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‘But what do I do in the classroom?’

Early career teachers navigating social, emotional
and mental health in primary and secondary
schools: A constructivist grounded theory study

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Thesis submitted to the University of Nottingham for the
degree of Doctor of Applied Educational Psychology.

June 2025

Table of Contents

Abstract	7
Acknowledgements	9
List of Tables	11
List of Figures	13
List of Abbreviations	15
Chapter 1. Introduction	16
1.1 The context of this study	16
1.2 Statement of positionality including professional background and interests	17
1.3 An overview of the thesis chapters	18
Chapter 2. Initial literature review	20
2.1 Methodological considerations for reviewing the literature	20
2.2 The evolving landscape of social, emotional and mental health in education	21
2.3 The role and implications for educators in addressing social, emotional and mental health needs	23
2.4 Introducing the Early Career Framework and the shift from newly qualified teachers to early career teachers	24
2.5 The role of educational psychologists supporting teachers and children and young people	25
2.6 A scoping review of the literature	25
2.7 The rationale and aims for this study	32
Chapter 3. Methodology	34
3.1 Reflexivity in the research process	34

3.2 Exploring the research landscape: the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study	34
3.2.1 An introduction to research paradigms	34
3.2.2 The positivist and post-positivist paradigms	37
3.2.3 The qualitative research paradigm	38
3.2.4 The philosophical positioning and research paradigm of the study	40
3.2.5 Introduction to qualitative research methods	41
3.2.6 Which grounded theory method?	43
3.2.7 The present study and constructivist grounded theory	45
3.3 The research design and procedure	47
3.3.1 The stakeholders of this study	48
3.3.2 Ensuring ethical integrity in this study	48
3.3.3 Introduction to research quality considerations	49
3.3.4 Participant sampling and recruitment	50
3.3.5 An iterative approach to data collection and analysis	57
3.4 Chapter Summary	73
Chapter 4. Findings	74
4.1 Introduction.....	74
4.2 Category 1: Recognising the complex and diverse nature of social, emotional and mental health.....	76
4.2.1 Focused Code 1.1: Defining social, emotional and mental health: ‘A massive suitcase of so much’	76
4.2.2 Focused Code 1.2: Children and young people’s lived experiences and their impact: ‘There’s lots of variables’.....	77
4.2.3 Focused Code 1.3: The multifaceted presentation of children and young people’s social, emotional and mental health needs	79

4.3 Category 2: Identifying, categorising and labelling	81
4.3.1 Focused Code 2.1: High prevalence of need	81
4.3.2 Focused Code 2.2: Overlapping Needs	82
4.3.3 Focused Code 2.3: Diagnosed and undiagnosed special educational needs and disabilities.....	83
4.4 Category 3: Responding to children and young people's individual needs.....	85
4.4.1 Focused Code 3.1: Promoting inclusivity through universal accessibility.....	86
4.4.2 Focused Code 3.2: Prioritising social, emotional and mental health to foster children and young people's readiness for learning	87
4.4.3 Focused Code 3.3: Flexibly implementing a range of strategies and approaches	88
4.4.4 Focused Code 3.4: Targeted and specialist intervention	89
4.4.5 Focused Code 3.5: Monitoring and reflecting on children and young people's progress over time	90
4.5 Category 4: The importance of relationships and support systems	90
4.5.1 Focused Code 4.1: Building and nurturing relationships	91
4.5.2 Focused Code 4.2: Connecting through conversation.....	93
4.5.3 Focused Code 4.3: ' <i>Work in collaboration</i> '	94
4.6 Category 5: '<i>Pulled in many different directions</i>'	95
4.6.1 Focused Code 5.1: Diverse Needs: 'Very difficult to manage'	96
4.6.2 Focused Code 5.2: Systemic pressures and challenges	99
4.6.3 Focused Code 5.3: Prioritising and decision-making in the moment	100
4.6.4 Focused Code 5.4: Navigating uncertainty.....	101
4.6.5 Focused Code 5.5: 'Underprepared'	103

4.7	Category 6: Learning is continuous	106
4.7.1	Focused Code 6.1: Drawing on past roles and experiences.....	107
4.7.2	Focused Code 6.2: Training and ECT induction experiences: Theory and Practice.....	108
4.7.3	Focused Code 6.3: Learning from others	110
4.7.4	Focused Code 6.4: Seeking further learning opportunities	111
4.7.5	Focused Code 6.5: Self-Awareness: Reflecting on practice	111
4.8	Category 7: Building personal resilience	112
4.8.1	Focused Code 7.1: Managing own social, emotional and mental health needs	113
4.8.2	Focused Code 7.2: Growing in confidence.....	114
4.8.3	Focused Code 7.3: Dedication, determination and persistence..	115
4.9	Category 8: Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice	116
4.9.1	Focused Code 8.1: Building capacity through guided support....	117
4.9.2	Focused Code 8.2: Bridging the gap between theory and practice	117
4.9.3	Focused Code 8.3: Increased involvement with external professionals.....	118
Chapter 5	Revisiting the literature following analysis	121
5.1	Understanding the complex and diverse nature of social, emotional and mental health.....	123
5.1.1	Defining social, emotional and mental health	123
5.1.2	Social, emotional and mental health presentation within educational settings and the impact on children and young people	125
5.2	Identifying, categorising and labelling children and young people	126
5.2.1	A shift towards needs-led identification	129

5.3	Responding to children and young people's individual needs.....	130
5.4	The role of relationships and support systems	133
5.5	Managing the demands of teaching	134
5.6	Building personal resilience	136
5.7	Lifelong learning and professional growth.....	137
5.8	Envisioning a preferred future.....	138
5.9	Chapter Summary	139
Chapter 6. The grounded theory and discussion		140
6.1	Introduction.....	140
6.2	The grounded theory: A toolkit for early career teachers supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs	140
6.3	Linking the grounded theory with the reviewed literature	143
6.4	The unique contribution of this study	146
6.5	The implications of this study on practice.....	147
6.5.1	Implications for early career teachers and schools.....	147
6.5.2	Implications for educational psychology	148
6.6	Dissemination of the research findings	152
6.7	The strengths and limitations of this study	152
6.8	The quality evaluation of this study	154
6.9	Ideas for future research	157
6.10	Reflexivity revisited	157
6.11	Chapter summary	159
Chapter 7. Conclusion.....		160
References		162

Appendices	193
Appendix A: Ethical Approval Letter	193
Appendix B: Research Posters	195
Appendix C: Email Response	196
Appendix D: Research Information Sheet	197
Appendix E: Research Consent Form.....	202
Appendix F: Microsoft Form Survey	204
Appendix G: Research Interview Script.....	206
Appendix H: Interview Schedule Prompts and Theoretical Sampling Interview	208
Appendix I: Research Debrief Letter	212
Appendix J: Example of the initial (line-by-line) coding of interview one	214
Appendix K: Example of the Microsoft Excel code organisation	216
Appendix L: Example of the focused coding of interview one.....	217
Appendix M: A table presenting the focused codes, final focused codes following analysis and conceptual categories.....	219
Appendix N: Examples of memo-writing throughout the research	228
Appendix O: Examples of Clustering and diagramming used towards developing the conceptual categories	232
Appendix P: Examples of the visual representation of the study's grounded theory	236
Appendix Q: Bridging the conceptual categories and literature to the study's grounded theory	238
Appendix R: A visual representation of the amended grounded theory's toolkit outlining implications for educational psychology practice	240

Abstract

Within the United Kingdom (UK), the rising prevalence of social, emotional, and mental health (SEMH) needs among children and young people (CYP) is a growing concern. Consequently, the responsibility placed on educational staff to support these needs contributes to increasing pressures within the profession and affects teacher retention, particularly among early career teachers (ECTs). Despite a government initiative aimed at ECTs implemented in 2021, there remains limited research exploring how ECTs experience and navigate the responsibility of supporting CYP's SEMH needs.

This exploratory research adopted a constructivist grounded theory (GT) methodology to explore ECTs' interpretations of their experiences in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Additionally, the research highlights implications for the role of educational psychologists (EP) in assisting ECTs in this area. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with six ECTs: four working in primary and two in secondary school settings. Using constant comparative analysis, eight conceptual categories were identified: recognising the complex and diverse needs and experiences of CYP; identifying, categorising and labelling; responding to CYP's individual needs; the importance of relationships and support systems; *'Pulled in many different directions'*; learning is continuous; building personal resilience and envisioning a preferred future for professional practice.

Through the integration of data analysis and a review of pertinent literature, a conceptualised grounded theory model was developed entitled *"But what do I do in the classroom?" Bridging theory to practice: A toolkit for ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH*. The developed toolkit provides a novel framework to assist ECTs with responding to SEMH. It offers flexibility and relevance across educational roles, making it a versatile resource for both individual practitioners and external educational professionals.

The findings emphasise the importance of bridging the gap between theory and practice for teachers new to the profession. For this shift to be effective, it must be underpinned by high-quality, ongoing professional development that equips ECTs with a deeper understanding of SEMH - including how it manifests

beyond behaviour to impact learning, skill development, and overall wellbeing. Implications for educational practice include the importance of schools fostering safe, reflective environments where ECTs feel supported, and for teacher training programmes to better prepare new teachers for the realities of responding to SEMH needs in the classroom. The role of EPs is also considered, particularly in supporting ECTs through consultation and systemic work. Limitations and directions for future research are discussed highlighting areas for further exploration to strengthen support for ECTs working with CYP with SEMH needs.

Acknowledgements

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the support of many incredible people. Firstly, I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the six participants who generously volunteered their time and shared their experiences with me. Without them, there would be no thesis! Secondly, I am deeply grateful to the three Educational Psychology Services that have been integral to my training. I extend my sincere thanks to my colleagues who have shared their passion, skills and kindness throughout this journey. A special mention goes to Sarah Luxford, Elaine Hack, Gemma Gough, Dan Lake and Sarah Cooper for providing insightful and supportive supervision throughout my placements.

Thank you to the dedicated tutor team on the Doctorate of Applied Educational Psychology at The University of Nottingham for planning reflective sessions and sharing inspiring stories. To my Academic and Research Tutor, Victoria Lewis - your psychological articulation never ceases to amaze me. I am especially appreciative of your pastoral support, reassurance and guidance throughout this extended thesis journey. A heartfelt thank you to Nick Durbin, Course Director, for your calm approach and ongoing encouragement. I also extend my appreciation to the admin team for their organisational assistance – especially Ruth, for the ever-helpful tutorial record reminder!

To those who swam the waters of grounded theory before me and so generously shared your experiences, insights, and advice – thank you. To my fellow Cohort 16 trainees – thank you for navigating this memorable journey together. A special mention to Bec: despite being almost three hours apart, your strength, motivational jumpers, and our working Teams calls have carried me through. I'll be forever grateful that our paths crossed. To my friends (including my former colleagues and 'old' teachers) - thank you for the check in messages and for still being there despite my absence for the past four years. I can't wait to catch up soon! To the doctors and consultants who listened – thank you. And to every fellow Endo Warrior striving to live life with resilience following their diagnosis, you've got this!

And, to my family. Mum, Dad – thank you for your unwavering love and support every step of the way. You've helped me to climb every level of Maslow's hierarchy – from Sunday roast dinners at the base to cheering me on at the peak of self-actualisation (A.K.A. submitting my thesis!). Return dinner invitations will be on their way! Matt, you gave me the push I needed to finally go for my dream – 'Elephanks' for that and for the cups of tea that helped me get there! Also, thank you to your mum, Karen, for the thoughtful treats left at the door and for supporting my ever-growing stationery collection. To my furry best friend, Maisie – thank you for the endless cuddles, the much-needed walks away from the computer screen and for keeping me company (and awake with your snoring!) during the early mornings and late nights.

Finally, to my nan and gramps - I will always cherish my memories I have of sharing my dream of becoming an Educational Psychologist with you both. Your love and belief continue to guide me. Although I won't be able to tell you in person when I achieve this dream, I hope you are proud.

To everyone who played a part in this journey - thank you for helping me turn a dream into reality.

List of Tables

Table 2.1	<i>The PCC framework used to clearly define the key components of the research focus to construct the scoping review question for this study.</i>	26
Table 2.2	<i>The scoping review search terms entered into the four databases: British Education Index, Educational Psychology in Practice, Education Resources Information Centre and Scopus.</i>	27
Table 2.3	<i>Number of records retrieved from each electronic database in July 2023, along with the filters applied during the scoping review process.</i>	28
Table 2.4	<i>Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the scoping review, along with the rationale for each criterion.</i>	28
Table 2.5	<i>The two studies relevant to early career teachers' experiences identified through the scoping review.</i>	31
Table 3.1	<i>A summary of the four key criteria - credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness - used to assess the quality and rigour of grounded theory studies, proposed by Charmaz (2014, p.337).</i>	49
Table 3.2	<i>Overview of the inclusion and exclusion criteria and justification for the use of purposive sampling in participant selection.</i>	51
Table 3.3	<i>Overview of participant data collected via Microsoft Form survey to support sample contextualisation.</i>	56
Table 4.1	<i>The eight conceptual categories developed through the constructivist grounded theory analysis conducted in this study.</i>	74

Table 6.1	<i>The study's conceptual categories and how they correspond to the elements of the study's grounded theory toolkit following theoretical sensitisation and review of the literature.</i>	141
Table 6.2	<i>Measures taken by the researcher to support the credibility of the current study using criteria proposed by Charmaz (2014, p.337).</i>	154

List of Figures

Figure 1.1	<i>A visual summary outlining the key sections and the progression of this thesis research.</i>	19
Figure 2.1	<i>A flowchart outlining the database search and screening process for the study's scoping review.</i>	30
Figure 3.1	<i>A diagram created by the researcher to illustrate the relationship between ontological and epistemological positioning and their influence on the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in research.</i>	36
Figure 3.2	<i>A visual representation of the data collection and analysis procedure adopted in the current constructivist grounded theory study, adapted from Charmaz (2014, p.18).</i>	58
Figure 3.3	<i>A visual representation of the data analysis stages and increasing levels of abstraction within this constructivist GT study displayed in ascending order (adapted from Charmaz, 2014 & Lewinson et al., 2018).</i>	66
Figure 3.4	<i>Illustrative memo capturing early analytical thinking during focused coding.</i>	68
Figure 3.5	<i>Example of memo writing at key stages of the research process: theoretical sampling and theoretical saturation.</i>	72
Figure 4.1	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 1 (C1).</i>	76
Figure 4.2	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 2 (C2).</i>	81
Figure 4.3	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 3 (C3).</i>	85

Figure 4.4	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 4 (C4).</i>	91
Figure 4.5	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 5 (C5).</i>	96
Figure 4.6	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 6 (C6).</i>	106
Figure 4.7	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 7 (C7).</i>	113
Figure 4.8	<i>A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 8 (C8).</i>	116
Figure 6.1	<i>A visual representation of the grounded theory developed in this study.</i>	142

List of Abbreviations

ACEs	Adverse Childhood Experiences
ADHD	Attention deficit hyperactivity disorder
BPS	British Psychological Society
CGT	Constructivist grounded theory
CoP	Code of Practice
CYP	Children and young people
DfE	Department for Education
DHSC	Department for Health and Social Care
DOH	Department for Health
EBD	Emotional and behavioural difficulties
ECF	Early Career Framework
ECT	Early career teacher
EEF	Education Endowment Foundation
EHCP	Education Health Care Plan
EIF	Early Intervention Foundation
EP	Educational psychologist
EPIp	Educational Psychology in Practice
ERIC	Education Resources Information Centre
GT	Grounded theory
HCPC	Health and Care Professions Council
IPA	Interpretative phenomenological analysis
ITT	Initial teacher training
NASENCO	National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordination
NQT	Newly qualified teacher
PGCE	Post Graduate Certificate in Education
PRU	Pupil referral unit
QTS	Qualified teacher status
SEMH	Social, emotional and mental health
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator
SEND	Special educational needs and disabilities
TA	Thematic analysis
TEP	Trainee educational psychologist

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 The context of this study

Supporting the social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs of children and young people (CYP) is an essential element of their overall wellbeing and academic achievement (Carroll & Hurry, 2018; Clarke, 2020). However, there is an increasing concern about the rising prevalence of SEMH needs for CYP (Martin-Denham, 2021), particularly since the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19) which hit the UK in 2020 (Daumiller et al., 2023; DfE, 2024a).

In educational settings, teachers play a pivotal role in identifying and addressing these needs through tailored interventions and strategies. However, this responsibility places increasing demand on teachers (Howard et al., 2020), particularly those who are training or new to the profession. A significant number of early career teachers (ECT) leave the profession within their first two years post-qualification (DfE, 2019a; Maisuria et al., 2023) highlighting the need for adequate training and support for beginner teachers. To enhance early teacher retention, the UK Government introduced the Early Career Framework (ECF) in September 2021 (DfE, 2019b); however, the effectiveness in improving teacher retention rates is ongoing (Baines et al., 2022). Considering the rise in SEMH needs alongside the implementation of the ECF, there appears to be limited research highlighting ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH. Therefore, this research seeks to fill this gap in the literature.

1.2 Statement of positionality including professional background and interests

Reflexive commentary: Using first person language

As first-person language helps to highlight the researcher's active role in the research process, including their interactions, interpretations and reflections, I have chosen to write this thesis in the first person. This aims to enhance transparency by openly acknowledging my influence as the researcher on the data and findings. To further support this, I will include a reflexivity commentary in each chapter which will offer a space to reflect on my position, assumptions, and emotional responses throughout the research journey. This approach is supported by my research diary described in Section 3.1. and memo writing in Section 3.3.5.9.

Before beginning my Degree in Psychology in 2008, I gained a range of experiences working with CYP. During my studies, I developed a growing interest in understanding and supporting CYP with additional needs, particularly those with SEMH needs, which were at that point in time being referred to as emotional and behavioural difficulties (EBDs).

Following my degree, I trained as a primary-aged teacher through a one-year Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) specialising in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). I completed my one-year newly qualified teacher (NQT) induction and taught for nine years across three school settings, including first and middle schools in England, and for one year in a private English school in Cairo, Egypt. During my time teaching in Cairo, I gained valuable insight into how cultural context and educational expectations can shape CYP's behaviour, communication and engagement with learning.

Throughout my teaching career, I held several roles, including Head of Year and NQT mentor. I also completed the National Award for Special Educational Needs Co-ordination (NASENCO), and I volunteered as a governor at a local pupil referral unit (PRU). These experiences deepened my interest and passion for supporting CYP and furthered my interest in behaviour.

Before leaving teaching in 2021 to begin the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology Professional Training at the University of Nottingham, the ECF was being piloted (DfE, 2019b). From my experiences as an NQT mentor, I was intrigued by its upcoming implementation.

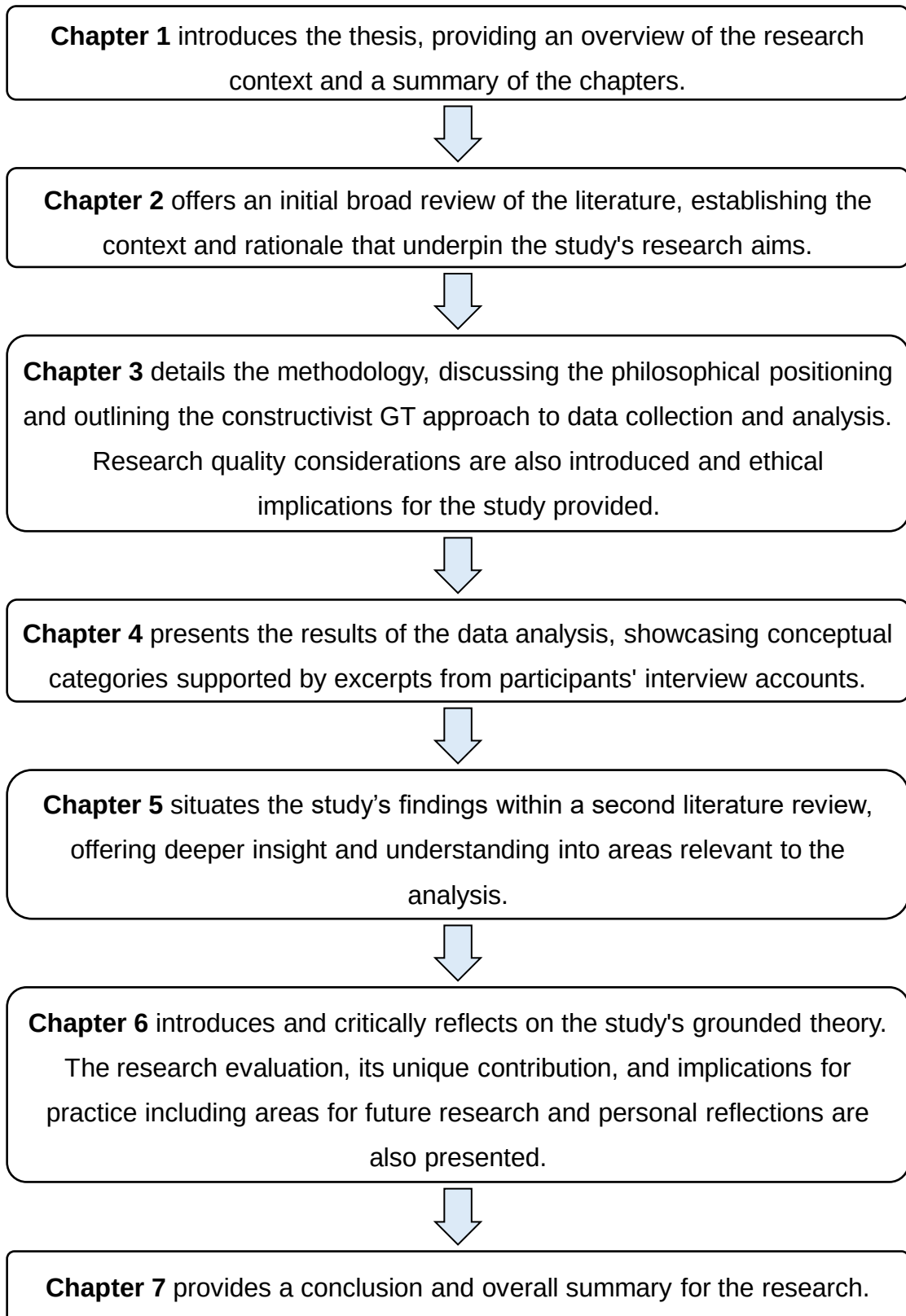
Once I started to train to become an EP in 2021, my engagement in various university sessions and my involvement on placements shaped my research aspirations. Through discussions with ECTs during my involvement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist (TEP), it became clear that despite the additional time allocated out of class for engaging with the ECF learning content, managing this alongside their teaching responsibilities and meeting the needs of the CYP they were teaching was challenging. Additionally, I reflected that the knowledge and skills I was acquiring during my training would have been incredibly beneficial during my teaching career and wondered how in my role as a TEP and as a future EP, I could use this knowledge and skills to support ECTs in this important aspect of their work.

1.3 An overview of the thesis chapters

Adopting a constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach to this study has shaped the structure of the thesis away from perhaps a more traditional format, which may start with a detailed literature review. An overview of each chapter is outlined in Figure 1.1.

Figure 1.1

A visual summary outlining the key sections and the progression of this thesis research.



Chapter 2. Initial literature review

2.1 Methodological considerations for reviewing the literature

The current study employs a constructivist grounded theory (GT) approach for data collection and analysis which will be described further in Chapter 3. By utilising an inductive reasoning method, constructivist GT facilitates the development of theory grounded in data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Charmaz, 2014). This has led to ongoing debate regarding whether a literature review should be conducted prior to initiating a GT research project (Dunne, 2011). Some GT researchers argue that engaging with existing literature before data collection and analysis can introduce bias, potentially leading to preconceived interpretations that hinder the emergence of novel theories (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Glaser, 1992). However, this perspective overlooks the inherent biases and preconceptions that researchers inevitably bring to the research process through their personal and professional experiences (Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Cutcliffe, 2000). Furthermore, it fails to provide a clear justification or rationale for the study (McGhee et al., 2007). As such, avoiding engagement with the literature may leave researchers open to criticism for lacking contextual awareness and theoretical grounding.

Alternatively, other researchers suggest that being informed about a topic prior to commencing a GT study is beneficial and can enhance the research process (Thornberg, 2012; Dunne, 2011; Charmaz, 2014). Some familiarity with the topic area supports researchers with facilitating richer data collection as they can communicate more effectively with participants during interviews (Charmaz, 2014). Given these considerations, I chose to undertake an initial literature review that combined narrative and scoping approaches. This decision was driven by a desire to establish a broad overview of the research landscape, identify gaps in existing knowledge, and ensure the originality and relevance of the study. In doing so, the review supported the rationale and aims for the research and informed the development of the research question.

Reflexive commentary: My initial engagement with the literature

As I embarked on the initial, broad scoping review of the literature, I was mindful of my dual role as both a researcher and a former teacher. This early stage of the research required me to cast a wide net across diverse theoretical and policy-orientated sources. While my background in education provided a useful foundation for navigating the field, I was also aware that it could shape my interpretations when collecting data. Therefore, my research diary was used throughout this narrative review to record existing theoretical concepts drawn from my personal and professional experiences. This helped ensure that I remained critical and self-aware when engaging with the literature.

To maintain the breadth and openness required of the initial review, I made a deliberate effort to engage with literature that would help develop an overview of the research topic and ensure the proposed study was not replicating existing research. In line with my chosen methodology, this process laid the foundation for a more focused and critically engaged second literature review following data collection and analysis.

2.2 The evolving landscape of social, emotional and mental health in education

There have historically been, and continue to be, a wide variety of definitions and terminology associated with the topic of social, emotional and mental health (SEMH). To ensure clarity at this stage of the research study, the following definition from the 2015 SEND Code of Practice (CoP) (DfE & DoH, 2015) is used. Within this statutory guidance document, SEMH, one of the four broad areas of need, is described as CYP potentially experiencing:

...a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically

unexplained. Other children and young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD) or attachment disorder. (DfE & DoH, 2015, p. 98)

As the SEND CoP outlines the legal requirements and best practices for supporting CYP with SEND, it is likely that teachers will be familiar with this definition. Presenting this definition in isolation at this point aims to reduce potential bias before data collection.

In 2004, one in ten CYP were reported to have a mental health need, equivalent to three CYP in every classroom (Green et al., 2005). The UK government commissioned a study in 2019 to provide a more up to date view of CYP's mental health needs. The findings revealed that significant mental health conditions among children had risen by almost 50% compared to three years earlier, with one in six CYP aged 5-19 and one in four aged 17-19 with a probable mental health need (Children's Commissioner for England, 2020). Further research indicates that this statistic has increased since the Covid-19 pandemic, which exacerbated existing mental health needs and created new challenges (Fledderjohann et al., 2021; Norwich et al., 2022; Newlove-Delgado et al., 2023; NHS England, 2023).

According to the World Health Organisation (2024), CYP with mental health needs are at higher risk of facing difficulties in adulthood if they do not receive appropriate and adequate support. As SEMH needs among CYP continue to increase, there is an urgent need to intensify efforts to effectively address the challenges these CYP are experiencing. Promoting positive SEMH development in CYP is a well-documented and extensively researched area (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). Governments worldwide have recognised this as a priority, committing significant time and funding to proposals supporting the mental health and wellbeing of CYP.

UK Government guidance emphasises the importance of promoting mental health in schools. Despite critiques of its medicalised focus, the 'Green Paper: Transforming CYP's Mental Health Provision' (DHSC & DfE, 2017) proposes that every school should have a designated mental health lead working alongside Mental Health Support Teams (MHST). In order to promote

mental health awareness, the 'Mental Health and Behaviour in Schools' guidance highlights the crucial role of schools to recognise early signs and implement preventive measures (DfE, 2018a). The Office for Standards in Education also updated its inspection framework to include, '*Personal Development, Behaviour and Welfare*' (OFSTED, 2015). This update was to ensure that schools focus not only on academic achievement but also on the overall well-being and development of all students.

2.3 The role and implications for educators in addressing social, emotional and mental health needs

Legislation and documents, such as the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) have highlighted the increasing expectation of professionals in educational settings to support and promote students' SEMH needs. Teaching staff are noted to be in a prime position to provide this support as they are trusted professionals who can offer direct help (Clarke, 2019; Lowry et al., 2022). While it is apparent that schools and teachers have a responsibility to support the SEMH development of CYP and there are guidance documents available (e.g., National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2022), the implementation of this responsibility is not mandatory and subject to individual interpretation.

According to a poll by TeacherTapp, a UK-based daily survey app which gathers insights from educators, teachers identify SEMH needs as the second biggest concern in their settings (Roberts, 2025). Many teachers also report feeling inadequately trained to support these needs (EIF, 2021a). Furthermore, considering how SEMH needs often manifest through CYP's behaviours as outlined in Section 2.2, it is notable that experienced teachers frequently cite concerning behaviour as a key reason for leaving the teaching profession (DfE & Morgan, 2015).

According to the DfE (2019a), retention issues were particularly acute among newly qualified teachers (NQTs) with over 20% leaving the profession within their first 2 years and 33% within five years. Many NQTs often report feeling unequipped in managing poor pupil behaviour (DfE, 2018b). More recently, the Department for Education (DfE, 2024b) reported that although

retention rates improved for teachers who qualified in 2022, teacher attrition remains a significant concern, with over forty-three-thousand teachers leaving the profession in 2023. This highlights the urgent need to better equip teachers with the knowledge and skills required to support CYP's SEMH needs, and thereby improving both teacher retention and student outcomes.

2.4 Introducing the Early Career Framework and the shift from newly qualified teachers to early career teachers

The term NQT has been replaced by ECT (Early Career Teachers) as part of the Early Career Framework (ECF) reforms (DfE, 2019b). This change reportedly reflects a shift towards a more structured and supportive induction period for new teachers. Introduced in England in September 2021, the ECF provides a fully funded, two-year professional development framework which aims to better prepare teachers for the challenges of the profession and improve retention rates.

All schools are required to deliver the ECF to their ECTs. Schools can register with different providers, such as Steplab, which offer learning platforms to access evidence-based content. This content is delivered through live face-to-face training or online learning modules. The ECF's five core areas are behaviour management, pedagogy, curriculum, assessment and professional behaviours. On the surface, the ECF does not appear to emphasise SEMH. References are made to 'Managing behaviour,' and 'Adaptive teaching,' directing ECTs to the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015). The Department for Education's evaluation of the ECF reported improvements across several areas, particularly associated with the satisfaction and quality of mentoring (DfE, 2023a). These early findings offer valuable insight into the implementation of the ECF, though the full impact of the reform was still being assessed at the time of this initial literature review. Since then, further evaluation has been conducted (DfE, 2024c). This is discussed in Chapters 5 and 6 when revisiting and discussing the literature following data analysis.

2.5 The role of educational psychologists supporting teachers and children and young people

Literature suggests that teachers who receive targeted training and ongoing support are most successful with meeting the individual needs of CYP (Fletcher-Wood & Zuccollo, 2020). Educational Psychologists (EPs) are ideally positioned to provide this support. Although EPs are involved to support the learning, development, and wellbeing of CYP up to 25 years old, as extended from 19 years (DfE & DoH, 2015), they work across individual, group, and systemic levels (Cameron, 2006; Fallon et al., 2010).

EPs collaborate with schools and CYP's families to indirectly support CYP, consulting with teachers across a diverse range of work to share their knowledge and practice. In doing so, they aim to '*give psychology away*' (Miller, 1969, p.1074) and deliver evidence-based training to empower educational staff (Boyle & Kelly, 2017). The importance of their work, particularly in prevention and early intervention, is increasingly recognised (DfE, 2023b). EPs are considered 'agents of change,' (Dunsmuir & Kratochwill, 2013, p.61). The combined contribution of knowledge, practice and research skills is argued by Birch et al. (2015) to improve outcomes for CYP and bring about positive change. Their involvement within research in education contributes to the evidence base of educational psychology (Cameron, 2006; Gulliford, 2015), aiming to widen its impact and supporting the view that EPs are 'scientist-practitioners' (Kratochwill & Shernoff, 2004).

2.6 A scoping review of the literature

The current study seeks to explore ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs and consider how EPs can assist ECTs in this area. In line with GT recommendations, the preceding narrative literature review presented a broad overview of the current context and key relevant topics. The reviewed literature illustrates that there have been significant changes over the last two decades, particularly in relation to the conceptualisation of SEMH, the rising prevalence of CYP's mental health needs and the implementation of the ECF for new teachers.

To ensure that the proposed study provided a unique contribution to the field of educational psychology and does not replicate existing research, a scoping review was conducted. A scoping review is a form of research synthesis that maps the existing literature on a given topic, identifying the breadth, depth and gaps in the evidence base (Mak & Thomas, 2022). While they are systematic in their approach, scoping reviews differ from systematic reviews in that they do not typically assess the quality of included studies. Instead, they provide an overview which can inform future research directions.

Given the constructivist GT methodology adopted in this study and the aim to assess the extent of existing knowledge in the topic area, a scoping review was deemed appropriate. According to updated methodological guidance by Peters et al. (2020), the title of a scoping review should clearly reflect its focus. Therefore, a PCC framework (population, concept and context) can be used to guide the development of a meaningful and structured review title. Table 2.1 presents the PCC framework used to define and construct the scoping review title for the current study.

Table 2.1

The PCC framework used to clearly define the key components of the research focus to construct the scoping review question for this study.

PCC	Scoping Review
Population	ECTs
Concept	Experiences of ECTs in supporting SEMH needs of CYP
Context	Mainstream educational settings in England

Subsequently, the following question was crafted for this scoping review:

What is currently known about the experiences of ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs?

The initial scoping searches were conducted in July 2023 across the following four electronic databases, which were selected due to their relevance to education and psychology: British Education Index, Educational Psychology in Practice (EPiP), Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Scopus. Search terms collectively used in these databases are presented in Table 2.2.

Table 2.2

The scoping review search terms entered into the four databases: British Education Index, Educational Psychology in Practice, Education Resources Information Centre and Scopus.

PCC	Search Terms
Population	'Early Career Teacher' OR 'ECT' OR 'Newly Qualified Teacher' OR 'NQT'
Concept	'Social, Emotional and Mental Health' OR 'SEMH' OR 'Behaviour' AND 'Children and Young People' OR 'CYP' AND 'Experiences'
Context	Filtered options on the databases or during the screening process to include mainstream educational settings in England.

Recognising that the ECF had only been implemented for 22 months at the point of the review, 'Newly Qualified Teacher' and 'NQT' were included as search terms to highlight research completed before the ECF. In total, 848 records were imported from the four databases into EndNote X9. Table 2.3 presents the number of records generated from each database and the filters which were used.

Table 2.3

Number of records retrieved from each electronic database in July 2023, along with the filters applied during the scoping review process.

Database	Filters Used	Number of Records
British Education Index	2015-2023 English	243
Educational Psychology in Practice	N/A	375
ERIC	2015-2023 English	26
Scopus	2015-2023 English	204

Duplicates (n =139) were removed, leaving 709 studies for title review. This initial title screening reduced the records to 67. Subsequently, inclusion and exclusion criteria (see Table 2.4) were applied to the title and abstracts of these remaining studies.

Table 2.4

Inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the scoping review, along with the rationale for each criterion.

Study Feature	Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
Date of publication	Papers published during or after 2015	Papers published prior to 2015	As this review focused on what is known about ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs, the term, 'SEMH' was first defined in the 2015 SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015).

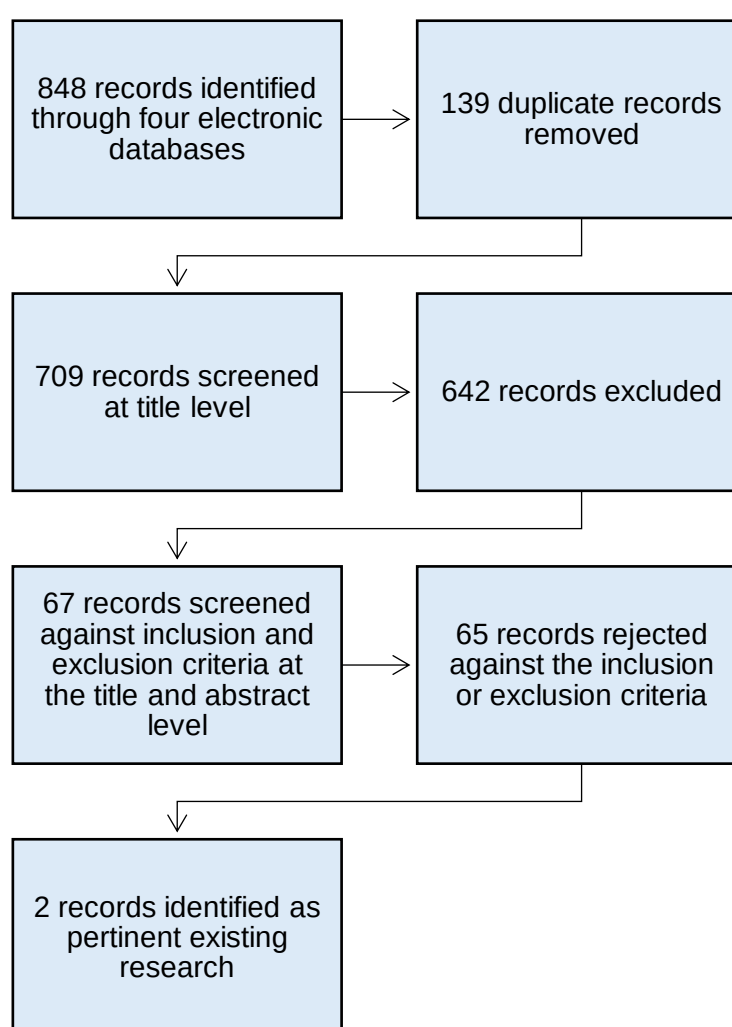
Location (country)	Study conducted in England	Study conducted outside of England	Papers in England were selected to reflect the English education system.
Research paradigm (qualitative or quantitative)	Studies collecting qualitative data	Studies collecting only quantitative data	Focusing on qualitative studies provides rich and detailed insight into participants' experiences which can be crucial for understanding research topics. In addition, findings from qualitative studies can help to shape future research questions and methodologies.
Participants	ECTs	Teachers who have been teaching for more than two years	This review is focused on exploring what is known about ECT experiences.
Focus	Experiences of ECTs with SEMH	Not highlighting experiences of ECTs or new teachers	Although I intend to review what is currently known about the experiences of ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs, for this scoping review the content was considered if it reflected their experiences.

A total of 65 studies were excluded during the title and abstract screening stage, based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The search generated two qualitative studies conducted in England that were relevant to ECTs' experiences. To ensure comprehensive coverage and minimise the risk

of overlooking key literature, the reference lists of these two studies were examined. However, no additional records met the inclusion criteria. Notably, neither of the identified studies made explicit reference to SEMH. The search and screening process is summarised in a flowchart in Figure 2.1.

Figure 2.1

A flowchart outlining the database search and screening process for the study's scoping review.



In line with the purpose of this scoping review - and in consideration of the ongoing debate around the influence of prior reading on data collection and analysis, particularly the risk of imposing existing theory (Holton, 2007) - only titles and abstracts were screened for relevance. The two studies identified as relevant to ECTs' experiences are highlighted in Table 2.5.

Table 2.5

The two studies relevant to early career teachers' experiences identified through the scoping review.

Author, date and title
Woodhouse & Pedder. (2017). Early career teachers' perceptions and experiences of leadership development: balancing structure and agency in contrasting school contexts.
Barnard et al. (2022). Beginner teachers and classroom communities: a thematic analysis of UK beginner teachers' experiences in initial teacher education and beyond.

The identified studies suggest that very limited research has been conducted around ECTs' experiences. Of the two studies, the first paper focuses on ECTs' experiences of leadership development (Woodhouse & Pedder, 2017) and data collection took place before the ECF Reforms, so it does not reflect current teacher induction policy or practice. The second paper (Barnard et al., 2022), using thematic analysis, explores the experiences of beginner teachers in England during their initial teacher training (ITT) courses and their first year of teaching. It also focuses on how teacher educators might support them better. Although the latter is more relevant to the present study, neither of the two studies focus on ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs. This suggests that the current research is likely to provide a unique contribution to address a gap in the research literature.

While the scoping review offered a useful overview of existing literature, its scope was intentionally restricted to qualitative studies conducted within England. This decision was made to ensure contextual relevance to the English education system. However, this narrow focus may have excluded valuable insights from international research or quantitative studies that could have broadened understanding. As such, the conclusions drawn from the

scoping review should be interpreted with caution, acknowledging that they reflect a specific methodological and geographical perspective.

2.7 The rationale and aims for this study

As highlighted in the narrative review, the SEMH needs of CYP have been extensively researched (Carroll & Hurry, 2018) and are a key priority in UK government initiatives (DoH & DfE, 2017; DfE, 2018a). Teachers are widely recognised as playing a pivotal role in addressing these needs. However, emerging evidence suggests a concerning link between the rising prevalence of SEMH needs among CYP, the increasing responsibility placed on teaching staff to manage these needs, and challenges in teacher retention, particularly among early career teachers (DfE, 2019b), which makes this work of particular interest.

Teachers have identified SEMH needs as the second most significant challenge they face in their roles (Roberts, 2025). In light of this, and within the context of the ECF Reform, which aims to better prepare new teachers for the demands of the profession, initial evaluations suggest that the ECF lacks sufficient focus on equipping ECTs to support CYP with SEND, including SEMH needs (DfE, 2024c). Furthermore, the scoping review (see Section 2.6) revealed a notable absence of literature specifically exploring ECT's experiences in supporting CYP's SEMH needs, highlighting a significant gap in the research.

The importance of early intervention in addressing SEMH needs is well-established (DoH & DfE, 2017), which supports the inclusion of early years and primary teachers in this study, as they are well-positioned to provide support during critical developmental stages. Concurrently, growing concerns around adolescent mental health (Patalay & Fitzsimmons, 2017) and findings that 50% of secondary teachers report a lack of confidence in supporting these needs (EIF, 2021b) emphasise the value of exploring how experiences may vary across educational phases.

While there is increasing recognition of the role of applied psychology in improving outcomes for CYP, much of the existing research linking educational psychology with new or trainee teachers originates from outside the UK. These

international studies often focus on the role of school psychologists or their involvement in teacher education programmes (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2018; Nezhad & Vahedi, 2011; Shernoff et al., 2016), further highlighting a gap in UK-based research. Anderson et al., (2007, p.146) assert that, '*School psychologists are perfectly placed to promote inclusive practice in schools and in classrooms...*' emphasising the unique contribution applied psychologists can make to supporting SEND inclusion. However, they also note that they '*...will only be successful if they first listen to the voices of teachers.*' This study seeks to do this by exploring the lived experiences of ECTs across different educational phases.

The gaps identified in the existing literature, alongside my professional interests outlined in Section 1.2, have informed the aims of this study. This research seeks to explore ECTs' experiences in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Specifically, it aims to examine ECTs' perspectives on their training, induction, and early teaching experiences, as well as their understanding of SEMH-related terminology and their experiences with supporting SEMH needs. In light of these aims, the study is guided by the following research question:

- 1) *What are early career teachers' experiences of supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs?*

Although the study adopts an exploratory approach with a primary focus on ECTs' lived experiences, it also seeks to consider the potential implications for EPs in supporting ECTs in this area. In doing so, the research aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on the application of educational psychology in schools, particularly in the context of early career teaching and SEMH.

Chapter 3. Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological decisions made to answer the research question presented in Section 2.7. It introduces relevant philosophical research paradigms, considers my positionality, and highlights the role of reflexivity in shaping the study. A rationale is provided for selecting constructivist grounded theory (GT), followed by an overview of the research design, including sampling, data collection and analysis. References to appendices support transparency and ethical implications are presented throughout.

3.1 Reflexivity in the research process

Given my prior knowledge in education and psychology at the outset of this research, it was essential to acknowledge how my background might influence the research process (Olmos-Vega et al., 2023). Alvesson and Sköldbberg (2018) describe reflexivity as *“the interpretation of interpretation”* and *“a critical self-exploration of one’s own interpretations of empirical material”* (p.11). This perspective informed my ongoing reflection on the assumptions, beliefs, and decisions that shaped the study (Darawsheh, 2014).

To ensure reflexivity did not become an exercise to satisfy administrative research requirements rather than a sustained and meaningful process as Gabriel (2018) warns, I maintained a research diary (alongside memo writing, see Section 3.3.5.9). This research diary served as both a reflective and reflexive tool. This practice informed the integration of reflexive insights throughout the thesis which enhanced the research quality and supported transparency of my impact on the research (Hammersley & Atkinson, 2019).

3.2 Exploring the research landscape: the philosophical and methodological foundations of the study

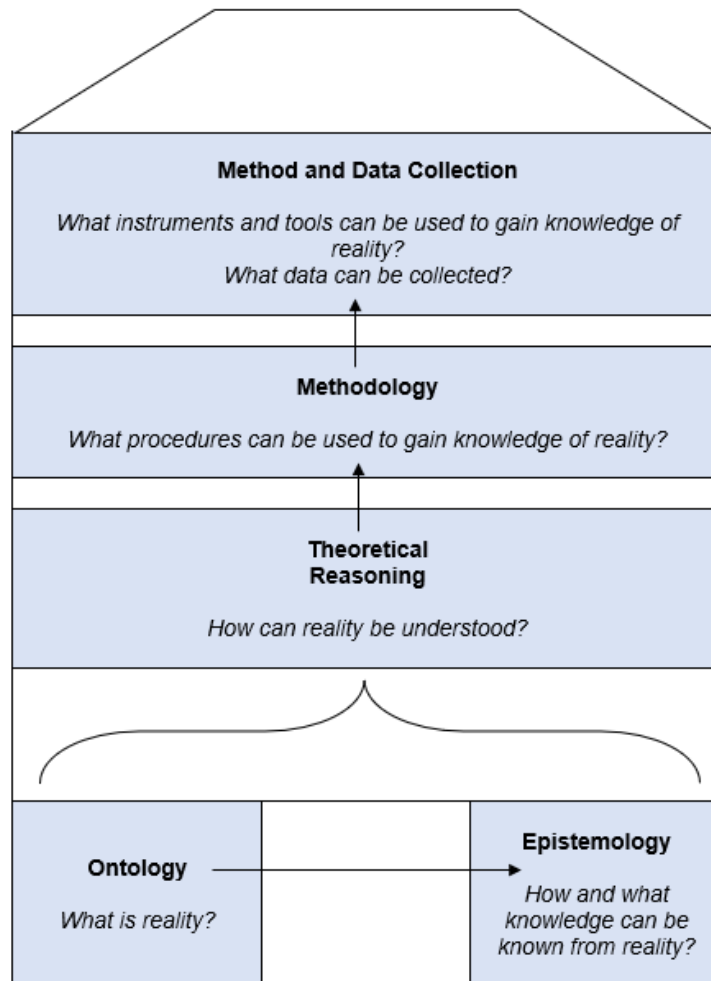
3.2.1 An introduction to research paradigms

When carrying out research, it is important for researchers to be aware of the beliefs which are central to their research (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). These beliefs are often shaped by the research paradigm adopted, which provides a framework for understanding the nature of knowledge, reality and

the methods appropriate for inquiry (Kuhn, 1962; Mustafa, 2011; Robson & McCartan, 2016; Cohen et al., 2017). A research paradigm, also described as a theoretical framework or a world view, is informed by its philosophical roots and assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). A diagram displaying the relationship between ontology, epistemology alongside theoretical reasoning and methodology is presented in Figure 3.1. There is widespread debate about research positions held in educational and psychological research (Bryman, 2008), and the association between ontology and epistemology (Hay, 2007). Ontology is concerned with the nature of reality or the world and how people view it, whereas epistemology considers the nature of knowledge, and how to research the relationship between knowledge and reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Grix (2004, p.59) states: "Ontology and epistemology are to research what 'footings' are to a house: they form the whole edifice," portrayed in Figure 3.1.

Figure 3.1

A diagram created by the researcher to illustrate the relationship between ontological and epistemological positioning and their influence on the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in research.



Considering the nature of evidence gathered about reality, people attempt to understand the world through different types of theoretical reasoning. The two main approaches are deduction and induction. Deductive reasoning involves gathering broad concepts and refining it to more specific details, whereas inductive reasoning moves from specific observations to broader generalisations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). With inductive reasoning, theories are discovered through open questioning, while deductive reasoning tests theoretically developed hypotheses. Before presenting the qualitative

methods considered and the method adopted for this study, research paradigms will be outlined.

3.2.2 The positivist and post-positivist paradigms

Researchers who identify as positivists are centred on a scientific method by attempting to understand the world through cause-and-effect relationships (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Researchers situated in this paradigm hold a realist ontology, which assumes that one single reality exists and is controlled by universal laws. It can be measured through investigation and carefully controlled conditions (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, their epistemological position is objective in nature, meaning that they believe the world can be simply observed, and knowledge produced. Positivism seeks to understand the world through deductive reasoning, drawing logical conclusions from theoretical hypotheses. Typically, quantitative methods for data collection will be used, limiting all external variables (e.g., randomised control trials). The methods are often easily replicable to repeat future research (Cohen et al., 2017). This research paradigm is argued to be problematic when studying complex human behaviour (Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Fox, 2011) because it removes the influence of a researcher's perspective or beliefs. Furthermore, this research paradigm is described as excessively deterministic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) as it suggests that all behaviours (or outcomes) are predictable and inevitable. Instead, it could be argued that there are many factors which can contribute to behaviour, and this paradigm does not acknowledge these factors (Robson & McCartan, 2016). People are bound by their values and opinions, which they cannot separate from, so this paradigm could be argued as essentially undermining individual differences.

An extension of the positivist research paradigm, post-positivism also holds the belief that one objective reality exists; however, it acknowledges that this "*can only be known imperfectly*" (Robson, 2011, p.22). Although post-positivist researchers seek objectivity through careful consideration of planned variables, based upon a realist ontology, they acknowledge the complexity of real-world research and the possibilities of the researcher influencing what is observed (Reichardt & Rallis, 1994). However, such influences are controlled through rigorous scientific investigation (Robson, 2011), which typically use

theory-driven quantitative methods seeking to clarify or disprove claims through hypothesis testing (Phillips & Burbules, 2000). Although this paradigm accepts that the researcher's knowledge and values impact on what is observed, it fundamentally adopts a positivist view of how research 'should' be performed (Robson & McCartan, 2016) and rejects the idea of reflexivity (Cohen et al., 2011). Due to the control expected within this paradigm, it is not practical for real world researchers (Robson & McCartan, 2016), particularly those who seek to explore and gain a rich picture of the perspectives and experiences of participants operating in a complex social world.

3.2.3 The qualitative research paradigm

3.2.3.1 Constructivism as an epistemological and ontological foundation

Constructivism sits within the broader qualitative research paradigm, which is underpinned by the belief that reality is subjective, context-dependent, and best understood through the perspectives of those who experience it (Farrow et al., 2020). Situated as both a foundational theory of learning and an epistemological stance, constructivism suggests that individuals actively construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world through their experiences and reflection (Ültanir, 2012; Kara et al., 2021). In research, constructivism supports the idea that knowledge is co-constructed through social processes and dialogue (Meltzoff & Cooper, 2018), aligning closely with qualitative methodologies that explore how individuals make sense of their experiences. Ontologically, constructivism typically adopts a relativist stance, asserting that reality is not fixed or objective but is instead constructed by individuals based on their unique experiences and contexts (Guba & Lincoln, 2013; Denicolo et al., 2016); however, Willig (2016) challenges this assumption, arguing that most constructivist qualitative research operates from a position of ontological realism - the belief that social and material structures exist independently of our knowledge of them - while embracing epistemological relativism, which acknowledges that our understanding of reality is subjective, partial and shaped by interpretation (Denicolo et al., 2016). Willig suggests that critical realism, characterised by a realist ontology and an epistemological stance grounded in humility, more

accurately reflects the underlying philosophical position of much qualitative research, even when it is labelled as constructivist.

3.2.3.2 *Interpretivism in qualitative research*

Interpretivism, closely aligned with constructivism, also recognises the existence of multiple perspectives, shaped through individual experiences. For example, people may experience the same situation differently based on their personal background and perspectives. While constructivists are primarily interested in how individual realities are co-constructed (Alanazi, 2016), interpretivists focus on how these realities are individually experienced, viewing participants as experts in their own lived experiences. In applied research, interpretivism is recognised for prioritising the interpretation of individual experience (King & Horrocks, 2019). Interpretivist epistemology emphasises the importance of understanding how individuals make sense of the world around them. It provides a platform for individuals to articulate their feelings, perceptions and experiences. However, Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) caution against labelling these subjective accounts as realities suggesting instead terms such as “*multiple perspectives, opinions or beliefs*” (p.16). This epistemology is closely linked with inductive reasoning, which posits that knowledge is not simply observed and recorded, but it is shaped by the researcher’s theoretical perspective and methodological approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

Interpretivist researchers, therefore, acknowledge their role as active participants in the research process, and as outlined in Section 3.1, engage in reflexivity. This includes being transparent about their positionality and ethical considerations (Moore, 2005), while amplifying the unique voices and experiences of their participants (Tomaszewski et al., 2020). Being situated as an active participant is considered a privileged position, as it allows researchers to not only share diverse perspectives on a phenomenon but also develop a deeper understanding within a shared social and cultural context (King & Horrocks, 2019; Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). Studies grounded in the interpretivist paradigm typically employ qualitative methodologies, such as interviews or ethnographic case studies, which enable the collection of rich, detailed accounts of participants’ lived experiences (Tuli, 2010). However, like

other qualitative research paradigms, interpretivism is not without criticism. Concerns are often raised about the validity and reliability due to the subjective nature of data and the potential for researcher bias (Leung, 2015) and their influence on findings (Pervin & Mokhtar, 2022). To address these concerns, interpretivist researchers often adopt reflexive practices, such as using vignettes (Duffy et al., 2021) or maintain diaries and journals to acknowledge and manage their subjectivity.

3.2.3.3 The interpretivist-constructivist worldview

Within the ever-evolving landscape of qualitative research, the interpretivist-constructivist worldview is emerging as an approach, particularly in social science and education research (van der Walt, 2020), for its ability to capture the complexity and richness of human experience. It recognises that knowledge is constructed through interpretation, shaped by context, values, and theoretical perspectives, and that meaning is co-created between researcher and participant. This paradigm also places strong emphasis on the importance of individual lived experiences, acknowledging them as valuable sources of insight into social reality. It encourages reflexivity, embraces multiple realities, and draws on deep philosophical and theoretical roots to explore how individuals make sense of their world. Van der Walt (2020) argues that many researchers reference this paradigm superficially, without fully engaging with its philosophical depth, methodological implications, and epistemological commitments.

3.2.4 The philosophical positioning and research paradigm of the study

Within this research, ECTs are recognised as constructing their own subjective understandings of supporting CYP with SEMH needs. This perspective rejects the notion of a universal, objective reality and instead aligns with a relativist ontology, which acknowledges the existence of multiple, socially constructed realities. Consequently, the study declines a positivist stance.

Initially grounded in a constructivist worldview, the research evolved in response to the nature of the data and the need to uncover deeper layers of meaning. This led to the adoption of a more explicitly interpretive approach. In

line with Kivunja and Kuyini's (2017) argument that paradigms should align with the research question, the exploratory aims of this study - focused on understanding ECTs' lived experiences - are viewed within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm. This philosophical positioning reflects a subjectivist, interpretivist epistemology, where knowledge is seen as being co-constructed through the interaction between researcher and participants. The study explores how ECTs make sense of their roles and experiences in supporting CYP with SEMH needs, within the complex and dynamic contexts of early professional practice.

In response to van der Walt's (2020) critique of researchers engaging superficially in an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm, this study engages meaningfully with the paradigm's philosophical and methodological depth. It acknowledges that knowledge is shaped by theoretical roots and the researcher's worldview. Reflexivity is therefore central to the research process, with a conscious effort to amplify ECTs' voices while maintaining critical awareness of my own influence. Rather than testing hypotheses, the study employs inductive reasoning to develop contextually grounded insights that reflect the complexity of lived experience. Although inductive in nature, the interpretive process is understood as both upward - towards theoretical development - and downward – grounded in foundational beliefs and contextual understanding.

3.2.5 Introduction to qualitative research methods

A qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for my research exploring the views of ECTs. Qualitative methodologies enable the acknowledgement of both the voices of participants and of the researcher (Chandler et al., 2015), which was essential given my background and interests in this area of study. During the planning and design phases of this research, various qualitative approaches were examined to ensure that the methodological principles aligned with the adopted research paradigm (Tomaszewski et al., 2020) and the proposed research aims. Before presenting the rationale for selecting constructivist GT, other qualitative approaches which were considered will be outlined.

3.2.5.1 *Thematic analysis*

Argued to be a ‘foundational method for qualitative analysis’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.78) to explore people’s experiences (Willig, 2013), thematic analysis (TA) can be used across different epistemologies and for a range of research questions and topics (Nowell et al., 2017). TA is typically used to identify, analyse, and organise themes or patterns found across a data set (Braun & Clarke, 2019) to highlight shared experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2021a). A benefit of this qualitative method of analysis is its flexibility (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Wolgemuth et al., 2024); however, this could also be viewed as a criticism as it could be argued that it is open to interpretation, and it could be prone to subjectivity and bias as the researcher tells their own story about the data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2021b). Furthermore, rather than a focused analysis of an individual’s experience, TA seeks to understand shared experience across a data set, which may result in the individual voices of participants, or their “*multiple perspectives*” (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004, p.16), being lost.

3.2.5.2 *Interpretative phenomenological analysis*

Also considered as a potential method to explore the research question, interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a valued qualitative method of analysis which seeks to explore and understand how an individual thinks about a topic or situation and makes sense of their world (Smith, 2011; Creswell, 2013; Mertens, 2015). It also recognises the interactions and possible influence between the participants and the researcher (Saddler & Sundin, 2020). Although IPA enables researchers to develop a rich description of individual participants’ lived experiences (Demuth & Mey, 2015), it is criticised for simplifying complex experiences and limiting underlying explanations of a topic or phenomenon (Willig, 2013). Furthermore, IPA typically seeks to recruit a homogenous sample (Noon, 2018). Although it could be argued that this is appropriate for the current study as participants shared similarities and experiences in their role as ECTs, they also attended different training and acquired their own diverse experiences prior to being ECTs, so it seemed the current study would benefit from a more comparative method with highlighting potential exceptions between participants’

experiences. Although IPA enables a rich exploration of individuals' lived experiences, I thought it lacked the depth of inductive reasoning necessary to fully capture the complexities and comparison of ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs.

3.2.5.3 *Grounded theory*

Compared to TA and IPA, grounded theory (GT) allows researchers to engage in an emergent design in constant comparison to seek exceptions (Mills et al., 2006). I thought the current study would benefit from comparative analysis to interpret the individual voices whilst also highlighting the potential exceptions and diversity in ECTs' experiences. In addition, my research aims included facilitating a level of exploration which offered a deeper understanding to move towards a more complex explanation (Willig, 2013). TA and IPA both provided flexibility to gather the perspectives of the participants, but I reflected that these methods were unlikely to provide the level of exploration required. GT is also argued to be appropriate when exploring topics with limited research (Holton, 2007) which supported consideration of this method further.

3.2.6 Which grounded theory method?

Argued to be one of the most used qualitative methods within the social sciences globally (Morse et al., 2021; Stough & Lee, 2021; White & Cooper, 2022), there is a vast array of information which exists about GT approaches (Birks & Mills, 2023). Moving away from verifying or extending existing theories, as the name indicates, GT seeks to generate a theoretical account of a topic which is grounded in data (Birks & Mills, 2023; Connor et al., 2024). Although it is widely applied, GT is frequently misunderstood due to its complexity (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). Engaging in GT literature, variations of GT methodology were acknowledged based on three main approaches (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Kenny & Fourie, 2015): classical GT (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), Straussian GT (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, 1998), and constructivist GT (Charmaz, 2000, 2014).

3.2.6.1 Classical grounded theory

Grounded Theory (known as classical or Glaserian GT) was first established by Glaser and Strauss (1967) within the field of sociology. Proposed as an alternative to the traditional scientific method of quantitative research, classical GT sought to present a systematic approach to collect and analyse data to discover theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, 1999). More aligned with the post-positivist paradigm (Hall et al., 2013), classical grounded theorists hold the belief that one objective reality can be found through methodological data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) assuming that 'the data speaks for itself' (Reay et al., 2016, p.27). When adopting this method, Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed that the researcher is independent of their participants and are viewed as impartial observers only being influenced to the topic by exposure within the study.

3.2.6.2 Straussian grounded theory

Following disputes about researchers being viewed as 'neutral observers' (Hallberg, 2006, p.142), an adaptation of classical GT was developed. Straussian GT (Strauss and Corbin, 1990, 1998), also referred in the literature as interpretivist GT (Sebastian, 2019), proposes that researchers play an interactive role throughout the research process (Howard-Payne, 2016); therefore, unlike classical GT, Straussian GT acknowledges the researchers' engagement within the research to better understand the world through interpreting the participants' perspectives. Although Straussian GT adopts a relativist ontology and subjective epistemology (Annells, 1996), it adopts a more linear, prescriptive method using a deductive coding approach (Evans, 2013) which signifies that it is objective in nature and more likely to be underpinned by positivist beliefs (Charmaz et al., 2018). Despite moving towards a more reflexive approach, this GT method has received criticism for being too far removed from the original inductive approach of classical GT (Willig, 2013).

3.2.6.3 Constructivist grounded theory

Developed by Charmaz (2000), constructivist grounded theory (GT) is similar to earlier GT techniques (Mills et al., 2006; Sebastian, 2019) primarily

its iterative process (Charmaz, 2014). However, constructivist GT challenges the idea that one objective reality exists as it adopts a relativist ontology recognising the multiple perspectives of participants. Constructivist GT emphasises how participants construct meaning linked to the area of research (Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). Furthermore, this approach to GT appreciates the active relationship between the researcher and participants and how a researchers' interpretations - influenced by their own background, experiences, and values of the world - may contribute to the outcomes of the research; thus, acknowledging the importance of researcher reflexivity (Charmaz, 2017) and positioning them as the author reconstructing the participants' experience (Mills et al., 2006). To ensure the participants' voices remain present, constructivist grounded theorists engage in memo writing, which are highly reflexive (see Section 3.3.5.9).

To understand a world view on a topic, constructivist GT proposes that a researcher must engage in an iterative process which exceeds descriptive interpretations of participants' views by generating a theory situated within the topical context (Charmaz, 2017). To enable a unique theory to be developed, constructivist grounded theorists establish a guiding research question at the start of their research project, which focuses on illuminating the experiences and perspectives of participants, whilst engaging in personal and theoretical reflection throughout their research process (Charmaz, 2008).

3.2.7 The present study and constructivist grounded theory

Approaches to GT share several characteristics (Mills et al., 2006) and provide researchers with guidance on collecting and analysing qualitative data; however, each approach has their own distinct features (Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021) including the research paradigms which they align with. As Burns et al. (2022) recognise, it is important for researchers to examine their own positioning and beliefs to aid their decision-making with which approach to adopt.

Straussian or interpretivist GT appeared to align closely with my positioning initially. However, through further exploration of GT literature, I recognised that the coding techniques utilised in the method were restrictive and underpinned by positivist beliefs. Furthermore, the data could be guided by existing literature making the approach less inductive. My research aimed to adopt an inductive and open-ended design without forming hypotheses about what might be found. Therefore, considering my relativist ontological and subjectivist, interpretivist epistemological positioning, I selected to use constructivist GT. In choosing a methodological approach that resonated with my philosophical stance, I sought to strengthen the research's quality and credibility.

Reflexive commentary: My role as the researcher and navigating methodological decisions

I recognise the privilege and responsibility involved in exploring ECTs' experiences. In my previous role as a mentor to NQTs, many shared the challenges they faced in supporting CYP with emotional needs. These memories remain vivid and could, if unacknowledged, unconsciously influence how I interpret participants' narratives.

Recognising this was a crucial first step in maintaining reflexivity. To ensure that my interpretations remained grounded in the lived experiences of participants rather than shaped by my own, this research diary serves as a space for critical reflection, allowing me to examine how my positionality may be influencing the research process.

In designing the study, I was intentional in selecting a methodology and tools that not only aligned with my philosophical positioning but also enabled ongoing reflexivity. Exploring different GT approaches allowed me to consider which aligns most with my philosophical beliefs and is most compatible with my research aims. I think that Straussian GT aligns well with my subjective, interpretivist epistemological positioning, but I consider the deductive nature of the approach to be very restrictive. In contrast, I think that classical GT does not place enough acknowledgement on the

active role of the researcher. Exploring constructivist GT as a potential method, I am wondering: 'Can I use it if my beliefs are situated within an interpretivist-constructivist paradigm?'

According to literature, constructivism and interpretivism are closely related as they typically share a relativist ontology recognising that multiple perspectives exist (Mills et al., 2006). The difference lies with the epistemology or how they seek to understand these perspectives. Constructivists are keen to explore how individuals' perspectives are socially constructed, whereas interpretivists are interested in how they are individually experienced. Both research paradigms recognise the subjectivity of the researcher and the active role they play in the research with how they interpret the data and author the research.

Despite their focus on mental health nursing practice in Australia, Gardner et al. (2012) acknowledge that 'methodologically constructivist GT is interpretivist in nature' (p.67). Furthermore, constructivist GT is described as an 'adaptable and flexible method' (Bobbink et al., 2024, p.6) and can be viewed as an interpretive response to positivism (Charmaz, 2014). It could be argued that a constructivist GT study results in the researcher's interpretative understanding being shared.

Therefore, I decided that constructivist GT was an appropriate methodology and guiding framework for my research as it will enable me to explore my research question. It was intended by choosing constructivist GT that the inductive and data-driven nature of classical GT would remain whilst also upholding the reflexive approach of Straussian GT, enabling a more flexible method to explore the present topic. While constructivist GT was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for this research, there are limitations of the approach which are considered and outlined in Chapter 6.

3.3 The research design and procedure

This section of the methodology chapter provides a description of the research design including sampling, data collection and analysis. Additionally,

ethical implications are discussed, and key elements of the chosen methodology, such as memo writing and diagramming, are outlined.

3.3.1 The stakeholders of this study

This research was completed for the Professional Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology Training at The University of Nottingham. A 'stakeholder' is defined as "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives" (Fares et al., 2021). Therefore, in research it describes a group or individuals who will be affected by the outcomes of a piece of research. The stakeholders involved in the current study include:

- The researcher
- The Local Authority (LA)
- The LA Educational Psychology Service (EPS)
- Other LA SEND Services
- The University of Nottingham
- The ECTs and their schools participating in the research
- The CYP with SEMH needs who are taught by the ECTs

This research aligns with the SEND development focus of the LA, where I completed my placement as a TEP while undertaking this research. To foster collaboration and improvement, I committed to sharing a summary of my findings and conclusions upon completion of the research with the EPS, the LA and the consenting participants.

3.3.2 Ensuring ethical integrity in this study

Throughout this research, careful consideration of the factors which may affect ethical practice was essential. Ethical approval for the present study was granted by The University of Nottingham's Ethics Committee in July 2023 before data collection began (see Appendix A). As I held dual roles as a researcher and a TEP, these ethical considerations were also guided by the British Psychology Society's (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021a), Code of Human Research Ethics (BPS, 2021b), Ethics guidelines for internet-mediated research (BPS, 2021c), and the HCPC Standards of Conduct,

Performance and Ethics (2024). Key ethical aspects considered which informed decision making are presented in the following sections to demonstrate their consideration throughout the whole research process.

3.3.3 Introduction to research quality considerations

In addition to adhering to ethical standards, it is essential to critically evaluate a study to ensure its quality and integrity. Qualitative researchers (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Stahl & King, 2020) discuss concepts such as trustworthiness and credibility to enhance the rigour of their research. These criteria recognise that qualitative research explores subjective experiences, which cannot be assessed using the same methods as quantitative research (e.g., validity and reliability). To support the quality and rigour of GT research, Charmaz (2014) offers a set of evaluation criteria. These criteria were considered from the outset of this research project and have guided the study's design, data collection and analysis. Table 3.1 outlines a description of the criteria used, and their application is discussed in detail in Section 6.8.

Table 3.1

A summary of the four key criteria - credibility, originality, resonance, and usefulness - used to assess the quality and rigour of grounded theory studies, proposed by Charmaz (2014, p.337).

Evaluation Criteria	Description
Credibility	Ensures that the research findings accurately represent the participants' experiences and perspectives.
Originality	Considers the novelty and uniqueness of the research.
Resonance	Refers to the extent to which the findings resonate with and are meaningful to the participants and the broader audience.

Usefulness

Evaluates the practical implications and applicability of the research findings.

3.3.4 Participant sampling and recruitment

3.3.4.1 Purposive sampling

When adopting constructivist GT, sampling is typically purposive initially, meaning that a specific individual or group are selected (Charmaz, 2014). The benefit of this approach to sampling is that the researcher can select participants who are most likely to provide rich data relevant to the topic of study (Robson & McCartan, 2016). It could be argued that this provides a level of bias as participants are not randomly selected. As constructivist GT notes that sampling should be guided by the research topic (Charmaz, 2014), purposive sampling was deemed to be appropriate for this study initially. Guided by the research aims, the purposeful sample sought to recruit ECTs to gain data regarding their experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Additionally, with the ECF (DfE, 2019a) implementation, which aimed to '*strengthen qualified teacher status (QTS) and improve career progression*' (Scutt, 2020, p.2), I decided that ECTs were an important sample to explore their views.

Driven by my personal values and the importance of keeping CYP's voices central within my practice, I considered a second layer to the research including children's voices, but I recognised the potential difficulties of this within a doctoral piece of research, so I decided to focus on the perspectives of ECTs to achieve an initial interpretive understanding. Set eligibility criteria regarding the participants were determined (Mertens, 2020) as outlined in Table 3.2. To ensure participants had sufficient experience of the ECF, I initially aimed to recruit ECTs who had completed at least one full year of their two-year induction. However, due to recruitment challenges early in my research journey and insufficient participants coming forward, I amended the inclusion criteria to include ECTs in both their first and second year of induction engaging in the ECF.

Table 3.2

Overview of the eligibility criteria and justification for the use of purposive sampling in participant selection.

Inclusion	Exclusion	Rationale
ECTs who are completing their induction following the Early Career Framework.	ECTs who are not completing their induction following the Early Career Framework.	To allow ECTs at any stage of their induction following the Early Career Framework to share their views and experiences.
ECTs who have completed any accredited teaching qualification to teach early years, primary or secondary-aged CYP.	ECTs who have not completed an accredited teaching qualification.	To keep the research as open as possible and provide a richness of data. Furthermore, this will support comparative analysis to explore potential exceptions in experiences.
ECTs currently working in mainstream settings.	ECTs currently working in specialist settings including alternative provisions.	This research focuses on mainstream ECTs' experiences to support with participant recruitment and as the additional needs of CYP attending specialist settings are likely to influence ECTs' practice.

ECTs currently working in England.	All participants working in the same LA or county or ECTs working outside of England.	To ensure ECTs were using and following similar frameworks and policies, (e.g., National Curriculum) and to adhere to ethical considerations and ensure participant confidentiality (outlined in Section 3.3.4.6).
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Following ethical approval, the recruitment process began with a tweet on my professional Twitter account sharing a research poster (presented in Appendix B) inviting ECTs to express their interest in participating via email. The decision to use Twitter, now known as X, as the platform was to ensure participation was solely voluntary rather than participants feeling obliged to participate (Aluwihare-Samaranayake, 2012) through the interaction of gatekeepers (e.g., Headteachers). However, due to recruitment challenges, the initial two participants were selected through purposive, convenience sampling as they were personally known to me. Although this is not an ideal sampling method technique for the reason noted above, the time constraints associated with completing a doctoral thesis project necessitated this approach. Measures taken to ensure that all participants did not feel any obligation to take part, or that they could present views with a reduction in bias as far as possible, are outlined in Section 3.3.4.4.

In constructivist GT, data collection follows an iterative process, meaning that data collection and analysis occur simultaneously. This allows the researcher to move back and forth, comparing and developing the emerging analysis (see Section 3.3.5). Following the initial two interviews and their subsequent analysis, I remained open to further potential sources of data, including the recruitment of additional participants to build on early insights. This is known as '*theoretical sampling*' (Robson & McCartan, 2016, p.281). Additional participants were recruited through a poster (See Appendix B)

shared via Twitter and through gatekeepers (e.g., professional contacts who shared my poster). As previously noted, I did not wish to use gatekeepers, but due to ongoing recruitment challenges and time constraints, their involvement became necessary. Procedures to ensure participants did not feel obliged to participate and were aware of their right to withdraw were consistently followed.

3.3.4.2 Introduction to theoretical sampling

Considered to be a central element of successful GT research (Morse, 2007), theoretical sampling allows the researcher to carefully decide what data to collect next to engage in rigorous comparative analysis to seek out variation within the data and develop a grounded theory (Birks & Mills, 2015; Charmaz, 2014). As the current study focused specifically on ECTs' experiences, it was decided that there was no requirement to seek other populations beyond this. However, theoretical sampling can also be used during data generation (Foley et al, 2021).

Following debate about when to start theoretical sampling, Birks and Mills (2015) suggest that all subsequent participants after the initial purposive participant should be theoretically sampled, providing there is some prior data analysis before selecting the next participant, to consider emerging ideas from the outset. In comparison, Charmaz (2014) recommends beginning theoretical sampling once theoretical categories are identified, so categories can be immersed with new data to clarify and consider when theoretical saturation is reached. Details about theoretical saturation and theoretical sampling in this study is presented in Section 3.3.5.12.

3.3.4.3 Sample size in constructivist grounded theory studies

As is typical in GT research, the sample size for this study was guided by the principle of theoretical saturation and shaped by the scope of the research question (Charmaz, 2014; Charmaz & Thornberg, 2021). The aim was to recruit a sufficient number of participants to construct a meaningful and coherent account of ECTs' experiences in supporting CYP's SEMH needs (Birks & Mills, 2015; Tie, Birks & Francis, 2019). While Thomson (2011) notes that the average sample size for GT studies is around twenty-five, the practical

constraints of a doctoral thesis, particularly time constraints, necessitated a more flexible approach. In line with Charmaz's emphasis on reaching a story which can be told, the focus was placed on achieving conceptual depth and narrative coherence rather than adhering to a fixed numerical target.

Furthermore, the recruitment process presented as a significant challenge in my research journey which I had not anticipated. Overall, seventeen participants expressed an interest in participating, but the majority ultimately felt unable to participate. From the responses received, I thought that this was an example of the pressures ECTs were facing, particularly with time. I was conscious that this reflection may influence my analysis of subsequent interviews, so I included it within my research diary to be conscious of throughout.

3.3.4.4 Informed consent of the participants

When individuals expressed an interest in participating in the study, I responded via email (see Appendix C) with two attachments. The first attachment included a research information sheet (see Appendix D) to provide comprehensive information to enable them to make an informed decision whether to participate. The research information sheet outlined the purpose and aims of the research, what participation would involve and potential risks and how these would be prevented. The second attachment included a research consent form (see Appendix E) for interested participants to complete if they decided to participate. This was to ensure that I respected the individuals' autonomy to decide. These documents were to ensure I adhered to the Professional Ethical Codes of Research Conduct as outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS, 2021a).

A Microsoft Form survey (see Appendix F) link was included in the email to collect additional information including gender, age category, ethnicity, parenting experience, teacher training route and age range, previous study and roles, and current working location. This information (see Table 3.3) supported contextualisation of the sample. To protect participants' identity, how this data was stored is outlined in Section 3.3.4.6.

Before interviews commenced, I ensured that I received completed consent forms from the participants. I also read an interview schedule script (see Appendix G) which gave the participants further opportunities to ask any questions at the start and the end of their interviews. The information sheet and consent form (see Appendices D and E) also included my contact details and the details of my research supervisor if participants wished to ask further questions following their interview.

3.3.4.5 The final sample of this study

Six participants were recruited in total, with the first two being chosen through purposive sampling. It could be argued, due to the consideration of emerging ideas from these first interviews, that theoretical sampling began from interview three. However, due to the limited sample size, it is difficult to distinguish between purposive and theoretical sampling.

All six participants had varied work experience prior to commencing their teacher training. These experiences included roles within marketing, community development, mental health nursing and supporting in schools (e.g., teaching assistants and cover supervisor). Furthermore, it became apparent during interviews that the first five participants had additional study experience associated with the research topic (e.g., they had completed undergraduate degrees in psychology or mental health nursing, or they had completed postgraduate studies, such as Master of Psychology or Master of Education). Whilst a more varied and diverse sample would have been welcomed in this research, reflecting on the timeframe of this doctoral research, recruitment challenges and the analytical process within a constructivist GT study, these factors influenced my decisions – as the researcher - and justified the final sample size.

Table 3.3

Overview of participant data collected via Microsoft Form survey to support sample contextualisation.

Data collected	Number of participants
Gender	
Female	5
Male	1
Age categories	
25-34	4
45-54	2
Ethnicity	
White British	5
French (trained in the UK)	1
Are you a parent?	
Yes	3
No	3
Teacher training route	
Bachelor of Arts Primary Education	1
Bachelor of Education (BEd)	1
PGCE – university	2
School-Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT)	2
Trained teaching age range	
Early Years and Key Stage 1	1
Primary (KS1 & KS2)	3
Secondary (KS3 & 4)	2
ECT Year	
1	3
2	3
Current working location*	
South-East England	3
West Midlands	1

**The regions of current working location are named rather than specific towns, cities or counties to protect participants' anonymity.*

3.3.4.6 Protecting participant confidentiality

Initially, recruitment was considered to focus on ECTs within the LA where I was on placement, but to extend efforts to protect the participants' confidentiality, I decided to broaden the location of the population sample to recruit ECTs in England. Participants' names, and other identifiable information (e.g., specific locations) were not used in this written account. All collected data was stored securely on a password-protected document on One Drive on an encrypted laptop in line with the University of Nottingham's Privacy Guidance (see Appendix D). Participants were asked to choose a pseudonym to ensure their data was confidential but easily identifiable if they requested to withdraw their involvement from the study. Due to the small sample size, I decided not to use the chosen pseudonyms within the research narrative. Instead, the participants were allocated a number representing the order in which their interviews took place (e.g., participant 1, participant 2, etc). Names and other identifiable information shared by participants during all interviews were removed during transcription, and recordings were subsequently deleted. Transcription was completed manually to avoid sharing data through any transcription services. Additionally, only short extracts and quotes have been included within this written account to ensure confidentiality of participants and any individuals (e.g., colleagues or CYP) who may have been discussed. Before commencing their interviews, all participants acknowledged that confidentiality may be breached in exceptional circumstances if information shared highlighted a risk to the safety of the participants or other individuals, discussed further in Section 3.3.5.3.

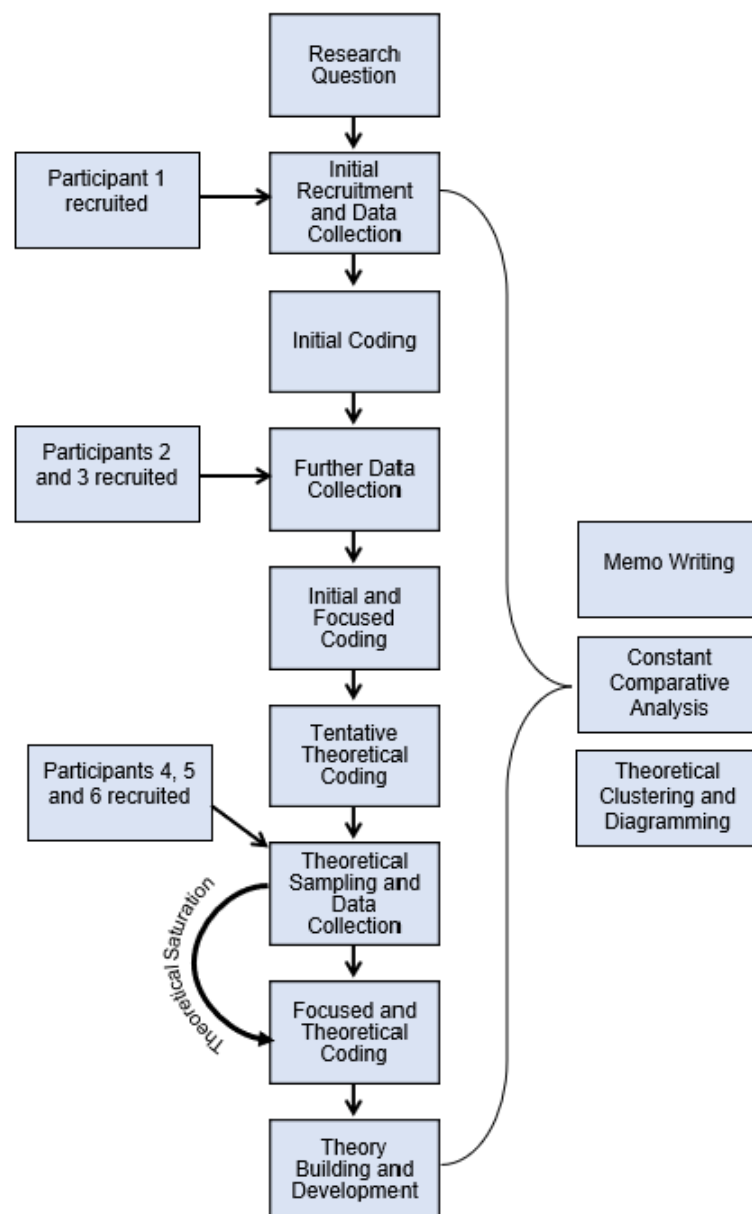
3.3.5 An iterative approach to data collection and analysis

This section will outline the procedures used to collect and analyse data within this study. Compared to alternative qualitative methods, data collection and analysis in constructivist GT studies is iterative in nature (Robson & McCartan, 2016). Rather than following a linear process, data collection and

analysis occur simultaneously: once data is collected, analysis commences. Figure 3.2 provides a visual representation of the comparative constructivist GT approach of Charmaz (2014) adopted in this study.

Figure 3.2

A visual representation of the data collection and analysis procedure adopted in the current constructivist grounded theory study, adapted from Charmaz (2014, p.18).



3.3.5.1 *Semi-structured interviews*

Semi-structured or intensive interviews were used as the data collection method in this research. This approach to interviewing offers a method of collecting rich qualitative information (Braun & Clarke, 2013) within a specific time and context (Charmaz, 2014). As outlined by Charmaz (2014), *“Key characteristics of intensive interviewing include its:*

- *Selection of research participants who have first-hand experience that fits the research topic*
- *In-depth exploration of participants’ experience and situations*
- *Reliance on open-ended questions*
- *Objective of obtaining detailed responses*
- *Emphasis on understanding the research participant’s perspective, meaning and experience*
- *Practice of following up on unanticipated areas of inquiry, hints and implicit views and accounts of actions” (p.56).*

Conducting semi-structured interviews provides a flexibility suited to constructivist GT research because it allows for reciprocal interactions between the researcher and participants (Karpouza & Emvalotis, 2019) and the interview can follow the experiences of the participant through the ordering of the questions (Check & Schutt, 2012). Alternatively, by adopting a structured interviewing method, all topics and discussion points would have been decided in advance, but I thought this method may reduce the breadth of information which participants shared about their experiences.

3.3.5.2 *Interview schedule*

Before data collection commenced, I conducted a mock interview with a TEP colleague to read through my research interview script (see Appendix G) and to practise audio-recording, as agreed through ethical approval. As I was recruiting nationally, it would not have been possible to arrange in-person interviews due to financial and time implications, so I requested feedback from my trainee colleague on her experience of the mock interview on Microsoft Teams. She shared that the set up felt positive. Her experience in addition to acknowledging that participants were likely to choose an environment where

they felt most comfortable to complete the online interview reassured me (Salmon, 2010).

All participants were interviewed individually via Microsoft Teams. Interviews were arranged directly with the participants at a mutually convenient day and time. Reflecting on my professional experiences of NQTs' availability and to avoid prolonged testing, interviews were proposed to take no longer than twenty minutes as outlined in the research poster (see Appendix B) and research information sheet (see Appendix D). However, participants were given the opportunity to share further experiences or comments before ending the interview. As a result, interviews lasted between twenty and thirty-five minutes, with an average duration of twenty-six minutes and eight seconds. This had implications for my ethical responsibility which I noted in my research diary and discussed during research supervision. Through these discussions, the decision to allow interviews to extend beyond the proposed duration was made with participants' explicit consent, ensuring that their autonomy and comfort remained central throughout the process. Therefore, the flexible approach to interview duration was ethically justified, participant-led, and aligned with the study's commitment to reflexive and ethical research practice.

The interview schedule was developed using the characteristics of intensive interviewing (see Section 3.3.5.1). Sample questions were developed following Charmaz's (2014) guidance and were discussed during research supervision. The initial interview schedule (see Appendix H) included purposefully broad, open-ended questions and prompts, which were intended to initiate the direction of the interview, and participants would then take lead of the interview and its subsequent direction (Corbin & Morse, 2003). During the initial interviews, I found this challenging, and I was consciously thinking about my responses in the moment. I was grappling with ensuring I was addressing my research aims and questions whilst also avoiding leading questions or responses and allowing space for the participants to share their individual experiences. On reflection, a piloting phase before data collection to test the semi-structured interview guide's content and structure and adapt the schedule, as required, would have supported the challenges which I faced; however, there would have also been ethical implications to consider, such as

purposive recruitment and whether I would include the pilot data within my analysis.

Intensive interviewing acknowledges the active role of the researcher, so I was able to reflect continuously on my own knowledge and assumptions which I brought to the interview (Charmaz, 2014) and consider why and how I was gathering the data. I included these thoughts as comments in my research diary. I recognised the importance of ensuring my interactions and question style remained unbiased and did not lead or guide participants to share desired information. In addition to noting in my research diary, I discussed successive interview drafts with my research supervisor throughout data collection. Examples of developing interview schedules are presented in Appendix H.

3.3.5.3 Keeping participants safe by minimising harm

Prioritising the safety and wellbeing of the participants in addition to avoiding a position of power imbalance - between myself and the participants - was important in this study. To achieve this, I developed professional relationships with the participants during the interviews by providing an emotionally containing space for participants to share their experiences. In line with the constructivist GT approach, I aimed for an egalitarian, conversational style. Allocating time at the beginning of interviews for rapport building and utilising interpersonal skills (e.g. active listening skills, reflecting and summarising, and empathy) - which I had developed during the Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology Professional Training - throughout all interviews also supported these considerations.

I recognise that the beginning of a teaching career can be extremely demanding as supported by the statistics of those leaving the career in their initial years; therefore, it was possible that participants may share specific experiences which had been or were difficult for them. To account for this, I highlighted to participants that there was no expectation to share topics or answer any questions which participants did not feel comfortable in doing so. Throughout the interviews, I monitored participants' emotional cues and had prepared to respond to these by offering a pause if required. Although some participants shared personal experiences associated with their own or family

members' mental health, no participants appeared to display signs of emotional distress. Despite this, I encouraged participants to access support from colleagues and signposted them to relevant support services during debriefing to minimise the possibility of any emotional harm.

Additionally, due to the nature of this thesis topic exploring CYP's SEMH needs, it was possible that safeguarding concerns might arise during the interviews. To prepare for this possibility, within the research information sheet (see Appendix D) and when reading the research interview script (see Appendix H), I made it clear that if a disclosure suggesting that a participant or other individual were at risk of harm, I would follow appropriate safeguarding procedures. One participant disclosed about using physical intervention but not having received appropriate training; therefore, during their debrief, we agreed appropriate next steps to safeguard them and the young people. No other safeguarding concerns were raised.

3.3.5.4 Right to withdraw and debriefing procedures

All participants were informed of their right to withdraw their data. Due to the nature of this constructivist GT study and the time constraints of a doctoral thesis research project, I decided to assert that participants could withdraw their data up to one week (seven days) following their interview. After this time, data would have been anonymised and may have been analysed. This was outlined in the research information sheet, consent form and debrief letter (outlined in Appendices D, E, and I). My contact details for participants to withdraw their data was included in these documents. During the interview debriefing, all participants were assured that they could contact me regarding any queries or concerns before or following their withdrawal date. No participants exercised their right to withdraw their data.

Debrief procedures were followed at the end of participants' interviews using the interview schedule script (see Appendix G) and a personalised debrief letter (see Appendix I) which were also emailed to participants. At this time, a further opportunity for participants to ask any questions or make any comments was given. Participants were reminded of their right to withdraw their data up until the specified date when transcription and analysis of the data

was likely to be completed. I also confirmed with participants who were happy to be contacted for a follow up interview (if required) and participants who would like to receive a research summary sheet following completion of the study. All participants consented to their contact details being kept securely for a potential follow-up interview until a set date and five out of six participants requested a research summary sheet.

3.3.5.5 Recording and transcribing interviews

Interviews were recorded digitally using an audio recording device. As noted above, constructivist GT adopts an iterative approach to data collection. Therefore, following an interview, I would listen to the audio recording and manually transcribe it into text format before completing an initial coding phase (see Section 3.3.5.6). I used non-verbatim secretarial transcription including ellipsis, to highlight significant pauses, and parenthesis, to note additional verbal and non-verbal communication (e.g., laughing or nodding). Although verbatim transcription can be useful to provide context and non-speech sounds (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Corden, 2007), in line with constructivist GT purposes, it was deemed unnecessary for this study.

Although time consuming, my decision to complete the transcription process myself manually was to ensure confidentiality of the participants and familiarise myself with the data early to avoid missing out on any emerging developments. As it is often described as an element of the analytic phase of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), transcribing the interviews myself enabled me to note down initial thoughts as memos (see Section 3.3.5.9) including possible codes, categories, and questions to be explored in further interviews.

3.3.5.6 Initial coding of the data

As suggested for novice GT researchers, I initially engaged in a line-by-line coding process assigning codes to each line of the data (as per Charmaz, 2014). This enabled me to interact closely with the data in a thorough and systematic manner whilst also avoiding focusing my analysis too early. I allowed some flexibility in this process, where it was appropriate, by assigning multiple codes to one line to ensure that I did not overlook potential

themes and remained open to all possible theoretical directions (Charmaz, 2014).

To keep initial coding “*simple, direct and spontaneous*” (Charmaz, 2014, p.113), coding was completed by hand as I felt more competent using this method compared to computer software. Advised to move quickly to protect against forcing data to fit codes (Charmaz, 2014), lines of text did not always lead to initial codes at first glance, so I made a note and returned to them later. Furthermore, I acknowledged that initial codes were not fixed. Instead, codes were provisional and could be amended. Then, when returning to the data with a fresh perspective new insight was revealed (Charmaz, 2014).

To identify codes that were succinct and remained close to the data, I used gerunds transforming noun-based or descriptive phrases into verb-based forms, where appropriate (e.g., ‘*do fall within the category of having SEMH*’ became ‘CYP falling into the SEMH category,’ and ‘*I can communicate with parents*’ became ‘communicating with parents’). This approach to coding considers and explores actions which are occurring rather than only highlighting theoretical or abstract topics and themes (Charmaz, 2006; 2014). In-vivo codes directly quoting participants’ voices were also assigned for some lines (e.g., ‘*Nice to have that relationship*’ and ‘*If we were in a perfect world*’) to emphasise the participants’ individual voices and experiences. This also reduced the possibility of becoming preoccupied with answering the research question and placing existing theory on the data (Willig, 2013). An interview extract illustrating the line-by-line coding process is provided in Appendix J.

Although codes were not synthesised during the initial coding stage, similar ideas emerged naturally, so I started to bring early ideas together to identify gaps and potential lines of enquiry to inform the focus of subsequent interviews. Engaging in memo writing (see Section 3.3.5.9) throughout this process enabled me to note these emerging ideas and overlapping codes but avoided moving to analytical thinking too early in my analysis. Furthermore, memo writing supported my reflexivity as the researcher by self-questioning my prior experiences and how these may have impacted the codes which were

selected. I also took several extracts of data with my initial codes to supervision. My supervisor agreed with my coding of the examined sections.

3.3.5.7 Engaging in comparative analysis

During the initial coding, I compared the data to itself and, as more data was collected, with other transcripts. This process of ongoing iterative analysis is referred to as comparative analysis or constant comparative analysis (Charmaz, 2014) and, as noted previously, is a core component of GT approaches. Through constant comparative analysis, I interpreted the individual ECTs' voices whilst also highlighting potential exceptions and diversity between their experiences. Comparing similarities and differences helped to refine the wealth of initial codes to consider what the data was really saying. Comparative analysis continued through all stages of the constructivist GT process until a grounded theory was conceptualised.

3.3.5.8 Advancing analysis: Focused and theoretical coding

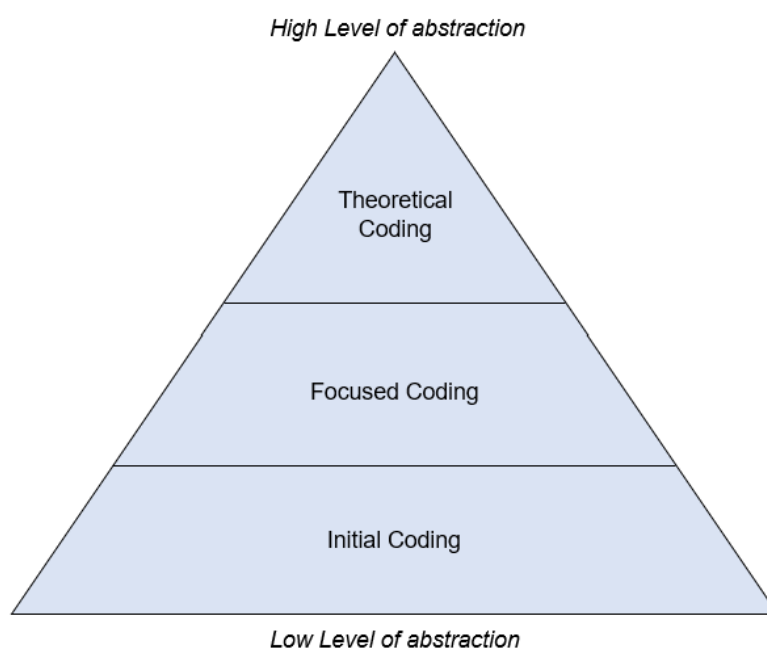
Through detailed line-by-line coding of interviews one, two and three, I had accumulated a substantial number of initial codes. To support the organisation of these codes, I used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet initially (see Appendix K). This next step of analysis involved sifting and sorting the initial codes to synthesise them into focused codes. To do this, I filtered the initial codes which were occurring more frequently or appeared to have more significance associated to my research question. As Charmaz (2014) states, this stage, "*Condenses and sharpens what you have already done as it highlights what you find to be important*" (p.138). Appendix L presents an example of focused coding for the interview extract used in Appendix J.

During focused coding, I referred to my memos where I had noted my initial thoughts and ideas during transcription and initial coding. I continued engaging in constant comparative analysis by re-examining larger sections of the data to consider how it fit with the developed focused codes. Likened to the initial coding process, I adopted a flexible approach to focused coding, and where focused codes did not account for the data, I considered whether new alternatives were required. By doing this, it shifted analysis to a more abstract level of interpretation towards theoretical coding. Figure 3.3 presents a visual

representation of the three levels of coding and the increasing levels of abstraction within the stages of my analysis.

Figure 3.3

A visual representation of the data analysis stages and increasing levels of abstraction within this constructivist GT study displayed in ascending order (adapted from Charmaz, 2014 & Lewinson et al., 2018).



Alongside memo writing, clustering and diagramming (see Section 3.3.5.10) also occurred throughout this stage of analysis to ensure researcher reflexivity. This generated additional questions and reflections about the impact of my previous experiences and my decision-making during this stage. I discussed these with colleagues, who did not have teaching experience, to challenge my beliefs and potential assumptions and add a critical perspective. This also allowed me to step back from the data for a few days before returning to clarify if my focused codes represented what was happening in the data.

Through discussion with colleagues who had completed GT studies, they suggested, from their experience, using a qualitative computer software. Therefore, I transferred the transcripts and focused codes to NVivo. I

considered what analytic story the focused codes were revealing. This moved the direction of analysis to a conceptual representation of the data as it was capturing what was happening (Thornberg, 2012) and showing the relationships between focused codes (Charmaz, 2014). Reviewing the analytical strength of the focused codes, those with higher weight were treated as tentative categories, but flexibility remained to allow for any emergent concepts when comparing with new data during theoretical sampling (see Section 3.3.5.12) to ensure the categories accurately represented all the data. In line with Charmaz's (2014) notion of, '*Theoretical playfulness*' (p.71), I embraced the creative freedom to explore patterns, test ideas, and let the theory take shape through curiosity and conceptual experimentation. A table of the conceptual categories encapsulating the focused codes before and after analysis is provided in Appendix M.

3.3.5.9 *The use of memo writing*

As a key aspect of GT methodology (Birks & Mills, 2015), memo writing supports the iterative process of analysis and overall research process. Varying in form, written memos are typically informal to aid flexibility and continuous engagement with the data. They can be short notes about coding to explore conceptual links and relationships in the data or longer, detailed reflections associated with the overall research process helping researchers to reflect on their beliefs and assumptions. By allowing reflexivity and relationality between the data and analysis, memo writing is considered to enhance the rigour and quality of a constructivist GT study (Hall & Callery, 2001).

Within this study, some memos were quickly captured in handwritten form on paper - typically during active coding - while others were typed as more reflective memos. All memos were stored in either paper or electronic formats to allow for easy revisiting. Unlike the research diary, memos served to deepen my understanding by enabling me to capture initial theoretical thoughts and ideas without committing to them. Memo writing supported my engagement in constant comparative analysis and facilitated the development of categories and theoretical concepts at increasing levels of abstraction. Ultimately, memo writing enhanced transparency in my role as a researcher, enriched my

analytical engagement, and contributed to the development of a grounded theory. Figure 3.4 provides an example of a memo, with additional examples presented in Appendix N.

Figure 3.4

Illustrative memo capturing early analytical thinking during focused coding.

Memo: Reflecting on the term, ‘SEMH’ before data collection

As I prepare to begin data collection, I find it important to pause and reflect on the term – SEMH. It is widely used in educational contexts, particularly in the UK, to describe a broad spectrum of needs that affect a young person’s ability to engage with learning and social environments.

At this stage, I am approaching SEMH as a working term. Given the exploratory nature of this study, I am not seeking to define SEMH in fixed terms. Instead, I aim to explore how it is understood and experienced by the ECTs. I am interested in how the term is used in practice, what assumptions underpin it, and how it shapes responses and interactions in school settings.

I’m also conscious that the research information sheet stated that the study seeks to understand ECTs’ views of SEMH language and terminology, and ECTs’ views and experiences of CYP’s behaviour. While I included this to ensure transparency and uphold ethical standards, I now find myself reflecting on how this framing might influence the accounts ECTs choose to share.

3.3.5.10 Theoretical clustering and diagramming

Used in constructivist GT studies, clustering and diagramming are strategies to record, visualise, and explore relationships in the data during analysis (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, I used clustering (initially on Post-it notes) to organise the focused codes by adding, removing, and rearranging them. It is possible to use NVivo for clustering, but I was more reassured having concrete pieces of paper to move initially. Furthermore, I was able to

present them on my wall and refer to them more frequently than I would have on a computer, which allowed me to be more actively engaged in my analysis. I did, however, refer to NVivo to ensure focused codes were not missed and they continued to reflect the dataset. Appendix O presents photographs of clustering.

During clustering, I also employed the flexible, visual approach of diagramming (by hand and using Microsoft PowerPoint) to clarify relationships between codes and the theoretical significance of my emerging ideas, aiding the generation of the conceptual categories. This supported recognition of the direction of my analysis. As the analysis moved to higher levels of abstraction, my diagrams became more coherent and represented the entirety of the data. Examples of diagrams which evolved as analysis progressed are presented in Appendix O.

3.3.5.11 Developing theoretical sensitivity

Throughout this study, I engaged with the concept of theoretical sensitivity as a guiding principle in the development of grounded theory. Theoretical sensitivity refers to the researcher's ability to recognise significant elements in the data and to interpret them meaningfully within the emerging theoretical framework (Charmaz, 2014). From the outset, I was aware that my prior experience could both enrich and potentially bias my interpretations. To manage this, my research diary served as a space to critically examine how my assumptions and professional background might be shaping the analytic process. I also engaged in constant comparison and iterative memo-writing to ensure that emerging categories were grounded in participants' narratives rather than preconceived ideas. This process helped me remain open to unexpected insights and supported the development of a theory that was both analytically robust and closely aligned with the lived experiences of participants. These practices and their influence on the analysis will be further illustrated in subsequent chapters.

3.3.5.12 Theoretical sampling and reaching theoretical saturation

The aim of GT studies is to reach theoretical saturation (Foley et al., 2021), where no new theoretical ideas emerge in the previously collected data

or when gathering new data through theoretical sampling. It is important to note that theoretical data saturation is not just recognising the repetition of similar patterns, events, or stories, but, as Glaser (2001) proposes: *'It is the conceptualisation of comparisons of these incidents which yield different properties of the pattern, until no new properties of the pattern emerge. This yields the conceptual density that when integrated into hypotheses make up the body of the generated grounded theory with theoretical completeness'* (Glaser, 2001, p.191). Following Charmaz's guidance (2014, p.214), I considered the questions below to consider whether my categories were theoretically saturated:

- *"Which comparisons do you make between data within and between categories?"*
- *What sense do you make of these comparisons?*
- *Where do they lead you?*
- *How do your comparisons illuminate your theoretical categories?*
- *In what other directions, if any, do they take you?*
- *What new conceptual relationships, if any, might you see?"*

Reflecting on these questions, I initially acknowledged the patterns in the data which had led me to the categories. However, to reach theoretical saturation, I established an abstract level of analysis by handling the categories theoretically. Details of the findings from my analysis will be discussed in subsequent chapters.

As previously indicated, theoretical sampling is a technique within GT methods which enables researchers to collect further data, based on their analysis, to clarify and explore their emerging theoretical ideas (Foley et al., 2021). It could be argued that this study followed Birks & Mills' (2015) approach to theoretical sampling as emerging concepts gathered through analysis of the first two interviews were noted as memos and considered in the subsequent interview. Recruitment and data collection of the third interview followed the same procedures presented in Section 3.3.4, and the data was analysed as outlined in Section 3.3.5. A comparative approach was also maintained,

revisiting, and comparing the initial coding and transcripts from the first two interviews.

At this point, I had collected a substantial amount of data, and initial codes, to start focused coding (see Section 3.3.5.8). Following this process, identifying the most significant and frequent focused codes led to a fourth interview schedule to gain clarity on the relationships between focused codes. Previous data collection and analysis procedures were replicated for interview four. Alongside revisiting my memos, I used clustering and diagramming (see Section 3.3.5.10) to reach a higher level of abstraction when analysing interview four. This process filtered focused codes into tentative categories; however, I recognised the requirement to seek further data through theoretical sampling to saturate tentative categories within the data to enable the grounded theory to take shape.

Experiences and ideas associated with labelling, categorising, or diagnosing CYP's needs were prevalent in all four interviews and appeared to be a significant focus in the participants' teacher training. In addition, all participants shared experiences of not feeling fully prepared to meet CYP's SEMH needs following their training. Therefore, in interview five, I explored these areas explicitly (see Appendix H) by clarifying the participant's views of their role with SEND, particularly with diagnoses, and asked how they thought their training, and the ECF, prepared them for supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Engaging in explicit theoretical sampling at this stage helped minimise the risk of ending data collection too early and ensured my findings were robust and well-supported.

As all participants up to this point had prior study and/or professional experiences related to psychology of education or mental health, it was appropriate to recruit an ECT whose background was more distanced from these areas. This decision aimed to explore potential similarities and differences in experiences and consider the robustness of the identified categories. The semi-structured interview was adapted to include relevant prompts to support this exploration (see Appendix H), though it continued to serve only as a flexible guide allowing the conversation to flow naturally.

Recruitment, data collection and analysis of the sixth interview followed the same procedures as earlier interviews. I remained open and responsive to emerging concepts ensuring that the evolving categories accurately reflected the full dataset. The process of refinement continued, and during this interview, a new idea related to the expectations placed on ECTs within multi-academy trusts (MAT) emerged. Figure 3.5 presents two memos written at this stage of the research process, capturing my reflections on this emerging concept and its potential implications for the developing analysis.

Figure 3.5

Example of memo writing at key stages of the research process. The first memo documents the insight gained from the theoretical sampling of participant six. The second memo captures the decision-making process around data collection following a supervisory discussion that confirmed theoretical saturation.

Memo: Theoretical sampling of participant six

I have intentionally recruited an ECT without a background in psychology or mental health. I made this choice to test the strength of the emerging categories and to see whether different experiences might surface. During the interview, a new idea began to take shape around the expectations placed on ECTs within MATs. The participant's reflections suggested that these institutional pressures could significantly influence how ECTs develop their professional identity and the impact it has on their confidence. I need to reconsider and refine my analytical framework and think more critically about how MAT structures might be shaping ECT experiences across the dataset. I am uncertain about whether to continue recruiting more participants or return to previous participants. I will discuss this in supervision.

Memo: Reaching theoretical saturation

I reflected on my uncertainty and the tension between wanting to deepen

the analysis and recognising the practical constraints of a doctoral project during research supervision. My research supervisor agreed that - given the focus of the research, the scope of a doctoral thesis, and the word count limitations - it was appropriate to conclude data collection at this stage. We discussed where the idea of MAT structures fits within the categories and focused codes to ensure it was captured. This decision will allow me to shift fully into analysis, confident that the six interviews provide a rich and varied foundation for the study's aims.

Following discussions with my research supervisor, I concluded that the expectations placed on ECTs within MATs could be refined within the focused code, 'Systemic pressures and challenges.' Therefore, while interview six impacted previously identified categories, there were no further categories identified, so data saturation was reached, and a narrative could be told following six participants.

3.4 Chapter Summary

Specific details of the design and procedures have been presented in this chapter. Research quality considerations were introduced, alongside a discussion of the key ethical principles relevant to this study. The chapter outlined the ontological and epistemological positioning underpinning the research and justified the use of constructivist GT as the chosen methodology for data collection and analysis. The next chapter will present the findings that emerged through this process.

Chapter 4. Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the findings which emerged following the analytic process described in Chapter 3. The findings are grounded in the experiences of six participants gathered through semi-structured interviews conducted during purposive and theoretical sampling. The use of constant comparative analysis and memo writing enabled the development of higher-level conceptual insights, enhancing the analytic depth and relevance of the findings in relation to the study's research question:

1) What are ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs?

Eight conceptual categories, summarised in Table 4.1, will be presented and examined. These categories will be revisited in Chapter 5, where they are discussed alongside relevant literature to inform the development of this study's grounded theory.

Table 4.1

The eight conceptual categories developed through the constructivist grounded theory analysis conducted in this study.

Category Number	Conceptual Category
1	Recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH
2	Identifying, categorising and labelling
3	Responding to children and young people's individual needs
4	The importance of relationships and support systems
5	<i>'Pulled in many different directions'</i> (In vivo code)
6	Learning is continuous
7	Building personal resilience
8	Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice

Each conceptual category will describe the focused codes from which it was developed. Appendix M presents a table of the conceptual categories

encapsulating the focused codes before and after analysis. Direct quotations from transcripts will be used to illustrate a rich picture of each conceptual category. As mentioned in Section 3.3.4.6, to protect participants' anonymity, full transcripts are not included, and each participant was assigned a number (e.g., P1, P2, etc) based on the order of their interviews.

Although eight distinct categories are presented, constructivist GT acknowledges that these categories should be considered collectively when addressing the research question. The iterative process reveals the interconnections between the data and categories, highlighting that they are not isolated (Charmaz, 2014). Therefore, while each category offers a distinct interpretation of the ECTs' reported experiences and views, they should be viewed as interlinked parts of a whole. Adopting this holistic perspective ensures a comprehensive understanding of the research question and captures the complexity and nuance of the ECTs' experiences and perspectives. Consequently, reference to other conceptual categories and focused codes, where appropriate, will be made to aid the interpretation of the findings.

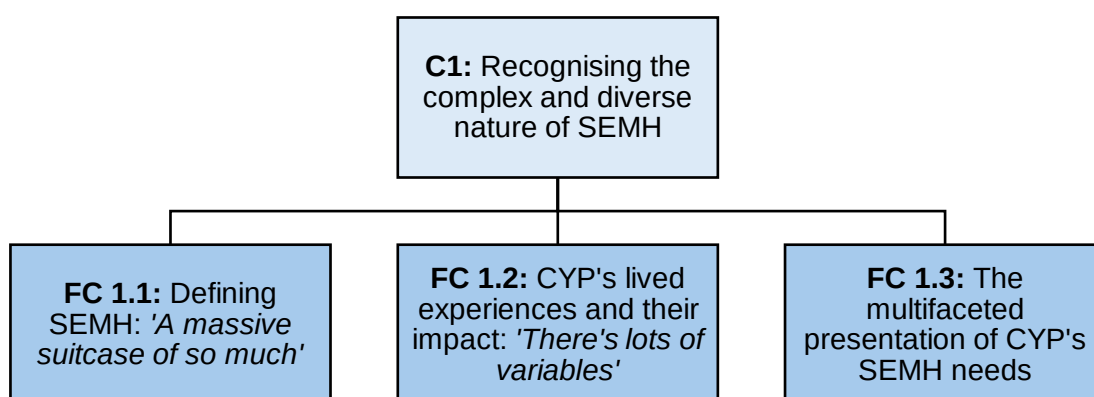
Reflexive commentary: Navigating analytical complexity

As the analysis progressed, I found myself reflecting on the challenge of managing a large number of categories without losing coherence. While I was excited by the richness of the data, I was also aware of the risk of overextending the analysis or drawing connections that were not grounded in participants' narratives. To navigate this, I used my research diary as a space for critical reflection, examining how my assumptions and prior experiences might be shaping the way I grouped and interpreted codes. I asked myself whether I was privileging certain categories because they aligned with my expectations or professional background. This reflexive practice helped me remain grounded in the data and guided my decisions about which categories to refine, collapse, or retain. It also reminded me that theoretical sensitivity is not just about insight: it is about staying open to what the data is truly saying.

4.2 Category 1: Recognising the complex and diverse nature of social, emotional and mental health

The first category reflects participants' understanding and views of SEMH, their recognition of the complexity of defining the term and the extensive range of lived experiences and the diverse presentation in CYP. Figure 4.1 illustrates a visual representation of Category 1 and the three focused codes which contributed to its development.

Figure 4.1



A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 1 (C1).

4.2.1 Focused Code 1.1: Defining social, emotional and mental health: 'A massive suitcase of so much'

To determine participants' views of the term, 'SEMH,' they were asked: 'What does SEMH mean to you?' Some participants expanded the abbreviation, noting, 'Social, emotional and mental health,' while also considering the whole individual and emphasising the term's holistic viewpoint, as shown in the following excerpts:

So, social, emotional mental health. So, looking at someone as a whole, their whole wellbeing both physical, emotional and mental. (P3, p.1, 2-5)

I guess it's a holistic kind of view on the emotional, spiritual, physical, mental well-being of a person. So how they feel about themselves, how they feel about the world around them (...) (P4, p.1, 3-12)

Three participants highlighted the descriptive nature of SEMH and how it encompasses a range of aspects:

So, I mean, I think the name is quite descriptive. (P5, p.1, 3-4)

A big umbrella of a lot of different things put under it (...) it can actually feel like a massive suitcase of so much, so many different things (...) And even that definition, I was just like goodness to me that's that is a big it's a very wordy definition I think, which can be quite daunting. (P3, p.2-3, 93-110)

Yeah, it's quite a heavy question on a Friday afternoon (laughing). (P4, p.1, 13-15)

The idea of “a big umbrella” and “a massive suitcase” suggests that there is a lot to unpack and understand. Participants seem to share a common theme of feeling overwhelmed by the complexity and breadth of the term.

4.2.2 Focused Code 1.2: Children and young people's lived experiences and their impact: 'There's lots of variables'

This focused code is a partial in vivo code from participant 1 highlighting the ECTs' views that CYP's lived experiences contribute and impact upon them. Participants noted that social and emotional factors can occur from birth, throughout childhood and adolescence, and into adulthood, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

(...) there's been something that has happened in (...) a child or in adult's life really that has had a significant effect on how they function day-to-day. (P6, p. 1, 2-6)

That could be from very early like infancy, obviously right through to recent (...) That maybe have stemmed from early life from being a baby

or toddlers, but there are also some that have had things that have happened more recently that just make that just general day-to-day stuff more difficult. (P6, p.1, 8-19)

Participant 1 also discussed the presence of diagnosed and undiagnosed difficulties, offering insight into the complex interplay between trauma, mental health, and lived experience:

The social impacts or emotional impacts that a young person or adult could be experiencing due to perceived or experienced trauma, and it could be linked with mental health issues that are (...) not diagnosed or diagnosed and it could be to do with (...) lived experiences or chemical imbalances in the brain. (Participant 1, p.1, 10-19)

Participants noted that multiple interacting factors associated with CYP's lived experiences contribute to SEMH development rather than one isolated cause. Examples of these influencing factors, shared by participants, included family dynamics, bereavement, socioeconomic factors, school environment, community influences, social media, the Coronavirus pandemic and experienced trauma. Further excerpts of data coded under this focused code demonstrating the range of CYP's lived experiences and the impact noted by the participants are illustrated below:

(...) just knowing how many different variables that could go into a student experiencing something they're going through at the time. (...) it could be an unlimited amount of variables (...) actually knowing there might not be one single thing, there's lots of variables that go into. (P1, p.8-9, 395-414)

I've (...) got one girl who's lost her mother (...) a boy who's lost his father and his stepfather. There's children who have got parents who may be dabbling in drugs. Or actually dealing drugs... they're quite significant ACEs really. Traumas that these children have gone through. So yeah, bereavement, grief. drugs. A lot of parents haven't got employment. So yeah, that there's a whole gamut of various things (...) there's split families (...) Oh, there's siblings as well, (...) talking about suicide and things like that. (...) these children witness so much

at home. And that's before they get to school and then have to deal with the pressures of (...) learning and friendships and things. But yeah, it's really varied actually. (P2, p. 9, 405-429)

My class (...) just had a supply teacher all year because the teacher that they had to start with just left. Then obviously they had COVID throughout that time, (...) so they've had a hard go around my class really. (P6, p.2-3, 99-106)

(...) there had been a little bit of gang affiliation with his brother. They were kind of looking into that and it does it has a huge impact on their school life and life in the classroom (...) (P6, p.10, 483-491)

These perspectives acknowledge that not only are early childhood experiences a contributory factor, but also ongoing experiences, reiterating that 'There's lots of variables.'

4.2.3 Focused Code 1.3: The multifaceted presentation of children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs

Participants shared various observations and examples recognising that SEMH needs manifest in different ways further reiterating the diverse and complex nature of SEMH. Linking closely to the previous code, Focused Code 1.3 highlights participants' experiences of the multifaceted presentation of CYP's SEMH needs. Presenting needs were typically described by participants with reference to observed behaviours as illustrated in the following excerpts:

(...) became very withdrawn. Antisocial. I noticed some self-harming marks. (P1, p.6, 256-262)

(...) the cohort that I've got are very needy of me (...) have a lot of children who check in regularly throughout the day, whether it's just for a hug or (...) (P2, p.3, 105-113)

I have a little girl in my class who (...) would not sit down. Very restless. Very minimal language just didn't really engage (...) struggling to come in. Very, very emotional. Lots of sort of tears every day. (P3, p.10-11, 495 - 511)

(...) we've had completely trashed classrooms, chairs thrown. I ended up with some punches and bruises (...) A lot of screaming running out of the school building (...) this year are that sort of refusals to enter the classroom or hiding themselves away if they're feeling really overwhelmed or anxious (...) so, it's kind of on two different ends of behaviour presentation. (P5, p. 8, 314-355)

Some participants also shared their experiences of noticing CYP's presenting needs and behaviours changing following lived experiences (linked to Focused Code 1.2).

I've seen students that are so good (...) then suddenly something happens at home and the behaviour is a lot more argumentative and, you know, ready for a fight. (P4, p.4, 172-177)

(...) then the behaviour might present in a slightly different way or there might be a triggering event that changes the child's attitude or reaction to something (...) (P5, p.2, 59-69)

There's one girl (...) she wasn't on anybody's radar (...) She wasn't on the SEMH tracker. She's got no SEN needs. Behaviour wasn't an issue. She was age-related across the board, but because of recent events in her home life, that's taken a massive dip. And actually, she's probably got the worst behaviour in the class now. (P6, p.9, 405-415)

One participant spoke about the children's ability to manage their own behaviour.

(...) there's only maybe three children in the class now that still struggle with not being able to rein in their behaviour (...) (P6, p.7, 327- 332)

The following quotation references one participant's experiences of how CYP's needs present through impacted skill development:

(...) struggled with emotional regulation, social understanding. Well, understanding social rules (...) And really just being able to recognise how to respond to any emotion (...) (P5, p.6-7, 293-306)

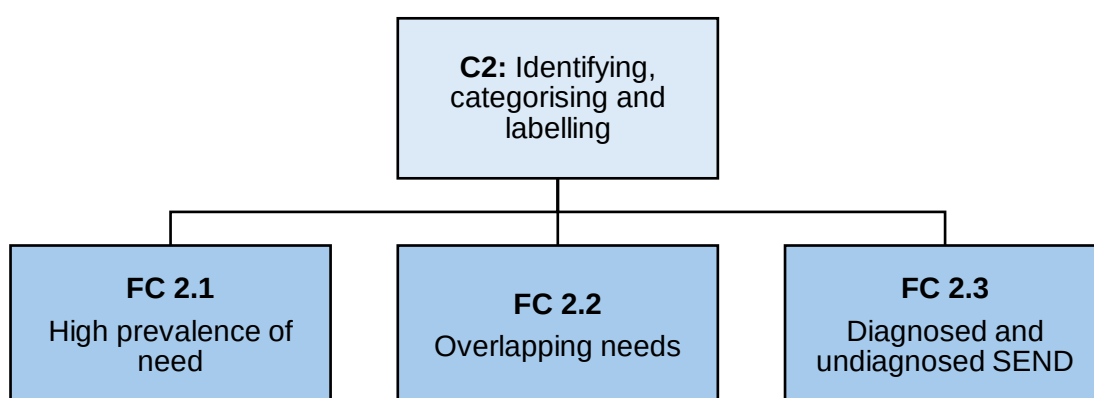
With only one participant mentioning this, it suggests that behaviour is likely to be a focus with how SEMH needs are observed, and the presentation of skill development might be less commonly considered by ECTs.

4.3 Category 2: Identifying, categorising and labelling

The identification, categorisation and labelling of needs emerged as a consistent narrative across interviews highlighting its significance in the experiences of ECTs. Figure 4.2 presents Category 2 alongside the focused codes that contributed to its development.

Figure 4.2

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 2 (C2).



4.3.1 Focused Code 2.1: High prevalence of need

The first focused code within this category refers to the high prevalence of need described by the participants. All participants discussed CYP who they or their colleagues had identified as having specific needs, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

(...) there's so many students that (...) fall within the category of having SEMH (P1, p.4, 157-160)

(...) I wrote out a sort of a profile of my class (...) I actually listed about 20 of them out of 25 (P2, p.8, 383-390)

(...) there are 11 children in my class that have been identified by the SENCO as needing to be on the SEMH tracker. (P6, p. 6, 274-278)

(...) there's nine children in my class that have all got. They're all on the SEND register, so they've all got what we call one-page profiles within the trust. (P6, p.14, 668-672)

Furthermore, the increasing occurrence of presenting SEMH needs and SEND was emphasised by participants, as illustrated below:

(...) I think it was 40% SEMH students, which is quite a percentage for a typical, you know, school. (P1, p.5-6, 248-250)

(...) there's been a big rise, hasn't there over the last few years so I think (...) it's quite significant within teaching, definitely for me (P2, p.1, 23-28)

(...) SEND just seem to be getting even more prevalent and SEMH needs just seem to be growing. (P5, p.11, 512-516)

These shared experiences indicate the widespread and growing nature of SEMH needs in schools.

4.3.2 Focused Code 2.2: Overlapping Needs

The next focused code within Category 2 reflects participants' discussions about their experiences of labelling CYP's needs. Some participants appeared to consider SEMH needs as a separate entity to SEND, whereas others commented on SEMH needs being a branch of SEND. One participant spoke about how labelling or categorising CYP can be useful for identifying suitable interventions and support based on research, while another ECT spoke about CYP fitting into a category and the difficulty of knowing how to support them individually. Participants also noted challenges of categorising CYP where categories or labels did not fully reflect their needs. These experiences are reflected in the following excerpts:

(...) particularly those with either SEND or SEMH needs. (P6, p.15, 738-740)

(...) they kind of fall into a group and it's really, really difficult to know what's the best way to support them on a really individual basis. (P1, p.4, 160-165)

(...) we are trying to decide a defining label for this, we're trying to put a name to what we're seeing, which obviously for us is helpful in terms of then looking at direct intervention or things that have been researched and found to be really supportive for people that are also in that category or that label. But that doesn't always work for a child who then might also be under the SEMH branch of the SEND register but actually is also showing things in C and I or all the different areas too. (P5, p.1, 32-46)

From the participants' shared experiences, categorising SEND does not appear to be a linear process as CYP often present with overlapping needs highlighted in these further excerpts:

(...) there was a lot of students who were struggling that didn't fit under a category or hadn't moved through to get this kind of label as such (P1, p.5, 251-255)

(...) the children I've got in my class that are categorised as this and I'm conscious that it is a category or a label that we're applying to that, but they really do show very much an overlap between all of the areas of need there. (P5, p.1, 7-14)

The ECTs' experiences reveal shared challenges and there appears to be a lack of clarity regarding their role as an ECT in identifying SEND and SEMH needs.

4.3.3 Focused Code 2.3: Diagnosed and undiagnosed special educational needs and disabilities

The final focused code for this category reflects participants' discussions around diagnosed and undiagnosed SEND. All participants commented on CYP who they support and teach who have diagnoses. For example:

(...) there's children with diagnoses of sort of autism, ADHD. I've got ... global learning difficulties, so there's SEND in there as well (...) (P2, p. 9, 429-434)

In addition to working with CYP who already had received formal diagnoses, three out of six participants identified CYP in their classes as potentially having diagnosable SEND, as demonstrated in the following excerpts:

So, every class has a quite a few that could quite easily be diagnosed with something (...) I have a couple of children in my class that quite clearly have some tendencies of ADHD (...) (P3, p.6, 288-297)

(...) or is this actually a different area of need like autism or something like that, that we're actually seeing come through. I've got a little boy who's SEMH, but we are 99% sure he's and he's currently under support for diagnosing ADHD (...) (P5, p.2, 74-86)

Participants appear to actively identify potential indicators of SEND. This illustrates their observational awareness but also highlights a broader issue surrounding their role in identifying need. Without appropriate training or the qualifications to formally diagnose, participants appear to rely on informal judgements. Furthermore, one participant elaborated on how, following the identification of a young person's diagnoses, they were able to collaborate with the SEND team to implement tailored support strategies:

It was linked to basically an undiagnosed autism or ADHD. She was neurodivergent but hadn't been diagnosed and this was furthermore causing really, like, dire mental health issues for her (...) emergency urgent referral for her to go for a diagnosis of some sorts, and it came back that she had. She was on the autism spectrum, and she also had generalised anxiety and depression (...) With that diagnosis, I then worked with the SEND team to get her counselling every day and also these different access arrangements. So, a time out card and headphones like noise defenders and things like that. (P1, p.6, 264-309)

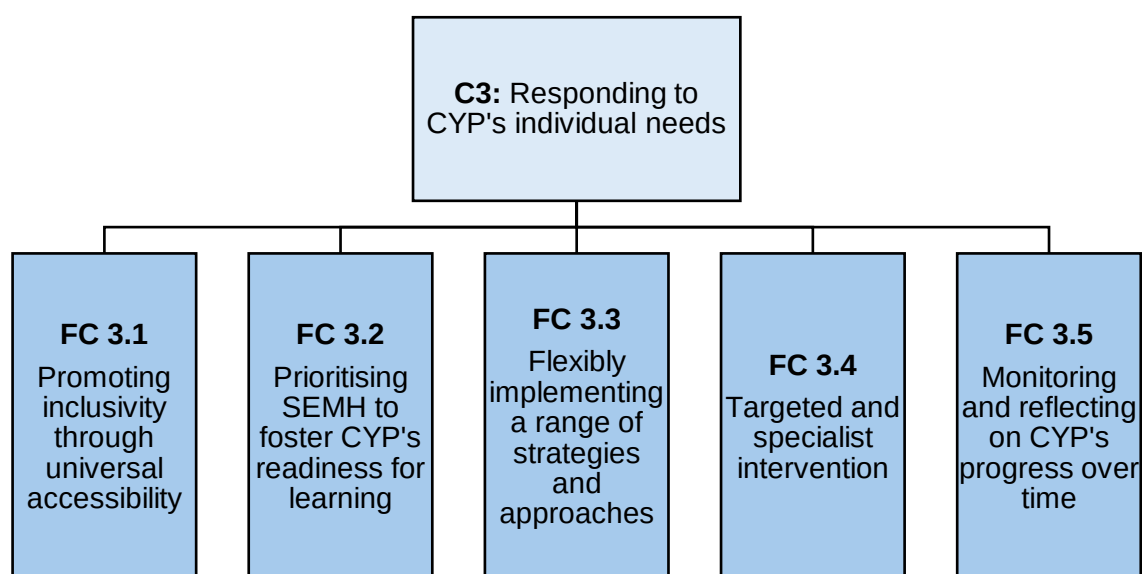
This participants' language conveys concern and urgency with supporting a referral for the young person to receive a diagnosis. Additionally, the phrase, 'With that diagnosis, I then worked with the SEND team to get her counselling...' appears to suggest that the participant thought that the diagnosis was critical in unlocking access to the counselling intervention. ECTs' discussions about diagnoses further highlights a lack of clarity and uncertainty around their role with identifying and supporting SEND.

4.4 Category 3: Responding to children and young people's individual needs

All participants acknowledged that CYP are unique and have varying needs; therefore, the third constructed category refers to ECTs' experiences responding to CYP's individual needs and is comprised of five focused codes illustrated in Figure 4.3.

Figure 4.3

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 3 (C3).



4.4.1 Focused Code 3.1: Promoting inclusivity through universal accessibility

The first focused code of this category refers to participants recognising that all students, regardless of their needs, should have equal opportunities to access their learning. Participants noted adjustments they make to accommodate the unique needs of CYP and how they strive to make the learning environment inclusive, universally safe, and accessible, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

I will speak to the SEND team to say I've noticed this. Can we work together to make sure that the student has the equal and same access to the learning as everyone else in the room that isn't experiencing the same things as they are. (P1, pg. 2, 75-82)

I think it gives them a space that they feel safe to talk about it with other children (...) it's nice to be able to foster that in a safe environment where all children feel that they can participate. (P3, p1-2, 33-45)

And we need to make sure that they don't feel isolated, don't feel like they're not like everybody else and that. (P4, p. 10, 463-466)

So, we're very much just trying to make it as universally safe and accessible for all the different areas of need we're seeing. So that hopefully regardless of which label we're trying to categorise them into, we're still meeting all the potential needs. (P5, p.3, 130-137)

Me and SLT identified probably in the autumn term, that there were certain children that it just wasn't working for (...) So, there's just different reasonable adjustments that as a class, school, trust that we put in place just to make sure those children have got something slightly different. (P6, p.6 251-266)

Most of these excerpts also highlight working with colleagues to enable this inclusivity linking to Focused Code 4.3.

4.4.2 Focused Code 3.2: Prioritising social, emotional and mental health to foster children and young people's readiness for learning

Focused Code 3.2 captures participants' recognition of the importance of prioritising CYP's social and emotional needs as a foundation for learning. This reflects an understanding that readiness to learn is closely linked to emotional wellbeing, and that addressing these needs is not separate from, but integral to, effective classroom practice.

Before you can start anything (...) I've definitely becoming a teacher, have realised (...) I'm supposed to be teaching this, but (...) I might have to just stop and do a whole circle time or. Yeah. Deal with that sort of social, emotional side of things first. (P2, p.3, 129-138)

(...) I have a lot of children (...), who really struggle in the mornings to come in, so our sort of start to the day is delayed because that becomes a lot more about helping them to feel ready in the classroom and accept the fact that they're going to be in a classroom for the day. (P5, p.7, 334-343)

(...) a lot of the time, the lesson plans would go out of the window because of. All right, I need to re teach these children how to learn properly. (P6, p.3, 129-140)

One participant also spoke about whole school PSHE (Personal, Social, Health Education) lessons discussing topics to support CYP's wellbeing:

So, we have a wellbeing afternoon every Friday, which is kind of partnered with PSHE and a scheme that we use which looks at looking at different emotions, looking at wellbeing and mental health all like by module. (P3, p.1, 11-16)

Although participants recognised the importance of prioritising CYP's SEMH, they expressed experiences of internal conflict due to academic pressures outlined in Category 5.

4.4.3 Focused Code 3.3: Flexibly implementing a range of strategies and approaches

Implementing a range of strategies and approaches to meet the individual needs of CYP was referred to by all participants. Participants shared about pupil profiles and passports which highlight helpful strategies and potential triggers for students.

And we also have pupil profiles which gives details on strategies to help and possible triggers and things to avoid. (P1, p.5, 204-207)

Some of the strategies that the ECTs described using to support the CYP's SEMH needs included giving time, movement breaks, transitional objects and personalised checklists.

A lot of them, you know, I give them time in the morning when they come in. (P2, p.3, 105-107)

So, he's got a checklist that I've printed. It's been personalised for him. He has that every day. (P6, p. 14-15, 695-698)

I'll say to him, do you want to go and have 5 minutes, (...) he'll just pop outside with his Pokémon cards and then I'll go to him and say, are you ready to talk now? (P6, p.15, 732-737)

One participant also spoke about her signposting approach when supporting CYP's needs:

(...) but, I tend to signpost now more than I used to (...) so I will say do you think you know do you think you need to chat to so and so about that or I can help you get in touch with whoever (...) So yeah, it's more signposting I think and offering the support rather than me doing it myself, (...) (P2, p.7, 309-337)

Therefore, participants shared both strategies and approaches working directly with the CYP and indirectly through colleagues and parents or carers, which links to Category 4.

Flexibility emerged as a key narrative across all interview accounts. Participants discussed how they adapted their teaching approaches to support the varied needs of CYP. Additionally, they highlighted where changes were

made when strategies were ineffective and noted adjustments based on the views of CYP, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

And I have had to be so flexible with the children that I've got. And that's fine. That that, that suits my nature (...) the flexibility and adapting everything and adapting lessons as you actually go in when you can just see that the children thinking I'm not going to get this bit done (...) (P2, p.4-5, 183-205)

(...) what worked last term isn't working this term for him (...) you're constantly sort of changing how you are and what you want, how you sort of deal with it, how you manage with it (...) (P2, p. 10, 466-475)

You know, let's just go at a different pace. You know, I'm here for you. I'm here to support you. And let's just see how we go today. Still do some work. But this is just a different approach. Rather than just going you need to do this work now. (P4, p.3, 134-141)

It were highlighted earlier in the year by the two twins in my class and one of them said to me, I don't think it's fair that children that don't behave get rewards when they do decide to behave. Do the right things all the time. Don't get rewards and I agreed. I said. You're absolutely right. And I changed it from that day on. (P6, p.8, 351-360)

Yeah, there's a lot of times where you're, like, right. This isn't working (...) I've had double digits worth of seating plans in this class. Because of the high need (...) (P6, p.18, 878-885)

4.4.4 Focused Code 3.4: Targeted and specialist intervention

ECTs discussed about some CYP receiving tailored interventions to address specific needs, which is reflected in the fourth focused code of Category 3.

(...) I have three or four children that go to different support groups (...) and their Drawing and Talking Therapy. (P3, p.7, 338-342)

ECTs highlighted their experiences of CYP receiving direct support from specialist external services and professionals as demonstrated below:

There's one boy again whose behaviour at the minute is still not great, but he's had, I don't know if you've heard of them before. He's had quite a lot of work done with (Name of external support group). They come in and speak to him quite a lot. (P6, p. 10, 453-458)

4.4.5 Focused Code 3.5: Monitoring and reflecting on children and young people's progress over time

The final focused code of Category 3 refers to ECTs sharing their reflections on CYP making progress.

(...) over time, by working with her at a level where she felt comfortable giving her clear goals, but clear boundaries at the same time (...) she's actually settled in really well (...) and finally, she's actually starting to work with other children in my class for the first time (...) She's really flourished and she's so much more independent now (...) (P3, p.10-11, 511-536)

And now at this point in the year, they are a lot better with knowing why we do stuff (...) we're doing it because I need to be able to find out where they need some more help (...) And they all seem to have come on loads. (P6, p.4, 157-199)

Participants also spoke about one-page profiles and assessment tools which they use to assess students' needs and set targets to make further progress as illustrated in the following quotation:

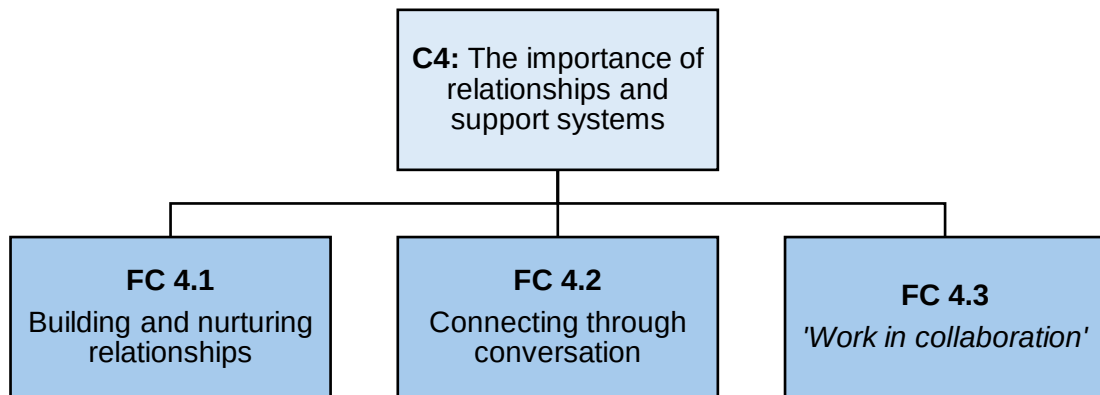
There's one who's just had an EHCP referral go through. So, for me that's kind of identifying from their one-page profile (...) all their needs are all kind of listed and that just gets transferred over on Edukey so that I can look at that as a bit of an assessment tool for where they are as well and try and come up with some targets kind of termly look at what their previous support has been. (P6, p.14, 674-687)

4.5 Category 4: The importance of relationships and support systems

Illustrated in Figure 4.4, Category 4 highlights ECTs' shared narrative of the importance of relationships and support systems and encompasses three focused codes.

Figure 4.4

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 4 (C4).



4.5.1 Focused Code 4.1: Building and nurturing relationships

The first focused code within this category refers to the importance of building and nurturing relationships when supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Some participants spoke about their school or their personal approaches with building relationships as highlighted in the following quotations:

My school do a really good job (...) to implement as many different ways to build relationships at the beginning of the year, (...) which is basically just like an induction, but it's about for two weeks long, (...) you get to be around and see them. (P1, p.4-5, 192-202)

It's that relationship approach as well that we have. We have a laugh in my classroom. (...) we always have a bit of a laugh and a joke. And I think by using that side of my personality, I've been able to tap into some of those children, especially those that are on the SEND register that didn't really engage with their education last year in the way that they probably should have done (...) (P6, p.15-16, 742-754)

Other participants commented on how building a relationship resulted in CYP sharing information which helped them to recognise what may help and support.

So, they'll come in and whatever they've experienced at home (...) because of the relationship they will come in and they will tell me what's happened. So, then I can talk them through it. And then they're OK to get on with their day. (P2, p.12, 581-589)

(...) I know that knowing my students means that for some a clear-cut answer will actually go somewhere. But for some, for others it is going to deprive them of all the self-esteem, the confidence (...) (P4, p.6, 262-267)

Furthermore, some participants expressed how having relationships with CYP resulted in them having a deeper understanding and empathy regarding the CYP's lived experiences.

(...) that's one of the reasons I've stayed with this cohort is just because of those relationships and that it they're quite attached to me. So, I think yeah, just that understanding that empathy (...) what they're going through at home, really. I think that's been quite key for me. (P2, p.10, 483-496)

Although all participants emphasised the importance of relationships, the nature of some settings posed challenges with developing trust and rapport with students. Even where interactions occurred daily with form students, significant time constraints (linked to Category 5) hindered the implementation of support strategies.

I think at secondary level. They see so many different people at so many different times of the day that it's really hard to build a relationship of trust (...) (P1, p.3, 136-147)

(...) it's really nice to have that relationship, but again...having the time to implement things that you think would really help that student is limited. (P1, p.4, 167-175)

Participant 6 also offered insight into building mutual relationships with colleagues and the apparent role of relational trust in facilitating access to professional guidance, linking to Focused Code 6.3:

And yeah, either they will give me an answer and I've got a really good relationship with both of those SENCOs. And if they can't, they'll always point me in the right direction. (P6, p.16, 769-774)

4.5.2 Focused Code 4.2: Connecting through conversation

This focused code captures the role of communication in supporting ECTs in their work with CYP. Communication emerged not only as a practical tool for sharing information, but also as a relational and emotional resource that underpins learning and wellbeing. For one participant, engaging in dialogue with CYP was used as a strategy to build mutual respect, enhance understanding and foster positive behaviour, as demonstrated in the following quotation:

If they are misbehaving, it's high priority for me that they understand that I consider them as a person and not just, you know, this is the rule. And you know, there's a communication happening (...) and I see great, great development (...) (P4, p.2, 91-99)

Participants frequently described engaging in dialogue with colleagues to discuss CYP's needs and determine appropriate next steps for support.

(...) I would have taught a student, observed their behaviour, and observed how they get on with tasks and then I will speak to the send team to say I've noticed this. (P1, p.2, 71-77)

And the two people that run it are really easy to go and have a little chat to. (P3, p.4, 171-173)

So, I'm going to speak to SLT about putting her on the SEMH Tracker (...) (P6, p.8-9, 415-418)

One participant also emphasised the significance of team communication, noting that although teachers work in close proximity, the role can often feel isolating.

(...) it can be a very isolated job, and a good department makes a massive difference. Good colleagues and talking (...) that's so important. (P4, p.7, 327-338)

Contact with parents or carers was also recognised as a key aspect of supporting CYP's SEMH needs. However, participants noted that opportunities for direct, daily contact had diminished since the Coronavirus pandemic. Despite this, interview accounts revealed that ECTs continued to prioritise communication and support, even when faced with challenges in maintaining regular contact.

Well, I think when I used to work in early years, I had far more contact with the parents, so it would be a daily conversation. And that might have been the only conversation those people had that day. You know, some of them are quite isolated (...) So on an afternoon it's, I'm out on the playground and parents do come over, but I tend to signpost now (...) (P2, p.6-7, 296-316)

And to tell the parents, 'Look your child, even though yes, he's got different challenges. However, his behaviour is actually amazing. (...) and you can see the face of the parents and the child just starting to just like, you know, the confidence is coming up. I think that that's our job as teachers to infuse and inspire encouragement into those lives. The parents and the children, because the parents must feel, I feel for the parents. (...) But you know (...) as a unit, they need to feel that they're doing a great job. This is hard to support sometimes. (P4, p.9, 433-457)

4.5.3 Focused Code 4.3: 'Work in collaboration'

This focused code reflects the emphasis that all participants placed on collaborative working practice in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. The title of the focused code: '*Work in collaboration*,' is an in vivo code shared by participant 1, who highlighted that they work with colleagues to ensure that students receive appropriate support as demonstrated in the following quotation:

I work in collaboration with our SEN team...to help identify areas that certain students may need extra support (...) (P1, p.2, 58-63)

Another participant described a situation in which collaboration with external professionals was particularly beneficial. While this could be linked to

Focused Code 3.4, it also illustrates how such collaboration can indirectly benefit CYP by equipping teachers with targeted strategies and guidance.

And then last year, we did have an educational psychologist come in for a student (...) And that was really helpful to just have a third party come in who didn't know the kids (...) And being able to sort of see suggestions that weren't the generic, you know your classroom should have this, this and this, and this should be done, and you know have an adult do this when it's not as easy as that, so yeah. (P5, p.8-9, 395-412)

Consistency and shared expectations among colleagues were also identified as key factors in promoting positive progress for CYP. One participant reflected on how a unified approach, particularly through classroom management, helped establish clear behavioural boundaries:

But I think just the high expectations of me in class (...) So, we had a new Principal come in and again, same thing as me, just really high expectations. (...) those children that were pushing those boundaries (...) kind of realised oh I'm not going to keep getting away with that in here. (P6, p.7-8, 334-348)

Some participants expressed that they found working closely with colleagues and seeking their advice helpful:

When I've kind of got a question, I'll go and ask (...) 'I've recognised this. What do you think? What's your opinion?' And I think having that I'm so lucky and (...) they can come in and have like oh actually I do agree with you there. So having that support is really helpful definitely. (P3, p.4, 177-186)

However, this was not consistent for all participants, some participants expressed where they had felt unsupported and the implications on supporting CYP, linking to Category 5.

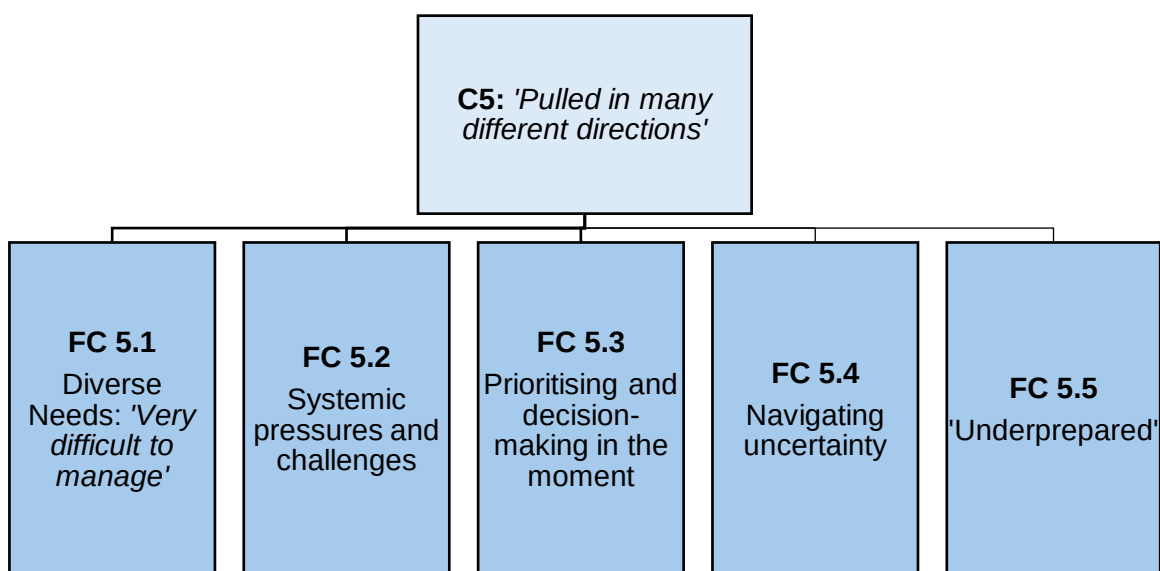
4.6 Category 5: 'Pulled in many different directions'

Category 5 was constructed from an in vivo code as a direct quote from Participant 1 when discussing how they feel when teaching and managing the

range of CYP's needs. During initial coding of Participant 1's transcript, the feeling of being, '*Pulled in many different directions*,' was noted as a strong and frequent experience (see Appendix N). As a result, this was noted on future interview schedule prompts (see Appendix H) to consider. All participants described similar narratives of being, '*Pulled in different directions*,' due to the number of different roles they hold in teaching and feeling stretched, not feeling fully equipped or having multiple pressures upon them at one time. The focused codes encompassing this category are shown in Figure 4.5.

Figure 4.5

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 5 (C5).



4.6.1 Focused Code 5.1: Diverse Needs: 'Very difficult to manage'

Participants faced challenges managing the diverse needs of the CYP they teach and support. They felt stretched and unable to fully support all CYP due to the multifaceted nature of the role and this diversity. This focused code is partially an in vivo code shared by participant 4:

It's very difficult to as a teacher, it's very difficult to manage 30 emotions (laughing) in one go, one after the other after the other all the way through the day. So, it is absolutely mental. Literally. (P4, p.1, 40-45)

(...) being the teacher, the support, the guide, all of those like roles is really hard to manage, especially if you got one child (...) having a really hard time at home. (...) and managing that and another 29 children who also start crying because it's the end of term (...). It's really hard to prioritise because you don't want to dismiss children's emotional needs. (P3, p.7, 323-338)

And you're kind of pulled in many different directions that you fear you're not kind of approaching each student with the level and care of attention that they deserve (P1, p.4, 177-181)

Linking to Focused Code 4.1, some participants expressed that time challenges impacted upon their opportunities to develop relationships with CYP which made managing diverse needs more difficult as they thought this was important with understanding and supporting CYP's SEMH needs.

(...) I see them for 55 minutes that day. And then I only see them like two to three times a week. So, you know when they're in a class of 32 pupils, it's really, really difficult and challenging to know strategies or potential triggers or even just like how to communicate that is helpful for them. (P1, p.3-4, 136-154)

(...) I can't build the same relationships in the same way and have that time with those children that need those really secure relationships in a different way to perhaps the rest of the class. (P5, p.4, 187-194)

Furthermore, all participants described about managing classroom dynamics and addressing student issues which impacted on their time for other duties.

It's hard to teach sometimes when there's a lot of issues, a lot of social issues, a lot of friendship issues that are bubbling during the lesson time. It's that you (...) sort things out after break, sort things out after lunch. (P2, p.3, 121-127)

It's like 'Whack a mole' whenever you're dealing with an issue in class, another issue seems to arise, almost instantly. (P6, p. 19, 909 - 912)

One participant described teaching as a multifaceted role which extends beyond teaching and how these roles impact on their ability to teach.

(...) and we have to almost be like a counsellor and guide and it's just more than educating so I think, yeah, it does impact, obviously. (P2, p.2, 81-86)

All participants spoke about their attempts to implement different strategies to support CYP's individual needs; however, they expressed challenges with finding effective and sustainable strategies.

(...) it's been very challenging to figure out a lasting way of supporting the children. We're often finding that something works for a very short period of time (...) and sort of all the pre-planned interventions and things that are supposed to fit this SEMH category for this behaviour now doesn't have the same desired effect. Or support the child in the same way, so it's requiring a lot of creativity and sort of rethinking. (P5, p.2, 55-72)

It's that balance of well, which area are we seeing in this moment and which type of intervention are we going to try and put in to support that at that time? Keeps me on my toes (laughing). (P5, p.2, 82-87)

The vice principal talked about using like a reward system (...) get like 5 minutes reward time at the end of each lesson, which ideally that sounds great, but being able to facilitate 7 boys all having 5 minutes of reward time all at the end of a lesson, it just wasn't feasible long term. (P6, p.7, 319- 327)

Participants also described an internal conflict between delivering the curriculum and ensuring all students are ready to learn and feel heard, which links to Focused Code 3.2.

But I think becoming a teacher has made me realise I'm often in a bit of conflict with that, trying to teach your curriculum but actually trying

to get all of them on a on a level to sort of be ready to be taught. (P2, p.2-3, 97-103)

There's not enough time in the day I would absolutely love to be there to listen to 30 children and it is really hard to distribute your time, the curriculum and offering that support (...) (P3, p.7, 317-323)

(...) I'm still trying to work with my mentor and with the SENCO working out exactly how I'm balancing supporting behaviour as a need (...) And how much am I trying to reinforce the academic learning side? (P5, p.2-3, 99-113)

One participant highlighted that it extends beyond the CYP to the parents or carers too and how some ECTs feel anxiety about this aspect of their role.

(...) it's not just the teaching, is it? It's the parents having to sort of, you know, support them and speak to them. And I know a person who's on my course said she was dreading doing that. (P2, p.4, 267-276)

4.6.2 Focused Code 5.2: Systemic pressures and challenges

The second focus code in this category highlights the broader pressures impacting ECTs. This included time constraints, juggling multiple roles and responsibilities, managing heavy workloads, and navigating insufficient support and resources. These pressures contribute to participants experiencing feelings of overwhelm as expressed in the following interview accounts:

And if the school day there was more time to do it, you're finding yourself doing the extra things because you just have to. And that's hard. (P3, p.7, 344-347)

But, at the moment, I don't have the time. So, to catch the breath and be able to think outside of my subject and put a mental mood board for the students, it's just too much for me at the moment, (...) but there's no support to actually make it happen. (P4, p6-7, 293-301)

Different participants also described the systemic pressure to meet the high expectations set by schools and trusts. They noted the frequent

observations, learning walks, moderations and inspections they were involved in which led to judgements on the progress and development of learners and the education and skills which settings provide to all CYP. These evaluations subsequently added to the overall pressures of teaching and feelings of overwhelm and frustration for participants as illustrated in the following excerpts:

We get observed a lot. That's another stress. So, you know, and you've got to learn this and learn that and all that. It's just a lot. (P4, p.11, 522-526)

(...) we got observed, a learning walk with a school advisor and he was talking a lot about behaviour for learning, and everybody was really quite, 'Aarghh,' if he knew what these children go through. (P2, p.8-9, 390- 400)

(...) the trust that I work for, the expectations are sky high. (...) we've just recently had Ofsted. And the CEO of the trust basically said that out of all of the schools in the trust, this school is particularly one of the hardest schools to work in in terms of meeting those expectations that are set trust wide (...) (P6, p.1-2, 47-68)

We recently had a writing moderation with a school and me looking at one of my greater depth writers in comparative to one of his. (...) These are worlds apart, so me as an ECT trying to teach them the same content that is expected trust wide is difficult. (P6, p.2, 75-84)

4.6.3 Focused Code 5.3: Prioritising and decision-making in the moment

Linking closely to the previous two focused codes in this category, participants described how they make rapid decisions due to the numerous roles and responsibilities they manage. They often found themselves prioritising tasks and needs in the moment, determining what requires immediate attention.

I've had to evacuate the classroom quite a bit, which was very difficult because you didn't know which group of children to stay with (...) Who do I go to in this situation? (P5, p. 7, 321-328)

Not putting a lot of pressure on myself, thinking, wow, that's not done. It's kind of looking at things thinking right? What needs to be done straight away, what can be done over the next couple of days. What do I not need to do for a little while? As a teacher, you're making a thousand decisions in a split second. (P6, p. 18-19, 898-907)

Highlighted in Focused Code 5.1, one participant expressed their concerns about dismissing CYP's emotional needs when prioritising tasks. All participants appeared to experience pressure to respond promptly to situations or tasks, while also concerned about how to prioritise CYP's needs.

One participant reflected on the impact on a student when making quick decisions and how they learned from this experience, linked to Category 6.

So, I've learned as well from experience (...) where I've literally had split second decisions to make as a teacher, do I raise my tone here? Or do I just back down and just actually go for that? And on that occasion, I decided to go up and the child went up with me and I thought bad decision (...) since then I thought never again. (P4, p.2-3, 99-113)

4.6.4 Focused Code 5.4: Navigating uncertainty

All participants described experiences where they felt uncertain as an ECT. This sense of grappling with the unknown appeared to add another layer of complexity to their role, intensifying the feeling of being, '*Pulled in many different directions.*' Focused Code 5.4 reflects the ambiguity that ECTs face at the start of their teaching careers, particularly when they receive minimal or incomplete information about students' backgrounds and needs, often due to safeguarding and confidentiality procedures. While participants acknowledged the importance of protecting CYP's right to privacy, they also expressed that these gaps in knowledge made it difficult for them to tailor approaches effectively to meet individual needs, as illustrated below:

You know, there's all sorts of situations at home that we're not aware of. (P4, p.4, 169-172)

She's basically. I don't. I don't know all the in and outs of it. She's just had a lot of stuff going on at home and with. I don't actually know. (P6, p.8-9, 418-421)

(...) when we spoke to one of the guys that delivers the training, he came in and he knew information about that particular child's home life that we didn't know. (P6, p. 10, 473-478)

In addition to echoing the views above, one participant shared their desire for more detailed information to better understand CYP's needs; however, they thought this was unrealistic.

It's kind of like if we were in a perfect world, which I don't think this would ever be achievable. It's almost like having a little introduction or talk with a key person that knows the ins and outs of the different experiences that they've gone through because one of the challenges is you can see they've experienced trauma and I know that there's a certain level of confidentiality, but you don't know what that trauma is. So maybe breaking it down (...) just to help know a tiny bit more without breaking that confidentiality and then knowing you know you're not shooting in the dark with what might be a trigger for them (...) (P1, p.5. 209-237)

A second participant also used the phrase, 'Shooting in the dark.' The use of this phrase indicates that participants think they make guesses or decisions without having a clear understanding.

(...) And because we didn't really have that full transition period, for me it was just a bit like shooting in the dark. (P6, p. 17-18, 858-861)

Furthermore, when asked about their role supporting CYP with diagnoses such as autism and ADHD, one participant expressed that being new to the profession, they were trying to understand this aspect of their role. This links to Focused Code 2.3.

Honestly, it's what I'm still trying to learn and figure out, especially only being in second year. (P5, p.2-3, 97-99)

Uncertainty surrounding the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on the CYP's presentation was also mentioned by one participant. Their quotation below highlights the broader theme of ECTs grappling with the unknown and the challenges they face with evolving situations.

I don't know if that's just from COVID or just how children are now. I don't know until there's probably more research. (P2, p.2, 113-117)

Furthermore, there was a reflected gap between participants' expectations and the realities and experiences they face in their role as an ECT as highlighted in the following interview accounts:

You know, when you do your training, you have an image of what it's like to be a teacher. But actually, reality is very different. (P2, p.4, 180-183)

So, when you come into the classroom and you've got a bunch of children that are completely different to maybe what you've looked at or researched (...) you're stepping in the shoes of a teacher rather than looking at it from a bird's eye view. (P3, p.3, 129-136)

(...) my first year was then very different from my training and a big shock to the system (...) I thought that I was going to be quite confident and comfortable supporting these children then realised exactly how different the requirements of a teacher are (...) (P5, p.4, 177-194)

I always used to think that teachers were really well organised, that they've got everything really far in advance and it's only been this year while I've had my own class that I realised that winging it is very much a skill and there's a lot. (P6, p. 18, 871-878)

These quotes offer insight into the emotional and practical disconnect these ECTs experienced between their expectations of teaching and the realities they encounter in classroom teaching practice and how they navigate this uncertainty.

4.6.5 Focused Code 5.5: 'Underprepared'

This focused code reflects participants' experiences of not feeling fully prepared following teacher training. The title, '*Underprepared*,' is an in vivo

code expressed by Participant 5. Despite previous experience as a teaching assistant, they felt, '*Underprepared*,' as an ECT to implement effective support for CYP. The lack of preparation contributed to the broader sense of participant's being, '*Pulled in many different directions*,' as participants were expected to meet diverse and complex needs without the practical tools and confidence to do so effectively.

I very much felt that I was underprepared, and I don't want to say under supported, but I think because my CV had said all this like experience before I thought I was able to recognise the children that would need it but wasn't sure how to actually put something in place for them. (P5, p.4-5, 194-202)

The following accounts illustrate examples where participants thought training lacked practical guidance.

And then also kind of very simple surface level ways of...being sensitive, trying to build relationships, asking them to breathe and it was very like surface level. (...) at the beginning of this journey with (YP's name) I had no idea what to do (...) (P1, p.8, 353-362)

I think we just heard a lot of horror stories (...) this is like a terrible behaviour scenario like kicking chairs and hitting people and screaming and actually, by December of my first year, I was having that almost daily (...) with no real knowledge of, I know I can talk to my SENCO. I know I can talk to my mentor, but what do I do in the classroom? (P5, p.5, 225-237)

Despite being made aware of the potential behaviours they may encounter in a classroom context, the phrase, '*But what do I do in the classroom?*' encapsulates the participant's uncertainty when faced with reality of supporting CYP's SEMH needs and captures the moment-to-moment challenge of having to act without feeling fully equipped. It highlights a gap in the theoretical knowledge and guidance provided during training and actionable strategies that ECTs can confidently apply in classroom situations.

Commenting on the prevalence and diversity of CYP's needs (linked to Focused Codes 2.1 and 5.1), two participants highlighted the unlikely

possibility of feeling fully equipped as an ECT. While they recognise that their training or their ECT induction provided a foundational starting point, they emphasised that it cannot cover all the diverse needs and situations encountered in the classroom.

(...) you can't possibly be taught how to cope with sort of you know 15-20 different needs and it's all very individual as well (...) You know you learn obviously, and it does give you a good foundation, but each child is so individual with how they are, what works for one child doesn't work for another (...) I don't think the training can actually provide you with all of the skills that you need (...) (P2, p.9-10, 439-461)

So, I don't think any level of you know you can try every example, and it never correlates to what you've already looked at. And yes, it gives you the stepping stone of like, helping you to think about. Well, I've had a similar situation before, but it's never gonna mirror what you've had. And I think that that some of the scenarios, yeah, I can relate to, but they don't necessarily give me the guidance that I maybe would have wanted. Umm, because I think every child is just completely unique in their own way. So, all different challenges are gonna come up. You have to kind of deal with it as it comes (...) (P3, p.3-4, 139-156)

One participant also shared their experience of not being adequately trained to deal with behaviours they described as violent, as illustrated in the excerpt below:

There's still stuff that I'm still unsure about. I mean, I've had to probably three or four times this year hold children in my class and I haven't had training to do that. (...) So, for me afterwards I were like, I don't know if I've done the right thing. I hope I've done the right thing. I suppose when it comes to if anyone's being violent and they're putting either themselves or someone else in danger, it's a kind of a needs must scenario. (P6, p. 12-13, 593-625)

They expressed uncertainty about whether their actions were appropriate, indicating limited confidence due to inadequate training. However,

they reassured themselves by recognising that their decisions were made with safety in mind.

4.7 Category 6: Learning is continuous

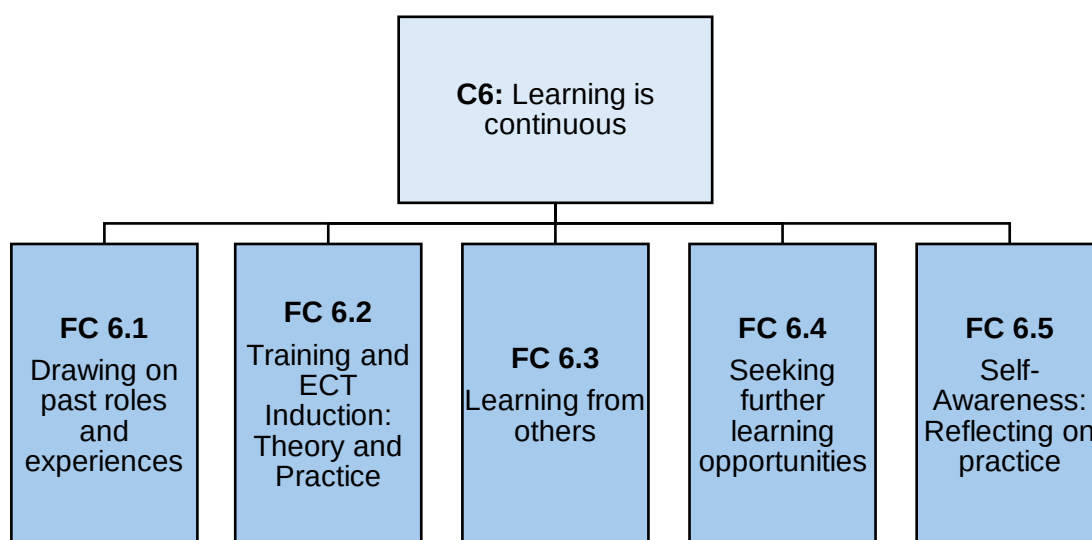
All participants recognised teaching as a continuous learning journey. Participant 2 specifically shared that following training:

(...) you learn all the time and you get advice from the professionals and things. (P2, p.9-10, 461-463)

All participants expressed daily experiences and opportunities to learn new approaches, keep updated with educational policy and explore creative ways to meet the needs of CYP. Category 6 is formed from this narrative and the five focused codes used to construct it are presented in Figure 4.6.

Figure 4.6

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 6 (C6).



4.7.1 Focused Code 6.1: Drawing on past roles and experiences

The first focused code for Category 6 reflects the participants drawing on knowledge and understanding from their past experiences to support them in their role as an ECT, which all participants shared about. Some participants spoke about their previous undergraduate studies and job roles which they thought supported them with identifying needs and working with CYP with diagnosed and undiagnosed SEND (linked to Category 2).

I had come from having a psychology degree, so to some extent felt like I could recognise different struggles or issues that students may have been experiencing. I felt more prepared to identify issues in front of me. (P1, p.7, 339-346)

So, I did (previous role named) before (...) You have to look at things at quite inner, you know, with a certain hat on to be able to understand why people are doing what they're doing and what the underlying problems are. So, I think having that experience gives me quite an individual insight to look, what causes certain behaviours and what trigger points to recognise (...) So, I think that was ultimately a really good kind of guide maybe. (P3, p.9, 402-424)

(...) I was a teaching assistant for three years after coming out of my psychology degree. And in that time worked with three children that met the criteria for pathological demand avoidance, a selective mute and three who were categorised as autistic and ADHD but didn't have formal diagnoses (...) And I then did my one-year PGCE, and I had only really met one child with SEMH in that whole year. And he had a very familiar criteria similar to PDA again. So, I felt quite confident working with him already, just from a teaching assistant perspective. (P5, p.4, 151-174)

Two participants spoke about their personal life experiences and having maturity which enabled them to be more understanding:

I think unless you've gone through something like that, you don't truly understand. (...) And it just gives you that that extra knowledge. But

the same with yeah, teaching and with mental health. I've been there and with my own daughter. (P2, p.5, 212-223)

I'm glad that I am at the age that I am because I think with a bit of maturity, a little bit of perspective, having had children myself having had teenagers myself really helps me to just show a lot more empathy and compassion. (P4, p.1, 31-37)

4.7.2 Focused Code 6.2: Training and ECT induction experiences: Theory and Practice

Despite varied training routes (see Section 3.3.4.5), all participants discussed their training and ECT induction experiences. This focused code highlights the learning experiences for ECTs as they transition from their training to being ECTs. All participants, except for participant 3 who thought their training extensively covered mental health, noted that there was minimal focus on SEMH during their initial teacher training.

In terms of the training (...) Yeah, there's not a lot of talk at all about mental health, whether it's for teachers or for the pupils whatsoever. That's how it came across to me anyway. (P4, p.5, 233-239)

Participants spoke about engaging in sessions and being taught about conditions or medical diagnoses as highlighted in the following excerpts:

I mean during my PGCE the amount that we were taught about SEMH was the different type of conditions or sensitivities or whatever you want to call it that students might be experiencing. (P1, p.7-8, 346-351)

I remember having a few sessions that were helping us to understand areas like autism, they mentioned ADHD, dyslexia. I think we looked at dyscalculia. (...) then we did also touch upon SEMH (...) it felt more general than really, truly understanding each in depth. (P5, p. 6, 260-282)

A common theme across interviews was that teacher training was largely theory-based learning, and participants thought it lacked practical guidance or skills to address CYP's SEMH needs (linked to Focused Code 5.5) as illustrated below:

(...) but I almost think that's quite theory based. So even when you do a scenario, you can never really relate to it because you've not necessarily been in that situation. (P3, p. 3, 120-129)

And whilst we did learn about SEND, it wasn't in such a practical way, it was much more just this is what these areas of need are and I've already done that on my psychology degree, so it didn't feel very practical. (P5, p. 5, 213-218)

While participants recognise that their training provided a foundational starting point (highlighted in Focused Code 5.5), the participants' learning experiences at this time appeared to be focused upon theoretical knowledge. One participant spoke about the ECT induction being the bridge into their practice and the in-person seminars being like a, 'toolkit of different things to try.'

So, it's basically bringing kind of the theory knowledge to kind of more classroom based. (P3, p.5, 241-243)

So, it was kind of giving you a toolkit of different things to try. Which I thought was really helpful because when you first come to it, you're like oh my goodness, how do I manage this? It was more like an open discussion but partnered with a lot of ideas and research-based stuff which (...) then you could kind of put them into practice. Give them a go, see if it works with your class, your particular children. (P3, p.6-7, 297-309)

However, other participants thought that the ECT induction lacked real-world application and only 'touched on' SEMH needs. Instead, their learning was focused on subject knowledge and curriculum.

It's touched on it, but again, I don't think it truly prepares you for it until you're doing it and you're in it and you're with those children. You can read all sorts, can't you? You can put it into practice, I guess, but I'm not sure we've done a lot. There's been a lot of subject knowledge (...) it's all based around the curriculum (...) (P2, p.11-12, 541-555)

Two participants expressed how valuable having additional ECT time was in gradually easing them into full-time teaching, giving time to review their ECT study materials and to implement interventions for CYP.

(...) I was thinking, oh, God, it's two years wish I'd have done it in in a year. But actually, I think I've needed that time extra time out of the classroom (...) So, it breaks you in a little bit more gently I suppose to sort of full life teaching (...) (P2, p.11, 503-528)

And so being able to have things like the ECT extra time outside the class at the moment is very helpful. A lot of that is often taken up with reviewing study materials as well (...) And preparing different interventions and reviewing them. So that's been very helpful. I'm quite nervous to lose that next year. (P5, p.8, 382-395)

Although participants reported varied experiences during their teacher training and ECT induction, particularly in relation to SEMH, there was a shared recognition that their learning as a teacher was an ongoing progress.

4.7.3 Focused Code 6.3: Learning from others

All participants described situations where they had learned from others linking to Category 4. Participants spoke about learning from their colleagues including more experienced staff, their ECT mentor and the SENCO. One participant also spoke about learning from fellow ECTs during the seminars they attend as part of their induction. This learning is illustrated in the interview excerpts below:

(...) so the seminars that I go to (...) we can kind of give each other different ideas, but there's also sort of teachers who have been in the profession for a long period of time, which can kind of give more structured advice, which is really helpful. (P3, p.4-5, 193-210)

I think through my mentor, that's been really helpful in school and sort of learning from her experiences and her suggestions (...) Really try and take on board whatever I can take. (P5, p.8, 364-376)

We've got two SENCOs because one of them is kind of part time. I'll always just go and see them. And say this is an area that I feel like I've

identified. This is something that they are struggling with. I'm not sure what to do next. What do you think? And yeah, either they will give me an answer and I've got a really good relationship with both of those SENCOs. And if they can't, they'll always point me in the right direction. (P6, p. 16, 762-774)

4.7.4 Focused Code 6.4: Seeking further learning opportunities

A common narrative, although varying in presentation, was participants seeking further study and learning opportunities outside of their training and ECT induction. Two participants spoke about completing further educational courses after their teacher training before starting as ECTs:

(...) doing my masters I did, the modules that I did gave me quite a good knowledge for the children that I deal with. (P2, p.8, 359-362)

(...) this is my first year ECT cause (...) I did my training two years ago, then I had a break and did a bit of psychology (...) and I'm glad I've done that. (P4, p.1, 23-29)

One participant noted about engaging in their own self-study during their ECT induction to further their knowledge to support a YP.

I took it upon myself to kind of do more research and help her. (P1, p6. 275-276)

Linked to Focused Code 6.3, one participant shared that her approach to self-study was through speaking to other professionals as she acknowledged the time constraints with doing additional research:

(...) we have quite a few professionals coming in, (...) so I sort of I speak to them directly. I suppose it is a form of self-study (...) I find having conversations is (...) less time consuming and more meaningful to the children that I've got because they sort of know who they are. If I didn't have that, then maybe I might have to do more reading myself. (P2, p.8, 351-376)

4.7.5 Focused Code 6.5: Self-Awareness: Reflecting on practice

The final focused code for Category 6 is Self-Awareness: Reflecting on practice. As this focused code was one of the less occurring concepts,

consideration was given whether to include it; however, through ongoing memo-writing (see Appendix N) during constant comparative analysis, the snippets shared by participants felt important to include. Participants reflected on their practice highlighting personal and professional growth and their overall self-awareness to make informed decisions as illustrated in the following excerpts from participant 4:

(...) I'm seeing the benefit of changing my approach and being a lot gentle and considerate you know so going down that route and the loving route rather than the judgmental route. (P4, p. 4, 158-165)

I'm not saying I'm perfect (...) but I'm learning as a person and that's a better approach for my mental health and their mental health. (P4, p.4, 193-197)

The following quotation also indicates the importance of reflection for ECTs as it helped the participant to accept that they won't have all the answers and that it is acceptable to adapt and learn from each experience.

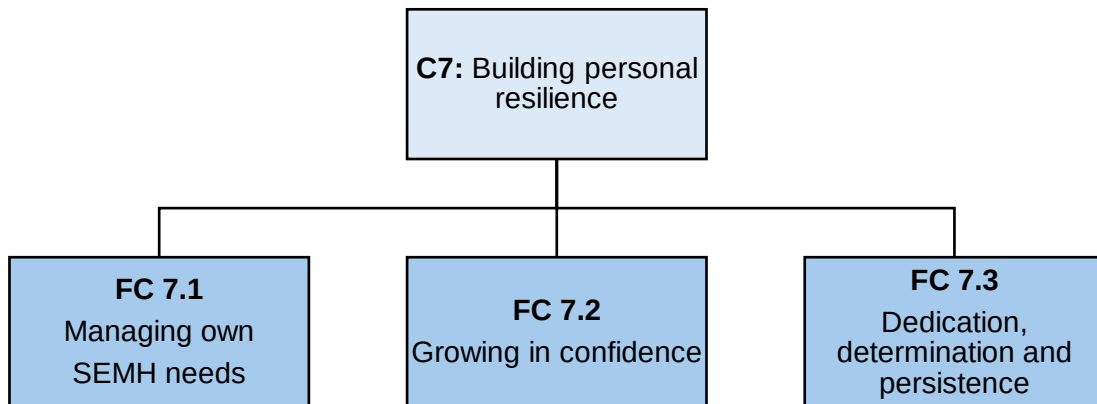
So, it's been a massive learning curve for me to realise that I'm not going to have the answer to everything, not everything's going to be planned weeks in advance. And kind of accepting that that's OK (laughing). (P6, p.18, 890-896)

4.8 Category 7: Building personal resilience

The seventh category indicates the focus on ECTs' wellbeing and their personal growth as a teacher which help them to navigate the challenges and demands of their role. Figure 4.7 illustrates the three focused codes which developed this category.

Figure 4.7

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 7 (C7).



4.8.1 Focused Code 7.1: Managing own social, emotional and mental health needs

The first focused code for Category 7 reflects the experiences shared by participants associated with their own SEMH needs. Several participants shared personal experiences associated with their mental health prior to training and during their induction years, as illustrated below:

So having that experience has given me far more understanding and probably empathy really with the children and parents who struggle. But it has definitely helped with protecting myself and knowing what I can, you know, what I can cope with (...) (P2, p.5, 225-233)

I had to take some time off just mental health based (...) it wasn't just the class; that was a big factor. But there was just a lot of stuff going off. (P6, p.11, 554-559)

Participants shared different feelings and emotional responses they have experienced in their role. A sense of frustration and helplessness was a common theme as demonstrated in the following accounts:

Come on. I'm a human. Some of them can be absolute pain (laughing). I can feel anger. I'm infuriating and you repeat yourself 100 times. You still have to repeat it, so patience is like. (P4, p.3, 120-126)

But at the minute it's like, slowly banging my head against a brick wall. (P6, p. 9, 437-438)

And I had a lot of different adults changing all the time. I was very anxious myself because I wasn't sure what to do each day or what was coming my way. (P5, p. 7, 307-311)

Participant 4 highlighted the initiatives their school is implementing to support staff wellbeing and manage the emotional challenges of teaching:

(...) mental health is being talked about more (...) So, we have a boxing club that's happening at the moment for teachers after school, which I think is perfect (...) So, that's reason why I love this school because I don't think there's many schools that do things like this so that there is an aspect of trying to do something (...) (P4, p.7, 318-335)

4.8.2 Focused Code 7.2: Growing in confidence

The next focused code reflects the development of teachers and their increasing confidence in their roles. Some participants explicitly noted their growth in confidence:

So, this year I feel far more confident in myself as a teacher and will take time out and I don't put that pressure on myself (...) (P2, p.3-4, 146-150)

Others were less direct but highlighted challenges of supporting CYP's progress and the initial self-doubt, but eventually recognising that student progress is not a direct reflection of their teaching abilities:

They're all below where they should be, which as an ECT you look at and you're like 'Oh no'. But at the same time, it took me a while (...) to realise that it's not my fault. It's not a reflection on me. (P6, p.2, 93-99)

Additionally, participants demonstrated increasing confidence in their abilities and how to manage the demands of the job (linked to Category 5) more effectively as illustrated in the quotation below:

You know, I think because of the workload, when you first start, especially the transitioning from an ITT into an ECT, you think, oh my gosh, how am I going to do all this? The kind of foundation, basic stuff as an ECT and deal with the fact that I've got such high needs and behaviours in my class as well. But you know, you find a way and we are getting there slowly. (P6, p.11, 521-531)

While acknowledging the challenges, participants also highlighted rewarding experiences which referenced the positive impact they have had on CYP.

(...) as challenging as it is (...) It's very, very rewarding because you see the difference that you make. (P2, p.12, 589 -594)

And that was a really positive experience for me as an early career teacher to know that I have an impact (...) and to help her was a really positive experience, albeit challenging, but one of the most positive experiences that I've had so far. (P1, p.7, 310-327)

These experiences of success with supporting CYP appeared to be fundamental in building ECTs' confidence.

4.8.3 Focused Code 7.3: Dedication, determination and persistence

Despite the various challenges faced, particularly with the complex and competing demands of teaching while not feeling equipped, all participants shared examples where they had strived to make a positive impact on CYP's lives. This reflects the final focused code for Category 7 and participants' references to their dedication, determination and persistence in supporting CYP.

(...) So, I made it kind of my mission then to try and figure this issue out (...) (P1, p6, 287-302)

From where we came from day one and then where we are now like, it's really lovely (...) being persistent and not giving up on her. (P3, p.11-12, 541-547)

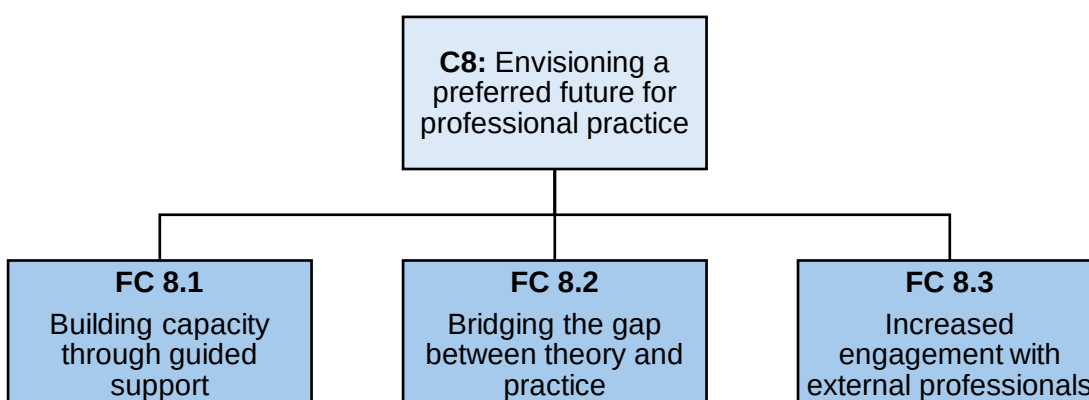
So, I make it my aim to encourage those who might feel like they can't do. (P4, p.9, 407-409)

4.9 Category 8: Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice

The eighth and final category draws on reflections shared by all participants who considered what would meaningfully enhance their capacity to support CYP with SEMH needs. Participant 1 and 5 expressed the phrases, *'In a dream world,'* and, *'If we were in a perfect world,'* which convey a strong sense of hopefulness about what teaching and supporting CYP with SEMH needs could look like under ideal conditions. At the same time, these expressions subtly acknowledge the perceived limitations and systemic constraints of the current educational context. Other participants echoed these aspirations, identifying specific forms of support, training and collaboration that they believe would better equip them to meet the complex demands of their role. This category is constructed from three focused codes, which are visually presented in Figure 4.8.

Figure 4.8

A visual representation of the focused codes (FC) in category 8 (C8).



4.9.1 Focused Code 8.1: Building capacity through guided support

The first focused code of Category 8 reflects participants' hopes for more structured support and tools to address the SEMH needs of CYP. Two participants explicitly expressed a desire for 'How to...' guidance.

And essentially, I was kind of left on my own to do it (...) I didn't even know where I'd start. I didn't know what I didn't know at that point. I feel like being prepared in, OK, if you spot any issue. This is the steps you would go through (...) Like a session on you know. Just how to navigate the different steps would have really helped. (P1, p.8, 364-373)

I think I would like to have a bit more support of how to build conversations (...) So kind of like a toolkit to unlock if you've got like an anxious child that doesn't speak to you (...) it would be really nice to have a different way of working with those children (...) (P3, p.8, 359-377)

Connected to Categories 5 and 7, while recognising the challenges of the role, one participant highlighted the significance of support and guidance for teachers' own well-being and building on their strengths and skills:

If the teacher is not well, then the classroom is not gonna be well (...) So, I think to look after the students, the best thing you can do is to look after the teachers and give them tools to manage their own internal world and their own emotions and mental health. Yeah, because it's tough. It's really tough. (P4, p. 10-11, 478-502)

And working alongside not their preference, but their natural abilities and their strengths, (...) so, it's how to take on the strength of that teacher and develop it into a skill that will make the job easier (...) (P4, p.13, 602-615)

4.9.2 Focused Code 8.2: Bridging the gap between theory and practice

This focused code captures participants' strong desire for training that is grounded in the day-to-day realities of the classroom, particularly in preparing them to identify and support CYP with SEMH needs. Participants critiqued the overly theoretical nature of their training. Instead, they call for

training that is interactive, practical and directly applicable to the challenges they face.

Training again is like too boring, you know, it's sitting while you give some theories. It's got to be more practical (...) (P4, p.12, 581-585)

(...) you could do with really whatever it is that you use to identify, you know what the needs are of children in your class, what interventions, reasonable adjustments, that sort of thing. (...) you could do with some quite rigorous training on it, really. And probably not just looking at a PowerPoint and listening to somebody talk. (P6, p. 17-18, 837-847)

Linked to Focused Codes 5.5 and 6.2, which highlights the disconnect between training and classroom realities, participants expressed a clear need for training that bridges this gap, equipping them with the confidence, competence and practical strategies to respond effectively to the complex and evolving needs of their students.

4.9.3 Focused Code 8.3: Increased involvement with external professionals

The final focused code of Category 8 reflects participants' desires for more opportunities to engage and interact with external professionals. One participant spoke about how meeting with other professionals in education during their training and induction would have been supportive. This is illustrated in the accounts below:

I think if we'd had an opportunity to meet with outside agencies, who come in and practically deliver the training and actually give wider, greater context to it. I think I would have felt a little bit more prepared. (P5, p. 5, 218 - 225)

And so, I think yeah, being able to hear from people who are the ones who will come in and be the helper in that situation (...) (P5, p.5, 237-245)

Participant 5 also expressed that, 'In a dream world,' the opportunity to engage in regular interactions and open dialogue with educational psychologists would be beneficial:

(...) actually, being able to have sessions with an Ed psych and learn about different proactive strategies that perhaps aren't ones that schools are aware of, or schools are already doing. And being able to freely ask questions without feeling judged or, you know, from the people that are already in your school context, I think would be really helpful. (P5, p.10, 475-488)

I think perhaps on the broader note of that, having spoken to the other ECTs in my school, I think just more of an involvement with Ed Psychs (...) But I think a lot of people who are especially new to teaching A) don't necessarily understand the role of an Ed psych. B) don't really understand what they can offer, and because it's seen as this oh, it's really hard to get an Ed Psych in. They very rarely come in. It's got to be extreme that for even those less extreme behaviours, but you can see a child's really struggling. I think in a dream world, having like a termly visit from an Ed Psych to just like, come and review would be like amazing. And just be able to like check-in with sort of like an allocated school Ed Psych or something. (P5, p.9-10, 448-471)

Linking to the other focused codes within this category, participant 6 expressed a desire for other professionals to provide ready-made resources that incorporate psychological principles to support their understanding. This participant also suggested incorporating more psychology and mental health into training programmes.

Be nice if somebody else did it. So, (...) as an educational psychologist to help schools and teachers to have something already put together that you can just put on the wall, but (...) I mean, it's not about decorating the room, it's about understanding and having the, the whole psychology behind it. (P4, p.7, 305-314)

It's working along the training programmes, isn't it, really? Yeah, rather than the schools. Although it'd be great to then incorporate stuff in the schools (...) it starts with the training and to incorporate more psychology and mental health into the training programmes, yeah. (P4, p. 13, 634-646)

Although the focused code, *'Incorporating more psychology and mental health'* was considered during analysis, it was ultimately excluded due to limited support across the data. However, its inclusion here ensures that individual perspectives are not lost, and it contributes to the broader narrative of collaborative engagement with external professionals as a desired form of support for ECTs.

Chapter 5. Revisiting the literature following analysis

Following the initial literature review presented in Chapter 2, which established the broad rationale and context for this study, a second, more focused review was undertaken after data analysis. In line with constructivist GT methodology, engagement with the literature is not confined to the outset of the research process but remains responsive to the data as it emerges. Rather than seeking to validate existing theories, the aim of this re-engagement with the literature is to deepen theoretical sensitivity, refine emerging constructs, and situate them within the broader academic discourse. This iterative approach enables a more nuanced understanding of the developing grounded theory highlighting similarities, differences and novel ideas in relation to existing knowledge (Charmaz, 2014).

To support this process, the current chapter adopts a narrative literature review approach which prioritises conceptual engagement and critical reflection over rigid, systematic search processes (Sukhera, 2022). Although narrative literature reviews may be critiqued for potential bias, such as selectively including evidence to support a particular viewpoint (Hammersley, 2020), this approach aligns with constructivist GT methodology (Charmaz, 2014). In such an approach, literature is purposefully selected based on its relevance to the developing theory, which is grounded in data. The emphasis is not on evaluating the literature itself, but on critically examining the study's own categories and interpretations in relation to existing research (Charmaz, 2014).

The review was guided by the categories and focused codes identified in Chapter 4, which were considered most conceptually relevant for exploring ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Therefore, literature was selected that aligned with the eight categories presented in Chapter 4:

- Recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH
- Identifying, categorising and labelling
- Responding to CYP's individual needs
- The importance of relationships and support systems
- *'Pulled in many different directions'*

- Learning is continuous
- Building personal resilience
- Envisioning a preferred future

To identify literature for this second, more focused review, a targeted search strategy was employed. Rather than conducting a broad database search, literature was purposefully selected based on its conceptual relevance to the categories and focused codes developed during data analysis. This included revisiting key texts from the initial review, exploring reference lists of relevant studies, and conducting keyword searches aligned with the conceptual categories and focused codes (e.g., Defining Social, Emotional and Mental Health). The approach reflects the iterative and responsive nature of constructivist GT, where literature engagement is guided by the developing analysis rather than predetermined search parameters (Charmaz, 2014). It enabled a deeper theoretical sensitivity and ensured that the selected literature meaningfully informed the evolving grounded theory, presented in Chapter 6.

Reflexive commentary: Merging analysis and discussion

In keeping with the constructivist GT methodology and the interpretivist-constructivist stance of this research, this chapter presents an integrated account of analysis and discussion. Rather than separating findings from interpretation, the conceptual categories are explored alongside relevant literature to reflect the iterative and reflexive nature of the research process. This approach allows for a richer, more nuanced understanding of the data and its implications.

Importantly, the methodological process provided the opportunity to revisit the literature at multiple stages, not just as a preliminary review as is common in traditional qualitative research designs, but as part of an evolving dialogue between emerging data and existing knowledge. This recursive engagement enabled a deeper interrogation of theoretical perspectives, helped refine conceptual categories, and ensured that the final GT was both grounded in participants' experiences and situated within the broader academic discourse. Through this dynamic interplay, the

literature served not only as a contextual backdrop but also as a critical lens through which meaning was constructed and re-constructed throughout the research journey.

Given the limited body of research specifically exploring ECTs' experiences in supporting CYP's SEMH needs, this review acknowledges the absence of directly comparable studies due to what appears to be a fairly novel area to research. Where research involving ECTs is unavailable, literature relating to closely aligned roles, such as NQTs and more experienced classroom teachers, has been considered. Despite these limitations, the literature discussed in this chapter offers valuable insights that inform the development of a grounded theory rooted in participants' lived experiences and underpinned by both educational and psychological literature.

5.1 Understanding the complex and diverse nature of social, emotional and mental health

The reviewed literature in this section builds on the strong narrative emerging from the data analysis in Chapter 4, focusing on participants' recognition of the complex and multifaceted nature of SEMH needs. To support theoretical sensitivity in the development of the study's grounded theory, it is essential to critically examine how SEMH is defined, how it presents in educational settings, and how it impacts the development and wellbeing of CYP and its relevance to teachers at the start of their careers.

5.1.1 Defining social, emotional and mental health

As outlined in Section 2.2, SEMH is identified in the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) as one of the four broad areas of need, with the other three areas being communication and interaction, cognition and learning and sensory and/or physical needs. This revised terminology replaced the earlier classification of, '*Behaviour, Emotional and Social Development*' (DfES, 2001, p.85), marking a shift from a focus on externalised behaviours to a broader recognition of the underlying and unmet emotional, and mental health needs of CYP (DfE & DoH, 2015; Nasen, 2015). However, despite this intended shift, the current statutory definition continues to refer to a wide spectrum of

emotional and behavioural difficulties. Researchers have criticised its reliance on diagnostic labels and deficit-orientated language, which may reinforce a within-child perspective of SEMH (Stanforth & Rose, 2020; Hickinbotham & Soni, 2021; Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022). As a result, the term, ‘SEMH,’ remains a complex topic, reflecting both the breadth of needs it seeks to capture and the ambiguity surrounding its practical application.

This ambiguity is reflected in the in vivo codes shared by participants in the current study: *‘a big umbrella of a lot of different things,’* and *‘a massive suitcase of so much.’* These metaphors illustrate the perceived complexity and overwhelming nature of the term for the ECTs in this study but potentially, also for other professionals too. Nevertheless, two participants offered more positive and holistic interpretations, viewing SEMH in terms of the ‘whole’ child (see Section 4.2.1). Such perspectives align with a growing body of literature advocating for strengths-based, relational and context-sensitive approaches to SEMH (NICE, 2022). While not a new concept (Weare, 2005), this holistic perspective has gained renewed attention in contemporary educational discourse (NICE, 2022). The focus moves beyond deficit models and instead promotes inclusive, person-centred practices that recognise the broader ecological systems in which children develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1994; Frederickson & Cline, 2009). Highlighted in Chapter 4, participants recounted that, *‘There’s lots of variables,’* when considering CYP’s lived experiences and noted how these contribute and impact on their presentation.

In the context of this study, adopting a positive, holistic definition of SEMH is particularly relevant for ECTs as it encourages a broader understanding of CYP’s needs – one that moves beyond behaviour presentation to consider the emotional, social and psychological factors influencing behaviour. SEMH can therefore be understood as the dynamic interplay of emotional wellbeing, social functioning and psychological health that enables CYP to form positive relationships, regulate emotions, engage in learning and navigate challenges. A holistic understanding acknowledges these elements as interconnected and shaped by the combination of biological, psychological and environmental factors that influence CYP’s ability to thrive both in school and beyond.

5.1.2 Social, emotional and mental health presentation within educational settings and the impact on children and young people

Despite the shift away from behaviour in the term, 'SEMH' and some participants moving towards a more holistic view of the term, a dominant theme in the ECTs' accounts was the emphasis on behaviour as the primary indicator of CYP's SEMH needs. Although this reflects common classroom experiences, focusing on behaviour risks oversimplifying the complex and often internalised nature of SEMH needs. Research indicates that this narrow focus may result in misinterpretation of emotional need and the adoption of punitive approaches rather than supportive responses (Moore et al., 2019). Furthermore, it may result in an inadvertent marginalisation of CYP whose SEMH needs manifest in less overt ways, such as anxiety, withdrawal or low mood, which are less likely to disrupt classroom routines, but are equally significant (Cooper & Jacobs, 2011; DfE, 2018a). The prominence of behaviour in ECTs' narratives in the current study may also reflect limitations in initial teacher training (ITT), where insufficient exposure, awareness and preparation can restrict teachers' conceptualisations of SEMH (DfE, 2019c). Addressing this issue requires a shift towards more nuanced and comprehensive professional development that equips teachers with the knowledge and tools to recognise and respond to the full range of SEMH presentations.

It has been documented that when CYP's SEMH needs are unrecognised or unsupported, they can significantly impair their emotional regulation, social relationships, academic engagement, and overall wellbeing - factors that are foundational to healthy development and lifelong learning (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). Therefore, focusing on behaviour may not only limit teachers' responses but also delay early identification and intervention necessary to support CYP's holistic development. This is particularly concerning given that students with SEMH needs are disproportionately affected by school exclusion (Thompson et al., 2021) and underachievement, which can further compound developmental challenges and influence future life opportunities (DfE., 2019c). Recent findings, from a London-based charity who work with CYP who have faced trauma in their childhood, highlight the long-term negative impact of exclusions and suspensions in primary school

(Chance UK, 2024), reinforcing the urgent need for early, targeted support for CYP with SEMH needs.

An alternative perspective for teachers in understanding SEMH needs would be to focus on the underlying needs that behaviour may be communicating and the impact on their skill development. In the current study, only one participant referred specifically to the impact of SEMH on a CYP's skill development (see Section 4.2.3), reinforcing the earlier observation that behaviour remains the primary indicator of SEMH needs. This emphasis may be shaped by the framing of SEMH in the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), as discussed above, and also by the *Teachers' Standards*, which highlight '*managing behaviour effectively*' as a core professional competency (DfE, 2011). While there is increasing emphasis on addressing underlying SEMH needs (e.g., Moore et al., 2019), the prevailing focus in schools remains on managing behaviour.

The literature suggests that a shift to a needs-led focus encourages more empathetic responses, enabling earlier identification and the implementation of targeted interventions that support CYP's emotional and social development (Carroll & Hurry, 2018). For such a shift to be effective, it must be underpinned by high-quality ongoing professional development for ECTs. This should equip new teachers with a deeper understanding of SEMH, including how it manifests beyond behaviour to affect skill development, learning and wellbeing.

5.2 Identifying, categorising and labelling children and young people

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of SEMH needs, alongside their varied and often contested definitions, it is unsurprising that challenges and inconsistencies persist in the early identification and support of CYP with SEMH needs across educational settings (Hutchinson, 2021). The SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) emphasises the importance of early identification in preventing CYP's difficulties from escalating and disrupting learning (Martin-Denham, 2021). However, the effectiveness of early intervention is heavily dependent on educators' understanding, awareness and access to appropriate tools and processes to support identification (Carroll & Hurry, 2018).

All participants in the current study noted an increase in CYP presenting with SEMH-related challenges, reinforcing the urgency highlighted in Section 2.3 to strengthen identification and support. In the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015), the four broad areas of need are presented to, *‘Give an overview of the range of needs that should be planned for. The purpose of identification is to work out what action the school needs to take, not to fit a pupil into a category. In practice, individual CYP often have needs that cut across all these areas and their needs may change over time’* (p.97).

In the current study, participants’ reflections revealed uncertainty around the process of identification. One participant described, *‘Trying to decide a defining label,’* an experience echoed by others who expressed confusion about how to categorise needs. Some viewed SEMH as distinct from SEND, while others saw it as a subcategory. While a few found labelling helpful for guiding intervention, others highlighted the complexity of overlapping needs, which made interpretation and response more difficult. Blanco-Bayo & Reraki (2025) support this, noting that SEMH is frequently misidentified due to overlapping characteristics and the behaviour-focused nature of current assessment tools. Despite these challenges, examples of effective identification were also evident in the current study. For example, one participant highlighted the value of collaboration where input from more experienced colleagues provided a more holistic understanding of a child’s needs.

For ECTs, these challenges may be shaped by the content and emphasis of their ITT and induction. As discussed in Sections 4.6.5 and 4.7.2, participants recalled training that focused on extreme behaviour scenarios or diagnostic categories, reinforcing a behaviourist and medicalised framing of SEMH. This may leave ECTs more confident in applying labels than in engaging with the relational and developmental aspects of SEMH. Furthermore, while participants acknowledged that children are individuals - and those sharing a label or category are not identical - one participant highlighted the difficulty of responding to individual needs, suggesting an additional rationale for the blanket use of labels and categories.

The broader debate around labelling and diagnosing remains contentious (Demetriou, 2022; Werkhoven et al., 2022; O'Sullivan, 2025) and also perhaps misunderstood by ECTs. While it is acknowledged that labels can provide clarity, and a shared framework for understanding, they also risk reinforcing stigma, narrowing perceptions of a CYP's potential and contributing to exclusionary practices (Thomas & Glenny, 2000; Lauchlan & Boyle, 2007; Franz et al., 2023; O'Sullivan, 2025). For example, labels may lead to lowered expectations from others and can result in CYP internalising negative self-concepts (Sims et al., 2021). Stanbridge and Mercer (2022) emphasise that language used to describe SEMH can shape perceptions, often framing difficulties through a deficit-orientated lens.

In the current research, all participants shared their experiences of supporting CYP with formal diagnoses and three specifically described informally assigning diagnostic labels, such as autism and ADHD, based on CYP's observed behaviours. This appeared to be despite lacking formal training to use diagnostic assessment tools. While it appears to reflect a genuine desire of the ECTs to understand and support CYP's needs, reviewed literature suggests that this labelling approach risks reinforcing deficit-based interpretations and overlooks the broader systemic, relational, and contextual influences on behaviour. In addition to the emphasis on teacher training and the ECF induction, the confidence levels of new teachers and the challenges of addressing individual needs as possible explanations, these approaches to identification of need may also reflect the accessibility and dominance of such explanatory frameworks in contemporary society (Blanco-Bayo & Reraki, 2025).

Misdiagnosis and misidentification further complicate the issue of labelling as it can potentially lead to inappropriate or ineffective support (Ford-Jones, 2015). Furthermore, it is argued that once diagnostic labels are applied, they can be difficult to remove, even when a CYP's needs evolve (Jutel, 2014; Mickelberg et al., 2024). Ultimately, the literature suggests that the use of labels must be critically examined, ensuring they empower rather than constrain the CYP they are intended to support.

5.2.1 A shift towards needs-led identification

Although diagnostic labels can provide a snapshot, Desforges and Lindsay (2010) argue that assessment and identification should be an ongoing, dynamic process closely linked to teaching and intervention, rather than a static label. Similarly, Blanco-Bayo & Reraki (2025) advocate for moving beyond rigid diagnostic categories toward a more flexible, needs-led model of identification. As noted above, this perspective was only highlighted inexplicitly by one participant describing what a child could not yet do (e.g., regulating their emotions), instead identification of SEMH needs were typically described by participants through a behavioural lens or using medical and diagnostic terminology.

There is growing evidence supporting the value of a whole-school approach (NICE, 2022), underpinned by a graduated response and inclusive pedagogy, as essential for effectively addressing SEMH needs (Education Endowment Foundation, EEF, 2025). The graduated approach, outlined in the SEND CoP (DfE & DoH, 2015) and widely adopted in UK schools, follows a four-stage cycle: assess, plan, do, review. This model encourages early identification of needs, implementation of targeted support, and continuous adaption of provision based on ongoing review, without the necessity of a formal diagnosis. Despite the central role of the graduated approach in national guidance (DfE & DoH, 2015) and within literature aimed at trainee teachers (e.g., see Alix, 2024), there was a noticeable absence of explicit reference to it from all participants.

Although participants in the current study often described SEMH needs in terms of behaviour, they also noted adjustments they made to make the learning environment universally accessible. This aligns with inclusive, strengths-based practice, which focuses on what support a CYP needs to thrive, rather than what label they fit (Lee & Alonzo, 2024). Literature suggests by reframing SEND through a needs-led lens, educators can more effectively tailor interventions and support positive outcomes for all learners (EEF, 2025). Ultimately, a needs-led approach can shift the focus from educators asking, *“What is wrong with the child?”* to *“What support does this child need to thrive?”*

promoting inclusion, reducing stigma and enabling all CYP to access meaningful learning opportunities.

5.3 Responding to children and young people's individual needs

Guided by the strong narrative drawn from the analysis of data occurring across all six participants' interviews, the reviewed literature for Category 3: responding to CYP's individual needs relates to the following focused codes which constructed the category.

- Promoting inclusivity through universal accessibility
- Prioritising SEMH to foster CYP's readiness for learning
- Flexibly implementing a range of strategies and approaches
- Targeted and specialist intervention
- Monitoring and reflecting on CYP's progress over time

Although there were no explicit references made, participants' experiences of supporting CYP with SEMH needs appear to reflect elements of the tiered approach to educational support (EEF, 2025, p.28). A tiered approach outlines that most students' needs can be met by universal, high-quality teaching, but there are some CYP who will require additional help through targeted and specialist support.

As highlighted above, the ECTs in this study shared a commitment to inclusive education, where all CYP, regardless of their needs, can access learning equally and not feel isolated or different. Creating safe, supportive environments where CYP feel valued and able to learn was a strong narrative across all participants. This is consistent with existing evidence which includes embedding social and emotional learning into the curriculum, fostering positive relationships, and creating environments where all CYP feel safe and valued (EEF, 2025).

Prioritising CYP's SEMH to promote readiness for learning was raised within the current participants' experiences. The EEF (2019) offers six evidence-based recommendations to support primary schools to strengthen their approach to social and emotional learning (SEL). The report highlights that effective SEL can boost students' behaviour, mental health, wellbeing and

academic outcomes. Despite this, and primary schools viewing SEL as important, the EEF (2019) report that only around a third have embedded it into their curriculum planning. One participant in the current study shared a specific example where SEL was incorporated in their school's PSHE lessons. However, sparking debate, there is evidence to suggest that universal school-based mental health interventions may have limited - or even negative effects - if not carefully aligned with student needs and implemented within a broader, tiered framework of support. Andrews & Foulkes (2025) advocate for a more nuanced understanding of what works, for whom and under what conditions, rather than a one-size-fits-all approach.

Other participants recounted instances where they adapted their practice to prioritise CYP's emotional needs over their learning needs to promote a readiness for learning. Although behaviour provides a necessary foundation for learning, as discussed previously, an overemphasis on what is outwardly observed can detract from the task of identifying and addressing underlying needs (Children & Young People's Mental Health Coalition, 2023). By prioritising SEMH, participants were fostering inclusive and emotionally safe environments to support both wellbeing and academic engagement.

Flexibility was a strong narrative across all interviews. Participants shared where they adapted practice to support the varied needs of CYP and when approaches were deemed ineffective. According to a study by Lübke et al. (2021), teachers who demonstrate greater flexibility are more likely to adopt evidence-based inclusive strategies. Furthermore, the authors argue that flexibility positively influences teachers' attitudes toward the academic and social potential of all students. Although conducted in Germany, the findings support the UNESCO agenda for inclusive education, emphasising that inclusion is not only about being in the classroom but about meaningful participation and support (UNESCO, 2017). The ECF reinforces this message, setting out the term, '*Adaptive teaching*' (DfE, 2019b). Described as a responsive and flexible approach, which moves away from the traditional model of differentiation, adaptive teaching focuses on responsiveness to learning through ongoing assessment and observation and in-the-moment adjustments based on responding to learners' responses and needs and the

use of practical strategies, such as scaffolding and flexible grouping (DfE, 2019a; EEF, 2025).

Participants also expressed a range of strategies and reasonable adjustments used in their practice to support the individual needs of the CYP who they teach. Although they did not explicitly describe this, considering the literature, this appeared to be at the universal tier of educational support. Four participants also referred to CYP receiving targeted and specialist support including access to counselling or other therapy-based interventions and input from external professionals. However, literature suggests that due to limited access and increasingly long wait times for support services (Lowry et al., 2022), the responsibility of supporting CYP's SEMH needs often lands on their teachers (Graham et al., 2011). Although, teachers accept they should be involved in supporting students' mental health, Kidger et al, (2010) argue that teachers lack confidence in assisting students with mental health-related needs. This is supported by Reinke et al. (2011) who found that teachers feel inadequately trained. These challenges were closely linked to participants' experiences.

As noted in Chapter 2, the UK Government aim to provide early intervention directly in schools and colleges through MHSTs. These teams are staffed by trained professionals including Educational Mental Health Practitioners and work closely with staff in schools to deliver evidence-based support, promote a whole-school approach to wellbeing and act as a bridge to more specialist services when required. According to the Department for Education (DfE, 2025), by April 2026, MHSTs will have significantly expanded their reach and impact covering approximately 60% of students.

For all learners receiving universal, targeted or specialist support, monitoring over time and reflecting on progress are integral to adaptive teaching. These practices enable educators to make timely, evidence-informed adjustments to their teaching practice, ensuring that support remains responsive to the evolving needs of CYP (DfE, 2019a; Eaton, 2022). This approach aligns closely with the assess, plan, do, review graduated response model, which emphasises continuous assessment and iterative planning to

drive progress. Participants shared reflections on observing CYP making progress over time and described how they used assessment tools and other resources to set meaningful targets, guiding further development and support.

5.4 The role of relationships and support systems

Consistent with the findings of this study, research consistently shows that positive teacher-student relationships are foundational to effective teaching and learning, particularly for CYP with SEMH needs. Children who have trusting relationships with their teachers are found to be more willing to ask questions, solve problems, try new tasks, and express their thinking than their peers without such relationships (O'Connor & McCartney 2007). Frameworks like relational pedagogy, attachment-aware practice, and trauma-informed approaches (e.g., Attachment Research Community, 2024; Treisman, 2017) emphasise the importance of secure, trusting relationships in supporting both wellbeing and academic success.

In the current research, participants consistently highlighted that building strong, trusting relationships with CYP was central to effectively supporting their SEMH needs, describing how relational approaches fostered emotional openness, improved engagement and enabled more tailored support. However, they also acknowledged how the various challenges often limited their ability to develop these connections fully and also the lack of perceived competence. A need for more practical guidance on how to develop and sustain these relationships was shared by one participant, particularly in the face of their workload pressures and competing demands. This aligns with research in the United States (US) by McHugh et al. (2013), who highlight both the bridges that foster and the barriers that hinder the development of positive student-teacher relationships. They argue that recognising and addressing these factors can significantly enhance relational quality.

The importance of relationships extended beyond teacher-student interactions in the current study, with participants reflecting on meaningful connections with colleagues, parents and external professionals. These relationships were often nurtured through communication, which enabled collaborative working and a shared understanding of CYP's needs. Research

conducted by Hellowell et al., (2022) explored the critical role of collaboration across the SEND system in England, particularly in response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, and found that effective working partnerships between schools, parents and external professionals were vital in maintaining support for CYP with SEND. Thematic analysis of 100 survey responses identified six key lessons including the importance of communication, trust and shared responsibility, which were echoed as strong narratives in the current study. While all six participants in the current study recognised the value of support systems, three participants expressed experiences where they had not felt adequately supported. Some described inconsistencies in communication or limited access to external services which appeared to hinder their ability to work collaboratively and provide joined-up support.

5.5 Managing the demands of teaching

Linking with Category 5: *'Pulled in many different directions,'* the following reviewed literature reflects the challenges of managing the varied demands of the teaching role, such as balancing emotional and learning needs. Experiences for participants in the current study appeared to vary in some respect across educational phases, such as secondary ECTs reporting greater difficulty in sustaining relationships due to larger class sizes and subject-specific teaching. This highlights the unique pressures and relational dynamics of each individual educational setting. In 2023, the Education Endowment Foundation conducted a review focused on managing teacher workload in schools and found that excessive workload, particularly administrative tasks, was a key factor affecting teacher retention and wellbeing (EEF, 2023). This was echoed in ongoing research by Ainsworth et al. (2023), exploring key predictors of teacher wellbeing, job satisfaction and burnout. In their survey of 2938 teachers in England, contextual factors such as school size, workload and student behaviour, were most significantly linked with job satisfaction and burnout. The School Teachers' Review Body (STRB) 35th report (2025) recommends systemic changes to reduce pressure on teachers and to provide better support structures.

In the current research, participants also described a disconnect between their theoretical training and the realities of the classroom reflected by one participant stating, '*But what do I do in the classroom?*' highlighting the uncertainty they feel when translating theory into practice. O'Reilly & Colum (2021) found that newly qualified teachers in Ireland lack confidence regarding teaching SEND. This sense of uncertainty and feeling '*underprepared*,' also expressed by participant 5, emphasises the importance of building capacity for teachers, not only at the individual level but also through systemic change, reinforced by the STRB's 35th report (2025). Literature suggests that creating an inclusive environment depends not only on the individual teacher, but also on the vision and priorities set by school leadership (Allen et al., 2021). This was reflected in the current research with participants sharing about managing the systemic pressures to meet high academic expectations set by trusts. While the importance of maintaining school standards is widely acknowledged, it is equally vital that teachers retain a sense of agency in shaping their educational philosophy and pedagogical approaches (Glazzard & Coverdale, 2018).

Uncertainty was also experienced by participants stemming from differences between their expectations of teaching prior to entering the profession and the realities they encountered in practice. This is echoed in a study conducted in Australia, where pre-service teachers were asked to visually represent their future professional selves. The findings revealed that the trainee teachers rarely depicted the complexities or emotional demands of teaching, instead presenting idealised images of confident teachers in harmonious classrooms (Beltman et al., 2015). Such representations suggest that teachers may enter the profession with optimistic, yet somewhat simplistic, conceptions of teaching, which may contribute to their feelings of uncertainty when faced with the reality of real-world classrooms and the manifestation of SEMH needs.

The ECF aimed to build capacity for ECTs by providing more tailored, evidence-based training to support them beyond initial teacher training. However, evaluations (DfE, 2023a, 2024b) suggest that while many teachers valued the structured support and mentoring, concerns were raised about the

intensity of workload, the relevance of some training and the limited flexibility to adapt learning to their individual school contexts. Recognising the evolving demands of the profession, the Department for Education announced in January 2024 that the ECF and ITT Core Content Framework would be replaced by a single, integrated Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) from September 2025 (DfE, 2024d). This updated framework is based on the, '*best available evidence from this country and around the world, assured by the Education Endowment Foundation*' (p.4) which aims to streamline and strengthen the early stages of teacher development by clearly outlining the knowledge, skills, and behaviours expected of trainee and early career teachers. It also places greater emphasis on adaptive teaching, inclusive practice, early cognitive development and social and emotional learning.

5.6 Building personal resilience

Ultimately, fostering resilience in teachers to manage the demands of their role requires more than individual coping strategies, it requires a whole-school ethos that values wellbeing, prioritises inclusion, and equips staff with the tools and time to respond meaningfully to CYP's needs. Reviewing the literature, the graduated response is a framework to assist teachers with managing demands effectively (DfE & DoH, 2015). This structured yet flexible approach supports teachers to prioritise and focus on what CYP need to thrive, such as support to develop their emotional regulation or social communication, rather than which label they fit.

Teaching is widely recognised as a profession with significant emotional demand. Educators are often responsible not only for supporting their students, but also for managing their own emotional wellbeing. This was evident in participants' reflections sharing personal experiences of mental health challenges during their induction. Emotions such as frustration and helplessness were noted as common themes. Zinsser et al. (2016) pose an important question: while teachers are expected to support CYP, 'Who is supporting the teachers?' Although their research was conducted in the US, the implications are widely applicable. They highlight that insufficient preparation for teachers to support CYP's social and emotional learning can

negatively affect teachers' sense of self efficacy. In the current research, only one participant noted that their school had begun implementing strategies to support staff wellbeing. Rae et al., (2017) highlight the importance of systemic, whole-school approaches to supporting teacher well-being. This includes reflective supervision, training in emotional literacy and resilience, and collaborative supportive school cultures that prioritise staff mental health alongside student needs. This perspective is strongly echoed in the views of Participant 4, who articulated a clear connection between teacher well-being and effective student support (see Section 4.9.1).

Despite the emotional strain, participants demonstrated dedication, determination and persistence to make a difference in the lives of CYP, as reflected in focused code 7.3. Reflecting on their practice, participants highlighted rewarding experiences which appeared to be fundamental with enhancing their confidence. Research acknowledges the importance of the first years of teaching in shaping teacher self-efficacy, which tends to stabilise and become resistant to change over time (Pendergast et al., 2011). This highlights the need for robust support systems for ECTs, including professional development, mentorship, and opportunities for reflective practice. By creating environments where new teachers feel valued and capable, school settings can contribute to ECTs' teaching effectiveness and retention.

5.7 Lifelong learning and professional growth

For some participants, their previous academic, professional, and personal experiences supported their transition to teaching, particularly in identifying and responding to the needs of CYP with SEND. Backgrounds in psychology and roles such as teaching assistants provided them with practical insights and confidence. Some also drew on personal life experiences, such as parenting or managing mental health, which enhanced their empathy and understanding. These findings align with research which, despite being dated, highlights how novice teachers draw on their personal background and experiences to interpret and navigate their teaching roles (Olsen, 2008).

Participants in the current study frequently acknowledged that teaching is a profession of continuous learning. As one participant noted, '*You learn all*

the time,' reflecting the dynamic nature of professional development, which includes both formal training and informal, experiential learning. While ITT and the ECF provide foundational knowledge, they felt that their training lacked depth in preparing them for the SEMH needs of CYP, being largely theoretical with limited practical application. While some found the ECT induction helpful in bridging this gap by offering practical strategies and having additional time to ease the transition into full-time teaching, others thought it still focused too heavily on curriculum content and there was a significant workload.

There is ongoing debate about what continued professional development (CPD) for teachers should include. Parker and Patton (2017) argue that for CPD to be meaningful, it must be bespoke and responsive to the diverse needs of both students and educators. While addressing immediate classroom challenges is vital, they also emphasise the importance of CPD which is holistic and engages with broader social, political, and professional dimensions of teaching. In this context, CPD must be seen as a career-long process, responsive to both individual needs and systemic changes in education. A national survey in England explored how school staff access and perceive CPD related to SEND (Dobson et al., 2023). They found a notable gap between the types of CPD that staff find most impactful and the CPD which they are able to access. Based on responses from 637 school staff, the study highlights the need for more targeted and accessible CPD which aligns with staff needs and school priorities. Guided by the narratives shared in the current research, supporting teachers to engage in reflective practice, navigate uncertainty, and apply theory meaningfully in the classroom might be a starting point for ECTs' CPD.

5.8 Envisioning a preferred future

Participants in the current study frequently expressed a desire for more practical, classroom-focused training, highlighting a gap between theoretical frameworks and the day-to-day realities of teaching, particularly when supporting pupils with SEMH needs. This aligns with findings from Petronzi et al. (2025), who note that balancing theory and practice remains a persistent challenge in ITT, with many educators feeling underprepared for the practical demands of the classroom.

Collaboration with experienced colleagues was seen as beneficial by participants and some acknowledged the value of working closely with external professionals such as educational psychologists (EP). Research by the Ambition Institute provides evidence that incorporating modelling into professional development significantly helps bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and classroom practice (Sims et al., 2023). The study found that teachers who engaged with video models of evidence-based strategies demonstrated more effective classroom implementation compared to those who only read about the strategies. This supports participants' hopes of building their capacity through guided support.

Participants also highlighted their ongoing reflection and self-awareness. Reflective practice has been widely recognised as a key driver of teacher growth, enabling educators to critically examine their beliefs, adapt their approaches, and develop a deeper understanding of their professional identity and classroom dynamics (Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). The reviewed literature and findings from the current research emphasise the need for teacher development to be both practically grounded and reflective, supporting educators in navigating the evolving demands of inclusive education.

5.9 Chapter Summary

This chapter presented a second review of the literature to support the contextualisation of data analysis and the development of conceptual categories. The integration of existing research has enhanced theoretical sensitivity and informed the construction of the study's grounded theory, which will be presented and discussed in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6. The grounded theory and discussion

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the final grounded theory (GT) developed in this study, alongside a critical discussion of the literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 5, and explores implications for ECTs, schools and EPs. It highlights how constructivist GT can add original insights to the field of education and educational psychology. This chapter also includes a research evaluation and my reflective account of this research journey.

6.2 The grounded theory: A toolkit for early career teachers supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs

Through the comparative analysis of six participants' interview data, thirty focused codes were developed, leading to eight conceptual categories that form the foundation of the study's GT. These are presented in Table 6.1 and were discussed in the previous chapter with reference to existing literature and research. Consistent with the interpretivist-constructivist stance adopted throughout the study, the GT is deeply rooted in the subjective experiences of the six ECTs, illuminating the emotional, relational, and professional complexities inherent in their roles. It reflects the co-constructed meanings that ECTs ascribe to their experiences, shaped through their interactions, contexts and evolving professional identities. As the researcher, I played an active role in this meaning-making process, engaging reflexively with the data and participants to interpret and construct a theory that authentically represents their lived realities.

The GT is presented as a conceptual toolkit designed to assist ECTs in supporting the SEMH needs of CYP. The rationale for presenting the GT as a toolkit lies in offering a structured yet flexible framework that aligns with the training and developmental needs identified in the data and reviewed literature. The overarching concept, '*Bridging theory to practice*,' captures the core challenge ECTs face in applying theoretical knowledge within real-world classroom contexts (Petronzi et al., 2025). The toolkit comprises eight interconnected areas and three core supports, reflecting both participants'

experiences and insights drawn from the literature. Table 6.1 provides the conceptual categories alongside the corresponding toolkit elements, while Figure 6.1 presents a visual representation of the final GT. Additional diagrams illustrating the development of the theory are also provided in Appendix P.

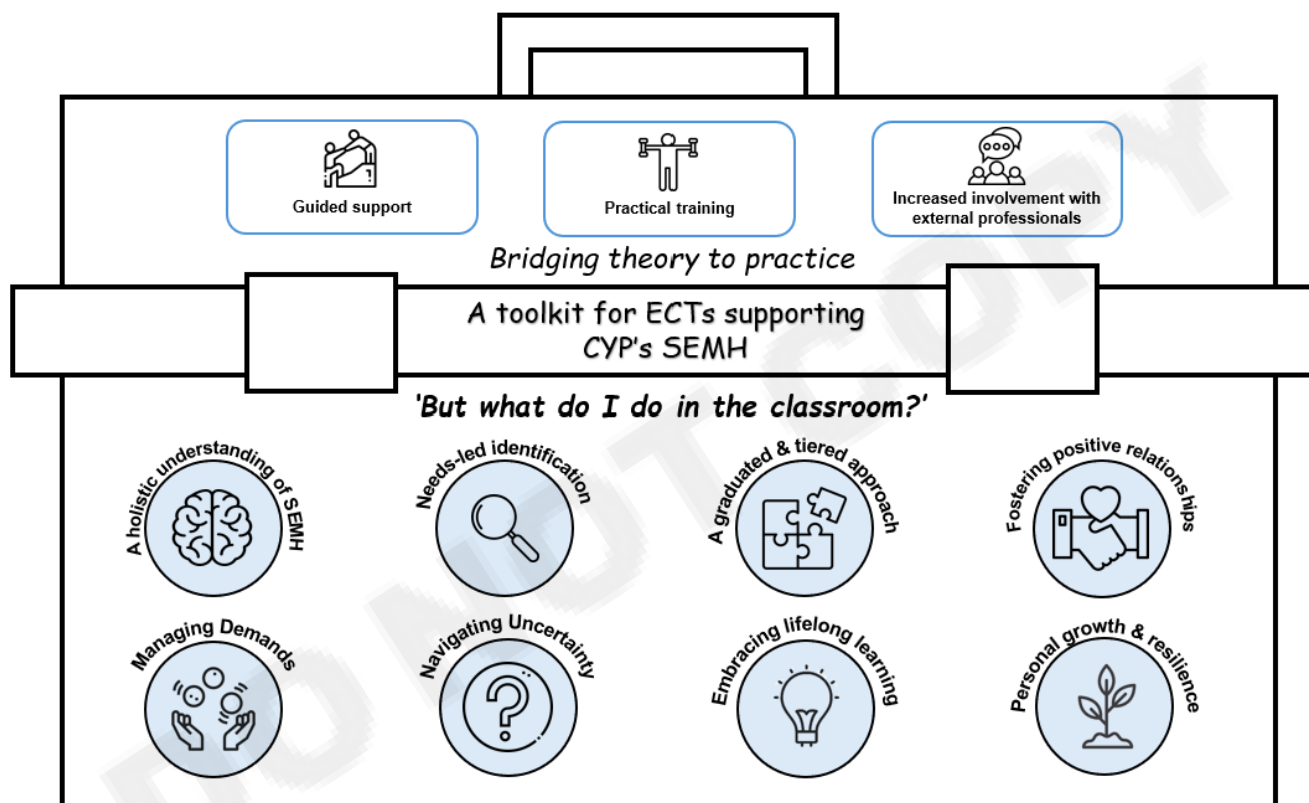
Table 6.1

The study's conceptual categories and how they correspond to the elements of the study's grounded theory toolkit following theoretical sensitisation and review of the literature.

Conceptual category	Grounded theory model element
Recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH	A holistic understanding of SEMH
Identifying, categorising and labelling	Needs-led identification
Responding to children and young people's individual needs	A graduated and tiered approach
The importance of relationships and support systems	Fostering positive relationships
'Pulled in many different directions' (In vivo code)	Managing demands Navigating uncertainty
Learning is continuous	Embracing lifelong learning
Building personal resilience	Personal growth and resilience
Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice	Guided support, practical training and increased involvement with external professionals

Figure 6.1

A visual representation of the grounded theory developed by the researcher in this study, conceptualised as a toolkit to guide early career teachers in supporting the social, emotional and mental health of children and young people. The model is informed by participants' lived experiences and highlights the importance of bridging the gap between theory and practice.



6.3 Linking the grounded theory with the reviewed literature

A foundational aspect of the proposed toolkit is the development of a holistic understanding of SEMH, which enables ECTs to further understand the complexity and individuality of children and young people's needs. This understanding underpins a shift from deficit-based models to more inclusive, strengths-based perspectives. Closely aligned with this is the emphasis on needs-led identification, which challenges reliance on diagnostic labels and instead promotes a nuanced, contextualised approach to recognising SEMH needs (Blanco-Bayo & Reraki, 2025). Together, these elements inform the implementation of a graduated and tiered approach to support (EEF, 2025), allowing ECTs to respond flexibly to varying levels of need. This reflects the importance of clarity and structured practice in enabling ECTs to navigate the early stages of SEMH support effectively.

The toolkit highlights the relational and emotional dimensions of ECTs' work. Fostering positive relationships with CYP, colleagues, families and professionals emerged as a central mechanism for effective SEMH support, reinforcing the value of connection. However, participants also described the challenge of building relationships when managing competing demands within constrained systems (McHugh et al., 2013). This tension often contributed to a sense of uncertainty, particularly when navigating unfamiliar situations without clear guidance. This emphasises the need for relational competence and adaptive decision-making as essential components of ECTs' professional practice (DfE, 2024).

Embracing lifelong learning reflects an ongoing process of intrapersonal development shaped by meaningful reflection, feedback, and evolving experience (Parker & Patton, 2017). This orientation toward continuous development is closely linked to the development of personal growth and resilience, qualities that enable ECTs to sustain their practice in the face of emotional demands, systemic pressures, and professional challenges. Together, these elements highlight the importance of self-awareness, reflective capacity, and developing emotional literacy and resilience in fostering sustainable and appropriate support for CYP alongside prioritising staff well-being (Rae et al., 2017). This aligns with the grounded theory's emphasis on

giving teachers the tools to support their own emotions and mental health and enhancing teacher resilience as a foundation to effectively supporting the SEMH needs of CYP.

Participants expressed a strong desire for guided support, practical training, and increased involvement with external professionals. These core methods of support were viewed as essential in helping ECTs feel more confident and equipped to respond to the SEMH needs of CYP. Guided support was valued by participants for its ability to provide structure and reassurance, building on existing strengths and skills. Practical training was desired to translate theoretical knowledge into actionable classroom-based strategies. Additionally, participants advocated for greater involvement with external professionals to enhance understanding and access specialist expertise. These foundational supports underscore the importance of embedding multi-agency collaboration, experiential learning, and ongoing mentorship within the broader provision for ECTs. To further illustrate the development of the GT, a table which maps these elements, and the conceptual categories is provided in Appendix Q.

Reflecting on the study's GT in relation to the purposely broad, initial policy and practice backdrop in Chapter 2, the conceptual grounding of this study is situated within the broader context of how SEMH is defined, understood, and addressed in educational settings. As outlined in the SEND Code of Practice (DfE & DoH, 2015), SEMH encompasses a wide range of emotional and behavioural needs. This statutory definition, widely recognised by educators, was adopted at the outset of this study to ensure clarity and minimise bias during data collection. However, following in-depth analysis and a higher-level of conceptualisation informed by relevant literature, it is recognised that this definition simplifies the complexity and contextual variability of SEMH needs as experienced in practice. The GT developed in this study, therefore, challenges deficit-based interpretations towards understanding SEMH holistically as a construct shaped by systemic, relational and environmental factors.

Additionally, the increasing prevalence of SEMH needs among CYP, as evidenced by national surveys (Children's Commissioner for England, 2020; NHS England, 2023), emphasises the urgency of equipping ECTs with the knowledge and skills to respond effectively. Despite policy initiatives such as the Green Paper (DoH & DfE, 2017) and the ECF (DfE, 2019b), research consistently highlights that ECTs may feel underprepared to meet these complex needs (EIF, 2021a; Roberts, 2025). This gap between policy expectations and classroom realities is further compounded by high attrition rates among new teachers, often linked to challenges in supporting SEMH (DfE, 2018b; 2024c).

The scoping review of the literature conducted prior to data collection identified two article abstracts relevant to this research. The scoping review search outlined in Section 2.6, was repeated in March 2025 to identify any additional studies published since the initial search. However, no further studies were found that met the established eligibility criteria.

In line with the principles of constructivist GT methodology, the full texts of the two identified articles were reviewed following data analysis to help contextualise and deepen the interpretation of the findings. Reporting on a longitudinal study, Woodhouse and Pedder (2017) explored ECTs' experiences and perceptions of leadership development in English secondary schools. Although it predates the ECF reforms and is not directly comparable to the current study's focus, it echoes similar challenges faced by ECTs in mastering the demands of their role. The authors advocate for early leadership development opportunities, which align with the current GT's toolkit elements of '*Embracing lifelong learning*,' and, '*Professional growth and resilience*.'

The second study by Barnard et al. (2022) is more closely aligned with the present research focus. It explores the perspectives of 11 beginner teachers in England about their ITT and their first year of teaching using thematic analysis. Participants reported a strong, reciprocal connection between theory and practice during their ITT, contrasting with the current study's findings. Barnard et al. (2022) also highlight the self-reliance and emotional demands experienced by new teachers, noting that professional

learning often occurs in the classroom due to limited capacity for broader development. For the current study, this reinforces the participants' desire for more practical, classroom-focused training and guided support. The grounded theory developed in this study directly addresses the contextual challenges faced by ECTs by offering a conceptual toolkit grounded in their lived experiences and professional development needs and seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice.

In relation to the findings of the current research, the upcoming implementation of the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) in September 2025 (DfE, 2024d) presents an opportunity to address some of the challenges identified by ECTs in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. The GT developed in this study aligns closely with the ITTECF's proposed emphasis on inclusive practice, social and emotional learning, and adaptive teaching. However, the success of this new framework will depend on how effectively it is implemented in practice, particularly in ensuring that training is not only evidence-based but also responsive to the lived realities of ECTs. The conceptual toolkit proposed in this study offers a practical, relational model for ECTs with supporting CYP's SEMH needs that could complement the ITTECF in practice.

6.4 The unique contribution of this study

This study offers a distinctive and timely contribution to the field of education and educational psychology by developing a grounded theory that illuminates ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Listening to the voices of ECTs, the research enabled the interpretation of meaning, ensuring that the resulting theory was firmly rooted in their lived experiences. Adopting an interpretivist-constructivist stance, the research prioritised subjective perspectives capturing the nuanced realities of ECTs day-to-day practice and the emotional and professional challenges they encounter.

A scoping review of the literature conducted prior to data collection revealed a significant gap in existing educational and psychological research, providing a clear rationale for the current study. While existing studies have explored ECTs' early professional leadership experiences (Woodhouse &

Pedder, 2017) and others have examined new teachers' experiences transitioning from ITT to the first year of teaching (Barnard et al., 2022), none - as far as I am aware - have examined ECTs' experiences through the lens of SEMH. Therefore, the GT presented in this study contributes new knowledge to this underexplored area and provides an original, practical framework to bridge theory to practice and subsequently enhance ECTs' confidence and professional skills in supporting CYP with SEMH needs.

6.5 The implications of this study on practice

The conceptual toolkit, grounded in ECTs' lived experiences, provides actionable insights for both ECTs, schools and EPs, with implications for training, support structures, and systemic collaboration.

6.5.1 Implications for early career teachers and schools

For ECTs, the findings highlight the importance of developing a holistic understanding of SEMH which promotes a needs-led identification, building emotional resilience, and engaging in reflective practice. Schools play a critical role in enabling this by fostering supportive environments where ECTs feel safe to explore, question, and grow. While it is acknowledged that ECTs and mentors will be involved in the ITTECF from September 2025 (DfE, 2024d), a key implication for schools to consider is the need to embed SEMH-focused training into induction and professional development opportunities. This ensures that ECTs are equipped with practical strategies and emotional literacy skills from the outset. Additionally, schools should create structured opportunities for reflection and supervision to help ECTs process emotionally demanding experiences and build resilience. The toolkit for ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs can be used as a flexible framework for ECTs and other educational staff to consider when working with and supporting CYP. Promoting a relational school culture is also essential. School leaders should prioritise collaboration and relational competence, recognising that strong professional relationships underpin effective SEMH support. At the same time, it is important to balance expectations with adequate support, ensuring that ECTs are not overwhelmed by workload pressures and have the flexibility to adapt learning to their specific contexts.

6.5.2 Implications for educational psychology

Educational Psychologists (EP) are widely recognised as key contributors to inclusive education, particularly in supporting CYP with SEMH needs (Purewal, 2020). Their expertise enables them to empower educational staff through individual, group and whole-school involvement, and they play a vital role in early intervention, staff training and multi-agency collaboration (DfE, 2023b). EPs are uniquely positioned to provide targeted, sustained, and evidence-based support to educators (Fallon et al., 2010; Boyle & Kelly, 2017; DfE, 2023b). Their specialist knowledge, applied practice, and research expertise (Birch et al., 2015) contribute to meaningful change for CYP (Cameron, 2006; Dunsmuir & Kratochwill, 2013, p.61), while also supporting the professional development of teaching staff navigating the complexities of inclusive practice.

This section draws on the study's grounded theory to explore implications for EP practice, integrating relevant literature and participant narratives to consider how EPs can assist ECTs with supporting CYP's SEMH needs. EPs are well-positioned to help ECTs bridge the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application, reinforcing the value of accessible, theory-informed frameworks (Eddleston & Atkinson, 2018). The toolkit proposed in this study offers such a framework (see Section 6.2).

To enhance its practical relevance, the study's GT toolkit has been adapted (see Appendix R) to serve as a flexible guide for EPs working with ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs. The amended framework conceptualises EP involvement through four key functions: consultation, collaboration, containment, and coaching. These functions reflect a nuanced and systemic understanding of EP practice and offer a structured yet adaptable approach to supporting ECTs across diverse educational contexts.

- **Consultation** enables EPs to facilitate reflective dialogue and problem-solving with ECTs.
- **Collaboration** promotes joint working across professional boundaries to enhance SEMH provision.

- **Containment** supports ECTs emotionally, helping them manage the psychological demands of their role.
- **Coaching** fosters professional growth and confidence in addressing SEMH challenges.

This framework is intentionally flexible, allowing EPs to tailor their approach based on the developmental stage of the ECT, the complexity of the SEMH needs, and the wider systemic context of the school. It also offers a shared language for EPs and educators to communicate and plan SEMH support more effectively, promoting consistency and clarity in collaborative practice.

6.5.2.1 Consultation, Collaboration, Containment and Coaching

Guided by participants' aspirations for future practice, there are several key areas where EPs can build capacity among ECTs in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. Consultation, one of the five core functions of EP practice - alongside assessment, intervention, training, and research - remains the most frequently used approach to service delivery (Jones & Atkinson, 2021). It facilitates collaborative problem-solving among key adults supporting CYP, fostering shared understanding, joint action planning, and professional self-efficacy (Kratochwill et al., 2014). Through consultation, EPs model reflective practice, scaffold decision-making, and promote the application of psychological theory in real-world classroom contexts.

Despite its recognised value, Royle & Atkinson (2025) highlight inconsistencies in how consultation is defined and implemented across UK local authority EP services. Their scoping review found that while many policies emphasise collaboration and empowerment, tensions often arise between these ideals and the more directive expectations placed on EPs. This reinforces the need for greater visibility and coherence in how EP support is communicated and accessed, particularly in the current educational climate. This was echoed by a participant in the current study, who noted that many ECTs were unaware of the EP role and the support they can offer. This highlights the need to clarify and promote the distinctive contributions EPs can make (Cameron, 2006; DfE, 2023b; Royle & Atkinson, 2025). Where EPs link

with schools, consideration should be given to the range of support they can provide for ECTs, particularly in relation to SEMH and their professional development.

EP collaboration with school leaders could further enhance this. By engaging in joint planning, EPs can help co-design support structures that are both responsive to ECTs' needs and aligned with whole-school approaches. Within this broader role, EPs are also well-positioned to promote inclusive, reflective practice within schools - an approach shown to challenge deficit-based narratives and drive systemic change (Stanbridge & Mercer, 2022).

A key component of EP consultation is containment - the emotional and psychological support provided to adults working with CYP, enabling them to remain effective in their roles (Zafeiriou & Gulliford, 2020). Containment helps consultees process and manage emotionally demanding experiences, contributing to resilience and sustained engagement in inclusive practice. EPs draw on a blend of consultative skills - including containment - alongside knowledge of child development and organisational systems to support mental health in schools. For ECTs, who may feel underprepared to manage classroom complexities, EPs can provide both preventative and responsive input, guiding staff through reflective processes that enhance understanding of SEMH and its manifestations. By embedding psychological thinking into everyday practice, EPs can help ECTs develop the confidence and competence needed to support pupils with SEMH needs, while strengthening their personal and professional resilience.

In addition to consultation, coaching psychology is an emerging area of interest for psychologists (Adams, 2016). Fanshawe (2019) reports that approximately one-third of EPs regularly use coaching techniques, although definitions and applications vary. The Association for Coaching (2023) describes coaching as a cooperative, goal-oriented process that supports personal and professional growth. Within education, coaching has been shown to promote positive mental health in CYP (Robson-Kelly & Van Nieuwerburgh, 2016) and enhance staff wellbeing (Adams & Lee, 2021). For ECTs, coaching

delivered by EPs offers a structured yet flexible space for reflection, goal setting, and problem-solving.

6.5.2.2 Extending the impact of educational psychologists

The implications for EPs extend beyond immediate school contexts. EPs have the potential to contribute meaningfully to the design and delivery of the Initial Teacher Training and Early Career Framework (ITTECF) (DfE, 2024d). Their expertise in child development, inclusive pedagogy, and psychological theory can help embed a deeper understanding of SEMH from the outset of a teacher's career.

By working collaboratively with training providers and school leaders, EPs can ensure that ECTs are not only better prepared for the realities of meeting SEMH needs in the classroom but are also supported in developing the reflective, relational, and resilient capacities required for lifelong professional growth. In doing so, EPs can extend their impact beyond individual consultations, influencing the broader educational landscape and contributing to a more inclusive and psychologically informed teaching workforce.

However, broader systemic challenges were reflected in participant accounts. For example, Participant 5 noted limited access to EPs, echoing national concerns raised by the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) regarding capacity and flexibility within the profession (DfE, 2023b). These constraints highlight the need for systemic change - enabling EPs to work more flexibly and collaboratively with schools and wider systems in ways that support both the outcomes of CYP and teacher development.

Ultimately, the implications from this study advocate for a shift towards more relational, and inclusive approaches to SEMH in schools. By bridging the gap between theory and practice, EPs can play a central role in shaping a workforce that is not only equipped to meet the diverse needs of CYP but also supported in sustaining their own wellbeing and professional growth.

6.6 Dissemination of the research findings

In line with my commitment to the stakeholders of this study, as outlined in Section 3.3.1, I will ensure that the findings are shared with the EPS, the LA and the consenting participants upon completion of this study. To facilitate accessibility and ease of distribution, a summary sheet outlining the broad findings will be emailed to the participants who consented to receiving a summary of the findings. To protect participant's confidentiality, all shared findings will be presented in a generalised and non-identifiable format, and no transcripts will be distributed. I considered sharing the developed toolkit with participants to gain their reflections on it; however, the study's aims were primarily exploratory in nature, and due to time constraints, this was not possible before my thesis submission. As this research aligns with the SEND development priorities of the LA, where I completed my placement as a TEP and continue to work while undertaking this research, I will also share more detailed insights with professionals across the SEND and Inclusion Department whose work is aligned with the study's focus. Given the national emphasis on supporting ECTs, particularly in light of the upcoming implementation of the ITTECF, and the growing focus on addressing CYP's SEMH since the COVID-19 pandemic, it is intended that disseminating the outcomes of this constructivist GT study will contribute meaningfully to broader strategic discussions.

6.7 The strengths and limitations of this study

This study has several strengths that contribute to its overall credibility and relevance. The use of a constructivist GT methodology enabled the development of a theory grounded in the lived experiences of ECTs, capturing the complexity of their interactions with SEMH needs in educational settings. The application of constant comparative analysis, theoretical sampling, and memo writing supported a rigorous and transparent research process. Engagement with multiple stakeholders, including EPs and LA professionals enhanced the contextual relevance and practical applicability of the findings. Furthermore, the alignment of the study with national priorities, such as the upcoming implementation of the ITTECF and the growing emphasis on

supporting CYP's SEMH, strengthens its potential impact to current educational discourse.

Despite its contributions, the study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, the nature of constructivist GT means that findings are not intended to be generalisable. Instead, it seeks to develop theory that is situated and context specific. While this may be viewed as a limitation by those who prioritise generalisability, this study acknowledges the multiple individual perspectives of participants and does not seek to make universal claims. Secondly, although the sample size was appropriate for qualitative research, it lacked diversity in terms of gender, ethnicity and geographical representation. This may limit the transferability of findings. Additionally, due to the sample size, it could be argued that rather than a theory, the study shared a mini narrative of six ECTs' experiences.

It is acknowledged that the first five participants had a background or an interest in psychology and/or mental health, either through academic study or professional experience. This may have influenced their decision to participate and shaped the depth and direction of the data collected. Although theoretical sampling was used to include a participant with less exposure to these areas, this characteristic of the sample may still be considered a limitation. Also, considering my dual role as the researcher and as a TEP, participants' responses may have been influenced by this despite efforts to maintain reflexivity and transparency throughout the research process. Much of the existing literature on constructivist GT is situated within medical, and nursing contexts. This could be considered a limitation when applied to educational research, as the methodology may not be fully represented within these contexts. Additionally, the recruitment process, as outlined in Chapter 3, presented challenges. Convenience sampling, used for the initial two interviews, is subject to criticism due to the potential for selection bias and limited representativeness.

Although efforts were made to follow the methodological process, the complexity of GT was acknowledged, and my position as a novice grounded theorist in this approach meant that learning occurred throughout the study.

On reflection during the writing process of this thesis, despite employing reflexive techniques such as a research diary and memo-writing, it became apparent that my interpretive stance may have subtly shifted during some interviews - particularly with participant 4, who appeared notably resilient in comparison to others, and participant 6, who placed strong emphasis on relationships with senior leadership and external agencies. These participants stood apart in ways that may reflect individual differences such as age, prior experience, or personal coping strategies. Their narratives might have warranted further exploration as distinct cases or could have been more explicitly integrated into earlier discussions. This raises important considerations for future research regarding the consistency of the questioning stance and the interpretive lens applied across interviews.

6.8 The quality evaluation of this study

As introduced in Chapter 3, Charmaz (2014, p.337) proposed a set of criteria for evaluating the quality and rigour of GT research. These included credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness. Table 3.1 in Section 3.3.3 outlines and describes these criteria. How they were applied both at the outset of the current study and following data collection and analysis is outlined in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2

Measures taken by the researcher to support the credibility, originality, resonance and usefulness of the current study using criteria proposed by Charmaz (2014, p.337).

Evaluation Criteria	Measures in place in the current study
Credibility	• To develop an insight into the research topics, an initial scoping literature reviewed was conducted. • Engagement in taught sessions and workshops related to research methods, particularly those focused on GT, supported the development of methodological understanding.

- Regular research supervision facilitated critical reflection throughout the research process. Additional insights were gained through peer supervision with individuals experienced in GT research. Professional discussions within the EPS and LA further informed the study.
- GT techniques such as theoretical sampling and constant comparative analysis were applied. Memo writing and the maintenance of a research diary contributed to a transparent audit trail of decisions and outcomes to fulfil reflexivity. The analytic process of the study is illustrated throughout the main body of this thesis and in the appendices.
- Data saturation checks were used to ensure the adequacy and richness of the data. Interviews ranged from twenty to thirty-five minutes in duration, allowing for in-depth exploration of participants' experiences. Although the sample could have been more diverse, variation in participants' age, training routes, and the age ranges they taught enabled the inclusion of a range of perspectives.
- The unique contribution of the developed GT is discussed in Chapter 6.
- The use of a constructivist GT methodology, and the application of constant comparative analysis, enabled a rigorous research approach that generated findings closely aligned with the study's core topics.

Originality

Resonance	• Findings of this study demonstrate strong resonance with participants as evidence by the alignment between the constructed GT and the lived experiences shared during interviews. • The resonance of the findings is further supported by feedback from this study's stakeholders within the EPS and LA. • This study aligns with current national priorities. The findings hold relevance for a broader audience, including school leaders and professionals involved in ITT and policy development.
Usefulness	• The implications for practice of the developed GT are considered in Section 6.5. Additionally, the study offers improvements in practice for stakeholders. • While context-specific, the findings offer transferable insights into the needs of ECTs, with potential applicability across educational settings in England. • Strengths, limitations and suggestions for future research are presented in Sections 6.7 and 6.9 to further enhance understanding of the topics explored in this study.

While Charmaz's (2014) evaluation criteria offered a valuable framework for evaluating this constructivist GT research, it is not without its limitations. Notably, the framework does not explicitly address aspects such as confirmability (the extent to which findings are shaped by the participants rather than researcher bias) and dependability (the consistency and reliability of the research process over time). These are central to Lincoln and Guba's (1985) evaluative criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research. My commitment to reflexivity and maintaining a transparent audit trail aligns more

closely with these additional criteria. Therefore, while Charmaz's criteria provided a useful framework through which to evaluate the study's quality and was selected based on the methodological decisions underpinning this research, there are alternative evaluation frameworks (e.g., Lincoln & Guba, 1985) that would have offered a more comprehensive approach to assessing the study's trustworthiness.

6.9 Ideas for future research

The findings of the current study should be interpreted in light of its limitations and the need for continued research to deepen understanding and inform practice. Future research could build on exploring ECTs' experiences of SEMH across a broader range of educational contexts, including different regions, school types, and levels of support. Longitudinal studies could provide insight into how ECTs' understanding of SEMH evolves over time. Additionally, further research could examine the impact of specific elements within this study's GT toolkit on ECTs' professional development in relation to SEMH. Future studies could explicitly explore ECTs' views and experiences of EPs, to better understand the perceived role and impact of EPs in supporting SEMH needs. Comparative studies involving other professional groups, such as ECT mentors, senior leaders, support staff, EPs and CYP, may also offer a more holistic understanding of the systemic factors influencing SEMH support in schools. Alternatively, future research might employ survey-based methods to gather broader datasets and explore patterns across larger populations.

6.10 Reflexivity revisited

As discussed in Section 3.1, reflexivity is an essential component of qualitative research, particularly within GT studies. Constructivist GT requires the researcher to be an active participant in the research process, acknowledging that the emerging theory is shaped by their interpretations, the participants' narratives, and the broader context in which the study is situated (Miller, 2022).

Reflexive commentary: 'Trust the process'

My doctoral research journey has been marked by both exciting learning opportunities and significant challenges. Alongside managing ongoing personal health needs, the recruitment of participants proved to be a particularly demanding aspect of the study, contributing to delays and considerably impacting my initial anticipated timeline to completion. For several months, it appeared that recruiting participants would be unachievable. However, support from colleagues and peers within my professional networks proved invaluable in overcoming this barrier.

My research diary, alongside memo writing, provided an audit trail to document my ideas, events and thought processes to maintain analytical rigour and reflect on my potential biases. They also served as a space to document emotional responses and uncertainties, which are often overlooked but are integral to the reflexive process. Connecting with colleagues who had experience using GT methodologies was particularly beneficial. I vividly recall one person describing GT as a "messy process," advising me to "sit with the mess and be okay with it." This became my guiding mantra, alongside my cohort's favourite phrase: "Trust the process." I did. And through the complex, iterative, and at times exhausting analysis of constructivist GT, I experienced numerous lightbulb moments as patterns, narratives and categories began to emerge from the data.

Engaging deeply with the data was both intellectually demanding and creatively fulfilling. Charmaz's (2014) notion of theoretical playfulness resonated strongly with my experience. As I moved through the stages of coding, constant comparison, and theoretical integration, I found myself increasingly immersed in the process. The emergence of a unique conceptual model was empowering and brought a sense of ownership and authenticity. This reflexive journey has not only shaped the outcomes of the research but has also had a lasting impact on my professional identity. Initially in developing my skills as a 'scientist practitioner,' it has also deepened my understanding of the demands ECTs face, and has influenced how I approach my own practice, particularly in terms of challenging and reframing thinking around SEMH needs.

6.11 Chapter summary

This chapter presented the GT developed through the current study, which offers a toolkit model for ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs, developed within the current study. A critical discussion of the final GT model was provided, situating it within the context of existing literature. The chapter also explored the implications of the study, outlining its unique contribution to the field and its relevance for ECTs, schools, EPs, and broader educational practice. Research quality evaluation is presented, before outlining the strengths, limitations and future research suggestions. The chapter concluded by revisiting the role of reflexivity throughout the research process, emphasising the importance of the researcher's positionality and reflective engagement. Chapter 7 will provide a final summary of the thesis, drawing together key findings, contributions, and concluding reflections.

Chapter 7. Conclusion

The role of teachers supporting the SEMH development of CYP has become an increasingly prominent focus in education, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite this growing emphasis, there remains limited research exploring how ECTs experience and navigate this responsibility. Furthermore, with the implementation of the ECF in September 2021 (DfE, 2019), designed to provide structured support and development for new teachers, it is timely to examine ECTs' experiences in this area.

This study sought to explore the lived experiences of ECTs in supporting the SEMH needs of children and young people and to examine how EPs can assist in this endeavour. Using a constructivist GT methodology, the research illuminated the nuanced and complex realities that six ECTs are navigating in their formative professional years. Through iterative data collection and analysis, eight conceptual categories were identified that addressed the research question, '*What are ECTs' experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs?*' These include recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH; identifying, labelling and categorising; responding to CYP's individual needs; the importance of relationships and support systems; '*pulled in many different directions*'; learning is continuous; building personal resilience and envisioning a preferred future for professional practice. Key narratives across these categories highlighted ECTs' uncertainty in their role associated with identifying needs and knowing how best to respond, feelings of being underprepared to support CYP's SEMH needs, and a desire for guided support to bridge the gap between theory and practice. These findings directly informed the development of the study's GT, entitled, '*But what do I do in the classroom?*' Bridging theory to practice: A toolkit for ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH.

The model, presented as both a practical and conceptual toolkit, comprises eight elements of practice and three core supports derived from ECTs' shared experiences. These elements were theoretically sensitised through engagement with relevant literature, including frameworks for understanding SEMH, relational and trauma-informed practices, and strategies for managing professional demands and uncertainty. The model also emphasises the importance of personal growth, resilience, and lifelong

professional learning. Implications for EP practice were presented. Through the study's grounded theory and a review of relevant literature, four key functions - consultation, collaboration, containment and coaching – were identified as central implications for EPs working with ECTs. These functions reflect the multifaceted ways in which EPs can support ECTs, not only through the provision of expertise but also by fostering collaboration and developing emotional resilience.

This research makes a distinctive contribution as the first study to adopt a constructivist GT methodology to specifically explore the experiences of ECTs in supporting CYP's SEMH needs. As outlined at the beginning of this chapter, the study is situated within the context of the ECF (DfE, 2019b), and therefore offers valuable insights into approaches which can support teacher training and induction. Ultimately, this research advocates for a shift away from ECTs feeling underprepared to support CYP's SEMH needs, toward a model of professional support and development that meaningfully integrates theory and practice.

Final word count: 39,724

(excluding abstract and appendices)

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Appendices

Appendix A: Ethical Approval Letter



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SJ/tp

Ref: S1530

Thursday 6th July 2023

Dear Elizah Barnes & Victoria Lewis

Ethics Committee Review

Thank you for submitting an account of your proposed research 'How can educational psychologists (EPs) support early career teachers (ECTs) with supporting children and young people's (CYP's) social emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs?'

That proposal has now been reviewed and we are pleased to tell you it has met with the Committee's approval.

However:

Please note the following comments from our reviewers.

Reviewer One:

- You are collecting personal information (e.g., email address) to contact the participants prior and after the study and send through study documentation. You need a secure study for storing and deleting this data. This information should be on a password protected document stored securely on OneDrive and in a secure password protected computer. There should only be one key document that links the participant ID to study documents. All other files, such as audio files and transcripts, should be stored under participant ID. This key linking file should be deleted after the study is over and data collection is finished and there is no further need to keep personal information.
- You request consent to keep their personal information (e.g., email addresses) to contact them about future research. There is no justification for this procedure based on your application, and therefore it is advised that you do not keep personal information past when it is needed for this study.
- If you have a specific reason to keep their information and re-contacted them, then this should be clearly outlined in the information sheet along with a clear timeline for how long you would keep their details and when it would be deleted. This procedure and justification should also have been in your application in the procedure section.
- Your data withdrawal procedure is potentially problematic. Participants are usually given a clear timeline (with dates where possible) for when they can withdraw data and be informed that past this point their data might have already been analyzed and submitted for conferences or publication. It is not withdrawal of data if participants data may still be used and presented in public forums (e.g., e-thesis online repository, conferences, journals etc). Please remove these statements and replace them with clearer timelines on when data can and cannot be withdrawn.
- "Do you give consent to your data from this research being shared with other researchers provided that your anonymity is protected?" This standard statement on the



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consent form was likely written with numerical studies in mind where anonymization is easier. I would instead suggest that you state your processes for ensuring confidentiality but acknowledge this is a possible possibility that others may identify them if they have shared these experiences with others (but discuss the small/unlikely possibility of it).

Independently of the Ethics Committee procedures, supervisors also have responsibilities for the risk assessment of projects as detailed in the safety pages of the University web site. Ethics Committee approval does not alter, replace, or remove those responsibilities, nor does it certify that they have been met.

Yours sincerely

Professor Stephen Jackson
Chair, Ethics Committee

Appendix B: Research Posters

'How can Educational Psychologists support Early Career Teachers with supporting Children and Young People's Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs?'



Are you an Early Career Teacher? You are invited to share your lived experiences.

My name is Elizah, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at The University of Nottingham. I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of Early Career Teachers with supporting SEMH needs.



Ethical Approval Number: S1530

I am looking for Early Career Teachers (ECTs) - early years, primary or secondary trained - in England, who have completed one year minimum of their induction following the Early Career Framework, to participate in my doctoral research exploring how Educational Psychologists can support ECTs with supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs.

Taking part would involve a one-to-one interview (no longer than twenty minutes) with myself as the interviewer via Microsoft Teams on an agreed date.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please contact me **before Friday 8th March 2024** by emailing me at elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk for more information.

'How can Educational Psychologists support Early Career Teachers with supporting Children and Young People's Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs?'



Are you an Early Career Teacher or in your third year of teaching (having completed your induction)? If so, you are invited to share your lived experiences.

My name is Elizah, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at The University of Nottingham. I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of Early Career Teachers with supporting SEMH needs.



Ethical Approval Number: S1530

I am seeking Early Career Teachers (ECTs) - early years, primary or secondary trained - in England, who are completing their induction following the Early Career Framework or have completed their induction (in their third year of teaching), to participate in my doctoral research exploring how Educational Psychologists can support ECTs with supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs.

Taking part would involve a one-to-one interview (**no longer than twenty minutes**) with myself as the interviewer via Microsoft Teams during the week commencing 1st April 2024.

If you are interested in taking part in this research, please contact me as soon as possible by emailing me at elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk for more information.

Appendix C: Email Response

Dear <Participant's name>,

Thank you for your interest in participating in my doctoral thesis research exploring how educational psychologists can support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs.

Please find the research information sheet and consent form attached. These documents provide further information about the study. Please take time to read through these and if you have any questions about any area of the research, please respond to this email and I will get back to you.

If you decide that you do not wish to participate, I respect your decision. If you do wish to participate, please complete and sign the attached consent form and return it to me. Due to the nature of this grounded theory study, initial participants will be selected on a first-come basis; however, you may be contacted to participate between now and (Date). Please only complete and return the consent form if you agree to this.

Best wishes,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizah". The script is cursive and fluid, with the 'E' and 'L' being particularly prominent.

Elizah Barnes

Trainee Educational Psychologist

The University of Nottingham

Appendix D: Research Information Sheet



Research Title: 'How can Educational Psychologists support Early Career Teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs?'

Ethical Approval Number: S1530

Researcher: Elizah Barnes

Supervisor: Dr Victoria Lewis

This is an invitation to participate in a research study which will be reported and assessed as part of the researcher's doctoral thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology Training at The University of Nottingham. Before you decide whether you would like to take part, it is important for you to understand the purpose of the research and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information sheet carefully. Please ask if you would like any further information or have any questions. Once you have taken your time to read the information, if you decide to participate, please complete the research consent form enclosed.

Who will conduct the research?

Elizah Barnes, Trainee Educational Psychologist, The University of Nottingham.

What is the title of the research?

How can educational psychologists support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs?

What is the aim of research?

The study aims to explore how educational psychologists can support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs. To do this, the research seeks to understand early career teachers' views of social, emotional, and mental health language and terminology, and their views and experiences of children and young people's behaviour. It will also explore their perspectives on their training, their induction, and early teaching experiences with a particular focus on children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs.

Why have you been chosen?

You have been invited to participate as you have identified yourself as an early career teacher as described by the Early Career Framework (Department for Education, 2019).

Who else is involved?

The research will invite other early career teachers to participate. The University of Nottingham is the other stakeholder within this research.

What would you be asked to do if you took part?

You will take part in an interview with the researcher which will be no longer than twenty minutes in length via Microsoft Teams. You may also be invited to participate in a follow-up interview during this study. If you consent to being re-interviewed, your details will be kept in a secure, password-protected document until April 30th, 2024. Before your interview, you will be asked to complete a Microsoft Form to gather the following information: age category; ethnicity; gender and a few questions relating to the context of your training and your current and previous roles. The purpose of gathering this information is for the researcher to consider additional factors which may contribute to the participants' experiences.

What happens to the data collected?

Your responses in the interview will be audio-recorded, analysed using a grounded theory approach, and written up for a doctoral thesis. All data

collected will be kept confidential and used for research purposes only. Any quotations or information will be anonymised.

What is Grounded Theory?

Grounded theory seeks to discover new theory from data collected compared to methods which seek to extend existing theories. Therefore, with the nature of grounded theory, fully informed consent may not be available as it is not possible to know what will emerge throughout the research. This study proposes to use the grounded theory model as outlined by Charmaz (2014); the basis of this approach highlights an emphasis on how participants construct meaning.

How is confidentiality maintained?

Participants' names and other identifiable information will not be used in the written account of the research. You will be asked to choose a pseudonym at the start of your interview to protect your identity. All data will be stored securely on a password-protected document stored securely on OneDrive and on a secure password-protected computer. Data will be destroyed when it is no longer needed. However, it is important to consider when deciding whether to participate that there is a small possibility that others may identify you if you have shared your experiences with them. Furthermore, as an online participant in this research, there is always a potential risk of intrusion by outside agents, for example through hacking, and therefore the possibility of being identified. In addition, the researcher has a legal duty to safeguard participants. Therefore, if you make a disclosure which suggests there is a risk of harm to yourself or others, the researcher will agree the next steps with you depending on the circumstance.

What happens if you do not want to take part or if you change your mind?

Your participation in the research is voluntary and you are under no obligation to take part. It is your decision whether you participate or not. If you decide to take part, you will have a copy of this information sheet to keep and asked to complete and sign a consent form. If you decide to take part, you can withdraw your data up to one week (seven days) after your interview. After this date,

your data will have been anonymised and may have been analysed. The specific date you will be able to withdraw your data will be included in a debrief letter which will be shared with you at the end of your interview.

What is the duration of the research?

The research process will last for approximately one academic year. However, data will be kept until the researcher has completed their doctoral training.

Where will the research be conducted?

The interview will take place on Microsoft Teams at an agreed time between you and the researcher. You will need access to a device with Microsoft Teams installed. You can decide whether you wish to have your camera on or off during the interview.

Will the outcomes of the research be published?

The research findings will be written up as part of a doctoral thesis for the Professional Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology at The University of Nottingham. The researcher may also submit the research to an appropriate journal for publication in the future.

How can I ask questions or gain further information about the research?

You can email the researcher or their supervisor for further information about the research using the details below:

Researcher: Elizah Barnes, elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk

*Academic Tutor & Research Supervisor: Dr Victoria Lewis,
victoria.lewis@nottingham.ac.uk*

What if something goes wrong?

If you have any concerns or a complaint about this research, please contact
Stephen Jackson (Chair of Ethics Committee):
stephen.jackson@nottingham.ac.uk

Privacy information for Research Participants

For information about the University's obligations with respect to your data, who you can get in touch with and your rights as a data subject, please visit: www.nottingham.ac.uk/utilities/privacy/privacy.aspx.

Why we collect your personal data

We collect personal data under the terms of the University's Royal Charter in our capacity as a teaching and research body to advance education and learning. Specific purposes for data collection on this occasion are completion of a research study investigating how educational psychologists can support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional and mental health needs.

Legal basis for processing your personal data under GDPR

The legal basis for processing your personal data on this occasion is Article 6(1a) consent of the data subject.

How long we keep your data

The University may store your data for up to 25 years and for a period of no less than 7 years after the research project finishes. The researchers who gathered or processed the data may also store the data indefinitely and reuse it in future research.

Measures to safeguard your stored data include the following steps:

- Interviews will be audio-recorded on a password protected device accessible to the researcher.
- Interviews will be transcribed using university transcription services, which comply with GDPR regulations.
- Chosen pseudonyms will be used to replace the participant's names and any information which could identify the participant will be removed to address anonymity and confidentiality.
- Interview recordings will be deleted three weeks from the date of transcription.

Appendix E: Research Consent Form



Research Title: How can educational psychologists support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs?

Ethical Approval Number: S1530

Researcher: Elizah Barnes, elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk

Academic Tutor & Research Supervisor: Dr Victoria Lewis,
victoria.lewis@nottingham.ac.uk

Dear Participant,

Please read and answer the following questions independently:

Have you read and understood the Information Sheet?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Have you had the opportunity to ask questions about the research?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Have all your questions been answered satisfactorily?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Are you completing your early career induction?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you understand and accept the risks to maintaining confidentiality described in the research information sheet?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you understand that due to the nature of this grounded theory study participants will be selected on a first-come basis, so you may not be required to participate?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you agree to being contacted via email between now and 30 th April 2024 to participate?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Do you understand that you are free to withdraw your data up to one week after your interview date?	Yes ☐	No ☐

Do you agree to being contacted to be re-interviewed for this research up until 30 th April 2024?	Yes ☐	No ☐
Would you like to receive a research summary sheet once the research has been completed? <i>If you select yes, you are consenting to your email address being held in a secure, password-protected document until successful completion of the researcher's viva examination.</i>	Yes ☐	No ☐

If you consent to participate in this research, please read the statement on the following page, then sign your name and return this document to **elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk**

By checking this button, I indicate that the study has been explained to me to my satisfaction and I agree to take part. I understand that I am free to withdraw up until one week (seven days) after my interview date ☐

Participant Name: _____ Date: _____

Participant Signature: _____

"I have explained the study to the above participant, and they have agreed to take part."

Researcher Name: _____ Date: _____

Researcher Signature: _____

Appendix F: Microsoft Form Survey

Participant Information Form

Research Title: How can Educational Psychologists support Early Career Teachers with supporting Children and Young People's Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs?

Thank you for agreeing to participate in the above research. Before we begin the interview, please complete the following participant information form. The purpose of this form is to consider factors which may contribute to your lived experiences.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me: elizabeth.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk

* Required

1. Please choose a pseudonym (a first name different to your own) which will be used to anonymise your data. Please remember this for your interview. *

2. Which age category are you? *

- ☐ 18-24
- ☐ 25-34
- ☐ 35-44
- ☐ 45-54
- ☐ 55-64
- ☐ 64+

3. What is your gender identity?

4. Which pronouns do you use?

5. What is your ethnicity?

6. Are you a parent? (If yes, how many children do you have? What age are they?)

7. Where did you complete your teacher training? (e.g., university name)

8. Which route of teacher training did you complete? (e.g., BEd, PGCE, SCITT)

9. When did you complete your teacher training course?

10. What is the title of your current role?

11. Which county in England is your current role in?

12. What age range and subject did you train to teach? (e.g., primary, secondary - Maths)

13. What age range and subject are you teaching this year?

14. What was your previous role/s before beginning teacher training?

15. If you wish to make any additional comments about your answer for question 14, please do so here.

Appendix G: Research Interview Script

Introductory Script

My name is Elizah. I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist at The University of Nottingham. As you know from reading the research information sheet, I am interested in exploring early career teachers' experiences supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs. I am very grateful that you have agreed to participate in this research. Before we begin and I start recording the interview, I am going to run through a few points and give you chance to ask any questions.

Consent for recording

You have read the research information sheet and completed and signed the consent form. To highlight, as the researcher I have a legal duty to safeguard participants. Therefore, if you make a disclosure which suggests there is a risk of harm to yourself or others, I will agree the next steps with you depending on the circumstance. Before we begin, can I check again that you are happy for me to begin recording? You will receive a notification in a moment. This interview will be recorded and stored on my password-encrypted laptop and will not be accessible to anyone else.

Post-interview support

This interview will last no longer than 20 minutes. After the interview is finished and we have stopped recording, I will share a debrief information letter with you which will take no longer than 10 minutes, which will also be sent to you in the chat function via Microsoft Teams.

If during the interview, anything does come up that is difficult, there are a number of places you can go to for support:

- Your induction mentor, Your GP, Samaritans, Mental Health Matters Helpline, Education Support. The contact details for these will be shared in the message function at this point in the interview and highlighted on the debrief sheet.

Confidentiality agreement

Information shared will remain confidential unless I felt that a safeguarding issue arises. If you or someone you are talking about is at risk of harm, we will agree next steps together depending on the circumstance. I ask that if you talk about any specific people that you do not use their name, instead please use their initial. I will ensure any identifiable data is anonymised upon transcription.

If you have any questions, please ask. I would also like to remind you that you have the right to withdraw at any point during the interview and before the analytical phase. However, as outlined in the information sheet and consent form, due to the nature of the grounded theory approach, you have seven days from today to withdraw.

Before we begin, do you have any questions? What is your chosen pseudonym? Do you consent to me starting the recording?

Start recording/timer if they consent

Debrief procedure script

Thank you for taking part – I am really grateful. I will now turn off the recording and we will have an opportunity to debrief.

Share the debrief letter with participant (reiterate that they can contact after the withdrawal date has passed to share any concerns).

Explain what will happen next.

Confirm whether they consent to being contacted for a follow-up interview, if required, and if they wish to receive a summary sheet.

Appendix H: Interview Schedule Prompts and Theoretical Sampling Interview

At the start and end of each interview, the script in Appendix G was read to participants. As outlined in Section 3.6.1.1, the interviews utilised the key characteristics of intensive interviewing (and semi-structured interviews), so the interview schedules outlined in this Appendix were developed as prompts. This provided flexibility so I was able to follow the experiences of the participant whilst also developing prompt scripts in response to emergent codes and theoretical sampling.

In addition to the interview schedule prompts, I also had the following sentence starters at hand to use as prompts to follow up on the participants' experiences, they shared. This enabled an egalitarian, conversational style and helped gain a rich picture of their perspectives and experiences.

Can you tell me a bit more about...

Can you expand...

You mentioned about...

What are your views/thoughts...

How did/does it make you feel?

It sounds like... is that right?

What have your experiences been in relation to...

That's interesting, can you tell me more?

Is there anything you...

Interview 1

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role?
- What have you found helpful in supporting CYP's SEMH needs?

- Can you share a time or experience when you felt things went well while supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 2

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role? *(Note: Are they being 'pulled in different directions?')*
- What have you found most helpful/important when supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- What are your thoughts and experiences regarding self-study or self-research to understand and support CYP's SEMH needs?
- Can you tell me what your teacher training experience was like?
- (If it doesn't come up in previous question) In what ways, if any, did your training help you with supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Can you share your experiences of the Early Career Framework, and your induction?
- Can you share a time or experience when you felt things went well while supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 3

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role? *(Note: Are they being 'pulled in different directions?')*
- I'm going to read the definition from the SEND code of practice of social, emotional and mental health needs...

Children and young people may experience a wide range of social and emotional difficulties which manifest themselves in many ways. These may include becoming withdrawn or isolated, as well as displaying challenging, disruptive, or disturbing behaviour. These behaviours may reflect underlying mental health difficulties, such as anxiety or depression, self-harming, substance misuse, eating disorders or physical symptoms that are medically unexplained. Other children and

young people may have disorders such as attention deficit disorder, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder, or attachment disorder.

What are your views?

- Can you tell me what your teacher training experience was like?
- (If it doesn't come up in previous question) In what ways did your training help you with supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Can you tell me about your experiences with other professionals?
- Can you share your experiences of the Early Career Framework, and your induction? (If participant highlights about any barriers to supporting SEMH needs during ECT induction, explore this further using sentence prompts).
- What support do you think would assist you/be helpful during your ECT induction?
- Can you share a time or experience when you felt things went well while supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 4

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- What is your understanding of SEMH and SEND?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role? (*Note: Are they being 'pulled in different directions?'*)
- Can you tell me what your teacher training experience was like?
- In what ways did your training help you to support CYP's SEMH needs?
- What support do you think would assist you/be helpful during your ECT induction?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 5

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role? (*Note: Are they being 'pulled in different directions?'*)
- Tell me about your role with supporting CYP's SEMH needs and SEND?

- Can you tell me about your experiences of CYP's behaviour as an ECT?
- What were your experiences of your training?
- In what ways did your training help you to support CYP's SEMH needs?
- What would assist you, as an ECT, with supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Interview 6

- What does SEMH mean to you?
- Tell me about your experiences of supporting CYP's SEMH needs in your current role? *(Note: Are they being 'pulled in different directions?')*
- What is your role with supporting SEND?
- Tell me about your professional roles prior to teaching?
- What would assist you, as an ECT, with supporting CYP's SEMH needs?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

Appendix I: Research Debrief Letter



Research Title: How can educational psychologists support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs?

Ethics Approval Number: S1530

Researcher: Elizah Barnes, elizah.barnes@nottingham.ac.uk

Academic Tutor & Research Supervisor: Victoria Lewis,
victoria.lewis@nottingham.ac.uk

Dear <Participant's name>,

Many thanks for your participation in the above research study.

The study aims to explore how educational psychologists can support early career teachers with supporting children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs. To do this, the research seeks to understand early career teachers' views of social, emotional, and mental health language and terminology, and their views and experiences of children and young people's behaviour. It will also explore their perspectives on their training, their induction, and early teaching experiences with a particular focus on children and young people's social, emotional, and mental health needs.

You have shared your perspective and lived experiences with me today. I may invite you to participate in a follow-up interview in the future if you have consented for me to do so. Please let me know if you no longer wish to be contacted. Furthermore, if you wish to withdraw your participation from this research project, please contact me on the email above up until (date seven days from interview date) when your data will have been anonymised and may have been analysed.

Your data which has been collected today will be stored securely on a password-encrypted device and destroyed when it is no longer needed.

If you would like any further information about this research, please contact me and/or my supervisor using the contact details above.

I encourage you to speak to your induction mentor and/or your GP or seek support from the following services if you require post-interview support:

- Samaritans offer a safe place for you to talk any time you like, in your own way – about whatever is getting to you. Call them for free on 116 123.
- Mental Health Matters Helpline: 0800 616171 (Landline) or 0300 330 5487 (Mobile). Live chat is also available: [Helpline & Webchat | Mental Health Matters \(mhm.org.uk\)](https://www.mhm.org.uk)
- Education Support: 08000 562 561 [Contact Education Support UK charity for education staff](https://www.contacteducation.org.uk)

Thank you for your participation in my doctoral research. I wish you the best in your teaching career.

Kind regards,



Elizah Barnes

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Doctorate in Applied Educational Psychology

School of Psychology

The University of Nottingham

Appendix J: Example of the initial (line-by-line) coding of interview one

150 a class of 32 pupils, it's really, really *class size*
 151 difficult and challenging to know *'really, really difficult + challenging'*
 152 strategies or potential triggers or even *Not knowing strategies or triggers*
 153 just like how to communicate that is *Not knowing how to communicate*
 154 helpful for them. Because they're not
 155 always able to be an advocate or a *CYP not always being able to advocate*
 156 spokesperson for themselves. And *for themselves*
 157 unfortunately, because there's so *'so many students'*
 158 many students that, you know, do fall *CYP falling into SEMH category*
 159 within the category of having SEMH
 160 that there's not... Like a key work with
 161 each and every one of them, they kind *'Fall into a group'*
 162 of fall into a group and it's really, really *'really, really difficult'*
 163 difficult to know what's the best way to *Uncertainty/difficult knowing how to*
 164 support them on a really individual *Support*
 165 basis. *Supporting on an individual basis.*
 166 E: Yeah.
 167 B: I think on a form tutor level I see *Different levels/roles*
 168 them every single day for 40 minutes *Seeing CYP daily*
 169 and I can communicate with parents *communicating with parents*
 170 and I think the challenge that comes *Recognising challenges*
 171 with that is it's really nice to have that *'Nice to have that relationship'*
 172 relationship, but again...having the
 173 time to implement things that you think *Things that help students*
 174 would really really help that student is *Limited time*
 175 limited.
 176 E: Yeah.
 177 B: And you're kind of pulled in many *'Kind of pulled in many different*
 178 different directions that you fear you're *directions'*
 179 not kind of approaching each student *Experiencing fear*
 180 with the level and care of attention that *Not giving CYP what they need.*
 181 they deserve.
 182 E: Yeah.
 183 B: There's kind of two aspects of how it *Different challenges*
 184 could be challenging.
 185 E: It's really interesting that you
 186 said about not having the time to
 187 build those relationships from a
 188 subject teacher role within
 189 secondary. What things do you
 190 think would support you as a
 191 teacher to be able to do that?
 192 B: My school do a really good job of *Recognising what school does well*
 193 trying as much as they can to *'as much as they can'*
 194 implement as many different ways to *Implement different ways to build*
 195 build relationships at the beginning of *relationships*
 196 the year, we have a very lengthy
 197 matriculation process...which is *'a very lengthy matriculation process'*
 198 basically just like an induction, but it's *Two-week induction*
 199 for two weeks long, so the

200 students don't actually start learning 'don't actually start learning'
 201 for two weeks, but you get to be Direct interaction and observation of CYP.
 202 around and see them.
 203 E: Yeah.
 204 B: And we also have pupil profiles pupil profiles
 205 which gives details on strategies to Strategies which help
 206 help and possible triggers and things possible triggers to avoid
 207 to avoid.
 208 E: Yeah.
 209 B: It's kind of like if we were in a 'if we were in a perfect world'
 210 perfect world, which I don't think this Feeling like it would not be achievable
 211 would ever be achievable. It's almost
 212 like having a little introduction or talk Introduction with key person
 213 with a key person that knows the ins 'knows the ins and outs'
 214 and outs of the different experiences Different experiences
 215 that they've gone through because one what CYP have gone through
 216 of the challenges is you can see Challenges
 217 they've experienced trauma and I Observing experienced trauma
 218 know that there's a certain level of Acknowledging confidentiality
 219 confidentiality, but you don't know what Not knowing what trauma it is
 220 that trauma is. So maybe breaking it Breaking it down would help.
 221 down. To something more specific
 222 would help, like if it's, you know, a Domestic trauma
 223 domestic trauma. If it's an immigration Immigration trauma
 224 trauma, like anything, just to help know 'know a tiny bit more'
 225 a tiny bit more without breaking that without breaching confidentiality
 226 confidentiality and then knowing you 'You know you're not shooting in the
 227 know you're not shooting in the dark' Triggers
 228 with what might be a trigger for them, Building relationships
 229 but actually able to build relationships
 230 and go. OK, I know this person has Knowing experiences of trauma
 231 experienced some kind of trauma with Immigration trauma fleeing their
 232 having to flee from their home country. country
 233 You know, I'm going to be really Being really sensitive
 234 sensitive in that way and just building Building relationships
 235 up that...relationship from the very get trying to eke it out
 236 go instead of kind of trying to eke it out without crossing the line.
 237 of them without crossing the line.
 238 E: Yeah, that sounds like it would
 239 be helpful. Can you tell me about a
 240 positive experience you've had
 241 since starting teaching with
 242 supporting children and young
 243 people's SEMH needs?
 244 B: Yeah, I think one student comes to 'one student comes to mind'
 245 mind in my first ever teaching post. My Early teacher experiences first teach-
 246 first year ECT was a form tutor to a contextual information - ing past
 247 year eight form group and the school form tutor role secondary school
 248 had, I think it was 40% SEMH SEMH prevalence
 249 students, which is quite a percentage 'quite a percentage'

Appendix K: Example of the Microsoft Excel code organisation

B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Focused Codes	I1	I2	I3	I4	I5	I6
Implementing different strategies/approaches	12	2	4	1	2	5
Observed behaviour	3		3	5	6	5
Building relationships	7	7		2	1	
Different roles and responsibilities	7	3	2	4		1
Teaching pressures		8	1	5	3	
Acknowledging different factors	4	4	1	4		3
Communicating with CYP	3	2	3	3		4
Managing own feelings and emotions	1	4	2	6	2	
Communicating with colleagues	2	1	3	2	2	4
Personal experiences		7		5		2
Intervention/s			3	1	6	3
Individual needs	1	3	4	3	1	
Lived experiences	7	1		1	1	1
Time challenges	2	3	2	1	3	
Uncertainty	5	1		1		4
Discussing diagnoses	5	1	2		3	
Knowing the CYP	3	2	2	1	2	1
Early teaching experiences	2	1	2	1	3	1
Finding it difficult		2	2	4	1	1
Adapting practice	1	3	2	3		1
School environment		1	2	2	4	1
Finding it challenging	3	1		3	2	
Curriculum focus	1	2	2	2	1	1
Noticing CYP's needs	3	3	1	2		
Previous experiences		4	1	1	2	1
Reflecting on progress			4	1	1	3
Balancing needs	1	2	2	1	1	2
Making adjustments	3	4		1		
Seeking support	2		3		2	1
SEMH prevalence	2	3			2	1
Recognising/identifying SEND	3	2		2	1	
Noticing CYP struggling	4	1	2			1
Noticing CYP needing support	1	1		2	2	2

Appendix L: Example of the focused coding of interview one

150 a class of 32 pupils, it's really, really	Finding it difficult and
151 difficult and challenging to know	challenging to implement
152 strategies or potential triggers or even	strategies/ knowing potential
153 just like how to communicate that is	triggers communicating
154 helpful for them. Because they're not	w/CYP
155 always able to be an advocate or a	CYP not always being able to
156 spokesperson for themselves. And	advocate for themselves
157 unfortunately, because there's so	SEMh prevalence
158 many students that, you know, do fall	Falling into the category
159 within the category of having SEMh	of SEMh
160 that there's not... Like a key work with	Difficult to know what is
161 each and every one of them, they kind	the best way to support
162 of fall into a group and it's really, really	supporting CYP on an
163 difficult to know what's the best way to	individual basis
164 support them on a really individual	Different roles
165 basis.	communicating w/parents
166 E: Yeah.	Not having the time
167 B: I think on a form tutor level I see	Implementing helpful strategies
168 them every single day for 40 minutes	
169 and I can communicate with parents	
170 and I think the challenge that comes	
171 with that is it's really nice to have that	
172 relationship, but again...having the	
173 time to implement things that you think	
174 would really really help that student is	
175 limited.	
176 E: Yeah.	
177 B: And you're kind of pulled in many	'Pulled in many different
178 different directions that you fear you're	directions'
179 not kind of approaching each student	Feeling conflicted
180 with the level and care of attention that	Noticing what CYP deserve
181 they deserve.	Finding it challenging
182 E: Yeah.	
183 B: There's kind of two aspects of how it	
184 could be challenging.	
185 E: It's really interesting that you	
186 said about not having the time to	
187 build those relationships from a	
188 subject teacher role within	
189 secondary. What things do you	
190 think would support you as a	
191 teacher to be able to do that?	
192 B: My school do a really good job of	Building relationships
193 trying as much as they can to	Implementing different
194 implement as many different ways to	approaches
195 build relationships at the beginning of	
196 the year, we have a very lengthy	
197 matriculation process...which is	
198 basically just like an induction, but it's	
199 for two weeks long, so the	

200 students don't actually start learning
201 for two weeks, but you get to be
202 around and see them.

203 E: Yeah.

204 B: And we also have pupil profiles
205 which gives details on strategies to
206 help and possible triggers and things
207 to avoid.

208 E: Yeah.

209 B: It's kind of like if we were in a
210 perfect world, which I don't think this
211 would ever be achievable. It's almost
212 like having a little introduction or talk
213 with a key person that knows the ins
214 and outs of the different experiences
215 that they've gone through because one
216 of the challenges is you can see
217 they've experienced trauma and I
218 know that there's a certain level of
219 confidentiality, but you don't know what
220 that trauma is. So maybe breaking it
221 down. To something more specific
222 would help, like if it's, you know, a
223 domestic trauma. If it's an immigration
224 trauma, like anything, just to help know
225 a tiny bit more without breaking that
226 confidentiality and then knowing you
227 know you're not shooting in the dark
228 with what might be a trigger for them,
229 but actually able to build relationships
230 and go. OK, I know this person has
231 experienced some kind of trauma with
232 having to flee from their home country.
233 You know, I'm going to be really
234 sensitive in that way and just building
235 up that...relationship from the very get
236 go instead of kind of trying to eke it out
237 of them without crossing the line.

238 E: Yeah, that sounds like it would
239 be helpful. Can you tell me about a
240 positive experience you've had
241 since starting teaching with
242 supporting children and young
243 people's SEMH needs?

244 B: Yeah, I think one student comes to
245 mind in my first ever teaching post. My
246 first year ECT was a form tutor to a
247 year eight form group and the school
248 had, I think it was 40% SEMH
249 students, which is quite a percentage

Working with CYP in different
contexts

Implementing different
strategies and approaches

'If we were in a perfect world'
Things not being possible

Communicating w/CYP

Understanding CYP's lived
experiences

Experiences of trauma

Different roles + responsibilities

Experiences of trauma

Not breaking confidentiality

'Shooting in the dark'

Building relationships

Experiences of trauma

Building relationships
sensitivity

Early teaching experiences

Different roles

SEMH Prevalence

Appendix M: A table presenting the focused codes, final focused codes following analysis and conceptual categories

Note: In vivo codes are in bold and italics

Conceptual Category 1	
Recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH	
Focused codes after analysis	
Defining SEMH: <i>'A massive suitcase of so much'</i> CYP's lived experiences and their impact: <i>'There's lots of variables'</i> The multifaceted presentation of CYP's SEMH needs	
Focused codes before analysis	
Defining SEMH Behaviour Impact of trauma Environmental context Impact on behaviour Falling into the SEMH category Impact on development Experiences of trauma Covid and pandemic <i>'A big umbrella of a lot of different things'</i> CYP's lived experiences Social and emotional experiences Acknowledging different factors Family factors Mental health issues Observed behaviour Lived experiences Understanding SEMH needs Human/child development CYP being triggered Different presentations	Different contexts Pressures on CYP Peer interactions <i>'Gang affiliation'</i> Lots of influences Social media Pressures in society Physical behaviours <i>'How much the SEMH bracket encompasses'</i> Impacting on daily functioning Recent experiences Finding learning difficult Limited socialisation Delayed development Parents' education and employment Home environment Inconsistency <i>'It has a huge impact'</i> CYP's ability to manage their behaviour

Being able to/relating to/understanding CYP's experiences	Observed changes in CYP's presentation Parent experiences Impact upon mental health
Conceptual Category 2	
Identifying, categorising and labelling	
Focused codes after analysis	
High prevalence of need Overlapping needs Diagnosed and undiagnosed SEND	
Focused codes before analysis	
Different needs SEMH prevalence Prevalence of need Rise in mental health needs Categorising Overlapping areas of need Identifying areas requiring support Identifying needs SEND Noticing CYP needing support Noticing CYP struggling Recognising/identifying SEND Labelling Discussing diagnoses Noticing CYP's SEND Noticing CYP's needs Not fitting a category	Seeking a diagnosis Vulnerability of CYP CYP receiving a diagnosis <i>'Overlap between all of the areas of need'</i> CYP's Emotional regulation needs Looking within Re-evaluating area of need Not having a formal diagnosis <i>'Every class has quite a few that could quite easily be diagnosed with something'</i> Recognising which area of need Undiagnosed difficulties CYP struggling to focus CYP being on the SEND register
Conceptual Category 3	
Responding to CYP's individual needs	
Focused codes after analysis	
Promoting inclusivity through universal accessibility Prioritising SEMH to foster CYP's readiness for learning	

Flexibly implementing a range of strategies and approaches Targeted and specialist intervention Monitoring and reflecting on CYP's progress over time	
Focused codes before analysis	
<i>'First port of call'</i> <i>Behaviour for learning</i> Getting a whole picture Focus on the positive Accommodating needs Accessible for all Teaching CYP to learn Inclusivity Taught lessons Making learning accessible Implementing helpful strategies Implementing different strategies and approaches Pupil and class profiles Reflecting on progress Adapting practice Flexibility Time and space Signposting role Target and goal setting External services Meeting CYP's needs CYP's skills and attributes Intervention/s Observed progress Individual needs Modelling Fairness Encouraging CYP	<i>'Internal monitoring system'</i> <i>'Reasonable adjustments'</i> The impact of the teacher CYP being ready to learn Having high expectations of CYP Following a scheme Evidence-base <i>'Equal and same access'</i> Giving CYP positive feedback Noticing what CYP deserve Highlighting strengths and positives Listening to CYP Providing extra support Universal support Observed improvement in assessment scores Gradual progress Informal assessment activities Approaching activities differently Monitoring systems Rewards and consequences <i>'Open to everybody'</i> Practical, interactive activities Specialist referrals EHCP referral Assessment tool Personalised checklists Reviewing strategies

Reviewing the impact Developing CYP's confidence Supporting CYP on an individual basis	Using humour Seating plans Behavioural approach
Conceptual Category 4	
The importance of relationships and support systems	
Focused codes after analysis	
Building and nurturing relationships Connecting through conversation <i>'Work in collaboration'</i>	
Focused codes before analysis	
Understanding CYP's needs and experiences Seeking support Working with CYP in different contexts Building relationships Receiving support Working with colleagues Working with other professionals Working with CYP Importance of relationships Difficulty building relationships Access to and availability of support Supportive colleagues and department Safe space to talk Feeling alone or isolated <i>'Kind of left on my own to do it'</i> EP involvement Building relationships sensitively Communicating with colleagues Discussing needs of CYP	'The right school' Support from experienced teachers Working together Developing empathy Increasing understanding Communicating with CYP CYP having a voice Encouraging CYP to talk about emotions and feelings School community Communicating with other ECTs Consistency Supportive environments Feeling supported Not making assumptions Clear expectations Giving CYP a safe space Relationship approach Being curious Nurturing Team teaching The impact of relationships

Knowing the CYP Communicating with parents and carers Supporting parents Understanding other professionals' roles	Working with others CYP not always being able to advocate for themselves Being signposted Communication
Conceptual Category 5	
<i>'Pulled in many different directions'</i>	
Focused codes after analysis	
Diverse needs: <i>'Very difficult to manage'</i> Systemic pressures and challenges Prioritising and decision-making in the moment Navigating uncertainty <i>'Underprepared'</i>	
Focused codes before analysis	
Decision-making Time challenges and pressures Class size Feeling conflicted Different roles and responsibilities Prioritising needs Prioritising tasks Teaching pressures Curriculum pressures School environment Secondary schools Policies Managing behaviour Education system Finding it challenging Challenging behaviours Managing CYP's different needs Facing challenges	Managing all the strategies Following the behaviour policy Trust expectations Pre-planned lessons Meeting expectations Ofsted Meeting all the needs Location of the school Writing moderations Comparing progress with others Assessments <i>'Making a thousand decisions in a split second'</i> Expectation vs experience: <i>'Reality is very different'</i> Not having access to information <i>'Whack a mole'</i>

Balancing needs Finding it difficult Making adjustments Difficult to know what is the best 'No support to actually make it happen' Not being possible 'If we were in a perfect world' Funding challenges Finding it difficult and challenging to implement strategies Finding it difficult and challenging knowing potential triggers Making quick decisions Parent expectations Not breaking confidentiality Form tutor role Approach not working with CYP 'Often in a bit of conflict' 'It's just more than educating' Supporting all of the CYP in the class 'Really hard to prioritise' Not feeling supporting A lot to learn Feeling restricted 'Keep me on my toes' Evacuating the classroom High workload Juggling expectations and responsibilities 'Winging it' How SLT manage staff	'Don't think the training can actually provide you with all the skills' 'Information isn't available' Confidential information 'Simple surface level ways' 'Still trying to learn and figure out' Role of the teacher 'A big shock to the system' 'No real knowledge' Not knowing where to go for information or support Not being adequately trained 'I had no idea what to do' 'I didn't know what I didn't know at that point' Uncertainty Not feeling prepared 'But what do I do in the classroom?' Managing the unknown 'Reality is very different' 'Shooting in the dark' Not knowing what to do Not having the time Things not being possible Visualising the teaching role Not knowing how to implement different strategies Unknown impact of Covid Grappling with the unknown
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Conceptual Category 6	
Learning is continuous	
Focused codes after analysis	
Drawing on past roles and experiences Training and ECT Induction: Theory and practice Learning from others Seeking further learning opportunities Self-Awareness: Reflecting on practice	
Focused codes before analysis	
Psychology experience ECTs' previous roles and personal experiences Being able to relate ECT induction Continued learning Theory-based Good foundation Teacher training Training experiences Limited SEMH training Signposting Theory to practice Self-awareness Personal experiences Engaging in self-study Reflecting on practice Curriculum focus Doing the job Previous experiences Teaching preparation Maturity and age Online study modules Drawing on other knowledge	Basic understanding Developing new skills Applying knowledge Accepting things Additional ECT time out of the classroom Learning with other ECTs Training modules Seeking others' opinions/views Sharing ideas ECF requirements Being conscious Applying learning Preparing interventions for CYP Having extra knowledge Early teaching experiences Types of conditions or sensitivities Feeling hopeful <i>'Learning as a person'</i> Having immediate strategies Ability to learn new things Ineffective approaches Transition between training and induction

Constant learning	Teaching being a learning curve
Conceptual Category 7	
Building personal resilience	
Focused codes after analysis	
Managing own SEMH needs Growing in confidence Dedication, determination and persistence	
Focused codes before analysis	
Having an impact Making a difference Developing confidence Positive or rewarding experiences Not giving up Managing own needs Managing own feelings and emotions Feeling overwhelmed ECTs' mental health and wellbeing Self-protection Having boundaries Feeling confident Not putting pressure on self	Personal gains Moving forward Vulnerability of teachers Having the confidence to make decisions Making it their mission Feeling frustrated Feeling inspired <i>'Being persistent and not giving up'</i> Having patience Building teachers' resilience <i>'It's not a reflection on me'</i> Finding a way
Conceptual Category 8	
Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice	
Focused codes after analysis	
Building capacity through guided support Bridging the gap between theory and practice Increased involvement with external professionals	
Focused codes before analysis	
ECTs' best hopes Wanting guidance Structured support 'How to...' guidance	Supporting ECTs' mental health and wellbeing Smaller classes

Holistic view Navigating different steps Practical training Training programmes <i>‘If we were in a perfect world’</i> Work more closely with external professionals Opportunities to meet with professionals and agencies <i>‘Incorporating more psychology and mental health’</i> <i>Understanding the role of different professionals</i> Toolkit to support	Building on teachers’ skills and strengths Other professionals delivering training Sessions with an EP Role of EPs Look after the teachers Give teachers tools to manage their own emotions and mental health <i>‘Having the whole psychology behind it’</i> <i>‘An ideal world’</i> Changing the system Being able to ask questions
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Appendix N: Examples of memo-writing throughout the research

Memo: ‘Pulled in many different directions’

The feeling of being ‘pulled in many different directions,’ emerged several times throughout participant 1’s interview, suggesting it may be a significant aspect of their lived experience. I wonder if other participants feel the same. I am going to put this as a note on future interview schedules as a prompt to reflect on. I want to deepen my understanding of this potential thread and ensure its thorough exploration in future data collection.

Memo: Comparing early data

Starting to compare transcripts across participants. While going through participant 1’s interview again that strong sense of being “pulled in many different directions” really stood out - it came up a lot and was quite central to their experience.

Now that I’ve started looking at two other transcripts, it’s interesting to see that this is popping up elsewhere too, though not always in the same way or with the same intensity. Some participants seem to echo the same feeling because they have so many different roles to juggle and manage, while others focus more on different challenges such as time pressures.

This kind of comparison is helping me see which narratives might be more universal and which are more individual or context specific. It’s also giving me ideas for refining my coding and maybe even tweaking my interview prompts a bit more as I go. However, I am also conscious not to refine too soon and to keep grounded in the data.

Memo: Sorting and sifting codes

My eyes feel like they are trapped in the Microsoft Excel sheet. I have been endlessly scrolling and endlessly coding. I am trying to organise and sift through the codes to see if any can be merged. Every time I consider deleting one, I hear a tiny voice: ‘Are you deleting meaning?’ I think it is time to step away and come back later with fresh eyes.

Memo: Identifying need and diagnoses

As I've been working through the data, one thing that's really standing out is the strong emphasis on categorising and labelling CYP and mostly their behaviour. There's a clear pattern of participants trying to make sense of experiences by naming them - whether that's through formal diagnoses, perceived needs, or broader labels. I am wondering if this is possibly echoed in the systems around them. Reflecting back on the SEMH term. Despite the shift away from behaviour in the name, it is still incorporated within the definition in the SEND CoP. Also, one of the five core areas of the ECF is behaviour management.

It feels like this process of labelling sometimes brings clarity but other times it seems to create tension or even confusion. I'm not sure that the ECTs are clear about their role in identifying SEMH needs. Observed behaviour appears to be the primary indicator. This might be something to explore further - how participants talk about labelling and diagnoses, and what that means for how they understand CYP's needs. I think I will ask the next participant about their role supporting CYP with SEND more broadly as the previous participant expressed about it.

Memo: Self-awareness and reflecting on practice

While going through the data, I've noticed that self-awareness and reflection on practice do come up, but not as frequently or consistently as some of the other narratives. It's definitely present as participants occasionally mention moments of stepping back, thinking about their actions or decisions but it's not a dominant story.

I'm not sure whether it should be a FC. At this stage, I'm leaning toward including it, even if it's less common, because when it does appear, it feels meaningful. These reflections often offer insight into how participants make sense of their roles or experiences.

I'll keep an eye on how this develops across other transcripts. It might not be a major category, but it could still play a supporting role in the overall analysis—especially in relation to identity, learning, or change over time.

Memo: Clustering to support conceptualisation

I've started clustering my codes to see if visualising them helps make more sense of the emerging patterns. It's been surprisingly helpful - almost like having a conversation with the data. I keep finding myself asking, "What is my data telling me?" and more importantly, "To what extent is it telling me this?"

Some tentative categories are beginning to take shape, which is really encouraging. However, there's still a lingering sense that something doesn't quite fit - like there's a piece of the puzzle that hasn't revealed itself yet. It's not necessarily a problem, but it's keeping me curious. I'm trying not to force things into neat boxes too soon.



Memo: Sitting with the mess and being ok with it

I'm really trying to sit with the mess right now. The codes, the clusters, the half-formed categories - it's all swirling around, and while I know this is part of the process, it's still uncomfortable.

There's a tension between wanting to figure it out and knowing I need to give it time. I'm trying not to rush things too soon. Some things are starting to make sense, but there are still bits that don't quite fit.

Memo: 'Incorporating more psychology and mental health'

One participant expressed a desire for training or resources 'incorporating more psychology and mental health,' highlighting a perceived gap in their preparation for managing the emotional and psychological aspects of their role or wanting to understand more about the underpinnings of psychology. However, as this account was only raised by a single participant, I have not included it as a focused code following analysis. That said, it still feels important to flag. I will consider how I will acknowledge this.

Memo: Considering theoretical saturation

Following Charmaz's guidance (2014, p. 214), I've been reflecting on whether my categories are reaching theoretical saturation. I've been comparing data both within and across categories, noticing where patterns are consistent and where they deviate. These comparisons are helping me make sense of which categories I think are grounded and which still seem a bit loose or overly descriptive. This process is leading me to think more deeply about the relationships between categories, such as how participants' uncertainty and managing the many demands affects their own SEMH needs. While I don't think I've fully reached saturation yet, I can see the categories becoming more stable and conceptually rich. I'm staying open to what further coding might reveal, especially as new conceptual relationships continue to emerge.

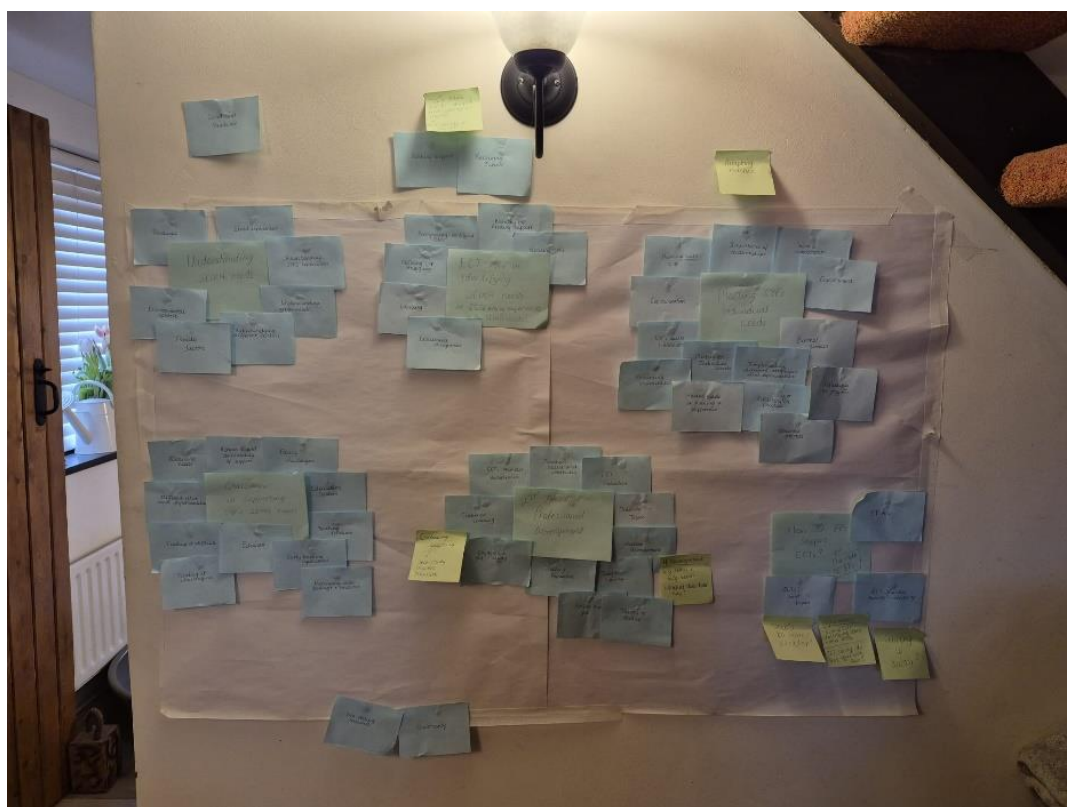
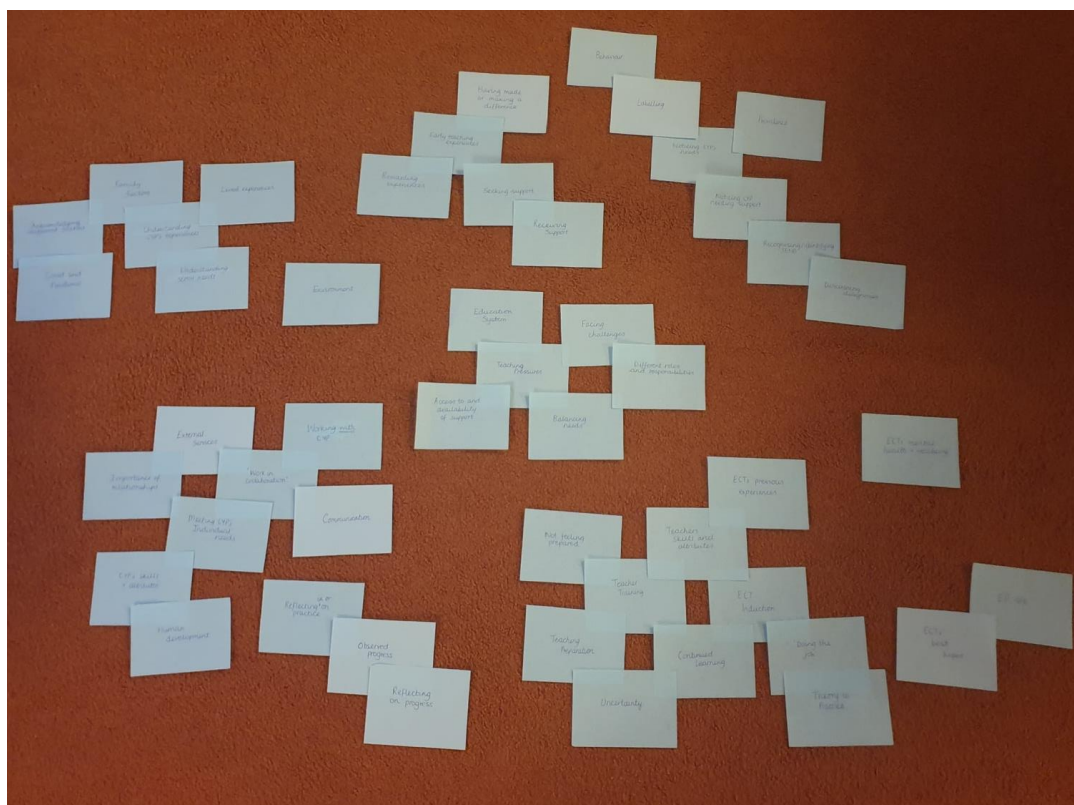
Memo: The graduated approach – a notable absence

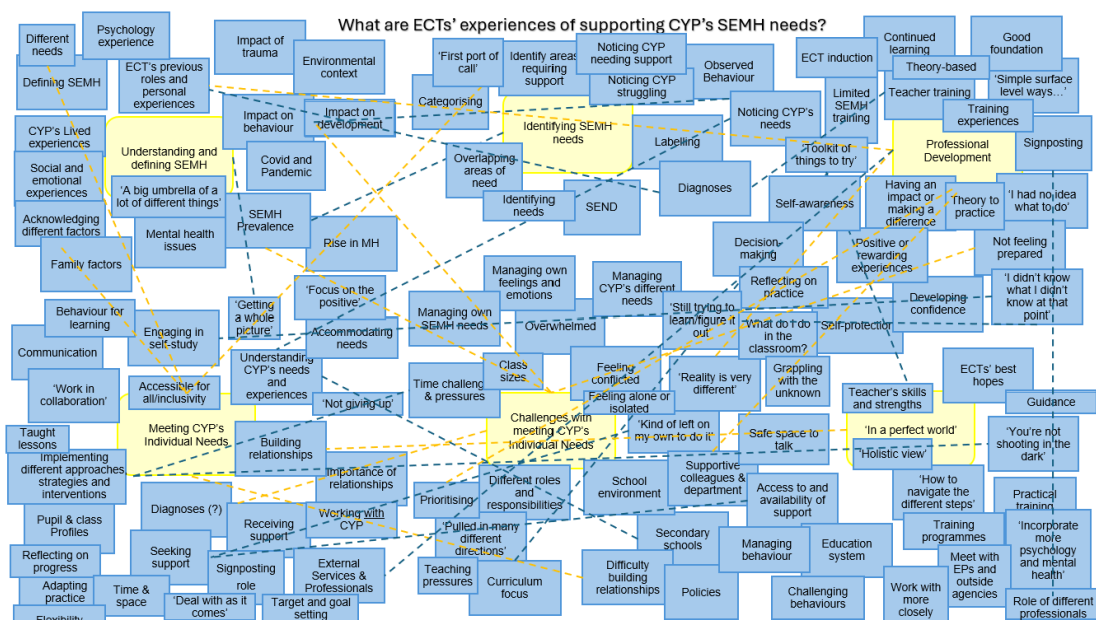
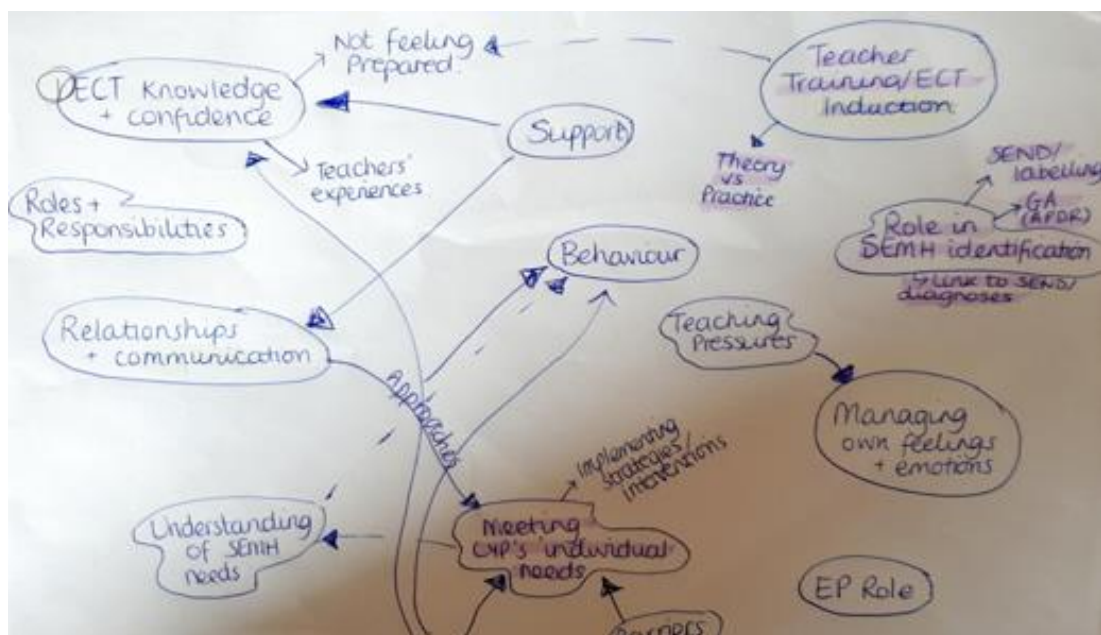
Although the Graduated Approach is a key element of national SEND guidance, none of the participants mentioned it explicitly. This absence may suggest a disconnect between policy and practice, or that the terminology isn't commonly used by ECTs - even if elements of the approach are being applied informally. It's a gap worth noting and exploring further.

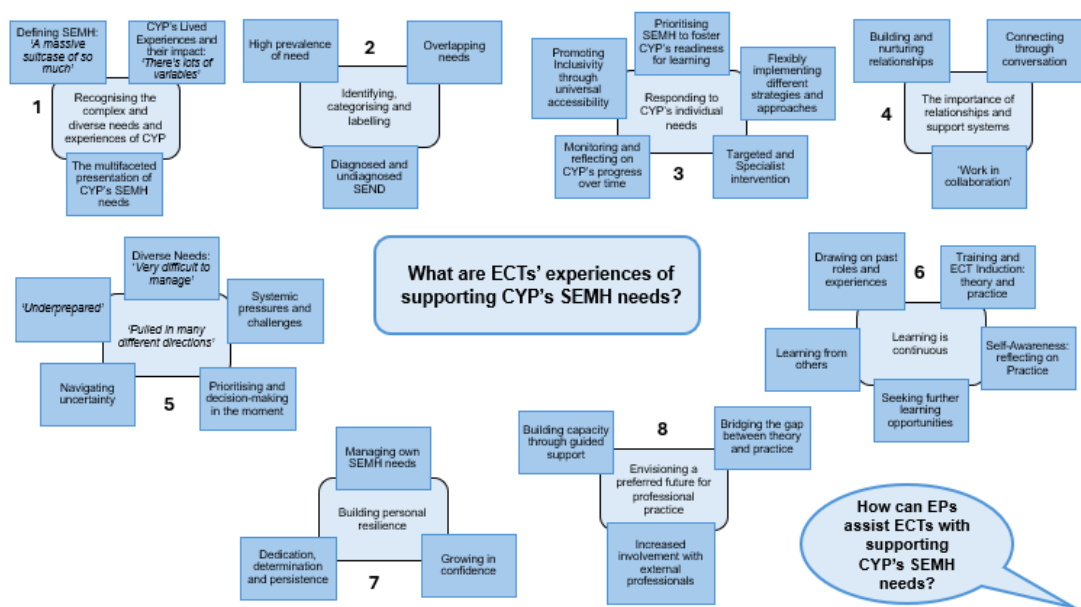
Memo: Developing the grounded theory

If I had more time, I would have asked ECTs directly about their experiences with EPs to ensure this aspect of the research was directly addressed and more firmly grounded in the data. However, as this was not possible with the time of the interviews, I have drawn on participants' expressed desires and their lived experiences to consider the potential implications for EPs. This interpretation has been supported by existing literature, but I've been mindful throughout to avoid imposing my own assumptions or shaping the grounded theory to fit what I think should be there. Instead, I've aimed to stay close to the data, allowing participants' voices to guide the development of theory while using literature to sensitise, not steer, the analysis. Considering the broader systemic challenges around EP demand and capacity currently, I am also conscious that the GT toolkit should remain flexible – offering a framework that can be used without relying on EP involvement.

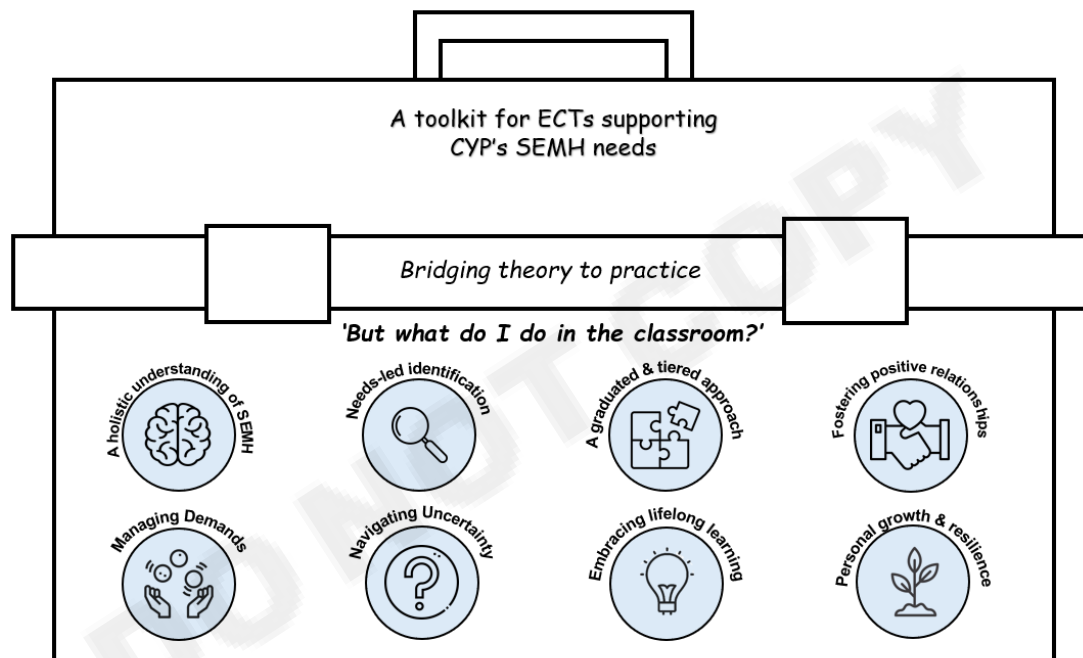
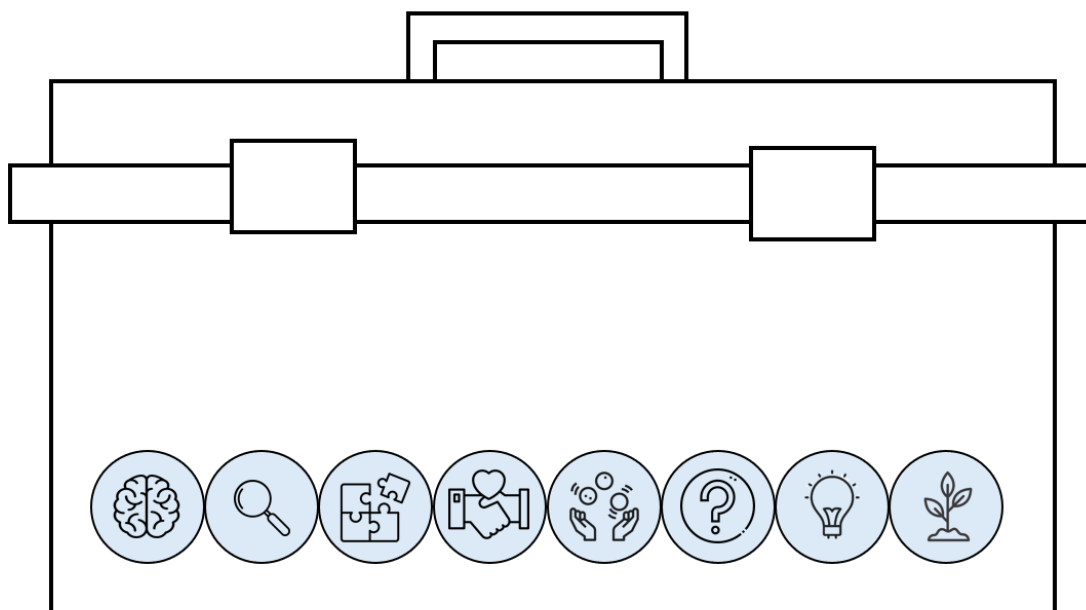
Appendix O: Examples of Clustering and diagramming used towards developing the conceptual categories



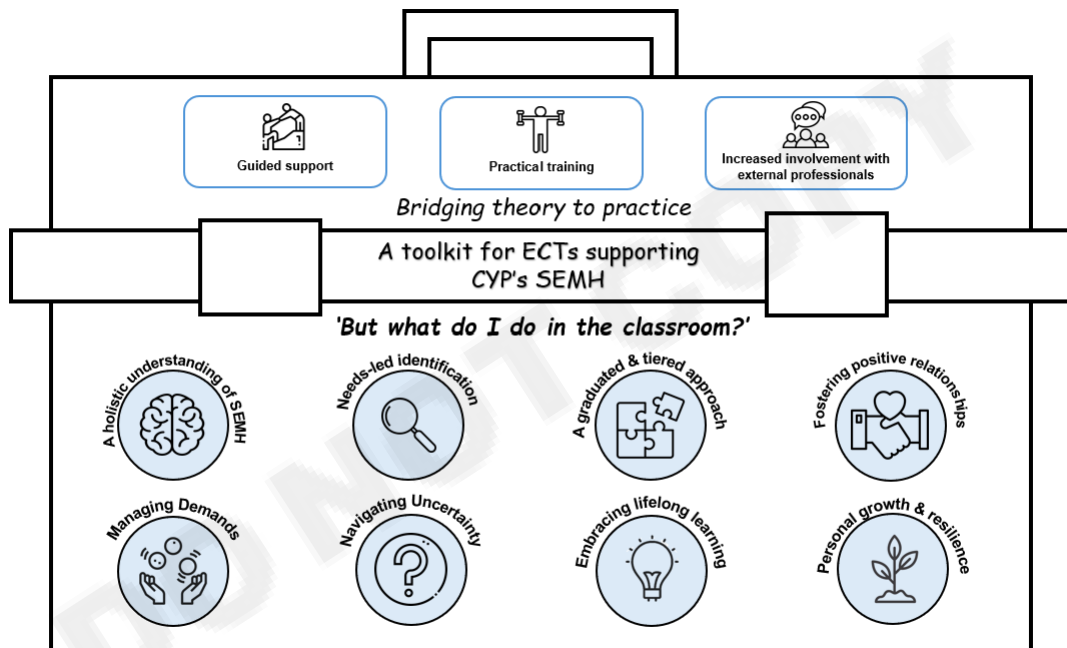




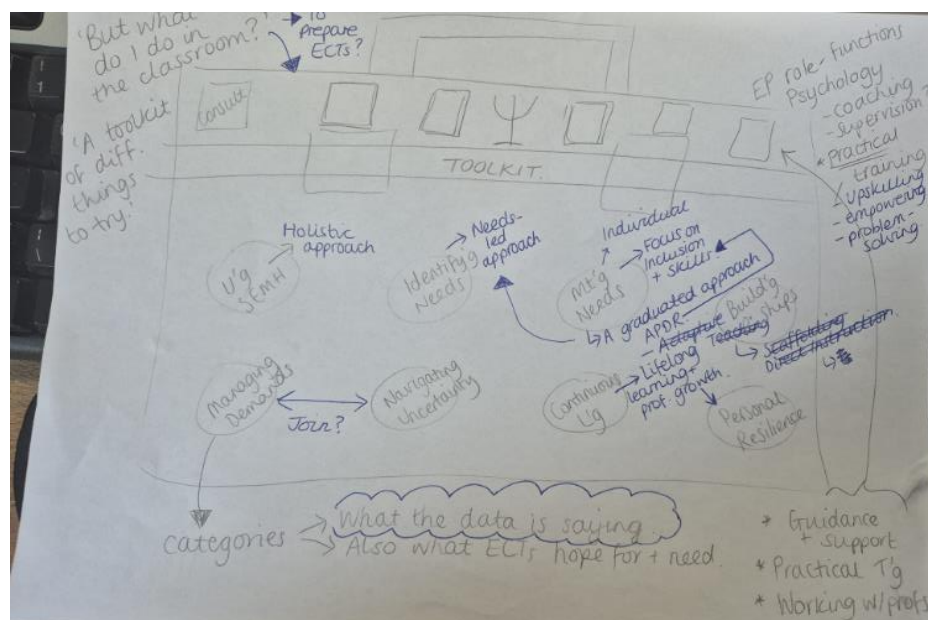
Appendix P: Examples of the visual representation of the study's grounded theory



The study's grounded theory toolkit illustrates the eight interconnected elements and three core supports derived from participants' narratives and the reviewed literature (see diagram below).



Implications for educational psychology practice were also considered (see Section 6.5.2). The drafting of an amended toolkit for educational psychologists to use as a guiding framework when working with ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs is presented below. The final amended toolkit for EP practice is included in Appendix R.

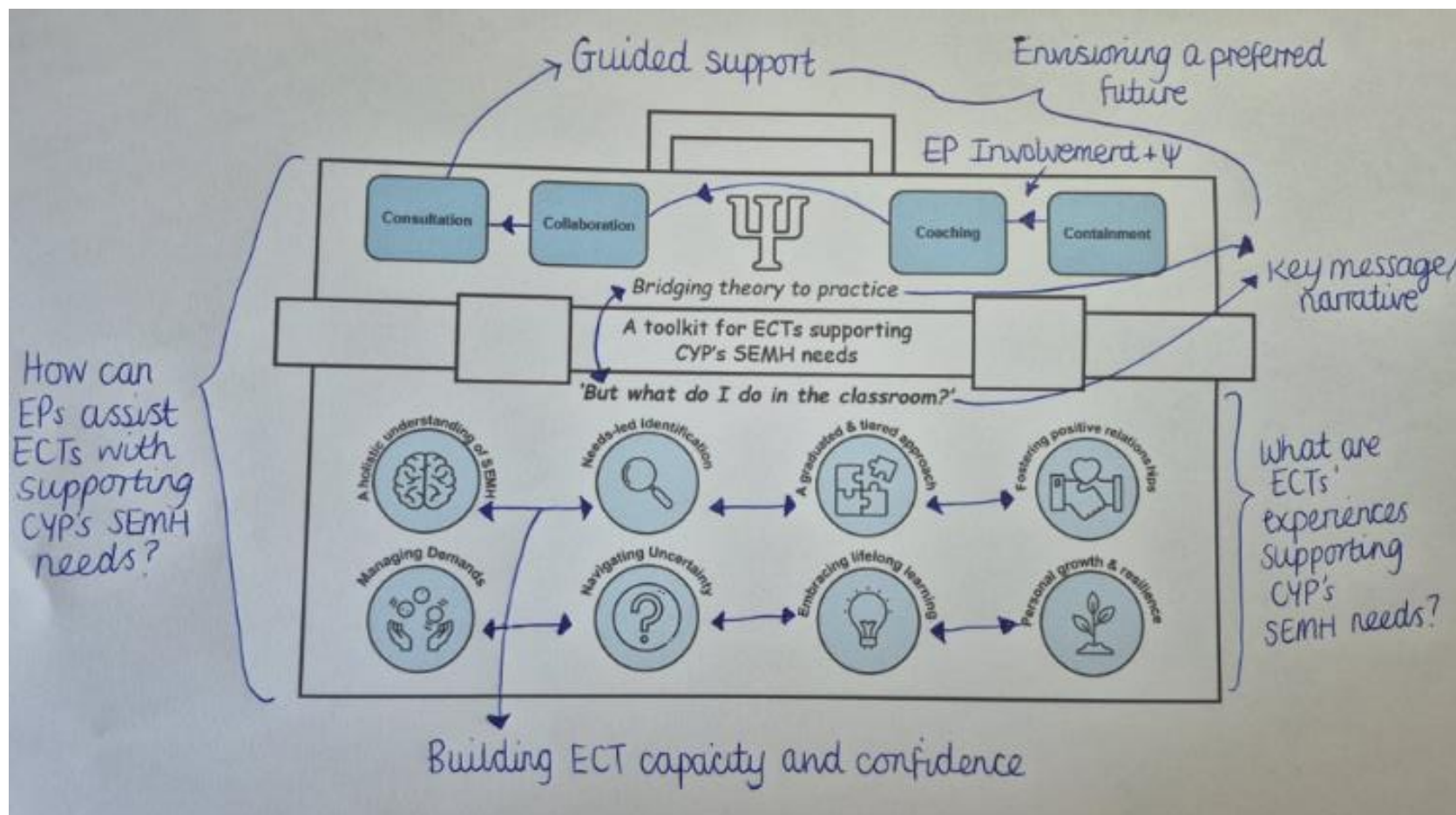


Appendix Q: Bridging the conceptual categories and literature to the study's grounded theory

Conceptual Category	Literature to support the conceptual category and elements of the grounded theory toolkit	
Recognising the complex and diverse nature of SEMH		• Support ECTs to view SEMH holistically. • Move beyond a focus on behaviour and deficit-based models to a strengths-based, relational and context-sensitive focus. • Promote inclusive, person-centred practices recognising broader systems in which CYP develop.
Identifying, categorising and labelling		• Promote early identification and subsequently early intervention. • Build on ECTs' understanding, awareness and access to appropriate tools and processes to support identification of need (e.g., The graduated approach – assess, plan, do, review). • Support with planning and what action to take. • Drawing on the holistic understanding of SEMH, move away from label-focused identification to consider relational and developmental aspects (e.g., What skills does a CYP need to develop?) • Support ECTs to develop confidence to critically examine the use of labels and diagnoses to ensure they empower rather than constrain CYP.
Responding to children and young people's individual needs		• In line with the graduated response model, promote awareness of a tiered model of educational support (e.g., universal, targeted and specialist support). • Reframe thinking (e.g., 'What is wrong?' to, 'What support is needed?') • Promote inclusivity and meaningful participation through safe and supportive educational environments for CYP. • Provide evidence-based training around interventions and approaches which support social and emotional learning and development. • Prioritise CYP's SEMH development to foster readiness for learning. • Provide tools and approaches to assess, monitor and review CYP's progress over time. • Support with appropriate target setting linked to CYP's need rather than behaviour. • Empower ECTs to explore strategies and reasonable adjustments which CYP need to thrive.

The importance of relationships and support systems	 Fostering positive relationships	• Share relational pedagogy, attachment aware and trauma-informed practice to support the development of secure, trusting relationships. • Explore bridges and barriers to relationships and support systems and co-produce solutions. • Using dialogue to support connection. • Training to develop confidence of navigating conversations. • Promote collaborative multi-professional working.
‘Pulled in many different directions’	 Managing Demands  Navigating Uncertainty	• Support with balancing the emotional and learning needs of CYP. • Managing and prioritising workload. • Bridging the gap between theory and practice so ECTs feel equipped and prepared to support CYP’s SEMH needs. • Draw on experiences in different educational settings. • Explore whole school priorities and engage in systemic and strategic development work to support the needs of ECTs.
Learning is continuous	 Embracing lifelong learning	• Promote problem-solving approaches. • Deliver formal and informal experiential learning. • Apply psychology to bring theory to practice. • Ensure continued professional development is bespoke and responsive to the diverse needs of CYP. • Build capacity through guided support (e.g., consultation, modelling through coaching). • Work collaboratively to empower ECTs to use self-awareness and ongoing reflection.
Building personal resilience	 Personal growth & resilience	• Foster a whole-school ethos to building resilience. • Promote the values and importance of staff wellbeing at individual and systemic levels (e.g., tools to support ECTs to manage their own emotions, containment and encourage leadership in educational settings to prioritise this). • Prioritise the inclusion of staff and CYP. • Encourage the use of reflective practice to develop confidence and shape ECTs’ self-efficacy.
Envisioning a preferred future for professional practice	 Guided support  Practical training  Increased involvement with external professionals	• <i>‘But what do I do in the classroom?’</i> Bridging theory to practice • Guided support • Practical training • Increased involvement with external professionals

Appendix R: A visual representation of the amended grounded theory's toolkit outlining implications for educational psychology practice



The grounded theory toolkit developed in this study can also be used as a flexible framework by EPs to guide their practice when working with ECTs supporting CYP's SEMH needs. The amended framework (see below) centres on four key functions of EP practice: consultation, collaboration, containment, and coaching.

