

VOLUME 1

“I HAVE NO CLUE HOW I SURVIVED SCHOOL LET ALONE DONE WELL”:
AN INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE LIVED
EXPERIENCES OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN CARE WHO HAVE ACHIEVED
EDUCATIONAL SUCCESS

By

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A thesis submitted to The University of Birmingham for the DOCTORATE OF
APPLIED EDUCATIONAL AND CHILD PSYCHOLOGY

School of Education

University of Birmingham

June 2020

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ABSTRACT

Very little is known about the educational experiences of young people in care (Benbenishty, Siegel and Astor, 2018), with even less attention given to the minority of children in care who are educationally successful (Jackson and Cameron, 2011). This research is a small-scale study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) that sought to explore the lived experiences of young people in care who were considered by professionals as having achieved educational success. Five school-aged young people attending mainstream secondary schools were interviewed. Unlike previous qualitative studies, IPA was used as the method of data analysis to address the individuality of each participant's lived experiences. Despite the uniqueness of their experiences, there were a number of common themes including: connectedness, support and coping, stability vs instability, the future and self. Findings highlighted the importance of connectedness, with supportive caring relationships with others seen as crucial. These young people appeared to experience more facilitative factors from their perspective. However, the barriers they did experience were significant for some and consistent with previous research. This study highlights that it appears to be the dynamic interplay of personal and environmental factors that is crucial in the drive towards educational success. The unique contribution of this study and implication for practice are discussed. Future research could build on the current findings by conducting research in different settings, exploring more specific aspects of their school experiences in detail, such as their social, emotional and mental health or increasing child participation so that young people themselves can define educational success and be even more actively involved in the research design.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people I will be indebted to for their support during this time completing my doctoral studies. Thank you for spurring me on. Below are a particular few, without whom this work would not have happened.

Thanks must go firstly to the young people who took part in this study, who were so willing and honest in sharing their experiences.

To my colleagues on placement for their support and encouragement along this journey. Particular thanks to my supervisor, Stevan, for being the ever-calming influence and Marion, who was instrumental in supporting the early stages of this research and participant recruitment.

To Huw, my university tutor, for his support, wise words and feedback, which were invaluable.

Finally, thanks must go to my family. I would not be where I am today without you all, in more ways than you will ever know. Dad, I promise no more proof reading!

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ACRONYMS

DfE - Department for Education

DfES - Department for Education and Skills

EHCPs – Education Health and Care Plans

EP - Educational Psychologist

EPS - Educational Psychology Service

IPA - Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

NEET - Not in Education, Employment or Training

NSPCC - National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children

PATH - Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope

PEP - Personal Education Plan

TEP - Trainee Educational Psychologist

U.K. - United Kingdom

VSH - Virtual School Head

YiPPEE - Young People in Public Care Pathways to Education in Europe

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

'In removing children from their homes and birth families and placing them in care, we are making them a promise that we will help them with a brighter future. To deliver on that promise, we must pay attention to education'

(Vera Institute of Justice, 2004, p. 10)

1.1 Professional Context

This research was conducted as part of a doctoral training course in Applied Educational and Child Psychology. In addition to completing this research as a course requirement, I also work as a trainee educational psychologist (TEP) on placement in a large county educational psychology service (EPS) in the East Midlands. This research is volume one of a two volume thesis comprising of a small-scale study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the voice of young people in care who have achieved educational success.

My professional interest in children, both in care and who are adopted, developed through my previous role as a teacher. Later, in my role as a TEP, my interest grew when working with some young people in care. This population of children can be particularly vulnerable given their past, and sometimes current, experiences and may need the support of additional services such as EPSs. In my casework as a TEP, I began to notice that many of the children in care with whom I had involvement with were experiencing a range of challenges, including difficulties with social, emotional and mental health and academic attainment. This made me reflect on what it might look like if these children were being successful in education. Consequently, my aim is to make a positive contribution through my research by focusing on the phenomenon

of educational success, the definition of which is explored in Chapter 2 Section 2.12, within a small group of children in care.

Considering educational success from the perspective of the young people themselves was a particular interest of mine, rather than considering it from the perspective of professionals supporting the young people. I felt it was important to consider the lived experiences of the young people participating in this study. It is hoped that in listening to these young people with direct and personal experience of the care system, who are succeeding educationally despite challenges they may have faced, professionals can further develop their practice by understanding their needs from their perspective and how they can be better supported. The more professionals can identify and understand the possible facilitative factors and barriers to the educational success of children in care, the more likely they are able to support progress towards positive outcomes for children in care they work with in their future practice.

IPA, which is explored in greater depth in Chapter 3, aims to investigate how participants make sense of their personal and social world, with a focus on the meanings for them of particular experiences, events or states (Smith and Osborn, 2015). As a qualitative approach to research, IPA allows the researcher the greatest chance to make sense of the innermost thoughts of the lived experience of the participants (Alase, 2017). In this current study, the particular experience being investigated is educational success (see Chapter 2 Section 2.12 for the definition used in this study) and the aim is to explore how these participants make sense of it. The end result of a successful piece of IPA research is likely to involve 'giving a voice' that

is capturing and reflecting on the main statements and concerns of participants and 'making sense' that is suggesting an interpretation of this information, which is grounded in their accounts (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Therefore, I have the hope of 'giving a voice' to the participants who took part in this study.

1.2 Organisation of Thesis

This thesis comprises of five chapters. Chapter 1 outlines the professional context of this research. Chapter 2 is a review of relevant literature on the education of children in care. Chapter 3 focuses on the methodology. IPA is explored in more detail. My philosophical and methodological stance, the method, data collection and analysis approaches are all outlined. Chapter 4 describes the findings of the research, which are discussed in relation to previous research. Strengths, limitations, implications for practice and future research are also explored. Finally, chapter 5 presents a summary and conclusions of the research.

Looked after children are also often referred to as children in care, a phrase which many children and young people favour (NSPCC, 2019). For this reason, and because it is also the term used within the local authority where I am on placement, children in care as opposed to looked after children will be the term used throughout this thesis.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter introduces key literature about the education of children in care. Firstly, the term 'looked after' is defined. Then, the context at a national and local level, policy and guidance and educational outcomes for children in care are reviewed. Next, the facilitative factors and barriers to educational success, as identified from previous research from the perspective of young people where possible, are examined. Then education of children in care is discussed in relation to educational psychology, the voice of the child and the concept of educational success. Finally, a synthesis and critique of previous studies is provided, identifying gaps in the literature, leading to a summary of the current study.

2.2 Search Strategy

This literature review focused on four key areas: children in care, their education, the voice of these young people and educational success. The review of the literature was conducted between August 2019 and March 2020. Three databases (EBSCO, Web of Science Core Collection and PsycInfo) were systematically searched for relevant journal articles with a combination of key terms including: children in care, education, voice of young people and educational success. Key terms also included relevant synonyms (see below). Additional internet searches were conducted, which further identified relevant literature.

While there was no specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, given the focus was not a systematic literature review, searches were limited to articles published in English and

after 1989. This date was chosen because this is the date the Children Act (1989) was published which emphasised the significance of exploring the views of children. Furthermore, all titles and abstracts were screened to ensure relevance to the key areas of the study outlined above.

Search terms included:

- For children in care: Looked after children or lac or foster care or children in care or out of home care
- For education: education or school* or learning or teaching or classroom or education system
- For the voice of young people: experience* or percept* or attitudes or view* or voice or personal experience* or reflect*
- For educational success: high achiev* or educational success or academic achiev* or academic attainment or success

2.3 What Does the Term 'looked after' Mean?

The term 'looked after' is defined in Section 22 of the 1989 Children Act (1989), which also identifies the general duty of local authorities regarding looked after children. A child is legally considered looked after by a local authority if they fit one of the following categories:

- Are provided with accommodation for an uninterrupted period of longer than 24 hours (see Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21)
- If a care order is granted
- If a placement order is granted (see Children Act 1989, Part IV)

Children or young people may be placed in care with or without parental agreement (voluntary or compulsory respectively) (Gorham, 2009). Section 20 of the Children Act (1989) states a voluntary agreement permits a local authority to give accommodation to any child in need if they believe that in doing so it would safeguard or support the welfare of that child (DfE, 2018a). This requires the consent of those with parental responsibility where a child is under 16 (DfE, 2018a).

In the Children Act (1989), a care order is a court order that can be applied for by a local authority or an authorised person to: (a) place a child in the care of a designated local authority; or (b) put the child under the supervision of a designated local authority.

A placement order is a court order, which provides a local authority with the legal right to place a child for adoption with any potential adopters selected by the local authority. It can only be applied for by a local authority (DfE, 2018a). A child is no longer referred to as a looked after when they turn 18 (DfE, 2019b). On their 18th birthday, their status alters to being a young adult entitled to help and assistance from the local authority (DfE, 2019b).

2.4 National Context

National statistics indicate that, as of the year ending 31 March 2019, in England there were 78,150 children in care, equivalent to 65 in 10,000; a rise of 4% from the previous year which followed the growth of recent years (DfE, 2019a). In 2018-2019, abuse and neglect was the primary reason for being in care (63%), followed by family dysfunction (14%), family in acute stress (8%), absent parenting (7%), child disability

(3%), parent illness (3%) and other (2%) (DfE, 2019a). The characteristics of children in care remain consistent with the previous year, with slightly more than half (56%) being male and the biggest age group being aged 10-15 (39%). The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children has risen to 11% (5,070) with a majority being in care for the primary reason of absent parenting (DfE, 2019a). Considering legal status, as of 31 March 2019, in England most children in care were subject to a care order (75%) with some in care under voluntary agreement (18%) or a placement order (7%) and very few were detained for child protection or under a youth justice legal status (less than 0.5%) (DfE, 2019a). Regarding the placement of children in care, a majority were in foster placements (72%) with 13% of these children being placed with relatives or friends (DfE, 2019a). The remaining children in care were in residential children's homes, secure units or living semi-independently (12%), living with their parents (7%), living independently or in residential employment (4%), or living with potential adopters (3%) (DfE, 2019a). Considering stability of placements, 68% had one placement, yet 10% experienced three or more placements over the year (DfE, 2019a).

2.5 Local Context

2.5.1 Characteristics of the Children and Young People in Care

An annual report from the Virtual School Head (VSH) was published in November 2019 of the local authority in which this research took place, covering the period September 2018 - August 2019. The report indicated that on 24th July 2019, the last day of the academic year, there were 1138 children in care, of which 728 (339 female and 389 male) were of statutory school age. Of the school age children, 33 were in reception,

80 Key Stage One, 223 Key Stage Two, 217 Key Stage Three and 175 Key Stage Four. There were 19 children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and 27% of children in care were unaccompanied asylum seekers. Location of placements included 24% being placed out of the authority and 76% placed in the authority.

Ethnicity	Percentage
Any Other White Background	4%
White Irish Black African	1%
White British	76%
Any Other Ethnic Group	4%
White and Black Caribbean	3%
White and Black African	1%
Any Other Mixed Background	4%
Any Other Black Background	1%
Black African	4%
Any Other Asian Background	2%

Table 1: Ethnicity of the children in care in the County Council

2.5.2 Academic Outcomes

At Foundation Stage, 68% of children in care achieved a good level of development in the Early Learning Goals, which was a significant improvement from 44% in 2018. This was only slightly behind the performance of all children in the county (71%) and nationally (72%) the previous academic year. At Key Stage 1, 41% achieved the expected standard in reading, writing and maths while at Key Stage 2 this reduced to only 24%. There were no permanent exclusions in the 2018-2019 academic year for

children in care, but 12.6% received a fixed term exclusion. Finally, considering post 16 young people, there was a reduction in young people in care not in education, employment or training (NEET) although exact data reflecting this was not available in the report.

2.6 Policy and Guidance

The educational achievement of children in care has previously been a relatively ignored area within policy (Lipkin, 2016). The principal reason for this was because within the care system 'care' and 'education' were viewed as distinctly discrete, both from an administration and conceptual perspective (Lipkin, 2016). The Children Act (1989) states the duty of local authorities to safeguard and support the welfare of children in their care, including an explicit duty to promote educational achievement (DfE, 2018b). Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) and the Children Act (2004) gave greater consideration to the education of children in care. Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a) stressed a collective responsibility, 'corporate parenting', for Children's Services to achieve better outcomes for children. The Children Act (2004) required local authorities to promote the educational accomplishments of children in care. Furthermore, The Children Act (2004) stated that local authorities were also expected to carefully consider the educational implications of any decisions regarding the welfare of children in care. A fundamental aspect of care plans are Personal Education Plans (PEPs), which create strategic plans aimed to support the educational attainment of the child, helping them reach their potential academically and in life (Firth and Fletcher, 2001). These ought to reflect the significance of a personalised approach towards learning while, at the same time, extending aspirations (Craddock, 2008).

The Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000) and the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) ensured that local authorities were legally obligated to support young people in care up to the age of 25 if in education full time. The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) also identified the functions of the designated teacher, a teacher which every school needs to identify who promotes the education of children in care (Sebba and Berridge, 2019). The designated teacher is expected to be an advocate for children in care and help detect any potential problems in respect to their education (Brodie, 2010). Furthermore, the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) actioned some of the pledges of the White Paper Care Matters (DfES, 2007) with the focus being on improving the statutory framework of the care system. Four principles became protected in legislation: a duty to practice corporate parenting for all involved in the lives of children in care, the importance of the voice of the child, providing continuity and stability of placements and having high educational aspirations (Lipkin, 2016).

In 2007, England introduced Virtual Schools as a pilot, with the focus of supporting the education of children in care (Sebba and Berridge, 2019). Rather than being a physical school, a Virtual School involves a team of professionals, often teachers, working in a local authority with schools and other services to promote the education of children in care (Sebba and Berridge, 2019). In light of the White Paper Care Matters (DfES, 2007), the Children and Young Persons Act (2008) and the Children and Families Act (2014), which revised the (1989) Children Act, local authorities in England were required to employ a VSH.

Pupil premium plus is additional funding introduced in 2014 (DfE, 2014), which is controlled by the VSH, for each child in care to be spent in line with their needs identified in their PEPs (Sebba and Berridge, 2019). Some, if not all, is allocated to school while some can be held back for strategic development by the Virtual School as long as it can be indicated how it benefits children in care (Sebba and Berridge, 2019). Pupil premium plus currently stands at £2300 per pupil. Ofsted monitors the spending to ensure it is spent in line with the pupils' PEP targets (Sebba and Berridge, 2019).

In 2014, there were further developments concerning both the care and education of children in care. The Children and Families Act (2014) led to significant modifications in the special educational needs framework with the introduction of EHCPs, replacing statements and learning difficulty assessments (Lipkin, 2016). Given that a high percentage of children in care have special educational needs (in 2018 it was 55.5%, DfE, 2019a), many of these will have EHCPs (in 2018 it was 26.5%, DfE, 2019a).

Statutory Guidance published in February 2018 from the DfE (DfE, 2018b) outlines how professionals should support the education of children in care and care leavers. It outlines the required functions of the VSH when improving the education of children in care, children adopted or children under a special guardianship order (DfE, 2018b). A review conducted by Ofsted (Ofsted, 2012), focusing on evaluating the impact of Virtual Schools, indicated some effective approaches for individual pupils that made a difference to their educational progress, stability of placements and emotional

wellbeing. However, despite some evidence of effective PEPs (Brodie, 2010), many were not adequately aspirational (Ofsted, 2012).

2.7 Educational Outcomes for Children and Young People in Care

Research regarding the education of children in care indicates a gap in attainment in comparison to their peers (Fernandez, 2019). Finishing primary or secondary school is less likely for these children (Berlin, Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Sebba *et al.*, 2015) with academic achievement often lower than their peers (Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011; Berger *et al.*, 2015). They are at greater risk of being absent or excluded from school (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) and they face being excluded from opportunities both in higher education and wider life prospects (Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Driscoll, 2018).

The latest statistics (DfE, 2019b) focusing on the outcomes for children in care, in comparison to their peers, are stark and difficulties appear to transcend the full length of the school career:

- In Key Stage 1, the attainment for children in care is much lower in comparison to children who are not in care, with the largest differences in maths and writing (DfE, 2019b).
- In Key Stage 2, the attainment for children in care is also much lower, with 35% reaching the expected standard in reading, writing and maths compared to 65% for children not in care (DfE, 2019b).
- In Key Stage 4, the average Attainment 8 score (the average achievement for pupils in up to eight qualifications including English and maths) for children in

care is again much lower (18.8) in comparison to children not in care (44.4) (DfE, 2019b). The percentage of children in care that passed English and maths was 17.5% compared to 59.4% of children not in care.

- In 2018, 55.5% of children in care had a special educational need, compared to 14.6% of all children (DfE, 2019b).
- Only 6% of care leavers from England aged 19-21 were known to be attending higher education and 39% were NEET (DfE, 2019a).

An array of negative life outcomes, potentially impacted by educational disadvantage, are more widespread in those who have been in care, such as unemployment, homelessness and receiving social welfare support (Viner and Taylor, 2005; Berlin, Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011). The Social Exclusion Unit (2003) reported at the time that about a quarter of adults in prison had experienced time in care. Despite the potentially bleak educational outcomes for children in care, there are some who are successful in education (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). Furthermore, research has also shown that the attainment gap in education of children in care compared to the general population may reduce or disappear when other factors are considered (Luke and O'Higgins, 2018).

In certain circumstances, children in care may experience better educational outcomes (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). Young people in care indicated strongly that coming into care was considered educationally beneficial (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) with positive

impacts but this does not assume similarity of experiences for all children, with some having negative experiences (Brodie, 2010). Children in care have expressed how important they view education in their lives (DfES, 2007). Their aspirations are no different from their peers they want to finish school and progress onto further education or training (Morton, 2016).

2.8 Research into the Education of Children in Care: Facilitative Factors

Previous research into children in care has identified a range of facilitative factors to educational success. The following areas will be reviewed: experiencing stability, a caring relationship with a significant adult, school belonging and connectedness, participation in social and leisure activities, support and resources and resilience and personal attributes.

2.8.1 Experiencing Stability

The latest statistics (DfE, 2019b) indicate that at Key Stage 4, young people in long term care have better Progress 8 scores (a score looking at the progress from the end of Key Stage 2 to the end of Key Stage 4) compared to those whose current period in care is much shorter. Sutcliffe, Gardiner and Melhuish (2017) supported this, finding with evidence that being in care at an earlier point and for longer was commonly advantageous for educational progress. A majority of young people who were making good educational progress had stable long term placements (Berridge *et al.*, 2015). Yet it is worth considering that, despite such evidence, associating length of care placements with better outcomes can be complex (Brodie, 2010).

Many reviews have highlighted that reducing the number of placement changes is one of the most vital factors in improving educational outcomes for children in care (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003; Leone and Weinberg, 2012; The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2014b, 2014a; Brownell *et al.*, 2015). Despite its age, the Social Exclusion Unit's (2003) key messages are still relevant today. One such message was the call for greater stability, meaning that children do not need to move home or school on a regular basis. Exploring the factors that facilitate placement stability, Rock *et al.*'s (2015) systematic review found that being placed with siblings, older foster carers, foster carers with greater experience and good parenting skills and foster carers who created opportunities for educational development were all facilitative factors. Furthermore, considering school mobility, having fewer changes in schooling for children unsurprisingly provides stability and consistency (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018) and has been shown to have a positive influence on academic attainment, relationships with peers and wellbeing (Pecora, 2012; Stoddart, 2012; Sebba *et al.*, 2015), while also allowing young people to make new attachments (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006).

Stability is a valued factor according to the views of children in care across a range of research (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sugden, 2013; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). A five year action research project conducted by Jackson and colleagues (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005), which followed care leavers who went onto university, found those that had been most successful had experienced a stable foster home that offered sustained emotional and

practical support for the duration of their university experience. Interestingly, most care leavers noted that, despite having numerous placements, there was one that made a significant difference to their life (Morton, 2016). For most, it was their last placement where they found their 'family', which is important given this happened in their high school years, a crucial academic time especially for those wanting to transition to further education (Morton, 2016). Furthermore, the Young People in Public Care Pathways to Education in Europe (YIPPEE) project, which aimed to investigate how more young people in care could be supported to remain in education, found when interviewing educationally successful young people that they perceived placement and schooling stability vital factors (Jackson and Cameron, 2011).

Those who experienced less stability were united in acknowledging the unhelpfulness of this context and the influential nature of their final long-term placement (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). Stability in the home environment and routines were also highly valued, such as regular times for waking and eating meals. While it is hard to determine if the quantity of moves had a direct influence on outcomes for these young people, they perceived stability as an influential factor in their own success (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). A key message from young people in care was that the perceived high levels of disruption and negative influence on their education was more important than the number of placements they experienced (Brodie, 2010). Furthermore, the level of satisfaction with placements as opposed to the type of placement was vital, relative to positive educational outcomes (Brodie, 2010).

2.8.2 A Caring Relationship with a Significant Adult

Feelings of attachment towards a significant adult is important for all young people (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). Yet for children in care, who may previously have experienced significant adults who have not been able to provide consistency in their care or parenting that meets their needs, positive attachment is crucial (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). Many children in care have experienced a range of factors that could result in relational trauma and feelings of loss such as neglect, different forms of abuse, witnessing domestic violence (Bomber and Hughes, 2013), tremendous levels of stress in the family home (Rees, 2006) and fractured attachments with parents or carers (Macdonald and Millen, 2012). However, there is potential for children to start to recover from the separation from their damaging family contexts if they have sensitivity and continuity in their care (Aldgate, 1990). Attachment is explained as the 'lasting psychological connectedness between human beings' (Bowlby, 1969, p. 194). Attachment research indicates that children have the capability to develop new attachments, will have many different attachments as they grow (Fahlberg, 1991) and patterns of attachment remain flexible and impermanent for children (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). How children's attachment needs are met will impact on how they perceive the world, trust people and ask for support (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). If an adult is attuned and sensitive to meeting their needs, providing consistency and responsiveness in care, a secure attachment may develop. When the opposite occurs and the adult is not attuned, insensitive and inconsistent in their care, insecure attachments may develop (Bowlby, 1969; Ainsworth *et al.*, 1978).

Sebba and Luke (2019) identified that most papers in the recent special edition of the Oxford Review of Education focusing on children in care (volume 45, issue 4), highlighted the importance of having supportive and positive relationships with a minimum of one significant adult in the home or school context. Research suggests that to have a person who genuinely cared about the young person and their successes and believed in them was critical (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Neal, 2017; Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). The main features of these relationships were feelings of attachment, belonging, trust and being safe, warm and nurtured (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006). These young people needed to have a sense that their lives mattered and they would not, like previous experiences, be discarded (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). It is not necessary for the significant adult to live with the young person but they must have the ability to offer a warm relationship with psychological and emotional support, encouraging the young person's capacity for learning (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018).

Teachers and school staff were seen as central to the young people in supporting their educational progress (Sugden, 2013; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Sebba *et al.*, 2015), with many young people from a care background being able to name one teacher who made an impact on their lives (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Merdinger *et al.*, 2005; Hass and Graydon, 2009; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Morton, 2016; Neal, 2017). Carers, teachers and pastoral staff from schools were all perceived as important on a day to day basis for many young people in supporting their educational progress (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). Young people revealed that while carers and teachers were most

regularly referred to as people supporting their education (Harker *et al.*, 2003), remaining a consistent perspective at follow-up interviews (Harker *et al.*, 2004), teachers were placed above the foster carer and social worker as those who supported their educational progress (Harker *et al.*, 2004). This possibly suggests the emphasis which teachers place on education and consequently the pivotal role that teaching staff can play in the educational progress of these young people (Sugden, 2013).

2.8.3 School Belonging and Connectedness

Having a sense of belonging, acceptance and social connectedness is an essential human need for all people (Maslow, 1970). One factor regularly ignored in existing research regarding educational experience of children in care is their perceived feeling of social support and connectedness to the school community, termed a sense of belonging (Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020). This is created in educational settings, partly through both formal and informal social interactions children experience with their peers, teachers and wider school staff (Ma, 2003). For children in care, a sense of belonging and being included is particularly important in helping them be successful (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006).

School is valued as being a place to experience relative normality for young people in care (Morton, 2016; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018), which is fundamental for positive emotional, social and cognitive development (Harper Browne, 2014). School was also perceived as a source of security and relief where they could escape the trauma they had experienced at home (Morton, 2016) and it was perceived as a positive substitute for their unsettled lives (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005). Younger children

perceived it as a place where they could belong to the school community, through offering access to social groups and access to play (Sugden, 2013). These children were supported to develop a sense of belonging in school through their interactions with their teacher and peers (Sugden, 2013).

A majority of care leavers who successfully completed high school expressed a strong sense of connectedness to school, staff members (especially teachers or counsellors), school clubs, sports, music activities or their peers (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). Themes that were identified within school connectedness was school seen as: an anchor in their unsettled lives, a place providing normality and purpose, a predictable setting offering an opportunity for a sense of control, a place with caring adults being attentive and finally a place for connecting with peers and offering opportunities for supportive relationships with peers and a sense of belonging (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). Care leavers often described school as a safe haven, which was a source of emotional comfort where talents and competencies were encouraged (Hass, Allen and Amoah, 2014; Rios and Rocco, 2014) and where academic rigour and information about college entrance was provided (Rios and Rocco, 2014).

2.8.4 Participation in Social and Leisure Activities

Research has indicated that social, leisure and informal learning activities have a positive influence on educational achievements and participation, especially on young people from disadvantaged backgrounds (Hollingworth, 2012). The Care Matters paper (DfES, 2007) stated that participating in social and leisure activities can have a positive influence on self-esteem and wellbeing for children currently in care and care

leavers and can influence their educational achievement as well as future success in employment. Research has indicated that many educationally successful care leavers had been actively involved in a range of social and leisure activities, supporting positive experiences, informal learning, boosting self-esteem and widening their social support networks by mixing with children not in care (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Merdinger *et al.*, 2005; Lovitt and Emerson, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Neal, 2017). For young people in care, school attendance and completing secondary school education was found to be helped by involvement in extra-curricular or community based programmes in three quarters of participants (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). While not necessarily the main activity referenced, being involved in sport was highlighted as motivating school attendance and belonging through team participation (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018).

2.8.5 Support and Resources

From the perspective of young people, Cameron (2007) stated that support in their education was perceived as a significant factor for them achieving. Support and resources such as a space to complete homework, financial support, access to appropriate accommodation for those leaving care, educational advice and emotional support were identified as factors that were important for their education and allowed them to follow their educational goals (Harker *et al.*, 2004; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). A lack of practical resources, particularly in residential homes, such as access to books or a quiet space to complete homework, was viewed as a significant barrier to educational success (Martin and Jackson, 2002). Morton (2016) found that

resources in school were used by young people in care to support them to complete college applications, write personal statements and research scholarships. Individual tuition was also common, with many young people in care believing it supported their educational progress (Berridge *et al.*, 2015).

Additionally, moving to more educationally supportive placements was perceived by young people themselves to generate improvements in educational achievement (Dearden, 2004; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Rios and Rocco, 2014). A review looking into factors contributing to educational achievement of children in care found agreement that carers involved in schooling was linked to higher educational attainment, suggesting that the characteristics of carers could act as protective factors (O'Higgins, Sebba and Gardner, 2017). Higher educational expectations from carers, parents or carers showing an interest in education, and living in an environment where education is valued were related to better outcomes for young people (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Pecora *et al.*, 2006; Flynn, Tessier and Coulombe, 2013; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018). Therefore, carers should be encouraged to take a significant role in assisting the education of their foster child's education (Cameron *et al.*, 2010; Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2010).

Considering the nature of support, direct educational support from teachers (Sugden, 2013) or university tutors (Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Pinkney and Walker, 2020) was very important to young people. Academic support, as well as encouragement and help from foster parents in areas such as extracurricular activities through to college

applications, was noted by academically successful young people (Morton, 2016) yet a key recommendation from the Social Exclusion Unit (2003) was the need for better training for carers regarding children's education. In addition to academic support in class and university, wider support with school attendance and emotional wellbeing was identified as key, highlighting the multidimensional nature of support (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). Emotional support was perceived as important (Strolin-Goltzman *et al.*, 2016; Neal, 2017; Pinkney and Walker, 2020) and even more so than access to practical resources (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; Brodie, 2010). Young people needed ongoing support that was specific and relational in nature (Pinkney and Walker, 2020). For some, the empathy, care and advocacy displayed by educational professionals was also important (Hass, Allen and Amoah, 2014).

Research suggests the significance of having a mentor for children in care cannot be overstated (Morton, 2016). Young people were able to name adults in the community who offered important sources of support (Rios, 2008; Hass and Graydon, 2009; Morton, 2016). Support from adult mentors facilitated young people with prioritising education, provided emotional support that strengthened educational success (Strolin-Goltzman *et al.*, 2016) and supported the application and enrolment process to college (Rios and Rocco, 2014). Mentors were also identified as the main reason for college attendance and succeeding academically (Rios, 2008). Mentors should be reliable, consistent, build trust (Salazar *et al.*, 2016) and be educationally knowledgeable (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rios and Rocco, 2014). More specifically, school-based mentoring can successfully encourage the social and educational capabilities of

children in care beyond school (Carroll and Cameron, 2017). Often this involves pairing university students with young people in care (Carroll and Cameron, 2017). Mentors were highly thought of by young people in care who were academically high achieving, especially with respect to assimilation into the culture of higher education (Martin and Jackson, 2002) and were considered a facilitative factor when they offered consistent encouragement and support (Jackson and Martin, 1998). Evaluations of mentoring schemes indicate that they were most successful when the relationships were maintained over time, where they were structured to ensure regular contact with meaningful and practical support offered and where an emotional bond was established (Cameron, Connolly and Jackson, 2015).

2.8.6 Resilience and Personal Attributes

Fortunately, not every child in care who experiences adverse conditions or mistreatment will experience negative outcomes (Horsburgh, 2018). Authors have highlighted the importance of developing resilience when investigating why some children in care go on to engage positively in education and lead fulfilling lives (Horsburgh, 2018). Resilience can be defined as 'positive patterns of functioning or development during or following exposure to adversity, or, more simply, to good adaptation in a context of risk' (Masten, 2006, p. 4). Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt (2005) indicate an important shift in resilience research moving away from simply risk and protective factors to understanding the dynamic process in the development of resilience (Luthar, Cicchetti and Becker, 2000) where individual vulnerabilities and protective factors could change with developmentally associated shifts in cognition,

emotion, and social settings and may also differ in light of cultural contexts (Masten *et al.*, 1999). Masten (2001, p.235) stated that:

‘Resilience does not come from rare and special qualities, but from the everyday magic of ordinary, normative human resources in the minds, brains, and bodies of children, in their families and relationships, and in their communities’

Educational success is a particular resilience-focused outcome (Tessier, O’Higgins and Flynn, 2018). Wang, Haertel and Walberg (1994) define educational resilience as the increased chance of success in school and further life outcomes despite facing environmental hardship relating to early attributes, circumstances and experiences. The school environment can develop resilience by having a caring ethos and promoting relationships with teachers and peers (Werner and Smith, 1989) and providing opportunities for extracurricular activities (Luthar and Cicchetti, 2000). Resilience can also be promoted through maintaining high expectations for all, expressed through the curriculum, teaching, relationships and evaluations supporting belief in themselves and their futures (Rutter, 1979). The development of personal attributes is also important.

Resilience and personal attributes of children have become an area of interest for researchers (Pinkney and Walker, 2020). Neal (2017) believes personal attributes associated with educational resilience include intelligence, being disciplined and focused on goals and having high aspirations, all of which were demonstrated by academically successful care leavers. Rios and Rocco (2014) also suggested perseverance, responsibility, resourcefulness, diligence, motivation, goal orientation,

self-efficacy and an internal locus of control were personal attributes associated with resilience that arose from narratives of their participants who were academically successful care leavers. Furthermore, having high levels of internal locus of control alongside intrinsic motivation (Jackson and Martin, 1998), determination, self-sufficiency (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005) and being self-reflective regarding their attitudes and behaviour (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006) were all found to be important personal attributes in the success of young people from care backgrounds.

Alongside the role of personal attributes in building resilience, it is crucial to consider how these interact with environmental factors. It may be an oversimplification to think of risk and protective factors having a purely cumulative effect (Woodier, 2011). Risk factors can co-occur, with one having a cascading effect on another (Luthar, Sawyer and Brown, 2006). Consequently, identifying the most influential factor is not necessarily an instinctive process (Woodier, 2011). This is also true when considering protective factors and which process is the most influential (Woodier, 2011). Why is it that family support encourages resilience? Is it the feeling of security? Higher self-esteem? Or a sense of control? (Luthar, Sawyer and Brown, 2006). It is key to concentrate interventions on developing assets that can have a cascading effect on additional protective processes (Schofield and Beek, 2005). Additionally, Ungar (2011) argues that emphasis on building resilience should be placed on enabling environments and the interactional process as opposed to individual attributes.

2.9 Research into the Education of Children in Care: Barriers

Previous research into children in care has identified a range of barriers to educational success. It is important to note that a lack of any of the facilitative factors reviewed above could be considered a barrier. However, there are also additional barriers. The following areas will be reviewed: pre care experiences, social emotional and mental health, low educational expectations and instability and school mobility.

2.9.1 Pre care experiences

A systemic review found that pre care experiences, such as maltreatment and neglect, were part of the explanation for the relationship of being in care and achieving low educational outcomes (O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke, 2015). Some studies indicated a persistence in difficulties faced by children, which may have occurred before entering care (O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke, 2015). When learning about the pre care experiences of participants in the YIPPEE project, Jackson and Cameron (2012) identified the most salient finding was the similarities across all five countries. In most cases, parents were divorced, separated or had never lived together. At least one parent normally had a mental health disorder or an addiction to alcohol or drugs. With the exception of families seeking asylum, most had suffered severe neglect and different types of abuse, these being the main reasons for entering care. Family life was often complicated, chaotic and volatile, with regular changes in their family structure, living arrangements and housing. Parents often had unskilled jobs or were dependent on welfare and were educated to a low level (Jackson and Cameron, 2012). Three central themes impacting on the young people arose from these accounts of family life prior to entering care: feelings of being unloved and unwanted, addiction and

mental health difficulties of their parents and bereavement (Jackson and Cameron, 2011).

Sinclair and colleagues (2020) state attainment at age 7 is a central predictor of attainment aged 16, irrespective of whether children are in care or not. Therefore, the care system alone does not provide the explanation for poor early attainment given that 79% of children in care were not in care aged 7 and if they were this was often for a short time. This educational gap is better explained by the presence of special educational needs, socio-economic status and potentially a complex family background (Sinclair *et al.*, 2020). That said, despite the levels of disadvantage these young people face prior to coming into care and the difficulties they may bring with them, it does not excuse the failure of the care system to focus on and support them with their difficulties (Jackson and Martin, 1998). Neither does it consider children who are placed in care from a young age, remain there and experience no better outcomes (Jackson and Martin, 1998). A review found that, while there was a lack of evidence that being in care was detrimental to education, it did not seem to provide benefits academically (O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke, 2015). Interestingly, when considering the pre care experiences of high achievers, it does not seem that they are more privileged than those in lower achieving groups or compared to the care population more generally (Jackson and Martin, 1998). This therefore suggests a complexity of factors that interact to lead to more successful educational outcomes.

2.9.2 Social, Emotional and Mental Health

Having social, emotional or mental health difficulties is one significant barrier for young people in care completing high school (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2016). Peers can also have a significant influence on the educational success of children in care (Groinig and Sting, 2019). While friendships were perceived as very important for children in care (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; McClung and Gayle, 2010; Jackson and Cameron, 2012; Sugden, 2013) and could provide social and emotional support (Groinig and Sting, 2019), encourage the development of positive learning identities and the continuation of education striving for success (Jackson and Cameron, 2011), they can also be a negative influence (Rios and Rocco, 2014). Friends can place a lower value on education (Harker et al., 2004; Rios and Rocco, 2014) and can sometimes be hostile or even abusive (Rios and Rocco, 2014). Bullying was a particular social issue that emerged (Berridge et al., 2015), with some young people in care experiencing higher instances of bullying than their peers (Dearden, 2004). However, they were also more likely to be perpetrators of bullying (Social Exclusion Unit, 2003). The impact of bullying can be extreme, especially in the absence of a supportive family (Thompson, Arora and Sharp, 2002).

To further compound potential social difficulties with peers, individuals themselves may experience particular difficulties that could impact on their ability to make and maintain friendships. There is a link between early adverse conditions and difficulties in developing social relationships (Horsburgh, 2018). Bazalgette, Rahilly and Trevelyan (2015) found that from young people's perspectives, they experienced difficulties with emotional wellbeing, which resulted in actions such as harming themselves and others,

alongside engaging in socially isolating behaviours. It is reasonable to assume that such emotional difficulties and associated actions could potentially lead to difficulties forming relationships (Horsburgh, 2018).

Mental health difficulties are a frequent occurrence for young people from a care background, with research indicating these difficulties cause a barrier to long term successful outcomes in many aspects of wellbeing, including education (Arria *et al.*, 2013). A comprehensive and large-scale survey revealed that 45% of children in care in England and Scotland and 49% in Wales were diagnosed with a mental health disorder (Meltzer *et al.*, 2004b, 2004a). Multiple studies have identified emotional and mental health difficulties as a barrier to educational success (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Day *et al.*, 2012; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Berridge *et al.*, 2015; Morton, 2015, 2018; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Clemens *et al.*, 2017; Neal, 2017; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). It was obvious from participants' accounts that emotional and mental health difficulties were impacting on their ability to focus and accomplish in social and academic activities in school (Geiger and Beltran, 2017). Day and colleagues (2012) found young people were not able to access specific mental health services, such as counselling designed to meet their needs as care leavers. Seeking help was avoided by some participants because of the stigma of mental health difficulties while others could not access the required support (Salazar *et al.*, 2016).

Clinical depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder were frequently mentioned alongside eating disorders, feelings of abandonment and shame and, more generally, feelings of stress or fear (Salazar *et al.*, 2016) and anger and behaviour

difficulties (Rios and Rocco, 2014; Morton, 2015). Anger can develop into bad behaviour leading to school exclusions (Rios and Rocco, 2014), resulting in poor educational outcomes (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018). Berardi and Morton (2017) noted that exclusions hinder education progress and, while the young person may be removed from the classroom, these approaches do not tackle the underlying problems that resulted in the inappropriate behaviour. Such emotional and mental health challenges may manifest in difficult behaviour and stem from trauma young people have experiences both prior to and whilst in care (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Geiger and Beltran, 2017). Trauma that is not confronted was common in research with care leavers and seemed to affect relationships, motivation and behaviours necessary for success in higher education (Unrau, Font and Rawls, 2012).

2.9.3 Low Educational Expectations

While some successful young people experienced high expectations and a strong culture of education (Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006; Neal, 2017; Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad, 2017), some felt that adults supporting them had low educational expectations of them (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Clemens *et al.*, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Groinig and Sting, 2019), with their educational successes not recognised and teachers pitying them (Clemens *et al.*, 2017; Moyer and Goldberg, 2019). Young people highlighted the need to challenge negative stereotyping and poor attitudes towards children in care (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006). Data on children in care found that expectations for educational success held

by young people themselves was greater than that held by carers or social workers (O'Brien, 2012).

Harker *et al.* (2004) identified that teachers, social workers and carers did not perceive young people's educational achievement and progress a priority in comparison to their emotional and physical needs, such as relationships, care and maintaining contact with parents. Craddock (2008) indicated the focus was on the short rather than long term needs such as having food, water, clothes and shelter. Social workers were the most frequently named adult who hindered educational progress (Harker *et al.*, 2003) with many successful care leavers stating that they were uninvolved in their education (Rios and Rocco, 2014). The lack of regard for how moving placements could impact educational progress and the emotional wellbeing of the young person was the main explanation for this (Harker *et al.*, 2003). However, some young people stated that their social workers had greater interest in their education at follow-up interviews (Harker *et al.*, 2004). Yet the contribution from social workers had a tendency to be perceived as irrelevant (due to consistent changes in their "named" social worker or poor contact with them) or associated with procedural aspects, such as the completion of PEPs (Harker *et al.*, 2004). More recently, 50% of young people still noted their social workers were not actively associated with their education and they had a desire to have been better informed about educational opportunities (Rios and Rocco, 2014).

A Canadian conference titled 'Improving Educational Outcomes for Children in Care Conference' was sponsored by the University of Ottawa and Ontario's Practice and Research Network. The message from this conference was the need to create a

culture of education, meaning those responsible for children in care need to make educational success the highest priority and ensure that this materialises (O'Brien, 2012). Fernandez (2019) calls for changes in attitudes from teachers, carers and caseworkers in acknowledging young people's potential to aim for and attain educational goals equal to their peers not in care and their right to the opportunities and resources to reach their potential.

2.9.4 Instability and School Mobility

Instability in placements and schooling, which can go together (Clemens *et al.*, 2018), may result in academic, social (Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020) and emotional challenges (Fernandez, 2019) and negatively impact education (Kinarsky, 2017). Such challenges include difficulties following syllabuses, coursework demands and preparation for exams (Stein, 1994; Blyth, 2001; Fletcher-Campbell, Archer and Tomlinson, 2003) being sufficiently prepared for a new school (Fernandez, 2019) lacking advocacy (Berardi and Morton, 2017), loss of coursework and leaving behind supportive relationships with peers and teachers that are conducive to educational success (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007) which challenges a child's sense of belonging in school (Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020). The timing of a school transfer can be critical if they occur around transition or assessment times, meaning the impact on educational success can be grave, reducing a young person's chances of sitting exams and gaining qualifications (O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007). Instability in placements and schools was found to be detrimental to educational achievements with each extra change of placement after age 11 linked to a third of a grade lower at GCSE (Sebba *et al.*, 2015). Young people state that education should

be of the highest priority and if a placement move must happen, then it should be coordinated with the school calendar so as not to occur during the middle of a term or interrupt school or social activities (Martin and Jackson, 2002). Even when young people remain in the same school but experience instability in placement, this can suppress educational progress due to necessary adjustments to new carers and routines, causing disruption and stress (Berger *et al.*, 2015).

2.10 Relevance to Educational Psychology

Jackson and McParlin (2006) state that children in care form a substantial proportion of most Educational Psychologists' (EPs') caseloads and are more likely to have special educational needs (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Jackson and McParlin, 2006). Furthermore, they are more likely to have involvement from a psychologist at some time in their lives (Jackson and McParlin, 2006). Much of the previous research has come from a social work context with little published work from an educational psychology perspective (Norwich, Richards and Nash, 2010). Research has suggested a range of roles for EPs when supporting children in care including: assisting parents, carers and teachers to help children (Dent and Cameron, 2003), contributing to multiagency meetings and providing training (Bradbury, 2006) with EPs being able to offer a distinctive contribution to the lives of children in care (Farrell, Woods and Lewis, 2006) and the social work sectors, highlighting a possible broader role for EPs regarding supporting children in care (Bradbury, 2006). The Division of Educational and Child Psychology (2006) recognised that EPs have a contribution to make in supporting children in care through their relationships with professionals and

schools, using their skills in assessment and facilitating intervention to meet their needs and provide effective support.

Yet this work is not without challenges. Bradbury (2006) found that two EPs in her study found it hard to identify the distinctive contribution of their roles and that this could be completed by non-psychologists. Furthermore, Evans, (2003) suggests the organisational structure of EPSs, with link EPs often attached to schools, may result in the risk of losing track of children in care due to high mobility rates resulting from placement breakdowns. Despite the challenges, Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs (2005) report that cases of children in care with EP involvement were less prone to experience a placement breakdown and that carers rated EPs as the most valuable specialist help received for supporting their child in care. This suggests an important role for EPs in promoting the welfare of children in care (Sinclair, Wilson and Gibbs, 2005).

2.11 The Voice of the Children and Young People

The voice of the young person is central to this study. To elicit and promote the voice of children and young people is a dominant feature in national and international policy and is a fundamental aspect of the work of EPs (Hammond, 2013). The voice of the child is associated with the approval of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lundy, 2007), specifically article 12 (United Nations, 1989). It states that children have the right to articulate opinions and have these considered in areas that impact their lives, giving weighting to age and maturity. Freeman (1996) states this article is noteworthy as it views children as fully operating humans with principles, character and the capability to participate.

The importance of listening to the voice and experiences of young people was highlighted by Every Child Matters (DfES, 2004a), the Children Act (2004), The Children and Young Persons Act (2008) and, most recently, by statutory guidance from the DfE (DfE, 2018b), indicating the importance of considering specifically the voice of children in care. Additionally, Brodie (2010) highlights the need to listen to children in care and be aware of their existing experiences as it is a fundamental aspect of progressing their educational achievement. Clemens and colleagues (2017) state, when considering their educational experiences, that listening to the perspectives of children in care offers educational professionals, social workers and policy makers recommendations that are based on experience and common sense which are free of administrative barriers to service delivery.

Numerous authors (Thomas and O’Kane, 1998; Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006; Winter, 2006) have also acknowledged the need to directly consider the views of children in care when contemplating how best to support them. Although more research has started to ascertain and discuss contributing factors to achievements of children in care, their own views are not always directly given (Sugden, 2013). As stated by Winter (2006), radical change is required to progress from viewing children in care as passive recipients to active agents of services. Viewing children as active agents is achievable where they are seen as participants rather than objects of research (Winter, 2006). Only then will their views be completely valued and governments can further develop what works for children in care by understanding what modifications are needed systemically so that their attainment can be more equal to that of their peers not in care (Sugden, 2013).

2.12 Exploring the Concept of Success

Being deemed 'educationally successful' could be interpreted in numerous ways, with various assumptions being made (Gorham, 2009). The definition of educational success that will be operationalised in this study is wider than that adopted by much of the previous research, in line with Gorham (2009) and is in opposition to a more restricted emphasis on academic attainment. This decision was made on the grounds of the constricted nature and potential unsuitability of focusing on academic attainment. Francis and Skelton (2005) deemed achievement as a narrow concept that highlights only credentials from exam performance, ignoring other important aspects such as participation in school social life, engagement with peers and school culture. Additionally, having high grades has been viewed as too narrow a description of achievement, overlooking the fact that school success can have different meanings to a range of people and can be reached in numerous ways (Howard, Dryden and Johnson, 1999). Finally, Cameron (2007) noted that young people in care can experience disruption in their school careers. Consequently, the suitability of applying the same narrow definition of educational success to all was questioned (Gorham, 2009). This does not imply that low educational expectations are sufficient, rather that the expectations applied to a young person in care should be critically examined (Gorham, 2009). This is illustrated by Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate (2006), who used criteria that reflected different examples of success important to all young people, including making and sustaining meaningful relationships and engaging in work, training or education.

Gorham (2009) stated that 'educational success' was defined as being engaged with education which included having good attendance and reaching targets set by educational professionals. While I adopted this definition for the current study, the initial criterion of good attendance was removed in light of discussions with a Team Manager in the Virtual School (see Chapter 3 section 3.7 for further details). This definition takes into consideration the work of Coulling (2000), who used personal construct psychology to understand the term educational success. Sociability, good attendance and reaching their potential were main factors that teachers, social workers, home-finding officers, carers and children in care thought were central to educational success for children in care. Critically, Coulling (2000) noted that successful educational experience focused not on academic ability but on being well supported to reach their potential by carers and school. The fundamental aspect about reaching potential seemed to be concerned with a child's ability to do their best wherever they were educated (Coulling, 2000). Similarly to Gorham (2009), the appeal of this wider conceptualisation of educational success was to potentially incorporate the voices of a greater range of young people than purely the highest achieving pupils, allowing the exploration of factors associated with their success beyond academic achievements (Gorham, 2009).

2.13 Synthesis and Critique of Previous Studies

Table 2 indicates qualitative research about young people in care who have experienced educational success. This research is from the perspective of young people themselves. A search of the literature identified thirteen peer reviewed articles. Additionally, one book (Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006) and two reports

(Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; Jackson and Cameron, 2011) were included despite not being peer reviewed due to the high relevance of content. It is preferable to use peer reviewed articles for quality assurance purposes. If articles are peer reviewed it means they have been subject to a board of scholarly reviewers in the chosen subject area. They review the quality and importance of the research, ensuring it is in line with the editorial standards of the publishing journal (San Diego State University Library, 2020). Despite the preference for peer reviewed articles, the book could be considered an academic source according to a library guide (Thompson Rivers University Library, 2020) because it meets all of the three following criteria: the authors are paid experts in the field, there is a bibliography and there are in-text citations. The book was produced by the Social Work Inspection Agency in Edinburgh and was authored by two social work inspectors and a Professor of Social Care at The Open University and Honorary Professor of Social Work at Queen's University, Belfast. Additionally, the two reports could also be considered academic sources as they fulfilled the same criteria stated above, with aspects of the later report being published in a peer reviewed article (see Jackson and Cameron , 2012).

It is evident that the research is sparse, varied in context and research methodology and, at times, dated. Most research considers the perspectives of care leavers and is from an international perspective. Five studies were from the U.K., seven from America, one from Australia, one from Norway and one from an international context including England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary. While adding diversity, the value of international research could be questioned due to differences in educational and social policy, curricular and pedagogic practices. Crossley (2010) reports concerns

about how rarely international educational research findings reflect the lived experiences of people.

Study	Sample	Methodology Data collection and analysis	Key findings	Comment
Jackson and Martin (1998)	<p>Participants had spent more than a year in care and obtained five or more O levels or GCSEs at Grades C or above or were in further or higher education.</p> <p>n = 105 (questionnaire); n = 38 (interviews); comparison group not in further or higher education, with experience of care</p>	<p>An opportunistic sample</p> <p>Data collection: Postal questionnaires; In-depth semi-structured interviews; measures of health, locus of control, life satisfaction and self-esteem</p> <p>Data analysis: statistical analysis stated for questionnaires but details of data analysis method for qualitative data not declared.</p>	<p>Experiencing educational success was viewed by the young people as very important to their success in later life.</p> <p>They noted factors that might promote better outcomes included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The young person having an internal locus of control • Learning to read from a young age. • Having stability and continuity. • A parent, carer or significant adult taking an interest in their education and who valued education. • Friends who were not in care who were succeeding in school. • Participating in interests or hobbies out of school. • Access to a significant adult who offered consistent encouragement and support acting as a mentor or role model. • Regular school attendance. <p>The authors concluded that educational success was critical for determining future way of life and social inclusion and should therefore take a high priority in planning for young people in care.</p>	<p>Focused on care leavers</p> <p>Using academic attainment (high achievers) as indication of success</p> <p>Methodology unclear in parts with chosen method of data analysis for interviews not declared.</p> <p>U.K. context</p>
Martin and Jackson (2002)	<p>n = 38 (interviews) (as above in Jackson and Martin, 1998)</p>	<p>(as above in Jackson and Martin, 1998 for the interviews)</p> <p>An opportunistic sample</p> <p>Data collection: in-depth semi structured interviews</p> <p>Data analysis: method of data analysis not declared.</p>	<p>This article reports the participants' opinions (from the above research in Jackson and Martin, 1998) for the best ways to enrich the educational experience of children in care. The participants were from the interviews</p> <p>Results indicated:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of a significant adult offering encouragement and support for educational success. • Participants highlighted the importance of normalisation, wanting to be like others, therefore going to school should be as normal as possible, like those not in care. • Some participants noted low expectations and negative stereotyping of professionals as a barrier to educational success. Participants stated the importance of employing well-educated, qualified carers and attending school should be prioritised. • Lack of resources such as books, desk or quiet space to complete homework in residential homes. The educational environment and practical resources in residential homes needs immediate attention. • Lack of opportunities to participate in extra-curricular activities in residential homes but more opportunities in foster homes. Therefore, providing opportunities for children in care to participate and meet others not in care is important. • Problems on entering higher education included housing issues and financial help. • Some participants were keen for a person to support them during university. 	<p>Same as above</p> <p>Date of when interviews were conducted may suggest research findings could be considered outdated. Some factors such as access to resources may have improved in the current day especially with the changes in recent policy and guidance such as the role of the Virtual School making local authorities more accountable for the educational progress of children in care.</p> <p>U.K. context</p>

<p>Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley (2005)</p>	<p>n = 129</p>	<p>Prospective longitudinal study. A five-year action research project to explore the experiences of care leavers who continue into higher education.</p> <p>Data collection: questionnaire to collect basic information. Interviews - first interview was unstructured. Most participants were interviewed twice more using a semi-structured questionnaire, once at the end of their first academic year and again during their second year of study.</p> <p>Data Analysis: not declared</p>	<p>Three groups; one followed for three years, one two years and one for one year. The main purpose of the research was to investigate the experiences of young people themselves from their perspective. Some key findings were:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The drop-out rate for <i>By Degrees</i> participants was only 10 % compared with 14% for the national average. • Most participants enjoyed university and acknowledged the social and life skills they developed • They lacked support for mental health difficulties. • Some students lacked information before starting courses, leading to missed opportunities to apply for grants or gain university accommodation. • Students who lived in university accommodation were in favour of it • Friendships were key for emotional support and securing accommodation for the second year. • Financial support was lacking for some students, leading to them taking on too much paid work to the detriment of their studies. • A lack of money also limited their social life, preventing them from fully engaging in university life. • 16% of the research sample were unaccompanied refugees compared to 5% of the care population • Almost all acknowledged they would never have got to university if they had remained with their birth families. 	<p>Report – not peer reviewed article</p> <p>Large sample size</p> <p>Care leavers</p> <p>Longitudinal study</p> <p>U.K. context</p> <p>Method of data analysis not declared</p>
<p>Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt (2005)</p>	<p>n = 14 care leavers attending a 4-year university course</p> <p>19-35 years a subsample of a larger study (n = 49) on the educational needs of former foster youth (Hines and Merdinger, 1999).</p>	<p>Data collection: in-depth interviews Then a self-administered questionnaire including demographic information as well as information specific to experiences within the foster care system, Data analysis: Grounded theory</p>	<p>The study looked at risk and resilience by investigating factors related to academic success of carer leavers.</p> <p>Adversity factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feeling different • needing to grow up quickly • lacking connection <p>Moderating factors:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual – assertive, independent, goal orientated, determination to be different from past, acceptance of help, conscious change • Family – lack of connection, importance of friends/ significant adult, positive parenting adults • Community – education system, foster family, relationships. <p>Outcomes – resilience and educational success</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hopes and plans for the future • Emotional adjustment <p>Results demonstrated that factors at the individual, family, and community levels and incorporating more than one system at a time were essential in understanding developmental pathways of these young people.</p>	<p>Focused on care leavers</p> <p>Focus on just maltreatment</p> <p>Developed a process model for pathways to resilience</p> <p>American context</p>

<p>Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate (2006)</p>	<p>n =32 30 over 16 and most were aged between 16 and 21</p>	<p>Data collection: interviews Data analysis: not declared</p>	<p>Five factors that helped young people to achieve success:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having people who care • experiencing stability • being given high expectations • receiving encouragement and support • being able to participate and achieve. <p>They also observed that participants generally placed a high value on education.</p>	<p>Not a peer reviewed article Method of data analysis not declared Mixed in care and care leaver participants Scottish context</p>
<p>Jackson and Cameron (2012) (Article) Jackson and Cameron (2011) (YIPPIE final report)</p>	<p>n = 32 (time point 1) n = 27 (time point 2) 25 were in education aged 18-24, 12 studying for a degree (170 in total across all 5 countries)</p>	<p>International Longitudinal study Data collection: 2 rounds of in-depth interviews a year apart. First interview informant led life story, second interview more structured about how plans had unfolded. Data analysis: not declared</p>	<p>Three-year international research in England, Denmark, Sweden, Spain and Hungary. It aimed to discover how more care leavers could be encouraged to stay in education longer and facilitated to access further and higher education.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Despite big differences in the care and education systems between the countries, the experiences of young people transitioning from care to independence were found to be extremely similar. • Nearly all had experienced numerous disruptions in their earlier education, both from their birth families and often after entering care. There was a higher than normal number of school changes, often related to placement breakdown, and from the young people's perspective most social workers failed to give education as much value as care placements, causing delays and poorer attendance. • Beyond 16 there was a cumulative delay meaning few young people were able to follow the traditional route through school to college or university. • The English sample included young people from 5 areas of England that showed 'educational promise' aged 16 by passing exams. • Difficulties included: lack of financial support, mental health problems, disruption to their education and bullying. • Success factors included: care and school placement stability, financial and practical help, individual motivation to achieve and fulfil hopes and dreams. They often engaged in a wide range of social and leisure activities. • Professionals acknowledged; big structural problems with the historical split between care and education, low expectations and lack of interest in education by social workers and carers, limited horizons and poor financial and personal support. • A champion, such as from school, local authority or foster care made a big difference to self-belief. 	<p>Longitudinal study Large sample International research Clearly designed 4 stage research plan: literature review, secondary analysis literature review, case studies of local area and interviews with educational professionals and social service managers and in-depth face to face interviews with young people with care backgrounds. Consistency across countries in methodology Difference in research sample across countries such as foster care more common in England and Sweden and residential homes in Spain and Hungary. Data analysis method not declared</p>
<p>Hass, Allen and Amoah (2014)</p>	<p>n = 19</p>	<p>Phenomenological study Data collection: semi-structured interviews Data analysis: inductive descriptive coding</p>	<p>This study was an investigation of how care leavers account for their academic success and, from their perspectives, what constituted the turning-point experiences in their lives. The results suggested that a sense of autonomy, support systems both social and instrumental, and environmental factors including access to "safe havens" and experiencing or demonstrating competence interacted to facilitate turning-point events in their lives.</p>	<p>Focus on turning points considering facilitating factors only Care leavers American context</p>

Rios and Rocco (2014)	n = 24 care leaver college students	Phenomenological study Data collection: semi-structured interviews Data analysis: thematic analysis	Academic barriers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School – unempathetic teachers, not enough academic rigour • Foster care - low performing and abusive peers, home not encouraging study, foster family uninvolved, caseworkers uniformed • Internal – bad behaviour, anger Academic supports: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School – school stability, caring teachers, academic challenge, helpful counsellors • Foster care – high value of education from foster family, placement stability, caseworkers promoting education • Community – educationally knowledgeable mentors, conscientious relatives • Internal – perseverance, responsibility, resourcefulness, diligence, motivation, goal orientation, self-efficacy 	Focused on care leavers American context
Morton (2015)	n = 11 young people currently in care and care leavers	Phenomenological study Data collection: in-depth interviews Data analysis: phenomenological analysis	Explored the perceptions of current and former young people in care about the barriers during their education to achieving academic success. Three themes developed from the data: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The foster care system - lack of trust with caseworkers, foster parents, and society • The school system - high mobility and Individualized Education Plans • Emotional factors -disempowerment, self-defeating attitudes, and anger. 	A mix of current and former young people in care American context
Morton (2016)	n = 11 young people currently in care and care leavers	Phenomenological study Data collection: in-depth interviews Data analysis: phenomenological analysis	Four themes of support were identified: family, school, community and self-reliance. Data from these young people suggested that family, teachers and community can work together to support academic success for children in care.	A mix of current and former young people in care American context
Salazar et al., (2016)	n = 248 College graduates. Aged 20 - 37	An exploratory study Data collection: online survey Data analysis: inductive qualitative content analysis of three open-ended survey questions	Seven themes related to their experiences were: positive self, overcoming, interpersonal relationships, finances and logistics, academic orientation, physical and mental health, and independent living skills.	Expanded previous research, including perspectives of a considerably larger and more diverse sample. American context
Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad, (2017)	n= 13 foster carers n =16 young people attending or completed university	Data collection: semi structured interviews Data analysis: thematic analysis	Two main themes: motivation and effort of young person and foster home qualities were identified. This article focused on foster home qualities that supported school achievement. The focus was educational success; the aim was to acquire a deeper understanding of the circumstances in foster homes that promoted the foster children's school performance. The themes were: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promoting a feeling of belonging • core values such as taking schoolwork seriously and giving one's best • providing order and structure. 	Norwegian context Focus purely on qualities in the foster home and on care leavers. Similar to many studies, because both the foster parents and the young people were requested to remember particular events in the past. It is possible that their views could have

				been influenced by their successive experiences or events recalled inaccurately.
Neal (2017)	Care leavers who were undergraduate students enrolled at one university n= 57 survey n=11 interviews of care leavers who completed the survey (aged 18-23) n=9 supportive adults identified from the interviews by the care leavers themselves as having important influence on their academic success	Explored the lived experiences of foster youth and their perceptions about preparing to attend college. Data collection: surveys and in-depth interviews Data analysis: not declared	Survey data: Successful care leavers thought: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • they were generally well supported by schools • took responsibility for academic success • participated in positive activities in high school. • identified protective factor of relying on a network of caring adults to create positive environments in which students could excel. • 51 students reported that they were connected to a supportive adult while in high school • positive feelings about high school environment with high expectations from peers and teachers. Interview data: four main themes for academic success and enrolment at university: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intrinsic characteristics: intelligence, goal-oriented and disciplined, and high academic aspirations. • motivation for academic success sometimes fuelled by negativity • organisations and extracurricular activities provided structure, supported growth and academic success and helped to boost self-esteem. • Significant adults met needs of young people by providing guidance, stability and emotional support 	Methodology lacking detail with method of data analysis not declared Focused on care leavers Interview data of care leavers and supportive adults combined therefore not clear American context
Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner (2018)	n = 18 female care leavers with university degrees 25-65 years	Narrative inquiry approach Data collection: in-depth semi-structured interviews Data analysis: Narrative inquiry approach using thematic analysis	This study explored factors contributing to educational success. The research question was 'What might have contributed to the education of academically successful ex-care women' Findings highlighted the importance of both a 'conducive environment' and 'personal factors'. Conducive environment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • valuing education • social networks • practical and financial resources Personal factors included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • resilience • motivation 	The focus was on only positive factors and women. Australian context Focused on care leavers
Pinkney and Walker (2020)	Participants included university students who were care leavers and university staff supporting care leavers from one university. Within one local authority young people currently in	A small-scale study investigating the lived experiences of care experienced young people relating to higher education. Data collection: semi-structured interviews with eight university students care leavers and two university staff. Two focus groups, one with young	Their success depended on a complexity of factors. Themes included: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Internal factors - self-determination to succeed and escape their background, proving people wrong, resilience, having an end goal, keeping focused and being stubborn to succeed. • Having someone to believe in them and who is positive • Care experience influencing choice of university course 	Question homogeneity of participants as mix of undergraduate and postgraduates students with one recently graduated student at interviews. Focus groups included school pupils and school leavers – voices of different groups of

	<p>school and school leavers all of whom had experience of care.</p> <p>n = 8 university students n = 2 university staff n = 6 young people currently in school who had experience of being in care. n = 9 young people who had left school who had experience of being in care.</p>	<p>people currently in school who had experience of being in care and one with young people who had left school who had experience of being in care.</p> <p>Data analysis: phenomenological as looking at lived experiences using research questions as the frame for themes – not explicated stated the type of data analysis.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need for ongoing emotional and mental health support, continuity of care, accommodation and financial support. • Supportive factors: personal tutor, university staff, other students, carers 	<p>participants not distinguishable. Yet this study provides insights from both school-aged participants as well as those in higher education.</p> <p>Data analysis approach clearly stated?</p> <p>U.K. context</p>
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Table 2: A synthesis of current research papers

2.14 Conclusions

The research on the education of children in care, with a focus on educational success, indicates that there are facilitative factors associated with positive educational outcomes. Having conducted a review of the literature, the key facilitative factors appear to be experiencing stability, a caring relationship with a significant adult, school belonging and connectedness, participation in social and leisure activities, support and resources and resilience and personal attributes. The key barriers, in addition to the absence of the facilitative factors, appear to be pre care experiences, social, emotional and mental health, low educational expectations and instability and school mobility.

2.15 The Current Study

Very little is known about the educational experiences of young people in care (Benbenishty, Siegel and Astor, 2018) with a paucity of research having investigated the supportive strategies and barriers to successful experiences in school from the children's own perspective (Moyer and Goldberg, 2019). There is even less attention given to the minority of children in care who are educationally successful (Jackson and Cameron, 2011). Even when research is conducted, a majority of it focuses on the perspective of care leavers rather than young people currently in care.

The current study sought the voice of young people currently in care who were considered by professionals as having achieved educational success. A strength of this research is that, similar to Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate (2006), it focuses on the positive phenomena of educational success, rather than young people who are struggling, as much of the previous research does. It further extends previous research

exploring educational success (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Gorham, 2009) to investigate the perceived barriers alongside the facilitative factors. The use of a broader criterion of success (see section 2.12) than previous studies was used to capture the perspective of a wider range of children in care to understand what they perceive as the facilitative factors and barriers to educational success. This qualitative study hopes to offer much needed in-depth insight into this area. Unlike previous studies, IPA will be used as the method of data analysis to address the individuality of each participant's lived experiences. It is envisioned that this current study will add to the sparse qualitative literature in the area of educational success of children in care and help to inform the work of education, social care and educational psychology professionals by understanding the needs of children in care from their perspective and how they can be better supported.

This current study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- What are the facilitative factors to educational success from the perspective of young people in care?
- What are the barriers to educational success from the perspective of young people in care?

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter states the rationale regarding the methodology and analysis. First my philosophical and methodological stance is explored. Next, IPA as a qualitative approach to data analysis is considered and why it was deemed appropriate for this study. The research questions, design, method and context are stated. Ethical considerations, participant information, data collection and analysis are also detailed. Finally, the validity and quality in data collection and analysis are assessed.

3.2 Philosophical and Methodological Assumptions

When reflecting on social reality, there are widely differing means of understanding it (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Examining the explicit or implicit assumptions is one possible approach to accessing these views of the social world. Such assumptions are noted as ontological, epistemological and methodological assumptions (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Below my stance on these assumptions will be stated.

3.2.1 Ontological Stance

Ontology derives from the Greek vocabulary *on* meaning 'being' and *logos* meaning 'theory' and is acknowledged as 'the theory of being as being' (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, p. 6). It focuses on questions regarding the nature of reality (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017), concentrating on assumptions regarding the existence of objects in the social world and how these should be viewed and studied (Thomas, 2013). This study sought to explore the participants lived experiences of educational success whilst being in care and consequently subscribes to relativist ontology. Willig (2008)

clarifies a relativist ontology as one that questions what is out there and highlights multiple interpretations that can be applied to things. Here reality is perceived as subjective experience (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005) with nothing existing beyond our thoughts (Levers, 2013). As there are multiple interpretations of experiences, there are consequently multiple realities (Levers, 2013). From this ontological stance, the aim of science is to comprehend the subjective experience of reality and of numerous truths (Levers, 2013). This is in opposition to a realist ontological stance that perceives objects as existing independently and consequently not reliant on people for existence (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Reality is perceived as existing independently from the human mind irrespective of whether it is understandable or experienced directly (Levers, 2013).

3.2.2 Epistemological Stance

Epistemology derives from the Greek vocabulary *episteme* meaning 'knowledge' and *logos* meaning 'theory' and is acknowledged as 'the theory of knowledge' (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, p. 4). It is concerning the knowledge we hold about the world (Thomas, 2013). When adopting a positivist stance, researchers make the assumption that knowledge is objective, rigid and concrete therefore becoming an observer favouring methods allied to natural science (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Contrary to positivism, researchers adopting an interpretivist stance assume knowledge is subjective and constructed by individuals. Thus, such researchers become involved with their participants and oppose methods associated with natural science (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

My epistemological stance would be considered interpretivism, where the social world is perceived as constructed by individuals and knowledge is exclusive to them being subjective in nature (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). In order to support the conservation of integrity of the phenomena being explored, there is a drive to understand from the perspective of the individual (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

More specifically, from an interpretivist and consequently a qualitative perspective (see methodological stance below), Willig (2013) discusses three differing categories of knowledge that qualitative researchers may generate: realist, social constructionist and phenomenological. The epistemological stance of a realist declares that social processes, as the foundations of the social world, can be exposed by the use of qualitative methods. Researchers adhering to a social constructionist approach perceive language as the key to the construction and mediation of the social world. They therefore promote analysing discourse in order to understand the use of language to construct particular accounts of reality (Willig, 2013). In contrast to realists, social constructionists believe in multiple realities, rather than a single reality to be discovered by a researcher, therefore pertaining to the ontological position of a relativist.

Social constructionists differ from phenomenologists as they do not consider that experience particularly goes ahead of description (Willig, 2013). Phenomenological researchers adopt a philosophical approach concerned with lived experience and unite on the necessity to conduct the detailed analysis of experience on its own terms (Smith, 2011). Numerous approaches have been established for phenomenological research,

primarily the descriptive approaches and the interpretative approaches (Willig, 2008). Researchers using descriptive approaches, (see Giorgi, 1992), are only focused on description, and do not have the intention of interpreting experience. In contrast, researchers using interpretivist approaches do not support pure description of experience as they believe it is impossible for the researcher to completely bracket off their own preconceptions and experience and consequently knowledge created is consistently as interpretation on behalf of the researcher. This phenomenological knowledge is explored further below and in Section 3.3 as I examine phenomenology, its origins and the theoretical foundations of IPA.

IPA specifically is an interpretative phenomenological epistemology where the focus is on understanding an individual's relatedness to their world through the sense that they make of things (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Larkin and Thompson (2012) state the following epistemological assumptions of IPA include:

- Understanding of experience being necessary to understand the world.
- Researchers eliciting and engaging with personal accounts of participants who are submerged in a physical, cultural, relational and linguistical world.
- An idiographic stance to assist an in-depth emphasis on the particular.
- Direct access to experience not being gained through the accounts, rather an intersubjective process of making meaning by the researcher.
- Researchers recognising and reflecting on their own assumptions and experiences to be able to engage with the experience of others.

- Interpretation being unavoidable. However, by researchers reflecting on their position when creating such interpretations, they can pledge to ground these interpretations in accounts of the participants.

3.2.3 Methodological Stance

Methodology derives from its Greek origin as the procedure that allows for the achievement of an objective (Delanty and Strydom, 2003). Choices of methodology have begun to reflect the alliances of the researcher to particular philosophical stances in addition to practical concerns regarding data collection (Bryman, 2008). Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggested that ontological assumptions influence epistemological assumption which in turn influence methodological assumptions and, as a result, the methods for data collection. Taking a positivist stance would lead researchers perceiving reality as real and operating externally to participants, therefore favouring approaches such as experiments and surveys (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). In opposition, taking an interpretivist stance would lead to researchers perceiving reality as unique to participants, therefore favouring approaches such as individual accounts and participant observation (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

By taking a relativist ontological and interpretivist epistemological stance, I will be favouring qualitative methodology, which aims to comprehend the phenomena from the perspective of the individual (Creswell, 2009). Supporters of qualitative methodology argue that an approach more suited to reflecting the uniqueness of the person is necessary (Bryman, 2008). Favouring methods aligned with a scientific approach, such as quantitative methodology, has been criticised for holding a

reductionist perspective, which endeavours to view life as measurable in contrast to seeing the individual experience as having a sense of individuality, choice and autonomy (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017). Yet those favouring a positivist approach have criticised interpretivist researchers for the rapid abandonment of scientific approaches and, as a result, the potential of discovering helpful generalisations (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2017).

3.3 Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis

3.3.1 Phenomenology – Origins and Influences on IPA

Phenomenology originates from the Greek language in which phenomenon and logos mean the study of human experience and how things are perceived as they appear to consciousness (Langdrige, 2007). Phenomenology is not a united concept, rather it has grown and been modified by a range of influential people such as Husserl, Heidegger (Langdrige, 2007) and Merleau-Ponty (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Despite these individuals potentially varying in their thinking, they unite on the necessity to focus on the lived experience of individuals (Langdrige, 2007) with the focus concentrated on the way the world seems to the individual experiencing the world (Moran, 2000).

Phenomenological psychology is concerned with a detailed description of experience and meaning making of experiences. This approach is in opposition to the positivist stance and identifying causality as it does not perceive the world as it is, as distinct from our perceptions of the world (Langdrige, 2007). The underlying philosophy of phenomenology evolved as a reaction to the positivist stance (Reiners, 2012).

Phenomenologists adhere to the belief that there is not a constant and fixed knowledge regarding a real knowable world. They identify numerous aspects that influence how we perceive the world, for example our position relative to the object. The object will have diverse meanings for different people and that includes the same person in another context (Langdrige, 2007). In the current study, the object of interest was educational success. I was interested how a particular group of children in care related to educational success and how they made sense of their experiences.

Phenomenological psychology originates from phenomenological philosophy and Husserl (Langdrige, 2007), a German mathematician and the founder of phenomenology (Reiners, 2012). Langdrige (2007) stresses that phenomenological psychology is a broad approach which is shaped by differing strands of phenomenology. There were two significant historical periods of phenomenology, prior to the development of IPA (see Smith, 1996), the first being transcendental phenomenology and the later hermeneutic or existential phenomenology (Larkin and Thompson, 2012).

Transcendental phenomenology originates from the work of Husserl (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Husserl's epistemological stance, that is his approach to knowledge, includes interpreting a phenomenon as experienced by people in consciousness as an event or process (Creely, 2018). The central question for Husserl was: What do we know as people? (Reiners, 2012). Transcendental phenomenology aims to ascertain the main structures of a certain experience through a procedure of methodological 'reductions' (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Husserl regarded

phenomenology as focusing on recognising and checking our own preconceptions and setting them aside (termed 'bracketing' off influences, for example those of historical, cultural, and contextual aspects) to allow access to the universal essence of a selected phenomenon, as it presents itself to the consciousness. His phenomenological approach aimed to transcend our daily preconceptions (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). These ideas are key to the descriptive approaches in phenomenology (see Giorgi, 1992). Husserl's work has aided researchers adopting an IPA approach to give attention to the technique of reflection by outlining systematic and attentive examination of our consciousness (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). However, Husserl's quest of a pure investigation of experience is possibly too abstract for application in educational research, necessitating IPA to look to the work of Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

IPA, unlike transcendental phenomenology, does not have transcendent knowledge as the goal, rather it associates with the later strand of phenomenology, the hermeneutic or existential phenomenology, which was influenced by Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty and Sartre (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). They proposed that Husserl's reductions are not possible because our observations are forever conjured from somewhere (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Ultimately Heidegger (1962), believed it was not possible to separate out preconceptions from our understanding of an experience. Heidegger rejected epistemology, which is the theory of knowledge (Reiners, 2012). Alternatively he embraced ontology, which is acknowledged as 'the theory of being as being' (Delanty and Strydom, 2003, p. 6), developing the interpretivist approaches to phenomenology by broadening hermeneutics (the theory

of interpretation) (Creswell, 1994). This broadening was conducted by studying the notion of being in the world in contrast to knowing the world (Reiners, 2012). Moving beyond description, meanings are sought that are embedded in daily occurrences (Lopez and Willis, 2004). Merleau-Ponty (1962) highlights the significance of the physical body relative to the experience of the world, proposing that while it is difficult to be fully captured it should not be overlooked. From the work of a range of philosophers stated above, the understanding of lived experience reveals a complicated process of preconceptions, perspectives, senses and meaning making. The complexity of studying experience is acknowledged with the lack of a straight path to experience and research actually being about attempting to be ‘experience close’ as opposed to ‘experience far’ (Smith, 2011).

3.3.2 Theoretical Foundations of IPA

IPA, first established in health psychology by Smith (1996), is ‘an approach to qualitative, experiential and psychological research, which has been informed by key concepts of philosophical knowledge: phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography’ (p11, Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). These key concepts form the theoretical underpinning of IPA (Smith, 2017) and are explored below:

Key Concept	Description
Phenomenology	Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to studying experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and it is appealing to psychologists because it provides a rich foundation of concepts about how to study and understand lived experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA research aims to engage with participants reflections, thoughts and feelings on their experiences of significant events in their lives (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Hermeneutics	Hermeneutics is the theory of interpretation (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). There is an interpretative effort from both the participant and researcher operating within a double hermeneutic circle (Smith, 2017). This is reflecting that the researcher is attempting to make sense of the participant attempting to make sense of their experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The researcher is making sense in the second order, that is accessing the participants experience only through their own account (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The hermeneutic circle urges researchers to analyse data dynamically, repetitively and using a non-linear approach. It is important to study the whole by considering the parts, the parts by considering the whole and the circumstances in which the parts and whole are embedded (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).
Idiography	Idiography considers the level of analysis and focuses at the particular as opposed to the general level (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), whilst preserving the integrity of the participant (Eatough and Smith, 2017). This focus on the particular occurs at two stages. The first considers the level of detail, being in-depth analysis that is comprehensive and systematic (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The second considers how a particular relationships, process or event is comprehended from the perspective of a particular group of people in particular circumstances (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Table 3: Key concepts of IPA

3.3.3 Alternative Qualitative Approaches and Rationale for Choosing IPA

The data analysis approach must be considered at the early stages of research before formulating research questions, considering data collection, accessing participants or commencing data collection (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The chosen data analysis approach will influence strategies selected in the early phases of the research process (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It is essential to consider not the right tool for the job but rather what that job is (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Different qualitative approaches offer an insight into what is considered as data, inferences that can be made and goals of analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Consequently, other approaches to qualitative analysis need to be considered before being discounted. Table 4 explores the main qualitative approaches and my rationale for decision.

Qualitative Approach	The Focus	Rationale for Decision
Grounded Theory	Grounded theory aims to generate a theoretical account of a particular phenomenon (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It is helpful if the focus is a high level conceptual account (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Willig (2008) argues this approach takes the perspective 'from the outside in' as opposed to 'the inside out' like phenomenological research (Willig, 2008, p45).	I did not seek a theoretical account of a particular phenomenon in my research, therefore grounded theory would not have been appropriate.
Discursive Approaches	There are numerous approaches but they can commonly be grouped by a primary interest in either power or interactions and have a shared foundation in social constructionism (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Foucauldian discourse analysis, the former, focuses on the manner in which discourse constructs self, subjectivity and power relationships (Willig, 2008). Discursive psychology, the latter, focuses on how people use language (Willig, 2008).	Smith and colleagues (2009) argue that these discursive approaches have a stronger more exclusive commitment to social constructionism than IPA. In discursive approaches, discursive representations are the component of analysis while in IPA the emphasis is on the individual and make sense of their experiences (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Discursive representations are not the focus of my research, therefore discursive approaches would not have been appropriate.
Narrative Approaches	These approaches span a broad range and are rooted in social constructionism but have connections with phenomenological and discursive approaches. Some narrative researchers focus on the content or structure of stories while others focus on the relationship between stories. A collective theme in narrative research is the investigation of identity, with numerous narrative researchers focusing on the social features of narrative (Griffin and May, 2012), as opposed to how the people make sense of their experiences.	Narrative researchers formulate meaning from the narrative and work with narrative accounts of particular experiences and being interested in meaning and understanding (Griffin and May, 2012) which is similar to IPA. Yet narrative approaches would have not been appropriate as the focus is not on how the individual makes sense of their particular lived experience.
Phenomenological approaches	Phenomenology is the philosophical approach to studying experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Numerous approaches have been established for phenomenological research, primarily the descriptive approaches and the interpretative approaches (Willig, 2008). Considering descriptive approaches, the phenomenon investigated necessitates the researcher to bracket their experiences and opinions regarding the phenomenon (Reiners, 2012). In the interpretative approaches, such as IPA, the focus is interpretation and meaning as opposed to descriptions and does not necessitate the researcher to set aside their experiences and opinions (Reiners, 2012). See Chapter 4 Section 4.14 for more details on bracketing.	Phenomenology is described as a philosophical approach to studying experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA specifically was the chosen qualitative approach to data analysis because it pursues comprehensive understanding of how people experience a phenomenon from a certain perspective in a particular context and focuses on how individuals interpret their experience and ascribe meaning to events (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). I believe this to be the most appropriate qualitative approach to explore the lived experience of educational success of children in care.

Table 4: Qualitative approaches to data analysis and rational for choice

The main objective of IPA is to investigate how participants make sense of their personal and social world with the focus on the meanings of particular experiences, events or states (Smith and Osborn, 2015). As a qualitative approach to research, IPA allows the researcher the greatest chance to make sense of the innermost thoughts of the lived experience of participants (Alase, 2017). Being orientated towards participants, IPA enables them to express themselves and their lived experiences how they see appropriate, free from distortion (Alase, 2017). The end result of a successful piece of IPA research is likely to involve 'giving a voice' that is capturing and reflecting on the main statements and concerns of participants and 'making sense'. This involves an interpretation of the data grounded in their accounts but potentially extends them utilising psychological theories (Larkin and Thompson, 2012). Furthermore, Smith (2017) states that IPA fits well with positive psychology and can be utilised to provide explorations of positive psychological phenomena.

The aim of the current study was an in-depth exploration of how young people in care make sense of their educational success, which is a particular positive phenomenon, with the hope of 'giving a voice' to these participants as described by Larkin and Thompson (2012). Ultimately, the theoretical underpinnings of IPA, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography, support my philosophical stance and desire to understand their lived experiences. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) explicitly state the main reason for selecting IPA, as opposed to alternative qualitative approaches, is its alignment with the epistemological stance of the research question. Implicit in the construction of a research question is an assumption regarding what the data can tell us and for IPA that is something about a person's participation in and orientation towards the world and how they make sense of it (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

IPA therefore seemed the most appropriate qualitative approach to data analysis to explore the lived experience of educational success of children in care.

3.3.4 Limitations of IPA

IPA, despite being an appropriate qualitative approach for the current study, is not without criticism. There is an issue regarding the absence of transparency at the descriptive level with Larkin, Watts and Clifton (2006) suggesting that the flexible approach to analysis in IPA has been mistaken for an absence of rigour. This has resulted in a tendency for novice researchers to provide more descriptive level of analysis rather than investigating, comprehending and communicating the perspectives and experiences offered by the participants (Larkin, Watts and Clifton, 2006). Contrary to this, IPA has also been criticised for its over reliance on the structure in the analysis process, yet Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) clearly state that there is no single approach prescribed when analysing data. Rather, the suggested stages are offered as a useful heuristic framework, which aims to promote reflective engagement with the accounts from participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

In addition, IPA has also been criticised for its reliance on perceiving language as representationally valid (Willig, 2008), meaning there are challenges in being confident that the data is reflective of actual experience as opposed to the manner in which participants discuss it (Ware and Raval, 2007). Language is perceived as a construction rather than a description of reality and, as a result, interviews can only express how someone discusses a phenomenon as opposed to experiencing it (Willig, 2008). However, Eatough and Smith (2006) dispute that IPA acknowledges the

significance of language in shaping how people make sense of their lived experience. There is, however, a need to be aware of the reliance in IPA on the capabilities of participants to reflect and articulate their experiences and thoughts.

IPA has been condemned by some for the lack of guidance associated with researcher subjectivity and reflexivity (Willig, 2001), yet a critical evaluation of IPA revealed it had progressed much further than other qualitative approaches in tackling such concerns (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

3.3.4 Reflexivity in IPA

One universally accepted assumption of qualitative approaches is that research is fundamentally relational (Wertz *et al.*, 2011). This means that, despite focusing on themes of a particular topic with the purpose being to develop knowledge, research unavoidably contains and communicates the researcher's orientation, personal qualities, values and methods (Wertz *et al.*, 2011). Consequently, in seeking rigour of qualitative research, reflexivity and self-disclosure on behalf of the researcher is necessary (Wertz *et al.*, 2011). In psychology, qualitative researchers stress the importance of including a self-critical disclosure of the researcher's interests, presumptions and relationship with the topic. Rather than weakening validity, the request for reflexivity extends research by incorporating clarity, self-criticism, and accountability at a social level (Wertz *et al.*, 2011).

In relation to the current study, reflexivity involved an awareness of: my position as a researcher and my professional role as a TEP (Chapter 1 and this section), the views I hold regarding educational success and children in care (Chapter 2 and in in this

section), my prior knowledge of current literature (Chapter 2), themes not being constructed prior to data analysis by revisiting the data to ensure the analysis is grounded in the participants' accounts and retaining transparency in the processes of data analysis (see table 5 and appendices 6-9).

Throughout the research process I continually self-reflected on my role taken in planning, collecting and analysing data. The use of reflective boxes throughout the methodology and findings further aided the process of reflection. These reflective boxes state dilemmas and deliberations throughout the research process and analysis and explain how phenomenology influenced different aspects of the research. They aim to expose the interview process, state how superordinate and subordinate themes were arrived at and how interviews were integrated and conclusions made.

Reflecting on my personal background, I have experience of educational success, as categorised in this current study by achieving targets set by educational professionals, but no personal experience of the care system. Professionally my interest in this area developed through my previous and current role as a primary school teacher and TEP respectively. In my casework as a TEP, I began to notice that many of the children in care with whom I had involvement with were experiencing a range of challenges including difficulties with social, emotional and mental health and academic attainment. This made me reflect on what it might look like if these children in care were being successful in education. After initially researching the area, focusing on educational success became an important consideration. Additionally, contemplating this from the voice of young people themselves, rather than the perspective of professionals, was a particular interest of mine. I felt it important to consider the lived

experiences of young people in care focusing on the positive phenomenon of educational success.

3.4 Research Questions, Design and Method

This study aimed to explore the experiences of young people currently in care who have achieved educational success. The research questions are:

- What are the facilitative factors to educational success from the perspective of young people in care?
- What are the barriers to educational success from the perspective of young people in care?

These research questions can be considered suitable to adopt for an IPA study as Larkin and Thompson (2012) state that research questions need to be open and concentrated on the experiences and understanding of a specific group of people in a certain context. The current study focuses on how young people make sense of their experience of educational success in the specific context of being in care.

The research design frame used is a cross sectional 'snapshot' design frame with a purposive sample (see Section 3.7). The methodology used is qualitative with semi-structured interviews being the method of data collection. The interview schedule is explored further in section 3.8. IPA is the chosen method of data analysis, which is detailed in section 3.9.

3.5 Research Context

This study was conducted with five young people currently in care who have achieved educational success. These young people attend a range of mainstream schools in a county local authority in the Midlands of England. The aim of the study was an in-depth exploration of the experiences of these young people. Previous research does not focus often on the voice of young people and, if it does, it primarily involves care leavers. This study also sought to explore experiences focusing on the facilitating factors and barriers to educational success. Given the use of semi-structured interviews, it felt necessary to recruit older secondary school pupils, who may be more able to articulate and reflect on their experiences and have the necessary communications skills to understand and participate in the study. A decision was made to focus on young people in Year 9-11, aged 13-16, given younger pupils may have found the interview demanding or the level of reflection challenging and older pupils would be starting to transition into leaving care.

Considering recruitment, I initially liaised with a Participation Officer who was linked to the Children in Care Council in the local authority where I was on placement. I met with her in August 2019 to explain my study. She proposed I attend a session with the Children in Care Council to introduce my study, run a workshop to pilot my questions in my interview schedule (Appendix 4) and start to recruit any potential participants. After a second meeting with the Participation Officer to plan sharing my research, I met with the Children in Care Council in September 2019. My interview schedule was piloted with small groups of young people, focusing on different sections of the schedule, then giving feedback to the whole group. Six young people in Year 9-11 expressed an interest in participating and I was able to be introduced to a majority of

their foster or residential support workers that evening, who agreed for me to contact them with more information. In addition to communicating with the Children in Care Council, I liaised with a secondary school that I was linked to as a TEP regarding recruiting participants and they agreed to support my study. This was an attempt to broaden my sample of participants beyond those in the Children in Care Council.

A meeting with a Team Manager from the Virtual School identified that four of the six participants from the Children in Care Council would be suitable to interview. These young people were identified as meeting the expectations set for them by educational professionals. This was based on their progress data held by the Virtual School and information contained in their PEPs. Two additional participants were identified from the secondary school, both of whom expressed an interest to participate. However, given a recent change in circumstances for one young person, it was decided the timing was not appropriate for their participation. The final number of participants was four from the Children in Care council and one from the secondary school.

3.6 Ethics

3.6.1. Ethical Approval

This study gained full ethical approval from the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review Process (see Appendix 1 for the Application for Ethical Review).

3.6.2 Consent and Right to Withdraw

A participant information sheet was shared with potential participants (Appendix 3). If they expressed an interest to partake, then the participant information sheet and personalised consent letters (Appendix 2) were shared with their carers and social

workers. This information included the process if the young person decided to participate, the right to not take part, the right to withdraw, confidentiality, what would be done with the research data and contact details of the researcher and supervising tutor. Consent was gained from their social workers, who had parental responsibility. Consent was also gained from participants using the participant consent form (Appendix 3) prior to commencing the interview with a reminder of the details of the study, their right to withdraw, confidentiality and safeguarding responsibilities of the researcher.

3.7 Participants

Studies using IPA seek homogeneity in their participant samples in order to aid exploration of convergence and divergence (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) and typically have a small number of participants with the intention of revealing something about the experience of each participant (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

This study sought the experiences of young people currently in care who have achieved educational success in Year 9-11. Participants were identified through a purposive sample. Thomas (2017) describes a purposive sample as where the researcher pursues people of interest and, with this approach to sampling, there are no claims of representativeness of the wider population. Given IPAs emphasis on the particular, participants are selected through purposive sampling as it offers researchers an understanding into a particular experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Often potential participants are sought through recommendations from gatekeepers (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), which was partly the case for this

current study, the gatekeeper being the Participation Officer at the local authority (see participant recruitment detailed in section 3.5).

The inclusion criteria of this study for potential participants was:

- Young people currently in care and who have been for at least a year
- Year 9 -11
- Achieved educational success, which means being engaged in education by:
 - Achieved targets set by educational professionals
- Suitable communication skills to understand and participate in a semi-structured interview (see Appendices 4 and 5 for the interview schedule and supporting materials).
- Attending a school in a Midlands County Council, where I am currently on placement as a TEP from the University of Birmingham.

Initially, an additional inclusion criterion under the description of achieved educational success was considered. This was to be that the young people are engaging in education with attendance of 85% or above. However, discussions with a Team Manager in the Virtual School highlighted the arbitrary nature of attendance because most children in care in this local authority are driven to school in taxis so consequently have good attendance. Therefore, this criterion was removed. Five participants took part in this study. They were between Years 9-11, one female and four males. Four were in long-term foster homes and one in a long-term residential home. A description of each participant in the form of a 'pen portrait' is detailed below (table 5) with pseudonyms used to protect the participants.

Name (pseudonyms)	Participant Information
Eva	<p>Gender: Female Year group: Year 11 Age:15 School: mainstream secondary Lives: with foster carers Identified: through children in care council Interviewed: at foster home Background: Eva lives with her younger brother in her foster home. She is academically high achieving with future aspirations of attending university. While she appeared to have positive experiences at primary school, her transition to secondary school and more recent educational experiences have seemed to be challenging for her. She shared some negative peer experiences and difficulties with managing emotions, mainly anxiety. She has had recent success in a school public speaking competition and she enjoys creative writing. She appears to value positive relationships with her teachers and one particular friend with which she has shared interests. She has a passion for anime (Japanese film and television animation).</p>
Charlie	<p>Gender: Male Year group: Year 11 Age:16 School: mainstream secondary Lives: with foster carers Interviewed: at local authority office Identified: through children in care council Background: Charlie has experienced prolonged bullying, which has appeared to impact him significantly. Despite this, Charlie appears to want to do well in school and has a plan to become a concept artist, which involves studying for an art degree at university. He feels he can be more himself and is happier when at home with his foster family. He spoke about managing his anger issues. The relationship he has with a mentor, who is a university student, has been attributed by Charlie himself to the shift towards a more positive attitude to learning in recent years.</p>
Daniel	<p>Gender: Male Year group: Year 11 Age:15 School: mainstream secondary all boys state funded school Lives: in a residential home Interviewed: at residential home Identified: through children in care council Background: Daniel appears a confident young person. Sport plays an important part in Daniel's life, being an active member of hockey, rugby and football teams. He appears to have a competitive nature. He has been playing hockey at county level for about the last year and has started umpiring games. Daniel seems to have a stable friendship group and he reports no issues with friends. He seems to value the</p>

	help of those around him offering both academic and emotional wellbeing support. He is an active army cadet member, who has ambitions to be in the armed police unit.
Ben	<p>Gender: Male Year group: Year 9 Age:13 School: mainstream secondary Lives: with foster carers Interviewed: at foster home Identified: through children in care council</p> <p>Background: Ben enjoys performing arts and is a keen dancer. He attends regular dance classes and has participated in school performances. Ben talked positively about a stable friendship group, who are not all addicted to their phones! He appears to have a positive outlook on school life, being accepting of support to help him improve further. The support he receives from his foster family appears valued by Ben.</p>
Harry	<p>Gender: Male Year group: Year 10 Age:14 School: mainstream secondary Lives: with foster carers Interviewed: at school Identified: through a secondary school I was linked to as a TEP</p> <p>Background: Harry appeared a confident and reflective young person, who was honest about his school experience. Transition to a different secondary school was something he appeared hard to accept initially. Socialising seemed very important to Harry with him often adopting the class 'joker' role, which could result in some low-level disruptive behaviour. He talks positively about relationships with his foster carers, teachers and friends. Army cadets plays an important role in his life currently with him looking to attend two different detachments to maximise the range of opportunities he can experience. His foster father is also training to be a leader with the army cadets. Harry has ambitions to either go into business or sign up to the army.</p>

Table 5: Pen portrait' summaries of participants

3.8 Data Collection and Interview Design and Use

Interviews were conducted face to face individually by the researcher at a convenient time and place for the participant. All interviews were completed October to November 2019. Two participants were interviewed in their foster homes, one in their residential home, one in school and one at county council offices. See Appendices 4 and 5 for the semi-structured interview schedule (which used the design maze depicted in Thomas, 2017 p. 133) and supporting materials. The supporting materials aimed to provide visual prompts and make the interviews as child friendly as possible. Prior to commencing the interviews, the questions in the semi-structured interview schedule and supporting materials were explored in a workshop with groups of young people currently in care as stated in section 3.5. The amendments suggested by the young people can be seen in coloured text.

The aim of the interview is to enable interaction, prompting participants to tell their own stories (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Structured interviews were discounted because IPA interviews do not follow a prescriptive focus (Smith, 2017). In contrast, a research question is selected and an interview schedule is utilised but flexibly, probing the participant appropriately in areas as they arise (Smith, 2017). Unstructured interviews are similar to conversations (Thomas, 2017). The aim of an unstructured interview is to allow the participant to set the schedule and raise important issues (Thomas, 2017). I feel this approach would possibly be too demanding or make participants feel uncomfortable given they are young people talking to an unfamiliar adult. Semi-structured interviews offer the best of both worlds (Thomas, 2017).

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they are the most frequently used method of data collection for IPA (Smith, 2017), they offer freedom to expand where needed (Thomas, 2016) and there is personal contact, meaning the interviewee would respond to the interviewer being physically present far more differently than if asked to complete questionnaires (Thomas, 2017). However, a significant challenge of interviews is establishing a rapport. Interviews will vary with interviewees dependent on their character and relationship with the interviewer (Thomas, 2017). In light of this, I met each participant prior to conducting the interview to introduce myself in person, answer any questions and start building a rapport. The supporting materials also aimed to help to guide the interview, make them more child friendly and help the participants feel more relaxed as they had insight to the topics arising. An additional limitation of interviews is the reliance on language skills (Willig, 2008) in order for participants to share their lived experiences. Reflecting on this reliance on language, one of the inclusion criteria was suitable communication skills to understand and participate in a semi-structured interview.

Developing an interview schedule is an important process as it allows the researcher to consider explicitly what they expect to be covered in the interview and plan for any potential challenges (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The interview schedule explored some important areas already identified in the literature and included: self/identity, stability of school and placement, relationships, school, involvement and support and educational aspirations. As suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), I used questions that were open and extensive to allow the participants to provide a detailed account of their lived experiences. Different question styles were used, including descriptive, narrative, contrast and evaluative (see Smith, Flowers and

Larkin, 2009 p60 for more information). Care was taken to attempt to answer the research questions without being influenced by any preconceptions of the experiences of young people in care informed by earlier reading. It is suggested that 6 to 10 open questions with prompts is an appropriate length for an interview schedule (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Interviews should last between 45-60 minutes (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Whilst I had a few more questions acting as a guide, I had 6 sections in the interview schedule. Interviews lasted between 25 minutes and an hour.

Interviews were audio recorded with the consent of the participants and social workers, who had parental responsibility. This was to allow for accurate verbatim transcription to support data analysis. Data was stored on a password-protected computer on The University of Birmingham Research Data Store, compliant with The General Data Protection Regulation and the Data Protection Act 2018 (Data Protection Act, 2018). The audio recordings were deleted once the study was complete.

Reflective Box

Phenomenology influenced the interview process which is explored below. Whilst conducting the interviews, I reflected on my own experience of developing my interviewing skills as a researcher and the impact that this potentially had on accessing the lived experiences of my participants. I felt that, particularly for the first two interviews (Eva and Charlie), I was rather nervous initially and preoccupied with what I was going to ask next rather than being in the moment. I felt there were some missed opportunities to explore in more depth occasional statements they offered, with a tendency at times to ask leading or more closed questions unintentionally. I felt this was particularly the case for Charlie's interview at the beginning as he arrived late, I was in an unfamiliar setting and I initially felt flustered. After Charlie's interview I thought carefully about the importance of trying to be more in the moment and inquisitive about their experiences as well as focusing on using more open questioning. As the interviews progressed, I felt I was able to be more in the moment and curious and consequently possibly was more able to engage with participants reflections, thoughts and feelings.

The interview experience differed with each participant as expected. Reflecting on this, I felt Ben, who was the youngest, offered thoughts, feelings and reflections on his experiences that were maybe not as in-depth as some of the older participants such as Eva, despite prompting from me. This could be related to the challenges of reflecting on and articulating experiences and the level of maturity required to do this. Additionally, I was left wondering if some of the positive thoughts, feelings and reflections offered were because he felt pressure to provide more socially acceptable answers or was an attempt by him to offer a shared understanding rather than reflecting on his real experiences? Despite this concern, Ben did appear to be optimistic by nature so this could well have been how he genuinely felt.

3.9 Data Analysis

Considering the literature detailing IPA data analysis, there is no single approach prescribed (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Flexibility in analysis is depicted in many methodology chapters and published papers regarding IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Similar to other qualitative approaches used in psychology, central to IPA is the focus of analysis, which for IPA is specifically making sense of the lived experiences of participants (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Consequently, IPA adopts shared procedures such as progressing from the descriptive to interpretative and from the particular to collective. It also adopts shared values, such as a desire to understand the perspective of the participant and making sense of meaning in a specific circumstance (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). IPA Analysis has been termed an inductive and iterative process, which is non-linear and complex, offering a

challenging yet rewarding experience for the researcher (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Analysis encompasses flexibility of thinking, requiring reducing, expanding, revising the data in a creative and innovative manner with constant movement between different analytical steps (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Consequently, analysis is dynamic and open to modifications, only becoming 'fixed' when findings are written (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

Despite suggesting the lack of prescribed approach to analysis with no correct or incorrect approach, Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) do offer a useful heuristic framework for the novice IPA researcher. This aims to promote reflective engagement with the accounts of the participants yet offers a sense of order to the process of analysis (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). However, any interpretation is the researcher interpreting the participant's interpretation of their lived experience, that is the double hermeneutic circle, which is stated in section 3.3. As a result, findings are subjective and tentative (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).

All interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio recordings (Appendix 6) then the six-step framework for analysis proposed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, (2009) was followed (see table 6).

Once the data analysis was complete, written summaries of the findings were produced in the form of adapted thematic maps using appropriate language for the young people. Originally the plan was to discuss and disseminate these maps face to face with the young people in the summer term 2020. However due to the 'social distancing' measures in place as a result of COVID-19, this was delayed until autumn

term 2020. Once discussed with the young people the findings will be shared with carers, residential staff, the SENCO of the secondary school that Harry attended, the Participation Officer, the Virtual School team and the Educational Psychology Service.

Step	The Process
Step 1: Reading and re-reading	This involves immersion into the original data by reading and re-reading the transcripts at a reduced pace to avoid superficial reduction of the data. Each transcript was read multiple times. Additionally, as suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), I relistened to the audio recordings whilst reading each transcript. The aim of this step is to keep the participant as the focus of the analysis. Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009, p. 82) encourage 'active engagement with the data' at this stage in order to begin entering the world of the participant.
Step 2: Initial noting	This is the initial level of analysis, being the most time consuming and detailed step, focusing on the semantic content and language at an exploratory level. The aim is to complete this step with extensive notes and comments on the data. Despite being separated, step 1 and 2 often merge together as the researcher starts reading and making initial notes on the transcript. Close analysis is essential. There are no rules on what to comment on during initial noting but progression usually moves from descriptive (describe things that matter to the participants such as relationships, events, processes, places and values) to interpretative (considering the circumstance of concerns, use of language and identifying more abstract concepts which allow sense making). There are three levels of exploratory comments; descriptive (describing the content) linguistic (particular use of language) and conceptual (interpretative, interrogative and conceptual) which are described as analytical tools as opposed to an exhaustive or prescriptive list. All the comments are to be detailed on the same transcript because connections and links between the different comments encourage immersion into the participants world supporting the engagement with the data analysis at a deep level (Appendix 6),
Step 3: Developing emergent themes	Based on the initial noting done in the previous step, the data is reduced in the volume, but complexity is maintained. There is a shift from working primarily with the transcript to the initial notes. This step involves focusing at a local level on sections of the transcript yet keeping in mind what has been learned throughout the whole procedure of initial noting. The main aim is to turn the initial notes into themes and produce succinct accounts of what is important in many of the comments connected to the transcript (Appendix 6).
Step 4: Searching for connections across emergent themes	This step includes charting or mapping how the researcher thinks themes fit together. There is not a prescriptive approach and the researcher is encouraged to be inventive when organising. At this point, some emergent themes may be discarded. The aim is to look for connections. Some suggested approaches to looking for connection and patterns include amongst emergent themes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abstraction (development of super-ordinate themes) • Subsumption (an emergent theme acquires a super-ordinate status) • Polarisation (oppositional relationships amongst emergent themes) • Contextualisation (emergent themes related to particular narrative moments or key life events) • Numeration (the frequency with which emergent themes are supported) • Function (the specific function of emergent themes) This information is then brought together to produce a graphic representation of the themes (Appendix 7).
Step 5: Moving to the next case	This step involves moving onto the next transcript and repeating the above process. The crucial aspect here is to treat the next case as separate, setting aside any emerging ideas from the previous transcript while working on the current one.
Step 6: Looking for patterns across cases	This involves laying out tables and looking for connections across cases, how themes in one case can enlighten another and which themes are most compelling. This can result in the reconfiguring and relabelling of themes (Appendices 8 and 9).

Table 6: The analytical framework used in data analysis (as proposed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009)

Reflective Box

Before completing the data analysis, I was aware that I had read widely about the education of children in care and therefore my understanding had developed. Therefore, throughout the analysis I was conscious of not returning to any of the literature in an attempt to limit any preconceptions which may have altered in the process of completing a review of the literature, so as not to influence my decision making.

During step one, I listened back to the audio recording whilst reading and re-reading accounts in an attempt to immerse myself in the data and keep the participants as the focus of the analysis.

Throughout the process of analysis, as I moved onto the next case, I attempted to bracket off any previous interpretations from other participants. At step 5 each case was considered on a new day to allow physical space and time between interpretations in the hope of supporting bracketing and treating the cases as separate.

Supervision was sought before reaching step 6 to check adherence to the steps 1-4. Support was also sought when arriving at superordinate and subordinate themes and reflecting on the appropriateness of these with my supervisor and a peer.

3.10 Assessing Validity and Quality in Data Collection and Analysis

There is debate amongst qualitative researchers regarding assessing the quality of research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This has been a reaction to mounting frustration that qualitative research has been evaluated against validity and reliability used in quantitative research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). While many qualitative researchers consider validity and reliability as imperative, they argue the importance of using evaluative criteria suitable for qualitative research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). There are various guidelines for assessing the validity and quality of qualitative research. Yet some guidelines, while being accessible checklists, tend to lead to potentially simplistic and prescriptive approaches to assessing, that omit the subtler features of qualitative research (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Smith, and colleagues (2009), note two favoured approaches that are more refined when assessing qualitative research, one being Yardley's principles (2000). Yardley (2000) offers a set of four broad principles that can be used for assessing the quality of qualitative research, which have been applied to the current study in table 7.

The Broad Principles	Demonstration of the Principle in Current Study	Weaknesses in Current Study
Sensitivity to context	<p>The choice of IPA as the method of data analysis suggests sensitivity to context. By choosing IPA, and the rationale for that choice, focuses on the perceived need for sensitivity to context due to the engagement with Idiography that is considering the level of analysis at the particular as opposed to the general level (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009), whilst preserving the integrity of the participant (Eatough and Smith, 2017).</p> <p>Clear child friendly information sheets were provided to the participants prior to their involvement in accordance to ethical requirements. The use of child friendly supporting materials also aimed to help to guide the interview, make them more child friendly and to help the participants feel more relaxed as they had insight into the topics being covered.</p> <p>Participants were interviewed in a time and location convenient to them.</p> <p>I made sure that I met each participant prior to conducting the interview to introduce myself in person, answer any questions and attempt to put them at ease about the process of interviewing.</p> <p>I sought the opinions of the children in care council regarding the suitability of my interview schedule and questions I wanted to ask and adapted it according to their feedback (see Appendix 4).</p> <p>The strongest context in which IPA studies can be sensitive is in the data ensuring analytical claims are grounded in the data meaning it is sensitive to the raw material (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). A good study will have a sizable amount of quotes from participants supporting any claims and 'giving a voice' (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). When conducting data analysis, I ensured continual checking that any claims were reflected in the original data, constantly checking back and forth. Additionally, I checked the credibility of my final thematic maps with another researcher to ensure that it was reflective of the original data and maintained integrity.</p>	<p>Interviews were the chosen method of data collection. A limitation of interviews is the reliance on language skills (Willig, 2008) in order for participants to share their lived experiences. The children may have found it challenging to express themselves through the use of language.</p> <p>Using semi-structured interviews could be claimed to be supporting a power imbalance between the researcher and participants. Children should be involved as the collaborators in the research (Spyrou, 2011). While this was attempted to some degree by seeking feedback on my interview schedule, the level of true participation could be questioned.</p> <p>The researcher's status as a TEP may have affected the views shared by the participants. Children may have felt the need to share views that were considered more socially acceptable with an unfamiliar adult and it could have altered how they communicated in the interview.</p>

Commitment and rigour	<p>The sample of participants were selected purposively in order to seek a level of appropriate homogeneity.</p> <p>Data analysis was conducted thoroughly and systematically aiming for idiographic engagement going beyond the descriptive. The analytical framework proposed by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009) was followed and detailed in the appendices.</p>	<p>The study did not seek feedback on the analysis stage from any participants to check credibility of themes but themes were checked with another researcher. However, Osborn and Smith (1998) emphasise checking credibility is not intended at producing a single true account but to safeguard the integrity of the finished account.</p> <p>While seeking homogeneity in the sample, it is worth considering that one participant, while attending mainstream secondary, was living in a residential home, which may have provided a different experience relative to those in foster homes.</p>
Coherence and transparency	<p>Each stage in the research process is described in this write up as suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009).</p> <p>My philosophical and methodological assumptions are clearly stated in section 3.2. The participant inclusion criteria and recruitment are clearly stated in section 3.7.</p> <p>The research question, design and method are detailed in section 3.4. The study observed to the underlying theoretical foundations of IPA stated in section 3.3.</p> <p>The design and use of the interview schedule is described in section 3.8 after a review of relevant literature.</p> <p>The process of data analysis is clearly stated in section 3.9, along with evidence of each stage in process in the appendices.</p> <p>Feedback given to each participant about the summary of findings.</p>	<p>Willig (2008) states that IPA acknowledges the interpretations that the researcher makes of the participant accounts is impacted by their own individual thoughts, knowledge and ideas. Yet IPA has been blamed for not considering how in theory the views of the researcher are considered in the process of research.</p>
Impact and importance	<p>The impact and contribution of this study will be discussed in Chapter 4.</p>	

Table 7: Applying Yardley's (2000) four broad principles to assess the quality of the current study.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the findings of the data collection and analysis. The findings are displayed under each relevant research question with thematic maps indicating the superordinate and subordinate themes. Supporting direct quotations of participants are taken from transcripts (in italics). Any identifying features have been removed and pseudonyms used to protect participants. Findings are contextualised in previous research, noting similarities and differences. Having achieved educational success for this study meant being engaged in education by achieving targets set by educational professionals (see Chapter 2 Section 2.12). The unique contribution of this study is discussed and implications for practice for EPs are considered. Finally, the limitations and future research for this study are explored.

Considering the structure of this chapter, Smith and colleagues (2009) suggest that merging the analysis and discussion in an IPA study, where themes are related to the literature as the writer progresses, is possible. In light of this, the analysis and discussion are merged to allow the reader to contextualise the findings of this study in sequence.

4.2 Research Question 1: What are the facilitative factors to educational success for children in care?

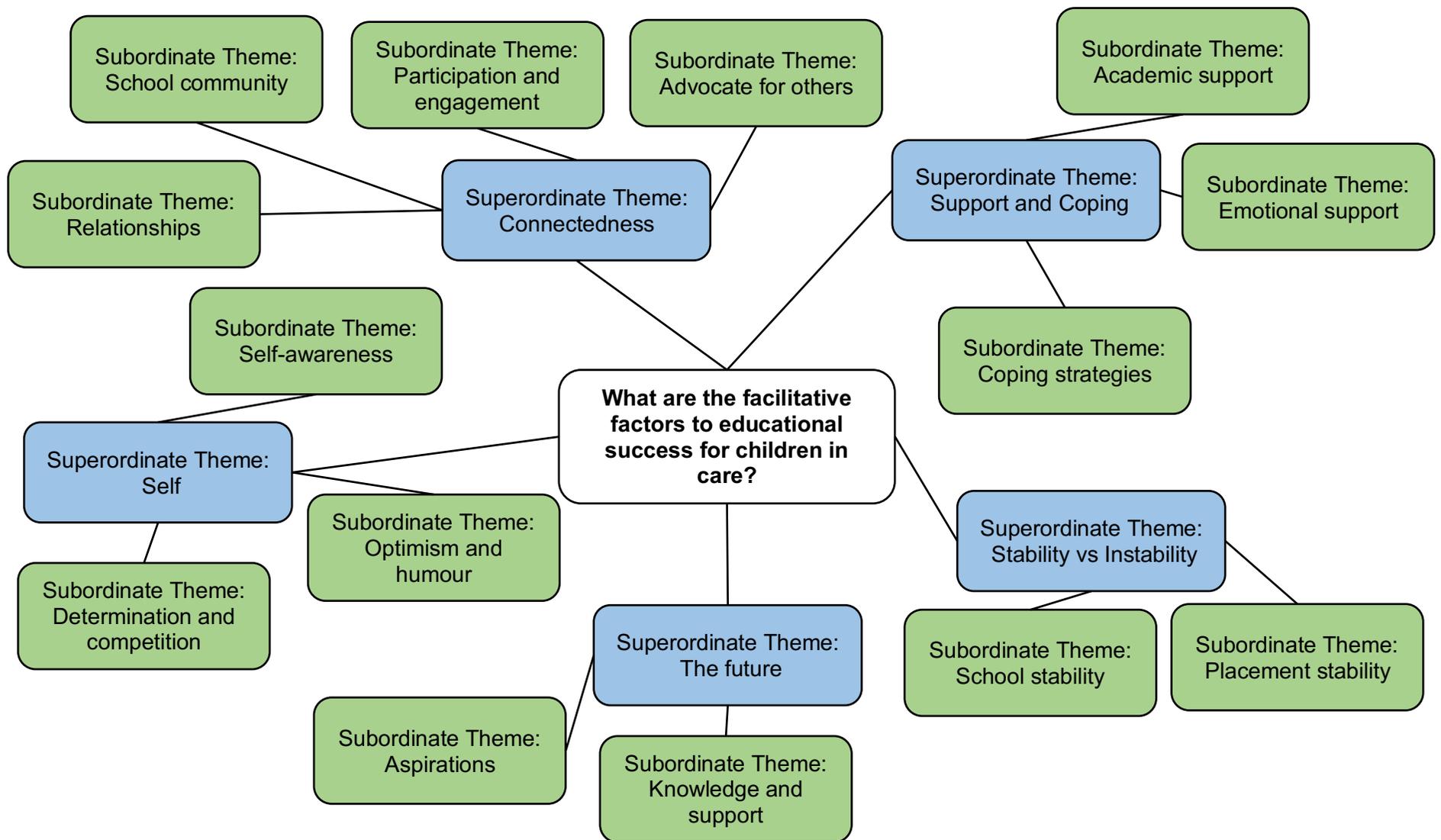


Figure 1: Themes that relate to facilitative factors to educational success for children in care

4.3 Superordinate Theme: Connectedness

The importance of connectedness was evident throughout all accounts. Connectedness can be identified as a sense of belonging, feeling that others care, that you matter and your contributions are appreciated (Solomon *et al.*, 1996; Osterman, 2000). Each participant had their own unique experiences of connectedness but there were similarities, which were reflected in the subordinate themes of: relationships, school community, participation and engagement, being an advocate and negative peer experiences and bullying. The first four appeared to act as facilitating factors for educational success.

Reflective Box

Arriving at the superordinate theme of 'connectedness' took some time. The word appeared to encapsulate something fundamentally important for the participants. I felt this superordinate theme experienced the greatest change over time. Originally the aspect of relationships appeared to transcend much of the participants' accounts, both as a facilitative factor and barrier, and I had a feeling this would be a superordinate theme. However, on further reflection there appeared to be a higher-level concept beyond relationships, a sense of being connected, known and understood. These were key words I initially noted down. From this, after much thought, connectedness felt like it was the higher-level concept that suited as the superordinate theme. From connectedness the remaining subordinate themes followed which involved other themes that appeared to support or threaten the function of connectedness. This then enabled me to integrate the interviews and make conclusions.

The participation and engagement subordinate theme was originally noted as a potential superordinate theme without the mention of engagement. However, after closer consideration it appeared that participation was not just about having the opportunity to participate in social, leisure and learning activities but more about the level of commitment and engagement to these activities that was evident in participants' accounts. Additionally, there was something important about these opportunities that appeared to be offering a sense of connectedness hence it became a subordinate theme to connectedness.

4.3.1 Subordinate Theme: Relationships

All participants were able to talk about positive supportive relationships with others. These included: relationships with foster carers, residential support workers, teaching staff, friends, mentor and independent visitors (adult volunteers who befriend young

people in care with the aim of developing long term relationships (National Youth Advocacy Service, 2017)). One participant also mentioned her grandmother, however, no other birth family members were discussed by participants. Foster carers, who often become the closest adults in the lives of young people (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018), were mentioned positively by all four participants living in foster homes. Charlie and Ben were overwhelmingly positive about the supportive nature of their relationships with their foster carers.

'My parents, I mean the carers, have been great. They have fought my corner whenever something has happened or whenever I have had a bad time or something bad has happened. They have always been in my corner, stuck with me.' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

Charlie referring to his foster carers as his parents suggested he has formed positive attachments with them and felt a level of connectedness towards them. The use of the word fought indicated that things have been hard for Charlie in the past. There is a sense that he feels consistently supported and protected by his foster carers and potentially had not felt this in the past.

'My foster parents they help me with like homework and ask me what I did today and I'll say my subjects, they will ask me questions.' (Ben)

This is a similar finding to previous research, where in-depth interviews with successful care leavers revealed the importance of supportive relationships and the ability to connect with others (Morton, 2016; Salazar *et al.*, 2016). Young people's definition of family was wider than including just their birth families, with relationships with foster families being maintained beyond leaving care, contributing to feelings of security. Calling foster mothers 'mom' was common (Morton, 2016). This is similar to the views

of Charlie, where his relationships with his foster parents seemed to offer security. Furthermore, Charlie and Harry also referred to their foster carers as their parents on multiple occasions, suggesting a wider definition of family for them both.

Charlie also reported a supportive relationship he has developed with a university student mentor. This relationship has been consistent and been able to develop over time, which Charlie appeared to appreciate. This supported previous research indicating the importance of mentors being reliable, consistent, building trust (Salazar *et al.*, 2016) and being educationally knowledgeable (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rios and Rocco, 2014).

'We have had like a really good connection, a bond shall we say. A uni student comes in. He does psychology. It is really nice because you get to have that one to one with the person.' (Charlie)

Four participants mentioned the importance of positive relationships with friends, with Daniel, Ben and Harry indicating they had a consistent, established group of friends. Eva's and Charlie's experiences with peers were more mixed but Eva did have one positive relationship with a friend. The social aspect of school was particularly important for Harry, who spoke about having a range of different friends who fulfilled different purposes for him. He spoke fondly about his best friend and the connection to his family, suggesting a wider support network beyond his foster parents. He also mentioned small gestures by others, suggesting the importance of making him feel connected.

'...my best friend, I get on well with his family as well so I sleep round his house like quite a lot and we both annoy his dad and take the mick out of his brother, his sister...Whenever I'm around, they are like 'alright son' his dad and then he goes, he went out the other day I slept round his last weekend and yeah he just said bye and everything its quite nice.' (Harry)

Reflective Box

Here, considering a phenomenological focus on the way the world seems to Harry and how he is experiencing it, I felt the sense of connectedness to his best friend's family was very important for him. There was a feeling of belonging and being part of the family by participating in typical family behaviours with his best friend such as gentle taunting of family members. This connection seemed to offer a support network of caring adults beyond home and school. The phrase *'alright son'* seemed significant to Harry and this choice of language may have made him feel even more part of the family with such small but important gestures increasing his sense of connectedness.

Relationships with teaching staff was discussed as important by all participants. Most mentioned particular teachers who appeared to show they cared and conveyed a sense of connectedness by small gestures that were valued by the young people. This indicated the important influence staff can have on educational success, as suggested by Sugden (2013).

'Last year's head of year...I build quite a strong relationship with her last year. Whenever she has been in the corridor, she gives me a nudge or whatever...It's quite alright, its good because I kind of wanted her to be my head of year this year but she weren't so don't know, it's just to kind of say hello I guess, it makes you feel nice.'
(Harry)

Only one participant mentioned their social worker as providing a positive supportive relationship.

'...my current social worker now. They have all been full on like you can do it, just put the effort in and get it done. They know me well, they know me way too well.' (Charlie)

Like much of the previous research, for all participants in this study, having a relationship with a person who genuinely cared about them was critical (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Neal, 2017; Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020).

4.3.2 Subordinate Theme: School Community

All participants reflected on school being generally a positive place despite some facing challenges. The school community fostered a sense of school belonging and connectedness. This was partly achieved through relationships with peers and teaching staff and also through the individual's participation and engagement in school life, connecting the subordinate themes of: relationships, school community and participation and engagement.

Eva, Harry and Ben reminisced about positive experiences in primary school. Harry stated he had grown in confidence in the last two years of primary school and had developed positive relationships with friends and teachers.

'I also had quite a lot of close teachers.' (Harry)

Ben also spoke positively about his current school, including the sense of space and freedom created by physical environment, the consistency and fairness of rules and the communication with pupils and the wider community, all helping to promote a positive school ethos indicating staff valued the pupils.

'They do say that the people, pupils in the school are great.' (Ben)

'...there are like these TVs around school that tell the time and tell the news and show pictures of what is happening on Twitter page of school.... There was actually a picture of me today...I was thinking wow I'm on a picture!' (Ben)

Eva's participation in year group council allowed her to be an advocate for others and develop positive relationships with peers and teachers. This appears to have supported her further connection to the school community and helped with school belonging. Eva appears to have found an aspect of the school life where she is accepted, she matters and is important to the group, all key aspects of an educational sense of belonging described by Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler (2020).

'I enjoyed year council because I got along with the people who did it as well. And the teacher who runs it, because there is a teacher who writes down the notes and everything and leads the discussions, she is my maths teacher...I came up with quite a lot of good ideas.' (Eva)

Reflective Box

Year council seemed to provide a place where Eva could experience positive relationships and connection with both pupils and teachers which is important for creating a sense of belonging. Eva talked openly about her difficulties with peers, yet year council seemed to offer a sanctuary where she could see the value of her contribution and potentially demonstrate confidence in her abilities.

Ben also spoke enthusiastically about showcasing his dance performance with other schools, adding to school belonging and a wider sense of community belonging with multiple schools in his local community.

'Every year we get some schools in xxxxx to perform and it is just sharing our work, what we have done...with other schools... it is just showing all our work and acting and dancing art. So quite a big thing actually.' (Ben)

A perceived feeling of social support and connectedness to the school community is an unresearched area (Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020). However, it appears it could be a facilitative factor towards educational success for young people in care.

4.3.3 Subordinate Theme: Participation and Engagement

A prominent feature throughout all interviews was the level of participation in social and leisure activities. Additionally, the participants indicated a high level of engagement and commitment to these activities. Sport is a large part of Daniel's life, with him representing school in hockey, football and rugby. He also plays hockey at county level. Additionally, Daniel and Harry were active member of the Boys' Brigade and Army Cadets respectively. Harry was particularly passionate about progressing within the Army Cadets. He wanted to become part of two detachments so he could

make the most of the strengths of each detachment. He appeared to be further motivated because his foster dad, who he refers to as dad, was training to be an instructor.

'I was an army cadet for two and a half years...I'm part of the Boys' Brigade and I had my own squad.' (Daniel)

'...in the army cadets...I'm going away this weekend...It's like a training camp. Shooting, er like field craft stuff like that yeah. Learn about all sorts really.' (Harry)

Participation in such activities for these participants created opportunities for informal learning, widened their social support networks and helped develop personal attributes such as leadership skills, as Daniel explicitly noted, supporting findings of previous research (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Merdinger *et al.*, 2005; Lovitt and Emerson, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Neal, 2017). Daniel commented on his commitment to the range of social and leisure activities he participates in, indicating how busy he was.

'I literally only have Thursday free the whole week.' (Daniel)

Others, such as Eva and Ben, indicated a preference for performing arts, including singing, dancing and acting. A few participants also expressed well-developed interests in anime (Japanese animation) and gaming, describing visits to Comic Con events and gaming festivals with independent visitors. There was also a range of

opportunities to participate in trips, both in and out of school, such as weekends away with scouts and activities run by the Children in Care Council.

'I do choir every week at school which is quite fun, I enjoy doing that.' (Eva)

'If you want to do a play you can audition...I did actually I think it was last year. Well not exactly last year but it was in Year 8 and it was the golden compass, his dark materials...I was the golden monkey...It was actually a really fun experience, I loved it...Yeah weekend rehearsals, after school, a lot of work.' (Ben)

Ben described an opportunity to participate in a children in care choir, which was a memorable event. This is similar to the findings of Sebba and Berridge (2019), who found a children in care choir gained widespread admiration with the VSH teacher noting they developed into a resilient group supporting and learning from each other. This indicates how social and leisure activities can develop skills, confidence and social networks (Gilligan, 1999).

'We get some songs, we sing them we practice...at first I felt really nervous performing in xxxxxxxx [local authority offices]...It was, a lot of people watched that was a surprise [laughing]. It was like everyone on the balconies, sitting in cafes and actually listening I was thinking woah [laughing]. It was not what I expected...I felt really good because it went well and it was fun.' (Ben)

Engagement was also evident in their approach to school life and learning in particular. Ben demonstrated engagement and curiosity in learning, particularly if it was a topic he enjoyed.

'I do revise sometimes at home and I try and do my homework and if I'm enjoying my homework I'll try and do more because I want to find out more and I'll concentrate in lessons.' (Ben)

'It could be worse my attitude towards school, I quite enjoy school, I quite enjoy learning so that's a good thing.' (Eva)

Eva indicated an enjoyment of learning similar to the perspectives of most participants from Neal (2017), who stated they always had a love of learning.

Reflective Box

Eva's use of the word 'quite' when stating her enjoyment may have indicated a slight reluctance to admit she enjoys school and learning. Could this be because it is not always seen as 'cool' to enjoy school? Is she presenting her account in a manner that would be seen as more socially acceptable? She appeared to make a distinction between school and learning. Could that be a distinction between school as a place and learning as a process? By the end, she is clear that enjoying learning is a positive perspective to have.

4.3.4 Subordinate Theme: Advocate for Others

Advocacy is about speaking up for children and trying hard to ensure their perspective and wishes are listened to and acted upon by people who make decisions (DfESb, 2004). While four participants were recruited via the Children in Care Council and consequently their involvement in this implies that they are already advocates for others, this theme was also true for the fifth participant, who was not part of the Children in Care Council. The main argument for listening to children is that they are

the experts about their own lives and can support adults in finding positive solutions that will make lasting impacts (Pona and Hounsell, 2012).

Being an advocate for others was evident at the local authority level through the Children in Care Council, but also at a school level by being an active member of school and year group councils and also an anti-bullying ambassador. Charlie and Harry described the range of work they had been involved in through the Children in Care Council and anti-bullying ambassador respectively. Eva described how she had been in both year group and school councils. These accounts indicated a level of dedication to being advocates for others.

'...we have gone round children's homes interviewed them and said how was this and how was that? And could you change anything if there was a way to change something?... Also we did do recently a young inspectors for the custody suits in the police, cause we have heard, well we have had reports let's say from children that it isn't great...' (Charlie)

'Last year I used to do all the anti-bullying stuff and like charity sort of stuff...So I have done this day course thing so I went to a different school. You know the Princess Diana award thing? [anti-bullying ambassadors]...I done that and then after that I done like assemblies, I went round to forms and stuff like that...I had to wear a badge and not what...I had a blue shirt...It's quite good.' (Harry)

'In Year 7 I was in the year council, Year 10 I was in year and school council then this year I am only in year council.' (Eva)

These roles convey an element of 'work' and responsibility for the young people, but they spoke about them with a sense of pride and enjoyment. It appears that young people valued the chance to have a say about matters that are important to them (Pona and Hounsell, 2012) and be an advocate for others.

4.4 Superordinate Theme: Support and Coping

Throughout all interviews, participants spoke about the variety and degree of support they received and how they coped on a day to day basis. Within the superordinate theme of support and coping, five subordinate themes were identified: academic support, emotional support, coping strategies, managing emotions and behaviour and academic pressures. The first three appeared facilitative factors to educational success.

Reflective Box

Support and coping as a superordinate theme was challenging to pull together. Originally, managing emotions and behaviours was a potential superordinate theme due to the extent to which nearly all participants highlighted a range of difficulties they experienced with managing their emotions or resultant behaviour. However, this did not seem to capture the range of participants' reflections, thoughts and feelings about their experiences. There seemed a contrast between receiving help from others yet a sense they were, at times, managing and self-reliant. The naming of the superordinate theme as support and coping seemed to capture this contrast and consequently aided the integration of interviews. The young people spoke about how they managed day to day and the academic and emotional wellbeing support they received. In Eva's account the academic verses emotional support caused some tension due to the differing views held by herself and a staff member regarding appropriate support for her. This was captured in the subordinate theme emotional support.

4.4.1 Subordinate Theme: Academic Support

This subordinate theme covered a variety of sources of academic support. High expectations of adults supporting the young person appeared an important aspect of academic support, with all participants expressing the high expectations of adults who

support them. This is in stark contrast to low educational expectations held by some adults as perceived by young people in care (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Clemens *et al.*, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Groinig and Sting, 2019). There were numerous examples from participants of adults recognising their educational successes, unlike the findings of Clemens *et al.* (2017).

'They want me to do well because they know that I can do well, yeah because we had my PEP the other day and we were looking at my targets and they were all 7s and 8s so quite high.' (Eva)

'Oh this always [hand held high] you are a bright child you can do stuff you just need to put it in to action...They have got really high standards of me.' (Charlie)

Extra academic support in the form of a reading intervention group, an English tutor and a mentor was highly valued by three participants, with the relationship with a mentor appearing even more important in terms of the emotional support this provided, (see section 4.4.2). Additionally, prioritising the completion of homework and providing appropriate space and resources to complete homework seemed to promote a culture that education matters in the residential home. This is in contrast to earlier research where a lack of practical resources to complete homework, particularly in residential homes, was a barrier to educational success (Martin and Jackson, 2002).

'Every day I have to do half an hour of homework at GCSE level and then on a Monday I do tutoring.' (Daniel)

PEP meetings were mentioned by two participants as helpful for book recommendations and accountability. Yet it is worth noting that opinions of whether or not PEP meetings were perceived as useful by young people was divided in some research (Berridge *et al.*, 2015).

'I still have PEP meetings and LAC meetings...I have found them helpful because they, yes they do most of the things that they say they are gonna do...' (Charlie)

Participants also mentioned access to a range of practical resources necessary for academic support; such as e-learning platforms, revision guides, core texts for English, extra revision sessions, helpful written feedback from teachers and having laptops.

'...we get revision guides, we get texts, we get the texts of our plays and books for reading out for our exams like English, we get the Jackal and Hide book for that, our own little mini one. For the drama one I have got Blood Brothers text, so I have to read through all that play. It's hell, it's hell, it's hell. Yeh but it is working.' (Charlie)

'...about two days ago I got all the revision guides that I needed.' (Harry)

'Teachers they erm they like put some questions in my book to mark. They write in green pen so I can understand it and if I don't understand it, I just write it down. Like it is always there working pages red pen and my answer that I get, so it is helpful. It helps me because the teachers try to challenge me.' (Ben)

Reflective Box

From a phenomenological perspective considering meaning making for Ben here, the feedback from teachers seemed valued by Ben appearing to offer a balance between clarifying his understanding yet offering challenge to help him progress. The written dialogue, offered through the working pages with coloured pens, appeared a technique that is used consistently and gave him a chance to formulate an answer.

Academic support from carers in terms of prioritising education, helping with homework and good home school communication were all features identified.

'Whenever I couldn't be bothered to do anything, they kind of took all my distractions away from me and then made me do that!' (Harry)

'A lot of the time it is teachers and foster parents as well because they support me. They always help me.' (Ben)

'...towards the middle of Year 7, that was when I started making quite a few good friends and I started messing about a lot in lessons and yeah they kind of made sure that I was aware of like what not to do and what to do. They spoke to the teachers.' (Harry)

Academic support was a broad subordinate theme that stretches beyond practical resources. Supportive relationships with others who promote academic achievement seemed important. This is in line with previous research findings indicating the importance of children in care having access to at least one significant adult who promotes and values learning, helping them understand the value of education (Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018).

4.4.2 Subordinate Theme: Emotional Support

Positive supportive relationships with foster carers, teaching staff, peers, a mentor and the Children in Care Council appeared to provide important sources of emotional support. Eva talked about one particularly positive friendship and Ben valued his friendship group. For Daniel, emotional support, alongside academic support, from his teachers was seen as just as important and for Charlie the support received from his foster carers was essential. The impact of a mentor for Charlie cannot be underestimated, similar to previous research (Morton, 2016).

'...they know me more now because the other people didn't get to know me as such, they only saw the beginning bit of me getting angry and me getting annoying but my family have gone through the highs and lows and I am happy...' (Charlie)

This finding is similar to those of Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad (2017), where being defended and fought for was a subtheme of belonging when they investigated what foster parents of academically successful care leavers did. Friends and teachers were also an important source of emotional support.

'I have a friend that is always there for me so when I am having a bad day, she will always be there to help me and vice versa. It's just nice to have someone.' (Eva)

'They [his friends] would cheer me up if I had a bad day.' (Ben)

'I have quite a good relationship with maybe some of the teachers...Maybe in the learning zone and then everywhere else so maybe if there wasn't something that was quite right, I could go over and speak to them.' (Harry)

'They [teachers] help me settle down and they help me out, cheer me up.' (Daniel)

Daniel spoke about academic verses emotional support from the teachers. Children in Care Council was also referenced as a source of emotional support.

'It is like a 50 50 split...They are concerned about the wellbeing of you, they want to get the best out of you, the academic, so it weighs up.' (Daniel)

Reflective Box

Daniel identified that teachers seemed to be concerned in equal measure about pupils' emotional wellbeing and academic achievement. He appeared to be eluding to high academic expectations held by teachers yet the appreciation that wellbeing is also be a priority.

'Children in care council is every month, the first Friday and it is when foster children go to xxxxx and erm so we talk about feelings about being fostered.'

'...in Year 7 I used to fight, I used to get in arguments, I used to do everything under the sun as a child would in school. When I met my mentor, I've changed drastically. Now you would see me get in and try to get focused in lessons getting that done instead of 'oh I'm not going to do this, oh I'm not going to do that, I'm just going to do this instead.' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

There is a stark change described here in Charlie's approach to learning with the use of past tense suggesting a change over time. He seemed to indicate the degree to how bad things used to be in year 7 with the phrase 'everything under the sun'.

This links with his previous quote in Section 4.3.1 when he describes his relationship with his mentor. The bond which he describes suggests that Charlie is experiencing positive attachments with his mentor. There is a contrast in how Charlie perceived the 'year 7 Charlie' and the 'Charlie now', some of which he attributes to his mentor. I was left thinking how again relationships appear fundamental and an important mechanism that allowed Charlie to accept emotional and academic support. He described later in the interview how the support that he receives from his mentor is consistent. Accessing a mentor appeared to be a turning point for Charlie in his approach to learning and how he perceives the value of education.

It appears from Charlie's account that his mentor had impacted positively on him, not only in terms of emotional support and his attitude to learning but also helping him see the value of education. Mentors were stated as the main reason for college attendance and succeeding academically (Rios, 2008). More specifically, school-based mentoring can successfully encourage the social and educational capabilities of children in care beyond school (Carroll and Cameron, 2017).

4.4.3 Subordinate Theme: Coping Strategies

Some participants mentioned coping strategies as a way of managing school life. Relationships with foster families, teachers and friends seemed an important aspect of these coping strategies. Charlie found his home a place he could be himself, a safe haven. A particular teacher, recognising and encouraging educational success and personal strengths, seemed to have promoted a love of English for Eva, especially in creative writing and public speaking.

'My family know that I'm mostly happy at home, not at school. Surprisingly, it's a weird thing when you're at home at school you are a completely different person. That is me basically.' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

Contemplating interpretation here necessary from a phenomenological focus, Charlie portrayed a sense of being known and understood by his family, where home is his safe haven. Yet there appeared to be a tension that he presents as two different people, one at home and one at school. The choice of language such as 'weird' could be a means for him masking the extent to how uncomfortable he felt about the need to be a different person at school. However there appeared a level of acceptance throughout his interview that this will be the situation until he finishes school.

'They've [teachers] known me for 5 years so they know what I'm like they know that if I get angry, I should go out and calm and then come back with a fresh head, fresh mindset.' (Charlie)

'My English teacher I get along with quite well...the one who said I was doing well said I was doing well with my non-fiction, writing speeches.' (Eva)

Other coping strategies were more practical or reliant on the individual themselves. For example, taking an alternative route to school, using an agreed strategy, seeking help, learning to ignore, leaving the room or distracting themselves from negative people or feelings of pressure.

'Last year like I would just get bored and annoyed and at that point I used to just walk out but they gave me a ten-minute time out card so I could just go out whenever.' (Harry)

'I'm not really fussed about not asking the teacher about something, so I'll be happy to ask the teacher if I don't understand something.' (Harry)

'I have had that for 5 years [bullying], I have learnt to ignore them and carry on.'
(Charlie)

'Sometimes I have a really bad day and I need to go and sit out...' (Eva)

Reflective Box

A 'really bad day' indicated how challenging school could be for Eva and the need to leave and seek out a quiet space. Taking herself away from a situation is a potential coping mechanism that allows her to manage the challenges of school life.

Some previous research looking at educational success has considered only the facilitative factors (Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006; Gorham, 2009; Hass, Allen and Amoah, 2014; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). It is vital to be aware that, despite these young people doing well in school, they still have barriers to overcome and as a result need to develop coping strategies. The more adults supporting them are aware of this, the more they will be able to help facilitate coping strategies.

4.5 Superordinate Theme: Stability vs Instability

All participants spoke about a degree of stability at school, with some having experienced instability at points in their lives. Four subordinate themes were identified: school stability, placement stability, experiencing instability and transition. The first two subordinate themes appeared facilitative factors to educational success.

Reflective Box

This superordinate theme was arrived at as an attempt to capture the contrast between the period of relative stability that they were all experiencing at the time of the interviews and the instability of the earlier years of some participants. Originally, I felt transition was a subordinate theme, but it took some thinking about which superordinate theme to connect it to. I settled on stability vs instability as the participants reflections, thoughts and feelings around transition appeared to focus on the unsettling nature, instability and fears of fitting in to a new social setting.

4.5.1 Subordinate Theme: School Stability

An important finding was that all participants experienced stability in secondary school, having been at the same school since Year 7. However, some did experience higher school mobility in primary school (see Section 4.11.1). Daniel and Harry were the only participants who had experienced complete school stability throughout their education, with only planned transitions.

'I have been at that school since Year 7...I'm in year 11 now and I've literally been to three schools.' (Daniel)

'I haven't moved school apart from obviously the transition from primary to secondary.' (Harry)

'Five years...I have been at the school so basically since Year 7.' (Charlie)

'For my current school now, I have been there for three years, from Year 7 to now in Year 9.' (Ben)

All participants appeared to be in a period of stability in both their care placement and school placement. At school, this meant they were more likely to maintain consistency

with the curriculum and exam preparations. Additionally, they were more likely to maintain supportive relationships with peers and teachers, which promotes a sense of school belonging (Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020). All of these factors are conducive to educational success.

4.5.2 Subordinate Theme: Placement Stability

Similar to the findings of Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate (2006), these educationally successful young people have all experienced a period of relative stability in their home lives, with their most recent placements being stable for a number of years.

'I have only been in one foster home and I have been there for about 4 or 5 years.'
(Harry)

'Fairly consistent. I have been here [the residential home] for about three and a half years.' (Daniel)

With the level of satisfaction rather than the placement type being key relative to positive educational outcomes (Brodie, 2010), it is important to note all participants appeared happy and settled with their current placements. This was true whether it was a foster or residential home. Both Ben and Charlie expressed positivity about their placements with Charlie suggesting a feeling of perceived future stability gained from his foster family.

‘Very stable. When I moved to being fostered, I stay here. I’ve never moved around...It’s nice not moving around because just moving to another house and another house would be quite hard for me. Yeah and its really good, I enjoy it.’ (Ben)

‘...it was annoying for me when I was a child [moving placements] but I mean now my family have kept me there for 6 years...I think this family is solid and this family will keep me going for a long time.’ (Charlie)

Stability is a valued factor according the views of children in care across research (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sugden, 2013; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018) and appears true for this current study. In alignment with Morton (2016), they seem to have all found the one placement that has made a significant difference to their lives (Morton, 2016).

4.6 Superordinate Theme: The Future

The future was a superordinate theme that appeared purely a facilitative factor. All participants had considered their future to varying degrees. The two subordinate themes were: aspirations and knowledge and support.

Reflective Box

This superordinate theme appeared one of the more obvious ones to arrive at in the process of data analysis. However, I knew it was more than just these young people indicating aspirations within their accounts. There seemed something important about the process by which they arrived at these aspirations. Support seemed fundamental in creating discussions about plans for the future. Additionally, important experiences provided them with knowledge about their potential future aspirations and in Eva’s case a change in direction. Arriving at these particular subordinate themes supported the integration of interviews and drawing conclusions about the importance of their future aspirations and having the appropriate knowledge and support to develop plans to reach their aspirations as a critical aspect in supporting young people in care.

4.6.1 Subordinate Theme: Aspirations

Shin (2003) found educational aspirations were one of the most critical predictors of educational attainment. All participants expressed aspirations, with some having identified a clear plan post 16.

'I think I want to do something like screen writing because I really enjoy my media studies and I really enjoy writing in English.' (Eva)

'...hopefully go to uni and get a creative writing degree.' (Eva)

'I was planning to go into concept art for my future, for my job...' (Charlie)

'...it would be classed under so graphic design and art and then from there go to uni for graphic design.' (Charlie)

'Oh many people have said I have got a clear plan and that is what, I can officially say yes I have got a clear plan, it does help.' (Charlie)

'So my number one goal is to get into the armed police...and then my second one is to go into trade, that is my second goal if the police don't work out.' (Daniel)

'Do my GCSEs and going into public services. Level three hopefully and then enrol for the police.' (Daniel)

'I wanna be a dancer, maybe an actor maybe I'm not sure. Erm.. and a foster parent.'
(Ben)

'I want to go into business...or I might want to go into the army.' (Harry)

'I think I'm going to go to sixth form and study it there [business].' (Harry)

This theme is similar to the findings of Salazar *et al.* (2016), who found participants shared the importance of setting and focusing on academic goals, having clear plans after school and working with professionals to implement those plans. All participants shared their hopes and plans for the future and after continuing with education. They all had high expectations for themselves, with some knowing the exact profession they wanted to enter, similar to previous research (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Rios and Rocco, 2014).

4.6.2 Subordinate Theme: Knowledge and Support

All participants appeared to have a level of knowledge regarding potential options post 16, which was particularly true for the three participants in Year 11. This knowledge was gained through their own research, opportunities to visit and stay at universities, work experience and meeting with professionals in industry.

'Well I play a lot of games I'm not going to lie I've always been fascinated, because I used to try to draw pieces of art, the concept art and I was like it is so cool how they do it and how they think about it. And then one day I was just looking at a simple bow I was thinking how do they make that from that to like this? So I was looking at that I was like wow that is how you actually do it...Basic research myself.' (Charlie)

'Yeah I just know that is what I want to do because I have been to some universities.'

(Eva)

'I used to want to be an engineer until I did my work experience engineering and it was very repetitive and I didn't really enjoy it.' (Eva)

'...I have recently had an interview with a concept artist as an actual thing recently just today. Basically, they have just told me there is this unreal thing. Basically, you have the first two years of uni, you then have a break year where you get fully paid.' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

Here Charlie spoke animatedly about his experience interviewing a professional in the industry he was keen to work in. It appeared that this experience has been important for Charlie indicating what could be possible for him and assimilating him into the culture of higher education with knowledge of degrees with placement years in industry. This interview potentially gave Charlie the opportunity to visualise his future, seeing being a concept artist as a 'an actual thing' and bringing it alive rather than just something he has researched in his own time. This really made me reflect on and consider the importance of post 16 plans for children in care.

Sources of support regarding future aspirations and plans came from a range of sources including foster families, a social worker and a careers advisor.

'...my carers and my social worker. Those have been the major ones [helping to make plans].' (Charlie)

'Mostly xxxx and xxxx [foster parents], actually just knowing I could help a child out that needs help because they are maybe unsafe where they're living.' (Ben)

'I've got a careers advisor in school.... I came up with the idea but then they helped me out to get to it.' (Daniel)

'Like everyone wants me to go on to sixth form so I don't know if I have much choice.'
(Harry)

Reflective Box

'everyone wants me to go to sixth form' suggested that Harry has a support network with high aspirations for him who want him to achieve his best. Harry was smiling as he spoke about the expectation of him attending sixth form. This was possibly a pride at having this support network.

Their future aspirations and having the appropriate knowledge and support to develop plans to reach their aspirations is a critical aspect in supporting young people in care. Research reviewed highlighted the need to plan, to help young people feel safe and secure about their future and to address what may happen to them in the short and long term (Brodie, 2010) as this may not always be effectively managed by professionals (Jackson, Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; O'Sullivan and Westerman, 2007).

4.7 Superordinate Theme: Self

A superordinate theme that emerged from interviews was about the young people themselves and their personal attributes. Personal attributes of children and resilience have become an area of interest for researchers (Pinkney and Walker, 2020) with a wide range of attributes being linked to resilience (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Neal, 2017; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). In this current study, personal attributes appeared evident with subordinate themes seeming to be: self-awareness, optimism

and humour and determination and competition. All of these subordinate themes were considered facilitative factors.

Reflective Box

It was quite clear from the beginning of the analysis that there was something about the personal attributes of these young people that was important. I felt I battled the most with this aspect in trying to encapsulate what this was. I think part of the issue is that many personal attributes share similarities. I found this the hardest superordinate theme to decipher, it felt particularly subjective.

Self-awareness was a label I was late to settle on as a subordinate theme. Originally, I had reflection, insight and self-awareness noted down. I think it was the aspect of the definition of self-awareness described as taking a step back from the experience that made me eventually settle on this as a subordinate theme. This appeared to be what some of the participants demonstrated in their accounts.

4.7.1 Subordinate Theme: Self-awareness

Across interviews, the young people appeared to demonstrate self-awareness. Bernard (2004) defines self-awareness as an ability to observe your own thoughts, feelings and attributes, demonstrated by taking a step back from the experience and the emotional hold. Bernard (2004) identifies self-awareness, self-esteem and self-efficiency as key personal attributes associated with resilience. Self-awareness could possibly facilitate the mental action of reframing, seeing yourself and your experiences in a new light (Bernard, 2004), with some authors considering the power of reframing to be the essence of resilience (Bernard, 2004). There were a number of examples of participants indicating self-awareness. Charlie appeared aware of his tendency to pretend to himself he was progressing without the need to put in the effort.

'They have got really high standards of me...I think it is helpful but I mean I just need to pull myself out a little bit from just being so blind of saying 'I'm doing fine, I'm doing fine' I'm not doing fine, let me just get it done and get it to that standard.' (Charlie)

Ben was confident talking about his personal attributes of being honest and responsible and described what that may look like in school.

'Maybe if like I don't do my homework or I forgot it, I would be honest. Like I would like actually not blame it on other people like my dad or my mum did that because I can't bring in my homework, I would just say I forgot it or I didn't do it.' (Ben)

Harry was able to indicate self-awareness when considering the reason for his dislike of Spanish, despite getting on well with the teacher. He was also aware of his tendency to be over opinionated or reactive at times. Being sociable was very important for Harry and he described his need to be connected to others.

'I think it is because I started it all from scratch and I didn't know anything. And I think for some reason I, other people, I think in Year 8 some people done Spanish, but I done German...I thought if I done Spanish then I would obviously be on the same page as everybody and like it would be more helpful in the future but yeah it's not been.' (Harry)

Reflective Box

Here, Harry was honest about his dislike of Spanish. The reason for it appeared to be based on his unequal starting point for learning Spanish compared to some of his peers, who had accessed the subject for an extra year. Not knowing anything was possibly an intimidating situation for him to be in which could have impacted on his confidence levels. This unequal starting point resulted in Spanish not being perceived by Harry as helpful as it could have been for his future. He seemed quite matter of a fact about the situation with a level of acceptance that Spanish was not going to be as helpful.

'There are certain lessons, maybe like with a debate sort of thing maybe the religious education R.E. whatever when we talk about stuff like that, I can be too over opinionated when it comes to things because I don't know I'm just quite strong headed.' (Harry)

'I mainly make something bigger of it and then understand later that I didn't need to make something that big out of it.' (Harry)

'So that's kind of why I have gone out a lot more. Cause I like to be around people. I'm not the sort of person that like would sit on my own in my room.' (Harry)

Eva demonstrated self-awareness by being honest about her academic strengths and areas to develop. She also compared herself to others on multiple levels including access to her birth family, approaches to learning, creative writing skills and in social terms.

'Every week which is quite rare for someone to get to see their family every week. I have talked to people in foster care who only see their family once a month.' (Eva)

'Even when people went with 'and I felt so sorry for myself' [ending line in an English mock paper] they still did GCSE results. Mine was really dramatic and Miss said that she found it really interesting and she had never read someone do that before.' (Eva)

'I'm not a girlie girl and most of the girls in my year are, all the girls are kind of snarky about it. And I was always called a guy. I only got along with a few of the boys because

I was interested in video games and TV shows and stuff and a lot of the popular boys likes sports and stuff. I'm not very sporty...' (Eva)

Reflective Box

In attempting to understand the lived experience of participants there is a complicated process of preconceptions revealed. Originally, I had the element of comparison for Eva noted as a subordinate theme which was a barrier. However, reflecting on this and rereading her account I actually found that the comparisons she was making were not necessarily negative but offering a level of self-awareness. I had to check myself and bracket my own preconception that comparison is a negative aspect. I realise I try hard to not to compare myself to others generally, so this possibly influenced my original choice of placing comparison as a barrier.

These findings are similar to Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate (2006), who found successful young people with experience of being in care were self-reflective regarding their attitudes and behaviour.

4.7.2 Subordinate Theme: Optimism and Humour

Within the accounts from participants, there was evidence of optimism and humour. This was apparent through attitudes towards themselves, school and learning, care placement, social and leisure activities and their future.

'I kind of like being myself...I don't think I need to change.' (Ben)

'Brilliant, love it, awesome [describing school].' (Daniel)

'... I feel like school is good for a multitude of reasons that the teachers are nice, the work is good, I'm trying to get on it.' (Charlie)

'History, I love learning about what happened in the past and we have got a really funny teacher.' (Ben)

'On the school side of things, I think everything is like quite good.' (Harry)

'I love it [living at residential home].' (Daniel)

'Basically I wanted to put myself out as more of a helping out role [on activity days for children in care] before because I used to be like that and I was like 'I really want to help them out, I really want to be there for them'...I wanted to be that role model for them just to say, yeah this is what I used to do and it's fun.' (Charlie)

For some, humour was used to connect to others such as teachers and as a coping mechanism to avoid fears of social isolation or detract from painful experiences with peers.

'I used to always get told off by other members for joking to much while doing it with her [teacher running school council] but being serious as well.' (Eva)

'...from Year 7, I think of the first days I think I got like, as I said I was quite confident and I was the joker of the form I say and so that literally straightway I made a lot of friends.' (Harry)

'Maybe something around peers like introducing the cane, I'm joking, I'm joking! Yeah introduce the cane.' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

I found myself feeling surprised when discovering the sense of optimism and humour in participants accounts especially when discussing difficult aspects such as transition to a new secondary school or experiences of bullying. I had noted that the reason for the use of humour may have been for a range of reasons including in Charlie's case to detract from painful experiences with peers. At this point I returned back to the transcripts and reread them to ensure that humour and optimism was present in their accounts while acknowledging and bracketing my surprise.

These findings are similar to Salazar *et al.*'s (2016) theme of positive self, where participants had a positive outlook and attitude. Participants mentioned a range of attributes including being optimistic, hardworking and making good decisions (Salazar *et al.*, 2016). Other research found that participants believed their own positivity and self-determination played an important part in being successful at university (Pinkney and Walker, 2020).

4.7.2 Subordinate Theme: Determination and Competition

Determination was a personal attribute that appeared across interviews, similar to previous research (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Lovitt and Emerson, 2008; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Pinkney and Walker, 2020), with competition being particularly important for one participant. Eva and Charlie, despite both experiencing difficulties with peer group relationships, demonstrated a determination to do well in school. Charlie explicitly noted determination as a personal attribute of his.

'I have to say I am determined quite a lot to get my work done to a good standard.'

(Charlie)

'I think that they did not like that I was smart as well. So I would always put my hand up and stuff in class and do all that. I was in loads of the top sets in Year 7.' (Eva)

Reflective Box

Here Eva is reflecting on why she was a target for bullying. She demonstrated a level of determination to continue with her engagement in learning and actions associated with being smart despite perceiving this is a factor as to why she was not liked.

'I used to do a couple of enrichment clubs after school which was art club, they had a gaming club ...I don't do those anymore as I am focusing more on revising, getting my work done and also mentoring...' (Charlie)

Daniel considered himself to be competitive. For him, sport is a big part of his life which he believes has helped him develop his teamwork skills. Competition in his school sports teams appeared to support his education, promoting the expectation of working hard academically in order to play. Additionally, he described a competition he had with his group of friends about getting the best grades at GCSE. He was in the lead at the time of the interview.

'Hockey and rugby and football...I'm actually umpiring a match tomorrow and then playing straight after that...I play for the county and for school.' (Daniel)

'I have to pass the ball to other players and then receive it and score goals. Lots and lots of goals.' (Daniel)

'We have a rule in rugby and football, don't get the grades, don't play.' (Daniel)

Similar to Pinkney and Walker (2020), the participants in this study reflected Stein's (2005) classification of the 'moving on' group where Stein (2005) had applied a resilience framework to care leavers. This group had experienced more stability and continuity, were moving on with their lives and preparing for their futures. Considering Berridge's (2017) later classifications, again similar to Pinkney and Walker (2020), they reflected aspects of the 'private/self-reliant' group in that they were sustaining a quiet determination to succeed. However, they also reflected aspects of Berridge's (2017) 'committed/ trusted support' group as they often had good support and felt genuinely cared for.

4.8 Research Question 2: What are the barriers to educational success for children in care?

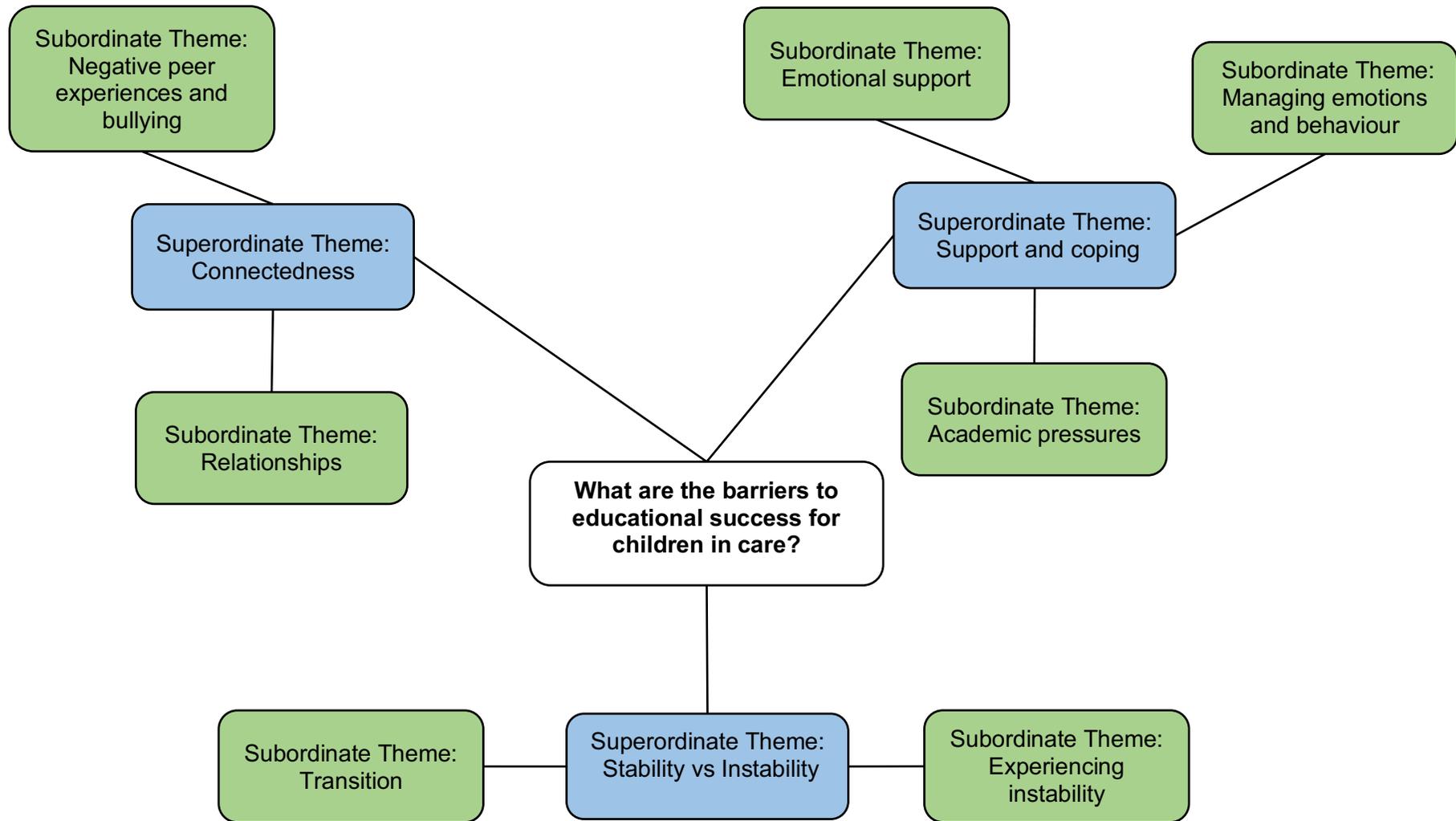


Figure 2: Themes that relate to barriers to educational success for children in care

4.9 Superordinate Theme: Connectedness

The importance of connectedness was evident throughout all accounts. Each participant had their own unique experiences of connectedness but there were similarities across participants, which were reflected in the subordinate themes of: relationships, school community, participation and engagement, being an advocate and negative peer experiences and bullying. Negative peer experiences and bullying and relationships appeared to act as barriers to educational success.

Reflective Box

While connectedness as a superordinate theme has been explored in the Reflective Box in Section 4.3, there was further deliberations between the subordinate themes that appeared to act as barriers. While relationships appeared to transcend much of the participants' accounts both as a facilitative factor and barrier, over time I felt negative experiences with peers and bullying was a significant and distinct aspect of relationships. I felt that this warranted a separate subordinate theme given the extent of difficulties faced by both Eva and Charlie. At first, I felt apprehensive about this subordinate theme being separate as there was a risk of labelling children in care as having social difficulties or being influenced by previous reading on social difficulties and imposing preconceptions about them experiencing such difficulties. Therefore, I returned to their accounts to reread to be confident in this subordinate theme. I felt that given these difficulties were mainly reported by Eva and Charlie, this highlighted an element of divergence from the three other participants who did not express particular difficulties with peers.

4.9.1 Subordinate Theme: Negative Peer Experiences and Bullying

Negative peer experiences and bullying was a significant barrier that appeared in two accounts, similar to previous research (Rios and Rocco, 2014; Berridge *et al.*, 2015). Bullying is a complex problem to describe and report given that individual variation in what is perceived as bullying is dependent on power dynamics in the relationships, frequency, duration, context and nature of incidents (Berridge *et al.*, 2015). Furthermore, an element of conflict and friction may occur regularly in schools (Berridge *et al.*, 2015). Therefore, similar to Berridge *et al.* (2015), I was guided by the participants' own perceptions of bullying. While not all participants reported negative peer experiences and bullying, those that did tended to describe particularly difficult

experiences that were persistent. Eva appeared to distinguish between being unkind and more persistent examples of bullying. Charlie depicted particularly extreme examples of bullying persistent throughout school. Harry and Daniel reported no difficulties with peer relationships and Ben mentioned an example, but this appeared more bad behaviour from a minority of pupils rather than anything targeted at him.

'I have had bad experiences with quite a lot of people in my year just being...bullying or generally not being nice to me. So it is kind of weird having to be in the same lessons as those people.' (Eva)

'The bad things I think about of school would have to be some of the peers because they can be absolute hell...' (Charlie)

Both Charlie and Eva reported delays or difficulties with school dealing with reports of bullying.

'It took ages for it to happen, so I reported it to about six different teachers when I was in Year 7 when things started to happen.' (Eva)

Ben's experience did not appear as difficult as Eva and Charlie, but when asked if there was any way to improve school he highlighted the need to tackle bullying.

'Stop bullying really because I don't think they do take bullying seriously because they might say 'oh we will sort it out and talk to them' talking never does anything.' (Ben)

Further research is needed into school approaches to managing negative peer experiences and bullying as it appeared to be an issue that was not always taken seriously or tackled swiftly enough according to the perspective of some of the participants in this study.

4.9.2 Subordinate Theme: Relationships

While supportive relationships with others were mentioned by all participants, some also referred to difficulties with relationships, including with social workers, teachers and peers. Such difficulties could be considered a barrier to educational success. However, they did not appear as prominently across most participants' accounts as supportive caring relationships. Charlie, despite valuing his relationship with his social worker, did not have enough time with her.

'I haven't really seen much of my social worker. Yes I do see her more often than I used to because they have been working on it, but I don't see her as much.' (Charlie)

Eva's social worker did not consider her voice when making a decision about whether she should move schools after moving to her first placement.

'My social worker said to keep going to my old school because they said that it would be better for me with my SATS to know the people around me. But I was just starting Year 5 at that point it didn't really matter too much because a year's time I would have gotten to know everyone.' (Eva)

This was an important factor to consider as Eva then experienced some difficulties when transitioning to secondary school (see section 4.11.2), which she believed was influenced by being new. Teachers were also mentioned as not always being particularly helpful. However, these teachers appeared to be in the minority. Here it appeared there was an absence of a caring and supportive relationship developing between the pupils and teachers.

'One of my teachers. Just one...A science teacher. Erm she is not fun whatsoever. She is always like... we have to copy out of our textbook and you are writing stuff down and it doesn't go in your head really, you are just writing stuff down....we are just copying from a book we barely do stuff really...And she always types, I can just hear her writing her emails and it's annoying.' (Ben)

'...it's mostly drama that I don't like because I'm not going to lie the teacher is very very strict when it comes to most things and she likes to get everything, she is competitive, she is competitive. Cause there is two drama groups and our one let's say is the competitive one...' (Charlie)

'He singles people out quite a lot as well so like maybe towards the people that he did not like at the beginning of the year. There could be a whole group of people talking but out of that group of people talking you'll know who he will pick out and send out.' (Harry)

Reflective Box

Considering a phenomenological focus on the way the world seems to the young people and how they are experiencing it, the above quotes about teachers indicate an absence of a caring and supportive relationship developing between pupils and teachers. It appears in all these accounts there is little respect for these teachers because their actions were not conducive to promoting positive relationships. These accounts of teachers demonstrated a lack of interest, over competitiveness and the unjust targeting of pupils. In these accounts, there appeared little attempt from these teachers to have a shared understanding. This again highlights the importance of caring and supportive relationships.

Charlie also described not having contact with friends out of school hours, suggesting he lacked any particularly strong peer relationships. However, he was able to describe positive supportive relationships with other adults, including his foster family, an independent visitor and mentor, meaning his needs might be being met elsewhere.

'And friends I only talk to them during school time.' (Charlie)

'It's really hard and my class may not be the greatest. Yeah we have got a few like not nice people and a few disturbing people that don't know when to stop...I get really bored because I just have to hear the teacher shouting and people just shouting at the background...it just wastes time and that time you could be learning.' (Ben)

Peers were also noted to negatively impact learning as described by Ben above. This was an example of where peers were having a negative influence and placed a lower value on education similar to previous research (Harker et al., 2004; Rios and Rocco, 2014).

4.10 Superordinate Theme: Support and Coping

Throughout all interviews, participants spoke about the variety and degree of support they received and how they coped on a day to day basis. Within the superordinate theme of support and coping, five subordinate themes were identified: academic support, emotional support, coping strategies, managing emotions and behaviour and academic pressures. Emotional support, managing emotions and behaviours and academic pressures appeared to act as barriers to educational success.

4.10.1 Subordinate Theme: Emotional Support

While emotional support was a facilitative factor for all of the participants, it was also a barrier for some. Eva depicted a rather stark example about how a teacher differentiated between the educational and emotional support she required. She was initially stopped by her head of year from accessing 'house', the area for emotional support. Another teacher overturned this decision.

'Sometimes I have a really bad day and I need to go and sit out, so my head of year normally deals with all that stuff told me I couldn't go to a certain place where quite a lot of people go when they are not having a good day.' (Eva)

'She said it wasn't the right environment for me. I think she thinks I'm too clever to need support like that.' (Eva)

'A lot of the people who they don't really associate needing emotional support with those people that are smart in my school so everyone who normally goes to 'house' doesn't really get good grades and need to go there to actually, not like educational

support but they need emotional support to do their work...Say if you have a break down and you go to 'base' they will try and send you back to class whereas in 'house' they will let you stay.' (Eva)

Reflective Box

I felt a sense of shock when Eva stated, '*I think she thinks I'm too clever to need support like that*'. I had to check myself when Eva shared her view of the teacher's potential perspective because it was in complete contrast to my own values. As a result, I acknowledged this then focused on rereading this section of her account. There appeared a feeling of a lack of awareness from this staff member about the emotional support Eva required. It alluded to potentially grouping students in a simplistic manner. Eva is clever and not a behavioural concern therefore she does not need support because she is already succeeding. However, it could be that she is succeeding despite this. This seemed an important tension to capture in the lack of agreement between Eva and her head of year. This indicates a divergence from the other young people's accounts with only Eva sharing such challenges with emotional support.

Here there appeared to be a lack of agreement between the support that Eva and her head of year perceived she needed. Additionally, there was also a lack of agreement amongst staff. This raises the important issue of adults supporting children in care being made aware of their underlying emotional needs. Moyer and Goldberg (2019) state that teachers can lack understanding of a trauma informed approach, misinterpreting behaviour of the young person, which can then cause a strain on the relationship between the young person in care and school. Bomber (2011) describes how, for many children in care, school can be a daily challenge and therefore a safe base can be important in providing familiar space that acts as an anchor from where these challenges can be addressed.

4.10.2 Subordinate Theme: Managing Emotions and Behaviour

Four participants mentioned the need to manage their emotions or the subsequent behaviour that emerged as a result. There were reports of managing anxiety, anger, more generally frustration and being hypervigilant. Some participants indicated a

sense of becoming overwhelmed and needing to rely on their own coping mechanisms or the support of others to manage.

'A lot of my teachers said that in my report that I need to be put on track and that I am quite anxious in lessons especially if I don't know people there or I don't like people.'
(Eva)

Because of difficulties managing anger, resultant fighting caused Charlie to struggle, with a sense of hypervigilance and social isolation evident. He gained a reputation that proved hard to lose, even when he stopped fighting. Harry, who distinguished between feelings of anger and frustration, also gained a bit of a reputation for his behaviour.

'...at school my senses go on to full on 'I'm alert, I must be alert at every time because someone is going to call me a name or someone is going to do this and that.' (Charlie)

'Because I used to get in fights on the way to and from school because I never really had any friends, so I used to get in fights...' (Charlie)

'...people know who I am, people know what I do, people know I get angry very easily.'
(Charlie)

'It's never been anything that I'm really angry it's just maybe something that has annoyed me a little bit.' (Harry)

'I argued with a teacher because he was trying to tell me that I hadn't done any work and then he tried putting his point across but I wouldn't, yeah like I argued back, and then I ended up going off on one and just walked off. But obviously he was aware of that at that point [the exit card] and so it was good in that sense I think.' (Harry).

Reflective Box

Harry appeared to be experiencing a strong sense of injustice particularly in the above quote. It appeared that he may have some difficulties in either accepting authority or respecting teachers when there appears a lack of regard for building positive relationships from the teacher's perspective.

The quotes from Eva, Harry and Charlie above appeared to indicate some difficulties that they may have been experiencing in managing their emotions, which can then in turn influenced their behavioural responses.

These reports from some of the participants appear to align with previous research with young people, who agreed that emotional and mental health difficulties are a significant barrier to school success for children in care (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). However, in this study, it appears that as the participants progressed through school, difficulties with emotional outbursts or more challenging behaviour was reducing, particularly for Charlie and Harry. Ben was the only participant who did not disclose any difficulties managing his emotions or behaviour.

4.10.3 Subordinate Theme: Academic Pressures

Four participants were in GCSEs years and the academic pressures were evident throughout their accounts.

'It has been really stressful as I have more coursework and more stuff to do especially because it is more pressure for GCSEs.' (Eva)

'I find it quite challenging in tests so at least when I get in when I am doing my classwork I'm with people the same ability as me whereas in my tests...I can't normally put my knowledge down into the tests' (Eva)

'...they are quite high [expectations from teachers] I think sometimes like they kind of enforce how high they are and then you kind of feel pressured about doing that like doing so well...is just a lot of pressure' (Harry)

Here, a supportive home environment and positive involvement from carers in the education of young people in care are facilitative factors (Cameron *et al.*, 2010; Osborne, Alfano and Winn, 2010; O'Higgins, Sebba and Gardner, 2017) that would help ease the academic pressures some young people were feeling.

4.11 Superordinate Theme: Stability vs Instability

All participants spoke about a degree of stability at school, with some having experienced instability at some points in their lives. Four subordinate themes were identified: school stability, placement stability, experiencing instability and transition. The last two subordinate themes appeared barriers to educational success.

4.11.1 Subordinate Theme: Experiencing Instability

Considering school mobility, three participants experienced at least one, if not multiple moves in primary school, either before or as a result of coming into care. Daniel and Harry were the only young people who had experienced complete school stability throughout their education, with only planned transitions. While home life had been stable for all participants in recent years, it does not mean they were exempt from

experiencing instability in their earlier life. Eva experienced a difficult time of instability with a placement breakdown.

'I wasn't originally allowed to stay here because my previous placement broke down and I moved here temporarily.' (Eva)

'When I was with my mum, we lived somewhere else before moving to where my second primary school was. With my first foster carers was in xxxx and then I moved to here so I have moved a bit.' (Eva)

'When I was with my mum, yes I did move around quite a bit. I went to xxxx then I moved went back to xxxxx again but when I was fostered, I was going to xxxx academy and that wasn't really a good school, so we had to move.' (Ben)

'I have moved around probably 5 or 6 times during the 10 years that I have been in care.' (Charlie)

'...there was a lot of moving round when I was a kid 8 and below, I was like moving around every other year, so I have been put with that...it was annoying...' (Charlie)

Reflective Box

Charlie spoke about his experiences of moving frequently when he was younger in a rather matter of fact manner and something he had to just put up with. Having described his instability as 'annoying' could have been an attempt to acknowledge the experience yet move on as that instability appeared part of his past.

Despite experiencing instability, all participants appeared to be in a current period of stability in both placement and school contexts.

4.11.2 Subordinate Theme: Transition

Three participants spoke of difficult times around transition due to social concerns about fitting in to a new school where they knew no one. For two of them, this involved transition to secondary school and one was involved in transition to a new primary school. While two participants settled well into their new schools, one experienced prolonged bullying and being new was one of the reasons she believed this happened.

'It was hard because I was quite popular in my primary school because I didn't know anyone going to secondary school. It was kinda hard.' (Eva)

'I was bullied in Year 7 and 8. Especially because I was that one kid who came from somewhere else.' (Eva)

'When I moved from xxx to xxxx [the two different primary schools] it was kind of a big jump really because I just remember being in xxxx [the first primary school] for a long time and all my friends would go there. And yeah it's just moving to another school. It's a bit weird. Got no friends.' (Ben)

Reflective Box

Ben reflected on the social challenges and the feeling of isolation brought about by moving primary schools. When asked more about his experience of transition he described how a teacher from his old school visited him in his new setting, which Ben appeared to value. Relationships appeared to transcend this theme, like many others. Mostly the issues surrounding transition appeared to be the loss of important and valued relationships with peers and teachers from the previous school and a fear of the unknown when starting in a new school.

For Harry in particular, transition was a particularly difficult time, which resulted in a change in behaviour due to feelings of anger and a lack of control.

'...that was quite a difficult time because obviously I went to school quite far away erm and that is where all my friends were in primary school and then obviously I came up here and I didn't want to come up here I wanted to go with where all my friends were... I rebelled quite a lot around that point I didn't really listen to anybody.' (Harry)

'I argued a lot with obviously the social worker who decided that was the case and obviously I fought my carers, they have enforced it.' (Harry)

'I refused to do everything yeah that was it really... on the way there I remember my dad having to stop on the side of the road and he was like just shouting because I was like I didn't want to do anything.' (Harry)

From the perspective of young people from care backgrounds, there was a lack of focus preparing both them and the receiving schools for transitions, with recommendations to consider their voice central when making decision about which school to attend (Clemens *et al.*, 2017). The findings of the study suggest that school transitions can be a difficult time for young people and that this process needs careful management to support the transition, including listening to the voice of the young person.

4.12 Unique Contributions of the Current Study and Main Findings

This current study is the first qualitative study, to the author's knowledge, to offer an in-depth insight into the experiences of educational success from the perspective of young people in care within a U.K. context, focusing on the facilitative factors and barriers and recruiting a sample of school age participants only. The definition of educational success that was operationalised in this study is wider than that adopted by much of the previous research (see Chapter 2 Section 2.12). A majority of previous studies are from an international context or from the perspective of care leavers. Unlike previous qualitative studies, IPA was used as the method of data analysis to address the individuality of each participant's lived experiences. In some previous studies, the methodology lacked detail about the data analysis, whereas this study is transparent about the research design, method and analysis.

The study sought to explore the experiences of educational success from the perspective of young people in care attending school in 2019. Comparing the findings of the current study to previous studies (see Chapter 2 Section 2.13), the experiences of the current participants appear to reflect those of previous participants, with the exception of experiences of low educational expectations and negative stereotyping by professionals (Martin and Jackson, 2002), which participants in this current study did not report.

Findings highlighted the importance of connectedness, with supportive caring relationships with others as crucial. Participants needed to experience relationships with people whom they felt genuinely cared about them, as highlighted in previous research (Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Cameron, 2011;

Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Neal, 2017; Skilbred, Iversen and Moldestad, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). All of the young people participated in social and leisure activities that gave them opportunities for informal learning, widened their social support networks and helped develop personal attributes, supporting findings of previous research (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Merdinger *et al.*, 2005; Lovitt and Emerson, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Neal, 2017). Stability also appeared a valued facilitative factor similar to previous studies (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sugden, 2013; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018), with all participants experiencing a period of stability at home and school that had lasted a number of years. Participants appeared to have a range of personal attributes that acted as facilitative factors for educational success with evidence of self-awareness, determination and optimism. They all had future aspirations, some with more detailed plans established of how to reach these aspirations than others. Gaining knowledge and accessing support about future aspirations were important to ensure they were informed and had a plan.

These young people appeared to experience more facilitative factors from their perspective. However, the barriers they did experience were significant for some and consistent with previous research. Social difficulties were present, with reports of negative peer experiences and bullying a persistent factor for two participants. Yet the other participants appeared part of established friendship groups, with friends offering a source of emotional support for them. Emotional challenges were also evident, with all but one participant experiencing some difficulties managing their emotions or the

subsequent behaviour. Experiencing instability at home or in school placements was common in their earlier lives either due to their pre-care experiences or as a result of coming into care. Difficulties around transitions were experienced by some due to social concerns about fitting in to a new school community.

This study highlights, similar to previous research (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Hass, Allen and Amoah, 2014; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020), that it appears to be the dynamic interplay of personal and environmental factors that is crucial in the drive towards educational success and the development of resilience for these young people (see Chapter 2 section 2.8.6 for more information on the development of resilience). Personal factors include personal attributes such as determination, optimism and a focus on future goals. Environmental factors include caring supportive relationships with significant adults, stability, participation in social and leisure activities, accessing support networks, emotional and mental health support, academic support and valuing education (Hines, Merdinger and Wyatt, 2005; Hass, Allen and Amoah, 2014; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020). Experiencing caring and supportive relationships appeared a particularly prominent finding, highlighting the importance of feelings of positive attachment towards a significant adult being crucial (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006), especially for young people in care who may have previously experienced a lack of consistency in their care (Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006) (see Chapter 2 Section 2.8.2 for more information about attachment). The findings from this study suggest, similar to Hass, Allen and Amoah (2014), that there are multiple personal and environmental factors present, which interact in a

dynamic manner supporting educational success for children in care. In light of this, Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner (2018) suggest the promotion of education for children in care should be viewed from an ecological perspective, addressing both personal and environmental factors.

4.13 Implications for Educational Psychologists

This current study, adding to the paucity of research from an educational psychology perspective, offers an insight into the potential facilitative factors and barriers to educational success as perceived by young people in care. The advantages of the EP role are the variety of functions and levels in which they can work and apply psychology. Five core functions of EPSs have been identified as consultation, assessment, intervention, research and training operating at the individual, group and organisational level (Scottish Executive, 2002). There are, therefore, opportunities to make an impact for children in care at a number of functions and levels.

At an individual level, including all children in care on the agenda at planning meetings with school and using this process as an opportunity to enquire about their academic and social, emotional and mental health progress and the support available is important. Furthermore, this study suggests that when working with children in care, EPs may need to pay particular attention to their sense of connectedness, particularly their relationships with others. Do they have supportive caring relationships with significant adults? Is there a particular staff member they trust? Being aware of their social situation in school and whether they are part of an established friendship group or if they face difficulties with peers would also be important. EPs may need to explore the young person's perceived personal attributes and resilience and how this could be

further developed. Additionally, a central aspect of the role of EPs is supporting the social, emotional and mental wellbeing of pupils, families and teaching staff (Lyonette *et al.*, 2019). A significant barrier identified in this study was managing emotions and behaviour. Therefore, careful assessment of emotional or mental health may be required when considering what support or intervention should be implemented. EPs are also well placed to run a range of interventions, including therapeutic based interventions that could support children in care such as Play Therapy and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy.

At a group or whole school level, experiences of transition for children in care need to be carefully considered given some reported social concerns about fitting in at a new school. Furthermore, attention needs to be given to careers advice and future aspirations. This study suggests the importance of future aspirations and having appropriate knowledge and support to make plans towards these aspirations. Therefore, it is important that EPs discuss carer plans and post 16 options.

This study indicates that some professionals may have lacked understanding regarding the emotional needs of young people in care. EPs have a significant role linked to training staff to ensure high quality provision for pupils is available (Lyonette *et al.*, 2019). EPs are well placed to deliver a range of training and facilitate group work focused on meeting the needs of children in care. This could vary from whole school level training on topics such as attachment and trauma informed practice, to group level work facilitating sessions such as Circle of Adults or Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope (PATH) to further develop empathy, to individual level work supporting carers and staff to meet the needs of children in care. At an organisational

level, EP's could work in collaboration with Virtual Schools to promote trauma informed practice and positive educational outcomes for children in care.

There were instances in this study where it was clear the voice of the young person in care was not considered when decision making regarding school placements occurred. In addition to working with adults, EPs should also work with young people directly to develop their self-advocacy skills so they can have the confidence to speak for themselves in meetings but also on a day to day basis informing others how best to support them. EPs and other educational professionals could also have a role in multi-agency meetings to ensure the voice of the young person is heard and that meetings are accessible. Increasing participation of the young person in such meetings can potentially lead to more targeted and personalised support.

4.14 Limitations of the Current Study

Acknowledging the limitations of the current study and considering these whilst interpreting the results is important. Table 7 states the limitations of the current study.

Limitation	Evaluation of Limitation
<p>Idiographic as opposed to nomothetic</p>	<p>Idiography considers the level of analysis and focusing at the particular as opposed to the general level (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This focus on the particular occurs at two stages. The first considers the level of detail, being in-depth analysis that is comprehensive and systematic (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The second considers how a particular relationships, process or event is comprehended from the perspective of a particular group of people in particular circumstances (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). The aim of the current study was an in-depth exploration of how young people in care make sense of their educational success. The sample size was small and therefore not generalisable. However, generalisability of findings is not the aim of IPA or this current study. IPA pursues comprehensive understanding of how people experience a phenomenon from a certain perspective in a particular context and focuses on how individuals interpret their experience and ascribe meaning to events (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009).</p> <p>Yardley (2000) indicated that researchers should also consider the socio-cultural setting of the study, such as the linguistic, ideological, historical and socioeconomic influences on the participants' beliefs, goals, expectations and conversations. In this current study, all participants were from one county local authority and attending mainstream secondary schools with four in foster homes and one in a residential home. Therefore, these young people may have reported very different experience from others in care who may living in different areas of the U.K, such as inner cities, and attending different settings such as an alternative provision. Similar to Happer, McCreddie and Aldgate (2006), this study is focused on only a small group of young people in care and does not claim to be representative of all young people in care. While it is possible to learn from their experiences, assuming that a replication of their experiences elsewhere would inevitably improve outcomes for all children or young people, would be naïve.</p> <p>When using IPA, pertinent literature is utilised to aid the positioning of the study and the findings should always be connected to pertinent literature in the discussion (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). However, the idiographic nature of this research could cause a sense of tension given the lack of generalisability yet the necessity to relate findings to previous research.</p>
<p>Interpretative nature of IPA</p>	<p>Given the interpretative nature of IPA and the unique experiences and dialogues drawn on when reflecting on the lived experience of participants, it is expected that researchers with the same data could construct differing themes (Coolican, 2004). Consequently, I acknowledge that the findings presented are operating with a double hermeneutic (Smith, 2017) (see Chapter 3 section 3.3.1), meaning it is my interpretation of the young person's interpretation of their experience they felt able to share. I was making sense in the second order, accessing their experience only through their own highly personal accounts (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). It is possible that within the social context of the relationship between the participants and myself the researcher, experiences could have been adapted and communicated by participants in order to prompt a shared understanding (Yardley, 2000).</p> <p>Furthermore, the role of bracketing (setting aside your preconceptions) and reflexivity in the interpretative process needs consideration. In IPA, Heidegger's perspective of interpretation is central. He acknowledges that interpretation is never without presuppositions, meaning the researcher brings prior preconceptions, experiences or assumptions (called fore-conceptions) with</p>

	<p>them to the encounter, which influences how the new stimulus is seen in relation to previous experience (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). In interpretation, priority should be to the new stimulus not to these preconceptions (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). However, the process of understanding such preconceptions is not linear and it may not be until the researcher engages in data analysis that preconceptions become clearly apparent (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). This causes a reevaluation of the part of bracketing viewing it as cyclical and only partly achievable and this connects the role of bracketing with reflexivity in qualitative psychology (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009). Reflexivity is key in the researcher attempting to challenge their preconceptions (Horrigan-Kelly, Millar and Dowling, 2016) (see Chapter 3 Section 3.3.4). I attempted to actively bracket off preconceptions. One particular example that arose during data analysis was my own preconception that residential homes may not have been as educationally supportive placements in comparison to foster placements based on previous reading. However, the participant's account appeared to be portraying a different experience. I noted my preconception and revisited his transcript numerous times to ensure my interpretation was embedded in his account. However, despite this attempt to practice reflexivity and bracket preconceptions, as suggested by Smith, Flowers and Larkin (2009), this is only partly achievable and is therefore a limitation.</p>
<p>Reliance on language</p>	<p>Another criticism directed towards IPA, discussed in Chapter 3 (Section 3.3.3), from Eatough and Smith (2006) is the need to be aware of the reliance in IPA on the capabilities of participants to reflect and articulate their experiences and thoughts. In light of this, supporting materials were used in the interview, which aimed to provide visual prompts and make the interviews as child friendly as possible. Additionally, prior to commencing the interviews, the questions in the semi-structured interview schedule and supporting materials were explored in a workshop with groups of young people currently in care as stated in Chapter 3 section 3.5. Amendments suggested by the young people can be seen in coloured text. This exploration of the interview schedule and supporting materials was partly to ensure they were appropriately worded. Further reflecting on this reliance on language, one of the inclusion criteria was suitable communication skills to understand and participate in a semi-structured interview. Therefore, participants selected for this study were Year 9 and above and as a result it does not consider the views of younger children in care.</p>

Table 8: Limitations of the current study

4.15 Future Research

This current study focused on five young people in care attending mainstream secondary schools in a county local authority. It would be interesting to investigate the experiences of children in care who are successful in education in a wider range of settings or in an inner-city local authority. Additionally, exploring specific aspects of their school experiences in more detail, such as their experiences of managing their social, emotional and mental health or coping with transitions to new schools, would be interesting given some participants spoke of these being particularly difficult aspects of school life. The current study discussed the perceived barriers to educational success but did not explore their social, emotional and mental health or school transition experiences in-depth. Researching the type of support, if any, that was offered to these young people around these areas would also be interesting. Further research into effective staff practices and interventions when supporting children in care with their social, emotional and mental health would help to ensure more informed and consistent levels of support.

Finally, with the voice of the young person being central to this current study, it would be interesting to conduct research which has a greater focus on child participation, climbing to even high rungs of Hart's ladder of participation (see Hart, 1992) to include young people themselves. They could define educational success (developing the work of Anderson and Williams, 2018), be even more actively involved in the research design from planning to implementation and therefore become active agents as opposed to passive recipients (as described by Winter (2006) see Chapter 2 Section 2.11). Individuals with experience of the care system may be subjects of research regarding educational success but seldom are their personal perspectives of success

investigated (Anderson and Williams, 2018). However, it is necessary to be mindful that there are difficulties associated with child participation research, such as which voice is being articulated and at the same time which voice is being heard (Mannay, 2016). Even with successful engagement and collaboration, with children it can be hard to translate their recommendations into policy and practice (Mannay *et al.*, 2019).

CHAPTER 5. CONCLUSION

The current study sought to explore the voice of young people currently in care who have achieved educational success, hoping to offer much needed in-depth insight into this area. This study aimed to answer the following research questions: What are the facilitative factors to educational success from the perspective of young people in care? What are the barriers to educational success from the perspective of young people in care?

Previous research in the education of children in care indicates gaps in attainment in comparison to their peers (Fernandez, 2019). They are at greater risk of being absent or excluded from school (Sebba *et al.*, 2015) and from being excluded from opportunities both in higher education and wider life prospects (Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Driscoll, 2018). An array of negative later life outcomes, potentially impacted by educational disadvantage, are more widespread amongst those from care backgrounds, such as unemployment, homelessness and receiving social welfare support (Viner and Taylor, 2005; Berlin, Vinnerljung and Hjern, 2011).

Previous research into children in care has identified a range of facilitative factors to educational success. Stability is a valued factor according to the views of children in care (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Jackson and Ajayi, 2007; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Sugden, 2013; Sebba *et al.*, 2015; Rutman and Hubberstey, 2018). Having supportive and positive relationships with a minimum of one significant adult appeared consistently important (Sebba and Luke, 2019). Further facilitative factors appeared to be: school belonging

(Johnson, Strayhorn and Parler, 2020), being actively involved in social and leisure activities (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Merdinger *et al.*, 2005; Lovitt and Emerson, 2008; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Neal, 2017), accessing support and resources (Harker *et al.*, 2004; Jackson and Cameron, 2011; Salazar *et al.*, 2016; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Pinkney and Walker, 2020) and personal attributes associated with resilience (Rios and Rocco, 2014).

Previous research has also identified a range of barriers to educational success. A lack of any of the facilitative factors stated above could be considered a barrier. However, there are also additional barriers. These include: having social, emotional or mental health difficulties (Rutman and Hubberstey, 2016), pre care experiences such as maltreatment and neglect (O'Higgins, Sebba and Luke, 2015) and low educational expectations (Jackson and Martin, 1998; Martin and Jackson, 2002; Rios and Rocco, 2014; Clemens *et al.*, 2017; Mendis, Lehmann and Gardner, 2018; Groinig and Sting, 2019).

A majority of previous studies are from international contexts or from the perspective of care leavers. This qualitative study has filled a gap in the research literature by offering an insight from a U.K. context and perspective focusing on facilitative factors and barriers and recruiting a sample of school age participants only. Unlike previous qualitative studies, IPA was used as the method of data analysis. Findings were contextualised in previous research, noting similarities and differences. There were a number of similarities with previous research.

This study found that facilitative factors to educational success from the perspective of young people in care appeared to be associated with experiences of connectedness. This was supported by positive supportive relationships with others, the school community fostering a sense of school belonging, participating and engaging in social and leisure activities and learning and being an advocate for others. Furthermore, participants appeared supported academically and emotionally by significant others and developed their own coping strategies. Experiencing stability, having future aspirations and accessing knowledge and sources of support regarding these aspirations were key. The young people demonstrated important personal attributes, including self-awareness, optimism, humour and determination. The element of competition also appeared a facilitative factor. There appeared to be a greater number of facilitative factors to educational success compared to barriers.

The barriers, while fewer in number, were not any less important. Social difficulties with negative peer experiences and bullying were a significant barrier that appeared persistent for two participants. More generally, difficulties with relationships, including with social workers, teachers and peers, were raised by participants. Emotional challenges included a lack of agreement between the perceived emotional support required. Additionally, the need to manage their emotions or subsequent behaviour was a difficulty faced by nearly all participants. Some participants expressed important views about the academic pressures that they faced. School mobility and home instability were experienced by some participants in their earlier lives either due to their pre-care experiences or as a result of coming into care. Difficulties around transitions were experienced by some due to social concerns about fitting into new schools.

This study considers implications for EPs. The findings can help inform how EPs can support children in care, including enquiring about their progress and the support on offer, social, emotional and mental health assessment and intervention, transition and career support, school staff training and raising the profile of the voice of the child, including developing young people's self-advocacy skills.

Future research into the experiences of children in care who are educationally successful in different contexts, such as in a wider range of settings or in an inner city location, would add to existing research. Additionally, future research could focus on exploring more specific aspects of their school experiences in detail, such as their social, emotional and mental health or school transition. Researching effective staff practices and interventions when supporting children in care and increasing child participation so that young people themselves can define educational success and be even more actively involved in the research design would be interesting and potentially important future directions.

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Appendix 1: Application for Ethical Review

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW

Who should use this form:

This form is to be completed by PIs or supervisors (for PGR student research) who have completed the University of Birmingham's Ethical Review of Research Self Assessment Form (SAF) and have decided that further ethical review and approval is required before the commencement of a given Research Project.

Please be aware that all new research projects undertaken by postgraduate research (PGR) students first registered as from 1st September 2008 will be subject to the University's Ethical Review Process. PGR students first registered before 1st September 2008 should refer to their Department/School/College for further advice.

Researchers in the following categories are to use this form:

1. The project is to be conducted by:
 - staff of the University of Birmingham; or
 - postgraduate research (PGR) students enrolled at the University of Birmingham (to be completed by the student's supervisor);
2. The project is to be conducted at the University of Birmingham by visiting researchers.

Students undertaking undergraduate projects and taught postgraduate (PGT) students should refer to their Department/School for advice.

NOTES:

- An electronic version of the completed form should be submitted to the Research Ethics Officer, at the following email address: aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. Please **do not** submit paper copies.
- If, in any section, you find that you have insufficient space, or you wish to supply additional material not specifically requested by the form, please it in a separate file, clearly marked and attached to the submission email.
- If you have any queries about the form, please address them to the [Research Ethics Team](#).



Before submitting, please tick this box to confirm that you have consulted and understood the following information and guidance and that you have taken it into account when completing your application:

- The information and guidance provided on the University's ethics webpages (<https://intranet.birmingham.ac.uk/finance/accounting/Research-Support-Group/Research-Ethics/Ethical-Review-of-Research.aspx>)
- The University's Code of Practice for Research (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf)

UNIVERSITY OF BIRMINGHAM APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW	<i>OFFICE USE ONLY:</i> Application No: Date Received:
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1. TITLE OF PROJECT

Against all the Odds: The voice of young people in care achieving academic success - an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis
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2. THIS PROJECT IS:

University of Birmingham Staff Research project
 University of Birmingham Postgraduate Research (PGR) Student project
 Other (Please specify):

3. INVESTIGATORS

a) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF THE PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATORS OR SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family name	Dr Huw Williams
Highest qualification & position	EP Psy D /Academic and Professional Tutor in Educational
School/Department	School of Education
Telephone:	XXXXXXXXXXXX
Email address:	XXXXXXXXXX

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

b) PLEASE GIVE DETAILS OF ANY CO-INVESTIGATORS OR CO-SUPERVISORS (FOR PGR STUDENT PROJECTS)

Name: Title / first name / family name	
Highest qualification & position	
School/Department	
Telephone:	
Email address:	

c) In the case of PGR student projects, please give details of the student

Name of	Rowan Gaffney	Student No:	xxxxxxx
Course of study:	1. Applied Educational and Child Psychology Doctorate	Email	xxxxxxxxxxxx
Principal	Dr Huw Williams		

Name of student:		Student No:	
Course of study:		Email	
Principal			

4. ESTIMATED START OF Date: PROJECT

ESTIMATED END OF Date: PROJECT

5. FUNDING

List the funding sources (including internal sources) and give the status of each source.

<i>Funding Body</i>	Approved/Pending /To be submitted
N/A	

If you are requesting a quick turnaround on your application, please explain the reasons below (including funding-related deadlines). You should be aware that whilst effort will be made in cases of genuine urgency, it will not always be possible for the Ethics Committees to meet such requests.

I have the possibility of students to see in the near future and I would like to capitalise on this. I would also like to keep within the timeframe to collect data in line with my course deadlines. I would like to be collecting data before the end of May.

6. SUMMARY OF PROJECT

Describe the purpose, background rationale for the proposed project, as well as the hypotheses/research questions to be examined and expected outcomes. This description should be in everyday language that is free from jargon. Please explain any technical terms or discipline-specific phrases.

It is well known that educational outcomes for looked after children (children that are in care) are often poorer in comparison to their peers (O'Higgins, Sebba and Gardner, 2017). Following the Children Act 1989, a child is considered looked after by a local authority if they fit one of the categories: are provided with accommodation, for a continuous period of more than 24 hours [Children Act 1989, Section 20 and 21], are subject to a care order [Children Act 1989, Part IV], or are subject to a placement order (DfE, 2018). Much of the educational research focuses on those children in care who are struggling academically and who are falling behind their peers. There are however a minority of children in care who are achieving well in education, despite the difficulties they will have faced prior to and whilst in care. This research will seek to add to the very limited qualitative accounts of children and young people currently in care or who have previous experience of being in care who are considered to be achieving educational success (Martin and Jackson, 2002; Ajayi and Quigley, 2005; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling and Wyatt, 2005; Happer, McCreadie and Aldgate, 2006; Gorham, 2009). A definition of educational success that will be operationalised is wider than much of the previous research. Gorham's (2009) definition of educational success will be utilised which includes engaging in education, as indicated by have a good attendance record, and also achieving the predicated targets set by teachers compared to other looked after children.

The research questions will be:

- What are the facilitative factors to educational success for looked after children?
- What are the hindering factors/ barriers to educational success for looked after children?

Semi-structured interviews will be conducted with at least 5 young people currently in care who are achieving academic success in year 9 or above. Themes will be analysed using **Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)**. IPA is an investigative method. It was initially established by Smith (1996) with the aim to 'capture the experiential and qualitative, and which could still dialogue with mainstream psychology' (Smith *et al.*, 2009, p.4). This approach to data analysis was chosen because it pursues detailed understanding of how a person experiences a phenomenon from a certain perspective in a particular context and focuses on how individuals interpret their experience and ascribe meaning to events (Smith *et al.*, 2009).

The voice of the child is central to this project. The voice of the child has been a focus of mounting attention and is often associated with the approval of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (Lundy, 2007), specifically article 12 (United Nations, 1989). It states that children have the right to articulate opinions and have these considered in areas that impact their life, giving weighting to age and maturity. To elicit and promote the voice of the child is central to national and international policy and a fundamental feature of the work of educational psychologists (Hammond, 2013). Numerous authors (Happer, 2006; Winter, 2006; Thomas and O'Kane, 1998) have recognised the need to directly consider the views of looked after children when looking at how best to support them.

Factors that influence educational success of looked after children in past literature include: social relationships (Emond, 2014; Sempik *et al* 2008; Hodges and Tizard, 1989; Jackson and Martin, 1998), placement and school stability (Happer, McCreadie, and Aldgate, 2006; Sugden, 2013; Department for Education and Skills, 2007; Hennessy *et al.*, 2014), school belonging (Sugden, 2013), having a caring/ significant adult (Happer, McCreadie, and Aldgate, 2006; Taking Care of Education" project, Harker *et al.*, 2003; Harker *et al.*, 2004; Dobel-Ober *et al.*, 2006), high expectations (Happer, McCreadie, and Aldgate, 2006), professionals having low expectations including social workers and care staff (Aldgate, *et al.*, 1992) and teachers (Francis, 2000), being able to participate and achieve (Happer, McCreadie, and Aldgate, 2006) and personal factors such as motivation and importance individuals placed on education (Dobel-Ober *et al.*, 2003) and resilience (Stein, 2008; Gilligan, 2007).

Key Terms: Children in care, educational success, voice of the child

7. CONDUCT OF PROJECT

Please give a description of the research methodology that will be used

The methodology used is qualitative. Face to face semi-structured interviews will be used with at least 5 young people currently in care who are achieving academic success in year 9 or above. Interviews will be conducted individually by the researcher, audio taped and transcribed. See Appendix A for the semi-structured interview schedule and supporting materials that will be used. The supporting materials aim to make the interviews as child friendly as possible. Prior to starting the interviews, using the semi-structured interview schedule, a trial will be conducted to pilot this interview schedule with a young person currently in care.

Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they offer a range of advantages such as:

- Freedom - A list of potential subjects rather than detailed questions creating a sense of freedom to expand on key aspects where needed (Thomas, 2016).
- Adaptability – Ordering and exact wording can be altered and adapted for each interviewee if needed (McCrary *et al.* 2010).
- Validity - Despite complete validity being an unrealistic option, considering factors such as length, clarity of wording, identified time intervals and guaranteed confidentiality boosts the opportunities for interviewees to be as truthful as possible (McCrary *et al.* 2010). When interviews are conducted face-to-face the personal contact allows for data to be checked with the interviewee regarding how accurate or relevant it is (Denscombe, 2014).
- Personal contact –the person being interviewed would respond to the interviewer in bodily presence far differently than if asked to fill a questionnaire electronically or by post (Thomas, 2017). The experience of being involved in an interview can be pleasing for the interviewee (Denscombe, 2014). In comparison to other research tools such as questionnaires, experiments and observations, there are greater personal aspects and participants are more inclined to appreciate the opportunity to discuss their opinions (Denscombe, 2014). There is an obvious therapeutic element here (Denscombe, 2014).

A significant challenge with interviews that will need to be considered is:

- Establishing rapport – this is not an easy mechanical procedure and it varies with each interviewee, given their character and the relationship the interviewer has with them (Thomas, 2017). McCrary *et al.* (2010 p. 114) describe it as the “mysterious force” that draws people together”. This could be a particular challenge when working with young people.

Themes will be analysed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). This approach to data analysis was chosen because it pursues detailed understanding of how a person experiences a phenomenon from a certain perspective in a particular context and focuses on how individuals interpret their experience and ascribe meaning to events (Smith *et al.*, 2009). Reid, Flowers and Larkin (2005) state that IPA is the investigation of lived experiences combined with a subjective approach with a focus on reflection when interpreting. This approach was chosen over alternative approaches such as thematic analysis or grounded theory because of the desire to focus on the uniqueness of individual experiences and wanting an in-depth account. Grounded theory looks for common codes from the start of the analysis stage amalgamating and analysing accounts as one data set (Robson, 2002). Thematic analysis also treats all the accounts as one data set. IPA analysis starts with a detailed examination of each account individually before progressing onto more wide-ranging statements (Smith *et al.*, 2009). This seemed the most valid approach to understanding lived experiences of children and young people in care.

8. DOES THE PROJECT INVOLVE PARTICIPATION OF PEOPLE OTHER THAN THE RESEARCHERS AND SUPERVISORS?

Yes No

Note: ‘Participation’ includes both active participation (such as when participants take part in an interview) and cases where participants take part in the study without their knowledge and consent at the time (for example, in crowd behaviour research).

If you have answered NO please go to Section 18. If you have answered YES to this question please complete all the following sections.

9. PARTICIPANTS AS THE SUBJECTS OF THE RESEARCH

Describe the number of participants and important characteristics (such as age, gender, location, affiliation, level of fitness, intellectual ability etc.). Specify any inclusion/exclusion criteria to be used.

At least 5 young people currently in care who are in education and achieving academic success. These participants will be considered vulnerable as a majority will be under 18 additionally this population have experience of the care system.

Inclusion Criteria

- Young people currently in care and have been for at least a year
- Year 9 or above
- Achieving academic success which means:
 - They are engaging in education – attendance 85% or above
 - Achieving targets set by educational professionals
- Suitable communication skills to understand and participate in a semi structured interview (see Appendix A for the semi-structured interview schedule and supporting materials)
- Attending a school in an East Midlands County Council where I am currently on placement as a second year Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Birmingham.

10. RECRUITMENT

Please state clearly how the participants will be identified, approached and recruited. Include any relationship between the investigator(s) and participant(s) (e.g. instructor-student).

Note: Attach a copy of any poster(s), advertisement(s) or letter(s) to be used for recruitment.

Identifying potential participants

Participants will be identified in a range of ways:

- Contact will be made with the xxxx Virtual School (a team of experienced teachers and dedicated educational professionals that promote and support, the educational attainment and progress of xxxxxx's children in care and children previously in care) and attendance in meetings if needed to help identify potential young people who may fit the inclusion criteria stated above.
- Contact will be made with educational psychologists within xxxxxx County Council educational psychology service. Team meetings attended if necessary, to help identify potential young people who may fit the inclusion criteria stated above.

Approaching participants

Once potential participants have been identified as fitting in the inclusion criteria direct contact via telephone or email will be made through the educational psychology service to the social workers and carers who had parental responsibility to seek permission to invite participation. A letter explaining the research and consent form will be shared with the carers and social workers (see Appendix C). Then, if social workers and carers give permission, potential participants will be asked if they wish to participate and an information sheet will then be shared (see Appendix B participant information sheet and consent form).

Recruiting participants

If social workers, carers and the young people agree to participation then a convenient time and place for the interview to be conducted will be arranged. Prior to the interview the young people will have the purpose of the study, the right to withdraw, confidentially and consent explained

11. CONSENT

a) Describe the process that the investigator(s) will be using to obtain valid consent. If consent is not to be obtained explain why. If the participants are minors or for other reasons are not competent to consent, describe the proposed alternate source of consent, including any permission / information letter to be provided to the person(s) providing the consent.

Voluntary (freely given) informed written consent will be obtained and recorded from social workers, carers and the young people participating in the interviews (See Appendix B and C). Initially contact will be made with the social workers and carers to seek consent before approaching the young person. An information sheet will be shared with all (see Appendix B). Risk of coercion will be addressed by seeking the freely given informed consent of the young people, not providing compensation (so they are not swayed by financial gain) and considering the balance of power between the student researcher and young participants (see Q20). Confidentiality will be maintained by the researcher. However, in the case of a safeguarding concern the researcher has a duty to report disclosures to the relevant safeguarding officers. This will be made clear to the young person prior to starting the interview both verbally and in the participant information sheet (see Appendix B). Carers/ social workers providing consent will always be the legal guardian.

Note: Attach a copy of the Participant Information Sheet (if applicable), the Consent Form (if applicable), the content of any telephone script (if applicable) and any other material that will be used in the consent process.

b) Will the participants be deceived in any way about the purpose of the study?
Yes No

If yes, please describe the nature and extent of the deception involved. Include how and when the deception will be revealed, and who will administer this feedback.

12. PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK

Explain what feedback/ information will be provided to the participants after participation in the research. (For example, a more complete description of the purpose of the research, or access to the results of the research).

Participants will receive verbal and written information (participant information sheet Appendix B) regarding the purpose of the research. All participants will be provided with short written letters of feedback summarising the results of the research in an appropriate format for the young people to access. The information provided will be anonymised. They will also be offered verbal feedback of the research if they wish. Access to a full written copy of the doctoral thesis will be available to the social workers, carers or the young people if required. Participants will be informed that the research forms part of my thesis and that the results would also be shared with the local authority. Lewis and Porter (2004), when working with vulnerable groups, advised asking the following question regarding feedback: Is the feedback given easily understood by participants using tools such as people that they know to talk it through with them, simplified text or pictures? I will ensure that the feedback is easily understood and where appropriate ask those who know them to discuss it with them.

13. PARTICIPANT WITHDRAWAL

a) Describe how the participants will be informed of their right to withdraw from the project.

Participants will have the right to withdraw. The participants will be informed of their right to withdraw verbally prior to, at the start, and during the interview and in the participant information sheet (see Appendix B). This sheet will contain information of how participants can withdraw both during and after the study with the appropriate contact details. December 2019 will be the time limit for participant withdrawal as stated on the participant information sheet.

- b) Explain any consequences for the participant of withdrawing from the study and indicate what will be done with the participant's data if they withdraw.

If a participant withdraws their data collected will be removed from the research and deleted up to December 2019.

14. COMPENSATION

Will participants receive compensation for participation?

i) Financial

Yes

No

ii) Non-financial

Yes

No

If **Yes** to **either** i) or ii) above, please provide details.

If participants choose to withdraw, how will you deal with compensation?

15. CONFIDENTIALITY

a) Will all participants be anonymous?

Yes No

b) Will all data be treated as confidential?

Yes No

Note: Participants' identity/data will be confidential if an assigned ID code or number is used, but it will not be anonymous. Anonymous data cannot be traced back to an individual participant.

Describe the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and/or confidentiality of data both during the conduct of the research and in the release of its findings.

Anonymity cannot be assumed because the interviews will be conducted face to face. However confidentiality of the data both during and post the research will be ensured through the use of pseudonym names for the individual participants and a data management plan with secure data storage and access.

If participant anonymity or confidentiality is not appropriate to this research project, explain, providing details of how all participants will be advised of the fact that data will not be anonymous or confidential.

Anonymity cannot be assumed because the interviews will be conducted face to face. This will be made clear to the participants prior to meeting and before starting the interview.

Circumstances in which confidentiality would be breached would be if there was a safeguarding concern raised. If this was to occur safeguarding procedures would be followed and appropriate people informed following guidance in Working together to Safeguard Children (DfE,2018). All this information would be provided on the participant information sheets and will be explained verbally to the participants before the start of the interview.

16. STORAGE, ACCESS AND DISPOSAL OF DATA

Describe what research data will be stored, where, for what period of time, the measures that will be put in place to ensure security of the data, who will have access to the data, and the method and timing of disposal of the data.

All data will be compliant with The Data Protection Act and GDPR (2018). A University of Birmingham data management plan will be in place. Data storage, access and disposal will be explained using appropriate language to all participants verbally before conducting the interviews. Interviews will be audio recorded. This data will be recorded on local authority equipment with double encryption. If this equipment needs to be transported before the data can be transferred it will be done so securely in a locked bag. It will be transferred as soon as safely possible onto an encrypted laptop where the data will be transferred using a secured connection to BEAR DataShare. BEAR DataShare is a file synchronisation and sharing service provided by IT Services at the University of Birmingham. Based on PowerFolder the service allows secure saving and syncing of files. The DataShare servers and storage is located within University of Birmingham data centres. Data will be stored in the Research Data Store (RDS). The RDS is a central storage service for active or working research data. The RDS is built on an enterprise storage system, which means it is fast and secure and also allows presentation of data to PC/Workstation/Mac on campus (or through the University's Remote Access Service) as a local drive. Data in the files will be password protected and will be accessed only by the principle investigator and the postgraduate research student. Raw data will be stored and accessible for 10 years from the date of first write up of results before being deleted. Any paperwork will be stored in a locked cupboard for which only I will have the key.

17. OTHER APPROVALS REQUIRED? e.g. Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks or NHS R&D approvals.

YES NO NOT APPLICABLE

If yes, please specify.

Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks - these have already been conducted given the nature of the course and daily contact with children and young people in our placement work.

18. SIGNIFICANCE/BENEFITS

Outline the potential significance and/or benefits of the research

The benefits of this research is the 'what works' approach for a vulnerable population of society. This research takes a positive approach focusing on educational success, an area less researched in the population of children in care. Much of the research focuses on those children and young people who are struggling. Furthermore, it is hoped that by focusing on the voice of the child or young person the research will be valued, could provide a sense of empowerment for these young people who are having their voice heard and could help inform future educational support for children in care.

19. RISKS

a) Outline any potential risks to **INDIVIDUALS**, including research staff, research participants, other individuals not involved in the research and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap

There is a potential emotional risk to both the researcher and the participant given that the interviews will be conducted with a vulnerable population – children and young people in care. Although not a homogenous group of people, these participants will have faced significant difficulties prior to and whilst in care. While the interviews aim to be a positive experience for all and are focusing on the educational success of these young people, delicate or distressing information may be shared by the participants. The measures that will be put in place for the participants will involve declaring before starting the interviews that they should only share information which they are happy for me to know and that if there is something that stirs an unhappy memory or emotional response there can be breaks or the interview can be terminated. Questions chosen will be positively framed, open and non-threatening (see Appendix A). Additionally, there will be the opportunity for the young people to self-refer or social workers/ carers to refer them to the educational psychology service for therapeutic support if required given potential emotional consequence of participating in this research. For the researcher appropriate debriefing will be accessed through supervision if needed.

Interviews will be conducted in a place that is convenient for the young person and carer/ social worker such as school, foster home or at the educational psychology office in a private meeting room. If conducted in school, there will be no mention in front of peers about the child being interviewed because they are in care. Instead if questioned the young person could share that their involvement is because of interest regarding educational experiences of young people, what helps and what are the barriers to educational success.

b) Outline any potential risks to **THE ENVIRONMENT and/or SOCIETY** and the measures that will be taken to minimise any risks and the procedures to be adopted in the event of mishap.

A potential risk to society is that the research could influence sustaining a stereotypical view of children in care. If the research is not written thoughtfully and findings reported with care, it may influence people's views of this vulnerable population. This research could create a sense of pity for young people who will have faced many significant difficulties in their lives. It could also lead to the assumption that this population of young people are a homogenous group and therefore have all had very similar negative experiences. The measures taken to minimise this risk include a positive approach focusing on what works and does not work for those achieving educational successes despite some of the difficulties that they will have faced prior to or whilst in care. The writing and reporting of results will also be done with care making it clear that this research applies to this specific group of young people and cannot be generalised to all children in care.

20. ARE THERE ANY OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES RAISED BY THE RESEARCH?

Yes No

If yes, please specify

Potential Imbalance of Power and the Effects of the Researcher

There could be a risk of an imbalance of power between the researcher and the participant especially when working with vulnerable populations. Vulnerable populations are defined as people who may not understand the implications of consent or who may be open to being pressured to collaborate due to economic or social situations (Thomas, 2016). Children and particularly children in care are considered vulnerable groups so careful consideration needs to be given to the ethical aspects when working alongside them. As the researcher I need to be aware of the potential imbalance of power and ensure that these young people are clearly informed about the purpose of the research, ensure consent is freely given and informed and that they are aware of the withdrawal process. Lewis and Porter (2004) advised asking the following questions when working with vulnerable groups: Has informed consent been gained and have discussions been had with parents, carers and teachers? Has pupil understanding of the aim of the research and meaning of confidentiality been tested? Are participants reminded of the right to withdraw regularly? Has the ending of the research relationships been considered? I will carefully consider each of the above questions when conducting my research.

When discussing the potential effects of the researcher, Thomas (2017) raises the experimenter expectancy effects. This focuses on the expectations of the researcher. Researchers may express their expectations concerning research findings to participants through actions, voice tone, questions asked or vocabulary used (Thomas, 2017). This could then lead to the participants consciously or unconsciously confirming the expectations of the researcher. Researchers need to be careful that they are not leading participants in anyway (Thomas, 2017). The semi structured interview schedule developed uses open questions and avoids any leading questions with the aim of avoiding experimenter expectancy effects. Careful consideration will also be given to my actions, voice tone and vocabulary used.

21. EXPERT REVIEWER/OPINION

You may be asked to nominate an expert reviewer for certain types of project, including those of an interventional nature or those involving significant risks. If you anticipate that this may apply to your work and you would like to nominate an expert reviewer at this stage, please provide details below.

Name N/A
Contact details (including email address)
Brief explanation of reasons for nominating and/or nominee's suitability

22. CHECKLIST

Please mark if the study involves any of the following:

- Vulnerable groups, such as children and young people aged under 18 years, those with learning disability, or cognitive impairments
- Research that induces or results in or causes anxiety, stress, pain or physical discomfort, or poses a risk of harm to participants (which is more than is expected from everyday life)
- Risk to the personal safety of the researcher
- Deception or research that is conducted without full and informed consent of the participants at time study is carried out
- Administration of a chemical agent or vaccines or other substances (including vitamins or food substances) to human participants.
- Production and/or use of genetically modified plants or microbes
- Results that may have an adverse impact on the environment or food safety
- Results that may be used to develop chemical or biological weapons

Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.

	ATTACHED	NOT APPLICABLE
Recruitment advertisement	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Participant information sheet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Consent form	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Questionnaire	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Interview Schedule	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

23. DECLARATION BY APPLICANTS

I submit this application on the basis that the information it contains is confidential and will be used by the University of Birmingham for the purposes of ethical review and monitoring of the research project described herein, and to satisfy reporting requirements to regulatory bodies. The information will not be used for any other purpose without my prior consent.

I declare that:

- The information in this form together with any accompanying information is complete and correct to the best of my knowledge and belief and I take full responsibility for it.
- I undertake to abide by University Code of Practice for Research (http://www.as.bham.ac.uk/legislation/docs/COP_Research.pdf) alongside any other relevant professional bodies' codes of conduct and/or ethical guidelines.
- I will report any changes affecting the ethical aspects of the project to the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.
- I will report any adverse or unforeseen events which occur to the relevant Ethics Committee via the University of Birmingham Research Ethics Officer.

Name of principal investigator/project

Dr Huw Williams
4/3/19

Date:

Please now save your completed form, print a copy for your records, and then email a copy to the Research Ethics Officer, at aer-ethics@contacts.bham.ac.uk. As noted above, please do not submit a paper copy.

Appendix 2: Letter and consent form for social worker with parental responsibility/ carers

Career or Social Worker with Parental Responsibility Letter and Consent Form

Rowan Gaffney
Trainee Educational Psychologist
XXXXXX XXXXXXXX XXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXX XXX

Dear carer(s)/ social worker

My name is Rowan Gaffney I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from the University of Birmingham. I am currently on placement in xxxxxxxx. I am hoping to complete a project on educational success of looked after children. This project will explore factors that help and hinder educational success from the perspective of children and young people in care who are achieving in school.

The child or young person that you support has been identified as a potential participant through xxxxxxxx in xxxxxxxx and this letter is requesting your consent for their participation. They will also be asked separately for their own consent. As you can imagine there are few young people in the county who can potentially participate and provide an in-depth insight into the experiences of children and young people in care who are currently being educationally successful. I hope through participating in this research that the voice of the young person that you support can be heard and influence future educational support for other children in care so that they too can become successful.

If the child or young person that you support participates in this project they will be interviewed individually about their experiences of school. The interview will take no longer than one hour. The interview will need to be audio recorded to ensure than I capture all of their views accurately. This recording will be kept confidential and will be heard by me only. The timing and location of the interview can be arranged to be suitable for you. This research forms part of my doctoral thesis and will be written up as a formal report. Information in this report will be anonymised and remain confidential. Names will be changed so participants cannot be identified.

After the report is written you will have the option of receiving a short summary of the findings of this project. Child friendly summaries will also be provided for the children and young people who participate. Withdrawal from the project. either by yourself or the young person, can happen up until December 2019 when the final analysis will

take place making it impossible to isolate the exact information. If you agree to allow the child or young person that you support to participate please sign the attached form and return it to xxxxxxxx or via email to to xxxxxxxxxx.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that there are only a few potential participants across xxxxxxx who will be approached to take part in this project and the contributions of the child or young person who you support would be extremely valued. Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any questions or would like any further information, please contact me or my supervisor Huw Williams via the contact details at the bottom of this letter.

Yours sincerely,

Rowan Gaffney
Trainee Educational Psychologist
University of Birmingham
XXXXXXXXXXXX

Supervising tutor contact details:
Dr Huw Williams
Academic and Professional Tutor, educational psychology
School of Education
University of Birmingham
B15 2TT
XXXXXXXXXXXX

Career or Social Worker with Parental Responsibility Consent Form

Carer's/ Social worker's name

(please print): _____

Child or young person's name

(please print): _____

Please sign below to give consent for the child or young person to participate in the project.

I have read the attached letter and the information sheet and I give consent for the young person to be involved.

Signed (carer's/ social worker's signature) _____

Please sign below to give consent for audio recording to be used.

I acknowledge that audio recording will be used and that the recordings are confidential and for the use of the researcher only. I give my consent for audio recording to be used.

Signed (carer's/ social worker's signature) _____

Finally, in the unlikely event that the researcher needs to contact you regarding the child or young please provide a telephone number that you can be contacted on and consent to being contacted.

Phone number: _____

I consent to being contacted by the researcher should they need to speak to me.

Signed (carer's/ social worker's) _____

Important – please read

Additional Information

During the project the researcher will maintain the confidentiality of the participants involved, including anonymising all data collected and reported. However, in the case of a safeguarding concern the researcher has a duty to report disclosures to the relevant safeguarding officers. This will be made clear to the young person prior to starting the interview.

The researcher also acknowledges that there may be occasions when discriminatory or poor practice may be reported/uncovered. In the event of this happening the researcher may need to make other professionals aware of the situation.

Appendix 3: Participant information sheet and consent form

Information Sheet



HELLO

My name is Rowan Gaffney and I am training to be an Educational Psychologist. This means I work with children and young people in schools to see if there is anything I can help with. I work in different schools in xxxx. I am writing to invite you to take part in a project I am doing.

What is this the project about?

This project is about what helps and what does not help in school for children and young people who are in care and have been doing well in school. I am interested in your experiences of school.

Who will be taking part?

I will be aiming to interview at least 5 children and young people in care who are doing well in school and get their views.

What will happen if I agree to take part?

If you decide to take part, I will arrange to meet you to talk about your experiences in school. This will be at a time and place that is good for you. This meeting should last no longer than one hour. I will ask some questions but there are no right or wrong answers, I just want to hear about what helps or does not help you to be successful in school. You do not have to answer a question if you do not want to. You can stop at any time. The interviews will be audio recorded so that I remember everything you say. The recording will only be listened to by me.

Do I have to take part?

No. You do not have to take part. Signing the consent form shows me that you are happy to take part.

Who will know I have taken part?

The information collected will only be seen by me and my tutor at university if they request to see it. All the information will be kept safely locked away or in password protected files on the computer. Your name will be changed so that no one knows who said what. I will not tell anyone anything you said in the interview unless I am worried about your wellbeing. If this is the case, we will talk about it first.

What will be done with the research?

Once I have interviewed everyone, I will write a report which will include some of your answers. Your name will not be in this. If you decide that you do not want your answers included, you have until December 2019 to tell me so I can remove it (or tell an adult who can contact me).

Who will the research help?

The research will help me but also it is hoped that it will help future children in care and how to support them to become successful in school. Hearing the voices of children and young people is very important and can help change things for the better.

If you have any questions you can contact me via email on:

xxxxxxx

Because I am still at university, I have a tutor who is an educational psychologist. His name is Huw Williams and he is helping me with my project. You can contact him on this email address if you have any questions or are worried about something:

xxxxxxx

I would really like you to take part in my project. If you want to help me then please fill out the form on the next page.



Participant Consent Form



My name is: _____

Please circle your answers:

I would like to take part in the project	Yes	No
I know that I can stop at any point in the interview	Yes	No
I know that my information can be removed from the project at any time up until December 2019 when the information will be combined with other information.	Yes	No
I understand that my information will be in a report but that my name will be changed and any personal information will be kept private	Yes	No
I understand that I will be audio recorded during the interview and that only the researcher (Rowan) will hear this.	Yes	No
I know that if the researcher (Rowan) becomes concerned about my wellbeing she will need to let someone else know.	Yes	No

Appendix 4: Interview Schedule
 Amendments indicated as suggested by the Children in Care Council
Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

Supporting sheets for interview were helpful and appropriate in design and content according to the Children in Care Council.
 Red text = additions Green text = delete

Issue/ Topic	Possible Questions	Possible follow-up questions	Probes	Supporting Resources
Warm-up <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction • Purpose • Permission to record 	<p>Opening script: Hi my name is Rowan Gaffney, I work in xxxxx as a trainee educational psychologist. This means I work in different schools with staff, parents, carers, children and young people to see if I can help with anything.</p> <p>As part of my training I am doing a project about the educational experiences of children and young people in care. It is hoped this information can help make things better for other children in the future. It will not take any longer than an hour. Please say if you do not understand a question and you do not have to answer a question if you do not want to. Do not worry there are no wrong or right answers I just want to hear about your experiences.</p> <p>I need to record this to make sure I remember all the information but it will only be me who hears the recording. Are you happy for me to record what we talk about?</p>		<p>You can stop at any point if you wish.</p> <p>I will keep all your personal information private and change your name when I write it up so no one will know it is you or be able to know what you said.</p> <p>Does this all make sense to you? Are you happy to continue?</p>	<p>A copy of the information sheet that the participant will have already seen.</p>
Self/ Identity	<p>What qualities do you think you have demonstrated to do well at school? Are there any qualities that you would like to develop further? How do you think you have developed?</p>	<p>What would describe was your strengths? How would you describe your attitude towards school? What would your friends/ teachers say about you?</p>	<p>Could you tell me more..... What do you mean by that?</p>	<p>My special qualities sheet</p>

<p>Stability of placement/ school</p>	<p>How many schools have you been to? What is different about the good schools/ teachers/ pupils/ friends environment compared the not so good ones? Have you moved house / areas often as you have grown up?</p>	<p>How long have you been at this school? Can you tell me about your experience of different schools? I raised concerns about asking about different placements/ schools but the group said it was okay to ask.</p>	<p>Can you explain that more? Just so I understand.....</p>	
<p>Relationships A significant adult Peers</p>	<p>Tell me about the important adults in your life. Is there anyone who you feel has been particularly supportive to you and helped you succeed in school? What about people who have not been supportive to you? Have you had help getting to where you want to be such as a job/ college? If so what were the steps to get there? What expectation do these adults have of you? Who do you spend time with in school? Tell me about your friends. Have you had any particularly good or bad experiences with young people in school?</p>	<p>A parent, carer, teacher, social worker, sibling or someone in the community? How did they/ did they not support you in school? Are they high/low? How do they influence you in school? Positively/ negatively? How do your friends find school? Is there anyone else you spend time with in school? Other friends? Staff? Do you ever spend time alone?</p>	<p>What do you think about..... Can you tell me a bit about that..... How did that make you feel? What so you mean by.....</p>	<p>My important people sheet</p>

<p>School Feelings about school</p> <p>Teacher expectations</p> <p>School belonging</p>	<p>Tell be about school, how do you find school? What might a normal typical school day look like? What is good? What is bad? How could it be made better? What would make you want to come to school? What are your feelings towards school, teachers and peers?</p> <p>Is there anything about school that helps you to feel part of school and included in the school community? Is there anything that you think could be better to help you feel part of the school community?</p>	<p>What are your favourite lessons/ things about school? What are your worst lessons/ things about school? Has it always been like this or was there a time it was different? What are the expectations of school/ teachers/ peers like in school? Are they high/low?</p>	<p>Just so I'm clear..... Can you expand on that?</p> <p>How does that make you feel?</p>	<p>How do you find school sheet</p>
<p>Involvement and support Participation</p> <p>Resources</p>	<p>Do you belong to any groups or clubs/ do any activities in school?</p> <p>What about your spare time? Are you involved in anything outside school in the wider community?</p> <p>Do you get help with your learning / homework?</p> <p>Do you go on interesting school trips or have opportunities to be involved in things outside the classroom?</p>	<p>Do you get to take part in meaningful activities?</p> <p>Do you have any particular hobbies or interests?</p> <p>Do you have a quiet space to study/ complete homework? Do you have access to all the things you need to complete your homework such as books, calculators etc?</p>	<p>Can you tell me more about that?</p> <p>What does that look like? Can you tell me more about such opportunities?</p>	<p>My interest or hobbies sheet</p>

<p>Educational aspirations</p> <p>Educational long-term outlook</p>	<p>Thinking about the future, do you have a particular idea/ plan/ goal of what you might want to do?</p> <p>What do you see yourself doing?</p>	<p>What does this plan idea/ goal look like?</p> <p>Does it involve any more education or training?</p> <p>Have you considered going to college/ sixth form/ university?</p>	<p>What do you mean by that?</p> <p>Can you explain that?</p>	<p>My Future sheet</p>
<p>Closing</p>	<p>Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today and share your experiences. I really appreciate you giving up the time to talk. I have enjoyed listening to your experiences and views. I will have a summary that I can share with you by summer 2020. We have come to the end of the questions. Is there anything that you would like to ask?</p>		<p>My contact details are on this information sheet if you need to contact me in the future. Thank you.</p>	<p>Information sheet</p>

Semi Structured Interview Schedule adapted from Thomas (2017 p. 208)

Appendix 5: Supporting materials for interview

How might others describe you in a positive way? What have others said about you in the past?



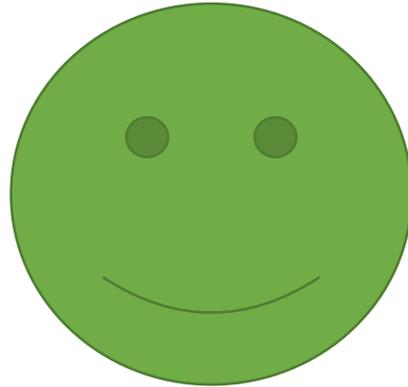
What qualities would you like to develop to help you in school?

My important people who help me be successful at school are.....

Family?

Social worker?

Teacher?



Friends?

Carers?

The people who do not help me be successful in school are.....

Good

How do you find
school?

Bad

I feel.....

Better if?

In school I belong to.....

I am part of

The things I need to help me with
my learning at home and school:

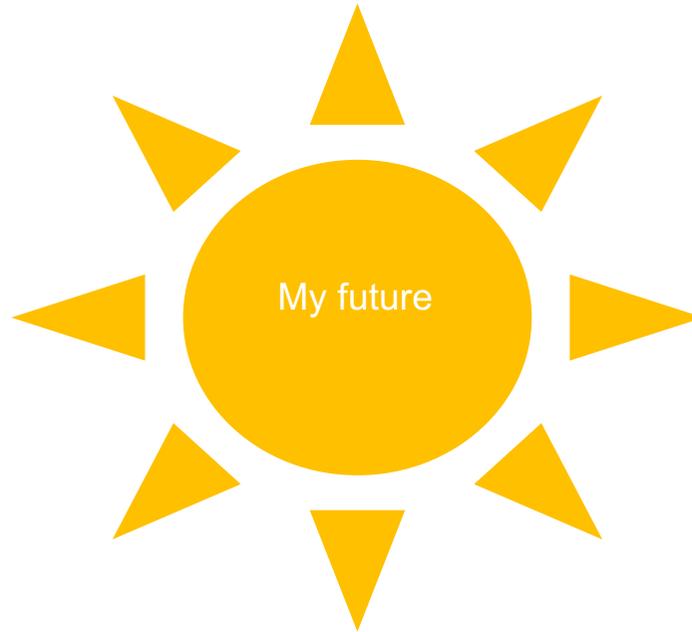


My interests
or hobbies

My goal is....

My plan is

I wish ...



Appendix 6: Charlie’s transcript typed up verbatim showing step 2 (initial noting) and step 3 (Developing emergent themes) of data analysis

Transcript Two (Charlie)

Key:

Descriptive comments *Linguistic comments* Conceptual comments

Emergent Themes		Exploratory comments
Shy/ introvert Making friends	<p>I thought we would start talking about you, about your special qualities. Have you got anything that you feel has helped you in school, your qualities? Anything on here [pointing to prompt sheet]?</p> <p>I’d say that I’m quite a shy person so I don’t really make that many friends but ever since I came to school I like made friends I got to see the same qualities and interests as in other people so I get to make friends as I go.</p> <p>That is interesting, so you have a good group of friends so maybe friendly approachable?</p> <p>Friendly approachable.</p> <p>Is there anything that you find might help you with your motivation to do well in school?</p>	<p>Shy/ Introvert Difficulties making friends so <u>implies it is because he is shy, more introverted so more challenging to make friends?</u> <u>School possibly a turning point for making friends?</u> Seeing his qualities and interested reflected in others</p> <p>Positive peer experiences</p>
Qualities Motivation/ goals Driven	<p>There is always something to do, to get towards so I would say there is quite an motivation to get my good grades to get the top and get the best set.</p> <p>Yes. Is there anything that you think you are particularly strong in? Do you work hard? Are you quite honest?</p>	<p>Driven/ goals</p>
Qualities Determination	<p>I have to say I am determined quite a lot to get my work done to a good standard. I have to say that.</p> <p>Determination that is good.</p> <p>The determination is really good.</p>	<p>Determination works hard</p> <p>Values determination</p>

<p>Use of humour Caring supportive friend</p> <p>Improve communication Public speaking</p> <p>Lacking a degree of confidence Resilient? Determined?</p> <p>Secondary school stability</p>	<p>What about, because it is quite hard doing it about yourself, what would other people say if I asked your teachers or friends, is there anything that they would say particularly?</p> <p>They would say I'm annoying but in all honesty they would say I'm a caring friend and that I would be there for someone when they need me.</p> <p>Is there anything you would like to particularly develop, any of your personal qualities, even further?</p> <p>I would say communication because yes I am good at speaking to people but I would like to be better at speaking, well speaking with people.</p> <p>Ok and why is that?</p> <p>Because I don't have enough confidence. I do have confidence but not enough of it because like there was this time that when I was doing the social worker thing and I was standing up on the stage with me and the other young child and basically I was feeling really tense inside but I managed to get through.</p> <p>That is really good, you persevered then?</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>So maybe developing your communication in the sense of being more confident to speak in public?</p> <p>Yeah.</p> <p>Ok I think we have sort of covered that one so let's think about school and home. I'm thinking about how stable things have been for you. Have you been at the same school for a long period of time?</p> <p>Five years</p> <p>Five years</p> <p>I have been at the school so basically since year 7.</p> <p>And what about primary? Did you move around a bit for primary?</p>	<p>Humour Caring friend who is supportive there when needed. Is this because it is a quality that he values so much that would like to see reflected in others given comment above about seeing the same qualities in others.</p> <p>Wants to improve communication skills. Good at speaking, wants to be better speaking <i>with sense of want to improve further, acknowledges where he is and where he wants to get to. Appears realistic/ self-aware when assessing strengths and difficulties.</i></p> <p>Lacking a degree of confidence - makes distinction between having some but not enough. Public speaking <i>Sense of resiliency/ determination/ perseverance, feeling tense but did it anyway – got through</i> Positive perspective</p> <p>School stability – same secondary school since year 7.</p>
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<p>Period of instability in homelife when in care when younger</p> <p>Feeling towards instability- Annoying</p> <p>Currently a period of stability</p> <p>Connected to foster family</p> <p>Perceived future stability</p> <p>Importance of knowing - comparison to other families</p> <p>Difficulties managing emotions (anger)</p> <p>Carers listening School listening – responses</p> <p>Significant adults – connection to foster family Support/ protection</p>	<p>Yes I have moved around probably 5/ 6 times during the 10 years that I have been in care.</p> <p>Wow ok.</p> <p>Yeah so there was a lot of moving round when I was a kid 8 and below I was like moving around every other year so I have been put and that.</p> <p>How did you find that?</p> <p>Err.. it was annoying for me when I was a child but I mean now my family have kept me there for 6 year I am like... I think this family is solid and this family will keep me going for a long time.</p> <p>Yeah. That obviously has a big impact on how you feel.</p> <p>Yeah because they know me more now because the other people didn't get to know me as such, they only saw the beginning bit of me getting angry and me getting annoying but my family have gone through the highs and lows and I am happy about it.</p> <p>That is lovely to hear, what would you say is there anything that stands out either at home or at school that helped you or was more positive than some of the other homes or schools you have been in compared to others?</p> <p>I mean the carers have listened to me and the school tried to listen to me as such not as great for responses.</p> <p>Is that your current school?</p> <p>Yeah. My parents I mean the carers have been great they have fought my corner whenever something has happened or whenever I have had a bad time or something bad has happened. They have always been in my corner, stuck with me.</p> <p>That sounds like it would be really important for you.</p> <p>Uhmm.</p>	<p>A period of instability when younger</p> <p>Instability in home life</p> <p>Instability described as annoying. <i>'My family' sense of belonging 6 year period of relative stability.</i> <i>'solid' and 'keep me going for along time' suggests perceived future stability and positive view of foster family</i></p> <p>A sense of the family knowing who he is. <u>Comparison made to other families that did not get to know him – suggests a change over time in stability.</u> Difficulties managing emotions – getting angry and annoying. <i>'At the beginning' – sense of not coping with yet another move.</i> <i>'My family' sense of belonging – gone through the high and low – stuck by him making him happy – this family did not give up. Positive emotion</i></p> <p>Importance of being listened to across contexts, home and school. School not as effective at listening and responding</p> <p><i>'My parents I mean carers' suggests attached to them and they are significant adults in his life.</i> <i>'Fought indicates that things have been hard, been a battle for him. An expectation that there will be the bad?</i> <i>'Been in my corner, stuck with me' suggest he has been really supported / protected. In the past has he felt that he did not have anyone in his corner before he joined this foster family?</i></p>
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<p>Lack of early memories</p> <p>Significant people – teachers</p> <p>Positive relationship with teachers</p> <p>Importance of being known</p> <p>Emotional support/ strategies</p> <p>Different person at home to at school</p> <p>Negative peer experiences Hypervigilance</p> <p>Persistent bullying</p>	<p>Ok is there anything in a particular school or home you were in that wasn't helpful in terms of helping you feel stable and secure?</p> <p>I can't really say anything because in the previous ones I was 8 and below so wouldn't remember as much.</p> <p>Ok.</p> <p>So I wouldn't remember a lot of things.</p> <p>Ok so shall we move on to the next bit. So this one...thinking about the important people in your life that have helped you become successful in school.</p> <p>I have to say my teachers first thing.</p> <p>Teachers. Fabulous.</p> <p>They've known me for 5 years so they know what I'm like they know that if I get angry I should go out and calm and then come back with a fresh head fresh mindset. My family know that I'm mostly happy at home, not at school. Surprisingly it's a weird thing when you're at home at school you are a completely different person. That is me basically.</p> <p>And how come you are happier at home than school?</p> <p>At home there is more.. there is less people who will pick on me at home because they are family. And if it is picking it is just joking around. Whereas at school my senses go on to full on 'I'm alert, I must be alert at every time because someone is going to call me a name or someone is going to do this and that'</p> <p>That sounds really unpleasant.</p> <p>I have had that for 5 years, I have learnt to ignore them and carry on with my day.</p> <p>So it is on going?</p> <p>It is still here and there but it not as much as it used to be.</p>	<p>Lack of memory for the days that were more unstable – has he potentially blocked out memories if they were painful ones?</p> <p>Teachers names significant adults – plural</p> <p>Importance of being known Emotional support – help him manage his anger Strategies in place to manage emotions Home = happy School = not happy – family have knowledge of his feelings – suggest offering emotional support at home. Different personas at home and school <u>'weird' is he masking the extend to how bad things are or is it. That it sits uncomfortably that he appears to be two different people?</u></p> <p>At home humour – joking around <u>'They are family' – connected to foster family suggests strong attachments.</u> At school negative peer experiences Hypervigilant at school – expectation of name calling or oding something – Sensory overload <u>'Learnt to ignore' – suggests a change/ learning over time. Implies that he did not always ignore them.</u> Persistent bullying Resilient and determined – 'carry on with my day'</p>
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<p>School tackling bullying</p>	<p>Was it worse when you were younger?</p> <p>Oh I .. one time I think they had to actually bring everyone into school and I had to stay behind outside of school for a while just so they could inform us about it.</p>	<p>Bullying still present</p> <p><i>Hesitation – was this because it is painful to recall?</i></p> <p>A wider approach taken by school to tackle bullying suggests it was systemic or at least a significant concern.</p>
<p>Bullying persistent across schools</p>	<p>That was in secondary?</p> <p>No that was in primary. And then in secondary it started up again because there was this one word that just kept on coming through into the other year because someone from my old school had remembered the word and passed it on basically. I'm fine with now.</p>	<p>Bullying across school career and present in different schools. A word that triggered an emotional reaction for him and consequently he became a target again in secondary.</p> <p><i>'I'm fine with now' – change over time, maturity? Developed coping strategies to manage emotions/ the response? Or is he just masking? Is he fine with it?</i></p>
<p>School action to bullying</p>	<p>But that is potentially a real barrier to you to school?</p> <p>That was a real barrier at the time but they sorted it out and they have managed to undo it.</p>	<p>Negative peer experiences- persistent bullying was significant barrier at the time.</p> <p>School address it – <i>'they sorted it out' and 'undo it' – have they really undone it, is that possible or is it that he has learn t to cope better with strategies in place, manage his emotional responses better so that the bully's got bored of a lack of response?</i></p>
<p>Difficulties with peers</p>	<p>So actually there when you are thinking about important people, some of those people who have had negative impacts might be your so called peers, I wouldn't call them friends.</p> <p>Well we don't call them friend we call them peers.</p> <p>Peers in your year group?</p> <p>Yeah.</p>	<p>Not 'friends' in year group.</p>
<p>Lack of access to social worker</p>	<p>Is there anyone else who you think is particularly important or helpful like a social worker or any friends in school that have been important and supportive to you to help you be successful?</p> <p>I haven't really seen much of my social worker. Yes I do see her more often than I used to because they have been working on it but I don't see her as much.</p> <p>So not particularly helpful.</p> <p>No because I'm nearing 16 I'm going to have my PA soon so it is going to completely change for me. And friends I only talk to them during school time. I don't really tell them about ' oh I'm doing these piece of work</p>	<p>Lack of access to social worker?</p>

Period of transition leaving care	and how is this and what could be improved'. I'm more of a I'll get it done myself and talk to my friends in general after I work.	Coming up to a period of transition Only talk to friends in school time – what about out of school? Suggests difficulties with friendships.
Lack of socialisation out of school	So it sounds like you are quite independent.	<u>'Get it done' driven</u>
Independence/ Drive	Uhmm.	
	Ok. Is there anyone who stands out as being particularly unhelpful like a particular teacher or somebody else that has not been supportive of you at school?	
Negative peer experiences	Big words peers. I had quite a lot of bad experiences over the 5 years in this school. I've seen the teachers come and go and then student change. I have seen so many bad people turn nice and then so many nice people turn annoying and bad and it just gets weird like the change over a shorter period of time you can see how much children can go from a really nice state to a really nasty state.	<i>'Big words peers'</i> significant barrier for him – multiple bad experiences
Instability vs stability	And why do you think that change is happening?	Suggests lots of changes in the school despite remaining in the same school so far for all of secondary.
	Well because they are getting older. They are getting older they are learning to understand more things and understand 'oh maybe if someone gets that point on him maybe we will be able to make him tick or explode'.	Stability vs instability – is it instability an issue despite being perceived as being stable?
Peer understanding developing	Wow it sounds like it has been a really tough experience for you.	<u>Does he find it hard to trust people if he perceives many people changing from good to bad and vice versa?</u>
	It has, oh it has but I have learnt to live with it. I have recently been doing stuff to put in place to stop it but it really doesn't really stop.	Some change can be positive – sense of some pupils growing up becoming more understanding and taking responsibility for their actions <i>'him' third person</i> but is he referring to himself?
Coping with negative peer experiences	What kind of things have you been trying to do?	Acknowledges the difficulties with peers but accepting – resilient – 'learnt to live with it'
Unsuccessful strategies to stop bullying.	Because I used to get in fights on the way to and from school because I never really had any friends so I used to get in fights at school. I mean sometimes with people from different schools came down that way and I once had a fight with them. Basically I went there. I'm now allowed through a back way so it avoids any fights.	Trying strategies to stop but not working Social isolation – difficulties with peers
Social isolation	Is that what school have let you do?	Physically fighting in the past with pupils from his school and another Associated it with lack of friends <u>Was he fighting because he was unhappy and could not handle his anger? Fighting as a reaction to feeling social isolated</u>
Fighting	Yeah	Alternative route to school to avoid fights

Strategies to reduce fighting	<p>Is that through talking to school where they have helped you come up with a plan?</p> <p>I still have PEP meetings and LAC meetings.</p>	
Supportive structures	<p>Have you found those helpful in developing strategies?</p> <p>Yes I have found them helpful because they, yes they do most of the things that they say they are gonna do but when it comes to action like some students are still persistent even after that.</p>	<p>Structures in place to support him</p>
Action taken bullying still persists	<p>When you say they, do you mean the teachers, or do you mean peers?</p> <p>Peers, peers are still persistent annoying and.....it just...yeah they have tried to learn to do it but I think it is a bit too late for that because people know who I am, people know what I do, people know I get angry very easily.</p>	<p>Support from PEP and lack meetings most actions are completed from it but difficulties with peers still persistent despite the different strategies.</p>
Negative reputation amongst peers	<p>So they try and wind you up do they?</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>That is not nice at all. Thinking then about the teachers, or any of the adults particularly, what would you say are there expectations for you for your work in school?</p> <p>Oh this always [hand held high] you are a bright child you can do stuff you just need to put it in to action.</p>	<p>On going difficulties with peers. <i>Hesitation – indicating a difficult or frustrating issue</i> Reputation remained for him despite attempts to change <i>Present tense – suggests still an issue despite his attempts to manage it</i></p>
Consistently high expectations from teachers	<p>Ok.</p> <p>So basically, I'm not going to lie, I don't go the greatest amount of work but I do try and get to my standards.</p> <p>So am I right in thinking that they have got high standards of you?</p>	<p>Consistently high expectations – acknowledgement that he has potential he just needs to</p> <p>Honest about how much work he completes</p>
Workload vs quality	<p>They have got really high standards of me.</p> <p>Do you think that is helpful or unhelpful?</p>	<p><i>'Really' shows extent of high standards.</i></p>

<p>Self – aware Reaching goals</p>	<p>I think it is helpful but I mean I just need to pull myself out a little bit from just being so blind of saying 'I'm doing fine, I'm doing fine' I'm not doing fine, let me just get it done and get it to that standard.</p>	<p>Helpful for others to have high expectations – face reality and get to the goal</p>
	<p>Yeah, that sounds important. So it sounds like you have had a bit of a tough time with your peers, really tough time but on the flip side it sounds like your family and your teachers have been helpful.</p> <p>Yes.</p> <p>Is there any other experiences that stand out with young people in your school, apart from the negative ones we have just discussed that you think maybe important? It could maybe be a positive?</p> <p>Well I have had mentoring recently.</p>	
<p>Mentoring</p>	<p>Oh have you?</p> <p>Because I have been having mentoring for the past couple of years now.</p> <p>And how have you found that?</p> <p>We have had like a really good connection, a bond shall we say. A uni student comes in. He does psychology. It is really nice because you get to have that one to one with the person.</p>	<p>Mentoring</p> <p>Mentoring for sustained period of time</p>
<p>Mentoring - Importance of connection</p>	<p>How of often does that happen?</p> <p>Every day after school because we used to have session but they were affecting my times and they were affecting my grades so therefore we have now found an ideal way of doing things so we are going every day after school from 3.15 to 4.15.</p> <p>That is amazing, it sounds like it is having a positive impact.</p>	<p>Importance of connection with others – socially connected University student Appreciation of one to one</p> <p>Altering the mentor meeting to suit him – supportive <i>'Ideal way' conveys how happy he is with new plan</i></p>
<p>Change of behaviour and attitude to</p>	<p>It is, oh right, when I was in year 7 I used to fight, I used to get in arguments, I used to do everything under the sun as a child would in school. When I met my mentor, I've changed drastically. Now you would see me get in and try to get focused in lessons getting that done instead of 'oh I'm not going to do this, oh I'm not going to do that, I'm just going to do this instead'.</p>	<p>Mentoring <i>Past tense – <u>suggest change over time in behaviours</u></i></p>

<p>learning over time</p>	<p>How long have you had your mentor for then?</p> <p>Roughly two years</p> <p>And would you say that the change in your behaviour is down to that two year mark?</p> <p>Oh yes, yes it would I would definitely say that because at first I was always like 'urgh... do I have to do this, urgh do I have to do that'. Now I've been her for two years I'm like 'right let's get this done, let's get on this'.</p> <p>Is there something in particular that she did or said or helped you with that made you think 'oh' or is it more of a general...</p> <p>It is more of a general thing between us.</p>	<p><u>'everything under the sun' indicating degree to how bad things used to be – change of time since mentoring</u> <u>'drastically' indication of the extent of change</u> Demonstrating positive learning behaviours compared to past</p> <p>Sustained period of time</p> <p>Change in mindset and approach to learning since starting mentoring.</p>
<p>Connection to mentor</p>	<p>That sounds really positive thing to come out of some pretty awful experiences.</p> <p>Yeah. Also I had an IV an independent visitor as well that has helped me.</p>	<p>A connection with him? A potential significant adult?</p>
<p>Independent visitor – range of experiences</p>	<p>Do they still visit?</p> <p>Oh Yeah. I think we are planning to met up soon sometime in October or before the end of it.</p> <p>Oh Yeah.</p> <p>Either that or the beginning of November.</p> <p>And what kind of things do you do with them?</p> <p>We go all places, we have been to Harry Potter World in London.</p> <p>Oh fabulous</p> <p>I know it is so fabulous. Where else.. we have been to two gaming festivals, what else? We went to the theatre once to listen to music from sci-fi so any sci-fi music from movies. We go to movies here and there.</p>	<p>Independent visitor</p> <p>Regular contact</p>

<p>Caring adult</p> <p>Supportive wider network</p> <p>Adults viewing positive attributes in him</p> <p>Pride</p> <p>Positives - Teachers</p> <p>School work</p> <p>Drive and focus</p> <p>Negative peer experiences</p> <p>Classroom management variation</p> <p>Supply teachers</p> <p>Frequency of supply teachers</p>	<p>And is it about once a month you meet up?</p> <p>We met up.. sometimes it will be twice a month because he actually takes his time, he takes his own time out of his life to come and see me every other time and I'm like it's amazing because we have been as an IV thing for 2 years now again same time as xxxx came in and they have both been great. They have both been there for me. Heck my IV has been really helpful and really great, he puts a report in and says that I am positive and happy and heck he likes me being funny and great to hang around with.</p> <p>That is lovely, it sounds like you have support from different angles there not just from school but home and other opportunities.</p> <p>Yeah in general.</p> <p>So the next thing that we are going to explore briefly is school. Really I want to find out how you find school.</p> <p>Urgh....well I feel like school is good for a multitude of reasons that the teachers are nice, the work is good, I'm trying to get on it. The bad things I think about of school would have to be some of the peers because they can be absolute hell when you get in there. When you get into one of our classes it's full on either really silent or it sounds like it is world war three going on.</p> <p>And is that down to the teacher or the lesson style?</p> <p>It depends on the teacher really because if the teacher is ill let's say and they have a supply in that will just be world war three.</p> <p>Ok. Does that happen often?</p> <p>It happens the occasional here and there especially when teachers have to go off ...cause they have to go to do review meetings and stuff, it doesn't help and recently we had our history teacher and he had to leave because he has to do a trip with his other students in the younger years to help them out with their history projects and we have been sent covers and covers and covers.</p> <p>Oh so in one particular area so the history?</p>	<p>Opportunities to engage with a range of activities and experiences with IV</p> <p>Viewed positively</p> <p><i>'he takes his own time out of his life' – appreciation that someone takes the time for him, caring adult.</i></p> <p><i>'amazing' views it very positive</i></p> <p>Mentor and IV 'been there' for him support network beyond home and school providing a range of opportunities for him to experience.</p> <p>He values what they think of him – positive relationships with adults</p> <p><u>Seems proud that others have a positive view of him – does this help give him some self-confidence and help counteract some of the negative peer experiences that he has been involved in?</u></p> <p>Range of support</p> <p>General support</p> <p><i>'Urgh....well' suggests not positive at first or use of humour?</i></p> <p>Starts with the positives – does this indicate the positive attitude that he has?</p> <p>Good = Good relationships with teachers, positive view of learning, focus and drive</p> <p>Bad = peer experiences – 'they can be absolute hell'</p> <p>Extremes of classroom environment – dependent on teacher classroom management.</p> <p><i>'it's full on either' – one extreme or the other.</i></p> <p>Supply teaching can result in poor behaviour.</p> <p>Occasionally teachers away</p>
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<p>Resource issue – textbook and teacher Contact to aid understanding</p> <p>Teacher presence</p> <p>Use of humour masking negative experiences?</p> <p>Travelling to school</p>	<p>Yeah and it is not great because then we don't get our one to one with the teacher and we don't understand what we are doing because 'yeah oh copy this from a textbook and it will be fine'. No we need the physical contact to understand it and to put it in to context.</p> <p>Definitely, definitely so I was going to say what would make it better if....</p> <p>Teachers don't take as many breaks as they do. Either that or.... I don't know just that.</p> <p>And maybe something around peers.</p> <p>Maybe something around peers like introducing the cane, I'm joking, I'm joking! Yeah introduce the cane.</p> <p>What does a typical day look like then? Is there anything that stands out?</p> <p>It's normal really. I get up at 7 get my breakfast, get up get ready, get out the door by 7:40 get to school by 8:40 because I live in xxxx it takes me like an hour to walk down because I have to go the long way.</p> <p>Oh right.</p> <p>Round from, you know where the old toby carvery used to be?</p> <p>Yeah I think so.</p> <p>Down that way.</p> <p>That's a long walk then.</p> <p>At least it gets me active, walking. Errm... I get to school start my main tutor lesson go from there cause we now have 5 periods instead of 6 periods it's so much nicer. They are hour lessons per lesson.</p> <p>So does that mean you get more time than you used to?</p> <p>No we get less time for lessons, more time to relax at home. No not really it is basically the same times but I mean they have just shortened the periods cause they used to do it then they were like ' Let's not do that, let's do it some</p>	<p><i>Repetition to indicate continuous nature</i></p> <p>Resources - History – a series of supply teachers impacting on learning Needing connection with teacher to bring meaning to learning rather than copying from textbooks</p> <p>Better = teachers more consistently there. <u>Has this been identified as an issue particularly because relationships with others is important for him and because he view his teachers as positive, having good relationships with him?</u></p> <p>Use of humour – <u>hiding the reality of the struggles with peers?</u></p> <p>Travel to school takes time – long commute on foot – <u>issue between distance between foster homes and school?</u></p> <p>Positive perspective on long journey to school</p>
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<p>Changes in the school day</p>	<p>other time and now they are going to go back to that for like the time we are going to have our year 11 exams because it's going to get hectic and we have to sort them out it easy even chunks and also if we don't have the right, let's say I have 2 exams on the same day, I'm going to have to take the first exam one time then I'm going to have to take it the next time then I'm going to have to do all the exams and then catch up on every other exam.</p>	<p>Change in school day seen positively.</p>
<p>Academic/ exam pressure</p>	<p>Ok</p> <p>That is what I'm going to have to do isn't it. And then we get luckily a four day week off next week I mean after the half term.</p>	<p>Academic/ exam pressure/ managing exam timetables</p>
<p>Exams/ study leave</p>	<p>Oh right.</p> <p>For relax because we have our mocks coming up.</p> <p>Is it meant to be relax or is it meant to be study?</p> <p>Obviously study now but relax after exams.</p> <p>Oh after exams ok.</p> <p>There is that piece until December half term back on exams from April time to March to May no til June and then we are done.</p>	<p>Study leave vs relaxing</p>
<p>Aware of academic / exam pressure</p>	<p>So it sounds like they have changed the structure of schooling a little bit is that a positive then?</p> <p>It is a positive because then you do not have as much of a day as you used to because we used to have double lessons just chock a block, we had six periods. I just want to flop I just wanted to go to home, sit on my bed and flop on it. That is important.</p>	<p>Aware of academic / exam timetable and pressure <i>'back on exams' sense of focus/ drive - get it done and finished move onto next goal</i></p>
<p>Double lessons</p>	<p>Is there any particular lessons that you really enjoy?</p> <p>Art, surprisingly I have enjoyed my maths lessons recently because they are fun, we get to talk and do the lesson. It is a good thing because some teachers will be like oh you can talk and do the lesson, some teacher like no get on with work and get it sorted.</p>	<p>Change in the school day viewed as positive – dislike of double lessons. Important of relax after a long day at school <i>'home' suggested settled with carers</i></p> <p>Favourite lessons art.</p>

Favourite lessons	So the ones you like is it down to the subject you like or because of the teachers or is it a mixture?	<i>'Surprisingly' – change of enjoyment of maths over time.</i>
Teacher style	I think it is both.	Teacher classroom management style <i>'get it sorted'</i> suggests high expectations from the teachers
	Ok. Which ones do you really dislike?	
Importance of subject and teacher	Now I regret that I even chose this as a GCSE. Drama.	Teacher and lesson important for favoured lessons
	Oh gosh ok, what is it that you don't like about it?	
Least favourite lesson	Most things, I have got a 2500 word devising plan that I have to do by the end of the week, I have only done 1500 so far.	Dislike drama <i>'regret' choice suggests would change if he could</i>
	Ok, you have started it!	
	Another 1000 to go. Erm..what else. There is another bit well its mostly drama that I don't like because I'm not going to lie the teacher is very very strict when it comes to most things and she likes to get everything, she is competitive, she is competitive. Cause there is two drama groups and our one let's say is the competitive one and she is like do it to this do it that.	
Strictness and competitiveness of teacher	Against the other drama group?	Teacher approach important <i>Repetition highlights the point – she is competitive – <u>not viewed as a positive trait when it is this strong possibly</u></i>
	Yeah because there are two drama groups and both are, well one is way ahead that is the other group and we are like right 'we have not even done the basics'.	
	So the element of competition is not particularly helpful for you?	
	No	
	No ok. We have talked about teacher expectations and we have talked about peers quite a bit and your feelings towards school. Is there anything particular about school that helps you feel part of the school community that you take part in? Or that school do?	
Element of competition	I used to do a couple of enrichment clubs after school which was art club, they had a gaming club so you can go there and play Xbox with a couple of kids in years but that is it really.	Element of competition between drama groups not viewed as positive.

<p>Enrichment clubs vs academic pressure</p>	<p>You don't do any of those anymore?</p> <p>I don't do those anymore as I am focusing more on revising, getting my work done and also mentoring so it is all on that.</p> <p>Is there anything you think they could do better to make you feel part of the school community?</p>	<p>Participation – used to have involvement in extra-curricular after school clubs - Art and gaming club.</p>
<p>Revision Completing work Mentoring</p>	<p>Ermm..... not really.</p> <p>No. Ok</p> <p>It just the last year yeah, not really a point to doing it.</p> <p>I suppose the focus is slightly different coming into year 11</p> <p>Yeah being in the final year.</p>	<p>Clubs not participated in anymore as focus shifted to revision, completing work and mentoring.</p> <p>Cannot identify ways to improve feeling of school community. <u>Is that because it is already good or because he doesn't feel part of it because of all the issues with peers?</u></p>
<p>Sense of belonging vs completing the year</p>	<p>Ok so this section is thinking about all the different things you might do in and out of school. What is particularly positive about then. So you have already mentioned your mentoring that you think has had a big impact and your independent visitor as well. Is there any other activities that you do maybe outside of school?</p> <p>I do virtual schools xxx and xxx group, and I do, well I'm on the children in care council as well. They're all good because all the children in care get to go out and do this for, basically for free in a way but and it is all funded by virtual school which is a good thing.</p>	<p>Doesn't see the point in changing anything as in school as it is the last year – <u>a sense of just focusing and getting through this last year</u></p>
<p>participation Virtual school – kick and study Funding Children in care council</p>	<p>So the virtual school one tell me a bit more about that one, what is it called kick and study?</p> <p>Kick and study so basically they do activity days during half terms and sometimes during school time after schools they will do like let's say sailing they have done a lot of things, they have gone to sports centres they do a lot of sport related and outdoor activities related stuff.</p> <p>And what do you like about taking part in that?</p> <p>Basically I help out the youngers because they, I have done that for the past 6 or 7 years this kick and study stuff.</p>	<p>Participation – involvement in activities run to support children in care – virtual schools study group and children in care council – <u>being in care possible perceived as an important part of his identity.</u></p> <p>Aware of funding - of the need to provide opportunities for children in care for free.</p> <p>Participation – opportunities to participate in a range of activities through kick and study</p>

<p>Putting self out there</p>	<p>So are you like a leader then?</p> <p>Basically I wanted to put myself out as more of a helping out role before because I used to be like that and I was like 'I really want to help them out, I really want to be there for them'</p>	<p>Mentor type role for other young people in care</p>
<p>Positive role model for younger children in care</p>	<p>That is brilliant so it sounds like you are almost being that older role model for them. Am I right in thinking that?</p> <p>I wanted to be that role model for them just to say, yeah this is what I used to do and it's fun.</p> <p>Brilliant. Then you have got the children in care council and that is quite a different focus isn't it?</p>	<p><u>'Put myself out more' – wanting to take a more active role – indicates a sense of drive and eagerness to be involved</u> <u>'I used to be like that' a sense of connection or shared experiences with other young people in care. This appears an important part of his identity</u></p>
<p>Projecting child's voice/ representation</p>	<p>Yeah. It is more focused on the child's voice and how we can project that in a study or escalation chart we have ways of putting that to performance.</p> <p>Is there anything that you have enjoyed particularly? Any particular projects that you have been involved in through that that stand out?</p>	<p>Positive role model for others</p>
<p>LAC ball Lack of funding</p>	<p>We used to do the LAC ball we sadly haven't been doing that recently, I don't know why. Well funding let's say. Let's just say funding. Erm.. and we are planning to go out to do an activity day before Christmas because we have been working hard. We have also done, we have inspectors, we have gone round children's homes interviewed them and said how was this and how was that? And could you change anything if there was a way to change something?</p>	<p>Children in care council - importance of the voice of the child – methods of how to 'project that' suggests the importance that he places on the voice of the child and the need to have it more prevalent in the work of professional and throughout the council</p> <p>LAC ball positive but stopped because of funding –funding a barrier to providing a range of opportunities for children in care? 'sadly' unhappy about the missed opportunity to be involved in this. <i>Repetition to highlight funding issue</i></p>
<p>Inspecting children's homes and custody suits Position of responsibility</p>	<p>Do you feel like your voice is being heard through those routes then when you are doing things like that?</p> <p>Yeah I do feel it is more routed to me. Also we did do recently a young inspectors for the custody suits in the police</p>	<p>Acknowledgement of the 'work' nature of children in care council and need for a reward. Sense of responsibility with inspector role</p>
<p>Anti-oppressive practices</p>	<p>So that is using similar skills but branching out really?</p> <p>Cause we have heard, well we have had reports let's say, from children that it isn't great and we have had a look and they are fine it's just some children have had worsen experiences with police male staff.</p>	<p>Inspector role in children's homes and custody suits</p>

<p>Networking- shared experiences.</p>	<p>And did you manage to get to speak to staff, the police at the station and things like that?</p> <p>Yes and we did speak with them in general and they are fine but just depending on which staff you have got on which night.</p> <p>I suppose the context of what has happened.</p> <p>Yeah just in general the whole thing.</p> <p>So that sounds like you have had a really wide range of experiences through children in care council.</p> <p>Yeah</p> <p>Is there anything else you do? Is there any particular hobbies you are interested in?</p> <p>I used to do scouts a bit well I'm 16 now I should be going to guides or something I haven't been able to I plan to soon. I used to do kick boxing, got taken off that for a while, still am.</p> <p>For a particular reason or?</p>	<p><u>'we' – collective part of a group</u> Network to share experiences Acknowledgement of different experiences can be linked to difference in staff reactions</p>
<p>Interests Scouts Kickboxing</p>	<p>Anger issues</p> <p>Ok. So you did have that and it was helpful then.</p> <p>I mostly took out my anger out on kick boxing and it did show.</p>	<p>Interests – used to do scouts – looking to move on in the future. Planning. Kick boxing but taken off due to difficulties managing emotions.</p>
<p>Anger</p>	<p>What that not helpful then?</p>	<p>Difficulties managing anger/ emotions</p>
<p>Difficulties managing anger/ coping strategy</p>	<p>No. It helped me like I was using it to help me relieve anger but it wasn't helpful in general but I mean if I did have a choice to do it again I would do it again.</p> <p>I was going to say would you like to be involved again?</p> <p>But I mean I would do it but I mean obviously I would have to redo it properly and not as I used to do it and take all my anger out.</p>	<p><u>Coping strategy for managing anger but possibly not supported to do this in a productive manner – was taken off.</u></p> <p>Would like to be involved in kick boxing again. <i>'relieve anger' suggests it helped to some extent</i></p>

<p>Loss of opportunity due to difficulties managing anger</p>	<p>So maybe that is something that you can explore for the future possibly. Ok thinking about you are year 11 now and the things that you might need around your studies. Do you find you have access to the things you might need to help you with your homework and revision? So different resources and books or revision guides that you might need.</p> <p>Yes speaking of that [pointing to bag]</p> <p>Your bag looks quite big!</p> <p>Revision guides upon revision guides [indicating to them]</p>	<p>Acknowledging if returned there would have to be a change in approach to kickboxing. <i>'properly' implying did not do it properly first-time round. Suggests there would be a change over time</i></p>
<p>Resources – revision guides texts</p>	<p>Wow so you have got access to the things that you need?</p> <p>Yep we get revision guides we get texts we get the texts of our plays and books for reading out for our exams like English we get the Jackal and Hide book for that, our own little mini one. For the drama one I have got blood brothers text so I have to read through all that play. It's hell, it's hell, it's hell. Yeh but it is working.</p>	<p>Resources – access to multiple revision guides.</p>
<p>Resources positive/ supported</p>	<p>Is there anything that you feel like you need access to support you more to your studies in terms of things?</p> <p>No not really cause I have got</p> <p>Books? Laptops?</p> <p>Yeah we also get pupil premium which basically funds everything else and I managed to get a laptop by funding.</p> <p>Oh fabulous. Is that helpful?</p> <p>It is useful</p>	<p>Revision guides and texts for English</p> <p><i>'yeh but it is working' having access to all the revision guides and text needed for lessons especially English and drama is supportive.</i></p>
<p>Pupil premium funding Laptop</p>	<p>And what about space to do your work? Have you got a quiet space at home to do your work?</p> <p>Yeah I do it in my room, I relax more if I do it in there.</p> <p>And you don't get to disturbed?</p>	<p>Resources – feels supported- understands about pupil premium funding access to laptop.</p>

<p>Space to complete work</p>	<p>No hopefully I don't get too disturbed.</p> <p>So coming towards the end I was thinking about your future. Have you had a think, have you got a particular goal or a plan or a hope?</p> <p>Well I was planning to go into concept art for my future, for my job anyway.</p> <p>Can you tell me a little bit about that?</p>	<p>Access to space to complete homework and able to relax – possibly relax more because it is his own space</p>
<p>Future aspirations</p>	<p>Basically it is, let's say I want to make a game. I would have to think of the idea, put that down on paper, sketch it out, do whatever. Then I would have to render that somehow into a 3D studio app or thing to actually use that and make it into an actual full on thing.</p>	<p>Future aspirations - Considered a specific future job role</p>
<p>Concept art</p>	<p>So it sounds like you are seeing the process right from....</p> <p>Beginning to end. And then from there it gets put into the game or thing. So from here from now I wanna go from here to college, keep on studying in college for the, until I get to a level 4 plus.</p>	<p>Detailed understanding of what is involved in potential future job. <i>'I would' first person – sense he can really imagine himself doing the job - has a vision</i></p>
<p>Clear plan for future</p>	<p>Do you know what you want to study in college, what courses do you want to do?</p> <p>Well it's be graphic design that it would be classed under so graphic design and art and then from there go to uni for graphic design</p> <p>Oh fabulous</p>	<p>Clear plan identified without prompting – knows how to get from current position to future goals.</p>
<p>Drive/ goals Courses to study Aspirations to go to university</p>	<p>And work on it from there.</p> <p>And where did the idea come from about your concept art?</p> <p>Well I play a lot of games I'm not going to lie I've always been fascinated, because I used to try to draw pieces of art, the concept art and I was like it is so cool how they do it and how they think about it. And then one day I was just looking at a simple bow I was thinking how do they make that from that to like this? So I was looking at that I was like wow that is how you actually do it.</p>	<p>Desire for further study and then to attend higher education – sense of drive to achieve goals he has set himself.</p> <p>Has also considered the type of work post university.</p> <p>Future aspirations linked to current interests</p>

<p>Future aspirations link to current interests</p> <p>Curiosity</p>	<p>Did you research that or was it something you were learning about in your art lessons?</p> <p>Basic research myself I didn't do it in lessons I was just wondering how they did it.</p> <p>And you are doing something about concept art in your GCSE aren't you?</p> <p>Yes</p>	<p><i>'fascinated' – indicates level of interest in concept art</i></p> <p>He appears captured by the process both the action and thought process</p> <p>Curiosity in the process – researched interpedently.</p>
<p>Self-motivated</p>	<p>Have you chosen to do that or were you guided towards do that particular area?</p> <p>I have chosen it myself because I want to go more towards that area myself because I feel like that is more me than anything else.</p> <p>Than say fine art or something?</p>	<p>Self-motivated to independently research.</p>
<p>Current GCSE art linked to future aspirations</p>	<p>Yeah</p> <p>It sounds like you have got a really clear plan to where you want to get to.</p> <p>Oh many people have said I have got a clear plan and that is what, I can officially say yes I have got a clear plan, it does help.</p>	<p>Directed GCSE art project to future aspirations in concept art – suggests that he has been thinking carefully and taking opportunities to move towards his future plans where possible</p> <p><i>'more me' knowing self, having direction</i></p>
<p>Knowing self</p>	<p>Has anyone helped you with or plan or is it just something that you have developed yourself?</p> <p>It is something I have wanted to go for for a while now.</p>	<p>Clear plan that has been acknowledged by those who support him – suggests he has good access to a good support network</p> <p>Clear plan helps</p>
<p>Having direction</p>	<p>Yeah</p> <p>Yeah, I have to say, I like the way things have been and like I have wanted to go for it and everyone is like go for it, if you can do it, you can do it.</p>	<p>Sustained interest over time.</p>
<p>Clear plan Good support network?</p>	<p>Is there particular people that have been more instrumental in helping you make those plans?</p> <p>I would say my carers and my social worker. Those have been the major ones.</p>	<p>Support and encouragement from others to strive for what he wants</p> <p><i>'I' - he wants it alongside the other who are supporting him.</i></p>
<p>Sustained interest in future aspiration</p> <p>Support and encouragement</p>		

<p>from others for future plan</p> <p>Carers and social work supporting future plans</p> <p>Importance of knowing him</p> <p>Researched university</p> <p>Met with professional in industry</p> <p>Placement year</p> <p>Sense of excitement/ drive to achieve goals</p> <p>Job/ working for a particular company</p>	<p>Is that your current social worker now?</p> <p>Yes my current social worker now. They have all been full on like you can do it, just put the effort in and get it done. They know me well, they know me way too well.</p> <p>Oh that sounds fabulous and you know exactly what courses you want to do, that you want to go to uni. Have you thought about what uni you might want to go to, I know it is a long way way but any particular unis that are good for that area of art?</p> <p>Well I have had a look at xxxxxx university because I have heard they are good for stuff and they have recently just done a new thing I have heard. Cause I have recently had an interview with a concept artist as an actual thing recently just today. Basically they have just told me there is this unreal thing. Basically you have the first two years of uni, you then have a break year where you get fully paid you have your own apartment and you work for unity so you work for a game engineering company.</p> <p>So like a placement year is it?</p> <p>Yeah so like a placement year for that and then you come back do your third year and then you are done.</p> <p>And do you think there is a chance that you might be able to get a job working with that company when you finish as well or is it just experience?</p> <p>I'm saying I think just experience for me because I have set my sights on a company for a while now.</p> <p>Oh have you! Tell me more about that company, I'm intrigued</p> <p>It has been like, basically I have played their games for a long time and I have been a dedicated fan of bungie. They have created the classic Halo series and Destiny series. I have been wanting to join their team for a while because I have seen that they actually treat their members, I mean their staff member really well and they keep them up to nice, they are like 'oh yeah if you need this we have got this for you, we have got this'.</p>	<p>Social worker and carers instrumental in helping make plans for the future – <u>suggests the important role of professionals and carers in supporting children in care as they transition to leaving care.</u></p> <p>Positive encouragement from social worker to achieve goals. <u>Importance of familiarity and knowing him as a person – suggests importance of social workers for children in care remaining consistent and not having a high turnover of social workers.</u> <i>Repetition to highlight importance.</i> <i>'full on' suggest high level of support and encouragement</i></p> <p>Researched into universities Discussions with a concept artist that lead to an understanding of placement years at university <i>'unreal thing' expresses the sense of excitement</i></p> <p>Knowledge of the exact company he would like to work for when he graduated from university – an detailed career plan.</p> <p>Sustained interest in this games company.</p>
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Appendix 7: Step 4 of data analysis (searching for connections across emergent themes) for Charlie

Charting how the researcher thinks emergent themes initially fit together with suggested potential tentative subordinate and superordinate themes.

Participant Two

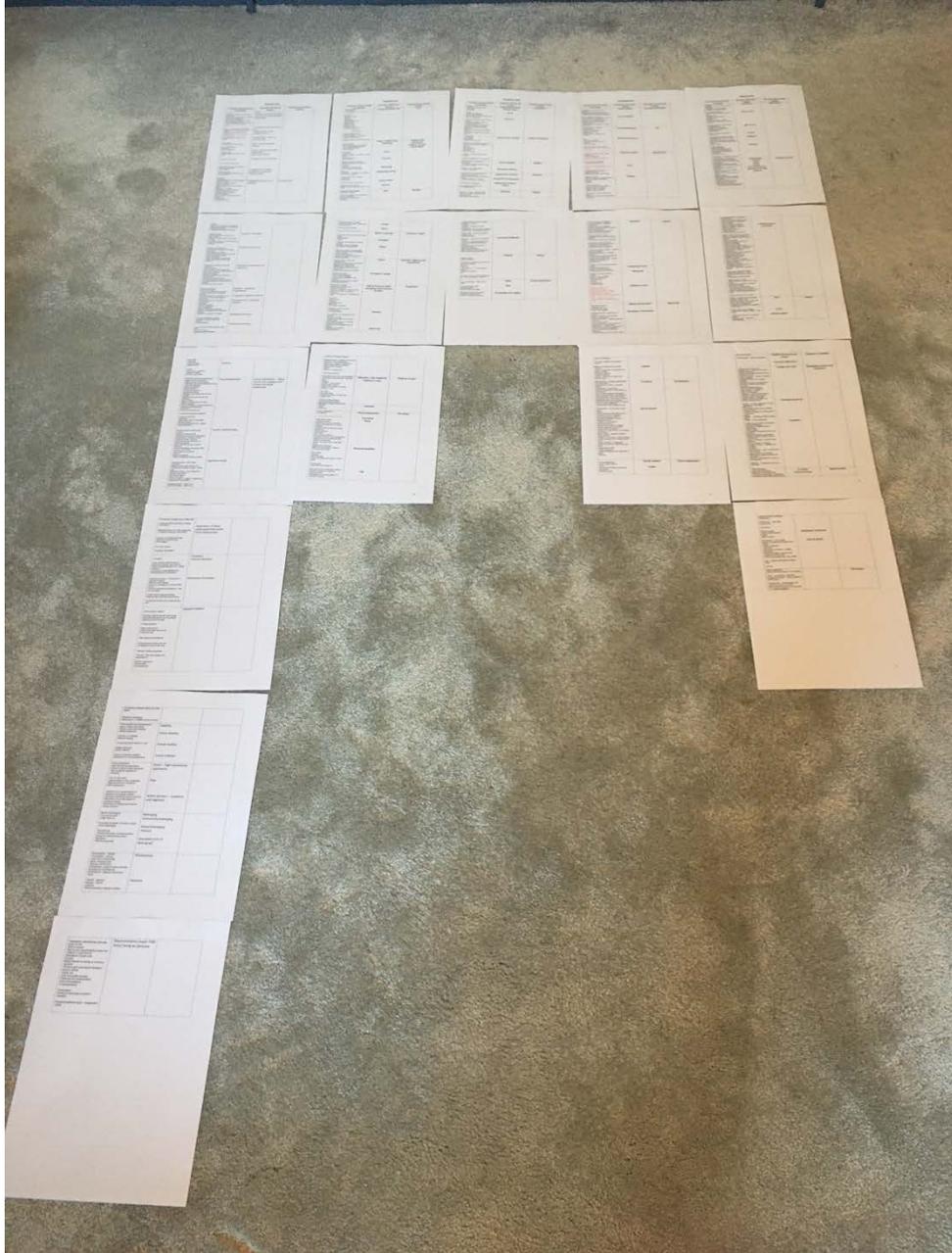
Emergent themes (initial groupings)	Potential subordinate themes	Potential superordinate themes
Shy/ introvert Use of humour Use of humour masking negative experiences? Qualities Motivation/ goals Driven Qualities Determination Independence/ Drive Self – aware Reaching goals Positives - Drive and focus Ultimate goal/ driven For future: Drive/ goals Curiosity Self-motivated Improve communication Public speaking Lacking a degree of confidence Resilient? Determined? Different person at home to at school	Personal qualities/ self	Self
Making friends Lack of socialisation out of school Peer understanding developing Caring supportive friend Social isolation Connected to foster family Significant adults – connection to foster family Support/ protection Carers listening Significant people – teachers Positive relationship with teachers Positives - Teachers Importance of being known School listening – responses Mentoring Mentoring - Importance of connection Connection to mentor Independent visitor – range of experiences Caring adult Lack of access to social worker	Social / relationships Socialising Carers Teachers Mentoring Independent visitor Social worker	Relationships Connection Support network Caring adults

Supportive wider network Adults viewing positive attributes in him Pride	General	
Secondary school stability Instability vs stability Period of instability in homelife when in care when younger Feeling towards instability- Annoying Currently a period of stability Importance of knowing - comparison to other families Perceived future stability Period of transition leaving care	Past Present Future	Stability
Difficulties managing emotions (anger) Anger Hypervigilance Fighting Difficulties managing anger/ coping strategy Emotional support/ strategies Strategies to reduce fighting Negative reputation amongst peers Loss of opportunity due to difficulties managing anger Lack of early memories Change of behaviour and attitude to learning over time	What it looks like Strategies Impact	Emotions / anger
Negative peer experiences Hypervigilance Coping with negative peer experiences Negative peer experiences Negative peer experiences Use of humour masking negative experiences? Action taken bullying still persists Persistent bullying School tackling bullying School action to bullying Unsuccessful strategies to stop bullying. Bullying persistent across schools Difficulties with peers	Impact Strategies / coping	Bullying/ negative peer experiences
Work load vs quality Academic/ exam pressure Exams/ study leave Aware of academic / exam pressure Enrichment clubs vs academic pressure Sense of belonging vs completing the year Positives - School work Revision Completing work Mentoring Supportive structures Changes in the school day	Shift in focus on work/ managing exam pressure revision	Academics

<p>Double lessons Favourite lessons</p> <p>Consistently high expectations from teachers Teacher presence Classroom management variation Teacher style Importance of subject and teacher Least favourite lesson Strictness and competitiveness of teacher Element of competition Supply teachers Frequency of supply teachers</p> <p>Resource issue – textbook and teacher Contact to aid understanding Resources – revision guides texts Resources positive/ supported Pupil premium funding Laptop Space to complete work</p> <p>Travelling to school</p>	<p>Teachers</p> <p>Resources</p>	
<p>Projecting child's voice/ representation participation Virtual school – xxx and xxx Funding Children in care council Putting self out there Positive role model for younger children in care</p> <p>LAC ball Lack of funding Inspecting children's homes and custody suits</p> <p>Position of responsibility Anti-oppressive practices Networking- shared experiences</p>	<p>Advocate / role model for children in care</p>	<p>Children in care</p>
<p>Interests Scouts Kickboxing</p>	<p>interests</p>	
<p>Future aspirations Concept art</p> <p>Clear plan for future Courses to study Aspirations to go to university Future aspirations link to current interests Current GCSE art linked to future aspirations Having direction Clear plan Good support network? Sustained interest in future aspiration Support and encouragement from others for future plan Carers and social work supporting future Researched university Met with professional in industry Placement year plans</p> <p>Drive/ goals Curiosity Self-motivated</p>	<p>Future Aspirations</p> <p>Plans</p> <p>Personal qualities (shown about future plans)</p> <p>Job</p>	<p>The future</p>

<p>Sense of excitement/ drive to achieve goals</p> <p>Knowing self Importance of knowing him</p> <p>Job/ working for a particular company Sustained interest in company Company ethos Advantages of knowing players for working in industry</p>		
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Appendix 8: A photo indicating the initial stages of step 6 (looking for patterns across cases) of data analysis



This involves laying out tables for each participant in a large space and looking for connections across cases. Columns left to right indicate the tables of emergent themes and tentative subordinate and superordinate (see Appendix 6 for an example) for each participant 1 to 5 to allow for the searching of connection across cases.

Appendix 9: A table showing the final stages of step 6 (looking for patterns across cases)

Looking for Patterns Across Cases

Emergent themes (initial groupings)	Potential subordinate themes	Potential superordinate themes
<p>Teachers: (P1) Positive relationships with teachers (P1) Staff communication (negative) (P2) Positive relationships with teachers (P2) Teacher classroom management variable/ supply teachers (negative) (P3) Academic and emotional support from teachers and residential staff (P3) Positive perspective of teachers (P4) Good relationships with teachers / teachers supportive (P4) Teacher strictness variable (P4) One unhelpful teacher (P5) Good relationships with teachers (P5) Negative relationship with teacher (P5) Head of year 7 eased transition</p> <p>Peers: (P1) Positive friendship – shared interest (P3) No negative experiences with peers (P3) Socialising with friends (P4) Supportive friendship group - stable (P4) Friendships beyond school (P4) Supportive of friends (P5) Positive peer relationships (P5) Connection to best friend's family (P5) Importance of socialising (P5) No negative experiences with peers</p> <p>Other significant adults: (P1) Nan from birth family (P1) Foster carers (P1) Independent visitor (P1) Social worker not considering her voice at the time (negative) (P2) Foster carers (P2) Mentor (P2) Independent visitor (P2) Social worker (positive) (P3) No unhelpful adults (P4) Foster family very supportive (P4) Independent visitor (P5) Carers 'mum' and 'dad'</p>	<p align="center">Relationships</p>	<p align="center">Connectedness</p>

<p>(P1) sense of belonging community spirit (P1) Reminiscing about primary school (P4) School environment (P4) School belonging – positive school ethos (P4) Communication of achievements (P4) School community projected positively</p> <p>(P1) School and year council, children in care council (P2) Children in care council/ role model for others (P2) Inspecting children’s homes/ custody suits (P3) Children in care council (P4) Children in care council – ‘work’ opportunity to improve for others (P5) Anti-bullying ambassador</p> <p>(P1) Performing arts music, choir, acting (P1) Strong interest in Anime (P1) Engagement in learning (P2) with children in care – networking (P3) sports hockey, rugby, football (P3) Army cadets, boys brigade (P4) Children in care choir (P4) Dance and performing arts (P4) Scouts residential camps (P4) Engagement with homework (P4) Curiosity in learning (P5) Anti-bullying ambassador assemblies and form time (P5) Eagerness to learn (P5) Army cadet opportunities</p> <p>(P1) Negative peer experiences and sustained bullying (P1) School slow to react to peer issues (P2) Lack of socialisation outside school (P2) social isolation (P2) Negative peer experiences (P2) School unsuccessful strategies to stop bullying (P4) How to tackle bullying in school</p>	<p>School Community</p> <p>Advocate for others</p> <p>Participation and engagement</p> <p>Negative peer experiences and bullying</p>	
<p>(P1) Access to resources (P1) Benefits of setting (P1) Educational support (P1) PEP – teacher reports (P1) High teacher expectations (P2) High teacher expectations (P2) Access to resources (P3) Access to resources – tutor</p>	<p>Academic support</p>	<p>Support and coping</p>

<p>(P3) High teacher expectations behaviourally and academically (P3) extra revision sessions (P4) Access to resources – e learning/ homework club (P4) Reading intervention (P4) Marking feedback, challenging and questioning (P4) Carer support with homework (P5) High teacher expectations/ goal setting (P5) Home/ school communication</p> <p>(P1) Emotional support (P1) Perceived emotional vs behavioural support from staff – initial exclusion (negative) (P1) Caring teachers (P2) Lack of emotional support - persistent bullying (negative) (P3) Academic and emotional support from teachers and residential staff (P3) Wellbeing as important as academic attainment (P4) Emotional support from friends (P4) Emotional support from Children in Care Council (P5) Access to pastoral staff</p> <p>(P1) Focus on strengths (P2) School tackling bullying/ school action (P2) Coping with negative peer experiences (P2) Hypervigilance and use of humour (P2) Coping strategies (P2) Strategies to reduce fighting (P2) Different person home vs school (P5) Seeking support (P5) Coping strategies (P5) Self-control</p> <p>(P1) Managing negative emotions (P1) Anxiety (P2) Hypervigilance (P2) Difficulties managing anger (P2) Fighting (P2) Negative reputation amongst peers – impact of difficulties managing anger (P2) Loss of opportunities due to anger (P5) Change over time in behaviour (P5) Difficulties managing emotion (P5) Managing emotions and behaviour around transition – refusal to cooperate (P5) Anger vs annoyance</p>	<p>Emotional support</p> <p>Coping strategies</p> <p>Managing emotions and behaviours</p>	
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<p>(P1) Academic pressures – coping with pressure of expectation (P1) Tests challenging (P2) Shift in focus on work/ managing exam pressure (P5) Academic pressure resulting from high expectations (P5) Coping strategy from academic demands – distraction</p>	<p>Academic pressures</p>	
<p>(P1) Placement ‘transition’ to sibling (P1) Initial stability post bereavement (P1) Placement stability (P2) Period of stability now (P3) Settled in residential home (P4) Home stability (P1) Placement stability</p> <p>(P1) School stability (in primary) (P1) Future school stability (P3) Stability in school (P4) School stability (in secondary) (P4) Old teacher aided transition in primary (P5) School stability – expected transitions</p> <p>(P1) Difficult transition- social isolation (P2) Period of transition leaving care (P4) Transition big jump – disruption (P5) Primary years going to waste – social isolation (P5) Unprepared for level of difference</p> <p>(P1) previous ‘placement breakdown’ (P2) Period of instability in homelife (P4) Instability pre care</p>	<p>Placement</p> <p>School</p> <p>Transition</p> <p>Experiencing instability</p>	<p>Stability vs Instability</p>
<p>(P1) Desire to attend higher education (P2) Future aspiration – content artist (P3) Future aspiration - armed police (P4) Future career options (P5) Future aspirations linked to strengths</p> <p>(P1) Plans for the future (P1) Active decision for post 16 (P2) Perceived future stability (P2) Plans for the future (P2) Good support network – supporting future plans (P2) Researched universities and met with industry professional (P2) Knowledge of industry and particular company (P3) Post 16 plans (P3) Knowledge of preferred career (P3) Support to develop plans for future</p>	<p>Aspirations</p> <p>Knowledge and support</p>	<p>The Future</p>

<p>(P4) Plans for future (P5) Plans - remain in education post 16 (P5) Support network valuing education (P5) Flexible plan may change over time</p>		
<p>(P1) Self-aware – academic strengths (P1) Reflecting over time/ awareness of negative impact of transition friendships (P1) Mature insight (P1) Compassion to self in: Birth family access Academically – a desire to learn/ passion Skills – public speaking and creative writing Socially – gender stereotypes/ social expectations (P2) Self-aware (P4) taking responsibility for actions (P5) Reflective about past behaviours (P5) Self-awareness (P5) Reflective (P5) Spanish lessons</p> <p>(P1) Use of humour (P2) Use of humour (P2) Positive view of school (P3) Positivity (P3) Positive perspective of current placement/ school (P4) sense of humour (P4) Happy with self (P4) Positive attitude to lessons and learning (P5) Use of humour – known as joker - mechanism to make friends (P5) Positive about school and social side</p> <p>(P1) Public speaking competition (P2) Drive/ goals / self-motivated about future (P2) Drive/ focus, determination (P2) Determination noted as personal quality (P3) Academic competition with peers (P3) Academic standard to hit to play for school team (P3) Competitive (P3) Drive and determined (army cadets)</p>	<p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Optimism and Humour</p> <p>Determination and Competition</p>	<p>Self</p>