main categories and sub themes that arose from the participant responses to the research terms and how they were analysed to elucidate the group “essence” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 21) of understandings. Key concepts raised from the literature review (Chapter 2) provided reference points for interpretations and findings. The cohort’s perceptions, reactions and experiences of child abuse and protection were examined and participants’ categorisations of physical, verbal, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect were delineated. Responses that paralleled and diverged from patterns of responses from literature were identified and the cohort’s extensions and redefining of definitions of abuse are highlighted in this chapter.

Chapter 5 provides a contextual analysis of participants responses that emerged from the three separate phases of the research. It focuses on individual understandings of using a strengths approach to teacher preparation for child protection as the contexts for the participants changed from being students to student teachers and finally, becoming qualified educators. The research terms ‘teacher preparation’ and ‘strengths approaches’ are the focus of the contextual analysis. Individual responses (vignettes of participant narratives) are analysed for understanding of existing and possibly improved preparation of teachers to protect children. The chapter is structured into three sections representing three phases of the research project data collection: during the subject study period, after teaching practicum and upon graduation. Section 1 describes the individual struggles and successes with defining, explaining and using a Strengths Approach to child protection during the subject. Findings outlined in this section indicate a strengths approach to pre-service child-protection training could provide a positive alternative, or addition to, more traditional adjunct, child-protection workshops. Participants noted the initial difficulty and value of determining their own as well as the children’s strengths in their practice and the importance of a relationship building time when using the approach. Section 2 considers responses from the participants to the research themes after teaching practicum which were heavily focused on teacher preparation. Participants explored, with a deep level of critical reflection, incidences of identifying and challenging their own personal strengths in practice. Relationships formed during their recent practicum with children, supervising teachers and lecturers are strongly emphasised. Section 3 explores participants’ responses when they were about to graduate or were nearing completion of their degree course. Responses and findings relate strongly to teacher resiliency, overcoming barriers in entering the teaching profession, mentoring and student burn out. Some of the vignettes raise the idea of utilising the Strengths Approach as a personal philosophy as well as an issue solving approach.

The sixth chapter, *Changing the Frame*, revisits the aims of the project, highlights findings and elaborates on their scope and future related research possibilities. This final chapter discusses the implications of and the potential impact on policy and practice that the

Strengths Approach might have, particularly for child protection. It also considers the limitations of the project, gaps remaining, and issues arising from the research that warrant further research. Overall, this research explores an alternative method of child-protection preparation through the eyes of a single group of pre-service teachers to those commonly used in teacher education. While the research is conducted on a small scale, and its findings are context specific, participants' responses and the research findings may also be useful to other education students, teachers and teacher educators when they teach and learn about child protection. The research may also be of interest to practising and potential strengths practitioners and researchers, child-protection workers, childcare workers and those influencing policy and practice in care and education.

Research Findings: Snapshot

This thesis examines relevant literature, provides analysis of research participant responses to a strengths-based child-protection module, and considers if the Strengths Approach can prepare teachers to protect children. The thesis begins by noting the continued lack of reduction and, in some cases, escalation of abuse rates that suggest that teachers are likely to encounter abused children in their careers and that more research is needed to assist teachers prepare to protect children. The thesis builds on the success of the Strengths Approach in social services (Glicken, 2004; McCashen, 2005; Saleebey, 2009) and on the limited studies available that assess teacher preparation for child protection (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Laskey, 2004, 2005; McCallum, 2000, 2002, 2003). For the author, as an education researcher, there are social and moral consequences of accepting child-abuse statistics (AIHW, 2011) without investigating possibilities for change. Child abuse negatively affects whole communities including professionals such as health workers, lawyers, the media, churches, politicians and teachers and interdisciplinary research is needed to suggest possible solutions to the complex area of improving child protection. Social-services practitioners, however, struggle virtually alone with the task of protecting children, and research into child protection to date has been largely undertaken by social-service or medical researchers (Stevenson, 2007; Wilson & James, 2007). Despite the welfare focus of social-service practitioners, protection strategies often happen after abuse has occurred and research mostly charts the effects rather than the prevention of abuse (Hopper, 2010; Krug et al., 2002). Yet, child abuse is preventable and children who have been abused can be helped. Educators have the ability and duty to show deep concern and to protect the well-being of children and educational researchers have an opportunity to assist with research in this area of teaching practice. Educators are among a small group of professionals (including childcare workers) that may possibly be able to prevent the abuse of children (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Briggs &

McVeity, 2000). It is for this reason that the research project outlined in this thesis aims to investigate strategies to assist teachers to protect children.

The literature review for this research shows that policies and legislation already exists to support teachers in protecting children (Child Protection Act 1999, 2010; Education (General Provisions) Act 1989, 2006; Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011a, 2011c; Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011) and access to resources and organisations that specialise in child protection (ACT, 2009; BoysTown/Kids Helpline, 2011) is available, however, more is required. Teachers have the opportunity to assist positively in child protection and yet they continue to be hesitant and anxious when confronted with possible child abuse. This research attempts to understand the reasons for this and to trial new ways of viewing and acting upon possible abuse situations as a teacher. The research aspires to show that pre-service programmes can enhance teacher preparation for child-protection issues by a number of relatively small but significant steps, which will ultimately assist vulnerable children. The author argues that using an extended Strengths Approach can assist by allowing pre-service teachers to connect with and understand protection issues early in their careers. By examining their own and others perspectives on child protection, pre-service teachers can then more readily prepare for their demanding child-protection roles.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE: A RESEARCH STRENGTH

Introduction to the Literature Review

This chapter is a review of literature pertaining to key themes of the research. As outlined in the introduction, the research project analyses responses from pre-service teachers to a Strengths Approach child-protection module. The research, essentially, investigates the potential of the Strengths Approach to help teachers protect children. The literature review, therefore, uses the key research themes of *child protection*, *strengths approach* and *teacher education* as search terms. The term *child abuse* is also used as a search term, in conjunction with the term *child protection*. Even though it is a deficit term, and as such sits outside the Strengths Approach, as the methodology chapter shows, the review includes *child abuse* as a search term, as it yields a large field of records that hold undeviating links to child protection. After an introduction explaining key sources and terms, the first section of the review explores literature on child abuse and child protection. In the second section, literature relating to early-childhood teacher preparation for child protection is explored. The third section of the review examines literature pertaining to the development, critiques, and potential of strengths approaches (particularly the Australian Strengths Approach version) to enhance child-protection education.

Definitions of Key Terms

A significant finding within the following literature review is variability around definitions of the research terms and some key pieces of literature list slippage over terms as a major research limitation (see, e.g., Feerick et al., 2006). The author therefore, provides operational definitions at the beginning of the review as a precursor to discussion. Where definitions in the body of the text are discrepant with respect to those included below, this is identified, as the review discussion consequently inherits similar definitional limitations.

The term child protection is well defined by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which states in Principle 9: that “The child shall be protected against all form of neglect, cruelty and exploitation. He shall not be the subject of traffic in any form” (Alston & Brennan, 1991, p. 2). Further, The Office of the Queensland Parliamentary Counsel explains that in Queensland, the Child Protection Act 1999 (2011) defines a child “in need of protection” as:

A child who has suffered harm, is suffering harm, or is at unacceptable risk of suffering harm; and does not have a parent able and willing to protect the child from the harm ... *Parent* is defined broadly to include persons having or exercising parental responsibility for the child and includes a person who, under Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander tradition or custom, is regarded as a parent of the child. A

child is an individual under 18 years of age. *Harm* is defined as any detrimental effect of a significant nature on the child's physical, psychological or emotional wellbeing. (Pt. 3 Div. 1 § 9-11)

Child abuse is defined in Article 19 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child as:

All forms of physical or mental violence, injury or abuse or negligent treatment, maltreatment or exploitation including sexual abuse while in the care of parent(s), legal guardians(s) or any other person who has care of the child. (Alston & Brennan, 1991, p. 5)

Social service, such as an activity occurring in child protection or strengths based organisations, is defined as “an activity designed to promote social well-being; *specifically*: organized philanthropic assistance (as of the disabled or disadvantaged)” (Miriam-Webster, 2011).

In relation to the educational concepts discussed in the thesis, the *Collins English Dictionary* defines a pre-service teacher as “a person who is teaching in a school for a limited period under supervision as part of a course to qualify as a teacher” (Collins, 2003). Arnold and Maio-Taddeo, (2007) define child-protection education, as it is principally used in this thesis, as:

Curriculum content that promotes professional competence for recognising and responding to child protection issues ... enhancing professionals' child protection knowledge, beliefs and practices ... promote quality teaching and effective learning about child protection and diffuse exemplary models of professional practice through the development of high quality curriculum support models. (p. 1)

Finally, Glicken (2004) defines a strengths perspective as:

A way of viewing the positive behaviours of all clients by helping them to see that problem areas are secondary to areas of strength and that out of what they do can come helping solutions based upon successful strategies they use daily in their lives to cope with a variety of important life issues, problems, and concerns. (p. 3)

This is elaborated by McCashen (2005), who explains that the Strengths Approach is “a philosophy for working with people to bring about change. It is an approach to people that is primarily dependent upon positive attitudes about people's dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities” (p. v).

Literature Review Sources

For the review, the University electronic journal search engine, *X Search*, was used as the initial, primary search tool. *X Search* enabled further searches to full education databases including *Education Resources Information Center* (United States, Department of Education, 2011), *Education Network Australia* (2011), *ProQuest* (2011) and *Education Full Text* (H. W. Wilson Company, 2011). Cross discipline searches used search engines such as *Expanded Academic* (Gale, 2010), social-work search engines, and the *National Child Protection Clearinghouse* (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011b). Links from the International Society for Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect [ISPCAN] (2004, 2010) and the National

Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect [NAPCAN] (2010, 2011) provide additional literature including key published child protection and Strengths Approach texts. The purpose of literature selection was to obtain international and Australian primary sources of refereed or peer reviewed material, as well as secondary sources primarily for definition or clarification purposes. Section 2, however, contains some necessary, formal grey material, government reports and legislation, for context. Sources also include practitioner resources from project-related organisations such as ACT For Kids (ACT, 2009), St. Lukes, Innovative Resources (St Lukes Anglicare, 2010) and Queensland Department of Education (Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011c).

For sheer volume of literature, the search terms of *child abuse* and *child protection* are the most overwhelming in drawing responses. There is a mass of primary, peer reviewed research material from the last three decades, with solid recent additions. Literature published in the previous five years has priority in the review to ensure the relevance of empirical material to the research project. For example, recent statistics corresponding to national and state changes to teacher responsibilities are more significant to this review than literature charting historical developments. This section of the review includes current literature (at the time of submission) providing context for the research and identifying contemporary factors that may influence teacher reactions to child-protection issues.

There is substantial literature for the broad area of teacher education and within this, child-protection education yields a manageable sub section of data. Literature about teacher responsibilities is mainly in the form of secondary sources. Searches reveal child-protection teaching resources for use with children in the classroom including learning experience ideas, stories, audiovisual material, and links to support agencies. The resources are generally presented without formal evaluation, peer review or explicit information regarding the influencing philosophical framework of the resources. Searches reveal no body of academic data that associates positive terms such as teacher confidence or preparation with child protection although the practitioner resources mentioned are often designed to assist therapists, counsellors, or teachers with child protection.

The search term *strengths approach* produced a few texts and articles that explain and specialise in strengths-based frameworks. This material emerged almost entirely from the fields of social work and positive psychology. Although not from traditional educational literature sources, it has a foundational place in this education research project, as a starting point, to explain the Strengths Approach origins and features. The Australian book, *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005) is a primary source for the research, both in evaluating the possibilities of the approach for education and influencing the research methodology. Through natural progression, recent strengths literature is most useful as it draws on founding concepts and adapts to current contexts. It is perhaps not surprising that there is little current, refereed

literature that focuses specifically on the junction of all three spheres presented in Figure 1. In the spirit of strengths-based practice, the researcher views the sparse amount of information available to connect all of the search terms, as an opportunity to create knowledge in this area. The review material from one or a combination of the search terms provides useful scaffolding for the research to occur.

Interplay of Key Terms and Extent of Literature

Figure 1 (below) shows the interplay of key literature search terms determined for the research and the extent of the literature reviewed under these terms. The review examines literature that arises from the key search terms (indicated by the main circles) and any material that emerges from two or more search terms (the circle intersections). The review starts with literature pertaining to child abuse and child protection and progresses clockwise to literature that relates to teacher education and then a strengths approach. The middle intersection of the three circles symbolises the placement of this research within the relevant fields of literature.

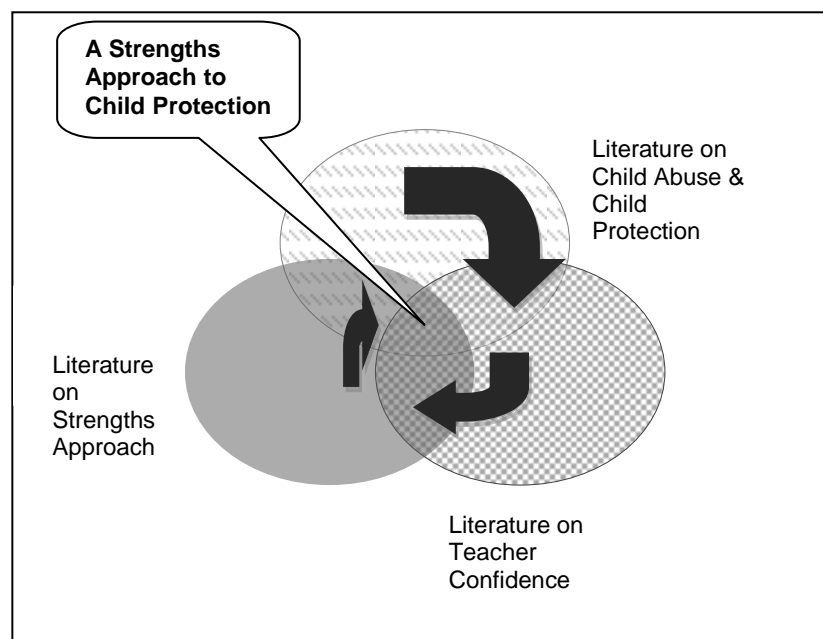


Figure 1. Literature review: The interplay of key search terms and extent of literature.

Figure 1 represents the use of a top down style of literature review, where the amount of literature decreases as the researcher searches from broad literature relating to individual search terms to more specific literature connecting to all of them. The wide arrow moving through the top circle summarises a mass of broad, international and local literature available for the terms of child abuse and child protection. This arrow indicates a multitude of statistics and definitions from prolific literature under these terms. The review then shifts to the realm of

teacher education, and examines several studies (decreasing arrow size) that focus on the issue of teacher preparation confidence and competence in child protection. In the final part of the review, the author explores small but foundational studies on strengths-based frameworks, to assist educators with child protection (smaller arrow). The empty intersection of the three circles, indicates the opportunity in this research to add literature to the area of *a strengths approach to child-protection education*, the title of this thesis.

A Strengths Approach to Literature Review

Using the Strengths Approach as a theoretical framework provides a particular structure and purpose to the literature review to align with a solution focus. The review aims, first, to examine the central issue of the research, a *strengths approach to child-protection education*, as per the first column of the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). While this may be the logical aim of any traditional literature review, the Strengths Approach demands that the researcher externalise the issue as well as examine it. This involves, for this research, taking a position on the issue of child protection, to move from the literature presented, articulate an opinion and focus on answers to the issue. A second aim for the review, therefore, is to identify and evaluate strategies from the literature to assist a Strengths Approach to child-protection education. For positivist researchers, this aim of position taking is incompatible with demands for researcher objectivity in their research paradigm (Kumar, 2005). From the qualitative research perspective of this research, however, externalising allows, indeed encourages, the researcher's individual perspective as a strength for the research and thus aligns with the Strengths Approach well. The researcher can examine the thesis statement that the Strengths Approach has the potential to enhance pre-service teacher preparation to protect children throughout the literature review and all stages of the research process, not only at the beginning and at the conclusion of the project.

In addition to filtering literature to get closer to the specific subject of research (top down search style), this review uses a funnel like process, as shown in Figure 2 (below), to help meet the particular needs of a strengths-based review. Using the funnel process, the researcher can focus and funnel the acquired strengths of the literature as they emerge, to help solve issues as the Strengths Approach demands. In this research, for example, the funnel process is applied to literature searches, to develop strategies for the success of the research project aiming ultimately to help protect children. The funnel process provides a plan and useful cues to ensure this review both explores and models a Strengths-based framework. To be consistent with the Strengths Approach, the literature search must examine the issue *and* move on to sieve the literature for possible strengths, resources, and solutions.

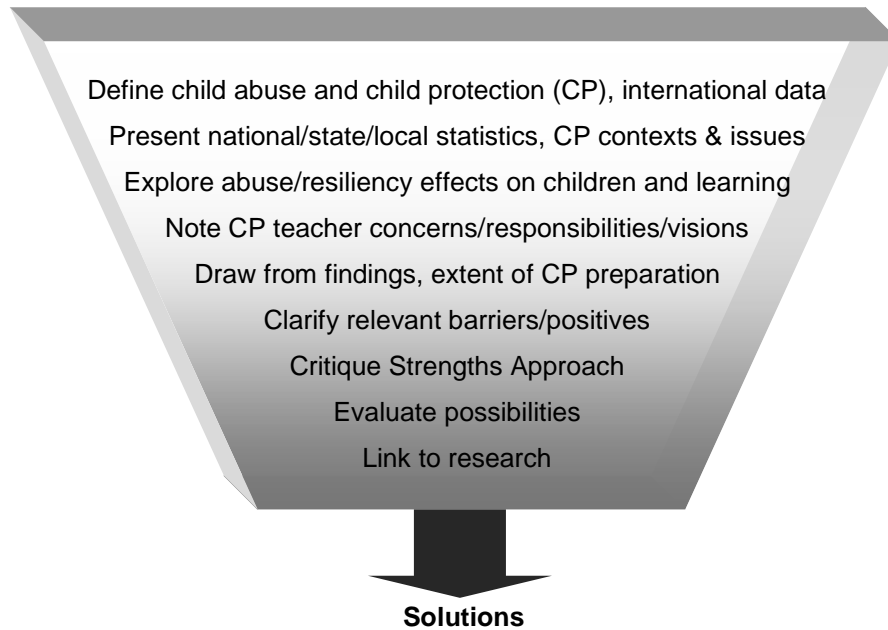


Figure 2. Funnel approach to strengths-based literature review for enhancing child-protection teacher education.

A review in a Strengths-based framework, by definition, needs to examine problems to propose a plan of action. In this research, literature is examined with the aim of increasing confidence and competence of Pre-service Teachers in child protection. The literature is examined for positive findings, even when overall findings weigh to the negative. In the Strengths Approach, drawing out examples from literature of successful research or practice is crucial, even if limited. Exceptions may provide vital clues to improving issues more widely. By searching the literature, this review will explore findings and gaps specific to the body of knowledge for child protection. In a strengths approach, the researcher views even negative findings in literature as opportunities for research solutions. Gaps in literature are opportunities for research rather than lack of research. Considering the research themes, key search terms and the extent of literature available, this literature review has four main opportunities:

1. To provide contextual “groundwork” to the research, outline the issue of child abuse and its effects on children’s well-being and teacher roles;
2. To explore pertinent literature to aid pre-service teachers protect children with confidence and competence and investigate the need and potential to increase these factors;
3. To investigate the possible use and merit of the Strengths Approach and analyse its application beyond its social service origins into education; and
4. To use the literature to design the child-protection module and methodology for this research.

Section 1: Child Abuse and Child Protection

International and Australian Context

On October 11, 2006, the United Nations (UN) released the *UN Secretary-General's Study on Violence against Children* (Pinheiro, 2006). The renowned United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Health Organisation and Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights endorsed the study, which was a considerable time in completion. It was the "first comprehensive, global study conducted by the United Nations on all forms of violence against children," a prominent milestone (Pinheiro, 2006, p. xiii). The report was most welcomed and the commitment to such depth and intensity of research gathering is a significant achievement. The report included the following global statistics:

Almost 53,000 children died worldwide in 2002 as a result of homicide...150 million girls and 73 million boys under 18 experienced forced sexual intercourse or other forms of sexual violence during 2002... Between 100 and 140 million girls and women in the world have undergone some form of female genital mutilation/cutting ... In 2004, 218 million children were involved in child labour, of whom 126 million were in hazardous work ... Estimates from 2000 suggest that 1.8 million children were forced into prostitution and pornography, and 1.2 million were victims of trafficking. (Section II. B., pp. 9-10)

Undoubtedly, this type of factual evidence, outlining the volume of children abused worldwide, is symbolic and perhaps also so overwhelming, as to make its significance difficult to conceptualise. While the report uses accurate and graphic terms and reports an extensive scale of abuse, the figures presented are divorced from the daily reality of individual lives in Australian homes, communities and schools. Viewed alone, the report offers no way to appreciate the likelihood of such abuse being present in an individual teacher's classroom. Australia was, however, not only an integral part of the United Nations study it also reported startling separate data. This data reveals that many teachers across Australia are aware of and report suspected child abuse to relevant authorities in their area.

An ISPCAN (2004) international survey found that there are still considerable differences in cultural perspectives from the sixty-four countries studied, on what constitutes child abuse. Strong agreement was found in some areas, for example, 95 per cent of respondents regarded child prostitution as abuse and 84 per cent of respondents regarded female infanticide as abuse (p. 18). Less agreement, however, was noted on other abuse issues, 73 per cent thought child labour to be abuse and 51 per cent agree female circumcision was abuse (p. 18). Regardless of differences, in the last two decades there has been an increasing worldwide acknowledgement of basic child-abuse parameters. The *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child* (supported by 194 countries including Australia) outlines, amongst other rights, the child's right to be protected from abuse and exploitation (Alston & Brennan, 1991).

The AIHW (2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011) annually presents detailed official abuse data from relevant government child-protection departments in each state and territory. Although there are similarities between states and territories in abuse definitions and reporting mechanisms (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005), there are also differences between, and changes in, child-protection policy, population rates and reporting procedures that make comparisons between jurisdictions weak, if not impossible (AIHW, 2011, p. 10). In this thesis, the AIHW (2011) data explored is mainly in relation to teachers as notifiers of child abuse, in Queensland and, separately, in Australia as a whole.

The most recent AIHW report, for 2009-2010, indicated that there were 286,437 child-protection notifications in Australia during this period (AIHW, 2011, p. 15). Specifically for Queensland, notifications numbered 21,885 (p. 15). Explanations accompanying the data outline how notifications of suspected child abuse from teachers and other reporters, such as police officers, are a starting point for departmental assessments, which are conducted by the relevant authority for each state or territory. In Queensland the agency specifically responsible for statutory child protection is the division of Child Safety Services, Department of Communities, which liaises closely with other government organisations with child-protection responsibilities such as the Queensland Police Service, which delivers first response child-protection services (Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011). Notifications are assessed and classified by the “type of action” that is taken by the department and this may range from specific advice through referral to support services or investigation (AIHW, 2011, p. 13).

In Queensland all notifications must be investigated ... as being either substantiated, not substantiated or no outcome possible ... Substantiations can (but do not always) lead to a child being placed on a care and protection order and/or in out-of-home-care. (AIHW, 2009, p. vii)

Of the 18,025 finalised child protection investigations for Queensland, 6,922 cases of substantiated abuse were recorded (AIHW, 2011, p. 67) with just over 6 children per 1000 in Australia (p. vii) where “there was reasonable cause to believe that the child had been, was being, or was likely to be, abused, neglected or otherwise harmed” (AIHW, 2011, p. 13). Actions resulting from investigations include prosecutions, care and protection orders, the provision of intensive family support services and out-of-home care options. Children on care and protection orders numbered 37,730 nationally with 8,090 from Queensland (AIHW, 2011, p. 38). Children in out-of-home care (including foster care, relative or kinship care and residential care) numbered 35,895 at 30 June 2010 with 7,350 of these children from Queensland (p. 49). For this research specifically, the figures and explanations indicated that teachers in Queensland (and in other jurisdictions in Australia), are highly likely to encounter children experiencing, or at risk of, child abuse and that they have a specific reporting, rather than an investigative role in formal child-protection processes. Additionally, teachers may at

some point in their careers, have students in their classes who live in out-of-home care and have specific on-going protection needs.

The significant difference between substantiated and non-substantiated finalised investigations of child-protection notifications (39.9% substantiated compared with 60.1% non-substantiated) (p. 67) was also reflected in the overall figures for notifications across Australia. As reporters, school personnel were listed, after police and medical practitioners, as the third highest notifiers (of 15 notifier types) of child abuse in Queensland and second nationally. In Queensland in 2009-2010, 3,126 child-protection notifications were from school staff more than government department personnel notifications of 1,735 (AIHW, 2011, p. 74). Across Australia in 2009-2010, 21,131 child-protection notifications were received from school personnel with an additional 2,303 from personnel in childcare services. In preparing prospective early-childhood teachers for child-protection responsibilities in Queensland, it can be confidently stated that many teachers make child-protection notifications, that there are many cases of abuse substantiated, and that more child abuse is reported than proven. For teacher educators an implication arising from this summary is the need to assist prospective teachers, as *key* notifiers of child abuse, to understand child-protection systems, their reporting role alongside other notifiers, and their connected but different role to other child-protection professionals who undertake separate investigative and support functions.

For this research, the AIHW (2011) statistics give an impetus to explore with pre-service teachers, as potential reporters, the types of protective action that can occur for children and families (regardless of whether abuse is substantiated) as a result of a teacher notification. Teacher education in child protection can also clarify that the mismatch between the high rates of reporting of suspected abuse and low substantiation rates relates directly to investigative decisions and should not deter teachers from reporting suspected child abuse. The opportunity presents to explain and prepare teachers for their inter-professional role and abilities as *part* of a child-protection system to protect children, and to debunk common myths, such as that “reporting suspected child abuse can cause more harm than the abuse itself ... [and] if child abuse is reported to authorities they will take the child away from their family” (Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011, pp. 11-12). Additionally, teacher educators can raise awareness that while lower substantiation rates may be interpreted as over-reporting this is an argument is more than balanced by the additional belief of many researchers, that the majority of child-abuse cases go undetected. There is widespread credence to the view that more abuse occurs than is reported and official government statistics are only the “tip of the iceberg” (Hopper, 2010; Sedlak, 2001). Scott (2006) additionally notes that notification and substantiation figures in Australia are “highly unreliable indicators as they are primarily measures of reporting behaviour, not the amount of child maltreatment or the well-being of children in a community” (p. 12). Some researchers estimate that reported cases of child abuse constitute as little as “40%

of all cases” (Kalichman, 1999, p. 441) and that professionals may be reluctant to report child abuse as they are not confident that it will assist the situation (Gilbert et al., 2009).

Nevertheless, the detailed breakdown of the AIHW (2011) *reported* figures could provide some help to clarify further the complex area of child protection for early-childhood teachers. The age of children in substantiated notifications, their gender, Indigenous or non-Indigenous background and categories of abuse reported are relevant for teachers who regularly work with children aged 0-8 years of different genders and backgrounds. For both Queensland and Australia overall, children aged less than 1 year were most likely to be the subject of a substantiation (13 per 1,000 children nationally), followed by children in the 1-4 years old age group (6.9 per 1,000 children nationally) and then those in the 5-9 years age group (6.0 per 1,000 children nationally) (pp. 24-25). The highest proportion of substantiated notifications by abuse category in Queensland (and again similarly nationally) was for emotional abuse. Emotional abuse constitutes 40.4 percent of the overall reported abuse cases in Queensland, followed by cases of neglect at 31.5 percent, physical abuse at 21.9 percent and sexual abuse at 6.1 percent of total cases (p. 26). Further information highlights that “females were more likely to be the subject of a substantiation of sexual abuse than males” and “males were slightly more likely to be the subject of a substantiation of physical abuse than females” in Queensland and Australia (AIHW, 2011, p. 23). Also, across Australia, “Indigenous children were 7.7 times as likely as non-Indigenous children to be the subject of substantiation” of child abuse (6.1 in Queensland) (p. 28). The recorded distinctions can assist those involved in child protection, across a number of professions, to see the areas of most need and to be able to tailor initiatives and resources effectively (Council of Australian Governments [COAG], 2011). Early-childhood teachers come into extended contact daily with many young children of the ages most likely to experience substantiated child abuse, either in before school age settings such as early-childhood long day care centres or within the early years of school. Prospective early-childhood teachers undertaking preparation for child protection may benefit from being alerted to children in high target groups, not only to counteract any misunderstandings of the most common ages and categories of abuse, but to raise awareness of their unique access and ability to play a protective role with these children. Additionally, a high weighting in teacher preparation programs to exploring nuanced understandings of protective practices with very young children, males and females, Indigenous children, and to particularly recognising emotional abuse and well-being may be most beneficial.

Records of Abuse and Protection: Limitations and Variance

Questions arise internationally regarding “the complexities for the child protection field” (Macdonald, 2001, p. 3) and the “unavoidable controversies” (Hopper, 2010, Introduction section, para. 1) about which methods to employ to obtain statistics, the reliability of data,

definitions and investigator bias. As noted previously, the AIHW acknowledges this dilemma finding that differences may occur because of the maze of different child-protection legislation, policy and philosophies in Australia (AIHW, 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011; see also Lamont, 2011). Bromfield and Higgins (2005) explain:

- There are considerable jurisdictional differences in what child protection data means;
- It is difficult to compare trends in notifications and substantiations between jurisdictions; and
- Current data systems are dependent on legislative frameworks. (p. 29)

Efforts to report, standardise and increase consistency and comparability in child-abuse definitions and statistics, therefore, appear well placed (AIHW, 2011; Feerick et al., 2006; Price-Robertson, Bromfield & Vassallo, 2010; Price-Robertson & Bromfield, 2011). Especially pertinent is research that emphasises how increasing recording accuracy can encourage public awareness and more finely tuned strategies for prevention and intervention to assist all involved with child protection (Asmussen, 2010; Macdonald, 2001). Not only are current data complex and inconsistent from one source to another, but Mudaly and Goddard (2006) also question the reliability of data (p. 12). Definitional and reporting arguments may serve to keep debate and advocacy on the issue of child protection on the academic, educational and public service agenda (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Feerick et al., 2006). The complexity and unreliability of the data, however, can be seen as barriers, further hampering progress for teachers endeavouring to understand their child-protection roles and responsibilities within and between teaching in various jurisdictions in Australia. Thus, for example, Krug et al. (2002) argue that:

Lack of good data on the extent and consequences of abuse and neglect has held back the development of appropriate responses in most parts of the world. Without good local data, it is difficult to develop proper awareness of child abuse and neglect. (2002, p. 78)

Similarly, Mudaly and Goddard (2006) link the lack of reliable data to systemic disengagement and lack of collaborative responses to child abuse:

We have national debates about industrial relations, education, war, nuclear power. But we have no national debates about our most valuable asset, our children and their protection ... We still have no national standards for child protection, no federal children's minister, no national policies or legislation, no national definitions, no federal system of children's commissioners, no independent scrutiny of child protection.. (p. 12)

The list of lacking elements can be viewed, alternatively, as a child-protection wish list of policies, debates and standards. Encouragingly, in 2009, COAG launched *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009 – 2020*, recognising that “over recent years the reported levels of child neglect and abuse in Australia have increased at an alarming rate” and that this is an “issue of national concern” (COAG, 2009c, p. 5). The framework, however, highlights improvements in progress across a wide range of protection organisations and departments and the need for a “shared agenda” that

moves away from “responding to abuse” to “promoting safety and well-being” (p. 5). The framework details state and territories strategies and plans for improving child protection (including separate Children’s Commissioners) across Australia, although separate responsibilities, reporting systems and variations of definitions of child abuse remain. Child-protection debates are being continued and previous calls for national child-protection data, regulations and federal advocacy roles (Bromfield & Holzer, 2008) appear to have been heeded with improvements to the accuracy incidence data and a national prevalence study underway (COAG, 2009c; Lamont, 2011; Price-Robertson, Bromfield & Vassallo, 2010). In 2012, initiatives are in progress to ensure that there is “national data on treatment and support services” (AIHW, 2011, p. 3). For early-childhood teachers and teacher educators, the improved provision of clear and accurate child-protection information pertinent to their teaching context such as, the amount and type of child abuse, how to access child-protection systems and the support services available, may well be a factor in increasing their confidence to protect children.

Responding to Child-Abuse Data

From a strengths perspective, statistics on abuse (regardless of the difficulties of definitions and reporting mechanisms as previously outlined) can provide a starting point for analysis, in order to move quickly to solution finding. If researchers and practitioners restrict their view solely to one of statistical tallying, they limit their ability to find answers to the issues they have described. Research following a Strengths Approach aims to “create conditions that enable people to identify, value and mobilise their strengths and resources as opposed to compensating for their deficits” (McCashen, 2005, p. v). The resource of child-abuse data has existed for many decades and in recent years a plethora of studies have continued to confirm the existence and the effects on children of abuse (Higgins et al., 2005; Mullen & Fleming, 1998; Wise, 1999). Literature on abuse can be used to highlight specific barriers, further knowledge of assessment, treatment and prevention responses for those close to the issue as well as assist with government and practitioner accountability. Scott (2006) indicates that “a combination of indicators can be used to give a picture of the well-being of children at a whole of community level” (p. 12) and that a public health approach to child protection is needed. Research from across disciplines is needed so that “data can also be used to monitor progress, direct resources to areas of greater need and identify promising pockets of success despite adverse conditions (thus increasing knowledge about possible protective factors)” (Scott, 2006, p. 12). In a Strengths Approach, researchers may view identifying barriers to child protection, for example, as a research beginning, a solid foundation and asset for establishing the scope and nature of abuse, and for finding and testing strategies to prevent abuse. Along with this focus on positive outcomes, however, must be the realisation by strengths practitioners that the detrimental

effects of child abuse deserve full examination and the serious nature of child protection should not be trivialised. Contrary to common misconceptions of the Strengths Approach, Clabaugh (2005) argues, that it does not advocate for negative issues and events to be merely glossed over or ignored. An integral part of the approach, indeed the vital catalyst for change, is first to investigate issues with respect before drawing out any resources or strengths from situations.

Literature from many countries charts the effects of child abuse, both in the short and long term, and for both individual children and society as a whole. *The Canadian Incidence Study of Child Abuse and Neglect* (Trocmé et al., 2010) details a nationwide study of data collected from Canadian child welfare agencies in 2008. The study found that the short term effects (lasting at least 48 hours) for children who had been physically harmed included cuts, bruises, burns and scalds. Longer term effects that were noted were physical injuries such as broken bones and head trauma. The study recorded that 3% of substantiated physical abuse required medical treatment (pp. 31-32). For substantiated cases of emotional maltreatment, effects such as nightmares, bedwetting or social withdrawal were noted, with 17% of cases needing ongoing therapeutic intervention for emotional distress (p. 33). Overall, 27% of abuse cases were identified by welfare services as needing on-going support services (p. 27). Early-childhood teachers are in regular contact with children and are likely to see physical injuries and hear reports of emotional incidences in their communications with children. Teachers knowledgeable about the effects of abuse, can monitor children closely with an awareness that their observations may possibly indicate maltreatment is occurring and that their records may be useful for formal child-protection investigations.

Asmussen (2010) reviewed recent child-protection research from the United States, Great Britain, New Zealand and Australia and summarised the reported effects of child abuse in these countries. Asmussen further notes that “surveys suggest that at least 16 per cent of the population within Western cultures will experience some serious form of maltreatment during their childhood” (2010, p. 1). Asmussen (2010) highlighted the multitude of effects of child abuse found by various authors, including United Kingdom researchers, Gilbert et al. (2009) and United States researcher, Tyler (2002), including “low educational achievement and poor physical and mental achievement in adulthood” (Asmussen, 2010, p. 10). Gilbert et al. (2009) scrutinised systematic reviews or overviews related to child maltreatment, from a multitude of countries, as reported in reputable academic and government publications across medical, psychology and education fields and found:

Child maltreatment substantially contributes to child mortality and morbidity and has long-lasting effects on mental health, drug and alcohol misuse (especially in girls), risky sexual behaviour, obesity, and criminal behaviour, which persist into adulthood. Neglect is at least as damaging as physical or sexual abuse in the long term but has received the least scientific and public attention. The high burden and serious and long-term consequences of child maltreatment warrant increased investment in preventive and therapeutic strategies from early childhood. (p. 68)

Tyler (2002) examined 41 articles relating to the outcomes (socially and emotionally) of childhood sexual abuse which included “suicide, gang involvement, pregnancy, running away, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), risky sexual behaviour, and behavioural problems” (p. 567). Tyler highlighted research by Luster and Small (1997a, 1997b) that outlined supportive factors for assisting children experiencing abuse. Luster and Small (1997a) found (in a survey of 1,109 female adolescents in the United States that identified as having experienced sexual abuse) that parental support can “mitigate the negative effects associated with sexual abuse” (p. 210). By considering the literature outlining the wide-ranging and inter-linked effects of various forms of child abuse, early-childhood educators can see strong reasons and support for their child-protection roles. Such literature supports the preventative and early interventionist capacities of early-childhood teachers and their ability to contact and support families. Teachers readily notice, for example, children regularly not attending school or attending without food, clean clothes or with poor hygiene and may be able to put in place strategies or referrals to assist families when noticing the early signs of possible neglect.

Specific information relevant for early-childhood teachers in Australia also arises within an overview of child-abuse and protection data and services as presented by McIntosh and Phillips (2002) in a brief for the Parliament of Australia. They refer to Abused Child Trust reports that reframe the impacts of abuse in terms of educational outcomes. In the area of personal development alone, “the Abused Child Trust list retarded cognitive development, poor self development, poor language development, diminished verbal skills, possible psychiatric disorders and lower self esteem” (McIntosh & Phillips, 2002, Consequences section, para. 4) as outcomes for children who have suffered abuse. The developmental markers listed “conceptualise[s] child maltreatment in a developmental framework” (Consequences section, para. 2) and teachers have studied and practiced helping children to develop in most of these areas in order to become qualified (Arthur et al., 2008; Berk, 2009; Blaise & Nuttall, 2011; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Hendrick, 2003; NAEYC, 2009; Keating, 2011). Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) is one perspective that (amongst others) has particularly influenced the development of early-childhood education (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 2009).

High profile cases reported in the media may also affect teachers’ perceptions of child abuse and protection. In 1993, Goddard and Liddell recalled the high profile abuse case of Daniel Valerio:

A Melbourne court learned that Daniel’s body had 104 bruises, two new and several untreated old fractures, a ruptured duodenum and tears to the membrane anchoring the intestines to the abdomen. These injuries were inflicted over a four-month period when Daniel was thrown against a wall, punched on the head, beaten on the penis and had his face rubbed in faeces. They gave the impression that the child had been in a severe car crash. (p. 25)

Exposure of child abuse in the media is often sensationalist and focuses disproportionately and heavily on extreme physical and sexual abuse cases that occur less often, and that teachers are less likely to encounter, compared to other reported abuse categories such as neglect (AIHW, 2011). Teachers prepared with a strengths approach may resolve to give their strong personal emotional leverage to actively support vulnerable children in their care and to implement programs to prevent or help any abuse issues that they may encounter.

Rather than the quantity or quality of “good data”, as mentioned previously (Krug et al., 2002, p. 78), it may be that difficulties occur for early-childhood teachers in attempting to *connect* with the “serious global health problem” (Krug et al., 2002, p. 80) of child abuse. Tucci, Mitchell and Goddard (2003, 2006, 2010), revealed a lack of engagement with the issue of child abuse and neglect in their studies of community attitudes. The 2009 study (Tucci et al., 2010) analysed phone interviews from a nationally representative sample of 722 adults and identified the need to support individuals and the community more broadly to act against child abuse (p. 8). More than 1 in 4 respondents identified a child whom they believed was being abused or neglected in the last five years and 16% of these respondents identifying possible abuse took no action (p. 12). Tucci et al. (2010) conclude that “clearly, there is a need to empower the community in relation to taking action when they become aware that a child is being abused rather than feel impotent and a hostage to the problem” (p. 11).

The Centre for Community Child Health (2011) stresses that to foster action and engagement early-childhood “professionals have to be able to understand and interpret emerging research findings and integrate them into their practice, as well as learn to work in a more coordinated way in teams and with professionals from other disciplines” (p. 4). Davis (2007) claims that lack of engagement is due to a “communication gap” between scholars and practitioners and that academic literature can benefit from efforts to translate ideas in a more readily available and understandable form. Riehl, Larson, Short and Reitzug (2000) assert that for the area of educational administration, for example, “much of the research is written in language and terms that make it inaccessible to many of the people it is intended to reach” and “research should be accessible to its community” (p. 405).

To assist with child-protection engagement, child-protection organisations play a role as intermediaries between formal research and teachers, providing a starting point and resources to foster the dissemination of formal child-protection literature into concise, credible, and readily accessible formats. The Australian Childhood Foundation (2009), for example, provides research updates and summaries regarding child-abuse consequences and prevention. The foundation, in conjunction with Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia and Access Economics, reports in brief financial terms, for instance, that the economic cost of child abuse to the Australian community in 2007 was between \$10.7 billion and \$30.1 billion (Taylor et al., 2008). Hopper (2010), an instructor in Psychology at Harvard Medical School, uses a free and

publically available web site to disseminate research summaries outlining some of the far-reaching results of child abuse from published and peer reviewed research worldwide. Along with statistical reports and summaries, Hopper refers to a succinct summary from the United States National Clearinghouse on Child Abuse and Neglect Information (NCCANI, 1995).

Much research has been done about the possible consequences of child abuse and neglect. The effects vary depending on the circumstances of the abuse or neglect, personal characteristics of the child, and the child's environment. Consequences may be mild or severe; disappear after a short period or last a lifetime; and affect the child physically, psychologically, behaviourally, or in some combination of all three ways. Ultimately, due to related costs to public entities such as the health care, human services, and educational systems, abuse and neglect affect not just the child and family, but society as a whole. (NCCANI, p. 6)

The Abused Child Trust (ACT, 2009) in Queensland, now known as ACT for Kids, provide a concise summary revealing that the effects of child abuse have been reported as including:

- physical damage;
- health issues (chronic illness, substance abuse);
- developmental problems (language delay and diminished verbal skills, cognitive impairment, lower social maturity, learning difficulties, diminished life-coping skills); and
- emotional problems (delinquency, adult criminality, psychiatric disorders, depression, suicide, self-destructive behavior, sexual difficulties, low self-esteem, haunting memories). (Our work section)

The condensed list is a small but significant resource from a practitioner organisation which reflects results from formal and longitudinal studies in an efficient format. The Kids Helpline (BoysTown/Kids Helpline, 2011), similarly, summarises large amounts of information to give readers an overview that they:

Received 81, 674 phone and online contacts for Queensland in 2009, responding to 48,922 of contacts. Counsellors responded to 628 calls in relation to abuse and of these calls, 40% related to physical abuse, 33% had concerns about sexual abuse, 15% were related to emotional abuse, 9% domestic violence and 3% were about neglect. (p. 7)

Summaries of research or service provision can provide short introductions and clarifications on child abuse and protection that not time-consuming to analyse. The ACT (2009), for instance, reports some common misconceptions in relation to child abuse in a case study format:

Contrary to what many people think, sexual abuse is the least common form of abuse, comprising around 5% of cases. The most common type of abuse is neglect. Most child abuse is rarely the result of a single incident. It results from a complex combination of factors that may involve deep personal or marital conflict, drug problems or depression. Child abuse occurs in all socio-economic groups. In an overwhelming majority of cases (around 94%), the child knows and trusts the perpetrator. (Case study section)

According to Briggs and Potter (2004), child-protection research is not often published in professional teacher literature and child abuse is still widely pigeonholed, and therefore researched and reported upon, as a social welfare issue rather than an educational one.

Information from child-protection organisations, however, provides pathways for teachers to engage with child-protection research and organisational findings.

Links to Child-Protection Interdisciplinary Research

While specific educational and strengths-based research into child abuse and protection is in its infancy, child-protection research in child health, social science, and other related fields has much to offer teachers. Connections for teachers with these fields may be helped by positively engaging with a public health standpoint on child abuse that is now becoming a dominant discourse in Australia (COAG, 2009c; Higgins and Katz, 2008; Scott, 2006).

A public health model offers a different approach with a greater emphasis on assisting families early enough to prevent abuse and neglect occurring. It seeks to involve other professionals, families and the wider community – enhancing the variety of systems that can be used to protect children and recognising that protecting children is everyone's responsibility. (COAG, 2009c, p. 8; see also Higgins & Katz, 2008, p. 45).

Professionals with a role in the *early* care and education of children, while challenged by the individual, financial, and societal costs of child abuse as previously outlined, may be reassured by their well-regarded and defined role within a child-protection system that indicates “protecting children is everyone’s business” (COAG, 2009c).

Also noticeable among some recent interdisciplinary research are reports of reductions in child abuse. Finkelhor et al. (2010) in an examination of American juvenile victimisation data (of children aged 2 – 17 years) from two national surveys conducted 5 years apart (2003 and 2008), found a decline in reported abuse. Declines were found in reporting of “physical assaults, sexual assaults, and peer and sibling victimizations, including physical bullying. There were also significant declines in psychological and emotional abuse by caregivers, exposure to community violence, and the crime of theft” (p. 238). In Australia, the AIHW (2011) report highlights that “from 2004-05 to 2009-10, the number of children subject to a substantiation of a notification decreased by 8% from 34,046 to 31,295 (7.1 to 6.1 per 1000 children)” (p. viii). Additionally, in 2009-2010, “expenditure on child protection and out-of-home care services was approximately 2.5 billion, a real increase of \$296.3 million from 2008-09” (p. 2). Child-abuse figures continue to be monitored and there are positive indications that in some areas instances of abuse are decreasing.

Internationally there is an increasing amount of cross-disciplinary research and service provision articulating the positive effects of prevention and early intervention in the area of child protection and well-being that links very closely with early-childhood education. Cicchetti, Rogosch and Toth (2006) in a randomised preventive intervention trial conducted in the United States, found secure attachments could be formed between infants and mothers in maltreating families with psychotherapy and psychoeducational parenting intervention. Cohen, Deblinger, Mannarino and Steer (2004) also reported positive results (from a multi-site, randomised control trial) for cognitive-behavioural and child centred-therapy with children in

the United States who had experienced posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and related emotional and behavioural problems after sexual abuse. Scheeringa and Zeanah (2001) in a review of 17 clinical and research studies (mainly from psychiatry and psychology publications) alerted attention to the importance of “understanding young children’s traumatic responses in the context of their primary caregiving relationships” (p. 813). In relation to human service research, Groves (2007) explains how “in the past 15 years, tremendous strides have been made in recognizing the vulnerability of our youngest children to trauma in the environment” (p. 16) and promotes that “early care/education settings ... are examples of agencies that see large numbers of young children and parents, and they offer important opportunities to screen for early trauma” (p. 18). Early-childhood teachers in their daily work with young children encounter practical issues that they have learnt about theoretically in their educational studies, such as the importance of caregiver attachment (Bowlby, 1969, Ainsworth, 1989; Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters & Wall, 1978), parent, child and caregiver relationships (Arthur, Beecher, Death, Dockett, & Farmer, 2008) and the influence of the bioecological perspectives on learning environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Similar exposure to literature in their pre-service studies regarding successful prevention and early intervention programs could, likewise, link with the practical role early-childhood teachers have in identifying possible child abuse in the early years and in referral to appropriate services.

In the United Kingdom, researchers Barlow and Schrader-MacMillan (2009) studied evidence from 21 studies and 18 interventions in an effort to find out what works for helping to prevent child emotional maltreatment. The evaluation found that brief behaviourally focused interventions aimed at increasing maternal sensitivity to infants, cognitive behavioural programmes such as the group-based parenting program *Triple P*, the *Family Nurse Partnership* programme and parent intervention programmes all reported successful outcomes (pp. 3-8). Although evaluation was hampered methodologically, by research without control groups or less than representative samples, both population-based and targeted interventions were viewed as successful overall (Barlow & Schrader-MacMillan, 2009, pp. 3-8). Research that explores child protection by across disciplines demonstrates the significant emphasis that is emerging from a range of professions and groups to protect children from abuse and outlines available community resources outside of education services that may be of use to teachers.

Also in the United Kingdom, a formal evaluation of the *Family Pathfinder Programme* (York Consulting, 2011), an intensive localised intervention program run by 27 local authorities “for families who face multiple and complex social, economic, health and child problems” (p. 1), showed positive results. The programme involved an experienced professional worker assigned to families for an extended period, capable of both delivering and brokering cross sector support services (including in schools and early-childhood services for child-protection concerns), and had a “whole family approach” (p. 3). Consultations, surveys and interviews

with families before, during and after the programme were held, the data were analysed, and “significant improvement in outcomes for nearly a half (46%) of families supported by the Family Pathfinders” (York Consulting, 2011, p. 1) was found. Additionally, “a conservative assessment of the return on investment indicates that for every £1 spent, the Family Pathfinders have generated a financial return of £1.90 from the avoidance of families experiencing negative outcomes” (p. 2). The research results give additional impetus for encouraging early-childhood teachers to identify children and families with support needs and to investigate the local services available to access.

In Australia, Valentine and Katz (2007) argued that “decades of research in Australia and internationally have demonstrated the benefits of early interventions” which have “been shown to achieve, at relatively modest cost, changes to prevent harms that are very expensive to remediate” (p. ii). McDonald, Higgins, Valentine and Lamont (2011), in an Australian research audit for 1995-2010, recorded 235 formally evaluated child-protection programs including family violence initiatives, child-abuse prevention and intervention programs, community development and education programs and statutory services (p. 14). Valentine and Katz (2007) record that programs available in Queensland include home visiting by nurses, para-professionals and volunteers, parent education and training, family support and community interventions, educational programs about specific issues such as sexual abuse or substance misuse (p. 2). Valentine and Katz (2007) also consider early-childhood care and education services (childcare and preschool) and school based programs, such as school counsellors and bullying initiatives, as key intervention strategies useful for promoting the well-being of young children, although they add that there is a need for formal evaluations of these services.

An Australian longitudinal study of children in the intervention service of long-term foster care used a prospective repeated measures design to assess the developmental outcomes for vulnerable children in out-of-home care (Fernandez, 2009, 2011). The eight-year study analysed perspectives of children, carers and caseworkers and found positive outcomes in terms of family and social relationships and prosocial behaviour of children over time in their placements. Negative outcomes in relation to education, however, were also found including:

- Incidence of school disruption;
- Incidence of learning difficulties;
- Children’s perceptions of the school experience; and
- Acquisition of skills and interests, and attainment. (Fernandez, 2011, para. 4)

Teachers already working confidently and competently with educationally disadvantaged children that, although are not identified as in need of child protection, are also experiencing these same negative outcomes may perhaps be able to use many of the similar skills and strategies that they use each day with these children. While Fernandez’s (2009) research also stresses the negative impact education services may have on children who have been abused, it

importantly highlights the integral link between and care and education. The study reports positively on the *Looking After Children Framework*, used in the research (developed in the United Kingdom), as an inter-disciplinary approach for assisting children in out-of home care to promote resilient outcomes (Fernandez, 2009). Specifically supportive for this research are the claims that:

It is imperative that education and schooling are prioritized ... More specifically, they must recognise the protective value of education and the schooling experience for vulnerable children in the care system and the risks posed by low attainment, school exclusion, unscheduled school changes and early school leaving. (Fernandez, 2011, para. 14)

Child Protection and Well-being: Links to Early-Childhood Education

Historically there has always been an intrinsic link between care, protection and education, most notably in early-childhood education (Brennan, 1998; Weihan, 2004). Renowned education pioneer and Swiss theorist, Pestalozzi (1746-1827) influenced early-childhood education by stressing the need to closely observe children, move beyond instructional or rote learning of facts, and to enhance holistic learning across all developmental areas of the child's life (Guimps, 1890; Sibling, 1976; Brühlmeier, 2010). Pestalozzi's work was influenced directly by work educating and caring for orphaned and neglected children following the French invasion of Switzerland in 1798 (Sibling, 1976). Teaching with the "head, heart and hand" (Brühlmeier, 2010) became a unique summary of Pestalozzi's plan for education that could empower and enable children and his work emphasised the importance of training teachers, and pedagogy. The German creator of the Kindergarten, Freidrich Froebel (1782-1852), based his views of education on a foundation of compassion and care for their young charges (Brennan, 1998, p. 14). Lascarides and Hinitz (2000) highlight that it was "Froebel's belief of the supreme importance of early education" (p. 86) that led him to create the well-known Kindergarten method which, according to Evans (1975), Froebel believed should be passive and *protective*. Wong (2007) reports that at the turn of the twentieth century the earliest formal early-childhood education and care (ECEC) services in Australia such as the Kindergarten Union and Sydney Day Nursery Association in New South Wales, were founded with a strong expectations that teachers and assistants in these services would deliver care and protection as well education to the children attending these organisations. Wong (2007) explains the relevance to contemporary early-childhood services, that these founding services "provided safe, reliable work-related care ... and assistance on childrearing that no doubt contributed to children's well-being – services that contemporary ECEC continues to provide" (p. 151). Early-childhood educators, having studied the history of early-childhood education and theorists' ideas, have clear precedents that make child protection and teaching well matched terms and that continue to bring them both into the domain of their current practice.

Recent research has shown that in terms of determinants to improving children's development physically, socially, emotionally, creatively and cognitively, having a protective early-childhood environment is a most important factor influencing young children's ability to thrive. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC, 2009) in the United States underlines that "the public are far more aware of the importance of the early years in shaping children's futures" (p. 2). More specifically, direct links between quality early-childhood education, children's well-being, and future outcomes can be confidently made. For example, the ongoing *Chicago Longitudinal Study* (CLS) (Reynolds, 1999; Reynolds, Temple, Ou, Arteaga & White, 2011) is monitoring and evaluating the development of 1,500 children (now up to 28 years of age) who attended early-childhood programs in inner-city Chicago. The study has found that "relative to the comparison group receiving the usual services, [quality early childhood] program participation was independently linked to higher educational attainment, income, socioeconomic status (SES), and health insurance coverage, as well as lower rates of justice-system involvement and substance abuse" (Reynolds et al., 2011, p. 360). Reynolds et al. (2011) gave overall "support for the enduring effects of sustained school-based early education to the end of the third decade of life" (p. 360).

Further research has outlined the particular benefits of quality early-childhood services for children with child-protection concerns. The Ounce of Prevention Fund (2011) in the United States has developed research-based programs such as Educare and Head Start (learning environments serving at-risk children from birth to 5 years). Yazejian and Bryant (2010) revealed results from early study implementation data using standardised assessments of children attending Educare programs in the areas of basic concepts, vocabulary and rating scales for classroom quality. Yazejian and Bryant reported "promising results in preparing at-risk children from birth to five for later academic achievement. Evaluation data show that more years of Educare attendance are associated with better school readiness and vocabulary skills" (p. 1).

Research from across disciplines has indicated that early-childhood teachers are encountering children in a period that is crucial for their present and future well-being. In 2000, the United States study *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: the Science of Early Childhood Development* (Shonkoff & Phillips) combined research from disciplines such as neuroscience, biology, human services, psychology, psychiatry, paediatrics and early-childhood education to provide "authoritative guidance" (p. 1) to policy makers and practitioners regarding the health and well-being of young children. The study found major advances across disciplines in understanding the conditions that cause children to develop (or not) and underlined:

1. the importance of early life experiences, as well as the inseparable and highly interactive influences of genetics and environment, on the development of the brain and the unfolding of human behavior;

2. the central role of early relationships as a source of either support and adaptation or risk and dysfunction;
3. the powerful capabilities, complex emotions, and essential social skills that develop during the earliest years of life; and
4. the capacity to increase the odds of favorable developmental outcomes through planned interventions. (Shonkoff & Phillips, 2000, pp. 1-2; see also McCain, Mustard & Shanker, 2007)

There is clear empirical evidence from research such as the studies outlined above for investing in early-childhood initiatives in education and child protection. Early-childhood teachers, familiar from their own education studies with the influence of nature and nurture on learning (Keating, 2011), early-years brain research (McCain et al., 2007) and notions of emotional intelligence (Schiller, 2009), can see distinct connections with the findings from multi-disciplined studies. Additionally, protecting young children fits clearly within the early-childhood teacher's role. Shonkoff and Phillips (2000) research findings indicated that "more often than not, the developing child remains vulnerable to risks and open to protective influences throughout the early years of life and into adulthood" and "human development is shaped by the ongoing interplay among sources of vulnerability and sources of resilience" (p. 4).

In Australia, the Centre for Community Child Health (2011) notes the strong support for the protective value of early-childhood programs based on overseas research but cautions "there are obvious caveats in translating these into the Australian context" (p. 3) and a need for Australian evidence-based research into early-childhood development. To help meet this need, they point to promising commonwealth, state and territory policy initiatives and studies since 2003, most recently under the *National Early Childhood Development Strategy – Investing in the Early Years* (COAG, 2009b). Under this strategy, for example, the *Early Years Learning Framework* (COAG, 2009a) was developed as a key component of a *National Quality Framework* (Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2011) for early-childhood education and care. The frameworks have been developed with the aim of guiding and monitoring early-childhood practitioners' ability to create high quality care and education environments for young children in Australia. The *Early Years Learning Framework* (COAG, 2009a) lists a number of best practice outcomes needed for young children's protection in early childhood, including "Outcome 1: Children have a strong sense of identity. Children feel safe, secure and supported" (p. 21) and "Outcome 3: Children have a strong sense of well-being" (p. 30). The *Early Years Learning Framework* stresses the need for early-childhood educators to "acknowledge and respond sensitively to children's cues and signals" (p. 21) and aligns well with strengths approaches when acknowledging that:

A strong sense of well-being provides children with confidence and optimism which maximise their learning potential ... Well-being is correlated with resilience, providing children with the capacity to cope with day-to-day stress and

challenges ... Children's well-being can be affected by all their experiences within and outside of their early childhood settings. (p. 30)

A long-term, nationally representative research project, *Growing up in Australia: the Longitudinal Study of Australian Children* (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011a), was initiated in 2004. The study follows approximately 10,000 children with main data collection "waves" occurring every two years. One cohort (B cohort) of children were 0-1 year when the study commenced and the second cohort consisted of children aged 4-5 years (K cohort). Data is collected from parents, caregivers, teachers and children in the study in the form of questionnaires, interviews, physical measures, time-use diaries and administrative data. Findings focus on children's development in social-emotional, cognitive, physical and health areas within their environments, such as in families, education and communities (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2011, p. 1). Of the B cohort children, 68.4% had some kind of non-parental care on a regular basis when aged between 2 and 3 years (Harrison, 2011, p. 58). There is a likelihood that early-childhood teachers working in prior to school settings, such as long day care and family day care, will come in to regular contact with young children in the age groups that also have the highest rates of substantiated child abuse (AIHW, 2011, pp. 24-25) making them well-placed to notice and notify of child-protection concerns. The Centre for Community Child Health (2011) summarise the importance of early-childhood services and teachers in enhancing the protection and well-being of young children:

What happens to children in the early years has consequences right through the course of their lives. There are many opportunities to intervene and make a difference to the lives of children and young people. The evidence shows the most effective time to intervene is early childhood, including the antenatal period. (p. 1)

These specific links to educational outcomes in child-protection research use the same discourses, terminology and focus that are teachers areas of expertise. For example, teachers regularly keep records of children's development and are required to report to their services, schools and families on the developmental progress of the children in their care. In 2009, formal data were collected from 15,522 teachers from 7,422 Government, Catholic and Independent schools around Australia (Centre for Community Child Health & Telethon Institute for Child Health Research [CCCH & TICHHC], 2011, p. 3) as part of national data collection of the health and development of Australian children, the *Australian Early Developmental Index* (AEDI, 2010). Results are reported in terms of geographical communities and are made available to communities including families and teachers. Teachers completed a checklist for children in their first year of full-time school for 261,147 children (representing 99% of Australian children) (CCCH & TICHHC, 2011, p. 3). Teachers were asked to record children as either *on track* or *vulnerable* in five domains of the children's development: physical health and well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognitive skills, and communication and general knowledge. For example, in one section of the physical

domain the AEDI checklist assesses children's "physical readiness for the school day" and asks if children are dressed appropriately for school activities, or come to school late, hungry or tired (CCCH & TICHC, 2011, p. 14).

In the context of this research, the Queensland location where the participants studied to be early-childhood teachers recorded that 13.3% of children were developmentally vulnerable in the area of physical health and well-being (CCCH & TICHC, 2011, p. 15). Early-childhood teachers are in a very strong position to notice indicators of neglect and abuse and the AEDI provides valuable localised data to track specific areas of developmental concerns as well as strengths. The AEDI data revealed overall that while "the majority of children are doing well on each of the five developmental domains ... 23.6 per cent of Australian children are developmentally vulnerable on one or more domains" (CCCH & TICHC, 2011, p. 11) and 33.5 per cent in the Queensland location of this study. The data collected provide indicators of domains needing particular support and highlight areas needing community investment in the early years (CCCH & TICHC, 2011, p. 4; see also Centre for Community Child Health, 2011). Akin to the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48), the AEDI support package accompanying the online data results gives a format for visioning, engagement, planning, action and evaluation for individual communities aiming to improve their specific results. The Australian Childhood Foundation (2009) notes in their *Strategies for Managing Abuse Related Trauma (SMART Program)* that:

Interventions are most successful when professionals enact collaborative practice that can achieve protective, reparative and restorative objectives for children and young people. Given the central role of education, education professionals are pivotal in providing support and resources for children and young people who may be at risk of or have experienced child abuse. (SMART section, para. 3)

Child-Protection Legislation

Legislative arrangements require early-childhood teachers in Queensland to comply with the *Child Protection Act 1999* (2011), *Education and Other Legislation (Student Protection) Amendment Act 2003* (2003) as well as the *Commonwealth Family Law Act 1975* (2010). Under the *Education (Queensland College of Teachers) Act 2005* (2010) prospective teachers must also complete a criminal history check to determine suitability for teacher registration. Teachers sit very clearly within a range of prescriptive, regulatory and ethical boundaries aimed to protect children. The first statutory obligation for Queensland teachers to report any form of child abuse was passed in 2003 with an amendment to the *Education (General Provisions) Act 1989* (2006) requiring teachers to report child sexual abuse (Mathews & Walsh, 2004). Mathews and Walsh (2004) comment on the limited nature of this reporting requirement compared to the requirements of teachers in many other Australian jurisdictions or sectors who are mandated to report all forms of abuse. For early-childhood teachers working in a Queensland Government centre or home-based licensed service, for example, the *Child Care*

Act 2002 (2010) states more broadly that “a licensee must report harm to children [if] a child has died or suffered a serious injury, or the licensee becomes aware, or reasonably suspects, that harm has been caused to a child” (Pt. 4 Div. 1 § 81). Teachers working in long day care centres in Queensland, for example, are required to report child-protection concerns to the centre director and they, in turn, would report to either the management committee (as licensees) of a community-based service or to the business licensee in the case of private centres.

Another legislative context for this research in Queensland followed the release in 2004 of a blueprint, prepared by external consultant Peter Forster for the Queensland Government, (DOCS, 2004). The blueprint was a plan of action for implementing the 110 recommendations outlined in the Crime and Misconduct Commission Inquiry Report (CMC 2004) (2004). The Report, *Protecting children: An inquiry into abuse of children in foster care*, has revolutionised the Queensland child-protection system:

Over a long period of time the Queensland child-protection system itself has failed to deliver the support and services that are required for children at risk of abuse. Reform is necessary. This report concludes that transformational change is required, and provides a vision for how that might occur. It outlines a blueprint for a new system which is capable of providing children with the protection so lacking at present. (p. v)

The report and blueprint made 110 statements for an overhaul in Queensland of the child-protection system and a consultation process resulted in a unanimous call for cross department and organisational collaboration. The blueprint recommended many new projects to be included in the area of education and resulted in the demise of the Department of Families (the previous overseer of child-abuse complaints). Most relevant for this study was that education services were clearly considered as having child-protection responsibilities and the report called for “a coordinated whole-of-government approach to child protection” by identifying the Queensland Department of Education and Training as an agency with child-protection responsibilities. The Crime and Misconduct Commission (2004) presented the final report to the Queensland Government stating, “a society can rightly be judged on how it treats its children” (p. vi).

The introduction of the Commonwealth Government’s *National Safe Schools Framework* (Queensland Government, DET, 2011b) has also focused on the need for a collaborative effort from teachers, children and families in relation to bullying and child protection (para. 1), and requires schools to have written protection policies and procedures (although the framework does not specify an obligation to report child abuse). The *Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers* (Queensland College of Teachers [QCT], 2006, 2011) as a best practice guide, urges teachers in relation to child protection to “support students by providing appropriate pastoral care, across a range of activities, in an ethical and

professional manner that observes students' rights to safety and confidentiality" (p. 12). For teachers in Queensland government schools, the policy statement is comprehensive and states clearly that employees must:

- Not cause harm to students in the department's care;
- Actively seek to prevent harm to a student in the department's care;
- Report suspected student harm in accordance with this policy; and
- Inform themselves about the contents of this policy. (Queensland Government, DET, 2008)

Seemingly straightforward, the protection parameters are overall well expressed and laudable, though as noted earlier, teachers are only required under legislation to report sexual abuse. To underline this, the policy states as a separate point, that "school staff must immediately report sexual abuse or suspected abuse to their school principal" (Queensland Government, DET, 2008, p. 1). This is notably different from the previous statement on general abuse where "employees will report to an appropriate authority all instances where it is reasonably suspected a child is at genuine risk" (Queensland Government, DET, 2008, p. 1). The tone is different as the reporting channel is different and the onus falls squarely on the individual teacher to take the external reporting initiative. A contradiction within the legislation can be seen here, the child-abuse category with the least number of reported cases is given precedent and priority of concern within the formal policy procedures for teachers. While the emphasis on sexual abuse reflects the particular sensitivity with the nature of this category and the importance of protecting children at high risk, discrepancies with reporting priorities and procedures may work against teachers reporting and addressing of *all* categories of child abuse in schools.

For teachers in non-government schools, Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC, 2008) points to additional sector legislation requiring non-state schools to develop a policy for child protection:

The Education (Accreditation of Non-State Schools) Act 2001 and ... regulations (that) provide the overarching requirements for student protection in all Catholic schools in Queensland. The obligation is for each school to develop and maintain a Risk Management Strategy, which seeks to reduce the harm to students. It also includes documentation and procedures, which demonstrate the schools compliance with all other forms of child-protection legislation in this state. (para. 4)

While QCEC identifies the most important "consequences of failing to act in accord with legislation and regulation" as "the potential impact on the lives of students", it also clearly warns of "considerable penalties in the form of fines, convictions" (QCEC 2008, para. 4) for teachers who do not report.

Regardless of the differences between jurisdictions and sectors and the limitations that follow from the existence of such differences, child-protection legislation and policies are a significant resource and can assist teachers in identifying and reducing abuse. The *aims* of the legislation to reduce child abuse can be readily used in a strengths approach as a vision to create

positive change. Legislation and strengths approaches share a recognition of the primary, power imbalance of abuser over child (McCashen, 2005, p. 19). At the very least, regulatory changes have brought child abuse as an issue to the forefront for teachers. As noted earlier, teachers are amongst the most numerous notifiers of child abuse, indicating some engagement with child protection on the part of teachers, even if it is limited to reporting.

Researchers and advocates have noted for two decades that teachers are ideally placed to be notifiers by their connections with young children (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Egu & Weiss, 2003; Crosson-Tower, 1992, 2003). Crosson-Tower in 1992 (then a Professor of Human Services with extensive child-protection experience) compiled for the United States Department of Health and Human Services an extensive manual advocating for *The Role of Educators in the Prevention and Treatment of Child Abuse and Neglect* stating:

There are many reasons why educators must become involved in the detection, treatment, and prevention of child abuse and neglect. In addition to professional and moral responsibility, school personnel have a unique opportunity to advocate for children in a way that no other adults except parents can. If the parent is the abuser, this need for advocacy on the part of the school becomes even more imperative. (1992, p. 9; see also Crosson-Tower, 2003, p. 9)

Briggs and Hawkins similarly noted in Australia, in 1997, that:

Teachers and early childhood professionals play a vital role in both the primary and secondary prevention of child abuse. No other professionals have such a close, continuous, daily contact with child abuse victims on a day-to-day, long-term basis or have such extensive knowledge of children in their care. (p. 17)

They caution, however, that while teachers are in a “unique position to identify and help children to stop abuse” (p. 17), they “are inadequately trained in their role in child protection, they misinterpret or fail to see the signs of maltreatment or in cases of neglect, some try to compensate for the deficiencies of parents without taking action that will improve the child’s circumstances at home” (p. 18). Kesner and Robinson (2002) indicate that for many states in the United States, schools report more cases of maltreatment (with the exception of sexual abuse) than any other organisation. Compared to medical, legal and social-service reporters, teachers, however, generally have significantly lower substantiation rates of their reports and this may be due to the characteristics of their reports and the poor training they receive about child maltreatment (pp. 222-231). Sedlak and Broadhurst (1996) found that in the United States, that an estimated “84 per cent of cases identified in schools are never reported” (p. 209). Sedlak et al., (2010) noted in their subsequent study that “the lowest rates of investigation occurred for children recognized at schools (20% or less across the definitional standards) [and] day care (12% or less)” (p. 17). Crenshaw, Crenshaw, and Lichtenberg (1995) summarised this as a tension where schools are “simultaneously the largest source of over and underreporting child maltreatment” (p. 1095). A clear pathway of training is needed, one that is tailored for early-childhood teachers, to allow them to not only recognise and engage in the issue, but to

respond and be confident with protective strategies they use, whether these include reporting or non-reporting decisions. Specific Australian research in this area would be valuable and this presents an opportunity for action.

International literature shows that there is a clear mandate for teachers to act to uphold children's rights by educating and protecting them. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) argues that "education is a human right, a child's right" and that this right exists alongside "the rights of children to survival, development, protection, and participation" (UNICEF, 2005, Right to education section, para. 2). Despite Australia being a relatively affluent country, contributing financial and physical resources to well-established education and child-protection systems (CountryReports, 2011), Australian teachers, nevertheless, face significant challenges in educating and protecting children, particularly those from Indigenous backgrounds. Australian children from Indigenous backgrounds are overrepresented in the child-protection system, more vulnerable to absenteeism and less likely to succeed academically in the education system (COAG, 2011, pp. 2-8). A recent major national initiative *Closing the Gap* (COAG, 2011), which unites education, health and protection initiatives for improving the well-being of Indigenous children, indicates, however, that with significant funding, national awareness and practical strategies, policy makers and communities are seeing some progress in reducing the negative outcomes reported (p. 9).

For teachers, an additional challenge in protecting children arises not only from the amount of identified abuse but also from the unidentified amount. The following excerpt from a case study exemplifies this challenge and provides further impetus to find solutions to protecting children. It records the situation of an abused child based on real events:

Sarah isn't particularly noticeable. She's never in trouble with her teacher, and always goes out of her way to be quiet. She never talks out of place, and tries hard to get all her work done. Sarah doesn't disrupt other children, nor does she volunteer in class discussions and activities. Sarah doesn't have the confidence to try and make new friends, or to answer questions in class. She doesn't feel very good about herself, and is afraid to take risks because she feels "stupid". It is children like Sarah that often go unnoticed. However, it is children like Sarah that most need someone to notice them. (ACT, 2009)

Child abuse and protection remain difficult areas for research and practice, compounded by the scale and affects of child abuse and the diversity of children's experience. While this review has explored child abuse and protection as educational, early-childhood and cross discipline issue, from a strengths perspective the reviewer must continue to use the literature, drawing it together to pursue solutions. For this research project, literature, focussed further on illuminating teacher responses to child protection and early-childhood teacher preparation programmes are most valuable resources. This specific, filtered literature on teaching and learning to protect children is central to the research project and is the focus of the following section.

Section 2: Early-Childhood Teacher Preparation and Child Protection

Child-Protection Confidence and Preparation Issues

This second section of the literature review will explore research that examines how early-childhood teachers to engage with child-protection legislation, as well as literature that explores teacher confidence and competence in preparing to protect children. The previous section highlighted solid evidence of child abuse that warrants general teacher concern and that legislative and ethical guidelines, outline particular responsibilities and potential abilities of early-childhood teachers to protect children. A number of studies, however, also reveal that early-childhood teachers may be apprehensive about their ability as teachers to protect children. Lindsay (1999) illuminated this conundrum in research that explored the impact of legislative changes for educational professionals in New South Wales. Lindsay examined the “relationship between legal regulation and professional ethics” (p. 3) and found that while legal reform has the “potential to achieve justice for students and for teachers” it can also “produce unintended and undesirable consequences in a professional community: fear, retribution and even repression” (p. 3).

A corpus of literature around teaching programmes and teacher efficacy demonstrates that teachers (across sectors) and teacher educators, in general, lack confidence in the area of child protection. Kalichman and Brosig (1992) described the ethical situations involved with child protection that teachers in the United States face as an “unusual burden on educators and schools to identify and deal with maltreatment that is occurring in the home” (p. 284). David and Burns (1993) explored additional factors that may reduce confidence in child protection. They found that early-childhood teachers in the United Kingdom may struggle teaching child protection due to their own personal experiences of abuse. In South Australia, McCallum (2000) indicated that learning reporting obligations and mechanisms is an emotional, highly charged task for all teachers. They noted that teachers “were unsure of the indicators that identified “at risk” children, they were confused about the procedure to report, they lacked confidence to make a report, and felt unsupported in their work environment” (p. 1).

Webb and Vulliamy (2001, pp. 59-77) listed a range of factors affecting the confidence of school protection coordinators in the north-east of England, including attacks on their own personal integrity, school and personal security, stress and the need to talk to a child-protection specialist. Infant, junior and primary schools participated in Webb and Vulliamy’s (2001) research and “data were collected during 1998–99 through document analysis, interviews and observation in 15 schools in the primary phase” (p. 61). Coordinators, concerned with how they should react to children revealing abuse, reported disincentives with the time consuming and emotional nature of recording and debriefing. The extensive list of factors undermining teacher confidence in child protection was presented along with a call for better training both for pre-

service and practising teachers and promoted interagency cooperation for child protection. Despite the reported factors affecting confidence, schools in the study noted they often provided social support and many families confided with them on personal problems (p. 71). Support was provided to families in practical ways including listening, referral to counselling, “parent and toddler groups, parenting classes, homework clubs, child and adult literacy initiatives, Saturday outings, pupil discos and other social events” (Webb & Vulliamy, 2001, p. 71).

In 2000, results from a survey of child-protection content in more than 60 primary and secondary teacher preparation courses were released. Commissioned in 1997 by the British National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) the survey results indicated widespread uncertainty in teaching child protection (Baginsky, 2000; Hodgkinson & Baginsky, 2000). The expression of uncertainty aligned with research from Horton and Cruise (2001) in the United States that indicated, “among school personnel, lack of information and confidence are barriers to reporting suspected child abuse” (p. 104). The NSPCC survey found concerns about “what should be covered and who should teach it” and found that “a maximum of 3-4 hours was been devoted to child protection on a few courses but sometimes it was as little as one hour” (Baginsky, 2003, p. 119). MacBlain, McKee and MacBlain (2006) explained further that the survey found “while teachers took their responsibility towards the protection of children in schools seriously, few felt informed and prepared to deal with a child abuse and neglect issue” (p. 188) and called for a collaborative approach to child protection across disciplines. The NSPCC subsequently developed a student teacher course on child protection and Baginsky (2003) followed up with evaluative research of this initiative.

Twelve of the NSPCC courses were piloted and evaluated by Baginsky (2003), 10 taught by NSPCC staff to student teachers, and two by teacher educators from the institutions; two other institutions provided contrast groups by not offering the NSPCC course. While initial child-protection confidence was shown when completing the course (particularly in the NSPCC groups), this was not confirmed after the student’s next long placement in schools (Baginsky, 2003, p. 120). Students expressed confusion about child protection especially in the area of neglect (p. 120). Former students of the NSPCC course were surveyed, two years after completing the course, along with other (self-nominated) newly qualified teachers who had various child-protection preparation experiences. Participants completed a questionnaire and 1118 were analysed. Questionnaire responses indicated that, regardless of the amount, type or delivery of child-protection preparation, participants believed teachers should have a role in child protection (Baginsky, 2003, p. 121). Fifty-two per cent of respondents had been involved with at least one child-protection case since leaving college (p. 124). Baginsky concluded that “the results of this study indicate that teachers are more confident after child protection training” (p. 127) and underlined the need for teacher-education programmes in child protection to link closely to the contexts in which the students will teach.

Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) further analysed the child-protection courses designed by the NSPCC for initial teacher training (ITT) in the United Kingdom. This rare work in the pre-service teaching field, included a thread-by-thread analysis of protection preparation. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) reflected on the evaluation of the first NSPCC training pack developed and piloted in 2000-01 for student teachers which included “basic introductory information to prepare them for their role in protecting children from abuse” (p. 319):

It was built around a series of headings—recognizing, responding, reporting, roles and responsibilities, and reflecting—and included tutor presentations supported by video material, overhead transparencies and handouts; small group problem solving activities based on case study and other practical material; and directed time tasks which could be undertaken while students were on their school placements. (p. 319)

Thirteen higher-education institutions were involved in the trial, with some using their own staff to teach the NSPCC training pack, others having NSPCC staff teach the training and two institutions allowed their own child-protection training to be evaluated alongside the NSPCC training. Questionnaires were given to students immediately after the child-protection training and then again after their next teaching practice. Data were also collected from discussion groups held with students and interviews with tutors who had presented the training. Feedback on the materials developed was also sought from experts in the fields of education and child protection. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) found a variety of responses to training:

At the time of the first questionnaire, 59% of students said they were confident in their role and responsibilities in relation to child protection. This rose to 73% by the time they completed their second questionnaire, but there was a considerable variation between those who had received different types of input (delivery methods) and between different courses. (p. 320)

Most salient for this thesis, was a conclusion from Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) that, “despite the high confidence levels recorded in the questionnaires, there was a significant number of respondents expressing (in their questionnaire comments and discussion groups) some anxiety and confusion, even among those who had indicated that they were confident” (p. 320). The results are a salutary warning of the difficulty of attempting to measure accurately and objectively, attitudinal aspects that are open to enormous variation and dependant on a range of subjective factors. Additionally, as most students had little previous experience of child-protection training before the research, comparisons were understandably difficult. In essence, there were confidence issues with recording confidence, particularly when linked to a comparative pre- and post- test format. If participants assess their confidence levels in relation to their limited previous knowledge of child protection then we may expect them to relate gaining new information to gaining confidence automatically.

Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) further assessed respondents' comments to articulate a list of possible factors affecting teacher confidence in child protection. Significantly, these included:

- The sensitivity of the subject matter;
- The belief that the reality would be much harder to cope with than they had been led to believe by the course;
- The importance of the approach taken by the school and the support offered;
- A recognition that time constraints and other factors meant that coverage had been superficial and was not adequate preparation;
- The failure to deal with the subject in an integrated way throughout the initial teacher training course; and
- A fear of dealing inappropriately with a disclosure. (p. 320)

The discussion group data from Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) suggested that although participants were confident with the material learnt during the training, there were still specific issues of personal competence with protection issues where ongoing confidence was still lacking. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) argued that future ITT programmes, as the first stage of training, needed to take into account the previous child-protection experiences students may have had (p. 321). Other factors that may increase confidence in child protection include placing child-protection preparation prior to teaching placements, including more specific information on talking and responding to children, recognising the vulnerability of teachers and "relat[ing] to the realities of schools and the responsibilities and roles of other agencies" in programmes (p. 321).

Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) decided to redraft the NSPCC training pack based on their findings, and as part of this revision a further survey of initial teacher training programmes was instigated. The survey confirmed that child-protection training of some kind was being offered by 83% of the 156 ITT courses evaluated although, as with previous surveys, this was still most often limited to less than three hours, concentrated on reporting procedures and was in the form of a lecture or workshop and not prior to teaching placement (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005, p. 322). Teacher educators responded in the survey that what was needed for increasing teacher confidence and preparation was concise information on categories and consequences of abuse, realistic case studies, links to resources and guidance on protection decisions (p. 325). Although there were conflicting responses to whether the content should be in a "very focussed approach" or broader "awareness raising" format, most respondents believed that "materials that shock were counterproductive" (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005, p. 325). Particular areas that the teacher educators highlighted for inclusion in future programmes were safety issues for male teachers, internet use for children and dealing with teacher allegations of child abuse (p. 325). An updated NSPCC pack was designed for delivery in ITT (2.5 hours - 1 day duration) with content added to the original pack on working with other agencies. Consolidation materials, designed for after school placement, were also added to the

pack, including information on communicating with children and parents (p. 327). Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) note, however, that:

It would probably also benefit from being integrated into teaching on individual needs and inclusion. Everything we know about learning supports the idea that one-off courses, which are not embedded into other elements of programmes, will not be effective. While there are severe restrictions on the time available for any additional input on initial teacher training courses, the efficacy of “isolated” workshops or the like is questionable. (p. 327)

This research provides valuable clues to why pre-service teachers may feel a lack of confidence in child protection and how to design and teach child protection to pre-service teachers. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) conclude, “it seems likely that there will be less chance of success with a course which is delivered to, rather than developed with, those responsible for using it” (p. 328). The research provides an excellent precursor for designing strategies to assist pre-service teacher connection and long-term confidence with child-protection issues. Baginsky and Macpherson’s (2005) work is an important international precedent for this research.

During the same period as Baginsky’s work, Mellor and Sachs (2004), discussed teachers’ confidence in relation to child protection and claimed that the field as a whole is characterised by a sense of “child panic”. In an analysis of Australian press media reports from 2003 to 2005, they reveal two narratives “which antagonistically intersect and perpetuate social anxiety around issues of child protection and teaching practice in schools” (p. 1). Further, they argued that along with identifying abuse in children, teachers simultaneously fear litigation for abuse against them. The work builds on the idea of “moral panic” (McRobbie, 1994) “instilling fear in people (including teachers) and, in so doing, encouraging them to turn away from the complexity and the visible problems of everyday life” (p. 199).

Mellor and Sachs (2004) examined the impact of child-protection legislation changes and examined the “shifting relationships between teachers’ identity and child protection policies” (p. 1). They added that teachers’ credibility as protectors is challenged when children are abused from within the school system. Teachers may not be comforted but alarmed, from advice such as that of the NSW Teachers Federation to “try not to touch students” (NSWTF, 2005, para. 1). The risk to students from paedophiles within or around schools particularly worries teachers and “media representation of schools as unsafe and risky places for children does not help us envisage teachers as valued professionals” (Mellor & Sachs, 2004, p. 10) but rather causes “low morale [which] affects teaching practice” (p. 12). Communication factors are highlighted in the study with the type and frequency of the language used about child protection in the media a possible factor in shaping early-childhood teachers’ engagement and responses across all jurisdictions in Australia. Searches for the terms *pedophile/paedophile* and *school* in media articles “brought up 758 references” whereas the terms *child protection* and

teachers “brought up 97” (p. 6). Mellor and Sachs (2004) suggest a turnaround “role that Australian press media can play in recuperating schools as safe and dynamic learning environments” (p. 1). Early-childhood service and teachers could also play a role in promoting to the media “success-stories” (Mellor & Sachs, 2004, p. 12) of the productive strategies they engage in every day to protect children.

In 2004, Singh explored teachers’ confidence and preparation in child protection, describing their reactions as being of “heightened anxiety” (p. 2). Singh’s study, reviewed pertinent literature, and analysed interview data from nine policy officers, within five different (education and human services) organisations in Queensland. The study focused on the framing of childcare protection policy and legislation for teachers (including early-childhood teachers working in schools). The study indicated that “four major themes emerged in the interview talk of (school) policy officers: (1) children’s rights; (2) distinguishing between risk, harm and significant harm; (3) appropriate touch; and (4) strategies for dealing with teachers’ heightened anxieties” (p. 2). While appropriate touch is an issue distinct from this thesis, and links to children’s rights have already been made, two new relevant areas are revealed in Singh’s research. Singh’s call for “strategies for dealing with teachers’ heightened anxieties” (p. 13) is confirmation of the need for enhanced teacher preparation in the complex area of protection including training in distinguishing when harm has occurred.

Singh (2004) succinctly summarised confusing contradictions in the literature reviewed:

The first set of literature dealt with the changing ecology of childhood, particularly notions of children as paradoxically and simultaneously “wasted” and “prized” in these new globalised networked times. The second category of literature dealt with the emotional labour of teaching, as well as the psychoanalytic topic of “not wanting to know” or be touched by knowledge. (p. 4)

One interviewee in the research by Singh, comments:

My view about teaching (child protection)... is that we do not support our teachers enough. What I mean by that is, take our staff here, our staff does a lot of high emotional labour and I think teaching is high emotional labour. And what we expect is that teachers get on and do their job without some of the appropriate social and emotional support to do that. (p. 11)

This “emotional labour” (p. 11), an insightful description, aptly reflects the feelings and difference with the curriculum area of child protection, distinguishing it from, for example, teaching maths or language concepts.

Singh (2004) argued that, in terms of recognising potential child abuse, “teachers, like other professional groups, do not readily engage with ideas/images/voices that are likely to question and challenge long established or habitual practices” (p. 6). Singh explained that this perspective is often part of an understandable defensive mechanism practitioners may employ when acutely aware of the emotional effects and widespread consequences of child-abuse

substantiation. Singh's explanation draws on ideas explored earlier by Britzman and Gilbert (2004) that "any theory of learning must account for the problem of not wanting to know. That is, every theory of learning includes a theory of not learning" (pp. 88-89).

Singh (2004) suggested that interactive factors play a large role in teacher engagement with child protection including that different frames of reference in the organisations involved with child protection may sometimes clash with each other and be a barrier (p. 6). Britzman and Gilbert's (2004) work suggests that it is important to reduce teacher disengagement in order to enhance teacher development to protect children. Singh (2004) further draws on Britzman and Gilbert's psychoanalytic work and suggests a reframing of child protection away from "risk retreat" to "risk management" (Singh, 2004, p. 1) by better understanding the effect that knowledge of child abuse can have on teachers.

If teachers are to be assisted in making appropriate professional judgements in relation to the care and protection of children then they must be supported in the emotional labour of teaching. This requires engagement with new knowledge – and working through both what teachers don't know (the not knowing), as well as what they actively refuse to know (the not wanting to know). (Singh, 2004, p. 14)

Amidst the confusion, anxiety and confidence issues reported as associated with child protection and teaching, educators, with varying degrees of knowledge of the field and preparation, offer child-protection education to children. Whiteside's (2001) South Australian research identified that a spectrum of child-protection education was taught to children (personal safety curriculum) by the 33 practising junior primary teachers surveyed. Whiteside found that there were small pockets of child-protection initiatives that the teachers deemed useful and which they indicated aided them to teach child protection. Some teachers reported that minimal teaching of child protection was occurring, though many recorded that no child-protection strategies were taught. Whiteside found from the participants (although having completed initial teacher preparation), "that motivation for teaching personal safety was low" (p. 31). Whiteside (2001), additionally, found:

The teaching of personal safety strategies to children is spasmodic and selective, avoiding vital information that would help children to identify and report sexual abuse ... most of the participating teachers claimed to teach some personal safety skills, using a variety of materials and methods, but it would appear that they concentrate on 'safe' topics such as road safety and avoided topics relating to child sexual abuse and violence ... 50 per cent had not undertaken any training within the last two years even though the overwhelming majority felt that further training was required. (pp. 31-36)

While the teachers felt prepared to teach certain safety subjects, child protection was identified as an area where teachers felt least prepared and trained. When looking to improve teacher confidence and preparation in child protection, the focus unavoidably returns to enhancing initial teacher-education programmes.

Teacher Preparation for Child Protection

In 1983, Levin concluded that “there is relatively little training of pre-and in-service teachers regarding abuse, and most teachers feel inadequate to recognise and handle maltreatment cases” (p. 14). Goldenberg and Gallimore (1991) later questioned the value of “isolated” child-protection workshops that emerged in teacher training institutions at the time and concluded that they do not sustain “meaningful changes” (p. 69). In a seemingly unheeded urge, they argued:

Teachers need to be engaged in rigorous examination of practice, set within a range of possible situations which allows for close examination of the subject and reinforcement over time ... weaving the content into the rest of the curriculum. (p. 72)

Abrahams, Casey and Daro (1992) also listed inadequate training as a reason for underreporting of child abuse by teachers. In the United Kingdom, Braun and Schonveld (1994) called for more than simply providing abuse information as they claimed this was not enough for teachers attempting to implement legislation. They added that in-depth training for teachers was required, “to explore their own feelings, attitudes and values about abuse” (p. 92) as the impact of their personal contact with child abuse can make a difference to future practice. Watts (1997) established over a decade ago, that the amount of training in protection was minimal in Australian teaching courses. Watts’ findings “indicated that only a limited number of institutions included the topic at all and only a few of these included it as part of their compulsory course requirements” (p. 171). While tertiary institutions expressed support for the provision of teacher training in child protection, actual examples of it in practice were minimal. Watts (1997) claimed:

Lack of support was expressed by non-inclusion in the compulsory component of the course, lack of time being accorded with the topic (with other topics receiving a higher priority), active antagonism from some staff, lack of specific policy, the payment of lip-service to the topic and the fear that a “can of worms” would be opened and counselling would be required as a result. (p. 171)

Watts expressed the view, at that time, “there is an urgent need to adequately prepare teachers to respond appropriately to maltreated children in their school communities” (p. 177) and gave three major recommendations for teacher preparation programmes:

First, a policy that requires tertiary institutions to include child protection training as an essential part of pre-service teacher education; secondly, a programme which can be used or adapted by the tertiary educators who prepare pre-service teacher-education students for their role in child protection; and thirdly, a programme of revision and continuing professional development for practising teachers in the area of child protection. (p. 177)

In 1998, Chalk and King (1998) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of 114 cross-discipline prevention, intervention and protection initiatives between 1980 and 1996 in the United States (p. 3) and found that the amount of training about child abuse was among the

strongest predictors of reporting (p. 9). Conversely, McCallum's (2000) research claimed that for educators "training is preventing, rather than assisting, educators to report their suspicions" (p. 1). Both statements may be uncomfortably true rather than contradictory: training for mandatory reporting may both help and hinder child protection depending on the individual teacher.

Some studies offer quite specific, detailed suggestions for designing better pre-service child-protection programmes. MacIntyre and Carr (2000) reviewed thirty, mainly American, child sexual abuse, prevention programmes, some particularly targeted for teachers, and others for parents and children aged under 12 years. They concluded, overwhelmingly, that "child abuse prevention programmes can lead to significant gains in children's, parents' and teachers' safety knowledge and skills" (p. 194). MacIntyre and Carr (2000) reported a "considerable consistency across programmes in the core concepts included in curricula ... [*and children*] made significant gains in the acquisition of safety skills" (pp. 185-189). Most common programme inclusions were concepts of body ownership, touch differences, saying no, escape, secrecy, intuition, support systems, blame and bullying (p. 188). MacIntyre and Carr stressed that "particularly impressive training effects occurred in longer programmes" and "the superiority of active teaching methods which involve participant modelling" (p. 190). This suggests that child-protection preparation should include appropriate content and modelling of methods of teaching child safety successfully in the classroom. In a strengths perspective, encouraging teachers to protect children hinges on their ability to teach and empower children to protect themselves.

In comparing pre-service training to report child abuse and neglect in Australia and the United Kingdom, McCallum and Baginsky (2001) conducted an evaluation of a six-hour mandatory notification training program for pre-service teachers in South Australia. Students, who were about to complete an professional elective subject on child-protection issues in their degree, were asked to complete a questionnaire in their final semester of study about mandatory notification training that they had received in the second year of their studies (before school placement). McCallum and Baginsky (2001) found "67% of the sample" (p. 6) of student teachers could (two years later) articulate their legal child-protection responsibilities as taught, "although some lacked clarity" (p. 6). Most of the sample could identify four types of abuse though some were confused over types which "could create difficulties for student teachers to identify specific cases of child abuse and neglect" (p. 8). The students were also asked to report their confidence on a range of child-protection issues. McCallum and Baginsky (2001) found that, while 88% of the students expressed a high personal commitment to identify and report abuse, 41.5% had low confidence in reporting procedures and 49% did not feel confident to train others about child abuse (p. 9). They concluded that the mandatory notification training was "not making adequate impact on the knowledge of, and confidence needed, to report" (p.

11) and therefore did not support the child-protection legislation in place. In 2002, in a survey of schools in South Australia, McCallum argued further that there was a need for training in obligatory reporting, as well as how to deal with child-protection issues in the classroom. McCallum (2002) argued that knowledge of mandatory reporting is only part of child-protection preparation for teachers and that the reasons for teacher disengagement with child protection are diverse:

These include: a lack of school structures; lack of experience with teaching and with child protection matters; personal issues in relation to child abuse and the handling of individual cases; and the perceived increase in their workload. These factors suggest that current training arrangements are inadequate in preparing teachers to report suspicions of child abuse and neglect, and this has a direct impact on their practice. This subsequently, does not support the role outlined for teachers in school or departmental Child Protection policy, the Children's Protection Act 1993, and ultimately the Rights of Children. (Inhibiting factors section, para. 1)

McCallum's argument points strongly to the conclusion that teacher-education programmes need to arm teachers, not only with knowledge and resources on child-protection issues but also importantly, with self-assurance in their ability to make positive changes for children's well-being.

McCallum (2003) continued to review and confirm difficulties with "the pre-service teacher knowledge, understanding and confidence about child protection issues, specifically as they relate to mandatory notification training" (p. 3) for three consecutive years. McCallum (2003) explored "mentored learning to support pre-service teachers in child protection" (p. 2) with a group of 25 pre-service teachers in their last semester of studies during an elective child-protection subject. The group undertook a 14-week course entailing two hours face-to-face teaching and additional online and website support (p. 8). An emphasis was placed on time for discussion with the lecturer, as mentor, about issues arising from their previous mandatory notification training and school placements and to reflect on content, advocacy and personal values. The mentor guided the students to explore relevant policies and procedures for the educational services they would seek employment in and posed problems from "actual teaching episodes" (p. 9). Participants indicated the benefits of collaboration with a mentor:

In summary, the mentored learning approach encouraged dialogue about sensitive issues, was effective in helping pre-service teachers to overcome personal problems and to feel more comfortable to address child protection issues; challenged prior knowledge about child abuse and neglect and their role in it; built on this knowledge and its understanding; allowed the preservice teachers to situate themselves into the teaching culture and the realities of the classroom, demands of day-to-day teaching, and complexities they will be faced with; supported the development of necessary skills and confidence; and, allowed mentor and novices to engage in collaborative inquiry. (McCallum, 2003, p. 11)

At a similar time, Kesner and Robinson (2002) articulated parallel concerns to those raised in McCallum's work and indicated that teacher child-protection preparation in the United States was not improving:

Greater effort is needed to educate teachers about child maltreatment ... Unfortunately, many teacher education programs do not adequately educate pre-service teachers about the issues facing today's families. Thus, educators may be unaware of what many children bring into the classroom and go home to at the end of each school day. (p. 222)

Positively framed, the persistent advocacy and consistent reiteration of the need for improved teacher preparation from the researchers mentioned provides motivation to continue to explore ways of not only extending preparation but also integrating child protection with other course content.

In Australia, Walsh (2002) attempted to improve teacher preparation for child protection by acquiring "authentic documentation on how early-childhood teachers work in child abuse and neglect and what knowledge they apply to this work" (p. 1) to assist in teacher preparation. Walsh found that child-protection literature was "dominated by medical and scientific discourses" (p. 1 abstract) with little from education contexts and very few early-childhood specific studies. Using a multi-method qualitative enquiry, her research team invited "teachers from 207 different childhood settings, in a geographical area with a recognised high incidence of child abuse and neglect" (p. 1) to respond to the research. Walsh (2002) reported that "no teachers were willing or able to participate in the research - they were silent" (p. 1). Investigations of the reasons for silence indicated that "research into child abuse and neglect was problematic because it was perceived to be sensitive and potentially damaging" (p. 1). The research concludes:

a more accurate representation of teacher's work in the field ... the concept of multiple roles rather than a singular role [and] ... refutes the notions of teachers as incompetent and unknowledgeable regarding child abuse and neglect but recognises that they are often absent from, and invisible within, the collective of professionals working to prevent it. (p. 1)

Methodological intricacies and the work demands of the target group, could explain some non-responses. The complete absence of responses, however, Walsh interpreted as being more closely linked to the participants strong regard for their positions as educators and an awareness of the potential negative impact of their experiences and perspectives on child protection, if expressed. The teachers' recognition of the highly confidential and risky area of child protection *and* research participation is useful for future research to help recognise the vulnerability of teachers asked to participate. Research with early-childhood pre-service teachers, before they are bound by employment contracts, may partly reduce restrictions or risks of participating in such sensitive research and particular care should be given to participant confidentiality.

Singh (2004) encapsulated the idea that teachers need to *engage with* rather than move *away from* addressing protection concerns. Singh and McWilliam (2005) explored Queensland teachers' capacity to work with colleagues responding to child-protection issues using mentoring, peer support and risk minimisation strategies. Eighteen teachers from two public primary schools in Queensland participated in focus group discussion based around child protection "scenarios concerning teacher–student touch and teacher–student interaction ranged from classroom-based pedagogical moments to matters well beyond the classroom" (p. 122). Through the analysis of the focus group data, Singh and McWilliam (2005) found "teachers' professional self imagining to be more risk-conscious, and more needy of professional support, at a time perceived as less pedagogically innocent, with greater 'more for less' work demands" (p. 132). It appears that any new model of child-protection preparation needs to address the needs of *teachers* alongside those of *children*. Singh and McWilliam assert that "child care and protection have become key issues of concern for all teachers, and particularly for those teachers responsible for the care of young children" (p. 115).

In 2012, the recommendations by advocates to improve child-protection preparation remain largely unheeded but are enduring and continue to be confirmed by contemporary research as relevant and provide consistent possible solutions to enhancing child-protection preparation. In a "benchmark study" (p. iv) by Arnold and Maio-Taddeo (2007), *Professionals Protecting Children: Child Protection and Teacher Education in Australia*, 33 universities were surveyed. The findings revealed that:

76.6 percent of teacher education programs in the sample did not include any discrete child protection related content ... Of the 23.4 percent that reported providing discrete child protection curriculum content, two-thirds allocated less than 7 hours to the teaching and learning of the associated content throughout the entire award program ... the data suggest that of the 14,500 potential teacher education students graduating annually, approximately 1,200 students will have been exposed to a day or less of dedicated teaching related to discrete child protection content. (p. iv)

Respondents articulated the challenges of addressing legislation differences, uncertainty on how to address abuse issues "in the light of the climate of fear induced by the media, the public perception of risk in child protection, and the impact these issues have on male teacher education students" (p. 52). Arnold and Maio-Taddeo (2007) reported that while there are isolated pockets of effective teacher preparation in child protection occurring, in most cases teacher preparation is limited to nominal workshop responses.

Arnold and Maio-Taddeo's (2007) work concluded that the long history of a lack of specific child-protection content in teacher preparation programmes appeared to be continuing and that "uncertainty about the most efficient and effective way to address and deliver child-protection content in teacher education programs prevailed" (p. 63). Nevertheless, they also

found a “commitment to exploring and improving the current approaches was a commonly held tenet” from respondents (p. 63).

There was recognition among participants that this is a highly sensitive, and often controversial, area of discussion for both students and educators. Subsequently it was felt there is a need to consider carefully the philosophy and the most effective pedagogies that will support the effective teaching and learning of child protection content. (pp. vi–viii)

A major implication of Arnold and Maio-Taddeo’s (2007) work was the need for further investigation into “ways that can assist higher educators to provide a strengths-based discourse that can underpin work with undergraduate teachers in the child protection area” (p. 53). Strategies to improve teacher preparation were listed for both discrete and integrated modules of child protection, including making clear links to child centred approaches, ensuring content is not limited to obligations training, and including information on community services that support children and families.

In Australia, Walsh and Farrell (2008) studied how child-protection knowledge and skills may be implicit within the content of pre-service education course. They argued that even “in the absence of preservice and inservice education specifically about child abuse and neglect, early-childhood teachers held and deployed knowledge in resourceful ways” (p. 585). In a qualitative study, eight Queensland early-childhood teachers were selected for their reported experiences with child-protection issues, in early-childhood services and schools, and in-depth open ended interviews were used to collect data (Walsh & Farrell, 2008, p. 589). Walsh and Farrell found that the early-childhood teachers used their knowledge of early-childhood contexts, existing networks and resources, learners and learning, general pedagogy, curriculum and self to assist children and families (often in innovative ways) to cope with child-protection issues (pp. 585-600). Although a small-scale study and difficult to replicate, the research provides important positive factors to assist in the design of future teacher preparation programmes and important linkages to existing early-childhood curriculum and pedagogy. Walsh and Farrell (2008) also stress the need for a “discipline-specific knowledge base about child abuse and neglect for teachers and teacher education programmes” in order to “establish teachers’ professional reputation for dealing capably with cases of child abuse and neglect” (p. 585).

In Australia, some specifically designed child-protection education resources are available. In conjunction with the Child Abuse Prevention Research Australia and the Indigenous Health Unit at Monash University, the Australian Childhood Foundation has developed the *SMART Program* (2009) which includes an online child-protection training modules and downloadable resources particularly targeted (discipline specific) for school and early-childhood personnel. The program which is funded by the Department of Education and Children’s Service in South Australia, gives suggestions for updating child-protection policies

and particularly outlines the effects of child abuse, linking child-protection content to studies on early-childhood brain development. For prospective early-childhood educators, there are clear connections between what they are learning in their studies of early-childhood education, emerging neuroscience perspectives on early learning (McCain et al., 2007) and child-protection studies. Emerging resources and research in early childhood, teacher education, and child-protection fields, provide new possibilities of enhancing teacher preparation.

While in general, researchers in the area of teacher education for child protection have noted a lack of preparation and explicit content beyond mandatory reporting, their continued advocacy, efforts and utilisation of opportunities to improve teacher preparation have also been a feature of their research. Arnold and Maio-Taddeo (2007) envisioned that “further Australian research in this area would provide much needed insights into the benefits and challenges associated with the inclusion of child-protection content in teacher education” (p. vi). Research that can provide assistance to teachers and support teacher educators in child-protection education may be most valuable given the probability that teacher educators may themselves have received little initial teacher preparation in child protection.

Section 3: The Strengths Approach to Child Protection and Education

The previous sections, examined the incidence of child abuse, established strong reasons for teachers to engage with the issue of child protection and explored teacher preparation to protect children. The literature indicated that there is a commitment by teachers to child protection but a lack of confidence and a variety of reported reasons for this (Baginsky & Mcpherson, 2005). Literature also revealed that improvements in pre-service preparation for child protection are both necessary and possible (Baginsky & Mcpherson, 2005; McCallum, 2003; McCallum & Baginsky, 2001). Minimal pre-service preparation has caused some researchers to call for a new model of child-protection education and to begin to explore collaborative, interagency possibilities for enhancing child protection (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Baginsky, 2003; McCallum, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2003). This section examines literature on the development and principles of a particular version of the Strengths Approach as a possible way of implementing child-protection education in teacher-education programs.

In conjunction with the calls in literature for an improved or new model of teacher education for child protection are other general cautions about proclaiming “another looming ‘crisis’ in teacher education” (Borko, Liston and Whitcomb, 2006, p. 199). In the Strengths Approach, the formulation of any new model must inherently avoid denigrating previous models and approaches, seeking to build on existing parts and strategies that have worked. The strengths model examined here, therefore aims to provide a new framework or approach to issues and methods that builds on existing content and processes. According to McCashen (2005), “the strengths approach is not a model for practice. It is an approach to practice based

on a philosophy” (p. 15). The approach encourages the fusion of findings about successful practices with a positive philosophy to provoke solutions. In this research, therefore, a new approach is examined to enhance pre-service teacher education, building on previous research that also supports strengths based principles, so that “skills and knowledge are mobilised as resources to serve principles that enable change” (McCashen, 2005, p. 15). Borko et al. (2006), aligning with strengths approaches, claim that both critiques and visions of teacher education are necessary and that currently “when we look to the research on teacher education, we don’t find clear solutions to its problems” (p. 201). Presenting key publications from scholars focussing on teacher education, Borko et al., stress the need to avoid singular approaches to teacher education.

History, Development and Extent of Strengths Approaches

The Strengths Approach is a relatively recent development in organisational practice, largely emanating from social-service research in the United States (Saleebey, 1996, 2005). Researchers have continued to disseminate the approach, which has gained prominence over the last decade and there are now pockets of international practitioners, particularly in welfare services and therapeutic intervention work (Fuller, 2006; Jewell & Blackmore, 2004; Glicken, 2004; Ryan & Morgan, 2004; Saleebey, 2009; Schott & Critchley, 2004; Scott, 2000). References to the principles of strengths-approaches (sometimes also labelled strength/s-based practice, models, perspectives or frameworks) within the field of social work and psychology have also emerged in literature, with increasing popularity and success since the late nineties (Beilharz, 2002; Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Saleebey, 1996, 2005, 2009; Seligman et al., 1995).

The International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW, 2011), with 80 affiliated countries and half a million members, notes common elements of social-work practice that align with strengths approaches. The IFSW (2011) outlines a long held, generic striving for social justice in the profession as evidenced in their claim that, “the social work profession promotes social change, problem solving in human relationships and the empowerment and liberation of people to enhance well-being” (Definitions section, para. 1). Readers may assume, understandably but incorrectly, from such statements, that strengths approaches are similar to, or practised implicitly by the majority of social workers. Although the IFSW acknowledges the evolving nature of multiple social-work methods, strengths advocates warn that broad overviews can be misleading. Strengths practitioners warn that general definitions do not sufficiently delineate the significant differences in practice between strengths approaches and other methods of social work, even when they assert similar goals. Saleebey (2009) succinctly explains:

In the lore of professional social work, the idea of building on people’s strengths has become axiomatic. Authors of textbooks, educators, and practitioners all regularly acknowledge the importance of this principle. Many of these calls to

attend to the capacities and competencies of clients are little more than professional cant. So let us be clear: The strengths perspective is a dramatic departure from conventional social work practice. (p. 1)

Glicken (2004, p. 6) explains an important difference:

In summary, the binding elements of the strengths perspective include the recognition that the client, not the worker, is the primary change agent. The worker's role is to listen, help the client process, and facilitate by focusing on positive behaviours that might be useful in coping with the client's current life situation.

According to Saleebey (2009), a minority of social workers and researchers worldwide specifically practice and study a client-led, strengths approach, compared to the majority of practitioners that use more traditional, expert-led, methods. Saleebey (2009) relates that most practitioners continue "social work's continuing emphasis on problems and disorders and the profession's increasing commerce with theories that focus on deficits and pathologies" (p. 5). There are, however, small but significant and increasing, networks of strengths practitioners. Specialised websites (see, for example, <http://www.socwel.ku.edu/Strengths>) and university departments (see also <http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu/>) now promote strengths-based practice and positive psychology research. The roots of strengths approaches appear in the development of humanistic and positive psychology as well as social services. Maslow (1908-1970), a founding humanist psychologist, focussed on positive human attributes and success, researching mental health and the "hierarchy of human needs" peaking at self-actualisation (Simons, Irwin, & Drinnien, 1983). The research was largely in response to a field focussed on illness and dysfunction and although the methodology has been criticised, Maslow's findings have also spawned an unprecedented interest in personality research (Reid-Cunningham, 2008). Maslow's work sparked curiosity about how people can heal, grow and respond to issues themselves, a crucial element of current strengths approaches. Therapies including "client-centred therapy" (Rogers, 1951) also arose in conjunction with Maslow's work and are precursors to strengths approaches. Therapists were encouraged to show empathy and to mirror client responses, the client led atmosphere became (and remains) a frequently used therapy tool. Maslow's work is renowned in early-childhood education as applied to learning theories (Reid-Cunningham, 2008).

A major influence and complement to strengths approaches has been the parallel development of positive psychology (Seligman, 1990; Seligman et al., 1995). Early in the 1950s, Clifton considered that psychology focused, detrimentally, on what was wrong with people (Clifton et al., 1952). Clifton subsequently set out to study what was right with people (Clifton & Harter, 2003). Clifton's work on positive motivation included designing tests to identify and use particular types of personality strengths in the workforce (Hodges & Harter, 2005). This exclusiveness is at odds with modern strengths approaches that promote collaborative power (Clabaugh, 2005; McCashen, 2005). Nevertheless, Clifton's work

extended much further than strengths tests. Clifton's research made impressive links between positive emotions and health and promoted the benefits of realistic positivity (Clifton & Harter, 2003).

Positive psychologist, Martin Seligman, articulated concepts of learned helplessness and learned optimism, providing foundational concepts to the strengths approach (Seligman 1990). He argued that there was value in applying a positive focus to individual and community issues, particularly depression. Seligman's early experiences of psychological experiments, using dogs, dramatically challenged behaviourist, "stimulus response" theories. Inside a chamber, dogs failed to react to or turn off electric shocks as expected but remained passive accepting shocks (Seligman et al., 1995, p. 4). Seligman claimed the dogs learned the abstract concept of helplessness, "nothing I do matters", which also presents in humans with symptoms akin to depression. Seligman and his team further "discovered that ... pessimists, were more likely to give in to helplessness" (p. 4) rather than optimists. This initial research was a catalyst for Seligman's book *The Optimistic Child* which further argues that by teaching optimism it is possible to raise resilience and "immunise" against depression (Seligman, et al., 1995, p. 5). Seligman cautions, however, this is not the same as the trend of universally promoting self-esteem. Seligman et al. (1995) claim:

By emphasising how a child *feels*, at the expense of what the child *does* – mastery, persistence, overcoming frustration and boredom, and meeting challenge – parents and teachers are making this generation of children more vulnerable to depression. (p. 27).

Research findings indicate overly optimistic people, with unrealistic high self-esteem, might overestimate the control they have over situations. Seligman, therefore, promotes a distinctive form of optimism, which he terms "accurate optimism" (p. 297), focusing on purposeful reinforcement of positive actions rather than universal praise regardless of achievements.

Optimism is not chanting happy thoughts ... not blaming others when things go wrong ... not the denial or avoidance of sadness or anger. Negative emotions are part of the richness of life and they are usually healthy responses that encourage us to understand or change ... When you teach your child optimism, you are teaching him to know himself ... reflect thoughtfully on these beliefs and evaluate their accuracy. (Seligman et al., 1995, p. 297)

Seligman contests criticisms of both positive psychology and strengths approaches that they are "Pollyannaish purveyors" (Seligman et al., 1995, p. 298) of simplistic feel-good theory that cause people to be unrealistic about their abilities or situations. The optimism Seligman is advocating is not the denial of suffering or failure but the notion that a child "is equipped to persevere in the face of adversity and to struggle to overcome his problems" (p. 297). The concept of accurate optimism (p. 297) is crucial to understanding the development and legitimacy of the Strengths Approach and to counteracting claims of the approach being mere "evangelical enthusiasm" (Clabaugh, 2005, p. 166). The actions of identifying and utilising

existing strengths to persevere and overcome issues are a primary emphasis of strengths approaches (Saleebey, 1996), rather than “just positive thinking in disguise” (Glicken, 2004, p. 9).

Some researchers and practitioners have drawn out the single concept of strengths identification, from strengths approaches, developing this as a separate entity. Away from social service and psychology origins, strengths identification, as a distinct technique, has influenced various areas of business management and personal motivation training (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001; Clifton & Anderson, 2002). For example, in America, a “Strengths *Movement*” has recently arisen, which is promoted as an educational movement. Literature on the movement claims it is “based on positive psychology principles” (Fox, 2008). Building on a strengths business model (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), as founder of the Strengths Movement, Fox (2011) outlines how teachers can help students promote their strengths and increase career opportunities. Organisers for the movement advertise a number of resources for purchase and lobby for the mandatory adoption of the strengths movement into school systems nationwide.

The contrasting contexts of career management and social services may have necessitated the discriminate borrowing of the strengths identification concept from strengths approaches. Filtering of elements from strengths approaches and positive psychology into a commercial package, however, make it difficult to differentiate between empirically based strengths research and market driven, strengths branding. Labelling resources as *strengths based* may confuse and encourage the view that strengths *approaches* are limited to strengths identification, positive thinking or self-improvement. A danger also exists in directing others to identify their own strengths, however well-meaning an objective. Principles of self-determination are ultimately either compromised or invisible. The dilemma is not limited to those applying a modified version of the strengths approach for commercial purposes. Strengths practitioners using a full strengths approach also need to recognise that they may be inadvertently guilty of enforcing rather than facilitating. Practitioners should be aware of their own reasons, when using the approach. For example, motivation for personal gain or professional acknowledgement may be a higher priority than collaborative solutions (Saleebey, 2009). The ethical pull of justice and power principles continues to challenge all forms and techniques of strengths approaches (Glicken, 2004; Saleebey, 2009). Conversely, maintaining a balance of justice and power has also assisted in forming a particular version of the Strengths Approach in Australia (McCashen, 2005).

Australian Strengths-Approach Development

In Australia, the social-service organisation of St Lukes, based in Bendigo, Victoria, pioneered and adapted the Strengths Approach (St. Lukes Anglicare, 2010). St. Lukes applied a version

of the approach to everyday operations of their existing family and community welfare services from the late 1980s. O’Hanlon (1994) explains that there were influencing strands to strengths approaches which emerged as part of a “third wave” (p. 23) of universal approaches to therapy. The first wave was pathology and disease focussed. The second wave provided a “quick-fix” (p. 23) solution to issues with the therapist as solution finder. The third wave therapies and strengths approach, alternatively, viewed “people as the experts and solutions as resting with them and their networks” (McCashen, 2005, p. 3).

While *enabling strengths*, a term from American strengths and positive psychology origins, was a common thread in forming the Australian strengths version, according to McCashen (2005) the approach “does not simply involve an emphasis on strengths ... a common misunderstanding” (p. 14). The Australian strengths approach anchors firmly on combining strengths identification with principles of self-determination and social justice. McCashen (2005) explains that balancing these principles helped form the particular St. Lukes adaptation of the Strengths Approach. Connected to and influenced by a wide variety of pre-existing social-service approaches in Australia, the Strengths Approach aligned and arose particularly from “solutions-focussed”, “narrative” and “family therapy” (McCashen, 2005, p. 3; Scott & O’Neil, 2003) as well as “community capacity building” (Beilharz, 2002; Scott, 2000). After using strengths identification in third wave, intensive family service models McCashen (2005) records, “some of us were [*still*] not entirely comfortable with some aspects of these approaches. It seemed they did not go far enough in addressing issues of justice and power” (p. 1). The St. Luke’s team wondered if they,

were inadvertently acting in ways that ultimately kept people in their place or, worse still, contributed to further marginalisation and disempowerment. Simply focussing on people’s strengths is not enough to liberate people from oppressive realities. (pp. 1-2)

Practice methods were evaluated against key organisational values and attitudes. The Strengths Approach formed on “values of respect, self-determination, empowerment, social justice and the sharing of power” (p. 2). The approach became a template for policies, resources and management principles as well as the client services provided. Through St. Lukes’ training and publications arm (known as Innovative Resources) strengths resources, including a formal articulation of the Strengths Approach in the book *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005), were developed.

The Australian Strengths Approach arose, essentially, from separate strands of social work and psychology. Both strands unite in opposing deficit models of practice, a defining reaction in the development of all forms of strengths approaches (Seligman et al., 1995). Scott and O’Neil (2003) highlight that deficits or (interchangeably) pathological models linger dangerously in a mentality that focuses solely on the problems of social issues such as child

abuse. They claim a deficit approach concentrates on what is wrong with children and families and thus disengages practitioners and families from solution-focussed outcomes.

Lees (2004, p. 3) presents a useful table (Table 2, below) showing the comparison between strengths-based and deficits models which also helps to more finely describe the Strengths Approach. The structuralist and post-structuralist (Barry, 2002) labels are perhaps an unnecessary binary, possibly due to the table format, but nevertheless serve to date the theoretical emergence of the approach. Taken together, the principles outlined by Lees (2004, p. 3) form a model of practice grounded in a way of viewing the world that allows for multiple understandings as opposed to espousing one positivist, objective truth (Hughes, 2001; Kerlinger, 1986). Clearly, strengths-based approaches have more apparent links to post-structuralist than positivist paradigms (Barry, 2002; Burns, 2000; Hughes, 2001). Lees' specified post-structuralism link still appears a little incongruous perhaps because the two dimensional representation perhaps limits the explanation of how, equally clearly, a strengths focus and post-structuralism both allow for a range of theoretical strengths to inflect the approach (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Saleebey, 2009). While the Strengths Approach aligns well with post-structuralist tenets, it would also seem reasonable to consider that there are a range of alternative theories with which the approach may also align and could substitute as a frame of reference. Attempting to force alignment with strengths principles on an existing theory could become, conversely, a constraint to using the approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 27). Cochran-Smith (2003) cautions that there is a danger creating dichotomies in teacher education when introducing approaches as *new* and comparing and contrasting approaches:

Many dichotomies are based on the mistaken assumption that the only alternative to a particular idea, concept, or position is its opposite or its absence. Although dichotomies are often rhetorically effective, they are rarely useful for sorting out complex issues. Instead they tend to reduce important differences to mere caricatures while obscuring equally important similarities and nuances. (p. 275)

In a deficits approach, social workers or teachers may portray children experiencing abuse, as victims and sufferers. Children may be viewed, patronisingly, as “poor things” in need of rescuing by experts. This view not only places the social worker or teacher in a place of power, as rescuer, but simultaneously risks disempowering the child. The child who has been abused is, therefore, always viewed as a victim and sufferer, helpless and hopeless in the public vision (Scott & O’Neil, 2003). Sedlak (2001) offers the alternative term of *sentinel* (p. 7) to describe a professional in a child-protection service role (social worker or teacher) who is concerned with guarding social justice. According to Sedlak (2001), sentinels are “community professionals in specific categories of agencies with regular, direct child/family contact” (p. 7), such as law enforcement, health, social service, school, and childcare staff.

Table 2

Comparing Deficit and Strengths Models

Deficit or Pathology (Structuralist) Models	Strengths (Post-Structuralist) Models.
The focus is on problems and causes.	The focus is on solutions, possibilities and alternate stories.
The client is viewed as someone who is damaged or broken by the problem.	The client is viewed as someone who is using their strengths and resources to struggle against the problem.
The worker (professional) is the expert.	Both the worker and client bring expertise.
The process is driven by the worker.	The process is driven/directed by the client.
The goal is to reduce the symptoms or problem.	The goal is to increase the client's sense of empowerment and connection to the people and resources around them.
The focus is on insight/awareness.	The focus is on the "first step" to change.
The resources for change are primarily available through the worker.	The resources for change are the strengths and capacities of the client and their environment.

Note. From *Capacity Building from a Strengths Approach* (p. 3), by D. Lees, 2004, Brisbane: Lighthouse Resources and adapted from material developed by St. Lukes and Lighthouse Resources. Copyright 2004 by Lighthouse Resources. Reprinted with permission.

Critics of strengths approaches warn that merely swapping terms can be equally dangerous as it "is overly simplistic and superficial" (Glicken, 2004, p. 14). Changing terms from *victim* to *survivor*, as in Lees' (2004) table example, may also equate to disempowering children as it may disrespectfully gloss over the serious issue of abuse, implying that an answer is instantly possible. In defence of the approach, however, Witkin (2009) warns "do not let the strengths perspective's apparent simplicity lull you into thinking that it provides a quick and easy fix to the complex problems of the world" (p. xiv). Saleebey (2009) reinforces the view that "there is nothing ... in the strengths approach that mandates the discounting of the problems of life" (p. 286). Saleebey (2009) cautions practitioners to heed criticisms and ensure

thorough examination of issues is completed before identifying positive strengths. Practitioners may use power to transform situations only if embraced by worker *and* client. Glicken (2004) argues further that even strengths identification is far from simple, “focussing on what is right about a person is a very in-depth process” (p. 14). Strengths practitioners may need to allocate more time to this than practitioners using traditional approaches. This, conversely, is another criticism of the approach, that it is too time consuming. Building a relationship with clients, establishing strengths and resources may indeed require an early time investment when using the Strengths Approach. However, as McCashen (2005) explains, the setting of goals and visions for solutions in the strengths approach process may be time saving in the longer term. Goal setting enables expedient progression with issues and avoids the often repetitive and lengthy dwelling on problems and negative effects found when using pathological methods.

In the Strengths Approach, every response to an issue requires transparency, self-determination and the sharing of existing resources. Therefore, recognising, affirming and using an individual’s skills, knowledge and resources (strengths) to problem solve are integral parts of the approach. In child protection, the child is viewed as using their strengths and resources to struggle against abuse rather than as a powerless, damaged child. The primary focus of the Strengths Approach is on *solutions* rather than *problems*. McCashen (2005, p. v) explains, “It is an approach to people that is primarily dependent upon “positive attitudes about people’s dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities.” The Strengths Approach, is characterised by social justice principles of respect, “power with” and ownership by those affected by issues, in a process of change (McCashen, 2005, p. 31). Witkin (2009, p. xiii) warns, however, “we must be mindful of how ostensibly positive concepts like social justice have been used to deflect or rationalise the perpetration of harm.” Many social-work methods have claimed to be for “universal good” but consequently have failed to “recognise human diversity and how different perspectives function in different contexts” (p. xiii). Witkin also urges to keep the approach open to manifold definitions, so that “the strengths perspective not be reified, converted into a ‘thing’ with an enumerated list of defining characteristics that functions as a kind of virtue ethic or prescription for healthy living” (p. xiii). Nevertheless, the strengths approaches have also been criticised for being unclear in definition and presented without actionable steps. Witkin commented that to avoid hypocrisy, strengths developers should at least avoid prescriptive definitions of the approach and remain open to individual perspectives and interpretations. McCashen’s (2005) work perhaps charts a middle ground on this point. Acknowledging his fellow strengths practitioners’ calls for further explanation of the broad principles of strengths approaches, McCashen developed a flexible framework and used a variety of practitioner interpretations and explanations of the use and possibilities of the approach.

Scott and O'Neil (2003) explained pitfalls with empowerment theories, and refined notions of power in strengths approaches. They asked, "is the process of empowering actually any different from the imposition of normative ideas of how *we* think *you* should be?" (p. ix). McCashen (2005) stated that "probably the most important principle of the strengths approach is the sharing of power, or what is referred to as power with" (p. 19). *Power with* is the opposite of the colonising *power over* used by a dominant culture over minority groups. Power with allows control by the clients and demands that practitioners demonstrate respect and social justice for those who are marginalised (p. 19). Glicken (2004) stressed that "There must be a willingness to suspend orthodox notions of the worker-client relationship and to recognise that a professionally aloof therapeutic approach discourages change" (p. 5).

In the Strengths Approach, practitioners are encouraged to work collaboratively with clients and facilitate solutions to issues. Strengths approach critics stress, however, that in roles of facilitating, strengths practitioners do not avoid colonising power over, but rather that clients simply transfer it to a more subtle role. Critics proffer that facilitating still constitutes a power dynamic which the approach claims to be trying to avoid (Clabaugh, 2005). Clabaugh claims this tension of power can make strengths approaches difficult to implement and that they often lack clear instructions on how to avoid power over practices or how to implement power with. He concludes however, with the rhetorical question, "Does that mean it isn't worth a try?" to which he answers, "No, the obstacles noted above stand in the way of all meaningful improvements. So let's investigate and learn more about the limits and possibilities of strengths-based education. But we should also remember the importance of doing no harm as we experiment" (2005, p. 170). While the principle, power with, is accepted as laudable by strengths practitioners and critics alike, a lack of practical instructions on how to promote it has undoubtedly been a valid criticism in the early literature pertaining to the Strengths Approach (Glicken, 2004; Saleebey, 2005).

McCashen (2005) provides multiple suggestions for promoting and applying the Strengths Approach. He claims that all ways of applying the approach primarily work by progressing to solutions while maintaining socially just practice and power with clients. From the five columns of the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48), which was introduced briefly in the introduction to this thesis (see Table 1), can be drawn five steps to assist in applying the Strengths Approach to solve particular issues. These steps can also be adapted and presented in various table formats so that, according to McCashen, they are "client-owned" (2005, pp. 91-92). Table 2 (below) illustrates a table format that was designed for this research by the researcher:

Table 3

Five Steps from The Column Approach (McCashen, 2005)

Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Outline the issues/stories from the perspectives of all stakeholders involved	Create a picture of the future, vision good outcomes for resolving the issue	Recognise the strengths – skills, resources, personal characteristics of the stakeholders	Identify other resources available to assist with the issue	Ask questions that enable people to specify concrete steps towards their goals.

Note. From *The Strengths Approach* (p. 48, pp. 91-92), by W. McCashen, 2005, Bendigo: Innovative Resources. Copyright 2005 by the St. Lukes Innovative Resources. Adapted with permission.

McCashen gives examples and techniques for applying each of the five steps including using prompting questions, picture resource cards, photography, artwork and the use of scaling sheets. For example, while some clients may prefer to tell their story or recognise their strengths verbally, others may write journals or prefer to show on a scale of 1-10 levels of confidence on issues.

In *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005), practitioners are given advice and role modelling scenarios based on asking open-ended questions to facilitate responses and encourage change. For example, to vision a future goal the “miracle question” (Berg, 1994, pp. 97-102) may be used prompted by a question such as, “[if] there had been a miracle and all these problems were gone, what would be happening?” (McCashen, 2005, p. 97). Similarly, clients can imagine what a “special person” (somebody who is encouraging and positive to them) would advise on an issue (McCashen, 2005, p. 98). McCashen suggests the Strengths Approach is transferable beyond social services:

Whatever the field of work: counselling or therapy, education or health, casework or support work, group work or community development; whatever the role: family worker, youth worker, teacher, health worker, case worker, manager, supervisor or member of the executive, the strengths approach is of vital importance. (2005, p. 187)

Acknowledging the history and development of strengths approaches is crucial to understanding and refining the Strengths Approach for new situations. The solution focus of the approach essentially offers a framework for many other issues demanding action.

The Strengths Approach appears well placed for use in the field of teacher education and particularly for addressing the issue of preparing teachers for child protection. Literature

on approaches to teacher education in the United States (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Noffke & Zeichner, 2006; Wilson, Floden & Ferrini-Mundy, 2001) outlines key aspects for successful teacher-education programs and approaches across jurisdictions and give indicators for this research of the possible transferability of strengths approaches to an education context. Wilson et al. (2001) examined over 300 reports on teacher preparation and evaluated 57 peer reviewed research reports and found “research shows a positive connection between teachers’ preparation in their subject matter and their performance and impact in the classroom” (p. i). Wilson et al. (2001) called for more research detailing subject matter preparation and found “the pedagogical aspects of teacher preparation matter, both for their effects on teaching practice and for their ultimate impact on student achievement” (p. ii). Teaching placements were evaluated as powerful, though often not well connected to the university-based components of preparation and Wilson et al. (2001) concluded that “teacher preparation research must be explicit about connections to the improvement of student achievement and about the contexts in which graduates of teacher preparation are working” (p. iv). Similarly, Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) conducted a teacher preparation study for the US National Research Council and Department of Education. While finding little empirical evidence on what constitutes successful teacher-education preparation they reinforced that research conclusions suggested that both content and pedagogical knowledge is highly valued in preparing teachers generally. In 2006, Zeichner examined 37 studies on teacher education between 1985-2004 and presented a framework for examining teacher education that emphasised the “relationship between teacher education, and teacher and student learning” (p. 89). Zeichner points to the need to recognise the interplay between student teachers’ own demographic background, the policy and teacher-education institutional context and the school environment for which they are preparing. The Strengths Approach emphasises fully examining the content and contexts of issues, preparing for success, and becoming aware of effective resources and strategies to address issues. Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) conclude that “clearer understanding of the content and character of effective teacher preparation is critical to improving it” (p. 7). Connections can be seen here with the Strengths Approach process and standard methods of successful teacher education (Wilson et al., 2001)

Teacher-education literature reports a number of further factors responsible for aiding pre-service and novice teachers, including developing professional knowledge and identity, and reflective practice (Kidd, Sanchez & Thorp, 2008; Mayer, Reid, Santoro & Singh, 2011; McMaugh, Saltmarsh & Sumsion, 2008; Saltmarsh, Sumsion & McMaugh, 2008). In a small-scale study in the United States Kidd et al. (2008) indicated that early-childhood pre-service teachers benefited from “material resources, diverse internship experiences, interactions with diverse families, critical reflection, and discussion and dialogue” in their teacher preparation to enhance their “culturally responsive dispositions and teaching practices” (p. 316). In Australia,

Mayer et al. (2011) suggest that professional knowledge, practice and a developing teacher identity are key components influencing successful teacher education. Australian researchers McMaugh et al. (2008) also point to the “socio-political climate that often shapes the work of teachers and teacher educators” (p. 257) and Saltmarsh et al. (2008) add that “rigorous and deliberate theorising and reconceptualising this knowledge base is essential for any field to remain vibrant and relevant” (p. 77). Salveron, Arney and Scott (2006) discuss how innovative models for child and family services in Australia (including child protection), however, have often remained as reconceptualisations, models or pilot studies or have had a “diffused innovation” (p. 39). Salveron et al., note how care must be taken in offering innovative or *new* models as this may present as superior or preferable to improving existing models, undermining lessons that may be learnt by repeating, modifying and evaluating programs. Salveron et al., (2006) distinguish between the adaptation or adoption of a model or approach and explain adaptation as to “adapt/reinvent it to fit a new context” rather than adoption where “the program in its pure form” (p. 41) is used. In attempting to *adapt* the Strengths Approach from a social-service context to teacher education, Salveron et al. (2006) provide key suggestions and cautions for this research, including emphasising the need to disseminate information about successful programs, win community support, and develop a plan for sustained “embedded practice” (p. 40).

Repositioning the Strengths Approach in an Education Context

The Strengths Approach is relatively unknown and unused in education research and practice systems. The strengths identification aspect of the full Strengths Approach is used in some educational contexts. The Strengths Movement (Fox, 2011), for example, which concentrates on identifying the individual strengths of students to assist learning, is used in a few schools in the United States. Some curriculum materials used in Australian early-childhood services also include aspects of strengths building in a broad sense (Hendrick, 2003). In its full version, however, the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005) is grounded in social justice principles and collaborative solutions for change, and represents more than a focus on individual strengths and maintaining positivity. Single elements of the approach, nevertheless, may be useful precursors to introducing full strengths approaches into education programmes. Full strengths approaches are well adapted to teacher education and education more broadly, as they align with many of the principles underlying widely studied and used educational theories. Pre-service teachers may also accept principles of many educational theories they are studying implicitly align with Strengths Approach principles.

Lees (2004, p. 3) table, comparing deficit and strengths models (see Table 2, p. 61), may be useful to assist in translating the Strengths Approach to education programmes. Table 2 shows the approach as a model of practice grounded in a specific way of viewing the social-

service roles of client and worker. By substituting education-based terms in the comparison indicators from Table 2, Table 4 suggests a possible translation of the Strengths Approach to education, articulating the relationship between teacher and pupil.

Table 4

Comparing Deficit and Strengths Models in Education

Deficit or Pathology (Structuralist) Models	Strengths (Post-Structuralist) Models.
The focus is on childrens' problems & non-achievement.	The focus is on childrens' achievements & goals.
The child is viewed as uneducated, needy with problems & damaged.	The child is viewed as knowledgeable with prior experience, strengths & resources to learn.
The teacher is the expert.	Both the teacher & child bring experiences & knowledge to enhance learning.
Learning is driven by the teacher.	Learning is driven/directed by the child.
Educational goals focus on children's underachievement, failures & areas of concern from the teacher	Educational goals focus on children's engagement, achievements, competencies, aspirations, connection to people & resources around them.
The focus is on recognising inability.	The focus is on recognising ability & ability to change.
The resources for change are primarily available through the teacher.	The resources for change are the strengths & capacities of the child, family & community (including teacher).

Note. From *Capacity Building from a Strengths Approach* (p. 3), by D. Lees, 2004, Brisbane: Lighthouse Resources and adapted from material developed by St. Lukes and Lighthouse Resources. Copyright 2004 by the Lighthouse Resources. Adapted with permission.

Replacing *client* with *child*, and *worker* with *teacher*, provides educators with more familiar terms with which to consider the power roles outlined. A Strengths Approach to teaching, directs teachers and children, to explore and actualise their strengths together, in order to find solutions to issues. Rather than constructing the teachers as the expert, exposing children's

problems and weaknesses, it requires that children work through self-identified issues with the help of resources, including their teacher. The teacher and children would collaboratively recognise individual and whole class issues, tackling them with negotiated plans, rather than teacher-determined changes and imposed outcomes. In the social-service setting, a Strengths Approach sees the client rather than the social worker as responsible for the process of change (McCashen, 2005, p. 9). A Strengths Approach, applied to education, would position the child as the change agent, with teachers available as human resources. The individual teacher would, therefore, be viewed as a strength for children in facilitating change, as opposed to being the person responsible, making the changes for the child.

Enhancing Teacher Education using Strengths Approaches

One aspect of teacher education for which strengths approaches offer a potentially valuable addition is the area of personal-professional development. Czubaj (1996) demonstrates the importance of enhancing teachers' "unconditional well-being, intrinsic motivation, innate wisdom, creativity, and a capacity for insight", which he described as their "higher self" (p 377), to counter stress, low self-belief and esteem in teachers. Czubaj suggests that encouraging self-reflection can increase positive practice and that "highly motivated teachers teach students to become highly motivated themselves, repeating a positive, productive cycle" (p. 379). Strengths approaches offer precisely the practices of self-reflection, and work to cultivate the self-belief and personal strengths that Czubaj identifies as critical.

Strengths approaches are also highly congruent with a number theories that are central to pre-service teacher preparation (Education Services Australia, 2011), especially for early-childhood educators. In Queensland, the *Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers* (QCT, 2007) requires both knowledge and practice standards to be met by qualified teachers including "a sound fundamental knowledge of the socially, culturally, historically constructed nature of knowledge" (p. 3). Pre-service teachers study a range of educational theories, from those that viewed the child as a passive recipient, a blank slate or "tabula rasa" ready to receive instruction (Locke 1690 as cited in Winkler, 1996), to more contemporary theories that argue that children learn by self discovery and that teachers facilitate children's development and problem solving (Hendrick, 2003). The strengths approach resonates well with the work of established social constructivist educational theorists such as Bruner (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976) who highlighted that children's competencies should be fostered by teachers so that their potential is maximised. Strengths-based resources (Masman, 2007; Veecken, 1997,1999) can be used in education settings to identify strengths and competencies. Socio-cultural theories (Vygotsky, 1929, 1978) and ecological models (Bronfennbrenner, 1979) of education, that emphasise the importance of understanding the context and power dynamics that affect learners and the need for teachers to scaffold learning, are a prominent feature of teacher-education

courses. The Queensland College of Teachers (QCT, 2006) states that teachers must know both the theory and practice of “scaffolding techniques to assist students to achieve learning goals and progressively take appropriate responsibility for their own learning” (p. 5). Strengths literature offers additional theoretical explanations of how socio-cultural influences affect power and knowledge and gives practical guidance on how empowerment strategies can be enacted, such as by the use of the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). Strengths literature can help explain the change that has occurred across education theories from traditional theories of instructing and saving the disadvantaged, to those that are positively reframed to emphasise a shared responsibility of all stakeholders to improve conditions (Saleebey, 2005). Using a Strengths Approach could assist with the role of the early-childhood teacher as a collaborator, scaffolding children’s development rather than an authoritarian expert (Meadmore, Burnett, & Tait, 2000).

Strengths approaches are well-suited to foster the development of emotional intelligence and trusting relationships. Queensland state school curriculum guidelines (Queensland Government, DET, 2011a) state that for the key learning areas of Health and Physical Education (HPE), early-childhood teachers are required to assist children to “develop and refine personal and social skills to promote positive interactions with others, be resilient and manage their own lives” (HPE section, para. 4). The need for teachers to be aware of children’s emotions and feelings and to be empathic supporters of children as they move through development stages is a standard inclusion in teacher education. Early-childhood teachers study psychodynamic theorists, such as Freud (1856-1939) and Erikson (1902-1994) who provided specific understandings of the “place of emotion in learning and explored the extent to which our ‘thinking life’ and our ‘feeling life’ are interconnected” (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 53). Hendrick (2003) explains that “Erikson theorised that during their life span, individuals pass through a series of stages of emotional development in which basic attitudes are formed” (p. 219). Erikson emphasised the need for trust in all stages of development., adding significantly to teacher preparation. Strengths facilitators, in order to provide a “safe, trusting and inclusive environment” (McCashen, 2005, p. 45), use the first step of the Column Approach to express feelings and issues with facilitators which involves time and “listening to people’s stories” (McCashen, 2005, p. 51). The Strengths Approach and strengths resources offer practical ways of facilitating, rather than demanding, self-confidence and resilience skills, along with valuing and encouraging the emotional development of children. Strengths approaches offer strategies for creating not only a “trusting and inclusive environment” but also one “where power imbalances and transparency are addressed at every level” (McCashen, 2005, p. 45).

Strengths approaches can give insight and aid understanding of the power relations inherent in teaching and the need for socially just practice. The Australian *Early Years*

Learning Framework (COAG, 2009a) (as studied in Queensland early-childhood teacher-education courses) guides early-childhood teachers to understand that children:

Actively construct their own understandings and contribute to others' learning. They recognise their agency, capacity to initiate and lead learning, and their rights to participate in decisions that affect them, including their learning. Viewing children as active participants and decision makers opens up possibilities for educators to move beyond pre-conceived expectations about what children can do and learn. This requires educators to respect and work with each child's unique qualities and abilities. (p. 9)

The recognition of power imbalances in education has triggered cautions to be raised for teachers regarding the manner in which education theories translate into practice. Vygotsky (1929), for example, indicated from a social constructivist view of education, that learning "cannot be forced on the child" (p. 421) and must take into account the social and cultural context involved. Bloch (2000) explained further, that from a critical constructivist standpoint we need to realise also the conditions that children are experiencing in order to understand how children learn. Bloch asserted that educators need to recognise "the power of the power/knowledge relationships that regulate and administer freedom, limiting and defining who is to be included and who to be excluded from participation" (p. 275). Critiques of psychodynamic theories, for example, identified that while children may need to express and act out feelings in play, this is not always socially just. Through play, children can construct play worlds in which they practise and learn to be fair, to share power and enjoy social diversity (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 58; see also Derman-Sparks, 1989; Neugebauer, 1992; Sook-Kyoung & Lewis, 1999). However, through play children can also practise and learn to be unfair, to compete for power and fear social diversity. "They can create and experience racism, sexism, homophobia and classism" (Mac Naughton, 2003, p. 58; see also Derman-Sparks, 1989; Creaser & Dau, 1995). McCashen (2005) emphasises the Strengths Approach as a process for change, offers a way of both acknowledging the strengths and power inequities that may occur in play situations and gives strategies to help teachers positively address inequitable power relations if they occur. A crucial part of the Strengths Approach is not only the identification of individual strengths and resources to assist with issues but also understanding how these can be maximised to ensure socially just practice.

The Strengths Approach is compatible framework to aid understanding of transforming theories, such as critical theory, social constructionism, post-modernism, feminism and post-colonialism (Mac Naughton, 2003) that are currently influencing early-childhood education pedagogy. Mac Naughton explains that these theories have primarily arisen from the debates about knowledge and power (Berger & Luckman, 1967; Habermas, 1990; Young, 1990) and have been influenced by theorists such as Foucault (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984) and Freire (1970, 1995). Similarly, O'Hanlon (1994) emphasised strengths approaches arose with complex theories in social work about empowerment and self-determination. The Strengths

Approach and critical theory (Young, 1990) both recognise the negative impact that authoritarian power can have and the ability to change this. While critical theorists, such as critical constructivists, emphasise that power relations get in the way of meaning construction (Freire, 1970, 1995; Young, 1990), they also positively add, “every human being, no matter how ‘ignorant’ or submerged in the culture of silence he or she may be, is capable of looking critically at the world in a dialogical encounter with others” (Freire, 1970, p. 13). The importance of the inherent capabilities of children, social justice, and the opportunities of education to foster empowerment, are pivotal themes of critical theorist Paulo Freire in his works the *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) and *Pedagogy of Hope: Reliving Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1995). Freire proffers that teachers should not impose knowledge on children in a “banking” fashion and should work with children as an “educator – educatee” rather than “universal educator” (Taylor, 1993, p. 53). McCashen (2005) offers a succinct tool for evaluating power imbalances; the use of the question “is our practice power with or power over others?” to highlight the effects that social issues have on well-being. The Strengths Approach offers practical ways of implementing (the sometimes complex) transforming theories. The solutions-based focus of the Strengths Approach emphasises working collaboratively to raise resilience and to gain positive change for children experiencing disempowerment or oppression.

Strengths approaches have possible merit as an additional tool to assist teachers to develop a discourse with children to enhance learning, a discourse that recognises interests, needs and societal constraints. As pre-service early-childhood teachers study the Australian *Early Years Learning Framework* (COAG, 2009a), that will also influence their practice as graduates, they are guided to view children as learners who “participate in everyday life, they develop interests and construct their own identities and understandings of the world” (p. 7). The standards and procedures for the *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia* (Education Services Australia, 2011) additionally emphasise that teachers need to have a clear knowledge of critical factors affecting children’s learning and have a social justice role to “support students’ well-being and safety” (p. 4).

On successful completion of their initial teacher education, graduate teachers possess the requisite knowledge and skills to plan for and manage learning programs for students. They demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the implications for learning of students’ physical, cultural, social, linguistic and intellectual characteristics. (Education Services Australia, 2011, p. 4)

Strengths approaches offer a combined emphasis on the ability to consider people’s strengths as well as the ability to address issues of social justice and power affecting their development. From a critical theory perspective (Young, 1990), education must increase consciousness about injustice and engage with the less powerful, collaboratively and respectfully for change to occur (Patton, 2002, p. 545). Strengths Approaches link well in this respect with general post-structuralist theories (Barry, 2002; Hill, McClaren & Rikowski, 2002) that are applicable in

education as well as social services (Patton, 2002). Foucault (Foucault & Rabinow, 1984), for example, explains how power creates and transfers through the *economy* of discourse in education. Strengths approaches suggest that, in practice, for empowerment to occur worker and client need to develop a discourse that recognises and avoids the colonising effect that discourse power can have. Applying a strengths approach to education, therefore, implies that children are involved with the conversation of education, in a speaking as well as listening role. Post-colonialist education theorists contend that dominant westernised theories have been offered as universal truths on how children learn and develop. Dominant theories tend to ignore and further marginalise alternative views on education from those less powerful, including children (Rizvi, 2007; Crossley & Tickly, 2004). McCashen's (2005) explanation that power over occurs when an individual, group or institution assumes the right to control or colonise others" (p. 20) can be readily applied to education. He adds,

Dominant culture and knowledge can offer much that is useful but it can so often constrain people's potential. The strengths approach leads us to explore and unpack the entrenched messages that define people, keep them in their place and prevent them from being the best they can be. (p. 186)

The anti-rescuer viewpoint (Scott & O'Neil, 2003) argued by the Strengths Approach could be useful in education to recognise and increase children's resilience to address issues that might hamper their education (McGrath & Noble, 2003).

Strengths approaches are well adapted for cultivating resiliency in both teachers and the children they teach, especially children who are experiencing disadvantage. Increasingly, educators are studying emerging research focussed on improving resilience in children and this is now included in many pre-service courses. McGrath and Noble (2003) in their classroom resiliency programme, *Bounce Back*, explain the origins of resiliency research, "The construct of resilience emerged, almost by accident, from longitudinal development studies of "at risk" children. This research showed that despite encountering many life stressors as they grew up, some children survived and even thrived" (p. 14). In parallel to strengths approach developers, resiliency researchers referred to Positive Psychology (Seligman et al., 1995) for alternate ways of viewing children who have experienced trauma or abuse. Similar to original strengths research, foundational resilience work concentrated on endeavouring to learn from children and communities who display resilience rather than charting the negative effects of their trauma (Bernard & Bonnet, 2005; Bowman, 1997, Pransky, 2007). Indeed, by initial definition, the strengths approach and resiliency research seem nearly identical, "The resiliency construct is a dramatic shift in perspective from the deficit model of young people at risk to a model that focuses on the personal and environmental strengths that help young people withstand high levels of risk" (McGrath & Noble, 2003, p. 14). Glicklen (2004) explains that "the concepts of strengths and resilience are sometimes confused" but clarifies there are complementary differences, "*strengths* refer to those sets of attributes that people possess that help them cope

with life issues. *Resilience* refers to the ability to cope with serious traumas and stressors and not be significantly affected by them” (p. 77).

The Strengths Approach and step-by-step Column Approach may potentially add to and draw from existing resiliency programs. Withers and Russell (2001), in *Educating for Resilience*, explain an application of resiliency theory thus: “by implementing positive programs and strategies we can strengthen environmental protective factors within the family, school and community and enhance the resilience of young people, thus helping to prevent them from succumbing to risk, adversity and marginalisation” (p. x). There is a “preferred model” (p. xiii) for resilience education involving participation from students, families, school staff and support services. Participation, they claim “communicates the valuing of those concerned and empowers” and “enables the strengths of participants to be built on” (Withers & Russell, 2001, p. 49; see also Hooper-Briar & Lawson, 1994; Stokes & Tyler, 1997). Rather than teachers facilitating children to empower themselves, as in a strengths approach, the model is expressed with the expectation that teachers empower the children. Rather than a client-led approach, where children build on their own strengths with the assistance of teachers, the suggestion implicit in the expression of this resiliency model is that teachers are the building force. While, there may appear a remnant of an authoritarian power relationship in this expectation for teachers to be the empowering force, the articulation may also be seen as emphasising that the disempowering burden of responsibility cannot be placed entirely on the child. The differences may be more semantics than actualities, however, as Withers and Russell (2001) provide numerous examples of the model for various age groups and a range of different prevention and intervention contexts. The twenty principles that make up their resiliency model are also drawn from wide-ranging research (p. xii). Strengths practitioners may find a structured resiliency model more suitable where self-empowerment and self-determination of strengths from a child is unlikely and intervention for safety by an adult is required. Conversely, resiliency practitioners may be able to use a less-structured strengths model alongside existing resiliency programs as resilience increases.

Critiques of Strengths Approach

McGrath and Noble (2003) warn that “when a concept is popularised there is a risk that the construct is over-simplified” (p. 24). Strengths researchers need to be aware of condensing explanations of their work so that the approach does not appear limited to identifying strengths or to providing a single template for solutions. Glicklen (2004) shows that these types of critiques were raised for resilience research and are also relevant for strengths research. Thus, for example, “the quality of resilience research is a problem. For one, resilient children are not necessarily resilient adults” (p. 86). He adds that “research on resilience appears to be limited methodologically” (pp. 86-87). Notably he questions the formulation and bias of some

resiliency research (c.f., Teit et al., 1998) that seems to provide a researcher-determined, never-ending “shopping list of strengths” (Glicken, 2004, p. 87) needed for resilience. The critique of resiliency methodology is a welcome caution for those using strengths approaches and wishing to undertake research using a Strengths Approach. Strengths researchers must thoroughly explore their own researcher subjectivities, identify and avoid bias where possible and clearly define the limitations of studies and subsequent findings to avoid similar criticism of “very spurious results” (Glicken, 2004, p. 87).

Heavy criticism was levied, similarly, at the publication of a collection of non-traditional social-work practices (including positive psychology based strengths approaches) co-edited by key American strengths researcher Dennis Saleebey (2009). In reviewing the publication, *Social Work Dialogues*, Epstein (2008) rejects what he interprets as blanket approval, almost evangelical selling of approaches, such as the strengths approach, in preference to more empirically proved, traditional social-work methods. Epstein accuses the contributors of “individual idiosyncrasy” (p. 82) entitling his review *The True Hypocrites* (p. 82). He states that they fail to analyse critically their own theories or provide evidence for their claims when they criticise more traditional social-work theories: “the guru-speak is not accompanied by evidence speak” (p. 82). Epstein asserts that there is a proliferation of largely unchallenged and evaluated perspectives in the book that claim to be based on post-modern theoretical foundations. Here, claims Epstein, is the hypocrisy, as post-modern theories would insist that critique and recognition of the possible power imbalances of each approach is necessary. Yet presented together, the variety of unevaluated alternative approaches relies on the assumed truths of the previous and also cumulatively equate to an assumed and unquestioned joint power. He states abrasively that “instead of defending the post modern impulse ... [*the book*] simply propagates faith ... oblivious to the flaws of social construction” (p. 82). Epstein (2008) highlights a severe lack of formal research on non-traditional approaches and infers that non-traditional theorists are apparently unconcerned with this. He concludes that alternative approaches are relying at best on thin anecdotal examples of success and at worst presenting personal beliefs in the guise of rigorous research. If accepting this critique, then this reliance is a salutary caution to strengths researchers to avoid over-exuberance, the over-stating of results and confusing personal philosophies and assumptions with reliable and valid interpretations of data.

Epstein’s (2008) criticism may be explained by a continuum that exists in social-service fields between traditional and post-modern and structuralist theorists who, it seems, by definition, are in opposition to the other. While in an empirical, traditional approach, the emphasis is placed on establishing correct and universal truths about happenings in the social world, a post-structuralist approach emphasises that each individual holds their own truths about happenings and post-modernism insists that these are influenced and constrained by the

society to which they belong. McMillen, Morris, and Sherraden (2004, p. 318) write of a consequential “grudge match” developing, with the “dichotomy” between theorists and practitioners in both the traditional, problems-based and alternative, solutions-based camps. Stuadt, Howard, and Drake (2001) argue that the Strengths Approach is “poorly defined, not much different from other approaches and not yet based on evidence of its effectiveness” (p. 1). Saleebey (2009) counteracts with published results from quasi-experimental and non-experimental studies that indicate better results (symptom reduction) when using strengths approaches compared with traditional approaches.

McMillen et al. (2004) argue that the dichotomy is “unnatural” (p. 318) and the battles unnecessary. Saleebey (2009) likewise, welcomes the critique that argues for a resolution. Unlike the critique by Epstein (2008), labelling strengths research the “stunted offspring of professional inbreeding” (p. 82), McMillen et al. appeal to “end the grudge match” (p. 318). In their rebuttal of strengths approaches, they suggest that social workers continue to address as they always have, both client problems and strengths. Drawing from all the critiques of strength approaches, provides extra impetus in this study to clearly define, explore, consolidate and especially critique, the theoretical principles from which the approach emerges and self-interrogate the claims made in research project. Critiques of strengths approaches cannot be ignored as merely differences of opinion on preferred paradigms or research methods. Strengths practitioners, and critics alike, have cited the lack of formal study in non-traditional compared to traditional social-service approaches as a cause for concern. Documented strengths studies are modest both in quantity and in conclusions compared with research in other social-service areas. The author suggests that debates questioning the effectiveness of strengths approaches are unlikely to be resolved without the time needed to complete a range of different research projects for different purposes. Strengths researchers may need to carefully negotiate and change the form, scope, and methodology of their studies in order to validate successfully any positive findings for using strengths approaches. Strengths researchers who show restraint and tentativeness in their conclusions and pursue formalised studies of strengths approaches (regardless of personal convictions), place them in a much better position of being able to influence social-service practice. In parallel, it is important that strengths researchers continue to improve and challenge research practice to improve social conditions and honour those most marginalised in society, those for whom theoretical debates are a privileged luxury. The criticism of strengths approaches to date, has offered an opportunity to develop a strengths framework for this research that values the experiences and voices of both critics and proponents of non-traditional approaches. It combines the joint objectives of all stakeholders in providing knowledge to improve the social situations of disadvantage and acknowledges the issues in common to practitioner-based and empirical/evidence-based approaches.

Implications of Critiques

Strengths researchers can learn from critiques of resiliency and strengths research to be cognisant of professional bias and the danger of over labelling practices as strengths approach examples. Examples of positive practice do not automatically indicate the use of a full strengths approach. Compton and Galloway (1999) claim that as well as in solution focussed models of social service, “the identification and use of strengths has always been part of the problem solving model” (p. 89). Analysing alternative possibilities and explanations for data is crucial for methodological rigour and validity. Using a Strengths Approach to research allows the researcher to include their own experiences and knowledge if contributing strengths to finding solutions. Care must be taken, however, as in resiliency research, not to equate acknowledgements of subjectivity with allowing research to be biased. Bias could occur when using a strengths approach if prejudice, unfairness, or preconceived notions of a single, correct way of viewing events constrain actions. To avoid hypocrisy the strengths researcher needs to be transparently open to multiple interpretations of data, respect the subjectivities of others and be themselves willing to change. While *subjectivity* may be used carefully as a strength, *bias* must always be questioned as a constraint in a strengths approach. Strengths teachers and researchers must recognise that in the pursuit of solutions and changes they may also experience change themselves. In an interview in 1983, Foucault candidly responded to criticisms of changing perspectives: “When people say, ‘well, you thought this a few years ago and now you say something else,’ my answer is ... [laughs] ‘well, do you think I have worked hard all those years to say the same thing and not to be changed?’” (Gauntlett, 2002, p. 252).

Regardless of perceived differences between resiliency work and strengths approaches, the similarities and opportunities for change are worthy of further investigation. Despite noting some difficulties, Glicken (2004) urges the examination and further research of the “intriguing notions of resilience and the strengths approach and links between these” (p. 87). The Strengths Approach also insists that its practitioners progress beyond the niceties of debating differences in theory, towards mutual agreements and practical strategies for helping those in social need. Indeed, the commonalities of interest and joint direction of purpose would seem reason alone to view resilience research, for example, as a complementary and valuable resource to strengths approaches.

McGrath and Noble (2003) identify many linkages with resilience and strengths work and suggest that a broader shift in thinking can entwine the two in education.

This paradigm shift is emerging in the helping professions of teaching, counselling and clinical psychology and social welfare. All these professions are using the term “resilience” and reviewing ways to adopt a strengths approach to prevention and intervention ... The new notion of resilience emphasises that we can help students to identify, develop and access protective resources to minimise the potential damage of such stressors and help them to bounce back. (p. 14)

This new notion of resilience mirrors the development of the Strengths Approach from a broad theoretical opposition to deficit approaches to refined expressions of strengths principles. Glicken (2004) adds, “over time ... resiliency research has focused less on the attributes of resilient children and more on the processes of resilience” (p. 78). Similarly, strengths practitioners find new benefit in concentrating on full strengths approaches to issues, less on individual strengths identification. Some resiliency researchers have fine-tuned resiliency constructs to stress innate factors of resiliency. Pransky (2003) argues, “there can be no greater strength than the strength that exists automatically and naturally within each and every human being” and explains this is “looking at strengths from the inside out” (p. 5). Counteracting earlier criticism that the resiliency construct ignores self-determination principles he suggests workers cannot impart resiliency on another, it comes from within the individual. This aspect of resiliency research has implications for strengths approaches. Pransky (2003) suggests concentrating on internal as well external factors is necessary when “determining resiliency and strengths” (p. 7) and acknowledges the vital role changes of thought (mind shifts) have on changing actions.

The development of resiliency work in education has extended further through to practitioner support materials to help raise resilience in children. Resources that engage children with personal safety, recognising emotions, increasing optimism and identifying strengths and emotions are common threads to both resiliency and strengths approaches. The author asserts that, opportunities to combine resiliency and strengths research and resources may contribute significantly to improving teacher confidence to protect and develop children. Of particular interest would be the possible inclusion of a resiliency acknowledgement as a foundational principle of a Strengths Approach to education. Strengths Approach practitioners may more clearly avoid using a rescuer role if they understand the resiliency capacity of each child in their care and education.

Strengths Approach to Child-Protection Teacher Education

Whilst aware of the critiques and implications using strengths approaches, the literature reviewed suggests that the use of a strengths approach across such a range of teacher-education contexts would provide an integrating framework. The use of a cyclical approach in which resources and skills are repeatedly considered, used, and promoted is integral to strengths approaches (Glicken, 2004), facilitating a depth of knowledge, richness of understanding and level of skill that more fragmented approaches and single issue use of a strengths approach militate against. Thus strengths approaches align closely with overall philosophies of education that stress that teaching entails not so much an array of discrete knowledge and skills, but a broad, complex, integrated and coherent understanding of themselves, their work, the children

they teach, and the contexts within which they work, such as that articulated by critical theorist, Giroux (1995):

We must get away from training teachers to be simply efficient technicians and practitioners. We need a new vision of what constitutes educational leadership so that we can educate teachers to think critically, locate themselves in their own histories, and exercise moral and public responsibility in their role as engaged critics and transformative intellectuals. (p. 57)

In teaching child-protection education, teacher educators need to ensure that pre-planned curriculum materials do not constrain teachers opportunities to develop as transformative educators, able to connect and promote child protection with pre-service teachers' development in other curriculum and theory areas. In line with the teacher standards for Queensland (QCT, 2007), pre-service teachers study "a range of contemporary evidence-informed theories" (p. 4) and practices across a range of curriculum areas and are encouraged to use "teaching strategies such as inquiry learning that promote the active construction of personal knowledge" (p. 5). For example, in the area of language development pre-service teachers are required to learn, through pre-service education, how "social, cultural and historical contexts influence language choice and literacy and numeracy practices" and learn how information and technology "supports, enhances, enables and transforms" (p. 4) language development. The social, cultural and historical contexts of child protection could be also be taught in pre-service teacher education with a similar focus on learning how child protection can support, enhance, enable and transform children's well-being.

The Strengths Approach offers a strong basis for approaching child protection. Czubaj found positive outcomes among parents who adopted a new "higher self" paradigm a decrease of child abuse of 65% in the home (p. 378). While requiring further scrutiny and research, these bonus findings point to the value of using self-reflection and strengths-based practice with parent and teacher child-protection projects. Czubaj (1996) concludes that "highly motivated teachers teach students to become highly motivated themselves, repeating a positive, productive cycle" (p. 379), which could in turn positively affect family relations. Using a strengths approach to teaching child protection can promote cross-disciplinary practice and partnerships with parents. In Queensland, curriculum policies used in state government funded schools, require the use of "Productive Pedagogies" that stress that "teachers learn most effectively in professional learning communities ... and there is a need to build partnerships with key stakeholders" (Queensland Government, DET, 2011a, Productive Pedagogies section, para. 1) including families and communities.

Conclusion

The literature review has shown that at the intersection of the key terms of child abuse and protection, teacher preparation and the strengths approach, there is an opportunity for new

research and solutions to better prepare teachers to protect children. The review has used a funnel approach to define and examine the issues of child abuse and the ability to protect children worldwide and locally. The research studied revealed that although early-childhood teachers are in an ideal role to identify and assist abused children they express hesitation, fear and lack confidence and competence in protecting for a number of interactive factors. Positively, research confirms that teachers operate under international, national, and state protection legislation and policies, are amongst the highest reporters of suspected abuse, and express strong commitment to child protection and well-being. The rise in child-abuse figures generally is concerning and yet juxtapositioned with the acknowledgement that greater awareness and likelihood to report abuse may be contributing to the rise in abuse statistics, some decreases are recorded, and successful prevention and intervention services are available. Concurrently, research also suggests that reported cases are a small portion of actual abuse occurrences, that reported figures are problematic due to varying definitions of abuse and legislation differences, and that many teacher notifications are not substantiated. The literature provides multiple examples of government and community organisations' child-protection initiatives, empirical evidence for the benefits of prevention and risk minimisation efforts, and highlights the benefit of cross discipline research and practice in early-childhood education and child protection.

Literature confirms the importance of the early years in children's long-term well-being and the ability of early-childhood education and protection strategies to assist children at risk of, or experiencing, child abuse. Early-childhood educators are identified as in key positions of influence in young children's lives yet report feeling under prepared for their child-protection roles. Teacher preparation programmes currently offer minimal child-protection training in Australia, typically an adjunct workshop for a few hours in a four-year teaching degree. Workshops concentrate mainly on reporting procedures although some tailored research, using extended teacher preparation models that link more closely to early-childhood curricula and pedagogy and teaching practice, are emerging. Nevertheless, literature suggests that increased preparation is required urgently to assist teachers, who are in a position to prevent, stop, limit, or assist children to whom abuse is occurring. Researchers in the last three decades have repeatedly called for enhanced child-protection preparation for teachers to assist them in this challenging task. The literature review analysed the Strengths Approach as a possible new way of approaching child-protection teacher education and revealed possible positive connections to resiliency research and cautions about bias and over-labelling of strengths approaches within literature examining successful teacher education and innovative child and family service models.

The origins and principles of the Strengths Approach arose from solutions-orientated approaches in psychology and social services. The current Australian version of the approach,

founded on principles of social justice and self-determination, uses the strengths and resources of the client to facilitate solutions to issues. The practical use of strengths resources and the step-by-step, Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) has been successful in social-service settings. McCashen acknowledges the transferability of the approach to other fields and summarises the approach:

As a philosophy, the strengths approach is not really new. But it does bring new language and new frameworks to capture those timeless and universal ideas that emerge in every age; ideas about the essence of justice and the essence of people and their possibilities. (2005, p. 187)

The review has explored the relationship of the strengths approach to existing education theories and the possibility of applying a Strengths Approach to the field of education, teacher preparation and the pressing social issue of child protection.

The following chapter (Chapter 3) examines the development and application of the Strengths Approach to research methodology. The Strengths-Approach framework designed for this research emerged from evaluating strengths principles outlined in the literature review against key education, social service, psychology and research theories for linkages and similarities that could be of guidance when researching child-protection enhancement.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY: A STRENGTHS APPROACH

This chapter considers how the research project was organised to examine an application of the Strengths Approach to pre-service teacher education in child protection. This chapter explicates how the research project was organised to best explore concepts of child protection and teaching with participants and describes the consequent challenges and opportunities that emerged. Issues with the context, site, role, and representation of the participants and researcher are examined and ethical considerations of data collection, storage, and analysis are featured. Descriptions of the qualitative data collection methods adapted to include strengths techniques and the child-protection teaching module designed, are a focus of this chapter. The advantages and challenges of applying a strengths theoretical framework, and the resources for doing so are discussed in section 1, which outlines the qualitative focus, particular context and nuances of this research project within the overall perspective of applying a strengths approach to the research process, beginning with an examination of methodological precedents. Section 2 describes the practicalities and implications of using a strengths framework in this research, in what has been termed the organisational methodology for this research.

Section 1: Research Methodology with a Strengths Theoretical Framework

Repositioning the Strengths Approach as a Research Framework

Frameworks for educational research have changed over time but a core reason for much educational research has remained constant. In 1984, Popkewitz drew “attention to the fact that investigations into educational problems are carried out by people who are seeking an understanding of those problems and who are striving to improve educational institutions and processes” (p. 10). As an identified educational problem, child abuse certainly raises complex questions and provides a legitimate need to search for understandings through research. An examination of dissatisfaction with child-protection education and pre-service teacher preparation also falls well into Popkewitz’s stated reasons for research.

The first challenge to a strengths-based approach to research is evident in Popkewitz’s (1984) definition of research as problem-based. For strengths-based research, defining the purpose of study in terms of research problems is in itself problematic. Examination of some of the “taken for granted” elements of traditional research processes is needed for the potential strengths researcher, to debate the use of a deficit focus on research problems as the basis for successful research. The notion of a research opportunity, or research issue rather than problem, perhaps more adequately sits with the principles of strength approaches. Although many university doctoral guides explain that research topic choice may be guided by personal interest, the foundational question facing most researchers is based pathologically on, “what is your problem?” or “where is the gap?” The author argues that this emphasis sets a powerful precedent for how research projects unfold. The underlying message for

researchers may be to concentrate on the negative impacts of issues or what is missing from research issues rather than what is available and working. Even if researchers assert that they are examining an affirming issue, the traditional research processes may subtly pull them to concentrate on comparisons with less affirming examples or spend time in describing the negative context to within which their research lies. For this particular research project, the negotiation of traditional research guidelines within a strengths focus has been a constant tension.

Constructing a Strengths-based Research Framework

To lay a foundation for conducting this research, the principles underlying a strengths approach are used to explore how existing research methods might need to be selected and modified to ensure that they are fully consistent with the aims and purposes of the study. Rather than articulating the strengths approach as a new theory, this research presents it as a framework for guiding not only educational practice, but also research practice by drawing on a number of compatible methodologies that support key strengths principles of social justice, collaboration and power with research participants. Existing paradigms, theories and theoretical constructs that align with principles of the strengths approach are viewed as research resources or assets rather than separate or competing theories. Amalgamating these assets enables the development of a single, composite, theoretical framework to guide research methodology that is consistent with the strengths approach. This process has similarities to the bricolage approach to qualitative research (Kincheloe, 2001, 2008). Kincheloe (2001) explains bricolage as the interdisciplinary synthesising of multiple methods and perspectives on research. He states, “bricolage is concerned not only with multiple methods of inquiry but with diverse theoretical and philosophical notions of the various elements encountered in the research act” (p. 682). Bricolage has been criticised as superficial theorising (McLeod, 2000; Palmer, 1996; Friedman, 1998) and as relying on snippets of theory that do not fully explore ontological and epistemological questions. Kincheloe (2001) retorts that, on the contrary, bricolage requires a solid theoretical understanding to be able to compare and contrast theories and develop a consistent, linked approach. This, Kincheloe claims, misunderstands bricolage, as a substitute for learning and following one form of theoretical thought, rather than an approach that recognises and engages with the strengths of various theories:

Bricoleurs recognize the limitations of a single method, the discursive strictures of one disciplinary approach, what is missed by traditional practices of validation, the historicity of certified modes of knowledge production, the inseparability of knower and known, and the complexity and heterogeneity of all human experience, they understand the necessity of new forms of rigor in the research process. (p. 681)

Kincheloe further argues that, “given the social, cultural, epistemological, and paradigmatic upheavals and alterations of the last few decades” (p. 681), a bricolage approach is not just an option of research process but a necessity if we accept, along with researchers such as Morawski (1997), that:

Any social, cultural, psychological, or pedagogical object of inquiry is inseparable from its context, the language used to describe it, its historical situatedness in a larger on-

going process, and the socially and culturally constructed interpretations of its meaning(s) as an entity in the world. (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 682)

Drawing upon varying existing theoretical constructs (as assets) that consistently aligned with a strengths approach, a strengths framework for this research was formed.

The strengths approach can be described as a contemporary, pragmatic approach with humanistic principles. The approach has emerged and coincided with many developments in “post-structuralism, postmodernism, cultural studies, and deconstruction [which] refer to a group of ideas and theories that have had a broad impact on the social sciences and humanities” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 24). A linking tenet within the strengths approach and these paradigms is acceptance that “understandings and interpretations reflect more general cultural patterns of meaning, are not fixed, but continually changing and transforming under the influence of the power of vested interests” (p. 27). Some postmodernists have taken this view much further, to suggest that perhaps reality does not exist and is purely a result of individual’s creations of realities (Farberman, 1992; Prus, 1996). However, “much postmodernist theory is not to deny the existence of reality, but to point out that reality is as much constructed in talking and writing as it is “out there” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 25) and it is with this post-modern and social constructivist perspective that strengths approaches align. McCashen (2005, p. v) explains that the strengths approach is about “sharing power and creating change”, and in parallel to postmodernist thought recognises that individual contexts are influenced by powerful social systems and beliefs within which individuals construct their opinions and interpretations. So, for example, while not denying that child abuse exists as a reality, the strengths approach stresses that individuals can choose to use a victim or survivor interpretation of this event. Furthermore, the strengths approach recognises that care, education and research systems often reinforce and impose a disempowered victim interpretation when addressing child protection.

Previous Studies: Methodological precedents

The explicit articulation or adoption of a full Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005) to an educational context has yet to be formally researched. At the time of writing, a primary study using an explicit strengths approach to research is also not available. Regardless of this, examples of combining strengths practice and research are accessible, from the research of strengths approach founders and the increasing number of organisations using strengths approaches in contemporary practice. Schott and Critchley (2004) stated that there is a need to “build a body of efficacy” (p. 24) in relation to the use of strengths approaches and state that the emphasis to date has centred on theoretical rather than empirical research. Staudt et al. (2001) noted, from the limited empirical studies of strengths approaches, that often strengths principles were not clearly defined to allow comparisons between strengths-based and other methods of social-work practice.

Green, McAllister and Tarte (2004) conducted research in the United States to ascertain if strengths-based early-childhood and family programs that “have adopted a philosophy of practice that

builds on family members' competencies, supports families to make decisions for themselves, and focuses on enhancing the strengths of families, including cultural strengths, rather than fixing deficits" (p. 326) have followed this model consistently in practice. Green et al. (2004) developed a Strengths-Based Practice Inventory of 10 principles (with five descriptors for each principle) that identified essential elements of strengths-based work in practice. The elements were placed into an inventory where participants could indicate on a scale (1-7) their agreement or disagreement that the principles were evident in the service they participated in (p. 327). The inventory was used to assess 275 clients (parents) perceptions and outcomes of the service they attended (p. 327) and to develop a clearer indication of what constituted strengths-based practice. Four factors emerged as distinct to strengths-based practice:

The extent to which staff (a) build on family strengths and skills, (b) are sensitive and responsive to parents' cultural backgrounds and beliefs, (c) are knowledgeable and sensitive to family needs, and (d) facilitate parents' relationships with other parents and community members. (Green et al., 2004, p. 333)

These factors were reported as being used consistently in the early-childhood and family-support programs studied. The four factor sub-scale was reported a "reliable and valid measure" (p. 333) for evaluation of strengths-based practice though Green et al. (2004) noted the limitations of adopting applying the inventory and sub-scale universally to other contexts or being able to assess program outcomes over time (p. 333).

Recent organisational research from Sydney Day Nursery Association investigated inclusion factors within its services using a strengths approach and feminist perspectives as a theoretical base (Wong & Cumming, 2008). Wong and Cumming's work is particularly pertinent to this thesis as they similarly explore the challenges and importance of ensuring methodological consistency with a strengths theoretical framework. They describe how strengths principles affected the way they gathered data and interacted with participants.

In recognition of the power imbalances set up by traditional approaches to research settings and participants, we placed great importance on developing reciprocal, trusting relationships over time between ourselves and participants wherever possible. (p. 36)

The importance of allowing relationship-building time appears to be an element of effective strengths-based research. Wong and Cumming adapted traditional research techniques to value strengths and self-determination principles. Interviews were viewed as "co-constructed narratives" (p. 36) and participants were given questions prior to interviews. Wong and Cumming (2008) combined qualitative and quantitative methods in their research stating that "multiple methods of data collection are essential" to aid the recognition of "multiple understandings" on issues, a foundational strengths principle (p. 36).

Foundational strengths researchers in social services and psychology have generally utilised traditional research techniques when describing applications or the effectiveness of aspects of the strengths approach. Within descriptions of their research methodology emerge methodological

tensions from using a strengths approach and attempting to meet traditional research guidelines. Seligman et al. (1995) conducted mixed method, clinical comparative trials which tested the possibility of preventing depression with children displaying depressive tendencies (the strengths-based, Penn Prevention Program). Questionnaires were given to children before and after a teaching program of twelve weeks, responses and results were gathered immediately and at six-month intervals for several years after the programme. Research findings were communicated in quantitative and qualitative terms in statistics and vignettes of individual stories in *The Optimistic Child* (1995). Seligman expressed concern about establishing a traditional methodological research control group consisting of children who (as other participants) had depressive qualities but would *not receive* the prevention programme in the control group (p. 125). Seligman et al. (1995) outlined an ethical dilemma in the research, in not offering a possibly helpful programme, that was inconsistent with the caring and solutions-focus of the strengths approach. The research team decided to offer “wait list control groups” (p. 125) meaning that they would be offered an opportunity to participate in the programme twelve months or a few years after the first group to allow comparisons. The decision was perhaps an implicit result of adopting an underlying strengths approach to the research process. Seligman also makes brief reference to one restriction emerging during the comparative study that was not resolved. Researchers were unable to have contact with the programme participants between the six-month data collection points:

It would have been nice to call the kids every once in a while to say hello and find out how they were doing. But because this was a research project designed to assess whether the twelve-week course could have lasting anti-depressive effects for the children, we knew that once the program ended, we could not treat the children who participated in the course any differently than the children who were in the control group. (Seligman et al., 1995, p. 127)

The methodological findings of recent and foundational strengths researchers presented a rationale to develop and adapt strengths research techniques for this study. Literature confirms that the strengths approach appears transferable across various sectors to address individual and community issues (Hodges & Clifton, 2004) and the author posits that this includes the issue of guiding effective educational research. McCashen (2005) claims that the Strengths Approach is a new way of addressing issues by using existing strengths available, such as well-established research methodologies to solve problems.

Methodology Choices and Implications

Burns (2000) states that “it is up to the researcher to choose specific methodologies that will enable a clear understanding of the topic to emerge” (p. 14). Kumar (2005) stresses further that “A researcher has an obligation to use appropriate methodology in conducting a study. It is unethical to use a method or procedure you know to be inappropriate” (p. 215). When determining an appropriate research methodology for this project both qualitative and quantitative methods were considered and the methodologies of previous studies examined. Qualitative research methods are primarily used in

describing the variations and differing perceptions of individuals to phenomena, whereas quantitative methods tend to focus on quantifying and generating facts about phenomena. In relation to child-protection issues, for example, the literature review revealed the ability of quantitative studies to provide up to date, large scale records of child-abuse incidences and to chart the time allocated in degree programmes to child-protection teacher education. In contrast, qualitative studies were able to examine teachers' reactions to identifying child abuse and to elucidate from their responses the barriers that teachers face when reporting child abuse. The findings from both types of research are assets to this research, valuable for giving an overarching understanding of the issue of child protection in education.

The primary aims of this research are to document and analyse a group of pre-service teacher responses and understandings of a strengths approach to child protection and to interpret their responses for any findings that may help to improve teacher education in child protection. By using a Strengths Approach teacher-education module and a Strengths Approach to research methodology, the additional purpose of the research is to explore the translation of the social service founded Strengths Approach, into an educational setting. These strengths research aims fit a little uncomfortably with a traditional, general definition of the purpose of quantitative and qualitative research as "a systematic investigation to find answers to a problem" (Burns, 2000, p. 3). The author puts forward that a systematic investigation of an issue to collaboratively find solutions, more clearly expresses the general purpose of strengths research.

Adopting a quantitative approach to this particular research project would be problematic. One implication of accepting postmodern constructs and strengths principles is the need to gather different perspectives regarding key research themes rather than searching for one truth or generalised meaning on teacher education and child protection. While a pragmatic strengths approach requires practitioners to accept shared knowledge and self-determination principles as foundational, it also encourages individuals with differing philosophical persuasions to inflect their own understandings and potential outcomes of issues. The underlying tenet of quantitative or scientific approaches, however, is "nomothetic and assumes social reality is objective and external to the individual" (Burns, 2000, p. 3) and as such is in direct opposition to the strengths principles valuing individual subjectivity.

Less problematic is the description of qualitative research given by Patton (2002), that "qualitative inquiry cultivates the most useful of all human capacities – the capacity to learn from others" (p. 1). Patton's definition links well with the emphasis on collaboration in strengths principles. There are clearly conceptual and terminology similarities in this description to capacity building approaches, a forerunner to strength approaches. Rather than seeking a definite, singular answer to the question of how to prepare teachers for protecting children, the study aims to explore "the 'multiple realities' of specific educational settings from participants' perspectives" (Burns, 2000, p. 388). Unlike the quantitative, scientific methods "employed in an attempt to establish general laws

or principles”, qualitative methods are not “concerned with the objective truth, but rather with the truth as the informant perceives it” (Burns, p. 388). These fundamental differences between quantitative and qualitative research methods made the broad choice of qualitative methodology uncomplicated. The underlying strengths approach theoretical framework and the aims of the research, align with qualitative methods more easily than quantitative. The size of the group, combined researcher and teacher role and time limitations also made it impossible to implement an objective and comparative study, large enough to produce a representative sample of pre-service teachers or statistically significant results under quantitative guidelines. Liamputtong and Ezzy’s (2005) further description of qualitative research explains that “Qualitative research aims to elicit the contextualised nature of experience and action, and attempts to generate analyses that are detailed, ‘thick’ and integrative” (p. 2). With the small cohort of the study, aiming for depth rather than quantity of responses was possible with the qualitative research guidelines.

As further reinforcement, Burns (2000) elaborates that qualitative methods provide openings for “critical inquiry and meaning in educational action” (p. 388). This action focus aligns with the strengths approach as a process for change. Study of issues must be purposeful, resist lingering in discussion and present and trial strategies to solve them. In *Action Research*, Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008) explain that the researcher and participants begin with “hopes, dreams and desires” (p. 5). A link can be seen with McCashen’s second step in the Column Approach (2005, p. 48) where strengths practitioners vision how to resolve an issue. The time limitations in this study, prevented the cyclical process of action research (Eikeland, 2006; Whyte, 1991) which requires implementing and evaluating new strategies developed during the research process. There are, nevertheless, similarities in the research aims for both strengths and action research which both focus on facilitating change as a researcher (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2008; Mac Naughton et al., 2001). In conjunction with the strengths approach, qualitative research methods focus on recognising and valuing multiple perspectives as well as emphasising multiple solutions to issues. “Qualitative research places stress on the validity of multiple meaning structures and holistic analysis, as opposed to the criteria of reliability and statistical compartmentalisation of quantitative research” (Burns, 2000, p. 11). Examining the understandings of a new approach to child protection from a single group corresponds with Burns’ descriptions of qualitative studies as “being context specific, collaborative and interventionist” (Burns, 2000, p. 12). This research project seeks to align with the “multiple understandings” strengths principle. Layers of understandings are examined by triangulated data collection (Patton, 2002, p. 48) using responses from interviews, focus groups and electronic research (eresearch) methods. Data is collected during three phases, corresponding to three different contexts within which participants were located: during the teaching module, after teaching practicum and one year after the module. Similarly, data interpretation includes contextual and thematic analysis, using findings from previous literature and the strengths five-column process (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) to assist interpretations.

While a large, long-term, comparative study with control groups is outside the scope of this thesis, the use of a single, purposive sample group provides assurance from a strengths perspective, that all participants have access to a potentially advantageous teaching module. Additionally the record of the group while contextualised (thus precluding generalisability) may provide an empirical point of reference for future evaluations if not comparisons with other programmes. By ensuring that all participants had equal opportunity to experience the module, the research aimed to meet social justice principles of the strengths approach. Despite pockets of strengths techniques being used in previous research, the aim of matching research methodology with the research topic remained challenging given the absence of an explicit and full Strengths Approach to research (MacKenzie & Knipe, 2006, pp. 193-205).

A qualitative methodology choice gives the opportunity to test rather than prove the potential of the strengths approach to child-protection education by gathering a range of confirming and disconfirming narratives to “capture lived experiences of the social world and the meanings people give these experiences from their own perspectives” (Corti & Thompson, 2004, p. 327). One implication of the aim of capturing perspectives was that the researcher would need to use a variety of data collection methods such as interviews, diagrams, and research options to give multiple opportunities for dialogue around the research themes. This idea of “data triangulation, the use of a variety of data sources in a study”, is often promoted in qualitative research as a strengthening tool as “different types of data provide cross data validity checks” (Patton, 2002, p. 48). Additionally, giving participants a choice in the way they respond or do not respond, allowed participants communication preferences to be considered. This ties in to the strengths principle of self-determination, particularly as participants in the project also determined the time, place and extent of data collection that was suitable to them.

A qualitative approach also allows (and requires) recognition of the power relationship between the researcher and participant and the possible affect this may have on the responses gathered. To do this the researcher must reflect on their own inherent bias, avoid prejudice and incorporate reflexivity into the research work. It is accepted that while objectivity is not possible in qualitative research and some would argue in any research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 43), care should still be taken that the researchers’ subjectivity does not overwhelm or disproportionately influence the research process. Ethical considerations of researcher bias and the possibility of more heightened, detrimental power imbalances with teacher-led research, made this method choice particularly sensitive. In strengths approaches, avoiding overpowering interactions and acknowledging the effects that positions of power may have on constraining responses to issues is integral (Saleebey, 2009). As with using a strengths approach in a therapeutic situation with clients, using a qualitative strengths research process requires researchers to be self-aware and to address the issue of perceived researcher bias. Research strategies were therefore needed to acknowledge, as well as to limit and reduce, the possibility of researcher bias. The author’s background, previous

experiences and knowledge of the Strengths Approach, and position as a research stakeholder in the project, was outlined to participants of the research and outlined on the research consent form. The research design was adapted to include options for anonymous and low risk responses as well as identified responses. The key teaching and separate research roles of the author were clarified to participants at the beginning of the research and moderation processes were included in the research design for monitoring both roles, including the availability of a research supervisor and teaching moderator (outlined further in section 2).

Despite the attention needed to address power imbalances, the opportunity to examine in-depth individual constructions of child protection, strengths approach and teacher education remains a key advantage of research with a single group of participants. Although findings could only be recorded and interpreted as understandings for those pre-service teachers at that time and place, they, nevertheless, would present an authentic view of pre-service teachers and would be valuable for others in similar positions. Care must be taken in a strengths approach to balance power and to find equilibrium in the strengths principle of power with. The implications of taking a power with approach include not overwhelming the research with researcher perspectives and demonstrating transparency in recording and valuing the authors of other viewpoints. This implication results from the premise that the underlying strengths approach is “an approach to people that is primarily dependent upon positive attitudes about people’s dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities” (McCashen, 2005, p. v).

Qualitative research appears a suitable research foundation for exploring human services topics such as a strengths approach to child abuse and teacher education. It allows the embrace of subjective and contextualised dialogues about abuse and prevention as well as enabling a focus on practical individualised strategies to increase teachers’ ability to protect children. The Strengths Approach, as a multi-perspective standpoint, has a social justice focus, which binds it more readily to a range of commonly used, post-positivist (Campbell & Russo, 1999) theories influencing education research such as critical theory (Kincheloe, 2008, Kincheloe and McLaren, 2000), social constructivism (Guba & Lincoln, 1990) and empowerment theories (Fetterman, 2000) all of which operate with largely qualitative foundations. Qualitative research allows small-scale research to gather in-depth responses without the larger sample often needed to infer significance and generalisability in quantitative approaches. Qualitative methodology was therefore chosen for this project, for its ability to capture the perceptions of pre-service teachers towards concepts of child abuse and protection and to generate understandings for enhancing teacher education in this area.

Section 2: Organisational Methodology

Purpose and Aims of Research

This research studies the use of a Strengths Approach in teacher preparation for child protection. The study presented an opportunity for the systematic investigation of preparing teachers to protect

children. The primary aims of this research are to document and analyse a group of pre-service teacher understandings of child abuse, a Strengths Approach, teacher education and child protection and to interpret these responses for findings and implications to enhance teacher education in child protection. An additional aim is to explore the translation and potential of the social service founded, Strengths Approach, into a tertiary educational setting. The potential of the approach is investigated by exploring literature in education and social-service fields, implementing a Strengths Approach teacher-education module and developing a Strengths Approach to educational research methodology.

The *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* (National Health and Medical Research Council [NHMRC], Australian Research Council & Australian Vice-Chancellors' Committee, 2007) states that for qualitative research:

If a sampling strategy is used, the most common type is purposive sampling, which aims at the selection of information-rich cases relevant to the research question. While random and representative sampling is not precluded in qualitative studies, many sampling frames are grounded in the specific aims of the research question. (p. 27)

This research uses purposive sampling with a small student group as the research cohort. The primary influence for the choice of purposive sample is the group appropriateness to the research aims. As a small group study, the research could be defined as a case study, “an approach to studying a social phenomenon through a thorough analysis of an individual case, group, episode, process ... unit of social life” (Kumar, 2005, p. 113). Case studies are perhaps more readily recognised though as research about an individual or specific incident, therefore the terms *small group study* is used in preference to describe the research generated from a cohort of participants. Two layers of analysis are applied in this research to study the small group as a whole (thematic analysis) and individuals within that group (contextual analysis). Kumar (2005) asserts that small group studies provide “an opportunity for the intensive analysis of many specific details often overlooked by other methods” (p. 113).

The timing, cost and location of the research project were factors to conducting the research effectively and efficiently for participants such as pre-service teachers and the researcher as a teacher/researcher. Campbell (2010) advises, “You [practitioner researcher] should state upfront in your methodology section that your respondents have been chosen on the basis of convenience or opportunity, and consequently your conclusions will be suggestive rather than definitive” (p. 399). This study excludes the majority of pre-service teachers in Australia and does not focus on part-time, distance or international students. The students in this project were internal domestic students studying by face-to-face delivery. Significantly larger samples with multiple cohorts and extended time frames would have been required to provide a representative sample of all Australian pre-service teachers studying child protection. The scope of the research project precluded representative sampling from occurring. Emphasis was placed upon examining a small group of in-depth responses to the research terms in a purposive rather than representative sample. This sampling decision drew on the recognition that “the rigour of a qualitative study should not be judged on sample size. When

sampling is appropriate, the objectives and theoretical basis of the research should determine the size of the sample and the sampling strategy (NHMRC et al., 2007).

The strengths theoretical base for the research supports the value of using a small group. In a strengths approach “noticing and measuring change are essential elements of strengths-based work” (McCashen, 2006, p. 71) and the approach is used mainly in small group (case study) situations in social-work practice. In the Strengths Approach, recording change is not reliant on specific quantities of responses or community wide consensus, but rather is measured and evaluated on the ability to create positive change individually or with a small group of stakeholders. Change that occurs in individuals, through one off events or as an exception to everyday patterns is valued as much as change occurring as a result of large scale and longitudinal studies (McCashen, 2005, p. 70). A strengths approach to research is supportive of small group and case studies, and validity is based more on the authenticity of participant responses than on the extent, frequency and generalisability of responses (Eikeland, 2006). Nevertheless, it is hoped that future studies will enable wider and more representative studies of pre-service child-protection preparation.

The cohort for the research was a small group of nineteen pre-service teachers. As context for the research, all participants were enrolled full time, in a Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) degree and completing their third year of the four-year degree programme at a single campus of a university in Queensland, Australia. As part of their third year programme, research participants were all enrolled in a 13-week, early-childhood subject offered by internal face-to-face study mode over the second semester of 2007. All students enrolled in the subject agreed to participate in the research although one participant, Participant (10) indicated that Phase 2 and 3 data collection might be difficult due to pregnancy and different practicum dates from other participants. This participant was, however, able to contribute to EVIEWS during these phases.

Participants were not selected to represent a particular demographic group other than the enrolled students in the early-childhood subject outlined above. Issues of gender balance, age, cultural and social background were not identified as main research themes to be studied in relation to the research question; however, where they arise in the data collected, these issues are explored. Although the participants in this research were neither required to, nor did they, supply any demographic data prior to the research commencement, some factors were, nevertheless, identifiable by default from the demographic group of Australian early-childhood education students from which the cohort was purposefully drawn. For example, to participate in this Australian teaching degree, all students were required to have a High School standard of education with literacy skills applicable to university entry (completed year 12 or had appropriate other tertiary education to similar standard or above). The socio-economic status of the participants was mixed, with a high proportion of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. As domestic students in an undergraduate degree course, all participants were eligible to defer their payment of university fees via an Australian government-

funded study loan repayable through the tax system. In the responses, some participants indicated that they undertook part-time work in childcare services or education-related organisations to support their studies but specific details were not recorded within the scope of this research. As Australian citizens, all participants at the time of the research lived in a relatively affluent and politically stable country compared to the other 192 countries listed by the United Nations (Woolwine-Moen Group, 2011). For example, Australia is determined as the eighteenth wealthiest country in the world as determined by Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (CountryReports, 2011, Australia section). The Australian Trade Commission (2011) promotes “Australia [as] one of the best places in the world to live while you learn. The standard of living is amongst the highest in the world, yet costs remain competitive” (Why study section, para. 5). While student unions argue that further improvements are needed to improve student conditions within Australia (National Union of Students, 2010), on a worldwide scale, the students in this research were studying under state and national policies that supported and promoted their right to tertiary education, ethical treatment and freedom of speech (Higher Education Support Act 2003, 2010). To the author’s knowledge, the individual participant comments in this study were not forced, changed or censored by government, political or university personnel and participation in the research was not mandated to ensure continuing enrolment or to receive payment.

The Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) reported in 2005 that “over recent years, between 9,000 and 11,000 students have completed undergraduate initial teaching education” with early-childhood students forming fewer than 2,000 of this number (as cited in Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 6). In 2009, the Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations reported that “2,481 applicants were offered a place in an early-childhood education course” (p. 48). Changes in the 2008-2009 budget allowed for “an additional 500 university places for early-childhood teachers starting in 2009 and rising to 1500 places in 2011” (p. 48). The small group of participants in the research formed part of a significant and growing sector of early-childhood education students nationally and when qualified as teachers, they joined an even larger “community of practice” (Wenger, 1998).

All participants, as student teachers, were required to have a satisfactory criminal history check confirming they had no previous criminal record (including child protection and crimes against children). All participants were also required to and had successfully completed initial introductory practicums before commencing the subject and all had the current *Working with Children* card required by the Queensland Government, Department of Education and Training (2011a) and Queensland Government, Department of Communities (2011) confirming that individual police checks were satisfactory. Further existing demographic data, such as identified gender and age indicators, was known from general student enrolment details available to the lecturer/researcher with the approval of the participants.

Statistically and historically, early-childhood education groups are likely to be dominated by females rather than male students (Brennan, 1998). The cohort included one participant who

identified as male, Participant (17) and the remaining eighteen people in the group identified as female. This ratio is reflective of the disproportionate gender weighting towards females enrolled in early-childhood-education teaching-degrees across Australia (Connell et al., 2010). None of the participants identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander background in their student enrolment although Participant (15) indicated through informal conversation that they were unsure of their family background. The disproportionate weighting towards non-Indigenous students within the group is consistent with enrolments in previous offerings. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) data indicate that fewer than 4 percent of the population from Queensland and an average of 2.5 percent Australia-wide, identifies as being of Indigenous background (Main Features section, para. 1). The age of participants was not recorded for the research, however, responses from face-to-face participation, which include prior work experiences, time since completing school or age of family members indicate that five students from the group could be classified as mature-aged students. In most Australian universities, mature age is generally classified as over 21 years of age or as commencing university one or two years after completing high school. Mature students under this description (Participants (1), (15), (16), (17) and (19)) constituted approximately thirty percent of the cohort with the remaining seventy percent being students between 19 and 21 years of age who commenced university immediately after completing high school. This mature to non-mature student ratio was again consistent with enrolments across the university in all faculties. The participant identifying as male and the participant of unknown family background (Participants (17) and (15) respectively), were also mature age students.

The Curriculum Subject as the Research site

The subject the participants completed was structured within the degree programme prior to blocks of final practicum placement (spanning third and fourth years) and was a core subject, necessary for graduation (although exemption from the subject was available for some students dependant on their relevant previous childcare studies). The subject incorporated studying early-childhood services and ethical issues incorporated with the care and education of young children. Subject delivery was by interactive lectures, tutorials and a subject website with electronic discussion board facilities which were used during the semester. The topic of child protection was identified in the university subject handbook as one of the key elements to be covered in this subject, in both previous offerings and the research offering.

This subject was chosen as an appropriate site in which to integrate a strengths-based child-protection education module. The subject was chosen for module integration both for its content alignments with the research terms and for the opportunity it presented to the teacher/researcher to access relevant research participants. The author had been the subject lecturer for previous offerings of the subject and was responsible for developing the delivery methods for the nominated topics which were set by the university academic board. In previous offerings of the subject, child-

protection training had been delivered as a single session within one of the lectures either by the author or by a Queensland Department of Communities representative. Researcher insider knowledge is discussed in a separate section (below). Previous child-protection sessions had focused largely on child-abuse identification and mandatory reporting. Student feedback from previous child-protection offerings indicated concerns with their preparation for child protection. The lack of confidence in addressing child-protection issues as expressed by previous students completing the subject was one of the catalysts for the development of the research. Student feedback had prompted the author as the lecturer to redesign and, as researcher, to study a new way of teaching child protection with future students completing the subject.

The involvement of primary stakeholders in studying change aligns clearly with Strengths principles of self-determination and transparency (Saleebey, 2009) and made the subject the most appropriate site from which to draw research participants. Kumar (2005) argues that case study research “rests on the assumption that the case being studied is typical of cases of a certain type so that, through intensive analysis, generalisations may be made that will be applicable to other cases of the same type” (p. 113). There may be some grounds for suggesting that the research group was a somewhat typical early-childhood pre-service group and that the findings may be applicable in some other contexts. Many universities have early-childhood programmes for student groups of a similar size to the research cohort, either in face-to-face delivery or via distance mode (Watson & Axford, 2008). Some universities in Australia, however, have much larger cohorts of internal and external students studying early childhood than the research cohort; groups of over four hundred internal students and one thousand students studying by distance are not unusual. In contrast, other universities either do not offer teaching degrees or do not offer early-childhood education as a distinct offering and for both of these contexts the research findings may be far less applicable. The group of pre-service teachers in the research cohort were atypical of student groups studying the subject in previous years at that particular university and may in this way meet Kumar’s criteria for informing future offerings of child-protection preparation in that particular context. Previous subject groups had sometimes been a little larger (approximately 25 to 30 per group). Lower student enrolments in the cohort in 2007 appear to have been part of a general downturn in education degree enrolments and influenced by the newly introduced credit exemptions given to potential students with previous post-secondary childcare qualifications. Given the exemption of some potential students from the subject, the implications of research may therefore, be useful for childcare preparation as well as teacher preparation to ensure consistency for both sectors and to assist those who transfer and are qualified to work across the two areas.

The Child-Protection Education Module

An integrated module of teaching and learning about child protection was especially designed for this research by the researcher and implemented within the subject, across the full university semester of

thirteen weeks (Appendix A). The integrated module was a semester long study unit that explicitly identified and linked strengths-based, child-protection content to the other topics in the subject. The module was developed with reference to best practice principles for tertiary education (Education Services Australia, 2011). Biggs and Tang (2007) discuss effective teaching and learning at university suggesting that there are characteristics common to rich teaching and learning contexts:

- An appropriate motivational context;
- A well-structured knowledge base;
- Relevant learner activity;
- Formative feedback; and
- Reflective practice and self-monitoring. (p. 92)

These characteristics assisted in designing the module. By integrating child protection with a range of care and education topics that students may encounter in their teaching careers, the module content was developed to link motivation for child protection with the participants' core preparation and motivation to become a teacher. In contrast to the more usual "early childhood programs [*that*] are more likely to allocate 1-4 hours to child protection content" in workshop form (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 35), the integrated module structured content to be introduced cumulatively across thirteen weeks. While adjunct workshops generally are lectures or presentations, learner activity in this integrated module was varied, practical and interactive using role-modelling activities relevant for participants' future work with children. Adjunct workshops may allow brief questions or lecturer feedback, whilst the integrated module allows more time to incorporate mentoring, evaluating scenarios and extended peer and lecturer formative feedback throughout the semester (McCallum, 2003). The time allowed for critical reflection, "meaningful changes" and self-monitoring, which was a crucial element of the recommended integrated model (Goldenberg & Gallimore, 1991), is not generally available in one-off workshops.

The integrated module design built on the strengths of both dedicated and necessary child-protection content included in adjunct workshops and the availability within core education subjects of extended study periods giving the ability to link to other topics. The module format utilised and extended the time usually allocated for a child-protection workshops of 1-7 hours (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 34) allowing additions to the content design. Arnold and Maio-Taddeo (2007) record that "discrete" child-protection workshops usually take the form of "identification and response [content] rather than any educational issues related to working with children at risk because of abuse or neglect" (p. 34). The extended timeframe of the integrated module allowed for discussion of child-protection issues to be included in the content of the module. Often, traditional adjunct workshops are presented outside of regular teaching degree subjects, requiring extra effort for students to attend, and are linked to compulsory requirements for completing practicum subjects. The adjunct nature of traditional child-protection workshops may be positively interpreted as indicating child protection is especially important to require a separate teaching event especially as linked to the important milestone of teaching practicum. The brief compulsory nature of the event compared to

subject length studies, however, may unnecessarily heighten pre-service teachers' anxiety around child protection, particularly if they wish to follow up on ideas raised from the workshop content. Combining reporting information and issues based learning within a core (compulsory) subject connected to practicum may give the similar assurance for teacher educators as the adjunct workshop that reporting procedures have been covered within the degree and greater opportunities to follow up student queries. Additionally, as a module format of child protection is integrated within rather than separate from other areas of study, students and teacher educators may have more opportunities to connect child protection with other teaching issues more readily. The Australian *Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education, National Program Standards* states that "program structures must be sequenced coherently to reflect effective connections between theory and practice" (Education Services Australia, 2011, p. 13).

The integrated module designed for this research was distinct from the adjunct workshop and from what Hodgkinson and Baginsky (2000) labelled as the *permeation model*. The permeation model refers to an approach in which child-protection content is included in core curriculum subjects though not explicitly articulated or delivered as a discrete course of child protection (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 8). Permeation models of child-protection preparation may include useful information and discussion about child protection as the issue is raised at opportune times during teacher-education subjects. It may, however, be difficult for both students and educators to clearly identify, as well as accurately estimate, the amount and consistency of child-protection coverage when using permeation models. The extended timeframe of the integrated module allowed a mapped, semi-structured format with discrete protection subject matter apportioned to set timeframes *and* allowed flexible time for discussion of child-protection issues alongside other curriculum issues as they arose during the semester. Drawing on the strengths of adjunct workshops, the integrated module included clearly delineated mandatory reporting content which was purposively recorded and mapped for teacher educators' and students' records. Similarly, drawing on the strengths of permeation models, the integrated module was flexible to allow impromptu teaching moments for students and teachers to discuss and raise questions on child-protection issues that could be personalised and contextualised in relation to other subject content.

Strengths Approach principles were foundational to the module development, along with literature findings relating to child protection and teacher education. The Strengths Approach, as a theoretical framework for teaching and addressing child protection, was explained gradually over the course of the module. *The Strengths Approach* by McCashen (2005) was used as a recommended text for the module, which included exploration and practice using the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) to address education based, child-protection scenarios.

The module was placed in a subject that included interactive teaching, a mixture of whole group formal lectures, individual and group tutorials, mentoring workshop sessions, subject web site and discussion board facility, which were all supported with texts and readings. As part of their

participation in the subject, students kept a portfolio of subject materials and many kept a personal journal in which they made at least one entry each week. Face-to-face lectures for the subject generally lasted for two hours, tutorials for one hour and workshop sessions (a combination of both) lasted up to three hours. While the total contact time was thirty nine hours for the subject during the semester, it was an expectation that students would spend up to a further seven hours on independent study per week on the subject (130 hours for the subject in total). It is difficult to determine exactly the amount of time spent on specific module content due to the integrated nature of content, and its overlap with other topics and the combined presentation mode. As an estimation, at least eleven hours of relevant material to child protection and the use of a strengths approach can be identified within the module breakdown (Appendix A). The module breakdown clearly identifies how child-protection discrete content is integrated and explicitly linked to other early-childhood curriculum content in the subject. The time received for child-protection preparation by the participants in this study contrasts strongly with reports from Arnold and Maio-Taddeo, (2007) that “over 70 per cent of potential teacher education graduates do not engage in any discrete learning about child protection” (p. 35) and that “over half of the teacher education programmes surveyed ... did not offer any integrated child protection content” (pp. 35-41). Additionally, programmes offering permeation models of child protection reported difficulties in accurately estimating the time covered on child-protection content as many of the integrated child-protection issues taught in this model were not mapped or linked to curriculum hours within teaching degrees (p. 44).

In the module for this research, at least half an hour each week, from week 2, could be identified as explicit content relating to key research terms (6 hours). In addition, week 1 included a longer introductory strengths session (1 hour), week 7 included a practical tutorial incorporating the Strengths Approach (1 hour) and week 8 included a workshop session covering child-protection theory and strategies (3 hours). The participants’ child-protection-related journal entries, discussion board posts, readings and time devoted to addressing scenarios were also evidence that significant child-protection study work was completed by participants outside of the identified eleven hours from within the subject. Though difficult to quantify precisely, it would be realistic to conclude that over the semester students, on average, engaged in at least twelve hours of discrete child protection and strengths content compared with the two to four hours in a traditional adjunct child-protection workshop. Due to the module’s integrated nature, the child-protection content also contained information relevant to the historical and contemporary development of children’s services, philosophies of education and preparation for practice. For example, formal presentations outlined child-abuse and protection history and the role of the teacher alongside the historical development and philanthropy elements of children’s services.

The Strengths Approach was introduced to students gradually, in parallel with introducing theories of education, from initial brief definitions and history of the approach to more careful examination of the strengths text focussing on underlying principles. Across the semester, students

moved from early relationship building sessions where the lecturer role modelled strengths approaches (McCallum, 2003) for use with children, to practical sessions where students identified their own strengths (Saleebey, 2009) and philosophies for teaching. From a strengths perspective, the possible overlapping of content did not diminish the time spent on child-protection content in the module but value-added to other necessary teacher-education components in the subject. Regardless of problems with estimating the exact time participants spent studying child protection whilst completing the module, it can be claimed with certainty that the nineteen participants in this study were in a minority group of Australian pre-service teachers nearing graduation. At the time of the cohorts graduation, when it was anticipated that the highest number of teacher-education students ever would graduate, that is 14,500 across Australia, a mere 1200 students would have experienced one day or less of dedicated teaching of child protection content (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. iv). In addition, “only 850 students [would] have experienced more than 8 hours of discrete child-protection instruction. With regard to the remaining 12,450 graduates, the exposure to dedicated and discrete learning related to child protection issues is unknown” (p. iv).

In early module weeks, students explored key education theorists and investigated the historical and changing roles of teachers, children, women and parents in theories (Brennan, 1998). The influence of power in the care and education of children was explored and linked to the misuse of power in child-abuse and empowerment principles in contemporary education and social-work theories such as the Strengths Approach (Arthur et al., 2008; McCashen, 2005). The statistics, indicators and signs of abuse were then outlined and legislative reporting and policy reporting requirements were explained. These module inclusions represented the common and main features of most adjunct child-protection training formats (Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011c). The decision to retain and integrate this content element of adjunct workshops at this point in the module was made with the recognition of the need in strengths approaches to acknowledge and build on existing research and knowledge rather than dismiss it for the sake of change (Saleebey, 2009). The adjunct workshop inclusions were not the primary emphasis of the strengths child-protection module but were presented as resources for child protection to help identify suspected abuse and give the pre-service teachers clear advice and skills on the legal protocols and organisational processes to follow (QCEC, 2008; Watts, 1997). These inclusions recognised criticisms of integrated programmes excluding legislative child-protection elements in favour of more generic protection content merged into broad discussions of childcare and education. Hodgkinson and Baginsky (2000) claim that generic content places students at risk, as it lacks emphasis on the commitment they “need to make to child protection” (p. 279). Hodgkinson and Baginsky argue that under such programmes “graduates entering the teaching profession were unskilled and unprepared” (p. 279).

Regardless of the de-emphasis, the adjunct content remained a crucial part of the strengths child-protection module design. Legislative content was included and valued although reframed and sandwiched with other supporting material. For example, information from community, non-profit,

non-government child-protection agencies or academics was given alongside the more formal quantitative statistics informing of the incidences of child abuse from government records (AIHW, 2007; ACT, 2008; NAPCAN, 2010, 2011; Scott & O'Neil, 2003; Beilharz, 2002; McCashen, 2005). Community information included resources such as child and teacher help lines, websites, information kits, story books, DVD's and resiliency programmes that may be used to teach protective behaviour or to help children in need of protection (Briggs & McVeity, 2000; Furman, 2007; Masman, 2007; McGrath & Noble, 2003). Students explored available resources such as computer programmes and a variety of personal safety programmes being used in schools and were encouraged to share with each other the resources that they had accessed and found useful. Baginsky and Macpherson (2005) argue that students require preparation for how to communicate and guide children who may be at risk or are experiencing child abuse as well as teaching the effects of abuse.

The traditional, adjunct content was included at the beginning of the module along with information on community resources, and both content materials were placed here to align with the first-column step of exploring the issue of child abuse from multiple perspectives (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). The community resources added different perspectives on child protection, as well as being other sources of support for providing solutions to child-protection issues (as related also to column 4 - additional resources). The combined material gave important information from the perspectives of governments and employers as well as community practitioners and teachers. The cohort was encouraged to use the online discussion board or place a journal entry in their subject portfolio regarding their own perspectives, resources, stories and strategies on child protection, to add to the formal subject materials.

In later weeks, child-abuse and protection literature was revisited and discussed alongside other contemporary issues affecting education, such as divorce and bullying. Discussion prompts included the researcher's and participants' experiences (de-identified) as well as real life scenarios from community organisations (ACT, 2008; McCallum, 2003). Practical small group sessions explored cohort perspectives and understandings of child abuse and protection followed by individual practise applying the Column Approach to complex scenarios of child protection. Scenarios were debriefed and opportunities were given for students to compare approaches. To assist with visioning and planning for positive outcomes (column 2) students were introduced to Strengths Approach resources, including journaling tools and *The Scaling Kit* (Masman, 2007). Scale templates can be used to record the progression of solving issues or in order to set goals and aims. The kit includes pictorial templates, such as a ladder or a thermometer outline, where participants can mark their confidence levels on the scales (Appendix B). An increase in confidence, for instance, can be recorded as a rise in temperature on the thermometer scale or as climbing another rung on the ladder diagram. In addressing the scenarios presented, students were encouraged to use the step-by-step Column Approach to work towards possible solutions for the scenario and to use the picture templates from the Scaling Kit to indicate how confident they felt with the issue.

The scaling template could also be used to reflect on what steps may need be taken to reach the top of the scale which represents a solution to the issue. The cohort was encouraged to do this orally in discussion, in written responses to set scenarios, and through online discussions. A range of resources assisted students to understand the Column Approach. Strengths-based picture prompt cards, stickers, journaling tools, children's storybooks and adult reference books were used. For example, the use of *The Bear Cards* (Veeken, 1997) and *The Strengths Cards* (Veeken, 1999) were modelled. These cards feature brightly coloured, cartoon like characters that have a wide variety of expressions. The cards are used in therapeutic situations to encourage children to think about feelings and emotions that are being expressed as well as to identify different strengths being exhibited. The cards help children to identify their own feelings, emotions and strengths with the aim of raising self-awareness, self-esteem where appropriate and resilience to assist in problem solving. Participants were shown practically, for instance, how children can be encouraged through games to explore pictures of bears and articulate a variety of emotions that were displayed such as fear or anxiety. Conversely, the strengths cards were used to demonstrate in pictures how strengths such as kindness or curiosity might be demonstrated by certain actions. Advice on the use of the commercially available strengths resources was given to participants during the module, as well as guidance on how to make their own strengths resources such as flash cards using photographs from magazines.

The strengths resources were used during the module to demonstrate their use in teaching assertive, protective behaviours to children. Children may be encouraged to increase their emotional language, to be able to identify the difference between feeling angry and hurt and to be able to articulate what makes them scared, shy or anxious, for example, in relation to their own bodies. Moving children beyond the limited expressions of happy, sad and angry appears vital if teachers are to build up a full picture of each child. Briggs and McVeity (2000) acknowledged the need for children to be able to clearly articulate to their teachers changes in their own well-being and safety. Knowing a child's expressions may help teachers to recognise crucial signs indicating that children are at risk or experiencing abuse. The author proffers that children who have explored a variety of expressions and feelings may start to build a trusting relationship with their teachers and have the emotional language tools to speak knowledgeably about themselves. Child-focussed resources that are user friendly, with open-ended use, underline the Strengths Approach belief that tools for change should be accessible to all literacy levels and allow input from adults and children on issues.

As the module progresses, participants were taught that behind the seemingly simplistic resources is the assertion that it is crucial to hear and value the perspectives of children. Child appropriate resources were presented, not as an addition to child-protection talks with children, but as a vital starter for exploring, recording and using the strengths of children when addressing child-protection issues. More than just a set of stickers and cards, such resources were important prompts that promoted engagement with the approach that was inclusive and personalised. Observations, anecdotal records, artwork samples and conversations arising from using such resources may

consequently become important as child-protection tools for practising teachers. These formats are importantly familiar and comfortable for teachers as they use them for other records of child development (Berk, 2009). The module covered advice for writing detailed child-protection observations. Participants were shown how to avoid misinterpretation and making assumptions when observing children. The participants' previous knowledge of developmental observations was built on and it was emphasised that for child-protection observations it is especially important not to make judgemental statements in observations as this may make the documentation inadmissible as evidence for child-abuse cases. While the child-protection information contained in the records may be different from other developmental records, the familiarity with the methods is likely to aid teacher confidence.

In week seven of the module, the pre-service teachers use the *Strengths Cards* and stickers (Veeken, 1997, 1999) to identify their own strengths verbally and in a poster format. The cards give pictures and words as examples to express the myriad of different personal strengths that individuals may possess such as being hardworking, creative, enthusiastic, careful and helpful. After becoming familiar with a range of strengths and reflecting on their own characteristics, the participants drew a poster to express their own strengths (column 3, identification of strengths). Participants discussed their strengths with a partner and learnt how strengths can be added to the column process when addressing issues. The process was debriefed to demonstrate how the resources can be used with children to help them identify their own strengths and raise self-awareness, self-esteem and resilience.

A main point of difference between this module and the more traditional, adjunct workshop was the inclusion of many child-protection strategies for working with children (column 5). Strategies to help raise resilience and self-esteem by the identification and use of teacher and child strengths were introduced. The use of stories, music, art and drama were demonstrated in the module as ways of encouraging children to express emotions and feelings and to help with the identification of issues. Pre-existing evidence-based resources, which aligned with strengths principles, were introduced in an effort to combine with rather than replace other useful programmes. For example, *Bounce Back – A Classroom Resiliency Program* (McGrath & Noble, 2003) was shown to students during the module. The programme includes detailed individual and group strategies for managing bullying and measuring resilience with children with easy to follow teaching experiences and photocopiable activities. Pre-service teachers listened to a range of stories, viewed websites and DVDs written for children by child-protection agencies (for example ACT, 2009; NAPCAN, 2010, 2011) and discussed their use in the classroom. Dolls, puppets and picture prompt cards were demonstrated to model identifying expressions, role-play situations and examine personal strengths with children. In the final weeks of the module, students incorporated these and their own strategies into column plans and responded to child-protection scenarios. Although students kept reflections during the module, the final week also included time for summary evaluation. Students were asked to comment on the content and implementation of the module and gave ideas for changes and

improvements. The evaluation inclusion reflected the Strengths Approach focus on documenting positive change.

Ethical Considerations

Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) state that when “social researchers ... undertake research on topics that are sensitive”, extra care must be taken when researching the “vulnerable” (2005, p. 203). Renzetti and Lee (1993) explain sensitive research is research concerned with behaviour that is “intimate, discreditable, or incriminating” (p. ix). The child-abuse and child-protection issues raised in the research and module are considered as sensitive issues (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Briggs & McVeity, 2000; Scott & O’Neil, 2003). Briggs and Hawkins (1997) elaborate that this sensitivity is compounded, since many entering caring professions such as teaching and nursing may have experienced child abuse themselves, as a disproportionately higher representation of those abused are in these career groups than in the general community. Recognising this, the research question parameters for this project were carefully set: “Participants will be asked to reflect on their knowledge of child abuse, child-protection factors and their own ability to teach this curriculum area; they will not be asked questions in relation to their own or their [*own*] children’s experiences of child abuse” (Appendix C). Definitions of terms such as child protection, child abuse and protective behaviours were clarified with participants before the data collection phases, in order to prevent misinterpretation about the type of information to be collected. Questions and prompts were phrased non-intrusively, to maintain the focus on child-protection preparation and teaching enhancement rather than on personal disclosure of child abuse. For example, participants were asked to talk about being prepared to address child-protection issues with children rather than being asked if they had experienced child abuse.

Despite the precautions listed above, it was acknowledged that discussing child-protection issues, even in relation to teaching or in general terms, might still evoke deep-seated, personal responses to the research themes. The NHMRC et al. (2007) state that “qualitative research that explores sensitive topics in-depth may involve emotional and other risks to both participant and researcher. There should be clear protocols for dealing with the distress that might be experienced by participants” (p. 28). Participants were informed of and had access to local and free counselling services should the process of participating in the research raise personal issues that caused them distress. One counselling service was located on the university campus and was regularly used by students for study-based counselling; another was a free anonymous helpline. Counselling services specialising in child-protection issues were available. The research was anticipated to have no (or insignificant) risk of psychological distress or physical discomfort for participants. The author was prepared to terminate data collection and to refer participants to specialist services if any participants indicated or demonstrated distress. All participants were reminded that the process of data collection sessions could be suspended if necessary and reconvened later with those who wished to do so.

Additionally, debriefing with the researcher was an available follow-up option for any participants experiencing or witnessing distress. However, suspension of data collection did not occur and no participants indicated the need for counselling services directly to the researcher. While participants did not indicate or demonstrate distress during the project, a few participant responses referred to previous personal events or reactions to child abuse and expressed verbally that there was discomfort with these issues at the time.

Given that the Strengths Approach places emphasis on acknowledging and reducing power imbalances, it could be argued that teacher researchers are in particularly powerful roles and that they should take unobtrusive and uninvolved roles when gathering data. In traditional scientific research methods, limiting interactions between the researcher and the research participants is considered necessary to achieve the goal of researcher objectivity (Burns, 2000). This approach, however, clashes with the communication-rich work of teachers and students (the site for this research) and strengths work that emphasises the need for close community involvement. Acknowledging researcher subjectivity is aligned with the quest for collaborative solutions, storytelling and relationship building that is integral to the Strengths Approach (Beilharz, 2002). The author's interest in improving child protection intertwined with her previous roles as both a teacher educator and researcher. Aspects of the author's and participants' subjectivities, including our prior knowledge and experiences of child protection, were included as they arose in discussions in the early weeks of the module. As joint stakeholders, personalised input was included rather than restricted as outside of the module schedule. The inclusion of some aspects of researcher subjectivity in the research is supported by qualitative researchers who challenge the dominance and status of objectivity as primary indicators of valid research. As Patton (2002) explains, "that kind of detachment [*objectivity*] can limit one's openness to and understanding of the very nature of what one is studying, especially where meaning-making and emotion are part of the phenomenon" (p. 48). He argues that "getting close to subject matter, including using own experiences ... illustrates the all-encompassing and ultimately personal nature of in-depth qualitative inquiry" (Patton, 2002, p. 47). The NHMRC et al. (2007) state that,

Qualitative research may involve methods of data collection that require the development of personal relationships with participants. Researchers should reflect on the impact that they may have on the participants and vice versa, and as far as possible should describe in the research proposal any anticipated impact of this nature. (p. 28)

It was crucial for the author to acknowledge and minimise any possible power imbalances in the research. Acknowledgement was balanced by the belief that researchers can be involved and form respectful relationships which facilitate collaborative solutions to the research issues with participants. It is also important for strengths researchers to remember that the caution in traditional research methods of separating researcher and participant roles has positive roots in aiming to reduce potential harm to research participants. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008) explain that "an ethical researcher ensures that in their project, the advantages and benefits of being a research subject outweigh any

disadvantages or risks” (p. 80). Indeed, due to the emphasis in the Strengths Approach of self-determination and empowerment principles, strengths researchers need to evaluate thoroughly their role in research projects. Strengths researchers not only need to describe possible inequalities within the research project, but also broker solutions to these with the stakeholders involved.

The author had taught the research participants (the same group of students) previously, in a professional role as a teacher educator. There had been no altercations or incidences with the student group and all of the students had successfully completed the previous subject. For example, there had been no appeals of grades, student awards given or feedback regarding negative lecturer or student performance. The student feedback from the previous subject taught had been positive. The author was not related to or a friend of any of the participants but would describe interactions with the cohort at the commencement and throughout the research, as trusting, professional and friendly. University guidelines, the *Early Childhood Australia Code of Ethics* (Early Childhood Australia, 2006), and the *Professional Standards for Queensland Teachers* (Queensland College of Teachers, 2006) were used as aspirational guides. No private relationships existed or developed between the author and students that could be classified as a conflict of interest, causing prejudice, advantage or disadvantage to any student. In Phase 1, careful consideration was needed to acknowledge the impact of the author’s role as lecturer and assessor, and how this may negatively or positively affect the welfare of the participants and the responses given to the research. Requests for data were separated clearly from the subject teaching and assessment tasks correspondence and suitable times were negotiated with participants for data collection. For example, data collection sessions did not clash with assessment task submission times or unduly limit study preparation time. Data analysis with de-identified data began after the subject results were submitted. In Phase 3, EView prompts and the participant responses were more personalised than in previous phases of the research. They were still professional though more collegial. Other strategies employed to maintain professional integrity in the research are examined in the informed consent section (below).

Patton (2002) alerts qualitative researchers to the option of aiming for neutrality in research.

He claims:

The neutral investigator enters the research arena with no axe to grind, no theory to prove (to test but not to prove) and no predetermined results to support. Rather the investigator’s commitment is to understand the world as it unfolds, be true to complexities and multiple perspectives as they emerge, and be balanced in reporting both confirmatory and disconfirming evidence with regard to any conclusions offered. (p. 51)

This definition of researcher appears both conducive to a general strengths approach and appealing for this research but due to the additional ethical considerations of teacher led research, perhaps a difficult position to achieve. Graziano and Raulin (1993) list potential conflict of interest risks in education research where researchers are closely involved with participants rather than detached. The risks for this research include participants’ perceptions of preferential or detrimental treatment from the researcher for either participating or not participating in the research. Additionally, there was risk that

participants may perceive researcher bias, for or against, the use of the Strengths Approach and therefore adjust their responses to seek favour with the researcher.

Researcher, Insider Knowledge

Kumar (2005) explains to new researchers that practitioner research is:

More than a set of skills, research is a way of thinking: examining critically the various aspects of your day-to-day professional work; understanding and formulating guiding principles that govern a particular procedure; and developing and testing new theories for the enhancement of your practice. (p. 2)

Researchers often base their research on their professional work and on their own “insider knowledge” (Burns, 2000, p. 17). Care must be taken to ensure this knowledge does not act as a bias, causing researchers to make assumptions, miss new perspectives or skew findings because of previous experience with the issues being studied (Burns, 2000). Regardless of limiting ethical considerations, insider knowledge can be beneficial in contributing to the maintenance of research momentum and aiding participants with a researcher who is knowledgeable of the study context. In a Strengths Approach to research, transparency in the use of researcher insider knowledge is crucial to developing trust and respect between participants, researcher, and research audience rather than holding power over them. As a pioneer strengths researcher and writer, Saleebey (2009, p. xiii) promotes the value of the metaphorical “alternative language” a strengths perspective can supply in allowing individuals to “talk back” to “dominant discourses” relating that:

I find it heartening to hear stories of students for whom the language of strengths provides a context from which they can question policies and practices and generate new, constructive possibilities for working with people (p. xiii)

In this research, comments that originate from the author as the researcher are identified and as such, the individual interpretations of the author are presented. Saleebey (2009) warns that “our voices may need to be quieted so that we can give voice to our clients. Comfortably ensconced in the expert role, sometimes we may have great difficulty assuming such a conjoint posture” (p. 14). Wolcott (1990) advises qualitative researchers that “the more critical the observer’s role and subjective assessment, the more important to have that role and presence acknowledged in the reporting” (p. 19). Additional risk minimisation and safety precautions were taken as the author occupied the dual role of teacher and researcher. The author’s background and connection with the research topic were explained to potential participants verbally and in an information letter from the Faculty Dean of Research. “Xxx [lecturer] has extensive experience and a long-standing interest in the area of child-protection education and, as you know, Xxx is currently lecturing in the Xxx Early-childhood education programme, in subjects which involve issues of child-protection and child-protection education” (Appendix C). The author’s insider perspective emerged from work as a classroom teacher and director of early-childhood services for eleven years before becoming a teacher educator. In a parallel to her work as a teacher educator role for the previous nine years, the author worked as a project officer for two Queensland social-service organisations with Indigenous communities and was

introduced to the Strengths Approach at this time. Kumar (2005) asserts that research “is a habit of questioning what you do, and a systematic examination of the observed information to find answers, with a view to instituting appropriate changes for a more effective professional service” (p. 2). This view of research sits well with using the Strengths Approach as a focus for change (McCashen, 2005). Kumar (2005) tempers the assurance of research needing to be relevant “to you as a professional” (p. 44) with a warning for researchers to be aware of their level of interest compared with the magnitude of the study. Researchers, regardless of their interest, must be able to measure the concepts they have chosen, have available data, and a level of expertise as well as being aware of ethical issues.

Ethical Clearance

In consultation with the university Head of School of Education and Academic Board representative, it was approved that the topic of child protection could be taught during the 2007 subject offering, by using an integrated strengths-based child-protection module. Permission was granted to apply for ethical clearance to research concurrently the module implementation and pre-service teachers’ responses to research themes of child abuse, child protection, teacher preparation and the strengths approach, during and after the subject. In the ethical clearance application, guidelines and limitations were defined regarding the timeframes, questions and prompts for data collection given the sensitivity of child abuse and child protection as an issue. Based on the full description of procedures and ethical considerations, the University Human Ethics Committee, approved and classified the research as Category 1 of experimental categories: “Research or teaching projects with no, or insignificant, psychological distress or physical discomfort. No deception involved and no invasion of privacy ... [using] Non-intrusive ... development, learning, teaching processes” (Appendix D). Data collection commenced and was finalised within the ethics clearance period.

All pre-service teachers enrolled in the subject campus offering were invited to be research participants after attending a presentation during the first week of semester given by the Dean of Research and the researcher. An information letter and consent form was prepared and distributed to potential participants (Appendix C). The NHMRC et al. (2007) state, “participation that is voluntary and based on sufficient information requires an adequate understanding of the purpose, methods, demands, risks and potential benefits of the research (p. 19). These information points were covered in the letter and at the meeting (Appendix C).

To limit any perceived pressure on the group to engage with the research, there was no predetermined number of participants proposed by the researcher or the research supervisors to commence research. It was also not suggested to the group that there was any minimum number of participants required in order to begin the research. At the meeting, potential participants were informed of the proposed research study and how this would run in parallel, but separate, to the subject they were enrolled in. The group was informed that participation was not compulsory or linked with their university subject enrolment and participation was not connected to assessment for

the subject. Specifically, potential participants were alerted that participation was voluntary and unpaid. It was explained to the group they could accept or decline to participate in the research and either option would not favourably or unfavourably influence successful completion of the subject. The assessment items did not contain explicit questions relating to child abuse, child protection or to the Strengths Approach and as with previous offerings of the subject, the child-protection component was recorded as being covered rather than assessed in the subject. All the students in the subject (regardless of their participation in the research) received the same child-protection content and all received a certificate recording that they had studied child-protection issues (Appendix E). Students were informed that the assessment items for the subject would be marked by the teacher/researcher and that these items would be related to subject content other than child protection. To further reduce any perceived risk of the students feeling advantaged or disadvantaged over other students by participation or non-participation, students were also informed of the availability of a different assessor to the teacher/researcher for subject assessments (on request before submission). Additionally, a separate moderator to the teacher/researcher was available (in a process similar to that of a remark of an assessment), if any student felt their assessment was marked unfairly due to participation or non-participation in the research.

The aims, parameters and expectations for participating in the project were outlined at the presentation. Potential participants were informed that they could withdraw from the research at any time without reason and with no penalty. The information letter and consent form (Appendix C) outlined details of the research, including the purpose of the study, the risks involved and how responses would be gathered, used, stored and disseminated. Participants were informed that the research was expected to result in enhanced learning outcomes for them and for future students of the subject. On completion of the child-protection module, all students were given a completion certificate to add to their resume and handouts of information that was generated as a group during a collaborative strengths workshop session (Appendix E). All participants were also given access to the research findings and copies of related peer reviewed papers. Notification of research findings and publications were emailed to participants and contact details were regularly updated throughout the research, with access to data via attachment or hyperlink.

The NHMRC et al. (2007) state “special care should be taken to protect the identity of participants when disseminating information and storing material” (pp. 27-28). Participants were informed that, “raw data from this study will be stored in a locked cabinet at the School of Education of James Cook University” (Appendix C) and that this consisted of de-identified typed transcripts and copies of audio files of Open Views, Open Focus Group as well as deidentified copies of EView and Electronic Discussion Board (EDB) documents. Each method of data collection is discussed further on in this chapter. All personnel and students were bound and agreed to the university policy on internet/computer fair conduct, privacy and confidentiality when using electronic media. There were no reported instances of misconduct in accessing or using the subject website/discussion board or

email for EViews during or after the subject. Once on the subject web site, participants could access the EDB and add individual posts. Only the students and lecturer made posts on the discussion board. The EDB has the option of using anonymous or identified posts although no anonymous posts were recorded (Appendix F). Participants were familiar with using the EDB having been required to use this communication tool and anonymous options in previous subjects. The EDB was removed from the subject website, once the subject was finalised and after 12 months of being archived was fully deleted. Copies of the EDB entries and EViews were copied into a word processing document by the researcher, before being removed from the university server and being stored securely as research data. Further discussion of the particular ethical considerations required by using the contemporary format of electronic research in EViews is discussed further in the separate EView section.

As lecturer in the subject and researcher, the author had access to all students' names and email contacts, however, no identifiers were used in research documents, which were collected and stored separately. Open View, Open Focus Group transcripts and copies of EDB and EView responses were stored in a locked filing cabinet at the researcher's office separately to the consent forms. Telephone numbers and postal addresses of participants, although available through student enrolment details, were not necessary for this research and are not recorded with research documents. Confidentiality concerning the data collected was explained to participants and they were informed that responses would be incorporated into research findings and released without identifying names and addresses. Participants were informed that the date and location of the research in Queensland would be detailed in the research as a relevant factor to understanding the context of the research findings. It was explained that these identifiers as well as the particular degree, subject and year of study increased the risk of participants being identified by readers of the research and therefore by the public. Kumar (2005) notes that "sometimes you need to identify your study population to put your findings in context" (p. 214). All participants indicated an understanding of this when consenting to be involved in the research.

Participants were informed that pseudonyms, viz., Participants 1-19, would be used as a de-identification method to limit their personal identification in the data collected. De-identification of the single participant who identified as male (Participant (17)) in the cohort, was more difficult than for the rest of the female identified cohort. The common language uses of gender identifiers in responses and interpretations such as the pronouns *he* or *him*, made it easy to identify this participant in the group. The researcher discussed the additional risks involved with being more easily recognised in the research than other participants with Participant (17). Options of withdrawing from the research, continuing with more rigid de-identification strategies (removing expressions of gender in terminology and not recording gender of participants) or continuing participation were discussed. Participant 17 confirmed he still wished to participate in the research and felt it important that his responses be recorded without name but was not concerned with being identified more easily from the narratives as being male. Additionally, Participant (17) expressed that he felt that as the only

identified male student enrolled in the subject, it was important to be involved in the research and that male pre-service teachers had particular child-protection concerns that were important to be discussed, recorded and added to the research findings.

The term *Participant* was viewed as adequately reflecting the contributions and active membership of those in the cohort. Whilst using numerical identification of participants in this written thesis, it is important to note that the participants' personal names were always used in all prompts and responses given and gathered in the research. Names are removed in the transcripts and in the thesis they are represented by Xxx in text. Participant is purposefully capitalised (as in the first letter of a name) before the bracketed identifying number as a representation that the number is less important and for explanatory purposes only. This should read distinctively not as Number 2 participant but as a named Participant in the research (coded, for reference and confidentiality, with the number 2). The terms *Co-Researcher* or *Co-Searcher* were also considered as alternative terms to Participants in the research. The more traditional term of participant was chosen due to possibility that readers may be unfamiliar with the alternative terms of co-researcher or co-searcher. Participants may also appear to be paid researchers in the research if the alternative terms were used.

The numbering of the participants was random and not according to class lists or alphabetical order. Participants were made aware that their participation in the focus groups necessarily involved the sharing of ideas and information in the presence of other students. The researcher encouraged participants at the beginning of each session, to be open and honest in their interactions whilst being aware of the additional risks involved with sharing information in this format. Participants were asked to be mindful of maintaining the privacy of the data to be generated and were requested not to reveal information outside of the group. In alignment with the strengths principles relating to acknowledging the dignity of others, participants were informed that "any information gained during the course of the research in relation to the research or any other matter arising out of the research will be treated with respect and dignity and in a professional and ethical manner by the investigator" (Appendix C).

Data Collection and Research Phases

The aim of matching research methodology with the research topic was challenging given the absence of a strengths approach to research (c.f., Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006, pp. 193-205). A qualitative methodology presented the opportunity however, to develop and adapt research techniques to give a strengths approach to data collection and analysis. Data were collected by multiple, strengths adapted, qualitative research methods. In this section, the types of data collected by the various methods are discussed and in following sections of the chapter, each strengths-adapted method is discussed separately.

An Open View rather than interview method was developed to collect face-to-face (audio-recorded) responses from individual participants as well as collaboratively organised Open Focus

Groups, adapted from traditional focus group design. The strengths of recent literature regarding research using internet resources such as web sites, discussion boards and email, prompted the incorporation of the subject EDB into data collection and the development of a strengths adaption of interviewing by email, termed an EView. The data collected by email (EViews) included responses to the researcher's strengths-based email letter prompts and electronic copies of individual module reflections given by participants (see methods summary Appendix F).

The research consisted of three phases of qualitative data collection. The first phase of collection lasted approximately four months (July 30th – November 29th 2007) and included the study semester. Phase 1 was timed to gather feedback from pre-service teacher participants during the thirteen-week strengths child-protection module that was integrated into the semester-long early-childhood teaching degree subject (Appendix A). All methods of data collection were used in Phase 1, as participants were available on campus and had access to the EDB and student email facilities. The second phase of data collection spanned approximately three months (22nd February – 28th May) although the main data for this phase gathered over two days by Open Views and Open Focus Groups (27th – 28th May, 2008). Data collection in Phase 2 concentrated on gathering responses after the child-protection module was completed and participants had completed (all or part of) a seven week practicum school placement and had returned to university. In Phase 2, the EDB was no longer available due to the subject completion and EViews were not requested from the researcher in acknowledgement of the students' increased study load and practicum requirements. Three Participants lodged their own EViews during this phase. In Phase 2, the dates and times of Open Views and Open Focus Groups were specifically negotiated with individual participants around their practicum placement requirements and preferences to ensure that practicum experience had been achieved before the data were collected. The third and final phase of data collection spanned approximately two months (1st November 2008 – 3rd January 2009). Phase 3 of the research occurred approximately twelve months after the child-protection module was taught and spanned a time when participants were nearing graduation and beginning as qualified teachers. Due to most of the participants moving away from university in Phase 3, EViews were the primary data collection method. Most students had graduated, and many had dispersed to various locations off campus and were working full-time, making face-to-face data collection difficult and costly. The author was also located off campus during this phase. All students still had alumni access to their university email accounts and therefore EViews were determined as a cost and time efficient method of data collection. Participants could respond to EView prompts if they wished, at a time that suited their individual arrangements. A fuller description of each strengths research method adaptation and use is presented below.

Electronic Discussion Board

Resnik (2005) found, when evaluating the use of an EDB with a group of 25 university students in the United States, that “the respondents indicated that electronic discussion boards are a convenient way of promoting debate and in-depth discussion” (p. 617). Resnik (2005) found that on a scale of 1-5 respondents rated highly (4.36 – 4.76) the use of EDB’s as an effective teaching tool to get feedback from their peers and to analyse ethical dilemmas (p. 617). Moloney, Dietrich, Strickland and Myberburg (2003) found some difficulties with participation on internet discussion boards and caution that the written communication format of discussion boards can sometimes lead to misunderstandings. An EDB was used as a method of data collection in Phase 1 of this research project. The participants as students, had access to the university subject website which included study information and an EDB to communicate with students and the lecturer regarding subject content and administration. The EDB for this research was not readily available to all internet users, only to the subject staff and students enrolled in the subject. The participants of the research (all the enrolled students for the subject) were informed and consented to the board also being used for research data collection. All participants had access, were encouraged and knew how to work the discussion board, including the anonymous posting option. Sweet (2001) described this form of online research as akin to an ongoing focus group where participants access the discussion at a time when it suits them. The EDB contained a number of threads (pre-set questions and prompts loaded by the lecturer) to initiate, guide and separate discussions.

There were four specific threads entitled *Subject Evaluation*, *Contemporary Issues*, *Strengths Perspectives* and *Child Protection*. For the research project, participants consented for responses posted on all EDB threads to be available as data. In previous offerings of the subject, the discussion board had been used similarly although without the specific strengths perspectives and child-protection threads. Initial questions set by the researcher were designed to be open-ended about the broad research terms and flexible enough to allow a wide variety of personal perspectives to be added to the board. An example of an initial question on the board was, “what are your thoughts and experiences about [topic]?” The researcher in a conversational and mentoring fashion replied to student responses on the board. The strategies for using and responding to posts on the board were adapted from strengths social-work practitioner guides such as *Using the Strengths Perspective in Social Work Practice* by Glicken (2004). Although written from the view of establishing rapport with social-work clients, the underlying principles were applied here in order to guide the role of the researcher with participants.

Glicken (2004) advises that “early rapport is essential” (p. 51) along with “active and attentive listening ... a core ingredient of the strengths perspective” (p. 52). The researcher would, therefore, refer to issues or concepts raised by participants in their responses, add extra questions to specific issues they identified or give a different prompt if the topic appeared to be not progressing or

was in need of stimulus. For example, when Participant (16) talks of concerns with children with special needs being taught in mainstream classrooms, the researcher links to the Column Approach and asks the prompting questions: “What would your vision be for special needs children and education in the future? What are the strengths of current practice in this area?” Glicken (2004) adds that strengths practitioners should be using, “evidence-based practice ... [and] encouraging independent client solutions” (p. 53). In the contemporary issues discussion board thread, a reading is discussed about the changing role of women in society and included in order for students to understand their roles as educators and changing perspectives on the care and protection of children.

Any complex issues or questions raised by participants on the discussion board were responded to by the researcher and followed up with the cohort or on an individual basis if appropriate. On average, the researcher responded to posts within two days of posting, unless the responses were generic or consisted of participant-to-participant conversations that did not require researcher responses, support or guidance. For example, when asked about the practical child-protection strategies (before the planned workshop) the researcher replies by including some ideas on the board for Participant (16) and adds, “we will work through some examples together.” More practical child-protection strategies were added to the workshop agenda. Glicken (2004) argues that in using a strengths approach “we need information from clients that only they can provide if we are to be helpful ... the purpose of the work we are to do together should be specified by developing a contract between the client and the worker that frames the issues to be resolved (p. 51). Posts given by participants on the discussion board comment about the subject and the integrated child-protection module and record how the subject and module delivery was changed and affected by participant input. Attempts were made in the research to implement a collegial and inclusive approach, as emphasised in the Strengths Approach. It must be recognised, however, that in the education context of this research, the author, as lecturer and assessor of the participants work, was unable to avoid systemic “power differentials” (Glicken, 2004, p. 51) that impact on collaboration. Although Glicken (2004, p. 51) states that “the absence of a power differential is the driving force of the strengths perspective”, the student to teacher power dynamic was impossible to negate in this research and this is acknowledged as a major limitation.

A total of thirteen participants from the cohort of nineteen contributed to the discussion board in one or more of the threads and there were no anonymous postings recorded. Once submitted, posts could not be removed by students, but only by the lecturer, head of school or university technicians. No posts were removed. Many of the thirteen contributors posted multiple times in various threads and there were thirty-nine responses recorded on the board during the subject. Al-Jahf (2004) claims that web-based learning creates a genuine community of discourse and Beauvois (1994) adds that there is often high motivation, equal opportunity for learners with different cultural backgrounds and increased participation to communicate through electronic media compared to face-to-face participation. The average length of a posting was one paragraph (including any researcher

responses) and there were a total of 28 transcript pages for the combination of all responses to the board. The number of postings was similar to those entered in previous offerings of the subject and in comparison to other subjects represented an average usage (apart from subjects requiring posts to be entered for assessment purposes).

In postings, the author consciously reinforced participants' comments with similar personal experiences (if relevant) or gave additional knowledge, perspectives or resources on the concepts being discussed. Glicken (2004) confirms that "a worker may share opinions" but with the condition that it must be the client's "inner resources, critical thinking competencies, and the ability to rationally determine what is best for them" (p. 54). This client focus, along with "focusing on the positives" (Glicken, p. 54), was a guide to the framing of responses on the discussion board. When responding to a complex post on the issue of neglect from a participant (Participant (14)), for example, the author firstly acknowledged some of the key concepts raised in the post: "you outlined many strengths in that situation and the support available and a great positive is that the child trusted you enough to say that they did not have lunch" (Researcher, EDB). Drawing on similar experiences with children and knowledge of neglect statistics, the author added, "neglect is the most common form of abuse and is so much affected by socio/economic factors including poverty, unemployment, access to resources" (Researcher, EDB). The author expressed interest in hearing more from Participant (14) and asked if other participants had similar or other experiences. The discussion continued with other participants identifying not only possible indicators of neglect but underlying influences on neglect. In a subsequent post, Participant (14) links to wider community issues of neglect and identifies other positive strategies used by the school that had not previously been mentioned. Glicken (2004) claims that "clients need to know what helpers know. The purpose of the strengths perspective is to empower clients to use their own resources to understand the complex nature of their current situations and to process those situations in ways that lead to client-directed change" (p. 53).

While general encouragement was given to submit responses on the board during this subject and research, participants were not directed to submit responses as a participant requirement but were instead informed that it was a data collection option. The six participants who were not contributing postings to the board were not asked why they did not submit responses and all six gave individual Open Views in Phase 1. Participant (10) indicated in informal conversation that she did not post any responses on the board but had read all of the threads and agreed with many of the posts but did not want to repeat the same ideas. Other non-respondents, similarly, indicated by their Open Views and Open Focus Group responses that they had also read the other participant postings and verbally responded in other data collection methods, to themes raised by the postings.

On the subject evaluation thread, students were asked the question, "how is the subject going for you?" and were given a simple prompt, "you can add your suggestions, ideas, criticisms, frustrations and feelings to this thread." Seven participants added responses here. The contemporary topics thread was related to subject matter examining contemporary issues facing educators in current

early-childhood contexts. This section of the subject occurred after studying the historical development of early-childhood services in Australia (see subject/module plan Appendix A). As part of the subject assessment, students were required to choose and study a contemporary issue affecting early-childhood education and share this with the group. The voluntary EDB thread led with the prompt “add any info that may be of use to the group, for example, website links or resources or ask for help for your topic”. Sometimes the responses on the subject and contemporary topics threads overlapped and child-protection issues were incorporated in the contemporary issues thread. Two students self-selected child protection as their contemporary issue to study. A separate child-protection thread was also available on the Discussion Board, which asked “what are your thoughts and experiences around child-protection issues?” prompting participants to reflect on their confidence, strategies and preparation for child protection.

Open View

Individual interviews were used for this research as another method of data collection. Interviews are a frequently used qualitative method of data collection and Burns (2000) claims “unstructured and semi-structured interviewing are the major tools of qualitative research. Their advantage is that the informant’s perspectives are provided using language natural to them” (p. 440). From a strengths perspective, the opportunity for individual participants to express their own understandings of the research terms in an interview fitted well with the qualitative framework and strengths principles of recognising multiple ways of knowing.

Qualitative interviewing begins with the assumption that the perspective of others is meaningful, knowable, and able to be made explicit. We interview to find out what is in and on someone else’s mind, to gather their stories. (Patton, 2002, p. 341)

Elements of the interview format of data collection, however, proved problematic when using a full strengths approach to research.

The term Open View arose in this research out of an informal reflection from Participant (16) at the beginning of the project when she expressed that the word interview had negative connotations for her. Participant (16) explained that she felt fearful of upcoming formal interviews with the Queensland Department of Education and Training that would determine her own (and others from the cohort) suitability rating for employment as a teacher in that system. For Participant (16), interviews were viewed as stressful, pressurised and potentially disempowering. The interviewers were viewed by Participant (16) as definitely having power over her career opportunities and from her perspective the relationship was unequal as the interviewers were viewed as of higher status, experts, who were more knowledgeable and senior educators. Participant (16) explained she perceived interviews as when interviewees are questioned and interviewers only speak to ask everyone the same question. The interviewees are judged as giving the right (correct) or wrong answers. This view of an interview, though not based on a research format, was definitely not the collaborative, informal and open dialogue sought for this research from a strengths-based interview. Participant (16)’s reaction to

the prospect of being interviewed and previous work by strengths practitioners describing their practice with clients (Glicken, 2004; Saleebey, 1996, 2009) caused the author to hastily examine the effects of research terminology. The author sought to investigate ways in which literature on successful strengths practices in social services may be used to adapt research techniques to be more consistent with a strengths theoretical framework. Wong and Cumming (2008) stress that a strengths researcher must be aware of the “power imbalances set up by traditional research approaches” (p. 36). It was crucial that the participants in the research did not feel interrogated, forced to give one “correct” answer or be too overwhelmed to engage with the research issues. The recent anxiety and hesitation with upcoming formal interviews for the participants of the cohort proved an opportunity to develop and change ways of collecting data as clear and open views.

An Open View, a strengths adaptation of a semi-structured interview format, was developed for this research as a data collection method. Burns (2000) notes that while comparability between participants is difficult with semi-structured interviews the benefits include “the informant has equal status to the researcher ... the informants perspective is provided rather than the perspective of the researcher being imposed and it increases rapport” (p. 425). These advantages sit more clearly with strengths approach principles than the vision of a formal structured interview process. Glicken’s (2004) advice on establishing rapport gave clues for the practicalities of designing an Open View, strengths interview and format:

Rapport is established, or not established, almost immediately. The contributing factors in establishing rapport are the helper’s level of warmth, the helpers comfort level, the similarity of the contact with the client’s usual social interactions, the warmth and comfort of the physical setting, the lighting, the comfort of the seating arrangements. (p. 51)

Using the setting factors that Glicken describes for the therapy contexts, the Open View, similarly, paid attention to the environment chosen to create a rapport for the strengths-based interview.

For this research, participants were asked where they wished to meet with suggestions made by the researcher in consideration of time, travel, privacy and familiarity of location. For example, suggestions included the university cafe at a quiet time, any spare student rooms on campus, the researcher’s room (with coffee table, easy chairs and refreshments available), an outdoor campus picnic-table area and the university library veranda. All interviews incorporated refreshments of tea, coffee, cold water or soft drink and were at various times of the day to suit the work, study and family commitments of the participants, and so were unlike an interview for employment. Participants were emailed to identify suitable times and they were assured that times could be changed if needed rather than being given a mandatory pre-set date and time of interview. Participants were informed that they could stay for as long or short a time as they wished and that the Open View was an individual meeting with the researcher to chat together about the research and issues of child protection, teacher preparation and the Strengths Approach from their perspective. The research information sheet indicated Open Views would be approximately 40 minutes long.

Each Open View environment choice avoided a desk and office chair setting and the researcher was purposefully seated alongside each participant rather than sitting opposite as in a traditional interview. Round tables were used where possible to project a power balanced inclusive relationship. Strengths resources used during the module were displayed on a table nearby. The Open View sometimes used these resources such as stickers containing a strengths statement or colourful flash cards with drawings of bear characters demonstrating different feelings and emotions (Veeken, 1997, 1999; Masman, 2007) and the book *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005). The resources were used to visually prompt, remind, initiate and record responses during the interview in addition to or as an adaption of traditional verbal questioning. Some participants would pick up resources and find book sections or pictures to illustrate their responses, or as the researcher, the author would refer to a resource to elicit further reflection. For example, pictorial scaling sheets used for recording levels of strengths or progression on issues by strengths practitioners were incorporated into some Open Views. Participant (8) for instance, although having previously generally indicated her confidence has increased, appeared to struggle with describing her current confidence level in child protection saying, “I don’t know”. The researcher drew her attention to the strengths scaling sheets on the nearby table. Participant (8) picked up a sheet, which showed an outline of a ladder with ten rungs. The researcher prompted, “if the top of the ladder is feeling really confident with child-abuse and child-protection issues where would you place yourself on the ladder” (Open View). Participant (8) responded, “Well I feel fairly high, yes I feel pretty confident, so maybe a six or a seven or something” (Participant (8), Open View). She further added, “the first few rungs up are pretty easy to step up but I think the higher you get, they space out, those rungs, there’s a bigger gap between the steps” (Participant (8), Open View). The strengths resource allowed, with a picture, to prompt Participant (8) to express more fully, what she knew about her child protection than verbal questioning alone would have enabled. She was able to express not only that she currently felt quite confident but also that confidence in child protection is difficult to define and is not in equal intervals of progression. In an Open View, participants are included as co-searchers and they make decisions as to the method of recording, setting and structure of the Open View as well as choosing and adapting the strengths tools they wish to use to describe their perspectives.

A semi-structured interview foundation was used for the Open View design. Semi-structured interviews use a more relaxed, conversational style than formal interviewing but are not as completely open-ended and unstructured in format as in-depth interviewing (Burns, 2000, p. 425). Although in-depth interviews operate as a “free-flowing conversation”, the researcher may not be able to anticipate the length of interview needed and may find it difficult “to ensure the focus stays relevant to the problem” (Burns, 2000, p. 425). The scope of this research precluded lengthy interviews and the strengths focus values progression on issues that makes a semi-structured format more appealing. Rather than being open-ended and unsure of the direction of dialogue, the Open View aims to frame and be open to an individual’s particular view or perspective on a particular issue. Metaphorically, it

is showing interest and asking participants to open a window and show their view of a scene that is of interest to researcher and participant. The openness additionally reflects the recurrent theme in the Strengths Approach of the need for strengths practitioners to demonstrate transparency in their work (McCashen, 2005).

The semi-structured format was further adapted to decrease anxiety with the interview process and to increase the opportunity for collaboration between researcher and participants (crucial in the Strengths Approach). To negate the pre-determined set questions that Participant (16) describes as a negative interview feature, Burns (2000) suggests that:

Rather than having a specific interview schedule or none at all, an interview guide may be developed for some parts of the study in which, without fixed wording or fixed ordering of questions, a direction is given to the interview so that the content focuses on crucial issues of the study. (p. 424)

The guide for the Open View was developed to include a short period of familiarisation with the Open View process. Reminders of the research focus and the ability to cease the Open View at any time followed introductory welcomes and thanks for participation. Participant welfare issues from the research information sheet were also revised, such as the availability of counselling services. Some personalised, relationship building comments are then featured to guide the beginning of the Open Views. These comments should not be intrusive and only based on any information offered or shared with the researcher in previous informal conversations. Rather than trivial, this personalisation is a purposeful part of the Open View approach to interviewing participants. Glicken (2004) notes, “to help clients overcome the ‘stage fright’ they may initially experience ... small talk may be used or the workers may talk a little about the helping process” (p. 52). The author posits that this applies to the strengths approach’s use in interview as well as therapy settings and that for this cohort it was relevant given the anxiety expressed as felt in other interviews.

After introductions, the Open View used simple beginning, conversational prompts around each research term, such as, “what are your thoughts and ideas around the Strengths Approach or child protection?” or “in the research I have been interested in listening to different pre-service teachers views on preparation to protect children, I was wondering what your thoughts are on this?” Sometimes Open Views began by using a previous comment from participants around the research terms like “I noticed you said on the discussion board about child abuse that ... and how was that a challenge? (or) and how did that work as a strategy?” This mirroring technique is also used in counselling sessions by strengths practitioners (McCashen, 2005, p. 71) and is a feature of the active listening espoused by Glicken (2004, p. 52) as a necessary strengths practice. In the Open Views, the researcher particularly chose to repeat comments by participants that highlighted “exceptions” occurring in dialogue (De Jong & Miller, 1995). Strengths literature explains the value of recognising the positive “exceptions”, times of difference or “special understanding” especially when working with challenging issues that may generate many problem-based narratives. Saleebey (2009) explains the need to highlight “what about your world, your relationships, *your thinking* [author emphasis] was

special or different?” (p. 102). For this research, for example, the researcher repeated back an Open View comment from Participant (17) about Strengths Approach literature, “you’re saying about not liking the terminology “client” ... you think if we are translating that to education that would be an important point, to change that terminology?” (Researcher, Open View).

As well as using mirroring techniques in an Open View, if possible, prompts and questions should emerge from the participants’ own dialogue around the key research terms. Burns (2000) explains that “the techniques which counsellors - particularly non-directive counsellors - use in their counselling sessions are equally valuable to ... interviewers” (p. 426). A key feature of the Open View as opposed to other semi-structured interviewing techniques is the adaptation from the strengths social-work practice of using opportunities in research interviews to “stimulate the discourse and narratives of resilience and strength” (Saleebey, 2009, p. 104). During the dialogue of the Open View, as researcher, the author was able to find information about research issues whilst recognising opportunities to model strengths-based practice. Saleebey suggests categories of questioning can be used when interviewing to assist in revealing clients strengths such as “survival” or “support questions” (p. 102). Some questions are focussed on therapeutic contexts, applying strengths practice to help with a personal issue (over a period of sessions) rather than generic research issues. Other questions were of research use, to foster strengths narratives or to continue in-depth discussion around research terms, particularly when participants recounted sensitive or personalised incidences. “Perspective”, “Change” and “Meaning” (Saleebey, 2009, p. 103) categories of questions, for instance, were often relevant to the discussion of preparing to protect children or using a Strengths Approach in teaching with minor edits. For example, “what are your ideas or theories about your [the] current situation [with child-protection reporting]?” or “what are your ideas about how things [teacher preparation] might change?” (p. 103). In an Open View with Participant (8), the researcher used a similar change question to aid further discussion about recognising children who may have been abused. The researcher asked, “what sort of strategies do you think might be good to do with children to help ease that situation?” (Researcher, Open View).

Open Views contained both the participants and researcher in conversation and were maintained around the key themes of the research of child abuse, child protection, teacher education and the Strengths Approach. Questions, prompts and affirmations of positive strengths approaches and the use of strengths resources punctuated the conversations. The transcripts show a variety of distribution of dialogue between participant and researcher. While some Open Views were more heavily weighted to participant responses, others recorded less verbose participants and more researcher prompting. If the dialogue appeared in danger of distracting from key research terms, the researcher used prompts to return to earlier relevant discussions such as “I was wondering if you could tell me a little more about ...?” or “do you think ...[current dialogue] links to [a key research term]?” Distractions from key research terms did not happen frequently in the Open Views and when they did, the linking question often provided a useful pathway to restore focus or links to research

terms. For example, Participant (17) gave a lengthy comment in an Open View about managing children's behaviour which included examples of how pre-service teachers drew on the children's interests to reengage and manage negative behaviour. After a detailed example of a lesson utilising children's interests (identified as using a strengths approach) but not specifically referring to child protection, the researcher commented, "It seems that people are seeing the Strengths Approach in a more holistic way, useful as a framework for teaching, rather than it just specifically being limited to child protection?" (Researcher, Open View). Discussion continued to examine a broader use of the Strengths Approach for issues other than child protection whilst recognising this was the original stimulus area for the research.

Open Views were conducted in Phase 1 and 2 of the research project. In Phase 1, the Open Views took place in a two week period from October 15th until November 1st, 2007, during the delivery of the final weeks (weeks 11 – 13) of the subject and module. All nineteen participants were offered and encouraged to participate in an Open View for the research and settings were negotiated with those interested. The relaxed focus of Open View rather than interview was explained to participants. All participants were also informed that Open Views were not mandatory and that they were one of the data collection options for this research. Some participants indicated they had contributed to the EDB or would participate in an Open Focus Group rather than have an individual Open View. Nine participants gave Open Views, including Participant (16), with the average length being approximately 25 minutes long. Three hours 49 minutes of Open View audio was recorded (71 pages of transcript). In Phase 2, ten months had elapsed from the beginning of the original subject and some participants were no longer studying with the rest of the research cohort participants. Some participants had deferred subjects, different enrolment patterns, study groups or were on maternity leave (Participant (10), EView). Four participants were not corresponding by university email or on campus as regularly as the other fifteen in the group. Participants indicated two days (May 27th and 28th, 2008) as most suitable for the Open Views, due to these being days they were back on campus between professional experience commitments. Of the nineteen participants and fifteen regularly available, four gave Open Views in Phase 2. As in Phase 1, others indicated they would participate in Open Focus Groups or EViews as preferred methods of data collection. The participation rate for Phase 2 overall, was fifteen out of the original nineteen participants by some form of data collection. The average length of Open View was approximately 19 minutes (slightly shorter than Phase 1) and 1 hour 17 minutes of Open View audio was recorded (31 pages of transcript). The shorter Open Views recorded are most probably due to the participants requests to fit Open Views and Open Focus Groups around other university commitments over the shorter period of two days rather than two weeks in Phase 1. Open Views were concluded by either participants or researcher expressing that the agreed time for the session has elapsed or that significant data had been collected. When the session had concluded the researcher thanked participants for their contributions and the audio recorder was turned off.

Open Focus Groups

Ten participants participated in Open Focus Groups, a strengths-based variation of a focus group method of data collection. Traditional focus groups use a technique of an in-depth group interview focused around a given topic (Krueger, 1994, 1998; Krueger & Casey, 2000). Rabiee (2004) claims focus groups can “provide information about a range of ideas and feelings that individuals have about certain issues, as well as illuminating the differences in perspective between groups of individuals” (p. 655). Many of the elements of the Open View (strengths-based interview) were replicated in the Open Focus Group format. The terms *open* and *focus* appear to be conflicting, perhaps suggesting a widening or opening up of group discussion topics contradictory to concentration or focus on particular issues. The openness in this case, refers rather to the goal of transparency of the groups focus, a key principle of the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005). Patton (2002) defines a focus group as “an interview with a small group of people on a specific topic” (p. 385), in this case, the area of teacher preparation for child protection using a strengths approach. Negotiation of date, time and setting options with participants was the same as for Open Views; mandated times were not given but instead options were offered with study and university contexts in mind. The group size and duration of the Open Focus Groups were smaller than the typical “groups of 6 to 10 people with similar backgrounds who participate in the interview for one to two hours” (Patton, 2000, p. 385). The average length of the Open Focus Group was 33 minutes and group sizes varied between four to seven participants. The Focus Group times reflected the university context of the cohort, fitting into an average tutorial length session and the participants themselves decided on clusters for the Open Focus Groups based on friendships and availability. For example, one Open Focus Group was engaged in a group assignment for another subject and made times to meet for planning. The group suggested they be an Open Focus Group and could give a thirty-minute group interview before their planning meeting. Although the Open Focus Groups were very similar in conversational style to contemporary focus groups, as with the Open Views, strengths tools were available if needed by the group and questioning, prompts and additional emphasis was placed on modelling a strengths approach when facilitating the Open Focus Group.

The sessions were introduced as informal conversations (facilitated by the researcher) around central themes of *child abuse*, *child protection*, *teacher education*, and the *strengths approach*. This contrasts to the more traditional focus group using predetermined and ordered questions set and asked by the interviewer (Higginbotham & Cox, 1979). Traditional focus group interviews were developed “in recognition that many consumer decisions are made in a social context often growing out of discussion with other people” (Patton, 2002, p. 385). While keen to acknowledge the strengths this traditional focus group affords in recording contextual perceptions and the influence of multiple perspectives child-protection issues, restrictive power imbalances of traditional interviewing (that

were problematic in forming the Open View) apply here too. Krueger (1998) presents an alternative view of the researcher and new way of conducting a Focus Group, as that of moderator.

The term *interviewer* tends to convey a more limited impression of two-way communication between an interviewer and an interviewee. By contrast, the focus group affords the opportunity for multiple interactions not only between the interviewer and respondent but also among all participants in the group. The focus group is not a collection of simultaneous individual interviews, but rather a group discussion where the conversation flows easily with nurturing by the moderator. (p. 2)

This view has alignments with the role of the strengths practitioner engaged in group social work, like family therapy (Scott & O'Neil, 2003) that values and acknowledges the impact that others have on individual perspectives on issues. In this research, the author choose to use the term *facilitator* in the Open Focus Group to reflect the role of the strengths researcher in encouraging, rather than refereeing, discussion on issues and acknowledging strengths as they arise. Benard and Truebridge (2009) explain the benefits of “group discussions and professional learning communities” for the fostering of strengths-based narratives and “sustaining a personal belief in resilience is far more probable if one is part of a supportive professional learning community” (p. 212). The Open Focus Group, as the Open View, contains the additional element to traditional focus groups of modelling and recognising strengths-based practice, if occurring during the session. The format for the Open Focus Group was guided by strengths group practice in social-work settings. Benard and Truebridge (2009) caution that “opening yourself up to your inner beliefs is not easy” (p. 212) and that participants may be nervous or more fearful of expressing views in a group. One participant expressed a little anxiety with the Open Focus Group data collection method (Participant (18)). The anxiety was not articulated as being concerned with the formality of method (as with the hesitant Open View Participant (16)) but demonstrated more of a hesitancy of speaking in the group. The transcript at the beginning of Open Focus Group 1, records:

As Participant (18) enters, she says to the group and researcher “I won't talk much” [had previously had an Open View and expressed feeling shy with speaking in front of the group]. The researcher asks if the participant is OK to go ahead with the focus group and participant replies “Oh yes, that's no problem, I just might not say much, that's all.”

The Open Focus Groups were not a mandatory requirement for participation in the research and all participants were informed of the format for the Open Focus Groups as an option for participation before agreeing to participate. Care was taken that the settings, as for the Open Views, were able “to create a community with a climate of mutual trust, safety and respect ... [*and to establish*] group norms”, such as being respectful of rights for equal communication, participation and acknowledging time restraints (Benard & Truebridge, 2009, p. 212). The groups were reminded at the beginning of each session that “group norms” such as “all participants are equal and each person's voice and opinion count ... no put downs ... refrain from side conversations” (p. 213) were the same as for their familiar, university tutorial discussion sessions used in most subjects.

Utilising the influencing views outlined above and foundational strengths literature (McCashen, 2005), the researcher explained to participants at the beginning of Open Focus Group 1 the term Open Focus Group and how this is a strengths modification of a traditional focus group:

Focus groups are often led by the researcher asking specific questions, but my thought is that's a bit daunting because people [Participant (18), gives an exaggerated nod to the group and points to herself while smiling. Researcher acknowledges action with a smile and nod and adds] ... don't necessarily want to say anything and that really in a Strengths-based approach, if we're supposed to be taking away that power dynamic, then we should be trying to make people feel as comfortable as possible to talk. So all I really wanted to do, [Participant (18) and researcher smile/laugh] is for us to talk about ... child protection, child abuse, the Strengths Approach and where we're at ... what our feelings are around the issue ... What are your thoughts at the moment?

The Open Focus Groups were conducted and audio recorded in Phase 1 and 2 of the research project and there were two groups in each phase (groups 1 – 4). A total of 2 hours 12 minutes of recordings for Open Focus Groups were transcribed. In Phase 1 participants arranged for the Open Focus Groups to take place on October 18th (group 1) and October 25th 2007 (group 2). In total, 57 minutes of audio and 23 pages of transcript was recorded for these groups. The groups involved thirteen of the nineteen participants in the cohort and took place at the end of weeks 11 – 12 of the subject. The participants who did not contribute to Open Focus Groups during this stage contributed to Phase 1 data collection by either Open View, EDB or EView options. In Phase 1, the duration of Open Focus Group 2 was a relatively brief (15 minutes) as participants had arranged the session around other commitments but the group still covered the main research themes in this time. In Phase 2, two focus groups (groups 3 & 4) were both recorded on the 28th May by arrangement with participants. The audio recorded for these groups lasted 1 hour 15 minutes (26 minutes for group 3 and 49 minutes for group 4) with 37 pages of transcript recorded. Eleven participants from the cohort of nineteen contributed to Open Focus Groups in Phase 2 with another four participants contributing by alternative methods. Four participants did not contribute to data collection by any method during this phase.

The organisational arrangements and contextual settings of phases were identical to the Open View in consideration of when and how to hold the Open Focus Groups. The introductions, methods of prompting, types of questions and the mirroring of participant responses by the researcher generally followed the Open View format. Due to the additional participants and group dynamics present in focus groups as opposed to individual interviews, additional care was taken by the facilitator/researcher to ensure each participant had opportunity to speak and that quieter participants were not overwhelmed by more talkative participants (including self-monitoring by researcher). Mostly the monitoring was achieved with non-verbal clues such as eye contact, smiles, nods or giving a prompt to a particular member of the group rather than direct questions such as “what do you think?” The issues discussed in the focus groups ranged from a group that discussed a case of a local teacher aide dismissed for child pornography allegations to how teachers generally address child-

protection issues with children and their parents. One group debriefed the *Identifying your own Strengths* session from the child-protection module and talked about how this felt and if this could be adapted for use with children. Participants were thanked for their involvement in Open Focus Groups when either the researcher or participants identified that it was time to conclude the session.

EViews

A final data collection technique that was used for this research was a strengths adaption of data collection by electronic questionnaire, email or internet sources. The collection technique, termed an EView, was used to represent a strengths-based, email letter containing prompts to individual research participants inviting them to share perspectives on key research terms. Each email letter was individually written (typed) and was different for each research participant but guided by a template. The guiding template for EViews in Phase 3 of the research provided a consistent format (Appendix G). The guide assisted in adding personalised comments and slight variations depending on previous interactions with participants. Comments were inserted into the template and the letter was sent as an email. The EView format used a strengths-based focus, aiming to gather information and model strengths approaches in the correspondence. The main research data generated by EViews were participant replies, though the term s used interchangeably to refer also to the researcher prompting letters. The EView was developed for this research to gather further data about the key research themes of enhancing child-protection preparation, using a strengths approach during and following the child-protection module.

The format for the EView, particularly the extended format used in Phase 3, was influenced (as with Open View and Open Focus Groups) by key elements of strengths social-work practice, such as developing a rapport and dialogue with stakeholders (Glicken, 2004, p. 51; Saleebey, 2009, p. 13). Liamputtong and Ezzy (2005) state that “rapport and interaction between the researcher and researched can be better enhanced through online communication” (p. 232). A rapport was established in the beginning of the EView by giving brief relationship-building comments such as recalling an event previously mentioned by the participant or mirroring a comment made in an earlier phase of the research. General reminders were given to participants in the EView introduction regarding research protocols, terms and progress. The prompting EViews then referred to the research key terms, drawing excerpts from previous transcripts of key responses on child abuse, child protection, teacher education or the Strengths Approach. Particular mention was made in the prompting EViews of any identified strengths, elements of resilience and resources used in previous phases.

Collecting data by electronic methods is increasing in quantitative and qualitative research methodology (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). Electronic research or *eresearch* is used to describe research that is online and uses the internet through websites, discussion boards or emails to collect data. Eresearch has arisen partly out of the organisational difficulties faced by researchers, of

arranging suitable settings for research methods such as face-to-face interviews and focus groups. The costs of traditional methods can be restrictive when research cohorts are dispersed and travel for data collection is needed (Sweet, 2001). Eresearch has also emerged with the advent of wider internet use across Australia and the relatively cost effective access to internet resources for the public. The cohort for this research, as graduating students, had regular access to university email provision (alumni access in Phase 3) and were very familiar with this method of correspondence. While the main push to online research emerged from quantitative survey methods, “qualitative researchers cannot ignore considering the electronic communication as a research resource and tool” (Strickland et. al, 2003, p. 247). Eresearch was considered in this qualitative research, therefore, for the possible strengths it may bring to the project. The collection of email, online or real-time text are common qualitative eresearch modes and operate in either “semi-private” or “public domains” (Mann & Stewart, 2000). This research utilises semi-private domain options of data collection from “email, one-to-one discussion” in the EViews as well as “forum discussion” from the EDB where more user management and security of data is present than in the public domain (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 230).

EViews, though a flexible and efficient data collection method, have additional risks and differences to traditional research methods. Nosek, Banaji and Greenwald (2002) explain,

Differences between traditional laboratory research and Internet-based research require a review of basic issues of research methodology. These differences have implications for research ethics (e.g., absence of researcher, potential exposure of confidential data and/or identity to a third party, guaranteed debriefing) and security (e.g., confidentiality and anonymity, security of data transmission, security of data storage, and tracking participants over time). (p. 161)

For this research, care was taken to use the reputable university email server with backup facilities as well as Spam (junk email) and virus protection for all EViews sent and received. Email delivery was to the participant’s university email address and read receipts were requested and received for each EView. All participants as students, had automatic coverage with the university free virus software. EViews were copied from an email format to a word processing document and then deleted and removed from the researcher’s email server once sent or received (including recycling bin, recent history and author identifying functions). Participants were advised of the implications of storing any EViews received or sent on their own computer server and that deletion was required, particularly if EViews contained sensitive and personal material. There was however, no capacity to check whether participants had deleted EViews from their computer systems and this is an identified risk with this form of data collection.

Participants were reminded not to use personal identifiers in their EView correspondence and to use generic terms when talking about schools and children for example, “a child at the school where I was on placement” rather than “Xxx at the Xxx School.” No EViews identified children or schools by name and participants were informed their EViews would be de-identified to remove their

own name and email address. EView prompts were purposefully phrased to avoid any requirement to discuss personal or sensitive issues throughout the whole research but particularly in this phase, with this type of electronic data collection. For example, when drawing on previous comments for strengths-based EView prompts, the research themes of child protection, teacher education and the Strengths Approach were prioritised over the term of child abuse. None of the EViews contained personal comments relating to child abuse. As a word processing document, the EViews were dealt with employing the same process as with other data transcription. EViews were deidentified and kept for the duration of the research as a word processing document, stored securely in password and virus protected files with all other computer generated research data. All participants for the research project agreed to participate in EViews and despite the restrictions detailed above, many indicated this was their preferred mode of data collection.

EView prompting letters were sent in Phase 1 and 3 of the research and were received in all three phases of the research. Participants were invited to reply to EView prompts but this was optional, not a mandatory requirement. EView prompts in phase 1 consisted of a brief email to participants asking for any reflections during the subject and child-protection module, based around the key research terms. Phase 2 EViews were impromptu email responses sent to the researcher by participants and Phase 3 EViews consisted of more in-depth email prompting letters and responses. By Phase 3 of the research, the Open Views partly avoided the disadvantage that Nosek et al. (2002) identified as “researcher absence” (p. 161). Participants already had completed face-to-face teaching and research data collection with the researcher as a known entity when EViews commenced. EViews allowed personalised correspondence to occur in this phase between the researcher and individual participants. Although there were not immediate conversations, the EView provided research communication similar to the face-to-face Open View and allowed short responses from participants. Participants could reply to EViews at a time and place (with internet connection) that suited them and could choose to reply immediately. Some replies came within hours of the prompting EViews being sent, whilst others occurred up to two weeks after prompts. Mann and Stewart (2000) point to the benefits of this personal “asynchronous” communication used in the EView and the EDB where “recipients can read, reply ... at their leisure” (p. 2) rather than needing to be connected at a particular time as in synchronous or real-time options such as chat room. While some participants had expressed being a little anxious with participating in Open Views or Open Focus Groups, no participants expressed any discomfort with participating in EViews in any phase.

Some researchers claim that rather than finding it more difficult to communicate online, many research participants feel more comfortable with this mode than in traditional “face to face” interviews. Selwyn and Robson (1998) further suggest that online research negates the “interview effect” of fear and shyness (as expressed by Participants (16) and (18) in phases 1 and 2), as the “spatial” and “temporal” distance offered by online research is often beneficial (p. 4). As a strengths researcher, the potential opportunity to alleviate negative effects of data collection and increase

rapport and communication was a determining factor to use and extend the EView format in Phase 3.

In Phase 1, fifteen participants participated in EViews (compared to nine Open Views) with 73 responses received (71 pages of transcript). Some of this data included email attachments (scans or word documents) of existing journal-like reflections from participants, which were sent as an attachment rather than retyping information into the main body of the email. In Phase 2, although no EView prompts were sent or requested, three participants sent self-initiated EViews regarding the research (6 responses, 4 transcript pages). When EViews were used as the only data collection method in Phase 3, fourteen of the nineteen participants' participated (28 responses, 56 pages of transcript) and these were all participants who had received and opened the EView prompting letter. There were five non-responding EView participants in Phase 3, more than twelve months after Phase 1 commencement. The five participants possibly did not respond with in-depth EViews due to reduced capacity for involvement and (or because of) changes in their study status at that time which may have caused them to less frequently check their university email accounts to which the prompting letter was sent. One of the five non-responding participants sent a brief email to the author to indicate that they were undertaking examinations and had a different enrolment pattern to the rest of the group, commenting "I have been studying part-time" (Participant (16)). Another non-responding EView participant emailed the author to indicate that they had deferred their studies due to family commitments, "I have dropped out of this semester, but hope to complete the subjects next year. This wasn't a hard decision for me, as juggling work, studies family life and reduced finances is not easy ... but I have had many positives, such as spending more time with family" (Participant (17)). The remaining three non-responding Phase 3 EView participants did not respond to the prompting EView, had different enrolment patterns to, and were not in regular contact with, the rest of the group.

The EViews from Phase 3 were collected when most of the responding participants had completed their teaching degrees and were either preparing to, or had already graduated as qualified teachers. Some participants were already employed as teachers or were working in education positions in various locations, some in interstate and international locations. Most participants and the researcher were no longer on campus and would have found it difficult to meet for data collection. Patton (2002) emphasises that, "the implication of thinking about purpose and audience in designing studies is that methods, no less than knowledge, are dependent on context. No rigid rules can prescribe what data to gather to investigate a particular interest or problem" (p. 12). The flexibility that Patton (2002) refers to, in determining what data collect was applicable to the type and method of data collection. From a strengths perspective, rather than the geographic distance that existed between researcher and participants being a problem, it created an opportunity to investigate research techniques and build on the resource of internet access for all involved. For the research project, email responses were considered a flexible, inclusive, time and cost efficient method of data collection for participants and researcher.

Data Analysis

This research involved one small group of students at a single institution and the analysis is, therefore, unable to make generalised claims about how the population of pre-service teachers overall, might respond (Burns, 2000). The inclusion of all members of a particular pre-service teacher cohort does, however, present the opportunity of analysing and discussing tentatively, the transferability of findings to similar contexts. In keeping with the principles of a strengths approach to research, the author identifies and defines this opportunity as *purposive analysis*; analysis aimed at maximising the advantage of the purposive sample. In this research, the purposive analysis aims to provide clues to identifying both the barriers and the solutions to protecting children that had been experienced by participants, and to examine examples of child-safety strengths and constraints from the data available.

Two different types of analysis were applied to the participant data collected in this research, namely thematic analysis (Aronson, 1994) and contextual analysis (Ross & Nibett, 1991). These differing layers of analysis were applied in order to sieve the data collected, for meaning and clues using a solutions based, multi-perspective focus that is inherent to the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005). Recognising and examining different stakeholder perspectives is a constituent part of most single qualitative analysis methods (Patton, 1990; 2002), however, the ability to apply another analysis method is a distinct benefit in strengths-based research, as it may generate additional findings and appeal to different audiences. From a strengths perspective, thematic analysis allowed the benefits of cross-examination of stakeholder responses to determine collective, constructive findings to key research terms (Burns, 2000). Equally beneficial, however, was the contextual analysis that highlighted particular influences on, and interpretations of, participants' voice and examined how these might assist, hinder or help improve child protection (Kumar, 2005). The combination of analysis methods recognises the importance of individual views and needs as well as the strength of group and collaborative responses.

As a strengths researcher, the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) provided the author with a guide to the issue of developing the appropriate analysis methods for this research (first column). It was important to vision what goals the analysis might achieve (second column) and identify the author's own strengths as a novice researcher and available through other literature resources (third and fourth columns) before determining the final analysis strategies to use (fifth column). The aspiration of the analysis was to help reveal and interpret participants' understandings and experiences of using a strengths approach to child protection in teacher preparation. Additionally, the analysis aimed to reflect on the potential of the Strengths Approach for future use in educational settings. The researcher was able to investigate different qualitative analysis options with the knowledge gained from previous study and experiences of using a Strengths Approach, to determine the most appropriate options. Literature suggested that both thematic and contextual analysis

provided opportunities to add to the developing, and complex body of child-protection knowledge (Aronson, 1994; Ross & Nisbett, 1991).

Burns (2000) emphasises that in qualitative research it is not necessary to be able to generalise results when analysing data. The NHMRC et al. (2007) advise that nevertheless, data analysis should aim to provide a sufficiently detailed account to enable others to determine whether there are other circumstances in which the findings may be applicable (p. 27). This research, as a non-representational, purposive sample of pre-service teachers, aimed to apply data analysis to find suggestive rather than universally applicable findings that could possibly assist other pre-service teachers and educators in enhancing child-protection preparation. At a micro level, the research was a single study of a small cohort of pre-service teachers engaging with the key research terms of child abuse, child protection and teacher preparation. The thematic data analysis therefore, investigated clusters of understandings from data transcripts around key research terms and investigated if these clusters confirmed, disconfirmed or added to previous literature on these terms. At a macro level, the research was context driven and placed at the intersection of a small subset of solutions based, child protection and teacher-education research that is influenced by, and potentially influential to, larger bodies of research disciplines. The contextual analysis, therefore investigated the contextual influences on qualitative, non-medical responses to child protection in an area that, to date, is more heavily weighted towards statistical reports of the quantity and negative effects of child abuse. Kumar (2005, p. 6) explains that the rigour of qualitative research should be assessed primarily by criteria of quality and credibility of data collection and analysis and not by matters of validity and reliability as defined in quantitative research designs. The sections below describe the investigation and use of both thematic and contextual analysis methods in this research to provide credible, quality data on a strengths approach to child-protection education.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis (Patton, 2002) is applied in this research to sieve the data emerging across the entire research project for key concepts to enhance child-protection preparation. Aronson (1994) explains that in thematic analysis data is arranged into already classified patterns (such as the literature search terms for this research) and combined and catalogued into sub-themes to reinforce or find new patterns in the data and these should be related to the literature in the field of study. Patton (2002) argues that thematic or “content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings” (p. 453). In this research, individual dialogues were examined, particularly at points where they combined, to form a collective response to the research themes and to enhancing the protection of children. The grouping or patterning of responses aimed to explore concentrated commonalities and differences of a group of individuals, rather than to present a diluted summary of separate responses. The thematic analysis explored ideas that participants collectively

identified as important to child abuse and protection, as well as exceptions and singular ideas generated within the group.

Transcripts from all data collection methods and phases of the research were typed using a word-processing computer program then highlighted and coded for evidence of themes (research terms). Coding was then applied to the documents by using the colour highlighting and comment box insertion functions of the word-processing program. Passages of text were highlighted with different colours and numbered to indicate correlations with key research terms. For example, words, phrases and blocks of text relating to the research term child abuse were highlighted in blue and the number 1 inserted beside the text in a comment box along with any additional notes. The coded transcripts allowed the research terms to be revealed, clustered and more readily examined (content analysis) in the dialogue for reflections and responses to strengths-based child-protection teacher preparation. Sub-sets of coding were also applied. From the research term of child abuse for example, subsets arose from the data such as, physical abuse, sexual abuse and neglect. Findings from the three phases of data collection are drawn together in the thematic analysis. Whilst the contextual analysis portrayed a multiplicity of individual meanings emerging from the separate phases, the thematic analysis explored the fusion of socially constructed knowledge (Patton, 2002) arising from the joint research experience, as a whole. The main categories and themes arising from the participant responses were analysed to elucidate the group “essence” (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005, p. 21) of understandings about child abuse and child protection. In the thematic analysis, the expressions from the cohort towards the intersection of research themes were portrayed and consolidated as pre-service teacher responses to a strengths-based child-protection module. This deductive analysis “where the data are analysed according to an existing framework” (p. 21) drew from the existing identified research terms, which were analysed using the strengths theoretical framework. The identification of subsets of themes, however, arose inductively from the participants’ responses. This thematic analysis used the influence of the strengths theoretical framework (McCashen, 2005) and added understanding to the data by grouping strengths ideas and exploring intersections of responses. The Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) assisted the analysis of data in thematic analysis by allowing a consistent and stabilising theoretical framework. Participant responses were analysed to show any alignments with the column aspects of identifying issues, visions, strengths, resources and strategies that were also linked to the research terms. Evidence that explored, confirmed or disconfirmed the use of strengths processes and principles of social justice and self-determination in relation to child abuse and protection were particularly noted. Key findings from the literature review (Chapter 2) provided comparative reference points for interpretations.

Drawing together threads of participant responses in this way, the author analysed the extent to which the research project had met its stated aim of exploring the use and potential of the Strengths Approach to enhance child-protection education. Rather than traditionally returning to examine whether the research findings answer the research problem or question, the author evaluated the

engagement with the strengths research opportunity (Rath & Clifton, 2009; Saleebey, 2009) and whether strategies could be identified from the narratives that might contribute to developing a more effective pre-service child-protection preparation. In the thematic analysis, the ways in which group interactions shaped individual understandings about child abuse and protection were examined. In parallel to this, the strengths of individual exceptions to group comments were considered as valid, since they may provide innovative, individual solutions to issues. In this way, the findings of this research are less reliant on a quantity of responses to themes (though this is discussed) and more on the authenticity, weight and intensity of individual and group responses. The term *synthesis of research findings* is therefore used for these chapters rather than research findings summary in an effort to portray the blending of a range of group findings with those that emerged from individual responses. The theme responses, in this way, represent the opportunity to add to, rather than condense from the phase responses.

Qualitative research demands that the researcher transparently acknowledges the power dynamic inherent in including, excluding, categorising and analysing thematic data (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). To return to the previous camera metaphor, there is a sense in which the thematic analyst, like a photographer, takes, develops and presents pictures, choosing the angle, selecting who is highlighted and who is blurred. From a strengths approach it is considered beneficial for the analyst to be more than aware of the theoretical lens, editing and framing they are applying, but to be able to respond to it. The conduct of the analysis must be consistent with inclusive social justice principles and focussed (in this case) on the strengths and strategies identified by participants to protect children (Glicksen, 2004; Saleebey, 2009). Strengths researchers, like and qualitative researchers more generally, need to recognise fully their own influence, contributions to, and at times differences from, other participants. Therefore, rather like a pre-timed group shot, the researcher sought to also be in front of the lens and include herself as member of the group photo. The author's voice was therefore included in the thematic analysis section, recognising that experience and interest in child protection and the Strengths Approach as a practitioner, teacher and researcher undoubtedly coloured themes chosen and analysed. Researchers must be respectful of the multitude of interpretations possible and the danger of forcing "colonising" (McCashen, 2005, p. 24) interpretations on the data. Using a Strengths Approach, however, also allows researcher input to be a strength, provided it is a "power with" the research group and focussed on solutions (McCashen, 2005, p. 31).

Contextual Analysis

Contextual analysis was applied to data in this research to allow examination of how individual stakeholder perspectives evolved, altered and were influenced by changing contexts in this research. Ross and Nisbett (1991) urge that situational differences must be taken into account with any interpretation of data and Wright and Zakriski (2001) explain how contextual analysis deepen

understanding of research data. Focussing on the research terms *teacher education* and *strengths approach*, the contextual analysis considers the influencing and transforming contexts and sub contexts for the pre-service teachers in this research. The research participants moved, in the broad context of teacher education, from study and teaching practicum contexts to graduation and practising teachers' contexts. Equally, some participants moved from contexts as students of strengths approaches to becoming strengths practitioners.

A contextual analysis aligned with a strengths approach, looks at individual responses and contexts and evaluates how these may combine to broker diverse and multiple strategies for improving child protection. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2004) explain:

Education is context-specific and context-dependent. Context refers to the settings or surroundings in which education takes place. A student teacher is faced with the exciting but challenging task of assimilating a variety of contexts very rapidly when embarking upon teaching practice, whether during a course of initial teacher pre-service education or as a newly qualified teacher entering a first appointment in a school. These contexts vary from the very broad and general macro-contexts at a societal level to the very specific micro-contexts at a societal level to the very specific micro-contexts of a particular individual in a particular school, class and lesson. The prospect can be daunting. (p. 1)

Contextual analysis, as a form of narrative analysis (Burns, 2000), moves away from more generalised response summaries to investigate individual responses to key terms and the situations in which they were generated. Kushner (2000) advocates "personalising evaluation" (pp. 9-10) and Patton (2002) adds that "personalising and humanising evaluation are particularly important for education" (p. 176). Cernea (1991) argues this personalisation colloquially as, "putting people first". Cernea (1991) explains, "the personal nature of qualitative inquiry derives from its openness, the evaluator's close contact with the program, and the procedures of...in-depth interviewing that communicate respect to respondents by making *their* ideas and opinions (stated in their own terms) the important data source for evaluation" (p. 32). In part agreement, the author would further argue that data must be analysed in relation to the context in which the story is told. Contextual analysis adds to the personalisation pattern espoused by Cernea (1991) and is consistent with a strengths approach to research.

There is significant literature that emphasises the value of contextual analysis. Patton (2002) claims that "qualitative descriptions permit documentation of deeper and unanticipated program difference, idiosyncrasies and uniqueness's" (p. 165). Patton also refers to Feiman's (1977) foundational work in this area which highlighted the significant differences that contextual elements had in affecting the teaching and learning experiences experienced in teachers' centres in the United States. In the data collected for this research, in-depth personal stories and exceptions in participants' responses (those diverging from the generic group acknowledgements) were often most intriguing and engagingly pointed to new protection factors not previously considered. These participant vignettes often could not be presented as a whole, or examined in-depth, by using thematic analysis alone. For example, previous child-protection experiences expressed by individuals were often too lengthy to

include in full or were lost in the grouping of responses that occurs in thematic analysis. The thematic analysis captured valuable insights across all three phases of data collection on key terms such as physical abuse, emotional abuse, sexual abuse, child protection, teacher education and the Strengths Approach. There were more connections and details in the data, however, than the like terms of these responses. The contextual analysis for instance, noted differences occurring between the type of data captured during the teaching module, after teaching practicum and 12 months after the implementation module.

Individual perspectives changed between and during the phases and did not remain insular but were affected by other individual and group responses arising from the focus groups. These chronological response changes were significantly affected by the three different phase contexts. The influence of firstly the study context, secondly the teaching practicum context and thirdly the context of graduation and employment affected participant responses. These separate contexts for data collection could not be fully reflected in the dissection and collating of data from across all phases necessary for thematic analysis. The contextual analysis aimed to capture the sequential research journey that formed an overall story of this research. From the viewpoint of individual participants, the author examined firstly the circumstances occurring when participants engaged in a new way of studying child protection, in Phase 1. In the analysis of Phase 2, the impact on participants after teaching practicum was examined and how this context affected their recognition and developing views of child-protection issues. Finally, in examining Phase 3, the author reflected on how, as prospective and new graduates, participants' responses to research themes were affected by their new roles. The contextual analysis aimed to highlight the sequential nature of this research project and the changes, nuances and implications that occurred for different individuals from the different contexts. The author posits that, examination of contextual variations aided the interpretation of participant responses and offered additional understandings for improving child-protection preparation and the use of the Strengths Approach. Patton (2002) captures this explaining:

Qualitative descriptions are necessary to capture the unique diversities and contrasts that inevitably emerge as local programs show considerable variation in implementation and outcomes. These variations are not such that they can be fully captured and measured along standardised scales; they are differences in content, process, goals, implementation, politics, context, outcomes and program quality. To understand these differences, a holistic picture of each unique site is needed. (p. 165)

Participant Voice

Patton (2002) argues “if decision makers want to understand variations in programme implementation, qualitative data are necessary to give a complete evaluation of local variations” (p. 326). In the contextual analysis, the author examined participants' individual responses to child-safety issues, and strengths-based preparation for teaching with emphasis on contextual nuances affecting narratives. Much of the data in this analysis chapter is presented as full block responses, paragraphs of participants' dialogue, rather than snippets of entries punctuated by researcher

interpretations or links to literature. While recognising the value of referring to previous studies and the addition of researcher insight to explain and interpret data, a strengths approach to research must recognise the power that researchers can wield in interpreting participants responses (Liamputtong & Ezzy, 2005). When participant responses are divided and diluted into smaller excerpts there is an increased risk of misinterpretation in researcher comments. Additionally, the researcher's analysis can be viewed as intrusive and overwhelming, a barrier to allowing the reader to draw different inferences from data provided. Providing, in colloquial terms, "the full story", not "butting in" or taking information "out of context" is essential to the "putting people first" approach that Kushner (2000) holds in high regard in evaluation. In the strengths perspective, Glicken (2004) advises of the need for "workers to help clients clearly communicate the nature of their problems and the impact the problems are having on their lives ... allow clients to tell their stories unfettered by questions or observations" (p. 52). Although the description Glicken (2004) gives is primarily from a therapeutic context, for those attempting to approach research from a strengths perspective, the links with enabling participant voice seems familiar.

Jackson and Mazzei (2008), however, warn against the "too easy" (p. 3) theory of simply placing chunks of participant data, devoid of analysis with the assumption that voices of participants are thereby empowered to "speak the truth of consciousness and experience" (p. 1). They discuss the "limit of voice" (p. 1) and urge researchers to consider carefully "dangerous assumptions in trying to represent a single truth (seemingly articulated by a single voice)" (p. 1). In the contextual analysis, the author attempts to juggle the raw representation of participants' responses to the research with non-intrusive analysis. The author attempts to avoid reducing narratives to dissected conceptual components, yet with the realisation that even as substantial blocks of text, the responses are themselves uncertain and the individual influences and assumptions of the author are forever present. This reflects the view of Mazzei (2008), who explains that:

The voice which I have been seeking to "capture" and tame as clear, pure and articulable is now only present to me as slippery, shifting, knowable, unknowable, certain, audible, inaudible, and certainly unstable ... Voice clearly happens in spoken utterances "voiced" by our participants, but does it not also happen when/they/we fail to audibly voice an opinion with words and instead voice displeasure, discomfort, or disagreement with silence ... *Where* does voice happen? ... Does it happen in the spaces and places that name us and claim us? (p. 45)

In the contextual analysis, both participants' voices and silences to child-protection preparation are explored in an attempt to identify some of the spaces and places that have influenced the participants' dialogues. Rather than to take participant data out of context, the contextual analysis aimed to give in context information to the reader to help make their own sense of responses and interpretations. The Strengths Approach's recognition and respect for "people as their own agents of change" is important here too (McCashen, 2005, p. v). Often in traditional research methods, participants' responses are termed *raw data*, yet to be analysed, free from interpretation and needing to be manipulated by the researcher in order to identify salient points (Bentzen, 2000, p. 85). The author highlights that many

of the participants engaged in self-analysis within their own responses to a high degree. Participants often compared and contrasted their own and fellow participants' developing knowledge of child protection, teacher education and the Strengths Approach. The Strengths Approach emphasises that people involved in issues are the most knowledgeable and the primary solution brokers (McCashen, 2005). Allowing participants to tell their own stories and to recognise analysis occurring within narratives before adding other insights would seem consistent with a Strengths Approach to research. Lather (2008), however, warns against "romantic aspirations about giving voice to the voiceless" (p. 18) and questions concepts of "empathy, voice and authenticity" that are automatically achieved by "dialogical knowing" alone (p. 17). Lather's work calls for researchers to recognise the dangers in poststructuralist methodologies that may infer "a wish for heroism and rescue" (p. 17). The very selection and non-selection by the researcher of which participant responses to use, as well as the planned interpretation or non-interpretation of participants responses may well equate to a self-serving strategy to "produce the persuasive text that elicits reader empathy" (p. 17). From a strengths perspective, these critiques are most valuable as a warning that choosing post-structuralist, qualitative methodologies does not fully avoid power over participants and may also infer the rescuer approach (Scott & O'Neil, 2003) it is seeking to avoid.

Jackson and Mazzei (2008) claim that researchers need to address the "limit" and "primacy of voice in conventional qualitative research" (p. 1) and "strain notions of voice" (p. 16). Lather (2008) asks if this could be research "where centers and margins are both situated and yet constantly changing intersections of interpretation, interruption and mutuality?" (p. 17). In the contextual analysis, the author presents vignettes of participant voices, chosen from the research cohort, with the recognition that this selection was subjective to the author's individual conceptualisation of the research and that other researchers may have chosen differently. The vignette choices were not intended to be representational of the entire cohort or of pre-service teachers in general, but based on presenting a sample of responses collected. Responses were chosen, in particular, for those that may capture contextual clues to improve child-protection preparation from each phase of the data collection and those that reinforce and contest central research themes. Vignettes are presented with responses that are both central and marginal to the key research findings and those that capture changes in situations and understandings related to child-protection preparation. Generalised and collated cohort responses are presented in the thematic analysis chapter as distinct, intersections with key research themes and with researcher and literature input providing, what Lather (2008) describes as, "interruption and mutuality" (p. 17).

Conclusion

The Strengths-Approach framework for this research emerged from evaluating strengths principles against key education, social service, psychology and research theories for linkages and similarities that could be of guidance when researching child-protection enhancement. By reviewing these links

and emergent theoretical concepts alongside the Strengths Approach, an eclectic range of aligning theoretical strengths were drawn. Though drawn from a multi-layered theoretical foundation, these complementary conceptual strengths combined to form a single reinforced strengths theoretical framework for this research in teacher education. The discrete framework was designed to elucidate cohesively rich meaning and understanding from the qualitative data collected. Rather than risking weakened analysis by applying multiple theories and research techniques, the unified framework provided a consistent reference point for determining methods and guiding analysis.

This research was a purposive, single study of a small cohort of nineteen pre-service teachers in Queensland, Australia, engaging with the key research terms of child abuse, child protection, teacher preparation and the Strengths Approach. Strengths-based adaptations of qualitative methods were used to generate participants' responses to an integrated child-protection module within a university teacher preparation, semester-long subject. Ethical considerations such as confidentiality, participant and researcher voice and the dual role of researcher and teacher both challenged and supported the use of a strengths framework for this research. Data collection methods consisted of semi-structured interviews (Open Views), focus groups (Open Focus Groups) and electronic responses (EDB and EViews). Data were collected in three phases, during the subject, after teaching practice and twelve months after the subject completion. Data were analysed in reference to existing literature using both thematic and contextual analysis. Consideration was given in this organisational methodology chapter, to the impact of using a strengths approach as a theoretical framework, the practical implications of applying this framework to research and to designing a child-protection education module. An integrated module was designed to include teaching on the strengths approach with traditional and additional child-protection content included. Students discussed child-protection issues and engaged in practical familiarisation with community and strengths resources. The author as lecturer taught, mentored and role modelled strengths principles and students explored and designed strategies to address real life child-protection scenarios using the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48).

CHAPTER 4

THEMATIC ANALYSIS: DRAWING TOGETHER UNDERSTANDINGS OF CHILD ABUSE AND PROTECTION

The previous chapter outlined the methodology for this research and the three phases of data collection that occurred during and after the implementation of strengths-based child-protection module. It described the two layers of analysis, thematic and contextual, that are applied to the participant data. In this chapter the author uses thematic analysis (Patton, 2002) to sieve the data for key concepts to enhance child-protection preparation that have emerged across the three phases of data collection. This chapter combines learnings from the literature review and “insider knowledge” (Mac Naughton et al., 2001, p. 6) to interpret and present the themed data as the story of a group. This provides a platform for the next chapter, which will focus on individual stories. Metaphorically, the discussion will “zoom out” to provide a holistic class photo before “zooming in” on individual portraits of pre-service teachers’ child-protection dialogues.

The author examines in this chapter how the individual dialogues combined at points to form collective responses, clusters within the research themes that focussed on child abuse and enhancing the protection of children. The grouping of the responses aims to explore the concentrated commonalities and differences of a group of individuals, rather than to present a diluted summary of their separate responses. This chapter concentrates on the ideas that participants collectively identified as important to child abuse and protection, as well as exceptions and single ideas generated within the group. Individual responses to the themes of teacher preparation and the Strengths Approach in relation to the different contexts in which they were situated, and the influence of these different contexts on their responses, are explored in the next chapter (Chapter 5).

Gathering Child-Abuse and Protection Data

Responses to the theme of *child abuse* were generated from the initial questions and prompts given by the researcher. The questions typically asked were “what are your thoughts and experiences about child-abuse and protection issues?” and “I was wondering what your knowledge and experiences are around child protection and child abuse?” From these questions, discussions developed between participants and researcher on the EDB, in emails and EViews, Open Views and Open Focus Groups. Given the sensitive nature of the theme of child abuse, participants received prior assurance from the researcher, and from the research supervisor that the aim of questioning for this theme was to enhance teacher preparation for protecting children and that they were not required to give personal details of abuse situations. Participants were reminded of the participant support services available and no participants withdrew from the project or declined to respond to the theme of child abuse.

The conjoint use of the terms *abuse* and *protection* in the questioning emphasised the need in “solutions-focussed” research (Walter & Peller, 1993), both to protect children and to explore fully

the issue of child abuse. Combining the terms also reflected the general overlapping usage of the terms *abuse* and *protection*. These terms are sometimes used interchangeably (despite contradictory definitions) to refer to issues pertaining to children's well-being or methods of ensuring child safety. A few responses, for example, gave child-protection examples that were records of possible abuse or discussed abuse issues, yet recounted protective strategies. It is not possible to tell whether asking child-abuse and child-protection questions separately would have affected the responses given. It is clear from the perspective of a strengths researcher, however, that a separate focus on abuse would have risked anchoring the research in a pathological focus the author was trying to avoid. Regardless, separate responses to each term appeared in the data and were equally substantial. The multiplicity and complexity of participants' perceptions of abuse and protection warranted some separate analysis and physically amounted to approximately twenty transcript pages for each theme. Responses to abuse and protection prompts frequently followed on from each other in the narratives. This seemingly innocuous point may be a small encouragement to strengths advocates wishing to move away from solely deficit dialogues on issues. For strengths practitioners, it is significant that although concepts of child abuse were differentiated from those of protection in the narratives, they arose mostly alongside them. As the research project progressed, responses combining discussions about abuse with protection also increased. To maintain the authenticity of these responses, the analysis of child-abuse and protection themes will also occur alongside each other in this chapter.

Direct and Indirect Experiences: Perceptions of Abuse and Protection

The pre-service teachers' responses to the theme of *child abuse* were eclectic and reflective of the diverse range of experiences and knowledge of abuse within the cohort. While the next chapter explores nuances in individual responses, the excerpts in this chapter are included to represent types of examples given by cohort. For example, the spectrum of previous, direct child-abuse experiences was captured by initial participant responses ranging from "I haven't come across any child safety issues yet" (Participant (2), EView), to "my experience with child protection [*child abuse*] is possibly a little longer than others I have read" (Participant (15), Discussion Board). After practicum one participant stated that, "as for child safety I haven't really noticed anything, although I had noticed a little boy that always had bruises on his wrist" (Participant (7), EView), while another revealed "on my last prac... there were a number of students who suffer from neglect. In particular, many students had come from broken families, terrible living conditions and horrifying home lives" (Participant (8), Discussion Board).

All participants also recognised that they acquired knowledge of abuse indirectly through reported abuse cases in the media. In the literature review, the author proffered the view that the often sensationalistic, concentrated, reporting of abuse cases may overwhelm pre-service teachers and reduce engagement with issues. Within the first data collected in Phase 1, all participants expressed concerns with the issue of child protection and some expressed a sense of being overwhelmed

(Participant (6) Open Focus Group), particularly by child-abuse statistics, such as those published by AIHW (2007) and Pinheiro (2006). Baginsky and Macpherson (2005, pp. 317-330) received similar feedback from pre-service teachers before they completed child-protection training including the NSPCC model for ITT and comparable models discussed in Chapter 2. They also reported that confidence increased after training and again after teaching practice but also that there were “a significant number of respondents expressing some anxiety and confusion, even among those who had indicated that they were confident” (p. 320). At the beginning of this research, for the participants, as pre-service teachers preparing to work in Queensland early-childhood settings, the contemplation of encountering children who have experienced child abuse also appeared to be daunting but not to the extent anticipated, that might discourage action or engagement with the issue of child protection. The majority of participants’ preliminary reactions to child abuse more closely matched the anxiety and confusion recorded by Baginsky and Macpherson’s (2005) participants, post training. Exceptions to this occurred, as expected, when participants conveyed shock and revulsion at extreme, media reports, of the graphic nature of injuries inflicted on children in some child-abuse cases. Despite the stronger emotional emphasis in these participant responses, they were also often very detailed and conveyed concern and indicated a higher level of engagement rather than withdrawal from the issues as anticipated:

The death of a two-year-old boy who was returned to his father after being with the Department of Child Safety. The father had a violent history and has now been charged with manslaughter and torture ... he was returned to the “care” of his father. I felt quite sick when I read that the boy had a broken arm and nose and had 271 bruises, some quite old. (Participant (6), Discussion Board)

There are many issues, notwithstanding the somewhat lenient nature of the judicial system. I read about a case where a man was released from jail and placed in a house 2 doors across the road from his victim ... I guess that I too have many questions that hopefully time and training will help to answer. (Participant (17), Discussion Board)

The reported cases of child abuse are increasing ... I believe that more training is needed so that professionals like me can feel comfortable in dealing with this topic. (Participant (1), Open View)

Where do we as pre-service teachers (and eventually teachers) learn to deal with these matters? ... Are we at some stage thoroughly trained and taught how to handle the situation? (Participant (16), Discussion Board)

The engaged reactions of the cohort to the mistreatment of children, parallel the child-safety concerns expressed by child-protection researchers calling for increased and advanced research into child abuse (AIHW, 2011; IPSCAN, 2010; Krug et al., 2002; NAPCAN, 2011; UNICEF, 2011). Many responses also appear to support child-protection research findings that claim that there is a need to enhance pre-service preparation for child protection (e.g., Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Baginsky, 2003; Watts & Laskey, 1997). In line with strengths approaches, the responses exhibited a willingness to examine in

depth the issue of child abuse, a first step (column 1) in the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) to developing solutions.

Despite differences in the extent of participants' direct or indirect experience with issues of abuse, all participants in the cohort expressed recognition of what Hopper (2010) and NCCANI (2005) show to be the damaging effects of abuse and the need to explore the issue further:

I don't really feel comfortable with teaching and addressing child protection. I guess that for a lot of people of [it] would be a very sensitive issue and sometimes easier to just "not go there". Still, I think it is such an important issue that it cannot be ignored. (Participant (5), Discussion Board)

It is an issue that needs to be addressed. (Participant (17), Discussion Board)

This is an important issue that is important for teachers to be aware of. (Participant (13), Open View)

The teacher needs to ... ensure that the student's time in school is one that is safe, supportive and protected. (Participant (19), Discussion Board)

The responses corresponded to research that indicates although teachers may feel fearful, ill-informed and lacking in preparation to protect children, they take "their responsibility towards the protection of children in schools seriously" (MacBlain et al., 2006, p. 189). Although Participant (5) offered the view presented by Britzman and Gilbert (2004), that some people may adopt an attitude of "not wanting to know" (p. 88) about child abuse, participant responses in the cohort did not appear to present an unwillingness to discuss abuse.

While the purpose of the research project was not to identify child abuse or confirm the extent of abuse indicated by statistics, details of possible abuse emerged in some responses to the child abuse theme. Detailed quantitative analysis is not the purpose or within the scope of this project but the grouping and essence of participants' dialogues can, perhaps, be explained and enhanced by the use of numbers. All possible abuse-related responses arising from school or childcare contexts that were gathered during this research were reported to the relevant Supervising Teacher, Principal, Director or child-protection service by participants. The research data recorded over fifty separate incidences of possible abuse and unspecified numbers of possible neglect, from a cohort of nineteen participants. The number of incidences recorded by participants is, however, likely to have been influenced by their involvement in the research project. All participants were willing and expressed enthusiasm to learn about child abuse and protection. Participants had a heightened and developing awareness of abuse indicators from the teaching module and knew that research participation was not formal abuse reporting. These factors may have made them more willing to explore possible abuse situations. The author interprets many responses as asking *is this* abuse rather than stating that *this is* abuse.

Many participants expressed uncertainty, across all phases, as to whether the incidents they discussed were possible abuse:

I am not quite sure if it is classed as neglect but I know that when I was on 3rd year prac ... we had one student, she didn't come to school for a week ... so I mean that's neglecting her education. (Participant (6), Open View)

I don't really have any child protection stories, however I had one little incident that I was a little nervous about addressing. A little girl and boy were showing their private bits to each other. (Participant (13), EView)

This hesitancy from pre-service teachers could be interpreted as an unwillingness to identify suspected abuse, based on fear or knowledge of negative consequences when reporting. One participant, indeed, recorded how a practising teacher was assaulted by a parent after reporting abuse and consequently "she obviously was anxious about having to report another child considering what happened last time" (Participant (6), Open Focus Group). Fear of retribution, however, does not seem to be a significant factor in the hesitancy of the participants' responses, as they openly examined sensitive abuse issues and understood that research confidentiality helped to protect their identity. Their tentative responses could, more critically, be seen as evidence that they did not understand abuse or their duty of care as specified by various Acts and Regulations e.g., Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011c; QCEC, 2008; Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995, 2011). It seems more probable, however, that the participants' expressed uncertainty related to their role as student teachers under the supervision of qualified teachers and that they understood that abuse notification is the responsibility of the service the child attends (c.f., Child Care Act 2002, 2010). From a strengths perspective, the uncertainty also demonstrated, encouragingly, a positive recognition of the dangers of making false allegations and a willingness to explore incidents, non-judgementally, whilst seeking advice (c.f., COAG, 2009c; Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011). Using a disclaimer as a precursor to a response is constructive, reflecting understanding from these pre-service teachers that the process of substantiation of abuse is often uncomfortable, complex, and reliant on observable evidence (c.f., Briggs & Hawkins, 1997).

The author puts forward the view that through their education studies pre-service teachers and childcare workers gain a growing knowledge of child development that can be an asset to identify child abuse correctly. The hesitancy to label an observation as definitive evidence of abuse may also be due to pre-service teachers' critical skills in recognising age-appropriate child development and behaviour rather than signs of abuse, i.e., the possibility of healthy sexual development rather than sexual abuse in the example above. In addition, hesitancy may reflect participants' efforts to grapple with a range of behaviours from parents, teachers and children that risk the safety of children and their ability to learn and wonder if these should be termed abuse.

Personal Responses to Abuse and Protection

The participants' varied responses to the themes of child abuse and protection align with calls for "a more accurate representation of teacher's work in the [child protection] field ... the concept of multiple roles rather than a singular role" (Walsh, 2002, p. 1). Although the number of responses in

this research is in direct contrast to the “silence” or lack of responses noted in Walsh’s own research (p. 1), nevertheless, findings for both agree: “The research refutes the notions of teachers as incompetent and unknowledgeable regarding child abuse and neglect” (p. 1). It also seems likely that the differences in roles, between the practising teachers in Walsh’s (2002) study and the student teachers in this research, may have contributed to the difference in response rates. Walsh (2002) interpreted the lack of responses in her study as due to fear from participants that their responses may be “sensitive and potentially damaging” to them as practising teachers (p. 1). In this research the multitude of responses given may be, conversely, due to the data collection environment being of relatively low risk to the participants. As non-qualified teachers, in a learning environment, participants were not expected to correctly identify abuse or take primary responsibility for reporting. Fear that their responses would be interpreted as incorrect or judged as incompetent were, perhaps, lessened by having guidance available from both supervising teachers on teaching practice and the researcher as a teacher educator. The author suggests that the collaborative nature and solutions-focus of strengths research assists in establishing a trusting and respectful relationship between researcher and participants where understanding multiple perspectives and expressing feelings on issues are welcomed. Respectful of the devastating effects of child abuse and the need to report suspected abuse, data collection also presented a positive opportunity to examine with participants, definitions and categories of abuse, processes of identification and false identification in learning environments. The author posits that by sharing and developing deep understandings of child abuse, tailored child-protection strategies can be facilitated and the protective capacities of pre-service teachers can also be enhanced.

Five of the research participants shared in-depth, life-affecting stories of abuse which had occurred prior to the research project beginning. These comments on single incidents of possible child abuse were highly detailed and emotive personal narratives, such as:

My cousin was accused of molesting his child, she was four or five at the time and she was walking around saying that “Daddy molested me”, those were her words ... him and his partner were going through a custody issue at the time and he wasn’t accused but during that time he wasn’t allowed to be with her by himself and it’s really marred their relationship as well now. (Participant (9), Open View)

When my son was almost 5 and in pre-school I arrived home from work to find a card from Family Services in my door informing me to contact ASAP. I nearly died then & there. They were on my door 9 am the next day. An allegation of neglect had been made regarding me with my son, along with allegations that I physically abuse him ... my first response was “Are you aware that my divorce date is in 2 days?” (Participant (15), EDB)

The participants recounting these experiences provided further details and confirmed the difficulties and barriers for those involved in reports of suspected abuse (c.f., Mellor & Sachs, 2004; Sachs & Mellor, 2005). They expressed fears that notifications may cause retaliation, or might be incorrect, and noted cases where abuse notifications emerged during divorce and separation procedures.

Abuse statistics suggest that within the cohort some participants may have experienced abuse themselves (AIHW, 2011). Additionally, Briggs and Hawkins (1997) estimated that many people who have been abused often choose to work in caring professions such as teaching and nursing. Individuals who have been abused may not reveal abuse, possibly as a defensive or healing action, and they may be unwilling to be negatively stereotyped as a victim or abused (Scott & O’Neil, 2003). As the researcher, the author was cognisant of the sensitivity and care that was required in collecting data from the cohort, as some of the participants may potentially have experienced abuse. Though not required, two participants willingly included responses that may be interpreted as indicating previous protection concerns: “I have been a victim in certain circumstances” (Participant (19), EDB) and “myself and my 2 brothers are adopted from different families we were all wards of the state in the 1970’s” (Participant (15), EDB). The researcher needed to take into account that some members of the cohort may have come to the research project with existing and specialised knowledge of child-protection issues. Participants had experiences of reporting procedures, false allegations and the debilitating effects of abuse on family and work relationships. These pre-existing personalised meanings of child abuse were also a powerful strength of experience and resilience they were willing to share. Ensuring that their responses were used to enhance teacher preparation rather than to victimise further was essential to the author as a strengths researcher. Participants were reminded of the child-protection counselling and victim support resources available. Participants (8), (19) and (15) particularly, had high involvement in the research process generating many responses focussed on bettering child protection. The Strengths Approach values and encourages the use of multiple perspectives on issues (Saleebey, 2009) and in strengths research, the respectful listening and recording of participant perspectives is integral to column 1 of the Column Approach with the acknowledgement that the exposition of issues must ultimately lead to strategies for improving issues (McCashen, 2005, p. 48).

School-Based Responses to Abuse and Protection

Despite the pre-service teachers’ limited experience of working formally in schools, over twenty responses to the theme of abuse (more than one incident per participant) arose from a teaching practice, which lasted less than eight weeks. Many responses to the theme of abuse emerged from the in-depth conversations about experiences in school settings.

There was a boy from the other class, a couple of times I looked at him, oh he’s got bruises on him, everywhere, bruises and I actually said to two of the teachers, “Is that normal?” I worked out with a little bit of info [information] from another teacher that he’s got some sort of learning problem or something and that he isolates himself and that is a problem with him, the bruising, you know, he’s just got to bump himself [bruises easily]. (Participant (15), Open View)

I did have one child in my class who I suspected may be neglected. The student had so many lice they were falling onto her uniform and when the mother was rung to come and pick her up, she refused. The teacher aide took her and washed her hair. My SBTE

[school based teacher educator] was aware of the mother acting this way on numerous accounts. She rang the mother that afternoon. (Participant (5), EView)

While I was on one prac the teacher told me that a child in the class had recently stated to her mother that she had been sexually abused by a family member ... she didn't want to talk about it and I didn't feel that it was my place to pry because I was just there observing at the time. (Participant (9), EDB & Open View)

The responses indicated that participants considered that most supervising teachers were aware of possible abuse and neglect cases and were implementing protective strategies such as practical assistance, observing, monitoring, recording possible abuse and communicating with parents. Further, they said that supervising teachers answered their questions relating to children's well-being, explaining behaviours or symptoms of abuse. The responses signified the useful mentoring role supervising teachers provided in modelling child-protection strategies (c.f., McCallum, 2003).

Participants reported that a few supervising teachers offered them limited information about particular child-abuse notifications. In these cases, both participants and supervising teachers appeared to have recognised the need to balance, professionally, the sharing of such information to ensure children have their needs met and pre-service teachers have the opportunity to learn about such situations and privacy and confidentiality required by education policies (Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011c; QCEC, 2008) is maintained. Due to the sensitivity of abuse cases and the practical demands of teaching, extended discussion about specific incidents may be inappropriate during practicum. The opportunity for pre-service teachers to debrief with a teacher educator about their child-safety observations after practicum, however, appears potentially beneficial as part of post-practicum teaching degree content. Thus, for example, Participant (2) commented on the individual and group discussion about child abuse and protection after practicum:

It [individual discussion with teacher educator] gave me an opportunity to think what I would do, you know because you never really think about it. And then I think discussing it afterwards with everyone, getting everyone's different ideas ... Learning how to deal with it, how to know whether a child [may have been abused] ... gave me confidence in dealing with that area. (Open View)

Some initial Phase 1 responses to the theme of child abuse reflected the "heightened anxiety" highlighted by Singh (2004, p. 2) as being consistent with many teachers' responses to the identification of child abuse, particularly risks concerning teacher-student touch (Singh & McWilliam, 2005, p. 132). Explaining an incident that occurred prior to the research project, Participant (1) for example, stated that "I was very anxious too, what if she says 'he touched me here or he touched me there', you know, how do you respond to that if you're not trained? So I was very anxious of what she might say" (Open View). Early comments from other participants also confirmed a sense of fear as reported in previous research (McWilliam & Jones, 2005; Singh, 2004). Participant (16) replied, "I think my hair would stand on end having to think of what to say and then do" (EDB), and Participant (19) said, "it is just so daunting" (Open View). Participant (1) explained her anxiety further: "I do not feel confident in teaching child protection [*talking about abuse*], I have taught my own children [at

home], probably frightened the daylights out of them, but not sure how I would approach this issue in a classroom” (Participant (1), Open View). Many responses in the early weeks of the module were also limited to comments such as being “uncomfortable” or “fearful” with examining child-protection issues (Participant (8), EDB). The responses indicated that the participants in this research (as an atypical early-childhood student group) entered the teaching module with the same feelings of being inadequately prepared to deal with child-protection issues as reported in other previous child-protection studies (Hodgkinson & Baginsky, 2000; Whiteside, 2001).

Participants’ articulation of initial discomforts with child-protection issues was consistent with findings in previous literature (Singh, 2004). The data suggests also that the participants did not leave the subject and graduate expressing the same feelings or with low motivation for exploring child-protection issues (c.f., Whiteside, 2001). Phase 3 data (see p. 211) indicated that, while not all of the responding participants reported as having child-protection issues arise in their practice at the time of data collection, there was an overall willingness in responses to discuss child protection. After expressing, during the teaching session, a growing interest and confidence in child protection, Participant (8), for example, commented in Phase 3 that she had been working “positively” to assist a child with high behavioural needs and was “going to look further into child protection” (EView). Participant (1) commented that the child-protection focus of the research is “a great topic, one that needs to be explored more” (Phase, 3 EView).

The data collected suggests that facilitation during the teaching module allowed participants to express feelings that were common among the group and to explore the individual reasons for those feelings. The analysis suggested that extended facilitation time in child-protection preparation supported self-empowered and initiated responses to child protection from the participants and this provides added impetus to calls for further investigation of this phenomenon. The data supported McCallum’s (2003) findings regarding the benefits of extended time in child-protection preparation for extended discussion and that mentoring of pre-service teachers can assist them to feel more comfortable in addressing child-protection issues. The complexity of issues expressed relating to child protection for teachers validated the need to explore child protection over a period longer than a one-off workshop. The participants comments pointed to the same conclusion that Laskey (2004) reached, that child-protection training of two hours is “manifestly inadequate, considering the complexity and emotional impact of child maltreatment” (p. 2) and that teachers’ personal needs should be recognised in any child-protection program design. The cumulative sharing of individual experiences and listening to others each week, allowed the pre-service teachers in this project to explore more fully the issue of child protection (column 1 of the Column Approach) rather than limiting discussion to the number of abuse cases. The author argues that discussion of personal experiences and case study information along with child-abuse information are useful components of effective child-protection preparation. Comprehensive preparation is needed so that pre-service teachers cannot ignore the likelihood of encountering children in situations of abuse during their

careers or dismiss child-protection issues as irrelevant for their practice. This small scale research was able to examine claims by Laskey (2004) that what is required for child-protection education is a “program extending over one semester in pre-service teacher education” (p. 18; see also Laskey, 2005, p. 271) and agrees with MacIntyre and Carr (2000) that in this instance, “longer programs are more successful in changing teachers’ behaviour” (pp. 183-199).

Confidence Issues with Abuse and Protection

While a preliminary lack of confidence was commonly expressed within the cohort, the author did not interpret it as the intense moral “child panic” that Sachs and Mellor (2005, p. 125) suggested occurs amongst practising teachers. Nevertheless, the extended participant conversations from this research supported Mellor and Sachs’ (2004) earlier work that stated in respect to child-protection issues and teachers, “low morale affects teaching practice” (p. 12) or at least the preparation for it. In the early weeks of the module, individual responses to child abuse and protection depended largely on participants’ previous experiences and emotional reactions to abuse (including compassion and empathy). Participant (9) stated early in the module that a barrier to engaging with child protection is “the fact that it does stir up those emotions and that it’s so complex and you don’t know where to start” (Open View). Prominent in the early-recorded responses of the cohort was a sense of *elevated emotions*:

It broke my heart to see this delicate little girl missing out on so much that the future has to offer her. (Participant (17), EDB)

When you [researcher] went through all the abuses and like the statistics, I was really, really shocked with all of that. (Participant (14), Open View)

Her mum could not afford to buy them food. I was nearly in tears and had no idea what to do. (Participant (14), EDB)

I just get too emotional, I know during one of the lectures when you were talking about the stats and stuff I was almost sitting there crying. (Participant (18), Open Focus Group)

It’s so sad, and makes me so angry, when people take advantage of the vulnerability of children. (Participant (3), EDB)

One response did express ethical concerns in emotional terms and seemed on first reading a possible example of “child panic” (Mellor & Sachs, 2004; Sachs & Mellor, 2005; Singh, 2004). Participant (18) reflected on the statistics of child abuse:

Initially all I could think about were the stats - 53 million children killed! – 53 thousand boys having sex forced on them – 1 child abuse every 15 mins! – 1 child in every 2 classrooms! This was soooooo wow, like how can we possibly combat that!! How can people do that to children? I hate the thought of this, I hate that adults can have such power over young children. It’s heart breaking!! [Participant’s emphasis]. (EDB)

“Initially” was a significant qualifying term in this response as the participant then went on to say, equally emphatically but without panic: “If as teachers we can help *one* of these children or stop the abuse occurring we can change the stats, we can help! [Participant emphasis].” Participant (18)

further explained how her reactions towards child abuse changed after studying the Strengths Approach: “instead of feeling completely overpowered and upset I was inspired.” Participant (7), similarly, expressed feeling initially “rather scared” that she would “be one of the people who pretended it [abuse] wasn’t there,” then reflected that, “being able to recognise this trait I will be able to work on it so as not to ignore problems instead identify and report case of concern” (EView). The participants’ responses were consistent with Briggs and McVeity’s (2000) claim that teacher educators must realise that:

Child abuse arouses strong emotions ... [but] tertiary training institutions have a responsibility to provide exposure to child abuse issues [and while] the shock of new cases [can] never be removed by education, they can be reduced to a level where people are not immobilised ... If we reconsider the common responses to child abuse, we will see that the emotions can be turned to advantage by a combination of education and a psychological technique called reframing. (p. 169)

Participants’ open and honest expressions of strengths-based changes to reframing child-protection issues are discussed further in the next chapter (Chapter 5). The changes recorded an increasing movement in the cohort responses from demonstrating negative, elevated emotions to those demonstrating positive, action-led emotions.

From a strengths perspective, the participants’ initial emotional exploration of instances of child abuse appeared to be a necessary part of the strength process (Scott & O’Neil, 2003). According to McCashen (2005, p. 15) exploring different “ways of knowing” issues precedes moving to solutions. Participant (18)’s response also demonstrated that, contrary to the suggestion in the literature analysis that pre-service teachers may lack connection with larger statistics of child abuse and protection, the cohort experienced strong and sensitive connections. Most participants, however, did appear to connect more readily with the smaller local statistics orientated towards teaching rather than the larger global mass reports:

I think I said at the time that I thought the 53 million worldwide was disconnected, it’s not related to me, but then you had an Australian one, when you gave us that statistic and I thought that was very interesting. (Participant (16), Open View)

When you hear one in every 15 minutes, you’re like, oh wow, that’s really a lot ... [ACT - abuse notification rate] because it’s such a taboo subject to talk about. (Participant (8), Open View)

Yeah, the one in every fifteen minutes [statistic] that really impacts on me, but the one in every two classrooms as well because that could be my classroom, or the other person’s next door or whatever, but the one in every fifteen minutes is just astounding! [Participant emphasis]. (Participant (9), Open View)

I was alarmed at the statistic that one in two classrooms has a reported abuse case and one child in every nine classrooms is being investigated for an abuse case. These statistics made it so much more real of the likelihood of having an abused child in my own classroom. (Participant (7), EView)

Responses to the informal information from philanthropic, church and charity group’s publications (e.g., ACT, 2008) were more detailed than those in respect to the more formal reports detailing global

and national statistics. Participants often made connections between the informal information and their own experiences whereas responses to the larger statistics were limited to comments such as “oh that’s a lot isn’t it?” (Participant (10), Open Focus Group). In particular, they commented on case studies featured on those web sites that translated statistics into a more immediate context. The focused information and recommendations on these sites, specifically related to education, were far more successful at engendering interest and a willingness to engage in discussion about child protection. For example, the ACT (2009) presents information that “a child is abused every fifteen minutes” and that investigations are carried out for “approximately 1 child in every 2 classrooms”. Participants commented emotively on these figures, Participant (14) for instance turned to another student in an Open Focus Group and commented “wow and that’s just the investigations too, not everyone gets investigated, just do the maths!” which initiated a detailed discussion of the investigation procedure. The author suggests that large-scale figures of child abuse may be difficult to relate to on a personal level and that they may be a barrier to engagement with child protection. Workshops that are limited to outlining abuse figures and reporting procedures may risk disengaging pre-service teachers from action in child protection. Analysis of the participants’ responses during the module confirmed a “teacher vulnerability” (McWilliam & Jones, 2005) towards child-abuse statistics and the need for continued research to examine the critical factors influencing teachers actions (and inaction) in relation to child abuse (Walsh et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2005). Specifically, it appears that unlike the broader statistics, informal case studies that translate statistics into more immediate timeframes and personalised contexts need to be used in training as they enable engagement with the prevalence of abuse for pre-service teachers on a personal level, connecting the figures with the prospect of teaching more successfully.

The breakdown of the different types of abuse also surprised many participants, for example:

But the one [statistic] that I was really stunned by was the fact that the whole sexual abuse is really out there, sort of everyone is really, really aware of it, yet there is less than 6% of it happening [% of various types of abuse] whereas the neglect, over the 50% is just, yet everyone just turns a blind eye to it and it’s not really getting the attention that it should. (Participant (14), Open View)

Reports in literature indicate that abuse is occurring internationally and locally, and that knowledge of different types of abuse, each with separate identifiers, aids in substantiation of abuse claims (ACT, 2008). The small group of pre-service teachers in this research gave their responses based mainly on personal and teaching practice experience in North Queensland, Australia. Despite limited teaching experience, their responses related to indicators of abuse across all reporting categories, namely, physical, verbal, sexual, emotional abuse and neglect.

Focus on Physical Abuse and Protection

In the category of physical abuse, one participant, on teaching practice, identified possible abuse occurring to a child at home:

Well we've/I've got one boy, and he took off on day one and it's a regular thing he does every week ... he'll cry, he would cry all the time [group "Oh"], he will just cry, "Oh, now I'm going to get another flogging,"... but I know he's [from a] broken family, he doesn't live with his Dad, he goes, "Now I don't get to go and visit him and when I do it's going to be a flogging, I'll get in trouble." (Participant (8), Open Focus Group)

The suggestion from the child that reports of misbehaviour at school may result in severe physical punishment at home has undoubtedly, worrying implications for the child but also for the teacher in deciding how to deal with inappropriate behaviour. For children in abusive situations, school reprimands may lead to disproportionate punishment at home. Some participant responses explored, more generally, whether discipline procedures at home constituted physical abuse, "Some people see the issue of smacking a child as a case of child abuse" (Participant (17), Open View). Participant (16) reflected personally on this:

I think of myself as a mother and know that I have over-disciplined ... When the situation arises, I automatically over-discipline, at 12 or 13 months [participant's child's age], I would hold up a wooden spoon and my little girl would not move. (Open View)

The extent to which parental discipline techniques may constitute physical abuse is also a contentious, cultural and generational issue within abuse reporting (IPSCAN, 2004; 2010; Pinheiro, 2006). In a related issue, Participant (9) reflected back on her practicum and expresses how a parent appeared to have influenced bullying behaviour:

I did see a very sad case. I was in a year one class and there was one boy who was bullied by his father. I will call this boy John. John's father spoke down to his family. He would tell John that he did not have to listen to what the teachers said and that if anyone gave him any grief at school he could punch them in the head! John was the bully of the class and picked on one child in particular. (Phase 3, EView)

Participant (16) also explored parental influence in her own situation:

I was over-disciplined, I come from a very authoritarian family and I did automatically what was done to me and I thought I want to be different and so I went out of my way to find a different way, where Xxx [husband] has no boundaries, I was so hemmed in ... my mum told me I was one of the easiest [behaviour] but I just saw what happened to the others [punishment] ... I think there's a definite link [abused to abuser] because I didn't like how my parents were treating me and I had no idea, no-one said, "OK, when you're a mother, you should do A, B, C" ... [When] I'm thinking, "What do I do, what do I do?" ... I always remember that because that's what my parents did, and I know it was wrong. (EDB)

While some literature suggests that severe smacking and physical discipline constitutes physical abuse (ACT, 2008; Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Briggs & McVeity, 2000) and that a high percentage of abused children consequently abuse others (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Stevenson, 2007), strengths literature also emphasises the power individuals have to break abuse cycles (Saleebey, 1996, 2005, 2009). Participant (16) openly evaluated her own behaviour and explained how her parenting style and relationship with her children had changed since studying education, "someone has commented 'oh you've grown with your children'... I have two girls, 13 and 15 and they will still come up and give me a hug and talk to me and they don't argue a lot, they're pretty easy going"

(Open View). From a strengths perspective, this participant's understanding, shared with fellow participants, helped to facilitate a sense of empathy in the group for the difficulties parents may experience in raising children and demonstrated the possibility of changing physical discipline techniques. McCashen (2005) stresses that "people can change. Given the right conditions and resources people's capacity to learn and grow can be harnessed and mobilised" (p. 9). Participant (19) underlined the strength of empathy that pre-service teachers who are parents, for example, can bring to child-protection preparation:

As a parent myself, I know that it is hard work bringing up a child and you don't always get things right. It is a matter of trial, error and persistence. It is trying to ensure that you do the best that you possibly can for your child with the resources that you have to work with. This is not an easy task. (EDB)

Teachers are "ideally placed" to report and identify child abuse (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997, p. 17; AIHW, 2011) and to understand the stresses of managing children's development and behaviour on a regular basis. Experience in teaching combined with child development knowledge and positive behaviour management techniques make teachers more than ideally placed to identify abuse, it also places them in a preferable position to assist families in protecting children. With a community capacity building emphasis (Beilharz, 2002; Berg, 1994; Jewell & Blackmore, 2004; Ryan & Morgan, 2004), the teacher acts in partnership and as a resource for abuse prevention to parents advising and supporting them with their children's behaviour.

Gender differences

Many participants noted dealing with physically aggressive behaviours of children on teaching practice, "mainly boys" (Participant (7) Open Focus Group). The cohort recorded children abusing and bullying each other in schools as a common experience and classified this as an example of physical abuse.

I noticed with the Grade 2 boys, particularly, very ... if they were men you'd say there was testosterone flying around, we had a lot of fights, a lot of fist fights, a lot of slanging matches across the classroom, like I'd never seen anything quite like it at the last couple of schools I've been in ... I had one boy that would just lie across everybody's desk and you'd ask him to get off, you know, you'd try/use a few strategies; he'd just look at you and go, "No! Don't want to, don't want to learn!" And he'd just lie there and you'd think, "What do I do now?" (Participant (19), Open Focus Group)

Child-abuse literature notes that aggressive behaviour in children is a possible sign of physical abuse occurring elsewhere (Webb & Vulliamy, 2001; Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; Briggs & McVeity, 2000). Some participant responses alluded to this possible connection between aggressive behaviour and physical punishment at home.

I went on week one and then when I went back again this time and there's this one little boy and he had really turned into a bully ... it would be really interesting to see what's going on at home. (Participant (19), Open Focus Group)

One of the new little boys that came into the class was a bit rough and tough. At times, I wondered if he had problems at home. He had no manners, he misbehaved and he sometimes had bruises on him. (Participant (13), EView)

Would that show in super-aggressive boys though? Like if you were being abused, would you be the bullier? (Participant (9), Open Focus Group)

Participants also reported instances of children physically harming themselves, also an indicator of possible abuse (ACT, 2008; Sedlak & Broadhurst, 1996, Sedlak et al., 2010; Watts, 1997). They reported the instances below as occurring with school age children, in childcare and home settings.

He [a particular child] would bite his wrist when he got angry instead of lashing out at others. He has since been diagnosed with ADHD and is now medicated. The biting then moved to his shoulder and he now very very rarely does it. But I have noticed a little boy at work who bites his own arm when he gets frustrated or angry and I wonder if he too has the same condition. (Participant (7), EView)

I had this young boy who actually cut himself on purpose and I said to him, "Oh mate that's not cool. What are all the scratches there?" ... red bits sort of like little cuts ... it wasn't deep or anything, but still, he had done this to himself ... I spoke to appropriate people and then even his mum, she's like "What can I do about this thing? [child cutting himself] and I said, "It could just be a once off but keep an eye on it." (Participant (14), Open Focus Group)

[In reply to above] My son did that last year; came home with cuts on him and I said, "What's this?" and we got to the nitty gritty and it was just a boy thing though and I said, "Don't do that because you're putting yourself into a risk category and also you're going down a line of thinking that's not a rational thing." (Participant (17), Open Focus Group)

The participants' comments in this research highlight the need for preparing teachers to address self-harm issues with children and parents and the value of discussing similar incidences with colleagues to focus on prevention and intervention strategies. A full examination of links between aggression, abuse, self-harm and gender is beyond the scope of this research, but these connections would certainly appear to be of interest to the pre-service teachers, based on the cohort's comments in this research.

Abuse statistics indicate that boys may be more susceptible to harsh physical punishment and girls more susceptible to sexual abuse (AIHW, 2011). Work by Werner and Johnson (1999) suggested that vulnerability is more prevalent for boys aged less than 10 years and for girls aged over 10 years in the transition to adolescence. The prospective early-childhood teachers in this study identified differences in behaviours exhibited by boys. Briggs and Hawkins (1997) expressed concerns with placing too much emphasis on gender differences. They claimed that further research is needed to ascertain whether, for example, boys may simply be more reluctant to reveal sexual abuse rather than being less abused, and to establish the influence that socially-determined, gender roles play in abuse patterns. The complexity of gender issues raised by the participants in this child-protection research support this further examination of gender differences in abuse patterns.

Positively, the participants in this research gave enticing hints of noticing gender differences in child-protection needs and early adaptations of protective strategies based on gender. Participant (2) noticed on teaching practice that boys in her groups reacted differently to the strengths resources, *The Bear Cards* (Veeken, 1997).

I trialled them on one day on prac, I don't think it worked quite as well because I probably didn't explain it quite as well as I should have. A lot of the boys gave me the angry bear card and none of them could tell me why they were angry or what they were angry about. (Open View)

Participant (2) explained that the boys had indicated that they picked out "menacing and angry bears ... [bigger in size also] because they liked them" rather than as an indication of their feelings. She discussed whether their choice of large bear pictures (which also demonstrated mainly negative emotions) was because they may appeal to boys as socially constructed, "macho" images, as a result of peer pressure, or both (Open View). Adopting a child-protection role, she indicated that she wanted to pursue this to identify whether the boys required help in managing aggression and unhappiness as there had been some behaviour management issues "particularly the boys" (Open View). She decided to explain the activity differently and to repeat it again.

I am so keen to do bear cards again because I want to see if I do it again, will they pick those cards again or will they pick a different set and will the boys pick big ones again. (Open View, Phase 2)

As a teacher educator, the author indicated to Participant (2) in the Open View that further information regarding gender issues and the expressions of feelings would be provided in the module. In an EView, information from McGrath and Noble (2003) was included that indicated that "boys are less practised at self-disclosure than girls" (p. 58) and that supported the reflections Participant (2) made about the use of the bear cards.

Asking boys to talk about their feelings about specific issues runs the risk of making them feel vulnerable and contradicts their socialisation about being tough and not showing their feelings ... but don't make the mistake of thinking they are not taking in what is being discussed ... boys, although usually having more reservations about the process, often report greater satisfaction than girls when given the opportunity to discuss issues to do with feelings.

Participant (2) reported a different response from the boys in Phase 3, when she has graduated and was employed as full-time teacher with the same class:

I have been using the bear cards again this year and once again a few of the boys picked out the angry cards. I did notice that usually the ones who picked those cards wanted attention or that they were unsure of how to express themselves e.g. I don't know why I feel angry or I feel angry because I don't know what else I feel like. That seemed pretty interesting to me! However, about half of my boys pick an emotion card that actually expresses their emotion at the time and can tell me why they feel like that. (EView, Phase 3)

She explained that persevering with the activity helped her to form a connection with the boys, "I know the ones that need positive reinforcement and then I know the ones that tend to [misbehave] ... interestingly, [they now misbehave] less when they've had positive reinforcement rather than [saying]

‘don’t do that’ [authoritarian expression whilst speaking]” (EView). From participant responses, it would appear that in any future strengths-based child-protection modules, a more explicit exploration of gender issues regarding feelings and strengths identification would be valuable.

Focus on Verbal and Emotional Abuse and Protection

Participants did not recount any directly observed incidences of verbal and emotional abuse between parents and children. Due to their short period and supervised nature of teaching practice, with limited access to parental interactions, this is understandable. Verbal and emotional abuse often occurs in conjunction with physical, sexual abuse and neglect cases though it is not necessarily identified or recorded separately (ACT, 2008; Crenshaw et al., 1995, Hopper, 2010; NCCANI, 2005; Tomison & Tucci, 1997; Tyler, 2002). In the United Kingdom, the *National Commission of Inquiry into the Prevention of Child Abuse* (1996) found that, of the 721 letters submitted to the commission, from participants who had experienced sexual and physical abuse, 80% included indicators that emotional abuse also occurred. It is likely, therefore, that at least some of the incidents recounted by participants under other categories of abuse might have included emotional abuse, though not directly specified. Unlike physical abuse, verbal and emotional abuse does not leave physical signs although there may be physical responses to it such as also using abusive language and physically withdrawing. Verbal and emotional abuse is commonly reported by those who have been abused as having long lasting negative effects on growth and development (Fuller, 2006; Levin, 1983; Tomison & Tucci, 1997; Tyler, 2002) yet is difficult to define (O’Hagan, 1995). O’Hagan (1993) noted that the emotional and psychological trauma associated with physical and sexual abuse caused the most detrimental effects on child development and Tomison and Tucci (1997) conclude it is often a hidden form of abuse with long-term consequences (conclusion section, para. 4). Children may not report verbal abuse or even view it as abuse, considering it rather as normal interaction in their lives (Scott & O’Neil, 2003; Mudaly & Goddard, 2006). The incidents recounted by participants below may be interpreted as including possible, underlying emotional abuse in addition to other protection concerns highlighted:

Xxx [child] suddenly stood up, threw his pencils on the ground, his book across the room and yelled out “you stupid teacher!” He then crawled under the table and covered his ears with his hands ... The teacher said to him “Come on Xxx, let’s pick up the pencils” ... His little body rocked back and forth and he screamed, “I don’t want to, you are stupid”. Xxx has a terrible home life and lives with his single mother. His mother is constantly being admitted to hospital for her anorexia problem and the police are always at the house because she also has a severe drinking and drug problem and often abuses others. Xxx is aware that there is something wrong with his mother, he often comes to school saying “my mummy almost died last night, the police were over again.” (Participant (13), Open View)

As it turned out Xxx’s [child] mother admitted that she had told Xxx to say her father “molested” her. (Participant (9), EDB)

It was a box of sultanas and I think an apple or muesli bar [contents of lunch box], I've forgotten or something really small and I'm like, "Did dad or mum forget your lunch?" and he said, "Yeah maybe", Xxx [teachers name] just sent him up to tuck-shop and got him something but then the Dad came in the afternoon and got really cross that we had given him food because he was trying to teach him a lesson. (Participant (6), Open View)

Participant (15) also expressed concerns for a child who demonstrated potential for self-harm and verbally abused herself, "She'd start writing [notes] 'Just chop me out of everything, I hate myself' and on the blackboard 'I just want to die'" (Open View). While the child may not be experiencing abuse from someone else, her own verbal abuse, nevertheless, indicates a protection concern (NAPCAN, 2010).

Participants demonstrated a developing understanding of what constitutes verbal abuse. Participant (9) explained that before a session on categories of child abuse "I was unaware that child abuse consisted of verbal and emotional abuse" (EView). After the session, she added with detailed analysis,

I feel that verbal and emotional abuse is just as damaging as other forms of abuse but much easier for parents/carers to perpetrate. Verbal abuse affects children's levels of confidence and self esteem in a very negative manner. This may be something that has life-long effects if the situation is not rectified and the child not counselled. I believe that verbal abuse of children occurs as a result of the low self-esteem of the perpetrator. It can be a replication of the way they were treated as a child ... the perpetrator obviously requires professional help. (EView)

After discussing verbal abuse, Participant (9) explored strategies for assisting children who may be experiencing this form of abuse including not tolerating this form of abuse, the use of "positive thinking" and "positive affirmations" by teachers.

Focus on Sexual Abuse and Protection

Participants' responses indicated a particular uneasiness regarding sexual abuse. Participant (17) indicated that this category of abuse is particularly sensitive for him, as an identified male early-childhood educator. He was particularly engaged by a guest speaker arranged for the subject, who talked about his role and challenges as a male early-childhood teacher on a range of issues and perceptions of traditional male and female parenting and teaching roles, including child protection. Participant (17) agreed with the speaker that "people's reaction to men teaching ECE" (EDB) appear more cautious than to his female counterparts, possibly due to statistics that show the main perpetrators of sexual abuse on young children are adult males (Briggs & McVeity, 2000; Finkelhor, 1994; Stevenson, 2007; Watts, 1997). The underlying negative assumptions possibly held by these people he asserted, is that male educators (more than female) may become teachers to have access to young children in order to sexually abuse them. This personally affronting suggestion is not only off-putting to his chosen career but, he claimed, almost caused him to profess defensively, "I am not a paedophile" (EDB). It is because of this possible view of male educators that he claimed: "It was, and still is, with some fear and trepidation that I work with young children" (EDB). Participant (17)

indicated that it was reassuring to hear from a male educator, engaged in further discussion with other participants about perceptions of teachers relating to their gender, and received support and encouragement from the cohort as a male early-childhood educator. More research and tailored inclusions in child-protection preparation would seem necessary for male *and* female pre-service teachers to raise awareness, dispel myths and address specific identity affecting anxieties, regarding sexual abuse and teacher gender. Finkelhor (1994) reviewed research studies on sexual abuse across a range of jurisdictions and explained “there is no question that women do sexually abuse children, that much of this abuse goes undetected and that, until recently, it received little professional attention” (p. 46). Briggs and McVeity (2000, p. 130), for example, indicated that prospective educators may not be aware of small-scale research that shows some sexual abuse in day care centres is perpetrated by women.

Many participants expressed surprise that sexual abuse is reported as “the least common form of abuse” (ACT, 2008; AIHW, 2011) and expressed the perception and conviction that sexual abuse is perhaps the most acknowledged form of abuse in the public vision and yet is “such a taboo subject to talk about” (Participant (8), Open View). Participant (15) generated an animated group discussion about a sexual abuse case that all participants were aware of through extensive media coverage:

There was actually a big thing on the news this week about this guy, a paedophile, who moved into a jail, inside a town, near Wacol I think, and they rehabilitated him, and they had all people protesting that there is a paedophile in their town. (Open Focus Group)

Media reports often concentrate on the category of sexual abuse, relaying graphic details of cases which attract responses of shock and revulsion, perhaps hampering willingness to be involved in child protection (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000; Singh, 2004). The participants expressed disgust and concern about the case and discussed in-depth the impact it may have on families and how they would act if they were the community teacher. Participant (15) added a perspective relating to sexual abuse offenders and their well-being and queried: “Do they actually ever rehabilitate any serious offenders? Give them their independence” (Open Focus Group). From a strengths perspective, this comment is a positive search for solutions (c.f., Saleebey, 2009). The focus on offender needs in the comment was an exception to other comments in the discussion at this point. Column 3 of the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) indicates that exceptions can be used to provide possible areas from which solutions can be generated. Understanding and assisting child-abuse offenders may be difficult to contemplate given the harm that they have perpetrated (Anderson & Levine, 1999, Briggs & Hawkins, 1997). However, as Scott and O’Neil (2003) suggest, engagement with offenders in strengths-based practice may assist some perpetrators to refrain from reoffending and break the cycles of abused to abuser more readily than incarceration. Participant (15)’s question gave an opportunity for the group to move on to discuss themes of restorative justice with sexual abuse cases and gave the author the opportunity to highlight research explaining that abuse perpetrators (across categories) may often be victims of abuse themselves (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997). Participant (8) commented:

You've got to get away from that name and blame and shame mentality, you know. It doesn't help all the things in the media about exposing paedophiles but it seems to be that that's the only vision that we have of people who have child-protection issues [Participant (15) says "Yes"]. Rather than putting in support to help people, particularly when the biggest form of abuse is neglect [as opposed to sexual abuse] so trying to help people avoid it happening again [sexual abuse] and preventing it, rather than deal with the consequences. (Open Focus Group)

Contrary to indications in the literature (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000; Mellor & Sachs, 2004; Sachs & Mellor, 2005) responses from the participants did not withdraw from examining sexual abuse; indeed, they indicated a particular care and monitoring of suspicions in this area. Many responses, such as the one below, however, appeared to demonstrate a sense of hesitancy or *uncomfortable involvement* when discussing sexual abuse:

I think it was in Grade 4 and there was one girl, and she was in foster care and I think something may have happened to her, maybe child abuse or sexual abuse or something [looks down and away, shuffles in chair], like ... we were ... never specifically told but you know, you knew she was with a foster mother and she was very, like [looks down] we were only Year 4 and I was always very naïve and that and she seemed very informed on those sort of [sexual] things, you know, like you could just tell something was just a little bit different. (Participant (6), Open View)

As Hopper (2010) suggests, preparation for child protection may need to include recognising the long-term effects of child abuse both on the child, classmates and friends. Teachers should recognise that an abused child might bring advanced sexual concepts to the class and that teachers may need to develop strategies to monitor information shared with non-abused children. Participant (17) suggested nuanced definitions of sexual abuse: "Others may suggest that young girls glamorously dressed and pictured in alluring or sexy poses is okay, or is it [abuse]?" (Open View). The experiences recorded by participants confirmed that addressing sexual abuse concerns, perhaps more than any other type of abuse, generates a sense of "emotional labour" (Singh & McWilliam, 2005, p. 118).

My experience is not through prac but through my work [teacher aide]. A couple of years ago, I had to work one on one with a year two girl. The teacher told me that the girl's dad had abused her [sexually] and to watch and listen if she says or does anything different. I must say I felt extremely uncomfortable being alone with that child. I kept thinking "Oh the poor thing", and wanted to tell her she would be okay that there was help for her. But as far as I know, no allegation of abuse was substantiated with evidence. (Participant (1), EDB)

Participant (1)'s response early in the teaching module also demonstrated a traditional deficit approach to child protection as explored by Scott and O'Neil (2003), where the teacher takes a rescuer role focussing on the child as a victim rather than as a survivor. The experience, prior to the research, had a profound negative impact on Participant (1)'s assurance with her child-protection abilities. She examined after the module how her confidence improved from being able to share her story and discussed how the situation could have been handled differently. This participant's response seems to suggest that continued child-protection preparation for teacher aides and practising teachers might be

needed to teach strategies for providing support and comfort for the child and themselves, without jeopardising abuse evidence.

Responses around sexual abuse concepts also included recounts of children watching sexually explicit movies, dancing in a sexual manner and questioning pre-service teachers about personal relationships. While these are not evidence of sexual abuse, the responses from participants indicated possible sexualised behaviour and definite protective concerns:

I have a boy [Grade 1] that told me that he would sit up with Mum and watch R-rated [sexual content] movies [participant then recounts conversation with child on practicum] “Miss Do you have a boyfriend?” and I said “Oh no, I don’t”, “Do you have a girlfriend?”, “No, I don’t”, “Oh do you have a husband?”, “No!”, “Do you have a wife?”, “No!”, “Well then who do you sleep with?” I said, “I sleep with myself.” He goes, “What all alone in your bed?” and I said, “Yeah” and he goes “Well, if you ever get lonely I can come over and sleep with you.” He spends some days with Mum and some days with kind of close family he’s got two older brothers that are in jail and he spends some nights with this other family and some nights with Mum. (Participant (18), Open Focus Group)

A prep student came up to me and asked if she could show me what her mum does at work ... she had her legs wrapped around a pole and was [sexualised] pole dancing for me [she] enjoys showing her pole dancing skills to every adult that is in the school. I later found out this little girl has a terrible home life as her father passed away about a year ago, she has to deal with a lot of neglect and sometimes she even lives in the back seat of a car. The fact that this girl has seen her mum pole dancing is frightening on its own. (Participant (5), Open View)

The full versions of these response excerpts also indicated that supervising teachers were aware and monitored these behaviours and were able to guide the pre-service teachers on appropriate responses to sexualised behaviour. The participants were able to discuss further the influence of poverty and socio-cultural factors and links between sexual abuse and neglect. From a strengths perspective, participants’ responses indicated a keen sense of inappropriate behaviour and a developing understanding of social justice issues affecting families (McCashen, 2005).

Focus on Neglect and Protection

Many participant responses indicated that incidents of neglect might be occurring for some of the children in the schools they visited:

I’ve been on prac and children have worn the same clothes four/five days in a row. (Participant (16), Open Focus Group)

I know that for the two classes in the room, I know half of them didn’t go to school with lunch ... [the teachers were] bringing in bread every day, vegemite, butter, milk, the kids came in, they had breakfast. (Participant (15), Open Focus Group)

A little girl came up to me, and just looked me in the eyes and said “I don’t have any food today because my Mum doesn’t have enough money to buy me any.” (Participant (14) Open View)

The responses appeared to support researchers’ “tip of the iceberg” claims (Kalichman, 1999; Sedlak, 2001) that formal reports of child neglect grossly understate the amount occurring. While the

observations made were undoubtedly disconcerting for the participants, teaching practice presented the opportunity for most participants to observe and evaluate the extent of abuse and neglect *in situ*, and experience directly the effects described in child-abuse literature and module scenarios. In addition, the placement of the child protection, teaching module prior to teaching practice, appears to have maximised this opportunity, causing participants to look specifically for abuse and neglect examples:

A lot of the children didn't come to school to start off with, of the Year 1 class and only 14 students were in the class, less than half would be there and the teacher just said this was very normal. Children wouldn't come to school with shoes on, you could just see that they were being neglected, things like personal hygiene, not having enough food, not having any sleep and not having their messes [toileting] looked after. Unfortunately, a student going to school with no lunch was common, I was unaware of it as I was only there 2.5 hours a week, but after this incident, the teacher brought it to my attention. It seemed as though a lot of the children at the school were neglected ... The school was very good though, if students did not have lunch, arrangements were made through the tuck-shop. The school also helped families by having a nurse at school that the children could go and see if they were sick, and the schools bus would go and pick up students from their house/residence and then after school would drop them off at their doorstep. This was done to make sure that the children would actually go to school. (Participant (14), Open View)

Following teaching practice, responses suggested that all participants were able to identify that child abuse and neglect was likely to be a prominent issue in their teaching careers, even participants who noted minimal experiences of abuse and protection issues prior to practicum. All participants expressed the view that sharing, confidentially, real life protection stories from practicum was valuable preparation for their future role as teachers. Before practicum, Participant (18) was able to increase her own understanding of the realities of neglect by drawing on her mother's recounts of child neglect issues experienced when working in a school as a practising teacher: "One day Mum was at school and she had a family of kids come and all they had the entire day was one muesli bar and there wouldn't be any school food, and they wouldn't have shoes and stuff" (Open View). Not all students had prior experiences to draw on. At the beginning of the teaching module, Participant (6) stated:

I've probably just been quite sheltered. I haven't really heard of any stories of abuse or things like that, I haven't really had any first-hand experiences with it, like no-one that I really know, or that I know of have had experiences or anything like that so it's really hard to try and get your head around it when you haven't even seen people. (Participant (6), Open View)

After the teaching module and practicum were completed, Participant (6) listened and responded to other participants' comments and added three possible abuse and neglect observations from her own practicum, including the case of "one of the preppies she wouldn't always have clean hair and things like that. You could sometimes tell if she might not have had a bath and things like that" (Open Focus Group). In other cases, the post teaching-practice responses also were consistent with suggestions that teachers are "ideally placed" to identify child abuse and neglect (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997, p. 17;

Walsh, 2002) and from a strengths perspective, to implement child-protection strategies. For example, in relation to observed cases of absenteeism, some participants put forward the view that this is *educational neglect*.

There was also [a] student in my class who could not write her own name or count past three and had no idea of one to one correspondence. This was due, I believe, to having huge blocks of time away from school. It was very sad as she was an intelligent girl and was very sweet. If only she has the opportunity, she would do well as she is a trier. One other girl had no books to use at school. The teacher has repeatedly sent notes home and even spoke to her parent but to no avail. I ended up providing her with lined paper the whole time I was there. It must not have been good for her self-confidence. She was extremely intelligent and in the top per cent of the class. I wonder what will happen to her over time if she is deprived of the equipment that she needs to continue her schooling. (Participant (19), EView)

... a little Indigenous girl in the class. It was the 5th time she was at school for that year. It broke my heart to see this delicate little girl missing out on so much that the future has to offer her. Why is this the case??? There are undoubtedly numerous reasons, however, it is an issue that needs to be addressed. In addition, I discussed this issue with an [Indigenous] friend of mine who mentioned she knows a child that has been to school once this year. Where can we go from here; there are so many issues for teachers that these problems slip between the cracks (Participant (17), EDB)

These types of responses link with literature that suggests that the rights of children to an education and to protection from abuse are often closely related (Alston & Brennan, 1991).

Redefining Abuse and Protection for Educational Contexts

Some participant responses suggested non-traditional definitions of abuse, not included in formal abuse statistics, and gave examples to extend existing categories of abuse. Participant (15) suggested, provocatively, in group discussion, for example, that not spending enough time with a child or spoiling a child with expensive material goods may be classed as abuse. She added, “Bullying, not *reading* to your child is neglectful, not making your child carry their own bag into school is neglectful” (Open Focus Group). Participant (16) asked “Why?!” and Participant (15) replied, “Because, how on earth can they ever learn to be independent people if you do everything for them?” (Open Focus Group). Resilience research (McGrath & Noble, 2003) confirms that interlinked and overlapping aspects of child protection with behaviour management, school violence and bullying are connected by features of “power imbalance ... based on threat and intimidation” (p. 92). Different forms of bullying, for example, cover a range of child-abuse categories; name-calling, fighting, social exclusion and unwanted sexual remarks (p. 92) are likewise, indicators of verbal, physical, emotional and sexual abuse. Similarities between child protection and issues-based education, such as resiliency programmes (McGrath & Noble, 2003; Withers & Russell, 2001), emerged from participant responses during this research. The responses confirmed the rationale of placing child-protection preparation alongside, rather than apart from, other social issues in teacher preparation in order to draw from and add to practical research and teacher strategies available in these areas (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Connell

et al., 2010; McGrath & Noble, 2003). Participant (14) explained that what helped her feel confident in her role of child protection was “I think the fact that you’ve also got it [need to protect children] out there, you’re talking about it, you’re intertwining it within the subjects as well, that we will then use it in the classrooms” (Open View).

Some participants continued to explore the issue of divorce and separation on children’s emotional well-being, suggesting that acrimonious custody battles and stressful access visits could constitute emotional neglect. Participant (9) studied the issue of divorce and separation further as an individual topic and cautioned, with a developing Strengths Approach, that:

Parental separation has a huge impact on the lives of children. These changes are not always negative though Xxx [author of a reading] made the point that regardless of the changes, the consequences of parental separation make children's lives unstable. This is as opposed to making the children themselves unstable (EDB)

Participants’ responses and redefinitions, as a whole, mirrored researchers’ efforts to distinguish between a maze of definitions of abuse, signs and symptoms of abuse and factors contributing to abuse and neglect (MacIntyre & Carr, 2000; Hopper, 2010; NCCANI, 2005). The author posits that reflecting on teaching practice experiences led some participants to redefine and extend their understandings of child abuse to include abuse that happens around children. Individual responses also indicated that key preparation issues for child protection in educational settings extended to dealing with sensitive parents, child and staff member interactions, supporting children from families experiencing separation, self-harm, bullying and aggressive behaviours, as well as developing socially just teaching and behaviour management styles. From a strengths perspective, rather than view participants’ seemingly ever-expanding concepts of abuse as confusing or an overwhelming barrier to solutions, their diversity of views and engagement with the issue of abuse is a cause for celebration (Saleebey, 2009).

From both teacher educator and researcher perspectives, the wealth of responses were an opportunity to clarify traditional definitions of abuse, distinguish factors at home and school that may contribute or increase the risk of neglect, and to explore alternative explanations of children’s behaviours (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Briggs & Hawkins, 1997; International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, 2011). Responses were often (in line with previous research) emotionally highly charged (McCallum, 2001, Personal Factors section, paras. 1-2) but also showed an engagement that Singh and McWilliam (2005) see as a positive movement in child protection, away from “risk retreat” to “risk management” (p. 1). The challenges experienced with defining child abuse are consistent with the literature reporting that distinct cultural and social differences lead to varying views (Mudaly & Goddard, 2006) and “unavoidable controversies and biases” (Hopper, 2010, Introduction section, para. 1) on what constitutes child abuse. Participant responses to the child-abuse theme seemed to confirm, at the very least, that the pre-service teachers viewed education, care and protection concepts as closely interlinked. In the following examination of the research terms of teacher education and use of a strengths approach (Chapter 5), for example, it is impossible at times to

separate issues of the use and promotion of deficits-based teaching strategies from those of abuse perpetrated by teachers. The diversity of questions and range of issues arising from the theme of child abuse in responses suggested that participants perceived child protection as integral to many curriculum and teaching management areas. Responses also portrayed that in educational contexts, definitions of abuse need to extend beyond abuse perpetrated at home to include a wide range of maltreatment involving children, families, teachers and teacher education.

Conclusion: Protection Clues from Abuse Dialogues

Rather than a deficit charting of possible maltreatments, the multitude of responses to the child-abuse and protection themes in this strengths-based research are a rich resource base for reaching a realistic and broad understanding of the protection skills needed for pre-service teachers. The author argues that preparation for child protection at a pre-service level should take into account, share and build upon, the existing and developing definitions of abuse and protection (both professional and personal) arising from the learning group. Participants demonstrated existing direct and indirect experiences of abuse and generated in-depth discussion about the extent and types of abuse occurring, particularly after teaching practice. The responses to abuse and protection themes indicated that by valuing and fostering pre-service teachers' understandings of abuse and protection, as well as their teaching and personal skills, preparation to protect children can be enhanced. Sharing experiences of possible abuse assisted participants to extend their knowledge of abuse and their learning of protective strategies.

Participant responses explored the traditional areas of physical, verbal, emotional and sexual abuse. The responses also emphasised multiple cases of possible neglect and discussed the factors that may have influenced this. The pre-service teachers' responses extended to the broader issues of protection involved with teaching, including aggressive behaviour, self-harm, teacher self-protection and behaviour management styles, indicating that these issues are integral to child protection. Baginsky and Macpherson's (2005) claim that "teachers need to be engaged in rigorous examination of practice, set within a range of possible situations which allows for close examination of the subject [child protection] and reinforcement over time ... weaving the content into the rest of the curriculum" (p. 328) remains relevant and confirmed within this research. Although often with elevated emotions and uncomfortable involvement, the pre-service teachers in this research engaged with the child-abuse and protection themes in an effort to find their understandings of these terms as an antecedent to exploring how to assist children and increase their teaching and protection abilities. Although over 20 years old, Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1991) conclusion that one-off workshops for child-protection preparation do not generate meaningful explorations of child-protection terms and issues is still pertinent. The integrated and extended timeframe of the strengths model of child-protection preparation appears to have allowed detailed and thorough examinations of child-abuse and protection not noted in workshop models. The next chapter (Chapter 5) evaluates specific participant responses

to a strengths-based child-protection module encompassed by the research terms of teacher education and strengths approach. Contextual analysis is used to explore responses and solutions for enhancing protection preparation that emerged from the context and sub contexts of teacher education, during and after implementing the strengths-based child-protection module. Contrary to the research showing that “graduates [including pre-service teachers] may be entering their careers with limited confidence and assuredness of what does and does not constitute maltreatment” (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 9), the author explores how the participants in this research were able to not only define but to convincingly articulate positive strategies for working with maltreatment issues.

CHAPTER 5

IN CONTEXT: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In the previous chapter, the participants' expressions and understanding of child abuse and protection were explored and the subthemes emerging from those terms were examined. Building from the thematic synthesis of group findings on child abuse and protection in the previous chapter, this chapter examines selected participant responses to teacher education on child-safety issues using a strengths approach. The analysis concentrates on the development of individual responses during the three phases of data collection, and explores the contexts influencing these. Distinct characteristics of responses appearing from the different phases are explored. By narrative analysis, individual and contextual distinctions can be gleaned from the data. In the research, each phase of data collection was distinct from the previous and each involved significant precursors and alterations to the situations of the participants involved. These contextual changes cannot be underestimated or ignored in the analysis process. The author will argue that articulation and understanding of these contexts are essential to understand fully the findings arising from the data. Many of the phase-influencing factors were milestones in teacher education for the participants: completing a core degree subject, completing mandatory professional experience, graduating from the degree programme, being interviewed for a teaching position and starting employment as an educator. These factors themselves are all distinct areas of research. While the contextual analysis is focussed primarily on how teacher education using a strengths approach may assist in preparing teachers to protect children, it is hoped that the contextual interpretations generated may also be useful to those researchers involved with research into teacher education, professional experience (school placements) and the transitions of graduating pre-service teachers.

This contextual analysis chapter looks at samples of individual participant experiences from the research and the influencing contexts in which they were gathered. Often powerful in their straightforward manner of speaking, the following participating pre-service teachers' experiences (interchangeably termed vignettes) are chosen from different times during this research project. The different phases of data collection (during the teaching module, post teaching practice and one year after the module, nearing graduation) provided the opportunity to explore pertinent variations affecting pre-service teachers' understandings of child protection. Whilst aware of the pitfalls of researcher bias when interpreting narratives, this contextual analysis of the data draws on strengths in narrative and discourse analysis (Burns, 2000; Graziano & Raulin, 1993; Patton, 1990; 2002) of aiming to "retain the complexity and diversity inherent in the text" (Mac Naughton et al., 2001, p. 133). As explored in Chapter 4, in order to align closely with strengths processes, much of the data is presented in the form of extended individual stories rather than generic summaries of responses (Glicken, 2004; Saleebey, 2009). The Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) emphasises that exploring issues in detail, with adequate discussion is the first step of applying a Strengths Approach.

In a Strengths Approach to research, exploring personalised perspectives on issues is a necessary precursor to “solution-focused practice”, which is concerned with how solutions (rather than problems) work (McCashen, 2005, p. 39). Reflecting on individual stories may offer insights for both participants and researcher by providing foundations for exploring how strategies to address issues are personally constructed (Walter & Peller, 1993).

Characteristic of the individual stories highlighted and analysed in this chapter, the following excerpt reflects one participant’s personal experience and efforts to find solutions to child protection. The reflection is included here, before the main contextual sections of vignettes, as it also succinctly captures and explains, perhaps more than any formal strengths text or the preceding theoretical discussion, the impetus for the development and use of the Strengths Approach and the value of individual child-protection stories in this research.

I think that the strengths-based approach offers a way of thinking about how we react to certain situations and how these situations make us feel. Following on from this point more importantly, what we can do to make changes in our own lives for the better. For example, do these situations and feelings empower or do they make us feel negative about ourselves. Through looking at our own lives and these reactions, we can begin to understand what triggers the way we think, what we do and who we really are. Hence, from this, we can look at what strengths we have and how we can use these strengths to empower us. The thing that I like the most about what I have learnt so far [teaching module] is the idea of changing the frame. I know that in the past I have been a victim in certain circumstances. However, from being involved in those experiences, I believe that I am much stronger emotionally for having experienced them. I have been through some extremely hard times in my life, as I know that most people have, but if I have any real strength’s they are that I am a survivor. I know that I can pick myself up after a really bad experience, dust myself off and just get on with it. Victims are disempowered and survivors are enduring. This idea changes negatives into positives and helps us to look at our lives from another perspective. Sometimes I believe that we get locked into a particular way of thinking, doing and being without conscious thought. Through changing the frame, it gives us a whole different way of thinking about who we are and what is possible for us. (Participant (19), EDB)

Phase 1: Teacher-Education Context

The data collected from the participants across all phases in Open Views, EDB’s, Open Focus Groups and EViews emerged directly from or were influenced by contexts in which they were situated; in Phase 1 this was of undergraduate degree level, teacher-education study. Research participants were all engaged in studying the same teacher preparation subject that included the strengths-based child-protection module, for the same period of study, with the same lecturer who held the joint role as researcher. The reactions, responses and interpretations of participants to the research terms of child abuse and child protection (as shown in the previous chapter) were diverse. Similarly, the participants’ responses to the terms of teacher education and the Strengths Approach (in the form of the integrated module) were also diverse and contextually influenced. While all students had the same access to lectures, tutorials, online materials and resources relating to learning and implementing a Strengths Approach to child protection, individual responses suggest that there were varying levels

of engagement with the subject content and of effect with respect to the concepts learnt. The author proffers that examining these variations and study contexts in which understandings were formed and offered may provide clues to recognising and improving teacher education in child protection.

In the vignettes chosen and contextual analysis applied, the author seeks to examine how the context of studying at university interplays with using an integrated model of child-protection preparation and with other influences on participants such as family background or prior life experiences. The author suggests that the participants' emotional responses and developing theoretical constructs of child abuse and protection were influenced strongly by their existing socio-cultural contexts as well as the content and methods of teaching and learning. As illustrated in the introductory vignette above, both previous experience and acquired knowledge appears to have affected the participants' understandings of and responses to the research terms.

On the subject evaluation thread of the EDB, participants as students could report their experiences of the subject, including their reactions to the integrated strengths child-protection module. The different participant responses, below, were taken from the subject thread at the beginning, towards the end and after the subject was completed (respectively).

The subject is going quite well for me at the moment however, I have had some difficulties with the essay in knowing what to put into it and what not to put into it [critically reflecting on the development of early-childhood services]. The other problem that I have had with the essay is the idea of critical reflection and weaving it throughout my assignment. This is an area that I need to work on. It has been quite a difficult task. (Participant (19), EDB)

As it is the end of week 11, I have to say that I am both exhausted and also a little bit excited to be finally finishing this year. I have found that all the subjects I participated in this semester were all "eye-openers." This subject in particular has made me think about the needs and importance of early-childhood care more deeply. Like Xxx, [participant] I really enjoy the laid-back and comfortable learning experience both in lectures and tutorials, however am finding it a bit difficult to process the information as I am very much a hands-on learner. Having to do the portfolio has however helped to structure my learning and because I am physically filing information it seems to stay with me. I still can't believe that we only have 2 weeks left! I only have 12 hours of uni left and then fourth year. Something I am really worried about as we only have one more year of studies and then everything is up to us! I will have finally had a break in my education. 17 years straight of education. Finally finished!!!! [Participant emphasis]. (Participant (11), EDB)

This subject has been a real eye opener. I enjoyed learning about the history of ECE and also really enjoyed reading, researching, listening to and telling stories about issues that surround our contemporary society. I am grateful that we had an opportunity to share our issues with one another. I definitely feel more equipped and confident as a teacher to deal with any of these issues addressed in this subject. I think I managed to survive the semester despite the ongoing stream of illness. (Participant (13), EDB)

Although, these subject responses hinged around broad learning and teaching areas they are also highly personalised (c.f., Abrahams et al., 1992; Kushner, 2000). The personal issues and experiences that were noted from responses varied from the juggling of time to participants' preferred learning

styles and their experiences of the subject format. The integrated child-protection component of the subject (including critical reflection) was not specifically identified in participant responses as a separate, additionally onerous, difficult or different part of their studies. By omission, however, child protection appears to be able to fit easily alongside critically reflective subjects that “made me think about the needs and importance of early-childhood care more deeply” and were “eye opening” (see Appendix A, module format). While at the beginning of the subject, critical reflection for the essay was noted as an accepted challenge to be “worked on” by Participant (19), the ability to “think more deeply” and “tell stories about issues” appears to become more comfortable (even enjoyable) to participants in the later parts of the subject. Participant (19)’s own later reflection on the strengths approach (used above in the introduction to this chapter), demonstrated a general growth in confidence within the cohort to critically reflect, a key component of addressing child-protection issues using a Strengths Approach. Kesner and Robinson (2002) claim:

Unfortunately, many teacher education programs do not adequately educate pre-service teachers about the issues facing today’s families. Thus, educators may be unaware of what many children bring into the classroom and go home to at the end of each school day. (p. 222)

The strengths exploration of child abuse and protection in this research, in the form of an *issues-rich* module, utilised Kesner and Robinson’s criticism as a strategy for enhancing teacher preparation.

Child Protection in Teacher-Education Studies

Confident critical reflections from the participants on their ability to engage with child-protection issues and strengths approaches were recorded across the cohort by the end of the module. While these responses were from a small study group, they were from all of the participants of the group. All late module responses from this research, at the very least, demonstrate engagement, willingness and enthusiasm to discuss child-protection issues. Some participants chose to use strengths-based, pictorial scales (Masman, 2007), available during Open Views, Open Focus Groups, to note their confidence level changes in dealing with child-protection issues (Appendix A). Participant (13), as well as commenting positively about studying child-protection issues alongside a range of other historical and contemporary issues covered in the subject (above EDB response, p. 170), noted a more specific change in her confidence levels for child protection by completing a scale. Using the strengths-based, pictorial scale, she recounted that her confidence level in dealing with child-protection issues increased during the subject. Participant (13) indicated on a picture of a ten-rung ladder that she began the module at rung three and at the end of the subject pointed to rung eight as her confidence level for addressing child protection. Participant (9), likewise, commented on the ladder picture levels (Appendix B), “I’m feeling quite good at the moment, after we wrote down our strengths - a nine - before that I was indicating sort of a three or a four” (Open View). The growth and development of confidence by these pre-service teachers within their initial teacher education courses can be considered as being due to a number of factors which may, or may not, be linked to the

use of a strengths approach. Teacher-education literature reports a number of factors that could be responsible for the increase in confidence reported by the participants in this research, including available resources, interactions with families and colleagues and their developing professional knowledge, identity and practice (Kidd et al., 2008; Mayer et al., 2011; McMaugh et al., 2008; Saltmarsh et al., 2008).

Participant (16) displayed initial hesitation with using a strengths approach to child protection, “my own opinion is that the strengths-based approach would only work with those teachers who are willing to put in the time to make a difference. These comments demonstrate my scepticism about everyone taking the Approach seriously and implementing it in the classroom” (EView). This scepticism mirrors criticisms that strengths approaches are not taken seriously and are time consuming (Clabaugh, 2005; Epstein, 2008). Participant (16), however, exhibited a change in perspective after teaching practice when she successfully developed and initiated a strengths-based activity where children worked collaboratively to get out of a maze when blindfolded. She animatedly described the satisfaction of debriefing with the children how difficult situations can be worked through together. She described her confidence in Phase 2 as further along the path than previously indicated on a picture scale (Appendix B). Other participants added notes to their original pictures to explain increases in confidence. Participant (1) in an Open View, updated her picture of weighing scales from a “50/50” confidence level, as increased and wrote, “talking about it [EDB] has made me more confident” (Appendix B). Participant (12) reflected strong confidence levels in the group at the end of the module:

When talking about our confidence in relation to the strengths-based approach I chose the thermometer scale. I chose this as I think it is more of hot or cold topic. I said that I was up towards the top of the thermometer as I have quite a good awareness of child protection and child abuse due to the information given [to] us. (EView)

The stark contrast between these end-of-subject responses and the initial responses is worthy of note. A change in responses occurred during the implementation of the subject and child-protection module and this was expressed as a cumulative increase in understanding and confidence during this time. The participant responses from the earliest stages of the research, were already “at odds” with literature reporting fear and moral panic from educators who have completed traditional child-protection preparation (Singh & McWilliam, 2005; Whiteside, 2001; Laskey 2004; 2005). The author concludes that the positive responses from the pre-service teachers completing the module seem to suggest that preparation and confidence in child protection can be enhanced by placing study alongside grounding for other ethical and moral issues. Additionally, child-protection preparation appears to fit well alongside teaching about the history and contemporary development of education services (c.f., Brennan, 1998; Hendrick, 2003; Weihan, 2004).

Participant (11)’s comments towards the end of the subject provided further analysis of the subject (and the child-protection module) in relation to the teaching and learning styles employed. The comments evaluated and critically interrogated teaching methods as well as visioned and

identified helpful strategies to improve understanding. Participant (11) noted the format of lectures and tutorials. The subject used an interactive workshop mode of teaching and learning. Teaching occurred within the standard hours, terminology and timetabling of *lectures* and *tutes* to which the participant referred. Biggs and Tang (2007) remark that “teaching declarative knowledge by lecture, followed by tutorial, has become so established that ‘lecturing’ has become the generic term for university teaching” (p. 104). The interactive teaching mode included what Biggs and Tang (2007) describe as “interactive learning and teacher questioning ... teaching/learning activities that can be supported by educational technology” (p. 104). As the module description elaborates, teaching sessions were not solely in a format of lecture PowerPoint presentations. Discussions, quizzes, role-plays, scenario based learning, EDB’s and guest speakers all formed part of the interactive teaching in the subject. Participant (11) described these experiences as “laid-back and comfortable learning experiences of lectures and tutes”, and indicated the value of the portfolio task though she noted that more hands-on experiences (at time of writing) would be beneficial. The portfolio activity involved students reflecting, discussing and collating information on contemporary issues (including child protection) cumulatively during the subject, developing a take-away resource for future practice. As part of their portfolio development, students collected readings, resource agency pamphlets, useful websites, books and curriculum learning experience ideas relevant to issues they studied. Each student designed a pamphlet on a contemporary topic and these were shared and added to portfolios. The author replied to Participant (11), “thanks Xxx, we will have a look at more hands-on strategies re Strengths Approach soon” (EDB).

From the participants’ feedback on the EDB, the author was able to feel confident that the practical sessions planned for the following sessions would be well received and could be extended to include more role-play, use of strengths cards, stories, learning games and experiences if needed. Understanding the participants’ individual learner needs and how the child-protection content fitted into their overall context of teacher education guided the author’s presentation of the child-protection material. The concepts of hands-on learning and critical reflection are not new to education (Biggs & Tang, 2007; Connell, et al., 2010) and are a significant part of the history of teaching charted through the pioneering work of many key theorists and practitioners, such as Locke, Froebel, Erikson and Freire (Brennan, 1998; Freire, 1970, 1995; Postman & Weingartner, 1969; Sayers, Evans & Redclift, 1987; Taylor, 1993; Winkler, 1996; Wollons, 2000). A commonality of interest between these key educators is their arguments for giving all students, including student teachers, immersion in both the practicalities of applying, and the process of reflecting on, various philosophies and theories of education. Tyler, in 1949 (p. 63) espoused the view that “learning takes places through active behaviour of the student: it is what *he* [*sic*] does that he learns, not what the teachers does.” In applying this principle to the incorporation of child-protection content in teacher education, the data in this research suggests that as a contemporary issue, child protection is little different from other curriculum content in the preferred mode of presentation.

Placement of Child Protection in Teacher-Education Programmes

Participants not only gave positive feedback on the inclusion of experiential learning and other curriculum links, but their feedback suggests that it was necessary for their understanding and critical reflection of key principles of child protection and the Strengths Approach. Practical methods and scenarios used within the subject and module were consistently linked to students' professional experiences and other education topics. This integration with other study foci appeared to generate more opportunities for student engagement with the nuances of child protection than the brief question time allowed at the end of traditional adjunct child-protection workshops. In the student postings on the EDB, there was no separation between child protection and other contemporary issues that the students were studying, such as the changing role of women in childcare, and drug dependency. Links were made between child protection and other contemporary issues, especially those that similarly addressed sensitive and ethical issues or related to changes in society.

The data collected included participants discussing child protection alongside issues such as changes in the provision and value of childcare, debates on the impact of divorce and separation on learning and the lack of male educators in early childhood. While there are perhaps obvious links between child-protection issues and moral and ethical dilemmas such as changes in women's family roles that suggest placing them together, placing child-protection content alongside the history of early-childhood education seems to have also produced logical links with child-protection themes for students, albeit unintended ones.

Students readily explored how child protection had been a founding philanthropic principle of early-childhood services and appeared to be able to see the contemporary links and necessity of child protection because of this. Participant (8) added to the subject evaluation thread of the EDB, "I really enjoy this subject, it is very interesting. I'm not usually one who enjoys learning about history however, when it is on a topic which interests me I suppose it is different." The author interpreted the topic of interest for Participant (8) to be that of child protection as the cohort was studying the historical development of child protection at the time of the EDB post (see the strengths child-protection module-guide Appendix A) and Participant (8) expressed a specific interest in child protection in earlier and subsequent posts. In Phase 1, Participant (3) indicated, "I have a natural interest in the prevention of physical abuse so I have the passion in wanting to make a difference" (EDB) and in Phase 3, Participant (3) confirmed "I am still interested in going into child protection" (EView). It is recognised, however, as a limitation of this research that without further specific questioning and clarification the evidence provides only a weak basis from which to make any substantial claims supporting the placement of child-protection content alongside other historical and contemporary issues.

Ability to Protect in Teacher Education

Participant examples show that participants' responses changed during the phases of the research and an increase in confidence was recorded. Changes in responses are now analysed with reference to the process for positive change articulated in the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). Participant responses to the terms of *child abuse* and *child protection*, identified in the thematic analysis chapter, largely operated within issues exploration, the first column of the approach. The author explores below, how participants' responses to *teacher education* using a *strengths approach* developed contextually through the change processes of visioning, identifying strengths and resources, and formulating strategies. Participant (9) described this as, "instead of just looking on the bright side, it's actually putting the positivity into practice" (Open View) supporting the view that strengths approaches are not merely positive thinking in disguise (Saleebey, 1996, 2009).

Visioning Solutions (Column 2)

As the module progressed, participants' responses appeared to be operating within column two of the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) where participants describe a goal or vision as a good outcome to an issue. These responses mainly occurred after the extended discussion of child-protection issues, module activities on goal setting and during weeks six and seven of the module:

(I am) passionate about helping children who have endured such cruel experiences however, now perhaps (after researching the issue further for my negotiated learning project) I am more concerned and aware of how I will help them. (Participant (8), Open View)

As adults, and especially parents and teachers, it is our responsibility to ensure the safety of those children in our care. These children look to the adults in their lives for nurturance, guidance, support, protection and most of all love. (Participant (9), Open View)

I think it is such an important issue that it cannot be ignored and that no matter how uncomfortable and fearful I may be about addressing it in the future (in my classroom), it would be negligent not to. At the same time, I think that it's important to get all the facts right before jumping to conclusions. (Participant (13), Open View)

After extended discussion, many of the participants, as pre-service teachers, were able to express their hopes for child protection even when some of their initial responses had expressed disengagement with child-protection issues. These later responses reflected a personal connection and an acknowledgement by all the participants of their responsibility to protect children despite concerns or negative experiences expressed in earlier responses. Participant (7) reflected on her own development of *visioning* for child-protection issues as changing her "ways of thinking" from previous hesitation. She explained her ability to act on child-protection issues:

I understand what I should do and how I should go about it [but] I also think that I have always been one to focus on "this child has been abused" rather than looking at the positives. Although I have not yet come across an abused child in other situations, I tend to label children as [for example], "behaviour problems" or [from] "divorced parents".

This is certainly a way of thinking I need to change and after this lecture I intend on working on my ways of thinking so as not to focus on the negatives instead focus on the strengths, solutions, possibilities and alternative stories. (EView)

The responses are similar to conclusions drawn by Webb and Vulliamy (2001) that despite the difficulties of child-protection issues, practising teachers believe it is their responsibility to address these issues as they “are concerned about the well-being of the whole child” (p. 73). The responses from the participants in this research support the same concerned view of practising teachers to child welfare. Additionally, the pre-service teachers in this study, during the completion of the strengths-based module, appeared to be developing guiding principles to assist them in dealing with these concerns. Far from feeling “inadequate to recognise and handle maltreatment cases” (Abrahams et al., 1992, p. 229), participants expressed motivation and direction to protect children as well as to use the Strengths Approach. Many participants demonstrated extended exploration of child-protection issues and practised goal setting in their EDB entries (column 2 of the Column Approach):

Child protection is both an ethical and moral issue. Duty of care for children has to be seen as the most important factor for the safety of children. Empathy and sympathy for a child who has been abused is not enough. You need to empower yourself and the child to make a change. (Participant (15) EView)

Responses showed the positive psychology attributes of “goal directed determination, and pathways, or planning ways to meet goals” (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, p. 269) which appeared to work well in moving participants beyond exploring the issue of child abuse and into planning solutions. The use of goal setting in this educational setting mirrored success using the strategy in social-work settings and in the Strengths Approach (Hodges & Clifton, 2004, pp. 256-269; McCashen, 2005; Scott & O’Neil, 2003; Beilharz, 2002). Participant (15) argued that the Strengths Approach “would be a good whole school thing” for child protection.

I think you really need to get into the PD days [practicing teachers’ professional development days]. You need to get into your PD professional development at your school [points to a student], or your one at your school [points at another student], and go and get Xxx [person in charge of teacher development at a school] and show him the theory because it only clicked for me today. (Open Focus Group)

Participant (9) agreed, saying that “it would be difficult if you’re starting something in your classroom then they go up to the next classroom and it’s not followed through” (Open Focus Group). She suggested a less direct introduction of the approach into schools by role modelling, explaining the difficulty of change processes.

I’ve heard experienced teachers refer to them “they [beginning teachers] come out with all these wild ideas, I want to change this and I want to change that, and they just don’t know how the system works, they just can’t do it.” You are just shut down like the moment you go out there and you’ve got all these ideas and you’re just shut down. [they say] “That’s not how we do it at our school, we don’t do it like that.” (Open Focus Group)

Participant (9) articulated common experiences by strengths practitioners of resistance to change (Saleebey, 2009), but confidently followed with the role modelling strategy for introducing a strengths approach in a school.

It does work too, you go out and you do believe in the strengths-based thing, and you start working it, other teachers take a look at your class and go “Wow! It’s working”, you know, “What are you doing?”, and they’re more interested in what you’re doing and that’s how it starts to rub off and go through, yeah, rather than saying “I’ve got this great idea.” (Open Focus Group)

The inclusion of personal goal setting and role modelling in child-protection education training is an important factor in moving pre-service and practising teachers towards a solution-focussed outlook on child protection. Some participants in this research argued, additionally, that the Strengths Approach is a helpful belief system for improving teaching practice more generally.

Exploring Strengths (Column 3)

Many responses analysed under the research terms *child abuse* and *child protection* described the negative issue of child abuse and operated primarily in the issues column of the Column Approach (column 1). Concern for the children and adults associated with abuse incidences was also noted. This could be considered as a strength (column 3 of the Column Approach) in dealing with the issue of child protection. The acknowledgements by the pre-service teachers that child protection is an issue they need to be aware of and their adoptions of a cautionary approach to child abuse are interpreted as positive strengths.

More explicit responses about using strengths, that were relevant for child protection, were also recorded following the module session which focused on identifying and enabling personal strengths. Participant (2) explained:

I think I can keep my promises, I think I give my word and I will do it even if it means I am dead-tired. I’ve seen in my own personal experiences, how important it is to small children because it only takes one instance where you give your word and don’t keep it and they don’t trust you at all. So I think that’s important for young children. (Open View)

Participant (8) in an EDB entry noted that, “my strengths are that I am a kind and caring person, I am a good listener, I have a positive outlook on life and always try to find a funny side to lighten the moment.” When debriefing her teaching practice in Phase 3, Participant (19) demonstrated the practical application of her strengths to addressing (previously mentioned) physical abuse incidences, “extreme behaviours” and a possible child-protection case (“one child in particular who was very aggressive ... something might have been happening at home”):

I realised that I needed to put on my big girl pants and take ownership of my prac. I sat down all day on Sunday and rewrote all of my lesson plans and changed some of my strategies for behaviour management and also for teaching. From that point on I gained [supervising teacher’s] respect and more confidence in myself. I found that I really had to learn to think on my feet and once I started doing better, a lot of the theory (strengths approach) that I had learnt at uni really started to make sense and become useful. I found

that by developing relationships with these students, and using some tangible rewards, things got a bit smoother. (EView)

All students were able to identify personal strengths in the module session although some of the group expressed that this was slightly uncomfortable during the module. During the module, Participant (8) explained that she is “not the kind of person who likes to talk about myself a lot so sometimes I find it a little difficult”. Yet, as evidenced above, Participant (8) was able to clearly identify and apply her strengths after the module. The need to define, clarify and feel more secure with the Strengths Approach was a recurring theme in Phase 1 for participants. Comments early in the module, such as, “I know you’ve mentioned it a few times, but I’m still not sure exactly what it means” (Participant (4), Open Focus Group) articulated the need to continue to explain and explore the Strengths Approach and its application throughout the later weeks of the module. Participant (17) indicated that terminology of *client* and *worker* used in social-service strengths literature was at first off-putting and the substitution of *teacher* and *child* in the module, assisted understanding. Participant (17) explored, intriguingly, how the use of *client* may be viewed as a deficits term because the term has conflicting connotations:

Client is a very generic term, very medical and sterile. Client [suggests] I am here to pay them money and they see me as a means of meeting their needs, client is “power over”. They [strengths writers] talk about the client all the time, I really hate that because it sort of stereotypes everyone into a box and it’s sort of like going to a hospital - I just don’t like that.

Participant (17) gave an explanation and evaluation of how strengths identification fits into the Strengths Approach describing individual efforts to understand and use the approach in an educational context:

I see The Strengths Approach as a philosophical approach [that] looks at the person as a whole person, as a person with strengths as well as having problems, but the problem isn’t the person, it’s separate to them, though sometimes I think that problems and people can get meshed a bit. I like how it speaks about looking at the person telling the story and building - taking strengths from [stories then] looking towards a common goal. I hate the concept that I’m the expert and you are [not], that same approach with like teacher-child, I often get on my knee and talk to smaller kids, because I hate that sort of “I’m bigger and better“ view. I think The Strengths Approach [explains] that a person has strengths and *is* the expert but they just need support, maybe short or long term support, to get through these issues.

Exploring the Strengths Approach in Teacher Education

For teacher educators attempting to use a strengths approach to child-protection education, it would seem clear that pre-service teachers connect with the approach when it can be translated and clearly explained into meaningful educational terms and contexts. The strengths approach concept of substituting “expert power” and “hierarchical” approaches with collaborative empowered ones (McCashen, 2005, p. 27; see also Saleebey, 2009) appeared to appeal to the education students looking to teach and learn alongside children. For some participants, the approach connected with, and complemented, the contemporary education theories that they were learning about and adopted

throughout their degree studies. Participant (9) linked the strengths approach with elements of “Gardner’s intelligences [theory] that would cater for their different learning styles” (Open View), while Participant (3) saw links to “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” (Open View). The participants began to explore how the approach may improve their ability to protect children:

I think that building on the pedagogy of teaching, by developing a strengths approach, when you do actually come to talk about issues that are confronting, I think you’ve developed a relationship and trust and you’ve taken steps to bridge gaps that you can be more effective when you do touch onto issues. If you notice a child comes in with bruises, you can more simply get a story and read a story, develop the concept, because working with stories, individual stories, I think children relate. (Participant (17), Open View)

As students of education, the participants in this research were ideally placed to comment on, and suggest improvements to, the methodology of using an approach arising from another discipline. Participant (18) deconstructed the process of learning the Strengths Approach that occurred for him as a pre-service teacher and reconfigured that experience to ascertain how he would present the approach if teaching it. He noted that practice in applying the approach to issues had helped him to develop his understanding and to recognise that as a teacher educator and novice strengths researcher, the author was both teaching and learning:

I think the interesting thing is from a student perspective is that in discussing issues, we as student[s] are clarifying our own thinking all the time and developing it [understanding of the Strengths Approach] and taking it further, so I wouldn’t like to see [children viewed] as in a client sort of role, I see both [teacher and child] as on the journey, like you [the teacher educator], and that we’re developing our thinking, I think you’re [also] developing yours further. (Participant (17), Open View)

The Strengths Approach was explained to participants in the project in multiple layers over time. The module progressed from brief definitions of the approach and role modelling, to real examples of identifying individual strengths and resources before attempting to address scenarios using the Strengths Approach. Questions regarding key terms and underlying theoretical principles, diminished once the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) was introduced as a step-by-step way of thinking and working through child-protection issues. Participant (16) stated that “going through McCashen’s five-column strengths approach was great because I heard Xxx [lecturer], talking about how it could be used in the classroom. I found this activity and discussion just great.” (EView).

In Phase 2 and 3, many participants expressed the view that they had used their personal strengths to address issues, either explicitly using the Column Approach or implicitly by the manner of their approach. Participant (13), for example, although faced with a “challenging” teaching practice with many “different concerns” including the inclusion of children with special needs, behavioural issues, and minimal feedback on her practicum teaching, nevertheless, confidently identified her existing resources and growing strengths:

If it wasn’t for the excellent young teacher teaching next to me I may have struggled. I had my unit well prepared and was very organised and knew what to teach (one of my strengths). At the time, I was super stressed and concerned about the little feedback that I

was getting for my overall grade. But thinking back now it was an amazing experience which was so beneficial for when I get out teaching. I now have experience dealing with parents, reporting, assessment and the list goes on and on. (Participant (13), EView)

More specifically for child protection, Participant (13) elaborated on how she utilised her strengths on practicum using the Column Approach with a possible child-protection concern:

I personally looked at the strengths approach, and I had to constantly draw on my strengths when the times got tough on prac. I guess I naturally have a friendly, polite and calm nature so this was beneficial when dealing with parents and getting along with staff. I am also quite artistic so I managed to make and create many useful resources on prac that the children absolutely loved. My good organisation skills were also a help ... A little girl and boy were showing their private bits to each other in class reading time and were arranging a meeting at lunchtime to explore further. I wasn't sure how the parents would react but I told them in a private and relaxed moment and they were very understanding and said that they would have a little chat to them. I was lucky for the understanding parents. I didn't make a big issue of it, only to let the children know that we don't do that behaviour. (Participant 13, EView)

The author posits that the Column Approach was a valuable inclusion in the strengths module as it explained to students the necessity and place within the Strengths Approach of identifying teacher strengths to improve child-protection practice, moving beyond a rescuer approach (c.f., Scott & O'Neil, 2003; Withers & Russell, 2001). The participants in the research demonstrated a strong, professional commitment to take action if necessary on child-protection issues (c.f., Briggs & Hawkins, 1997):

I have to admit that it is so easy to watch the horrible stories of child abuse on the news and think "oh how awful' that poor child!" It is a natural reaction. As a teacher, I cannot just sit back and say this if I suspected a child was being abused in my class. This is why I think the Strength Based Approach is such a useful theory as it gives people like me a new way of thinking about problems. It requires the focus not on the negative or the problem but solutions beyond it to change the situation for the better. (Participant (5), EView)

I'm quite confident when talking about child protection and abuse especially in regards to the different types of child abuse. I think the hardest part of child abuse is to recognize whether or not it is actually child abuse or not. It is often, quite easy to make assumptions and therefore it is important that we find out all the information we can before reporting the incident or asking any further questions. (Participant (12), EView)

The feedback from participants suggested, however, that in any future versions of the strengths-based child-protection module, the Column Approach might be more effectively placed earlier in the module to explain readily the practical application of the approach. Participant (2) noted,

I must admit the first time I heard about it [definitions and principles session] I thought it sounded good, but it wouldn't really work in the classroom, [after column approach introduced] I have come to realise how important the SBA [Strengths-based Approach] is. It looks at people strengths and builds on them, rather than telling them that they aren't good at certain things. I aim to use the SBA on my next practicum. (EView)

The Column Approach allowed students to understand that child-protection solutions can vary immensely depending on the issue, their own strengths and available resources. For the successful implementation of a Strengths Approach to child-protection training in the future, an extended period

for teaching and learning would always seem necessary and the retention of the Column Approach would help to address the criticism that the approach often lacks clear instructions (Clabaugh, 2005, pp. 166-170). Although some participants initially found it difficult or uncomfortable to determine and explore their own strengths, this aspect of the Strengths Approach was embraced by the cohort overall. Phase 3 responses demonstrated the ongoing positive effects of strengths self knowledge, on the participants' child protection and general educational practice (c.f, Clifton et al., 1952; Rath & Clifton, 2009; Seligman, 1990; Seligman et al., 1995). Participant (4) reflected that "in the challenging times I remember to see the situation as an opportunity to use my strengths, (or develop new ones) and the strengths of others. I really want to thank you for allowing me to see it like that!" (EView).

Notwithstanding the personal gratitude expressed by Participant (4), other similar endorsing responses from participants to the Strengths Approach compelled the author, as a strengths researcher, to investigate these further to determine reasons for the positivity recorded. Initial reluctance to ignore and exclude appreciative statements in the research analysis as flattery or platitudes (normally dismissed as biased in traditional research) was challenged by remaining consistent to a Strengths Approach and appreciative inquiry (Wilson & Mellowship, 2001) that supports thankfulness and gratefulness as strengths worthy of exploration. Apart from the personal connection and thanks that participants applied to the author, as a teacher of the Strengths Approach, the narratives also expressed more than an appreciation of being introduced to the Strengths Approach. Responses, rather, expressed a realisation, a personal adoption and use by participants of the approach (particularly strengths identification) that moved beyond use for child-protection preparation:

This week was a good culmination week for me. I felt that all my knowledge came together. I found the exercise in the lecture where we identified our strengths really useful. At first I couldn't really think of my strengths, but as we got going I started to really think about them. I felt that the exercise really put us all together and greatly encouraged as a group. For myself, the exercise demonstrated how I work the best and how I can use these strengths to assist me in my learning. (Participant (2), EView)

I found it really empowering to be reminded that everyone has strengths and regardless of what they have been through, they still have positive aspects to their personality and can be used to produce changes in their lives. I think it could be such a powerful tool to have this concept as my day-to-day frame of mind. It really relates to teachers, as it requires empathy, positive thinking and an ability to look for solutions to problems. (Participant (5), EView)

During the lecture Xxx [lecturer] also talked about the "Strengths-based Model". I understood this model as a way of focusing on children (and adults) strengths as opposed to weaknesses. I feel that people, myself included, have a tendency to focus on the negative traits and ignore the positive aspects of situations, In a classroom situation, focusing on children's positive attributes will only enhance their self-esteem and make them feel valued. In order to follow the "strengths-based Model" when I am a teacher will require a commitment to adopt this approach to all areas of my life from now on (Participant (1), Phase 1 EView) ... I am using the Column Approach self consciously, especially in helping me to organise my school work. The planning stage really helps to

cement in your head what you need to do, and you can adapt as you go along.
(Participant (1), Phase 3 EView)

Numerous positive examples from the participants of using strengths identification and the Strengths Approach as a wider philosophical tool beyond child protection oblige the author, as a strengths researcher, to highlight these exceptions to the research terms of study (c.f., De Jong & Miller, 1995; Saleebey, 2009, p. 102). Rather than dismissing the responses as being outside of the scope of the child-protection research, they have emerged alongside and are opportunities worthy of note. The embracement of the Strengths Approach was noticeably wider than child protection in responses. Regardless of the research focus and prompts from the researcher to refocus strengths dialogue towards abuse and protection, the narratives instead frequently returned to examining the participants own eclectic and personalised uses of the Strengths Approach. It is possible to dismiss some of the peppering of dialogues with strengths references as mere regurgitation of module material and as skewed data symptomatic of the research being sited in a teaching context. Early in the module, for example, Participant (9) stated in a definitional manner, bearing close resemblance to strengths text expressions, “I believe the Strengths-based Approach focuses on people's strengths but at the same time it identifies areas where people could improve. This approach uses a person's strengths to improve their weaknesses” (EDB). The response could be seen as a result of indoctrination rather than an expression of personal understanding, an overly “religious involvement” and misuse of “faith” (McGrath & Noble, 2003, p. 21). Criticisms of the Strengths Approach’s “missionary zeal” and propensity to “Pollyanna” type accolades (Clabaugh, 2005; Saleebey, 1996; Epstein, 2008) come into play here. Wary of partiality as a researcher, the author therefore further clustered responses from participants that referred to the Strengths Approach beyond child protection but excluded responses similar to existing strengths literature or those using generic promotional type phrases, possibly given to generate lecturer favour. This reclustered produced interesting results and most responses in this subset were from mid Phase 1 onwards. The subset of responses repositioned the Strengths Approach to individualised educational circumstances that were not reliant on definitional or promotional explanations. As opposed to being demonstrations of knowing the Strengths Approach and linking it to child protection in order to impress, the reclustered responses had definite participant-led agendas that indicated an existing knowledge of the approach. Participants did not linger, as they had earlier in the module, in trying to understand or articulate the Strengths Approach but expressed knowledge and acceptance of the approach and a wish to examine ways of applying it that was meaningful for them.

I think that the SBA is very important in early-childhood education. Teachers in ECE are often the first interaction that a child has with a teacher. In these first interactions, the teacher can use the SBA to encourage and assist in the development of the child so that they develop to their full potential, in addition to developing their physical and mental selves. Thus, I think the SBA can really assist teachers to develop all of the child’s selves. (Participant (2), EView)

I have been able to use the strengths-based approach in my own study. I have just completed an assignment for ESL children and had to choose a case study child and develop 3 lesson plans to aid language development. I chose an Indigenous girl and the study referred to her interests which I believe were her strengths in her ways of knowing. She had shown interest in animals. So I looked at that as her strength and built the whole lessons around her knowledge of animals. (Participant (1), Phase 3, EView)

Regardless of the researcher's focus on child protection, these suggestive uses of the strengths approach emerged apart from and despite the research terms, perhaps with the unspoken expectation from participants that as a strengths practitioner the author would act on them. With respect, therefore, to the participants' expressed sense of the usefulness of the Strengths Approach as a universal pedagogical tool, the author makes the broad recommendation to incorporate strengths approaches into general teacher education while noting the obvious caveat of researcher personal bias. The author acknowledges the risk of participants' responses being unduly affected by researcher bias and that they are reflective only of this small personalised study with an identified strengths practitioner. Aware of criticism that strengths approaches are too "evangelistic" (Clabaugh, 2005; Epstein, 2008), the author counters that the participants' responses generally indicated less religious-like adherence to the Strengths Approach but were more reflective upon the "prosocial core values" in strengths and resiliency research (McGrath & Noble, 2003, p. 21). These values according to McGrath and Noble are not restricted to one faith but underpin "most religions" as well as being held by many "not currently affiliated with any religion" (p. 21). Nevertheless, any incorporation of strengths approaches into a wider application in education would undoubtedly require at the least, further research and significant resources and time allocated to this area of teacher education.

Resources and Strategies (Columns 4 and 5)

Many of the EViews received in Phase 1 reflected on the strengths-based child-protection preparation as an ongoing resource. Responses supported the usefulness of the integrated and extended child-protection content and articulated how the methods of delivery changed perceptions and confidence in protection. Participant (2) noted the inclusion of extended collaborative discussions on child protection in the module as a useful strategy helping to equip her for potential child-protection issues, giving ongoing strategies for future use:

Child protection is a subject that is often swept under the carpet. I don't normally like to discuss child protection [before module] because often people become upset and I, myself become a little upset ... I found it really useful this week to be able to discuss child protection issues with the class. I have always been worried that one day I would have to deal with a child who has been abused and I wouldn't know what to do. The open discussions we have had in lectures and tutorials has really opened my eyes and helped me to see how important it is to know about these issues. I now feel a little more confident in dealing with child protection and will try and develop my knowledge of how to do this. (EView)

Participants were asked to identify their own resources in the module that may assist them in feeling confident to deal with child-protection issues in their teaching, thus role modelling resource-finding as a child-protection strategy for children:

During this lecture we also had to list our resources. This helped me to appreciate the people in my life who encourage and support me. I am really fortunate to have the financial support and encouragement of my parents, as well as the encouragement of my sister and most of my friends. I believe that the people in a person's life help to shape that person's life in some way. I am grateful that the people I choose to have in my life are good for my confidence and self-esteem. (Participant (9), EView)

Critical self-reflection was a feature of responses to strengths and resource identification tasks. All responses indicated that this was a practical and useful aspect of the module, which helped them to complete the Column Approach sections (4 & 5) and work on solutions for protection issues. A feature of participant responses was deliberations of if and how resources may be applied in their practice and of their personal preferences. Participant (16) commented “some of the story books that Xxx [lecturer] read were confronting with social issues [fictional animal character story books with sexual abuse protection themes]. I wouldn't feel comfortable with them but I still think that with the right child in the right classroom it could be useful to start a discussion” (EView). Although Participant (16) highlighted discomfort with certain sexual abuse protection resources demonstrated during the module, she also indicated that, with evaluation to determine the suitability for the context of use, they could be beneficial. Further questioning from the researcher to the participant would have been beneficial to explore further the particular difficulties with teaching children about sexual abuse protection issues.

The participants demonstrated a professional approach to resources, a high level of engagement, and potential competence to teach “sensitive and often controversial issues inherent in child protection” (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 61). Participant responses commented on the range of strengths resources and strategies demonstrated in the module. Participant (3) commented, “I liked going for a walk” and the mask making activities (McGrath & Noble, 2003, p. 173), both activities designed to prompt the participants to contemplate their strengths and express feelings. Participant (2) engaged in “reading about the Strengths Approach” (EView), finding this useful, whereas Participant (7) noted that “I need someone to explain it to me rather than reading about it”, and indicated that she preferred “the *Scaling Kit* [(Masman, 2007) as] a useful resource for the classroom” (EView). Participant (2) commented: “I would like to use this exercise [picking a strengths sticker to represent personal strength] in schools, particularly using the stickers. The stickers really reinforced my strengths and helped me to identify them” (EView). Conversely, Participant (16) “found the sticker activity very confronting and horrid” (EView) explaining that identifying her own strengths face-to-face with a fellow student she did not know well was difficult. When debriefing this activity with the lecturer, she indicated that she would be comfortable using the sticker activity with children and her evaluation did not indicate she objected to the activity. She linked her discomfort, as

an adult, with being “socialised that to talk about our strengths is big-noting ourselves and then the tall-poppy syndrome sets in” (EView). Participant (16) expressed that she found the EDB much easier to contribute to and does so, frequently, during the module. Participant (16) discussed her strengths, “my internal strength is that I am compassionate” (EDB), in the less confrontational format of the EDB.

The reaction of Participant (16) revealed an important caution in this research. Strengths practitioners and researchers must be aware that depending on the timing and method, strengths identification may be difficult, embarrassing and occasionally inappropriate for some participants. McGrath and Noble (2003) give detailed precautions and suggestions about using emotive resources as well as giving strategies for promoting “psychological safety” (p. 55) for the children using them. In this research, strategies such as engaging in debriefing and maintaining confidentiality were found to apply to using resources with adults as well as children, and are recommended for any future teaching modules. Participants in the group noted the fluidity of strengths identification and the changeability of their emotions and feelings, which may affect confidence and competence in identifying strengths for both adults and children:

I found it hard to choose one that was representative of me at that *moment* [participant emphasis]. It made me realise that children at school each day must go through so many different feelings and emotions as well, from insecurities to excitement to tiredness. (Participant (5), EView).

Participant (5) later identified the educational resource, *Bounce Back – Classroom Resiliency Program* (McGrath & Noble, 2003), “A – Z list of emotions” (p. BLM 11.1) as useful for pre-services teachers in order to guide children on teaching practicum to explore their fluctuating emotions.

Resources designed and used for private, therapeutic or family settings may need more adaption and different considerations when used in larger group or educational setting. A variety of methods may need to be tried to ensure that pre-service teachers and children are both comfortable and agree with exploring strengths from their personal and professional lives. Participants in this research gave suggestions for using strengths identification resources effectively with children in classroom situations. Noting that it is sometimes difficult to identify your own strengths as an adult and that some children may feel shy to do this with peer pressure, the participants suggested that group work may be useful, where friends may help identify the strengths they see in their classmates as a precursor to their own self-identification. Participant (6) explained that although she found the stickers a useful prompt to identifying her strengths “it was also nice hearing strengths from friends as I think it validates it more coming from others” (EView). Participants indicated different ways of using the resources in educational settings.

Similar to Participant (2)’s response to strengths resources (and strategies involved in using them) Participant (5) commented during Phase 1, “I like the cards and the book [*The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005)] it is easy to understand and I could actually see myself using the cards a lot with kids” (EDB). In Phase 3, Participant (5) confirmed the use of strengths resources as a

practising teacher, “[even though] I haven't come across any child safety issues yet. I have used a sort of strengths approach sometimes (without realising). I have been using the bear cards again this year” (EView). Many participants commented on the open-ended use of the bear cards (Veeken, 1997) indicating that the picture-only format was appealing to “pre-readers [as it] allows littlies to learn how to recognise issues about themselves” (Participant (15), EView). Participant (3) promoted the use of the picture cards as “an awesome tool, a way to communicate first through pictures and then verbally” and suggested that they would be “great to use during morning session, this will help the teacher decide what activities will be done as well as becoming aware of their students needs” (EView). The participants’ responses indicated that strengths resources and strategies must be introduced carefully so that they are used, as intended, as additional tools rather than as constituting the only way to implement a strengths approach in practice (McCashen, 2005; McGrath & Noble, 2003).

Many of the suggestions for resources and strategies arose from participants’ own research into other resources (column 4) that could be used for child protection. For example, Participant (7) alerted the cohort to a not-for-profit, local family centre with free information on child protection including two books she purchased that help children understand their bodies and feelings. She explained one “book could be used to gently start conversation with children about self protection” (EView). Some participants shared strategies that they employed when working with child-protection issues, such as using a code of ethics, organisational policy or children’s website on cyber safety. Others recounted strategies used in teaching contexts, the influence of available books and human resources such as children’s families, advocates and other teachers:

I believe that it is for this reason that teachers need to know the students in their classrooms and the families that they come from in order to attend to children’s needs. By developing relationships with both families and students, teachers can gain insights into backgrounds of the families to find out what they value and the way the family works. If children’s needs in the home are not being met, the teacher needs to know this to ensure that the student’s time in school is one that is safe, and protected. (Participant (14), EDB)

I have always followed Xxx [child-protection organisation founder] she became an outspoken advocate for child protection and due to her campaigning, she has put child protection in the spotlight, and produced positive programs. (Participant (1), EView)

During my prac I was lucky enough to gain some more child protection training. Xxx [training organisation] ran a child protection seminar and my prac teacher took me along with her. I am still gathering more information about the topic as I go but I feel a lot more confident now. (Participant (3), EView)

The depth of information, resources and strategies shared by the cohort by the end of the module and beyond into Phase 2 and 3 of the research assisted the author in analysing participants’ claims of feeling prepared and confident with strategies to address child-protection issues, as genuine. While Baginsky (2003) noted that few teachers feel ready and equipped to deal with child-abuse and neglect issues, the participants in this study appeared to be able to identify relevant resources for child protection and knew how to use them. Participants not only noted useful resources but also deeply

analysed them, anticipating how and when they may be appropriate to use, or which they felt most comfortable in using. Participant (4) commented on a storybook (from a child protection agency) about sexual abuse, “I am not sure that I would be confident enough to use this book in my classroom even on a one to one situation” (EView). She followed up by recommending another story that she expected she would use that introduces general themes of being hurt and the availability of caring people to help: “I think it is a great book to share with children of all ages. The message is a strong one and one that in today's society needs to be heard” (EView). When talking about a free parental brochure on keeping children safe from sexual predators in the community, Participant (5) made the following evaluation:

I think that resources like this are really important as they not only give parents ways to keep the children safe, it also puts the issue out there in society to help the community remain aware of certain dangers. Keeping children safe is the responsibility of not only parents, but the whole community also. While this booklet is a positive resource that parents might find useful, it is important to recognise that even though children might be vulnerable to such dangers of society, there are a lot of good people in the community that are trustworthy. My only concern with the booklet is that some parents could become overly concerned about the welfare of their children and go to extreme lengths to protect their children. This could leave children scared rather than “knowing what to do in a troubled situation”. Despite this, I feel the overall tone and presentation of the booklet is a positive step towards protecting the children in our society. (EView)

Participant (5) not only noted strengths of the resource but also considered the potential of deficit focus of the booklet. The strengths-based module appeared to have introduced participants to a range of resources from strengths-based and child protection agencies and enabled them to evaluate critically these and their suitability for future practice (Council of Australian Governments, 2009c; NAPCAN, 2011; QCEC, 2008; Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011; Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011c; St Lukes Anglicare, 2010; Veeken, 1997, 1999). While hesitations in using resources from child protection agencies on sexual abuse could be deemed as lack of confidence in dealing with this area of abuse (Kids First Foundation, 2003; Whiteside, 2001), the accompanying alternative resource choices suggested that this is not the case. The author proffers, it is more likely that participants are necessarily cautious of undertaking therapeutic roles that they are not qualified to undertake with children and that are outside of their reporting and referral roles as teachers. The careful evaluations from the participants in this research indicated that there were many suitable child-protection resources available and these offered them a myriad of applications to educational settings. The participant evaluations suggested that resources could be used in ways to promote childrens' well-being that could complement rather than jeopardise any formal child-protection process. The finding supports conclusions from research that indicates that the existence of resources in child protection does not automatically equate to use and confidence in dealing with child-protection issues (Rizzotto, 2003; Laskey, 2005; Whiteside, 2001). It appears that the role modelling, trialling and evaluating of the child-protection resources introduced in the module increased the participants'

confidence in using these themselves, as expressed in later phases of the research, as well as encouraging them to look for other suitable child-protection resources.

Some responses suggested that participants used a strategy of exploring the advantages and disadvantages of different ways of dealing with child-protection concerns. The caring responses indicated that one important strategy employed by the participants included thinking through and debating different perspectives and circumstances around issues. Many strategies were not physical resources but verbal advice and solutions given to the cohort, based on experience:

I understand it is important to watch for signs of abuse and diligently report any concerns. But on the other hand it is important not to spread ‘gossip’ about something that has not been proven. (Participant (7), EDB)

I wondered if he had problems at home. He had no manners, he misbehaved and he sometimes had bruises on him. I met his mother a few times and she seemed lovely so it was hard to presume anything. However sometimes parents can put on a brave face in public and then be completely different at home. I kept an eye on the situation but it didn’t arise to anything, but maybe I wasn’t there long enough. (Participant 13, EView)

I had to be careful how I handled situations which involved these students, especially with the manner in which I spoke to them or how they were disciplined. I believe that it will always be a challenge to teach students who have been abused or neglected as each student is different and their circumstances are always different. (Participant (17), EDB)

These types of responses were often at the end of EDB conversations with others in the subject or exploring issues with the researcher, and appeared to take into account other participants’ responses. The module would seem to have allowed them opportunity and time to explore different perspectives on child protection, to think out and adapt their own plans of dealing with child-protection issues. Whiteside (2001) argued that there is a need to include in training strategies “that will help adults deal with disclosures ... as well as discussions about mandatory notification” (p. 35) and this has been confirmed as useful in this project. The findings from this research appear to point, similarly, to the value of using case studies and scenarios to enhance pre-services exploration of perspectives, strategies and resources with these issues. Participant (2) explained that the most useful module inclusions were,

The scenarios and discussing it, definitely over [lectures] because I think it gave me an opportunity to think what I would do, because you never really think about it. I think discussing it afterwards with everyone, getting everyone’s different ideas. (Open View)

This highlights the call from Laskey (2004) that realistic scenarios for students to address should be “core components” (p. 18) of child-protection training and from Whiteside (2001) that “training needs to include practical, hands-on activities ... as well as strategies that will enable them to feel confident in dealing with disclosures” (p. 36).

Participant (8): A Personalised Study Experience

In the following sections, the author presents selected responses from Participant (8) who provided many reflections by EDB, EView, Open View and Open Focus Group during Phase 1. The data

provided by Participant (8) is presented in the following vignettes to give a single personalised view of the strengths-based child-protection module. While this one perspective cannot represent the experience of the other participants in the cohort, the vignettes can perhaps provide clues as to some of the reasons that elements of the module were well received or critiqued by the cohort and also capture a sample of the on-the-ground adaptations that were made to the module in light of the ongoing communication between participants. The detailed and reflective comments in the extended excerpts allow a single participant's personal experience of the teaching module and her growing and changing perspective on strengths approaches to be viewed.

In general, the participants in this study revealed many previous experiences and understandings of child abuse and protection. Some participants had personal direct experiences and detailed knowledge of child abuse while others noted no experience in child protection and were unsure of what constituted as child abuse. Explaining that she had prior knowledge of child-abuse issues before starting the child-protection module, Participant (8) noted that she had a friend who had revealed that she was abused:

I've got a friend who was abused. So yeah, [looks down] it was a personal, home life situation, but there are probably three people that she's actually told about it, she's never got help over it or anything. I don't really talk to her that often anymore, but at the time we were very close and we were young, I think she said to me it happened when she was like about five and I would have been told when I was eight years old and the three of us, well as far as I know, have never told anyone else and nobody knows about it, we talk about it a bit more now, you know, when I see her ... her reasons were she didn't think anyone would believe her because we were so young and so she didn't. (EView)

Participant (8) added, "I did counselling [previous school based study] so what I did was more based on social welfare, actually psychology for social welfare and it looked at a lot of different theories, it looked at Piaget [developmental theorist] that sort of side of it" (EView). While this previous experience was determined as part of the data collection terms for this research, the exploration of prior experiences and existing knowledge of child abuse and protection was also valuable, from a teacher educator's perspective, as it could be incorporated to enhance the teaching module.

Preparing to Teach a Strengths Approach to Child Protection

Participants' responses in the research indicate that students often come to study child abuse and protection with sensitive and personalised experiences as well as pre-existing knowledge and skills that may be utilised in the child-protection preparation context. Respecting and identifying with the students how their previous experiences might affect their perspectives on child protection was a central part of introducing the child-protection module. As a teacher educator using the child-protection module as a guide, the author needed to be aware when initiating discussions about child abuse and protection that they could raise highly emotional repressed memories and perhaps distressing reactions from students (although this was not experienced in this research). The depth of responses indicated that students were willing and needed to explore their own understandings and

hesitations about child protection in a safe and facilitated environment. This essential part of examining issues from multiple perspectives was role modelled by the author as the teacher educator. Teacher educators using a strengths approach can facilitate students to draw on their experiences and understandings of child protection to determine their own strengths, resources and strategies to deal with issues.

In this research, some students commented on content of resources about sexual abuse and of feeling discomfort with using these but not to the extent of adverse reactions. As a teacher educator, the author forewarned students of the content of the module each week, particularly when child-abuse categories and indicator information, that necessarily contained graphic and sexualised wording, was to be covered. Students were informed that if, after attending a session, they required a debriefing session this was available. The PowerPoint designed for explaining the child-abuse categories in the module, for example, contains a warning notice at the beginning, similar to a classification rating for a television program that indicates some child-abuse material of a sensitive nature is contained within the lecture. Teacher educators may feel more comfortable to present child-protection information if they are sure, beforehand, that students are prepared to view it and also confident to cease or pause at any time during the presentation, if adverse reactions occur. Teacher educators may advise of social-service support agencies available if students experience difficulties. McGrath and Noble, (2003) suggest that teachers who feel “out of their depth” with assisting students demonstrating adverse reactions to sensitive materials or indicating a lack of well-being may need to refer these students “for professional help” (p. 60). This applies to teacher educators of child protection.

Some of the decisions regarding the specific content to be included in the module and the method of presenting the materials in the module were challenging, particularly those concerning abuse identification. For example, a module PowerPoint that contained some de-identified sample photographs of physical abuse injuries was included in order to demonstrate how abuse injuries differ from common playground injuries. The photographs were certified as allowable for viewing for educational purposes and no graphic sexual images were included. Nevertheless, the author presented the PowerPoint cautiously with the realisation that the shock of some images might overwhelm students. The author refrained from using other sensitive resources unnecessarily. To assist in preparing the child-protection presentations there were approved de-identified materials available from relevant child protection agencies and government departments (Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011; Queensland Government, DET, 2011a; NAPCAN, 2010). To assist with content to be delivered on child-abuse statistics and the reporting elements of the module, support and guidance from local child protection agencies was also available (ACT, 2008; AIHW, 2007; Briggs & McVeity, 2000). Many Australian child-protection services and government agencies also have resources, presentations, websites and guest speakers available to meet this component of the module for possible future offerings (ChildSafety Australia, 2011; Council of Australian Governments, 2009c; Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011a, 2011c). In this research, often brief discussion of abuse

statistics or making reference to contemporary news items was sufficient to raise awareness of abuse and to stimulate discussion with participants on the different categories involved (ACT, 2009; BoysTown/Kids Helpline, 2011). Participants also indicated that they were already well aware of the realities of child abuse and preferred the weighting in the module towards learning protective skills. If the author had been hesitant to deliver the discrete child-abuse information in the module, professional child-protection staff from the local area were also available to deliver the categories and reporting elements of the module if needed. If required in future module offerings, liaison with the child-protection professional prior to presentation would be necessary to explain the strengths module and the place of the child abuse/reporting content within it. The teacher educator would need to attend the guest presentation, introduce and facilitate the session with particular emphasis on this as representing one perspective on child protection, and as being one important element of a range of child-protection preparation sessions to be covered during the module.

As a teacher educator, the author was reassured that with the support and resources available a child-protection specialist was not needed in order to implement the strengths model of child-protection preparation. The strengths approach elements of the module were ideally suited to be implemented after a preliminary reading of *The Strengths Approach* (McCashen, 2005). Specific training on the approach was also available but was not required in order to teach the module, though the author's knowledge of the principles and prior use of the Column Approach was particularly useful.

A Pre-service Teacher Response to the Strengths Approach

The author suggests that the participants can be seen developing theoretical constructs of strengths approaches and child-protection preparation that are influenced by their previous knowledge and experiences and affected by contexts of study, teaching practice and graduation. Both previous experience and acquired knowledge affect participants' understandings of, and responses to, the Strengths Approach. At the beginning of the child-protection module and after an introduction to the research project, Participant (8) reflected:

I believe that it is great that Xxx [researchers] research will be ground-breaking (hopefully) and that [researcher] is taking into account the perspectives of pre-service teachers. We always seem to be forgotten and most researchers will interview qualified and practicing teachers rather than up and coming teachers so I am really looking forward to participating in her research. The strengths-based approach, although I haven't learnt a lot about it seems to be very useful and interesting. From what I know about it so far, I believe that it would have proven valuable for me while I was completing my last practical experience. Mainly because I had a couple of students who were in the lower academic levels for the class but they still were very keen to learn (they hadn't given up yet). They struggled a lot with whole class activities because they required the extra support [compared to] most of the other students so they were always getting left behind. For one particular maths lesson I assigned the work for the whole class around the extension activities so that they wouldn't bother me. I sat down with this group of students and we looked at what they were good at in maths and what they were interested in and I used these to help them understand the maths concept. It was incredible how

well they picked up on the concept and that some of them actually wanted to continue doing maths into their lunch break (when usually they are the ones asking if they could go to lunch early). From this and what I have learnt, I am not sure if it is really a strengths-based idea what I did but I did build on the students strengths and they were actually interested in learning so that made me feel good. I am very interested to learn more about the strengths-based model. (Participant (8), EDB)

Participant (8) reflected a number of shorter early responses gathered from the cohort that expressed general interest in being part of research into the issue of teacher preparation for child protection. Most of these responses were linked to expressions of wanting to find solutions and to improve teacher preparation that seemed inadequate. As with Participant (8), many other responses articulated that participants felt respected because their views were deemed research-worthy, although only Participant (8) made the distinction between research conducted with pre-service as opposed to practising teachers. Research with pre-service teachers is a growing contemporary component in the field of educational research and is not unusual (Blaise & Elsdon-Clifton, 2007; Nuttall, Murray, Seddon & Mitchell, 2006; Nuttall and Ortlipp, 2009). According to researchers in this area, however, pre-service teacher research is still underutilised and perhaps undervalued. As teacher educators, Blaise and Nuttall (2010) explain that “the professional dilemmas our students have encountered ... [are a] rich and immense data set” (p. xii). Previous studies with child protection and pre-service teachers (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; McCallum, 2003) negate the use of the term *groundbreaking* in Participant 8’s response. The response, however, is indicative of an understanding, confirmed across the cohort, that strengths-based child-protection research with pre-service teachers is minimal compared to other educational research topics. Arnold and Maio-Taddeo’s 2007 research examining child-protection content in Australian universities teacher-education courses confirms that:

While child protection has been highlighted as a primary policy issue for teachers and schools for a number of years (Briggs & Hawkins, 1997), only a small number of Australian-based reviews, research projects or evaluation studies of child protection in teacher education and professional development have been published. (p. 7)

Participant (8) was the first student to reflect on previous teaching practicum experiences in relation to the strengths approach and prompted a number of subsequent similar posts on the EDB from other students. These posts indicated that child-protection preparation and strengths approach content might have been beneficial before earlier practicums. Although as a teacher educator, the author recognised that the students had some preliminary teaching experience and therefore had many personal experiences to draw on for the subject, the author was unprepared for the expressed impact that these introductory involvements with children and educational services had on them. As a researcher, the author expected that the block of practicum occurring after the teaching module would mainly influence the students’ practical understandings of child protection, teaching and the strengths approach. The unexpected number of experiences mirrored findings by Baginsky and Davies (2000) who found that a small but significant number of student teachers experience direct involvement with

child-protection issues while on professional experience. An implication arising from these findings is that child-protection training should be included early in the degree programme, before major practicum blocks. Participant (8) demonstrated that pre-service teachers' first encounters with children and teaching are memorable, a resource for teacher educators, regardless of the duration of the experience. For Participant (8), early teaching encounters were positive experiences that suggested to her that she might already be using a strengths approach. Other participants, although expressing less positive early encounters, also reinforced the opinion that child-protection issues and strengths approaches should be covered earlier in the degree programme. These practical suggestions add weight to formal research concerned with improving the content, duration, format and mapping of child protection in teacher education (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007).

Participant (8) conveyed that the strengths approach sounds "useful" and reinforced a wish for pragmatic approaches to child protection that arose in the literature reviewed and in other participants' responses. These responses have implications for recommending the early mapping of strengths-based child-protection content in degree programmes and practice-based methods of delivery. Participant (8) made early links with using a strengths approach in general teaching (not limited to child-protection issues). As indicated in Chapter 5, this was not the case with the majority of other participants in early research stages so that in this respect Participant (8)'s response is unusual. Phase 1 responses highlighted participants' previous teaching experiences in relation to child protection with broader links to the use of the strengths approach in general teaching practice explored more in phases 2 and 3.

Participant (8)'s study experience continued after an introductory lecture on strengths approach theory. The prompt "I would be interested to hear in your own words what you think a Strengths-based Approach is" was placed on the EDB. Participant (8) contributed:

The approach begins with exploring the issue, telling the story about what has happened through to examining the strengths that the person possesses. The last phase looks at designing a plan to follow which will help the person to overcome the issue. This plan works on building on the person's strengths rather than the negatives. That is all I can think of at the moment. (Participant (8), EDB)

Participant (8)'s response was atypical of the early cohort responses repeating the Column Approach verbatim as outlined in McCashen's (2005) book (p. 48). Often missing from these responses were explanations of other strengths principles and the underlying philosophy in the strengths approach of social justice, transparency, respect and a sense of power with rather than power over stakeholders (McCashen, 2005, p. 19). It appears that these were not easy to remember, explain or considered as important from the initial lecture as strengths identification.

Adding Understandings to the Strengths Approach

Later responses after using the Column Approach indicated that a more personalised understanding of the Strengths Approach was emerging for Participant (8).

Knowing the steps has helped me understand how the Strengths-based Approach might work in education and I have been thinking about them a lot in my self-evaluation of how this subject and the Strengths Approach I am trying to take, works in practice. Actually attempting to teach using a Strengths Approach with the group this semester has made me realise though, that perhaps before even talking about the issues or telling the story (step 1) there is, needs to be, a step before that of connecting with people and engaging the group/individuals in dialogue. (EView)

This is a significant contribution for this research, and an exception to other participants' responses, as it evaluates the Strengths Approach for education and identifies the possibility of improving its application to a teaching context. The context of being a student of the approach has added another perspective on attempting to teach using the approach. Her suggestion to add another step to the Column Approach was drawn directly from her pre-service teacher experience using the approach for her own learning and is presented in detail. She identified that something was missing in the explanations of how to use a Strengths Approach, the need to emphasise to potential practitioners that before feeling confident to work on collaborative solutions, communication and relationship building has to occur and that this cannot be taken for granted. Participant (8)'s recount below is noteworthy as it captured the relationship-building session of the module that influenced her suggested amendment to the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48). Additionally, the response portrayed the difficulty experienced by some students in identifying strengths, and the time and reassurance necessary from the teacher educator as a facilitator. The excerpt (below) highlighted the weighting of strengths processes to child-protection content and indicates for potential strengths educators (more expressively than any module breakdown) the different mode of child-protection preparation presented in this research. The response indicated that although strengths identification was sometimes difficult, with time it also increased positive emotions such as self-confidence and esteem.

Upon entering our workshop room this week, we had to select a bear card, which showed on it the emotion of how we were feeling at that time. I enjoy this activity because it allows me to really think about how I am feeling at that particular time and the two times that we have done this I was surprised at the cards I have chosen. I usually look at myself to be a positive and stress free person, who is happy however, the cards which I chose on both occasions weren't very positive but rather sad. The card I chose for this workshop had a bear looking very tired and exhausted and that was how I felt. Once everyone had chosen a card we spent the entire workshop working our way around the group looking at the card they chose and then discussing it. I had originally thought that this activity was going to take us about five minutes however, it took the whole 50 minutes. It may have looked to outsiders that we didn't cover any content but rather just had a chat about each person who was present although it was quite surprising to note the amount of content which we did cover. We were discussing each person and their card with regards to the strengths-based approach. We also asked: "What do we think we bring to this subject?" I found this to be quite difficult as I felt like I was big noting myself and I don't like that so I just said to be positive and stress-free. Some of my peers stepped in and said that I have an open mind and that I am willing to listen to what other people have to say. It was good to hear that other people have positive things to say about me and that they didn't say that I am very argumentative or difficult to talk to. This made me feel a little better (although I was still very exhausted) to know that other people do notice me and that their interpretations of me were pleasant things. I feel that during this workshop I learnt a lot about the strengths-based approach and realised that I

do a lot of it anyway and most teachers do however, it is good to know that what we are doing is actually a good thing. (Participant (8), EView)

The excerpt confirmed that the process of identifying strengths involved both teacher educator and student in critical reflection and sometimes required resistance to rush onto child-protection content. Critical reflection is a crucial component in both the Strengths Approach (Saleebey, 2009) and teacher-education best practice, where “we reflect on our practice as a prelude to changing or improving it” (Mac Naughton & Hughes, 2008, p. 99). If teachers are to use a Strengths Approach to child protection and expect children to acknowledge and use their own strengths then teachers themselves must be comfortable and able to do this. Additionally, Participant (8)’s portrait of the session is sufficient to consider that a relationship-building component needs to be explicitly articulated as either the first step or a prerequisite to using a Strengths Approach. In future versions of a strengths child-protection module, an accompanying teacher educator guide detailing strategies would seem appropriate. For new strengths practitioners it should not be assumed that relationship building is an easy thing to do. Future child-protection modules could model this relationship building practice more explicitly and identify transparently that this is occurring:

I believe that it is very important [to] get to know the group first and build a sense of trust between each other. I had never thought of this when considering the strengths-based approach, I guess I had just presumed that a positive relationship would already exist (but now I realise that I can't just assume that, it needs to be worked on). Now looking back on the beginning of the semester I understand why you [teacher educator] didn't start lecturing straight away however, perhaps in the future (for other groups) it would be worth noting that this may not need to take so long. I think that you can naturally do this throughout the course of the semester. Getting to know your students at an early stage of the semester is a very valuable aspect of teaching. (Participant (8), EView)

The cyclical theme of relationship building as an important aspect of teacher education using a Strengths Approach was explored and emphasised again by Participant (8) after the mid-semester break. As a teacher educator, the author welcomed back students, showed interest in their well-being during the break and linked vacation experiences to our ability as a collaborative group to return to study. This was not in a planned application of a strengths approach (not recorded on the module breakdown), though through the conversations with students, the group revisited personal strengths areas and identifying resources. As a teacher educator, the author viewed this introduction after a break in study as a minor preliminary activity to reengage with the group. The introductions were not intended as a role modelling session or recognised by the author as using a Strengths Approach, yet Participant (8)’s response indicated that this experience was significant, useful to her as a student, and viewed as representing a Strengths Approach to teacher education.

Upon entering this week's workshop Xxx [lecturer] asked us about lecture recess. I thought that this was a lovely gesture as most other lecturers wouldn't really care what we did. It was good that she asked everyone as a whole group and then individually what each person did; she took a genuine interest in our lives outside of uni. By us telling others what we did during lecture recess was similar to the story section of the strengths approach, and then Xxx [lecturer] told us what she did during lecture recess which in a

sense was also storytelling. It is quite amazing how Xxx [lecturer] knows about the strengths approach and that can simply weave it into our discussion (probably doing it consciously however, it doesn't appear that way). I am actually beginning to get on top of my assessment pieces now and actually feeling like the semester is coming to a close. I worked full time [during recess] and tried to find the time to plan as much of my prac as possible we began semester two and here I am today, no break or holiday since February and I think I just need some time to myself. (Participant (8), EView)

Participant (8) was able to articulate her study issues and express a positive attitude towards achieving her goals and it appears that the informal, personalised conversation was able to reengage her to express these. From the response, the author gleans that the value of incidental opportunities to connect with students and role model a strengths approach as an educator cannot be underestimated. For potential teacher educators of child protection using a Strengths Approach, it is not only particularly important to demonstrate a caring approach to the well-being of students but also to recognise and plan to do this explicitly. McGrath and Noble (2003) note the importance of “teachers connecting with students in a personal way” as likely to “increase students’ commitment to learning and their connections to school, and be responsible for better student outcomes” (p. 64). The author suggests that Participant (8)’s experience in this research demonstrates that this list of benefits may hold true for pre-service teachers in teacher education at university and have cumulative advantages to the children that they will teach in schools.

As indicated previously, most participants reacted positively to the Strengths Approach used in the child-protection module but further analysis is needed to determine the particular contextual features of this teacher educator programme that fostered such positivity. Although participants expressed positive understanding of the approach by the end of the module, some appeared hesitant initially, even after definitional and introductory sessions. Participants’ reactions to a subsequent workshop (most often described as a lecture) that explained and modelled the Column Approach, however, was different and here represented well by Participant (8):

Today was my most favourite lecture that we had had so far for my entire degree (or from what I can remember). We spoke about the strengths approach. Not only was I writing down a lot of information during the lecture but I was also reflecting on my own life in relation to what [lecturer] was saying. Perhaps it was more of a feeling of accomplishment I have almost completed my third year of uni, I help out around the house every day and I am working a lot to help out my boss (who is very short staffed). At the moment I am able to juggle all of these three things into my life and still find time (although it is only a little time) to socialise with friends. Today was a very interesting lecture as we looked further into the idea behind the strengths approach, we looked specifically at the stages in the strengths approach and where previously I had thought that they were a little difficult to understand and grasp today, they seemed very logical and simple. Each phase seemed to follow on from the previous one in continuous manner without there being any disjunction, which I think help me to further understand the concepts. (Open View)

This workshop appeared to explain and cement the participants’ learning about using a strengths approach to child protection, even for those who at first expressed a lack of understanding. Students related the approach to their own circumstances and strengths. It appears that this session, as part of

the module, was a crucial component of child-protection preparation. The pre-service teachers in this study indicated that it was the rehearsal of using the solutions based and procedural Column Approach, which helped to explain to them the theory of the Strengths Approach. The exercise of using the Column Approach template (Appendix E) to address real-life child-protection scenarios was evaluated as a practical and useful way to demonstrate a system that they could use to promote children's well-being. The most useful component of the module, and one that represented a significant change for the pre-service teachers' learning to protect children, was interpreted as being the Column Approach workshop. Participants variously recorded this positive change as being "a total mind shift" (Participants (2), (9) Open Views), a "light bulb moment" (Participant (15), Open View), a "change of frame" (Participant (1) Open View) or an increase in confidence. Participant (2) explained the benefits of studying the Strengths Approach across a "whole subject" and that "three hours [typical workshop] is *not enough!!* [Participant emphasis]" (Open View). She recounted that after the column sessions she thought "Ah! OK, I get this!" and rapidly started to design ways of using strengths resources for her practice. The proactive and individualised strategies for child protection offered by participants, all appeared in narratives recorded after this session and Participant (8) reflected on her own interpretation and use of a Strengths Approach to child protection.

Individual Application of a Strengths Approach to Child Protection

In an Open View with Participant (8), towards the end of the module, the author asked, "how do you feel about going into a classroom and a child revealing abuse to you?" Participant (8) replied,

I think I have more knowledge in the way of how to deal with it, probably also because I negotiate better and I've read up a lot on it [in the module], but yes, because I have the knowledge in it and the interest, I think I'm more aware of what the child will be like, and how they'll act. (Open View)

Participant (8) visioned and identified her strengths (columns 2 and 3) for child protection:

In the prevention of physical abuse I have the passion in wanting to make a difference. Due to the fact that I have said that I am a kind and caring person I believe will go a long way with addressing the issue of physical abuse, mainly because I will be able to comfort others. I am also a good listener so I would easily be able to sit and listen to others while they tell me their stories/situation. (EDB)

The connection Participant (8) made between her difference-making vision and her own strengths was substantial. She expressed the ability to enact her vision with confidence in her own strengths and abilities. In contrast to responses in literature regarding pre-service teachers' lack of confidence to protect children (Baginsky, 2003), Participant (8) did not demonstrate disengagement, anxiety or lack of motivation to protect children, but self-efficacy. Participant (8) also moved from a simple repetition of the strengths principles taught during the module to a self-actualised statement that suggested she was using a strengths framework which "emphasises people's ability to be their own agents of change by creating conditions that enable them to control and direct the processes of change they engage in" (McCashen, 2005). As with other participants, she also moved beyond the hesitant

responses recorded in the early module weeks expressing insecurity about the responsibilities of child protection. Participant (8)'s vibrant expressions moved beyond hopeful, the phrases "I have the passion", "I am a good listener" and "I will be able", indicated an action-led dialogue. When the researcher inquired further, "what sort of strategies do you think might be good to do with children to help ease that situation?" (Researcher, Open View) she added,

I think just being very open and being genuine to them, tell them when you're not having a good day so that they know they can talk to you about things like that, be very open with them. (Participant (8), Open View)

The author interprets this seemingly simple, conversation-like response to child abuse from Participant (8) as expressing a uniquely thought-out child-protection strategy based on an individual perspective and learning gained from the strengths module. Participant (8)'s assertion that personalised, relationship-building strategies should be highlighted in the strengths approach, perhaps draws on her own study experience. Participant (8)'s final entry on the EDB, nearing the completion of the subject, reflected the culmination of her individual study experience of the strengths approach. The cyclical, relationship-building inclusion to her perspective on the approach is evident as she articulated her strategies for child protection:

Obviously knowing what strengths your students possess will be vital in the classroom however, it will be even more relevant for a child who has been abused. I think that as a teacher we need to make a conscious effort to ensure that we know our students strengths. Perhaps at the beginning of every term and possibly half way through as well the teacher could do a series of activities with the students. The one at the beginning of the first term would be simply getting to know your students, how talkative they are and what their personality, likes and dislikes are. The subsequent times throughout the year would be looking at how the child has changed (do they still believe, like and dislike what they said at the beginning of the year?), you would also note changes in their attitude, and perhaps this could be a time when you may pick up on suspected abuse. Although you should be looking at indicators of abuse everyday of the year, these designated times could be about refining your notes on each child. I suppose some possible activities could include: pair share, you could also have a different student every day stand up in front of the class and state what they are good at, what they like, etc. This will not only help the rest of the class to look at other people's strengths, they will also have to look at themselves. This is also a way of getting the students to frame their mind to think in a positive way. I really think that you use almost every type of activity which you would use in English or other subjects as long as they are directed towards finding out students strengths or even how we could improve our strengths. I really like [other students] ideas of using Chinese whispers and developing each child's own kids help group. (EDB).

Other participants reported that they had already confidently trialled relationship-building strategies that demonstrate their interest in student welfare and that these had proved a useful foundation for protecting children. Participant (15) recounted how on practicum she trialled a simple strategy to check student well-being:

Every morning I was doing the roll, I watched the relief [teacher] do it for the first couple of days and the kids [just said], "Yep, I'm here, yep I'm here!" and I thought "I'll take over," just to have a whirl at it before my full week of teaching and I [would say for instance], "Yeah, good morning Xxx how are you today? Are you feeling a bit better?"

(because he was sick) and I tried to ask how they [all] were feeling and some of the kids would go “Oh yeah, don’t feel real good.” [conversation would proceed] “Anything I can help you with? Are you sure, is it school?” (Open View)

Participant (15) described the connections formed with the group of children from using this strategy and how she received positive feedback from the children on her teaching style (using a self-designed facial expressions pictures chart):

All the kids, all 28 of them, did feel safe and comfortable. I figured, you know, I know this sounds stupid, if my teaching of a certain concept is not up to scratch, or my timing is out or a lesson runs over, that doesn’t even matter because the kids feel like they can come and talk to me. (Open View)

Phase 2: Professional Experience Context

The participants’ teaching practice experiences (mainly recorded in this research, after teaching practicum in Phase 2) heavily influenced their understandings and strategy formulation for child protection. Participant (14), when asked what influenced her growth in confidence to address child-protection issues, replied:

I think more so through practice, [rather] than sitting at uni learning it through text book, you might read on paper and might say “That’s really good”, but it just doesn’t work for you in practice. It’s not until you are on prac that you do see these things and it is eye-opening. (Open View)

Goos, Smith and Thornton (2008), examined Australian pre-service teachers’ preparation for teaching mathematics and presented three different categories of learning that occur in pre-service teacher education, “learning as knowing, learning as believing and feeling, and learning as becoming.” Participant (14) emphasised the role of professional experience in connecting theory (knowledge of child protection) learnt during the subject to practice (believing and feeling able to apply a strengths approach to child protection) as well as opportunities to develop a sense of teacher identity (becoming a protective teacher). This parallels findings from Wilson et al. (2001) on the ability of teaching placements to connect theory learnt in preparation programs with the practice of teaching, and literature that supports the view that teaching placements can have an important impact on developing teacher confidence and identity (Cochran-Smith & Zeichner, 2005; Noffke & Zeichner, 2006). Wilson et al. (2001) emphasise that “experienced and newly certified teachers alike see clinical experiences as a powerful—sometimes the single most powerful—element of teacher preparation” (p. ii).

The multiple, different, challenging and successful experiences with children, schools and practising teachers dominated the participant responses in Phase 2. Cohen et al. (2004) explain that,

The roles and tasks of the student teacher on teaching practice will be diverse and plentiful. If the scope of the task appears daunting, then, perhaps with little solace, this is because it is. Clearly, a teacher, at whatever level or age group, has a wide range of responsibilities, having to be more than simply a subject teacher. Whilst the size of these responsibilities is very considerable, some of them will have a greater priority than others, depending on local circumstances. (p. 40)

Open Views and Open Focus Group responses often started with lengthy vibrant discussions about individual professional experience experiences. In these discussions, participants compared and contrasted the school or early-childhood service environments they attended noticing the stark differences, reassuring similarities and complex situations experienced. Zeichner (2006) concluded that it is important that teacher educators understand the differences between pre-service teacher's backgrounds and placement experiences and the interplay between these and learning in teacher preparation programs.

The participants' animated conversations in this research were placed most often, as a precursor to discussions about the key research terms of child abuse, child protection and the Strengths Approach but also occurred in parallel and occasionally, simultaneously, in the narratives. These conversation starters could perhaps be dismissed as introductory, or warm up comments irrelevant to the main research issues for discussion (Burns, 2000; Glicken, 2004, p. 52). Participant-initiated narratives were indeed, weighted towards the minutiae of their own practicum details rather than explicit child-protection themes or the Strengths Approach. Further analysis of the context of professional experience for pre-service teachers, however, suggests that these general contextual conversations were vital to help explore and explain the participants' understandings of teacher preparation for child protection and the Strengths Approach, that were later expressed when questioned. Reflecting on teaching practice experiences after completion led some participants to redefine and extend their perspectives on child abuse to include abuse that happens around children. Individual responses indicate that key preparation issues for child protection in educational settings extend to dealing with sensitive parent, child and staff member interactions, supporting children from separated families, experiencing self-harm, bullying or aggressive behaviours, as well as developing socially just teaching and behaviour management styles.

Factors Affecting Practicum and Understandings of Child Protection

Phase 2 data were collected within the context of the participants recently completing professional experience (also known as teaching placement, practicum or simply "prac"). The author prepared to ask the participants, in Open View and Open Focus Group conversations, about their experiences and thoughts about child protection, child abuse and the Strengths Approach. Consideration was given to the possibility that the participants' views and experiences may have been affected, changed or enhanced by their recent placements. As an introduction, the author opened with general comments about their recent practicums or simple prompt questions such as "how was prac?" Participants were eager to tell their own professional experience stories and to answer direct questions about child protection. In this context, questions regarding the Strengths Approach did not always seem fitting. The author found it seemed inappropriate and disrespectful to interrupt conversations, so with the flexible format of the Open View, the dialogue was allowed to unfold. Often the discussion seemed to be in the format of a practicum debrief and, interestingly, seemed to have a cathartic nature to it. It

appeared participants wished to tell their individual stories of professional experience and the author avoided blunt questions about research terms. Prompts to reflect on the Strengths Approach or child-protection themes were, however, included in conversations if a suitable point or link in conversations arose. As the conversations unfolded, and in later analysis of the transcripts, the author noticed a similarity within many of the professional experiences recounts. Many of the participants described difficulties on placement and strategies that they employed to overcome complications. Overall, it appeared that participants were using at least some of the principles of the Strengths Approach and with some prompting, were able to evaluate their own practice and the use and value of the approach. The author found a point of commonality within the responses was a focus on resilience and being successful under adversity and this parallels findings from resilience researchers Withers and Russell (2001). The research terms and the professional experience context were linked both by stories of problematic issues and by successful strategies. Viewed as a whole, the stories in this phase often mirrored the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48).

The pre-service teachers' general conversations about professional experience revealed localised difficulties, logistical variances and individualised barriers to a successful placement. It may have been logical to dismiss these as being interesting, but off-track in terms of preparation for the research term of *child protection*. The contextual analysis, however, seeks to find clues within these holistic teacher preparation experiences that may in turn yield specific links or benefits to support child-protection preparation as part of the wider teacher preparation programme. This comes with the understanding that the pre-service learning environment may significantly affect their understandings of a wide range of teaching and learning issues including how to deal with child protection. The capacity of strengths-based approaches and principles to assist pre-service teachers in forming a personal philosophy of teaching began to emerge in this phase of the data collection.

One of the central issues for new teachers revolves around the conception of self as teacher. The inability of a new teacher to define his or her teacher identity – an underlying philosophy and way of being in the classroom, not to mention perspectives on schools, views of parents and community and ideas about curriculum development, for instance ... may push the teachers to merely cope with the affairs of the day according to the policies or rules of engagement.” (Knowles, Promsilow & Cole, 2008, p. 3)

Participant (17): A Professional Experience Vignette

The defining of teacher identity and the possible use of strengths principles is explored in an Open View with Participant (17). In the vignette below, Participant (17) examined in-depth issues and influencing factors affecting placement success and described the strengths and resources he employed to improve the situation. As with other participants, Participant (17) is experiencing “learning as becoming” (Goos, Smith & Thornton, 2008) during professional experience as his identity as a prospective teacher develops. After leading an unsuccessful whole class activity on insects, where children were disruptive, and receiving critical feedback from his supervising teacher, Participant (17) reflected:

I was still a novelty. I wasn't a paid, hardcore teacher ... feeling rejected for the day, I went home feeling worse, but the next day it *drove* me to make changes. and that's a good thing [adopted an outlook] "I'm not going to fail this, I can do this, I'm going to" and so the next day I made the changes that Xxx [supervising teacher] talked about but also that I *knew* that I needed to do too and so you do, you dig deep, and it's a humbling, but you find a sense of resilience and a strength to say, "No, I *can* do this and I can move on and I can be assertive, and directive, but also caring towards the kids." Because I think what I was doing was being too caring and not strong enough. And Grade 2 kids need a lot of clear directions and boundaries and that just didn't happen and I tried a few strengths approaches for myself, I'm a very big "group work" person and they [the teachers at the school] never give group work, they sat in rows ... I like incorporating technology I did a library lesson and part of it was You-Tube, we looked at insects and YouTube, and so I played the videos on the big projector screen, and little worksheets for the kids to take notes and draw pictures on [the children then became] right into insects and some were metamorphosising and some were making a cocoon, bees coming out of the honeycomb backwards and opening up their wings and it was just amazing but for me that is a strength and I presented that to the kids. (Open View)

Participant (17) explained that he tried strengths approaches, appeared to have increasing teacher confidence, became able to achieve learning outcomes from professional experience, and his ability to connect with children appeared enhanced. This can only be interpreted as an individual outcome for Participant (17) and does not specify that the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005) was employed in a structured way or was responsible for the positive outcomes expressed. The participants' responses more generally do, however, appear to support research conclusions from Bobis (2007, 2010) detailing the importance of the practical component of a primary-teacher-education-program in Australia. Bobis (2007) researched the evaluations from 86 prospective teachers and found that learning how to teach mathematics needed both practical and theoretical components. In subsequent research into professional experience, Bobis (2010) found across a wide variety of curriculum areas that "becoming a teacher is not just about learning more knowledge or the transforming of beliefs about teaching and learning, it is also about developing an *identity* as a teacher" (p. 47). As a critically reflective approach, the use of a strengths-based approach appears to have assisted Participant (17), for example, to take on advice from a mentoring teacher as well as to determine improved teaching strategies and a teacher identity of his own.

Participants' practicum experiences suggested that integrating child-protection studies throughout a teaching degree and linking these specifically to professional experience is preferable to the traditional one-off or adjunct child-safety workshop (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007; Goldenburg & Gallimore, 1991; Watts & Laskey, 1997; Whiteside, 2001). An integrated approach to child protection would appear to match participants' indications that child protection relates to the broad range of teaching issues and practices rather than being a separate, additional curriculum area. For example, participants gave examples of abuse and threats against themselves and other teachers:

There were a number of students who had extreme behaviours in the classroom (all boys). I got punched by one whilst trying to break up a fistfight that was endangering others as they were fighting on top of the students sitting in line, waiting to come in from playtime. There was one child in particular who was very aggressive. I think that

something might have been happening at home but cannot confirm this. When I tried to reason and speak with him after he hurt another student, he told me that his Dad would come in and get up me. He was a very angry child and would often hurt others for no particular reason. (Participant (19), EView)

After a while Xxx [child's name], picked up his chair and began to swing it around the classroom, almost hitting some of the other students. The relief teacher approached Xxx to take the chair off him and he hit the chair into her leg and then decided to stand and jump on the desks. I had not realised that a grade two student could potentially be that violent. (Participant (2), Open View)

I have a friend who was a teacher, he was teaching at Xxx [school name] and there was this one child who made an accusation that he touched him, or something like that and straight away, there was put in an order [report of suspected abuse], there was no [teacher] protection nothing and this kid just made it up and we were like [questioning look], there's nothing and they always believe the child so I think people are cautious. My teacher was telling me about a teacher, it was only a few years ago who had reported a child (a student) to child services ... the man [father of child] walked in and punched her in the face, broke her nose! (Participant (6), Open Focus Group)

Teacher preparation may need to include topics of self-protection and how to respond to allegations of child abuse (Anderson & Levine, 1999). These topics may logically be included within child-protection subjects linked with professional experience preparation.

Contrasting with the possibility of experiencing teacher abuse, for educators there also appears to be the possibility that some authoritarian teaching and discipline methods used may border on being classified as student abuse. Both possibilities together result in complex tension for teachers between child and self-protection. Two of the participants recalled in detail incidents in their own early schooling of possible verbal and emotional abuse from teachers:

The teacher called the correct answer to each [mathematics] question she then asked the people who did not get the correct answer to each question to stand up. After about the fourth time that I stood up the teacher said in an exhausted but frustrated manner, "Not you again!" I felt completely embarrassed and wanted to run away and cry. I felt dumb. (Participant (9), Open View)

Each afternoon the teacher would line the class up in a circle. We [would] wait for the mathematics questions. I would stand there in fear knowing firstly I would have to answer in front of everyone in the class and secondly knowing that I would most likely get the answer wrong [and] would remain standing in the circle until such a time that they got the answer right or the bell had gone. I stood in that circle day after day. What would I do if I missed my bus? How would I get home? All of these fears made fears made me a nervous wreck in school and every year after that I failed mathematics. This impacted on my life greatly. (Participant (19), Open View)

The responses support the view of that there are long-lasting effects of emotional abuse (O'Hagan, 1993; Tomison & Tucci, 1997; Tyler, 2002) and call into question teaching styles demonstrating "power over" students (McCashen, 2005, p. 19) common in the not so distant history of education (Brennan, 1998). Piekarska (2004), building on previous research in Poland, conducted a quantitative and qualitative survey of 412 New Zealand university students' retrospective memories of school experiences (across all levels of their schooling including early childhood). Piekarska "suggests that

mistreatment by teachers is a relatively common event, experienced by perhaps half of all school children at some time during their early education” (p. 60). Mistreatment by teachers was less reported by the younger university students surveyed, which Piekarska (2004) suggests, perhaps indicates “abuse by teachers has dropped” (p. 60). Nevertheless, Piekarska claims, there is still ample evidence to suggest that it is imperative that children be protected from teacher “victimization” and that “more comprehensive training in child abuse prevention (including institutionalized abuse) is necessary for teachers” (p. 60).

The inclusion of references in participants’ responses to the existence, damaging, and reportable effects of teacher abuse emphasises that modelling of non-abusive teaching strategies within the strengths module appears a necessary, contextually-linked component in child protection and professional experience preparation for educators. The strengths module linked each abuse category with corresponding teaching methods, giving simple links to indicators of abusive and best practice alternatives for each category. This module element appears from some responses to have been particularly pertinent for participants. Participant (2), for example, recalled that “the teacher was yelling at the children [verbal abuse], well not yelling but raising her voice enough and I thought, ‘you don’t yell at children, you just don’t do that.’” The response supports conclusions from research by Juan (2010) that stresses that “unkind words tear a child down, make the child feel bad, damage self-esteem and undercut healthy communicative relationships” (p. 196). Participant (2) explained how after recognising possibly verbal abuse she adapted her own communicative style of teaching, moving from feeling to action:

She [supervising teacher] left myself in charge of the students there and I felt, I decided I was going to do things a little differently and I just had conversations with the kids and the worksheets they were doing were too hard for them I thought they were finding it really hard and she wasn’t helping them, so I was helping them do it and their little faces, they just lit up, you know, just being encouraged and [example] “Oh yes, I can see you’ve done this one right” the difference from when I left the classroom to when I walked in. When I walked in you could feel the tense sort of [atmosphere] whereas when I walked out I felt like the kids were happy and content with what they did and probably knew a bit more, I’m pretty sure because they understood it after I had explained it. (Open View)

Participant (2) reported that her positive teaching style was different to that of her supervising teacher. Although her response was a single one of this kind (an exception response), as such, it is interesting when viewed alongside work by Grootenboer (2006). Grootenboer studied 29 New Zealand pre-service primary teachers, prior to and during practicum. From analysing interview and questionnaire data gathered from the pre-service teachers, Grootenboer (2006) found:

When professional experience placements reaffirmed the beliefs espoused by their teacher education program, their attitudes remained positive. However, for pre-service teachers in placements where these beliefs were not reaffirmed, any affective changes that occurred as a result of coursework were mostly reversed. (p. 26)

Participant (2) appeared to be able to make strengths-based changes to improve issues arising on practicum, as modelled in the module, and demonstrated a change process congruent with a Strengths Approach that is,

Primarily dependent upon positive attitudes about people's dignity, capacities, rights, uniqueness and commonalities ... [and] creates conditions that enable people to identify, value and mobilise their strengths and capacities in the process of change. (McCashen, 2005, p. v)

For teacher education, the Strengths Approach may be a particularly valuable practicum tool "for sharing power and creating change" (McCashen, 2005) because the daily and ongoing processes of teaching and professional experience are intrinsically managed by change and power.

The participants' responses following practicum support Piekarska's (2004) conclusions that extreme overpowering teaching styles do not occur often. One participant, however, perceives methods used by a long-serving teacher as including overly-authoritarian verbal questioning of a child: "This teacher felt that it was her duty to sort him out" (Participant (17), Open View). Later comments from the participant indicated that the teacher later discussed with the pre-service teacher her methods as being in order to "draw the child out", to seek a response or connection with the child. The teacher positively indicated additional involvement with the child's well-being as Participant (17) reported, "she told me that he had problems and they'd had to get professional people to go to his house to assess him at home as well as they've done at school" (Participant (17), Open View).

Teaching practice appears to be an ideal learning point to assess the difficult balance between managing children's behaviour and protecting their well-being, and learning how different teaching styles help or hinder this process. Coverage of teacher abuse during the module may also have affected the participants' likelihood and ability to recognise and take action on teacher abuse. After explaining an incident when a child tripped another child during a sport lesson, Participant (6) described a mature sport teacher's response: "Xxx [teacher], having witnessed the incident proceeded to strike Xxx [child] across the legs, chastising him for intending to hurt the other student" (Open View). The participant recounted the incident to the mentoring and supervising school based teacher educator (SBTE) on returning to the classroom. The participant added that the SBTE followed up on her observation from the sports lesson by informing the school principal and ensured the children involved were not seriously harmed. An incident debrief occurred with parents, staff, student and children involved. From a strengths perspective, valuing the pre-service teacher's concerns in this instance demonstrated that child-safety issues were considered seriously in the school and that child centred practice was more the norm than retributive discipline (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

Many responses also indicated that school personnel took time with students to mentor and guide their practice. After a violent incident with a child, a participant recounted, "the vice-principal had a discussion with me afterwards about how best to deal with the situation in the future, I felt that next time I may have been able to cope slightly better" (Participant (2), Open View). While responses from participants indicated that teachers often struggled to deal with children's behaviours, responses

displayed more positive examples of supportive and caring practice than negative ones. Examples of teachers providing food, equipment, clothes and practical help and support for children are numerous in the responses, for example, “The teacher spoke in a firm but comforting voice then spent some one-on-one time with Xxx [child] to help him catch up and make him feel valued” (Participant (13), Open View). Placing the teaching practice after the child-protection module appears to have assisted pre-service teachers identify and redefine abuse and protection in school contexts. Mentoring from their supervising teachers helped participants to distinguish between possible indicators of abuse and protective strategies, and to question practices which may help or hinder child protection.

The participants in this study confirmed the importance and value of professional experience for prospective teachers, “learning in the real world and the influence of significant others, such as role models, on learning” (Ewing, Lowrie & Higgs, 2010, p. 23). From the responses of participants in this study, it appears that the value of this learning context is as relevant and important for child-protection education preparation as it is for other curriculum areas. Participants supported the value of “situated learning” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; McLellan, 1996) for child protection and emphasised that it is “often incidental and unintentional rather than deliberate and it is facilitated by a range of contextualised learning activities” (Ewing et al., 2010, p. 24). Participants’ responses and strategies relating to child abuse and protection were enhanced by their teaching practicums. A finding that emerged from the research process of collecting data around professional experience was that this could be also a valuable debriefing strategy and a child-protection education process for teacher educators. From a strengths approach, professional experience may allow potential and novice strengths practitioners to trial theoretical principles for themselves and debrief in realistic and supported environments. Future child-protection preparation programmes can benefit from the experiences of participants in this study, by clearly mapping and linking programmes to professional experience, providing opportunities for pre-service teachers to prepare for and debrief child-protection issues experienced during practicums.

Phase 3: Transition from Pre-service to Practising Teacher Context

Participants transformed during the period of the research from students and pre-service teachers on practicum, to nearing or graduating, practising teachers. During Phase 3, responses were gathered from participants, essentially as early career teachers, in the context of working or preparing for work in educational institutions. The majority of the cohort either had finished, or were near completion of, their teaching degree. Many participants were employed full-time and others were working part-time in children’s services while completing their studies or seeking permanent employment and attending interviews.

Xxx [other participant] and I are looking at going to Canada in September to teach for 12 months to 2 years. (Participant (9), EView)

Not sure about job prospects yet. I am thinking about applying for Kindergarten job.
(Participant (12), EView)

I just had my EQ [Education Department Queensland] interview today and it went OK.
(Participant (19), EView)

I am currently at a local day care centre and group leader of the 2-3 year olds but I honestly know that isn't my calling and I yearn to be in a classroom!! (Participant (4), EView)

It is clear that child-protection preparation for early-childhood education students must not be limited by the expectation that skills will be only applied in state education classrooms. University pre-service programmes limited to teaching state child-protection reporting systems for schools, for example, are likely to under-cater for students who work in a variety of jobs and geographical locations. Participant (1) for example, reported that she had moved from Queensland to the state of Victoria, was working part-time “in occasional care with children under 5” (EView), had transferred to external studies with another university and was nearing completion of her degree. By the end of Phase 3, many participants were paid and practising teachers employed in an assortment of early-childhood services and schools. For instance, Participant (9) informed that “I am currently teaching at Xxx [Catholic School] five days per fortnight” (EView) and Participant (8) was situated “relief teaching [private & public schools] for the next 6 months” (EView). Connell et al. (2010) describe the new contexts in which the participants, as new teachers, have entered or are about to enter as a combined,

“Occupational culture” of teaching. Teachers as a group, and teachers’ organisations, hold distinctive traditions, customs, language, attitudes, styles of dress, manners, ways of seeing the world and [importantly for this research] ways of dealing with problems. (p. 343)

Phase 3 responses arose from this new teacher context and these newly grounded, practitioner responses were crucial to assess the differences, consistencies, relevance and any ongoing usefulness of the strengths-based child-protection module that was delivered to them in Phase 1. The inclusion of module content, generic and flexible for use in long day care, outside school hours care and family day care services, as well as state, catholic and private schools seemed useful. Material from early-childhood and social-service work contexts was drawn on for the module as well as child-protection specific resources used in the traditional adjunct workshops (COAG, 2009a; QCEC, 2008, Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011a, 2011c; Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011). Connell et al. (2010) argue that the occupational culture of teaching that the participants were now involved in, “cannot be taught in university courses, but is very powerful in the actual work context. It gives teachers a sense of direction, a sense that problems can be solved” (p. 343). Participant (2) commented: “my prac last year was excellent - very different to having your own class. I now have a job at the same school teaching the same age group! I am thoroughly enjoying it!” (EView). Participant (5) explained that on practicum:

I think that I did find out more about my own teaching style. However, I am confident that when I have my own class, I will be even more myself and even more confident in making my own decisions. It's always hard on prac as you have someone watching you constantly. (EView)

Participants reported that the actual work context of early-childhood teaching when they graduated was different from previous practicum environments they had experienced, although physically located in similar settings, as a paid work context, it was different to their supported professional experience context experienced whilst studying. Participant (11) commented in Phase 3 that “it is such weird feeling to think that I no longer will be at uni and I will actually have to start working full time!” (EView). Blaise and Nuttall (2010) explain that the difference of teaching contexts between pre-service and practising teachers lies in the significant, heightened responsibility for ongoing moral and ethical dilemmas faced by qualified teachers in forging and maintaining relationships with children, families, colleagues and communities. Blaise and Nuttall claim that “teaching is not easy! It is emotionally and physically demanding work ... engaging with uncertainty and difference” (p. 248).

Phase 2 responses from participants after teaching practicum underlined the value of situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991; McLellan, 1996) on practicum to assist in initial strengths-based teacher preparation to protect children. In Phase 3, participants re-entered the same potential learning situations but in a very different role, in most cases that of qualified educator. As qualified teachers, they now had legal child-protection responsibilities beyond those entailed in their previous student status, and whether they could remain confident to protect children and use a strengths approach was under question.

As a teacher educator, the author wished to investigate whether the child-protection module was appropriate preparation for the roles that the participants were in, a year after the learning occurred. The author wondered also whether the Strengths Approach was fulfilling the potential to be useful for fields other than social services (Hodges & Clifton, 2004) and whether participants had altered their expressed enthusiasm for and use of the approach from earlier phases. Participants had previously indicated that they had some reservations about practising teachers’ acceptance and motivation to use strengths approaches when teaching. The analysis of Phase 3 responses investigated whether the move to qualified teacher status had influenced the participants’ own acceptance and motivation to use a strengths approach to child protection. Phase 3 analysis explored whether, within a new occupational culture, participants had continued to adopt a Strengths Approach or had changed views to align with other approaches used in the contexts that they were now working in. In Phase 1 and 2, participants as students, demonstrated philosophies and strategies for child protection that could be assessed as emanating from a “transformative model” of education (Mac Naughton, 2003). Would responses in the field, upon graduation, support a more conforming model (Mac Naughton, 2003) than previously reported?

The change of context for participants brought with it changes in responses to research themes of child abuse and protection, teacher education and the Strengths Approach. Participants’

responses in Phase 3 (one year after completing the strengths protection module) were philosophical and reflective. Participants' comments supported conclusions from Cohen et al. (2004) that for "a newly qualified teacher entering a first appointment in a school" (or early-childhood service), they are "faced with the exciting but challenging task of assimilating a variety of contexts" in macro-contexts of communities and "micro-contexts of everyday life in classrooms" (p. 1). Many participants reported successfully addressing child-protection issues and did appear to be using a Strengths Approach, though this was not always explicitly recognised or identified. As a solutions-based approach, the Strengths Approach appeared to connect with new meaning for participants joining the teaching profession and with their new identity as qualified teachers. Participant responses in Phase 3 reconnected with the Strengths Approach, reevaluated teaching experiences, revised their knowledge of educational theory and noted how these influences affected their teaching philosophy.

Phase 3 Responses

Participants' Phase 3 responses expressed both explicit and implicit uses of a Strengths Approach to teaching. Participant (1) stated that, "I have been able to use the strengths based approach" and details the use of the five-column approach for planning. Participant (2) recounted continuing to use strengths-based resources (bear cards) and learning experiences in her early-childhood teaching in Phase 3 (as noted previously, p. 156), exploring emotions and feelings with children in a "sort of strengths approach" (EView). Participant (3) noted that, "I did not use the strengths approach on paper per se but I think being aware of it helped me and my situation along the way" (EView). Participant (3) recounted in detail how she experienced an accident requiring surgery and actively sought to draw on personal strengths and available resources, such as feedback from her supervising teacher, to complete her final practicum and studies, saying "it's awesome what a little dedication and drive can do" (EView). With the context of graduation and employment, the earlier focus of using the approach as a philosophical tool re-emerged along with the resilience required for the difficult job of teaching (Blaise & Nuttall, 2010).

My teaching prac was out of "wack" with everyone else and I finished in November last year. No one ever tells you how tough being a teacher is, but on the other hand it is so hard to explain the absolute joy and rewards that come with it. I sent off my registration today and am eagerly waiting to teach. In the challenging times [current childcare work] I remember to see the situation as an opportunity to use my strengths, (or develop new ones) and the strengths of others. (Participant (4), EView)

The health problems I had talked about last year have continued this year and I have undergone another 3 surgeries - getting through those as well as uni took a lot of resilience most definitely. I think the dream of me always wanting to be a teacher since I was 3 years old has also helped me get through. That dream is almost a reality. (Participant (7), EView)

Participant (4) appeared to represent the broad adoption by many participants of the Strengths Approach as "a philosophy for working with people to bring about change" (McCashen, 2005, p. v) though some specific child-protection usage is noted. The approach seemed potentially useful for

participants as early career teachers, as well as pre-service teachers, in visioning and raising their confidence in their own teacher identity (Withers & Russell, 2001; Ewing et al., 2010).

I think I have finally worked out the meaning of the saying if you want something done ask a busy person. I have found many personal strengths over this past year although some weaknesses also. I have found mothers guilt. It is certainly difficult juggling studies with Xxx [baby], now 10 months old. I have completed the 2 subjects this semester which has been quite a task as both subjects' assessments are quite large. Xxx [baby] is a strength. I feel I am a lot more understanding and compassionate person now and I think I will understand parents of the students I teach a lot better than I would have before. I don't know if there are any specific times that I have used a strengths approach apart from telling myself I can do it and knowing that I will. I know I will be a good teacher when I finally get there. (Participant 10, EView)

I have almost finished and yes it is very exciting. My prac was a huge success. I absolutely loved it. I learnt a lot about networking and partnerships and the importance of using other professionals in the school. I completed my code of conduct training and student protection while I was on prac. I also have had my interview [Education Qld] and it went really well. [The] subject taught me a lot about reflecting and I now reflect often. It was a great strategy to use during my prac in determining what kind of teacher I want to be. (Participant (12), EView)

I probably couldn't say that I knowingly use the strengths approach i.e. I don't sit down and think OK I am going to use the strengths approach to work out this problem but subconsciously I really was using it. As for child safety I noticed a little boy that always had bruises on his wrist. He would bite his wrist when he got angry instead of lashing out at others. I have mentioned to Xxx [supervisor] she is monitoring it a little more. He has since been diagnosed with ADHD. (Participant (7), EView)

Phase 3 responses demonstrated that participants were able to “identify and address social, personal, cultural and structural constraints to people's growth and self-determination” (McCashen, 2005, p. v) including their own. Participant (11) commented how “strengths-based teaching and learning” was difficult on practicum as her supervising teacher used a more teacher-led, “old fashioned” curriculum that was different to her own developing philosophy of early-childhood education. Participant (11) recounted that she reviewed her strengths and gained an understanding of working with colleagues who had a different perspective on teaching. Participant (11) commented in Phase 3, “I guess my strength isn't patience, but at least I know that now and can work on it - especially since I'm majoring in early childhood” (EView). Positive, first person statements featured heavily in EViews. Participant (5) commented that “one strength that I used a lot on prac was my mother [a teacher] who I would ring and ask for advice on lessons and how to be assertive with the children regarding behaviour management. My organisation skills also helped me get through prac” (EView). The commitment to undertaking solutions-based practice demonstrated in earlier phases of the research was still apparent (though more integrated) within Phase 3 responses. Noticeably, there was also an increased emphasis on personalised statements and explorations of participants' individual feelings and experiences. The conversational and personalised EView prompts appeared to have assisted the participants' to adopt a critically reflective tone in their responses. Participant (1), who has moved and is both working and studying, reflects in detail on the changes that have occurred for her since

previous phases. She articulated the use of a strengths approach in her EView responses in Phase 3, saying that she was using the “five-column approach to planning” to help complete her remaining university subjects and for enhancing her practical work with young children (as noted previously, p. 182 and p. 183). She commented: “I am finding it hard to study externally” and then explains how she uses a strengths approach to assist her completion. She noted that one of her subjects “makes very good use of the discussion board so I feel I am getting good support there” (Participant (1), EView).

While critical reflection on key research terms had been present in all phases of the research, the emphasis in responses in Phase 3 seems different. In Phase 3, participant responses were more self-evaluative, confident of their own circumstances and opportunities and knowledgeable of their future goals and roles. Some participants made positive links in Phase 3 between the strengths-based approaches that they had learnt about in the teaching module and other early-childhood teaching approaches that they had experienced on practice. Participant (19) commented in Phase 3 that the strengths approach theory “that I had learnt at uni really started to make sense and become useful” (EView) and details examples of behavioural and neglect issues (as noted previously, pp. 163-164). Participant (1) made links between strengths identification elements of strengths approaches and her early-childhood teaching experiences.

Setting up learning experiences was so different and the centre uses the emergent curriculum approach so I was able to see how experiences followed the children's interests. For instance, one girl was going to visit her Granddad's farm, so the Group leader set up an inside farm experience. I was able to contribute to that with ideas for grass and others materials. I have learnt a lot. I like the way the emergent curriculum builds on the children's strengths as well, when a child showed preference for a particular area (say building blocks) because they were good at it, then for several days blocks would be made available and extension activities used. (Phase 3, EView)

Participant (13) also explained:

I didn't use the Strengths Approach model that you gave us [column approach template] but I was doing a little morals unit for religion. We looked at good and bad behaviours and then further explored good role models and bad role models. Some of the activities included getting the children to think of how they are good role models, what they could do to be like their own role models etc. So I guess this was getting the children to look at their strengths as to why they are a good role model for others. (EView)

Participants' responses offered during Phase 1 and 2 were generally more focused on specific subject, module and research terms while their responses during Phase 3 were more indicative of a collegial relationship. Dialogue about protection was integrated with other issues. It appeared that earlier relationship-building inclusions in the module maintained a collaborative power balance during the research, assisting participants in transition to becoming colleagues rather than students (Saleebey, 2009). Participants asked less mentoring-type questions or for clarifications on child-protection issues and gave direct, journal-like responses with some retrospective acknowledgements reflecting the culmination of their teacher education. The responses suggest that the use of journaling tools (Masman, 2007; St. Lukes Anglicare, 2010) may be a useful future addition to the resources demonstrated in the protection module.

While it may be deemed that EView prompts did not facilitate enough targeted responses to child protection, the author argues the more heavily weighted, self-identity responses that were given were instead a positive indication that child-protection issues had been included by participants into their roles as new teachers along with a myriad of other issues. Participant (8), for example, commented in Phase 3 that she had continued to have an interest in child protection and was using positive approaches in early-childhood teaching. Participant (8) detailed using positive behaviour management and planning techniques to assist her teaching and evaluated “my class settled down a lot” and adds that she is considering moving to Canada with Participant (9) “to teach for the next year or two (probably two years). After I get back, I am definitely going to look further into child protection” (EView). Child protection was not expressed as a separate, onerous area of teaching that participants were not prepared for (c.f., Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005) and the responses that were given did not express anxiety or undue negative focus on child-protection issues. Responses indicated an acceptance of child protection as a responsibility and one that participants had strategies and confidence to address if it arose. Child-protection issues were not over or under represented in dialogues but were evaluated alongside issues such as behaviour management and working with families and colleagues. For instance, Participant (9) mentioned, in Phase 3, an incident that occurred during practicum when a child bullied other children and she reflects with the classroom teacher that the child may have been experiencing abuse themselves at home (as noted previously, pp. 153-154), “I felt that Xxx was so confused because his dad's attitude was the total opposite from the school's attitude about how to treat others” (EView). The integrated child-protection teaching module, the author suggests, produced integrated child-protection responses that linked with, built upon, and added to, an array of education skills that the participants had developed during their studies. The Phase 3 responses supported claims by Laskey (2004, 2005) that integrated approaches are most valuable in preparing teachers to protect children and that explicit child-protection content should be included in at least a semester of study for pre-service teachers. The findings of this research, prompt the author to suggest that *integrated and linked* child-protection content of no fewer than ten hours across a semester of study provides a much stronger preparation for teachers in child protection than a traditional adjunct workshop. Extended protection study time in the module gave opportunities to “value add” to other teacher-education topics being studied.

Child-protection education within the overall degree programme, even with an extended model, is a small component of pre-service preparation (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007). In parallel to a micro-examination of its effectiveness to assist in child protection, teacher-education preparation can also be examined for its ability to build on and add to the overall outcomes of teacher-education programmes at a macro level. It appeared from Phase 3 responses that the Strengths Approach principles learnt via child-protection education were integrated into a much broader tool for new teachers. Participant (15)'s extended Phase 3 responses gave an indication of the contextual

influences at play as a new teacher and demonstrates an individual outcome of the strengths-based module.

Participant (15): Vignette as Practising Teacher

Participant (15) reconnected with the research project in Phase 3 by EView, saying, “I am still very interested in the Strengths Approach.” She engaged in updating the researcher on graduation and moving to a rural town in Queensland, becoming “quite involved in things in town quickly” with her family. She had gained employment as a full-time teacher with a disadvantaged group of children. In a number of conversational EViews, she outlined the challenges she experienced working with the group. These consisted of child-protection concerns observed such as substance abuse and neglect, and using a Strengths Approach explicitly in teaching:

In the class there are 5 very interesting boys [low levels of] literacy & numeracy of about year 3/4 and high behaviour. 1 boy has only been at school for 2 years, was a petrol sniffer prior to being removed from Xxx [another school]. 1 boy sniffs now, not heavily but misses a lot of school, 2 I think are just starved for attention so play up so they get some [attention], then get kicked out of class and have survived this way for so long they missed more than they learnt and my last 1 [of the five boys] just can't be bothered with school. They [were disruptive] at the start of the year and got removed from [other] classes. I have really enjoyed having them though and have not had a problem at all with them. I started a veggie garden with them and gave them the responsibility for caring for it, planting the lot. They are nearly loving it to death. They crack if any of the kids that go near it and are always cleaning up around it. I have seen a lot of change in them. We spent a lot of our time at the start reading (me to them), and any activity I want them to do I do it *with* them not up on the board. Now 8 weeks along and I have all five of them reading to me and trying to outdo each other with spelling etc. They were coming hungry a lot to my class so I started to bring them each a piece of fruit and gave it to them at the start of the lesson. How true it is that behaviour has a lot to do with food. I have gained a lot of enjoyment from these boys. (EView, Phase 3)

In circumstances that include complex child protection and self-harm risks, Participant (15) was able to confidently design and effectively use resiliency-raising principles (Withers & Russell, 2001). Participant (15) explained using a laminated Column Approach template (Appendix E) to work through difficult issues when teaching (such as the one above), writing with a whiteboard marker and reusing the template each time. Responses in Phase 3 indicated that rather than merely learning the Strengths Approach, Participant (15) was innovatively and successfully practising it with difficult, multiple, child-protection issues. Bobis (2010) claims that “teaching is a profession where systematic inquiry into students’ learning is an expected part of everyday processes” (p. 49). The author suggests that Participant (15) clearly demonstrated that systematic inquiry into students well-being must also be expected of our teachers and that teacher educators must prepare and cultivate the ability of teachers to do this. Participant (15) indicated a depth of reflective practice that Bobis (2010) interprets as indicative of a “self directed teacher-learner” who knows how to learn themselves and moves beyond “determining ‘what works’ with their students ... [to] a level of inquiry that is both self-sustaining and also *generative* ... teachers seek to understand *why* these practices work with

particular students in particular contexts” (p. 49). This positive self-reflection aligns well with founding statements of strengths perspectives aiming to study instances of positive practice rather than deficits (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Evidence of participants as self-directed teacher learners (Ewing et al., 2010, p. 49) reinforces the purpose of contextual analysis in strengths research to provide clues as how solutions-based practice may be transferable.

Participant (15)’s responses changed dramatically in the time of the research from initial seeking of clarification and lack of connection with the Strengths Approach. After trialling and evaluating strengths-based protection strategies, at the completion of the research she ended by applying the approach to her teaching in a personalised way. In Phase 1, she indicated that “there has to be a way that the state of a child’s safety can be looked at [but] I couldn’t get it [the Strengths Approach] and the child protection thing” (EDB). After professional experience, which she described as “a great learning experience”, Participant (15)’s responses became increasingly confident and attuned to children’s well-being and contain accounts of strengths-based techniques.

In an Open View, Participant (15) described how on practicum she was required to administer a test (set by the supervising teacher). She earlier mentioned concerns that some children may be experiencing neglect, coming to school tired, apparently without having breakfast and shows concern for the effects this may have on their learning. She organised the test for mid morning (before the students normally show excessive tiredness) and arranged a sandwich and fruit break for the group in a shaded outside area. Participant (15) explained her strategy to improve their ability to succeed: “Just to give them that walk out of the classroom, have a break, you know, have something to eat so they’re not working on an empty stomach sort of thing, fresh air” (Open View). In Phase 3, as a qualified teacher, a year after the module, she demonstrated clearly her understanding and use of strengths principles in her daily teaching. Participant (15)’s experiences on the previous practicum appear to have been formative, complementing the strengths approach studied and she continued to use strategies learnt on practicum as a qualified teacher.

Conclusion

Higgs and Titchen (2001) argued that practitioners in health and education need three types of knowledge:

1. Propositional, theoretical or scientific knowledge;
2. Professional craft knowledge, or knowing how to do something; and
3. Personal knowledge about oneself as a person and in relationship with others. (p. 3)

The contextual analysis of the participants’ responses to the strengths-based child-protection preparation in this research supports the view that having these three separate knowledge types is valuable for teacher preparation. In Phase 1 of the research, participants responded positively to the principles and processes of the Strengths Approach, child-protection information and theories. Phase 2 responses indicated the worth of professional experience for enhancing participants’ understandings

and trialling strategies for how to protect children. Finally, Phase 3 responses confirmed that developing a confident teacher identity and self-reflection was integral to being able to protect children in the ongoing role as a teacher.

The author concludes, based on participant responses, that while generic child-protection content, such as recognising signs of abuse, included in traditional adjunct protection workshops (Queensland Government, DET, 2008) is necessary for assisting pre-service teachers to recognise and report abuse, this should be considered as only a minimal starting point for developing understandings about child protection. From the data collected, the author concurs with McCallum (2002) that “current [traditional] models of teacher professional developments ... are ineffective in the preparation of teachers to implement the conditions set down by the Rights of the Child” (Teachers Work section, para. 4). The author further suggests that integrated yet clearly identified, strengths-based child-protection preparation can assist pre-service teachers to engage with and increase their ability to address child-protection issues. As opposed to “evidence linking the adoption of permeation models to ignorance and serious misconceptions about the nature and incidence of child abuse in the minds of students” (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 9), the participants undertaking the integrated strengths module in this research appeared well informed about child abuse and were fully aware of their child-protection responsibilities. Participants demonstrated not only knowledge of the existing complex definitions and categories of child abuse and protection but were able to critically reflect on and redefine these, exploring their own personalised meanings with clarity. Participants were able to design strategies to address child protection and adopt a Strengths Approach to improve their teaching practice in general. Their enhanced confidence was supported by having an extended, interactive and integrated module of child-protection preparation linked to professional experience. Preparation to protect children was assisted by the active exploration and role modelling of resources within the subject, and by practice in scenarios and on teaching practice. The completion of the module was fostered by a personalised, critically reflective teaching and learning process that was mirrored and maintained by participants after the module was completed. Twelve months following the child-protection module, participants reported that they were using a Strengths Approach in both child protection and general teaching pedagogy.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION: CHANGING THE FRAME

This chapter revisits the aims of this research project, highlights findings and elaborates on future related research possibilities. It also discusses the implications and potential impact on policy and practice that the Strengths Approach may have, particularly for child protection. This research aimed to explore an integrated strengths approach, as an alternative to a traditional one-off workshop method of child-protection preparation through the eyes of a single group of pre-service teachers. Regardless of the small scale of the research, the findings might also be of use to other education students, teachers and teacher educators when they teach and learn about child protection. Additionally, the research may be of interest to practising and potential strengths practitioners, child-protection workers, childcare workers and those influencing policy and practice in care and education. Finally, the author hopes that this attempt to develop strengths-based education research may extend and inspire others to study the application of strengths principles to research techniques.

The conclusion as a coalescence of this research, is, as with many of the methodology processes in this research, not without challenges. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008) discuss the difficulties of concluding research, arguing that:

“To conclude” can mean “to terminate” or “to end”. This use can be a little tricky... How do you [the researcher] decide that your project is complete? Ideally... research never concludes – each cycle generates new questions, initiating a further cycle. (p. 216)

As a strengths-based researcher, the difficulties of cessation and hopes for the continuation of research outcomes are similar, yet the researcher is cognisant that a “researcher has to stop researching at some point – especially if they have reached the end of their resources” (p. 216). The decision by a researcher to end a research project may have additional challenges when using a strengths approach, as the decision to conclude must be recognised as an act of power (McCashen, 2005). The strengths researcher must give adequate thought and time to the strengths of the data collected, rather than rushing to complete in a self-serving manner and yet must also not restrict, withhold or delay the publication of results and solutions that potentially could be of use to those struggling with issues. Strengths researchers should be clear that the proposed end for their research is suitable and will benefit the participants and those affected by the research issue, not only the researcher. If possible, the endpoint should be discussed and determined with participants in the formulation of the research in order to maximise involvement and assist in the improvement of the issue being studied (or at least not be a barrier to this). Cornwall and Jewkes (1995) claim that participant involvement “involves recognizing the rights of those whom the research concerns, enabling people to set their own agenda for research and development and so giving them ownership over the process” (p. 1674). While this may be an ideal for the potential strengths researcher, the individual, organisational, economic and political factors affecting the timely completion of research may make this extremely difficult.

Participants should, however, at the very least be made aware of the given research timeframes and be comfortable with the beginning and ending times of the research when consenting to participate and committing to their level of participation. In this way, participants and researcher have a joint vision of when and how the research will conclude and all parties will recognise concluding as both a positive strategy and a successful outcome to a strengths-based project.

Any positive relationships forged between researcher and participants during research are also strengths outcomes and can perhaps provide opportunities for future research involvement. In strengths research, concluding can be viewed as not so much a cessation of communication between researcher and participant, but the fulfilment of an agreed contract from the researcher to tell a joint research story, seeking improvements on the issue studied. Mac Naughton and Hughes (2008) reinforce this via another definition of conclusion as, “to reach a final, reasoned decision or judgement” and they suggest, “you [researcher] should summarise your data and your analysis of it; then explain why and to whom your data and analysis are significant” (p. 216). It is with this guidance in the forefront, that the author examines the pertinent, solutions-orientated findings of this research.

Enhancing Child-Protection Teacher Preparation

The literature review for this research project revealed the historical connections and the contemporary relevance of aiming to enhance child protection in education. The participants in this study again confirmed that teachers are in an ideal role to identify and assist children who may be abused as well as to teach important prevention and resilience strategies. The research findings outlined the significant practical and moral demands of child-protection education for pre-service teachers identified previously in child-protection education literature (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Walsh et al., 2006; Walsh et al., 2005). Some participants indicated (prior to professional experience) that they had existing personal and school-based knowledge and experiences of child abuse. Feelings of hesitancy and anxiety with dealing with child abuse (particularly sexual abuse) were common at the beginning of the module. All participants, however, demonstrated engagement, rather than panic (Singh & McWilliam, 2005), with the issues of child abuse and protection, and indicated they had a clear idea of the responsibilities and duty of care involved with teaching (Farrell, 2001; Workplace Health and Safety Act 1995, 2011). Whilst early responses showed discomfort, elevated emotions and the possibility of inaction towards child abuse akin to earlier research (Baginsky, 2003; Watts & Laskey, 1997), the multitude of responses to the child-abuse and protection themes were not merely a deficit charting of maltreatment. Early module responses were engaged and hopeful of solutions, and later module and post module responses were action-led and proactive with ideas for improving the treatment of children. The participants’ indirect and direct protection experiences were a rich resource base for reaching a realistic and broader understanding of the protection skills needed for pre-service teachers and confirmed the complexity and multiplicity of child-protection subissues.

After professional experience, participants were able to identify personalised instances of possible abuse and identify, clarify, and extend definitions and categories of abuse. The participants' responses indicated that protection from verbal, physical, emotional, sexual abuse and neglect might be needed for many children in the environments in which they were training to teach. Participant responses also indicated that gender issues, institutionalised abuse, educational neglect and social factors were all factors affecting the well-being of children. In parallel, participants expressed that teachers were mentoring, caring and meeting the basic needs of children and addressing the protection challenges noted in early-childhood-education environments. This suggests that child-protection preparation programmes can be enhanced by valuing and using pre-service teachers' prior and developing understandings of abuse and protection, as well as utilising their practicum teaching experiences and personal skills.

The responses of the pre-service teachers in this study appear to support literature that asserts that adjunct or add-on child-protection workshops for pre-service teachers are less adequate than integrated models for exploring the complexity and developmental effects of child abuse on children (Watts & Laskey, 1997; Landgren, 2005; Pinheiro, 2006). The focus in adjunct workshops on state based reporting and statutory, school-based policy requirements (Bromfield & Higgins, 2005; Farrell, 2001) may provide a starting point for teachers exploring child-protection issues in education. The author suggests, however, that the responses of the participants in this research (as typical early-childhood education students) indicated that more practical strategies, support and guidance for working with at risk children are required in order to feel adequately prepared for the issue of child protection. For many participants early dialogue focussed initially around the issues of child abuse and protection and their personal needs and feelings as they prepared to be teachers. Participants affirmed the need, articulated by MacIntyre and Carr (2000), for practical solutions to protect children and saw the inadequacy of teacher preparation as a barrier to protection (c.f., Watts, 1997). Participants expressed a need for practical ideas for child protection, backing work of key child-protection researchers:

Although considerable emphasis is placed on training teachers to identify and notify child abuse and neglect, we contend there is a concomitant imperative for teachers to receive professional training and support to develop strategies and processes that meet the needs effectively of this educationally disadvantaged group of students. (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007, p. 11)

Participants appeared to welcome and value the opportunity to vision, explore strengths, resources and strategies as presented in the teaching module. The strengths approach studied by the participants (McCashen, 2005; Saleebey, 2005) appears to have contributed to an increased awareness and confidence in child-protection education both during and after the module. Some participants explained they used an explicit strengths approach during teaching practice, while others reported they felt they had used elements of the approach more implicitly for a broader range of teaching issues. After studying the module, all participants demonstrated a strong understanding of "issues

facing today's families" and unlike Kesner and Robinson's (2002) evaluation, were not "unaware of what many children bring into the classroom and go home to at the end of each school day" (p. 222).

Goldenberg and Gallimore's (1991) conclusion that one-off workshops for child-protection preparation do not generate meaningful explorations of child-protection terms and issues are supported in this research. Sharing experiences of abuse assisted participants to extend their knowledge and assisted in preparation to learn protective strategies. The integrated and extended timeframe of the strengths model of child-protection preparation appears to have allowed detailed and thorough examinations of child abuse and protection. Participants identified that the opportunities to discuss protection issues in-depth, identify their own strengths, practice with scenarios, experiment with resources and games, listen to guest speakers, attend workshops, lectures and practical tutorials all contributed to their expressed increase in confidence to protect children. Whilst the researcher is aware of limitations, as outlined by Baginsky & Macpherson (2005), in expressing participant confidence directly after completing a child-protection initiative, her confidence is strengthened by the fact that later, in Phase 3 of the study, participants continued to explore and evaluate child-protection issues.

Unlike reported reactions to protection workshops that focus on abuse categories and obligations reporting which may, perversely, work counter intuitively against teachers reporting child abuse (McCallum, 2000), the participants appeared to be ready and willing to report child-protection concerns after the integrated module. While some participants did not identify explicit child-protection concerns as arising, others recounted (post-module) reporting child-protection concerns to supervisors and assisting unhesitatingly. Students evaluated, compared and utilised child protection and strengths resources and strategies extensively during the module and research period. The resulting evaluations gave support and recommendations for the appropriateness of using strengths-based resources (Veeken, 1997) and existing supports, such as resiliency perspectives (McGrath & Noble, 2003), in protection preparation (QCEC, 2008; Watts, 1997). Students' cautiousness with using some therapeutic resources, especially books on sexual abuse, underlined a growing understanding of the limitations of protection ability and the important referral, rather than treatment, role of the teacher in suspected cases of abuse. Further research might usefully investigate the reports from participants in the study that strengths resources were utilised differently by girls and boys, and to examine suggestions from McGrath and Noble (2003) that gender differences affect the ability to identify personal strengths. Similar to conclusions by Briggs and Hawkins (1997), this research also highlighted the need to explore further the possible barriers of teacher gender identity and identity perceptions relating to child-protection confidence. While many participants in this study expressed an increase in confidence to protect children during the module implementation and demonstrated continuing confidence a year later, further long-term research would be advantageous considering the body of research indicating that teachers have a lack of confidence and preparation (Hodgkinson & Baginsky, 2000; Singh & McWilliam, 2005). Although some research studies have indicated

participants may withdraw from or ignore issues of child protection (Kalichman, 1999; Laskey, 2004, 2005), during and after the extended module, the participants in this research recounted numerous incidences of using protective skills and strengths approaches to promote child welfare. Participants also highlighted possible extensions to child-protection preparation for future examination. Participants gave the suggestion of extending strengths-based child-protection preparation to practising teachers, also noted by Watts and Laskey (1997), and identified that more explicit information on relationship building may be advantageous in explanations of the Strengths Approach to child protection. Other observations suggested that a strengths approach was particularly useful for early-childhood practitioners and could be incorporated with other theories and approaches to early-childhood education in general teacher preparation programmes. These broader suggestions, although outside of the scope of this research, are worthy of future investigation.

Limitations

The fact that this was a small-scale, strengths-based, teacher research means that it is not possible to imply that such positive participant responses would be representative of all pre-service teachers if the module were applied on a large scale. This was an isolated and purposive study focussed on nineteen pre-service teachers with a researcher who had used strengths approaches previously and therefore, results can only be *suggestive* for any extended or varied applications. As a non-comparative study, it was based in a specific context and would be difficult to replicate. As a small-scale study, it was not a representative study of pre-service teachers and its findings were not statistically significant. Longitudinal and multiple university site research, with representative sampling, would be needed to assess whether the strengths approach module had a wide appeal and longstanding usefulness to improve child-protection preparation more generally. While, encouragingly, Phase 3 responses (outside of assessment and student contextual constraints) suggested that participants adopted the strengths approach to child protection willingly, time constraints are acknowledged as a limitation that prevented extended monitoring of the participants to ascertain if any positive findings were maintained over a longer period. Although personalised responses indicated that strengths approaches had been integrated into the professional development of participants outside of the research terms and period, the author's dual role as teacher and researcher must be taken into account in respect to any positive findings of the research. The power differentials inherent in any teacher/researcher led research, such as this, are impossible to negate, and findings are presented with the acknowledgement that the researcher taught the module and conducted the research as an identified, novice strengths practitioner. Although the findings suggest that learning child-protection skills alongside studying historical development and contemporary issues may allow the students to consolidate and link their developing child-protection skills with education theories and best practice teaching, more research is needed to present a strong argument for this. Additionally, linking child-protection studies to professional experience appeared to reinforce awareness of child-protection responsibilities enabling

the participants to identify and trial protective strategies in a supported environment. Individual university course structures (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007) and accreditation guidelines for teacher-education degrees (Education Services Australia, 2011) may present limitations to exploring these particular implications raised from the findings. Overall, the diversity of definitions and jurisdictional policy and procedure differences are limitations to defining, reporting, teaching and learning about child protection and likewise are a constraint to applying the findings of this research into other contexts.

The Potential of the Strengths Approach

This research sought to consider the potential of the Australian version of the Strengths Approach beyond its social-service and psychology origins and to investigate the use of the approach to enhance child-protection teacher education, whilst being aware of contemporary critiques of the approach. In the literature review, applications of strengths approaches were highlighted to show noticeable pockets of success in social-work and psychology fields (Hodges & Clifton, 2004; Saleebey, 2005) though not as universally recognised modes of operation. Successful strengths-based projects included working with clients involved in child-protection issues, and the research sought to determine whether strengths approaches may also be of benefit to teachers learning to protect children. While there is some evidence of strengths identification being used in school based programmes, such as within the *Strengths Movement* (Fox 2008; 2011), these programmes generally exclude the social justice, collaborative and solutions based elements of the *Strengths Approach* and have not been formally researched. It is the social justice version of solutions-based practice (Glicken, 2004; Noble & McGrath, 2007; Saleebey, 1996; 2009; Seligman, 1990, Seligman et al., 1995), and particularly the distinct Australian articulation of the Strengths Approach (McCashen, 2005), that was used (and therefore evaluated) in this research.

Based on the findings of this research, child protection appears to be a justifiable research area to explore the translation of the Strengths Approach into an educational context (Hodges & Clifton, 2004). Early literature review findings of the project suggested that while information on abuse is necessary for prospective teachers to view, a difficulty might exist for teachers to connect personally with, and act on, the valuable resource of statistical child protection data available (AIHW, 2007; IPSCAN, 2010; McCallum, 2000). Strengths literature stressed the danger of lingering on the problem of child abuse rather than investigating solutions-focussed approaches (Saleebey, 2009). The Strengths Approach literature, however, while solutions-focussed, did not outline a specific way of teaching child protection and was largely limited to social-service applications (Saleebey, 2009; Glicken, 2004; McCashen, 2005). The research therefore looked at literature from across disciplines, in order to inform the design of the child-protection module. From a Strengths Approach perspective, recognising the time and effort given to charting the cases of child abuse and increasing worldwide recognition of the issue was important. Statistical data were crucial to defining and raising the issue

of child abuse and protection for research. Participants in the research expressed that education-specific statistics (ACT, 2008; Kids First Foundation, 2003) assisted them to engage with abuse issues and confirmed the likelihood of teachers facing child-protection issues in their careers. This research simultaneously confirms and supports Watts (1997) in her recommendations that adequate preparation at a pre-service level for child protection is essential and that teacher educators of child protection urgently need a programme to assist them with this. The development of a teacher educator guide to implementing a strengths child-protection programme may be a useful addition to practitioner literature. Along with previous research (Baginsky & Macpherson, 2005; Kesner & Robinson, 2002; Laskey, 2004, 2005; McCallum, 2002, 2003; Walsh & Farrell, 2008; Watts, 1997), the findings of this research support strong recommendations for increased preparation for teachers and teacher educators in child protection. Additionally, the author suggests that the participants' responses outlined multiple benefits of learning and using a strengths model of child-protection education for teachers, of not less than eleven hours of specified protection content, across a semester of study.

An integrated Strengths Approach to child-protection education module was designed to capitalise on findings from literature on child protection (Scott & O'Neil, 2003; Wilson & James, 2007; Briggs & McVeity, 2000), early-childhood education (Brennan, 1998; Weihan, 2004), resilience raising (McGrath & Noble, 2003; Withers & Russell, 2001) and strengths approaches (Beilharz, 2002; Glicken, 2004; McCashen, 2005). The module included integrated and linked child-protection content that was implemented over a semester within a subject including historical and contemporary issues influencing early-childhood education. Participants experienced at least eleven hours of explicit, direct child-protection content during the module compared to the 1 – 4 hours early-childhood course average hours (Arnold & Maio-Taddeo, 2007). Many participants demonstrated that they had undertaken further self-study hours often linking child-protection study with time studied on other educational topics. These links appeared to have assisted participants to integrate and to add child-protection study to educational theory study, to recognise child protection as a teaching issue and to help prepare them to protect children as both students and early-childhood teachers. The participants in this study confirmed conclusions from McCallum (2003) that mentoring in child-protection education is valuable. Phase 2 responses also suggested that debriefing practicum experiences is also necessary to foster the critical reflection that is especially useful for enhancing child-protection capabilities.

Based on the findings of this research, for any future integrated strengths-based protection programmes, the inclusion of child-abuse statistics and reporting procedures (QCEC, 2008, Queensland Government, DET, 2008, 2011a, 2011c; Queensland Government, DOCS, 2011) is recommended. Teacher educators are encouraged to utilise existing child-protection resources (including guest speakers) if these are sensitively and positively included as one perspective and resource for protection. The main strengths approach elements of the module, which were evaluated as appropriate to implement with moderate preparatory reading of professional development and

strengths resources, would give teacher educators additional support to facilitate the module. Although criticisms of the Strengths Approach (Clabaugh, 2005; Epstein, 2008; Glicken, 2004; Saleebey, 2009) imply that the strengths approach should be introduced through clear definitions of theoretical principles, feedback in this research indicates that it is useful to quickly move on to practical examples of applying the approach, such as practising the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48), in order to best define it. Care should be taken with presenting child-abuse information and strengths identification activities as some participants may find both of these elements of the module confronting (McGrath & Noble, 2003). Teacher educators should prepare child-protection content carefully, exclude unnecessary graphic content, forewarn students of content, and ensure that student welfare services are available if needed.

Overall, the participants' reactions to a strengths approach to child-protection education were multi-layered, positive, critical and pragmatic. For some, the approach influenced or complemented their individual personal and professional philosophy, was integrated with their knowledge of broader education theory, and was therefore not restricted to child protection. Some responses identified limitations in, and suggested adaptations to, using the approach. Participants' reactions to the strengths approach appear to support claims that it has potential beyond the social-service sector (Hodges & Clifton, 2004) and may be translated from a largely therapeutic context to an educational one (McCashen, 2005). Most participants found that identifying their own strengths was not only challenging and time consuming but was also confirming and valuable, backing claims by Glicken (2004) and Seligman et al. (1995) that strengths identification can be a more difficult method of practice than traditional forms. The uneasiness expressed by one participant in self-identifying strengths prompted further investigation of the strengths identification element of the strengths approach. Participants suggested adjustments to improve the approach in an education context, including using group work, cards and games and written rather than verbal means for identifying strengths. The post teaching practice data revealed that participants, regardless of initial hesitation, recognised individual strengths, used solution-focussed strategies, and were confident when discussing and planning for the complex ethical issue of child protection.

Participants indicated explicit and implicit use of the strengths approach and were not limited in their application of it to child protection. Responses indicated that the Strengths Approach may be useful as a philosophical framework for general pedagogy, supporting the aspirations of Noble and McGrath (2007) for developing a "positive educational practices framework" to transform "school leadership through optimism" (p. 1). In Phase 3, participants' reflections indicated that a Strengths Approach assisted in their transition from students to qualified teachers and was useful for a variety of the complex issues involving children, families and teachers, beyond child protection.

Further Limitations

The Strengths Approach to child protection involves a longer programme than adjunct workshops and would consequently require proportionate extended investment in teacher educators' delivery time. Strengths approaches have been criticised as being too glossy, unclear and a time consuming approach to crucial issues affecting society (Clabaugh, 2005; Epstein, 2008). Some participants in this research initially confirmed critiques that indicated that the approach was difficult to grasp (Glicken, 2004). Participants noted in early weeks of the module, that they were unsure of how to apply the approach into educational practice, were sceptical of the time involved to learn the approach, and questioned whether practising teachers would change deficits-based practices. Further questioning of participants to determine factors that may improve confidence in teaching child protection (including or excluding the use of a Strengths Approach) would be a beneficial inclusion for future studies. Any large-scale applications of the approach would undoubtedly also require additional research and development of strengths-based support materials for teacher educators and teachers, outside of the scope of this pilot-type study. Participants in this research indicated that existing resources for social-service and psychology applications of the strengths approach, while useful to demonstrate the basic concepts, would need adaptations to reflect the educational contexts of teacher, child and classroom as opposed to work, client and service. One participant articulated the call from Glicken (2004) to "suspend client/worker" terminology, adding that it inferred a power imbalance, of expert over client, that is misaligned with strengths approaches (McCashen, 2005; Saleebey, 2009; Seligman et al., 1995). Although many strengths and resilience resources were useful and easily adapted (Veeken, 1999; McGrath & Noble, 2003), others were more suitable for therapeutic situations (Wilson & James, 2007). Positively, the participants in this research modified, designed and successfully trialled additional protection resources using a strengths approach (UNICEF, 2005; Furman, 2007) and these could be of use in future practitioner publications for teachers and teacher educators.

The participants in this research reported that while they were initially unsure of using the Strengths Approach, the Column Approach (McCashen, 2005, p. 48) was a practical, step-by-step, easy-to-use implementation method. The explanations and definitions of the strengths approach formed a significant part of the early module weeks in the project and scenarios, and practice using the Column Approach appeared to have greatly assisted participants' understandings of how to form solutions to child-protection issues themselves. The participants' responses support claims that strengths approaches need to be clearly defined (Glicken, 2004) and indicate that the Strengths Approach principles and the Column Approach may help to counteract claims that the approach is poorly defined (Clabaugh, 2005, p. 170). Participants describe a mind shift occurring by understanding the Strengths Approach, similar to the internal change explicated as necessary for strengths practice by Pransky (2003). Participants reinforced claims that a strengths approach represented a dramatic change (McGrath & Noble, 2003; Saleebey, 2009; Seligman et al., 1995) from

traditional practice models of child protection, changing the frame from a problem-based approach to a strategy-focussed approach. Participant 19 (EDB) highlights the change experienced by many participants:

I think that the strengths-based approach offers a way of thinking about how we react to certain situations and how these situations make us feel. The thing that I like the most about what I have learnt so far is the idea of changing the frame. Through changing the frame, it gives us a whole different way of thinking about who we are and what is possible for us.

The participants in this research did not express the view that a Strengths Approach involves positive thinking that glosses over serious issues and is disrespectful to those experiencing serious challenges (Clabaugh, 2005; Epstein, 2008). For the pre-service and novice teachers involved in this research, time and further research would be necessary to evaluate if strengths principles are evident in their teaching over time and if their child-protection skills (and expressed confidence) develops or diminishes when faced with more in-depth, complex and serious issues than were encountered during the research.

The analysis of participant responses to protection issues looked carefully for evidence of tokenistic views or appropriations of a strengths approach to child protection that, for example, were limited to simplistic changes in terminology. The analysis found instead, in-depth and respectful engagement with the issue of child abuse and protection by participants using a strengths approach. While a few early participant responses regurgitated principles and strengths processes from initial presentations, by mid-module all participants demonstrated engagement with using a strengths approach to child protection and offered highly individualised responses to protecting children that were more than “just chanting happy thoughts” (Seligman et al., 1995). Professional experience and graduation appeared to assist participants to try out strengths approaches in “situated learning” contexts (Lave & Wenger, 1991; McLellan, 1996) and reinforced the need to link clearly strengths-based child-protection preparation with complementary practical experience. Responses showed that participants used the Column Approach to child protection that included deep discussion of issues, visioning positive outcomes, utilising their own and others’ strengths on the issue and identifying resources and strategies to formulate solutions. This research corroborates McCashen’s (2005) claims that the Strengths Approach does not shy away from real issues or makes light of people’s concerns, rather, it frees people to discuss experiences openly with a focus on timely progress.

By module end, participants demonstrated that the role modelling and explanations, resources and practice using the Strengths Approach prepared them well to interpret the approach themselves and consequently to use the approach with issues they encountered in teaching practice and graduate roles. Enthusiasm and focus for using the approach appeared self-initiated and self-directed rather than what Clabaugh (2005, p. 170) calls “evangelical” or religiously repetitious of researcher focus on using a strengths approach to child protection. Further research would be necessary, however, to determine whether the participants, after extended time in early-childhood teaching, continue to use

the Strengths Approach with enthusiasm or have the same reported optimism to deal with child-protection issues. Claims that the approach is grounded on prosocial values applicable for practitioners of varied backgrounds and religions (McGrath & Noble, 2003) were corroborated to the extent that the approach appears to have appealed to the whole of the cohort but this is limited by small size of the research group which lacked gender diversity and did not record the religious backgrounds of participants. Further research with multi-faith, gender groups would be necessary to assess whether the approach has generic appeal to groups with greater socio-cultural diversity. The early-childhood focus of the cohort in the study may also be an influencing factor in the positive uptake of the strengths approach module. Further studies would need to be undertaken to assess if, for example, primary and secondary pre-service teachers found the approach applicable, adaptable and relevant for these educational contexts.

Unexpected Methodology Findings

Unexpected findings from the research emerged, not from the data collected but from determining the research methodology. In attempting to match research subject and method, surprisingly, the strengths approach also emerged as an enhancement to conducting research. Strengths principles influenced the choice and appropriateness of data collection, provided a guide to developing new research adaptations, as well as assisting the rigorous examination of researcher subjectivity and ethics. By drawing on the strengths of existing paradigms, theories and methods, especially those that are fundamental to social justice approaches to child protection, a new strengths research framework was developed. The strengths framework was determined by evaluating strengths principles against key education, social-service, psychology and research theories for linkages and similarities that could be of guidance when researching child-protection enhancement. By reviewing a range of theoretical concepts alongside the Strengths Approach, aligning theoretical strengths were able to be drawn on. Although influenced by a multi-layered theoretical foundation, the singular strengths framework was designed to elucidate rich meaning and understanding from the data collected. The theoretical and research framework provided a consistent reference point for determining methods making decisions about research techniques and communication with participants and for guiding analysis in the research.

Preparing to Protect

This research indicates that a strengths approach to pre-service child-protection training can provide a positive alternative, or addition, to the single adjunct child-protection workshop currently offered by most teacher-education courses. The research findings suggest that an extended strengths approach assisted the cohort of pre-service teachers to connect with, understand and develop strategies to address child-protection issues in their careers. Additionally, the findings suggest that a solutions-based, strengths approach helps to relieve the reported anxiety felt by teachers in dealing with child-

protection issues. Rather unexpectedly, using a collaborative, strengths-based research process also provided an opportunity to develop and use new techniques to work with research participants. The findings of the child-protection project would seem to justify the claim by Hodges and Clifton (2004, pp. 256-269) that the Strengths Approach has potential beyond the social-service sector. Encouragingly, the Strengths Approach, at the very least, appears to be helpful for pre-service teachers in the much-needed area of child-protection education and possibly in wider teacher-education areas. After extended discussion, many pre-service teachers were able to express their hopes for child protection even when some of their initial responses had expressed hesitation with child-protection issues. Later responses reflected a personal connection and acknowledgement by all the participants of their responsibility to protect children despite concerns or negative experiences expressed in earlier responses. The responses add to findings by Webb and Vulliamy (2001) that despite the difficulties of child-protection issues, practising teachers believe it is their responsibility to address these issues as they “are concerned about the well-being of the whole child” (p. 73). From the findings in this research, it seems that the participants also shared this view and found a solutions-focus useful.

A new and positive way of empowering and protecting children can emerge and teachers can be key players in protecting children and preventing abuse. The Strengths Approach provides a constructive addition to pre-service preparation for child protection. Additionally, the Strength Approach research techniques developed for this project may present a useful alternative or addition for qualitative researchers.

“Like the nets of deep-sea explorers, qualitative studies may pull up unexpected and striking things for us to gaze on” (Barton & Lazarsfeld, 1969, p. 166).

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APPENDIX A

Strengths Child-Protection Module Guide

Week Beginning	Subject Content	Linking SA module content
July 30 th Wk 1	Introductory Lecture, Assessment, readings & outlines	Outline research project component and adaptations/implications to subject. Logistics for participants and non-participants. Please consider. Time line of research & reasons Intro to SA (principles & column approach)
August 6 th Wk 2	LECTURE Historical development of Education. Conditions for children. Time line – Greek philosophers, Indigenous child rearing practices. Importance of understanding foundations of ECE	Overlap with existence of child abuse, child labour and methods of punishment historically. Cultural and historical differences on what constitutes as child abuse. How these provide foundations for social service approaches and how child protection is viewed. Private/family matter, little government involvement in social services? Idea of philanthropy. Knowing individual strengths/philosophy (personally/professionally)
August 13 th Wk 3	LECTURE - Care and Education dichotomy and theorists who shaped ECE education– Froebel and Pestalozzi. The introduction of the Kindergarten and ECE programs (impact of war)	Role of teacher/carer and involvement with social issues, unavoidable in historical context. Abuse of children in war. Theorists & early philanthropists’ links to SA principles E.g. Sydney development of Kindy/Nursery and Pestalozzi’s ‘Love, Acceptance, Trust’. Practical approach to teaching not termed SA, however, intrinsically linked to social justice
August 20 th Wk 4	LECTURE – Equality and education – role of education, Horace Mann, Rousseau, Owen, McMillan’s, Locke	The affect of a philosophy to influence practice Acknowledgement of power, care and education tensions. Ideas of performatism and reformation. The ability of education to empower (SA links) and philosophies of enlightenment (dignity and respect SA links)
August 27 th Wk 5	LECTURE – historical development of Australian services – saving children from the streets, impact of child labour and war efforts, Policy and elections	Deficits approach outlined – medical and pathology approach – 1 st wave in social work, rescue approach – historical links. Expert power and needs targeted. Children as commodities, influence of social consequence. Political and economic factors, changing role of women – what does empowering mean in SA?
September 3 rd Wk 6	LECTURE – services C&K, influences from other fields Freud, Skinner. Approaches to ECE Montessori, Steiner, Indigenous educ, teacher and parent relationship is distinct.	2 nd wave social work– problem solving, behaviourist approaches. Links to feminism. Child abuse links to wider issues, poverty, domestic violence, role of women and children, ECE emphasis on ‘women’s work’. Early teacher training history – child protection part of early teacher training

September 10 th Wk 7	LECTURE – contemporary issues. Ethical dilemmas in ECE. Reframing problems. Media influence on ECE and current areas of interest	3 rd wave social work. Outline St. Lukes approach. Outline the history of positive psychology and particularly influences of Clifton. Arose out of practice, social service approach. Use cards, scaling sheets diagrams and book to show difference in deficits and SA . SA Practical approach to change
September 17 th Wk 8	Child Abuse & Protection Incidences, types and stats. Referrals, policy and regulations	Effects of CA & AP on children, families and teachers. Research findings re teacher fears and confidence in CP. Stats of CP. Current programs and strategies. Use SA cards to discuss feelings/resources available to assist teachers - role model for own & chn's use
September 24 th Recess	LECTURE RECESS Look for articles, topics of relevance and interest to ECE teachers for study	LECTURE RECESS - reconnect with grp Examine focus of such reports deficit or SA? Reframing exercise: Rewrite the news What are the strengths here?
October 1st Wk 9	Lecture Ethical issues – behaviour guidance, short term and long term strategies	Building relationships. Raising resilience and self esteem for children (teachers?). Activities and ideas to start substantive conversations. Revisit Stages of implementing a SA . Ways of framing interactions 'Power with' rather than 'power over'.
October 8 th Wk 10	ASSESSMENT In-Class assessment	
October 15 th Wk 11	Contemporary themes - Impact of technology, obesity, autism (dependant on media articles)	Scenario based exploration of ethical issues. Opportunity to explore SA approaches and resources for topics other than CP
October 22 nd Wk 12	LECTURE Code of Ethics, Professional Standards – policy into practice. Opportunities for career enhancement, wages and conditions	Personal philosophies and community capacity building – areas of teaching strength, professional development and organisations to assist. Scenario and mentoring opportunities – What are our strengths, human strengths, resource/time strengths – opportunities and challenges?
October 29 th Wk 13	Logistics of assessment and feedback. Ensuring the links between phases	Opportunities for self reflection and critical analysis of subject content and themes. Use cards, to chart the journey

APPENDIX B

Scaling Sheets

The Scaling Kit
PARTICIPANT (9)

Confident

Phase 3 (OPEN VIEW)

Prior to module (PHASE 1)
(retrospectively) OPEN VIEW

Not confident

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The Scaling Kit

Dealing in child protection
in the classroom.

⇒ Talking about
it has made me
more confident.

PHASE 2
(UPDATES
AFIX MODULE
& PROF EX)

NOT CONFIDENT

CONFIDENT

balanced 50/50

PHASE 1
(DURING MODULE)

PARTICIPANT (16)

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The Scaling Kit

confident +
success

Beginning at uni.

and dealing with
talking about child abuse in the
classroom

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APPENDIX C

Informed Consent Information Sheet and Form



JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
TOWNSVILLE Queensland 4811 Australia Telephone: (07) 4781 4111

INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH - INFORMATION

**Administrative documentation
has been removed**



JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
TOWNSVILLE Queensland 4811 Australia Telephone: (07) 4781 4111

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

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APPENDIX D

Ethics



JAMES COOK UNIVERSITY
Townsville Qld 4811 Australia

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APPENDIX E

Certificate & Handouts

CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION

This certificate is awarded to

For completing a Strengths Approach
Child Protection Module

July - November 2007

Signature

Date

Angela Fenton, B.Ed (Hons), M.Ed - Module Facilitator

The Strengths Approach - 5 Column Plan

The issue/concept or story	A vision Positive outcomes Picture of the future	Strengths skills/knowledge teacher/chn	Resources & Strategies	Planning steps Solutions

Adapted from "The Strengths Approach" by Wayne McCashen 2005 (St. Lukes Innovative Resources)

The Strengths Approach - 5 Column Plan

The issue/concept or story	A vision Positive outcomes Picture of the future	Strengths skills/knowledge teacher/chn	Resources & Strategies	Planning steps Solutions
Explain the issue Explain the task/project Explain the challenge Explain the opportunity What has happened What is going to happen What needs to be done	What do you want to happen? In an ideal world how would this situation work out If you had all the money in the world what would happen here? \$\$\$\$	How Can Strengths be used for this issue Know and reexamine your strengths confirm your skills knowledge experiences	Use the readily available Strengths first Determine if you need additional help for the issue or task Look for resources like books, music, guest speakers, DVDs, internet resources, games, activities	Make a step by step plan to address the issue List ABC or 1, 2,3 of what you will do to meet your goals Think carefully about what to do first then next and the process this will follow
Include perspectives of those involved 'multiple ways of knowing'	What would someone you know and trust for advice say to do? What is the perfect outcome?	Think about the resources you always have available to you as Strengths Use strength cards to explore strengths within yourself and chn Build on your Strengths	Be critical of these and only use if you feel comfortable with them but also resources such as time, care, support and humour for teachers as well as children, links with families.	Think about how long things should take Think about the order you introduce Strengths resources, strategies Include time for reflection and evaluation within the plan Use a format you are comfortable with Sometimes the plan will be small so maybe on the spot
Open and transparent OK to use feelings emotions (use cards to help identify feelings) Honestly examine the situation Use scaling ideas e.g ladder to determine where you are in relation to the issue - confidence	On the scaling sheet what would it look like at the top of the ladder	Develop new Strengths Encourage chn to discuss and use their Strengths		

Adapted from "The Strengths Approach" by Wayne McCashen 2005 (St. Lukes Innovative Resources)

APPENDIX F

Research Summary: Data Collection and Timeframes

Human Ethics Approval 21st Feb 2007 – 27th Feb 2009
Data collection commenced July 30th 2007 and ceased 3rd January 2009
Duration of data collection periods approx 1 year and 5 months
Data collection periods total 7 months.

Phase 1
July 30th – November 29th 2007 (4 months)

Electronic Discussion Board (EDB) posts (responses)
Average post = 1 paragraph
12th Sept 2007 (wk 7 of module) – Prompt placed on Strengths Approach EDB thread
8 responses (6 pgs) from 3 participants (0 anon) 15th Sept – 23 Oct 07 (5 weeks)
12th Sept 2007 - Prompt placed on *Subject Evaluation* EDB thread
11 responses (6 pgs) overall from 7 participants (0 anon) 15th Sept until 26th Oct 07 (5 weeks)
12th Sept 2007 - Prompt placed on *Contemporary Issues* EDB thread
9 responses (9 pgs) overall from 6 participants (0 anon) 23rd Sept until 1st Nov 07 (6 weeks)
2nd Sept 2007 - Prompt placed on Child Protection EDB thread
11 responses (7 pgs) overall from 10 participants (0 anon) from Sept 18th until Oct 18th 07 (4 weeks)
Total EDB responses = 39 responses (28 pgs)
Total individual participants responding on EDB = 13 (from cohort of 19)
N.B. 9 participants contributed to both EDB and EViews
Total Anonymous postings = 0

EViews (Strengths-based electronic interviews/emails/data collection)
July 30th – October 15th 2007 (wk 1 – wk 11 of module)
EView strengths-based letters as prompts sent and replies received.
Emails and attachments received with strengths module/subject reflections
70 responses (70 pgs) from 15 participants
Average response = 1 - 2 paragraphs (per separate page)
Emails Nov 1st – 29th 07 – completion of subject emails
3 responses (1pg) from 3 participants
Total Phase 1 EView responses = 73 responses (71 pgs)
Total individual participants responding to EViews = 15 (from cohort of 19)
N.B. 6 Participants that responded to EViews did not contribute to EDB's

Open Views
Transcripts from October 15th - Nov 1st 2007
Average Open View = 25 mins (**71 pgs**)
Total individual participants responding to Phase 1 Open Views = 9 (from cohort of 19)
Total Phase 1 Open View Audio recorded = 3 hrs 49 mins

Open Focus Groups
October 18th 2007 Open Focus Group 1
42 minutes audio recorded (18 pgs transcript) Responses from group discussion of 6 participants
25th October 2007 Open Focus Group 2
15 minutes audio recorded (5 pgs transcript) Responses from group discussion of 5 participants
Total Phase 1 Open Focus Audio recorded = 57 mins (23 pgs transcript)
Total participants responding to Phase 1 Open Focus Groups = 13 (from cohort of 19)

Total Participants contributing to Phase 1 overall = 19 participants (all of cohort)

Phase 2
22nd February – 28th May 2008 (approx 1month)

Open Views

Audio recorded 27th & 28th May 2008

Transcripts (**31 pgs**) Average Open View = 19 mins

Total individual participants responding by Open Views = 4 (from cohort of 19)

Total Phase 2 Open View Audio recorded = 1 hr 17mins (31 pgs transcript)

Open Focus

Audio recorded 28th May 2008 - Open Focus Group 3

26 minutes audio recorded (11 pgs transcript) Responses from group discussion of 4 participants

Audio recorded 28th May 2008 Open Focus Group 4

49 minutes audio recorded (26 pgs transcript) Responses from group discussion of 7 participants

Total Phase 2 Open Focus Audio recorded = 1 hr 15 mins (37 pgs transcript)

Total individual participants responding Phase 2 Open Focus Groups = 11 (from cohort of 19)

N.B. 1 participant contributed to Open Focus Group 4 and gave a individual Open View

EViews

22nd February – 21st May 2008

Participant initiated email correspondence

Total Responses: 6 – average 1 paragraph (**4 pgs total**) from 3 participants

Total individual participants responding to Phase 2 EViews = 3 (from cohort of 19)

N.B. 1 Participant that responded to EViews did not contribute to Open View or Open Focus Groups

Total Participants contributing to Phase 2 overall = 15 participants (from cohort of 19)

Phase 3
1st Nov – 3rd January 2009 (approx 2 months)

EViews

1st Nov – 3rd January 2009

EView strengths-based letters as prompts sent (1st Nov – Dec 08) and replies received.

28 responses (Transcript **56 pgs** includes prompting letters) from 14 participants

Average response = 1 - 2 paragraphs

Total individual participants responding to Phase 3 EViews = 14 (from cohort of 19)

Total Participants contributing to Phase 3 = 14 participants (from cohort of 19)

Summary of Data Collection across Phases

Total EViews = 107 responses (131 pgs)

Total EDB responses = 39 responses (28 pgs)

Total Open View Audio recorded = 5 hours 6 mins (102 pgs)

Total Open Focus Audio recorded = 2 hours 12 mins (60 pgs)

Minimum participants in phases = 14/19

Maximum participants in phases 19/19

Total Audio recorded = 7hrs 18 mins

Total research transcript pages = 321 pgs

APPENDIX G

EView (Email Template) – Strengths Letter

Hi XXXX,

How are you? It's hard to believe it is nearly a year since ED3590 finished. Hope this semester is going OK for you [*insert any personal context known - i.e. illness, house move, baby born etc*] Any plans for the future? [*or insert question re any known/stated plans i.e. move to country, applying for job in certain sector*].

I have been busy myself, completing some writing for the research as well as teaching both ED2590 & 3590 this year [*insert any communication replies from last correspondence i.e. if requested copy of paper or asked about researchers move off campus*].

Last time I spoke with you and a few others [*specify focus group*] in Townsville you had finished your 2 week prac and were building up to your final 5 week block. We were talking about your prac experiences and using our strengths in teaching [*insert a key statement from previous Open View or Open Focus i.e. You said 'you felt exhausted' or 'were happy with how things went on prac'*] Hope it all went well [*or specific encouraging statement regarding completion of practicum and/or strengths the participant identified at the time*].

From reading the transcript of your Open Focus group again I can see we talked about [*insert main issues/topics of discussion i.e. children with ADHD, abuse, bullying and aggressive boys*]. I was wondering now prac is over if you can reflect again on our research areas of child abuse, child protection, teacher education and the strengths approach [*insert if participants have previously mentioned they have used a strengths approach (or think they might have) or encountered any child safety issues such as neglect, abuse (bullying, verbal abuse etc)*]

During the subject you talked to me about [*add any additional areas covered from Phase 1 i.e. Strengths Approach difficulties or if useful*]. I remember you said [*insert quote from transcript*]. I wondered how you feel about these things now - a year down the track?

Thankyou for your contribution so far to the research [*insert any specific individual contribution here - caused me to further research definitions of abuse to include absenteeism or has caused me to look more closely at where child protection is placed in the degree program*]

I look forward to hearing from you [*confirm preferred contact times, methods for participants i.e. if would prefer to telephone, have another email address*]

Regards, XXX

[Researcher]

APPENDIX H

Permission to Print Tables

**Administrative documentation
has been removed**

Administrative documentation
has been removed