Adoptive Parents' Home-School Partnerships: An Exploration of the Partnership Experiences of Parents and School Staff with a Focus on Barriers, Facilitators and Developing Partnership Practices.

Submitted by Adam Lewis-Cole, to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Educational Psychology in Educational, Child and Community Psychology.

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Acknowledgements

Abstract

It has been increasingly established in literature that the educational outcomes for adopted children and young people are comparatively low across a range of measures, when compared to non-adopted children (Gore-Langton, 2017). Indeed, the educational outcomes of this group remain a priority at government level, as evident in a range of recent policies (for example pupil premium funding, designated teacher for previously looked after children). Literature highlights that adoptive parents encounter many challenges in their experiences with schools (e.g. a lack of staff understanding of adoption; communication; information sharing; ostracism) often leading to them becoming "battle weary" (Phillips, 2007). However, there is little literature that details the experiences of home-school partnership with adoptive families (Goldberg & Smith, 2014). With Parent-school partnership heavily cited in educational literature as essential to educational success (Hattie, 2008), such research with adoptive families is arguably of importance.

The study presented here employs a qualitative, two phase research design. In phase one, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five adoptive parents and five teachers. These interviews sought to elicit the individuals' experiences of partnership, with a particular focus upon (i) how parents related their experiences to Hart's Ladder (1997) model of partnership; and (ii) the factors which influence partnership working (either as barriers or facilitators). In phase two, semi-structured interviews and a card-sort design were used with a sample of five SENCos. This phase explored how SENCos conceptualised the needs of adoptive parents (in comparison with the experiences parents reported in phase one), and how SENCos viewed that partnership practices with adoptive families could be improved.

The data was analysed using thematic analysis in order to address the research questions. The findings highlighted that (i) parents were able to relate their partnership experience to Hart's Ladder (1997) model; (ii) a variety of factors influencing partnership were established and there was some commonality between factors identified by parents and those identified by school staff. In phase two, the findings highlighted that (i) whilst SENCos were aware of many factors identified by parents, they tended not to anticipate more affective and perception-based factors; and (ii) that SENCos identified a variety of ways in

which partnership could be improved with adoptive parents (through development at a school, broader professional and local authority level). Throughout both phases the overarching themes of a lack of understanding of adoption and a need to broaden the partnership were evident. The findings offer insight and thematic models to understand a sparsely researched area; several implications for EP practice are also highlighted and discussed.

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Table of Abbreviations

Abbreviation	Terminology
ASF	Adoption Support Fund
CYP	Children and Young People
DT	Designated Teacher
EP	Educational Psychologist
EPAC	Educational Plan for Adopted Children
LA	Local Authority
LAC	Looked After Children
PEP	Personal Education Plan
SENCo	Special Educational Needs Co-Ordinator

Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter offers an overview of the scope and aims of the thesis. It will explore how the project was imagined and conceptualised, influenced by my own personal interests and values, and how it is of relevance contextually, in current educational psychology practice.

1.1: Personal Relevance

In the following paragraphs, I intend to offer an insight into my own background, views and aspirations and how I am situated within this research. I will also offer a summary of the context that led me to develop my specific research focus, questions and rationale.

It is important to acknowledge my own interest in the topic of research and to be mindful of this as an integral part of the interpretive research process. It is my intention to start a family through adoption and hence I have had a long-standing interest in the needs of adopted children and families. I was drawn to this area of research, identifying with the families of adopted children and the challenges they face, because these are also challenges that I have imagined myself facing. As such, much of the research, for me, is motivated by a genuine interest to learn about difficulties adopters face when working with schools, as part of my own ongoing learning journey about starting a family. With this in mind, I approached this research with an awareness of how my own values, beliefs and world-view influence me as a researcher and my interaction with and interpretation of the data (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Foote & Bartell, 2011). Accepting my influence, situated within this research, I was mindful of presenting myself explicitly throughout the thesis and considering my position in relation to the research topic, participants and context (Savin-Baden & Major, 2013), I summarise this briefly within Table 2.

Table 2

My position in relation to aspects of the research

	My position
	My position
Topic	I am passionate about the `topic` of adoption and the educational needs of adopted CYP (discussed in the literature review) and I strongly value the contribution that EPs can make

	to support these needs.
	My work as a trainee EP positions me within systems, observing and participating in the home-school partnership. From this experience, I also recognise my strong belief in the value of holistic approaches to understanding and supporting children and the valuable contribution that positive partnerships offer these CYP.
Participants	I recognise how I identify with adoptive parents, viewing myself as a prospective adopter. Within this, I acknowledge how the (particularly difficult) experiences that I have witnessed adoptive parents navigating with school staff have resonated and remained with me, and how this influences my view of the challenge of partnership for adoptive parents.
Research context and process	I note how my views and values (as summarised above) influence my approach to conducting this research. I have attempted to use reflection and reflexivity (Wilkinson, 1988) in order to be mindful of this, remaining open-minded to allow all perspectives to emerge.

The following paragraphs offer an overview of the development of the research in line with my interest and views. The specific focus and my initial research questions developed during my first-year placement studying on the Educational, Child and Community Psychology Doctorate, where I worked alongside an Educational Psychologist who held a specific role supporting adopted children and families. I became aware of the disparities between understandings of the child's educational needs held by staff and parents and I became interested in the systemic factors that contributed to this. In this relatively brief experience, as a critical observer, I was quickly and acutely aware of the challenges adoptive parents could encounter when staff's understanding of adoption is limited. For example, some staff I observed, had little awareness of the needs associated with the early trauma common in adopted children.

Consequently, in many of these shadowing experiences there was a notable tension between the family and the school staff, with parents feeling as though

staff were not supporting their children and staff often feeling that parents were over-anxious. In these situations, the EP was often the bridge between the two conflicting positions, with a role to play in terms of supporting and harmonising that system around the child (Beaver, 2011; Day, 2013). As such, my personal interest and motivations for the research are two-fold; primarily identifying myself as a potential adopter and seeing myself in the position of the parents; but also, as a practising EP finding myself professionally in the harmonising position between parents and staff. Whilst there is a growing evidence base considering the educational needs of adopted children, I noted that there was little research investigating the experiences of adoptive parents working in partnership with schools and this along with the experiences described inspired the current research.

1.2: Current Socio-Political Relevance

Whilst the needs of looked after children (LAC) have been recognised by the government for some time, the enduring needs CYP experience after adoption have not been widely recognised. Golding (2010) highlights that adopted children have historically tended to be less likely than LAC to be viewed as vulnerable; furthermore, there remains concern that the `fairy tale ending` misconception of adoption is still prevalent, even in recent research (Thomas, 2015). However, with the growing evidence base identifying the needs of and poorer educational outcomes for adopted children, they have begun to receive increased recognition and educational entitlements from the UK government. In 2013, adopted children were given the same priority admission to schools as LAC and as of 2014, they became eligible for enhanced pupil premium grants (of £2300 in the year 2018-2019), again on a par with LAC (DfE, 2014). Early years funding from 2 years of age was also extended to encompass adopted children. Such legislation recognises the additional support that many adopted CYP will require in education, since the rationale behind such funding is identified by the government to "raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils, of all abilities, to reach their potential" (ESFA, 2018). These changes mark significant recognition at government level, that adopted CYP require additional resource and support in school and they joined LAC, children from forces families, and children who are eligible for free school meals as a recognised vulnerable group in education. However, it is important to note that measures

such as pupil premium funding do not necessarily safeguard a certain provision for a specific CYP, since there is no requirement or stipulation that funding is attached to the specific child. Guidance from the ESFA states that the grant may be used in various ways for the benefit of these pupils.

It is evident that the educational needs of adopted CYP continues to be a sustained priority for the government. Recently, the Children and Social Work Act (2017) introduced further provision for adopted CYP in education, with recent statutory guidance expanding the role of the Virtual School Head and Designated Teachers (DT) in schools to encompass children who have left the care system as well. Schools are now required to designate a member of staff to have responsibility for previously looked after children (who are no longer in care due to adoption, special guardianship order or child arrangement order). In addition, there is the requirement for DTs to receive appropriate training in order to ensure school staff support these vulnerable CYP. Adoption UK (2018) suggests that the impact of the new DT role will be to develop greater understanding of the impact of early trauma in adopted children across schools. Such legislative changes reflect a growing recognition of the complex and enduring needs often evident in adopted CYP.

The above details support introduced for adoptive children specifically within education. However, there is (and has historically been) awareness of the needs of adopted children more broadly, as well as support services to address these needs. Families can be assessed for and access a variety of additional support e.g. therapeutic interventions and parent training through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) introduced in 2016 (King, Gieve, Iacopini, Hahne & Stradling, 2017, provide a review of ASF regarding support available and assessment processes). However, whilst this does reflect an understanding and recognition of the challenges and needs of adopted children and their families, it arguably fails to recognise the broader systems within which adopted children and families operate. King et al. highlight the concerns that individual therapies that are accessed may be de-contextualised. They suggest that the fund should be more "whole system" (p. 51) and allow for intervention and support across systems around that child, including schools. Indeed, this point could be extrapolated further to consider, as is the aim of this research, how the sub-

systems within the `whole system` interact and can best be supported e.g. home and school systems.

Various charitable organisations and adoption support agencies within the UK offer support and guidance to adoptive families and schools. They have contributed to the recent raised awareness of the needs of these CYP within education and the subsequent changes (detailed above). Prominent examples include PAC (Post Adoption Centre) UK; Adoption UK, who offer advice and guidance to parents as well as resource and training offers for school staff.

The discussion above highlights the current and developing awareness of adopted CYP and their needs within education. More recently attention has also been given to the need to support adoptive parents in relation to their child's education as well. For example, with the extension of the role for the DT who will become a key point of contact and should "work closely with parents and guardians, as they will understand their child's needs better than anyone else" (DfE, 2018, p. 31). As this new role emerges, it will be important to consider how school staff, in particular DTs, approach working with adoptive families under this statutory guidance. The guidance also makes reference to the need for DTs to have appropriate training to support them in carrying out this role. This research project can be sited within these emerging questions and developments, by considering how school staff currently do and could improve working with adoptive parents.

1.3: Professional Relevance and Contribution to Educational Psychology Practice

Given the proportionately higher level of SEN in adopted CYP compared to the rest of the school-age population, they remain a vulnerable group with whom educational psychologists are likely to be involved (Gore-Langton, 2017). Given the growing awareness of the needs of these CYP in school, EPs are increasingly likely to be involved, supporting adopted CYP and consequently working within the parent-school system around them. There is an increasing literature base around the role of the EP in supporting adopted CYP in school (e.g. Midgen, 2011; Gore-Langton, 2017), but there is also a clear role in relation to supporting parents and families within the context of education. The

SEND Code of Practice (2014) identifies the central importance of parents' and carers' views and voice, underlining the importance of EPs working collaboratively with parents. Furthermore, many authors underline the holistic nature and style of EP work, which leads to information gathering, assessment and intervention across home and school contexts (Cameron, 2006; Wagner 2000).

Beyond involving and consulting with parents, Farrell, Woods, Lewis, Rooney, Squires & O'Connor (2006) highlight that the EP's role extends to supporting parents and carers as well as the CYP. Indeed, Holland (1996) highlights the importance for EPs of attending to, and being supportive of, the emotional needs of parents of children with additional needs (this is of particular relevance given the increased incidence of SEN in the adopted population). Furthermore, Pelco and Ries (1999) argue that EPs should seek to take an active role in facilitating home-school partnership and collaboration, supporting staff to develop the efficacy and skills to build positive partnership practice; this needs to involve EPs raising awareness of the positive impacts of home-school partnership (Christenson, 2004). This role can be considered to extend beyond the parents and family around the child, with Holland suggesting that EPs are well positioned to guide other professionals in understanding parents' needs and perspectives. Hence it can be suggested that EPs are well placed to work with and support adoptive parents, but also to shape other professionals' perceptions and approaches to these parents. For example, Buckwalter, Reed and Mercer (2017) draw attention to how the attachment and coping backgrounds of adoptive parents influence the outcomes for their children, but are often overlooked. Whilst it is not the assertion that EPs become focussed upon these needs within parents, in taking a holistic, systemic view, EPs are skilled to understand the influence of such needs. This literature highlights a clear role for EPs in supporting parents and families of vulnerable groups, utilising their skillset and place within these social systems to support positive home-school interaction.

With specific reference to adoptive parents and families, Osborne, Norgate and Triall (2009) highlighted that 69% of Educational Psychology Services (EPSs) surveyed were involved in work with fostered and adopted CYP. As part of this work, consultation around educational needs, and training with staff and parents

were highlighted as key contributions. Osborne and Alfano (2011), also reporting on consultation sessions with parents, noted that behavioural issues and educational issues were the most common focusses raised by parents for discussion with EPs. They report positive changes in levels of concern and confidence following such intervention, highlighting the beneficial support EPs are able to offer working with adoptive parents in relation to educational issues. Midgen (2011) and Gore-Langton (2017) highlight how EPs are well placed to support families and staff as well as strategic development. Indeed, Syne, Green and Dyer (2012) describe the EPAC (Education Plan for Adopted Children), this model (discussed in detail later in the thesis) represents a now, well-established example of such strategic work where EPs are actively involved in strengthening partnership practice, whilst also contributing to support for school staff and parents. Indeed, EPs surveyed in Osborne, Norgate and Triall identified that EPSs could offer greater support to adopted CYP and their families. This underlines the level of need within this group and the potential benefit that EPs view their involvement might offer.

Such assertions highlight the important position of the EP supporting and working with schools and adoptive families. EPs are well placed to support children in school; the staff supporting them; their families; the working relationships (partnerships) around the CYP and systemic and policy change.

1.4: Overall Research Aims

A review of the current literature has highlighted a scarcity of research into the experiences of partnership between adoptive parents and school staff. In particular, very limited research could be obtained regarding the perceptions of school staff on such partnerships. Indeed, there is also a relative absence of literature exploring approaches and interventions to improve the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents. I propose that it is important for EPs to have an appreciation of the experiences and challenges in the adoptive parent-staff relationship, in order to be able to inform holistic assessment and intervention for adopted CYP and support these partnerships.

This research seeks (in the first phase) to explore and understand the experiences of partnership from both the perspective of adoptive parents and that of school staff and furthermore to establish barriers and facilitators to

partnership working. The second phase of the research seeks to explore how SENCos view the needs of adopted parents when working with schools. Secondly, following presentation of phase one findings, how they (as strategically placed stake-holders) consider partnership practices could be improved with adoptive parents. The core aims of this research are:

i) To investigate the experiences of parent-school partnership held by a sample of adoptive parents in relation to Hart's (1997) model of partnership.

ii) To investigate the factors perceived to influence partnership experience as constructed by adoptive parents.

iii) To investigate the factors perceived to influence partnership experience as constructed by teachers.

iv) To investigate what SENCos understand to be the key needs of adoptive parents working collaboratively with schools.

v) To investigate how SENCos view that partnership practices can be improved.

1.5: Research Questions

RQ1: How can the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents be related to Hart's model of partnership?

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by adoptive parents?

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by school staff?

RQ4: What do SENCos view to be the key needs of adoptive parents working with schools?

RQ5: Which of the partnership factors, reported by adoptive parents, are unanticipated by SENCos and why are they surprising to SENCos?

RQ6: How do SENCos view that partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1: Overview of the Literature Review

In this chapter, I present a review of relevant literature. I begin by highlighting the the needs of, adopted CYP within the context of early adverse experiences. I will then consider the importance of parent-school collaboration and partnership in supporting adopted CYP's educational experience and provide an exploration of current models of parent-school partnership. A particular focus is given to the factors that may act as barriers or facilitators to partnership and an existing, salient framework of factors affecting parental involvement is presented. I will then offer a critique of this framework and consideration of how it can be adapted, in light of partnership research and literature exploring adoptive families' experiences with schools (in the absence of literature specifically examining their home-school partnerships). Finally, I present an overview of the scarce literature examining how adoptive parent-school partnership experiences and practices can be developed and highlight relevant gaps in the literature.

2.2: Literature Review Search Terms

For this review, I sourced literature through academic search engines (EBSCO, JSTOR, ERIC, Web of Science and ScienceDirect) along with textbooks and searches using Google Scholar. In addition, to source further relevant articles, a search of articles from two key journals was conducted (Educational Psychology in Practice, and Adoption and Fostering). I used a variety of search terms including `partnership`, `relationship`, `engagement`, and `involvement` to follow `adoptive parent and school`. I noticed a general sparsity of literature in using these terms in relation to adoptive parents and found that I needed to draw literature relating to the `views` and `experiences` of adoptive parents (not specifically focussed around school) which yielded studies that offered insights into this research. By comparison, there was a greater wealth of research exploring the impacts and outcomes for adopted CYP. I viewed that this could potentially reflect that whilst the needs of adopted CYP within education are being (recently) explored in research, the experiences of parents in relation to navigating schools has not received such attention. Consequently, I have drawn on research exploring adoptive parents' views and experiences generally, as well as considering other minority groups within education. The same was true

of school staff views regarding partnership with adoptive parents, where very minimal literature could be found.

2.3: The Contemporary Picture of Adoption in the UK

In the year ending 31st March 2017, 4350 CYP were adopted from care, this reflects a decrease of 19% from the peak number of adoptions in 2015 (5,360). This falling trend is in spite of a rise in the number of children and young people who are looked after in the care system; rising by 4.6%, from 69500 in 2015 to 72670 in 2017. (DfE, 2017). The decline in adoption from care is referred to by the Department for Education as "unexpected" (DfE, 2016, p. 8). In their report (Adoption: a vision for change) they highlight that adoptions may not have been prioritised, even when they have been in children's best interests. The report outlines planned changes in the law and systems around adoption to address this (examples being regionalising adoption agencies and speeding up matching processes). The priorities outlined reflect a vision that sees an increased need for adoption to ensure that the number of children finding permanency increases and thus reflects that adopted CYP, as a group, are receiving increased attention from the government.

O'Halloran (2015) highlights that "the traditional form of adoption in the U.K. is dying out" (p. 40). She suggests that voluntary adoptions by birth parents to new adoptive families is a myth and not reflective of the modern adoption context. This highlights the trend from closed, voluntary adoptions (where birth parents have no future contact with the child, and willingly place the child for adoption), to open adoptions directed by authorities (where children are removed by the state and there is an arrangement regarding a form of contact with birth families). Indeed, the dominant reasons for entering care in 2017 were abuse and neglect; family dysfunction; and acute family distress (DfE, 2017), many of these children reach permanency through adoption. As well as a move away from closed and voluntary adoption, Wood (2017) discusses the change in adoptive family structures, particularly since the introduction of the 2002 Adoption and Children Act. This act broadened the right to adopt to include same-sex couples; unmarried couples; single individuals and step-parents. As such, the rigid conformity to the traditional, archetypal family model in adoption gradually gave way to reflect modern families, with their more permeable

boundaries (O'Halloran, 2015). Given the changing face of modern adoption in the UK, I would argue that it is concerning that dominant societal understanding of adoption has not caught up. Indeed, research into societal views on adoption by the BAAF (2010) found that 39% held the traditional understanding of voluntary adoption (lacking awareness of the likely trauma).

2.4: Adopted Children as a Vulnerable Group

Adopted children are recognised as a vulnerable group (DfE, 2014), with a growing evidence base highlighting the challenges and needs of these CYP in education. In a recent review, Gore-Langton (2017) highlighted comparatively poorer outcomes for adopted CYP across a range of measures. (1) In learning, the proportion of adopted CYP achieving `age-related` expectations was on a par with LAC and significantly below that of children living at home; (2) in social and emotional development, there were higher rates of exclusions of adopted children than the general school population; further, adopted children scored on a par with LAC on the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire; and (3) in relation to special educational needs, there was a higher incidence of statements/ education health and care plans and special school placements for adopted CYP compared to the general population. In the following paragraphs, I offer a broad overview of the key areas of needs and contextual psychological theory relevant to adopted CYP.

2.4.1: The impact of early trauma.

The outcomes I have highlighted above for adopted CYP are often understood from a developmental and neurological lens as an effect of early trauma. Fisher (2015) draws attention to the extensive evidence base highlighting the detrimental effects of early trauma for psychological and neurobiological development. There is now widespread acknowledgement of the trauma adoptees experience (NICE, 2013), however there is also a danger of oversimplification in how trauma and its effects are understood. D'Hooge (2017) for example highlights that trauma is predominantly conceptualised as events of abuse and neglect during childhood, and this fails to recognise several key areas of trauma: (1) pre-birth influences e.g. Gregory, Reddy and Young (2015) found that 75% of adopted CYP were exposed to alcohol in the womb; (2) the impact of successive losses e.g. Selwyn, Wijedasa and Meakings (2014) report

that only 0.3% of adopted CYP experience only one stable foster placement, highlighting the successive losses of primary caregivers; (3) the impact of less obvious detrimental experiences from more subtle factors within caregiving (e.g. lacking the ability to regulate, contain, play). Furthermore, assumptions about experiences and impacts of trauma can also disregard the mediating contextual and intra-personal factors. Fisher, for example, highlights a variety of individual differences which influence a child's resiliency to trauma, whilst Grotevant and McDermott (2014) highlight many mediating pre and post-adoption factors. Given this research, I suggest that a position should be taken which understands early trauma in adopted CYP on a continuum of experiences and effects (Kinniburgh, Blaustein, Spinazzola & Van der Kolk, 2017). This reflects that adopted CYP are far from a homogenous group and explains the differing effects that result. Such a consideration also highlights a need for caution when considering likely outcomes for adopted CYP as discussed by Gore-Langton (2017), since these will be influenced by the nature of the trauma experienced. In the following paragraphs I offer a brief overview of the salient effects associated with early trauma and the key needs of these CYP (and the associated demand on school and family systems).

2.4.2: Social development – attachment needs.

One key developmental process likely to be disrupted by early trauma is the development of attachment, with trauma being linked to fewer opportunities for positive attachment interactions (Archer, 2006). Bowlby's (1969) seminal work conceptualised attachment as an enduring emotional bond connecting infant and primary carer. Bowlby postulates that the early attachment lays the basis for future relationships, as it constitutes the infant's internal working model from which future relationships are constructed. Given this assertion, the nature of the attachment relationship is key to the individual's ongoing social development.

Ainsworth and Bell (1970) suggested that patterns of attachment behaviour could be organised into types of attachment (based on security). Furthermore, these attachment patterns were influenced by the nature of the interactions with primary caregivers. Children who are experiencing trauma are arguably not receiving the sensitive, responsive and competent care to which Ainsworth refers (D'Hooge, 2017; Schimmenti & Bifulco, 2015) and hence attachment

development is not optimal. Van den Dries, Juffer, Van Ijzendoorn and Bakermans-Kranenburg's (2009) meta-analysis of attachment in adopted children supports this, finding that children adopted after the first year of age had less secure attachments and greater attachment disorganisation than non-adopted children. Furthermore, whilst the level of attachment disorganisation is significantly lower in those children who are living with their adoptive families than those waiting to be adopted, disorganisation remains at a higher rate than in typical samples (Barone & Lionetti, 2012; Zeanah, Smyke, Koga & Carlson, 2005). This indicates the complex ongoing nature of attachment needs in adopted CYP (despite the remediating effect adoption offers).

2.4.3: Cognitive development.

Research highlights specific challenges with executive functioning (DePrince & Freyd, 1999; Freyd, DePrince & Gleaves, 2007; Bombèr, 2011) in trauma exposed CYP. These are the cognitive abilities which regulate behaviours and processes (e.g. attentional control, working memory, and inhibitory control) and are essential in effective goal-directed behaviour (Lubit, Rovine, Defrancisci & Eth, 2003). These problems are likely to be further exacerbated by the difficulties identified with both receptive and expressive language (Cook et al., 2017); Coster and Cicchetti (1993) highlight differences in the exposure to language for children experiencing trauma, for example, high exposure to instrumental language but less exposure to social language. They further assert the tendency for such children to focus attention on the non-verbal communication more than verbal (since they may have learned that this is a reliable way to anticipate threat) and hence may not process much language content.

2.4.4: Emotional development.

With regard to emotional development, research regularly highlights the impacts of early trauma on emotional literacy and regulation (Langton & Boy, 2017). Oshri, Sutton, Clay-Warner and Miller (2015) suggest that parents are key to emotional socialization enabling children to identify, communicate and understand emotions. Hence, in situations of neglect or abuse children lack this effective socialisation, meaning they may lack emotional literacy and regulatory strategies (Shipman & Zeman, 2001). Emotional regulation is further

complicated by the likely high levels of hypervigilance. Statman-Weil (2015) suggest a continuous state of hyperarousal can lead to apparently disproportionate responses to classroom triggers (e.g. loud noises) and aggressive behaviours, making learning environments incredibly challenging contexts.

2.5: Parent-School Partnership

2.5.1: What is partnership?

Langton and Boy (2017) highlight that when adopted CYP experience difficulties in school, this can put considerable strain on the adults supporting them and lead to tensions in these networks. This is particularly exaggerated in cases where problems seen at home are not seen in school, which is common for adopted CYP. In such instances, a culture of distrust and blame emerges (Dunstan, 2010; Langton & Boy, 2017) and parents and professionals are unable to work together effectively. As such, a focus on parent-school partnership is especially justified with adoptive families. Furthermore, given the findings regarding the comparatively poorer outcomes for adopted CYP and the evidence base supporting the beneficial impact of partnership for a wide range of outcomes (discussed later), schools working collaboratively with families of adopted CYP is especially crucial. In this section of the literature review I will explore the concept of home-school partnership, offering an overview of how it has been defined and constructed, as well as salient models in understanding partnership practice.

Parent-school partnerships are a familiar concept in schools, having featured in government policy and educational legislation for over three decades (O'Connor, 2008). However, whilst the terminology is familiar, the meaning is less clear (Beveridge, 2005). Indeed, Calder (1995) argues that partnership "remains a loosely defined, but fashionable concept whose boundaries are fluid and permeable" (p. 753). One approach to defining partnership is offered by Pugh (1989), who suggests that partnership is a "working relationship characterised by a shared sense of purpose, mutual respect and the willingness to negotiate. This implies a sharing of information, responsibility, skills, decision-making and accountability" (p. 5). Across definitions there is general consensus around features/components of partnership including (i) working reciprocally; (ii)

equality and respect; (iii) shared power and responsibility; (iv) shared decision making; (v) valuing complementary skillsets (Vincent, 2001; Christiansen, 2004; Tett, 2010; Blue-Banning, Summers, Frankland, Nelson & Beegle, 2004).

Yet, partnership is still argued by some to be an aspirational or ideal model of parent-school relationship as opposed to a realistic expectation (Vincent, 2001). In particular, Bastiani (1993) and Tett (2010) highlight the natural power imbalance within these relationships, rendering the aim of true equality unrealistic. Such assertions raise a question around terminology, parent-school relationships are presented in the literature with different concepts. Parental involvement, participation and engagement are commonly associated with partnership and are best understood in terms of the power and role afforded to parents. Involvement and participation reflect parents holding a passive role, with schools directing them; engagement on the other hand, reflects a reciprocal process involving listening to and working with parents as active agents of change (Ferlazzo, 2011; Harris & Goodall, 2007; Shirley, 1997). Ferlazzo explains that engagement is most synonymous with partnership, since it is built from a position of engagement. Given these distinctions it may be that the traditional power imbalances, to which Bastiani and Tett refer, are more aligned to practices of involvement and participation and that attempts to reduce these tensions are evident where professionals and parents aim for partnership.

2.5.2: Parent partnership as an effective intervention.

The positive effects of parent-school engagement and partnership are well established in the literature. Hattie (2008) states that the effect of parental engagement over a child's school career is equivalent to adding 2 to 3 years to their education and Harris and Goodall (2007) argue that it is the most significant factor in raising achievement. Whilst such assertions allude to academic benefits for CYP, evidence highlights the wide-ranging benefits across domains beyond the strictly academic. Specifically, research has highlighted positive effects on behaviour (Feinstein & Symons 1999), self-esteem (Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003), attendance (Melhuish, Sylva, Sammons, Siraj-Blatchford, & Taggart, 2001) and lower risk of exclusion (Deforges & Abouchaar, 2003). As these broad domains are all identified as key areas of need for adopted children, the benefit of working in partnership with parents is further underlined.

2.5.3: Models of partnership experience.

Various models have been proposed to understand, conceptualise and guide partnership practice within schools. Several authors highlight the evident trend in moving from models which viewed parents as aides of the professionals supporting learning, towards conceptualisations that see parents as active agents in their child's education (Beveridge, 2005; Hornby & Lafaele, 2011). These models provide a basis for understanding the partnership experiences of both adoptive parents and school staff, salient models in the literature are briefly outlined.

Discussions by Mittler & Mittler (1982) and Swap (1993) reflect on the changing understandings of partnership over several decades. They discuss how earlier traditions in parent-school relationships focussed upon expert models as described by Mittler and Mittler where professionals relied upon their expertise to make educational decisions, parents were drawn upon to supply information and were informed about practice. There are similarities here with what Swap describes as protective models, where the emphasis is on school staff being protected from parental intrusion and the role of teacher and parents are deliberately demarcated. A next generation of partnership models are conceptualised as transplant models (Mittler & Mittler, 1982) or home-school transmission models (Swap, 1993). In these theories, parents are viewed as taking more of a role in their children's education, but on the professionals' terms; parents became recognised as a useful resource to extend the teaching of CYP, guided by teachers. At best, it can be argued that these models viewed parents as co-educators and not as active partners. Cunningham and Davis (1985), in recognising the inequality inherent here, advocated a consumer model; this recognises the parents' knowledge and expertise in relation to their children and highlights that they should be empowered to make decisions regarding their education (guided with support from professionals). Whilst praised for the recognition and advocacy of parental expertise (Case, 2000), critics highlight practical and contextual issues. Questions arise over, (i) whether parents have the appropriate skills and understanding to exercise these rights (Appleton & Minchom, 1991); (ii) the lack of joint responsibility in final decisions (with this model seeing parents as having the final say; Hood, 1997). Extending on this trend of parental empowerment, Swap elaborates on

the more current approaches based on a partnership model. This model is characterised by extensive collaboration between schools and families through four key components; two-way communication; enhancing learning at home and at school; parents and teachers offering mutual support and joint decision-making.

Whilst discourse tends to portray these models as a reflection of the development in partnership practice (implying that older forms of practice have diminished), the argument can be made that the majority remain relevant in parent-teacher experiences today. Indeed, Swap (1993) presents an argument of a hierarchy in the models that she proposes, implying current practice across schools may reflect features of different models/levels. Furthermore, it was argued by Henderson and Berla (1994) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011) that despite the models of, and evidence for, effective practices in collaborating with parents, practice is still highly variable. Indeed, whilst literature has not situated adoptive parents' experiences within these models, it has highlighted the varying partnership practices and experiences that adoptive parents have encountered (Lyons, 2016; King, 2009).

In understanding varying partnership practice, Reed, Jones, Walker and Hoover-Dempsey (2000) highlight the importance of role construction, which relates to how parents construe their role in relation to the parent-school partnership, Keyes (2000) extends the same concept to teachers' role construction. These authors suggest that parents and teachers may construct different beliefs about their roles. Constructions can be parent-focussed (seeing themselves as holding primary responsibility for their child's educational outcomes); teacher-focussed (school staff have primary responsibility) or partnership-focussed (seeing parent and teacher working together, sharing responsibility). Thus, partnership experience may be influenced by the individual constructions that parents and staff bring to the interaction. Furthermore Lopez-Larrosa, Richards, Rodriguez and Soriano (2019) highlight the importance of staff beliefs around self-efficacy with regard to partnership practice, meaning that actual interactions are guided not just by how they construct the role, but also by how they evaluate their ability to manage interactions. Potentially, due to the lack of training regarding adopted children within initial teacher education (Langton & Boy, 2017), I would suggest that

teachers may perceive lower self-efficacy when working with these children and families.

The models described arguably reflect an effective means to understand and organise the partnership experiences of parents and schools. This is something that Langton and Boy (2017) advocate. They suggest that typologies/hierarchies of participation are a useful heuristic from which to understand adoptive parents' experiences of partnership. They advocate consideration of Birney & Sutcliffe's (2013) hierarchy, (which is one of many adaptations of Hart's Ladder, 1997), to explore parental partnership experiences. Whilst Hart's ladder was intended to explore the participation of CYP in adult-dominated domains, the concepts have been adapted by many (Hart, 2008) and, as Langton and Boy (2017) suggest, can legitimately be applied to school-family partnerships where similar power dynamics apply. Consequently, for brevity and clarity, I have organised the salient models of partnership alongside Birney and Sutcliffe's hierarchy (Figure 1), in order to provide a representation of the differing experiences of parent-school partnership. Throughout the thesis, I shall, for brevity, refer to the model as Hart's Ladder, this is because whilst there have been many variations/adaptations of Hart's original model (Hart, 2008), it was important to recognise Hart's original intellectual property within the model.

Description of each rung (adapted from Birney & Sutcliffe (2013)

Link/ similarity to models of partnership

Partner — Parents are strategically involved and share power. — Partnership Model: reciprocal communications; mutual support and shared decision making

Participant — Parents participate as active contributors to decision-making and have influence over the outcomes — Consumer Model: active participation & parental decision making

Consulted — Parents are involved and are able to respond to questions and decisions made

Represented — Parents views are gathered in some way and shared in decision making although active participation in decision making is not involved. — Transplant Model: parents as aides, acting on direction of school professionals

Considered — Professionals consider the perspective of parents and make judgements about what parents may want/think, No direct engagement.

Informed — Professionals take decisions independently of parents without consideration of their views. — Expert Model: parents told about decisions.

Absent

Figure 1: A representation of types/levels of partnership experiences developed by Integrating Birney and Sutcliffe's (2013) ladder of participation and salient models of partnership described in the literature

2.6: Factors Influencing Partnership Experiences – Facilitators and Barriers

Much discourse within the partnership literature discusses (often indirectly) factors which influence the practice and development of partnership. Within this section, I intend to summarise these factors. Given the sparsity of literature exploring specifically the factors influencing partnerships with adoptive parents, I will present an evolving model starting from parental involvement literature; then adding insights from literature relating to partnership and specifically partnership with parents from minority groups; finally adding insights from the small selection of studies exploring adoptive parents' views and experiences of school. Given the sparsity of literature around adoptive parents, I will also offer suggestions as appropriate in consideration of how factors identified in general partnership literature may relate to adoptive parents.

Hornby and Lafaele (2011) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018) provide a framework (later updated) under which they organise the key factors from the literature in an attempt to explain parental involvement in schools; this is

outlined in Figure 2 and the following brief discussion to elaborate the most salient factors to the current research.

Parent and family factors		Parent-teacher factors	
- Parental perception of their role - Parental self-efficacy - Family circumstances - Socio-economic status - Own experiences of schooling		- Opposing goals and agendas - Parental fear of judgement - Attitudes held by teachers - Teachers lack of time, training and insight into families other than their own.	
Child factors	Societal factors	Practical factors	
- Age - SEND - Child's behaviour	- Historical context (e.g. whether involvement has historically been encouraged). - Political and economic factors	- Parental time constraints - School opening hours - Contact staff e.g. office staff. - Parental access to information provided by school e.g. internet and social media access.	

Figure 2: Factors influencing parental involvement, adapted from Hornby and Lafelle (2011) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018)

2.6.1: Parent and family factors.

The framework highlights the influence of factors within the parent/family system influencing involvement. Parent's role construction and ability to support their child (e.g. in relation to academic work) as previously discussed, is noted as influential. Also highlighted are specific family circumstances e.g. employment status, family make-up and parents' own school experiences, which can empower or disempower them in relation to their children. Socioeconomic factors are discussed in relation to theories of social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1973) whereby parents' knowledge, skills, education and resources determine their relationship with schools, with those of dominant socio-economic status (e.g. middle-class parents) being valued most by schools.

2.6.2: Parent-teacher factors.

These factors refer to the dynamics between parents and teachers. Bastiani (1993) argues that often parents and teachers have different goals and agendas which can create conflict. Hornby (2000) further argues that this is exacerbated by a persisting deficit view of parenting that is a common attitude held by teachers; given the high level of challenging behaviour adopted CYP present, this may be a barrier faced regularly by adoptive parents. Parental fear of

judgement was identified as a key factor, and has already been suggested as a barrier that adoptive parents face (Dunstan, 2010). The authors suggest a lack of competence in teachers in working with families, due to a lack of time and training; specifically, teachers' practice is suggested to be limited as they lack insight into family circumstances that are different to their own. I would suggest that this is especially relevant to adoptive families, where developing an empathetic understanding may be particularly challenging.

2.6.3: Commentary on the framework.

This framework, offers a useful organisation of factors influencing parental involvement and I suggest this provides a useful starting point in understanding factors influencing adoptive parents. However, as I have already established, involvement is qualitatively different from partnership. Furthermore, there is also a high focus upon parent and family factors, Feuerstein (2000) warns against this as it implies a responsibility and unnecessary focus on static family factors, which may become an excuse for being unable to engage parents. I argue that the collaboration and equality aimed for by partnership would require more consideration of teacher and school factors which act as barriers and facilitators to effective partnerships. Finally, as a general approach to understanding parental involvement, the specific needs of adoptive parents and the factors they face are arguably not comprehensively reflected by such a model. A review of the literature has not yielded any direct research into partnership factors for adoptive families, however in light of literature referring to partnership (rather than involvement) and experiences of parents of minority groups (who may have more bespoke experiences, like adoptive parents), I have adapted Hornby and Lafaele's (2011) original model to offer a more informed view of factors which may influence partnership experiences of adoptive parents (see Figure 3).

Parent and family factors	Teacher factors	Parent-teacher factors
• Parental perception of their role • Parental self-efficacy • Family circumstances • Socio-economic status • Own experiences of schooling • Level of parent skills in advocating for children (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007) • Level of educational aspirations for child (PTA, 2016)	• Teacher valuing of partnership (Ramirez, 2000) • Teachers' perceptions of parental behaviour (Lasater, 2016; Povey et al, 2016) • Teachers' perceptions of parental capacity, capability and interest (Povey et al 2016; Hill & Craft, 2003). • Teachers' understanding and skills in relation to diverse family backgrounds (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011)	• Opposing goals and agendas • Parental fear of judgement • Attitudes held by teachers • Teachers lack of time, training and insight into families other than their own. • Power dynamics (Tett, 2010) • Experiences of and managing conflict (Christenson, 2004; Lasater, 2016) • Different perspectives of child and child's needs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000) • Communication (Wanat, 2010)

Child factors	Societal factors	Practical factors	School factors
• Age • SEND • Child's behaviour	• Historical context • Political and economic factors	• Parental time constraints • School opening hours • Contact staff e.g. office staff. • Parental access to information.	• Parental involvement and engagement processes (Harris & Goodall, 2008) • School climate and friendliness (Povey et al, 2016; Kim, 2009)

Figure 3: Factors influencing parental partnership. Based on Hornby and Lafelle (2011) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018) with additions from partnership and minority parent literature. Additions are included in red.

2.6.4: Teacher factors.

These factors reflect issues highlighted in the literature related to teacher attitudes and behaviours. For example, the value teachers place on partnership and their willingness to collaborate with parents, Ramirez (2000) highlights the gap between rhetoric and actual practice in relation to this factor. Teacher perception factors are incorporated here from literature exploring teacher's views; Lasater (2016) and Povey et al (2016) note that teachers can feel nervous and pressured in response to parental behaviour which they find attacking and rude. Teachers' perceptions of parental capacity and efficacy has also been discussed, Kim (2009) for example, highlights the tendency for teachers to negatively evaluate the skills and willingness of parents to engage

with schools, due to a lack of a culturally-sensitive appreciation. Certainly, this could be argued to also reflect adoptive parents' experiences, given the lack of understanding of modern adoption (BAAF, 2010).

2.6.5: School factors.

These factors were added to the model to reflect the literature (again, commonly in relation to minority parents) that identified school climate and friendliness as key factors in partnership (Kim, 2009; Povey et al., 2016). This subjective experience and impression given by schools is reflected in their practices, relationships, values, and goals; whilst difficult to objectively assess, it is identified as an important precursor to working collaboratively (Whitaker & Hoover-Dempsey, 2013; Povey et al., 2016). Indeed, the approaches, methods and opportunities that schools use to engage parents could well be considered an aspect of this climate. Harris and Goodall (2008) suggest that often, undifferentiated approaches are used which reach those parents who least need to be reached and are already engaged (arguably not reaching parents of different backgrounds such as adoptive parents).

2.6.6: Additions to parent and family factors and parent-teacher factors.

Further literature indicated additional factors of parental aspirations and skills, with questions raised regarding how parents are supported with the latter (Appleton & Minchom, 1991). This is of particular relevance to adoptive parents given the high level of need associated with adopted CYP (Gore-Langton, 2017).

In relation to the parent-teacher domain, several additional factors were evident in the literature. Power dynamics are consistently referenced, with Tett (2010) and Williams, Williams and Ullman (2002) drawing attention to the imbalance created by features such as job titles and professional language. Christenson (2004) and Lasater (2016) highlight the likelihood of conflict that arises from collaborative working between parents and schools and the need to be able to manage this by respecting the differences of opinion (Smidt, 2007) and utilising these to reach shared understandings (Dale, 1996). These conflicts may often emerge from the next factor of differing perspectives and understandings of the child's needs (Lake & Billingsey, 2000), which is especially relevant to adoptive

families given the misconceptions surrounding adoption (BAAF, 2010; Gore-Langton, 2017). Finally, communication appeared as a salient feature with Wanat (2010) finding that these parents generally wanted open, frequent, immediate and specific information. Indeed, Ludicke and Kortman (2012) found that communication was identified by parents of children with additional needs as the most significant barrier to collaborative working with school staff.

Thus, this elaborated framework provides a broader range of factors which influence partnership practice. I suggest that such a framework offers an increasingly fairer reflection of the experiences of adoptive parents in their partnership's with schools, which will now be elaborated on further in the next section of the literature review.

2.7: Adoptive Parents' Experience with School

Goldberg and Smith (2014) highlight the absence of research investigating adoptive parents' engagement in schools, and there is a distinct lack of exploration of partnership practices between adoptive parents and schools. However, within the last decade, research has begun to explore more broadly the experiences of adoptive families and their views on school. Such research offers insights into the specific challenges that influence collaboration and partnership which I will discuss below and then assimilate into the partnership factors framework that has been developed.

2.7.1: Social stigma.

Firstly, prevailing societal views about adoption are discussed in the literature and referenced by adoptive parents as a source of perceived stigma. Weistra and Luke (2017) draw attention to two particular views; the attitude that adoption is `second best` to a `natural` family and in some way depicts adoptive parents as failures, unable to have children in the typical way (Miall, 1987). Furthermore, Hartman & Laird (1990) highlight another strongly held view (borne out of the observation of adoptive parents needing to `prove` themselves able to have children) which believes that parents should be able to `solve` the child's problems. The internalisation of such attitudes leads to a fear of judgement as a parent and concern that they, and their children, will be considered different and of less value. Whilst this research is several decades old and critics may point to changes in societal views on family diversity,

Weistra and Luke's own research suggests that these attitudes endure today. Although, it would perhaps be more accurate to suggest that the perception of such stigma endures (as this research involved interviewing adoptive parents). Consequently, with schools being a significant agent of socialisation (Mortimer & Simmons, 1978) it can be argued that adoptive parents are likely to be sensitive to particular attitudes in their interactions with school staff.

2.7.2: Teachers' understanding of the impact of early experience.

One of the most regularly cited issues across the research relates to a perceived lack of understanding that teachers display of the long-term impacts of early trauma (Gore-Langton, 2017; King 2009; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Lyons, 2016; Comfort, 2007). In particular, Cooper and Johnson found parents were concerned by unrealistic expectations that children would now `catch-up` following adoption and King notes that unrealistic expectations such as this were particularly prevalent when adoption took place at a young age, with staff not appreciating the impacts of in-vitro and early trauma. Lyons provides further elaboration with adoptive parents' construct of "getting what it means" to be adopted (p. 105), which refers to an empathetic understanding of the child's viewpoint and an appreciation of how subtle aspects of school, or teacher behaviour may influence them (e.g. understanding that the child may be concerned about transitions). This lack of understanding of trauma and its effects often leads to different perspectives on the needs of the CYP, with Cooper and Johnson reporting that parents often felt needs were unidentified or too slowly identified in school. Langton and Boy (2017) offer a potential explanation for this, noting that often the child's behaviour manifests very differently at home (their secure base) and the child's needs may not be so evident in the school. Phillips (2007) argues that parents ultimately become frustrated and "battle weary" (p. 30), which depicts the level of conflict and discrepancy that can, at times, exist. These misunderstandings often lead to misattributions of the CYP's behaviour (another identified factor), with parents noting that challenging behaviour was often explained by teachers as a result of the adoption itself (Cooper & Johnson, 2007) or was explored in a way that left parents feeling as if they were to blame (Dunstan, 2010). Comfort (2007) also highlights that staff are often unaware of the importance of the skills and

knowledge of adoptive parents and the contribution this offers to understanding their children within education settings.

2.7.3: Communication and information sharing.

Communication as a factor was expressed by parents as one of their most important concerns (Cooper & Johnson, 2007) and could be separated into communication between parent and school and communications within school. In relation to the former, Gore-Langton (2017) highlights parental concerns over whether to share their child's information and who to share that with, there were also issues raised over schools' communication with parents, leading some to feel uninformed (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). In addition, the manner and approach of communication can be a cause for concern for parents, with one parent in Lyons' (2016) research highlighting the experience of being asked to "have a word with" (p. 107) the teacher regularly in front of other parents, which was shaming for her. Varying experiences are discussed in relation to communications with teachers, with some reporting positive dialogues (King, 2009), but others feeling dismissed (Dunstan, 2010). This is problematic in consideration of Lyons' finding that one of the main hopes for adopters in their dealings with school is to feel listened to. In respect of communication within schools, parents reported having to re-tell their child's story as information was not shared within school. King highlights inconsistencies in how schools manage this information, with some making the information accessible to staff, whilst others questioned why it would be relevant to hold such information.

2.7.4: School community: perceived acceptance and ostracism.

Goldberg and Smith (2014) highlight that adoptive parents are more likely to engage with schools if they feel accepted by and connected to other parents. They suggest that "the absence of a community of other parents, who share a central feature of one's identity, can inhibit a sense of connection to the school" (p. 466). This may be very relevant to adoptive families where they may be the only adopted family in the school. Indeed, Kosciw and Diaz (2008) note that acceptance and connection to other non-adoptive families at school is valuable, as it creates a sense of belonging to the school and offers the assurance of greater collective power. Furthermore, there is evidence of a fear of ostracism

(Gore-Langton, 2017) and some evidence of parents making negative comments about specific adoptive parents on social media (Fursland, 2013).

2.7.5: Curriculum issues.

The literature reveals that some adoptive parents have concerns regarding curriculum issues, and a lack of consideration regarding the implications of activities, topics and language which focus on family issues. Again, experiences are mixed with parents in Lyons' (2016) research discussing experiences where this had and had not been planned for, such issues may erode the trust that parents feel towards teachers (Gore-Langton, 2017).

2.7.6: Parent and family factors.

Whilst the concerns highlighted above present a perspective on areas of practice that schools and teachers should address, there is also literature highlighting specific parent and family factors of salience to adoptive families. Hindman, Miller, Froyen and Skibbe (2012) propose that higher levels of conflict may emerge when adoptive parents work with schools due to the way in which they conceive their role as a parent. They suggest that given the usually traumatic pre-adoption backgrounds of their children, adoptive parents have a clear view of themselves as protectors, this leads to heightened emotional arousal when any threats or failings to support their children are perceived. Furthermore, Weistra and Luke (2017) advocate the value of social support for adoptive families to help them manage such circumstances, however Sturgess and Selwyn (2007) warn that adoptive parents are often unaware of the support services that they can access or may choose not to access support due to fear of judgement. Selwyn et al (2014) highlight the need to be aware that support from family and friends should not be assumed, as this is not always forthcoming, meaning adoptive parents can often feel isolated.

There is arguably a broader literature base to draw upon in relation to parent and family factors and I present here literature pertaining more to pressures beyond schooling that adoptive parents experience. Smith and Howard (1999) identify that adopting a child is often a very stressful experience for parents; for example, Rushton and Dance (2002) report that parents identified rejection of affection, non-compliance and aggression as the most challenging experiences.

Ingersoll (1997) highlights that adoptive parents present with higher levels of parental anxiety than biological parents and, perhaps due to their increased experience with social services, are more likely to refer/seek support from professional services than others (Miller, Fan, Grotevant, Christensen & Dulmen, 2000). Bird, Peterson and Miller (2002) identify the complex nature of stressors that adoptive parents experience e.g. feeling responsible for solving their child's problems; challenges with bonding; uncertainty over needs; questions surrounding discussing adoption with their child. These stressors contribute to experiences of stress and anxiety for adoptive parents (Barth & Miller, 2000). Additionally, Barth, Crea, John, Thoburn and Quinton (2005) note the strong desire adopters often present with to address their children's attachment difficulties. Whilst this research is sited more within the fields of social work and mental health, the findings can be extrapolated to an education context to highlight the likelihood of increased stress and anxiety which adoptive parents may bring to their interactions with school staff.

2.7.7: Commentary on this research.

The issues explored above provide invaluable insight into the experiences adoptive parents have with schools and likely factors affecting partnership. These factors have been incorporated into the previous framework, to represent a comprehensive range of factors that are proposed to effect parent-school partnership for adoptive families (see Figure 4).

However, whilst such insights are clearly valuable, there are several reservations which need to be considered. Firstly, it should be considered that, in several of the studies discussed, there is recognition that many parents were satisfied with their child's school and their experiences (King, 2009; Cooper and Johnson, 2007); the apparent focus of the research of establishing the challenges adoptive families face may therefore have missed the opportunity to capture the beneficial strategies already in place. This point also highlights the need (already mentioned) to recognise that adopted CYP and their families are not homogenous groups. Similarly, there is recognition that parents who volunteered for interviews and responded to questionnaires were likely to have had challenges with their child's education and hence the issues highlighted above cannot be seen to be representative of all families. However, for the purposes of my research it is particularly relevant to consider the significant

barriers experienced by families in order to appreciate their reality. A further issue concerns the focus on eliciting parent and family views. A parental perspective of working with schools and the emergent issues is provided by this literature, however examination of teachers' experiences of working with adoptive families is not evident and as partnership is, by its very nature, collaborative, arguably, there is currently only a partial understanding to offer. Finally, educational contexts are regularly changing and only one study (Lyons, 2016) took place after the extension of pupil premium funding to adopted CYP, this has implications in terms of how this increased focus and resourcing from the DfE may have influenced experiences and perceptions.

Parent and family factors	Teacher factors	Parent-teacher factors

• Parental perception of their role
• Parental self-efficacy
• Family circumstances
• Socio-economic status
• Own experiences of schooling
• Level of parent skills in advocating for children (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007)
• Level of educational aspirations for child (PTA, 2016)
• Access to support networks (Weistra & Luke, 2017)
• Parental role as protector (Hindman et al, 2012)
• Increased parental anxiety (Ingersoll, 1997)
• Low threshold for referring to additional services (Miller, Fan, Grotevant, Christensen & Dulmen, 2000)
	• Teacher valuing of partnership (Ramirez, 2000)
	• Teachers' perceptions of parental behaviour (Lasater, 2016; Povey et al, 2016)
	• Teachers' perceptions of parental capacity, capability and interest (Povey et al 2016; Hill & Craft, 2003).
	• Teachers' understanding and skills in relation to diverse family backgrounds (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011)
	• Teachers' understanding of contemporary adoption, early trauma and expectations (Lyons, 2016; King, 2009; Gore-Langton, 2017)
	• Curriculum issues (Lyons, 2016)
	• Understanding and valuing of parent knowledge and skills (Dunstan, 2010)
		• Opposing goals and agendas
		• Parental fear of judgement
		• Attitudes held by teachers
		• Teachers lack of time, training and insight into families other than their own.
		• Power dynamics (Tett, 2010)
		• Experiences of and managing conflict (Christenson, 2004; Lasater, 2016)
		• Different perspectives of child and child's needs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000)
		• Communication (Wanat, 2010)
		  - Manner of communication (Lyons, 2016)
		  - Language used (Lyons, 2016)
		  - Sharing child's story (Cooper & Johnson, 2007)
		• Perceptions of blame and misattribution of child's behaviour (Dunstan, 2010)
		• Dismissal of concerns (Lyons, 2016)

Child factors	Societal factors	Practical factors	School factors
• Age • SEND • Child's behaviour	• Historical context • Political and economic factors • Social myths and stigma regarding adoption (Weistra & Luke, 2017)	• Parental time constraints • School opening hours • Contact staff e.g. office staff. • Parental access to information.	• Parental involvement and engagement processes (Harris & Goodall, 2008) • School climate and friendliness (Povey et al, 2016; Kim, 2009) • Information sharing within school (King, 2009; Gore-Langton, 2017) • Connection to school community and fears of ostracism (Goldberg & Smith, 2014) • Where responsibility for adopted children is held (Lyons, 2016)

Figure 4: Factors influencing parent-school partnership for adoptive parents. Based on Hornby and Lafelle (2011) and Hornby and Blackwell (2018) and partnership and minority parent literature, with additions drawn from literature on adoptive parents' views and experiences of their child's school. Additions from adoption literature are included in purple.

2.8: Developing Partnership Experiences between Schools and Adoptive Parents

Whilst there are many texts devoted to the development of partnership practice in general (Beveridge, 2005), there is a sparsity of literature concerned with improving partnership practice for adoptive families and the specific considerations that should be addressed. Lyons (2016) addresses the challenge of communication in her research with an adoptive parent support group, this can be viewed as addressing an aspect of partnership (although places an onus upon parents). Recognising some of the challenges that have been highlighted in the discussion above, Syne, Green and Dyer (2012) discuss the development of the EPAC (Education Plan for Adopted Children). The EPAC is designed to be used when the PEP (Personal Education Plan for LAC) ends or when a child starts school. It is designed around the premise of a multi-agency meeting and offers a template for completion which organises relevant background information, key strengths and needs of the child and actions that are required. Whilst the PEP is a statutory document, the EPAC is not and requires parental agreement (Syne, Green & Dyer, 2012). The EPAC appears to be adopted across a range of local authorities and is focussed on ensuring support for the CYP is identified and delivered; in this way it can be considered a mechanism by which partnership practice can be improved for adoptive families (e.g. by identifying needs and provisions). Further support regarding partnership practice with adoptive parents is evident in the work of Langton and Boy (2017). They provide a guide for schools which aims to help them become `adoption-friendly`, the toolkit offered provides specific resources and guidance to help staff reflect on and develop their practice with adopted children and their parents.

These resources provide positive frameworks for schools to work from; however, Taymans et al (2008) highlights that for most teachers, knowledge that there is an adopted child in their class rarely leads to changes in their practice. Hence. it could be suggested that more collaborative work with school staff is needed to establish improvements. This leads Goldberg & Smith (2014) to argue that input from adoptive parents may be needed to help teachers understand, review and adapt their practice to meet the needs of these children. The same argument could be extended to considering partnership practice and

relationships with adoptive parents. I suggest, based on evidence of benefits of participatory approaches to school improvement (Jenkins, Ronk, Schrag & Stowitschek, 1994), that information from outside the school system directing improvements may be less effective than ideas emerging from those within the school system, where staff become participants in, rather than recipients of, improvement strategies (Shaeffer, 1993). There is an absence of research exploring the views of school staff regarding how practice with adoptive parents could be improved.

2.9: The Present Study

Through the preceding discussion several areas have been highlighted where there is a relative sparsity of literature pertaining to adoptive families. Firstly, whilst there is broad research concerning adoptive parents' experiences of school, this has not been investigated specifically in relation to parent-school partnership, furthermore a coherent understanding of both barriers and facilitators of this partnership relationship is not evident in the literature. Secondly, there is a notable absence of literature pertaining to the experiences of school staff in relation to collaborative working with adoptive families. Finally, whilst there is emergent literature and resource to support schools' development of partnership practices with adoptive families, there is an absence of literature exploring how school staff view partnership can be improved. This research intends to elaborate and inform these identified gaps in the literature.

Chapter 3: Methodology

In this chapter I will explore and justify the aims and research questions that my research seeks to address. I will explain the ontological and epistemological assumptions that have guided my research design and provide an overview of the methods that I used to gather and analyse data. Finally, I will provide an overview of important ethical considerations that were addressed.

3.1: Restating the Aims of the Research

This research seeks to explore and understand the experiences of home-school partnership; perceived barriers and facilitators to partnership; and explore views on how partnerships can be improved. My aims in conducting this piece of research can be presented as follows:

i)   To investigate the experiences of parent-school partnership held by a sample of adoptive parents in relation to Hart's (1997) model of partnership.

ii)   To investigate the factors perceived to influence partnership experience, as constructed by adoptive parents.

iii)   To investigate the factors perceived to influence partnership experience, as constructed by school staff.

iv)   To investigate what SENCos understand to be the key needs of adoptive parents working collaboratively with school.

v)   To investigate how SENCos view that partnership practices can be improved.

3.2: Research Questions

I initially developed broad research questions at the outset of the research (influenced by relevant literature and observations from practice discussed in the introduction). These prima facie questions (Thomas, 2017) guided the initial design of the research and are listed below:

- What are the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents and school staff?
- What level on Hart's Ladder (1997) of partnership do adoptive parents feel accounts for their experiences?
- How do these experiences differ?

- What do adoptive parents view to be the factors that affect home-school partnership?
- What do school staff view to be the factors that affect home-school partnership with adoptive families?
- What do parents perceive to be the effects of the home-school partnership on their children?
- What could schools do differently to improve the experiences of home-school partnership for adoptive parents?

During the course of the research I refined these questions. These refinements reflected (i) an acknowledgement of the breadth of some of the initial questions, identifying a need to further refine and focus them; (ii) recognition of emerging issues highlighted through the review of relevant literature; (iii) reflections from initial conversations with colleagues and school staff. Following these refinements, I arrived at the following research questions:

RQ1: How can the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents be related to Hart's model of partnership?

> *Rationale: to consider if and how parents respond to the adapted version of Hart's Ladder (1997) and to explore how parents perceive and describe their experiences in relation to this model.*

RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by adoptive parents?

> *Rationale: To expand on the very limited literature exploring adoptive parents' views on partnership practice. In addition, expanding on the factors that influence their experience, in order to develop an understanding of what parents view as barriers and facilitators of partnership.*

RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by school staff?

> *Rationale: In light of the absence of literature exploring school staffs' views on working with adoptive parents specifically, the aim of this question is to explore the factors that influence their experience and develop an understanding of what staff view as barriers and facilitators of*

partnership. This will also allow for some comparison and consideration of parents' and teachers' views.

RQ4: What do SENCos view to be the key needs of adoptive parents working with schools?

Rationale: To establish (in the absence of existing literature) how SENCos, as staff who sit in more strategic positions within school, view the needs of adoptive parents. Allowing for exploration of what they currently consider to be the key areas of support that these parents may need.

RQ5: Which of the partnership factors, reported by adoptive parents, are unanticipated by SENCos and why are they surprising to SENCos?

Rationale: To establish any differences between SENCos' expectations of challenges and those reported by parents in relation to home-school partnerships. To identify potential areas of learning for SENCos and further understand the challenges that parents may encounter when working with staff in school.

RQ6: How do SENCos view that partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved?

Rationale: To identify, based upon the sharing of phase one findings, how SENCos view that partnership practices with adoptive parents could be developed. This will add to the emerging literature base, which is currently focussed around professionals offering guidance to schools on becoming more `adoption friendly`.

3.3: Methodological Assumptions

3.3.1: Methodology adopted within this area of research.

Whilst I note a scarcity of research exploring the experiences and perceptions of adoptive parents or school staff regarding home-school partnership, it is apparent that the relevant literature is based around qualitative self-report approaches. Most regularly this has involved interviews, although surveys have also been used. I will similarly be following a qualitative paradigm in order to

establish the rich and detailed data necessary to address my research questions.

3.3.2: Philosophical assumptions.

Willis, Jost and Nilakanta (2007) provide a guiding understanding of a research paradigm, defining it as "a comprehensive belief system, world view, or framework that guides research and practice in a field" (p. 8). All research is guided by a paradigm which provides the guiding principles about how problems should be understood, investigated and addressed (Kuhn, 1962). Different paradigms constitute different assumptions in relation to ontological, epistemological and methodological stances (Guba. 1990). The following section offers an explanation of the guiding paradigm and assumptions, in relation to ontology and epistemology, which have underpinned my design of this research and my role as a researcher.

3.3.3: Ontological position.

Ontology refers to the nature of social reality, how things really are and how they work (Crotty, 1998; Dillon & Wals, 2006). Of particular interest within the realm of social science is the question of whether reality exists independently of human interpretation (and can be accessed given the appropriate research techniques), or whether reality is actually the product of human interpretation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The former assertion can be said to reflect a realist view and contends that there is one reality (or truth) and this truth is independent of the ways in which we, as people interact with, interpret and understand it. Relativism (the latter), on the other hand contends that there are multiple realities (Guba, 1990) and that these realities are constructed from human interaction with phenomena and hence there is not one universal, pre-social truth that can be ascertained; "the world is largely created by the human mind" (Fletcher, 1996, p. 410). Relativism also proposes that what constitutes reality will change across context and time, since the interactions and interpretations will vary.

I lean heavily toward the relativist end of the dichotomy and in particular, I have adopted the ontological approach of interpretivism. Interpretivism posits that reality can only be understood through social constructions and that there are therefore multiple realities, which are context-bound (Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

This is reflected in my initial conceptualisations of the research aims and questions. I make the assumption that individual parents and staff will construct their own reality of partnership due to their unique experiences, understandings and interpretations of these. In seeking to answer my research questions, I assume that there are individual realities to be understood which are a product of how those staff and parents have themselves interacted within partnership experiences. Assuming that these realities can only be understood through discussion, reflects the belief that reality is created and needs to be interpreted to establish underlying meanings. Furthermore, the expectation of drawing themes from across each individual's reality reflects the point made by Guba and Lincoln (1994). that even though we all construct our own, unique reality, there are common elements shared among individuals which can be ascertained. This is reflected in my anticipation that parental experiences, whilst unique, can be understood in relation to models of partnership which seek, not to offer a replacement reality (a `label` that is the truth of partnership experience), but to organise these multiple realities in line with key heuristics regarding partnership.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) on interpretivism, suggest that the multiple realities that are created by different individuals also depend on other systems for meanings. This assertion also underpins my views as a researcher, influenced by my practice as an educational psychologist, where recognition of the many different systems within which an individual operates, and which operate on an individual (Bronfenbrenner 1979) guides my expectation about truths that individuals will create. One example to illustrate this belief would be my view that influences within the exosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) such as the support/understanding (or lack of) offered to parents by their friends and family, influence their experience of partnership, since it potentially affects their resilience and style of attributions that they may make about experiences with school staff. This is something that was also evident from my pilot interviews with parents. Hence, the complex and unique nature of the systems around and within each parent-school partnership, would strengthen the need to consider truth as individually construed, as opposed to attempting to assume a fixed reality (Neuman, 2000).

Given this discussion, the starting point for my research is an acceptance that there will be multiple and uniquely constructed truths about home-school partnership experiences, which need to be qualitatively explored. From these constructions it will be possible to identify key themes which emerge across each individual's constructions that can then be used as a means for understanding the experiences more collectively.

I note at this point, that there is much debate about the possibility for generalisation when working within an interpretivist framework, indeed Denzin (1983) for example would assert that generalisation is not possible. Such a stance could seem at odds with the aim here of drawing key themes and heuristics from across all participants' accounts. However, Williams (2000) highlights that interpretivist researchers do draw generalisations in their research (almost inevitably) and argues for the consideration of different types of generalisation, for example, Moderatum Generalisations "where aspects of a situation can be seen to be instances of a broader recognisable set of features" (Williams, 2000, p. 215). This assertion would hold that even holding the belief of multiple truths, it is possible that there will be common aspects across these individual constructions and this research seeks to establish just that.

3.3.4: Epistemology.

Epistemology relates to the nature of knowledge and how it can be created and acquired (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), in short, how the multiple truths I discussed above can be accessed and studied.

On discussing epistemology that follows the interpretivist paradigm, Crotty (1998) highlights that meaning cannot simply be discovered, but is created and constructed by individuals' interactions with the world. I acknowledge Crotty's view in this research and I make the assumption that meanings (pertaining to partnership experiences) are constructed by the individual and need to be built and understood through dialogue rather than simply discovered by the researcher. In particular, I adopt the epistemology of social constructivism whereby individuals create meaning through their interactions with each other (Prawat & Flodden, 1994). Hence through discursive methods, it will be possible to understand the individual truths that are held by participants. There is an important distinction to be made, at this point, between social constructivism

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and social constructionism. Whilst both approaches adopt similar positions in relation to the point that reality is socially constructed and hence approaches to study should be discursive (Howell, 2012), they advocate different means of achieving this. Social constructivism, as adopted in this research, believes that knowledge and reality is constructed in the individual, seeing knowledge generation as a cognitive process. Social constructionism on the other hand, focusses upon the interactions within a group of people as they construct meaning (Howell, 2012). Consequently, social constructionists place emphasis on social interchange and the central role of language (Guterman, 2014; Gergen, 2009), which is not the focus of study in my research. Instead the emphasis is upon the meaning that is created by each individual in reflecting upon and discussing their experiences.

As highlighted above, the understandings that individuals offer in this research are not created in a vacuum, but through discourse with myself as the researcher. Guba and Lincoln (1994) highlight the important influence of the researcher and their values upon this process, suggesting the need to consider the relationship between the `would be knower` and what can be known. I have previously discussed my positionality within Chapter 1, acknowledging how my values and beliefs will naturally influence the research process. It is thus accepted that the knowledge gained in each interview will be highly context-bound and bound also within the relationship between myself as the researcher and the individual participant.

3.4: Research Design

Having established the key philosophical and methodological assumptions that guide my research, the following section within this chapter will outline the design of the research in relation to participants and methods of data collection and analysis. A brief outline of this is offered in Table 3.

Table 3:

Summary of research design across the two phases

Phase 1	
Participants	- 5 adoptive parents - 5 school staff
Data collection method	- Semi-structured interviews
Data analysis method	- Thematic analysis.
Phase 2	
Participants	- 5 SENCos.
Data collection method	- Semi-structured interviews (incorporating a card sort).
Data analysis method	- Thematic analysis.

3.4.1: Participants - phase one.

The first phase of this research required participants from two separate target populations: i. adoptive parents and ii. school staff.

3.4.1.1: Adoptive parents as a target population.

Adopted children reflect a small proportion of school populations. In 2017, the percentage of the population (in England) who were looked after (including those who are adopted) was 0.62% (DfE, 2017). Considering that adopted children represent a small proportion of this, it can be assumed (in the absence of official figures) that the percentage of the school population that is adopted is very small. Consequently, it follows that adoptive parents of school-aged children are a small target population. With this in mind, I defined my target population as parents of any school-aged adopted children (in primary or secondary settings). I decided at the design phase, that a minimum of three and a target of five parents would be recruited in order to achieve the rich data needed to address the research questions, whilst being mindful of the potential challenges of recruiting from this relatively small target population.

3.4.1.2: School staff as a target population.

The relative scarcity of adopted CYP in schools also has implications for the second target population of school staff, who have experience of working with

adoptive parents. With this in mind, the target population was defined as school staff who had either current or recent experience working with adoptive families. Based on the acknowledgement that staff in school beyond the teacher may have more contact with, or responsibility towards, adoptive families, `school staff` were invited to participate rather than just specifically `teachers`. This decision was made based upon my initial conversations at the planning and pilot stages. School staff were recruited from across both primary and secondary phases. This was decided based upon feedback from adoptive parents who participated in the pilot interviews; where they highlighted that many families would have experience of both phases (with multiple children). In addition, focussing solely on one phase would lessen the pool of potential participants.

3.4.1.3: Recruiting participants

Adoptive parents. To obtain a group of adoptive parents, I selected a volunteer sampling method where information regarding the research was circulated to prospective participants, who would then contact me to volunteer their participation. Given that this population is relatively small and due to issues of anonymity, several approaches were needed in order to reach potential participants with the research information. The research information sheet (See Appendix 1) was circulated in the following ways:

1. Circulated in a newsletter via a local authority post-adoption service.
2. Circulated to families known to a private adoption support agency.
3. Circulated via EPs within the local authority to families they are/have worked with.
4. Circulated via a school colleague (who is an adoptive parent) to families known to her.

From these methods, a sample of five parents (each from different families) was obtained. I offer below a brief summary of characteristics and nature of the sample; however, detailed information regarding participant characteristics has not been included for the purposes of protecting anonymity. Parents had adopted their children at varying ages, but in all cases the children were adopted before the beginning of their school careers. Several parents had more than one child and their experiences spanned both primary and secondary

school phases. Two parents discussed periods where they had chosen to home educate their children.

I was mindful of the influence of potential gate-keeping (Archibald & Munce, 2015), whereby some agencies judged that there were particular families who would be interested and likely to participate. Whilst I acknowledged that the nature of this research was likely to lead to recruitment of participants with a particular interest in the research (explored in the discussion), to counter this potential sampling bias, I asked agencies to send information to all families meeting the target population, as to ensure all potential participants were reached.

School staff. To obtain a group of school staff, I employed the same volunteer sampling method (described above). Information sheets (See Appendix 2) were circulated via email to schools within the local authority. Interested participants were then able to contact me to volunteer their participation. To obtain the full quota of participants it was necessary to utilise schools outside of the local authority.

A sample of five school staff was obtained from across both primary and secondary schools (five different schools). Five participants were teachers, one of whom was a teacher who had also recently taken on the SENCo role. All staff had more than 5 years of teaching experience. Brief participant details are offered below:

- Participant 1: primary school teacher and Key Stage 1 Leader (single form entry school)
- Participant 2: secondary school teacher and SENCo
- Participant 3: primary school teacher (three form entry school).
- Participant 4: primary school teacher and Key Stage 1 leader (two form entry school).
- Participant 5: primary school teacher (two form entry school).

I was mindful of the influence of my own affiliations and rapport with some school staff and how this influenced recruitment (Archibald & Munce, 2015), as such I also approached schools with which I had and had not worked. Arguably however, it was prior familiarity and rapport that enabled the recruitment of the target number of participants.

3.4.2: Participants - phase two.

For the second phase of the research, SENCos were identified as a target population. SENCos were selected because they are often involved with supporting adopted children (and their parents and teaching staff) due to the high proportion of SEN that is associated with adopted CYP (Gore-Langton, 2017). Indeed, in the phase one interviews, both parents and staff readily referred to SENCos when discussing partnership experiences (e.g. as a point of communication, co-ordination of support etc); hence the experiences of these participants identified SENCos as holding an important mediating role.

The Children and Social Work Act (2017) describes the new statutory requirement for schools to extend the role of the Designated Teacher for LAC to also include responsibility for previously LAC. Whilst this would suggest that such individuals may be better placed for this research, the legislation is very recent. As such, to interview only these members of staff would potentially limit my findings, as such staff may not yet have experience of supporting adoptive families to draw upon. In addition, I found, at the planning phase, that it was common for the SENCo to also hold the DT role in many schools.

3.4.2.1: Recruiting SENCos.

I recruited SENCos working in schools within the local authority using the same volunteer sampling method as previously outlined. A research information sheet (see Appendix 3) was circulated to schools within the local authority, interested SENCos were then able to contact me to volunteer their participation. This led to the recruitment of five SENCos across both primary, secondary and special schools. Some SENCos also held multiple roles as outlined below:

- Participant 1: primary school SENCo.
- Participant 2: secondary school assistant head, SENCo and designated LAC teacher.
- Participant 3: special school deputy head and SENCo.
- Participant 4: primary school SENCo and designated LAC teacher.
- Participant 5: primary school SENCo and designated LAC teacher.

3.5: Phase One Methods

3.5.1: The use of semi-structured interviews.

In line with my research questions and epistemological orientation, I decided to use interviews as the best suited method for research exploring experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In particular, I decided to utilise semi-structured interviews to gather rich detail in order to address Research Questions One, Two and Three. Semi-structured interviews were selected due to the flexibility that they afford. Galletta (2013) highlights the potential of semi-structured interviews to address the specific dimensions of a research question (e.g. features of partnership), whilst still "leaving space for participants to offer new meanings to the topic of study" (p. 2). Such an approach was beneficial in my research, as I deemed it important to probe all areas and facets of partnership with suitably open questions, but still allow the flexibility to follow interesting lines of enquiry and seek contextual examples.

3.5.2: Semi-structured interview construction.

I used the approach of hierarchical focussing (Tomlinson, 1989) to guide the design of the interview schedules for Phase One. Hierarchical focussing was selected as an appropriate approach to interviewing given the core aims and assumptions of the research. The design, construction and administration of this interview technique provides the opportunity to elicit freely, the respondents' suggestions and terms of reference (Tomlinson, 1989) in order to appreciate their constructions of partnership, as opposed to imposing my own. Further, the suggestion of utilising open, Rogerian-like prompts to further elaborate and elicit responses, continues the effort to avoid imposing suggestions upon interviewees; more specific prompts are only utilised as necessary.

Whilst an open approach (akin to unstructured interviewing) appears compatible with my aim of understanding and interpreting respondents' experiences, there is also a need to elicit such experiences across an agenda of areas of partnership (as identified by the literature review). The hierarchical focussing technique allows for this flexibility and the introduction of the researcher's terms as needed. As such, I view that this approach to interviewing provides, as far as is possible, initial non-directed exploration of respondents' experiences, as well as the ability to explore further, areas that are not spontaneously discussed, but are acknowledged as being of relevance in the literature. This interview design and technique also enables me to gain insight into both conceptual and

contextual aspects of respondents' views, with the use of prompts at both conceptual and contextual levels (e.g. asking for specific examples).

I developed the interview schedules in line with the stages outlined by Tomlinson (1989): (1) initial analysis of topic domain; (2) determining interview focus; (3) constructing interview agenda; (4) interview procedure, as summarised below:

Initial analysis of topic domain: This stage involved drawing upon the relevant literature and my own construal of the topic of partnership in order to develop a concept map (as guided by the research questions). This map makes clear the hierarchical links between super-ordinate and sub-ordinate components (the concept map developed is provided in Appendix 4).

Determining interview focus: Tomlinson (1989) highlights that having drawn out a conceptual map of the topic area, the second phase involves identifying which areas are of particular relevance to the given research questions (as well as the practical constraints, meaning that investigating every aspect of the map may not be possible). Based upon the research questions and given the methodological stance adopted, I identified several aspects of the map to be left out of the interview agenda (with de-selected items shown in italics in the concept map in Appendix 4). There were no items removed from the first theme, `experiences of partnership`, the sub-ordinate themes which reflect the components of partnership were deemed as necessary prompts to ensure coverage of the research question (establishing experiences of partnership) especially given the ambiguity of the term partnership. Furthermore, the initial question still allows for exploration of the term as perceived by respondents prior to using such prompts. Within the theme of `facilitators and barriers` two themes at the 3rd level were removed (child factors and practical factors). I made this decision because `child factors ` were, based on the literature, deemed more relevant to determining parental involvement rather than partnership. Practical factors were removed as, given the literature review, they were not identified as being more relevant to partnership than for non-adoptive parents. Finally, the decision was taken to remove all of the themes at the 4th level within this theme of `facilitator and barriers`. This decision was taken in line with the aim of this phase of the research (to establish respondents'

perceptions of facilitators and barriers to partnership), I believed that inclusion of the prompts at the 4th level would risk leading the respondents to simply confirm facilitators and barriers highlighted in the literature and would be at odds with my interpritivist paradigm. Prompts at the 3rd level were retained due to their breadth of interpretation and potential to prompt further spontaneous discussion from respondents.

Constructing the interview agenda: This stage involves moving from the concepts and constructs identified through the first two stages to questions and prompts that can be posed to respondents. At this point a further question was generated to conclude the questions around facilitators and barriers to partnership practice; a question asking respondents how they felt partnership practice could be improved was included. This was included as providing another opportunity to establish key facilitators of partnership practice, tapping the concept through a different route.

In order to trial the interview schedule, I decided to conduct pilot interviews with both parent and staff participants and adapt the schedule in line with these (further details of the pilot interviews are discussed below). The final interview schedules are included in Appendices 6 and 7 for reference

3.5.3: Pilots interviews.

I carried out pilot interviews to investigate how the designed schedules transferred to real data collection. I also wanted to carry out pilot interviews to gain the opportunity to practise my interviewing skills with both audiences (Robson, 2002). I was able to seek feedback from participants regarding style and language used for example. Pilot participants were those known to and accessible to me, they were individuals whom I felt would offer valuable feedback, but who, for various reasons could not take part in the research. For example, one pilot participant was an adopter who was also a teacher and hence would not fit within only one target population.

Following the pilot interviews with parents and school staff, I reflected upon feedback and the data that the questions had generated (comparing this with my research questions). I made several changes to the interview schedules as a result. I offer in Appendix 5, a summary of my findings from these pilot

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interviews and also in Appendices 6 and 7, the finalised interview schedules for parents and staff that were used.

3.6: Phase Two Methods

3.6.1: The use of semi-structured interviews and interview design.

As in Phase One (and for the same reasons), I chose to use the semi-structured interview technique, as discussed above, in Phase Two. However, whilst it was necessary in Phase One to guide participants' responses to elicit views on the varying facets of partnership, I considered such a level of direction could be counter-productive in Phase Two. Given that, in this phase, I aimed to explore what SENCos understood as the needs of adoptive parents (and what they did not), as well as considering how SENCOs believed that partnership could be improved, it was important not to lead these constructions with prompts. For example, whilst my conception of how partnership could be improved might span different levels of intervention e.g. school policy level, it was important not to impose my own structure and views on participants, allowing SENCos to generate their own suggestions. With this in mind, an interview schedule was created which consisted of open initial questions with minimal probes/follow-up questions planned (Thomas, 2013). The interview design (pre-pilot) for use with SENCos is provided in Appendix 8.

3.6.2: Piloting the interview.

The interview schedule was piloted and adapted in response. A change was made to develop a card sort approach within the interview to explore Research Question 5 (which of the partnership factors, reported by adoptive parents, are unanticipated by SENCos and why are they surprising to SENCos?) This replaced the printed A4 document that had been used to present the findings to SENCos. My reflections following the pilot interview and implied changes are presented in Appendix 9 and the refined interview schedule is provided in Appendix 10. SENCos would now be presented with factors, one at a time, on individual cards, and asked to sort into piles of `very surprising`, `somewhat surprising` and `not surprising` (more detail is provided in Chapter 5).

3.6.3: The use of card sorts.

Card sorts have been well established as a useful method within qualitative research (Ryan & Bernard, 2000). Neufield, Harrison, Rempel, Larocque, Dublin, Stewart and Hughes (2004) highlight the range of uses of card-sort approaches within research, for example, to understand experience; explore concepts; develop hierarchical models of concepts and decision-making processes; and design interventions. Indeed, card-sorting approaches are noted to offer deeper participant reflection and help to make abstract concepts more tangible (Conrad & Tucker, 2019).

Having established the valuable use of card sort approaches, it is also evident that the technique is used in a variety of different ways within research. Given the nature of this research question (to establish factors which are surprising, or not, to SENCos) I decided to adopt a card sort approach similar to that used by Neufield et al. (2004). They report on the use of a card sort activity exploring beliefs about family caregiving, in which participants classified cards as "my experience" or "not my experience". I decided upon a similar approach for my research, as this offered the best way to address the research question, also allowing opportunity for participants to "think aloud" (Borgatti, 1999) in order to explain their rationale behind their decisions. This allowed me to explore the reasons for their surprise in response to the factors as they were considered. Given the aims of this card sort activity in addressing my specific research questions, it was appropriate to use a surface level card sort, described by Mammen, Norton, Rhee and Butz (2016) as a simple pile sort, as opposed to exploring the more complex designs which explore deeper conceptual understanding, which card sorting can also offer.

Creating meaningful, understandable statements for card sorts is identified by Neufield et al. (2004) as a key challenge with such an approach. I was guided by the remit of presenting my findings from Phase One, and so used the factors that emerged from the thematic analysis in Phase One as statements for my card sort. Through piloting these statements, it became apparent that in some cases, further elaboration was required of statements to allow the participant to fully appreciate the meaning of each factor. As a result, further elaboration (in the form of examples from parents) was added. The card sort used is presented in Appendix 11.

3.6.4: Considerations in conducting the interviews in Phases One and Two - building rapport:

Sawyer, Regev, Proctor, Nelson, Messias, Barnes and Meleis (1995) discuss the concept of `interviewing across difference`. This is the suggestion that participants are more likely to share information with someone who is, in some way, similar to them. This felt particularly relevant to my research given the explicit focus upon adoptive families. I made a conscious decision to share with parents (as part of the pre-interview conversation) my interest in adoption and how I viewed myself as a prospective adoptive parent. I found that this opened up dialogue prior to the beginning of the interview and helped create a level of rapport. Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen and Liamputtong (2007) highlight that, particularly with sensitive topics, rapport-building is essential in order to "build a relationship which will allow the researcher to access that person's story" (p. 331). I also felt that a level of self-disclosure was beneficial for the development of a non-hierarchical relationship between myself as the researcher and the interviewee. Indeed it led, in some cases, to the reciprocal story-sharing to which Liamputtong and Ezzy, (2005) refer. There were interesting implications of this developing rapport; some participants shared a great deal of information, seemingly welcoming the opportunity to share their story (it was my impression that they otherwise did not have the opportunity to do this). This experience is echoed by Patai (1991) who notes that some people may participate and share their stories when they have few other listeners. It was therefore important for me to be mindful of the need to protect participants by being clear about the boundaries of the research and offer a clear debrief (discussed later in the ethics section).

3.7: Data Analysis

3.7.1: Approach to analysis.

Robson (2002) highlights that there is "no clear and accepted set of conventions for analysis" (p. 457) in qualitative data, arguably as this would act against the flexibility and contextual relevance that qualitative analysis is predicated upon. Braun and Clarke (2013) further point to the variety of different approaches and methods for analysing qualitative data and the need to consider carefully the

approach to be used. In selecting the most appropriate method of analysis, I was guided by Richards' (2014) assertion that whilst it is not always possible to know what the outcome of qualitative research will be, it is pertinent to consider the questions of "what is being sought; what is achievable and what would be satisfactory?" (p. 125). Such questions led me to consider that it is the meaning which participants construct of their partnership experiences, that is of greatest importance in my research.

3.7.2: Rejection of alternative approaches and methods of analysis.

Firstly, I acknowledge the wealth and variety of different methods of qualitative analysis and sub-variations within broader `families` of analysis. In my consideration of available methods and in the discussion that follows, I was guided by Braun and Clarke (2013) and Lyons and Coyle (2016), who identify several different methods, as those which are widely used within psychological research. (i) Discourse Analysis and Conversation Analysis were considered and rejected on the basis that such approaches are heavily focussed upon the structure of the data e.g. the language use and the construction of language between individuals (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Hence this approach is more in-line with a constructionist epistemology (Burr, 2003) as opposed to the constructivist epistemology guiding my research. Braun and Clarke also highlight that such approaches tend not to translate data for "giving back to participants" (p. 192), again this would mean that such an approach is incompatible for this research design as this was at odds with the intention of phase two. (ii) I did not deem Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to be appropriate for this research due to its epistemological ties with phenomenology (Smith & Osborn, 2007). Whilst the focus upon understanding individual experiences in depth is attractive, my aim in this research is not so much to describe the individual experience of partnership as a phenomenon (Mertens, 1998), but more to understand key factors of partnership which influence the overall experiences. (iii) Grounded Theory presents another option and is a consideration for my research, since it is well suited to exploring questions about influencing factors in social situations (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, the same authors also highlight the limitation of the in-depth nature of this process of analysis, requiring significant time and resource which was not deemed feasible within a small-scale project such as this. Indeed, Mertens

draws attention to a key principle of grounded theory which would be problematic for this research: the use of theoretical sampling to continually gather data based on emerging hypotheses as a means of formulating and reformulating theory. Such a commitment was beyond the scope of my research.

3.7.3: The selection of thematic analysis.

As highlighted in the discussion above, when considering an appropriate approach to data analysis, it was important to be clear about desired and realistic outcomes, my broad desired outcomes are listed below:

- to offer an understanding of how adoptive parents' experiences are related to Hart's Ladder (1997) model;
- to offer understanding of factors that influence and affect partnership experiences;
- to offer a range of ways in which partnership practices can be improved (according to SENCos) and the common features of these suggestions.

With this in mind, it was important that I select a method of analysis which allowed for analysis across different types of research question. Braun and Clarke (2006) highlight the important flexibility of thematic analysis as a reason for its popularity in qualitative research, with the ability to use the approach to answer a very wide range of research questions. In addition, they highlight how this method is accessible to novice researchers and produces analyses which are usually accessible to others (this was important since findings were to be shared with SENCos).

As an interpretivist, I accept that my own values, expectations and beliefs will influence the research and the analysis. Consequently, it is possible that different conclusions would be drawn from the data obtained by different researchers. Operating within this framework, it has not been the aim to attempt to impose total neutrality in analysing the data.

3.7.4: Approaches to quality assurance.

Braun and Clarke (2013) highlight the importance of quality assurance of thematic data analysis. In Table 4 I briefly outline quality assurance processes that I incorporated within my research. Again, the importance of reflexivity was

highlighted here, as to find complete agreement between myself and others would be unexpected given my position within the research and how this (as acknowledged) reflects my interpretation.

Table 4:

Quality assurance measures at key stages of the analysis process.

Level of analysis	Quality assurance process undertaken
Coding transcripts	In order to quality assure my coding of data, I provided the research questions and a sample of a transcript to another colleague experienced in research. This allowed for comparison of the codes generated and a consideration of the degree of similarity.
Identifying and defining themes	I sought feedback on the thematic maps from EPs (who work with adoptive families within their role). They offered feedback in terms of the credibility of the analysis (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) in relation to whether the themes created reflected coded data and also reflected their experiences of parents and staff views.
Triangulation (Denzin, 1970)	I argue that through comparison of my findings with existing literature base, there is a level of triangulation embedded within the research. However, as with Smith (1996), I view this in terms of building up a bigger picture, more than `checking accuracy`.
Member checking (Braun & Clarke, 2013)	I utilised the approach of member checking with staff participants. This involved presenting participants with the thematic maps generated from the data (and offered in the following chapters) and asking for feedback regarding whether and how the themes generated were reflective of their experiences.

3.8: Ethical Considerations

This research was designed and conducted in accordance with the University of Exeter Ethics Committee; British Psychological Society Code of Ethics (2018) and the Health Care Professions Council Standards of Conduct Performance and Ethics (2016). At the outset of the research, I sought ethical approval from the University of Exeter Ethics Committee and a certificate of approval is included in Appendix 12. Below, I provide a discussion of salient considerations and approaches taken to ensure ethical conduct in my research, as well as a discussion of ethical dilemmas that emerged.

3.8.1: Consent and briefing.

Participants were provided with a thorough brief in advance of the interview, this was then discussed again on meeting participants. The brief provided details of what would be involved (in terms of the question areas explored); their rights as a participant (right to withdraw data, stop the interview, as well as confidentiality and anonymity). Data collection and storage was explained to participants regarding audio-recordings and the secure storage of these (in line with university guidelines). Finally, the intentions regarding data analysis was discussed with participants to ensure they were aware of how their data would be used (an example of a brief, for parents in phase one, is included in Appendix 13). Through an open and honest approach and allowing time to discuss all aspects of the briefing sheet, I ensured that participants had a good understanding of the research and were able to ask questions about it before beginning interviews. This was important to me as a researcher and reflected the core tenets of the BPS ethical guidelines, in particular integrity and respect (BPS, 2018).

3.8.2: Privacy.

Allmark, Boote, Chambers, Clarke. Mcdonell, Thmpson and Tod (2009) highlight that whilst privacy is generally considered within broader concepts such as confidentiality, their review of ethical issues in in-depth interviews revealed privacy as a consideration isolated and discussed in many pieces of research. Indeed, privacy was something that I was increasingly mindful of whilst conducting interviews. Whilst assurances of confidentiality and anonymity are naturally explained, it was also important to be reflexive and responsive to points where participants' privacy may be compromised (i.e. that the interview

question may have intruded into an unanticipated area, or one that the participant may have preferred not to discuss). It was particularly important to be cognisant of this issue in conducting the interviews since, as Allmark et al. acknowledge, there is a tendency in interviews to probe areas of particular interest, these may well be particularly sensitive areas (Clarke, 2006). For example, in this study an instance of conflict between parent and school. Allmark et al. highlight the implication of this upon informed consent if there are aspects of an interview that are unanticipated, especially given the assertion that participants may feel obligated to answer questions as they have entered into a form of social contract (like that described by Hollander & Turowetz, 2017).

In this research, I took various steps to address these issues. Firstly, when individuals expressed their interest in participating in the research, they were sent the list of questions which would be addressed in the interview in an attempt to avoid the issue of unanticipated questions. Secondly, Byrne (2001) highlights the approach of reaffirming consent throughout the process and so during the interviews, participants were reminded of rights and questions were presented to first seek permission to explore a point of interest raised that might be sensitive (guided by researcher attunement and judgement, Allmark et al, 2009).

3.8.3: The challenge of being a practitioner-researcher.

McGinn and Bosaki (2004) draw attention to the challenge inherent in practitioner research, particularly given the impossibility of attempting to entirely `de-role` during research. As a researcher, I made an initial assumption that it would be possible to separate my professional role and my researcher role, an assumption that Fraser (1997) identifies as commonplace in practitioner-research. However, this proved challenging and dilemmas arose when information was disclosed by participants which related to schools, young people and colleagues, of whom I had prior knowledge (or even direct involvement with) from my professional role. Whilst none of the information required action to be taken (e.g. due to safeguarding concerns), this still felt in some way deceitful, where participants were talking anonymously about an individual whom I could identify. This was something that, as a researcher, I

reflected upon continually. It was important to protect the trust, privacy and anonymity of the participants (Pring, 1984) and as a practitioner to protect the confidentiality of my clients (HCPC, 2016). I found that I identified to some extent with Punch (1986) who said that "fieldwork often has to be intentionally deceitful in order to survive and succeed" (p. 71), Whilst I did not identify with the `intentional` aspect, there was some truth in the concept of needing to allow and tolerate the tension I felt.

Chapter 4: Phase One

This chapter details the process and findings from phase one of the research. I begin by summarising the procedure by which data was gathered and analysed. Then the findings are explained and discussed in line with existing literature in relation to each research question.

4.1: Restating the Research Questions

- RQ1: How can the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents be related to Hart's model of partnership?
- RQ2: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by adoptive parents?
- RQ3: What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by school staff?

4.2: Method - Procedure

Following the construction and piloting of the interview schedules and participant recruitment (as detailed in Chapter 3), interviews were arranged with participants at times and locations of their choosing. Before beginning the interview, I reviewed the briefing sheet and consent forms (that had been sent to participants in advance) and revisited their rights as a participant, before gaining their signed consent. Interviews were conducted in accordance with guidance from Tomlinson (1989) regarding hierarchical focussing approaches, with the use of open prompts and Rogerian-style approaches to elicit further information from participants. The interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and a debrief (see Appendix14) was discussed with the participant at the end of the interview.

4.3: Data Analysis - Thematic Analysis

I selected thematic analysis as a method for analysing the data gathered from parent and staff interviews (the rationale behind which was discussed in Chapter 3). Braun and Clarke (2006) outline a six-stage process to complete a robust thematic analysis and I adhered to these stages as is summarised below in Table 5. I approached my analysis, research question by research question, hence I completed three separate analyses for phase one. This was because it was important to keep the parent and teacher interviews and analyses

separate, based on the nature of my research questions, it also allowed for more clarity in addressing the different research questions. For Research Questions Two and Three, having coded the transcripts, barriers and facilitators were then analysed separately. This was achieved by creating separate codebooks for barriers and facilitators and searching for themes for barriers and then themes for facilitators separately. This decision was taken based on my reflections from the data familiarisation stage. I realised that some of the codes could get lost within bigger themes if I were to take the view that barriers and facilitators are simply opposites of each other. Whilst conducting separate analyses was more time-consuming, I considered this would ensure that any distinctive findings were highlighted. All themes developed for facilitators and barriers were then considered collectively in order to develop the overarching themes for the research questions.

A complete coding approach (Braun & Clarke, 2013) was used, whereby anything that may have some relevance to the research question was coded. This was consistent with the bottom-up intention behind the analysis, allowing ideas in relation to that specific research question to emerge.

Table 5:

Stages of thematic analysis applied to phase one data.

Stage	Description within my analysis
Familiarisation with the data	Familiarisation took place as I transcribed the interviews and re-read them. Whilst transcribing, I noted initial thoughts regarding the data.
Generating initial codes within the data	I uploaded the transcribes to Nvivo and created initial nodes from the interviews. A sample of coded transcript from a parent interview along with a full list of initial nodes for Research Question two is provided in Appendices 15 and 16, for illustration.
Searching for themes	Having coded the transcripts, the codes and coded data were reviewed to search for patterns and develop initial candidate themes. To do this, I created a word document with a table and used colour coding to group and organise similar nodes and made initial notes

	regarding possible central organising concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Having grouped codes together, I was able to identify potential candidate themes, using a table in a word document. An example of this table for one candidate theme is provided for illustration in Appendix 17.
	Given the broad nature of research questions two and three, and the broad range of responses, I decided that it would be important to create overarching themes to structure the analysis around the most salient ideas. To do this, the range of candidate themes were identified and then these were organised and grouped according to the salient organising concept (which became the candidate over-arching theme).
Reviewing themes	In line with Braun and Clarke's (2013) suggestion. I found it important to allow time between searching for themes and reviewing them. At this stage I revisited my initial candidate themes and asked whether they (i) addressed my research questions and (ii) told the most accurate and fair story with regard to the accounts that were shared with me. At this point some revisions were made.
Defining and naming themes	This stage involved reviewing the name of the themes and considering the `boundary` of each theme. To do this, I found it helpful to handwrite a brief paragraph describing each theme.
Producing the report	At this stage I reported on and described my themes with reference to the existing literature; developing and finalising thematic maps.

4.4: Findings and Discussion

I present thematic maps for each research question to organise and present my analysis of the data in terms of both super-ordinate and sub-ordinate themes. The findings and subsequent discussion of these will be presented research

question by research question. Findings and discussion with reference to existing literature have been integrated within the chapter in order to allow clarity of reference of the themes to current research throughout.

4.5: Research Question One Findings and Discussion

RQ1. How can the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents be related to Hart's model of partnership?

All parents interviewed were able to relate their experiences of partnership to the ladder model adapted from Hart (1997) in that they described their experiences with reference to the different levels or `rungs` (as shown in Figure 5). Most participants identified that their experiences varied/changed and spanned different levels of the model. It appeared that their experience of partnership was dynamic and variable and that they may experience different levels or `rungs` at different points. For example, for one parent the partnership began well and she felt like a `participant`, but it deteriorated in that same school over time and resulted in her feeling that her experience was best captured by the `informed` level. Having moved schools, she now feels that her experience is reflected by the `participant` level again. Whilst most parents described similar changes over the course of time in relation to the model, one parent related to the model in a way in which she was able to use the levels of the model to categorise or label her partnership experience (e.g. primary was best reflected by "participant" and secondary by "considered").

Description of each rung (adapted from Birney & Sutcliffe (2013)

Rung	Description
Partner	Parents are strategically involved and share power.
Participant	Parents participate as active contributors to decision-making and have influence over the outcomes
Consulted	Parents are involved and are able to respond to questions and decisions made
Represented	Parents views are gathered in some way and shared in decision making although active participation in decision making is not involved.
Considered	Professionals consider the perspective of parents and make judgements about what parents may want/think. No direct engagement.
Informed	Professionals take decisions independently of parents without consideration of their views.
Absent	

primary

secondary

Figure 5: A visual representation depicting how parents related their experiences to Hart's Ladder (1997) model. The arrows depict each participants response as explained in the summary box to the right.

Summary of how each parent related their experiences to the model:
Parent 1: Described having experienced partner, participant and consulted.
Parent 2: Primary: participant, Secondary: considered.
Parent 3: Felt that they had experienced the whole range from informed to participant, gradually moving up the ladder as their child got older and they gained more experience with schools. Currently, they identified their experience as participant.
Parent 4: Described having experienced all levels at different points, although more recently `partner`.
Parent 5: Described variation between schools. They described that their experience varied from informed to partner.

Accounts and explanations that parents offered in relating their experiences to the model were analysed in relation to how parents made sense of and explained the nature of partnership. These themes are shown in Figure 6 and then discussed. It should be noted that parents often offered accounts of the features which contributed to experiences of positive partnership working (higher up the ladder) as well as more negative experiences (lower-down the ladder). I decided to incorporate this data within the analysis for Research Question Two (barriers and facilitators of partnership), as they directly address this question.

```
                    ┌─────────────────┐
                    │  Experiences of │
                    │   partnership   │
                    └─────────────────┘
                    ┌────────┴────────┐
          ┌─────────────────┐  ┌─────────────────┐
          │ Parents driving │  │  Partnership is │
          │   partnership   │  │     dynamic     │
          └─────────────────┘  └─────────────────┘
```
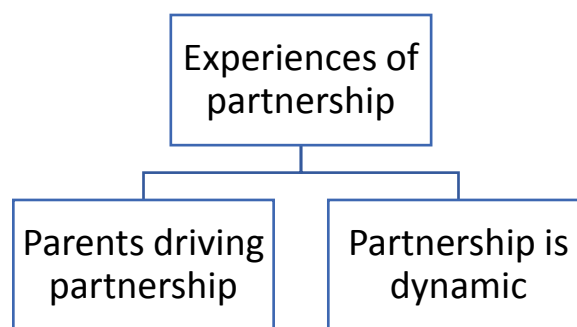
Figure 6: Thematic map showing how parents made sense of their partnership experience in relation to Hart's (1997) model.

4.5.1: Parents driving partnership.

This theme developed from parents' reflections upon how they felt that they had often needed to drive the partnership themselves, perhaps feeling that they needed a different relationship or approach from school than other parents as is summed up by Parent 4:

> We were instrumental in driving being partners, because most parents are happy to be perhaps, `consulted` or `participant`, but for our kids, we have to be partners because staff don't get it.
>
> Parent 4

Parents described a need to be persistent with their requests and communication, often feeling as though they needed to instigate contact and actions. This led some parents to feel as though they were perceived as difficult

or pushy, since they were regularly making contact with school staff and making requests of school staff.

The willingness and ability, or confidence, to drive the partnership was attributed by parents to several factors: (i) Some parents related this to qualities and attributes of their personality (as discussed by Parent 1); (ii) or it was related to their own professional experience, which meant that they were perhaps taken more seriously by school staff or that they had a greater understanding of their rights; (iii) it was also attributed to a learning journey for parents, whereby they had learned from previous experiences with schools what they wanted the partnership experience to be like and how to achieve this (as seen in Parent 3).

> It's my personality, if I didn't have that personality then I'm really not sure where I would stand on the ladder.
>
> Parent 1
>
> We are getting better at it. I don't know… Maybe the change in school. We had come from here (represented) and we weren't going to go back to that!
>
> Parent 3

The finding that parents felt they needed to drive the partnership is, in some way, reflected in the literature by comments where parents acknowledge needing to fight for their children in school (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). This could imply that parents could feel the onus falls on themselves in the home-school relationship. This finding can be understood in terms of the level of need of adopted CYP and subsequently their parents., so that, for example, parents need more regular communication (Langton & Boy, 2017) and their child's needs are not understood or identified quickly by school staff (Cooper & Johnson, 2007). If staff are unaware of, or dismissive of these needs, this would understandably lead to parents feeling as though they need to make more initiatives.

This finding could also be understood within the context of school staff beliefs which guide their approach to and interactions with parents. Lopez-Larrosa et al. (2019) highlight how teachers' beliefs regarding parent-school relationships

influence practice. Of particular relevance here is the belief of self-efficacy, Lopez-Larossa et al. highlight the key importance of teachers' beliefs about what they can do and how they can relate to families. It may be that in the case of adoptive families, teachers experience lower perceived self-efficacy and so are unable to act upon beliefs that they may hold regarding collaborative practice. This could lead to what Green et al. (2007) describe as a parent-focussed construction; imparting more educational responsibility onto parents (in this case leaving them feeling that they need to drive the partnership). Alternatively, when faced with adopted children and families, teachers may believe that they know best how to support the child (what Lopez-Larossa et al. refer to as subordinate and delegation beliefs) and hence parents may feel that they are not included and involved unless they are persistent (again feeling that they are driving the partnership). I offer both possibilities in relation to teacher beliefs, as this was evident in parental discussions. Parents referred to staff viewing themselves as "experts" (which reflects the latter explanation), but other parents referred to staff who appeared unsure about how to support them (reflecting the first explanation).

4.5.2: Partnership is dynamic.

Another theme which became evident from the discussions of parents when reflecting on their experiences and Hart's (1997) model was the dynamic and changeable nature of home-school partnership.

In particular, the concept of a journey was evident in several parents' discussions, whereby the partnership relationship developed and changed over time with (from the parents' perspective) school staff gaining more of an understanding of the child and the family. This was particularly evident in the account of Parent 3 (below), where in her initial interactions with school her ideas and views seemed to be ignored, with the impression that school staff took decisions without consultation with her. However, over time, school staff came to form a different understanding of her child and a different relationship with her; a position which she felt reflected the level of participant. In this way it appeared that the partnership could be a journey of understanding and acceptance for staff and parents.

> I felt that, as parents, we weren't particularly listened to. I felt that we were making excuses and that the deputy of that school thought he could fix my child. As time has gone on, the current school have realised that they could punish him over and over, but he isn't going to come into school, so I personally feel now that I am listened to. It may not be acted upon, but at least I feel listened to and not just dismissed… just making excuses. I was just trying to say that he was struggling. They have thanked us, as they have had to think outside the box, whereas at the beginning, they didn't understand and just said take his Xbox away. None of that works.
>
> Parent 3

Parents highlighted how changes (including some that may seem insignificant to staff) could have broader effects upon the child in school and also upon the partnership relationship. For example, when moving between classes; changes to teaching staff; or when there were more removed changes within the organisation e.g. a change in role of a member of staff. This is highlighted in the extracts from Parent 4:

> In this recent transition when X's school closed, it was recommended that he go to a particular provision and we knew it was too big, too challenging and that he wouldn't manage there. The school were asking us "why's that?" We were like "this is X, we know him, that's why" and they persisted. They were expecting him to have yet another transition and settle in.
>
> We aim for `partner`. We went last year and had a meeting, but none of the notes from that meeting were passed over when the key member of staff left in January, so although we aim for `partner`, we ended up at the `considered` level, because notes weren't handed over. So, the partnership that had been going well, went wrong because we didn't trust them anymore.
>
> Parent 4

The dynamic nature of the partnership, as described by parents, can be understood with reference to the factors highlighted by both parents and staff

within Research Questions Two and Three (barriers and facilitators to partnership). For example, staff understanding of adoption is a key theme that emerges within these research questions and is likely to vary between staff members leading to changes to the experience of partnership over time.

4.5.3: Summary of findings addressing Research Question One.

These findings reflect that parents are able to relate their experiences to the levels within Hart's Ladder (1997) as a model of partnership. In understanding their partnership experience in relation to this model, it is apparent that parents feel they have needed to be the `driving force`, initiating and maintaining the relationship with school staff, whose beliefs regarding partnership collaboration and self-efficacy may vary. This desire and persistence is, to parents, a significant factor in bringing about partnership practice that would be consistent with the higher levels of Hart's Ladder and the partnership model discussed by Swap (1993). Another key finding was the variability of the `level of partnership` (the rung which best described parents' experiences). This highlighted the dynamic nature of partnership experience, which is perhaps best understood through consideration of the factors influencing partnership (explored in research questions two and three).

4.6: Research Question Two: Findings and Discussion

RQ2. What are the barriers and facilitating factors to partnership working as perceived by adoptive parents?

Research Question Two examines parents' experiences and perceptions of factors that influenced their partnership experiences with schools. Figure 7 offers an overview of the themes and sub-themes developed from the interviews with adoptive parents in relation to factors influencing the partnership.

Understanding of adoption
- Staff lack understanding about the impact of early experiences
- Lack of consstency within school
- The power of a diagnosis
- Assumptions held about parental knowledge of supports and services.
- Support and influence of outside agencies
- Experience of (and attitudes towards) families with varied needs

Feeling wanted
- Impression they/ their child is unwanted
- Parents' impression that they are seen as difficult
- Conflict breaking down partnership
- Motivations regarding funding

Feeling respected
- Lack of belief and respect
- Responsiveness of communcation
- Recognition and dismissal of parent skills and knowledge
- Being heard
- Specific collaborative activities (e.g. joint decision making)

Inaction and compromise
- Inaction in response to meetings, suggestions and professionals' advice
- Lack of flexibility
- Willingness to compromise and act
- Parental knowledge and persistence

Figure 7: Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes developed from parent interviews, showing factors that influence partnership experience. Orange sub-themes come from analysis of `barriers`, whilst green sub-themes come from analysis of `facilitators`

4.6.1: Superordinate theme - understanding of adoption.

This theme emerged from discussions across all of the interviews, with parents highlighting a lack of understanding amongst school staff of the impacts of early trauma, the nature of adoption and the complexity of their children's needs. Understanding of such aspects represented a significant factor in the development and functioning of partnership. Parents regularly identified examples where an absence of understanding was evident, when asked about their most negative experiences working with school. This theme developed from and consists of several subthemes which were evident from the interviews, as shown in Figure 7.

4.6.1.1: Subthemes: `staff lack understanding about the impact of early experiences` and `lack of consistency within school`.

It was evident from parents' discussions that a key barrier that they had and continued to encounter was a lack of consistent understanding in school staff of the effects of early trauma, adverse childhood experiences and the contemporary nature of adoption. Parents highlighted frustration at the expectations placed upon their children to conform as they are "adopted now", which seemed to be synonymous with the expectation that their earlier difficulties should be remedied. Parents explored a lack of awareness and a need for training in school staff to support their understanding and interpretation of their children (as shown in the comments below):

> I believe now that this is something that should be fully, *fully* put into training and continuous training. So, I think for me the main difficulty has been teachers' (not all, but a good percentage) lack of understanding of the difficulties and the subsequent effect that it (early trauma) has on the children in a school environment.
>
> Parent 1
>
> It's mostly the lack of understanding that can cause a massive negative. Why would people get it if they've never had an understanding of it?
>
> Parent 2

Most parents identified that there had usually been a teacher who had "got it" and understood the needs of their child and that working with school at this

point was a positive experience. However, this tended to be the exception with parents identifying that there was a lack of consistency and so a good school year could be followed by the worst when a new teacher who lacked this understanding was involved. This could be because the new staff did not continue successful interventions or because information and co-constructed ideas were not shared between staff in school, thus, reflecting both systemic issues within school and individual staff factors.

This lack of understanding meant that often behaviours were misunderstood and misinterpreted. This made working with schools more challenging for parents, since the actions of the school were seen to exacerbate or unfairly "punish" the CYP and contact with parents would be for these negative reasons. Such findings are consistent with the literature, which identifies a lack of consistent understanding of the long-term impacts of early adverse experiences and the nature of adoption (Gore-Langton, 2017; King 2009; Cooper & Johnson, 2007; Lyons, 2016; Comfort 2007). My findings would suggest that not only is this lack of understanding impacting the CYP in school, but also, is clear to parents and impacts negatively on the partnership, with parents being unable to trust that staff can support their child. Further, these findings are also reflective of Adoption UK (2014) survey in which two thirds of parents reported that their child's school staff did not understand the continuing impact of their early experiences. Parents from Lyons (2016) research referred to whether or not staff "get it", a sentiment echoed by participants in this research which referred to staff's ability to understand the small behaviours/needs differently, from an adoption-informed or trauma-informed lens. This certainly offers further elaboration upon the sub-theme of consistency, with regard to the varying degrees to which staff are able and skilled in applying such a lens to adopted CYP. Parent 5 highlighted many such instances and, that due to the lack of understanding, there was a lack of flexibility and an expectation to conform which led to conflict between himself and staff.

> But if he is badly behaved as a result (of school not thinking through decisions and changes), which he will be, because his anxiety has gone up, then there is no account taken to how this is due to the supply teachers, it just a detention.

4.6.1.2: Sub-theme: the power of a diagnosis.

Understanding of adoption was also highlighted in parents' view that the absence of a diagnosis contributed to this lack of understanding. It was apparent that parents felt that if their child had a diagnosis then their needs would be understood and taken seriously. The absence of a diagnosis was identified as a barrier to working in partnership (since parents felt needs they raised may be more readily dismissed), due to the way in which parents felt schools would respond differently if there were one (as discussed by Parent 5). This finding was of particular interest since it was not documented within existing literature regarding adoptive parents' experiences with schools. Indeed, Cooper & Johnson's (2008) survey revealed the wide variety of diagnostic labels associated with these children and the challenge for home and school in understanding and meeting these. They did not highlight a challenge in obtaining a diagnosis or a frustration around the impact of not having one. Such a finding offers further insight into and elaboration of the challenge of understanding that is faced by adoptive parents and can influence partnerships.

> If there is no diagnosis, then there is no disability. Getting them (staff) to understand the nature of disability is very challenging. They have already made their judgement and decided how they will deal with it and they haven't got a clue how to deal with it. When they have learning difficulties, I think they can make the adjustments, but when the child's learning is fine their answer is that this child is doing it deliberately. So, you have a barrier where they refuse to recognise disability, because it is not evident and because the child is clever and therefore everything is done deliberately.
>
> Parent 5

4.6.1.3: Sub-theme: assumptions held about parental knowledge of support and services.

Exacerbating the working partnership further was the lack of understanding of the adoption process, which parents reported led to inaccurate assumptions regarding parents' knowledge of services and support (as discussed by Parent

4). Several parents noted that staff in schools had seemed to make assumptions that, as part of the adoption process, they would have been made aware of support services that they, as adopters, could draw upon when issues emerged in school (for example, the Virtual School). In fact, parents reported that they were not made aware of these agencies until later on, in difficult situations. Cooper and Johnson (2007) identified that parents wanted more information regarding services they could access, however, this lack of signposting by schools is not currently evident in the literature and highlights an implication for key staff (e.g. designated teachers) in terms of their sign-posting role.

> We didn't know what was available and so the assumption was that we would know what is available… actually we should have been told.
>
> Parent 4

4.6.1.4: Sub-theme: support and influence of outside agencies.

Where other agencies were involved, parents highlighted their involvement as beneficial because they were able to shift understanding of the staff and, hence, working with schools became a more positive experience (as described by Parent 1). This finding is largely consistent with previous research e.g. Cooper and Johnson's (2007) survey highlighted the majority of parents had found professional involvement valuable in supporting school experiences. The findings from this research allow us to elaborate further; it was felt that school would listen to and trust the opinion of the professional more than their own. For some parents, it appeared that these professionals provided a role of support for them in terms of assuring and promoting their (parent) views.

> There are times when I will get professionals to come into meetings and say something that I want to be said because I know that it will be heard from them differently because they are a professional. It's really bad that that happens, but I know it happens and I use it to my advantage.
>
> Parent 1

4.6.1.5: Sub-theme: experience of (and attitudes towards) families with varied needs.

Finally, within this theme, parents noted that whilst schools may not have had experience of other adopted children (or at least, not very often). It was beneficial to collaborative working when schools had experience of working with families of different make-ups and with potentially similar needs, as they were better able to "accept and empathise" with parents, which led to "more awareness of different needs".

4.6.2: Superordinate theme: feeling wanted

4.6.2.1: Sub-theme: impression they or their child is unwanted.

It was apparent from the majority of parent interviews that they had at some point felt as though they, as a parent, or their child was not wanted by, or was unimportant to the school. For some parents, this sense was the result of very unambiguous communication from staff (an example of which is described by Parent 3). For others, such as Parent 4, comments at the outset of the partnership relationship led them to feel unimportant. Such directive assertions at the outset by staff create obvious and immediate barriers to partnership working. This was an interesting finding as this is not something which has been explicitly referenced or addressed in the literature exploring adoptive parents' school experience. However, it is consistent with and logically relates to other existing understandings. For example, Dunstan (2010) reports similar experiences as Parent 4, where schools have been uninterested in information produced by adoption organisations. It is also consistent with the finding that parents feel they have to fight for recognition of their child's needs (Cooper and Johnson 2007). Indeed, it could be suggested that the lack of understanding (discussed in theme one) can be seen to contribute to and create the sense of being difficult and unwanted (as explored in this theme). It is notable that Weistra and Luke (2017) highlight the impact of societal views on adoptive parents, suggesting that they fear that their children will be seen as different or of less value, offering an alternative perspective on this finding, as something that parents are potentially primed to perceive.

> They said if it wasn't for the fact that they had to, they would not have accepted him because of all of the previous exclusions. The last school

had written to say that his behaviour was violent, but he wasn't really, it was fight or flight. That was a hurdle, he was going to a new school but they automatically had an image of him.

<div align="right">Parent 3</div>

The adoption agency offered to go into the school and deliver some training, and they didn't want it. They made a comment along the lines of "we have 600 children and only a small number are adopted and we don't have the time".

<div align="right">Parent 4</div>

4.6.2.2: Sub-theme: parents' impression that they are seen as difficult.

For some parents it was clear that they had developed a sense that they were difficult, or had been made to feel as though they were by their interactions with staff. Again, this presented as a part of the barrier in the sense that some parents commented on how this made them more defensive and likely to "fight", whilst for others it led to them wanting to "give up" and feeling a sense of helplessness. This is reminiscent of Lasater (2016) and Povey et al. (2016) who highlight how staff can feel threatened by parental behaviour that they perceive as attacking and respond accordingly. Given that parents used the term `fight`, it is possible that this is how staff felt. My findings imply that parents are strongly attuned to the responses of staff and that whilst `fighting` for their child, they may also be internalising messages about how they themselves are viewed by staff, which then influences partnership.

Perhaps I was an annoying, persistent parent. So to them it might have been like "oh, goodness me", but from my point of view that's how I needed to be because else we might not have gotten anything done. "There's that parent again". Almost daily or weekly, there was a phone call I needed to make.

<div align="right">Parent 2</div>

4.6.2.3: Sub-theme: motivations regarding funding.

A common source of difficulty referred to by parents, which is identified as contributing to the barrier/facilitator of feeling wanted, was in relation to the additional funding their children received. Parents identified issues relating to a lack of transparency and openness about how pupil premium or EHCP funding was being used, as well as financial motivations behind decisions. One parent was left feeling that "the school's agenda was finance", identifying that he felt that the school had decided it would be cheaper to pay the penalties associated with their child leaving school, rather than pay for the recommended support. This represents another finding that is not currently discussed in the literature pertaining to adoptive parents and offers insight into what can constitute a key barrier for some parents. Whilst it is not directly referenced in existing research, this finding is not entirely unexpected given the attention to Pupil Premium Plus on adoption support websites (such as PACUK). Here, particular attention is given to the fact that such spending is not ring-fenced, as parents in this research often felt it should be.

4.6.2.4: Sub-theme: conflict breaking down partnership.

These issues highlighted above (feeling unwanted; feeling as though they are difficult and issues to do with funding) contributed in several cases to instances of conflict or difficult interactions between parents and staff. This varied from instances where parents felt that their comments could be "played with and used against them" to situations of "arguments" with staff, through to situations where complaints are taken and made beyond the school to other governing bodies. The incidences of conflict which parents discussed appeared, in part, reminiscent of a power imbalance between school and parents (Tett, 2010) and Hornby's (2000) assertion of a deficit view of parents often held by school staff, due to a lack of experience of and insight into family circumstances different to their own.

4.6.3: Superordinate theme: feeling respected

This theme was constructed from the data based on experiences that parents reported whereby they had been dismissed, ignored and disbelieved, as well as positive instances where respect was evident - being listened to and working collaboratively. This theme was constructed from several sub-themes:

4.6.3.1: Sub-themes: not being believed and being heard.

Several parents discussed feeling as though they were not believed by school staff, discussing instances where their accounts of situations had been challenged or met with disbelief and questioning. Parents often linked this to a difference in the behaviour of their child between home and school contexts, this is particularly evident in an account from Parent 4. Some parents highlighted the negative impact of such instances on the trust and respect within the partnership and the trust that staff could support their child.

> We were really struggling with behaviour, extreme behaviour. So, we were going in and school were saying there is no issue here, so it's not a problem. School did not get that the problems were real and I think the partnership went wrong because they didn't believe us. They just did not believe that this little angel could have violent temper tantrums. They just did not believe us and so I think the partnership didn't exist. The biggest problem we had, because home and school were so different, believing it didn't happen.
>
> Parent 4

Conversely, when discussing factors that had supported the partnership working, parents identified instances which have been classed as being heard. This related to feeling that they were being listened to, their concerns were taken seriously and they were believed. This is exemplified in the following account offered by Parent 2:

> We felt heard, "oh actually, they do understand, they are listening and they do understand that these things are important", so it made the relationship positive, because I could go in and say it's a difficult day or a difficult morning and they would say "it's fine, we can use this space for example". It's all those little things which made the relationship better.
>
> Parent 2

The challenge created by the different presentation between home and school is evident in the literature and highlighted by Langton and Boy (2017), which then leads to different perspectives being held between home and school (Lake and Billingsley, 2000) creating tension in the partnership. This also reinforces

the issue of a lack of understanding as an issue for partnership practice, as lacking understanding of this distinction between contexts that is common to adopted CYP exacerbates this factor.

4.6.3.2: Sub-theme: responsiveness of communication.

Responsiveness of communication was also significant within the context of feeling respected. Specifically, this related to barriers that some parents identified where there was uncertainty over who to communicate with; an absence of communication from staff, (or even a sense of deliberately being "ignored") and a lack of timely communication from school. Responsive communication was also identified as a facilitating factor where parents and staff were able to find an effective means of responsive communication. Some striking extracts are provided for illustration:

> I told the staff how appalled I was and that I didn't know what message they felt this gave my child. I'm not important enough for them to remember. I heard nothing from them, they've not even acknowledged that message.
>
> Parent 1
>
> Staff have clearly been told by leadership not to communicate with us.
>
> Parent 5
>
> We had a home-school diary as to what was going on with Y's speech. So, I think what's always worked well in partnership has been that ability to pass messages backwards and forwards.
>
> Parent 4

Communication is particularly salient in the literature and these findings concur with and elaborate upon existing research. Langton & Boy (2017) highlight the uncertainties parents can face in knowing whom in school to share information with, which can then impact directly upon responsiveness. It is of note that this is planned to be addressed by the introduction of designated teacher for post LAC role. Within existing literature, Dunstan (2010) does highlight how parents can feel dismissed by school staff when communicating with them. Whilst this is consistent with and similar to the assertions here, it is arguably not as strong an

experience as being ignored (one of the key codes contained within this sub-theme). Such experiences were of particular interest, since it fell outside of even the earliest models or parent-school partnership such as expert models (Mittler and Mittler, 1982) and the lowest `rung` of Hart's Ladder (1997), `absent`. A comparison is drawn between the models which refer to parents being uninvolved/simply informed of some information by school; which is contrasted here with a deliberate sense of staff actively avoiding and ignoring parents in some cases.

4.6.3.3: Sub-theme: recognition and dismissal of parent skills and knowledge.

Respect for, understanding of and utilisation of parents' skills and knowledge was another key aspect within this theme. As adoptive parents, participants often referenced the additional training and knowledge that they have in relation to early trauma and supporting associated needs. One parent also referred to being the "expert" on their child. Through this, parents highlighted the specialised knowledge and skillset that they have in relation to supporting their children and barriers to collaborative working were highlighted in relation to staff not respecting, or using their knowledge or skillset.

This finding is consistent with suggestions from the existing literature base, e.g. Selwyn et al. (2015) reports how parents felt that they were not seen as "reliable and credible informants" (p. 244) regarding their children. Further, Dunstan (2010) identified how school staff do not act on the advice and suggestions of adoptive parents. Comfort (2007) underlines the significant contribution adoptive parents can make to the education of their children, by working to shape the understanding of school staff, so the assertion by many parents that this knowledge and skillset is not being utilised was understandably concerning to them. This finding could also be situated more broadly within the broad home-school partnership literature base that highlights how school staff may question parental skill-set and competence (Kim, 2009). In some instances, it appeared that parents had also been left feeling as though staff were taking an expert role which led to the dismissal of their skills, this is particularly evident for Parent 5 below:

> We were quoted by a principal: "we are professionals and you are naïve parents". They refuse to listen because they don't treat you as professionals, even though we have more experience than they have ever had and experience is powerful.
>
> Parent 5

4.6.3.4: Sub-theme: specific collaborative activities.

Conversely, parental involvement in specific decisions and opportunities to work together collaboratively with school on these specific decisions and activities emerged as a facilitating feature. Where this was successful, parent reports reflected that their knowledge of their child had been understood and accepted. Parents reported both positive and negative instances of such collaboration:

> They would have all the information that they needed from me, but after that, decisions would be just carried out without any further consultation, we were not involved in decision making.
>
> Parent 2
>
> They do training, they have done training on attachment and autism and they invite parents in to do that with them.
>
> Parent 3

4.6.4: Superordinate theme: inaction versus compromise.

Another clear factor influencing partnership related to inaction versus compromise. This theme developed from the examples cited by parents where partnership working was challenged because school had failed, in their view, to act on advice to best support the child. However, what was also apparent was that rather than simply `action` on the part of school being a facilitating factor, parents referred to instances where action by school had been based upon hearing parents' and professionals' views and reaching mutual compromise. The theme was constructed from several sub-themes:

4.6.4.1: Sub-theme: inaction in response to meetings, suggestions and professionals' advice.

In discussing barriers working with schools, parents regularly referred to a lack of action from staff, whether this was a failure to carry out agreed actions from a meeting; not acting upon parental requests; or a failure to put into practice advice from other professionals. This also extended to and could be seen to encompass issues related to a lack of flexibility on the part of schools, where parents identified making requests about attendance or curriculum issues which were not accommodated (as was found by Lyons, 2016). Such experiences reflected a frustration in parents, particularly where they felt that small changes could potentially have a large impact on the educational experience. Ramirez (2000) discusses the gap between rhetoric and practice in relation to school staff's approaches to partnership working and this is arguably reflected within this sub-theme, where agreements appear to be reached (but perhaps these are represented and understood differently) but are then not perceived to be actioned, ash shown below:

> We have submitted suggestions and obviously they have been totally ignored… I have said, "he forgets, so write it down", he has a little book for this and it's blank, so they can't even be bothered to make the effort to write it down.
>
> Parent 5

4.6.4.2: Sub-theme: willingness to compromise and act.

Where positive experiences were described it was often an experience of reaching compromise. Parents were able to share concerns and make suggestions which they felt were heard and considered by schools. School staff were then able to offer practical and reasonable solutions, based upon feasibility and compromise (shown by Parent 5, below). Such instances were described positively and reflected that whilst parents were aware that they might ask for lots of additional supports, as one parent noted they "realise that not everything is possible, but some things are". Such compromise was discussed by one parent as creating a sense of "good will" between them and staff, whereby they would be prepared to do more to specifically help the school as a

result. This finding is of particular interest, since in reference to models of partnership such as Hart's Ladder (1997), parents seemed to be discussing positively instances where they were, in Hart's terms, participants as active contributors to decision-making rather than partners who are strategically involved.

> When you make a suggestion, they come back with a reasonable answer about whether it's realistic or not… Where we have given suggestions from us that we have known to work, they have tried them out and experimented with how they could work in their setting. They have come up with a solution.
>
> Parent 5

4.6.4.3: Sub-theme: parental knowledge and persistence.

In discussing instances where there had been action and or compromise from schools, it became apparent that this might sometimes need to be brought about directly by the parents. Some parents identified this as an attribute that they felt had been a facilitating factor; that they were prepared to "fight" for their child (a sentiment evident in research by Phillips, 2007) and be assertive with schools. In this sense it appeared that many parents felt they had to drive the partnership themselves and so attributes such as being assertive; persistent and informed were identified as facilitating factors.

4.7: Research Question Three: Findings and Discussion

RQ3. What are the barriers and facilitating factors to home-school partnership working as perceived by school staff?

Research Question Three examines school staff's experiences and perceptions of factors that influenced partnership experiences with adoptive parents. Figure 8 below offers an overview of the themes and sub-themes developed from the interviews with school staff in relation to factors influencing the partnership.

Being able to support families	Feeling informed	Parental expectations	Demonstrating commitment
Parents' desire for normality as a block to school support	Needing more information	Conflict arising from different understandings	Caring school ethos
Lack of external support systems	Frequent and open communications	Unrealistic expectations	Being prepared to do more
Parents' capacity to support child and emotional needs	Undersanding the child	Collaboration with parents in decision making	Empathising with parents
The challenge of being honest			
Broadening the partnership and sources of support			

Figure 8: Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes developed from school staff interviews, showing factors that influence partnership experience. Orange sub-themes come from analysis of `barriers`, whilst green sub-themes come from analysis of `facilitators`

4.7.1: Superordinate theme: being able to support families.

This theme encompassed the regular comments from school staff that referred to a desire to support the child and family, but often feeling unable to do so or finding a block to accessing, offering or gaining engagement with support. This theme is comprised of several sub-themes.

4.7.1.1: Sub-theme: parents' desire for normality as a block to school support.

Some staff discussed situations in which they experienced resistance from parents when they offered support. This was cited by some participants as a desire on the part of the parents, to feel like a `normal family`, thus resisting support because it is seen in some way as exposing or re-identifying the child/family as different (this is particularly evident in the thoughts of Teacher 1 below). Another reason cited for the resistance to support was that staff felt as though parents misconstrued support offered as criticism, particularly as adoptive parents were regularly referred to as "working harder" due to the needs of their child (as discussed by Teacher 2). Thirdly, an issue raised across most interviews related to difficulties in being able to offer support that staff knew would be beneficial, due to the parents deciding that their child should not yet know their adopted status. This created both an obvious practical barrier to direct support as well as, in some cases, a moral barrier for staff where they felt conflicted about this decision (discussed by Teacher 4). Finally, staff identified that parents may resist hearing honest messages about their child's needs or behaviour and this made it difficult to collaboratively agree on support needed (discussed by Teacher 3).

> Our biggest barrier is the families that want to be considered a normal family, when it's quite obvious to us what we could do to support, but we have to respect their decision.
>
> Teacher 1
>
> It wasn't that we were saying that he (dad) wasn't doing the right thing and that he didn't care, as there is a certain amount of that, "you're saying I'm not doing it right" and it was not that in the slightest.
>
> Teacher 2

When the parents didn't want the child to know, you were having conversations where you were being very careful to protect the parents' right not to tell the child, but at the same time, having an open and honest dialogue, where you were saying well, because of that, this might have been a factor, and you couldn't always be quite as open as very often the child was part of the conversation. I personally felt that the children should know, that's an emotional decision on my part, but I thought they needed to know.

Teacher 4

Sometimes, they don't want to hear that their child has done something, or it might be upsetting for them to think that their child has maybe got upset over something or is struggling in a certain way. Sometimes you feel you are treading on eggshells. "I don't want to say that because…", but actually, you have to treat them like everyone else.

Teacher 3

Such findings are in contrast with Rushton & Upright (2012) who suggest that parents want support in their role supporting their child, implying that the support that school staff may be wary to offer would be welcomed by parents, or perhaps that the way in which this support is conceptualised and discussed is of greater importance. However, these findings are consistent with those of Lasater (2016) and Povey et al. (2016), who highlight the pressure and anxiety school staff may feel in response to parental behaviour. This is especially salient given Hindman et al.'s (2012) suggestion that responses of adoptive parents may be particularly heightened, given the way in which they conceptualise their role as their child's protector. This might imply that whilst parents may seek support, the way in which this is offered by school staff may threaten or appear to question their role and provoke a response that leaves staff feeling wary of continuing. Furthermore, staff may not perceive themselves as having the self-efficacy to broach concerns and consider support needed within the partnership (Lopez-Larrosa et al, 2019) and it is important to consider that this may also underlie some of the reasons given above.

4.7.1.2: Sub-theme: parents' capacity to support their children's emotional needs.

Within this theme, there was also discussion highlighting staff having concerns about the parents' capacity and ability to support the additional needs of their adopted children, discussed by Teacher 4:

> They didn't have the communication skills, or the background where they knew that there were systems and structures in place to support them. I don't think they were actually equipped to support the child.
>
> Teacher 4

This also encompassed staff identifying emotional needs and the high level of anxiety of the parents and that this could impact on their capacity. This was encompassed within the theme of being able to support the family due to the added difficulty of building a partnership where the capacity of parents is under question. Henderson et al. (2007) highlight the barrier of parental skillset in relation to their ability to advocate for their child. This assertion is supported by literature such as Holmes et al. (2013) and Golding (2007) who highlighted the very challenging nature of parenting adopted children, suggesting that this requires additional resources, skills, training and resilience. This offers two key possibilities; (i) in some cases, it may be that parents present as lacking in these skills (especially given the recurring finding that staff felt they had to play a role of reassuring parents). This would be consistent with Buckwalter, Reed and Mercer (2017) who note that some adoptive parents can find it hard to adapt parenting in line with advice around therapeutic approaches due to their own attachment and coping history. (ii) Alternatively, it may be that parenting styles and techniques (to which the authors refer) present differently to what staff expect and value.

4.7.1.3: Sub-themes: `lack of external support systems` and `broadening the partnership and sources of support`.

Staff made reference to how the availability of other professionals' support could facilitate the partnership and enable them to support families, but also that often, there was an absence of this involvement. This is reflected in the literature with the assertion that once adopted, these children become almost

invisible to support services e.g. CAMHS (Barratt, 2011; Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009). A finding identified in several interviews as a key facilitating factor has been broadening the partnership generally; involving and working collaboratively with other professionals or school staff, or the involvement of other adoptive families and the mutual support that this can offer. Indeed, Cooper and Johnson (2007) found that parents valued opportunities to meet and discuss educational issues with other parents, reflecting the beneficial experiences to which staff referred of "linking-up" adoptive parents.

> We've had times when I've linked up two parents and said just have a think about how it's working for them. I've been, kind of, the middle person. This was effective because the student who they were having difficulties with was a year 8 and the other student was year 11 and these parents had been through the same sort of pattern. I think it is really good for them to hear that there is an end and that this is a normal thing which is going to get better.
>
> Teacher 1

4.7.2: Superordinate theme: feeling informed.

This theme relates to whether staff feel as though they have information needed to support both child and family effectively. Being `informed` related to specific knowledge of the individual child and their circumstances as well as more broad and academic knowledge around adoption e.g. effects of trauma. This theme is comprised of several sub-themes:

4.7.2.1: Subtheme: needing more information.

It emerged that staff perceived that a key factor in facilitating partnership was having knowledge and understanding of key theories related to adoption e.g. trauma and attachment. Staff discussed the impact of examples of training upon their understanding of the child as discussed below by Teacher 4. Whilst (as is evident from the literature review) there is little research exploring school staff views and experiences of working with adoptive parents, this finding is largely consistent with the literature previously highlighted, that points to a lack of knowledge and understanding by school staff, as well as this perception being held by parents. Again, this theme can also be understood in relation to staff

beliefs, particularly their belief regarding their self-efficacy; where staff feel uninformed, they are less likely to believe that they can effect positive change. Whilst there is limited research exploring staff experiences of collaboration with adoptive parents, the finding that staff seek more background information is consistent with findings of Ludicke and Kortman (2012) who found that staff working with parents of children with additional needs, highlighted a need for further details about the child's background, behaviour and context.

> We had some training on trauma a long time ago, which helped me significantly to deal with one of the families that I worked with. The trauma training was interesting, because even though it was about trauma, it made you realise all the little reminders of things, especially if a child hasn't been taken out of a situation until they are a little bit older.
>
> Teacher 4

4.7.2.2: Subtheme: frequent and open communication.

As well as information and understanding of theories related to adoption, staff also identified the need for open and frequent information sharing and communication between home and school in facilitating partnerships. This sub-theme captured thoughts about the regularity of communication, meetings and the benefits of staff making themselves especially available for parents (as expressed by Teacher 1). Whilst there is an absence of literature considering staff views in relation to communication with adoptive parents, this finding is consistent with Wanat (2010), who found that parents generally wanted open, frequent, immediate and specific information. Of particular interest was the tendency to relate regular communication to being able to share positive things from school for parents to "highlight and celebrate successes".

> Communication sometimes needs to be more frequent. Short, sharp bursts, rather than leaving it a long period of time. Really emphasising the importance of praise and making sure that's really regular, supporting the parents in helping them to recognise their child's achievements, which we do anyway, but I think with some of our adopted students, it's more important.
>
> Teacher 1

4.7.3: Superordinate theme: parental expectations.

This theme relates to the views school staff expressed in relation to parents' expectations of staff in terms of the provisions and support they should be putting in place for the CYP, as well as the differing opinions and conflicts that could arise from this. The theme comprised several sub-themes.

4.7.3.1: Sub-themes: `unrealistic expectations` and `conflict arising from different understandings`.

Firstly, it was apparent that staff felt that parents could make unreasonable or unrealistic demands. In some cases, staff felt that the expectations about what was achievable or what was within their role may be unrealistic; in others, staff highlighted the demands upon their own time and resources as limiting the scope of what could be achieved (illustrated by Teachers 2 and 5, below). This could lead to disappointment or conflict with parents, or the perception that parents are especially demanding. Demands were often explored within the context of the increased anxiety that staff note in adoptive parents in comparison to other parents.

Existing literature from the mental health domain has highlighted the increased anxiety and tendency to seek referrals to other services that is evident in adoptive parents (Miller et al., 2000; Ingersoll, 1997), and the present finding offers an extension of this evidence of increased anxiety within education, leading to staff needing to both contain and support parents in such encounters.

> Another barrier is time, it's a huge factor for us. We have no time. You want to spend all the time in the word with families who are having those issues, but actually it's difficult. You'll deal with something and agree that we can get that in place and the parent thinks you are walking out from that meeting and all of those things are immediately done. But we've got classes to teach and a whole list of other things to do and so it might not be immediate. That then leads onto parent barriers, which is that their expectations, at times, are high and unachievable. That, as a teacher, you have a magic wand which can sort some things out and help with things which are out of our reach. We'd love to be able to do everything, but we don't have that ability sometimes.

It puts a lot of pressure on the school to make quite exceptional arrangements for the child, so the child can't be treated the same as the others. The parent has made quite unreasonable requests like having a home school book every day, although it wasn't needed for a learning issues, mum just wanted this.

Teacher 5

4.7.4: Superordinate theme: demonstrating commitment.

This theme relates to the views staff expressed in relation to ways in which they demonstrated commitment. This theme was drawn from various facilitating subthemes and largely captured the concept of `caring about and doing more` for these parents, which was evident in staff views. The theme comprised several sub-themes.

4.7.4.1: Sub-themes: `being prepared to do more` and `empathising with parents`.

These sub-themes captured staff's descriptions of the need to understand parental viewpoints and the need to be particularly proactive in their approach to adoptive parents, e.g. being more mindful of the significance of events for them and "touching base in response". Several staff discussed their role in providing direct support for parents based on an understanding of "how challenging it must be to look after adopted children". These comments related to hearing parents and showed an appreciation of their additional challenges, as shown by Teacher 2:

It very much was the parent needing to almost have a counselling session and off-load some things that had happened, it might be over night, or over a weekend. They'd get to a point where they'd need to come and vent about it. I was in the position where one of the children I taught had a 1 to 1 TA, so she would meet with mum for ten minutes every Thursday, so that mum could have that time to talk about herself sometimes more than the children. We realised that she was really struggling with the situation at home and dealing with the behaviours that she was getting from the children

Teacher 2

Staff provided specific examples, such as additional meetings or collaborative activities with adoptive parents, which may "not have been necessary" but were valuable to building trust and demonstrating their investment within the partnership.

This factor of `doing more`, whilst not directly evident in the literature, is reflective of Ramirez (2000) who identifies that teachers' valuing of partnership is a key factor in its success. I would suggest that in their willingness to `do more` staff demonstrate this commitment. Furthermore, it could be argued to reflect efforts by staff to try to understand the unique family background and the implications this has for school (Hornby and Blackwell, 2018).

4.7.4.2: Sub-theme: caring school ethos.

Within this sub-theme, some staff directly referenced the importance of investment of leadership and how they value parent partnership and understand adopted children. Staff made reference to the ethos and values of the schools they worked in, generally giving examples such as all staff knowing the children (as shown below by Teacher 2). Coded data that made up this sub-theme tended to reflect the less tangible "feel" of school and the school community to which Povey et al. (2016) and Goldberg and Smith (2014) refer.

We have all got quite a deep link with the school and we care about the school, this isn't just where we go to work, we really care about it and I think that comes across when working with parents.
Teacher 2

4.8: Summary of Findings for Research Questions Two and Three

Figure 9 represents a summary of the findings in relation to factors influencing partnership experience drawn from both parent and staff perspectives. These findings are presented alongside existing literature in the table to highlight established factors that were found and confirmed in the present research as well as additional findings from these interviews. As a note, higher order factors were included (in-line with previous literature) i.e. specific nodes from the

transcripts are not represented in this table; themes and sub-themes have been used as they represented somewhat broader and more useful factors.

Parent and family factors	Teacher factors	Parent-teacher factors

• Parental perception of their role
• Parental self-efficacy
• Family circumstances
• Socio-economic status
• Own experiences of schooling
• Level of parent skills in advocating for children (Henderson, Mapp, Johnson & Davies, 2007)
• Level of educational aspirations for child (PTA, 2016)
• Access to support networks (Weistra & Luke, 2017)
• Parental role as protector (Hindman et al, 2012)
• Knowledge of available support services*
• Knowledge of rights and persistence*
• Openness about adopted status*
• Response to support offered*
• Information parents share*
	• Teacher valuing of partnership (Ramirez, 2000)
	• Teachers' perceptions of parental behaviour (Lasater, 2016; Povey et al, 2016)
	• Teachers' perceptions of parental capacity, capability and interest (Povey et al 2016).
	• Teachers' understanding and skills in relation to diverse family backgrounds (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011)
	• Teachers' understanding of contemporary adoption and early trauma and expectations (King, 2009; Gore-Langton, 2017)
	• Curriculum issues (Lyons, 2016)
	• Understanding and valuing of parent knowledge and skills (Dunstan, 2010)
	• Action in response to meetings/discussions*
	• Willingness to offer more than is typical*
		• Opposing goals and agendas
		• Parental fear of judgement
		• Attitudes held by teachers
		• Teachers lack of time, training and insight into other family structures
		• Power dynamics (Tett, 2010)
		• Experiences of and managing conflict (Christenson, 2004; Lasater, 2016)
		• Different perspectives of child's needs (Lake & Billingsley, 2000)
		• Communication (Wanat, 2010)
		  - Manner of communication (Lyons, 2016)
		  - Language used (Lyons, 2016)
		  - Sharing child's story (Cooper & Johnson, 2007)
		  - Responsiveness*
		• Perceptions of blame and misattribution of child's behaviour (Dunstan, 2010)
		• Dismissal of concerns (Lyons, 2016)
		• Parents sense of being wanted and valued *
		• Parents feel as though they're perceived negatively*
		• Specific collaborative activities an joint decision-making*
		• Shared understandings and compromise*
		• Different expectations*

Child factors	Societal factors	Practical factors	School factors
• Age • SEND • Child's behaviour	• Historical context • Political and economic factors • Social myths and stigma regarding adoption (Weistra & Luke, 2017) • Debate surrounding diagnosis of attachment disorders*	• Parental time constraints • School opening hours • Contact staff e.g. office staff. • Parental access to information.	• Parental involvement and engagement processes (Harris & Goodall, 2008) • School climate and friendliness (Povey et al, 2016; Kim, 2009) • Information sharing within school (King, 2009; Gore-Langton, 2017) • Connection to school community, fears of ostracism (Goldberg & Smith, 2014) • Where responsibility for adopted children is held (Lyons, 2016) • Funding – use and transparency* • Support and involvement of outside agencies* • Signposting to services*

Figure 9: Figure showing factors influencing partnership previously drawn from literature and how these were reflected in the present study. Key: Factors in black are those identified in the literature which were not discussed in this research. Factors in orange are those identified in the literature that were found in this research. Factors in blue are those that were not previously identified in the literature and were discussed in this research.

4.9: Overall Discussion of Phase One

In this section I will offer a combined discussion considering the themes that have emerged in relation to the three research questions as explored above. This section will provide some salient comparisons that have been drawn between parent and staff views of factors influencing partnership and will offer key findings from the phase in relation to the broader literature. Firstly, consideration and interpretation of the findings from Research Questions Two and Three led to the identification of three salient themes. These appeared to be key to understanding and explaining the factors which have influenced partnership experiences for both parents and staff.

Secondly, I give consideration to how these, most salient themes can be related to models of partnership (previously highlighted in the literature review); in order to offer further insight into and conceptual explanation of the partnership experiences of adoptive parents.

4.9.1: Key over-arching findings and comparisons across parents' and teachers' views.

4.9.1.1: Knowledge and understanding of adoption.

A key theme across the research questions was that of knowledge and understanding of adoption. This was highlighted by parents (with a lack of understanding proving to be a significant barrier) and was also a theme evident from staff, where the need for further information to help them develop this understanding was expressed. Literature continues to highlight the complexity of the needs of adopted CYP within education, but also establishes the absence of this understanding amongst the education workforce (Langton & Boy, 2017; Comfort, 2007). Through analysis, this theme appeared to be central to understanding the experiences and challenges of partnership. For example, it is logical to argue that the absence of understanding that parents experience from school staff, in turn leads to parents not feeling respected and wanted. In particular, the experiences parents reported of not being believed could be understood in relation to staff lacking understanding of how attachment may mitigate the display of the effects of trauma across home and school contexts (Langton & Boy, 2017). Hence the differences evident between home and school are not understood, or are construed as an absence in parenting

competence. Similarly, the recognition by staff that they require more information and training to provide this understanding of adoption similarly underpins some of the challenges to which they referred, such as unrealistic parental expectations. Some of the parental expectations which were discussed by staff and deemed unrealistic (e.g. needing a home-school book) may have been perceived in this way because of the lack of understanding of the nuanced needs and contexts of adopted children. For example, for one parent a home-school communication book was essential in supporting her daughter. In her view, it provided the security she offered as an attachment figure indirectly within school. Such interpretations highlight the potential importance of understanding of adoption as a central theme within home-school partnership experience, with key implications to addressing this to improve partnership practices.

4.9.1.2: Inaction.

Further parallels can be drawn in relation to inaction. A key theme emerging from staff experiences concerned the ability to support families which can be compared with the theme of inaction and compromise emerging from parents. Interpretation of these themes highlights the complex and vicious cycle that can explain these accounts. Parents describe frustration at perceived inaction from school to make adjustments or provisions for their children, or to act upon their suggestions and expertise. The expectation on staff to act is arguably high, based on staff reports and the literature highlighting parental anxiety (e.g. Ingersoll, 1997). However, staff report, at times, feeling unable to offer support to parents due to fear of being perceived as criticising, or due to the perception that parents do not want support. Thus, it could be suggested that the apprehension staff feel over offering support, leads to further perceived inaction and further strain on the partnership.

4.9.1.3: Hearing each other.

Finally, hearing each other emerged as a dominant theme that was evident across the themes drawn from both parents and staff. Parents talked openly about feeling ignored, disbelieved and dismissed, all of which led, as one parent put it, to "being listened to, but not actually heard". The same theme was evident from staff; for example, where they identified unrealistic expectations

(parents unable to hear and accept reasons and limitations upon support). Successful resolution and partnership examples from teachers' perspectives came from reaching mutual compromise and collaboration where shared understanding could be reached. This required listening and hearing each other. Indeed, in such instances, parents were able to consider and wanted to know more about the limitations placed on schools in order to improve collaboration.

4.9.2: Reference to broader literature and models of partnership.

The partnership experience of adoptive parents in this study (in relation to Hart's 1997 model) has already been highlighted as dynamic and changeable, with a wide range of barriers and facilitators contributing to this. Indeed, this is largely in line with Henderson and Berla (1994) and Hornby and Lafaele (2011) who point out the varied practice in home-school relations across and within settings. To further elaborate on the partnership experiences reported, it is possible to consider the factors identified in relation to broader models of home-school partnership.

In Research Question One, all parents identified some experiences which they felt reflected the lower rungs of Hart's Ladder (1997). Indeed, analysis of the themes drawn from parent and staff interviews offered several examples of practice and perceptions that reflect what Swap (1993) describes as the earlier models of partnership. For example, in some ways, staff accounts were comparable to the consumer model (Cunningham and Davis, 1985) viewing that parents may be driving and demanding provisions as `additional services` (such as the home-school book as described above), with staff needing to meet these demands. Similarly, there is evidence of early expert and protective models of partnership (Mittler & Mittler, 1982; Swap 1993) whereby the roles of parent and professional are demarcated in order to protect and boundary each role. This was particularly evident in the failure to utilise parent skills and the way in which staff could present themselves as experts on the education of the child. Most notably this was evident where one parent reported an absence of communication and a sense of being ignored by staff. This reflects a very boundaried approach to partnership, with staff taking a more demarcated education role, (as per Katz's, 1984 description of the `education role`) as a means of protection against a parent who had made several complaints.

Furthermore, parents' view that inaction was linked to dismissal or lack of insight into their own skills and expertise further reflects these models of partnership (Hatcher & Leblond, 2001). I propose that the three key factors drawn above (understanding of adoption, inaction and not hearing) provide explanation of these experiences of the lower rungs of partnership. For example, a lack of understanding of need means that parental requests are viewed as demands, as well as a tendency to adopt an expert role in relation to education.

However, parents were also able to identify positive experiences at the higher rungs of Hart's Ladder (1997). Accounts of mutually beneficial and rewarding collaboration were also shared; these instances were characterised by developing a shared understanding and reaching mutual compromise. Such accounts reflect the partnership model (Swap, 1993) with the characteristics of open decision-making, joint empowerment and open two-way communication. For example, descriptions of jointly attended training, where parent and teacher worked together to apply the information and form an action plan, particularly reflected the attributes of this model. Again, the three core themes are evident and offer understanding of higher rungs of partnership experience described here.

One possible explanation for the co-existence of different values and approaches to partnership can be offered by consideration of a social systems perspective (Getzels, 1978). This helps to understand the "dynamic quality of interaction between participants and their impact on each other" (Keyes, 2000, p. 114). Such an approach advocates consideration of both the institution and its roles/expectations, but also the individuals' personalities and conceptions. Within this Keyes highlights the importance of consideration of teacher and parental efficacy, beliefs, expectations (also descried by López-Larrosa et al, 2019) and role construction (which is of particular salience here). Teachers and parents can take differing educational role perspectives of parent-focussed, teacher-focussed or partnership-focussed constructions (Green et al. 2007). Parent-focussed constructions assume ultimate responsibility for educational outcomes lies with parents; teacher-focussed expectations assume the responsibility lies with staff; whilst partnership-focussed responsibility is held by the co-operation between parents and staff. Asserting that individual staff (and

indeed the parent) may hold differing role perspectives in different contexts, perhaps linked to beliefs regarding partnership and/or self-efficacy (Lopez-Larrosa et al., 2019), it is possible to understand how the interaction within this social system may vary depending on the unique circumstances.

4.10: Link to Phase Two

In Phase One, I sought to explore the home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents and school staff, as presented above. Whilst understanding was the goal of this phase of the research, in Phase Two, I aimed to share these findings with staff who could be agents of change within the partnership experience. As such, in Phase Two, I sought to explore the perception of SENCos in terms of how they view the needs of adoptive parents, before sharing the findings generated from parent interviews with SENCos to explore unanticipated challenges that parents experience. Finally, I sought to consider how, given this information, SENCos considered that partnership practices could be improved for adoptive families.

Chapter 5: Phase Two

As with the previous chapter, in this chapter I will detail the process of data collection and findings from Phase 2. I begin by summarising the procedure by which data was gathered and analysed. Then the findings are explained and discussed in line with the existing literature in relation to each research question.

5.1: Restating the Research Questions

- RQ4: What do SENCos view to be the key needs of adoptive parents working with school staff?
- RQ5: Which of the partnership factors reported by adoptive parents, are unanticipated by SENCos and why are they surprising to SENCos?
- RQ6: How do SENCos view that partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved?

5.2: Method - Procedure

Following the recruitment of participants and the construction and piloting of the SENCo interview schedule (see details in Chapter 3), convenient interview times and locations were arranged with participants. Before beginning the interview, I reviewed the briefing information with the participant to remind them of the details of the research, their rights as a participant and to confirm consent. Interviews were conducted according to the interview schedule created and open, Rogerian-style prompts were used to elicit further detail and further explore ideas that SENCos presented.

Within the interview procedure, a card-sort activity was used in order to explore SENCos' reactions to findings from parent interviews in Phase One. The card sort was introduced with the following instructions:

`It has been interesting to hear about your views on the needs of adoptive parents in school. Earlier in my research, I carried out interviews with some adoptive parents regarding their experiences working with school staff and the challenges and facilitators that influenced their partnership experiences. I'd like to share those key findings with you via a card sort activity and would like to know which findings are unexpected or surprising to you and which ones are

expected and anticipated. Could I ask you to sort them into the following three piles?`

Very surprising to me	Somewhat surprising to me	Expected and not surprising

The cards were numbered in order to keep track of how each SENCo sorted them and those that were described as surprising were explored with SENCos using a "think aloud" approach (Borgatti, 1999), whereby participants were encouraged to talk through their decisions as they placed the cards. I used further questioning to explore the reasons for their surprise as needed. The interviews were audio-recorded for later transcription and interviews were closed with a debrief.

5.3: Data Analysis

As with Phase One, I decided to use thematic analysis as a method to analyse the data, and this was approached research question by research question. Transcripts were uploaded to Nvivo to enable coding and subsequent analysis. It is important to note that during the familiarisation stage it was apparent that the data of interest to each research question tended to be contained within a specific section of the transcript (e.g. data pertaining to ways in which partnership could be improved, tended to be in the final section of the interview after this question was posed). However, I remained open-minded to the possibility that relevant data would emerge in other areas of the transcript. For this reason, the whole transcript was read for each research question and indeed there were several examples where relevant data was found and coded in a different part of the interview transcript.

For Research Questions Four and Six, thematic analysis was conducted as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) and as explained in Table 5 (Chapter 4) to develop key themes which organised responses and addressed the specific questions. A sample of a coded transcript; list of codes generated; and a candidate theme example for Research Question Six are provided in Appendices 18, 19 and 20 for illustration of the analysis process.

For Research Question Five, card sort responses were reviewed in order to establish the frequency with which factors appeared in the `very surprising` or `slightly surprising` piles. This was visually presented to offer the reader an overview of these findings and address the first part of the research question (what were SENCos surprised by?). In line with my qualitative stance, it was not appropriate to offer any further quantitative analysis of this (small) set of data. Instead, I choose to explore the factors that SENCos most frequently reported to be surprising and identify any patterns within this before focussing upon their explanations and justifications of surprising factors (to address the second part of the research question; why were SENCos surprised?) To do this I utilised thematic analysis as described above.

5.4: Findings and Discussion

5.4.1: Commentary on the discussion of phase two.

There is very limited literature specifically exploring the views of SENCos, or school staff regarding the specific needs of adoptive parents or developing partnerships with adoptive families. Given that my focus within Phase Two is to consider the specific needs of adoptive parents (and ways to develop partnerships with school staff), I judged it less appropriate to attempt to discuss these findings within a broader, generic literature base focussed on parent-partnership, since this would ignore the aim of considering adoptive parents as a specific group. Therefore, themes for each research question are discussed with the following rationales:

- *RQ4.* In the absence of literature regarding SENCos' views of the needs of adoptive parents, the findings from this research question will be discussed in the context of literature exploring the needs of and challenges experienced by adoptive parents. This provides a means of comparing SENCos' views with parent's perceptions.
- *RQ5.* The findings regarding what partnership factors SENCos were unaware of will be presented and the potential reasons behind this inconsistency (between parent and SENCo view) will be discussed in the context of broader practice theory.
- *RQ6.* In the absence of specific literature examining school staff views on improving partnership with adoptive families, these findings are

discussed within the literature base which exists guiding school staff in how to support adopted children and families.

5.5: Research Question Four findings and discussion

RQ4. What do SENCos view to be the key needs of adoptive parents working with school staff?

Figure 10 displays the themes and sub-themes produced from thematic
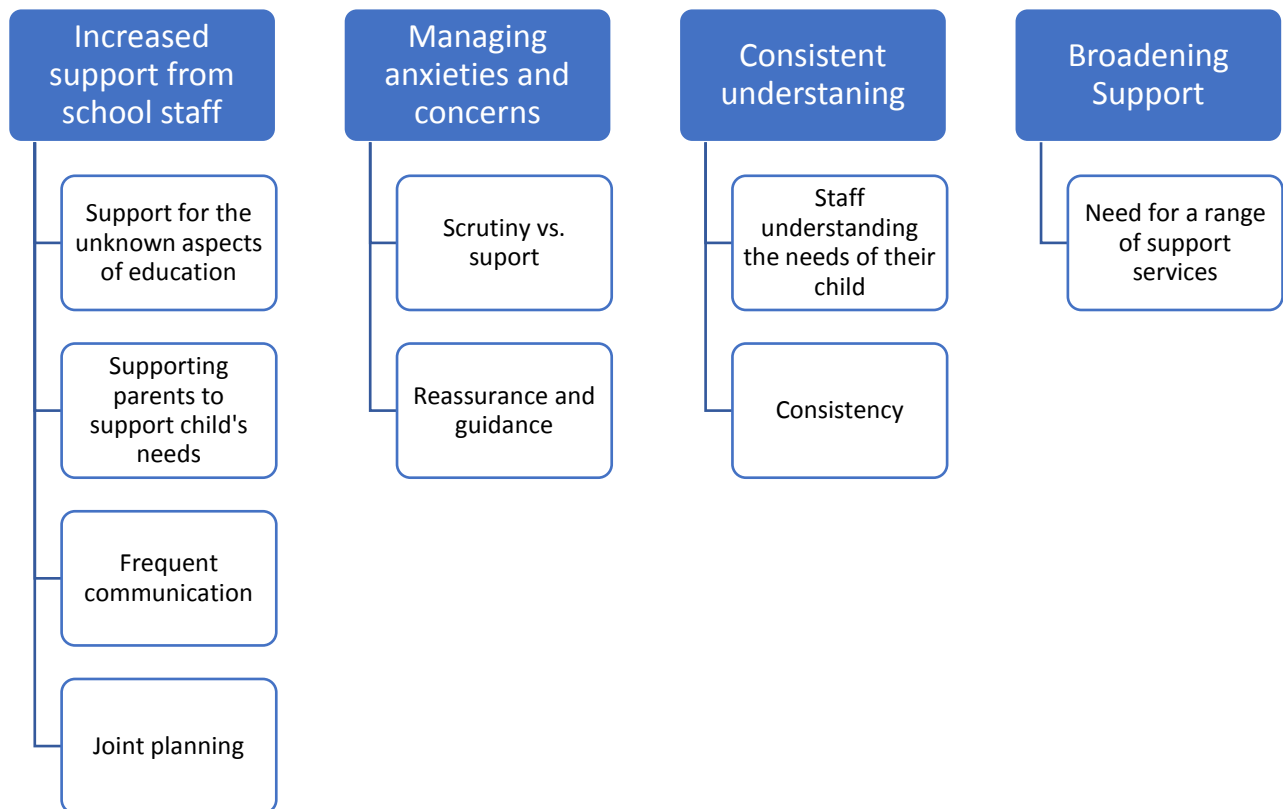
analysis of the interviews with SENCos to address this research question.

Figure 10: Thematic map of the themes and sub-themes showing what SENCos viewed to be the key needs of adoptive parents in their interactions with schools.

5.5.1: Superordinate theme: increased support from school staff.

This theme was developed based upon SENCos reporting that parents often needed support which was, in some way, reflected as additional or extra in comparison to other parents.

5.5.1.1: Sub-theme: support for the unknown aspects of education.

Within this theme, SENCos discussed how adoptive parents can find the education system particularly challenging. A common narrative was evident about parents adopting children who are already of school age, or are close to school age (meaning less time for parents to prepare for the child attending school). SENCos noted that parents could be unclear about what they can expect from schools (in terms of support); the nature of the curriculum; the expected attainment levels of children; and how to communicate with school staff as examples (some of which is discussed by SENCo 1, below). Within this, SENCos stressed how adoptive parents could need additional support from themselves or other staff to navigate the education system and curriculum e.g. by exploring developmental attainment levels, curriculum features and day-to-day situations.

> They may not have had the children with them for a particular amount of time, they may never have had children with them. So, they may know nothing about school or the education system. They may actually be totally overwhelmed by all the new stuff. It's just the basics of education, they may not be aware of the little things like snack money, so it's about making things very clear, there's lots of new stuff and they might not take everything on board all at once.
>
> SENCo 1

This appeared as a strong view held by SENCos, but one which is not specifically referenced within the literature exploring needs of and challenges for adoptive parents. More broadly, Hornby and Lafaelle (2011) explore parental competency with, and own experiences of schooling as potential challenges to partnership, but it is of interest that SENCos identified how adoptive parents needed particular support with the education system.

5.5.1.2: Subtheme: supporting parents to support child's needs.

SENCos also identified adoptive parents' need for additional support to meet the needs of their children. This often related to recognition of the complex needs of adopted children (particularly in relation to behaviour), the additional

stress this causes adoptive parents and the additional support that SENCos believed adopters might need for their parenting. In this way, SENCos were identifying a need for support across both school and home contexts which schools contributed towards meeting. Indeed, the challenges of becoming a parent to adopted children is well established in the literature (Smith & Howard, 1999) and a tendency to seek support from professional services has also been identified (Miller et al, 2000). Such research supports the increased need for cross-context support that SENCos identified and offers insight into how school staff are drawn upon by parents to provide this support. As with the above sub-theme, this was often discussed within the context of being "new to parenting" as well as later adoption and "missing out on early development". Some of these ideas are discussed by SENCo 5:

> I think perhaps adoptive parents are a little more nervous about their children and more aware. Sometimes, the very ordinary developmental steps that happen with children, like not going to bed at night properly, they think that it is because they are adopted and so it's sometimes about sitting the parents down and helping them to understand that this is something that happens to all children. It's not about trauma, it is about their developmental stage.
>
> SENCo 5

5.5.1.3: Subtheme: frequent communication.

Regular communication was highlighted as a need by SENCos, (something widely established by parents in the literature e.g. Lyons, 2016 who identified that adoptive parents tended to need regular contact and more regular meetings). SENCos identified that they would often tend to "check-in" more regularly with adoptive parents and that being available and flexible to ensure an open-door policy was important to facilitate communication. Several SENCos identified the importance of sharing the "little things" that may have happened during the day, which may seem more trivial, recognising that these can be important to the parents. Hence two-way, frequent communication was identified as a need. Again, this is strongly echoed by Langton and Boy (2017), who stress the importance of sharing what appear to be small matters in order to strengthen partnership.

5.5.1.4: Subtheme: joint planning.

This related to the additional layers of planning that SENCos identified as a need for some adoptive parents, again with emphasis on the additional nature of this planning as is evident in SENCo 4 below.

> The parents came in and took a photo of the classroom to identify where they thought he would be comfortable sitting and they gave me a list of things that they felt he would need.
>
> SENCo 4

5.5.2: Superordinate theme: managing anxiety.

This theme was derived from SENCos' discussions of the anxieties, concerns and worries which parents may have in relation to their child's education and the need for reassurance, guidance and containment from staff. This theme was constituted by two sub-themes:

5.5.2.1: Sub-theme: scrutiny vs support.

Several SENCos highlighted the potential scrutiny that parents could feel and the anxiety and concern that this could cause for parents. SENCos discussed how parents felt they "needed to be seen to be coping" and so were anxious about behaviours from their children, or seeking support from staff that might challenge this view (as discussed by SENCo 1):

> Adoptive parents are desperate to do the right thing, desperately wanting to be seen to be coping and that everything is going well. So, sometimes I think there is that barrier of not necessarily being completely honest, because they need to be seen to be coping, they might not always tell you what's going on.
>
> SENCo 1

Scrutiny was also evident in suggestions that parents may feel judged or viewed as being "different" by other parents and staff in school, due to the reasons they have come to adopt a child. This again was something that SENCos identified as needing containment. The theme of parents feeling in some way different

and blamed for their child's behaviour is evident within the literature (Weistra & Luke, 2017; Dunstan, 2010). However, these findings expand upon this, highlighting that SENCos are aware that their interactions with school staff (and being offered support) may lead to parents feeling scrutinised in regard to how they are coping with their children. Indeed, a similar view was expressed and discussed by school staff in Phase One when identifying the difficulties of supporting parents.

5.5.2.2: Sub-theme: reassurance and guidance.

Adoptive parents were identified as needing a high level of reassurance and guidance from school staff, with SENCos noting how parents may seek guidance regarding decision-making (educational and parenting-related) as well as often looking for reassurance. Several SENCos highlighted the high level of uncertainty and anxiety that adoptive parents experience as the basis for the reassurance work that they and colleagues felt was needed.

> There may be many things going on at home that may affect their ability to manage as a parent, sometimes they just need more reassurance. A lot of the work I do is reassurance work. There's one family, where the child is having a very tricky time and the parent just needs to know in this case that I am aware that her child needs to be seen throughout the day. In some cases, the thoughts are irrational, but it's just about me listening and supporting them as much as possible.
>
> SENCo 2

5.5.3: Superordinate theme: consistent understanding.

This theme was developed from the emergent views of SENCos, that adoptive parents need to experience consistent understanding of and approaches to their child and was constituted by two sub-themes:

5.5.3.1: Sub-themes: `staff understanding the needs of their child` and `consistency`.

This sub-theme reflects the identification by SENCos that parents need staff to listen to them about, and understand their child's needs (often described in the context of an attachment-informed lens). This also extended to a need that

parents have for the challenges they experience in parenting their child (across contexts) being recognised and understood by staff with whom they interact. Some SENCos identified this need, within the challenge that they felt adoptive parents might face, where the child's behaviour is "not understood and their needs have not been recognised" by staff, and inappropriate approaches to behaviour management are used. As previously discussed, understanding the needs of adopted children is a strong theme in the literature and that has again been echoed in SENCos' views as well as in parents and teachers from Phase One. SENCos, holding more strategic positions however, were able to recognise the need for "consistency of understanding" and practice (to which parents in Phase One refer).

5.5.4: Superordinate theme: broadening support.

This theme captures the comments made by SENCos relating to the need to broaden the support network appropriately around adoptive families. This encompassed the need for (and sometimes difficulty of) engaging other professionals and services e.g. social care and CAMHs. This was discussed in the context of the withdrawal of services which were supporting the child as a LAC, but "appear to exit" on adoption, leading to the concern that adoptive families can "fall through the cracks" of support services. This need is evident in the literature (Barratt, 2011; Osborne, Norgate & Traill, 2009) and is identified as another consistent concern across parents, staff (from Phase 1) and SENCos. SENCos also discussed the beneficial impact for adoptive parents of support gained by being linked with other adopters, who were considered best able to understand and discuss concerns. Within this, SENCos often identified their role of "sign-posting", in meeting this need.

5.6: Research Question Five: Findings and Discussion.

RQ5. Which of the partnership factors, reported by adoptive parents, are unanticipated by SENCos and why are they surprising to SENCos?

To address this research question, SENCos completed a card sort activity responding to the themes drawn from parent interviews from Phase One (as previously described). This data was gathered to offer insight into the experiences, both positive and negative, which SENCos are aware of and likely anticipate/account for in their working with adoptive families, as well as those

which SENCos may not consider. All SENCos completed this activity and Figure 11 provides a presentation of the SENCos' response to the task.

Understanding of Adoption: Staff lack understanding of the impact of early trauma/experiences. [red]	Understanding of Adoption: There can be a lack of consistency within school (e.g. lack of communication between staff). [orange, red]	Understanding of Adoption: The power of a diagnosis (e.g. the frustrations experienced where a lack of diagnosis can mean child's needs are not understood). [orange, orange]	Understanding of Adoption: Assumptions that parents' have knowledge of services and supports which they are unaware of. [orange, red]
Understanding of Adoption: The beneficial support and influence of outside professionals and agencies (e.g. professionals coming to meetings).	Understanding of Adoption: Schools having had experience of working with a range of different family structures and needs. [orange]	Feeling Wanted: Parents feeling as though they and/or their child was unimportant or unwanted by school. [red, red, red]	Feeling Wanted: Parents feeling as though they are perceived as difficult by school staff. [orange, red, red, red]
Feeling Wanted: Instances of conflict/ misunderstandings (e.g. parents experiencing defensiveness and describing a need to fight for child). [red, red, red]	Feeling Wanted: Motivations regarding funding (e.g. lack of transparency around pupil premium spending). [orange]	Feeling Wanted: Experiences of feeling that their child is cared about and that staff want to help.	Feeling Respected: Parents can feel a lack of belief or respect (e.g. parents often felt that their accounts were not believed by school). [orange, red, red, red, red]
Feeling Respected: Absence of communication from school. [orange, orange, red]	Feeling Respected: Parents knowledge and skills not being recognised or utilised by schools. [red]	Feeling Respected: Being heard (parents highlighted instances where they had felt listened to, believed and asked their thoughts). [red, red, red]	Feeling Respected: Specific collaborative activities (e.g. joint decision-making or joint training).
Feeling Respected: Reciprocated and responsive communication.	Inaction and Compromise: Perception of inaction in response to meetings, parental suggestions and the advice of professionals. [orange, red, red]	Inaction and Compromise: Lack of flexibility (e.g. in relation to curriculum; school policies). [orange, red]	Inaction and Compromise: Willingness to compromise and act (e.g. schools being proactive, as well as reaching mutual compromises with parents). [red]
Inaction and Compromise: Parental knowledge and persistence (parents being assertive, proactive and knowing rights etc).			

Figure 11: Figure to present the responses of SENCos to the card sort task. Each factor (card) in the card sort is presented with a colour-coded key, indicating the number of times a factor was identified as "very surprising" in red; and the number of times it was identified as "somewhat surprising" in orange

Figure 11 highlights several factors, which emerged from interviews with adoptive parents, which SENCos were broadly surprised by and had not anticipated. The factors identified most frequently as surprising to SENCos (those which were reported by three or more SENCos as `very surprising`) are listed below for clarity:

- Lack of belief or respect*
- Impression that they/ their child is unimportant or unwanted*
- Parent's impression that they are seen as difficult*
- Recognition/dismissal of parent's knowledge and skills
- Conflict breaking down partnership*

5.6.1: Commentary on these findings.

In the following paragraphs, I offer an interpretation of the data gathered in relation to this research question. Firstly, from consideration of the factors deemed surprising by SENCos, I offer an interpretation to organise and understand the patterns in the data. Secondly, I will describe the results of a thematic analysis of the reasoning given behind SENCos surprise.

5.6.2: Parental perception and affect factors.

It is possible to offer an interpretation that whilst SENCos anticipate some of the more practical challenges that adoptive parents experience (e.g. staff lacking understanding of adoption; lack of consistency; motivations around funding etc), there was greater surprise and less awareness of more affective factors and challenges (e.g. parents' perception of a lack of belief and respect; feeling unwanted or unimportant). These factors can be considered to stem from some of the more practical factors which SENCos had anticipated (e.g. the lack of understanding and difficulty of consistency could lead to parents feeling that they/ their child is unimportant). In this sense the factors could be considered in the context of primary factors and secondary factors, with the secondary factors being those which are less well understood and unanticipated by SENCos.

The factors which were reported as surprising by SENCos reflect the parents' feelings and perceptions as opposed to more tangible, practical challenges and

I have collectively labelled them here as `parental perception and affect factors` (in the list above, these are marked with an asterisk). This could imply that SENCos are less attuned to, or aware of, the emotional impact for parents of working with school staff and the way in which parents may interpret these experiences.

5.6.3: School inaction factors.

Another pattern in the above data is that there were several factors pertaining to inaction from school staff (e.g. absence of communication; inaction in response to meetings and dismissal of parent knowledge and skills). I have grouped these factors and termed them `school inaction factors`. This captured SENCos' surprise at several factors reported by parents where school staff were not perceived by parents to be fulfilling roles that SENCos appeared to deem central to their role or profession.

5.6.4: Explanations of surprise at parental perception and affect factors.

A brief thematic analysis was conducted to explore the reasoning behind
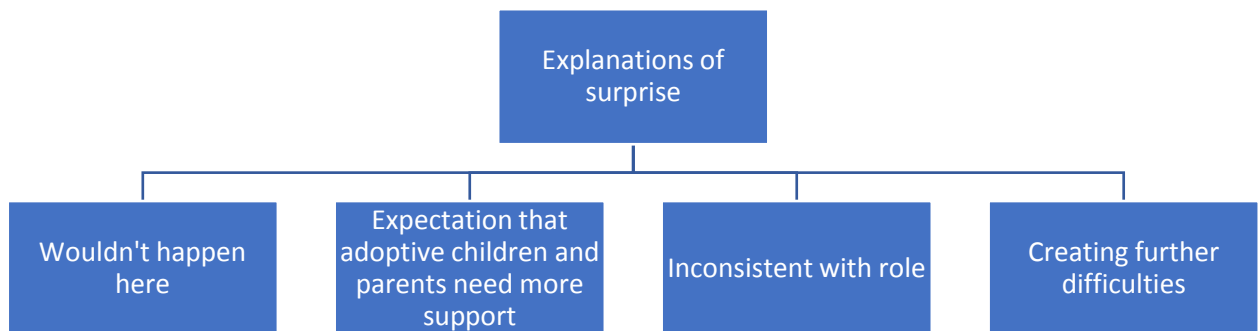
Figure 12: Thematic map showing key themes from SENCos' explanations of their surprise to the factors identified above

SENCos' surprise to these factors, displayed in Figure 12 below:

As shown in Figure 12, a clear theme (and arguably the most dominant) from SENCos' justifications, was a belief that "this wouldn't happen here". This related to SENCos' direct assertion that they felt their school's adoptive parents would not feel this way and the implication that this must be the experience in other schools. SENCos explained this belief within the context of the extensive support they offer in their schools for adopted children and their parents; their "open-door policies" encouraging frequent and honest communication; and skilled staff, who "would not allow parents to feel this way or show frustrations to parents".

Of note, during phase two interviews it became apparent that one parent interviewed in Phase One had been discussing one of the schools included in Phase Two. On examination of both transcripts, it was apparent that this parent discussed many experiences and views which constituted the themes of `not being believed` and `impression they are seen as difficult`. By comparison, the SENCo in this school expressed views that constituted the theme of `this wouldn't happen here`. A possible interpretation that can be offered is that SENCos may feel that they and their staff offer a high level of support and form positive relationships with adoptive parents, but that parents may not feel the same way. This highlights a lack of holistic awareness of partnership experience for adoptive parents at (an often) strategic level.

Espoused theory versus theory in practice (Argyris & Schon, 1974) offers the possibility that there is a distinction between the way in which SENCos believe they support adoptive parents and their actual practice. This could be further extended to suggest that there is a discrepancy also between the SENCos' beliefs about how school staff interact with adoptive parents and their actual practice. This discrepancy is well-established within education research. For example, in studying the practice of teachers, Harnett (2010) notes how implicit beliefs and routinised behaviours regularly influenced practice in negative ways and actual practice was inconsistent with teachers' stated beliefs. Eraut (2000) highlights that in education, staff learn espoused theory within a theoretical and artificial learning context, whilst theory in practice is largely learned in the role under the pressures of teaching. The same explanation could be extended to

SENCos' development of espoused theory and theory in practice regarding partnership practices.

There is also a further consideration regarding the different expectations that may be held by parents and SENCos regarding what each factor means or `looks like` in practice. If parents and SENCos hold differing views and expectations about what one of those factors should comprise, then it is highly likely that a SENCo may believe that a particular practice is happening in school and parents view that it is not. One example to illustrate this may be that whilst SENCos viewed that they (and other staff) draw upon parental expertise, this was discussed and understood through discreet activities where parents' skills are directly drawn upon (e.g. a one-off training event). This differs from a more consistent/ embedded approach which is (1) advocated in literature, e.g. Langton & Boy (2017); Comfort (2007) and (2) seemingly sought by parents. Hence it is possible to understand SENCos' surprise within this explanation.

Other themes within the explanations were identified and are briefly presented below:

- ***The expectation that adoptive children and parents need more support.*** This related to recognition and expectation that adoptive parents may have higher needs and expectations, and surprise that school staff wouldn't be prepared for this. Reference was made to the growing body of understanding and knowledge about the needs of adopted children and hence school staff should be aware of this.

- ***Inconsistent with professional role.*** SENCos explained their surprise within the context of their (and other school staff's) professional duty and role. For example, some suggested that the main role was to ensure that "parents felt listened to" and to "be flexible in how they work with parents".

- ***Creating further difficulties.*** SENCos also explained their surprise in relation to the further difficulties that inaction or lack of consideration of parents' perceptions could cause. This was described in terms of implications for the parents, but also for themselves and the partnership,

impacting upon the trusting relationship. This is summed up clearly by SENCo 4 below:

> So that is why I was surprised, I think most schools would do actions (from meetings) as they are held accountable. Then you'd get disgruntled parents as well, which you don't want as it takes up your time in a negative way.
>
> SENCo

5.7: Summary of Research Questions Four and Five

The purpose of these research questions was to explore what SENCos perceive and anticipate as key needs and challenges faced by adoptive parents in their interactions with school staff and whether, based on the views of adoptive parents from phase one, there were any `gaps` in this understanding.

The findings from Research Question Four highlight the way in which SENCos understand the challenges for, and needs of adoptive parents working with school staff. I suggest that this was of particular importance and relevance given the lack of existing literature regarding their perceptions and the central importance of their role in supporting adoptive families. The themes generated highlight that SENCos have a broad awareness of key needs of parents: SENCos appreciated the potential challenges of parenting adopted children (and the need for additional support beyond the school context); as well as the increased level of anxiety and need for reassurance and guidance. SENCos also identified the need parents had for consistent practice from staff which reflected understanding of adoption, and the need to broaden the support networks of parents in view of the reduced multi-agency support following the adoption. I suggest that this can offer an insight into the cognitive frameworks that SENCos bring to their interactions with adoptive parents.

Whilst there is considerable overlap between the views expressed by parents in Phase One and those identified by SENCos, the findings of Research Question Five illuminate gaps. These findings revealed that whilst SENCos would identify and expect some of the key barriers and experiences that adoptive parents

face, there were several factors that they did not anticipate, particularly the parental affect-related factors and perceived school inaction. The most salient explanation for their surprise related to this "not happening here", which I interpreted within the context of espoused theory versus theory in practice (within SENCos and the broader school staff); the gap between rhetoric and action. This was also interpreted in terms of the difference between how parents and SENCos may conceptualise some of those factors. Potential implications from this analysis highlight that whilst SENCos may consider that they can identify, understand and meet the needs of adoptive parents in their schools, there is a knowledge gap and a training need regarding what the needs and experiences of these parents really are. Furthermore, these findings raise a question regarding the consistency with which practices with adoptive families are implemented within schools.

5.8: Research Question Six Findings and Discussion

RQ6. How do SENCos view that partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved?

The responses of SENCos were organised according to the themes presented in Figure 13, below:
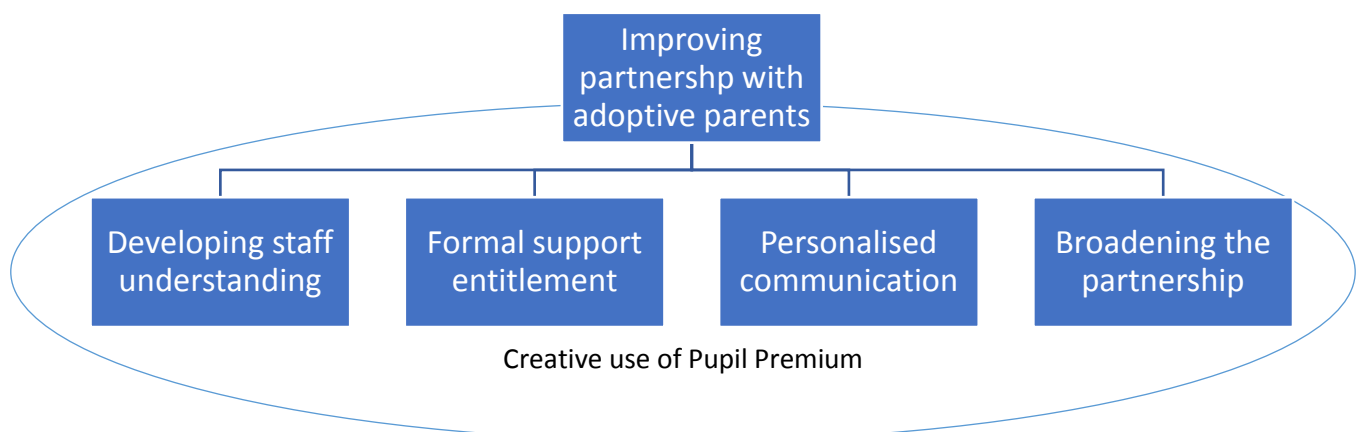
Figure 13: Thematic map showing key themes relating to how SENCos viewed that home-school partnership experiences and practices with adoptive parents could be improved.

5.8.1: Theme: developing staff understanding.

This theme was developed based upon references made by SENCos to the need to increase the understanding of adoption and needs of adopted CYP within schools. Within this, it is possible to identify several different levels of understanding from SENCos' responses, as shown in figure 14 below:
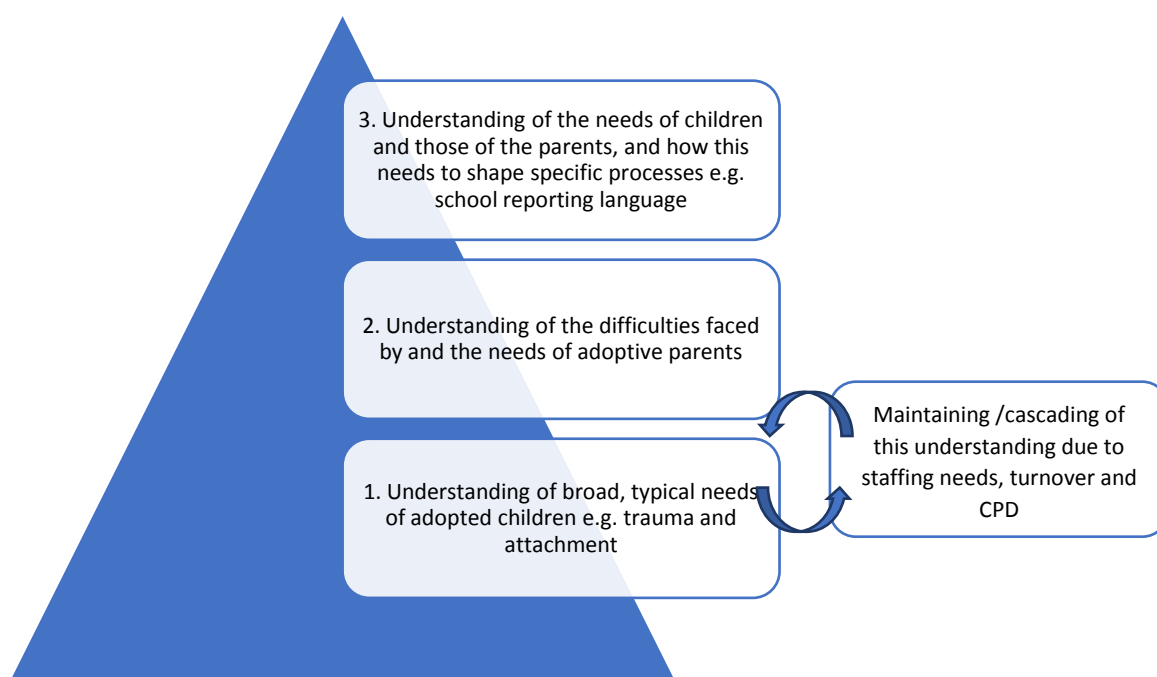
Figure 14: Diagram showing how SENCos' views regarding improving staff understanding can be conceptualised as reflecting different levels.

It was evident across the interviews that SENCos believed that partnership practices would be improved by increased staff understanding of the needs that adopted children commonly displayed, often citing training on attachment and trauma as something which is required. Regularity and refreshing of this training was also highlighted to ensure that this remained salient in staff's minds and to ensure consistency across staff in school. Arguably this reflected a more

surface-level understanding and potentially implies the risks posited by Hare and Bullock (2006) that LAC (and by extension, adopted children and their parents) do not constitute a homogenous group, for whom attachment needs would be experienced in the same way for example. There is a need for such understanding to then be applied and used skilfully in context, to understand individual need and not to draw generalised assumptions. Indeed, in the context of the burgeoning popularity of attachment theory and its limitations as a singular explanation, Barth et al. (2005) warns against its generic overuse.

At the next level, some SENCos drew attention to also providing staff with information about the challenges and needs of adoptive parents, in order to develop empathy and raise awareness of specific circumstances and barriers which can then be planned for. Historically, it appears that literature has more saliently established the need for staff to consider the experiences and needs of the adopted children than that of their families (Comfort, 2007; Cooper & Johnson, 2007). However more recently, Langton and Boy (2017) highlight the importance of consideration of adoptive parents' experiences and needs; something which is reflected in some SENCos' views here.

Finally, one SENCo highlighted that as a school there was regular training around the first level and involvement from adoptive parents in such training (the second level). This SENCo identified the next area of their work as relating to how such understanding can be consistently and sensitively embedded across staff practices. For example, considering the needs of the child and the parent in "day to day school practice" to improve partnership experience, as is highlighted by SENCo 2.

> We have done some attachment work. But I think we now need more specific training and thinking, like how to structure conversations and things like that e.g. sentence starters and how to turn around a negative… That's something I'd like to work on. I am working with staff to understand and recognise that adopted students have a level of need and encourage them to use the same approaches to writing reports and communicating in a similar way as SEN e.g. clear and SMART targets.

The need for developing understanding in this way is reflected in the literature base exploring support for adopted children in school (Phillips, 2007). Many guidance documents produced by local authorities or charities aim to educate the school staff audience about key areas of need and key perspectives on behaviours of adopted children (Adoption UK, 2018). Commonly, these focus on attachment and early trauma for example. This arguably reflects the first level in Figure 14 where SENCos are identifying the need for staff understanding of these theories. Langton and Boy (2017) suggest that a graduated response to staff training is needed with all staff having a level of knowledge and understanding and those working more closely with the child and family requiring greater expertise. This offers a similar heuristic to that presented above in Figure 14, although SENCos in this research did not discuss the level of understanding in relation to the job role and relationship to the child as Langton and Boy do.

Training was the salient means referred to in relation to developing understanding. Staff interviewed by King (2009) reported an openness to training that would support understanding of adopted children (although this was considered by them to be a lesser priority than training regarding LAC). Langton and Boy (2017) also highlight the importance of supporting staff as well as training them, this requires consideration of how experiences with adoptive families can lead to experiences of secondary trauma and blocked care (Langton & Boy, 2017). This leads to the suggestion that developing understanding which leads to effective change in practice, will also rely on management and supervision structures within the school to ensure that staff are supported to implement this developing understanding, this was not highlighted by SENCos.

5.8.2: Theme: formal support as an entitlement.

Across the interviews, there was a clear theme of needing a planning document to support the educational needs of adopted children. Commonly, the PEP for

LAC was highlighted, with SENCos suggesting that such a document and process should ether be continued when a child is adopted, or that a similar one be created. SENCos highlighted reasons such as (1) increased school accountability regarding how they were supporting the child and how they were using additional funding; (2) a written document formalising agreements and actions; (3) a clear responsibility for the local authority to hold schools to account over agreements; and (4) parity of experience across schools. Indeed, it emerged from several SENCos' discussions that this was a change that they felt was needed at the level of the local authority and further, at government level (highlighted in the comments of SENCo 1, below). This tied in with the subtheme of an entitlement, whereby SENCos highlighted that whilst in some cases, plans such as TAMs (team around me meetings) or IEPs (individual education plans) were put in place for adopted children, this was largely at the request of their parents. Instead, they viewed that partnership would be improved if the onus was removed from parents by making it an automatic entitlement and expectation that a school put in place the plan, targets and review procedures as a matter of course.

There should be the wrap around like with LAC and school should report to the parents and the LA about what they are doing to support the child. Like with LAC through the PEP system, with termly reports on progress and what you are doing to support the progress. It would enable parents to feel more informed, it would help them to feel that the school is accountable, because sometimes, I think they can go to schools for help and the door is shut and there is nowhere else to go. I also think it would give parents someone who is more objective and the parents wouldn't feel they were pushing. It is something that is their right and had been granted to them so the power relationship might then be different, because that is at the crux of everything really, if it is an equal relationship then things work.

SENCo 1

It was interesting that whilst SENCos clearly voiced the need for a planning framework and an entitlement to this to support the partnership, they did not refer to or seem to be aware of the EPAC. The EPAC (Education Plan for Adopted Children), which, as discussed in Chapter 2, provides a clear planning framework around identifying, addressing and monitoring adopted CYP's needs in school. The EPAC has been widely adopted across different local authorities and in their evaluation, Syne, Green and Dyer (2012) note that it was welcomed by school staff (despite adding to paperwork demands), reflecting the desire for such a system, as discussed by SENCos here. The EPAC is widely referred to across many local authority websites, including the local authority in which this research took place. This would suggest that there is a need for greater awareness raising and training regarding the use of the EPAC. The EPAC however, is not a statutory document (unlike the PEP) and so arguably may not afford the same level of accountability and protection to which SENCos referred. That being said, this finding offers various implications regarding a review of the EPAC; (i) evaluating outcomes where it has been used; (ii) training and awareness raising needs in relation to the EPAC; and (iii) how this process may fit within the new emerging role of Designated Teacher for Post LAC.

5.8.3: Theme: personalised communication.

Figure 15: Diagram showing the theme of `getting communication right` and the subthemes which captured how SENCos viewed this would be achieved.

This key theme encompassed views expressed by all SENCos about the need to prioritise and personalise communication with adoptive parents (as shown in Figure 15). This was presented often in terms of "getting the basics right" and acknowledging that communication was one of the harder things to get right currently for schools and adoptive parents. Within this, SENCos made reference to greater regularity and frequency of communication for adoptive parents (in comparison to other parents) and this was in reference to different levels of school staff, e.g. high frequency with class staff and regularity with themselves as the SENCo/DT. This was reflected in the literature with Langton and Boy (2017) advising that parents are supported by regular (daily) communication, ensuring they are informed about what their child has been doing, any difficulties, preparations for the following day etc.

SENCos highlighted that improvements could come from being able to establish the "preferred communication style" for that parent and then ensuring consistency in using this approach. Often SENCos identified the potential benefit of themselves and other staff initiating interaction and communication with adoptive parents earlier than the usual school systems would allow. Examples included an enhanced induction for these parents when children start; inviting in for additional informal meetings about progress earlier in the year than normally scheduled; and providing parents with tools to structure communication with school e.g. agreed plans (some of which is highlighted by SENCo 5 below). Previous research and existing guidance has focussed on developing such tools to aid parents in communicating with schools. For example, Lyons (2016) focussed on developing a resource aimed at helping parents to communicate with school staff, sharing the background, key needs and strengths. Such a tool was reported by participants to serve both a practical and emotionally protective function. However, it is notable that this could be viewed to place the onus upon parents within communication with schools,

whereas SENCos in the present research were expressing more intention for school responsibility for improved communication.

A designated channel of communication and key person within school to support this was identified as a suggestion to support timely and responsive feedback and resolutions. This was reflective of previous research e.g. Cooper and Johnson (2007) who highlighted the challenge of knowing who to contact in school. The new role of DT for Post LAC seems likely to alleviate some of these concerns, however.

> More regular communication and more regular progress meetings, because they do get to see IEPs and things, but it could just be a school report and a parent meeting for the year. So, it might be that the parent doesn't know about the progress until later on.
>
> SENCo 5

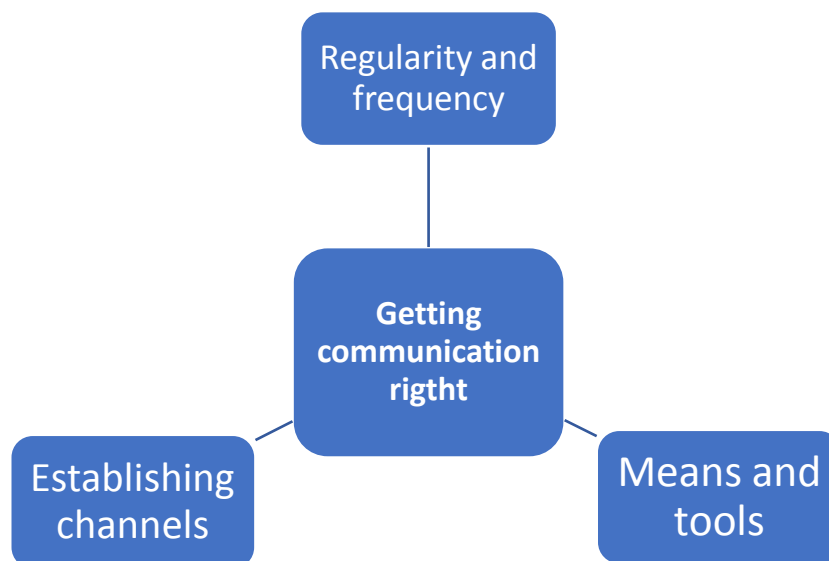### 5.8.4: Theme: broadening the partnership.
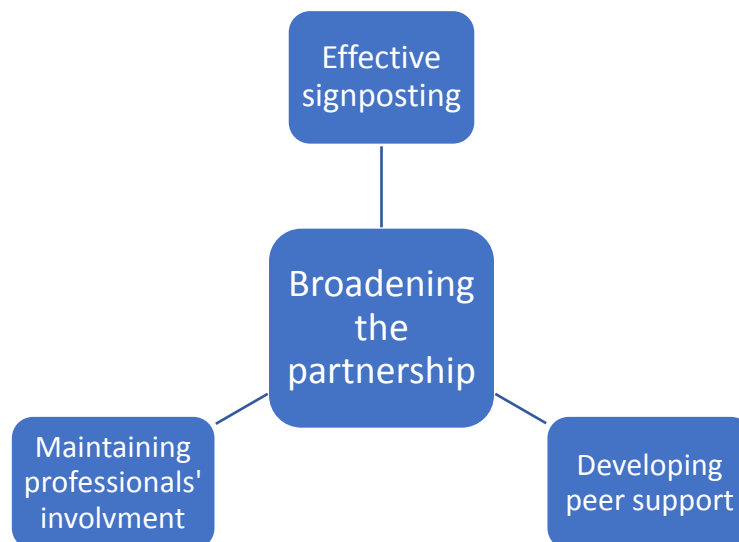
Figure 16: Diagram showing the theme of `broadening the partnership` and the subthemes which captured how SENCos viewed this would be achieved.

This theme related to the suggestions that SENCos made which related to involving others and developing the support network around the partnership, as shown in Figure 16. This related to:

(i)   The maintenance of involvement of other services such as social care and the virtual school. SENCos, teachers and parents have all expressed frustrations around the absence of this support when the child becomes adopted, and this is prevalent in the literature (as previously discussed). SENCos highlighted a need to be proactive in trying to maintain this involvement whilst realising the pressures on these services which contribute to their limited involvement. The EPAC process recognises this challenge and is planned around a multi-agency framework in order to attempt to maintain professional involvement (Syne, Green & Dyer, 2012). This `wish` from SENCos has wider reaching implications than school level, identifying a broader pressure on resources and capacity of professionals across education, health and care, whose collaboration with parents and school could enhance the child's education. For example, Osborne, Norgate and Triall (2009) revealed how principal educational psychologists viewed that EP involvement with adopted children could have beneficial effects on their outcomes, but that limited resources and statutory pressures limit the scope of involvement that is possible.

(ii)   Being aware of and able to signpost parents to services (educational and non-educational) which might offer support. SENCos identified potential development work here around gaining and maintaining current knowledge of different services and resources that adoptive parents might access, in order to be able to accurately signpost parents.

(iii)   Linking parents to other adoptive families and developing specific parent support groups of adoptive families. SENCos reflected that partnership might be improved by strengthening peer support for

adoptive families and by "investing" in the development of adoptive parent groups. These were described in relation to parents being able to share more openly and honestly, their concerns with others who can empathise, offering mutual support (whilst still operating within the school community). Parent support groups are discussed in the literature regarding post-adoption support (Barth & Miller, 2000) highlighting the beneficial support and potential mentoring qualities of relationships formed and reduction in isolation (Atkinson & Gonet, 2007). However, there is no apparent literature exploring these groups within a school context to explore beneficial outcomes for home-school partnerships.

5.8.5: Over-arching theme: creative use of pupil premium.

Underlying these key themes was the suggestion from SENCos of creative consideration regarding spending of pupil premium money to facilitate home-school partnership intervention (e.g. organising and resourcing parent support groups), as opposed to spending solely on intervention that the child might access in school. This reflected some of the practical considerations that SENCos were mindful of in considering partnership practice.

5.9: Summary of Research Question Six:

These findings highlighted that SENCos suggested a range of ways in which partnership practices with adoptive families could be developed. These ideas referred to school-level, broader professional level and local authority or government level (as illustrated in Figure 17).
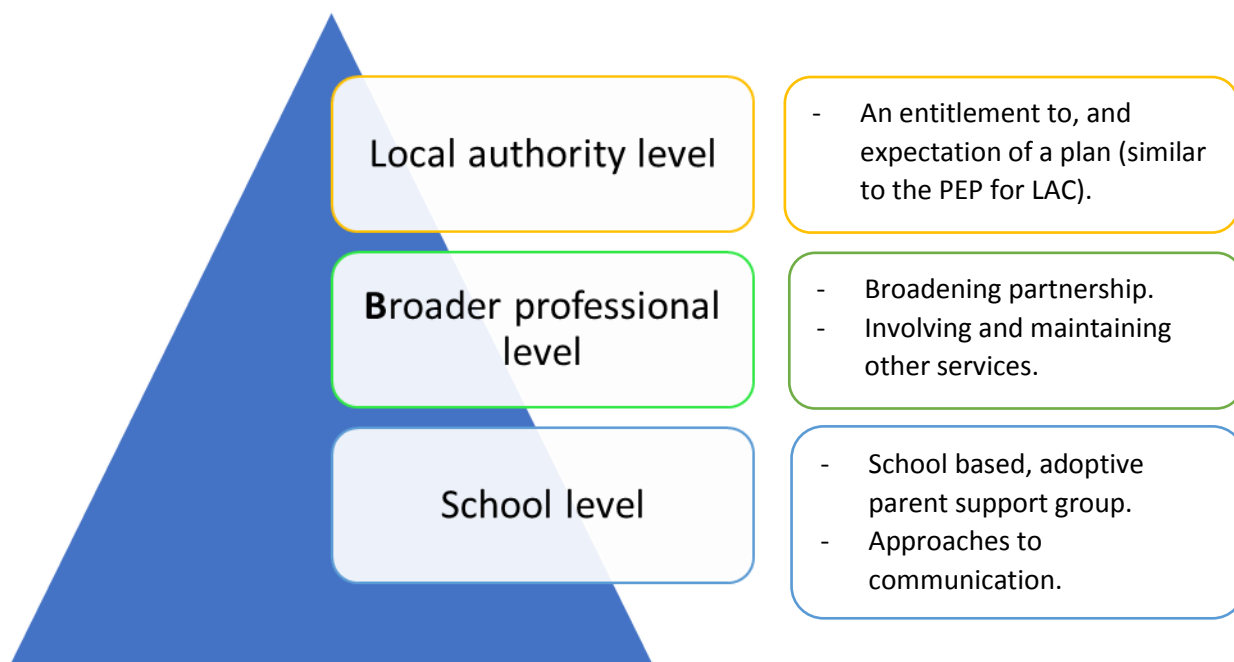
Figure 17: Diagram showing how the suggestions regarding developing partnership practice can be conceptualised as relating to different levels.

This is reflective of the eco-systemic theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), whereby SENCos were identifying implications for practice within:

i)   The Microsystem (e.g. school practices such as processes for staff training).

ii) The Mesosystem (e.g. improving practices regarding interactions between home and school, such as personalised communication mechanisms).

iii) The Exosystem (e.g. the need for local authority-led policy and expectation regarding educational plans for adopted children).

Chapter 6: Overall Discussion

In this research, I set out to explore the partnership experiences, barriers and facilitators, as perceived by adoptive parents and staff in phase one. In phase two, I explored SENCos' perceptions of the needs of adoptive parents and their views on improving partnership. There has been a clear link between the two phases, in considering how SENCos responded to parents' reported experiences and how, given this information, strategies for partnership development are constructed. Throughout the previous two chapters, the findings from each phase have been presented and considered within the context of existing literature to address the specific research questions. In this chapter, I will present the overarching findings which link both phases and could be considered as salient themes within the stories of all three stakeholders. I will also reflect upon the limitations within this research study and the future directions for research which are apparent.

6.1: Over-arching Themes

6.1.1: Understanding of adoption.

Arguably the most salient over-arching theme evident in parent, teacher and SENCo views around working partnerships was that of understanding of adoption. Parents expressed frustration at the lack of understanding (of the context of adoption and the long-term impacts of early experiences) that they met when working with school staff. Parents attributed negative experiences for themselves and their children to such absence of understanding and also highlighted the lack of consistency of knowledge and understanding within schools. The same theme was alluded to by school staff, who identified that they needed to know more about the children and families' background and the impact of this upon the child. Indeed, SENCos were aware of and anticipated the potential lack of consistency that parents might meet from staff and a key theme in developing partnership practice, in their view, related to developing staff understanding of adoption and implementing this within their daily practice.

However, what has also become apparent through the research is the different level of understanding to which each party refers. For staff, further

understanding was linked closely to understanding the individual experiences and background of an individual child. In this way, staff appeared to cite the need for understanding within the boundaries of that particular child and their specific role with that child, as opposed to identifying the broader knowledge and understanding gap that exists within the profession. This would be consistent with King (2009) who suggest that the rarity of adopted children within education means that training and understanding around these children is not viewed as a priority by staff. In this way, staffs' views on understanding appear to pertain to parents sharing more background information regarding their children and how this might impact them. SENCos, who sit in a more strategic position, were more aware of the knowledge and understanding gap that exists within the education workforce; often they highlighted the need for regular training to upskill staff in relation to attachment and early trauma and the impacts of this. Some SENCos were also able to identify that whilst this training is an important first step, there is also a gap between this knowledge and day-to-day practice and expressed their priorities around focussing on how to develop more "attachment-sensitive" approaches to school processes and systems. Whilst parents identified a need for staff knowledge of trauma and attachment, this appeared to mean utilising an attachment and trauma lens, appropriately and flexibly, in all aspects of practice. it was more important that their child's needs were considered holistically, within the context of being an adopted child and responded to appropriately (what one parent referred to as staff "getting it"). This appears to fit within the context of current literature regarding the popularity and ubiquity of attachment as a dominant lens in understanding the needs of these children (Barth et al., 2005).

I propose that the difference is in the level of understanding that is aimed for or viewed as important; school staff focussed on a need for information regarding backgrounds; whilst SENCos conception goes further to consider the need for knowledge about trauma and attachment which can be utilised in practice. Parents however, were highlighting the need to understand the complexity of their individual children by applying those theoretical lenses holistically. In doing so, staff would need to appreciate the complexity and nuanced ways in which

attachment and trauma manifest differently, for example. Parents seek this level of understanding in the response they and their children gain from school staff. However, another finding of this research was that, by parents own admission, they did not know what level of training and resourcing was available to staff. This raises questions regarding the initial expectations parents may have about the understanding school staff are equipped with through initial teacher training and how this might influence partnerships.

Given these findings, it appears that all parties recognise a need to prioritise understanding of adoption, but that what they understand this to mean is different in relation to the level and depth of understanding and also the extent to which it is applied in practice. Indeed, Langton & Boy (2017) highlight the considerable need to create capacity within school staff through resourcing, support and supervision to enable the application of new knowledge. Whilst teachers and SENCos highlighted the need for training, the measures described by Langton and Boy to enable this understanding to become part of practice were not discussed by teachers or SENCos. Perhaps this is due to the fact that teachers, despite their very challenging roles, do not receive professional supervision (Jackson, 2002; Comfort, 2007). Consequently, I would highlight the risk that, whilst training would lead to new knowledge and understanding relevant to adopted CYP, staff may not be equipped or supported to embed it, as is evident in literature highlighting the overall ineffectiveness of one-off training (e.g. Jayaram, Moffit & Scott, 2012).

Within the context of understanding of adoption; parents made reference to the challenge of the "happy ending" narrative (Syne et al., 2012), where they had directly experienced staff viewing their child differently and expecting conformity as their child had been adopted. Indeed, several staff and SENCos within the interviews discussed how "lucky" these children were in the context of finding a "loving and stable home". This highlights another aspect of understanding, which is that parents still encounter barriers relating to the societal view of adoption (Weistra & Luke, 2017), which staff inadvertently perpetuate. This perhaps signals a reason for the lack of understanding in schools and perhaps also the lack of priority with which staff appear to view adopted children (King

2009). A key implication from these findings is that until such views are addressed, training in and understanding of the needs of adopted children is less likely to be internalised.

6.1.2: Broadening the partnership.

Another theme that emerges across both phases is the need for broader support for adopted children and families. Parents described the beneficial impact that professionals and other agencies had had in their partnerships with schools (often viewing that the professional understood their child's needs and that staff were more inclined to listen to professionals). However, they also expressed frustrations at not always being made aware of what support services were available. School staff also identified frustration, reflecting on experiences of the withdrawal of other services, often leaving education as the only agency involved to support the families. SENCos also identified this challenge and suggested that partnership would be improved by systems that maintained this involvement over time.

Whilst the withdrawal of services and parental tendency to seek service involvement is documented in the literature (e.g. Barratt, 2011; Ingersoll, 1997), it is my view that these findings can offer further elaboration. Parents' discussion regarding other professionals' involvement reflected a narrative of parental initiation of, and autonomy over, professional involvement, which then led (in their view) to positive outcomes for partnership. However, more of a deficit narrative was evident in staff and SENCos who discussed the support that they felt parents needed from continued involvement of services. It appeared that the absence of these professionals left school staff feeling that responsibility for supporting the child and family lay with them, and that this placed pressure upon them to offer support which was beyond their perceived remit. For example, guidance on parenting was regularly referenced by staff. Furthermore, Gore-Langton (2017) and Rushton (2004) highlight how adoptive parents can be wary of judgement and scrutiny from services such as social care and hence this reflects the need for parental autonomy in the involvement of services. Thus, whilst both parents and school staff identify the importance of

other professionals' involvement, this appeared to reflect different functions. For parents, other professionals appeared to offer empowerment within the partnership, whilst for school staff professionals were viewed as offering support to families which they felt unable to offer themselves (thus sharing the responsibility). A key implication is highlighted that whilst broadening the partnership and involving other professionals serves a facilitating function, staff need to be mindful of parental autonomy in this process and that parents may view the professionals' contributions differently to themselves.

6.2: Limitations and Future Research

In presenting this research and the analysis above, I am mindful that adoptive parents, teachers of adoptive children and SENCos cannot be considered homogenous groups. Whilst this research does not set out to offer generalisations that can be extrapolated (e.g. as a reflection of all adoptive parents' partnership experiences), it is still important to reflect upon the nature of the participants and the context of these findings to allow consideration of their transferability (Firestone, 1993). Taking parents as an example, whilst a variety of approaches was utilised to reach a broad range of parents, I noticed that parents interviewed had all experienced significant challenges with their school partnerships and all had children who were in the latter stages of their educational career. Arguably, the nature of volunteer sampling approaches is that it recruits those who have a vested interest in the topic of study (Rosenthal, 1965) and so parents who had had more positive experiences with schools were less likely to volunteer. Whilst acknowledging this limitation, I also identify that all parents were able to reflect on positive experiences and hence both barriers and facilitating factors within partnership were discussed. I also note the value of each individual's rich experience, in line with my ontological view that we each construe our own narrative and hence the stories gathered in this research are as valuable as others. Given the sparsity of research regarding adoptive parents' experiences of partnership, future research may seek to gain a broader range of experiences from adoptive parents in order to further explore the themes generated in this research.

Participants broadly reflected positively on the interview questions during the debrief. Several parents reflected on how it had been interesting to reflect upon their experiences in line with Hart's (1997) model and, upon reflection, I realise that it would be valuable to have incorporated questions regarding how useful Hart's Ladder offered a helpful framework for parents in understanding and improving their experiences. I became aware that I made the assumption that Hart's Ladder would be useful when exploring partnerships (based upon the suggestion made by Langton & Boy, 2017). Upon reflection it may have been pertinent to also explore the value of this model itself with adoptive parents, as well as exploring how parents relate their experiences to it. Future research may seek to explore this in order to consider how the model could be useful to parents, or to empower partnership.

I also acknowledge the challenge of ensuring the quality of data analysis within small-scale qualitative research such as this. Whilst I recognise the value in member-checking as a means of guarding against misinterpretation and misrepresentation of views (outlined by Braun & Clark, 2013), I was also mindful of some of the challenges with such an approach, given the practical and time constraints around the research and my relativist ontological stance. For example, how to respond to participant feedback; the balance between merely representing participant data and the role for interpretation (McLeod, 2001; Taylor, 2001). A particular challenge of using member-checking within my research was the time constraints around the project which meant that it was not possible to also arrange for a second meeting with participants to allow for a face-to-face discussion of the analyses. With this in mind, I decided to utilise member-checking with staff participants by providing the opportunity to reflect and feedback on my analysis via email (where thematic maps were shared via email and feedback provided by email).

This approach was appropriate for staff participants, however, I decided not to use such an approach with parents. I made this decision reflecting upon the emotional connection that participants would have with the data, assuming that parents would be more emotionally invested in and sensitive to the analyses than staff participants. For example, themes such as "not being wanted" may

evoke strong responses and hence I decided that member-checking with parents could only have been completed through face-to-face conversations, which would allow for sensitive explanation and reflection on the themes. As mentioned, the time constraints around this project (and the limitations placed upon participants' own availability) meant that such face-to-face meetings were not possible and since I deemed indirect (email) feedback measures not to be appropriate for these participants, it was not possible to gain feedback from parents about these analyses. Feedback was however, sought from EPs (who work with adoptive families regularly within their role) who offered feedback on the credibility (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992) in relation to whether the themes created reflected the coded data and also reflected their experiences of parents' views. Future research conducted over a broader timescale could seek to adopt a more participatory approach to the data analysis, building in time for cycles of review based on participants' involvement, in order to further strengthen credibility.

Within Phase Two, SENCos' suggestions regarding how partnership practice with adoptive parents could be improved were explored. This offered useful insights, in the absence of existing literature, and highlighted implications at staff, school and local authority level. Future research might seek to explore how such suggestions might be implemented with regard to resourcing, policies etc. Indeed, longitudinal research may aim to consider the implementation and outcomes of changes to practice in schools.

Suggestions for future research are highlighted above within the context of the limitations of this study. In addition, I am mindful of the need for future research to explore views and practices of senior leaders in school, who have significant influence in the culture of, and approach to, partnership practices within schools (e.g. Bauch & Goldring, 1998; Lewis & Forman, 2002). Furthermore, given the emerging role of the DT for Post LAC, future research may seek to explore how these staff (following the training referenced by DfE, 2018) view and approach partnership working with adoptive parents. An evaluation of this training with a focus upon partnership practice would also be of interest, to consider how staff are guided in this role.

6.3: Re-visiting my Positionality

Before considering key implications and conclusions from my research, I reflect again upon my positionality and personal interest in this research. At the outset, I identified myself as a prospective adoptive parent and how I anticipated that this may influence the interpretations which I drew. I remained curious and utilised approaches to facilitate this e.g. bottom-up approaches to coding transcripts. However, I must acknowledge how my values and beliefs will naturally have shaped my analysis and interpretation of the data, and that another researcher could have presented somewhat different themes. Although, given my ontological and epistemological beliefs, I do not view this as a limitation of the research: indeed "qualitative research emphasises that we see things from a perspective" (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.11) and is, by its nature, subjective. In response to this awareness, I have attempted to be mindful and reflexive throughout the research, particularly considering personal reflexiveness (Wilkinson, 1988), as "part of the data is the researcher (myself)" Richards (2005, p. 42). As such, I made myself visible within the research to emphasise my central role in the production of this knowledge and to reflect that this is my own perspective, in alignment with my values and interests (Elliott, Fischer & Rennie, 1999).

6.4: Significance of the Study

The findings from this research have offered further insight into adoptive parents' experiences of home-school partnership, adding to the sparse extant literature. The findings I have presented have highlighted how parents perceive their partnership experience in line with Hart's Ladder (1997), highlighting the potential use of such a tool, an implication for future research. The findings also offer further insight into the barriers and facilitators adoptive parents perceive in home-school partnership. Secondly, school staff's views of partnership with adoptive parents (and how this can be developed) has very rarely been explored and so this research offers an initial insight into staff perceptions and establishes a framework of themes, which future research can develop upon. In this way, the research presented here has offered new understandings of the

home-school partnership experience, where a gap was clearly evident and provides some key themes which organise and explain these experiences.

6.5: Implications for Practice

The findings outlined and discussed in this research highlight several implications for home-school partnership practice with adoptive parents. Implications for school practices have been highlighted and discussed as part of the research by SENCos within phase two, as such, I focus here on key implications for EPs and the local authority in supporting partnership.

6.5.1: Understanding of adoption.

At all stages of this research, a lack of comprehensive, consistent understanding of adoption was highlighted by parents, staff and SENCos. This related to understanding of the enduring effects of early adverse experiences; the contemporary nature of adoption; as well as the challenges faced by parents. A key implication is the need to raise the profile of adopted children in school and up-skill the school workforce in relation to their understanding and skillset surrounding the needs of these children. Furthermore, there is a need to challenge the myths regarding adoption to which parents referred. Literature highlights that EPs are well placed to support this goal through training, consultation and ongoing supervision (Gore-Langton, 2017; Syne et al., 2012). For example, training around the needs of adopted children and impacts associated with early trauma; systemic-level consultation in school to guide practice by supporting understanding; and ongoing staff supervision to explore needs and support practice.

6.5.2: Support for staff in developing partnership practice.

The findings discussed (particularly focussing on school staff interviews) highlight a need to support staff in developing positive partnership practice. EPs are well placed to do so by developing staff efficacy and skills (Pelco & Ries, 1999) to empower them to develop positive partnership practices. Drawing upon the findings from this research, EPs are well placed to support staff by:

i.   Modelling and guiding communication approaches and skills (noted as a core EP skillset by Cameron, 2006).

ii.   Offering consultation and supervision to staff (Gore-Langton, 2017).

iii. Advocating for the value and positive impact of partnership with adoptive parents (Christenson, 2004).

iv.   Advising on whole-school policies and resources which adapt these partnership processes to be more "adoption friendly" (Langton & Boy, 2018), so that staff can draw upon this.

6.5.3: Advocating for parents within the partnership.

EPs work within systems collaboratively with both staff and parents, and have a responsibility to advocate for parents. EPs are also noted by Holland (1996) to be well placed to support other professionals in understanding parents' needs. My findings contribute to this assertion and highlight the need for EPs to take a holistic and eco-systemic approach when considering the challenges and needs of adoptive parents, in order to facilitate positive working experiences with staff. EPs are well placed to help school staff to consider the perception of parents, and indeed support parents to consider the views of staff, which is offered by these findings. Certainly, this is consistent with Cameron (2006) who identifies that part of EPs' distinctive contribution lies in the ability to understand and reconcile different views.

6.5.4: The Educational Plan for Adopted Children (EPAC).

A key implication from the second phase of the research came from the finding that SENCos were not aware of the EPAC (Syne et al. 2012) and how it could be used to provide the protection, accountability and strategic planning which SENCos identified as needed. The EPAC is detailed and available through the virtual school within this local authority, but my findings would imply that there is a lack of awareness of the EPAC. As such, there is a need, at a local authority level, to adopt approaches to make schools and families aware of the EPAC and to create best practice guidelines regarding its use. Furthermore, this highlights a need for professionals such as EPs to be aware of and advocating for the use of the EPAC within their roles.

6.5.5: The emerging role of the Designated Teacher for previously LAC.

This research offers implications for the development of the new role of DT for previously LAC. Introduced in the Children and Social Work Act (2017), it is identified that individuals undertaking this role require training so that they can support these CYP and be a supportive link for parents. Within this context, my research highlights the need to (i) raise awareness of and train staff in the needs of adopted children (as highlighted above); and (ii) develop awareness of the parental experience of home-school partnership, so that DTs are well informed and can appreciate parental viewpoints in collaborative work. EPs appear well-placed to support on both aspects and as such, work collaboratively with Virtual Schools to shape the emerging role of DT for PLAC (Gore-Langton, 2017).

6.6: Conclusion

Building on the sparse literature regarding home-school partnership experiences of adoptive parents, my findings from this research offer insight into the nature of these experiences. This research has shown how parents perceive a range of partnership experiences in line with Hart's Ladder (1997) and how partnership is viewed to vary and require significant parent input. Hart's Ladder was established as a framework to which parents could relate their experiences, and from this, I argue that further research into how it may be of value to parents and staff would be beneficial.

This research has identified a wide range of factors which influence the partnership experience from both parents' and school staff's perspectives (which in itself highlights implications for improving partnership practice by making these factors explicit). It is apparent that there are some commonalities in the views of staff and parents e.g. the lack of understanding of adoption and need for broader support (as highlighted above), but also that many experiences noted by parents were not reflected in the views of school staff or

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anticipated by SENCos. For example, affective factors, such as feeling as though they are `unwanted` or `difficult` were not anticipated. Furthermore, narratives around these factors highlighted the differing perceptions around how partnerships operated, that were constructed by school staff and parents. For example, parents' view of school inaction and themselves needing to drive the partnership is contrasted with staff perceptions that adoptive parents have heightened anxiety and greater expectations. In this way, partnership experiences (and the factors influencing these) were constructed differently by parents and staff. The thematic maps produced provides a means of organising these perceived barriers and facilitators and offer a framework for understanding parent and staff views, and can act as a basis for further research.

SENCos identified a range of needs and challenges which adoptive parents might experience when working in partnership with school staff, much of which was consistent with parents' reported experience. However, as is highlighted above, some of the more nuanced and affective barriers/experiences were not anticipated by SENCos who appeared to be more focussed upon tangible and practical experiences. Thus, I would argue that school partnership practice (at least within this study's sample) is currently founded upon an incomplete appreciation of the needs and views of adoptive parents. This may then lead to some of the negative experiences and barriers that parents identified in phase one and the underlying need for (as several SENCos identified) training around parents' views and needs when working with school staff. Furthermore, whilst SENCos felt that they and their staff were able to meet many of the needs that they anticipated parents would have, my findings cast some doubt over the consistency of, and understanding behind, such practice. Indeed, one likely interpretation from this research was the gap between SENCos' espoused theory and theory in practice with regard to supporting and meeting these needs.

Finally, SENCos identified various ways in which partnership experiences with adoptive families could be improved and generated suggestions that fit broadly within a framework of improved practices at (i) a school level; (ii) broader

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professional level; and (iii) local authority level. This reflected the need for consideration of practice across different levels of the system, in line with Bronfenbrenner's eco-systemic model (1979). Suggestions offered reflected a need for broader promotion of systems such as the EPAC, which is already established and would reflect some of the suggestions made by SENCos, as well as highlighting implications for policy and training at a school and broader local authority level. The range of suggestions demonstrated reflection on the views of parents and highlighted an optimism regarding how practice might be developed. The suggestions highlighted by SENCos and findings raised through this research, have key implications for the development of the new role of DT for Post LAC, with regard to the training that these post-holders will need to fulfil this role.

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Appendix 1: Phase one information sheet sent to parents

<u>Understanding and developing partnership between adoptive parents and school staff</u>

<u>Information sheet for parents:</u>

Dear Parent(s)

I am a trainee educational psychologist carrying out a piece of research investigating parent-school working relationship/ partnership experiences, I would like to invite you to take part in my research. The project aims to explore the experience of partnership between adoptive parents and schools in order to investigate factors that support and act as barriers to collaborative working. The project involves 2 stages. Stage one will involve individual interviews with parents and school staff (who have experience working with/ or responsibility for adopted children and families) about their experiences of home-school partnership. You would then be invited to stage 2, which involves a focus group of adoptive parents. The aim of the focus group is to design a training/development resource which can be delivered in schools to reflect on and develop partnership practice. There will be a similar focus group of school staff who will also be asked to input into the resource. It is not the intention for parents and teachers of the same child to be interviewed (however, it is possible that this could occur as a coincidence) and no personal information will be shared with schools.

What will the research involve? Stage 1 is an interview between parent/s and the researcher, which can be arranged at a convenient time and location. The interview will explore topics related to partnership and your experiences around this (for example, communication with school; decision making about child's education; respect and equality in the relationship etc). A full list of the question areas will be provided ahead of the interview so that you can consider if there are any areas you would prefer the researcher not to explore. Interviews are anticipated to last around one hour.

Stage 2: You will be invited to participate in the second stage of the research (of course there is no obligation to participate in this stage if you would prefer to only be involved in the interviews). A focus group of adoptive parents will be held to consider how partnership experiences could be improved between home and schools. These ideas will be used to develop a training resource (e.g. a presentation) which an educational psychologist could deliver to schools to reflect on and develop their practices around partnerships with adoptive families.

Anonymity: Information you provide will remain anonymous at all times and comments you share will not be disclosed to schools. In writing up the research, themes will be identified from across the interviews and with your consent, anonymised quotations will be used to illustrate the points. These themes will also be used to guide the focus group discussions.

Data protection: The information provided will be used for research purposes and personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transferred onto an encrypted memory stick storage device. Voice data will be kept for transcription purposes on an encrypted storage device, these transcriptions will also be stored on the encrypted memory stick. Voice data will be deleted within 18 months, it will be retained for up to 18 months in case further analysis of the original interview is needed.

The researcher: This research project is being conducted by a trainee educational psychologist as part of their doctoral training programme. The researcher receives supervision from university research supervisors and all aspects of the study have been considered and approved by the University of Exeter's Ethics Board.

Participation and further information:

If you would be interested in participating in the research and/or would like to know more about the research please contact Adam Lewis-Cole (Researcher)

email: xxxxxxxx

Contact details for research supervisor: xxxxxxxx

Appendix 2: Phase one information sheet sent to school staff

Research Project: Information sheet for school staff

Understanding and developing partnership between adoptive parents and school staff

I would like to invite you to participate in a piece of research investigating adoptive parent-school working relationship/ partnership experiences. The project aims to explore the experience of partnership between adoptive parents and schools in order to investigate factors that support and act as barriers to collaborative working. The project involves 2 stages. Stage one involves individual interviews with adoptive parents and school staff (who have experience working with/ or responsibility for adopted children and families) about their experiences of home-school partnership. You would then be invited to stage 2, which involves a focus group of members of school staff. The aim of the focus group is to contribute to a training/development resource which can be delivered in schools to reflect on and develop partnership practice. There will be a separate, similar focus group of adoptive parents who will also be asked to input into the resource. It is not the intention for parents and teachers of the same child to be interviewed (however, it is possible that this could occur as a coincidence) and no personal information will be shared with families. If you work in school (in any capacity) and have experience working with/ responsibility for adoptive children and families I would love to hear from you.

What will the research involve? Stage 1 is an interview between yourself and the researcher, which can be arranged at a mutually convenient time and location. The interview will explore topics related to partnership and your experiences around this (for example, communication with families; decision making etc). A full list of the question areas will be provided ahead of the interview so that you can consider if there are any areas you would prefer not to discuss. Interviews are anticipated to last around one hour and will be audio recorded.

Stage 2: You will be invited to participate in the second stage of the research (of course there is no obligation to participate in this stage if you would prefer to only be involved in the interviews). A focus group of staff from schools will be held to consider how partnership experiences could be improved between home and schools. These ideas will be used to develop a training/development resource (e.g. a presentation) which an educational psychologist could deliver to schools to reflect on and develop partnership practices with adoptive families.

Anonymity: Information you provide will remain anonymous at all times and comments you share will not be disclosed. In writing-up the research, themes will be identified from across the interviews and with your consent, anonymised quotations will be used to illustrate the points. These themes will also be used to guide the focus group discussions.

Data protection: The information provided will be used for research purposes and personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

The researcher: This research project is being conducted by a trainee educational psychologist as part of their doctoral training programme. The researcher receives supervision from university research supervisors and all aspects of the study have been considered and approved by the University of Exeter's Ethics Board.

Participation and further information:

Thank you for reading. If you have experience working with/responsibility for adopted children/families and would be willing to participate in the research, or would like to know more about the research, please contact Adam Lewis-Cole (Researcher)

email: xxxxxxxxxxxx   tel: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Contact details of research supervisor: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix 3: SENCo information sheet for phase two

Improving Partnership practices with adoptive families

I would like to invite you to participate in a piece of research investigating the home-school partnership experiences for adoptive parents and staff working with them. The project aims to explore the experience of partnership between adoptive parents and schools in order to investigate factors that support and act as barriers to collaborative working. This is the second phase of the research and is focussed on how partnership practice and experiences between schools and adoptive families can be improved and developed. Phase one (already carried out) has explored the experiences of home-school partnership from a sample of adoptive parents and a sample of teachers, the findings from this research will be used to guide aspects of the interview. If you are a SENCo and would be willing to take part in a research interview I would like to hear from you.

What's involved: The research will consist of an interview between yourself and the researcher. The interview will aim to explore how partnership practices between schools and adoptive families can be improved. As part of this, a summary of key findings from the first phase of the research (regarding adoptive parents' and teachers' experiences of partnership) will be shared and discussed in order to consider where and how partnership practice and experiences might be developed. It is anticipated that interviews will last between 30 and 60 minutes.

Anonymity: Information you provide will remain anonymous at all times. In writing up the research, themes will be identified from the discussion and with your consent, anonymised quotations will be used to illustrate the points.

Data protection: Interviews will be audio recorded and transcribed. The information provided will be used for research purposes and personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Personal data will be treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Participation and further information:

If you would be interested in participating in the research and/or would like to know more about the research please contact Adam Lewis-Cole (Researcher)

email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix 4: Interviews design process: concept map (the adoptive parent interview)

The development of the interview agenda has been guided by the stages outlined by Tomlinson (1989): (1) initial analysis of topic domain; (2) determining interview focus; (3) constructing interview agenda; (4) interview procedure.

(1) Initial analysis of topic domain: This stage involved the researcher drawing upon the relevant literature and their own construal of the topic to develop a concept map of the topic area under investigation (as guided by the research questions). This map makes clear the hierarchical links between super-ordinate and sub-ordinate components. Several over-arching superordinate themes were identified. Firstly `experience in relation to features of partnership` - this theme reflects the key features eluded to in the literature as central to the concept of parent-school partnership and is included because it provides the opportunity to elicit respondents' views and experiences across these features. Secondly, `views on facilitators and barriers to partnership experience` - this theme reflects the variety of factors which influence the experiences of partnership (either, positively or negatively). It is included because it provides the opportunity to ascertain what is perceived by respondents to be affecting their experience of partnership. Finally, a theme of `views on the perceived impact of partnership on child/YP` was identified – this theme reflects the body of evidence supporting the parent-school partnership as a significant influence over outcomes in school REFS) and provides the opportunity to ascertain respondents' perceptions of these.

(2) Determining interview focus: Tomlinson (1989) highlights that having drawn out a conceptual map of the topic area, the second phase involves identifying which areas are of particular relevance to the given research aims (given the practical constraints meaning that investigating every

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aspect of the map may not be possible). Based upon the research aims/ questions and given the methodological stance adopted, several aspects of the map were identified to be left out of the interview agenda (with de-selected items marked with an Asterix and shown in italics below).

There were no items removed from the first theme, `experiences of partnership`, the sub-ordinate themes which reflect the components of partnership were deemed as necessary prompts to ensure coverage of the research question (establishing experiences of partnership) especially given the ambiguity of the term partnership. Furthermore, the initial question still allows for exploration of the term as perceived by respondents prior to using such prompts. Within the theme of `facilitators and barriers` two themes at the 3rd level were removed (child factors and practical factors). This was decided as `child factors ` were, based on the literature, deemed more relevant to determining parental involvement rather than partnership.   Practical factors were removed as, given the literature review, they were not identified as being more relevant to partnership than for non-adoptive parents. Finally, the decision was taken to remove all of the themes at the 4th level within this theme of `facilitator and barriers`. This decision was taken in line with the aim of this phase of the research (to establish respondents' perceptions of facilitators and barriers to partnership), inclusion of the prompts at the 4th level would risk leading the respondents to simply confirm facilitators and barriers highlighted in the literature and would be at odds with the interpretivist paradigm. Prompts at the 3rd level were retained due to their breadth of interpretation and potential to prompt further spontaneous discussion from respondents.

Constructing the interview agenda: This stage involves moving from the concepts and constructs identified through the first two stages to questions and prompts that can be posed to respondents. This is shown in figure X below. At this point a further question was generated to conclude the questions around facilitators and barriers to partnership practice; a question asking respondents

how they felt partnership practice could be improved was included. This was included as providing another opportunity to establish key facilitators of partnership practice, tapping the concept through a different route.

Initial Domain Analysis (1) and determining of domain focus (2) *items with * and italics text were removed at stage 2:*

1st level	2nd level	3rd level	4th level
Understanding and nature of partnership experiences and perceptions			
	Understanding and conception of partnership		
	Experiences in relation to features of partnership:		
		Decision-making	
			Curriculum issues
			Non-curriculum issues
		Communication	
			School to parents
			When parents want to contact school
			Means of communication
			Language use
	.	Recognition of skills	
			Trauma specific knowledge and skills
		Equality and respect	
			Equality of voices of school and home.

			School expectations and narratives
	Views on facilitators and barriers to partnership		
		Parent-teacher relationship/interaction factors	
			Power, conflict and blame
			Differing viewpoints on child's needs
			Communication and language
		Teacher factors	
			Teachers' views on parental involvement
			Teachers' understanding of adoption
			Curriculum issues
		School factors	
			School climate
			School community
			Involvement and engagement programs
		Parent & family factors	
			Parental perception of role
			Parental perception of skills
			Social support
			Socioeconomic factors
		Child factors	

			Age
			SEND
		Practical factors	
			Time constraints
		Societal factors	
			Stigma
	Views on the impact of perceived partnership on child		
		Academic	
		Social and emotional	

Figure 2: Interview Agenda (3)

1. What does the concept of partnership mean to you (in relation to home-school partnerships			
2. I'd like to ask you about your own experiences of partnership with your child's school/s, could			

you tell me about this?			
	Prompts: There are some key features of partnerships, could I ask you about your experiences in relation to: Decision-making		
		Curriculum issues	
		Non-curriculum issues	
	Communication		
		School to parents	
		Parents to school	
		Means of communication	
		Language use	
	Recognition of skills.		
		Trauma specific knowledge and skills	
	Equality and respect		
		Equality of voices of school and home.	
		School expectations and narratives	
3. I'd like to ask you about your views on the barriers to and			

facilitators of partnership and collaboration. Could you tell me about you experiences of and views on what helps and what prevents partnership?			
	Parent-teacher relationship factors (how you and your child's teacher interact, communicate etc)		
	Teacher factors (specific factors related to teachers)		
	School factors (specific aspects of the school)		
	Parent/family factors (specific aspects related to yourself and family)		
	Wider societal factors		
4. Given your experiences and what we have discussed, how would you advise that partnership could be improved?			
5. Finally, is there			

anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed about partnership experiences?			

Appendix 5: Reflections from phase one pilot interviews with parents and staff.

Teacher Interview Pilots:

Pilot school staff participants (who had experience of teaching adopted children in recent years) took part in pilot interviews. The interview was administered as per the initial schedule and afterwards, feedback was elicited regarding the questions and whether there was any information the participant had that was relevant to the research, but was not `tapped` by the questions.

The pilot highlighted a concern around Section 2 (questions exploring barriers and facilitators to partnership). Whilst there is little research in the literature highlighting expected responses from staff, the respondent appeared to find these questions difficult to answer. Furthermore, in the discussion after the interview it became apparent that there were other barriers and facilitators that the participant had experienced, but that these had not been tapped by the question. The participant noted that these questions were more difficult to consider answers to, largely due to asking simultaneously about barriers and facilitators. As I had noticed during the interview that this question was not eliciting the sort of information that I had anticipated, I added in a final question "can you tell me about any negative or difficult experience that you have had working with adoptive families?" This question elicited greater detail of barriers that were not drawn out by the original question, afterwards the respondent discussed how this helped her to isolate a specific family and specific challenge which she had otherwise not considered. Consequently the interview schedule was re-designed to ask separately about barriers and then about facilitators. At the beginning of the barriers question, participants would be asked about specific difficult/challenging experiences (since this provided a great deal of data in the pilot) before using the prompts to further elicit barriers. The same approach was adopted towards the facilitators questions. The second pilot participant was able to answer the questions more fully and reported at the end of the interview that there was nothing that he felt the questions had failed to

draw from him. As such this same design change was also applied to the parent interview design.

Parent Interview Pilots:

Two pilot parent interviews were conducted with adoptive parents, whom were known to the researcher and willing to participate in the pilot stage. Several key issues emerged from these pilots which led to adaptations to the interview questions:

- The first pilot participant highlighted a difficulty with a particular question which they suggested could be reworded. In the questions asking about barriers and facilitators to partnership, one of the prompts was "school factors (specific aspects of school)", the participant found this hard to respond to explaining that "they did not know what was meant by it". Through discussion with this participant, I shared ideas as to what I imagined this question might elicit and the participant gave suggestions about how the prompt might be re-worded. The re-worded question was School factors (processes, how the school operates as an organisation and how welcoming they are etc). This was tested in the second pilot interview, where participants were able to give responses that reflected the aim of the questions and did not identify any particular concerns with this question.

- The second pilot study highlighted a second issue with a specific question. In the same section (asking about facilitators and barriers), one of the prompts was "parent/family factors (specific aspects related to yourself and family)". The participants interpreted this to mean other parents and families and found this difficult to answer. This highlighted to me that I would need to make it clear that this question was asking about themselves as parents/family. Consequently I developed a script that I used around this question: "This is quite a reflective question as it is asking directly about you/ your family…"

The participants in the second pilot interview commented that they felt they may have repeated themselves when reflecting on the interview questions. From

this, I reviewed the recording of the interview and the comments that were made. There were indeed several points/responses that came up in response to section 1 (questions about experiences) and question 2 (questions about barriers and facilitators). However, what was apparent was that in section 2 questions a considerable amount of new information was given from the participants which had not been provided in section 1. I drew two conclusions from this. The first was the implication that respondents could feel as though they are repeating themselves and need to be made aware that this could be the case in some questions and that they need not repeat information already given, but could consider any further thoughts. Secondly, that it was important not to change or condense the interview since each section seemed to offer a route into the concept under investigations (factors influencing partnership), but through different angles hence providing a richer dataset.

Appendix 6: Parent interview schedule (phase one)

1. What does the concept of partnership mean to you (in relation to home-school partnerships)			
2. I'd like to understand your own experiences of partnership with your child's school/s, could you tell me about this?			
	Prompts: There are some key features of partnerships, could I ask you about your experiences in relation to: Decision-making		
		Curriculum issues	
		Non-curriculum issues	
	Communication		
		School to parents	
		Parents to school	

		Means of communication	
		Language use	
	Recognition of skills that adoptive parents bring.		
		Trauma specific knowledge and skills	
	Equality and respect		
		Equality of voices of school and home.	
		School expectations and narratives	
3. I'd like to share this model of partnership with you and ask you to reflect on your experiences and whether any feature/s of this model reflect your experiences.			
4.a. Have there been any particularly difficult or challenging experiences working with school?			

4.b. Have you experienced any other difficulties/ barriers in relation to working with adoptive parents?			
	Parent-teacher relationship factors (how you and your child's teacher interact, communicate etc)		
	School factors (processes, how the school operates as an organisation and how welcoming they are etc)		
	Teacher factors (specific factors related to teachers)		
	Parent/family factors (specific aspects related to yourself and family)		
	Wider societal factors		
4. c. Thinking about what we have discussed, have any of			

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these issues impacted your child (e.g. progress, behaviour etc)? if so, how?			
5. a. Have there been any particularly positive or successful experiences working with school?			
5.b. Have you experienced any other facilitators/factors that have been helpful in working together with school?			
	Parent-teacher relationship factors (how you and your		

	child's teacher interact, communicate etc)		
	Teacher factors (specific factors related to teachers)		
	School factors (processes, how the school operates as an organisation and how welcoming they are etc)		
	Parent/family factors (specific aspects related to yourself and family)		
	Wider societal factors		
5.c. Thinking about what we have discussed, have any of these issues impacted your child (e.g. progress, behaviour etc)? if so, how?			
6. Given your experiences and what we have discussed, how would you			

advise that partnership could be improved?			
7. Finally, is there anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed about partnership experiences?			

Appendix 7: School Staff Interview schedule

1. What does the concept of partnership mean to you (in relation to home-school partnerships)			
2. In relation to the adopted child/children you have worked with, I'd like to ask you about your own experiences of partnership with the family.			
	Prompts: There are some key features of partnerships, could I ask you about your experiences in relation to: Decision-making		
		Curriculum issues	
		Non-curriculum issues	
	Communication		
		School to parents	

		Parents to school	
		Means of communication	
		Language use	
	Recognition of skills that both school and parents bring.		
		Trauma specific knowledge and skills	
	Equality and respect		
		Equality of voices of school and home.	
		School expectations and narratives	
3.a. Have there been any particularly difficult or challenging experiences working with adoptive parent/ families?			
3.b. Have you experienced any other difficulties/ barriers in relation to working with adoptive parents?			

	Parent-teacher relationship factors (how you and the child's parents interact, communicate etc)		
	School factors ((processes, how the school operates as an organisation and how welcoming they are etc)		
	Teacher/staff factors (specific factors related to teachers/staff)		
	Parent/family factors (specific aspects related to parents and family)		
	Wider societal factors		
4.a. Have there been any particularly positive or successful experiences working with adoptive parent/ families?			
4.b. Have you experienced any other facilitators/factors that have been helpful in working together with			

adoptive parents?			
	Parent-teacher relationship factors (how you and the child's parents interact, communicate etc)		
	School factors		
	Teacher/staff factors (specific factors related to teachers/staff)		
	Parent/family factors (specific aspects related to parents and family)		
	Wider societal factors		
Given what we have discussed, how do you think partnership practices between adoptive parent and schools can be improved?			

Appendix 8: Initial Interview design, pre-pilot for SENCos in Phase 2

Question	Prompts/explanations	Notes
Do you think the needs of adoptive parents are different to those of other parents? If so, how?		
	- Particular examples from supporting adoptive families you have worked with	
SHARING FINDINGS FROM PHASE ONE		
Instructions: In phase one, I conducted interviews with adoptive parents exploring their experiences of partnership and factors that they felt influenced partnership. I would like to share those findings with you now on this A4 sheet. Please have a look at these factors and consider if they are surprising to you. Please highlight any that are surprising/ unexpected to you.		
Please can you explain why these ones were surprising to you		
	- Rogerian prompts to encourage expansion.	
How do you think partnership practices with adoptive parents can be improved?		
	- Anything in particular in response to the findings that I presented in the last question? - How might you want to change your own practice now?	

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Appendix 9: Reflections from phase two pilot interviews with SENCos.

Based upon the pilot several revisions were made to the interview design. Firstly, additional prompts were added to some questions in order to clarify the meaning of the question (based upon pilot participant feedback). For example the initial questions which asks interviewees whether they view the needs of adoptive parents as different to those of others did not produce much data from the pilot interviewee initially, (they also commented at the end of the interview that they weren't sure how to respond to this question), through discussion with the pilot participant several prompts were constructed to be added to this question which would provide clarity/alternative ways to access this information e.g. "Are their concerns/ questions different to other parents, or not?" and "do you find in your role that you need to offer more or different support to them as parents?"

A second revision concerned Research Question 5, where interviewees were asked to consider the themes from phase 1 findings and discuss any surprising findings. In the initial design this was completed via participants viewing an A4 sheet of the findings and highlighting the issues for discussion. The pilot participant reported that he found it difficult to consider "in detail" each factor when they are all visually presented together and I noticed that it appeared to lead to the participant `skim reading` over the last factors. Furthermore, when discussing those he had highlighted as surprising, he appeared to be distracted by the statements above and below the one of interest and lots of prompts were needed to focus the discussion. The pilot participant also felt that there needed to be a middle ground for findings that were somewhat surprising to him.

In discussion with the participant he felt that it would be easier to process and make a decision about each finding in isolation and as such a card sort activity was generated in response. respondents would view each finding one at a time and categorise into 3 piles "surprising"; "Somewhat surprising" and "not surprising". By generating a card sort, I also felt that participants would need to make a decision (of some description) regarding each statement, this potentially helps to overcome the issue that when reading from a sheet of paper, participants may have paid less attention to some factors.

Appendix 10: Post-Pilot Interview Schedule for SENCos

Question	Prompts/explanations	Notes
Do you think the needs of adoptive parents are different to those of other parents? If so, how?		
	In terms of: - Support needed from school? - Concerns they have? - Any different practice from school? - Elicit examples	
What do you think the key challenges are for adoptive parents in terms of working with schools?		
	- What challenges do you think parents may have highlighted in phase 1?	
CARD SORT ACTIVITY		
Instructions: In phase one, I conducted interviews with adoptive parents exploring their experiences of partnership and factors that they felt influenced partnership. I would like to share those findings with you now. Each factor is presented on a card and I'd like you to sort the cards according to your response to each factors. Please consider if each factor is something you would have anticipated o is surprising; you could sort them into 3 pies (very surprising, somewhat surprising; not surprising/expected).		
Could you explain why you were surprised by each factor in the very surprising pile? Could you explain why you were surprised by each factor in the somewhat surprising pile?	- What in particular is surprising about this? Can you illustrate with an example? - Rogerian prompts to encourage expansion.	

Looking at these findings and drawing on your own experiences, in what ways do you think partnership practices could be improved?		
	Anything that is: - Needed - Missing currently - Needs to be changed - Reflecting on the factors in the card sort, is there anything that can be developed/changed to improve this? - From the research, is there anything that you would try to change in school to improve practice?	

Appendix 11: Card sort of factors influencing partnership (drawn from parent interviews in phase 1)

Understanding of Adoption Staff lack understanding of the impact of early trauma/experiences.	Understanding of Adoption There can be a lack of consistency within school (e.g. lack of communication between staff)	Understanding of Adoption The power of a diagnosis (e.g. the frustrations experienced where a lack of diagnosis can mean child's needs are not understood)	Understanding of Adoption Assumptions that parents' have knowledge of services and supports which they are unaware of.
Understanding of Adoption The beneficial support and influence of outside professionals and agencies (e.g. professionals coming to meetings).	Understanding of Adoption Schools having had experience of working with a range of different family structures and needs	Feeling Wanted Parents feeling as though they and/or their child was unimportant or unwanted by school.	Feeling Wanted Parents feeling as though they are perceived as difficult by school staff
Feeling Wanted Instances of conflict/ misunderstandings (e.g. parents experiencing defensiveness and describing a need to fight for child).	Feeling Wanted Motivations regarding funding e.g. lack of transparency around pupil premium spending.	Feeling Wanted Experiences of feeling that their child is cared about and that staff want to help	Feeling Respected Parents can feel a lack of belief or respect (parents often felt that their accounts were not believed by school).
Feeling Respected Absence of communication from school.	Feeling Respected Parents knowledge and skills not being recognised or utilised by schools	Feeling Respected Being heard (parents highlighted instances where they had felt listened to, believed and asked their thoughts)	Feeling Respected Specific collaborative activities e.g. joint decision-making or joint training.

Feeling Respected	Inaction and Compromise	Inaction and Compromise	Inaction and Compromise
Reciprocated and responsive communication	Perception of inaction in response to meetings, parental suggestions and the advice of professionals.	Lack of flexibility (e.g. in relation to curriculum; school policies)	Willingness to compromise and act (e.g. schools being proactive, as well as reaching mutual compromises with parents).
Inaction and Compromise Parental knowledge and persistence (parents being assertive, proactive and knowing rights etc)			

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CERTIFICATE OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

Title of Project: Understanding and developing partnership between adoptive parents and school staff

Researcher(s) name: Adam Lewis-Cole

Supervisor(s):   Andrew Richards
Chris Boyle

This project has been approved for the period

From: 14/03/2018
To: 30/07/2019

Ethics Committee approval reference:

D/17/18/29

Signature: Date: 05/03/2018
(Professor xx, Graduate School of Education Ethics Officer)

Appendix 13: Phase one briefing sheet (parent example)

Understanding and developing partnership between adoptive parents and school staff

Briefing sheet for parents:

Thank you for agreeing to take part in my research, I would like to begin by revisiting the information sheet together to ensure that you are aware of what the research will involve and how your participation will be used as well as your rights.

The project aims to explore the experience of partnership between adoptive parents and schools in order to investigate factors that support and act as barriers to collaborative working. The project involves 2 stages. Stage one will involve individual interviews with parents and school staff (who have experience working with/ or responsibility for adopted children and families) about their experiences of home-school partnership. You would then be invited to stage 2, which involves a focus group of adoptive parents. The aim of the focus group is to design a training/development resource which could be delivered in schools to reflect on and develop partnership practice. There will be a similar focus group of school staff who will also be asked to input into the resource. It is not the intention for parents and teachers of the same child to be interviewed (however, it is possible that this could occur as a coincidence) and no personal information will be shared with schools.

What's will this stage of the research involve? You are currently participating in stage 1. This will be an interview between parent/s and the researcher. The interview will explore topics related to partnership and your experiences around this (for example, communication with school; decision making about child's education; respect and equality in the relationship etc). A list of the question areas has been provided for you ahead of the interview so that you could consider if there are any areas you would prefer the researcher not to explore. Are there any questions from the list provided that you would prefer we not talk about? Interviews are anticipated to last around one hour, but you of course can stop the interview at any stage.

Right to Withdraw: You can pause or stop the interview at any point and have the right to withdraw at any Stage – You can withdraw your data after the interview has been completed if you wish and this can be done any time up until completion of the write-up of the research.

Anonymity: Information you provide will remain anonymous at all times and comments you share will not be disclosed to schools. In writing up the research, themes will be identified from across the interviews and with your consent, anonymised quotations will be used to illustrate the points. These themes will also be used to guide the focus group discussions. Confidentiality however would have to breached if concerns of a safeguarding nature were to be disclosed to the researcher which would need to be appropriately referred on. With your permission generic descriptive information e.g. age of child(ren)/ stage of school; family context etc may be included to provide context to the research and conclusions drawn.

Data protection: The information provided will be used for research purposes and personal data will be processed in accordance with current data protection legislation and the University's notification lodged at the Information Commissioner's Office. Personal data will be

treated in the strictest confidence and will not be disclosed to any unauthorised third parties. The results of the research will be published in anonymised form.

Interviews will be audio recorded and transferred onto an encrypted memory stick storage device. Voice data will be kept for transcription purposes on an encrypted storage device, these transcriptions will also be stored on the encrypted memory stick. Voice data will be deleted within 18 months, it will be retained for up to 18 months in case further analysis of the original interview is needed.

Data analysis: The information you provide will be used to answer the research questions related to understanding parents' experiences of partnership practice and experiences and perceptions of the barriers and facilitators of this. Key themes will be drawn from the transcriptions of the interviews that are conducted.

The researcher: This research project is being conducted by a trainee educational psychologist as part of their doctoral training programme. The researcher receives supervision from university research supervisors and all aspects of the study have been considered and approved by the University of Exeter's Ethics Board.

Participation and further information:

For further information and queries about the research please contact Adam Lewis-Cole (Researcher)

email: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Contact details for research supervisor: xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

_____

Consent:

Consent: I have read about the `**Understanding and developing partnership between adoptive parents and school staff**` project and understand the basis for my/our involvement and consent to take part. I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time:

Name:…………………………………………………………………………………………

Signature:……………………………………………………………………

Date:…………………………………………………

List of the broad questions that will be posed and discussed in the interview:

- What does the concept of partnership mean to you (in relation to home-school partnerships
- I'd like to ask you about your own experiences of partnership working with tour child/children's school, could you tell me about this?
- Could you think of any particularly difficult experiences/ times with your child's school
- I'd like to ask you about your views and experiences of barriers to partnership and working together with school. Could you tell me about your experiences of and views on what prevents partnership?
- Could you think of any particularly positive experiences/ times with your child's school
- I'd like to ask you about your views and experiences of facilitators to partnership and working together with school. Could you tell me about your experiences of and views on what enables partnership?
- Given your experiences and what we have discussed, how would you advise that partnership could be improved?

Appendix 14: Sample of a coded transcript for research question 2 (parents view of barriers and facilitators to partnership)

P: Primary school was quite smooth, we didn't start off with much communication, it wasn't felt it was needed. He is our only child and education has changed immensely from when we were at school, so both my son and myself were a bit like fish out of water because I didn't understand the system and he definitely didn't, so we floated along on our own. But as time went on there were some difficulties and there didn't seem to be a lot of understanding of why he'd do some of the things that he did. We asked for some assessments, but it was always declined. I think by the end, he got the impression, (adopted children are very good at picking up signals, especially negative and they hold onto it) I think he got the impression, and I did, that he was just seen as someone who couldn't be bothered and didn't want to follow the rules. Although communication got a bit better at the end of primary, it was too late then. I chose the primary school under recommendation, so I didn't look at any other schools but during his time there it merged with another school, which didn't help. Then we decided that we would make a big choice on secondary, we saw a variety, about seven, we told him he would have a choice in where to go, but as parents we needed to decide. We went for XXX school because there were not many people and it seemed very focussed on the individuals and was more relaxed and more flexible. His first year went OK, but in year 8 it didn't go so well, he hit puberty which is a difficult age anyway. We used to have regular meetings, but actually considering the school was supposedly person centred, I felt that as parents we weren't particularly listened to. I felt that we were making excuses and that the deputy of that school thought he could fix my child. It came across that he took him under his wing to mend him and that what we were saying… there would be a play with words. I might say "he gets very anxious" and he would say, "I would ask why he is anxious not that he is anxious", he would flip things. He has anxiety, it's a medical condition. That school ended because he voted with his feet and they couldn't cope with him, I was getting constant phone calls telling me to pick him up, he is being excluded and I was having to change my work.

Commented [PL1]: B: Parents lack knowledge of education/school system

Commented [PL2]: B: Staff lack knowledge/understanding of ACEs etc

Commented [PL3]: B: Requests for assessment declined

Commented [PL4]: B: Anxiety regarding child's wellbeing

Commented [PL5]: B: Feeling concerns are dismissed by staff

Commented [PL6]: F: Informed choice of school

Commented [PL7]: F: Flexibility with curriculum and systems

Commented [PL8]: B: Not being listened to

Commented [PL9]: B: Feeling of making excuses

Commented [PL10]: B: Staff portraying an expert role

Commented [PL11]: B: Not taking difficulties seriously

Commented [PL12]: B: Parent time and work pressures

I: Was that quite gradual or…

P: Quite quick, we asked for an assessment for dyslexia, we didn't have an EHCP and that wasn't put in place. It felt like if they asked for outside help they were deemed as… we kept asking for other help, but they would say they can deal with it, but they couldn't. it got to the point where he would hide in the basement under the stairs and in the end I thought what am I doing to him and his mental health. We were then stuck with what to do now. The school he goes to now, he originally refused to go to. I have to say that, it's not been an easy road, this is the only time I've ever *used* his adoption, I did use the adoption card to get him into the school because of the report that followed him. The new school said that if I wasn't for the fact that they had to, they would not have accepted him because of all of the

Commented [PL13]: B: Not having n EHCP
B: Request for assessments being declined

Commented [PL14]: B: Requests for assessment declined

Commented [PL15]: B: Anxiety regarding child's wellbeing

Commented [PL16]: F: Knowledge of the entitlements for adopted children
F:

previous exclusions, because the last school had written to say that his behaviour was violent, but they weren't really, it was fight or flight. That was a hurdle, he was going to a new school but they automatically had an image of him, we asked to see the report and the evidence for that, but it didn't come forward. So, he's at this school they have a special educational needs unit, he seemed to do alright, but as time went on his attendance got less and less, they introduced him on a partial timetable and he never went to his tutor class, he would just head to the SEN because it was small and quiet and he liked the lady there, but gradually he stopped going. They got him a TA and it had been hit and miss, but they got him a full time TA, she was good for him, he trusted her, he would shout for someone to get her if he was upset and she wasn't afraid of him when other teachers might have been. She understood him. She left and he got a TA that he didn't want. We are at the stage now that he is doing his mocks, he hasn't attended the school for over a year, but they have come to accept that now, rather than calling me to say that I have to get him in, it's the law.

Commented [PL17]: B: Impression that child is unwanted
B: Reports that follow child

Commented [PL18]: F: School providing support for child

Commented [PL19]: B: Large number of staff – lack of consistency

Commented [PL20]: F: Believing and accepting parents' accounts

Appendix 15: List of codes for research question 2 (part a) – Parents view of barriers affecting home-school partnership

B - Anxiety regarding child's wellbeing
B - Assumption that parents know about supports and services
B - Attitude and lack of understanding of other parents
B - Being ignored
B - Conflict and power issues
B - Contact staff are limited by leadership
B - Cost of supporting CYP
B - Defensiveness and anxiety of staff in response to parental queries
B – Dishonesty
B - dismissing parent knowledge
B - expectation to conform
B - feel alone in dealings with school
B - Generic rather than tailored approaches and paperwork
B - impression that A. CYP are rare and so not priority
B - Impression that child isn't wanted
B - Indirect communication, through CYP
B - Inflexibility in enforcing policies
B - Inflexible curriculum
B - Lack of diagnosis
B - lack of facilities or resources
B - lack of immediacy and responsiveness
B - lack of reparation to relationship
B - lack of therapeutic community
B - Large numbers of staff – consistency
B - Leadership uninvested
B - managing behaviour
B - Not acknowledging disability
B - Not being believed
B - not communicating within school
B - not involving parents in decisions
B - Not listening
B - Not listening over time
B - Not taking difficulties seriously
B - parent time and work pressures
B - Parental hopes and expectations which may be unrealistic
B - Parental stress and illness
B - Parents feeling hurt by school
B - parents focus on negative rather than positives
B - Parents going in to `fight`
B - Parents having to drive the partnership
B - Parents not confident with the school system or teaching child
B – parents' persistence and perceived as overbearing
B - Parents questioning things
B - Parents seen as defensive and making excuses
B - Pressures on schools
B - Reports that follow child
B - Requests for assessment declined
B - School fatigue - drifts off

B - school not fulfilling agreements
B - school not responding to suggestions
B - Societal view that children should achieve academically
B - Spending of PP+
B - staff assuming expert role
B - staff don't care to make extra effort
B - Staff lacking knowledge and understanding of attachment and trauma
B - Staff too busy to help, see parent as a problem
B - Targets limiting potential and investment in CYP
B - Teachers unaware how they may have affected the child e.g. body language

Appendix 16: Example of a table showing how initial codes were grouped to develop potential candidate themes. This table shows the candidate theme developed from parent interviews of `staff lacking understanding of adoption and the impact of early experiences`.

Candidate Theme	Staff lacking understanding of adoption and the impact of early experiences.			
Codes	Staff lack knowledge and understanding of attachment/ trauma	Expectation (on child) to conform	Managing behaviour	Generic rather than tailored approaches and paperwork
Coded Data	P1: It's really unhelpful that attachment theory and a trauma developed brain is not a recognised diagnosis and I feel that in training, students should be learning about attachment disorder and trauma, because it is not just specific to children who have gone into care P1: they will say that they do work in a PACE-y sort of way, but I don't see evidence of that myself, and a PACE-y kind of way is not the same, it's just `kind talking` P2: it was a teacher who obviously didn't know or read what is wrong and made her sit there and then couldn't understand why that was then not a good day. P2: I believe now that this is something that should be fully, *fully* put into training and continuous training. So I think for me the main difficulty has been the lack of, not all, but a good	P2: oh yes, but they've all got to grow up, this is life, we've got to face these things in life, they've got to get out there". P2: At secondary, it's more like they have to go in on their own and the partnership isn't there as much because you haven't got that contact, it's by email. You can email the teacher, so, not as great I don't think, partnership working with secondary. P3: school realising how some kids are and that you can't get a square	P1: It just wasn't set up with the things that my child needed and it couldn't be set up fast enough because his behaviour progressed so quickly and couldn't be managed. P4: He completely went off the rails, and we were talking with the teacher and he was labelled as a naughty child, because he didn't conform to their behaviour expectations. He'd be getting these points for little things like turning off someone's laptop, he was labelled as a naughty boy	P1: The risk assessment that I was given a copy of was appalling, there wasn't even a `how to manage a risk` in some places and we had to have a meeting about the risk assessment, the SENCo told me it was a generic risk assessment, it felt like they were making excuses, P1: Handling policies, when I asked to see a copy, I was given something generic and I thought this is not OK, it has nothing to do with my child

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	percentage, their lack of understanding of the difficulties and the subsequent effect that has on them in a school environment. P2: So, if I've gone to a meeting and it's me for example saying that the school bell could even be a trigger for her, them looking as if to say "really?" Meeting that lack of understanding can be very frustrating. P2: It's mostly the lack of understanding that can cause a massive negative. Why would people get it if they've never had an understanding of it? P2: So they can't recognise the triggers. "oh, they're just playing up, they're just having a bad day". P2: "oh yes, but they've all got to grow up, this is life, we've got to face these things in life, they've got to get out there". P4: The assumptions about what children know about themselves has hurt all of our children despite us saying they are adopted, I think it is a training need for school to help them think, adopted children don't actually know this. P4: the insecurities that the children have is maybe not recognised all the tim	peg in a round hole	P5: But if he is badly behaved as a result, which he will be because his anxiety has gone up, then there is no account taken to how this is due to the supply teachers, it just a detention. P5: The difference is one child is very volatile and the other is very compliant, both struggle with the same disability and diagnosis, but different approach to school	P3: We had ILPs, they were very contradictory from year to year, he needs this, he then was fine and suddenly was behind again, they weren't worth the paper they were written on.

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Appendix 17: Debrief example – copy of debrief provided to parents at the end of the interview

Phase 1 Debrief:

I would like to thank you for your participation in this research and for sharing your experiences and views. To draw the interview to a close I'd like to draw your attention again to your continuing rights as a participant.

Firstly, you retain the right to withdraw your information and interview from the research by contacting the researcher or research supervisor directly (you do not need to supply a reason to withdraw your information). You have the right to do this until the research is written and submitted. At this stage is there anything that we have talked about in the interview that you would like to be omitted? I will send you a transcript of the interview in due course and you will have the opportunity to comment further on this or state that certain information be omitted.

As a reminder, the audio recordings of our interview will now be transferred onto an encrypted memory stick storage device. Voice data will be kept for transcription purposes on an encrypted storage device, these transcriptions will also be stored on the encrypted memory stick. Voice data will be deleted within 18 months, it will be retained for up to 18 months in case further analysis of the original interview is needed.

I will be analysing the transcribed interviews in line with my research questions in order to explore the experiences and facilitators and barriers to partnership. The outcomes will also be used to inform and guide the focus groups in phase 2 of the research.

I'd like to invite you to share any comments or feedback on the research that you may have.

Future Contact:

Please feel free to contact the researcher or research supervisor with any queries, concerns or comments regarding the research:

Researcher email (Adam Lewis-Cole): xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Contact details for research supervisor (XXXXXXXXXXXXXXX): xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx

Appendix 18: Sample of a coded transcript for research question 6 (SENCos' views regarding how partnership practices can be improved with adoptive parents)

I: Thankyou. The last questions in this interview are aimed at considering how partnership experiences can be improved specifically thinking about adoptive parents. So, could I start by asking you how you feel home-school partnership experience could be improved or strengthened for adoptive families. What is needed, or what is missing or needs changing?

P: I think there should be an expectation that adopted children start with a TAM or EHAT process so that there is an expectation that school and other agencies and the parents meet on a regular basis to make sure that things are working. I think this should be an expectation, it should be a right to have this, not for parents to have to ask for it, school should be doing this even f just or a short period of time, but I think it should just happen. It shouldn't be down to the individual school whether this happens and it shouldn't be down to the parents to have to push for it, because then they may start to feel as though they are a nuisance perhaps. Also there should be the wrap around like with LAC and that school are reporting to the parents and the LA about what they are doing to support the child, as with LAC through the PEP system with termly reports on progress and what you are doing to support the progress, it is good practice and would help adoptive families.

Commented [PL1]: Regular meetings

Commented [PL2]: Automatic TAM/EHAT process

Commented [PL3]: Removing onus on parents to ask for support

Commented [PL4]: Increasing school accountability

Commented [PL5]: A process akin to LAC PEP

I: And what do you think that would do in terms of strengthening the partnership?

P: It would enable parents to feel more informed, it would help them to feel that the school is accountable, because sometimes, I think they can go to schools for help and the door is shut and there is no where else to go. I also think it would give parents someone who is more objective and the parents wouldn't feel they were pushing for, it is something that is their right and had been granted to them so the power relationship might then be different because that is at the crux of everything really, because if it is an equal relationship then things work. If school is wielding the power because they are the gatekeepers to further support who have to be asked for things then that's not equal so therefore parents can never really feel valued and consulted and would feel `done-to` more. So having those things as a right across the city will help them feel more valued and important. No school would turn a foster parent away, but if there is no-one or no thing standing behind these adopted parents, would schools be more able to say, you're the parent be a parent like other parents. It would of course need to be holistic and down to the individua families, so not to say it's something that they all have to follow because there will be families who actually fly and within a few months things are fine and the children are making progress, but I still don't think there is any harm in schools being accountable. I also think there would be mileage in there being a designated person within the school who is not the teacher, as the person in school that the parent can go to if there are difficulties, that give two or three people in school who the parent can go to then. Someone who is able to iron out small niggles as they happen, that would be goo too.

Commented [PL6]: Increasing school accountability

Commented [PL7]: Removing onus on parent to ask for support

Commented [PL8]: Promoting equality

Commented [PL9]: Reducing gatekeeper role

Commented [PL10]: TAM/PEP-like process as a right

Commented [PL11]: Individualised approach to support

Commented [PL12]: Increasing school accountability

Commented [PL13]: Designated staff in school as point of contact

Commented [PL14]: Staff listening

Appendix 19: List of codes for research question 6 – SENCos' views regarding how partnership practices with adoptive parents can be improved

A process akin to LAC PEP
A timely response
Automatic support plan (e.g. TAM or EHAT)
Child-level interventions
Collaboratively identifying needs
Communicating with home about the little things
Creative use of PP+
Designated staff in school as contact
Developing staff understanding
Differentiated approaches to reporting and communicating
Drawing on parents' experience or to deliver training
Included in parental groups
Increasing school accountability
Individualised approach to support
Instigating earlier or more contact
Investigating parental preferences
Inviting parents to check and correct information
Involved in finances and PP+ decisions
Linking families-up
Linking with support groups
More time as DT
Personalised approach to communication
Promoting equality
Reducing gatekeeper role
Refreshing staff knowledge
Regular and accessible communications
Regular meetings
Removing onus on parents to ask for support
Sharing info with staff
Sharing information about services and support
Staff listening and hearing
Staff preparation prior to child starting school
Support from virtual school
Supporting parents to express their views
System for tracking PP+
TAM and PEP-like process as a right across authority
Thorough induction for parents
Tools for parents to support communication
Training – application of theories
Training – attachment/trauma
Training/information sharing about parents' needs

Appendix 20: Example of a table showing how initial codes were grouped to develop potential candidate themes. This table shows the candidate theme developed for RQ6 from SENCo interviews of `formal support as an entitlement `.

Candidate Theme	Formal support as an entitlement			
Codes	A process akin to the LAC PEP	Automatic support plan e.g. (TAM or EHAT Process)	Increasing school accountability	Removing onus on parents to ask for support
Coded Data	S1: there should be the wrap around like with LAC and that school are reporting to the parents and the LA about what they are doing to support the child, as with LAC through the PEP system with termly reports on progress and what you are doing to support the progress, it is good practice and would help adoptive families S2: There needs to be more statutory guidance, like with a PEP for a LAC, we need a system like this. There should be some kind of document which identifies targets and who is doing what S2: I can't see why they can't have a PEP as needed or a support plan which really highlights what they need	S1: I think there should be an expectation that adopted children start with a TAM or EHAT process so that there is an expectation that school and other agencies S2: Some kind of plan in place needs to be created, so there is something visual for parents that is there to hold schools to account S4: Creating pen portraits for the child (I am doing one for an adopted child	S1: It would enable parents to feel more informed, it would help them to feel that the school is accountable, because sometimes, I think they can go to schools for help and the door is shut and there is no where else to go S2: some kind of plan in place needs to be created, so there is something visual for parents that is there to hold schools to account S2: Obviously, we can claim money (PP+) for them and I feel it's just not tracked, how that is consistently used and it	S1: I think this should be an expectation, it should be a right to have this, not for parents to have to ask for it, school should be doing this even f just or a short period of time, but I think it should just happen. It shouldn't be down to the individual school whether this happens and it shouldn't be down to the parents to have to push for it, because then they may start to feel as though they are a nuisance perhaps S1: It would give parents someone who is more objective and the parents wouldn't feel they were pushing for, it is something that is their right and had been granted to them so

	specifically and what the money is being spent on. The area school lead would hate me for saying that. I think this would bring more clarity for parents, it's like peace of mind so they don't have to chase those things, they don't have to worry about whether the school knows about the student or worry about how funds are being used to support them either and that would be a big chunk of thought and worry taken out of the equation S5: You have the PEP for LAC, but there isn't really an equivalent for adopted children and I think there should be to look at educational and social-emotional targets for them S5: the regular PEPs for LAC children to look at what the money is being spent on and the impact and then where is that for the children when they are adopted? I can look at that and track the money and impact, but actually I think it needs something more with a form to check and track	now), so that things that don't work for them are shared with staff. I have incorporated things that the parents have told us into that and I think then sharing this with parents and involving them in it would help.	could sometimes go under the radar if the school hasn't got the specific strategy for that S5: Like with the regular PEPs for LAC children which look at what the money is being spent on by school and the impact. Where is that for the children when they are adopted? I can look at that and track the money and impact, but actually I think it needs something more with a form to check and track.	the power relationship might then be different because if it is an equal relationship then things work. S2: I can't see why they can't have a PEP as needed or a support plan which really highlights what they need specifically and what the money is being spent on. The area school lead would hate me for saying that. I think this would bring more clarity for parents, it's like peace of mind so they don't have to chase those things, they don't have to worry about whether the school knows about the student or worry about how funds are being used to support them either and that would be a big chunk of thought and worry taken out of the equation