

**The positive educational experiences of ‘looked-after’
children and young people**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the University of
East London for the Professional Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology

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STUDENT DECLARATION

University of East London

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Declaration

This work has not previously been accepted for any degree and it is not being concurrently submitted for any degree.

This research is being submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology.

This thesis is the result of my own work and investigation, except where otherwise stated. Other sources are acknowledged by explicit references in the text. A full reference list is appended.

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Abstract

Research has consistently reported the academic underachievement of children in care (Department for Education and Skills, 2005), with authors reporting associations between academic performance and later outcomes. People with experience of care are over-represented amongst adults in prison (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003), mental health service users (Jackson & Simon, 2006), and drug users (Jackson & Simon, 2006). Much research has focused on negative outcomes. However, more recently a strengths-based approach has been utilised to draw upon the experiences of young people in care (Martin & Jackson, 2002; Dearden, 2004). In relation to educational progress, key studies have highlighted the importance of relationships, support, encouragement, the provision of resources, and achievements.

The qualitative research elicited the views of six young people in foster care and three young people in residential care, regarding their positive educational experiences. Interviews were semi-structured and took a solution-focused approach (de Shazer, 1985). Findings are largely consistent with the existing literature, with the following main themes identified: 1. achievements; 2. support; 3. relationships; 4. approach to learning; 5. identity; 6. self-efficacy; and 7. the impact of care.

The research findings raise challenging issues regarding current service delivery, suggesting that, in addition to the provision of ongoing relationships and various types of support, young people in care will benefit from opportunities to face challenges and involvement in decision-making. These opportunities were related to the development of positive self-perceptions, which in turn is associated with increased resilience. The implications of these findings are discussed in relation to the profession of educational psychology, and in terms of wider service delivery and research implications.

Key Words: Children looked-after, foster care, residential care, experiences, education, educational psychology, thematic analysis.

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List of Terminology, Abbreviations and Transcription Notation

Terminology

Accommodated under Section 20: This is a voluntary arrangement between the parent(s) and the local authority for the local authority to provide care, for example, an alternative home. The local authority does not gain parental responsibility.

Corporate Parenting: ‘the collective responsibility of local authorities to achieve good parenting’ (Department for Education and Employment (Department for Education and Employment/Department of Health, 1999).

Foster care: placement in which the child lives with an individual in their family home. Foster carers must be approved by fostering services registered with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (Department for Education and Skills, 2006).

‘In Care’: Children subject to a court order (Children Act, 1989).

Leaving and After Care Team: Service providing support and advice from social workers for young people aged between 16 and 21. Types of support include financial support (16 to 17 years old), and advice relating to health, finances, personal and independence skills.

‘Looked-after’: Denotes all children in public care, including those living at home but subject to care orders (Children Act, 1989).

Pupil Referral Unit: A specialist Local Authority setting to provide education to children and young people who are unable to attend mainstream school for a variety of reason.

Residential care: placement in which the child lives in a children’s home and is cared for by professional carers. The home must be registered with the Commission for Social care Inspection (DfES, 2006).

Special Guardianship: This gives the special guardian parental responsibility. The parents remain the child’s parents and retain some parental responsibility, but their ability to exercise this responsibility is very limited (Rocco-Briggs, 2008).

Student Support: A department within a school in which support staff provide academic, social and emotional.

Abbreviations

ASCC: Achievement Service for Children in Care

EP: Educational Psychologist

LA: Local Authority

Transcription Key

- ***** Denotes the use of the name of a person or place, which has been removed to maintain anonymity.
- (inter) Denotes one person interrupting another.
- [] Denotes meaning when this is not clear e.g. ‘they [the teachers] told me...’
- () Denotes non-verbal communication e.g. (both laugh)

Introduction

1.1: Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the current piece of research, in which young people in foster care and residential care were interviewed to elicit their positive experiences of education. The chapter begins with a discussion around the nature of looked-after children in England, describing the reasons for children entering the care system, and their subsequent living arrangements and life outcomes. With much research emphasising the academic underachievement of this group, the rationale for the current research is based on positive psychology (Seligman, 1998), and a strengths-based approach which emphasises the valuable insights to be gained by listening to the views of young people in care. The relevance of this area of research to the profession of educational psychology is also noted. The chapter concludes with a description of the researcher's epistemological position, and a description of the focus of the current research.

1.2: Who are 'Looked-after' Children and Young People?

The term 'Looked-after' was introduced in the Children Act (1989) to describe children and young people under the age of 18 who are subject to 'care orders' or those who are voluntarily accommodated and are therefore in the care of the Local Authority (LA). Children enter the care system for a variety of reasons including:

abuse and neglect (61%), family dysfunction (11%), acute family stress (9%), the disability of the parent or child (8%), or the absence of a parent to provide care (9%) (Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF), 2009). The term ‘looked-after child’ technically includes children living at home under a ‘care order’ and those who are remanded or detained, however the present review will apply the term as it is more generally used, to refer to children living in residential or foster care.

Throughout the literature the legal term ‘looked-after’ is used to describe a heterogeneous group in which children who are all subject to care orders, but otherwise may live in very different environments. In a recent Department for Education and Skills (DfES) review (2005), 68% of looked-after children were identified as living in foster care, 11% in children’s homes, secure units, and hostels, 10% with parents, and 6% in a variety of other settings. Goddard (2000) highlights the lack of research regarding the experiences of looked-after children living in different settings; suggesting that existing research does not serve to clarify the relative benefits various settings may provide educationally. In particular, there are discrepancies between studies comparing the educational support provided in residential and foster care (Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2008).

1.3: The National Context

With around 60,000 looked-after children in England at any one time (Harker, Dobel-Ober, Berridge, & Sinclair, 2004), and a continuing slow growth in the total number of children looked-after (Statham, Candappa, Simon, & Owen, 2002), it is of increasing importance to address the ongoing issues of poor outcomes and low

educational achievement amongst this group. Research suggests that these concerns have been apparent in the United Kingdom for around 30 years (e.g. Jackson, 1987; Fletcher-Campbell, 1990). Somewhat surprisingly this is an area which, until fairly recently, has been neglected in terms of research and legislative development (Connelly & Chakrabarti, 2008), with the Department of Health (DoH) and DfES issuing the first joint guidance on the education of children in public care in 2000; and the Children Act (2004) being the first legislation to specifically include a duty for Local Authorities (LAs) to promote the educational achievement of looked-after children. The DoH and DfES joint guidance prioritised education, stability, having high expectations, early intervention, and listening to children in care; with more recent legislation (Children & Young Person's Act, 2008), again highlighting the need to listen to the views of looked-after children and involving them in decisions about care placements.

1.4: Outcomes for Looked-after Children and Young People

In 2005 a large-scale study conducted by the DfES found that only six percent of looked-after children achieved five or more GCSE qualifications at grades A* to C, in comparison with 53 percent of all children. This study also reported that over half of looked-after children leave school with no qualifications. Leaving care studies further suggest that those in residential care are even less likely to have gained educational qualifications on leaving school (Kendrick, 1998). Berridge (2007) warns that this under-achievement must also be understood within the context of the high precedence of statements of special educational needs within this population. However Berridge also notes that these identified needs may or may not be a consequence of involvement with the care system.

Looked-after children are under-represented in post-compulsory education. Jackson, Ajayi, and Quigley (2003) report that only one percent of care leavers in their study attended university, compared with 38 percent of the wider population. Additionally the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) reported that in the academic year 2001-2002, 46 percent of care leavers aged 19 were in employment, education or training compared with 86 percent of all 19-year-olds. Whilst the negative impact of pre-care factors has been noted in the literature (Berridge & Brodie, 1998; Kendrick, 1998), poor educational outcomes have also been attributed to experiences of the care system itself. For example Winter (2006) reports that when pre-care factors are controlled for, the educational performance of looked-after children remains poor.

Evans (2003) notes that care leavers account for fewer than one percent of their age group, however they are hugely over-represented among disadvantaged groups. For example, between a quarter and a third of homeless people, and a quarter of adults in prison were in care at some point (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003); children in care are four times more likely than others to need support from mental health services (Jackson & Simon, 2006); and are seven times more likely to misuse alcohol or drugs (Jackson & Simon, 2006). Information regarding outcomes for children in care is disheartening. However, Rutter (1988) emphasizes the role that education can play in helping these young people to escape from social disadvantage.

1.5: Adopting a Positive Perspective

Whilst much of the research involving looked-after children focuses on the prevalence of poor educational outcomes, there is little evidence of practice which raises attainment, and no clear evidence that this focus on ameliorating difficulties has improved outcomes for looked-after children (Jackson & Simon, 2006). However, more recently a ‘strengths perspective’ has evolved within social care practice (Chase, Jackson & Simon, 2006), which encourages a focus on strengths and capacities rather than inadequacies.

This strengths-based perspective comes from positive psychology (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000) in which individual competence is highlighted. Within this perspective, the concept of resilience describes an ability to overcome adversity and cope with disadvantages (Dent & Cameron, 2003). Seligman (1998) suggests that mental ill-health can be prevented through the promotion of competencies over deficiencies in individuals. Rutter (1985) suggests that resilience stems, in part, from a sense of self-efficacy, which can be promoted through participation. Within social care, Gilligan (2001) describes ‘resilience-led practice’ as that which acknowledges that nurturing resilience may be critical in overcoming the instability of placement and schooling which is inherent within social care.

Gilligan (1997) suggests that self-efficacy and therefore resilience, can be developed through educational participation and achievement. Dent and Cameron (2003) further suggest that success in school enhances resilience. Thus the facilitation of positive educational experiences may ultimately help to minimise the impact of risk factors associated with being in care (Fletcher, 1993). These findings have been incorporated into research by Martin and Jackson (2002), who interviewed high-achieving care leavers about what helped them to achieve. These

studies highlight the importance of effective communication between education and care staff, supportive adults, and study resources. They also demonstrate that the benefits of research around the problematic aspects of education for looked-after children can be limiting. Research which includes the views and positive experiences of this group will give a more complete picture of the issues surrounding the education of looked-after children (Chase et al., 2006).

The current proposal suggests a need for a shift in focus towards that of positive psychology (Seligman & Csikzentmihalyi, 2000), and a strengths-based perspective (Chase et al., 2006), specifically focusing on the power of increasing resilience through practice and research which fosters self-efficacy through participation (Rutter, 1985).

1.6: Listening to Children and Young People

With Governmental pressure on LAs to become more accountable, there has been a move towards the production of statistics on needs and outcomes to inform funding decisions, which has been described as both pragmatic and anti-ideological (Solesbury, 2002). Some have argued that against this backdrop there is a clear need for more participatory approaches to research (e.g. Humphreys, Berridge, Butler, & Ruccick, 2003), in which the views of service-users, particularly those considered more vulnerable, are considered. The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) (1994) has also suggested that children's views should inform the implementation of services.

Many would suggest there are also ethical and moral obligations to consider the views of children who are capable of forming views and expressing opinions regarding matters affecting them. Gersch (1996) suggests that young people have a moral right to be heard, and can contribute much to consideration of their educational experiences. Whilst the majority of previous research comes from a more empirical tradition as highlighted above, Holland (2009) suggests that feminist research traditions tend to be more ethically driven and have more recently been utilised to facilitate the voices of marginalised groups.

When considered from a developmental perspective, the ability to take responsibility for themselves is seen as a key stage of development for children in our society. As such Munro (2001) suggests empowering looked-after children through listening to their views is not simply an ethical requirement but also a 'developmental task' (p137). Flekkoy and Kaufman (1997) considered the views of children and young people regarding participation in decision-making, and noted that the majority of complaints regarding lack of participation came from teenagers, whilst those aged between ten and 12 were more accepting of low levels of participation. This suggests that children's wishes to become involved in decision-making, may increase with age.

The current predominance of a needs-based discourse within the research regarding looked-after children emphasises the role of this group as recipients of services to ameliorate difficulties (Winter, 2006). This does little to empower a group who are already considered vulnerable. Winter suggests that a broadening of this research agenda is required to re-identify looked-after children as competent and active within social processes. This conceptualisation can be identified in research where looked-after children are repositioned as subjects or participants, rather than the objects of research (Winter, 2006). Winter further highlights the

need for a sociological model of childhood to inform research, where children are considered as active participants.

There is a growing recognition of the benefits of gathering children's views to inform practice and service development. Martin and Jackson (2002) suggest that children have a 'wealth of practical knowledge and experience' (p124) with which to advise professionals. There is also some evidence that the presentation of children's views to service providers can dramatically influence service development (Kirby, 2004). A prime example of this was a collaborative project between education and social care departments in two LAs, in which the views of young people were sought specifically to inform professional guidance that was subsequently produced (Firth & Fletcher, 2001). In a further participatory project led by the Economic Social Research Council, children were consulted about teaching and learning with an aim to increase participation (ESCR, 2002). Within routine practice there is also evidence of the consideration of children's views, for example in the interviewing of children by Ofsted as part of school inspections (DfES, 2005). However, such practice is not yet common-place.

Goddard (2000) specifically highlights the lack of research involving the views of looked-after children, whilst looked-after interviewees in Munro's (2001) study note a lack of opportunity to participate in decisions or take risks. One reason Munro suggests for this lack of opportunity is the need for professionals to maintain a balance between enabling children to make decisions whilst ensuring their safety and protection. However, the DoH (1998), also suggest that safeguarding children must involve more than simply protecting them from harm, and should include enhancing quality of life. This could be seen to include the empowering experience of participation in research projects. Murray (2005) notes that the matter is further complicated by a preponderance of difficulties in gaining access to looked-after children for research purposes.

1.7: Relevance to the Profession of Educational Psychology

This area of research has important implications for Educational Psychologists (EPs). The percentage of children with special educational needs is much higher within the population of looked-after children than in the general school population, suggesting that they would benefit as a group from more EP involvement (DoH, 1998). It has been reported that most EPs caseloads include a significant proportion of looked-after children (Jackson & McParlin, 2006). In addition, Social Services Departments have suggested a broader role for EPs in working with a wider range of looked-after children (Bradbury, 2006).

However, Evans (2003) suggests that the way that EP services are organised is often not conducive to supporting looked-after children, highlighting the risk that when EPs are attached to schools they may easily lose track of children who change schools as a result of frequent placement breakdowns. However, Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs (2005), found that EPs were involved with 23 per cent of the looked-after children in their study, and that those with EP support were much less likely to experience placement break down. In the same study, carers generally rated EPs as the most useful specialised help they had received in caring for their looked-after child. The evidence clearly suggests a key role for EPs in the welfare of looked-after children.

Studies have described a variety of roles for EPs with regard to looked-after children including: helping teachers, parents, carers and peers to support individual children (Dent & Cameron, 2003); delivering training; and facilitating multi-agency meetings (Bradbury, 2006). In fact in a recent review of the work of EPs, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires and O'Connor (2006) suggest that EPs could provide a distinctive contribution to looked-after children's lives.

1.8: Epistemological Orientation of the Research

A critical realist epistemology (Archer, Bhaskar, Collier, Lawson, & Norrie, 1998) will be assumed within this research in order to identify differences in experiences and interpretations of these experiences between two groups of children looked-after by a large LA in England. This approach suggests that whilst experience is the product of individual interpretation and therefore constructed, it is 'real' to the individual (Willig, 2008). Thus it is hoped that the adoption of a critical realist stance will help to fulfil the emancipatory potential of this research (Robson, 2002), by identifying and highlighting the views of the participants to the relevant stakeholders involved in their care and education. Emancipatory research seeks to empower marginalised groups, through their involvement in the research process, and an emphasis on the views of participants (Lather, 1991). This stance will acknowledge individual interpretation of experiences whilst also considering how the broader social context affects these interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Positive psychology forms the theoretical foundations for this study. This approach suggests that well-being can be enhanced through the systematic promotion of individual competence (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The broad theoretical perspective of positive psychology will inform the methodology (Cresswell, 2009). This perspective suggests that positive educational experiences and feelings of self-efficacy can enhance resilience through participation (Gilligan, 1997). There is a hope that this identification of positive educational experiences will further help to shift the predominantly negative focus of current research (Winter, 2006).

1.9: Research Rationale

The current research was negotiated between the researcher and professionals within the LA in which the research took place. Representatives from the Educational Psychology Service and Achievement Service for Children in Care (ASCC) identified a particular need for the development of more participative procedures, and were involved in the development of the research questions. It was agreed that information generated would be distributed to stakeholders within the LA to inform service development. This research therefore has relevance and applicability to processes and procedures within the LA in which the research is taking place, and it is hoped that it will therefore improve outcomes for looked-after children. Information gained will have some generalisability to other looked-after children within the LA.

The relevance of this research is evidenced above, where the lack of research into the positive educational experiences of looked-after children is discussed (Dent & Cameron, 2003), particularly with regard to different care settings (Goddard, 2000). It is further hoped that this research may encourage the initiation of similar research to enhance generalisability. Further relevance of this research is highlighted legislatively (United Nations, 1989), ethically (Gersch, 1996), and educationally (Gilligan, 1997), in the obligations professionals have in empowering vulnerable groups such as looked-after children.

Findings from this research will be disseminated to key stakeholders including participants, foster carers, residential care staff, the ASCC, and the EP service. There is also a possibility of publication of the research findings, leading to further dissemination within the profession of educational psychology.

1.10: The Research Focus

This research will explore the educational experiences of looked-after children (Winter, 2006), comparing those in residential and foster care settings. The main purpose of this study is to explore the little considered positive experiences of this group, with an aim to use this data to inform future service delivery. A further aim of the research is to empower this vulnerable group through consideration of their personal views and experiences. The expectation is that most, if not all participants will be able to identify some positive educational experiences when interviewed using solution-focused techniques. Inductive thematic analysis will be employed to identify themes within and between these two groups.

Due to the identified need for research which gives ‘voice’ to looked-after children, the research questions will be broad. Areas of investigation include; people and processes which have facilitated positive educational experiences; personal qualities and strengths; feelings of control over educational experiences; involvement in decision making; potential improvements to services and procedures; and effective ways of empowering participants.

Thus the purpose of the current research is to explore and compare the positive educational experiences of children in residential and foster care, with a view to disseminating findings amongst relevant professionals, to inform future practice regarding the care and education of children looked-after by the LA. Key research questions include:

1. What have been the positive educational experiences of young people in care?

2. How do these experiences differ between young people in foster care and in residential care?
3. How can these positive experiences be drawn upon to improve service delivery to young people in care?

1.11: Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided a context for the current research through the introduction of key issues relating to the underachievement of looked-after children, the usefulness of a strengths-based approach, and the importance of eliciting the views of the children themselves. Following chapters will include a detailed literature review (Chapter Two), a description of the methodology used (Chapter Three), presentation of the research findings (Chapter Four), and finally a discussion of the findings in relation to the wider literature, and concluding remarks (Chapter Five).

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces key literature around the educational experiences of children in care. The developmental perspective assumed by much previous research is discussed, with the sociological model of childhood proposed as a more empowering approach for young people involved in research. A systematic literature search, and subsequent screening of articles, generated a list of nine articles for critical analysis. Key areas highlighted by the literature reviewed include the achievements and aspirations of young people in care; the support, encouragement and resources required to succeed; the importance of relationships; the impact of being in care on education; attitudes towards and experiences of school; and feeling of control. Recommendations from the reviewed literature are summarised.

2.2: The Epistemological Foundations of Previous Research

2.2.1: A Developmental Perspective

Winter (2006) argues that much research involving looked-after children has come from developmental psychology, which tends to present children's development as

a uniform and universal process. Winter further argues that this developmental perspective can overlook the individual developmental processes through which children progress, and can view children as ‘becoming adults’, and therefore lacking in adult capacities such as rationality and responsibility. Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2002) also suggest that this view of childhood represents the dominant discourse of developmental psychology, and can lead to a denial of children’s rights on the basis of age and vulnerability. Hogan (2010) discusses the impact of this epistemological position on methodological decisions in research, suggesting that it prohibits the role of children as experts in their own lives, instead validating the role of adults as experts.

2.2.2: A Sociological Perspective

Mayall (2002) describes an emerging body of literature based on an alternative epistemological position, in which the sociological aspects of childhood are emphasised. However, she notes that this position has, as yet, been underused in research with looked-after children. Winter (2006) describes how this model allows for the influence of multiple cultural and social factors on the development of the individual child. This position is conducive to research methodologies in which children and young people’s views and experiences are considered as useful and relevant in exploring the complexities of their lives. James and Prout (1997) suggest that the sociological perspective of childhood emphasises the validity of children’s own accounts of their experiences, embracing their right to participate in research. However, Hogan (2010) reports that there is a paucity of research in which children are asked to describe their experiences, suggesting that this view of children as experts with valid information to contribute has yet to be accepted by many researchers and professionals. Additionally, Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2002) describe an increasing body of research which suggests a disparity between the

perceived educational experiences of children and young people and the experiences described by the professionals providing services to them. For example, Sinclair Taylor (1995) reported that children in a special needs unit attached to a mainstream school experienced the unit as marginalising, whilst professionals within the school believed it to be inclusive. Clearly there is much to be gained from eliciting the views of young people.

2.3: The Literature Review

2.3.1: Method of Obtaining Papers

A systematic literature review was conducted between September 2011 and May 2012. Electronic journal searches were conducted through the following databases: EBSCO, PsycInfo and Academic Search Complete. Key search terms such as ‘looked-after’, ‘education’, and ‘experience’ formed the basis of the initial database searches (see Appendix A for further detail regarding search terms, synonyms used, and initial inclusion and exclusion criteria). Key search terms included variations of word usage according to countries in which research was conducted, and the British Education Thesaurus was used to identify relevant synonyms. Studies were included if they were peer reviewed, written in English, and published after 1989 (this date was chosen to reflect the publication of the Children Act 1989 which specified the importance of eliciting children’s views). This initial search generated a list of 1,001 potential studies, which were reduced to 830 after the removal of duplicates. An iterative screening of articles was then performed (screening titles, then abstracts), which led to the removal of studies related to youth offending, policy evaluation, correctional education, elderly care,

rehabilitation programmes, outcome data, and studies in which education was not a main focus. This left a total of 31 potential studies which were subjected to a final stage of screening (screening whole articles). At this point a further 26 articles were excluded for a variety of reasons including those studies in which the views of looked-after children and young people were not clearly represented (see Appendix B for further detail). This search and screening process therefore identified four studies for inclusion in the literature review.

A more organic search was also conducted in which key internet sites (including those of the Department for Education, and various children's charities) and reference books were searched, and references of key articles examined. Articles generated were subjected to the same inclusion and exclusion criteria as those generated through the electronic search. This search identified a further five studies for inclusion in the literature review.

2.3.2: Overview of the Studies Reviewed

The table overleaf summarises key characteristics of the nine articles chosen for in-depth review.

Table 1: Articles included in literature review

| Article Reference | Participants | Methodology | Country |
|---|---|---|----------------|
| Celeste, Y. S. C. (2011). Perspectives of looked-after children on school experience — a study conducted among primary school children in a children's home in Singapore. | Majority of the residents in a children's home | Document analysis; structured interviews; questionnaire. | Singapore |
| Dearden, J. (2004). Resilience: a study of risk and protective factors from the perspective of young people with experience of local authority care. | n=15; 13-19 yrs old; experience of living in local authority care | Interviews. | England |
| Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Lawrence, J., Berridge, D. & Sinclair, R. (2003). Who takes care of education? Looked-after children's perceptions of support for educational progress. | n=80; aged 10-18; looked-after for at least 3 months. | Semi-structured interviews. | England |
| Harker, R. M., Dobel-Ober, D., Akhurst, S., Berridge, D. & Sinclair, R. (2004). Who takes care of education 18 months on? A follow-up study of looked-after children's perceptions of support for educational progress. | n=56; looked-after for at least 3 months | Same questions as (2003) and questions relating to the participant's awareness of projects. | England |
| Hedin, L., Höjer, I. & Brunnberg, E. (2011). Why one goes to school: What school means to young people entering foster care. | n=17; age: 13-16; young people in care; in foster | Low-structured interviews; network maps; regular text | Sweden |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|----------|
| | care 3-18 months. | messages | |
| Jackson, S. & Martin, P. Y. (1998). Surviving the care system: Education and resilience. | n=105 (questionnaire); n=38 (interviews); in further or higher education experience of care; comparison group not in further or higher education, with experience of care | Questionnaires; semi-structured interviews; measures of health, locus of control, life satisfaction and self-esteem | England |
| Martin, P. Y. & Jackson, S. (2002). Educational success for children in public care: Advice from high achievers. | n=38 (as in Jackson & Martin, 1998) | (As with Jackson & Martin, 1998) | England |
| McClung, M. & Gayle, V. (2010). Exploring the care effects of multiple factors on the educational achievement of children looked-after at home and away from home: An investigation of two Scottish local authorities | n=1407; n=30; 11-19yrs old ; 23 looked-after, 7 care leavers | Census; In-depth, interviews. | Scotland |
| Merdinger, J. M., Hines, A. M., Lemon Osterling, K. & Wyatt, P. (2005). Pathways to college for former foster youth: Understanding factors that contribute to educational success. | n=216; former foster youth attending university. | Survey/self-administered questionnaire. | England |

All of the studies excluding Merdinger et al. (2005) utilised individual interviews, ranging from high to low in structure, to elicit the views of children in care, or previously in care. The majority of the participants in studies were children and young people ranging in age from ten to 19. Three studies instead focused on youth emancipated from care (Merdinger et al., 2005; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002), in part so that information regarding outcomes could be elicited. In Jackson and Martin (1998) individual interviews were accompanied by a variety of standardised assessments including the General Health Questionnaire (Goldberg & Williams, 1988), Internal-External Locus of Control Scale (Rotter, 1996), Life Satisfaction Index Z (Wood, Wylie & Sheafor, 1969), and Self-Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965). This allowed comparisons between scores on the assessments and points raised by individual participants. This study, and the follow-up study (Martin & Jackson, 2002) are both included in the current review, with the initial study reporting findings from questionnaires regarding experiences of care completed by 105 young people. A subsample of this group (n=38) considered to be 'high achievers', as assessed by academic achievement, and completion of further or higher education courses, were also interviewed by the researchers, with the findings being reported initially in Jackson and Martin (1998) and then in more depth by Martin and Jackson (2002).

Harker et al. (2003) and Harker et al. (2004) describe the experiences of young people in care at two separate points in time, allowing the inclusion of a longitudinal element to the research. Whilst these studies were evaluating a variety of programmes delivered in the local community and aimed at the children in care, they also gathered much useful information regarding the educational experiences of their sample.

Three studies incorporated questionnaire elements (Merdinger et al., 2005; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Celeste, 2011), allowing for comparison with the data gathered from individual interviews. Whilst the Merdinger et al. study used self-administered questionnaires, McClung and Gayle report results gathered from a census of all children in care in two Scottish LAs. Participants in the Celeste study included most of the residents in a residential care setting, and as such the questionnaire was completed by the majority of this population.

Other methodological approaches incorporated into the reviewed studies included document analysis (Celeste, 2011); creating network maps to describe relationships (Hedin et al., 2011); and the use of text messages to elicit regular feedback from participants (Hedin et al., 2011).

Whilst some studies did not differentiate the care placements of participants, as a whole the literature reviewed can be said to incorporate views from children in a variety of settings, including residential settings (Celeste, 2011; McClung & Gayle, 2010); foster care (Dearden, 2004; Hedin et al., 2011); and children looked-after at home (McClung & Gayle, 2010). It should also be noted that most studies were conducted in England, with the exception of Celeste in Singapore; Hedin et al. in Sweden; and McClung and Gayle in Scotland.

The majority of studies did not explicitly state their theoretical positions. However given that all studies sought to elicit the views of the participants it can be assumed that a sociological epistemological position had been adopted. Those studies which explicitly stated their theoretical foundations took a strengths-based approach, for example Dearden (2004) identifies resilient and non-resilient individuals within her

sample; and Jackson and Martin (1998) and Martin and Jackson (2002) report the experiences of ‘high achieving’ youth.

2.3.3: What do Children in Care Say about Their Experiences of Education?

2.3.3.1: Achievements and Aspirations

At least average academic achievements in GCSEs or National Curriculum assessments were reported by around half of the participants interviewed by Dearden (2004), and one-third of participants identified personal achievements including overcoming difficulties and learning from past mistakes. Research repeatedly highlights the academic underachievement of children in care, which suggests that participants in Dearden’s study compare favourably to the wider care population. Participants in two studies reviewed were identified as ‘high achievers’ (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002). Participants in this sample were self-selected, giving a possibility of sample bias i.e. these participants may not be representative of the wider population of high achieving young people looked-after. McClung and Gayle (2010) also reported the academic achievements of participants, noting that a significantly higher number of those in residential care attained Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework (SCQ) level four in English compared with those on care orders but looked after at home. Linking this to the requirement of English and Maths SCQF level three for entry to foundation level college courses, McClung and Gayle conclude that looked-after children residing at home are the least likely of all looked-after children to enter college.

Two studies reviewed discuss the aspirations of looked-after children, with Dearden (2004) reporting that two-thirds of participants planned to pursue educational courses, career plans, or independent living arrangements. She concluded that the positive expectations of others were a key factor in believing these plans were possible. In her comparison of levels of resilience, Dearden highlights that more resilient participants tended to report that others, usually carers or teachers, had high expectations for them. Jackson and Martin (1998) report participants' perceived difficulties in having their aspirations recognised, with career advice being either absent or inappropriately pitched. They give an example of participants with higher degrees being advised to pursue secretarial training. This relates to earlier descriptions of the low expectations that many professionals have for looked-after young people.

2.3.3.2: Support and Encouragement from Significant Others

The literature highlights the support of others as a key factor in the success or otherwise of looked-after children, with every study in the literature review mentioning this in some form. Young people interviewed by Dearden (2004) reported that foster parents had played a significant role in their education, by caring for them, being firm but fair, and instilling a sense of belonging in them. 31 of the 80 children interviewed by Harker et al. (2003) noted that both foster and residential carers had supported their education, by providing advice and encouragement. However the literature is not entirely consistent, with the majority of young people interviewed by Dearden perceiving residential staff as unhelpful. Further investigation into what constitutes a supportive residential carer may therefore be warranted. Interestingly young people interviewed by Hedin et al. (2011) reported receiving support from

foster parents and foster siblings. There is an interesting comparison to be made here between foster and residential settings. With foster siblings as a potential source of support, might peers in residential settings play a similar role?

In addition to support from carers, Dearden (2004) identified a supportive role for biological family, with six young people in this study describing support from family members, including from siblings and grandparents. This may appear contrary to the literature around negative familial experiences of children in care (DCSF, 2009), however this study highlights the continuing role of biological family in the education of looked-after children.

Teachers were also cited in the literature as providing a supportive role and were seen as providing both academic and emotional support (Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004), and promoting self-belief by encouraging young people to succeed (Harker et al., 2003). Friends (Merdinger et al., 2005) and social workers (Dearden, 2004) were also reported by young people in care to have provided support.

2.3.3.3: Taking an Interest

A key factor noted in this review was the interest in education demonstrated by significant people in the lives of the young people in care. This tended to vary depending on the care setting and the relationship of the person to the young person. Jackson and Martin (1998) report that parents and carers of the ‘high achievers’ in

their study were significantly more likely to attend school events or show an interest in education than those in the comparison group. In studies where young people described parents and carers as failing to demonstrate an interest in their education this was seen as detrimental to their educational progress (Dearden, 2004; Harker et al., 2003). Parental interest in education was highlighted by several young people as encouraging them to value education themselves (Martin and Jackson, 2002). The link between parental beliefs and children's feelings towards education has been highlighted in previous literature (Osborn, 1990; Taylor, 1991; Lucey & Walkerdine, 2000). However these findings are particularly striking given the relative absence of parents in the lives of the majority of the young people interviewed. In fact Jackson and Martin (1998) report that some young people interviewed quoted comments made by parents ten or more years earlier which had encouraged them to strive for educational success.

Disappointingly the literature currently reviewed consistently reports a lack of interest in education demonstrated by residential carers (Dearden, 2004; Harker et al., 2003; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002). Harker et al. (2003) report that in terms of carer interest in education, foster children tended to fare better than those in residential care. Jackson and Martin (1998) describe how residential workers were more likely to focus on fostering good social relations and participation in activities within the home, than emphasising education. They suggest that this may in part be due to the low level of academic achievements of the residential workers themselves. One young person in this study reported that, other than ensuring they were correctly dressed, residential workers showed no interest in school: "No one ever asked you what you'd done in the day or said well done if you got a good mark" (p577).

Social workers and teachers were also mentioned by young people in terms of demonstrating interest in their education. Young people tended to be disappointed in the low level of interest exhibited by social workers towards education, whom they felt prioritised physical and emotional needs instead (Harker et al., 2003). Teachers, on the other hand, were reported by young people surveyed by Celeste (2011) to have been more likely than parents or residential workers to have shown an interest in their education.

Recognition of achievements was also noted within several of the reviewed studies as being instrumental in encouraging young people to engage in education. For example young people report being encouraged by praise from parents, foster carers, siblings, and foster siblings (Hedin et al., 2011); and rewards and encouragement from teachers was reported to build self-esteem and boost interest in learning (Celeste, 2011). Also, McClung and Gayle (2010) reported that 53 percent of their sample were able to identify at least one person who would be proud of their achievements. Jackson and Martin (1998) report that the 'high achievers' they interviewed were given significantly more encouragement than members of the comparison group, suggesting a relationship between encouragement for learning and achievement.

Despite the differences in the emphasis given to education by different people, and in different care settings, a consistent finding is that when an interest in education is demonstrated by a person who is significant in the young person's life this can encourage a belief in the importance of education. Harker et al. (2004) report that young people who felt that their educational progress had deteriorated, also reported receiving no support or encouragement in terms of education. Interestingly McClung and Gayle (2010) report that 60 percent of the young people they surveyed said there

was at least one person who demonstrated an interest in their education, including teachers, carers, and parents.

2.3.3.4: Practical Resources

Young people in the studies reviewed frequently reported a lack of resources to support their educational development, such as a lack of books and quiet spaces to work (Jackson & Martin, 1998); and limited access to computers and other educational resources (Harker et al., 2003). Young people interviewed by Dearden (2004) rated educational facilities in foster care placements as ranging from ‘very good’ to ‘very poor’, suggesting a wide variety in experiences. These findings are consistent with other research (e.g. Rees, 2001) which has suggested a frequent lack of educational resources for children in care. When considered alongside the findings from Jackson and Martin (1998) that their ‘high achievers’ reported a much higher availability of resources than the comparison group, this suggests the worrying possibility that many looked-after children and young people’s educational success is being hindered by a simple lack of physical resources.

A further potential impact of a lack of educational resources is on the post-compulsory education plans of young people in care. For example young people interviewed in three of the nine reviewed studies raised concerns about the financial support required to further their education (Merdinger et al., 2005; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Harker et al., 2004). In fact young people interviewed by Merdinger et al.

reported that the availability of financial support was instrumental in decisions to attend college.

The availability of resources was often related to the care setting, with discrepancies between studies: Dearden (2004), Martin and Jackson (2002) and McClung and Gayle (2010) all report a lack of facilities being particularly prevalent in residential settings, whilst Harker et al. (2003) report that young people in residential care reported greater availability of resources than young people either in foster care or placed with relatives. These findings suggest that there may be wide variation not only between types of care setting but also within them.

2.3.3.5: Relationship with a Significant Adult

Three of the studies reviewed highlighted the significance of an ongoing relationship with at least one adult. Participants interviewed by Martin and Jackson (2002) reported the need for a mentor or friendly adult to support them during higher education, with whom they envisaged having an ongoing relationship. Similarly participants interviewed by Dearden (2004) suggested that having a key worker who knew them well and could be trusted would enable increased communication between care and education services, which would subsequently reduce the confusion the young people felt from receiving conflicting messages from different professionals. Participants in both of these studies seemed to envisage an advocate or mentor to fulfil this role. The ‘high achievers’ in the Jackson and Martin studies (1998; 2002) described having a special relationship with at least one person who they felt listened

to them. This person was often regarded as a role model or mentor, helping to motivate young people to work hard and achieve aspirations. These descriptions of a special relationship are consistent with studies relating to attachment theory which posits that a secure attachment to a caregiver forms the basis of future relationships (Bowlby, 1988). Whilst Bowlby asserts that this relationship is of crucial importance to the development of future attachments, other authors have suggested less deterministic interpretations which incorporate a role for infant temperament and heredity (Kagan, 1989), attachment to multiple caregivers (Rutter, 1981), and the positive effects of the provision of support and emotional warmth for children in care after separation from parents (Clarke & Clarke, 1976, 2000, 2003). Previous research also indicates that a positive role model can foster resilience (Maluccio, Abamczyk & Thomlinson, 1996).

2.3.3.6: Relationships with Peers

Friendships were mentioned by many of the young people included in the studies reviewed. Dearden (2004) reports that the majority of participants said they had supportive friends, some of whom had known them prior to their experiences of being in care. McClung and Gayle (2010) also report that most of the participants they interviewed said they had friends in school, although the majority of those who reported having little or no contact with school friends outside of school were those living in residential settings or living with parents. This suggests that care setting can be highly influential in the development and maintenance of friendships.

Hedin et al. (2011) report that a frequent narrative in the interviews of their sample of looked-after young people was the need to interact with peers. The researchers also note the disruption to friendships which can be caused by moves of placement and accompanying moves of school. Young people tended to ascribe a supportive role to peers (Hedin et al., 2011; Harker et al., 2003; Celeste, 2011), for example through encouragement or help with homework. There was also some suggestion that the development of these relationships may be affected by others' knowledge of the looked-after children's care status: five of the 80 young people interviewed by Harker et al. (2003) suggested that they would benefit from their school friends gaining an understanding of what it meant to be looked-after. Hedin et al. concludes that, just as with non-looked-after young people, peer relationships may be crucial in identify formation for looked-after children.

There is also evidence in the literature reviewed of the potentially negative impact of peers, either in terms of 'hanging out with the wrong people' and not having trusting relationships (Dearden, 2004); or being bullied (Dearden, 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Harker et al., 2003). In Dearden's comparison of resilient and non-resilient children in care, she found that frequency of bullying was rated as lower in the resilient group. This study describes correlation rather than causation, so we cannot conclude whether bullying causes a decrease in resilience, or more resilient children are less likely to be bullied in the first place, or whether a third factor is involved. In McClung and Gayle's study 43 percent of children reported having been bullied, which compares with only ten percent of the non-looked-after population (Social Exclusion Unit (2003).

2.3.3.7: Attitude towards School

Many of the studies reviewed highlight an interest or enjoyment in school, and a motivation to learn (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Hedin et al., 2011; McClung & Gayle, 2010; Celeste, 2011), with Celeste noting that participants generally liked teachers, could identify subjects which they enjoyed, and recognised the importance of education in achieving self-sufficiency in adulthood. McClung and Gayle also noted a correlation between enjoyment of school and school attendance.

Interestingly both Hedin et al. (2011) and Celeste (2011) noted gender differences between attitudes towards school, with Hedin et al. reporting that boys tended to be mostly interested in activities, whilst girls tended to be more interested in social relations. Celeste reports that those participants who enjoyed school the least tended to be boys, although no links were reported between enjoyment of school and the academic ability or conduct of these boys at school. Whilst it is difficult to draw conclusions from this limited information, the impact of gender on looked-after children's attitude towards school is perhaps an area which requires further investigation.

Participants in two of the reviewed studies refer directly to the impact of being in care on their attitude towards education (Hedin et al., 2011; Harker et al., 2003). For some their adaptation to a new care environment was accompanied by the development of a more positive attitude towards school and future possibilities (Hedin et al., 2011), whilst others attributed a lack of educational progress to their attitude rather than a result of being looked-after (Harker et al., 2003). Once again this highlights the individual differences amongst the attitudes and beliefs of children in care, and

emphasises the importance of eliciting their views to gain a greater understanding of the complexity of their educational experiences.

2.3.3.8: Interests and Hobbies

Engagement in extracurricular interests and hobbies was highlighted in three of the reviewed studies as being of importance to young people in care (Merdinger et al., 2005; Hedin et al., 2011; Dearden, 2004). These studies all concluded that such activities had positive outcomes such as the enrichment of the educational experience (Merdinger et al., 2005); the opportunity to demonstrate commitment and to experience pride; and the opportunity to develop relationships (Hedin et al., 2011). However, Dearden reports the frustration highlighted by young people interviewed who had experienced a lack of leisure facilities and a lack of opportunity to follow up interests. The impact of recreational activities should not be underestimated, with Gilligan (2008) describing the multitude of benefits to be had from engagement in extracurricular clubs and hobbies, including the development of a wider network of relationships; increased opportunities to experience achievement and accompanying feelings of pride; and the development of a range of new skills.

2.3.3.9: The Perceptions of Others

Many young people within this literature review are reported as highlighting the negative stereotypes others have about children in care. For example, Martin and Jackson (2002) and McClung and Gayle (2010) report that around a third of their samples felt they had been treated differently at school because of negative stereotypes. Interestingly McClung and Gayle noted that nearly all of the children in their sample who reported these concerns were living in residential care settings and attending mainstream schools. This suggests that perceptions of teaching staff may depend on the placement setting of the looked-after child. Harker et al. (2004) report only two of their sample of 56 young people in care felt they had suffered from teachers' negative stereotypes, although the setting and duration of the care placements of these young people are not made clear. Young people in the Harker et al., (2003) study specifically highlight the stereotypes of peers, assumed that children were placed in care because of behavioural issues. Young people interviewed by Martin and Jackson (2002) and Harker et al. (2003) made suggestions that this stereotyping could be addressed through ensuring that teachers were aware of the unfairness of these assumptions, and training teachers to better understand the difficulties faced by children in care.

Perhaps because of these negative stereotypes, young people frequently reported teachers and carers having low expectations of them (McClung & Gayle, 2010; Martin & Jackson, 2002). This is consistent with other research studies (Jackson & Sachdev, 2001). Whilst the majority of these studies are focused on the perceptions of young people themselves, these findings are supported by the Who Cares? Trust (2004) finding that of a group of children in care in Kent, some young people with reading ages of 16 or over had been allocated to remedial classes.

2.3.3.10: Feelings of Control

Dearden (2004) reports that around half of her participants rated their involvement in decision making as average or above average, which is disappointing considering the current legislative emphasis placed on eliciting and considering children's views (DoH & DfES, 2000). Jackson and Martin (1998) looked at feelings of control in more detail, assessing participants' locus of control using standardised measures. They found that the 'high achieving' group were significantly more internal in their locus of control than the comparison group, suggesting that they felt a greater level of control over their environments and futures. Interestingly the researchers also noted a gender difference; males were significantly more internal in their locus of control than females. This finding is consistent with other studies (Parkes, 1985). Jackson and Martin (1998) also assessed their participants using the Self Esteem Scale (Rosenberg, 1965), which indicated that there were no significant differences between the 'high achievers' and comparison group in this area. This suggests that locus of control can exist independently of self-esteem. Reports from participants in Hedin et al.'s (2011) study are consistent with findings from Jackson and Martin, in that participants varied in terms of how much in control of their own lives they felt themselves to be.

2.3.3.11: Being Listened To

Two studies in this review raise issues of feeling listened to (McClung & Gayle, 2010; Dearden, 2004). In both studies the value given by young people to being

listened to by various professionals, including teachers, care staff and parents, was highlighted. However McClung and Gayle report that only one-third of the looked-after children in their study said that social workers had asked for their views on education. This is perhaps also related to the low priority given to education by social workers (as noted in Chapter two), as McClung and Gayle also note that children were more likely to be asked their views on their care rather than their education. The researchers also report that three-quarters of the 30 looked-after children interviewed said they felt they could talk to at least one adult in their lives; although once again placement differences were noted, with the majority of those who said they had no-one to talk to living in residential settings.

2.3.3.12: The Impact of Care on Education

Some young people within the reviewed studies referred directly to the impact that being in care had on their education. For example Harker et al. (2003) report that 45 percent of children interviewed perceived improvements in their educational progress since becoming looked-after, although 33 percent felt things had got worse, and 21 percent reported feeling it had had no impact. More useful perhaps were participants' reasons for these evaluations: those who felt being looked-after had a negative impact on educational progress also gave significantly lower ratings for progress made than those who had perceived either no difference or a positive impact. When interviewed on the second occasion, participants who perceived they had made educational progress saw placement stability and quality of placement as key factors (Harker et al., 2004). During the initial study participants also highlighted initial entry into the care system as a traumatic experience which impacted on school progress (Harker et

al., 2003). These findings are consistent with studies investigating the educational outcomes for children in care (DfES, 2005), but the weight which is added to these findings by eliciting the views of service users themselves cannot be underestimated.

Participants interviewed by Dearden (2004) reported how the move to a good foster placement, or the move into satisfactory independent living, was seen as a significant event in terms of improving their educational experiences. In seven cases the move to a good foster placement was followed by increased resilience. Yair (2009) discusses the notion of ‘turning points’ in the lives of children in care, during which their life trajectory changes course. Yair suggests that turning points come about through a significant event in the life of a young person, and goes on to discuss the emotional significance of these events, suggesting that they are opportunities for young people to make positive life changes.

2.3.3.13: Stability

Several of the studies reviewed included reports from young people of multiple placement moves (Jackson & Martin 1998; Dearden, 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010), with many young people reporting associated disruption to schooling (Dearden, 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010). McClung and Gayle reported that ten percent of participants in their study had changed school more than five times. This finding is consistent with previous reports of instability in care placements and subsequent poor attendance at school (DfES & DoH, 2000). However, this was not always the case. For some looked-after young people, school was reportedly seen as a source of

stability where it had remained constant during instability in care placements (Harker et al., 2003); whilst for others their care setting had remained constant during a number of school changes (Celeste, 2011). This once again highlights the heterogeneous nature of looked-after children as a group.

As with many other aspects of educational experience, stability was also related to care setting. McClung and Gayle (2010) found that 60 percent of the looked-after children in their study had been moved into residential care after having been unable to settle in foster care. They identified a correlation between number of placements and placement type, in which children in residential care tended to have experienced more placements than those in foster care. Again this demonstrates that simple comparisons based on current placement are likely to be misleading, given the multiple interacting factors associated with placement settings.

A disappointing finding reported in two of the studies reviewed is the reference made by looked-after young people to a perceived lack of awareness in professionals of the impact of placement moves on schooling (Harker et al., 2003; Jackson & Martin, 1998). Young people interviewed by Harker et al. reported that placement moves could affect their ability to concentrate in school, and those interviewed by Jackson and Martin (1998) suggested that placement moves often happened mid-term, when they could see no reason for them not to happen during the school holidays. Worryingly Biehal, Clayden, Stein and Wade (1998) reported an association between placement moves and poor educational attainment. In this study three-quarters of young people who had experienced four or more placement moves had no qualifications, compared to half of those who had experienced no moves. This suggests that the concerns raised by young people in this literature review are indeed justified.

2.3.3.14: Links between Home and School

Cooperation and information sharing between home and school were mentioned in many of the reviewed studies (Hedin et al., 2011; McClung & Gayle, 2010). This ranged from young people explicitly highlighting the importance of effective communication (Dearden, 2004; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Hedin et al., 2011), to rating their experiences of information sharing (Dearden, 2004). Promisingly, in Dearden's study, one-third of the participants rated information sharing between services as 'good' or 'very good', although this suggests that two-thirds of the participants found information sharing to be less effective. McClung and Gayle report that around one-quarter of the looked-after children in their study thought their social worker had no contact with their school. Whether or not this was the case, this perception of the lack of communication by young people is noteworthy in itself. This finding is consistent with other studies, which report that a lack of information sharing can lead to a lack of clarity about roles, and unnecessary changes of schools (Who Cares? Trust, 2004). Further, Borland, Pearson, Hill, Tisdall and Bloomfield (1998) suggest that this lack of collaborative working can come about because of uncertainty between social care and education departments as to who has responsibility for the education of children in care.

2.3.3.15: The Home Environment

Within the literature reviewed various aspects of the home environment were mentioned by young people as impacting on their educational development. For example participants interviewed by Hedin et al. (2011) described how routines and structures around meal times and bed times could bring feelings of structure and security to their home lives. In fact one participant reported how these feelings of security elicited by structures within the home also helped to increase feelings of security at school. Celeste (2011) conversely reports participants' frustration at inflexible rules around group study in the children's home, suggesting that routines and structures alone do not equate to a supportive and homely environment.

2.3.3.16: School Attendance

Jackson and Martin (1998) report that the 'high achieving' looked-after young people in their study were significantly more likely to be attending school, with the comparison group being significantly more likely to have been suspended or excluded (63.6 percent) than the 'high achievers' (23.7 percent). They also report that almost all of the comparison group left school at age 16 or earlier, whilst 53 percent of the 'high achievers' remained in education after age 15. Studies highlighting the poor school attendance of looked-after children are prevalent in the wider literature around the education of children in care (Fletcher-Campbell, 1997; Berridge & Brodie, 1998). Whilst higher attendance rates were reported by the 'high achievers' in the Jackson and Martin study, these young people also noted the relaxed attitude of

residential care staff towards school attendance, suggesting that truancy should be considered as unacceptable for them as it would be for a non-looked-after child (Martin & Jackson, 2002). School attendance was also highlighted by young people interviewed by Harker et al. (2003), who suggested that teachers could provide additional support to combat missed schooling due to placement changes or attending care-related meetings. The findings reported in the literature reviewed are consistent with the wider literature, which suggests that children in care are more than ten times more likely than children not in care to be excluded from school (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). Evans (2003) also describes how the majority of children in the twelve homes researchers visited in his study were not attending school.

2.4: Conclusions Drawn by the Literature Reviewed

The following list summarises the conclusions drawn from the literature reviewed:

- Children should be provided with the facilities and resources that are required to complete their schoolwork and engage in leisure activities (Celeste, 2011; Dearden, 2004; Martin & Jackson, 2002).
- Inter-professional collaboration needs to be deliberate and consistent in order for these children to benefit (Celeste, 2011).
- Information shared between professionals must exceed a superficial level such that truly collaborative ways of working are developed (Celeste, 2011).
- A key worker system would help to ensure that information is shared effectively and confidentially between home and school (Dearden, 2004).
- The views of children in care should be respected in order to instill feelings of control in looked-after young people (Celeste, 2011).

- Services must address the issue of bullying as a matter of urgency (Dearden, 2004).
- Services should explicitly focus on the building of networks of relationships for children in care (Dearden, 2004).
- Education should be considered as a priority when making decisions about placement moves and care review meetings (Celeste, 2011; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002).
- More consideration needs to be given to where children are placed when they become looked-after, and also to the emotional and practical support needed by children who are looked-after at home and in residential care, to ensure that they have comparable experiences to those in foster care, as a minimum (McClung & Gayle, 2010).
- Carers should be encouraged to see the promotion of education as a key part of their role by: addressing low levels of education of residential workers at a policy level (Martin & Jackson, 2002); considering the educational backgrounds of foster carers as a factor in their selection (Jackson & Martin, 1998); and ensuring that foster carers have the resources to provide, for example, extra tuition, recreational activities, and opportunities for school trips and outings (Martin & Jackson, 2002).

2.5: Chapter Summary

The research reviewed in this chapter suggests that further investigation is required into the educational experiences of young people in care. Many of the studies reviewed failed to state their epistemological and theoretical stance, leaving underlying motives and thought processes of the researchers to be assumed by the reader. The majority of the studies also did not differentiate between the looked-after children in their sample with regard to placement type, thus limiting comparisons which can be made at the current time. Whilst a few of the studies utilised a strengths-based approach, these tended to categorise young people as ‘high achieving’ or otherwise, or resilient and non-resilient. The approach taken in the current research assumes that all young people have positive experiences and achievements from which to draw useful interpretations, and suggests that the living arrangements of young people in care can have a significant impact on their experiences of education.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1: Chapter Overview

This chapter details the methodology employed to investigate the positive educational experiences of young people in foster and residential care. This will begin with a discussion around the epistemological position of the researcher, and the corresponding methodological approach. The process of selecting and interviewing participants is then described, followed by a detailed description of the thematic analysis conducted to interrogate the data. Ethical issues and the reflexive role of the researcher are also addressed.

3.2: A Critical Realist Epistemology

There is a growing body of research suggesting that the reality of individuals cannot be fully understood simply through inference and assumption, and that neither a positivist nor a relativist position can fully illuminate the experiences of others within a social context (Lloyd-Smith & Tarr, 2000). Houston (2010) argues that to understand the subjective experience of others, we must examine the interplay between the objective world and subjective experience. Moore (2005) describes the constructivist approach to research as considering language to go further than simply

mirroring the objective world, and suggests we consider its role as a means of interpreting that world. Language is therefore considered to shape our understanding of a phenomenon within a particular social context. In this vein the current research attempts to move beyond a literal description of the educational experiences of young people in care, and to move toward a conceptual understanding and representation of those experiences. In keeping with these assumptions, critical realism is an epistemological position which assumes that whilst the world is essentially real and objective, individuals make meaning of it through the application of their social constructions (Houston, 2010; Willig, 2008). This position further suggests that the complex interplay between multiple interconnecting systems within any given social context creates difficulty in predicting outcomes for individuals, particularly in relation to social research (Houston, 2010).

A critical realist epistemology (Archer et al., 1998) will be assumed within this research in order to identify differences in experiences and understandings of these experiences between two groups of children looked-after by a LA. It is hoped that the adoption of a critical realist stance will help to fulfil the emancipatory potential of this piece of social research (Robson, 2002), in identifying and highlighting the views of the participants to the relevant stakeholders involved in their care and education. This stance will acknowledge individual interpretation of experiences whilst also considering how the broader social context affects these interpretations (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.3: Research Paradigm and Design

With an increasing emphasis on a sociological understanding of childhood Christensen and Prout (2002) note that the role of children within such research has changed from being objects of research to being subjects or co-participants. The assumption then is that child participants are competent and can add value to research. This has methodological implications, in which children are seen as being actively involved in the research process (Winter, 2006).

The theoretical foundation of this study will be that of positive psychology, which suggests that well-being can be enhanced through the systematic promotion of individual competence, particularly for children and young people considered vulnerable (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). This is compatible with a sociological view of childhood.

3.4: A Qualitative Methodology

Davies and Wright (2008) suggest that in areas in which a relative lack of research has been undertaken a qualitative approach can be valuable in terms of offering rich descriptions of phenomena which can be used to generate hypotheses alongside larger, quantitative research studies. Within social care research in particular, Goddard (2000) suggests that the complex nature of looked-after children's experiences of education cannot be accessed through larger scale, quantitative

research alone as it misses the nuances of the experience. Further, Davies and Wright (2008) suggest that qualitative approaches are more able to ensure that participants' views are represented than quantitative approaches.

A qualitative research design will be employed in which individual, semi-structured interviews are used to elicit descriptions of positive educational experiences of the participants. This research will compare the experiences of two groups of children looked-after by the LA. Interviews will be conducted to investigate the following key research questions:

1. What have been the positive educational experiences of young people in care?
2. How do these experiences differ between young people in foster care and in residential care?
3. How can these positive experiences be drawn upon to improve service delivery to young people in care?

3.5: Context and Location of the Research

Westcott and Littleton (2010) note that it is useful to recognise the importance of the particular context in which any research takes place, as this frames the interactions which take place within that context. They argue that discourses within socially defined settings are always nested within the wider sociocultural context. The wider context of the current research includes the ongoing legislative interest in the

educational underperformance of looked-after children (DoH, 1998; DfES, 2005; DfES, 2007; DCSF, 2009).

International reviews of data regarding children looked-after suggest that numbers of children in out-of-home care have increased in the past decade in England, Australia and Norway (Munro & Manful, 2012). Munro and Manful also report that the majority of maltreated children are classified as having experienced neglect (in England and the US) or emotional abuse (in Australia); and that numbers of children in care returning to live with their birth parents are declining in both England and the United States. Whilst such trends are worthy of investigation, international comparisons are complicated by variations in definitions of terms such as ‘neglect’. This difficulty is also apparent within the United Kingdom, where there are variations in data collected and published by LAs (Munro, Brown & Manful, 2011). When investigating which children are looked-after the wider context of the social care system must also be considered. Gilbert, Kemp, Thoburn, Sidebotham, Radford, Glaser and MacMillan (2009) report that Anglo-American countries including England and the US could be classified as adopting a *child protection* approach, whilst Continental European and Nordic countries adopt a *family service* approach in which out-of-home care is seen as part of a continuum of support services for families (Munro & Manful, 2012). There has also been a move internationally towards trying to achieve permanence for children who have experienced the care system. England and the US have sought to increase adoption rates and to offer guardianship as an alternative in which foster carers become permanent carers (Munro & Manful, 2012).

In terms of the composition of the population of looked-after children in England variations in ethnicity have been noted, in which children from black and mixed ethnic backgrounds are overrepresented, and those from Asian backgrounds are underrepresented (Owen & Statham, 2009). It is unclear as to the cause of such variations although Owen and Statham report that reunification with birth families is more common among children from Asian backgrounds than black or mixed ethnicity

backgrounds. These authors also report that reasons for entering care, placement in residential settings, and rates of adoption also vary by ethnicity. Some authors have highlighted a policy of seeking ethnically matched placements where possible as one reason for such variations, given that the availability of ethnic minority carers is limited (Sinclair, Baker, Lee & Gibbs, 2007).

The research took place within a large LA in England. It is notable that this was a time of some turmoil for Social Services Departments and residential settings within this LA, as recent decisions had been made to close the residential settings. Young people and staff alike were therefore in a stage of uncertainty as to their future living arrangements and employment respectively. To gain a more coherent perspective as to the current situation, it was considered useful to spend some time within these homes prior to conducting the research. The researcher visited several residential settings across the LA and talked to staff and managers. Creswell (2009) suggests that spending time in the research setting prior to conducting the research can help to develop a more in-depth understanding of the phenomenon being explored, and can subsequently increase validity of findings.

3.6: Procedure

3.6.1: Participants

Potential participants were identified by the Achievement Service for Children in Care (ASCC) via their database of looked-after children living within the LA. The following criteria were applied to the database: children and young people must be looked-after by the LA, aged between nine and 16 years old, and have been living in either foster care or residential care within the LA for at least six months. This age range was identified to match the age range catered for within the residential settings in the LA. The identification of a minimum amount of time in care was necessary to ensure both that participants had a substantial amount of experience on which to draw during interviews, and that they had not recently undergone the potential upheaval of a move into foster or residential care. At this stage 80 participants in foster care and 12 participants in residential care were identified as meeting these criteria.

Social workers acting as these young people's key workers were then identified by the ASCC who then sent them a list of the names of the potential participants. Information sheets and consent forms for participants and relevant adults (see appendices C to F) were also disseminated to social workers by the ASCC at this time. Consent forms used clear and simple language, and included information regarding the aims of the research, the time commitment required, how findings would be disseminated and to whom (Hill, 2010).

Those young people interested in taking part were offered the opportunity to have an initial meeting with the researcher, to discuss questions and concerns prior to giving their agreement to take part. Following the initial dissemination of information about the research, the researcher made contact with the relevant social workers to identify young people who wished to participate. Discussions were also had with parents, foster carers, and residential care staff where appropriate.

This method of sampling carries some risk of bias in the selection of participants by social workers. For example they may have only given consent for young people who they felt would not be critical of social services (Munro, 2001). The sample selection is also dependent on the views of social workers as to the capacity of young people to take part, and therefore less articulate young people may have been excluded from participation. However, due to issues of confidentiality, no information regarding the young people was made available to the researcher until consent had been gained. Reasons for non-participation known to the researcher included:

- Young person did not wish to participate (11 young people)
- Social worker was concerned about the emotional impact of the research on the young person (one young person)
- Social worker felt that learning and communication difficulties prevented the young person from being able to access the interviews (one young person)
- A change of school and/or care placement were taking place or imminent (nine young people)
- Social worker did not respond to contact made by the researcher (27 social workers)

From the original list of potential participants six in foster care and three in residential care ultimately took part in the research. For these nine participants, informed consent was gained from both participants and adults with parental responsibility prior to data collection. These adults included social workers, foster carers, residential care staff, and biological parents. With young people's choice to participate as a determining feature of this study, the sample of participants was consequently somewhat self-selected. All of those who returned consent forms were interviewed.

Table 2: Participant details

| Name | Age | Gender | Care Setting | Education Setting |
|-------------|------------|---------------|------------------------------|---|
| Barney | 13 | M | Long-term foster care | Mainstream school |
| Darcy | 13 | F | Long-term foster care | Mainstream school |
| Robyn | 11 | F | Long-term foster care | Mainstream school |
| Justin | 16 | M | Long-term foster care | Mainstream school |
| Aaron | 14 | M | Long-term foster care | Mainstream school |
| Steven | 12 | M | Special Guardianship | Mainstream school |
| Sarah | 15 | F | Independent residential home | Special school – emotional and behavioural difficulties |
| Ryan | 14 | M | Independent residential home | Education provided by residential setting |
| Will | 15 | M | LA residential care home | Education provided by residential setting |

Of the participants in long-term foster care, three were siblings living in the same foster home (Darcy, Robyn and Justin). Two of these siblings had been living together since entering care some years previously, and their brother had joined them shortly after this. Steven had been fostered by his current carer until recently, when his foster carer had been granted Special Guardianship.

Of the participants in residential care, two were placed in independent residential settings, and one in a LA-run residential setting. Two of these participants were provided with education by the care setting, with Will receiving one-to-one tutoring on site, and Ryan enrolled at an educational setting attached to the care setting. Sarah attended a special school for young people with emotional and behavioural difficulties, which was situated near to her residential setting.

3.6.2: Design of the Interview Schedule

A semi-structured interview schedule and list of prompts were compiled (see Appendix G) which incorporated solution-focused techniques such as the ‘miracle question’ (de Shazer, 1985), which encourages participants to envisage their preferred future in detail, thus making this future more tangible and therefore more achievable. Solution-focused approaches suggest that the client’s strengths be built upon, and thus assumes that they have the power to make positive changes in their own lives.

Following recommendations from Smith (1995), the following stages were undertaken:

1. A broad range of themes or questions within the over-arching theme of 'positive educational experiences' were identified;
2. These themes and questions were ordered into a logical sequence, considering which areas may be more sensitive and therefore potentially more difficult for the young people to talk about;
3. Questions relating to each broad theme or question were compiled;
4. Consideration was given to possible probes and prompts which could follow from answers given to the interviewer's questions.

The interview schedule was piloted in a role play with a colleague EP, and was subsequently refined so that more specific prompts were included and questions were re-ordered to match how topics seemed to naturally arise in conversation. This pilot interview also provided an opportunity for the researcher to become familiar with the use of the interview schedule.

3.6.3: The Interview Procedure

Interviews took place between November 2011 and February 2012, including the school Christmas holidays. The interviews were all conducted in participants' homes, as requested by the participants themselves when given the choice of setting. The potential impact of the timing and setting of interviews (Jones & Tannock, 2002) was

considered during the planning stages of data collection, with conversations had between the researcher and foster or residential carers to ascertain the most convenient timings and most comfortable settings for the participants. On two occasions this led to the rearrangement of interviews to best suit the needs of the participants concerned. The potential impact of the time of the year during which some of the interviews took place i.e. during school holidays and over the Christmas period, cannot be overlooked. It is possible that this would be a time when young people's families are at the forefront of their minds. Care was therefore taken by the researcher to ensure that no participant felt pressured to discuss family relationships.

Individual, one-off, semi-structured interviews, lasting between 40 minutes and one hour, were conducted with participants, using solution-focused techniques to elicit details regarding positive educational experiences. The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed participants some freedom to highlight issues of personal importance, therefore allowing them some control over the process of investigation, and thus increasing reliability (Robson, 2002).

Following Lewis and Lindsay's (2002) suggestion that communication techniques may require differentiation to suit individual differences in speech, language, and communication skills, the researcher discussed appropriate methods of communication with social workers and with foster and residential carers prior to conducting interviews.

The interview schedule (see Appendix G) focused on a few broad topic areas, thus allowing some flexibility in areas discussed. Biases stemming from participants' assumptions about the role of the researcher were kept to a minimum by ensuring

transparency in the aims of the research, and in the procedures of interviews (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Interviews also included icebreakers such as allowing participants to listen to themselves on the Dictaphone (Hennessy & Heary, 2005); and a range of open and closed questions (Wescott & Littleton, 2010).

The researcher did not access any formal data held within the LA for the participants, and therefore was reliant on self-reports. This limited professional and personal assumptions being made regarding participants' experiences of education prior to the interviews (Munro, 2001). The researcher was also aware of the possibility of linguistic variability, such that the same linguistic term may not have the same meaning for the interviewer and the interviewee (Willig, 2008). The researcher conducting the interviews was cognizant of the risk of alienating participants by the use of professional jargon (Winn Oakley, 2002), and thus avoided any use of such language. With the focus of this research being on meaning rather than forms of expression, it was therefore important to ensure that terms used by the interviewer were understood by the interviewee and vice versa. It is also relevant to note that the meaning of language is context dependent, such that the comment 'I did really well in my maths exam' will have different meanings for different participants (Dockerell, Lewis & Lindsay, 2002; Willig, 2008). For these reasons it was considered important to use clarifying questions and statements throughout the interviews to check interpretations against the participants' views (Lewis & Lindsay, 2002). Previous literature highlights the risk of social expectancy effect i.e. participants saying what they feel will please the interviewer (Hill, 2010). Research also highlights drawbacks of interviews in terms of accuracy, reliability, and reconstruction of memories (Crozier, 2002). Hill (2010) suggests that these issues can be addressed through the adoption by the interviewer of an interpersonal style which reduces participants' inhibitions and desire to please, thus increasing the validity of the research. The researcher was careful to take a non-directive approach, thus encouraging participants

to lead the topics of conversation, and to ensure they did not feel pressured to answer in a 'correct' way (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

Jones and Tannock (2002) consider the increased validity that can potentially be achieved when young people being interviewed have an ongoing relationship with the interviewer. However they conclude that such a relationship may increase the likelihood of bias on both the part of the interviewee and the interviewer, which could ultimately influence the findings and conclusions drawn in the research. Kendrick, Steckley and Lerpiniere (2008) suggests that this issue can be addressed through using research methods which allow participants to retain privacy where they so wish to, but which still enables them to offer their views. In the current procedure the researcher encouraged participants to control the agenda of interviews, and sought to elicit feelings of trust from them through sharing some personal information (Hennessy & Heary, 2005).

Interviews were audio-recorded, and transcribed by either the researcher or an Assistant EP working within the EP Service of the LA in which the research took place. Transcription emphasised readability whilst maintaining a level of detail including linguistic nuances such as pauses and laughter, to ensure richness of data was retained at this early stage of the analysis. To enhance reliability transcripts were all checked by the researcher for accuracy (Creswell, 2009).

3.6.4: The Impact of the Setting

Many authors highlight the importance of considering the setting when conducting interviews with young people (Dockerell et al., 2002; O’Kane, 2000; Kellet, Ding & Fraser, 2005; Kendrick et al., 2008). Whilst given the choice of setting for interviews to take place, all participants chose to be interviewed at home. Kendrick et al. discuss the significant methodological and ethical implications of interviewing young people in their own homes, suggesting that researchers must be respectful of the fact they are entering the private spaces of young people, and that sensitivity should be shown for the routines and rhythms of the home environment. Kendrick et al. further suggest that issues of control over access to the setting and the agenda of the interview process are intensified within the home setting, and in particular within residential care settings because of their ambiguous location between public and private space. O’Kane suggests that a way of addressing such issues is to ensure that a private space is provided with minimal disturbances, such that the young person feels comfortable and confident that confidentiality will be achieved. In the current research care was taken to discuss interview arrangements prior to conducting interviews, to ensure that they took place in an appropriate setting in which the young person felt comfortable. All interviews were conducted in private spaces within the homes of participants, and in most cases only the interviewer and interviewee were present. During one interview a foster parent wished to ‘sit in’ on the beginning of the interview, however the young person appeared to be comfortable to speak openly in front of her, and this was therefore not thought to have significantly impacted on the data generated from the interview.

3.6.5: Feedback to Participants and Stakeholders

During interviews the participants were asked for their opinion regarding who the research should be fed back to. The following range of people was identified by participants as people they considered would be interested in hearing about their views: foster carers, social workers, parents, siblings, and teachers. A summary of the research and findings was posted to the individuals identified by the participants. This summary was also emailed to various additional stakeholders identified through the course of the research. These included the ASCC, the EP Service, and the managers of the residential care settings. At the time of writing the ASCC and EP Service have both invited the researcher to feed back to their services in July 2012 with a view to identifying next steps. Roberts (2005) suggests that the ultimate objective in conducting research is that it has an impact for children and families, as evidenced through service developments. Whilst measuring service level change is beyond the scope of this research, it is hoped that by feeding back to the relevant stakeholders, some change at this level may become apparent.

3.6.6: Method of Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that thematic analysis is compatible with a variety of epistemological positions, and therefore provides a useful research tool which is free from theoretical assumptions. It is seen as providing a method of analysing and reporting the experiences and meanings given by participants to their own realities, and is therefore compatible with the overarching critical realist epistemology of the

current research (Willig, 1999). Thematic analysis allows the organisation of qualitative data whilst retaining the richness of such data. This approach is therefore highly conducive to emancipatory research in which the ‘voice’ of participants is of key importance.

3.6.6.1: Thematic Analysis

A thematic analysis of the data was conducted. An inductive approach to the identification of themes ensured that themes produced were closely linked to the data themselves, thus allowing them to be driven by individual responses and limiting the impact of any preconceptions of the researcher on the development of themes (Patton, 1990). This process involves the coding of data without the use of a pre-existing coding framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The process of analysis took place as follows:

1. Familiarisation of the researcher with the data: Transcription, reading and re-reading of the data, noting initial ideas.
2. Generation of initial codes: Systematic coding of the entire data set.
3. Searching for themes: Collating codes into potential themes and gathering supporting data.
4. Review of themes: Including the generation of a thematic map.

5. Definition and naming of themes: Generation of clear definitions and names of themes.
6. Producing the report: Selection of supporting extracts, and final analysis.

(Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.87)

3.6.6.1.1: Stage 1: Familiarising Oneself with the Data

Interview recordings were reviewed several times by the researcher. For those transcribed by the researcher, the transcription process itself was seen as an opportunity to increase familiarity with the data. For those transcribed by the Assistant EP, the researcher reviewed the interview recordings repeatedly whilst checking transcriptions for accuracy. Following completion of transcription, the transcripts themselves were read several times by the researcher (see Appendix H for transcripts).

3.6.6.1.2: Stage 2: Generating Initial Codes

Miles and Huberman (1994) describe coding as ‘something that drives ongoing data collection’ (p65), suggesting that coding should therefore be undertaken whilst data is being collected. Their reasoning for this is that codes will continue to develop as the

researcher's understanding of the field of their research develops. As such coding took place in the current research as soon as transcriptions were available. This approach was also necessary due to pragmatic reasons such as time constraints for completion of the data analysis.

Transcripts were read and any recurring comments and concepts noted in the margins (see Appendix I for an example of a coded transcript). For example, the following extract was coded for 'Friendships' and 'Trusting Relationships':

"Like, like, sometimes I'm told things that have to go in secret. And sometimes I tell them to like, it, like normal people. But to my best friends I'd sometimes tell them something secret"

(Steven, foster care)

As coding continued some codes required further differentiation, and others were combined to make them more conceptually inclusive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1985, p.350) discuss a variety of coding procedures which can occur as a coding structure develops. These include:

'Filling in': reconstruction of a coherent scheme as new insights materialize;

'Extension': re-interrogation of material previously coded;

'Bridging': identification of new relationships within categories; and

'Surfacing': identification of new categories.

Coding continued until the researcher felt satisfied that all data was classified, a sufficient number of regularities had been identified, and categories had been 'saturated' (Miles & Huberman, 1994; p256).

A reliability check was conducted during this stage to monitor potential variations in the definitions of codes between individual usages. Continuous comparisons were made both within and between codes (Creswell, 2009).

3.6.6.1.3: Stage 3: Generating Themes

Whilst themes were generated based on repeated and observable references within the data, consistent with the qualitative approach of the research no specific number of references was required to constitute a theme. Themes were therefore generated based on the identification of overarching concepts which incorporated a subsample of codes. Smith (1995) notes that there is a tension present within this process whereby the ongoing categorisation of data and the move to higher order constructs moves the researcher further and further from the original transcripts which generated these constructs. Smith advises reminding oneself of the content of the original data at regular intervals to ensure themes continue to represent the original data.

Boyatzis (1998) describes themes as varying in their content from describing a range of similar observations, to categorising data at an interpretive level. This refers to the use of semantic and latent themes. The former includes themes which are generated

through categorisation of explicit data i.e. considering what has been said without making assumptions about meaning. The latter includes themes through which underlying conceptions and assumptions are theorised. The analytic process of the current research involved the initial development of semantic themes, with themes being refined and further interpreted as understanding of the data set progressed (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

3.6.6.1.4: Stage 4: Reviewing and Merging Themes

Once initial themes had been identified for both groups, transcripts were re-read to check for occurrences of these themes. Where codes and subthemes were incongruent with the theme itself, themes were refined and codes re-categorised (Smith, 1995). Comparisons were also made across themes within samples, to ensure that all relevant material was categorised appropriately, and that there was no duplication of meaning. A compare-and-contrast approach was then undertaken to highlight any differences between the foster care and residential care samples. Miller and Crabtree (1992) refer to this process as ‘immersion and crystallisation’. Individual themes from each sample were compared and similarities and differences noted.

Guest, MacQueen and Namey (2012) note that qualitative research is often criticised for selectively presenting data which support conclusions drawn by the researchers. To address this issue, transcripts were examined at this point to highlight any ‘deviant cases’ (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). Fossey et al. consider a ‘deviant case’ to be one which contradicts the conclusions so far drawn. They also

highlight that identification of such cases can lead to novel insights into the data. Some evidence was uncovered at this stage which ran counter to themes thus far identified. These instances are highlighted within the following chapter. Where appropriate, themes were again refined to incorporate this information.

Reliability issues were addressed at this stage through the use of inter coder agreement checks (Guest et al., 2012), to limit any biases brought to the analysis by the researcher. This included themes and subthemes being independently reviewed by the Assistant EP who had transcribed four of the interviews. She had therefore generated some initial hypotheses about potential themes, and could compare these to those generated by the researcher. Any discrepancies were discussed and themes refined until agreement was reached between the researcher and the Assistant EP. At this stage four themes were collapsed into two (see Appendix J), due to perceived similarities between the themes. However, when the transcripts were revisited it was agreed that the original themes were in fact distinct from each other. This suggests that a level of parsimony had been reached such that themes could be usefully refined no further.

3.6.6.1.5: Stage 5: Defining and Naming Themes

Theme names and descriptions were generated with the intent of achieving parsimony i.e. capturing the essence of the themes in the most concise way possible. Where possible and appropriate, themes and subthemes also incorporated the language used

by the participants themselves, to indicate the closeness of the themes to the data itself, and thus illustrate the participants' 'voices' in the analytic narrative.

At this stage a form of inter coder agreement was utilised to increase reliability. This involved the codebook (Appendix K) being examined by two colleague Trainee EPs (Guest et al., 2012). Both Trainee EPs fed back individually that the codebook made intuitive sense, thus addressing issues of face validity (Guest et al., 2012).

3.6.6.1.6: Stage 6: Producing the Report

Creswell (2009) suggests that qualitative data analysis is conducted simultaneously with the stages of data collection, interpretation, and report writing. Therefore this final stage of the analysis included the production of a cohesive thematic map, incorporating all of the themes and subthemes generated (see Appendix L). At the stage of producing a graphical representation of the findings, interpretation continued, such that the final thematic map followed two revisions (see Appendix J), to ensure that the data were represented clearly and concisely. To enhance transferability and external validity of findings, detailed descriptions of themes and subthemes are provided in Chapter 4 (Creswell, 2009).

3.7: Ethical Considerations

Alderson (2005) suggests that there are three main tenets to what is considered ‘good’ research by ethicists. These are conducting research which is respectful and justified; being fair; and using resources efficiently. She also refers to ‘rights based research’ which emphasises providing for basic needs; and protection from harm. It could be argued that both perspectives are of relevance in the current research, and therefore ethical considerations have sought to address all of these areas. Guidance from professional bodies was also sought, including the British Psychological Society (2009), and the University of East London (2010). Ethical approval was also sought and granted by the ethics committee based at the University of East London (see Appendix M). In addition the researcher was familiar with, and adhered to, LA policies and procedures throughout the research. Lindsay (2002) also highlights the need for ethical issues to be addressed on an individual basis, suggesting that the status of each participant will vary with respect to competence, knowledge, and emotional status. This posits the consideration of the impact of the research on individual participants on a case by case basis.

3.7.1: Informed Consent

Hill (2010) suggests that consent should ideally be obtained in person from participants, following the presentation of all relevant information about the research, and following opportunities to discuss any queries and concerns. In the process of gaining consent from children in care however this can be challenging. In the current

research, potential participants were approached via an identified social worker. Whilst this was necessary for reasons of confidentiality and in order that participants did not feel coerced into agreeing to take part in the research, this left the role of explaining the research up to the allocated social worker. As the process of gaining consent progressed and the researcher contacted social workers individually, it became apparent that the information provided to potential participants was dependent on social workers' perceptions of the aims and importance of the research. Whilst potential participants were all provided with information sheets, this led to some uncertainty regarding the dissemination of information. Hill (2010) suggests that it may be beneficial for young people to have an independent adviser who can help them decide whether to participate in research. In some sense this became the role of the social worker in the current research, however the 'independence' of any adviser may be questioned.

Heath, Charles, Crow and Wiles (2004) describe 'process consent', or ongoing consent, which allows participants the right to withdraw from the research at any point. Whilst signed consent forms were received for all participants prior to the researcher initiating contact, it was reiterated to participants before and after interviews that they would be able to withdraw from the research at any time. Because of the role of the researcher as Trainee EP within the LA, it was also highlighted to participants that withdrawal from the research would be in no way detrimental to the support they received from LA services.

Hill (2010) suggests that consent from parents and other appropriate adults should be sought, depending on the legal status of the young people participating. However, Masson (2002) argues that if a child is deemed capable of understanding the consequences of their participation in research they also have the capacity to decide whether to participate without the need for parental permission. As discussed in previous chapters (see section 3.2), a sociological understanding of childhood

suggests that the capabilities of children should be assessed on an individual basis. However, due to the legal status of the young people as being looked-after by the LA, it was necessary to seek the consent of social workers or adults with parental responsibility. This led to a variety of complications in terms of gaining informed consent. Sometimes social workers were keen for young people to participate but young people themselves did not wish to. Alternatively some professionals including social workers and residential care staff reported that they did not wish to give consent as they did not feel it would be in the best interests of the young person. This raises an interesting question about how much agency the young people had in this situation. In terms of the current research, this also raises issues about sample representativeness. Certain characteristics of the relationships between young people and their social workers, carers, or parents, may be represented within the samples included in this research.

3.7.2: Anonymity and Confidentiality

Munro (2001) highlights the importance of confidentiality as perceived by young people as participants. However, to ensure the safety of those involved in the research, participants were informed that any information that arose during interviews which suggested that they, or someone else may be at risk of any harm, would need to be passed on to the relevant professionals. In this situation the benefit in terms of protecting participant's safety must be weighed against the cost of limiting willingness to confide in the interviewer (Munro, 2001). The researcher was also aware of, and adhered to, LA policy and procedures regarding confidentiality and child protection.

In the current research confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that all data was stored securely. Participants voice recorded responses were stored on a password protected laptop and were deleted immediately following coding by the researcher. Only essential personal information was recorded (this included names, dates of birth, and legal care status). Qualitative information relating to care and placement histories was not gathered. Interview transcriptions were destroyed according to Local Authority procedures within six months of completion of the research.

Extracts from interviews are quoted within this research report however anonymity has been maintained through the removal of all features within the quotations which could lead to identification of participants. Participants have also been given pseudonyms within the report to avoid the possibility of identification. Social network confidentiality was maintained by ensuring that no information given by participants during interviews was passed on to any members of their social network without their explicit agreement (Hill, 2010).

3.7.3: Risk of Harm

Whilst direct involvement in the research is unlikely to have caused any discomfort, participants were offered the opportunity to pause or terminate interviews should they experience any distress. Time was also allocated post-interview to debrief the participants and ensure that concerns were addressed and questions answered.

Participants were also given access to support from key workers following the interviews. Studies have noted the benefits of incorporating therapeutic techniques into research methodologies (Hill, 2010). Jones and Tannock (2002) describe the apparent psychological and personal benefits of therapeutic approaches to data collection. This was seen as an area of particular strength in the current research, given the perception of looked-after children as being vulnerable (Chase et al., 2006).

Veale (2005) argues that negative representations of young people within research can have a damaging effect on perceptions about these young people amongst their communities and in a wider context. This can subsequently disadvantage whole groups of children (Alderson, 2005). The researcher was therefore careful throughout the research process and reporting of the research to avoid negative labelling of young people looked-after, and to critically reflect on the use of constructs that may negatively stereotype them (Holland, 2009).

Hill (2010) suggests that the risk of harm to those affected by the research findings must be considered, with an onus on the researcher to present findings in ways in which they cannot be misused or used by others against the interests of the participants. To this end where the research findings were disseminated electronically, documents were protected as 'read-only' to ensure that they could not be altered. Where possible the researcher also took opportunities to discuss the research findings with the relevant stakeholders.

Lindsay (2002) suggests that ethical researchers ensure they have access to formal supervision in which the supervisor will not collude with the researchers preferred way of resolving issues. During the research process the researcher had access to

regular supervision with an EP, with whom discussions were had around the role of the researcher, and thoughts and feelings about conducting the interviews. This professional support enabled the researcher to identify, for example, the possibility for participants to submit to the effects of social desirability, where participants may have been aware of the professional role of the researcher in the LA, and therefore may have tailored responses to portray their views in a way they felt was expected by the researcher.

3.7.4: Power Relations

Hill (2010) notes that power within an adult-child relationship are often ascribed to the adult, who is seen as having authority over the child. This can potentially impact how willing the child is to disagree with, or say things which they feel may be unacceptable to, the adult. This issue is inherent within interview-based research, and authors have advocated ways to minimise the power difference. Kellet, et al. (2005), for example, report that some researchers attempt to become ‘one of the children’, to gain access to their unique perspectives. Mayall (2002) suggests instead that a more achievable approach is to acknowledge this power imbalance and invite children to help us understand their perspectives. O’Kane (2000) suggests addressing this power imbalance through the use of participatory techniques, allowing children more control over the research agenda. Through doing this we are likely to gather more relevant information regarding the views of young people. A range of strategies was used in the current research to minimise the power imbalance during interviews. This included allowing participants to choose the time and place of the interviews (Greene

& Hill, 2010); valuing their time by thanking them (O’Kane, 2000); and minimising the authoritative image of the interviewer by using informal language (Hill, 2010).

3.8: Reflexivity and the Role of the Researcher

Greene and Hill (2010) suggest that the ‘objective researcher’ is a myth recognised by many social scientists, and Davis (1998) argues that it is important for researchers to be reflexive, and to question their assumptions about children, and adjust their approaches accordingly. This highlights the importance of reflexivity when conducting research; and the need for researchers to investigate their position as an enquirer. Greene and Hill further suggest that an additional layer of interpretation is therefore required to uncover our personal biases, feelings, attitudes, ideologies and experiences in relation to the research we are conducting. Willig (2008) recommends that the researcher familiarise themselves with the participant’s ‘cultural milieu’, and considers the positioning of the interview within this milieu. An awareness of the potential impact of the researcher’s social identity will maximise understanding of what is being communicated by the participant in the interview. Personal and epistemological reflexivity addresses issues of validity, acknowledging and considering the personal and epistemological biases of the researcher and their potential effects on outcomes of the research (Willig, 2008). This level of reflexivity discourages impositions of meaning by the researcher and thus promotes validity. Creswell (2009) also argues that researcher bias should be clarified, as a core characteristic of good qualitative research.

Any qualitative piece of research which seeks to ‘give voice’ to participants requires a certain amount of subjective selection of narrative evidence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As such, a thematic analysis which describes themes as ‘emerging’ or ‘being discovered’ inaccurately suggests that the researcher takes a passive role. Braun and Clarke argue that the active role of the researcher in shaping the findings and summarising conclusions must be acknowledged.

As a Trainee EP with previous experience of working with children in care, I bring certain biases to the current research. Whilst every effort has been made to reduce these biases and maintain objectivity, they will have some impact on my understanding and interpretation of the research experience. Given my current professional role it may be assumed that I value education highly and in conducting this research will draw upon my understanding of psychological constructs linked to learning and children in care such as social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), and attachment (Bowlby, 1988). Having come into contact with children in care in my professional capacity it is likely that these experiences will have influenced both the way the research has been conducted and my interpretation of the data. I also acknowledge that, having not experienced the care system first hand as a service user, the level of understanding I bring to the research is limited. It is also important to note the inherent challenges in conducting research within your place of work. Young people, professionals, carers and parents may have had certain expectations as to my professional role, necessitating transparency as to the motives, methods, and anticipated outcomes of the research at every step of the journey.

3.9: Chapter Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the methodology of the current research, locating the research questions and procedures within a critical realist framework. Information was provided regarding the recruitment of participants, followed by a description of interview procedures and the thematic data analysis used to investigate the data. Ethical issues are also addressed, as is the role of the researcher within the research itself. The following chapter will provide an analytic narrative of the data generated.

Chapter 4: Findings

4.1: Chapter Overview

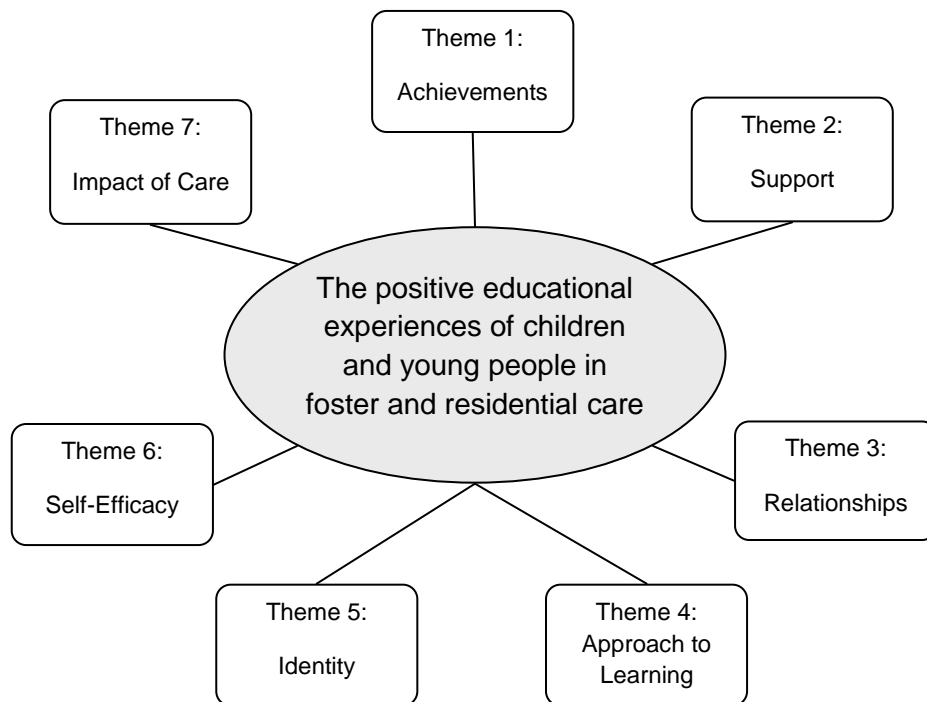
This chapter provides an analytic narrative of the research findings, using quotes from participants to illustrate themes and subthemes drawn from interpretation of the data. Thematic maps provide diagrammatic representation of the findings, illustrating seven master themes and twenty corresponding subthemes. Findings relating to participants in foster care and residential care are presented together to facilitate comparison between the groups. The final chapter (Chapter five) will describe further how the findings relate to the research literature on this topic.

4.2: Master Themes and Subthemes

Data analysis generated seven master themes and twenty subthemes which describe the educational experiences of the young people in foster and residential care interviewed in this research (see figure 1). Whilst all of the master themes corresponded to both foster and residential data, there were some subtle differences between the two groups within subthemes. These differences will be discussed throughout the chapter. Due to the similarities between themes generated from the

two groups, themes will be presented on a single thematic map. Themes and subthemes will be described in the following sections.

Figure 1: Thematic map illustrating the seven master themes

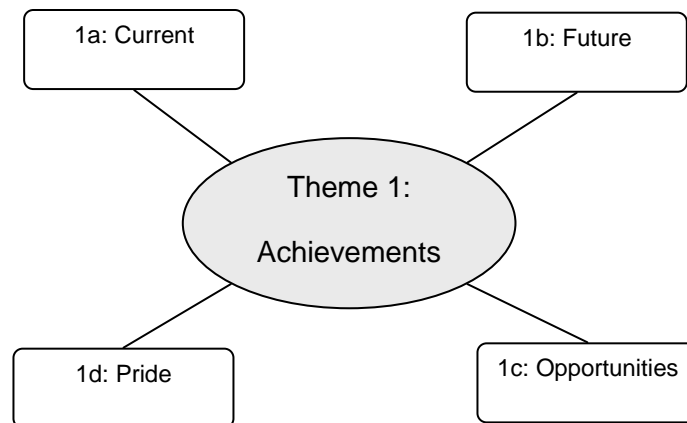


4.2.1: Theme 1: Achievements

Theme Definition: Achievements are important and elicit feelings of pride. Young people require opportunities to achieve, and past achievements will often inform future aspirations.

The theme of achievements was salient in all of the young people's interviews, with all of the young people able to identify some form of previous achievement, and several discussing aspirations.

Figure 2: Thematic map illustrating theme 1 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.1.1: Subtheme 1a: Current Achievements

The majority of young people interviewed were able to identify academic achievements:

“Erm, well, I did get, I am higher on French than I’ve ever been before. I’m, I’m on level, Key Stage 3”

(Aaron, foster care)

“music. I’ve been to two different schools and I got high grades in both of them”

(Will, residential care)

Only one young person who was in residential care was unable to think of an academic achievement when asked directly. However, this young person had not attended school for some time, which perhaps explains his difficulty identifying a tangible achievement. He was, however, able to identify a recent sporting achievement:

Young person: *But I’m level 1 on racketball.*

Researcher: *What does that mean?*

Young person: *Well let's just say that the young, apart from me the only one who got a level one is a 21 year old*

(Ryan, residential care)

In fact most of the young people interviewed talked of achievements from outside of school, giving wide-ranging examples of things they had achieved through recreational activities:

Young person: *Cause I'm a kid in care, who wrote a book.*

Researcher: *You wrote a book?*

Young person: *Wrote a few, two pages of a book.*

Researcher: *Wow, that's impressive. Are you writing it still at the moment?*

Young person: *No, cause it's already been published*

(Aaron, foster care)

4.2.1.2: Subtheme 1b: Aspirations

All of the young people interviewed identified educational aspirations, although differences can be noted between the two groups. Young people in foster care tended to have long-term plans for their education with several mentioning university:

“Erm, I suppose just kind of getting good GCSEs and then A levels and then a degree hopefully!”

(Darcy, foster care)

Whereas the aspirations of young people in residential care tended to focus on the most current challenge:

“I will be doing GCSEs. I’ve got GCSE CD things to go into the computers”

(Will, residential care)

The majority of the young people interviewed also discussed career aspirations, demonstrating interests in a range of jobs including scientist, drummer and soldier. One distinction between the groups was that descriptions of future careers from young people in foster care tended to be more detailed than those of the young people

in residential care. Different motivations for future career choice were demonstrated, with one young person identifying salary as an important factor:

“it’s like ‘oh god, what to choose from’. I’d obviously pick the one with the most money”

(Will, residential care)

Another young person in residential care discussed how she would like to work in residential care herself, motivated by her own negative experiences to help other young people with similar experiences:

“I want to help other kids that haven’t been listened to. Cause I would listen to them. I know what it’s like to not be listened to”

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.1.3: Subtheme 1c: Opportunities

A common theme amongst several of the young people was the importance of having the opportunity to achieve:

“in primary school I didn’t have to do all these good things, like sewing, managing points, and pop art. I didn’t know I could do it then but now I could”

(Barney, foster care)

Another young person described his achievements in rugby, explaining that he had reached a level of skill because of the opportunities in school to develop this interest:

“Yeah, but that’s years of pushing. I started off playing, I started off playing tag rugby in primary school”

(Will, residential care)

Whilst the majority of young people in foster care described opportunities as being available to them, one young person in residential care described how she felt that she was not able to challenge herself because there was a lack of opportunity:

“even my social worker said it herself the other day, she said that until I go to the Leaving and After Care Team I’m just going through one door, right round, and through the same door over and over again, in one big hoop. Which really isn’t good for me because I need

challenges, and other doors to go through. I'm just going in a big su, loop. It's just wasting my time"

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.1.4: Subtheme 1d: Pride in Achievements

Several of the participants described feelings of pride associated with their achievements, which were also often associated with the recognition of their achievement by someone with whom they had an ongoing relationship:

Young person: *In Geography erm we had to.. we had to do stuff about the World. And erm.. I drew my own World.*

Researcher: *You drew your own World. So was it like, what an A4 piece of paper you...?*

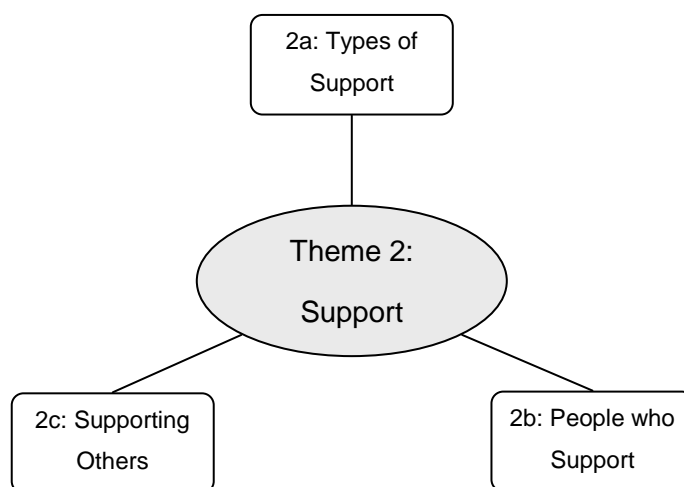
Young person: (inter) *I done it like that big and I done all the details. And Anne had bought me an Atlas and it had erm a picture on the front of the World, so I drew that and I was quite proud of it.*

(Robyn, foster care)

4.2.2: Theme 2: Support

Theme Definition: Young people in care benefit from the provision of practical, emotional and academic support, which can be provided by a range of people. They also benefit from involvement in mutually supportive relationships.

Figure 3: Thematic map illustrating theme 2 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.2.1: Subtheme 2a: Types of Support

A variety of types of support were described by the young people interviewed. Responses varied somewhat between the two groups of participants. For example, whilst the young people in foster care were able to articulate a wide range of types of support they had received; those in residential care were less specific:

Young Person: *Yeah I've got a lot of resources here. I've got everyone as a resource.*

Researcher: *That's good.*

Young Person: *Everyone and everything is a resource.*

(Will, residential care)

Young people frequently mentioned practical resources as instrumental in their educational progress. These appeared to be more abundant in foster care than in residential care, based on the frequency of comments made during interviews. Young people in foster care often mentioned access to computers, and books that had been provided for them:

*"A*** had bought me an Atlas and it had erm a picture on the front of the World, so I drew that and I was quite proud of it"*

(Robyn, foster care)

In contrast, one young person in residential care described how they were currently unable to access the computers in their home because another young person had been viewing inappropriate websites, and all of the residents had subsequently been banned from using them.

Some of the young people, notably more of those in foster care than in residential care, had come to the conclusion that being pushed academically was a form of support, because it would help them to achieve career goals:

“I understand why they’re making us work harder. Cause like some people are like, ‘aww’ but then I understand why they’re doing it to try to get us like better like careers and we can get better careers like... cause if we didn’t work as hard and they just gave us easy work we’d probably get, we won’t get such a good career”

(Robyn, foster care)

All young people in foster care mentioned academic support, frequently describing how carers had supported them by taking an interest in school:

“Erm, well if you, say came home and said, ‘I think I done really well in this’, she’d go, ‘oh well done’ and kind of take a real interest in it”

(Darcy, foster care)

What came across in the data from young people in residential care was a sense of a lack of academic support, with two of the three noting how professionals had failed to show an interest in their academic careers:

*“H**** said that she was going to go through the book and highlight the things that I needed to do. And then I could just do it. But she hasn’t done that I don’t think. Someone’s touched my folder and moved it and... dunno where it is”*

(Sarah, residential care)

Young people in both foster and residential care spoke about the importance of emotional support and being treated fairly:

“Yeah, and they [student support] um, they do help you... quite well. And I mean, and they’re quite, I mean they’re not like strict so they’re quite understanding. If something goes wrong and they know, they’re quite fair to you”

(Robyn, foster care)

Interestingly the emotional support described by one young person in residential care included being pushed to control their behaviour. This was seen as a demonstration of how residential staff cared:

“Showing they care. In a different way to everyone else. They [school staff] used to push me to the limit practically but these don’t push me to the actual limit”

(Will, residential care)

4.2.2.2: Subtheme 2b: People Who Support

Young people were able to name a variety of people who had supported them with their education, with some variation between groups noted. Biological family members were more frequently reported as having supported young people in residential care, for example this young man describes support from his father, who encouraged his interest in sports by sharing this interest with him:

“I want to. I think my dad’s taking me actually” [to the Olympics]

(Will, residential care)

Young people in foster care were less likely to describe support from their biological family, perhaps due to them having less contact than those in residential care. One young person felt that their mother had supported them, but when questioned could not articulate how she had helped:

Young person: *I think mum helps a bit.*

Researcher: *What does mum do that helps?*

Young person: *Dunno really! I think she helps. I dunno.*

(Barney, foster care)

Foster family were seen as a source of support in education, with all young people in foster care noting how they helped and took an interest in their education:

“Erm, I believe erm. When I was thinking about cookery and then, after my work and then going on to do cookery, not doing any of my A-levels, erm, my foster carer said it would be quite a shame if, like you could just get those A-levels. Yeah”

(Justin, foster care)

There was also evidence of the extended foster family being supportive. One young person talked about the support he had received from his ‘foster cousins’:

“Like, you can just like talk to people and like, it doesn’t, you don’t feel embarrassed to talk to someone with the same problem. Like, yeah...”

(Steven, foster care)

Peers were frequently cited by both groups as being supportive in terms of education, for example describing how friends and girlfriends helped to motivate them and keep them on the right track:

“My girlfriend. She’s helped me stay out of trouble”

(Will, residential care)

Those in contact with siblings also frequently described the support they provided:

“Cause like I had my brother and sister and they’re older than me so they would probably learn to do it more and then they could explain it to me better”

(Robyn, foster care)

Only one young person in foster care described their social worker as being supportive, by showing interest in their education:

“I think some, like the social [care] team, like my social worker. They would be very interested in my, my education”

(Justin, social care)

Conversely social workers were much more frequently mentioned by young people in residential care, perhaps because of their increased contact with their individual social workers. Feelings about how supportive they had been of their education were mixed, with one young person describing a social worker as “*really good*” (Robyn, foster care), and another young person having a rather more negative view of their role:

“Well they just do their job innit. I always say that as long as there’s a roof over my head and I’ve got a school to go to and I’m being fed, they don’t care. In their eyes that’s them doing their job”

(Sarah, residential care)

All young people in foster care described school staff as being supportive, including both teaching and support staff:

“In school we’ve been doing a lot, like citizenship, we’ve been going through a lot like, of application forms and ... and about jobs we’d like to do... and everything like that”

(Justin, foster care)

Young people in residential care on the other hand, viewed school staff as less supportive. When questioned about how teachers had helped him, one young person was only able to identify one supportive thing he felt they had done:

“They, they help me with the college course. That’s how they’ve helped. That’s about it”

(Ryan, residential care)

Another young person in residential care felt that a lack of support from school staff had acted as a barrier to her completing a qualification she was working towards:

“I could have finished it within a week. But if no-one’s going to give it to me then it’s just sitting there”

(Sarah, residential care)

Young people also mentioned adults met through hobbies or recreational activities as being supportive of their learning:

“And, err, he [Sensei] was constantly improving me. Like improving everything that I can do. Which I found very helpful”

(Justin, foster care)

An additional source of support worth noting was that provided by friends’ families, as reported by one young person in residential care. He discussed how, when he was living with his family, his friends’ mothers would help him to stay out of trouble:

“A few mums actually. A few of my mates mums... They’ve helped me stay out of trouble a bit and drove me off from scenes where I could have got arrested and stuff”

(Will, residential care)

This suggests that this young person had a supportive network of people around him in the local community in which he lived prior to coming into residential care.

4.2.2.3: Subtheme 2c: Supporting Others

Some young people also highlighted the supportive role they played in relationships with peers and family. Two young people in foster care described how they helped other pupils in class, whilst another young person described how he had changed the timing arrangements for his review meetings in order to make them more convenient for his grandparents to attend:

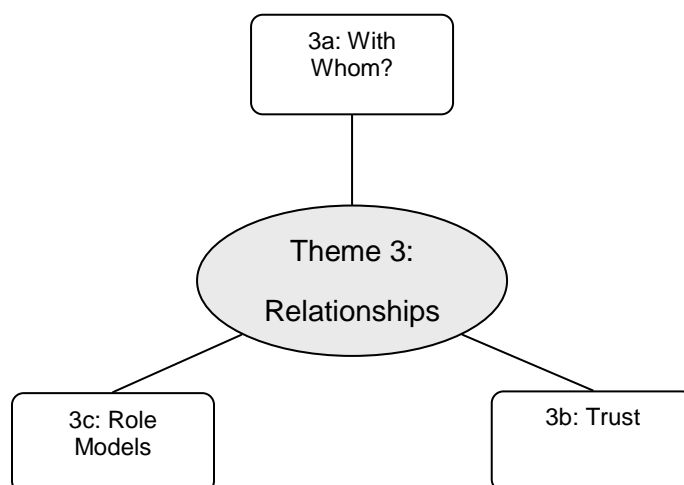
“To see how we’re getting on. And that’d make their life a lot easier cause then they don’t have to travel down every, like, three times”

(Justin, foster care)

4.2.3: Theme 3: Relationships

Theme Definition: The development and maintenance of trusting relationships with a supportive network of people is important, and can provide young people in care with role models.

Figure 4: Thematic map illustrating theme 3 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.3.1: Subtheme 3a: Relationships with Whom?

Friendships with peers were discussed by all of the young people in residential care and four of the six young people in foster care, suggesting that this was a strong subtheme. All of the young people in foster care were able to name friends, and on

the whole spoke positively about making new friends and about their current friendships:

“Well, I like year 7 because you’ve started like, a new school, and like, like you make new friends, and like you trust different people”

(Steven, foster care)

“Yeah cause like I have one person who’ll speak their mind, but then the other person who will say nice things and that’ll cheer me up”

(Robyn, foster care)

Friendships described by two of the young people in residential care appeared to be more complex, with one young person noting the negative impact his former peer group had had on his behaviour:

“Mates down there. I know for a fact that I’ll get into sh, err same err trouble”

(Ryan, residential care)

Another young person in residential care noted a distinct lack of friendships which she related to the limited opportunities to develop friendships in the specialist educational setting which she was attending:

“I used to, I used to love going to mainstream cause you’d walk towards the school and all your friends would be sitting on the benches, talking, and then you’d go into class”

(Sarah, residential care)

This young person further described the perceived lack of opportunity to socialise with female peers:

“there’s no female pupils but there is two female staff”

(Sarah, residential care)

Bullying was mentioned by only two of the young people in foster care and by none of the young people in residential care. Comments made by the two young people who mentioned bullying suggested that they had been bullied themselves:

Researcher: *So are there people in school that you feel like pick on you?*

Young Person: *Where do I start!* (laughs)

Researcher: *Oh goodness!*

Young Person: *Er, there's a lot of them.*

Researcher: *Oh really? Okay. Why erm, why do they pick on you?*

Young Person: (pauses, shrugs shoulders) *I don't know. They're just weird!*

(Aaron, foster care)

"Well, if I'm picked on, I'll just like ignore it or I like, make a comment back. But normally it gets it to go away anyway"

(Steven, foster care)

Three of the young people talked explicitly about their relationship with carers, with one young person describing a previous relationship with a home manager whom she felt had supported her. In particular she seems to value the ongoing nature of their relationship, despite his no longer having professional responsibility for her:

"he looked-after me for three years and then, like he's just stuck by me. He hasn't had to stick by me but he has. I left there when I was eleven and now I'm sixteen and he's still there for me. He still supports me, comes and takes me out, chats with me if I need to chat with him"

(Sarah, residential care)

A notable difference between the young people in residential and foster care is that those in foster care tended to refer to carers as ‘family’:

*“Yeah. Oh, and uh, my cousins are like we, we got, they’re actually A****’s [foster carer] side but we call them our cousins. And er, we er, like trust them quite well. We get on with them”*

(Steven, foster care)

Comments made by young people in foster care about relationships with teachers were positive, and described ways in which their teachers understood their care situation:

“I mean teachers already know but its good, like sometimes, like, like, you might have to do a paragraph like, on what your life’s been about. And they don’t always make you do it but, and you don’t have to do it if you don’t want to but I normally do”

(Steven, foster care)

Only one young person in residential care discussed relationships with teachers, describing a turbulent relationship with the teachers in her school:

*“I said ‘what really annoys me is let down, two-faced, back-stabbing people’, and he [teacher] was like ‘what you on about’? I said, ‘well ***** [tutor] always says here [in the residential setting] that things are pathetic, and she doesn’t agree with things, and she sticks up for me. Then she comes into school and it’s everyone else is right, Sarah’s wrong, school rules are fantastic’. Like I hate people like that. I said ‘With me I’m straight to the point’.*

(Sarah, residential care)

Only young people in residential care mentioned relationships with social workers, and they described an awareness that the social worker had the young people’s best interests at heart, despite personal differences. This perhaps indicates some of the complexities of the relationships between social workers and young people in residential care:

“My social worker’s really good. Uh, I dislike her, but, you’ll find that most kids in care hate their social worker but they think everyone else’s is alright (both laugh). I do hate her, but she does listen and she does try, so...”

(Ryan, residential care)

Young people in both residential and foster care described relationships built through shared interests and hobbies:

Young Person: *I do it [music production] with my brother and everyone.*

Researcher: *Ok, who's everyone else?*

Young Person: *Just all my mates*

(Will, residential care)

Sibling relationships were mentioned exclusively by children in foster care, with young people tending to describe how frequently they had contact with siblings. The frequency of contact varied from around twice per year to those who were living with siblings currently:

"I see him [older brother] at Christmas and sometimes his birthday and that"

(Barney, foster care)

"Yeah. I've lived with him [brother] since like I went into foster care"

(Steven, foster care)

4.2.3.2: Subtheme 3b: Trust

Issues of trust were raised by the majority of the young people interviewed, with most young people identifying people they could trust. Other comments tended to focus on negotiating issues of trust with friends i.e. deciding how and when to share secrets:

“Like, like, sometimes I’m told things that have to go in secret. And sometimes I tell them to like, it, like normal people. But to my best friends I’d sometimes tell them something secret”

(Steven, foster care)

One young person in residential care reported feeling as though she had been let down by many people and therefore could no longer trust the professionals around her:

*“J**** said that she was going to go through the book and highlight the things that I needed to do. And then I could just do it. But she hasn’t done that I don’t think. Someone’s touched my folder and moved it and... dunno where it is... Well everyone else has given up so I might as well give up as well”*

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.3.3: Subtheme 3c: Role Models

Many of the young people interviewed described role models as important in relation to their education and progress. Most of the role models described were people with whom the young people had relationships, who had demonstrated academic or personal achievements:

Young Person: *Well, my sister's just been like an idol sort of thing.*

Researcher: *What does she do or what's she done?*

Young Person: *Well, she, she's going to college soon*

(Ryan, residential care)

One young person in residential care described a more complex relationship with a role model, as someone he admired but who had not achieved his goals because of getting into trouble with the police. This young person was able to describe the lessons he had learnt from this role model:

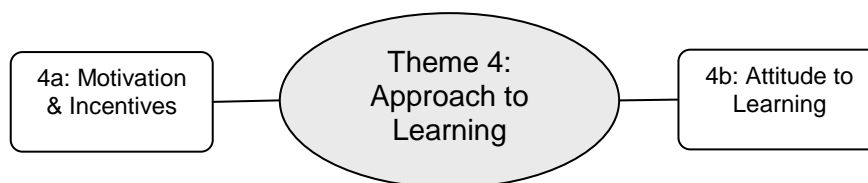
"Not to get in trouble with police cause it stops your, like, cause it stops how you play and stops your training, and no-one wants a, someone that's getting in trouble with the police on their rugby team and stuff"

(Will, residential care)

4.2.4: Theme 4: Approach to Learning

Theme Definition: In general young people in care have a positive attitude towards learning, seeing it as a means to achieve goals and aspirations.

Figure 5: Thematic map illustrating theme 4 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.4.1: Subtheme 4a: Motivation and Incentives for Learning

Notably, all young people interviewed expressed a motivation for learning. Incentives for both groups of young people tended to focus on educational and career goals:

“If we didn’t work as hard and they just gave us easy work we’d probably get, we won’t get such a good career”

(Robyn, foster care)

“Well, they’ve told me that I need to be good in school otherwise I won’t get the course sort of thing. So they have helped”

(Ryan, residential care)

One young person also noted the incentive of impressing girls, suggesting that he felt education was something highly regarded by his peers:

“You know like sometimes you get fit girls there and it makes you want to go and educate and be like, get clever”

(Will, residential care)

4.2.4.2: Subtheme 4b: Attitude to learning

Despite some young people expressing negative experiences of school, all young people interviewed demonstrated a positive attitude to learning, seeing it as an opportunity to achieve future goals and challenge themselves:

“I learn a load in school. I’ve learnt, I’ve learnt quite a lot in school actually. Cause I always used to say ‘oh, why don’t I get paid for coming to school’ and everything like that but like school pays you to

be honest, and it's like when you're older, you get all your jobs and stuff"

(Will, residential care)

The fact that every young person also mentioned some form of further or higher education also suggests that learning was seen as an ongoing process:

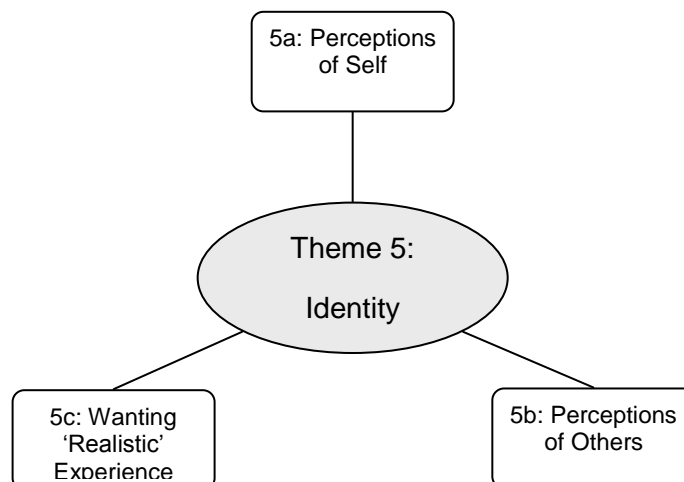
"You learn something new every day. Even the most intelligent person in the world does"

(Will, residential care)

4.2.5: Theme 5: Identity

Theme Definition: The development of identity is influenced by self-perceptions, and an awareness of the perceptions of others. Young people in care want to experience the same 'reality' as their peers, rather than be defined by their care status.

Figure 6: Thematic map illustrating theme 5 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.5.1: Subtheme 5a: Perceptions of Self

Many of the young people discussed having confidence in themselves and in their academic ability, with the majority of young people demonstrating a positive sense of themselves as learners:

"I'm good at maths and I like maths and into maths I can properly get into it, and I can stay on it for ages"

(Ryan, residential care)

Young people tended to explain these positive self-perceptions by giving examples of their achievements, and by making comparisons with peers:

“I’m not like at sixth form yet I got, I still got quite a while to do my, err, like get to Bs and Cs, that sort of level. But, I think I’m doing quite well for my age limit”

(Steven, foster care)

Only one young person described a lack of confidence in her academic ability, despite others reassuring her that she was capable:

“They asked in my last review on December the 14th if erm, how many GCSEs I could get and they said five. And they said that I was capable of getting all of them but, it’s all well and good saying it but I don’t see it in myself or believe it”

(Sarah, residential care)

Young people also talked about confidence in social situations, with the majority describing feeling confident with friends who knew them well:

“Say it was like the class, like whole class which I used to go to primary school with, then I’d be like totally confident cause I’ve been at primary school with them for at least 5 years”

(Robyn, foster care)

One young person related feelings of confidence directly to their experiences of being in care, suggesting that, having become used to answering awkward questions about his family, his confidence in interacting with others had increased:

“I, I, cause I’ve been, in like the moment of like, having to just like, talk to people, I think my confidence boosts up more than other children, cause children not in foster care, they never, um, never had to just like, give out an answer. They have to like, they have to think about it, so I’ve, it kind of helps in that way”

(Steven, foster care)

In general young people perceived themselves as competent with a range of skills and talents. For example, one young person described how he had developed independence skills during the time spent living with his mother:

“I’ve got my life skills. I’ve had them since the age of... ten. Mum always used to, mum always used to leave me in on my own and I used

to just like... cook my own dinners, teach myself practically how to cook”

(Will, residential care)

One young person looked back on his pre-care experiences as a time when he had less awareness of the impact of his own behaviour. His perceptions of his former self were negative, and he saw his behaviour as the reason for his entering the care system:

“I was too much of a, practically I was too naughty for them [school], I was too immature back then. I was doing my education but at the same time getting in trouble with the police. So I got put in care”

(Will, residential care)

This young person noted that his behaviour had led to the police becoming involved. He went on to describe an experience of being in juvenile court, which he saw as a turning point from which he then perceived his previous behaviour to have been negative:

“I was, this year, no last year I was on literally, I was err one little thread away from getting put into prison. That’s how bad it got to”

(Will, residential care)

4.2.5.2: Subtheme 5b: The Perceptions of Others

The inaccurate perceptions of others was a salient theme within the majority of interviews. Comments made reflected a complex variety of experiences.

Two young people spoke specifically about the negative stereotypes of children in care as academic underachievers, reflecting on the impact these stereotypes would have on biological parents among others:

“Cause um, then like the parents aren’t so worried cause, at the moment there is a lot of bad, kind of like, press on it, really like saying how every foster care family, ergh, foster child is err, underachieving and all that”

(Justin, foster care)

Comments made by young people in foster care tended to reflect disbelief in this negative stereotype, because of their own positive experiences in education. Comments made by youth in residential care had the subtle difference of expressing a wish to prove people wrong, including teachers:

“I, I need to do a lot more, cause I want to prove the teachers wrong so much”

(Will, residential care)

Others' perceptions of care was also discussed by many of the young people, again with subtle differences between the youth in foster and residential care. Those in foster care tended to describe how people perceived young people in care as having done something wrong themselves:

"I... I'd st... Like people, like, ask you questions as you, how you, 'why are you in foster care? Have your mum and dad been bad to you?' Or whatever. And I just like, like, like think that I'm bad, but, it puts me on the spot a bit"

(Steven, foster care)

On the other hand young people in residential care tended to describe how others' perceived the experience of being in care as more positive than it was in reality:

"Cause like, I've know people say 'oh, I hate my mum, I hate this. I wanna go in care', but they never know they have a brilliant life. They just don't understand what it's like being in care"

(Sarah, residential care)

On the whole the negative perceptions of others were not described in terms of personal experiences, and one young person making it clear that it was the opinions of those close to him that mattered to him:

*“Yeah, it’s important what A**** [foster carer] thinks, she’s the one who’s looking after me”*

(Barney, foster care)

4.2.5.3: Subtheme 5c: Wanting a ‘Realistic’ Experience

Two young people in residential care discussed a desire to have what they described as ‘normal’ experiences of education. One young person in particular described feeling strongly that her experience in a special school and in residential care led to missed opportunities:

“It doesn’t feel like GCSEs or exams. When I was in school, mainstream, it was totally different. Cause like, we ain’t got the opportunity to get what other kids have”

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.6: Theme 6: Self-Efficacy

Theme Definition: Young people in care experience and develop self-efficacy when they are ‘given a say’, and are provided with opportunities to face challenges.

Figure 7: Thematic map illustrating theme 6 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.6.1: Subtheme 6a: ‘Getting a Say’

The majority of the young people described how they were given choice and a level of control over decisions made on their behalf. Young people in foster care tended to acknowledge that at times it was in their best interests for an adult to make the final decision:

Young person: *I think I do have a say but, I think... other people have a bigger say.*

Researcher: *Which people do you think have more say than you?*

Young person: *Erm, I reckon, like social serv ergh, social services, and like foster carers and all that, cause they have more experience haven't they?*

(Justin, foster care)

One young person described an abundance of choice regarding his future career, suggesting that he was currently pursuing several avenues of interest, such as mechanics, music, and sports, which may lead to future career options:

"It's hard to choose. If I carry them all, if I carry them all on..."

(Will, residential care)

However, at the other extreme, one young person used the following metaphor to describe her perceived lack of choice, and how this made her feel:

"It's like being inside a bubble and then concrete built all around me. It's like, there is no way out. And... I can't do it myself. I'm quite happy to put my hands up and say that"

(Sarah, residential care)

Most of the young people in foster care described themselves as playing an active part in decision-making, with the support of carers and other significant people in their lives:

“Actually, most of the time I tr... I like to make my own decisions. Sometimes Sarah will like, erm correct me if I’m making a silly mistake. But err, I like to make my own decisions and...”

(Steven, foster care)

Two of the young people in residential care, however, talked a great deal about ‘getting the final say’, suggesting that they frequently felt as though negotiations usually ended with someone else having made a decision for them:

“No matter what it is she [social worker] will, he or she will always want the final say (both laugh). No matter how much you challenge them. You’ve just got to give in”

(Ryan, residential care)

All of the young people in residential care, and the majority of the young people in foster care described their involvement in decision-making as something that should increase gradually as they become more mature and independent:

“I think it would, should change. Yeah, slowly though. Not say, when I’m seventeen I have barely any say, and then eighteen I have every single say. Like slowly”

(Justin, foster care)

The universal cut-off point of certain services at certain ages was viewed as unhelpful, because this indicated that young people would suddenly become independent adults:

Young person: *Cause I’m meant to be a responsible adult whe I’m sixteen so...*

Researcher: *Do you feel like you’ll be a responsible adult when you’re sixteen?*

Young person: *I will be a responsible adult.*

(Will, residential care)

One young person in residential care described how important it was to her for people to understand that, whilst she required a degree of independence, she also needed support with certain things, demonstrating a need to get this balance right:

“Everyone looks at me as older cause with make-up and my hair done I do look older. But I am only fifteen. Like, so everyone expects quite a

bit for me. Sometimes it's really hard cause... like... yeah it's easy to get served fags, get served alcohol and all that, but then when it comes to school, and here [residential setting], social services, everyone's like, expects more from me and... I don't mind being treated like I'm older but just... Not all the time. I'm immature, I can be immature at times. But I don't like being treated like a five-year-old. I ain't a five-year-old. No-one else would like to be treated like that so don't treat me like it. But it is quite hard at times when I am... looked at... quite a bit older than what I actually am"

(Sarah, residential care)

All young people described feelings of control as being internal to themselves i.e. suggesting an internal locus of control. This talk tended to be about pushing themselves to achieve:

"I have to like do the work myself cause then I'll realise and also I can, I'm the only one who can make me go, to make me have good sets and get high results in like tests cause I'm the only one who can do that myself"

(Robyn, foster care)

Whilst these feelings of being in control were generally perceived by young people to be positive, one young person in residential care felt rather that he had to be in control because of a lack of support from others:

“I just work towards it myself. Ain’t nothing that’s helping me”

(Will, residential care)

Whilst the majority of young people made comments suggesting an internal locus of control, there were also times when two young people in residential care suggested feelings of uncertainty and lack of control in terms of the future:

“It, it’s just different. I can’t see the future can I? I can’t tell the future?”

(Will, residential care)

4.2.6.2: Subtheme 6b: Challenge

All young people described challenges they had faced and overcome, with some young people explaining that they relished challenge, and that this was seen as a chance to achieve:

Young person: *Maths is a challenge, English and Science ain’t.*

Researcher: *What do you mean by ‘challenge’?*

Young person: *You have to work it all out don't you really.*

Researcher: *So is it, you like the problem solving?*

Young person: *Yeah. Challenges. Not easy neither. Hard.*

(Ryan, residential care)

Opportunities for challenge were provided in both the academic sphere (as in the example above), and through recreational activities:

Young person: *Sports is... I need my sports. Tennis.*

Researcher: *Just for, is that for enjoyment more than anything?*

Young person: *Any competition. You know.*

(Ryan, residential care)

Young people also tended to describe these challenges as times when they had needed to persevere and push themselves to achieve. When asked what helped her to get her homework done when she found things difficult, one young person replied:

"Perseverance really" (laughs)

(Darcy, foster care)

Another young person described how they dealt with challenges during which they felt they had failed:

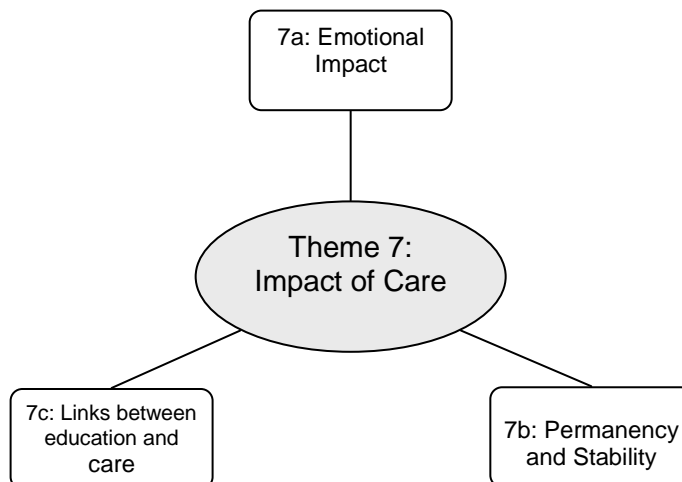
“In the end all you can do is keep going back and trying cause you can only get better”

(Ryan, residential care)

4.2.7: Theme 7: The Impact of Care

Theme Definition: The stability of a care placement influences the emotional development of young people in care. The care experience is also mediated by effective links between care and education professionals.

Figure 8: Thematic map illustrating theme 7 and corresponding subthemes



4.2.7.1: Subtheme 7a: The Emotional Impact of Care

Young people also described the emotional impact that being in care had had on them, with the majority recognising a positive impact in this aspect of their lives:

Young person: *Well I'm not in a bad mood when I go to school so I learn more.*

Researcher: *So you learn more. So explain to me how those two things are linked. If you're not in a bad mood then what happens at school?*

Young person: *I concentrate more.*

(Aaron, foster care)

One young person, however, talked about how unhappy she was in her current placement and school, and described the impact this had had on her well-being:

“when I was at home I did really well. I come back in care and I did, it wasn’t my fault, I put myself back in care. It wasn’t my fault. It was the best move at the time. But this last two years, two and a half years since I have moved back in care, my life has gone downhill”

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.7.2: Subtheme 7b: Permanency and Stability

This subtheme illustrates comments made by participants which demonstrated feelings of stability and permanency. A clear distinction can be made between the two groups here. Those in foster care described experiences which suggested stability of placements and schools. For example one young person described friendships initiated at primary school which continued into secondary school:

“Yeah, I’ve made new friends and I’ve got some of my old friends”

(Robyn, foster care)

Another young person described how he was physically healthier now that he was in foster care, and so his attendance at school had improved:

“Well cause I’m not with my mum I’m quite healthy and that means that I don’t get ill as much... And that helps my attendance. And it means that I don’t get days, many days off school. So it means I’m a bit better with my work”

(Steven, foster care)

The long-term nature of the foster care placements was also seen as beneficial in terms of facilitating sibling relationships:

“I think it’s [long-term foster care] made me better cause like, cause..erm cause.. and also like I’ve been allowed to be with my sister and then after a year my brother joined us”

(Robyn, foster care)

And in terms of commitment to hobbies:

“Yeah, I was in cubs for about a year and a half then I went to scouts then I wanna get invested”

(Barney, foster care)

Experiences described by young people in residential care, on the other hand, illustrated a sense of instability related to both care and education:

“To be quite honest my life has been, my life has always been up and down in terms of home and education”

(Sarah, residential care)

Comments made by young people in residential care regarding the impact of care on their education were, on the whole, much more negative in their content. Young people frequently described how they had missed school because of placement moves:

“I’ve missed out on education and... I got taken out of a mainstream school in year six and then I was being moved around a lot so they didn’t put me back in one. When they put me back in school they put me in a PRU [Pupil Referral Unit]”

(Ryan, residential care)

One young person even felt that frequent placement moves were the ultimate reason for her being in a special school:

“if I wasn’t moved around, when I moved out of the care home, when I was in a mainstream school then I wouldn’t be in schools that I am in now, I’d be in a mainstream school”

(Sarah, residential care)

This young person further suggested that a consequence of this school placement was that the opportunities for educational achievements were limited, because of an approach which was not individualised to her needs:

“Cause half the things they put in front of me I’m not going to need for a GCSE. But things that I do need for a GCSE and like, my ASDAN bronze is equivalent whatever, like is a GCSE. It goes towards a GCSE cause I could do my ASDAN silver and they said ‘no’”

(Sarah, residential care)

There was an indication from one young person, however, that school attendance had been an issue prior to being placed in care. He described his exclusion from school, and the time between this event and his being taken into residential care:

Young person: *That was when I was in year eight.*

Researcher: *Ok. What happened in between? Were you...*

Young person: *No-one gave me any schooling.*

Researcher: *So you just stayed at home?*

Young person: *They didn't send no letters. No I wasn't at home I was out.*

Researcher: *Oh, ok.*

Young person: *With mates (laughs). Nicking.*

(Ryan, residential care)

Another young person in residential care described how she felt that her school were able to exclude her more easily now because, whilst her father would have been angry about her being excluded, residential care staff were more accepting of this:

"my dad would have gone ballistic if they excluded me. Half the things they [school staff] exclude you for are pretty pathetic"

(Sarah, residential care)

4.2.7.3: Subtheme 7c: Links Between Education and Care Professionals

This subtheme reflects comments made regarding the perceived links between school staff, social workers, and foster or residential carers. Comments from young people in foster care suggest that there tended to be regular formal communication between social workers and school staff in the form of review meetings:

“I think they [school staff] go to the review meetings”

(Robyn, foster care)

Mention of social workers was notably infrequent in the comments regarding education made by young people in foster care. However this is probably attributable to the limited contact they would have with social workers given the long-term nature of their care placements.

Young people in residential care mentioned social workers more frequently, although these comments were mainly in terms of care arrangements, suggesting that the young people themselves may not have perceived the role of the social worker as relating to education.

In terms of communication between residential carers and school staff, one young person in residential care noted a lack of understanding on the part of her teachers of her experience in care:

*“***** [teacher] goes ‘I don’t know what you’re on about with ***** [tutor]’. I was like ‘yeah but you won’t know because you’re just seeing the school side, you’re not seeing the home and school side and what she’s like’”*

(Sarah, residential care)

4.3: Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented an extensive analytic narrative which reports the data whilst retaining the ‘voices’ of participants through illustrative quotes. The seven master themes identified during analysis are reported: Achievements and aspirations, Support, Relationships, Approach to Learning, Identity, Self-Efficacy, and Impact of Care. Twenty subthemes extend the depth of the narrative, illustrating the complexity of participants’ experiences. The final chapter will relate the analysis to the research literature and discuss the wider implications of these findings. Recommendations for practice and suggestions for further research will be made.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Concluding Remarks

5.1: Chapter Overview

In Chapter four the following themes from the data were illustrated: Achievements; Support; Relationships; Approach to Learning; Self-Efficacy; Identity; and Impact of Care. Chapter five will discuss the findings in relation to the original research questions, and then in relation to the research literature around the educational experiences of young people in care. A detailed critique of the current research is then provided, and the findings are discussed in terms of educational psychology practice, and wider implications. Potential areas for future research will also be highlighted.

5.2: Aims of the Research Revisited

The following research questions were identified to frame the current investigation into the positive educational experiences of young people in care:

1. What have been the positive educational experiences of young people in care?
2. How do these experiences differ between young people in foster care and in residential care?

3. How can these positive experiences be drawn upon to improve service delivery to young people in care?

1. What have been the positive educational experiences of young people in care?

The analysis illustrates the broad range of positive educational experiences of the participants, including opportunities to achieve both academic and personal goals, and to challenge themselves through formal education and through recreational activities. Participants also described a range of types of support received from a variety of people including carers, teachers, friends and siblings. The participants articulated positive attitudes towards learning, identifying aspirations in terms of learning and careers. These positive experiences were instrumental in the development of young people's feelings of self-efficacy and identity.

2. How do these experiences differ between young people in foster care and in residential care?

Whilst master themes were similar for both young people in foster care and in residential care, some subtle differences were identified between the two groups. Key differences related to experiences of stability within care and educational settings, and the nature of relationships with family members. Despite some differences both groups were equally able to identify experiences of achieving goals, and both groups were able to identify hopes for their futures.

3. How can these positive experiences be drawn upon to improve service delivery to young people in care?

Whilst it is not within the remit of the current research to implement any changes to service delivery, clear messages can be drawn from the analysis. The development and maintenance of key relationships is of crucial importance to young people in care. This may include relationships with family members, in particular siblings, and relationships with peers.

Young people need opportunities to challenge themselves and to achieve in both educational and recreational domains, and will benefit from the opportunities these activities bring to engage in mutually supportive relationships. Whilst young people in care require a variety of types of support from a range of people, a key component of such support involves taking an interest in their education. Young people value opportunities to contribute to decision-making and highlight the importance of their gradual development of independence. Given the negative stereotypes attached to young people in care (Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010), and a common lack of stability in care and education provision (Jackson & Martin 1998; Dearden, 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010), education and care professionals need to work more closely together to facilitate continuous placements and to challenge stereotypes.

5.3: Identified Themes as Related to Literature

5.3.1: Theme 1: Achievements

Theme Definition: Achievements are important and elicit feelings of pride. Young people require opportunities to achieve, and past achievements will often inform future aspirations.

5.3.1.1: Subtheme 1a: Current Achievements

All participants in the current research were able to identify achievements and aspirations in either the academic or personal domains of their lives, and the majority in both. This is promising given that authors suggest academic attainment is a precursor for many other positive life outcomes (Evans, 2003). Only one young person had difficulty initially identifying a recent academic achievement, but this is not surprising given that he had not attended an educational setting for several months. However, this does highlight the crucial role which schools play in offering opportunities for achievement. This is in keeping with the literature reviewed in Chapter two, which found that the majority of young people involved in the research were able to identify academic and personal achievements (Dearden, 2004; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

As noted previously in the literature review, McClung and Gayle (2010) reported that significantly more of their participants in residential care achieved Scottish Credit Qualifications Framework level four compared with those on care orders but looked-after at home. Whilst none of the participants in the current research were looked-after at home, there were no overall differences in achievements reported between the young people in foster care and in residential care. Ryan, living in residential care, was the only young person unable to easily identify an academic achievement, potentially because of having not attended school recently. The possibility cannot therefore be overlooked that different patterns in school attendance between these two groups may impact on opportunities to achieve academically.

Notably all young people in the current research were able to identify personal and extra-curricular achievements. These achievements were wide ranging, and tended to stem from interests and hobbies which had been supported by carers. These achievements included, for example, writing poems which were later published in a poetry collection book, attending a cookery workshop, and attaining a grading in a marital art. The benefits of recreational activities has been highlighted in the literature review (Dearden, 2004; Hedin et al., 2011; Merdinger et al., 2005), and the current findings add weight to the findings previously reported, which suggest that recreational activities offer an important opportunity to achieve.

5.3.1.2: Subtheme 1b: Aspirations

The identification by all participants of current achievements is promising, and participants frequently cited past achievements as indicators of their confidence in achieving future aspirations. All participants identified both educational and career aspirations, which compares favourably with the two-thirds of participants identifying aspirations in Dearden's (2004) study. An interesting difference between the young people in foster and residential care was the extent of these aspirations, with those in residential care tending to focus mainly on current challenges such as GCSEs, whilst those in foster care tended to identify longer term goals. Whilst young people in residential care did mention career aspirations, they were described in less detail than the career aspirations of the young people in foster care. As noted in Chapter two, Jackson and Martin (1998) reported difficulties highlighted by participants in gaining appropriate career advice, suggesting that career advice offered by professionals seemed to reflect their low expectations. It is possible then that the differences observed between the two groups in the current research are related to the expectations of significant others in the lives of the participants. The sample of young people in foster care in the current research had all been in the same care placement for some years, whilst the time spent in current placements by those in residential care ranged from six months to two years. The possibility that placement stability was a mitigating factor here can therefore not be overlooked.

5.3.1.3: Subtheme 1c: Opportunities

One finding from the current research which was not highlighted within the literature review, was the importance of opportunities to achieve. Young people interviewed mentioned examples of being given opportunities to try new activities, in which they subsequently developed interests and identified achievements. For example Barney noted how having the opportunity to try new skills at secondary school allowed him to discover what he was good at. This point was reiterated by Sarah, who described how a lack of opportunities had stopped her from being able to achieve. Gilligan (2001) highlights the importance of opportunities to succeed in manageable challenges in building resilience. Opportunities to succeed are seen as promoting self-esteem and self-efficacy, both of which support the development of resilience.

5.3.1.4: Subtheme 1d: Pride in Achievements

Another finding not reported in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, but highlighted in the current research is the feeling of pride gained from achievements. Feelings of pride were identified by the majority of participants in both foster and residential care, illustrating the importance of achievements in emotional development. Gilligan (1999) discusses the value of others recognising achievements for young people in care, and the confidence that may ensue from feelings of pride.

5.3.2: Theme 2: Support

Theme Definition: Young people in care benefit from the provision of practical, emotional and academic support, which can be provided by a range of people. They also benefit from involvement in mutually supportive relationships.

5.3.2.1: Subtheme 2a: Types of Support

Concurrent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, young people interviewed in the current research discussed the importance of practical resources for supporting their education. However, whilst the majority of previously reviewed studies highlighted a lack of resources for young people in both foster and residential care (Harker et al., 2003; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002), the young people interviewed here referred to the usefulness of the resources that were available to them. Considered in conjunction with the previous theme which suggested that all of the young people in the current study were able to identify achievements, the current sample could perhaps be compared to the ‘high achievers’ of Jackson and Martin’s (1998) study. They found that ‘high achievers’ reported more availability of resources than a comparison group. In line with this suggestion is the finding that whilst many of the young people in the current research discussed plans for further or higher education, none mentioned concerns over financial support. This is contrary to findings discussed in the literature review, in which young people’s decisions to attend post-compulsory education was highly influenced by the level of financial

support available (Harker et al., 2004; Martin & Jackson, 2002; Merdinger et al., 2005).

Young people in the current research also mentioned the importance of support in the form of others taking an interest in their education. This is highly consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, in which several studies noted the positive impact of interest in education being demonstrated to children in care (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002). A difference in the two groups was apparent here, with young people in foster care more frequently mentioning support they had received, whilst those in residential care tended to talk about a lack of support. Notably the support most often mentioned by those in foster care was from their foster carer, suggesting that the lack of support described by young people in residential care may be due to the lack of an individual carer, where instead their care was provided by a number of residential care staff.

Additional types of support noted in the current research as being of importance to young people, but little highlighted within the literature previously reviewed, are emotional support and showing support through the provision of boundaries. One young person described how the provision of consequences in his residential placement had helped him to learn to control his behaviour.

5.3.2.2: Subtheme 2b: People Who Support

Consistent with research reviewed in Chapter Two, young people in the current research cited a number of people who supported them with education. Similarly to interviewee's in Dearden's (2004) study, foster family members were mentioned by all young people in foster care in the current research. As described by Hedin et al. (2011), foster siblings were mentioned as being supportive; suggesting that foster siblings had taken on a similar role to that of biological siblings.

Biological family were mentioned in a supportive capacity in Dearden's (2004) study, with young people mentioning support from parents, grandparents, and siblings. Biological parents were also discussed by young people in the current research, however they were mentioned little by those in foster care, and more frequently by those in residential care. This is likely to have been due to the more recent contact which young people in residential care had had with their families, as they had all entered care more recently than the young people in foster care. Siblings were mentioned by several of the young people in foster care, including those who lived with their siblings and those who had limited contact with them. This demonstrates the perceived supportive role of siblings even in the face of limited contact.

Notably, the young people in foster care were much more likely to refer to carers supporting their education, than were the young people in residential care. This is also consistent with findings reported in the literature review, which suggest that residential care staff tended not to prioritise education for the children in their care (Dearden, 2004; Harker et al., 2003; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002).

Friends were also reported in the literature review to have been supportive to young people in care, and these findings were corroborated in the current research, with peers being cited by young people in both foster and residential care. Emond (2003) suggests that friends demonstrate support through encouragement, and Brewin and Stratham (2011) emphasise the role of supportive friendships in the development of self-esteem and well-being.

Whilst social workers have previously been reported by young people in care to have supported them educationally (Dearden, 2004), young people in foster care in the current research tended not to mention a role for social workers in their educational development. This is possibly due to limited contact with social workers, or could also be to do with the perceived role of social workers by the young people themselves. Young people in residential care mentioned social workers more frequently, however their views as to how supportive they had been were mixed, with one not mentioning social workers at all, another saying his social worker had been supportive, and another suggesting that social workers were only concerned with living arrangements.

Consistent with the literature review (Celeste, 2011; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002) teachers were also mentioned by young people as supporting their education. In the current sample those in foster care, but not those in residential care described teachers as helping with their education, although this finding may be explained by the limited contact participants in residential care currently had with teachers. Gilligan (2007) notes that teachers' roles may, in addition to teaching, include offering encouragement and support to vulnerable young people.

5.3.2.3: Subtheme 2c: Supporting Others

A finding from the current research which is distinct from the literature reviewed is the supportive role which young people in care identified themselves as playing. Some of the young people discussed occasions when they helped friends with school work, and one young person described altering review arrangements to make them more convenient for siblings and grandparents to attend. Holland (2010) discusses the increasingly dominant discourse of autonomy and self-reliance in Western societies, which emphasises the importance of independence for children leaving care. However, Holland suggests that, rather than aiming to move young people from dependence to independence, interdependency should also be identified as a goal for children and young people. This identifies a role for young people in supporting others as well as being supported.

5.3.3: Theme 3: Relationships

Theme Definition: The development and maintenance of trusting relationships with a supportive network of people is important, and can provide young people in care with role models.

5.3.3.1: Subtheme 3a: Relationships with Whom?

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, young people in the current research discussed the importance of relationships with a variety of people including peers (Hedin et al., 2011; McClung & Gayle, 2010), carers and teachers (Dearden, 2004; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002). Relationships with peers sometimes proved complex, with two of the young people interviewed experiencing bullying, and one young person feeling isolated from same-gender peers. This is consistent with the finding from McClung and Gayle that young people in residential care had more limited contact with friends outside of school than young people in other forms of care. As described by Dearden, two of the participants in the current research reported ‘hanging out with the wrong people’ prior to entering care. One young person reported that it was helpful to have friends to talk to who had experienced being in care too. This is consistent with Emond’s (2003) finding that young people in residential care appreciated having access to peers who had experienced similar difficulties as them. Clough, Bullock and Ward (2006) describe how the development of friendships can positively influence young people’s sense of well-being.

Relationships with adults including foster carers, residential care staff, social workers and teachers, was noted as important by young people in the current research. Four of the studies reviewed in Chapter Two highlighted the significance of an ongoing relationship with at least one adult (Dearden, 2004; Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002). The wider literature around children in care also supports these suggestions and highlights the importance of having at least one significant relationship. For example, Fernandez (2009) found that high cohesion between young people and their foster mothers was associated with better emotional outcomes on the

Emotional Subscale of the Action Records of the UK Looked-after Children's Framework (Parker, Ward, Jackson, Aldgate, & Wedge, 1991). Fernandez (2007) also asserts that relationships with foster family members have a significant impact on care outcomes. According to attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988), children develop affectional relationships with caregivers who act as a secure base. This relationship then serves as a guide to future relationships. Further attachment theorists have acknowledged the potential for children to develop and maintain multiple attachments (Rutter, 1981; Fernandez, 2007), which suggests that attachments can develop with foster and residential carers, as well as with parents. Fernandez (2009) also suggests that these relationships can be instrumental in developing a sense of identity and belonging. A link has also been noted between attachment and resilience, with McMurray, Connolly, Preston-Shoot and Wigley (2008) suggesting that secure attachments lead to increased resilience.

Young people in the current research described relationships with siblings as important to them, and although this was not highlighted within the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, it is highlighted in the wider literature around experiences of being in care. For example, McCormick (2010) reports that whilst 50 percent of youth in foster care who have siblings are not placed with them, those who do have contact with siblings rely on them for support. McCormick also notes the importance of this relationship where parents are absent or where traumatic events have taken place. Interestingly differences have been noted between placement types, with Shlonsky, Webster and Needell (2003) reporting that young people in residential care are 25 percent less likely to be living with all of their siblings than young people in foster care. All comments made regarding siblings in the current research were made by young people in foster care, three of whom were in fact living together at the time. It is unknown however, whether the young people in residential care had siblings, let alone whether they had contact with them. In addition, Shlonsky et al. note that research rarely identifies who young people in care consider their siblings to be. In

this research two young people referred to foster family members as ‘cousins’ and ‘brother’, suggesting that they considered them to be their family. This is an area which may require further investigation.

5.3.3.2: Subtheme 3b: Trust

Trust was identified in the current research as being an important aspect of building and maintaining relationships, with examples given of sharing secrets with trusted friends, and trusting professionals to behave in young people’s best interests. Within the literature review, Dearden (2004) suggests that having a trusted key worker was important to young people. In the wider literature Stolin-Goltzman, Kollar and Trinkle (2010), in their investigation of looked-after children’s views of caseworker turnover, report that changes in staffing often resulted in a loss of trust. Discussions around friendships in the current research tended to include the development of a mutually trusting relationship, and when mentioning siblings young people often talked of ways in which they helped each other. This highlights the reciprocal nature of these relationships. Holland (2009) discusses the interdependent caring relationships in which young people in care are engaged, suggesting that looked-after children are often viewed as the recipients of care. However, she argues that young people have a role to play in care-giving too.

5.3.3.3: Subtheme 3c: Role Models

Role models were mentioned by young people in the current research as being influential in their education. Role models tended to be family members (foster or biological family) and friends with whom the young people had an ongoing relationship, and who had demonstrated an academic or personal achievement. Role models could also be admired people who had made mistakes which the young person could learn from. This is consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter two (Jackson & Martin, 1998; Martin & Jackson, 2002), which suggests that young people often have a special relationship with someone they see as a role model. Maluccio et al. (1996) also note that the presence of a positive role model can foster resilience.

5.3.4: Theme 4: Approach to Learning

Theme Definition: In general young people in care have a positive attitude towards learning, seeing it as a means to achieve goals and aspirations.

5.3.4.1: Subtheme 4a: Motivation and Incentives for Learning

Young people in the current research all indicated a motivation for learning, with the majority describing educational and career goals as incentives for working hard at school. Other incentives mentioned included financial gains, and impressing peers. Motivation and incentives for learning were little mentioned in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, however Celeste (2011) described how participants in a children's home recognised the importance of education for the development of self-sufficiency as they achieved adulthood. Whilst extrinsic motivations were cited for learning, comments also suggested an intrinsic motivation. Self-determination theory (Ryan & Deci, 2002) suggests the importance of intrinsic motivation for meeting psychological needs.

5.3.4.2: Subtheme 4b: Attitude to Learning

Consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Celeste, 2011; Hedin et al., 2011; Jackson & Martin, 1998; McClung & Gayle, 2010), all young people in the current research expressed a positive attitude towards learning, despite some describing negative experiences. Education tended to be described as a way of achieving future goals, and something which young people hoped to pursue into further and higher education. As reported by Hedin et al., one young person in the current research described how he had reached a turning point when he entered care, at which point he recognised the importance of education in achieving his goals and

becoming successful. Another young person described how his ‘mood’ had changed since being in care, and he was now more focused at school.

Hedin et al. (2011) and Celeste (2011) noted gender differences in attitudes towards school, such that whilst boys tended to be focused on activities within school, and tended to enjoy school less; girls were more focused on the social aspects of school and found it more enjoyable. No such gender differences were noted in the current research, although it should be noted that all young people talked about the importance of opportunities to socialise at school and all were able to describe aspects of school which they did, or had, enjoyed.

5.3.5.: Theme 5: Identity

Theme Definition: The development of identity is influenced by self-perceptions, and an awareness of the perceptions of others. Young people in care want to experience the same ‘reality’ as their peers, rather than be defined by their care status.

5.3.5.1: Subtheme 5a: Perceptions of Self

Findings in the current research which were not highlighted within the previous literature reviewed, are the generally positive self-perceptions of the young people in both foster and residential care. These findings do, however, replicate findings from the wider literature around identity development in young people in care. For example Honey, Rees and Griffey (2011) report that looked-after children in their study tended to report positive self-perceptions, and related this to enjoyment of school, and being supported at home with schoolwork. These elements were notably present within the current sample, most of whom described school as a positive experience. Young people in the current research also frequently made reference to achievements, and made comparisons of themselves to peers to justify their positive self-perceptions. These comparisons and experiences of achievement appeared to have helped the young people to develop confidence and perceptions of themselves as competent learners. McCormick (2010) suggests that young people in foster care who are placed with siblings develop a sense of belonging through these relationships, which then contributes to personal identity development. Given the frequent mention of sibling relationships by the young people in foster care, it is quite possible that these relationships also had a positive impact on self-perceptions in the current sample. Woodier (2011) also links self-awareness i.e. the ability to observe one's thinking, feelings and attributes, to self-efficacy and the development of resilience. The current sample demonstrated self-awareness repeatedly during interviews, frequently mentioning feelings and attitudes towards learning. Alongside the achievements reported by participants this may well have led to increased resilience amongst this group. Interestingly one young person in residential care, Will, described his pre-care experiences as a time when he was less self-aware, and was subsequently not attributing consequences to his actions. He describes a realisation of the negative impact his behaviour was having on his future, and goes on to describe an increased self-awareness following this turning point.

One exception to the positive self-perceptions of the group was with Sarah, who described how others' told her that she was 'bright' but that she did not believe this of herself. Sarah had reported negative current experiences of education and care, and her comments around self-perceptions suggest that it is not enough to simply tell young people in care that they are capable. Fostering positive self-perceptions may require a more holistic approach in which young people are given opportunities to achieve and are encouraged to develop self-awareness.

5.3.5.2: Subtheme 5b: The Perceptions of Others

In keeping with the previously reviewed literature, young people in the current research described the assumptions of others based on their status of being looked-after (Harker et al., 2004; Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010). Whilst no young people described direct experiences of negative stereotyping by others, many of those in foster care demonstrated their understanding of the negative perceptions of others around children in care, particularly in relation to their behaviours, or academic ability, or of the behaviours of their parents. These findings compare favourably with those of Martin and Jackson (2002) and McClung and Gayle (2010) who reported that around a third of their samples had directly experienced being treated differently at school because of negative stereotypes. McClung and Gayle do however note that those young people reporting such treatment were living in residential care. The young people in residential care in the current research tended to comment instead on the overly positive perceptions of being in care that they felt were held by some other young people. This may be

related to recent negative experiences of care placements as reported by one young person interviewed.

Contrary to findings reported in the literature review, no young people in the current research explicitly mentioned teachers and carers having low expectations of them based on assumptions about children in care (Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010). Some young people in residential care reported being given academic work which was inappropriate because it was not challenging enough. However this tended to be explained as teachers not yet knowing the young people, and thus not being aware of their capabilities. This may though, reflect the low expectations of teaching staff prior to young people's entry into their schools. Also one young person in residential care described wanting to 'prove the teachers wrong', although this comment was made in the context of a discussion around his previous lack of interest in education, rather than his status as a young person in care. Fraser and Robinson (2005) describe the risks of 'labelling' children, and warn that negative stereotypes may become self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968) i.e. the assumption that children in care will underachieve becomes a reality because we unconsciously behave in ways which make this happen. Importantly, young people in foster care in the current research suggested that whilst they were aware of the negative stereotyping of children in care, the opinions of carers and friends were more important to them than those of people they knew less well.

5.3.5.3: Subtheme 5c: Wanting a ‘Realistic’ Experience

Young people in the current research reported that they did not want to be treated any differently based on their status of being in care. This is also highlighted in the literature review where Martin and Jackson (2002) report that the young people they interviewed suggested that their experiences should be ‘normalised’. The importance of ‘normalisation’ is also highlighted in the wider literature around children in care (Honey, Rees & Griffey, 2011), with young people expressing concern about the stigma attached to being in care (Kendrick et al., 2008). However, Ward (2004, 2006) discusses the importance of recognising individual differences and meeting needs, rather than subjecting children in care to the usual expectations, in order to enable them to feel ‘normal’.

5.3.6: Theme 6: Self-Efficacy

Theme Definition: Young people in care experience and develop self-efficacy when they are ‘given a say’, and are provided with opportunities to face challenges.

5.3.6.1: Subtheme 6a: ‘Getting a Say’

Gilligan (2009) describes self-efficacy as the belief that one can determine their own life outcomes, and suggests that self-efficacy can be increased through opportunities to contribute and to take responsibility for decisions affecting their lives. The current research suggests that feelings of self-efficacy are important to young people in care, with most of the participants demonstrating confidence in achieving their goals, and often basing this confidence on past achievements. Young people frequently talked about ‘getting a say’, indicating that choice was desirable, with the majority feeling that they were involved in decision-making up to a point. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggests that a sense of control is linked to achievement (Jackson & Martin, 1998). Jackson and Martin report that the ‘high achievers’ in their study were rated as more internal in their locus of control than a comparison group. Whilst locus of control was not formally assessed in the current research, many comments were made by young people which indicated an internal locus of control (Weiner, 1985), particularly in relation to school work. Interestingly, many of the participants recognised that others often made decisions in their best interests, and subsequently reflected that involvement in decision-making should increase gradually as they became more independent. This is consistent with Weiner’s (1985) attribution theory, which suggests that feelings of control increase expectancy of success. This theory also relates feelings of control to motivation, which suggests that by allowing young people in care some control over decisions about their lives, young people will be motivated to strive for success. Cashmore (2002) summarises studies which suggest that when young people are given a say in decisions about their lives, they evaluated these experiences as positive, even when their choices did not have the outcome they had hoped for. This suggests that the benefits of giving young people in care choice are not simply based on outcomes of these decisions, but on the act of having control in decision-making.

Young people in foster care in the current research tended to report feeling that they were actively involved in decision-making, whereas those in residential care tended to report feeling less involved. One extreme example of this was with Sarah, who described vividly how her lack of choice felt like ‘being inside a bubble and then concrete built all around me’. A distinct difference between the two groups was that those in foster care tended to describe decision-making as a joint process over which they had some control. Those in residential care tended instead to describe decision-making as a case of trying to ‘get the final say’. Leeson (2007) describes how a lack of involvement in decision-making can ultimately lead to feelings of helplessness, with potentially serious consequences for young people’s futures. Rutter (2000) describes these potential outcomes as including a sudden introduction to independence when leaving care, during which young people move from an environment in which the emphasis has been on safety and protection, to one in which they are expected to be autonomous. Rutter raises the question of whether there should be greater opportunity for young people to experience autonomy prior to leaving care in order to prepare them for independent living. Interestingly both groups demonstrated some uncertainty as to their future, regardless of whether they had reported feeling in control of their short-term goals or not. This perhaps demonstrates the need for increased emphasis on preparation for leaving care.

Whilst young people in the current research emphasised their need to be involved in decision-making, both groups of participants also discussed the importance of being heard. Whilst this was often linked to involvement in decision-making, young people also highlighted the importance of having their views heard as a separate issue. This is consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, in which Dearden (2004) and McClung and Gayle (2010) reported the value placed on being listened to by young people in care. Similarly to this literature, the young people in the current research who were placed in residential care tended to report not being listened to, whilst those in foster care felt they were listened to. Thomas and O’Kane (1999)

report that whilst social workers in their study felt that young people in care wanted to participate in review meetings primarily to influence outcomes, young people reported that their main reason for wanting to attend reviews was to have their opinions heard. This raises the potential issue that social workers may be reluctant to ask young people for their opinion for fear of not being able to meet their requests. However, the literature suggests that having their opinions heard, regardless of the outcome, is important for young people in itself.

5.3.6.2: Subtheme 6b: Challenge

Young people in the current research frequently discussed the importance of facing challenges in their lives, with several describing the perseverance required to overcome them. Opportunities to overcome challenges seemed closely related to feelings of self-efficacy, as may be expected from Gilligan's (2009) description of self-efficacy as belief that one can influence outcomes in their lives. The subject of challenge was not raised within the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, however this theme is closely linked to the literature around resilience. For example, Bernard (2004) describes self-efficacy as being related to mastery, the feeling of competence which is linked to achievement. Rutter (2006; cited in Woodier, 2011) suggests that without risk resiliency cannot be achieved, and that a limited amount of positive stress in the face of managed challenges can improve feelings of competency, and therefore self-efficacy and resilience. Whilst the challenges described by young people in the current research focused on those faced through academic or recreational pursuits, Woodier (2011) describes how facing moderate levels of risk can prepare young people for dealing with future experiences of adversity. Far from

the notion that young people in care should be protected from risk because of their vulnerability, the current research suggests a potential for growth through facing moderate challenges.

5.3.7: Theme 7: The Impact of Care on Education

Theme Definition: The stability of a care placement influences the emotional development of young people in care. The care experience is also mediated by effective links between care and education professionals.

5.3.7.1: Subtheme 7a: The Emotional Impact of Care

Young people in the current research mainly described their experiences in care as having a positive impact on their education, giving reasons related to improved mood and concentration. One young person in residential care, however, described the negative emotional impact of being in care, suggesting that this was related to her dissatisfaction with her current care and educational settings. These mixed responses reflect findings in the literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Harker et al., 2003; Harker et al., 2004). Harker et al. (2003) suggest that those young people who had perceived a positive impact of being in care attributed this experience to placement stability and quality. This is similar to Sarah's, situation, in which she describes how she was

happy after her first entry into care, but after returning home and then entering care a second time, the poor quality of care and education she was now receiving had a negative emotional impact. Hedin et al. (2011) reported that routines and structures within the care environment had elicited feelings of security in young people in care, which had then transferred to feelings of security in the school environment. This seemed evident in the current sample, some of whom described how the provision of boundaries and consequences had allowed them to have increased control over emotions and behaviour. Dearden (2004) also reports how the move to good quality foster care was seen by her participants as a turning point, from which point educational experiences improved, and resilience increased.

5.3.7.2: Subtheme 7b: Permanency and Stability

There were striking differences reported by the two groups in the current research regarding feelings of permanency and stability, with those in foster care describing how their move into long-term foster care had given them a stable home environment, whilst those in residential care described multiple placement moves and missed schooling as a result. This association between multiple placement moves and disruption to schooling is consistent with the literature reviewed in Chapter Two (Dearden, 2004; McClung & Gayle, 2010), and also with the wider literature base (DfES & DoH, 2000). Young people in foster care made frequent reference to long-term relationships with friends through school, and on-going hobbies which they had pursued uninterrupted for some years. In contrast, young people in residential care described how initial placement in care, and subsequent placement moves had seemingly involved little consideration for consistency in schooling. Findings in the

literature review suggest that regular school attendance is necessary for young people to achieve academically (Jackson & Martin, 1998), and that truancy should be, but perhaps is not, considered unacceptable by residential care staff. Interestingly one young person in the current research described how, if she had been excluded whilst living with her father he would have been very angry with her school, whilst she felt she was excluded more frequently now that she was living in residential care because it was considered less unacceptable by residential care staff. This information is consistent with the wider literature around school exclusion for children in care, which suggests that they are at least ten times more likely to be excluded from school than children not in care (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). These findings also raise interesting questions regarding placement type. Whilst the literature reviewed in Chapter Two suggests that young people in residential care had been placed there following unsuccessful placements in foster care, participants in the current research who were placed in residential care did not report having previously been in foster care. McClung and Gayle report a correlation between number of placements and placement type, which does not appear to be the case in the current sample. Stability therefore is not necessarily simply related to number of placement moves. This argument is reinforced by Freundlich, Avery, Munson and Gerstenzang (2006), who suggests that permanency is multi-faceted, and includes the dimensions of relationships, safety, stability, and continuity. Interestingly they also suggests that legal status is a dimension of permanency, which suggests that different types of care placement may elicit different feelings of stability. Weiner (1985) also discusses the importance of feeling a sense of control over one's environment, suggesting that this promotes an internal locus of control.

5.3.7.3: Subtheme 7c: Links Between Education and Care Professionals

Findings from the current research suggest that young people in care are aware of the formal communication procedures between social workers, carers, and school staff. However, in discussions around educational experiences and progress social workers were rarely mentioned by either group. For those young people in foster care this may be related to the infrequency of contact with their social workers given the long-term nature of their placements. However, those young people in residential care reported more frequent contact with social workers, and yet did not discuss their involvement in education. This suggests either that social workers were little involved in the educational aspects of these young people's lives, or that young people's perceptions of the roles of social workers did not incorporate educational support. Either interpretation suggests a need for increased links between social care and education. This is highly consistent with findings reported in the literature review, which suggest that information sharing and cooperation between services was limited (Dearden, 2004; Hedin et al., 2011; Martin & Jackson, 2002; McClung & Gayle, 2010). The wider literature links this lack of communication to educational failure, suggesting that it is born out of a lack of information sharing and subsequent ineffective planning, and a lack of clarity around professional roles (Evans, 2003). Authors have also related this lack of communication to the low priority given to education by social workers (Harker et al., 2003), and the lack of a single person who is able to take a holistic view of the young person's development and take responsibility for overseeing both their education and care (Evans, 2003).

5.4: Critique of the Methodology

5.4.1: Selection of Participants

Previous research with young people in care illustrates difficulties in recruiting participants which were similarly experienced in the current research. Of the 92 potential participants initially identified, nine took part in the interviews. Gilbertson and Barber (2002) summarise a range of studies with looked-after children, reporting participation rates ranging from nine percent to 18 percent. In the current research participation rates were as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------|
| Young people in foster care | 8 percent |
| Young people in residential care | 25 percent |
| Overall | 10 percent |

These figures are therefore similar to the range identified by Gilbertson and Barber. These authors go on to analyse reasons for non-participation as reported in the studies they reviewed. Reasons given were as follows:

Table 3: Reasons for looked-after children's non-participation in research

| Reason for non-participation | Gilbertson & Barber (%) | Current Research (%) |
|--|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Lack of cooperation or follow-up from social worker | 23.1 | 66.3 |
| Young person declined to participate | 13.2 | 11.9 |
| Young person did not keep appointment | 1 | 0 |
| Young person missing or transient | 15.4 | 0 |
| Change of placement taking place | 12.1 | 9.8 |
| Young person considered too distressed by social worker | 5.5 | 1 |
| Young person considered too dangerous to interview | 2.2 | 0 |
| Social worker considered young person unable to access interviews due to learning difficulties | 0 | 1 |

Given the high percentage of non-participation due to lack of contact from social workers, potential sample bias must be acknowledged. Kendrick et al. (2008) raise the issue of 'gatekeepers' when discussing the difficulties of conducting research with young people. Whilst gatekeepers can have a protective function, Masson (2002) also suggests that they are able to censor the views of young people. Kendrick et al. suggest that gaining access to young people can be an ongoing process involving negotiations with several people. In the current research this was particularly the case for young people in residential care, for some of whom residential care staff gave consent but the social worker did not, or vice versa. Bogolub and Thomas (2005)

describe making between nine and 14 phone calls to each child's social worker to arrange interviews. This is certainly consistent with the current research, in which the number of phone calls to individual social workers ranged from two to eight. Heptinstall (2000) raises concerns about gatekeepers' ability to block participation, consequently limiting children's participation in research. Leeson (2007) also describes social workers he approached for consent as feeling that some young people would not be capable of understanding what was being asked of them. This view was raised by only one social worker in the current research; however this raises a significant issue regarding the involvement of young people with learning difficulties in research. Heath et al. (2004) highlight the risk of key workers underestimating levels of competence, and therefore denying their right to participation.

It is worth noting that the lack of young people who were 'missing or transient' compares favourably to the 15.4 percent of young people in this category in Gilbertson and Barber's (2002) summary. This perhaps suggests that the LA in which the current research was conducted has efficient and accurate data regarding their young people in care.

The young people who agreed to participate in the current research represented a range of ages and a balance of males and females. However, all of the young people in foster care were in long-term foster care, and had been living in their current placements for several years. It could therefore be argued that their experiences are not comparable to young people in short-term foster care placements, or those who had recently moved to their current placement.

Whilst there were some unavoidable issues regarding the selection of participants who were representative of other young people in foster or residential care, it is hoped that a transparent approach to procedures around gaining consent, will enhance the validity of the current research. The potential for generalising from this sample is necessarily limited due to the qualitative nature of the research and the aim to draw upon a broad range of participant experiences (Holland, 2009). Descriptions elicited from participants therefore provide a rich source of data from which to challenge or confirm current ideas regarding the experiences of young people in care (Lewis & Lindsay, 2002). Further, Gilligan (2008) warns that in generalising from the experiences of young people in care, we risk incorrectly assuming that certain groups of young people have particular immutable characteristics.

5.4.2: Data Collection

Greene and Hill (2010) suggest that people are prone to biases such as social desirability when giving their views to others; and that they can also deliberately try to deceive. Other research suggests that participants' memories can be unreliable and inaccurate (Hennessy & Heary, 2005). To lessen the likelihood of these biases, the interviewer adopted an interpersonal style which put participants at ease, and therefore reduced inhibitions, and the desire to please (Hill, 2010). The semi-structured, non-directive nature of the interviews also allowed participants some control over the discussions, with the additional benefit of enhancing the reliability of accounts given (Robson, 2002). Interviews were also all conducted by the same interviewer, to ensure a certain amount of consistency between ways in which interviews were conducted (Creswell, 2005). Whilst issues of validity are inherent in

qualitative research of this nature, Willig (2008) suggests that the real-life settings in which data is collected gives the research greater ecological validity.

5.4.3: Data Analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) suggest that a key mistake when conducting thematic analysis is to generate themes which simply reflect the research questions. To ameliorate the risks of the data being analysed in a simplistic manner, a variety of reliability checks were conducted during data analysis. These included regular checking back to the original data and checking between codes to ensure continuity in codes generated. Reliability issues were also addressed using inter coder agreement checks (Guest et al., 2012) during stages four and five of the analysis i.e. during review, definition and naming of themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At stage four this included the independent review of codes and themes by an Assistant EP, with discrepancies in interpretations being discussed and themes refined to incorporate relevant hypotheses. In stage five issues of reliability were addressed through the examination of the codebook by two Trainee EPs, both of whom agreed that the codebook made intuitive sense. Creswell (2005) suggests that internal validity, as evaluated through the accuracy of findings from the standpoint of the researcher or readers, is a particular strength of qualitative work. Firestone (1993) suggests that there are three levels of generalisation in research, including from sample to population, from case to case, and theory-connected. Whilst the first of these is not necessarily an aim in qualitative research, the second is achieved through reliability checks as described above, and the third is evidenced in the current research through the generalisation of findings to prior research.

As suggested by Holland et al. (2010) issues of reliability were also addressed through reflexivity regarding ethical issues and power relations. Formal opportunities for reflection on the research processes were provided through professional supervision provided by the EP service.

5.5: Ethical Considerations

5.5.1: Representing the ‘Voices’ of Participants

Lloyd-Smith and Tarr (2002) suggest that young people’s realities cannot be fully understood through inference, as the meanings they give to their experiences are not necessarily the same as those that the researcher would give. They go on to discuss the accessibility of these experiences to adults. Miles and Huberman (1994) also discuss the use and understanding of language between participants and researcher, suggesting that the meaning ascribed to words and comments may be different for different people. There is also a potential issue around language-based difficulties among participants. These are particularly prevalent amongst young people in care. Stock and Fisher (2006) report that estimates of prevalence of language delays among this group range from 35 percent to 73 percent. In the current research only one young person mentioned having received support from a speech and language therapist, although a stutter was apparent in another young person’s speech, and another reported having difficulties in pronouncing certain letter sounds. In addition it

was informally noted that the young people in foster care tended to be more articulate than those in residential care. Communication difficulties of interviewees were not highlighted by any social workers prior to the interviews, and there was no explicit reason for young people in foster care to have been more articulate than those in residential care. However, this may also have influenced the ability of participants to express their views thoroughly. All of these issues may impact the ability of the participants to express themselves, and of the researcher to understand their meanings. At some level then, interpretation by the researcher is necessary and should be acknowledged. Holland, Renold, Ross and Hillman (2010) suggest that this requires exploration through reflexivity regarding power relations and ethics.

5.5.2: The Involvement of Parents

Consent from parents becomes a complicated issue when conducting research with young people in public care. In the current research only one parent was contacted during the process of gaining consent for participants. This was following the advice of the social worker, who deemed this as not strictly necessary but ethically appropriate. For some other participants, contacting parents may have been deemed inappropriate because of their lack of contact with the participants. This is a potentially contentious issue, with Bogolub and Thomas (2005) debating the issue, and suggesting that leaving parents out of the consent process could harm them if they heard about their child's participation second-hand. They also note however, that there will be times when parental contact with their children is necessarily limited, and parental responsibility has been given to a professional. During the current research advice regarding contacting parents was elicited from social workers,

all of whom had ongoing relationships with the young people for whom they were key workers. All but one social worker suggested that the most appropriate route to gaining consent was through foster and residential carers.

5.5.3: The ‘Ethic of Care’

Kendrick et al. (2008) suggest that children have traditionally been viewed as vulnerable in terms of research, with ethicists emphasising an ethic of care and protection. They go on to suggest that more recently children have been viewed as competent actors, and that this view is leading to the use of methodologies which include children and young people as co-researchers to varying extents. However, this raises the issue of involving young people in research from which they are unlikely to benefit directly. Kendrick et al. highlight the potential risks of disappointing young people when, having elicited their views, they see no impact of the research. Therefore it was made clear to participants prior to gaining consent that the researcher would not necessarily be able to act on any advice they gave, but would pass on their views to relevant professionals. It is hoped that the current research will positively impact on service development, but this may not be felt directly by the participants. One way in which this issue has been addressed in the current research is through the use of a therapeutic technique in interviews i.e. taking a solution-focussed approach (de Shazer, 1985). The interviews were used as an opportunity to identify personal strengths and achievements for individual young people, who may therefore extract some direct benefit from participation. Kendrick et al. also note the benefits inherent in research which involves hearing the views of young people, suggesting that these opportunities can serve to empower participants.

5.5.4: Feeding Back Contentious Research to Stakeholders

Bogolub (2010) highlights the potential difficulties around feeding back research to stakeholders, suggesting that where criticisms have been identified the approach taken by the researcher should be carefully considered. Whilst he suggests that by feeding back contentious research there is a risk of alienating stakeholders and thus jeopardizing opportunities for future research, he also suggests that it is ethically unacceptable to fail to feedback participant views which may improve services based on the response they may elicit from stakeholders. He suggests that as researchers, we also have a responsibility to contribute to knowledge and understanding by making research available to professionals and other researchers. Lindsay (2002) also acknowledges the challenges of conducting research where initial approval or facilitation may be influenced by concerns about the way services will be portrayed. In the current research this issue was addressed by negotiating the research area with stakeholders at the outset, and by being transparent with stakeholders throughout the research process. Thus, feedback was less likely to be perceived as threatening or confrontational.

5.6: Reflexivity within the Research Process

McLeod (2007) warns that researchers who seek to listen to young people in care must be flexible in their approach and be prepared for challenge and resistance. This awareness, he argues, will enable more successful communication. McLeod goes on to describe ‘unsuccessful’ interviews in which participants were uncooperative in a

variety of ways. However, after closer analysis he surmised that by answering in ways in which he initially perceived to be unhelpful, participants may have been demonstrating some control over the interviews. He goes on to suggest that these interviews were therefore only ‘unsuccessful’ when examined from his point of view. For the interviewee, on the other hand, they may have achieved their aim and communicated the message they aimed to communicate. There were certainly points during the interviews when I, as an interviewer, felt that things were not going to plan, and that conversations seemed to be moving in unexpected directions. However, similarly to McLeod’s descriptions, these tended to be at times when interviewees were taking control of the interview agenda. Thus it is suggested that the aim of the interviews, to elicit the views of the young people, was achieved to an extent. However, the tension between allowing young people to lead the interview agendas, and ensuring that they generated what I would consider to be ‘good data’, was present throughout the interview process.

Willig (2008) states that personal reflexivity involves deliberate reflection on our values, experiences and beliefs, and in particular how these aspects of our identities have shaped the research process and changed us as researchers. Throughout the research process this was facilitated through regular supervision and discussion with colleagues in which I had the opportunity to explore my feelings and attitudes towards the participants and the research itself (Mason, 2008). This highlighted situations which I had found emotionally challenging, such as when young people were describing difficult times in their lives, both past and present. In particular this was difficult to hear because of my role as a researcher in disseminating research to stakeholders, without the capacity to follow up suggestions or progress made by individual young people. Overall however, the experience of conducting interviews with young people was very positive, with a wide array of positive and insightful comments made by participants. This raised another issue relating to my role as researcher, in that this rich data needed to be represented faithfully, ensuring that the

data was clearly presented whilst maintaining its depth and quality. Some difficult decisions were made regarding the inclusion and exclusion of quotes from young people whose views I felt it was important to represent. In particular I hoped to demonstrate the wide range of both academic and personal skills and talents represented within a group often considered vulnerable. These interpretations are consistent with my prior assumptions relating to looked-after children and young people. However, the opportunity to interview them directly about their experiences proved powerful.

5.7: Implications for Educational Psychology Practice

5.7.1: The Benefits of EP Involvement

As noted previously (see Chapter one), EP work with children in care has been highlighted as useful and valuable. For example, Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs (2005) reported that EP work with children in care was perceived positively by carers and social workers, and was associated with a reduction in truancy and placement breakdown for young people. A report by the British Psychological Society Division of Educational and Child Psychology (DECP, 2006) suggests that EPs have a particular knowledge base which is of relevance to this group of children, including an understanding of child development, emotional well-being, ways in which children learn, and behaviour management. The report also highlights the unique skills in assessment, target setting, monitoring progress, and listening to children, which EPs

bring to their work with children in care. The report concludes that EPs are able to provide an holistic view of the experiences and outcomes of children in care.

5.7.2: The EP Role: Present and Future

5.7.2.1: Working with Young People, Families and Carers

Authors have highlighted the potential for early intervention by EPs in preventing entry into the care system or preventing placement breakdowns (DECP, 2006; Jackson & McParlin, 2006). Jackson and McParlin also suggest that an initial comprehensive assessment of all children who enter the care system should be conducted by an EP to ensure that educational and psychological needs are identified and appropriately addressed. Honey et al. (2011) also see a role for EPs in the provision of targeted interventions, including therapeutic work for young people in care, given their skills in this area. However, Vostanis (2005) notes the difficulty of providing continuous support from services which operate referral or waiting list systems, because of the potential urgency of their need when placements break down, and because of the frequent placement moves experienced by some young people in care. Evans (2000) suggests that if EPs are working within a 'patch' of schools and do not carry individual caseloads, they can lose track of young people who experience multiple placement changes and school moves. The DECP report (2006) also suggests that where EP support works best is when a specialist service is provided which is flexible and timely, and works to prevent placement breakdown, or offers continuous support following placement moves.

The DECP (2006) report also commends EP work with parents and carers, suggesting that EPs should involve them in the identification and implementation of strategies to support their children, and also suggesting that work with parents and carers should be considered a partnership.

5.7.2.2: Working with Professionals

Several authors recommend the EP provide support to professionals in an advisory capacity (DECP, 2006; Gilligan, 2001; Thomson, 2007). This could include consultation regarding learning, behaviour, social and emotional development, and packages of support. Gilligan (2001) also suggests that a key role for EPs in this capacity would be to promote the understanding of concepts of resilience, and to identify opportunities for schools to develop resilience through encouragement, support, and meaningful participation.

EPs are also seen as being able to provide training to a range of other professionals, including teachers, residential care staff, and fostering panel members (Honey et al., 2011; Thomson, 2007). It is suggested that such training could include information regarding the educational needs of young people in care, ecological models of assessment, staged interventions, and awareness regarding the pre- and post-care experiences of children in care.

Farrell et al. (2006) evidenced the role of EPs in multi-agency contexts, reporting that colleagues from other professions valued this input. Bradbury (2006) reports that Social Services Departments would value an increased level of joint working to support children in care, and to facilitate the joining of care and education perspectives into a more holistic view of individual looked-after children. The DECP (2006) report suggests that this approach can be facilitated through clarity of differing professional roles, and sharing of data systems.

5.7.2.3: The Role of a Specialist

Reports from surveys of EP work suggest that many services have a designated EP who works specifically with children in care (Bradbury, 2006; DECP, 2006; Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009). Frequently this role was assumed by an EP in a senior position, with perceived skills and expertise in the area of children in care. This role was also seen to include the overseeing of all work with children in care, as well as direct work with children, involvement in multi-agency teams, and the provision of advice and support for non-specialist colleagues. Bradbury (2006), reports that support of this nature is valued by EP colleagues. The predominant model of service delivery as identified by the surveys of EP work, involves the specialist EP working closely with colleagues who were linked to schools. Typically the role of the specialist EP in this situation was to ensure that the school EP was aware of social care plans and placement moves for individual children.

5.7.2.4: The Meta-Level

Several authors have commented on the wider role of the EP with regard to looked-after children, suggesting that EP services are well-placed to conduct systemic work. Specific examples given in the literature include contributing to system and policy development at a LA level (Thomson, 2007), addressing service level issues relating to early intervention (Norwich, Richards & Nash, 2010), and designing and supporting projects aimed at improving outcomes for children in care (DECP, 2006). At a broader level, Norwich et al. (2010) suggest that good practice should be shared across EP services and LAs, with the generation of working groups of specialist EPs. The DECP (2006) also suggests a role for EPs in gathering and disseminating information at a legislative level.

The specific skills of EPs in relation to conducting, understanding, and implementing research has also been highlighted by various authors (DECP, 2006; Osborne et al., 2009; Thomson, 2007). It is suggested that EPs can contribute to the knowledge base around looked-after children, using a range of research designs, methodologies, and analyses, in order to facilitate evidence-based work.

5.8: The Distinctive Contribution of the Current Research

Jacklin, Robinson and Torrance (2006) note the distinct lack of data regarding looked-after children, which they suggest is a barrier to the development of an

holistic understanding of their experiences. However Gilbertson and Barber (2002) highlight the progress that is being made in research around children in care, giving prominence to education, and encouraging the development of evidence-based practice in social work. Through in-depth investigation of young people's experiences, the current research has highlighted the utility of strengths-based psychological concepts such as self-efficacy (Gilligan, 1997), self-determination (Ryan & Deci, 2002), and resilience (Rutter, 1985), to describe the experience of young people in care. The research begins to address questions about the impact of different placements on the educational experiences of looked-after children. The current research also provides a wealth of information garnered from young people in care, demonstrating the value of eliciting the views of young people. It is hoped that this research will contribute to the growing body of evidence relating to the educational needs of young people in care, and that it will support the development of a research agenda which identifies young people as active participants in both the research process and in their own lives.

5.9: Implications for Service Delivery and Future Research Directions

Many of the current findings are consistent with existing research, as highlighted in section 5.3. However, this raises questions regarding what is being done to address these issues. Key recommendations arising from the current research include:

- Young people in care should be given opportunities to challenge themselves and therefore achieve goals. The need to experience a certain level of risk should be managed carefully against the need to ensure the safety and protection of young people in care. This may take the form of increased levels of academic challenge,

or opportunities to develop new skills through recreational activities. This will facilitate the development of feelings of self-efficacy and will subsequently allow these young people to become more resilient individuals, ready to face the challenges of adult life.

- Young people in care will benefit from a variety of types of support, including the provision of practical resources, emotional support from individuals who understand their experiences of being in care, and the experience of a significant adult taking an interest in their education. This need may be met by the provision of a mentor or advocate for young people in care.
- The ultimate goal of moving from dependence to independence must be re-evaluated, such that the ability of young people to provide support themselves whilst in care should not be underestimated. Opportunities to engage in mutually supportive relationships will facilitate the development of independence, whilst acknowledging the ongoing importance of support into adulthood. This will require a shift in perspective of professionals working with young people in care, from a focus on protection and safety, to a focus on managed risks and achieving autonomy.
- The development and maintenance of relationships should be considered as a key factor when negotiating placement moves. Consideration should be given to familial relationships, in particular those with siblings, and the importance of maintaining friendships should not be underestimated. Opportunities to develop new and existing relationships can increase the availability of role models, who in turn can influence the development of identity for young people in care.
- Involvement in decision-making and the gradual development of independence should be encouraged, such that young people in care have a sense of control over their lives. This will encourage the development of feelings of self-efficacy.
- Communication and joint-working between care and education professionals must be improved to facilitate the appropriate planning of placements and to increase levels of understanding as to the experiences and needs of young people in care. This transparent way of working will help to challenge stereotypes, and

should be particularly focused on increasing understanding amongst those who work closely with children in care. The development of a specialist EP role for looked-after children is a promising move towards increased communication between services.

- The important role of qualitative research in which looked-after young people's views are emphasised must be highlighted to professionals working with young people in care, to support the development of evidence based practice, and to increase social workers' awareness of the important role which young people can play in the research process.

5.10: Summary and Concluding Remarks

The final chapter has linked the findings of the research to the research questions, and also to the wider literature around the education of children in care. This investigation has highlighted an ongoing role for EPs in the support of young people in care, and has re-emphasised findings from previous research including the importance of relationships; the role of practical, emotional and academic support; and the need for improved communication between social care and education professionals. This research has also identified the importance of concepts of self-efficacy and resilience in relation to young people in care, and has identified a variety of ways in which to support the development of these young people into confident, autonomous individuals with much to contribute to society. With a prevalent view of young people in care as dependent and requiring of protection and care (Winter, 2006), the current research proposes a shift in emphasis towards a discourse in which these resilient individuals are given opportunities to take risks and challenge themselves, in

order to develop feelings of self-efficacy and resilience. This may be the most effective way of ensuring improved outcomes for these young people.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Key Search Terms and Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

| Search Term | Synonym |
|--------------|--|
| Looked after | Foster care; foster child*; public care; residential care |
| Education | School* |
| Experience* | Perspective*; view*; voice; personal experience*; reflect* |

Studies were *excluded* if they met *one* of the following exclusion criteria:

Scope

- Not focused on pupils who are/were 'looked after' (as defined above)
- Not concerned with education
- Not concerned with young person views
- Concerned with: kinship care; child care; adoption; youth offending

Study type

- Descriptions
- Reviews
- Purely quantitative

Time and place

- Not written in English
- Not produced or published after 1989
- Not peer reviewed

Appendix B: Table of studies excluded from literature review

| Author(s) | Title | Source | Reason for Exclusion |
|--------------------------------|---|---|--|
| Christmas, L. | Looking after learning: Making a difference for young people in care | Educational and Child Psychology, 1998, 15 (4), 79-90 | Project evaluation |
| Connelly, G. & Chakrabarti, M. | Improving the educational experience of children and young people in public care: A Scottish perspective | International Journal of Inclusive Education, 2008, 12 (4), 347-361 | Outcome data only |
| Coulling, N. | Definitions of successful education for the 'looked after' child: A multi-agency perspective | Support for Learning, 2000, 15 (1), 30-35 | Views of young people not clearly differentiated |
| Denecheau, B. | Children in residential care and school engagement or school 'dropout': What makes the difference in terms of policies and practices in England and France? | Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties, 2011, 16 (3), 277-287 | Views of young people not clearly differentiated |
| Dixon, J. | Obstacles to participation in education, employment and training for young people leaving care | Social Work and Social Sciences Review, 2007, 13 (2), 18-34 | Outcome data only |

| | | | |
|--|---|---|--|
| Francis, J. | Investing in children's futures: Enhancing the educational arrangements of 'looked after' children and young people | Child and Family Social Work, 2000, 5 (1), 23-33 | Views of young people not clearly differentiated |
| Goerge, R. M., Van Voorhis, J., Grant, S., Casey, K. & Robinson, M. | Special education experiences of foster children: An empirical study | Child Welfare: Journal of Policy, Practice and Program, 1992, 71 (5), 419-437 | Descriptive data only |
| Gustavsson, N. S. | No foster child left behind: Child welfare policy perspectives on education | Families in Society, 2011, 92 (3), 276-281 | Review of outcomes and legislation |
| Havalchack, A., White, C. R., O'Brien, K., Pecora, P. J. & Sepulveda, M. | Foster care experiences and educational outcomes of young adults formerly placed in foster care | School Social Work Journal, 2009, 34 (1), 1-27 | Outcome data |
| Heath, A., Colton, M. & Aldgate, J. | The educational progress of children in and out of care | British Journal of Social Work, 1989, 19 (6), 447-460 | Measurement data only |
| Lindsey, M. & Foley, T. | Getting them back to school: Touchstones of good practice in the residential care of young people | Children and Society, 1999, 13 (3), 192-202 | Evaluation of a particular residential programme |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| McMillen, C., Auslander, W., Elze, D., White, T. & Thompson, R. | Educational experiences and aspirations of older youth in foster care | Child Welfare, 2003, 82 (4), 475- | Reporting demographic data only |
| Scherr, T. | Educational experiences of children in foster care: Meta-analyses of special education, retention and discipline rates | School Psychology International, 2007, 28 (4), 419-436 | Not primary research |
| Smith, M., McKay, E. & Chakrabarti, M. | What works for us: Boys' views of their experiences in a former D list school | British Journal of Special Education, 2004, 31 (2), 89- 93 | Evaluation of residential schools |
| Spiteri, D. | Citizenship education as an educational outcome for young people in care: A phenomenological account | Theory and Research in Education, 2012, 10 (1), 39- 55 | Evaluation of specific programme |
| Stone, S. | Educational services for children in foster care: Common and contrasting perspectives of child welfare and education stakeholders | Journal of Public Child Welfare, 2007, 1 (2), 53-70 | View of young people in care not represented |
| Sullivan, M. J. & Jones, L. | School change, academic progress, and behaviour problems in a sample of foster youth | Children and Youth Services Review, 2010, 32 (2), 164- 170 | Young people's views not represented |

| | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| Vacca, J. | Breaking the cycle of academic failure for foster children: What can the schools do to help? | Children and Youth Services Review, 2008, 30 (9), 1081-1087 | Review paper |
| Zetlin, A. | The experiences of foster children and youth in special education | Journal of Intellectual and Developmental Disability, 2006, 31 (3), 161-165 | Views of young people not clearly differentiated. |
| Zetlin, A., Weinberg, L. A. & Shea, N. M. | Seeing the whole picture: Views from diverse participants on barriers to educating foster youths | Children and Schools, 2006, 28 (3), 165-173. | Views of young people not clearly differentiated. |

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

The Positive Educational Experiences of 'looked after' children and young people: A comparison of residential and foster care.

This sheet gives you some information about a research project happening in your area which you have the opportunity to be a part of.

Dear.....

Hello. My name is Nicola Cann and I am training to become an Educational Psychologist. This means I work with schools, families, children and young people, to support and improve education.

As part of my training I am doing a research project about children and young people who are 'looked after' or 'in care', and want to find out about their experiences of education and schools.

I hope that this project will help professionals to understand what children and young people in care want from education, and how they can be best supported.

I am looking for children and young people who would be interested in talking to me about their experiences of school and education, and what has helped them in the past, or could help them in the future.

If you would like to be part of this project, this is what will happen:



1. I will arrange to meet with you (and your support worker if you would like them to attend) for a short chat of about 20 minutes, to discuss the project and answer any questions you have. I will also talk to you about getting your permission to be part of the project.

2. If you agree to be part of the project, I will arrange a second time to meet with you, in a place where you feel comfortable, where I will spend no more than one hour asking you about your experiences in education.

When I talk to you, I will record what you say using a voice recorder, so that I remember what you have told me. You can stop the discussion at any time if you feel uncomfortable or do not wish to continue for any reason.

What you say will be kept between us, unless you tell me something that means either yourself or someone else is in danger. In this case I will need to pass the information on to another adult.

When I have talked to other children and young people I will write about what I have found out, making sure that I don't use your real name or any information that lets people know who you are. You will have the opportunity to read the report. This will be part of my doctoral research, and may be published when finished.

If you are interested in taking part...



1. Let your support worker know that you want to take part.
I can then contact you to arrange to meet you.



2. If you want to know more before deciding whether to take part, then you can ask me any questions at our first meeting.

3. REMEMBER you don't have to take part in this project if you don't want to, and if you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time.

Appendix D: Participant Consent Form

The Positive Educational Experiences of 'looked after' children and young people: A comparison of residential and foster care.

If you want to take part in this project you need to fill in this CONSENT FORM.

Please circle 'yes' or 'no'.

1. I have looked at the information sheet about the project and I understand what it is about.

Yes



No

2. I understand that I do not have to answer any questions that I don't want to.

Yes



No

3. I understand that I can change my mind about taking part at any time. This will not affect the way I am supported.

Yes



No



4. I understand that my answers to questions will be recorded.

Yes



No



5. I understand that what I say will be kept private and only shared after it has had my name or any other details that could identify me taken out. The only time that Nicola will tell anyone else about my name or details is if I say something that means me or someone else is at risk.

Yes



No



6. I agree to take part in this research project.

Yes



No



Name:

Signature:

Date:

Thank You

Appendix E: Parent/Professional/Carer Information Sheet

The Positive Educational Experiences of 'looked after' children and young people: A comparison of residential and foster care.

My name is Nicola Cann and I am a student at the University of East London, in my second year of doctoral training to become an Educational Psychologist. As part of this training I am required to complete a substantial piece of research, for which I hope to investigate the educational experiences of looked after children and young people in residential and foster care settings within Essex Local Authority. This research has been agreed by the University of East London, Essex Educational Psychology Service, and the Essex Virtual School Team.

The involvement of children and young people in this research is important, and will give them an opportunity to express their views and perspectives regarding positive educational experiences. It is hoped that this research can help to inform future practice.

Please take the time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with colleagues if you wish.

1. 'Why is this research being carried out?'

- This research will attempt to increase the knowledge base around positive educational experiences of looked after children.
- Findings from the research will be fed back to the Educational Psychology service and Virtual School Team, so that they can be considered in relation to current practice.

2. 'Why this group of children and young people?'

- Educational barriers and risk factors relating to looked after children have often been highlighted. There is currently little research looking into 'what works' for this vulnerable group.
- Looked after children have little opportunity to be involved in research and to have their voices heard.

3. 'What does the research involve?'

- Initially the children and young people will have an opportunity to meet with me to ask questions prior to volunteering their involvement in the project.
- Once involvement is agreed, individual, semi-structured interviews with the children and young people will be conducted, each lasting no more than one hour.
- Interviews will take place in a venue where the child or young person feels comfortable, for example home or school.
- Issues discussed in the interview will include: positive educational experiences; involvement in decision-making; control and choices over educational decisions; what is working/has worked previously.
- Interviews will be recorded so that information can be transcribed and analysed.
- Personal information discussed will be confidential (apart from where a disclosure is made, in which case information will be passed on to the relevant professional).
- Data gathered will be anonymised so that participants cannot be identified.
- Interviews will be terminated/paused if the participant becomes upset or wishes to discontinue for any reason.
- Participants may withdraw at any point before, during or after data collection.
- After completion of all interviews the information I have gained will be disseminated to the Virtual School Team and Educational Psychology service.
- This piece of research may be published in the future, however details of participants will remain confidential and anonymous.

4. 'What if I have further questions?'

If you wish to discuss any of the above further, please do not hesitate to contact me at:

Email: Nicola.cann@essex.gov.uk

Tel: 01279 404 502

Address: Goodman House, Station Approach, Harlow, Essex, CM20 2ET.

5. 'Who should I contact if I have any concerns about the research?'

This research has been approved by the UEL Ethics Committee (0208 223 2976; Graduate School, University of East London, Docklands Campus, London, E16 2RD). If you have any concerns or complaints regarding the research and how it is being carried out, please contact myself initially at the above contact details, or Mr Merlin Harries (University Research Ethics Committee) at the above address or phone number, or by email at m.harries@uel.ac.uk.

6. 'What next?'

Enclosed is an information sheet and consent form for the child or young person in your care. Please take the time to discuss these forms with them and, if they are happy to take part, send the completed consent form to me at the above address. Also enclosed is a professional/carer consent form. If you are happy for the child or young person in your care to become involved in this project, please complete this consent form and return it to me at the address above.

You will have the option to withdraw at any time before or during the data collection stage of the project.

Thank you for taking the time to consider this information.

Yours Sincerely,

Nicola Cann,

Trainee Educational Psychologist.

Appendix F: Parent/Professional/Carer Consent Form

The Positive Educational Experiences of 'looked after' children and young people: A comparison of residential and foster care.

| | YES | NO |
|---|-----|----|
| Yes, I am happy for the child/young person in my care to take part in this project. I understand that Nicola will contact them to arrange a meeting. | | |
| I have read the letter on the previous page which gives background information to the study and explains what participation will involve. | | |
| I know I can contact the researcher, Nicola Cann, at Essex Educational Psychology Service, if I have any questions about the project. | | |
| I understand that my participation is voluntary, and that I am free to withdraw at any time before, during or after data collection. | | |
| I understand that Essex Educational Psychology Service and the Virtual School Team will receive a copy of the completed research, which will be anonymised. | | |

Signed.....

Date

Name (in capitals).....

Enclosed is an information sheet and consent form for the child or young person in your care. Please take the time to discuss these forms with them.

Thank You

Appendix G: Interview Schedule

Focus Areas

- Previous positive educational experiences of participants
- Involvement in decision-making
- Control and choices
- What is working/has worked previously
- What would you like to change
- Who the research should be fed back to

Prompts

- Past successes:
 - After having been through what you've been through, how did you find the strength to keep pushing on?
 - What do you need to do so that you'll feel good about yourself and in control of your education?
 - What would it take for you to bring back the confidence you used to have?
- Exceptions:
 - I can see you have every reason to dislike school. When do you suppose you like school? How would you say you are different when you are enjoying school?
 - When you work hard in school, what do you suppose your friends/foster carer/social worker will notice different about you?
 - What would it take to work hard in school more often?

- Tell me what is different for you at those times when school is going well?
 - What would have to happen for school to improve?
-
- Miracle question: "Suppose one night there is a miracle while you were sleeping and the problem that brought you to child protective services is solved. Since you are sleeping you don't know the miracle has happened or that the problem is solved, what do you suppose you will notice different the next morning that will tell you that the problem is solved?"
 - If the miracle happened, what would be the first thing you would do?
 - If the miracle happened what will be the first change you will notice about yourself?
 - What would your friend/carer notice different about you?
 - If you were to take these steps, what would you notice different around your house?
-
- Scaling:
 - On a scale of 1-10 with 10 meaning you have every confidence that things can improve, and 1 means no confidence at all, where would you put yourself today?
 - On the same scale, how hopeful are you that this problem can be solved?
 - What would be different in your life when you move up just one step?
 - On a scale of 1-10 how much would you say you are willing to work to solve the problems?
 - What do you suppose your carer/teacher would say you need to do to move up 1 point on the scale?

Appendix H: CD of Transcripts

Appendix I: Example of a Coded Transcript

Robyn

Researcher/Robyn

| | | |
|---|----|--|
| Okay. Hello Robyn. Now (pause 2 secs) I want to have a chat to you today about how things have been going at school, in particular things that have been going very well. So, first of all I suppose I'd like to...if you could think of, erm, something recently that has gone well for you at school, could you tell me about it? | 1 | |
| Erm...In SATS I got three level 5s and then, when I done my tests at high school I got, I was put into top sets. | 5 | Comment [D1]: Academic achievement |
| That's really impressive, isn't it? Have you worked hard to get there? | | |
| Er, yeah. | 10 | |
| And what do you think helped you to get those.. to achieve those level 5s? | | |
| Probably cause I not.... in primary school I listened. And also I think the teachers kind of helped me out because they taught me and stuff and stuff like that | 15 | Comment [D2]: Teachers help |
| So, which other people can you think of that have helped you? | | |
| Er, probably A**** [foster carer] because she's like she sometimes helps me out with my homework if I'm stuck and | | Comment [D3]: Foster carer helps with homework |
| G**** [sister] and P**** [brother] if I'm like stuck on a maths question or something like that, they help me out. | 20 | Comment [D4]: Siblings help with homework |

| | | |
|--|----|--|
| And G**** and P**** are you're sister... | | |
| Yeah | | |
| I'm just saying that for that. Okay. Lovely. And what kind of... so that's helping you for your homework. And then at school you said the teachers helped you, what kinds of things would the teachers do to help? | 25 | |
| Cause like they'll teach erm.... in primary school if like you're in trouble, you can put your hand up and teachers come over to you and like explain it more and if you still didn't get it and it quite | | Comment [D5]: Teachers help with school work |
| a hard thing, you just ask, sometimes the teachers would like say, everyone who doesn't get it you can sit on the floor and I'll like, I'll explain it to you better than all the people who do get it can just sit on the table and carry on. | 30 | |
| Um, okay. And so you were quite happy to ask for help and to erm go and sit in the right place to show if you need help or not? | 35 | |
| Yeah. Normally I didn't need help cause I did normally get it the first time. | | Comment [D6]: Self-perceptions |
| Okay so what, what things to you think you have done for yourself to help you get those level 5s recently? | | Comment [D7]: Locus of control |
| I think cause I listened and I didn't like muck about and I was, I was actually good so teach... and also I got it so I found it easier. | 40 | Comment [D8]: Self-perceptions |
| Um. Okay. What did you get your level 5s in? | | Comment [D9]: Locus of control |

| | |
|--|---------------------|
| <p>Erm, Maths, science and English I think</p> <p>Okay</p> <p>We weren't really supposed to do science but we still done it.</p> <p>Oh, why did you do science?</p> <p>Cause, I can't remember why. It's just because, erm our teacher in year 6, erm, like I think she wanted us to do science as well</p> <p>Okay. And how did you find doing those tests?</p> <p>I found it quite intimidating but A**** kind of helped me out cause she said, 'what are you saving up for?' and cause I like lego I was saving up for something out of lego thing. And she said 'if you stay calm through the whole week of doing your tests for SATS, I'll buy it for you'.</p> | <p>45</p> <p>50</p> |
| <p>Ah, so you had a kind of incentive to go for? Yeah, I can see how that would help (laughs)</p> <p>Cause on the first day we were going to do SATS I cried so she said that to me.</p> | <p>55</p> |
| <p>Oh wow.</p> <p>I was like... "okay"</p> <p>So it was really scary that first time? So what else helped you to get through and to go back the next day and do so well in them?</p> <p>I guess its just what A*** said, cause I really wanted the thing so she, so I like, she said like, if you don't like... erm, be that scared</p> | <p>60</p> |

Comment [D10]: Help from foster carer

Comment [D11]: Emotional support from carer

| | |
|---|----|
| I'll like buy it for you so that made me not be that scared cause I really wanted it. | 65 |
| That's good. I think that probably takes some bravery on your part as well though. Because you still had to, as much as you wanted that lego, you still had to go back in there and have a go even though you were really nervous that first day. | 70 |
| But then again erm, I, cause I can knit, I knitted my own bracelet for luck and then my sister had this other one and she said 'have this lucky bracelet' so I had that as well. | |
| Ah, that's lovely. So, erm I mean you've said as well that your brother and sister have been really helpful and supportive with you, with your education. Can you think of other people? Then A**** you said, and the teachers. | 75 |
| Um | |
| Can you think of anyone else that's helped you up until now? | |
| Nah, not really | 80 |
| No? | |
| No, can't really think of anyone else | |
| Okay | |
| Accept for like speech therapy people | |
| The speech therapy people? You were telling me about them before? | 85 |

Comment [D12]: Help from foster carer

Comment [D13]: Siblings help

Comment [D14]: Locus of control

| | | | |
|--|-----|--|--|
| (inter)Yeah cause they help with speech, they helped me to speak | | | |
| How long ago was that? | | | |
| That was when I first went into foster care | 90 | | |
| And, so how old were you when you first went into foster care? | | | |
| Erm, it was about a month before my birthday. My 5 th birthday, a month before my 5 th birthday | | | |
| So how old are you now? | | | |
| 11 | 95 | | |
| 11 now | | | |
| 11 and a bit | | | |
| So and have you been with Anne for the whole of that time? | | | |
| Yeah. Accept from, erm sometime.. cause her uncle was.. when my uncle, my foster uncle wasn't that well, so we had to go into respite for a while. But erm | 100 | | |
| Okay | | | |
| Accept from that, yeah we've stayed with her, its been long term and it's been set for long term as well | | | |
| And how has that effected your school do you think? | 105 | | |
| I think it's made me better cause like, cause... erm cause... and also like I've been allowed to *** with my sister and then after a year my brother joined us | | | |

Comment [D15]: Help from Speech and Lang Therapist

Comment [D16]: Who is family?

Comment [D17]: Duration of placement

Comment [D18]: Siblings in care together

| | |
|--|-----|
| Okay | |
| And so that, and that's kind of gave me more insure...like I was more insured [reassured?] that I was going to do well. | 110 |
| Okay | |
| But yeah, | |
| So what is it that made you feel then that you were more certain that you were going to do well? | 115 |
| Cause like I had my brother and sister and they're older than me so they would probably learn to do it more and then they could explain it to me better. | |
| Okay. So they've helped you out quite a lot then, haven't they to, even in practical things like understanding your work. (pause 3 secs) Okay that's lovely. Can you think of any other examples of things that have gone really well at school and you can think back as far as you like? | 120 |
| (pause 3 secs). I don't... I can't really think of anything else | |
| No? Er what about, erm... it doesn't have to necessarily be exam results. It could be things like... are there been things that you've been involved in at school that you've enjoyed doing, that you're proud of doing? | 125 |
| I don't really do clubs. I did once do guitar club and I still do play it, but erm my first teacher left and then erm, they got another | 130 |

Comment [D19]: Support from siblings

Comment [D20]: Siblings help

| | |
|---|---|
| teacher but then he left as well. And I did do a dance club but then I stopped doing it | |
| <p>Why did you stop the dance?</p> <p>Cause I didn't really like it anymore and I was going more into a 'tom boy'.</p> <p>Okay. You're still playing your guitar? (pause 2 secs) Yeah. I hear you've been playing it for quite some time now? (pause 2 secs) And what kind of songs do you play?</p> <p>Err... not really, it's more songs that not everyone's really heard.</p> <p>Oh, what... what style?</p> <p>Kind of pop, but then not. It's like you start off with twinkle, twinkle little star and you go more into stuff and more songs. So it's different like genres of music</p> <p>That's good. So you're teaching yourself now?</p> <p>No, I'm not teaching myself, I just don't have lessons any more</p> <p>Okay. So do you, do you normally play the songs that you know at the moment then?</p> <p>I don't normally really play it but sometimes I just feel like playing the guitar so I just play it.</p> <p>Ah, okay. So you don't play it so much these days. (pause 2 secs) Okay. Erm.. Anything else you can think of at school then that's gone well?</p> | <p>135</p> <p>140</p> <p>145</p> <p>150</p> |

Comment [D21]: Hob
bies

| | | |
|--|-----|---|
| Not really cause I don't do any other clubs | | |
| Erm any... what about any particular bits of work that you're proud of doing? That you feel went well? | 155 | |
| Err... (pause 3 secs). Can't really think of any pieces of work that I done well | | |
| No? That's alright. | | |
| Oh, yeah. Now I remember. In Geography erm we had to... we had to do stuff about the World. And erm... I drew my own World. | 160 | |
| So I was quite... | | |
| (inter) You drew your own World. So was it like, what an A4 piece of paper you...? | | |
| (inter) I done it like that big and I done all the details. And A**** had bought me an Atlas and it had erm a picture on the front of the World, so I drew that and I was quite proud of it. | 165 | |
| Wow. Is drawing something you're good at? | | Comment [D22]: Resources |
| Not always, but sometimes. | | Comment [D23]: Pride |
| So what was good about it that time? What made it work so well? | 170 | Comment [D24]: Foster carer helps with schoolwork |
| I think cause it did look like the thing on the front cover. I was quite proud of. | | Comment [D25]: Pride in school work |
| That's really good. And what did you do with that piece of work? | | |
| I stuck it into my book and then I put facts around it. | | |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Lovely. Did you get a good mark from the teacher? | 175 |
| Err... I got a credit I think... I can't really remember. | |
| Ah. So it's good that you produced something that you felt really proud of. And it sounds like the thing that helped the most was probably that Atlas that A**** had got you. | |
| Um | 180 |
| What other things do you think helped you with that? | |
| I guess... I can't really think of anything else that could of helped me with it. Accept from colouring pencils but I already had them. | |
| Did it take you a long time to do? | |
| Err... yes but no. | 185 |
| (laughs) what does that mean? | |
| (laughs) I can't really remember how long but it probably took quite a while but I'm not too sure. | |
| Oh okay. I see. I was going to say that it sounds like you persevered with that. Have you heard that word before? | 190 |
| What does it mean? | |
| It means that you stuck at it. So it sounds like it could be something that may have taken quite a while to do but you didn't give up easily you carried on going? | |
| First I done just the world with the like normal one which you draw a huge XXX bit like a circle with some sea and some land. | 200 |

Comment [D26]: Res
ourses

| | | | |
|---|-----|--|---|
| And then A**** like pointed out that it didn't really look like a world and its then I, I drew one which was better | | | |
| Okay. So having some advice has helped as well then? | | | |
| Um. | 205 | | Comment [D27]: Foster carer helps with homework |
| Okay. (pause 3 secs). What about erm..at school when decisions get made do you feel like you have much choice in .. in what happens.. | | | |
| (inter) what do you mean 'when decisions are made'? | | | |
| Well, I suppose things like, how much control do you think you have over what you get to do at school? | 210 | | |
| I... if I want to do a club I'm allowed to but if I don't want to do one then I don't have to. | | | Comment [D28]: Choice |
| Yeah. And do you feel like you have quite a lot of say in what you get to learn about or what work you get to do? | 215 | | |
| Erm, not really. Cause most of the work is kind of compulsory so have to learn it and you have to do it. | | | Comment [D29]: Choice |
| Yeah. Do you think, do you think you get to make much choice in what you, what bits you get to do? | | | Comment [D30]: Approach to homework |
| Not really. | 220 | | |
| No? Erm. And how about; do you feel, do you feel like people ask your opinion about things at school? | | | |
| Erm. Sometimes my friends might say, 'what do you think of | | | |

| | | |
|--|-----|---|
| this?' and I'll say my opinion. But (pause 3 secs) er... | | Comment [D31]: Friends listening |
| What about teachers, do they ask about what things you might like to do? | 225 | |
| Not really cause you get set works and supposed to get through it but if you don't that's kind of okay. If you don't get through all of it | | |
| Um. Erm... and I suppose... what about things like... I guess I'm thinking that there could be times when things are complicated like you have to have additional meetings with your social worker or people like that. Do you get much decision... do you get to decide very much about when those things happen? | 230 | |
| Not really | 235 | Comment [D32]: Decision-making |
| No? | | Comment [D33]: |
| Cause they normally have like set days. Normally A**** sorts that out | | Comment [D34]: |
| Okay so do you normally see her at school? | | Comment [D35]: Foster carer and school involvement |
| What do you mean, 'see her at school?' | 240 | |
| Does erm... R**** come into.... | | |
| (inter) No she doesn't come into my school | | Comment [D36]: Social worker and school |
| She doesn't. So she sees you at home anyway. Okay. And do the people at school talk much to A**** or to R**** about how things are going? | 245 | |

| | | |
|---|-----|--|
| I think they go to the review meetings | | |
| Yeah? | | |
| And then that's, that's when they normally talk about stuff like that. | | |
| And how often do they happen? | 250 | |
| Erm... Don't really know. | | |
| Do you not go to any of them yourself then? | | |
| I've been to one but the other one that I would of gone to but I went to London for a school trip so... | | |
| Ah, so you missed one. And so the one that you went to how did it go? | 255 | |
| It went quite well cause like we were talking about... they talked about stuff and then they might ask me questions, about like how's it going how I think about stuff | | |
| Yeah | 260 | |
| And then if they're gonna talk about G**** or P****, cause I had my DS erm.. then they'd ask me to just may be play on my DS or something like that, I just played on my DS | | |
| Did you find that meeting helpful? | | |
| Erm... Kind of but kind of not | 265 | |
| What, what ways did it help? | | |
| Cause like they....I guess they found like how I was doing but | | |

Comment [D37]: Teachers and care review meetings

Comment [D38]: Inappropriate time for review

Comment [D39]: Involvement in care reviews

Comment [D40]: Views not represented in review

| | |
|---|-----|
| then again you could really just send it, like a letter to them or something like that. | |
| Um. Okay. And what it helpful for you? | 270 |
| Yeah kind of. Cause I like, I found out what they really talk about | |
| Yeah. I suppose, is it nice to actually sit in on those meetings to hear what they say? | |
| Um, well I've been to two, but the first one me, G**** and P**** went all together and it didn't really work out cause our Gran...cause they were gonna talk about something and we weren't suppose to be there. So our Granddad, my old Granddad and Nan was there, so our Granddad took us out to market, well into town, so he didn't really get to listen to it. So since then, we kind of done it like in turns. | 275 |
| Okay, | |
| So it'd be like me, P****, G****, me, P****, G**** | |
| Um. Okay. I think that makes sense | |
| (inter) which works out better | |
| Yeah. Why do you think its better that way? | 280 |
| Cause then we don't... cause if we do need to not listen then we can just take our DS and someone doesn't have to sit out when they probably do need to listen. | |
| Yeah. And are you happy with doing things like that? | 285 |

Comment [D41]: Involvement in care reviews

Comment [D42]: Involvement from grandparents

| | |
|---|-----|
| Erm, yeah I'm fine with it | 290 |
| Taking it in turns | |
| Yeah. I'm fine with it. | |
| Okay. That sounds good. Right... now, I'm going to ask you a question about... about the future and what you'd like the future to be like | 295 |
| (inter) Aww | |
| So, suppose one night there's a miracle while you're sleeping and erm, whatever difficulties you might have had at school, erm any problems you might have are completely solved and gone. Since you're sleeping, you don't know the miracle has happened or that your problems are solved, what do you suppose, who, what do you suppose you'll notice is different in the morning when you wake up that will let you know that the problem is solved? | 300 |
| That, so if like I couldn't reach up to stuff, then may be I might have gone taller so then I could reach the ceiling or something | 305 |
| So you want to be taller? (laughs) | |
| Yeah and other things | |
| What about, are there any things at school that you think you would like to wake up in the morning and things have been completely different for that particular thing and everything would | 310 |

| | | |
|--|-----|--|
| Yeah, okay. And what things have you done that have got you that 9 and a half so far? | 335 | |
| SATs, it has to be SATs and what sets I've been put into. | | Comment [D45]: Academic achievement |
| Okay, but then I think that the teachers wouldn't have put you in those sets or given you those marks unless there were things that you've done yourself that meant that you've achieved those things. Do you see what I mean? | 340 | |
| Yeah | | |
| So what do you think you've done that has helped you get into those set and helped you to get those marks? | | |
| I've done. I've always done my homework on time. | | Comment [D46]: Approach to learning |
| Yeah | 345 | |
| And, I guess... that's about all. I haven't... yeah about all. Also the tests I worked hard on I would have got I probably, that's probably why I've got harder like a higher set. | | Comment [D47]: Locus of control |
| Um | | |
| But I could always end up like getting, finding the work hard and I might go down a set. I don't know | 350 | |
| Okay. So how confident are you, on here, that things are going to continue going well for you, the way that they're going at the moment | | Comment [D48]: Confidence in achieving |
| Erm, probably 9 and a half again because I think that that's | 355 | |

| | | |
|---|-----|---------------------------------|
| practically the same questions | | |
| Yeah, it's very similar. Okay. Excellent. (pause 5 secs). You said homework was something that really helped you. And it sounds like you've worked really hard. | | |
| Um | 360 | |
| You've been hard working. (pause 4 secs) Okay. Erm on this, on our scale again of 0 to 10, how much do you feel like you are in control of what happens with your education where 10 is completely in control and 0's the opposite? | | |
| I guess 10 because it's up to me that I have to do my homework on time and I know I have to work hard. And it's in my control, nobody else can do it for me. | 365 | |
| Um, that's very proactive. That means that you're taking control yourself and you feel like you're in charge of being able to do well for yourself | 370 | Comment [D49]: Locus of control |
| Cause it's not like G**** can come along and like do the work for me, can she? | | Comment [D50]: Locus of control |
| Mm. | | |
| I have to like do the work myself cause then I'll realise and also I can, I'm the only one who can make me go, to make me have good sets and get high results in like tests cause I'm the only one who can do that myself. | 375 | Comment [D51]: Locus of control |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Mm. | |
| Cause I couldn't like have G**** come in to the test and just do it for me, can I? | 380 |
| No, absolutely | |
| I've got to do it myself, cause there's no other way that I can get up to high sets. | |
| And what about other people that have helped you though? | |
| Cause although you've got to work very hard yourself, there are people that can help as well aren't there, we've talked a bit about them already? | 385 |
| Like the teachers. | |
| Yeah. | |
| Cause they can help me out if I'm stuck, and stuff like that. And like G**** and P**** and Nan can help me but they can't get... actually do it for me. | 390 |
| Um. Okay... erm. I'd also like to ask you a bit about what you'd like to do in the future. So you are in year 7, that's right isn't it? | |
| Um | 395 |
| So you've only been in your current school for a term so far. | |
| Erm... so, it's quite early days yet isn't it? But what are your hopes for the future and how school will go and what's going to happen after that? | |

Comment [D52]: Locus of control

Comment [D53]: Locus of control

| | | | |
|---|-----|--|--|
| I'm hoping that school's going to go well and I'm probably going... I'm hoping I'll get like A or B or C may be even D if it ends up, erm for like my GCSEs. I don't know, really know what job a want when I'm older | 400 | | |
| And what things do you like doing, what do you think you'd enjoy to do, enjoy doing when you left school? | 405 | | Comment [D54]: Educational aspirations |
| I guess I would enjoy like playing the drums in a band, but then again, you're not gonna, that's just a dream, it's not always going to happen | | | Comment [D55]: Career aspiration |
| Um. Okay. And what things would you need to do to be able to play drums in a band? | 410 | | |
| Probably practise even harder and have confidence and like try and find other band mates, but that's, that'll probably be hard cause there probably isn't that many people and most people normally have a drummer in their bands already. | | | Comment [D56]: Career aspiration |
| Um. You need to maybe get a band together, wouldn't you? | 415 | | |
| (pause 2 secs) And is that something you'd like to do for a job, to earn your living? | | | |
| Yes but no, cause you wouldn't really get that much money. It's like would I have enough money to...er... to, for a like daily life, normal life. Er... A**** pointed out to me that you don't always get that much money in that job. So I don't... I do want that, but then | 420 | | Comment [D57]: Financial incentives for career choice |

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| it's like would that be enough money to for me to actually live on? | |
| Um. That's very sensible that you're thinking that way as well. So maybe it would be more like a hobby or something that earns you a bit of extra money. | 425 |
| Mm. | |
| What other things have you thought of that might be your main job? | |
| I don't know | 430 |
| No? What things do you like doing at the moment? | |
| I do think making some stuff and but I more like playing like drums and guitar. | |
| Um. So maybe that would be your main job and you'd have to get another job on the side to add a bit of extra cash. That might be the better way around to do it. | 435 |
| Mm. | |
| Have you thought about other things that you'd like to do that are related to music that might be a bit more stable for a job then? | |
| Not really | 440 |
| No? (pause 2 secs) Okay. And what about in the next few years at school, what do you hope's going to happen? You'd like to get some good GCSE grades, what other things would you like to | |

Comment [D58]: Foster carer, career advice

| | |
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| achieve while you're at school still? | |
| Maybe, probably get more confidence. I'm not really that confident like playing to the class even for that alone, like playing to other people or the whole world or something like that. Like boost my confidence, I'd like to do that. | 445 |
| And is it just with the drumming that you're not very confident playing to people? | 450 |
| I guess it's more of speaking to a lot of people or speaking to many people or something like that I'm sometimes shy, but then if I'm with my friends then I'm not really that shy. | |
| Mm. So what situations are you really shy in? | |
| Like playing stuff to people which I don't know or like people who I've just met or something like that, I don't really know that well. | 455 |
| Mm, that seems sensible. I think lots of people are like that. They're a bit more shy around new people aren't they? | |
| Mm. | |
| Okay. So what kinds of things could you do to get over that do you think? To overcome it? | 460 |
| I don't really know. | |
| How about; can you think of a time when you have played the drums in front of someone or you had to maybe give a speech to the class, when it went quite well? | 465 |

Comment [D59]: Self-confidence

Comment [D60]: Confidence with friends

Comment [D61]: Shy with strangers

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| <p>I played the guitar to the class but the bell then went so we had to go outside and I didn't get to finish the whole song.</p> <p>Oh, well. And how did it go down?</p> <p>Err... don't really know. Cause nobody really commented on it.</p> <p>Ah, cause you got cut off at the end. That's a shame. How did it feel when you did it?</p> <p>It felt nervous. But I was allowed to practise in the hall. But with the drums I was going to play it to the class but I didn't bring any of my drum sticks along cause I was so nervous, that I didn't want to do it.</p> | 470 | |
| <p>Ah</p> <p>But erm... I wouldn't have been able to practise it cause they were going to bring it in to the middle of the class, like middle of the time before the bell goes but.... yeah...</p> | 475 | <p>Comment [D62]: Confidence in performing</p> |
| <p>So you weren't really feeling very prepared anyway then? Well so maybe that's one thing that you could try doing, if you were to try having a go a doing something like that again, was to do whatever you could to be make sure you felt more prepared.</p> <p>That would probably make you feel a bit more confident, wouldn't it?</p> <p>Mm. Cause, we had, at drum class we had got erm.. a beat rally but then I was too nervous to do it so..</p> | 480 | <p>Comment [D63]: Confidence in performing</p> |
| | 485 | <p>Comment [D64]: Nervous about performing</p> |

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| Ah. So what... can you think of another time when you've been able to do something in front of the class? (pause 3 secs) No? | |
| So what about this, going back to this time before then when you played the guitar... | 490 |
| (inter) but then again I done a play in the year 6 production and all the plays I had done before I'd never ever spoken in any of them. But then, in the year 6 one, I was given quite a few lines and a song to sing, so that was quite nerve-racking but it went quite well. | 495 |
| Oh | |
| And, but then I dropped the bubbles | |
| You dropped the bubbles? What were the bubbles? | |
| Like the bubble blower, where you go like that | 500 |
| Oh, okay. I see what you mean. Like a wand is it? | |
| Yeah a bubble wand. | |
| Oh. Okay and did lots of people notice that or did it, was it okay? | |
| (inter) Yeah | |
| Oh (laughs), I see. But everything else went quite well with that | 505 |
| Mm | |
| So what made you able to go and do that because cause that sounds like something... that would be really uncomfortable for you. | |

Comment [D65]: Achievement

Comment [D66]: Overcoming fear/nerves

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| (inter) we were kind of forced to do it! (laughs) | 510 |
| Oh (laughs) | |
| (laughs) we were forced to do it. | |
| Did you have some choice in it though, some say in it? | |
| (inter) erm.... well some of us were like, wanted to do certain | |
| ones, but then, cause they had to pick who got the play | 515 |
| Right | |
| So we tried out for some of the things which we wanted to do in | |
| the class, then we were allocated the ones and I got allocated a | |
| caterpillar! | |
| Ah (laughs) Why were you a caterpillar who had bubbles, I don't | 520 |
| understand? | |
| Oh, do you know Alice in Wonderland? | |
| Ah yes, I see. | |
| That's basically xxx | |
| Now it all makes sense. Oh how wonderful. Now that sounds | 525 |
| quite exciting to be in? | |
| Ummm... (sounds indifferent) | |
| Bit scary as well but exciting. | |
| But then again I didn't have a much pressure as my friend did | |
| cause she was the main character | 530 |
| Now that must be terrifying | |

| | |
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| <p>Because I, cause I will do it to like my friends and people who I know. Say it was like the class, like whole class which I used to go to primary school with, then I'd be like totally confident cause I've been at primary school with them for at least 5 years.</p> | 555 |
| <p>Yeah. And all these people that you're at school with now you've not known them that long yet have you? It's only a few months, most of them.</p> <p>I still have some friends there but, it's like a group of us, of friends and only two, there was four of us, yeah four of us, but then one of them wasn't there so there was only three of us and we were missing her.</p> | 559 |
| <p>Urm... okay. So if you're at a four here at the moment with your confidence and this is because you've, you know you have done it before and you've done it a few times, and you've been able to... you've got through that haven't you, what would it take to get you to the next step up to a five?</p> <p>I don't know</p> <p>What would it look like if you were at a five instead of a four?</p> <p>Five's more of like someone who didn't care if someone saw me do something, like that, five's more confident</p> <p>Mm</p> <p>Like do something, like my friends</p> | |

Comment [D69]: Confidence depends on how well knows audience

Comment [D70]: Long-standing friendships

| | | |
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| Mm | | |
| Cause their... their more of, kind of louder than me. So they're more confident on doing stuff. | | Comment [D71]: Comparing confidence to friends' confidence |
| Okay, so what about if your friends who are quite confident, what if they saw you performing something in front of the class, what would they say about you that... the things you've been able to... (inter) they'd say probably 'well done' | | |
| Yeah, and what would they be able to... how would they describe you? | | |
| Well they normally speak their mind, so if it was bad they'd say its bad | | Comment [D72]: Trust: Honest friends |
| (laughs) well that's kind of good to know isn't it, you want to know if you've done well and, or what you need to get better at I suppose don't you? | | |
| Mm, | | |
| It's good to have some honest friends. | | |
| Though sometimes it's like, you say but, they say, 'oh that was really bad' and you're like... (sigh) and then you get quite upset and so it not always that good | | Comment [D73]: Honest friends |
| Well are they helpful when they say that, do they tell you what you need to do to get better? | | |
| One of them'll go 'oh it wasn't that good actually' then one of | | |

| | |
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| <p>them will say, 'that was good'. One of them speaks their mind completely, the other one will say it's bad and then they'll say it's good, so they will speak their mind but not if they know it's going to offend me, they won't</p> | |
| <p>So they're a bit gentle about it</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>And do you find that helpful, having that kind of advice from your friends?</p> <p>Yeah cause like I have one person who'll speak their mind, but then the other person who will say nice things and that'll cheer me up.</p> | <p>Comment [D74]: Trust: Friends are honest</p> |
| <p>Mm, that's quite a nice balance really isn't it?</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>Okay, lovely. Let's check how we're doing (pause 2 secs). Right, now I'd like to ask you about.. erm anything at school that you would like to change?</p> <p>(inter) not really, I'm fine</p> <p>Anything that you could think of that would improve things? What about... to narrow it down a bit, is there anything you think you could do differently to make things better for yourself at school?</p> <p>Not really cause I'm in the top set, so I'm thinking I'm... I'm doing well so I'm going to just keep at it</p> | <p>Comment [D75]: Friendships</p> |
| | <p>Comment [D76]: Self-perceptions</p> |

| | | |
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| And you're happy at school and you feel quite confident there, got friends? | | |
| Yeah, I've made new friends and I've got some of my old friends | | Comment [D77]: New and old friends |
| That's nice. Okay, good so things are going really well at the moment, which is lovely to hear. What about can you think of anything that erm the teachers could maybe do differently to make school better? | | |
| Not really cause I understand why they're making us work harder. Cause like some people are like, 'aww' but then I understand why they're doing it to try to get us like better like careers and we can get better careers like... cause if we didn't work as hard and they just gave us easy work we'd probably get, we won't get such a good career | | Comment [D78]: Teachers help |
| yeah | | Comment [D79]: Career aspiration |
| cause we won't be able to do so much stuff, but if they work us hard, we're going to learn more and we're gonna be able to do more so then we'll be able to get a better career. | | Comment [D80]: Teachers help |
| That's very sensible. What a long term view! Okay. Then the last thing I'd like to ask you about is, if there is anyone you can think of who you would like me to feed this, erm, the information you've given me, back to? Who do you think would be interested in knowing about how you're getting on and also about how all | | |

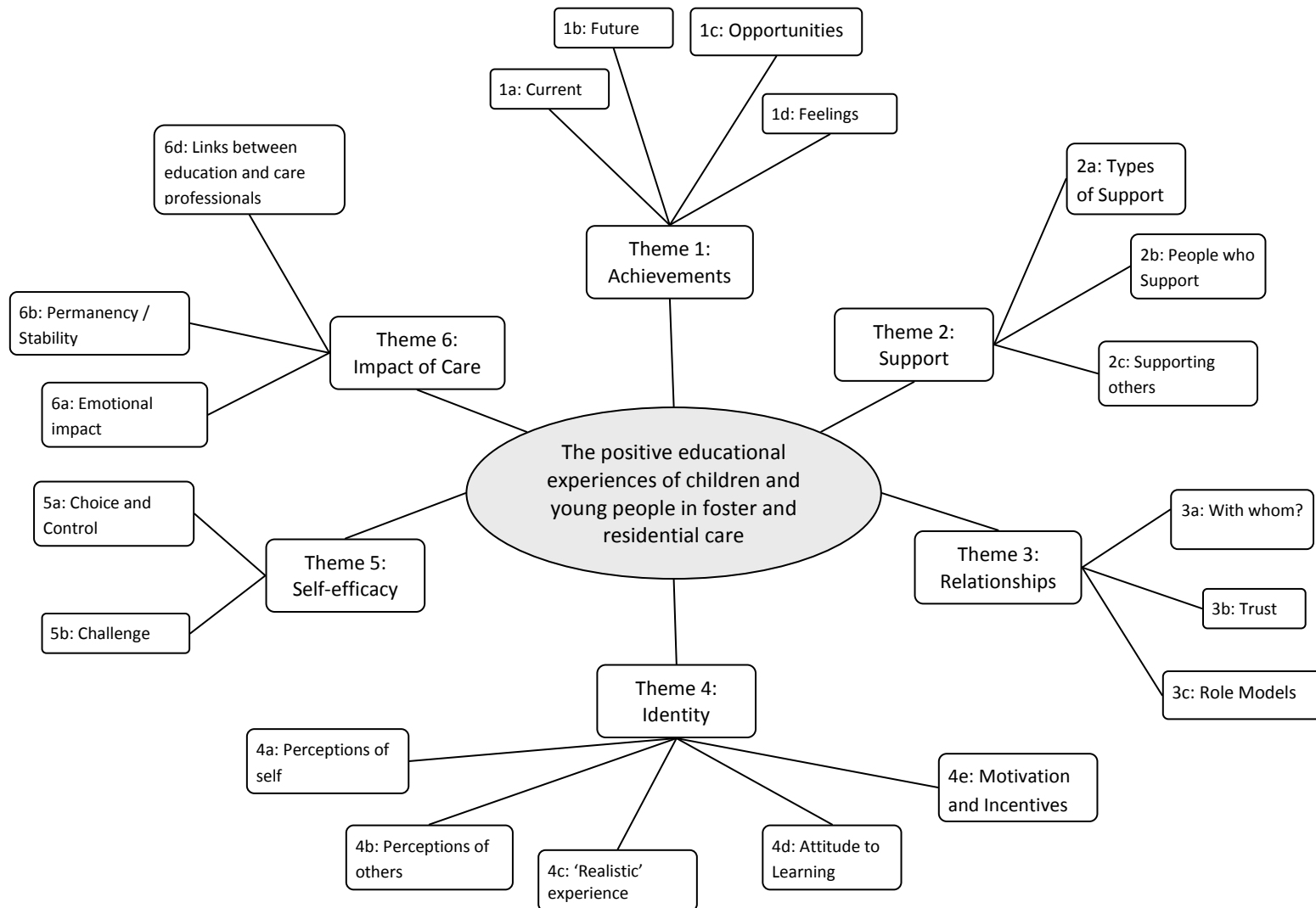
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| the other children and young people I'm interviewing are getting on? | |
| A would like my Nanny and Granddad to but then it's like do, do I think, do... will they understand? | |
| Well what I'm going to do, what I'm thinking of doing, because I've got to write a very big report at the end like I said, but what I'm also going to do is like a summary of all the things I've found out. So maybe one or two pages long with just some bullet points. So do you think that they would like to get something like that? | |
| Yeah, cause then they'll know what's going on and what we think. | |
| Yeah. Anybody else that you think would be useful. Who would like to know about it? | |
| Erm, probably A****, but then she's probably going be able to read ours isn't she? | |
| Yeah, yeah | |
| Erm, that's all I can really think of | |
| Is there anyone else that erm maybe that you don't know personally but other people that you think should know about the whole, the project altogether about what everyone, what all the children and young people have said? | |

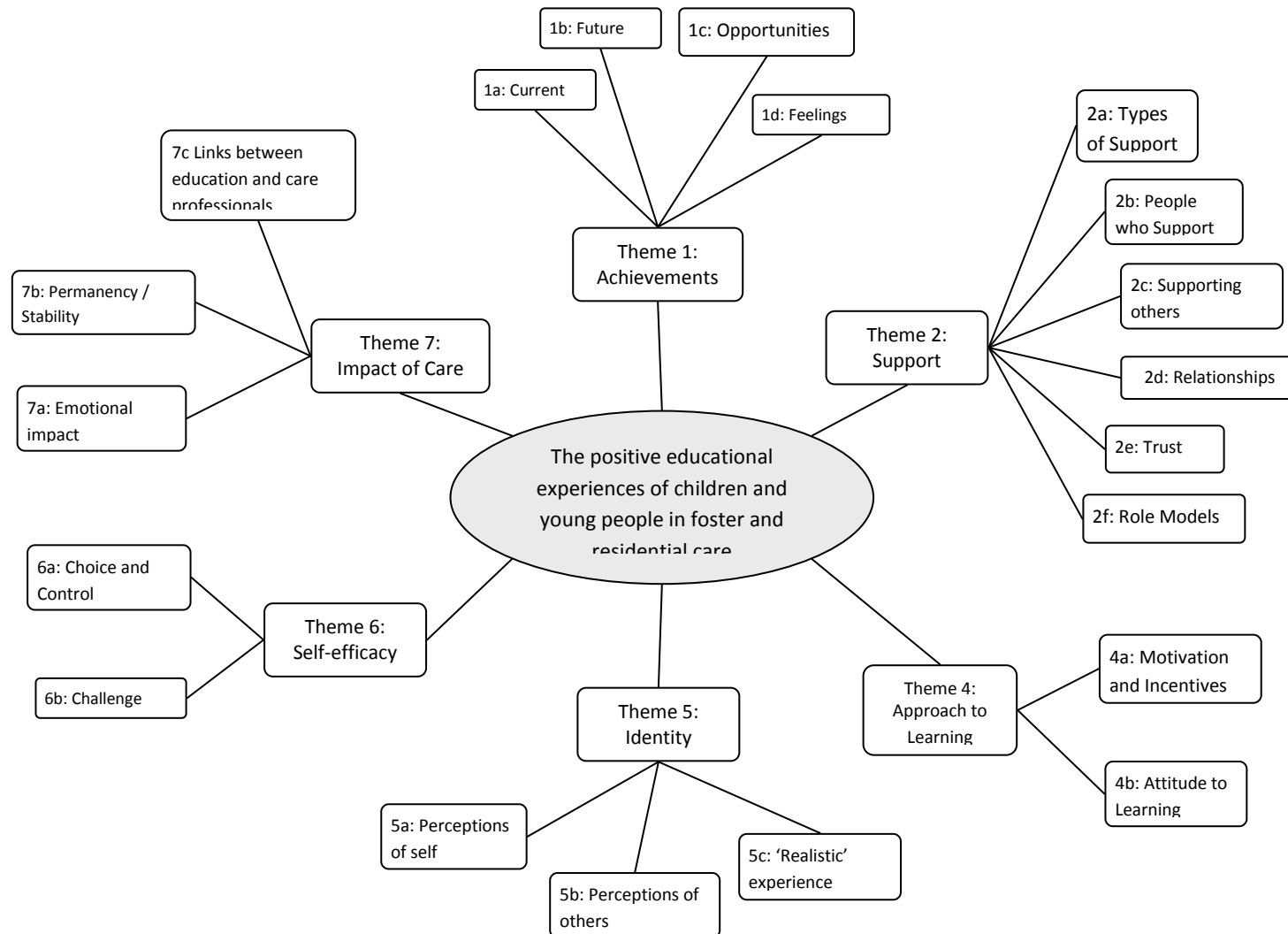
Comment [D81]: Involvement of grandparents

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| <p>I guess social workers should</p> <p>Um, Okay. And do you think your social workers or more than that, other social workers?</p> <p>I guess the people, cause most foster children have like social workers, their own ones, so probably maybe ours and the peoples their own ones. And like they get their social workers get one of theirs and then like mine G**** and P****'s social worker gets one of ours.</p> <p>Yeah, so all the ones that are involved in the children who are doing the project</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>Yeah okay. Can you think of anybody else?</p> <p>Not really no</p> <p>No? Sure?</p> <p>Sure.</p> <p>Okay</p> <p>And by the way I have an '*' on the end of my name.</p> <p>Oh, sorry. And I knew that as well, I think I did it and then I rubbed it out. How silly (laughs). That's because my friend ***** who I told you about, who's going to be typing this, erm, spells her name like that!</p> <p>Because I used to, people used to pronounce my name as R****,</p> | |
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| | |
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| but then I asked them to pronounce it as Robyn | |
| Yeah, Robyn | |
| That's why. So most people think it's got no '*' on there | |
| So people forget the '*' then. Well I should have known because | |
| I've seen it written down as well. Okay is there anything that you | |
| would like to ask me before we finish? | |
| Not really no | |
| No? Okay. Well thank you very much | |

Appendix J: Interim thematic maps





Appendix K: Codebook

| Theme | Subtheme | Code | Code Description |
|-----------------------|---------------------------|-------------------------|---|
| Theme 1: Achievements | 1a: Current Achievements | School | School-based achievements |
| | | Non School | Non-school achievements |
| | | Recreational Activities | Achievements through recreational activities and hobbies |
| | | Skills/Talents | Achievements through skills and talents |
| | 1b: Aspirations | Education | Educational aspirations |
| | | Career | Career aspirations |
| | | Other | Any other aspirations e.g. independent living |
| | 1c: Opportunities | Recreational Activities | Opportunities for achievement provided by recreational activities |
| | | Opportunities | Opportunities to achieve |
| | 1d: Pride in Achievements | Feelings of Pride | Pride associated with achievements |
| | | Recognition by Others | Recognition of an achievement by another person |
| Theme 2: Support | 2a: Types of Support | Career | Support for future employment |

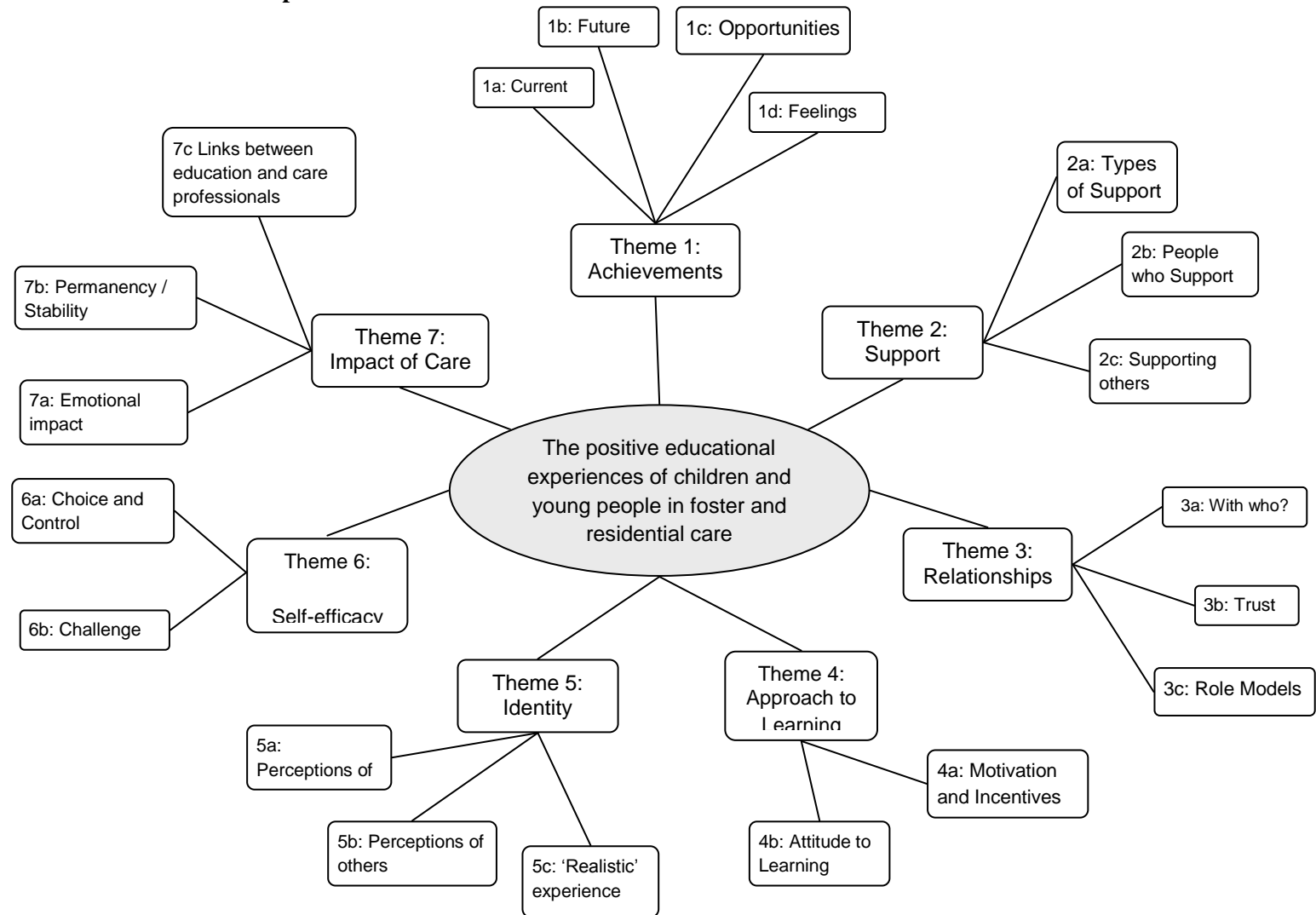
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|------------------------|------------------------|---------------------|--|
| | | Learning | Support with learning |
| | | Social/Emotional | Social and/or emotional support |
| | | Practical | Practical support e.g. resources |
| | 2b: People who Support | Family | Support from biological family |
| | | Foster Family | Support from foster family |
| | | Friends | Support from friends |
| | | Siblings | Support from siblings |
| | | Social Workers | Support from social workers |
| | | Teachers | Support from teachers |
| | | Teaching Assistants | Support from teaching assistants |
| | 2c: Supporting Others | Helping Others | Young person helps others |
| | | Responsibility | Young person has responsibilities relating to others |
| Theme 3: Relationships | 3a: With Whom? | Bullying | Experiences of bullying |
| | | Friendships | Importance/description of friendships |
| | | Carers | Relationships with carers |
| | | Family | Relationships with biological family |

| | | | |
|--------------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| | | Teachers | Relationships with teachers |
| | | Social Workers | Relationships with social workers |
| | | Relationships through interests | Relationships developed through hobbies and interests |
| | | Siblings | Relationships with siblings |
| | 3b: Trust | Trusting others | Trust in relationships |
| | | Feeling let down | Young person feeling let down by others |
| | | Secrets | Keeping or telling secrets |
| | 3c: Role Models | Positive | Role models who young people want to emulate |
| | | Negative | Role models who have provided examples of what not to do |
| | Theme 4: Approach to Education | 4a: Motivation | Incentives |
| Motivation | | | Demonstration of motivation for learning |
| Aspirations | | | Motivated to learn in order to achieve aspirations |
| 4b: Attitude to Learning | | To achieve goals | Learning seen as way to achieve goals |
| | | Lifelong | Learning is ongoing |
| | | Future education plans | Young person demonstrates interest in further and/or higher education |

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| Theme 5: Identity | 5a: Perceptions of Self | Positive self perceptions | Young person has positive self-perceptions |
| | | Confidence | Young person has confidence in self |
| | | Skills/Talents | Young person names skills and talents they have |
| | | Self-Awareness | Demonstration of self awareness |
| | | Lacking confidence | Young person lacks confidence in self |
| | 5b: Perceptions of others | Negative stereotypes | Young person describes negative stereotypes |
| | | Others' perceptions of care | Description of how others perceive care |
| | | Others' perceptions of abilities | Description of how others perceive young person's abilities |
| | 5c: Wanting a 'realistic' experience | Normality | Young person wants to be treated like 'normal' i.e. as though they were not in care |
| | | Being treated fairly | Young person wants to be treated fairly |
| Theme 6: Self-Efficacy | 6a: 'Getting a Say' | Being Heard | Young person talks about being listened to |
| | | Choice | Young person talks about experience/importance of having choice |
| | | Decision Making | Young person talks about involvement in decision-making |
| | | Locus on Control | Young person demonstrates internal or external attribution |

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| | | Maturity | Importance of 'getting a say' as young person matures |
| | 6b: Challenge | Challenge | Experiences of challenge |
| | | Self-Confidence | Experiences of challenge have increase confidence |
| | | Perseverance | Young person perseveres at challenges |
| | | Recreational Activities | Challenges from recreational activities |
| Theme 7: Impact of Care | 7a: Emotional Impact | Altered mood | Change in mood associated with entering and remaining in care |
| | | Happiness | Happiness as related to being in care |
| | 7b: Permanency and stability | Length of Placement | Young person indicates length of current placement |
| | | Duration of relationships | Young person mentions new and/or ongoing relationships as related to care experience e.g. ongoing relationships linked to long-term placement |
| | | Recreational Activities | Opportunities to develop and maintain hobbies |
| | | Missed school | Missed school associated with care moves |
| | 7c: Links Between Education and Care | Links between professionals | Carers and education professionals demonstrate communication or lack of communication |
| | | Wasting time | Placement moves leading to school moves and time wasted doing inappropriate work |

Appendix L: Final Thematic Map



Appendix M: Ethical approval letter from the University of East London



MS NICOLA CANN
FLAT 1, ARCHERS APARTMENTS
235 GROVE ROAD, CHADWELL HEATH
ROMFORD
RM6 4DW

Date: 12 April 2011

Dear Nicola,

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Project Title: | <i>The Positive Educational Experiences of 'Looked After' Children and Young People: A Comparison of Residential Foster Care</i> |
| Researcher(s): | <i>Nicola Cann</i> |
| Supervisor(s): | <i>Mark Fox</i> |

I am writing to confirm that the review panel appointed to your application have now granted ethical approval to your research project on behalf of University Research Ethics Committee (UREC).

Should any significant adverse events or considerable changes occur in connection with this research project that may consequently alter relevant ethical considerations, this must be reported immediately to UREC. Subsequent to such changes an Ethical Amendment Form should be completed and submitted to UREC.

Approval is given on the understanding that the 'UEL Code of Good Practice in Research' (www.uel.ac.uk/qa/manual/documents/codeofgoodpracticeinresearch.doc) is adhered to.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Merlin Harries', written in a cursive style.

Merlin Harries
University Research Ethics Committee
Email: m.harries@uel.ac.uk