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### **Social Capital as a Mechanism for Exploring the Low Educational Achievements of Looked After Children.**

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**TITLE:** Social Capital as a Mechanism for Exploring the Low Educational Achievements of Looked After Children.

**ABSTRACT**

Social capital has been identified as a mechanism for combating the social disadvantage that children experience in their lives. Part of its appeal is the way in which it helps us to think about these aspects in new or innovative ways (McGonigal *et al*, 2007). One group of children that are affected by social disadvantage are looked after children and this disadvantage often follows them into adulthood making them some of the most disadvantaged adults in society. Therefore, it seemed appropriate to investigate whether or not social capital theory as a concept has anything original to offer in explaining the low educational achievement of children looked after in the UK today. Through the examination of concepts such as bonding social capital, bridging social capital, linking social capital and trust, we determine that social capital theory can be usefully deployed to help to theoretically interpret the low educational achievements of looked after children.

**KEY WORDS:** looked after children, education, social theory, social capital, care experiences.

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## **SOCIAL CAPITAL AS A MECHANISM FOR EXPLORING THE LOW EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENTS OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The idea for this paper was formed from a project which explored the factors that influence the educational achievement of looked after children. The project was innovative because it focused on children looked after at home and away from home. A mixed methods strategy was adopted to analyse data from two large Scottish local authorities. The project developed, what is to date, the largest dataset which includes variables for one fifth of children discharged from care in Scotland over a five year period. The qualitative element of the project collected in-depth data on the care and education experiences of looked after children and care leavers (See McClung, 2001; McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010).

There were 3 main findings from the project. First, that looked after children are being discriminated as they continue to perform less well academically than the general school population. Second, that the Corporate Parent has been ineffective in improving the educational achievement and life chances of looked after children and that this is, in part, a consequence of their approach to policy. Last, that there is a relationship between key care factors and educational achievement. When we take a multi dimensional view of the relationship between key care factors and educational achievement, it is a specific combination of key factors that determine different levels of educational achievement within the looked after population.

It seemed appropriate to use social capital theory to explore the educational achievement of looked after children for several reasons. First, the government and

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policy makers identify the development of social capital as a way of combating social exclusion (Bassani, 2007). Second, social capital theory has been used to help explain the educational underachievement of groups of poorer children (Munn, 2000). Third, it seemed appropriate to investigate whether the concept of social capital has anything original to offer in understanding the lives and outcomes of looked after children.

## **LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN**

In Scotland, children who are in the care of local authorities are described as 'looked after' under the Children (Scotland) Act 1995. Children can be 'looked after' whilst remaining at their usual home, or 'looked after away from home' in residential care, or in foster care. The majority of children in Scotland are looked after at home (Scottish Government, 2005a)<sup>1</sup>. When a child becomes looked after it becomes the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that the care the child is receiving is better than the care given before the child became looked after. This includes the educational dimension of their care (HMI and SWSI, 2001). Educational achievement is fundamentally important to the life chances of most children. The right to education is enshrined in the UN convention on the 'Rights of the Child', and attaining success in education is a '*graduated staircase*' to success in adulthood in terms of occupation, income and life style (Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005:232). However, the socio-economic risk factors that are associated with family breakdown and admission to care also predict low educational achievement (Berridge, 2006), so whilst children in public care span a full range of educational potential, they do not in general perform as well as other children living in their local area. Jackson (1999) and Jackson and

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<sup>1</sup> In this paper the term 'looked after' refers to all children in local authority care unless a distinction is made between those looked after at their usual home and those accommodated away from their usual home.

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McParlin (2006) report that even those looked after children who attend school regularly are unlikely to reach their educational potential, unless active measures are taken to compensate for earlier disadvantages. We envisage that the minimum educational aim that looked after children do as well as all other children cannot easily be achieved because looked after children have so many disadvantages that they need to perform a good deal better than other children to succeed in life. As a consequence, looked after children leave school with fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be homeless and generally more likely to face social exclusion throughout their lives (McClung and Gayle, 2010).

It has been identified that there are four underlying causes for the educational under achievement of looked after children (Maxwell *et al*, 2006). First, placement instability has been linked to low educational outcomes as looked after children frequently have too many placement changes, and school changes, which can be unsettling. Second, poor school attendance has also been identified as a contributory factor along with the lack of support that children receive at school. Third, the lack of sufficient support and encouragement where looked after children live has been identified as another factor contributing to the educational under achievement of the looked after population. Last, the lack of adequate support with emotional, mental and physical health and wellbeing has been identified as a contributing factor to the low educational achievement of looked after children (Maxwell *et al*, 2006).

There are those who hold the view that the care system is failing looked after children because there is a general lack of shared knowledge between Social Work and

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Education Services in local authorities about each other's services, and that they do not currently work well together to communicate regularly about the children that they have a corporate parenting responsibility for (Harker *et al*, 2003; Barnardo's, 2006; Bullock *et al*, 2006; Fletcher-Campbell, 1998; Francis, 2000; Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Walker, 1994; Who Cares? Scotland, 2003). It is arguable that historically, local authorities have accepted little responsibility for the educational achievement (or failure) of looked after children (Jackson and McParlin, 2006; Barnardo's, 2006). Instead, they have blamed the low achievement of the looked after population on the disadvantaged backgrounds that these children have come from. Jackson (1999) argues that the low educational achievement of looked after children is often a product of the weaknesses within the care system rather than individual children. However, not all share the same view as Jackson and McParlin (2006), Barnardo's (2006) and Jackson (1999). For example, Berridge (2006) argues that it is the absence of a broader sociological perspective that has led to insufficient and simplistic explanations of the low achievements of looked after children. For him the economic risk factors that are linked to family breakdown and admission to care also predict low educational achievement, such as social class and poverty. Therefore he concludes that it is by no means obvious that the care system necessarily jeopardises looked after children's education. (Berridge, 2006:1). Nevertheless, looked after children continue to leave school with fewer qualifications, are more likely to be unemployed, more likely to be homeless and generally more likely to face social exclusion throughout their lives (McClung and Gayle, 2010).

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## **WHAT IS SOCIAL CAPITAL?**

Social capital is an attractive and useful idea for attempting to make sense of a range of outcomes, processes and social institutions and part of its appeal is the way in which it helps us to think about these aspects in new or innovative ways (McGonigal *et al*, 2007). The concept of social capital was developed in sociology and political science to describe various resources that people may have through their relationships in families, communities, groups or networks (Catts and Ozga, 2005; Kawachi, 2000; Lin and Erickson, 2008): by resources, we are referring to social, personal and economic assets (Healy, 2001). Whilst there are many possible approaches to defining social capital, much to the exasperation of anyone trying to research it (ONS, 2001), the general consensus in the social science world is towards the definition that emphasises the role of networks and civic norms (Healy, 2001 and Li *et al*, 2003), where networks serve to mobilise the resources that individuals have (Lin 2001) and where social norms are simply norms of trustworthiness operating at the level of the social compact (Knack and Keefer, 1997).

Only in the last two decades have theorists begun to conceptualise social capital and recognise its value as a theory for explaining social life (ONS, 2001; Lin and Erickson, 2008). Three individuals who have played a significant role in this are

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Bourdieu, Coleman and Putnam. Each of them has played a different role in the development of the theory. Bourdieu (1986) was the first significant figure to recognise the usefulness of social capital as a theory for explaining social phenomena. Bourdieu believed that social capital could be accrued by individuals; depending on the size of the network of connections that the individual could mobilize (Deuchar and Holligan, 2010). Whist children do not feature in the work of Bourdieu (Leonard, 2005); Morrow (1999:746) argues that Bourdieu's (1986) perspective is fruitful because he locates the construction of social capital in the practices of every day life. Coleman (1998 and 1990) followed Bourdieu by providing a theoretical framework for social capital, subjecting it to empirical scrutiny and developing ways of using it for research purposes (Baron *et al*, 2000). Coleman (1998:S98) viewed social capital as a positive feature emanating from interactions between and among actors. Hence for Coleman the best way to understand social capital is to look at its function, that is, as a resource that individuals can use in their relationships with others. This view is shared by Putnam (1995:67) who was responsible for exporting the concept out of academia in to the wider media with his book '*Bowling Alone*', which examines the decline of social capital in American society, as people chose to undertake individualised activities rather than be part of groups and organisations (Putnam, 2000). Putnam's (2000) theories of social capital focus more on the outcomes of social cohesion between groups and networks. He has highlighted the distinction between 2 basic forms of social capital: bonding and bridging. Putnam (2000) argues that young people need to move from bonding to bridging networks, where they transcend their immediate social circumstances as a means of equipping them for broader social inclusion (Deuchar and Holligan, 2010). However, Leonard (2004:940)



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argues that the relationship between bonding and bridging social capital is much more complicated than Putnam suggests.

Notwithstanding the competing definitions of social capital (ONS, 2001; Lin and Erickson, 2008), it is generally accepted that trust and networks are the two key components of social capital (Baron *et al*, 2000). Social capital is developed in our relationships through doing things for one another and in the trust that we develop in one another. The theory identifies three forms of social capital connecting people together. These are bonding social capital, bridging social capital and linking social capital. It is argued that the three types of social capital will produce different outcomes (Li *et al*, 2003). Social capital helps in bonding fragmented social life, in the bridging of communities to contacts beyond their immediate environment and in the linking of people to formal structures and agencies that they may need for help with opportunities and advancement (Putnam, 1995; Catts and Ozga, 2005). Furthermore, a person's social capital is affected by trust (Baron *et al*, 2000; ONS, 2001). Trust is defined as the expectation within a community for regular, honest, co-operative behaviour based on community shared norms. These do not require contracts or legal regulation because prior moral consent gives members of the group mutual trust (Fukuyama, 1995). There are two types of trust. First, there is the trust we have for individuals we know (ONS, 2001). Then there is the trust we have for individuals we don't know in the community (ONS, 2001).

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Li *et al* (2003) argue that social capital has as much of an impact on people's lives as other socio demographic factors such as gender and ethnicity. By its very nature, social capital is available to all members of the community (Woolcock, 2001) and it powerfully shapes a child's development (Putnam, 1995). This is because trusts, networks, and norms within a child's family, peer group, school and larger community have a far reaching impact on opportunities, choices and educational achievement (Putnam, 1995). For all its advantages, it has been recognised that social capital has a negative side, with social networks acting as a foundation for negative actions and the exclusion of particular groups in society (Portes, 1998; Kawachi, 2000).

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## **METHODOLOGY**

This project adopted a mixed methods approach. The project developed a quantitative dataset from official and administrative records and collected qualitative data. An original feature of the project was the development of a specialist quantitative dataset relating to the educational achievement of children looked after away from home and children looked after at home. Despite the size of this latter group, most studies relating to children who are looked after at home generally do not concentrate on education but in the care aspect of their lives. The quantitative dataset was the largest specialist dataset containing information on looked after children in Scotland. It was a Census (i.e. 100%) of all looked after children in two Scottish local authorities (n=1407). The datasets included young people aged over 15 years old discharged from care in Scotland over a five year period (2000/01-2004/05). The dataset was a large-scale resource and contains 20% of all of the looked after children in Scotland aged 15 years or over who were discharged from care within the five year period. The dataset included measures relating to educational achievement and social care measures for children in care (approximately 40 variables) and therefore facilitates multivariate data analyses that would not be possible with other existing data resources.

The project was further enhanced with a qualitative component. In-depth information was collected on the care and educational experiences of a sample of looked after children (n=30). This information was gathered via one to one in-depth interviews with the looked after children. Areas such as placement history, placement experience, support from carers and professionals, school experiences, school

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exclusions, support from teachers and pupils, decision making and general social exclusion were considered in the interviews. A purposive sampling approach was adopted for this element of the project.

## **DOES SOCIAL CAPITAL THEORY HAVE SOMETHING TO OFFER IN UNDERSTANDING THE OUTCOMES OF LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN?**

In terms of education, social capital has been identified as a useful concept in relation to understanding school practices, especially those aimed at combating social exclusion. Fukuyama (1999) suggests that education is the one area where the government has the direct ability to generate social capital. Similarly, Putnam (2000) and Halpern (1999) identify education as key to the creation of social capital. Munn (2000) argues that the concept of social capital helps explain the low educational achievement of poorer groups of children. Munn (2000) asserts that this underachievement is a consequence of the lack of access to familial, peer and other networks which reinforce aspirations and overcome any problems with achieving.

Children live out their daily relationships in a number of domains. This includes domains such as a family setting, a school setting, within their peer group, in their neighbourhood and through their leisure time interests and activities (Gilligan, 1999). For looked after children this also includes their care setting. Each of these domains can potentially make a positive contribution to the lives of children (Gilligan, 1999) and can contribute to their accumulation of social capital. Whilst we recognise that looked after children's social capital can be developed through their relationships with this range of people across all of these domains, social capital for children is

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primarily developed through relationships with family, friends and with people they interact with at school.

#### Family Life and Placement Life

Children first start to develop their social capital at home with their parents. For those children looked after away from home, they also develop social capital in their care placements, although their experience at home serves as the foundation to their development of social capital. Children develop bonding social capital through their relationships with families, carers and friends. This type of social capital is valuable for children as it helps them build a sense of shared identity and provides them with security (Catts and Ozga, 2005). Indeed, close interaction between a parent and child is seen as crucial to the development of social capital and it is the key mechanism by which human capital is transmitted to the child (Coleman, 1998). Families that are rich in social capital are families that have strong family ties and communicate well with each other (Schneider and Stevenson, 1999). However, for some people making the transition from bonding to bridging social capital may not necessarily lead to positive outcomes (Leonard, 2004:942).

Our empirical evidence demonstrates that looked after children do not necessarily have lives that were characterised by positive interaction with their families and carers nor do they always live in environments where they are able to develop trust with family and carers. Many looked after children in our study had lives that were characterised by instability. They often lived in families or had lived in families where there was a history of neglect, abuse, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, imprisonment, unemployment and deprivation. For example, 28% of children in our study had

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become looked after as a direct result of neglect or abandonment, 25% had become looked after as a result of school exclusion or non attendance and 20% became looked after as a direct consequence of their inappropriate behaviour (McClung & Gayle, 2010). Others lived in a number of care settings resulting in disruption to their lives. For example, just under half (47.5%) of the children in our study who had been looked after away from home at some point had more than 2 placements and one in ten (10.7%) had more than 5 placements (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010). This issue has also been evidenced by others (Jackson and Thomas, 2000; Pecora *et al*, 2006; Audit Scotland, 2003; Aldgate *et al*, 1993, 1994 and 1995; Gibb *et al*, 2005). According to Harker *et al* (2003) the relationship between looked after children and significant adults in their lives does contribute to the low achievements of looked after children (Harker, 2003:90). For Barnes (2006), Winkworth *et al* (2010) and Ghate & Hazel (2002) there are certain families who face challenges because they do not have access to the range of complex and rich networks enjoyed by other families. In some instances the family and neighbourhoods can be conflicted as well as supported and undermine any external support. If we accept that these factors influenced the relationships that children had with their family and carers, and that social capital is about the relationships we have in the networks we are part of, we would argue that this would have had some impact on their accumulation of social capital.

Furthermore, it could be determined from our empirical evidence that a significant proportion of looked after children reported not receiving support or encouragement to do well at school from their families or carers. Just over one quarter (27%) of

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children reported that they had no support at home or felt that there was anyone they could talk to. This was especially so for those children being looked after in a residential setting. A number of children (43%) also report that no one where they lived asked them about school or that no one was proud of their achievements (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010). In our view, the experience that these looked after children had did not reflect traditional family life in the UK today, where the majority of children are cared for and supported to do well at school. One of the significant disadvantages to this is that people can internalise the negative images of where they live and it can lead to a low level of involvement in community exchanges (Leonard, 2004; Pacione, 1997). For these reasons we would argue that looked after children are generally not able to develop the same level of bonding social capital that other children are, and that this not only affects their ability to develop bridging and linking social capital, but that it affects their ability to achieve academically.

It has been claimed that the social capital offered by families varies to different degrees and extents and that families add to this their own history and identity (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). This might help explain why looked after children develop different levels of social capital. Through our empirical evidence we illustrate that the primary reason for becoming looked after (parental behaviour or child's behaviour) and the age at which a child first becomes looked after (under 12 or over 12) very much impacts on the care setting they are placed in (looked after at home or away from home in a foster or residential setting). What we were able to determine from this is that children in foster care who become looked after when they are under 12 years of age, as a result of parental behaviour, had the

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most enriching lives and the greatest capacity to develop their bonding social capital, albeit not to the same levels as children in the general population (McClung, 2008; Gayle, 2010). This might be because the support children in foster care receive, by living in a family setting, helps compensate for their experiences prior to becoming looked after and that this creates a more stable family environment. Where as children looked after at home or in residential care, who mostly became looked after when they were 12 years old or over as a result of their own behaviour, do not necessarily live in supportive and stable environments. Overall, children looked after in foster care were the most successful academically (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010).

It could be argued that children looked after at home and children looked after in residential care are less likely to develop in the areas that contribute to bonding social capital as they had much less support and encouragement from the environment in which they live. In general, those children looked after at home and in residential care had far less enriching lives. Our empirical evidence illustrates that 40% of children reported having no contact with friends outside of school. This was especially an issue for children looked after in residential care. Also, 26% of children in our study reported not having access to a quiet study space. All of these were living in a residential setting. However, 14% of children reported not having access to study materials and books where they lived and all of these were looked after at home. Similarly, over a third (36%) had no access to a pc at home this was made up of children looked after at home or in residential care (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle. 2010). Consequently, these children do not have the same access to social



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networks that children in foster care have access to and are arguably at greater risk of becoming disengaged in general.

One of the fundamental issues for children looked after at home is that they are never actually removed from the problematic situation within their family home and often social work intervention does not have a positive impact on their lives (Connelly and Chakrabarti, 2007). For those children looked after in residential care, rather than living in family settings they live in group situations with many other looked after children and this can be disruptive. Additionally, children in residential care have multiple carers at any one time who work on a rota basis and we know that this can also be difficult for looked after children to manage (Who Cares? Scotland, 2003; Shaw, 1998). As a result, we would suggest that these children are not able to form the same bonds and trust that other children form and that this impacts on their ability to develop social capital and on their ability to achieve academically.

### Schooling

For a child to succeed in education their social capital has to be developed and resourced, not only through their relationships with family, carers and friends, but through their relationships with people at school. This is why the relationship that children have with teachers and fellow pupils at school is important for the development of their social capital (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). Moreover, even if a child does not achieve a high academic level, he or she can still derive considerable support from positive school experiences, especially since school is often a bridge into other community resources such as clubs and activities (Daniel,

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2007). Therefore, if social capital acts in schools as it does elsewhere, then its role is to assist in the full development of both human and cultural capital in each individual (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). Social capital is provided by schools through social networks of association and it also provides entry into a range of intellectual and social activities, allowing the child to profit from the culture into which he or she is being inducted (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005). As such, at school children are able to further develop their bonding social capital but they can also develop their bridging and linking social capital.

Our empirical evidence highlights that looked after children do not have the same experience at school that other children have, as their experience tends to be more disjointed and negative (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010). It could therefore be argued that looked after children are not able to develop social capital at school in the same way that other children can. We further evidence that the ethos in many schools is one that discriminates against looked after children. For example, in comparison to the general school population looked after children in our study were found to have an increased chance of being excluded from school. Indeed, 80% of looked after children in our study were excluded at least once compared to less than 1% in the general school population (Scottish Government, 2005b). Moreover, some teachers were found to expect less of children because they were looked after and it was determined that some pupils and teachers treated looked after children more negatively. For example 23% of the children in our study reported that teachers expected less of them because they were looked after and 20% reported being treated differently by other children at their school because they were looked after (McClung,

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2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010). Additionally, almost half (43%) of all of the children who participated in the study had experienced bullying. Children explained that there were many reasons for the bullying, including their own behaviour, however, being looked after and not fitting in was an underlying theme for the children (McClung, 2008; McClung and Gayle, 2010). Whilst social capital concerns networks and personal associations, it does also concern values, norms and social attitudes (Croll, 2004). Consequently, the experience that these children had at school may have impacted on their development of social capital and on their ability to attain academically.

If we accept that children looked after in foster care have better access to social networks and that there is a link between different types of social networks, different types of social capital and academic achievement (Schools and Social Capital Network, 2005), it is not surprising we found that children looked after in foster care perform significantly better academically than all other looked after children. This may be because children looked after in foster care are more equipped to develop social capital and have an increased chance of receiving the same type of support that children in the general population receive. Our findings are reflective of Hedin *et al* (2011) who were able to determine that for children in foster care educational improvement was based on their understanding of scholastic achievement as meaningful for their future.

In Scotland currently, a significant measure of literacy and numeracy levels in secondary schools is the percentage of children attaining qualifications in English and

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maths at SCQF level 3 or above. As illustrated below in figure 1, we demonstrate that there was a correlation between placement type and achievement of English and Maths at SCQF level 3 ( $p < 0.001$ ; Cramer's  $V = .309$ ). As Figure 1 shows, less than 1 in 10 children looked after at home (6.7%) or in residential care (8.6%) attained Maths or English at this level compared to just under half (42.9%) of those in foster care attaining both English and Maths. At this point it is worth noting that 90% of the general school population attain English and maths a SCQF level 3 or above (Scottish Government, 2005a).

<sup>2</sup>Figure 1: English and Maths at SCQF level 3 and Placement Type

SCQF Level 4 or Above in English and Maths		At Home	Foster Care	Residential Care	Total Children
<b>English and Maths</b>	<b>No.</b>	55	103	30	<b>188</b>
	<b>%</b>	29.3%	54.8%	16.0%	<b>100%</b>
		6.7%	42.9%	8.6%	<b>13.4%</b>
<b>English Only</b>	<b>No.</b>	63	39	56	<b>158</b>
	<b>%</b>	39.9%	24.7%	35.4%	<b>100%</b>
		7.7%	16.3%	16.1%	<b>11.2%</b>
<b>Maths Only</b>	<b>No.</b>	10	6	9	<b>25</b>
	<b>%</b>	40.0%	24.0%	36.0%	<b>100%</b>
		1.2%	2.5%	2.6%	<b>1.8%</b>
<b>None</b>	<b>No.</b>	691	92	253	<b>1036</b>
	<b>%</b>	66.7%	8.9%	24.4%	<b>100%</b>
		84.4%	38.3%	72.7%	<b>73.6%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>819</b>	<b>240</b>	<b>348</b>	<b>1407</b>
	<b>%</b>	<b>58.2%</b>	<b>17.1%</b>	<b>24.7%</b>	<b>100%</b>
		<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

There were, however, subtle differences between those looked after at home and those looked after in residential care as a significantly higher proportion of children looked after in residential care (16.1%) attained English only compared to those looked after at home (7.7%). Our study demonstrates that a far higher proportion (84.4%) of

<sup>2</sup> Full empirical results can be found at <https://dspace.stir.ac.uk/bitstream/1893/1128/1/McClung%20PHD.pdf>

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children looked after at home leave care having not attained English or Maths as SCQF level 3 compared to 72.7% children in residential care and 38.3% of those in foster care. This is a crucial finding as English and Maths at SCQF level 3 is often a requirement to gain entry to low level employment and foundation level college courses and our results demonstrate that children looked after at home are the least likely of all looked after children to gain entry to either.

As illustrated below in Figure 2, placement in its self is not the primary factor here. When we take a multi-dimensional view of social care and educational factors we are able to demonstrate that it is a specific combination of factors (placement type, age when became looked after and primary reason for becoming looked after) which impact on educational attainment.

<sup>3</sup>Figure 2: Logistic Regression – Achievement of 1 or More Awards at SCQF Level 4 or Above by Placement Type, Received into Care Age and Received into Care Reason

Variables in the Equation

	<b>B</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>Wald</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>Exp(B)</b>
<b>Foster Care</b>	0.99	0.36	7.47	1.00	<0.05	2.70
<b>Residential Care</b>	0.25	0.25	1.04	1.00	>0.05	1.29
<b>Received into Care Under 12</b>	0.89	0.27	10.69	1.00	<0.001	2.44
<b>Parental Reasons</b>	0.47	0.22	4.64	1.00	<0.05	1.61
<b>Constant</b>	-0.93	0.15	36.78	1.00	<0.001	0.39

Cox and Snell R<sup>2</sup>=.12; Nagelkerke R<sup>2</sup>=.16.

<sup>3</sup> For the purposes of this analysis, it is our intention to interpret the binary logistic regression models through a process known as estimated probability. A discussion on the appropriateness of this model can be found in Gayle and Davis (2000). An illustration of the empirical value of this method can be found in Gayle *et al* (2003).

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### Probability

<b>1 or More at SCQF Level 4 or Above</b>			<b>Probability</b>
Foster Care	Child	Under 12	0.72
Foster Care	Child	Over 12	0.52
Foster Care	Parent	Under 12	0.81
Foster Care	Parent	Over 12	0.63
Residential Care	Child	Under 12	0.55
Residential Care	Child	Over 12	0.34
Residential Care	Parent	Under 12	0.67
Residential Care	Parent	Over 12	0.45
At Home	Child	Under 12	0.49
At Home	Child	Over 12	0.28
At Home	Parent	Under 12	0.61
At Home	Parent	Over 12	0.39

In Figure 2 above, we have calculated and reported the logistic regression as a probability - in this instance the probability of a looked after child with certain characteristics attaining 1 or more awards at SCQF level 4 or above. This approach aids us to easily understand the effects of a particular explanatory variable and allows us to compare groups more easily (Gayle *et al*, 2003). For example, our empirical findings demonstrate that overall children in foster care are more likely to attain than those looked after at home or in residential care. Age on becoming looked after (under 12 or over 12) also impacts on this as does the reason for becoming looked after (child or parental reasons). In our model we demonstrate that the least successful child was a child looked after at home who became looked after when they were 12 years old or over as a result of their own behaviour (estimated probability of 28% attaining 1 or more at SCQF level 4 or above). The most successful child at this level was a child looked after in foster care who became looked after before they were 12 years of age, as a result of parental behaviour (estimated probability of 81% attaining 1 or more at SCQF level 4 or above). A matter of interest is that children in

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residential care who became looked after when they were under 12 years of age, as a consequence of the behaviour of their parents, performed better than children in foster care who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age, irrespective of whether their behaviour or the behaviour of their parents resulted in them becoming looked after (estimated probabilities of 67%, 52% and 63% accordingly). Another significant finding is that children looked after at home, who became looked after when they were under 12 years old, as a result of the behaviour of their parents, performed very closely to children in foster care who became looked after when they were over 12 years of age, as a result of the behaviour of their parents (estimated probabilities of 61% and 63% accordingly). This starts to raise questions over whether it is children who have specific key factors when they come into care, resulting in them being placed in specific destinations, that can be associated with educational achievement and the propensity to develop social capital, rather than the experience that children have when they are looked after at home, in residential or foster care influencing their academic achievement and accumulation of social capital.

### **IMPLICATIONS OF THE EMPIRICAL FINDINGS**

The empirical findings of this project have implications for those with parental responsibilities for looked after children (i.e. the Corporate Parent). First, it needs to be recognised that the looked after population is not a homogenous group. We would argue that the Corporate Parent needs to further consider how to improve the life chances of specific groups of looked after children to ensure that they are, at least, equal to those of all other looked after children. An emerging feature of the empirical data is that being looked after at home is a distinctive experience that has specific

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consequences for educational achievement. We strongly recommend that in future researchers take care to recognise that this is a distinctive group of children in care.

The experience that looked after children have in school requires further consideration by the Corporate Parent. Looked after children can have a negative experience at school, this is often associated with the stigma of being looked after. Also their relationships with teachers and other children have been found to impact on their experience, particularly for those children in residential care who attend mainstream schools. Additionally, many more looked after children face exclusion from school, and sometimes for long periods. A scheme which targets looked after children and focuses on limiting school exclusions could potentially pay dividends. Further research and evaluation in this area would be beneficial.

The array of social factors we considered were limited by the available data and it may have been beneficial to explore the impact that a wider set of factors had on educational achievement. In particular we suspect that data related to parents and siblings as well as information on parental contact, extra curricular activities and social networks would enable more comprehensive analyses. We concluded that more detailed empirical research is necessary to establish improved the evidence base for the development of policy frameworks that can deliver better results for looked after children.

## **CONCLUSION**



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In summary, through the examination of concepts such as bonding social capital, bridging social capital, linking social capital and trust, in this paper social capital theory has been used to explore the low educational achievement of looked after children. It has also been used to consider the differing levels of achievement for children looked after at home and children looked after away from home in foster care and residential care. However, it needs to be recognised that social capital theory does have limitations and restrictions. An emerging position is that social capital is a rather nebulous concept and that it has begun to generate scepticism because of its wide and variant range of definitions (Schuller *et al*, 2000 and Morrow, 1999). There are also those who argue that the fundamental problem with social capital theory is its circular nature and the fact that it can be used as an explanatory variable and an outcome variable (Schuller *et al*, 2000). Another area of concern highlighted by Catts and Ozga (2005) is the measurement of social capital. The use of social capital theory in social policy and practice requires the development of reliable indicators that take account of key social and cultural features of a particular society. One of the significant problems with theorising the role of social capital is that it is often difficult to measure social participation and social engagement amongst those groups disengaged from more obvious formal civic engagement. This may be particularly acute in relation to looked after children. Despite this, we would propose that, overall, the theoretical conception of social capital has been useful for exploring the educational achievement of looked after children. We observe that increasingly public debates are beginning to draw loosely on ideas emerging from social capital literature. Morrow (1999) suggests that a popular image is being generated which suggests children who live in the wrong types of families are damaged. This position is

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obviously uninformed by social science thinking but it has the potential to be made more palatable when it is crouched in the language of low social capital. To conclude, notwithstanding the limitations of social capital theory, we would argue that theories of social capital can be usefully deployed as what Giddens (1984) terms 'sensitising devices' which help to theoretically interpret empirical results.

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